



6 Pages Of Mayhem
God Of War (PG.56)



First Xbox, PlayStation 2
& GameCube Review
Spider-Man 2 (PG. 67)



How Details:
Grand Theft Auto:
San Andreas (PG. 78)

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WORLD EXCLUSIVE

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ISSUE 136

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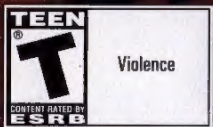
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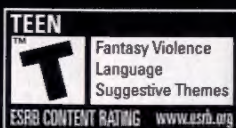
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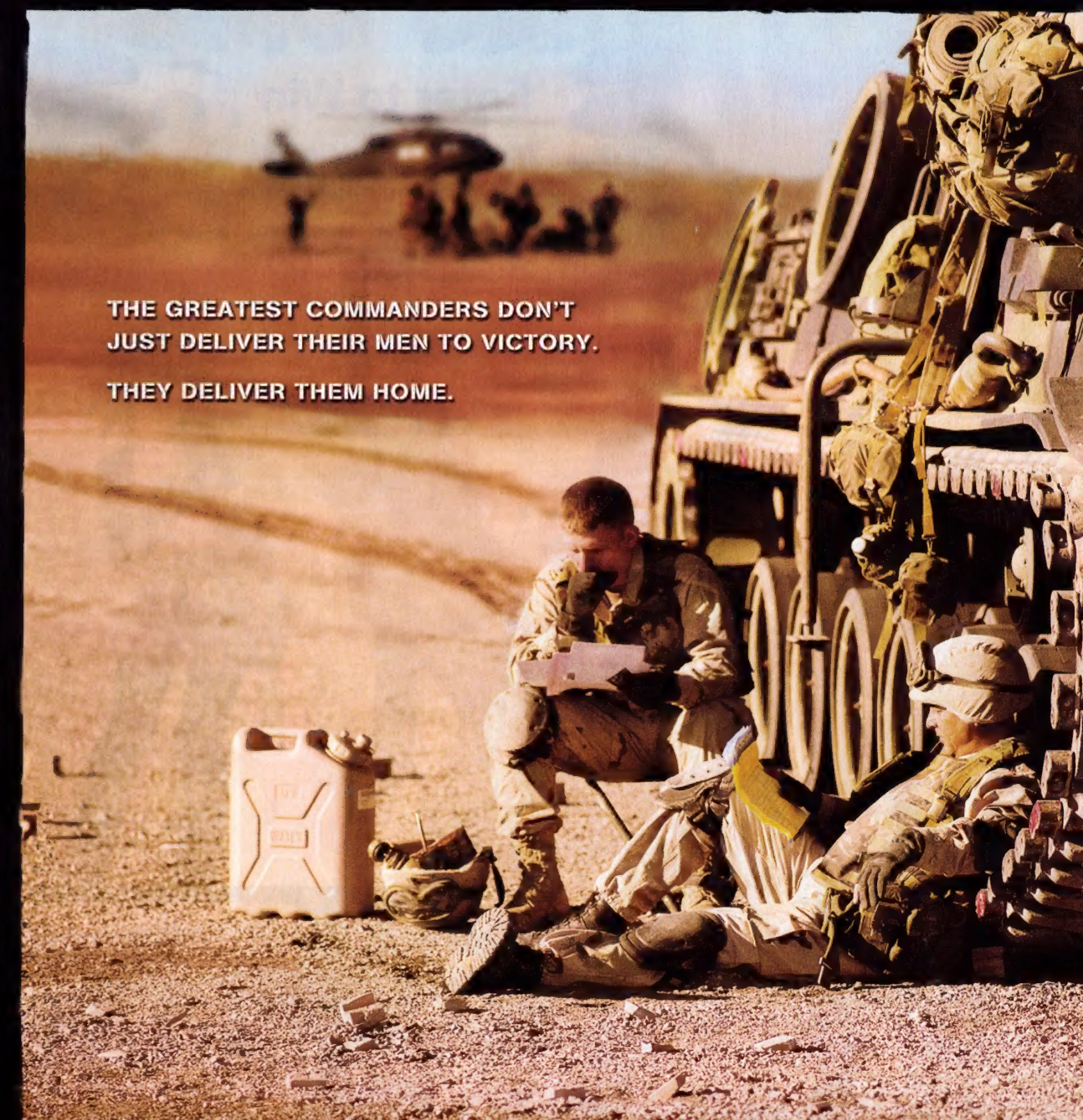
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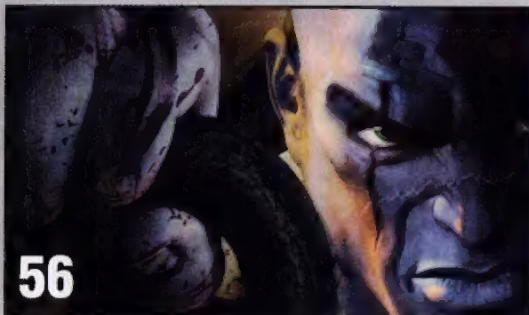


cover story

44 SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

We tried to sneak "Sam Fisher style" into the top-secret headquarters of Ubisoft, but they laughed at how un-stealthy we really were. But the joke's on them, because while they were chuckling at our clumsiness, we got all sorts of top secret details about Sam's next incredible mission. Who's laughing now?

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GOD OF WAR

We begged Sony to make a game about the god of marshmallows, but they told us it might be hard to market. We get the next best thing in the form of Kratos, a vengeful ex-Spartan and aspiring god of war. This guy could kick your butt almost as fast as he kicked ours.



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THE CLASH OF THE PRIMETIME TITANS

It's that time of year again. Football season is rearing its helmeted head again, and so too are the games that emulate it. Take a look at the two titles to watch, then get the scoop on who scored the most touchdowns this time around.

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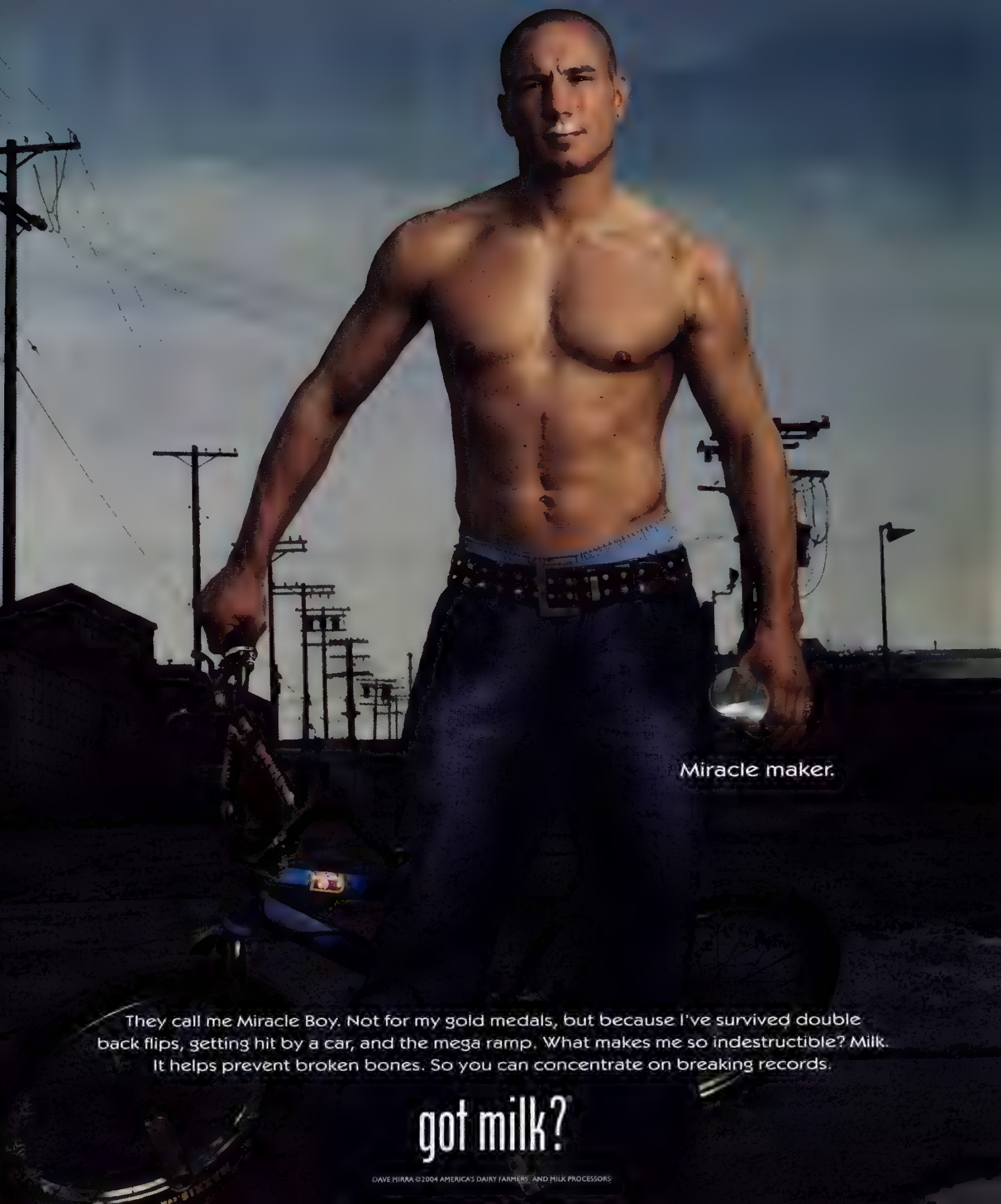
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The end...or is it?



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?

STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



THE WAIT

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I'm impatient. I know it. As a rabid video game fan, I want the next big thing and I want it now. Sure, we get thrown a couple of bones this summer (especially if Doom 3 and Half-Life 2 come out on time, but I wouldn't hold my breath), but the sad truth is that the really big stuff doesn't start hitting the shelves until September rolls around.

But when it hits, it hits like a tsunami. The back half of this year offers up so many amazing products it's almost certain that I won't sleep a wink trying to play them all. I won't bore you with a list, but let me just give you a taste of some of the things that have me brimming with anticipation: Burnout 3, Gran Turismo 4, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, Halo 2, Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition, Need for Speed Underground 2, Resident Evil 4 (though rumor has it moving out to 2005), and well, let's just say a whole lot more. And yeah, okay, I bored you with a list. Sue me.

In the meantime, while we wait for the big deluge of holiday titles, the staff and I offer up another great issue of Game Informer for your enjoyment. Definitely check our news report on the upcoming wave of game machines, and our pre-season football coverage where Kato goes off the deep end and makes some bold predictions for the upcoming football game showdown.

We also took a trip to Sony Computer Entertainment's Santa Monica Studios to get a glimpse at one of the most exciting PlayStation prospects of 2005: God of War. And of course, like always, Game Informer has got a ton of information you won't find anywhere else, including our huge 10 page cover story on Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory.

One final note about this issue is that even though Pandora Tomorrow for PS2 and GameCube was the highest scoring game of the issue, the game was not in the running for console Game of the Month, since we bestowed the honor to the Xbox version in March of this year. For more details on the two versions, check the review section. Also, make sure you check out Unlimited this month (head to www.gameinformer.com for more info) as we have interviews with Kirsten Dunst and Anthony Michael Hall.

See you next month, and enjoy the issue.

Cheers

Andy >>> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** McNamara, Bratwurst, Happy Hour, The Thrill Of Victory, Ronda - Prince's Funky Bassist, Jay-Z **Dislikes:** Being Outsmarted By Walleyes, Rock City, Cheap Shots, The Agony Of Defeat **Current Favorite Games:** City Of Heroes, Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando, Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, God Of War, Mercenaries

10 GAME INFORMER



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Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** Wimbledon (A.K.A. Best Movie Ever!!!), Eragon By Christopher Paolini, Batman Comic Books, Jalapeno Flavored Potato Chips, The Thought Of Transforming Into A Car **Dislikes:** Knowing I'll Spend Over A Grand On Games This Holiday Season, Black Olives (Where Does This Flavor Come From? Hell?), Joe **Current Favorite Games:** Star Ocean: Till The End Of Time, Final Fantasy XI, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, Resident Evil 4, Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater



Matt >>> matt@gameinformer.com

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Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Survival Horror, Adventure, RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing **Interests:** Summer Disaster Movies, Making A Game Based On Exotic Foodstuffs (Last Boss Is A Giant Haggis!), Getting A BMW 1602 **Dislikes:** That Humanity Has Yet To Really Improve On The Rubber Car Tire (Mapping The Human Genome? Done. Eliminating Side-Of-The-Road Tire Changes? Maybe Later... Dumb) **Current Favorite Games:** Mario Golf: Advance Tour, Final Fantasy IV, Resident Evil 4, Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude, Myst IV: Revelation



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Handle: Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Platform, Fighting, Strategy/RPGs **Interests:** Shopping For Houses And Other Major Life Changes, Ex Machina By Brian K. Vaughn, Stainless Steel Rings **Dislikes:** Phones That Never Stop Ringing, Getting Sugar Cookies In Place Of Clearly Superior M&M Cookies, Not Being Able To Afford All The Awesome DVD Box Sets Out Now **Current Favorite Games:** The Splinter Cell Series In All Its Various Forms, Pikmin 2, Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy, Anything On N-Gage (Kidding!)



Adam >>> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Beastie Boys' To The 5 Boroughs, Evangelion, UT 2004 Mods, Finally Finishing Games, Watchmen By Alan Moore, Soloing Baal In Hell Difficulty **Dislikes:** Anime DVD Prices (Damn You Bandai!), Undead Flyer Death Novas, Malfunctioning CD Decks **Current Favorite Games:** Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising, Ground Control II: Operation Exodus, Dungeon Lords, Warlords: Battlecry 3, World Of Warcraft Beta Phase 3



Joe >>> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** The Pit In My Stomach That Cries For The Blood Of Nations, Jubarcia's Torpedo Penguins, Double-Dipping (I'm That Guy!), Sewing Together Patchwork Humans **Dislikes:** Mini-Golf Courses Without Windmills, 21 Grams (Of Pretentious Garbage!), The Way Reiner Hurts The Ones He Loves **Current Favorite Games:** God Of War, Star Ocean: Till The End Of Time, Myst IV: Revelation, Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude, Knights Of The Old Republic



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Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Reiner's Wailing Blues Guitar, Pac-Man In Surround Sound, The Dark Tower (Book VI Just Came Out!), Grapefruit Spoons, New Episodes Of Clone Wars, The Way Life Is Like A Parking Meter **Dislikes:** Reality TV Commercials, Library Fines, Having To Wait For A Second Season Of Carnivale, The Dead Rising From The Grave To Begin An Empire Of Zombies, Moldy Bread **Current Favorite Games:** City Of Heroes, Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay, Halo 2, Metroid: Zero Mission

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GAMEINFORMER

AUGUST 2004
Volume XIV • Number 8 • Issue 136

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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
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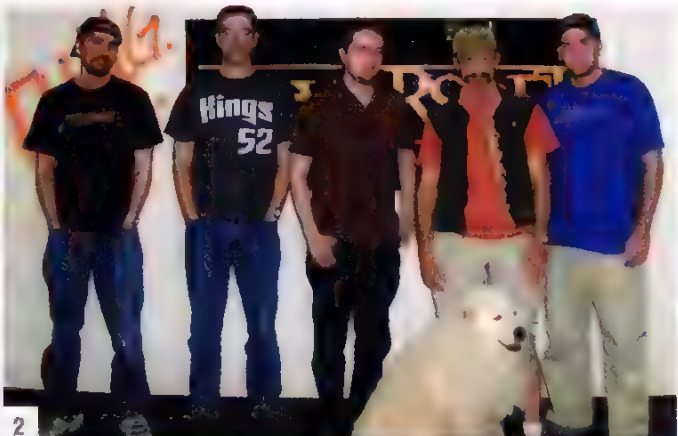


GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



1 2



3



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1 Welcome to our special "Jeremy Edition" of GI Spy! Here's Jeremy hanging out with his buddy, Splinter Cell's Sam Fisher! Hmm... we think there's some "chemistry" going on between those two. Hubba hubba! 2 Jeremy's always on the go, but he's never too busy to stop by and say hello to his good friends at Neversoft 3 When the Illuminati bring about the Apocalypse, Jeremy will be ready for them, hiding out in his underground bunker, eating baked beans, posing in this authentic Master Chief helmet! 4 It's just another day at the office for Visual Concepts' Anthony Chau 5 The Highwater Group's Laura Heeb and Tara Bruno hang with Andy, ending their long absence from GI Spy! 6 Well, Matt's no Jeremy, that's for sure, but we must admit that Stormfront Studio's head Don Daglow (currently overseeing Demon Stone) is one pretty cool guy 7 Midway's Reilly Brennan, Tim DeRosa, and Natalie Salzman hang on the GI Balcony of Fame 8 Andy poses with Free Radical's man about town, David Doak 9 Rockstar Games' Rob "Bobz" Fleischer, Chris Carro, and Ryan Rayhill recreate the "hobbit-romp" from *Return of the King* at The Clift Hotel in San Francisco



5



8



7 6



I think we're in for another
genre-defining moment in survival horror.
Most Anticipated of 2004 award - IGN

Call of Cthulhu filled us with awe and dread.
Best of E3 award - Gamespy

Bethesda once again blazes a trail
in the gaming world.
ActionTrip

CALL OF CTHULHU

Dark Corners of the Earth



PRESS START

I was reading Issue 134 [June 2004] and at the end, I noticed that after it said 'GAME OVER' it said 'Press START to Continue. 9, 8, 7, 6, 5...' and I thought: Oh GOD. Continue! CONTINUE! Where's the freaking START button on this thing? Oh God, CONTINUE!

Ken Nelson
via comcast.net

■ Yeah, we really didn't want to tell everyone about this but...Game Informer magazine is actually a full-featured puzzle in and of itself. By manipulating the pages in a certain order and configuration, the brainteaser can be solved. We didn't want to clue in the masses because, well, the result of successful completion is opening a portal to hell. But hey, that's okay, right? It all worked out in the end in those *Hellraiser* flicks, so it should be dandy in this highly transportable, widely distributed form. We'll probably be fine.



TOO FAR FOR ROCKSTAR?

I just got the June issue. I don't think there is a word in the English language for just how awesome it is. GTA San Andreas was the most exciting article in the issue. I will be anxiously awaiting the game's arrival, perhaps even camping outside my local retailer for days on end. I've already requested vacation time for the hours of upcoming GTA goodness.

Mitch Gigglet
Via hotmail.com

After reading the San Andreas cover story, I am in awe at what is to come for this latest installment in the series; but I have strong reservations concerning the lead character and the gang warfare elements on which the game is based. GTA III and Vice City were fun because there has always been a fascination in the cinema and games with criminal kingpins. Just look at the huge fan base for the *Godfather* films and related titles. Why would anyone want to play an LA gang-banger? The Crips and Bloods, as well as other rival Asian and Latino gangs during the early 1990s, should not be idealized. They were bad for the city and the population.

The 1990s were a real downer in all forms of entertainment and lifestyle compared to the 1980s. Why would Rockstar wish to put players in such a time period as an African-American gangster? The race of the character doesn't bother me - it's the motives and situations discussed in the article that do. Robbing houses? Drive-by shootings? Sure, it is just a game and no one gets hurt, but Rockstar is making harsh reality into entertainment with this title.

Why didn't Rockstar stick with the tried and true "mafia" story element that has been in every GTA title to date? It would have satisfied gamers worldwide, no matter what race, color, or gender. Sure, San Andreas is going to sell in the millions, but is it worth playing when there is so much negativity surrounding the main and secondary characters? You probably say, "Yes," but I'm still holding my reservations right now.

Vice City was tame and very cartoony with stylized looks, which made it fun without going too far into reality. San Andreas is taking real life and making it into a game. The life of a real gangster in Los Angeles? That's way too much realism.

Elak Swindell
Waynesboro, GA.

■ If there's any company who is absolutely no stranger to the edge of acceptable good taste and appropriate subject matter, it's probably Rockstar. Their titles (especially the GTA series) get a lot of attention at least in part because of their sales, but also because they are consistently well made. During our time spent with Rockstar for the article (and again during our recent visit for the preview on page 66 of this issue), we were convinced that the touchy subject matter is being handled in an honest, and not exploitative, way. Less than a year ago, we were all nervous about how a game set during the Vietnam War would handle the rough waters of morality. But the surge in responsible representations of the conflict shown at E3 this year point out the fact that even though games are just entertainment, they can be informative and responsible as well.

And, with regards to Rockstar leaving their series' overblown crimelord roots, the developer has confirmed that familiar faces from the earlier entries will make an appearance. The mobster possibilities are certainly there, especially considering Las Venturas' Vegas-inspired setting. We're itching for a vice-grip, limb squishing sequence!

A JUST TRADE

I am angry that someone would think that all gamers are fat, live in their mother's house, and would give their left arm to see a woman naked. I need that left arm to play PS2. I would give my left foot, but all the nurses have to be topless.

Robert Williams
Via email

■ Now really, are topless nurses a good idea during surgery? We can't imagine that all of that exposed flesh is a sound medical practice. A little more entertaining for sure, but gangrene waits for no man - resting in the glow of naked ladies or not.

DREAMCAST EPIC

I was just wondering if the Shenmue series would finish? I've been waiting and waiting for it to come out ever since I beat Shenmue 2. I love the series and I can't stop thinking about how it will end!

Luis Zavala
Via yahoo.com

■ Sorry Luis, and all you other Shenmue fans who wrote in, we don't have news for you except a cryptic quote from series creator Yu Suzuki. Apparently, when asked about the game before Microsoft's press conference, Suzuki laughed and only said, "You'll see." The original plan for Shenmue was elaborate, expensive, and high-concept - perhaps too much so. And, even at the loose-lipped, boozy parties of E3, nothing else was revealed about it. Maybe you could start a support group or something? How about G.A.S.S.Y. - Gamers Awaiting Sega's Shenmue and Yams? Everyone likes yams, especially when they roast the marshmallows on top...yum!

TRANSLATION

I was just reading through another top-notch GI, when I got to an interview with Redman and would like to voice some concern about your editing. I was surprised at the choice of wording (or non-wording as the case may be) in the interview. Aside from the obvious typos like misspelling of the words "dog" and "sayin"; there was some incomprehensible, what I assume to be English, dialogue as well. Would you be so kind as to attempt to use more specific wording next time? What is, "I be on the PS2 daily" supposed to mean exactly? Is he literally standing on his console? I am sure there are some other concerned English-speaking readers out there, so ruling out the possibility of your editor being on vacation at the time of print, could he be taking his job a bit too lightly?

Forrest Bassett
Via email

■ You're kidding, right? Oh, no. Would you rather the edited version that our old intern (we'll call him



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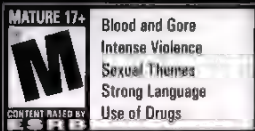


"We've never seen a more realistic war game." - PSM

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NAM '67



PlayStation 2

eidos



John McMadeup) submitted? He wasn't down with Redman's mad style, and sucked every last ounce of interesting out of it. Here it is:

GI: Do you play games?

Fake Redman: Yes. I play SOCOM and NBA Live 2004.

Did you help make your character for Def Jam Vendetta?

Yes. He is wearing nice clothes because I asked for them.

If they were making a game all about you, what would be in it?

It would be called Brick City and it would be good.

What's next for you?

I'm working on my album. It will be good.

OLD UPDATES

I remember when I was younger, Nintendo came out with a new look for the NES – I think that it was a while after the SNES came out. I was just wondering, what ever became of it? I only know of one person that bought one. How did sales go on it? What was the price and were there any improvements upon the original?

Jason Kaleta
North Adams, MI

■ Back in 1993 (almost two years after the SNES appeared), Nintendo

released a compact, top-loading version of the NES for \$49.99. The main differences were the size, the lack of moving parts involved with the cartridge slot, and the more ergonomic controller that was very reminiscent of the SNES. This version of the NES is actually highly sought after by collectors due to its reliability.

PRETTY, BUT FEARFUL

While perusing the latest edition of GI, the wealth of flashy-looking titles on almost every page was almost overwhelming. I have been playing since the Commodore 64 and the Colecovision, where the cutting-edge of technology let 13 objects move at the same time. Today, hardware capabilities have never been better. Yet, I increasingly find that games today are blurring together and nobody seems willing to risk making anything that breaks away from the mold. Everywhere you look there is a new RPG out where the only thing that changes is hero's sword growing and the girl's outfit shrinking, or yet another FPS set (A) in WWII, (B) in Vietnam, or (C) with aliens or demons.

I realize that when you are spending millions of dollars it kind of takes away the urge to put your neck on the block. However, I feel that there is still a strong market for smaller producers with original ideas. Some of the big names are getting to be like Hollywood, letting the little independent guys take all of the risks. Is there a bright light at the end of the tunnel? Am I the only one out here who thinks that things are stagnating in the game industry?

Jabberwock Jake
Via email

■ Jake, we feel ya buddy. We only hope that when all the data is analyzed, a weakness can be found in the impenetrable shell of derivative video game product. But, between PC, mobile gaming, and the (hopefully fruitful) claim that PSP is easy and cheap to develop for, we're looking a bright future of interesting new titles. And, of course, the DS should offer some new twists to gaming.

ENVELOPE ART

AUGUST WINNER!
ERIC YAHNKE



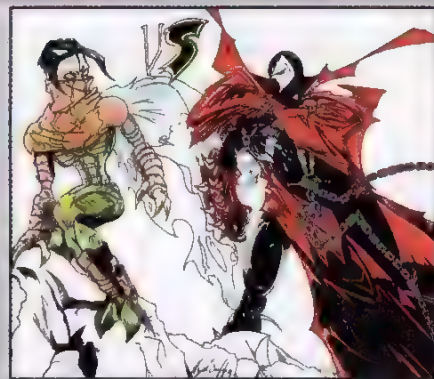
GEORGE M. YOUNG

"Dang! My hand really stinks!"



Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best damn 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.

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724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401



ANGEL GONZALEZ

"So, what do you use for those really stubborn cape stains?"



MELODY SHUM

Staring at the sun turned her eyes black and made them smell like crispy bacon



ARISTIDES RODRIGUEZ

This envelope is so creepy that it doesn't even need a joke caption



TRISH NOVABLADE

For some reason, The North Face's line of "Happy Elf Smile Time" clothing never really took off

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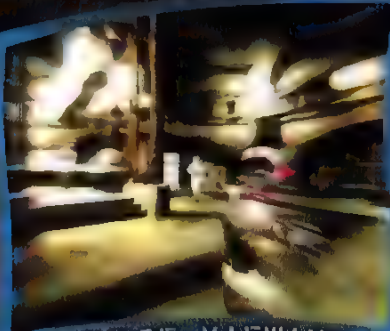
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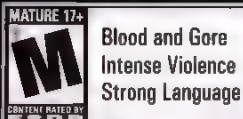
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PlayStation 2



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news

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

GAME INFORMER LOOKS INTO THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSOLES



Coming out of this year's E3, the industry found itself in an interesting position. The pre-show conferences for Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony are where the big announcements are made and the strategic tone for the upcoming year is set. But while Nintendo's DS and Sony's PSP were the talk of the town, everyone had at least one eye forward to the future. Each of the console makers – in their own roundabout way – touched on the next generation of hardware, but with release dates, specs, and all manner of other details still unknown, what does the future actually look like?

More and more speculation points to the fact that Microsoft will be out of the gate first with Xbox Next (code-named Xenon) by the end of 2005. Both publishers and developers have been told of a release next year, and with its recent announcement of XNA development tools, it seems that Microsoft has every intention of getting studios prepared for the company's next console. General Manager of Microsoft Games Studios, Shane Kim, even mentioned to Game Informer at E3 that it was determined to hit the market first.

Nintendo has sent some mixed signals about when the successor to the GameCube, code-named Revolution, would appear. President Satoru Iwata says that the company will give its first public showing at next year's E3 and that the Revolution's launch will be "competitive" with the other systems'. However, Nintendo has stated that being a slave to a release schedule is hampering the industry.

Out of all the potential release dates for the consoles, Sony's PlayStation 3 appears to be the farthest out, not likely until sometime in 2006. The company itself has said that it and its partners Toshiba and IBM don't expect mass production of the Cell processor to occur until the second half of 2005. At E3, Sony announced that workstations with the processor would start rolling out in the fourth quarter of this year – a first step towards getting development kits to studios. Sony is said to be working on a shell that makes creating games easier for studios. Regardless of a speculated release date, Sony of America president Kaz Harai was very clear at E3 that he thinks the PS2 still has plenty of life and money in it.

There are benefits to coming out first, but there are pitfalls, too. At a Piper Jaffray investor's conference, one president of a retail chain anticipated that Microsoft could pick up as much as 30 percent of the market if it came out first. Historically, however, being the leader isn't always advantageous. Early technology could be supplanted by those companies that wait. Sega's Dreamcast was not only first, but also technologically ahead of the game with its built-in modem, but neither was a ticket to success.



darkSector™

The artwork adorning this page is from the upcoming Digital Extremes game, Dark Sector, which has been announced for next generation hardware. Which one or ones exactly, Digital Extremes won't say.

THE NINTENDO REVOLUTION

Befitting Nintendo's singular style, the company is holding its cards very close to its chest regarding its future system. At E3, Iwata announced that work has already begun on this platform. He teased gamers about the Revolution, coming within a hair of discussing specs. Instead he quipped, "I won't for a simple reason: they really don't matter." At a recent meeting in Japan, he said that the system could be hooked up to a PC monitor, and would, as its codename suggests, offer something new in gaming. "It will be clearly distinct from the other next-generation consoles that competing companies will develop. What's important isn't next-generation technology, but a next-generation way of playing games."

Chips for the system are being made by both ATI and IBM – the two companies also working on Xbox Next. Some rumors claim that Revolution sports dual 1.8 GHz PowerPC processors and a 500 MHz graphics chip, while others point to a 2.7 GHz PowerPC G5 processor and a 600 MHz graphics chip. There is also an alleged 15 GB hard drive, but none of these specs can be confirmed. Nintendo's unveiling of the DS handheld signaled the company exploring technology such as Wi-Fi and voice recognition, but it has yet to outline whether it will take the plunge with a full-fledged online policy for the Revolution.

PLAYSTATION 3

Although Sony has yet to say that the Cell processor is going to be used in the

PlayStation 3, the technology and structure is expected to be used in the system in some form. Together with Toshiba and IBM, Sony has been crafting the Cell, which is actually a group of smaller processors working together with the main CPU doling out work to the others. This simplified explanation of Cell is actually instrumental in outlining the system's wide-reaching potential.

In a U.S. patent filed in late 2003 and approved early this year, the Cell processor while in its "preferred embodiment" (i.e. the PS3) could perform a trillion floating point calculations per second. At E3, Sony's chief technical officer, Masa Chatani, explained that the floating point performance directly translates into how fast a unit like the PS3 will integrate and utilize everything from physics to sound and visual effects.

What Sony wants to do with the Cell processor is ambitious. As outlined at E3, the company expects to be able to connect any unit containing the processor – including multiple PlayStation 3s or other home appliance/electronics – through a broadband connection.

This means that through a Cell-based "Cyber World" network, as Chatani put it, one could download footage from a Sony Cell camera without leaving the couch in front of your PS3. Due to its architecture and focus on communication between Cells, your PS3 could then have shared processing, data storage and manipulation, and other resource sharing.

Of course, commerce comes into play, and as Sony Europe COO David Reeves recently explained, the company is aiming at widespread broadband distribution. It is assumed that with this in mind, and the possibilities of the Cell processor, the PS3 will become a broadband-only unit.

The larger question then becomes what will come standard with the unit. Reeves explained that the PS3 will likely come in two flavors: one with a number of the "all-singing, all-dancing" features included (with possibly a hard drive), and a stripped-down model for those focused on gaming. The PlayStation 3 will also be backwards compatible and feature a DVD player utilizing Blu-Ray technology [see page 20 for more].

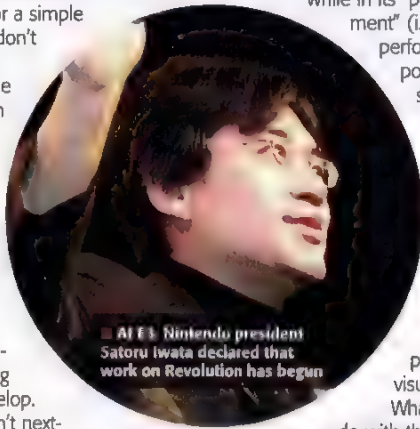
XBOX NEXT

Early rumors on Xbox Next, based on a leaked white paper [see right], claims it is powered by three IBM-designed 64-bit microprocessors. These PowerPC chips are similar to those used in Apple's G5 PowerMac. The graphics chip is being done by ATI (clocking in at a rumored 500 MHz with 10 MB of dedicated EDDRAM), and will run games with the resolution of a high-definition TV. Xbox Next will contain 256 MB of main memory; up from the current 64 MB. These specs, however, will probably change, and full utilization of the system is up to developers.

Right now, the internal debate within Microsoft is whether to include a hard drive and backwards compatibility. Game Informer has heard that both might be axed from Xbox Next. When talking about the hard drive, the question is whether it's worth what it'll cost the consumer. In February, M-Systems and Microsoft entered into an agreement where Microsoft would receive removable flash memory units for "future Xbox products." Furthermore, in perhaps another portent for the hard drive, Microsoft's own evolving of the Xbox Live service features the storage and sharing of data over the company's own network. As for backwards compatibility, Xbox Next's architecture would make the feature expensive for Microsoft.

The system also includes USB 2.0 ports for potential cameras, microphones, or an external hard drive. Memory units are back (at a size of 64 MB apiece), but this time they will be attached to the console, not the controllers (for which there are still four ports). According to the leaked paper,

(continued on next page)



EARLY XBOX 2 SPECS REVEALED

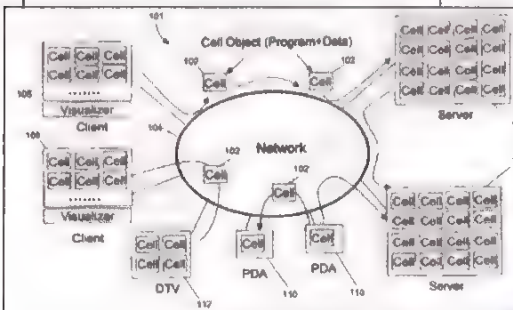
Recently Game Informer got its hands on the white paper for Xbox Next's (code-named Xenon) initial specs, which developer sources have confirmed are the same as the official Microsoft document sent to them. A white paper is an in-depth design document submitted before a system or game is actually made. Thus, by definition, any specs we've listed in this article are Microsoft estimates and not final by any means. Below are highlights of some of the features listed directly from the white paper. To see the full document, head to Game Informer Online.

- The CPU includes three independent processors (cores) on a single die. Each core runs at 3.5+ GHz. The CPU can issue two instructions per clock cycle per core. At peak performance, Xenon can handle 2.1 billion instructions per second.
- The system has a custom 500+ MHz ATI graphics processor. The Xenon graphics architecture is a unique design that implements a superset of Direct3D version 9.
- 256+ MB of unified memory, equally accessible to both the GPU and CPU. Supports multiple high-definition formats up through 1080i, plus VGA output.
- The Xenon CPU can process and encode hundreds of audio channels with sophisticated per-voice and global effects. The system also contains a key hardware component for audio – XMA decompression.

• At the time of this writing, the decision to include a built-in hard disk in every Xenon console has not been made. If a hard disk is not included in every console, it will certainly be available as an integrated add-on component.

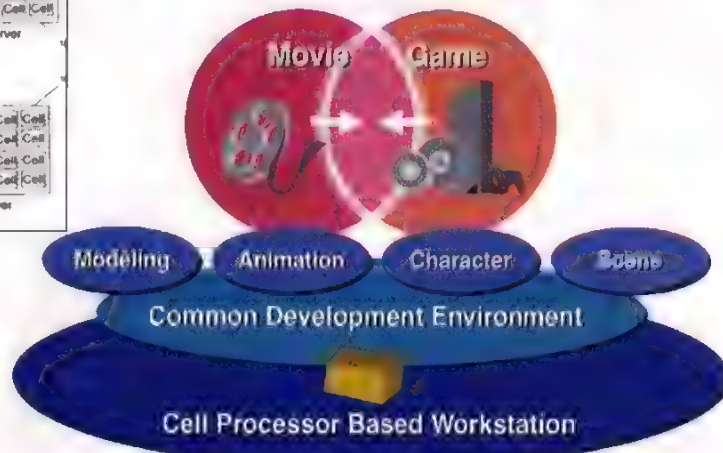
PORTS

- Ethernet 10/100-BaseT port
- Four controllers (removal of the black and white buttons and an increase of shoulder buttons)
- USB 2.0 ports
- Two memory units (each 64 MB)



■ Above is an architectural overview of the Cell processor from the U.S. patent filed by Sony last year. To the right is a simplified overview of Cell's capabilities and its application to games – particularly Sony's stressing of movie-quality video game graphics. This diagram was shown by the company at E3 2004

Digital Content Creation



■ Developers like Digital Extremes are currently working on next-gen products using PC emulators. They are approximating what they think the consoles' specs will be

(continued from previous page)

big changes for the controller are planned, such as the removal of the black and white buttons and an additional set of buttons for the shoulders

At the Game Developers' Conference this March, Microsoft unveiled its XNA development program, which will guide current and future Xboxes, as well as PCs. Already, Microsoft has put forth cross-platform features such as a shared controller among PCs and Xbox Next. Cross-platform online play is a possibility.

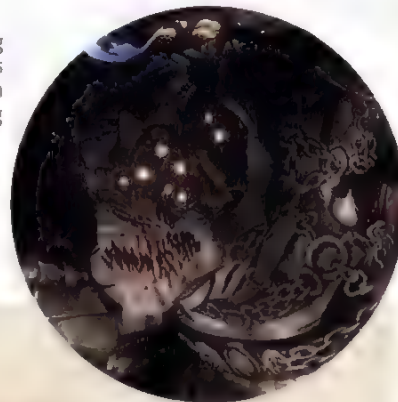
Perhaps the most open-ended question regarding the next Xbox is what kind of home entertainment features it will contain. Microsoft has stuck close to its mantra that the system is about gaming alone, but both it and Sony are salivating at the lucrative possibilities of making gaming systems a Trojan horse in your home. Microsoft has Media Center PCs (allowing digital video recording of broadcast TV on your com-

puter), and everyone would love to have TiVo-esque features for the next system, but apart from the fact that there may not be a hard drive, the cost of having a TV tuner card in the console becomes an issue. The current Xbox allows the usage of media like pictures from your PC via the Media Center Extender kit, and this function could be integrated into Xbox Next or these home entertainment features could be sold in separate bundles.

If it sounds like Microsoft is hemming and hawing about what to include, that's exactly right. Recently, a marketing-research study was uncovered by CNN/Money asking participants what they thought of "a video game console system with a hard drive and a built-in, fully functional PC" entitled

■ Epic's Unreal Engine 3 could produce images of this quality (right) for next-generation consoles

Xbox Next PC. This focus group console contained a hard drive, pre-installed Xbox Live, CD burner, DVD player, a version of Windows, would be backwards compatible (and play PC titles), and contain other PC features. This unit was being tested at \$599. This study implies that Microsoft is trying to see what the public does and does not like before it proceeds.



WHAT DO WE THINK? GAME INFORMER ANALYZES THE FUTURE

Microsoft will likely come out first, but it's hard to tell how much that will help them. With the popularity surge that the current Xbox is experiencing as future and present software and Xbox Live pick up steam, the new system will undoubtedly garner an increase in market share. Of course, it has a long way to go to catch Sony. Perhaps a telltale sign will be how quickly Xbox Next's numbers pick up after the early adopters buy the platform when it first comes out. This would be a barometer of what percentage of the casual gaming public are really in it for the long haul with Microsoft.

Ironically, the Xbox brand's reputation of delivering the best graphics could slip if Sony has extra time to deliver above and beyond what Xbox Next does. Despite having XNA, Xbox Next might not be friendly to developers because without the PlayStation 3 also out at the same time, publishers and developers may balk at having to make titles only for Xbox Next. This would prevent them from cutting costs by releasing multi-format games.

As for what the console will look like, we've heard that the hard drive is definitely out in an attempt to be cost friendly. Regardless, it's Sony and Nintendo that have shown it's about software — a practice that Microsoft is just now getting right. Ironically, if it makes the hard drive optional and extra (we've even heard of a removable hard drive that will make for an iPod-like device), then they are following Sony's lead of making you pay extra for amenities. This is something that they made fun of Sony for at E3. Of course, if you have to sell the hard drive separately, will that put a damper on the downloadable possibilities?

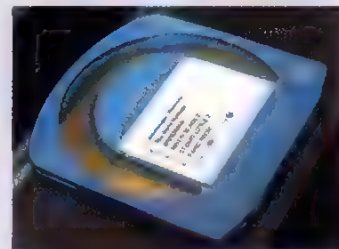
In some sense, it looks like Nintendo might not be in a bad position by carving out its own path. If it's not worried about who

has the biggest specs, then it can release as early or late as it wants. The GameCube was debuted at the fall SpaceWorld in 2000, and it launched less than a year later. Nintendo seems to be following the same pattern if it unveils Revolution at next year's E3 and brings it out by the end of 2005.

As for what the system will actually do, who knows? Nintendo is operating in a whole other playing field than Sony and Microsoft, and as long as its marquee titles still sell and its old war chest of money still lasts, it doesn't have to conform to what anybody else does.

Speaking of war chests, it appears that Sony is in a very advantageous position. It has the fanbase to survive not coming out first (and we expect the launch to not be simultaneous worldwide, as there will probably have to be a ramp-up of Cell production), and it can also grab the trophy for being technically superior from Microsoft. The caveat here is that Cell has to live up to its potential, and it's got to be developer-friendly and have a manageable learning curve. The PS2 failed at both.

The company will have to be careful with the PlayStation 3 not to confuse consumers as to what it actually does. We've already seen people scared of the PSP because it's not a pure gaming machine, and the PS-X DVD recorder, satellite tuner, PS2, hybrid machine has been a spectacular failure. The company will have to convince gamers that the PlayStation 3 is a video game machine at heart. Notice how quickly the PS2 mouse, keyboard, and monitor setup sunk? Make no mistake about it however, the system will definitely pry open your home to a digital content invasion. It will also — literally — make toast for you. Assuming, of course, that you also have the corresponding hi-tech Sony toaster. Oh yeah, we forgot — it plays games too.



■ Blu-Ray discs are the same size as normal DVDs. This one is seen with a protective cartridge, although TDK has recently developed a surface coating that protects the disc without having to use one

BLU-RAY VS. HD-DVD

There is a war being waged for the successor to DVDs to see who will deliver high-definition quality. Sony and its partners back Blu-Ray technology, while Toshiba, NEC, and others support HD-DVDs. What does this matter to gaming? Everything from which type of DVD drive the new systems use to whether the gaming industry utilizes these new formats for software.

Sony obviously is putting Blu-Ray into its PlayStation 3, and it would be natural for Microsoft to shy away from Sony's format for the Xbox 2. Blu-Ray is attractive due to its ability to download content directly onto the disc itself. Recent news may confirm that Microsoft is heading towards HD-DVD since it will support the VC-9 codec (among others), which is the basis for Microsoft's Windows Media Video 9. It is assumed that Nintendo will follow its trend of proprietary software formats and come up with something entirely new for the Revolution.

Although HD-DVD has the approval of the DVD Forum (which formulates DVD specifications), how this war shakes out will largely depend on what Hollywood thinks is the better direction to go in, but that decision isn't expected until the end of the year. One factor influencing which way Hollywood will lean is in production costs. Whatever format is cheaper to manufacture is likely to get a huge boost. Regardless, it seems like Sony is charging ahead, leaving us on a DVD format collision course reminiscent of the old VHS/Beta war — which Sony famously lost.

BLU-RAY

- A single-layer disc can hold 23.3 GB, 25 GB, or 27 GB, while a dual-layer disc will be able to store 46.6 GB, 50 GB, or 54 GB of data
- Allows recording, rewriting, and playback of high-definition television, and is backwards compatible with current DVDs
- Blu-Ray recorders are currently on sale in Japan for around \$3,000, and are expected to appear in the U.S. before the end of the year
- Dell and Hewlett-Packard will offer Blu-Ray drives in their PCs

HD-DVD (also known as AOD)

- Disc capacity ranges between 15 GB and 30 GB depending on whether the disc is single/dual-layered and if it's read-only or rewritable
- The format is expected in 2005, and is also backwards compatible

WILL SMITH

i,ROBOT

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EA MEETS ODDWORLD'S STRANGER

ODDWORLD SIGNS WITH EA;
RETURNS TO PS2

Developer Oddworld Inhabitants has signed an agreement with Electronic Arts for the publishing of the studio's next Oddworld game, colloquially known as *The Stranger*. The 2005 game will appear for both the PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

The fate of Oddworld's project has been the subject of much speculation since the Game Developer's Conference, when rumor spread that the developer's president, Lorne Lanning, had split from Microsoft. The two companies once had a cozy relationship. Lanning had pulled Oddworld's support of the PlayStation 2 and handed it exclusively to Microsoft before the Xbox came out – a coup at the time for the new system which was trying to build a roster of compelling content. Unfortunately, Munch's Oddysee on the Xbox completely failed to live up to either its hype or sales expectations. Interestingly, however, Microsoft still owns a stake in Oddworld via a deal involving Lanning's old contract with Atari.

The Stranger is the name of this upcoming game's mysterious, bounty-hunting main character. The adventure takes place within the Oddworld universe, but is not tied to the story arc of the previous titles. The game will feature first-person shooting elements, and early looks at it confirm that it retains the developer's famous brand of humor and sensibilities.

