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The Future Of RPGs (pg. 78)

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New Screens & Info:

Jade

Empire (pg. 112)



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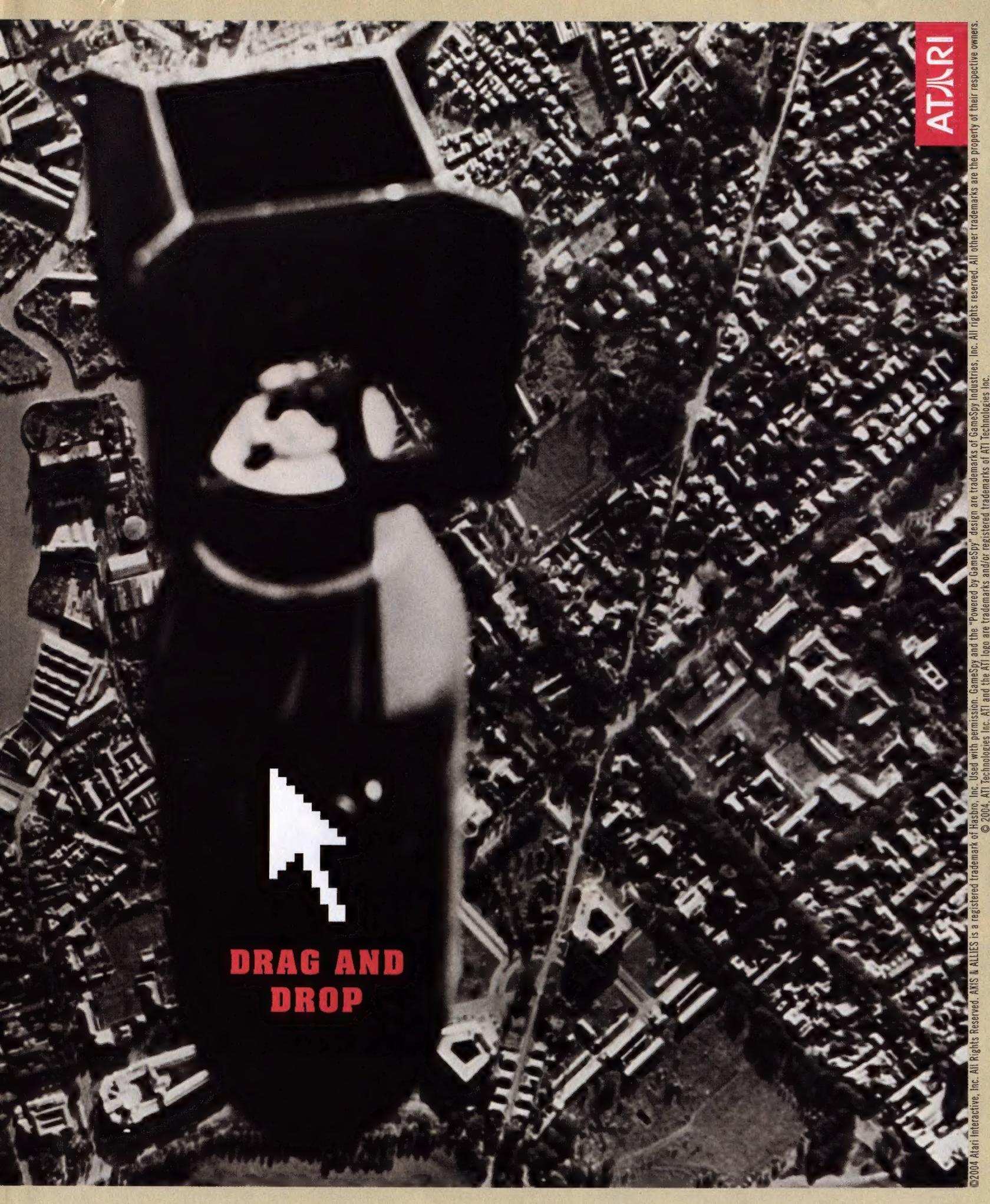
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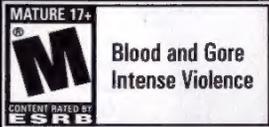
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We all know that Liu Kang and Kung Lao are about kicking ass and taking names. Up until now, however, they've been limited to one opponent at a time. We get the exclusive first look at how their new game, *Shaolin Monks*, opens up the action and promises a whole new level of karmage...er, carnage. Peep it on page 56.



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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



REVIEWING THE REVIEWERS

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I know you do it, and you know you do it, too. Reviewing the reviewers is one of the more amusing aspects of entertainment – be it books, movies, or video games. Because no matter how open-minded you think you are, rating it yourself, then praising those that agree with you and damning those that don't is just plain fun. I can hear the sentence running through your head whether you know it or not: "Can you imagine the nerve of some people disagreeing with me?"

Now just so you are aware that I'm not some evangelist sitting on his high horse, I do it too. I review the reviewers each and every month. Heck, we do it to each other almost daily here at Game Informer. On almost any given morning in this office you can find someone saying "How could [unnamed but most likely wrong person] possibly think that [some game] is better than [some other game]? How could [unnamed but most likely wrong person] think such nonsense!?"

Well, like I've said a million times, reviews are just opinions and sometimes people have opposing views. But let me tell you one thing: Whether I agree with someone on our staff's review or not (and there are times we disagree), I can respect them. I see it every day. This staff works hard. And I can assure you that these review scores aren't reached on some whim, a roll of the dice, or a throw of the dart. Of course, I bring this up this month because we have more than our fair share of controversial reviews, which will in turn fill my email account with readers canceling their subscriptions over this review or that. And to you I say, "Get over it."

Game Informer is here to help you find your way through a market swelling with titles each and every month – a minefield of product, if you will. We are here to help you find a game that perhaps you would have overlooked or to stop you from spending your money on a much-hyped title that falls short. It's just advice, and as such, should be taken with a grain of salt. Do this, and you might just get what you want out of video games and this magazine: entertainment.

Speaking of entertainment, now that my diatribe is over, I can now mention how much this issue kicks ass. Not only does it have a mind-melting number of features, it still has a plethora of previews and reviews that you simply won't find anywhere else.

Oh, and one last thing: a bit of a celebration is in order. Game Informer is now the 48th largest magazine in the nation and growing, and is far and away the biggest video game magazine in the world (beginning patting yourself on the back now). So from the staff and myself, I say thanks for reading. Keep it up and we might just catch *O: The Oprah Magazine* at number 20. And that's really what it is all about isn't it? I know I can't rest until I can prove to the world that video games are bigger than Oprah. Which begs the question: Can you be bigger than Oprah? In the words of Triumph, The Insult Comic Dog, "I kid! I kid!"

Enjoy the issue, and see you here again next month when we unveil yet another gargantuan title to the world.

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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



EA's Wayne Teats smiles while Adam seduces you! That's his "Blue Steel" look & Kato hangs with "The King" Richard Petty, the greatest NASCAR driver of all time! He's cool - unlike that pansy, Tom Cruise-lookalike Jeff Gordon who Andy has a crush on. His cowboy hat could whip Gordon with one feather tied behind its back! 3 At Midway HQ, GI Spy hangs with Mortal Kombat creator Ed Boon and Midway's Tim DaRosa, Natalie Salzman, and Shaun Himmerick 4 The Rainbow Studios' crew [l-r]: Rob Baumstaiger, Pete Reich, Brian Coonce, Rob Cassel (THQ), and Elliot Olson look warily at the unforgiving eye of the GI Spy camera 5 Rockstar Games' Rob Fleischer shows off his prize power strip. It won a blue ribbon at the Steele County Fair last summer! 6 EA's Barbara Gamlen and Alex Hutchinson grab some tasty pizza with the GI gang at Pizza Lucé. When you're visiting downtown Minneapolis, stop by Lucé to have some truly excellent pizza served to you by a stinky crust-punk with a bulling through his nose! 7 Super hottie Rebecca Romijn poses with a Tron 2.0 standee. We really wish she'd quit calling us all the time and asking to hang out. We're busy! 8 Visual Concepts' Anthony Chau sure likes cookies! Just don't feed him after midnight. He turns into a Grinch!



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POLYGON NUPTIALS

In issue #137 I read an e-mail from Alex Coleman ["Supersize," page 14 in Dear GI]. He says that the Master Chief and Samus would be a good couple. I disagree because Master Chief is definitely not gay. Sorry to disappoint you Alex, but it just wouldn't work.

Jill Kleier
Via email

■ Ding, ding, ding – we've found a gamer who's never played a Metroid game through to completion! Jill, listen really carefully, we're going to use our quiet voice here, so pay attention...Samus is a woman – a female asskicker who rocked the gaming world by messing with all of our preconceived notions. She's like the polygonal Susan B. Anthony. And, if there were such a union, can you imagine how awesome a reception in combative space would be?

FOOTBALL SHAKEOUT

I was just wondering how you guys actually came up with your ratings for both football games [ESPN NFL 2K5 and Madden NFL 2005]? I mean, graphically, ESPN is crap. The players are emotionless and look a bit cross-eyed. Now Madden isn't the greatest looking thing in the world, but at least the players show some kind of emotion. Madden's gameplay this year is better than ESPN's as well – I mean, how in the heck can someone like Jerome Bettis outrun DeAngelo Hall? And why is it that the AI can run the hell out of the ball, but when I try to, it doesn't work? I will give it to the ESPN guys when it comes down to presentation, because the SportCenter spots are great, even though Berman should be bigger. Maybe next year we can have a football game that leaves a great taste in everyone's mouth. Keep up the good work.

Karl Williams
Via aol.com

This year I have played both ESPN and Madden. As a Madden lover, I was thinking that Madden would crush ESPN, but I was completely wrong – ESPN beats Madden in just about every category.

J. Hunter
Via email

I can't possibly understand why ESPN NFL 2K5 is even in the same league as Madden NFL 2005. Just like everyone else out there, I bought both of them (the only reason I bought ESPN is because of its dirt cheap price). I honestly would be totally pissed off if I actually bought ESPN NFL 2K5 for \$50. If I wanted to play crap in my Xbox, I would do my business in the DVD tray. There are so many things that are ridiculously inconvenient in ESPN NFL 2K5. Madden is a far superior football game than ESPN can ever claim to be, especially since Madden changed the graphics engine and/or the physics on the field. That was one of my biggest complaints last year, but the game runs so fluidly now.

Brian Wersal
Via hotmail.com

Madden will always be better than ESPN. Yeah ESPN has the day-by-day schedule, but who wants to be that in-depth? I have always loved Madden, and always will.

Jon Crawford
Via email

■ We, and many recent converts to the ESPN fold, fully back up the scores given to this year's football simulation titles (ESPN NFL 2K5 got a 9.5 and Madden NFL 2005 received an 8.75). The reasons are stated pretty clearly in the reviews, but even with a clear conscience, we knew that the selection would be controversial. Still, ESPN is worth a go for all football fans – don't let fanboy bias keep you away from the best pigskin title this year.

GRRRL POWER

I am writing in response to the letter "Dreamy" in your September issue [#137]. While it is true that "a woman of the breed is rare indeed," I, for one, would burn a gaming mag that had perfume tear-outs. I read magazines like GI because I am a gamer. I don't spend my time drooling over blonde playboys and wondering what color to paint my nails. I spend my time drooling over La Pucelle; Tactics and wondering how to best crush yonder basilisk. If all the gaming magazines started looking like *Cosmo* or *Entertainment Weekly*, where would I get my updates and previews? Give us some credit – the gamer girls are out there!

Stephanie Miller
Via yahoo.com

What the hell? What does he [C.M. Ruiz] mean by, "include more perfume tear-outs" in GI? If any magazine I read ever did that I'd burn it, and yes, I'M A GIRL. My friends read GI (they're girls too!) and I have to hide mine from them! I think GI is perfect and if you ever put any makeup sh@! in GI I'll kill you all! C.M. Ruiz, you are a complete dumbass.

Katie Kelly
Via email

I just got my issue of Game Informer today, and saw not one, but two letters that pissed me off. First to Mr. C.M. Ruiz: You want "hot girls" to read GI? Nice. I bet you that plenty of girls that read GI are great, even if they aren't "hot." And to Ms. Carin Miley: Sometimes I find myself embarrassed to be a female gamer, and this is one of those times. A great gaming magazine like GI is about hot video games, not hot guys. Go read a *Glamour* magazine or something if you're concerned about looking at guys. GI, don't listen to these dopes. Your magazine is perfect the way it is!

Beth J.
Via aol.com

■ So the new column discussing "What's In And Out – Lipliner 101" isn't going to go over terribly well? What about our planned "Hottest Men of Upper Midwest Swing States" feature? Oh no, we're going to have to redo all of our exclusives for the next six months. Even "How To Trick Your Man Into Making Tex-Mex" is going to have to get scrapped. Crap! Well, if our email box is proof of an earlier suspicion, Lisa isn't the only girl who reads the mag, and Stephanie, Katie, Beth and all of the others who wrote in should know one thing: We just want to write about games, so it'll all be okay. Okay?

HALO TENSION

I'm a "Southpaw" who wants to play Halo 2. Believe me, I've tried the default setting in the first Halo, but the N64 and Turok are forever ingrained in the way I play – in Halo, that's a kiss of death. The thumb that has to press

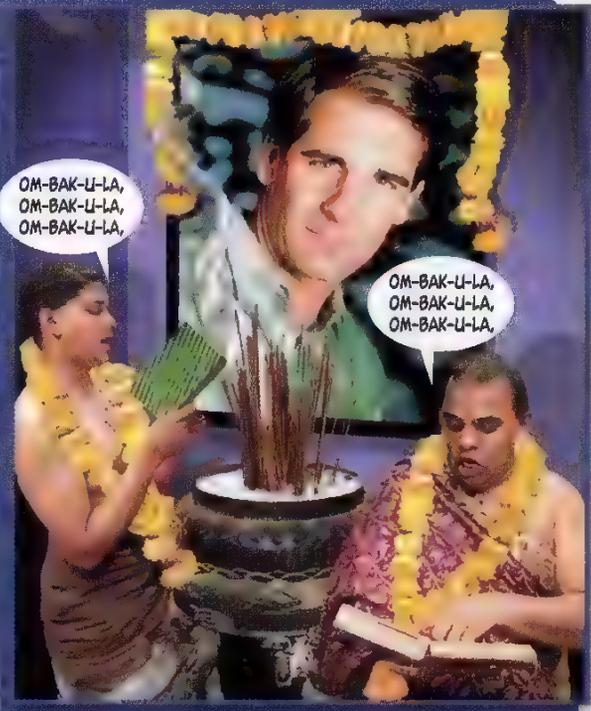
QUANTUM FORGIVENESS

I am writing in regards to your description of the *Quantum Leap* DVD in the Gear section of issue #136. I should first say that I feel just as strongly as you do on the issue of the Bakula – I, too, would be in line to dish out the harshest of punishments to those who do not appreciate the Bakula.

That being said, I think it is important to note that some of your younger readers may not have seen or even be aware of the amazing show that is *Quantum Leap*. Worse yet, they may only be familiar with Mr. Bakula from his role on *Star Trek: Enterprise*, which I think we can all agree is, to put it nicely, a sad and pathetic entry into the well-loved *Star Trek* universe. I certainly do not blame the Bakula for *Enterprise's* failure. If anything, he is the only reason I would allow myself to view such an abysmal show at all.

The point is that we can not "hunt down" and "wipe from the earth" the younger generation that may have never experienced *Quantum Leap*. It would not be civilized. Now, suggesting they are familiar with QL, and they still do not appreciate the Bakula, well...obviously some type of severe action will need to be carried out.

Atlas T. Moon
via email



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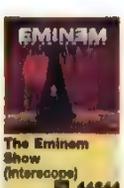
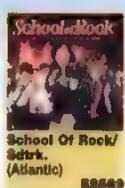
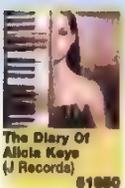
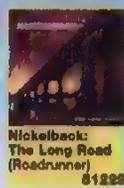
■ We don't generally concern ourselves with the concepts of "civility" and "honor," but when it's thrown in our face like this, maturity and reason must be feigned. True, it would be mean, and maybe even judgmental, for us to rid the Earth those who don't offer proper respect to Bakula...but still, the man deserves our reverence. Ignorance is no defense.



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the buttons controls character movement on the right thumbstick. It's especially unfair in multiplayer, and I understand Halo 2's multiplayer incorporates jumping a lot more.

I have sent suggestions to Microsoft and Bungie via e-mail to map the A, B, X, and Y buttons to the directional pad for the left-handed configuration. I believe this would be a huge help not just for me, but for many other players. To date I've yet to receive any specific response.

What do you think of the idea? This isn't begging for some feature or other; it's a matter of all players being able to control and compete on equal footing. Somehow I think such a suggestion coming from Game Informer might make more impact than an email from a random gamer.

Aaron Marshall
Via earthlink.net

■ Well, to all the lefties in the house, the news is that (as of press time) Halo 2's controller configurations are effectively the same as the first game. Granted, the left trigger now manages a secondary weapon (as well as grenades), but otherwise it's nearly identical. If those look-and-move controls left you out in the cold, we suggest that you A) become right-handed or B) start practicing – those Live folks will hand your ass right back in a neat little package before you can say, "I love bees, too."

HORROR ROOTS

I was reading the "Classic GI" section of issue #135 ["Playing Scared," page 132] – it was a great article about the evolution of horror games and how popular they are. I know all of the mentioned games were very influential in the development of this genre, but you overlooked a game that I believe is one of the most important factors in the evolution of survival horror. Sweet Home, released for the Nintendo Famicom by Capcom in late 1989, was one

of Capcom's first attempts at a new direction of gaming. It later evolved into the Resident Evil and Dino Crisis franchises.

With gameplay elements similar to that of Resident Evil, Sweet Home challenges the player to solve multiple puzzles as well as fight zombies and evil baby doll spirits that attack at certain

hot zones throughout the game. More of an RPG than an action title, it delivers surprisingly deep gameplay for something that came out in 1989.

In any case, if any survival horror gamers haven't played or even heard of Sweet Home, trust me, they would want to. It's slightly different in composition and gameplay than its modern counterparts, but it is definitely worth a try.

Bruce N.
Via hotmail.com

■ Capcom's Sweet Home was based on (and according to some sources, was released on the same date as) the Japanese gore-flick of the same name. Because of Nintendo of America's stringent licensing requirements during the era, it never came to America. Apparently, the company didn't appreciate the decapitation, random corpses, and cleaved bodies that the game pioneered. Still, the title has its fans because of the puzzles, item management, multiple endings, and macabre story. In a handful of interviews, members of the first Resident Evil development team often cited Sweet Home as an inspiration for their classic horror masterpiece.

ENVELOPE ART



JOHN MUNGIELLO

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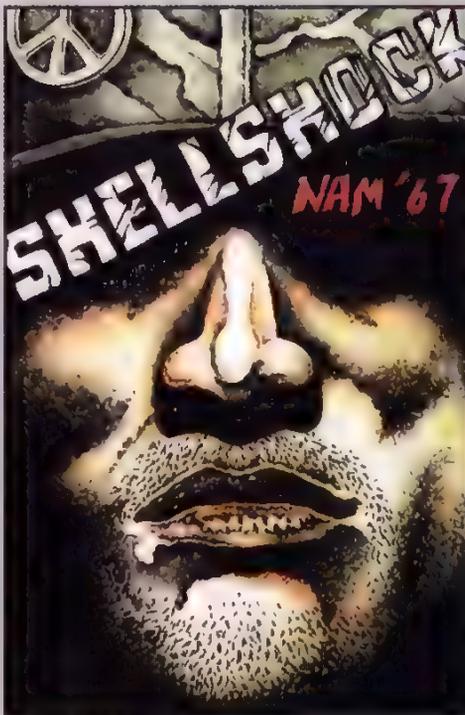
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RICHARD ROBERTS

You'd look surly too if you had a pocket watch crammed up your...nevermind.



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Apparently Spira has a booming mail-order bride business



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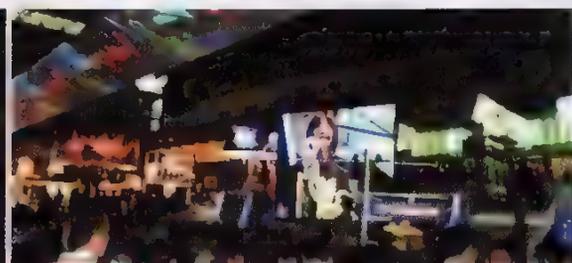
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TOKYO GAME SHOW 2004

For the past few years, the Tokyo Game Show has been gradually diminishing in both excitement and importance. In many ways, it's a reflection of the struggling Japanese video game market. Has the country which was once considered the center of the video game universe lost its passion for games? If you look at this year's show, the answer would be absolutely not. Energized by upcoming handhelds from both Sony and Nintendo, this year's show was the biggest ever.

While Nintendo reportedly asked all third-party publishers not to display DS titles at the show, PSP was there in all its glory, and we got our first chance to wrap our hands around the system. Over the next couple of pages, you will find out more key details on the games themselves. However, as you might expect, many of them are pretty typical of first-generation product.

The unit itself is impressive. It feels light for its size, but looks huge once you start staring at its 4.3-inch widescreen display. For almost every game, the unit is comfortable in your hand, however there were a couple of times when playing Konami's Coded Arms that its complex first-person shooter controls made using the analog stick and holding the unit a tad uncomfortable.

To prove that it was indeed final hardware and not running on hidden development boxes, Sony had ladies with the units tethered to their hips throughout its booth. The

display was clogged with long lines and throngs of gamers interested in both the PSP and the lovely models. You could feel the excitement the PSP was generating, which makes one wonder whether Nintendo's decision to not attend or let third-parties show software was a wise one.

Some speculated that Nintendo didn't have enough of the newly designed units ready to go, while other industry pundits offered up the theory that Nintendo was trying to avoid a one-on-one confrontation with the PSP.

Whatever the true reason, the lack of DS product was disappointing. Sega did manage to have an interactive kiosk showing a demo of the DS title Project Rub on hand, but without a playable version most of the game's genius was lost. One of its innovative concepts we were told about involved a woman stuck in a sea of sharks. To reduce her, the game forces you to carefully blow on the DS's microphone to create "wind" and push a sailboat to save her.

Throughout the rest of the convention center, it was madness as usual. From the endless mobs surrounding the Square Enix booth dying to get a look at Final Fantasy VII: Dirge of

Cerberus (for more turn to page 85) to the Xbox faithful playing Halo 2, the show was easily one of the best in years.



news

PSP PLAYABLE!

BUT SONY MUM ON DATE AND PRICE

Although E3 was our first viewing of Sony's PSP, the Tokyo Game Show let us dive in and get some quality hands-on time with the handheld, as well as see a large number of its titles. Unfortunately, Sony itself wasn't as forthcoming when asked about the PSP's price and exact release date.

"We hope to announce the price and release date of the PSP after we hear the voices of our users, distributors, and developers at the Tokyo Game Show," said PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi at a Sony press conference. The PSP is expected to hit America in the first quarter of 2005.

He did hint, however, that it will likely retail for more than the Nintendo DS, which will cost \$149 when released on November 21. Kutaragi said that he believed the PSP could survive and succeed even if it was more than \$149, because Sony sees the PSP as being positioned a different kind of handheld than the DS.

