See The Future Of Handheld Gaming [PG.28]

First Screens: The Legend Of Zelda [PG.72]

Star Wars Knights Of The Old Republic 2: The Sith Lords [PG.76]

GAMEINFORMER

ER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

METROID PRIME 2

E C H O E S

DARK AND LIGHT...A STRUGGLE FOR POWER...
UNCOVER THE TRUTH BEHIND SAMUS' RETURN
[PG.62]

ISSUE 130

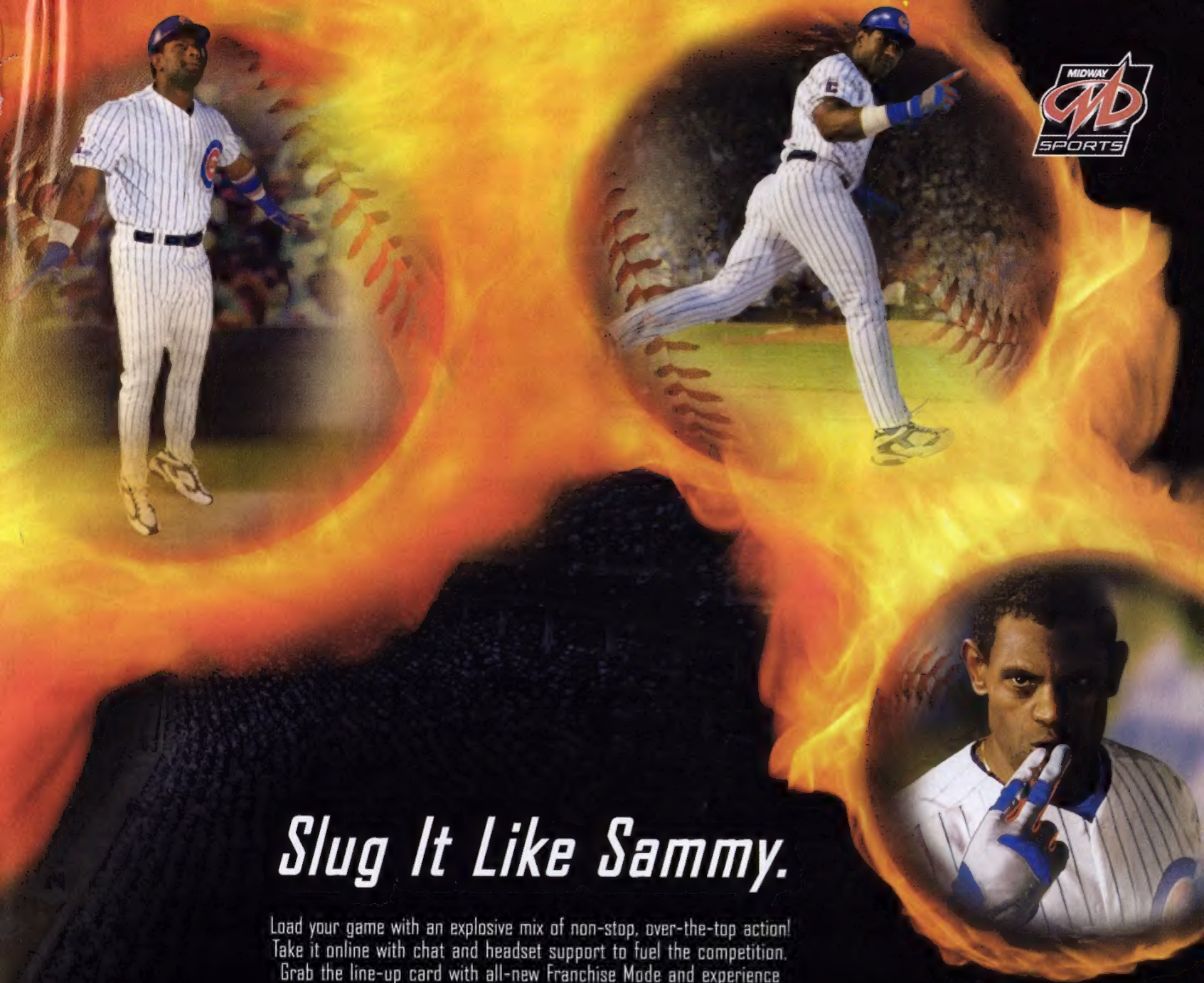
US $5.99 | CAN $7.99 | UK £3.50

07

7 20150 85048 4

JULY 2004

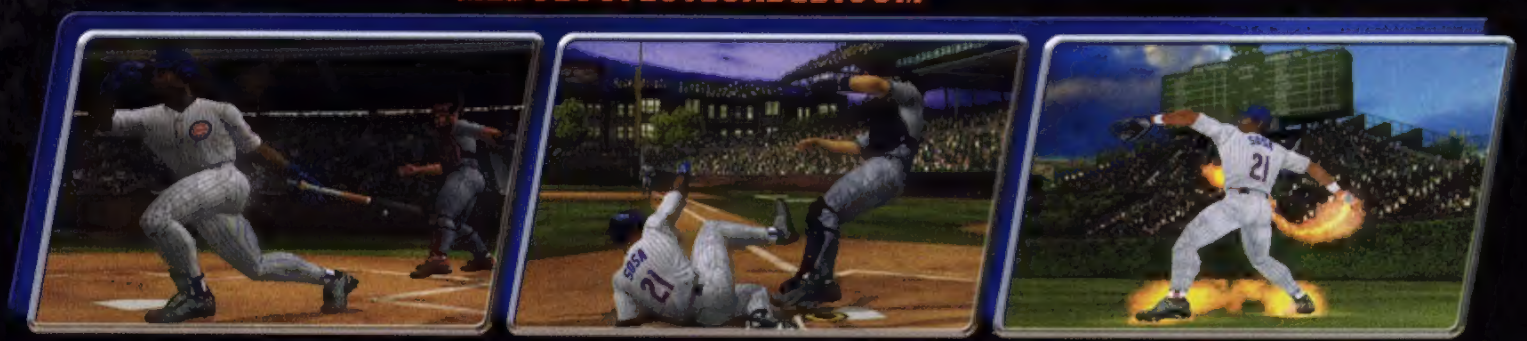
MLB
SLUGFEST
LOADED
POWERED BY gamespy
PlayStation 2
MLB.com



Slug It Like Sammy.

Load your game with an explosive mix of non-stop, over-the-top action!
Take it online with chat and headset support to fuel the competition.
Grab the line-up card with all-new Franchise Mode and experience
a whole new level of depth to the adrenaline-style gameplay.

MLBSLUGFESTLOADED.COM



XBOX LIVE ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY

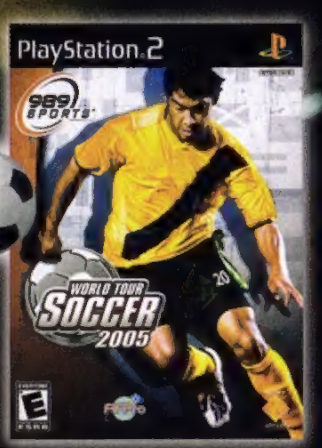
TEEN T
Comic Mischief
Mild Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

YOUR CLUB IS ALWAYS ON.

There are more than 900 teams from 21 divisions and 23 leagues playing for 6 different Cups on World Tour Soccer 2005.
You'll never have to go to a pub at 5 a.m. to see yours play again.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

World Tour Soccer ©2004 Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. 989 and the 989 Sports logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. The names and brands of FIFPRO and its Member Associations are trademarks of FIFPRO and/or its player associations. "FIFPRO" is a trademark of the International Association of Football Players Unions. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live In Your World. Play In Ours." is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc.



989 SPORTS

PlayStation.2

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.

www.989SPORTS.com

T H E T H R E A

YOU ARE FRANK HAYDEN, AN ELITE OPERATIVE CHASING A WEAPON OF UNSPEAKABLE DESTRUCTION. FROM CHAOTIC SYRIAN STREETS TO THE JUNGLES OF THE CONGO, YOU MUST TRACK DOWN AND DISARM A DEVICE KNOWN ONLY AS *RED MERCURY*.

• IMPECCABLE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION, FROM SCREENPLAY TO SOUND DESIGN • RELENTLESS, GROUND-TREMBLING COMBAT • THX® CERTIFIED GAME • THUNDEROUS DOLBY® DIGITAL SOUND • EXPANSIVE VARIETY OF LEVELS AND TACTICAL OPTIONS • XBOX *LIVE*™ ACTION: CAPTURE THE FLAG, V.I.P. ESCORT AND DEATHMATCH •

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Violence

XBOX

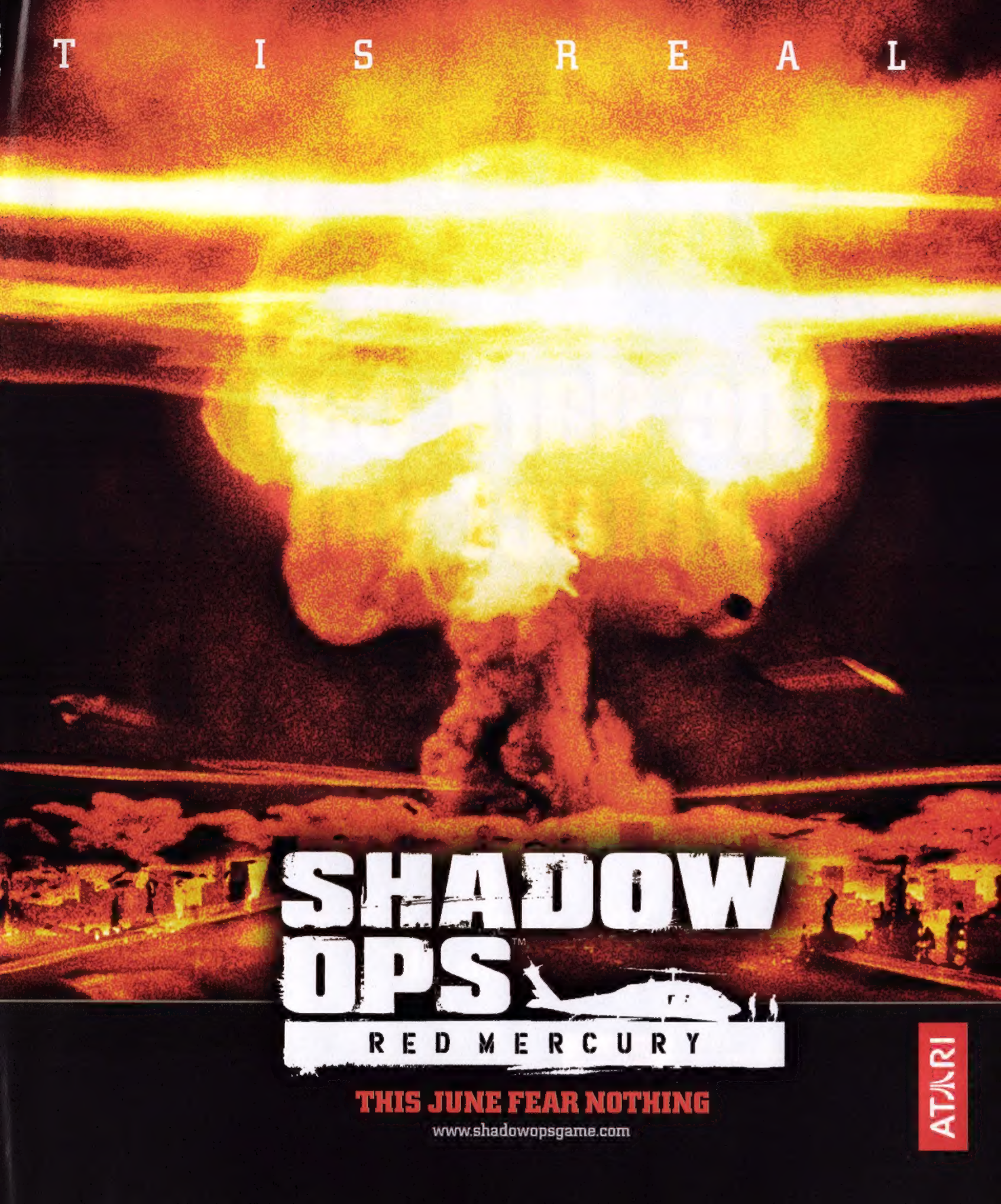
XBOX LIVE

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

zombie

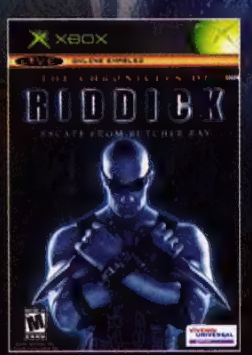
THX CERTIFIED GAME

SHADOW OPS™: RED MERCURY © 2004 Atari, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Developed by Zombie Studios, Inc. All trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Dolby and the double-D symbol are trademarks of Dolby Laboratories. THX is a trademark of THX Ltd. which may be registered in some jurisdictions. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox *Live*, the *Live* logos and the Xbox Logos are registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft.


T I S R E A L
SHADOW OPS™
RED MERCURY
THIS JUNE FEAR NOTHING
www.shadowopsgame.com
ATARI

"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

ESRB

UNIVERSAL

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL games

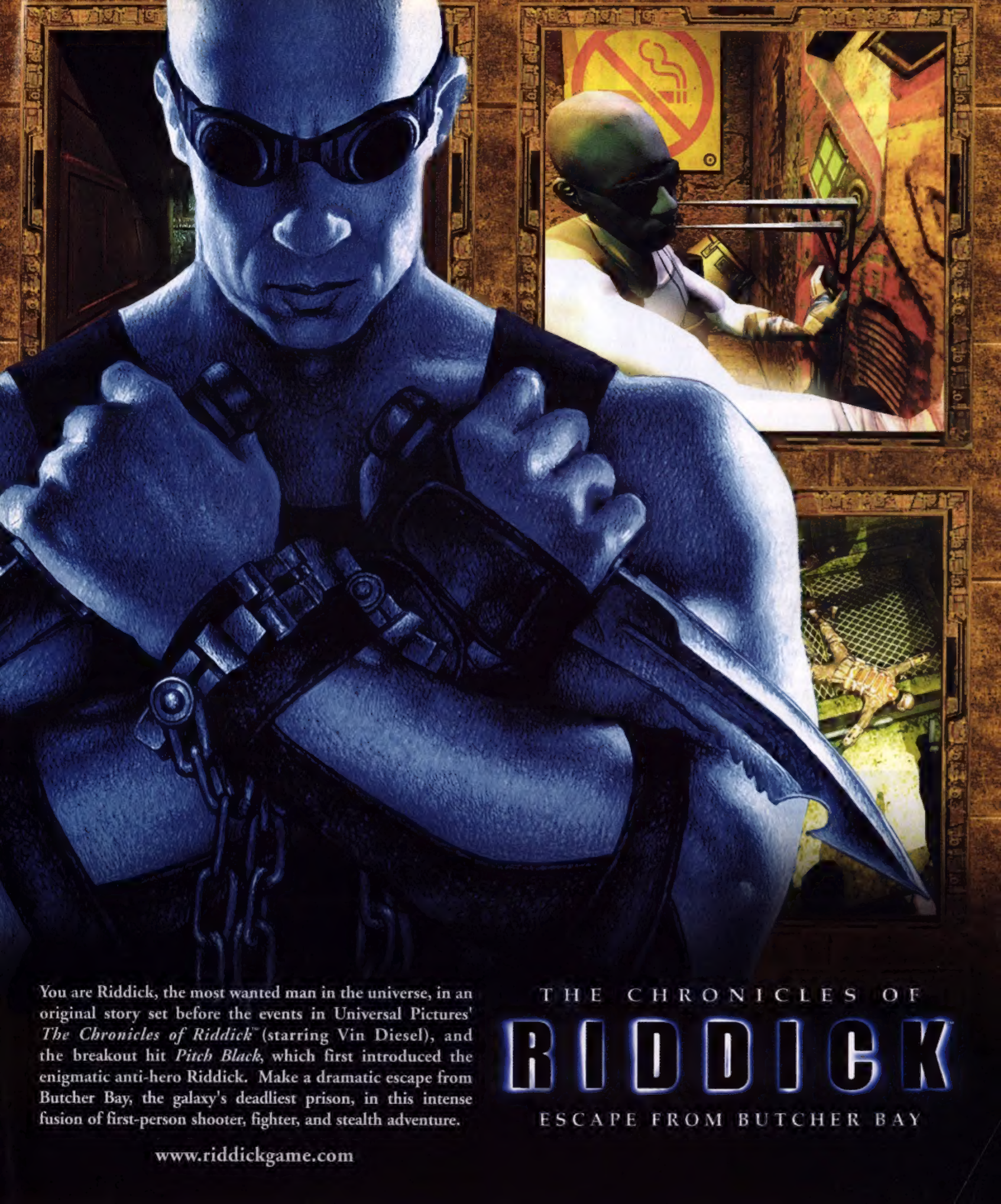
TIBURON

XBOX

XBOX LIVE

"The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay" interactive game © 2004 Vivendi Universal Games, Inc. All Rights Reserved. "The Chronicles of Riddick" ™ & © Universal Studios. Licensed by Universal Studios Licensing LLLP. All Rights Reserved. Vivendi Universal Games and the Vivendi Universal Games logo are trademarks of Vivendi Universal Games, Inc. The Starbreeze Engine Technology © 2002-2004 Starbreeze AB. All rights reserved. The Starbreeze Logo is a trademark of Starbreeze AB. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox *Live*, the *Live* logo, and the Xbox logos are registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. All other trademarks referenced herein are the property of their respective owners.

Parental advisory: A note to parents: Please consult www.filmratings.com for information regarding movie ratings in making viewing choices for children.



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.

www.riddickgame.com

THE CHRONICLES OF

RIDDICK

ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

CONTENTS

The "Everything About E3" Issue

cover story

62 METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES

Retro Studios proved to the world that an American company could turn Metroid into an FPS and make it great. Now the developer has returned with an all-new adventure for Samus that pits her against a foe more devious than any she's faced. Plus, Game Informer has the behind the scenes look at how Retro works its magic.

features

CONNECT FEATURE SONY PSP

E3 2004 was all about one thing: the future of handheld gaming. Behold the lowdown on Sony's sexy new portable system.

CONNECT FEATURE NINTENDO DS

Nintendo isn't taking Sony's handheld challenge lying down. Is the DS the next GBA or the next Virtual Boy? Read all about it here.

CONNECT FEATURE NOTABLE AND QUOTABLE

This year's E3 certainly got a lot of people talking. Find out who had what to say about all the biggest announcements, surprises, and disappointments of this year's expo.

CONNECT FEATURE GI'S TOP TEN GAMES OF E3

What really stood out at this year's E3 convention? Discover which games rocked our world on each system, and which title earned our coveted "Best in Show" award.

departments

10 STAFF
Read the team's latest favorites

12 GI SPY
Silly pictures of our life and times

14 DEAR GI
Your chance to fire back at us!

18 CONNECT
Where news, talk, and technology collide

52 INTERVIEW
Epic Game's Cliff "CliffyB" Bleszinski chats with us about the future of Unreal, mod culture, and gaming in general

56 GEAR
Geeky gadget stuff for the masses – from robots to TVs

58 OPINION
EA's Greg Rizzer talks about why big budget games are actually good for the industry

60 CALENDAR
Get hip to this month's happenings

72 PREVIEWS
The Legend of Zelda returns! But if you think you know Link, this new title may shock you

108 REVIEWS
Game of the Month: The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay

124 CHARTS
Retail Sales Data and the GI editors' Top 10 Games

128 SECRET ACCESS
Codes, strategies, and passwords

132 CLASSIC GI
Reliving gaming's greatest moments

136 GAME OVER
The end...or is it?

game index

GAME	PAGE #
25 to Life	104
Advance Wars: Under Fire	91
Altered Beast	96
Amazing Island	102
Armored Core: Nexus	104
Ashen	123
ATV Offroad Fury 3	89
Battlefield 2	95
Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	105
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	116
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	93
Capcom Fighting Jam	103
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay, The	118
Citizen Zero	102
City of Heroes	120
City of Villains	95
Cowboy Bebop	106
Dead or Alive Ultimate	99
Devil May Cry 3	74
DK: King of Swing	107
Donkey Kong Jungle Beat	82
Dungeon Siege II	101
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	104
EyeToy: AntiGrav	104
F-Zero GP Legend	103
Fable	87
Farenheit	106
Forza Motorsport	90
Full Spectrum Warrior	119
Galactic Wrestling Featuring Ultimate Muscle	115
Geist	96
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	104
Ghost Recon 2	103
God of War	79
Goldeneye: Rogue Agent	89
Gran Turismo 4	83
Halo 2	78
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (Multi)	111
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (GBA)	123
King of Fighters Maximum Impact, The	105
Kingdom Hearts 2	92
Kirby and The Amazing Mirror	107
Legend of Zelda, The	72
Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap, The	91
Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle	122
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	94
Mario Pinball	101
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	111
Mega Man X8	103
Mercenaries	97
Metal Slug 3: DUB Edition	119
Midnight Club 3	86
MLB Slugfest 2004	114
NCAA Football 2004	112
Odama	107
Otogi 2	105
Outlaw Golf 2	107
Perimeter	121
Phantom Crash 2050	106
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	110
Resident Evil 4	85
Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots	121
Second Sight	100
Shield, The	106
Shrek 2	112
Sims: Bustin' Out, The	123
Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2	115
Snowblind	92
Sonic Advance 3	123
Spikeout: Battle Street	105
Splinter Cell 3	80
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	76
State of Emergency 2	103
Strike Force Bowling	112
Tales of Symphonia	117
Tekken 5	98
Thief: Deadly Shadows	113
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	123
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	112
UFC Sudden Impact	115
Under the Skin	105
Van Helsing	114
Way of the Samurai 2	116
Wild Arms Alter Code: F	102
Witcher, The	99

Miracle maker.
They call me Miracle Boy. Not for my gold medals, but because I've survived double back flips, getting hit by a car, and the mega ramp. What makes me so indestructible? Milk. It helps prevent broken bones. So you can concentrate on breaking records.
got milk?
DAVE MIRRA ©2004 AMERICA'S DAIRY FARMERS® AND MILK PROCESSORS

STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

E3: THE GREATEST SPECTACLE ON EARTH (OR IS IT?)

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I've just arrived home from video games' biggest and most important show of the year, and I can tell you with some certainty that things need to change. Now don't get me wrong, I do indeed love going to E3. There are always some fantastic surprises, the parties are great, and getting to see all the industry folks from around the world (and sit and talk shop) is perhaps one of my greatest joys.

However, the show itself is flawed. I hate to ruin the illusion, but the time we get to spend with the games at the show is limited. So in many ways, the impressions that we (or any other media outlet) bring back from a show such as this are oftentimes based largely on experience and gut reaction. For example, I spent over an hour playing with the DS and its various games/tech demos. Was I impressed? I think so. Do I feel that I have a full grasp of its impact or how successful it will be? Not really. In fact, I left with more questions than answers. The same goes for the PSP. It is sexy to look at, but without playing a single game or knowing its battery life, do I really know how great it is?

The true test of how good a game or product is will always be when we get to test the product in our offices or spend a day with the developer.

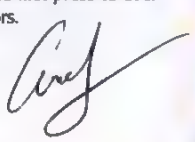
I would like to see E3 become a place where fewer games are showcased, giving the press and the attendees of E3 a better opportunity to analyze what truly stands out. I propose something more akin to a film festival, where companies bring only their best products.

All my complaints about E3 aside, the staff and I worked very hard to make sure that we brought back the best information possible from the show. In this issue of Game Informer we offer up a very special edition of Connect that will in fact do everything that I want E3 to do. We cut out all the crap and bring what we feel is the cream of the crop from the world's biggest video game spectacle.

Sure, some may call us crazy for giving a game that was only shown in movie form (like The Legend of Zelda for GameCube) one of our Games of The Show slots. But when I look back at this show years from now, I know that video will still be one of my highlights.

I hope you Nintendo fans enjoy the Metroid Prime 2: Echoes cover. It's a big step forward for us, as it marks the first time in the history of Nintendo that they let the American media in to see a developer before a product is finished. I know I'm quite proud of the fact that Game Informer was the first press to ever walk through Retro's hallowed doors.

Enjoy the issue.



Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** E3 Parties, Reliving Gran Turismo On The Streets Of Minnesota, Interns **Dislikes:** The Zoo Of Misinformation And Pageantry That Is E3 (I Just Want To Play The Games, Not Sit In Lines Or Listen To Presentations), Anthony Peeler, Online Sites That Blatantly Rip Off Our Stories **Current Favorite Games:** Mercenaries, Resident Evil 4, Devil May Cry 3, God Of War, Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal, Halo 2, Mortal Kombat: Deception, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, City Of Heroes

Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** *Invader Zim* (It's Almost As Funny As Me!), Ninjas, Sony's Super Sexy PSP, The Jesus Lizard's *Liar*, Plotting To Take Over The World, Scott Bakula (a.k.a. God) **Dislikes:** Being Afraid Of Nintendo's Reggie (See Page 35), The Fact That I Squealed Loudly When Nintendo Showed The New Zelda **Current Favorite Games:** Final Fantasy XI, Final Fantasy XII, Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy, The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay, Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat

Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Franz Ferdinand, The PSP, Bass Cabinets, "I'm Coming Out (Chic Mix)" By Diana Ross, Recording, Hassle The Hoff: David Hasslehoff's Rap Career! (We Are Living In An Important Era In Human History) **Dislikes:** Sleeveless T-Shirts (On Men), LA Cab Drivers Who've Apparently Never Driven In LA Before, Board Trolls **Current Favorite Games:** God Of War, Red Dead Revolver, Full Spectrum Warrior, Halo 2, Jade Empire

Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** *Up At The Lake* By The Charlatans, The Paring Down Of Football Titles, Vagrant Story And Final Fantasy XII Artist Akihiko Yoshida, The Death Of Phish **Dislikes:** Wal-Mart, California, Loud Talkers, Fanboys, Faulty Logic, Old T-Shirts As Ironic Fashion, Hipsters **Current Favorite Games:** Full Spectrum Warrior, God Of War, ESPN NFL 2005, NCAA Football 2005, X-Men Legends, Jade Empire, Final Fantasy XII, Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat

Lisa >> *lisa@gameinformer.com*

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Survival Horror, Adventure, RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing **Interests:** *Hero* (The Awesomest Movie, Even Though Chinese Subtitles Didn't Let Me Know Exactly How It Ends), *Invader Zim*, Evil Reptilian Kitten Eaters From Another Planet, Crop Circles, Iced Mata Hari **Dislikes:** Styluses (Styli? More Than One Stylus? Whatever), Spam (The Tinned Meat And The Unwanted Emails), Buffets, Bad Cab Music **Current Favorite Games:** Jade Empire, Prince Of Persia 2, Final Fantasy XI, Halo 2, Resident Evil 4, Myst IV, Gran Turismo 4, Final Fantasy XII, Odama

Jeremy >> *jeremy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Platform, Fighting, Strategy/RPGs **Interests:** The Mighty Armies Of Zosstrailia, *Coupling* (The Original British Version, Not the Stinktacular Remake), Qees, *Bubba Ho-Tep* On DVD, Psycho Suzi's Motor Lounge, My New MP3 Player (a.k.a. "The Best Thing Ever") **Dislikes:** E3 Fatigue, The Curse Of Low Sales Which Afflicts Games I Love, *Van Helsing* **Current Favorite Games:** The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay, Snowblind, God Of War, Halo 2, MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf, The Punisher

Adam >> *adam@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Cleaning My Desk Off, Finally Having Headphones For My GBA SP, Large Amounts Of Post-E3 Sleeping **Dislikes:** Hit And Runs, Off Days In Soul Calibur II, Getting One-Hit-Killed By Witch Doctor Endugu's Minions, My Huge Backlog Of Unplayed Games **Current Favorite Games:** Forgotten Realms, Demon Stone, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, Halo 2, Pariah, Rise Of Nations, Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth

Joe >> *joe@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** Final Fantasy Concerts, Cucumbers (The Poor Man's Steak), How Everything Always Comes Back To Tacos With Me, Gas Station Sages **Dislikes:** The Word "Socket," Zosstrailia's Despotic Regime (Though I Do Respect Its Universal Health Care), The Way Los Angeles Feeds On The Souls Of The Hopeful **Current Favorite Games:** Xenosaga II, Myst IV, God Of War, Final Fantasy XII, Second Sight, Devil May Cry 3, Mega Man Anniversary Collection, Tales Of Symphonia

Miller >> *miller@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Univers Zero, The Big Cheese, Optimus Prime (Go Find The 20th Anniversary Figure Now!), Ocremix.org (Thanks, Adam), *X-Men 3 & 4* (They Might Film Back To Back!), The Square Concert, Spelunking **Dislikes:** Prescription Drug Commercials, Packing Up My Apartment, Talking On The Phone, Trailers That Give Away the Whole Movie, Dark Closets **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 2, City Of Heroes, Prince of Persia 2, Final Fantasy XII, Jade Empire

UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAME INFORMER UNLIMITED

When you see this logo on a game preview, review, or feature, you can learn more about it by heading to www.gameinformer.com and clicking on the Unlimited logo. There are tons of other bonuses there (including movies, interviews, and screenshots) exclusively for Game Informer subscribers, so even if a game you like doesn't have the logo in the magazine, there is a good chance you can still learn more online.

GAMEINFORMER

JULY 2004
Volume XIV • Number 7 • Issue 136

PUBLISHER
Cathy Preston

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Andrew McNamara

EDITORS
Executive Editor Andrew Reiner
Senior Associate Editor Matt Helgeson
Associate Editors
Matthew Kato • Lisa Mason • Jeremy Zoss
Adam Biessener • Joe Juba • Matt Miller
Intern Brian Vore
Mascot Arthur

PRODUCTION
Art Director Thomas Blustin
Production Director Curtis Fung
Production Assistant Rachel Nimerfroh

CONTRIBUTORS
Photography
Bryan Regan • Mike Gitler

GAME INFORMER ONLINE
Managing Online Editor Billy Berghammer
Associate Online Editor Chris Cook

ADVERTISING SALES
MINNEAPOLIS
Rob Borm
Director of Marketing and Midwest/East Coast Sales Manager
(612) 486-6155
Fax (612) 486-6101
rob@gameinformer.com

Amy Arnold
Advertising Coordinator
(612) 486-6154
Fax (612) 486-6101
amy@gameinformer.com

SAN FRANCISCO
Doug Faust
Vice President Advertising Sales
(650) 728-5647
Fax (650) 728-5648
doug@gameinformer.com

LOS ANGELES
Marc Misasian
Southwest Regional Sales Manager
(818) 991 9923
Fax (818) 991 9923
marc@gameinformer.com

CIRCULATION
CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT

For change of address or subscription inquiry ONLY:
Toll Free: **1 (866) 844-GAME (4263)**

Fax: **(612) 486-6101**
Email: **customerservice@gameinformer.com**
Or send correspondence to:
724 North First St., 4th Floor
Minneapolis MN 55401 • Attn: CIS Dept

Circulation Manager
Paul Anderson • (612) 486-6104
paul@gameinformer.com

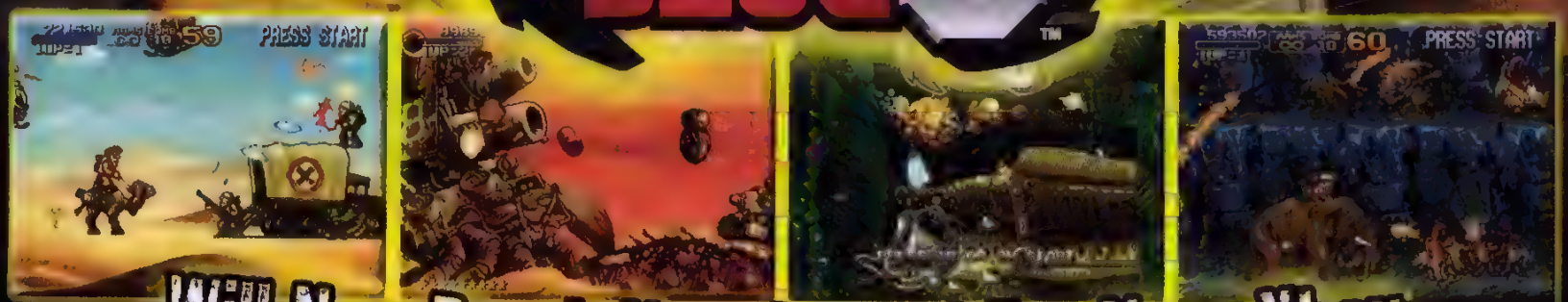
Information Systems Manager
Paul Hedgpeth
paulhedgpeth@gameinformer.com

Manufactured and printed in the United States of America The Editor welcomes company product information for all video games. Such materials should be addressed to: Editor, Game Informer® Magazine, 724 North First St., 4th Floor Minneapolis, MN 55401. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. Entire contents copyright 2004. Game Informer® Magazine. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer is a trademark of GameStop, Inc. Products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies. PUBLISHER LIABILITY FOR ERROR The publisher shall not be liable for slight changes or typographical errors that do not lessen the value of an advertisement. The publisher's liability for other errors or omissions in connection with an advertisement is limited to republication of the advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any monies paid for the advertisement. INDEMNIFICATION The advertiser and/or Advertising Agency agrees to defend and indemnify the publisher against any and all liability, loss, or expense arising from claims of libel, unfair competition, unfair trade practices, infringement of trademarks, copyrights, trade names, patents or proprietary rights or violation of rights of privacy, resulting from the publication of the Advertiser's statement.

Member Audit Bureau of Circulations

The Arcade Franchise That Broke The Mold

METAL SLUG 3



Will Now Break New Ground For Your Xbox

Video gaming is all about game play. Always was, always will be. Experience the title that defined arcade action adventure... Bringing to Xbox added levels, added difficulty and more than enough firepower to overheat your Xbox.

TEEN T
Animated Blood Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

ONLY ON XBOX

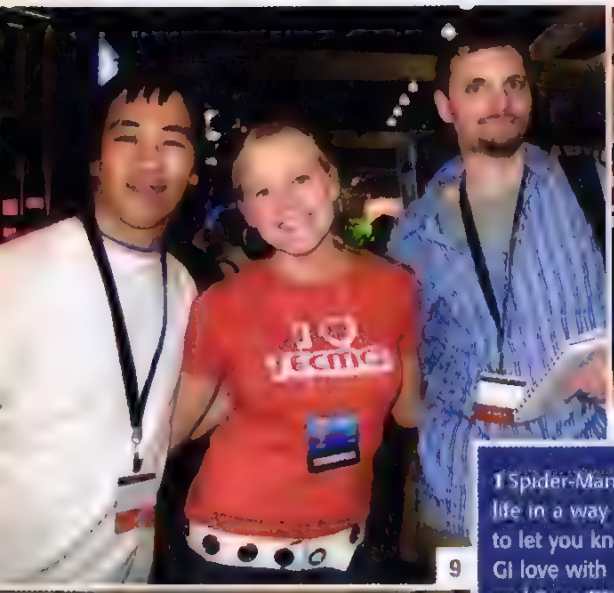
SNK NEOGEO
snkneogeousaconsumer.com

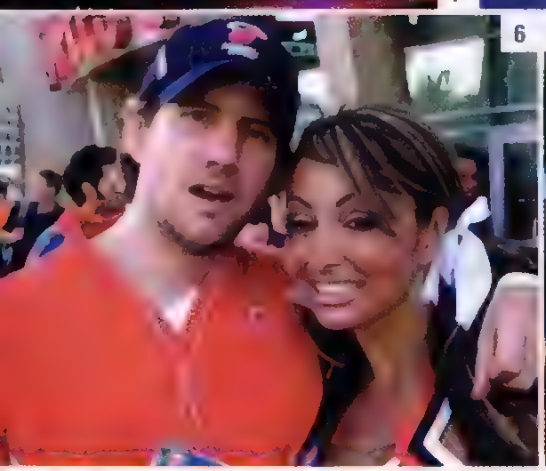
XBOX LIVE

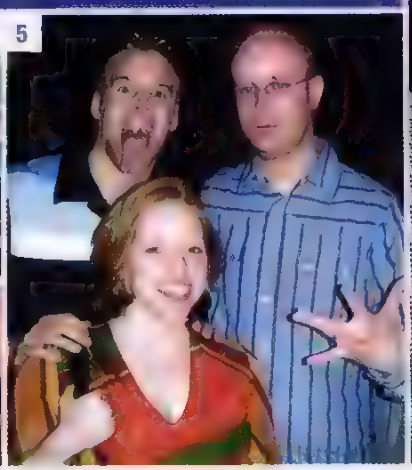
METAL SLUG is a registered trademark of PLAYMORE CORPORATION. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox Live, the Live logo, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. "SNK" & "NEOGEO" are registered trademarks of PLAYMORE CORPORATION.

GI SPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry







1 Spider-Man creator Stan Lee has truly lived life in a way that you never will. Just wanted to let you know. Sorry **2** Andy spreads the GI love with SOCOM mastermind Seth Luisi and Sony PR director Molly Smith **3** "Damn, check out the gams on that guy! Hey honey, do fries come with that shake?" Billy shows off his legs for members of the Metroid Prime team **4** At Sega's E3 ESPN soiree, Reiner hangs with Capcom's Carrie Root and Masayuki Fukumoto **5** Matt (who still thinks doing that sign with his hand makes him cool), reunites with the Digital Deviant, Justin Leeper, and his better half, Activision's Kate Mitchum **6** GI Spy pulls a fast one on professional trickster Jaime Kennedy by telling him he was posing for a picture for *US Weekly*. Suckal **7** Remember all those letters you wrote about how Game Informer needed more pictures of mimes being molested at Sony E3 parties? Well, don't say we never did anything for you **8** Jenny McCarthy was on hand at the Xbox press conference to bring a little hope to the life of game dorks everywhere. Thanks, Jen! Blackberry us soon, 'kay? **9** Kato and Reiner chill with Tecmo's Melody Ann Pfeiffer, who loves her job and has the t-shirt to prove it

TOURNAMENTS 24/7
NEW SETS RELEASED
Wizards OF THE COAST
CUSTOMIZABLE AVATARS !
LIVE CHAT !
MAGIC The Gathering ONLINE
ALL LEVELS OF PLAY
Prizes
ALL MAGIC ALL THE TIME – UNLIMITED STRATEGIES
BEST REWARDS
HALL OF CHAMPIONS
THOUSANDS OF CREATURES
MOST COMPETITION
DEADLIEST STRATEGIES
PLACE TO PLAY: WWW.MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM THIS IS THE PLACE
THIS IS THE PLACE TO PLAY: WWW.MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM
WWW.MAGICTHEGATHERING.COM THIS IS THE PLACE

DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

LIKE A SOUTHERN DEBUTANTE

The changes to the magazine look good, but I can't believe you got rid of two necessary things. First, the New Releases page is gone. Secondly, I can't believe the section where editors tell their thoughts on random stuff is gone. Now the only person I get to hear from is smelly Andy.

Noah Cook
Michigan

WOW! That's all I can say after receiving the latest issue. No other mag has this great of a design – so simplistic, modern, and smart. I love it!

Tristan Powell
Via email

What were you thinking, editor people? The new format in issue 133 is weird and confusing. It looks like something out of a sci-fi movie. The reviews look bad and the order of sections is all mixed up. It's insane! The only cool new thing is that Calendar – it is very helpful and informative.

Sean Dempsey
Medina, OH

I just got your May Issue. I was at first appalled that you had gone and changed the entire look and layout of my beloved GI. However, as I began to read through the magazine, I began to grow into the new look. After realizing nothing had actually changed, I started to like it. It now really looks like a game magazine is supposed to look. Keep up the good work.

Sentinel 17
Via msn.com

<Expletive deleted> you guys. The new version of GI sucks.

Nick Castillo
Via email

I just want to commend you on a great new look. The old GI was like that little annoying kid who runs into walls, but is still tolerable when he isn't having his ADHD moments. The new GI is like the suave, sophisticated Yale grad ready for the new modern world.

Juan Sebastian
Via yahoo.com

■ Reader response to Game Informer's recent makeover has been positive overall, and at bare minimum, enthusiastic. Thanks, we really appreciate the feedback. That being said, we're still messing around with it and, in our opinion, the issues after the redesign's launch have been huge improvements on a new layout we all liked in the first place.

It seems that readers have been collectively mourning the loss of one thing though, and that is the editor's diatribes in the front of the magazine. At least in part because of space, we took them out and moved our likes/dislikes lists into that position. To let the staff expand on ideas more thoroughly than those little blocks of text allowed us, the review editors you all know and love will be stating their cases in the Opinion column when they've got something really deep to share.

And, in regards to the Calendar, it is much more accurate than the old release list ever could be and offers us the ability to clue you into stuff like DVD releases and gaming events.

EXPANDING THE DEV. SQUAD

In your last issue [133, May 2004] you had a great article on creating your own video game. It was good, and it gave all the uninformed a little bit more knowledge on the subject.

One slight problem though... You explained Blender as a game engine capable of doing just about anything and great for beginners. Well, it's a wee bit more programmer-oriented than most beginners are comfortable with.

There is a solution though. It's called Game Maker (www.gamemaker.nl). It's free and astonishingly easy to use, with no programming involved. Though primarily 2D, you can get old school Doom-like games made with it.

Owen D.
Lake Elmo, Minnesota

■ Good suggestion from Owen and a handful of others giving props to Game Maker. Give it a shot and see if it fits for your next development project.

EXPOSING THE RIFT

Steve Kent's article in issue 133 ["A Shift in the Game," May 2004] was a voice not unlike my own. If you could, just tell him "Well said."

Will
Via email

I wanted to comment on the Opinion section of issue 133 (which by the way, is an amazing addition). Steve Kent succinctly put into words all of the frustration and confusion I have been experiencing the past few years as pertaining to the changing climate of video games and their culture. I may sound like an old school fanatic but there is a reason why people went berserk over the re-release of classic NES titles this past year: There is a lot to be said for simplicity in gaming. Over the top violence and ultra-realistic graphics are, to me at least, no match for solid gameplay and a title with character.

Brandon Campbell
Via hotmail.com

■ The good Mr. Kent certainly started out our new monthly feature with a bang, and we're really excited about what the section offers readers and industry insiders – a forum for expressing anything and everything that people may feel about this gaming world we like to call home.

TOUCHÉ

It is my sad duty to hand you the dubious Dennis Miller Award. Why? Let's look at those captions in issue 133. "These aren't the droids you're looking for," *Star Wars*, okay. "Same as it ever was..." – a little Talking Head quip, I can deal with that. Let's see. "Must...crush capitalism..." a *Simpsons* reference, always good. "Manos: hands of fate." Screeeeeech!

Manos: hands of fate. Granted, the worlds of video game nerddom and *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* nerddom are only a quick shuttlecraft ride apart, but seriously every reader who actually GOT that caption, raise your hands of fate.

I thought so.

Just so you know that I'm here to help, I thought of a couple of alternate suggestions: "Way too much appetite suppressant." "Who rocked the party that lost his body?" "Thing 1 and Thing 2." (Two references for the price of one, *Addams Family* and *Dr. Seuss*).

Like I said, I'm a big fan, but I humbly suggest you take care how far afield your captions get – one of these days [illegible] from Monday Night Football.

Inset: The picture in question from the Pool Paradise review [issue 133]

Will Robie
Via juno.com

■ We used the giant wheel of pop culture references and witty quotable retorts that our editors go to for most of our captions for this response. Since you are clearly wily like a fox, we know that in France you would be called la renarde and hunted with only your cunning to protect you. And in case you're wondering, we learned everything we know from college...and the *Police Academy* movies.

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

"★★★★★"

"Best Action Game"

RELOADED FOR PC.

TRUE CRIME

STREETS OF LA™

The streets of Los Angeles are being terrorized by vicious gangs and it's going to take a renegade ex-cop like you to clean them up. Drive, fight and shoot your way through 240 square miles of recreated LA. And now, the deepest console game ever just got deeper on PC. Battle friends in PC-exclusive multiplayer modes. Draw from an arsenal of new weapons like rocket launchers and crossbows. This is True Crime for the PC.

Visit truecrimela.com for exclusive game clips and soundtrack samples.

Luxoflux

ACTIVISION

activision.com

PlayStation.2

XBOX

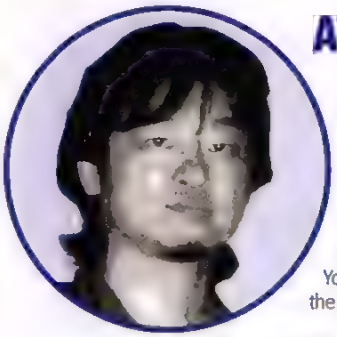
POWERED BY gamespy.

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

MATURE 17+ M ESRB

Blood and Gore
Mature Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Violence

© 2003-2004 Activision, Inc. and its affiliates. Published and distributed by Activision Publishing, Inc. Activision is a registered trademark and True Crime and Streets of LA are trademarks of Activision, Inc. and its affiliates. All rights reserved. Developed by Luxoflux. Microsoft, Xbox and the Xbox logos are trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. TM, ® and the Nintendo GameCube logo are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2003 Nintendo. All rights reserved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The NVIDIA logo and the "The way it's meant to be played" logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of NVIDIA Corporation. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. PC CD-ROM logo: TM and © IEMA, 2000. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners. Screenshots taken from PC gameplay.



ATSUSHI INABA

HEAD OF CLOVER STUDIOS AND CREATOR OF VIEWTIFUL JOE

Is there anything that you're looking forward to seeing here at E3?
I always look forward to E3, but this year, there hasn't really been that much that I've been impressed with or that's out of the ordinary. We always come to E3 to look for stuff that looks good. But our imagination is soon spent. There's not much that stands out.

You took a huge risk with Steel Battalion. Is that something that more companies should be doing?
You've got to take risks like that. I think more companies should take risks like that, because all the games get to be the same and the market shrinks.

What does the next year look like for video games?
Really what is catching my interest is Xbox 2. [I'm really excited to hear about that] and Nintendo DS, those I find really interesting. The Xbox and its network is very popular in North America, and the DS is a game developer's dream. Isn't it about time that we got away from that GTA-style trend that has been around for the last couple years and did something else?

INSANE CLOWN POSSE

RAPPERS/SPREADERS OF CLOWN LOVE

Do you play video games a lot?
VIOLENT J: Well, he does more than I do.

SHAGGY 2 DOPE: Yeah, I got like four PlayStations at my house. I don't know why, because I'll leave them on the bus or whatever. I play mostly like Tony Hawk. You know, just like games like that. But I don't play that many video games because they get too addictive, man. You know what I'm saying?

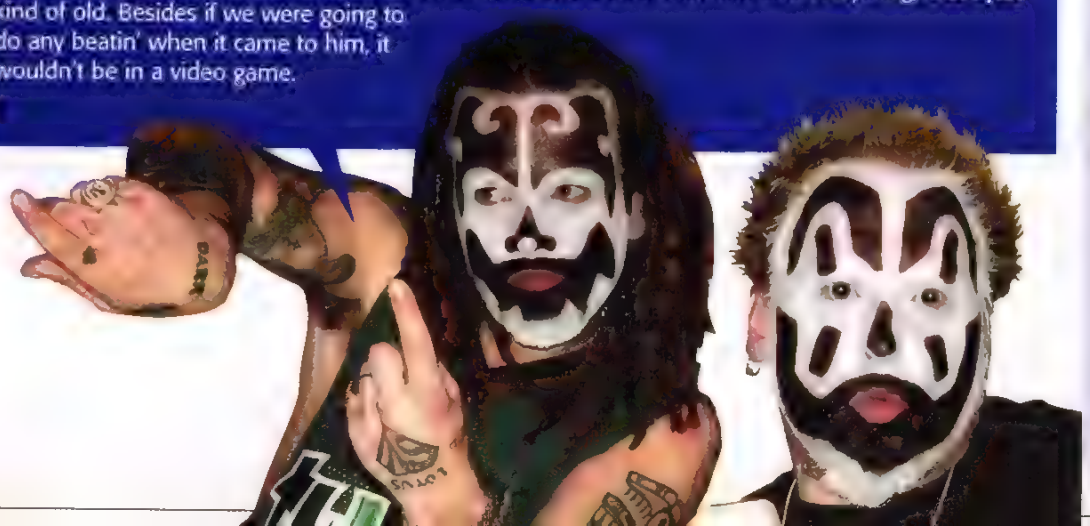
How do you think Eidos did with translating the whole juggalo, ICP vibe into Backyard Wrestling?
VJ: I think they did a good job because of those juggalos behind it. It was juggalos that did all that. The people at Eidos are real juggalos. Therefore, they knew exactly how to make it. That's why they called us. Because they knew it was a good combination. We probably wouldn't have made sense in any other wrestling game, but Backyard Wrestling: There Goes the Neighborhood? [We're] perfect for that.

In real life in a wrestling match between Shaggy and Violent J, who would win?
VJ: Shaggy, because he's way better conditioned. Look at how f——in' thick he is. Look at that cut they gave me. They put me in a shirt because they know how flabby I am.

SHAGGY: See, the whole thing is they make you big and thick like that, all fit, because at one point in my wresting career, which was about six months ago, I was like that. But I got off my training now so you can see the four inch pythons going on right now.

Are any other rappers that you wish were in this game so that you could kick their ass in the game?
VJ: Well, you know, there's a couple of rappers we wish were in the game, you know what I mean?

Anybody else from Detroit [Eminem]?
VJ: Naw, it's pretty much old school. Like as far as us and a beef with him and everything, that's just kind of old. Besides if we were going to do any beatin' when it came to him, it wouldn't be in a video game.



Views From The Floor

Neils Garlick

We got in to see the DS, and that was pretty amazing. That was really revolutionary. The touch screen thing was great. I think if they do it correctly the potential is just sky high. I mean there are so many new ways you can implement it in game design. It's amazing.

Nate Rathbun

I'm a little disappointed with Doom 3. I don't think it's got the coverage that it's been building up to, and I actually got to run through it on the Xbox, and I wasn't overly impressed.

On the PSP's potential price: Depending on the graphics power, I've heard it's comparable to PS2. I'd say I'd pay, depending upon the line up of games and what developers they have, $150 or so. Not much more than that.

Remington Noss

What looks probably the best is Guild Wars. I'm a big PvP fan and that's finally bringing back the original PvP. You start at level one. You can PvP no matter what level you're at. And it has a little bit for everybody. Another game that really piqued my interest was Jade Empire. I was sitting there with one of the game designers and he was kind of giving me some tips while I was playing, and just the different amount of combos and attacks you can use took my breath away. That game was awesome.

On the PSP: Honestly I would prefer to just use the standard console. I think it's a really nice frilly thing, but it doesn't apply for most gamers.

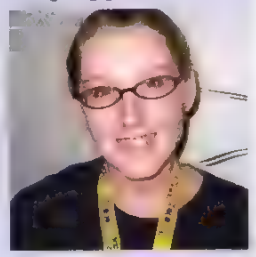
Sam McMullen

I think [the PSP] is amazing; I definitely think that it might blow the DS out of the water. I'm really impressed with the fact that it's going to have movies on it and that it's going to have all of the other functionality of a good Sony product. I also think that the graphics are going to be phenomenal. The concept behind [the DS] is really, really solid. I like having a stylus-based game system, as well as the two backlit screens. I also like the wireless idea.

Views From The Floor

Bethany Blue

I liked Final Fantasy XII and all of the Square Enix stuff. Some of the SNK fighters were really good. Oh, and Mortal Kombat [Deception] was awesome. Actually, I'm not really into fighting games. I'm actually just starting to play them. [MK: Deception] had different things you could do other than just being a fighter. It had chess mode and kind of a Tetris game added to it, too.



Greg Gibson

I really liked the PSP. The screen was awesome. Unbelievable graphics. Good size, too. You're able to fit it in your pocket and everything. [Nintendo] DS looks a little bit larger, kind of a little bit less portable. Seeing that [PSP's] a portable DVD device and everything, I think I'd pay a maximum probably $350, maybe $400. Just because portable DVD players can easily be $299.

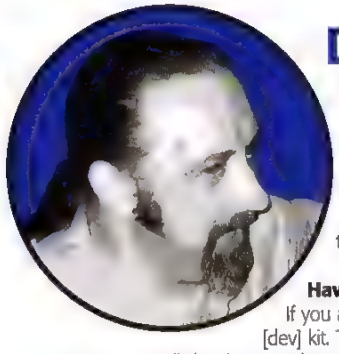
John Jones

Leisure Suit Larry looked absolutely terrific. I haven't played the previous games in the series, but I'm a fan of the adventure genre, and they seem to be taking it in a really interesting direction with the streaming conversational options.

I've seen a picture of the DS, and I think if they're going to be going in the direction that they were with the GameCube and Game Boy Advance connectivity it could be really interesting, because I've played some games with that. I've heard that the DS has a touch sensitive screen. You can move things around and such. That sounds awesome. I'd love to see Nintendo really take advantage of that.

Kathleen Foley

Gameplay is something that I really think gets lost compared to graphics. I think they concentrate so much on the artwork that the gameplay and the controls aren't given as much thought as they should. Especially with the 3D games where you're running around and the camera ends up behind a wall, it's very annoying.



DAVID DOAK

DIRECTOR OF FREE RADICAL DESIGN

With companies focusing on smaller lineups of games and many turning to licenses, is this the way of the future or just a cycle for the industry?

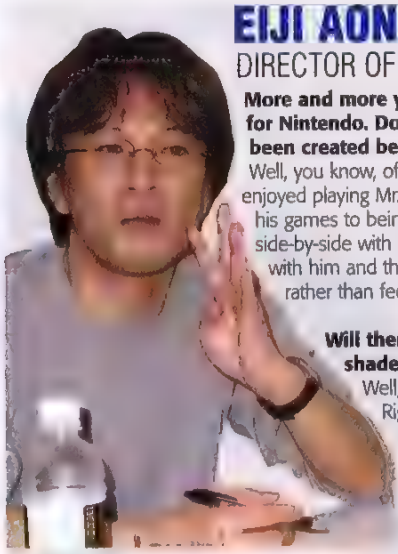
We love doing original stuff, but there's no point in doing the best thing ever if it doesn't reach the mass market anymore, because the costs of producing it are becoming so high. Everyone loves successful originality, but they only love it after it's successful. I hate to think that we'd become more restrictive in what we do.

Have you started working on any next-generation titles?

If you are an independent developer, even of our pedigree, it can be difficult to get access to the [dev] kit. The first-parties are always trying to place it with sure-fire products. I think they need to be more inclusive of all developers, otherwise they are going to make it difficult to compete. If you look at the really good games at this point in the lifespan of the current generation, they are all games that are built on second generations of engines, and all have had two or three years to develop. Where are the games coming for launch? They need to be making them now or a year ago.

Any comment on Microsoft's acquisition of Rare [Doak's old employer] and specifically their product so far for the Xbox?

I think they paid a lot of money for it [laughs]. It seems a bit strange that they ended up buying a company where the first fruits of that [Grabbed by the Ghoulies] was the kind of game that wasn't really an Xbox game. I guess in the timescale of the whole thing happening and being executed, the industry kind of moved on. Still, Rare has an enormous talent for high production values. I'm sure you'll see some really good stuff come out of [the acquisition].



EIJI AONUMA

DIRECTOR OF THE NEW LEGEND OF ZELDA FOR GAMECUBE

More and more you are being identified as the man that's guiding the Zelda franchise for Nintendo. Do you feel a lot of pressure to deliver up to the heritage of what has been created before?

Well, you know, of course I do feel pressure from time to time, but I'm a gamer that always enjoyed playing Mr. Miyamoto's games. If you follow the timeline, [I went from] a gamer enjoying his games to being someone that worked underneath him on games, and now being able to work side-by-side with him on the Zelda franchise is very exciting and thrilling. Being able to sit down with him and think of new things for the Zelda series is a great honor and a lot of fun. Right now, rather than feeling a lot of pressure, I'm excited about where we're going to take Zelda next.

Will there ever be a true sequel to the The Wind Waker using the same cel-shaded graphics engine and the same style?

Well, there's definitely a possibility of that. Yeah, I think we can definitely consider that. Right now, with the adult Link, we're using this more realistic art style, but if we decide to go back and make a story based on more of a child Link, then reusing that toon shading art style is definitely a possibility. So if I, over the course of time here, come up with some ideas that would work well, again to revisit a child Link story, yeah I think I would definitely like to do that. But nothing definitive at this point.

Do you have any Zelda games in development for the DS currently or plans to in the near future?

Yeah, it's undergoing planning right now. The team that put together Four Swords Adventures, they're used to working with connectivity. So the idea of working with the DS and using the dual screens to show off some new and innovative gameplay is something we'd really like to do. So that's definitely under consideration right now.

KEIJI INAFUNE

EXECUTIVE OFFICER, R&D DIVISION, CAPCOM

You've stressed that Shadow of Rome was conceived for the U.S. market; it hasn't even been officially announced for Japan. Do you feel that tailoring products for America is part of a new philosophy for Capcom Japan?

It's not about going after the American market just because it's bigger; that's not Capcom's new philosophy. Since the PlayStation 2, graphics have gotten a lot better and people have been able to realize the stories they have been going after, and the lines between movies and games have gotten dimmer and dimmer. The American style of making games is a lot more creative, more based in movies. The Japanese method has its own unique style. Before it might have worked, now it doesn't. Now, we Japanese have to learn from how Americans make games, to make it more of a movie experience. It is a new challenge, and maybe we can learn something new. This is something we feel we have to do in the future to survive, because the industry is changing so rapidly.

In America, we hear about how the Japanese game market is depressed. Is this a reality?

I wish I could tell you it's all just a rumor, but the reality is that it's not doing so well. There are a lot of different reasons for that. One is the Japanese economy. Another reason is our responsibility, we didn't really think about the Japanese gamer. We didn't try to push the envelope and deliver new experiences, we were pumping out sequels and things that worked before. We got lazy as creators and thought, "If we make a sequel it will sell." But that's not the case. Eventually the Japanese core users went on to different things and got tired of games. Now, we have to come up with a counter-attack plan to come up with some new, fun play experiences for the Japanese market. This is one of the reasons we're trying to learn from the American gaming market.

TSUYOSHI TANAKA

PRODUCER, CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 1

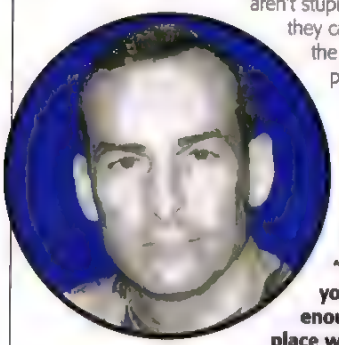
Devil May Cry 2 was not received as well critically or commercially as the first game. Have you made changes in DMC 3 to reflect that?
The game itself will give you the ultimate answer as to whether 3 is better than 2. As far as Devil May Cry 2 goes, whether I'm satisfied with it or not, it was a different concept. That was the concept we were aiming for; that's the concept we were able to do. Just because you get the concept right, it doesn't mean that the gamers will like it. It's a lot of guesswork. Sometimes you hit with a new concept, sometimes you miss.

"Sometimes you hit with a new concept, sometimes you miss."

COLONEL E. CASEY WARDYNSKI

DIRECTOR, AMERICA'S ARMY GAME PROJECT, U.S. ARMY

Are you worried that by portraying the Army in the game, you might be misleading kids? There really can't be any real consequences in the game – not real consequences like those our troops in Iraq are facing.
Well, you can die in the game. I've never seen a commercial where somebody died. I've never seen a print ad where somebody died. So, life is a continuum, and we think the games move the ball more in the direction of realism in terms of the benefits and consequences of service. The other thing we know is, A) kids aren't stupid, and B) there's lots of other resources they can look to. The game isn't supposed to be the end point, it's supposed to be the starting point, because it's aimed at teens. You can't join the Army until you're 18. This is 13 through 17-year-olds. What we're trying to do is make sure the Army is in the set of things kids think about. Beyond that, they are likely – and they need to – do more research.



I know you have plans with Ubisoft to bring America's Army to consoles. The console market has always tended towards more "run-and-gun" gameplay. How can you find a balance between providing enough action to compete in the marketplace while not feeling like you're being irresponsible towards the Army's mission?
When we licensed the game to them, the design criteria we use were built into the license. We'll review their console games the same way we review our product. We've been working with their group that's making the Xbox and PlayStation 2 games, and we've been really pleased by the degree to which they're trying to stay true to the original game and embed the rules of engagement and rules of land warfare. Right now, one of the things we're recommending is Striker Brigade and Green Berets. The reason for picking those is that they play true-to-life in small organizations. Then we provide them resources, like one of our guys from West Point, a Green Beret major, he just came back from the War on Terror. His team destroyed about 1,200 Taliban with 12 men. He's an expert, and he advises Ubisoft on Green Berets. We also take them on base visits, so they can get in vehicles and roam around. We want them to get it right, we don't want someone's interpretation of the Army.

Also, this is probably the most cooperation the U.S. Army and the French have had for a long time! You're breaking new ground.
[Laughs] That's right – France is in this with us.

YASUMI MATSUNO

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR OF FINAL FANTASY XII

Have you begun to think about the next generation of hardware?
I'm really interested in PlayStation 3, and I want it to come out as soon as possible. PS3 needs to come out before the prices of PCs go down, because more people will start to buy PCs because of their technological advancements. The PlayStation 2 still has many more possibilities, it's just a matter of using creative thinking to come up with what's good.

TOMONOBU ITAGAKI

HEAD OF TECMO'S TEAM NINJA

We've heard a rumor that you're taking over Rygar 2. Is that true?
Regarding that, I will make an announcement in the very near future. If you're wondering why I'm making that announcement, I'll leave that to your imagination.

What do you think of other fighting games like Mortal Kombat: Deception?
I haven't seen it or played it, so I'm just making a general statement, but the action games made [in America] have very low motion quality. American developers should pay a little more attention to the way characters walk.

Some found Ninja Gaiden too hard. Any comments to those gamers?
That's the spirit of Team Ninja: We do whatever we want to do – take it or leave it.

QUOTABLES

QUOTABLE AND

HEARD AT THE SHOW

TERA PATRICK
VIVID VIDEO STAR

How did you get involved with Backyard Wrestling?
[Eidos] approached me about, well actually they had approached Vivid video, who I'm under contract with, about six months ago and asked if I'd be interested in the project and I thought, "Absolutely." I mean, this is my way of being immortalized.

Are you happy with how they made you look in the game?
I love it, I think it's great. I love my outfit. Listen to me – I sound like such a girl. I can't stop looking at it. I think it's awesome. I mean, I was just playing myself five minutes ago, and I was just having a big laugh about it.

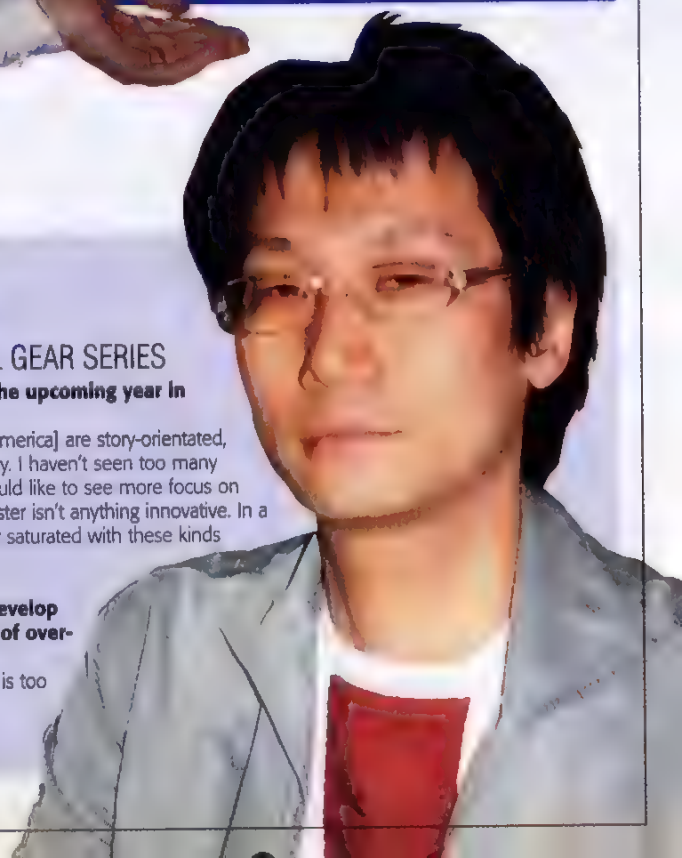
Do you see yourself doing more video game appearances in the future?
Absolutely! I hope so. I really do. I mean, I foresee something, like The Sims, which has a dating [emphasis]. I think "A Hot Date with Tera Patrick" would be great; a lot of my fans play video games.

"I haven't seen too many innovative gameplay ideas, so I would like to see more focus on the gameplay."

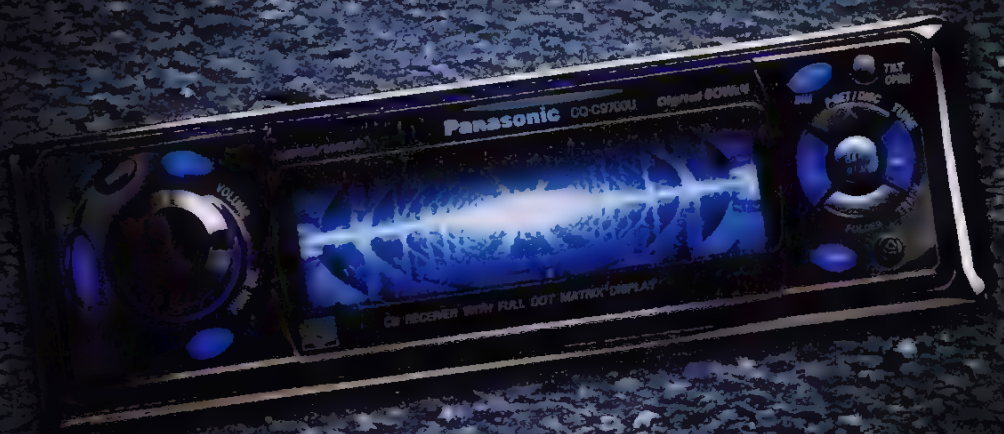
HIDEO KOJIMA
CREATOR OF THE METAL GEAR SERIES

What are your predictions for the upcoming year in video games?
Many of the games over here [in America] are story-orientated, and not really focusing on gameplay. I haven't seen too many innovative gameplay ideas, so I would like to see more focus on the gameplay. You versus the monster isn't anything innovative. In a year, the market is going to be very saturated with these kinds of games.