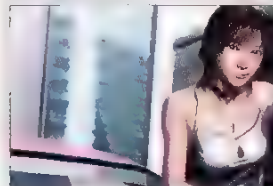
Lanning says that the title's new character also imbues it with a preponderance of action over traditional platforming.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

RIDGE RACER RETURNS IN 2005

Ridge Racer versus Gran Turismo used to be the talk of video games, and Namco hopes the two can resume their rivalry when it releases a new Ridge Racer sometime before March 2005. No platform details have been given, and Namco of America representatives wouldn't comment on a U.S. release.



MEMORY CARD 1019

PROBLEMS

Nintendo has issued an incompatibility warning with its GameCube Memory Card 1019. Disney Sports Soccer, Disney Sports Skateboarding, and WTA Tour Tennis won't save games on the card. Other titles have also exhibited some small problems, but you don't want to play them anyway.



PLANET MOON ALL IN FOR PSP

Armed and Dangerous developer Planet Moon has declared that it is going to stop making games for any other platform but the PSP. The studio has a third-person action title

in the works tentatively called *Infected*.

THERE'S A GAMERIOT GOING ON

Xbox fans can get their hands on new and unreleased titles on the GameRot summer tour. Hitting cities across the nation this summer and fall, this festival will let you play titles from Microsoft, Vivendi Universal, ESPN Videogames, and more. Go to www.gameriot.com for info.

DISTURBANCE IN THE FORCE

LucasArts has revised the release date for *Star Wars: Republic Commando*, pushing it back from fall, to winter – likely signaling a move into 2005. In better news, it appears that *Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords* has moved up. The game is listed as a winter title, but we believe it has been changed to hit during the holidays this year.



EA STARTS FANTASY LEAGUES

Electronic Arts is branching out with its EA Sports Fantasy Football starting July 21 at www.easports.com/fantasy. The site features leagues for commissioners and the regular public, as well as info supplied by Stats Inc. EA Sports prizes will be given to winners.

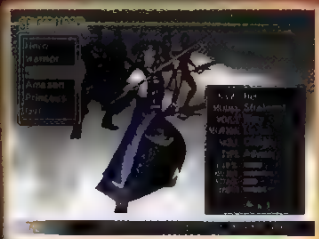


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PlayStation 2



LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



SUMMER MULLET

The potential strike between the player's union and the National Hockey League may affect this year's crop of NHL video games. Loose Talk has heard that publishers such as EA Sports, ESPN Videogames, and Sony are being advised to release their titles as early as possible before any such strike happens and kills all the fun.



MO' MONKEY BALL

Game Informer Online recently came across a retail listing for a PlayStation 2 title called Super Monkey Ball Deluxe. The game has since been removed from the retail page, although the title is apparently supposed to hit the console this December for \$29.99. Sega representatives haven't confirmed the game, but admit that the company is looking into the "continuation" of the series. With that name and price, it sure sounds like a compilation of the first two Monkey Balls may be the first roly-poly action the PS2 would see from Sega's monkeys.



TRUE FANTASY NO LONGER ALIVE

XBOX RPG CANCELLED

After a release delay and a no-show at E3, Microsoft of Japan and developer Level 5 pulled the plug on Xbox MMORPG True Fantasy Live Online. Microsoft of Japan cited lack of developmental progress and quality concerns as the reasons for the move. A statement read, "The MMORPG genre, across all platforms, has become an incredibly crowded and competitive marketplace. In response, Microsoft Game Studios has decided to streamline its portfolio, making fewer bets in this genre." The PC title Mythica was axed not long ago for similar reasons.

Ironically, it was the mere fact that True Fantasy Live Online was an MMORPG which made fans excited for the title, due to the diversity it would bring to the Xbox to compete with the likes of PlayStation 2's Final Fantasy XI. This development is a blow to an already weak market for the Xbox in Japan, along with departures of titles like Psychonauts, yet another game that fans of the console won't have the chance to play.

In other Xbox news, the psychic combat game Phantom Dust will not be brought to North America.

ICE-T IN SAN ANDREAS

Everyone's wondering which famous celebrities are doing the voicework for Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. The company wouldn't say a word when we visited, but spies have sighted rapper/member of the *Law & Order* posse Ice-T at Rockstar. Ice Cube and Yo-Yo were also seen on the premises. Rockstar better watch out, because there's some sort of dispute with Ice-T's royalties, we hear that Sam Waterston and David Hasselhoff carry some mighty big sticks.



INTERESTED IN INTERPLAY?

When not getting shut down by the state of California for not paying its employees, Interplay is in all kinds of trouble. The company has been on deathwatch for a while now, and it is quietly trying to unload what few attractive franchises it has. Rumor has it that Interplay is now selling the rights to Earthworm Jim and Redneck Rampage to the highest bidder.



DELAY FOR RE 4?

When we broke the exclusive on Capcom's Resident Evil 4, we were told it may come out this fall. Retailers, however, are now being advised the title will come out in winter. Saying "winter," as opposed to "holiday," usually entails the beginning of the next year. Thus, it looks like RE 4 will be coming out in early 2005.

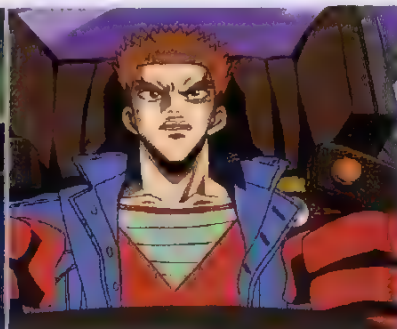
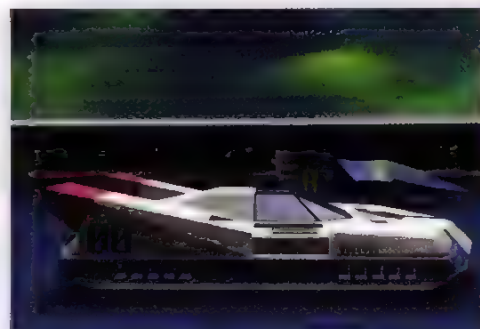
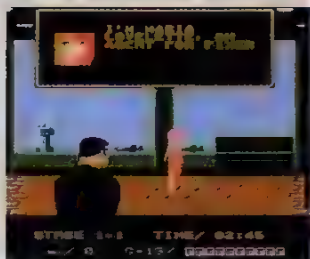
Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gamerformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

The anime spy in this game isn't always known by his titular moniker. Duke Togo starred in this game developed by Vic Tokai for the NES about searching for a group called the Iron Curtain. The title not only featured standard side-scrolling action sequences but also underwater scenes, sniping, and first-person mazes. It is also famous for having the first implied sex scene on the NES! Your payoff at the end of a hard game's work was to indulge in one of the anime character's favorite pastimes - hooking up.

(Answer on page 28)



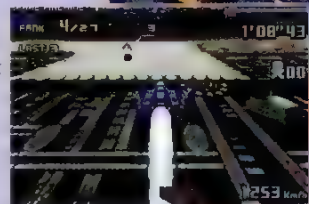
news

GO CAPTAIN, GO!

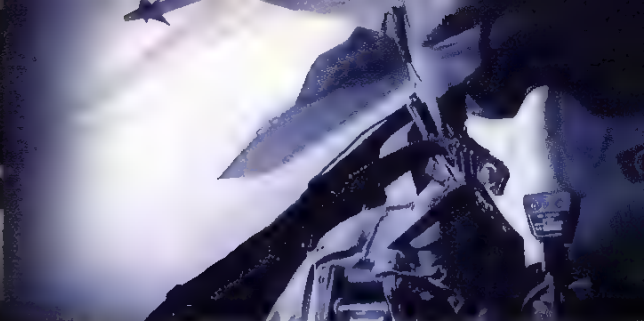
F-ZERO RACES TO TV, GBA

Nintendo and Captain Falcon are pushing the g-forces on an all-new track - television. *F-Zero: GP Legend* is an animated show already being broadcast in Japan (where it's subtitled *Legend of Falcon*), and should be shown in the States on Fox Box this September. The show introduces a new character, Rick Wheeler (above), for the Captain to spar with. It appears that Rick is the same character as Ryu Suzak from the Japanese show, who is actually from 150 years in the past. He was cryogenically frozen at the time, and is now being brought back to fight F-Zero racing corruption.

Nintendo is also preparing a game of the same name for release on the Game Boy Advance September 14.



F-Zero: GP Legend for GBA



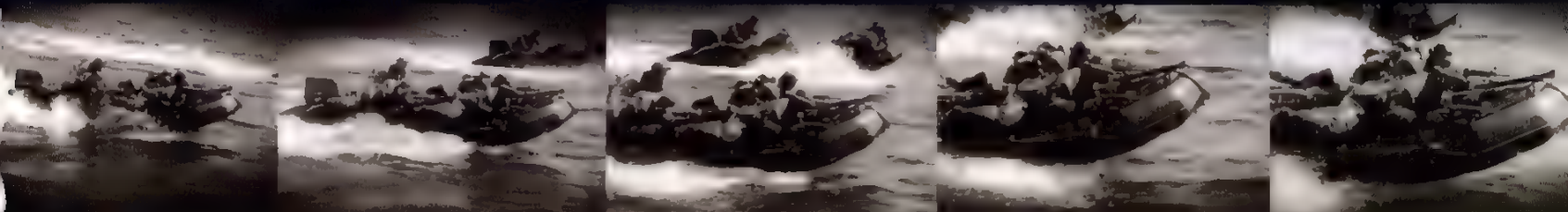
**THE BEST PART OF EARNING
A DEGREE IN THE NAVY?
GETTING TO CLASS.**

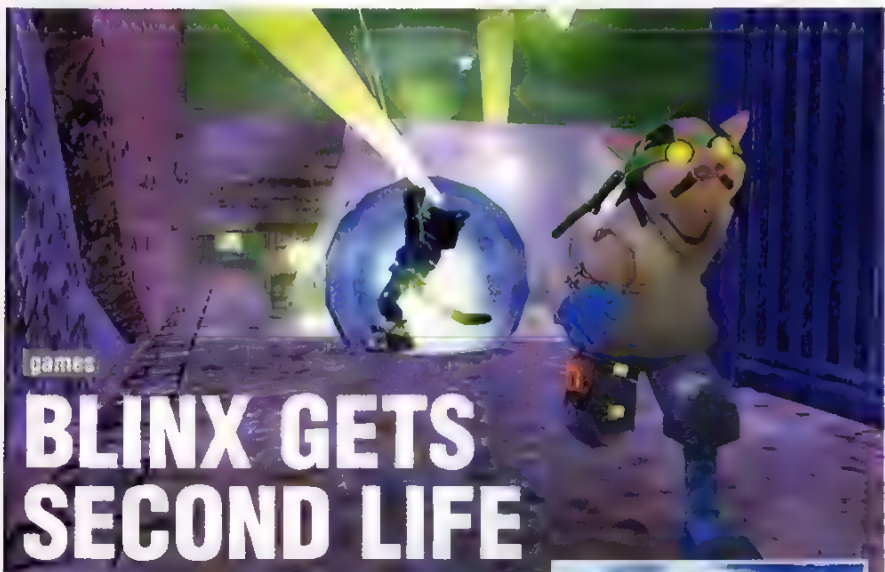


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games

BLINX GETS SECOND LIFE

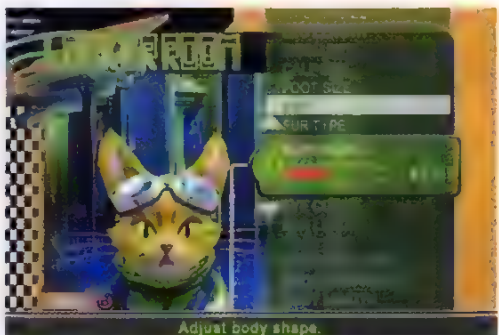
CAT HAS MULTIPLAYER BUT NO XBOX LIVE

Microsoft and developer Artoon are having a second go at crafting an action-platform hero for the Xbox. Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space is dubbing itself as "the world's first 5-D game," and a host of new features hope to take it to greater heights than its predecessor.

The holiday title has undergone improvements from the first Blinx, such as speeding up his vacuum cleaner combat mechanic and the cat's movements in general. Aiming is also easier thanks to a lock-on and an optional first-person view.

This time around, you can control other characters, including fully-customizable ones – right down to how fat your tail is. Playable pigs in Blinx 2 introduce new game mechanics via stealth. Pigs are the masters of space (while cats master time), and they can warp across a level or suck up enemies in a black hole.

Finally, Blinx 2 visits more unknown territory with the introduction of multiplayer. The game contains co-op as well as Battle mode, where cats and pigs will square off in various maps. Oddly enough, however, the game doesn't support Xbox Live.



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

GOOD

For all of you RPG-heads out there that missed out on Atlus' PS2 cult hit Disgaea: Hour of Darkness, the publisher is re-releasing the game due to popular demand. Purchase it and you can send in for an eight-page art book while supplies last. We imagine that this offer will go over way better than the "Free Poke in the Eye" subscription incentive we had a couple of months ago.



UGLY

The sad saga of Blizzard's StarCraft: Ghost just got worse. Co-developer Nihilistic has pulled out of the project, and Blizzard is indefinitely delaying the game while it looks at taking the title in new directions.

In other depressing news, StarCraft publisher Vivendi Universal has cut 350 jobs in a move to save costs. Reports are, however, that neither Blizzard nor Valve (Half-Life 2) will be affected by the layoffs.



BAD

While on the telephone with a co-worker from a Jacksonville restaurant, Anthony Jones yelled to a nearby friend playing Grand Theft Auto, "There's a bomb in the building. Everyone needs to get out!" Unfortunately, the co-worker on the phone at the restaurant thought Jones was talking to him, so the building was evacuated. Local police were not pleased at the perceived bomb threat, and Jones could be looking at 15 years in prison for the second-degree felony.



GOOD

Rated-Xbox! The latest attempt to stiffen flaccid Xbox sales in Japan is a satellite TV show hosted by adult model Eri Kitajima. When DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball fails, try the real thing.



UGLY

Nintendo recently admitted that the new Mario Party – in an effort to make it even more accessible – will be playable for those that "can't handle the controllers." Like who? Word is that the game will be played with an EyeToy-like camera peripheral. Sounds too complicated to us. The game should be controlled by a heartbeat monitor so anyone with a pulse has a shot at the crap-shoot fest that is Mario Party.



GOOD

The invaders have landed. An unknown French artist has been putting up Space Invader-inspired mosaic pieces in cities across the world, as well as doing indoor installations. Check it out at www.space-invaders.com

R & D


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



Live Through This Starring Courtney Love

Courtney Love is not afraid to glom on to the ideas and hard work of others to get ahead; so frankly, we're a little surprised that she hasn't inserted herself into a familiar video game formula for a quick buck. Well, have no fear Miss World, because we've got the perfect game idea for you. In Live Through This, a blatant rip off of Grand Theft Auto, players would assume the role of Courtney as she staggers drunkenly through an open-ended city looking for trouble. Armed with bottles, metal flashlights, microphone stands, or just her own unwashed funk, Courtney can attack innocent bystanders for fun or head to a dealer for some prescription drugs. Make out with a homeless man, leave a flaming poopy bag on Dave Grohl's doorstep, or just flash people randomly – it's all up to you in Live Through This. Of course, since Courtney is all about seemingly pointless behavior, there would be no concrete mission objectives. The only way to actually finish the game would be to meet a hot young musician at a club (like a member of The Strokes or Interpol), date him, and get him to write material for your new album. Ahh Courtney, you truly are America's Sweetheart!

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Xbox Magazine

"...one summer blockbuster that you'll want to be part of..."

TeamXbox.com

"The Xbox's first-person shooter lineup will be one game stronger this summer..."

GameSpot.com

"...sure to fill the needs of *Rainbow Six* and *Medal of Honor* fans alike"

UGO.com

"...will capture the hearts of gamers everywhere."

Gamers-Depot.com

"...intense action and cinematic flair in every square inch of the game."

GameInformer.com

"...rises above the glut of first-person shooters..."

GameSpot.com

"...fast, exciting and certainly has hit potential..."

Official Xbox Magazine

"I can honestly say that I have never said 'Wow' or 'Gosh' that many times in 10 minutes before in my life."

GameZone.com

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games

NINJA GAIDEN REVISITED

TECMO OFFERS FREE UPGRADES VIA XBOX LIVE

Those stymied by the difficulty of Tecmo's Ninja Gaiden Xbox title are going to find things getting tougher – but in a good way. In a historic move for a console game, the company is offering a free content-rich download for Xbox Live subscribers called Ninja Gaiden 1.1. As part of the second round of its Master Ninja Tournament, Tecmo is giving fans a download package in early August that will improve upon the game engine and give you smarter new enemies, bosses, costumes, weapons, and more (assuming you already have the original game). This extra content will be used by the Master Ninja contestants, but the download is available to anyone, and is playable offline.

Creator Tomonobu Itagaki said that he surveyed fans' feedback before designing the new features. These include an improved camera system that changes the player's perspective in relation to enemies' position. It will allow full 360-degree player camera control, and will be smarter when handled by the AI. Also, the engine now makes combat faster and "more extreme." Personally, GI can't think of anything more extreme than when we crapped our pants the first time we played Gaiden.

Stay tuned to www.masterninjatournament.com for more news on the download and the tournament.



TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

WIL STAHL
Director, Pandemic Studios

READER

STERLING DAWSON
Las Vegas, NV



- 1 Robotron 2084 – Arcade
- 2 Quake 2 CTF – PC
- 3 Thief series – PC
- 4 Halo – Xbox
- 5 Counter-Strike – PC

- 1 Final Fantasy Anthology – PSone
- 2 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City – PS2
- 3 Red Dead Revolver – PS2
- 4 The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker – GC
- 5 Viewtiful Joe – GC

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...

TOP 10 THINGS I DO IN MY SPARE TIME

By Sam Fisher

- 10 Get a tan
- 9 Give something back to the community
- 8 Creep through neighbor's bushes just to stay sharp
- 7 Join O.J. in the ongoing search for Nicole Simpson's killer
- 6 Test sticky-shockers during hide-and-seek games with neighborhood kids
- 5 Interpret the works of Kierkegaard and their relationship to international espionage
- 4 Cry myself to sleep
- 3 Knit rifle cozies
- 2 Try to integrate some color into my wardrobe
- 1 Watch *The Hunt for Red October* on DVD

Name That Game Answer: Golgo 13

WHOEVER
WINS...
WE
LOSE.

AVP

ALIEN VS. PREDATOR

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX PRESENTS A DAVIS ENTERTAINMENT/BRANDYWINE PRODUCTION A PAUL W. S. ANDERSON FILM "ALIEN VS. PREDATOR" STARRING SANA'A LAYLA, RAOUF BOVA, LANCE HENRIKSEN, EWEN BREWSTER, MAGALI GONDASCI, HARALD KRÖGER, ALI F. GILIS AND TOM WOODRUFF, JR. COSTUME DESIGNER JOHN BRUNO, HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST ALEXANDER BERNEH, PRODUCTION DESIGNER RICHARD BRIDGLAND, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DAVID JOHNSON AND CHRIS SYTA, PRODUCED BY WYCK GODFREY, EDITOR S.M. HAMMEL, MUSIC BY MIKE RICHARDSON, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JOHN DAVIS AND GORDON CARROLL, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID GILER AND WALTER HILL, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DAN O'BRIEN AND PAUL W. S. ANDERSON, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JOHN THOMAS AND JAMES THOMAS, PRODUCED BY PAUL W. S. ANDERSON, DIRECTED BY PAUL W. S. ANDERSON AND SHANE SAKPINDO

08.13.04

www.avp-movie.com

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

College Days



Following high school, Zucker hits the Ivy League as an underclassman at Princeton University, where he graduates magna cum laude

Harvard Man

Continuing his prestigious education, Zucker obtains an MBA from an obscure eastern university called Harvard. We've never heard of it, but then again we went to Hennessee Technical College for TV and VCR repair!

Extreme Sports

Zucker works for the Walt Disney Company's ESPN branch, overseeing the launch of ESPN 2 and the company's popular extreme sports X Games competition

Tech Sector Adventures

Zucker serves at the helm of two Internet technology companies, DIVA Systems Corporations (where he served as CEO) and Walker Digital LLC (where he was president)

The Ultimate Dream



Zucker gets the call from Hef himself, and lands every man's dream job, scoring a gig at Playboy Enterprises, where he was both president and CEO. Oddly, he decides to leave! Maybe he got sick of Carmen Electra calling him all the time

Joining the Game



Zucker joins the fast-growing world of video games when he is tapped to become the new president and CEO of Midway Games. Zucker is guiding the company through an impressive period of commercial and critical success

DAVID ZUCKER

PRESIDENT AND CEO/MIDWAY GAMES

>> David Zucker is new to the game industry, but is already making a splash as the the head of Midway. Recently, the company has been experiencing a renaissance, enjoying strong sales of new properties like NBA Ballers and The Suffering, as well as popular franchises like Mortal Kombat. <<

Talk a little bit about your career prior to Midway. What is your background?

I like to say I have two next-door neighbors. One of them on the left side, there's a woman there who thinks I'm the evil incarnate. Her husband doesn't talk to her because he watches ESPN all the time, and I was head of programming at ESPN for eight years. Her son doesn't talk to her because he's too busy playing video games. And, of course, I was the president of Playboy for a period of time. Now, on the other side of the street I have two teenage kids that think there are no better jobs that they could ever dream of having: programming for ESPN, president of Playboy, and now running a video game company. That's sort of my career in a nutshell.

What prompted you to make the move to video games?

I waited in line when the Xbox first came out, and I've been a fan and a gamer for a long time. I believe this is the future of entertainment. And Midway was the perfect company to join. It is a

publishers' games, last year Midway was number 20 [out of all publishers]. This year we're number two. In fact, we're neck and neck with EA. So it's a pretty dramatic change in a relatively short period of time.

We've heard rumors that Midway is considering either dropping or seriously retooling its current sports lineup. Is this true?

You know we've been very focused on what we do well at Midway. I think part of the choppy couple years that we had was [Midway] going outside of its core competencies and making games that perhaps we didn't have expertise in. Sports is a good example. Midway is simply, in terms of over-the-top sports and great graphics, [about capturing] that fast and furious action. As well as integrating lifestyle elements, like you saw in NBA Ballers, into the game. That's what Midway has always been great at. You know, the mistake we made was probably trying to get into the sim business, and competing in an area where we really don't have the expertise. We're very much committed to our over-the-top franchises.

in the U.S., 8 to 34-year-old men watched cumulatively 30 billion hours of television according to Nielsen. Boys or men 8 to 34 years old also played 30 billion hours of video games. That's going to increase. Two years from now there'll be more time spent playing video games than watching television. This is a big market. We're at the early stages of growth in this business. You're gonna see a handful of big companies that are certainly competing with EA. It doesn't mean EA's not going to be a big player. It will be.

There is talk that Hollywood and video games are eventually going to merge together and become one entertainment medium. Do you see this happening?

I don't know if that's necessarily the right question. I mean, I think, as you know, one of Midway's great franchises is Spy Hunter. Universal has come to us and they're actually paying us to make a movie called *Spy Hunter* starring The Rock, which John Woo's going to direct for 2005, and it's a

Two years from now there'll be more time spent playing video games than watching television.

great company with a lot of incredibly creative and talented product development executives and people. You know it kind of lost a couple of steps as it made the transition from the arcade business into the home console business. There was just a huge opportunity here to get things organized to tap back into the talent that's inherent in this organization, and really turn things around.

How are things going at Midway right now? The company seems to have been on a bit of a hot streak recently with titles like The Suffering and NBA Ballers. What do you attribute this current success to?

You didn't mention Psi-Ops. It will probably be the best reviewed game Midway's had in its history on a console. So I think really it comes down to a recommitment to quality. I think we as a company probably got caught up in the need to get product out on a quarterly basis, and to some extent forgot about the need to really make great games. Great games in terms of compelling story, compelling gameplay, and groundbreaking elements like you see in Psi-Ops. One of the first decisions that I made when I got here was to delay the launch of *The Suffering* and *NBA Ballers* to add more time to the games to make sure that they were of the kind of quality that Midway would be proud of. And actually, if you look at gamerrankings.com's average review scores for

We'll be spending more time to make them. We're certainly making another *NBA Ballers* game down the road. And the goal is to kind of release one or two really special Midway-style over-the-top sports games. We'll have a football game again someday.

Did you get a chance to check out the PSP and Nintendo DS at E3? What are your thoughts on those systems?

I think they'll both do well. We're certainly excited about the PSP. We think it's pretty hard not to bet along with Sony. They're very committed to it and we think there's an opportunity there to attract a new type of gamer to the product and we'll be participating on the PSP as it rolls out.

We noticed that you didn't comment on DS. Do you have any plans to support that handheld?

Yeah, we're certainly looking at it. We've really focused on Sony and Microsoft on the console side. And we'll be looking at the DS.

Can any company ever hope to really compete with EA, or are they just too big?

EA's an incredibly impressive company. But, I think it's a big market; it's a growing market. You may have seen that Nielsen came out with some statistics recently which really sort of sums it up. Last year

\$120,000,000 movie. It's going to have a lot of special effects. And we'll have a game, of course, alongside it, but I think it's going to work both ways. You'll see more and more Hollywood [video game] movies happen. Think about it. People are spending a lot of time playing video games. There are franchises there that will have built-in marketing.

Do you think that original IPs or licensed properties are the way to success? Midway has generally pursued original IPs - do you see the company pursuing more of them in the future?

I really do. I think it's interesting. You know one of the great misconceptions is that movie-based games work. For the most part if you look at the whole PS2 console cycle, there have only been a handful of movie-based games that have really sold units. The vast majority of them are not financial successes. And the other problem with licenses is that you always have the license holder looking to extract more of the economic value from the license. So Midway's been fortunate to have obviously our own intellectual properties: the *Mortal Kombat*s, and *Gauntlets*, and so forth. And we continue to be one of those companies that will take shots. Psi-Ops is a very bold and risky investment for this company. It's a whole new type of gameplay, and Midway will continue to take those kinds of risks.



MIDWAY'S COMEBACK CAPTAIN

By [unreadable] and [unreadable]

FRONT MISSION 4



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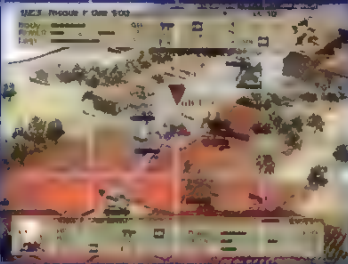
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1



2



3



4



5



6

BY THE NUMBERS

12 Number of employees the studio began with in 1999

22-43 The age range of employees

56 Number of full-time staff employed

15 Number of games currently in the works at Santa Monica Studios, including all internal, external, and localization projects

5 Number of developers that Santa Monica Studios has collaborated with: Incog Inc., Polyphony Digital, Guerrilla Games, Clap Hanz Limited, and Sony Computer Entertainment Japan

9.5 The highest score given by Game Informer to one of the studio's titles (Twisted Metal: Black, Issue #99)

6 The lowest score given by Game Informer to one of the studio's titles (War of the Monsters, Issue #118)

8 The average score the studio's seven released titles have earned from Game Informer

TIMELINE

April 1999
Studio founded in Santa Monica with 12 employees on site

July 1999
Moved into current facility with 23 employees

September 1999
Growth continues, employees jump to 42

Sony Computer Entertainment America

SANTA MONICA STUDIOS

Forming the core of Sony's first-party software development, Santa Monica Studios is responsible for turning out the Playstation 2-exclusive titles that realize the company's vision of what gaming should be. With concerted efforts being put into both internal design and external collaboration, Santa Monica Studios presents a unique model of creating their own content while simultaneously working with second-party developers to get their products out to the ravenous gaming public.

Sony's Santa Monica Studios is located in a hotbed of game development (both Naughty Dog and Treyarch have studios just down the street), but they have no reason to be intimidated. With an impressive roster of talent that has helped to bring you such titles as Gran Turismo 3, Twisted Metal: Black, and the upcoming God of War, the Santa Monica Studios has proven it has what it takes to create those must-buy titles for your video game library. However, even with these exceptional games, the way the studio truly distinguishes itself is the solid partnerships it has cultivated with respected second-party developers. In fact, the studio is practically split into two halves with varying goals and functions.

The first side is essentially a production house that collaborates with external developers to fine-tune and localize a wide variety of titles. Of the seven games to come out of the studio, only Kinetica was made entirely in-house. All of the others were joint efforts with external developers like Incog Inc. (Twisted Metal: Black, War of the Monsters, Downhill Domination), Polyphony Digital (Gran Turismo 3 A-Spec), and SCEJ (Siren). Another function of the studio includes conducting focus groups with these games, allowing the developers themselves to concentrate more on producing the actual content.

The second half of the studio is the single-minded internal development team, which focuses its efforts on just one game at a time. Since Kinetica was released, God of War has been the studio's primary effort — that's over two years the team has spent fashioning legendary settings and mythological beasts. However, even in a game that lends itself so well to horrifying abominations, don't expect any cameos from the studio's infamous Sweet Tooth; though David Jaffe (Twisted Metal Series, JetMoto) is at God of War's design helm, the team creating the game is entirely different. [For more exclusive info on God of War, turn to our feature on page 56]

Though no one can tell us quite what to expect from the studio after God of War ships, with the PSP on the horizon and a lucrative franchise like Twisted Metal in its arsenal, it is certain that we can continue to look to Santa Monica for engaging offerings in the future.

1 Just about every desk has an assortment of toys, models, and other important work-related miscellany **2** Nothing keeps morale up like a demonic clown taskmaster **3** The upper level is where localization and external work take place, while the main floor is for internal development **4** Once you enter, this is where you'll be asked to wait...with Parappa piercing you with his mocking, vacant stare **5** The God of War team (and one doomed nipple-twister enthusiast) pose with their leading man **6** The perks of working for Sony: Nearly every desk in the office has a dev kit **7** Though it does have an alarm system, apparently the studio can't keep out invaders — Space Invaders

June 2001

Santa Monica studio ships first title, Twisted Metal: Black

July 2001

Gran Turismo 3 A-spec ships,

October 2001

Ships first internally developed title, Kinetica

August 2002

Ships Twisted Metal: Black Online as launch title with Network Adapter

January 2003

War of the Monsters ships

July 2003

Downhill Domination ships

April 2004

Siren ships

Summer 2004

Hot Shots Golf Fore! ships

Fall 2004

Killzone and Gran Turismo 4 ship

Early 2005

Second internally developed title, God of War, ships

etc

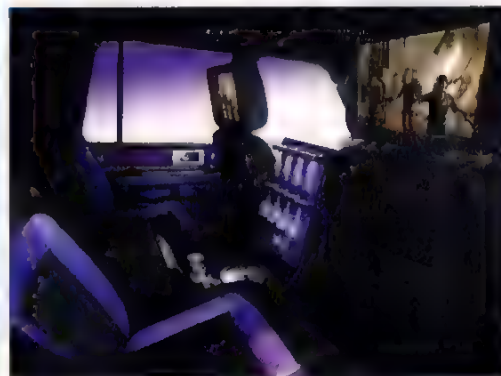
GALPINIZED 24/7 LINCOLN NAVIGATOR

Manufacturer: Galpin Motors
Website: www.galpinized.com
List Price: \$110,000

This ride is far beyond any of our pocket-books, but that doesn't mean we didn't seriously look into black-market organ donation to make the down payment. Check out the features on one heck of a Navigator.



We question their functionality, but not their decisive style statement. The custom 22-inch rims are covered in purple ostrich skin and are only available on this car. Aren't you just horrified when your car is wearing the same shoes as someone else? It's like a bad prom nightmare over and over and over.



Endangered species? We laugh at exotic flightless birds! Matching the ostrich skin on the rims, the interior features purple avian leather on the door panels and seat backs, and those in the second row of seating get access to even more of the finer things in life. The center console offers purple burl wood, a refrigerator, ice bucket, humidor, crystal glasses, and a freaking PS2! And, 15-inch monitors are built into the front-seat headrests for maximum gaming enjoyment.

etc

BUSHPIG

Manufacturer: Wheelman Pty. Ltd.
Website: www.wheelmanworld.com
List Price: \$890

What comes in a variety of fashion colors, suggests that the youngest users are at least 16, and hits 20mph? Why, the Australian Bushpig by Wheelman! It's like a snowboard that wraps wheels around your feet and flings you across rural terrain by using a two-stroke lawnmower engine. Sounds like a good idea, doesn't it? Well, there is a more environmentally friendly electric version coming out soon and the gas-powered type comes in pink, so the ladies who lunch can get to their tea date in high-class style.

tech

NOKIA 3220 AND XPRESS-ON FUN SHELL

Don't scoff at the \$300 price point for this phone – almost all handsets sold in America are subsidized by carriers (meaning that this one will be dirt cheap when it hits retail). With all of the normal accoutrement (color screen and iffy camera), the phone isn't terribly remarkable; but the Xpress-On Fun Shells that can be wrapped around it have features we've never seen in an American phone before. For example, you can write a text message and then swing the phone back and forth. The little LEDs on the backside will make your message appear in the air. Say you're at a concert and you want someone up to 18 feet away see exactly what you're thinking, just type in "Wyld Stallyns Rule" and see how the queue of lovely ladies piles up to meet you. The Xpress-On shells also have a gyroscope feature for games akin to Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble.

Manufacturer: Nokia
Website: www.nokia.com
List Price: (Phone) \$300, (Shell) TBD

■ Other shells for this model are being announced – including blinky strobes whose programmable patterns indicate specific events or callers





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etc

VANA'DIEL CLOCK

Manufacturer: Hori

Website: www.hori.ne.jp

List Price: 4,980 yen (around \$50)

Hori is talking about importing this dock through its American branch, but the specifics of release and price are still a bit up in the air. We do know that it displays Vana'diel and Earth time and offers alarms themed after the four nations of the game world. There is also a backlight and support of Daylight Saving Time. No true FF XI dork could possibly be without one of these – at least until they start releasing the bone sublighter at Hot Topic.



BIC

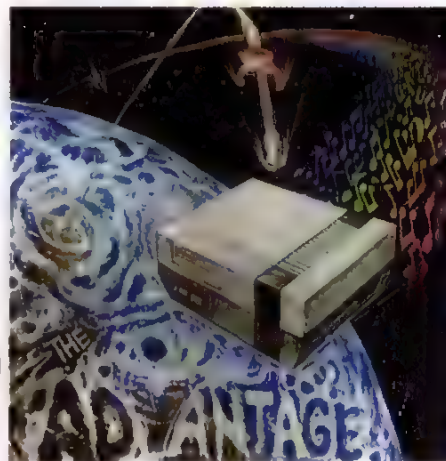
THE ADVANTAGE

Manufacturer: 5 Rue Christine Records

Website: www.theadvantageband.com, www.killrockstars.com

List Price: \$11

Featuring members of punk-prog terrorists Hella and Crime in Choir, The Advantage is another of the burgeoning number of indie bands that mine the riches of 1980s NES game soundtracks. Although not the first to attempt this, The Advantage are ace players and savvy arrangers with a keen ear for picking out some of the 8-bit era's finest music. While the performances are strong, the real revelation is hearing just how wildly varied and expertly composed the melodies themselves are. In this new context, the pieces evokes genres as disparate as ominous post-punk ("Goonies 2") and florid progressive rock ("Blastermaster Stage 2") that would make '70s forebears Yes proud.



peripheral

CUTTIN' THE CORD

Manufacturer: Logitech **Website:** www.logitech.com

List Price: (Rumblepad 2) TBA, (Action) \$39.99, (Precision) \$49.99



CORDLESS RUMBLEPAD 2 CONTROLLER (PC)



CORDLESS ACTION CONTROLLER (PS2)



CORDLESS PRECISION CONTROLLER (XBOX)

Each of Logitech's controllers sports a redesigned shape (more compact and similar to the first-party versions for their respective systems), impressively long battery life (around 50 hours on the consoles and 100 for the PC), automatic sleep mode to get every

ounce of use from the two AAs each pad uses, and rumble feedback. That, and they use 2.4GHz RF instead of icky infrared and offer 8-way digital d-pads. Wowza. The releases are staggered, but they should be all out by August of this year.

etc

SUMMER TV MAKEUP:

Shows You Should Have Watched – Grab Them on DVD



THE DEAD ZONE

List Price: (Season One) \$49.99, (Season Two) \$49.99

With its third season on USA Networks, this is smart crime-solving and psychic coolness.

UNLIMITED ENTERTAINMENT
Anthony Michael Hall Interview!



FREAKS AND GEEKS

List Price: (Complete Series) \$69.99

The wry, sarcastic misadventures of this crew are required viewing for anyone who went to public school. Check it out before we start writing mean notes on your locker!



DEAD LIKE ME

List Price: (Season One) \$59.99

When the main character is killed by a crapper falling from the Mir space station, you know good things are coming. Dark comedy and unapologetic death sequences.



QUANTUM LEAP

List Price: (Season One) \$59.98

Scott Bakula. Fear the person who doesn't appreciate the Bakula! Actually, don't fear them – hunt them down and wipe them from the Earth. No, really. We're being serious.



FARSCAPE

List Price: (Season One) \$149.99, (Season Two) \$149.99, (Season Three, sold in volumes) \$19.99 – \$39.99, (Season Four, sold in volumes) \$39.99 each

The Sci-Fi channel will air the miniseries this fall – catch up before then. It's really worth it.

THE FINE-TUNING WILL BE COMPLETE THIS WINTER.

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PLAYSTATION PORTABLE AND NINTENDO DS: A NEW HORIZON FOR INDEPENDENT DEVELOPERS

BY CHRIS CHARLA, SENIOR PRODUCER,
AND MIKE MIKA, CREATIVE DIRECTOR,
BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT



Last month, Greg Rizzer from EA talked about the importance of Big Games – those 150-person-team blockbusters that his company has been known to put out. We couldn't agree more. Big games are great, healthy for the industry, and fun to play for casual and hardcore gamers. He also mentioned smaller games – niche games, original game ideas, and quirky titles – saying that publishers can always choose to do these kinds of products – “gamers' games” he called them.

That's true, but it's definitely harder for “little games” to do well these days, unless they're imports, like *Harvest Moon*. There just hasn't been a way to make “modest games” successfully, because a modest game can't compete on looks or production values with a massive blockbuster game, even if the gameplay is there. They're both fun games, but which would you rather look at, *Dynasty Warriors 3* or *Return of the King*?

With budgets rushing steadily upward, and the biggest publishers putting 100-plus people on their games, most developers today either have to go big or go home. To use a Hollywood analogy, you've got to shoot for *Star Wars* and hope you don't end up with *Waterworld*. We do have something like the direct-to-video movie model – the \$9 budget title. That's awesome for super-niche titles and risk buys, but there's no game equivalent of an independent movie: A modest budget movie that has huge breakout potential, like *Blair Witch Project*, *Evil Dead*, or even (gag) *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

And since a medium budget game isn't as risky financially as a would-be blockbuster, it's easier to try some innovative or experimental things with

it, such as using an original character, making an attempt at a new genre, or even just creating a game that aims at a smaller audience (I'm thinking here of smaller sports like dirt track racing or lacrosse). Luckily, it appears that the game industry is about to deliver two excellent tools for developers for doing just that: the Sony PSP, and the Nintendo DS.

The DS, with its touch screen and 3D capabilities, is clearly built for innovation. Nintendo has always been able to pioneer unique markets with its hardware, and the DS doesn't look to be any different. While the GBA has mostly seen a few established game styles, the DS's unique features make creating innovative games almost a necessity! All those new features create a new, level playing field. It's tough to say just what's going to make a “blockbuster” on DS, and that helps gives games at all levels an equal shot at success.

The PSP is a more traditional system, but it's also a developer's dream. It hits a lot of sweet spots that may make it the ultimate indie game system of choice. It's very easy to develop for, thanks to its OpenGL-like graphics API and some other smart decisions Sony made at the hardware level. At the same time, the smaller absolute size of the screen means creating graphics that look great can be done faster. The net result is that we're going to be able to develop modern, console-quality games – that are indistinguishable to the eye from PS2 games – on PSP, for budgets that range from \$1.5 million to \$3 million. That's still a lot of money, but it's a lot less than the budget for a top-line PS2 game today.

A wacky two-million dollar PS2 game may attract some attention from hardcore gamers, but it's never going to be able to go toe-to-toe with Tony

Hawk on production values. On PSP, it can. And that means we have a shot at creating a new model for games, whether it's a forum for launching (and testing) new characters and properties, or publishers taking a chance on creating a game that's not aimed squarely at the mainstream.

Developers are already responding. We're working on our original title *Death, Jr.* exclusively for PSP while we continue to focus on all platforms. Some developers, like Planet Moon (creators of the amazing *Armed and Dangerous*), have said they're focusing their entire studio exclusively on PSP. Why? Because they can do original games on PSP much faster, and for much less money than they could on Xbox or PS2.

That's pretty freaking cool, and it's our hope that it's just the start. It would be awesome for the PSP to turn into the indie game machine. Sony has already gone on the record saying it's very excited about the potential for a lot of original games on the system, which is really awesome.

The game industry is getting so big that we have to recognize that there's no longer a single model (budget or blockbuster) that can work for all games, or that all games should be striving towards. Luckily, with the coming release of the PSP and DS, it looks like we're going to be getting some excellent diversity in the way we can develop games, and that's going to really open up the door for innovation. Hopefully, we'll get to see some mind-blowing games released that might otherwise have stayed on the drawing board. ■■■

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.

The PSP
is a more
traditional
system,
but it's
also a
developer's
dream.

Solar Power

FIFTH DAWN

also available online

MAGIC
The Gathering[®]

www.magicthegathering.com

sun

mon

tue

wed

thur

fri

sat



Headhunter: Redemption

02

NEW RELEASES
 • Funkmaster Flex: Digital Hit Factory – PS2, Xbox
 • Headhunter: Redemption – PS2, Xbox
 • Phantasy Star Trinity – PS2
 • Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow – Xbox
 • The Unseen – Xbox

03

Hidalgo comes to DVD and craps all over Seabiscuit



05

Open Water makes its theatrical debut and no one ever sets foot in the ocean again.

06

Charlize Theron celebrates 29 years of being smokin' hot... except for in that Monster movie



08

SIGGRAPH 2004 (August 8-12)
 The 31st international conference on computer graphics and interactive techniques will be held at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Learn about game design at this five-day conference and three-day exhibition!

09

HOLLYWOOD GAMEMAKER SUMMIT (August 9-10)
 Held at the Universal Hilton in Los Angeles, gaming's biggest names outline the future of video games.

10

NEW RELEASES
 • Growlanser: Generations – PS2
 • Kill Bill Volume 2 – DVD
 • Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders – Xbox

11

Hulk Hogan turns 51. His birthday wish is to finally make a sequel to Mr. Nanny.

12

QUAKECON 2004 (August 12-15)
 Deep within the heart of Texas, PC gamers unite and revel in four days of network gaming, tournaments, and id Software love. Id is once again the sponsor of this year's event!

13

WIZARD WORLD TOUR 2004 (August 13-15)
 Joss Whedon, Kevin "Why Did I Make Jersey Girl?" Smith, Kelly Hu, and tons of comic book creators will be in attendance, allowing you to truly get your dork on as you shop for comics and toys!

14

ATHENS 2004 (August 13-29)
 A lifetime of training...you have to admire the determination of Olympic athletes. That's like playing the same video game every day for your entire life. Billy Mitchell, our hats off to thee!



Alien vs. Predator releases in theaters on August 14

16

GAME DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP (August 16-27)
 In this two-week program of Cal State University, high school-age students will learn the basics of game art creation. The class ends with students making their own game.

17

NEW RELEASES
 • Armored Core: Nexus – PS2
 • Astro Boy: Omega Factor – GBA
 • Ghost Hunter – PS2
 • Hot Shots Golf Fore! – PS2
 • Madden NFL 2005 – PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
 • Metal Slug Advance – GBA
 • Yu-Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament – GBA



Growlanser: Generations



21

CLASSIC GAMING EXPO (August 21-22)
 In its seventh year, this year's Classic Gaming Expo will be held at San Jose's McEnery Convention Center. This is the place to be if you enjoy or wish to purchase retro games!



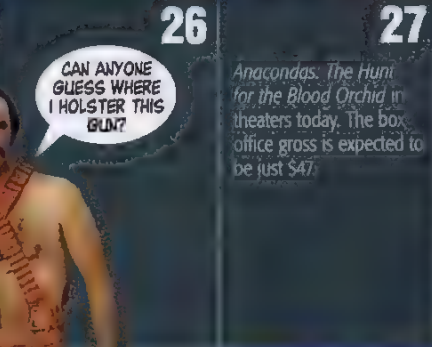
WWE Day of Reckoning

24

NEW RELEASES
 • Amazing Island – GC
 • Digimon Racing – GBA
 • ESPN NFL 2005 – PS2, Xbox
 • Futurama: Season 4 – DVD
 • Samurai Warriors – Xbox
 • Shaman King – PS2, GBA
 • Terminator 3: Redemption – PS2, Xbox, GC
 • WWE Day of Reckoning – GC

25

Sean Connery turns 74!



26

Anacondas: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid in theaters today. The box office gross is expected to be just \$47.

27

PENNY ARCADE EXPO (August 28-29)
 You've read their comic strips online. Now it's time to hang with the Penny Arcade gang. This expo has a little something for everyone... including the Minibosses live in concert!