As for the public getting an exact release date,

Kutaragi said that it would be determined by software. Although mass production of the PSP is complete and the unit is ready to launch, Kutaragi doesn't want a shortage of software after it goes on sale. "It wouldn't be good if there were a stack of games released at launch, and then a long period afterward without game releases." The handheld's launch did get a software boost, however, as Electronic Arts announced that it would release *Need for Speed Underground Rivals* and *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* with the system. Sony says that 46 new titles are now in development for the PSP, bringing the total number of games expected to 105. Across the next few pages, you'll get your first look at 20 of them. Please note that some of these titles are not confirmed for U.S. release, and the publisher info listed applies only to Japan.

In other PSP news, it was also revealed at TGS that the unit would allow MP3 playback, and according to *Popular Science Magazine*, the battery of the PSP would last eight hours while playing games.

■ (left) Famed Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi takes the PSP for a test drive (right) Thousands of showgoers got their hands on a unit, too



▼ PSP at TGS



APE ESCAPE

FORMAT: PSP **PUBLISHER:** Sony Computer Entertainment

Now you can have monkeys in your pocket! The popular simian-snagging series is coming to PSP with two new titles. This game will play like its console forebears, complete with button-headed primates.



ARMORED CORE: FORMULA FRONT

FORMAT: PSP **PUBLISHER:** From Software

This mech combat game deviates a bit from the familiar Armored Core formula. You won't actually control the mechs yourself; instead, your job is to create a team of mechs from hundreds of parts, tell them what strategies to employ, send them into battle, and then watch the chaos that ensues.



HEAVEN'S GATE

FORMAT: PSP **PUBLISHER:** Sony Computer Entertainment

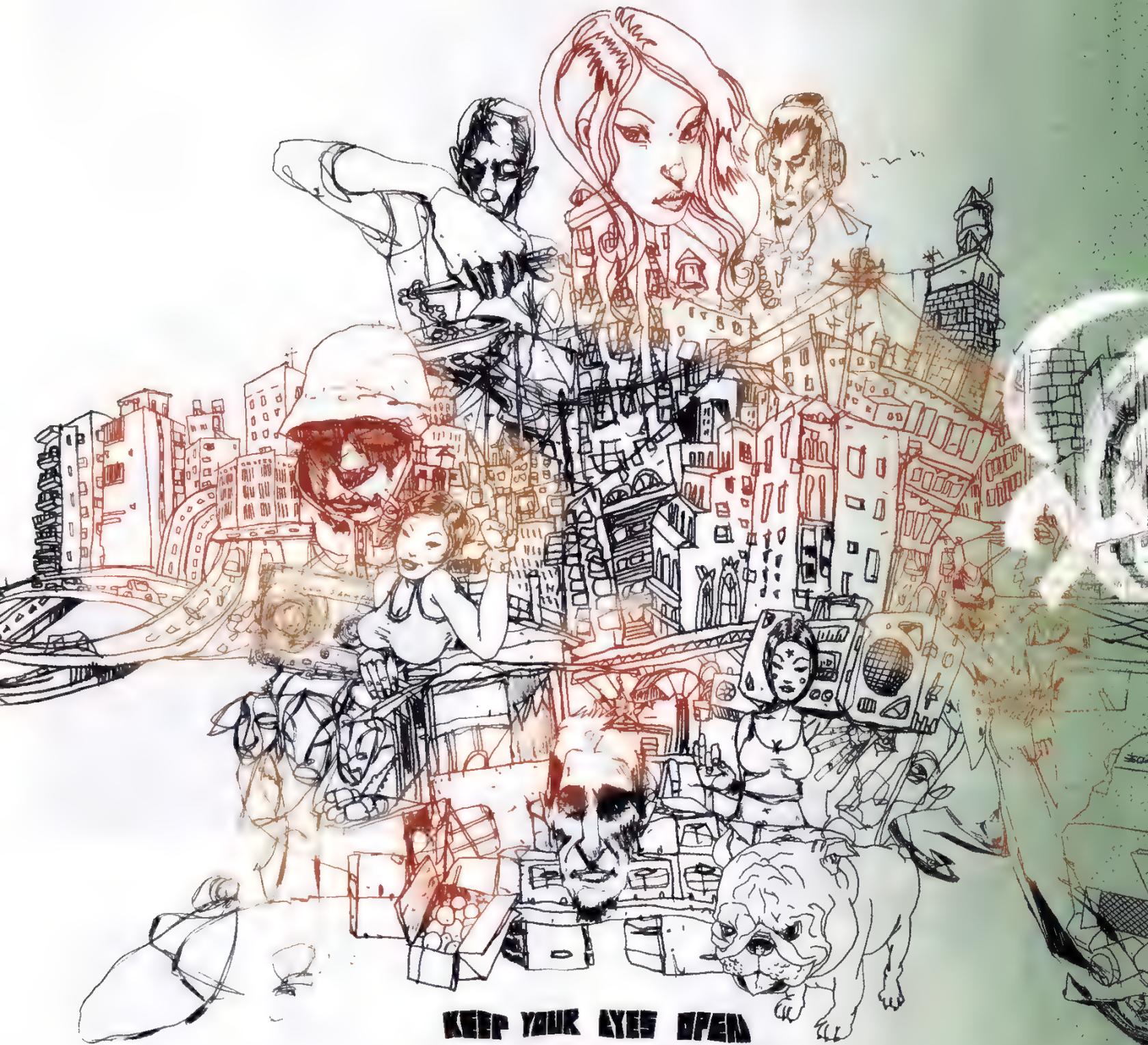
There is very little information about this title, other than that it is called "Tenchi no Mon" in Japan. It is listed as an action/RPG with a focus on sword fighting.



HOT SHOTS GOLF

FORMAT: PSP **PUBLISHER:** Sony Computer Entertainment

You'll be amazed how similar the new PSP version of Hot Shots appears when compared to the recent PS2 game. As it is, the new title looks fantastic, and all of the familiar aspects of the series are present, including the three-click shot mechanic and quirky sound effects featured in previous titles.



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games

METAL GEAR ACID

GOTTA KILL 'EM ALL!

TOKYO
GAME
SHOW
2004



After all this time, guards are surprised to see Snake



Your actions depend on the hands you are dealt

FORMAT: PSP
PUBLISHER: Konami



Familiar foes in unfamiliar territory



Instead of using item cards, you can also equip them



Life 200/200 → 800/010

Terrorists are apparently using overhead projectors for their nefarious plots



Teriko joins Solid Snake as a playable character

As Sony unveiled its lineup of PSP titles at its E3 press conference in May, no game was greeted with as much uproarious applause as Metal Gear ACID. Despite some skepticism about Snake's ability to sneak away from the stealth genre, this strategy title remains one of the most highly anticipated for the sleek new handheld. From the quality time we recently spent with Snake, we can say that he is taking the transition very well indeed.

The first shock to overcome is the fact that all of Snake's actions are performed by playing various cards featuring different weapons and abilities. For instance, if you want to shoot an enemy, you'll need to play a weapon card from your hand. However, building from this simple concept, the game becomes remarkably complex. By taking into account enemy positioning and the currently available set of actions, players will complete a series of objectives while avoiding detection. You can even combine cards like SOCOM and Head Shot for more devastating attacks. Of

course, as you progress through levels, you'll acquire new cards to add to your repertoire, as well as entirely new decks with greatly expanded skills.

The initial deck contains cards based on moves available in Metal Gear Solid, but as you collect the decks from other games in the series, you gain additional skills that were introduced in those titles, such as hanging from railings in MGS 2. Even skills unique to the upcoming Snake Eater will be available, but (not surprisingly) no one at Konami is talking about them yet.

Despite the new method for making the action unfold, ACID is still a part of the Metal Gear canon. Occurring after the events of Sons of Liberty, the legendary soldier Solid Snake is once again taken out of retirement to battle a volatile group of terrorists demanding control over a mysterious research project known as Pythagoras. Somewhere along the way, he meets up with a woman named Teriko, who will also be a playable character during the mission. Apart from a story filled with twists and

turns, players can also expect some trademark Metal Gear moves and characters. For instance, the cardboard box will be returning to lend Snake some conspicuous cover, and familiar faces like Meryl, Roy Campbell, and Grey Fox will all grace the fronts of cards (whether or not they have roles beyond that is unknown).

Much like many other aspects of the Metal Gear series, nothing about ACID is as it seems – not even the title. Besides sounding really cool, ACID is actually an acronym for "Action Combat Intelligence Duel," highlighting the multiple approaches taken with the gameplay style. But there's still an even deeper connection: "ACID is also in reference to burning away the old game to come up with something new," said project manager Shinta Nojiri. Comments like these simply cement the fact that though it isn't the Metal Gear Solid derivative some fans were hoping for, Metal Gear ACID has all of the depth and strategy it needs to emerge as its own compelling series.



Boss battles still have that epic quality



A grid-based movement system helps Snake maneuver through his mission

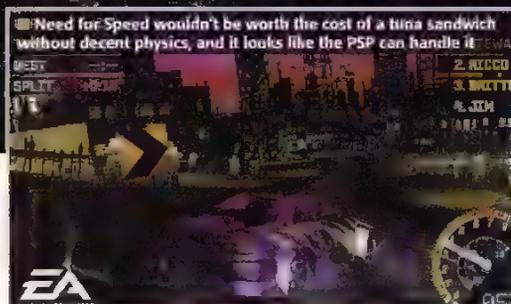
games

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND RIVALS

EA'S SPEEDSTER RACES ONTO PSP



FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts



Need for Speed wouldn't be worth the cost of a tuna sandwich without decent physics, and it looks like the PSP can handle it



Monster hills and oncoming traffic are clearly included



Close quarters and nice lighting make this tunnel look intense

Everyone knows how elated we were with EA's console juggernaut *Need for Speed: Underground*. What's even more exciting is that, from what we've seen, the PSP edition of the series is shaping up to be just as much fun.

We talked with David McCarthy, producer on *Need for Speed Underground Rivals*, about what's going on with this landmark handheld title and what the team is doing to customize the portable experience. "A lot of work has been done on the visual language on the track. There are a lot of cues that help you drive on a small screen," says McCarthy. "We actually size up the cars and make the body kits more extreme [so that they're] easier to see."

Other planned eye-candy includes visible neon kits and the series' trademark light trails, nitrous blurs, and highly reflective environments. *Rivals* will feature all of the customization options included in the console predecessor, as well as an increase on the effect that these updates will make on car performance. EA is keeping mum on specific makes and models, but we do know that most (and possibly all) of the vehicles are new and will fall conveniently into two neat categories — American muscle and Japanese street rides.

With this TGS showing we're also learning a lot about the gameplay and modes. There will be 10 all-new tracks

for players to rip through in first- or third-person perspective. Multiplayer head-to-head competitions are confirmed and other "PSP specific modes" have been hinted at in the company's press materials. No matter what the specifics, the multiplayer sessions will be entirely wireless. Surely playing off of the *Rivals* moniker, the head-to-head competition results will be tracked and, during any subsequent matches with the same opponent, the statistics of your shared races will be displayed.

Besides the look, the cars, and the competition, the other trademark feature of *NFS:U* was the soundtrack. McCarthy assured us that, with regard to the tunes, there will be "no compromises" allowed. We weren't given a track list, but McCarthy did seem at a loss for words when we asked about the possibility of being able to listen to the game's licensed songs on the PSP even when you're not playing. We can only hope this cool feature does, in fact, become a reality.

Electronic Arts has confirmed that *Need for Speed Underground Rivals* is a launch title for the PSP, which means that we'll see it sometime in the spring of 2005. Judging by our hands-on time and the new info we uncovered, it could be a very lovely slice of gaming bliss.



▼ PSP at TGS



VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: THE CHAOS TOWER
FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Capcom

A part of the series known as *Darkstalkers* in the U.S., *Vampire Chronicles* is a 2D fighter in the vein of *Street Fighter II*. Expect to see 18 playable characters as well as head-to-head network play. The standard six-button Capcom control will also be used. Although details are scarce, *The Chaos Tower* is believed to be a compilation of the three *Darkstalkers* titles that have been released stateside.



SHUTOKOU BATTLE: ZONE OF CONTROL
FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: TGA

Known as *Tokyo Extreme Racer* in North America, Genki's racing series will be coming to PSP with *Shutokou Battle: Zone of Control*. In this take on street racing, you roam around the city looking for races against rivals. Flash your high beams and the battle is on. This PSP entry already delivers a smooth framerate and nicely modeled cars, and can only improve between now and release.



GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX
FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: SCEI

Masamune Shirow's manga/anime masterpiece is getting a new video game adaptation on PSP, courtesy of SCEI. Based on the trailer we saw, this is a first-person shooter that already looks pretty nice and features the clearly recognizable characters (and art style) from the anime series of the same name. Even the beloved Tachikoma make an appearance! Here's hoping that the source material receives the treatment it deserves.



THE GAGHARV (WORKING TITLE)
FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Bandai

Very little is known about this title right now, other than that it looks like an old-school, hand-drawn RPG romp. It seems that the battles may well be *Tales of Symphonia* or *Lunar*-esque, with a separate quasi-tactical combat screen coming up after your party encounters enemies in the overworld map. Also, the English translation is already underway, so it's a pretty safe bet that this title is coming to the U.S.

games

GRAN TURISMO 4

RETAIL DATE SET, ONLINE FEATURES PULLED



FORMAT: PlayStation 2
PUBLISHER: Sony Computer Entertainment America

Shocking the gaming public, Sony Computer Entertainment and developer Polyphony Digital have dropped the online portion of Gran Turismo 4. The game's American release date has been pushed back until December 14, and during its Tokyo Game Show press conference the company even admitted that it could fall further, saying it was "trying to hit that date." In other bad news for the title, Sony confirmed that GT 4 will not utilize the hard drive, something that Polyphony had planned on doing a year ago.

Online play, however, is not totally lost. Sony plans to provide the feature in a stand-alone Gran Turismo offering to be available sometime next year. It is unknown how much this extra GT title will cost, or what additional cars, tracks, or features (if any) will be available. Polyphony Digital president Kazunori Yamauchi said that the dropping of online was due to the "challenges" of the European and Japanese online infrastructure, which would have meant the game couldn't have come out this year. GT 4 will, however, support LAN play for up to six players.

Despite these setbacks, Sony was able to offer some good news for GT fans. It will now contain B-Spec Mode, a feature that lets players coach on-track drivers. You will give instructions to your driver throughout the race (which you'll see as if it was a replay of a traditional GT race), telling him to pass certain cars, pit, or drive with one of five aggression levels. Racing on the edge, however, can lead to mistakes, which your driver will make if you push him too hard.

Yamauchi also confirmed that the game will ship with over 650 cars, and your garage can now store over 1,000 vehicles. GT 4 will also utilize Dolby Pro-Logic II. During Yamauchi's demonstration of GT 4, he also unveiled four new tracks (the title will feature over 50): El Capitan in Yosemite, Infineon Raceway, Suzuka, and the Twin Ring Motegi circuits. The title will include drag racing on the Las Vegas strip and a new ice rally course (shown above) has been added.

▼ PSP at TGS



DYNASTY WARRIORS

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Koei

There is no word yet on how this iteration differs from any of the others in the series, but that should come as no surprise to anyone who has ever played these games before. Zing!



LUMINES

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Bandai

We can't wait for more details on this music game from Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the producer responsible for such cult hits as Rez and Space Channel 5. From what we've seen, his newest creation is a sort of puzzle game where you must carefully observe and react to complex patterns of light and sound.



POPOLOCROIS

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Sony Computer Entertainment

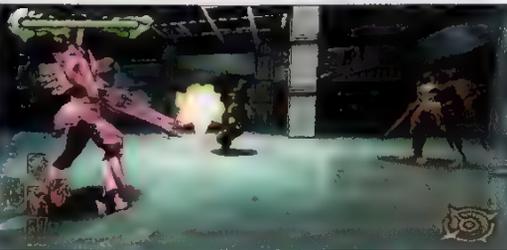
This title is part of a long-running game and anime series about the peaceful fantasy kingdom of Popolocrois. This iteration details the ordeals of a young and inexperienced prince named Pinon.



TALES OF ETERNIA

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Namco

Sony fans who were deprived of the excellent Tales of Symphonia on GameCube should rejoice, as the next installment is heading to the PSP. We saw some gameplay of the new RPG, and are impressed by the well-animated characters and vivid backgrounds.



REN-GOKU: THE TOWER OF PURGATORY

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Sony Computer Entertainment

Acclaimed manga artist Jun Suemi has designed the characters, and we're excited about the game's concept - it is loosely based on the Purgatory cantos of Dante's Divine Comedy, and is a world-spanning quest of personal redemption. Deep subject matter, but don't worry - there's plenty of stuff to blow up along the way.

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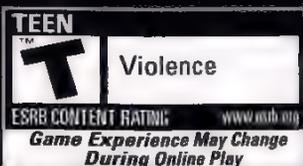
STAR WARS GALAXIES

JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED

Hundreds of thousands of *Star Wars* fans have immersed themselves in the epic struggle for the Galactic Empire in the highly successful massively multiplayer online game, *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided*. Now, *An Empire Divided* expands into space with the release of its first expansion, *Star Wars Galaxies: Jump To Lightspeed*. Experience a whole new level of action-oriented gameplay and content that lets you jump into the cockpit of classic *Star Wars* starships and join the fight for the Galactic Empire.

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games

WANDA AND THE COLOSSUS

GIANT NEW FRANCHISE FROM ICO CREATORS

FORMAT: PlayStation 2
PUBLISHER: Sony Computer Entertainment America



ICO may not have been a hit in the sales department, but the 2001 PlayStation 2 game garnered a sizeable cult following. A sequel has long been rumored (dubbed NICO), but the team behind the game (including ICO art director Fumito Ueda and producer Kenji Kaido) were at work on something else. The pair recently debuted their creation – Wanda and the Colossus – a game which isn't a sequel to ICO, but is instead an all-new journey from the internal Sony team that shares the same captivating look as that revered title. Wanda and the Colossus is exclusive to the PS2, and should come out in Japan next year. A U.S. release has not been officially announced, but is expected.

Wanda is not the game's main character, but rather a fallen girl whom you, a young hero with a trusty sword and steed, must revive by defeating the towering beasts of this mysterious land. Similar to ICO, the world of Wanda has a barren, ethereal quality. In the trailer for the game, the hero places the limp body of Wanda on a shrine. Emboldened by his mission, he draws his sword and rides through the land, soon encountering one of its giants.

As you can see from the screens, these titular nemeses aren't just tall, they are absolutely huge. How can you defeat such a creature? By mounting a full-frontal assault. After dodging an earth-shaking blow, the giant's sword becomes momentarily lodged into the ground. This is your opportunity to leap upon its hand and scamper up its arm, clinging to the beast's body with the R1 button. Believe it or not, this is where things get complicated. Making your way up is not easy. Rather, it's almost like a maze, requiring the player to find the correct route to the appropriate weak point on the creature which can then be exploited. You'll encounter puzzles along the way, and the layout of the beast may even change as you make your way forward. In the video we saw, our hero's journey ended atop the head of this colossus, where he plunged his sword into the monster's brain, prompting a geyser of black blood to spew forth. Other enemies require the use of your steed, who will act as a semi-automatic ride during combat, avoiding obstacles to leave you free to do battle.

Does Sony have another cult hit on its hands? We believe Wanda and the Colossus has all the ingredients to be much more than that.



■ During battles your horse will be controlled semi-automatically



■ Your horse just lost 10 pounds out its back end



■ You'll have to maneuver around the obstacles on its body like they are puzzles



TOHKO
GAME
SHOW
2004

▼ PSP at TGS



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: EA Sports
Everyone's favorite golf sim looks truly incredible on the brightly lit PSP. You'll have 12 of the top PGA courses, and not only will you be able to play against golfing legends like Arnold Palmer and Vijay Singh, but also against your friends over the new Wi-Fi connection, which will include full stat tracking and wagering options. Also, the PSP version will feature the famous analog swing.



CODED ARMS

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Konami
Coded Arms is a survival horror FPS created exclusively for the PSP. Based on a video shown at TGS, we were very impressed by the game's gorgeous graphics. Coded Arms appears to be set in a universe akin to the Alien movies, as you dispatch strange lifeforms to the great beyond with an impressive assortment of weapons.



YS: THE ARK OF NAPISHTIM

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Konami
The long-running Ys RPG series received its sixth installment earlier this year in Japan, and Konami is working on bringing it to PS2 and PSP for 2005.



PUZZLE BOBBLE POCKET

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Taito
Also known as Bust-A-Move Pocket, this game is the same popular bubble-popping puzzle that has appeared on just about every platform since the dawn of time.



PUYO POP FEVER

FORMAT: PSP PUBLISHER: Sega
Those little jelly-like Puyos are coming to Sony's new handheld. The graphics look crisp and bright, and we can only hope that we'll get to tackle each other in hours of puzzling fun via the PSP's wireless connection.

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING PS2

SEXY NEW DESIGN FOR CONSOLE



WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

This new PS2, although much smaller, enjoys all the same functionality of the current unit, save for a couple of points. It does not support the hard drive, but the broadband and analog modem jacks are now built into the unit. Also added is an infrared receiver for the DVD remote. The iLink port, however, has been removed.

■ A closeup of the back of the new unit. The dial-up connection exclusive to the U.S. model is not shown

■ The PS2 is now one-third as thick, an inch less in width, and three inches shorter

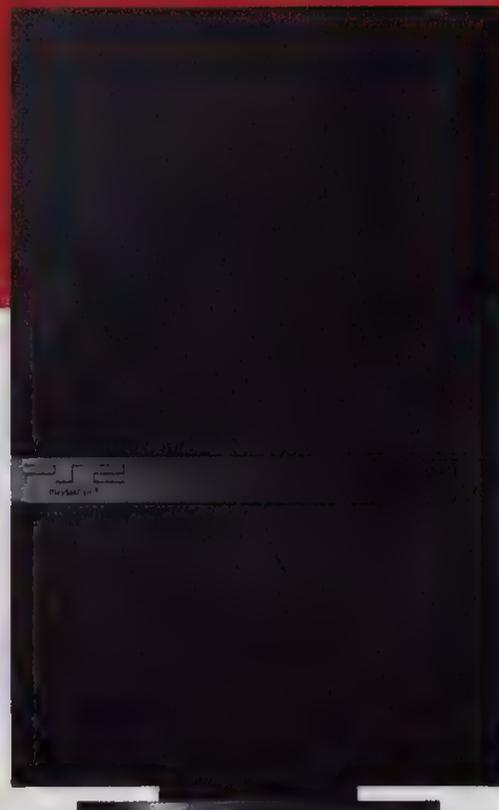


■ PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi with the newest addition to the family

Confirming rumors that have been swirling for months, Sony followed in the footsteps of the PSone and introduced a slimmed-down model of the PlayStation 2 (SCPH-7001 CB in America) that will begin to phase out the current version as of November 1. This new PS2 is half the weight, one-third the thickness, and several inches smaller than the old model. Sony says that it uses fewer parts and therefore cuts down on production costs. However, this new PS2 will remain at its current price of \$149.

All the functionality of the current PS2 is still there -- except for the hard drive and iLink port. The unit comes with a built-in broadband adapter, and U.S. models will also exclusively feature a dial-up modem port (not shown in these pictures) for those with 56K connections. Otherwise, this PS2 houses two slots each for controllers, memory cards, and USB connections. There is also a digital optical output in the back. DVD playback functionality remains (there is also an IR port for the DVD remote), and one controller is included in the box. Of course, this new PS2 will play all of the games that the current model does. However, without hard drive support, *Final Fantasy XI* cannot run on this model.