Would you like to personally develop an original Xbox game instead of overseeing ports?
No, I have no plans. The controller is too big! [laughs]



CLEAR AS A BELL. LOUD AS HELL.



The CQ-9700U Car CD Receiver. Experience the mind-blowing clarity of Performance Digital.
Digital Amplifier » Radio DSP » SQ9

Panasonic
ideas for life

Available February/March 2004

panasonic.com/caraudio

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

THE SPIDER BEHIND THE MASK

Activision's Spider-Man gravy train isn't slowing down anytime soon. In fact, the publisher has just confirmed a video game for the third movie. Activision has also agreed to do one based on the comic. Which one? Loose Talk has learned that this mystery arachnid will be based on the current *Ultimate Spider-Man* series which retells the famous tale of Peter Parker. In fact, work has already begun on this future game. Activision isn't mentioning which consoles it's on, leading some to believe that it won't appear until the next round of systems comes out.

EIDOS UP FOR SALE?

British paper *The Observer* published a report that American companies are looking to snatch up Eidos. Part of the allure is picking up IO Interactive (developers of Hitman) in the deal. As far as the potential suitors, the list is the usual roundup of the rich and successful – EA, Ubisoft, etc., but we're not too convinced that this rumor isn't just another guessing game from a non-industry source.

GAMES BIG WILLIE STYLE

Everyone but Jeremy loves Will Smith, and we've heard that Smith (who is an avid Civilization player) is dying to get into video games. He's had voice offers so far, but refused them. Instead, he wants to get involved in the industry by coming up with and nurturing concepts for video games, much like Vin Diesel's Tigon Games. Smith is currently talking to publishers like Atari about getting his company off the ground.

Atari is also reportedly interested in making a title based around the upcoming horror film *Devour*, which is about a video game that ends up possessing some college students.

MICROSOFT TO GBA?

An inside source has told Loose Talk that although Microsoft isn't interested in making a handheld to rival Nintendo and now Sony, that doesn't mean that it isn't looking at the market. Specifically, Microsoft has approached some developers about making some games on the Game Boy Advance and/or DS for Bill's people. We imagine Halo would be sure to jump to the platforms, as would the MechAssault series.

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

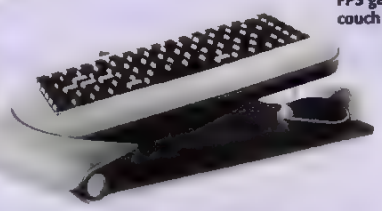
NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Cross-marketing between a video game and a comic book is common these days, as is having numerous sequels. However, back in 1982, this Atari 2600 series (based on the elements) broke the mold. Not only did you have to refer to the enclosed comic book to solve this first title's puzzles, but the game itself gave you clues which would help you in the next installment. Sound like too much work for a 2600 title? It was. Gamers didn't bite on this novel concept, and the series' last cartridge was never even released.

(Answer on page 60)

The unique "lapboard" keyboard-and-mouse controller (shown below) allows gamers to take their FPS game to the couch with ease



news

PHANTOM FINALLY UNVEILED AT E3

MYSTERY CONSOLE MATERALIZES

Up until now, talk of Infinium Lab's much-discussed Phantom console had been just that – talk. After missing a couple of proposed unveilings, the company finally stepped out of the shadows at E3, giving the world its first look at the PC/console hybrid up close and in playable form. Game Informer was given a behind-the-scenes showing of the machine by Infinium Lab's president and CEO Kevin Bachus, a former Microsoft executive who was instrumental in the launch of the Xbox. From what we saw, we can definitely say that Phantom indeed does exist, and looks to be an intriguing alternative to the traditional PC game markets.

Bachus explained the company's strategy for the system, in addition to details regarding pricing and subscription services, as well as a firm release date of November 18. At launch, customers will be able to join the Phantom service in one of two ways: by signing a two-year commitment of $29.99 per month, which would allow gamers to obtain the hardware for free; or by paying $199 up-front for the hardware, and getting the service on a month-to-month basis (the initial hardware investment would ultimately be refunded for customers that logged 24 months of service fees). For the basic service, you'll get a selection of games, and be allowed to either rent or purchase additional titles for download onto your hard drive. At this point, the games will be PC-only, with no console titles scheduled to appear on the service. Bachus feels this model will appeal to a range of consumers.

"There's a real wide variety of people that are attracted to a games-on-demand service. Initially, we're going to see a disproportionate number of gamers. What's attractive to the gamer is the range of choice – you can find games that are no longer in retail, games that never came out in retail, imports and things like that," observes Bachus.

As far as the unit itself, it's certainly an impressive-looking piece of industrial design, if a bit too reminiscent of a George Foreman Grill. The white box comes equipped with Ethernet broadband connections in back, alongside component and progression scan video outs, and optical audio outs for Dolby 5:1 playback. Inside, it's powered by an AMD Athlon XP 2500+ processor and a Nvidia GeForce FX 5700 Ultra graphics processor. Despite the fact that the unit's closed box means you won't be able to upgrade, Bachus informed us that they feel the unit will be a viable PC gaming platform for at least three years, at which point the company will allow customers to upgrade to a new version of the hardware.

The most ingenious part of the Phantom's design is the "lapboard" controller, which tilts the keyboard on an incline, allowing the user to move the mouse underneath, for use on a couch or easy chair. A console-type controller was also shown, but is only in the prototype stages at this point. Graphically, the system (which was running on a very expensive Fujitsu flatscreen HDTV) was impressive, and we played Unreal Tournament 2004 multiplayer with no trouble. The menu system, which will allow players to access reviews, demos, and downloads for games, was very easy-to-use, and features parental content controls and different desktop skins for different members of the family. All in all, a notable bit of technology – although much of the unit's success will depend on the public and publishing community's acceptance of the company's Direct TV-style business model.

While the publishers who have signed on will be announced in August, Bachus claims that the press will be impressed with the final list, characterizing publisher reaction to the Phantom as "very enthusiastic."

TALKING 'BOUT A REVOLUTION

NINTENDO CHARTS A NEW COURSE

>> Game Informer Interviews Beth Llewelyn, director of public relations for Nintendo of America, on the company's past, present, and future <<

How is the DS reception going so far?
It's been very, very positive. They've been going out, both in Japan and then talking to U.S. developers. They've been doing that for a while because they've got over a hundred companies out there starting to work on product.

Nintendo seems to be positioning the DS as a lifestyle device that you might have in class to communicate with people and play games. Are there any other types of planned peripherals or devices for the DS, similar to what you've done with the GBA camera and the GBA video cartridges?
Nothing that we've announced. But the beauty of that system [is the] fact that there is the port or media bay for the DS media, plus it also accepts Game Boy Advance cartridges – that slot could also be used for peripherals. So could it be a camera? Could it be something else that you attach on there? Yeah, it could be used for that. It comes down to what a developer chooses to do.

Along those same lines, you talked about Wi-Fi. Could you give us more details about how this is going to work? Is this supported by a Nintendo operated network?
[I'm] not going into all those details right now. It's important to get the news out that it's going to be Wi-Fi compatible. It will come down to what developers want to program for – who creates what kind of a program. But the fact that not only do we have the Nintendo proprietary system that allows communication in a confined area, like 30 to 100 feet. You're [able to link] 16 people, or 16 systems. That's in there, and then also the fact that it's Wi-Fi compatible so that you can expand that to other markets. But as far as real technical details and what that will entail, that stuff we'll be announcing later.

With GameCube you had the network adapter, but it wasn't really followed up by any sort of initiative or much publisher support. As a result, you had Phantasy Star, but there hasn't really been any games online. Do you think for DS Wi-Fi to be successful you need to support the publishers?
Nintendo's main area of focus will still remain games, and what's going to enhance that gaming experience. And if it means creating a game that uses Wi-Fi in a certain way then we're certainly going to do that. It's just a little early right now to talk about what that will be.

Here's a more practical question: Are you going to sell those styluses seperately? Because all those kids are going to lose their styluses in a week. Either that, or will you attach it with a cord or string?
I don't know if that decision's been made. It's a good one. A lot of what happens at the show here, it's the first time we're showing the system, so you tend to get a lot of feedback. And I'm sure a lot of little tweaks and fine-tuning will be done.

At the press conference Nintendo stated that the DS is going to change names before launch. Could this become a Game Boy product? There must be some temptation on the marketing side to tap into that extremely successful brand.
We believe this: we've got Game Boy; we've got GameCube. We're looking at Nintendo DS as its own category in a certain way. So it's important for it to be a standalone product. We want a name that stands on its own. And that's the intent. It's just very difficult to find a name that you can use worldwide these days. That's why it just takes some time.

Nintendo has talked about Game Boy, GameCube, and the DS as the "three pillars" of your business. Does that mean that the Game Boy also will continue in the future with future hardware iterations?
Absolutely.

Do you have any idea when the successor is planned?
No, but there's always something being worked on. Certainly they're back working on what will be the next Game Boy.

Are you going to use GameCube/DS connectivity or is that still kind of the Game Boy's arena?
That's a good question and I don't know the answer to that. I don't know if that's been decided if there's going to be a connection there.

Sega in the early nineties had a bad experience with the Genesis, 32X, Sega CD, and Saturn out at the same time. Some people have said, "Is Nintendo crowding the handheld market out and competing with themselves by having both DS and GBA?" You claim they're different products, but in a certain sense they are still in the same marketplace because they're both handheld video game systems.
They're both portable, yes.

Are you worried about the DS cannibalizing GBA sales and vice versa?
I think we're looking at this more as a way to continue to expand that market. Yes, we've sold 21 million units of Game Boy Advance. I think there's a whole lot more to sell because the DS probably will appeal even more to the – I don't know if I want to say hardcore gamer – but somebody who's really into games, at least initially. And those may be folks who maybe weren't into Game Boy.

So you see the Game Boy as maybe slightly younger and very mass market. Whereas DS is maybe older and a little more techie?
Probably initially. And even though we haven't announced a price, it will clearly be different from what it is for Game Boy Advance, which also will dictate kind of who [buys it].

Obviously it'll be more than Game Boy Advance.
You know, that's a good bet. But we understand that it can't be outrageous. We've been doing this for a while. We recognize what that threshold is.

Have you seen anything on PSP?
I've wandered around their booth to sort of get an idea. I haven't put my hands on it. I think we're both going in different directions. We're maintaining focus on fun and entertainment gaming – how we can innovate and create new ways to play games. Sony seems to be going more for the general consumer, mass market. Is it a game machine? Is it a video player? Is it a music player? They're kind of doing a little bit of everything. Whereas I think we have a much clearer vision of what we want to do with our system.

One of the great things about Game Boy Advance is that you can still have a five-man team doing a game for a developer. Using the DS's innovative two-screen and touch functionality is probably going to require larger team sizes. Do you worry that the development costs are going to become too high for studios? Especially since the DS won't have near the installed base of the GBA?
Our intent with our machine is to make it easy to develop for so that it's not like developing for a home console necessarily. Because we want people to be out there making games. In one sense, developers have to take a little leap of faith. It is a brand new system. But I think our track record, certainly on the handheld side, speaks for itself. From what we're hearing, developers are excited about it, they're saying, "Okay this is a little different. I can do this kind of a game that I couldn't do or I can't do on the existing systems." Again, that goes back to our intent all along. If we just make a prettier Game Boy, is that really going to excite gamers or excite consumers?

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO ON NINTENDO DS

The world's most respected game creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, has spent his career redefining our expectations of what video games can be. No doubt, Miyamoto's titles will be instrumental in the success of the DS. At a special question and answer session at E3, Miyamoto gave us a glimpse into his thinking about the DS, and how he feels it can help revitalize the game industry.

If you just take a glance at it, it looks like a Game Boy, but we've created this hardware with the idea that it's not a Game Boy. Obviously, the chipset and graphics of the DS are far beyond what the Game Boy has been capable of. Because we have provided backwards compatibility with the Game Boy, lots of people will see it as a Game Boy. But really we're calling this our "Third Pillar." What we mean by this is that with the DS we'll be able to create software that we haven't been able to create on any Game Boy or the GameCube.

We're always talking about Nintendo innovating new ideas, but we're always under pressure to create new and better versions of our franchises. So really the idea was to reevaluate the goal of continuing to improve on the graphics and technology, and to look for new ideas. So, of course, we're changing the controller, but we've also looked at the DS to bring a whole new generation of capabilities to the hardware.

As we look at the game industry, we see how people have been playing games for a long time and demanding higher graphics, better technology, and more in-depth gameplay. But as we see the industry continue to grow and people demand these types of games, we see that the world is really separated into two camps: one that plays video games and one camp that doesn't.

When I look back to the days of Mario, when all you would do is hit one button to make Mario jump, and see the reaction people had to that simple control, I really kind of long for that kind of control again, when games were something anyone could enjoy. With the DS, we tried to focus on a kind of control where people could be directly involved – they can touch it, they can feel exactly what it's like to be in control of that character. That's why we put so much work into the touch panel on the DS.

With the DS and the new control scheme, people that have been gaming for a long time and people who have never played a game are brought to the exact same starting line. They can go out and experience these games on the same level, without worrying about the difficulty. It's something that's accessible to everybody.

Mario Kart® DS

LET YOUR IMAGINATION RUN WILD

The DS's two screens are something completely new to the world of games, so it's anyone's guess as to how developers are going to utilize them. One interesting thing we noticed at E3 was the different ways that DS titles were configured for two screens. In general, we observed most titles seemed to have a primary and secondary screen. Obviously, in titles like Metroid Prime: Hunters, which requires use of the lower touch pad, the bottom screen was primary, with the top being used for a real-time map. On games that use a more conventional d-pad and button operation, the developers tended to use the top screens for gameplay, and the bottom for maps and stats. It's interesting to see patterns like this already surfacing so early in the DS's life.

REACTIONS

E3 is the world's largest gathering of video game developers, publishers, and fans. We took the opportunity to ask some of them their opinion on the Nintendo DS. Read on to hear what their take on Nintendo's intriguing next-gen handheld.

HIDEO KOJIMA (KONAMI)
Creator, Metal Gear Solid series

The fact that it comes with two monitors and the touch sensor, and you can tell that it's a Nintendo product, I think it's a good thing, and I think you could do many things with it. The two screens and a touch sensor feature are the draw of the thing, and I think that when many developers start developing games for [DS] they will be focusing on those features. The thing is, when people do this, they'll be coming up with the same game ideas, and they'll be too simple. What I would like to do is something no one else would think of.

YUGI NAKA (SEGA)
Co-creator, Sonic the Hedgehog

It's interesting hardware that has many playable elements that can contribute to new games. I've just started playing with it. I'm still brainstorming a lot of ideas, [seeing] what kind of things can be done. Just looking at two screens instead of one screen will broaden the ideas, and something that was unthinkable can now be happening. We have a Sonic DS title.

KEIJI INAFUNE (CAPCOM)
Executive Officer, R&D Division

I think Nintendo has their concept and their target down. They're not saying it in so many words, but it's obviously the next Game Boy Advance. Because of that, we know what worked for Game Boy Advance, we know what direction it's going in; it makes making games a lot easier for us. As for thinking that two screens might be too strange for the average consumer to get, I don't think so. I think Nintendo's pushing the envelope with a new kind of play, and more than the two screens is the fact that one of them is a touch panel. Computer car navigation systems are very popular in Japan. Even in the car navigation there were two types, one that was touch panel-operated and one that wasn't. Obviously, the touch panel one is much easier, and that pushed the whole industry forward.

JOHN KROKNES (AMUZE)
Producer, Headhunter: Redemption

I think the DS can be successful, but probably in the traditional Nintendo younger market.

the tech specs are the unit's 16-channel sound and rechargeable battery, which Nintendo promises will far eclipse the battery life of the PSP.

Of course, the DS is much more than a pumped-up GBA with double vision, as the company is intent on changing the very way we experience games through the use of the unit's touch screen. Anyone who's ever used a Palm Pilot will be right at home, and the screen seems to track the solid-feeling metal stylus very accurately. It definitely takes some getting used to, but we have no doubt that Nintendo will find a host of ingenious ways to utilize the touch screen. However, having to use one hand to grip the unit while holding the stylus in the other could force many to set the system (which is much larger than a conventional PDA) on a flat surface, diminishing the DS's portable gaming functionality.

On the downside, the traditional d-pad and face buttons actually felt a bit chintzy and too small for the unit – which is very odd for a Nintendo product. The buttons are tiny and configured so closely together that the tip of an average adult male's thumb can cover all four at once. This could prove to be problematic when playing fast-paced action games. The two shoulder buttons were solid and comfortably placed, and it's worth noting that Nintendo said that the unit shown at E3 was not the final hardware, so some of these things could be tweaked before its U.S. release in late 2004.

"...the Nintendo DS is the most daring and innovative gaming system in years."

In all honesty, it's hard to assess the DS at this point in time, simply because we've never seen anything like it. As always, Nintendo is travelling the road less taken, following its muse into uncharted waters. Already, it's a pretty impressive list of "firsts": the first two-screen handheld, the first mainstream system to use a touch screen, and the first to really put an emphasis on wireless connectivity. The DS represents a huge risk for Nintendo, which could have been content with the Game Boy's 15-year dominance of the handheld market. Whether it opens up a new era of gaming like the Nintendo Entertainment System or crashes and burns like the ill-fated Virtual Boy remains to be seen, but the Nintendo DS is the most daring and innovative gaming system in years.

THE NEXT EVOLUTION OF GAMING?

Nintendo claims that over 100 developers have signed on to produce games for the DS, including the brains behind such big franchises as Activision's Spider-Man, Ubisoft's Rayman, Sega's Sonic the Hedgehog, Electronic Art's Need for Speed, and Namco's Pac-Man. Still, expect that, as in the past, Nintendo itself will be the company that pushes the DS to its conceptual and technical limits. The company showed off a number of DS titles at E3 and here are a few of the highlights:

SUPER MARIO 64X4

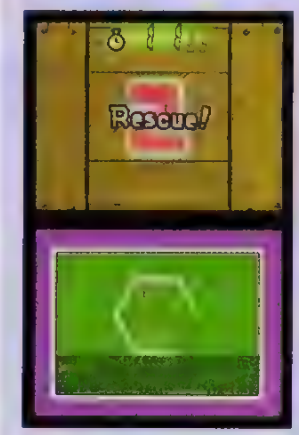
A multiplayer game based on the N64 classic, only one level (based on the opening castle area of Super Mario 64) of Super Mario 64x4 was playable on the floor. This is one of the games that seemed more like an enhanced Game Boy Advance title than one specifically created for the DS. Using the conventional d-pad and button scheme, players competed with each other to collect stars littered across the playfield. It's nothing special, but could be a strong multiplayer title. Plus, everyone knows that the Mario franchise will help sell systems.

METROID PRIME: HUNTERS

Easily the most graphically impressive DS game shown at E3, Hunters shows the system's ability to handle a fast and furious 3D experience. Fans were clamoring to get their hands on it, but some were disappointed with the touch screen control, which requires you to turn by moving the stylus at the bottom of the screen and tap the screen to fire your weapons. Interesting, but Metroid might be better served with a more conventional design.

ANIMAL CROSSING DS

Sadly, this wasn't playable at E3, since Animal Crossing's quirky, communication-based gameplay seems a perfect fit with the DS. Judging by the brief video we saw, the stylus and touch screen is being used to perform the more work-intensive interfaces (like typing and menu selections) of the GC version. We're not sure if Animal Crossing will utilize the wireless functionality, but the possibilities for player-to-player interaction and commerce seem endless.



WARIOWARE, INC. DS

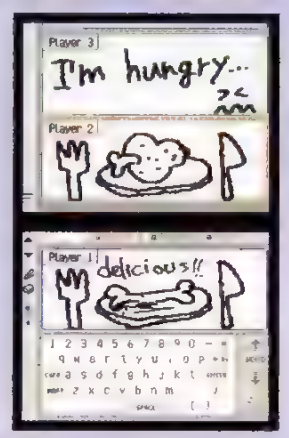
WarioWare's manic, simple minigames are made for the DS. This game made the best use of the stylus, allowing you to chop food thrown at you, drag objects across the screen, or draw a quick picture. Of all the playable DS games on the floor, WarioWare easily outstripped more well-known franchises and stands out as the most fun DS title of the show.

SUPER MARIO BROS. DS

Another somewhat mysterious DS title that Nintendo provided screenshots for, this is a new side-scrolling platformer in the spirit of the original NES Super Mario Bros. Judging by these screenshots, the only use being made of the extra screen is to...tell you the name of the game you're playing! Ah, we just got some warm memories of the Dreamcast VMU! Still, the DS's advanced graphics capabilities are reason enough for a new platforming adventure – just check out the jumbo Mario! Sweet.

MARIO KART DS

So far, there seems to be two types of DS games: those that use the dual screens to their full potential and conventional titles that use the extra real estate for real-time maps or scoreboards. Mario Kart falls squarely in the latter camp, appearing to be little more than the kart racing action the series is known for – which is not a bad thing by any means. It's possible this could use stylus control like Metroid, but we doubt it.



PICTOCHAT

Although it's not a "game" as such, Pictochat was actually one of the highlights of the DS display. The final version will allow up to 16 users to trade instant messages, doodles, and drawings in real-time. You can type using an on-screen keyboard, or just scrawl out manic notes in freehand. As you can imagine, the possibilities for screwing around during class should be enough to give the teachers of America a few more gray hairs.

DEMOS

In addition to the games announced at the show, there were a number of tech demos made available for play that showed off the DS's feature set or concepts that might be utilized in future software. These include Balloon Trip, in which the player had to draw clouds onscreen to stop Baby Mario from plummeting to his death; Carving, a simulation in which you could whittle shapes out of wood, steel, or watermelons with the stylus; and Table Hockey, a version of the popular arcade amusement that used the touch panel.

NINTENDO DS:
NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT
CAN DS RESHAPE THE FACE OF GAMING?

■ With wireless and Wi-Fi compatibility, The DS will take gaming on the go to a whole new level

There's no company quite like Nintendo, and there's never been a video game system quite like the Nintendo DS. The company is staking its future on the success of a concept that has never been attempted in the history of gaming: a two-screen system that also utilizes a PDA-style touch-screen and stylus. Unconventional? Sure, but Nintendo's decades-long heritage of making top-notch hardware is reason enough to examine this machine a little more closely.

First, let's look at the unit itself, which was available for play at the Nintendo booth. In terms of design, its drab gray color and dull finish aren't as inspiring as the ultra-sleek PSP, but it's a comfortable size and feels as sturdy in construction as you would expect from Nintendo-engineered hardware. One thing that's instantly apparent is the improvement in visual display quality over the Game Boy SP – both LCD screens are bright and vivid, and don't require the use of a frontlight, which tends to result in a washed-out look on the SP. There are two ports, located behind the screens near the hinge, one of which supports DS memory cards, and another which can be used for Game Boy Advance cartridges or peripheral connections. Obviously, the backwards compatibility with the wide selection of GBA titles already on the market is a huge advantage for the DS, and could likely be a major factor in purchasing decisions for consumers who have hundreds of dollars invested in their handheld libraries.

Under the hood, the unit is powered by two processors (one ARM9 and one ARM7), which together can be used to render 3D games running at 60 frames per second. Based on what we saw at the show, expect the graphics capabilities to be similar to that of the Nintendo 64. However, given the brightness and resolution of the LCD screens, the graphics actually appear a bit more crisp than the N64 on a typical television. In keeping with the company's "connectivity" initiative, the unit also has built-in wireless gaming and messaging capabilities. Players will be able to use a proprietary short-distance (30 to 100 feet) connection to assemble up to 16 players, or the built-in Wi-Fi, which will theoretically allow you to play people across the country or – the world. Still, after witnessing the still-born GameCube online initiative, we'll have to wait for more detail before we get too giddy regarding DS Wi-Fi functionality. Rounding out

Nintendo president Satoru Iwata detailed Nintendo's plans for both the DS and future home console systems

E3 2004

NINTENDO PRESS CONFERENCE

NINTENDO'S GOT A NEW ATTITUDE

Let's be honest, Nintendo press conferences always get the most fanboy love at E3. Sony and Microsoft could announce that they are merging, buying Electronic Arts, and creating a new console together that runs 3D graphics on an 8Ghz CPU and many conventioneers would still walk away saying that Pikmin 2 stole the show. This year, however, Nintendo – usually known for its conservative style – got an unusual injection of machismo in the form of its new executive vice president of sales and marketing, Reggie Fils-Aime.

Fils-Aime kicked off the proceeding with, "My name is Reggie, and I'm about kicking ass. I'm about taking names, and we're about making games." A man of impressive stature and a penetrating glare, Fils-Aime cut an imposing figure onstage, a far cry from past Nintendo emcees like Peter Main (for more on Reggie-mania, see our sidebar).

After Fils-Aime excited the crowd, it was time for George Harrison, Nintendo's longtime senior vice president of marketing to expound on Nintendo's position in the marketplace. Citing slumping sales industry-wide, Harrison went on to show that Nintendo was the only company with positive sales growth in the past fiscal year. Now, the more cynical might say that this growth is more a reflection of the previous year's poor numbers, but either way it's clear that the GameCube price drop and the continued success of the Game Boy SP is keeping Nintendo well in the black.

Taking a shot at Sony's PSP, Harrison also observed that, "Nine serious competitors have made a run at Game Boy in the past 15 years, but nine have failed. Game Boy doesn't just lead the handheld market – it owns it." Citing the nearly 25 million Game Boy Advance units sold to date, Harrison also questioned the PSP's ability to make a dent in the marketplace.

Of course, Nintendo is not standing still, and much of the program was devoted to its newest handheld gaming system, the Nintendo DS. After showing off the unit to the public for the first time, Harrison introduced a video showing a number of leading developers singing the praises of the unique two-screen console. Throughout the presentation, Harrison emphasized the product's innovative qualities, asking the audience, "Do you want to go just a little bit faster down the same streets you've always driven, or down a new road to places you've never seen before?"

Rounding out the show was an appearance by Nintendo president Satoru Iwata, and "The Video Heard 'Round the World" – Miyamoto's mind-blowing teaser trailer for the new The Legend of Zelda title.

SHOW HIGHLIGHTS:

¡VIVA REGGIE!

Nintendo fans, fed up with trash-talking Xbox and PS2 owners, got a new hero at E3. Reggie Fils-Aime. Seriously, we almost fainted when Reggie stared into the pit of our souls…it's almost like he knew we used to wet the bed when we were in high school. Inspired by Reggie's aggro persona, the Internet soon crowned him the king of the Nintendo nation. Soon, "I'm about kicking ass and taking names" was the catchphrase of gamers everywhere, and some popular Internet forums had to create whole boards devoted to Reggie fan art and discussion. Whether or not DS succeeds, Nintendo has created at least one new gaming icon at E3…can a Reggie-themed FPS be far behind?

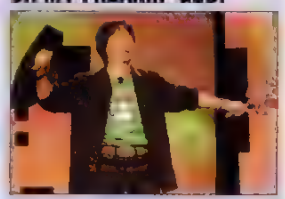
THE COMING REVOLUTION?

Alongside the usual trumpeting of their familiar characters and the expected debut of the DS, Nintendo's Satoru Iwata did drop a few hints as to the company's strategy for the next home console as well. Enigmatically, Iwata revealed, "I want you to know that Nintendo is working on our next system, and that system will create a gaming revolution."

Iwata observed that today's graphics have become so realistic that future generations of console hardware must do more than simply improve upon the technological specifications of systems past. "A new machine must offer [new] play experiences," commented Iwata, "something no other machine has offered before."

While no details were given as to just what this "gaming revolution" would entail, given Nintendo's track record of outside-the-box thinking and its extremely daring plans for the DS, we can't help but wonder what they have in store for gamers in the next console generation.

OH MY FREAKIN' GOD!



That was pretty much everyone's reaction when Nintendo dropped the bomb on the next iteration of the Zelda franchise. Reggie kicked it off by simply stating, "Before you leave, I'd like you to step into one more world for Nintendo GameCube." This was followed by a trailer featuring a mature Link galloping through environments so beautiful that they – literally! – brought tears to the eyes of one Nintendo fan we spied sitting in the audience. The applause reached decibel levels more akin to that of the seventh game of the World Series than a press conference.

Following the footage, Shigeru Miyamoto made a crowd-pleasing entrance (is there any other kind of Miyamoto entrance?) armed with full-sized replicas of Link's sword and shield. Alright, even we'll admit that was pretty awesome. Speaking briefly on the game, Miyamoto said, "We are now taking you to a world where Link has grown up. A world where he will act different and look different. In order to grow, Link must not stand still – and neither can I."

While no details were released regarding the game's setting or gameplay, it was most certainly a highlight of the show for everyone who witnessed it.

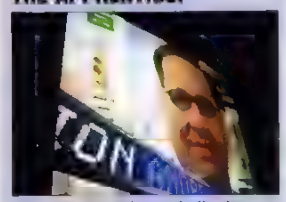
SHOW HIGHLIGHTS:

EA GETS LIVE

It's been a long time coming, but at last EA and Microsoft have put their differences aside and decided to play nice on Xbox Live. Expect the full complement of EA Sports titles to be compatible with the system, as well as Need for Speed Underground 2, Goldeneye: Rogue Agent, Battlefront: Modern Combat, Burnout 3, and TimeSplitters: Future Perfect . It was gratifying to see the two companies, which had disagreed over matters such as control of the customer relationship, revenue sharing, and server management, decide to give the fans what they want.

"Once we got through some of the 'religion' that both of us had built up over time," observed Bach, "and we got down to the real meat of things, there was a lot of common ground."

THE APPRENTICE:



Microsoft poked a little fun at itself and Sony with a very funny spoof of *The Apprentice*, which challenged Microsoft's Peter Moore, J Allard, and Robbie Bach to compete with actors playing Sony's Andrew House, Kaz Hirai, and Ken Kutaragi in creating the world's best online gaming service.

The Donald was in fine form, chastising Robbie Bach for Microsoft's weak sports lineup ("Robbie – NFL Fever? Is that the best you can do? Save it!"), but saved most of his ire for the ersatz Sony gang, claiming "What do you think we're selling here, lemonade? Why are you ignoring the service side of the equation? You didn't talk to customers...the whole online thing has been a complete and total disaster!" before uttering the feared words: "You're all fired."

Sony's Hirai seemed to take the ribbing in stride, commenting in an interview with GI, "It's all about fun at the end of the day. I guess I feel sorry that that's what they had to lead with for a press conference because they didn't have tangible stuff to go out there and say, 'This is what we're going to be doing.'"

NEW ONLINE FEATURES ANNOUNCED

Microsoft is planning to launch the Xbox Arcade service this fall, which will feature more "casual gamer" oriented fare including arcade classics like Dig Dug and Galaxian as well as popular puzzle titles like Bejeweled. Customers will be able to purchase and download the titles onto their Live account, and play them on demand.

In addition, video messaging is in the works, to complement the recently added voice mail functions of Xbox Live.

Halo 2 is coming out on November 9th – and Microsoft's Peter Moore's got the fake tattoo to prove it!

E3 2004

MICROSOFT PRESS CONFERENCE

XBOX PUTS THE FOCUS ON GAMES

In past E3s, Microsoft's press conferences were routinely upstaged by Sony's entertainment biz theatrics, so this year the company broke out of its buttoned-down image with an irreverent tone that poked fun at both itself and chief competitors in the industry. In fact, sometimes the event seemed more like "J, Peter, and Robbie's Comedy Hour" than a press conference.

Games were still a key focus of the event, and the show kicked off with a video montage of some impressive Xbox titles including Full Spectrum Warrior, MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf, Conker: Live and Reloaded (a crowd favorite), and...um...Shrek 2.

J Allard began the evening, welcoming the crowd to E3, praising the games just shown, and promising, "Tonight, we're going to show you how we're leading in software and service. We're going to show you how we're leading in innovation of new games, and we'll show you tonight how we're working with the best partners in the industry."

Following an amusing parody of Donald Trump's hit reality show *The Apprentice*, and the introduction of some promising new Xbox Live features (see sidebars), Allard took the opportunity to tout the company's XNA development platform, and showed a new version of Pseudo Interactive's "Crash" tech demo from the Game Developer's Conference, which this time showcased two gorgeous Saleens colliding and shattering across the screen. If this is any indication of what developers can accomplish with XNA, the outlook for the next generation of systems is bright indeed.

Once again, games took the forefront, with another selection of trailers, after which Microsoft's Peter Moore took the stage and introduced a very stunning live Halo 2 multiplayer demonstration. Even better, Moore finally confirmed the game's release date, which he said was "set in stone," rolling up his sleeve to reveal a Halo logo and the date November 9 tattooed on his arm. Fake ink and beefcake aside, it was certainly gratifying to finally know when we can get our hands on this sure-to-be classic.

Moore also showcased Tecmo's Dead or Alive: Ultimate and a somewhat underwhelming Doom 3 video. He then presented the world premiere of the company's would-be Gran Turismo killer, Forza Motorsport. Forza looked impressive indeed, and aims to one-up GT with real body damage, exhaustive vehicle customization, Xbox Live play, and development help from Ferrari's F1 design team.

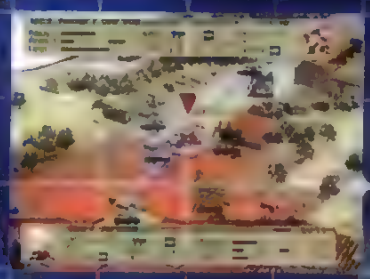
Finally, Xbox head honcho Robbie Bach took the stage, and proclaimed that an era of Microsoft dominance of video games was upon us. "We are now part of the landscape – a recognized player in the industry," commented Bach. "So, this year, our fourth year, I know it's time to change the game. We've proven we can play, now we're proving we can lead."

However, his sedate PR spiel was soon interrupted by an iconic voice. "Listen up, X-heads! Recognize this voice?" questioned the familiar EA Sports "It's in the Game" announcer. "Sure you do! I'm sure you're wondering, 'What's he doing crashing this Xbox bash?' Take a guess."

This of course, set the stage for the big Xbox announcement of the night: Electronic Arts is finally on board with Xbox Live. To celebrate, EA's Don Mattrick took the stage with a posse of famous athletes, including Carmello Anthony, Marshall Faulk, and the legendary Muhammad Ali (who earned a enthusiastic standing ovation). Even though it was the only console maker not showing new hardware (for this year, at least), Microsoft did do a good job of highlighting its increasing third-party support, and set the stage for a strong showing at E3 2004.

DOMINATE THE FUTURE

PlayStation.2



COMMAND YOUR FORCES
PLAN POWERFUL OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE TACTICS

EXPERIENCE TWO COMPLEX,
INTERTWINED STORYLINES WITH REAL VOICE-OVERS

UPGRADE YOUR WANZERS
WITH DEVASTATING WEAPONS AND ABILITIES

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Language
Violence

SQUARE ENIX
www.square-enix-usa.com

© 2003, 2004 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved.
FRONT MISSION is a registered trademark of Square Enix Co., Ltd.
SQUARE ENIX is a registered trademark of Square Enix Co., Ltd.

AVAILABLE NOW
SQUARE ENIX MOBILE

FRONT MISSION 4

MECHANIZED COMBAT

REPAIR/CUSTOMIZE

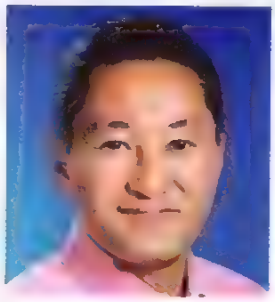
AIR STRIKE

RECON

AN INTERVIEW WITH SONY'S KAZ HIRAI ON THE PSP

>> Game Informer sat down with the president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America, Kaz Hirai. <<

PSP has caused quite the stir, but one of the big questions left for everyone is price point.
We're not ready to make an announcement on the pricing. What I can say is, I think that when we launched the original PlayStation back in 1995 and also the PS2 in 2000 – true to basically one of Sony's DNA of providing value to the customers – I think we hit the pricing pretty much dead on where it needed to be. And we certainly will make sure that when the PlayStation Portable comes out that we will have good pricing.



Do you think this is worth as much as a home system, or do you think a handheld has to be priced less than a home console?
I think that with the PlayStation Portable and what we've been able to pack into the hardware, I don't see the PlayStation Portable, despite its name, as being something of a subset, if you will, of the PS2. The environment in which they operate in are completely different obviously.

You talked about Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children, which is 70 minutes long, in your speech. Is UMD going to be able to accommodate a two hour movie?
Yeah, we have 1.8 gigabytes of capacity on the UMD, and with the compression technology that we'll be using we can fit a two hour motion picture, full length motion picture, into one UMD disk. It really depends on the authoring, how much time you spend, and also what kind of scenery you have. If it's static scenery for two hours I'm sure you can put in more.

Do you have any deals signed with either movie studios or record companies to be partners for prepackaged UMD music and movies?
First and foremost, the PlayStation Portable is a portable handheld gaming device that really simulates the experience of a PlayStation 2 in the home. Now, having said that, the other entertainment content is also important, and once we have a successful launch with the video games then I think, once we have the installed base we are certainly going to get a lot more interest and support from the other content providers like music and motion pictures. Having said all that, talks are already underway with a lot of the different content companies to, first of all, explain to them what the specs are, and we'll be sharing with the other content providers. But as I said before, first and foremost it's a handheld video game console, which means if we have a line up of motion picture and music content from day one, great. But that's not going to make or break the console by any means. It's going to be fantastic games that will actually make or break the launch of the PSP.

How many games do you anticipate having for PSP at launch?
Hard to tell at this point in time, but I do think what's most important is that we have one or two killer application titles, whether it be first or third party, that will be day and date with the launch of the hardware. And then a steady stream of hit titles or killer content month after month after that. That's really going to make or break the launch there. I would assume, and again I could be dead wrong, six to ten titles total on day one.

Are you going to sell blank UMDs to allow people to record?
The mic jack is really more for headset applications or voice over IP applications. The UMD is, for now, a playback-only medium. And recordable UMDs, or UMD-Rs I guess they would be called, though something that's technically feasible, are something that we won't be introducing in the market for some time. And that's why we have the memory stick slot, to take care of any downloads or recording of short messages or what have you. That's a better application I think for interchanging data between PCs and PlayStation Portable.

One thing we were a little confused about in the presentation was the battery life. At first you said ten hours and then you seemed to say it could be as short as two.
Battery life is one these things where if you state a number, then everybody's satisfied. The only problem, of course, is it never matches what you state. That's especially prevalent with the PlayStation Portable because it plays various entertainment content. If you're just listening to music with no visuals at all then it should last about eight to ten hours. If you are playing a game that is consistently cycling through and putting the CPU to good use, yeah, battery life is going to be shorter. Maybe about two and a half, three hours.

Are the GPS and camera additions you talked about going to be available at launch or is that stuff that will come in the future?
I believe those will be steps that will come out in the future. But, again, we wanted to kind of make sure that we position the product as having different kinds of applications because it is a mobile device.

Have you seen much of the Nintendo DS, and how much of a direct competitor do you consider that to be to the PSP?
It seems to me that the DS is more of a natural progression from the original Game Boy, through Game Boy Color, and then Game Boy Advance, SP, and now DS.... And if you accept that it's kind of a natural extension then it's more of a product that leans towards the younger demographic. Whereas, the PlayStation Portable is something that I think has mass appeal.

In its press conference, Nintendo was basically suggesting that DS is offering a true revolutionary alternative, and that that would win the minds of consumers.
I think ultimately no matter who you ask in this business, and I'm sure you would agree, that compelling entertainment content is what makes or breaks any console. If the DS is able to really take advantage of the two screens and provide compelling entertainment content, I'm sure the users will support it. But at the same time, I think that between our first party studios and our collaboration with all the third party partners that we have, we've come up with some really compelling entertainment software offerings over the past ten years. I am very confident that we're going to be able to expand that consumer experience to a new level. Especially with the widescreen here. This is really going to offer a multitude of opportunities for the users. Now, if there is somebody that really wants to do a two-screen game, then obviously, because it's widescreen you can split the screen in half and you still get a lot of real estate that way as well. I really need to see a killer application that really takes advantage of the two screen before I'm convinced [of the Nintendo DS]. Mainly because I just can't multitask visually that way. I mean I have a hard time just reading a speedometer on Gran Turismo when I'm playing single player mode. So, it could just be me.

"...the PlayStation Portable is a portable handheld gaming device that really simulates the experience of a PlayStation 2..."

DEVELOPERS ON PSP

HIDEO KOJIMA – Creator of Metal Gear Series
The thing with the PSP is that it isn't really a game console, it's not an MD player, but it does everything. You can play games, watch movies, and you can listen to music, so I like that idea. These three different things: Movies, music, and games, are rivals, but at the same time, we could be influenced in a positive way by these rivals.

ATSUSHI INABA – President of Capcom's Clover Studios
The PSP is very good hardware, I'm sure. I'm a fan of that, but it's multifunctional. You've got movies, you've got games, you've got all kinds of stuff on the PSP. So, I'm a little bit suspicious that people are going to buy it to just for the games.

DAVID DOAK – Director of Free Radical Design
Even with the PSP, the development budgets are still going to be of the order of a PS2 game. If you are going to do something original for it, you are going to be starting from scratch.

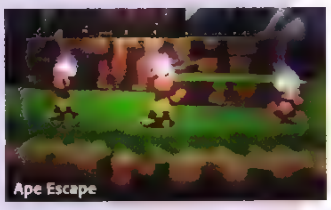
KEIJI INAFUNE – Executive Officer, R&D Divison, Capcom
Of course, it's a wonderful device and we plan to support it, but it's unique in the fact that no one knows what direction it's going to go in. First, we'll see when it goes on the market and see what types of people are buying it, and then after you know that you can custom-tailor the type of games you're going to make. For example, if I was trying to sell Mercedes Benzes to a bunch of kids in kindergarten, nobody's going to buy it. You have to make a game for the target audience.

YUJI NAKA – Creator of Sonic the Hedgehog
We will propose a new style of gaming and entertainment that maximizes the features unique to PSP, such as network communication battle via wireless LAN and the face-to-face system that utilizes the 16:9 widescreen TFT LCD.

JOHN KROKNES – Producer, Headhunter: Redemption
I think that a game like Headhunter: Redemption would look almost the same on PSP. It's very powerful. Also, since you have a smaller screen, you have less of a fill rate, so the graphics chip basically has the same capability as the PS2. I think we can do some hefty stuff on it. At first, when they were only going to have 8 megs of RAM, that was a hassle, but now that it has 32, it is the same as PS2.

FOOTAGE SHOWN ON PSP:
E3's demo of PSP was so early that few companies have officially come forward with any titles. Game Informer talked to a Sony press representative who told us that no games were officially announced at the show on purpose. Listed below are some of the games which were represented by video footage on the system. Therefore, some of these titles may actually only be tech demos running on emulation hardware.

- Gran Turismo 4 Mobile – Sony
- Twisted Metal: World Tour – Sony
- NBA ShootOut – Sony
- NHL FaceOff 2005 – Sony
- Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow – Sony
- ATV Offroad Fury – Sony
- Fighting Spirits – Sony
- MediEvil – Sony Europe
- Hard Corps – Sony Europe
- WRC: World Rally Championship – Sony Europe
- Formula One 04 – Sony Europe
- World Tour Soccer 2005 – Sony Europe
- Wipeout Pure – Sony Europe
- Hot Shots Golf – Sony Japan
- Ape Escape – Sony Japan
- NFL Street – EA Big
- NBA Street Vol. 2 – EA Big
- Tiger Woods' Pro PGA Tour – EA Sports
- Need for Speed: Underground – Electronic Arts
- Viewtiful Joe – Capcom
- Devil May Cry – Capcom
- Darkstalkers Chronicles – Capcom Japan
- Death Jr. – Backbone Entertainment
- Spider-Man 2 The Movie – Activision
- Tony Hawk's Underground 2 – Activision
- Puyo Puyo Fever – Sega
- Project S – Secret title from Yuji Naka for Sega
- Ridge Racer – Namco
- Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children (UMD Movie) – Square Enix
- Frogger 2005 – Konami
- Metal Gear Acid – Konami
- Ys: The Ark of Napishtim – Konami
- Winning Eleven – Konami
- Meikyuu Tansakugata Monster Shooting – Konami
- Armored Core: Formula Front – Agetec
- Tales of Eternia – Namco
- Dynasty Warriors – Koei
- Free Running – Eidos
- Metal Shell – Tantalus Interactive
- Tokyo Xtreme Racer – Genki
- Puzzle Bobble – Taito
- Bomberman – Hudson Soft
- Rengoku: The Tower of Purgatory – Hudson Soft
- Mobile Suit Gundam – Bandai



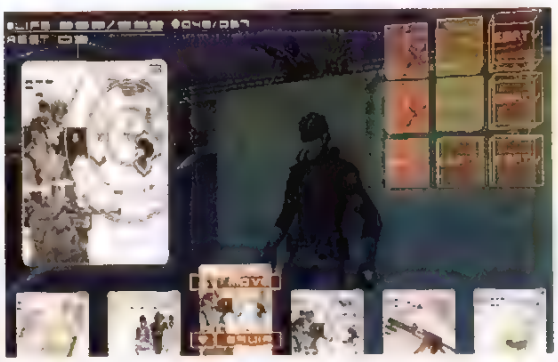
THE GAMES OF PSP

Unlike Nintendo's DS, there wasn't anything that was really playable for the PSP. Namco's Tales of Eternia allowed you to run around a town and talk to some people, and you could tweak the camera on Metal Gear Acid, but that's about it. Sony says, however, that it has almost one hundred publishers and developers worldwide set to furnish the platform with plenty of games to play (peep the list at left for a taste). During Sony's pre-E3 press conference, Electronic Arts announced that it would support the platform with four titles for launch: NFL Street, NBA Street Vol. 2, Need for Speed: Underground, and Tiger Woods' Pro PGA Tour.

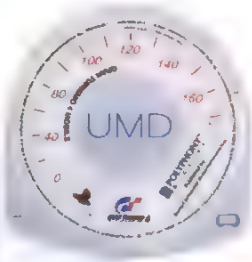
METAL GEAR ACID

As is the case with anything involving Snake, nothing is as it seems. Acid is not just another stealth/action title in the series. A game of cards, anyone? That's right, this inaugural PSP title for the franchise utilizes a card combat system. We guess this proves once and for all that Snake is the ultimate killer – all he needs is a deck of cards.

Acid is a turn-based strategy game where normal MG actions like stealth kills, knocking on walls, and laying claymores, for example, are all card based. All actions have a cost, so you'll have to plan out your moves in advance, and being careful will be more important than ever. The game does show some close detail on Snake's and the guards' models, although little control of the game was offered at E3. Love it or hate it, we'll have to reserve judgement on Acid's new take on the Metal Gear universe until we see more. Card-based play? Sounds like a game only Raiden would enjoy.



(PSP and memory stick shown actual size)



■ **The PSP's Universal Media Disc (shown left) has enough space to accomodate around a two-hour movie**

■ **Here is a photo of a PSP running actual video (above)**

PSP SPECIFICATIONS

- Dimensions: Approx. 170 mm (L) x 74 mm (W) x 23 mm (D)
- Weight: Approx. 260 g (including battery)
- CPU: PSP CPU (System clock frequency 1~333MHz)
- Main Memory: 32MB
- Embedded DRAM: 4MB
- Display: 4.3 inch, 16:9 widescreen TFT LCD
- 480 x 272 pixel (16.77 million colors)

KEYS/SWITCHES

- Directional buttons (Up/Down/Right/Left)
- Analog pad
- Enter keys (Triangle, Circle, Cross, Square)
- Two Shoulder buttons
- Start, Select, Home
- Power On/Hold/Off switch
- Brightness control, Sound Mode, Volume +/-
- Wireless LAN On/Off switch
- UMD Eject

MAIN INPUT/OUTPUT

- 802.11b wireless LAN (Wi-Fi)
- USB 2.0 (Target)
- Memory Stick™ PRO Duo
- IrDA infrared connections
- IR remote (SIRCS)
- Speakers: Built-in stereo speakers w/ headphone jack
- Power: Built-in lithium-ion battery (and terminals for charging), AC adapter

UMD SPECIFICATIONS

- Dimensions: Approx. 65 mm (W) x 64 mm (D) x 4.2 mm (H)
- Weight: Approx. 10 g
- Disc Diameter: 60 mm
- Maximum Capacity: 1.8GB (Single-sided, dual layer)
- Laser wavelength: 660nm (Red laser)
- Encryption: AES 128bit

SUPPORTED FORMATS

- UMD Audio (codec ATRAC3plus™, PCM, (MPEG4 AVC))
- UMD Video (codec MPEG4 AVC, ATRAC3plus™, Caption PNG)

PSP ACCESSORIES

On the show floor, an array of peripherals for the PSP were shown, and Sony announced that Logitech would be officially handling this aspect of the unit. Everything from special faces to straps and cases were shown, as Sony tries to make PSP as personable as Apple's iPod.

- Stand
- Headphone with remote commander
- Headphone with remote commander and microphone
- External battery pack
- Case
- Strap
- USB Camera
- USB GPS
- USB Keyboard

SONY INTRODUCES THE PSP

FINAL SPECS AND HARWARE ANNOUNCED

At last year's E3, Sony laid down the biggest announcement of the whole convention when PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi unveiled the "new baby in the family," PlayStation Portable. A year later and Sony was ready to not only show the unit, but let gamers on the floor get their greedy hands on it. Pricing wasn't given, but the PSP will come out initally in Japan at the end of this year, and the U.S. and Europe launches will follow in early 2005.

The first thing we noticed was that the size of the screen was larger than the original prototype art that Sony officially released last year. Sony says that the unit will be capable of 3D graphics and full-motion video "similar to PlayStation 2." Throughout the show, looping video of future PSP games and tech demos showed off many titles [turn to page 30 for more]. Although they weren't using the CPU, the picture shown on the platform's screen was very crisp.

The unit has all of the controls that the regular PlayStation controller has, except it is missing the L2 and R2 buttons and right analog stick. The PSP does have a slideable analog stick in the lower left region of the handheld, but it does not depress. In our hands-on time with the PSP, some complained that the buttons felt clunkier and more slippery than the PS2's, but the d-pad felt just like it does on the PlayStation controller. Everyone agreed, however, that the PSP is thin, svelte, and sexy.

Of course, it does much more than play games. Sony plans to offer movies and music videos on the device. Both the *Spider-Man 2* movie trailer and an Incubus music video were shown as examples. A short clip from Square Enix's *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* was also debuted. Although the movie will last 70 minutes, Sony says that compression will allow for films just over two hours to fit on one disc. The unit's battery life will vary from over two to 10 hours, depending on whether you're just playing music, for example, or watching a movie or playing a game.

PSP offers even more possibilities due to its inputs and outputs. Wireless gaming and connection to the Internet is possible thanks to its support of the 802.11b Wi-Fi protocol. The transfer of data (including music, photos, movies, etc.) is enabled through Memory Stick Pro Duo and USB 2.0. Sony touched on the fact that the PSP would hook up to the PS2, PCs, and other PSPs, but only hypothesized that this would open up "really exciting possibilities for games."

Kaz Hirai, CEO and president of Sony Computer Entertainment America

SONY'S E3 PRESS CONFERENCE

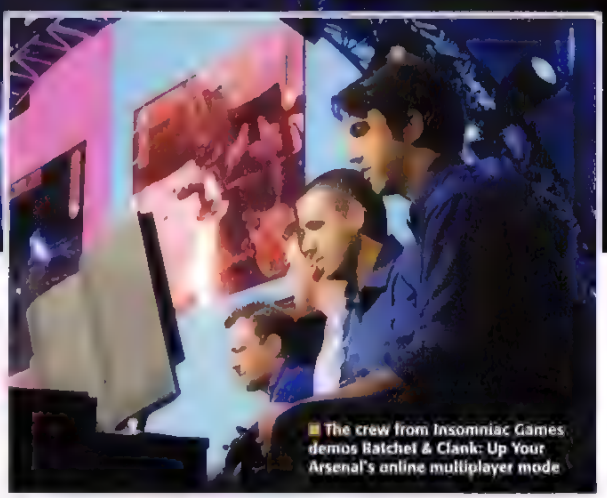
PSP LEADS SONY'S CHARGE

Listening to president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America, Kaz Hirai, rattle off the dominance of the PlayStation brand was like watching a millionaire count his money – one bill at a time. It was impressive and convincing, but a little dull. With 25 million units sold in North America – accounting for one in every four households – it's safe to call Sony the industry leader in sales.

Believe it or not, however, Sony wasn't just pitching this press conference as a brag-fest. It put forth a sort of video game version of trickle down economics. Citing the ten-year life-cycle of the original PlayStation, Hirai stated that what was good for Sony was good for both the industry and consumers. Developers get to make better games, and we get more titles over the life of our systems. Sounds fair enough.

Even though it seemed like Sony was content to do nothing more than sit back on its large mountain of money, the company came forward with several things that gamers could get excited about. The PlayStation 2 has dropped to $149, and reinforcing his point that the best software for the console was yet to come, the audience was treated to a barrage of upcoming titles including Gran Turismo 4, God of War, and the announcement of Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas exclusively for PS2 (which you already read about in last month's GI!).

Despite its runaway console sales, when it comes to online it's obvious that Sony has been paying close attention to Xbox Live. Ironically, Sony says it is actually leading the online spitting contest, having 1.2 million registered users (Xbox Live is approaching a million according to Microsoft's own numbers). Sony is taking a page from Xbox's book by offering gamers and publishers options (see below for more). Still, taking a shot at Microsoft and speculating at how well their control of Xbox Live has fared with the company overseeing everything, Hirai told Game Informer, "...You can't build something and have all this stuff in place if nobody's playing. And that's what seems to be happening with the other strategy." Sony expects more than 100 online titles for the PS2 by the year's end. To punctuate the strength of this roster, Insomniac's president Ted Price came out to show off Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal's new online multiplayer mode.



The crew from Insomniac Games demos Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal's online multiplayer mode

Even with Hirai's claim that the longer the PS2 sticks around the better we are for it, Sony did tease the audience with two glimpses into the future. The public got its first gander at the PlayStation Portable and its specs (flip the page for more), and the chief technology officer Masa Chatani came out to deliver an oblique, thumb-nail sketch of the technology behind the PlayStation 3 – the Cell processor.

Chatani outlined how Cell-based workstations will provide a common development environment for both video game developers and movies to blur the line between the two. Finally, Chatani drew a hazy picture of Sony's cell-based "Cyber World" network where, presumably, the company will house its online distribution channel, among other things. Although this look into the future hurt our heads that early in the morning, leaving the press conference, one thing was abundantly clear – Sony certainly owns the present.

Sony's chief technology officer Masa Chatani

SONY'S PS3 TEASE

Sony gave us a glimpse into the future with the announcement that the first Cell-processor workstations will be available starting in the fourth quarter of this year (created in conjunction with IBM and Toshiba). This will be the first step towards offering development kits to studios; however, no timetable was set for this particular allocation. One of the key features of the CPU is its floating point performance. This will allow for faster computations by the unit that will apply to modeling, rendering, physics simulation, and other important aspects. If you're wondering if this means that PS3 titles are going to be faster, more realistic, and gorgeous-looking, then Sony is saying "Yes."

EXPANDED ONLINE

Sony conducted a survey of over a 1,000 console owners about online gaming, and came away with a new plan for the PlayStation 2. The company is sticking to its guns and not requiring publishers to integrate the company's new online options or charging gamers a monthly fee. No timetable was set for the release of these additional features.

MINI-DOWNLOADS

Sony envisions a distribution model similar to Apple's iTunes for levels, characters, and even player-to-player content, such as one player selling their custom Gran Turismo car to another gamer. Hirai and company are in favor of paying for only those downloads you want versus paying a monthly fee for items you may never use.

UNIFIED BILLING AND SIGN-IN

Sony also wants to let you move across different game lobbies and other community aspects.

A NEW HARD DRIVE

In his E3 speech, Hirai said that Sony is, "currently investigating a non-HDD solution for PlayStation 2."

PS2 GOES TO $149

In a move that has been long overdue to the gaming public, Sony dropped the price of the PlayStation 2 (effective immediately) to $149. This new price covers two formats of the console. Gamers can get the PlayStation 2 Combo Pack, which includes the platform, the Network Adaptor, and ATV Offroad Fury 2 (while supplies last), or the stand-alone system.

MTV MUSIC TELEVISION

music generator 3

THIS IS THE REMIX

FROM SOFA TO SUPERSTAR... YOU ARE THE REMIX MASTER

Battle game console greats coast-to-coast
and win a trip to MTV Studios in NYC.
To find out more about MTV Music Generator 3's
REMIX ROYALE contest visit codemasters.com

FEATURING MUSIC FROM: OUTKAST, SNOOP DOGG, SEAN PAUL & FABOLOUS

With MTV Music Generator 3: This is the Remix, you can create your own music like today's hottest producers:

- Remix songs from the biggest names in hip-hop and dance
- Sample music from your favorite CDs
- Make original tracks using thousands of sound samples

TEEN T Mild Lyrics
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation.2

Codemasters
GENIUS AT PLAY

© 2004 The Codemasters Software Company Limited ("Codemasters"). All rights reserved. "Codemasters"® is a registered trademark owned by Codemasters. "GENIUS AT PLAY" is a trademark of Codemasters. © 2004 MTV Networks, a division of Viacom International Inc. All rights reserved. "MTV Music Generator" and all related titles and logos are trademarks of MTV Networks. All other copyrights or trademarks are the property of their respective owners. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox and the Xbox logos are registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association.

FINAL FANTASY CONCERT DAZZLES THE FAITHFUL IN LA

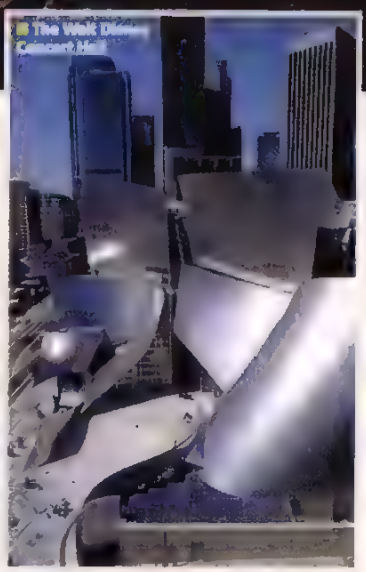
THE LA PHILHARMONIC PERFORMS EPIC ARRANGEMENTS OF FINAL FANTASY SCORES

In the overheated, hype-driven environment of E3, it's easy to get so caught up in handicapping console wars and picking apart marketing strategies that one could forget the love of gaming that brings us all to Los Angeles in the first place. Thankfully, Square Enix sponsored a lovingly done pre-E3 concert that, for many in attendance, will likely stand out as a night to remember for a lifetime.

Entitled *Dear Friends: Music from Final Fantasy*, the show featured orchestral arrangements of music from throughout the history of the famed RPG series, each composed by longtime Square maestro Nobuo Uematsu. All selections were performed by the prestigious Los Angeles Philharmonic and Master Chorale under the direction of Peruvian-born conductor Miguel Harth-Bedoya. The concert was held at the recently opened Walt Disney Concert Hall in LA, a world-renowned building designed by visionary architect Frank Gehry.

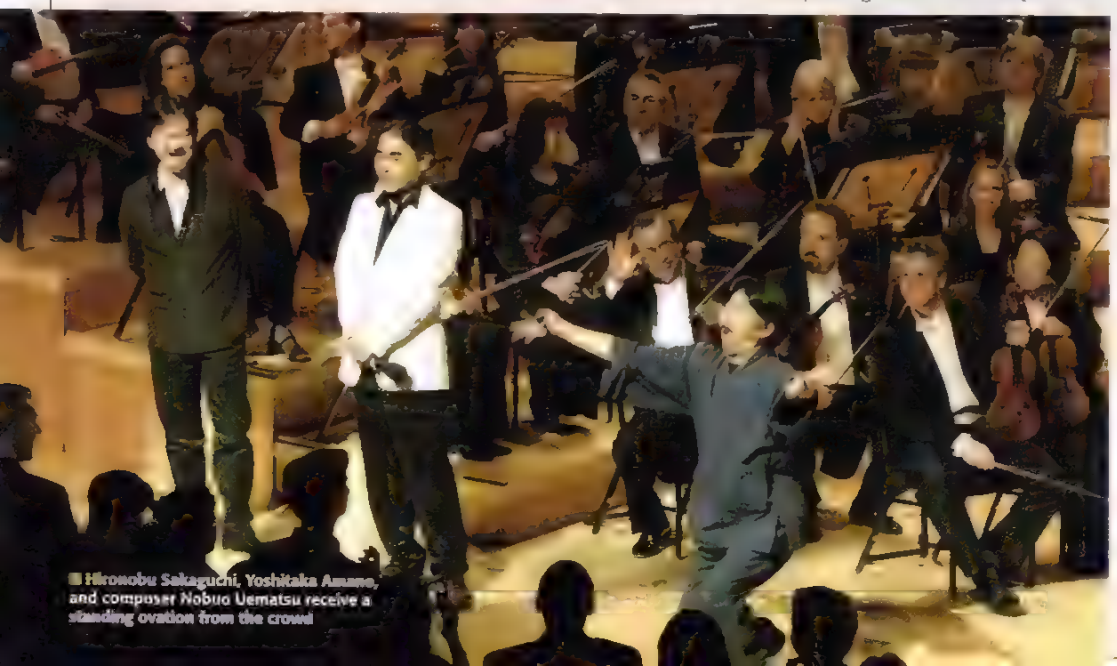
A few members of the GI staff were fortunate enough to attend the show, and returned gushing about the sheer beauty of both the concert hall and the music performed within. For all the strange swooping metal of its exterior, the Walt Disney Concert Hall is actually expertly laid out and acoustically perfect inside, and lent a dramatic setting to a truly historical event.

Kicking things off with "Liberi Fatali" from Final Fantasy VIII, the musicians whipped through rousing renditions of a variety of the series' most popular tunes, including "Aeris's Theme" and the crowd-pleasing Chocobo theme (done as part of a medley of songs from Final Fantasy I-III). During most of the set, big-screen monitors above the stage showed scenes of the games from which the scores were drawn.

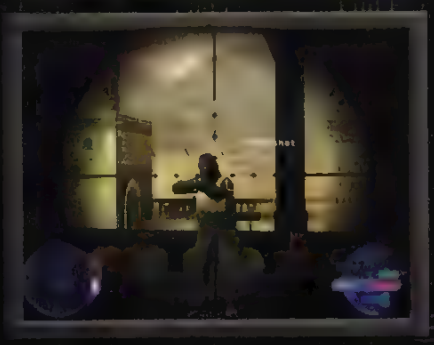

The Walt Disney Concert Hall

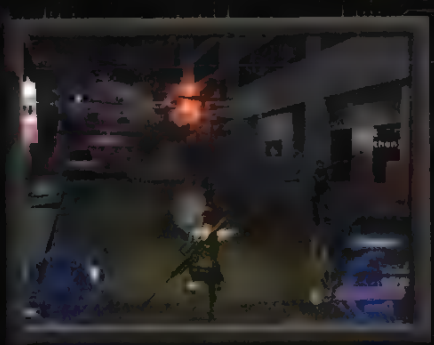
Aside from the glaring omission of the opera scene from Final Fantasy VI, the set list was nearly perfect, and made even better by the unexpected encore. After the main part of the program, series creator Hironobu Sakaguchi, famed Square character designer Yoshitaka Amano, and Uematsu came on stage to deafening applause. This triumphant appearance was quickly followed by a rousing rendition of "One Winged Angel" (from the final battle with Sephiroth), accompanied by video of Sephiroth emerging from the flames in FF VII. It was truly a fitting end to a most remarkable event.

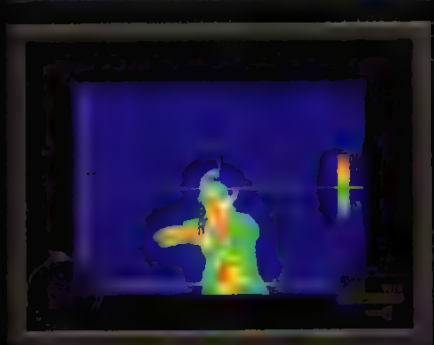
While this is likely to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, hopefully the success of the event will inspire Square to put Final Fantasy on tour (as it did briefly in Japan), allowing gamers from across the U.S. to experience Uematsu's compositions as they were meant to be played. It's certainly gratifying to see the world of classical music finally paying video game scores the respect they deserve. Hopefully, this will not be the last time we witness music composed for video games performed in a symphonic setting.


Hironobu Sakaguchi, Yoshitaka Amano, and composer Nobuo Uematsu receive a standing ovation from the crowd

SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN







YOU HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS
THE AGENT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

REPORT TO:
GABE LOGAN

OBJECTIVE:

ARSENAL:

MISSION DIRECTIVES:
ELIMINATE ALL ENEMY AGENTS AND PREVENT
OUTBREAK OF DEADLY MUTATING VIRUS.
ANY INFORMATION RECEIVED WILL BE HIGHLY
CLASSIFIED AS YOU WILL BE ENGAGING
LETHAL INTERNATIONAL ASSASSINS. SUCCESS
OF THIS GLOBAL COUNTER INTELLIGENCE
OPERATION IS CRUCIAL.