29

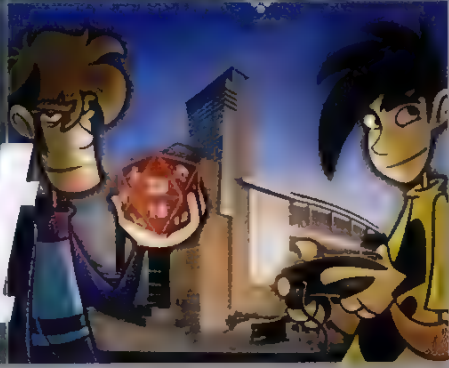
Michael Jackson turns 46 and his nose turns four.

31

NEW RELEASES
 • Pikmin 2 – GC
 • Star Ocean: Till the End of Time – PS2



Star Ocean: Till the End of Time



august

HALLE BERRY

CATW@MAN

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WRITTEN BY SYLVIE LANDRA PRODUCED BY BILL BRZESKI DIRECTED BY THIERRY ARBOGAST BASED UPON CHARACTERS CREATED BY KLAUS BADOLT COSTUME DESIGNER MICHAEL FOTRELL EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BENJAMIN MELNIKER MICHAEL E. USKAW ROBERT RIBBY AND BRUCE BERMAN

CHARACTERS AND STORY BY BOB KANE AND BASED UPON THE DC COMICS CHARACTER CREATED BY THERESA REBECK AND JOHN BRANCATO & MICHAEL FERRIS SCREENPLAY BY JOHN BRANCATO & MICHAEL FERRIS AND JOHN ROGERS

EDITED BY DENISE DI NOVI EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS EDWARD L. McDONNELL PRODUCED BY PTOF

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JULY

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX | PC

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



★ Tom Clancy's
**SPLINTER
CELL**
CHAOS THEORY

THE INFORMATION WAR DECLASSIFIED

SAM FISHER



The nature of the spy is to be stealthy, to move silently and to take the enemy by surprise. When a spy does his job properly, his arrival is unseen and his actions are undetected, but their repercussions can shock the world. At the 2004 Electronic Entertainment Expo, Ubisoft's debut of *Splinter Cell 3* (now known as *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*) rocked the video game world much like the spies that populate the books of Tom Clancy or Robert Ludlum. Another sequel so soon after the fantastic *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* was certainly a surprise, one that sent shockwaves of excitement through the industry and fans alike.

In order to delve further into the mystery of the unexpected new chapter in Sam Fisher's saga, Game Informer contacted Ubisoft Montreal, the studio behind the newest addition. Not long after we began our investigation, we were accosted by two men in black, drugged, and thrown into a cargo van. When we awoke, we found ourselves in the offices of Ubisoft Montreal, a place that holds clear influence on the games they create. Close inspection revealed many items that had obviously served as inspiration for their in-game counterparts. A security

camera looked suspiciously familiar, as did several side hallways, a few office plants, and many floors and textures in the converted warehouse office. While the facility itself was surprising, it was nothing compared to what Ubisoft had in store for us: A complete hands-on experience with the new *Splinter Cell* game, including the first-ever look at the Xbox version.

The third title is a complete reinvention of the franchise. According to Clint Hocking, the creative director of *Chaos Theory*, *Pandora Tomorrow* was about taking the existing *Splinter Cell* technology

to its maximum potential, while *Chaos Theory* is about starting from scratch and building Sam Fisher's ultimate adventure from the ground up. "We knew that we couldn't just have three games that were iterative in a row," said Hocking. "We did the third one to just reinvent everything. The Pandora team's goal was to take the existing technology to the absolute maximum, and the existing development standard to the highest that they could get it. [The *Chaos Theory* team's] goal was to make sure the game was the best it could possibly be – reinvent

everything and come up with the best game on the market."

Fans of the series shouldn't start to worry that the new game is such a departure that it will seem unfamiliar. The core elements of the franchise remain, although they have been rebuilt with superior graphics and tons of new features. Sam Fisher's world now sports a full weather system, the most realistic sound design yet, much more intelligent enemies, and the feature fans have always clamored for – truly open level designs.

(continued on page 46)



CASE FILE:
WEATHER CONDITIONS

At first glance, the weather system seems like just another visual layer to add to the already-beautiful series. Thanks to real-time rain effects, Sam will grow progressively wetter the longer he is in the rain, and the different materials on his suit will reflect light realistically. Puddles will form on the ground, and surfaces will become shiny with liquid. Thanks to the combination of normal mapping and Ubisoft's spectral highlight system (which adds more realistic reflections to normal-mapped objects), rain-drenched surfaces look shockingly realistic. Spectral highlights are used for more than just the weather system, however. The technique is used to create a look that is far more authentic than the first two games, and eliminates the "plastic" appearance that is often associated with the powerful normal mapping technique.

Spectral highlighting, in simple terms, adds a level of reflection that enhances the look of normal-mapped surfaces. It can be used to make doors look freshly painted, produce floors that appear freshly washed, and to create couches that look like

real leather. As impressive as these examples look in action, nothing shows of the power of spectral highlighting better than the weather system. Watching how the look of rain-drenched surfaces change as a storm worsens is an experience easily on par with the original Splinter Cell's groundbreaking use of light and shadow.

But the weather system is much more than an excuse for eye candy; every new system in the game has an actual discernable effect on gameplay. When it starts to rain, enemy guards will seek shelter if any is available. Staying out of the rain may keep guards more than comfortable; it may keep them alive. The normally non-lethal sticky shocker becomes deadly if the target is standing in a puddle. The electrical current of the shocker is grounded by the water, killing the victim.

Also included in the weather system are objects like sprinklers, which Sam can set off by shooting or throwing a smoke grenade. The unexpected activation of a sprinkler system is a good way to distract guards, and it also creates opportunities to use the lethal shocker trick. Obviously, water effects are a huge part of the weather system, but there are other elements as well. Lightning

flashes may give away Sam's position in the shadows, but thunder may mask the sound of his footsteps.

CASE FILE:
KEEPING QUIET

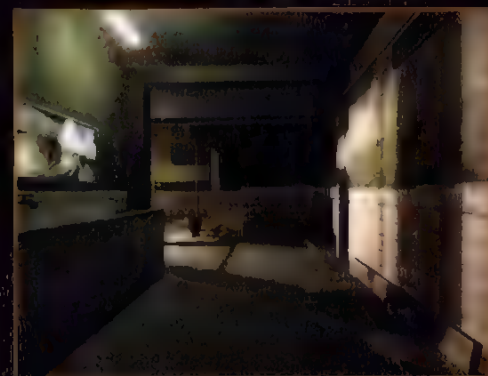
Just like the weather system has changed the way Sam interacts with his universe, so has the new sound system. While keeping quiet has always been an important part of the Splinter Cell games, the third volume has brought this to the forefront. A sound meter has been added to Sam's heads-up display. Much like how the stealth meter shows how visible Sam is, the sound meter relays how much noise he is making. But just because Sam is walking across broken glass doesn't mean he'll tip off the guards.

Thanks to the most realistic sound design to ever appear in a game, every area has its own ambient noises. A white indicator on the sound meter indicates the ambient sound level. As long as Sam makes less noise than the other sound sources in the environment, he won't be heard. For example, if Sam is near a loudly rumbling generator, he can move around fairly freely without fear of being heard. The closer to the machine he is, the more noise he can safely make; he

(continued on page 48)



▲ All areas, like this hallway in the Japanese Defense Ministry (above), and this North Korean Bathroom (below), were designed to be architecturally correct. Hundreds of photos were used as reference for every area.



Screenshots Guide

Green border = Xbox Screens

Brown border = PC Screens

■ In co-op, one player can hang from a ledge so the second can use him as a human ladder. Using this technique opens up otherwise inaccessible areas

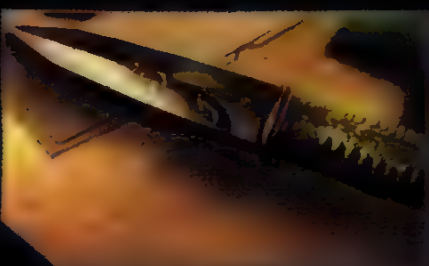


■ Sam now has more ways to deal with characters he grabs. He can interrogate them, knock them out, kill them, or even throw them off a cliff



■ By throwing this guard off the ledge, Sam can actually kill the character below with his falling body!





can even fire a gun without being detected. But if that machine were turned off, the amount of noise he can make would sharply decline. This technique, called sound masking, will be a key part of gameplay this time around.

Those who completed Pandora Tomorrow will remember a challenge late in the game outside the TV station. The area required Sam to make his way around a courtyard with a rotating spotlight in the center by moving from one shadowed area to the next in the intervals between the spotlight sweeps. Chaos Theory will feature areas with similar challenges, only this time they will be based around ambient noise. Sam will have to make his way through areas which offer no dark places to hide, and the only way he'll be able to proceed is by moving during an intermittent noise, like a siren. By waiting until the noise begins to start moving, Sam can sneak past guards undetected, even without the familiar shadows to conceal his movement.

Sound-based gameplay is possible because of the incredible attention to detail Ubisoft is paying to the audio portion of the title. Because the goal is to make the most realistic, immersive game ever, every surface in Chaos Theory will have real acoustical properties. Sound waves will carry through thinner walls, but be stopped completely by denser materials. If there is a noise in the next room and there is an open doorway to your right, you will hear that noise coming from your right side.

CASE FILE: KNOW THINE ENEMY

Obviously, using sound as a gameplay element doesn't work well unless enemies are smart enough to know what to listen for. Chaos Theory boasts the best enemy AI in the series – gone are the guards who would forget about you if you stayed hidden long enough. If you attack a pair of guards and kill one, the surviving guard will not forget about his dead partner – ever. He will search for you actively, and if he fails to find you, he will return to his post, but will never reset to his default

“unaware” status. He will stay alert and on edge until one of you is dead. These guards are actually trying to stay alive, and they will use every technique they have in order to do so.

If you attack a group of enemies, they will work as a team to take you out. They will call to each other for aid, lay down covering fire, and use group tactics like trying to pin you down and flank you. Of course, since your enemies are now more human than ever before, they can also be realistically tricked. If you are in a firefight with a guard and both parties have taken cover, you can fool him by laying down a burst of suppressing fire, then quietly slipping out from behind your safe spot and circling around behind him. If you are sneaky enough, the guard will be so busy popping up from his hiding spot to take potshots at your old location that he won't notice you coming. Until it's already too late, that is...

CASE FILE: THE WORLD IS YOURS

In the previous Splinter Cell titles, trial-and-error gameplay taught players what areas would force them into firefights. Pandora Tomorrow offered a bit more freedom in getting through a level, but still featured fairly linear paths. Chaos Theory will give you an objective at the start of each level, but how you proceed towards that goal will be entirely up to you. Fortunately, this new freedom won't affect the traditional storytelling method used in the games: scripted events.

Both of the first Splinter Cell titles favored relaying the plot through eavesdropping on NPC conversations or other in-game events, rather than cutscenes. Cutscenes tend to remove players from the action, which is contrary to the entire goal of the series. To retain the scripted-event storytelling method in an open environment, the scripted events can now take place in several different locations in a map, so Sam doesn't need to hit certain areas in order to advance the plot. In fact, many variations of the dialogue will be recorded to ensure that it corresponds with the player's actions.

Not only will the player be able to work towards the objective the way he or she wants to, the order in which they tackle certain goals will be reflected in the story.

When plotting out the story, every stage was conceived of as a group of different areas. These areas were swapped around in several different configurations in order to determine the layout that would lead to the optimum balance of exploration and logical routes. These larger, more lifelike areas also afford the player more opportunities to try out Sam's arsenal of moves and weapons. By providing expansive spaces with a bigger variety of obstacles and threats, players will be encouraged to replay the story mode in order to find new ways to make it through each area.

CASE FILE: TOOLS OF THE TRADE

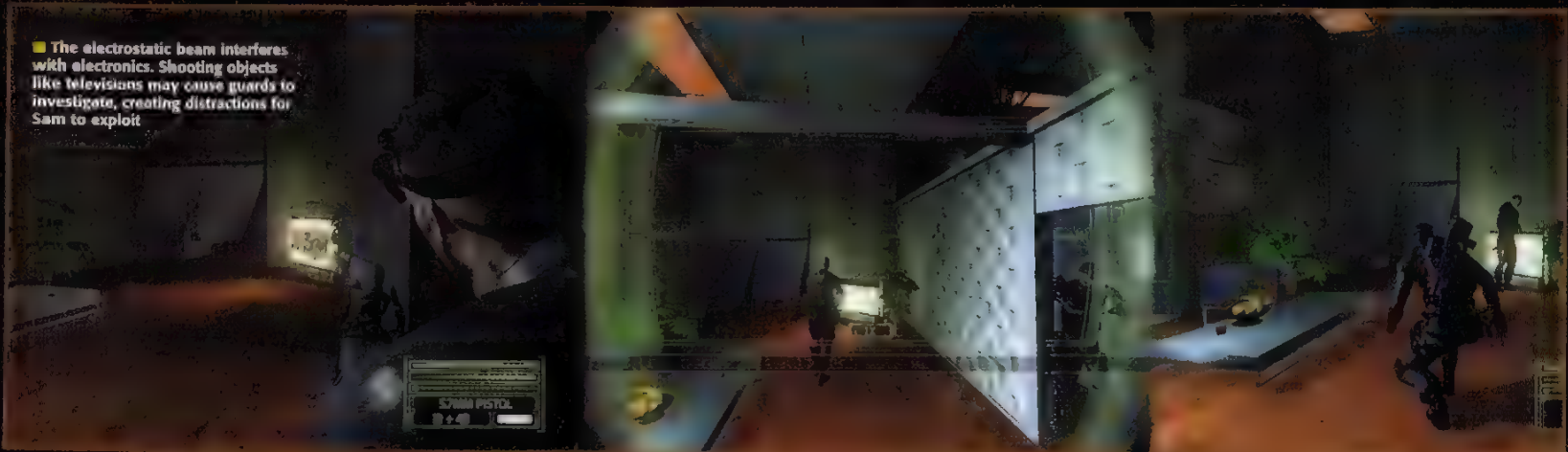
Sam Fisher has always had a large roster of moves at his disposal, and Chaos Theory has tweaked each of his existing skills, while adding several more. The goal is to give players the option to do anything they might think of. As always, Sam will need to sneak up behind guards and grab them, but the entire experience has changed. Sam's body language changes as he closes in on a guard, his hand going for the knife on his back as he nears. Ubisoft calls this the “closer than ever” system – it now feels easier and more realistic to close in on a foe. The Xbox version we played felt like we were actually sneaking up on a hapless guard to a greater degree than the previous titles. Sam creeps up on his enemy, his body growing visibly more tense as he nears. It's a great effect that really adds to the immersion of the game. Should he need to back away, Sam can actually walk backwards slowly, so he can put some distance between himself and the guard without turning his back. All of these movements now feel even more natural, thanks to a mechanic that “sticks” Sam's feet to the floor. He will adjust to changes in the terrain realistically, so it never feels like Sam is floating. It sounds

(continued on page 51)

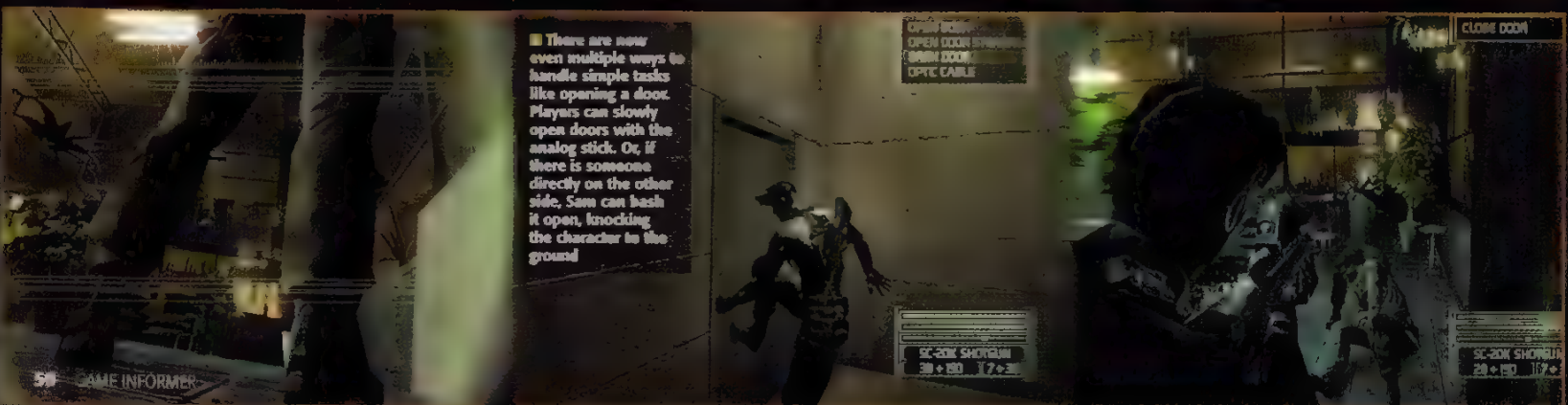




■ The electrostatic beam interferes with electronics. Shooting objects like televisions may cause guards to investigate, creating distractions for Sam to exploit



■ There are now even multiple ways to handle simple tasks like opening a door. Players can slowly open doors with the analog stick. Or, if there is someone directly on the other side, Sam can bash it open, knocking the character to the ground



like a minor aspect, but really adds a lot to the realism.

When Sam grabbed a guard in his previous titles, his options were pretty much limited to knocking him out or interrogating him if he was an important character. Now, interrogation will be a much more common and important practice – thanks to the open level design, guards will have more to say to ensure that the plot gets relayed. “Guards will tell you where you need to go when you interrogate them depending on the context,” says Hocking. “They’ll tell you where there’s equipment that you can find, or medical supplies, or how many guards are in the area, as well as high-level information, door codes and objective related stuff. Basically, you’re rewarded for getting up to these guys and dealing with them, which we think is more fun than simply tossing a grenade and blowing them up.”

After a character has spilled all he knows, you can choose how you want to deal with him and if he lives or dies. In the Xbox version, pulling one trigger deals a knockout blow, while pulling the other results in a slashed throat thanks to Sam’s new knife. You can even decide how the body falls by pushing the analog stick as you release the corpse. Want to push a body off of a cliff? Go for it – no one will ever find that corpse at the bottom of a ravine.

While intimidating guards and slashing their necks are both fine uses for Sam’s knife, its utility does not stop there. At E3, it was revealed that Sam would be able to use his knife for cutting through fabric, so Sam could make his own exits through tents and the like. Sam may also use it for other utilitarian purposes, like prying mounted microphones out of wooden walls. It also serves as a replacement for the disposable lock pick, one of the few items from the past games that probably won’t be returning. Instead of picking a lock, Sam can shove his knife between the door and the frame, slam the handle, and pop open the door. Of course, this makes more noise than picking the lock, so Sam must weigh his options carefully.

One of the other items that won’t be returning is the camera jammer

introduced in Pandora Tomorrow. It has been replaced with the far more useful pistol attachment currently called the “electrostatic beam.” This device screws onto Sam’s pistol and is mainly used for interfering with electronics. It can be employed to scramble TV and radio signals to create diversions, jam cameras, and even temporarily turn out lights. One may wonder why Sam would want to turn out a light for a short period of time, but the answer is obvious when the improved enemy AI is taken into consideration. In Chaos Theory, guards will actually notice when all the light sources in an area are smashed and deduce that you are somewhere close by!

The electrostatic beam can also be used for a taser, making it a passable, but not amazing, offensive weapon. For heavier firepower, Sam’s SC20K rifle is the way to go. Much like the pistol, it now has several attachments that will endow it with alternate fire modes. The first is the launcher, which fires Sam’s familiar gadgets: sticky shockers, diversion cameras, sticky cameras, and ring air foil rounds. The underused cameras have gained a few more functions that might make players more apt to utilize them. Sam can now fire multiple cameras and toggle between them. He can even return to camera view after exiting out of it.

As diverse as the launcher’s gadgets are, the other rifle attachments are a bit more simple, although every bit as useful. The second attachment transforms the SC20K into a powerful shotgun. By hitting the jump button on the Xbox controller while his rifle is drawn, Sam adds the attachment. Pulling the left trigger fires shotgun rounds, while the right trigger fires standard rifle rounds.

The third attachment is the sniper modification. Sam can still snipe with standard rifle rounds, but the sniper attachment packs a little more punch: it fires 20mm anti-vehicular rounds. Not only will they stop an enemy in one shot, but they will stop a car as well. They will even fire through many walls. That’s right, Chaos Theory will feature destructible environments! With the sniper attachment equipped, Sam can easily

(continued on page 53)



■ The new open level design will create several paths through stages, such as crawling through vents



■ Visually, the Xbox version closely resembles the PC



■ Of course, all of Sam’s familiar vision modes will return



The multiplayer levels will all be designed so that cooperation between the two players will be the key to completing the mission.

THE MYSTERY OF MULTIPLAYER

The multiplayer mode in *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* was undoubtedly revolutionary. Not only did it introduce a completely unique style of head-to-head gameplay, it tied it into the story in a compelling and intelligent way. Within days of its release, it became one of the most popular titles in the Xbox Live library. The spies vs. mercs gameplay stunned players by seamlessly transitioning *Splinter Cell*'s core mechanics into team-based play and pitting it up against the first-person, *Rainbow Six 3*-style gameplay of the mercs. But perhaps the most surprising aspect of this popular mode is that it probably won't be included in *Chaos Theory*.

Why would Ubisoft do such a thing? Because they've got something even better planned. Details are still scarce, but *Chaos Theory* will certainly include a multiplayer mode, and it looks like it will be a much more cohesive campaign than

the bite-sized missions of *Pandora Tomorrow*.

The spies' online missions in *Pandora Tomorrow* were clearly tied to the main story, but *Chaos Theory*'s multiplayer sounds like it will be even more connected to Sam's quest. Ubisoft hinted that it would actually be a full story mode in and of itself, which takes place parallel to the main story. There will be points in Sam's quest when Lambert tells him about a related situation that's being handled by other agents. Those other agents are the multiplayer characters.

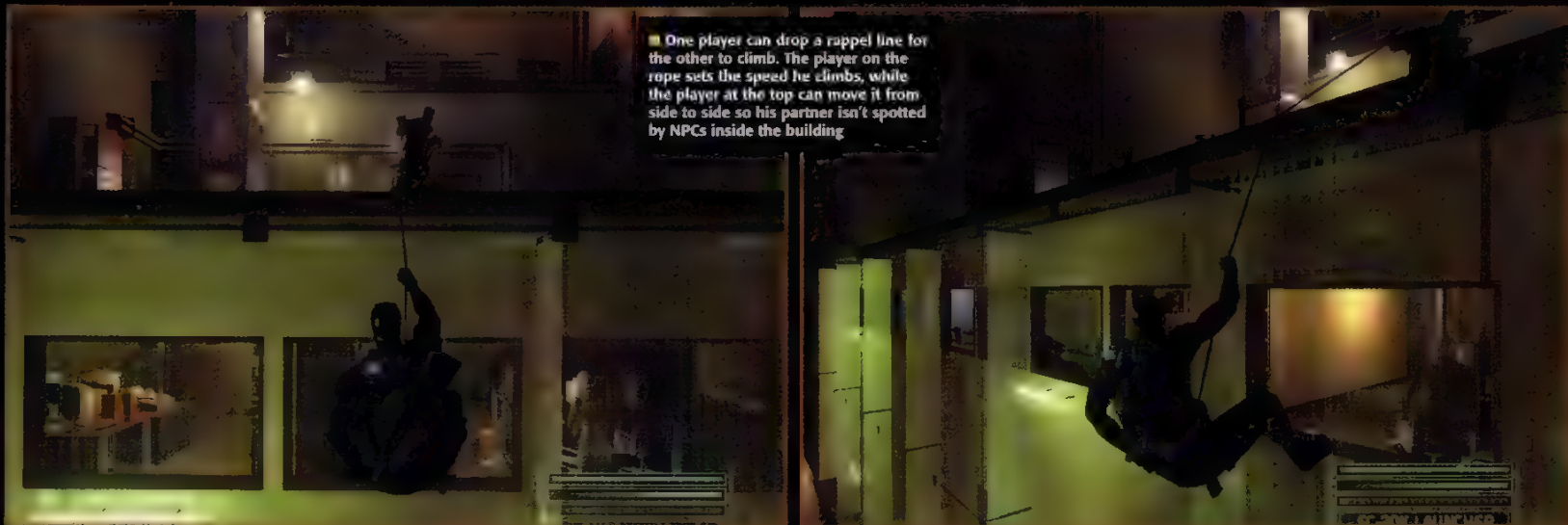
We had some hands-on time with *Chaos Theory*'s co-op mode, and so far it plays quite similarly to *Shadow Nets*' side of multiplayer gameplay in *Pandora Tomorrow*, but with an increased emphasis on cooperation. "Buddy moves" can be activated when two spies are in close proximity to each other. By pulling a trigger, a spy can give his partner a

boost, drop a rappel line from a roof for him to climb, and many other actions. Aside from these moves, *Chaos Theory* has some more new features that *Pandora Tomorrow* didn't have like NPCs.

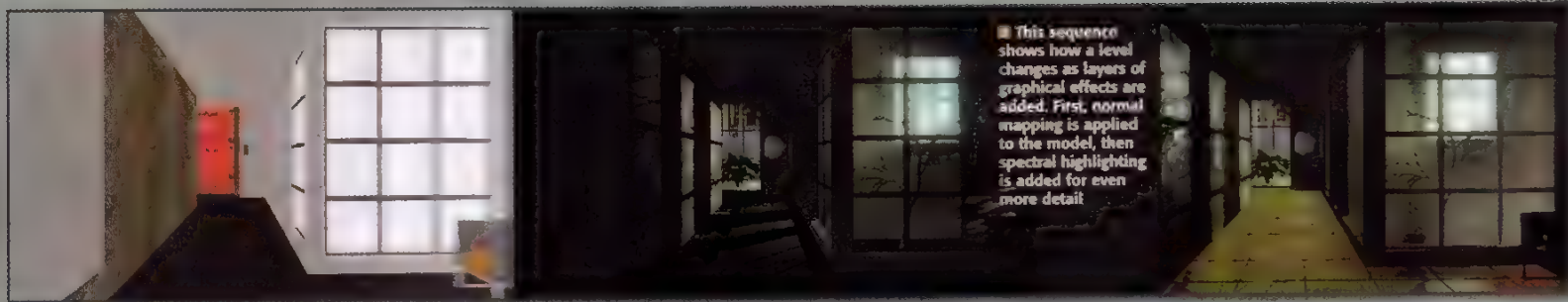
In our co-op mission, we lowered our partner down a line from a vent so he could hack a computer behind a sleeping guard's back. The presence of NPCs suggests that there will be no playable bad guys in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, although no decision has formally been made. But it does appear that multiplayer will have a more story-based approach this time, complete with AI enemies, scripted events, and multiple stages. The length of the online quest is also unknown, but based on comments by Ubisoft about it running parallel to the main story, we suspect it will be nearly as long as the main story mode. "We really have the multiplayer missions running along the same timeline as the single player

missions," says creative director Clint Hocking. "They're in similar locations that are related, and in the single player game you learn things and Lambert will outright say, 'We don't have time to deal with situation X. You've got to go here.' And of course the multiplayer mission is dealing with situation X."

Offering a significantly different online experience than *Pandora Tomorrow* may be an intelligent tactical maneuver by Ubisoft. Since *Chaos Theory* is releasing relatively soon after *Pandora Tomorrow*, having entirely different modes in the two games might encourage gamers to pick up both titles in order to get the best variety of gameplay types. Also, it would prevent gamers from feeling like they paid for the same thing twice. Whatever Ubisoft decides to do with *Chaos Theory*'s multiplayer, we have no doubt it will be nothing short of excellent.



One player can drop a rappel line for the other to climb. The player on the rope sets the speed he climbs, while the player at the top can move it from side to side so his partner isn't spotted by NPCs inside the building.



■ This sequence shows how a level changes as layers of graphical effects are added. First, normal mapping is applied to the model, then spectral highlighting is added for even more detail.

deal with enemies hiding around corners. Rather than expending round after round trying to hit his enemy as he pops out from cover, Sam can simply shoot the wall. The force of the round will cause an explosion of rock that will rip the helpless guard to shreds.

The final rifle attachment isn't quite as devastating. Called the foregrip, it is a handle on the front of the gun that gives it more stability, and thus, better aiming. Although the foregrip can help experienced players shoot their way out of tough spots, it was conceived as an aid for newer players to acclimate them to Splinter Cell's gunplay. As the player grows accustomed to aiming, the foregrip can be left behind.

Because Sam needs to travel lightly, players will not have access to every attachment at all times. At the beginning of each level, players will choose a limited number of attachments and other gadgets to bring on the mission. Choosing your own gear at the start of each scenario was designed to eliminate what Hocking called the "over management" of resources that many players fell victim to in the first games. By hoarding gadgets for fear that they'd

run out, many players never learned to use their spy gear to its fullest potential.

Not all the gadgets Sam can take on his missions have deadly applications. One item that Ubisoft is considering is a wireless hacking computer in order to bring Sam into the Wi-Fi era. Rather than sneaking into an area crawling with guards to access a computer terminal, Sam can use his wireless computer to tap into it remotely, triggering a "hacking mini-game." If positioned properly, Sam can even hack into the laptop or PDA a guard is carrying.

CASE FILE: YOUR MISSION, IF YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT

Sam obviously has more tricks up his sleeve than ever before, but what mission could require such cunning, equipment, and firepower? Preventing World War III, of course. Much of the story is still classified, but some details were given away by an unexpected source: the second game. While Chaos Theory was written by Hocking rather than JT Petty (the writer of the first two games), the Splinter Cell games have a surprisingly cohesive story.

As Pandora Tomorrow and the

third title were in development at the same time, Petty and Hocking swapped ideas back and forth to ensure that the series felt like a definite trilogy. If fans pay careful attention, they will notice that the events in the first game had repercussions in the second, which in turn, led to the story of the third. A few major aspects of the third chapter's story were revealed in Pandora Tomorrow: Douglas Shetland and the Japanese ISDF.

Douglas Shetland, the head of the private military organization that fights wars for money, first appeared early in Pandora Tomorrow, but he was actually created by Hocking for Chaos Theory. In order to develop the relationship between Sam Fisher and Shetland, the character was inserted into Pandora Tomorrow. Hocking has stated that Shetland is a major player in Chaos Theory's storyline.

The other story elements which sharp-eyed gamers may have caught in Pandora Tomorrow were small segments in the news interludes. One mentioned the poor state of the Asian economy, while another was about the creation of the Japanese ISDF. The Information Security Defense Force was created by the Japanese government to deal with the threat of "information warfare," much like how Sam's employer Third Echelon deals with covert attacks on the U.S. However, China and Korea felt that the ISDF is a violation of the international law that states that Japan can have no military force capable of acting beyond its own borders, increasing tension throughout Asia.

In Chaos Theory, the ISDF is the catalyst that could cause a global war if Sam fails his mission. The head of the ISDF secretly launches information warfare attacks on Japan and blames them on North

Korea. Since the Japanese Post-War Constitution states that the U.S. is obliged to protect Japan, the U.S. responds by attacking North Korea. North Korea responds, and reflexively invades South Korea.

Beyond this politically charged set-up, little is known about how the plot of Splinter Cell 3 will unfold. Ubisoft proudly presented us with stages set in Hokkaido, Japan; North Korea; and, most surprisingly, New York City. While most of the New York stage will take place inside a penthouse apartment, it will begin in an alleyway that is the most urban and public space to ever appear in a Splinter Cell game. Sure, Pandora Tomorrow featured a level in the Los Angeles airport, but it was mostly confined to back rooms and offices. The New York stage looks like it spans a few city blocks, and may place Sam in danger of being spotted by civilians.

Settings like New York are obviously a huge departure for the series, and it is only one of many new shockers the game has in store. Chaos Theory has retained every aspect of the first two titles that players loved, while simultaneously adding layer upon layer of realism. The normal-mapped graphics have taken the already beautiful series to a new level visually; and the new gadgets, physics systems, and intelligent AI have ramped up the stellar gameplay. Pandora Tomorrow introduced online stealth gameplay, and the third game is taking it to the next level. Splinter Cell is a series that gets better with each installment and raises the bar for the stealth/action genre as a whole. Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory has tons of surprises still in store, but one thing is no mystery: This is a title that gamers around the world will clamor for, counting the days until its release. ■ ■ ■



■ Sam can also swap his gun from hand to hand. When he does, he will shift from one side of the screen to the other, so the player can approach from the angle that has the clearest line of sight.

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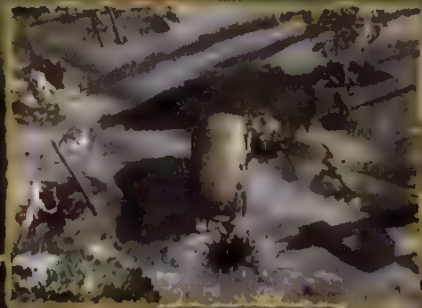
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GOD OF WAR



According to Greek mythology, the titan Prometheus, after betraying the secret of fire to the mortals, was shackled to a mountain so an eagle could chew at his ever-regenerating innards until the end of time. Zeus's son Tantalus dismembered his own child and served him to the gods at a banquet, and was thereafter forever parched and starving, with food and drink eternally just barely out of reach. Then there was Sisyphus, who paid for his affront to the gods by endlessly rolling a boulder up a hill, only to have it tumble down again once it reached the top. From high atop Mount Olympus, the gods dole out these diabolically creative punishments, assuming that no one will be foolish enough to risk everything by defying them. Then a man appears with nothing to lose. A man who inspires abject terror in all of his opponents. A man who has made it his mission to not only hunt with untiring fury one of the most powerful gods, but to take his place once he is slain. Kratos is coming — and suddenly not even Olympus seems safe anymore.

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> **RELEASE** FIRST QUARTER 2005

IMMORTAL RAGE

it is practically impossible to create a game these days and not see it compared to other titles; all works of art are influenced by the traditions that come before them. As such, it is difficult to say that God of War is unlike anything anyone has ever seen. However, the games that it does resemble are the very best of recent years. Drawing comparisons to such revered titles as Devil May Cry and ICO, Sony's new game out of its Santa Monica studio has been generating a lot of buzz. We recently had a chance to stop by and see what the fuss is about, and let us assure you, that it is not just empty praise.

The story centers around a raw and threatening ex-Spartan warrior named Kratos (Greek for "strength"), beginning just as he is throwing himself from the peak of a mountain. Why he has chosen to do this, as well as his fate, will become clear as players progress through the body of the game, a flashback to the previous weeks of Kratos' life.

With its ambitious combination of several gaming styles, David Jaffe, creative director of Santa Monica Studios and the game's lead designer, hopes God of War will be "a seamless blend of puzzles, combat, and some platforming. We want these elements to come together to create something that feels more like an adventure, not just a game."

BAD IS THE NEW GOOD

Anti-heroes are all over the place these days. Whether it is in a book, movie, or game, there is something attractive about rooting for a character with questionable ethics. It might seem like Kratos falls into this category, given his propensity for egregious violence and his ultimate goal of decide. However, even this dubious distinction has its limits. "He can barely be considered an anti-hero," says Jaffe. "He's just a bad guy."

Kratos' main objective is to retrieve Pandora's Box (the only weapon on earth that can kill a god), which he intends to use to destroy Ares and assume his place as the new god of war. Whether it be sacrificing captive soldiers or desecrating corpses, no morally reprehensible act will keep Kratos from accomplishing his mission. He remorselessly tears apart limbs. He plunges his Blades of Chaos into the eye sockets of monsters triple his size. Simply put, Kratos exudes fury and grim determination—a dangerous combination.

It isn't as though selecting a more conventional protagonist would have been difficult. Greek myths are rife with legendary heroes and noble deeds. However, in order to make the feel of the game coincide with

the subject matter, the main character could hardly be the wide-eyed, world-saving type. "I want players to unleash their dark side," declares Jaffe. "I want them to release this beast that I think everyone has inside, and Kratos lets you do that."

In its attempt to create one of the most brutal characters in video game history, Sony has also managed to create one of the most compelling. As you progress through the game, you learn more about Kratos' history, how Ares grafted the Blades of Chaos onto him, and how he earned the nickname "The Ghost of Sparta." While these story elements serve to flesh out Kratos's background and motivations, his true nature shines through more in combat than in cutscenes.

MORTAL COMBAT

Actions speak louder than words, and the game's designers have been working since the project's inception to ensure that all of the attacks and animations would have a stylized intensity befitting the game's main character. "We put together a movie at the beginning as a sort of style guide for combat," recounts Jaffe. "It had clips from films with nasty and vicious fight scenes, like Romper Stomper with Russell Crowe."

With such gritty inspiration, it is no wonder that Kratos has a huge complement of fierce (and surprisingly savage) moves to use against the bevy of mythological beasts that oppose him. Jaffe estimates that Kratos has about "15 to 25 base moves, and the player is able to link them together in a variety of ways." A typical attack consists of Kratos lashing out with the Blades of Chaos, aglow with fire, and whirling them around until they connect with flesh. Even the simplest moves look amaz-

There is no choice to be good or evil. Kratos just gets the job done.



What a second... my shoe isn't untied! Something's fishy here.



Monster designs are a mix between classic concepts and your worst nightmares.



This heavy piece of concept art, the entire world of God of War is situated on a landmass atop this titan's back.





ing, and they are all remarkably easy to execute; players will be performing elaborate aerial slash 'n' throw combos within minutes of picking up the controller. The interface is familiar, with most attacks activated by pressing a face button either alone or while holding a shoulder button. By performing moves in rapid succession, they become linked and turn into combos. However, there are no pre-set strings to memorize. It is entirely in the players' power to use the moves in the order and the way they see fit.

As he proceeds on his quest, Kratos will acquire a variety of magical attacks to augment his physical onslaughts. Perhaps the most interesting of these is the Gorgon head, which can only be obtained after performing a special grab-kill on Medusa in Pandora's Temple. After

gripping her neck and hearing some satisfying snaps and pops, you hold her head in your hand, which you can then use to petrify your foes. In addition to other, yet-to-be-disclosed spells, you will also obtain the throwable Zeus Thunderbolt, as well as a different lightning spell that has an area-effect and follows Kratos as he moves. Also, though it doesn't draw from the same source as his other magic, Kratos can initiate a god mode (very similar to Devil May Cry's Devil Trigger) for a brief period that sends electricity coursing through his body, amplifying the power of his attacks.

These magical assaults are powerful alone, but they become even more devastating when linked with Kratos's repertoire of physical attacks. For instance, at the end of a combo, a swing of your

blades might launch an enemy off the ground. At that point, rather than link another couple slashes, you can shoot a blast from the Gorgon head, turning the enemy to stone in mid-air, then watch as it drops back to earth and shatters. Alternately, you could throw some thunderbolts at its flying body, stuffing it full of divine wattage before it hits the ground. Innovative combinations like these are just a taste of the way God of War aims to offer a vast array of combat options in a variety of situations.

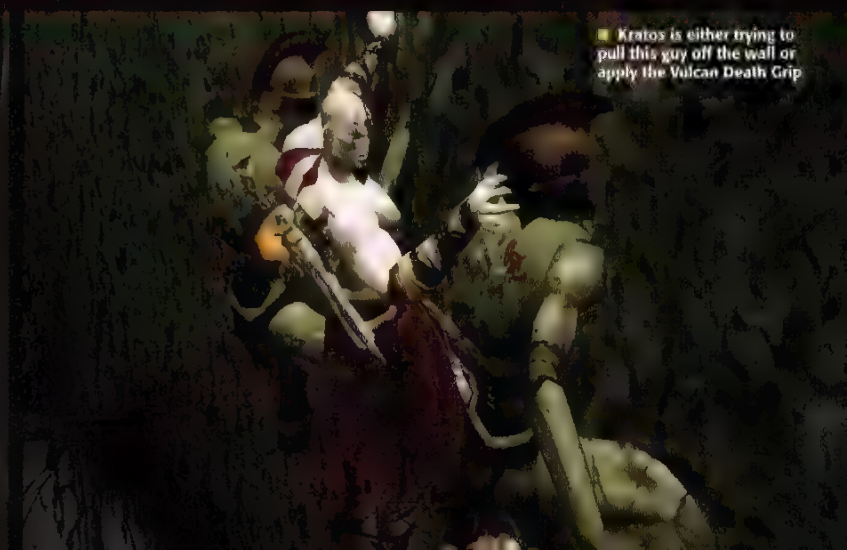
BEYOND BUTTON-MASHING

Even with Kratos's wide range of tools and abilities, the development team is making a focused effort to vary the

gameplay so players never feel like they are just repeating the same combos time after time. One way they approach this is with the addition of special grab attacks against some of the larger monsters. When you grab a skeleton or a harpy, Kratos can just rip through them and keep fighting without batting an eye. However, monsters such as the Cyclops or Medusa are too huge to be dealt with so easily. Instead, you can use your magic or physical attacks to wear them down until the special grab attack becomes available. At that point, a short combo sequence can be initiated, consisting of several timed button presses. If successful, you get to watch Kratos perform a series of deadly moves, usually culminating with a couple of blades in the face. If you fail, however, you take



■ The larger the enemies, the longer it will take for the Medusa blast to petrify them.



■ Kratos is either trying to pull this guy off the wall or apply the Vulcan Death Grip.



■ With an advancing wall to the left about to crush you, you'll need to kill this foe swiftly and get out of the way.



■ Whether you want to be more powerful or just look really awesome, ethereal armor is the way to go!

extra damage, so you need to weigh the risks and rewards of attempting these moves. Fortunately, these special grabs are not required — they are just one more way that a player can choose to dispose of enemies.

Different attacks are also open to you depending on the area you're in and the enemy you're fighting. For instance, while on the ground, you have your full arsenal of moves, but if you are scaling a wall or hanging from a rope, your techniques will change to fit the surroundings. Instead of your high-flying tricks, you'll have to rely more on grappling and close combat. The enemies' tactics change in these situations as well. They will pursue Kratos across all kinds of terrain — sheer cliffs,

gorges — trying to use their own grab attacks in an attempt to weigh him down and pull him off. Unless you shake the analog stick fast enough when this happens, the creatures will succeed and you'll find Kratos plummeting to his death.

"We're trying to find new twists on some of the standard fighting rooms. We don't want players to feel like they are just going from place to place, hacking and slashing monsters," explains Cole. This philosophy was illustrated perfectly when we played through Athens, one of the new levels not included in the version of the game at E3. After a heated battle in a courtyard, we reached the top of a turret and found a ballista aimed at an adjacent tower. Firing a spear (with a

rope trailing behind) from the massive weapon, we were able to make a connection to the opposite wall and begin climbing, hand-over-hand, to the other side. However, as we were suspended from the line, we were assailed by a legion of skeletons, beating them back and throwing them off the rope as we moved forward. Once we had crossed, we found another ballista stationed in the center of the next room. After using it to shatter a door, a gang of Minotaurs started charging down the corridor towards us. We had a few options at this point: We could have started whipping thunderbolts at them, or we could have weakened them to the point that the grab-kill was available. We decided on a

third option, though, and just kept firing away with the ballista, watching enormous stakes tear through the beasts in gory one-hit kills.

All of this variation was within only ten minutes of gameplay, and it doesn't even begin to cover all of the possible situations you'll encounter. You may need to kill certain monsters before the floor falls out from underneath you, or maybe try to stay on an elevator in a sandstorm as it ascends a cliff face. With so many different scenarios motivating the player to be quick and creative, God of War promises to provide a level of variety unseen in even the most respected titles in the action genre.

(Continued on page 61)

■ To cure Minotaurism, Dr. Kratos prescribes black therapy.



■ Your status can be upgraded, giving them different visual effects as they fall around.



HOLY WAR

While still fairly new to the world of video games, the subject of mortals trying to overthrow deities has already seen some spectacular treatments in other forms of media. If *God of War's* story has you eager to wage war against the heavens, maybe you should look into some of these thematically similar works:

Princess Mononoke

Directed by Hayao Miyazaki

When power-hungry humans try to kill the Great Forest Spirit, Ashitaka (an exiled prince) finds himself as the intermediary in the clash between worldly technology and the realm of the gods. This was one of the few anime films to be released in mainstream American theaters.



Preacher

Written by Garth Ennis



In this serialized comic book, Jesse Custer, a modern cowboy with a hankerin' for punchin', gets endowed with divine powers. He proceeds to kick up a fuss and seek God in order to hold him accountable for deserting his post and letting the world go down the can.

His Dark Materials

by Philip Pullman

Taking place in a world similar to our own (except with armored war bears!), a young girl named Lyra gets wrapped up in events surrounding her uncle Asriel's crusade to overthrow God. The series consists of three books: *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass*.



■ The bodies of all those who died seeking Pandora's Box are burned in this pyre. Kratos is just visiting... for now.





■ You even need to use your head in combat. Your regular attacks won't pierce these shields, so you need to take an alternate approach



■ "Hey, I'm pretty strong, right Atlas?" Atlas shrugs



■ Each ballista comes free with one pre-assembled Athenian soldier

REINVENTING THE PUZZLE

In addition to possessing unparalleled combat prowess, one who would seek to replace a god must have a keen intellect as well as a keen blade. Though he may not seem like the thinking type, Kratos will encounter numerous opportunities to test his mental mettle throughout his adventure. Though there is no denying that puzzles in the action genre have become somewhat tired, Jaffe explains that God of War adds a whole new twist to the old formula, making each puzzle much more than a simple fetch quest. "We use a lot of the same vocabulary, like pressure plates and dragging objects, but I think players will appreciate the unique ways in which we implement them."