■ This flip-top disc lid design is one of the reasons that the unit is one-third as thick, half the weight, and cheaper to produce



"We did it for PlayStation, and now we've done it for PlayStation 2," commented Sony Computer Entertainment Europe president David Reeves. "This totally redesigned, network-ready model will demonstrate that PlayStation has once again the design flair and innovation that has made PlayStation the world's best-loved and most successful games console." This shrinking of hardware size is similar to what was done to the original PlayStation in 2001, when it became the streamlined PSone. However, the timing with this generation is much different. The new PS2 debuts with the PlayStation 3 not releasing until late 2005 at the earliest, while the PSone released a year after the launch of the PS2. Either way, Sony hopes this attractive new model will scoop up even more of the casual gaming audience that has already helped make the PlayStation brand name hugely successful.

A newly designed Multitap and vertical stand (the old ones aren't compatible with this sleeker PS2) will also appear on November 1.

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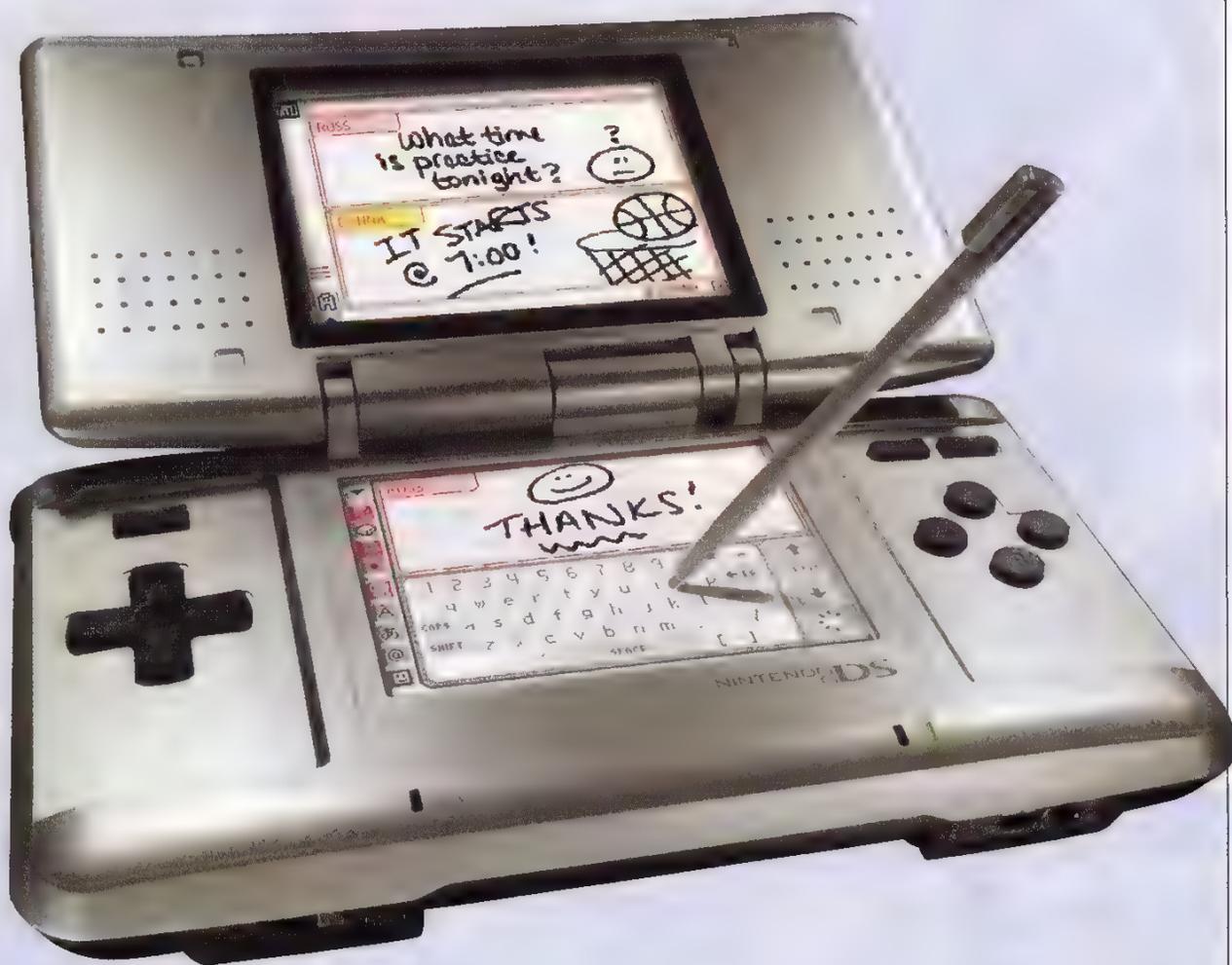
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NEWS

U.S. GETS NINTENDO DS FIRST

LAUNCH DATE, PRICING, AND METROID DEMO



Nintendo has announced that the Nintendo DS handheld will be available in stores November 21 in the U.S. for a retail price of \$149. The system will come out in Japan two weeks later – a break in tradition for the company. An official lineup of launch titles has yet to be confirmed, although Activision says *Spider-Man 2* will come out when the system does. Others should be announced shortly. Game Informer was told through a source that five third-party titles would be available at launch, although the unit would debut in only one color, platinum (as shown in photo).

The Nintendo DS will come with PictoChat already embedded in the system hardware. This program lets users draw pictures or messages on their DS and send them wirelessly to other users nearby. If gamers use the DS's sleep mode, the unit will instantly turn on if another DS is within transmission range.

Also packaged with the unit is a game card featuring a playable

demo of *Metrod Prime Hunters*, subtitled *First Hunt*. The demo features several single-player modes and multiplayer accommodating four players.

More information has also come down regarding a "secret port," which was hinted at shortly after the release of the final Nintendo DS design. According to industry analysts TNI Securities, the port (stationed right alongside the headphone jack) will utilize a Nintendo DS voice-chat headset. This new peripheral will also tap into the handheld's wireless functionality, allowing for wireless chat among DS owners who are in a wi-fi hotspot. In-game uses for this head-

phone peripheral are only speculative at this time, but it seems that it would be used for voice commands. For instance, in GameCube's *Mario Party 6* (which will also use a mic peripheral), voice commands are used in the multiplayer portion to fire missiles at other players.

NINTENDO DS

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

SCHOLARSHIP FOR WOMEN DEVELOPERS

The Guildhall at Southern Methodist University and WomenGamers.com are teaming up to offer an industry-funded scholarship to women interested in enrolling in The Guildhall's 18-month game development certificate program. For more info, go to www.womengamers.com or <http://guildhall.ecsv.smu.edu>.

THE GUILDHALL AT SMU

STAR TREK LICENSE NABBED

When we last left *Star Trek*, Activision had dumped the franchise after the publisher and Viacom got into a nasty court battle. Now Perpetual Entertainment has been awarded the license, and it plans to make a *Star Trek* MMORPG on the PC, which should start its beta in 2006. The game will occur in the 24th century universe of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and bring you in contact with the *Enterprise*, as well as famous show villains. Perpetual's agreement with Viacom also encompasses the rights to all *Star Trek* movies and TV series.



THE OOMPA LOOMPAS DOOMPITY DO

Global Star's got the golden ticket to publish the video game adaptation of Tim Burton's summer 2005 remake of the classic children's book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (written by Roald Dahl). The game will coincide with the film (starring Johnny Depp as Willy Wonka), and will appear on all major consoles.



EIDOS PUTS HIT ON PSP

Although still entertaining takeover options, publisher/developer Eidos spoke of its future plans recently, saying that the next *Tomb Raider* title, to be developed by its Crystal Dynamics studio, would appear in April at the earliest. The studio is also working on an unnamed PSP project. Finally, *Hitman 4* is projected for next year.



DEVELOPERS NO LONGER PHANTOMS

Infirnum Labs announced an initial list of 22 publishers and developers who have pledged to support games-on-demand system The Phantom. These include Eidos, Atari, VU Games, Dreamcatcher, Codemasters, and others. No specific titles were announced, and Infirnum says that more companies and specifics will be detailed before the platform's launch, which has been changed to sometime in 2005.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

BAD

Citing unspecified "technical issues," Codemasters has cancelled its Dragon Empires MMORPG - making it one in a line of canned online projects which is getting longer with each passing day



UGLY

Jeff Brown, vice president of corporate communication for EA, popping off on the sales numbers between EA's Madden NFL 2005 and Sega's ESPN NFL 2K5. "We killed 'em on football. They could give that thing away for free. Scotch taped to a ham sandwich, and we're still going to beat them."

GOOD

For those of you who aren't 18 and can't peep the October issue of Playboy, here's a censored taste of what you're missing: BloodRayne 2's Rayne. There's also a centerfold pull-out of Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude's Luba Licious, but you'll have to settle for our fully clothed review on page 148 instead.



GOOD

Nintendo sends the GBA SP down into the bargain basement. The handheld will now sell for \$79.99 - \$20 less than before.



GOOD

Confirming the long-running rumors, the Sega Rally series is making a return in Sega Rally 2005, which comes out for the PS2 in Japan next year. The title's main feature is a random course generator that mixes up weather and road conditions, time, and the track's layout.

news

XBOX RUMOR MILL IN FULL EFFECT

BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY BACK?

Whether Microsoft's next Xbox console, Xenon, will or won't include backwards compatibility with the original Xbox has been a heated topic of discussion recently, but perhaps the magic eight ball is starting to say "yes." Transitive Corp. of California says that its QuickTransit would allow any one platform to emulate and play the software of another. "This opens up a whole new world of things you can do, because previously software was tied to [a] particular processor," said president and CEO Bob Wiederhold. "It gives you access to a much greater diversity of software." Xenon will employ IBM PowerPC processors and an ATI graphics chipset, which is different from Xbox's Intel CPU and Nvidia graphics chip.

Although Microsoft has no deal with Transitive Corp. at the time of this writing to include the company's technology in Xenon, Wiederhold did specifically mention that QuickTransit would allow Xenon to play titles from the Xbox. Also, Transitive claims that the translation of code would not slow down processing at all. Concerns about including backwards compatibility into Xenon revolved around its cost.



Is this the controller for Xenon?

Hopefully, QuickTransit represents a solution to the problem. However, if Microsoft did choose to use this application, Xenon will assuredly not be able to play titles for other systems. Rather, the company would use it only as a cost-effective means of giving the platform backwards compatibility.

Meanwhile, other rumors kicking around range from a leaked prototype of the Xenon's controller to reported focus-tested hardware. While we have a feeling that the final look of Xenon will be different from these shots, the changes which are planned for its controller (removal of the black and white buttons, and an increase of shoulder buttons) are reflected in this prototype.

Despite recent comments by Microsoft CEO

Steve Ballmer that Xenon would not release "in the next year," Game Informer has heard from reliable sources that the system will, in fact, come out before the end of 2005 without a doubt. We imagine that next year's E3 will be the public debut of the platform. Until then, check out last month's cover story on Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion for more on what Xenon will offer.



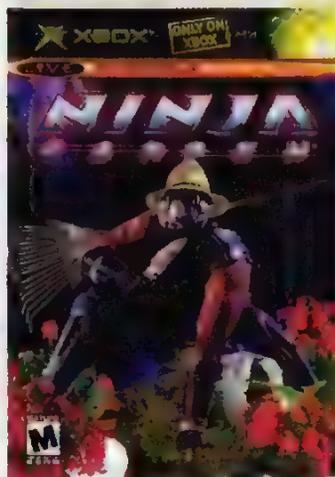
Here are a couple of purported Xenon hardware designs

R & D

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

Ninja Garden

By now, many Xbox gamers have completed Tecmo's Ninja Gaiden and asked themselves why a sequel hasn't yet been announced. Though Ninja Gaiden 2 will probably be released eventually, we propose this title in the meantime, which chronicles what Ninja Gaiden star Ryu Hayabusa does in his spare time. As ninjas are all into tranquility and meditation and stuff, we imagine Ryu likes to work in the garden outside his ninja shack. Hey, his whole life can't be about demon hunting and martial arts. In Ninja Garden, Ryu must undertake several death-defying missions to perfect his garden. Trips to the garden center to buy tulips require skillful dodging of incendiary shuriken, black ninjas will ambush Ryu while he plants mulberry bushes, and undead bunnies will do everything they can to destroy his vegetable crop. Pruning his trees requires a precise combination of platforming and aerial combat, as he fights off the demonic vultures attempting to ruin his arbors. Only through his skill with the sword, rake, hoe, and Garden Weasel can Ryu defeat his foes and emerge with a victoriously lush, aromatic yield of flowers, shrubs, and veggies. It goes without saying that this would be the absolute hardest - and best looking - gardening game ever.



We Made the First Level.



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Clearing out monsters and racking up experience points started with the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® roleplaying game. And with an endless number of spells, skills, and special abilities to choose from, it's still the best way to level up and take on whatever comes next.

We did it first. We still do it best. playdnd.com



EXPERIENCE COUNTS

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



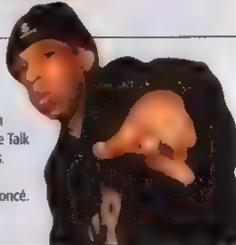
The original Smash TV

MIDWAY RESURRECTS SMASH TV

Midway's been on a roll recently, and Loose Talk has discovered its upcoming lineup - which includes the return of Robotron: 2084-influenced cult hit Smash TV. Also on tap are sequels The Suffering 2, Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows, Fear & Respect, Area 52, Shanghai, MLB Slugfest 2006, and NBA Ballers 2. Furthermore, Spy Hunter: The Movie, Midway Arcade Treasures 3, and a title called 7 Days are coming down the pipe. We've been told that NARC: Columbian Drug Wars is planned, but we don't know if that's a sequel to NARC or just the unveiling of the official subtitle for the yet-to-be-released game.

JAY-Z GETS GAME ON

We told you about Will Smith's video game aspirations in this column in issue #135, and now it looks like other rappers are taking his cue. Loose Talk has heard that both Snoop Dogg and Jay-Z want to have their own titles. Jay-Z is currently "retired" from the music business. Perhaps he's busy masterminding his own game when he isn't busy getting busy with Beyoncé.



SUCKER PUNCH GOING TO PSP ON THE SLY?

Not only is developer Sucker Punch looking for new programmers for an up-and-coming action/adventure game that it is working on, but the studio that created Sly Cooper is also dreaming of putting its raccoon mascot onto the PSP.

CARMACK'S LAST GAME?

After recent news that id Software genius John Carmack was already starting on the technology behind the next title from the developer, he has also given signs that he may be nearing the end of his video game career. In a conversation with CNN/Money's Chris Morris, Carmack said, "I wouldn't hazard to look too far ahead. I'm definitely going to see through this round of rendering work. I wouldn't make any promises beyond that."



MOLYNEUX ON FUTURE FABLES

Among Peter Molyneux's many plans - including that long-running secret project known only as *Dametri* - are future designs for *Fable*. The Lionhead Studios director hinted that a downloadable expansion to the Xbox game might be in the works, and said that if a full sequel happened, naturally, online and co-op play would be obvious guesses for the feature set.



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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

It's easy to think that any good RPG must come from Japan, but did you know that back in 1995 on the SNES, Squaresoft USA produced its first action/RPG? This title was not shabby, either. Influenced by *Secret of Mana*'s ring command menu, this game also let you switch between you and your canine friend, who would sniff out necessary spell ingredients for you. The title's story revolved around the exploration of a secret utopia that had trapped its creators for the past 30 years.

(Answer on page 40)



Formerly with Acclaim, Interview with a Made Man is now in a free fall

THE DEATH OF ACCLAIM

ANGRY EMPLOYEES IN SHOCK

Acclaim has been dogged by financial problems and less-than-stellar sales for many of its games, a situation that finally caught up with the publisher/developer, forcing it to completely shut down all its operations in both the U.S. and abroad. As of Friday, August 27, after 17 years in the business and putting out such titles as the *Turok* series, the first two *Burnouts*, and *Dave Mira Freestyle BMX*, Acclaim is no more.

On August 23, Acclaim was in negotiations to find a new lender to replace its loan agreement with GMAC Commercial Finance. The publicly traded company was also in the process of being delisted by the NASDAQ stock market for its stock not meeting the minimum requirements. Shortly thereafter, a new loan agreement could not be secured. The domino effect that this caused was swift. Several employees who wish to remain anonymous told *Game Informer* that on that Friday at Acclaim's Glen Cove, NY headquarters, they were informed of the company's closing and thanked for their service, then given 15 minutes to clear out their desks and leave. Anyone who wanted to come by later to pick up more belongings would have to schedule an appointment. Payroll checks for the last two-week working period would, possibly, be paid, but there would be no severance packages or payout for vacation time. Also, employees' health insurance would expire and COBRA coverage (a federal program that ensures individuals will continue to be enrolled in group health plans for events like unemployment) would not be available through the company. In Acclaim's Manchester, UK and Austin, TX offices, employees were locked out previous to the 27th, and some were still owed a month's salary.

One employee painted a pretty grim picture of the company's last days. "The secret actions of two honchos there, whom I will not name, just make me angry and sick. They had informed workers that everything would be okay as they were deleting computer records in their offices, moving all of their furniture while in the view of workers, and trying to scam money off workers' insurance benefits without the acknowledgment of employees. [That's so] if the workers had managed to get the advances from their benefits, and they had no funds in their insurance, they will be sued instead of the company. Pretty unbelievable huh?"

Acclaim had hoped to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, which would give it protection from creditors, but on the following Monday, had to instead file for Chapter 7. This meant the total liquidation of the company. According to court documents filed by Acclaim, it has an estimated worth of \$10 to \$50 million, while facing a debt of more than \$100 million.

Sources say that everyone pretty much knew that the writing was on the wall. Two years ago, Acclaim did an initial round of layoffs and was struggling in general. Some former employees claimed that nepotism and misappropriation of company funds for personal use by those in the highest levels in Acclaim certainly had been a drain on the business, but the failure of *Turok Evolution* is widely believed to have sealed the company's fate. An over-estimation of the game from Acclaim also damaged future titles due to an increased pressure internally for good sales and the bad perception of the company from both the press and retailers.

The fate of some of Acclaim's unreleased titles, such as *The Red Star*, *Juiced* (both reviewed last issue), *Worms Forts: Under Siegel*, *Interview with a Made Man*, and *The Last Job* are up in the air as of press time. Some, like *Under Siegel* (developed by Team17) have declared that they are already in talks with other publishers so the game can see the light of day. *Juiced* is just as lucky, for Take 2 Interactive has put in a bid for the rights to the title.

One former employee summed it up this way: "It's a shame that so many good people who are extremely talented are out of work, and possibly out of the industry, because of the position you're in when you live in New York if you cannot relocate. All because of a certain few higher-up people."

We Gave BOSS Monsters Their First Job.



Cracking skulls on the way to fight the Big Bad Guy started in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® roleplaying game. And with thousands of monsters to fight and countless ways to customize them, it's still the best way to go to work.

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■ An example of the power of Epic's Unreal Engine 3

news

BIOWARE GOES EPIC

DEVELOPER USING UNREAL ENGINE 3 IN NEW GAME

Absolutely no slouches in the game engine department themselves, Canadian developer BioWare recently licensed the forthcoming Unreal Engine 3 (above is an example of its power) from creator Epic Games.

According to the press release, the engine will be utilized in a future, as-yet-unannounced title using a new BioWare intellectual property. Joint CEO of the company Greg Zeschuk hinted that using the engine might cut down the upcoming game's development cycle. "One of our development teams will now focus on using Unreal Engine 3 to help us create a great gaming experience in a timely manner."

In other BioWare news, at the European Games Network trade show, joint CEO Ray Muzyka revealed that more is in store for Xbox title Jade Empire (see our preview on page 112). "This is a new IP," he explained, "and there are going to be follow-on products – sequels and other things, absolutely. This is a rich world, and there are all these parts around the periphery of the empire that we haven't even touched on. There are lots of cool adventures still in the works." He also admitted that a PC version of Jade Empire is a possibility. Muzyka's comments seem to indicate that BioWare would be involved in any sequels to Jade Empire, as it's their IP, instead of handing off the reins to another developer, which it did for Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords (see page 68).

■ NBA Live 2005 is now \$39.99



news

EA SPORTS' SLAM DUNK DEAL

HOW DOES A FREE GAME SOUND?

EA Sports has decided to give gamers maximum sports bang for minimum sports buck with a two-pronged attack. The publisher is not only lowering the price of NBA Live 2005 to \$39.99 (down \$10 from its original \$49.99 price), but is also offering a limited-time buy-two-get-one-free promotion covering EA Sports titles. Anybody who buys two new EA Sports titles between now and November 14 can get a coupon online for a third free EA Sports game (whether new or old).

When rival sports publisher ESPN Videogames announced that it was lowering the prices of its products to \$19.99, EA Sports quickly blasted the competition, saying they were admitting defeat. Now, however, EA Sports is changing its tune, obviously having seen some merit and effectiveness in ESPN's lowered price strategy. It is unknown at this time if EA Sports will also lower the retail price of the upcoming NCAA March Madness 2005.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
AKIRA YAMAOKA
Producer and sound director for Silent Hill 4

READER
ZACH LARSON
USS John C. Stennis, Somewhere in the Pacific



- 1 Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time – PS2
- 2 Spelunker – NES
- 3 Doom 3 – PC
- 4 Age of Empires – PC
- 5 Mach Rider – NES

- 1 Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies – PS2
- 2 SSX 3 – PS2
- 3 ESPN NHL Hockey – PS2
- 4 Unreal Tournament 2004 – PC
- 5 Rise of Nations – PC

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five
724 N 1st St 4th Fl
Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists... Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Video Game Ladies Not Posing Nude for Adult Magazines:

- 10 Anima: Yes, she is female, and we prefer her ethereal restraints on, thank you very much
- 9 Samus Aran: Too prudish. It takes hours just to talk her down to a bikini!
- 8 Trish: Might be willing, but her boyfriend is overly protective and awesome
- 7 Anyone from The Guy Game: What, and sabotage their skyrocketing careers?
- 6 Mary Jane Watson: That is one pug-fugly render. Rent Crazy/Beautiful instead
- 5 KOS-MOS: Her pictorial would be better suited for Popular Mechanics
- 4 Catwoman: No one wants to see her at all – not even naked
- 3 Fatai Frame II's sisters: Common decency aside, weird things happen with these girls and cameras
- 2 Lara Croft: After years of sublime tomb raiding, why suddenly shift focus to her sexuality?
- 1 Raiden: We've already seen more than enough in MSG2. Thank heavens for soda straws!

■ Name That Game Answer: Secret of Evermore



We Invented Godmode.



Available at a Game Store Near You

Powering up your character to take out everything in sight started with the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® roleplaying game. And with the D&D® Basic Game, you've got everything you need to start blowing through level after level of monsters.

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EXPERIENCE COUNTS

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Higher Education

Fils-Aime graduates from prestigious Cornell University, setting the stage for his extraordinary career.

Pizza Party

Fils-Aime works for another huge provider of the staple gaming diet – Pizza Hut. As Pizza Hut's senior director of national marketing, he helps launch the gargantuan Bigfoot Pizza.

Chinese Takeout



Entering the business world, Fils-Aime takes a job at Proctor & Gamble, but quickly leaves to become senior vice president of Panda Management Co., the world's largest Chinese food-service company.

Pour Me A Pint

Pizza and Chinese takeout inevitably leads to beer, so Fils-Aime's next logical step was working for Guinness Import Co., where he managed all of its major brands.