PRIORITY:
URGENT

THE BEST WEAPON WE HAVE IS YOU.

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD
PLAY IN OURS

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Strong Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

ONLINE BROADBAND OR

PlayStation 2

Syphon Filter is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ©2004 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live In Your World. Play In Ours." and "The best weapon we have is you." are trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Online play requires Internet connection and Network Adapter (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). The "Online" logo is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc.

PLACE HAND HERE

games

NONE MORE BLACK

CRITERION BLOWS A HOLE IN THE FPS MARKET

Criterion is known for its popular Renderware middleware and Burnout racing franchise, but is not a developer you'd associate with a first-person shooter. That suits the company just fine, because its PlayStation 2 and Xbox title Black is not something that you are going to affiliate with any other title in the crowded genre.

"Guns are our characters and the dialogue starts when you pull the triggers," declares lead designer Craig Sullivan in an effort to describe the game's philosophy that the weapons are the stars of the show. In America, they flow like water and are commonplace in our psyche. For these English developers, however, the country's lack of firearms presents a unique perspective. Criterion wants to bring the physical experience of firing a gun front and center, which is something we take for granted after years of playing video games. The main component of this is something you can't see in this screenshot – sound. Even the most modest handgun will sound like a howitzer in Criterion's attempt to convey the thrilling power of pulling the trigger.

It's not guns that kill people in Black, it's the bullets. "The bullets are our babies," says Sullivan. In Black, Criterion asks the question: What happens to bullets that don't hit enemies? In any other game, a stray bullet would – at most – produce a simple hole decal on a wall. Black, however, does so much more. Shooting a wall will actually cause plaster to fall off, for instance. Or a shot hitting a wooden table will cause dust and splinters to fly up. The effect each and every bullet has on the environment is more than just visual. Players will have to use their surroundings to their advantage. Opponents can be hit by firing ricochet shots off of metal. If Black wants to make the act of firing a gun thrilling in and of itself, imagine what it's going to be like getting shot at! In the gorgeous PlayStation 2 demo we saw, debris was flying everywhere as we chased an opponent with gunfire, with everything being destroyed in his wake.

Criterion's attention to detail will serve the game well, as it wants high production values throughout the title, including in its plot and enemy AI. The story will twist and turn like an episode of *24*, as you are an American agent sent in to Eastern Europe to take care of a fellow American gone bad. Black is expected to ship sometime next year.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

DEATH ORDERS JR.-SIZED POPCORN

PSP's first officially announced game, Death Jr, is making waves outside of the video game world. The Backbone Entertainment property not only has a comic book set to release later this year (with writer Gary Whitta and artist Ted Naifeh), but the movie rights to Death Jr. have also been picked up by Sony's production subsidiary Circle of Confusion.

NEWEST FROM CAPCOM'S CLOVER

Clover Studios head Atsushi Inaba has started on a new franchise called Okami (directed by Hideki Kamiya). The game carries forward Viewtiful Joe's strong animation style and infuses it with a more Japanese look. Okami has only been announced by the studio for a Japanese release so far.

FF VII HITS THE SMALL SCREEN

Square Enix is developing a Final Fantasy VII prequel for mobile phones subtitled Before Crisis. Players will take control of members of the Turks organization, and the game will feature multiplayer, but little else is known about the cell phone entry. In other mobile news, Square Enix and Sprint have teamed up to bring titles like Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest to Sprint PCS Vision subscribers here in the States.

HALO CREATOR HAS WIDELOAD

Bungie Studios founder Alex Seropian has formed his own development company called Wideload Games. Seropian wants to draw from the best independent talent in the industry to produce titles, and Wideload currently is planning its first game (on Xbox and PC), which will utilize the Halo engine for a release in 2005.

XBOX ENTERS FORGOTTEN REALMS

Atari's Dungeons & Dragons action title Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone is coming to the Xbox this fall. The game is being developed by Stormfront Studios (The Two Towers) and has a story penned by R.A. Salvatore (The Dark Elf Trilogy).

ID'S FUTURE NOT FILLED WITH DOOM

With a late summer release date firmly in place for Doom 3, id Software's Todd Hollenshead has already begun to look to the future. Talking to Reuters, Hollenshead said that the developer will begin work on an all-new game – one not related to any previous id franchise – as soon as Doom 3 ships. When this next title will come out, of course, is anyone's guess.

FOR MORE INFO VISIT...
WWW.PSIOPSGAME.COM

TELEKINESIS

PYROKINESIS

REMOTE VIEWING

MIND DRAIN

PSI-OPS
THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

"...ONE OF OUR MOST-WANTED GAMES OF 2004" -IGN

"...ONE OF THE YEAR'S MUST-PLAY EXPERIENCES..." -PSE2

"...THIS ONE LEVITATES ABOVE THE PACK." -PSM

"...ONE OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE ACTION GAMES OF THE CURRENT GENERATION." -XBN

Featuring COLD's "With My Mind" Music Video

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

XBOX

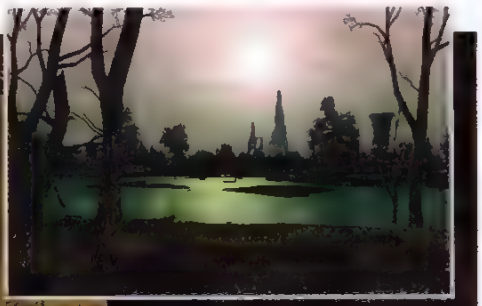
PlayStation.2

MIDWAY

Psi Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy © 2004 Midway Amusement Games, LLC. All rights reserved. PSI OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY, MIDWAY, and the Midway logos are registered trademarks of Midway Amusement Games, LLC. Used by permission. Distributed under license by Midway Home Entertainment Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. Screen shots shown are from the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system.

XBOX GETS FIRST MMORPG?

VANGUARD DEVELOPED WITH XNA



Sigil Games' MMORPG, helmed by EverQuest co-creators Brad McQuaid and Jeff Butler, has been in the works for a little while now, but at E3, publisher Microsoft talked a little more about this fantasy title. Vanguard will be the first game to utilize Microsoft's recently announced XNA platform, which shares tools and features across both the PC and Xbox. Will Sigil's game then appear on both of them? At the Microsoft press conference Xbox corporate vice president J Allard confirmed it will be on "all XNA platforms." Vanguard's use of these development tools opens up features such as cross-platform play, interaction with mobile devices, PC voice chat, and the use of an Xbox controller on PC if you like.

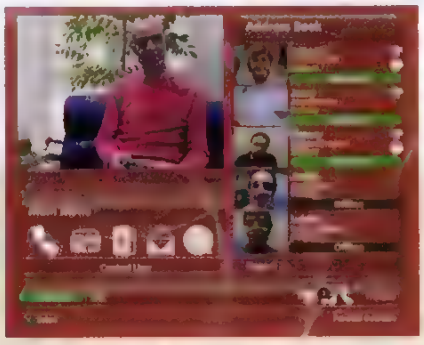
What about the game? McQuaid and company are mum on most of the details, but have said that players can specialize in multiple character classes (to the 40th level). Moreover, Sigil wants its massive world to be brimming with adventures in an attempt to avoid having dungeons as the only place where there's action (quests can be undertaken by multiple parties simultaneously). Towns themselves will contain quests and not merely be places to buy and sell loot. Swordplay during your adventures will be more exciting as well. The game aims to do away with simple point-and-click combat.

So far, Vanguard has no release or beta testing date in sight, but we'll keep you updated as they approach.

news

I SPY EYE TOY

PERIPHERAL GETS VIDEO CHAT



Ever wonder what Joe looks like with his shirt off? If you're on his buddies list, you might find out now that PlayStation 2's digital camera peripheral, EyeToy, has video chat. The broadband-only service will start in Europe this summer. No U.S. release date has been announced yet.

EyeToy chat allows four types of communication via text (chat rooms can hold up to 256 simultaneous users), voice-only (for a maximum of 16 people), video mail (in messages 30-seconds long), and video chat. For those using the latter function, there are games you can play with the person you are talking to such as chess, checkers, and Naval War.

By the way, if you get a video message from Joe, we suggest you decline it. He likes to show people his birthday suit.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
NICOLAS BEAUDETTE
Lead Programmer, Myst Revelation

1 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City – PS2
2 Diablo – PC
3 Battlefield 1942 – PC
4 StarCraft – PC
5 X-Com: UFO Defense – PC

READER
JOSHUA CANTEY
Cincinatti, OH

1 Conker's Bad Fur Day – N64
2 Half-Life – PC
3 Way of the Samurai – PS2
4 The Getaway – PS2
5 Mario 64 – N64

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to
Game Informer Magazine/Top Five
724 N 1st St 4th Fl
Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email. topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists

DISAPPOINTMENTS OF E3

10 This year's Half-Life 2 demo was just more of the same
9 Advent Rising's code gets screwed up a day before the show, rendering it almost unplayable
8 None of the E3 newbies on the staff missed their flights
7 Playboy Mansion isn't nearly as arousing as the real thing
6 Missing in action: A new Mario GC title, a playable Kingdom Hearts 2, NICO, and Perfect Dark Zero
5 We knew most of the games at the show because we covered them already. Damn we're good
4 Astro Boy was the only game with a wee lad flying around in his underwear
3 GI Online's Billy didn't bring an extra pair of underwear to the Nintendo press conference
2 Our cyanide capsules didn't work during the Nokia press conference
1 Nintendo wasn't handing out Reggie action figures at its booth

THE FINE-TUNING WILL BE COMPLETE THIS WINTER.

FORZA MOTORSPORT

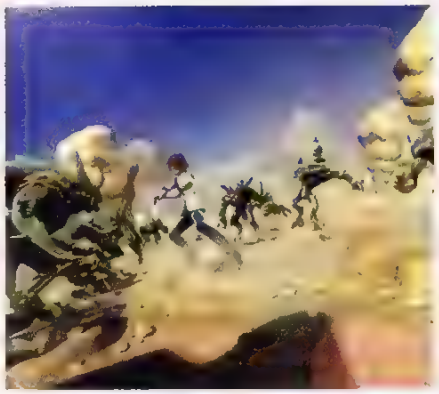
YOU ARE WHAT YOU RACE.

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more ratings information.

XBOX

xbox.com/forza



news

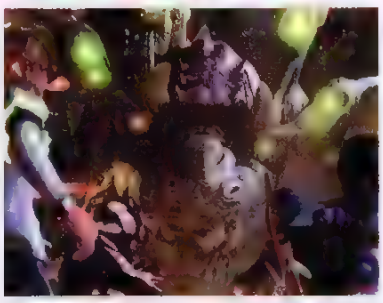
SEGA SEES FUTURE

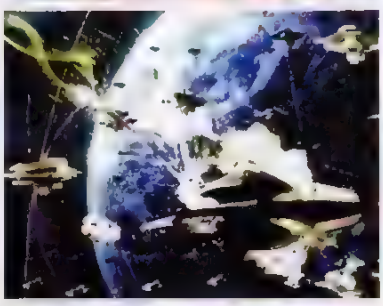
NEXT PHANTASY STAR SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

Billy Hatcher may have gone over with gamers like a carton of year-old eggs, but Yuji Naka still has a trick up his sleeve. Sega's E3 booth unveiled a hopeful upcoming project – Phantasy Star Universe. Very little is known about this game, as a trailer at the convention told very little, except to claim, "The rebirth of a legend…it's a whole new world."

We asked Naka himself, but he cryptically told us that while it "definitely offers new excitement to fans," this new game would continue the traditions of the series. Of course, this brings up the question as to which Phantasy Star variation we would see. The old RPG style? Would PSU be an online title? And what about the new combat mechanic brought about in C.A.R.D. Revolution?

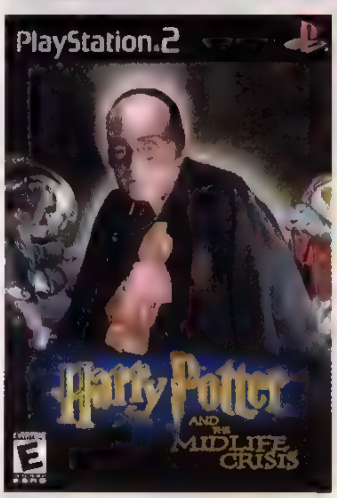
Game Informer has heard that the title will feature real-time battles, and the gorgeous trailer shows us an adventure that spans several worlds and races. It also features different types of transport, from huge space fleets to personal hoverboards. No date or platform has been given for Phantasy Star Universe.





R & D

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



Harry Potter and the Midlife Crisis

Harry Potter's recent theatrical outings have got us wondering about what middle age holds in store for the boy wizard. Based on real child stars, we can only imagine that he'll eventually lose his cuteness, see his career vanish (like magic), and possibly spend a little time in Azkaban Prison for possession of forbidden enchanted powder. But the world loves a comeback story, so we'd like to see Harry star in an RPG that chronicles his return to the public eye after twenty years of obscurity. In this title, Harry's powers would have dwindled to a fraction of their former strength, thanks to years of neglect and potion abuse. In order to claw his way back into the limelight, Harry would have to hone his magic powers by using spells like "summon beer," creating gin-flavored beans, and using his Cloak of Identity Theft. At the start of his quest, Harry would appear at Junior Varsity Quidditch games, do commercials for Knockturn Alley Bail Bonds, and keep in touch with his mystic parole wizard. With each successful public appearance, the ultimate goal would draw closer: an invitation to headline the Diagon Alley Broom and Boat Show! Such a high profile appearance would be just the thing our favorite boy wizard would need to stage a John Travolta-style comeback.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

GOOD

The Millar brothers (of Starcraft, Warcraft, and Diablo fame) have jumped ship from the exile that was Jaleco to head across the pond to Lionhead Studios. Ron will remain a designer with the English developer, while Chris will produce. "Ron and I have been fans for many years," said Chris in a statement. "It's very exciting to become a part of a cutting edge studio such as Lionhead." The pair start work this month.

GOOD

989 Sports and Sony are doing the humane thing and canceling the release of their football and basketball games for this year in order to give them more time to stew in development. Hopefully this running head start for the franchises won't result in them falling flat on their faces in 2005, because unlike watching NFL stars getting arrested, it's getting old.

Fun

No fun

UGLY

Skipping the break-dancers, spoken-word poetry, and stripping skater chicks of last year (but not the microphone problems), Nokia instead opted for straight-up boredom at its pre-E3 conference. Joe wept and Jeremy wished the N-Gage had more pirates. Or tacos. Anything would have been an improvement.

GOOD

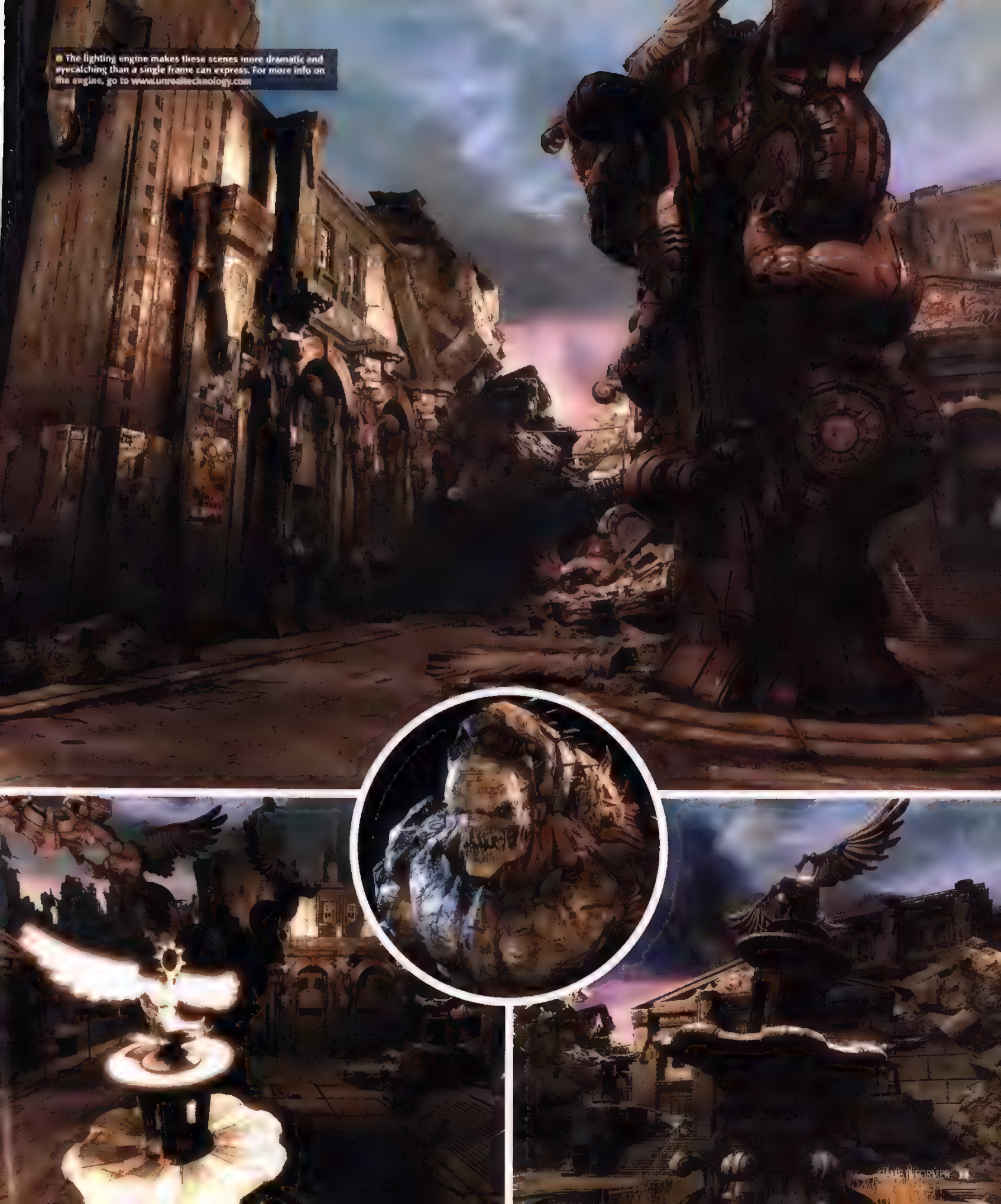
Barring any more stolen code or an attack of 50-foot ants, Valve founder Gabe Newell says that Half-Life 2 should be out this summer. Along with it, the company is releasing all the original Half-Life content, including Counter-Strike, redone in HL 2's Source engine. These games will also be available through Valve's Steam distribution service.

BAD

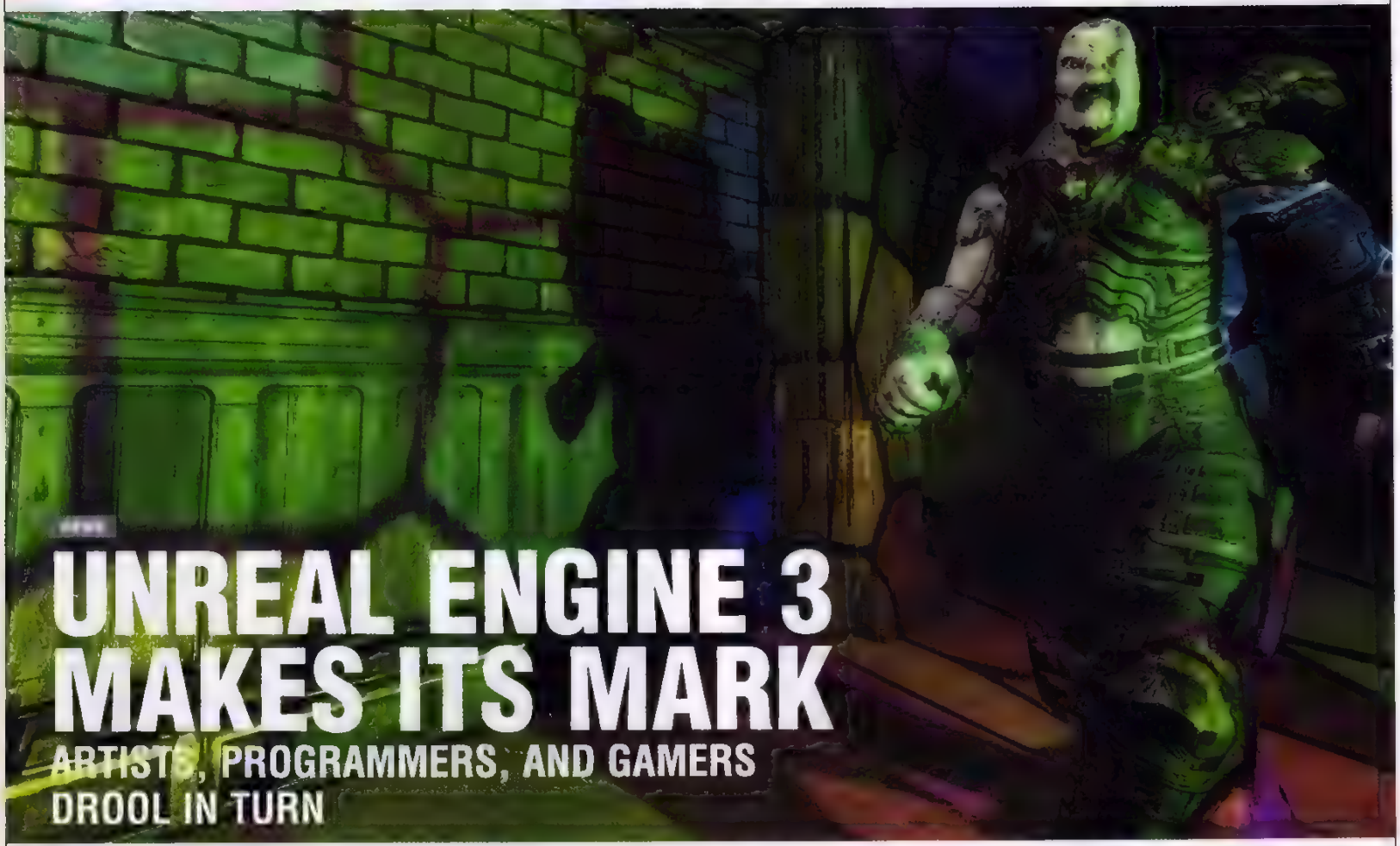
Sega scream! The merger of Sammy and Sega in Japan is completed this fall, but as of June 1, gamers are going to lose some familiar friends. According to a Sega internal document, the companies' famed development studios – including Yu Suzuki's AM2 – are going to be reintegrated into Sega for resource consolidation and increased productivity.

BAD

Although Midway's NARC has signed on Hollywood voice talent which includes Michael Madsen (*Kill Bill Vol. 2*, *Reservoir Dogs*) and Ron Pearlman (*Hellboy*, *Blade II*), the game has been delayed to 2005, and Game Informer has heard that the title is undergoing major changes.



The lighting engine makes these scenes more dramatic and eyecatching than a single frame can express. For more info on the engine, go to www.unrealtechnology.com



UNREAL ENGINE 3 MAKES ITS MARK

ARTISTS, PROGRAMMERS, AND GAMERS DROOL IN TURN

Although shown at GDC this year, Unreal Engine 3 made its first "public" appearance in NVIDIA's booth at E3. Technically designed as a demonstration for artists and game programmers, it's clear how exciting this updated engine is for gamers.

We saw a gothic-style lantern with an elaborate cage float down the hallway. The shadows generated by the frame were sharp and crisp when the walls were close, and fuzzy on the floor far away. This effect is calculated dynamically and in real-time by the new engine. This high-quality lighting effect was also used when an enemy paced back and forth in front of a wall. A stained glass orb was the light source, and as its colored panes moved around, the light's appearance changed based on both the distances of walls and the enemy's position. Again, the colors and shapes were sharp on close objects, and the creature's shadow blurred as he moved farther away from the wall.

Another bit of technological wizardry that we've heard about briefly in the past, normal mapping(and its partner in crime, displacement mapping), was illustrated. The iron lantern mentioned earlier was brought very close to a wall of stones. Each rock had deep grooves and crannies and there were noticeable spaces in between. The demonstrator then showed us the wire-frame model of the wall – it was just one large polygon.

While these demonstrations are certainly drop-dead gorgeous, the team's explanation of some artist-assistance tools had us excited as well. Real-time terrain editing tools let artists change the environment on the fly, and also specify certain attributes based on elevation or angle. For instance, an artist can place grass in a certain section of the level. If they later go in and decide that the meadow should be a hill, and the degree of incline is changed enough, the program will replace the grass with rocks. If the hill's elevation is raised further, snow will appear above a certain point. Artists can specify at what degree or elevations that each landscape change needs to take place, maintaining consistency across a level and automating certain texturing tasks.

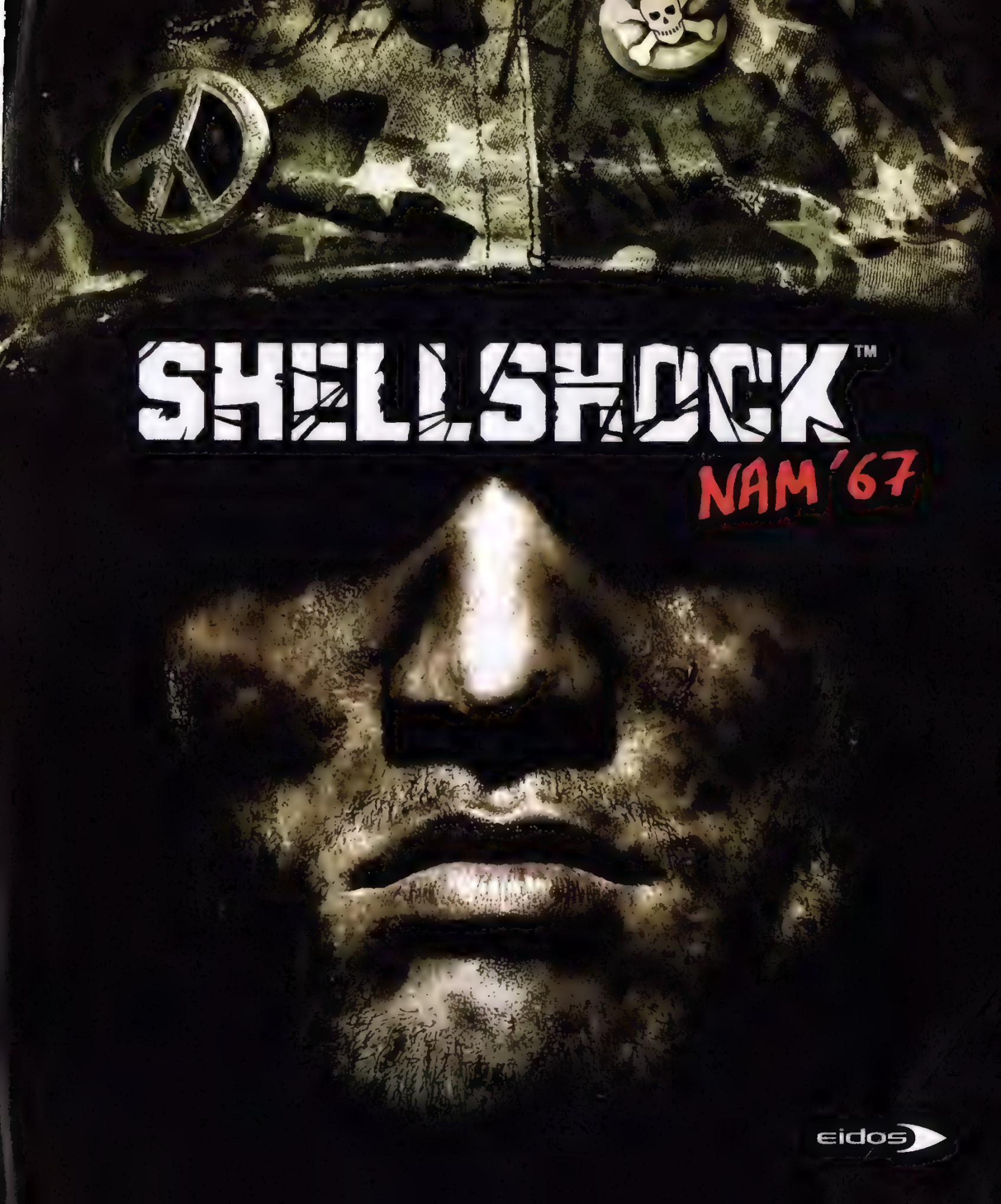
The engine also has a preferred card of choice – the NVIDIA GeForce 6800 that offers full support of Microsoft's DirectX 9.0 Shader Model 3.0. This tool allows developers to handle skin, hair and shadows that would make Renaissance painters jealous.

Unreal Engine 3 is already being used for a handful of projects, but we suspect that the real innovation with this powerful tool will come after programmers have some time with it. After seeing the demo, we can't wait to play what they come up with.

This high-res model is just over 2,000,000 polygons

This low-res version of the same enemy is around 5,000 polys

Using normal mapping (the industry's newest buzzword), this is how the low-res version looks in Unreal Engine 3


SHELLSHOCK™
NAM '67
eidos

Unnerving realism. A graphically harrowing depiction of the terror of war.

Powered by Guerrilla's groundbreaking 'Killzone' engine.

Missions range from large-scale NVA battles to stealth-based assignments.

"We've never seen a more realistic war game." -PSM

Forget Medals. Forget Honor. Just Survive.

It's 1967. You've been drafted to fight in the most controversial conflict of modern times. Prepare to experience the fear, chaos and atrocities of the Vietnam War. From napalm bombardments of civilian villages to deadly VC booby traps, can you survive your first tour of duty?

COMING JUNE 2004

MATURE 17+

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Use of Drugs

XBOX

PlayStation 2

GUERRILLA

ShellShockGame.com

©2004 Eidos. Developed by Guerrilla BV. Published by Eidos, Inc. ShellShock, ShellShock: Nam '67, the ShellShock logo, Eidos and the Eidos logo are trademarks of the Eidos Group of Companies. Guerrilla and the Guerrilla logo are trademarks of Guerrilla BV. All Rights Reserved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under licenses from Microsoft. The rating icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks and registrations are property of their respective owners.

INNOVATION VS. BIG, FAT MISTAKE

Is Ryan [the writer of the letter in issue 133 entitled "Sharing the Pain"] a complete moron? I have been a proud owner of all things Nintendo over the years, so my opinion may be a little biased, but I believe it is with due cause.

The new handheld from Nintendo is not going to be another Game Boy (or PSP for that matter) because Nintendo wants to push the envelope on what gaming standards should be.

Since 1986, players have been bombarded with a cross pad for movement, A, B, X, Y, L, R, Select, Start, A, B, C, Circle, Square, Triangle, X, L1, L2, R1, R2, Black, and White Buttons for input. In other words, we've held the same controller for the last twenty years, regardless of the casing around the buttons.

The innovation of throwing something new at consumers is the reason that I have been a Nintendo loyalist. Once again, they are giving millions of players (including myself) a new gaming experience.

Keith Frank
Via email

If Nintendo wanted to get across one point this year at E3, it may very well have been that how we interact with our consoles needs to change. The DS is still a question mark for many, but no one can deny that it certainly offers a unique experience. Check out our in-depth coverage of the hardware, software, and initial reactions to Big N's upcoming revolution on page 36.

BRIBERY FAILED

I received the new issue of Game Informer [issue 133] the other day, and I just couldn't help but read the article on Halo 2. I would like to say that you did a great job on it!

Jesse James II
Flagstaff, Arizona

The 10 pages on Halo 2 are amazing!

Brendon Lara
Via email

I have some questions about Halo 2. According to you guys and everyone from Bungie, Halo 2 would have destructible environments. My question is how interactive are the objects? For instance, if Master Chief is pinned down and he sees something on the ceiling, it would be great if he shot the object and it fell on his foes. I think that would be fun for multiplayer, too.

Unreal Demons
Via email

I just read your article on Halo 2, and I found something very interesting. On page 48 in the "Under the Helmet" section you tell us that the Master Chief is the result of a cyborg creation program, and these cyborgs are known as SPARTANS. You then say that the Master Chief's name is John. Does anyone else see what I see?

John Spartan?

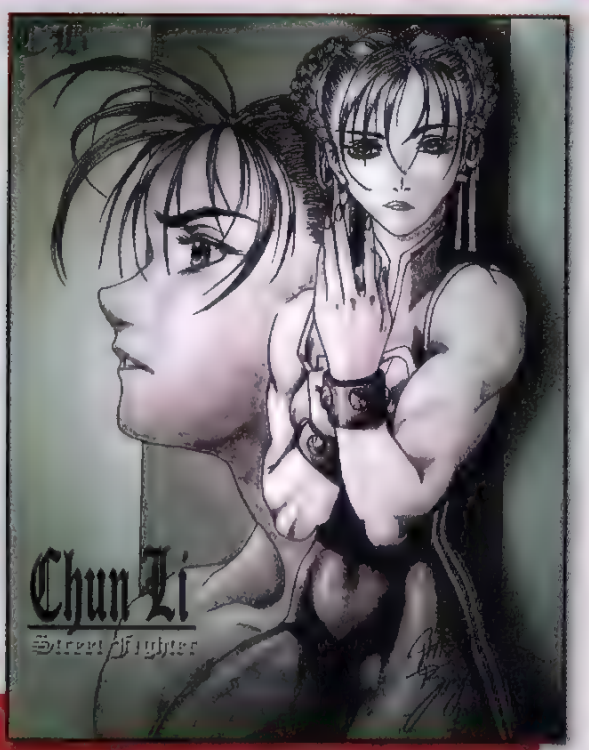
Is it a coincidence that a cyborg whose hobbies include killing by the dozen and blowing up giant space rings has a more than similar name to John Spartan, a.k.a. the *Demolition Man*? Could that be Sylvester Stallone under the armor?

Daniel Persing
Via hotmail.com

It looks like Bungie has shared all that the company wants to right now, but in the name of getting more scoop to share, we showered the team with gifts of fine champagne and even arranged for some special surprises. Still, the holdouts won't spill the beans on any extra info. Maybe candy-grams and a barbershop quartet weren't the special surprise that they had all hoped for...

ENVELOPE ART

MAURICE YOUNG
Kain and Raziel get nutty in Willy Wonka's Raspberry Funhouse.

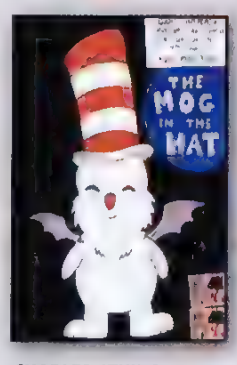


Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn envelope art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address on the back of the envelope. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your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

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

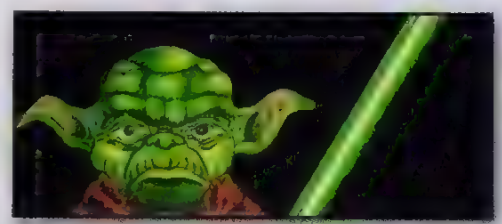
JULY WINNER:
CHAD BORGSCHAT

NHA NGUYEN
"I thought I told you to be in bed by nine!"

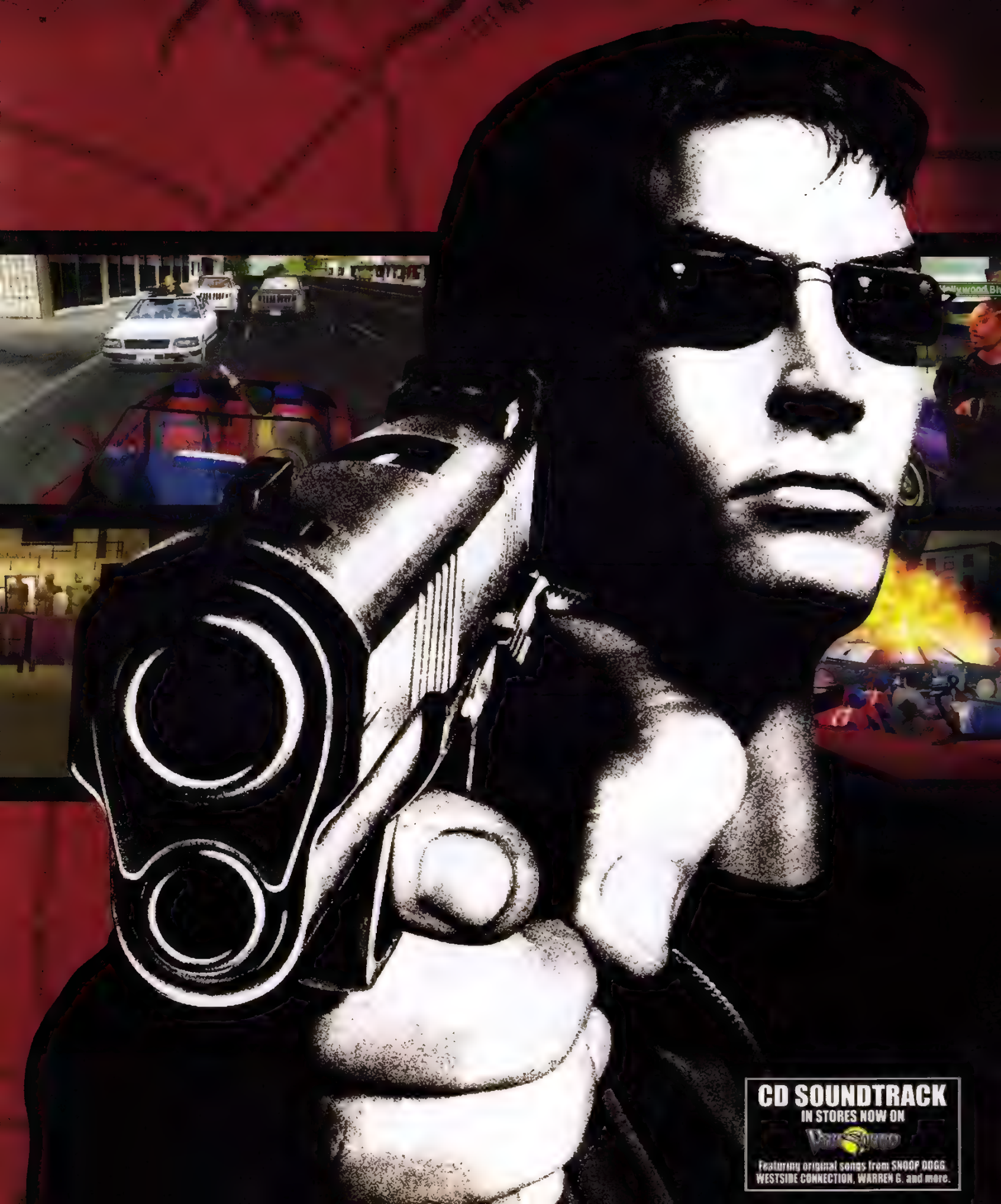


CHARLES ATKINS
Mike Myers explores new ways to end his career

ROBIN HENDRICKS
We were told our planned caption for this envelope would result in an FCC fine. Thanks a lot, Janet Jackson!



JON HILL
"Now reach into that bag and get my wallet. It's the one that says "Bad *$#%@%^*#!"


CD SOUNDTRACK
IN STORES NOW ON
Featuring original songs from SNOOP DOGG,
WESTSIDE CONNECTION, WARREN G. and more.

TOP 10 BEST GAMES OF E3

GAME INFORMER'S E3 2004 AWARDS

Top 10 PC

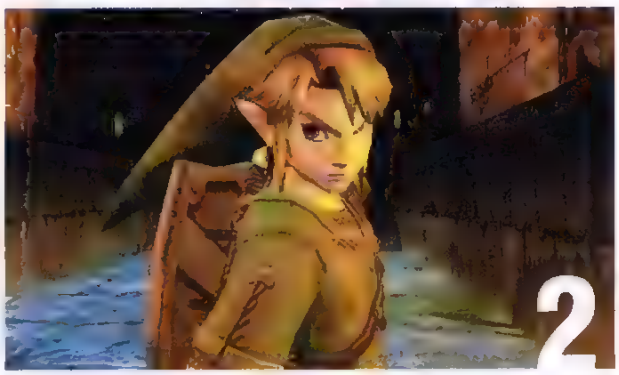
1 Splinter Cell 3
2 World of Warcraft
3 The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth
4 Half-Life 2
5 Battlefield 2
6 The Sims 2
7 EverQuest 2
8 Call of Duty: United Offensive
9 Tribes: Vengeance
10 Guild Wars

Honorable Mentions: Rome: Total War, Black & White 2, Dragon Age, Stalker, The Movies

Top 5 Handheld

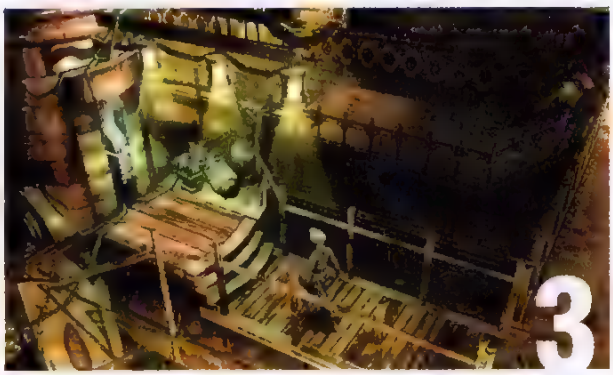
1 The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap
2 Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories
3 Mario Pinball
4 Kirby and the Amazing Mirror
5 Final Fantasy I & II

Honorable Mentions: F-Zero: Legend of Falcon, Donkey Kong Country 2, DK: King of Swing



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA (GC)

Does this mean that fanboys can finally stop whining about "Celda"? We sure hope so. The surprise debut of the adult Link at Nintendo's press conference was awe-inspiring, and we have no doubt that Nintendo has grand things in store for this legendary franchise.



FINAL FANTASY XII (PS2)

Rumored to be plagued by development troubles, Final Fantasy XII still looked amazing on the show floor. It seems impossible, but the series actually appears to be making another huge stride forward on the visual front, and the story looks to be truly epic.

SPLINTER CELL 3 (PC)

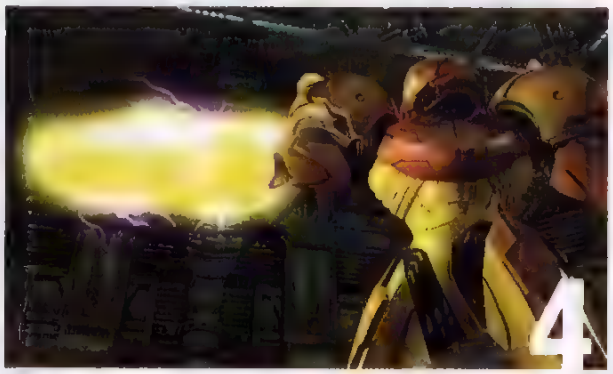
It's coming to multiple systems, but we're counting this as a PC title as it was shown only in that form at the show. After putting out two Splinter Cells in quick succession, we wondered if Ubisoft had anything left in the gas tank for this commercial juggernaut. After seeing the awe-inspiring lighting effects and intriguing co-op gameplay at the show, all our questions were answered.

RESIDENT EVIL 4 (GC)

After so many sequels, Resident Evil is being reborn on the GameCube, under the direction of series creator Shinji Mikami. Based on what we've seen, this is destined to be the greatest survival horror game of all time, zombies be damned. Featuring graphically stunning, grippingly tense action, and a vastly improved control scheme, this game should make history.

HALO 2 (XBOX)

It looked awesome last E3, and looked even better in multiplayer form at this year's soiree. No one has really questioned the fact that Halo 2 is going to rock, so the real news this year was (thank God!) a firm release date – and, yes, Peter Moore confirmed that it's November 9th *2004*!



METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES (GC)

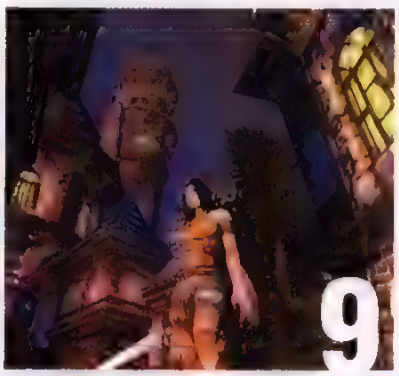
Metroid Prime was a revelation, and Echoes will go a long way to furthering Samus' stature as a gaming legend. Once again, GI brings you the inside scoop on one of the hottest titles of the year, so quit stalling and sink your teeth into our cover story starting on page 62.

JADE EMPIRE (XBOX)

Knights of the Old Republic was not only a high point in RPG gaming, but in the Star Wars universe. Just when you thought BioWare couldn't top their last work, it turns its view eastward and delivers a mind-blowing title that may eclipse even KOTOR in depth.

GRAN TURISMO 4 (PS2)

It didn't create much of a stir at E3, if only because we've been inundated with screenshots and a playable Japanese special edition of the game in the last year, but damned if GT 4 still doesn't look like the best racer on the market.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT (PC)

Every time we see WoW we can't help but come away impressed with what the team has accomplished. It should open new online horizons for the MMO genre.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER (PS2)

Snake's best adventure yet? We expect the use of outdoor environments and lush foliage to take stealth gameplay far beyond the corridors of yore.

Top 10 PlayStation 2

1. Final Fantasy XII
2. Gran Turismo 4
3. Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater
4. God of War
5. Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal
6. Mortal Kombat: Deception
7. Mercenaries
8. Prince of Persia 2
9. Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Bose
10. Devil May Cry 3

Honorable Mentions: Tony Hawk's Underground 2, Call of Duty: Finest Hour, Jak 3

Top 10 Xbox

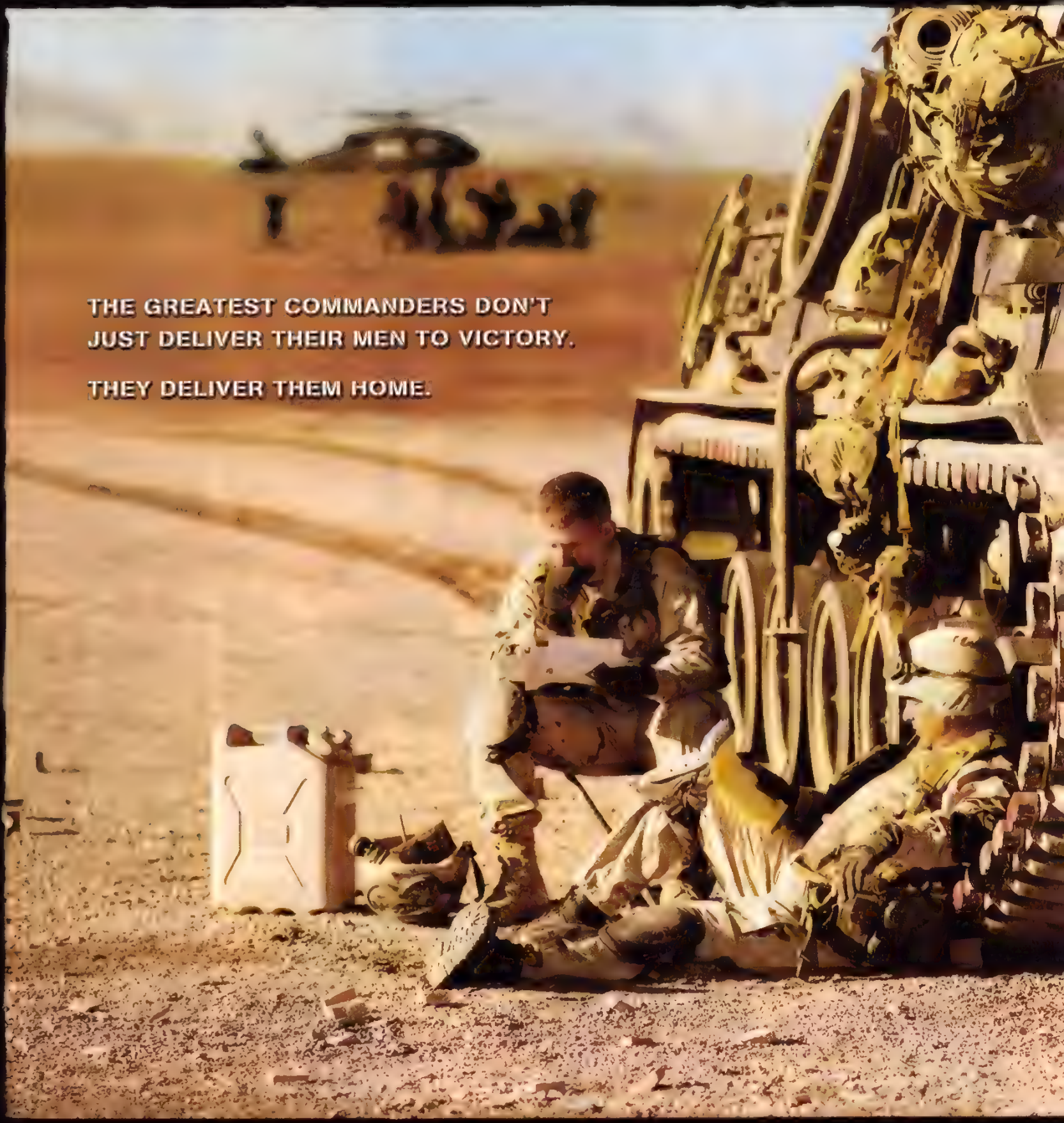
1. Halo 2
2. Jade Empire
3. Doom 3
4. Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords
5. MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf
6. Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict
7. Fable
8. Brothers in Arms
9. Dead or Alive: Ultimate
10. Forza Motorsport

Honorable Mentions: Burnout 3, Star Wars: Republic Commando, Snowblind, Conker: Live and Reloaded

Top 10 GameCube

1. The Legend of Zelda
2. Metroid Prime 2: Echoes
3. Resident Evil 4
4. Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat
5. Paper Mario 2
6. Advance Wars
7. Viewtiful Joe 2
8. Baten Kaitos
9. WWE: Day of Reckoning
10. Odama

Honorable Mentions: Star Fox, Donkey Konga, Pikmin 2



MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Strong Language
Violence

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

COMING SOON

XBOX

XBOX LIVE

BEST E3 2002 WINNER

BEST SIMULATION
MOST ORIGINAL GAME

★ BASED ON A TRAINING AID DEVELOPED FOR THE U.S. ARMY ★

THE LIVES OF THE 8 MEN OF ALPHA AND BRAVO TEAMS REST IN THE SWIFT DECISIONS YOU MAKE AS THEIR COMMANDER. THEY WON'T BREATHE, THEY WON'T FLINCH. THEY WON'T MOVE A MUSCLE UNTIL YOU ORDER THEM TO. ONLY YOUR WELL-THOUGHT OUT STRATEGY WILL ALLOW THEM TO ACHIEVE THEIR DIRECTIVE. ONLY YOUR LEADERSHIP CAN KEEP THEM FROM MAKING THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE FOR THEIR COUNTRY.

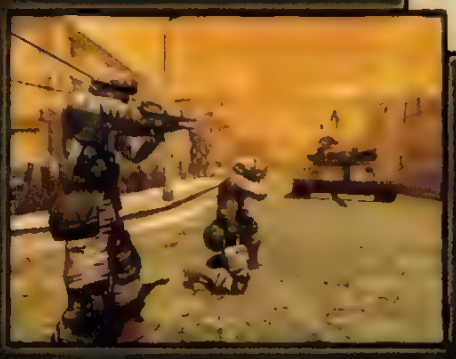
"...TAKES THE TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC SQUAD COMBAT OF RAINBOW SIX-STYLE GAMES TO A WHOLE NEW REALM OF REALITY."
- OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

"...IT IS UNCOMPROMISINGLY REALISTIC, YET RIDICULOUSLY FUN."
- IGN.COM

"...A QUANTUM LEAP FORWARD IN THE BATTLEFIELD SIMULATION CATEGORY."
- GAME INFORMER

CPL. DEVEREUX AND PFC SILVERMAN MOVE INTO FLANKING POSITION TO ENGAGE ENEMY.

PFC SHIMENSKI AND SGT. WILLIAMS PULL WOUNDED INFANTRYMAN FROM HEAVY ENEMY FIRE



TEAM UP ON XBOX LIVE FOR 2-PLAYER CO-OP.

"FULL SPECTRUM" WARRIOR

ASSUME YOUR COMMAND AT:
WWW.FULLSPECTRUMWARRIOR.COM

www.pandemicstudios.com

THQ
www.thq.com

CLIFF BLESZINKSI

LEAD DESIGNER/EPIC GAMES

>> Starting out in amateur development as a teenager, Cliff Bleszinksi has gone on to become one of video games' most outspoken and entertaining characters. As Epic's lead designer, Bleszinski has won acclaim for his work on Epic's legendary Unreal series, and continues to play a key role in guiding the company's future projects. <<

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1992 ▶ Youngest in Charge

At 17, Bleszinski hooks up with Epic Games and begins work on Jazz Jackrabbit

1993 ▶ Breaking Out

Graduates high school and ships Jazz Jackrabbit, his first commercially released title

1998 ▶ The Unreal World

The original Unreal ships, starting Bleszinski and Epic's rise to fame

1999 ▶ Fragging Gone Wild

The game that would become the first word in Internet FPS, Unreal Tournament is released, featuring Bleszinski's design work. It goes on to sell over three million units

2003 ▶ A Worthy Sequel

The long-awaited Unreal 2: The Awakening is released to fans the world over

2003 ▶ Glamour Shots

The notoriously camera-shy Bleszinski is featured in Entertainment Weekly

2004 ▶ Keeping the Faith

The amazing Unreal Tournament 2004 ships, reaffirming UT's place as one of the world's greatest online FPSs

Talk a little bit about your role at Epic. As the company continues to grow, are you now less hands-on with the actual games?
We recently merged with our sister studio, and my role's kind of shifted. I was in a position for a while where I was responsible for managing people as well as being creative. And it was one of those situations where I never really wanted to manage people. I just want to sit down and think of cool s—. I'm now at the point where, you know, I get to kick back and be creative. It's very enjoyable now. I'm not sitting here worrying about how to pay the bills or how to keep the lights on. I'm concentrating on making the coolest things I possibly can.

What games are you most involved in right now?
The majority of my time right now is taken up developing a new property that is unannounced.

Unreal has obviously always been one of the real standbys of online first-person shooting. What are some of the reasons you think the series continues to maintain such a large and loyal following?
What happens with a lot of games, and you're seeing this with a lot of the Halo clones now on Xbox, is [the developers are] looking at the bullet point list of what people expect out of the genre. And they spend so much time chasing after the bullet points of what every other game has that they never get around to figuring out what the original hook is going to be in their game. With Unreal 1, when we were working on that everyone else was saying, "Oh we gotta have a shotgun." And we said, "Well, everybody else is doing a shotgun. Let's do something a little bit different." We live in a world of games that are just drenched with terrorists and AK-47s and World War II. Unreal for us has always been a really good sci-fi alternative to that.

Are you working on anything for Xbox 2 right now?
Well, we do have a publicly announced partnership with Microsoft, and one might infer that, you know, that would go along with it. [Laughs]

Did you get a chance to see the Nintendo DS or PSP at E3?
I did not get to see the DS, but I got to see and touch and love the PSP – I wanted to rub my balls on it.

It's pretty sexy looking.

> ***"I just want to sit down and think of cool s—."***

That's interesting, because Epic has always stuck with Unreal and never branched out into new franchises. Is that changing now?
Unreal is our baby and it's been our bread and butter. But I've been trying to get a new IP started around here for quite awhile. When you go to a publisher and you knock on the door and say, "You have a choice of what products you want. Would you like a new Unreal game or would you like what's behind door number two?" The publisher's always going to go with the established brand as opposed to the new brand. It's the safer bet, right? So, basically, we're at this point: I really can't go into a lot of detail about it, but a studio increases its value by having multiple valuable intellectual properties that touch on different genres and touch on different elements of what you can do with a next-generation system or a next-generation PC.

Are you working on Unreal 3 right now?
No, there is no Unreal 3. [It's] Unreal Technology 3.0. It's a bit of a misnomer for anyone to say [there is an Unreal 3], because we've always had problems with our branding. What game is what? And part of the problem of the overlap between game engine and game name is that people assume that we're doing Unreal 3 right now. Someday, maybe. I'd like to consider doing it, but there are currently no plans right now for Unreal 3.

I know you're pretty involved with the mod community. Do you want to talk a little bit about the Make Something Unreal contest?
Yeah, we're trying to promote the hell out of this thing because there's a ton of cash and prizes that are being given away. The platform is there, the tutorials are there, and the money is there for the taking. There are a number of people that are doing really cool stuff. With our technology, it's very versatile. People are making racing games, they're making top down Gauntlet-style shooter games, they're making third-person action games and there are even single-player zombie action/adventure things.

The Unreal Engine 3 demo is very impressive. Can you talk a little bit about what that engine is going to allow you to do as a game creator that you couldn't in the past?
People in this industry tend to view graphics as like a zero or a one. You either get one person who says graphics don't matter or you get people who say they're all about the graphics. It's like, there has to be a balance. To say the graphics don't directly influence the fun of an entertainment experience such as a game is bulls—. If I walk over to a pretty looking weapon and I pick it up and it looks real – it's shiny and scratched and the paint flecks look good. Then, I pull the trigger and the muzzle flash is beautiful – that's fun. Just as much as sound can make a fun experience, and all those intangibles of control and tightness of experience when you're playing a game. And it's like now we're at the point where graphics don't suck, finally, in this business. We're finally at that point where we can render the crazy things that keep us up at night as designers. It's very exciting.

It's a Trojan Horse Game Boy for adults. It's something that an adult male sitting in business class on a flight would not feel embarrassed pulling out and playing because people would assume he's looking at a movie. It's a Trojan Horse as far as that it looks like it's built for movies, but you play games and watch pornography on it when no one's looking…the screen is f—ing beautiful. It looks better than the majority of TVs that most Americans have in their homes.

What are some of the games you've been playing right now? Or what's impressed you lately?
I'm really looking forward to God of War on PS2. It's so f—ing fun. When I played that game at E3 I was just grinning. Everything just felt tight. It had that kind of responsiveness that actually Nintendo's usually the master of. The thing is, you look at it on paper and it technically doesn't do anything very original, right? It goes to prove that as long as your execution is amazing, you don't necessarily always have to do something that is so revolutionary. Let Nintendo do the game where you're shooting the giant pinball at the army and whatever. It's like Nintendo's turning into this R&D think-tank for the business, and their ideas are so far ahead of everybody else's that you look at their games and you're like, "What the f—?" It's strange.

UNREAL & UNCENSORED!

■ Deep in the heart of Epic Games headquarters, Cliff Bleszinski plots world domination

Photo: Bryan Regan

©2004 Atari, Inc. All rights reserved. Licensed and developed by HUTCHINS Interactive Limited, an Atari studio. All trademarks are the property of their respective owners. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox and the Xbox Logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries.

AMBITIOUS.
RUTHLESS.
DEADLY.
Experience the world of DRIV3R now. Catch Run The Gauntlet, an Internet Film Event airing exclusively on WWW.DRIV3R.com.
DRIV3R
see it all at...
.com
REFLECTIONS
ATARI

tech

Z600 CAMERA PHONE, GAMEBOARD EGB-10, AND BLUETOOTH CAR-100

Manufacturer: Sony Ericsson
Website: www.sonyericsson.com
List Price: Phone: $399.99, Gameboard: $49.99, Car: $79.99

Seemingly a pretty run of the mill camera phone, the Z600 hides its style and tech savvy beneath a cool gray keypad. The front and back covers can be swapped with a whole bevy of fashion plates, but the real story is the accessory lineup available for this model. The Gameboard EGB-10 (which the phone plugs into) certainly is a start when it comes to making cell phones more ergonomically friendly for gamers, but in our time with it, the buttons left a lot to be desired while playing the pre-installed V-Rally 2 by Atari. Hopefully version 2 will rock our socks a little more. On the other hand, the Bluetooth Car-100 takes advantage of the set's built-in Bluetooth support – a feature getting more and more useful in current phones. Why should you care? Well in this situation it means that you can drive Sony's little RC-Racer from up to 30 feet away without having to do any complicated setup. So, feel free to torture friends, relatives, and coworkers from a safe distance. If you're really skilled, you can send your car to bring back delicious ribbon candies!

pc

NVIDIA GFORCE 6800

Manufacturer: NVIDIA
Website: www.nvidia.com
List Price: $299 – $499

Being the preferred video card of Doom 3 (due out "when it's done") is high recommendation indeed. Couple that with the recently displayed power of the Unreal Engine 3 on the 6800 [check out our coverage of the engine on pages 18 and 19] and geeks around the world get all tingly. Due out in June either by itself or with a handful of high-end gaming PCs, the 6800 has the world's first on-chip video processor and a new 16 pipeline superscalar architecture. A little too techy on the mumbo jumbo for you? The point is that this card is mega super ultra cool. You'll dig it.

peripherals

STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY PS2 CONTROLLER

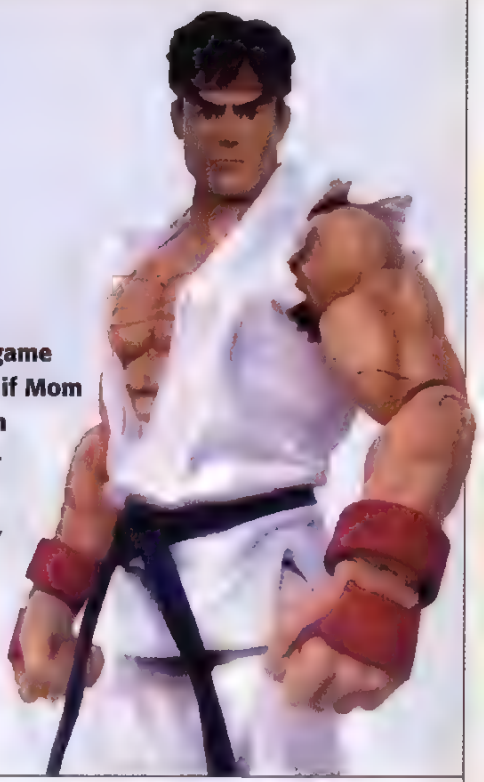
Manufacturer: NubyTech
Website: www.streetfightercontroller.com
List Price: $19.99

toys

STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY ACTION FIGURES

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

You'll only be 15 once – and that goes for video game icons known for kicking epic ass, too. Now, what if Mom and Dad had commissioned limited edition action figures chronicling your life, as well as a customized controller to relive your glory days with? Well, that would be cool, wouldn't it? Luckily, Street Fighter's figurative parental units we know and love (which sane people refer to as Capcom) did just that to ring in the anniversary of their fighters' births. We're glad, 'cause all we got was a weirdly ill-fitting sweater. Party on!

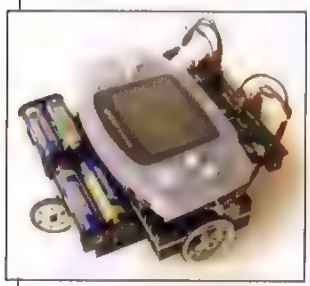


etc

XPORT 2.0

Manufacturer: Charmed Labs
Website: www.charmedlabs.com
List Price: $159 (50K memory), $199 (150 Kmemory)

The actual usefulness for normal people is a little slim on this product, but the possibilities are immense! Turn a Game Boy Advance or SP into a freaking robot! Trump Nintendo's Reggie by making a gaming revolution! The system includes several tested-and-approved logic configurations, open source software, and all the hardware you'll need to instigate the digital apocalypse. Okay, maybe the last bit is overstating, but still...

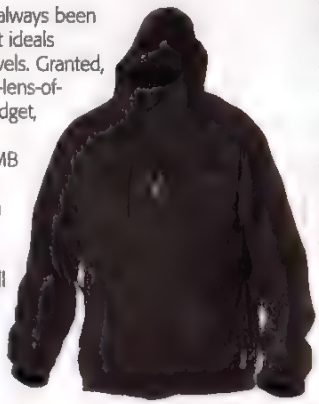


etc

THE HUB JACKET

Manufacturer: O'Neill Europe
Website: www.oneilleurope.com
List Price: TBA

Wearable computing has always been one of those high-concept ideals brought to life by sci-fi novels. Granted, this is no computer-in-the-lens-of-your-sunglasses caliber gadget, but the HUB jacket does feature a removable 128MB MP3 player and internal wiring. Headphones and a speaker are integrated to handle the music player and Bluetooth-enabled cell phones. Still, the part with the highest cool-factor is the soft keypad controls built into the left sleeve.



etc

SPACE INVADER SNEAKERS

Manufacturer: Vans
Website: www.vans.com
List Price: More than we'd ever think of spending for a pair of shoes

Vans produced these sneakers to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Taito's seminal Space Invaders. Only 30 pairs of the tan version were manufactured, so getting your hands on them is something to really brag about. They also came in black, which sold out just as quickly. Those Japanese collectors have all the luck!

toys

GIANT MICROBES

Manufacturer: GIANTmicrobes
Website: www.giantmicrobes.com
List Price: $5.95

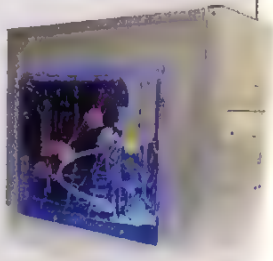
They're like little Care Bears, but deliciously evil. These are the bugs that give you the flu, colds, stomachaches, bad breath, and that pesky Black Death – but now they're in huggable plush form. Machine washable conversation pieces like this are hard to come by. Granted, the dialogue about what really happens when you get Athlete's Foot probably won't help out in a dating situation, but at least you'll have something to talk about besides games.

pc

LIAN-LI AQUARIUM MOD

Manufacturer: Lik Sang
Website: www.thinkgeek.com
List Price: $74.99

Six little plastic swimmers will flit and flip across the side panel of your shiny silver PC-6x, PC-07x, or PC-8x case after installing this aquarium kit. A blue cathode light, air pump, and rear-mounted power switch lets the whole illusion of the outside world come to life. Fool your friends, befuddle your enemies, and confound your conquests!