Since many familiar concepts are being used in unfamiliar ways, players might find themselves initially thrown off by the way the game approaches puzzles. For instance, in a level the team affectionately refers to as "the cake" (since its design resembles the layers of a wedding cake), we came across a closed door, a moveable statue, and a nearby pressure switch. Within seconds we had pulled the statue over the switch, assuming the door would open. It didn't. Instead, a whole new series of puzzles had to be uncovered which involved using a crane overhead to break through brittle ground (revealing yet another switch to contend with), as well as to hold down the switch we thought the statue was for.

Another example takes place in Pandora's Temple, where a wall on the far side of the room rotates, James Bond style, once you step on a tile in the floor. However, there isn't enough time to make it from the tile to the wall to catch a ride. Thinking we already knew the solution, we grabbed a nearby block and dragged it over the switch. The wall turned as expected, but we were still too far away to squeeze through. Eventually we had to drag the block over to the trick wall, then use a kick maneuver to send the block

sliding across the room. As it glided over the tile, the wall began to move and we were able to get through into the next section of the temple.

It is important to note that God of War's puzzles aren't restricted to simply getting you through doors. Even in the boss fights, players will find themselves analyzing the surroundings and using them to gain an advantage. "We don't have bosses that you just have to hit more times than regular enemies," Jaffe tells us. "All of the bosses have something unique about them in terms of the way they bring action and puzzle elements together."

GOD IS IN THE DETAILS

God of War has been in development for over two years, and though it isn't complete yet, this timeframe has allowed the folks at Santa Monica studios to start putting an exceptional level of polish on the game. From the raging battles and tortured souls scattered through the backgrounds to the total lack of load screens from start to finish, nearly every imaginable aspect is being fine-tuned to provide an immersive experience. Plus, with progressive scan and Dolby ProLogic II both being considered, the world of God of War will contain stunning visuals and sound to go along with its legendary setting. Not only that, but it will be a world worth revisiting, with several incentives to play through the game multiple times, like more information about the story and the characters, as well as behind-the-scenes material (including looks at levels that didn't make it into the game).

Every last detail of God of War, from the monster designs to the combat mechanic, contributes to the melding of stylized, adult action and high-adventure wonder. "It's sort of like *Clash of the Titans* meets *Heavy Metal*," confides Jaffe, "but I'm going to try get as much of the *Heavy Metal*-type stuff in there as I can. Sony does have its limits, but we haven't hit them yet!"





WCLASH

OF THE

PRIMETIME

TITANS

Madden and ESPN Go Toe to Toe



UNLIMITED ENABLED

This is how it was meant to be. Two teams vie for the distinction of being the best in video game football – Madden versus ESPN. It all comes down to this. With the other football titles bowing out (at least for this year), we're left with the two biggest and best titles out there, and frankly, that's the way we like it. That means no Fever, GameDay, or Blitz. After all, this is the NFL, not NFL Europe.

The roots of Madden and ESPN's rivalry goes deeper than you might think. ESPN Videogames developer Visual Concepts once worked for EA Sports, putting out the SNES versions of Madden '94 and '95. The debut of Sega's Dreamcast console in 1999 and Sega's purchase of Visual Concepts as a subsidiary, however, put EA Sports and Visual Concepts on a collision course. In fact, the two have built up a video game football arms race that has effectively pushed out the inferior competition this year because the bar has been raised so high.

It's easy for the public to think that Madden doesn't have to try to make better games anymore because it's the most popular and the leader in sales. Or that ESPN isn't as good because it's simply not Madden (or that it's better just because of the stereotype that EA Sports is some evil corporation). Well, those statements are absolutely misguided because they take for granted the enormous amount of time, energy, and love put into both franchises to make them the best – no matter what the sales numbers or zealots say.

Game Informer is going to wade through all the crap to get down to what you really want to know in this important year of video game football history: Who has the better game? We take a look at every feature each title has to offer and go over every blade of grass for you. The two best games in football go face to face in the pages of Game Informer. As Hall of Fame coach Marv Levy would say to inspire the Buffalo Bills, "Where else would you rather be than right here, right now?"



EA Sports' Madden is the king of football video games in many ways – especially in sales – but that doesn't mean it doesn't have standards to uphold. Whether it's catching up with itself, the competition, or its fanatical players, this new Madden is stepping up in many areas to try to stay on top.

PLAYSTATION 2 / XBOX 1 GAMECUBE
 > STYLE: 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX 2 W/ OR PS2 ONLY)
 > PUBLISHER: EA SPORTS > DEVELOPER: EA TIBURON > RELEASE: AUG

MADDEN NFL 2005



★ ON THE GRIDIRON ★

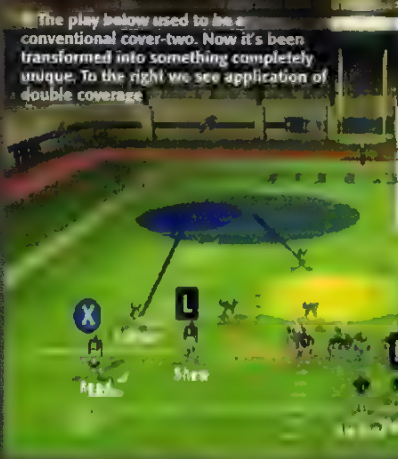
Last year's offensive Playmaker controls were cool, but little was done for the defense to keep up with these changes. Now, just like cover star Ray Lewis, defenses will be feared. Your right analog stick has been renamed the Hit Stick. Thumb this and you'll get extra pop in your tackle, letting you leave your feet for jamming and potentially fumble-causing hits. Timing is everything with the Hit Stick, and Tiburon is working on getting the mechanic as smooth as possible. Once you do it, you'll find that the Hit Stick is the most gratifying way to tackle someone in football.

To go along with this new mechanic, the game's animations are more contextual. Getting whacked by an opponent tackling you up high with the Hit Stick is obviously different than someone going low at your feet or even a partial hit. Madden excels each season at its plethora of new animations, and this year is no exception. This contextual thinking means that the title not only runs more noticeable sideline catches, but guys will even jump over piles of bodies as the play is whistled dead.

★ CHALK TALK ★

Defense is all about knocking the other guy into next week, but it takes brains as well. Coaches always say that no matter how hard you can hit, you are only going to tackle air if you aren't in the correct position first. Before the snap you can change the assignments of any of your players. Double team a receiver, pull a defensive tackle into the flat, send someone in for a blitz (or even fake like it), and much more. The only restriction is that guys in zone cannot be switched to a man-to-man assignment such as bump-and-run. As well as these individual assignments, adjustments can also be made to entire groups of your defense, such as telling all the linebackers to blitz or the whole defensive line to slant right. You can basically change and customize the entire face of a play. Finally, like last year's ESPN, in the pause menu you can also assign specific members of the defense to cover individual offensive players no matter what, so you can stick your best man on their speedy receiver.

Apart from wanting to put defenses on an even footing this time around, developer Tiburon implemented these changes to keep up with its own fanbase. Online play is huge, as is the Madden Challenge Tournament, which puts the game to the ultimate test from its best players. In fact, Tiburon talked to a few of these guys to find out how they exploit the gameplay to win, and therefore how it can be fixed. Accordingly, letting you change the assignments of each defensive player is a great way to keep up with all the motion and formation shifting your friends may pull on you. For instance, the Man-Lock feature is designed so that the offense can't tell if you're in



man-to-man coverage. Instead of a cornerback following a receiver in motion, the defense will adjust its assignments on the fly. The only drawback with these pre-snap maneuvers is that there are no macro-button shortcuts for your favorite play tweaks, so online defenses will have to adjust their plays lightning fast before the other player hikes the ball.

For their part, offenses can counter with the ability to designate any play as an audible on the fly, create custom personnel packages, and shift formations at the line without calling an audible. This lets you change a Singleback-Big formation to a Singleback-4WR set in an instant without changing anyone's pass routes. One of the biggest additions this year for offenses is also the most elusive. Certain plays will let receivers go on option routes. This is where the AI selects which branching path is the best to take in order to get open. So, if there is no safety coverage on top, your WR will run a post pattern. If there is, he might run a curl route instead. Game

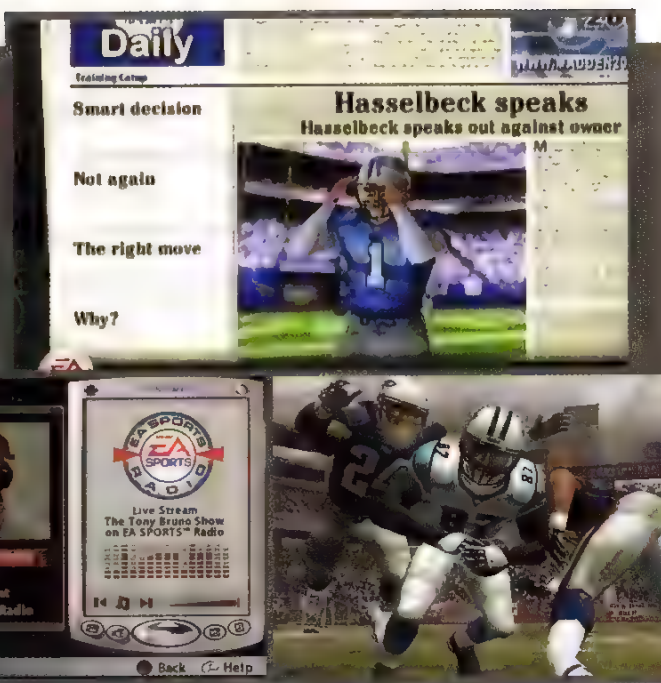
informer tested out how well the AI would decide which patterns were the best in our preview build, and we found that in most cases, it was smart enough not to run our WR into bad situations. AI like this is a big step forward for football games, as it mirrors the kind of on-the-field thinking that even NFL receivers can have trouble with. It's also an example of how, even though ESPN has many of the same on-the-field strategy features, Madden simply lets you do more.



★ FRANCHISES ★

Owner's options are unchanged, but the day-to-day happenings of your team have gotten a huge facelift. Instead of a bland sea of menus, the Storyline Central section of your franchise keeps you plugged in. Here (including a spiffy PDA interface) you can find out info on your team through newspaper headlines, look at scouting for the next game, check your email, or listen to what the rubes are talking about via Tony Bruno's radio show. Dial in and you'll get everything from trivia to real interviews with NFL coaches and players. Hear Jack Del Rio or Jeff Fisher talk about their goals for training camp or a tough loss. Tiburon says that there is over 20 hours of Tony in the game.

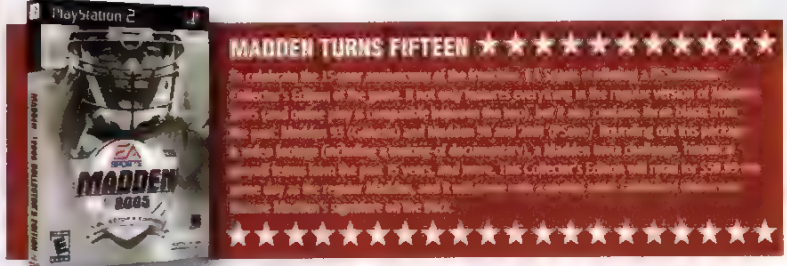
USA Today helps you keep an eye on opponents and what's going on around the NFL. Meanwhile, over 15 local rags will feature stories specifically about your team from real life papers, such as the *Miami Herald* if you're a "Fins fan. Here you'll get a window into more info. For instance, an article about a disgruntled player not only lets you know of the team's mood (maybe he's angry because you put him on the Trading Block), but from this story you can change the depth chart or designate someone a team captain to cheer them up. Players' feelings are real, so if Terrell Owens complains that Donavon McNabb isn't getting him the ball enough (likely), you'll not only hear about it, but T.O.'s performance - and ultimately the team's - might drop too. This year's Madden runs player skill progression updates every four weeks in the season. This feature helps imbue them with personality - something that may be helpful or harmful come contract negotiation time.



★ INTANGIBLES ★

Madden got kicked in the cup last year by ESPN in the presentation department, and now it's out to get even. You can create a fan who will be included with three other people in a crowd shot during post-play cutscenes. Have him go shirtless in the winter, wear a foam finger, or don some colorful face paint. The only thing missing is having him hold up a John 3:16 sign. Only one fan can be created per user profile.

The game has undergone graphical changes as well, and you'll notice that players have a bulkier look with their new shoulder pads and the way jerseys stretch over them. Overall, the game looks better than last year, and the new time-of-day lighting is one of those small touches that makes a big difference. High definition gamers can enjoy Madden in 480p on Xbox and GameCube.



★ ONLINE ★

Hitting Xbox Live isn't the only online notable. Props will be given via 30 different trophies you can get for feats such as winning five games in a row, for example. You can also play the Rushing Attack minigame against someone online (with its own leaderboard). Finally, tournament play has been sped up for better access. Overall, the team has worked with top online players to rectify many of the gameplay cheats that Madden fans like to whip out. A Reputation Rating has now been included to learn about what kind of opponent you're going up against. Furthermore, stats will be available so you can see the kind of game they play, such as if they juke a lot or what their pass/run distribution is. An online ticker following real-life sports results has also been added.

It may sound strange to say that Madden is working hard to keep up this year, but Tiburon has high standards for itself, and it knows that the expectations from fans are pushing it even higher.



It seems that ESPN is running out of time. We've been talking about how it's been getting close to Madden for years now, and although it has been picking up fans, it's still way behind EA Sports in numbers. Sega itself has been getting antsy, and one wonders if EA will try to monopolize football as it does NASCAR. How long can ESPN last in second place?

ESPN NFL 2K5

★ ON THE GRIDIRON ★

In an attempt to avoid having tackles governed by automatically triggered animations that you can't break out of once they are started, there is the Maximum Tackle system. This means that if you are a running back, and a guy tries to pull you down, you have a split second to jam on a button (A on Xbox and X on PS2) and break free of his grasp. The defensive player, on the other hand, will also jam on his button to keep hold of you. Although this sounds arcade-like and contrived, it works well during the game, because it doesn't slow things down at all. Runners can also avail themselves of the analog juke system with the right stick, where you can string combo jukes together to even switch directions rapidly like Marshall Faulk.

Along with the ability to break out of tackles, you can now get your QB out of trouble with a nifty move or two. When you see that you're about to be sacked, flick the left analog stick the appropriate direction and your QB will step up in the pocket or spin out of a potential sack to buy some precious extra time in the pocket.

Defensive players can choose between a wrap tackle or a jarring hit by either holding or tapping, respectively, the dive button. Similar to Madden's Hit Stick, the tuning on this mechanic is still being tweaked so it will probably feel better by the time the game ships.



★ CHALK TALK ★

Defensive assignments can be changed up per player, letting you double team receivers, call blitzes, and make other modifications to totally customize what your players do. However, the orders of individual d-linemen cannot be changed — they must still behave as a unit. Unlike Madden, you can change a zone assignment to man-to-man coverage, but ESPN also does not include macro buttons for quick decisions.

Last year's big splash, First Person Football (FPF), is back, and has gotten a few tweaks to make it more accessible. You can toggle on an optional QB progression system, so that your head will automatically swivel among your receiver reads. Catching the ball is also easier, because not only will the camera not switch until you have possession of the ball, but you are automatically orientated forward when you get control of the player. This prevents you from getting mixed up and running the wrong way down the field. Finally, you can now switch between first and third-person views at any time before the ball is hiked by clicking the left analog stick. This not only lets you mix up the views to your liking, but it allows you to do all the pre-snap fiddling of the third-person game in FPF. This is the most distinguishable new aspect of FPF for a feature that is otherwise largely the same as last year.



★ FRANCHISES ★

MONDAY SCHEDULE

W	L	T	STREAK	Conditioning Plan	On The Clock
SEA	0	0	0	Tasks Assigned 13	
LAST: No Game				Hours Used 30	
UP NEXT: Seattle				Hours Left 30	
				Players Trained: 15	

W	Task	Sets	Who	Details
	Add New			
J	Meeting			Happy
J	Film	3	M Bulger	Blitz Packages
J	Film	3	C Chandler	Blitz Packages
J	Film	3	J Smoker	Blitz Packages
J	Aerobic	3	All WRs	Shuttle runs
J	Weights	3	All RBs	Chest
J	Film	3	All DTs	Pass Blocking Schemes
J	Coaching			Fronts and Alignment

Press **A** to select an activity

COACHING

Examine the different defensive fronts you face this week to give your boys an edge in blocking.

Position	Rating
Offense Coordinator	Fronts and Alignment
Offense Ast. 1	Coverages
Offense Ast. 2	Blitz Packages
Defense Coordinator	Route Combination
Defense Ast. 1	Run Fundamentals
Defense Ast. 2	Defensive Fundamentals

Press **Y** To Confirm

SLEEPERS



DUANE WARD
POSITION: OUTSIDE LINEBACKER
COLLEGE: TEXAS TECH

ROUND	NAME	POS	COLLEGE
1	Kyle Peters	T	Georgia Tech
2	Jonathan Flahar	WR	Indiana
3	Josh Schultz	TE	Texas A&M
4	Carl Brady	QB	Western Michigan

Instead of fiddling with the price of hot dogs in your franchise like Madden, ESPN is putting you in the coach's shoes during the week leading up to Sunday's games. Players have the option of setting the schedules of both coaches and players. This includes having your QB study film to smarten up for an upcoming opponent's tough defense or setting the tone of the team meetings – whether it's happy and upbeat or chair-throwing angry. You've got 60 hours per week to use, and all these activities can be directed at specific players or a whole unit – but watch out that you don't get someone hurt. Not only is regulat-

ing how many activities your players do per week important for not injuring them, but activities like weight lifting and aerobic activity can be adjusted according to the number of sets you want to do and their intensity. Something like a deep tissue massage is low impact (there's even sensitivity training and ballet!), while running full scrimmages with pads are an entirely different matter. You can also set up rehab routines for hurt players.

The depth here is astounding, and it's important, too. The benefit of this planning is that you can earn up to six skill points for your players leading into a game. Look out, however, as you can lose

points if team morale or fatigue ratings drop. Think like Mariucci, not Mornhinweg, and you'll be fine.

During the season, there is now a *Sportscenter* after every week featuring a virtual Chris Berman with injury and news reports from Trey Wingo. Now users can see highlights of their own games instead of just everyone else's, and draftnik Mel Kiper Jr. will show up after week eight to start talking about the draft. This year, incoming rookies will have randomly generated faces to give them more personality, and Kiper will give you his thoughts on not only who's the best of the college crop, but who the sleeper picks are to look for.

★ INTANGIBLES ★



One thing you'll notice right away is how great this game looks. Instead of dumbing down the graphics for both consoles, developer Visual Concepts has optimized the Xbox version for that system. Using what they call triple-pass rendering (is that related to blast processing?), you can even notice the veins in players' arms. Does this mean the PS2 edition is horrible looking? No, but you'll notice the difference (both support 480p). The game has over 200 new cutscenes, including more shots of fans and ESPN touches such as pass distribution charts and replays from the SkyCam. The network was heavily tapped, allowing the developers to not only include virtual representations of Chris Berman, but also reporter Suzy Kolber for post-game analysis.

ESPN sprinkles a few cherries on top with some customization features. Xbox owners can drop in songs from their own CD collections to play over the stadium PA, as well as designate when you want them to play (PS2 gives you pre-selected tracks to edit). So, Xbox cheeseheads can feel right at home with their "Go Pack Go!" soundbite. You can also



tweak the game to your liking in the celebrations department. ESPN offers 25 different dances which are mapped to five buttons (with 20 more unlockable through The Crib). There are even some signature moves such as Deion Sanders' Primetime dance or Warren Sapp's disgusting bunny hop. If you'd rather customize history to your liking, you can replay some of ESPN's handpicked greatest moments in the NFL, from Wide Right to the Immaculate Reception.

Your Crib not only contains double the amount of unlockables as before, but it even has an upstairs room for your trophies. Items are bought from catalogs which you must purchase. Also new are the celebrity Booya Matches. These are challenges you get in your Crib via a phone on your bar. Beat people like Funkmaster Flex or Carmen Electra and get cool prizes. These matches even feature a picture icon in the corner of your screen with the star and their audio commentary. Does David Arquette say some annoying things? No, of course not.



★ ONLINE ★

In a first for console video game football, you can now pair up with 31 other people and play through an entire 16-game season (with injuries), including the playoffs. ESPN also introduces its VIP system, which is a profile of your online play, including everything from what your favorite hot route is to pass distribution to how often you like to go for it on fourth down. You can even download the VIP profiles of online players and practice playing against their tendencies. So, if some guy is kicking your ass every time, you can get his profile and practice offline with the CPU mimicking all his tendencies to better yourself. This VIP profile includes all the coaches in the league, so you can bone up while playing your franchise, as well.

ESPN is easy on the wallet and very easy on the eyes, but it doesn't skimp in gameplay or the frontend. The title may be less than half the price of last year's, but you're getting double the features of the same great franchise that just keeps getting better and better. Will it be enough?

IT'S ONLY \$20! ★★★★★

Due to a deal with Take 2 Interactive and its Global Star budget brand, this game is only \$20 bucks in a multi-year deal encompassing all the ESPN Sports titles. Global Star will co-publish them, while Take 2's Jerk of All Games will handle distribution. This move has led to rumor that Take 2 will buy out Visual Concepts from Sega, but there is no confirmation of this intent. Regardless, the game is only \$20!

As close as these two competitors have been recently, it's fitting that this year follows suit with both games only narrowly edging each other in various categories.

PRE-SEASON PREDICTION



★ GRAPHICS ★

ESPN is better looking...if you're on Xbox (although the PS2 edition is no slouch). Madden's approach of having a common denominator among all the console versions is the safe bet, but it hasn't resulted in the prettier game. Besides, the new character models have gotten bulkier – something that a lot of people were griping about before this year anyway.

In an attempt to catch up with ESPN's presentation, Madden added things like Create-a-Fan, but it simply doesn't match up with all the sexy bells and whistles of ESPN. When it comes down to what you see with your eyes, ESPN is the winner.

★ FRANCHISE ★

Off the field, Madden's Owner's Mode is unchanged, and Storyline Central breaks up what used to be simply a bunch of Franchise menus. When it comes down to it, there aren't many new options available. Of course, having to account for players' feelings when it comes to things like them getting the ball enough or wanting to sign with your team during the offseason is nothing to sneeze at. However, ESPN's weekly preparation system in its Franchise mode makes this better than Madden's with its Owner's Mode, and it gives you power to help your team on an immediate level, away from the business politics that some fans have no taste for.

★ GAMEPLAY ★

Although ESPN meets and even exceeds Madden in some of the defensive pre-snap options, work on both sides of the ball gives EA Sports the edge. Online players are going to have nightmares about all the different formations an offense can morph into.

As for Madden's Hit Stick and ESPN's Maximum Tackling, QB evading, and juking, it's too early to drop a verdict. Developers always fine tune a game up until the last minute. We will say this, however. Even though work is still being done, Madden's Hit Stick simply feels the best. When you connect your shoulder to some poor bastard's head, you get a big smile on your face.

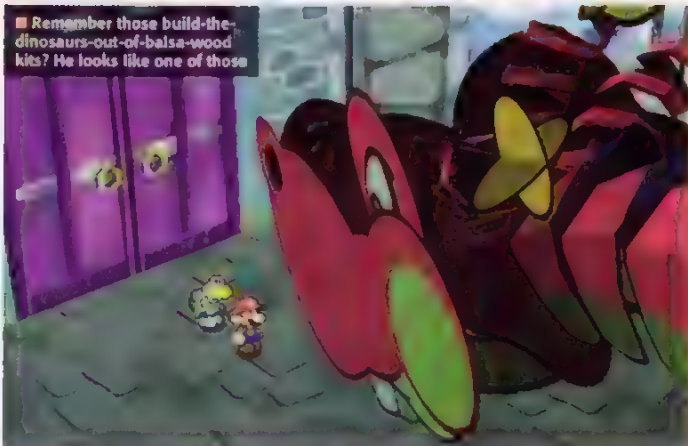
THE PROGNOSTICATION

In the end, when you factor in everything mentioned above, The Grid, first-person football, the possibilities for the VIP profiles and online seasons, and its affordable price; we think that while Madden will probably still lead in sales, it looks like this is the year that ESPN beats Madden as a game. Tune in next month for our reviews of these titles, and see who really takes the trophy. You can take your pick when the pair collide on retail shelves August 10. Hell, you can even buy both. Of course, if you just have a GameCube, then you're only choice is Madden!



PREVIEWS

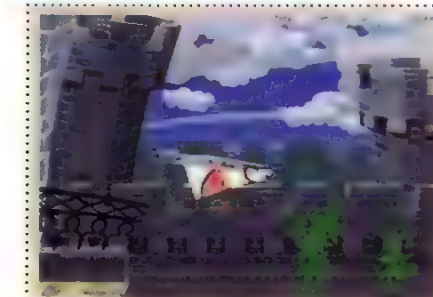
A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



Remember those build-the-dinosaurs-out-of-balsa-wood kits? He looks like one of those



We don't know who these folk are, but their fashion sense sure is keen



While only three of Mario's folded-paper forms have been announced, Nintendo and Intelligent Systems are promising "much more emphasis" on this feature for the plumber and his friends. We have seen the paper airplane routine (which has realistic physics and controls) and the get-skinny-to-slip-through-cracks move, and have confirmation of an option to roll into a tube to bounce away.

GAMECUBE

Paper Mario 2

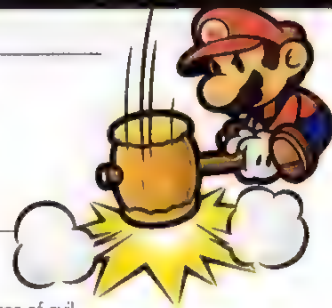
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER NINTENDO
> DEVELOPER INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS > RELEASE OCTOBER 11

ICON ORIGAMI

When last we spoke, there wasn't much for information on Paper Mario 2. We knew that it was in development and we had some nice screens to share. But then a build showed up and the world was let in on a lovely little demo for Intelligent Systems' action-infused RPG sequel that answered a lot of questions and left us hungry for more.

The game starts out with Peach on vacation. She sends a treasure map to her dear buddy Mario and is then promptly kidnapped. Good ol' Peach — gamers can always count on her to get snatched up by a malicious overlord. Sweet Mario follows the map to Star Crystals (powerful but previously unknown artifacts) and, he hopes, to Peach. In the meantime, Bowser, who isn't the main foe of this tale, is on his own quest to discover exactly who is cutting into his lucrative villain empire. It appears that Bowser will be a playable character, but with what purpose and through how much of the game remains unclear.

Much like the N64 Paper Mario and its similarly-styled GBA partner Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga, players will guide their team through a massive world, talk to many NPCs, upgrade their characters through experience points, and battle the deliciously



cartoony forces of evil.

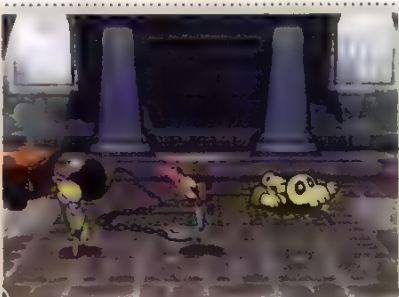
In our time with the game, we saw how the humor and dialogue mirror the recent GBA release in both style and tone. But where this Nintendo RPG will really outshine its handheld brother is in the scale of storytelling, environments, enemies, and combat dynamics.

Players will be able to change out the members of their party on the fly, even in battles. When the combat system is engaged, Mario and his teammates will be transported to a theatre stage. At the start, only a few audience members will be present. As the match progresses (using the timing-heavy, turn-based concept of earlier Mario RPGs), more spectators will show up. If players are doing well, the crowd will cheer them on — earning Mario more points in his Special meter. When things go poorly for the plumber, audience members will start hurling trash onto the stage — it's clear that style is as important as substance with this tough crowd.

Besides laying out the damage, Mario can time button presses to dodge attacks, use items like hammers and thunderbolts, and even opt to "appeal" to the crowd. Using Appeal during a match takes a turn and shows Mario turning to the audience and trying to get them a little more hyped up.

When not laying the smack down plumber style, Mario and friends will travel through a massive world. We don't know if a traditional overworld is planned for the areas between towns, but we do know that while in a village or castle, the game plays out like a 2D side-scroller. Players will be able to (at least in certain areas) move between the foreground and background, but camera rotation is definitely not an option.

With Paper Mario 2 coming out in October, the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel is near — and we can't wait for this one to show up in our 'Cubes ■■■





■ Timing your A button presses will produce multiple hits



■ We love the mix of Sunday comic strip graphics and well-known locations



■ Players can move between the foreground and background, but the camera is decidedly side-scrolling



■ "And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance..."

00



■ Your party will change frequently throughout the journey

66/101



■ Sweet is strapped and ready for action



■ The facial models are very detailed and animated – characters even chew gum!

PLAYSTATION 2

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES > DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR NORTH

> RELEASE OCTOBER 19

BOW DOWN

Rockstar already let Game Informer drop the bomb on Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas a few issues ago, and now we've reloaded after a trip to sunny California where we were able to get a viewing of an all-new demo of this year's most hotly anticipated title.

Rockstar representatives ran through a few of the game's early missions for us, giving us a small view into the dramatic saga of main character Carl Johnson. The demo began with our troubled hero being thrown from a moving car, driven by two corrupt cops who decided to give Carl an unexpected vacation in rival gang territory. With no gun and no ride, Carl has to take the only means of escape available to him: a BMX bicycle, one of San Andreas' new types of vehicles.

After scooting Carl back to his pad, we meet one of the game's other main characters, Ryder. Ryder is one of Carl's closest friends, and bears a strong resemblance to the late Eazy-E. Ryder seems to fill an essential role in any good hood drama: the reckless, brash, yet ultimately loveable bad

boy whose hot temper and violent ways leads his crew into trouble (see: Doughboy in *Boyz n The Hood* and O-Dog in *Menace II Society*). Ryder wants to settle a score with a pizzeria owner, so he enlists Carl (also known as "CJ") to be his wheelman and distract the owner by ordering a meal while Ryder sneaks in with a weapon to do some damage. In addition to being the first time we see Carl purchase a meal (one of San Andreas' new features), on the way he also took advantage of some of the new customization options by stopping in for a haircut (selecting a wide range of hairstyles including the classic flat-top and the ever-popular afro).

While this might sound like GTA-as-usual, other objectives showcased a new depth of gameplay and mission structure. Most impressively, we got to check out the much-discussed four-man drivebys. With CJ at the wheel, rolling slowly down the street, his three associates hang out the windows, blasting gang members in all directions. It's pretty wicked, and a huge improvement over the simple "hand sticking out of a car



■ The legendary CHiPs are on the scene to "protect and serve"

window" animations of past titles.

Even more impressive was the next setpiece, which illustrated the game's new emphasis on compelling interior action. At the outset, CJ and company arrive at a gang summit, where his older brother Sweet is meeting to help organize a truce between Los Santos' feuding sets. Unfortunately, another gang has tipped off the cops, who show up in force, rappelling off a helicopter and charging out of a SWAT van. CJ's other two homies, Ryder and Smoke, flee the scene, leaving CJ to go in and rescue Sweet. Entering the building, it's clear just how far GTA's interior environments and gun combat has come. You'll still use the auto-targeting of Vice City, but now you can strafe while locked on to an enemy. Also, you can now use the right analog stick to control your

point-of-view while walking or running, much like in Rockstar North's recent cult hit *Manhunt*. Watching CJ's siege of the building, we quickly realized that we're going to need to put the improved control mechanics to good use, as police jumped out of every doorway, and even swung down through shattered skylights.

While it's not as huge a graphical leap over Vice City as that game was over GTA III, the game's draw distance, vehicle models, lighting, and character models have all been substantially improved. When you consider that this is all being done in a game that's five times as large as either of its predecessors, it's clear that San Andreas is set to be another major milestone in gaming history. ■ ■ ■



■ You can customize your character by getting a fresh cut at the barber shop

70 GAME INFORMER



■ The interior environments are much larger and accommodate blazing gun battles like this sequence where Carl must save his brother



■ Here's San Andreas version of the iconic Hollywood sign



■ CJ's got his hand on the pump. Hope that car wasn't a rental



■ The police are tenacious in Los Santos - they'll even hitch a ride on your bumper!



■ BMX bikes aren't good for picking up girls, but they're great for poppin' wheelies!



■ This isn't going to end well



■ Ryder is the loose cannon of your crew. Here, we see him ready to catch wreck at a pizza joint





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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER STORMFRONT STUDIOS > RELEASE SEPTEMBER

AN ADVENTURE FOR THE AGES

We recently got to see a new presentation on the promising *Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone* at Stormfront's San Rafael studios, and came away extremely impressed by what we saw. For one, this *Demon Stone* is drop-dead gorgeous, as Stormfront's engine allows the developers to accomplish both a tremendous sense of scale and a subtle attention to detail. The epic scope is evident immediately, as you'll brawl your way through enormous battlefields teeming with charging armies, raining flaming arrows, collapsing structures, and rockslides. Just when you think it can't get any more hamied, a giant dragon swoops down and obliterates the bridge you just crossed. It's this kind of action that true fantasy classics are made of.

The detail is less readily apparent, but no less important to *Demon Stone's* overall impact. Custom-made tools allow the artists to gently tweak the "focus" of the camera, which creates very fine shifts in mood and can drastically alter the emotional impact of a

gameplay sequence or cutscene. This fastidiousness extends to other small touches, like the way characters' clothing and hair flows in the wind or the precise hand-animated lip syncing, which is some of the finest we've ever seen in a game.

Of course, this is no art project, so the real emphasis is on Stormfront's trademark action. If anything, the combat is even better than in *The Two Towers*, as the three party members (Rannek the warrior, Illius the sorcerer, and Zhai the rogue) are much more varied in their abilities and playstyles than the Fellowship posse in *LotR*. For example, Zhai's stealth combat moves provide some interesting alternatives to the usual tactics of these type of games, and her ability to jump and access areas closed to the others often comes into play during your adventures. Switching between characters on the fly is an enjoyable and often necessary way to conquer the game's 10 gigantic levels.

Another key feature of *Demon Stone* is Stormfront's collaboration with fantasy/sci-fi

author RA. Salvatore, who helped craft and create the game's storyline. Although told through very short cutscenes, the tale at hand is gripping and taut, with some interesting relationships between the protagonists (Rannek and Zhai have a serious Princess Leia/Han Solo relationship going on — except lovely Zhai is the Han Solo of the pair!). The voice acting is top-notch as well, featuring several top animation voiceover artists as well as Patrick Stewart and Michael Clarke Duncan.

Salvatore's also allowed his most cherished creation, the legendary dark elf Drizzt Do'Urden to become a part of the *Demon Stone* saga, and we actually saw part of the one level where Do'Urden joins your party as a playable character. During the course of the game, your party helps Do'Urden defend Mithral Hall. Drizzt lives up to his fierce reputation, slicing through foes with dual flaming swords and blasting them with his trusty handheld crossbow.



We even saw a brief cameo by Drizzt's companion Thibbledorf Pwent. Needless to say, hardcore *Dungeons & Dragons* fanatics will be wetting their bed at the sight of a playable Drizzt (as if they don't wet the bed on a regular basis anyway). However, given Stormfront's mastery of the action genre and console graphics technology, *Demon Stone* might well break out of the fantasy niche and make a big impact in the mass market. ■ ■ ■

■ Zhai's stealth gameplay provides a nice break from all the back n' slash madness



■ The legendary Drizzt Do'Urden makes an appearance as a playable character in one level





Look to the top of this picture, and you'll see Zhai putting her precognition abilities to good use



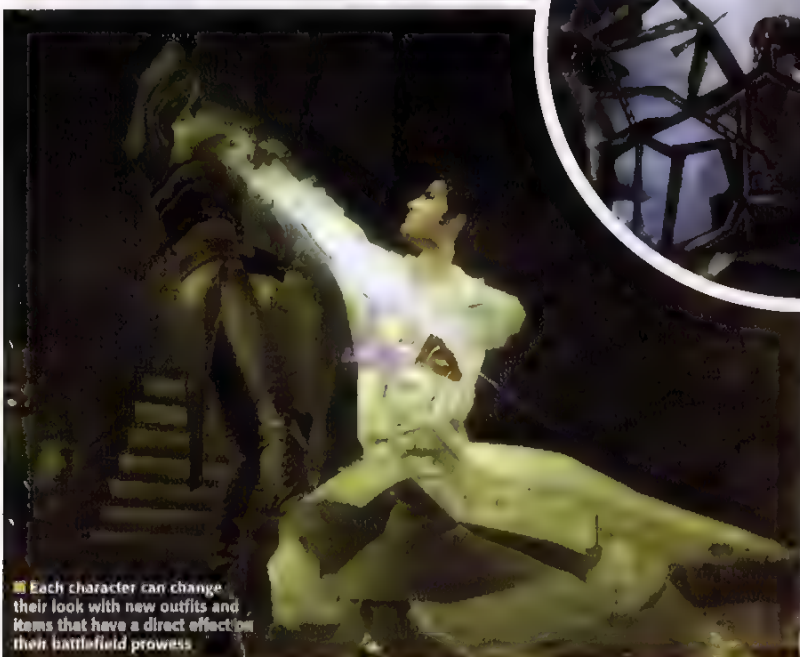
Illius is more effective when attacking with projectile spells from afar



The character models are stunningly detailed



Bosses come in many shapes and sizes, but all are challenging to defeat



Each character can change their look with new outfits and items that have a direct effect on their battlefield prowess



Rannok goes on a brutal finishing move



■ Battlefield missions have very specific objectives (like defending a certain door against an air assault) and offer opportunities to get extra bolts while furthering the mission



■ Clank will have a few solo missions including acting out episodes of "Secret Agent Clank," his new action show

PLAYSTATION 2

Ratchet and Clank: Up Your Arsenal

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAC GAMES > **RELEASE** FALL

EAT THIS

Insomniac has never been one to live off of past successes – Going Commando, besides being a dramatic improvement on the first Ratchet and Clank game, was one of the highlights of last year. Addictive is too light a term to describe the arena matches, and the single-player mission caused a Zen-like state we have been missing since old-school Contra.

But Up Your Arsenal? It looks and plays like this is going to be an unparalleled leap forward for the franchise and action/platform games in general.

We got a chance to play around with a multiplayer map and a few new weapons, and discovered some interesting dynamics that Insomniac has been cooking up. Arsenal will have three modes for multiplayer (online or off): Siege, Capture the Flag, and Deathmatch. In Siege, one to four-player groups battle to ultimately destroy

the power crystal deep inside the opposing team's base. As the forces advance, they activate Nodes that serve as spawn points and offer offensive turrets and bots that recognize you as friend and anyone else as foe. By activating Nodes, teams will gain landshare and work their way towards the heavily guarded bases. The final action inside encampments (to either destroy or save the power core) is, amazingly, more frenzied than the battles outside, and crazy fun too.

Still, what we really appreciated about Siege mode's potential is the different styles of play it offers in one encounter. While advancing to the bases, your team seems to grow almost exponentially – you and up to three human teammates join with automatic turrets, robots, player-controlled super-guns, and little mini bots make it feel like an advancing army. But inside, the action is based on frenetic dodging, taking cover, and maintaining a reasonable amount of ammunition. The transition between these strategies is honestly brilliant and extremely well executed.

Although most of our hands-on time revolved around Arsenal's multiplayer options, we're equally excited about the title's single-player missions which were just as balanced, hectic, and fun as the online campaign. Oh, November feels so far away! ■■■



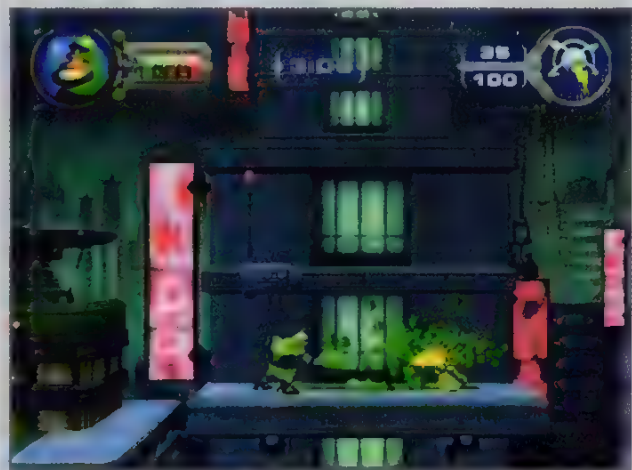
■ We got to test out new weapons like the Plasma Whip and the Infector, which spews and gurgles gelatinous green gunk at enemies. If foes are hit with enough of it, they will become infected, get confused and start attacking other enemies



UNLIKE OUR MUNDANE, EARTH COMICS...

Early on in Up Your Arsenal it's established that one of the universe's "best" superheroes, Captain Qwark, has lost his mind and his memory. Qwark's various misadventures of glory and triumph are played out in "vid-comics" – interactive comics that players, as Ratchet, will work their way through in hopes of jarring Qwark's memories and recruiting him to help overthrow the evil Dr. Nefarious.

We got the chance to play through the first vid-comic and, to be honest, replayed it six or seven times just because it was such a blast. Although 2D in design, the characters and environments have 3D technology like dynamic lighting and interestingly curved surfaces. Each level will take about 10 minutes for the expert, and a few more for mere mortals. Insomniac is staying tight-lipped about how many total levels will be in the final game, but have confirmed that rewards and clues will be doled out for playing through these levels efficiently and completely.

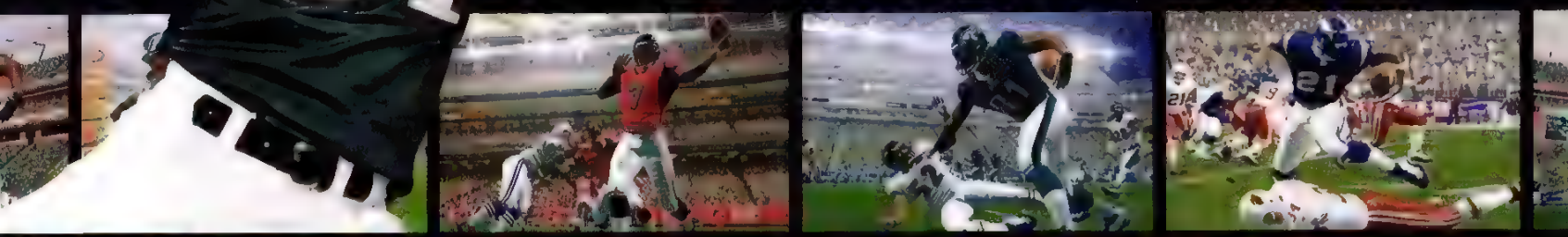


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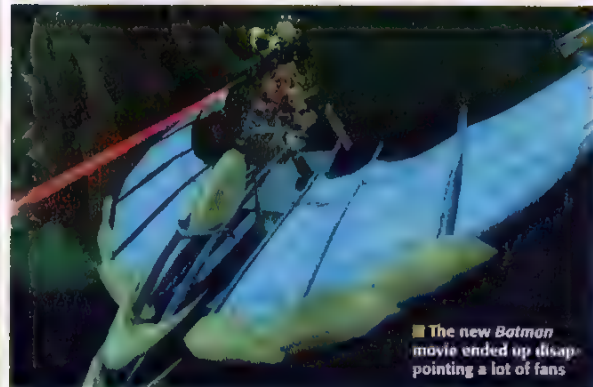
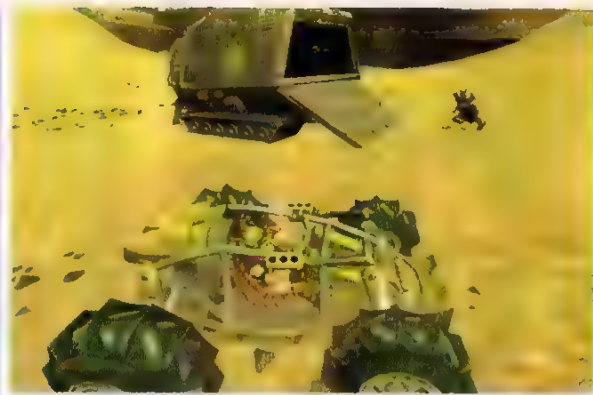
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■ The new *Batman* movie ended up disappointing a lot of fans



■ That saucy green goatee is back – but for the whole game? We don't know...



■ The Wasteland inhabitants are an...interesting bunch

PLAYSTATION 2

Jak 3

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

SERIES ENDER? OR IS IT?

We've been lucky to have a lot of hands-on time with Naughty Dog's upcoming *Jak 3* and are excited to see the full version in the near future. The dune buggy racing is fun and diverse; and as much as the last game was visually stunning, this third entry is looking to trump it in every form.

We've known that *Jak 3* is an end to the Precursor saga, and it seems to be following a traditional trilogy-pacing structure. The tale isn't necessarily darker than *Jak II*, and game designer Evan Wells tell us that, "Many of the mysteries set up in the previous two adventures about Jak, his past, and the Precursors will be answered in this game." Jak must come to terms with his place in this universe and his role in its destiny. This includes a feature we talked about in our cover story [April 2004, issue #132] – Jak's light Eco powers. These super abilities will couple with the dark Eco skills Jak gained access to during *Jak II* and further reinforce the theme that Jak is right in the middle of a universe-wide series of events that he can't escape.

