

6 Pages Of New Info
MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf

Exclusive First Look:
Marc Ecko's
Getting Up (pg. 76)

Final Design
Unveiled:
Nintendo DS (pg. 21)

GAMEINFORMER

THE WORLD'S #1 COMPUTER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



WORLD EXCLUSIVE

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION

[EIGHT PAGES OF PIMPIN' RIDES]

ISSUE 137

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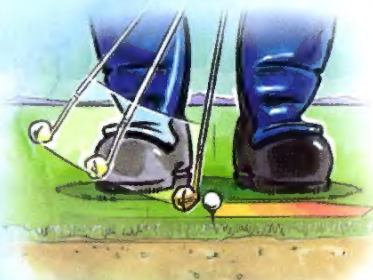
SEPTEMBER 2006

HOT SHOTS TIPS **1** PuttCrusher04 on the Short Game

There are two places I like to blow off steam. One is the wrestling ring, where I see how high I can throw other wrestlers. The other is the putting green. A good putt depends on a proper grip. I grip the putter firmly, but just loose enough so I don't shatter it with my bare hands.



When it comes to putting, mental preparation is key. For me, bench-pressing a golf cart and a couple hundred push-ups usually do the trick.



While standing with your feet neck-width apart, bend over until you can see the ball past your pectorals.



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2

BunkerBreaker007 on Getting Out of the Sand

People always ask how I learned to conquer these mighty sand traps. I don't know. That's like asking how gale-force winds learn to blow just as a dude's ready to tee off. All I do know is that ever since I was a kid, I liked surfing near sand, sitting on sand, even eating sand. But that was on a dare.



Before attempting to get that ball out, thoroughly wax your wedge. Better too much than not enough.

Swing under the ball and lift it out of the sand. Then do a thorough toe check for any signs of sand jam.



PlayStation.2





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SWITCH TO SECONDARY
CHECK FOR HOSTAGE CASUALTIES
GAS AND CLEAR
DETERMINE NUMBER OF TARGETS

HOLD

BE LOAD
WATCH FOR EXPLOSIVES
LOCATE

STAY FOCUSED
FOCUSED

WATCH FOR EXPLOSIVES

HOSTAGES GOT MY BACK



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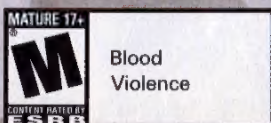
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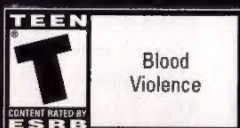


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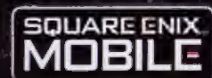
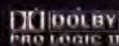


The year is SD 772. Fayt's vacation on the peaceful world of Hyda is shattered when an unknown military force attacks. Separated from all he knows and loves, Fayt must brave the galaxy to recover what he has lost.



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MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION

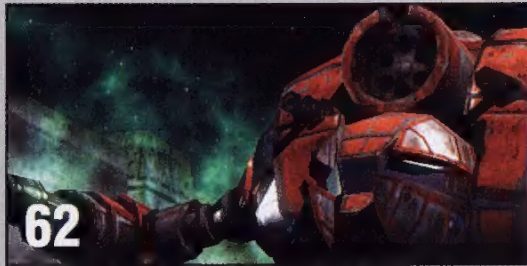
This game is so blingin' that Rockstar originally considered calling it *Midnight Club 3: Lord Blingingworth's Bling-a-thon*. Okay, not really, but this is still one tuned-up ride. We headed down to Miami to get the latest on this street racer, and while we were down there, checked out some pimpin' rides at a car show and even got to chat with the folks at *DUB Magazine*. Roll on over to page 42, won't you?

features



ELECTRONIC ARTS LA

We took a tour at one of the industry's biggest and busiest studios: Electronic Arts' LA facility. What horrible, substandard working conditions did we find? None! Get a glimpse inside the world of a top-tier developer here, and find out what games it is toiling on at the moment.



MECHASSAULT 2: LONE WOLF

The first *MechAssault* game is still the number one Xbox Live title of all time, and Developer Day 1 Studios has a few tricks to ensure that the franchise stays on top. Want to hop online and conquer an entire galaxy with your friends? Now you can, thanks to the new online mode that will make sure you never truly get away from the game.

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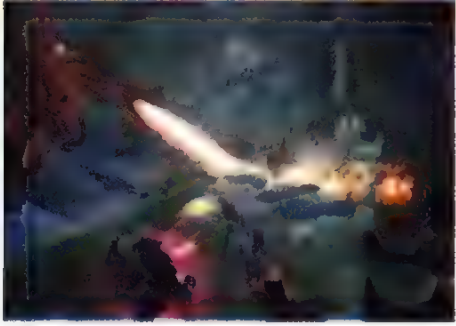
Reliving gaming's greatest moments

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The end...or is it?

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Weapons become as useless as prayer.

DEMON STONE



Three Heroes, One Unforgivable Curse

FORGOTTEN REALMS



PlayStation.2



ATARI

STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



PEOPLE AND PLACES

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

As a long time gamer, much of my youth was spent not only playing games, but thinking about how cool it would be to actually be a part of the industry. Of course, I now have my dream job. But one of the things that I always thought was missing from the world of video games was a look at the people and places that produce them. Working in the industry, I have had opportunities to not only meet my heroes, but to see the hallowed halls where the games themselves are made.

Game Informer is certainly all about the games, but over the last year we have introduced a number of departments that give you, the reader, a chance to meet the people that make this industry tick with our Interview and Opinion sections. Last month, with the debut of Connect's newest feature, Places, we were also able to show them to you. This month we take it a step further with a huge blowout on one of the newest video game studios, EALA.

While we don't plan on doing Places or features such as this each and every month, we are going to do them on a regular basis, as I think it gives you an opportunity to see how the video game industry works and plays. I know every time I walk into a studio I instantly feel a tinge of satisfaction from seeing the behind-the-scenes workings of the sources of my favorite games. EALA may be new, but it is also the home of many of the talented designers who created some of gaming's finest titles, including the Command & Conquer and Medal of Honor series.

Let me know what you think of this unique look at the world of video games by dropping me an email or hitting our forums at Game Informer Online.

As you would expect, the rest of the issue is jam-packed with all the latest info from the cutting edge of gaming, including an exclusive look at *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition*, Microsoft's *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf*, and Marc Ecko's *Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure* from Atari. Alas, we were unable to review *Doom 3* this month. However, you can expect a full review from our next month when Activision finally lets us get our hands on it (and yes, we are going to be buying at the store just like you - blame id Software's overprotective tendencies when it comes to its games).

Speaking of the next issue, Game Informer will once again have a world premiere for you to drool over and a ton of previews as we get closer to the busy holiday season. Enjoy the issue, and we'll see you again next month.

Cheers,

Andy >>> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Zebulon Pike, Watching Lance Armstrong Kick The French's Butt In Their Own Tour, The Mars Volta, Vectrex **Dislikes:** That I Don't Already Have A PSP (I Need It Now), Not Getting To Review *Doom 3* This Month, Going Linkdead **Current Favorite Games:** *City Of Heroes*, *Dead Or Alive*, *Ultimate*, *Mega Man Anniversary Collection*, *Ultimate Card Games*



Reiner >>> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** The Concept Of Lowering A Game's Price To Combat A Smash Hit, Air Hogs (Cheap Remote Control Airplanes That Kick A Lot Of Ass), www.vikingsuck.com, Billy D. Williams (We Still Love Ya, Buddy!) **Dislikes:** Fearing That Only 10 To 15 Games Will Sell This Holiday Season, The Sun (Stupid Ball Of Fire!), Gary Bettman **Current Favorite Games:** *Hot Shots Golf Fore!*, *ESPN NFL 2K5*, *NHL 2005*, *Final Fantasy XI: Chains Of Promathia*, *Halo 2*, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *Doom 3*



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Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** The Insanity Of Miami, Laying Sod (No, That's Not Some Dirty Metaphor), *The Bourne Supremacy*, House Hunting **Dislikes:** Miami Heat (The Weather Condition And The Team), *Spider-Man 2* Haters, Playing Shows After Having Not Practiced For Two Weeks ("We're Not Some Mainstream Professional Band," Man - Now Pay Us!) **Current Favorite Games:** *Astro Boy: Omega Factor*, *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition*, *Devil May Cry*, *Hot Shots Golf Fore!*



Kato >>> kato@gameinformer.com

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Adam >>> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Minnesota Public Radio, Johan Santana (Cy Young Baby!), *Transmetropolitan* (A.K.A. Best Comic Ever), *Armor Forged From The Scales Of Elder Dragons* **Dislikes:** People Crying Nerf, Kyle Lohse's 2004 Performance, Ticketmaster, CDs Getting Eaten By My Car Deck (I Thought This Was Over After Cassettes) **Current Favorite Games:** *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn*, *Phantom Brave*, *Joint Operators: Typhoon Rising*



Joe >>> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** Gluttony, *Spider Jerusalem*, *Lullaby* By Chuck Palahniuk, Handwiches, *Sealab 2021*, 73 Percent Of TMBC's *The Spine*, Doc Manhattan **Dislikes:** Temperance, 27 Percent Of TMBC's *The Spine*, Doc Hollywood (Stupid Non-Atomic Michael J. Fox) **Current Favorite Games:** *Second Sight*, *Viewtiful Joe*, *Final Fantasy XI*, *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*, *ICO*, *Quest For Glory IV*, *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*



Miller >>> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Shephard's Pie, The Way Jeremy Will Eat Whatever You Dare Him To, Vaughan Williams, The Inevitable GI RC Plane Dogfight, So Many Games This Holiday Season **Dislikes:** Commercials Where The Husband Is Always Stupid, Summer Heat, Cars With Giant Spoilers, Bad Writers On Comics I Like **Current Favorite Games:** *Castlemania: Aria Of Sorrow*, *City Of Heroes*, *Psi-Ops*, *The Mindgate Conspiracy*, *Super Mano Bros. 3*, *Halo 2*, *Matrix Online*

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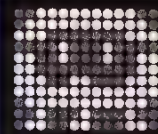


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GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly
Of The Video Game Industry



1 2



3



8

1 Activision's Ryh-Ming Poon, Aaron Grant, and Stacey Drellishak pose with the GI massive! 'Nuff respect! 2 What happened to that boy? He's grindin' with Star Trak recording artist The Clipse in sunny Florida 3 Lisa and Billy hang with the Myst crew: creator Rand Miller, Ubisoft producer Geneviève Lord, and composer Jack Wall 4 Andy gets in front of the camera for the filming of IGP and Digital Filmtime's upcoming documentary on the controversy surrounding video game violence, *Moral Combat* 5 Reiner and ESPN's Ben Bishop enjoy a game of ESPN NHL 2005. Hey, enjoy this picture - it might be the closest thing you'll get to a hockey season this year! 6 EA's Tammy Schachter and Brooke Cahalane having happy times in LA 7 Matt hangs with former GI editor Jay Fitzloff (now of Rockstar/Take 2 fame) at the DUB Super Series car show in Miami. Jay is showing off his new tattoo, a depiction of the dreaded Yuan-Ti from the D&D *Monster Manual*. Now that's gnarly! 8 The juke remains the only average. Hey, knock it



4



5



7 6



IN STORES SEPTEMBER

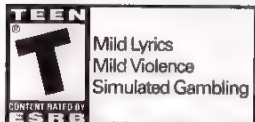
THE CARS ARE UGLY. THE RACES ARE UGLY.
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MONSTER
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DREAMY

Girls that read Game Informer are prime girlfriend material, but (sadly) not a lot of girls read it. To remedy this, I think that you should include more perfume teasers and/or the latest Hollywood rumors and pictures of the industry's hottest young stars. I think we can sacrifice some of Dreamy Bloom's face to get more hot girls picking up GI!

C.M. Ruiz
Via yahoo.com

Thanks for showing love for the FanGIRLS (yes, we do mean it) by putting that nice full page picture of Cliff B. and the accompanying article in your July (#135) issue. The extra eye candy was very much appreciated.

Carrn Miley
Via hotmail.com

Mr. Ruiz, your logic is sound, but the method is perhaps flawed. All we need to do to get more girls reading GI is put in pictures of dreamy developer types - like Cliff B. Yeah, that Cliff sure is keen. We especially love the way that his hair shines in the light of a monitor and the moonlight reflects in his eyes, making that really fetching color... Swoon! Sometimes, we like to think that, when he's writing code and playing games, he thinks of us and smiles to himself. That wonderful, whimsical, captivating smile of his...



SUPERSIZE

I read your Metroid Prime 2: Echoes coverage and it rocked more than the entire rest of the magazine! Keep up the great work! (And I mean great; it's not just for show).

Andrew Pignolet
Via aol.com

Thanks for absolutely blowing the f&#%#ing lid off of Metroid Prime 2. I'm thrilled that Nintendo allowed a gaming publication some serious access for once. Here's hoping the Big N will allow more of this with you in the future.

Mike Lovejoy
Milwaukee,WI

After reading your preview of Metroid Prime 2, there's only one way to describe it: off the hook! I guess the saying rings true, everything is bigger in Texas...even the games. I'm especially interested in the dual aspect of the light world and the dark world. But there's one thing I'm confused about: Is Prime not even going to appear in this game?

Andrew Putnam
Via yahoo.com

I was just reading your July issue (#135) with Metroid Prime, and it made me go back to your May issue (#133) with Halo 2. I looked at the cover and thought that Samus and the Master Chief would make a great couple. It would be the most publicized wedding ever - and the two of them in a video game would not be so bad, either. While on the subject, how about Sam Fisher proposing to Jade from Beyond Good and Evil?

Alex Coleman
Via email

After the begging, pleading, groveling, personal sacrifice, and crawling across burning coals on our hands and knees ended; Nintendo finally threw open the doors for one of our ideal cover stories. In case you were wondering, we're all physically

recovering, and most of us will regain the use of our legs - so that's good news. The fact that you readers dug it is also nice to hear.

DOA ONLINE STUFF

According to your preview of Dead or Alive Ultimate in the July 2004 issue (#135), the first Dead or Alive was never released in America. Well, then, how in the hell did I get a hold of an American copy for the PSone?

Rob D'Amico
Via hotmail.com

COPYRIGHT, SCHMOPYRIGHT

I just received the newest issue of GI and was paging through it. I always have a look at the envelope art that you guys print. Well, I noticed that the July issue (#135) winner's entry is a complete copy of an image I've seen before. No, not just an artist inspired by something, it is a straight up reproduction or another image.

As an artist, it sickens me that someone (Mr. Chad [unclear]) would have the guts to not only rip off someone else's work and be rewarded for it, but to be so bold as to do so in something that is published and widely distributed. It is a slap in the face to every artist who actually puts creativity and effort into their work.

I feel you should be notified of this in the hopes that he has not been sent any reward for his art thievery. I hope I caught this in time to put a halt on any more praise for him.

Fred Rodriguez
Via hotmail.com

We don't want people to plagiarize others in the name of a free t-shirt - that's just dumb. How to verify the originality of a piece is a system that we haven't entirely gotten down pat just yet, but we do make an effort to only include original work in the Envelope Art section. So, to future submitters: Make your own picture, we like them more. Also, it doesn't actually have to be on an envelope, and we don't run things that look photocopied - getting charcoal, oil pastels, and crayon goop on our hands is much more satisfying than that weird toner smell.

You were regaining my respect with your amazing E3 coverage along with the exquisite article on Metroid. Then I learned something: The first Dead or Alive was never released in the States. I guess I must destroy my copy (which was released on the PlayStation). Truth be told, I will not be renewing my subscription with you. In fact if you want to keep the respect of any real gamers, you will drag all that were responsible into the street and end their pathetic existence.

Lucas Stroud
Via yahoo.com

Harsh words from two people who are...wrong! There are two games called Dead or Alive - the Japanese release (available on Sega Saturn in 1996) and the PSone version released after the game hit in American arcades. The U.S. version includes updated graphics, a stabilized framerate, and never-before-seen characters, costumes, and gameplay modes. As we said in our preview, the Japanese Sega Saturn release has never been available in the U.S. - until Dead or Alive Ultimate comes out, that is.

THE REAL WORLD?

I just got done playing Singles: Flirt up Your Life - and that game is sexually offensive. Who do the creators think they are by creating a dating and relationship simulator for adults? This game really goes too far because of its graphic depiction of sex. They show the couples actually doing it in real-time. What the hell? Is this Eidos's way of spicing up people's lives? It's a poor plan. Those parents deciding to let their teens (God forbid, little kids) play this AO-rated game should sit down and explain to them how life and romance really is, instead of letting some low-class, slutty PC game do the talking.

Jason Carver
Via email

Well, um... see, the game is rated Adults Only, so it's just supposed to be for adults. We're betting that



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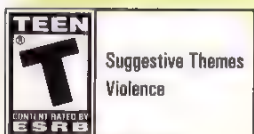
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PlayStation 2



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most parents who realize that the game is rated AO are, thankfully, probably already paying attention to what their kids are playing. Those that aren't need to be aware that the rating system is there for a reason. And, although we thought that the game's jollies are short-lived, it's certainly possible that others really enjoy watching fabricated, polygonal people do the horizontal mamba. Also, we have to wonder why, if Jason thought that the game was so perverse, why did he keep playing it? Hmmm...

FAUX PAS, SEE ALSO: BLUNDER

Dudes, love the mag, but you fell prey to an old trick – plasma TVs do not need recharging. Honestly, I swear.

Joe McTheatre

Via email, phone, snail mail, and random encounter

Wowza, did we proliferate a hoax? Indeed we did. Contrary to what our HDTV primer course in the June 2004 [#134] explained, plasma screen televisions do not need to be recharged. The source of this fallacy, which eluded all of our reasonable and responsible fact-checking skills, isn't really known. What we do know is that if you're willing to drop 60 large on a TV, ask lots of questions and do a lot of research. High-end TVs each have their advantages and downsides – the challenge isn't getting something that's really cool, it's getting something that fits your needs. And while we're second-guessing all of our decision making skills, we wanted to make sure that those guys from Uganda who want to funnel money through our checking accounts are on the up-and-up. They are, right?

E3 COVERAGE

I just got my July 2004 issue, and I was very much looking forward to your E3 coverage. However, when I turned to it, I realized that it was different than last year's. Your coverage of E3 2003 was phenomenal! It felt like I was actually there.

This year, it was toned down quite a bit and just ended up being "good." "Good" isn't bad...but it's definitely not "phenomenal."

David Thurman
Via email

I think your July issue [#135] is probably the best you've ever done. Why? Thanks for asking...

1. Lack of crowd following. While covering E3, you didn't fall prey to mandatory slobbering over presentations/games. As you know, just because it's presented doesn't mean it's good.

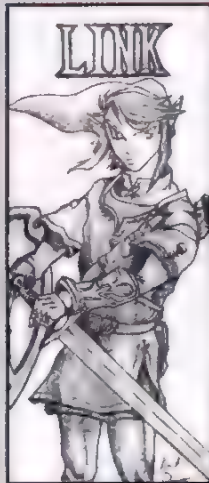
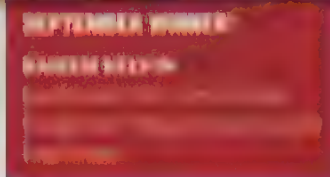
2. Balance. Your writers and reviewers consistently manage to balance personal views and opinions with technical merit of a game on the whole. Quite frankly, I value the reviews in GI far, far more than any other magazine.

3. Industry perspective. GI presents something that I find unique in game magazines: a pragmatic view of the industry. This feel comes into being by the GI Spy section, the Connect section, and the numerous interviews you all get with people who are very important to the games we love. Oh, and the new Opinion column, with industry folks getting on the ol' soapbox? Brilliant. Nobody else is covering the industry trends as a whole like GI does.

Game on!
Wizworm
Via email

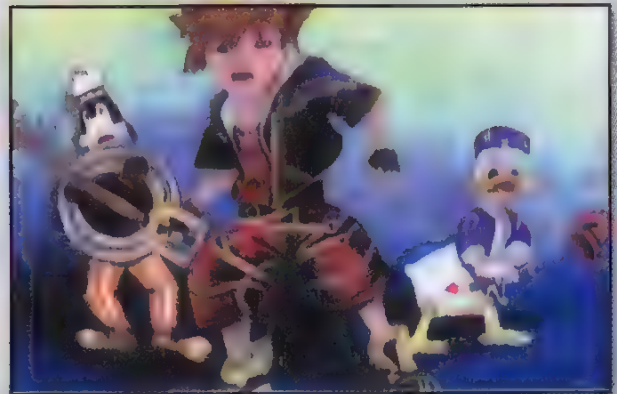
E3 this year was just plain different than last year's show – a difference great enough to justify a change in coverage. Who knows? We might be crazy enough to keep switching up the style each year, just to keep you all on yer toes.

ENVELOPE ART



KENT DOWNS

After E3, the adult Link art is rolling in!



PATRICK GOFF

Sora's got some junk in the trunk!

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.

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



GEORGE YANG

When he's not at Game Informer, Miller is the drag queen Millerina



MISAEAL MONTAÑEZ

Looks like Samus had a little "accident" in the corner



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THE STATE OF SONY FUTURE OF CONSOLES REVEALED

news

At the PlayStation Meeting 2004 conference in Tokyo, PlayStation creator and Sony bigwig Ken Kutaragi warmed the hearts of gamers the world over with a few choice details regarding what everyone's been talking about since E3 — PlayStation 3 and the PlayStation Portable. Kutaragi confirmed that the PS3 would be playable at next May's E3 convention in 2005. "There has been some talk that development is not going well, but we expect to have a playable version at E3. We are pushing ahead with that schedule in mind," he said.

This development puts the console square on a collision course with both Nintendo's Revolution and Microsoft's Xbox Next, both of which are expected to also appear at the industry gathering in Los Angeles. In addition, the announcement seems to assure that the PS3 will hit the market in 2006, despite a few rumors pointing to 2007. At a separate event, Kutaragi also talked about the system's XDR DRAM and how it would start manufacturing in the middle of next year, with a goal of production by the end of 2005. This latter development also seems to confirm the system for a 2006 release.

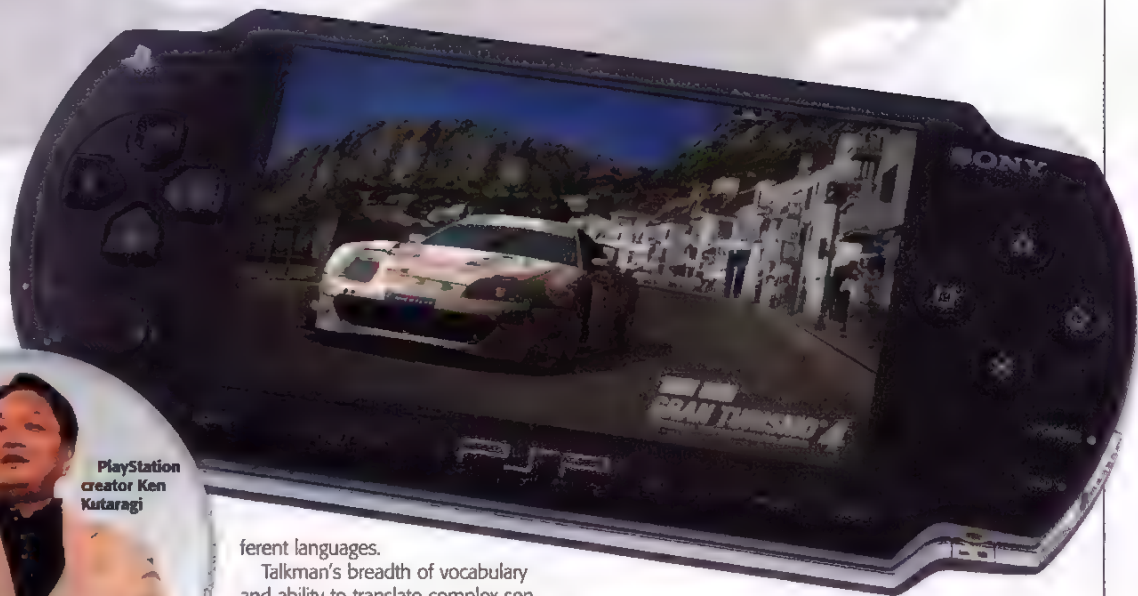
Although the relief felt at the conference that the PlayStation 3 was on schedule dominated, Kutaragi wasn't done. Coming out of E3, the gaming public was grateful to not only find out more about the PSP, but to finally get their hands on it (albeit in a non-playable form). Regardless, the unit still holds more questions. Kutaragi and Sony went a step towards sating curiosity by talking more about the handheld's wireless features and some new first-party software.

The PSP has the ability for up to 16 players to simultaneously play without any wires. This multiplayer function would be possible without requiring any of the PSP units to have hub hardware. The unit's support of the 802.11b Wi-Fi makes for other possibilities such as internet browsing and online gaming when near a wireless hotspot, but Sony has yet to talk about these features.

Also unveiled at the conference was translation software for the PSP called Talkman. This allows users to speak into the built-in microphone of the PSP. The software, through an onscreen bird named Max, will then translate (via text) what you've said into one of nine dif-

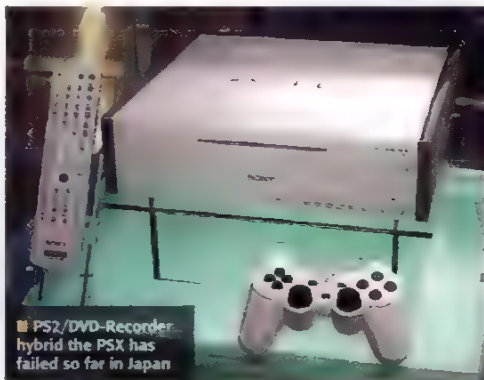


PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi



ferent languages.

Talkman's breadth of vocabulary and ability to translate complex sentences is unknown (as is the release date), but Sony says that it sees the program less as an all-encompassing translation tool and more of a fun program that has its practical uses. The software also contains a game testing your pronunciation by having you speak a foreign language phrase into the microphone after it appears onscreen. It is unknown if Talkman will take advantage of PSP's wireless functionality to facilitate conversations among people of different languages.



Finally, some new games for the PSP have been announced, such as Harvest Moon, popular Japanese RPG Popolocrois Story, Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex, Big Mutha Truckers 2, Bust-A-Move, and Chronicles of Namia. The PlayStation Portable is expected in Japan by the end of the year, and in North America before March 2005.

Unfortunately, the one Sony console that isn't getting any love is the PSX. The company is delaying the release of the all-in-one PlayStation 2/DVD recorder unit in America until sometime in 2005, according to Sony Electronics of America president Hideki Komiyama.

Komiyama says that the company is looking at adding some as-yet-unnamed features to the unit in order to make it more attractive to the American public. The PSX has not been a success in Japan since its debut last December, which was marred by the dropping of several promised functions, including CD-R and DVD+RW playback, and the halving of the HDD-to-DVD recording speed. Consumers also had to endure several firmware updates that added missing functions after the PSX's release. At this time it is unknown exactly which features the American version will receive.

More hardships for the unit popped up when production of the PSX was halted in Japan this April, and some even speculate that it won't come to America at all.



news

RE-INTRODUCING THE DS

NINTENDO UNVEILS FINAL DESIGN, NAME

Surprise, surprise, Nintendo's dual-screen handheld is called...The Nintendo DS. The company has officially cemented the name of the unit it unveiled at E3, and it has also released the final design of the platform. Unfortunately, other details, such as a specific launch date (the DS will be out before the end of the year), pricing, and the initial roster of games have yet to be revealed.

The Nintendo DS has undergone important changes since gamers first got their hands on the unit at this year's E3 convention. First off, perhaps in an attempt to compete with the modern look of Sony's PlayStation Portable, the Nintendo DS has become more stylized. The base of the unit is slimmer, and the outside of the top flipscreen is more angled. The system's buttons have been reorganized, with the face and shoulder buttons becoming larger. The arms of the d-pad have elongated for easier use, and

the face buttons look to be more substantial, although it is unknown if the spacing between them has changed. Some gamers at E3 felt that they were too close together for the thumb of an average person. The placing of the Start and Select buttons are now on the right side of the unit, switching places with the unit's Power button. Finally, the speakers of the Nintendo DS have been moved to the bottom portion of the top screen. Stereo sound is possible through these, with or without headphones.

With this redesign, Nintendo also addressed some com-

ments that gamers made at E3. There is now a storage space for the touch screen's stylus, and the hinge that opens the unit and supports the two screens is noticeably strengthened, resembling the one on the GBA SP. This latter change seems to alleviate any concerns as to whether the unit would stand up to repeated opening and closing of the handheld.

Nintendo says that over 100 companies are on board to make games for the DS, and says it has more than 20 titles in development for the platform in house. "We've figured out the magic of what makes portable gameplay so attractive to consumers," says Nintendo of America's executive vice president of sales and marketing Reggie Fils-Aime. "We've defeated nine challengers [to Nintendo's handheld throne] and once again we're prepared to win."

NINTENDO DS™

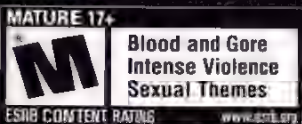


The Nintendo DS that debuted at this year's E3

WELCOME TO AN ENDLESS NIGHTMARE OF
PAIN AND SUFFERING

WELCOME

▪ New 1st Person Mode ▪ Riveting Story ▪ Ghostly New Creatures



PlayStation 2



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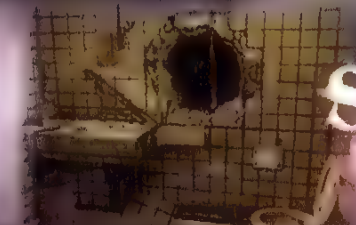
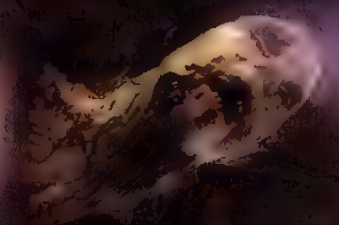
Home is definitely where the heart is.

Along with some spleen. And a little chunk of liver in the hall.

"Best Adventure Game of E3" - *IGN.com*

"Forget about pushing the envelope, Silent Hill 4 tears it to pieces." - *XBN Magazine*

"To the end, Konami's game still, without a doubt, is the greatest work of 2004." - *IGN.com*



SILENT HILL 4 THE ROOM

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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

NO REST FOR THE WICKED

Id Software's John Carmack isn't taking a break after Doom 3. The legendary programmer says that he's already working on rendering technology for the next game. However, there are no further details on his project.



PLAYSTATION NETWORK STARTED

Sony of Japan's employment site has posted a job listing for network engineers and system planners for an integrated PlayStation network that would encompass the PSP, PS2, and presumably, the PS3. This seems to be a first step in providing a means to convey digital content, and would allow the PSP, which possesses 802.11b wireless capabilities, to hook up to other consoles.

LARA IN 2005?

According to Top Cow Productions, the company behind the Tomb Raider comic, the next Lara video game will come out in the summer of 2005. The company says that it is involved with the game, and is halting production of the book to "relaunch in conjunction with the release of the seventh Tomb Raider in the summer of 2005."



Grand Prix Legends



PAPYRUS BACK ON TRACK

Papyrus co-founder David Kaemmer has resurfaced to buy back the Grand Prix Legends/NASCAR Racing Series source code from one-time partner/publisher Vivendi Universal (with help from Red Sox owner John W. Henry), according to PC Gamer. Kaemmer and other ex-Papyrus members are working on a hardcore driving sim that Kaemmer says will not be marketed through "conventional retail channels."

PS2's ICO



FEELING GROWS FOR NICO

Talk is growing regarding Sony's follow-up to the PS2 cult hit ICO, believed to be called NICO. Amazon.co.uk has a listing for the game's release pegged at November 29th of this year. Sony of Europe officials denied this date, but kept hope very much alive by cryptically warning us to stay tuned.

SQUARE TO XBOX NEXT?

Square Enix's general manager for corporate planning, Michiro Sasaki, recently stated that the company is considering developing for Xbox Next, although no specifics were given.

SQUARE ENIX

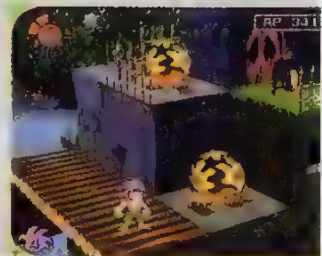
Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Created by the guy who brought you Ghosts n' Goblins, this PSone game, on the surface, looks like it's yet another 2D side-scrolling action/platform title. However, it broke from convention by offering 130 sub-quests. Although optional, completing a certain number of these (along with the requisite platforming) allowed you to continue to the next area. Our pink-haired hero was on a mission to recover his grandfather's bracelet, which was stolen by the Koma Pigs. This game spawned one sequel, also on the PSone.

(Answer on page 28)



games

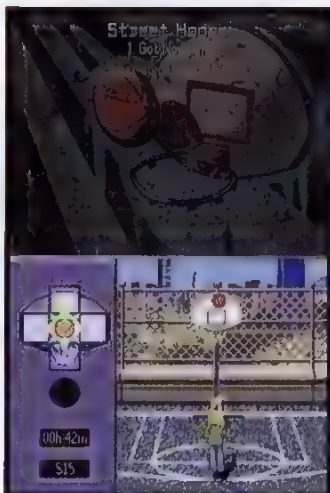
FIRST LOOK: URBZ DS!

SIMS GAME USES TOUCHSCREEN, WIRELESS

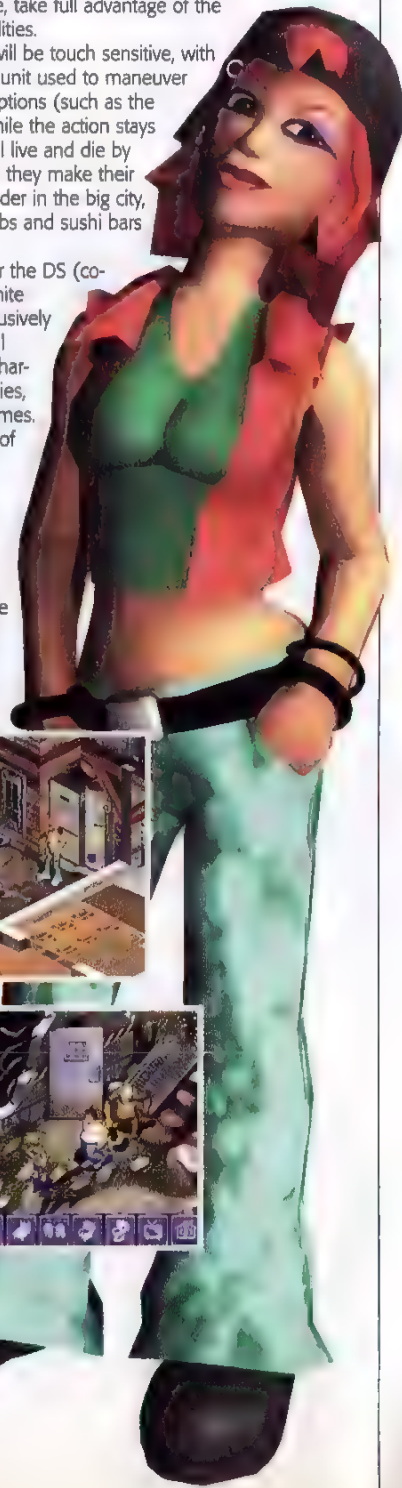
Giant Electronic Arts is supporting the Nintendo DS in a big way this November with Urbz: Sims in the City. The title will also appear on the Game Boy Advance; but the DS version will, of course, take full advantage of the Dual Screen's capabilities.

All of the menus will be touch sensitive, with the lower half of the unit used to maneuver around the various options (such as the character creator), while the action stays up top. Your Sims will live and die by their reputation while they make their way up the social ladder in the big city, train pets, and hit clubs and sushi bars along the way.

Sims in the City for the DS (co-developed by Griptonite Games with EA) exclusively features 24 additional objects, seven new characters, eight pet species, and five extra minigames. As you can see, one of these involves shooting hoops for cash, with a nice blow up of your skills on the top screen. These games also let you take on friends via the handheld's wireless function.



■ Above: EA shows exactly how it will utilize Nintendo DS' dual screens





news

EA ON THE MOVE

PICKS UP CRITERION; PARTNERS WITH CRYTEK

The biggest third-party publisher just got huge with the planned acquisition of Criterion. A buyout of UK-based Criterion has been a hot rumor ever since EA got the publishing rights for Burnout 3 from Acclaim. In this acquisition, EA will not only pick up Burnout 3 but also upcoming FPS Black (see issue 135, page 24) and Criterion's RenderWare middleware technology.

"This is a great fit," said EA CEO Larry Probst. "Criterion offers us studio talent and a proven management team, globally recognized intellectual property and technology infrastructure that will accelerate our readiness on the next generation of consoles."

Despite this development, EA will continue to do what Criterion had previously done, and license out the RenderWare middleware technology to other companies. Previously, the technology had been used in franchises such as Grand Theft Auto and Midway's NBA Ballers, among others. Probst's comments indicate a key motivation for the acquisition from EA (apart from retaining Burnout) – to be fully ready for the next genera-

tion of consoles. This sounds obvious, but gamers will be well-served by moves such as this if it results in an increase in quality of launch titles from the usually underwhelming fare.

"Combining EA's tools and technology libraries with the existing RenderWare technologies will create a superior platform for game development," said Criterion CEO David Lau-Kee. "This system will provide the most powerful common technological framework for creating great games. Our work on RenderWare4, combined with EA's next generation efforts, will also boost development efforts on the next generation of consoles which are expected to debut over the next two years."

In other EA news, the company has signed a deal with German developer Crytek (Far Cry) for an undisclosed PC title. This new game will be an all-new intellectual property.

Despite this deal, Crytek's Xbox title Far Cry: Instincts (expected to hit in 2005), will still be published and developed by Ubisoft.

news

ESPN PRICE DROP CONTINUES

NHL AND NBA GO TO \$19.99

Sega and developer Visual Concepts shocked the video game world when they lowered the price of ESPN NFL 2K5 to \$19.99, as well as announcing a co-publishing/distribution partnership with Take 2 Interactive. Now ESPN NHL 2K5 is following football's lead and dropping its price when it comes out in early September, and a source tells us that ESPN NBA 2K5 will likely follow suit at the same price point come mid-October.

Although it is too early to tell how successful this strategy has fared for Visual Concept's football game, the developer hopes that it can garner a fanbase that it can take into the next generation of systems.



DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

ADVENT FALLING/BLACK9 DEAD

The release date of Majesco's Advent Rising is being pushed back into 2005. The company cites an already crowded schedule as the cause.

In other Majesco news, PC/Xbox title Black9 has been cancelled due to the fact that developer Taldren is closing its doors. Taldren had previously developed Star Trek: Starfleet Command III.



Advent Rising

FINAL FANTASY STUDIO

Final Fantasy's Hironobu Sakaguchi is starting his own RPG game development studio for next-gen consoles called Mist Walker. Sakaguchi says that the idea

came after visiting E3 and finding great-looking games but little innovation. Several RPG projects are now underway, and Sakaguchi says that he wants to collaborate with FF character designer Yoshitaka Amano.

RIDDICK HITS PC

Vivendi Universal Games has confirmed that Chronicles of Riddick will be hitting the PC. Some online retailers jumped the gun and listed a mid-November release date, but VU Games hasn't officially mentioned when the title will appear. The company is currently considering a sequel.



BETHESDA GETS FALLOUT

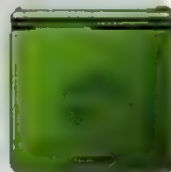
While Interplay is dying a financial death from all sides, it has decided to license the rights to its Fallout franchise to Bethesda. The Elder Scrolls studio will publish and develop Fallout 3, and it will have the right to pursue any subsequent titles on any platform. Meanwhile, Interplay is betting its future on an unannounced MMORPG.



NEW POKÉMON, NEW GBA SP

September 16th in Japan will see the release of Pokémon Emerald as well as a limited-edition commemorative GBA SP of the same color.

The game will support two-player wireless play with the adapter, and you can bet your Pokéballs that it'll come to America at some point. Whether the special GBA will appear as well remains to be seen.





games

OUTRUN 2 RIDES AGAIN

MICROSOFT GRABS THE WHEEL

It was the stuff dreams were made of: driving a hot car with a hotter girl at your side. And this fantasy only cost you 50 cents! Everyone remembers the daydream that was the arcade game *OutRun*. Now, in an interesting turn, Microsoft is putting out this sequel to Yu Suzuki's classic racing masterpiece and not Sega (although it's developed by Suzuki's AM2 studio). The game will appear on Xbox this October, and will feature Xbox Live support that includes racing with up to seven friends and the downloading of ghost cars and unspecified additional content.

Of course, Ferrari returns (as does the babe), and it now comes in eight different varieties, including a Testarossa, Enzo, and Spider. *OutRun 2* keeps the original's pedal-to-the-metal gameplay, and even contains the same branching path system in over 15 locations. We doubt that it'll cost 50 cents anymore, but rekindling your memories could be priceless.

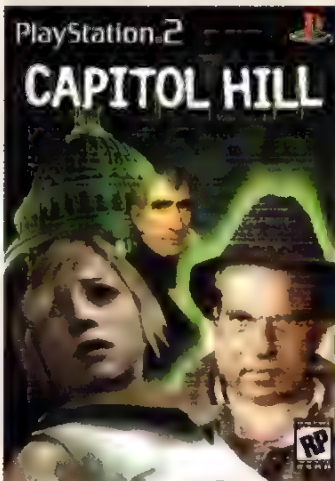


R & D

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

Capitol Hill

Politics are confusing and scary. That's the real reason that most people don't vote or even listen to political news. But there are far more frightening things going on in Washington than Senate Governmental Affairs subcommittee debates. Did you know that some claim our nation's capitol is infested with ghosts? In honor of these devoted crackpots, we present *Capitol Hill*, a survival horror game set in the District of Columbia. When an obscure bill passes that allows the holographic representations of dead politicians to run for office, the enraged ghosts of deceased lawmakers rise from the grave and attempt to overthrow the government. The disease-ridden spirit of William Henry Harrison incapacitates most of the city, so it's up to White House intern Bradley Q. Worthinghouse, Jr. to save the day. As the plucky political hopeful, you must fight back such terrifying specters as Alexander Hamilton, Richard Nixon, and Joseph McCarthy. You'll face the animated skeleton of Abraham Lincoln, fight a motorcycle cop possessed by Warren G. Harding, and even duel with the chainsaw-wielding ghost of George Washington! Only through grit, determination, and good old-fashioned American spirit can Bradley defeat our founding fathers and defend our right to make all the asinine laws we want!

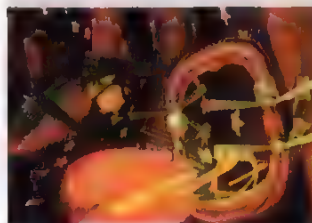


THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

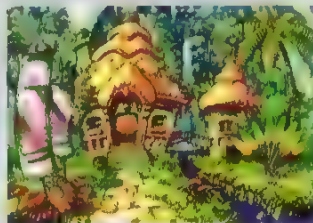
GOOD

Publisher Majesco has picked up Tim Schafer's *Psychonauts*. The Xbox game was once a pillar of first-party software for Microsoft, but was recently dropped by the company.



GOOD

It appears that Square Enix has started on a new *Sword of Mana* title (*Seiken Densetsu*, as it's called in Japan). The company is recruiting character and model designers, and has posted some early examples of the work being done.



BAD

MMORPG *Ultima X: Odyssey* was cancelled by publisher Electronic Arts. However, a new expansion for *Ultima Online* has been announced, subtitled *Samurai Empire*, which presents new ninja and samurai professions.

GOOD

Metal Arms developer Swingin' Ape has been hired by Blizzard for *StarCraft: Ghost* in order to replace Nihilistic Software. The latter company recently pulled out of the game.

BAD

Spider-Man 2's Kirsten Dunst complained to developer/publisher Activision that the breasts in her Mary Jane character model were too big, saying, "Tone down the boobs, please!" How much bigger than the real thing are they? When we know first-hand, we'll let you know - which is never.



GOOD

Lego Star Wars sounds like a failure waiting to happen, but the *Traveller's Tales* game debuted at the San Diego Comic Con, and the co-op PS2, Xbox, PC, and GBA title impressed. The action title recreates all the memorable moments from the series' first three movies. Speaking of which, look for LucasArts to return to making film-based video games when *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* hits theaters in May.



BAD

Despite announcing upcoming sequels for *Quake*, *Call of Duty*, *Spider-Man*, and *True Crime*, Activision had to cut back as well. Thus, the Treyarch-developed *Dead Rush* (the subject of a *Game Informer* feature story in issue #134) is being cancelled for not meeting "standards," according to CEO Ron Doornik.



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EXPERIENCE COUNTS


Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ©2004 Wizards. Illustration by Adam Lee.

news

TUROK IN LIMBO?

ACCLAIM FACES BANKRUPTCY, LOSS OF KEY FRANCHISES

A document detailing Acclaim's financial status confirms that not only has the company lost hold of the rights to Turok and Major League Baseball, but that its dire financial straits may warrant — by Acclaim's own admission — bankruptcy.

After reporting a \$25.4 million loss in the last quarter, the publisher says that it must secure new financing by August. For the fiscal year 2004, the company suffered a net loss of \$56.4 million with revenues down \$67.4 million from the previous year. Although Acclaim says that it has secured a letter of intent from a proposed new lender, the company admits, "there can be no assurance that the new credit facility or any other banking facility will be consummated." Failure to cut a deal could force closing or consolidation of operations, layoffs, sale of assets, and/or bankruptcy. Game Informer tried to contact representatives from Acclaim, but our calls weren't returned. The company plans to proceed with the release of games such as 100 Bullets (fall), Juiced (fall), The Red Star (fall), Worms Forts: Under Siege (fall), and The Last Job (2005).

Not so lucky, however, were Turok and Acclaim's successful baseball franchise All-Star Baseball. And don't forget that the company already lost the Bumout franchise to Electronic Arts. All-Star Baseball suffers from a dispute between Acclaim and the MLB's Players' Association, with the latter revoking its license — and therefore Acclaim's ability to use real player names — due to an allegation of a late payment of royalties. The loss of real-life players is a crippling blow to a franchise priding itself on its realism. As for Turok, that license was terminated by owner Classic Media, also for a failure to pay royalties. Acclaim says that it is currently talking to both companies to resolve the matter.

Stay tuned for more on the fate of Acclaim, as it happens.



TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
JOEL TAUBEL
Producer, Novalogic

READER
HENRY FRENCH
Lisbon, OH



- 1 Planescape: Torment — PC
- 2 Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic — Xbox
- 3 No One Lives Forever — PC
- 4 Half-Life — PC
- 5 Counter-Strike — PC

- 1 Military Madness — TurboGrafx-16
- 2 Nectaris: Military Madness — PSone
- 3 Killer Instinct — Arcade
- 4 Command & Conquer — PSone
- 5 Warzone 2100 — PSone

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five
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Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

GAME ISSUES THIS ELECTION YEAR

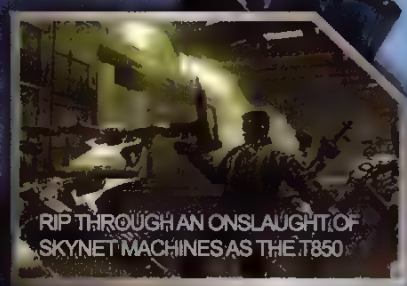
- 10 The question of character. Who is cooler: Clank or Dexter?
- 9 Half-Life 2's flip-flopping on the issue of a release date
- 8 The Mario Party is running third behind the two-party system of Microsoft and Sony
- 7 Military service: Who has the best Vietnam game?
- 6 Broker a peace deal between Zosustralia and McNAmerica
- 5 Illegal aliens: Doom 3 is criminally good
- 4 How about a constitutional ban against repetitive Dynasty Warrior titles?
- 3 Cleaning up all the online gaming jerks is good for the environment
- 2 Should the death penalty be used against the GI staff?
- 1 Same-sex marriage between fey RPG characters

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INTERMEDIA

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PlayStation 2



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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1991
Heavy Metal Memories

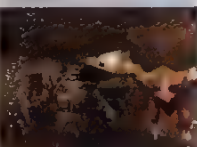
While attending Rutgers University, Kee works in the music industry as a road manager for some underground heavy metal bands of the day, including Anvil and Riot. Death to false metal!

1992
American Bad Ass

Key moves up in the music biz, running his own label and managing future superstar Kid Rock. Rock releases an EP on Kee's label, one which contained two future hits "Bawitdaba" and "I Am the Bullgod."

1994
Spreading Doom

Burned out on music, Kee sees an opportunity in video games at GT Interactive. Here, he spearheads the marketing on such titles as Doom II, Duke Nukem 3D, and the Oddworld series.

1996
Quaking In Their Boots

Kee helps id Software launch Quake, revitalizing the PC market and pioneering a new era in truly 3D first-person shooting.

1999
You Are the Wheelman

GT Interactive and Kee continue their hot streak with another innovative title, Reflections' Driver.

2002
The French Revolution

Taking some time off after leaving GT Interactive, Kee moves on to the greener pastures of Ubisoft, where he helps to craft marketing strategies for some of the company's biggest franchises, including Prince of Persia and the Tom Clancy series.