Two-Wheeled Adventures

Fils-Aime takes a position as chief marketing officer at Derby Cycle, where he helps guide the company to success with its Raleigh, Diamondback, and Univega brands.

Reviving VH1



Fils-Aime enters the entertainment world with the popular cable channel VH1. Ratings rise during his tenure, due mostly to the breakout success of a series he helped foster, the ultra-popular *I Love the 70s*.

A Helping Hand



Fils-Aime helps stage VH1's Concert for New York City, a special that helped raise more than \$35 million for disaster relief following the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Kicking Ass And Taking Names

Fils-Aime signs on with Nintendo and causes a sensation with his speech at the Nintendo E3 2004 press conference. Suddenly, Nintendo has a new hero to stand alongside Mario and Link.

REGGIEFILS-AIME

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING, NINTENDO OF AMERICA

>>> Reggie Fils-Aime went from relative unknown to instant video game superstar at last year's E3. Recently, Game Informer chatted with Reggie and got his views on the future of the "New Nintendo." <<<

You made a big splash at E3 with what's since been dubbed the "kicking ass and taking names" speech. Were you surprised at how that got turned into this huge phenomenon of Reggie art on the Internet?

I've seen a lot of it. It was my 14-year-old boy who pointed it out to me and said, "Dad, you're famous." But, frankly, I personally did not anticipate the passion and the vigor that our fans would have coming out of that speech. I mean, certainly the tone of that presentation was very deliberate. We wanted to show that this is a new Nintendo. That we have an aggressiveness, and the games to back it up. But did we think that the fans would take that presentation and have the fun with it that they've had? Absolutely not.

you to communicate what DS is all about?

I think we have a wonderful opportunity with DS to reshape for consumers what portable gaming is all about. Nintendo has a long, successful history of competing in the handheld wireless market, essentially with Game Boy SP. We've sold dramatically more SPs than the other hottest consumer electronics item out there today – the iPod. Now with the wireless capability we launched with Pokémon Fire Red and Leaf Green, consumers are experiencing our view of what wireless and sociable gaming can be. DS is going to take all of this and drive it to the next level. I'm confident that we're going to be able to communicate to consumers exactly what's so great about Nintendo DS.

have different motivation and a different vision for when the next console should hit the marketplace. It is common knowledge that Microsoft is losing significant money on every Xbox they sell. So, certainly they are the most eager to see the new console generation.

Do you see Nintendo in the race head to head with those companies, or are you going for a different niche?

One of the things that you'll find as you talk with [people] about my background is that I never settle for second place. And I've spent enough time with Mr. Iwata to know that he wouldn't be satisfied with second place. We're playing this game to win.

[We] wouldn't be satisfied with second place. We're playing this game to win.

And what did you think Nintendo was looking for when they hired you?

I think that Nintendo was looking for a number of things. First, certainly someone to come in with a different point of view, an aggressive point of view, to drive growth. I also think that the company was looking for someone that would have a clearer focus on the gamer, who the gamer that we're targeting needs to be, and how we speak to that gamer in a way that is motivating and involving versus what's been done in the past.

We know you helped rebrand VH1. Are you attempting to rebrand Nintendo to a certain extent?

I wouldn't quite say "rebrand," but certainly what we are looking to do is refocus the company on three things. It's the games, it's growth, and it's the gamer. And having a very clear understanding of what we're trying to do in these three areas. That's my mission here at the company.

Have you already been involved with creating some of the new TV ad campaigns and stuff like that?

I certainly have. "Who are you?" is the tagline, and frankly it's a tagline that the company has had since before I came onboard. But I think what I've been able to do is to bring a bit of an older teen's sensibility to all of advertising. One [example] is the new ad we have for Pikmin, which is just hilarious.

Talk about the DS. It's probably the most unique system ever made. Is it a challenge for

Would you care to elaborate on any details about what sort of "revolution" Nintendo has in store with its next home console?

We have code-named our next home console "Revolution." We did that very purposefully, because it will represent a revolution in the way consumers today think about gaming. Home console gaming has not changed very much since Nintendo redefined that category some 20 years ago with the NES. You're still tethered to a controller that's tethered to a machine that's tethered to your TV. We believe that the consumer wants more in the area of community, and we are looking at how we deliver that. We think the online approach of today is a bit flawed. We think the consumer wants a better way. And that's what we're looking to do with Revolution. We will be sharing more details at next year's E3.

You made a couple comments about "community." Does this suggest that the next Nintendo system is going to have a focus on online play?

What I am saying is that with our next home console we will address the area of gamer community. You said "online." I used "online" as a description of a flawed business model. We are passionate about enabling our gamers to play their friends [and] to play with others across long distances. There are a number of different ways to execute that.

Will the Revolution hit around the same time as your competition?

We are certainly committed to being in the marketplace with our competition. I think the issue is that, as you talk to the other two players, that they each

Where are third-party publishers at in terms of Revolution development?

On that issue, I'm not going to comment. In part, because we are looking to do business in a new way with our licensees. I think, in fairness, the relationship that Nintendo has had with certain third party developers at times has been strained. We are working hard to repair all those relationships. I personally have spent some time with the top five publishers here in the U.S. Certainly my counterparts are spending a lot of time with the Japanese publishers.

What do you think Sony has done right in terms of marketing and communicating to the audience? Is there anything Nintendo can learn from that?

I think that what Sony has done right is a number of things. First, they've been very smart on backwards compatibility, which means that they have successfully brought their historical consumers along with them to any new franchise. We certainly have taken a page out of that book with Nintendo DS and making that backwards compatible with most GBA games. Sony has done a very strong job of appealing to the heart and soul of the gaming industry – the prototypical 17-to 19-year-old consumer. We're looking to take a page out of that book and do that successfully. The third thing I think they've done quite successfully is they've had very healthy licensee relationships. I think that we can do all those things plus bring great proprietary franchises like Zelda, Mario, and Metroid – and drive that success even further than potentially they've been able to achieve so far.

**NINTENDO
GAMECUBE.**

**NINTENDO
GAMECUBE.**

**NINTENDO
GAMECUBE.**

LEADING THE REVOLUTION

■ Reggie Fils-Aime, ready to get his game on to promote the next round of Nintendo systems



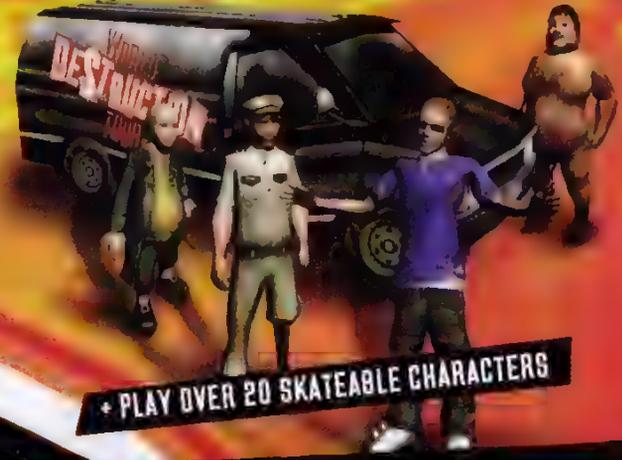
WHAT ARE YOU GET IN



• SKATE IT, THRASH IT



• LEAVE YOUR MARK



• PLAY OVER 20 SKATEABLE CHARACTERS



TEEN

T

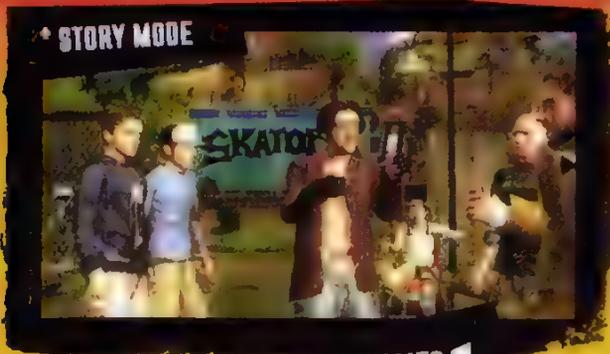
Blood
Crude Humor
Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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STARING AT? THE VAN!

It's Team HAWK vs. Team BAM
in an all-out World Destruction Tour!



2 GAMES
IN 1



TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2



ACTIVISION

activision.com

www.thug2online.com

pc

FRAGBOOK DR

Manufacturer: Falcon Northwest
Website: www.falcon-nw.com
List Price: \$4,383

These desktop replacements by high-end boutique PC manufacturer Falcon Northwest are total tanks (around 10 lbs.), but they also come in six bazillion colors and fly with the speed of a thousand gazelles. Each comes with a secret agent-looking metal attaché that, if one can pull off the look, is unquestionably awesome. In case you hadn't noticed, we love them and would consider selling precious family heirlooms on eBay to raise the funds for our very own.

SPECS SHEET

- Exotix Paint Job (literally millions of colors available)
- 17-inch WSXGA+ 1680x1050 LCD
- Intel Pentium 4 3.4 GHz
- Mobility Radeon 9700 Turbo 256MB DDR
- 1024 MB Corsair RAM
- DVD-ROM/CD-RW Mobile Combo
- 60GB 7200RPM HDD
- Intel 2200 802.11b/g Wireless
- Microsoft Windows XP Professional
- Briefcase



peripherals

LOGITECH MX1000 LASER CORDLESS MOUSE

Manufacturer: Logitech
Website: www.logitech.com
List Price: \$79.95

Optical mice are so 2001, they're totally for, like, suckers. Logitech's MX1000 has flawless wireless response, a rechargeable lithium-ion battery, and laser-guided tracking that offers 20 times the power of current optical models. High tech indeed, but the thing is really so awesome that Miller and Adam actually had a battle royale to see who could claim it "for keeps."



etc

THE ART OF ODDWORLD INHABITANTS: The First Ten Years 1994-2004

Manufacturer: Ballistic Publishing
Website: www.ballisticpublishing.com
List Price: TBA

The Oddworld games have always featured exceptional art design to go along with the series' quirky flavor of gameplay. It seems only fitting, then, that the concept art for the games would get collected in this great coffee-table book. Out by the holidays, the title will be available in softcover, hardcover, and numbered leather-bound editions (shown here). If you want the fancy one, you'll have to pre-order through Ballistic Publishing, but you do get to pick which number you want (and all the "naughty" ones are already taken, smartass).



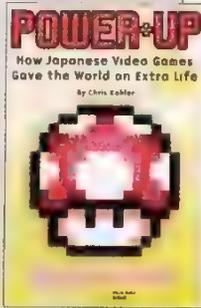
etc

POWER-UP:

How Japanese Video Games Gave The World An Extra Life

Manufacturer: BradyGames
Website: www.bradygames.com
List Price: \$19.99

More of a study on how Japanese video games influence (and steal from) a wide variety of entertainment mediums than a historical outline of the industry, *Power-Up* reads a lot like every video game fanatic's "Arguments For Why Gaming Should Be Taken Seriously." Read up, take notes, and be able to justify how much time you spend on your couch.



peripherals

GAMECOM HALO 2 EDITION

You gotta love a company that does these two things: designs Neil Armstrong a headset to wear on his first trip to the moon, and includes the phrase, "spank the Covenant" in its press kit. The group in question, Plantronics, is releasing a stunningly awesome Halo 2 headset just before the game launches. After playing around with the little ear-cupper, we haven't been able to break or complain about it – the unit is mighty comfortable (its form factor was designed for call center employees working eight-hour shifts), if a little scary looking.

Manufacturer: Plantronics
Website: www.plantronics.com
List Price: \$49.95



peripherals

SPEAKERCOM

Manufacturer: Nyko
Website: www.nyko.com
List Price: \$19.99

Cell phones have a speaker option, why shouldn't your Xbox? Nyko is easing the masses' ear pain with the SpeakerCom, which eliminates the need for a headset or microphone when chatting in Xbox Live games. The unit powers itself through the controller, so it's lightweight and doesn't need any batteries. And, to ice the proverbial cake, the SpeakerCom fits onto any first or third-party controller with two expansion ports.



peripherals

X2VGA+ HIGH DEFINITION VGA PACK

Manufacturer: Neoya
Website: www.x2vga.com
List Price: \$64.95

Sweet and simple (at least from the user's point of view), this adapter lets an Xbox and a VGA monitor play well together. Why do that in the first place? Because most computer monitors can pump out a 480p image – something that a majority of televisions in America don't do yet – which (we think) is the way that your divine entity of choice truly meant for you to play Halo 2.



etc

ATARI FLASHBACK

Manufacturer: Atari **Website:** www.atari.com **List Price:** \$44.95

Well here's an anniversary trend we'd like to see more of. Twenty years after Atari debuted the 7800, the company is putting out a retro console with 20 classic games on it. The titles draw from the 2600 and 7800 catalogues, but the case design is clearly based off of the more pimpin' 7800. Look for it before the holidays.



THE INCLUDED GAMES

- Adventure
- AirSeaBattle
- Asteroids
- Battlezone
- Breakout
- Canyon Bomber
- Centipede
- Crystal Castles
- Desert Falcon
- Food Fight
- Gravitator
- Haunted House
- Millipede
- Planet Smashers
- Saboteur
- Sky Diver
- Solaris
- Sprintmaster
- Warlords
- Yar's Revenge



If it seemed like they

WERE COMING
FROM ALL SIDES
BEFORE.

try it in 3D.

No matter how cool it looks, never stop shooting.
Three dimensions. Two playable heroes. One classic
franchise returns. Neo Contra. The more things
change, the more they stay insane.

MATURE 17+

M

Blood and Gore
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING

www.esrb.org



PlayStation 2



NEO CONTRA™

KONAMI

www.konami.com/usa

peripherals

MORTAL KOMBAT AND MEGA MAN CONTROLLERS

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

Apparently, the images on the MK controllers are too violent for us to print. We're pretty sure that this is a first for peripherals (outside of that DOA "love pillow")

Nuby, the current master of high-volume collectible goods, is putting out Mortal Kombat and Mega Man controllers for multiple systems to whet the gotta-have-it-all whistle. Pick a favorite and write your name on the back so your friends don't try to "acquire" it "by accident" the next time they come over. Then again, these are more distinctive than most, so the permanent marker might not be absolutely necessary.

PC

iMAC G5

Manufacturer: Apple
Website: www.apple.com
List Price: from \$1,299

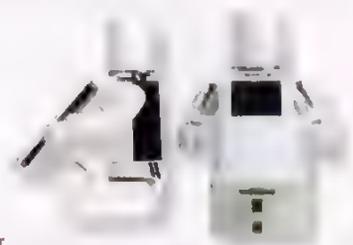


Okay, so Apple hasn't put out anything that could fairly be called a "gaming machine" in quite some time, but the new iMac G5 is just so damn sexy that we had to get it in here. What you see on the page is all that there is to the form factor – the whole PC is built into the two-inch deep frame. Slap a keyboard and a mouse in front of it and you've got one nice conversation piece sitting on the desktop.

etc

iKUB IPOD STAND

Manufacturer: Kubrick
Website: www.hmv.co.jp
List Price: 5,000 Yen (around \$45)



Collectible toy company Kubrick made a name for itself by producing a bounty of pop-culture themed Lego-esque toys that have jumped from Japan to the rest of the world's toy stores in recent years. Highly collectable, and mostly very affordable, the iKub is one of the company's blank forms pumped up to four times its normal size and designed to cuddle everyone's favorite MP3 player.

peripherals

WIRELESS NES AND SNES CONTROLLERS

Manufacturer: Messiah Entertainment
Website: www.playmessiah.com
List Price: (Controller) \$29.99, (Limited Edition Set) \$49.99

It's not often that we see updates to consoles that released decades ago, but many of us still pull out the hardware for some classic gaming. New company Messiah Entertainment is putting out current technology to make our experiences with the old-school a little more convenient. The forthcoming 2.4 GHz wireless controllers for the NES and SNES offer a 30 foot range and 40 hours of gametime per set of AAA batteries, and the company is producing a limited edition set for each model. The special packages include two controllers and a bucket of collectibles nestled into a metal lunchbox. Is it wrong to think of this as the Second Coming? Probably.





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A MIDST THE CHAOS OF WORLD WAR I, YURI AND KARIN EMBARK ON AN EPIC JOURNEY TESTING THEIR POWER AND MAGIC SKILLS WITH THE JUDGMENT RING TO COMBAT TERRIFYING CREATURES AND CONQUER THE EVIL THAT RASPUTIN PLANS TO UNLEASH UPON THE WORLD.

shadowheartscovenant.com

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Language
Partial Nudity
Suggestive Themes
Violence



PlayStation 2



THE SECRET OF GRIDIRON GREATNESS

A LOOK BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY OF ESPN NFL 2K5

BY GREG THOMAS, PRESIDENT,
VISUAL CONCEPTS



Every year for us has been an uphill battle filled with all sorts of big obstacles, tough decisions, and near-impossible deadlines. I'm sure every developer goes through its share of difficulties, but when you're making sports video games and your direct competitor is a well-established 800-pound gorilla that has imposed its will over the football market for almost 15 years, there's an unbelievable amount of pressure and stress. But, I believe this is the first year where we've really given the competition an intense, solid fight – both on a development and marketing level. It wasn't an easy journey from 2K4 to the launch of ESPN NFL 2K5, as we had to make several key decisions that decided the fate of the game.

There's no doubt that a good portion of the popularity and success of ESPN NFL 2K5 has to do with marketing decisions in pricing and an early release date. Both of these elements gave us a great advantage over the competition, but in turn really put pressure on development two-fold: (1) releasing the game on July 20 meant the team had to be done earlier than any 2K football game ever and (2) that even with the \$19.99 price point, the team had to deliver the best game they ever have – period.

Releasing the game on July 20 made tactical business sense because we launched right as the NFL buzz was going on and at the same time, we believe we disrupted the hype from our competitor. Truthfully, there was the possibility of releasing a week earlier, but the NFL 2K5 team and myself believed we needed that extra week to tune and fix any last minute errors we came upon. This was vitally important, especially because of the new price point; there was concern that consumers would be wary of a value-priced football game considering it as being "cheap on price, cheap in quality." We definitely wanted to avoid being called a "bargain bin" football

title, and the team came with the mindset that we had to go above and beyond whatever expectations we had early on.

Even with all of our great technology, the issue of realism in visuals is completely different than in gameplay. Having our game look realistically like an NFL broadcast is one thing, but realism when playing the game is always a balancing act. We have a very football-savvy programmer who, if I let go of the reigns completely, would make a football game so realistic that it would be the ideal game for him, but for our average consumer, it would probably be too complex and much too hard to play. If there's one thing I know, more realism in gameplay and controls doesn't necessarily mean a better game, and I can't tell you how many heated meetings we've had on just how our running game needs to be even more realistic. Realism is very important, but I think response of control and the fun factor are much more important. So, you have to balance the realism because, as much as you want to add these gameplay controls and mechanics, you've got to ensure that it's intuitive and makes for an entertaining experience.

I'm not boasting – well not really, anyway – when I say that we have so many more features this year compared to the competition. I don't know if the competition is satisfied with just giving updates every year because it seems they only try to concentrate on one facet of the game every year. For us, that seems almost lazy, as there are so many things you can add to a football title to make it feel fresh. My thinking is that gamers want to experience something new and different every year – to me, it doesn't seem fair to fans if a company sells a brand-new game annually but all it does is update the rosters, add some new visuals, and correct the bugs from last year. Our team has always been about pushing the envelope with new quality features and excit-

ing gameplay additions that really create a fun and unique playing experience.

Of all the new features we've brought out this year, two stick out in my mind that I'm really proud of. We've always been a big supporter of online play, and to add online leagues to our NFL game with living rosters (rosters that change within each league as injuries and trades occur) is truly something great. But of all the features that I think are spectacular, the Virtual Identity Profile System (VIP) is something really special. The ability to see the tendencies and behaviors of your opponents is awesome as it is, but then to take that data, load it onto a CPU team and play against your opponent's VIP profile makes it really unique.

Both online leagues and the VIP system are good litmus tests for that "Holy Grail" feature that every hardcore football fan wants – online franchises. While the popularity of online play has grown immensely for the console market, having a full online franchise mode is an incredibly huge undertaking requiring massive resources in every department. I'm not going to sacrifice valuable resources when I'm not absolutely sure that enough gamers will participate in an online franchise. That being said, online franchise mode will eventually happen, but when will definitely depend on the consumers.

The marketing strategy has worked great from what I've read, and the fan response has been tremendous. But, just because we released a stellar football title, that doesn't mean we are resting on our laurels – we're already knee-deep into the development of next year's game. A lot of it has to do with the competitive sports market. The minute you lose your passion and drive, that's when you won't be able to perform and deliver your best. ■■■

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

“

We definitely wanted to avoid being called a 'bargain bin' football title...

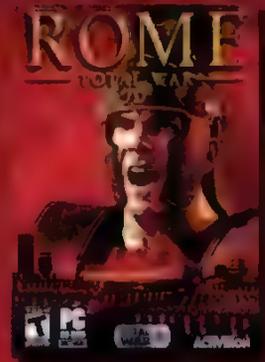
”

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



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sun

mon

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thur

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sat



Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal

02

NEW RELEASES

- Age of Alexander - PC
- ATV Offroad Fury 3 - PS2
- Axis & Allies - PC
- Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2 - Xbox
- CSI - Xbox
- Duel Masters - PS2
- Godzilla: Save the Earth - PS2, Xbox
- Guilty Gear Isuka - PS2
- King of Fighters 2002 & 2003 - PS2

- The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
- NCAA March Madness 2005 - PS2, Xbox
- Playboy: The Mansion - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal - PS2
- Roller Coaster Tycoon 3 - PC
- Sega Superstars - PS2

- Sonic Mega Collection 2 - PS2
- Spyro: A Hero's Tail - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Ultima Online: Samurai Empire - PC
- WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw - PS2

The Incredibles opens in theaters today. Small children and comic book dorks rejoice.



The redesigned Playstation 2 launches on Nov. 11



7

ROCK-CON 2004

NOVEMBER 5-7
Held in Rockford, Illinois, Rock-Con is the Midwest's premiere regional convention for miniature gaming, tabletop role-playing, and collectible card games. Video games are encouraged to attend and make fun of those nerdier than themselves.



Harbinger

09

NEW RELEASES

- American Chopper - PS2, Xbox
- EyeToy: Anticrawl - PS2
- Halo 2 - Xbox
- Creziky NHL 2005 - PS2
- Inuyasha: Secret of the Cursed Mask - PS2
- Jak 3 - PS2
- Lemmy Snicket: A Series of Unfortunate Events - PS2, Xbox, GC, PC
- Mario Tennis - GC

- Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault - PC
- Mega Man Anniversary Collection - GBA
- Shaman King 2 - PS2, GBA
- The Urbz: Sims in the City - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
- WWX Rumble Rose - PS2



Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

13

Today, Whoopi Goldberg celebrates 49 years of being not very funny.



14

MADDEN CHALLENGE

- 11/5 Kansas City Westport
- 11/6 Kansas City
- 11/7 Denver Cherry Creek Shopping Center
- 11/15 Phoenix McDouly Stempel
- 11/14 Las Vegas Fashion Show
- 11/20 San Diego Mission Valley
- 11/21 LA 3rd St. Promenade
- 11/26 Seattle Owest Field
- 11/27 Seattle
- 11/28 San Francisco SBC Park

15

SECOND ANNUAL GAME DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOP

NOVEMBER 15-16
This two-day event in Liverpool features panels, seminars, lectures, and other professional-sounding things regarding computer game design and technology. Since it's held in England, expect everyone present to sound smart and proper.