Many people who loved *Jak II* had one universal gripe with the title, and that was the hovering vehicles of Haven City. We got a chance to play with a handful of the sand buggies that the game uses for level-to-level transport, exploration, and mission-specific objectives – put simply, we are delighted at their evolution. Each one is handmade by a different character living in the game's Wasteland and because of that, the buggies have wildly varying

specifications to fit the uses of each owner. From a player's standpoint, these features add immeasurably to the fun factor of cruising around Jak's new desert surroundings. In fact, disregarding the goal of one timed mission, we joyfully tooted around the dunes a few times before moving on to the game's specified goal. Clearly, this is a big step in the right direction. Director Amy Henning also let us know that, "Jak and Daxter both get to man dozens of different vehicles this time out. Aside from those already mentioned, there will be hang gliding, torpedo riding, Eco tanker hijacking, Precursor sleds, and commandeered Blast Bots."

As we said earlier, *Jak 3* is a trilogy-ending entry in Jak's world, but does this mean that we're not going to see the goateed savior any more? Wells says, "Though we are completing the trilogy that we began with *The Precursor Legacy*, this will not be the end of the Jak and Daxter franchise. There are many more exciting adventures waiting for our heroes." ■ ■ ■



■ Old "friends" will return to wrap up the trilogy's story

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EXPERIENCE COUNTS



■ The squad liked to expose itself to enemy fire at the top of a hill each morning to watch the sunrise. They will be missed.



■ The level of facial detail is astounding.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Brothers in Arms

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
 > **DEVELOPER** GEARBOX SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** WINTER (XBOX, PC) 2005 (PS2)

60 YEARS SINCE NORMANDY

Most of the gaming generation has an intense, yet still impersonal connection with the strife and sacrifice of the second World War.

We've played the games, but only perceive the reality of the situation from pictures and the stories of our grandparents. Right now there are dozens of titles which have tapped into that source material of heroism and bloodshed for inspiration, but few with the level of authenticity and realism that has been promised from Brothers in Arms.

As Sgt. Matt Baker, you will lead your squad of men from the 101st Airborne through the harrowing days of the paratrooper drop that preceded the invasion of Normandy. As the story unfolds, players will experience that distinct period of time as they lead soldiers throughout the eight days of hell that followed. Based on a true story from the war, the game distinguishes itself by being as much a tactical game as it is a shooter. An innovative system for commanding your

troops allows you to give specific orders to both your fire team and assault team. The over 20 differing characters you interact with each have their own personalities and emotions to share. This makes the major conflict of the game the impossibly tough decision of completing your assigned missions or keeping your men safe and in one piece. The tale of Sgt. Baker and his squad has been recreated from Army Signal Corps photos and aerial reconnaissance imagery taken at the time. In addition, eyewitness accounts have been incorporated to further deepen the experience. The level we saw meticulously recreated the landscape of the coastal French town Carentan on June 11th of 1944. The developers boast that thorough exploration of the game will result in as intimate an understanding of the areas in question as if you were to visit France in real life. In others words – somebody did their research.

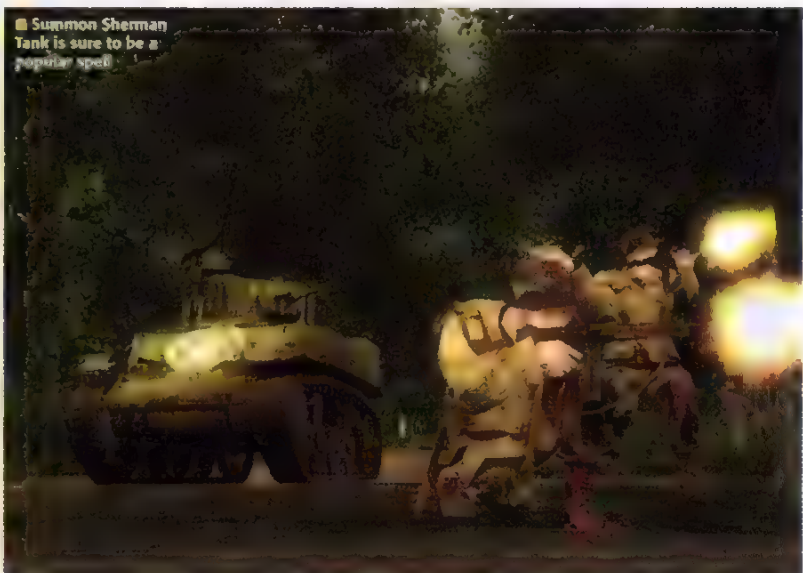
The situational AI for both your allies and enemies will utilize covering fire, allowing for

flanking maneuvers to get at foes. You'll have access to two weapons at a time, but those found on the battlefield are always fair game. And just as it was at the time, friendly fire can be as dangerous as the enemy – at one point, we saw Sgt. Baker thrown backwards and stunned by the passing bomb drops of the U.S. Army Air Corps. There's also an extensive multiplayer system which focuses on a competitive battle of wits where players each command three-man AI teams to defeat their opponents and reach objectives.

Gearbox looks to be backing up its claim that this will be one of the greatest WWII titles ever seen. The graphics and gameplay look positively top notch. But the most exciting thing about Brothers is certainly the level of emotional involvement and historical accuracy that this title wants to bring to the genre. Taking a cue from recent films and books, Brothers in Arms should serve as a worthy commemoration of the past as much as a gorgeous gaming experience. ■ ■ ■



■ Much of the game is inspired by true events and photographs



■ Summon Sherman Tank is sure to be a popular spell

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PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Viewtiful Joe 2

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM
> DEVELOPER CLOVER STUDIO > RELEASE WINTER

THE NEW VIEW

Not wanting to keep fans of its stylish platformer waiting too long, Capcom is well on its way to delivering the sequel to Viewtiful Joe – this time with identical versions being released on both PlayStation 2 and GameCube. We got a chance to ask creator/producer Atsushi Inaba a few questions about his eagerly anticipated sequel, and he filled us in on his plans for VJ 2.

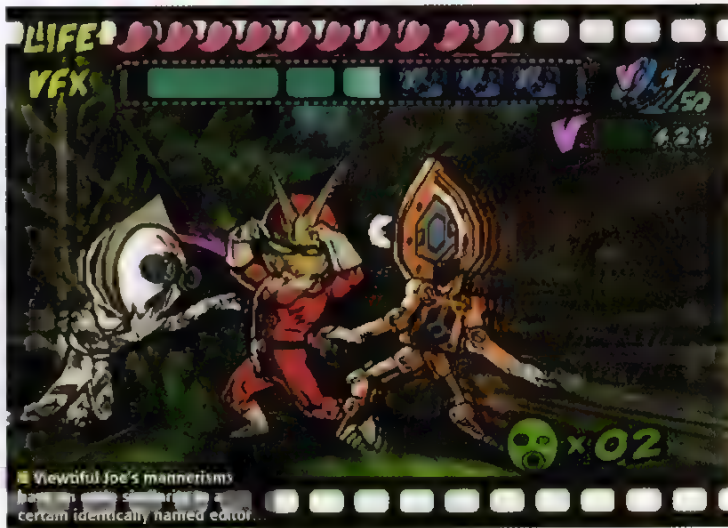
"The game takes place right after Viewtiful Joe. There are seven stages, with the play time being around twice that of the original," Inaba explains. VJ 2 finds Joe and Silvia confronting a new threat in tandem. Silvia will be along for the whole crazy ride this time, with a two-player cooperative mode available for the entire story. In addition to all the sweet film-inspired super powers available previously, a new ability called Replay will join the list, allowing you to repeat events that have already occurred a few moments earlier. You'll now also be able to grab foes and wildly fling them around. There are 40 distinct enemies to encounter in between the devilish new puzzles that will make up much of the gameplay.

Inaba also told us about one of the massive bosses you can expect to see this time out. "He's a temble and

fierce dragon and his name is 'Sergeant Big John.' His fire and tail attacks are powerful, but if you think back to a certain so-and-so boss that appeared in Viewtiful Joe you'll be able to beat him."

Fans of the zany characters from the original need not fear. "The voices for Joe, Silvia, and so on will continue to be the same as in Viewtiful Joe," Inaba assures us. There's no word yet on whether Joe will have a new theme song in the same vein as "Viewtiful World," but it is under consideration. Expect

to get your twitchy little hands on VJ 2 as soon as this winter. ■■■





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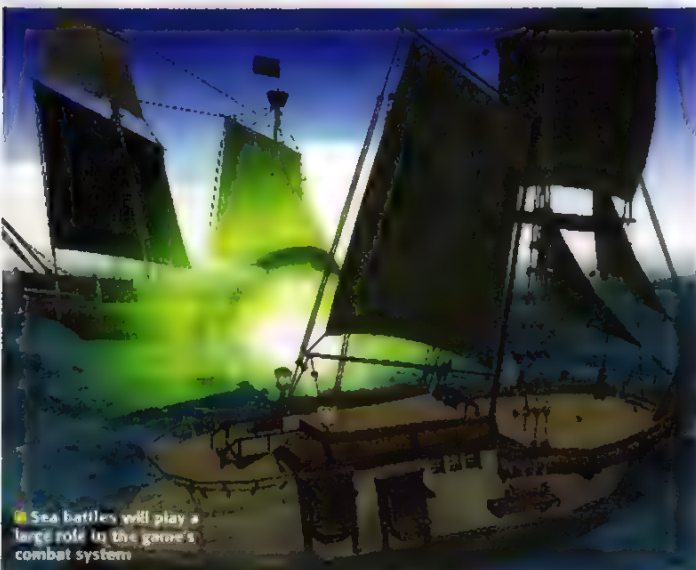
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Sea battles will play a large role in the game's combat system



Check out the quality of these enemy and player models—juggie free and quite nice looking

UNLIMITED ENABLED
PLAYSTATION 2

Suikoden IV

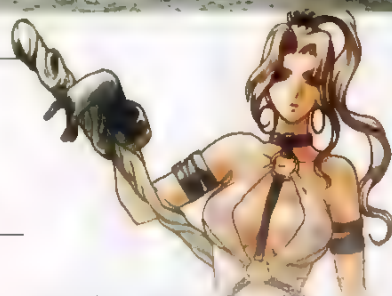
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER KONAMI
> DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE NOVEMBER

RAISE THE BAR

Suikoden, as a franchise, is an interesting mix of established RPG conventions and genre-bending additions. The stories, for example, have generally revolved around the standard “unexpected hero goes on epic journey to save the world,” but have also thrown in the popular Chinese tale of 108 Stars of Destiny.

Although the 108 Stars premise (where 108 average folk come together by the forces of destiny to do otherwise impossible things) has been used off and on in the three earlier games, it's back in full force for this fourth entry. This means that the pool of party members will, by the end of the game, be 108 and the group can be managed through a home base that gamers will set up.

Throughout the entire saga, the story focuses on one character—a young hero who has the Rune of Punishment. Runes are used for magical attacks in the battle system, and this particular one causes great damage to enemies, but also slowly kills its



owner. Like a parasite, it moves from person to person after their death, and during the course of the game, players will learn about (and maybe encounter in some form) earlier users of the rune.

We also noticed that, like most other epic RPGs, there is a lot of travel in Suikoden IV. But unlike the conventional vast plains and staggering mountains of others, Suikoden IV has players exploring a huge collection of islands. Using boats as the main form of transportation, it appears that sea battles will be frequent—Konami has mentioned ship-to-ship encounters and attacks against land forces, but the dynamics aren't yet specified.

Suikoden IV also offers a handful of technological upgrades that separate it from the crowd. Professional voice acting for almost all of the characters (and when there's over 100 of them, that's impressive indeed), updated and extremely nice-looking models, and multiple camera angles for the battle sequences are all promised. There are

also extra minigames planned like fishing and a new dice-based game.

Suikoden is one of those franchises that, in our opinion, gets dramatically better with each entry and, with what we've seen so far for part four, it looks like the trend should continue. Konami is holding the rest of the details for this title close to its chest, but it's looking like “epic” might be a dramatic understatement to describe the game ■■■■

Suikoden IV does away with the required two-person attack system found in the third game





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PLAYSTATION 2

Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER ATLUS > DEVELOPER ATLUS > RELEASE WINTER

LET IT RAIN

RPGs don't come a whole lot more Japanese than Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga. From its title to the art and story, everything we've seen about DDS falls right into line with the tone of heavyweights like Final Fantasy, Xenosaga, and Dragon Warrior. Whether that's a good or a bad thing is up to taste, but fans of any of those noble franchises will no doubt find a lot to look forward to in DDS.

Like any RPG worth its salt, DDS goes beyond merely presenting a good story. It integrates the plot directly into the gameplay. The main character, Serf, and his friends have all been infected by spheres of light from a mysterious Pod from the heavens, and this has cursed them with a hunger for splintering bone and a thirst for the blood of their enemies. With this, however, come demonic powers and the abil-

ity to devour foes to gain their abilities in battle. This may sound a bit macabre, but a little darkness in the tone can certainly go a long way in creating that epic feel that is the hallmark of a well-crafted RPG.

Not much else is currently known about Digital Devil Saga, but the gorgeous trailer and screenshots have the Japanophile in all of us following this one closely. Hopefully the plot will be a little less indecipherable than some of the more labyrinthine storylines coming from the Land of the Rising Sun. ■■■■



Many surfaces display intricate carvings and the like

ETRO ANIME

Atlus has licensed the song "Danger" (which can be heard in the trailer, as well as in the final game) from electronica band Etro Anime. The band's name means "to be infinite: with spirit and in movement," which we don't even pretend to understand. Those musicians and their coffee.



XBOX | PC

Close Combat: First to Fight

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > PUBLISHER GATHERING/DESTINEER > DEVELOPER DESTINEER > RELEASE FALL



OF BEING A MARINE

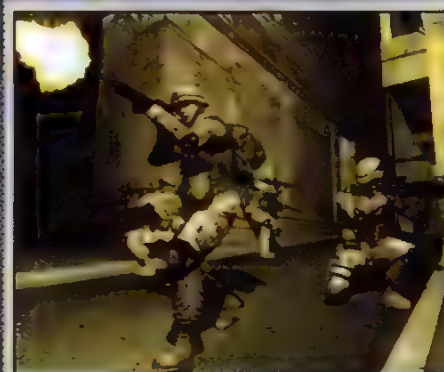
In our recent visit to its studio, developer Destineer proudly touted *Close Combat: First to Fight* as the one, the proud, the most realistic FPS ever. Because of its tight relationship with the U.S. Marine Corps, Destineer hopes to create a level of authenticity previously only seen in the Army-sanctioned *Full Spectrum Warrior* – except that players will assume the role of a Marine fire team squad leader.

The most standout part of *First to Fight* is the fact that at all times, your squad (and other allies) follow actual military doctrine. For the most part, this consists of two things: the Ready-Team-Fire-Assist protocol (details below) and AI that has your crew doing things like

using cover and assisting pinned teammates. This may sound like a lot of thinking for an FPS, but then this isn't your typical Quake-style fragfest.

Another unique feature of *FF* is the psychology model. Enemies will react in realistic fashion, such as breaking cover when under overwhelming fire. Also, you've got to keep the trust of your team – if you're constantly making poor decisions, they'll start to question your orders and lose their fighting edge.

There's a bunch more cool stuff in *FF*, like volumetric shadowing (along with the rest of the graphical buzzwords), 480p, widescreen, Dolby digital surround, and such; but we've all heard that before. More importantly, *First to Fight* should scratch that FPS itch for everyone who enjoys a little something different. ■■■■



READY-TEAM-FIRE-ASSIST

This doctrine is how real-life Marines operate in combat. Each member of the four-man squad is assigned a duty and angle of fire, though it can operate at a lesser efficiency with fewer Marines. It provides 360-degree security at all times, even when moving through what the U.S.M.C. calls a "fatal funnel." For civilians, that's a plain old stairwell; for military folk it's a location worse than an open field since you're vulnerable to fire from above and below.



■ Nothing says "future" like goggles



■ Enemies will actually try to flank you, for all the good it'll do them



■ Special Ops Regulation 106.22: All commanders must be tubby middle-aged guys

PC

F.E.A.R.

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > DEVELOPER MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS > RELEASE 2005

NEXT-GEN AHOY

Developer Monolith Productions, which has a resume that includes *No One Lives Forever 2* and *Tron 2.0*, is now coupling its expertise with a brand-new engine that incorporates all sorts of DirectX 9 goodness for 2005. This FPS, entitled *F.E.A.R.*, looks to be graphically close to — if not on par with — monsters like *Half-Life 2* and *Doom III*.

Details haven't exactly been flying out of the dev studio since the game is so far from release, but we do know that players will assume the role of a member of the government's special First Encounter Assault Recon team. These super-antiterrorists (each agent has their own extraordinary power) soon find out that the latest threat to the world is a lot more Stephen King than Tom Clancy. A disappearing little girl amid gruesome dismemberment is apparently the tip of the iceberg here, and the gory visuals we've seen certainly suggest some pretty twisted things going on.

Monolith is also promising action sequences worthy of a multimillion dollar summer blockbuster. Players will ride shotgun during breakneck car chases while being pursued by

helicopters, crash in a helicopter into the middle of overwhelming hostile forces, and otherwise make Bruce Willis look like a wussy. Backing all of this up is some serious postmodern weaponry, including something called a "sub-nuclear blaster." Whatever that means, you can be sure that with a name like that it will generate some sweet effects given the awesome capabilities of the game engine.

Despite its far-off shelf date, this is one you'll want to keep tabs on. To give you an indication of how high-tech *F.E.A.R.* is, on low settings, the build we played sent our state-of-the-art gaming PC into the corner where it lay whimpering and crying for its mother. Even with those baseline options set, though, it looked absolutely gorgeous. Just imagine what kinds of graphics the maximum level of detail will result in. ■■■





■ "Without their jawbreaker Moe, Larry and Curly will fall like dominos!"

PLAYSTATION 2

Shadow of Rome

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER PRODUCTION STUDIO 2 > RELEASE WINTER

ROME IF YOU WANT TO, ROME AROUND THE WORLD...

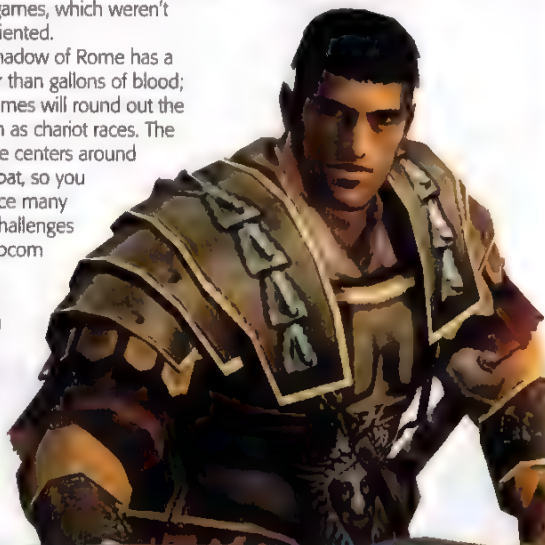
Togas are really in this season. After the lackluster sales of games like *Gladius*, it came as a bit of surprise that more than one developer decided to head back to ancient Rome for inspiration. Sony's *God of War* has garnered a lot of attention, but it's not the only toga-tastic game that has people buzzing. *Shadow of Rome*, from Capcom's famed Production Studio 2, has a tantalizing mix of cerebral stealth and bloody, bloody (yes, it warrants the "double bloody") action to appeal to all types of gamers.

The gameplay in *Shadow of Rome* will switch from action to stealth as the story unfolds, but will actually adjust to how the player performs. Excel in sneaking around in the shadows like a little weasel, and more stealth missions will be offered. However, if your expertise comes in the form of gutting humans like mackerel, then your experience will be far more combat-oriented. The battles will be unabashedly gory — limbs can (and will) be severed, blood will spray in every possible direc-

tion, and human heads can be loaded into catapults and fired at your enemies. It's almost hard to believe that this title comes from the man who led the Mega Man team for many years, Keiji Inafune. Of course, he did also produce the *Onimusha* games, which weren't exactly family-oriented.

Fortunately, *Shadow of Rome* has a lot more to offer than gallons of blood; a host of minigames will round out the experience, such as chariot races. The core of the game centers around gladiatorial combat, so you can expect to face many overwhelming challenges in the arena. Capcom also promises a rich and twisting story regarding a gladiator named Agrippa, a gladiator; his father, who has been accused of murdering Caesar; and Octavius,

Agrippa's loyal friend. When *Shadow of Rome* releases this winter, it may do more to make men in bed sheets seem cool than any project since *Gladiator*. We just hope Agrippa is as dreamy as Russell Crowe! ■■■■



■ Agrippa demonstrates his patented "de-spinefication" technique



■ The banana peel gag has been funny throughout the ages.

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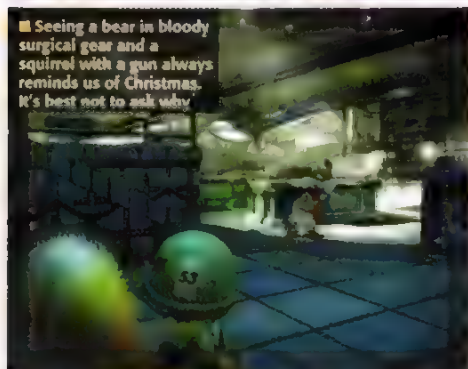
PlayStation 2

Codemasters

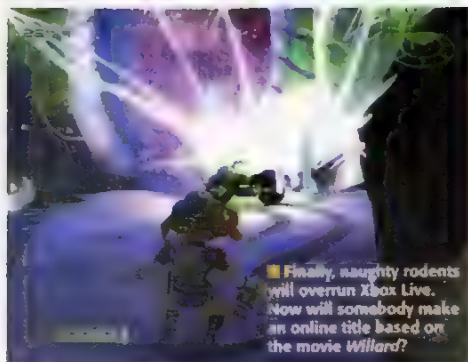
SERIES OF PLAY

TEEN T MILD LYRICS XBOX

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■ Seeing a bear in bloody surgical gear and a squirrel with a gun always reminds us of Christmas. It's best not to ask why.



■ Finally, naughty rodents will overrun Xbox Live. Now will somebody make an online title based on the movie *Willard*?

XBOX

Conker: Live and Reloaded

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER RARE > RELEASE MARCH

DRUNKEN SQUIRELS GO TO WAR

When Rare's Xbox Conker title was unveiled at E3 in 2003, those in attendance were less than impressed and began to publicly wonder if the developer had lost its magic touch. At 2004's E3, however, people were singing an entirely different tune. Rare's beer-swilling naughty squirrel had returned again, and this time his game was one of the most talked about Xbox titles of the show.

Conker: Live and Reloaded places a heavy emphasis on multiplayer, but has a lot to offer outside of a simple Deathmatch mode (although that is included as well). The marquee multiplayer mode is called Campaign, which is a string of multiplayer missions played in succession. In Campaign, up to 16 players will reenact the war between the heroic squirrels and the evil Tediz in two completely different scenarios: Old War and Future War. Keeping with Conker's tradition of spoofing movies, Old War apes *Saving Private Ryan*, while Future War mimics *Terminator 2*.

In both settings, six different classes will be playable, including Skyjockey, Long Ranger, Grunt, Demolisher, Sneaker, and the oddly named Thermophile. Each class has its own selection of skills, weapons, secret moves, and more. The presence of five

available vehicles only increases the military madness. While the E3 build of Campaign mode played a little more slowly than one might expect, Rare insists that the game will go through several tweaks and upgrades before it releases next year.

Although Campaign mode looks good, single-player looks even better. The cult-classic N64 title Conker's Bad Fur Day has been completely rebuilt with all-new graphics, re-recorded voice work, and the same nasty sense of humor. While the content of the quest is the same, the new visuals make it feel like a completely different game. Using the "fur shading" technique seen in *Star Fox Adventures*, the individual hairs on Conker's head are clearly visible. They can even be seen swaying in the wind!

Of course, the main attraction of Bad Fur Day was its ribald humor, and Live and Reloaded has kept the potty jokes intact. All of the choice moments from the single-player quest are back (including the opera singing Great Mighty Pool) and Campaign mode promises to feature a similarly raunchy sense of humor. With a hefty multiplayer mode, impressive graphics, and a singing turd, this is definitely one Xbox title to watch. ■ ■ ■

CONKER'S TALE

Conker is a pretty well known video game character, even though Live and Reloaded is only the fourth game he's appeared in. That's right, fourth. Before Bad Fur Day, he debuted as a character in *Diddy Kong Racing* and starred in the E-rated Game Boy Color title *Conker's Pocket Tales*. Back then, he was a nice polite little squirrel. See what alcohol does to you? Notice how each of Conker's starring roles have been on different systems — he must be a mean drunk.



■ Aww...he's so cute. When he's not puking, that is.



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Dungeon Lords

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > PUBLISHER DREAMCATCHER > DEVELOPER HEURISTIC PARK > RELEASE FALL

ONE STEP CLOSER

In a world that has seen way too many Diablo clones, developer Heuristic Park (which ranks D.W. Bradley of Wizardry fame among its number) is taking a somewhat different path with its forthcoming action/RPG, *Dungeon Lords*. Forsaking the genre's venerable isometric view, this title will feature FPS-style controls and a third-person, behind-the-shoulder view in an effort to bring players closer to the action.

And action it will have. Players will directly control all of the movement, attacking, and so forth, so you won't be relying totally on a random die roll to see if you hit your target. The over 90

spells of four different schools will also serve to spice up the combat, especially since they're available to every hero no matter the class. Fighters can learn all of the same magic as mages, they just won't learn them as fast.

From early indications, the story looks to be classic fantasy fare; it's got more evil wizards, endangered kingdoms, and missing lords' daughters than an adventurer could ask for. It does feature a ton of different settings though, including dark forests, towering mountains, shadowy dungeons, and everything else you could want. It's also laid out in a largely non-linear fashion which allows players to choose their own path through the

game. Whether this means that you'll be able to influence the ending KOTOR-style or just pick which area to go next is unknown, but it still beats being herded from one encounter to the next as action/RPGs are infamous for doing.

Bradley is adamant that *Dungeon Lords* will deliver a full RPG within an action-packed framework, and we're hoping that this pans out into a deep experience like the delightful *NeverWinter Nights*, except with more excitement. Because seriously, swinging a sword is a bit more thrilling than watching it being swung ■■■

■ The lack of clutter on the screen should help bring you into the game



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XBOX

GunGriffon

Late this year, Tecmo's GunGriffon, which debuted on the Sega Saturn, will jump to the Xbox. In this game, players pilot mechs called "High Macs" (High-Mobility Armored Combat Systems) in fast and furious robot action. And since Mr. and Mrs. Tecmo didn't raise no fools, expect GunGriffon to feature both a single-player campaign and oodles of Xbox Live combat. Details are still few and far between, but we have learned that the Live modes will place a huge emphasis on team-based play.



PLAYSTATION 2

Dance Dance Revolution Extreme

As if hopping up and down on that dance pad weren't embarrassing enough, Konami has added full EyeToy support to its newest North American DDR release, which means you'll get to see on your television just how much you can't dance. Well, we can't anyway, and neither can Phil Collins. But we still had fun with the new "Clean the Screen" mode, which takes full advantage of its EyeToy support by forcing you to madly paddle your arms around while dancing in order to wipe off onscreen debris from your field of vision. The music selections are as upbeat and pumping as we've come to expect from the series, and they keep you bopping and flailing long after you should have stopped. Now, if you don't mind, we'll be collapsing from exhaustion in the corner.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Trigger Man

The protagonist of Crave's new action title (due out in the fall) is a mild-mannered high school student who was bitten by a radioactive trigger, which endowed him with proportionate trigger strength, trigger speed, and a trigger sense. Okay, probably not, but we really like the idea of being bitten by inanimate objects. In reality, Trigger Man has players running and gunning through the seamy criminal underworld as a mafia hitman, blasting baddies with a huge variety of weapons. Sing with us, if you will, the Trigger Man theme song: "Trigger Man, Trigger Man, do whatever a trigger can..."



PLAYSTATION 2

Kuon

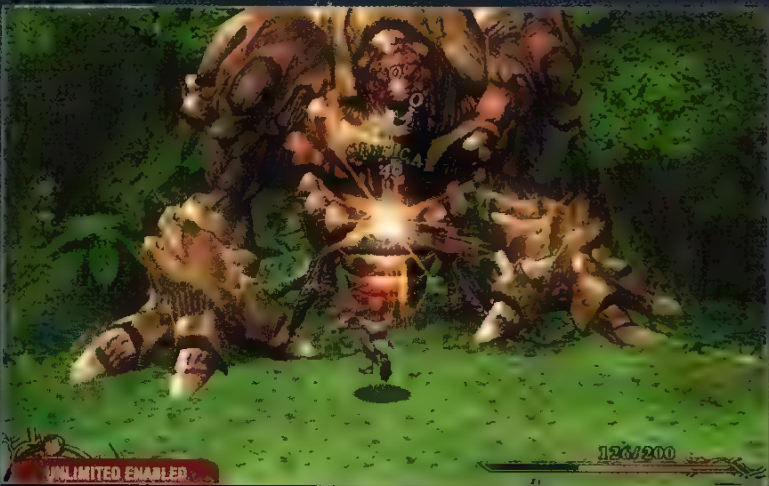
This September, Agetec is throwing its hat into the survival horror ring. From the looks of it, they won't be wearing that hat again, because it'll be all sticky and bloody. The PS2-exclusive title *Kuon* takes place in the Heian period of ancient Japan, and pits multiple playable characters against all kinds of disgusting mutants, spirits, and other mildly unpleasant critters. The American version of this title will actually be even darker and bloodier than the Japanese version, so we're guessing that *Kuon* is going to be a gorehound's dream.



PLAYSTATION 2

Get on Da Mic

Almost every member of the Game Informer staff likes to rap in their spare time. Just peep some of our lyrics: "Choppin' up the game just like a Cuisin-izz-art/Rhyme so stinky like a fi-fi-fizzart!" Okay, we'll stop now. Lucky for our wack asses, *Eidos* is supplying both the beats and the rhymes for its upcoming raparoke (we coined that term, so no stealing!) title, *Get on Da Mic*. Much like Konami's *Karaoke Revolution*, the game allows players to rap along to over 40 current hip-hop hits with the use of a USB PS2-compatible microphone. Along the road to the top of the charts, you'll unlock new characters, songs, gear, and the ever-popular bling. This fall, step in to the cipher. Word life.



PLAYSTATION 2 | PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Ys: The Ark of Napishtim

A new *Ys* game is actually coming to the U.S. Wow, that feels weird to read, right? The revival of the series long absent from our shores brings the action/RPG adventures of Adol Christin to the PlayStation 2 and PSP with loads of extras in this port of the Japanese-only PC title. Better graphics, new cutscenes, environments, and enemies will abound in the early 2005 release from Konami.



PLAYSTATION 2

Neo Contra

Bill Rizer, a.k.a. "the blue pants guy," returns this November in Konami's latest installment of the old school franchise. The team, which was also behind 2001's *Contra: Shattered Soldier*, decided to ditch the side-scrolling format in favor of a new 3D isometric perspective, à la *Smash TV*. Expect more grinding two-player difficulty, ass-hauling metal tunage, and the welcome return of the spread gun.



XBOX

Galleon

Originally scheduled to release for the Dreamcast, this swashbuckling adventure has survived seven years of stormy development seas and will finally find harbor thanks to Atlus. Created by Toby Gard (the man behind the original *Tomb Raider*), *Galleon* features expansive interactive environments with a high-seas theme. You'll control Captain Rhama as he fights his way through six different islands using a combat system designed for battling large groups of enemies – the more pain you cause, the more powerful you become, which unlocks special moves and combos that will only be usable for a limited time. Though European gamers already have *Galleon* at their fingertips, it won't hit U.S. stores until fall.

REVIEWS

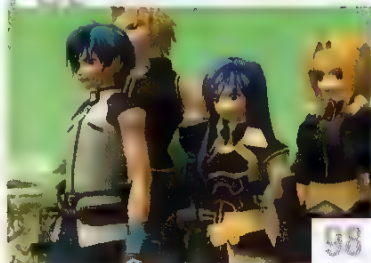
We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow

PS2



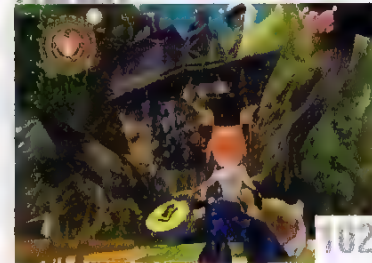
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time

GC



Puyo Pop Fever

XBOX



Malice



Pikmin 2

In the first chapter, Nintendo invited us into a strange world where plant creatures assisted an alien in his quest to recover the scattered debris of his spacecraft. With the sequel, duality is the name of the game. Twice the characters, along with new co-op and head-to-head multiplayer modes, equates to double the pleasure. This is the most fun we've had with bugs since Grandma got us that magnifying glass! Find out why this game is so irresistible on page 99.

Note: Although Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow achieved the highest score this month, it has already been honored with the prestigious Game of the Month title when it was released for Xbox in March. We feel that awarding a port of the game the same distinction a few months later is unnecessary. Go Pikmin!

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	Heartbreaking. A game so bad that it makes even happy puppies and joyful clowns cry.

> **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

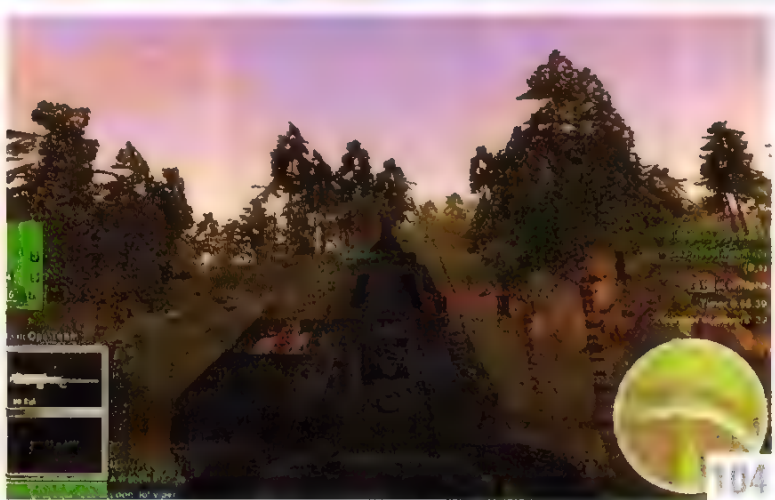


Ground Control II: Operation Exodus 105

HANDHELD



Astro Boy: Omega Factor 107



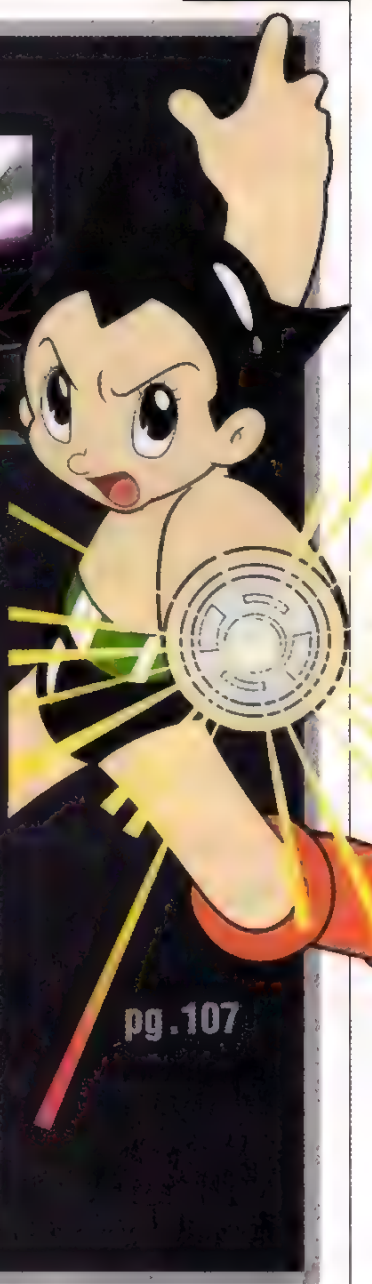
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising

The fast-paced online multiplayer FPS has been a staple of PC gaming for some time now, and NovaLogic aims to raise the bar for the genre with this release – and succeeds pretty well. With better balancing than Cirque de Soleil performers and servers that support up to 150 players(!), Joint Ops is in many ways the new face of online FPS. Check out the how and why on page 102.

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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.

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 Mano 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.

Dunst-bad – The art of abysmally poor celebrity voice work.

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

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

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

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

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

frontend – A game's menus and options.

GBA – Game Boy Advance.

GBC – Game Boy Color.

GC – GameCube.

HDTV – High Definition Television.

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

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

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

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

minigame – A small, simple game within a larger one.

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

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

N64 – Nintendo 64.

NES – Nintendo Entertainment System.

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

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

PKer – Player Killer. This is a person who thrives on killing newbie or vulnerable characters in

MMORPGs or shooting their teammates in games like Counter-Strike.

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

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

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2.

PSone – Sony PlayStation.

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

racing – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mano 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 Gradus.

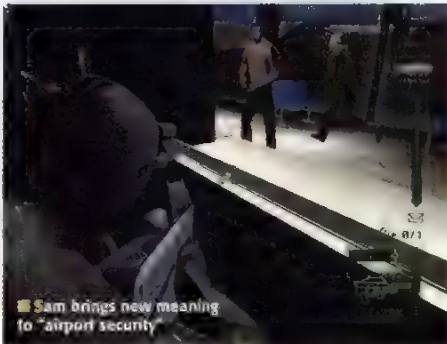
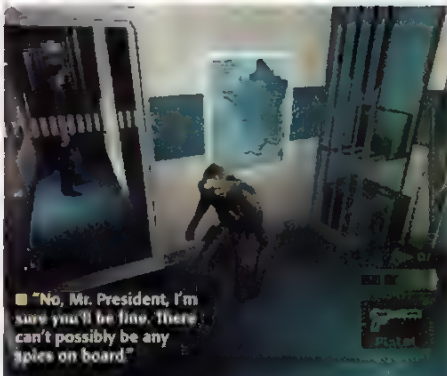
SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System.

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.

C CONTENT RATED BY ESRB	Content suitable for persons ages 7 and older	M MATURE	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older
E EVERYONE	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older	AO ADULTS ONLY	Content suitable only for adults.
T TEEN	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older	RP RATING PENDING	Product is awaiting final rating.



BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> Concept: Sam Fisher's latest adventure comes to PS2 and GameCube with somewhat uneven results

> Graphics: Surprisingly, the PS2 version outshines the GC and more closely resembles the Xbox original

> Sound: Top-notch voice acting and subtle music both add to this title's excellent mood

> Playability: Both versions use their controllers to their maximum extent, with fairly solid results

> Entertainment: The single player quest is fun, but this title's real innovation is multiplayer, which the GC version lacks

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion **9**

I won't argue that the Xbox version of Pandora Tomorrow is the best available (the graphic fidelity and framerate simply can't be matched). However, I would be hard-pressed to find too much to fault in the PS2 edition, as it is basically the same game with some slight alterations to the level design and lesser (but still kick ass) graphics. The GameCube? Well, while still a solid version of the title, it is easily the one with the most graphical hiccups and the lack of multiplayer play is really a shame, as it is one of Pandora Tomorrow's biggest draws. But in either case, the single player game is highly entertaining. The level designs are much improved over the original title, and the stealth gameplay is simply the best in the business. I highly recommend that you give this game a whirl on any system, but would advise you to avoid the GameCube version if at all possible because the multiplayer game is simply genius. —ANDY

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 NETWORK ADAPTOR) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL **> RELEASE** JUNE 16 (PLAYSTATION 2) JULY 6 (GAMECUBE) **> ESRB** M

A TALE OF TWO SPLINTER CELLS

Poor GameCube. With Pandora Tomorrow, Ubisoft has released one of the most fun and engaging multiplayer experiences ever, and it's only included on the Xbox and PlayStation 2 versions of the game. Sure, the 'Cube features connectivity, but it simply can't match the glory that is Pandora Tomorrow's online mode. Fortunately for Nintendo fans, the single-player mode is engaging no matter what console you're playing on, and the story simply can't be beat.

Sam Fisher's newest mission has him squaring off against a charming Indonesian terrorist with an anti-U.S. agenda and an "insurance plan" to keep him safe. Obviously, Sam has to take him out, but first he has to discover what the insurance plan is and how to deal with it. On its own, it's a great, mature plot, but once you discover how the multiplayer portion fits in with the story mode, it seems simply brilliant.

Those who played through the first Splinter Cell on either console will be instantly familiar with the gameplay, and neophytes will pick it up quickly. Despite the complex story and the variety of moves and gadgets at your fingertips, Pandora Tomorrow is actually quite easy to pick up and play. The quality level design, in-game story elements, and balanced level of difficulty make for a compelling experience that will constantly spur players forward.

Pandora Tomorrow is a great game on any system, but for several reasons, the PS2 and 'Cube versions fall a little short of the Xbox original. The simplified levels

make certain areas easier, and in many cases omit some cool sections that I really loved on Xbox. The controls for the GC release were also a little lacking — the left trigger has three separate uses! But the only time I felt that the downgraded graphics were really an issue was when I was using night vision in the PS2's multiplayer — everything looked so muddy that it was almost useless.

The lack of multiplayer on the 'Cube really is a shame, because Pandora Tomorrow's online play truly is unlike any other multiplayer mode out there. Each side (mercs and spies) offers a completely different

"...Pandora Tomorrow is the best stealth/action game yet, hands down."

The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Between the two versions, there's no contest: The PS2 version outshines the GameCube release in nearly every possible way. The PS2 title has the obvious advantage in that it has multiplayer, but it simply looks better, too. The 'Cube release suffers from a low frame rate and tons of jaggies, while the PS2 looks relatively clean. Although the PS2 version is clearly superior, it must be noted: neither comes close to the Xbox release in terms of visuals or gameplay. This game was meant for Xbox — it's that simple.



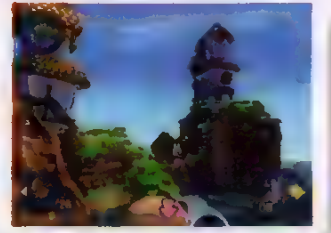


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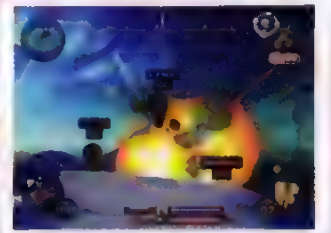
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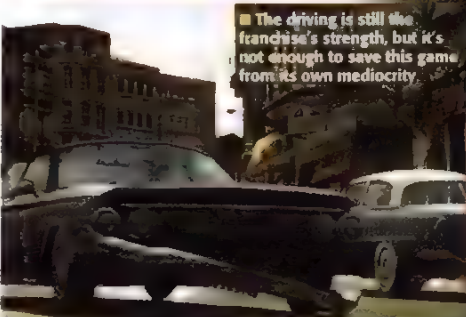
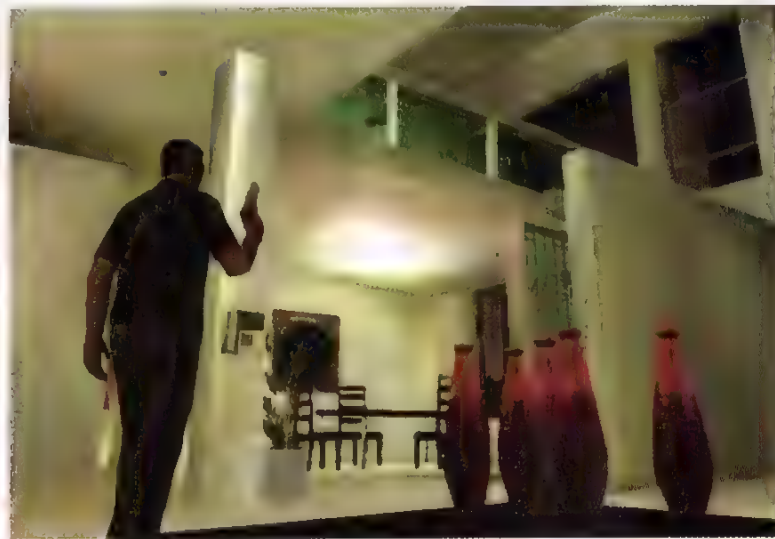
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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Driv3r

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER REFLECTIONS > RELEASE JUNE 21 > ESRB M

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

Delayed for what seems like a lifetime, Reflections' long-awaited *Driv3r* is finally making its way to store shelves. This is probably one of the most anticipated sequels in gaming history, and I imagine that Atari has huge hopes that it will become a phenomenon the likes of *Grand Theft Auto*. Well, *Driv3r* is not going to be, and here's why.

To put it simply, the video game world has passed *Driv3r* by. The really compelling hook of the original *PSone* franchise (driving in open city environments), has now become a commonly accepted part of the gaming landscape due to similarly themed titles like *Grand Theft Auto III*, *True Crime: Streets of LA*, and *The Getaway*.

Unfortunately, *Driv3r* doesn't do anything to push the action/racing genre forward, settling on an archaic game design that would have felt dated two years ago.

In *Driv3r*, you'll tool around Miami, Nice, and Istanbul as wheelman Tanner negotiates his way through a plot that appears to be constructed entirely of outtakes from generic action movies. Yes, they have some nifty graphics and top-flight voice talent, but I honestly couldn't remember what was going on at any point during the game, much less care. None of *The Getaway's* Cockney theatrics or *GTA's* pop culture satire is on display here, and I think most players will fail to become engrossed in this by-the-numbers potboiler.

The game has been in development since the beginning of this generation of consoles, and

the basic design is showing its age. Most missions are of the most generic variety: drive to a location while avoiding the fuzz, then get out and shoot people. There is the occasional novel objective, but most of your enjoyment of the out-of-the-car action will be ruined by the irritating control. While it uses the familiar FPS dual-analog control scheme (much like *Max Payne*), the targeting is suspect and awkward (don't expect that turning on the useless "auto-targeting" system will help here, either). Tanner moves with all the grace of a mentally damaged bull moose, and it's often difficult to perform simple tasks like jumping off a boat onto a dock. People criticize *GTA's* weapon functionality, but after playing this I was ready to marry *GTA's* targeting system and have all its babies.