TONYKEE

VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING/UBISOFT

>> Tony Kee has enjoyed a successful and varied career in the entertainment industry, one that has seen him cross paths with everyone from John Carmack to Kid Rock. Now overseeing Ubisoft's marketing efforts, Kee gives GI readers his take on the video game industry past and present. <<<

We heard that you were Kid Rock's manager before you were in video games. What was it like working with IGD Rock?

It was a fantastic experience. He was really smart, and I knew he was a star. I was told by every person I knew that he sucked. But, I trudged ahead with it because I really believed in him. We recorded a five-song EP, and it totally tanked. [After that] I basically left the business. Two years later, Atlantic released the Kid Rock album and most of those songs were on the album.

What were some of the reasons you decided to leave music for the video game industry?

Sony announced the PlayStation. The lure of an entertainment-based industry that [was] still in its infancy struck me as a real opportunity. I remember the impact that they had on the music industry. I had firsthand experience with that when Sony acquired CBS records a way long time ago. I just felt like they were going to have a huge impact on games, and to me that meant games were going big.

In the last couple years, Ubisoft has really kind of jumped up into the upper tier of publishers in terms of size and success. What's behind this success?

I think that it took Ubisoft some time to understand the U.S. market. Whereas the company was known more for Rayman-style games a few years ago, now they're known for making really high-quality, cutting-edge titles like Splinter Cell and Ghost Recon. There's always been a commitment to quality here, but I really think that just experience in making products, the maturing of our internally developed studios, and all that sort of came together at one time.

The Clancy franchise has really become a big part of video games. What's the value of the Clancy license, and where do you think it stacks up in terms of some of the other major video game franchises?

The Clancy line of products is obviously huge for us. But the reason why it's been so successful is because we've backed it up with really high-quality products.

a lot harder to get people to pay attention to it. For Prince of Persia, we really put a big push behind that title. We knew that it wasn't a product that fit within what was hot at the time. But, with a lot of great support from the editorial community and people who really appreciated the quality and innovation of the title, we were able to establish Prince of Persia as a major brand last year. It won game of the year in many publications. So, for us, it was a huge success.

We know that Ubisoft has tried to retool the Prince to make him more appealing. Does marketing have a voice into that or is that strictly the developer's decision?

All those things are marketing driven because the character's look and his attitude -- well, that is marketing. We have marketing teams embedded within our development teams. We have research teams. We have our teams here all working together sifting through community feedback, focus testing, etc., to figure out how we can make the game go to the next level. It's not just the Prince's look; it's how he fights,

If we made bad Tom Clancy games, it wouldn't matter whose name was on the box.

Where did you start in games?

I went to GT Interactive. I was the main marketing guy for all the id Software stuff that they were releasing at the time.

Id was obviously a pretty colorful company in terms of how they were run and the people that ran it. What was it like working with them?

They were rock stars. I remember when I went and interviewed at GT, I still kind of had my music business look, and I really think that appealed to them. They wanted someone from entertainment that could relate to creative people and creative attitudes -- people who were suspicious of marketers and business people.

Another game you worked on, Driver, was a big franchise for the PSone and helped set the stage for games like GTA III.

I remember the day [Reflections director] Martin Edmondson brought Driver into the product evaluation meeting that I was in. He showed us the game, walked out, and all of us just kind of looked at each other like Santa Claus had just come to town. It was immediately obvious to us that this was a breakthrough product. So much so that we didn't take any chances of him shopping that thing around anymore. We acquired the company.

Other brands, like Madden, still have to make great games every year in order to maintain the equity of the brand. If we made bad Tom Clancy games, it wouldn't matter whose name was on the box.

How has the marketing process for video games changed since you've entered the industry?

I think that it's become a lot more mass-market. It's becoming more like the movie business, where we launch a title with a huge day one. Television [advertising] is starting way before the game ships now, which is not something you would have seen several years ago. I think that it's just become less of a niche thing with, you know, running your print ads and putting a few [promotional items] up in a store. When I first started in the business, one brand manager would have 15 titles. Now a brand manager has one, because there's so much more to do.

Talk a little bit about some of the challenges of marketing. We're thinking in particular of games like Prince of Persia and Beyond Good and Evil. These were both games that got very good reviews, but they didn't sell to their expectations.

Well, when you don't have gangsters, guns, or Nazis in your product, then you're going to have to work

who the bosses are, and how much blood are we going to have in the game. All those things are things that marketing and development talk about when they decide to make a sequel.

You have a background in the music industry, and it's obviously in pretty bad shape. Do you think there's a danger that video games could go down the same road in terms of the piracy?

Piracy is definitely a stack of papers on every senior executive's desk in the game business right now. It's not a huge issue in the U.S. right now, but it can very quickly become one if we don't deal with it early. It did have a lot of damaging effects on the music industry. I think we're better equipped to deal with it than they were, though. The proprietary hardware that we use makes [piracy] harder. It doesn't make it impossible, but it makes it harder.

Would you care to kind of speculate on the next round of console systems?

I think that Microsoft is making a really good move by beating Sony to the market if that, in fact, ends up happening with the next generation of systems. But Sony is a very powerful consumer electronics company. They are in our business to stay and to be a leader for a long time.

UBISOFT'S MARKETING MASTER



■ Tony Kee surveys the video game market from high atop Ubisoft's San Francisco offices

Photo: Jeff Novick

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tech

SONY NW-HD1 20GB WALKMAN

Manufacturer: Sony Consumer Electronics
Website: www.sonystyle.com **List Price:** \$399

Coinciding with the Walkman's 20th anniversary, Sony recently announced a 20GB hard-drive based portable audio player. Is this a true iPod killer? It remains to be seen how much of a chunk this aesthetically pleasing piece of hardware will steal from Apple's market share, but it's clear that, come August, Sony won't be pulling any punches. The NW-HD1 weighs in at less than four ounces and comes with a 1.8 inch, 20GB hard drive. Mimicking what clearly works well on the iPod, Sony's baby has a seven-line backlit LCD and touch-sensitive (à la the second generation of 'Pods) jog wheel. With all of these features being nearly identical (price, size, storage capacity, screen, and navigation), the big push is on the unit's battery – the new Walkman has a rechargeable unit that will run for around 30 hours. While all of us in the office love our Apple players, we can also confirm that the current iPods don't offer that magnitude of battery life.



DIGITAL AUDIO SMACKDOWN

HOW TUNES GO DIGITAL

Everyone who went through seventh grade science class knows that sound is, essentially, a series of waves. Computers don't understand waves – they get their jolies from ones and zeroes. Therefore, when a soundwave needs to be understood by a computer and played back, it's converted into a string of binary code. An analog-to-digital converter (ADC software) takes samples of the audio, and each sample is turned into a series of ones and zeroes that the computer can understand as specific noises. If the samples are close enough together, most people won't be able to tell much of a difference between standing in the auditorium, and listening to the recording on their digital audio player a few hours later. However, audiophiles justly insist that "lossy" digital conversion cuts out the extreme high and low-ends of musical instruments – sometimes making drums sound flatter and wind instruments seem less nuanced. The algorithms (codecs like ACC and WMA) used to make digital music files are developed just like game engines and licensed. This means that (unless it's open-source) the tech costs money to companies mak-

ing products that rip CDs, like Musicmatch Jukebox – one reason why there are competing file formats vying for widespread acceptance.

FILE FORMATS, A.K.A CODECS

AAC – Advanced Audio Coding was developed by Dolby Laboratories (among others) and adopted by the industry-leading iTunes music store. AAC offers a nice balance between sound quality and file size.

FLAC – Free Lossless Audio Codec is a "lossless" system. This means that it produces a duplicate that is statistically identical to the original. Audiophiles prefer it, but the files produced are larger than the "lossy" formats that fill up most of this list (like MP3 and OGG).

MP3 – Don't know what the granddaddy of modern digital audio stands for? It's Motion Pictures Experts Group, Layer 3. Nearly every device and service supports this format, but other codecs are starting to catch up to it and the record labels hate it because there is no option for file protection.

MP3Pro – RCA acquired this follow-up to MP3, which some say sounds better at the same file size/bit rate, but it hasn't been widely accepted outside of RCA.

OGG – Ogg Vorbis looks to be the new hotness in digital music. The sound quality is good, the file size is pretty small, and it's open source (so there's no licensing fees to developers). If things go Ogg's way, this could be the file format of choice in the near future.

WMA – Microsoft's baby sounds better, byte for byte, than MP3 and offers integrated copy protection. It's widely accepted and supported, with the legal version of Napster, MusicMatch store, and Wal-Mart all selling secure WMA files.

WAV/AIFF – WAV is the PC version and AIFF is the Mac equivalent. These files are mammoth, but identical to what is found on retail CDs.



TLC

FLATRON L1710SK MONITOR

Manufacturer: LG Electronics
Website: www.lgusa.com
List Price: \$519

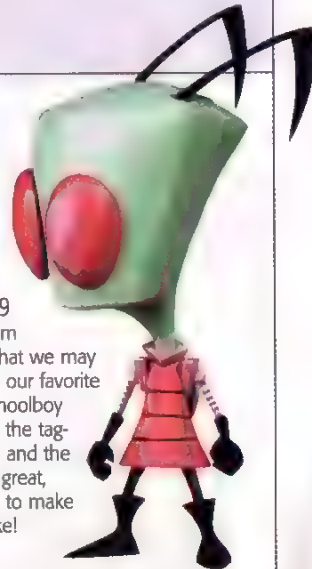
This isn't the end-all of LCD technology, but it's the nicest monitor we've seen at this price point. The 160-degree viewing angle is sweet and the 16ms response time means that this baby has practically no motion artifacts at speeds up to 60 frames per second. Nice! LG's monitor is one of those things that convinces people technology is useful, affordable, and totally awesome.

toys

INVADER ZIM ACTION FIGURES

Manufacturer: Palisades Toys
Website: www.palisadestoy.com **List Price:** \$14.99

We love Zim! We love Zim! Apparently, Palisades Toys loves Zim too – these figures and their companion pieces are so great that we may have peed a little at first sight of them. Series one will include our favorite mini-dominator, Invader Zim; his robot GIR; Dib, the fellow schoolboy who continually tries to expose Zim's alien nature; one half of the tag-team that sent Zim to earth, a.k.a. The Almighty Tallest Purple; and the schoolteacher of our nightmares, Miss Bitters. The sculptures are great, and the collection of accessories for each character is enough to make any follower of the series howl with glee. We miss our cupcake!





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etc

KEYRING SPACE INVADERS AND PAC-MAN

Website: www.gadgetshop.com

List Price: £10.00 (around \$19)

These keychain games sold through a handful of British websites (both Space Invaders and Pac-Man are available) are, we're told, the original games with updated sound effects. The unit flips up from the keychain and the images are bounced off of a mirror – making that wee LCD easier to see.



toys

HALO 2 ACTION FIGURES

Manufacturer: RC2/JoyRide Studios

Website: www.rc2corp.com

List Price: \$14.99 – \$17.99

We're all going to buy the game – that's a given. What's great is that about a month before the game's launch, JoyRide Studios is going to have their Halo 2 figures on the shelves. Series one offers a dual wielding Master Chief, formative enemy Brute, a Warthog with working suspension, and the civilian 'Hog. Buy the troops and then spend the next month building a replica of the Zanzibar level in your basement – that way you can formulate combat strategies with your dolls...er, action figures, and get a leg up on the competition.

peripheral

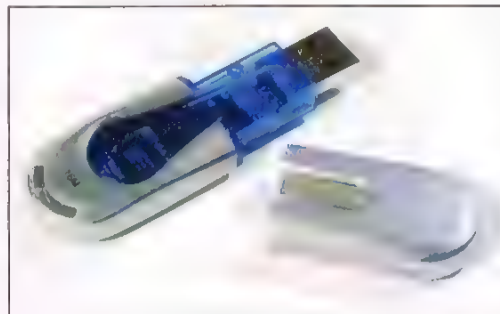
MAX DRIVE 32MB AND 64MB

Manufacturer: Dattel

Website: www.codejunkies.com

List Price: (32Mb PS2/Xbox) \$39.99, (64Mb PS2/Xbox) \$59.99

These larger-format upgrades to the previously available MAX Drives offer the same functionality, but dramatically more room. The big daddies of the line are offered only through the Code Junkies website, while the 16MB originals are available almost everywhere games are sold. Depending on the system, the USB storage device allows you to transfer saves to your computer (PS2) or codes from a PC to the console (Xbox).



etc

BLIK INVADERS WALL GRAPHICS

Manufacturer: Blik

Website: www.whatisblik.com/invader.html

List Price: (main set) \$45, (add-on pack) \$12.50

Remember the invaders charging along the walls of Sony's Santa Monica studio in issue 136 [Santa Monica Studios, pg. 34]? Well, the effect isn't just for the game-creation elite – you can order your own value-priced collection directly from Blik. They stick like a charm and leave no marks when you peel them off. Now everyone will be able to see the alien invaders infesting your room. See, you're not crazy after all!



etc

LATE NIGHT WITH CONAN O'BRIEN 10TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL DVD

THE BEST OF TRIUMPH THE INSULT COMIC DOG DVD

List Price: (Conan) \$19.99, (Triumph) \$19.99

UNLIMITED ENABLED

Interview with Triumph, the Insult Comic Dog

Both of these must-have discs come out on August 10th. We'll see you at the midnight sale, baby! The Conan one has the anniversary special along with 40 minutes of classic skits, outtakes, and remote reporting gigs. "Secrets?" Yup, the favorites are in there. "Inappropriate?" Those too. Even "Making the Band" and "Conan O'Brien on Jerry Lewis Telethon" show up. Triumph's disc is no slouch either, though. All of his famous misadventures are included with over 90 minutes of extra fun – outtakes, his first appearance, un-aired instances of berating various guests, and the pup's "I Keed" music video.



WHO YOU ARE IS NOT ALWAYS...



REALITY CHECK

A LOOK AT THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF GAME DEVELOPMENT

BY ROBERT JOHNSON, PROJECT MANAGER, CAPCOM PRODUCER, MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION



There are many misconceptions in the gaming world about video game development. The misunderstanding isn't on the developer end — it's on the gamer end. For the most part, gamers think development is fun; they think that you play games and, at the end of the day, somehow, the title gets done. In reality, making games is a lot of hard work. But those of us who have a passion for this would have it no other way. It takes a lot of sweat, effort, and headaches to make something go from a concept to a shrink-wrapped package. Things can go wrong from the moment you start until the last minute of development. Whether it's crash bugs, having your key programmer hospitalized with pneumonia, or needing to change the schedule by three months because the sales department wants to ship the product earlier; something is always there to keep you on your toes. We are in the business to make the greatest games possible. It doesn't always happen, but we always strive to do our best. No one ever sets out saying, "Let's make a piece of s—!"

With that said, even the best games aren't perfect. No matter how good a game is, it will never meet everyone's expectations — it's just impossible. Think of a game — a good game — and you can probably still find something that you didn't like about it or that you felt the developer could have done better. Even some of the best games ever suffer from the harshest criticism. I think everyone within the industry can relate to reading comments like, "If only they would have thought to add online play," "With all the space on a DVD why couldn't they add more content?," or "Why did they make this game for one system and not another?" From a developer's standpoint, "If only we had more time" is probably the most relevant reason, because with more time and money almost anything can be accomplished. However, the game has to come out eventually, right? Not everyone has

the luxury given to Polyphony Digital or the Warcraft team at Blizzard.

Arguably the biggest challenge to overcome in development is balancing the product budget with the schedule. The growing cost of development makes it harder and harder to get budgets approved. These are all challenges most people are aware of, but some of the struggles not everyone is aware of are issues like potential licensing problems (when working with a franchise or intellectual property), localization, external development, management hassles, and other random gremlins that no one expects or wants.

When proposing titles to management or decision-makers, sometimes your concept gets approved but not with the requested or desired budget. So, what do you do when you get the green light for the game you want to make, but don't have the cash to do it justice? Well, less money basically means less time to do the game. Instead of having 24 months to do an epic, the team might have 18 months to do a pretty-good game. Some producers might argue that balancing between a given budget and schedule could be one of the biggest challenges facing development teams. The producer wants to make a great game and the designers want to make a great game, too, but people have to get paid.

During the planning phase of each title, the team will brainstorm tons of ideas for features. Some are more feasible than others. Our team, for instance, will take all the ideas and rank them into categories like "Must have," "Should have," or "Would be nice to have." In the end, corners are cut, entire levels and ideas are left on the cutting-room floor, and the only thing to look forward to is a sequel where adding online play or using more of the DVD becomes a reality and not just a collective dream on the part of the team. It might sound blunt and a bit like back-peddling or excuse-making, but the truth is that

No matter how good a game is, it will never meet everyone's expectations — it's just impossible.

the video game industry is a business. And, just like Hollywood and any other industry, it's about being profitable.

Even beyond hands-on design and concept issues, there are other facets that we face when working with international developers. For games developed overseas, U.S. publishers not only have to submit the games for first-party approval; they have to carefully consider the localization of each game. Once the game has been translated into English, we then must make it appeal to an American audience. Sometimes that's as simple as cleaning up the translation and making it readable. But many games have social commentary or cultural references that need to be literally localized for a specific region. Add to the growing list marketing needs like screenshots, product information, press tour materials, special trailer footage, and you'll see that making a game is only one aspect of creating a game. All these factors must be carefully planned and well executed because, if not, they will directly affect your schedule and budget.

Ultimately, we are in this business because we love making and playing games; otherwise we'd have real jobs. Yeah, it's true that there are many ups and downs, but very few jobs compare to the creation of a video game — whether you're a tester or an executive producer. We have to tread that fine line between dealing with budgets, schedules, and managing internal and external teams while worrying about the most important aspect of development: the overall fun of the game. A little thought, effort, and love for your title goes a long way. This is our passion and we love our games like they are our own children. ■ ■ ■

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.

WHO YOU WILL BECOME.



sun

mon

tue

wed

thur

fri

sat

september

05

MADDEN CHALLENGE
09/04 Cincinnati Great American Ballpark
09/05 Pittsburgh Heinz Field
09/11 Buffalo Walden Galleria Mall
09/12 Boston Gillette Stadium
09/17 New York S. St. Seaport
09/18 New York
09/19 Philadelphia Gallery
09/25 Washington DC Union Station
09/26 Charlotte Concord Mills



06

NEW RELEASES
• Burnout 3: Takedown - PS2, Xbox
• Madden NFL 2005 - PC
• Mega Man Anniversary Collection - GBA
• NHL FaceOff 2005 - PS2
• Pokémon Fire Red/Leaf Green - GBA
• Silent Hill 4: The Room - PS2, Xbox
• Test Drive: Eve of Destruction - PS2, Xbox

07



01

NEW RELEASES
• Conflict: Vietnam - PS2, Xbox
• ESPN College Hoops 2K5 - PS2, Xbox
• Full Spectrum Warrior - PC
• Gallop Racer 2004 - PS2
• Ghost Master - Xbox
• Juiced - PS2, Xbox
• NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup - PS2, Xbox, GC
• Shadow Hearts: Covenant - PS2

02

EVENTS 2004 (SEPTEMBER 1-3)
Every year, the video game industry migrates to Europe. For this trade-only event, Amid the 130-plus exhibitors, new games and technologies are unveiled, at least two fuzzy-costumed characters will be accosted, and one person will walk away wanting to get an N-Gate.

03

GAME STARS LIVE (SEPTEMBER 1-3)
This new consumer video games show is being held at London's ExCel center and is based on the ITV show *Game Stars*. The event features a main stage with such challenges as The Bear Pit and the European Online Game Championships. Many publishers will be showing new products as well.

04

DRAGON CON (SEPTEMBER 3-6)
This expo (held in Atlanta, GA at the Hyatt Regency and Marriott Marquis) is geared toward the everyday nerd. Here, you can bask in the darkness of science fiction and fantasy, comics, literature, GYS, you are nerds too!, movies, music, art, and gaming. For all these are YOUR people. These are YOUR people.

12

GAMES EXPO 2004
Competitions, LAN parties, giveaways, and hot new games await at this first annual expo held at the Historic Hammerstein Ballroom in New York. People in attendance from Chicago or Boston are urged to put a curse on the Yankees.

13

NEW RELEASES
• Dynasty Warriors 4 Empires - PS2
• Fable - Xbox (if we're lucky)
• Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone - PS2
• F-Zero GP Legend - GBA
• Gradius V - PS2
• Monster Hunter - PS2
• NHL 2005 - PS2, Xbox
• Sly 2: Band of Thieves - PS2
• The Sims 2 - PC
• Viewtiful Joe - PS2

14

NEW RELEASES
• Dungeon Lords - PC
• Kohan II: Kings of War - PC
• Oggy and the Cockroaches - GBA
• Rome: Total War - PC
• Silent Hunter III - PC
• Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War - PC
• World Championship Pool 2004 - GC

15

GAMES FOR HEALTH (SEPTEMBER 16-17)
Healthcare experts and industry insiders gather in Madison, WI's Monona Terrace to explore how interactive games apply to direct patient care, therapy, and health education. From what we hear, if you play games every day for 6 hours, you'll live to be 241.

16

Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow opens in theaters

17



18

OKLAHOMA GAMING EXHIBITION
Finally there's a reason for gamers to travel to Oklahoma. As the state's official song goes "Oklahoma! Brand new state! Brand new state, gonna treat you great!" As you sing this catchy jingle, you can buy, sell, and trade classic games with fellow enthusiasts at this show.

19

STAR WARS TRILOGY DVD releases on September 21

20

NEW RELEASES
• Boktai 2 - GBA
• Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia - PS2, PC
• Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault - PC
• Mega Man X: Command Mission - PS2, GC
• Men of Valor - Xbox
• Star Wars: Battlefront - PS2, Xbox, PC
• Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 - PS2, Xbox, GC, PC

21



24

TOKYO GAME SHOW 2004 (SEPTEMBER 24-26)
Travel to the Nippon Convention Center for the largest video game exposition in Japan. Word has it that Sony will have playable PSPs on the floor, and Square Enix may just show off a new Final Fantasy game that is a complete departure for the series.

25

Mark Hamill turns 55 and is still waiting for a phone call from George Lucas... or any other director.

27

MEAT LOAF turns 57. Meatloaf gets more delicious with age.



28

NEW RELEASES
• Advance Wars: Under Fire - GC
• Blood Will Tell - PS2
• Crash Twinsanity - PS2, Xbox
• Def Jam Fight for NY - PS2, Xbox, GC
• Donkey Konga - GC
• Evil Geniuses - PC
• Galleon: Islands of Mystery - Xbox
• Rocky: Legends - PS2, Xbox
• Second Sight - PS2, Xbox

29



30

NEW RELEASES
• Atlantis Evolution - PC
• Top Gun 2 - PS2



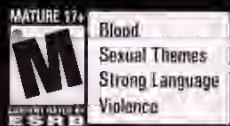


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MIDNIGHT CLUB 3™

DUB edition

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DUB



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER SUTHERLAND

PIMP YOUR RIDE:



ROCKSTAR AND DUB MAGAZINE BRING THE ART OF AUTO CUSTOMIZATION TO THE MAINSTREAM



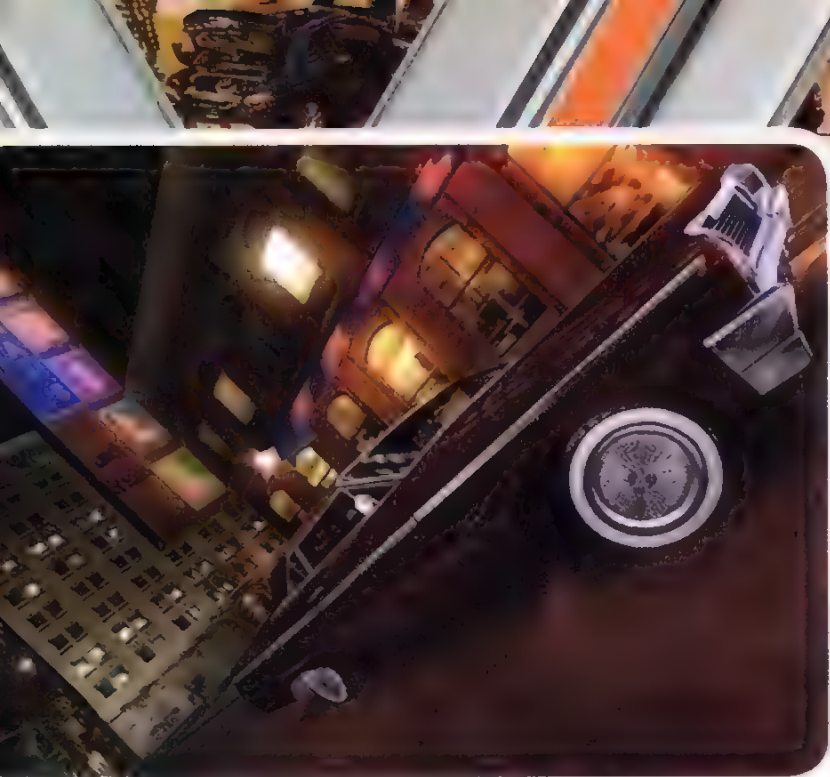
Contrary to popular belief, America did not invent the automobile. That honor belongs to Frenchman Nicolas Joseph Cugnot, who built a tricked-out, steam-powered horseless carriage that reached a blazing speed of 2.3mph in 1763. Of course, it was an American (Henry Ford), who brought the gas-powered automobile to the masses, and shortly after the first Model T rolled off the assembly line in 1908, the United States became a society obsessed with cars.

This fascination reveals itself in myriad ways. From the lowrider to the drive-through window, from the monster truck rally to our long tradition of backseat necking, Americans can and will do just about anything and everything with their cars. Whether it's building an SUV the size of a Tokyo apartment or pioneering the "sport" of demolition derby, the U.S. has mastered the art of automotive excess.

Even more importantly, Americans often define themselves by the car they drive. For every suburban cowboy who asserts his masculinity through a hemi-powered Dodge Ram, there's a sensitive artist who advertises his progressive politics with a Honda hybrid. Luxury makes like Mercedes and BMW are often viewed as status symbols, and it's not uncommon for a person newly flush with cash to purchase a high-end sedan before buying a house.

With so much of our identities wrapped up in sleek Detroit (or German) steel, it's no wonder that millions of Americans are rapidly joining the ranks of what is commonly becoming known as "DUB culture" each year. Named for *DUB Magazine*, which formed in 2000 to chronicle the world of car





hip-hop mentality. But it is – they've got blinged-out watches and their S500s on 22s [22 inch rims]. You see it in all mediums and forms of entertainment. It's not a specific niche anymore. Back in 1998, only thugs and hustlers did this. Now, you see cars like this everywhere. Soccer moms drive 22s on Escalades. Rims are

totally mainstream now."

Walking the show floor, it was hard not to be impressed by the ostentatious vehicles on display. From the smallest import tuner to the largest Hummer H2, individuals and pro shops had their best examples of radical customization on display. If there is a way to make a car stand out from the pack, someone has thought of it, be it Louis Vuitton seat covers, 26-inch spinning rims, or (God help us) having three LCD televisions in the trunk. Fan interest was high, with attendance projected at over 10,000

customization, this trend encompasses the huge scope of aftermarket automotive parts and modifications. After only four years, an appearance in DUB has become a badge of honor for musicians, athletes, and Hollywood stars who want to display their fleet of high-priced autos for the world to see.

At a DUB-sponsored car show in Miami, the magazine's creative director Haythem Haddad spoke about the rapid ascent of car customization into the mainstream.

"Every year it's just growing tremendously," Haddad observes. "It crosses all boundaries. We've got guys like Tony Hawk and Bucky Lasek. Traditionally, you wouldn't think of them as having a

people. This was probably helped by the star power on hand, which included celebrity vehicles owned by Latrell Sprewell, *Pimp My Ride* host Xzibit, and Snoop Dogg, as well as a concert by hip-hop stars Loon, The Clipse, and Fat Joe.

And the market is only growing. DUB's circulation will be well over 200,000 by year-end, and total sales for aftermarket auto parts last year topped \$3.2 billion. Rims and tires made up the bulk of this figure, and that hot segment of the market has enjoyed nearly 200 percent growth annually.

"Enthusiasts from the sport compacts are migrating – there's an evolution there," comments Haddad. "A lot of the guys that were into sport compacts four years ago are now into the big trucks and luxury vehicles. It's an aspirational thing. A guy that spends \$40,000 on his Honda, he's going to spend \$50,000 on his next car, whether it's a luxury car or an SUV. They don't usually turn around and buy another Honda."

According to Haddad, many of these enthusiasts are also rabid gamers. "If it's an SUV, you've got to have a PlayStation 2 and an Xbox. There's a system in almost every SUV here," he noted.

"We're all gamers – we're into racing games, we're into first-person shooters, we're into everything."

The DUB crew had long wanted to break into the world of gaming, especially because they felt that their culture was not being accurately represented in the customization-themed racing games currently on the market.

"Authenticity is the key," Haddad said. "[Enthusiasts] will walk by a car that they see in a TV ad or a print ad, and they'll automatically see the things that are wrong with the vehicle. They'll say, 'That's wack.' Need for Speed: Underground is a fun game. But, there are a lot of aspects of the game aesthetically that have no bearing on our market. It doesn't hit on the characteristics of the cars. It's not very current, either. A lot of the trends you see in there are kind of passé now. They were a little more popular three or four years ago."

Although DUB has been approached by several game companies, none of them offered what the magazine really wanted: hands-on involvement in the production process.

"We've had so many opportunities to just license our brand," recalls Haddad. "All the major manufacturers have approached us to license our brand



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MIDNIGHT CLUB 3
DUB edition

PIMP YOUR RIDE

for a racing game. But, initially, we didn't have [offers] for us being actually involved in the game... A lot of the developers think that what they know is what's best for the gamer. That's true to a certain extent - we're not going to talk about playability or technical things. But we want to go in there and say, 'This is the way the game is supposed to look, these are the cars you're supposed to have, and let's get our hands on everything we could possibly dream of.'"

Enter Rockstar Games, a company known for being keenly attuned to urban culture and trends. As it happens, the company was looking to take its already successful *Midnight Club* series in a new direction, one that focused on radical automotive customization, heading away from the franchise's tradition of compact tuner cars. At least part of the motivation for this move came from the amazing success of EA's aforementioned *Need for Speed: Underground*, which took the street racing formula pioneered by *Midnight Club* and reaped huge sales figures by adding real licensed vehicles and deep customization options.

"It's fair to say that we looked at what other games had done," comments Rockstar senior product manager Corey Wade. "It was pretty obvious that customization had to be a big part

of [*Midnight Club 3*]. It was a big hit in *Need for Speed: Underground* and other games, and we felt like we had to beat them at our own game."

Rockstar's Chris Carro quickly added, "It's also something people asked for from us. It was one of the top couple of things that people asked for; they wanted licensed vehicles and they wanted to be able to customize them."

The development team at Rockstar San Diego also wanted to attempt a more ambitious take on automotive culture as a whole, in an effort to move past the tuner car phenomenon that was the focus of *Midnight Club II*.

"The whole tuner car thing is what everybody is doing this year," stated Carro. "We feel like we pretty much tapped that with *Midnight Club II*. Now, everybody is following *Midnight Club II* and *Need for Speed*, and that's kind of passé. This year, we don't feel like we're in there with everybody else. This year, we feel like we're the only ones offering the full range."

Each part and manufacturer in the game is vetted by the DUB braintrust, to make sure that every add-on is as realistic and up-to-date as possible.

"What's good about doing this game with Rockstar is that a lot of these trends come and go," comments Haddad. "They'll be hot one year, and fall off the

next year. Even within months, you'll see lots of things that are just flashes in the pan. With Rockstar, we'll tell them, 'This is hot right now,' or 'This is going to be hot in four months.' Certain things we thought were going to work we had to take out. It's better to take it out and be authentic than leave it in there for the sake of leaving it in there. If something goes out of fashion, we'll take it out."

After giving us an extensive rundown of *Midnight Club 3*'s vast selection of vehicles and customization options, Rockstar finally let us sit down and create our very own pimped-out automotive masterpiece.

We started with the iconic West Coast ride - the 1964 Chevy Impala. At the outset, it was as pristine and untouched as if it had just rolled off the assembly line. Of course, we were about to change that very quickly.

The first big decision you have to make is your paint job. In *Midnight Club 3*, your options are much

more diverse than just selecting a simple "Red" or "Blue" from a menu screen. Just like in real life, you have an almost infinite selection of colors, finishes, and special paint techniques to choose from. Some of the more intricate ones include Pearlescent, which evokes the shifting, layered luminescence of the prized jewel that gives it its name. Glossy is a highly reflective sheen that is common on many hot rods. Fades let you perform subtle transitions between two different colors. For example, you might have a blue/black fade where the perimeter of your hood is black then



transforms to a large blue square in the middle. The most impressive paint option is Color Shift, which allows the user to select a base color and then pick up to five highlight colors. The effect is stunning; by adjusting your view of the car and altering the angle of the lighting



you will see deep greens, reds, and blues appear on a vehicle that seemed to be purple at first glance. Given the old-school appeal of our ride, we selected a cleaner, more traditional look, opting for a snow-white glossy finish.

From there, you can augment your paint job with flashy vinyls and decals. Vinyls include replicating the classic '50s flames to more intricate modern tribal designs. In addition, there are well over a dozen points on the vehicle where you can place manufacturer decals. Put it this way: If you want to look as blatantly commercial as a NASCAR driver, you'll be able to do it in Midnight Club 3. Again, we chose the tasteful route, placing two broad black racing stripes over the hood, roof, and trunk, alongside a choice "Nos" sticker on the front window. The windows themselves can be tinted to varying degrees, and you'll even be able to tint in more vibrant colors, something DUB's Haddad informed us was one of the newest fashions on the street. In a nod to its tuner car roots, Midnight Club 3 also gives you a variety of neon installations for that

cool, eerie undercarriage glow.

With the basic look in place, it was time to get down to some serious bodywork. The body of your vehicle can be dramatically altered. Options include dozens of bumper and grille combinations, rear ends, spoilers, tailfins, and hood modifications that range from a small scoop to the mammoth chrome Holly air intake. Even little details like trim and having your license plate (which can be personalized, of course) held up by two chains are available. For a lowrider look, we chose a classy, silver-trimmed spare tire mount on the backend, a smooth look for the front, and even chopped down the profile of the roof. Finishing things off, we opted for a sweet side exhaust, although more traditional single, dual, and double exhausts (as well as gold and chrome tip accessories) are available.

Then it was time to make the most important decision any car owner can make — the rims and tires. A hot set of rims is the crowning glory of a luxury ride, and thanks to Midnight Club 3's involvement with DUB, the game has a huge selection of rims, any of which can be purchased in sizes from 16-inch

to the just-debuted 28-inch models. Whether it's DUB's own ultra-popular TIS rims, the classic gold spoke Daytonos, or

the currently in vogue Davin Spinners, this title will have the blades you need to roll in style. In addition, the options for tweaking the tires are exhaustive, giving you the freedom to adjust both the profile and width.

With a clean set of BF Goodrich white-walls on our Impala, we added the final touch: rear-to-front airbag suspension. Airbags are a bit like hydraulics (which are also available in Midnight Club 3), but instead of a sudden bounce, they smoothly lower your car onto the tires when you pull up to a stop sign.

In addition to the visual elements available to players, there is an equal emphasis placed on under-the-hood enhancements. Again, these modifications are all fully licensed by some of the world's most respected part manufacturers. So far, over 25 companies have signed on for participation in Midnight Club, including Brembo brakes, Clutch Masters transmissions, Paxton/Vortech superchargers, Volant air intake systems, Eibach springs, and Tein suspension systems. Expect more in the coming weeks as Rockstar finalizes several deals currently in negotiations.

Of course, all these parts won't be available to you at the outset. As you work your way up the ranks of Midnight Club 3, you'll gradually win cash to buy both cosmetic and performance



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enhancements, in addition to new vehicles. As always, you'll have to make tough choices about expanding your garage versus tricking out the cars and bikes you already have.

These decisions will be made even harder by the vast selection of cars, SUVs, and motorcycles being assembled with the help of the DUB staff. As we stated before, all the vehicles in the game are licensed from real world manufacturers, a list that reads like a veritable who's who of the automotive industry. Even better, all cars support full damaging models, which had been a major sticking point with the auto makers last time around. This was another area in which DUB, with extensive contacts in the industry, helped smooth over any existing differences between Detroit and Rockstar San Diego, who were unwilling to have licensed vehicles come at the expense of full damage. Bear in mind that this damage is only cosmetic, however, as the team felt strongly that having damage affect handling and performance would only take away from the game's focus on lightning-fast arcade racing.

Even though *Midnight Club 3* is expanding its scope beyond the tuner car market, Rockstar was eager to point out that fans of previous titles will not be left out in the cold. To this end, there are still

a selection of popular sport compacts, including the Dodge Neon, the Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution, and the Volkswagen Golf R32.

That said, it's going to be hard to think small when you see some of the more impressive rides available to you as you advance through the game's career mode. In keeping with the DUB aesthetic, SUVs have been added to the mix, including the hip-hop status symbol du jour, the Cadillac Escalade (also available in the pickup EXT model). While the huge Detroit specimens have been painstakingly recreated, Rockstar did inform us that in the interest of keeping *Midnight Club 3*'s blistering sense of speed, the development team has taken some liberties with the acceleration and handling of the SUVs to make sure that they are nimble and quick enough to be used during races. Trust us, 

THE RIDES OF MIDNIGHT CLUB

Here's a list of all the vehicles confirmed for *Midnight Club 3*. Keep in mind that this list is not complete, as some licensing deals are still being negotiated. Rockstar has informed us that the final list will total over 50.

MAKE	VEHICLE	CLASS
Aprilla	Mille Factory	Sport Bike
Cadillac	2004 CTS-V	Luxury Sedan
Cadillac	Escalade	SUV/Truck
Cadillac	Escalade EXT	SUV/Truck
Chevy	1981 Camaro Z28	Classic/Muscle
Chevy	1968 Corvette	Classic/Muscle
Chevy	1969 Camaro	Classic/Muscle
Chevy	1964 Impala	Classic/Muscle
Chevy	1970 El Camino SS	Classic/Muscle
Chevy	Corvette Z06	High End
Chevy	1996 Impala SS	Specialty
Chevy	Silverado SS	SUV/Truck
Chrysler	300c	Luxury Sedan
Dodge	1969 Charger RT-SE 440	Classic/Muscle
Dodge	Charger RT-SE 440	Concept
Dodge	Neon SRT 4	Culture
Dodge	Viper GTS/R	High End
Dodge	Ram SRT 10	SUV/Truck
Ducati	Monster SR4	Sport Bike
Ducati	999R	Sport Bike
Ducati	SS1000	Sport Bike
Hotmatch	D'Elegance	Chopper
Hotmatch	Cuevito	Chopper
Hotmatch	Skully	Chopper
Hummer	H2	SUV/Truck
Hummer	H1	SUV/Truck
Kawasaki	Ninja ZX 12R	Sport Bike
Lexus	LS300	High End
Lotus	Elise	High End
Lotus	Esprit	High End
Mercedes	SL500	High End
Mercedes	CL500	Luxury Sedan
Mercedes	G55 AMG / G500	SUV/Truck
Mitsubishi	Lancer Evolution	Sports Tuner
Mitsubishi	Eclipse	Sports Tuner
Pontiac	1970 GTO	Classic/Muscle
Pontiac	1968 GTO	Classic/Muscle
Saleen	S7	High End
Saleen	S8	High End
Volkswagen	Jetta	Culture
Volkswagen	Golf R32	Culture
Volkswagen	Phaeton	Luxury Sedan



American muscle cars like the Corvette and Pontiac GTO are represented, but so are exotic sports cars like the Lotus Elise and the rare Saleen S7.

It's not all about four-wheeled transport, however. *Midnight Club II* was the first major racing game to incorporate both motorcycles and automobiles, and this is one of the areas that has received the most attention from the team.

"Let's be honest, the bikes in *Midnight Club II* were just too hard," admits Corey Wade. To help make the game's motorcycles a more user-friendly experience, Rockstar San Diego has again stretched reality to make bike racing more enjoyable. If you played the second game in the series,

your most vivid memory of riding a motorcycle is most likely sending your hapless rider flying ass over teakettle at the slightest collision with a lamppost, car, or median. This time, the feel of the bikes is more solid, allowing you to stay glued to the

handlebars even when running through a tree (which will now break away upon impact) or even being sideswiped by a car. The handling has been improved as well, so there's less of that frantic, out-of-control feeling you got astride your crotch rocket the last time around. These adjustments, in addition to the improved leaning mechanics, has allowed the team to implement nitrous on the motorcycles, something that was left out in *MC II* because the insane burst of speed made the bikes virtually impossible to maneuver precisely.

Midnight Club 3 is also broadening its horizons to incorporate not only import racing cycles, but the red-hot chopper bike phenomenon. If you have cable, you've no doubt become engrossed in the Discovery Channel's *American Chopper*, which has helped to restore the over-the-top road hog as a pop culture icon. To ensure the game has choppers that are as true-to-life as possible, Rockstar has enlisted the help of Hotmatch Custom Cycles, which recently was selected as the top custom shop in America on the broadcast competition *The Great Biker Build-Off* (also on the Discovery Channel). The shop has lent *Midnight Club 3* the virtual likenesses of a few of their most popular models, like the revered Hotmatch Skully. These rides are to the game's Ducatis and Kawasakis as the Corvette is to the Mitsubishi Eclipse — a hulking, asphalt shredding testament to American horsepower. They're sexy as hell to boot, and you'll never feel cooler than when you hit the handbrake, slam the gas and bust a 360-degree burnout before sprinting down the street.

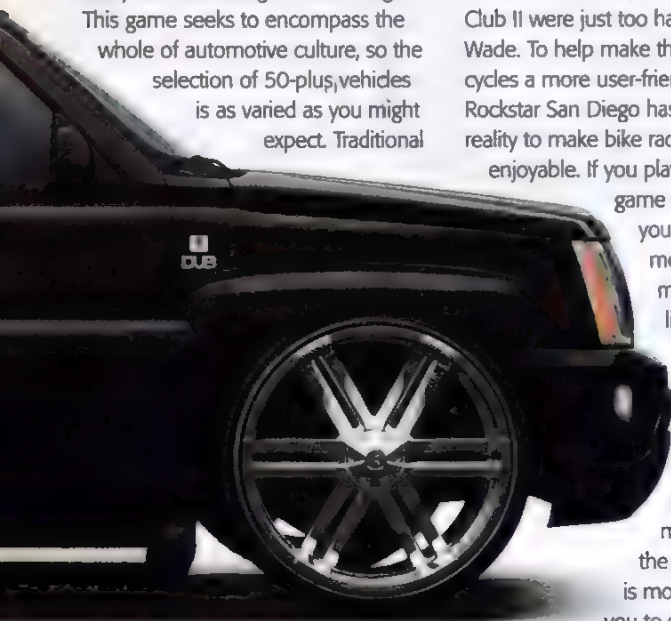
Just as you can supercharge your ride's engine, the team at Rockstar San Diego is intent on making sure that *Midnight Club 3* is improving in all areas, not just the front-end options. Significant enhancements are being made to a graphics and gameplay package that was already one of the finest in the racing genre.

"The city detail makes a big difference," observes Jay Panek, a producer at Rockstar San Diego. "There are more render passes for more details. The lights have more glow and realism. When you are tearing through the streets, the camera shakes and the lights begin to blur. In real life, when you are really going over 150mph, there is a strange combination of the world blurring around you and adrenaline giving you a sense of clarity. We are capturing that feeling here. The living city really enhances the feeling of speed as well. The fact that you have to navigate pedestrians on the street and a lot of ambient traffic makes everything feel more on edge and intense. The more detail you see when roaring down the street, the faster it feels."

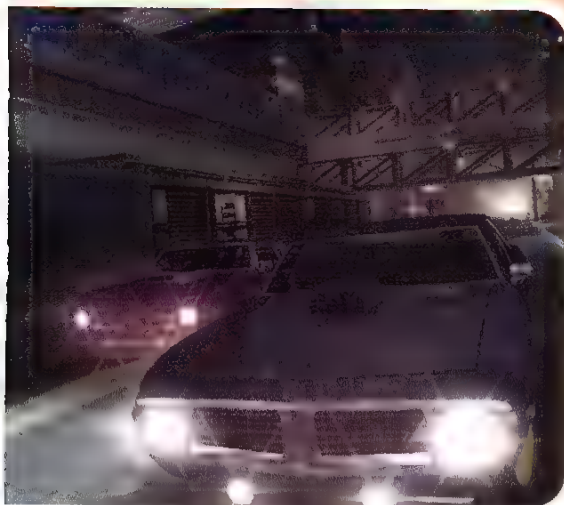
After trying our hand at a series of races in *Midnight Club 3*, we can safely say that Panek and the team have made great strides in the graphical presentation. As gorgeous as *Midnight Club II* looked, this game blows it away in nearly every area. The real-time lighting and reflections are striking, and make each city seem to sparkle with detail. As you reach speeds approaching 200mph in some vehicles, at times it's almost difficult to take in everything rushing by you. The texturing on the streets

you wouldn't want a Hummer H2 that actually felt like driving the real thing.

This game seeks to encompass the whole of automotive culture, so the selection of 50-plus vehicles is as varied as you might expect. Traditional



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is greatly improved, and you'll catch glimpses of streetlights shining back at you from puddles as you blaze by. The car models themselves are extremely shiny; all the better to see the complex multi-hued paint job you created in the garage.

The three cities recreated in the game have been picked for their specific significance in the automotive world. "Each one of the cities [is important]," comments Chris Carro. "Detroit is the Motor City. San Diego is the home of street racing. And, most recently, Atlanta and the Dirty South is where people are blinging out their rides with the most extreme things."

Although each city will include many familiar landmarks, the team has taken a bit of artistic license in order to create even more of the series signature shortcuts and jumps.

"We take signature elements of a city and create an environment that supports a variety of gameplay," points out Panek. "With all the game modes we have in *Midnight Club 3*, you can't design an environment just for one of them. They all have to work and be fun. There are so many cool things to do in the cities. Screaming through traffic, big drifting power slides, huge air, back alleys, shortcuts through buildings, breaking through plate glass windows...it's all in there. There are so many things to consider when making a real open city."

The career mode has also been

revamped to let gamers actually see every city. *Midnight Club II* offered some of the most challenging racing on the market, perhaps a bit too challenging for some consumers, many of whom did not complete the game or even reach the last stages.

"This is an area where *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition* has made enormous strides technologically. We have developed a new technology for MC 3 that will evaluate the player's performance and make adjustments to the game accordingly. This means that an entry-level player will be able to get deeper into the game while an experienced player is still challenged. The game is different for everyone who plays it."

In addition, you won't have to complete every race in one city to advance to the next, which should help less adept gamers get to experience the full range of what *Midnight Club 3* has to offer. Other less noticeable details will improve the playing experience, from wider streets in every city to generally improved handling, hopefully easing any frustrations caused by the last iteration of the series. Even better, the game doesn't end at the end of career mode.

"There is race content that is created during careers to guarantee that each experience is different," reveals Panek. "This content is created forever! I'm not kidding. Even after you have completed a career, there will still be races created so you can keep winning money and

customizing any ride you want. There is always something to do and it's always different."

One part of the career mode that is less emphasized in *Midnight Club 3* is the plotline and characters, a decision that Rockstar feels is best given the new emphasis on licensed vehicles and customization. "The star this time is the vehicles," says Carro. However, there are several characters you encounter through your hot-rodding adventures, including garage owners and mechanics who hip you to the ways of the streets.

Of course, you'll be able to get your thrills online for months after you've abandoned single-player, and this is another area in which *Midnight Club 3* places itself in the top rung of the genre. Once again, up to eight players can compete in a number of races and contests via either the PlayStation 2 Network Adaptor or Xbox Live (as of press time, only Xbox Live is confirmed to support voice chat). Not content with keeping the status quo, significant backend issues are being addressed as well. Now, if the host of a PS2 online race quits, the network will perform a "host migration," automatically moving the server to another player on the fly. This is the same for Cruise mode, which allows you to start a race with people you've met online, instead of backing out and having to start a race through the lobby menus. Also, Race Editor races allow you to take your own course online to play with friends.

Taking a look at everything *Midnight Club 3* has to offer: vastly improved graphics, insanely comprehensive front-end features, a partnership with one of the auto industry's most respected publications, and frenetic, open-ended racing action, it's hard not to expect that this will be one of 2004's best driving titles.

In many ways, just as *Gran Turismo*'s design philosophy, with its painstakingly recreated courses and obsessively detailed collection of vehicles, is distinctively Japanese, *Midnight Club 3* defines America's unique fascination with flashy displays of style and overwhelming horsepower. While accurate simulation is fine and good, there is something addictive about *Midnight Club*'s fender-banging, balls-out free-for-alls. Throw in the fact that you can do it all in a car that would put 50 Cent's to shame, and this game looks to be an instant classic. ■■■



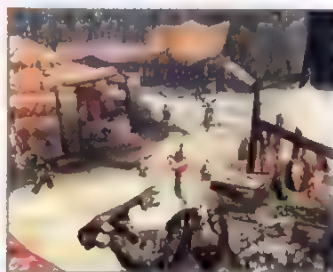


THE GREATEST FIGHTERS
KNOW THAT STRENGTH COMES IN NUMBERS

WHEN WARRIORS LEARN TO WORK AS A UNIT,
THEY ARE NOT SEPARATE AND STRONG
BUT UNITED AND UNSTOPPABLE.