16

NEW RELEASES

- Alan Anthology - PS2, Xbox
- Baten Kaitos - GC
- Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space - Xbox
- Call of Duty: Finest Hour - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Capcom Fighting Evolutions - PS2
- Dance Dance Revolution: Ultramix 2 - Xbox
- Digital Devil Saga - PS2

- Donkey Kong Country 2 - GBA
- Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3 - PS2
- EverQuest II - PC
- Fight Club - PS2, Xbox
- Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone - Xbox
- GoldenEye: Rogue Agent - PS2, Xbox, GC
- King Arthur - PS2, Xbox, GC

- The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth - PC
- Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater - PS2
- Metroid Prime 2: Echoes - GC
- Need For Speed: Underground 2 - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
- Prince of Persia: Warrior Within - PS2, Xbox, GC, PC

- Sid Meier's Pirates! - PC
- Spy Vs. Spy - PS2, Xbox
- Wild Arms: Alter Code F - PS2



ELECTRONIC GAME SHOW

NOVEMBER 19-21
Held in Brazil this year for the first time, the Electronic Game Show is the biggest gaming convention in Latin America. It's a lot like E3, but with more of a spicy salsa flair. In other words, EGS is the Ricky Martin of video game conventions.

21

DRAGONFEST 2004

This Glendale, CA convention of martial arts, movies, comics, toys, and more features one of the most impressive gatherings of B-list celebs we've ever seen! Invited guests include Ernie Hudson, Marc Singer, Lorenzo Lamas, Sybil Danning, and more martial artists than you can shake a nunchuck out of.



23

The first three seasons of *Seinfeld* hit DVD today, serenely now!

NEW RELEASES

- Mega Man X6 - PS2
- Viewtiful Joe 2 - PS2, GC

24



25

Today is Thanksgiving, but more importantly it's the launch of Xbox Live video chat in Japan! But since it's not yet scheduled for U.S. release, just sit back, gorge yourself, grow rotund with food, and be thankful that all of your video games haven't transmuted into copies of Drake of the 99 Dragons.

Happy Thanksgiving!



28

Anna Nicole Smith was born this day in 1967. Ironically, it is also "National Unintended Yet Still Famous Person Day."



29

30

NEW RELEASES

- Ghost Recon 2 - PS2, Xbox
- The Mummy - PS2, Xbox
- Star Fox Armada - GC
- Spider-Man 2 - DVD

november

“Weapons
inspectors
have found
NO threat.”

—August 24, 1964



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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION

> PUBLISHER MIDWAY

> DEVELOPER PARADOX DEVELOPMENT

> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 2005

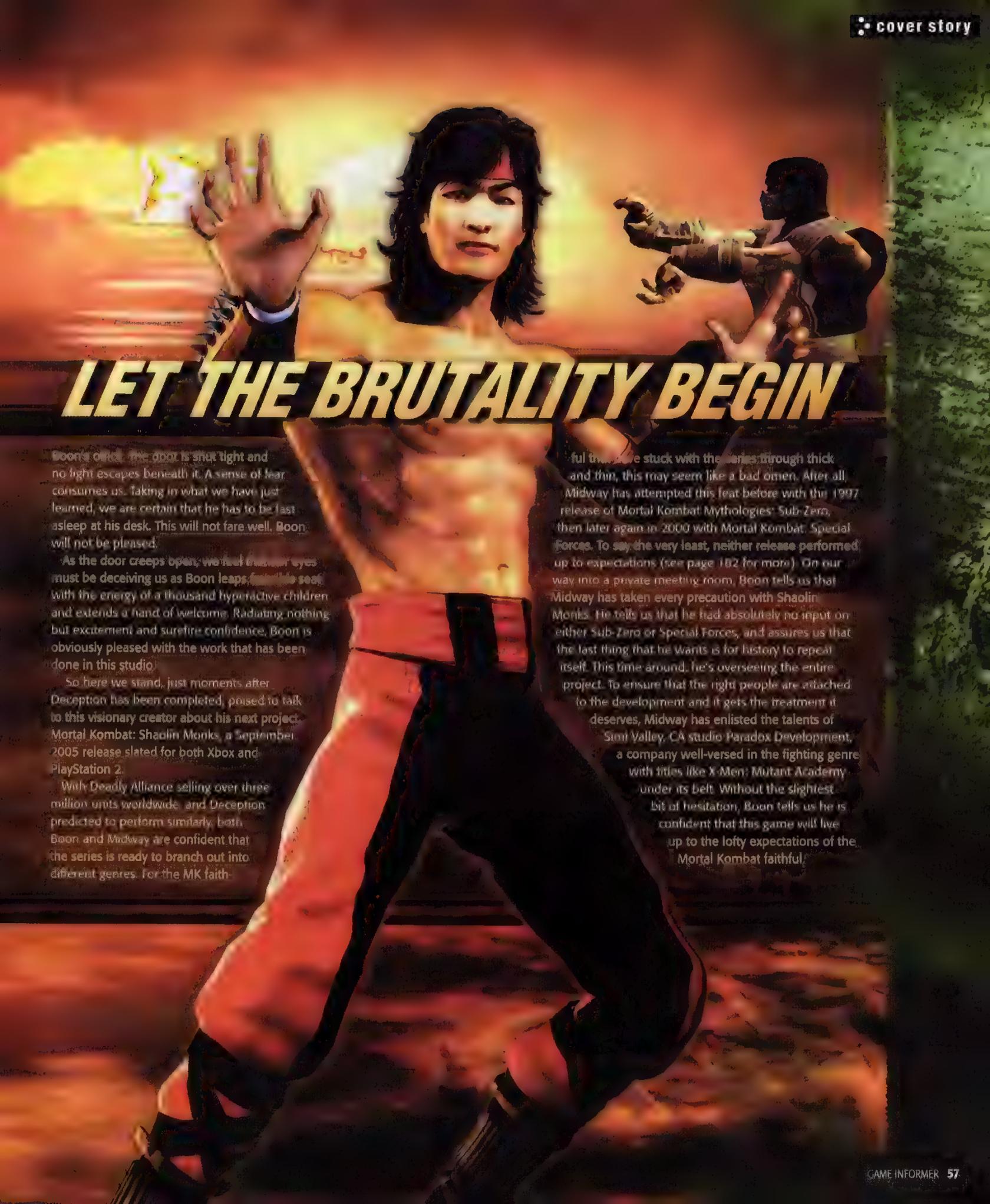


MORTAL KOMBAT

SHAOLIN MONKS

For three consecutive days, Ed Boon and his team have not seen the light of day outside of Midway's Chicago-based studio. Amid the faint glow of computer monitors, we see the rings beneath programmers' eyes and desks scattered with beverage containers and remnants of meals. The feeling sinks in that we are witnessing the aftermath of a great battle that has just been waged on this development floor. Sensing our bewilderment with the state of things, we are quickly brought up to speed on the situation at hand, learning that the team had put the final touches on *Mortal Kombat: Deception* on the night prior to our arrival.

Tunneling deeper into the workshop, we hear that several of the team members purchased cots, and one even equipped his office with a mini-fridge stocked to capacity with energy drinks. To maximize each day, the team even organized sleep shifts to get 20 to 30 minutes of slumber before tweaking the code yet again. Amazed by what we had just learned, we arrive at Ed



LET THE BRUTALITY BEGIN

Boon's office. The door is shut tight and no light escapes beneath it. A sense of fear consumes us. Taking in what we have just learned, we are certain that he has to be fast asleep at his desk. This will not fare well. Boon will not be pleased.

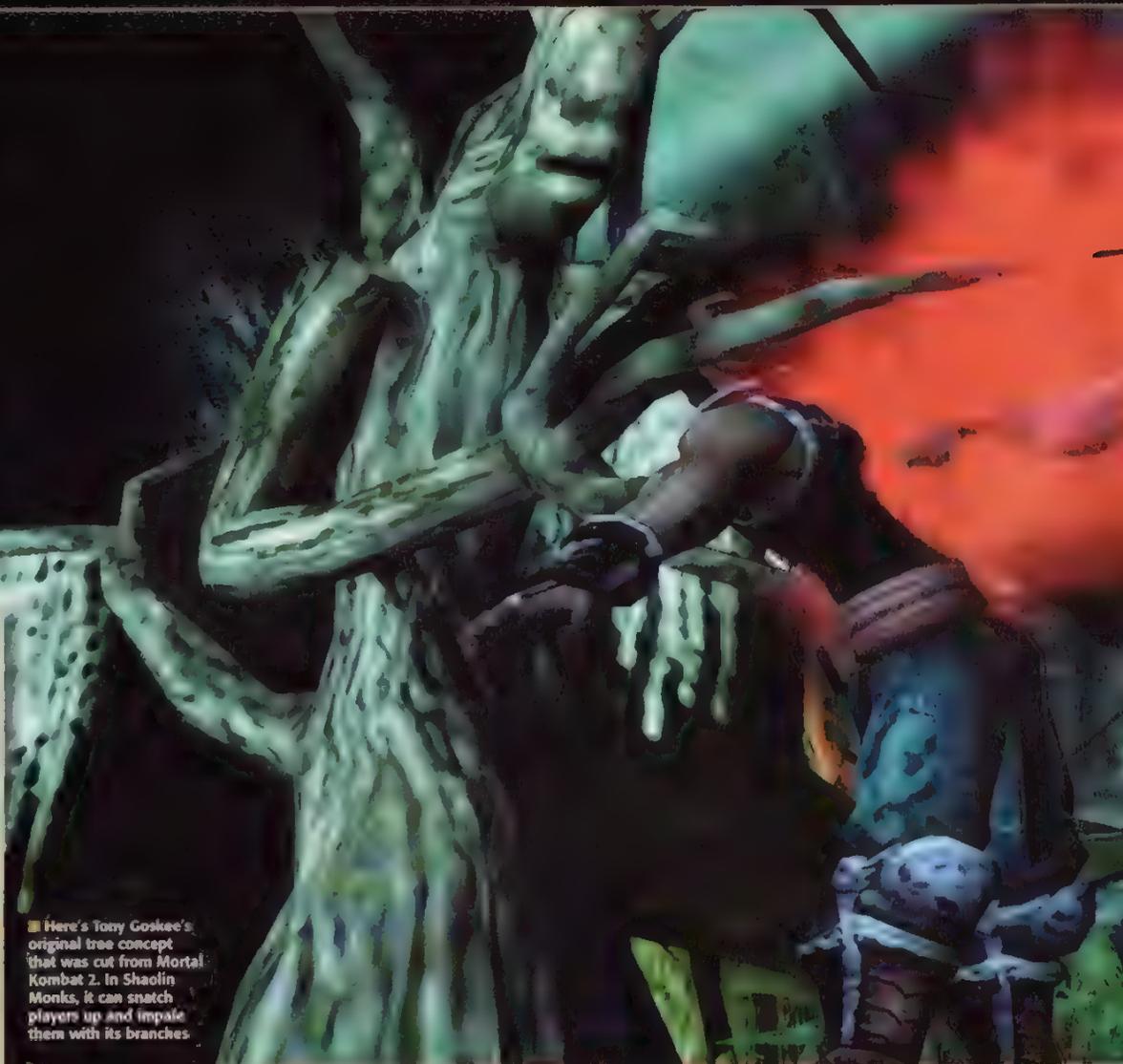
As the door creeps open, we feel that our eyes must be deceiving us as Boon leaps from his seat with the energy of a thousand hyperactive children and extends a hand of welcome. Radiating nothing but excitement and surefire confidence, Boon is obviously pleased with the work that has been done in this studio.

So here we stand, just moments after Deception has been completed, poised to talk to this visionary creator about his next project: *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks*, a September 2005 release slated for both Xbox and PlayStation 2.

With *Deadly Alliance* selling over three million units worldwide, and *Deception* predicted to perform similarly, both Boon and Midway are confident that the series is ready to branch out into different genres. For the MK faith-

ful that we've stuck with the series through thick and thin, this may seem like a bad omen. After all, Midway has attempted this feat before with the 1997 release of *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*, then later again in 2000 with *Mortal Kombat: Special Forces*. To say the very least, neither release performed up to expectations (see page 182 for more). On our way into a private meeting room, Boon tells us that Midway has taken every precaution with *Shaolin Monks*. He tells us that he had absolutely no input on either *Sub-Zero* or *Special Forces*, and assures us that the last thing that he wants is for history to repeat itself. This time around, he's overseeing the entire project. To ensure that the right people are attached to the development and it gets the treatment it deserves, Midway has enlisted the talents of Simi Valley, CA studio Paradox Development, a company well-versed in the fighting genre with titles like *X-Men: Mutant Academy* under its belt. Without the slightest bit of hesitation, Boon tells us he is confident that this game will live up to the lofty expectations of the *Mortal Kombat* faithful.

“...we are taking all of the environments and characters of *Mortal Kombat 2* and are bringing them to life.”



■ Here's Tony Goskee's original tree concept that was cut from *Mortal Kombat 2*. In *Shaolin Monks*, it can snatch players up and impale them with its branches.



■ We were asked not to reveal who this is, but MK fanatics should have a clue.

Arriving at the meeting room, we are introduced to Shaun Himmerick, the producer of *Shaolin Monks*. Like Boon, he is peppy – so much, in fact, that we wonder if a secret chemical agent is being added to the drinking water to keep the team on their toes during this development crunch. Not wasting any time, we are ushered to our seats and darkness falls around us. A massive projection screen flashes to life, and the visuals that appear are deserving of a standing ovation.

With a god-like fury and an arsenal of moves that would make Dante from *Devil May Cry* blush, we look on in awe as Liu Kang tears into a group of adversaries within the dangerous surroundings of the living forest. One attacker feels the wrath of Kang's athletic prowess as his body is launched

up into the air with a swift toss. Rather than turning his gaze to another attacker, Kang pursues the airborne assailant by catching his body mid-flight, slamming it to the ground, then launching into the air again with a mighty kick. Another attacker fares even worse as Kang lifts him off of the ground and tosses him into the mouth of a living tree. The end result is simply terrifying. As the tree gnaws on his bones, an eruption of blood spews from the wooden maw. Without our mouths nearly on the floor, Himmerick pipes in as he points toward a smaller tree onscreen. “To me, an interesting part is this living tree. Tony Goskie, who did the original *Mortal Kombat 2* background with these trees, this was one of his original concept arts, but he just couldn't get it to work right. He told us, ‘This is the tree

I wanted in, but we didn't have time. Or something like that. So now we put that tree in for Tony.”

The entire story in *Shaolin Monks* is set within the classic era of the series. “The opening movie will start at the end of *Mortal Kombat 1* and will then go up to *Mortal Kombat 3*,” Himmerick adds. “We're covering that story. There wasn't a lot of depth to the story back then so we're trying to bring a lot of that back. In this game way we are taking all of the environments and characters of *Mortal Kombat 2* and are bringing them to life.”

While the entire game is comprised of intense combat, this is not a traditional *Mortal Kombat* fighter. It's not even close. Outside of the familiar sights and sounds, this game is a complete departure from the formula that you know

■ Kung Lao leaps onto an enemy and pops him into the air



■ In cooperative play, you can coordinate attacks with your friend. Testers of the game have even taken to throwing enemies back and forth for minutes on end

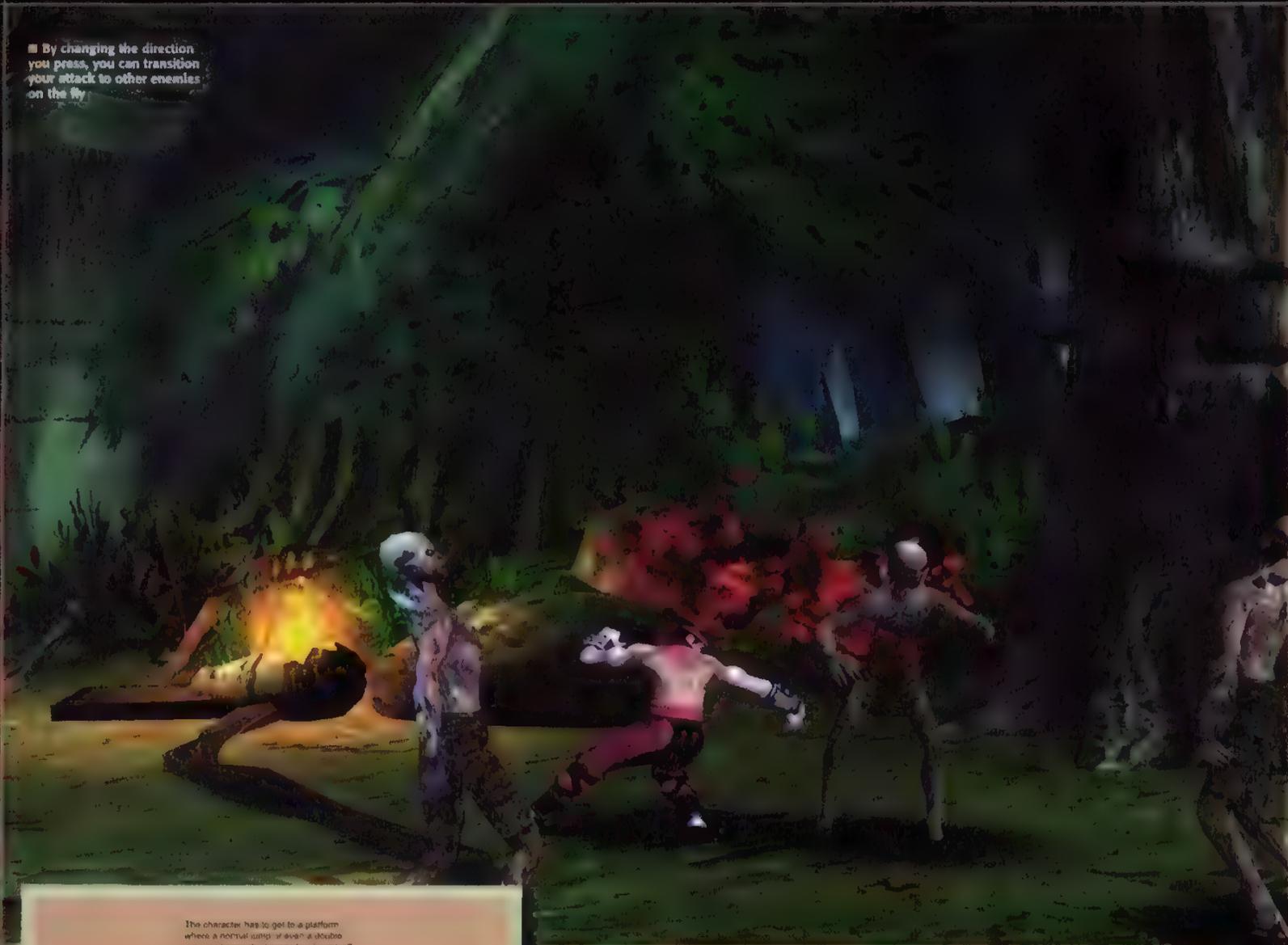


■ Characters who were simply a part of the backgrounds in Mortal Kombat 2 are now enemies. If you don't take down the druid first, he will heal your other foes

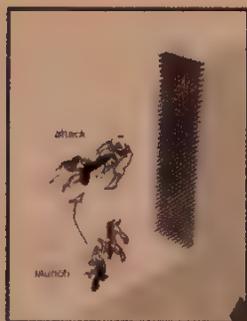


and love. Much like EA's recent *The Lord of the Rings* releases, and Atari's *Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone*, *Shaolin Monks* is a brawler at heart, focusing on frenzied multi-person battles as opposed to the complexity of head-to-head sparring. Like these aforementioned titles, one of the main focuses of this release is cooperative play. With a friend filling the shoes of Liu Kang, a second player can suit up as Kung Lao. Most titles of this ilk rely heavily on button mashing. That mindless technique won't work in this game, however. The team at Paradox is approaching the combat in this title much like a fighting game, offering a great range of moves and techniques to assail those who dare challenge your might. "We don't want this to be that *Ninja Gaiden* kill, kill, kill [gameplay]," says Hirammerick.

■ By changing the direction you press, you can transition your attack to other enemies on the fly.



The character has to get to a platform where a normal jump or even a double jump isn't enough. He can't wall jump off of the spikes. So he must creatively use an enemy to create a piece of wall to jump off of.



To get maximum height, he launches the enemy upwards and performs a knock-back attack.



■ Here's a development sheet showing how corpses can be used to navigate the terrain.

Now that the enemy is pinned to the wall, the character can use him as a safe spot to wall jump off of.

■ Many of the environments in the game are inspired by the backgrounds in Mortal Kombat 2.



■ All of the characters can unleash their legendary attacks from *Mortal Kombat 2*. In a nice touch, Paradox has transformed Liu Kang's fireball into a dragon head. Additionally, if you look at the moon closely, you'll see Santa and his reindeer



“We tapped any rumor that we could find for MK 2.”

Interestingly, the fighting mechanic works off of a multidirectional system. This allows players to seamlessly transition attacks from one enemy to any adversary that may be lurking in the nearby vicinity. This means that every attack that you perform will display four different animations: one for in front, one for in back, and one for each side. Additionally, the game makes use of four attack buttons that break down as such: fast, medium, hard, and throw.

Ensuring that this system fits every playing preference and is as far from frustrating as can be, Paradox has implemented a lock-on button that allows players to hone in on a single enemy and dish out punishment from there. “I can come over here and lock onto this guy,” Himmerick explains. “You can see which one he’s locked onto by a quick flash. So I know I’m attacking him, and I’m blocking this way. But if I want to attack an enemy behind me I can perform a backward attack without losing focus on my guy going forward. The character doesn’t just spin to do a new attack.”