I suppose, judged strictly as a racing game, it's a decent enough title. The car models and physics are nicely done, and you will experience your fair share of vehicular thrills. However, I didn't find the city environments to be very exciting, especially Miami, which is painfully drab in comparison to its *Vice City* doppelganger. Also, where *GTA's* cities are teeming with life and interesting locales, *Driv3r's* environments have very few pedestrians who simply walk around like bipedal cattle. Instead of feeling like you're tooling through a vital urban area, it's more akin to cruising through the deserted London of *28 Days Later*. Even worse are the non-existent boat and wave physics, which feel more like driving a large Cadillac than a boat.

I hate to say it, but I don't see how *The Driver* series fits into the current world of gaming. It's gone from being an innovator to being just another one of the "me-too" titles that is chasing the success of *Rockstar* and *Grand Theft Auto*. *Driv3r* fails to meet the bar that's been set by the best in the genre, and also fails to deliver a cohesive, quality play experience. I suspect the developers might have been better off constructing this as a pure racing title (as it does do the basics of racing well) and avoiding the shooting action altogether.—MATT

BOTTOM LINE **6**

> **Concept:** Try to reinvent an MIA *PSone* classic for a post-*GTA III* world

> **Graphics:** It looks nice, but it's not really a huge improvement over *Vice City* or *True Crime: Streets of LA*

> **Sound:** A moody and tasteful cinematic soundtrack—excellent use of Iggy and the Stooges' "Gimme Danger!"

> **Playability:** The driving is fine, out of the car action is very suspect

> **Entertainment:** This game has been in development for far too long, and its archaic design shows its age

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

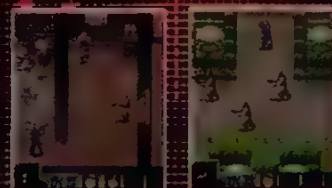
Second Opinion **5.5**

There are some dreams that are best left unrealized. As much as it pains me to say this, *Driv3r* is one of them. The previous two entries in the series were fueled by a powerful engine that roared with high octane gameplay and deeply satisfying missions. In this installment, the deafening barrage has been reduced to the faint hum of a remote control car. While the vehicles control admirably, I found that the majority of objectives are so dull and unimaginative that they make *Driving Miss Daisy* look like a white-knuckle thrill ride. It's also one of the most frustrating plays around. The on-foot run-and-gun sequences are simply atrocious, featuring the worst targeting system I've seen in years. Truth be told, the end result of this title's lengthy development cycle is what I'd picture *GTA* looking like after only five months of development.—REINER

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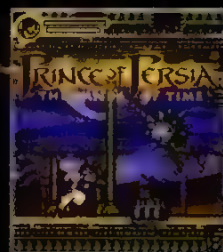


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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Showdown: Legends of Wrestling

> STYLE 1 TO 8-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ACCLAIM > DEVELOPER ACCLAIM STUDIOS AUSTIN > RELEASE JUNE 22 > ESRB T



WRESTLE AN OLD MAN IN A SPEEDO!

Wrestling has seen its share of failed ideas. Hulk Hogan's Pastamania restaurant briefly existed in the Mall of America, and the WWF actually once introduced a man in a turkey suit called the "Gobbledy Gooker." While these concepts were flawed from the very beginning, the Legends of Wrestling series actually has a good idea at its core: Let gamers play as some of the wrestlers of yesteryear. Showdown is Acclaim's attempt to revitalize the series, but, much like Hollywood Hogan himself, Showdown isn't fit enough to play with the current wrestling class.

The biggest attraction of Showdown is its roster of 73 classic wrestlers including the Hulkster, Macho Man, Andre the Giant, the doomed Von Erichs, and many more. If playing as an old (or, in many cases, dead) guy isn't your thing, a decent Create-A-Wrestler mode is included as well. Unfortunately, many of the characters play quite similarly, and overall, movesets are pretty limited. The engine is clearly patterned after the classic N64 wrestling titles cre-

ated by AKI, but lacks the finesse of those games. Not only are the action options a bit thin, but the collision detection is pretty awful, and there are several other minor technical issues that slightly mar the experience. Other areas of the game show a similar lack of polish. For example, while the presence of three professional commentators is a nice touch, they quickly start to repeat lines to the point where it grows rather annoying (and always refer to your wrestler as male, even if that's clearly not the case).

Like pretty much everything else in Showdown, the graphics are passable, but far from amazing. Character models look fairly accurate to their real-life counterparts, but are also lacking in detail and a bit bland. But, if the fact that this game simply contains all these characters gets you excited, you'll probably enjoy this title. It's a nice homage to wrestling's past, but just can't compete with the wrestling games of the present. —JEREMY

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Fight your way through the top wrestlers of the '70s, '80s, and '90s to earn a shot at Hulk Hogan

> **Graphics:** Like most of the wrestlers on the roster, the graphics don't look so hot by today's standards

> **Sound:** The three-man commentary crew of Tony Shavivone, Larry Zbyszko, and Bobby The Brain is about as good as you'd expect from that team

> **Playability:** The combat engine works perfectly, but lacks much in the way of depth

> **Entertainment:** Only diehard fans of old-school wrestling will want to enter the ring with this one

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 4.5

No game that has Andy Kaufman beating the hell out of Andre the Giant can be all bad. However, as Showdown illustrates, it can still be mostly bad. With sluggish controls, awful hit detection, and baffling collision, Showdown doesn't bring many positives into the ring. Even though it has an impressive roster of legends and a cool Create-A-Wrestler feature, the frustrating gameplay will get in the way regardless of which character you select. Unless you are currently enrolled in a graduate program studying to become a Wrestling Historian, you should definitely pass this one up. —JOE



PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers

BOTTOM LINE 3.5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ACCLAIM > DEVELOPER BATTLEBORNE ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE OCTOBER 15 > ESRB T



Let's say that I hold up a pair of baggy down pants and then attempt to convince you that they are actually a sophisticated robot, complete with bombs and a Christopher Walken emulator. You'd probably be more than a little suspicious. You should likewise be wary of anyone claiming that Combat Elite is a playable game.

Everything in this title borders on barely functional, from the blurry graphics (no, that isn't Vaseline on your TV screen) to the imprecise targeting. Sadly, the two-player co-op option doesn't make it any more fun — it just spreads the pain slightly thinner. In theory, a WWII shooter made with the renowned Snowblind engine could be a great idea. Unfortunately, in execution it works about as well as the aforementioned mechanical circus attire. —JOE

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Trivial Pursuit Unhinged

BOTTOM LINE 5

> STYLE 1 TO 6-PLAYER BOARD (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND OR 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER ARTECH STUDIOS > RELEASE MARCH 23 > ESRB T

There is nothing about this title that is better than the board game itself — and that includes not being able to ingest the pie pieces. The Unhinged version of the game (you can also play with the original rules) has some nice twists such as switching players' spots, betting on opponents' questions, and various effects for the board's spaces.

However, these are mostly random, so there is no strategy involved (and the trivia is pretty easy). The worst thing about this title is that there are no downloadable questions, so you can run out fast. I also don't know why they didn't make use of all the different Trivial Pursuit editions out there. —KATO



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

MTV Music Generator 3: This is the Remix

BOTTOM LINE 8

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER CODEMASTERS > DEVELOPER MIX MAX > RELEASE JUNE 15 > ESRB T

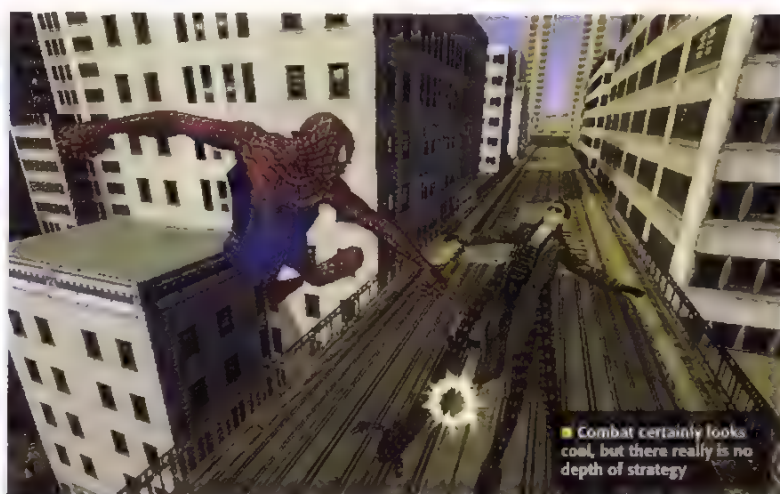


As usual with a new Music Generator, some elements are improved (the interface and the addition of some truly A-list rap artists like Snoop and Outkast) while others take a step back (personally, I miss the vertical scrolling of MMG 2). More impressive is the ability to "rip" samples off of your personal CDs (I had Snoop busting verses

over Led Zep's mighty "Moby Dick" riff in no time!). However, the "ripper" is a bit difficult to use as much more than a gimmick (especially since the samples take up so much memory that they limit your options in other areas pretty severely). The Xbox, with its much shorter load times and the ability to save to the hard drive, is the recommended version. On the PS2, you have to actually reinsert the original music disc you culled a sample from in order to load a mix that uses it. —MATT



■ Web swinging is better than *Cats*, and anything that your significant other can bring to the table



■ Combat certainly looks cool, but there really is no depth of strategy

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Spider-Man 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER TREYARCH > RELEASE JUNE 29 > ESRB T

DOES WHATEVER A SPIDER CAN

Every person has different gaming memories that they will cherish for a lifetime, whether it be concocting a strategy to take down a difficult boss or achieving the highest score in an arcade game. There are some experiences, however, that transcend individual taste and must be seen by the entire gaming populace. Battling Psycho Mantis in *Metal Gear Solid*; staring wide-eyed as you call forth your first summoned monster in *Final Fantasy VII*; scoring a massive combo in *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*; jacking your first car in *Grand Theft Auto III*; and now...web swinging in *Spider-Man 2*.

Although this gameplay mechanic has been featured in previous *Spider-Man* games, it has always been confined and not very true to the wall crawler's potential. With this release, developer Treyarch has removed the restraints and let the spider loose, making web swinging the primary component. With visually arresting, groundbreaking gameplay at your fingertips, an expansive New York skyline as your playground, and an arsenal of acrobatic maneuvers that would make even Mary Lou Retton blush, you can lose countless hours of your life just swinging across the city, flipping around poles, and crawling up walls. With realistic physics accompanying your every move, you'll encounter fear-induced stomach knotting when you leap off of skyscrapers, and shortness of breath as you tighten your line to avoid crashing into the side of a building. It's an amazing sensation to say the very least, and the closest a game has come to accurately conveying the incredible powers and supernatural abilities of a superhero.

Although the remainder of the game shows signs of being just as graceful and compelling with its combo-intensive combat, assortment of random missions, and bevy of hidden items, the majority of this content just doesn't sit well. Outside of the

interactive spider sense (which allows players to dodge bullets and attacks with a well-timed button press), combat can best be summed up as mindless button mashing. There are some decent boss fights, but there really is no need for strategy against your typical thugs. Even worse yet, missions are equally as simple. Just swing to an area denoted on the map to take out a pocket of enemies, and move on to the next mission.

The random objectives that you can take on for townsfolk hold a bit more interest, yet each of these tasks only lasts for a few seconds and are repeated way too often throughout the course of the game. In an afternoon, there's a good chance that you'll prevent an armored car robbery at least 15 times and stop someone from falling off of a building at least 20. It's a great idea to give players freedom to do other things outside of the critical path, but without a heavy injection of variety, you'll lose interest in these diversions very quickly.

I am a fan, however, of the timed ring races—which are very similar in design to the bonus goals in *SSX 3*. They really force players to hone their web swinging skills. Oddly, other than achieving a rank (like Silver or Gold Medalist), there is no reason to complete these difficult tasks. On this same note, players can scour the city for 150 Skyscraper Tokens and complete feats like helping 250 citizens. What is the end result of these time-consuming feats? Another rank. If I wanted a rank, I would have joined the Boy Scouts. Rewards and unlockables are noticeably absent. If you avoid these goals (which I would assume most people will do when they realize that there is no payoff), you can whip through the game in a day if you are determined.

So it's short; *Stevie Wonder* could probably rock the combat engine like nobody's business; and most of the missions get as old as Rob Liefeld's comics. Even with these flaws, this is one of those games that you will continually go back to and have the time of your life in. Once you get a taste of web swinging, there really is no going back, you just won't be able to live without it.—REINER

The Edge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Simply put, the PS2 version got stuck in the mud, and the GameCube incarnation was grazed by it. The effects, fluidity of play, and detailing in the Xbox version are far superior.



■ "Eat gunk, stupid guy from *Enter the Matrix*!"



■ "First, hand me your wallet. Then I will pull you up."



■ "Hey, mom! Lookie what I did!"

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Bring out the swinger in the Spider

> **Graphics:** Given the sheer enormity of the city, intricate detailing is lacking; but the animators are great, and you really do get the sense that you are in Spidey's world

> **Sound:** Kristen Dunst delivers the worst voiceovers in video game history. A dying cat could read the lines better. The rest of the cast is quite good

> **Playability:** It's all about the web swinging. Everything else plays second fiddle

> **Entertainment:** Flying around the city couldn't be much more entertaining

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

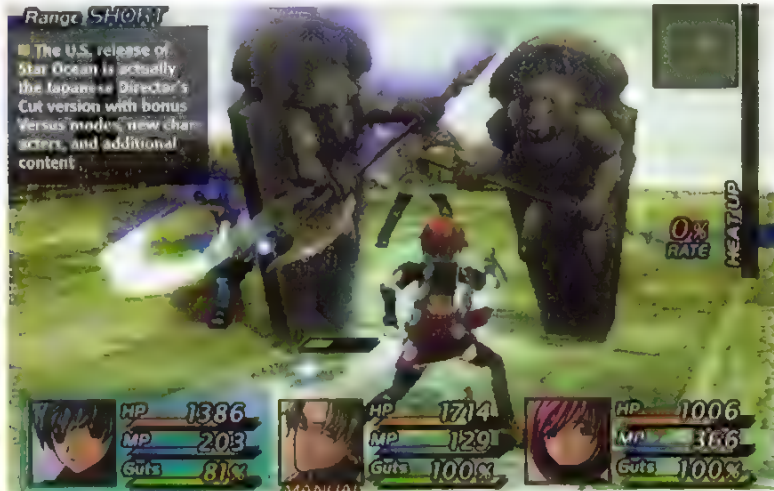
Second Opinion 8.25

Like no other game on the market, *Spider-Man 2* puts you in the shoes (and tights) of the main character. When you're ripping around the city on your web lines, busting out aerial tricks for your own enjoyment, you really feel the exhilaration that must come with superpowers. You honestly feel like *Spider-Man*. But as we all know, with great power comes great responsibility, and you must use your gifts to fight street crime, which frankly becomes kind of a drag fairly quickly. There are a lot of other things to do besides take on thugs and rescue people (which makes up for the super-short critical path), but none of them entertained me as much as simply swinging around the city. Despite the repetitive nature of certain aspects of the game, *Spider-Man 2* has some truly enjoyable sequences, a good sense of humor, and heaps of good old "fun factor," making it one of the best comic book games ever and a must-play for fans of the webslinger.

—JEREMY



Life was never the same for Fayt after he swallowed that flashlight



The U.S. release of Star Ocean is actually the Japanese Director's Cut version with bonus versus modes, new characters, and additional content

HP 1386	MP 203	Guts 81%	HP 1714	MP 129	Guts 100%	HP 1006	MP 316	Guts 100%
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Strange things happen when you listen to a lot of Creed



The real-time combat system is a serious joy to take part in



Fayt's first beach experience will forever be marked by the feeling of sand in uncomfortable places

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** A science fiction role-playing game that hammers home the importance of gameplay

> **Graphics:** Lively character animations... explosive battle effects... gorgeous vistas

> **Sound:** So bad that I would rather listen to Kenny G. Well, maybe not Kenny G...but you get the point!

> **Playability:** The combat system steals the show with its swift nature and incredible depth of customization

> **Entertainment:** The story clichés are a bit much, but the gameplay couldn't have been much better

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Star Ocean: Till the End of Time

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE > **RELEASE** AUGUST 31 > **ESRB** T

A DIFFERENT SIDE OF SQUARE ENIX

Never before have I come across a game that has such large shoes to fill. Not only are gamers hoping against hope that Star Ocean will feature production values that parallel Square Enix's most celebrated works, its science-fiction setting will be measured against the magnificent universe of Monolith Soft's Xenosaga. Higher expectations truly are unheard of.

If you play this game with the thought that you'll be knocked out of your socks by cinematics that rival the likes of Final Fantasy, or swept off of your feet by a story as emotionally moving as that in Xenosaga, you are setting yourself up for grave disappointment.

When most people reflect upon RPGs that they've played, they usually recall moments that are tied to the story...such as the death of Aeris in Final Fantasy VII or the opera scene from Final Fantasy III.

In Star Ocean, the story won't shake you to your core, nor will it stay fresh in your mind longer than the time you spend with it. Even with an imaginative universe that is rife with unusual technologies and species, this tale sticks to the conventionalized ideas that shaped the genre. Even the finely acted voiceovers and beautifully animated real-time sequences do little to lure players in.

While it may sound like a monumental disaster, Star Ocean actually succeeds in ways that are mostly foreign to traditional role-playing fare. Where most RPGs cling to story as their driving force, this one pulls players in with gameplay. With real-time combat that is analogous to a fast-paced action game, you can't help but reflect on how many times you've played Final Fantasy thinking, "Man, I wish I could just run over to that creature and beat it

senseless." You won't have to wait for a character's turn to pop up to attack, but you will still have to keep an eye on the movements and well-being of your entire party. To ensure that all group members are functioning to their highest of capabilities, at any point during combat you can either assign them pre-scripted commands or switch direct control to them. Combos and special attacks are bountiful, and as you level up, new skills and powers can be added to a character's arsenal. It's a wonderfully inventive angle for combat, and a complete departure from this genre's slow, dull, and repetitive nature.

Dungeon exploration is just as painless. All enemies are visible in the field, and the map actually tracks the ground that you've previously trekked across. In moving from area to area, you will run over a bit of backtracking, but given the fact that combat is the heart and soul of this adventure, and leveling up is tied to gaining new powers, I actually welcomed each and every battle.

Square Enix RPGs have always been heralded for their soundtracks as well. I'm afraid this one won't receive similar acclaim. With generic Joe Satriani-style licks that could in fact inflict physical damage on the brain, this is easily the worst RPG score I've heard.

You'll likely roll your eyes at the plot twists, and will assuredly have your finger on the Mute button when the music kicks in, but the gameplay is strong enough to weather this RPG's storm and keep you hooked.

—REINER

Second Opinion 8.25

On first glance, Star Ocean looks like one of the best RPGs ever made. If you were to judge solely by the gorgeous graphics, character models, and animations, you would have a serious contender for the best of this console generation. However, regardless of how good my eyes told me this game should be, some other aspects left me with lingering doubts. Very little is offered in terms of guidance; there are no in-game tutorials, and no map markers to guide you toward your next objective. This means that the flow of the story (which is very involved) is frequently interrupted by tedious stretches of wandering around trying to figure things out. However, thanks to the memorable characters and undeniably fun battle system, I still found myself enthralled by Star Ocean. Like butterscotch chicken, it isn't as delicious as some other fare, but it's still pretty sweet. —JOE



PLAYSTATION 2

Echo Night: Beyond

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** AGETEC
> **DEVELOPER** FROMSOFTWARE > **RELEASE** JULY 27 > **ESRB** T

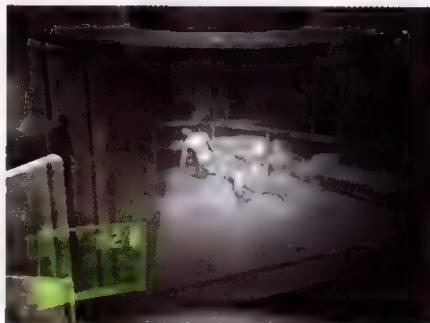
COMPLICATIONS WITH CONVENTIONS

This being the second entry in the Echo Night franchise, *Beyond* follows some conventions and gameplay mechanics established in the first, many of which aren't quite my cups of tea.

Richard Osmond (from the original entry) and his fiancée are on their way to the moon, intending to seal their lifelong union high above the earth. Their romantic plan predictably goes to the crapper when their shuttle crashes and the pair is separated. As in the earlier game, players must negotiate through a series of puzzles, which are my biggest problem with *Beyond*.

Almost all of the riddles revolve around finding an item and returning it to the appropriate specter — a convention that plays out as tedious and tiresome a short ways into the title. It's sad because there are glimmers of a really nice, scary game waiting to come out. Since this isn't a point-and-click affair, the action/survival horror bent on traditional adventure gameplay could be great. Ghosts can be very aggressive, and the "health meter" being a heart rate monitor (coupled with a nice use of force feedback) ups the tension dramatically.

Echo Night: Beyond tries a lot — combining survival horror with action and adventure is a great idea that merges some of my favorite things. But, without better puzzles and more draw-out scares, *Beyond* is a game that doesn't live up to its concept's potential. —LISA



BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** First person action-adventure game with survival horror and a creepy space station thrown in for good measure

> **Graphics:** Some pronounced jaggeds diminish the experience, everything else is just a hair above average

> **Sound:** Echoing voice track and minimal score actually make the game more tense

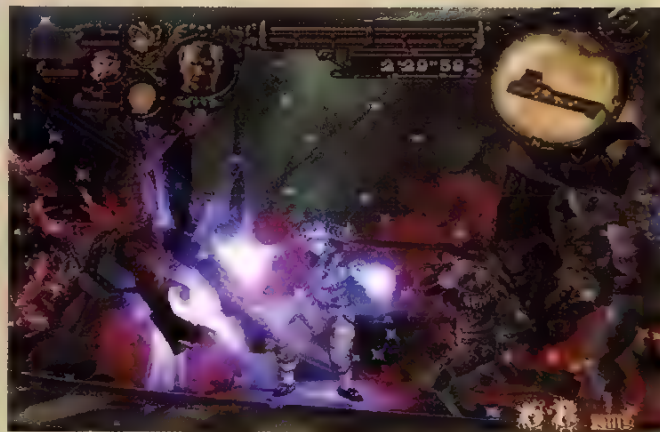
> **Playability:** Selecting specific items and using bits from your inventory is unnecessarily cumbersome

> **Entertainment:** Overall underwhelming, but there are some really nice things about this game

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5.5

This psychological thriller doesn't shred the nerves, nor does it induce the slightest bit of fear. What could have been a heart-pounding, stress-inducing journey through a haunted lunar colony actually turned out to be a game of "Find the Missing Item" for Casper the Friendly Ghost. Outside of matching up items with spectres, there really is nothing to this game. The premise is definitely intriguing, but it needs bigger scares and gameplay that you can wrap your hands around. —REINER



PLAYSTATION 2

McFarlane's Evil Prophecy

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
> **RELEASE** JUNE 15 > **ESRB** M

BEWARE, EVIL AT WORK

Like a piece of toilet paper stuck to your shoe, this game's annoyances are hard to shake off. The more time you spend with it, the more you feel like you're being punished for your sins. As for the game, it commits many.

Despite being a not-so-subtle way of trying to sell McFarlane's line of figures, there actually is an attempt at depth here. This fact, however, only unintentionally re-emphasizes how shallow it is once you get mired in its mindless, never-ending combo-fest. Irony — useful word, but no fun in this case. *Evil Prophecy* has four comrades battling through hordes of monsters to get to famous bosses such as Dracula and Frankenstein. You can switch among your friends at any time, and each has special combos. However, the combat is rendered joyless because the overall targeting is very poor. Half of the time, hitting someone right in front of you is a chore.

There is some degree of strategy in the game because you can command your other friends to follow pre-set orders such as staying back or attacking only the leader of a group of enemies. But I wouldn't rely on the AI to tie its own shoes, much less follow orders. The game also has lofty ambitions in its friendship system. If you watch each other's back, players will help you in combat. This system works, but the downside is that you are often worried about your comrades, and because of this (and the above-mentioned AI), you spend a lot of time switching between characters. This led me to throw my hands up and yell, "Do I have to do everything myself?! I'm surrounded by idiots!" You don't get that cool feeling, like in EA's *Lord of the Rings* fighters for example, that you're part of a larger battle — just that you've got to baby-sit everyone.

During my time playing this game I had to take a break. I ran an errand to the Minnesota Department of Motor Vehicles, and the freaking DMV was less taxing than this frustrating experience. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE 4

> **Concept:** McFarlane peddles his sculpted figures in a cross-marketing play that fails. Good triumphs over evil once again

> **Graphics:** The fog in this game is so bad, the characters even crack a joke about it

> **Sound:** Some spooky tunes here and there, but it's no *Castlevania*

> **Playability:** The character switching is neat, but like the battle combos, it just isn't fun

> **Entertainment:** I actually hate this game more than my objective score reflects

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 4.25

I don't even know where to start. There are so many things that make me dislike this game I felt compelled to start compiling a list as I played: 1) These graphics hurt my eyes. Literally. 2) My AI companions are stupider than the poorly rendered ground they walk on. 3) Passing through these mediocre level designs is reminiscent of passing a kidney stone — tedious and painful. There are so many more, but suffice it to say, my prophecy for this game was dire indeed. —MILLER

PLAYSTATION 2

Crimson Tears

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** DREAMFACTORY/SPIKE > **RELEASE** JULY 27 > **ESRB** T

A DULL BLADE

It will give *Crimson Tears* credit for trying to be something a little different from the typical Japanese hack n' slasher. In essence, this game could be best described as *Seven Samurai 20XX* meets *Dark Alliance*. At its core, it's still just a basic brawler,

but one that has a depth of item and weapon collection more akin to that of an RPG. While it is cool to buy, scavenge, and combine items to create new medicine and armaments, this title ultimately fails because of another design element it swiped from the RPG genre: randomly created environments.

In theory, these randomly created dungeons should add a level of unpredictability and replay to the experience, but in practice it renders the level design so incredibly tedious and dull that I could barely force myself to keep playing. There's so little variation between the few basic room templates on each level that instead of adding variety to the mix, the effect is more like an anime version of *Groundhog Day*.

In addition, there are very few types of enemies, and none of them (with the exception of bosses) seemed to require any degree of strategy beyond just flailing away blindly with simple combos. Yes, there is quite the array of long- and short-range weaponry available, but what's the point unless your choices have any bearing during battle? Unless serious changes are made, I sincerely hope that *Crimson Tears* will do the honorable thing and fall on its sword, rather than submit gamers to any more boredom than it already has. —MATT



BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** A generic hack n' slasher imbued with RPG elements

> **Graphics:** The characters' cel-shaded look is attractive, but the environments are repetitive and drab

> **Sound:** The voice-overs are of the typical goody anime sort, and the music is generic enough as to barely exist

> **Playability:** The basic combat is just that: extremely basic, and the camera sometimes puts you at a disadvantage

> **Entertainment:** Attempts to put a little more depth to the genre, but it's not enough to make *Crimson Tears* truly compelling

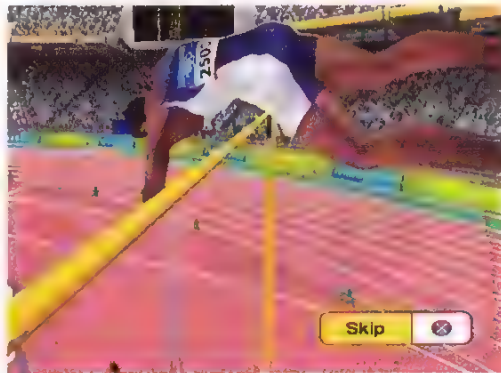
> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5.25

Crimson Tears isn't an epic failing — instead, it falls short by not really doing much at all. The RPG elements are so minimal, I feel kind of bad about calling them "RPG elements." Your characters level up, but it does little besides raising your HP. The weapon system is equally basic and the whole bundle (including combat that looks sort of cool, but requires very little skill) feels dull. —LISA



Players can execute enemy-clearing combos with each other — one of the game's only highlights



PLAYSTATION 2

Athens 2004

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** EUROCOM > **RELEASE** JULY 13 > **ESRB** E

FAILED URINE TEST

The Olympics are a joke. Either you fall asleep watching the bloated opening ceremonies or the late night live telecast of the Estonia vs. Ukraine thumb wrestling semi-final. Athens 2004 isn't half as boring, but things could be better.

There is little new in Athens' gameplay (few events use the analog sticks, and the dance pad peripheral is only available in the separate "Party" section), but how different should this game be? I expect to button mash when swimming or running — it makes sense. This game isn't interesting because there's no drama, which is something that even the real Olympics have. Sports titles aren't fun because of the controls you input, but because you get involved in your team. Wouldn't it be cool if you had to train to make the team years before the events, and then have to manage your athlete and his/her day-to-day routine?

The official Olympic Committee is partially responsible for the blandness here. It didn't want online play for Athens because it thought it took away the spirit of the Olympics. Well, I don't know about you, but I think that what's good for Olympic video games is good for the Olympics themselves. —**KATO**



BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** For a kind of game that only appears every four years, this just doesn't cut it

> **Graphics:** Some of the women look like they used to be on the East German Women's Shot Put team

> **Sound:** Although the commentary is admirable because it keeps up with the action, it gets repetitive

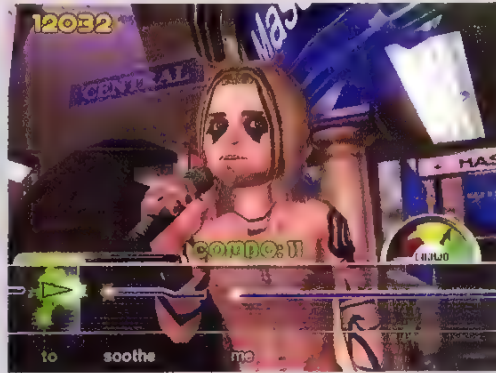
> **Playability:** Button-mashing is still the focus of this perfunctory release

> **Entertainment:** The mere idea of a Hassie the Hoff rap album is more tantalizing

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.5

While it is nice to see 989 upholding the video game tradition of frenzied button mashing, there is little here to keep players from racing at world record speeds back to the store to pick up a different title. I love how wind is factored into archery (I can see this technique being used in FPSs), and the sound effects that accompany weightlifting are simply priceless, but where are the hooks that will keep gamers glued? As has been the case for years on end, this Olympic hopeful loses its flavor after you play through each event just once or twice. —**REINER**



PLAYSTATION 2

Karaoke Revolution Volume 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX MUSIC SYSTEMS > **RELEASE** JULY 13 > **ESRB** E

I'VE GOT YOU UNDER MY SKIN

There is only one circumstance in which it should be okay to hear a full grown man sing the words: "I'm a genie in a bottle, you gotta rub me the right way." And that instance is with this game. Otherwise, run far, far away. Alternately, if you are playing KR 2, sit back, laugh yourself silly, and settle in for one of the better music games on the market.

As it should be, the sound and music of this sequel take the spotlight. Though the 35 songs you'll encounter are not performed by the original artists, the covers are meticulous in their replication, and the vocals are even better than in the first game. It took me a little longer to warm up to some of the slightly lesser-known tunes present in this version, but most of them won me over in the end. Here's a wider spread of genres here as well, including a heavy swath of rock and pop, a little touch of country, some classic R&B, and a pinch of Elvis to round out the mix.

Unfortunately, the game just doesn't make enough advancements to be the "Revolution" that the first game was. It is still alarmingly fun, but the changes that have been made are largely cosmetic, and a lot of the visuals have simply been recycled from the first version. The new Medley mode is okay, but it ends up feeling just a little awkward as it flips between songs. I'd also love to see a duet mode show up in this series, but that may be a ways off. I would still tout this as one of the truly great party games, and, if you're man enough to sing like a girl (or vice versa), you'll have no shortage of amusement with KR 2. —**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Sing songs, feel ridiculous, and come out smiling at the other end

> **Graphics:** Respectable graphics for the genre, with a couple hilarious looking characters

> **Sound:** High rung of the top notch in the cream of the crop

> **Playability:** Fantastic for parties, with a simple pick up and play mechanic

> **Entertainment:** Hilarious to hear your buddies sing Britney Spears — frightening to hear yourself do it

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

As far as sequels go, Karaoke Revolution Vol. 2 is as cheap and easy as Paris Hilton after seven cosmopolitans. Still, the way that Konami has figured out how to track your pitch to score your performance is still impressive, and the new selection of songs is packed with karaoke classics, so I can't begrudge the developers another go 'round. The new multiplayer and Medley modes are neat, but where's the ability to do duets? Still, this is a must for the party-game crowd. —**MATT**

SONG LIST

Baby One More Time • Born To Be Wild • Cry • Drift Away • Every Breath You Take • Friends In Low Places • Genie in a Bottle • Heartbreak Hotel • Here Without You • Hot Stuff • I Believe in a Thing Called Love • I Hate Everything About You • I Will Survive • I'll Make Love to You • I'm With You • Irresistible • It's My Life • I've Got You Under My Skin • Jesse's Girl • Lady Marmalade • Let's Get It On • Miss You • My Girl • Papa Don't Preach • Perfect • Rich Girl • Rock and Roll All Night • Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay • Sweet Home Alabama • The First Cut is the Deepest • The Joker • Toxic • Virtual Insanity • We Are Family • White Flag



GAMECUBE

Puyo Pop Fever

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** SEGA OF AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM > **RELEASE** JULY 20 > **ESRB** E

MAGICAL FRUIT PRESERVES?

Okay, so Puyo is a little weird. For what it's worth, you could conceivably adore figuring out the intricacies of the magic Puyo and translating those secrets into huge combos and devastating spells. The initial concept is simple to implement. However, the difficulty quickly ramps up and can push advancement to a virtual standstill.

Ultimately, it is this challenge level that both strengthens and weakens the game. Puzzle players are, by and large, a hardy lot. They're willing to put up with a great deal of frustration and challenge in order to see past the surface layers of a game and perceive the intricacies within. It really is no exaggeration to conclude that Puyo takes that nearly religious level of concentration before you can truly excel at it. For most players, the game will feel like a shallow Tetris copy, with a quirky concept and some pretty colors. And then they'll go play something else.

And that's actually too bad, since Puyo, for all its idiosyncrasies, is a deep and engaging play. That's why it's so disappointing that the game gives you so little worthwhile direction as to how to really begin to succeed at it. If you haven't been privy to the earlier versions of the game, you'll spend a long time just trying to figure out why things happen when they do. And that's just doesn't make a good first impression. Pop in Puyo at your own risk. —**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Globbs of jelly tumble Tetris-like down the screen to create magic spells.

> **Graphics:** Brightly colored puzzle pieces are entirely appropriate for the genre

> **Sound:** Voiceovers and music from Sesame Street poured through a strainer and then left out to dry. You'd be better off listening to the voices in your head

> **Playability:** Poor translation and confusing interactions between the different elements of gameplay mean you'll be unsure what you're doing for the first few hours

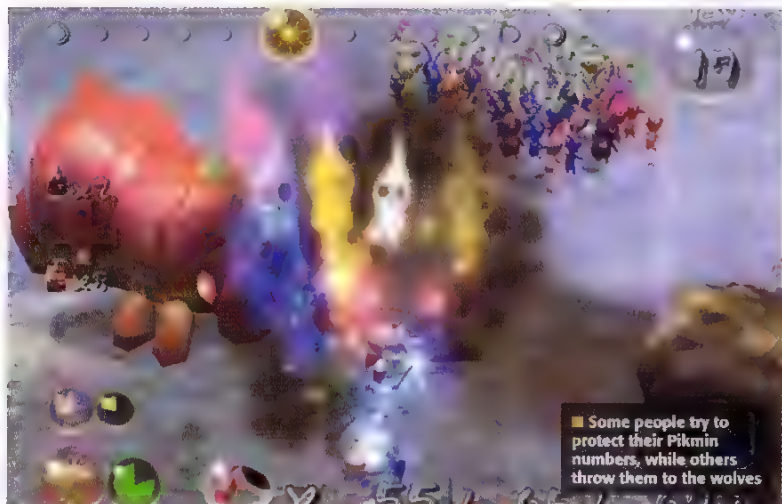
> **Entertainment:** A great joy for those willing to invest the time, otherwise a great waste of your invested money

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

Puyo Pop's frantic, combo-heavy gameplay remains just as addictive now as it was back in the day. While Puyo purists may scoff at the mere thought of Sonic Team implementing new puzzle pieces and mechanics, the series was due for a facelift. The new Fever mechanic may seem a bit too powerful at first, but if you can offset the bombardment that it can bring, the strategies that emerge are amazing. It may not be overflowing with new content, but you'll be hard-pressed to find a more satisfying puzzle game. —**REINER**





Some people try to protect their Pikmin numbers, while others throw them to the wolves



With each boss encounter, players will have to hunt for an opportune time to attack

GAMECUBE

Pikmin 2

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY > PUBLISHER NINTENDO
> DEVELOPER NINTENDO > RELEASE AUGUST 30 > ESRB E



WAR OF THE PLANTS

In every console generation, a handful of titles never achieve the level of respect that they so rightfully deserve. I would have loved to see Rareware create a sequel to the little known, yet highly acclaimed, *Blast Corps*. A follow-up to Sega's *Typing of the Dead* would also be a welcome addition to my library. Given both of these games' lackluster sales, the industry quickly deemed that running into barns with dump trucks and spelling to stop zombies were failed concepts with little to no chance of returning. With *Pikmin*, Nintendo took a huge risk on one of the wackiest ideas that the industry has ever seen: Violent plant creatures help an alien slaughter giant bugs in a quest to recover spaceship parts. To no surprise, this offbeat release didn't fly off of retail shelves, yet rather than retiring this unique idea, Nintendo is hoping that a second offering will attract a crowd.

Instead of tweaking the formula to have more mainstream appeal, this sequel specifically targets fans of the original with significant enhancements to the existing play mechanics. In particular, the different Pikmin troops that you control are now greatly varied in function – much like the different unit types in a PC RTS. Each Pikmin unit is differentiated by color. Red is the standard trooper that is immune to fire. Purple can lift 10 times the weight of red, but is much slower. White can unearth hidden items and is immune to toxins. Yellow is electrical. Blue, as you

would guess, can wade in water.

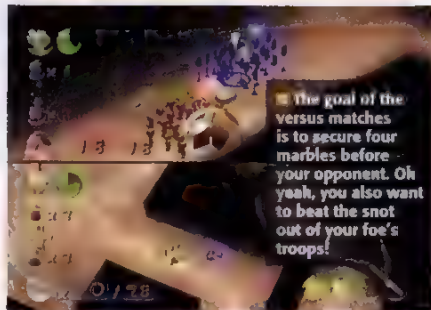
Each of these distinct abilities is constantly called upon throughout the course of the game. The design of the original focused heavily on the player's ability to solve puzzles and procure items within a set amount of time. In this game, Nintendo has removed the 30-day timer and shifted the focus in the direction of combat. As ingenious as the premise of having to complete the game in a set amount of days was, the pressure you were constantly under to run through stages perfectly was unbearable. You can now take your time, strategize, and scour every inch of the land without fearing that you won't get to the end of the game.

The basis of combat hasn't evolved at all, which is kind of a bummer; but there are more battles than before, and the variety of enemies that you encounter is far greater. With the addition of Louie, Olimar's cohort in crime, you can now divide your Pikmin troops into two groups and switch control between your alien of choice on the fly. Early on you won't use this ability too much, but as the difficulty escalates with each passing level, you'll be switching back and forth more than you could imagine.

Since there are two playable characters, Nintendo has implemented split-screen multiplayer support (and don't worry, you won't have to use your GBA). From the outset, only versus is available, but as you progress through the single player campaign, a



The co-op stages in Challenge mode are loaded with variety and complex team strategies



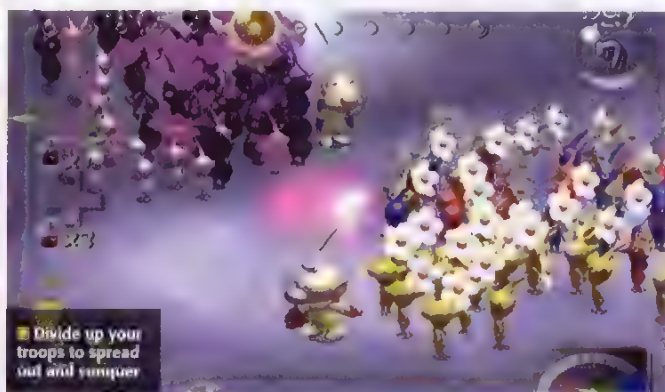
The goal of the versus matches is to secure four marbles before your opponent. Oh yeah, you also want to beat the snot out of your foe's troops!

30 level Challenge mode, which offers co-op play, unlocks both of these modes add serious legs to an already lengthy game. The battles that emerge from versus are an absolute riot, and although there are only 10 map designs, each time you enter the fray they are randomly generated either by the shape of the map or placement of items and enemies.

The concept may be just as extraordinary as its predecessors', but with a hefty dosage of multiplayer and a quest that isn't as nerve-racking, *Pikmin 2* is deserving of mainstream recognition and is easily the most noteworthy and praiseworthy GameCube product this summer. —REINER



Although the focus has changed, the basic gameplay principles remain: Build a Pikmin army, harvest dead bugs, and hunt for valuable items



Divide up your troops to spread out and conquer

BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> **Concept:** Stick with the core concept of plant-life warfare and build upon it with an infusion of multiplayer and greater diversity in troop types

> **Graphics:** Same as the original, but still gorgeous. Watching your Pikmin splash frantically in water, then transform into a ghost vapor is a sight everyone needs to see

> **Sound:** The Pikmin's high-pitched voices sure are cute, but they get annoying very quickly

> **Playability:** Focuses more on combat and the usage of the new Pikmin types

> **Entertainment:** Not as stressful, and loaded with multiplayer longevity

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8.75**

I was honestly a little surprised by how much this odd little strategy game charmed me. The simple concept and controls make it really easy for anyone to pick up and play, but it's never so simple that it will bore more hardcore gamers. While I had a good time with the single-player game (those little Pikmin buggers are strangely cute), multiplayer was what really did it for me. Obviously online play is too much to ask from Nintendo, but split-screen co-op and versus modes both have a charming, old school vibe that's joyous to play and highly infectious. Head-to-head mode is surprisingly fast paced and frantic – a major switch from the somewhat deliberate gameplay in single player. In both modes, the sound is amusing, the graphics are quite good (but not astounding by any means), and sure, the camera could be better. But overall, *Pikmin 2* is a really solid title – once you give it a chance, it's really hard not to get into its fun, friendly gameplay. —JEREMY

XBOX

Malice

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER MUD DUCK PRODUCTIONS/ZENMAX MEDIA > DEVELOPER AIRCRAFT
> RELEASE JUNE 1 > ESRB E



HERE COMES THE HAMMER

Hey, I'm reviewing both *Driv3r* and *Malice* this month! Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Game Informer's semi-annual "Games That Should Have Been Released in 2001" issue! As you probably know, *Malice* was once one of the Xbox's greatest hopes, and garnered reams of coverage after being showcased as part of Bill Gates' speech during CES 2001 when he unveiled the Xbox hardware for the first time. Since then, it's been a hard fall from grace as *Malice* continued to slip down the release schedules and went through publishers like J-Lo goes through husbands. Now, after all this time, it's finally seeing the light of day and revealed in all its...mediocrity.

Don't get me wrong, this isn't a terrible game. However, it's certainly not equipped to deal with the best of this generation's platformers. The main reason is that it's crippled by an over-reliance on the worst game design cliché

ever invented: too much collecting. Whether it's glow worms or orbs or gears or gold coins, you can bet your ass you'll be collecting them in *Malice*. You'll be gathering widgets like the old cat lady down the street hoards Precious Moments figurines. And then, when you finally open the door or lock or bridge, you'll get to a new area where you'll have to collect more crap to advance!

Hey, if that's your bag, this game should tickle your mojo quite nicely. It's fairly decent looking, and I did enjoy the strategy brought on by the different magical powers *Malice* acquires on her quest. But I have seen the future of the platformer in games like *Ratchet & Clank* and *Jak II*, and I'm never going back to the old collection grind. I'm as free as a bird now, and this bird you cannot change — not even for a spunky girl swinging a giant hammer. *Malice*, we should have hooked up back in the early days of the Xbox. —MATT

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> **Concept:** A long-lost Xbox platformer surfaces with an unknown publisher.

> **Graphics:** There are some nice textures and shadowing, but overall this looks like an Xbox launch title.

> **Sound:** Minimal tuneage and a conspicuous absence of Gwen Stefani.

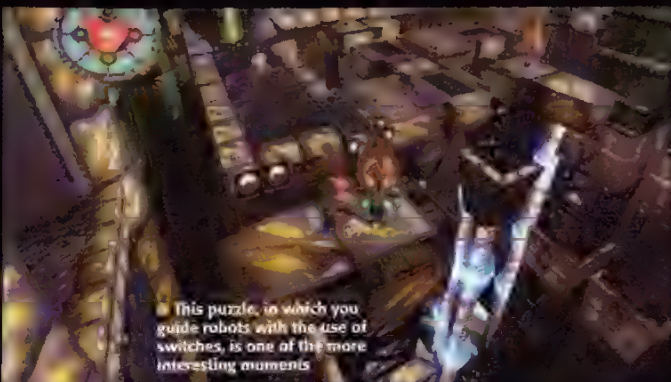
> **Playability:** The combat is rudimentary, and the platforming is only as hard as the camera makes it.