MONSTER HUNTER

GET READY TO
TEAM UP FOR ONLINE PLAY

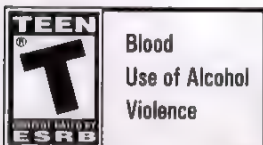


ONLINE AND OFFLINE GAMEPLAY OPTIONS - UP TO FOUR FRIENDS CAN PLAY ONLINE TO SIMULTANEOUSLY HUNT DOWN MONSTERS AND COMPLETE CHALLENGING MISSION OBJECTIVES.

DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS - EXPLORE BREATHTAKING, RICHLY DETAILED LANDSCAPES.

FULL CHARACTER CUSTOMIZATION - CREATE AND MODIFY YOUR CHARACTER INCLUDING NAME, GENDER, HAIRSTYLE, FACIAL FEATURES, OUTFIT AND MORE!

BUILD YOUR OWN EQUIPMENT - CREATE WEAPONS AND ARMOR FROM MONSTERS PARTS AFTER A KILL.



CAPCOM



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PlayStation 2



LIGHTS CAMERA

EA COMBINES THE GLAMOUR AND GLITZ OF



All Photography by Ed Carreón



ACTION!

HOLLYWOOD WITH THE POWER OF VIDEO GAMES

The lights of the City of Angels, the cameras of Hollywood's brightest talent, and the action of the world's largest entertainment software company all come together to make Electronic Arts' brand new complex in Playa Vista, CA a new standard in video game development. Affectionately known as EALA, this massive facility is, in many ways, not what one might expect.

While games in the 1970s and '80s were created with small one- or two-person teams in various garages around the world, game development in today's world of high tech wizardry is a massive undertaking where millions of dollars are won and lost by how far the development talent can take you. Designed to recruit and retain the industry's top talent, EALA harks back to the glory days of old Hollywood in both its grand design and enormous scope.

Located just off the Ballona Wetlands and minutes away from the Los Angeles Airport, EALA is the very definition of deluxe accommodations, and is the first new entertainment studio of its size to open in Los Angeles since Warner Bros. in the 1930s.



■ John Batter, vice president and general manager of EALA, also worked in the computer animation division at Dreamworks where he helped produce such animated hits as *Antz* and *Shrek*

Designed by world-renowned architect Michael White of HLW, this multi-million dollar studio pays homage to both the protected swamplands it resides beside and the Hollywood studios it is here to emulate. This is obvious the moment you approach the entrance, which features a classic gate with a palm tree-lined driveway. But it's what is inside that truly

makes this place special. Currently home to 425 engineers, level designers, programmers, and artists EALA hopes to house over 1,000 before the end of the decade. The current roster is comprised of former employees of EA Pacific, Westwood Studios, and Dreamworks Interactive, as well as a phalanx of new recruits.

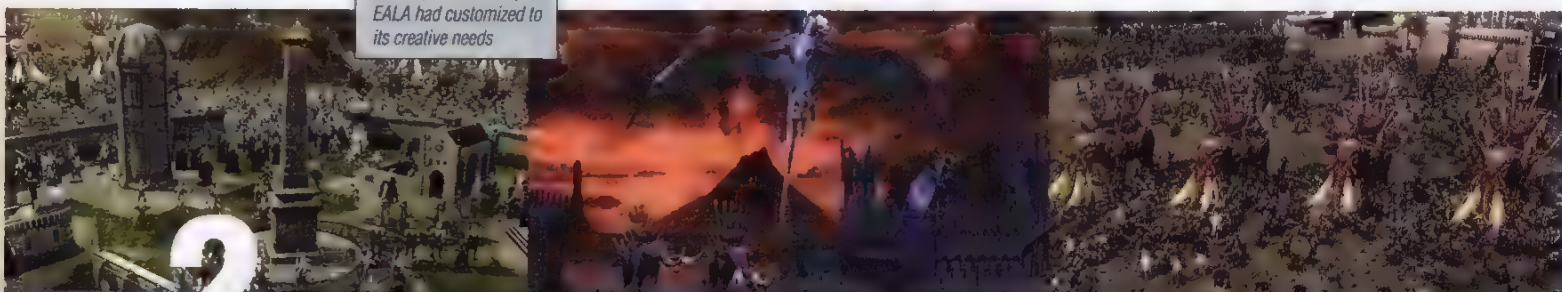
At the moment, the studio's announced titles include Medal of Honor

- Pacific Assault, The Lord of the Rings: The Battle For Middle-Earth, GoldenEye: Rogue Agent, and Medal of Honor 4 for consoles (see sidebars for more on each game), but that's just the tip of the iceberg of things you will see from EALA.
- On a typical day, there are six to eight teams working on projects in various stages of completion, from smaller pre-pro-



■ The courtyard features plants indigenous to the nearby Ballona Wetlands

250,000
Total square feet of space EALA had customized to its creative needs



FLOOR 2

The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth

> SYSTEM PC > RELEASE NOVEMBER 16

Built off the same Sage 3D game engine that was first used in *Command & Conquer: Generals*, EA's new real-time strategy game, *The Battle For Middle-Earth*, allows the player to relive the greatest battles from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Play as the forces of good or evil as you try to decide the fate of the One Ring. Featuring a unique ending for both campaigns and literally hundreds of units onscreen, *Battle For Middle-Earth* promises to push the real-time strategy genre to new heights.

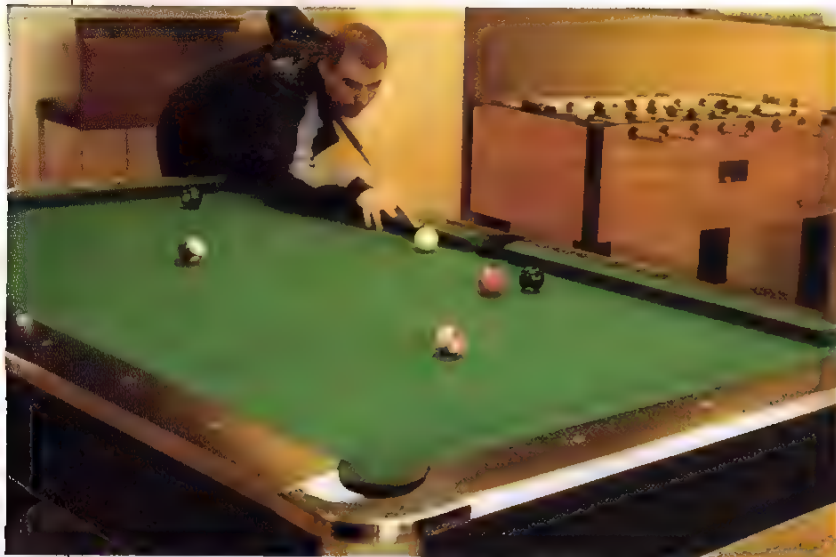
Play smaller scale levels like the Mines of Moria where

you get to lead the nine members of the Fellowship through its halls, or experience the grandeur of large-scale wars at Helm's Deep, the foot of the Black Gates, or the Battle of The Last Alliance.

One of the more interesting aspects to this RTS is the real-time emotions your units display depending on the situation. Watch swordsmen tremble as Trolls approach or cheer at the cleaving of their enemies. In total there are five emotions including cheer, fear, taunt, point, and cower.

After playing the game, we must admit that the epic

scope of the wars is amazing to see in action. Luckily, more often than not, you don't just generate one unit – you tend to spawn platoons. Plus, much of the resource management is simplified by the fact that structures must be built in pre-determined positions. Which, despite what the hardcore fans might say, is actually quite cool, as it creates much more interesting structures and helps everything fit into a castle theme like Minas Tirith.



■ What video game studio would be complete without a pool table...

■ ...and arcade machines?



duction units to ones in a full development cycle. This is one of the reasons why EA is such a successful company. It has the ability to move and secure resources to attend to each product's needs at any given time.

While the main goal of this facility is to create games, its long list of amenities reads more like a resort hotel than a place of work. The pampering of EA's most prized asset — its employees — begins the moment they arrive to work. There isn't a parking lot. If you want to park, just turn your keys over to the valet.

Want lunch? EALA features a 24-hour cafeteria. Want to work out? There's a state-of-the-art gym with enough equipment to work muscles most people didn't even know they had. Need coffee? There's a Starbucks in the lobby. Want to play a game of hoops? There is a full basketball court as well as a soccer

field and beach volleyball pit. It doesn't end there. There's also a game room, a theater, myriad conference rooms with top-of-the-line plasma TVs, and even a laundry service for those who need it.



Of course, Electronic Arts could have built this studio anywhere. And even though it may be easy to conclude that this studio is just about champagne wishes and caviar dreams, nothing could be further from the truth. John Batter, general manager of EALA, who can best be described as the Willy Wonka of this video game factory, concedes that it is, "a fun place to work," but that the developers here go above and beyond the call of duty, and that EALA was designed to give them as much comfort as possible to function well in their demanding jobs.

At its root, EA is a video game company, but the publisher came to this

town with an agenda. "Our core competency is creating games," states Batter, who speaks with a regal flair, "and we want to take bits and pieces out of Hollywood to create more immersive [and] better experiences."

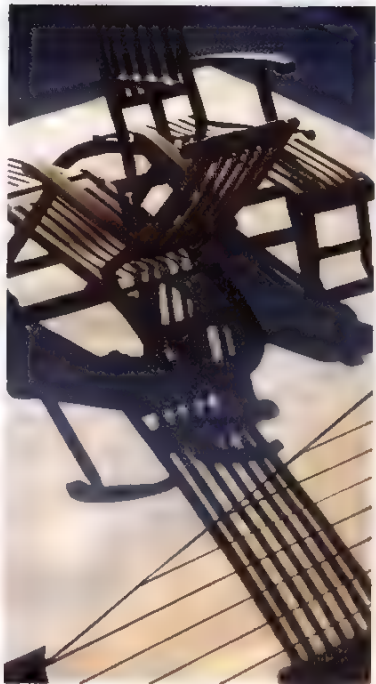
While it would be easy to assume that EA came here to get closer to the movie studios so it could get the jump on the latest Hollywood licenses, nothing could be further from the truth.

"We didn't create the studio to get closer to [Hollywood] to get more licenses. We've got working relationships with the studios; we know how to do those deals. What we really wanted to do was leverage the entertainment infrastructure that's here in LA — great production values, all the great artists, digital artists in the digital effects industry, and the feature animation industry. So you know, lighters, visual effects artists, animators, all those kind of people that can bring the production value up on what we're doing."

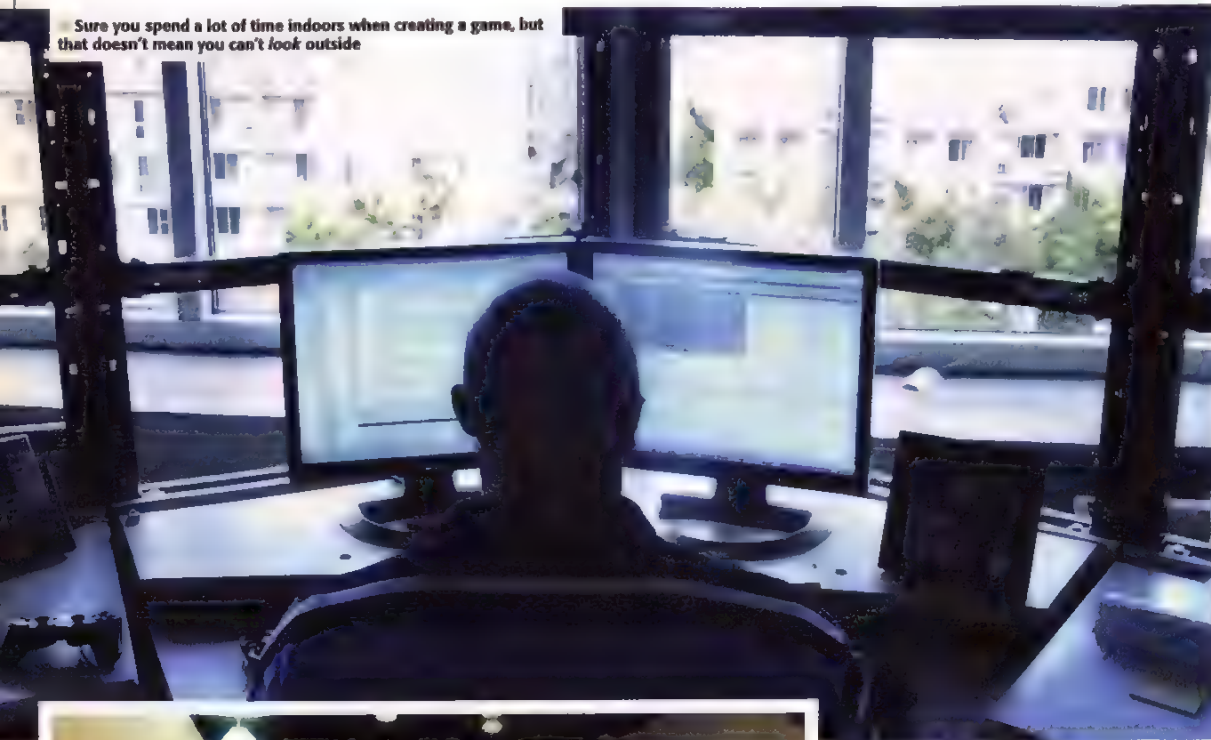
425

Number of employees creating games at EALA

■ And we bet you thought this studio didn't have planes attached to the walls. What can we say? This studio has everything!



Sure you spend a lot of time indoors when creating a game, but that doesn't mean you can't look outside



The basketball court and soccer field are popular destinations during lunch



Every floor has its own kitchenette where you can buy a soda for 25 cents and watch EALA TV – a closed circuit television channel that features game news and announcements – on a wall-mounted plasma

The Lord Of The Rings team blows off some steam with a little sword play



In fact, EA sees this as a move to get closer to the talent that it feels is essential for pushing the video game entertainment medium to new heights both now and in the future. Mark Skaggs, vice president and executive producer, sums it up best.

"Having EA in LA and the next generation of systems coming out really just highlights and focuses [what we are able to do]. Being part of EA means we get this huge juggernaut machine working to get the technology base set on these new platforms faster than anybody in the industry. We have guys in labs working on this stuff now, while we're doing the current generation of stuff."

He continues, "What that sets up is a platform by which

we can add a tremendous amount of new content. As we talk about it, there's going to be a ten times increase in content. Not necessarily just volume, [but] quality... details. All those things that come from a lot of creative people, and a huge number of those people live in LA, and work in LA, and have been doing creative content creation for 20-some years. So, that is the thing it's going to allow us to do for the next generation. We're going to be able to bring these guys in here who have been working high-end CG for films [who] suddenly go; "You know, this new PlayStation, it's not too far from what I was doing just a few years ago."

EA is starting to see the fruits of its investment here in Los Angeles. It already has people set up in development that have been influential in other

2,500+
Total number of EA employees worldwide. That's more than are employed at any film studio in Hollywood

Each and every desk features dual flat panel computer screens





■ The Battle For Middle Earth team has a nice view of the lobby from its second floor home



■ These classic Bond figures greet you as enter the GoldenEye: Rogue Agent development area

entertainment mediums. Rick Gialito, executive producer of Medal of Honor, was an actor who appeared in *As the World Turns*, *Jake and the Fat Man*, *Twin Peaks*, and even *Who's The Boss?*

The studio has many more connections to Hollywood, explains Gialito, "We're bringing people who have worked on movies like *Spider-Man*, *Spider-Man 2*, *I, Robot*, and *Titanic* into the studio and what they've done is brought in the practices that have been honed over 80 or 90 years of filmmaking. [They] have actually taught us how we can better our practices, especially in the areas of pre-production, which is something that this studio is especially known for. And it's really helping us to make better games and become more efficient. Because the way it's going right now – the games are becoming more and more complex. The content's richer. The consumer expects a deeper, more immersive, emotionally moving experience."

The studio art director and franchise art director for Medal of Honor, Mark Lasoff, won an Academy Award as senior digital effects supervisor for his work on *Titanic*. This is the man that actually sunk the Titanic in the biggest movie ever made. His blockbuster resume is littered with top franchises, including work on the *Matrix* sequels and *Apollo 13*.

EA isn't just hiring talent for full-time development, either. It is looking to some of Hollywood's top specialists for consulting in other areas as well. For example, EA brought in John Milius, who wrote *Apocalypse Now*, to pen the script for Medal of Honor 4, the next entry in the series. The production design in GoldenEye is being done by Academy Award winning Sir Ken Adam, the visionary creator for the look of the Bond film universe. The list of talent runs on and on.

These types of collaborations are one of the prime directives of the studio. Being in LA makes things all the easier for EA to capture some of the best in the entertainment business. Batter puts it bluntly, "It's not about, 'Gosh, I gotta get on an airplane. What's the business deal before we even talk?' It's, 'Hey, you're up the street, you're down the street, you're around the corner. Come on by. Have some coffee. Have some lunch. Sit down



■ Lots of oddities can be seen around the office, including radio controlled flying saucers

with us. Let's just talk!"

It's important to note that EALA is not just about Hollywood talent. In a world where all forms of media are increasingly convergent, experience in any and all types of entertainment is welcomed with open arms.

Executive producer Patrick Gilmore explains, "We have officially reached the spot where we don't even acknowledge that there's a line between movies and video games. The talent comes in. [If] they bring in a resume full of movie experience it doesn't matter. To us it's the same as bringing in a resume full of game experience. If you have the skill set that we need that applies directly to our product [and] we're interested in what you've done in the past, [it doesn't matter] whether it's movie experience or game experience. It all blends together. I mean, there are so many people now that have experience in both industries that we're casting a wide net. It means that we have access to a phenomenally huge talent pool. It also means that we're in the cultural and creative center of entertainment. I think because this is the heart of moviemaking, there's a vibe that goes along with being in LA. And I think that's kind of the rising tide that raises all ships."



■ Concept art is found on almost every wall



FLOOR

3

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

> SYSTEM PLAYSTATION 2/XBOX /GAMECUBE > RELEASE NOVEMBER 1

In a first for a game in the Bond Universe, Rogue Agent is not played from the perspective of 007. Instead you take control of an agent who is dismissed from M16 for reckless brutality, and quickly recruited by Auric Goldfinger to become the centerpiece of a battle for the underworld against the nefarious Dr. No.

After a brutal encounter with Dr. No costs you an eye, you soon find it replaced with a high-tech, gold-hued synthetic that earns you the name GoldenEye. From here on it's a

roller coaster ride of gunplay as you fight the game's merciless AI that has your foes working together – and with the environment – to challenge the player like never before. Luckily, your new eye has a number of special enhancements that let you project a magnetic field to throw enemies about like dolls, or it can generate an electromagnetic shield to protect you from the onslaught of bullets.

Featuring split-screen multiplayer on all systems, and online play for Xbox and PS2, GoldenEye looks to be the

long awaited sequel we have all been hoping for, with a plethora of cameos by many of the villains and babes from the films including Oddjob, Xenia Onatopp, Jaws, and Pussy Galore.

From the levels we have played, the evil angle isn't as pronounced as we would like it to be, but the graphics are most certainly stunning. Plus, the AI at this point is simply brutal – just the way we like it.

This search for talent extends to the music industry as well, which is key given that the audio presentation of games is fast becoming as crucial to success as the visual portion. At the helm of EA's music and audio department is

Steve Schnur, an animated and entertaining personality with a career in music that spans the decades and boasts a resume that reads like a who's who of the recording industry. He began his career at MTV in the 1980s, then went on to various executive positions at Elektra Entertainment, Chrysalis Records, and Arista Records where he was instrumental in breaking such major artists as Natalie Merchant, Sarah McLachlan, Metallica, and Björk.

He was also the man behind EA Trax, as well as the Def Jam licensing deal for Electronic Arts. He couldn't be more excited about video games or EA's new studio. "Well, I think it sends a message out to the music

industry that this industry is as big as they think it is," declares Schnur.

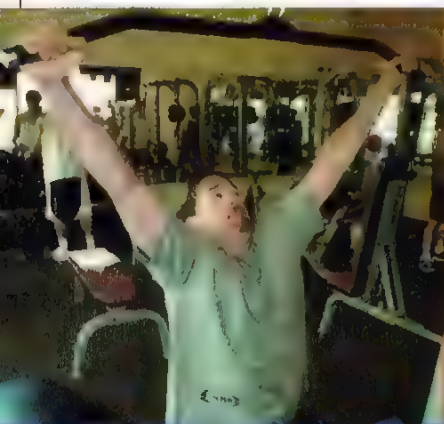
"It makes them realize, and I think it shows them that this company in particular is willing to really focus itself and respect the entertainment industry at large, you know, musically speaking, filmatically speaking – that we put ourselves in a big way in their backyard. It makes a statement for EA to say, 'We're putting our entertainment liaisons in the place where the entertainment industry is.'"

This is coming from a man who decided to join EA just by the feeling he got when he walked into the lobby of its Vancouver Studio. "It's going to sound silly, but it was like this feeling of rock and roll. This feeling of rebelliousness and a feeling of things happening. So, I left the record business and I went to EA and got in the music business. Because I feel like we've had more of an effect on bands in the last three years than anybody has had."

In fact, EA Trax has been so successful that some sources have estimated that almost



The lobby features its very own Starbucks



Hit the gym to get your muscles in shape for your next gaming marathon



There is no mistaking which game is being made on the 4th floor



Watch a little G4 while you work out



FLOOR 4

Medal of Honor Pacific Assault > SYSTEM PC > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 20

The most interesting thing about Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault is that the team is comprised of two groups: an 85 person team working on the single-player game that will feature seven expansive missions spanning 25 levels, and a 45 person group that is concentrating on the multiplayer elements.

In typical Medal of Honor style, the game is a cinematic recreation of historic battles from World War II. To add to the realism of the product, EALA worked closely with the

Congressional Medal of Honor Society to ensure that Pacific Assault reflects the ideals and integrity of the prestigious Medal of Honor. It also enlisted the help of a military technical advisor, Capt. Dale Dye, who has worked on such projects as *Saving Private Ryan*, *Platoon*, *Band of Brothers*, and all of the previous Medal of Honor games.

With over 21 historically accurate World War II era weapons, new vehicles such as the M4 Flamethrower Tanks, and the ability to call in air strikes, Pacific Assault offers much of

the frantic first-person action that has been a hallmark of the series.

New and very important to this edition of the game are the added squad tactics. Working with your team to complete your mission is crucial to success, and it also ups the realism of the title.

While much has been said about these new squad tactics, the game looks and plays much like the original from what we have seen – which is a good thing.



■ Hungry? EALA has a 24-hour cafeteria to appease any appetite

half the people who play Madden end up buying an album after hearing one of the songs in the game. Even musicians are clamoring to get in on the action.

Schnur tells a tale: "Green Day's a good example of this. We went to Ocean Wake studios over in Hollywood. They had all these written songs, but they hadn't recorded a note yet, and the band sat there with us and asked us please if they could finish the song on time if they could get it in Madden. And they did finish it in time and rushed it to us. Same thing happened with Blink 182 last year. The amount of pressure now that we have from labels and bands and managers to put their songs in games is unreal to me. It's nothing that I imagined when I started here. In the beginning, we used to beg people to put their songs in games. Now we have to learn how to say the word 'no.' I've probably turned down

about 2,000 to 3,000 songs for Madden to get to the 21. FIFA's more, [as I] probably turned down somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000 to get to the final 40."

For all of the Hollywood hoopla and award-winning artists, one thing is clear about EALA. It's a new type of studio that has been built from the ground up with one thing in mind: creating bleeding-edge video game software that incorporates all the visual flair and storytelling of the movie industry with the fun and interactivity that only video games can provide.

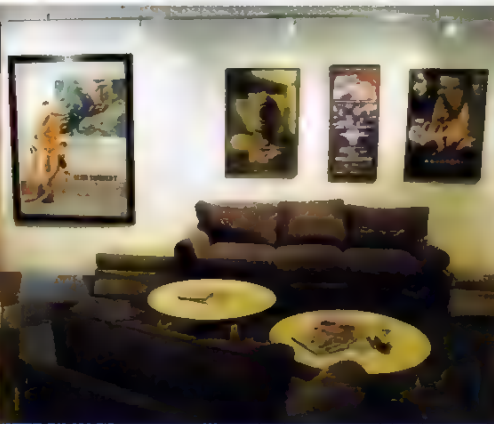
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The day people began working at EALA. However, the studio wasn't officially opened until May

You can tell that the people who work here are having fun. From the enthusiastic Steve Schnur and his love of music, to the unknown game developers that we saw huddling around a story board making car noises as they happily laid out a chase scene in the upcoming GoldenEye: Rogue Agent – EALA is about games. But a little Hollywood never hurt. ■ ■ ■



■ EALA features its very own store for all the latest EA games and gear



■ The aquarium in the lobby features fish that someday hope to create their own titles



■ The spirit of working at EALA: Have fun!

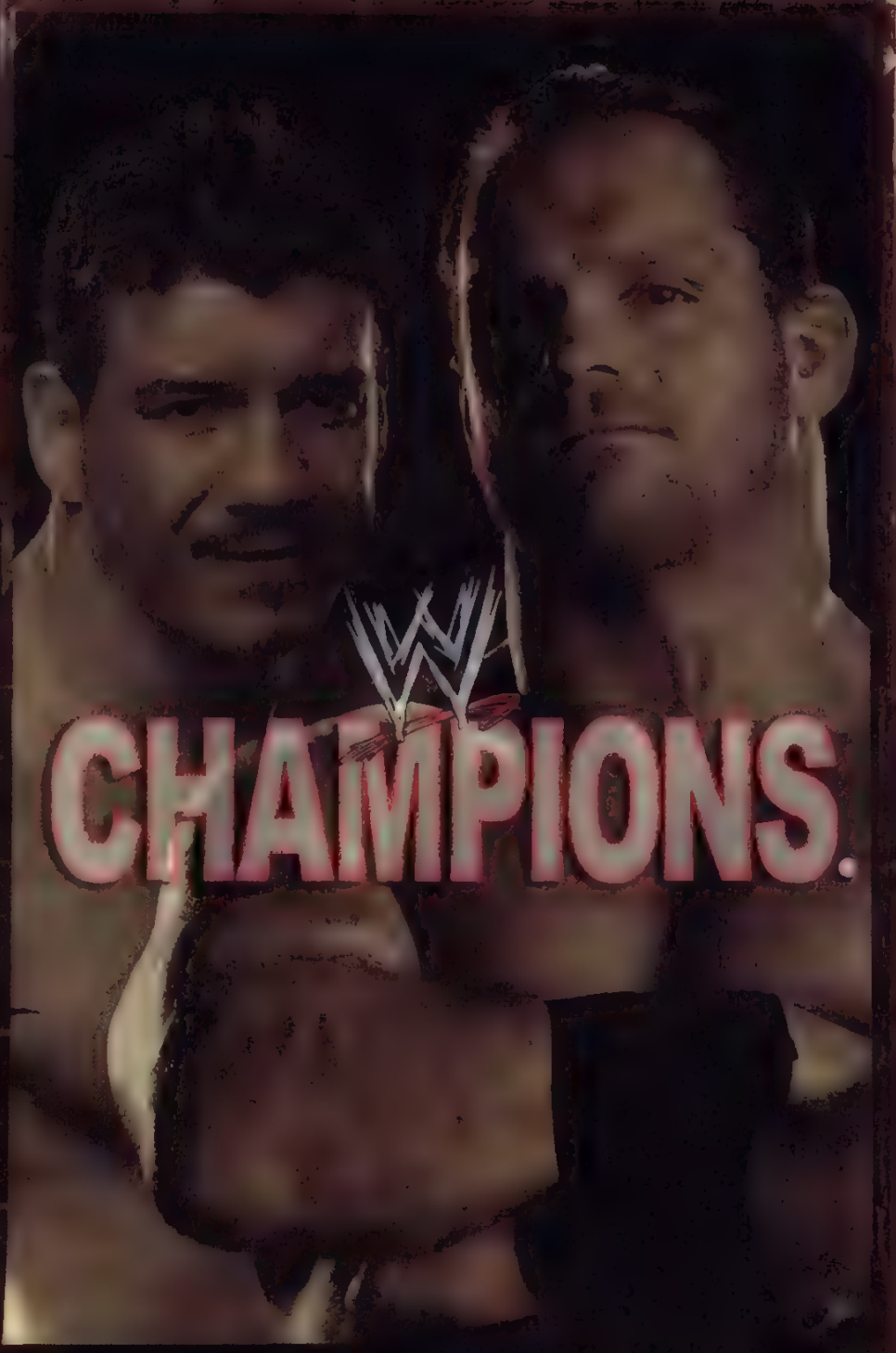
■ Steve Schnur, seen here contemplating which band he will make or break next, is in charge of all music and audio for Electronic Arts worldwide



■ EALA features unique octagon shaped work spaces, which are not only roomy, but customizable. Many of the employees remove panels to easily talk with others or even play a game of chess

UNLIMITED ENABLED

To learn more about the people in this article head to Unlimited #13 at www.gameinformer.com for complete interviews and extra pictures of EALA



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> **DEVELOPER DAY 1 STUDIOS** > **RELEASE WINTER**



MECHASSAULT 2

LONE WOLF

METAL MILITIA

Buildings crumble around you and cannon fire echoes through the air. Machine guns clatter, tanks plow through the rubble of the war zone, and heavily armed jets scream by overhead. In the distance, you see them: giant mechanical beasts that walk on two legs like a man. They bristle with weapons; energy beams, rockets, and grenades are hurled from their steel frames in every direction, and they are headed your way. Alone, you are powerless against them, but fortunately, a handful of vehicles offer you sweet shelter. Do you take to the skies in a VTOL (Vertical Take-Off And Landing) and attempt to deliver supplies to your team, or do you climb in a tank and try to knock down the

giant machines with your powerful cannon? The advanced power armor seems like a good subtle choice, but you opt for the final option: You climb into a giant war machine of your own and head into battle to meet the robotic warriors head on.

Welcome to the chaotic war zone that is MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf. The sequel to the Xbox's number one online game of all time, MechAssault 2 has earned a huge buzz of anticipation since it was unveiled, and has been widely touted as one of the Xbox's best upcoming games. Prominently displayed in Microsoft's booth at the most recent Electronic Entertainment Expo, the game attracted huge lines of eager players and was easily one of the most pop-

ular titles in the publisher's line up. The reason for the excitement surrounding it is easy to see: Developer Day 1 Studios has expanded on the MechAssault formula in every possible way, while retaining everything players liked about the original.

The first MechAssault title, which introduced many gamers to the long-standing BattleTech universe, featured both a single-player campaign and online multiplayer. The campaign mode was well-received, and multiplayer was simply adored. Featuring all the game types players have come to expect (deathmatch, capture the flag, etc.), along with downloadable content, MechAssault remains the most-played game on Xbox Live to date. MechAssault 2

is, according to project director TJ Wagner, Day 1's way of defending its online turf. Not only is every feature from the original returning, but a huge online meta-game has been added as well, one that uses all of the new features of Xbox Live 3.0 to deliver an online gaming experience unlike anything that players have encountered before.

While this new online mode is a huge focus, the single-player game has been greatly expanded as well. The experience this time around is far more immersive, as cutscenes have replaced the briefing screens between missions to relay the story. Your companions in the first title, Natalia and Foster, were nothing but voices that would keep you updated

on your missions, now you'll see them in all their high-res glory. You'll also see yourself as a human being for the first time – while your pilot remained safely in a Mech or armor in MechAssault, the sequel will allow (and even encourage) you to leave your vehicle.

The biggest addition to MechAssault 2's core gameplay is the ability to hop out of one ride and switch to another. With the press of a button, your Mech will crouch down so you can climb out. As a human pilot, you can truly appreciate the massive scale of these war machines, and freely choose which type of vehicle you'd like to pilot. While the Mechs are the main attraction, VTOLs, tanks, and Battle Armor all offer unique advantages. VTOLs, advanced planes designed for carrying cargo, have the obvious advantage of flight. They can drop off weapons and health for teammates (single-player mode will see you fighting alongside AI squad members), and even carry tanks and Battle Armor. Tanks pack a huge punch, can enter into a first-person sniping mode, and have a cloaking device for stealthy maneuvers.

The Battle Armor is the most exciting new addition to the vehicle lineup. Developed by Foster with technology gleaned from the Ragnarok core obtained at the end of MechAssault, the power armor is the smallest, lightest option on the battlefield, but it also has the most unique abilities. Aside from its laser and mortar shell launcher, the Battle Armor can climb buildings and latch onto VTOLs or Mechs. Hitching a ride on a friendly Mech is a good way to cross a battlefield unseen, as only your host's heat signature will show up on radar. Once

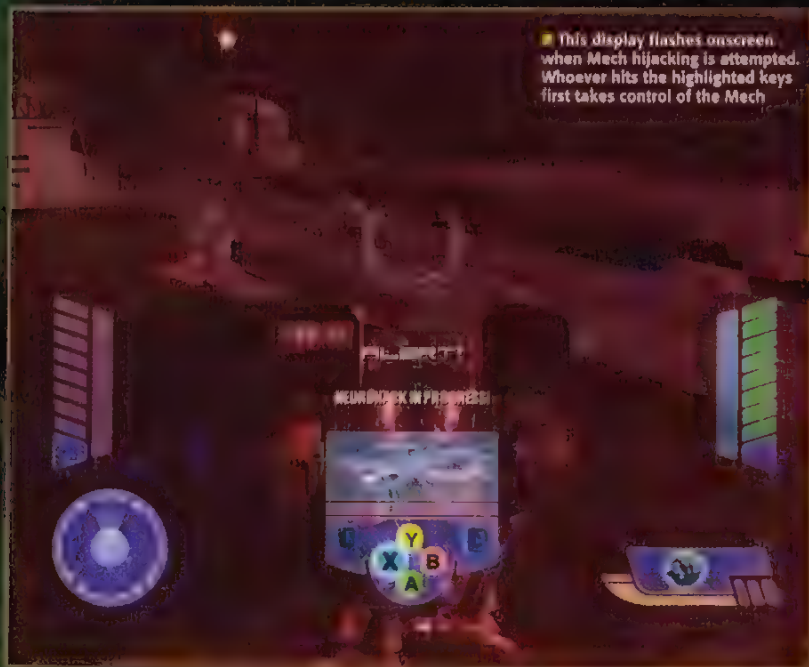
you enter enemy territory, you can clamp onto the back of an enemy Mech and try to jack it. A hacking minigame appears when you jump on board an enemy – both you and your enemy have to hit a sequence of keys to see who will take control of the Mech. If you are successful, the enemy pilot will eject, allowing you to take over his war machine.

You will need to use all of the vehicle types and their unique abilities to get through the single-player campaign, which is much more epic than the first. Continuing where MechAssault left off, Lone Wolf once again pits you against the well-armed religious fanatics The Word of Blake. Rather than spend the entire game on one planet, you'll battle across the galaxy, fighting the Word to possess pieces of mysterious technology called data cores. Just as the Ragnarok core allowed Foster to develop new technology such as the Battle Armor, the data cores will be key to new upgrades and Mechs. There are 30 Mechs in the game, including every one from the original. Several types of tanks will appear, as will variations on the Battle Armor and VTOLs. Wagner also stated that there are two more vehicle classes that have not yet been revealed.

As The Word of Blake is an especially well-armed cult, expect to see all of the various vehicle types in the enemy's fleet as well. They will use VTOLs to resupply their Mechs, try to sneak into your base with power armor, and otherwise make your life hell. You will also encounter boss fights in certain stages – something missing from too many shooters. While exact details on these boss fights are still unknown, Wagner has



■ The Battle Armor can hitch a ride on the VTOLs and fire while hanging. Multiple Armors can grab on to one VTOL, creating a flying unit with heavy firepower.



■ This display flashes onscreen when Mech hijacking is attempted. Whoever hits the highlighted keys first takes control of the Mech.





■ This map interface shows which faction controls what planets, and which territories are open to attack



told us to expect enemies that are four or five times bigger than the massive Atlas Mechs!

Thanks to the variety of vehicles, there are endless strategies on how to take out your enemies, so gamers of all types can work their way through Lone Wolf's quest. One particularly devastating technique is called the Alpha Strike. When in a Mech, picking up salvage power-ups upgrades your weapons. Once all three weapons have reached the third and final level, players can activate the Alpha Strike, a massive attack that fires all three weapons at once. Since the Alpha Strike can only be fired once, careful targeting is critical, but if it connects, the barrage can take down even the toughest Mech in one hit.

Of course, all the features offered in single-player will also be included in multiplayer. For gamers who crave the classic MechAssault online gameplay, every game type offered by the original and its downloadable content has returned. Several new modes have been added as well, including Check It, which requires players to leave the safety of their Mechs to flip switches on a base in

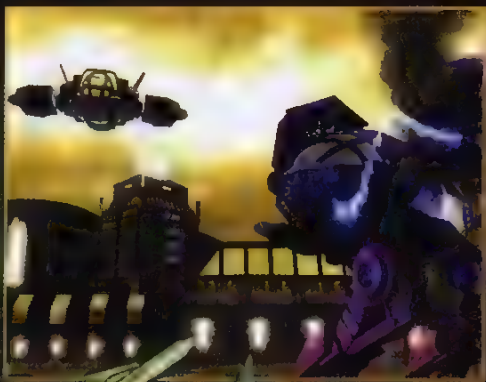
order to claim it as their territory. In essence, Check It plays like a game of king of the hill, only with multiple hills. Another game, Snatch It, plays similarly to capture the flag with multiple flags. Each team must collect multiple data cores and return them to its base before the other side can do the same. These game types can be played just as before, and a far more unique and compelling online mode has been added, currently called Conquest mode.

Conquest mode combines familiar MechAssault online combat with the new features of Xbox Live 3.0, and draws more heavily on the mythology of the BattleTech universe. The goal of Conquest is, in short, to conquer a solar system. This mode features a persistent online world – a collection of 45 planets that, at launch, will be divided evenly between five houses from the BattleTech universe. When players first log on to Conquest, they will be asked to join a house, and can start or join a clan within that house. Once a team is picked, the subjugation of neighboring worlds begins. Only planets adjacent to your team's territory can be attacked, and each planet has a specific point value.

■ Both online and off, teamwork will be a huge part of gameplay



■ You won't see any static menu screens in Lone Wolf. The online waiting room is your team headquarters, which you can run around in and issue taunts to your opponents.



If a planet is worth ten points, your team must obtain ten victories on that planet in order to take it over. Once a world is conquered, the planets adjacent to it are fair game.

Any of the familiar game types can be used in Conquest mode, with one distinction: All matches are team based. Since the point of Conquest is to work together for domination, free-for-all matches are not allowed.

Day 1 expects a frequent give and take of territory as the different house armies change and grow, and the utilization of the Xbox Live 3.0 features will help round up the most skilled troops. Thanks

to the new feature that allows Xbox Live gamertags to be tied to Passport accounts, players can send messages to their friends even when they're not online. Say that you are playing online, and you're about to lose a planet to an invading army. Send a message to some skilled friends at work via their email accounts or cell phone text messaging. With any luck, they'll pretend to be sick, head home, and hop on Xbox Live to assist.

Messaging for help is only one way Lone Wolf takes advantage of Live 3.0. You can email challenges to your enemies, setting

up games at certain times or parameters. Clan creation is another key way MechAssault 2 exploits the new features. By creating a clan within your house, you can choose precisely who you want to play with, create a clan logo and description (which players can view to learn about you), assign ranks to your members, and track your ranking. The clan ranking system won't simply track how many kills you score – it will tally how effectively you play. Your score will be determined by battle points, which can be earned by supplying teammates with ammo, defending a damaged friend, and, of course, by staying alive.

In certain ways, Lone Wolf's conquest mode shares characteristics with another popular online game type: the massively multiplayer online role-playing game. While not an RPG by any means, Lone Wolf features a persistent world, clearly defined challenges, and an emphasis on communication and teamwork, much like those games. Another similarity is that Day 1 can (and will) tweak the game after it launches, in the same way that MMORPG developers frequently add to their universes. Wagner suggested that Day 1 may add planets to the solar system, tweak point values for certain worlds, and even add entirely new houses. Planet specific goals are also under consideration. One idea that was mentioned is that whoever held a certain planet at a specific time would

(Continued on page 67)

DECONSTRUCTING BATTLETECH

When counting its earliest incarnation as BattleDroids, 2004 marks the twentieth anniversary of the BattleTech universe. The BattleTech storyline spans countless generations, and is far too complex to simplify here without annoying its hardcore fans. While a knowledge of BattleTech is not necessary to enjoy Lone Wolf, those who would like to learn more about the franchise can check out www.classicbattletech.com, an extensive resource on all things BattleTech.

■ The environments will range from dense quarters urban areas to lush forests, and everything in between



■ The Null Sig feature cloaks a Mech, removing it from enemy radar



■ Explosions are now prettier and deadlier than ever before



THE HUMAN FACTOR

While Mechs and other machines are the star of the show, humans take a much bigger role this time around. The static mission screens between stages have been replaced with cutscenes using the in-game character models. These character models show the returning

characters Foster, Natalia (shown here in her pilot outfit), and the central Mech pilot. Also pictured is the new character Alera, a female mercenary, and an outline of a mysterious, soon-to-be-revealed villain.

PILOT

FOSTER

NATALIA

ALERA

??????

be rewarded with a new Mech. There are countless ways that Day 1 can change the climate of the conquest universe. They may even go so far as to replace the entire solar system. The studio's goal is to keep things fun and fresh for all players, and keep them coming back for more.

Both online and off, players will be treated to a level of graphical beauty far beyond that of the original. Every model, from the humans to the Mechs has been rebuilt with all the latest graphical effects. The dynamic lighting system is especially impressive – sunlight glints realistically off of metal surfaces, energy beams cast

eerie tints on glass buildings, and shadows play realistically on your Mechs. The destructible environments are also drastically improved: chunks of structures will fall off realistically thanks to an improved physics engine. Buildings will blow up in stages – once the exterior is destroyed, a ruined core remains, which can be destroyed further. All of the rubble remains and changes the shape of the environment. It can even be used as a weapon – vehicles and large chunks of debris can be kicked into enemies to cause damage!

With so many impressive facets to gameplay, it's almost impossible

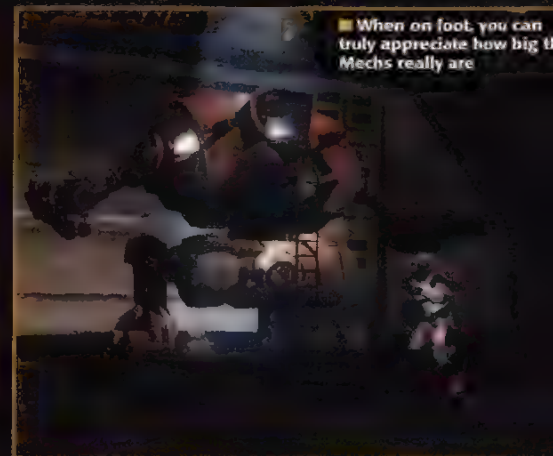
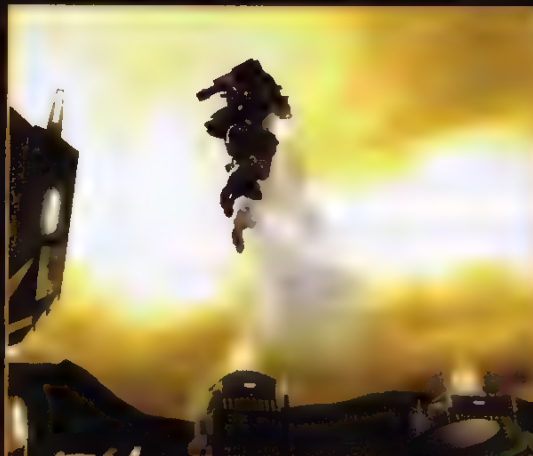
to take it all in at first. In action, MechAssault 2 is incredibly fast and frantic. You really feel like you have been dropped into a chaotic futuristic war, thanks to the constant action exploding around you. Mechs charge at you with guns blazing, while VTOLs swirl overhead, tanks rumble underfoot, and Battle Armor pilots sneak around causing chaos. But thanks to the variety of vehicle types, the action never feels mindless. There are always multiple tactics available, which makes gameplay incredibly addictive.

Thanks to the impressive features of Conquest mode, MechAssault

2: Lone Wolf looks like it will keep the franchise in the top tier of Xbox Live games. The contest for galactic domination will certainly please fans of the first title, and the general online multiplayer will be great practice for newer players before they dive in and form a clan of their own. Even those gamers without Xbox Live will find plenty of content to blast through, thanks to the compelling single-player campaign. With so much to offer, MechAssault 2 has truly earned its place as one of this winter's most exciting new titles. ■■■



■ Tanks pack heavy firepower, plus a stealthy cloaking device



■ When on foot, you can truly appreciate how big the Mechs really are



■ The VTOL can pick up and deliver health and weapon powerups to its teammates



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Race online for pinks!*

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Precision Street Racing



PlayStation 2



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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER THE COLLECTIVE > RELEASE JUNE 2005

EVERY REVOLUTION BEGINS WITH GRAFFITI

Designer Marc Ecko, who is best known for his fashions and understanding of urban youth culture, has spent the last six years working on another of his passions – video games. Turned off by the caricatured look at urban life that often finds its way into games, Getting Up represents what he feels is a game that reflects urban culture. No gangstas, no bling, no hip-hop. Getting up is about celebrating an authentic urban culture that you would see if you lived the life.

Starring Trane, a 17-year-old graffiti writer who wants nothing more than to go from being a toy (a derogatory term, the video game equivalent would be noob) to all-city, quickly finds himself wrapped up in the politics of New Radius when the Mayor's militaristic police force – the CCK – starts ruling the city with an iron fist.

The game soon becomes a journey of self-expression – a battle for creative freedom.

Think of it as an urban *Braveheart* mixed with the '80s film *Turk 182*.

The goal of the game is to try and capture the intense moments that come from putting your tags at the highest and most dangerous spots in the city as you try to put an end to the Mayor's rule. Imagine trying to tag a moving train or hitting a heaven spot (the term used for the sides of buildings and bridges where one mistake could mean death) on a place like New Radius Bridge with helicopters hunting you down.

The game isn't all about graffiti, however. There is also urban navigation and melee combat. The urban navigation portion of the game derives a lot of its style from an inner city sport known as Free Running (Google it, you want to see this stuff in action), which is basically people who run through cities jumping gaps between buildings and other death-defying, Jackie Chan-esque feats.

The melee portion of the game takes some

of its style from basketball with Trane pulling off all kinds of dekes and jukes as he pummels his opponents. Combat, like the urban navigation, has many contextual situations to create a flow back and forth between the two. For example, you may find yourself running on a pole, then quickly vaulting off another to land and unleash a barrage of combos on your foe. A high and low attack helps keep the combat fresh, but using the special ability button will allow you to dodge as well as pick up objects that you can use in combat, like trash can lids, 2x4s, and baseball bats.

We saw a good amount of the game and we must say that we were quite impressed by the combat. It's very easy to kick butt and interact with the environment without much thought.

The basic premise of all 13 levels in the game is to get in, get up, and get out. Getting your graffiti higher means more will

see it. Getting it done better means more fame, which translates into rep points that can then be used to purchase new moves and combos.

The graffiti portion of the game is surprisingly deep as well. You can use stencils, roll-ups, and wheat paste (posters) to get your message out. Plus, unlike say Jet Grind Radio, there is more to tagging than just pressing a button. For example, one of the more complex tags, called a burner, has three layers you can apply: the outline, the fill, and a finishing touch (that gives your tag a personal style and bonus points).

It's still a ways off, but the combination of Marc Ecko's style and urban smarts with The Collective's game know-how (best shown this generation through its work on *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and *Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb*) is sure to offer a gaming experience unlike anything we have seen before. ■■■



■ The game's developer, The Collective, is known for its intense melee combat, so you can be sure Getting Up will deliver brutal fighting from beginning to end



■ The environments are absolutely gorgeous



■ Even though Ecco's team of designers will help with the look and feel of the city, he promises that by no means is he using this game as a vehicle to sell clothes



■ Trane's animations are silky smooth as he climbs, flips, and ziplines through the environment



■ Trane is a member of the Still Free graffiti crew, and will find himself getting into plenty of run-ins with the CCK as well as rival crews like the Wrong Way Assassins and the Vandals of New Radius



XBOX

Halo 2

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

YOU SAY GOODBYE, I SAY HALO

Finally, it can be said with absolute conviction: Halo 2 is nearly upon us. On November 9th, the Xbox's most anticipated title will release and find its way into the sweaty hands of millions of eager gamers. Will it live up to their expectations? We think so, thanks to the bevy of new gameplay features that will accompany the title's awesome graphics and online play.