BIG BUDGET GAMES AND SEQUELS ARE YOUR FRIEND

BY GREG RIZZER, EA DESIGNER, JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

The Hollywood-sized production teams that develop games today are something mentioned quite often in gaming forums. Big-time development and the addition of well-known talent that goes into games have also garnered a lot of attention from mainstream media, but seems to be receiving a cold reception from some of the hardcore set. Personally, I feel that blockbuster games are vital to the growth of the gaming industry.

As more companies try to enter the fray, new methods of attracting the consumer's dollar will arise and more video-game related jobs will be created. Companies that invest substantial sums of money into a game have to be absolutely sure that the quality will be top notch in order to minimize risk. When we see movies, we don't question the size of the team that created the visual effects and sound, but we do demand that it blow us away. The average gamer should feel the same way when a car flips and explodes or a lightning bolt is cast on a troop of orcs. Our medium has to look and play better each generation and this implies more specialization and larger teams.

Given that game development is more expensive than ever, you have to ask where the money is going. At least some, if not a lion's share, is going to bigger teams. A game that used to have three to four animators may now have well over 10. That translates to new jobs and more opportunities for animators looking to get into games. The same can be applied to other areas of development such as engineering, design, and production. Proof of the scope of game development today is the fact that college curriculums exist that specialize in game development and design. This is a pretty clear indicator that the scale of game development has shifted. Aspiring game developers have a greater chance of chasing their dreams. Economics would also dictate that as more talent rises, competition for these prized careers will push our talent to succeed.

Many people felt that interactive entertainment would never reach the scope that it has. And it's no secret that Hollywood is looking to get in on the action. Games are now considered hip, and talent (actors, musicians, screenwriters, directors, etc.) have realized it's a great way to expand their awareness and tap into a culture that would also pay to see these people at the box office or buy their CDs. Knowing that games have "arrived" is a pretty overwhelming experience. I guess playing them for 24 years can have that effect on a person.

Let's talk about sequels for a quick second. Didn't sequels exist since the dawn of gaming? Asteroids was followed by Asteroids 2 and eventually Blasteroids. Pac-Man was followed by everything Pac-Man. Complaining about sequel-itis just doesn't seem like it should gamer that much attention any more. When shelling out 50 dollars for one piece of entertainment, the consumer has to take a giant risk. Retailers no longer allow games to be returned based on customer satisfaction, so it's understandable that a kid with very limited disposable income would come to trust the new Madden or the next Tony Hawk. He knows the quality will be there. Oh, and don't forget that two of the biggest selling games of all time were Super Mario 3 and GTA 3. Sequels give developers the opportunity to drive new things, and if the quality of a sequel does not meet expectations the entire franchise may eventually die. Gamers do have a voice.

Just for the record, I am a hardcore gamer. I import, collect old systems, and will admit to paying 300 dollars to have the Japanese version of Samba De Amigo shipped when it arrived in Japan. (I just wanted to clear the air briefly before talking about niche games.)

Current market trends tell industry decision makers what to make, and to many it seems like smaller quirky games are getting stomped down by the sequels and movie-based properties. As long as realistic sales goals are set for the smaller games, I think we will reach a good balance between the blockbuster game that sells millions and the side-scroller that pushes one-tenth of those numbers. Just as filmmakers have their independent projects, game companies will always have opportunities to make a "gamer's game" and reach solid and – occasionally – blockbuster numbers. You never know when the game equivalent to *The Blair Witch Project* will come along. A lot of people were taken aback that Prince of Persia didn't sell more given its critical acclaim. But don't forget that if you read this magazine you're in the minority. Most of my casual gamer friends don't check publications or the Internet when they head to the store to pick up a game.

> **"Personally, I feel that blockbuster games are vital to the growth of the gaming industry."**

With the advent of faster machines and sharper graphics, consumer expectations for what a game can deliver are at an all-time high. If we want to keep gaming moving forward and attract an even wider audience, games must keep on the same "wow factor" as Tinseltown blockbusters. Niche games will always arise and help provide inspiration for what we can (and sometimes shouldn't) do in order to attract a new audience. Consumers tell publishers and developers through sales numbers what it is they want to play. But there are so many other factors that can lead to the demise of a critically acclaimed title – subject matter, timing, and market perception, to name just a few challenges.

If there's another crash in the game industry, a lot of extremely talented people will be out of jobs, and not just the developers. Journalists, specialty retail shops, marketing, manufacturing, and advertising will all be affected by another downturn. So, while it's okay on paper to wish for the old days, game quality would suffer and ultimately so would the incredible progress games have made as a legitimate form of entertainment and art. ■■■

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.

If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior associate editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com.

RED DEAD REVOLVER

OUT NOW

"A DEEPLY IMMERSIVE OLD-WEST ADVENTURE...TRULY INSPIRED DESIGN AND CINEMATOGRAPHY"

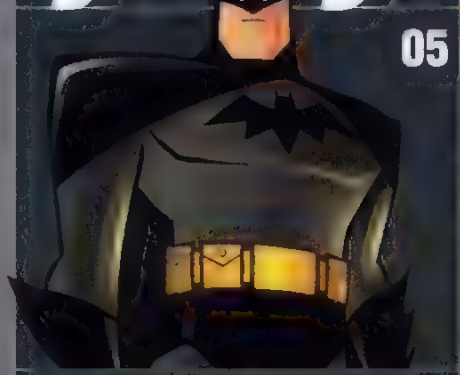
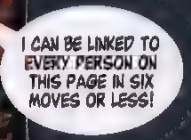
– PLAY

WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/REDDEADREVOLVER

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation 2

"PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, and the Xbox logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. ©2004 Rockstar Games, Inc. Rockstar Games, Rockstar San Diego and the R* logo, are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. Red Dead Revolver is a trademark of Angel Studios, Inc. (d/b/a Rockstar San Diego). All other marks and trademarks are properties of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
# july		Tales of Symphonia – July 13		**01** **NEW RELEASES** • Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow – Xbox • Wartime Command: Battle for Europe – PC • Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow – GC • Growlanser Generations – PS2	**02** **ANIME EXPO** (July 2-5) If you've ever dressed like a *Dragon Ball Z* character, this is the place to be. The expo is held at the Anaheim Convention Center and offers everything from cosplay to gaming.	**03** Tom Cruise turns 42. Coincidentally, 42 is the number of people who actually want to see another *Mission: Impossible* movie.
05 	**06** **NEW RELEASES** • Athens Summer Olympics – PS2 • *Batman The Animated Series: Season 1* – DVD • Kim Possible 2 – GBA • Way of the Samurai 2 – PS2	**07** **CAMP GAME INTENSIVE VIDEO GAME CREATION** (July 6-August 6) In this NYU class, industry pros will teach students how to pitch games, create concepts and prototypes, and more. Contact the Center for Advanced Digital Applications for details.	**08** Kevin Bacon turns 46 today.	**09** Courtney Love celebrates her 40th birthday today. At this rate, it could be her last. 		
11 John Quincy Adams turns 237 today. What? He could still be alive!	**12**	**13** **NEW RELEASES** • NCAA 2005 – PS2, Xbox, GC • Sudeki – Xbox • Tales of Symphonia – GC • Karaoke Revolution Volume 2 – PS2	**14** Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow – July 1	**15** **NEW RELEASES** • Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising – PC	**16** *I, Robot* opens in theaters. Zombified Isaac Asimov declares, "Will Smith is my dog. This movie is tight."	**17** **VIDEO GAME SUMMIT** Held at the luxurious Fairfield Inn and Suites in Lombard, IL, this event is organized by the Atari Video Club and is the place to be for anyone who wants to buy, play, or talk games with fellow enthusiasts.
Doom 3	**20** **NEW RELEASES** • Catwoman – PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA • Puyo Pop Fever – GC • *Starsky & Hutch* – DVD • *Sealab 2021: Season 1* – DVD • *Millenium: Season 1* – DVD		**22** **SAN DIEGO COMIC CON INTERNATIONAL 2004** (July 22-25) This convention is so huge that Aquaman couldn't get in because he wasn't cool enough. If you love comics, this is the biggest event of 2004.	**23** Who's hotter? Matt Damon or Halle Barry? We can't decide. They're both oh so cute! *The Bourne Supremacy* and *Catwoman* open in theaters today.	**24** **CLASSIC GAMING EXPO UK** (July 24-25) Held at Fairfield Halls, gamers are invited to experience the titles that shaped the UK's gaming scene. You'll also get a chance to meet the Oliver Twins (creators of the Dizzy games).
25 **AAAI-04 WORKSHOP ON CHALLENGES IN GAME AI** (July 25-26) This workshop at the 19th National Conference on Artificial Intelligence will explore game AI methodologies, studies, and design at the San Jose Conference Center. Will your robot become a real boy?	**26** **NEW RELEASES** • Doom 3 – PC • Hamtaro Ham Ham Games – GBA • Medieval Conquest – PC • Worms World Party – N-Gage			**30** **CHRISTIAN GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE** (July 30-31) Held at Cascade College in Portland, Oregon, Christian game developers can listen to speakers, pray, and exchange tips on creating software that will kick ass for the Lord.	**31** J.K. Rowling turns 39 today. Wizards across the planet celebrate with every-flavored cakes.

Take on your rivals with the new N-Gage QD

Take on your rivals with wireless multiplayer game play on the new N-Gage® QD

Quick and easy game changing
Pocket-sized
Exclusive and top publisher game titles
Connect, compete and conquer in the N-Gage® Arena
Games compatible with the original N-Gage® game deck
PDA
Mobile phone

n-gage.com/qd

Preorder now at GameStop

N·GAGE NOKIA

anyone anywhere

Copyright © 2004 Nokia. All rights reserved. Nokia, N-Gage, N-Gage Arena and N-Gage QD are trademarks or registered trademarks of Nokia Corporation. Other product or company names mentioned herein may be trademarks of their respective owners.

GAMECUBE
> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** RETRO STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15

Nintendo:

A simple word that brings back fond memories for gamers all across the globe. A name that at one point was synonymous with video games, much like Kleenex was for facial tissue.

Metroid: A franchise that sits next to some of Nintendo's biggest classics, including the much ballyhooed Mario and Zelda. While some would argue that the series never quite reached the heights of Zelda, few can deny the fact that to its fans, Metroid is perhaps the greatest franchise Nintendo has, or ever will, create.

These are bold words we know, but after making a trip to visit Retro Studios in Austin, Texas and getting a behind-the-scenes look at the development of Nintendo's biggest title of 2004, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, no other words are more fitting.

Samus Aran is back, and for gamers who know and love her as the greatest video game heroine to date, this couldn't be better news.

If you haven't experienced the magic that is Metroid, right about now is the time that you want to put down this magazine and go find yourself a copy of any of the 2D incarnations, or the one 3D adventure on which this sequel is based, the original Prime. There are many amazing things we can tell you about this sequel, but to truly understand its draw you most certainly must play Metroid for yourself. It's an adventure like no other you have ever encountered. It's an RPG without the role-playing. It's an action game with context – a story and adventure that will put you mind, body, and soul into the role of the world's greatest galactic trooper, Samus Aran.

THE NINTENDO DIFFERENCE

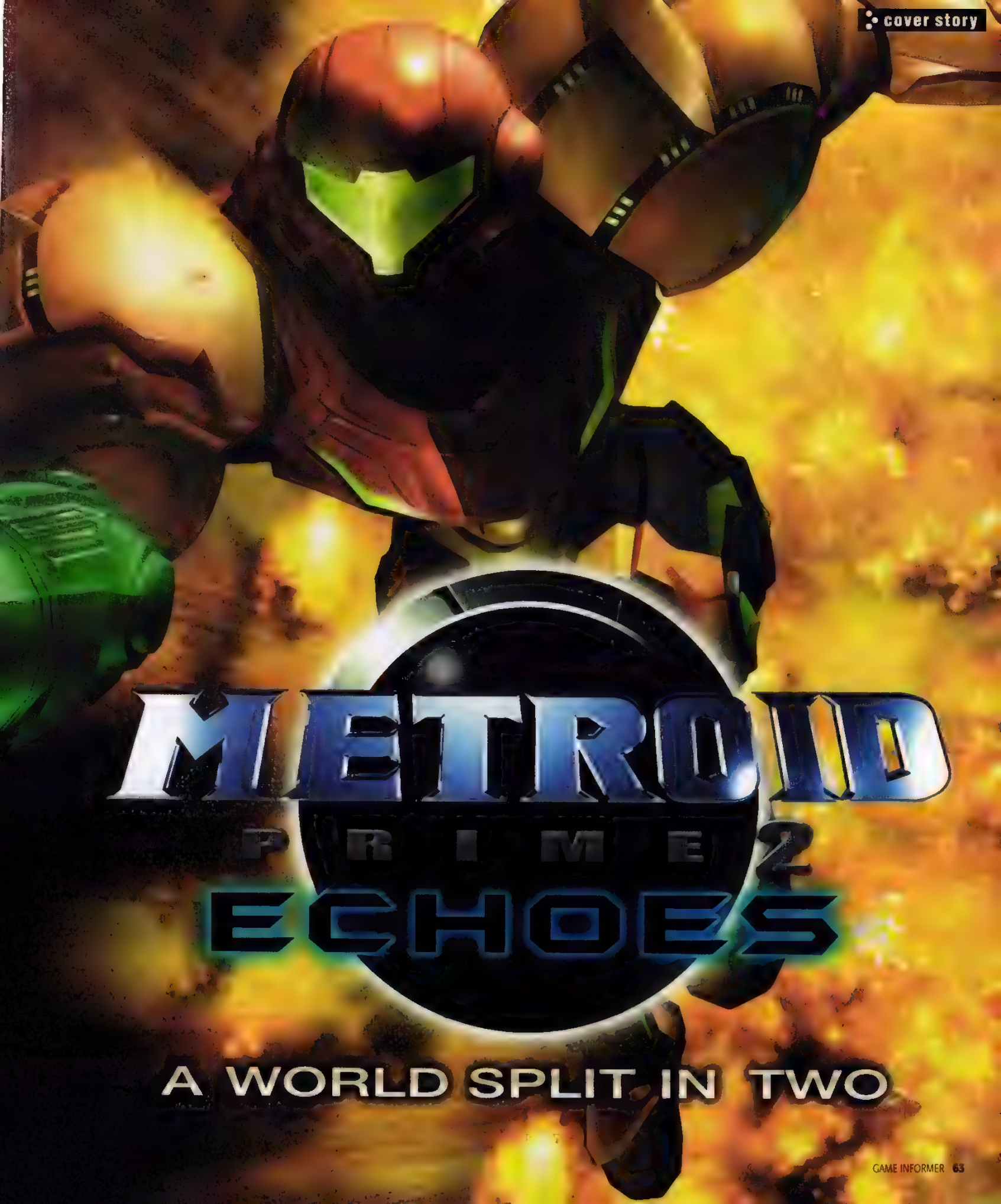
To learn more about Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, Game Informer sat down with the team at Retro Studios deep in the heart of Texas. While Echoes is being developed in the U.S., Nintendo of Japan works closely with Retro to make sure that the Nintendo magic makes its way into the title. Bryan Walker, senior producer at Retro is quick to point out, "It's not like we're working with Nintendo. We are Nintendo."

They are indeed. The Retro team is overseen by Kensuke Tanabe, Manager of Nintendo's Software Planning Department (SPD) and the producer on Prime 2. Tanabe brings over eighteen years of experience at Nintendo to the project (to give you an idea of the depth of his resume, his first title for Nintendo was Super Mario Bros. 2). While Tanabe will visit from time to time, Akira Otani, the project supervisor, makes constant visits to the Lone Star State to keep the ideas flowing between Retro and SPD.

When discussing the relationship between the two companies, Michael Kelbaugh, president & CEO of Retro, who started off as Nintendo of America's first play tester so many years ago, explains it best. "Between ourselves and SPD, [we'll] talk about ideas and agree upon certain things. They'll give us feedback through emails or phone conferences. And then, when Akira comes every month or two, [we'll have] meetings about this small feature, the flow, or whatever."

For all the meetings the two companies have to go through, it helps the product in the end, as Kelbaugh is quick to point

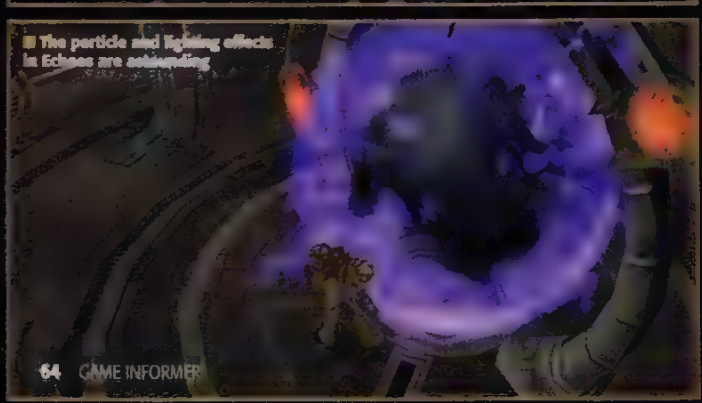
(continued on page 64)


METROID
PRIME 2
ECHOES
A WORLD SPLIT IN TWO

■ Samus acquires a new beam for her arm cannon

■ A wealth of information on the world and creatures can be collected with the Scan Visor

■ The Temple world serves as the central hub in the game



■ The particle and lighting effects in Echoes are astounding

out. "We have access to talent just on this project – design talent – that entire publishers in this industry cannot put together. Just being able to have Akira-san, or Tanabe-san, or even Miyamoto-san look at our product and offer feedback is a huge, huge help for us."

While no one can deny the amount of talent Nintendo has at its fingertips, a large part of the development falls on Retro. Luckily for them, more than 90 percent of its team of over fifty developers from the original Prime have returned to work on the sequel. The title also gets a great deal of support from Jeff Miller, director of product development at NOA, otherwise known as The Treehouse.

SECRETS OF THE NINTENDO SAGES

It may be hard to fathom, since Nintendo has been a key player in the industry for so long, but our visit to Retro is a rare treat indeed. In fact, no press (video game or otherwise) had ever stepped into Retro Studios before our visit. Not only that, but it also marks the first time Nintendo has let the American media visit one of its developers and see a product in its early stages. Given this unique opportunity, Game Informer wasn't going to miss out on a chance to learn (at least some of) how Nintendo develops its amazing products.

Speaking with Mark Pacini, the game director, we got some incredible insight into how Prime 2 is developed. Amazingly enough, the entire game is designed as one big linear quest. "What we do is we build the game linearly," explains Pacini. "Even though it's an open game. We always build rooms in the order that the player's going to encounter them." In fact, every room or area is gameplay tested before any artist even touches it. This is accomplished with what Retro calls a blue room – a textureless 3D representation of the world.

"What we do on the design side is we build out a rough sketch of the world environment that is completely gameplay oriented," Pacini proudly states. "So before it touches art, we could have [puzzle and enemy] scripting in there, we could have all of Samus' mechanics and everything and play around in the environment. We make them play well before they are even given to the art staff. At Retro we have a definite division of responsibilities. The level designers don't make art, they don't build textures, they don't do lighting, they don't make geometry. They build blue rooms that are given to the art team, which textures, lights, then builds the geometry."

To our amazement, the blue rooms, even though they show the basic shape of an area, look nothing like the final product. The art team at Retro makes solid walls disappear, and replaces them with gorgeous organic backdrops that look completely unlike the original design, but with all of the gameplay intact. One of the more interesting things we also learned is that designers put secret areas in every single blue room, so that during the balance portion of the development, it's easy to move pickups around.

For the Metroid faithful, this little tidbit finally explains all those nooks and crannies that chewed up countless hours of probing in search of secrets which simply weren't there.

■ Although the Space Pirates are featured in many of our screenshots, Retro assured us that they "are a very, very small part of this story."

The Luminoths mined crystals in the sand lands to create safe zones that Samus can use when travelling in the Dark World.

FROM THE LIGHT, COMES DARKNESS

Like any good sequel, at its core, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes is essentially the same game as the original. The control scheme is exactly the same as the first Prime: All movement is controlled with the left analog stick, and targeting still uses a lock-on and look system enabled with the shoulder buttons. However, since this game features an entirely new single player adventure, as well as a new multiplayer element (more on that later) the team at Retro is looking at other control options.

Pacini ponders the subject with the look of someone who obviously loves the control scheme from the first game. "[Dual analog control] is something that's still on the table, but it's not ready to be either put in the game or shown outside. But we are considering it. And I know that it was a comment that was made several times [about the original game].

Our control scheme was something that you either liked or you didn't."

While we hope that both play control options find their way into the finished game, once you see the new graphics engine for Echoes in action, we doubt you'll be too concerned which scheme you use. Spectacular lighting, explosive particle effects, more detail in the geometry (especially in Samus herself) is just the tip of the iceberg. Echoes, in every graphical category, ups the ante on the original Prime.

Many of the areas now feature animated objects that breathe life into the world. The level design itself has also expanded to include open vistas to take the player out of tunnels and into a larger world.

"We want to allow the artist to create more interesting visuals. With the last project, we were very strict on the environment to make sure it didn't look like you could fall off. Well, now we're just kind of opening it up so that the areas can seem bigger and grander."

The story of Echoes is also heading in new directions. At the beginning of the game, Samus is given a mission to find Galactic Federation Troopers (the mysterious gray armored troopers seen in early shots of the game and in art form in this article) who went missing on the planet Aether. Upon arrival, Samus finds herself facing an even bigger problem. Aether, like Tallon IV before it, was hit by a Phazon meteor decades earlier. Unlike

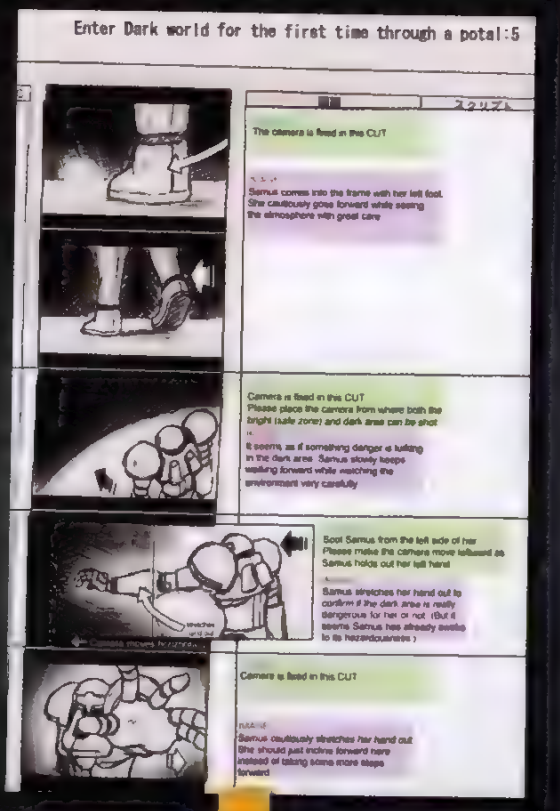
(continued on page 66)

THE GALACTIC FEDERATION TROOPER

One aspect of the game that the team is working on offers an interesting twist. President Michael Kelbaugh and producer Bryan Walker at Retro Studios were both members of the Special Forces, and Mr. Tanabe has challenged them to use their experience to expand Echoes' cinematics. "[There's] a small part of the game that involves interacting with Galactic Federation Troopers," Kelbaugh explains. "It was really important to SPD that there was a touch of realism in there when we were designing those parts of the game. We've been trying to lend our experience where applicable."

ENTER THE DARK WORLD

Here is how the cinematic sequence of Samus entering the dark world for the first time is created. First, a storyboard is used to show how the action unfolds, then it is scripted in real-time within the game engine



In this screen you can see how a charged Dark Beam shot can splatter onto the floor and home in on the enemy

You can freeze the enemy or enemies with a well-placed Dark Beam shot

Tallon IV, however, the impact of the meteor has opened a dimensional rift that has created a copy of Aether, leaving the two unstable planets fighting to stay alive.

As if that wasn't enough bad news, the Luminoth, the native species of the planet who now occupy the light version of Aether, are at war with the Ing, creatures from the dark world created over 80 years ago.

If this is starting to sound a lot like The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past, that's because the similarity between the two is very real. "The player is going to be able to go between both worlds to solve puzzles, to fight creatures, and there's definitely different aspects of gameplay to both worlds," says Pacini. "The idea is to try and make it feel like it's a similar world, but the gameplay between the two is very different."

Just a simple glance at the map gives the player a clear example of how the two worlds will work together. When studying it, you'll be able to see the differences between the light and the dark worlds, where you've gone and where you couldn't go before, and even paths that you can take in the dark world to reach previously unavailable areas in the light world.

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

To handle this new dual world, Retro needed to outfit Samus with a whole new arsenal of firearms and gadgets. On the weapons front, Samus still has her Power Beam as a default weapon on her arm cannon, but the other two new beams that we were shown play into the game's theme of duality. The Light Beam, which does massive damage to dark enemies, is partnered with the Dark Beam that similarly makes easy work of light world foes. The interesting twist for these opposing beams is that they require ammo – a new gameplay element introduced in Echoes.

"When you kill things or destroy things with the Dark Beam you get light ammunition. When you kill things with the Light Beam you get dark ammunition." Pacini is also quick to point out that Retro doesn't plan for the ammo aspect to be something that players really need to micromanage.

"We didn't design this to be like Resident Evil or something where you have to hoard your ammunition. One of the things that we're hoping that players do is when they know they're going to go into the dark world is to stock up on light ammunition, because they know that they're going to be able to mow through dark world creatures with the Light Beam."

Once the Charge Beam is acquired, these weapons also gain some interesting fire modes. For example, the charged Light Beam unleashes a shotgun-like spray that has a secondary fire incendiary effect. The charged Dark Beam offers even more unique gameplay mechanics, as it unleashes a goo that the team lovingly refers to as "grape jelly" that literally takes on a life of its own once fired from Samus' arm cannon.

A normal shot of the Dark Beam can slow enemies. A charged shot can freeze them. But that's not all it can do. If you shoot the ground

THE MINIONS OF EVIL

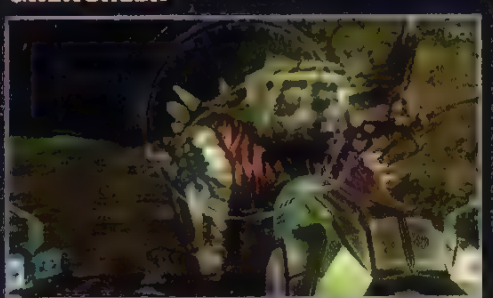
BOSS: AMORBIS

Amorbis is a boss that actually consists of three large Sand Worms. They have a unique ability that allows them to attach to a sphere of Dark Energy. Drawing energy from this sphere gives them the ability to fire Dark projectiles, as well as a hide of tough armor. A weak spot in their mouth is especially vulnerable to attack from the Morph Ball.

SPACE PIRATE COMMANDO

Space Pirate Commandos are equipped with a Variable Pulse cannon, E-Grenade launcher, and Energy scythe. Powerful Boost Thrusters allow them to skate along the ground at high speeds. They can use a personal Barrier Shield to repel most energy-based attacks. They also possess a "shadow cloak" that renders them invisible for short periods of time to normal vision, but can be detected with the Dark Visor.

GRENCHLER



The Grenchler is an amphibious creature that can pursue the player on land as well as deep water. If it can't kill its prey with its powerful jaws, it will fire a potent burst of electricity at them. Grenchlers have a genetic defect that makes the shell on their back susceptible to concussive blasts.

close to an enemy with the charged shot, the goo splashes onto the nearby terrain and homes in on the enemy. Or, if you manage to land a direct hit, the goo will splash off one enemy and splatter onto the next, enabling the player to freeze multiple enemies at once. The effect, as you may have guessed, is simply gorgeous in motion.

A fourth beam is confirmed, but still shrouded in mystery. When we asked if it was possible that there might be more than four basic beams in the game, we were greeted with a knowing smirk – so we have a feeling that more may be available.

On the gadgets front, Samus also comes prepared with some new and ingenious additions. As before, players still have the Scan Visor, and a new Echo Visor and Dark Visor are also at their disposal. These visors, like those in the original Prime, introduce some interesting new play mechanics.

The Echo Visor, while still being worked on visually, transforms the screen into a black and white outline of the world with a sonic pulse that constantly pings the environment. So in essence, the Echo Visor lets the player see sound. For example, if a pickup is hidden in the wall, you will see an echo of the object bouncing back at you.

The Echo Visor also has uses in gameplay. For example, one of the new creatures in the game (aptly named the Shrieker) attacks you with subtle sonic blasts that can't be seen without the visor. Flip on the Echo Visor, and Samus can see these sonic attacks. This creature also gives off a sonic disruptor field that is invisible to the naked eye, making it impossible to hit with missiles. In practice, the effect is awesome to behold, as the shield bends and refracts the high-powered onslaught – another aspect of Prime 2 that simply has to be seen in action to fully appreciate.

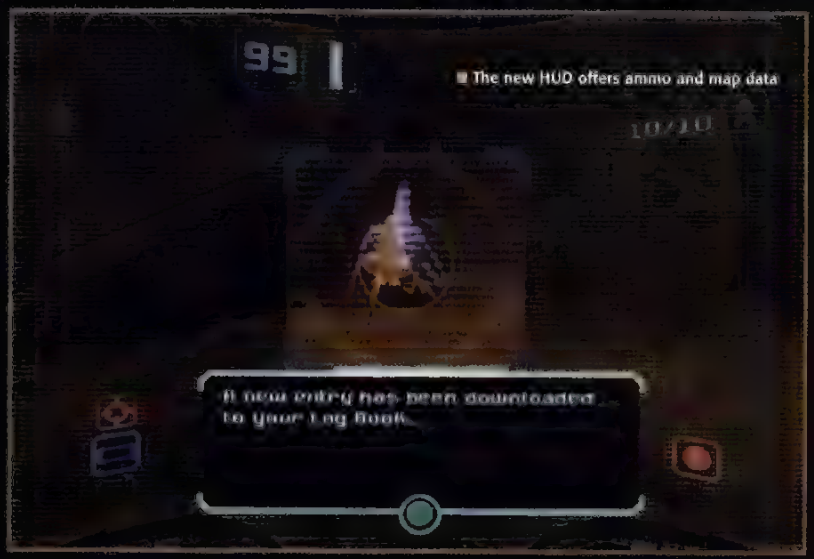
The Dark Visor enables the player to see things that otherwise wouldn't exist in the light world. Ings, the gooey creatures of the dark world, often counter the player in combat by going liquid, which cancels Samus' target lock. By using the Dark Visor, the player is able to stay locked onto the creatures, enabling the player to pummel the enemies with attacks to speed up the encounters.

Another interesting addition to Samus' arsenal is the Seeker Missile. With the Seeker Missile, Samus is able to acquire multiple targets or multiple hit zones on a boss by sweeping the targeting reticle over them. In essence, it is similar to "painting targets" in Panzer Dragoon Orta.

The Seeker Missile also has uses in puzzles when combined with the Dark Visor. In one puzzle, a series of H.R. Giger-inspired circles and shapes adorn the space above a door that is mysteriously locked. To highlight the correct targets, you must use the Dark Visor, and combine it with the Seeker missile so that you hit all the targets at once.

As cool as the Seeker Missile certainly is, perhaps the most exciting new pieces of Samus' gear are the Screw Attack (a fan favorite from the 2D Metroid titles) and the

(continued on page 68)



■ The new HUD offers ammo and map data

■ Combine the Dark Visor with the Seeker Missile to solve this puzzle

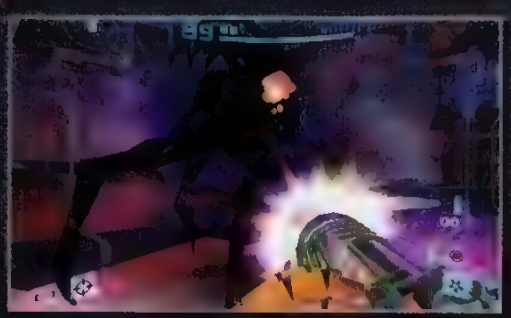
SHRIEKER

A carnivorous plant, the Shrieker waits for prey half buried in the earth. When it detects a target, it erupts from the ground and takes flight. It will release a stunning sonic blast that is invisible to normal vision, but can be detected with the Echo Visor. Shriekers can also generate a sonic disruptor field that redirects homing projectiles, making them difficult to eliminate with missile weaponry.

INGLET

The smallest of the Ing, Inglets are amorphous blobs capable of clinging to nearly any surface. They can fire bursts of dark matter in self-defense, though they prefer to avoid battle. They seldom travel alone, and can be dangerous in large numbers. They dislike bright light, and will avoid it if possible.

WARRIOR ING



The Ing reside in the hazardous waste that is the dark world and serve as the main enemy to the Luminoth. They are creatures of pure darkness, which allows them to become liquefied pools that can travel on any surface. Warrior Ing can turn their bodies into deadly projectiles sheathed in Dark Energy. The tips of their legs are razor sharp, making them formidable in melee. The Warrior Ing can also open small portals into the light world, which focus beams of intense light at the player. They fear the Light Beam, and any source of bright light.

Although the light of the normal world can kill Ings, they have the ability to possess light world creatures, allowing them to safely enter the light.

HUNTER ING

Hunter Ing are flying creatures that can be found throughout Dark Aether. They can render their bodies intangible, allowing them to phase through geometry or evade foes with ease. They project their long, deadly tentacles from their body like guided missiles. Like all Ing, they are vulnerable to the Light Beam.

Use the Seeker Missile to paint multiple targets at one time

The animation for the Seeker Missile is simply gorgeous

The new Screw Attack translates surprisingly well to 3D. To execute it, just after a Double Jump, you press the B button a third time to commence Screwing. Well-timed pumping of the button thereafter will keep you flying through the air. The third dimension does offer up some new challenges, however. It takes a steady hand to hit smaller areas, as you bend your trajectory with the analog stick during flight.

newly added Gravity Boost. After mastering fluid transitions from first-person to third-person view with the Morph Ball in Prime, Retro took on the Screw Attack for its sequel. There is only one minor difference between Echoes' version of the technique and the original's, explains Pacini, "Right now, the Screw Attack is strictly being used for traversal. There currently aren't any plans for it to chew through walls, or things like that. It's just really perceptively hard to do that." It will, however, let the player use the classic Kick Climb to bounce back and forth up specifically marked walls. It also has many uses in combat. "We have one creature that pounds the ground and sends out a shockwave. You can jump over it, which is fine, or you can jump over it and do a Screw Attack into his face [to open him up for other attacks]," adds an excited Pacini.

The other new play mechanic is basically an underwater version of the Screw Attack. Like previous Metroid games, you can attain the Gravity Suit to give the player unhindered movement underwater. Enhance that power with the Gravity Boost, and the player is given a third jump underwater, which is basically a hover jet that allows the player to cross larger areas.

Like the previous games, the Grapple, Double Jump, Morph Ball Bomb, Power Bomb, Boost Ball, and Spider Ball will all be available to the player once added to Samus' inventory. However, many of these classic aspects are being utilized in new ways.

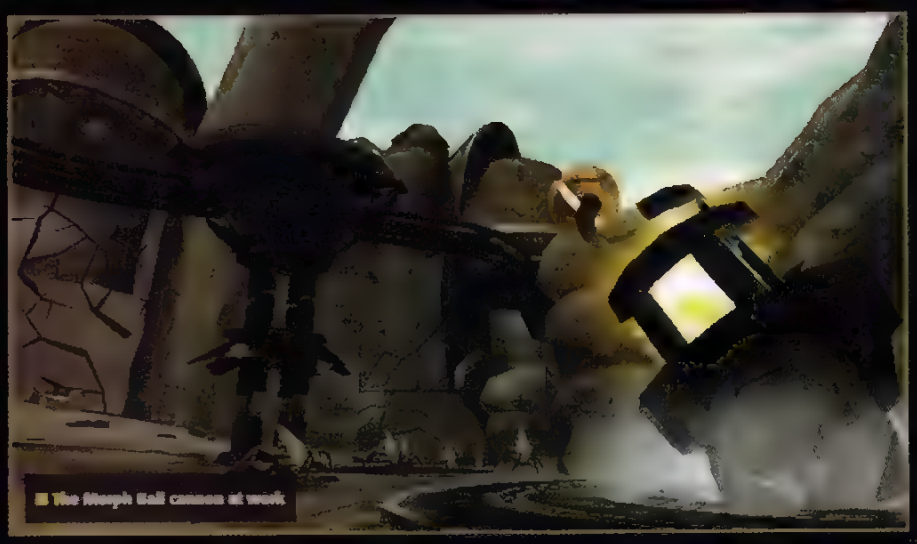
The Spider Ball is one of the powers that will take advantage of some of the new technologies Retro has added to the game. "In the last game, the Spider Ball was kind of limited to tracks," states Pacini. "Well, now we [can] Spider Ball on complex surfaces."

Demonstrating what he meant in one of Echoes' blue rooms, we got to see the theory in practice. In an area full of large spheres, Samus is able to roll on these round surfaces, then with the boost ability, launch herself perpendicular to other spheres. To aid in the process, since gravity pulls on the player once out of the ball's orbit, red dots are added to the objects to make the path easier to follow. This new technique has some rather interesting applications.

For example, there are various Morph Ball cannons throughout the game that can launch Samus across large distances. Combine this with the new Spider Ball aspects, and you can see how a cannon could be used to fire Samus to a far wall where she could stick and then further explore. We expect some exciting new secrets to find using these new gameplay elements.

THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME

Of course, all these new powers aren't worth a Space Pirate's rotting corpse if they don't work out in the finished game. Having played the entire E3 build, and numerous other never-before-seen areas of the game, we can say with confidence that the game is coming together quite nicely. Explaining how the game unfolds could easily fill an entire novel.



The Morph Ball Cannon at work

The Space Pirates are deadly creatures that offer up some long, intense firefights

Like the original Prime, Echoes will support 480p, and the team is looking into widescreen support, though it is unlikely

The Spider Ball plays a bigger role in this adventure

but here are some highlights of some things you can expect from Echoes.

Like the original, there will be plenty of areas where you must use the Morph Ball for navigation. But the action has been given an added dimension. In some areas, pillbug-like creatures will try to knock you off the tracks. In other areas, large Venus flytrap-esque monsters will shoot out tendrils that suck you off tracks and spit you out to the floor below. Other instances allow the player to actually move into the screen when travelling in the classic side-scrolling Morph Ball puzzles to open up larger, maze-like sequences.

The combat is also much deeper than the previous title, with enemy intelligence that works much harder to outsmart you. As Samus travels back and forth between the light and dark worlds, you discover that she takes damage when moving in the Phazon-polluted world. While Nintendo has hinted at a suit that eventually ends the damage from moving in this world, for now travel in these areas uses safe zones that are created by Luminoth crystals strategically located in the dark world.

Shoot one of these crystals with your Light Beam, and a protective shield expands for a limited time. Samus must use these safe zones to move about the world, but they can also be used in combat. By luring dark world creatures near crystals, Samus (with proper timing) can flip them on to unleash massive damage on her enemies. However, they won't be easily fooled. The Ing, who transform back and forth between solid and puddle forms, are armed with a vicious array of attacks. They even work in tandem to attack Samus from multiple sides.

The style of the worlds also creates an engulfing experience. Currently, there is a temple hub world featuring towering structures of alien origin, as well as a sandy waste, a swamp, and a yet-unnamed environment. Retro was conscientious in avoiding the often-used lava and ice levels found in many Metroid titles to ensure that the game feels new.

These worlds can also affect the gameplay. Since you can move back and forth between the light and dark worlds during your travels, so can the enemy. Appearing as dark swarms, the minions of the dark world can create portals into the light world and possess otherwise docile creatures to use against you (complete with new, more sinister models). Later on in the game, the Ing will even try to snatch the player. When they place their icy grasp on Samus, black tentacles will crawl all over your visor while the controller adds a panic-inducing rumble.

There are other great examples of visor effects that add to the immersion. Rain splashes against it in the damp swamp environment. Looking at light world safe zones with the Dark Visor on washes out the screen with a blinding display. While Samus sinks in water in the light world, it turns solid in the dark world, allowing Samus to walk across and reach new areas.

As if all these elements weren't enough for the player to keep track of, power-ups can also be found in new and interesting ways. In one area in the sand wastes, we were able to shoot a large hanging stalactite high up that you normally wouldn't notice. To our surprise, one well-placed charge shot dislodged the formation, sending it crashing to the ground below and unveiling a hidden pickup.

In another instance, we came face to face with a dark version of Samus (known simply as Dark Samus). You will battle your evil alter ego in what is one of the

(continued on page 70)

During the battle with the boss Amorbis, the controller will shake to warn the player that the worm will soon be emerging close by

The battles can get up close and personal

most intense fight sequences we've ever experienced. Not only is your evil doppelganger fast, she manages to blow the environment to hell and back in an example of the impressive deformation that takes place in the game.

The final piece of the gameplay pie we offer up is the first boss fight with Amorbis, the worm-like creature that you can see within the pages of this feature [see sidebar page 66]. Pacini shared his thoughts with us on the enormous monster.

"The idea with this guy is that he's a boss that's in three sections. Three independent bosses. He's three large worms that, in this first stage, burrow up under the ground and do a kind of stampede. When you give them enough damage and they go up into the center sphere, which gives them armor, now their only targetable area is their head. What's unique about this boss is what it wants to do is turn your safe zones off. Because – since this is the first boss of the game – you're still pretty weak and you're going to take a lot of damage from the dark world. So he's not really aiming at you, he's aiming at the safe zones. But you can break off his helmet and [when] he has this huge sucking vortex [he] will actually [suck] the Morph Ball in so you can damage him from the inside."

As you may have guessed, this is just the beginning of the encounters you'll find in Echoes. Of course, if all this amazing single player action wasn't enough to convince you why Prime 2 will blow the doors off the original, then the addition of multiplayer should push you over the edge.

MULTIPLAYER MADNESS

Retro is very hush-hush on how many modes and maps will be in the final game, but we did get a chance to play its unique take on the first-person multiplayer experience.

Pacini breaks it down with this simple statement: "We wanted to bring all the things that are unique to the Metroid universe into multiplayer. This isn't Quake. This isn't Halo. It's Metroid. One of the interesting, unique things that we try to use is the Morph Ball. The Morph Ball is very important in multiplayer. In the single player game it's very much a defensive weapon. It lets you escape swiftly. It lets you go into smaller areas that you couldn't before. That's all true in multiplayer as well. You'll start out with the Boost Ball, which allows you to get away quicker. But also you can damage other players with the Boost Ball [by ramming] into them. There are Morph Ball cannons in multiplayer that allow you to cross great distances and get to areas that you couldn't before. There are also certain abilities that force you into Morph Ball mode, but are very powerful. Like a Death Ball mode, where you can't go into first-person mode, you can't boost, but you're this ball that, when you touch someone, they're going to die. Pretty much," states a satisfied Pacini.

"The lock-on is very prevalent in multiplayer. Currently there's no dual analog support in multiplayer. We're still investigating that area so it's definitely not out of the question. But right now we're only going to be showing the lock-on system in multiplayer. But there are many enhancements that you can get in multiplayer that are great. Like pickups that use your visors. You'll get something called a scan virus, and it pops you into scan mode. You don't normally go into scan mode in multiplayer since there's no [need for the] scan visor in there. But it'll pop you into scan mode, and you can scan another player and it uploads a virus, and disables something on them, like they can't turn into Morph Ball, or they lose all their missiles. Stuff like that. So, it's a temporary ability."

All players start the game with the ability to Grapple, Double Jump, Boost, and Morph Ball, but other things, like the aforementioned power-ups, plus massive damage, invulnerability, and the Screw Attack are found throughout the maps.

Since the lock-on portion of the gameplay offers up interesting challenges to the design, additions to the heads-up-display like updates when players have a lock on you have been added. During the time we played the game, the lock-on targeting didn't assure anyone of a kill. Quick use of the Morph Ball – or just a good dose of double jumping – can make you very difficult to hit.

We got a chance to play two different multiplayer modes – Deathmatch and Bounty. Deathmatch is just like you would imagine it, but the Bounty match offers a twist that challenges players to collect coins that drop from your prey, creating a mad run for that last kill to grab the most cash.

Other uses of the single player elements are also in the works. Pacini fires off a couple of quick

Expect plenty of Morph Ball puzzles

examples. "We plan to have Deathmatch levels where all the lights go out and you need to use the Dark Visor [to see]. Or [where] the Dark Visor will allow you to quickly see all the players just by looking around like through the geometry."

Currently, there are no plans to have multiplayer maps that let the players travel back and forth between the light and dark worlds, since rendering the two worlds is taxing to the game's performance – especially since Retro is aiming for a full 60 frames per second for four-player split-screen matches. As you may have guessed, there will be no online or LAN support for multiplayer, but Retro did admit that it was working on offering up an array of player models to add some variety.

THE ESCAPE

All told, we are quite impressed by the entire Echoes package. Everything in the single-player game has been exponentially expanded upon. In fact, we would go as far as to say that this might be Samus' greatest adventure yet. Heck, even riding the newly animated elevators from area to area is a treat. Perhaps the only real concern that we have for the game at this point is the lack of dual analog support for the multiplayer aspect, but even that complaint is rather feeble since in its current state this aspect of the game is incredibly entertaining.

The timer starts now for the wait. This November, expect Metroid Prime 2: Echoes to remind you why Nintendo was once the most powerful company in video games, and can be once again. ■■■

There is no word yet if Mother Brain, Kraid, or Ridley will make appearances in Echoes. However, you do see Metroids in containment jars throughout at least one of the levels. When we asked the team about the subject, we were met with silence, or the standard answer that they "can't say anything about that." We did confirm, however, that the Chozo are definitely not a part of the story arc.

Retro expects multiplayer to run at a smooth 60 frames per second

Go, Seabiscuit, go!

GAMECUBE

The Legend of Zelda [Working Title]

> STYLE TBA **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** TBA **> RELEASE** TBA

SPANNING THE AGES

On August 24, 2000, a day before the annual Tokyo Game Show expo, Nintendo unveiled the GameCube console. Also debuting was an eye-opening tech demo of The Legend of Zelda running on the GameCube hardware. Interestingly, this clip felt quite out of character for the Zelda franchise. Not only was the atmosphere of the game incredibly dark and realistic, Link had matured significantly. Now, flash forward to August 21, 2001. At Nintendo's pre-Spaceworld press conference, the company shocked the gaming community with the highly stylized The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker. Featuring cel-shaded graphics, and a hero that looked younger than ever, it appeared as though we'd never see Link reach adulthood.

While many mocking voices called the game "Celda," it was a soaring success for both Nintendo and the series' rabid fans. Going into this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, rumors circulated throughout the gaming industry that Nintendo was going to unveil The Wind Waker 2 at the company's press conference. True enough, at the tail end of the presentation, a new Zelda was shown, but it wasn't the sequel everyone was expecting.

"Blades will bleed. Shields will shatter. But as the light fades, will the hero rise again? Or will darkness reign?" These are the words that accompanied the video debut of the new The Legend of Zelda game. With this ominous message came a fitting dark look. Link's boyish charm has been replaced with a battle-hardened scowl and the physique of a warrior who has slain thousands. "We have always wanted to show more of an older Link," says The Legend of Zelda's producer Eiji Aonuma. "A continuation, basically, of the Ocarina of Time style. And we were just wondering when is a good time to do it? Basically, we were just waiting for that window. We just thought it was a good time to do it. And, of course, the outcry of some of the fans to see that, certainly we didn't ignore that."

Link's growth isn't the only aspect of this game that stands out as shocking or different. If the trailer does it justice, this Zelda will be far more violent and action-packed than any entry yet. Within the blood-stained sky of the setting sun, an army approaches from the horizon. As the troops draw closer, we see that it's a squadron of roughly 20 bokoblins. Several are riding on the backs of boars. A handful wield clubs, others have bows in hand. They appear ready for war. As the camera pans, we expect to see an opposing platoon, but to much surprise, only one soldier and his trusty steed stand in their way. It's Link. As the two forces clash, a flurry of action explodes on screen. While still riding, Link cuts down one bokoblin after another. It's a glorious sight, and a tremendous departure from the action that we've become accustomed to for the series.

Another clip shows Link facing off against a large fire beast that would appear to be influenced by *The Lord of the Rings'* Balrog. As this infernal terror propels waves of flames at Link and swings its gigantic chains at him, you can't help but admire the detail that went into this creature model. The fire effects are simply gorgeous, and you can actually see that the heat of the beast is so intense that it is affecting the color of the chains near its hands. This high level of realism also accompanies a woodland area with subdued light descending through the canopy as Link and his horse march forward.

While no gameplay details have been given, Link's combat mannerisms seem very much in line with the recent batch of Zelda games. Spin attacks, evasive flips, and brain-splitting lunge attacks are ever present and look tremendous.

"In the past, working with the child Link, a lot of the themes revolved around Link growing up and becoming more mature. And of course the gamer coming along for that journey," comments Aonuma. "Now, with Link already being an adult, I think we're going to have to turn our direction. And I do believe we're going to have some new core concepts and themes." Wherever Nintendo takes the series, we are along for the ride...and what a ride it looks like it will be. ■■■

"Who wants a sword ride?"

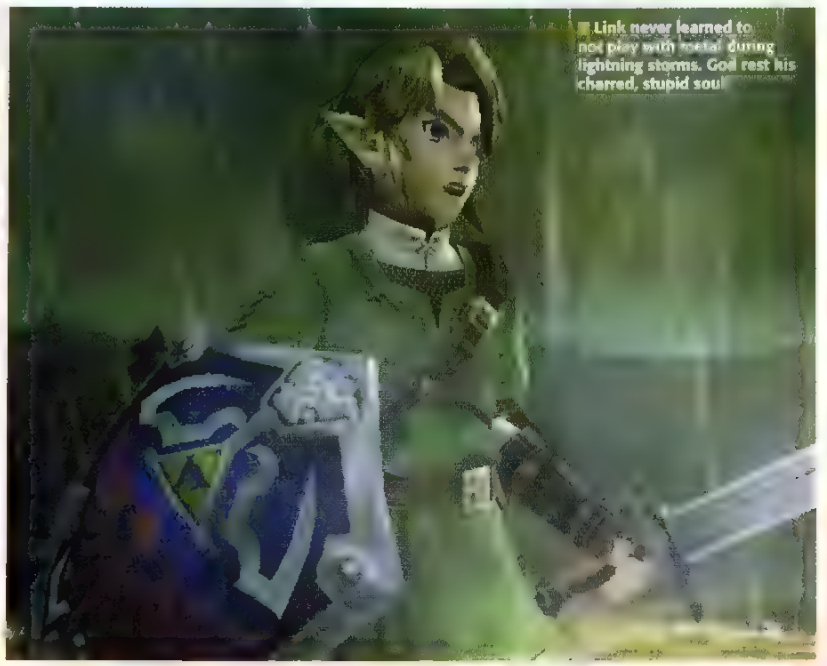
Is Link riding Epona? Producer Eiji Aonuma wouldn't say, but hinted at the possibility

Many believed that Nintendo would debut The Wind Waker 2. After seeing the game, the talk now is that this may be a sequel to The Ocarina of Time

Link auditions for the Hyrule community theater production of *Peter Pan*

Another case of the late night munchies has Link making a run for Taco Bell

Joe liked this picture so much that he got it painted on his van



Link never learned to not play with metal during lightning storms. God rest his charred, stupid soul

He's too sexy for his shirt

Dante's new character model features a coat he bought at Michael Jackson's yard sale

Enemies are smarter this time around, using their numbers to their advantage

"Dragon, wait up... I believe you can get me through the niiiight"

PLAYSTATION 2

Devil May Cry 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** WINTER

DANTE: THE FRAT BOY YEARS

At 19, most people are busy doing things they'll regret later in life, like getting arrested for disorderly conduct or trying to make explosives out of buckets of pork fat. If you're the son of a celebrated demon warrior, however, you don't have time for these standard activities. When the salvation of the world depends on your actions, you have to readjust your priorities.

In an effort to develop Dante's character and clear up some of the clouds surrounding his past, Capcom is making the next installment of the Devil May Cry series a prequel, detailing events that took place prior to the first game. The plot revolves primarily around the conflict between Dante and his brother Virgil, who has already been consumed by evil (but hasn't yet assumed the form of Nelo Angelo). Though younger and cockier than the Dante we're familiar with, the legendary devil hunter in his youth is just as unstoppable as his older equivalent. In one scene, after being ambushed and skewered by a horde of monsters, he proceeds to slice his way through a mob of them using a blade that is *still lodged in his arm*! Young or not, that's the kind of moxy that most video game characters can only dream about.

If there's one thing that Dante is known for, it is his vast array of over-the-top maneuvers. His repertoire continues to expand in DMC 3 with the innovative addition of various combat styles to the already diverse battle system, affecting the special moves and combos the player can perform. At the beginning of each stage you pick one of the four styles: the Swordmaster, which allows you to throw your sword (á la the Round Trip from the first DMC); the Gunslinger, giving you the ability to shoot at multiple targets at different angles; the Trickster, with deft evasion and tumbling techniques; and the Royal Guard, focused on defense rather than attack. As you advance in each class, new moves become available, giving you the feeling you're steadily growing more powerful – a sensation sorely lacking in the previous installment.

It is no secret that DMC 2 was one of the biggest disappointments of last year, but Capcom is making a concerted effort to make up lost ground and harken back to the series' roots. Along with the combat improvements, the myriad camera problems are also being worked on. Additionally, the graphics engine has been entirely rebuilt, allowing it to showcase the slick new character models and monster designs, as well as the series' trademark gothic environments. From the build we played at E3, we can certainly say that DMC 3 bears more resemblance to the revered first entry in this series, with the exception of voiceover work that makes Dante sound like he'd rather hunker down with Häagen Dazs and *Moulin Rouge* than rid the world of evil. ■■■

The new graphics engine features dazzling particle effects, like this festive sparkler

"I've got two guns, one for each of y... aw, nuts!"

Just because he was different, local bullies often hung the young Dante up by his undies

These sand-filled warriors are just one of many new enemies

Expect to see the same creepy art style with more detail than ever before

Just a flick of that scythe and Dante will be singing soprano

"No matter what the stripper tells you, there are no hellspawn in the champagne room!"

"This is my hobo fire! You make your own!"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX | PC

Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS **> DEVELOPER** OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY

SEDUCTIONS OF THE DARK SIDE

In the five years following the great war against Lord Malak, the Old Republic has grown weak. No longer possessing the military might to safeguard its planets or people, the end is drawing close. The Republic's guardians, the Jedi order, have been ravaged by Sith attacks and are on the verge of extinction. In fact, the Sith believe that only one Jedi remains – one final gasp of hope for the galaxy. This Jedi is you.

The fate of the universe lies solely in your hands. What do you do? Much like the original Knights of the Old Republic, players will not be railroaded into one choice. You will have the ability to choose your destiny, whether that be helping the Old Republic regain control or aiding in the Sith's reign of terror. Every action… every conversation…every step that you make could swing the pendulum one way or the other.

With the original Knights team deeply entrenched in the creation of Jade Empire, LucasArts and BioWare have turned to Obsidian Entertainment to handle the development of this sequel. The Sith Lords' producer Mike Gallo explains, "Obsidian Entertainment is the studio founded by members of the Fallout, Icewind Dale, Baldur's Gate, Dark Alliance, and Planescape: Torment teams. Obsidian is doing all of the development on The Sith Lords, but it is being built on the tools and tech that BioWare made for the first game. BioWare has been extremely helpful during the process, offering support and advice with regards to its engine."

Although a significant amount of time has passed between these two chapters, familiar characters will be appearing during the quest. "Some characters from the first game will be returning in various roles. Some will be coming back for small cameos and other will be able to join your party again," adds producer Chris Parker. "We only revealed one character that will be making a return appearance, and that is T3-M4. There will certainly be others, but we can't reveal any of those until a later date." This date turned out to be five minutes later when we hounded him about the return of HK-47. Giving in to our persuasive Jedi ways, Parker eventually blurted out, "He will be returning, but that's all I can say right now."

One of the new characters that players will be introduced to is a bounty hunter scout named Mira. While she shies away from contract killing, she scours the Outer Rim and Republic for targets that she can bring in for credits. "In the past, she has killed only in self-defense, and even then, she has done so reluctantly," explains The Sith Lords' lead designer Chris Avellone. "Aside from being easy on the eyes, Mira also comes equipped with a bounty hunter-specific weapon, similar to Boba Fett's in the Star Wars movies – a wrist-mounted rocket launcher that allows her to selectively take out a single opponent (with concussion darts or tranquilizer darts) or decimate hordes of enemies with buster rockets and ion rockets – perfect for leveling the playing field when enemies decide to gang up on the player."

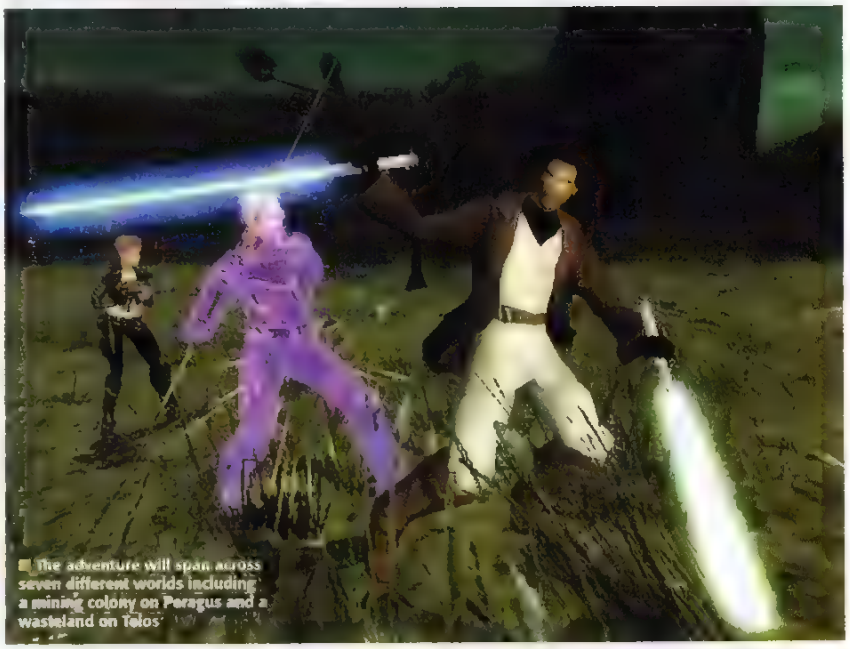
In total, players will be able to have up to 10 characters in a party (and on your ship, the Ebon Hawk). Interestingly, depending on how you play through the game, these characters can be different. Furthermore you'll be able to persuade the members in your supporting cast to join the light or dark side. As you move down one path or the other, your standing with that side of the Force will be much more robust and varied this time around. "There are going to be six new [Jedi] classes," states Parker. For the dark side you'll be able to become a Sith Lord, Sith Marauder, or Sith Assassin. For the light side, the options are a Jedi Watchmen, Jedi Master, or Jedi Weapon Master.

In addition to this, there will be 30 new Force powers in the game. "Two examples are Force sight and Force confusion," adds Gallo. "Force sight allows the player to see through doors and will reveal the alignments of characters (NPCs and PCs will "glow" an appropriate color – red, blue or grey) that are near him/her. With Force confusion players can turn weak-minded enemies against one another in combat. We've also gone through all of the Force powers that were in KOTOR and have given them a facelift."

Combat mostly plays out the same as it did in the original game. However, Obsidian has implemented two weapon slots in the action menu, allowing players to quickly switch between weapon types. All of the character creation facial textures are returning (so you can create your same persona again), and a slew of new looks will be available as well.

The Sith Lords is slated to release simultaneously for the PC and Xbox next February. ■■■

Here's a first look at a new Force power called Crush. Use your mind to mangle an opponent's body

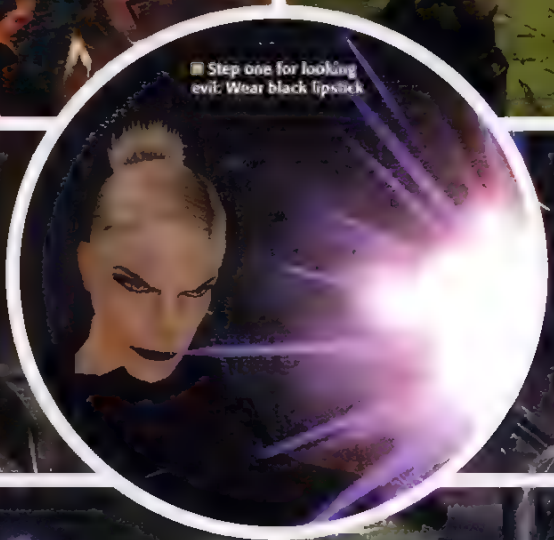


The adventure will span across seven different worlds including a mining colony on Peragus and a wasteland on Telos

One of the new light-saber colors is silver

Each of the six Jedi classes present different combat styles

During combat, players can freely switch between two weapon slots

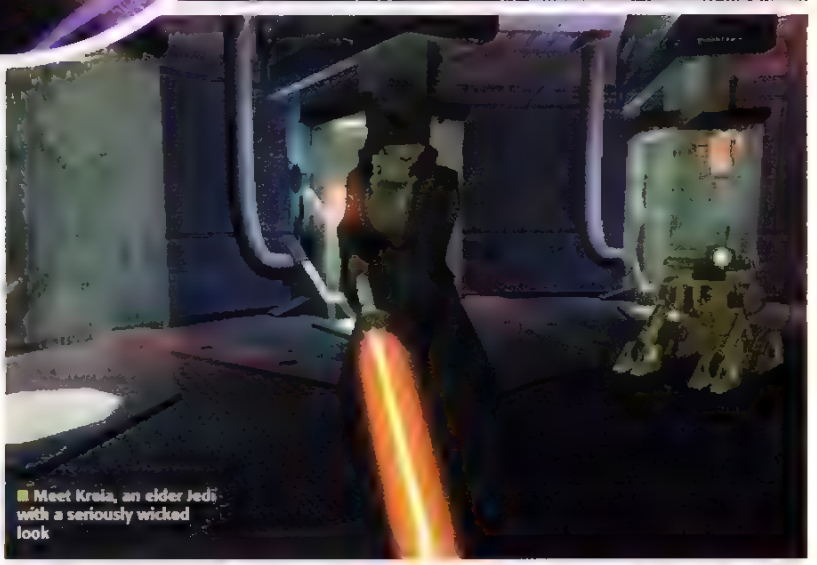


Step one for looking evil: Wear black lipstick

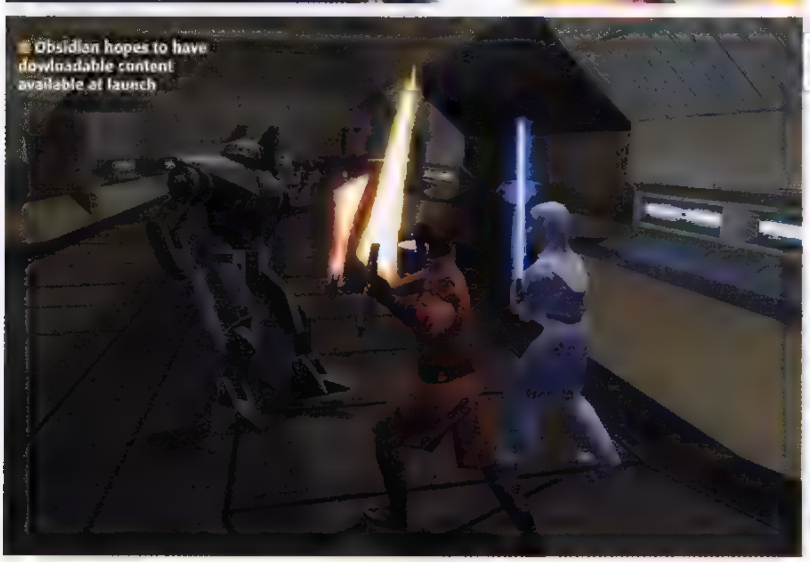
On that fateful day, Johnny became the first Jedi Master to accidentally slash himself in the face with a lightsaber

The game will feature over an hour of newly orchestrated music written by LucasArts composer Mark Griskey

Not every weapon is under your immediate control



Meet Kreia, an elder Jedi with a seriously wicked look



Obsidian hopes to have downloadable content available at launch

Once again, a variety of different lightsaber types will be available

Energy swords make us happy

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Halo 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA SYSTEM LINK OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT **> DEVELOPER** BUNGIE
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 9 **> ESRB** M

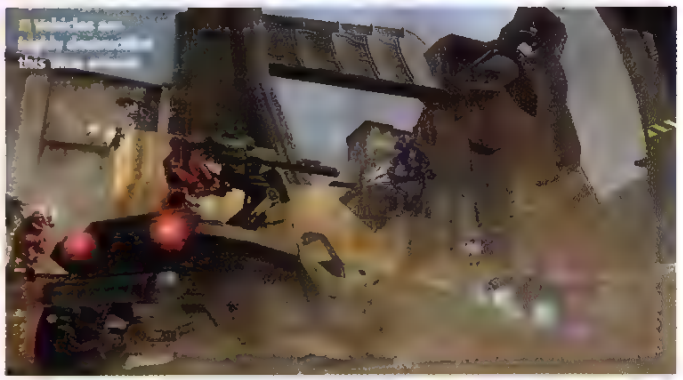
COMBAT PERFECTED?