> **Entertainment:** The world moves fast, and *Malice* has fallen more than a few steps behind.

> **Replay Value:** Low.

Second Opinion

Malice has shaken two of the pillars on which I base my day to day life. Redheads are cute, and enormous bludgeoning weapons are awesome. Nothing about this title, including the fiery-haired heroine, is visually appealing; the environments and enemies all look like they belong in the last console generation. And though you get to lug some oversized clubs and hammers, they feel clumsy and awkward instead of acrobatically worn. If I am wielding an oversized cudgel and I'm not looking forward to using it, something is seriously wrong. "Tombsen" or "Hobbes" might have been better abstract concepts after which to name this utterly derivative platformer. —JOE



This puzzle, in which you guide robots with the use of switches, is one of the more interesting moments



XBOX

IndyCar Series 2005

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER CODEMASTERS
> DEVELOPER CODEMASTERS > RELEASE JUNE 22 > ESRB E

HEY LOOK! OVER HERE!

I was watching the Indianapolis 500 this year and it was depressing. All that tradition and nobody cares anymore. Now, I didn't just say that because I've got a foam finger that says, "#1 IRL Fan." Like everyone else, I'm surprised there's still open-wheeled racing in America. I mean, there isn't even enough room on those cars for all the sponsorship decals.

If you're looking for an IRL revival, I'm sorry to say that *IndyCar* alone just isn't going to do it. And that's not an indictment of the league, it's just that — thanks mainly to Electronic Arts — people expect so much more of their video game sports these days. Codemasters has given us a relatively bare-bones approach, complete with all the tracks and a bunch of drivers, but this franchise needs to take a cue from EA's *NASCAR*, and do whatever it can to let people know that there's more to it than turning left.

On that note, I am glad that this game does impart some of the complexity of open-wheeled driving. Its balance (at the higher difficulty settings) is tuned so that you have to tinker with your car if you want to win races. This means that I hope you have the patience to run practice laps, bring your car into the garage, fix a few things, return for more laps, and do it all over again until things are perfect. To get a grip on all of this, Codemasters gives us the Masterclass lessons. However, selling the public on the nuances of racing is very difficult, and it's at this juncture that it's going to lose a lot of players who are looking for something else. And let me take this chance to tell you that you ain't gonna find that comfort in the graphics.

If an Indy car crashes and nobody sees it, does that mean it really happened? In a similar question of perception, this franchise is going to have to try extra hard for it to get noticed in the future. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Codemasters has its racing pedigree, but this is a fairly bland game that seeks to cover the Indy bases and little else.

> **Graphics:** See above where I use the word "bland."

> **Sound:** The spotter doesn't tell you who's around you — very, very dangerous.

> **Playability:** Changing the weight jacket and fuel mixture on the fly is pretty cool.

> **Entertainment:** There is some depth here, but unless your last name is Unser, I don't think you'll be captivated enough to really explore it.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion 6.5

Barring the obvious point that Indy racing is a niche sport to begin with, Codemaster's new Indy entry pretties up the earlier version and offers an extensive simulator of left-turn racing. That being said, the game still looks pretty heinous and the Masterclass training exercises seem to have been cut together by a high school digital arts class. A nicely accurate ride, but probably too dry a treatment for many gamers. —LISA



BOTTOM LINE **5.75**

> **Concept:** Hey, a military FPS set in the near future! Never seen one of those before

> **Graphics:** Passable, but far below where any Xbox-exclusive title should be

> **Sound:** Aside from the weird hiccups in the music, the sound is easily the high point of this title

> **Playability:** Not quite as tight as the now standard Halo control scheme, but everything works as it should

> **Entertainment:** If you've ever played an FPS before, there's not a single thing about Shadow Ops that seems new or unique

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion **6.25**

You remember that chair you made in shop class? You know the one. A little shaky on its feet, not very attractive to look at – thrown together too fast? That's this game. With lackluster visuals and a gameplay world populated by enemies of dubious intelligence, it's more frustrating than fun. And while the action can be invigorating, everything seems too static and non-reactive to your actions. Like the chair, Red Mercury probably started out with a great plan and big hopes. But ultimately, if you can't sit down and enjoy it, what's the point?—**MILLER**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Shadow Ops: Red Mercury

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** ZOMBIE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 15 > **ESRB** T

IN THE SHADOW OF OTHER SHOOTERS

Initially, there may be some surprise that this game scored so poorly. It all comes down to this: Shadow Ops is a merely passable game – there are much, much better titles out there, especially in the crowded FPS genre. So with so many great shooters out there, who would want to play one that is merely okay? I sure wouldn't.

To its credit, Shadow Ops plays decently, and has an acceptable (if a bit tired) story. What hurts the game so badly is the amazing lack of realism. The AI is temble, enemies die bloodless deaths and fall to the ground in prescribed ways, and only a handful of items in the environment are destructible. But what is worse than the lack of ragdoll physics and interactive environments (both of which are more or less required in top-tier shoot-

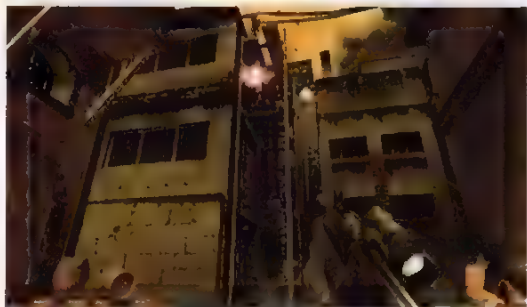
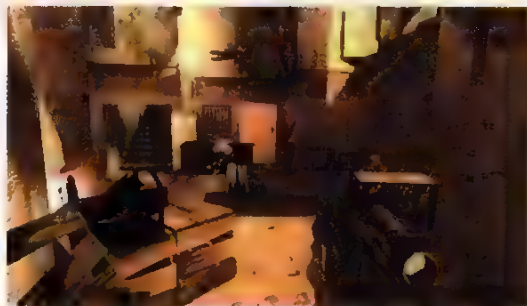
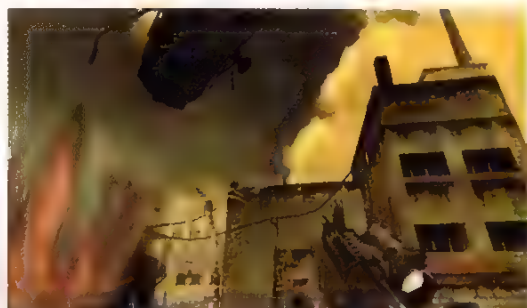
ers these days) is the fact that worlds aren't "living." Enemies appear in the same place in the overly-linear levels every single time, and don't spawn until the player reaches a specific point. Since there are no checkpoints, you'll learn where these points are pretty quickly, as dying forces you to play the level over from the start. At one point, I threw a grenade around a corner where I knew an enemy would appear. The grenade exploded, I walked forward, and the enemy appeared – he hadn't spawned until I rounded the corner and had taken no damage.

This lack of reality takes the player out of the game so severely that you begin to notice how ugly it is. Character models are blocky, textures are bland, and the color palette is dull. There

is certainly no excuse for an Xbox-only title to look this mundane.

It is nice to see a title include a bevy of multiplayer options like this one has, but they are sadly every bit as mediocre as the single player mode. Co-op is only available on split-screen, and the Live/system link options are limited to the familiar deathmatch, team deathmatch, capture the flag, and escort games. The multiplayer maps run smoothly on Xbox Live, but are even more visually banal and by-the-numbers.

Those who are obsessed with playing every military shooter out there may find something to enjoy about Shadow Ops, but it simply comes down to this: Why have a White Castle hamburger when you could have a juicy steak?—**JEREMY**



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Assaulting a base requires support to be successful



Tons of foliage provides ample cover for infantry

PC

Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 150-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** NOVALOGIC
 > **DEVELOPER** NOVALOGIC > **RELEASE** JUNE 15 > **ESRB** T



A BIGGER, BETTER BATTLEFIELD

You know who you are. You're the people that made Battlefield the juggernaut it is. You're the gamers who love nothing better than fragging your hearts out online for twenty hours per week. You're the ones who know that playing against AI has nothing on testing your mettle against other humans around the globe. And you all have a new addiction — Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising.

The first few hours of gameplay that you put into Joint Ops might not deliver the kind of fun that you expect. It's not as pretty as UT 2004, it doesn't have the sound design of BF Vietnam, and can't match the fast-paced tactical action of Counter-Strike. What it does have, though, is rock-solid netcode and the most exquisite balancing and map design I've ever seen. Spawn-killing happens, but isn't usually problematic. All of the classes (Rifleman, Gunner, Medic, Engineer, and Sniper) feel equally effective when used properly. Vehicles are plentiful, but they are neither overwhelming nor deathtraps. Once

you start getting drawn into the strategies that evolve for each map and gametype, and begin to develop a rapport with your team, the sky is the limit on how deep Joint Ops can get.

On the technical front, NovaLogic clearly focused all of their efforts on making the engine as smooth as possible in regards to framerate and lag. Even on a full 150-player server, I had very few problems with desync, choppiness, or teleporting enemies. Also, NovaLogic's Web service, NovaWorld, takes care of all of the stat-tracking and punk-busting a gamer could ask for. The flip side of this, of course,

"...the sky is the limit on how deep Joint Ops can get."



Rolling deep is the only way to go

is that Joint Ops looks like Black Hawk Down with a lot more foliage and better draw distance. When you're trying to make your way through 50 bad guys worth of fire to revive your fallen teammates in no man's land you don't really notice, though.

The only real issues with Joint Ops, besides its somewhat dated look, are intrinsic to the hugeness of the title. Sometimes, if your team is staffed with morons who don't form up into fire teams and fill up the vehicles, it can really bite to run across the enormous maps. Likewise, if a server isn't somewhat close to capacity, the massive levels can feel as empty as the Moon. Also, with the way that the Advance and Secure gametype is set up, matches can go on a bit too long since it's so hard to finish off the other team. But once you find a good server to play on (which I didn't have any problems at all doing), it's awfully hard to tear yourself away from the screen. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Take online FPS to the next level

> **Graphics:** Not the prettiest thing ever, but it runs silky smooth at all times

> **Sound:** The whine of bullets whizzing past you is unnerving, though some of the weapons sound like cap guns

> **Playability:** Even newbs can fly aircraft! Plus, the roll-while-prone feature is awesome

> **Entertainment:** This is easily the best way to get your military online mayhem on

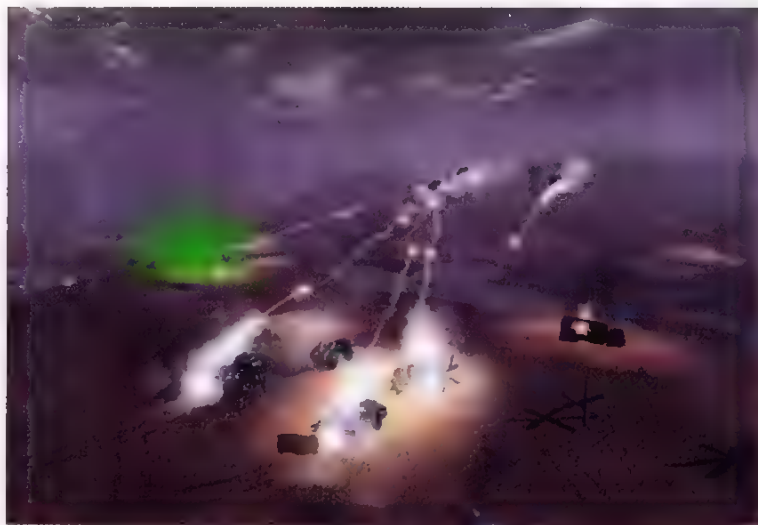
> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion

This game is huge. That's why you'll both love and hate it. You and 149 fellow online gamers will have all sorts of options to customize your characters and make them unique, both in terms of weaponry and skills as well as your in-game strategy and tactics. While the graphics are nothing mind-boggling, they do allow for a varied array of buildings, vegetation, and other environmental objects to be presented simultaneously. Because of the potential for so many players, the maps are vast. The numerous vehicle options are all pretty cool, but they end up being used mostly for transport and not assault, simply because it's so easy to blow them to hell with a well placed rocket or mine. Consequently, you'll find yourself either walking a lot or dying a lot. And then you'll respawn back where you started, and get to start walking again — kind of a pain. This frustration is balanced against an absorbing involvement in the borderline epic conflicts you'll be fighting in, which should keep multiplayer fraggers coming back for more again. —MILLER



Choppers, despite their intimidation factor, are more useful for transport than anything else



PC

Ground Control II: Operation Exodus

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
> **DEVELOPER** MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** JUNE 22 > **ESRB** T

A SERIOUS CONTENDER

It's nice to see an RTS that actually gives the heavies of the genre a run for their money. *Ground Control II: Operation Exodus* isn't quite among the top three titles of its kind, but it's head and shoulders above a good 95 percent of RTSs released. Plus, the campaign actually tells a story that makes you want to keep playing.

The defining characteristic of a great RTS is that it makes you balance resources, strategy, and tactics to emerge victorious. Most lean in one direction or the other, and this is no exception—the focus here is clearly on intense small to medium-scale battles. Between exquisitely balanced units, a good cover mechanic for infantry, and true line-of-sight, these battles are executed extremely well. Couple that with one of the best presentations around, and *GC II* delivers a tactical experience that is not to be denied.

The only knock against this title are in the depth department. Not the depth of strategy, tactics, or gameplay—that's all offered in spades.

There are only two factions, you see; and though they play quite differently, the fact remains that two isn't a very large number. Also, multiplayer doesn't have that feeling of perfect balance and infinite replayability that I've seen elsewhere. Don't get me wrong, it's still fun for a while, but I just don't see anyone staying up until the break of dawn to keep playing.

Still, *Ground Control II* delivers some of the best RTS action around. Its presentation is top-notch and will draw more than a few dropped jaws. The campaign is challenging without being cheap, and my units' behaviors never caused my mouse to get launched across the office. If you enjoy strategy gaming, you'll be well served by spending some time controlling this ground.—**ADAM**



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Bring the tactical gameplay of the original into line with RTS conventions

> **Graphics:** Absolutely incredible. Amazingly detailed units, lovely vistas, and impressive effects make this a sight to see

> **Sound:** Voiceovers are not only acceptable, they're actually pretty good! Units could have more acknowledgements, though

> **Playability:** Except for a very few pathfinding issues, it's just about perfect

> **Entertainment:** Only the smallest amount of content holds this back from dominating the genre

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.75

The new *Ground Control* succeeds in almost every category one might hope for with an RTS. Breathtaking visuals serve as the backdrop for a profoundly well-balanced strategy experience. The simple story is finely executed with quality voice actors and scripting leading the way. *Combat* manages to fit into that glorious niche between intelligent tactics and heart-thumping action. The already steep difficulty is unfortunately increased by some minor camera problems. However, so much else in this game works so well I'd readily recommend it to any and all fans of the genre.—**MILLER**

UNLIMITED ENABLED
PC

Singles: Flirt Up Your Life

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** DEEP SILVER
> **RELEASE** MAY 24 > **ESRB** AO



WINK WINK, NUDGE NUDGE

Let's be clear: *Singles*, in the end, is all about the horizontal hula. You'll play the roles of two lonely urban roomies looking to sow their wild oats. And since everyone knows how great an idea it is to start dating your roommate, they begin doing exactly that. You'll pick from a dozen pre-made characters, and even get the surprisingly forward-thinking option of same-sex couples. Starting out in an upper floor flat you'll manage the day-to-day activities of your modernistic, angst-ridden twenty-somethings as they discover the joys of love, lust, and Ikea furniture for the first time. And they had better discover it with each other since there doesn't seem to be anybody else in the world outside of their apartment. Maybe the implication is you need to get these two to make the beast with two backs just to repopulate the species...

Your characters look fantastic—with uniformly expressive facial features and a degree of anatomical correctness that would make a pirate blush. Gameplay is split between two tasks: First, you'll need to manage the mundane aspects of living—cooking, cleaning, showering, and all

the other sundry boredoms of life. Second, you'll slowly build a relationship between the two shag-starved apartment tenants. Your ultimate goal is to advance their romantic attraction to the point that they can engage in some healthy carnal gymnastics, and eventually fall in love and marry. The funny thing is you won't see them dancing the mattress jig anytime too soon. The remarkably conservative relationship has them making small talk for a long time before they even tentatively embrace. There's also some lewd, innuendo-laden conversations that periodically pop up to advance the "story" of their relationship.

Sadly, the game lacks the customization flexibility and long-term appeal of the game it is so clearly modeled after, *The Sims*. The only true victory that *Singles* can claim is the chance to vacuum the house in your birthday suit. Ironically, just like a relationship built entirely on the nookie, *Singles* ends up feeling more than a little shallow after the first few one night stands you spend playing it. But if you've long desired a title all about shaking the sheets, then by all means play the game of twenty toes and plug on in.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Hop on the good foot and do the bad thing

> **Graphics:** Detailed characters and environments look great even when you zoom in disturbingly close

> **Sound:** Grating European club music on repeat doesn't exactly set the mood

> **Playability:** A blatant spoof of *The Sims* interface is simple and easy to navigate

> **Entertainment:** Voyeuristic curiosity might keep you interested for a few days—just don't expect a long term relationship

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 7

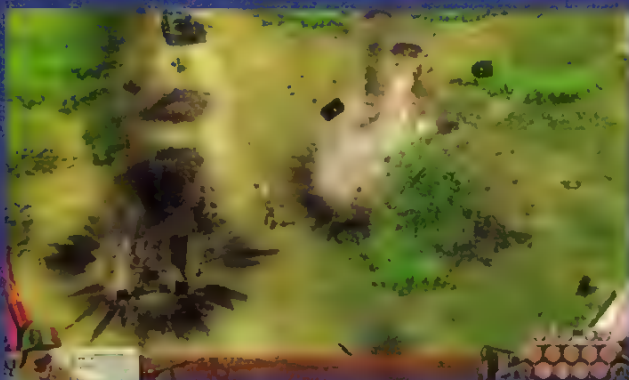
More than anything, *Singles* feels like a test of concept instead of a full-fledged game. Many will get a titillated giggle (oh, a pun!) from the title, but I think that another entry is required to truly flesh (I swear I'll stop now) it out. In all seriousness, the amusement factor is there—but for more than the cheap thrills, I think that *Singles* could become really, really interesting given enough time. I'd like to see an almost psychological relationship simulator—as it stands, *Singles* just makes it look like women are a pain and "the big act" is kinda boring.—**LISA**

PC

Soldiers: Heroes of World War II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** BEST WAY > **RELEASE** JUNE 29 > **ESRB** T

HEROIC BOREDOM



As much as we bemoan control, lack of documentation (how the hell am I supposed to know what a Russian PTRS does?), and spotty stealth bring Soldiers down, it's the sheer tedium of a moment that prevents any enjoyment of the cool features it offers. For instance, take reloading a tank. There are seven discrete steps to accomplish this menial task, and every single one of them was about as much fun as calculus. Everything in Soldiers is like that—accurate, but painfully boring.

This is a shame, given the potential of this war. The damage models for vehicles are brilliant, cover is implemented really well, and pretty much every piece of the environment can be blown straight to hell. It's all for naught though, because only the hardest-core war junkie will find the willpower to slog through the vast stretches of boredom. The pearls of brilliance hidden under Soldiers' skin. —ADAM

PC

Besieger

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** INFERNO/POWER > **DEVELOPER** PRIMAL SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** MAY 24 > **ESRB** M

DESIGN TRUMPS TECHNOLOGY



Besieger is exactly what I need to see in a RTS game: just about every feature of control that you could ask for, and flat on its face when it comes to gameplay.

The thing that makes this a boring title is what should be its saving grace: siege combat. With huge units like battering rams, siege towers, and airships, it would seem that destruction and chaos would be the order of the day. Such is not the case, since units die so quickly under enemy fire and the odds you face are typically stacked heavily against you. The wretched unit AI makes constantly monitoring your armies a necessity, as they quickly run off to their doom without your guidance. Combine all of these issues with weak multiplayer and a lame campaign, and Besieger comes up a bit shy of good. The engine, with its totally free camera movement and lack of slowdown even with enormous amounts of stuff on screen, is well done. Uninspired design, however, keeps this title firmly lodged in the B-class of RTS. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Solve tactical problems in a detailed, fully 3D RTS framework.

> **Graphics:** The deformable environments are gorgeous, and there's an animation for every single action you can perform.

> **Sound:** Passable, but never really made me feel like I was under heavy fire.

> **Playability:** Everything you do is a counterintuitive, frustrating chore.

> **Entertainment:** In a market flooded with RTS titles, there's no room for this subpar entry.

> **Replay Value:** Low.

Second Opinion

I hate to score this graphically impressive game so poorly, but after the mordinately frustrating experience had trying to decipher it, I'm left feeling that Soldiers borders on non-playable. With a dreadful control mechanism, completing any single action in the game is so labored and monotonous it's hard to ever immerse oneself in the detailed historical account being presented. If war were this boring we'd probably finally have world peace—if for no other reason than the soldiers would be fast asleep. —MILLER

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Fail to create a fun game, despite an excellent engine.

> **Graphics:** Gorgeous, though the slow response could be better.

> **Sound:** Put that CD player to good use, because two minutes with this noise is enough for a lifetime.

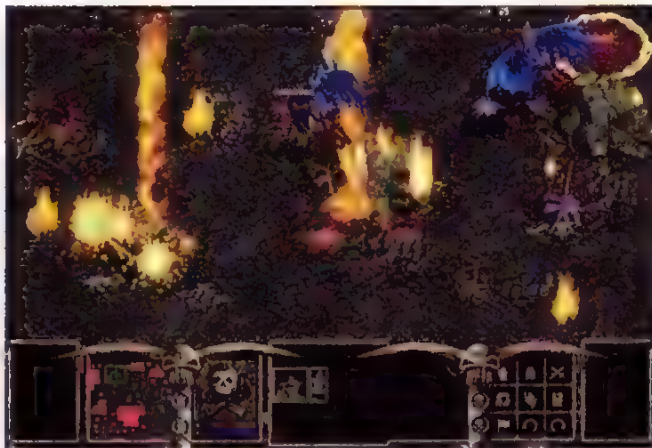
> **Playability:** You can orient your formations for the first time since Myth. Praise all that's holy!

> **Entertainment:** Today's lesson: Good technology is useless on bad design.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low.

Second Opinion

If there's one thing I like more than destroying things, it's destroying them in a big way. Unfortunately, despite its gunpowder-packed dingbats, Besieger rarely gathers enough steam to crest over average. The AI is so bad at times that it feels like you're controlling distractible second graders instead of soldiers. If I were going to baby-sit, I'd rather do it next door so I can at least help myself to the pudding pops in the fridge. —JOE



PC

Warlords Battlecry III

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ENLIGHT > **DEVELOPER** INFINITE INTERACTIVE > **RELEASE** MAY 17 > **ESRB** M

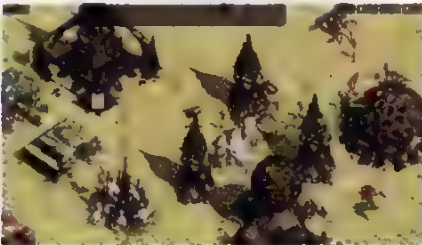
KEEPING IT SIMPLE

With the slew of RTS titles released over the past year, you'd think that reviewing another one would fill me with nothing but loathing. However, Warlords Battlecry III manages to overcome its deficiencies and deliver a worthwhile old-school romp through the world of Etheria.

Right from the start, you'll be astounded by the amount of content in WBC III. 16 races, 13 schools of magic, and 28 hero classes make for a staggering number of options. They're anything but mere cosmetic differences, too—playing the same race with another hero can result in a completely new experience. As you progress through the campaign, you'll be faced with plenty more choices: which battles to fight, where to go, what items to equip on your avatar, and which units to accept into your retinue for future combats. This RPG-like structure accounts for the lion's share of the enjoyment here, as leveling your hero up to be a one-man (or woman) invasion force is as compelling as it always is.

Gameplay is textbook RTS, but with some nice additions that would be awesome were they more consistent. The ability to set formations is great, but too clunky to do on the fly. Telling your forces what attitude (aggressive, scout, etc.) to cop is a wonderful idea, but many of the scripts don't work like they should. Multiplayer is serviceable, though not up to the standards of the genre's heavy hitters. Additionally, friendly unit AI is sometimes soul-crushingly stupid while enemy AI is very reminiscent of WarCraft II, and the normal difficulty setting is a total joke for anyone with a lick of RTS experience.

None of these shortcomings, however, get so obnoxious that they kill the fun factor. If you're more of an offline gamer, and are looking for the satisfaction inherent in kicking your enemies up and down the map while developing an ever-more-invincible hero, Warlords Battlecry III is for you. —ADAM



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Take a mediocre implementation of RTS concepts and somehow make it fun.

> **Graphics:** Acceptable, but the only camera view is zoomed a bit too far out.

> **Sound:** Having only a few music tracks gets old quickly.

> **Playability:** I deeply appreciate the fact that the resource-gathering is mostly automatic, freeing up my attention for the mighty armies I command.

> **Entertainment:** Despite all its flaws, the joys of powering up your persistent hero make for a good single-player time.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion

It would be easy to write Battlecry III off for the simple reason that the graphics and most of the interface, while acceptable, are nowhere near the standards of today's biggest and best real-time strategy games. From the 2D look and unimpressive models to the annoying lack of camera control, Battlecry has its fair share of problems, but it also has some solid gameplay mechanics. The ability to create your character from a wide variety of races and classes gives the game a nice personal touch. Unfortunately, the in-game model doesn't reflect your creation as much as I would like. Overall, Battlecry III is standard RTS fare with mediocre graphics, but like the previous editions there are some cool things you can do, like level-up and outfit your hero with items, which I find to be the most endearing part of the series. —ANDY

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Sabre Wulf

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** RARE > **RELEASE** JUNE 7 > **ESRB** E



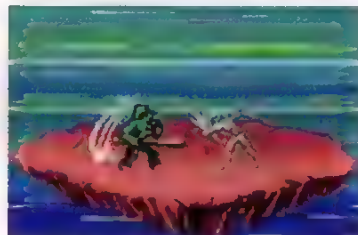
It took me a while to figure out exactly why I didn't like this game. After all, the visuals look great, the sound bites are hilarious, and it has some inventive puzzle solving. The problem is — and I sincerely hope this isn't becoming a habit for Rare — it's about as fun as a bowl of wheat. And not Frosted Mini-Wheats, either. The gameplay is overly repetitive, sending you into lair after lair trying to steal treasure back from the lupine kleptomaniac, Sabrewulf. Then you need to escape, which could be exciting if it weren't for the fact that the Wulf is a total chump, easily duped by the simplest jumping tricks. Once the charm of the graphics and sound wear off, the challenge of Sabre Wulf lies not in recovering treasure, but rather mustering the will to continue playing.—**JOE**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Duel Masters: Sempai Legends

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** MISTIC SOFTWARE/C4 DIGITAL > **RELEASE** JUNE 1 > **ESRB** E



If Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh did the big nasty, Duel Masters: Sempai Legends would be the progeny. In such, this is a card game set within the framework of an RPG. Although the character movement is a little too stiff for my liking, the worlds that you traverse are colorful and loaded with detail. Many of the

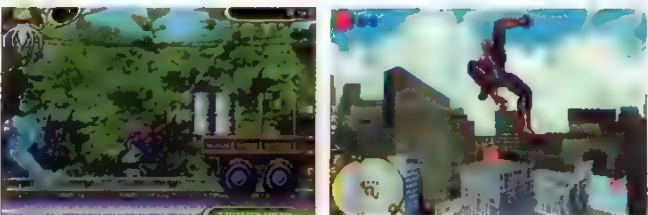
people that you can converse with also wish to duel. It'll be up to you to build a dominating deck that will crush any and all challengers. The card battling is ripe with strategies, and features over 180 different cards. Don't fret, you won't be summoning happy-go-lucky animals. All of the monsters look like cold-blooded killers that just crawled out of hell. In this regard, Duel Masters has more of an adult appeal, yet proves to be just as enjoyable as the Yu-Gi-Oh and Pokémon titles.—**REINER**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Spider-Man 2

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ECLIPSE > **RELEASE** JUNE 29 > **ESRB** E



This itty-bitsy Spider dazzles the eye with impressive three-dimensional web swinging, comic book inspired visuals, and gorgeous animations for the arachnid's vast arsenal of moves. Unfortunately, it is easily squashed when it comes to the delivery of thrills. You know you are in for a world of hurt when a game begins with a frustrating timed pizza delivery mission. The 3D web swinging has improved significantly, and the selection of moves that you have at your fingertips is expansive, but to much dismay, the difficulty isn't as blistering, and the missions just suck. I love the gameplay, but there really needed to be a more engrossing game around it.—**REINER**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Astro Boy: Omega Factor

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** TREASURE/HITMAKER > **RELEASE** AUGUST 17 > **ESRB** E



A HELLION IN UNDERPANTS

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

First off, let me just say that I have zero knowledge of the Astro Boy universe, the famous anime franchise, or the upcoming animated series. About all I know about the little dude is that he looks like the illegitimate son of Betty Boop and shoots bullets out of his ass — which is fine by me. I say this not to denigrate the Astro Boy legacy, but rather to point out that this title is earning its score not by virtue of its license, but by its superb gameplay.

For those of you who hold fond memories of the NES era, put this at the top of your "must buy" list. Created through a partnership between Sega's Hitmaker studio and Treasure, the company behind the cult classic GameCube shooter Ikaruga, Astro Boy demonstrates once again just how compelling classic 2D gameplay can be when it's done right.

Although a Sega product, Astro Boy is actually more reminiscent of Capcom's Mega Man franchise. Like Mega Man, our hero is equipped with a number of robotic powers, including a finger laser, jet boosters that allow for quick dash moves across the screen, and a handful of awesome special attacks. Whether flying in the air or on foot, Astro takes on all comers in hyperkinetic style, darting around at light speed, blasting and punching foes like an underwear-

sporting dynamo.

It's also a reminder of just how much skill was required to best the best of the 8-bit consoles. Astro Boy constantly keeps you on your toes, throwing new styles of gameplay and bosses at the player at a rapid rate. Mastery of your special attacks is paramount to survival, as (in true Treasure style) this title chucks hordes of on-screen enemies and fire at you. Because it's nearly impossible to avoid all the chaos through quick maneuvering, specials (which eradicate all bullets in their path) allow you that brief respite necessary to make your way to the next safe area. Also, since you can't be hit while performing a quick-dash, staying extremely mobile is also in your best interest. For those that do make it through, there's a very cool plot twist and a new mode that opens up at the end.

Astro Boy is definitely one of the highlights of gaming for me in 2004, and its pure and simple action is a perfect antidote to the poorly executed, overblown titles that clog store shelves these days.—**MATT**



- > **Concept:** A thrilling return to the days of 8-bit side-scrolling action
- > **Graphics:** Aside from the large enemies being very pixelated and brief bouts of slowdown, Astro Boy has a vivid and stylish look
- > **Sound:** An excellent old-school video game soundtrack
- > **Playability:** This difficult title gives you all the tools for success, and pushes your reflexes to their limits
- > **Entertainment:** This is as much fun as I've had with a game in a long time
- > **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Don't let the underpants fool you. Packed into this little cartridge is one of the most enjoyable GBA titles you're likely to find. The game mechanic is unique, and the difficulty, though high, ramps up at a steady pace. The occasional slowdown or heavily pixelated image really does little to lessen the fun. While Astro Boy is a relatively recent addition to American pop culture, he was quite literally the original manga and anime character that established that style in Japan. The game itself is chock full of the late Osamu Tezuka's (the man many consider the father of the medium) characters, and it serves as a fitting tribute that this game delivers those iconic characters in such a challenging and rewarding way.—**MILLER**



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For May 2004 Based On Units Sold

1 RED DEAD REVOLVER



You know why this game sold so well? Kevin Costner. We heard that he personally bought 10,000 copies of this game in hopes that it would help revive interest in the western genre. If westerns are hip again, he can finally get financing for his *Dances With Wolves* sequel: *Tangos With Aardvarks*.

2 NBA BALLERS



Did you know a basketball-themed cooking show is in the works? Yep, it's called *NBA Melonballers*. On this show, pros like Tim Duncan will show you how to make beautiful garnishes out of fruits and vegetables. If anyone knows how to throw a successful dinner party, it's the Dunkereno!

3 FIGHT NIGHT 2004



We want a game based on *Fright Night*, the '80s vampire movie. The stars Chris Sarandon and William Ragsdale went on to play Jack Skellington and Herman from *Herman's Head*. Maybe they should make a game about those two characters! Who wouldn't love an adventure about a neurotic yuppie and his skeleton friend?

4 MVP BASEBALL 2004



Last night, we had a dream that we were playing baseball with the Super Friends. Aquaman was the pitcher, and Superman played center field. Of course, Batman was the designated hitter. It's funny, but we usually have dreams like this when we eat food we find under the radiator.

5 SHREK 2



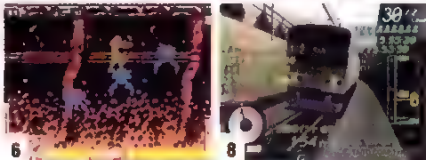
Did you know that the movie *Shrek 2* is actually based on a Malaysian book called "The Great Green Swamp Beast Desecrates the Tomb of the Vomiting Dead"? Yeah, it's true. Or maybe we just don't have anything to say about a mediocre licensed game. It's either one or the other.

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Red Dead Revolver	N/A	PS2	8	05/04	\$48
2	NBA Ballers	2	PS2	8	04/04	\$38
3	Fight Night 2004	N/A	PS2	9	04/04	\$48
4	MVP Baseball 2004	4	PS2	9.25	03/04	\$48
5	Shrek 2	N/A	PS2	7	03/04	\$50
6	Red Dead Revolver	N/A	XBOX	8	03/04	\$49
7	Transformers	N/A	PS2	7	03/04	\$50
8	Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	N/A	PS2	8.5	05/04	\$49
9	Shrek 2	N/A	GBA	N/A	05/04	\$30
10	Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	N/A	PS2	9	04/04	\$50
11	Samurai Warriors	N/A	PS2	7.5	05/04	\$50
12	Halo	9	XBOX	9.5	11/01	\$29
13	Hitman: Contracts	10	PS2	7.25	04/04	\$50
14	Pokémon Colosseum	5	GC	7	03/04	\$48
15	Shrek 2	N/A	GC	7	05/04	\$50
16	Van Helsing	N/A	PS2	7	05/04	\$49
17	Custom Robo	N/A	GC	5.75	05/04	\$40
18	Fight Night 2004	N/A	XBOX	9	04/04	\$49
19	Mario vs. Donkey Kong	N/A	GBA	7.5	05/04	\$29
20	NBA Street Vol. 2	N/A	PS2	9	04/03	\$20

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/FRSIS® • David Riley 516-625-2271

TOP 10 JAPAN

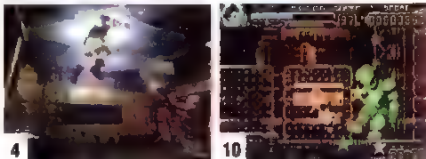
Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Super Robot Taisen MX	N/A	PS2
2	Jissen Pachislot	N/A	PS2
3	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	N/A	PS2
4	Wario World	N/A	GC
5	Atelier Iris: Eternal Manar	N/A	PS2
6	Metroid Zero Mission	N/A	GBA
7	Pikmin 2	1	GC
8	Densha De Go! Final	N/A	PS2
9	Pokémon: Fire Red/Leaf Green	5	GBA
10	Kirby And The Amazing Mirror	4	GBA



Source: Game Japan - Based On Monthly Units Sold

TOP 10 GI

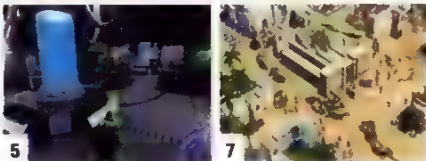
Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Pikmin 2	N/A	GC
2	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	6	Multi
3	Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay	1	Xbox
4	Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	3	Multi
5	City Of Heroes	2	PC
6	Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	N/A	PC
7	Ground Control II: Operation Exodus	N/A	PC
8	Mega Man Anniversary Collection	5	Multi
9	Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	4	PS2
10	Astro Boy: Omega Factor	N/A	GBA



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	N/A	\$22
2	City Of Heroes	1	\$47
3	Far Cry	5	\$38
4	Battlefield Vietnam	3	\$37
5	Star Wars: Jedi Academy	N/A	\$26
6	Rise Of Nations	7	\$34
7	Age Of Mythology	N/A	\$33
8	Rise Of Nations: Thrones & Patriots	4	\$26
9	Unreal Tournament 2004	6	\$38
10	The Sims Deluxe Edition	8	\$27



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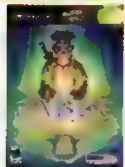
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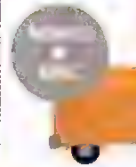


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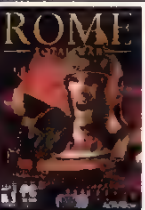


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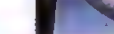
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All-Star Baseball 2005	7	Apr-04
American Idol	6.25	Feb-04
Backyard Wrestling		
Don't Try This at Home	5.5	Dec-03
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	8.5	Feb-04
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Beyond Good And Evil	8	Dec-03



Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain - PS2 - May-04

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Crimson Sea 2	7	Apr-04
Culdcept	8	Dec-03
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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
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
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	Jan-04
Galactic Wrestling		
Featuring Ultimate Muscle	4.25	Jun-04
Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	7.5	Mar-04
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Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jun-04
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Hitman Contracts	7.25	Jun-04
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Hi-Ninja	7.5	Jan-04
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Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
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King of Fighters 2000/2001	7.75	Dec-03
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Legacy of Kain: Defiance	8	Jan-04
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The Return of the King, The	8.25	Dec-03
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Monster Racer 4	8.25	Dec-03
MTX: Mototrax	7.5	Apr-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
MX Unleashed	8	Mar-04
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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 Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NCAA March Madness 2004	8.25	Jan-04
Need For Speed: Underground	9.5	Dec-03
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
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Onimusha Blade Warriors	8	Mar-04
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	9	Jun-04

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Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	9.5	Dec-03
Psi-Ops: The Mandate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
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Ratchet and Clank: Going Commando	9.5	Dec-03
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Whiplash	4	Jan-04
Winning Eleven 7	9.25	Feb-04
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Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrath Unleashed	8	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

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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
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Go! Go! Hypergrind!	7.75	Dec-03
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	7	Jan-04
GoTcha	8	Jan-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-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
Mano Kart: Double Dash	9.25	Dec-03
Mano Party 5	2	Dec-03
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	7.5	Dec-03
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
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



Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes - GC - May-04

NBA Live 2004	8.25	Dec-03
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
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
Scoby Dool: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Sims: Hit and Run	8.5	Nov-03
Sims: Bustin' Out: The	9	Jan-04
Sensum Sam: The Next Encounter	7.75	May-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Sonic Heroes	7.75	Jan-04
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SSX 3	9.5	Nov-03
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XBOX

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Beyond Good and Evil	8	Dec-03
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Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	8	Jan-04
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Curse: The Eye of Isis - Xbox - Feb-04

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Haunted Mansion, The	7	Feb-04
Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jun-04
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
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MTX: Mototrax	7.5	Apr-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
MX Unleashed	8	Mar-04
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
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
Need For Speed: Underground	9.25	Dec-03
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
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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
Steel Battalion Line of Contact	7.5	May-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Suffering, The	8.25	Apr-04
SWAT: Global Strike Team	7.5	Nov-03
Tenchu: Return from Darkness	7.25	Apr-04
Theif: Deadly Shadows	7.25	Jul-04
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
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Voodoo Vince	8.5	Nov-03
Whiplash	6.75	Feb-04
World Championship Pool 2004	6	Mar-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrath Unleashed	7.5	Feb-04
WWF 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
City of Heroes	9	Jul-04
Civization 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	6	Jun-04
Deus Ex: Invisible War	9.5	Jan-04
Dungeons 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

PS2

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
City of Heroes	9	Jul-04
Civization 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		



SECRET ACCESS

Codes, Strategies, Hints, Droids, And Tips

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

MTX Mototrax

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

From the main menu, select Options and then Cheats. Enter these codes there.

Extra Fast Bikes – JH345

Unlock All Movies – 23F71CS

Unlock Maggot Rider and Slipknot

Bike – 86657457

PLAYSTATION 2

Karaoke Revolution Volume 2

Enter these at the main title screen to unlock bonus t-shirts. If you do it correctly, the game will automatically advance to the next screen and save.

Game Informer (for Angela) – Down, L3 (x2), R3 (x2), ○, Right, □, L3, R3

Harmonix (for Ishani) – L3, ○, Up, ○, □, L3, Down (x2), R3

Konami (for Dwyane) – Right, R3, Right, R3, □, Right, ○, □, Down, Left



Shrek 2

During gameplay, pause and look at the Scrapbook. Enter this code on that screen. A voiceover will confirm correct entry.

Unlock All Levels – Left, Up, X, ○, Left, Up, X, ○, Left, Up, X, ○, Up (x5)

Samurai Warriors

Finish the corresponding campaign(s) to unlock the new heroes.

Goemon – Okuni

Keichi Maeda – Kenshin Uesugi

Kunoichi – Hanzo Hattori and Shingen

Magoichi – Any campaign

Masamune – Any two campaigns

Nobunaga Oda – Magoichi, Noh, and Ochi

Noh – Ranmaru Mori

Okuni – Keiji Maeda

Ranmaru Mori – Mitsuhide Akechi

Shingen – Sanada

UNLIMITED ENABLED

Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain

Unlockable Missions – To unlock the bonus missions, you must get the par time on all of the regular (non-bonus) missions that precede it. To obtain the par time, you must accomplish all of the single-player objectives and parameters within the time limit. Check out the Unlimited section of Game Informer Online to find walkthroughs, hints, and objective lists to cut this tall order down to size.

SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs

Give your team these voice commands for some entertainment.

Get Pumped Up – "Intimidate"

Incite Insubordination – "Bravo kill me"

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

At the title screen, enter this to add a sound effect to your turtle's footsteps.

Squeaky Feet – Up (x2), Down (x2), Left, Right, Left, Right, X, ○



Enter these codes at the Password screen of the options menu. The different power-up codes give separate bonuses.

Goofy Sound Effects – SMMSR
Unlock Playmates Toys – LSDRM
Unlock Splinter in Story Mode – MSRLS

DONATELLO
Alternate Costume – DDSMS
Power-Up 1 – DRLDS
Power-Up 2 – SSSMR
Power-Up 3 – DMDRS

LEONARDO
Alternate Costume – LDMSR
Power-Up 1 – LMLSD
Power-Up 2 – MRLLM
Power-Up 3 – LLSLR
Unlimited Shuriken – SMRDM

Red Dead Revolver



EXCELLENT RATING REQUIREMENTS

These numbers correspond to the minimum ratings you have to get to earn an Excellent on the mission.

	Completion Time	Damage Taken	Accuracy	Combo Money
Bull's Eye	5:30	40	50%	\$150
Bounty Hunter	3:50	100	66%	\$200
Ugly Streetfight	5:00	125	70%	\$200
Railroaded	6:20	200	60%	\$120
Carnival Life	8:00	200	66%	\$200
Freak Show	5:50	200	60%	\$200
Rogue Valley	5:00	200	66%	\$200
The Cemetery	8:20	250	75%	\$200
Range War	7:00	180	60%	\$200
Saloon Fight	10:00	200	66%	\$100
The Traitor	10:00	80	66%	\$60
Sunset Canyon	5:45	80	66%	\$200
Bear Mountain	10:00	300	66%	\$200
The Mine	3:00	100	66%	\$200
Hell Pass	10:00	200	66%	\$200
Fort Diego	9:00	200	66%	\$200
End of the Line	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$200
Devils and Angels	9:35	175	5%	\$200
Battle Finale	5:00	150	66%	\$200
The Siege	9:20	400	66%	\$200
Fall From Grace	2:30	50	20%	\$200

UNLOCKABLES

These are what you get for completing the missions.

	Good Ranking	Excellent Ranking	Bounty Hunter Mission Completed
Bull's Eye	Upgrade – Old Pistol	Level – Broken Creek	Character – Falling Star
Bounty Hunter	Character – Bloody Tom	Character – Big Oaf Whitney	Character – Curly Shaw
Ugly Streetfight	Character – Ugly Chris	Level – Freak Show	Twiggy Phelps
Railroaded	Upgrade – Owl Rifle	Character – Rico Pedrosa	Character – Sheriff Bartlett
Carnival Life	Focus (Dead-Eye) Max-Up	Character – Pig Josh	Character – Fidget
Freak Show	Health Max-Up	Upgrade – Breech Loader	Character – Professor Perry
Rogue Valley	Character – Cooper	Character – Bad Bessie	Character – Sissy Fess
Ghost Town	[nothing]	[nothing]	Character – Dig Fowler
The Cemetery	Level – Ghost Town	Character – Mr. Black	[nothing]
Range War	Level – The Ranch	Character – Holstein Hal	Character – Smitty
Saloon Fight	Character – Dan	Character – Sam	Character – Natalie
The Traitor	Level – The Bridge	Health Max-Up	Character – Natalie
Sunset Canyon	Upgrade – Twin Revolvers	Focus (Dead-Eye) Max-Up	Level – Sunset Canyon
Bear Mountain	Character – Shadow Wolf	Focus (Dead-Eye) Max-Up	Character – Grizzly
The Mine	Level – The Mine	Character – Smiley Fowler	Cheat – Sad Stars
Stagecoach	[nothing]	[nothing]	Cheat – No HUD
Hell Pass	Character – Bully	Character – Gabriel Navarro	[nothing]
Fort Diego	Health Max-Up	Character – Colonel Daren	Cheat – Bite The Bullet
End of the Line	[nothing]	[nothing]	Cheat – No Distortion
Devils and Angels	Level – The Ranch	Character – General Diego	[nothing]
Battle Finale	Focus (Dead-Eye) Max-Up	Character – Mr. Kelley	Cheat – Infinite Dead-Eye
The Siege	Level – Mansion Grounds	Character – Jason Cornet	Cheat – Golden Gun
Fall From Grace	Weapon – Scorpion Revolver	Character – Governor Griffin	Cheat – Invincibility

MICHAELANGELO

Alternate Costume	RRLMD
Power-Up 1	MRRML
Power-Up 2	MSRMM
Power-Up 3	MMSLR
Unlimited Fire Shuriken	DRDSS

RAPHAEL

Alternate Costume	DMDML
Power-Up 1	RDSRL
Power-Up 2	LRMDS
Power-Up 3	SLDMS
Power-Up 4	MSLLR

**Van Helsing**

During gameplay, enter these codes to unlock bonus movies which can be viewed in the Gallery.