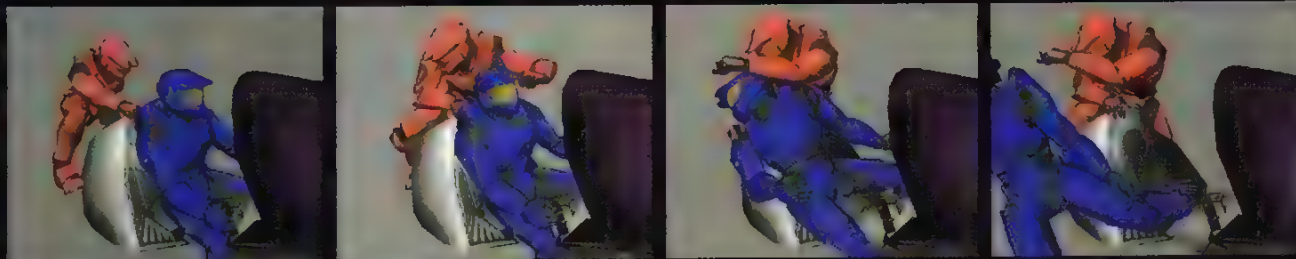
One of the features highlighted at E3 is the increased emphasis on vehicles this time around. Not only are they fully destructible, but they can be stolen by knocking the driver out and taking his place. Any vehicle moving slowly enough can be forcibly boarded this way, adding a new dimension to both single and multiplayer modes. Knock Elites out of Ghosts or swipe Warthogs from your fellow humans, but watch your back, because your enemies will knock you out of your ride if you're not careful.

The new emphasis on vehicles is only a small sample of what will greet Halo fans when the game is unveiled this November. But rather than burden you all with even more details, we'll sit back and let these shots do the talking. You guys don't look like you can handle any more excitement. Did you take your heart pills today? ■■■



BOARDING SEQUENCE

These renders show how the process of taking out some poor chump and stealing his ride works. You best catch the bus, sucker!



Meet New People, Then Kill Them

Halo 2 will introduce some new enemies, and the old foes have all gotten sexy makeovers. These renders show off two new enemies: the Brute and the Prophet, as well as the familiar Elite, Jackal, and Grunt. The Brute is a mammoth powerhouse, while the Prophet is weak, and serves as more of a general. All five of these guys will certainly make your life hell.



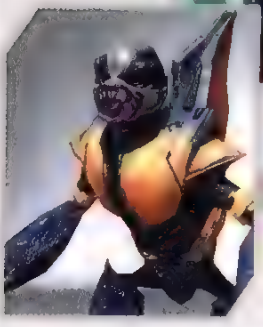
BRUTE

PROPHET



ELITE

JACKAL



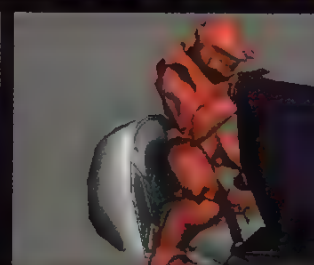
GRUNT

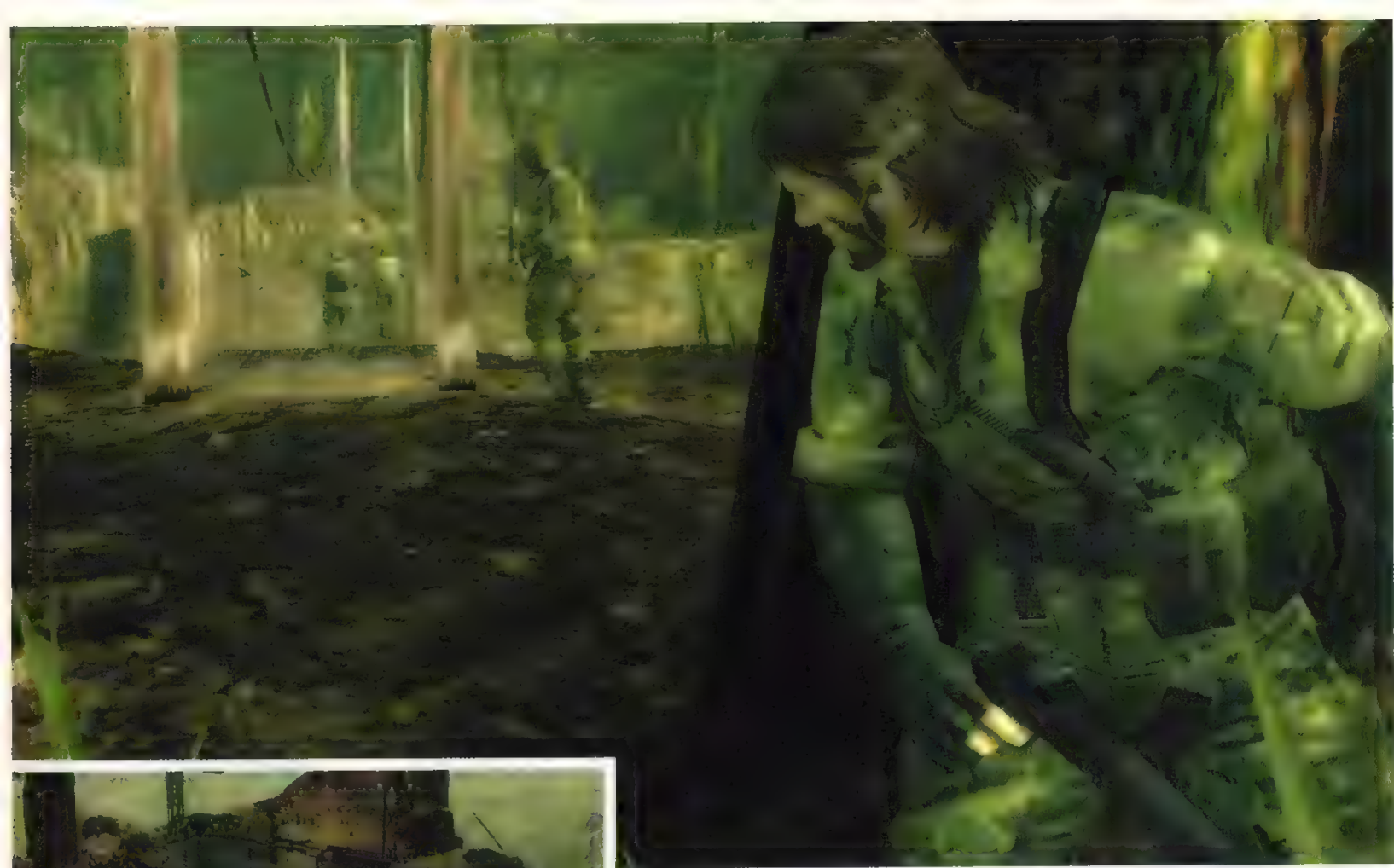


■ This time around, the marines will be even more helpful in doling out heaven's retribution of hot lead.



■ "Is it gas, then clutch? I wish I learned how to drive stick."





■ Close Quarters Combat should offer some interesting possibilities



■ Snake readies himself to make the most traumatic Santa Claus entrance ever

PLAYSTATION 2

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE NOVEMBER 23

A MULLET FOR EVERY OCCASION

All hairstyle jokes aside, we know that you all hunger for Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater goodness as much as we do. The bad news is that Konami has been keeping mum on any more details since this year's E3. The good news, though, is that we recently got some hot exclusive screenshots out from under Metal Gear creator, director, and resident genius Hideo Kojima's iron-fisted rule.

For those who haven't been following every tiny little bit of information coming out of Konami's Japanese headquarters regarding MGS 3, here's a quick recap of what we do know. First, Snake will have to catch and consume his own food – or leave the poor animal tranquilized for freshness and eat it later. Feasting on jungle goodies doesn't simply refill your health, either. It ties directly into Snake's stamina, which affects everything you would assume it would: accuracy, mobility, and the like.

The setting is nothing less than one of the most

realistically modeled video game jungles to date. Snake can climb trees to escape foes, slither through the underbrush for a sudden stealthy takedown, and fade into the landscape using his camouflage. In another huge departure from Metal Gear canon, Snake will have to use combinations of face paint and clothing (rather than boxes and lockers) to hide from his pursuers. A handy index in the corner of the screen will let you know how detectable you are, and takes into consideration your movement and positioning.

As for the story, everyone's guess is equally valid. If Snake Eater is set in the 1960s as it seems to be, there's no possible way that the protagonist could be the same Solid Snake from the first two MGS titles. Who knows, he could actually be the man who becomes Big

Boss. If that doesn't make sense to you, some serious time with Metal Gear Solid is highly recommended. ■■■





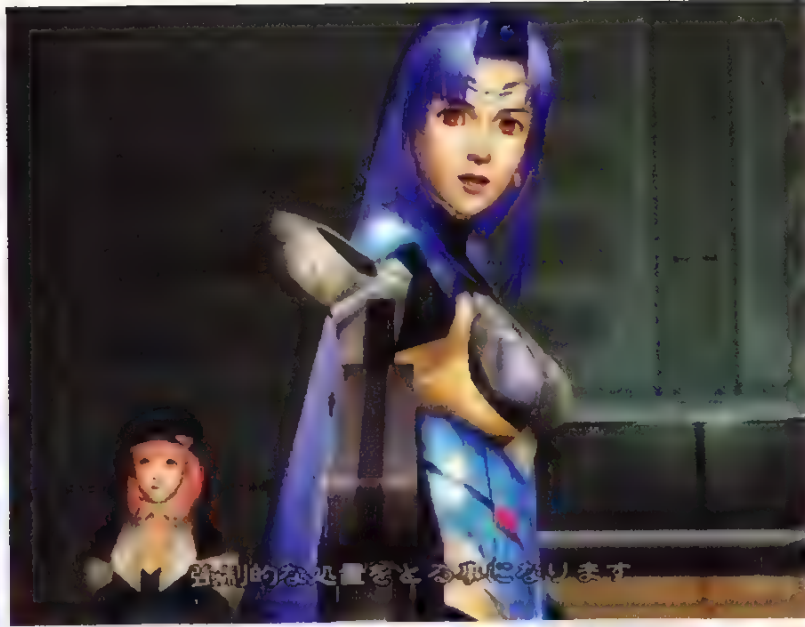
■ There really is a use for that goofy "flame" camo



■ This is after the second castle already sunk into the swamp



■ We can only hope that you can chuck grenades into crocs' mouths



PLAYSTATION 2

Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse

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

DREH' DICH NICHT UM, DIE KOS-MOS GEHT UM

Until now, the most we've seen of Xenosaga Episode II are gorgeous screenshots and tantalizing trailers, but very few details on the actual gameplay. Fortunately, with this much-anticipated sequel just recently hitting shelves in Japan, we were finally able to spend some time with it and clear up the mystery. Though we can't divulge much about the complex story, we can say that the emphasis on cinematic cutscenes and stunning graphics remains intact, though hardcore Xenosaga fans will certainly be surprised at how the battle system has been reworked for this epic sequel.



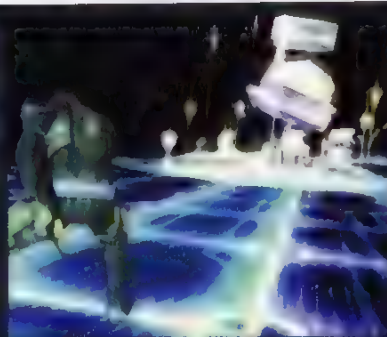
AGWS

Though the AGWS from Episode I aren't present in name, they have been replaced by two very similar styles of hulking robots. One is the AMWS (Assault Maneuver Weapon System), which serves more general functions than its Gnosis-hunting predecessor. The other new machines are dubbed ES, and they sport a more stylish look than the AMWS in addition to having certain mysterious special abilities. Also, addressing the issue that the mechs were underused in the first installment, Episode II features specific segments assigned either to standard combat or to mechs, but the two styles are no longer intermixed. For some players, this will mean much less roboting. For others, much, much more.



BOOSTING

The battle mechanic has been totally revamped, with the biggest improvement being the expanded use of boosting. In the previous game, characters would build up their individual boost meters in order to gain opportunities to attack out of turn. While much of this concept remains in Episode II, the party now shares a communal boost meter, allowing boosts to accrue faster as well as letting the player select which party member will use it and when. Additionally, boosting does more than simply allow you to make a move out of turn; it gives two characters the opportunity to deal extra damage by linking attacks together using special double techs. In short, the entire boost mechanic has evolved from a simple way to score a couple of pot shots into a major strategic factor.



ETHER SKILLS

Skill progression is another area that has undergone significant redesigning. Gone are the days when each character had individual skill trees to advance through — now all party members have access to the same array of abilities. Most of the ether skills will have familiar effects like healing and buffing, but this time it is up to players to shape characters as they see fit. Rather than the game dictating who will be your healer and who will be your support, it is now your choice. Even with a shared pool of abilities, it doesn't mean that all traces of individuality within the party have been wiped out — character statistics and special attacks are still unique.



TECHS AND COMBOS

Many fans may be disappointed to hear that Episode II's system of learning and upgrading special techs will not be present in Episode II. Instead, it has been replaced with a heavy emphasis on using your attacks in a specific way. Each enemy is divided into zones A, B, and C. Hitting these zones in a particular order (which differs from enemy to enemy) will result in increased damage. For instance, if an enemy has a BA zone weakness, you would want to use your first two attacks to hit those areas in sequence to achieve a "zone break." After a zone break, any additional attacks during that round (which you will need to stock from previous turns) will be much more devastating. These attacks may not be as flashy as the techs in the last entry, but they don't involve watching 20 seconds of animations each time they are performed, either.



Combat will be more varied, with double locks and attacks that can hit enemies in the air



Mechs now have a more Zone of the Enders look to them



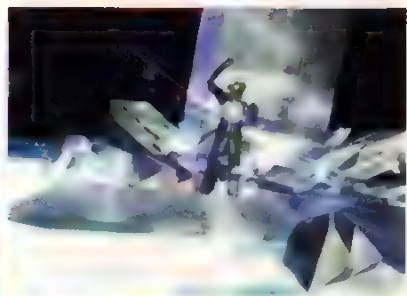
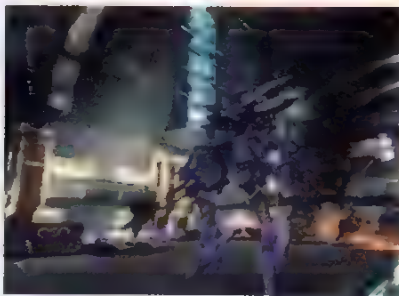
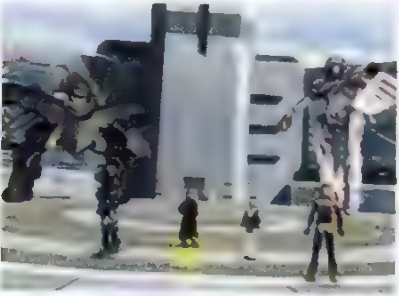
All party members can be switched in and battle at will



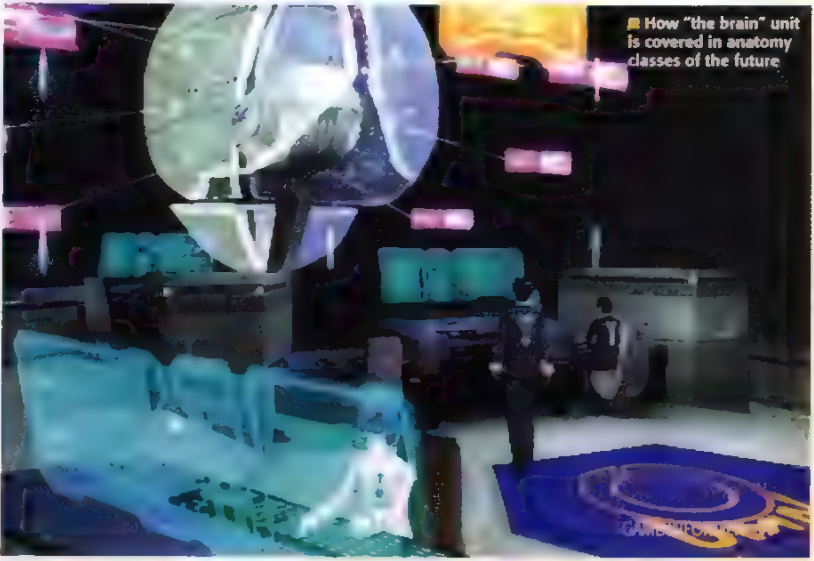
敵のHP 00700
 ZONE 00
 PLAYER 2



Calligraphy: Beautiful... and deadly



Many characters have been given a more mature look



How "the brain" unit is covered in anatomy classes of the future



PLAYSTATION 2

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

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

COUNTRY GRAMMAR

While most of the coverage of Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas has revolved around the game's three cities, details regarding the countryside that surrounds these three sprawling urban cityscapes has proven elusive. After getting a tour of San Andreas' rural areas during a recent meeting with Rockstar, it quickly became apparent that we had vastly underestimated both the size and importance of this aspect of the game.

First things first: The outlying areas of San Andreas are far from the simple system of freeways we thought they would be. This is a *state*, encompassing vast expanses of rolling hills, forests, rivers, pastures, and even a huge mountain called Mount Chiliad. In fact, we were shocked to discover that there aren't three cities in San Andreas, there are 15. This number accounts for the 12 distinct small towns and villages located in the countryside. Each of these has their own unique architecture and feel, from the mountain tourist town Angel Pines, with its bait shops and one-story bungalows, to Dillimore, a depressed working class burg populated by out-of-work, shirtless yokels and cowboy-hat wearing policemen.

Given the geographic diversity of San Andreas, you'll need a host of new vehicles, most of which are designed to deal with the demands of offroading through the open range. Monster trucks, four-wheelers, dirt bikes, and mountain bikes can all be used for transport, and even more impressive is the (now-winged) Dodo, which allowed us to see the gorgeous vistas of the game from the friendly

skies. It's a good thing, too, because we were informed that the rural area is so large that it will take nearly 15 minutes to cross by car. Rockstar informed us that air travel won't be limited to the countryside; each city will have an airport where you can jack planes or helicopters during certain points of the game.

Missions will also be tailored to the backwater locales. One objective we saw required CJ to distract a rival gang away from a friend of his they had captured by luring them on a high-speed chase through a series of gorges and valleys. Another (which we received at a trailer park), sent CJ to kill a federal witness holed up in a mountain cabin. As he fled, CJ gave chase down the precipitous trails of Mount Chiliad, eventually running his quarry off the road. Finally, after an aborted convenience store heist, CJ and a female companion hijacked a semi trailer full of gas and hauled out in an 18-wheeler towards freedom. Burt Reynolds would be so proud!

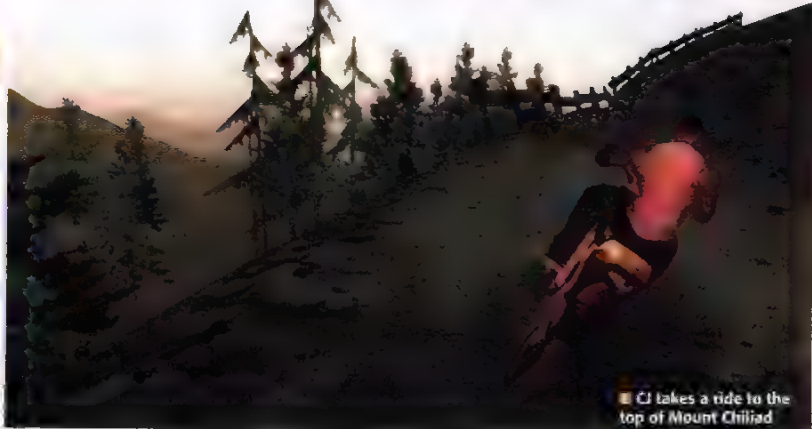
It's now very obvious that Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is much more than a video game retreat of *Boyz N The Hood*, and that Rockstar North

is giving every aspect of this title the depth and care fans have come to expect. "This is the first time we've taken Grand Theft Auto out of an urban area," commented Rockstar PR director Jeff Castañeda. "The misconception out there right now is that this is just a gang-banging game or this is just a hip-hop game. Hopefully, what we've shown people is that it's more than that; it's more diverse." ■ ■ ■





■ "PssL...CJ! You're running the wrong way!"



■ CJ takes a ride to the top of Mount Chiliad



■ Small-town police departments have come a long way since the days of Barney Fife



■ As you can see, CJ is a world away from the streets of Los Santos



■ The countryside features rugged vehicles designed for offroading



■ These environmental activists are getting really militant!



■ In the CJ series



■ Small-town pedestrians feature completely different looks and voiceovers



previews

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

Need for Speed Underground 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EA GAMES > DEVELOPER EA CANADA > RELEASE NOVEMBER 16

110 MILES PER AWESOME

Nothing gets us more excited than a good racing game. In fact, we're all into the tuner lifestyle. Lisa has spinner rims on her Ford Focus, Matt just had a kickin' spoiler installed on his Nissan Altima, and Joe even has a nitrous system on his bicycle! So naturally, we're very stoked about Need for Speed Underground 2, the sequel to last year's fantastic street racer. And we're not just excited because of its star, model and E! Network hostess Brooke Burke (although she is a definite plus).

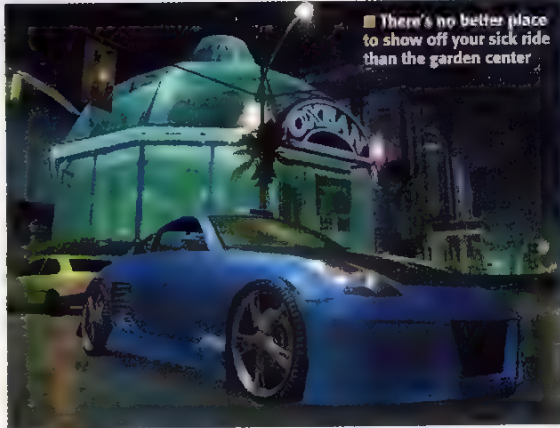
Underground 2 blows out the street race formula to even bigger and more insane proportions. An open, free-roaming environment has replaced the isolated tracks of the last game, with some pretty cool results. Associate producer Scott Nielsen took some time to speak with us about the game, and he was especially excited about this feature. "You can literally drive from one end of the world to the other and anywhere that you

can see on the map," says Nielsen. "You can drive from a circuit event to a drift event to a drag event without ever leaving the world. The world is alive and things are happening as you drive through it." This expansive environment really affects how the game plays. For example, in a new mode called Outrun, you initiate a race with another driver by pulling alongside him and matching speed. After the race begins, the goal is to get a certain distance ahead of your opponent. Once the whole city is unlocked, there is no set track and no boundaries — you can drive anywhere in the world you need to in order to get away from the other guy.

This new mode is clearly a centerpiece feature in Underground 2, and there are certain rewards that can only be unlocked by winning in Outrun mode. Unlockables and car upgrades once again play a huge role in the game — there are over 50 different performance upgrades for your car,

and players will be able to tweak and adjust over 20 different settings. More than 30 unique cars will be featured, including several new rides. Of course, visual customizations will also be a huge part of the game, and additions like spoilers will now have an actual effect on how your car feels, thanks to a new physics system.

Visual style was a big part of the first Underground title, and that trend continues in its sequel. Now, driving with style will not only reward you after a race, it will help you out in real time. Power slides, hang time, drafting, and other such crazy driving feats will reward you with Style points, which fill your nitrous tanks on the fly. If you drive with enough style, you'll never run out of your nitrous boosts during a race!



There's no better place to show off your sick ride than the garden center

At least seven types of races have been confirmed for Underground 2, and the action takes place both off and online. All offline modes can be played online, and online also sports an exclusive career mode. You can focus on whichever type of race you're best at in career mode, so all types of drivers can compete. We're not sure if this means our ride of choice will be available — a Pontiac Transport lowrider — but you can be sure we'll be the first to hop online and look for a race. ■■■■



Rick sped downtown, terrified that he'd miss the opening of "Andrew Lloyd Webber's Jurassic Park"



What's playing on the radio inside this car? Eddie Money



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Gran Turismo 4

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

THE CITY OF LIGHTS

Tightlipped Sony isn't sharing much with the rabid racing addicts out there, even though we've heard nasty rumors about teams of enthusiasts charging the doors of SCEA. Apparently, they're frothing at the mouth for new info, car lists, online specifics, photo mode details, track locations, and tuning options. Well, our sources have leaked one item of interest — a newly announced European course.

Called George V Paris, the track has players cruising through the age-old City of Lights at breakneck speeds. Also, while it doesn't necessarily mean that all race types will be offered for this course, the screenshots they've sent us show a variety of vehicle types — including classics and Formula One rides. At a bare minimum, it would seem silly if Paris weren't one of the locations

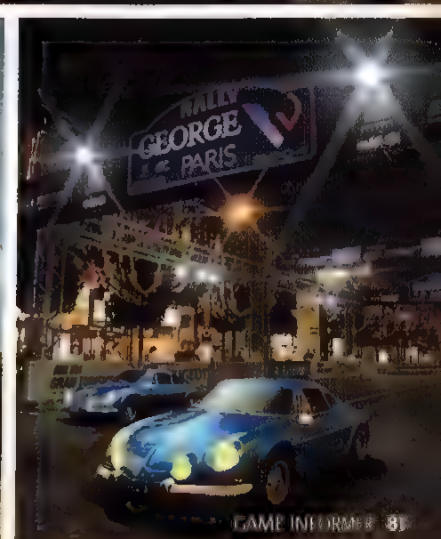
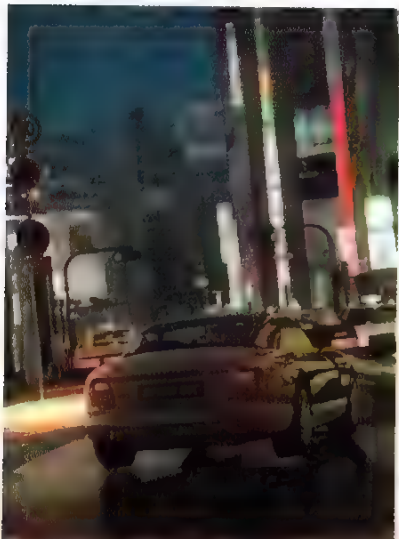
available in the recently announced photo mode, where almost any car can be used for automotive glamour shots.

Spectators will line up along the sidewalks surrounding the Arc de Triomphe and beside the high-traffic Champs Elysées. Side streets will loop racers back to these Parisian landmarks, twisting and turning through what look to be some extremely tight corners.

We're still waiting on a November release for this incredibly in-depth car simulation, and Polyphony Digital is blowing our mind with every single announcement. Is it even possible for the game to be better than we hoped? Soon, fellow racing dorks, we'll all be able to cruise the world in a staggering number of rides, and we can't wait. ■■■■



■ The huge turnout surrounding the Arc de Triomphe is crazy when you're not going 120 miles per hour — think of it during a race!



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CORONER'S DEPT.

RANK: Major

NAME: Mayhem

CAUSE OF DEATH:

Moron behind the
keyboard activated
his flashlight
instead of his
rocket launcher
in the middle of
a firefight.



UNLIMITED FRAGRANCE

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Burnout 3: Takedown

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA GAMES > **DEVELOPER** CRITERION STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1

TWISTED METAL

Even though it won't hit stores until September, *Burnout 3: Takedown* has already driven (Get it? Driven?) racing game fans into a frenzy of anticipation. The third entry in the esteemed racing franchise (which originated with *Acclaim* and is now part of the Electronic Arts library) will be one of the first non-sports EA titles to utilize the newly formed EA/Xbox Live partnership. This alone is enough to get gearheads' engines revved, but after they learn what *Burnout 3* has in store, gamers who have never touched a driving game in their lives will be just as excited.

The *Burnout* games have always placed a huge emphasis on crashing, and *Takedown* brings the steel-crunching carnage to a whole new level. Thanks to improved physics and a new damage mechanic, every crash looks like an elaborate Hollywood stunt. Doors and hoods fly off, glass shatters, and cars go flying through the air. In most races, the goal is to cause your opponents to crash by putting them into walls, forcing them into traffic, or ramming into them from behind. If you are successful, you will score a *Takedown*, which temporarily puts your opponent out of the race. This aggressive driving fills your Boost meter, a nitrous-like system that

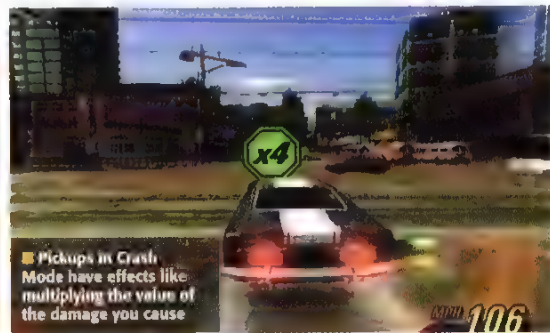
greatly increases your speed with the touch of a button. Driving into oncoming traffic, narrowly avoiding other cars, tailgating, and otherwise driving recklessly also awards you with Boost bonuses.

Crossing the finish line first is not always your goal. While standard races, time trials, and grand prix are included, many objectives are more chaotic. Some challenges have you competing to see how many *Takedowns* you can score in a given time, while the goal of others is to cause as much carnage as

possible. *Crash Mode* places you on a small track with traffic that follows a set pattern. The goal is to create the most monetarily damaging crash possible by plowing into other vehicles and watching them pile up. This perverse version of bowling is so sadistically addictive that *Burnout 3* is nearly impossible to put down. The fast-paced and intense standard races are just as engaging, making *Takedown* the racing game to watch this year. ■■■

HIGH SPEED ONLINE

Burnout 3 has a lot of content to keep gamers hooked, including 40 tracks (spread across three continents), each with multiple events. The depth is only increased by the presence of online play on both PS2 and Xbox. All race events will support six players online, and *Crash Mode* will even sport two-player co-op for causing the biggest pileups imaginable. More online modes are likely, including a *Party Crash Mode*, in which eight players compete to see who can cause the biggest wreck.





▲ PLACE HAND HERE ▲



YOU HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS THE AGENT WE ARE LOOKING FOR.

REPORT TO:

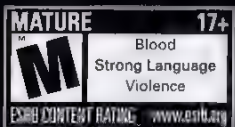
OBJECTIVE: STOP OMEGA STRAIN VIRUS AND THE TERRORISTS WHO CONTROL IT.

ARSENAL: [illegible] WEAPONS: SILENCED SUBMACHINE GUN, OSC-1 THERMAL SNIPER RIFLE, CN-8 MACHINE PISTOL, BLASTER GRENADE

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

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PlayStation 2



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UNLIMITED ENABLED
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude

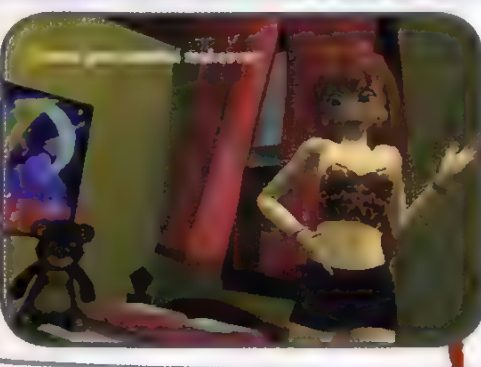
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > DEVELOPER HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE > RELEASE OCTOBER 5

THE LEWD LIFE OF LARRY

>> DIRECTLY AFTER WAKING UP AT THE CRACK OF NOON, LARRY HEADS DOWN THE HALL AND SPIES A COUNTRY BUMPKIN NAMED SALLIE MAE. THROUGH A SERIES OF MINIGAMES, HE TRICKS HER INTO BELIEVING HE IS A COUNTRY MUSIC PROMOTER, THEN POURS HER A STIFF DRINK. THEY GET LOADED, DO A COUNTRY LINE DANCE TOGETHER, AND PLAY A ROUND OF QUARTERS. IN HER DRUNKEN STUPOR, SALLIE MAE AGREES TO GO BACK TO HIS ROOM FOR SOME "FUN." LARRY DISROBES, AND HIS [REDACTED] REVEALS TO SALLIE MAE THAT HE ISN'T JEWISH! AS HER PARENTS WOULDN'T APPROVE, SHE LEAVES HIM HANGING, AS IT WERE.



>> UNDAUNTED BY HIS FAILED NOOKIE ATTEMPT, LARRY HEADS OUT ONTO CAMPUS TO DISCOVER THAT HIS FAVORITE SURVIVAL DATING SHOW, SWINGLES, IS FILMING ON CAMPUS. HE TALKS TO THE SEXY HOST, WHO BEGRUDGINGLY AGREES TO LET HIM ONTO THE SHOW IF HE CAN GATHER ENOUGH "TOKENS OF AFFECTION" FROM THE FEMALE STUDENT BODY. EXCITED, LARRY HEADS OVER TO THE LIBRARY, WHERE HE MEETS A QUIET GIRL NAMED IONE.



>> LARRY GETS A CHEAP LAUGH OUT OF THE RESERVED IONE WITH A PRANK PHONE CALL. THE ROUND-HEADED FREAK CONVINCES HER TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH HIM, AND THEY PLAY ANOTHER SERIES OF MINIGAMES. FIRST, THEY PARTAKE IN A ROUND OF QUARTERS. AFTER GETTING HER STINKING DRUNK, THEY HEAD BACK TO HER ROOM, AND HE GIVES HER A MAKEOVER. HE DRESSES HER UP LIKE A CHEAP-ASS [REDACTED], AND SHE GETS "IN THE MOOD" AND ASKS LARRY TO [REDACTED]. HE AGREES, BUT INSTEAD [REDACTED]. SUFFICE IT TO SAY, WE WERE HORRIFIED.

>> AFTER LEAVING THE CLUB, LARRY AGREES TO HELP RAISE SCHOOL SPIRIT BY DRESSING UP AS TWIGGY, THE SCHOOL MASCOT. HE GETS SOME STUDENTS EXCITED ABOUT THE BIG ARENA FOOTBALL GAME, THEN THEY GO BACK TO HER ROOM. AT HER REQUEST, LARRY [REDACTED] HARRIET WHILE STILL WEARING THE COSTUME. SHE LOVES IT, AND ASKS LARRY TO [REDACTED] HER. THEY [REDACTED], THEN, [REDACTED], AND EVEN [REDACTED]. THEY FINISH THINGS UP WITH [REDACTED]. AFTER ALL THE [REDACTED], SHE GETS FREAKY AND POSSESSIVE, AND LARRY SPLITS. AT THAT POINT, SO DID WE. WE HAD SEEN ENOUGH [REDACTED] FOR ONE DAY.



>> AFTER IONE'S ROOMMATE WALKS IN ON THEM [REDACTED], LARRY HEADS BACK ONTO CAMPUS AND MEETS HARRIET, A BAND GEEK. IN ANOTHER SERIES OF MINIGAMES, THEY CHAT, PLAY A ROUND OF SLAPS, THEN HEAD OVER TO THE LOCAL DANCE CLUB. THEY SIT IN SILENCE, AND LARRY EXCLUDES HIMSELF TO COMPLAIN TO THE GAME'S WRITERS ABOUT HOW BORING SHE IS. THE PRODUCERS CONVINCHE HIM THAT HE HAS A PRETTY GOOD CHANCE OF [REDACTED], SO HE HEADS BACK TO THE TABLE AND THEY TALK SOME MORE.



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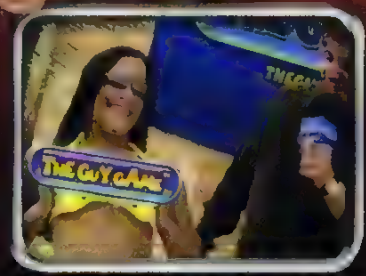
"The Guy Game is aimed squarely at testosterone-laden college students, spring breakers, and well, any red-blooded American guy."

-IGN.com

SHOT LIVE AT SOUTH PADRE!



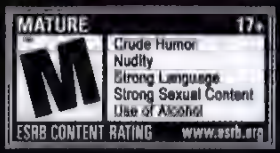
Outrageous Trivia questions to keep you guessing!



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PlayStation 2



AVAILABLE AT: GameStop

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Oddworld: Stranger

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER EA GAMES > DEVELOPER ODDWORLD INHABITANTS > RELEASE SPRING

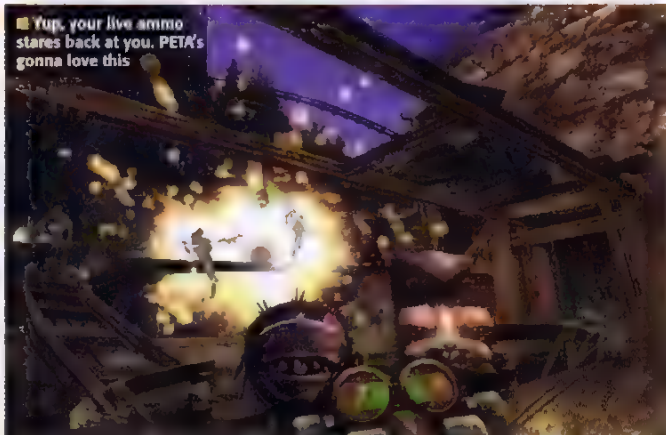
HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER

Talking chickens, a crossbow that uses skunks and bees for ammo, and a bestial cowboy bounty hunter can only mean one thing: Terry Gilliam is making another sci-fi movie! Actually, it means that it's the time for a new Oddworld game. Oddworld: Stranger has found a new home at EA after being dropped by Microsoft, and we've had a chance to check it out in all its bizarre glory.

As The Stranger, a Clint Eastwood-esque bounty hunter, you'll search out the baddest Oddworld criminals in a combination of first and third-person action with live ammo — literally. Spiders, wasps, bats, and

other small critters can be launched from your crossbow, each with unique results. Skunks stun enemies with their horrible smell, while creatures called chip-punks taunt enemies, creating a distraction.

Obviously, fans can expect the quirky humor found in the previous Oddworld titles, even if the gameplay is markedly different. The new contextual GameSpeak mechanic will provide much of the humor, as the townspeople The Stranger talks to will respond with a bevy of sarcastic retorts. If you appreciate all things odd, this is certainly one to watch. Obvious pun alert: Games really don't get any stranger than this. ■■■■





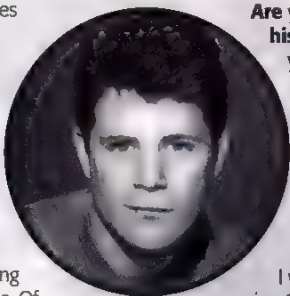
UNLIMITED ENABLED
XBOX | PC

Men of Valor

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR 24-PLAYER ON PC)
> **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** 2015 > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 5 (XBOX), OCTOBER 19 (PC)

LOOKING FOR CHARLIE

Realism in war games is now mandatory, and since Vietnam is becoming the preferred theater of conflict, gamers are finding entirely new topics to uncover. For example, *Men of Valor* explores race relations between black and white U.S. soldiers as they adjust to fighting in integrated combat squads. Of course, the game gives you quite a taste of warfare as well. Developer 2015 conveys the denseness of the jungle and periphery elements in battle such as the yells of your comrades, the smoke wafting through the trees, and the startling scattering of birds during a routine patrol. The team would be amiss if it didn't extend this attention to detail to its voice actors. And in *Lord of the Rings* star Sean Astin, it got one of the best. We had a chance to interview Mr. Astin, and found that he took his role as seriously as if it were on the big screen.



Are you a Vietnam history buff? Did you do anything to prepare for the role?

I am, I am. I mean, my degree at UCLA is in history and English. And also, when I was raised, when I was filming *Goonies* and when I made a bunch of movies, there was a man who was my guardian, so he would take me to the set and back. His name is Joseph Pasorelli or Peppy. Peppy was a Corps man in Vietnam so he would share with me every morning and every night, on the drive to work and on the drive home, stories of what it was like being in combat. He was a noncombatant, but he was in combat zones, and in firefights, and that kind of stuff. So he would describe that for me, and I actually thought about him a lot and felt like I was honoring him and his experience when I was doing the game. It's my hope that if people who are playing the video game realize how much attention went into designing it, and how accurate they tried to make it, there's actually a lot to be learned about Vietnam history by studying the game.

More actors are getting involved in video games. Is it hip in Hollywood?
You know, I thought long and hard before I

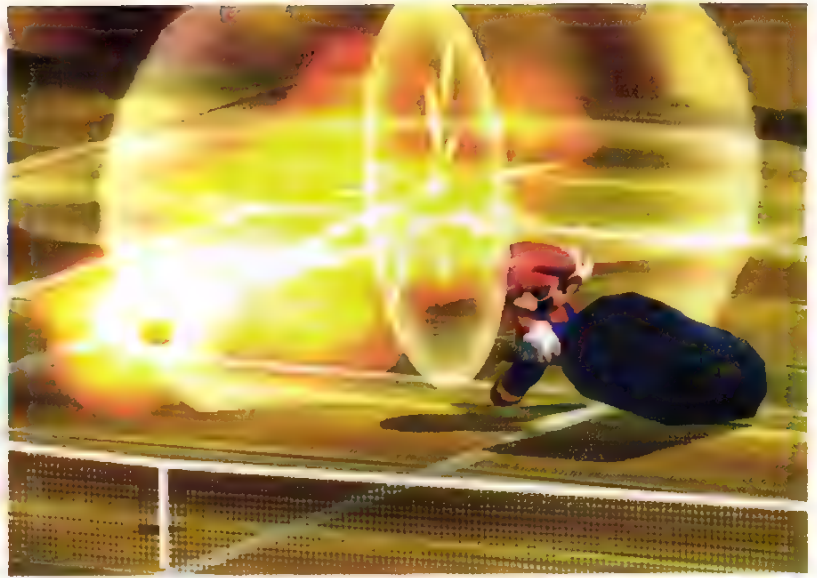


agreed to be in *Men of Valor* because I was really weighing what I thought that message was, like being a part of a Vietnam thing. I knew it was going to be a lot of swear words. I knew it would probably be made for a certain age. I think the art form itself is growing and becoming more sophisticated and I think it's intensely cool. And if it's not hip and cool it's a failure of imagination of Hollywood trends.

Are you a gamer?
I'm a huge video game and computer person. I mean, starting from Pong and Atari and Intellivision, going through to even the handheld video games, the ColecoVisions and those kinds of things I used to love when



I was a kid. When we were in little league I would go to Regular John's Pizza, this kind of pizzeria that had sawdust on the floor and a fire engine outside. And I remember playing Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, and Dragon's Lair. If you forced me to pick a favorite right now I'd say *Age of Empires*. ■■■■



GAMECUBE

Mario Tennis

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER CAMELOT > RELEASE WINTER 2005

EEETSA ME – ROGER FEDERER!

Okay, we lied. That super-sexy slice of Swiss cheesecake Roger Federer isn't a character in Camelot's long-awaited Mario Tennis for GameCube. We can dream, can't we? Although this glaring omission will hurt this game's all-important "hunk factor," we're pleased to report that Mario Tennis is shaping up to be excellent in all other areas.

Camelot has always had a very unique view on tennis, and everything we've seen and heard so far seems to point towards the fact that this entry is moving the series even farther beyond the norm. Wacky power-ups and unique gameplay modes are the hallmark of the Mario universe, and we expect that Mario Tennis is going to be an even wilder ride into the lighter side of sports – but without funnyman Mike Golic.

Of course, fans are always wondering which gaming icons are going to be making appearances in the game, and the initial list provided by Nintendo looks solid, if a little unsur-

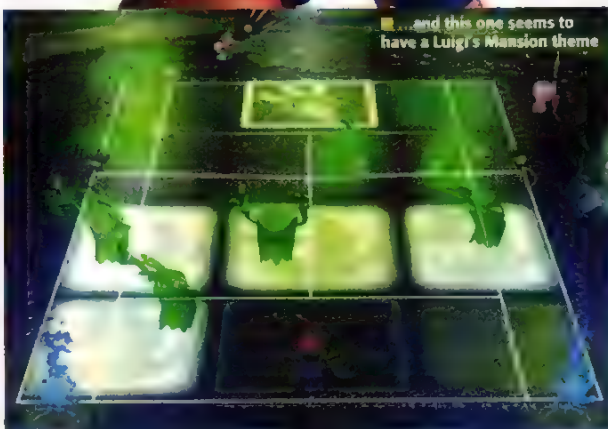
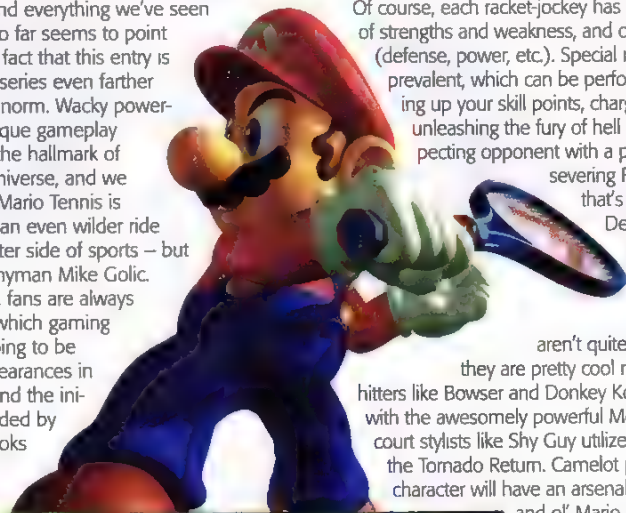
prising. We can confirm that Mario, Luigi, Wario, Waluigi, Donkey Kong, Peach, Yoshi, Shy Guy, and Koopa Troopa will be present and accounted for. However, Camelot promises that many more favorites from the past and present will be popping up for a little fuzzy-ball action.

This time around, however, the development team is emphasizing the need to make playing as each character a completely unique experience.

Of course, each racket-jockey has their own set of strengths and weakness, and overall playstyle (defense, power, etc.). Special moves are also prevalent, which can be performed by building up your skill points, charging up, and unleashing the fury of hell on your unsuspecting opponent with a punishing, spine-severing Fatality. Oh wait,

that's Mortal Kombat: Deception. This story is about Mario Tennis. Our bad. Actually, the special moves aren't quite that brutal, but they are pretty cool nonetheless. Heavy hitters like Bowser and Donkey Kong are equipped with the awesomely powerful Megaton Balls, while court stylists like Shy Guy utilize maneuvers like the Tornado Return. Camelot promises each character will have an arsenal of wicked tricks, and of Mario himself seems to be bringing the pain with a huge hammer in one of the screenshots provided by Nintendo for this piece.

Another aspect of Mario Tennis that is apparent in these screens is the title's emphasis on strange and new courts and minigame modes. Just have a look at the wild, ghostly playfields on display here and you can begin to get an idea of the insanity in store for us in early 2005 when this blockbuster hits shelves. ■ ■ ■



This wet n' wild court will keep players on their toes

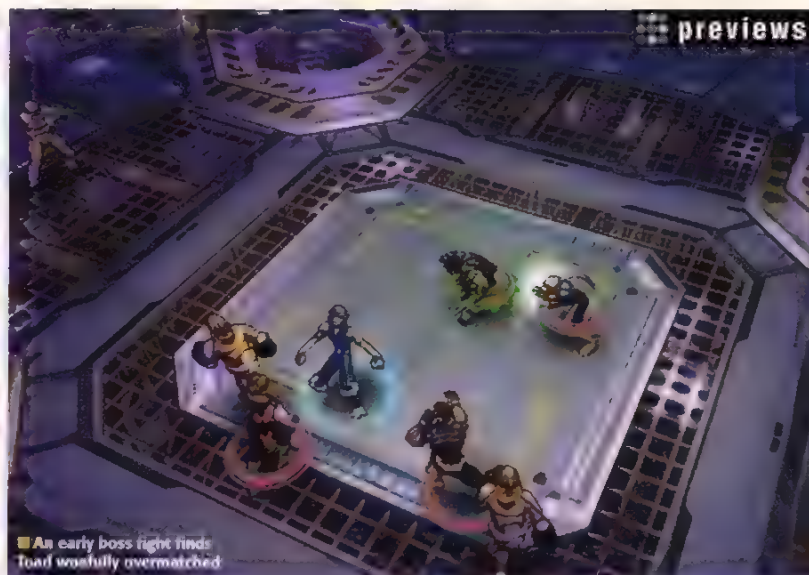
A shot of some multiplayer action in a minigame mode

...and this one seems to have a Luigi's Mansion theme

Tributes to some of Nintendo's recent hits pop up in Mario Tennis – here's one inspired by Mario Sunshine...



■ Onscreen action is pure chaos. In a good way.



■ An early boss fight finds Toad woefully overmatched.

UNLIMITED ENJOYED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

X-Men Legends

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** FALL > **ESRB** T



YOU WANT SOME, BUB?

They may be feared and hated by those they've sworn to protect, but not by us. We love these guys. Maybe that's why we were so excited when we got to make our way through several new levels of this mutant-powered action/RPG. Four characters are always onscreen as you flip among them playing solo, or you can jump in with up to three other buddies. The action is fast and frenetic whether you're taking down Brotherhood goons, blasting Sentinels, or challenging long-time foes like Magneto and the Blob.

A whopping 15 playable X-Men will appear, each with a unique upgradeable skill tree and power list. We have to admit to a certain level of unrestrained glee when we launched Wolverine into one of his feral berserker rages. And it's hard to describe the sweet taste of mayhem we sampled as Cyclops opened up with a wide arcing optic blast that flung everything in front of him back 30 feet. You even have access to character-specific combos, like Colossus tossing Wolverine forward for a "Fastball Special!" But one of the most impressive features appeared to be the non-combat powers. In order to rescue an endangered sailor, we used Nightcrawler

to teleport past a wall of flame to pick up the man and "BAMF" him back to safety. The next time we played through, we instead used Iceman to extinguish the flames with a freezing blast.