Transitioning to another area in the Living Forest, and pummeling foes the entire way, Liu Kang’s progress quickly came to a halt as four towering serpents

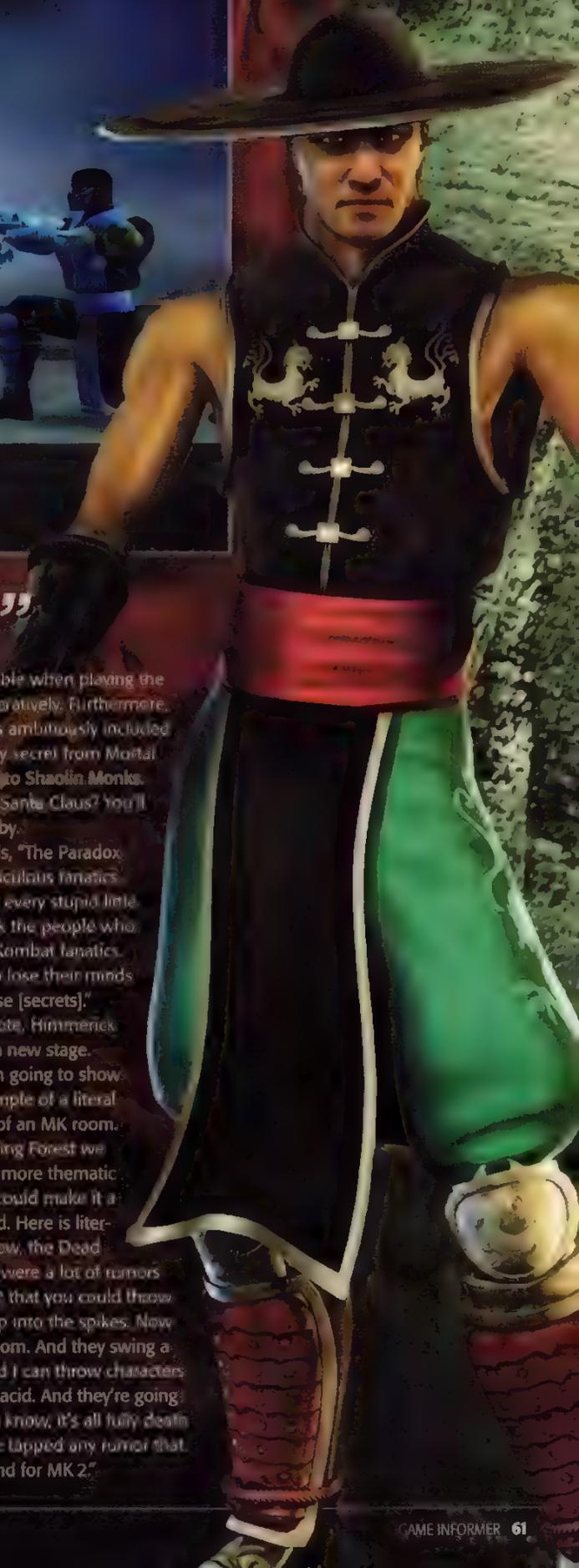
set up a perimeter around him. “So now you see the snakes have surrounded you,” Himmerick points out. “The environment is much more than a death trap. It has surrounded you.” Much like feeding a tree earlier on, to sate the appetite of these slithering threats, he simply needs to serve up a tasty morsel. So, for the second time within a matter of minutes, the hapless enemies have become the main course for a sadistic feast. With his eyes lighting up just at the thought of what he is about to say, Boon injects, “What’s really cool is that bodies are props. I mean there’s a ton of places where you see a ceiling full of spikes. You uppercut the guy, he sacks to those spikes, and his weight pulls the whole thing down, and you jump on there. They become background obstacles.”

Distancing itself even further from the traditional MK mold, platforming is a huge part of navigating your surroundings. As you double jump over chasms, scamper up walls, and swing across poles, you had best keep your eyes peeled or you might miss something. Himmerick illustrates, “If I climb up that [tree], there’s a hidden level up there... a hidden room that you can get to.” The secrets in the game are vast. In fact, there are some secrets that are

only accessible when playing the game cooperatively. Furthermore, Paradox has ambitiously included almost every secret from *Mortal Kombat 2* to *Shaolin Monks*. Remember Santa Claus? You’ll see him fly by.

Boon adds, “The Paradox guys are ridiculous fanatics. They added every stupid little thing. I think the people who are *Mortal Kombat* fanatics are going to lose their minds with all these [secrets].”

On this note, Himmerick loaded up a new stage. “So now I’m going to show you an example of a literal translation of an MK room. With the Living Forest we took a little more thematic liberty. We could make it a whole world. Here is literally, you know, the Dead Pool. There were a lot of rumors during MK 2 that you could throw someone up into the spikes. Now you can. Boom. And they swing a little bit. And I can throw characters off into the acid. And they’re going to char. You know, it’s all fully death trapped. We tapped any rumor that we could find for MK 2.”



“There were a lot of rumors during MK 2 that you could throw someone up into the spikes. Now you can. Boom.”



■ These sketches give a rough outline of how the fight will unfold



As your journey takes you from one familiar sight to the next, you'll also bump heads with other recognizable combatants from Mortal Kombat lore. “We didn’t just want to have boss fights that were just one fights,” Himmerick states. “For example, we have what we are calling the ‘chick fight’ internally. This is Kitana, Mileena, and Jade all in one fight.” True enough, Himmerick loaded up the fight. In a cutscene prior to the bout, Raiden informs Liu Kang that Kitana is under a spell. “We’re trying to honor the reality of the MK world,” Himmerick explains. “So she’s under a spell. That’s why she’s attacking you. So you don’t want to just kill her.”

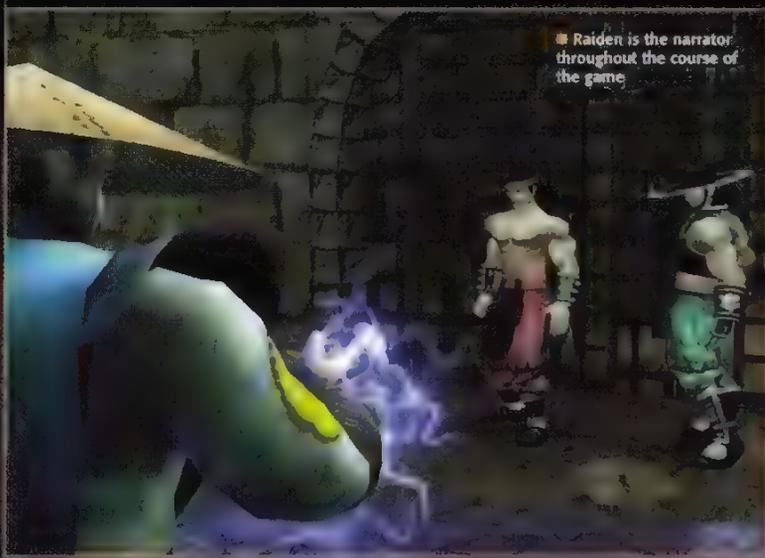
As Kitana lit up the screen with a flurry of attacks, Himmerick lured her toward the edge of the arena, then with one swift blow sent her sailing into a hovering portal. Seconds later, Kitana’s body came crashing to the ground with a hefty metal cage landing around her. With the assailant behind bars, this didn’t seem like much of a boss fight. That is, until Mileena and Jade made their presence known. Liu Kang was faced with the challenge of combating both of these lovely ladies and

preventing either one from freeing Kitana. If she gets loose, you’ll have to face all three of them.

“What’s really cool about the bosses is the range that we have,” says Boon. “The appeal, I think, in a lot of ways is the novelty of it. ‘Oh my God I’m fighting this guy!’ And then there’s the grandiose. ‘I’m playing Indiana Jones and I’m rolling a big rolling ball!’ To me, this is what really sets it apart.” To show the diversity in these fights, Himmerick brought up another stage. As Liu Kang entered what would appear to be a temple of some sort, the camera panned out and a massive snake, one that dwarfs the serpent that Harry Potter fought in *The Chamber of Secrets*, approached with Reptile riding its head. “We almost fell out of our chairs at the very sight of it.”

“So I’ve got to fight this snake before I can even get to Reptile,” notes Himmerick. “He’ll try to bite you and capture you. You’re going to be in his mouth, and there’s going to be a Test Your Might to get out of that. We’re trying to use those old MK 1 and MK 2 things in new ways. So we want to use those in these boss fights.” As the battle continued, the only strategy





■ Raiden is the narrator throughout the course of the game



■ By uncovering secrets, you'll unlock additional playable characters



that seemed to work against the beast is tricking it into slamming into pillars. This is no small feat, however. As it tries to feed on your flesh, you'll have to bound across platforms and do whatever you can to avoid this beast, hoping to land a blow or two to its head in the process. Once all of the pillars are destroyed, the floor will give way and you and the snake will crash land in a watery pit. The impact of the fall kills the snake, and its carcass creates a circle around you. This, of course, becomes the stage for the Reptile battle.

"When you fight a boss, you're not running into another guy that you have to hit 10,000 times and whittle down his health," Boon says. Every boss fight is going to be just as inventive and as ambitious as the two that we had witnessed. An air of skepticism even came about when talking about all of the elements that they wanted to include in the Scorpion fight.

"All the MK 1 or 2 people are bosses," Himmerick states. "You run into a lot of the other characters

in the game. Like Smoke wasn't in there, but Smoke is hidden in the Forest. Ermac's a good example of a really neat boss fight, and it's a very difficult boss fight, but we don't want this game to be too hard for your average player so it's a side mission. Roughly 30 percent of this game isn't part of the main storyline. You can play through the entire game and never fight Ermac. But if you want to play as Sub-Zero you have to beat Ermac. There's going to be tons of unlockable stuff like that."

In addition to locking horns with familiar faces, you'll get the chance to fight alongside them. "Here you see Johnny Cage," Himmerick points out. "I'm fighting with Johnny Cage. He's doing all original MK moves. If I just stay here and fight long enough he'll give me a warning. He'll probably tell us, 'Hey, we gotta get moving.'"

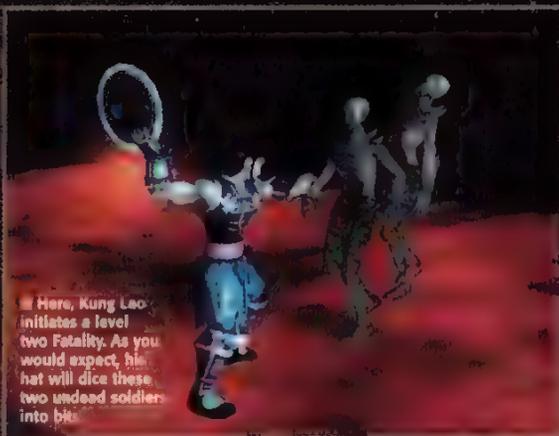
Literally every environment that we witnessed houses some kind of deathtrap, be it a ledge to toss an enemy off of, a pool of acid to melt them in, or pointy spikes to impale them on. If you feel as though the

enemy forces are simply overwhelming, you can quickly dispose of them by tossing them to their death. This may seem like the easiest way to march through this game, but actions like these come at a price. For each foe that you obliterate with your arsenal of moves, you'll be rewarded with experience points. If you choose not to fight, you won't get this reward. Additionally, when an enemy bites the big one, his or her soul will float up into your health meter and fill it ever so slightly. If you don't gain experience, you really won't get anywhere at all. The majority of moves in the game must be purchased by cashing in the XP that you earn.

"You start with just one fireball," explains Himmerick. "You can upgrade that to two fireballs, and then to the third, after that to throwing fireballs in the air. I can jump in the air and literally throw fireballs from the air. All the attacks have upgrades and combos. You start by simply throwing Kung Lao's hat. [Upgrade it] and it will ping off of walls, and again to make it swarm

and kill everything around you. This system lets you accommodate your skills and how you like to fight."

Not every move can be purchased from the menu, however. As mentioned previously, you really do need to keep your eyes open for secrets scattered about the levels. In a familiar environment with preordaineds soaring in the background winds, a stone wall separates you from the outside world. No matter how much you study this wall, it would appear to be just that... an ordinary wall. However, if you throw an enemy at it, it will explode, showering rubble everywhere. When the dust clears, something odd remains. Where once there was a complete arrangement of brick now rests a lonesome arrow. Hurling additional enemies at different sections of the wall reveals even more arrows. Most gamers will probably pass this secret up. Those who take the time to explore it will learn that this sequence is actually one of the hidden Fatalities in the game. And after all, what would Mortal Kombat be without bloody finishers?



Here, Kung Lao initiates a level two Fatality. As you would expect, his hat will dice these two undead soldiers into bits.

“People are dying left and right, heads are coming off.”

BONE CHANDELIER PUZZLE



THE OBJECT IN THIS ARENA IS TO IMPALE YOUR ENEMIES ON THE FANGS OF THE SKULLS IN THE CHANDELIER.

ONCE YOU'VE STUCK AN ENEMY ON EACH OF THE FOUR SKULLS THE WEIGHT IS SUFFICIENT ENOUGH FOR THE CHANDELIER TO LOWER INTO THE SOUL FIRE.

WHILE THE CHANDELIER IS LOWERED YOU CAN JUMP UP ON TO THE UPPER PLATFORM.



AND WHEN THE ENEMIES HAVE BEEN CUT OFF THE CHANDELIER WILL LIFT YOU IN TO THE NEXT REALM.



This diagram shows how some of the puzzles are.

As of press time, Paradox Development is planning on 10 different Fatalities for our two heroes, plus one for each of the hidden characters, and five team Fatalities. Furthermore, many of the bosses in the game will be able to perform finishers on you. So how does one go about executing a Fatality in a sprawling brawl? Much like a special meter, players will build up a three-level Fatality meter by defeating foes and performing combos.

Level one allows players to initiate a Fatality where you kill one enemy. Level two opens things up a bit and devastates more than one foe. As for level three, Boon and company are still trying to figure out what to do with this. When asked what it does currently, Himmerick stammered, looked at Boon and said, “We got a couple of different ideas. One of the ideas we’re calling a Brutality. It’ll basically give you 15 seconds where your heavy attacks are one-hit kills. Just bang bang. People are dying left and right, heads are coming off. That may be up to Ed’s discretion to change that. We’re leaving that kind of open right now to some extra ideas.” To actually initiate the Fatality, players simply need to enter the sequence that they had stumbled upon, been rewarded, or purchased from the menu. Holding true to the series thus far, the screen fades to black, and your characters go well out of their way to annihilate their prey.

One Fatality that we were treated to was quite gruesome indeed. Liu Kang decapitates his foe with a swift uppercut, then as the screen spins in slow motion, performs an amazing bicycle kick that sends the airborne head back at the lifeless corpse. Players will be able to call upon these moves whenever their Fatality Meter is full, but Paradox is still throwing around ideas as to how they will work in boss fights.

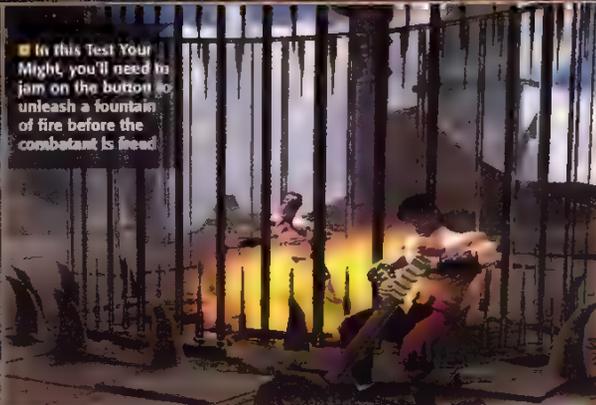
Another quick way to make mincemeat of your attackers is by brandishing a weapon such as a broadsword. With a smile on his face, Himmerick showed us exactly how this works: “With an armament, different attacks do different things. Like if I do the quick attack it’ll cut his head off. You can cut the guy horizontally, vertically, cut arms off. It’s a fully dismembered body system – just like ~~that~~, actually.” We also witnessed a puzzle that could only be solved by using a weapon. At one point during a stage, the player’s progress comes to a halt at an enormous locked door. To either side of this massive entry are two men who are shackled at their hands and at their feet. Closer inspection reveals that they are actually being stretched to the point that they may very well pop. The solution is obvious, you must free them of their misery. To do this, you simply need to chop them in both in two. By releasing the pressure that was torturing these poor souls, you will also open the door.



■ Baraka's clan will make quick work of you



■ Enter Smoke



■ In this Test Your Might, you'll need to jam on the button to unleash a fountain of fire before the combatant is freed



■ You never know who you will run into during a stage

“One question that everyone asks us is, ‘Can you attack each other?’” Himmerick remarks.

“It’s going to be a toggle. You can turn it off. You can turn it on. We’re defaulting to it off because we like it off just in our playing of it, but if you want to mess with your enemy you can go in, one quick toggle, and you can beat the crap out of your buddy. And we’re going to have what we’re calling just Versus mode.” As you can imagine, every character that you unlock can be used within this head-to-head option.

Paradox is also doing everything in its power to ensure that the co-op experience is never frustrating. Already the company has solutions to many of the problems that have plagued this

genre. Since the game throws a fair amount of platforming at the players, the last thing that you want to see is one player falling off of a ledge and dying, or having to leap up a tall series of jumps again. “We’re using the fact that Kung Lao has a teleport to our advantage,” explains Himmerick. “Kung Lao will either teleport himself back up or teleport the other player up.” On top of this, each character won’t have an individual health meter. In two player, there’s just one meter that is shared between the two players. Hence, if one player isn’t pulling his or her weight, it’s time to get another friend.

Whether you are playing through the game by your lonesome or with

a pal at your side, the team estimates that the critical path of journey will take roughly 12 to 15 hours. “A lot of the things that we are doing are bringing back old stuff, upgrading it, and just trying to make it look better,” says Himmerick. True enough, almost every second that we breathed in struck a chord with us and opened up a floodgate of memories. Midway is going back to the days when people would run out into the streets and scream “Mortal Kombat” at the top of their lungs, and when you couldn’t turn around without seeing someone pumping their hard-earned living into an arcade machine just to try to be the first person to perform a new Fatality.

Not only will Shaolin Monks build upon the sacred Mortal Kombat lore, it promises to inject new life into the third-person action genre. The depth of the fighting mechanics, level of interactivity within the environments, and extensiveness of the secrets should make the level for what you can expect from a beat ‘em up. Whether we were standing toe-to-toe with the titan Goro or flying through the air and bouncing off of walls as we unleashed one devastating combo sequence after another, we were blown away by what we had seen thus far of Shaolin Monks. If development proceeds as planned, next fall should be a bloody good time. ■■■



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UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX LPC

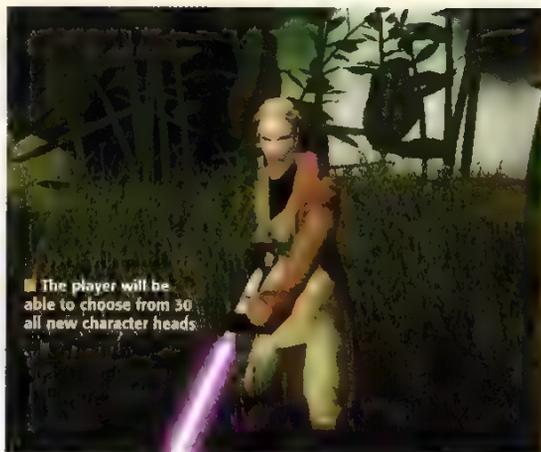
- > STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
- > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS
- > DEVELOPER OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
- > RELEASE DECEMBER (XBOX), FEBRUARY (PC)



Take a moment to examine the common stereotype of what it means to be a gamer. In addition to spending long hours in front of a television or monitor, there are also the inescapable associations with tabletop RPGs, science fiction, and frenzied trips to comic conventions in hopes of catching a glimpse of Mark Hamill. Of course, gamers are a varied bunch, and though these exaggerations do not hold true across the board, perhaps there is more than a kernel of truth in the generalizations. That would be one way to explain the runaway success of LucasArts' *Knights of the Old Republic* last year, which combined *Star Wars*, role-playing, and a d20 battle system in a glorious hybrid tailored to satisfy the inner nerd in all of us.

Wasting no time in dishing out a second helping, LucasArts already has the anticipated sequel to *KOTOR*, *The Sith Lords*, hitting store shelves this holiday season. The development reins have been passed from BioWare to Obsidian, but a shift in management does not mean a degradation of quality; gamers can still expect to see everything they loved about the first game, including a story filled with twists and intrigue. Setting the stage for a brand new adventure, LucasArts producer Mike Gallo explains what has happened in the intervening years between the two games: "The galaxy has really gone downhill. The Sith are seemingly moving at will throughout the galaxy, and generally making things pretty unpleasant. They have been hunting down and destroying the Jedi Knights in an effort to eradicate them, and they begin the game chasing after your character because they believe him/her to be the last of the Jedi order." So, as we picked up the controller and prepared to wield the Force once again, we assumed the role of a new character – the last hope for the Republic – and found ourselves at a crossroads, where we could walk the path of righteousness or begin the descent into madness.

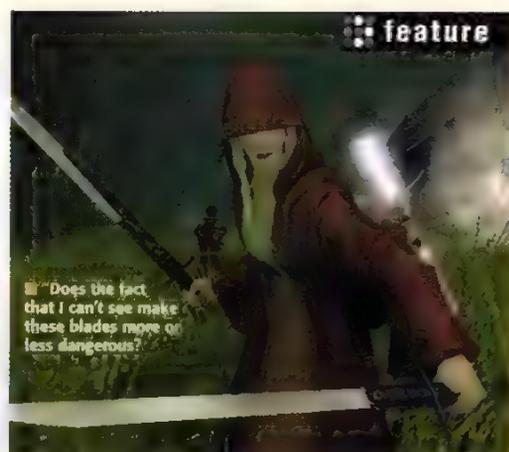




■ The player will be able to choose from 30 all new character heads



■ Expect to see new lightsaber colors, as well as more slots for customizing your weapons

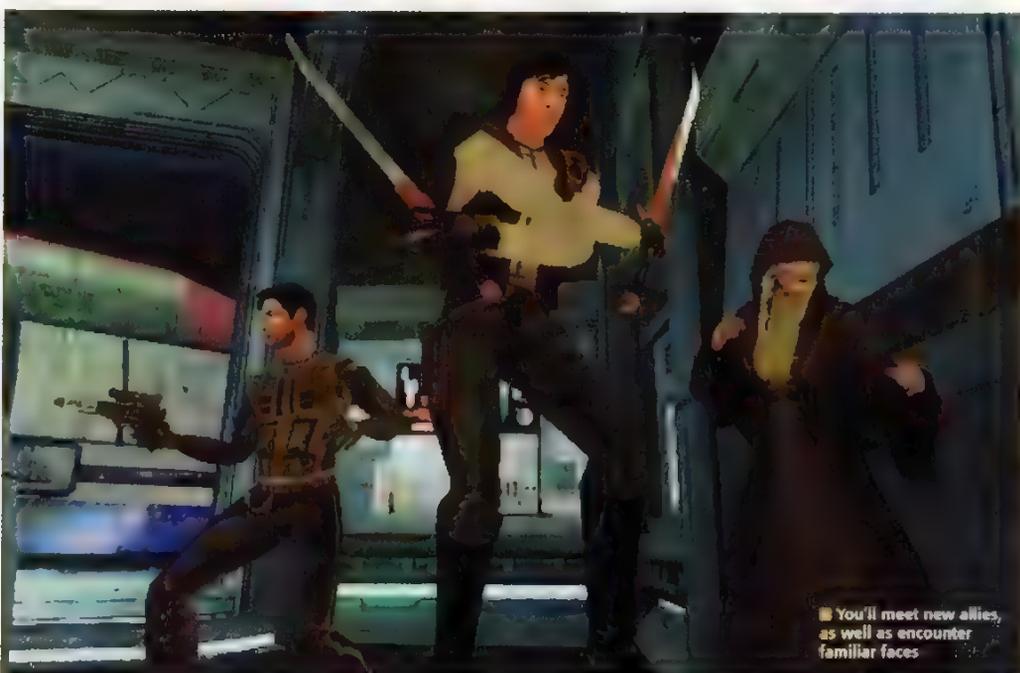


feature

■ "Does the fact that I can't see make these blades more or less dangerous?"