Bonus Movie 1 – Up, Down, Up, Down, Left (x2), Right (x2), L1, L3, R3, R1

Bonus Movie 2 – Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up, R1, R2, R3

Bonus Movie 3 – L1, L2, R2, R1, R2, L2, L1, Up (x2), Down (x2), Select

Bonus Movie 4 – Select, L3, R3, Select, R3, L3, Select, Left (x2), Up, Right (x2)

Bonus Movie 5 – L2, R2, L1, R1, Select (x2), L1 (x2), R2 (x2), L3, R3

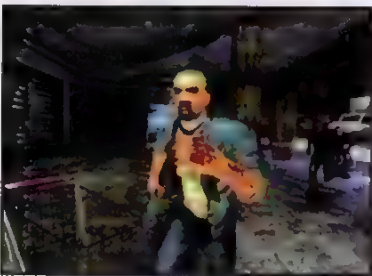
Bonus Movie 6 – R2, R1, R2, R1, L1, L2, L1, L2, Left, Right, Select (x2)

Bonus Movie 7 – L3, Left, R3, Right, L2, Up, R2, Down, L1, Left, R1, Right

XBOX**Full Spectrum Warrior**

At the cheat codes screen, enter these to enable the corresponding cheat.

Army Version	HA2P1PY9TUR5TLE
Big Head Mode	NICKWEST
Realistic Damage	SWEDISHARMY
Unlimited Ammo	MERCENARIES

**Manhunt**

To make the codes option available, you must get a five star rating in two different scenes. To get the five stars, you need to beat the level in hardcore mode with excellent stats. The codes will show up on the bonus artwork that you unlock by beating the levels in question.

Blind Hunters – Trained to Kill and Border Patrol
Deaf Hunters – Road to Ruin and White Trash

Fully Equipped – Drunk Driving and Graveyard Shift

God Mode – Every Scene
Helium Hunters – Strapped for Cash and View of Innocence

Infinite Stamina – Born Again and Doorway Into Hell

Monkey Skin – Press Coverage and Wrong Side of the Tracks

Piggy Skin – Key Personnel and Deliverance
Rabbit Skin – Kill the Rabbit and Divided They Fall

Regeneration – Fueled by Hate and Grounds for Assault

Super Punch – Mouth of Madness and Doing Time

Van Helsing

During gameplay, enter these codes to unlock bonus movies which can be viewed in the Gallery.

Bonus Movie 1 – Up, Down, Up, Down, Left (x2), Right (x2), L Button, L3, R3, R Button

Bonus Movie 2 – Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up, R Button, Black, R3

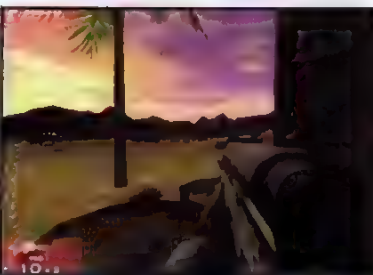
Bonus Movie 3 – L Button, White, Black, R Button, Black, White, L Button, Up (x2), Down (x2), Back

Bonus Movie 4 – Back, L3, R3, Back, R3, L3, Back, Left (x2), Up, Right (x2)

Bonus Movie 5 – White, Black, L Button, R Button, Back (x2), L Button (x2), Black (x2), L3, R3

Bonus Movie 6 – Black, R Button, Black, R Button, L Button, White, L Button, White, Left, Right, Back (x2)

Bonus Movie 7 – L3, Left, R3, Right, White, Up, Black, Down, L Button, Left, R Button, Right

PC**Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword**

During gameplay, press the tilde (~) key to bring up the console, then enter these cheats. Note that these also work with original Raven Shield.

Bring Terrorists to You	callterro
Complete Mission	completemission
Disable All Cheats	resetmeall
Disable Fly and No Clipping	walk
Disarm Every Bomb	disarmbombs
Fill Ammunition	fullammo
Fly and No Clipping	ghost
Invincible Everything	godall
Invincible Hostages	godhostage 1
Invincible Player	god
Invincible Team	godteam
Invincible Terrorists	godterro
Kill Every Terrorist	neutralizeterro
Make Immortality Okay	disablermortality
Mission Won't End	toggleunlimitedpractice
No Collision	togglecollision
Open All Levels	unlock all
Remove Every Hostage	killhostage
Remove Every NPC	killthemall
Remove Every Opponent	killpawns
Remove Every Rainbow Operative	killrainbow
Remove Every Terrorist	killterro
Rescue Every Hostage	rescuehostage

Reset Default Terrorists Settings	trothreat
Slo-Mo Deaths	nightmare
Terrorists Give Up	
When They See You	tsurrender
Terrorists Have No Stones	runaway
Terrorists Have Terrible Accuracy	tsprayfire
Terrorists Shoot Only at You	tamedfire
Terrorists Won't See You	playerinvisible
Third-Person Mode	behindview 1

GAMECUBE**Animal Crossing**

Go talk to Tom Nook and tell him you've got a code. Then enter one of the codes to get the item.

7 Block

v9GES@STRJhAA
sh09cb#9UaKHL4

Aloe

MupersmashbdoS SupersmashbroS

Amazing Painting

ebucddbklagnlg
BlMBbichCmqj3

Arwing

17r45678912345 E2345678912345

Balloon Fight

CbDahLBdaDh98d
9ub8ExZKwu7Zl

Baseball

1n5%N%8JUjE5fj IEcGr4%ync5eUp

Bench

cU3jim@hdl6Aip
zJFAEajAcBzXim

Block Flooring

666abcdn66efgh
DyGabcd6B6efgh

Brick Block

ArVhaAnUrarah
Spurling1re5&2

Coin

A9GES@STRJyZ
sh09cb39UaKHL4

Dainty Painting

ekr9bma9iom5ro
Flnomanomaro

Kiddie Bed

SupermanobroS
AnimAIcAossinG

Kiddie Bureau

MeeCAKafmeatdY
LsatloafmeatdY

Kiddie Chair

9#58UItokM6850
h%6Lskwrcmqj3

**GAME BOY ADVANCE****Crash Purple: Ripto's Rampage**

At the mode select screen, press L and R at the same time to open the cheat entry screen. Enter these there. The Wumpa Fruit codes only work once per save slot.

100 Wumpa Fruit – CR45H
200 Wumpa Fruit – G3C00

Mod World**Unreal Tournament 2004**

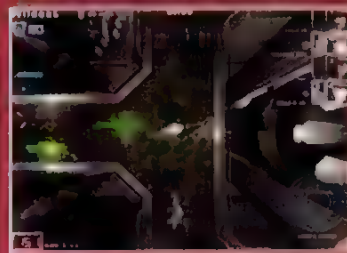
By now, everyone who cares has heard about the Unreal Tournament 2004 mod that's been making waves in the Unreal community. It's a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004. This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004. This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004.

**Red Orchestra**

This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004. This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004. This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004.



This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004. This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004. This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004.



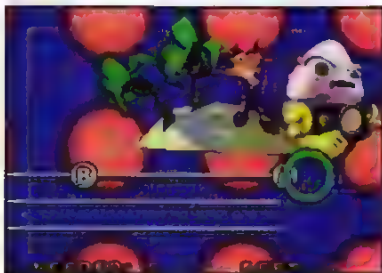
Another mod that goes the extra mile is... This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004. This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004. This is a total conversion for UT 2004, and it's a total conversion for UT 2004.

Spyro Party USA Minigame – SWINGS3T or hold down L and R while the game is booting up

River City Ransom EX

Enter these as your character name in the Status screen of the pause menu. The technique sets will override any current techniques you know.

- | | |
|------------------------|-------|
| Max Money | PLAYA |
| Max Stats | DAMAX |
| Technique Set 1 | FUZZY |
| Technique Set 2 | WUZZY |
| Technique Set 3 | WAZZY |
| Technique Set 4 | BEAR |



Spyro Orange: The Cortex Conspiracy

At the mode select screen, press L and R at the same time to open the cheat entry screen. Enter

these (except for the Crash Party one) there. Note that except for the 100 Gems code, they all reset when you turn the game off.

- 100 Gems (once per save slot)** – VISIONS
- Crash Party USA Minigame** – Hold down L and R while the game is booting up to play this goofy rhythm game.
- Orange Mode** – SP4RX
- Orange Spyro Mode** – SPYRO
- Purple Mode** – PORT4L
- Sheep Mode** – SH33P



The Legend of Zelda

To start a new game as if you had already beaten it once, enter this as your name.

Second Quest – ZELDA

Code of the Month

NBA Ballers



These should be entered in the traditional Midway style. In the five seconds before the match begins, on the screen where it shows the two Ballers about to have it out, enter these codes. The first number is how many times to press □ (PS2) or Y (Xbox), the second number is how many times to press ○ (PS2) or B (Xbox), and the third number is how many times to press △ (PS2) or X (Xbox). After doing all that, hit Right on the d-pad to lock the code in. You do have to do this fairly quickly, since you're on a short schedule – if the final loading screen pops up before you hit Right, the cheat won't work.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Alley-Oop Ability – 7-2-5 | Play As BiznezMan-A – 5-3-7 |
| Alternate Gear – 1-2-3 | Play As BiznezMan-B – 5-2-7 |
| Baby Ballers – 4-2-3 | Play As Coach – 5-6-7 |
| Back-In Ability – 1-2-2 | Play As Secretary – 5-4-7 |
| Better Free Throws – 3-1-7 | Put Back Ability – 3-1-3 |
| Big Head – 1-3-4 | Pygmy – 4-2-5 |
| Double Juice Replenish – 4-3-1 | R2R Mode – 0-0-8 |
| Expanded Move Set – 5-1-2 | Random Moves – 3-0-0 |
| Fire Ability – 7-2-2 | Show Shot Percentage – 0-1-2 |
| Great Handles – 3-3-2 | Speedy Players – 2-1-3 |
| Half House – 3-6-7 | Stunt Ability – 3-7-4 |
| Hotspot Ability – 6-2-7 | Super Back-Ins – 2-3-5 |
| Kid Ballers – 4-3-3 | Super Block Ability – 1-2-4 |
| Legal Goal Tending – 7-5-6 | Super Push – 3-1-5 |
| Paper Ballers – 3-5-4 | Super Steals – 2-1-5 |
| Pass 2 Friend Ability – 5-3-6 | Tournament Mode – 0-1-1 |
| Perfect Free Throws – 3-2-7 | Unlimited Juice – 7-6-3 |
| Play As Afro Man – 5-1-7 | Young Ballers – 4-4-3 |
| Play As Agent – 5-5-7 | |

Omar Escovar
Minot, ND

Mini-Walkthrough – Part 1

Star Ocean: Till the End of Time

Though it has stunning visuals and an intricate battle system, the latest Star Ocean sometimes leaves you wondering what to do next. In this first half of a two-part feature, you can follow our sage-like (though sometimes cruel) guidance to make it through with minimal aimless wandering.

GRANTIER HOTEL

Exit the first room and use the transporters at either end of the hallway. In the Hotel's main section, go the the northeast room and meet Peppita. With newly autographed shirt, head to the central room. Browbeat Sophia into playing in the simulator with you. Be sure to create the Battle Trophies on your memory card! Pick "Start Game" to begin your first battle. Win or lose, the story continues. Go back to the transporters and save your game before proceeding. After a few forced battles, continue on to the emergency shelter.

EMERGENCY SHELTER

Head to room 509 first, then over to room 506 to talk to Sophia. Approach the beds and choose to get some sleep. Make your way to the transporters again for another change of venue.

HELRE

Go straight ahead into the waiting room to witness an event. Move out into the hallway and enter the second door towards the east side. Watch a snooty poindexter get denied. Continue to talk to everybody in the hallway before going back to the waiting room. Go back to where you saw the poindexter and climb the stairs.



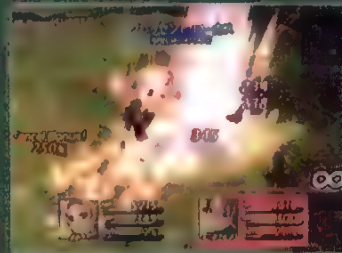
Keep heading north until you get to the bridge. Talk to Volga. Talk to Peppita and her company downstairs. Back upstairs, head south to the escape pods. Kick back for a long story sequence, eventually putting you on the planet Vanguard III.

PESOTTO FOREST

Head north through the forest, fighting some weak goo along the way. Once some punks block your way north, head northeast to find the village.

WHIPPLE

Search the village for assorted treasure chests. Check out the Manybloom General Store. Buy Ring Mail if you can afford it. Read the sign in the center of town. Go talk to the mayor in the northeastern house. Head to Niklas's house to yolk your sword back. Go back out to the woods, heading south towards your crash site. Return to Niklas's house... again. The path in the woods previously blocked by loitering punks should be clear. Use it.



RUINS OF COFFIN

Rummage around fighting things and getting treasures. Find a big house in the northernmost section of the area. Circle around the back. Beat some sense into the chumps that block your way. To spice up your life, go in the back door.

NORTON'S HIDEOUT

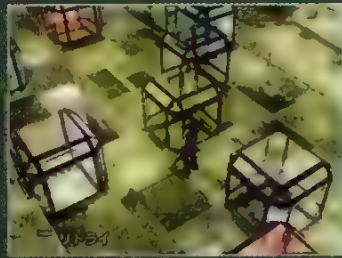
Practice using your anti-attack aura against some skeletons. Go south until there is a fork in the path. Head west to find a room. Enter code "256" into the computer terminal. Make your way back to the fork in the path. Eastward, ho! Boss fight. Fetch the Music Box Parts from the room with the computer terminal. Return to Whipple for a story event. Be sure to talk to the village chief afterwards. Back in the forest, head a bit south of your crash site to be retrieved.

EAGLE

Talk to Cliff, then talk to Mirage three times. Leave the ship to get locked up in the pokey. Meet Nel and use her in a forced fight against some guards. After the battle, you automatically enter the next area.

AIRYGLYPH AQUEDUCTS

Use the save and recovery points in front of you. Go south down the hallway. Make sure to get the chest with the Worm-Eaten Tome. In the next room, find a hole through the glacier that blocks your path. Cross a bridge to the east and find another glacier, this one with two holes.



Go through the northern opening, and continue heading north, then west. In the slippery areas, walk across the ground by holding X as you move. Keep heading west over the ice and down a corridor until you reach a save point. Boss fight. Move out to the east, continuing to walk rather than run over the ice.

ROYAL CITY OF AIRYGLYPH

Explore the city, collecting treasure and talking to townsfolk. Save and rest at the inn. Then exit the city to the east.

TRAUM MOUNTAINS

To exit, head east. Wander off to the west if you want to collect some treasures.

KIRLSA

Go shopping and collect items from the random chests lying around. Talk to Nel's subordinate in the house across from the inn. Chat with the old man by the mineshaft in the southwest corner of town. In a clearing north of the inn, witness an event involving Nel. Head north out of town into the Kirisa Caverns.

KIRLSA CAVERNS

Go east from the entrance, following the path as it winds to the west. Take care of business at the save point. Boss fight. Pull the machine's lever on the platform to the north. Exit west and loop back around to the area with the five buttons. Examine the buttons and read the manual about Hauler Beasts. Choose "Steady" and enter the mineshaft. Make turns in the following order: Left, Right, Left, Left, Left. To turn, your speed needs to be 25 kmph or lower. After the second time rocks fall, speed up to bust through three gates. Immediately decrease speed to make the final turn and exit the caverns.

BEQUEREL MOUNTAIN PATH

Your destination is to the southeast, but you can explore and pick up some goodies. Avoid enemies to the north — they are probably too tough for the moment.

ARIAS

Roam around, chat, and gather items. Then head northeast to the Lord's Mansion. Enter the back room and rendezvous with Clair. No, it's not that kind of back room. On the second floor, hop in bed after chatting with Cliff. In the morning, go downstairs and talk to Clair again.

Take the short road back to Kirisa by leaving the village to the southwest.

AIRE HILLS

Head west through the hills, picking up treasure as you go. Restock your items in Kirisa, then exit the town to the south.

GRANAH HILLS

Follow the winding path towards your ultimate goal in the southwest. Keep an eye out for treasure chests scattered about the area.

KIRLSA TRAINING FACILITY

You'll be forced into battle as soon as you enter, so be ready. From the save point, take the west corridor and circle around. In the north-south corridor on the east side, head west into a hallway. Use the door that takes you north, eventually leading to the stairs to the second floor. The next destination is the third floor. The stairs are in the northeast. There are many paths to the third floor. Just explore and gather treasure along the way. On the third floor, use the door in the north-south corridor on the west side. Talk to the two women and get the key from the youngest. Now backtrack down to the northeastern corner of the first floor. Remite with Nel and rough up a couple of knights.



Take the elevator to the second floor to grab some chests, then go to the fourth floor. Follow the path and use the save point. Boss fight. Return to Arias via Granah Hills, Kirisa, and Aire Hills. Once in Arias, stop in at headquarters to get some direction.

PALMIRA PLAINS

This is Palmira. You want Peterny. Peterny is north. Be sure to pick up the Cherubic Bust as you move through this section.

PETERNY

Do your standard recon and exploration. Find the Craftman's Guild in the west district and talk to Welch Vineyard. Tell ol' grapey that you are interested in inventing, making Item Creation available. Relax and wait for your party in front of the church in the middle of town. Watch some story events and meet Ameena. Head to the inn, talk to the clerk, and then leave while your rooms are being readied. Go to the east district and head south right away. After the event with Ameena, make your way back to the inn and talk to Nel. When you wake up, there is trouble. Awesome! Another rescue mission!

Leave Peterny through the west exit.

SANMITE STEPPE

Cross the stone bridge, get the nearby chest, then go south and west. Stay away from the northern part of this area. The monsters will snuff you out.

DUGGUS FOREST

Head to the center of the first area to meet a tired fairy. Search the area for the glowing spring, take some water, and return to the fairy. Your new companion can help identify evil trees, allowing you to fight your way west. Beware of falling rocks! If you get hit, you need to start the area over. Find a shack in the southwestern part of the forest and meet Roger S. Hudley. Fight off a couple of weaksauce thieves, free Roger, and have him help you. Boss fight. Go north and loop around to the west until you reach a save point. The next area is foggy, but follow the path towards the west until you find another spring. Boss fight. Head south for some treasure, then take the path to the northwest. Find Ameena. Say sayonara to Roger. Get whisked back to Peterny. After the story events, exit Peterny to the north.

IRISA FIELDS

Aquios lies to the north. Make your way there to advance. You can search around for treasure in the vast fields, but the enemies are fairly strong.

SACRED CITY OF AQUIOS

Meander. Open chests. Get things you haven't earned. Try to enter the house to the east of town. Meet a secret agent man. Make your way to the castle. When Nel starts to guide you, stick with her the whole way. Don't take any side-trips. Meet Queen Aquaria XXVII, then head back to the first floor. Enter the chapel and talk to Cliff, then Nel near the castle entrance. Go to your own room (towards the southeast) and rest. Meet with Elena and Dion in the southwestern part of the second floor. Watch the long story event, and emerge with an



inescapable need for copper. Exit the castle and go south. Go back through Irisa Fields, Peterny, and Palmira Plains to get to Arias again. Save in Arias and stock up. It's a long road ahead. Whomp some Dragon Knights near the northwest exit, and find yourself in the mines.

BEQUEREL MINE

Take advantage of the fact that most torches in

this dungeon can be lit.

Go north until you find a barred door. Light the torch next to it and approach again. Fight and defeat the dragon. Then equip Fayt with the Lightstone. Continue forward. At the fork, three dragons attack in quick succession. Kill them and head south. There will be a door to the west. Before entering, read the nearby tablet. Light the two torches, then stand between them so your two shadows form one line. Go through the door to the west and follow the path north. Chase the cowardly dragon down and defeat it, scoring you a key. Take the path east until you find the door the dragon's key unlocks. Enter the next room. Extinguish all torches and unequip Fayt's Lightstone to pass through the northern door. Head west, then north again until you reach another door with a stone tablet. Enter the room and go to the center, standing on the plate there. Turn off the lights by the south and west doors. Move north in such a way that your remaining shadow doesn't touch the northern door. Pass through the door, collect treasure, and head north to the save point. Boss fight. Get the copper from the northeastern corner of the room. Exit the room to the west to find another save point. Follow the path south and as it curves west and out of the mine. Once outside, you'll see a building that houses your allies. For free recovery, ask the man near the carts. Then talk to the nearby soldier. A few forced battles occur as you leave the mountain, including a... Boss fight. Afterwards, talk to the soldier near the carts. This will transport you back to the building. Full of pith and vinegar again, head towards Arias once more. Boss fight. Witness another story event, then go all the way back to Aquios via the Peterny route. Meet up with Mirage and Ameena again. After Ameena's inn event, find Dion in the castle and bring her back to the inn as well. After a series of events, Adray asks to join you. You know you want him. Head back to Arias and talk to Clair. Rest at headquarters, then talk to Clair again. Bring it on.

"GI Droid"
(location unknown — last seen punching anyone who purchases a ticket to Halle Berry's Catwoman)





FINAL FANTASY CHRONOLOGY

CLEARING UP THE QUEST



So was it *Final Fantasy II* in Japan that was released as *Final Fantasy IV* state-side? Or was *FF III* in America really number five in Japan? Wait. Was it... oh bugger, it's hard for somewhat less-rabid fans of the *Final Fantasy* series to figure out which versions came out when in what region, and we're here to help. Following is the chronology of the American *Final Fantasy* releases (through *Final Fantasy IX*, the last on the PSone), and we've even included a few oddities to round out your burgeoning collection.



US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY
> SYSTEM: NES > U.S. RELEASE: JULY 1990

ALSO AVAILABLE IN: An updated remake was released in the *Final Fantasy Origins* (PSone) collection in the spring of 2003, and a GBA version is due out in Japan later this summer. We suspect the North American release will happen this autumn.

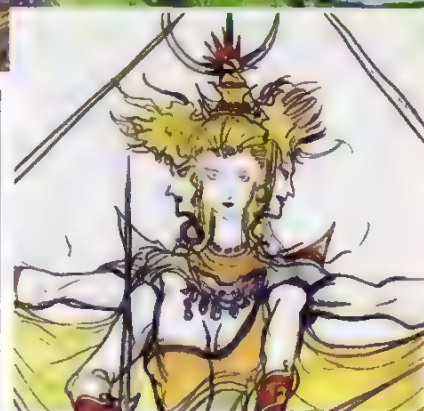
NEED TO KNOW: The WonderSwan Color version of this game is soon going to be available (along with the Super Famicom version of *Dragon Quest*) on Japanese cell phones later this year.

US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY II

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY IV - EASY
> SYSTEM: SNES > U.S. RELEASE: NOVEMBER 1991

NEED TO KNOW: Disparagingly termed *Final Fantasy IV - Easy* in Japan, this version lacks a few of the more complex features of Japan's *Final Fantasy IV* and was released as a gentle introduction to the saga.



US RELEASE TITLE:

"THE REAL" FINAL FANTASY II

(PART OF FINAL FANTASY ORIGINS)

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY II
> SYSTEM: PSONE > U.S. RELEASE: APRIL 2003

NEED TO KNOW: Confused yet? That's right, America has two very different games both named *Final Fantasy II*. "The Real" (a.k.a. Japan's *FF II*) *Final Fantasy II* became available state-side in the *Final Fantasy Origins* (PSone) collection, which is not the same game as *Final Fantasy II* released on SNES. Along with *FF I*, this title will be released in Japan and North America by the end of the year on GBA.

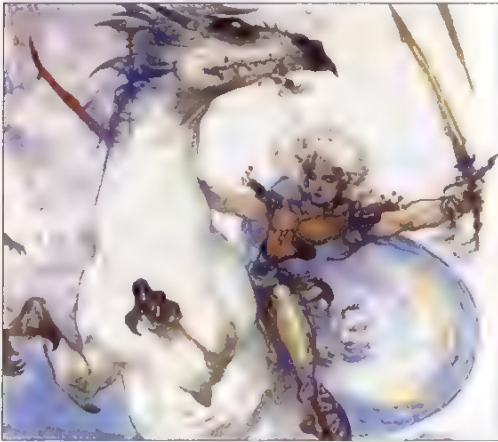


US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY III

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY VI > SYSTEM: SNES
> U.S. RELEASE: OCTOBER 1994

NEED TO KNOW: This entry introduced the concept of Limit Breaks into the Final Fantasy canon. These attacks offered a character with low health a last-ditch opportunity to inflict a massive amount of damage. Players didn't control this feature – it occurred randomly and therefore didn't factor into gameplay too much, but the concept would become more important in later FF titles.



JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY III



SYSTEM: FAMICOM > JAPANESE RELEASE: APRIL 1990

NEED TO KNOW: This is the only Final Fantasy game that has yet to be released in the U.S. – and because over a decade has passed since its initial offering, the title's probably not showing up any time soon. For the full Final Fantasy experience, it can be imported or purchased through a number of online auctions; and once you get it in your grubby little hands, extensive walkthroughs and translation guides are available on the web. Good luck.

US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY IV

(PART OF FINAL FANTASY CHRONICLES)

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY IV
> SYSTEM: PSONE > U.S. RELEASE: JUNE 2001

NEED TO KNOW: This is the Japanese game Final Fantasy IV (the hard version), with entirely new opening and closing CG sequences. The English translation, while still telling the same story, is also updated from the easier SNES release. To clarify, this is Japanese Final Fantasy IV – Hard, which includes the features taken out for the simplified American release, called Final Fantasy II (SNES) or FF IV – Easy in Japan.



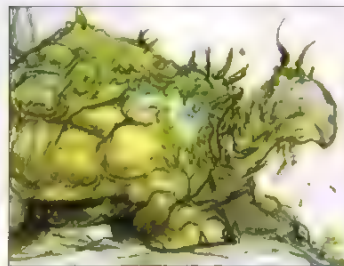
US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY V

(PART OF FINAL FANTASY ANTHOLOGY)

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY V
> SYSTEM: PSONE > U.S. RELEASE: OCTOBER 1999

NEED TO KNOW: The only North American version of FF V available is a remake of Japan's 1992 release. Notable in Japan for introducing the Active Time Battle system, the American Anthology edition includes all-new CG cinemas.



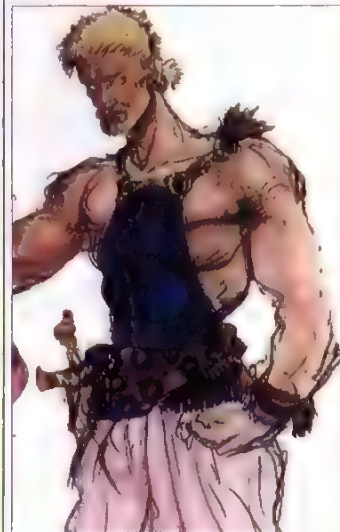
US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY VI

(PART OF FINAL FANTASY ANTHOLOGY)

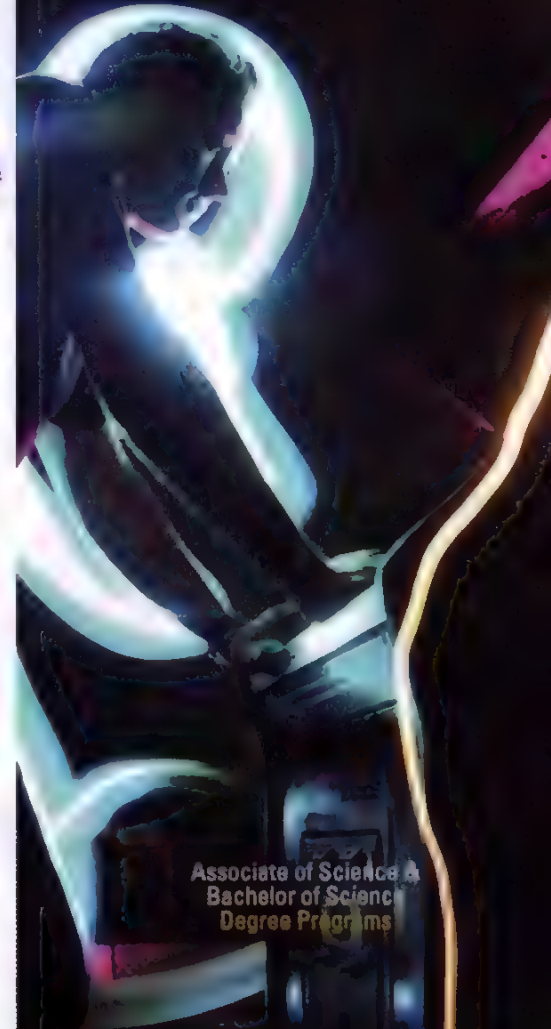
> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY VI
> SYSTEM: PSONE > U.S. RELEASE: OCTOBER 1999

NEED TO KNOW: Square had made a point in 1999 to use the Final Fantasy name to its fullest, and that included updating their old entries in the saga and making sure that each territory was up to speed. Basically a re-release of American Final Fantasy III (offered stateside in 1994 on the SNES), this edition does boast brand-new opening and closing CG cinemas.



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The Path of Least Resistance

To get the North American Final Fantasy collection with as few purchases as possible, here are your system and collection options:



For Final Fantasy I

- NES
- Final Fantasy Origins (PSone)
- GBA (coming soon)



For Final Fantasy II

- SNES



For "The Real" Final Fantasy III

- Final Fantasy Origins (PSone)
- GBA (coming soon)



For Final Fantasy Adventure

- GB



For Final Fantasy Mystic Quest

- SNES



For Final Fantasy III

- SNES



For Final Fantasy IV

- Final Fantasy Chronicles (PSone)



For Final Fantasy V

- Final Fantasy Anthology (PSone)



For Final Fantasy VI

- Final Fantasy Anthology (PSone)



For Final Fantasy VII

- PSone
- PC



For Final Fantasy VIII

- PSone
- PC



For Final Fantasy IX

- PSone

The Current Generation:

- Final Fantasy X (PS2)
- Final Fantasy X-2 (PS2)
- Final Fantasy XI (PS2, PC)
- Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles (GC)



US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY VII

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY VII > SYSTEM: PSONE/PC

> U.S. RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 1997

NEED TO KNOW: While most would say that *The Spirits Within* is a Final Fantasy product in name alone, Final Fantasy VII is steering towards a first for the franchise — the upcoming *Advent Children* is a CGI-movie sequel to this revered entry. Game Informer has strong reason to believe that this game will be re-released on PS2 to coincide with *Advent Children's* launch. This newer edition is not planned to be different in any way from the original release on PSone.

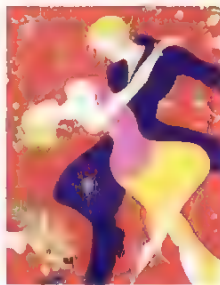
US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY VIII

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY VIII > SYSTEM: PSONE/PC

> U.S. RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 1999

NEED TO KNOW: Final Fantasy VIII (both the U.S. and Japanese versions) offered PocketStation support to unlock new abilities and items in the game. Sadly, the PocketStation never appeared on American shores, and gamers stateside were not offered a workaround to get the unlockable goods.



US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY IX

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY IX > SYSTEM: PSONE

> U.S. RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2002

NEED TO KNOW: Although the last Final Fantasy game to appear on the PSone, FF IX is a return to the series' roots in many ways. The towering skyscrapers of FF VII and military-themed towns of FF VIII are gone in favor of old-world palaces and fairytale creatures. In addition, comic artist Yoshitaka Amano, character designer for FF I through VI, is back and offers a main character that has a tail and one giant noggin.



Curious Sidequests

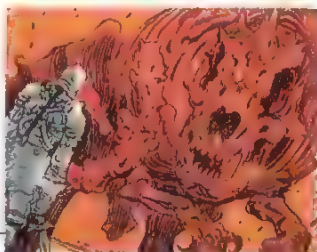
US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY MYSTIC QUEST

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: FINAL FANTASY USA > SYSTEM: SNES

> U.S. RELEASE: OCTOBER 1992

NEED TO KNOW: Disparagingly referred to as Final Fantasy USA in Japan, Mystic Quest is a painfully dumbed-down RPG designed to introduce Americans to RPG gameplay and conventions. Strangely enough, it was released after the SNES version of Final Fantasy II came to the U.S., and many unwitting fans of the series were insulted by its simplicity.



US RELEASE TITLE:

FINAL FANTASY ADVENTURE

> JAPANESE RELEASE TITLE: SEIKEN DENSETSU > SYSTEM: GAME BOY > U.S. RELEASE: NOVEMBER 1991

NEED TO KNOW: This Game Boy title actually isn't part of the Final Fantasy canon, instead it is the first in the Mana saga (called Seiken Denetsu in Japan). With real-time battles, this game outlines the history of the mana tree that American gamers became more acquainted with in the SNES release, Secret of Mana. It was put out shortly after the first Final Fantasy was launched in North America on the NES and was re-titled, presumably to make it more familiar to American gamers.

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Garrett Emery



VAGRANT STORY

> FORMAT PSONE
> PUBLISHER SQUARE

Vagrant Story combines the greatest things from the greatest games. Metal Gear Solid is often heralded for its cinematic directing and story (which it does have in abundance). However, Vagrant Story is a non-stop barrage of cinematic flair. All of the dialogue is contained in "comic book" bubbles, yet still has the best animation and style of any game in its era.

The characters in the game are all wonderful. Ashley borders on an ungodly level of cool. The scenes between him and the "antagonist" Sydney are as memorable as Luke-Vader scenes. Speaking of Sydney, not once in the game are you truly sure of his intentions. While the game emphasizes his being evil, it also makes sure you don't know why or how he got that way or if he might help you — or your enemies. Guildenstern, the Church loyalist, is down right scandalous. He is the most evil of characters — the type that does horrible things and pretends it's in the name of the Lord.

The action is a cross between real-time and turn-based fighting. It uses a dome system reminiscent of Parasite Eve, but its depth puts that already deep system to shame. Every enemy has six or so body parts Ashley can strike. Some take more damage, but require more accuracy, while others are sure hits that are fairly weak. Also, the game introduces the Risk meter. The more consecutively linked attacks, the higher your Risk goes — this increases your damage but leaves you far more susceptible to attacks and also lowers your accuracy.

The game also features a detailed magic system with many spells that are all useful. Last but certainly not least, the game



does indeed have a new game plus mode so you can go through it with your old characters' skills and weapons over and over

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

In August of 1976, a video game system was released that didn't even have a chance to be embraced and died quickly, but left a few important innovations in its wake. The Fairchild Channel F system was the first programmable cartridge-based console, meaning that instead of a system being hard-coded with circuitry for certain games, the Channel F owner could swap out plastic carts for entirely different titles. Sound familiar to anyone else? Despite this landmark innovation and the first games with a pause option, the Channel F was trumped in a dramatic way



by the Atari VCS which released in 1977. Bested in all areas important to consumers (namely game quality, graphics, and sound), the Fairchild Channel F unceremoniously died in 1979.

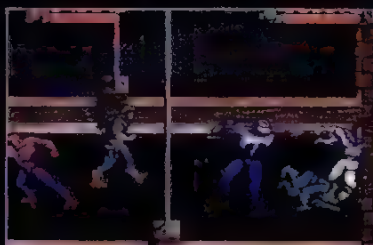


SNES

SEPARATION ANXIETY

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ACCLAIM ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER ACCLAIM > RELEASE 1995

In 1994, Spider-Man and Venom hit consoles in the infamous Maximum Carnage. The red SNES cartridge was intended to be limited edition, but the game sold slowly, and the standard gray cartridge was never produced. Despite the underwhelming sales, the sequel, Separation Anxiety, hit the very next year. Little changed between the two games: Both are side-scrolling brawlers starring Spider-Man and Venom, and the movesets in the two titles are identical. Despite the lack of innovation, Separation Anxiety is still a passable fighter. Two-player co-op is fun, and the graphics have a nice, bright look, although some characters are lacking in detail even by SNES standards. The fighting engine is shallow and the number of different enemy models is ridiculously low, but gameplay has a charming simplicity to it. The power-ups, which summon other Marvel superheroes to smite your enemies, are another cool touch (it's nice to remember that long ago, comics were adapted into games, even without a movie tie-in) that help Separation Anxiety stand as a basically enjoyable relic.

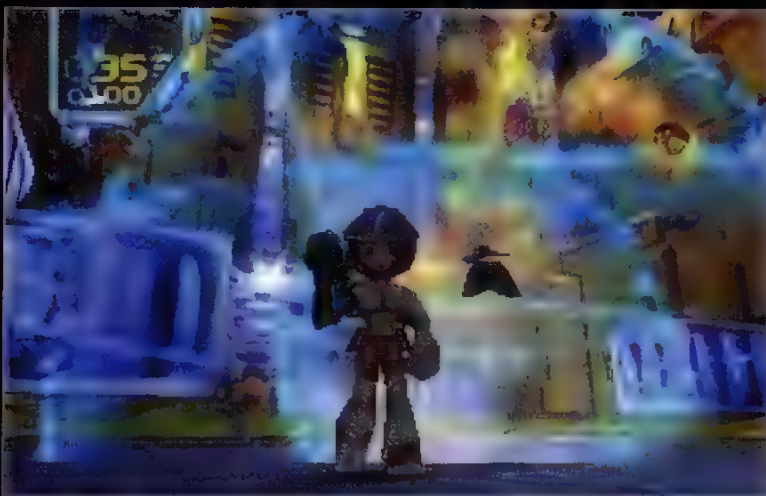
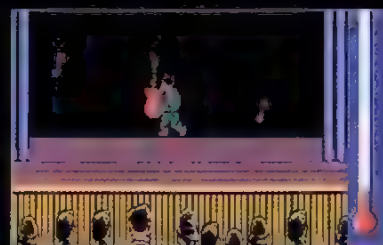
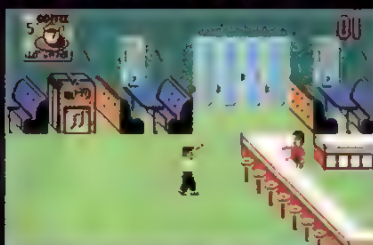


NES

BACK TO THE FUTURE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER LJN > DEVELOPER BEAM SOFTWARE > RELEASE 1989

The film *Back to the Future* accomplished many things that, to this day, are still baffling. It successfully pulled off a plot based on time travel. It made Michael J. Fox the epitome of cool. It induced a widespread mispronunciation of the word "gigawatts." Perhaps most puzzling of all, however, is how this era-defining piece of cinematic genius could be in any way connected to the odious video game aberration that bears its name. As Marty McFly, you roam the self-scrolling streets and collect alarm clocks (they keep time – clever) in order to keep yourself from vanishing out of existence. Along the way you'll have to contend against irate hula-hoopers, glass pane-holders, and bumblebees the size of watermelons. Every four or five stages, you have to play an aggravating "special" level, throwing root beer at bullies or playing a mournful approximation of music at a high school dance. With insubordinate controls and a soundtrack that will have you gnawing at your own ears, playing *Back to the Future* is a perfect way to condition yourself to resist torture. What's the matter, butthead? Chicken?



N64

JET FORCE GEMINI

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER RARE > DEVELOPER RARE > RELEASE 1999

Somebody dipped into the future on this one, and tried to make a game that was well before its time. Alas, the N64 just wasn't quite up to the task of showing off the future as it was fast becoming obsolete in the latter part of 1999. And it shows. Nonetheless, there are all sorts of compelling reasons to take a look at this title. The game includes Dolby Surround Sound support (nearly unheard of at the time of its release), and includes the option to play in letter-box widescreen. There are also multiplayer deathmatch and co-op modes, which were yet another rarity in that oh-so-distant last century. *Jet Force* includes multiple playable characters and some bracing insect-alien explosive action. The game is lengthy and challenging throughout. It does feel odd to manage a third-person action game without a dual-analog anymore, but you'll fall back into the swing of it after a few minutes. Sadly, like many 64-bit titles, the game looks pretty terrible. But if you get a kick out of current favorites like *Ratchet and Clank*, *Jet Force Gemini* would be a great place to start in your attempts to trace the ancestry of such games.

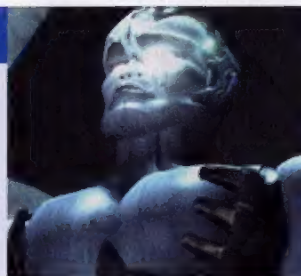


GAMEOVER

Y'all Come Back Now, Ya Hear?

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

We all know that robots are a huge part of the manufacturing industry, but they're an even bigger part of the video game industry. Robots have appeared in games as heroes, villains, and everything in between. In honor of our eventual overlords, we present this robot trivia challenge. Take this quiz to see how you compare to the greatest robots in history.



1. The severely underrated action title Metal Arms: Glitch in the System featured voice work by which of the following Simpsons actors?

- A. Hank Azaria
- B. Harry Shearer
- C. Dan Castellaneta
- D. Nancy Cartwright



2. In which Dreamcast game does a character named Chan fuse with a giant robot in order to overthrow the evil SovKhan organization?

- A. StarLancer
- B. Slave Zero
- C. Super Robot Wars Alpha
- D. The Giant Crushy Robot Fun Hour



3. Probably the most prolific robot in video game history is the freaky blue midget Mega Man. Fill in this blank: The Blue Bomber has starred in roughly _____ games to date.

- A. 30
- B. 40
- C. 50
- D. Like a million

4. The Word of Blake (which, as far as we can tell, has nothing

to do with actor Robert Blake) is the evil organization you face in which of the following robot-filled destruction-fests?

- A. Robotrek
- B. Cyberia
- C. Steel Battalion
- D. MechAssault

5. Which Capcom fighting game features giant robots based on those from anime titles like Neon Genesis Evangelion, Patlabor, and Bubblegum Crisis?

- A. Cannon Spike
- B. Street Fighter 2010: The Final Fight
- C. Tech Romancer
- D. Power Stone 2

6. Which of the following systems did NOT have a title based on The Governor's (or Arnold Schwarzenegger, as some people call him) breakthrough film, The Terminator?

- A. Super Nintendo
- B. Game Boy
- C. Game Gear
- D. Sega CD

7. Nintendo has a long history of releasing "quirky" products (Nintendo DS, we're looking in your direction...). One of the first was the robot peripheral R.O.B. What do those initials stand for?

- A. Robotic Operating Buddy
- B. Recreation Only Borg
- C. Robot Operations Brand
- D. Reiner's Official Bartender



8. Which company released the game with the all-time greatest title in history, Escape from the Planet of the Robot Monsters?

- A. Enix
- B. Konami
- C. Sierra
- D. Atari



9. The classic title Berzerk and its sequel Frenzy pitted players against an army of humanoid robots and the indestructible menace known as Evil Otto. What unusual form did Evil Otto take?

- A. A giant square
- B. A fuzzy-wuzzy kitten
- C. A smiley face
- D. Andy McNamara



10. I, Robot (an Atari arcade game from 1983) is known for what important gaming "first?"

- A. It is the first game based on a classic sci-fi story
- B. It is the first game to use 3D filled polygons
- C. It is the first game to feature motion-captured character animations
- D. It is the first game that Will Smith adapted into a movie

BREAKDOWN

2.6% of Bandai is owned by Nintendo. The big N is considering buying a larger share of the company, but denies a complete takeover.

85% of video games sold carry a rating of either "Everyone" or "Teen."

25% of GI editors will testify that Jeremy keeps wooden stakes in his trunk for hunting vampires. You never know when those suckers will strike, man.

53.7% of developers polled by Famitsu are interested in the Sony PSP. 27.8% of developers said they were intrigued by the Nintendo DS.

100% of the characters concocted by the GI editors with Showdown: Legends of Wrestling's Create-A-Wrestler mode were horrible.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



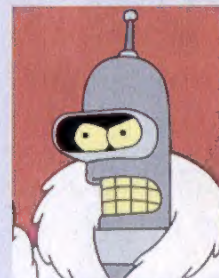
0-1
Laundrobot 5000



2-3
Hot Dog Delivery Unit #47894



4-5
Funkbot Ver. 3.9



6-7
Bender



8-9
Monica Bellucci-Bot



10
Robotic Clone Who Goes to Work in Your Place

FINISH THE FEUD



SHOWDOWN LEGENDS OF WRESTLING

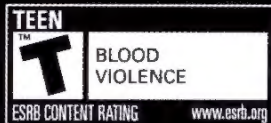
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