Patrick Stewart reprises his movie role and highlights the excellent voice acting present in the game. Over 35 rendered cinematics are scattered throughout the 25-plus hour storyline. The plot is an original one, but it's inspired by events throughout the X-Men's rich comic continuity and written by former X-Men scribes. All of the sizeable environments are filled with destructible objects, including walls. So instead of using the door, you might just want Storm or Gambit to blow a hole into the next room. Finally, in addition to the cooperative multiplayer mode, between missions you'll be able to try out four-player versus skirmishes in the Danger Room — which is just part of the fully designed three-level mansion.

With a bevy of unlockable costumes, characters, and features, we might have a real winner on our hands here. It's quite possibly the X-Men game we've all been waiting for. ■ ■ ■



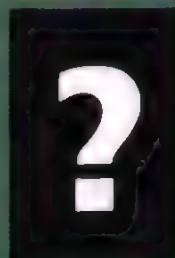
■ Cyclops didn't like the way that wall was looking at Jean.



■ Juggernaut assaults the Mansion.

FLASHBACKS FOR THE FANS

We got the scoop on one of the coolest features in X-Men Legends — flashback levels. While wandering the mansion, you can trigger the unlocking of important events from the X-Men's past, by using a special "Flashback" power. In one flashback, Wolverine talks about his early days on the team, and tells of their first encounter with Juggernaut. The game then dissolves into a playable level reenacting the first appearance of Xavier's intamous half-brother from way back in X-Men issue 12. You'll play as the original team, including Beast before his disastrous blue-turred transformation or Iceman when he still looked like a giant snowball. Another mansion conversation has Nightcrawler recalling the momentous fight against the Sentinels in New York, a battle inspired by early Claremont issue 98. Here you'll take on the Sentinels in the streets of the city as you frantically try to rescue hapless doomed mutants. Phoenix is playable in her classic green and gold outfit, and Wolverine fights in his original yellow get-up. A third flashback is planned, but it's being kept a secret for now. All we know is the excited assurances of the developers, who promise that this final level is "guaranteed to please the hardcore fans."





Sly will need to keep himself hidden from guards and indigenous wildlife



Sly suddenly realizes that there's nothing worth stealing in a Canadian train yard



Feel the burn, rope burn



"If you say 'katow' one more time, you'll be sorry!"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Sly 2: Band of Thieves

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> DEVELOPER SUCKER PUNCH > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 14

THERE'S NO "I" IN "RACCOON"

No matter how flawless the planning or juicy the target, the biggest and best heists can't be pulled off alone. Sucker Punch has taken this to heart as it works on its next entry in the Sly Cooper series, *Sly 2: Band of Thieves*. Gone is the structured, linear progression of the first game, replaced with a more open, mission-based approach centered on completing a series of smaller jobs leading up to the big filch-fest. If they made *Ocean's 11* into a video game, and if George Clooney (or Frank Sinatra, for you old-schoolers) were a raccoon, it would bear a remarkable resemblance to *Sly 2*.

Sly's pals, Bentley and Murray, take a much more active role this time around, and aren't simply relegated to the land of minigames. Murray is the muscle, Bentley is the brains, and they perform unique tasks and missions in preparation for each level's big payoff. In one case, in order to gain access to a heavily guarded building, Murray and Bentley sabotage a water tower, causing a fountain in the middle of town to stop

working. When a repairman comes to fix the fountain, Sly yanks the keys to the repair truck off of him and hands them over to Bentley. Bentley and Murray then use the repair truck to fire a grappling hook onto the building's sign and begin to pull it down. However, this attracts the guards' attention, and Sly needs to protect the truck as it wrenches the sign off of the structure, leaving a gaping hole in the front that allows Sly to slip inside. In some ways, this teamwork aspect recalls older puzzle games like *The Lost Vikings* and *Goblins*, where each of your characters uses their special skills to clear the way for others.

In addition to the new emphasis on working together, there is also an increased focus on managing mobs of monsters; one slip up in your sneaky and you can have a horde of goons pursuing you across rooftops. Whenever an enemy discovers you, you're faced with a choice: If you stand your ground and fight, you could take some hefty damage. If you flee, the resulting chase will undoubtedly attract more bad-

dies, but if you use your skills and your surroundings wisely, you can escape without a scratch.

All of the environments will be expansive and open for exploration, and it pays to get familiar with each new area as soon as possible. Knowing shortcuts through back alleys and quick ways to higher ground could mean the difference between a clean getaway and a messy one. Unfortunately, not every level will have convenient nooks and crannies to hide in; the stages range from cramped city streets to the expansive Canadian wilderness. With fewer places to tuck yourself away, you'll need to get comfortable staying hidden while still keeping on the move — the mark of a master thief.

While the gameplay mechanic has changed, the graphics are still gorgeous, and it retains the goofy charm and fun that made the first title so compelling. Overall, it feels as though *Sly* is poised to graduate from being simply a great platformer to a thieving adventure as immersive and intricate as that elusive perfect heist. ■ ■ ■



Laying siege to a city is a large undertaking

PC

Kohan II: Kings of War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** GATHERING > **DEVELOPER** TIMEGATE STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

THE SLEEPER RETURNS

The original Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns (and its add-on, Ahirman's Gift) was hailed by critics and fans alike for its unique take on real-time fantasy warfare, and it did an admirable job of injecting some traditionally turn-based concepts into an RTS framework. This September, developer Timegate Studios will bring a true sequel to strategy gamers with Kohan II: Kings of War.

The first thing Kohan veterans will notice is that Kings of War is much more of a standard RTS game than its predecessor. While concepts like customizable companies (see below) and supply zones are still very much a part of gameplay, anybody who has a lick of Warcraft experience will

have an extremely easy time picking up on the strategies here. However, this is not to say that the game is just another cheap knockoff. Kohan II simply puts its focus more on economy and high-level strategy than tactical expertise — so much so that micromanagement of your units is not even an option. Move, attack, and flee are pretty much the extent of the orders you can give, ensuring that you've got to snatch victory through careful development and strategy. Provided Kohan II ships with the level of depth, balancing, and content that any RTS needs to be truly enjoyable, it could be some much-needed variety in an overly iterative genre. ■■■

COMPANIES

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of Kohan has been its idea of interacting with your armies solely on the company level, and Kings of War is no different. Players can select from a number of pre-built squads or design their own, with more advanced units becoming available as you progress up the tech tree. From scouts to swordsmen, spellcasters to huge golems, and archers to mechanical siege engines, the combinations are endless. You can even assign units to specific roles within the group, and attach a hero to them for extra beatdown. Since you don't really control your units beyond telling them where to go, knowing how to use each company to its full potential will no doubt be a major determining factor in any battle.



All of these spells and formations are handled solely by the AI

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice of the Force

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 21

EWOKS, NOW POCKET SIZED!!!



Luke shows his father that he's not just a big sissy...he's a big sissy that can jump

"Mistakenly assuming reality!"

Developed by Ubisoft's famed Montreal studio, and releasing day and date with the highly anticipated Star Wars Trilogy DVD collection, Apprentice of the Force follows the story of those three films and allows players to act out the most memorable sequences. This means that you'll take control of Han Solo as he dodges Greedo's shot in the cantina; join Luke Skywalker in Jabba's palace as The Muppets give one of their greatest rock performances to date; and help Princess Leia hand-feed that adorable ewok, Wicket! Oh, the memories.

All jokes aside, this game does feature a wildly diverse selection of stages that center around sequences that had you clinging to the edge of your seat and lining up to see the films again and again. As you work your way through the trilogy,

you will take part in the Death Star run, lose a hand in a battle against Darth Vader on Bespin, and show off your true Jedi reflexes in Endor's exciting speeder bike chase.

To accommodate the variety of these scenes, the gameplay changes gears (and genres).

One minute you might be blasting stormtroopers on foot in a side-scrolling stage, only to find yourself piloting an X-Wing in a shooter sequence on the next level.

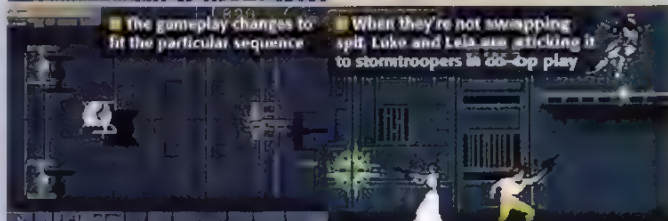
While this may seem like a single-player only experience, Ubisoft has also incorporated co-op play, as well as cutthroat multiplayer modes. While Hobbits and Spider-people are all the rage these days,

The Force will once again become the talk of the town on September 21st when Star Wars mania sweeps across the nation for the 500 billionth time. ■■■



If you had a gun as whiny as Luke, you'd probably chop off his hand too

All of the big battles from the movies are in the game



The gameplay changes to fit the particular sequence

When they're not swapping spit, Luke and Leia see attacking it to stormtroopers in co-op play



"Grrwool roooor!" (translation: "Kind sir, do you happen to know what time it is?")



Each of the golf carts are customized by the character driving them. This character thinks that clouds are swell and hemp is, like, the coolest fiber ever!



Insomniac's Dave Attell will be doing the course introduction and play-by-play



Swamps are underutilized for development of fine links



Class. Pure class. And, a nice use of the American flag.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Outlaw Golf 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR > **DEVELOPER** HYPNOTIX > **RELEASE** OCTOBER

SCREW DECORUM

Sometimes trash is so hip! Okay, not all of the characters in the upcoming *Outlaw Golf 2* are textbook examples of Springer's favorite guests. Still, they do all share an affinity for un-country club-like attire, loose interpretations of the generally practiced code of etiquette, and a refreshingly hands-on approach to bringing the fun back into the sometimes stodgy game of golf.

This sequel, due out in October, is more ambitious than most sports follow-ups. There are new courses, characters, minigames, online functionality, alternate gameplay types, and a handful of bonus abilities that make the game's \$20 suggested price all the more tasty.

Fully unlocked, *Outlaw Golf 2* will offer 10 playable characters (with sidekick caddies), eight courses (five of which are entirely new), multiple weather conditions, a driving range (where players can upgrade characters' stats by completing goals), and an 18-hole mini-golf course.

Those who played the first will remember a feature that is unique to the *Outlaw* series — the Composure meter. After hitting a good shot, it will go up. Shank the dots off of a ball and the meter will go down. Besides the players' input during the game's analog swing, the composure level is also taken into account to determine the result of the shot. With that logic in mind, it's extremely important to keep the composure in the green. So how do you go about getting back onto the fun side of golf? How about harassing your caddie or making mischief with a golf cart?

The caddie beatdowns are back from the first game, but the golf-cart trials are new. Just like the various caddie abuses available, there will be several different cart modes.

Some of them are racing, some involve hitting a certain number of onlookers in a certain period of time, and some of them are so freaking crazy that we couldn't wrench the details from the company (although we did hear mumbling about an obstacle course).

Besides these improvements in single-player, Global Star and Hypnotix are taking the game online. Xbox players will have leader board and voice communication options in addition to the PS2's head to head and tournament games. Although some of the specifics are a bit up in the air right now, "kooky" modes are also planned for online play. Skins, baseball (where you round the bases by playing well, and win by having the most runs), and pick-up-sticks were all mentioned.

Hilarious hijinks aside, we've gotten to play a bit of the game already and are excited to report that the analog swing, course design, and character advancement are all solid and well executed. Come October, a measly 20 bucks will get you more fun than a barrel full of monkeys — and a mighty fine golf game on top. ■■■■



Seriously, these two dancer/students have the most interesting composure meter



XBOX

Kameo: Elements of Power

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT > DEVELOPER RARE > RELEASE JANUARY

SHAPE-SHIFTING HOTTIE IN ASS-KICKING SHOCK HORROR

Let's not mince words: Rare is a company badly in need of a critical and commercial hit. In hopes of rekindling the flame, the developer is coming back strong with Kameo: Elements of Power, a game that should add a new wrinkle to the crowded character/action genre.

Kameo's main conceptual hook lies in the titular heroine's ability to transmogrify into 10 fantastic "Warrior Spirits." At any time, you have four Warriors mapped to the face buttons for instant transformations, but you can also swap out different beasts at any time. These incarnations are wildly diverse in both form and function. One of the more impressive ones was Chilla, a giant ice brute who has the ability to impale trolls on the spikes on his back, then use them as either projectiles or swing them like extremely hairy clubs. Other notable Warrior Spirits include Deep Blue (a squid-like aquatic creature that can shoot water from two powerful jets), Ash (your run-of-

the-mill fire-breathing dragon), and Rubble (a nicely animated pile of living rocks).

While the core gameplay is fairly straightforward, shape-shifting helps lend Kameo a depth that many titles in the genre fail to achieve. Kameo's abilities can be used in both environmental exploration and during battle. For example, at one point we saw Kameo come to a wide pit in an underground cavern. On the opposite side, was a sheer cliff covered with ice. Sounds impossible, right? Not so for Kameo, who quickly morphed into Major Ruin (an armadillo who can roll up into a ball and jump large gaps), launched off a ramp, then suddenly changed into Chilla (who can climb ice walls) in midair and latched onto the ice.

While we've attempted to focus on Kameo's gameplay, it must be said that this one is pretty freakin' gorgeous as well. Now, if they can just get the damn thing out by January, this winter looks to be a very hot one for Rare fans. ■■■■



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS > DEVELOPER EA REDWOOD SHORES > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 20



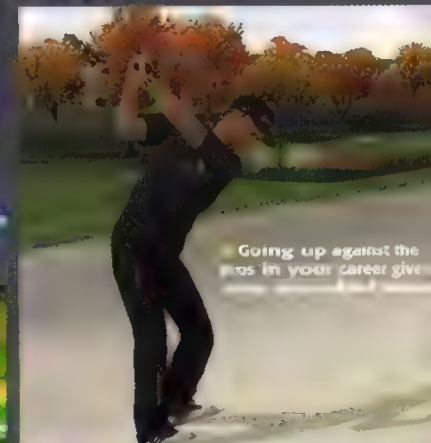
LOTS OF FOREPLAY

When it comes to golf, our motto is: "It's better to look good than to feel good." And as long as we take our bogies like our drinks ("Make it a double"), it shall remain so. That's okay, because the 2005 edition of Tiger Woods gives us plenty of reasons never to even leave the clubhouse.

EA Sports takes its famous customization features a step further. Apart from clothes, cash can now be spent to create your own swing (including adjusting its length, your knee flex, etc.) and positive and negative celebrations. You can even resell old equipment for more scratch. GameFace has also reached new dimensions, with everything from moles to eye bags to piercings for your golfer. So if you want to play as some wrinkled old coot with 30 years of hard drinking under your belt, you can show the world a liver spot for every putt you've made. Speaking of old coats, the title's career mode (including 30 Legends Scenarios) inserts golfing

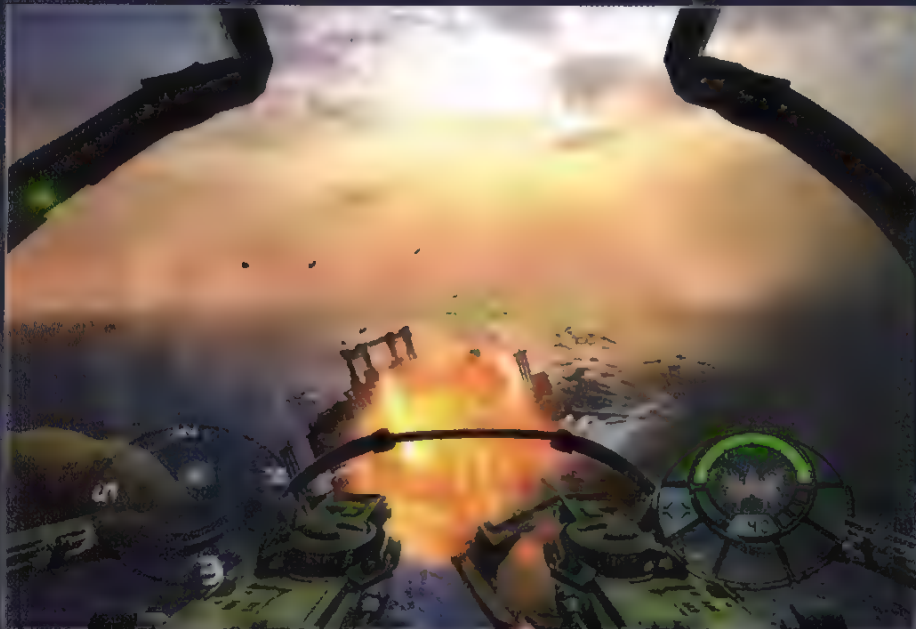
gods like Arnold Palmer into your path. Gameplay is largely the same; the notable additions include a new difficulty mode, a green matrix for approach chip shots, and the ability to shift your stance. Changing the way you play the game comes from the outside: instead of TigerProofing courses, Earn enough Legends coins and you can buy and redesign real-life holes to build your Dream 18. TigerProofing lets you change everything from the size of the fairways to how deep the bunkers are.

Tiger is beefing up this year, but if we have one complaint, it's that there's no 19th hole - which is our favorite watering hole, and where we do our best work. ■■■■



PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



XBOX

Yager

Yager, already released in Europe, is now coming to the States under the Kemco banner. Set to release in September, Yager is a futuristic space tale starring the acerbic hotshot pilot Magnus Tide. While truly a pure flight shooter, the science-fiction setting allows for weaponry and ships that are a bit different from the usual jet fighter fare. Interestingly, Yager's vessels have two flight modes – jet and hover. Jet controls just like any other high-powered plane, but hover allows you to control your height and strafe with the right analog stick. Hopefully, this will be a solid entry into a genre that's woefully underrepresented on Xbox.



PLAYSTATION 2

Gungrave: Overdose

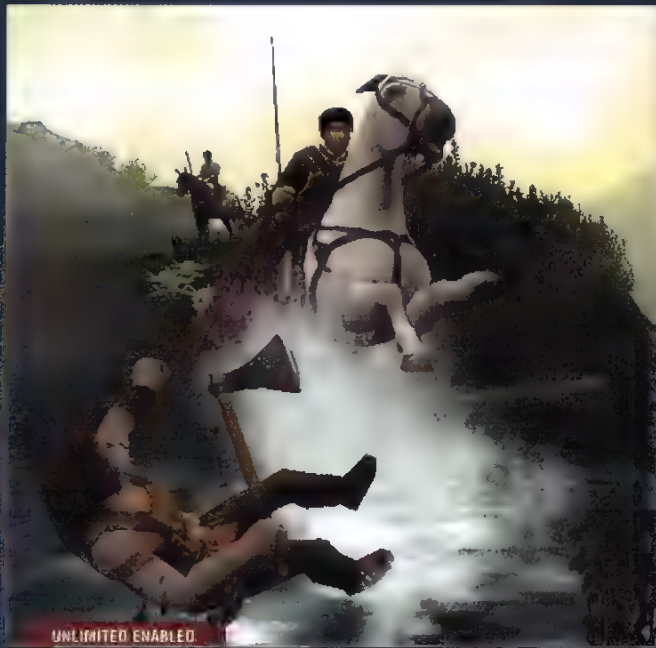
Beyond the Grave, the hero of the overlooked shooter Gungrave, is an incredibly cool character in need of a game that is worthy of his pistol-blazing, coffin-swinging panache. Hopefully Gungrave: Overdose, a sequel being developed by Red Entertainment and published by Mastiff, can deliver a better gameplay experience than the series' debut. This time, Grave has not only a host of new melee combat moves, but a posse in the form of two new playable characters: Rocket Billy RedCadillac (a violent guitar hero) and Juji Kabane (who dual wields powerful gun-swords). Check for Gungrave: Overdose this fall.



PLAYSTATION 2

ChoroQ

The demand for "CAR-PGs" has hit a fever pitch across the nation, and Atlus plans to satisfy the masses this fall. Formerly known as the Penny Racers series to U.S. audiences, ChoroQ incorporates a storyline and customizable upgrades between races. Survive earthquakes, go under the sea, and search for the terrible secret of space in a variety of fantasy tracks. And, with a retail price of \$19.99, it could have a high fun-to-cost ratio.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

King Arthur

The entire royal family has been killed in a freak accident, and you, a slovenly American, need to figure out how to rule Britain. No, wait, we're thinking of the *King Ralph* game. In Konami's upcoming King Arthur, which does not involve John Goodman in any way, you'll engage in both mounted and ground combat as you alternate between five playable characters that include Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere. While the concept of a warrior Guinevere (complete with unique weapons, special moves, and Keira Knightly's face) would make T.H. White quiver with sorrow, gamers will undoubtedly enjoy using her to fight through the realistic 3D environments based on settings from the film. Expect a release in November.



PLAYSTATION 2

Katamari Damacy

Folks, normally these little Photophiles are filled with our inane jokes and attempts to be funny. Well, this one will feature none of that nonsense. Why? Because this game is bizarre enough. In Namco's Katamari Damacy, coming to PS2 this September, you play the Prince of the Cosmos, whose father the King has accidentally knocked all the stars from the sky. Therefore, the Prince must roll around and collect objects to replace them. It doesn't matter what – everything from mailboxes and trees to cars and people will stick to your giant ball of junk. In both single and two-player battle mode, the goal is to acquire the biggest ball of junk possible. No, seriously, we're not making this up.



Give up now, and I may spare your life.

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Robotech Invasion

The epic anime saga Robotech is launching another game treatment courtesy of Gathering this fall in the form of Invasion, a ground shooter set in the New Generation – the third and final installment of the hallmark series. As part of the resistance against the invading Invid, fans of the series will get a chance to pilot the transformable Cyclone bike/mechs as they aid in the assault on Reflex Point. Abandoning the cel-shaded look seen in Battletory, Invasion's gritty visuals echo its darker storyline, which tells the tale of an amnesiac warrior with a dangerous secret.

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REVIEWS

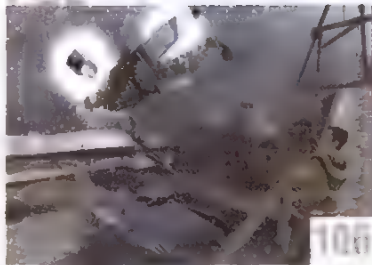
We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



Madden NFL 2005

PS2



Second Sight

GC



Amazing Island

XBOX



Sudeki



ESPN NFL 2K5

With balls the size of, well, footballs, developer Visual Concepts, Sega, Take 2, and your grandma (we think) have come up with a game that finally beats EA Sports' Madden. Featuring improvements and additions that reach far beyond the cosmetic (although it looks killer on the Xbox in particular), ESPN NFL 2K5 is the best football title the world has seen to date. Virtual jocks will have their hands full with gameplay that changes the way they play the game, while Franchise geeks will dive into the Weekly Gameplan options. Bow to the new king on page 100.

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.

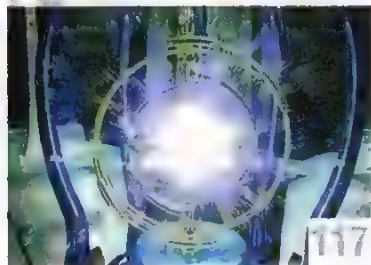
THE SCORING SYSTEM

- 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** Squakd. A ramshackle game hastily assembled with bubblegum and staples by a filth-encrusted hobo

- > **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



Aura: Fate Of The Ages

HANDHELD



Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors



Uru: The Path of the Shell

An adventure game expansion pack makes a big mark? Continuing the story of Uru: Ages Beyond Myst with unquestionably beautiful landscapes, plot insights for series followers, and genre-defining puzzling, Path of the Shell delivers. See exactly why, for fans and skeptics, this title defines adventure gaming on page 116.

Special Note: Because Activision and id Software would not provide Game Informer with pre-release code of Doom 3, that title is absent from this issue and therefore not eligible for Game of the Month. Look for a full review in next month's issue.

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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, 480p (i = interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CG – Computer Generated graphics.

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

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

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

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

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

frontend – A game's menus and options.

GBA – Game Boy Advance.

GC – Game Boy Color.

GBC – 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 with 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 Mario Kart.

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

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

SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System.

sports – A term we use for games like MaddenNFL.

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

thehammers – An unfortunate disease which afflicts web editors and makes them think terrible things are great and vice versa (Such as Billy claiming that Catwoman is a better movie than Spider-Man 2).

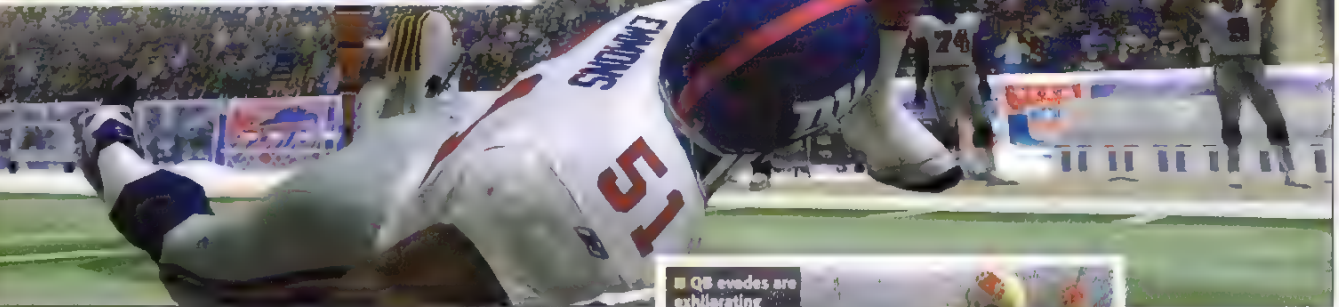
third-party – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer.

The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

This is where GI awards do their homework. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

C CONTENT RATED BY THE ESRB	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.	M MATURE	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
E EVERYONE	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.	A 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.



■ QB evades are exhilarating



YES COACH!
Sprints a track with the HOUSTON TEXANS

MONDAY:
Team meeting is confident in tone. Coach verbally challenges players. Rest of the day is devoted to film study.

TUESDAY:
Team gets half day off after 7-on-7 team drill in full pads. QB David Carr comes in for some weight training. Defensive line runs positional drills.

WEDNESDAY:
More team drills and film study. Scouting of upcoming game says that OT Seth Payne is a liability against the run, so he spends extra time in the weight room.

THURSDAY:
Full contact team scrimmage in full pads followed by aerobic training.

FRIDAY:
Team gets a half day off after light practice and some extra film study. Kicker does some ballet.

SATURDAY:
Team morale is great, but more film study is needed next week.

SUNDAY:
Texans beat Chargers 20 to 14.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

ESPN NFL 2K5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS ON PS2, 1 TO 4-PLAYER ON XBOX (2 TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, 2 TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA/GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE > **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS > **RELEASE** JULY 21 > **ESRB** E

THE CORONATION OF A KING

ESPN NFL 2K5 is better than Madden NFL 2005. I say this without reservation, because developer Visual Concepts has created a game that excels in every aspect. Everywhere you turn, 2K5 has gameplay, graphics, and features that open your eyes to exciting new ways to experience football. It's such a luxury that I can't decide what my favorite new element of ESPN is. The weekly preparation system (see sidebar for more) let me completely dork out as a wannabe coach. Best of all, it actually paid dividends for my team. The only problem is that it's so hardcore, I don't know how many people will have the patience to use it. On the other hand, I loved how Visual Concepts transformed the on-the-field experience. Between busting out of tackles by jamming on the A button (X for PS2)

or avoiding sacks with the right analog stick, I was sometimes at a loss for words, but never out of moves. Apart from how well these new features worked, I was also impressed at the changes the developer made to tighten up the gameplay. Due to the imported physics, runners don't feel like they are on a swivel, which allows for ball carriers to make cuts. Also, passing the ball has so much more zip this year, letting you throw bullets over the middle instead of slow-moving turds. CPU offences will actually chuck the ball downfield this year, too. Although the blocking of your offensive line (tackles in particular) is better, it could use work. Also, defensive backs' coverage was sometimes simply bizarre. I welcome all the new defensive pre-snap

options, but players don't always line up correctly. I simply couldn't get enough of this game. I watched all the installments of SportsCenter (Mel Kiper Jr. is in fine form), dreamt about what I was going to do with my Crib, and eagerly dove into my new role as coach. ESPN did just as thorough a job with its online component, giving you a complete season and VIP profiles—something I plan to take full advantage of as I study upcoming online opponents. ESPN needed to come out firing this year, and it did just that—exuding that big-time football confidence that only champions have. Everything about the game screams "primetime." Don't just get this game because it's 20 bucks, buy it because it's the best football title there is and the only one that's a must have. —KATO



BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

> **Concept:** Steal the football throne with a game that is hands-down the best

> **Graphics:** The level of detail and self-shading (especially on Xbox or with 480p) is breathtaking

> **Sound:** Importing stadium music on the Xbox is great, and I was amazed how much dialog the ESPN crew recorded

> **Playability:** New gameplay features such as QB evades and running back cuts are smooth

> **Entertainment:** This title is non-stop fun in every category, and I'd gladly pay triple the asking price

> **Replay Value:** High

The edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The Xbox takes it in a landslide. This game was made to be played on the console, and it's absolutely gorgeous in 480p. Throw in being able to play your CDs in the game, and it's a no-brainer. Unless you own the PS2 HDD, you won't be able to see the video footage in the halftime show. Even if you do, however, you still can't import your own music into the title on PS2.

Second Opinion 9.5

Much like David's miraculous victory over Coliath, the fervid team at Visual Concepts has defeated EA's gridiron giant with what I feel is the greatest football game to date. ESPN's swift-footed gameplay is amazingly polished and a visual tour de force. The velocity behind passes has increased greatly since last year, player movements exhibit more realism, and I absolutely love how breaking tackles, evading sacks, and applying jarring hits are based solely on user reaction. Visual Concepts has absolutely nailed the authenticity of the sport in gameplay, and knows full well what gamers want outside of it. Online seasons, daily player training, gorgeous out-of-play sequences, weekly SportsCenter recaps with Chris Berman, tons of unlockables in The Crib, VIP user stat tracking, importable music, the list goes on and on. Madden's gameplay is still tighter as a whole, but the wealth of options that ESPN throws at you is simply staggering. It's easily the best gridiron release of the year. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

- > **Concept:** The gameplay revisions are noticeable, but the majority of this year's changes are cosmetic
- > **Graphics:** I love the new time-of-day lighting, but the player models are ugly
- > **Sound:** The boo birds will come out in full force if you screw up
- > **Playability:** Even though the timing on the Hit Stick is slightly off, EA's continuing integration of the analog stick makes for good fun
- > **Entertainment:** The things I had most fun with were well below the game's surface gloss
- > **Replay Value:** High



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Madden NFL 2005

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
 > **RELEASE** AUGUST 9 > **ESRB** E

STUTTER STEP

Madden has had a knack of making quantum leaps with each successive title. This new edition, however, breaks the streak. Don't get me wrong—I appreciate a lot of the fun things it does, but the collective impact of these changes is less than fans are used to.

Defenses benefit greatly in 2005. I noticed more aggressive play from defensive backs, resulting in increased interceptions and pass breakups. I really like how linebackers are less timid and will now shoot the gap to disrupt running plays in the backfield. Being able to change up player assignments is quite useful, but doesn't let you change from zone to man-to-man coverage. On offense, the option routes are sweet, but I wish you could choose them as hot routes, which the developer took out from an early edition of the game.

In general, the tackles in this title jar the senses. The timing on the Hit Stick will take a little getting used to, but it rocks socks off. The best thing about it is that it triggers varied animations, and it isn't just some automatic tackle that sucks players together like magnets. Overall, the game is smoother, and the contextual correctness of the animations is notable. There are more over-the-shoulder and low catches as receivers adjust to where the ball is thrown (however, because a cheat called jet-packing has

been stopped, receivers won't jump for balls). I was glad to see more broken/missed tackles and that quarterbacks' ball release is quicker. The downside of this is that there are some collision cheats and faulty throwing animations. The presentation of Madden tries to catch up to ESPN, but even with extras it's not as good. I don't like the bulkier new models that make everyone look like Adam Sandler in *The Waterboy*.

At the end of the day, I wanted something new from Madden that changed the way I approached the game, but this doesn't do it. For instance, when Owner's mode debuted last year, I could help my team by hiring the best trainers and coaches. And when Training Camp was first introduced (it's unchanged this year), I loved how I could actively help my players' ratings. Now, however, the only thing I have to do differently is not bench my star players so their feelings aren't hurt (see sidebar at left for more). This is fun, along with the Tony Bruno Storyline Central stuff, but they are very passive, surface changes for Franchise mode. Perhaps, due to the game play fixes and the pre-snap options, those that play online will benefit most this year. This isn't a bad thing, not only considering it's on Xbox Live, but given how much more personable the online experience is with trophies and the like. Count this as a side step for the series. —**KATO**

ATLANTA TRADES VICK!

TAKE A LOOK AT HOW A FEW BAD GENERAL MANAGER MOVES AFFECT THE ATLANTA FALCONS.

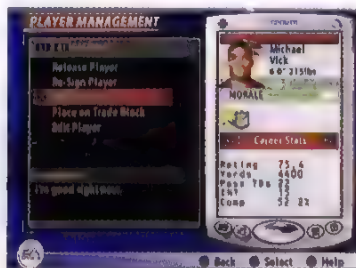
WEEK 1:
 QB Michael Vick replaced by Ty Detmer. Dunn (RB), Beasley (CB), and Whitfield (T) want to start.

WEEK 3:
 Article appears in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* saying Vick wants to start for another team.

WEEK 6:
 Vick traded. Beasley and Whitfield inserted as starters. Dunn put on trading block. Falcons request a WR with an overall skill rating of at least 80.

WEEK 7:
 Post-Vick fallout: Nothing in papers. No skill point drop for players, but the locker room is angry. Despite being reinstated as starters, Mora e of Whitfield and Beasley is still low.

OFFSEASON:
 Trouble re-signing low morale players, despite large money offered. Restricted free agent offers tendered to other teams. CPU trades occur in first round of NFL Draft. Unrestricted free agents gauge offers from teams based on their preferences.



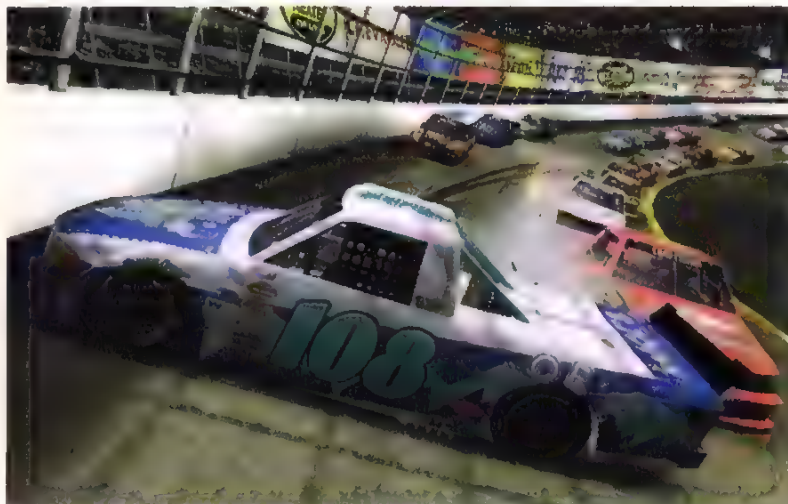
The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Madden's success on Xbox Live, along with great 480p hi-def support, gives that version a slight edge, as it looks better than on Sony's system. Unfortunately, there is a new juke control for the Xbox that some might not like. If money is an issue, online play on PS2 is true, but that edition doesn't support 480p. Both make use of a sports ticker and have the anti-cheating measures. Of course, GameCUBE isn't online at all, so I'd only get this version for its slight step up in the graphics department from the PS2.

Second Opinion 8.75

Unaware of its competition, Madden has been blindsided, knocked unconscious, and sent to grab some pine by Visual Concepts' spirited masterpiece, ESPN NFL 2K5. Madden has lost a step and is now trailing its rival—in some areas by a great degree. The new content that EA Tiburon has implemented into this year's game just doesn't generate excitement. As much as I love listening to Tony Bruno on EA Sports Radio or seeing the gooty getups in Create-a-Fan, neither of these aspects really add anything to the game. The only noteworthy addition is the flashy analog-based Hit Stick. EA Tiburon has always done a commendable job in creating new features that gamers can really sink their teeth into. This year's game just doesn't do that. Because of this, it feels more like an update than that irresistible new Madden that we've come to expect. —**REINER**



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1 > **ESRB** E

GREEN FLAG TO THE END

As NASCAR grows, so must its video game. Diehards will pick up this game just to tweak the gear ratios or to get the year's driver update. But to get everyone else interested, developer EA Tiburon has gone far beyond a simple roster expansion. By making its career mode even more complex, it has succeeded in giving players of all stripes quite a bit to chew on.

Real life drivers face a hectic schedule filled with test sessions, appearances, and work in the shop. Chase for the Cup's Fight to the Top career mode is sweet, not necessarily because of its attempt to mimic reality, but because it opens up the game dramatically. Even though previous titles have put you in charge of your race team, there is so much to do this year that it relieves some of the season-to-season monotony. It also lessens the gameplay curve with more chances to earn cash. Through the four racing series (Featherlite, Craftsman Trucks, a Busch-like league, and Nextel Cup), you can fill your calendar up with events once you earn contracts for the various series. You can even own teams where you control the R&D, paint schemes, and have drivers race for you (if you want).

The all-encompassing nature of the career mode is enhanced by the expansion of grudges and alliances (which now take longer to engage during a race) because you are rated as a Hero or a Villain. Push the Intimidator button when you're behind someone instead of just drafting with them, and you might spin them out and be labeled a bully on the track. It's a little too effective against younger drivers, but it's a step towards replicat-

ing the dreaded aero push condition, and being a Hero or a Villain is important to moving up the ranks and garnering fans. This even introduces an auto-graph minigame. Although I could do without the cheesy off-the-track production model races, I simply loved the variety of things to do that popped up all around this game.

This title has made some subtle improvements with its AI, such as rival drivers who won't sell the farm just to wreck you and CPU drivers who are smarter when a crash occurs in front of them. However, work is still needed with the AI. I particularly would like to see the pit stops overhauled. As for the graphics, it's still a sore spot (it looks like Vaseline is being boiled on the horizon), and their ugliness keeps this game from scoring a nine.

Diehard NASCAR gearheads won't forgive EA for pushing Papyrus and Monster Games out of the market, but this is a game that is strong in almost every department, with something to offer everyone. —KATO



BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** EA Tiburon cooks up a big, tasty enchilada, rolling in several aspects of what it's like to be a NASCAR driver

> **Graphics:** An already weak point for the series that isn't made any better

> **Sound:** There are separate voices for your spotter and crew chief, but the spotter's info could be more helpful

> **Playability:** The important info in your new HUD is too hard to read, and I hate that there's no cockpit view

> **Entertainment:** Having four racing leagues eases the franchise mode's learning curve and opens up the game greatly

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

I never thought I'd find myself comparing content from a NASCAR game with the character development in Star Wars. Knights of the Old Republic, but the connection in Chase for the Cup is unmistakable. Not only is it amusing to see your character's reputation fluctuate between Hero and Villain, this system changes the racing dynamic. After slamming into my opponents and taunting them with the new Intimidator button, I quickly learned that I was a marked man in the next race. Career mode is also bustling with newfound depth and variety, as players must now earn the right to tailgate with the pros. I really like how the gameplay shifts gears between traditional NASCAR, smaller leagues, and even illegal street racing. Just when I thought this series was running out of gas, EA has completely reworked it with irresistible content and a bold new direction. —REINER



UNLIMITED ERAILED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NHL 2005

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX, GC) (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE AND XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 > **ESRB** E

SLIDING IT PAST THE FIVE HOLE

The bone-jarring savagery of the sport ruled the rink in the last installment, but this year, it's all about the art of open ice. With the click of the button, control can be switched from puck carrier to any other player on the ice. This, of course, becomes very advantageous as it creates opportunities for crashing the net, orchestrating offenses, and setting up the ultimate one-timer.

Rather than opening the play up, I found that this off-the-puck control didn't work as well as it should. Given the breakneck speed and intensity of play, your actions have to be precise in order to excel with these maneuvers. I often found that when I switched control, I would skate the wrong way, or focus too intently on my other man that the puck would get stripped away. It works for ESPN because the play is a hair slower, the rink is larger, and the CPU assists you. In this game, you rely too heavily on luck.

While this aspect proves to be fly-by-night, the little enhancements that EA imple-

mented really tighten up the gameplay package. You can now call for double teams and picks, perform amazing wraparound shots, and even knock a twig out of a player's hands. The CPU AI has also been enhanced to cut down on breakaways. They now play more of a trap style of defense, and will try to drive you into the boards. Goalies will also glide out of the net to cut off your shooting angle. Moving the wrist shot to an independent button makes shooting more dynamic, and different face off formations are finally available.

In improving the visual realism of the game, EA has implemented stadium specific entrances (such as the shark head in San Jose), a slew of new animations, and detailed facial expressions (although all of the players have full sets of sparkling white teeth). Outside of the action you'll see on the ice, EA has done very little to strengthen user interaction in Dynasty mode.

For the second year running, NHL best encapsulates the play and authenticity of the sport. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Focuses heavily on the open ice aspect as well as CPU AI

> **Graphics:** Beautiful animations, authentic stadium details, and enhanced player model realism with facial expressions and rim lighting

> **Sound:** Ladduster commentary, great arena sounds, and a decent collection of underground tunes

> **Playability:** The give-and-go is a bit difficult to use successfully, but the new wraparound move, double teams, and picks add greatly to the flow of the game

> **Entertainment:** Excels in gameplay grace, but hasn't improved in the front office

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

The biggest asset of this title is its corrections from last year. New features are, in reality, sprinkled-in bonuses. Most improved are goalies, who come alive with new-found smarts and different playing styles. Gone are some of the more jarring animations - especially for defenders. Still, players can interact like bumper cars at times. Off the Puck control's usefulness is limited, and I wish it selected more players for you. Wraparounds, new practice scheduling, and Off the Puck help flesh out NHL into a solid step forward. —KATO

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

ESPN NHL 2K5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ESPN VIDEOGAMES > **DEVELOPER** KUSH GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 7 > **ESRB** E



ANOTHER SOLID EFFORT

Last season, developer Kush Games played the role of backup goalie - being called in late into the third period and asked to create a game that would compete with EA's juggernaut with just six months of development time. This year, Kush is starting in net, and we get to see just how talented this developer is.

Almost every key aspect of ESPN has either been tweaked or completely overhauled. With Franchise mode, Kush has implemented a comprehensive coach management system that allows you to monitor every little aspect of the game, as well as innovative international scouting in the off season. You'll also see that each team has a minor league squad that plays its own full season, but unfortunately, you cannot play or view the games, as the CPU simulates them all.

Gameplay has been tightened up significantly as well, although the player movements are still a bit too exact. Innovating in the same way as EA has this year, you can now set up plays with a give-and-go pass mechanic. The AI that the CPU exhibits for this move

is particularly impressive, as it will take a shot if it sees an opening. Equally as illustrious are the beautifully orchestrated backward skating and manual stick movement - which allows defensemen to dog the passing lanes and break up plays. Additionally, wrist shots have been sped up, deflections are in greater abundance, and you'll occasionally see players perform miraculous diving shots. Kush has also implemented a new fighting engine, but it's way too simplistic of a button masher to really hold your interest.

As far as longevity is concerned, ESPN is easily the deepest game of the year. The multiplayer mayhem of the NHL-themed minigames in Party mode never seem to grow old. Furthermore, I really enjoyed unlocking new player-created squads in Dream Team mode - such as the team Jeremy Roenick would create. The Sky Box boasts a bevy of new unlockables as well.

ESPN is a top-shelf pick that has an unrivaled franchise mode, but the gameplay doesn't have the hard-hitting finesse of EA's NHL. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Overhaul the existing content, innovate in key areas, add great longevity to the mix, but remain a strong second to EA

> **Graphics:** The fluidity of the framerate is outstanding. The animations and realism of player models are decent, but not nearly as grand as in EA's

> **Sound:** The commentary team calls a hell of a game and the rink effects are spot on

> **Playability:** The players still don't feel like they are on ice, but the new defensive moves and give-and-go passing tighten up an already great playing game

> **Entertainment:** Loaded with modes and features, but EA's still plays the best

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.75

ESPN's hockey is still the redheaded stepchild of Sega Sports. Developer Kush Games delivers an above-average title, but there's no desire to be the best. I am bothered most by the players' movements, which ignore momentum and feel like you're playing tabletop hockey - everyone moves on a swivel. For realism's sake, I suggest turning off the unlimited turbo after winning a fight. On the positive side, the title is fun, it looks gorgeous on Xbox, franchise scouting is cool, and the manual poke check is sweet. —KATO

The Edge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The Puck happens to run a fair bit on the superior aspects of the game. Will you see jersey tags as well?

The Edge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

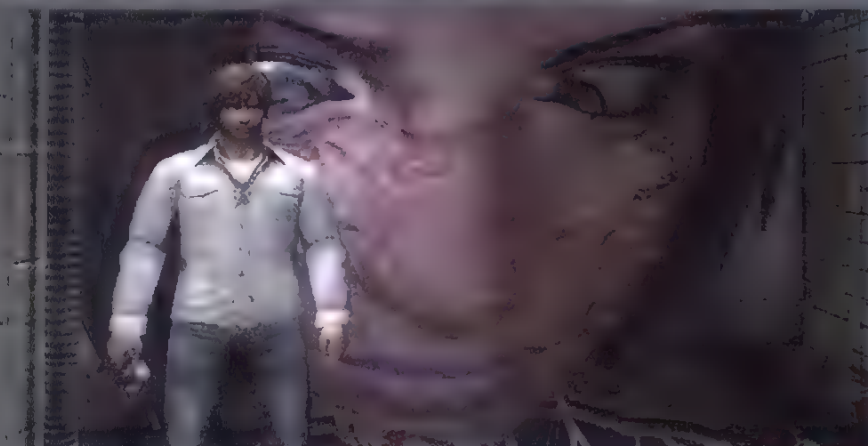
On the positive side, the title is fun, it looks gorgeous on Xbox, franchise scouting is cool, and the manual poke check is sweet. —KATO

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Silent Hill 4: The Room

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 7 > ESRB T



PSYCHOLOGICAL SUBVERSION

Silent Hill 4: The Room falls into that sometimes-dangerous category of "high-concept." Unfailingly, when trying to bring up an example of its genius, I feel like I'm trying to convince someone who thinks that Meg Ryan's romantic comedies are the pinnacle of modern cinema that they really should watch *Pi*. It's hard, because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The series' latest creepiest takes place in a city near Silent Hill and centers around Henry — a man who, for the last five days, hasn't been able to leave his apartment or make any noise that can be heard outside the walls of his rented flat. Sucky. And, for the player, who is in a first-person mode while in Apt. 302, it's creepy as hell. Your interaction in the room is minimal, but looking out the windows shows the real world outside. It's like playing a supernatural version of *Rear Window*.

The game's disarming voyeurism, bizarre camera angles, and exceptionally well-played tension is what the series has been trying to do all along — but *The Room* is the first entry to do it right. Being stripped almost entirely of puzzles and rarely outright forcing Henry to fight (although combat plays a

larger role than in earlier entries) are not normal things for a survival horror game to do. The solitude of the apartment is also something that the series hasn't tried before. When combined, they make for a tense ride that depends on the player's constant uncertainty of what is to come. Enemies are faster, stronger, and more intense than ever before. To counter this, the game features a new combat mechanic (a swing power-up function) which is nice, but certainly doesn't make this an action game.

Although I'm practically giddy about *The Room*'s mind-bending plot, tension, and horror, there are things that I think are less than golden about it. While some of the new foes are awesomely terrifying (twin baby-like heads strapped to a torso with no legs!), others are tedious and dumb (low-level bean sprouts that one quick whack takes care of are unnecessary). The sound design is excellent...but I swear that the dogs' death cries are a sample from Janet Jackson's "Black Cat." And, although I don't really agree with the assertion, I suspect that some people will be turned off by the game's exceptionally linear gameplay.

Still, even with these blemishes, I think that *Silent Hill 4: The Room* has done something important and interesting for the series and its genre — it's distinctly its own and still scary as hell, with a crazy ending that will be remembered for years. *The Room* is a truly smart game that skillfully plays off gamers' deepest fears. —LISA

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Live up to the previous entries in this nicely consistent franchise which still makes a fresh horror experience.

> **Graphics:** Great character models, environments (metal grates finally look good), and sticky enemies.

> **Sound:** Moody and atmospheric score plus forces with admirable voice acting.

> **Playability:** The combat mechanic is unique, and I mean that in a good way.