Everything you've heard is true. All the features and improvements and options – they're all there. Unlike Sony and Nintendo, Microsoft didn't have a new handheld to show off at its press conference this year. Instead, it put Halo 2 front and center. Where last year brought a tantalizing clip of single-player gameplay, the story this year was all about multiplayer. And what a story it was.

There were audible sighs of dismay at E3 when it was discovered that this long-awaited title wouldn't be shown on the floor. Instead, the game was playable only by private appointment in a dark room at the back of Microsoft's pavilion. Within, we settled in and launched into an explosive eight-player romp.

Most of the promised features have already shown up in the game. We gleefully jacked a Warthog from an unsuspecting Elite before running him down. This feature is available from multiple angles, allowing you to sneak up behind your enemy and steal his ride or jump aboard from head on. Later, we swept up two needlers and began to simultaneously launch their explosive bolts at our foes. Most of the weapons are available for dual-wielding, with the exception of obviously bulky types like the rocket launcher. Balance is maintained excellently with single weapon wielding, since grenades are unavailable when two guns are being utilized. The level itself was intricately crafted and strategically flexible. As we rounded a hill, chunks of building debris were flung overhead from the highly destructible fort. The turret guns are powerful, but hard to defend from enterprising snipers. Rocket launchers now include target tracking – enabling homing attacks on moving personnel and vehicles. And finally, the dreams of many a gamer have been answered with the inclusion of the Covenant Energy Sword as a confirmed weapon in the final version. The blade's primary attack is a quick downward slice, while the far more powerful uppercut lunge leads to an almost guaranteed one-hit kill.

Even with the comprehensive improvements in graphics, sound, and gameplay, everything still feels balanced and familiar. Expectations are alarmingly high for Halo 2. All we can say is this: Everything we've seen is even better than we had hoped. ■■■

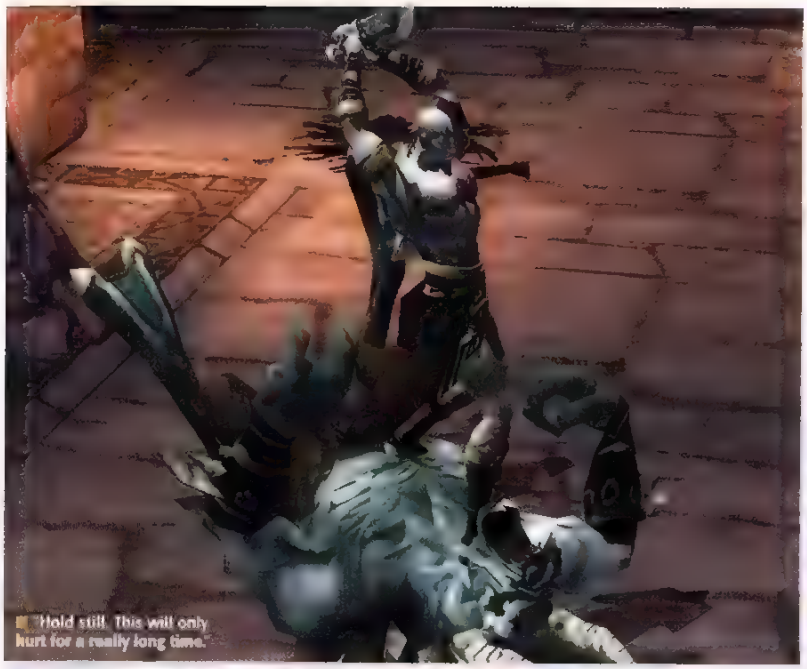


Vehicles are highly destructible this time around

ZANZIBAR: HELL ON EARTH

Pay attention, marines! Zanzibar is the new multiplayer map that was playable behind closed doors at E3. After a few rounds of fragging each other in a furious Capture the Flag game, we are forced to conclude that this beachside fort environment ranks somewhere between outstanding and phenomenal. Ghosts and Warthogs can assault the fort from open gates and breaches in the wall. Multiple sniping positions dot the cliff sides and perimeter defenses. The defensive team has access to standing gun emplacements as well as higher ground. However, the offensive team can infiltrate the base and use a computer panel to open the main door to the center keep, allowing vehicles to drive right into the flag room. In addition, the map holds a secret drawbridge which can be dropped into position for either team to go claim one of the highly coveted energy swords. In other words, team cooperation is essential. And the action is explosive, frenetic, and damn fun.

Find Waldo. No. Keep looking. He's in there somewhere



Hold still. This will only hurt for a really long time.

Check out the background: Those Greeks sure made some nifty sand castles

"Man, you're tense! But this should take care of your back problems."

PLAYSTATION 2

God of War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS **> RELEASE** SPRING 2005

WAR BREAKS OUT AT E3

This year's E3 convention saw the public unveiling of many fantastic games, but few had the attendees buzzing like Sony's God of War. Possibly the most talked about game of the show, God of War's fast-paced hack n' slash gameplay has drawn positive comparisons to the original Devil May Cry and has action fans around the world clamoring for more.

God of War is the story of Kratos, an ex-Spartan soldier known as the most vicious in all of Greece. His secret is that he has been possessed by Ares, the God of War. Tired of his life of bloodshed, Kratos sets off to kill Ares by opening Pandora's Box. Depending on the player's actions, Kratos may emerge as Ares' replacement, or he may end up dead. While the story is told in flashback, there are still multiple endings to be earned.

Though God of War will feature some creative (and slightly twisted) puzzle-solving elements, the real attraction of the title is its combat. Kratos' weapons are two blades chained to his wrists, which can be used as swords up close and flails at a distance. Kratos can easily whip enemies into the air for juggle combos, take on multiple foes at once, and unleash devastating magic attacks.

These intense combat tactics would be enough to make for a great action title, but God of War goes one better with its context-sensitive kills. After weakening foes with normal attacks, certain enemies can be finished off with killer moves that require hitting a series of buttons as they flash on the screen. For example, Kratos can pull the wings off of a flying enemy, scale a giant and deliver a series of deadly blows to the back of its neck, or twist a Medusa's head clean off!

The intense action of God of War will unfold in a variety of Greek-themed environments and settings. Kratos will find himself battling foes while swinging on ropes, fighting through raging rivers, and dueling with enemies atop mountain cliffs. All of these areas are alive and interactive – background environments will crumble and fall behind you, and NPCs will battle monsters to the death as you look on. We had a chance to witness the chaos that is God of War firsthand at E3, and we have a feeling that it has a lot more to offer which has yet to be revealed. Without a doubt, God of War is one of the most exciting titles of 2005. ■ ■ ■

IT'S GREEK TO ME

The story of Kratos is obviously heavily influenced by Greek mythology, but friends of Zeus shouldn't be offended if it's not one hundred percent accurate to its source material – God of War definitely takes a few liberties. For example, Medusa was an individual (one of three creatures called Gorgons), not a species. The title's producer David Jaffe said that the game was inspired by movies like *Clash of the Titans* and *Jason and the Argonauts* – both great movies to be sure, but not exactly completely faithful to the mythos of the Greek gods.

Rope combat like this will make you thankful that Kratos wears shorts under his skirt

Kratos discovers the hard way that the Bizarro world Play-doh factory isn't all that much fun

Dropping from pipes to snap necks is one of Sam's new tricks (and favorite hobbies)

PC

Splinter Cell 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** FALL

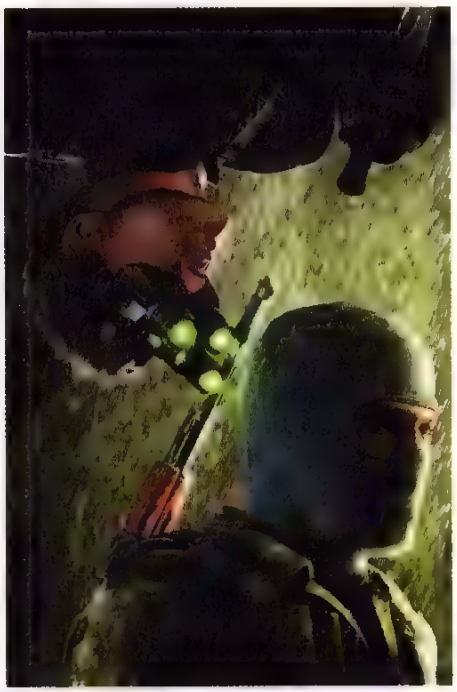
SAM'S SURPRISE RETURN

Although the phenomenal Pandora Tomorrow only recently crept on to store shelves, another Splinter Cell title has already emerged from the darkness. The tentatively named Splinter Cell 3 was unveiled at E3, and word is that it will be on shelves before the end of the year (for PC at least – console release details are still forthcoming). While solid information on the title is harder to find than a corpse in a dark room, the E3 demo did show off the title's amazing graphics and some impressive new features.

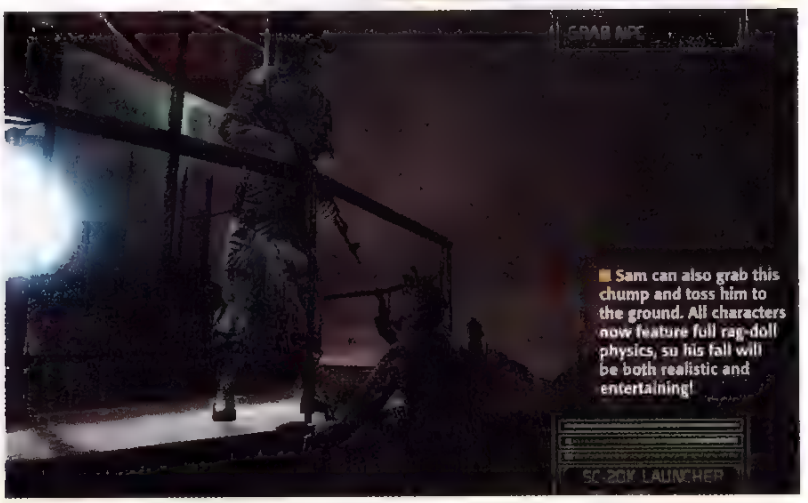
Just as Pandora Tomorrow was a step up from the original in terms of visuals, Splinter Cell 3 has improved on the second title's stunning graphics. We witnessed new graphical enhancements such as Sam's suit growing progressively shinier the longer he was in the rain, dynamic lighting emanating from road flares, and real-time reflections off of shiny wood floors. We have a feeling that these are just small tastes of the visual splendor that awaits us.

Of course, the graphics are not the only thing that have been upgraded. Sam has some new moves and tools – for one, he can now hang from an overhead pipe with his legs in order to grab a guard and snap his neck! He also finally has a knife available, which can be used for cutting through cloth (and human flesh). A new meter has also been added, which displays how much sound Sam is making, so visibility is now only half of staying hidden. The multiplayer that debuted in Sam's second outing is returning as well, and looks like it has a tremendously increased emphasis on cooperative play. The Shadow Nets can now give each other boosts to reach high ledges, pull each other up on rappel lines, and even use each other as human ladders.

We're certain that Splinter Cell 3 will have a plethora of surprises when it hits later this year. We expect both Sam and the Shadow Nets will have many more fantastic upgrades, and we haven't even seen the mercs at all yet. The story, as always, should be a high point, and will certainly contain many twists and turns. The Splinter Cell series has always been the pinnacle of stealth/action games, and it looks like the third entry will continue to raise the bar. ■■■



Expect more paths through missions this time out. These two shots show two different ways of dealing with a guard. Here, Sam is preparing to get all "stabby"



Sam can also grab this chump and toss him to the ground. All characters now feature full rag-doll physics, so his fall will be both realistic and entertaining!

SPIDER-MAN 2
THE GAME

THIS TIME, THERE IS
NOWHERE YOU CAN'T GO.

JUNE 29
Take New York for a spin.
www.activision.com/spider-man

TEEN T Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

GAME BOY ADVANCE
PlayStation.2
XBOX
NINTENDO GAMECUBE
MARVEL
SPIDER MAN
COLUMBIA PICTURES
N-GAGE NOKIA

Spider-Man and all related Marvel characters, TM & © 2004 Marvel Characters, Inc. Spider-Man 2, the movie, © 2004 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All rights reserved. Game code © 2004 Activision, Inc. and its affiliates. Published and distributed by Activision Publishing, Inc. Activision is a registered trademark of Activision, Inc. and its affiliates. All rights reserved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Xbox and the Xbox logos are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. TM, ®, Game Boy Advance and the Nintendo GameCube logo are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2001 Nintendo. PC CD-ROM logo TM and © IEMA 2003. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners.

ACTIVISION
activision.com

Sure, the Rat Hat is painful, but it's just so darn fashionable!

The most fearsome beast of the Himalayas: an ape riding a zombie yak

No buttons required—all of the action is controlled with the DK Bongo

Bang! Zoom! Right in the kisser!

Guile, eat your heart out! DK uses a massive sonic boom to attack foes

GAMECUBE

Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** 2005

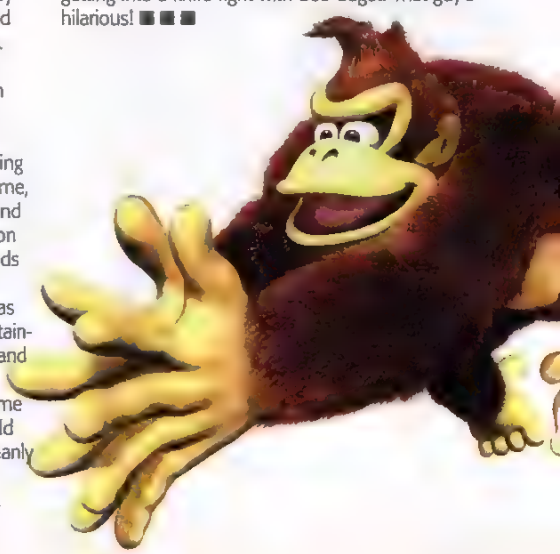
TURN THE BEAT AROUND

In real life, training monkeys to follow orders based on sound requires a large investment of time and effort. Fortunately, all it requires in the video game world is a pair of drums and an unbridled willingness to make a fool of yourself. In a daring move to smooth over the age-old rivalry between video game geeks and band nerds, Nintendo is combining the rhythm game phenomenon Donkey Konga with the old school Donkey Kong Country platformers in a wacky little hybrid that is easy to pick up, but difficult to put down.

All movement and action is controlled using the Donkey Kong Bongo controller. Banging on the left and right drums makes DK take off in that direction. If you tap slowly, he ambles at a leisurely pace. If you beat faster, he runs, building up speed. If you hit both drums at the same time, DK jumps into the air, leaping over obstacles and clinging to the walls around him. At any time, on the ground or in the air, you can clap your hands together to send out a sonic wave, which can take out enemies and collect items like bananas (surprise, surprise). If this doesn't sound entertaining to you, then you need to go to the doctor and have your fundocrine glands checked.

Even more impressive is the fact that the game features much more than platforming. The build we played at E3 had us engaging in a gentlemanly match of fisticuffs with another irate, 10-ton gorilla. By clapping as your opponent punches, DK dodges out of the way, and then delivers a flurry of counter-attacks as you frantically beat the drums to squeeze in that finishing blow.

Tapping into the same "everyone can do it" vein as Sony's EyeToy, Jungle Beat is fun for anyone with two hands. Yes, your arms might get exhausted, and your palms could become raw and swollen from excessive impact, but it is the most fun you can have injuring yourself short of getting into a knife fight with Bob Sagat. That guy's hilarious! ■ ■ ■



PLAYSTATION 2

Gran Turismo 4

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

HISTORY OF CARS

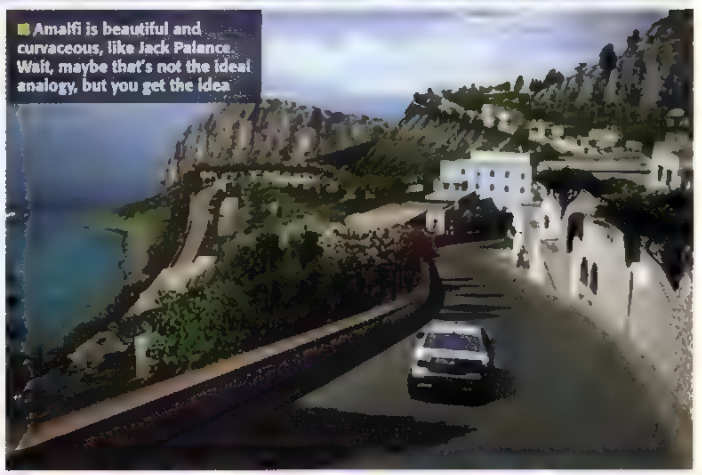
Everyone has been chomping at the bit to get their mitts on more tracks and cars from Sony's upcoming opus, Gran Turismo 4. Thankfully, the higher powers delivered at this year's E3 in LA by spilling the beans on a few new modes, letting gamers loose in a few new tracks, and offering up the scoop on some interesting details.

GT Photo Mode made its worldwide debut at the show and offers what (at first glance) is an odd option – the entire point is to take pictures of your ride in a variety of exotic locales. Places like the Piazza San Marco, Shibuya, Tsumago, and Sagano can be picked from the included16 locations and 50 tracks, and players will use life-like photography tricks to make the shots more compelling. Various lenses, motion blur, films, and filters will be offered, and the results can be outputted to a USB printer or saved on memory cards. Some of the game's online functionality includes sharing and trading the shots over the web.

Online options aren't limited to stat tracking or photo sharing, though. Up to six players will be able to race head-to-head, with chat and lobby discussions built right in. Specifics regarding spectators, trading, and time penalties are still up in the air.

Also playable and brand-spanking-new at E3 were three tracks: Capri, a Hong Kong street track, and Nurburgnng Nordschliefe. Generally referenced as one of the craziest race courses in the world, Nurburgring is a white-knuckle inducing rollercoaster ride featuring 73 corners in a quick 20.8km. While it has appeared in a handful of games, it's usually in a more interpretative form. Not so in this version. The course is replicated in GT 4 so exactly that the differences between the in-game and real-life track are less than 15mm (or 2/3 of an inch).

Still, surprises and attention to detail just wouldn't stop coming while we were playing GT 4 at the show. The cars can be organized by, in addition to the usual categories, the year that they were produced! It's Polyphony's obvious love of cars and completist attitude that is really putting this title ahead of its competitors. Well, that, and the smoking car models that make our jaws drop every time. GT 4 is gorgeous, and the goal of creating a library of history's automobiles is certainly on the way to becoming a joyful reality. ■■■



■ Amalfi is beautiful and curvaceous, like Jack Palance. Wait, maybe that's not the ideal analogy, but you get the idea

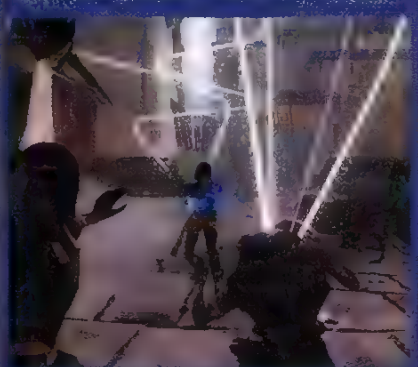
■ The streets of Hong Kong are even more intense than you would guess. Experienced drivers only, please

WAYS AND MEANS

There is more than one way to skin a cat, and in Jade Empire there are innumerable ways to kill a foe.

Furious Ming combines magic and melee fighting styles to reduce this enemy to rubble

Here we see a character transformed into Chai Ka, the heavenly gate guardian, to defeat this Toad Demon



Wu the Lotus Blossom uses magic to steal Chi from an enemy

Tiger Shen doesn't brush his teeth on purpose

Check out the rim lighting – Jade is a noticeably better-looking game than KOTOR

XBOX

Jade Empire

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER BIOWARE **> RELEASE** FIRST QUARTER 2005

Cycle targeting through multiple foes is easy

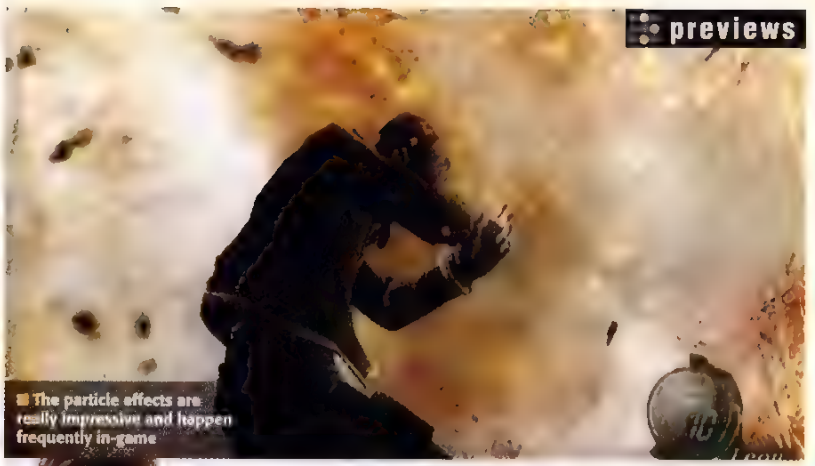
HANDS OF FIRE

It's been a while since we first reported on BioWare's Xbox action/RPG, and we were starting to get so anxious to actually play the damn thing we sent a few covert ops editors up to the company's Edmonton office. Unfortunately, BioWare CEOs/doctors Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka must have stopped them at the door and injected them with something, because our spies haven't been able to utter a word since their return. Come to think of it, maybe they did play it, because after our own hands-on time with the title at E3, we're simply stunned.

When we did our cover story on the game last fall, the team clearly had its priorities in order, but some of the more tangible aspects of Jade Empire were still up in the air. We can now say, however, that the title's interface and gameplay are as solid as can be. The game offers 30 different fighting styles, and you'll switch between them by hitting the d-pad. Executing combat moves is mapped to the face buttons; A and X are normal and strong attacks, respectively, while B is for parrying, and Y initiates your Focus, slowing down the movements of foes temporarily. Sounds simple enough, but there are plenty of options here. You can simultaneously hit the two attack buttons, for example, to do a clearing attack. There is a normal parry, or you can hold and use your analog stick to perform sweeping dodge acrobatics. Finally, the black and white buttons control your special Chi attacks and the transformation into your demon forms – larger and more devastating versions of your already bad self. Experimenting with the fighting styles is a discipline in and of itself, as you might paralyze an enemy in stone and then obliterate them into a million pieces with a powerful palm strike. Managing your controller isn't your only concern. One area we played had us fending off about five or six minions as a giant monster chased us around a city's streets. Another was set in a cave where the only way out of trouble was to bring down the house by collapsing five support columns.

Although the timing is more deliberate than a straight action game combo-fest, you'll be amazed at the possibilities as you fly around the controller and unleash all sorts of magic, melee, and weapon-based attacks. Sometimes you'll have friends fighting in the background who you'll help after finishing your foes, but you cannot switch and control them. Changing earlier plans, your companions won't stay put at a central stronghold, but will follow you via a home camp that moves throughout the game. Also, travelling in your dragon ship has been more fleshed out through a top-down minigame which plays similarly to an old-school shooter like Galaga.

In fact, the adventure is just beginning, as we can't wait to see what the game's like once this destructive gameplay is dropped into the context of your character as he/she progresses through the story (including good and bad paths) – something we know that BioWare is a master of. We can understand how the combat structure of Knights of Old Republic could have turned some people off, but if you own an Xbox and don't check this game out, we might have to send the doctors to your house to put you to sleep like a dog. ■■■



The particle effects are really impressive and happen frequently in-game

GAMECUBE

Resident Evil 4

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM **> RELEASE** WINTER

SOMETIMES I RUN

When we broke the Resident Evil 4 story in our March issue, a lot of hands-on impressions were included. At this year's E3, we got more play time and are pleased to see that the fast-paced intuitive action, context-sensitive controls, and first-person feel are sharper and even more fun than we remembered. Capcom is breaking the rules with this entry, but the development team is also making a game so well-crafted that even the initially disappointed die-hards will be converted. Just you wait and see.

What wasn't available to play, but we did get to see in the company's media presentation, was more information on Leon's mission, his young companion, and some of their interaction. The quick and dirty version of the story starts six years after the decimation of Raccoon City. The government has destroyed the Umbrella Corporation and Leon is now a federal agent tasked (in this mission) with finding the President's daughter. 20-year-old Ashley is not trained for any sort of combat – in fact, she looks like she's trained for trips to The Gap and not much else. After finding her, a large part of Leon's struggle is going to be keeping the girl alive.

More exploding melon heads? Sweet!

We saw Ashley trailing Leon. When he turned around and drew his gun, Ashley ducked to avoid the shot. We were also told that when, for example, Leon jumps out of a window to escape, players must consider if Ashley will be safe where she is or if she can perform the same maneuver. Unlike Resident Evil 0's multiple character setup, it appears that there will be few "safe" places to leave a companion. Other exciting possibilities we were shown include Ashley slung over the shoulder of an enemy. Requiring pinpoint accuracy, Leon is able to shoot the abductor and leave Ashley unharmed.

The enemy AI knows that she is really the valuable, but also very weak, target. They will constantly go after her and the player must keep her from harm at all costs. Both in the videos we saw and the time we spent playing RE 4, it was terrifying how quick and perceptive the enemies actually were. The smattering of lumbering zombies is gone and replaced with overwhelming hordes of villagers wielding pitchforks, chainsaws, and torches.

But enemies aren't the only ones with interesting weaponry – we also saw Leon using a rocket launcher, catapult, and Gatling gun extensively. In addition, during a fight with the large ogrish fellow pictured above, the Action Button feature was used to make Leon duck a swift blow and, when picked up by the enemy, stab him in the arm to escape. Although the scene wasn't playable, we also saw a sequence inside what looked to be a church. Leon jumped to a chandelier and used his momentum to swing to the other side and attack an enemy we hadn't seen before – monk-like foes with strange masks.

Overall, the feel of the new Resident Evil is much more realistic. The graphics are undeniably gorgeous, and the gameplay? Delightfully exciting. We can't wait to see what else the team has hidden up their sleeves in this entirely new vision of the Resident Evil saga. ■ ■ ■

You'll battle huge bosses on both land and water

The in-game animations are much more expressive

ACTION BUTTON IN ACTION

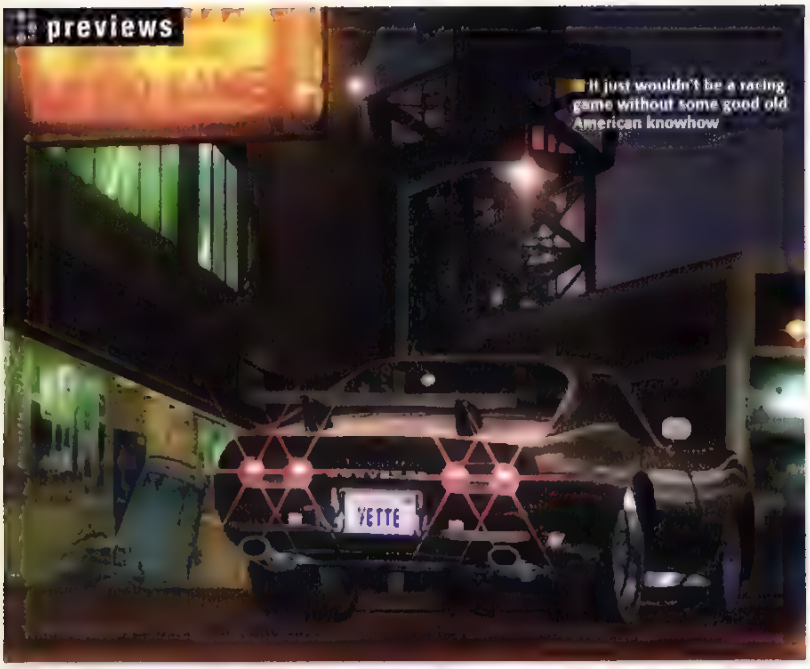
JUMP IN

JUMP OUT

KICK

KNOCK DOWN LADDER

STAND UP LADDER



It just wouldn't be a racing game without some good old American knowhow

All we can say is, "Cadillac grills, Cadillac mills, check out the oil my Cadillac spills."

Choppers are just one of the many new additions to DUB Edition

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
> DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO **> RELEASE** FOURTH QUARTER

THE O.G. OF STREET RACING

Rockstar San Diego isn't shy about letting us know that they, not Electronic Arts, are the innovators in the street racing genre, and with DUB Edition, Rockstar plans to prove it.

"We like to set trends," remarks Jay Panek, producer of the title. "We have been doing open cities since the original Midnight Club, and I can promise you it's not easy to create an open city you can drive around in at 120 mph."

To raise the street racing ante once again, Rockstar has partnered with *DUB Magazine*, one of the car industry's premiere automotive lifestyle magazines, to work as creative consultants on Midnight Club 3. Rockstar also went to the auto and motorcycle industry to ensure that the title will match any car fantasies you might have. Featuring over 50 licensed vehicles, from a $150,000 Mercedes-Benz to a macked-out Cadillac Escalade, DUB Edition wants to have it all.

Motorcycles are once again a featured part of the game, and will account for about 10 to 15 percent of the overall vehicle count. Rockstar already has a commitment from Ducati, but expect other manufacturers to climb on board as the game nears its holiday release for Xbox and PlayStation 2. DUB edition will also include choppers, which the company promises will feature reputable chop shop licenses (you can just see the West Coast Choppers announcement coming).

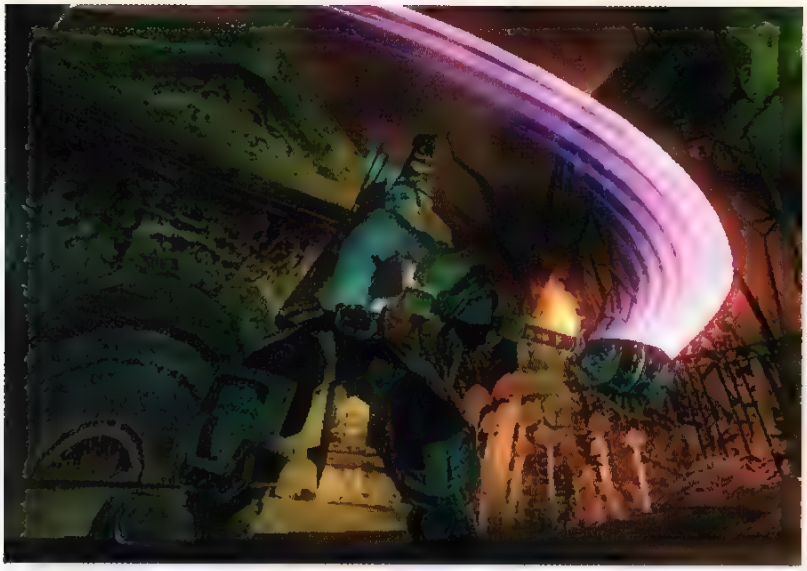
Of course, what are licensed vehicles without an extensive list of body and performance kits? Expect to see an impressive list of tweaking options that Rockstar promises will leave EA's Underground in the dust, including layered paint jobs that will let you set up to five different colors on your ride.

Offering three living and breathing cities for the player to race, expect to be dazzled by gigantic renderings of the streets of Atlanta (time to get crunk!), Detroit (Motor City madness), and San Diego (the place were the street racing phenomenon originated).

For all these exciting new features, perhaps the biggest is the addition of damage. "We are crumpling the cars," proclaims Panek. It's a shame that we are going to have to smash up our pimpin' ride after we plaster it with body kits, suspension packages, turbo upgrades, and custom wheels; but it wouldn't be a game if you couldn't do the things you can't do in real life. ■ ■ ■

THE RUB ON DUB

While the editors here at Game Informer always thought we were on the cutting edge of slick rides and profilin' lifestyles, *DUB Magazine* quickly taught us that the 15" rims on our Ford Focuses weren't where it's at. Featuring customized autos riding on 26" rims and more movie screens than your local cineplex, *DUB Magazine* is basically a car-only version of *Cribs*, where you get an inside look at the fashions and Ferraris of today's rich and famous.



For God's sake, man. Put on some pants!

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Fable

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** BIG BLUE BOX/LIONHEAD STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

THE NEW AESOP'S

Life can seem complicated. There are a lot of choices and changes, and every single one alters the path you're on. In other words, just being alive makes for some pretty interesting stories. The developers of Fable are counting on exactly that as they put the finishing touches on this long-awaited RPG for Xbox. From childhood through old age, you'll control every aspect of your character's growth as they shape the complex world around them.

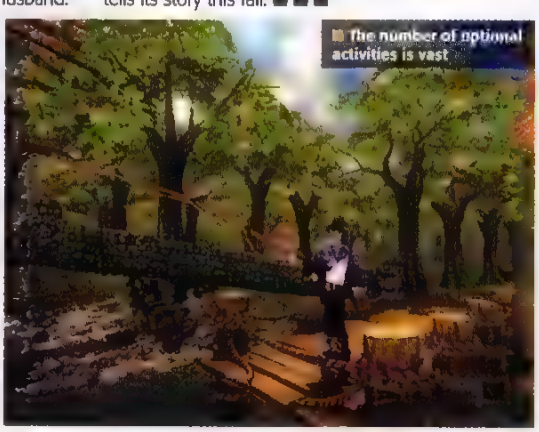
We finally got some hands-on time with this game at E3, and saw many of the features we've been hearing about for so long in action. Your hero could easily become a champion of the innocent, righting wrongs and defeating evil wherever he goes. Become truly angelic, and you'll see a halo and butterflies surround your head. On the contrary, your hero might not be a hero at all. Ignore suffering and pain in the world – or worse, contribute to it – and your little evildoer will begin to sprout horns from his devilish head. In one instance, we came across a man cheating on his wife, who was willing to pay us off to not tell her. At this point, several options presented themselves: Don't take the money, and go tell the wife. Alternately, take the money and don't tell the wife. But perhaps the most nefarious option was to take the money, tell the wife anyway, and earn the lifelong enmity of the adulterous husband. Making these sorts of moral decisions will affect the person that you'll become. Every action has consequences.

As another example, consider the local pub. As your character drinks, his renown will increase – for the common people appreciate a hero who can mix with the crowd. His attractiveness to the bar girls will skyrocket, and he'll start receiving propositions from his admirers. However, if our frolicsome hero drinks one too many, he'll find himself (in the eminent words of the developer we spoke with) "shouting for his carroty friend, Ralph." This, if you couldn't guess, is something of a turn-off to the ladies, and your renown will plummet.

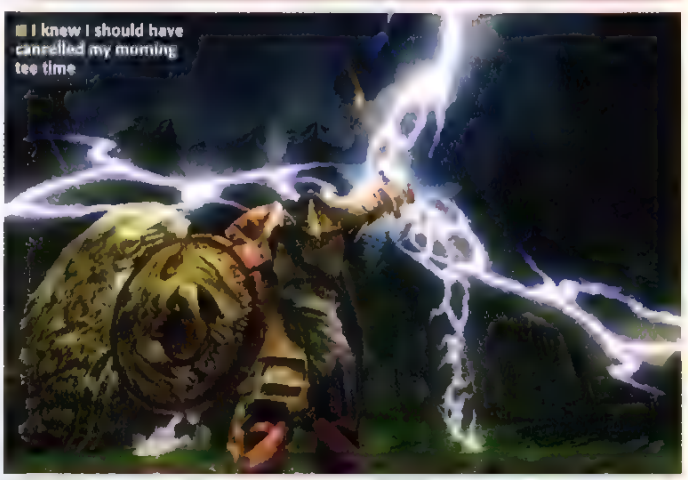
Every aspect of the game has this detailed level of interactivity.

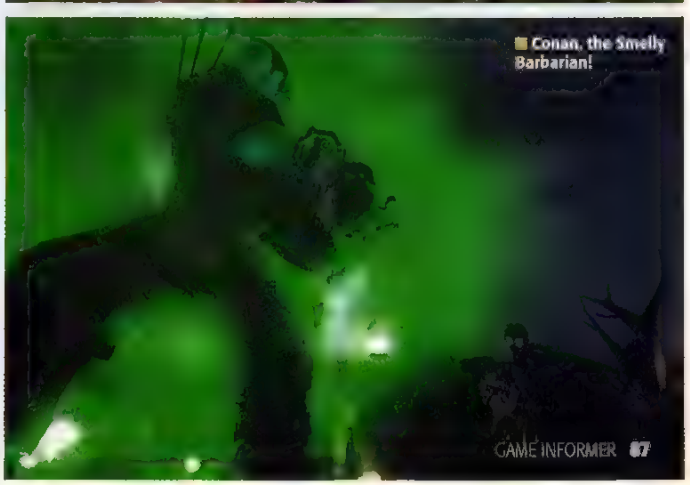
The combat mechanic for Fable is based entirely in real time, where you'll have to use either traditional fantasy style weapons or fall back onto the use of one of 15 upgradeable spells. The right trigger will act as a "shift key" that changes the function of the face buttons, thereby allowing for added combat flexibility. If you aren't careful, you'll suffer wounds that will leave behind a lifelong mark – particularly grievous injuries will scar your wandering adventurer. You'll discover an entirely open countryside is available for exploration. Housing hundreds of NPCs and creatures, along with multiple cities, the world you wander will have a dynamic weather system that changes from day to day. You'll encounter other questing explorers, and establish relationships of competition or cooperation with them. Finally, when you eventually tire of your gaunt and weary traveler – as twilight begins to fall on a long and noble (or ignoble) life – you can begin anew. And this time you'll have an entirely different experience with entirely new choices.

Much like the proverbial tortoise, this title has been long in finishing the race. But from our perspective, the slow and steady progress may result in one enormously intricate game when Fable finally tells its story this fall. ■■■


The number of optional activities is vast

This charming, colonial style ranch has a brand new kitchen and is situated near the best schools


I knew I should have cancelled my morning tee time

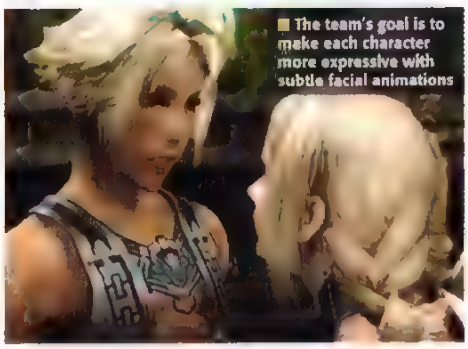

Conan, the Smelly Barbarian!

Penelo, like her boyfriend Vaan, lost family in the war

PLAYSTATION 2

Final Fantasy XII

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX **> RELEASE** 2005



The team's goal is to make each character more expressive with subtle facial animations

BREAKING THE WAVES

In the beginning of May it was announced that Final Fantasy XII wouldn't debut in Japan this summer as anticipated. Instead, the game would ship sometime in the winter of 2004 or spring of 2005 -- officially nixing any hopes American gamers had of seeing the title sometime this year. Square Enix expressed the desire to improve the overall quality of the game and ensure that it will satisfy the rabid FF fanbase.

So what does that mean for what we played on the show floor at E3? We suspect that the big changes shown in this latest build are what require the extra time to perfect. Final Fantasy XII seems to be most succinctly described as a single-player MMORPG.

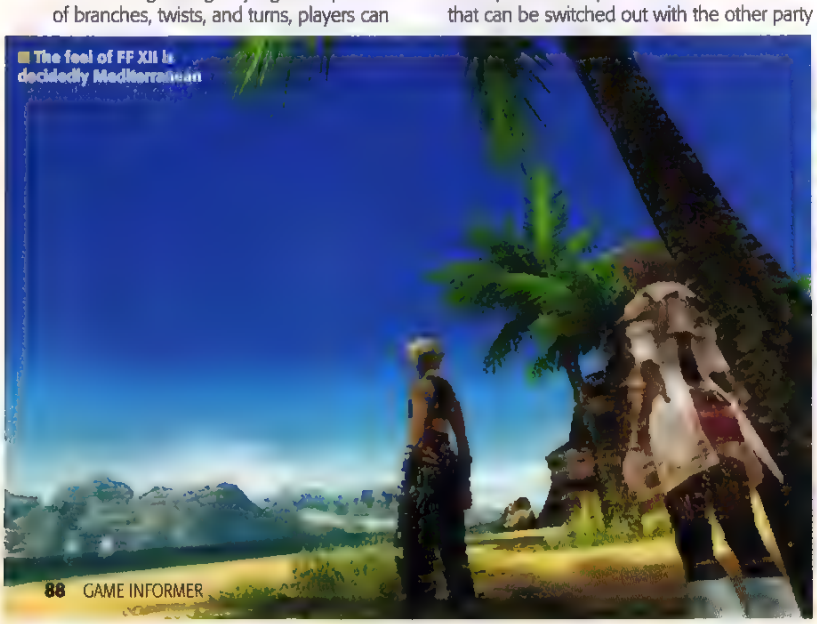
Wandering through a jungle-like path full of branches, twists, and turns, players can see enemies and avoid clashes if they so choose. Also, full camera control is given to gamers and the title's fully-3D landscapes are lush and interesting -- arguably rivaling earlier entries in the series that used more pre-rendered backgrounds. Because of this free-roaming environment, the random attacks of FF past are gone and this ability to see enemies in advance should (if the game is balanced correctly) offer some new strategy in combat.

FF XII's battle system is the real story here and was met with a mixed reception on the show floor. Generally speaking, the action in battle is quite a lot like FF XI -- except that the player controls the whole group instead forming a party with real, live humans like in the series' MMO. What we saw was a three-person lineup of active combatants that can be switched out with the other party members (at least six characters make up the whole team, perhaps more) at any time.

Players can run around at will during battles (again, like FF XI), control the camera, and have hands-on decision-making with one character at a time. The rest of the team can be managed with what Square Enix is referring to as the Gambit system. This mechanic allows players to set certain AI patterns for each member of the team and then let the AI make specific decisions.

By the time the game releases, there will be around ten different Gambits to assign to each character. The most straightforward was "All Attack," but other options include behaviors like healing the party, focusing on distance attacks, using magic, etc.

Although there was a lot to see in the show demo, there are still a lot of questions to be answered. Things like how much does a character's position in battle effect the attacks? Does the Gambit system's AI hold up in heated battles, and how does the automatic use of limit-break-esque like attacks play into planning larger-scale encounters? That's a lot to contemplate, but with nearly a year until any Stateside release, we've got some time to think about it. To be perfectly honest, the game made such an impression that we haven't stopped wondering, musing, and generally hypothesizing about it since our hands left the controller. ■■■



The feel of FF XII is decidedly Mediterranean

From what we saw, monsters (even of the same species) display more variety

Enemies can take hostages for human shields, but what do you care? You're evil

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Goldeneye: Rogue Agent

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** EA LOS ANGELES **> RELEASE** FALL

IT'S GOOD TO BE BAD

Although not all Bond villains are as cool as Oddjob or Jaws (Gustaf Graves...what's up with him?), it's still about time for the bad guys to get their moment in the sun. EA knows about your desires to join the dark side, and Goldeneye: Rogue Agent is the perfect way for you to get your evil on.

A spiritual successor to the N64's Goldeneye, Rogue Agent puts you in the shoes of a 00-Agent wannabe who gets kicked out of MI6. Eventually, you find yourself in the employ of Auric Goldfinger. In an exchange with Dr. No's forces, you lose an eye, only to have it replaced with a synthetic golden one by your boss. Armed with your new nickname "Goldeneye," you set out for revenge against Dr. No.

As Rogue Agent puts you in control of a bad guy, expect to notice some nasty elements in the gameplay. You can take hostages to use as human shields, execute those who are begging for their lives, and use the environment against your foes in diabolical ways. Of course, your opponents won't sit idly by and allow themselves to be killed; Rogue Agent features some of the best enemy AI around. Using something called the "E.V.I.L. AI Engine," enemies will actively seek cover and adapt to your tactics. They will try to flank you, work their way behind you, and otherwise try to end your life as quickly as possible.

Both single and multiplayer modes will take advantage of some completely new features that should make gamers cackle with evil glee, such as a mechanic called "visual cover." If there is no solid cover around, you can jump behind something that lessens your visibility. Although they don't make you impervious to bullets, smoke and frosted glass do make you harder to see, and thus harder to hit.

The villainous theme of Rogue Agent should help it stand out in a crowded lineup of first person shooters. Whether it lives up to its revered namesake remains to be seen, but one thing is for sure: the dark side of the Bond universe is sure looking pretty sweet. ■ ■ ■

"Sir, it's me. Don't you recognize me? I'm your loyal manservant, Waldorf."

PLAYSTATION 2

ATV Offroad Fury 3

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** CLIMAX GROUP **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER

Frank's explosive gas came in handy in the air tricks competition

BACK TO THE TRACK

Everyone's favorite cause of severe head injuries, ATV racing, is about to enter its third lap on the PlayStation 2. ATV Offroad Fury 3 is ripping on to the PS2 with more maps, rides, and gameplay modes than ever before. Choose from over 24 different ATVs (including regular, honey mustard, and extra spicy...wait, we're thinking about chicken wings again. Dang!) and tear around the track. Each bike has 20 different customizable pieces, and the new Garage mode keeps track of all the new stuff you've unlocked.

The Offroad Fury games have always offered a good selection of gameplay modes, and the third entry is absolutely packed with different ways to get your race on. Along with Freestyle and Career mode, there are Olympic events, Practice modes, Lap Attack, minigames, and more. There are so many different gameplay styles that the only thing left is Drive To the Store and Get Some Artichokes mode, which is probably best left out. Of course, online only increases the number of ways to race, and you can smack talk your buddies while you do, as Offroad Fury 3 supports both USB headset and keyboard chat. Just pay attention to the road as you lip off, because every course will be loaded with fully interactive hazards, like ramps, road cones, trees, and possibly drunk people. We've heard a lot of those race fans love their alky-hol. ■ ■ ■

NEITHER RAIN, NOR SLEET...

The Offroad Fury games have always been known for their realism, and a good example of just how in depth they get is the terrain types. ATV Offroad Fury 3 will feature six types of terrain: grass, mud, snow, dirt, ice, and water. Each of these types will have distinct handling properties that will noticeably affect how your ride feels.

"Let's see...Steve and Don both fell in the ravine and died. But I'm sure I'll be fine!"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Forza Motorsport

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS **> RELEASE** HOLIDAY

RE-DEFINING THE XBOX WHEEL

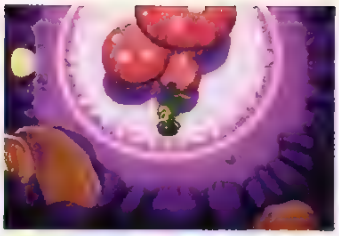
For Italian racing fans, the word *forza* is a triumphant cry yelled as their driver flies by. Forza Motorsport, then, is an apt title for a game that product manager Scott Lee says should make Xbox fans quite happy. "Our first-party group wanted to create the most realistic driving simulator on Xbox, a game that would give people who have a passion for cars and racing the ultimate ride. We felt like the simulation space was a bit underserved."

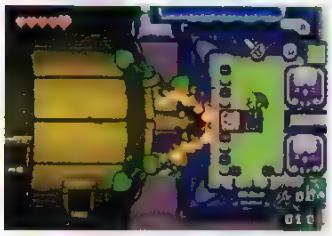
Microsoft goes after Gran Turismo? Well, why stop there? Forza isn't just about giving you a bunch of realistic rides – it does that and more. If there's an overall philosophy for Forza, it is that it's all about the cars. The game shares this with GT, but it also wants to go one step further. You may have been reluctant to tweak your car's settings in GT, but this game doesn't want you to be afraid to get your hands dirty. It encourages upgrading your car by giving you an endless stream of customizable parts, so if you played Need for Speed: Underground and wanted more than just cosmetic changes to your ride, then Forza is for you. Hood scoops, chameleon paint, front spoilers, weight reduction, and the like help you personalize your car to the nth degree. Moreover, Microsoft wants players to actually understand and feel what each part plays in the performance of your car – something that has been next to impossible for casual gamers so far in the genre. However, creating this four-wheel love affair is key to Forza, says Lee. "What's important to people is the ownership experience with the car. I own cars that will own you." Of course, this will transfer online (which accommodates up to eight people), where you'll not only be comparing your opponents' racing line, but their individually designed skin as well.

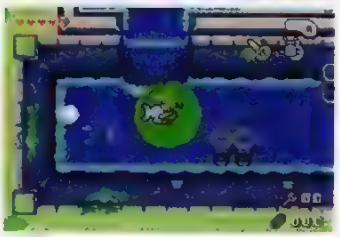
Forza will sport more than 60 manufacturers, including Ferrari, Mercedes-Benz, and Porsche, but Lee stresses that Microsoft Game Studios doesn't want to get into a numbers war with Gran Turismo. Besides, Lee finds that not all the cars in Sony's franchise are winners, anyway. "We're not going to feature the Honda Odyssey. [Our game has cars] you are going to want to race on the track." One area in which the team is breaking away from GT is in the damage to your vehicle. Not only is it allowed (we've banged up a Ferrari in the game and shed a tear for every flake of paint that came off), but repairs to your car will come straight out of your wallet, too.

Having to fiddle with your ride and pay for the damage sounds like Forza's career mode could have a pretty wicked learning curve. Worry not, however, as Lee assured us that players will have a wide variety of races to pick from at any one time. The team wants to prevent gamers from hitting that experience wall and resorting to re-racing past contests just to raise up enough money to move on. Lee couldn't give too many specifics, but we imagine the game will use a tier structure similar to RalliSport Challenge 2. The career mode will also keep you busy with Drivatars, who are your AI teammates. They will learn the techniques you use on the track, enabling you to use these Drivatars to race courses for you. In the build we saw, this feature wasn't implemented, so it remains to be seen exactly how smart these teammates will be. If you have a habit of hitting the outer wall, we don't imagine you'd want your Drivatars to follow in your footsteps.

"Where is the definitive console sim [racer] on the Xbox?" Lee asks. He isn't posing a rhetorical question to us. This is a specific area that neither RalliSport 2 nor Project Gotham Racing really tries to address. Forza Motorsport is a game that has been two years in the making, and which might do more than just fill a hole for the system – it could garner the moniker of "flagship title" on the console. ■■■







GAME BOY ADVANCE

The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM/FLAGSHIP > **RELEASE** 2005

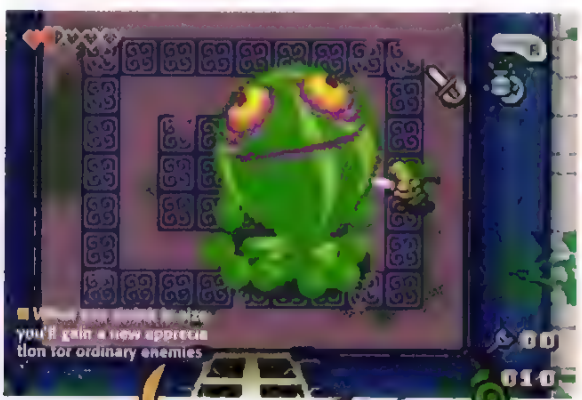
HONEY, I SHRUNK THE HYLIAN

Nintendo has enlisted the development muscle of Capcom to create an original Zelda adventure for the Game Boy Advance. Now, before you get your *Invader Zim* boxer shorts in a bunch and think about egging Shigeru Miyamoto's house for letting another developer tinker with his sacred Zelda franchise, let us remind you of the brilliant Oracle of Seasons and Ages titles for Game Boy Color. That's 100 percent Capcom, baby!

Much like the Oracle titles, Capcom is playing the role of innovator, and is adding a new dimension of gameplay to the classic Zelda formula. By donning the Minish Cap, which just happens to be a sentient entity, our pantyhose-wearing hero gains the ability to shrink in size. In microscopic form, Link will be able to squeeze into the narrowest of cracks, ride the smallest of leaves, hide in blades of grass, and even enter miniature dungeons (think about the model from *Zoolander*). Furthermore, from an ant's perspective, an ordinary enemy now possesses boss-like proportions.

In addition to this inventive play mechanic, Link will wield a new weapon that features vacuum-like powers. With this tool, cobwebs can be sucked up, air can be captured and released in a powerful gust, and elastic objects can be stretched and flung. As of now, no details have been given about the plot, but we do know that Link is hunting for Kinstone fragments. When a Kinstone is forged, secrets of the land are revealed.

Nintendo was also quick to note that The Minish Cap will feature four-player support, but wouldn't divulge anything outside of this. ■■■



GAMECUBE

Advance Wars: Under Fire

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** KUJU ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** 2005

WAR GROWS LARGER

Just like the recently announced Fire Emblem game, the popular Advance Wars GBA series will see a new entry on its grown-up purple cousin, the GameCube. We have a grown-up purple cousin too; his name is Stewart and he's allergic to raisins. Fortunately, Advance Wars: Under Fire is looking a lot cooler than Stewart. The turn-based strategy format of the GBA titles has been replaced with fast-paced 3D action, which combines the series' tactical roots with run and gun action.

The player will view the proceedings like an omnipotent god, but at any time you can choose an individual unit to control, and make the rest of their squad follow your lead. While you can only control a small number of units at one time, the rest of your forces will act on their own volition and take on the enemy. Although the AI soldiers can certainly fend for themselves, intelligent tactics are the key to success, and your guidance will be needed. Lead your troops well, and they may earn promotions, which makes them more efficient killing machines.

These powered-up troops and vehicles will be essential to winning your war, as each mission will present you with multiple goals. You can switch which units you control on the fly to send troops towards different objectives. This may sound chaotic, but cousin Stewart manages to effortlessly juggle his love of Dungeons and Dragons, the *Bikini Carwash* movies, and Weird Al, and we imagine that managing various squads is much more tolerable.

The Advance Wars games are some of the best titles on the GBA, and we have high hopes for the console version. The version shown at E3 revealed multiple types of troops, tanks, helicopters, and much more military chaos. Obviously, Under Fire is a huge departure from the GBA titles, but it looks like it should please fans of the series and newbies alike. When Advance Wars: Under Fire is released sometime next year, we'll be among the first to enlist. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Snowblind

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** CRYSTAL DYNAMICS > **RELEASE** WINTER

TAKE UP ARMS

"Hmm...airship. Good thing I brought my rocket launcher. Crap! This is my mayonnaise cannon!"

In the near future, Asia is rife with conflict. Disputes between warring factions spill out into the streets, putting the lives of innocent bystanders in danger. As a bio-engineered soldier, it's up to you and your squad to help restore peace. An arsenal of cutting-edge weaponry is your best friend, but you'll need much more than that to survive. Fortunately, your cybernetic enhancements give you skills far above those of the normal human.

This is the setup for Snowblind, the new FPS from Eidos. Although a lot of fantastic shooters are set to hit stores soon, Snowblind has enough going for it that it may become the sleeper title of the year. The game sports all the features players have come to expect in a triple-A shooter, like destructible environments, drivable vehicles, squad support, online play, and, of course, tons of guns. What makes Snowblind unique is the assortment of powers and weaponry the main character's cybernetic enhancements allow.

The bio-circuitry in your character endows him with skills like bot domination, which allows him to control any robots in the area (including giant mechs), a slow-time mode, which players can use to catch grenades and toss them back at enemies, and much more. Your character also features multiple vision modes and host of advanced weaponry. Along with the standard fare, Snowblind has unique guns like the Kicker, which can be used to push physical objects (like, for example, a car) into your enemies. It may not have the name recognition of some other shooters, but it looks like Snowblind will have the firepower to hang with the big boys. ■■■

Up to 20 characters may appear onscreen at once

Sora shows off his dance moves in *Beauty and the Beast*'s famous ballroom

PLAYSTATION 2

Kingdom Hearts II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** 2005

A MAGICAL REUNION

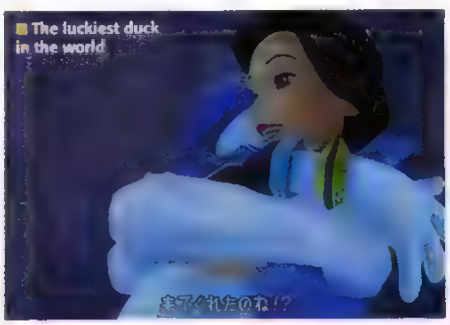
Mickey Mouse kicks ass. This is a statement that you would likely never hear from a grown adult. Come 2005, we have a feeling that you'll be hearing it quite often when Kingdom Hearts II hits the market. In the first game, Mickey was a non-factor and only made a brief cameo at the end of the adventure. Series director Tetsuya Nomura has hinted at the possibility of Disney's big ears playing a much larger role this time around. In the footage that we've seen thus far, Mickey has stolen the show. With his very own keyblade in hand, and his impressive mouse-fu in full effect, Mickey truly does look like the ultimate rodent avenger. We don't know exactly what role he will play, but we have a feeling he will be fighting at your side as a teammate.

Of equally exciting news, we also caught a glimpse of Final Fantasy X's Auron looking as tough as ever. Much like Mickey's breakout performance, we're hoping that the involvement of the Final Fantasy characters will be much higher this time around.

Tightlipped as ever, Nomura wouldn't disclose the locations or Disney licenses that would be tapped in this sequel, but he did say that "there will be some worlds that people could easily imagine. And there will be some worlds from Disney that nobody would imagine." Here's hoping that we get the chance to kick field goals with Gus the kicking mule!

He also went on to say that "reunion" is a key theme in this game. Many of the characters from the first game, such as Hercules and Peter Pan, will return and aid in Sora's quest against the Nobodies and a new evil that could tear apart the kingdom. It'll be interesting to see how the characters and their relationships have developed in the year since the original game.

A release date has yet to be set, but Square Enix representatives have stated that Kingdom Hearts II should release in both Japan and the U.S. in mid-2005. ■■■



The luckiest duck in the world

You think he looks tough now? Wait until you see what he does with that blade!

This is going to be one hell of a fight

Combat is just as fast-paced and explosive as before

"Last one into the breach is a Nazi sympathizer!"

No matter that the city is falling around you, you've still got a mission to accomplish

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Call of Duty: Finest Hour

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** SPARK UNLIMITED **> RELEASE** FALL

REAL RUSSIAN, BRITISH, AND AMERICAN HEROES

Last year's Call of Duty for PC rocked the military FPS genre with a combination of a lot of factors and an overall high level of polish. Its sister title, Call of Duty: Finest Hour, is developer Spark Unlimited's attempt to reach a similar level of success on consoles. By all accounts, it's well on track to become the new standard in wargaming.

First off, this is most assuredly not a port of the PC product. Finest Hour will be an entirely new experience, though it also takes place in World War II. In addition to participating in the siege of Stalingrad, players will take on the roles of both a British PPA commando in North Africa and an African-American tank battalion rolling through Belgium. These varied storylines will, however, be tied together into a cohesive narrative.

Speaking of the storyline, Finest Hour presents it in some of the grittiest, most immersive cinematically-styled sequences seen to date. When we saw the assault on Stalingrad in action, we just about dived for cover – it is seriously that intense. Being part of a platoon of 15 or so soldiers trying to storm an enemy emplacement only to look over a hill and see another hundred of your comrades joining the attack behind you is one of the most visceral, gut-wrenching yet utterly exhilarating things we've ever seen in a game.

A tank's primary cannon is downright intimidating

This leads us into the technical excellence present in Finest Hour. You probably think we're exaggerating when we say that you'll have a hundred allies charging alongside you. Maybe we are, but not by much – the number of onscreen characters is truly staggering. They're all brought to life by some of the best animation on consoles, putting yet another feather in Spark's cap. Along with the oppressive cloud of smoke hanging over the ruined city and the constant explosions and gunfire, these masses of humanity make Finest Hour one hell of a ride.

Of course, all of this awesomeness is of no use without engaging gameplay to go with it. The team at Spark clearly knows how to put together a tight console FPS from their members' experience on the Medal of Honor franchise, but that's only the beginning. There's a lot of variety to be had, whether it's surgical strikes with a female Russian sniper or taking on entrenched Nazis in accurately-modeled tanks. Also, a simple squad interface allows for interesting on-foot missions, like leading a group of infantrymen on a sweep of a devastated city – definitely not run-of-the-mill FPS gaming. Team-based Axis vs. Allies multiplayer (at least on the PS2 and Xbox) is also part of the package, though no details have been revealed yet.

All of this sounds like quite the tall order for one title, but seeing Finest Hour in action is enough to make anyone a believer. This fall looks to be a revolutionary season for the console FPS, and we've seen enough to make us want to be first into the breach. ■■■

Intense scripted events set the tone for each level

Particle effects like this are unheard of on the PS2

"Um, Gandalf? I need to go change into a clean suit of armor"

The turn-based battles have a familiar feel

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> RELEASE** FALL

THE FELLOWSHIP B-SQUAD

Considering that the Lord of the Rings series can be cited as a major influence on just about every kind of role-playing game imaginable, it is only fitting that it finally receives a next-generation treatment in that vein. The Third Age, EA's RPG counterpart to its LotR action games, will use a standard interface (with menu-driven, turn-based battles), but it is remarkable in the way it recreates the Tolkien mythos, as well as the number of opportunities it gives players to immerse themselves in an epic setting.

You control a party of all-new characters, and while there is an overarching storyline, your path will remain very open, allowing you to freely roam around the world of Middle-earth. Though the game does have the movie license, it is not so much about duplicating the experience of the films as it is about giving the player an opportunity to explore the farthest reaches of the Third Age.

But this isn't to say that there won't be any crossover. Though you walk your own path, at many points you will find yourself intersecting with key events or characters. In one instance, we were traveling in the Fellowship's wake in the Mines of Moria, when we saw Gandalf and the Balrog on the bridge of Khazad-Dûm. We moved in to get a closer look, and suddenly found ourselves fighting alongside the Grey Wizard against the infamous demon – and it was truly a foe beyond any of us. While this alliance doesn't exactly line up with the original story, it does give the player a chance to relive one of the saga's most pivotal moments.

As you progress through the game, you will have the opportunity to unlock missions of a less heroic nature as well, doing errands for the minions of Sauron and helping him retain control. Though the good vs. evil dynamic isn't nearly as involved as Knights of the Old Republic, it is interesting to get a look at things from the other side of the fence; in one scenario, you are actually assailing the walls of Helm's Deep with the forces of Isengard!

Continuing EA's tradition with the LotR titles, The Third Age will feature the voices of the original actors, along with motion capture from the film's stunt doubles. If the success from its previous ventures carries over to The Third Age, EA is sure to have a title that any bookworm, film dork, or RPG nerd can play with pride. ■■■

After peeking in on Gimli in the shower, this Troll's eyes spontaneously combust

Donkey Konga: Even Trolls love it!

"Pleased to meet you, Breakfast and Lunch. My name's Balrog."

Ancient Warhammer versus Stick on Fire. Place your bets!

PvP has some serious potential

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

City of Villains

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NCSOFT
> **DEVELOPER** CRYPTIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** 2005

BEING GOOD IS FOR WUSSIES

Everybody knows that defending the helpless citizenry from the depredations of unscrupulous madmen is a just and noble cause. Some also regard it as the occupation of people who don't have the imagination to devise a scheme and mold the world to their own liking. City of Villains, the forthcoming expansion for City of Heroes, will allow players with the requisite ambition to execute their own magnificent plots.

Fledgling villains will have to prove their worth in order to be granted their powers before terrorizing Paragon City. Once they earn their wings, though, the sky is the limit. You can build your own secret base – though we don't know yet if things like shark tanks for meddling heroes are available. And meddle they will; huge base invasions involving groups of superheroes fighting against your own nefarious alliance will be possible. You see, consensual PvP is one of the selling points for City of Villains.

Of course, what good is all this antagonism without some sort of underlying purpose? Players will be able to come up with their own plans for world domination, possibly involving the relics of massive power which hold the fate of the universe locked within. While it seems doubtful that game balance would allow any particular villain to actually gain control over the whole of creation, there's surely some mechanic in place to reward successful evildoers.

Comic dorks have finally gotten a worthy title in City of Heroes, and this expansion looks to make it all the sweeter in 2005. Because, seriously, the only thing better than saving the world in spandex is taking it over in tights. ■■■

"He's doing an interpretive dance! Get him!

Battlefield 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 100-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS > **RELEASE** SPRING 2005

Compensating? Probably. Dominating? Totally

THE JUGGERNAUT RETURNS

Since 2002, hundreds of thousands of gamers the world over have been furiously shooting the heck out of each other courtesy of Digital Illusions' stupendously popular Battlefield titles. Many companies would be content to bask in their success with periodic minor upgrades to their titles, but Digital Illusions is making Battlefield 2 almost entirely from scratch and incorporating a ton of great new features.

An all-new engine is the driving force behind BF 2. Better graphics, realistic physics, and dynamic lighting – all the good stuff is part of the deal. Extra bells and whistles, such as stat tracking and clan tags, are also in. The majority of the improvements, however, seem to be coming in the form of gameplay enhancements.

In BF 2, you have to choose your cover carefully – bullets will no longer be stopped in their tracks by any little piece of cardboard. In turn, parts of the environment are destructible, making good cover that much harder to find. Also, the maps scale dynamically to the number of players in the game, which should make the action a bit easier to find.

A new squad mechanic will also make an appearance to try to encourage team play. We don't know the extent of it, but at the least it will allow players to ping the minimap of their squadmates to point out objectives. You'll also score some points for kills by your comrades fostering the group experience that makes BF such a blast. Or, if you prefer a more strategic style of play, you can assume the non-combatant commander role and direct your team to victory.

As if all of these awesome features weren't enough for us to drool over, BF 2 will support over 100 players on a single server. Lock and load, because online combat may never be the same after this goes live. ■■■

An assault without a gunship is no assault at all

Here's a shot of multiplayer. Oh, we're sorry. Haunted multiplayer

GAMECUBE

Geist

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** N-SPACE > **RELEASE** WINTER

GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR SPIRITUAL SIDE

Be afraid. Be…sorta afraid. Be fairly confused. Nintendo's new first-person ghost title Geist has got our emotions in a big old jumble. The premise is so unique that we don't know whether to fear Geist or pant excitedly for its release. You see, Geist places you in the role of John Raimi, a man whose spirit has been ripped from his body. As a free-roaming apparition, you'll need to possess others in order to find your own body and unravel the mystery of the sinister Volks Corporation. Throughout the course of the game you'll take over the bodies of soldiers, engineers, scientists, and…bowls of dog food?