■ Licking 60 lb. toads has its consequences



■ You'll meet new allies, as well as encounter familiar faces

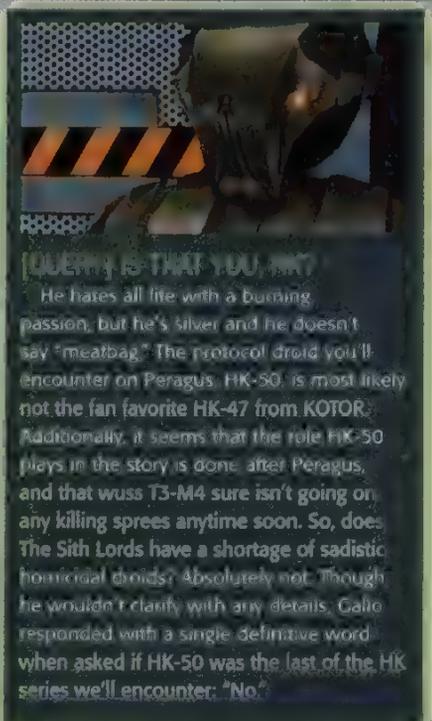
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Some of the best RPGs on the market play like digital novels, with the player taking a set of characters through a series of prescribed events. Also like books, these games lend themselves well to sequels, since the storyline remains the same no matter how many times it is played, meaning that the next installment can simply pick up where the last left off. However, given that player choice factored so powerfully into the fun of KOTOR, it is impossible for its sequel to simply take one outcome and build from it. With the highly variable nature of the first game, one of the mysteries surrounding The Sith Lords is how it reconciles the many alterable events of its predecessor. Fortunately, the game implements a creative solution that allows players to dictate their personal experience with the previous game rather than assume outright that one ending or the other came to pass.

In dialogue options early on, your character will engage in several conversations about the happenings since the collapse of the Star Forge, and the responses that you choose during these exchanges are far more crucial than they may first appear. Rather than just serve as a tool to inform the game of your propensities in KOTOR, they also have a further-reaching impact on the allies and cameos that will eventually become available. "Players will choose

things like 'was Revan good or evil' or 'was Revan a man or a woman,'" describes Gallo. "Those choices will determine what kind of characters you will run into later in the game (since the light and dark endings meant that certain people lived or died). There are also options that a first time player can pick that will make sense to them as well."

However, some old friends will be reintroduced regardless of your choices. In fact, before you even assume your role as the last of the Jedi, you'll control T3-M4 in a brief tutorial where he tries to keep a flaming, crumbling Ebon Hawk from coming apart at the seams. Not much later, once the ship lands safely on the mining colony of Peragus, you'll run into a self-proclaimed protocol droid with a familiar gleeful disdain for humanity (though the word "meatbag" is suspiciously lacking from his vocabulary). Gallo explains that "a few characters will at least have cameo appearances, and some of them will be key members of your party." Of course, since The Sith Lords is entirely new, it wouldn't make sense to saturate the party's ranks with familiar faces, but it can't hurt having a couple of experienced veterans along saving the galaxy...or ruining it. Whether or not Revan makes a reappearance isn't known for sure, but one thing is certain about the former Dark Lord: it isn't you.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

He hates all life with a burning passion, but he's silver and he doesn't say "meatbag." The protocol droid you'll encounter on Peragus, HK-50, is most likely not the fan favorite HK-47 from KOTOR. Additionally, it seems that the role HK-50 plays in the story is done after Peragus, and that wuss T3-M4 sure isn't going on any killing sprees anytime soon. So, does The Sith Lords have a shortage of sadistic homicidal droids? Absolutely not. Though he wouldn't clarify with any details, Gallo responded with a single definitive word when asked if HK-50 was the last of the HK series we'll encounter. "No."

“

...one moment you could be swinging a double-bladed lightsaber, and the next you could be dual-wielding Mandalorian blasters.

”



In addition to the new powers, old favorites like Force Crush will be returning.

THE SITH LORDS LOOK LIKE MICH, BUT

Your face will go down in history as the one who saved or doomed millions, so creating a new persona crucial to the fate of the galaxy is not a task to be taken lightly. In *The Sith Lords*, the player will once again select a visage that can change to reflect the purest intentions or the corruption of evil. Contrary to some early reports, it does not appear that the facial models from the first game will be returning, but there will be a whole crop of original choices for this adventure. "There are over 30 different heads to choose from, and all of them are new," Gallo clarifies. "Since you are creating a new character, we really wanted all the heads to be different from those in the first game." Despite the fresh faces, much of the character creation is nearly identical to the first game, giving players the chance to manually assign skills and attribute points in true *Dungeons & Dragons* style. The only notable change is the elimination of lame, Force-deprived jobs in favor of the three Jedi classes from *KOTOR*. Face it — you are a Jedi now. It's time to start acting like it.

The only problem is that Jedi have a honed and sharpened command of the Force, something you are unfortunately lacking as the game begins. Your character has been somehow severed from the Force and must slowly rebuild the connection, regaining powers and abilities as his/her sensitivity renews.

Over time, you will have the chance to obtain a more advanced Jedi class to take you deeper in the mysteries of the Force. These new classes are Jedi Master, Jedi Watchmen, Jedi Weapon Master, Sith Lord, Sith Marauder, and Sith Assassin. As you can see, these prestige ranks are actually tied to your alignment, each offering unique advantages based on the side of the Force from which they derive their power.

Does this mean that you'll need to make your ultimate choice between darkness and light even sooner? After all, if you've already become a Sith Assassin, you probably won't be entrusted with many missions critical to the Jedi's survival. LucasArts is currently keeping quiet on this point, but given the game's overall philosophy, plus the fact that *KOTOR* afforded you several chances for corruption and redemption, it seems unlikely that players will be railroaded into following one path or another too soon.

FROM SITH LORDS AND WATCHMEN

Of course, an awesome new title like Jedi Master doesn't mean much unless it brings with it an increase in power. Fortunately, *The Sith Lords* is greatly expanding the number of Force abilities available, as well as introducing a brand new way to obtain them. The old format, where you take one power at a time in a series of tests, is still intact. However, some of the coolest skills can only be gained in another manner — they

are taught. Throughout the game you will encounter certain characters who, depending on your alignment, can pass on their knowledge of exclusive and powerful techniques. Force Crush, where you lift a single opponent off the ground only to apply devastating amounts of unseen pressure, is an example of a skill learned through this new method. Other new powers are Force Scream, which unleashes an excruciating shriek, and Force Fury, a buff that dramatically increases your strength with each foe you cut down while enraged.

With all of the special powers and bonuses flying around, it shouldn't come as a surprise that a great deal of attention has been paid to balancing the battles. Obsidian was founded by members of the teams that worked on games with revolutionary battle dynamics such as *Fallout* and *Icwind Dale*, and this experience shines through in the many new levels that have been added to the formerly one-dimensional combat mechanic. New feats give players bonuses if two or more characters are attacking the same enemy, or they can drastically reduce the penalty for using a ranged weapon in close combat.

Even more impressive than the new feats, however, is the addition of forms. Forms are styles of fighting that characters learn to gain an advantage during a particular situation. For instance, one form might grant a hefty bonus to hit at the expense of defense (ideal for large groups of easy foes), while another may increase defense to allow Force-users to utilize their skills without taking damage. Like the class-specific Force powers, not all forms will be available to all classes; they are very much tailored to the tendencies of each job, making the entire battle experience more specialized. While these additions primarily affect numbers and statistics that players don't interact with, there are plenty of more apparent ways to delve deeper into battle than ever before.

The first time you engage in a fight, you'll notice a few changes. First of all, it is now possible to switch between two entirely different weapon configurations. That means one moment you could be swinging a double-bladed lightsaber, and the next you could be dual-wielding Mandalorian blasters. Also implemented is a much-needed mechanism for governing the action of the combatants you aren't currently controlling — a sorely underdeveloped aspect of *KOTOR*. Now, every character can be assigned a range of behaviors right from the battle screen, which will hopefully make it easier to keep over-enthusiastic allies from pursuing enemies straight into minefields. Still, mistakes happen, and if your party happens to get wounded,



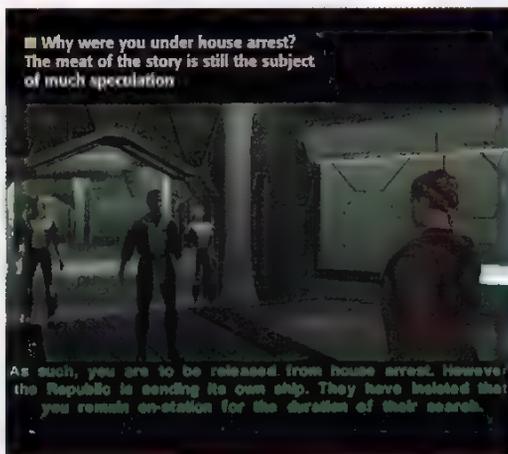
■ Zen gardens - mentioning a Jedi needs to attain inner peace



■ Are there any Star Wars villains without horribly deformed faces?



■ "Silly robots, singlets are for Jedi!"



■ Why were you under house arrest? The meat of the story is still the subject of much speculation

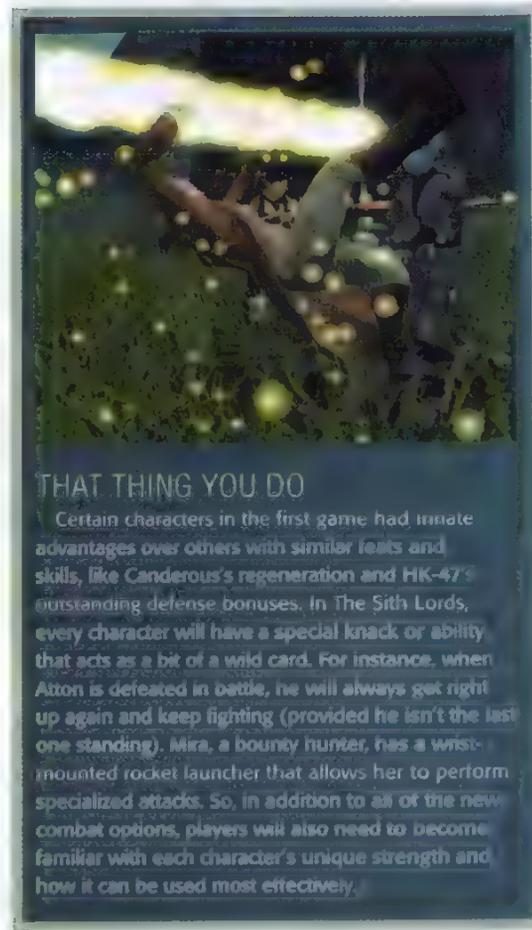
As such, you are to be released from house arrest. However, the Republic is sending its own ship. They have insisted that you remain on-station for the duration of their search.



■ Mining volatile fuel on Peragus can have explosive repercussions



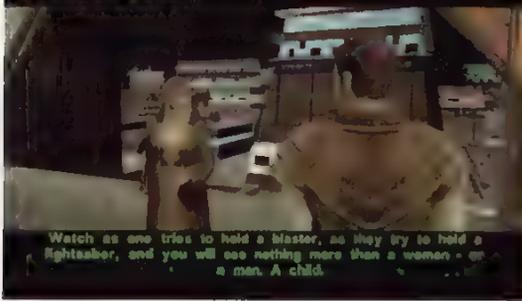
■ Your alignment now affects your party members in addition to your Force powers



THAT THING YOU DO

Certain characters in the first game had innate advantages over others with similar feats and skills, like Canderous's regeneration and HK-47's outstanding defense bonuses. In *The Sith Lords*, every character will have a special knack or ability that acts as a bit of a wild card. For instance, when Atton is defeated in battle, he will always get right up again and keep fighting (provided he isn't the last one standing). Mira, a bounty hunter, has a wrist-mounted rocket launcher that allows her to perform specialized attacks. So, in addition to all of the new combat options, players will also need to become familiar with each character's unique strength and how it can be used most effectively.

■ Kreia, a wise old Jedi, offers guidance and advice



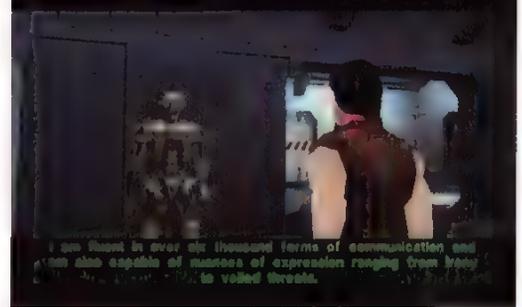
Watch as one tries to hold a Master, as they try to hold a lightsaber, and you will see nothing more than a woman - or a man. A child.

■ Unlike the first game, The Sith Lords will focus on multiple bad guys, though Darth Sion appears to be the main nemesis

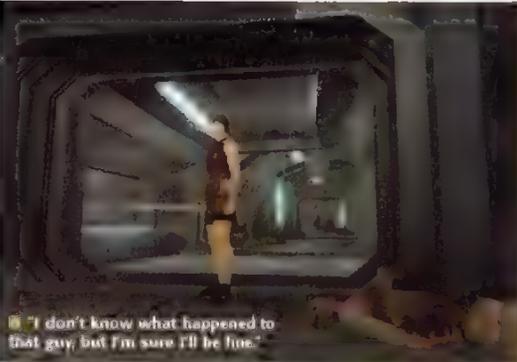


Perhaps. We shall see.

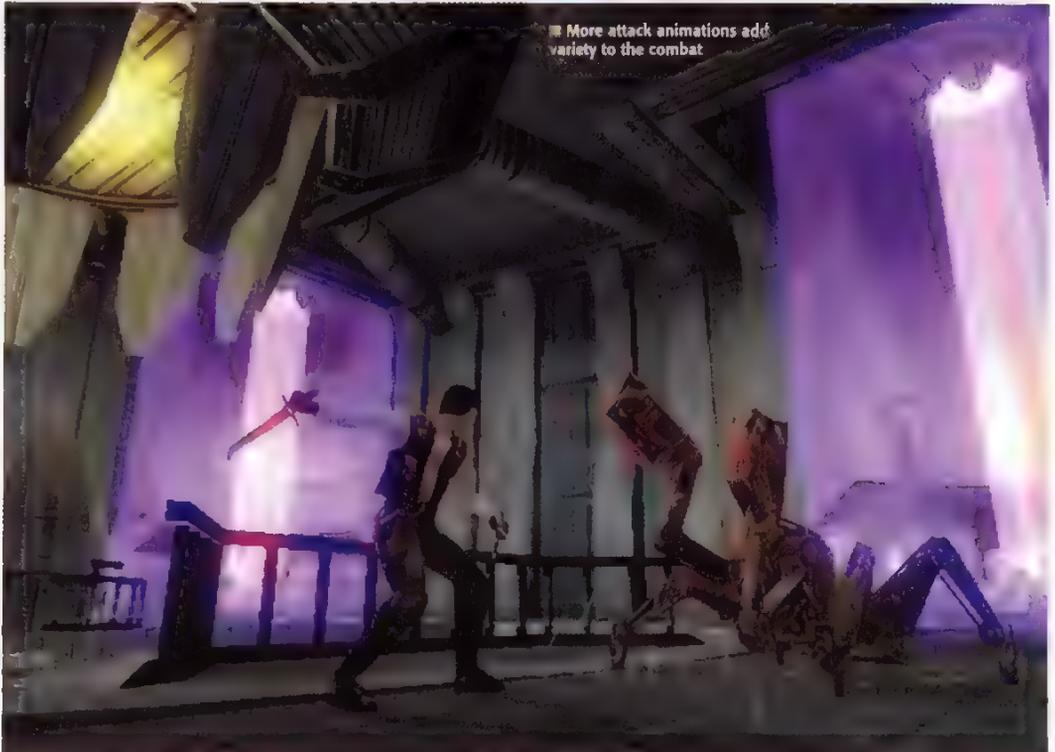
■ The HK series of droids returns with a vengeance



I can speak in over six thousand forms of communication and I am also capable of nuances of expression ranging from heavy sarcasm to subtle threats.



■ "I don't know what happened to that guy, but I'm sure I'll be fine."



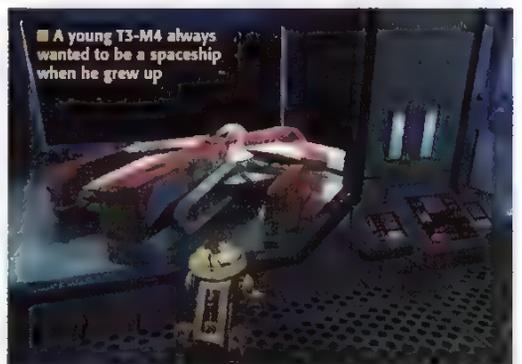
■ More attack animations add variety to the combat



■ The first section of the game has T3-M4 repairing a badly damaged Ebon Hawk



■ Visit five new planets, in addition to two old favorites



■ A young T3-M4 always wanted to be a spaceship when he grew up



■ You awaken as the lone survivor of a voyage gone awry

you'll no longer need to cycle through each member applying medpacs. Thankfully, items can now be used on other characters, making the fights flow much more smoothly while still keeping everyone in the pink. Of course, it also means that you can keep your party alive long enough to witness your transformation as you rediscover a lost affinity for the light or dark side of the Force.

THE FOOT WHO FOLLOWS HIM

Few will disagree with the assertion that the good vs. evil conflicts in KOTOR were simply brilliant. If you wanted to kill widows, massacre families, or torture captives, the game gave you the freedom to do so. Still, it always was a bit puzzling how a namby-pamby like Carth could stand by such a morally bankrupt character. While the player's alignment was variable, the party was already set in their ways. This is no longer the case in *The Sith Lords*. "Certain characters in your party will be affected by the choices that you make to the light or dark side," says Gallo. "Your leadership will also cause them to sway good or evil as you progress through the story. This, of course, will change dialogue options as well as certain aspects of the story." Not only that, but just as your character's leaning is reflected by appearance, so will your comrades undergo visual changes as they slide to either end of the spectrum.

This new dynamic is undoubtedly the most exciting aspect of *The Sith Lords*. Not only does your alignment directly influence the actions of your companions, but it even affects which companions you can have by your side. Gallo laid out how this works: "There are over 10 characters to choose from, and some of them are specific to the player character's alignment and gender. So there are some characters that will not join your party on one play through." The result is an astronomical increase in replay value; not only can you play through the situations differently, but you can do it with a different roster of allies to boot!

As cool as that sounds, there will still be party members that the story requires you to haul along. For instance, when your character first awakens, he/she is on a mining colony on the planet Peragus. Escape is impossible alone, so you need to enlist the help of a milky-eyed (and Force-wielding) stranger named Kreia, as well as Han Solo stand-in Atton Rand (who, though a bit Carthish, never feels the need to whine about his feelings). Things on Peragus quickly turn sour, and soon after you escape your ranks are expanded by the familiar T3-M4, and later still you'll encounter a bounty hunter named Mira, complete with a Boba Fett-esque array of armaments. Not all of the new faces that you see will be potential party members, though. The team at Obsidian has learned from the mistakes of the previous entry — most notably the lack of variety among the NPCs. "There are a ton of new unique heads for NPCs, and I think everyone will be happy to see them," Gallo assures us.

Of course, with a name like *The Sith Lords*, there is bound to be a sizeable evil presence as well. Taking Lord Malak's place on the game's title screen is Darth Sion, a topless wonder with thick, rock-like

skin. However, since the Sith are well known for their infighting and lust for power, there are several other unnamed villains (like the warrior in the black robes and painted mask) who, though they may not be allied directly with Sion, are uniformly bent on wiping you out. Unfortunately, they have both the means and the might to chase you to all ends of known space to accomplish their bloody task.

HEARD YOU WERE IN OTHER PLACE

In the five years since the fall of Darth Malak, the galaxy has become a changed place. Regardless of



what path Darth Revan chose, the Sith's power has continued to grow, and the worlds that the players travels to will reflect the passage of time. Two planets from the first game will be revisited in *The Sith Lords*, though only one of them is known at this time: Dantooine. That's right — you will now have a chance to witness first hand the aftermath of the attack on this peaceful farming planet, and perhaps even ascertain the fate of the Jedi Enclave it once housed.

Apart from treading familiar ground, players will also get a chance to explore new corners of civilization. We've already mentioned that the Peragus Mining Colony is a new area, and it is joined by the planet Telos, which astute gamers will recognize as the homeworld of that infamous patsy Carth Onasi (Uh-oh. Cameo alert?). So, exactly how much new ground does that give players to cover? Gallo does the math for us: "Five new planets, but there are several more new areas for the players to explore. So, that give us a total of seven planets/worlds, and a lot of variety within each of those areas."

The freedom of the first game, cruising around and hopping between the planets at will, returns. However, all of the locations you'll be traveling to are still unknown, as is the motivation that takes you from

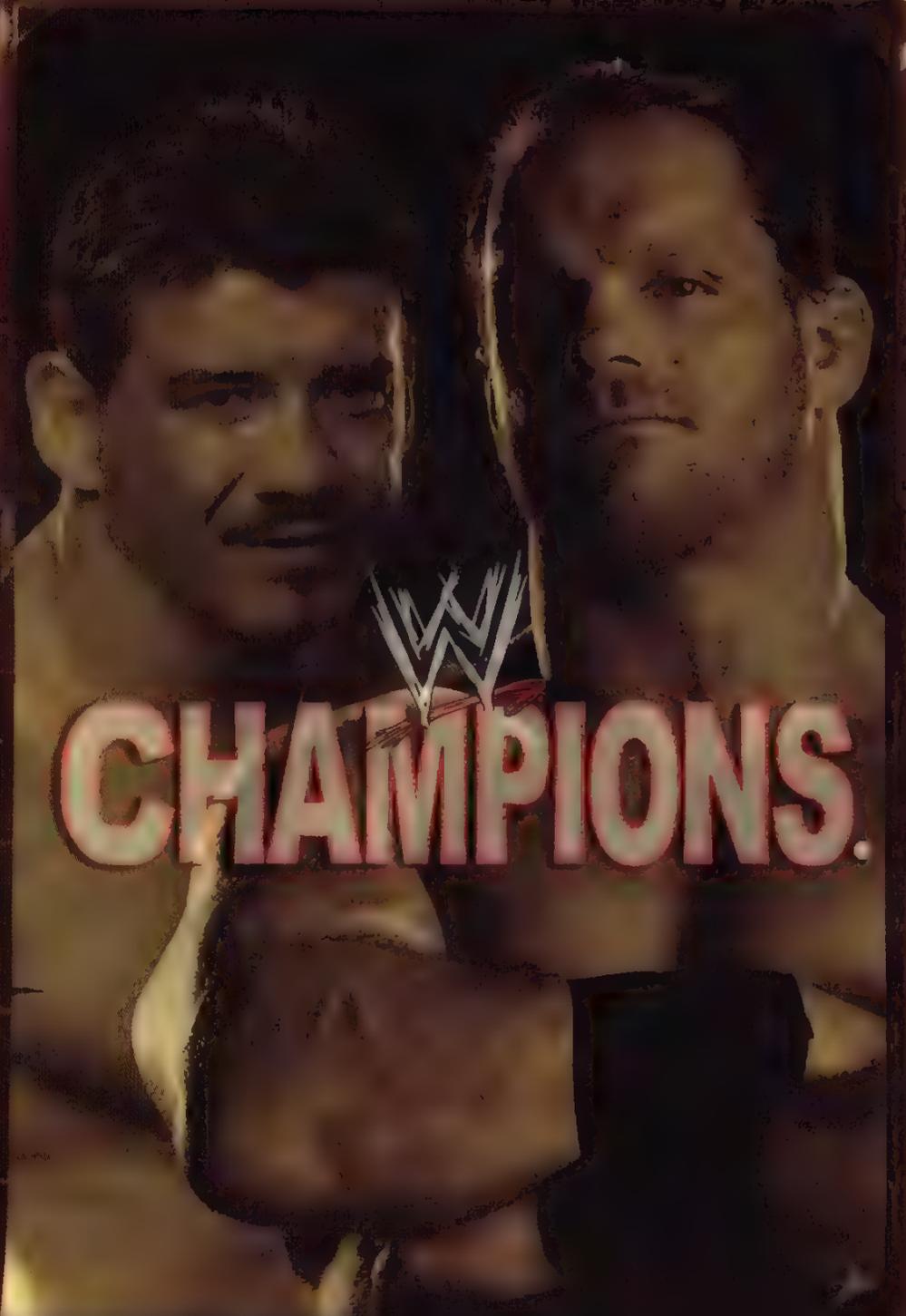
place to place. The way *The Sith Lords'* story unfolds is still a mystery at best, though Gallo did have this to say about its progression: "There is still a section of the game that allows you to choose the planets that you want to travel to first, and there are parts of the story that must be completed in certain orders. All of the travel is still managed from your ship, the Ebon Hawk." With these similar gameplay elements, along with no significant graphical enhancements, there will undoubtedly be some who will question *The Sith Lords'* ability to stand apart from its predecessor as a unique and engaging game. These doubts can only last so long (approximately 20 minutes into the game, by

our estimation), as it quickly proves that it packs the same engrossing, cinematic punch of KOTOR with an intrigue all its own.