> **Entertainment:** Wonderfully unnerving and an awful entry in the saga — fans will be pleased and new players will probably come into the silent.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion 8.5

Fascinating and freakish, and as suspenseful as a Hitchcock classic, *The Room* is a bone-chilling thriller that toys with your mind, jumpstarts your heart, and surrounds you with irredeemable evil. Being trapped in a room with no means of communicating with the outside world is incredibly intense as is, but it becomes an unnerving and nearly unendurable experience when overwhelming malevolence haunts every step that you take. This is essentially what *The Room* is. It's a brilliant concept that Konami has devised which translates into a compelling and absolutely terrifying game. The combat system still leaves much to be desired, but the newly incorporated strength meter does make it a touch better. The visuals are once again to die for, puzzles are easy to comprehend, the sound is profoundly creepy, and the plot will scare the living hell out of you. —REINER



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Catwoman

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER EA UK > RELEASE JULY 20 > ESRB T

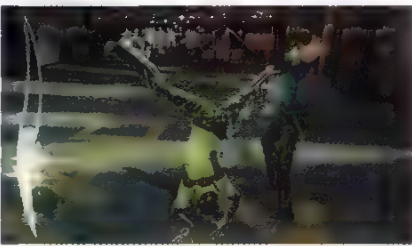
NINE PAINFUL LIVES

Just the thought of watching the *Catwoman* movie makes me vomit a little in my mouth. The idea of playing the game that is based on this waste of film is the equivalent to dunking my head into the world's dirtiest toilet and gargling. After spending two complete days with this killer app (killer as in you'll die a little inside each time you play it), I can safely say that I've experienced horrors that your mind can't even begin to comprehend.

With gameplay that should be buried in a litter box and flung into the farthest reaches of space, *Catwoman* shows no mercy as it tears your soul to shreds. As big of an abomination as it is, the production values that EA put into this game are surprisingly high, and the visual presentation is quite the eye-opener. The frisky feline's character model is meticulously detailed, and her acrobatic maneuvers are brought to life with silky smooth animations that are a thrill to watch. Much like the Prince of Persia series, *Catwoman*'s platforming segments demand precision on the player's part. Flipping around poles, scaling fencing, and whip-swinging are all done very well, but one ill-timed button press or movement can send you tumbling to the bottom of a towering vertical stage. This is where the game really starts to get on your nerves. One little slip up transforms into a lengthy sequence of repeating actions.

Sadly, the platforming is where this title excels the most. The remainder of the game is like watching a train wreck, only to realize that you are on the train. The analog-based fighting system is incredibly clunky, and the easiest way to defeat a foe is to simply knock them into a box, locker, or trash bin. As it turns out, these objects are everywhere! Even on the dance floor! As if it could get any worse, you can also pose seductively to entrance your attackers. Groan.

In short, playing this epic-sized monstrosity is similar to being scratched to death by a house cat...not only is it painful, it's also embarrassing. —REINER



BOTTOM LINE 4.75

> **Concept:** Transform the horrors of the silver screen into a game.

> **Graphics:** Meticulous detailing went into the *Catwoman* model and animations. The lighting effects also showcase an impressive blinding sheen.

> **Sound:** If you can hear anything over your cries of despair, you'll detect a cinematic soundtrack and some of the worst one-liners of all time.

> **Playability:** The high-flying platforming is executed fairly well, but the odious level designs and miserable combat engine pollute the entire package.

> **Entertainment:** Makes Batman games look good (and most of them really suck).

> **Replay Value:** Low.

Second Opinion 5

With all the wit and sagacity of a dead kitten, *Catwoman* spouts more clichéd idiocy than you'll know how to handle. The irrelevant plotline fails to make itself evident for the first several stages as you navigate irritating vertical level designs and a sorry excuse for a combat engine. Enemies can never be killed, so a perfectly reasonable scoring strategy is to kick a guy into a corner and whale on him until you've hit the max point value for the level. Every time I started to feel like I was enjoying myself with this foul feline, I'd fall down another gap and have to start an entire section over. Consequently, finishing each part of the game was a true joy for no other reason than I knew I'd never have to play it ever again. —MILLER

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Second Sight

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CODEMASTERS > DEVELOPER FREE RADICAL > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 21 > ESRB T

NOT PSI-AMESE TWINS

Not everyone with psychic powers is a super-soldier. If you woke up in a research facility with amnesia and suddenly discovered that you could move things with your mind, you probably wouldn't be ready to single-handedly take down an elite army. In fact, you'd probably be more concerned with discovering who you are and why you're covered with bandages and surgical scars.

John Vattic, *Second Sight's* leading man, is an unlikely hero — a skeptical scientist who remembers nothing about his past, but who has an inexplicable array of paranormal abilities. However, even with these awesome skills at the player's disposal, it is the story rather than run-and-gun action that drives *Second Sight*. The plot progresses in two separate timelines, one leading up to John's incarceration in the research facility, and one dealing with his escape. This method of telling the story is sheer genius — it allows the player to gradually uncover pieces and build up to two separate climaxes.

The thing that surprised me most about *Second Sight* was the emphasis on stealth rather than assault. Though you have powers geared towards offense, like Telekinesis and Psi Attack, the only way you can avoid constant gunfights is by using more

subtle skills like Charm and Possession. Instead of engaging the enemy in direct onslaughts, I often found myself using the objects around me as both cover and weapons. Not everything in the environment is necessarily useful, though; some things are lying around just for the fun of it. The ability to play arcade games, kick gorilla cages to rile up the primates, and tool around on other people's computers make the surroundings surprisingly engaging. In one instance, after killing a guard, I pulled up a chat program on his computer only to discover that I slaughtered him just as he was in the middle of a conversation with his wife! It isn't often that a game makes me feel guilty for my actions (I attack townspeople whenever possible), but as I watched her messages like "I can't wait 2 see u" and "Where r u?" scroll across the screen, I felt like the most morally bankrupt man in the western hemisphere.

The story, combined with immense freedom and psychically-charged stealth elements, would have made *Second Sight* an amazing game if the experience were more fluid and continuous. Some comparisons to *Psi-Ops* are unavoidable, and *Second Sight* simply doesn't provide the same ease in utilizing your psychic weaponry. Instead of having each



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Reclaim your lost identity...with mind bullets!

> **Graphics:** *TimeSplitters'* caricatured style feels right at home in third-person

> **Sound:** Solid voiceovers and generic music make this department a mixed bag

> **Playability:** The weapon aiming is especially cool, but the power selection process frequently slows down the action

> **Entertainment:** It feels like *Psi-Ops* after it just woke up from a nap... fun, but not firing on all cylinders

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

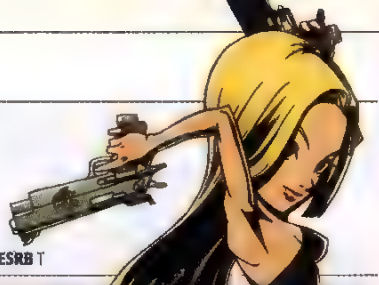
Psi-Ops may have beaten *Second Sight* to the psychic punch, but as luck would have it, both games are quite different in design. *Second Sight* focuses more on the stealth dynamic than tapping into your telepathic prowess to become the ultimate killing machine. While I do enjoy the manner in which your mental abilities are used for puzzle solving and sneaking undetected, the only gameplay aspect that I truly am impressed with is the weapon targeting system that allows players to lock on to enemies while manually marking zones on the body. Unfortunately, the remainder of the gameplay is a bit chaotic. The camera system is incredibly clunky, collision fields are often questionable, and having to pause the action to switch to different psychic powers is a real buzzkill. I do have to give Free Radical credit for creating a compelling story that alternates between events in the past and the present, and mimicking the graphical style of *TimeSplitters* is a nice touch. All told, however, *Second Sight* is the very definition of mediocrity. —REINER



PLAYSTATION 2

Viewtiful Joe

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 4 > **RELEASE** AUGUST 24 > **ESRB** T



UNLEASHING YOUR INNER JOE

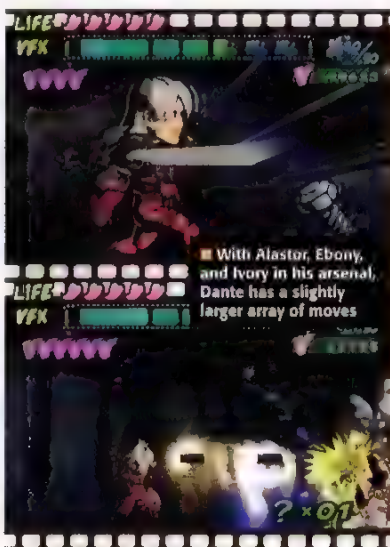
Now PS2 owners can learn what GameCube owners have known for many months: The world needs VFX powers in a bad way. You could use mach speed to make *Anacondas: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid* end faster, or slow-mo to savor every second of *Jet Li's Hero*. Though I won't be using these powers to aid my movie-watching anytime soon, every second I spent with them in *Viewtiful Joe's* Movieland was like breathing in a thick fog of condensed joy.

When it was first released on the 'Cube, VJ struck a chord with many gamers due to its old-school difficulty, often forcing players to replay large sections of each level upon dying. Of course, a tough 2D side-scroller is nothing new, but what continues to set VJ apart is the way it provides this towering difficulty while still enticing you to hit "continue" each and every time you die. Of course, if you're just in it for the style and not the challenge, you can start a game on the newly-added "sweet" difficulty level. A step below the "kids" level, this new tier is made for the more casual gamer who wants to enjoy all of the viewtiful moves without all of the frustration — though I have trouble imagining that a fight with Fire Leo on any setting could be classified as "easy."

In addition to the new difficulty, there is something else that makes this title more than a simple port: the addition of a new playable character, Dante. In order to unlock the legendary son of Sparda, players will simply need to beat the game

on any setting. The demon hunter's moveset is similar to Joe's in most respects, but with some added range. With a long sword and a couple of handguns, Dante's attacks have some incredible reach, making it easier to keep enemies at bay. His VFX and health meters behave the same as Joe's, too, so there isn't the same kind of ability trade-off that you see with the other hidden characters.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what makes this game so much fun. The concept is simple, but a combination of stylized moves, tongue-in-cheek humor, and merciless difficulty make *Viewtiful Joe* absolutely irresistible. PS2 gamers need to do themselves a favor and not miss this chance to own one of the coolest and most innovative action titles of this generation. —JOE



BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** A glorious hybrid of fluid action and superhero flair

> **Graphics:** Stylish and colorful, perfectly capturing that comic book feel

> **Sound:** The hidden characters' cutscenes still rely on subtitles and garbled gibberish instead of actual voices

> **Playability:** A few simple buttons control the remarkably complex action with ease

> **Entertainment:** Like a bel-ligerent clown, it's fun even as it kicks your ass

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.15

Yes, this is a port of the GameCube version that GI named as one of the greatest games of 2003, but for anyone that didn't get a chance to play Capcom's hand-cramping action title, this PS2 edition is a breath of fresh air. If you are unfamiliar with Joe, you are in for a treat. In simplest terms, Joe is about as old-school as games get in this day and age, with pulse pounding 2D gameplay wrapped in a gorgeous cel-shaded 3D world. For this version, Capcom dropped in a couple of nice extras, including a more forgiving difficulty for gamers that found *Kids Mode* too hard to complete. Another added bonus for finishing the game is getting to play as Dante, the star of *Devil May Cry*. If you already experienced Joe, only the hardcore will find joy in playing it again. —ANDY



PLAYSTATION 2

Dog's Life

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** HIP GAMES > **DEVELOPER** FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS
> **RELEASE** JULY 27 > **ESRB** E

EVERY DOG HAS ITS DAY

I like new ideas. I'll sometimes pick up a game just because it's a little different — something that reminds me of the old days when every concept hadn't already been done a dozen times. That might be why I liked *Dog's Life* so much. Or it might just be that, like a good pet, a lot of love has gone into this tribute to man's best friend — and it shows.

Dog's Life casts you in the role of Jake, a friendly pooch who has the hots for Daisy, the pup next door. When Daisy is dognapped, Jake begins an excursion to sniff out the culprits. Your main goal throughout is to collect enough bones to challenge the local hound from a given area, after which you'll be able to take control of the other canine and utilize that breed's individual skills. Initially, this style of play is enormously entertaining as you get to know what your dog can do and what sorts of events are available in each enormous level. Unfortunately, these exercises in fetch the bone eventually wear a little thin. Like many games of its ilk, collecting pick-ups becomes a curse that drags the game down.

Thankfully, there's a lot that brings it back up. Foremost among these is the versatile Smell-o-vision. At the press of a button you'll go from third-dog to first-dog perspective, where scents will appear as brightly colored gasses. In this mode you can track footprints, catch a whiff of buried bones, or pick up the odor of missing objects.

A tremendous amount of care went into the movement of the dog you control — so much so that a health meter isn't even used. You can always evaluate your well-being by observing the way Jake moves. If he's happy his tail will wag, and if he's hungry he'll drag his tail and dip his head.

It's also worth mentioning that Hip enacted a commendable venture through which a portion of sales for the game will go to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. There are few games I would sooner recommend to parents for their kids, and if those parents happen to be gamers, they may very well be sneaking down after bedtime to get their own fix. —MILLER

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** All the fun of being a dog, but without that smell when you get wet

> **Graphics:** Huge vivid environments and fantastic animal animation bring the game to life

> **Sound:** Some repetitive voice work, but the entertaining characters and laid back tunes are clever

> **Playability:** A quality control scheme and the innovative Smell-o-vision camera are intuitive and natural

> **Entertainment:** One of the best family games in a long while is more fun than you can shake a stick at

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.5

I'm a living, breathing, crapping machine! Call me a sick bastard if you like, but the only thrills that I garnered playing this game came from making my beloved pooch take big, steaming dumps. While it scores points for originality, outside of the cute (and disgusting) day-to-day canine actions, *Dog's Life* is little more than a simplistic collect-a-thon with a handful of mediocre minigames thrown in for good measure. That said, you'll probably lose interest in this game rather quickly, but it is one of those games that you just have to see. —REINER



■ He must be too sexy for his shirt.



■ The swing mechanic has been enhanced with pressure sensitive hitting and a new power shot.



■ Once again, you'll need to beat normal and hard versions of all of the characters in the game.



■ Of the 13 courses, eight are brand-new.



■ Trees now sway realistically in the wind.



■ A new power shot allows players to hit the ball even further.

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Double the size of the game, tighten up the gameplay, bring it online, and throw in some familiar PlayStation 2 characters for good measure.

> **Graphics:** Trees now sway realistically to the strength of the wind and new camera angles are introduced; but ultimately, it has an identical look to its predecessor.

> **Sound:** The ambient sounds perfectly echo the realism of the sport, and the caddie voiceovers are simply priceless.

> **Playability:** The same great meter-based gameplay with new power shots and enhanced ball physics.

> **Entertainment:** Best summarized as completely and utterly addictive.

> **Replay Value:** High.

Second Opinion 8

It's hard to articulate why I like this game. The series makes no large feature leaps, despite the addition of online. And yet its grip is unmistakable. Even after shanking countless balls into the woods, the game's pacing always gave me something to shoot for. You'll spend copious amounts of energy chasing after all the shop items, and I like how even a bad outing can still net you points to spend. Hot Shots is peppered with goodies. Visually it's airtight, and overhead airplane noise and the swaying trees add ambiance. Elsewhere you'll find a Sean Connery-esque caddie ("I love to sing showtunes"), loyalty ratings for your golfers, special rules for Stage Trial holes (such as penalties for hitting trees), and the return of an improved Mini-golf that includes obstacles and rewards risk taking shots. Although the game itself doesn't go out on a limb at all, it still wins in a big way. —KATO

PLAYSTATION 2

Hot Shots Golf Fore!

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 50-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** CLAP HANZ LIMITED/SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS > **RELEASE** AUGUST 17 > **ESRB** E

APES, ALBATROSSES, & TONS OF HOLES

The visuals may seem vaguely familiar, and the gameplay may fit like a glove, but you'll be hard-pressed to find a sequel that delivers as much new content as Hot Shots Golf Fore! so effortlessly does. The previous entry in the series allowed players to shank shots on five wildly diverse courses. In this installment, these same five 18-hole resorts are joined by eight original courses that are arguably the best in the series, given just how well thought out and treacherous they can be. On this note, if you excelled in the previous entries in the series, prepare for a boost in the difficulty. Violent wind (which is now shown cosmetically through finely detailed swaying trees), uneven greens, and CPU opponents who must have sold their souls to the devil for a killer golf game, will push your every skill to the limit.

The characters that you meet may seem a bit familiar as well. Joining Hot Shots' loony bin of overly exaggerated personalities are some of Sony's

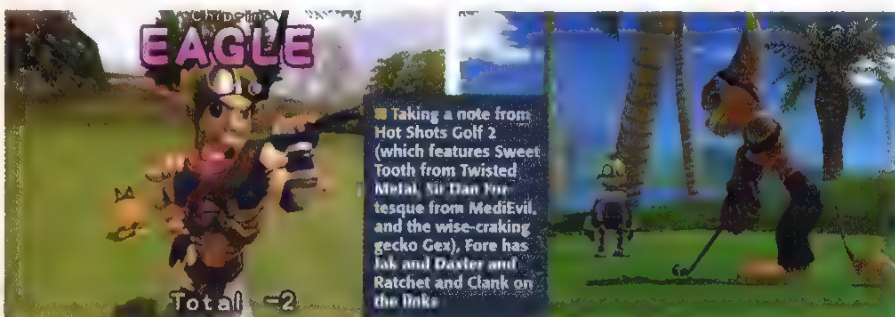
finest rising stars. As you progress through the game, you'll eventually unlock both Jak and Ratchet as playable characters, and their loveable sidekicks Dexter and Clank as caddies. You may even stumble upon a well-known primate with a blinking light on top of his head. Along with these pseudo-celebrity types, the list of golfers now stretches well beyond 30. As much as I appreciate the variety in characters, I still found myself rather annoyed with many of them. I either wasn't a fan of their appearance or was turned off by their attributes. I just wish I could stick with the one I like and level up his or her statistics, or better yet, create my own character.

Outside of subtle nips and tucks, the core gameplay mechanics are virtually identical to those within the previous entries in the series. Enhancements include a new Hot Shot Club for beginners (which simplifies the swing meter), and an additional power shot that rewards greater

distance, but the risk of tapping into it is much greater. Clap Hanz has also implemented pressure sensitive button presses. In such, if you apply the perfect amount of force to your swing, you'll change a "sweet spot shot" into a "super sweet spot shot." You'll know you hit one when two musical notes appear over your character's head. Of course, skilled players can still put shape on the ball to better play the wind, course elevation (now sporting a handy meter), and ball lie. Admittedly, I've become more of a fan of the analog stick-based swing mechanic of Tiger Woods over the years, but the determination and skill that Hot Shots brings to the table (especially in this entry) is far greater. The visuals may attract a younger audience, but make no mistake, this is the most challenging golf title on the market.

Adding further replay to the mix, Clap Hanz has included two wildly entertaining mini-golf courses that are directly inspired by original Hot Shots courses, more items to purchase in the shop, additional costumes to unlock, and the coup de grace of online play. Not only can you compete against another player head-to-head, you can enter tournaments that support up to 50 players.

At first glance, it may feel like you're swinging the same clubs again, but once you spend some time with it, you'll see that Clap Hanz has expanded upon the experience greatly and implemented features that can seemingly keep you playing forever. —REINER



■ Taking a note from Hot Shots Golf 2 (which features Sweet Tooth from Twisted Metal, Sir Dan Frettesque from MediEvil, and the wise-cracking gecko Gex), Fore has Jak and Dexter and Ratchet and Clank on the links.

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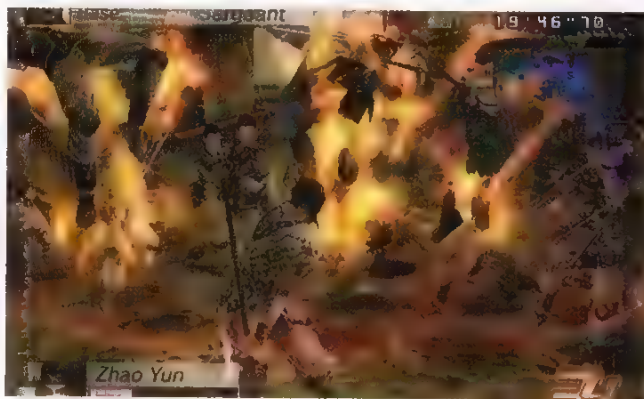
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PLAYSTATION 2

Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KOEI > **DEVELOPER** OMEGA FORCE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 > **ESRB** T

AT LONG LAST, ANOTHER DYNASTY WARRIORS GAME!

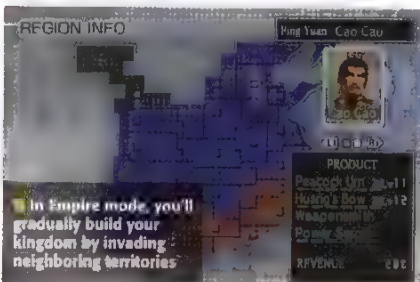
Since March of 2003, Koei has released Dynasty Warriors 4, Dynasty Warriors 4: Extreme Legends, Samurai Warriors (a Japanese-themed spin-off with nearly identical gameplay and graphics), and now Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires. Can someone say "Army Men?" While I'm suffering a severe case of burnout on this franchise, Empires does add some nice new elements to the overly familiar formula.

The Empire mode is essentially like a simplified version of Risk, in which you can select neighboring territories to invade, and perform governing tasks like trading items and forming alliances with neighboring warlords. In addition, players are treated to greatly expanded character creation options and all generals can now make use of new battlefield skills like Rally, Taunt, and Negotiate.

I only wish the graphics and gameplay would have received the same care as the frontend options. Once you're in battle, you'll have trouble distinguishing Empires from any of the other three Warriors titles released over the past few years. Winning a battle is still just a matter of hacking your way through wave after wave of enemies until you finally defeat the general required to complete your main objectives. If anything, I thought Samurai Warriors did more in terms of unique environments and at least has some degree of novel missions.

Even worse is the lack of attention paid to Empire's visual presentation. While each iteration of the series makes minimal improvements, serious issues like the pathetic draw distance and poor camera remain unfixed. It's kind of like buying new rims for your car when your transmission's broken.

Yes, the basic hack 'n' slash combat is still frenetic and fun, but I hope that Koei will have the foresight to retire this franchise for a few years, or until it can make some large-scale changes. —**MATT**



BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** The same ol' Dynasty Warriors updated with more comprehensive frontend features

> **Graphics:** I think it's time to take this graphics engine behind the barn and shoot it

> **Sound:** Aside from being able to select different voices for your created characters, very little has changed

> **Playability:** The new battlefield abilities are cool, but didn't seem to play a big factor in success

> **Entertainment:** Still fun, but Koei's zest for quick sequels is getting extremely old

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

While 99 percent of your time is still dedicated to pummeling as many foes as you can with a handful of attacks, the one percent that is different this time around actually adds a bit of strategy to the experience. Invading territories, forming alliances, collecting taxes from peasants, and capturing enemy generals are all part of the mix. On top of this, each of the maps are new and the officer abilities have been expanded upon. It's still the same Dynasty Warriors that we've played for years on PS2, but now you'll have a greater say in how the conflict unfolds. Decent, but still not enough of an update to warrant purchase for the casual fan. Regardless, it is nice to see Koei moving the series in a new direction. —**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2

Ghosthunter

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO HOMETEK > **DEVELOPER** SCEE STUDIO CAMBRIDGE > **RELEASE** AUGUST 17 > **ESRB** M



I AIN'T 'FRAID OF NO GHOST

Imagine, if you will, that some enterprising movie studio head decided to remake *Ghostbusters* for the 21st century. Of course, a video game tie-in would be mandatory. Then, imagine that the movie never happened, but the game did. Now you have *Ghosthunter* in a nutshell. As rookie cop Lazarus Jones, you battle ghosts with special weapons throughout a story that straddles honor and comedy. While clearly similar to that classic movie, *Ghosthunter* doesn't reach the same level of timeless appeal.

The basic concept certainly isn't the problem. As Jones, you must rescue your partner from an evil spirit after she is abducted in a haunted school. As it progresses, you encounter a sentient computer, a ghostly British ship captain, and other amusing characters. There are also some truly innovative boss fights, and the character models are stunning. Summoning Astral, the ghost bonded to Jones, adds life to the puzzle-solving, giving *Ghosthunter* several checks in the plus column.

But, while it does many things right, *Ghosthunter* does even more wrong.

The most painful and obvious flaw is the camera. It hangs up on walls, drifts inside your character, and is otherwise difficult to handle. It's nearly impossible to get a perfect angle on the action, which makes certain situations more difficult than they should be. The boss at the end of the prison level derives most of his challenge from the fact that he's almost always attacking you from offscreen.

However, the camera is far from the only problem. The control scheme is manageable, but far more complicated than is necessary. Rather than have one button toggle your stance, crouching and standing are mapped to two separate keys. Switching combat mode on and off functions the same way. It works, but it could have been much smoother. The same could be said for the game as a whole: There are some good ideas present, but *Ghosthunter* needs more polish before it can hang with the bigger ghosts. —**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Hunt spirits with anti-ghost weapons and a special trap. Sound a lot like a certain Bill Murray movie? It is.

> **Graphics:** Some elements, like the character models, are as cool as *Ghostbusters*. Others are as bad as *Ghostbusters II*.

> **Sound:** The voice acting is decent, but the music and effects fail to elicit any real scares.

> **Playability:** The camera is so bad you'll feel like it's possessed by an evil spirit.

> **Entertainment:** Who knew ghost hunting was about as exciting as real hunting?

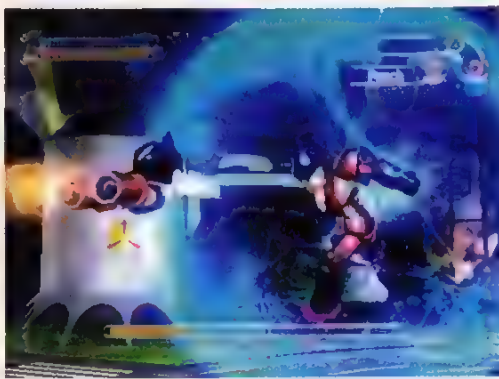
> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 7.25

It might not have been genuinely scary, but *Ghosthunter* did achieve a satisfactory level of creepy gloom to keep me playing long after some of the frustrating gameplay elements might have made me stop. The game is haunted by an unwieldy camera and an unresponsive combat and control dynamic. However, many of the visuals are truly outstanding, particularly the detail that is incorporated on the likeable main character. What is initially a mildly contrived plotline dilutes itself into near nonsense by the end. Nonetheless, excellent voice acting, moody settings, and some insanely cool enemies make it more than worth a look. —**MILLER**



■ Ghosts with gatling guns? Groovy!



PLAYSTATION 2

Astro Boy

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM > **RELEASE** AUGUST 17 > **ESRB** E

A TALE OF TWO ASTRO BOYS

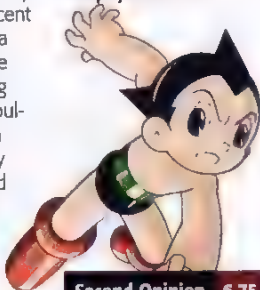
What the hell went wrong here? Astro Boy on GBA is one of my favorite games of recent months, and will deservedly turn up on a lot of critics' year-end "best of" lists. On the other hand, this ugly PlayStation 2 title will be a massive disappointment to fans of Sonic Team and Astro Boy alike.

Sonic Team's been on a terrible cold streak in recent years, and this title demonstrates the same dearth of ideas and lack of technical accomplishments that is fast becoming the developer's new trademark. Seriously, people, it's time to invest some money in technology and get a decent graphics engine and camera system. The amount of time you have to spend tweaking your viewpoint with the shoulder buttons is ridiculous, an unwanted flashback to early 3D platformers like Gex and Spyro the Dragon — simply inexcusable. Graphically, aside from some neat bosses and a few cool effects, this is drab with a capital "D."

Yes, it is cool to unlock Astro's various powers. He's a great little character for a video game. Unfortunately, there isn't much of a "game" built around him here. It's just a long series of boss battles interspersed with dull cutscenes and pointless flying around. It's like they didn't want to bother to build levels, so they just came up with some battles and left it at that. Sorry, but that's not good enough, and it's pretty pathetic that this console version gets completely overshadowed by its GBA counterpart. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

- > **Concept:** Take an anime icon back to the top in a 3D action game
- > **Graphics:** Aside from some cool bosses and explosive effects, this is pretty damn lackluster
- > **Sound:** The music is great and sounds amazingly like *Slayer*, or at least it did after I got wise and put on a CD
- > **Playability:** It's functional, but this is as bad a camera as I've experienced lately
- > **Entertainment:** Pick the vastly superior GBA *Astro Boy* for your anime pleasure
- > **Replay Value:** Low



Second Opinion 6.75

Clocking in at barely a full day's gaming to complete, *Astro Boy* still manages to have some incredible special effects and a smorgasbord of boss battles. In fact, most of the game is little more than a string of loosely connected story events used as an excuse to fight another giant rampaging robot. These battles, oddly enough, are most reminiscent of the memorable *Zone of the Enders* series in both style and execution. In the end, I found the game to be mildly charming, but unlikely to entrance me for more than a weekend. —**MILLER**



PLAYSTATION 2

Street Fighter Anniversary Collection

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** PRODUCTION STUDIO 2 > **RELEASE** AUGUST 16 > **ESRB** T

AKUMA MATATA

Street Fighter II will always be recognized as the game that pioneered the 2D-fighting genre. However, despite its historical significance, the *Street Fighter* franchise is the Ernest P. Worrell of video games, scoring one or two mainstream hits before trailing off into obscurity with countless reiterative entries. *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* captures the glory days of the series, and brings the rest along for the ride.

This compilation is essentially split into two parts. The first is a condensed amalgamation of all five SF II titles, allowing you to pit multiple versions of the many characters against each other. The second half of the game is *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* (previously only released in arcades and on Dreamcast), which is by far the best part of the collection. It looks gorgeous, has more responsive controls, and isn't plagued by the balance issues that can come up by fighting a late-era SF II character (complete with super moves) with a weak sauce earlier version.

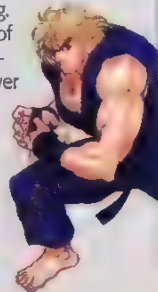
Even with so many ways to beat the hell out of your friends, this title doesn't have everything. Conspicuously absent is anything pertaining to *Street Fighter Alpha*, as well as new bonus features or incentives to keep you playing. It does have all of the familiar fighting you could ever need, though, and it definitely beats watching *Ernest Goes to Camp* for the twelfth time. —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 8

- > **Concept:** Consolidate most of the *Street Fighter* canon into the tightest package this side of the equator
- > **Graphics:** The cartoony look and flowing animations of 3rd Strike outshine SF II, which still retains its old-school charm
- > **Sound:** I still can't understand what Ken and Ryu say during that damn hurricane kick!
- > **Playability:** When you need a hadouken fast, an analog stick is no substitute for a joystick. The d-pad still feels pretty natural, though
- > **Entertainment:** Two player competitions are fun for hours. The single-player arcade mode is fun for minutes
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 8

Street Fighter has some tough competition in the ring these days, but this compilation's continued playability acts as a testament to the truly classic nature of these games by holding its own against even its newer 2D challengers. The multiple versions of the ever-popular SF II can seem frustratingly dated when compared against current standards, but the old-schooler in you probably won't mind. It is actually the lesser-known 3rd Strike with its stylish animations that is most compelling here. It would have been nice to see a few more extras packed in to this anniversary version, but it's nice to know that Ryu and Chun-Li can still make my thumb hurt. —**MILLER**



PLAYSTATION 2

Armored Core: Nexus

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** AGETEC > **DEVELOPER** FROM SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** AUGUST 31 > **ESRB** T

ROBOT SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP

If you're a fan of the *Armored Core* series, you may as well stop reading right now and go pick this up. Any and all things you could possibly hope for are contained in *Nexus*, and several of the faults found in previous iterations have been thankfully addressed. Unfortunately, the baffling story and incredible difficulty are likely to repel all but the most ardent and devoted of players.

The first of this two-disc set is a full sequel with brand new missions and a tired, but still newly written story to go along with them. The most significant addition is in the control scheme, which is now available in a long-needed dual analog format. There's no semblance of a tutorial, which means you'll have to learn as you go. Plus, many of the arduous missions cannot be repeated once finished. A dynamic plot responds to the results of your battles — win or lose. This, as you might conclude, is a mixed blessing.

Undoubtedly, the greatest strength of the game lies in its intricate customization options, which enables the purchase and creation of thousands of unique mechs. Those not interested in spending as much time tweaking their machine as fighting should avoid the game entirely.

The second disc is like an entirely separate game, made up of some of the best missions from previous *AC* games graphically reworked for this release. Also included is a bevy of unlockable music, movies, and artwork. Add in a robust multiplayer feature (sadly minus online play), and *Nexus* is everything a true fan could want and slightly less than everyone else will probably buy. —**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

- > **Concept:** Help foster civil war by renting your one-robot army out to the highest bidder as a gigantic, mechanized corporate lackey
- > **Graphics:** While the mechs and weapon effects are decent, most of the backgrounds deserve the explosions you inflict on them
- > **Sound:** Both the kid'n' electronic tunes and battle-worthy sound effects are best when channeled through the game's Dolby Surround support
- > **Playability:** You better know how to pilot a mech straight out of the gate — otherwise you're in trouble
- > **Entertainment:** Super steep difficulty and a deep but confounding customization feature make this strictly for the hardcore
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 5

Only slightly less awesome than pounding fools with a huge mech is building one that you're proud to pilot. Thus, the extensive customization options and frantic combat of this title could theoretically make for a totally sweet game. Well, I'm here to tell you that they don't. Each level that you play lasts for a measly few minutes at most, and though your actions can affect the storyline as you go along, it's hard to care when the plot is both told through lame text messages and utterly boring to follow. Loathsome control and a needlessly irritating mech-tuning interface round out this sub-mediocre package. —**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 2

Phantom Brave

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER NIS AMERICA > DEVELOPER NIPPON ICHI > RELEASE AUGUST 31 > ESRB T



GRIDS ARE SO 2003

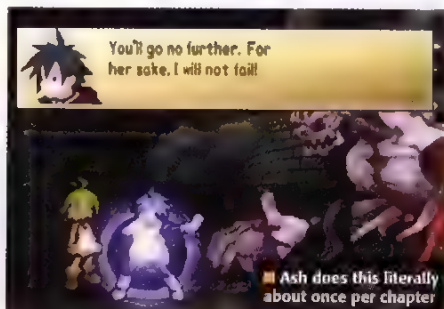
Disgaea/La Pucelle developer Nippon Ichi knows the tactical RPG genre as well as anyone else, so why shouldn't it rewrite the rules? Phantom Brave sports a similar look to the studio's previous efforts, but it plays totally differently — gone is the familiar grid, leaving battlefield maneuvers to take place in a much more organic distance-based environment.

Phantom Brave is as deep and groundbreaking as a gamer could want; you can reach levels in the thousands and play for a hundred hours, yet continue to find new things to enjoy. The differences between this and Nippon Ichi's other two titles, though, go deeper than the radically changed battle system. Protagonist Marona's story, despite the fact that she's a mere 13 years old, is of a markedly more adult nature. She is regarded as "Possessed," which causes her some pretty serious social problems. It also lets her create and summon spectral warriors to do her bidding — the kind of trade-off we'd make in a heartbeat. The trials she endures are difficult and occasionally heartbreaking, and for the most part not punctuated with the goofy humor so prevalent in Disgaea. Yes, the lack of wackiness makes for a more consistent tone, but I often found myself wishing for the hilarious antics of Laharl and company.

The meat of the gameplay — the combat and character development systems — are

interesting, new, and for the most part awesome. Explaining the specifics of each would take this whole magazine, but suffice it to say that most everything from combining items and characters to venturing through random dungeons is well-balanced and fun. I was frustrated, however, that there's not a whole lot of depth to the tactical execution of an encounter. This is due to two factors: Characters' movement ranges are huge, and they can simply hop onto or over allies and enemies in their way. As you might assume, this makes it incredibly easy for foes to ignore the hard coating of your tough warriors and get to your team's creamy center of vulnerable spellcasters.

Even considering its flaws and dated look, Phantom Brave is most definitely worthy of a spot in any strategy dork's collection. Even gamers weaned on Final Fantasy and the like who are looking to expand their horizons into the realm of strategy (which I highly suggest) should find plenty of enjoyment in its sympathetic characters and engaging gameplay. —ADAM



Ash does this literally about once per chapter

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Move the strategy/RPG scene forward by removing the grid from the battlefield

> **Graphics:** Some will decry the last-gen, 2D flavor; others will revel in the hand-drawn goodness

> **Sound:** Even if you hate subtitles, turn the voice-acting to Japanese. Your ears will thank you

> **Playability:** But for the sometimes tricky targeting, battles flow quickly and easily

> **Entertainment:** If you're more about overall strategy than battlefield tactics, this will be right up your alley

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

The phenomenal depth of strategic gameplay in Nippon Ichi's games always appears out of place amid the overly cutesy RPG tales that go along with them. That's especially true in this latest title, which somehow seems to me even more childlike in tone than its predecessors. The tactical options remain largely top notch, though the new style of free movement makes for some confusing battles. Still, the phantom possession aspect is a particularly clever idea, and all the different character creation options are formidable. However, I remain bewildered by the utter inattention to graphics and animation, which at this point border on unacceptable. —MILLER



PLAYSTATION 2

Asterix & Obelix XXL

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER ESTRANGE LIBELLULES > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 7 > ESRB E

THIS GAME HAS A LOT OF GAUL

BOTTOM LINE 6

Wow, this is one license I didn't expect to see popping up on PS2 in the U.S. Asterix and Obelix are comic stars in Europe, but largely unknown in these parts. Nonetheless, Atari is betting the duo can make an impact in the very competitive action/platform market. After having spent a good deal of time with this title, I'm afraid that video game stardom might be a little more elusive than they might have hoped.

It's not a bad game, per se, but I can safely say that there are few — if any — moments in this game that feature concepts or design clichés that you haven't seen many times. The combat is one of the high points — you can save up Roman helmets to buy new combos that can be performed by filling a meter on the side of the screen. In addition, you can press the R1 button to send your canine companion Dogmatix out to momentarily stun an opponent. These aren't hugely innovative features, but they are nice touches and do add some degree of polish to a largely mediocre package.

While I can't lavish praise on Asterix & Obelix, I will say that the characters and dialogue are charming and oftentimes amusing (especially the Roman spy who guides you through your quest), and the quest at hand does manage to entertain, despite the frequent bouts of déjà vu you'll experience.

In a weird way, I can't help but root for these two goofballs. It's definitely a "sleeper," especially given that the franchise itself is probably one of the least marketable properties that's been turned into a game in years. However, I can't let my desire to root for an underdog discount the fact that this game is really nothing special. —MATT



> **Concept:** Two obscure Euro comic icons come Stateside in a by-the-numbers platformer

> **Graphics:** If you're feeling generous, the graphics are "old-school," if not, "mediocre at best"

> **Sound:** I thought the aggressive techno tracks were inappropriate for the whimsical feel of the game

> **Playability:** Twitchy camera (natch), but nothing you can't handle

> **Entertainment:** It's nothing special, but oddly charming

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.75

I'm paid to explain things in a concise and entertaining manner, to distill my hours of playtime into something tangible and useful to readers looking for guidance. So it's a little weird that I can't be terribly descriptive about Asterix's best feature — the game is just damn charming. If you've played a platformer since 1998, there's nothing new here, but the game's universe and characters are well designed, funny, and interesting. Box puzzles and a shamelessly large-scale collection scheme (you'll be grabbing thousands of helmets or coins or laurel headpieces...whatever it is) are the crutches of Asterix's gameplay. Still, this is a really nice starter title for new players because of its friendly controls and just, well...charming characters. —LISA

GAMECUBE

Amazing Island

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER ANICENT > RELEASE AUGUST 24 > ESRB E



Shift Center Move
Snap Foto Talk to Monster

AND ON THE EIGHTH DAY

Dude, FistsofDeath rocks at Seaside Sparkies. The little hamster-framed pile of doom skips between tracks and collects all the wee gems in record time! Still, there's at least a small part of me that wonders why this is so terribly much fun. The creatures you make aren't always what you mean to, some of the minigames are beyond tedious, the graphics are a little primary color-happy, and the rewards (outside of new stuff for your monsters) are surprisingly uninspiring.

Amazing Island is a land possessed by evil, and its inhabitants sent out the call for help. You, as an inquisitive child, go to the island through a storybook and the surviving villagers place upon your shoulders a heavy burden—save their world by running monsters through obstacle courses of minigames. This part of the game isn't "amazing" by any stretch of the imagination. But, to the game's credit, it probably has a higher-than-party-game-genre average of good games to sucky ones.

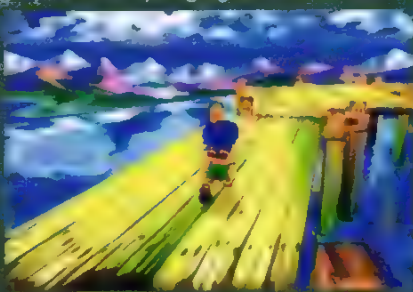
The best thing about this quirky Sega title, though, is the monster creation. The idea is that you're making the animals that you'll use to win minigames and slowly bring the world back to its former glory.

While the island doesn't really change that much as you progress through the missions (which is a bummer), the monster creation opens up in a really comfortable way. New options and abilities are unlocked with nearly every successful action, which lets digital Gods get used to the things that they've

got before loading on the complicated features.

It's certainly true that the tools offered are powerful, and definitely more predictable in their output than, say, Magic Pencil's are, but I still had problems really making the kind of shapes I was looking for. Despite changing the mouse speed and attempting to be really precise, the resulting head, body, or foot was never quite as I had imagined. Still, the results I got were certainly usable and, for most people, the accessory application process (which is much more precise) is where the newborn creature will really come to life.

In theory, the variables of body size, shape, and accouterment combine together to shape the attributes of each creature; but in my time, I still haven't figured out which attributes are modified by which variable, making the whole system kind of moot. This, coupled with the occasional bad minigame and lack of village upgrades as the game progresses, make it a sometimes laborious road to 100 percent completion—these are the main things holding Amazing Island back from Animal Crossing-like fits of fandom, but many will still enjoy its very long legs. —LISA



BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

> **Concept:** Magic Pencil meets minigames.

> **Graphics:** Cute and colorful—the monsters look cool, and the effects are nice, but it is still a little underwhelming.

> **Sound:** Besides the chirps and growls of your choosing, the rest is generically perky ambient tunes.

> **Playability:** The monster creation takes a minute to learn and more than a lifetime to master. Minigames are more fun than most.

> **Entertainment:** Creature creation is the draw, and it does have a lot of levers for the creative types.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion **7**

Even if you have trouble drawing stick figures, Amazing Island will turn you into Picasso. With user-friendly monster creation tools at your fingertips, every scribble and doodle that you make will transform into a living, breathing work of art. Being able to create your very own creature is a wildly entertaining venture with serious longevity, but this game doesn't excel in Promethean concepts alone. In the same vein as Olympic video games, the competitions that your monster enters consist of enjoyable button-mashing or timing-based events. The visuals may be a bit behind today's standards and the story makes *Blue's Clues* seem intelligent, but this game delivers where it needs to—with richly innovative gameplay. —REINER



GAMECUBE

Rainbow Six 3

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT SHANGHAI > RELEASE JUNE 15 > ESRB M

ZULU NO CODE

Would you play DDR without a dance pad? How about Duck Hunt without the gun? So why would we want to play an offline GameCube game when the primary draw on other systems was a phenomenal online mode? I love chocolate. But I wouldn't want chocolate on my sirloin steak. Similarly, I love my GameCube, but that's not where I want my Rainbow Six 3.

With that said, I readily acknowledge that this version maintains the tense emulation of counter-terrorism that has been the hallmark of the series. A spectacular exhibition of weaponry is compelling, while the nervous waiting behind a closed door is still exciting. The split screen co-op is reasonably well implemented, but it lacks the save checkpoints present in the single player campaign, making restarts a genuine frustration. Plus, co-op missions are only available once you've gotten to that point in the single-player mode, so don't expect to play through the first time with your buddy.

The enemy AI is sadly lacking, as foes often stare blankly without moving while you methodically fill them with lead. Your allies are similarly foolish, as they frequently wander about near a door, jostling for space and seeming to silently whisper "Oh, pardon me" to each other until you're ready to grenade them all for their own ineptitude. This led to an oddly perverse joy when my computer-driven teammates were finally incapacitated as I thought to myself, "Serves you right."

The indistinct visual backgrounds are made worse by the generally dark shading of most of the game, which lacks the distinguishing hues of gray and black that are essential to create the illusion. Facial models are fairly detailed, though, as are the gun models in your hands.

While the GameCube has several genres it excels at, the tactical shooter field clearly isn't one of them. I'm sure it was that rationale that prompted this foray. But with so many casualties to the game's original features, this mission was doomed almost from the start. —MILLER

BOTTOM LINE **5.75**

> **Concept:** Make a great Xbox game. Port a mediocre version to PS2. Strip that version of its online features and pass it off as the same title on GameCube.

> **Graphics:** Low framerate and poor shadow effects significantly detract from the experience.

> **Sound:** Decent music is often overridden by the repetitive sound effects of your own labored breathing.

> **Playability:** The controller layout works surprisingly well even with its fewer buttons.

> **Entertainment:** While maintaining the taut realism of the original, so much else has been lost that it's almost a different game entirely.

> **Replay Value:** Moderate.

Second Opinion **5.5**

I have no time for this futile tactical exercise. My teammates can't even put on their underwear without stumbling, and I'm supposed to defeat terrorists with them and give them my trust? No way. Similarly, there is no way this game succeeds over the other versions (or at all) without online. The one thing that saves this title from total ineptitude is the tight control scheme, which imbues RS 3 with a modicum of FPS proficiency, but nothing more. Don't get tricked by this. Instead, keep walking down the store aisle and spend your money on a talking cookie jar. Everyone needs one. —KATO

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PlayStation 2

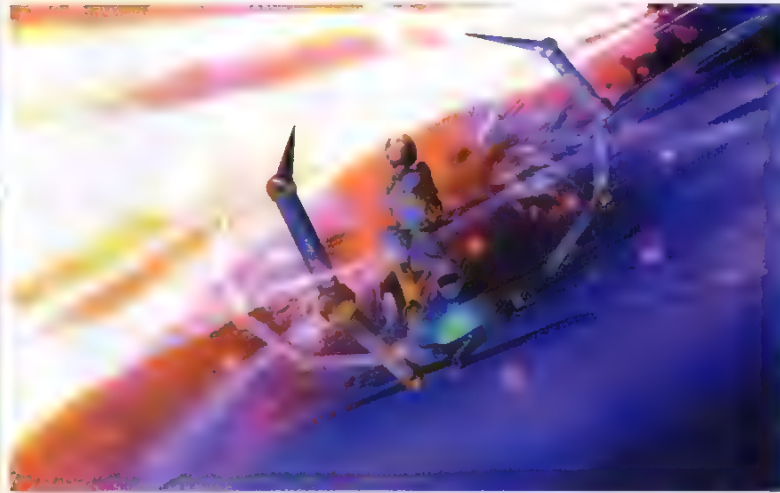


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UNLIMITED ENABLED
XBOX

Sudeki

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** CLIMAX
> **RELEASE** JULY 20 > **ESRB** M

NOT A CLASSIC, NOT A DUD

Sudeki is one of those titles I suspect will be either loved or hated. Role-playing enthusiasts will likely balk at some of the tinkering developer Climax has done with the traditional RPG formula. Also, the expectations you begin this title with will affect your end opinion of it. For those Xbox fans anticipating that Sudeki will be the next great Microsoft epic, you might be a tad disappointed. However, if you're like me and Sudeki had slipped a bit off your radar, you will be pleasantly surprised with this imperfect, yet ultimately compelling game.

One area in which Sudeki fails to deliver is storyline. I won't bore you with all the details, but basically our foursome is united to defend the kingdom of Illumina from the dark forces of the Aklorians with the help of an ancient god named Tetsu. Most of the characters are clichés right from RPG central casting — Tal, the sensitive young warrior; Buki, the fierce tribal leader; Alish, the spoiled princess; and Elco, the nerdy scientist and gadget expert. Although I didn't really find myself becoming too involved with the plot, there were some compelling elements, particularly Tal's conflicts with his father and the political intrigue involving the Queen of Illumina.

As trite as the tale at hand can be, the battles and detailed character

advancement system kept me hungry to continue the quest. One interesting thing Climax has done is shunning typical RPG design by making the combat for the "sorcerer" characters (Elco and Alish) function like a first-person shooter. When you switch to one of these characters in battle, you'll either see your staff or gun (in Elco's case) and get to blast away at your enemies through an onscreen reticle. The melee-oriented party members (Tal and Buki) pull off combos by hitting simple



X and A button combos in time with a three-window combo meter at the bottom left of the screen. While some of the moves they can perform are pretty sweet, I felt that the game required me to watch the meter too closely, which often distracted me from the action at hand, leaving me open to attack.

As the game progresses, battles become less about these basic maneuvers and more about casting Skill Strikes (essentially Sudeki's offensive and defensive spells) and the awesome Spirit Strikes. The in-game menu system (although clearly based on the work BioWare has done in this area) is very well done, allowing you to slow time to a crawl

while you tinker with your items, Strikes, and even set AI stances for the characters you're not controlling at the time. I like the fact that time is slowed, not stopped, as it lends Sudeki's battles a more visceral, tense feel while at the same time giving you enough room to thoughtfully heal, buff, and manage your party.

Exploration and puzzle solving is another matter, as I found these elements to be fairly rudimentary and overly repetitive. The "brain-teasers" are usually obvious and always revolve around one character's special ability. Tal can push and pull objects during the dreaded box puzzles, Buki can use her claws to climb to hidden areas, Elco has a jet-pack to fly between platforms, and Alish can spot hidden chests and doorways that are marked with green floating particles. In each case, what you need to do is fairly obvious, and as such, Sudeki never really gives you the thrill of discovery or ingenuity that great game puzzles do.