In order to possess someone, first you'll need to work his or her (or its) nerves. In order to possess a dog, you might have to haunt their food and give them a scare. You might have to take over a computer or security camera to freak out a guard. Does this mean that game editors are in danger of possession when we get scared by playing Mario Party? We sure hope not, because that's some frightening stuff right there.

When characters like soldiers are taken over, the action switches to a more traditional first-person shooter view and offers blazing gunplay. Nintendo is touting Geist as offering two completely different angles of gameplay, and if it delivers, it will certainly be one of the most unique titles out there. We have to admit, we're a little skeptical about possessing dog food (it would be way cooler to possess some pie!), but it is interesting to see a spooky game from a spirit's perspective. Those lousy Ghostbusters are always keeping the specters down! ■■■

Oooh! Haunted turrets! Oooh!

The process of possessing a dog is shown here. First, haunt the dog's food, then scare him as he's eating. He can then be taken over. Now it's time to sniff some crotch!

"Ooh, a puppy! I'm gonna get ya!"

PLAYSTATION 2

Altered Beast

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA WOW > **RELEASE** WINTER

RWISE FWOM YOUR GWAVE!

Many gamers have fond memories of Sega's classic title Altered Beast. Its slurred voiceovers were amusing, the gameplay was clunky, but man, were those beast transformations cool! Despite the fact that the original Altered Beast has not really stood the test of time (it's true, fanboys – go back and play it), Sega is releasing a new version, which should please fans of the original and impress the new generation of gamers as well.

Like the main character, Altered Beast has transformed: it is now fully 3D, and the medieval setting has been ditched in favor of the present. However, the essence of what made the original cool still remains – your character has the ability to transform into various monsters. The beast forms from the original are all included, like the bear, the dragon, and the popular werewolf. New forms are included as well, such as the minotaur, the merman, a bird creature, and more. But the similarities to the original don't stop there – the video displayed at E3 showed the main character kicking his way out of a casket. We assume this means the hero has once again been reanimated to take on the forces of evil.

The protagonist of Altered Beast will uncover the truth about his past over the course of the game, which deals with the complexities of genetic manipulation and the struggle between human and animal nature. This is a far cry from the simple tale of a medieval stooge revived to rescue a wizard's daughter, but we have a feeling fans of the original will be pleased. After all, the appeal of the series has always been unleashing your animal side. Personally, our animal side is a hamster, so we're really glad Altered Beast will let us change into something cooler. ■■■

The minotaur, one of the new beast forms, sure could use a Listerine Cool Strip

RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION NOW!

Don't Delay! Fill out the attached card, call toll free 1-866-844-GAME (4263) or renew online at www.gameinformer.com

SUBSCRIBE!!

Get a subscription to Game Informer Magazine TODAY and save up to $118.78 off the newsstand price.

24 ISSUES ONLY

$24.98

SAVE OVER 80% OFF EACH ISSUE!

GAMEINFORMER MAGAZINE

Save over **80%** off the cover price

✔ *Yes!* I want to take advantage of this amazing offer from ***Game Informer Magazine!***

☐ **1 Year** (12 Issues) for $19.98 Best Deal! ☐ **2 Years** (24 Issues) for $24.98

☐ **GameStop Value Card** for **$2.00**

Please Print Clearly

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

☐ Check or money order enclosed ☐ Bill my Credit Card

Credit Card # Exp. Date

To order with Credit Card by phone call toll free 1-866-844-GAME (4263) M – F 9am to 4pm Central Time. All International & Canadian orders must add $20/yr additional postage. Please allow up to 8 weeks for first mailed issue. Value Card good for 10% off Used Merchandise. Card may be used at any GameStop, FuncoLand, Babbage's, Software Etc. & Planet X for 10 months from purchase date.

07/04

GAMEINFORMER MAGAZINE

Save over **$100** off the cover price

✔ *Yes!* I want to take advantage of this amazing offer from ***Game Informer Magazine!***

☐ **1 Year** (12 Issues) for $19.98 Best Deal! ☐ **2 Years** (24 Issues) for $24.98

☐ **GameStop Value Card** for **$2.00**

Please Print Clearly

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Phone

☐ Check or money order enclosed ☐ Bill my Credit Card

Credit Card # Exp. Date

To order with Credit Card by phone call toll free 1-866-844-GAME (4263) M – F 9am to 4pm Central Time. All International & Canadian orders must add $20/yr additional postage. Please allow up to 8 weeks for first mailed issue. Value Card good for 10% off Used Merchandise. Card may be used at any GameStop, FuncoLand, Babbage's, Software Etc. & Planet X for 10 months from purchase date.

07/04

GAMEINFORMER MAGAZINE

Change Of Address Card

Please Print Clearly

Old Address Customer/Card #

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

New Address

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

07/04

Visit our website at
www.gameinformer.com

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 30041 MINNEAPOLIS, MN

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

GAMEINFORMER
MAGAZINE

724 N 1ST ST 4TH FL
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55401-9022

Visit our website at
www.gameinformer.com

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 30041 MINNEAPOLIS, MN

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

GAMEINFORMER
MAGAZINE

724 N 1ST ST 4TH FL
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55401-9022

Change your address online
at www.gameinformer.com

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

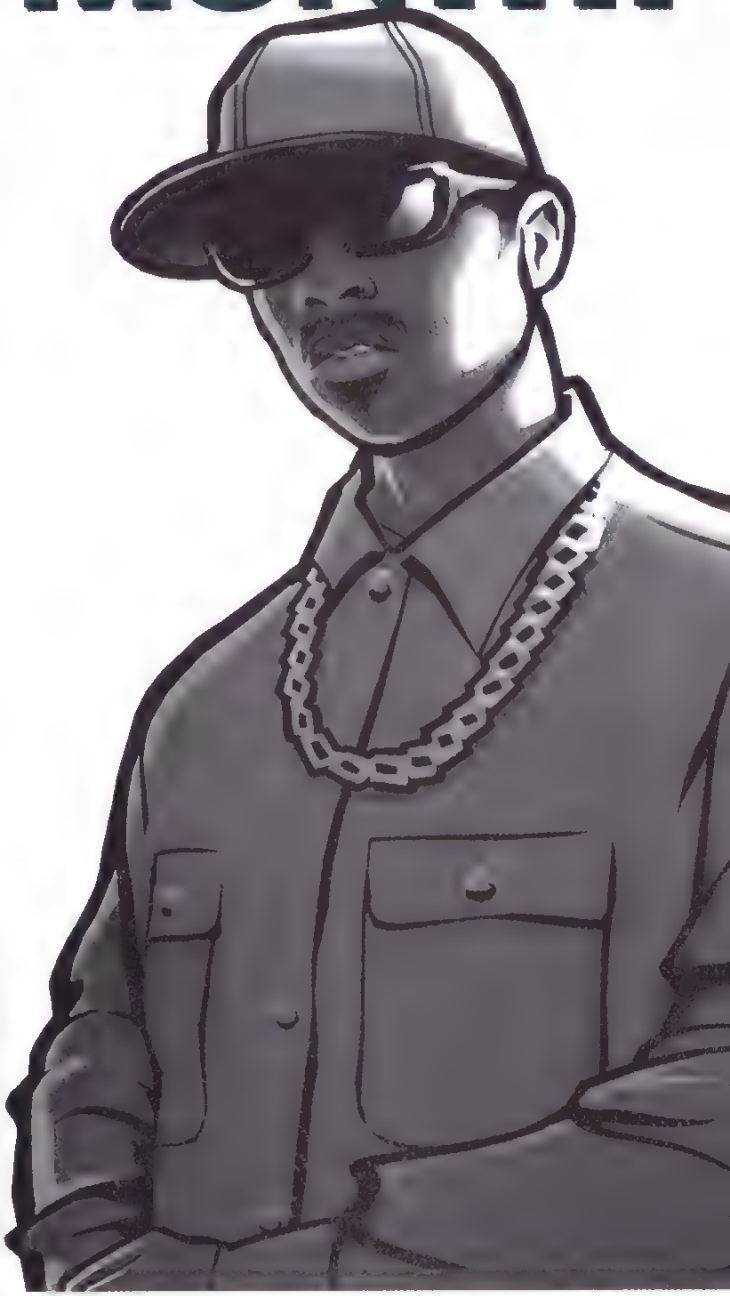
BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 30041 MINNEAPOLIS, MN

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

GAMEINFORMER
MAGAZINE

724 N 1ST ST 4TH FL
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55401-9022

NO GI NEXT MONTH?



RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION NOW!

Don't Delay! Fill out the attached card, call toll free 1-866-844-GAME (4263) or renew online at www.gameinformer.com

Art Courtesy of Rockstar Games

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Mercenaries

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS
> **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL

GRAND THEFT AIRWOLF

When someone asks you what you would do with your life if you had a million dollars, your answer is supposed to be linked to the kind of career you are cut out for. If you say, "collect model trains," you could be a railroad engineer. If you say, "eat ice cream and grow large," you could be a banana split inspector. But what if you answered, "cause widespread destruction without regard for ethics or human life"? You would certainly get a perturbed look from the person asking the question, but even more certain is this: the life of a mercenary is the life for you.

Mercenaries, Pandemic's upcoming title dealing with the exploits of warriors-for-hire, caused a lot of buzz on the E3 show floor this year. This was partially due to the game's oustanding particle effects, but the level of freedom available is what makes Mercenaries truly unique. From its wide range of vehicles (like helicopters, Jeeps, and tanks) to the smorgasbord of high-powered weaponry (like shotguns, rocket launchers, and assault rifles), we were amazed by the number of options offered at any given time. In one case, our target was holed up on the side of the map opposite us. We could have tried to sneak past the garrisons guarding the area, we could have run-and-gunned our way through, or we even could have stolen a Jeep and hit the gas, hoping for the best. While all tempting options, we chose to pursue a fourth possibility; we waited for a helicopter to fly low, at which point we grabbed on, flung the driver off the side, and flew into enemy territory with missiles blazing, humming the *M*A*S*H* theme song to ourselves.

The game contains 52 missions, each one centered around capturing one of the infamous "Deck of 52," a list of known terrorists who are a threat to world stability. However, as our example illustrated, the number of ways you can approach your tasks is mind-boggling, especially given the three playable characters and their varying strengths and weaknesses. Plus, it never feels like there is a right or wrong path to take; the game simply puts a wide array of tools at your disposal, and it is up to you to utilize them effectively. Sort of like *MacGyver*, if Richard Dean Anderson had taken Man Lessons. ■■■

■ "Quick! Attack while it's aroused!"

■ "Green light... Red light!"

■ Upset with their Hummer's poor gas mileage, these thugs take it out for good

■ "Sergei, help! The aliens have got me in their tractor beam!"

■ Dr. Hoppy, pictured here, is the most notorious one-legged mercenary on the planet

Xiaoyu hates being called cute

Dynamic lighting effects on characters! Yay!

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Tekken 5

> STYLE TBD **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO **> RELEASE** 2005

THE KING IS DEAD; LONG LIVE THE KING

As much as PS2 owners like to complain about getting shafted by their console-specific character in Soul Calibur 2 being Heihachi Mishima, nobody can deny the impact that the Tekken series has had on the fighting genre. Next year, that legacy will continue on consoles with Tekken 5, though without its leading man. Heihachi, you see, is dead.

Provided that Heihachi doesn't return in some form or fashion (knowing the liberties that fighting games tend to take with plotlines), he might be the only Tekken stalwart that doesn't. Lots of old favorites like Xiaoyu and Lei have been spotted, but the interesting part is the three new characters. All we know (plus a healthy dose of rampant speculation) is below, so check it out.

Other than these new characters, Namco has been keeping mum about this latest foray into the King of Iron Fist Tournament. It does have a new graphics engine, but the specifics about it are shrouded in mystery. We'll be sure to let you know anything new as it comes available though, so keep your joysticks hot and your fingers nimble. ■■■

Seriously, why would you wear boxing gloves in a no-rules tournament?

ASUKA KAZUMA

Fans of the series will immediately recognize Asuka's fighting style as shown in the E3 trailer. Remember the glory days of dominating everyone around you with Jun Kazama? They shall return, albeit with a different hairstyle and more denim than any self-respecting fighter should wear. Apparently Tekken has to have a certain percentage of its characters connected to the foggy story of the Mishima family to reach critical mass on the incomprehensibility scale. Otherwise we'd be able to figure out what's going on, which would be completely unacceptable.

It's no People's Elbow, but it'll have to do

RAVEN

You love *Blade*. Admit it – Wesley Snipes is like a fine wine, getting better with age. Namco apparently shares this opinion, which could be why this new character for Tekken 5 looks a lot like him, except with the steroid level of Mark McGwire. To make some wild guesses off of the video trailer we saw, Raven looks like he might be using a form of the ninjitsu that Kunitmitsu showcased most recently in Tekken Tag Tournament.

FENG WEI

Other than his Mishima-style eyebrows and some pretty severe hypertrophy of the pectoral muscles, there's a whole lot of nothing known about the mysterious fighter called Feng Wei. He does have those little bangles on his wrists that are just adorable, though. These accessories, along with the ponytail and harem pants, could imply that he's a dance-based warrior like Eddy or Christie from previous Tekken games. He could mesmerize his opponents with rhythmic body movements, and then pounce for a final devastating strike. How cool could that be? Not very, actually. Here's hoping he's more traditional.

Likes: Dawn walks on the beach. Dislikes – Murderous mutated fish people

PC

The Witcher

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** TBD **> DEVELOPER** CD PROJEKT **> RELEASE** 2005

WEIGHS MORE THAN A DUCK

Polish developer CD Projekt is breaking the traditional fantasy mold of happy-go-lucky elves and fairies frolicking gaily through blooming meadows with their first North American offering, The Witcher. Set in a very dark and adult world populated with monsters who threaten ordinary folk every day, The Witcher will have players controlling a powerful member of the warrior brotherhood called, logically, The Witchers. Killing abominations for money is only the beginning, though – a deep and intricate storyline penned by famous Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski promises to draw gamers into a quest upon which the fate of the entire world rests.

The Witcher is based on BioWare's Aurora Engine (which you may know from a little game called NeverWinter Nights), but with some pretty serious modifications. Motion-captured martial artists and ragdoll physics will lend a more authentic feel to the combat. Additionally, hand-crafted environments (rather than the tilesets of NWN) give the setting a more organic vibe and allow CD Projekt's artists much more freedom in creating a compelling world. Finally, since The Witcher is a single-player only title, the engine has been optimized to streamline the experience and free up system resources for graphical treats like better lighting and DirectX 9 support.

With three possible endings based on the moral dilemmas players will face throughout the game, cool technology over and above the Aurora Engine, and an atypical world to adventure in, The Witcher could very well shape up into a hell of a game. And hey – you could be the first person in your town to play a Polish-developed video game. Unless one of your friends is a closet Video Strip Poker enthusiast (yes, it really exists, and it's Polish). ■■■

Not all of the enemies will be abominations

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Dead or Alive Ultimate

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** TECMO **> DEVELOPER** TECMO/TEAM NINJA **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

New interactive environments abound

STILL KICKIN' HIGH

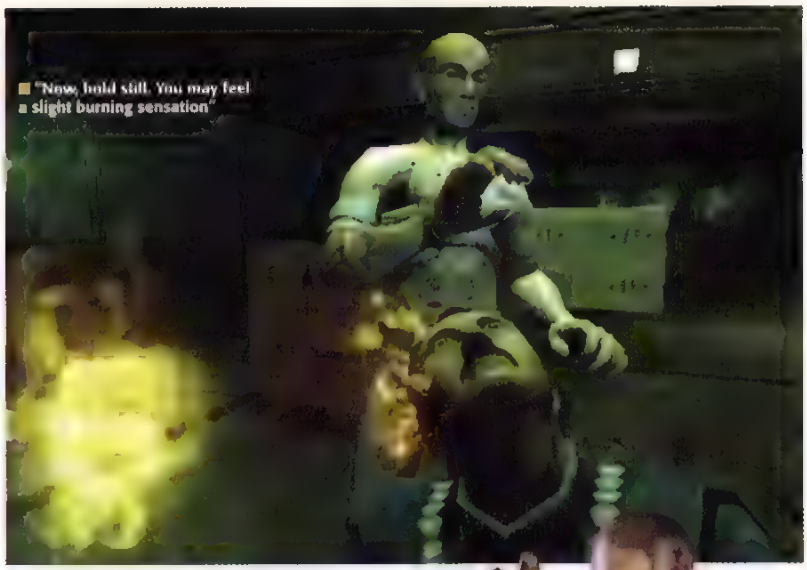
Our interest in Kasumi and her friends is entirely professional. Their technical specifications are always ample, and they seem to have a bounce to their step whenever they show up to work. That's why we're excited to see them back on the job this fall in their first attempt at appealing to an online crowd.

Dead or Alive Ultimate is actually two games in one. The first Dead or Alive never showed up in America – being at that time a Japan only exclusive. Finally, stateside gamers will get to play the original version of the franchise presented in its exact form from 1997. Along with this classic, there will be an entirely reworked version of Dead or Alive 2 that will boast all sorts of redesigned features. A brand new engine will power the exquisitely designed characters through uniquely interactive environments. The characters will have an expanded list of fresh fighting moves to try out as they battle opponents both offline and on Xbox Live. We'll see seven distinct modes available through Live including an eight player arcade-style tournament. In addition to the varied costume lineup from the numerous versions of Dead or Alive 2 that have come before, there will be a plethora of brand new costumes to outfit your favorite character in. Another huge plus of this updated version is the inclusion of an original opening movie along with cutscenes designed specially for this release. Tecmo has also promised us a special two-disc collector's edition that will include, among other things, a set of collectible trading cards of the characters.

Tecmo's not revealing a lot of details on this highly anticipated title. But, we think it might be a safe bet to say this: We're looking at a remarkable remake of one of the greatest fighting games in history that should introduce a whole new element to online gaming. There just might just be some girls, too ■■■

Fun for the whole family

■ Explosive diarrhea is a pain in the ass



■ "Now, hold still. You may feel a slight burning sensation"

■ "Go, my doppelganger, and find me a chili dog"

■ This guard is either possessed, or upset that he and his buddy wore identical outfits

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

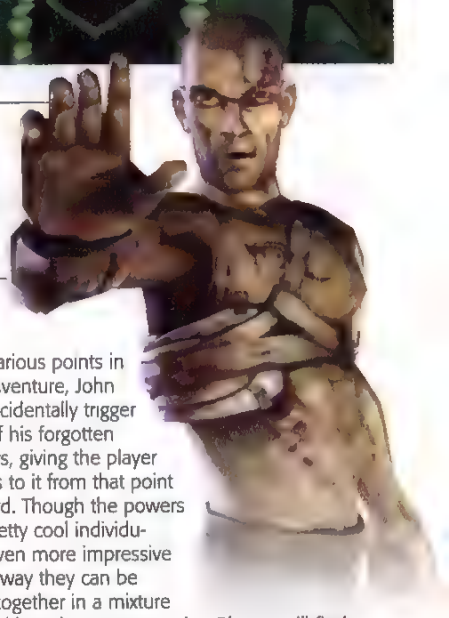
Second Sight

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
> **DEVELOPER** FREE RADICAL > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

USING YOUR NOGGIN

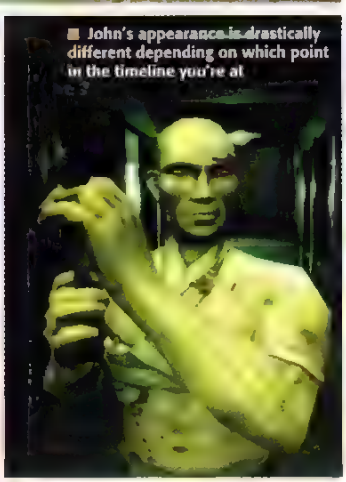
It's probably a good thing that we can't use telekinesis. Between levitating sandwiches to our desks and giving wedgies from across the room, we would just waste time and cheapen the gift. Fortunately, developer Free Radical (best known for its TimeSplitters series) has found a much more constructive and innovative way to implement this and many other psychic abilities in their newest title, Second Sight.

Though there are other games on the market featuring psionic powers (like Midway's Psi-Ops), Second Sight is far from a copycat. Showcasing a cinematic storyline, the game has the plotline of an intelligent thriller rather than the standard fare found in many action titles. It begins as John Vattic wakes up in a research facility, his body bandaged and stitched and his mind in disarray. He doesn't know who he is, and he doesn't know how he got his powers. What he does know, however, is that he needs to find a way out. The story periodically flips back and forth in the timeline, alternating control between a pre-research facility John (where he is a Jeff Goldblum-esque skeptical scientist) and a post-research facility John piecing the fragments of his life back together. Each scenario uncovers more details relating to how the two time periods converge, as well information about John's past and his extraordinary abilities.

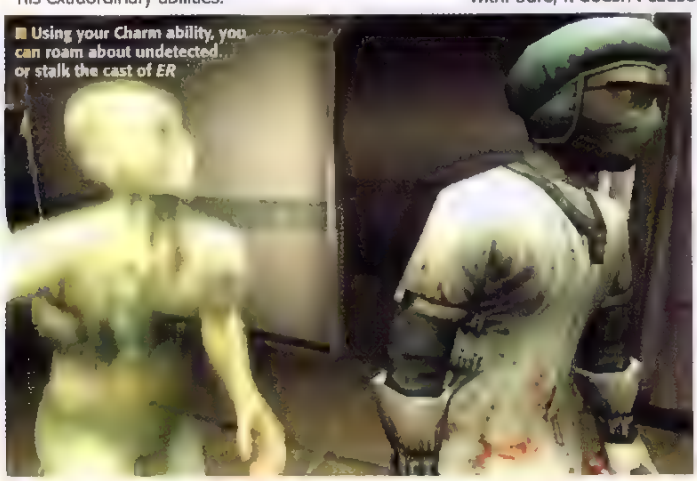


At various points in the adventure, John will accidentally trigger one of his forgotten powers, giving the player access to it from that point forward. Though the powers are pretty cool individually, even more impressive is the way they can be used together in a mixture of stealth and action gameplay. Players will find several methods available to overcome obstacles, suiting multiple forms of gameplay. For instance, let's say that there is a group of guards standing by a door you want to get through. You can take the mischievous approach, projecting an astral image of yourself, moving it towards the guards unnoticed, and having it possess one of them. With its newfound body, your image can draw a gun and shoot another unsuspecting guard, sparking a massive firefight. The exchange of bullets leaves one man standing, who you can pick up with telekinesis and repeatedly bash into the wall. Of course, stealthier players can just use the Charm ability to invade the guards' minds, convincing them that John isn't even there to begin with. Sure, it doesn't cause as much mayhem, but it does make it easier to move about.

Though the name sounds more like a bargain-priced sniper game (or maybe a romantic comedy starring Ben Affleck), Second Sight's awesome psionic powers combined with an intricate story has it shaping up to deliver a payload of psychic action and intrigue when it releases this September. ■■■



■ John's appearance is drastically different depending on which point in the timeline you're at



■ Using your Charm ability, you can roam about undetected, or stalk the cast of *ER*

"Hey, this isn't Link's house!"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Dungeon Siege II

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS **> DEVELOPER** GAS POWERED GAMES
> RELEASE WINTER

SLAY EVIL IMMEDIATELY

You've got to respect Dungeon Siege, its expansion, and this forthcoming sequel. The name says it all, really – players need to fabricate heroic ass-kicking out of their arsenal of both might and magic in order to save the world. Dungeon Siege II is keeping this basic concept and expanding, empowering, and enriching it in a number of ways.

Headlining the list of cool new stuff in Dungeon Siege II is a revamped character development system, rife with fresh skills and specialties. As they gain enough prowess, adventurers will be able to use class-specific Heroic Powers. Hopefully these will live up to their name and dispense annihilation (or healing and buffing, if you're a wussy) on a whole new scale. You'll need to know how and when to use them, though, as the enemies have much better, totally reworked AI.

In addition to being smarter, your opponents will be tougher – some of them will even present a statistical match for your party. This may not sound like the most revolutionary thing in the history of gaming, but in the land of fantasy action/RPGs it's worth noting. How many titles have you grown bored of simply because you were slogging through what seemed like an endless tide of weak monsters?

Aiding players in their quest will be more companions along the lines of the pack mule – except more interesting. We don't know the specifics on any of them, but apparently they will render somewhat more useful assistance than merely carrying your extra loot. The word is that they grow alongside you and develop special powers much like any other RPG character – a more than welcome addition.

All in all, there's a lot to get excited about in Dungeon Siege II. A more interactive world, with pitched battles potentially being waged around the players and a brand-new special effects engine round out what looks to be quite the package. Look for it to land in stores in time to bug your parents about buying it for you this holiday season. ■■■

The Purple Sparkle Attack is devastating

GAME BOY ADVANCE

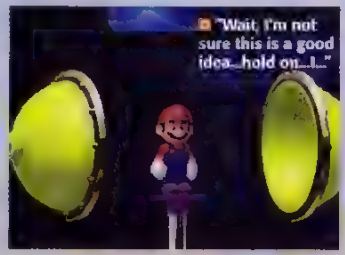
Mario Pinball

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** FUSE GAMES
> RELEASE OCTOBER 4

ONE TOO MANY MUSHROOMS...

Well, it's finally happened. We tried to tell the little plumber he should lay off those multicolored fungi years ago, but he just wouldn't listen. Now he thinks he's a pinball. Yep. A pinball. Worse yet, he's under the impression that Bowser has kidnapped the Princess (again) and taken her to another dimension. Stay with us here. It gets better. In order to pursue the kidnapper, our hero goes to a scientist who uses his "Spherifier" to transform Mario so that he can use his Super Cannon to fire him into the alternate dimension.

Okay, so Mario has gotten a bit delusional. It doesn't change the fact that his new pinball game looks like it should be a lot of fun. You'll use flippers to knock Mario around a 3D isometric level where you'll collect coins and defeat bosses. Each pinball stage will have particular objectives to fulfill in order to progress to the next board. Most of the popular characters of the Mushroom Kingdom ought to be making an appearance. You'll also be able to purchase items such as the Thunderbolt power-up with the coins you gather. The environments all look inviting and polished, and the coloration is most reminiscent of the glossy warmth of Super Mario Sunshine. We'll all get a chance to roll with Mario when the game releases this fall. ■■■


"Wait, I'm not sure this is a good idea...hold on...!..."

"Ow."

PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures

XBOX

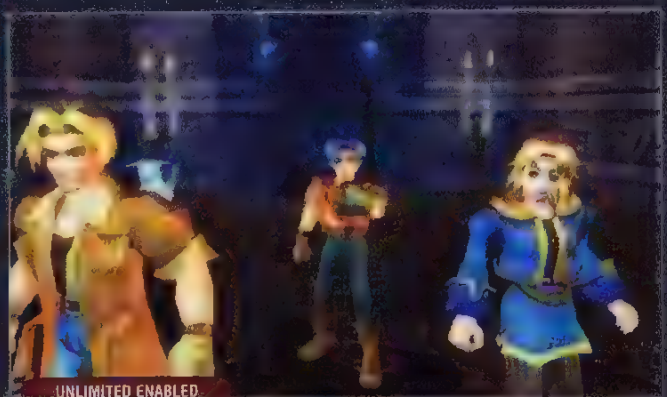
Citizen Zero

Who says that all MMOs need to be RPGs? Not Microforte (developer of Citizen Zero), that's for sure. This massive undertaking is more of an action/shooter that you play with thousands of people at a time. The focus, obviously, is on group combat and working together through the more than 100 types of missions. A robust social system, backend technology that allows anybody online to play with anyone else, and action gameplay worthy of the Xbox make Citizen Zero look like a title to follow until its October 2005 release. Though CZ doesn't have a publisher since being dropped by Microsoft, Microforte is in the final stages of talks with an unnamed company.

GAMECUBE

Amazing Island

Ahh, beautiful Amazing Island. It's located in the Pacific Ocean, somewhere between Fantastic Atoll and Mediocre Peninsula. Amazing Island is home to the Maboo tribe, a peaceful people whose ancestral homeland is being overtaken by a force called the Black Evil. Who can defeat the menace? Little kids, of course! In this summer title from Sega, the wee ones in your house can make and trade their own custom monsters and have them compete in minigames to battle the Black Evil. Think of it as Pokémon meets Mario Party. What could be a better combo than that? Besides *The Godfather* meets NASCAR, of course.



PLAYSTATION 2

Wild Arms Alter Code: F

In the earliest days of PSone, RPGs were few and far between. The original Wild Arms changed all that by offering a unique mixture of fantasy and western flavor woven together through memorable story and music. Alter Code: F is approaching the series with an imaginative twist. The first game will be retold with an entirely restyled script and visuals. The original three main characters are all there, but they'll be joined by three new heroes who were only NPCs in the old version. A new soundtrack is being prepared by the original composers to complement the redesigned graphics. Of special note is the ability to load the entire game onto the PS2 hard drive and thereby decrease load times. Look to arm yourself with this Agetec release this winter.

PLAYSTATION 2

State of Emergency 2

There's a lot to be said for wanton carnage and destruction, and SOE 2 aims to prove it. The over 500 characters present in any of the four distinct environments respond independently of each other, so the crowd will react in dynamic ways to your actions. The multiple playable characters each have unique special abilities to exploit. The riot can also be instigated with a friend, as the game will include both cooperative and competitive play. Publisher Bam Entertainment should have us smashing cars and shooting windows in the first quarter of 2005.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

F-Zero GP Legend

Nintendo is revving up its F-Zero series to take another lap on the GBA this September. The latest title will feature support for up to four players via link cable, as well as new grand prix and story modes for each pilot. As far as the vehicle lineup goes, you can expect to see your favorites make a return, including such veterans as the Blue Falcon and the Fire Stingray. After all, an F-Zero game without Samurai Goroh is like a cyborg monkey without arms: it's still pretty cool, but it can only climb so high.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Capcom Fighting Jam

No one does 2D fighters quite like Capcom, and the latest entry in the genre is a collection of its past successes. Choose your warrior from a handful of favorites taken from five of Capcom's most popular games (Street Fighter II, Darkstalkers, Street Fighter III, Red Earth, and Street Fighter Alpha). Each fighter will retain the moves and style unique to his/her respective title, and can be used to unlock even more playable characters as the game progresses. Expect this game to stuff your fight-hole to capacity when it releases this winter.

PLAYSTATION 2

Mega Man X8

Mega Man has shown up in well over two dozen games since his first appearance on the NES. Capcom aims to add another to the list with their release of Mega Man X8 sometime this winter. After the lukewarm reception to the blue man's attempt at 3D in recent iterations, X8 looks to return the player to a far more two-dimensional environment, with 3D used primarily for effect and not function. Not surprisingly, it looks like Zero joins Mega Man as a playable character yet again. No word yet on who else we'll get to shoot stuff with.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Ghost Recon 2

After a string of new versions and mission packs, Ubisoft is ready to unveil a full-fledged Ghost Recon sequel. Launching in the fall, this title chronicles the story of a spectral woodland creature as he rummages through garbage cans, explores chimneys, and...wait, that's "Ghost Raccoon 2." In Ghost Recon 2, players will take part in a war between North Korea and China, using the deadliest military weapons and tactics. This sequel features revamped graphics, a new over-the-shoulder camera angle, and, of course, plenty of online goodness. So, who wants to hear more about the raccoon game? Anyone? No?

PLAYSTATION 2

Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires

There's something to be said for finding a formula that works, a fact Koei has often taken advantage of in its popular Dynasty Warriors series. Packed with the same frantic action and a touch of history, this new title also tries to inject more strategic elements. Bolster the strength of your empire by conquering neighboring lands, using their resources to fuel your continuing conquest. Fans of the series can expect to see this one before the end of the year, though an official release date hasn't been announced.

PLAYSTATION 2

EyeToy: AntiGrav

Debuting at E3 this year and set to come out in the fall, AntiGrav takes further advantage of Sony's newest phenom: the EyeToy. Players wear special armbands that tip off the camera's color and motion sensors and translate their movement to an onscreen hoverboard rider. Remember *Back to the Future 2*? Yeah, we all wanted a hoverboard too. Although AntiGrav won't help you escape to the clock tower in an idyllic suburban community, it will let you vicariously jump, duck, and perform sick tricks on crazy futuristic tracks.

PLAYSTATION 2

Armored Core: Nexus

Agetec plans to bring gamers something entirely new in its latest title: giant walking robots. Okay, maybe not so new. But Nexus promises to deliver one huge mech lovers' fantasy with a two-disc package that includes both redone missions from earlier games along with an entirely new set of stages comprising a full sequel. In total, we're looking at a whopping 150 missions along with 14 vs. Battle maps. Your mech can be upgraded with over 400 unique parts. There will also be unlockable music, movies, and game artwork to entice the truly hardcore. Expect to enter the Nexus late this year or early the next.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

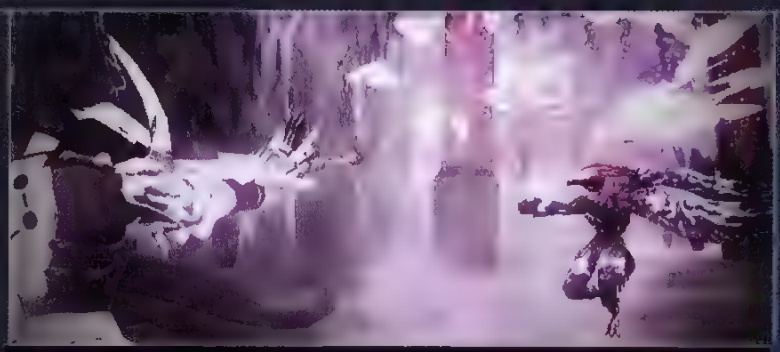
25 to Life

The game of cops and robbers will jump into the 21st century when Eidos' 25 to Life hits sometime next year. As either gangsters or police officers, players will be able to go online and shoot it out in close-quarters urban environments. If you've ever said to yourself "Man, I really like SOCOM, but it needs more gangsta rap and some pigs I can shoot," then this is the game for you!

PLAYSTATION 2

Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex

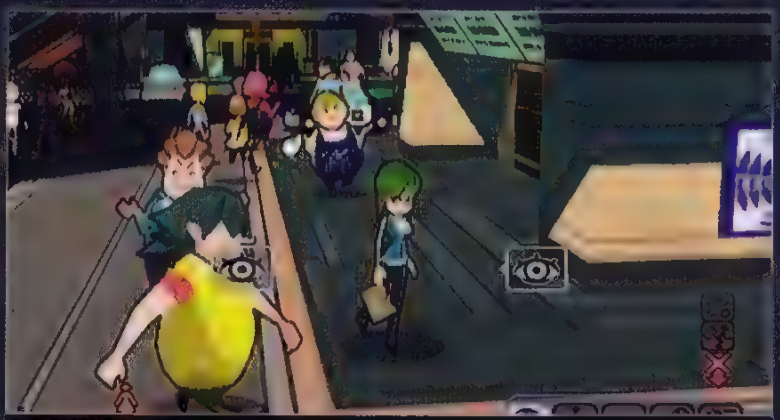
Hack your way into the existential future of Major Motoko and her companions in Bandai's much anticipated adaptation of the *Ghost in the Shell* TV series. And where does the newborn go from here? The net is vast and infinite, containing 15 weapons, 20 minutes of CGI sequences, a versus mode, and even four-player matches. Plus, since it is coming out in November – hot on the tails of the theatrical release of *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* – Stand Alone Complex promises to help rekindle interest in one of the most influential anime franchises to date.



XBOX

Otogi 2

When demons threaten Japan, there's nobody better suited to defend humanity than an unstoppable undead warrior. Unfortunately, Otogi's hero Raikoh had to go back to his eternal slumber after the events of the first game. That's where the other five playable characters in Otogi 2 come in – they sacrificed their lives to bring him back, then returned themselves to fight at his side. Players can choose which of the six to take on any given mission, and an entirely new graphics engine will detail the exploits of the undead posse. You'll be able to show Godzilla what saving Japan is all about this winter when Otogi 2 launches.



PLAYSTATION 2

Under the Skin

Capcom's "Quirky Game of Show" award goes to Under the Skin. With gameplay combining the large-scale crowds and mayhem of State of Emergency, the premise of Destroy All Humans, and the art style of Jet Grind Radio, this game looks to be unique at the very least. Besides the jaw-dropping craziness in every pixel, Under the Skin will have one more surprise when it launches in the fall – Jill and Nemesis from Resident Evil make an impressive appearance in one level.

XBOX

Spikeout: Battle Street

You young whippersnappers and your fancy-pants games! In our day, we played games called brawlers – classic titles like Streets of Rage and Final Fight. Those old-fashioned fighters were as tough as coffin nails, and that's the way we liked it, dagnabbit! That's why we were happy to hear that those nice young folks at Sega are bringing us Spikeout, a fully 3D brawler. It's got all the classic action we're hankering for, and it has four-player co-op via something called "Xbox Live." Look for Spikeout this winter, children. Now get off our porch!

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django

This September, the sequel to Konami's innovative solar-powered GBA title will hit store shelves. Continuing the series' use of a light to further gameplay (for good or ill, depending on who you ask), Boktai 2 will put more emphasis on the RPG aspects of the experience by offering new characters and cause-and-effect relations with the NPC interaction. The title will also offer a four-player head-to-head battle mode to see who can sit in the real outdoors – you know, the one with the sun – the longest.

PLAYSTATION 2

The King of Fighters Maximum Impact

We know it's hard to believe, but SNK is no longer sticking to its traditional formula of porting arcade classics of yore onto today's consoles. It is moving into the current millennium this September with the release of the first 3D King of Fighters title, Maximum Impact. A total of 16 characters will be pounding on each other, including both returning favorites and fresh meat. Maximum Impact will also feature four different jump moves, as well as a deep and intricate storyline. Okay, maybe we're kidding about that last one.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Fahrenheit

What do you do when some unknown dark force coerces you into killing a stranger in a New York bathroom? Good question. Sierra's Fahrenheit aims to let you find out through its player-dependent, twisting storyline. Not only will you discover what's behind the seemingly random murders from the perpetrator's point of view, but you'll also work to uncover the truth as three other characters, both hunter and hunted. Stay with us between now and Fahrenheit's winter launch for more details.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

The Shield

Bummed that no one ever made a video game adaptation of *The Commish*? Well, now your life will be slightly less empty, because Sammy's digital version of *The Shield* is shooting your way next spring. Players will take control of Detective Vic Mackey as he bullies, shoots, and otherwise injures those around him. And he's the good guy! Oh, what a grey, morally ambiguous world we live in.

PLAYSTATION 2

Cowboy Bebop

Bandai has got a treat in store for all of you space cowboys out there. In the upcoming Cowboy Bebop game, players will be able to use the distinctive fighting styles of Spike, Jet, and Faye as they beat down galactic scum and reap the rewards. In addition to containing multiple modes of play and unlockable characters, the game will also feature the series' trademark jazz music by Yoko Kanno. Plan on collecting this bounty in the fall, when it's sure to hit store shelves with a bang.

PLAYSTATION 2

Phantom Crash 2050

In the future that is post-apocolyptic 2071, football and car racing have been utterly replaced by mech combat as the premier spectator sport. Who knew? You'll be able to battle it out arcade style both off and online, and you'll get to choose between a first and third-person perspective. The online functionality allows for as many as eight players in one battle zone. There are hundreds of ways to customize your robot before challenging a buddy, and you'll fight in various arenas suitable for super-sized destruction, including London, New York, and Las Vegas. We're a little confused as to why the game is called 2050 since it is set in 2071 while being due for release sometime before the end of 2004.

GAMECUBE

Odama

What if you had to take on a feudal Japanese army, and your best weapon was... a giant pinball? This may sound like a spoiled sushi fever dream, but it's actually a new game from Nintendo! In Odama, which should hit sometime next year, players launch a giant rock ball at their enemies, crushing their defenses and converting troops to their side. While one player mans the flippers, a second player can rally the troops by playing drums on the Donkey Konga Bongo controller? Seriously, we're not making this up. Even for Nintendo, this game is weird, so naturally we can't wait to get our hands on it. Finally, a game that combines all our great passions: pinball, drumming, and violent military coups.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

DK: King of Swing

The swing music revival will never die! Whoo! Big Bad Voodoo Daddy rules! We just wanted an opportunity to say that. Donkey Kong's new GBA title actually has nothing to do with swing music (but it should). Instead, this new Nintendo title takes its name from the game's unique control mechanic. The L and R buttons on the GBA each control one of Donkey Kong's hands, and players will send him swinging through his quest to rescue his friends and stop the evil King K. Rool. This new GBA title swings into stores next year. Get it? Swing? Man, we're funny. Now, who wants to do the Lindy Hop?

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Kirby and The Amazing Mirror

Taking a page from the Four Swords book, Nintendo is giving another of its characters the multicolored multiplayer treatment. Using a link cable, up to four players can join in and enjoy an array of new powerups as they suck it up big time with Kirby. Though we're looking forward to seeing our favorite hoover-esque hero embark on another adventure, we do have our doubts about how amazing the titular mirror could possibly be. Can it undo the lines of disdain and cruelty that the years have etched into Reiner's face? We'll have to wait until October to find out.

XBOX

Outlaw Golf 2

The Outlaw series has always stood out for two reasons: trashy characters wearing as little clothing as possible, and undeniably solid play mechanics for their respective sports. This October, Global Star (a division of Take 2, for those of you not checking the news every day) will offer more of the same goodness in Outlaw Golf 2. Besides beating up your caddie to regain composure as you could in the first entry, a golf-cart trick driving game will also let you start swinging like a star again.

REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI

110

Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy

PS2

115

Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2

GC

117

Tales of Symphonia

XBOX

119

Metal Slug 3

118

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

We never would have guessed it, but being in jail is awesome! Far more than a simple star vehicle or another lame licensed game, Escape from Butcher Bay is not only one of the most graphically advanced games in history, it's one of the best titles for the Xbox, period. This prison escape adventure has a lot more to offer than you might expect, so turn to page 118 to check it out. Don't make us shank you.

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	Horrifying. This game is so frighteningly bad that it may take years of therapy to end the nightmares.

> **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.

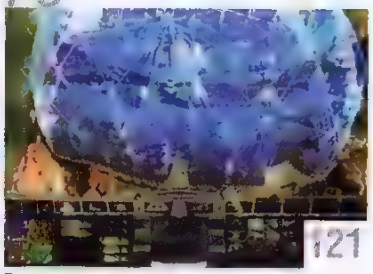
Moderately High – Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.

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.

PC



121

Perimeter

HANDHELD

123

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

120

PC GAME OF THE MONTH

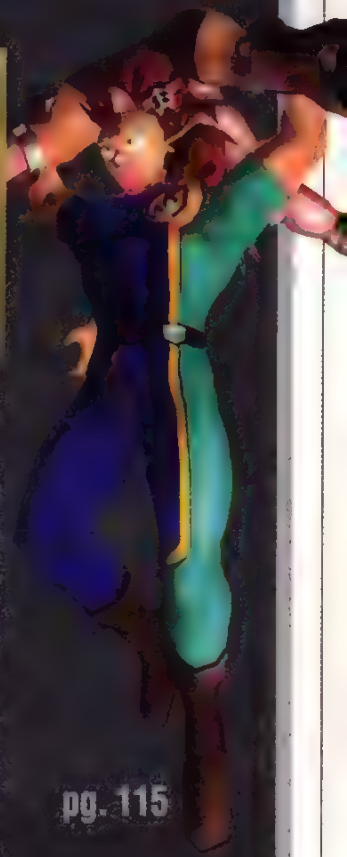
City of Heroes

Everybody needs an alter ego. Clark Kent is really Superman. Peter Parker moonlights as Spiderman. Bruce Wayne becomes Batman when night falls. Who will you be? City of Heroes lets you find out as it drops you into the disaster-ridden metropolis of Paragon City. With nearly endless character customization options and intensely fast paced high-powered action, this MMO makes spandex look good again. Find your new addiction on page 120.

REVIEWS INDEX

115

Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy 110
Mega Man Anniversary Collection 111
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (Multi) 111
NCAA Football 2004 112
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal 112
Strike Force Bowling 112
Shrek 2 112
Thief: Deadly Shadows 113
Van Helsing 114
MLB Slugfest Loaded 114
Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2 115
Galactic Wrestling Featuring Ultimate Muscle 115
UFC Sudden Impact 115
Way of the Samurai 2 116
Bujingai: The Forsaken City 116
Tales of Symphonia 117
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, The 118
Metal Slug 3 119
Full Spectrum Warrior 119
City of Heroes 120
Perimeter 121
Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots 121
Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle 122
Tiger Woods PGA 2004 123
Sims: Bustin' Out, The 123
Ashen 123
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (GBA) 123
Sonic Advance 3 123



pg. 115

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

This is where GI breaks down multi-platform games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

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	AO	Content suitable only for adults.
T	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older	RP	Product is awaiting final rating

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

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

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

minigame – A small, simple game within a larger one

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

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

N64 – Nintendo 64

NES – Nintendo Entertainment System

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

Panteranism – The condition of rocking harder than anyone else has rocked before

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

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

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

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

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

PSone – Sony PlayStation

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

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

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

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

SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL

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

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

Levitating enemies and opening fire beneath them is just as rewarding as the sword/gun trick in Devil May Cry

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY > **RELEASE** JUNE 14 > **ESRB** M

A CEREBRAL MASSACRE

From Obi-Wan Kenobi fooling the Empire with his Jedi mind tricks to Professor X's uncanny ability to convince gorgeous women to join his ranks, there is nothing more desirable in this world than psychic powers. Over the last few years we've seen a handful of games toy with metaphysical abilities, but not to the extent that Midway has with Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy.

Even without the telepathic hook, this release could have easily stood on its own two feet as a respectable run-and-gun action game. When you apply mental capabilities to the finely polished action that Midway has in place, Psi-Ops transforms into a juggernaut that delivers lethal dosages of innovative, in-your-face gameplay. Words cannot accurately describe the level of excitement that is delivered when you use telekinesis to levitate an enemy's body and fling them like a rag doll into a blazing incinerator, or tap into mind control to assume the identities of your attackers and obliterate their entire squad. You truly experience things that you've never done in a game before, and the way that Midway has incorporated these elements is a stroke of genius.

Being able to walk into a room, mentally lift any object within the nearby vicinity, then hurl it at a sprinting enemy is in itself a heavy load for any developer to attempt. Accomplishing this with ease of user interaction is even more impressive, yet Midway has managed to make telekinesis just as easy as firing a shot with a gun. In such, your typical gameplay scenario unfolds with debris whirling in the air along with numerous bodies. Tapping into Havok physics, accurate object movement and human rag doll effects add to the realism and bring about one amusing action-packed sequence after another. The other abilities in the game such as pyrokinesis, mind drain, remote viewing, and aura view are just as easy to manipulate and add variety to the mix. The effects that accompany each power are done beautifully, and in a way that doesn't seem too extraordinary or superhuman.

Story also plays a very large role in this adventure and can best be compared to Metal Gear Solid. The villains and the battles against them are way over the top. One such encounter leads to the adversary mentally lifting and hurling trucks in your direction. Another contains psionically controlled human bombs. No matter who you find yourself fighting, be it an ordinary guard or a boss, you're in for an explosive fight. The game even goes so far as to track statistics for the number of explosions that you caused and total property damage.

The missions are a little too cookiecutter for my liking, and I don't care for the plot twist mid-game, but I really can't ask for much more from the gameplay package. The means with which you can dispose of enemies is expansive. Do you use a sniper rifle? Enter his mind and have him walk up to and shoot a gas tank? Or do you tap into telekinesis, lift his body off the ground, then riddle him mid-air with bullets?

Psi-Ops may sound like Generic Action Game Number 2,540, yet it's unlike any title you've seen before, and will likely leave you breathless and craving more when the credits roll.—**REINER**

"Mmmm... Tastes like chicken!"

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Psychological warfare with explosive action, a compelling story, and a wildly amusing and highly original gameplay package

> **Graphics:** Nicely detailed environments and character models, but the effects and lighting are mostly average

> **Sound:** A superb score, and great effects for the psychic powers

> **Playability:** As should be the case, the psychic powers steal the show and create some amazing moments. It really couldn't control any better

> **Entertainment:** A new breed of action with a killer gameplay hook

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 9

I must admit, I really wasn't expecting much out of Psi-Ops. But, once I worked through the tutorial and the game started to unfold before my eyes, I quickly found myself quite addicted to this gem. From the story to the run-and-gun action, everything is done undeniably well, especially the puzzles and psionic powers. You can use your mind control to literally pop the heads off your enemies like they were ripe tomatoes. It sounds gross, but it is incredibly fun. The puzzles also use your powers to great effect. I don't want to spoil anything, but let's just say I've never used an enemy's body as a battering ram to get myself out of a jam before. There aren't a lot of differences between the Xbox and PS2 version, so basically this game is good on either platform. If you are looking for a title that is surprisingly fresh and fun at the same time, I highly recommend you check out Psi-Ops.—**ANDY**

HIDDEN POWERS OF THE MIND — PICTURED BELOW ARE IMAGES OF THE POWERS THAT PLAYERS CAN TAP INTO

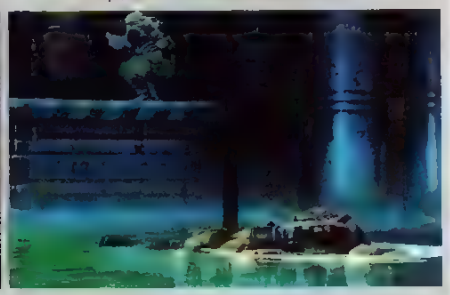
If you master the art of telekinesis, you can TK surf on objects

Tapping into aura vision shows things that are hidden from the naked eye

Pyrokinesis can be used to clear out rooms

Mind drain sucks telepathic power from enemies

Assume the identity of your enemy with mind control



With remote viewing, you can see your surroundings before heading there

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Mega Man Anniversary Collection

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** JUNE 22 > **ESRB** E

AN ANNIVERSARY WORTH REMEMBERING

If there's one thing I took away from Anniversary Collection, it's that the displacing rock monster in Dr. Wily's castle is one of the hardest bosses ever. To make things worse, the trick where you repeatedly hit the Select button to make your Elec Beam register multiple hits won't work this time around, which means you have to take him out the old fashioned way.

If I just lost you at "displacing rock monster," then you could use a history lesson – consider Anniversary Collection your assigned reading. Mega Man ranks right up there with Mario and Samus as an icon who defined an era of gaming. With titles releasing across many platforms, from the NES onward, he has enjoyed a tenure few others can claim; Anniversary Collection reminds us how he got to where he is today, and why he deserves it.

This game has everything you could want from a compilation. It has all eight Mega Man games, so you can witness the evolution of the series as you relive the titles that made up the blue bomber's initial run. It also has a boatload of unlockables, including artwork, interviews, and two games never released Stateside. It is noteworthy, however, that there is no content from the Mega Man X games, since that series is actually a spinoff from the original franchise.

Anniversary Collection is packed with tons of nostalgia, unique weapons (including the suspiciously fanciful "Top Spin"), and more hardcore 2D shooting and platforming than you can shake an arm cannon at. If you pine for your younger days when you could effortlessly fire off rounds of Search Snakes, you owe it to yourself to pick up this testament to one of gaming's true legends.—**JOE**

■ This is a shot from one of the unlockable fighting games

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Anthologize the adventures of gaming's most popular little blue robot

> **Graphics:** All games appear in their original form, with no visual enhancements

> **Sound:** An in-depth study of the evolution of the "blip"

> **Playability:** If you need more than jump, shoot and pause, then you're a high-falootin' snob

> **Entertainment:** The next best thing to taking Mega Man intravenously

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

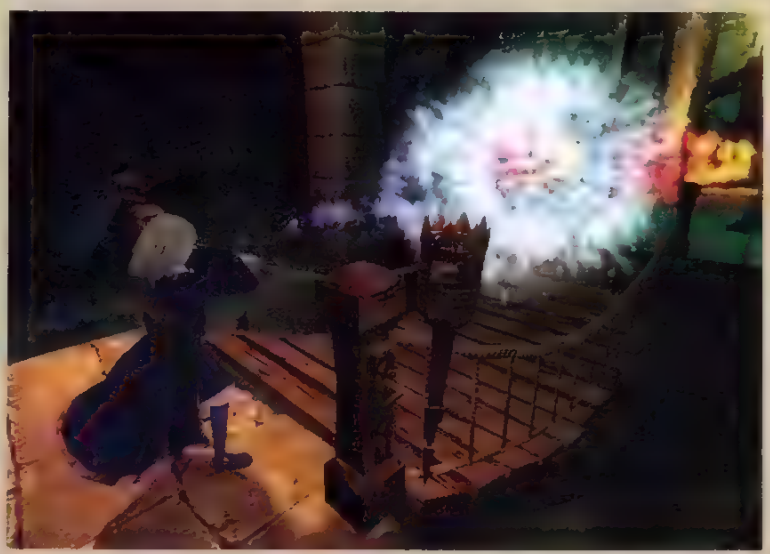
Second Opinion 8.5

The sheer value of this package is tremendous. Any fan of the series would be foolish to not snatch up a copy of this immense anthology post haste. The entire early history of one of the original gaming icons is represented here. Newer gamers should be aware of the challenging aspect of these early 2D action games – which seems even more daunting now in the face of the often breezy games of today. But any frustration should be easily averted through vibrant characters, varied weapons, and the always oddly memorable tunes. As a note: If you bought everything on this disc at its original cost, you'd be spending well over $400.—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **RELEASE** JUNE 2 > **ESRB** E



I HAVE TO ADMIT IT'S GETTING BETTER

Harry Potter has probably been one of the biggest video game disappointments of recent years. Electronic Arts usually comes through with top quality games to match their big licenses, as has been shown in its generally excellent work with The Lord of the Rings and James Bond franchises. However, the Hogwarts gang never seemed to warrant much more than a half-hearted effort at Zelda-style adventuring, minus all the genius parts. I wish I could say that Prisoner of Azkaban was a bold new start for the series. It's not, but this is a significantly better game than either of the previous entries (Quidditch World Cup notwithstanding).

It's still essentially the same formula – basic platformer puzzle solving interspersed with spell-casting combat, exploration, and brief flying sequences – but somehow the whole package seems a bit more refined. The graphics are more sophisticated, the tasks a bit more interesting, the camera system has been improved, and the action is a bit less aggravating. Also, the concept of switching between characters and using different spells in different situations is fleshed out to a greater degree than in the past. But, I should say before I finish damning this title with faint praise, that I do see this as a fairly decent product for the very young and Potter-crazed. However, I am neither, and as such it's merely another barely adequate character action game in a crowded market.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Another adventure following the storyline of a blockbuster book and film

> **Graphics:** Much improved over the last one – it actually looks like a current generation game!

> **Sound:** As with the entire Potter series, it makes nice use of orchestral and film score quality music

> **Playability:** It's not great, but progress is being made slowly but surely

> **Entertainment:** A couple more sequels, and EA might actually make a great Potter game

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.5

This game has better production values than the others, but it fails to be that movie-extravaganza experience we've come to expect from EA. The gameplay is more varied, but I believe that you can inspire a young audience with more sophisticated concepts instead of patronizing them. The targeting will have you more snarled than Hermione's hair in the morning. I'll paraphrase what your teachers have probably been telling you for years, "Harry isn't applying himself to his studies."—**KATO**

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Electronic Arts probably does more cross-platform game development than any other in the industry, and its experience shows. Unless you're an extreme graphics snob, you're not going to find huge differences between any of the three systems. However, it should be said that this game is only mediocre in that department to begin with, which means there's no huge Max Payne or Splinter Cell-style visual drop-off between the Xbox and PS2. However, the developers have done something interesting (and very commendable) with the PlayStation 2 version by including some EyeToy minigames. They aren't amazing, just simple little contests similar to those in EyeToy: Play, but I think it's a nice touch that adds some replay value and will probably be well appreciated by Potter's audience – certainly more than the little-used GBA/GC connectivity gimmick. I certainly hope more companies start looking at doing similar things with the EyeToy.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NCAA Football 2005

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** JULY 13 > **ESRB** E

BULLETIN BOARD MATERIAL

BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

I was disappointed in last year's NCAA for a few reasons. The main one was that I felt that the game artificially created too many big plays in an attempt to replicate the feel of college ball. Ironically, this title is all about creating that same atmosphere, and I couldn't be happier about how NCAA goes about doing it.

For big rivalry games or in certain stadiums, home crowds will go crazy (you can pump them up with L2). It makes the camera shake wildly and your palms sweat. The effect of this is that your wide receiver might not be able to hear his hot route because of the noise (and therefore he'll run his original pattern instead), or a rattled QB might choke and overthrow a key third-down pass. Under these circumstances, you've got to keep your composure. You can check how everyone is doing before the snap with the Match-up stick (the right analog). Now you can pick on a shaky linebacker with a sweep to his side or send a stud cornerback to blitz an already frazzled QB. I like this method of creating atmosphere because you can control it, instead of it feeling like the AI is deciding things for or against you. For instance, you can quiet a hostile crowd and boost the confidence of your QB by completing a few easy passes to start the game or through a strong running attack. I loved scoring first as an away team and causing the crowd to eat a big plate of shut the hell up. You can also get things under control by calling a timeout, during which your coach boosts the morale of a particular segment of your team, such as the WRs. This is what a big-time NCAA game feels like, and I love it.

The game also contains some nice brutal hits, including user-controlled ones by pressing the L2 button. In all, it felt like the players had a slightly lower center of gravity. This allows not only for a good running back to become extra shifty through better lateral movement (without even having to use the juke button), but it also gives defenders an extra punch to their hits. You can feel textbook tackles where guys really plant and drive a running back. If there's a few sticking points, it's that I still feel like players sometimes automatically engage each other like magnets (such as when you're trying to sack the QB and you instead become locked up with a nearby lineman). Also, the AI can take some bad angles to the ball carrier.

Yes, there are improvements to Dynasty mode that I could also go on about, such as reprimanding players for breaking team or NCAA rules, a new scouting option when recruiting, and points you can earn to improve your school's program. However, that's all stuff for the dean's office. I want to get out there and feel the love and hate of a stadium full of fans ready to celebrate the heroes and villains of a Saturday afternoon.—**KATO**

> **Concept:** NCAA takes a big step towards being more than a Madden stopgap

> **Graphics:** The new looks for time of day are surprisingly effective mood setters

> **Sound:** Not only can you command the home crowd to cheer, but it will automatically swell during a big play or complain about a bad call

> **Playability:** Both WRs and DBs are very aware of the ball, making for some good aerial battles

> **Entertainment:** NCAA contains innovations that make it a must-have

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.25

The NCAA series has always clung tightly to the Madden formula. With this year's release, EA is breaking free from the pros and is innovating in ways that better suit the college experience. In such, the stadiums are now abuzz with excitement, and the crowd plays a critical role in the outcome of a game. Visiting teams will need to fight against the deafening roar of the fans. As the noise level builds, the visiting player's controller will vibrate and the screen will shake. Player composure is also factored in. The gameplay hasn't changed too much, but it is tighter, and the new running back and defensive moves give you a little something extra.—**REINER**

MULTI-SYSTEM QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA SPORTS > **RELEASE** MAY 4 > **ESRB** E

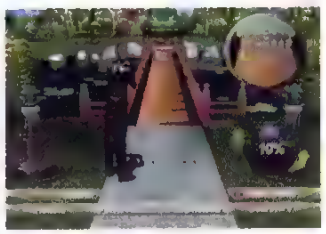
You're probably wondering what UEFA is and what it means to you. Not much. The Euro tournament is like The World Cup, but only for European countries. It's every four years, and is an excuse for grown men to beat each other up and cry in the streets. But only in Europe, mind you. Despite some slightly better AI, a new defensive swarm button, and setting up a qualifying schedule (then monitoring your roster to see who's morale is low), there isn't much here. Unless, of course, you have to follow the every move and new hairstyle of David Beckham like Joe does. I'd say save your euros and go buy some "medicine" next time you're in Amsterdam, instead. If EA insists I pay $40 on this mid-year installment (like its World Cup games), then I insist on a better game.—**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

BOTTOM LINE **5**

Strike Force Bowling

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** CRAVE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** LAB RATS GAMES > **RELEASE** MAY > **ESRB** E



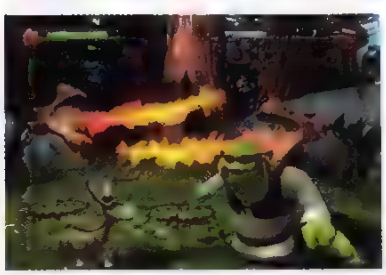
When I saw the words "Strike Force" in the title, I was hoping this game would be packed full of elite, government-trained bowlers with lasers and jetpacks. Instead, I got something entirely conventional and jetpack-free. SFB doesn't have a career mode, a create-a-bowler option (despite the fact that one of the characters looks remarkably like a certain executive editor), or anything else to offer apart from its accurate ball and pin physics. It has a few unlockables and modes of play, and though some of them are kind of cool (like cosmic bowling), the game fails in the simple task of capturing the excitement of actual bowling.—**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

BOTTOM LINE **7**

Shrek 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** LUXOFLUX CORP > **RELEASE** MAY 5 > **ESRB** E



I'll admit it. Shrek 2 surprised me. I was expecting yet another derivative title of questionable quality. On the contrary, the green ogre delivers with an entirely solid gaming experience. The fairly standard mission progression moves through a largely unremarkable platform landscape. Innovation lies in the use of four characters that you must control in cooperation. You'll get to play as most of the memorable cast, and each is voiced by some of the best sound-alikes I've heard. The game is marred by a sadly inadequate camera system and occasionally frustrating objective-finding. I also would have loved to see a little more of the adult innuendo and cleverness that made the film such a universal favorite. As it is, the jokes cater mostly to the kids, and that's exactly who should enjoy this fairy tale jaunt the most.—**MILLER**

XBOX | PC

Thief: Deadly Shadows

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** EIDOS **> DEVELOPER** ION STORM **> RELEASE** MAY 25 **> ESRB** M

HIDING FROM THE FUTURE

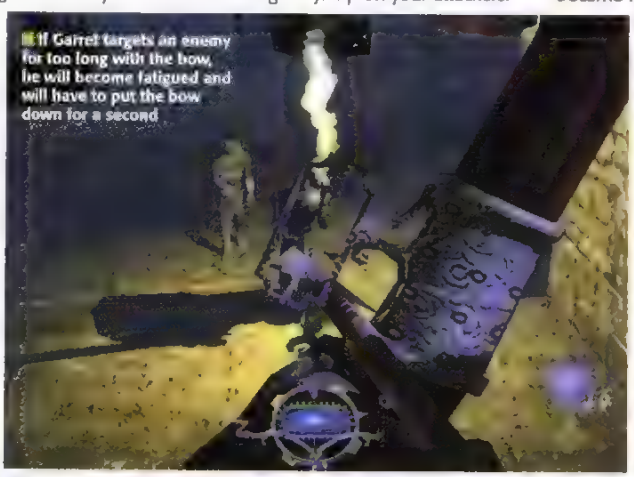
Innovation is everything. It's a sad fact, yet something that this industry is madly obsessed with. Developers strive to achieve it, consumers demand it, and if you don't have it at the end of the day, you're dead in the water and bound to hit bargain bins in a matter of weeks. Over the last few years, the stealth genre in particular has exploded, and with each new release that hits the market, innovation is the driving force. Although the Thief series has had a large hand in the modernization of stealth games and is considered one of its pioneers, name recognition will only bring it so far. It has a huge hill to climb to make another significant impact in this rapidly growing genre.

With Ion Storm replacing Looking Glass Studios at the development helm, I found myself wary that Ion wouldn't understand the vision of the series, yet at the same time exuberant in the expectation that it could breathe new life into this highly renowned franchise. As it turns out, both angles of my prediction hit the nail directly on the head. Ion Storm's involvement can best be viewed as a double-edged sword. In such, this game can best be summed up as both slick and slight.

First the good: This is a stunningly gorgeous game that will often have you staring at the screen in disbelief. The realism of texturing, extensive use of shadow casting, incredible character model details, and beautiful lighting effects paint a masterpiece of a picture that has a look and feel all its own. On the gameplay front, Ion is definitely well versed with the tools of the trade for stealth titles. Throughout every second of play, you'll find yourself ducking in and out of shadows, trailing enemies on patrol, and using the environment to your advantage -- whether it be firing a water arrow at a chandelier to douse the lit candles or ducking behind furniture to avoid detection. The game also takes a tip from the Splinter Cell series with a nifty rumble/sound-based lock picking technique. Later in the game, you will obtain climbing gloves that let you scale walls and get a jump on your attackers.

Now the bad: While it achieves a staggering level of brilliance on many levels, it also hits new lows in other areas. For instance, the intelligence of your adversaries is so pathetic that it's often laughable to the point of drawing comparisons to the Three Stooges. In one such sequence, I had an enemy chasing me in circles around a pillar in the center of a room. After five or six laps, the enemy still hadn't caught on to what I was doing and eventually became fatigued. After catching his breath, he forgot that he was chasing me. I just walked up behind him and impaled the guy with my dagger. The same goes for hiding behind boxes. The enemy will eventually lose any thought that he or she really wanted to slit your throat. Stealth kills are also poorly expressed and often deliver the sensation that you simply tapped your foe on the shoulder. As if it could get worse, bow targeting is wildly unpredictable.

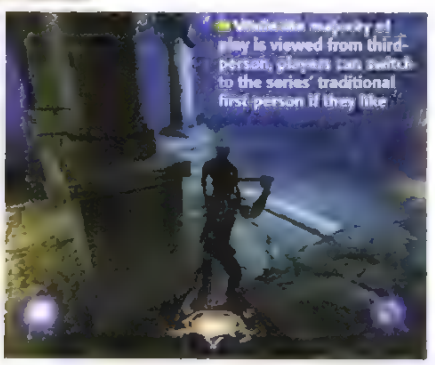
Despite sensationally attractive visuals and familiar gameplay techniques that have worked for other games, Thief doesn't have the innovation or sound mechanics that gamers demand and can easily get from titles like Splinter Cell. It's a decent play, but it didn't steal my heart the way that I had hoped.—**REINER**



If Garrett targets an enemy for too long with the bow, he will become fatigued and will have to put the bow down for a second

With the gloves equipped, Garrett can scale walls

The lock-picking mechanic screams Splinter Cell



While the majority of play is viewed from third-person, players can switch to the series' traditional first-person if they like

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> Concept: Steal from the rich, lurk in the shadows, and marvel at the magnificent visuals

> Graphics: Mouthwatering realism appears in the texturing, character modeling, and lighting effects. The character animations are also very impressive

> Sound: The wacky NPC dialogue doesn't fit the tone of the game. The soundtrack is completely forgettable as well

> Playability: The controls are perfect for the action at hand. Unfortunately, the AI and combat mechanics are lacking

> Entertainment: A decent game of hide and seek, but far below the standards of today's stealth titles

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

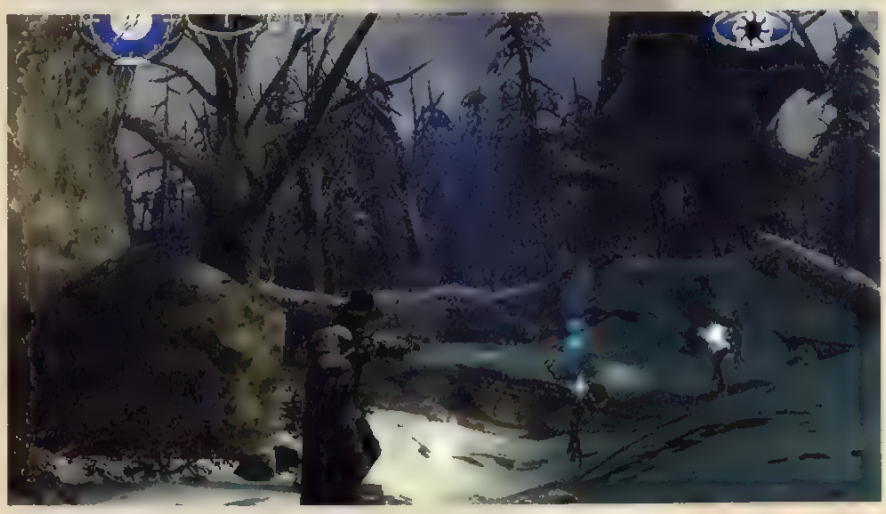
Stealing and murdering is fun! I have to give Thief credit for anticipating the things a player will want to do, and then allowing him/her to do them. Shoot a torch out of someone's hand with an arrow? Done. Kill an innocent man in his sleep? Go for it, you classy devil. These little tidbits fit so well into the normal course of the game that it plays almost seamlessly except for one nagging problem—the AI is tragically stupid. In one case I actually walked right in front of a sentry, the bleeding corpse of his comrade slung over my shoulder like a sack of stolen, soggy potatoes, and he didn't so much as tilt his head. If I'm trying to get my thieve on, I at least like to think I'm up against a challenge. Then again, I also like to have some concept of who I am and why I'm stealing. But sadly, Thief lacks the memorable characters or story of a Metal Gear or Splinter Cell game, so I never truly felt that I needed to sneak as though my life depended on it.—**JOE**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Van Helsing

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > **DEVELOPER** SAFFIRE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MAY 7 > **ESRB** T



NO HARDCORE CRED'

Here's a requirement that must be met before playing Vivendi Universal's Van Helsing: hardcore elitism is to be checked at the door. Like the movie, any fun that could be had is only going to present itself to the shameless – those who aren't going to compare it to other higher-brow entries in the action genre and scoff at its sometimes chunky character models or odd camera angles. Those shirking the responsibilities of good taste will have fun with Van Helsing, as long as they just don't think about it too much.

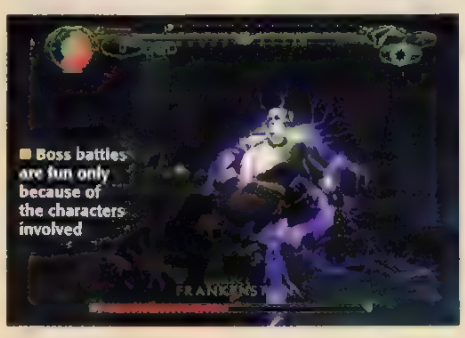
Following the story of a man sent by the Vatican to eliminate a great evil in 19th century Transylvania, Van Helsing features boss fights with Dracula, Frankenstien's Monster, and the Wolfman. Legends for sure, but their plot connection is tenuous at best. At times, I suspected that Transylvania had been converted into a rest home for the mutated and evil or a hippy-style commune for those seeking world domination. Either way, contemplating the how and why of this tale will only bring you pain.

Instead, players should focus on just kicking ass. This action dynamic is (thankfully) the largest slice of the Van Helsing pie and generally delivers the cool factor, strategic battles, and swarms of enemies in a way that's very reminiscent of the first Devil May Cry. Now, don't go and get all elitist on me. I'm not saying that Van Helsing is as good as DMC, only that the enemy juggling, fast-paced, dual-wielding action is *reminiscent*. Keep that distinction in mind because Van Helsing, like a lot of movie licensed action games, has its issues.

For one, the player has no control over camera angles. Presumably, this makes the experience more cinematic, but I found that it often offered abrupt changes in viewpoint or an inadequate display of the otherwise interesting locations. The sudden camera switches, coupled with the game's auto-targeting (which does work quite well) meant that on more occasions than I would have liked, my little asskicker was shooting foes off-screen. This is, admittedly, a pet peeve of mine and may not bother others nearly as much.

In addition, while the areas looked interesting, my interaction with them was minimal and kind of weird. Why is this warrior of (almost literally) biblical proportions breaking boxes to find trinkets in order to buy new moves? Other than the destructible crates, areas offer minimal interaction or exploration, which is a bummer.

Still, despite these shortcomings, Van Helsing manages to maintain a tongue-in-cheek cheese factor that makes the journey entertaining enough…in that shameless softcore kind of way.—**LISA**



Boss battles are fun only because of the characters involved

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Bringing the movie to home consoles with Devil May Cry-style action

> **Graphics:** Hit and miss. Some models are really great, others look like Lego people

> **Sound:** Dynamic score phases in and out with the onscreen action to raise the tension level Voice over work supplied by the cast is excellent

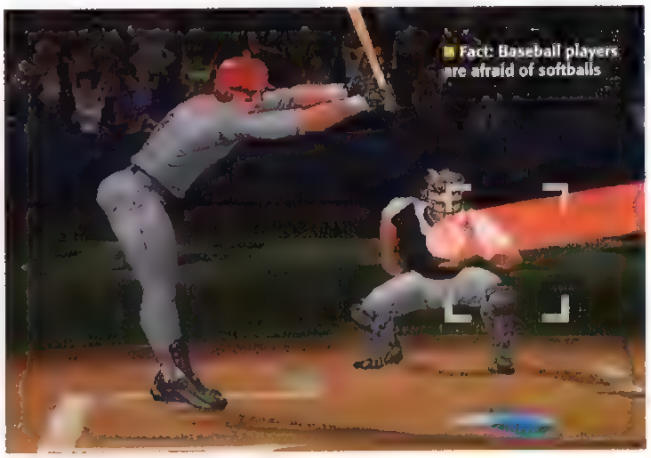
> **Playability:** Shamelessly fun This isn't a hardcore title, but the action is effective

> **Entertainment:** Fast-paced and certainly not deep – like the movie

> **Replay Value:** Moderately low

Second Opinion 6.75

In the video game world, Hollywood's summer blockbusters usually translate into tears of remorse, and consoles being flung from windows. With Van Helsing, there will be no tossing of hardware or property damage, but it will likely still lead to the shedding of a tear or two. In every conceivable way, this game is a poor man's Devil May Cry. While it does suffer from generic level designs, horrible camera work, and unimpressive visuals, it excels in delivering fast-paced, monster ass-kicking with a bit of style. Whether you find yourself juggling enemies with dual pistol fire, using your grappling hook to bring a flying adversary down to earth, or pumping a shotgun point blank, it really does feel good to dispose of your attackers. Unfortunately, these thrills don't last long; this is an incredibly short game that offers nothing in terms of replay.—**REINER**



Fact: Baseball players are afraid of softballs

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

MLB Slugfest Loaded

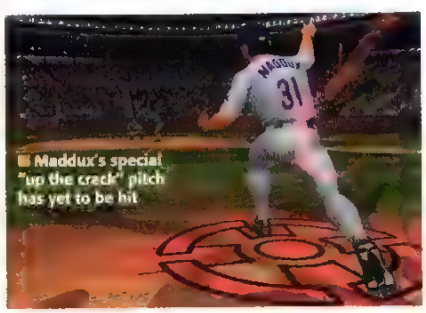
> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY > **RELEASE** JUNE 15 > **ESRB** T

BAD NEWS BASEBALL

This is the video game equivalent of getting beaned in the family jewels by a blazing Nolan Ryan fastball. Of course, your voice won't jump a few octaves, and you won't walk cross-legged after playing it, but it does have the uncanny ability to make you squirm uncomfortably and scream obscene amounts of profanity. Since you won't have the option to charge the mound and retaliate against the development team, it's in your best interest to avoid this game like you would a night out on the town with Darryl Strawberry.

With this year's release, Midway's development agenda has changed dramatically. While trick pitches, battles on the base paths, and nonsensical ramblings by the commentary team remain a large part of this experience, the feeling sinks in that Midway would rather do away with this absurdity and create a normal game of baseball. With the inclusion of Baseball Mogul statistical tracking and a new mode that simulates the realism of the sport, this is precisely what Midway tried to do. The result is a game that suffers from an identity crisis.

The gameplay is just as rewarding as it has always been. The new pressure sensitive pitching mechanic is a nice addition (although it still has a way to go to catch MVP's), and the play moves along at a nice pace. Unfortunately, the AI is still troubled in fielding and base running. Outside of new pitch types and fielding animations, the over-the-top angle hasn't evolved at all in this iteration, and the new simulation aspect pales in comparison to all of the other titles on the market. All told, it brings nothing new to the table and has lost the allure that kept me playing.—**REINER**



Maddux's special "up the crack" pitch has yet to be hit

BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> **Concept:** Add the realism of the sport to a game that needed a stronger arcade presence

> **Graphics:** Decent player model and stadium detailing Animations are hit and miss

> **Sound:** The commentary is amusing and easily the best part of this game

> **Playability:** Not a lot of new material has been included It still plays well, but AI issues remain and the simulation aspect doesn't feature proper balancing

> **Entertainment:** Tries to provide both arcade and simulation, yet does neither very well

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.25

If Barry Bonds stopped hitting homers, would baseball fans still love him? Probably not. What if Midway made a realistic baseball title? I think you know where this is heading… Slugfest fails because it subtracts the goofy stuff, but it doesn't add anything to make it more sim-like Although the franchise stats are interesting, realism on the field is what we need before this series belongs in the sim category. I will say, however, that I like that you can toggle on or off any of Slugfest's options, meaning you can go through the game with special pitches turned off, for instance. This lets you play your own brand of ball Barry without home runs? Nah, not interested —**KATO**

No, you're not crazy. This game looks like crap

PLAYSTATION 2

Galactic Wrestling Featuring Ultimate Muscle

> STYLE 1 TO-4 PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** BANDAI **> DEVELOPER** AKI CORPORATION **> RELEASE** JUNE 29 **> ESRB** T

ULTIMATE CRAP

This game stinks. That's really all there is to it. Ultimate Muscle: Legends vs. New Generations for the GameCube had the same shallow combat as Galactic Wrestling, but that game also had nice cel-shaded graphics, a wacky Create-A-Wrestler mode, and a very quirky story mode. Galactic Wrestling has none of these, so all that's left are a few different short modes to play through, bland graphics, boring combat, and the worst announcing team ever.

Although there is a wealth of fighters to choose from, combat is the same no matter who you select. The only real difference in their moves is the special attacks, which trigger a cutscene when used. Sadly, these are exactly the same moves featured in the GameCube title, only with far lamer graphics.

I could go on and on about all the reasons that this game sucks, but who really cares? Does anyone want to hear about its horrible collision detection, repetitive commentary, shallow move set, and drab, lifeless textures? If you're not a fan of the toys, there's no reason to even consider playing this, and if you are a fan, the unlockable figure museum is the only enjoyment you might dredge out of this ugly, boring fighter. —**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 4.25

> Concept: Characters based on tiny pink toys duke it out in the squared circle

> Graphics: No, your wrestler can't phase through solid matter, it's just crappy collision

> Sound: Like hearing the same three lines of commentary over and over again? This game is for you!

> Playability: Anyone who can mindlessly pound buttons can master this one

> Entertainment: Only Japanophiles and toy collectors will find the slightest interest in this lame, shallow fighter

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 4.75

I'm trying to think of a reason you should play this game. Nope. Isn't gonna happen. Wrestling buffs should play one of the many other genre titles that don't make you want to pile drive yourself. Fans of the series can go play the vastly superior GameCube title. Fans of not being bored can play just about anything else. I might consider recommending this title to someone with masochistic tendencies, but I'm just not that mean. —**MILLER**

"Ha ha! I'm gonna make you watch *Autumn in New York!*"

PLAYSTATION 2

Smash Court Pro Tournament 2

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

FAILS TO HOLD SERVE

Tennis is a tricky sport to review, because a huge part of what makes a racket title great is that elusive and hard-to-define quality called "feel." It's something that anyone can sense within playing a game for five minutes, but try to describe it and you end up sounding like some tweedy old music professor pontificating about John Coltrane.

Basically what feel comes down to is a sense of total ease with the control scheme; every move you make feels totally natural and exactly as you intended. A few tennis games (most notably the classic Super Tennis, Virtua Tennis, and last year's Top Spin) have accomplished that. Smash Court Tennis 2, sadly, does not. In attempting to make timing crucial to the velocity of a return shot (which sounds great on paper), the developers have made the game feel somehow out of whack. My biggest problem is the fact that you can't hold down a shot button to pre-load a swing – the computer takes the backswing for you – something that seems contrary to the way most tennis games have operated in the past. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 5

> Concept: Another tennis title with a good selection of pros, but no real horsepower

> Graphics: Definitely improved, and as good as any in the genre

> Sound: Deadly boredom ahoy!

> Playability: Feels awkward and choppy where it should be fluid and intuitive

> Entertainment: If you must have a new PS2 tennis title, this is all you'll get, but not recommended

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 4

You would think that making a "craptacular" tennis game would be rather difficult, but Smash Court 2 manages to accomplish this monstrous feat with ease. While there are some highlights to the play control – like how precise you can be with your serves, most of the play is vastly subpar when compared to VirtuaTennis or Top Spin. I will give the game some credit, as there are a nice selection of licensed players and some decent graphics, but overall, it offers little to no enjoyment. —**ANDY**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

UFC Sudden Impact

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE **> DEVELOPER** OPUS CORP **> RELEASE** APRIL 12 **> ESRB** T

MAN ON MAN ACTION

Ultimate Fighting Championship titles may be the only licensed game that suffer for being too faithful to their source material. Real UFC matches are quick, dirty, and usually over before you can figure out who's who. The same can be said about UFC: Sudden Impact. The matches themselves typically last less time than they take to load.

UFC aficionados will appreciate the huge roster of fighters, including several unlockable and hidden characters. Custom characters can be created in story mode, and their stats improve based on the exercises you complete. I had a fun time building up my character (who goes by the ultra-tough name Sweetiepie "Honeybunch" Johnson) in the three-year-long training section, but was let down when I got into the real tournament mode. Matches can be won too easily by button-mashing, and combos are more trouble to pull off than they are worth. But the brutal realism of UFC fighting is certainly retained; pinning a guy against the wall and pounding his head savagely usually leads to a victory, no matter how impressive his stats may be. The bottom line is that unless you love UFC, this probably isn't the fighter for you. —**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> Concept: Battle through the ranks of fighters as either a real UFC star or your own custom character

> Graphics: Character models are pretty realistic, and there's really nothing else to look at

> Sound: Sounds just like a real UFC match, only with less cussing from the crowd

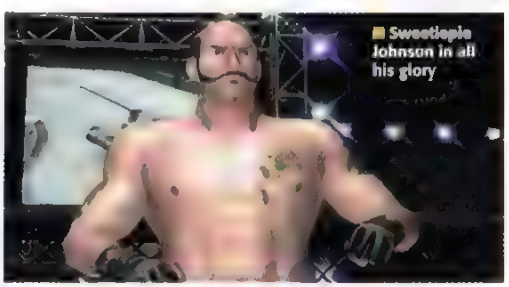
> Playability: While there are tons of moves for each fighter, button mashing is the best strategy

> Entertainment: Only recommended for those who like watching sweaty men roll around on the ground

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 6

My appreciation of the ebb-and-flow of the grappling moves is undermined by this game's inconsistency. I never really felt that I was using skill to play because either the match would end in an inexplicable flurry, or the combos I was inputting weren't connecting. The career mode is like a Phish song – lots of work, with none of the payoff. The "training" you undergo doesn't even teach you anything, but at least you've learned to stay away from this title! —**KATO**



Sweetiepie Johnson in all his glory

PLAYSTATION 2

Way of the Samurai 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** ACQUIRE
> **RELEASE** JULY 6 > **ESRB** M

SAMURAI SHAME

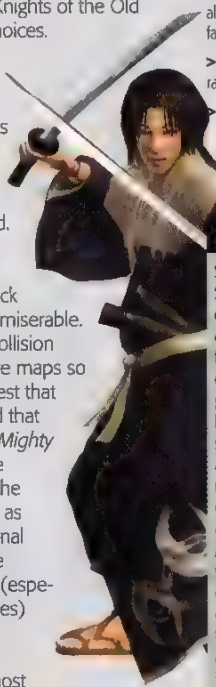
Sometimes, I weep for the samurai. They always seem to get the screw – especially when games like Way of the Samurai 2 come out and sully their hardcore street cred even more. This sequel, like its predecessor, is a mix of sword fighting combo-laden action coupled with an RPG-esque character progression and story.

Players start as a samurai entering the town of Amahara – a city on the brink of chaos as the Magistrates (good guys) attempt to keep control. The Aoto gang, whose noble leader recently passed away, is in turmoil and the likely successor is a cruel, mobster type of fellow. You can align yourself with either organization and the game offers many branching events like Knights of the Old Republic's dark/light Force choices.

The bulk of the gameplay is in the form of strategic, timing-based swordfighting action. While it's true that the fights can, given time, be sort of awesome, the road to this elusive fun is long, tedious, and ill-designed.

Still, I haven't even started on the graphics, voice acting, soundtrack, and plot. The quick and dirty version? They're all miserable. The models are blocky, the collision laughably bad, and the texture maps so lacking in personality or interest that I couldn't be more convinced that this was a long-lost set from *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. The voice acting will go down in the annals of video game history as particularly awful. The polygonal tearing on everything and the repetitive, clunky animations (especially during in-game cutscenes) are equally as terrible.

The first title was generally deemed just above par by most reviewers when it released – this one is honestly a sad, sad day for the samurai. Like those vacuum-powered hair trimmers, this one sucks while it cuts.—**LISA**



BOTTOM LINE 3.25

> **Concept:** Develop a sequel for a game that most people liked okay

> **Graphics:** Ewwww. Muddy, icky textures and bland, blocky environments are the good parts

> **Sound:** The stuttering goon and the bad nu-metal infused Japanese ditty that plays over and over and over aren't endearing

> **Playability:** Combat eventually looks cool – but few will get far enough to really feel powerful

> **Entertainment:** I would rather play Samurai Jack

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 2

Saying that Way of the Samurai is a game is a bit of an exaggeration. I've deduced that it's actually the purest form of evil masquerading in the form of a game. The level of pain that I endured playing it makes seppuku seem as tame as a tummy ache. The abysmal timing-based combat, choppy animations, horrendous level designs, pathetic AI, and embarrassingly bad voiceovers lead me to the conclusion that this title's only redeeming quality is the fact that it can be turned off and avoided in the future. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a ritual to perform that will hopefully teleport my copy of this game to the furthest reaches of hell. Begone, demon! Begone!—**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2

Bujingai: The Forsaken City

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** BAM ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** TAITO/RED ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** MAY 19 > **ESRB** T

FANCY-PANTS HACK N' SLASH

Raisins are boring. But add a little bit of chocolate coating, and those shriveled little wads become one of our most delicious and celebrated snack foods. Though sadly inedible, Bujingai is essentially the same situation in game form; it has a mediocre action framework at its core, but the polish and flair that surround it makes for a surprisingly engaging and enjoyable play.

A unique sense of style, reminiscent of Hong Kong cinema, permeates every aspect of this title, from the slick character design to the high-flying action sequences. Swinging your swords cuts an intricate multicolored swath through your foes. Gliding through the air looks like the wirework flight featured in kung fu movies. When you complete a level, one of the categories you're graded in is "stylized action points." No matter what you do, you do it with flair.

You don't do it for long, though. Bujingai is short, with only seven stages and a linear "kill the enemies, go through the door" progression. This leaves no opportunity to explore alternate or branching paths, and ultimately results in little incentive to play through a second time (unless you want to see an interview with Gackt, the Japanese pop star who the game's main character is based on).

Though Bujingai will provide some great moments for hardcore action fans, it doesn't make great strides forward in any department. It has a simple combat system, a weak story, and a lot of repetition. However, it is also a prime example of how a little bit of polish and style can go a long way. It doesn't sport the same array of killer moves as Ninja Gaiden or Devil May Cry, but it looks gorgeous, and has that elusive fun factor that can make an otherwise standard game stand out in the crowd.—**JOE**

Most levels have a vertical aspect, requiring you to sail through the air or run up walls

The wrath of the May Day Flag Dance!

Your regular attack looks like it should be a special move

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Create a post-apocalyptic version of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

> **Graphics:** The action looks amazing, but the enemies and environments will bore everybody

> **Sound:** A traditional Japanese soundtrack helps to set the mood ...for fighting!

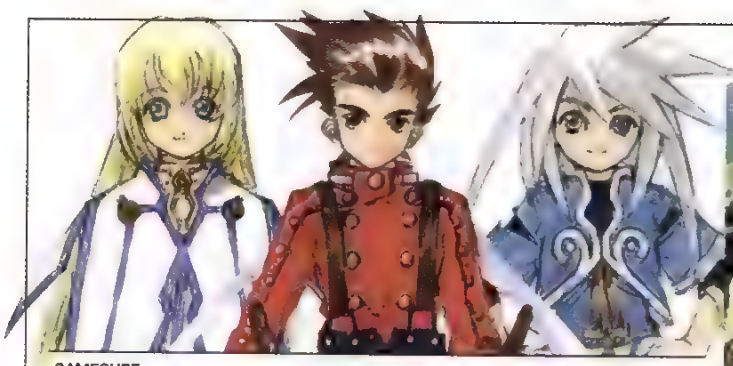
> **Playability:** All aerial controls are awkward, making precise jumps and glides impossible

> **Entertainment:** Despite its ordinary elements, the look and feel will keep your blood pumping

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Bujingai is a great example of how expectations can trick you. If this was the next Shinobi or Devil May Cry title (two series that clearly inspired the game's creators), I would have assailed it for lackluster game design and terribly simplistic levels. But, since this was a little sleeper that sailed under my radar, I was initially impressed that it didn't achieve Seven Samurai 20XX levels of hack n' slash suckiness. There are some things to like about Bujingai (like slick sword animations and cool-looking characters), but all in all this is strictly a mediocre title with illusions of making it in the big leagues. Despite its inherent flaws, this is solid action for those who don't crave anything more.—**MATT**



GAMECUBE

Tales of Symphonia

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO
> **RELEASE** JULY 13 > **ESRB** T

BRAINS AND BEAUTY

In the fairy tales, there's always that moment when the heroine steps into the ballroom, gussied up from head to toe, and immediately makes all of the other belles look like pug-fugly consignment store debutantes by comparison. This is the effect that Tales of Symphonia has on nearly every other GameCube RPG on the market, making them look underdressed and hopelessly outclassed.

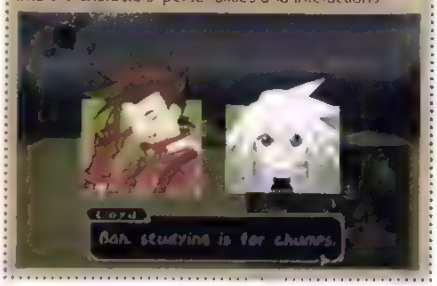
The first thing that you'll notice is the unique and vibrant visual style. By placing cartoony characters in detailed, picturesque environments, the game surrounds you with a colorful world that is one of the most stunning I have ever experienced. But, even though the amazing graphics are the most noticeable aspect of Tales of Symphonia, the area where it truly distinguishes itself is in its addictive and highly variable combat mechanic.

All of the battles unfold in real time, placing you in control of a single character while the game's impressive AI handles the rest of the party. I wasn't too hot on this at first (ever since Deep Blue beat Kasparov, I've been wary of giving technology too much power), but then I discovered the nearly unlimited ways to customize the computer's behavior. Each of the AI-managed characters can be tweaked to your preferences, including adjusting the types of enemies it targets, how it engages them, and how frequently it uses special attacks. Additionally, the level of automation is entirely up to you. It is possible to hand your character over to the AI, leaving you to sit back and eat some nachos as the battle rages onscreen. Or, if you and your friends want to manually control all four party members, you can share the glory in multiplayer mayhem.

Unfortunately, not every aspect of the game is as engaging as the battle system. The story is tired, and the character types are so cookiecutter (save for the woman who seems to derive sexual pleasure from uncovering archeological artifacts) that you never get the sense that you're a part of a new, exciting adventure—everything is pretty familiar. But, where the innovation runs thin, gorgeous visuals and dynamic gameplay fill in the spaces, making Tales of Symphonia the heavy-hitting GameCube RPG you've been waiting for.—**JOE**

WE NEED TO TALK

Though all of the game's key developments will be revealed as the plot advances, several clues and character reactions can only be obtained off the beaten path. In a technique reminiscent of the Active Time Events of Final Fantasy IX, you'll be able to trigger many optional conversations among your party members as you explore the world. These little skits, told through dialogue and animated portraits, aren't essential to the progression of the story, but they often have some hilarious lines, and also provide a great window into the characters' personalities and interactions



BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Assemble pieces from several RPGs and still end up with something unique

> **Graphics:** Mixing inventive character models with cel-shading lends a Windwaker-meets-anime kind of feel

> **Sound:** Though not epic, the soundtrack is pretty mellow and complements the game's tone

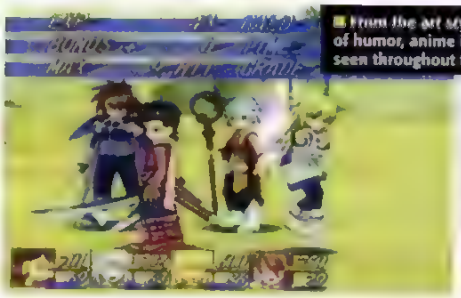
> **Playability:** The battle controls are a bit awkward at first, but eventually become second nature

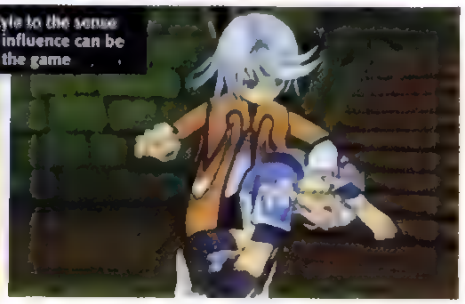
> **Entertainment:** One of the few great RPGs available on the 'Cube

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

Don't be fooled by the anime look of Tales. There is a deep, engaging game hiding behind the spiky hair and bright colors. This highly traditional RPG succeeds at the often-failed task of combining a gratifying story with high playability. The action-oriented combat is surprisingly entertaining, and the option to run battles multiplayer is an incredible plus. The flexible character control features mean that you'll still have a great time on your own as well. There's a healthy dose of humor thrown in that helps each of the characters develop compelling and endearing personas. High quality voice work and a varied musical soundtrack immerse the player even deeper. I came away feeling attached to the characters and fondly recalling the emotional story, even if both felt familiar. All told, Tales of Symphonia should more than fill the aching void that exists for starving GameCube RPG fans.—**MILLER**





Your ammo count is only displayed on the weapon itself

Lighting is a huge part of why this game looks so great

Chances are, that rusty piece of metal isn't sterile

The Vin Diesel model is freakishly realistic

XBOX

The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

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

RIDDICK ROCKS THE BOX

There are a lot of people out there who automatically dismiss anything with Vin Diesel attached (just admit it, *Knockaround Guys* rules!). In this case, doing so would be a huge mistake. The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay is a triumphant success of a game. Not only are the visuals ridiculously sweet, the gameplay is unique and incredibly well-paced. Hands down, this is one of the best titles in the Xbox library.

Despite the first-person viewpoint, this is no mere FPS. While there are several intense shooting segments, gameplay also involves a good deal of stealth, hand-to-hand combat, and realistic puzzle-solving. This mixture may sound toxic, but every aspect of play is expertly implemented. The first-person combat simply offers depth by having Riddick throw a different punch with each direction pushed on the analog stick as the trigger is pulled. Coupled with a variety of melee weapons, stealth kills, and counter moves, hand-to-hand combat is far deeper than most third-person action titles. Puzzle-solving is wisely limited to finding keys or turning valves – there are no box-pushing or silly logic puzzles here.

Over the course of Riddick's escape attempt, you will snap guards' necks, gun down underground mutants, take on other prisoners in sanctioned duels to the death, and fight your way out of three levels of prison security. There is a lot of variety to these activities, and even more is added by the optional side quests. Taking on missions from fellow inmates makes the game feel less linear, rewards the player, and helps create a unique mood. As soon as you're thrown into Butcher Bay's prison society, it's clear that this is far more than a shooter.

While Escape from Butcher Bay plays more like Deus Ex: Invisible War than Halo, its fantastic visuals can only be compared to upcoming mega-titles like Doom 3 and Half-Life 2. Thanks to normal-mapping technology, Riddick's look is mind-blowing. In-game graphics are on par with average CG cutscenes of this generation. There are some issues, such as jaggies and lip sync, but even with these problems Riddick is still, without question, one of the most visually amazing games ever.

"Hands down, this is one of the best titles in the Xbox library."

The tiny flaws in the visuals are a great analogy for this title as a whole. While excellent, Escape from Butcher Bay could have been a bit better. Since the main quest is short (I beat it in less than 15 hours) and there is no multiplayer, it's not a ton of game for your money. Had it included any additional modes of gameplay, Riddick might have been the absolute best title for the Xbox. But as it is, Escape from Butcher Bay is one title that every Xbox owner simply must buy. It's that good.—**JEREMY**

CHRONICLING RIDDICK

The Chronicles of Riddick is the first film in a planned trilogy, but even if the second and third movies never happen, Riddick himself has already amassed quite an epic tale. Chronologically, Riddick's story begins in Escape from Butcher Bay, continues in *Pitch Black*, and then *The Chronicles of Riddick: Dark Fury*, a new animated feature from *Aeon Flux* creator Peter Chung. The DVD release bridges the gap between *Pitch Black* and the first *Chronicles* film. That's a lot of Vin Diesel!

When unarmed, stealth kills are the best way to deal with guards

The view switches to third-person for certain actions

BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

> **Concept:** Step into the shoes of anti-hero Richard Riddick and escape from the galaxy's most notorious prison

> **Graphics:** Staggeringly beautiful. Without a doubt, this is one of the best-looking games ever

> **Sound:** Like him or not, Vin Diesel's voice work rocks. Riddick is one scary mutha

> **Playability:** The controls are so smooth and immersive that you'll really feel like you're (back) in prison

> **Entertainment:** The word that pops into my head every time I think about this game is "awesome." That just about says it all

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 9.25

There will be people that overanalyze Riddick, and not fall in love with it as they should. For example, there are times during the game (especially during the cutscenes) when the graphics get a little pixelated. Check that – they get a lot pixelated. Not that it ruins the whole experience, but it does get annoying. Especially when you consider how graphically impressive the rest of the game is. This lack of polish also rears its ugly head from time to time during gameplay; there are instances when the animation and some of the combat is a little wonky. However, I should note that all these points are minor in the total scope of this game. Not only is it one of most graphically pleasing games to hit the Xbox (most of the time), it's a thrilling adventure that will have you jumping at shadows and giggling in delight as you turn a guard's gun against him or silently break the neck of your jailers. It's not perfect, but I loved every moment I played Riddick and I highly recommend it. Keep in mind, it's not a first-person shooter – though it can be at times. It's a stealth adventure game at heart, and a very good one at that.—**ANDY**

XBOX

Metal Slug 3

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SNK NEOGEO > **DEVELOPER** SNK PLAYMORE
> **RELEASE** MAY 25 > **ESRB** T

SLUGFEST

For a series that initially only reached arcade and NeoGeo gamers, the Metal Slug games have a pretty strong following. After playing Metal Slug 3, it isn't difficult to see why. Just by integrating multiple vehicles and a little humor to the standard side-scrolling formula, it sets the bar for arcade shooters in terms of action, variety, and pure frenetic fun.

The trademark of the Metal Slug series has always been its ability to provide action on par with the best in the genre while still injecting a quirky sense of randomness every step along the way, and Metal Slug 3 is no exception. All in the course of one stage you can partner up with an uzi-toting monkey, transform into a foot-dragging zombie, and spew forth a fountain of blood that decimates your enemies. Let's see those Contra chumps do that!

In another step away from the conventions of the genre, Metal Slug has a surprising amount of replay value. It may only have five stages, but most of them offer several routes to the boss, which means that there are literally dozens of ways to play through the game, with a different experience each time. Not only that, but with two-player co-op, unlockables, and the ability to post your scores on the Xbox Live scoreboard, there are plenty of incentives to keep popping this one in even after you've beaten it.

The only reservation I have about recommending this title is its difficulty. Since this a direct port of the arcade game of the same name, it retains all of the challenge that was originally intended to keep you pumping in quarter after quarter. Even on the easiest setting, Metal Slug 3 is merciless in its attempts to crush your body and spirit. Not everybody will respond with "Thank you, sir! May I have another?", but I sure did. And yes, I may.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Add some zany antics (think Earthworm Jim) to an action-packed shooter

> **Graphics:** Appropriate, though unsophisticated. The colorful and cartoony visuals highlight the game's wacky feel

> **Sound:** The only noteworthy noise you'll hear is your thumb repeatedly jamming the fire button

> **Playability:** Aiming with certain vehicles can be frustrating, but otherwise the controls are straightforward and solid

> **Entertainment:** It's got camels equipped with vulcan cannons. If that isn't fun, I don't know what is

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

It's good to see the side-scrolling shooter genre is alive and well in games like Metal Slug 3. The bizarre humor and strange creativity that permeates this game (the zombie stage rules!) is a nice change from the overly-serious titles popular today. Granted, only a very specific audience will be interested in this retro throwback, but those who do will have a great time. It's intense, relentlessly hard, and its cartoonish look recalls the glory days of the arcade. In other words, it's everything Metal Slug fans could possibly want. —**JEREMY**

XBOX

Full Spectrum Warrior

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 1
> **ESRB** M

JOHNNY BRAVO GETS HIS GUN

I'd imagine that to the well-trained soldier, there are few situations you believe you can't get out of. What can't be solved with a few bullets or a handy battlefield maneuver? Full Spectrum Warrior's background as a U.S. Army training simulation both helps and hampers the game. It's a very refreshing title to play, even if it puts blinders on to the new possibilities it opens up for a very tired genre.

There are some of you out there who will pick this game up and be disappointed that you aren't picking up a virtual machine gun instead. That's because this game isn't a traditional war game where you can simply tighten your headband and go Rambo on people's asses. Boring as it may sound, it's about telling your two four-man teams to fire their guns rather than pulling the trigger yourself, but Full Spectrum sacrifices little intensity. Besides, using your head is simply the best way to keep it from being blown off.

Suppression fire, smoke grenades, and flanking moves are your tickets to a long and healthy life. An average battle in the game is like this: After checking your GPS and ordering a recon chopper to scout ahead, you encounter a guy firing a machine gun from a bunker down the street. One of your teams (Alpha) throws a smoke grenade to confuse him, allowing the other (Bravo) to safely cross the street and obtain cover behind a car. If Bravo sits there too long, the enemy will strip that auto down to its underwear, so you'll have to watch your degrading cover icon. Alpha engages him with some suppression fire to allow Bravo to eventually flank his position and go in for the kill.

However, the game plateaus as you learn that the tactics explained above are all you have to do to get out of any situation. It's here where the game's background as an Army simulation hurts, and it feels like a virtual trial-and-error textbook. Ironically, as instructional as it is to jump into a replay of the game from a save point while watching it, the title offers no stats for your performance. Furthermore, it doesn't allow tactical creativity, as your path and choices during a fight are limited.

However, I keep coming back to Full Spectrum's basis in reality to remind myself why I like the title. A fog of war means you have to orient specific soldiers to cover your blind spots, and the fact that it only takes a few bullets to kill is sobering. Furthermore, the control is tight, but the movement icon and camera need work.

By the end of the game I thought of myself as a hardened soldier. I was grateful for the training and experience gathered in the field with live rounds, but part of me still wondered what combat was like outside of this simulation.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Give gamers a true squad-based game that takes away individuality, but which keeps the intensity of combat

> **Graphics:** The attention to detail surprises even after you are several hours in

> **Sound:** From top to bottom, Full Spectrum is simply excellent in this category

> **Playability:** Apart from some camera hitches, your troops control like a well-oiled machine

> **Entertainment:** A refreshing take on military titles, but Full Spectrum can be confining

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

Full Spectrum Warrior blazes a new trail in gameplay, merging the visceral look of a top-quality Xbox action title with a vastly improved version of the small-scale, team-based strategy of the Commandos series. Some might be put off by the fact that you're never the one actually squeezing the trigger, but I actually found that this distance raised the tension, as you sit at the edge of your seat hoping your guys can make it through with your guidance. Of course, the fact that Pandemic actually created solid AI makes this all possible, as does the excellent control scheme, which gives you a great amount of flexibility with very simple button combinations. If you dig military tactics, this is a must-buy, although sometimes the missions are a bit too similar.—**MATT**

Truth and justice never looked so good

Combat is a firestorm of intensity

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

City of Heroes

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NCSOFT
> **DEVELOPER** CRYPTIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** APRIL 29 > **ESRB** T

SPANDEX RULES!

I've hungered for an MMO like this for a long time. I wanted something customizable yet uncomplicated – something that I could play for an hour or play all weekend and have fun either way. I dreamed of an online game wherein my character was exciting from the beginning – not just 30 hours into play. I was longing for a new concept – a clever twist on the online paradigm. I didn't know it, but the game I was yearning for was City of Heroes.

From the moment you create a character, you'll drop into that pleasant buzz that is a quality hit of gaming. Though character creation is straightforward, you might spend a long time just playing with the hero generator, checking out different powers and trying on various costumes. In-game you'll be constantly entertained by the distinctive characters that other players have concocted. Plus, unlike some similar titles, you can run up to eight characters on any of the eleven current servers. So if you want to play Super Huge Man one day, and The Incredible Flying Mongoose Girl the next – it's no problem.

With your character done, you are dropped smack in the middle of a drug-induced thug riot. You'll immediately have access to your superhuman abilities as you mow down the criminal element that has completely overrun this otherwise pleasant metropolis. The enemies are intelligent and powerful – no baby rabbits or tiny rats need apply. Right off the bat, you'll be facing crazed robot drones and sewer dwelling zombies. They'll react to your powers by adapting their approach – doing things like withdrawing from area effect skills and circling to surround you.

Your only hope for survival lies in your fellow superheroes. I've rarely had such a rush as when I charged my brawler of a hero headlong into a gang of mutant psions while the powers of my teammates whizzed overhead in bursts of flame and electricity. Eventually, you'll be able to formalize your alliances by joining a super group. After registering your squad with the local authorities, you can pick a leader and team colors, and change into and out of your newly colored duds at will.

The character models, though dynamic and plentiful, are not incredibly detailed. I'd also love to see the option to change your hair and clothing around after you've started – a choice that I'm confident an expansion or patch will introduce in the future. The city is expansive, particularly once you gain the ability to fly and leap your way about its breadth and height. There are also dungeon-like interiors of warehouses, sewers, and caverns – most of which are explored during missions. On that note, you'll constantly find yourself acquiring new missions from your network of contacts, so there's always a sense that you're accomplishing heroic deeds as you scour the streets for villains. The core combat mechanic is balanced and flexible. Each fight feels fast-paced and intense, particularly when you're cooperating as a team. Powers are well balanced between the classes, and your choice of origins (such as mutatation or magic) will help determine what enhancements you can power up with.

I'm a little concerned about the depth of the game. It's immensely fun, and I certainly haven't tired of it yet. But I do wonder whether I'll feel the same way in a few months. Regardless, City of Heroes offers up a super-charged helping of awesome, and you don't need to be a comic book fan to know it tastes sweet. 'Nuff said.—**MILLER**

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE
These are just a few options in the endlessly flexible character creation system

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Be a hero. Join other heroes. Become more engrossed with your alter ego than Bruce Wayne is

> **Graphics:** Bright and vibrant characters of limitless variety move about a surprisingly detailed cityscape

> **Sound:** Kapow! Zap!! Biff!!! This stuff is great

> **Playability:** A great intro to new online players, but still immensely satisfying to the veterans

> **Entertainment:** You'd be hard pressed to have more downright fun in an online game

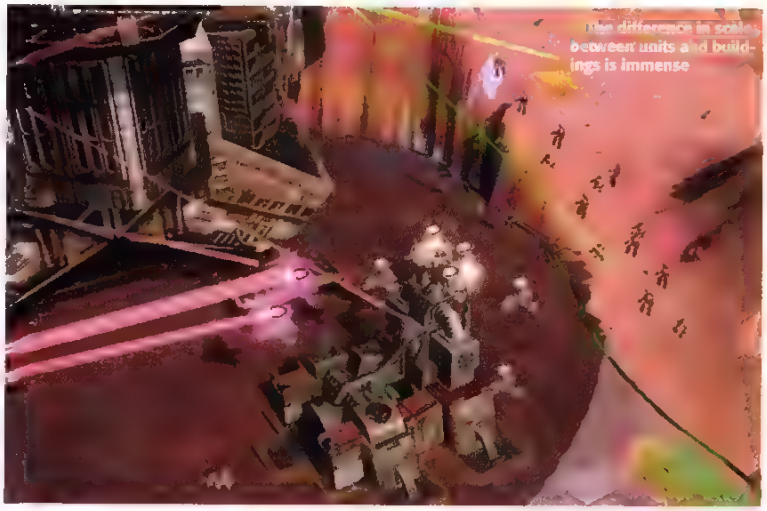
> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9

Without a doubt, City of Heroes is the best MMO I have played since EverQuest (and as many of you already know, I was quite addicted to that game). The interesting thing about Heroes is that in many ways it is the complete opposite of EQ. For one, your characters are extremely powerful, and you get to mow through legions of enemies. Secondly, since most of your power comes from leveling up and acquiring enhancements, there isn't a lot of inventory to worry or complain about (loot, as any MMO player knows, is the root of all evil). Cruising around Paragon City fighting crime is just a blast, especially since the combat system keeps the player involved. Plus, by creating mirrored zones when the player count gets too high, server population really isn't a problem. Not only is City of Heroes an original MMO, it is one of the better-executed pieces of software I have seen in a while. Plus, it's just fun being a super hero.—**ANDY**

Environments are vibrant and diverse

Look familiar? You can make your hero appear any way you like



PC

Perimeter

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

SETTING NEW BOUNDARIES

Despite the large number of untested concepts in Perimeter, at the end of the day it's an enjoyable play, albeit a slightly rough one. Because seriously, who doesn't enjoy the power to literally make the land over as they see fit?

The story of Perimeter is weird enough to do Philip K. Dick (of *Blade Runner* fame) proud. It's also told oddly, with the player jumping between three different factions (who unfortunately play almost identically) at seemingly random intervals. That's okay, though, because it sets up the myriad mission objectives well enough. The campaign switches up between variants on escape, survive, and conquer regularly, which keeps things fresh.

Three innovative concepts also serve to differentiate Perimeter. Impenetrable force shields, morphing units, and terraforming all work together rather well, and make for a unique flow of play. Enemies tearing apart your helicopters? Turn them into tanks. That didn't work either, and your squad is done for? Fine – create a big chasm or raise your Perimeter to buy yourself a little time. As you can easily tell, Perimeter has a strategy all its own, and it's a lot of fun to explore.

A general lack of polish holds Perimeter back from being a real contender for top dog in the RTS genre. Unit AI is often wretched, enemy AI is worse, and framerate suffers during camera pans or intense battles even on a beastly PC with settings set around medium. Cool concepts, excellent graphics, and good mission design save it though, and the new ideas alone make it worth a look. Don't be surprised if that quick look turns into a lot more; the gameplay is tight enough to glue any RTS fan to the monitor for a good long time.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Kick RTS conventions right in the jimmy, and tell a slightly confused story about humanity's future in the process

> **Graphics:** The much-touted proprietary graphics engine is indeed gorgeous, but it eats system resources like you wouldn't believe

> **Sound:** Utterly useless except for the audio "under attack" warnings

> **Playability:** The unique interface is smooth and intuitive

> **Entertainment:** Beyond all the innovations, at its core this is a heck of a fun game

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 6.75

I like RTS games, and I love esoteric science fiction. That's why I'm a little disappointed that I didn't love (or even much like) Perimeter. The game offers a healthy dose of innovation within the largely similar RTS market. Between terraforming, unit transformation, and energy shielding, I found plenty of new ideas to wrap my brain around. Unfortunately, half the time I barely knew what to do with those pioneering elements since the objective descriptions were so confusingly vague. Tack on a soundtrack that almost put my computer to sleep, and I came away impressed with an ingenious idea that just never seemed to get off the ground.—**MILLER**

Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
> **DEVELOPER** BIG HUGE GAMES > **RELEASE** APRIL 27 > **ESRB** T

MORE, MORE, MORE!

Expansions tend to fall into two categories. Those that enlarge the original game by adding content in the form of new maps, missions, weapons, and such; and those that alter the gameplay by introducing new concepts and mechanisms. The best ones, though, are the expansions that do both. Thrones & Patriots is an excellent example of this third type – it's the kind of add-on that brooks no argument as to whether fans of the original should get it immediately.

Thrones & Patriots has the obvious improvements in spades. Six nations (each with a very distinct flavor and unique units) and four Conquer the World scenarios add enough replay value to justify this purchase by themselves. The new campaigns are awesome, and trim down the scale of the Conquer the World mode into digestible chunks. Taking over Europe as Napoleon or the Mediterranean with Alexander is significantly less daunting than trying to overrun the entire globe.

As for changing the gameplay, the added Senate building and its attendant government advances integrate smoothly into the flow of play, and force players to make some interesting decisions over the course of developing their empires. Do you take Despotism for some killer military bonuses or go with Republic to kick-start your economy? Clearly, these choices have a large impact on the game, and picking the ones that complement your strategy the best is critical to your success.

Deepening the strategic possibilities is key to making a strategy title more fun, and T&P goes the extra mile to make sure that it delivers a more engaging experience than is possible without the expansion installed. Rise of Nations should be one of the essential pieces of any strategy gamer's collection, and T&P is the figurative cherry on top of a flavorful gaming sundae. —**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Enrich the gameplay of the original by adding a crapload of new content

> **Graphics:** Crisp and clean just like Mom used to make them

> **Sound:** Clangs and booms and assorted other battle sounds. Nothing to write home about

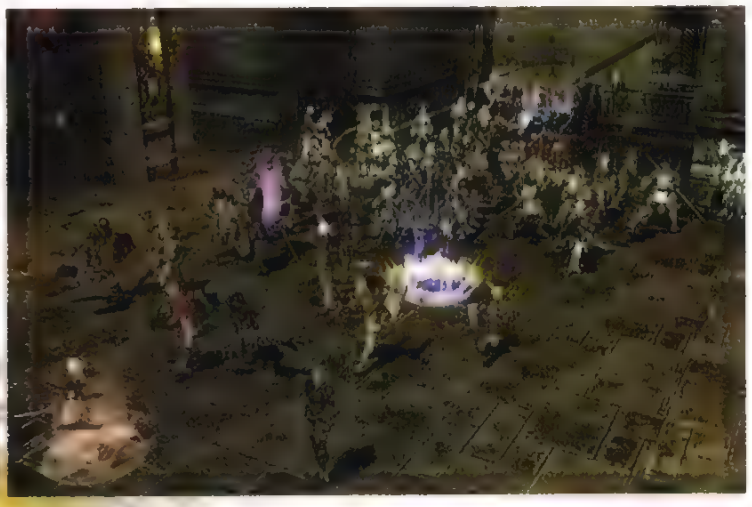
> **Playability:** No complaints here. All keyboard shortcuts present and accounted for

> **Entertainment:** One of the best RTSs ever just got bigger. What's not to like?

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

It seems that these days a RTS is harder to get into than a fistfight in a monastery, there are so many uninspired knockoffs, and very few of them end up holding your attention. Last year's Rise of Nations was an exception to that trend, and Thrones & Patriots keeps the tradition alive. It provides new nations to control, more Conquer the World scenarios, and some interesting additions dealing with your nation's style of government (I highly recommend Despotism). All of these new features, combined with the accessibility and depth of the original, make this expansion a sight for sore eyes.—**JOE**



PC

Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NCSOFT > **DEVELOPER** NC INTERACTIVE
> **RELEASE** APRIL 27 > **ESRB** T

WHO'S YOUR DADDY?

MMORPGs are infamous for placing the real meat of the gameplay and the most exciting rewards at the end of a long, arduous gaming journey. Lineage II, however, goes the extra step and makes the early levels so tedious that it really does feel more like clerking at Wal-Mart than honing your skills with blade and bow. I'm more than willing to put up with some low-level wankery in order to become an invincible engine of destruction when I finally get to the later stages of an RPG, but Lineage II takes it too far.

On the technical front Lineage II is above average, if not stellar – the Unreal engine is popular for a reason, and NCsoft clearly has an extremely talented team of artists bringing the world to life. All of the models and scenery are crafted with exquisite precision, and the different areas of the world each have a distinct feel. Character creation and development leaves a bit to be desired, however. Initially faced with a paltry five races and two classes to choose from, players won't be able to customize their online persona very much at all until at least level 20. At that point things get somewhat more interesting, but never reach the level of diversity available in other MMORPGs.

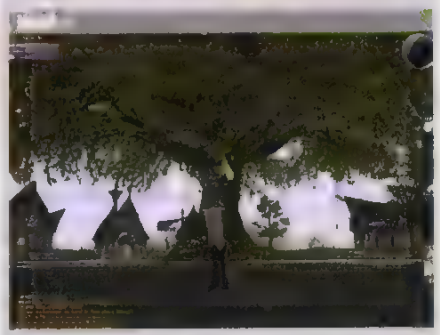
All of these issues are merely icing on the cake of what makes a massively multiplayer game great, though: interactions between players. Lineage II certainly delivers in this department, offering loads of goodies including player-controlled land and castles, alliances between clans, and clan warfare. The potential sweetness of participating in a globe-spanning conflict between thousands of players is huge. The flip side to these many features, however, is that Lineage II has a much more chaotic game world than similar titles due to the mostly-unrestricted PvP aspect. With few safe zones to be found, player-killing is a major part of the game. There are some rudimentary mechanisms in place to curb griefing, but the PvP is largely player-policed.

"The potential sweetness of participating in a globe-spanning conflict between thousands of players is huge."

Whether or not you enjoy PvP combat should be the determining factor in any decision to purchase Lineage II. Its only distinguishing feature is the PvP content, which in itself makes for a unique experience which some gamers will no doubt fall in love with. Be warned, though – that level 63 Orc Fighter standing outside the town gates probably isn't there to group up for some casual hunting. —**ADAM**

TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

LIFE BEFORE LEVEL 20



Made a hot elf chick, got started on my quest to become a champion of order in a world of chaos.

Finally killed enough wolves and goblins to reach level seven and upgrade my attack spell. Evil beware!

Realized that new equipment, better stats, and a level three Wind Strike only translate to about 10% more damage. Went back to killing goblins.

HOUR 15

Damn, I'm bored

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Make player vs. player combat the focus of a gigantic, open-ended MMORPG

> **Graphics:** The Unreal engine makes for some nice visuals, though animations could be more diverse

> **Sound:** A lovely orchestrated score sells the high fantasy theme

> **Playability:** The lack of contextual menus is often frustrating, and until now I had no idea how irritating a font can get

> **Entertainment:** If PvP is your preferred method of MMO gaming, this is tailor-made for you

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.25

With gorgeous presentation and an artful execution, Lineage II is hard to ignore. But the maddeningly slow progression along with the potentially irritating PvP system will very possibly make you wish that you had. Without a doubt, the title boasts a superior graphical presentation. The character models are simply stunning (Who knew orcs could be hot?), and the breathtaking orchestral soundtrack is as captivating as a fine film score. Here's my gripe: I was kind of bored. Take out the pretty pictures and the ear candy and I've played this game before – lots of times before. Have you played another MMO? Then you have, too. When you have to look forward to leveling your character high enough to fight fungi then something is wrong. Seriously. Plus, the one thing that makes this game unique just aggravates me. The uncontrolled PvP system means you can get assassinated at any time. Consequently, leveling is not about advancement – it's about revenge. Does that appeal to you? Then this is your game. I guess I'd just rather befriend online gamers than murder them. —**MILLER**

N-GAGE QUICKIES

N-GAGE

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA BLUETOOTH OR UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA N-GAGE ARENA)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **RELEASE** MAY 18 > **ESRB** E

Just as the real life Tiger gets mad when his godlike golf game goes awry, there will be times when this title will leave you irate. Getting your swing down on fairway drives can be difficult because of the handheld's d-pad. I appreciate attempting to bring an analog swing to the N-Gage, but the pad has little feel to it. Thus, your drives can be as erratic as hitting with a bent 9-iron while blindfolded. Putting is similar, since trying to understand what "three inches to the right" actually translates to in the game can make your frontal lobe throb in pain. The career mode does let you allocate attribute points, but with something as solid as Mario Golf: Advance Tour around, I wouldn't take your chances. For golfing results this chancy I'd rather hit the links myself and pray —**KATO**

N-GAGE

The Sims: Bustin' Out

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **RELEASE** MAY 11 > **ESRB** T

I can safely say this is by far the best game I've played on the N-Gage. Then again, it's also one of the best third-party games I have played on the Game Boy Advance. Nokia's partnership with EA has given gamers a few perks above the earlier version – like your uncle giving you a cell phone to play Snake on or make calls without having to find a landline. There are also competitions and unlockables through the N-Gage Arena service, but they won't really rock anyone's world. Graphically, the game looks really great, and converting Bustin' Out's areas to the tall-n-skinny screen works perfectly fine. And just to be crystal clear on the score difference, the quarter of a point dock is for the controls being a smidgen less responsive than the GBA version's.—**LISA**

N-GAGE

Ashen

BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA BLUETOOTH) > **PUBLISHER** NOKIA
> **DEVELOPER** TORUS GAMES > **RELEASE** MAY 25 > **ESRB** T

Developer Torus Games' fervent desire to create a killer app for the N-Gage is vividly expressed through Ashen's remarkable visuals, fluid framerate, and stellar animations. Unfortunately, this impressive technology is not backed by inviting gameplay. The controls are designed logically and work surprisingly well, but the snail-like pacing, abhorrent level designs, and uneventful gunplay diseases an otherwise impressive presentation. It's just a boring play that suffers from first-person banality.—**REINER**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS UK > **RELEASE** MAY 26 > **ESRB** E

SOMEONE SAW THE LIGHT

Well, call me one shocked reviewer! This surprising little GBA game has achieved a major milestone in my book – it has changed my grumpy attitude towards Potter games entirely. While this RPG has some annoyances, its amusement factor is hard to deny.

Like the book it's based on, this entry covers the dark storyline of Harry finding out more about his parents' murder, the escape of a dangerous convict, and the fact that our boy wizard has some baggage to deal with. In those regards, this game carries the more mature themes with style and tight storytelling. The gameplay mirrors this by requiring precision item management and upgrades for each party member. Azkaban's battle strategy and party arrangements (all three friends will be switched between every possible configuration during the course of gameplay) forces players to be thoughtful and strategic. This, my dear RPG junkies, is a good thing for all of us.

On the other hand, small annoyances break up the experience and stop it from being the end-all of the RPG handheld market. For example, when purchasing items, you can't tell who can use them and what they really do. There are other instances of making some menu structures harder than they need to be, but despite these issues, I still am happy to finally find a true Potter game that I can really get behind.—**LISA**

> **Concept:** Take the wizardly Scooby Squad through their third year of Hogwarts – RPG style
> **Graphics:** Large sprites and nice particle effects for the battle system make this a standout
> **Sound:** Eh. Take it or leave it, like most handheld titles
> **Playability:** The battles involve a lot of strategy, and item management is key, but other areas of the title need a little tuning
> **Entertainment:** Why all Potter games aren't RPGs is still beyond me. This is the best entry for the franchise on any system
> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.75

After playing all the various console version of Harry's Hogwarts adventures, the prospect of playing a Potter licensed GBA game was not very appealing. However, this is actually the best of the lot – a nicely done, if slightly rudimentary RPG that actually makes use of the Potter universe's myriad magical spells, items, and potions. The turn-based battles require a bit of strategy, and I also like how each character has unique attributes and abilities. This should please Potter fans reared on Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh.—**MATT**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Sonic Advance 3

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

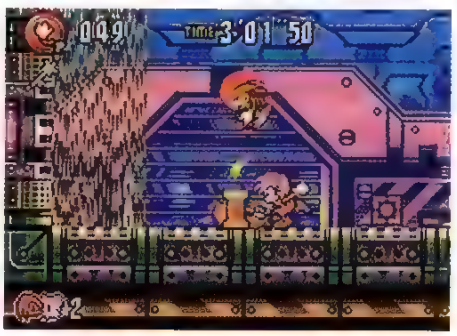
> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** THQ
> **DEVELOPER** SEGA TEAM SONIC > **RELEASE** MAY 24 > **ESRB** E

RIGHT ROUND BABY, RIGHT ROUND

Judging from the mountain of Sonic-related love mail that we get all the time, you people adore the blue blur in all his repetitive forms. I am not one of those people. I'm of the school saying that unless something major happens, Sonic and I are officially breaking it off. I don't want to deal with the random loops and springs that (I think) are supposed to make me believe I'm having fun. I'm not anymore – I can see through the otherwise simplistic level design and one-dimensional sprinting and look at Sonic Advance 3 like any other Sonic title, because that's all it is.

Sure, his crew is along for the ride, and they do offer some extra moves. To enhance replay, players choose a main member and then one of the remaining furry squadmates to come along for the ride as a partner. Although having certain characters as a sidekick is supposed to change the dynamic of each area (Sonic as a partner increases your speed, Knuckles lets you hit harder, etc.), it's just too much of the same for my blood.

For those of you who manage to take advantage of the multiplayer options, I say, "more power to ya." There are a lot of modes to dig through, and I'll let you do that on your own time. For my hours of leisure, I'll be looking for Sonic to really do something different. These are great characters that have been the same since the start of the franchise. I want more now. —**LISA**



> **Concept:** More Sonic, more friends, more loop-de-loops. Wee!
> **Graphics:** Did you play Sonic Advance? What about Advance 2? Yeah, it's the same thing here
> **Sound:** Again, the same as it ever was
> **Playability:** Wowza! Another category of sameness. Sensing a theme here?
> **Entertainment:** [Review cliché coming…] Sonic fans will dig it, others won't be converted to the way of the hedgehog
> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 7.75

When you catch a good idea, you've really gotta run with it. Sega caught one such idea in the early 90s, and Sonic's been running ever since. Even after all these years, the sheer velocity with which the little blue fuzzball zips through a level is astounding. In fact, that may be why the game ends up feeling a little short. Still, the animation is top notch, and the stages are colorful and inviting. Replay value is significantly extended by the variety of characters and the unique objective paths that are available to each. When it comes right down to it, Sonic's still running, but he ain't tired yet. —**MILLER**

CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For April 2004 Based On Units Sold

1 FIGHT NIGHT 2004

Did you know that so-called "boxing" has nothing to do with boxes? It's all about people hitting each other! Not once in this game is there even a passing mention of corrugated cardboard or fort-building. From now on, we're only paying attention to sports with clear, non-deceptive names, like Stickball and Jai Alai.

2 NBA BALLERS

Coming Soon: NBA Belle of the Ballers, a simulation game where players primp their favorite NBA player for a formal dance. Find out which eyeliner makes Shaq sparkle! See what stiletto heels can do for Yao Ming! And who would have thought Kevin Garnett could look so smashing in Chantilly lace?

3 FIGHT NIGHT 2004

Nothing brings the world together like punching. Show your friends and family how much they mean to you by landing a couple of uppercuts or throat jabs. Aw, shucks, just thinking about it gets us all choked up.

4 MVP BASEBALL 2004

About halfway up the mountain, the intrepid explorer came upon the secret Sherpa carnival. Calliope music echoed in the background as dozens of the guides frolicked in solitude, winning cheap prizes and eating mini-donuts. This relates to baseball in ways that should be obvious to you.

5 POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

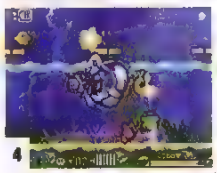
There's a new Pokémon that's been hanging around the office these days. He says his name is Joeruba, and claims that he isn't in any of the Pokémon games because he isn't cute, swears like a sailor, and kept calling the other critters "nancies" while challenging them to duels to the death. He has a remarkable knack for wedding planning, though.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Fight Night 2004	N/A	PS2	9	03/04	$50
2	NBA Ballers	N/A	PS2	8	04/04	$40
3	Fight Night 2004	N/A	XBOX	9	03/04	$50
4	MVP Baseball 2004	3	PS2	9.25	03/04	$50
5	Pokémon Colosseum	2	GC	7	03/04	$49
6	Resident Evil: Outbreak	9	PS2	7.5	03/04	$50
7	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	4	XBOX	9.5	03/04	$49
8	NBA Ballers	N/A	XBOX	8	04/04	$40
9	Halo	14	XBOX	9.5	11/01	$27
10	Hitman: Contracts	N/A	PS2	7.25	04/04	$50
11	Hitman: Contracts	N/A	XBOX	7.25	04/04	$50
12	Namco Museum	N/A	GBA	8	06/01	$12
13	MLB 2005	N/A	PS2	8.5	03/04	$40
14	MVP Baseball 2004	5	XBOX	9.25	03/04	$50
15	MX Unleashed	10	PS2	8	02/04	$40
16	Pokémon Ruby	17	GBA	7.25	03/03	$33
17	Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3	12	GBA	9.5	10/03	$30
18	Pokémon Sapphire	N/A	GBA	7.25	03/03	$33
19	Pac-Man Collection	N/A	GBA	8	07/01	$12
20	Ninja Gaiden	1	XBOX	9.5	03/04	$50

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Pikmin 2	N/A	GC
2	Derby Stallion 04	N/A	PS2
3	Naruto 2	N/A	GBA
4	Kirby and the Amazing Mirror	N/A	GBA
5	Pokémon Fire Red/Leaf Green	2	GBA
6	Kinniku Man Generations	N/A	PS2
7	Dragon Quest V: Heaven's Bride	1	PS2
8	Mega Man Zero 3	N/A	GBA
9	Famicom Mini: Super Mario Bros	4	GBA
10	Xenosaga Freaks	N/A	PS2



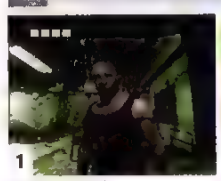
4

10

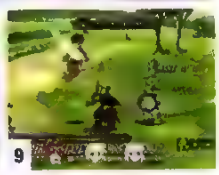
Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay	N/A	Xbox
2	City of Heroes	N/A	PC
3	NCAA Football 2005	N/A	Multi
4	Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	N/A	Multi
5	Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	1	PS2
6	Mega Man Anniversary Collection	N/A	Multi
7	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	3	Xbox
8	Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots	N/A	PC
9	Tales of Symphonia	N/A	GC
10	Unreal Tournament 2004	4	PC



1

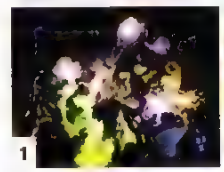


9

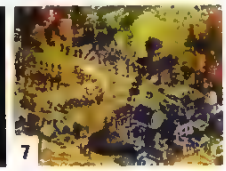
The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	City of Heroes	N/A	$40
2	Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle	N/A	$42
3	Battlefield Vietnam	1	$38
4	Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots	N/A	$26
5	Far Cry	2	$39
6	Unreal Tournament 2004	3	$40
7	Rise of Nations	N/A	$32
8	The Sims Deluxe Edition	4	$27
9	Call of Duty	N/A	$40
10	Drop!	6	$10



1



7

Based On Monthly Units Sold

GameStop.com

Exclusive Offers For GAMEINFORMER Readers

Sony PlayStation 2

100% Preowned Guarantee - Played, Tested and Approved by Gamers

Preowned PlayStation 2

and controller with

FREE Preowned Gran Turismo 3 Game

CODE: B9000621

ONLY $129.99

Preowned PlayStation 2

and controller with

FREE Preowned Enter The Matrix Game

CODE: B9090621ER

ONLY $129.99

Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban

Expected June 2004

With FREE Movie Ticket!