For all its faults, something kept bringing me back to Sudeki, most importantly the cool and extensive ways you can keep upgrading your character — which is really the heart of any RPG experience. —**MATT**



Elco uses his jetpack to access platforms during exploration

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Melds traditional RPG elements with a more action-oriented gameplay formula

> **Graphics:** A very nice package from top to bottom, you'll see some astonishing vistas

> **Sound:** The voiceovers can get a tad irritating, but the score is appropriate and well done

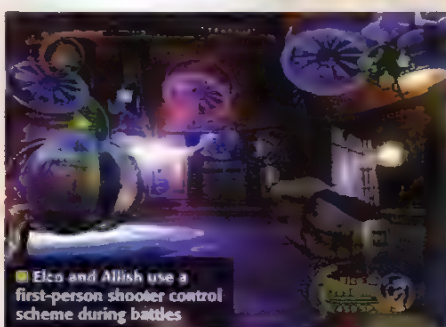
> **Playability:** The melee combos take some getting used to, but the menu systems are nicely designed

> **Entertainment:** It's not the classic some hoped for, but it's a solid entry in a genre that's very lacking on Xbox

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

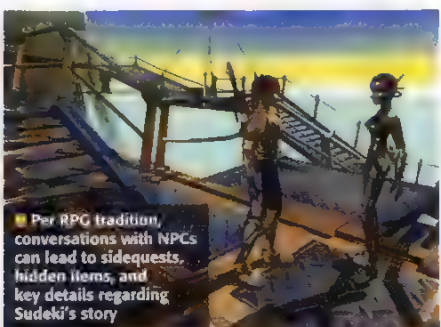
Sometimes when I was playing Sudeki, I was really excited to upgrade my characters and look around at the truly beautiful areas. Other times, I wanted to gouge my eyes out with a grapefruit spoon while talking to NPCs and waiting through the game's frequent loading screens. It's this duality that will divide players of Microsoft's action/RPG. The balance between the title's genres is perfect and the art direction is excellent. Areas and settlements offer nice variety and the enemy design is great (both in regard to combat strategy and appearance). Despite these achievements, I found myself disinterested with the waves of similar enemies in each level, the stagnantly cliché-idden plot and dialogue, and predictable main heroes. I wanted to advance my characters' skills and attributes, but not enough to struggle through my boredom with the game's story, people, and goals. —**LISA**



Elco and Alish use a first-person shooter control scheme during battles



Using Spirit Strikes like this wolf summon are key to success



Per RPG tradition, conversations with NPCs can lead to sidequests, hidden items, and key details regarding Sudeki's story

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XBOX

Samurai Warriors

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS/KOEI > **DEVELOPER** KOEI
> **RELEASE** JULY 13 > **ESRB** T



Mmm...bloodshed. There is something primally appealing about the wholesale slaughter in Koei's Warriors games. No other series delivers violence in bulk like these games. They're like the Sam's Club of death! But, like all other Warriors titles, Samurai Warriors has nothing else to offer — it's hack 'n slash action

in its purest form. The Xbox version has a better draw distance than the PS2 release, but other than that, there's little discernable difference. I'll admit, I'm one of the odd folk who enjoys the simplicity of these games, and if you are too, you'll dig this release. It's no better or worse than the Dynasty Warrior series, but we Koei fans have never demanded any significant change from these games, have we?—**JEREMY**

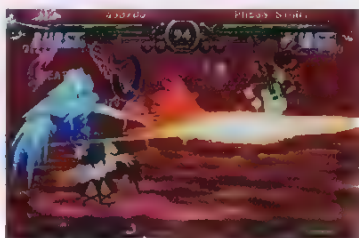
XBOX

Guilty Gear X2 #Reload

BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** ARC SYSTEM WORKS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 7 > **ESRB** T

Quirky doesn't even begin to describe this game. Maybe if you add "deeply disturbing" and "inexplicably compelling" then you'd have a start. With a roster of startling characters that would make Vincent Price whimper like a kitten, Guilty Gear distinguishes itself with humor, relentless difficulty, and a combat system that is hard to pick up and even harder to master. Though this title is not for casual 2D fighter enthusiasts (or people who like their like their games to have a solid "American" feel), hardcore fighter fans will love everything Guilty Gear has to offer: multiple modes of play, progressive scan, online matches via Xbox Live, and a \$20 price point that will make you want to punch the store clerk in the face with joy.—**JOE**

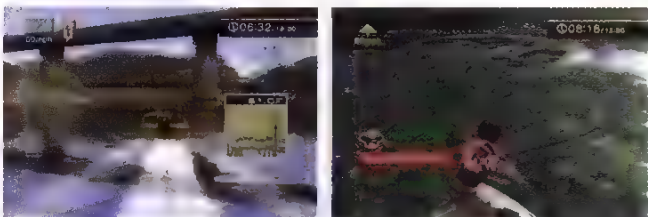


XBOX

Pro Fishing Challenge

BOTTOM LINE **4.25**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** OPUS STUDIO > **RELEASE** AUGUST 17 > **ESRB** E



Similar to fish being drawn to chum in the water, Pro Fishing Challenge's proposed online multiplayer through Xbox Live proved to be an irresistible allure. Just the thought of competing against other players in a tournament complete with voice chat seemed like an amusing venture. Piquing my interest even more, players can traverse four gigantic lakes, customize their character's appearance, and switch between over 100 lures, reels, lines, and rods. As I quickly found out, however, the fluff is the only redeeming quality. A foul dead fish aroma surrounds every gameplay aspect. The techniques of casting, jigging, setting the hook, and landing the fish are miserably executed. Outside of this, there really isn't much to do, other than aimlessly driving the boat. Simply put, this is one fish that won't be nibbling on my rod ever again.—**REINER**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 3 > **ESRB** M



TOM CLANCY'S FAKE MOUSTACHE

At first glance, the headline for this review isn't going to make much sense. Fake moustache? What the heck is Jeremy talking about? He's clearly gone mad from drinking spoiled salad dressing. No, I'm not crazy — I'm actually referring to the popular cartoon disguise. You know how a cartoon character can fool everyone by simply putting on a fake moustache and telling them he's a different person? Same deal here.

Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow is exactly the same game as Rainbow Six 3, only with a thin disguise. Sure, the single-player campaign has all-new levels, but everything about the way the game plays, looks, and feels is exactly the same. If you liked Rainbow Six 3, you'll like Black Arrow. If you didn't, you still won't. It's that simple. While early word on Black Arrow touted a bunch of new features, I really couldn't see any difference, at least in single-player.

In fairness, there are some noticeable multiplayer additions — and let's be honest, that's all people buy

Rainbow Six 3 for. It takes advantage of the new Xbox Live 3.0 features, like player-created tournaments, clan logos, and the like. It also adds a couple of new game types, like capture the flag and conquest mode. Personally, I'm a deathmatch type of guy, and those are as enjoyable as they ever were. Matches are fun and frantic, and realistically intense. The devoted Rainbow Six 3 fans will certainly dig all the new maps and the additional game types, and split screen co-op has been added for those who are interested in playing the main campaign with a friend.

While these new features are nice, it still comes back to the fake moustache with me. It's a good game, but the new bells and whistles aren't enough to convince me that this isn't the same title with a big old handlebar hanging off its top lip. I know that can be a mighty convincing disguise, but Rainbow Six 3 fans should be aware that this isn't by any means a totally new experience.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> **Concept:** Much like the recent releases in the Ghost Recon series, Black Arrow is essentially an expansion pack for Rainbow Six 3

> **Graphics:** Exactly the same as Rainbow Six 3 — not bad, but starting to look a tad dated

> **Sound:** You know what I said about the graphics? Same deal

> **Playability:** See graphics and sound

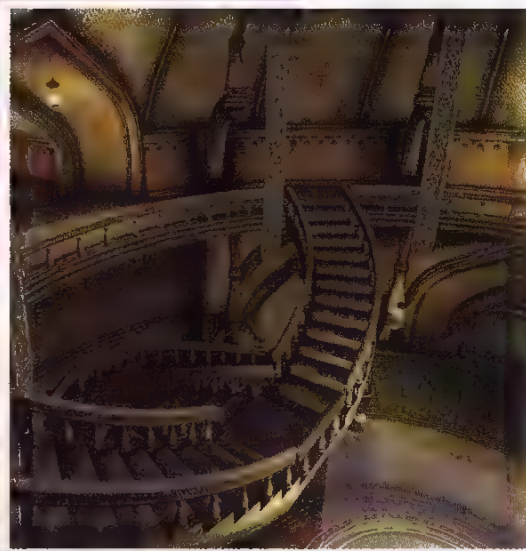
> **Entertainment:** So...how did you feel about Rainbow Six 3? Because you'll have exactly the same feelings about Black Arrow

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **8**

Black Arrow feels a lot like Unreal Tournament to me. It's got single-player, but the story, level design, and AI are all bad. Not terrible, not particularly rage-inducing, just plain, old-fashioned bad. The online options, on the other hand, have been significantly upgraded from the original Rainbow Six 3. New content, most notably the two fresh modes, are very welcome and expand the already-great Live experience quite a bit. Black Arrow is seriously so skewed toward online play that I really feel like it should get two different scores, depending on whether or not you're shelling out money to Microsoft every month.—**ADAM**





BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** With Uru Live going away, the planned extra content is being released in this expansion pack

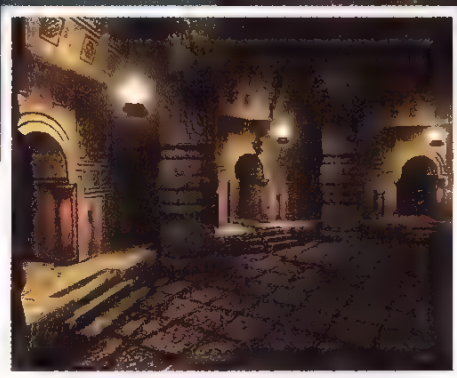
> **Graphics:** Do you even need to ask? They're so beautiful that it's almost a distraction

> **Sound:** Like the base game, Path of the Shell varies from near silence to really cool original songs

> **Playability:** The new swimming is harder to control than the still-fiffy running scheme

> **Entertainment:** Engrossing puzzles and a nice plot tie-in from Uru

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High



PC

Uru: The Path of the Shell

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** CYAN WORLDS > **RELEASE** JULY 7 > **ESRB** E

THE PATH OF KICK ASS

Uru has had a troubled run as of late. The base game, Ages Beyond Myst, was supposed to offer multiplayer content that would be upgraded regularly. As followers of the title know, the online features were never formally launched, but Cyan has released some of that planned content in Path of the Shell.

Many expansion packs are for online RPGs or strategy titles. They usually re-balance the classes, add new items or troops, and offer more playfield. Since Uru doesn't fall into the categories of RPG or strategy in any sense of their definitions, Path of the Shell is a fairly strange duck. From a feature standpoint, it offers a few new ages, added customization options for your onscreen likeness and home age, and gameplay like swimming. In a list form, it doesn't sound like terribly much, but in practice the plot, puzzle scope, and gameplay are more than rewarding enough to make this a no-brainer for those who have spent more

than two hours with the base Uru. Players should be forewarned – completion of Uru is required for any of the story in Path of the Shell to make sense. While the content is entirely separate (i.e. you won't be making trips to previously available ages, unless you want to), the plot still involves Yeesha and her crazy age-making skills. These new sections are amazing, and really highlight why the Myst franchise is the best at what it does.

Myst imitators are still coming out on a monthly basis, but what they don't seem to do very well is make the world believable. Don't scoff – Uru and D'ni are clearly fantastical creations with bizarre objects and complicated mechanical systems – and yet, when you figure out how it works, the reason for building the machine makes sense. There won't be a collection of whimsical gizmos sitting around for the sole purpose of telling you to align Libra with alpha, there will be a dam and lock system you have

to get working again so the canyon can have water. The methods are strange, but the reasons they exist make sense.

I'm clearly a fan of Cyan's flavor of adventure gaming, but there are still a few bits that pull Path of the Shell (and Uru, for that matter) just below total puzzle nirvana – the control scheme. I do really enjoy seeing someone onscreen, but the FPS-style movement controls are a bit clunky. The new swimming mechanic introduced in this expansion is, sadly enough, worse than the running. Part of this is because the main age where you'll use the feature has an incredibly strong system of currents (because of the structure of the age. You'll understand when you get there). Still, it wasn't the most fun thing to do.

Path of the Shell is a great addition to the Uru saga, and I hope that it isn't the last that we'll see; but like all Myst games, existing fans are the ones who will get the most out of this wonderful entry. It's beautiful, hard, smart, and alarmingly engrossing.—LISA



Second Opinion

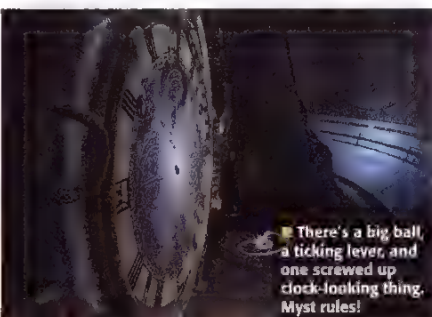
I appreciate being taught that I can have a lot of fun with a game without a single thing blowing up or a sword being swung. Path of the Shell demonstrates Cyan Worlds' mastery of its craft just like the original Uru does. The puzzles in the new Ages are well-designed, requiring players to not only figure out a solution to the task at hand, but to discover the rules governing the situation in the first place. This might sound like a recipe for naught but frustration, but somehow things never feel completely arbitrary. The plot is similarly deep and intricate, but you've got a slim chance of understanding it if you don't already have a doctorate in Mystology. On the down side, I still abhor the Uru controls, and the addition of swimming is nothing special. If you've got the requisite time and patience, Path of the Shell is just as worth playing as everything else from Cyan Worlds.—ADAM



Staggering, beautiful machinery is nothing new in the Myst franchise, but these are awesome.



The desert is an incredibly large area, and far more complex than it looks.

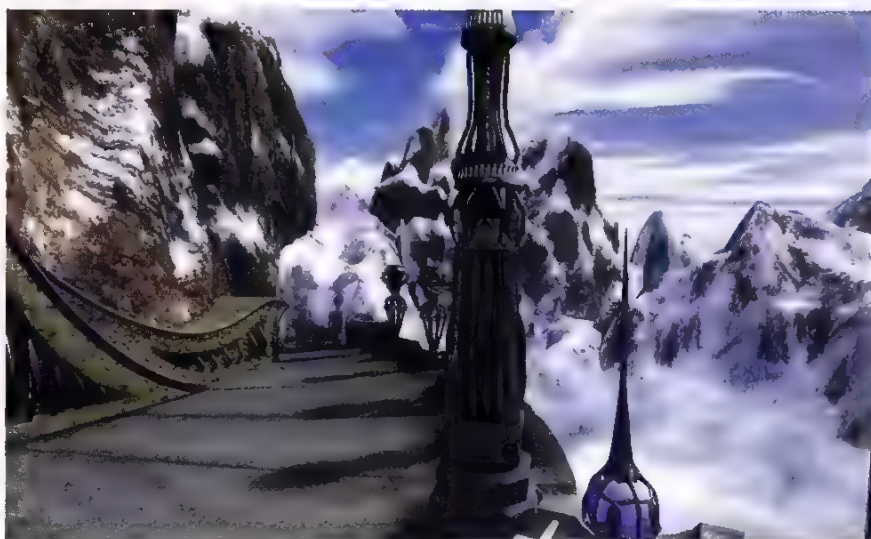


There's a big ball, a ticking lever, and one screwed up clock-looking thing. Myst rules!

PC

Aura: Fate of the Ages

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER/THE ADVENTURE COMPANY > **DEVELOPER** STREKO GRAPHICS
> **RELEASE** JUNE 24 > **ESRB** E



ADVENTURE LIVES

Some people are wont to claim that the adventure genre is dead, citing things like Sierra's tragic end and the failure of Uru's Live service. However, adventure titles do still see daylight – Aura, for instance, delivers an experience that will surely warm the hearts of Myst dorks the world around.

The movement system is exactly like Myst III's, where you can look around freely within each discrete scene. This is just fine, except for when you're required to visually scour every inch of your surroundings in order to find the clue you need to move on. It's not the end of the world, though, since the vistas you're presented with are uniformly freakin' gorgeous. Plus, each new world you enter has a very distinct feel to it, from the steam-punky machines of Dragast to the ethereal beauty of Na-Tiexu.

The puzzles themselves are by and large logical and neither too subtle

nor glaringly obvious. This is aided by the fact that your in-game journal will automatically update with drawings of most clues that you come across, as well as hints from the other people you meet. These NPCs, however, are Aura's definite low point. They do tell the story, but stiff animations, odious voice acting, and stilted dialogue mar every second of every meeting with another being. Plus, the story is boring and trivial enough that it's a better bet to just ignore it. You'll be glad when they stop talking and you can go back to the blissful, puzzle-filled solitude that makes up most of the game.

In the end, though, Aura proves itself worth its \$20 price point for adventure fans. It's decently long, the puzzles are mostly well designed, and it has more than its share of eye candy. If the wait for Myst IV is becoming interminably long, Aura should keep you sane until then. —ADAM



■ This stone has more personality than any of the game's flesh-and-blood characters

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Rip off Myst in as smooth and professional way as is possible

> **Graphics:** Environments will blow your mind. Character models will do the same, except in a bad way

> **Sound:** My hat's off to whoever did the music, because it's some of the finest synthesized orchestration I've ever heard

> **Playability:** Easy and intuitive, but occasionally there will be some frustratingly tiny onscreen thing you've got to click on

> **Entertainment:** Barring the odd arbitrary puzzle, this is a decent enough romp through a fantastical world

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 7

So you're some guy who has to make a journey to save the world or something, and when you show up to be trained by the new master, he's left you a freaking errand list. Start the super-pod-ship thing, get the map. Wah, wah, wah. The plot in Aura is terrible, but the rest of the game is a servicable ode to Myst – its obvious inspiration both artistically and gameplay-wise. Aura tries hard, but the puzzles exist just to be puzzles – coupled with the non-story, there's no way that anyone will be immersed in this world. Still, the teasers are reasonably well-designed, and while it's got nothing new going on, Aura is an okay way to spend an afternoon. —LISA



PC

Missing: Since January

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** THE ADVENTURE COMPANY > **DEVELOPER** LEXIS NUMERIQUE > **RELEASE** JUNE 21 > **ESRB** M

BLURRING THE LINE

With Missing: Since January, developer Lexis Numerique attempts to lend their work an unparalleled authenticity by including over 45 minutes of live-action video, a network of websites that exist solely to support the game's fiction, and a frighteningly realistic story about a missing reporter. For the most part, this succeeds – the problem is that the puzzles range from asinine to average, and in many cases have solutions that feel entirely arbitrary.

Technologically, Missing is a testament to the power of interactive Flash animations, which form the vast majority of the gameplay. Whether it's playing minigames to uncover the next clue or working through a more traditional brainteaser, these are uniformly implemented with a unique and very well-done visual style. Unfortunately, they are often flawed from their very conception; mindless clicking does not a puzzle make. Also, to even begin to solve the problem at hand, most of the time you've got to find the clue on some obscure website that the developer set up. This involves searching the 'Net for very specific keywords, and just about every time I Googled the appropriate search terms, I got a bunch of crap and several fan-written walkthroughs for the game – which completely broke my suspension of disbelief.

Even after getting to the actual puzzle, more often than not they were simply neither logic-based nor fun. Frustration ruled the day like an iron-fisted dictator every time I loaded up Missing. The story is intelligent, the premise high-concept, and those of you with Atlas-like levels of perseverance (or a good walkthrough) are in for a sweet surprise in the later stages of the game. However, for every stunning success in delivery and artistry, Missing has a miserable failure at an actual gameplay design element. I just can't shake the feeling that this would've made a much better experience in some other, non-interactive medium. —ADAM

■ Professional actors bring the story to life



BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Find a missing journalist by working through a series of puzzles left by the kidnapper

> **Graphics:** The live-action video is professionally done and one of the high points

> **Sound:** Blech. Short looping tracks and an irritating amount of ear-piercing white noise

> **Playability:** If nothing else, this will teach you the finer points of operating Google, since that's what you'll be doing most

> **Entertainment:** This is a different sort of game, and you should examine what you define as enjoyable before buying

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 8

I don't think that Missing is the pinnacle of adventure gaming, but I do think that it's an interesting and well-executed renaissance for the genre. The interface and video clips are of an exceptionally high quality, and I found an overwhelming majority of the puzzles to be logical, clever, and rewarding (as long as you don't cheat). I like that the game doesn't require you to suspend disbelief – you're just supposed to be a web junkie following the clues. And, it's really creepy in that Se7en kind of way. —LISA



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** BANPRESTO > **RELEASE** JUNE 29 > **ESRB** T

KICK 'EM IN THE KAMEHAMEHAS!

This title perfectly captures the essence of the Dragon Ball Z anime series: There are tons of characters sputtering out insipid dialogue before deciding to have epic world-engulfing dashes over barren wastelands. Unfortunately, though Supersonic Warriors retains the show's flavor, it fails to measure up to the standards of a passable 2D fighter.

The main advantage this game has over others of its ilk is the emphasis on aerial combat. The characters are almost always flying around, exchanging a few blows or fireballs, and then dashing back to the other side of the screen. Though this level of maneuverability is innovative in a 2D fighter, it makes hand-to-hand fighting unnecessary. Since your options for close combat are so limited and disappointing, you'll rarely be within arm's reach of your opponent. Instead, you and your foe will just charge up your chi meters, and then unleash supermove after supermove at each other from a distance. This lack of strategy persists through all of the game modes, and just makes the battles run together.

Though the gameplay itself is sub-par, this title does offer plenty of incentive to keep playing for those who are interested. Each character has three unlockable forms, as well as a "what if" scenario where you can see alternate versions of the DBZ storyline play out. I also have to give this title a nod for originality; at one point in Goku's story arc, he was forced to battle immediately after "recovering from heart disease." I know that whenever I'm sick, I like to recuperate by engaging in planet-devastating fights to the death. "I beat Priapism, eh? Guess I'd better go wreck Jupiter." —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> **Concept:** Can I interest you in some light fighting, or maybe a challenge?

> **Graphics:** The menu screens look cool, but the actual battle arenas are pure desolation

> **Sound:** The destruction of celestial bodies has never been accompanied by such dull noise

> **Playability:** The secret to success. Awkwardly mash R, A, and B simultaneously

> **Entertainment:** After an enjoyable first few rounds, you've seen all that the game has to offer

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6

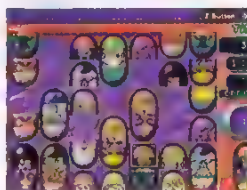
It takes a lot to make a compelling 2D fighter on the GBA, and very few companies have succeeded in doing so. Put Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors on the list of those titles that have failed. While it's cool to be able to dart around in the air while duking it out, my feeling is that this very ability diminishes the excitement and claustrophobic tension of the classics of the genre. Because of this increased mobility, (and the dearth of cool hand-to-hand combos), winning the fights becomes more about getting off a strong projectile attack at the right moment than solid technique. I think the move set in place here would have been better served by a more ambitious, side-scrolling game design (like last month's stellar Astro Boy: The Omega Factor). As it is, this is just another dull Dragon Ball Z title. —**MATT**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Mighty Beanz Pocket Puzzles

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** RADIUS9 > **RELEASE** JUNE 7 > **ESRB** E



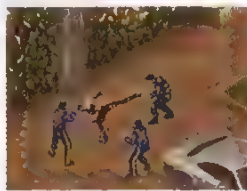
This puzzler might have been a real contender. Basically, it's a slight alteration of the Dr. Mario formula, in which you must match the top half of a Mighty Bean with the corresponding bottom. To do this, you flip-flop and move the pieces on the board before they reach a critical mass at the top of the screen. However, unlike Dr. Mario, which was based on colors, or Tetris, which used easy-to-recognize geometric shapes, the Mighty Beanz are just too damn hard to tell apart. You're constantly having to look at the right of the screen to see which parts go together, and lots of the bottom pieces are very similar in color and design, which ultimately makes this game frustrating instead of addictive. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 6

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Catwoman

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EAUK > **RELEASE** JULY 20 > **ESRB** T



Though based on the *Catwoman* movie, this game bears a closer conceptual resemblance to the cinematic masterpiece *Weekend at Bernie's*: Take something lifeless, dress it up, and hope no one notices. While Catwoman looks good (particularly the animations), all it does is serve to cover up sloppy controls and generic combat. Tiresome platforming litters nearly every level as you collect diamonds, save cats from plummeting, and smack thugs around. Oh, and this kitty doesn't have nine lives — die once and you'll need to restart from your last save. Like its titular character, this game might be easy on the eyes, but it just can't run with the big dogs. —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Ultimate Card Games

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER BOARD (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** TELEGAMES > **DEVELOPER** COSMIGO > **RELEASE** MAY > **ESRB** E



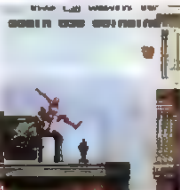
I have a weird addiction to these card compilations, especially ones that come to GBA — my handheld gaming weapon of choice. This one is especially impressive since it has a wide variety of Solitaire and classic card games (including Cribbage and Euchre), and casino games like Poker and Blackjack. Since this isn't your typical action game, and it's just a compilation of various 52 card, delights there isn't a whole lot of innovation to merit a high score. But, that doesn't mean I don't love this cart. If you find yourself hankering for a simple game of Hearts rather than saving the galaxy for the billionth time, Ultimate Card Games is for you. —**ANDY**

BOTTOM LINE 7

N-GAGE

Spider-Man 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** JULY 8 > **ESRB** T



The big detriment to this game is the control scheme required by the N-Gage. As we all know, the phone/game deck has a huge number of face buttons and they're almost all used for Spidey's adventures — it's just harder than it should be. The gameplay is a mix between 3D levels of pain (for the player) followed by serviceable 2D side-scrolling missions of heroism (for the superhero). Strangely, this game's earliest 2D level is actually lifted from the GBA adaptation of the web-slinger's first movie. I certainly appreciate the ambition with regard to the 3D swinging sections, but there isn't enough good material to push this game above its impressive, but un-fun tech demo feel. —**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Yu-Gi-Oh! Resef of Destruction

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** JUNE 29 > **ESRB** E



Yu-Gi-Oh titles have never been heralded as superior gaming accomplishments, but at least they have been consistent in providing fans a fair approximation of the popular trading card game. Sadly, not even that can be said of the latest installment, Resef of Destruction. A mishmash of RPG elements ties together a story that serves only as an excuse to make players engage in card duels, which aren't half as well executed as they were in other titles like World Championship 2004. With its sparse graphics (how hard is it to make a card game look decent?) and sterile gameplay, Resef feels like it was assembled from various rejected design concepts and shards of concentrated boring. —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 4.5

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Madden NFL 2005

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EXIENT > **RELEASE** AUGUST 9 > **ESRB** E



It's unfair to compare this title with its big-console namesake, but it's impossible to go back to this game's arcade-type of football once you've had a taste of the real thing. Some of you will enjoy the old-fashioned sweep plays and the over-zealous dives that stretch across the screen, but I don't know if anyone wants to see the sloppy route running and catching of the passing game that this title contains. To be fair, developer Exient tries to drag this old-school action into the present day with menu music; audio commentary with Madden and Michaels; and a season mode complete with free agents, trades, and player salaries. Still, this game works best as a memory of things past. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 7



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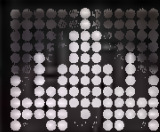
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CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For June 2004 Based On Units Sold

1 SPIDER-MAN 2 (PS2)



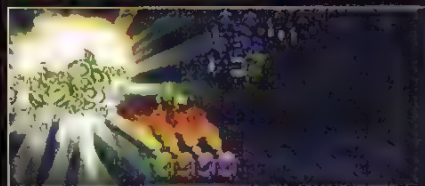
Sure, there's a lot of hype surrounding Spider-Man these days, but let's not forget another little movie about a super-powered wallclimber that taught us all how to love again: *The Fly*, starring Jeff Goldblum. Here's to you, Dr. Brundle!

2 FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR



This game was actually inspired by an old Apple IIe game called Full Spectrum of Visible Light Warrior. Released alongside such classics as Number Munchers and Odell Lake, it tried to teach students the dangers of ultraviolet radiation. It was unsuccessful.

3 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES



We haven't had this much fun controlling four guys in stupid hats since we kidnapped and hypnotized those Shriners. Man, you just haven't lived until you've seen a demolition derby with those tiny cars, and flaming fezzes scattered throughout the wreckage!

4 DRIV3R



In the future, the letter E will be obsolete, replaced by the obviously superior letternumber 3. As you fly around in your jet car, drinking your moon juice, don't be alarmed when you see billboards proclaiming "Spac3ly Sprock3ts is t3h roxxor!" It's just the language of progress.

5 SPIDER-MAN 2 (XBOX)



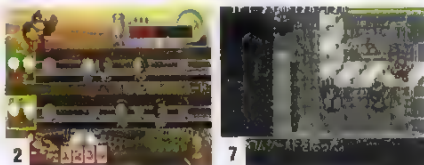
We aren't trying to undermine Spider-Man's abilities here, but if he truly "does whatever a spider can," couldn't he theoretically inject poisonous venom into Kirsten "The Dunster" Dunst to get a replacement love interest with whom he has some chemistry? He owes it to the movie-going public; with great power comes great responsibility.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Spider-Man 2	N/A	PS2	8	06/04	\$49
2	Full Spectrum Warrior	N/A	XBOX	8.25	06/04	\$49
3	The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	N/A	GC	8	06/04	\$49
4	Driv3r	N/A	PS2	6	06/04	\$49
5	Spider-Man 2	N/A	XBOX	8	06/04	\$49
6	The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay	N/A	XBOX	9.5	06/04	\$49
7	Shrek 2	5	PS2	7	05/04	\$43
8	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	N/A	PS2	6.5	06/04	\$40
9	Super Mario Bros.	N/A	GBA	9	06/04	\$19
10	Mario Vs. Donkey Kong	19	GBA	7.5	05/04	\$31
11	The Legend of Zelda	N/A	GBA	N/A	06/04	\$20
12	Halo	12	XBOX	9.75	11/01	\$30
13	MVP Baseball 2004	4	PS2	9.25	03/04	\$48
14	Driv3r	N/A	XBOX	6	06/04	\$49
15	Red Dead Revolver	1	PS2	8	05/04	\$46
16	Shrek 2	9	GBA	N/A	05/04	\$30
17	NBA Ballers	2	PS2	8	04/04	\$48
18	Fight Night 2004	3	PS2	9	04/04	\$48
19	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	N/A	GC	6.5	06/04	\$40
20	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	N/A	PS2	8.75	06/04	\$49

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld™/TRISTE • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Let's Make a J. League Pro Soccer Club! '04	N/A	PS2
2	Donkey Konga 2: Set Song Parade	N/A	GC
3	Gacha Mecha Stadium Saru Battle	N/A	PS2
4	Xenosaga Episode II: Jenovais von Gut und Bose	N/A	PS2
5	Jissen Pachislot	2	PS2
6	Super Donkey Kong 2	N/A	GBA
7	Dragon Quest Characters: Toruneko's Adventure 3	N/A	GBA
8	Monkita V	N/A	PS2
9	Pokémon: Fire Red/Leaf Green	9	GBA
10	Kirby And The Amazing Mirror	N/A	PS2



Source: Game Japan. Based On Monthly units Sold

TOP 10 EU

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	ESPN NFL 2K5	N/A	Multi
2	Viewtiful Joe	N/A	PS2
3	Hot Shots Golf Fore!	N/A	PS2
4	Madden NFL 2005	N/A	Multi
5	Pikmin 2	1	GC
6	NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	N/A	Multi
7	Uru: The Path of the Shell	N/A	PC
8	Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	4	Multi
9	Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	2	Multi
10	Second Sight	N/A	Multi



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	City of Heroes	1	\$46
2	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	N/A	\$29
3	Rise of Nations	5	\$35
4	Battlefield Vietnam	3	\$38
5	Far Cry	2	\$38
6	Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	N/A	\$38
7	Halo: Combat Evolved	N/A	\$30
8	Call of Duty	N/A	\$37
9	Unreal Tournament 2004	6	\$39
10	The Sims Deluxe Edition	9	\$23



Based On Monthly Units Sold

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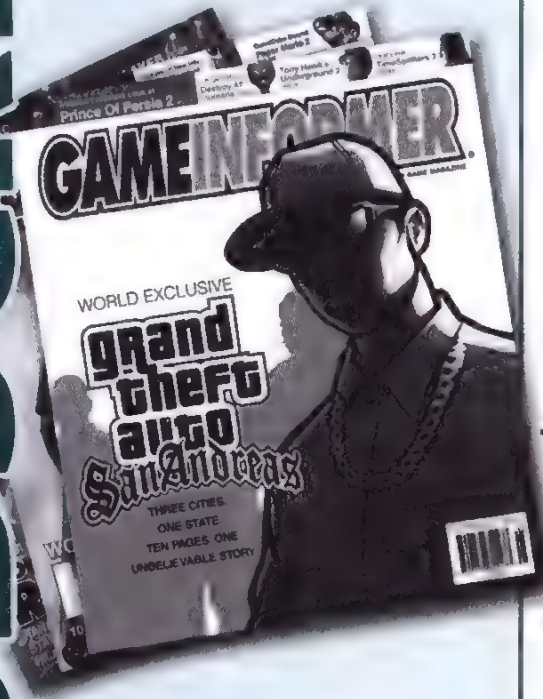
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PLAYSTATION 2

Airforce Delta Strike	7	Feb-04
Alias	7.5	Apr-04
All-Star Baseball 2005	7	Apr-04
American Idol	6.25	Feb-04
Athens 2004	6	Aug-04
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	5.5	Dec-03
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	8.5	Feb-04
Battlestar Galactica	6	Jan-04



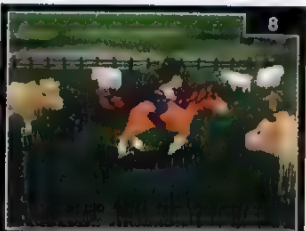
La Pucelle: Tactics - PS2 - Jun-04

Beyond Good and Evil	8	Dec-03
Bloody Roar 4	7.5	Dec-03
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	7.25	Jul-04
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts	4.75	Jan-04
Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums	6	Feb-04
Celebrity Deathmatch	2.75	Jan-04
Champions of Norrath		
Realms of EverQuest	8.75	Feb-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Convette	5	Jun-04
Crash Nitro Kart	7	Dec-03
Crimson Sea 2	7	Apr-04
Crimson Tears	5	Aug-04
Cyberchase	8	Dec-03
Cy Girls	4	Mar-04
Destruction Derby Arenas	6.75	May-04
Dot Hack Vol. 4: Quarantine	7.5	Feb-04
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	7.5	Jan-04
Drakengard	7.5	Mar-04
Dm3r	6	Aug-04
Dynasty Warriors 4: Xtreme Legends	7	Dec-03
Echo Night: Beyond	6	Aug-04
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 FD 18	5	Mar-04
Front Mission 4	7.25	Jan-04
Fugitive Hunter	5.5	Jan-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Galactic Wrestling		
Featuring Ultimate Muscle	4.25	Jul-04
Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	7.5	Mar-04
Goblin Commander		
Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	5	Jan-04
Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jan-04
Hot Wheels World Race	6	Jan-04
hNinja	7.5	Jan-04
Intelligence Lives	5	Feb-04
James Bond 007		
Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	8.25	Aug-04
Kill Switch	7	Dec-03
King of Fighters 2000/2001	7.75	Dec-03
La Pucelle: Tactics	8	Jan-04
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	8	Jan-04
Lifeline	8.75	Mar-04
Looney Tunes: Back in Action	5	Jan-04
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The Lowlander	8.25	Dec-03
Lupin the 3rd: Treasure of the Sorcerer King	5	Feb-04
Mafia	5.75	Feb-04
Mafia 2	7.75	Mar-04
Manhunt	9.25	Jan-04
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	8	Feb-04
Maximo VS. Army of Zin	8.25	Feb-04
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	4	Aug-04
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	7.75	Dec-03
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Midway Arcade Treasures	9	Dec-03
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	7.75	Feb-04
MLB 2005	8.5	Apr-04
MLB Slugfest: Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
Monster 4X4: Masters of Metal	6.5	Feb-04
Monster Racer 4	8.25	Dec-03
MTV Music Generator 3	8	Aug-04
MTX: Mototrax	7.5	Apr-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
MX Unleashed	8	Mar-04
Naval Ops: Commander	6	Apr-04
NBA Ballers	8	May-04
NBA 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
Nightshade	6.5	Mar-04
Onimusha Blade Warriors	8	Mar-04

Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	8	Jun-04
Pitfall Harry	6	Apr-04
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	9.5	Dec-03
Psy-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Puyo Pop Fever	7	Aug-04
R: Racing Evolution	7.25	Aug-04
Ranbow Six 3	7	Jan-04
Ratchet and Clank: Going Commando	9.5	Dec-03
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Resident Evil: Outbreak	7.5	May-04
Ribbit King	7	Jan-04
Rise to Honor	7	Jan-04
Romance of the Three Kingdoms X	7	Mar-04
RPC Maker II	7	Mar-04
R-Type Final	6.75	Mar-04
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	6	May-04
Samurai Warriors	7.5	May-04
Scoby Dool: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	7.5	Dec-03
Senous Sam: The Next Encounter	7.75	May-04
Seven Samurai 20XX	5	May-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Sims: Bustri' Out, The Siren	9.25	Jan-04
Siren	6.25	May-04
Smash Court Pro Tournament 2	5	Jul-04
SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs	9	Dec-03
Sonic Heroes	7.75	Mar-04
Space Channel 5: Special Edition	8.25	Dec-03
Spawn: Armageddon	6.5	Jan-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splitter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Spy Hunter 2	6	Jan-04
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	8.25	Aug-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Surfing, The	8.25	Apr-04
Super Trucks Racing	6.75	Dec-03
SWAT: Global Strike Team	7	Dec-03
Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	8.5	May-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	7.75	Dec-03
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	5.75	Jan-04
Time Crisis 3	7.5	Dec-03
Tokyo Xtreme Racer 3	6.75	Jan-04
Tony Hawk's Underground	9.25	Dec-03
Transformers	7	Jan-04
Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged	5	Aug-04
True Crime: Streets of LA	8.5	Dec-03
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
UFC Sudden Impact	6.5	Jul-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Virtual-On Marz	5	Dec-03
Way of the Samurai 2	3.25	Jun-04
Whiplash	4	Jan-04
Winning Eleven 7	9.25	Feb-04
World Tour Soccer 2005	6.5	May-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrath: Unleashed	6	Mar-04
WWWE Smackdown: Here Comes The Pain	8.5	Dec-03
XIII	7	Dec-03
X-Files: Resist Or Serve	6.5	May-04

GAMECUBE

1080° Avalanche	6.25	Jan-04
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	5	Dec-03
Beyond Good and Evil	8	Dec-03
Bionicle	6	Jan-04
Bombberman Jetters	8	Dec-03
Custom Robo	5.75	Apr-04
Disney's Hide and Sneak	3.5	Dec-03
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	7.25	Dec-03
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	7	Feb-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Gal Gol HyperGrid	7.75	Dec-03
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Cotcha Force	7	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 Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8.25	Dec-03
Mario Kart: Double Dash	9.25	Dec-03
Mario Party 5	2	Dec-03
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	7.5	Dec-03
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	9.25	Mar-04
Monster 4X4: Masters of Metal	6.5	Feb-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
NBA Live 2004	8.25	Dec-03
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
Need For Speed: Underground	9	Dec-03
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04

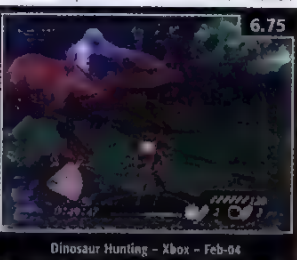


Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life - GC - Apr-04

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
Poo Paradise	6	May-04
R: Racing Evolution	7	Feb-04
Rabbit King	7	Jan-04
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	6	May-04
Scoby Dool: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Sims: Bustri' Out, The Siren	9	Jan-04
Senous Sam: The Next Encounter	7.75	May-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Sonic Heroes	7.75	Jan-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Spirits and Spells	2	Dec-03
Sprinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Tales of Symphonia	8.75	Jul-04
Tony Hawk's Underground	8.75	Feb-04
True Crime: Streets of LA	8	Jan-04
WaroWare, Inc.: Mega Party Games	7	Apr-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Falsebound Kingdom	6.5	Jan-04

XBOX

Alias	7.5	Apr-04
All-Star Baseball 2005	7	Apr-04
Armed and Dangerous	8	Jan-04
Ax Fatalis	7.5	Jan-04
Auto Modellista	7.5	Apr-04
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	5.5	Dec-03
Battlestar Galactica	6.5	Jan-04
Beyond Good and Evil	8	Dec-03
Blowout	6.5	Feb-04
Breakdown	7.5	Apr-04
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	8	Jan-04
Carve	6.5	Feb-04
Celebrity Deathmatch	2.75	Jan-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, The	9.5	Jun-04
Colin McRae Rally 4	8.5	Apr-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Counter-Strike	7.5	Jan-04
Crimson Skies		
High Road to Revenge	9	Dec-03
Curse: The Eye of Isis	6.75	Feb-04



Dinosaur Hunting - Xbox - Feb-04

Pikmin 2	8.75	Aug-04
Pitfall Harry	6	Apr-04
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	9.5	Jan-04
Psy-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Rainbow Six 3	8.5	Jan-04
RalliSport Challenge 2	7.25	Jan-04
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Rob Hood		
Defender of the Crown	6.75	Dec-03
Scoby Dool: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	7.5	Jan-04
Sega GT Online	7.75	Dec-03
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	5.75	Aug-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Scope Complete	8	Feb-04
Spawn: Armageddon	6.5	Jan-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splitter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	9.5	May-04
Spy Hunter 2	6	Feb-04
SSX 3	9.5	Nov-03
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	5.5	Apr-04
Star Wars: Jedi Academy	8	Jan-04
Steel Battalion: Line of Contact	7.5	May-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Surfing, 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
Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged	5	Aug-04
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	4	Jan-04
World Championship Pool 2004	6.75	Feb-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrath: Unleashed	7.5	Feb-04
WWE Raw 2	7.25	Nov-03
XIII	7	Dec-03
XGRA	5	Nov-03
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Dawn of Destiny	6	Jun-04

PC

Age of Mythology: The Titans	9	Dec-03
Battlefield Vietnam	8	May-04
Besieger	6	Aug-04
Black Mirror, The	4.5	Jan-04
Breed	5.75	Jun-04
Call of Duty: City of Heroes	9	Dec-03
Civilization III: Conquests	9	Jan-04
Command & Conquer: Generals Zero Hour	8	Dec-03
Commandos 3		
Destination Berlin	6	Jan-04
Counter-Strike	5.5	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	Jan-04
Deus Ex: Invisible War	9	Jan-04
Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna	9.5	Jan-04
Drake of the 99 Dragons	1.25	Jan-04
Dm3r	6	Aug-04
Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind		
GOTY Edition, The	7.75	Jan-04
ESPN Major League Baseball	7.5	Apr-04
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	8	Feb-04
Flight Night 2004	9	Apr-04
Freestyle Street Soccer	4	Feb-04
Full Spectrum Warrior	8.25	Jul-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Grabbed by the Ghoulies	4.5	Dec-03
Grand Theft Auto III/Vice City	10	Jan-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Haunted Mansion, The	7	Feb-04
Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jan-04
IndyCar Series 2005	6.5	Aug-04
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death	6.75	May-04
Kill Switch	7.5	Dec-03
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	8	Jan-04
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, The	8.25	Dec-03
Madness	8	Jun-04
Magic: The Gathering Battlegrounds	6.5	Dec-03
Malice	5.5	Aug-04
Manhunt		
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	8.75	Feb-04
Maximum Chase	7	Jan-04
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	7.75	Dec-03
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun: Medal Slug 3	8	Jul-04
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	7.75	Feb-04
MLB Slugfest: Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
MTV Music Generator 3	8	Aug-04
MTX: Mototrax	7.5	Apr-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
MX Unleashed	8	Mar-04
NBA Ballers	8	Mar-04
NBA Shootout 2004	8	May-04
NBA Inside Drive 2004	6.5	Dec-03
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
Need For Speed: Underground	9.25	Dec-03
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
NHL Rivals 2004	5.75	Dec-03
Ninja Gaiden	9.5	Apr-04



Nosferatu: The Wrath of Malachi - PC - Jan-04

Lord of the Rings: The War of the Ring, The	6.75	Jan-04
Lords of EverQuest	7.5	Feb-04
Max Payne 2	8	Feb-04
The Fall of Max Payne	9.25	Dec-03
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault: Breakthrough	9	Dec-03
Nemesis of the Roman Empire	7.75	Jun-04
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	8.5	Feb-04
Northland	8	Mar-04
Nosferatu: The Wrath of Malachi	3	Jan-04
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	8	Feb-04
Painkiller	8.5	Jun-04
Patrician III	7	Jan-04
Penimeter	7.75	Jul-04
Pirate Hunter: Seize and Destroy	6	Jan-04
PlanetSide: Core Combat	2	Jan-04

Republic: The Revolution	6	Dec-03
Rise of Nations: Thrones and Patriots	9	Jul-04
Runaway: A Road Adventure	7.25	Nov-03
Sacred	7.75	Jun-04
Savage: The Battle for Newarth	8.5	Nov-03
Silent Storm	7.5	Feb-04
SimCity 4: Rush Hour	7.5	Dec-03
Sims: Makin' Magic, The	7	



Star Ocean: Till the End of Time

Ten Tips Straight From Square Enix



TIP ON WINNING BATTLES

First, learn some effective chain attacks for each character. It is possible to chain regular attacks with a battle skill, followed by another battle skill, and there are combinations that are more effective and easier to chain for each of the characters. If you learn them and efficiently inflict damage to your enemies, victory can be assured. For Example: Fayt Leingod > Close range Hard attack > Blade of Fury > Air Raid.

ABOUT SYMBOLOGY

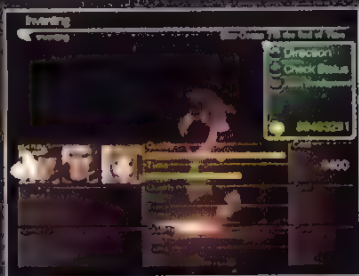
Certain characters will acquire symbology when they level up. However, by using rare skill books that can be obtained, you can teach simple support symbology and attack symbology to all of the characters. Even with simple support symbology, choosing to use only items or a combination of symbology will greatly affect the stability of your battles. However, skill books will disappear after use, so decide carefully which character should utilize them. If you stop using the character after you let him/her learn symbology, you won't be able to let other characters re-learn it.



TIP ON VS BATTLE MODE

At certain stages of the story, by giving a certain item to a certain character, you will be able to play in VS Mode, which enables two or three characters to battle each other. In VS Mode, you must understand each of the character specifics and be able to use them to their fullest potential to win. Characters with quick mobility can evade enemy attacks just by running, and characters with quick steps should maximize the use of steps rather than running. Also, each character has special attacks, and it is important to know how to handle them. For Fayt, strength stacking from

a long range during movement is matchless, and Maria can attack while stepping. Understand the specific strengths of the characters you use and be victorious in battle.



TIP ON ITEM CREATION

In Item Creation, new items can be created or items can be synthesized to improve their usefulness. However, there are infinite combinations, and you might find yourself at a loss. In order to create an item, you will need Fol for the cost. Items created will depend on the Fol needed. Of course, the tendency is that the higher the cost, the better the function, but there are low cost items that can be created that are quite useful. Also, there are items that cannot be used by themselves but may be effective in boss battles by synthesizing with a weapon. Depending on the situation, combining low cost items and creating efficiently is the key to advancement, even at the lower levels.



TIP ON ACQUIRING BATTLE TROPHIES

Meeting certain criteria during battle will let you acquire a Battle Trophy. The more Battle Trophies you have, the more privileges you can gain, such as changing character costumes and switching difficulties. The criteria vary and fulfilling them is a challenge. However, many of the criteria to acquire a Battle Trophy follow somewhat of a rule, so if you acquire one Battle Trophy, look for others that have similar criteria. For example, if you were able to acquire the Battle Trophy for defeating a boss without sustaining damage, then look for other bosses that may have the same criteria. That way you'll be able to collect them much quicker than blindly continuing battles.

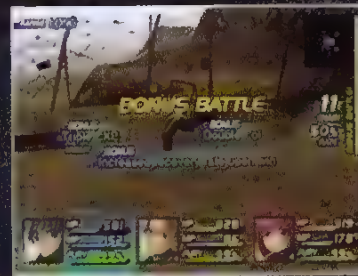
TIP ON DEFEATING ULTRA HARD BOSSES

There are a number of ultra hard boss characters in this game. They have deadly skills that make them extremely powerful. There are attacks that will mean the end, making it impossible to evade or recover. With that said, you can do something about that deadly skill, and defeat it. If you come across bosses that you cannot beat, think about how you can guard against their attack. For example, if that attack has a fire property, equip armor and accessories that absorb damage from fire attacks. If the boss attack causes an abnormal status such as petrified or frozen, equip armor and accessories that cancel them out. Even if the chosen equipment is not sold, you may be able to create them with Item Creation. If you think and equip for shutting out the enemy's strong point, you should be victorious.