FREE MOVIE TICKET

Code: 280948

$39.99

Driv3r

Expected June 2004

FREE "Run the Gauntlet" DVD with purchase!

FREE Run the Gauntlet DVD

Code: B280678A

$49.99

Samurai Warriors

FREE Strategy Guide with Purchase!

FREE STRATEGY GUIDE

Code: B280923A

$49.99

Spider-Man 2

Expected June 2004

FREE T-Shirt and Overnight Shipping with Coupon Code: GIOVR

FREE OVERNIGHT SHIPPING AND T-SHIRT

Code: B280931A

$49.99

Order by Phone: 1-800-865-3310
(8:00am - 8:00pm CST Monday - Friday)
(8:00am - 7:00pm CST Saturday - Sunday)

OR

Order Online: www.gameinformer.com

Pay for your order with your checking account using CheckFree!

CheckFree

Website orders only. See site for details. Requires CheckFree account to use.

Nintendo GameCube

100% Preowned Guarantee - Played, Tested and Approved by Gamers

Preowned GameCube

and Controller with

FREE Preowned Star Fox Adventures Game

CODE: B9090642

ONLY $79.99

Preowned GameCube

and Controller with

FREE Preowned Robotech Game

CODE: B9090640

ONLY $79.99

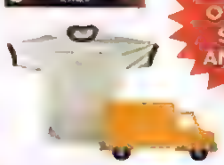
Shrek 2

FREE Overnight Shipping with Coupon Code: GIOVR

FREE OVERNIGHT SHIPPING

Code: 220349

$49.99



Spider-Man 2

Expected June 2004

FREE T-Shirt and Overnight Shipping with Coupon Code: GIOVR

FREE OVERNIGHT SHIPPING AND T-SHIRT

Code: B220348A

$49.99

WWE Day of Reckoning

Expected August 2004

FREE Overnight Shipping with Coupon Code: GIOVR

FREE OVERNIGHT SHIPPING

Code: 220429

$49.99

Mega Man Anniversary Collection

Expected June 2004

FREE Mega Man T-Shirt!

FREE T-SHIRT

Code: B220216A

$29.99

Offers good online or call-in only. Not valid in stores. May not be combined with any other offers. Offers end June 30th, 2004 or while supplies last. GameStop.com reserves the right to limit quantities or orders. No substitutions. Credit card orders and checks via CheckFree only. We DO NOT accept cash or money orders. Shipping offers good within continental United States only, excluding PO Box or APO/FPO addresses. Listed prices do not include shipping and handling. Prices are subject to change at any time. Not responsible for misprints or typos.

GameStop.com

Exclusive Offers For GAMEINFORMER Readers

Microsoft Xbox

100% Preowned Guarantee - Played, Tested and Approved by Gamers

Xbox Live and Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow

SAVE $20!

CODE: B801736D

ONLY $99.98

New Xbox & Controller with FREE Preowned Midtown Madness 3 Game

CODE: B020235BA

ONLY $149.99

Chronicles of Riddick

Expected June 2004

FREE Bonus DVD with Purchase!

FREE BONUS DVD

Code: B210536A

$49.99

Shadow Ops: Red Mercury

Expected June 2004

With Mini Strategy Guide & FREE Overnight Shipping with coupon code: GIOVR

FREE OVERNIGHT SHIPPING AND GUIDE

Code: B210818A

$49.99

Full Spectrum Warrior

Expected June 2004

With Mini Strategy Guide & FREE Overnight Shipping with coupon code: GIOVR

FREE OVERNIGHT SHIPPING AND GUIDE

Code: B210499A

$49.99

Preowned XBOX with Preowned Hitman 2 Game

FREE Overnight Shipping with coupon code: GIOVR

FREE PREOWNED HITMAN 2 GAME

Code: B909063N

$119.99

Order by Phone: 1-800-865-3310
(8:00am - 8:00pm CST Monday - Friday)
(8:00am - 7:00pm CST Saturday - Sunday)

OR

Order Online: www.gameinformer.com

Pay for your order with your checking account using CheckFree!

CheckFree

Website orders only. See site for details. Requires CheckFree account to use.

PC Games

GameStop also carries a wide assortment of PC hardware and accessories

Rise of Nations & Expansion with FREE $10 Mail-In Rebate and Trial pack

CODE: B644920B

ONLY $59.98

True Crime with FREE True Crime Hat

CODE: B645572A

ONLY $49.99

Doom 3

Expected 2004

FREE Baron of Hell Figurine with Purchase!

FREE Figurine!

Code: B644930A

$54.99

Joint Operations

FREE Interact Mouse & FREE Overnight Shipping with coupon code: GIOVR

FREE OVERNIGHT SHIPPING & MOUSE!

Code: B645634A

$49.99

City of Heroes

FREE Mini Strategy Guide with Purchase!

FREE MINI STRATEGY GUIDE

Code: B645391C

$49.99

Guild Wars

Expected August 2004

FREE Overnight Shipping with coupon code: GIOVR

FREE OVERNIGHT SHIPPING

Code: 645393

$49.99

Offers good online or call-in only. Not valid in stores. May not be combined with any other offers. Offers end June 30th, 2004 or while supplies last. GameStop.com reserves the right to limit quantities or orders. No substitutions. Credit card order and checks via CheckFree Only. We DO NOT accept cash or money orders. Shipping offers good within continental United States only, excluding PO Box or APO/FPO addresses. Listed prices do not include shipping and handling. Prices are subject to change at any time. Not responsible for misprints or typos

PLAYSTATION 2

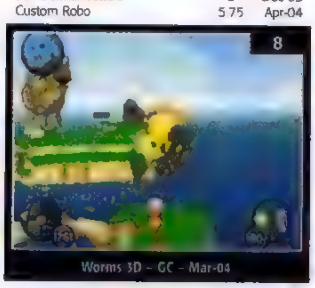
Airforce Delta Strike	7	Feb-04
Alias	7.5	Apr-04
All-Star Baseball 2005	7	Apr-04
American Idol	6.25	Feb-04
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	5.5	Dec-03
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	8.5	Feb-04
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	5	Nov-03

Final Fantasy XI – PS2 – May-04

Battlestar Galactica	6	Jan-04
Beyond Good And Evil	8	Dec-03
Bloody Roar 4	7.5	Dec-03
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts	4.75	Jan-04
Carmen Sandiego, The Secret of the Stolen Drums	6	Feb-04
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	8	Nov-03
Celebrity Deathmatch	2.75	Jan-04
Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest	8.75	Feb-04
Conflict Desert Storm II: Back to Baghdad	7.75	Nov-03
Corvette	5	Jun-04
Crash Nitro Kart	7	Dec-03
Crimson Sea 2	7	Apr-04
Culdcept	8	Dec-03
Cy Girls	4	Mar-04
Destruction Derby Arenas	6.75	May-04
Dot Hack Vol. 4, Quarantine	7.5	Feb-04
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	7.5	Jan-04
Drakengard	7.5	Mar-04
Dynasty Warriors 4: Xtreme Legends	7	Dec-03
ESPN College Hoops	8.25	Dec-03
ESPN Major League Baseball	7.5	Apr-04
ESPN NBA Basketball	9.5	Nov-03
EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers	7.5	Feb-04
EyeToy: Groove	6	Jun-04
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	8	Feb-04
Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly	9	Jan-04
FIFA Soccer 2004	8.5	Nov-03
Fight Night 2004	9	Apr-04
Final Fantasy X-2	8.75	Dec-03
Final Fantasy XI	7.75	May-04
Firefighter F.D. 18	5	Mar-04
Front Mission 4	7.25	Jun-04
Fugitive Hunter	5.5	Jan-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	7.5	Mar-04
Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	5.75	Nov-03
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	5	Jan-04
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	7.75	Nov-03
Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jun-04
Hot Wheels World Race	6	Jan-04
I-Ninja	7.5	Jan-04
Intellivision Lives	5	Feb-04
Jak II	9.25	Nov-03
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
Karaoke Revolution	8.5	Nov-03
Kill.Switch	7	Dec-03
King of Fighters 2000/2001	7.75	Dec-03
Kya: Dark Lineage	7.5	Nov-03
La Pucelle: Tactics	8	Jun-04
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	8	Jan-04
Lethal Skies	6	Nov-03
Lifeline	8.75	Mar-04
Looney Tunes: Back in Action	5	Jan-04
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8.25	Dec-03
Lowrider	5	Feb-04
Lupin the 3rd: Treasure of the Sorceror King	5.75	Feb-04
Mafia	7.75	Mar-04
Manhunt	8.25	Jan-04
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	8	Feb-04
Maximo VS. Army of Zin	8.25	Feb-04
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	7.75	Dec-03
Mega Man X7	7.5	Nov-03
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	8	Nov-03
Midway Arcade Treasures	8	Dec-03
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	7.75	Feb-04
MLB 2005	8.5	Apr-04
Mobile Suit Gundam: Encounters in Space	6.5	Nov-03
Monster 4X4: Masters of Metal	6.5	Feb-04
Monster Rancer 4	8.25	Dec-03
MTX: Mototrax	7.5	Apr-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
MX Unleashed	8	Mar-04
Naval Ops: Commander	6	Apr-04
NBA Ballers	8	May-04
NBA Jam	6.5	Nov-03
NBA Live 2004	8.5	Nov-03
NBA Shootout 2004	8	Dec-03
NCAA March Madness 2004	8.25	Jan-04
Need For Speed: Underground	9.5	Dec-03
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
Nightshade	6.5	Mar-04
Onimusha Blade Warriors	8	Mar-04
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	9	Jun-04
Pitfall Harry	6	Apr-04
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	9.5	Dec-03
R: Racing Evolution	7	Jan-04
Rainbow Six 3	7	Apr-04
Ratchet and Clank: Going Commando	9.5	Dec-03
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Resident Evil: Outbreak	7.5	May-04
Ribbit King	7	Jun-04
Rise to Honor	7	Mar-04
Rogue Ops	7.5	Nov-03
Romance of the Three Kingdoms IX	7	Mar-04
RPG Maker II	5.5	Jan-04
R-Type Final	6.75	Mar-04
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	6	May-04
Samurai Warriors	7.5	May-04
Scooby Doo!: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	7.5	Dec-03
Serious Sam: The Next Encounter	7.75	May-04
Seven Samurai 20XX	5	May-04
Sims: Bustin' Out, The	9.25	Jan-04
Siren	6.25	May-04
SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs	9	Dec-03
Sonic Heroes	7.75	Mar-04
Space Channel 5: Special Edition	8.25	Dec-03
Spawn: Armageddon	6.5	Jan-04
Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	7.75	Nov-03
SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom	4.25	Nov-03
Spy Hunter 2	6	Jan-04
SSX 3	9.5	Nov-03
Suffering, The	8.25	Apr-04
Super Trucks Racing	6.75	Dec-03
SWAT: Global Strike Team	7	Dec-03
Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	8.5	May-04
Tak and the Power of Juju	6.75	Nov-03
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	7.75	Dec-03
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	5.75	Jan-04
Time Crisis 3	7.5	Dec-03
Tokyo Xtreme Racer 3	6.75	Jan-04
Tony Hawk's Underground	9.25	Dec-03
Transformers	7	Jun-04
True Crime: Streets of LA	8.5	Dec-03
Virtual-On Marz	5	Dec-03
Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	8.25	Nov-03
Whiplash	4	Jan-04
Winning Eleven 7	9.25	Feb-04
World Tour Soccer 2005	6.5	May-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrath Unleashed	6	Mar-04
WWE Smackdown: Here Comes The Pain	8.5	Dec-03
XIII	7	Dec-03
X-Files: Resist Or Serve	6.5	May-04
XGRA	5	Nov-03

GAMECUBE

1080° Avalanche	6.25	Jan-04
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	5	Dec-03
Beyond Good And Evil	8	Dec-03
Bionicle	6	Jan-04
Bomberman Jetters	8	Dec-03
Custom Robo	5.75	Apr-04



Worms 3D – GC – Mar-04

Disney's Hide and Sneak	3.5	Dec-03
Disney's Party	2.5	Nov-03
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	7.25	Dec-03
FIFA Soccer 2004	8.25	Nov-03
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	7	Feb-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Go! Go! Hypergrind!	7.75	Dec-03
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Gotcha Force	7	Jan-04
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	8	Apr-04
Hobbit, The	6.25	Jan-04
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
Kirby Air Ride	7	Dec-03
Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures, The	8	Jun-04
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
NBA Live 2004	8.25	Dec-03
Need For Speed: Underground	9	Dec-03
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
Pac-Man Vs.	5	Jan-04
Phantasy Star Online Episode III	8	Apr-04
Pitfall Harry	6	Apr-04
Pokémon Channel	6.5	Jan-04
Pokémon Colosseum	7	Mar-04
Pool Paradise	6	May-04
R: Racing Evolution	7	Feb-04
Ribbit King	7	Jun-04
Rogue Ops	7.5	Nov-03
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	6	May-04
Scooby Doo!: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Simpsons: Hit and Run	8.5	Nov-03
Sims: Bustin' Out, The	9	Jan-04
Serious Sam: The Next Encounter	7.75	May-04
Sonic Heroes	7.75	Jan-04
Spirits and Spells	2	Dec-03
SSX 3	9.5	Nov-03
Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike	6.5	Nov-03
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	9	Oct-03
Tony Hawk's Underground	8.75	Feb-04
True Crime: Streets of LA	8	Jan-04
Viewtiful Joe	9.5	Oct-03
WarioWare, Inc.: Mega Party Games	7	Apr-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrestlemania XIX	7.75	Oct-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Falsebound Kingdom	6.5	Jan-04

XBOX

Alias	7.5	Apr-04
All-Star Baseball 2005	7	Apr-04

Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel – Xbox – Feb-04

Amped 2	6.75	Nov-03
Aquaman: Battle for Atlantis	2	Oct-03
Armed and Dangerous	8	Jan-04
Arx Fatalis	7.5	Jan-04
Auto Modellista	7.5	Apr-04
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	5.5	Dec-03
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	5	Nov-03
Battlestar Galactica	6.5	Jan-04
Beyond Good and Evil	8	Dec-03
Blowout	6.5	Feb-04
Breakdown	7.5	Apr-04
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	8	Jan-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt: 2004 Season	4.75	Nov-03
Carve	6.5	Feb-04
Celebrity Deathmatch	2.75	Jan-04
Colin McRae Rally 4	8.5	Apr-04
Counter Strike	7.5	Jan-04
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
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-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
Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jun-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
Mafia	8	Jun-04
Magic: The Gathering Battlegrounds	6.5	Dec-03
Manhunt	8	Jun-04
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
RalliSport Challenge 2	7.25	Jun-04
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
R-Type	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
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	9.5	May-04
Spy Hunter 2	6	Feb-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
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Dawn of Destiny	6	Jun-04

PC

Age of Mythology: The Titans	9	Dec-03
Battlefield Vietnam	8	May-04
Black Mirror, The	4.5	Jan-04
Breed	5.75	Jun-04
Call of Duty	9	Dec-03
Civilization III: Conquests	9	Jan-04
Command & Conquer Generals: Zero Hour	8	Dec-03
Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	6	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
Desert Rats vs. Afrika Korps	8	Jun-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	8	Jan-04

Northland – PC – Mar-04

Homeworld 2	9.25	Nov-03
Horizons: Empire of Istaria	7	Feb-04
Korea: Forgotten Conflict	5	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
Nemesis of the Roman Empire	7.75	Jun-04
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	8.5	Feb-04
Northland	8	Mar-04
Nosferatu: The Wrath of Malachi	3	Jan-04
Painkiller	8.5	Jun-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
Sacred	7.75	Jun-04
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
Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Rage	5.75	Jun-04
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	7	Dec-03
Disney Extreme Skate Adventure	6	Oct-03
Disney's Magical Quest 2	6.75	Oct-03
Donkey Kong	8	Jun-04
Dragon Ball Z: Taiketsu	6	Dec-03
Fire Emblem	8.75	Dec-03
Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	7	Dec-03

Justice League Chronicles – GBA – 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 Golf: Advance Tour	8	Jun-04
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	9.5	Jan-04
Mario vs. Donkey Kong	7.5	Jun-04
Max Payne	7.75	Jan-04
Medal of Honor: Infiltrator	6	Nov-03
Mega Man Battle Chip Challenge	6	Mar-04
Mega Man Battle Network 4: Red Sun/Blue Moon	7	Jun-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
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
River City Ransom EX	8	Jun-04
R-Type III: The Third Lightning	6.25	May-04
Scooby Doo! Mystery Mayhem	6	Jan-04
Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon	7.5	Jun-04
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
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8	May-04
Spyro: Attack of the Rhynocs	5.5	Jan-04
Spyro Orange: The Cortex Conspiracy	5.75	Jun-04
SSX 3	4	Dec-03
Star Wars: Flight of the Falcon	2.25	Jan-04
Super Duper Sumos	6	Jan-04
Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3	9.5	Nov-03
Super Mario Bros.	9	Jun-04
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

Psi-Ops:
The Mindgate Conspiracy

Project Lead Brian Eddy Hooks Us Up With Strategy

Control Cover Objects

Telekinesis is very versatile; you can create barricades and custom cover with any nearby objects. You can get really creative and make yourself a little fort, especially in tight situations where the player might get pinned down. You can also use TK to remove cover that an enemy is hiding behind.

Diversion Is Fun

Enemies are very aware of sound in the environment. To sneak by someone, try TKing an object across the room. If they hear it hit or break, they will go to investigate the sound. When they have their backs to you, simply sneak by them. This is an essential tactic to use when playing on Elite difficulty.

Watch Your Step

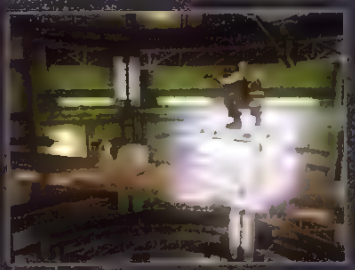
Enemies will hear you sneaking up behind them only if you are stepping in a puddle or on a loud surface like metal. If you hear the clanking sound of your or the enemies' footsteps you will want to avoid sneaking up on them. Use a different method to dispose of them instead.

Use Cover To Your Advantage

Use a combination of the wall press and crouch and cover technique. Players can also TK objects in front of themselves to make a TK shield. The metal crate is your friend...it is one of the best objects in the game. This technique becomes even more important when playing Elite mode. The player can use psi powers in complete safety while using the wall moves or when hiding behind objects.

Explosives – Fun For All!

Know them, use them, love them. Use telekinesis to carry explosive objects with you into hotspots or ambush areas. If you think you're going to be attacked in an area later, prep it with explosives.

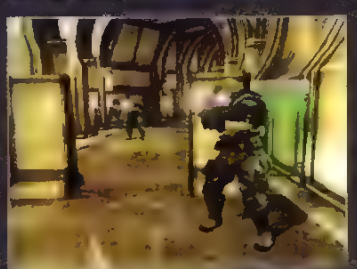


TK Surfing

Get creative with your powers. For example, by standing on an object and then lifting it with TK, you can fly almost anywhere in the game! By throwing the object and catching it quickly you can reach even higher areas.

Aura View And Mind Control

Use aura view to observe enemy soldiers who are patrolling. If they're unaware of your presence, their aura will be blue; if they're aware of you, their aura will be red. Towards the end of the game, you'll be confronted by armored MP3 soldiers who resist your psi attacks. However, they are only able to resist you if they are aware of you...so if you use aura view and sneak up on them, you can use mind control to take them over and have them do your dirty work.



Use Special Weapons

Some enemies are equipped with weapons that Nick can't carry with him, such as grenades, flamethrowers, or even rocket launchers. By observing the enemy with remote viewing, you can see exactly which ones are carrying them. Use mind control to take them over and you can turn the special weapons against the enemy. Press the weapon select button to throw grenades when controlling an enemy soldier; the angle you're looking up or down at will determine how far you throw.

Snipe Grenades

Use a sniper rifle to aim for the hand grenades carried on the belt by some enemy soldiers. If your aim is good you'll blow them with one shot. This trick provides hours of fun for the whole family, and a great method for dealing with those pesky MP3s.

Use PK-TK Combo Against MP3s

MP3s are probably the most resilient and effective enemies you will meet in the game. They are partially immune to most of the psychic powers in your arsenal, but they do have some weaknesses. Since MP3s can resist TK head on, you can distract them slightly by first using pyrokinesis to set them on fire. This leaves them vulnerable for a short time so you can TK them. To dispatch them quickly, set them on fire with PK and then quickly TK them into something before they put the fire out.

Use Mind Control

Mind control is probably one of the most under-used (but most powerful) of the psychic powers. It allows you to clean out areas without getting in harm's way. But it also allows you to get access to weapons that you could not otherwise use, such as the grenades and the rocket launcher. Find an MP3 with a grenade attached to his belt and mind control him. Now press the weapon select button and let the grenades fly. You can also mind control the MP3s who have the rocket launcher. First make sure they are not alerted; otherwise you can not MC them. Go into aura view and make sure their aura is blue. Now simply mind control them and unleash the rockets.

Stun/MD combo

Enemies are stunned for a short amount of time after you TK them into the wall or object. While they are lying on the floor but not yet dead (you can tell if they are dead if they have dropped their weapon) you can mind drain them for an easy kill. To do this, stand behind them. Once they are fully standing you can perform a MD on them. Be careful, you have to time this correctly or they will turn around and attack you before you can do the MD. This will yield the player maximum psi juice and a satisfying head pop.

Use Those Grenades

When an enemy is throwing a grenade at you, "catch" it in mid-air with TK and throw it right back. If you time it correctly, the enemy won't be able to run away before it detonates.

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

Simpsons: Hit & Run

> XBOX, GAMECUBE

Input all of these cheats at the Options menu located in the Simpson's living room. When a code is entered correctly, you'll hear a horn.

Alternate Camera – Hold L and R, then press B (x3), A
Brick Car – Hold L and R, then press B, B, Y, X
Faster Cars – Hold L and R, then press X (x4)
Jumping Cars – Hold L and R, then press X (x3), Y
No Car Damage – Hold L and R, then press Y, A, Y, A
One-Hit Car Explosions – Hold L and R, then press Y (x2), X (x2)
See Credits – Hold L and R, then press A, X (x2), Y
Show Grid – Hold L and R, then press B, A, B, Y
Show Speedometer – Hold L and R, then press Y, Y, B, X
Super Fast Cars – Hold L and R, then press Y (x4)
Trails Mode – Hold L and R, then press Y, B, Y, B

Soul Calibur II

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

Finish these challenges to unlock the following arenas, characters, modes, costumes, and weapons.

ARENAS
Hwangseo Palace/Phoenix Court – In Chapter 7 (Rigel), complete Rigel, Spiritual City.
Labyrinth – In Chapter 6 (Aldebaran), defeat the boss in Underground Juno.
Lakeside Coliseum – In Chapter 1 (Regulus), complete Warrior's Trial Grounds to unlock this snazzy new arena
Money Pit/Top Tier – In Chapter 4 (Mizar), complete Al Gieba Ruins and this arena will become available.

CHARACTERS
Berserker – In Subchapter 1 (Schedar) on your second time through Weapon Master mode, defeat the boss in Stone Temple.
Cervantes – In Chapter 3 (Benetnasch), complete Benetnasch Harbor to unlock Cervantes.
Character Profiles – Complete Arcade mode to unlock a Profile of the character you were playing as.
Charade – In Chapter 3 (Benetnasch), complete Carnival to add Charade to your character list.
Seung Mina – In Chapter 6 (Aldebaran), complete Seginus Temple.
Sophitia – In Chapter 4 (Mizar), defeat the boss in Charon's Pass.
Yoshimitsu – In Chapter 2 (Thuban), beat the boss in Minkar Mine to add this familiar Tekken face to your roster.

COSTUMES
New Nightmare – In Chapter 8 (Merak), complete Grand Shrine of Merak to unlock this costume!

MODES
Extra Arcade Mode – Simply complete Arcade mode.
Extra Practice Mode – In Chapter 1 (Regulus), complete Proving Grounds to unlock this handy feature.
Extra Survival (Standard) Mode – In Chapter 6 (Aldebaran), complete Siam Ruins.
Extra Team Battle Mode – In Subchapter 1 (Schedar), defeat the boss of Stone Temple.
Extra Time Attack (Standard) Mode – In Chapter 5 (Altair), complete Nereid Gorge.
Weapon Master Opening – In Chapter 10 (Antares), complete Tartaros.

WEAPONS
Acheron (Cervantes) – In Chapter 4 (Maxim), defeat a specific enemy in Charon's Pass.
Halberd (Seung Mina) – In Chapter 6 (Aldebaran), defeat a specific enemy in Underground Juno.
Schweizer (Raphael) – In Chapter 4 (Mizar), complete Deserted Village.
Soul Calibur Evil (Xianghua) – In Chapter 5 (Altair), defeat your doppelganger in Paradise of Altair.
Soul Edge Growth (Nightmare) – In Chapter 7 (Rigel), complete Forbidden Grounds.
Synval (Sophitia) – In Chapter 10 (Antares), defeat a specific foe in Court of the Dead.

PLAYSTATION 2

Corvette

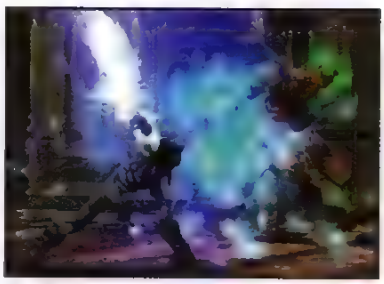
Enter this as your player name.
Open All Courses – XOPENSEZ

Hitman: Contracts

Complete Mission With Silent Assassin Rating – During gameplay, enter R2, L2, Up, Down, X, L3, ○, X, ○, X
Level Select – At the main menu, enter □, △, ○, Left, Up, Right, L2, R2

UNLOCKABLE WEAPONS
Complete the missions with a Silent Assassin rating (even by using the code) to unlock the following weapons.
Mission 1 – CZ 2000 Dual Pistols
Mission 2 – Micro Uzi Dual Submachine Guns
Mission 3 – Silverballer Silenced Dual Pistols
Mission 4 – Magnum 500 Dual Pistols
Mission 5 – Sawed-Off Shotgun Dual
Mission 6 – M4 Carbine Silenced Assault Rifle
Mission 7 – SG220 .S Dual Pistols
Mission 8 – MP5 Silenced Submachine Gun
Mission 9 – AK 74 Silenced Assault Rifle
Mission 10 – GK 17 Dual Pistols
Mission 11 – Micro Uzi Silenced Dual Submachine Guns
Mission 12 – PGM Silenced Sniper Rifle

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen trying to send tickles to Jenny McCarthy over Xbox Live)



Legacy of Kain: Defiance

Enter these codes while the game is paused to enable the cheats.

All Bonuses – R2, Down, L2, R1, Left, L2, Down, L1, △
All Dark Chronicles – R1, Down, R2, L1, Right, R2, △, Down, L1
Fill 'Er Up – Left, Right, Left, Right, R1, L1, ○, △, Down
Full TK Power AND Health – Left (x2), Up (x2), L1, R2, ○, Down, △
Give All Slams – Right, Down, Up, Down (x2), R1, △, ○, Down
Infinite Reaver Charge – Down (x2), Up, Left, R1, R2, Down, △, ○
Invincible – Up, Down, Right, Down, R1, R2, Down, △, L1
No Textures – L1, Down, R2, Right, R2, Up, △, L1, Down
Switch to Equivalent Toon Version – Up, Down, Up, Down, R1, R2, Down, ○, △
Tube Reaver – Up, Down, Left, Right, R2, L2, △, Down, ○
Wireframe – L1, Down, L1, Up, R1, L2, L1, Down, △

Simpsons: Hit & Run

Input all of these cheats at the Options menu located in the Simpson's living room. When a code is entered correctly, you'll hear a horn.

Alternate Camera – Hold L1 and R1, then press ○ (x3), X
Brick Car – Hold L1 and R1, then press ○ (x2), △, □
Faster Cars – Hold L1 and R1, then press □ (x4)
Jumping Cars – Hold L1 and R1, then press □ (x3), △

Mod World

America's Army

No Car Damage – Hold L1 and R1, then press △, ✕, △, ✕
One-Hit Car Explosions – Hold L1 and R1, then press △ (x2), □ (x2)
See Credits – Hold L1 and R1, then press ✕, □ (x2), △
Show Grid – Hold L1 and R1, then press ○, ✕, ○, ✕
Show Speedometer – Hold L1 and R1, then press △ (x2), ○, □
Super Fast Cars – Hold L1 and R1, then press △ (x4)
Trails Mode – Hold L1 and R1, then press △, ○, △, ○

Star Trek: Shattered Universe

Enter these codes at the main menu. A sound and a message will confirm correct entry.

Earn All Ranks and Medals – L1, R1, L1, ○, R1, △, L1, Select
God Mode – L1, ○, L1, R1, △ (x2), ○, Select
Unlock All Missions – R1, L1, ○, □, L1, R1, △, Select
Unlock All Ships – L1, □, L1, □, R1, R1, ○, Select
Unlock Kobayashi Maru Difficulty – L1, △, L1 (x2), □, △, R1, Select

XBOX

Hitman: Contracts – Xbox

Complete Mission With Silent Assassin Rating – During gameplay, enter R, L, Up, Down, A, L3, B, A, B, A

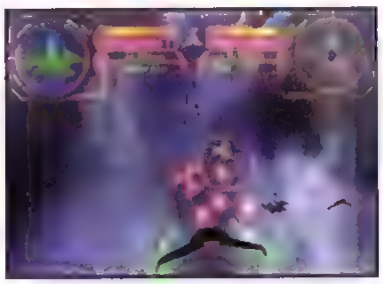
Level Select – At the main menu, enter X, Y, B, Left, Up, Right, L Button, R Button

UNLOCKABLE WEAPONS
Complete the missions with a Silent Assassin rating (even by using the code) to unlock the following weapons.
Mission 1 – CZ 2000 Dual Pistols
Mission 2 – Micro Uzi Dual Submachine Guns
Mission 3 – Silverballer Silenced Dual Pistols
Mission 4 – Magnum 500 Dual Pistols
Mission 5 – Sawed-Off Shotgun Dual
Mission 6 – M4 Carbine Silenced Assault Rifle
Mission 7 – SG220 .S Dual Pistols
Mission 8 – MP5 Silenced Submachine Gun
Mission 9 – AK 74 Silenced Assault Rifle
Mission 10 – GK 17 Dual Pistols
Mission 11 – Micro Uzi Silenced Dual Submachine Guns
Mission 12 – PGM Silenced Sniper Rifle

Legacy of Kain: Defiance

Enter these codes while the game is paused to enable the cheats.

All Bonuses – Black, Down, White, R Button, Left, White, R Button, Left, White, R Button, Left, White, Down, L Button, Y
All Dark Chronicles – R Button, Down, Black, L Button, Right, Black, Y, Down, L Button
Fill 'Er Up – Left, Right, Left, Right, R Button, L Button, B, Y, Down
Full TK Power and Health – Left (x2), Up (x2), L Button, Black, B, Down, Y
Give All Stams – Right, Down, Up, Down (x2), R Button, Y, B, Down
Infinite Reaver Charge – Down (x2), Up, Left, R Button, Black, Down, Y, B
Invincible – Up, Down, Right, Down, R Button, Black, Down, Y, L Button
No Textures – L Button, Down, Black, Right, Black, Up, Y, L Button, Down
Switch to Equivalent Toon Version – Up, Down, Up, Down, R Button, Black, Down, B, Y
Tube Reaver – Up, Down, Left, Right, Black, White, Y, Down, B

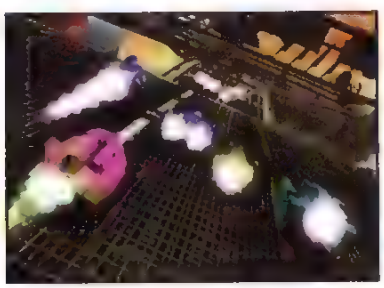


Star Trek: Shattered Universe

Enter these codes at the main menu. A sound and a message will confirm correct entry

Earn All Ranks and Medals – Black, L Button, R Button, L Button, B, R Button, Y, L Button, White
Unlock All Ships – Black, L Button, X, L Button, X, R Button, R Button, B, White
God Mode – Black, L Button, B, L Button, R Button, Y (x2), B, White
Unlock All Missions – Black, R Button, L Button, B, X, L Button, R Button, Y, White
Unlock Kobayashi Maru Difficulty – Black, L Button, Y, L Button, L Button, X, Y, R Button, White

GAMECUBE



F-Zero GX

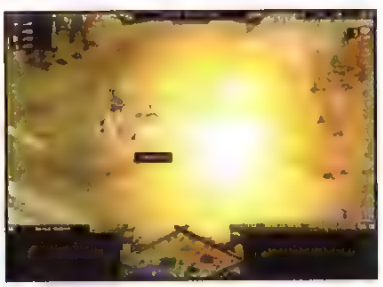
Codes, stuff to unlock, and special names for custom machines are all hidden in the new F-Zero.

Character Theme Music – You can change the music that plays during a replay to any of the character theme songs that you've unlocked. At any time, push the L and R triggers to do so
Sounds of Big Blue – Go to the F-Zero Shop and at the screen where you buy stuff, enter this code (use the d-Pad for directions): Z, Left, Right, Left, Z, Y, X, Z, Left, Right, Left, Right, Z, X, Z, X, Z. You can now buy Sounds of Big Blue in the shop for 99 tickets, which will let you hear it by pressing the L button while highlighting any Big Blue track.
Subtitles in Story Mode – Press the Z button during a cutscene to bring up subtitles.

UNLOCKABLES
AX Machine Parts – Beat all Story mode chapters on Hard difficulty.
AX Pilots – Beat all Story mode chapters on Very Hard difficulty.
AX Tracks – Win AX Machine Tracks or beat all the grand prix on Master difficulty
Dark Schneider – Beat all chapters in Story Mode.
Master Class – Come in first place in the Ruby, Emerald, and Sapphire Cups on Expert.
Sonic Oval – Beat the AX Cup.

SPECIAL CUSTOM MACHINES
When building custom machines out of the parts that you earn, you can get some with special names. Here's a partial list
Beat The Beast – Fire Wolf (B), Muscle Gorilla (B), Titan -G4 (C), 1740 kg
Desert Camel – Big Tyrant (A), Blast Camel (D), Bazooka -Y5 (D), 2030 kg
Fantasista – Liberty Manta (D), Scud Viper (C), Triple -Z (A), 1360 kg
Gargoyle – Funny Swallow (D), Bright Spear (C), Boxer -2C (C), 1170 kg
King Neptune – Grand Base (A), Super Lynx (B), Titan -G4 (B), 2380 kg
Long Shot – Rapid Barrel (C), Aerial Bullet (C), Scorpion -R (E), 1220 kg
Master Work – Sky Horse (C), Moon Snail (B), Titan -G4 (D), 1440 kg
Out Rider – Funny Swallow (D), Windy Shark (D), Bazooka -Y5 (E), 960 kg
Salvation – Rapid Barrel (C), Blast Camel (B), Raiden -88 (D), 1390 kg
Sockdolager – Big Tyrant (A), Muscle Gorilla (C), Boxer -2C (C), 2210 kg

PC



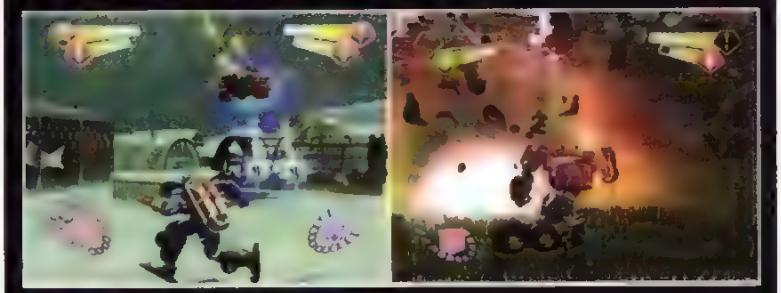
Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots

During gameplay, press Enter to bring up the chat window, then input any of these codes (substituting appropriate values for the bracketed parts; i.e. type "cheat defeat greeks" to defeat the Greeks). Note that these only work in single-player games.

Change Difficulty – cheat diff [0-5]
Create Bird at Pointer – cheat bird
Defeat Player – cheat defeat [name]
Destroy Selected Unit/Building – cheat die
Finish Selected Building or Item in Queue – cheat finish
Get Heavy Machine Gun Infantry – cheat safe
Get Resources – cheat resource all+[number]
Get Technology Level – cheat library [number]
Nuke at Pointer – cheat nuke
Reveal Map – cheat reveal [0 or 1]
Reveal Map And Control All Players – cheat sandbox
Victory for Player – cheat victory [name]

Code of the Month

Transformers



Enter these codes at the indicated screen. Optimus Prime will let you know with a voiceover if your code was accepted.

DIFFICULTY SELECT SCREEN
Beat Alaska Level – R1, ○, R1, □, Left (x2), Right, Left
Beat Deep Amazon Level – Left, Right, Left (x2), Right, R1, R2, ○
Beat Earth Level – R2, R1, L1, L2, □, ○, □, ○
Beat Mid Atlantic Level – ○, □, ○, □, Right, Left (x2), Right
Beat Starship Level – Left (x2), Right, ○ (x2), Right (x2), Left

AUTOBOT HQ SCREEN
Big Head Mode – ○ (x3), □, L1 (x3), L2
Faster Game Speed – L1, R2 (x2), □ (x4), L1
Unlimited Powerlink – Up, Down, Up, Down, ○, □ (x2), ○
Unlimited Stealth – Up (x2), Down (x2), L1, L2, L1, L2 (Note: You must have the Covert mini-con equipped for this to have any effect)

PAUSE SCREEN
Super-Powered Weapons – □, ○, □, ○, L1 (x2), L2, L1

Jeremy Westmoreland
Cincinnati, OH

Red Dead Revolver

Tips From The Team At Rockstar San Diego

Tactics: When Bullets Are Flying, Use Anything And Everything For Cover

When pinned down in a storm of whizzing bullets, it's a safer bet to utilize cover while returning fire. Simply find an object or structure that will provide you with the adequate shielding, draw your weapon, take aim, and fire. This maneuver will without a doubt save your life. Outnumbered and outgunned, take advantage of the environment for protection. If you don't, you're as good as dead.

Tactics: When Cover Is Not An Option, Strafing Is Your Best Bet

Sometimes you don't have the time or the suitable environment to find cover. If this is the situation, the strafing tactic is the only viable option. Just strafe from side to side and circle the enemy while firing your weapon continuously. Utilizing the strafing tactic will inflict damage to the enemy and, more importantly, make you a difficult target to hit.

Tactics: An Empty Bottle Makes For A Handy Weapon

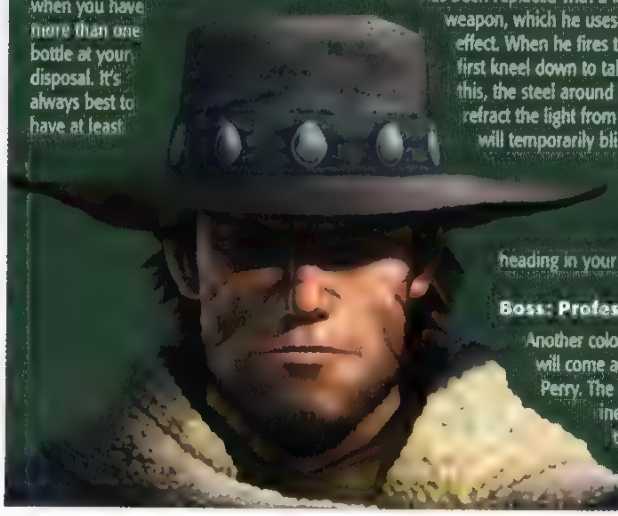
Nothing defines the Wild West like a good old rough and tough saloon fight. When you find yourself in this predicament with no weapons, you must think fast and improvise. Glass bottles are plentiful in a saloon and they also make an ideal melee weapon. To cause the most damage, grab a bottle and smash it on your enemy's face...this will knock him out. Be sure to use this move only when you have more than one bottle at your disposal. It's always best to have at least two bottles on you and make sure one is drawn at all times, ready for attack.

Boss: Pig Josh

This guy is the toughest son of gun that you'll ever run across. You can't attack him straight on because of the iron shields that are clasped to his forearms. The only way to inflict damage to Pig Josh is to shoot him from behind. When shot in the back, Pig Josh will be stunned momentarily, as soon as this happens, pump an entire revolver-full into him, and then reload as you run for cover. Repeat this three to five times and you will beat him without taking any damage. Just remember, when he comes to, he'll run directly towards the last place you shot him from. So whatever you do, do not stand around...keep moving!

Boss: Colonel Daren

Your journey through the tumultuous plains will bring you face to face with Colonel Daren. Half flesh and half steel, the Colonel's left arm has been replaced with a large cannon-like weapon, which he uses to devastating effect. When he fires this weapon, he will first kneel down to take aim. As he does this, the steel around his shoulder will refract the light from the sun. This glare will temporarily blind you, but more importantly, this light is an indication that a cannonball will be heading in your direction.



Boss: Professor Perry

Another colorful character you will come across is Professor Perry. The Professor has the inexplicable ability to appear and disappear at will. When battling this boss, be sure that you don't waste your Dead Eyes by targeting Perry right before he disappears. Only initiate your Dead Eye as he appears. During your intense battle with Professor Perry, his health meter may fall low; when this occurs he will drink from a mysterious bottle to regain his health. Right when he begins to drink, initiate your Dead Eye and fire. If can shoot him faster than he can drink, you should be able to kill him.

Power-Up Hints

Power-ups are plentiful if you know who to talk to...see below.

- Talk to Jack five times in Brimstone 3. He will sell you a health power-up.
- Talk to the newspaper boy in Brimstone 4. He will sell you a Dead Eye power up.
- Talk to the girls in the bathtub upstairs in Saloon Fight. They will sell you a health power-up.
- Talk to the girl in the Jailbreak twice after rescuing her. She will sell you a health power-up.

Level Hints: The Stagecoach

The armored coach in this level is much easier to deal with on foot rather than on horseback. As soon as you spot the coach, activate your Dead Eye and target the driver. As the coach passes by you, run up to the cemetery and keep shooting the driver with your rifle. From the cemetery, you will be overlooking the coach as it travels through the canyon below. With this height advantage you are not only out of range of the coach's Gatling gun, but you also have a clear shot at the driver. There is health in the cemetery and under the rock formation directly across from it. This should be plenty to keep you alive.

Level Hints: Fort Diego

The hard part of this level is the sheer number of enemies you confront in the courtyard. You have to first take out about twenty gunmen and immediately run up to the roof. Then take out the enemies around the Gatling gun. But do not use the gun just yet; there's no cover and you are more or less a sitting duck. Instead, run back down to the ground and take out enemies by using the strafing tactic...whatever you do, keep moving! Focus on killing the big miners wearing the red shirts, as they drop medicine bottles.

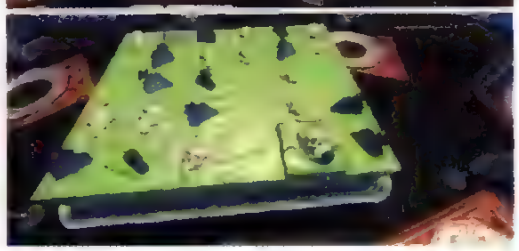
Level Hints: Jailbreak

The key to this level is stealth, and if that fails, RUN LIKE HELL! There are far too many enemies for you to take on, so it's in your best interest to hightail it. Kill the first enemy you see at the start of the level, pick up his weapon and keep running. When you get to end of the hall, turn left and you will find a key in this room.

Pick up the key and run back out and up the hall through the door. Enter the second section, turn right and run past the sleeping guard. Go across the bridge and into the jail at the end of the hall. Here you will find another key. Run back across the bridge and to your left. Run all the way around to the second doorway on your left. At the end of this hall, there's a room where you'll get another key and twin revolvers. With the twin revolvers, you now have ample firepower to push back the enemies. Remember to buy a "kiss" from the girl in the jail cell to regain your health.

PLAYING SCARED

MAJOR MOMENTS IN HORROR GAMING



The 7th Guest

The 11th Hour

The public's interest in horror goes in cycles, perhaps more than any other entertainment genre. Teen slasher movies caused increased attention in the mid-nineties, only to see it fall off again for a few years. Now it looks that horror is once again in style, with the success of smart, scary movies like *The Ring*, *28 Days Later*, and the remake of *Dawn of the Dead*. Of course, gamers have never really lost their taste for horror, as evidenced by the success of the Resident Evil, Silent Hill, and Fatal Frame series, along with the glut of new horror titles like The Suffering, Siren, and more. While Resident Evil gets a lot of credit for bringing horror games to the forefront, gamers have been seeking scares for years. Creep down the dark, musty halls of history with us, and unearth the corpses of horror games from the past.

While games with spooky themes had appeared earlier, 1993 was undoubtedly the year that set the gaming industry down the shadowy road that resulted in the current crop of survival horror games. Within the span of this single year, three titles appeared that conclusively proved one thing: People wanted games that could unnerve them. Those titles were The 7th Guest, Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers, and most importantly, Alone in the Dark.

The 7th Guest is undoubtedly a video game milestone, even outside of the scope of horror gaming. It was the first blockbuster CD-ROM title, and is even credited by some with increasing the sales of CD-ROM drives by 300 percent

Phantasmagoria

Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers

when it first hit shelves. It was also one of the first titles to feature full-motion video (FMV). Even before its impact on horror gaming is considered, The 7th Guest is undeniably an important game. Like many adventure titles of the time, it focused on puzzle solving, which remains an important part of horror games.

Created by developer Trilobyte, The 7th Guest placed players in Stauf Mansion, and revealed to them the sinister mysteries of the house as they solved puzzles. Horror novelist Matt Costello wrote the story, and the only characters to appear in the game were ghosts. Despite the dark theme, The 7th Guest wasn't very scary, and there was much debate within Trilobyte about the direction that the sequel, The 11th Hour, should take. Scenes were filmed for The 11th Hour that included nudity, but some Trilobyte employees objected that The 7th Guest was a family-friendly game, and its sequel should be as well. The 11th Hour sold decently, but wasn't a hit on the same scale as The 7th Guest, thanks in large part to the juggernaut known as Myst, which released about a year after The 7th Guest. While the series ended after only one sequel, it did inspire Sierra's Phantasmagoria, which when released in 1995, quickly became one of the most controversial games of all time. The huge, seven CD-ROM game featured adult content such as a sex scene, drug use, incredibly graphic deaths, and even an implied rape. The mainstream media ran several stories about the title's shocking content, which may have boosted its sales. Phantasmagoria was a hit and was followed up with the sequel Phantasmagoria: A Puzzle of Flesh. The second title, however, was greeted with bad reviews and worse sales, and the FMV series died forever.

Before Phantasmagoria, Sierra released a tamer horror title. Nineteen ninety-three's Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers played like a classic Sierra adventure (such as King's Quest), but featured markedly darker subject matter. This spooky gem centered on Gabriel Knight, a bookstore owner in New Orleans, who discovered that he was descended from a long line of supernatural investigators known as the *Schattenjager* (shadow hunters). He is drawn into a mystery involving voodoo, sex, and murder. More of a psychological thriller than an out-and-out horror story, it was long on suspense but short on actual scares. Still that didn't dissuade horror fans: Sins of the Fathers won many awards and sold well enough to spawn two sequels. While the original Gabriel Knight title featured voice work from Tim Curry, Michael Dorn, and Mark Hamill, 1995's The Beast Within: A Gabriel Knight Mystery featured FMVs and replaced the impressive cast with underwhelming actors. Curry resumed voice duties in Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned when the series dumped the FMVs in favor of the 3D visuals now standard in survival horror titles.

The three Gabriel Knight titles were written by Jane Jenson (who went on to write horror novels), and are credited as major steps towards the maturation of gaming. What is acceptable in horror games today was in large part established by the franchise, which dealt with touchy subject matter in an intelligent and adult fashion.

As influential as the Gabriel Knight games were in content, the Alone in the Dark games made an even bigger impression in terms of gameplay. Alone in the Dark featured a 3D character in static environments, cinematic camera angles, puzzle solving, and combat. This same formula was borrowed almost exactly for horror's shining moment, Resident Evil. Alone in the Dark was undoubtedly the template for Capcom's horror masterpiece, and was heavily influenced by the writings of H. P. Lovecraft. Players assumed the role of private investigator Edward Carnby as he explored a Louisiana mansion beset by sinister forces. While the graphics look absolutely laughable by today's standards, Alone in the Dark is actually one of the creepiest games ever, thanks to its masterful use of sound. Also, unlike the Resident Evil games, encountering an enemy was never an easy affair, thanks to their strength and the small amount of available ammo. When slinking around the haunted estate in Alone in the Dark, the thought that one might encounter a monster around every corner was enough to fill players with absolute dread.

The success of Alone in the Dark led to inevitable sequels. The second game in the series lost much of its magic when it introduced undead pirates as the main antagonists. This silly idea caused the scare factor to decrease considerably. Alone in the Dark 3 ditched the pirates and dropped Edward Carnby into a haunted western town, but the ghostly pirates surfaced again in Alone in the Dark: One Eyed Jack's Revenge. Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare

Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned

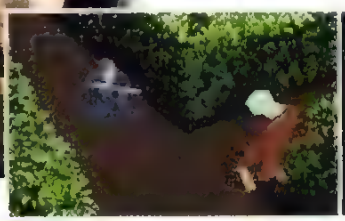
The Beast Within: A Gabriel Knight Mystery

FULL SAIL
Real World Education
Game Design & Development
Bachelor of Science
Degree Program
Associate of Science &
Bachelor of Science
Degree Programs
school of
Computer Animation
Digital Media
Entertainment Business
Film
Game Design & Development
Recording Arts
Show Production & Touring
800.226.7625
fullsail.com
3300 University Boulevard
Winter Park, FL 32792
Financial aid available to those who qualify
Job placement assistance
Accredited College, ACCSCT

Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare

returned the series to its roots, but by the time it released, Resident Evil had usurped its place as the dominant horror franchise. However, the upcoming Alone in the Dark film adaptation may renew interest in the games.

In terms of gameplay, Alone in the Dark is the single most influential horror game in history. It laid the foundation for Capcom's Resident Evil and Dino Crisis series, which in turn inspired legions of imitators. Some, like Silent Hill, became classics in their own right. Others, like Curse: The Eye of Isis, were quickly forgotten. This proliferation of horror titles simply proves that players are hungry for games that can scare them. Public interest in horror movies may come and go, but horror gaming is here to stay.



Alone in the Dark

FORGOTTEN FEAR

Throughout the years, many developers have attempted to establish new horror franchises. The following is a list of horror titles that most have forgotten. Some of them are great, some aren't, but they all deserve mention in order to develop the fullest look at the genre possible.

Splatterhouse – TurboGraphx-16 1990
An early side-scrolling horror game, Splatterhouse put you in the shoes of Jason Vorhees lookalike Rick, who battled horrible monsters to rescue his girlfriend. Two sequels appeared on the Sega Genesis.

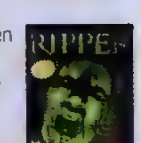
The Legacy: Realm of Terror – PC 1993
An honestly under-appreciated game, The Legacy was a first-person RPG in which players explored a haunted mansion. The Legacy was quite a frightening game for its time and was closely tied to classic horror literature. The writings of Edgar Allan Poe and H.P. Lovecraft served as major inspirations for this title.

Shivers – PC/Mac 1995
Another horror-themed FMV game from Sierra, Shivers kept players off-guard with a randomizing feature which meant that puzzles never appeared in the same place twice.

Frankenstein: Through the Eyes of the Monster – PC 1995
Like Gabriel Knight, this first-person adventure starred Tim Curry. Curry played Dr. Frankenstein, and players assumed the role of his creation!

Realms of the Haunting – PC 1996
Combining traditional adventure gaming with FMVs and a first-person perspective made Realms of the Haunting a solid title and a cult classic.

Ripper – PC 1996
This PC title stars actors Christopher Walken and John Rhys-Davies. It was released by Take 2 Interactive, which also released the Grand Theft Auto games and the modern horror title Manhunt through its subsidiary, Rockstar Games.



D – Sega Saturn/PSone 1996
This bizarre title is basically an interactive movie. The main character, Laura, must solve the mystery of why her father became a mass murderer. The game has no pause, no save, and must be completed in less than two hours. The Dreamcast sequel, D2, was a more conventional survival horror game, but still featured a strange amalgam of first and third-person views which severely limited player movement.

Blood – PC 1997
The gory first-person shooter Blood put gamers in the shoes of Caleb, a reanimated man battling demons, vampires, and other horror favorites. The sequel, Blood 2: The Chosen, was released in 1998.

Nightmare Creatures – PSone 1997
Unlike the slower paced survival horror of Resident Evil, Nightmare Creatures was a full-on hack n' slash action title with demons and monsters. Because of the frantic pace of the game, it was rarely scary, but did sell well enough to earn a sequel.

Noctune – PC 1999
One of the truly overlooked gems of horror gaming, Nocturne featured great graphics, genuine chills, and a fantastic story. Players controlled The Stranger, an agent for an X-Files-esque organization that explored the supernatural in the 1930s. The Nocturne engine lived on in developer Terminal Reality's second horror game, Blair Witch Volume 1: Rustin Parr. Terminal Reality continues their work in the horror field with their BloodRayne franchise.

The Ring: Terror's Realm – Dreamcast 2000
A direct clone of the Resident Evil series in almost every possible way, The Ring is most interesting because of its origin. This title is based on *Ringu*, the Japanese film which inspired the U.S. hit film *The Ring*. To date, it is the only game based on a Japanese horror movie to make it stateside.

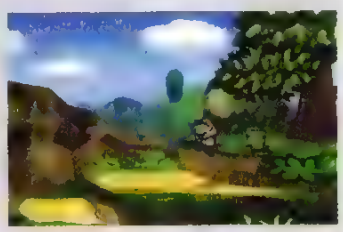
GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Tim Gilbert

PAPER MARIO

> **FORMAT** N64
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO

An easy choice for me as the Greatest Game of All Time is Paper Mario for the N64. At first, you start out battling Bowser, but the fight is impossible to win. Mario falls from Bowser's flying castle down to a town inhabited by Goombas. Mario learns how to fight using a hammer and his famous jump. He gets better at these techniques as the game goes on. Also, as the story progresses, Mario will meet partners who follow him around on his quest to save Peach. They will help him through tight spots and in battle. Luigi isn't a big part of this game, but after Mario learns a special move, he will be able to read Luigi's journal. Each time Mario levels up (by getting 100 Star Chips, which you receive by defeating enemies) he can upgrade his HP, FP (Flower Points), or BP (Badge Points) by 5. Confused about the Badge Points? Mario can collect badges that he equips that let him use stronger moves. Each special attack takes a certain amount of FP, and the BP let Mario equip more Badges at the same time. There are a good number of towns and cities, all with their own twists. The amount of enemies seems endless, and the depth and variety never ends. The bosses can be very hard, even with partners. This game has paper in its name, and the game looks exactly like paper. Even the backgrounds look like props in a movie. The excellent plot, music, graphics, playability, depth, replay value, and a unique concept make this an RPG no one will forget if they play it just once. If you never got a Nintendo 64, this will make you get one, whether you like RPGs or not. I'd obviously give this a 10.



THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

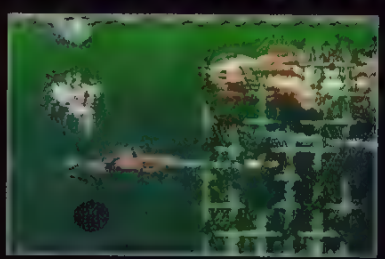
On July 3, 1999, in Weirs Beach, NH, Billy Mitchell played a "perfect" game of Pac-Man by getting the highest score the game allows. To achieve a perfect game, the player must eat every dot, piece of fruit, and ghost in the title's 256 levels without dying, which results in a score of 3,333,360 points. Mitchell, who runs a hot sauce company, also holds the Donkey Kong world record.

PSONE

IN THE HUNT

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** KOKOPELI > **RELEASE** 1995

Old-school games have a pretty rabid following among many gamers, and with titles like In the Hunt, it's easy to see why. This side-scrolling submarine shooter may not be the most innovative title ever, but it has a simplistic charm that is undeniable. Obviously influenced by the likes of R-Type and Metal Slug, In The Hunt is a colorful shooter with a unique underwater setting and some clever level design. Like most shooters, this title is a lot of fun, as basic as can be, and not without its flaws. It's an incredibly short game, but filled with wonderfully entertaining moments. The third stage, for example, has your sub surfacing while a giant rock monster (who fills the bottom of the screen) climbs up behind you. This early PSone title would have looked at home on the Super Nintendo (that's a good thing), and stands as one of the system's true buried treasures. Those who don't like shooters won't be swayed by its ultra-simple gameplay, but In The Hunt is highly recommended for side-scrolling aficionados, obscure game freaks, and Aquaman.

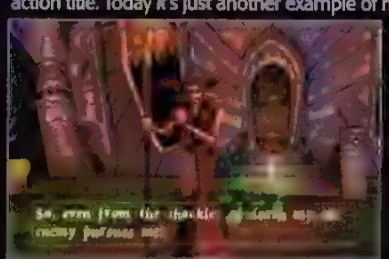


PSONE

MEDIEVIL

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SCEE CAMBRIDGE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** 1998

Sadly, the years have not been kind to many titles that were once some of the best games on the market. Take MediEvil, for example. Yes, the story and its central character Sir Dan are still charming and funny, and the overall look retains its Tim Burton-esque flavor. However, after playing even the most generic action title on any of today's platforms, MediEvil seems, well, medieval. By current standards, the gameplay is simply awful. The camera is the most egregious offender, but the familiar right analog camera control of today wouldn't even have been possible for MediEvil – it was released in the dark days before analog support. It's almost difficult to remember playing PSone games with the d-pad, isn't it? And although there are some nice graphical effects present, such as the light coming through the windows in the church, MediEvil hasn't aged well visually. It has held up better than a lot of PSone titles and still looks unique, but the animation is stiff and the character models are amazingly undetailed. When it was originally released, MediEvil was a charmingly different action title. Today it's just another example of how far gaming has come.



SUPER NINTENDO

EARTHWORM JIM 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** PLAYMATES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SHINY ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** 1996

As the saying goes, they sure don't make them like they used to, and in the case of Earthworm Jim 2, that's really unfortunate. This title is the perfect example of why there are so many retro gamers out there. The side-scrolling levels display creativity and an enthusiasm that is largely absent from modern 3D action games. One stage has players battling through a giant ant hill; blasting the sand around you changes the layout entirely, allowing you to work your way up to the top as the falling sand creates a growing pile beneath you. This imaginative level design is the highlight of Earthworm Jim 2, although the fantastic animation and amusing sound is nearly as impressive. With a roster of quirky characters, silly puzzles, and unique weapons, Earthworm Jim 2 has lost so little of its luster over the years that it can easily stand alongside many of today's best platformers. Only a few difficult minigames hamper this title's appeal, which makes this sequel only slightly less of a classic than the first Earthworm Jim game.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. In The Hunt (GI # 34 02/96), MediEvil (GI # 98 11/98), Earthworm Jim 2 (GI # 33 01/96)

GAMEOVER

That's It, Man. Game Over, Man! Game Over!

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Over the years, many video game characters have popped up to take on Mario, Sonic, and Blinx the Time Sweeper in a battle to become video game royalty. Take our trivia challenge about forgotten game mascots to see where your favorite characters are today, now that their digital adventures are over.

1. Without a doubt, Bubsy the Bobcat was the world's most popular video game character for many years. Sadly, a stint in rehab ended his career. What is printed on his shirt?

- **A.** An Exclamation Point
- **B.** A Question Mark
- **C.** Nothing
- **D.** "Will Platform for Food"

2. What is the name of the headless protagonist in the Genesis title Decapattack?

- **A.** Headsy
- **B.** No-Neck
- **C.** Chuck D. Head
- **D.** Headless Hank

3. The TurboGrafx featured a title known as Kato and Ken in Japan, which has no relation to Game Informer editor Matthew Kato (or so he claims...). What is it called in the United States?

- **A.** Toejam and Earl
- **B.** JJ and Jeff
- **C.** Joe and Mac
- **D.** Awesome Man and Super Guy

4. Mr. Bones, a jazz-guitar playing skeleton, appeared in a self-titled game on what system?

- **A.** Neo Geo
- **B.** Sega Saturn
- **C.** Atari Lynx
- **D.** None – he only appears in our dreams!

5. The recent smash hit game Whiplash starred a weasel and a rabbit who were voted "Best New Game Characters" at the Totally Not Made Up Video Game Awards Ceremony. What are their names?

- **A.** Scarlet and Hare
- **B.** Scratch and Sniff
- **C.** Rascal and Spazz
- **D.** Redmond and Spanx

6. Trevor McFur starred in a shooter on the Atari Jaguar system. What is the full name of this title?

- **A.** Trevor McFur's Space Paranoia
- **B.** Trevor McFur vs. the Alien Slime Fiends
- **C.** Trevor McFur in the Crescent Galaxy
- **D.** Trevor McFur in the Land of the Furries

7. As he was partying in Tijuana during the making of the game, Mario did not star in Donkey Kong 3. Who stepped into the starring role while Nintendo's plumber was living the high life?

- **A.** Stanley The Bugman
- **B.** Jumpman
- **C.** Fred the Electrician
- **D.** Luigi

8. True or False: The game Maniac Mansion, which featured the bizarre Edison family, was adapted into a television show.

- **A.** True
- **B.** False

9. Zombies Ate My Neighbors, one of the first horror games ever, featured two young heroes taking on zombies, vampires, and other evil nasty things. What are the names of these brave souls?

- **A.** Mario and Luigi
- **B.** Paul and Mark
- **C.** Jill and Ernest
- **D.** Zeke and Julia

10. All of these are actual games featuring lame central characters except one. Can you spot the fake crappy game?

- **A.** Harley's Humongous Adventure
- **B.** Kid Wicked's Gnarly Quest
- **C.** Haunting Starring Polterguy
- **D.** Lester the Unlikely

BREAKDOWN

11% of developers polled by *Game Developer Magazine* said they are making their latest title for the GameCube. Platforms that scored higher than Nintendo's console included Linux, Macintosh, and even mobile phones

86% of the staff refer to Miller as "Milli Vanilli"

98% of all handheld video game sales are currently attributed to Nintendo

60% of the staff ate the hot dogs wrapped in bacon outside of the Los Angeles Convention Center while at E3

65% of all the consoles being sold monthly in Singapore are Xboxes. The system is expected to replace the PS2 as the number one platform in the country by November

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

0-1
Dr. Muto, Dental Hygienist

2-3
Gex the garbage man

4-5
Awesome Possum and Radical Rex serving at T.G.I. Friday's

6-7
Boogerman, Certified Public Accountant

8-9
Aero the Acrobat, Flight Attendant

10
Battletoads, 7th Grade Science Project

Game Informer Magazine® (ISSN 1067-6392) is published monthly at a subscription price of $19.98 per year, or twenty four issues for $24.98 by Sunrise Publications®, 724 North First Street, 4th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. (612) 486-6100 or FAX (612) 486-6101. For subscriptions, back issues, or customer service inquiries Toll Free (866) 844-4263. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing offices. SUBSCRIBERS/POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Game Informer Magazine®, 724 North First Street, 4th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Foreign or Canadian orders must be prepaid in U.S. dollars and must include $20/year additional postage per year. Game Informer® does not claim any copyright in the screenshots herein. Copyright in all screenshots contained within this publication are owned by their respective companies. Entire contents copyright 2004. Game Informer Magazine®. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer® is a trademark of GameStop. Products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies.

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

Pray for a full frontal assault.

You're going to love her killer moves. When her world is threatened by the awakening of ancient evil, Ailish and three other great heroes must unite to defeat it. Now this enchanting princess, a brave warrior, a high-flying gunslinger, and a dark huntress will battle through the Realm of Shadows on a quest to reclaim their world. Rotate between each character and use all their powers to prevail in one of the most intense action RPGs. Sudeki will leave you breathless.

SUDEKI™

XBOX

it's good to play together

xbox.com/sudeki

MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence
Blood and Gore

CLIMAX

Microsoft game studios

©2004 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, the Microsoft game studios logo, Sudeki and the Xbox logos are trademarks or registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Developed by Climax. Climax and its logo are trademarks of Climax Group. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association.

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION OF MEGA MAN'S FINEST ADVENTURES!

10 GAMES IN 1
AVAILABLE SUMMER '04

Go back to Mega Man's beginning with these special game compilations. Save the planet from 15 years worth of evil villains! Mega fun awaits with 10 action-packed games for the Nintendo GameCube™ and PlayStation®2 computer entertainment systems and 5 infectious games on Game Boy® Advance.

COMING FALL '04
5 GAMES IN 1

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Cartoon Violence

GAME BOY ADVANCE

PlayStation 2

© CAPCOM CO., LTD. 2004 © CAPCOM U.S.A., INC. 2004. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. CAPCOM, the CAPCOM LOGO and MEGA MAN are registered trademarks of CAPCOM CO., LTD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Licensed by Nintendo. Nintendo, Nintendo GameCube, Game Boy, Game Boy Advance and the Official Seal are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2001 Nintendo. G4 is a registered trademark and service mark of G4 Media, LLC.

CAPCOM
www.capcom.com

Made with love by

Our goal is to preserve classic video game magazines so that they are not lost permanently.

People interested in helping out in any capacity, please visit us at retromags.com.

No profit is made from these scans, nor do we offer anything available from the publishers themselves.

If you come across anyone selling releases from this site, please do not support them and do let us know.

Thank you!