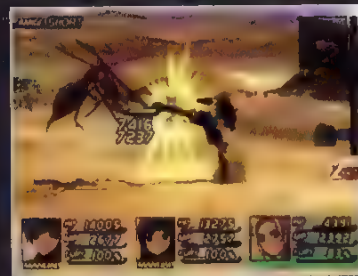
IF YOU FEEL THAT THE ENEMY IS EXTREMELY POWERFUL "TARGET" AND "PROTECT"

Powerful enemies have deadly skills. However, there are two types of attack, "Easy" and "Hard" in this game, and if the player's Fury is at 100 percent, you can damage the enemy by using Protect if the attack is "Easy." Fury will recover if you stay still for a while, so if you feel that your enemy is too powerful, don't move around so much and go for the Guard.



TIP ON RAISING YOUR LEVEL

During battle, the "Heat Up" Gauge is indicated on the right side. This will accumulate by hitting the enemy with your attacks and when it reaches 100 percent, you receive various bonuses such as triple experience points and double Fol acquired. Make good use of it for leveling up. First, look for enemies that have high experience points. The Bonus ends when the character that you operate receives a critical hit, so choose characters that are good at long range attacks such as Sophia or Maria. Let your CPU allies attack while you support your comrades. If all goes well, you can continually acquire triple experience points, and you will raise your level significantly.

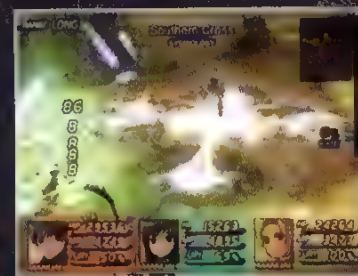


RECOMMENDED OPERATIONAL CHARACTER

Short Range

Fayt - Powerful battle skills (deadly skills). Most balanced among all the characters. Able to learn magic, so convenient to use... it's no wonder he is the main character.

Mirage - Mobility speed is quite fast, easy to use with tight attacks. However, low MP means Mirage is weak against attacks that deplete MP.



Long Range

Sophia - Powerful attack magic. Able to replenish herself depending on the battle situation, which means more stability for the entire party. Maria - Extremely powerful battle skills from long range. Able to shut out a single enemy by just attacking when the ally's short range attacks are interrupted.



SHORT-CUT TO "COUPLE'S ENDING"

In this game, there are many choices to make during the events. Choices will determine each character's feelings towards Fayt. These feelings affect the ending event and lead to a "Couple's Ending" with a close character. However, if there is no close character, there will be a lonely ending, so be cautious. The choices will mainly occur in "Private Action," events that have no relation to the main storyline. "Private Action" occurs by talking to other fellow characters that move about freely in town. So, if you wish to have a "Couple's Ending," the quickest way is to have your favorite character talk to the townspeople every time you get there.

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**Catwoman****> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

For a little fan service, get to an area where there are no enemies (or you've already dispatched them all). Then let the game idle (don't press anything on the controller) for a little bit, and you'll be treated to an in-depth view of what Halle Barry looks like after being digitized. Meow!

Mega Man Anniversary Collection**> PLAYSTATION 2, GAMECUBE**

These codes will start you off fully upgraded at the entrance to the final stage. Enter them in the password entry screen for the appropriate game.

Mega Man 2 - A5, B2, B4, C1, C3, C5, D4, D5, E2

Mega Man 3 - Blue: A1, A3, B2, B5, D3, F4; Red: A6, E1

Mega Man 4 - A1, A4, B5, E2, F1, F3

Mega Man 5 - Blue: B4, D6, F1; Red: C1, D4, F6

Mega Man 6 - B6, D4, F2, F4, F6

Mega Man 7 - 7853 5842 2245 7515

NCAA Football 2005**> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

From the main menu, go to My NCAA, then Pennant Collection. On the Pennant Collection screen, click the right analog stick (Xbox), press Select (PS2), or hold down Z and press A (GameCube) and enter the code to unlock the pennant.

GAME CHEATS

1st & Fifteen	Thanks
Blink	For
Boing	Registering
Crossed The Line	Tiburion
Cuffed	EA Sports
Jumbalaya	Hike
Molasses	Home Field
QB Dud	Elite 11
Stuffed	NCAA
Take Your Time	Football
Thread The Needle	2005
What A Hit	Blitz

ALL-TIME TEAMS

2003 All-Americans	Fumble
All-Alabama	Roll Tide
All-Auburn	War Eagle
All-Clemson	Death Valley
All-Colorado	Glory
All-Georgia	Hunker Down
All-Kansas State	Victory
All-LSU	Geaux Tigers

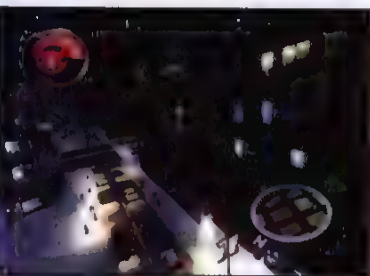
All-Michigan	Go Blue
All-Mississippi State	Hail State
All-Nebraska	Go Big Red
All-North Carolina	Rah Rah
All-Notre Dame	Golden Dome
All-Oklahoma	Boomer
All-Oklahoma State	Go Pokes
All-Oregon	Quack Attack
All-Penn State	We Are
All-Pittsburgh	Lets Go Pitt
All-Purdue	Boiler Up
All-Syracuse	Orange Crush
All-Tennessee	Big Orange
All-Texas	Hook Em
All-Texas A&M	Gig Em
All-UCLA	Mighty
All-USC	Fight On
All-Virginia	Wahoos
All-Virginia Tech	Tech Triumph
All-Washington	Bow Down
All-Wisconsin	U Rah Rah

TEAM BOOSTS

Baylor	Sic Em
Illinois	Oskee Wow
Texas Tech	Fight

MASCOT TEAMS

Ariz Mascot	Bear Down
ISU Mascot	Red And Gold
KU Mascot	Rock Chalk
Minn Mascot	Rah Rah Rah
Miss Mascot	Hotty Totty
Mizzou Mascot	Mizzou Rah
MSU Mascot	Go Green
NCSU Mascot	Go Cats
NU Mascot	Go Cats
WSU Mascot	All Hail
WVU Mascot	Hail WV

**Spider-Man 2****> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

This code will start you off with over 40 percent story completion, some upgrades, and a bunch of hero points. Enter it on the file naming screen, then start a game with whatever name you want. Note that you have to do this when you don't have any other save files on your memory device.

Jump-Start Story Mode - HCRAYERT**PLAYSTATION 2****Drive3r**

At the main menu, enter these codes. Then enable them from the Cheats menu (under Extras).

All Missions	- L1, R1, L1, L2, <input type="checkbox"/> (x2), <input type="checkbox"/>
All Weapons	- R1, L2, <input type="checkbox"/> , <input type="checkbox"/> , R1, R2, L2
All Vehicles	- L1 (x2), <input type="checkbox"/> , <input type="checkbox"/> , L1, R1, <input type="checkbox"/>
Immunity	- <input type="checkbox"/> (x2), L1, L2, R1, R2, <input type="checkbox"/>
Infinite Ammo	- R1, R2, R1, R2, <input type="checkbox"/> , <input type="checkbox"/> , <input type="checkbox"/>
Invincibility	- <input type="checkbox"/> (x2), L1, R1, L2, R2 (x2)

**MLB Slugfest Loaded**

Enter these on the VS. screen (the one before Jimmy and Timmy start doing their pregame schtick). A sound effect will confirm correct entry.

Big Heads	- <input type="checkbox"/> (x2), Right
Max Batting	- <input type="checkbox"/> (x3), Left
Max Speed	- <input type="checkbox"/> (x3), Left
Pinheads	- <input type="checkbox"/> (x2), Left
Rubber Ball	- <input type="checkbox"/> (x2), <input type="triangle-up"/> (x4), <input type="circle"/> (x2), Up
Softball Mode	- <input type="checkbox"/> (x2), <input type="triangle-up"/> (x4), <input type="circle"/> (x2), Down
Unlimited Turbo	- <input type="checkbox"/> (x4), <input type="triangle-up"/> (x4), <input type="circle"/> (x4), Down

XBOX**Drive3r**

At the main menu, enter these codes. Then enable them from the Cheats menu (under Extras).

All Weapons	- L Button (x2), X, Y (x2), R Button (x2)
Invincibility	- X, Y, L Button, R, L Button, R Button (x2)
Infinite Ammo	- R Button (x2), L Button (x2), X, Y (x2)
All Missions	- X (x2), Y (x2), R Button (x2), L Button
All Vehicles	- X (x2), Y (x2), L Button, R Button, L Button
Immunity	- X, Y, R Button (x2), L Button (x2), Y

MLB Slugfest Loaded

Enter these on the VS. screen (the one before Jimmy and Timmy start doing their pregame schtick). A sound effect will confirm correct entry.

Big Heads	- X (x2), Right
Max Batting	- X (x3), Left
Max Speed	- B (x3), Left
Pinheads	- X (x2), Left
Rubber Ball	- X (x2), Y (x4), B (x2), Up
Softball Mode	- X (x2), Y (x4), B (x2), Down
Unlimited Turbo	- X (x4), Y (x4), B (x4), Down

Shadow Ops: Red Mercury

From the main menu, select Options and then Cheats. Input these there.

Unlock All Cinematics	FILMCRTIC
Unlock All Co-Op Play Maps	WANDERLUST
Unlock All Single-Player Maps	HAPPYCAMP

Mod World**Command & Conquer Generals**

www.dereclitstudios.net

There's a ton of great downloadable mods out there, and such for C&C Generals, but one dedicated group of modders, Derelict Studios, have done (and are currently working on) some content of particular interest. First off, Blitzkrieg II - a total conversion (meaning that it shares little with the original game besides the engine) that turns C&C Generals into a World War II simulation. Tons of real-world units have been fully modeled, animated, and balanced for your gaming pleasure. Professional production values and lots of online community support make Blitzkrieg II more than worth a little bandwidth.



Derelict Studios also has a couple more projects in the works. Call To Arms will take Generals to the very near future, and offer a full selection of real-life vehicles and technologies - no fictional units are present. Right now, it's in public beta, so feel free to check out firsthand how awesome Derelict Studios is. Its most exciting work-in-progress, though, is Halogen. As you might guess, this is a total conversion that aims to recreate the war between Earth and the Covenant in the 26th century. It's a ways out - little bit the concept and some vehicle models without skins were available as of this printing, but even that was enough to get our blood pumping in anticipation. We dare you to not think this is sweetness incarnate!

**Xbox Live Alert**

Microsoft's got another booster pack planned for Project Gotham Racing 2. This one will add a city called Long Beach, which players will be able to haul through on eight new circuits - ideally while driving the eight new cars that are included. Also, if you haven't gotten it yet, another wave of Crimson Skies bonus content is available on Xbox Live. Three planes, two maps, and two game types should help keep your fingers wrapped around that joystick for a bit longer.

PC

Ground Control II: Operation Exodus

While playing, press tilde (~) twice to drop the console, then type in the cheats.

God Mode godmassive
Show Framerate fps
Unlock All Missions gomassive

GAME BOY ADVANCE

R-Type III: The Third Lightning

Enter these passwords on the Resume screen.

Code of the Month

Psi-Ops:
The Mindgate Conspiracy

At the main menu, highlight Extra Content and press the R button (Xbox) or R1 (PS2). Enter these codes on the keypad that pops up.

GAMEPLAY CHEATS

All Powers - 537893
Bullet Resistant - 548975
No Head - 987978
Super Psi - 456456
Unlimited Ammo - 978945

GAME MODES

Arcade Mode - 05051979
Cooperative Play Mode - 07041979
Dark Mode - 465486

SKINS

Crispy Soldier - 454566
Dockworker - 364654
Edgar Barret - 437878
Edgar Barret (Training 1) - 196001
Edgar Barret (Training 2) - 196002
Edgar Barret (Training 3) - 196003
Edgar Barret (Training 4) - 196004
Edgar Barret (Training 5) - 196005
Edgar Barret (Training 6) - 196006
Jack - 698798
Jov Leonov - 468987
Kimiko Jones - 978798
Labcoat - 998789
Marlena Kessler - 489788
Marlena Kessler (Bikini) - 135454
Marlena Kessler (Leather) - 136876
Marlena Kessler (Saranae) - 65496873
MP1 - 321646
MP2 - 698799

MP3 - 654659
Nick Scryer (Stealth) - 456498
Nick Scryer (Training) - 564689
Nick Scryer (Urban) - 484646
Nick Scryer (Wasteland) - 975466
Sara Blake - 135488
Sara Blake (Psi) - 468799
Sara Blake (Suicide) - 231644
Scorpion - 546546
The General (Default) - 459797
The General (Clown) - 431644
Tonya - 678999
UN Soldier - 365498
Wei Lu - 231324
Wei Lu (Dragon) - 978789
Wei Lu (Tranquility) - 654654

Extra Missions

Aura Pool - 659785
Bottomless Pit - 154897
Bouncy, Bouncy - 568789
Floor of Death - 05120926
Gasoline - 9442662
Gearshift - 154684
Gnomotron - 456878
Panic Room - 76635766
Psi Pool - 565485
Stoptlights - 945678
Survival - 7734206
Tip the Idol - 428584
TK Alley - 090702
Up and Over - 020615

5BDGB
 5HHLQ
 5MGLT
 5RFLX
 5DWLD0

Donkey Kong Country

Enter these codes while holding Select and highlighting Erase on the file select screen.

50 Lives - B, A, R (x2), A, L
Free Bonus Stage Practice - B, Up, B (x2), A
Sound Test Mode - B, A, L (x2), A, Down

Mini-Walkthrough - Part 2

Star Ocean:
Till the End of Time

Glory of glories! Part two of our stunning walkthrough! Genufect!

BATTLEFIELD

Move west, avoiding as many enemies as possible. Get comfortable, because you're in for about 45 minutes of watching things go down. Find and defeat Duke Vox. Stuff happens. Head east across the field. More stuff happens. Back in Aquios, head to Dion's room in the castle to watch slightly less stuff happen. Pick up Ameena from the Inn, and take her back to Dion's room. Bear witness to the longest stuff-happening jamboree in the game. Meet the Queen, gain Maria as a party member, then head to the chapel on the first floor. Talk to the priest by the stairs to get the Disintegration Hammer, then head on down.

SEALED CAVERN

Take a long walk straight ahead until you see a large blob monster. Avoid it if possible. Grab the two chests and examine the statue in the northwest corner. Press the switch, then head back to the first room and go through the eastern door. Follow the path until you see blocks moving up and down. Enter the north door. In the next room, go west for some chests, then north under three moving blocks. Enter the east door. In the next room, you'll find cracks in the east wall. It's Disintegration Hammer time. Break through and get the goods. Go back to previous room. Use the NW door. Save, navigate under the blocks, and head north. Avoid the blob thing again. Go north, then east. In this corridor, look for more cracks along the south wall. Using your hammer, smash through and find another switchy statue. Leave the way you came in and continue east to find a Luna Talisman. Now find the two blocks that weren't moving before and head west through them. Boss fight. The north entrance leads to the next new area.

SHRINE OF KADDAN

Head north from the entrance. Fight the crystal statue in the middle of the next room. Continue north for an event, then east for another battle with a crystal statue. Move south, then loop around to the east until you reach a dead end. Wait for an earthquake, staying close to the walls as debris falls. One of the walls to the west cracked, leaving it open to your hammer advances. Open the chests and get your third Saint's Stone. Approach the benches. With the Saint's Amulet, go back to the room with the second crystal statue. Go east. Collect treasure through a cracked wall, then loop north and use the save point. Boss fight. Keep heading north until you reach a locked door. Follow the west corridor. In the room with four chests, examine the empty one to start another earthquake. Backtrack to the room with the locked door. The

east wall is cracked. Bust it down. Don't open the closed treasure chest here. Just enter the next room and head north. Climb the western stair and enter the north door. Keep going north until you see a room with four doors and a statue in the middle. Ignore it! Use the crack in the eastern wall to bypass the doors completely. Northward again. In the next section, loop to the south and read the inscribed plates on either side of door. Go north until you find a red gem. Touch the gem, then go through the dual-plated door. Hoof it north through this entire maze-like section, being careful not to touch the blocks. Use the save point, examine the door, and enter. Boss fight. Examine the pedestal, then backtrack out. Watch another event with Nel near the entrance then head through the Sealed Cavern. Visit the Queen in the castle's throne room, triggering a series of events. Maria...you've got to see her! Go insane and out of your mind!



After the flashback, return to the throne room to find out where you'll backtrack next. Head to Peterny, go out the west exit, and cross the stone bridge into the Sanmite Steppe. Witness a short scene, get in a tussle, then head north.

SURFERIO

Chill out and stock up on items. You've been working hard. Head southwest along the first branch to meet with Roger again. Have him join the fun. Leave Surferio through the west exit.

PASSAGE FROM PARCH TO PLENTY

Head straight west, ignoring the branching paths. Talk to the old man near the exit, and buy the map from him if you choose. Exit the cave and head north.

MOSEL DUNES

Your water meter continuously drains out here. The more you move, the faster it empties. Make your way northeast. Examine oases on your way to refill your water meter.

ANCIENT RUINS OF MOSEL

Use the save point and go straight ahead. Examine the pedestal in the center of the room. Thief defeats wizard. Wizard defeats Knight. Knight defeats Thief. Remember it. Go through the northern door and proceed counterclockwise through the dungeon. When you come across black chess pieces, choose the white piece that will defeat it. Put the third chess piece into place, save your

Jack Forbes
 Potomac, NY

game, and enter the south door.

Cue long event. Afterwards, leave the ruins and trek way back to Airyglyph.

AIRYGLYPH CASTLE

Enter the castle to be greeted by Wolter. He takes you to Abel, who joins up with you. Leave Airyglyph and head to Kirlsa. Enter Wolter's mansion to collect some loot.

Go to the Mountains of Barr, either by walking or by accepting the dragon knight's offer.

MOUNTAINS OF BARR

Head north from the entrance. At the fork, go west for treasure. East to save point.

At the next fork, go south for some swag. Heading back north, enter the cave behind the waterfall, sticking to the northern path.

There are two chests in the NW corner, and the cave's exit is NE.

Once outside, continue north until the next fork. East is loot, west is story.

The path loops north and east, ending in save point and a cave entrance. Use both. Defeat a Blue Dragon Zombie to get a Dragon Windpipe. Take it south to the factory.

After creating the Dragon Bone Flute, leave the cave via the southern exit and head west.

Past the waterfall, wait in the dragon's shadow until it picks you up.

Head south in this new area, then move west until you come across a small cave.

The baby dragon will lead you to the cave's exit. Before you leave, play your flute in several ways noting the dragon's reaction.

Dropping back into the Barr Cave, go south and east to find a large dragon relief.

The relief's color corresponds to a mood, which also matches up with a flute tune.

Yellow/happy, red/angry, blue/sad, green/playful. Play the right melodies to get through.

THE RUINS OF BARR

Head north, examine the door, then loop back to entrance and head east.

Retrieve the Dragon's Cranium from the lab jars. Return to the room with the cross on the floor.

In the area to the west are two plates that remotely light parts of the cross. Activate them.

To the north is another dragon door. Match the timing and the tune to proceed.

To the east are more remote lighting plates and another dragon door. Activate these, too.

Now only the center of the cross should be unlit. Play the "angry" tune in front of the large door to head north. Use the save point.

Boss fight. Proceed to the last room, activate the final plate, and go back to the cross room.

Stand in the middle of the cross, offer the Dragon's Cranium, and make your way north.

URSSA LAVA CAVES

Of the three initial paths, use the eastern one first. At the fork, the path north will take you to a treasure chest. Follow the path east.

Examine the enormous bunny statue for the Rabbit Ears Key. Go back to the first room.

Take the west path if you want a few treasures. Otherwise, take the north path.

Use the Rabbit Ears Key on the door. Explore the western area to meet the rabbit inventor, Vanilla. Mmmm. Vanilla.

Pay what you can afford for the ring, and then leave to find a Glowstone.

Backtrack through the caves, ruins, and mountain. If you present Misty Lear with the Soul Jewel, she joins you as an inventor.

Talk to the dragon knight close by and ask him to take you to Airyglyph.

Go to the Aqueeducts again. The Glowstone is behind the ice to the north of the entrance.

Take the stone and head back to the Urssa Lava Caves to talk to Vanilla.

With the Ring of Disintegration, you can get rid of that rock in front of Crosell's lair. Go there and get ready to rumble.

Boss fight. Back in Aquios, wander around and chat with your stray party members.

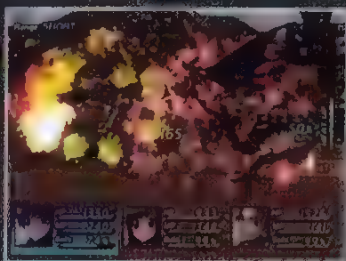
Head to the castle balcony (through the doors behind the throne) and brace for space.

DIPLO

With a few missing members, reconfigure your party for its new arrangement.

Start at the bridge and walk around the Diplo, talking to all Quark members.

After hearing from Maria, head to the transporter room.



KIRLSA TRAINING FACILITY

An event starts this area, followed by a forced battle with Vendeeni soldiers.

With the Ring of Disintegration, several new chests can be found. Knock yourself out.

This should all look familiar. Make your way to the elevator on the first floor.

Go to the fourth floor (again), exit, save, and then go south just like before.

Boss fight. Sophia joins. Oh, good! A level one weakening!

FEDERATION BATTLESHIP AQUAELIE

After the series of events, head to the southwest and find the room with Maria. Chat.

Make your way southeast and find the room with the save point. It's yours. Rest up.

Once you wake up, wipe that gunk out of your eyes and head to the bridge.

After an event, find the long range transporter (in the south section) and head out.

MOONBASE

Go west, ignoring the first fork. Eventually you meet up with Peppita again.

Head to the weapon shop up north and buy some new gear. Then continue west.

Save and follow the path that leads NW.

Collect the chests and keep plowing westward. Boss fight.

Head back to the main area with Peppita and take her to the bar. Classy!

Return to where you had the boss battle and continue west.

Collect the three chests in the next section (one via elevator), then go southwest.

Head straight east, looping around the elevator. Descend into the research lab for some story points, then head SW.

There are lots of chests around here. Explore to find them, then go east again.

Make your way northeast to end up back in the main area of the Moonbase.

Decide if you want Peppita. Be careful: if you take her, she'll be your final member.

Go back to the Aquaelie. Go back to your room after stuff happens on the bridge.

Of course, you get summoned back, and need to return to the long-range transporter.

Once aboard Calnus, head out the door to explore the next planet.

PLANET STYX

Go north. There is no shame in fleeing battles — these things are rough.

After an event at the Time Gate, you can enter 4D space. Stephen Hawking weeps.

ARKIVES

Teach the Security Service a lesson. Gang up on them for the best results.

Explore the city, taking a treasure from each house. Then go to the central transporter.

In the new section, take the transporter in the west to reach Arkives Station.

Head towards the middle of the area and enter the station, then head to Gemity.

GEMITY

Buy new weapons and armor. Girls behind counters to the east and west heal you for free.

Head up north to a circular area. If you use the middle transporters here, you get taken to the Eternal Sphere Terminal.

Talk to the clerk to get transported to another room. Examine the terminal here.

Talk to all of your party members, then Maria. Choose your destination of all the planets you've visited. Start with Elicoor II.

If you didn't accept Peppita into your party, you can now recruit your final party member.

Return to Gemity, and talk to the station clerk. Save, rest, do any shopping you need to, and then warp to the Sphere Company.

SPHERE COMPANY

Nothing says "welcome" like forced battles. Head north, recover, and enter the Sphere Company itself.

At the fork, head west and then north, looping around to take the stairs up.

On the second floor, go east, proceeding counterclockwise to find more stairs.

After reaching the third floor, go north again and follow the path northwest.

When you reach a north-south corridor, head north to find the stairs to the fourth floor.

From the stairwell, head east, then north. At the dead-end, go west past the fork.

Once you find the stairs to the fifth floor, climb up. Head west into the hallway.

Meet Blair, then talk to everyone. Continue west to the elevator room.

Boss fight. Go west from where you met Blair. In the next room, take the northeast door.

Collecting chests as you go, take the northwest path and use the terminal.

Now go east from where you met Blair. Take the northern elevator to the sixth floor.

In the first room, take the north arm of the cross and head east.

At the next cross, go south and follow the path to the west and then the east.

When you find the next elevator, just go straight up to floor 100.

Go south twice, east three times, south, then west. Take a ride to the top floor.

Just keep moving north, taking detours to pick up some booty.

Get ready for some rough battles, followed by a Boss fight.

After you talk to Blair, head south through changed terrain to the landing site.

Back on the Diplo, talk to everybody, then Mirage on the bridge.

Go the transporter to return to Elicoor II. Mirage offers to join your ranks. Take her along if you want her to fill that final slot.

Go back to Aquios, talk to the Queen, then return to the Shrine of Kaddan.

SHRINE OF KADDAN

Same old area with a few new faces. The tough enemies make for good leveling up.

Follow the familiar paths, using your Ring of Disintegration to explore new areas.

There are a couple of Boss fights along the way in similar locations.

After you get the Sacred Orb, go back to the throne room of Kaddan.

Time for Mosel again! Go through Sanmite Steppe, Surferio, and Parch to Plenty.

ANCIENT RUINS OF MOSEL

Pretend you're Bellerophon and slay the creature as soon as you enter the dunes.

In the ruins, go to the middle room with the save point and get your save on.

Proceed to the conference room. Boss fight.

The east stairwell leads to an optional area. The west stairwell leads to more plot.

FIREWALL

To get through the first section, just keep taking left turns eventually curving clockwise.

In the next section, avoid the Polyhedrons and keep in mind that most doors are one-way.

Go north, take any of the forking paths, and head north again.

Proceed through the eastern door, then turn north. At the dead end, follow the path back west through the one-way door, then head north.

Enter the eastern door at the dead end and continue in that direction.

Go through the south door, turn towards the east and go through that door.

Head all the way north and go through the door. Continue north, then make for the east.

Stand on the switch to change the color, return through the one-way, then westward.

Hug the south path until you find a one-way door to the west. Enter the maze section.

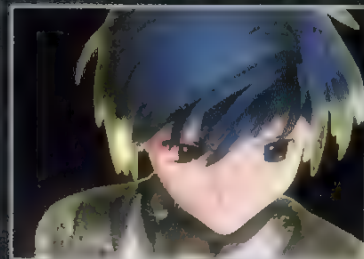
Make your way to the northwest, then go north through the western-most door.

Continue north and follow the path along to the east through the one-way door.

Change another switch's color, then return. Retrace your steps, heading south.

Loop through the maze section, heading to the southwest. Find a save point and use it.

Boss fight. Take the transporter to the final dungeon.



THE SPIRAL TOWER

First floor: Disintegrate crystals, collect treasure, and find the elevator leading up.

Second floor: Save and proceed forward. Boss fight.

Head north to the elevator and find Blair. Defeat the mini-bosses down the three paths to reactivate the elevator.

Third floor: In order to get through the colored doors, activate the red and blue crystals.

Purple: red x1, blue x1; Green: red x3, blue x3; Orange: red x9, blue x1; Red: blue x8, red x1.

Yellow: blue x5, red x7, blue x3.

Floors Four and Five: No! No! Don't stop a-rockin'!

Sixth floor: Use your ring to break down walls, step on switches, and reactivate the lift.

Seventh through Ninth floors: Just one path. Stick to it. What are you, a deviant?

Tenth floor: Ignore the branching paths and head north, over stairs, to the last save point.

Final Boss fight.

"GI DROID"

(location unknown — last seen filming Fahrenheit 420, a shocking exposé on Carrot Top)



AN INTERVIEW WITH TOBY GARD

THE MAN LARA CROFT CALLS "DADDY"



She's smart, she's British, and she's curvy. Since *Tomb Raider* hit shelves in 1996, we've marveled at Lara Croft's rise through the ranks from temple-scouring heroine to international movie star extraordinaire. Sure, there have been good times and bad, but regardless of the woes she may currently face, her spot in the annals of video game history has already been assured. Though Eidos and Core Design (the publisher and developer, respectively) deserve some credit for this, the real genius behind the game has been out of the limelight for years. Toby Gard, the man who conceived *Tomb Raider*, designed Lara Croft, and originated the ideas that have continued to drive the series, has been working diligently on the Xbox title *Galleon* with his studio, *Confounding Factor*, since 1997. We recently had the pleasure to sit down and chat with Toby about making games and what it was like creating a modern goddess.

GI: How did you get started in game design?

Toby Gard: One of my interests was drawing — characters, essentially. From there, I also got into animation because that was a natural progression for me; I was into comics and posing the characters nicely and stuff like that, and with animation I actually got to make the characters move around. I also very much enjoyed writing stories. So, when it all came together, I was either going to be doing something in animation, or because I liked games and computers, I could do something in that area. I had worked on a bunch of animations at home, and eventually I sent them off and I got a job with Core Design.

What was your official job on the original *Tomb Raider*?

It's difficult to say. I co-wrote the story with the script writer, storyboarded out all of the animations and the cutscenes, flowcharted the level playthrough and design, built and animated the characters and the baddies, plus I built a couple of the levels as well. It was essentially my brainchild, but at the end of the day I was lead artist and designer.

How big was the team that worked on *Tomb Raider*?

It was a core group of six of us. It was myself, the two level artists (who did most of the level work, background, all of that stuff), and the three programmers. But then towards the end of the game we drafted people from all throughout Core to help us out with FMV sequences and other bits and pieces to make sure the game got finished on time. Everything at Core was pretty amorphous as far as how it was organized (or not organized), so I had to coordinate the project, and we had to work together to get all of the pieces together.

What were some of the team's inspirations? *Prince of Persia* and *Indiana Jones* are often mentioned as key precursors to *Tomb Raider*. Are there any others?

In terms of the straight design, I saw *Virtua Fighter* on the Sega Saturn and I remember going, "Wow, that's amazing! We can actually have 3D characters." It was quite shocking to see them moving around, and





moving nicely at that. They looked even better than sprites! [Laughs] It was very impressive at the time. I thought it would be incredible to see those types of characters mixed with the first person 3D stuff that was out there (like Ultima Underworld), and try to make it work like a film. The camera kind of follows the character and the action, so it's kind of like watching a cartoon, but you're inside of it. That was the whole concept behind Tomb Raider.

Can you tell us about some of the choices that had to be made along the path to creating Lara as we know her?

I think a lot of the design decisions on Tomb Raider were reactionary responses. It was made quite clear from high up at Core that if you were going to make a main character, it had to be American, otherwise it wouldn't sell in America. [To me] that sounded like a great reason to try the opposite. [Laughs] So I made her as English as I possibly could, you know? Like, *super* English. And then made a lot of the bad-dies American just to do the opposite of what everyone was doing — not because I hate Americans, understand, but just because I wanted something unique.

So you made a lot of choices just to contradict what was popular?

It wasn't just to be contrary, though. When I was watching everybody play Virtua Fighter, I found that a majority of the guys were playing as the one female character more than all the guy characters. That was interesting to me. And I was also not happy with the fact that games were about killing a lot of people. That's a bit morally dodgy, isn't it? Just going around and killing people constantly. It didn't seem right. That's where the idea came from to use more animals. Although, to be honest with you, it's not very good killing animals, is it? And then there was the fact that I just generally like drawing girls more. It's much more fun. It was a bit of a selfish decision. I thought, "If I'm going to make this game, it might as well be about something that looks really nice and is enjoyable to work with." [Laughs]



How much did Tomb Raider evolve from the team's initial ideas? Did you have to cut out aspects of the game to deal with the technical restrictions of the time?

We couldn't have any outside sections. That was the main technical restriction with the original Tomb Raider. So the ideas we had for bigger, open-ended areas we had to leave out. Also, we didn't really sort out any way to do any decent gunplay between characters. We couldn't have a lot of shootouts, which was a shame because it was a part of the idea of the character, sort a John Woo-style guns blazing type of character. But there are just dogs in the game... That's not really fair — they can't shoot back. Other than those things, we had ultimate freedom. It was like, "Wow! We can do anything!" I

think it was more that we were stoked about what was possible and didn't focus on what we couldn't do.

Did you have any idea just how successful this character was going to be when you were first making the game? Were you shocked at the cult following that Lara attracted?

I was definitely surprised. I kind of felt that it would be big when we were making it, but obviously I never had any concept that it ever could have gotten as big as it did. It's quite bewildering, really. I don't understand how it became so enormous.

You left Core before Lara and Tomb Raider really became a huge success. Do you have any regrets about doing that?

Not really. I think I wouldn't have learned as much as I did going out and doing Confounding Factor and Galleon. I probably would have been too cosseted in a comfortable space, and I would have gotten all egotistical about it if I had stayed. As it is, I didn't really get any money for it, so I don't have to worry about it. It's just another job for me.

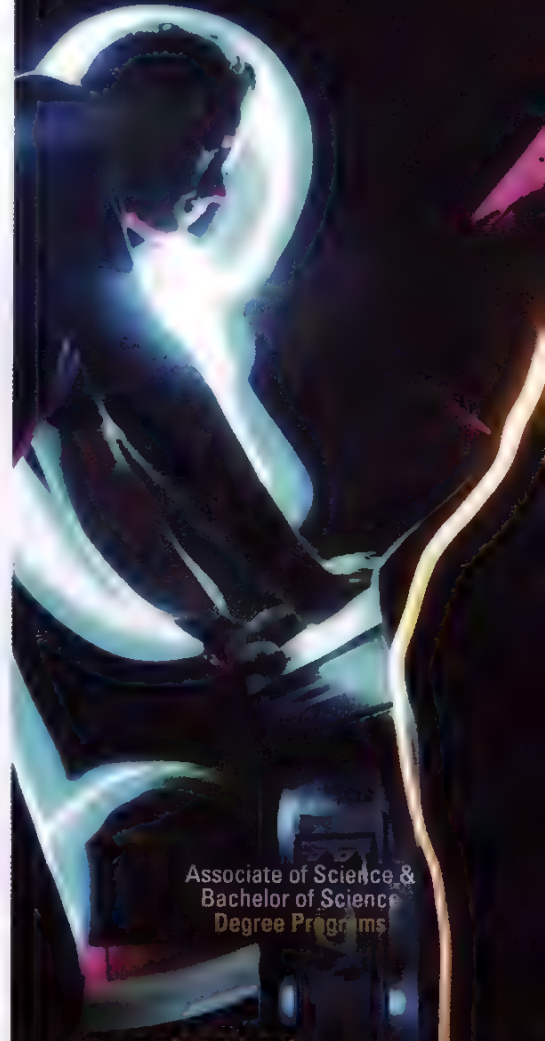
What is Tomb Raider's lasting impact on video games?

That's a hard one. You've got a lot more female characters in games these days — that's for sure. I think that's good. I mean, it sounds good, but I think that it isn't entirely being done in the best way possible. It was also one of the first

(continued on page 128)

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Rap Sheet: Toby Gard

BC RACERS

A game best described as the Flintstones meets Mario Kart, this was the first project Toby worked on at Core. It may have been a forgettable title, but it gave him the chance to pitch the idea for his next game to the top brass.



TOMB RAIDER

The one that started it all. Don't blame Toby for the rest of the series; he may have originated the franchise, but he had no hand whatsoever in driving it into the ground.



GALLEON

A swashbuckling action game that Toby sees as accomplishing many things Tomb Raider couldn't. Galleon's big draw is its expansive, interactive environments that allow players to explore freely in all directions.



(continued from page 127)

proper cross-genre games. It was at the beginning of the whole melding of styles. Talking in terms of genre is virtually worthless these days because so few things fit into the narrow terms that people assign them. Now you have to hyphenate so many things together just to describe a game; it becomes a bit pointless.

Lara obviously went a long way towards introducing sex appeal as a major part of video games. How has this impacted the industry, and has this been for the better or worse?

Well, it depends, because it can be done well and poorly. You can have exploitation, and then you can have something that's genuinely sexy in a good way. There's nothing to be ashamed of with sexiness, but it is more a question of how much taste you use when depicting it. I don't think it's wrong or bad in any way, really, it just seems to be getting out of hand with the old Xtreme Beach Volleyball scenarios. I think that's going a tad too far. That's not really empowering anyone.

Did you ever think about what you might do for a sequel if you had stayed on the team?

Yeah, but the whole point is that it belongs to Core at the end of the day, and it has nothing to do with me anymore. Any ideas I have are a bit irrelevant, because they'd be about what the character used to be, and not what she's become. I don't really even know who Lara is anymore.



With recent games like Ninja Gaiden and Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time, do you think the industry has become more reluctant to accept original characters?

Yeah, I think so. It's definitely a problem. I still can't understand how Beyond Good and Evil hasn't been snapped up by everybody. It's such a brilliant game, with great design as well. And a good female character, too, properly portrayed in a solid and non-exploitative sort of way. It's basically just tops all around, and why she's not as well known as Lara Croft is just weird. I think it must be that there are just so many games coming out, that many of them just get lost in the background noise unless it's something that people have already heard of.

Would you say that Jade from BG&E is your favorite character out there these days?

Yeah, Beyond Good and Evil is my favorite game of the last year. It's hard to come up with a character that really grabs your attention. There are some good games that have characters that are pretty good, but don't necessarily stand out on their own. Like ICO, which was a great game, but brilliant and fun as

the characters are, it's not the same sort of inspirational type of thing. It's more like a work of art, but in terms of gaming, they're not really super heroes. ■■■■

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Eric W.H. Thornton



BLADE RUNNER

> FORMAT PC
> PUBLISHER WESTWOOD STUDIOS

Today's video games are more open-ended than ever before, but how often does a game come along that forces you to choose between killing someone and helping them? Blade Runner took the old point-and-click adventure format and infused it with a depth and complexity that challenged those who played it to re-evaluate not just their view of video games, but life itself.

Set during the same time as the movie of the same name, and featuring characters and locations from both the film and the Philip K. Dick novel from which it was adapted, Blade Runner captures the gritty neon-infused dilapidation of post-apocalyptic Los Angeles with entrancing vividness. You are Ray McCoy, a rookie blade runner charged with the questionable task of hunting down and killing replicants -- bio-mechanical machines that resemble humans in every way.

The game's engine was old for its time, using sprites instead of polygons. Still the pre-rendered backgrounds are colorful, exotic, and immersive. As you desperately try to sort out who is who, you will encounter all kinds of colorful and shady characters whose unique personalities are expertly realized with professional voice talent. As the story moves forward and people live and die because of the choices you've made, you get the feeling that you aren't just working through a preordained sequence of events, but rather interacting with a living, breathing world where your actions have consequences that are subtle and dangerous.

If I had to choose one thing that makes this the greatest game of all time, it wouldn't be the multiple endings, surprise twists, beautiful cinematics, or branching pathways; it would be the moment when you finally track down the game's antagonist, Clovis. There is no grandiose confrontation, no explosive dash between good and evil. Just a man (or something that aspires to be a man), lying in bed and reading quietly from a book of mournful poetry as life and hope slowly leave him. As players



look down at their dying adversary, they are forced to ask just what it means to be human, and whether it is something you are born with or something you earn.

The Many Faces of Lara

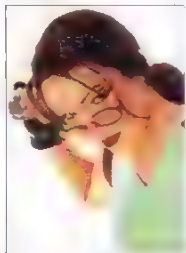
Whereas most video game characters only grace the cover of gaming magazines, the phenomenal reception of Lara Croft led Eidos to hold tryouts for "official" Lara models who would represent the buxom lass at industry events. These models tend to attract almost as much of a cult following as Lara herself, and as a result, a new Lara is cast every year or two in order to avoid any one person from overshadowing the character. Here's a rundown of the lovely ladies that have filled out the English explorer's, um...shoes:

1997



■ Rhona Mitra

1998



■ Nelli McAndrew

1999



■ Laura Weller

2000



■ Lucy Clarkson

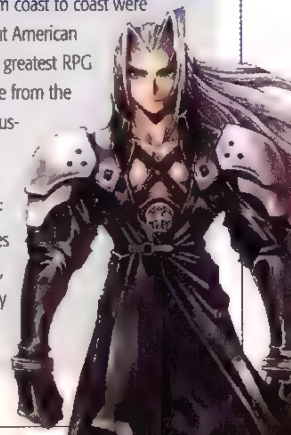
2002



■ Jill de Jong

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

On September 7, 1997, swords from coast to coast were put to shame as Final Fantasy VII hit American shelves. Argued by many to be the greatest RPG ever created, FF VII was a departure from the wizards and dragons fans were accustomed to, but its riveting story and compelling characters were quickly embraced by the gaming public. FF VII single-handedly drove early sales of the fledgling PlayStation console, and it remains the best-selling entry in the series to date.





N64

PAPER MARIO

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME ► **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO ► **DEVELOPER** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS ► **RELEASE** 2001

Since its release in 2001, Paper Mario has amassed a sizable following, as evidenced by the upcoming sequel. Despite the throngs of Nintendo fans who love this quirky title, it isn't actually all that good. Sure, it's a great-looking N64 game – the combination of 2D and 3D elements are uniquely appealing – but outside of the visuals, there's really nothing noteworthy about this game. Obviously intended for novice players, everything about gameplay is extremely basic and will bore anyone with an ounce of familiarity with the RPG genre. Although you'll do a lot of talking to NPCs throughout the course of the game, the story is no deeper than that of the original Super Mario Brothers. Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga proved that these characters can work in an RPG, but Paper Mario is simply too basic to appeal to most RPG gamers. It has a great look to it, and younger players will appreciate its simple charm, but everyone else will simply wonder why people think this title is such a big deal.

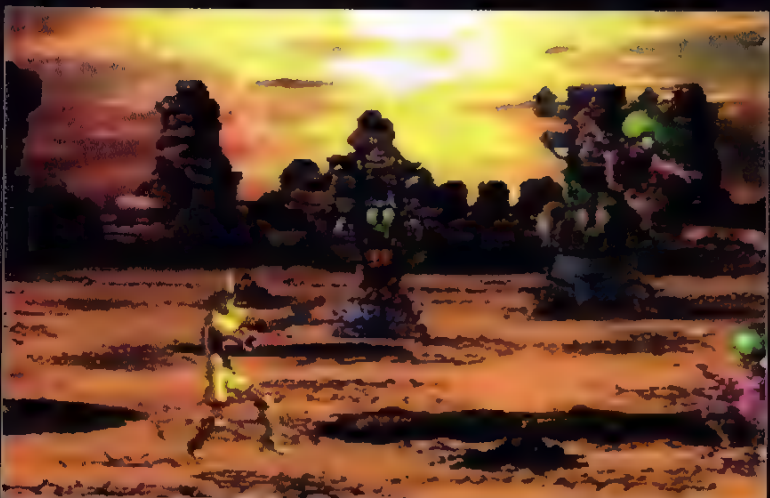
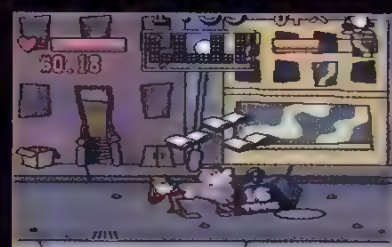


SNES

THE REN & STIMPY SHOW: FIRE DOGS

► **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION ► **PUBLISHER** THQ ► **DEVELOPER** ARGONAUT SOFTWARE ► **RELEASE** 1994

In 1991 *The Ren & Stimpy Show* debuted on Nickelodeon, and suddenly children across America yearned for powdered toast, nipples on their knees, and the Don't Whiz on the Electric Fence board game. Over the years, the show spawned countless products, including an unfortunate series of games across all consoles. This particular disaster, based on a single *Ren & Stimpy* episode, features only two repeating levels. In one, you roam around a fire station collecting pointless garbage. In the other, you catch pointless garbage falling from windows, all the while trying to decipher the game's foggy objectives and sluggish controls. The password screen, in which you dress up a Log with varying accouterments, is the game's only redeeming quality. Thankfully, not many people were exposed to *Fire Dogs'* toxin; it was a rental-only exclusive, so though you probably didn't purchase it, you might have been duped into giving it a try when all of the copies of *Final Fantasy III* were checked out. If so, you quickly learned that shaving a yak is more fun than this baleful slice of pure failure.



SATURN

SCUD THE DISPOSABLE ASSASSIN

► **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION ► **PUBLISHER** SEGASOFT ► **DEVELOPER** SYROX DEVELOPMENTS ► **RELEASE** 1997

It's wonderful to know that there was a time in video game history that independent comic books like *Scud the Disposable Assassin* could be adapted into video games. Unfortunately, the character's Sega Saturn action title simply isn't that good. Visually, it's not bad – the graphics were pretty sharp for the Saturn, and Scud's animations are nice, but gameplay is sadly lacking. The only real challenge in the side-scrolling game is the fact that enemies constantly shoot at you from off screen. The best way to progress through the levels is to stop every few steps and shoot at the unseen area ahead of you. A first-person light gun mode is included as well, which is a nice bonus, but it feels more like a shooting gallery than a full adventure. It's obvious that Scud's developer was interested in making a unique game – the story is funny, the cutscenes are nice, the soundtrack is interesting, and the graphics are decent. However, it's just not much fun to play. Ultimately, *Scud the Disposable Assassin* is a pretty disposable game.



GAMEOVER

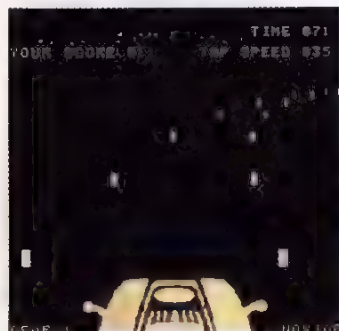
Thank You Mario! But Our Princess Is In Another Castle!

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Vroom! Where would video games be without cars? Driving and racing games are a huge part of the industry, and cars have starred in some of the most memorable titles. Take our auto-erotic trivia challenge, and see how your knowledge compares to some of the most pimpin' rides in the world!

1. What game, released in 1976, is commonly accepted as the first racing video game?

- A. Night Driver
- B. 280-ZZZAP
- C. Speed Freak
- D. Speedy McRaceRace



2. Which Japanese company developed the Tokyo Xtreme Racer series, as well as the Fast and the Furious, Maximum Chase, MRC: Multi-Racing Championship, and several other racing titles?

- A. Genie
- B. Namco
- C. Sega of Japan
- D. Kamek



3. Which of these titles sold approximately 3.4 million copies, making it the most successful racing game to date?

- A. Gran Turismo
- B. Gran Turismo 2
- C. Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec
- D. Furious Karting

4. What 1989 arcade title was the first racing game with polygon-based graphics?

- A. Winning Run
- B. Hard Drivin'

- C. Virtua Racing
- D. Super Chase

5. Mmm...ripoffs! The Simpsons: Hit and Run is obviously patterned after Grand Theft Auto 3. What game inspired the earlier title The Simpsons: Road Rage?

- A. Smashing Drive
- B. California Speed
- C. Need For Speed
- D. Crazy Taxi



6. In 2003, THQ released a Twisted Metal clone starring WWE wrestlers. What was the name of this unloved vehicle combat title?

- A. WWE Ruthless Aggression
- B. WWE Crush Hour
- C. WWE Car Combat
- D. WWE Motor Mania



7. Although known for role-playing games, Square actually produced a number of racing games, including Rad Racer for the NES and Chocobo Racing for the PSone. What is the name of the racer Square released for the PS2 in 2001?

- A. Le Mans 24 Hours



- B. Option Tuning Car Battle Spec-R
- C. Sephiroth Street Syndicate
- D. Driving Emotion Type-S

8. Long before Grand Theft Auto became the world's most notorious video game series, the name belonged to a low-budget car chase film. Which famous director is to blame for the terrible 1977 film Grand Theft Auto?

- A. Elia Kazan
- B. Ron Howard
- C. Billy Wilder
- D. McG



9. Name the incredibly popular racing title pictured below. Come on, you know this one. It's easy.

- A. Spy Hunter
- B. Change Lanes
- C. Pole Position
- D. Turbo



10. Which of the following brand-based racing games is nothing but a product of our sick, sick minds?

- A. Beetle Adventure Racing
- B. Toyota Celica GT Rally
- C. Honda Accord Hot Rod Rally
- D. Ford Truck Mania

BREAKDOWN

14% The percentage that game sales have declined thus far in the UK compared to the same period last year

66% of the Game Informer staff went to see *Spider-Man 2* at the opening midnight showing. Coincidentally, 66% of the staff are huge dorks

0% of the staff attended the first showing of *Catwoman*

216% The amount PS2 sales increased the week after the new \$149.99 price went into effect

55% of the games released by struggling publisher Acclaim in the last fiscal year were for the PS2. 24% were released for Xbox, while 13% were on GameCube

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1
Power Wheels



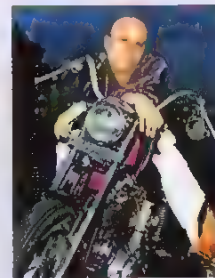
2-3
AMC Gremlin



4-5
Segway



6-7
Toyota Corolla XRS



8-9
Orange County Choppers
Custom Motorcycle



10
Saleen S7

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