I HATE YOUR LACK OF FAITH (DISTURBING)

"Obsidian has done great RPG stories," announces Gallo. "The designer from *Planescape: Torment*, Chris Avellone, is also lead designer for [*The Sith Lords*], and we wanted to make sure he could put his stamp on it as well. The style of the game is darker, more combat focused, so there will be an underlying dark tone. We want players to feel a sense of tension as they're going through the game, like they're under this constant assault."

Given this kind of pedigree, it seems clear that fan concerns about whether or not this sequel's story will hold up in comparison will soon be proven unfounded. In fact, the holy trilogy itself followed a similar pattern in its plot, with the happy-go-lucky *Star Wars* trailed by the notably gloomier *The Empire Strikes Back*. Does this mean that the Knights of the Old Republic franchise is poised to revive its Sith-ridden universe in a third installment, *Return of the Jedi*-style? It is too early to say — always in motion is the future. ■ ■ ■



CHAMPIONS

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood
Language
Lyrics
Sexual Themes
Violence



JAKKS Pacific



HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE.



WWE DAY OF RECKONING

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MASTERS OF FANTASY

SQUARE

ENIX

2005

Nobody knows role-playing games like Square Enix. Master of the genre, the company is responsible for some of the most memorable RPGs in history, including the Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest series, Star Ocean, the SaGa games, and more. While Square Enix likes to keep its titles under lock and key for as long as possible, Game Informer was granted a peek at its upcoming lineup. Some of these games have been announced before, others will come as a surprise. Some are parts of old franchises, and others are the start of new series. If these titles have one thing in common, it's that they all have the magic Square Enix touch.



RADIATA STORIES

ALL FANTASY ALL THE TIME

Star Ocean maestro Tri-Ace has a new trick up its sleeve. The developer's upcoming RPG, called Radiata Stories, looks to be a shining example of the words "epic" and "fantasy." Taking place in a world where humans and fairies are warring over what appear to be small quibbles, players will guide Jack Russel through his coming-of-age saga.

Now, the conflict between humans and some little fairies might not sound like a fair fight, until players realize that the fairies' allies are the dragons. Things are suddenly much more interesting. Our hero Jack's father was once a militiaman himself, and a renowned dragon slayer. Jack wishes to follow in his footsteps and joins the armed forces at age 16.

The girl who will clearly become quite important to him is Ridley Timberlake. Raised to become a knight (what a forward-thinking world Radiata is, by the way, for training women to fight), she bickers with Jack from the get-go. From what we've heard, she is the uptight, rule-following half of this odd couple, and we're thinking that Jack's going to get her to soften up a bit.

Besides the epic plot, Radiata Stories

features some stunningly huge ideas: 300 characters in the game and a battle system that is incredibly deep. Over half of these characters are available to join your six-member party with three being controlled by the player, and the others by the game's AI. Teammates can join forces with the Link system to organize attacks, stronger defense, healing, and other not yet identified skills. In addition to the Link dynamic, a Bolty meter will enable special abilities like super attacks.

The world of Radiata inches towards realism by using activity patterns for all NPCs (wake up, go to work, get some grub, and go home at a certain time, for example), day and night cycles, and hours of operation for most businesses. The many inhabitants also sound like a species list from the canon of fantasy land: humans and fairies (obviously) will be joined by elves, dwarves, orcs, and others.

We can't help but be charmed by the title's obviously unique art style and impressive battle system, so we're looking forward to getting a firm stateside release date shortly. If you just can't wait, Japan will get the title sometime next spring.

PLAYSTATION 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE
> **RELEASE** SPRING 2005 (JAPAN), (NORTH AMERICA TBA)



The characters will talk to each other during combat, but it's unclear whether that will be player-controlled or AI-driven



many fighting styles should be represented



The entire game has a somewhat dreamy look to it



This looks to be the intro animation for one of the game's many special moves



We're assuming that the bald fellow is praying, but um...



■ "I don't care how funny it was, that smells terrible!"



■ Big feet and sparkly stars can still look really badass



■ These white creatures are just some of the new enemies you will face



■ Mulan is one of the new faces from the Disney stable to appear in Kingdom Hearts



KINGDOM HEARTS 2

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Combing two established properties into a new product is typically viewed as an attempt to cash in on their popularity for a quick buck, but the original Kingdom Hearts demonstrated that this isn't always the case. Merging the worlds of Final Fantasy and Disney, Kingdom Hearts surprised many by delivering a title that both charmed the gaming public and racked up huge sales. The success of the game meant that a sequel was inevitable. One of Square Enix's most anticipated titles, Kingdom Hearts 2 is slated to hit U.S. shores sometime early next year.

The sequel will once again star Sora and his stalwart companions Goofy and Donald. Taking place a year after the original game, Sora has grown, and the changes are reflected in his character model. He is taller, leaner, more proportionate, and his overall look is darker. Costume changes will actually have a significant impact on the game, as different looks for Sora are part of a new gameplay mechanic, currently called the Transformation Drive.

In combat, Sora will be able to use this new ability whenever his Drive meter is full. Using it allows him to merge with one of his party members, which changes his look, adds new moves, and grants him the ability to dual wield swords. While down one party member when using this ability, Sora's

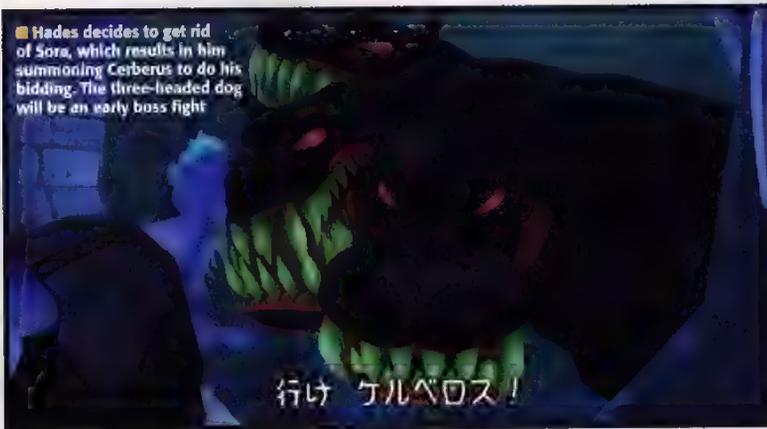
added skills toughen him up so significantly that they more than make up for the loss of a comrade. Overall, combat will be similar to that in the original Kingdom Hearts, with a few minor tweaks to tighten it up. Combos will be even more critical, and it will now be much easier to chain a combo together between multiple enemies.

Also getting a significant upgrade is the camera. While the first title was well-received, most agreed that the shoulder button-controlled camera was the title's major downfall. Camera control has been moved to the right analog stick, making it much more user friendly.

While these new improvements have been revealed, much of Kingdom Hearts 2 is still as mysterious as the shadowy new enemies that populate the game. Sora's old foe the Heartless will return, but he'll also face many mysterious new enemies such as the Nobodies. Of course, old friends will be back as well, along with new faces like Mulan and Final Fantasy X's popular badass, Auron. Players will revisit many familiar locations, such as Beast's castle and Hercules' coliseum, and travel to many new locations as well. There may still be many unanswered questions about Kingdom Hearts 2, but one thing that we know for sure is that this game is already shaping up to be one of next year's most exciting titles.

PLAYSTATION 2

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



■ Hades decides to get rid of Sora, which results in him summoning Cerberus to do his bidding. The three-headed dog will be an early boss fight

行け ケルベロス!



■ The Drive ability lets Sora bust up enemies with two swords at once



■ Players will meet Auron in the Underworld after Hades summons the scarlet buttkicker to do a job for him. Fortunately for Sora, Auron has no desire to work for the evil deity



■ The battle system will be tweaked, but very familiar to those who played the first game



KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

FIND YOURSELF

Apparently, one new Kingdom Hearts game just wasn't enough for rabid fans of the series. While Kingdom Hearts 2 will take place a year after the original, the GBA title Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories will start right after the original game ended. Although it will feature familiar faces and locations, the story and gameplay will be decidedly different. It seems that Sora has developed a strange form of amnesia, and he must remedy it by finding cards that are actually his memories.

While searching the world, players will control Sora in an isometric view. However, when combat is initiated, the camera will switch to a side view like that seen in fighting games. The A button will activate the selected card to unleash attacks, magic, and other abilities. This card-based combat system is certainly a departure for the series, but isn't the biggest surprise that Chain of Memories has in store for gamers.

What will most certainly garner this title the most attention is its unprecedented use of full motion video on the Game Boy Advance. The story will unfold in cutscenes similar in art style to those seen in the original game, with video quality close to that of the GBA video packs released by Majesco. This amazing focus on visual quality will certainly attract new fans to the series, as Chain of Memories promises to deliver one of the most cinematic experiences ever to hit the GBA.



GAME BOY ADVANCE

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





イトのテンションが 20あがった!



ゴーレム80 こうげき!

DRAGON QUEST VIII

ENTER THE DRAGON

Although unfamiliar to many American gamers (here it is known as Dragon Warrior), the Dragon Quest series is highly revered by Japanese RPG fans. The series started its third trilogy of titles with the highly successful Dragon Quest VII, and the hotly anticipated Dragon Quest VIII will continue its story. Although it is the middle title in a planned trilogy, Dragon Quest VIII is somewhat of a new beginning for the franchise, as it is the first release to make the transition to complete 3D.

While it will retain the familiar art style of the series, the world of Dragon Quest VIII will feature fully three-dimensional environments and characters. The thickly outlined look of the characters recalls the cut-out style of the previous games, while updating the series to the current generation of role-playing games. This new visual style is certainly a big change for the franchise, but it isn't the only way that experienced RPG developer Level 5 (best known for Dark Cloud 2 and the cancelled Xbox MMORPG True Fantasy Live Online) is updating things. The battle system will be changed to be more familiar to fans of Square Enix's best known series, Final Fantasy.

Level 5 has added a new combat mechanic to Dragon Quest VIII that is similar in function to Final Fantasy VII's Limit Breaks. The Strengthen command will let a warrior sit out a round of combat in order to gather power. This causes the character to enter High Tension mode, which greatly increases both damage and accuracy. Defeating enemies in High Tension mode also

grants extra experience points as an added bonus. Characters can even enter Super High Tension mode by using the Strengthen command multiple times. But certain enemies can also Strengthen, so players will have to carefully decide when they can afford to use the time-intensive technique.

Beyond this information on the battle system, details on Dragon Quest VIII are still scarce. There is no word on a U.S. release and the story is still shrouded in mystery. Square Enix has shared a few details on the characters, however. The main hero will be joined by four core party members: Jessica is the lead female, as well as a skilled magician. Yangus is the muscle of the party; he carries a huge axe and treats the main character like a younger sibling. Kuku is an older fighter and a member of his monastery's military unit, and Torode is a green-skinned sage who dispenses advice throughout your quest. Each of these characters is linked to a different NPC who will be featured prominently in the story. The main character is linked to a mysterious fortune teller, Yangus has a relationship with a female thief, Kuku fights alongside a Temple Knight, and Jessica is followed by two meddlesome kids. It is unknown exactly how these additional characters figure into the story (although they won't be playable), but with such a large cast, a complex and in-depth story is assured. If Dragon Quest VIII does indeed make its way stateside, the franchise may quickly become one of the major players in the U.S. RPG scene.



Either these two are powering up with the Strengthen command, or they had some powerful Kool-Aid at a rave



Although he was the worst audience member imaginable, this guy was the only one to show up for Bob Sagal's comedy set



Even Ents go through rebellious teenage years and have to be put in their place

PLAYSTATION 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER LEVEL 5 > RELEASE TBA



■ "Hi! My name is Charles, and I live in your nightmares!"



feature

■ The new Mutant Bear Marshmallow Peeps was a real surprise!

ダンビラム-チョコBに 242 のダメージ!
ダンビラム-チョコBを たおした!



■ As expected, Jurassic Park 7 really, really sucked

バトルレックスAに 387 のダメージ!
バトルレックスAを たおした!



■ Enemies can also use the Strengthen command for additional "smack laying down" ability

ゴーレムBのテンションが 30あがった!!



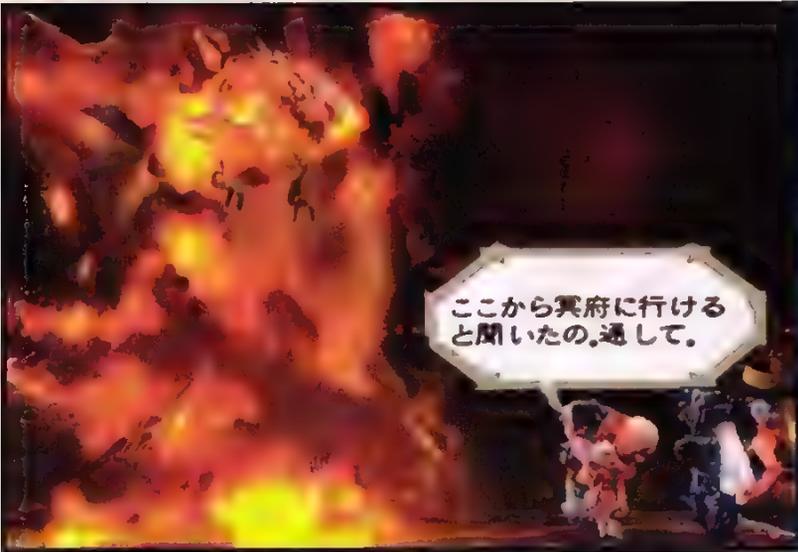
■ Whatever she's doing is probably about to hurt someone really badly

セシカは ベギラマを とらえた!



■ Sadly, the Renaissance Festival's attendance hit an all-time low

さらに イイトは 6ポイントの経験値を かくとく!



ROMANCING SAGA: MINSTREL SONG

A CLASSIC REBORN

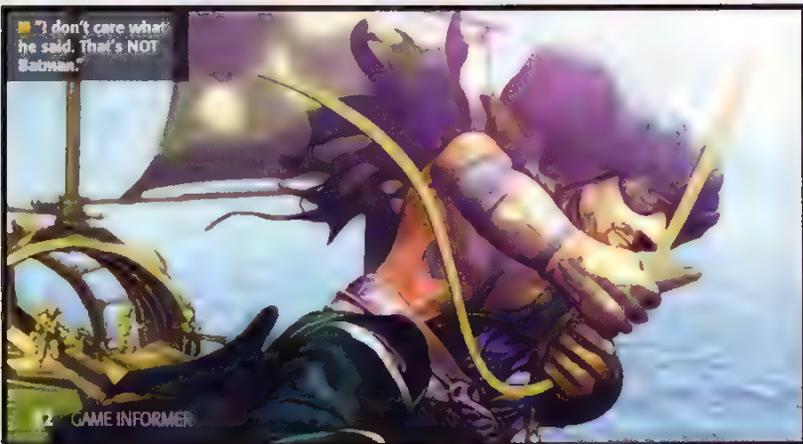
American gamers may be familiar with the SaGa Frontier and Unlimited Saga games, but few know that they are actually sequels to the Romancing SaGa series (which, in turn, are follow-ups to a Japanese Game Boy trilogy). The original Romancing SaGa and its two sequels were released for the Super Famicom; Minstrel Song for PS2 is a remake of the first title, with updated 3D graphics, an enhanced story, and two new playable characters.

The original Romancing SaGa chronicled the story of three evil gods who turned on their fellow deities. In a bloody war, the

three were defeated, thanks to the help of a human warrior granted special powers. One of the three gods was sealed away in a dark world, while the other two surrendered. Thousands of years later, the barrier between the real world and the dark world began to weaken, and a human hero was called upon to once again challenge the dark god. Minstrel Song should follow this story closely, with a few tweaks to keep players on their toes. This remake is scheduled for a 2005 release in Japan, although an American release has not yet been confirmed.

PLAYSTATION 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX
> **RELEASE** SPRING 2005 (JAPAN) (NORTH AMERICA TBD)



FINAL FANTASY I & II: DAWN OF SOULS

TWO GIGANTIC POCKET ADVENTURES

Merging the classic story and gameplay of the original fantasy classics together with modern RPG conventions, Dawn of Souls seeks to bring new fans of Final Fantasy insight into the birth of their favorite adventures, and return older fans to the worlds where the saga began. The battle systems of both games have been refurbished to include magic points instead of a static number of one spell or another. In addition, enemies will now drop items in addition to gold. The first installment will include four new dungeons that will unlock upon the

defeat of each of the four fiends. These underground lairs will house new tilesets and even some monsters from games further on in the series like FF VI's Phantom Train. FF II will include the Soul of Rebirth, a mode of play that unlocks after completion of the game in which you play a new section with all the characters who have died in the main story, as they return to life and join together for a mysterious purpose. Between the two classic games, there will be dozens of hours of gameplay in which to explore the birthplace of the world's greatest RPG franchise.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 29



EGG MONSTER HEROES

HATCHING ON THE NEW HANDHELD

In the DS booth at E3, amid self-explanatory titles that had players drawing clouds and Pac-Men, Square Enix had a single title available for play dubbed Egg Monster Heroes that baffled almost all who tried it. However, now that the details have been clarified and the translation tweaked, it looks as though Egg Monster Heroes is much more than a confusing diversion. A continuation of Japan's Hanjuku Eiyuu series, the game has two types of battles, the first being an army

battle in which players "drag" their troops with the stylus on the bottom screen. The other uses a grid on the lower screen which allows players to point to monster body parts (determining the attack it will use), then look to the top screen to watch the attack animation. How exactly all of these elements fit together, and in what ratio, is still unknown, but the title looks certain to provide the quirky fun that gamers are expecting from the DS.

NINTENDO DS

> **STYLE** TBA > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** TBA



FINAL FANTASY XII

NO INTRODUCTION NEEDED

Square Enix's flagship franchise, Final Fantasy, has recently seen some new details come to light regarding the races of Ivalice in its next installment. Anyone who played

Final Fantasy Tactics Advance will be right at home here – Bangaa, Viera, and Moogles are all part of XII, as well as a new race called the Seeq.



PLAYSTATION 2

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

BANGAA

Bangaa are evolved from reptiles, and still have scales covering their skins. The way their mouths work prevents them from using magic, but they have a greater sensitivity to sounds and smells than the other species. Also, the race is split into four subspecies: Bangaa-Ruga, who are less aggressive and have smaller ears; Bangaa-Bista, which tend toward a life of commerce; Bangaa-Faas, the most physically inclined of the Bangaa; and Bangaa-Sanga, which we don't know anything about.



VIERA

There are two types of Viera: Veena and Vana, though the only difference we're aware of is in the color of their skin. Both subspecies are slender and agile, live in the forest, and sport those adorable pointy ears and silver hair. Unfortunately for them, their race is in a bit of a state of flux, since their wooded homeland was severely damaged by warring armies. Some of the Viera live with the Humes and do the best they can within Hume society, while others have decided to return to their former home and rebuild it. Of course, the two groups are less than pleased with each other much of the time.



MOOGLES

Moogles are, well, Moogles. They're cute, they're cuddly, they've got pom-poms on their heads. However, in FF XII they seem to have a bit more of an air of mystery about them. From what we understand, they're the only race other than Humes with their own capital. Also, Moogles can and will perform anything anyone else can, pursuing careers from noble knights to powerful wizards and even airship engineers. Finally, they apparently know something about lost technology of the ancients, but surprise – they're not talking.



SEEQ

Seeq are reminiscent of the Gamorreans from Jabba's Palace – big, stupid, piggish, and strong. They're not possessed of any great amount of intelligence, but do enjoy stealing gold and jewels to decorate themselves with. As one might guess, the dominant Humes aren't the biggest fans of the Seeq, though they aren't above using them for manual labor.



Even with this new info coming out, FF XII is delayed until an unknown timeframe in 2005. Rumor has it that the director wasn't pleased with the direction that the game was taking and wanted to go back to square one and really turn it into something special. Trust us, we're as hungry for the goods on

this game as you are – but Square is keeping any gameplay details tightly under wraps for the moment. Interestingly, we've heard that Final Fantasy XIII is shaping up quite nicely and may be unveiled shortly. The question is, if FF XII keeps getting delayed, which one will release first?

FANTASY EARTH: THE RING OF DOMINION

LIFE AFTER FF XI

As if the MMORPG genre didn't have enough love coming its way over the coming year, Square Enix has just announced a forthcoming title to join the fray, titled Fantasy Earth: The Ring of Dominion. Little is known about the game at this point, other than that it will include both action and real-time strategy elements – which could certainly provide a high level of awesomeness if done well. One could also easily surmise that the

publisher's PlayOnline service will also be utilized to some extent, likely providing cross-game chat and friend-finding with the already-established Final Fantasy XI, among other features. At the moment it is only confirmed for the PC, but we wouldn't lose our lunch in surprise if some sort of console plans were also in the works. We'll be sure to let you know any more info as it becomes available, but this sweet movie still will have to do for now.

PC

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





DRAGON QUEST AND FINAL FANTASY IN ITADAKI STREET SPECIAL

PASS "GO," COLLECT 200 GIL?

The Itadaki series has been a presence in Japan for quite some time (around 1990 was when the first game released) and has featured a mix of board game antics and minigame challenges. While we don't know for certain exactly how this one will play out, it's clear that Itadaki Street Special is the first time that Square Enix's powerhouse RPG franchises have shared the same stage.

From screenshots and artwork released for the title, it is confirmed that Cloud, Tifa, Yuna, Rikku, Paine, and a chocobo from

the Final Fantasy series will show up. The Dragon Quest franchise offers the iconic slimes and some legendary heroes, and the boards look to be inspired by locations from both series. Whether or not there's a home court advantage remains unknown, but fanboys for each franchise will surely be picking favorites and trash-talking the opposition.

Look for what will surely be madcap multiplayer hijinks by the end of the year in Japan, and hopefully shortly thereafter in North America.

PLAYSTATION 2

> **STYLE** BOARD (NUMBER OF PLAYERS TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** WINTER 2004 (JAPAN), (NORTH AMERICAN RELEASE TBA)



FRONT MISSION ONLINE

A NEW FRONT

Square Enix clearly has big plans for its PlayOnline service — ones that are in no way limited to the role-playing descriptor. Front Mission Online, which is in closed beta on PS2 in Japan, will allow PS2 and PC users to play together like Final Fantasy XI. From what we've seen, FMO will be a third-person action game, with strong elements of classic Front Mission customization included. Whether or not the world will be persistent is unknown, but given the history behind the FMO world, it seems a strong possibility.

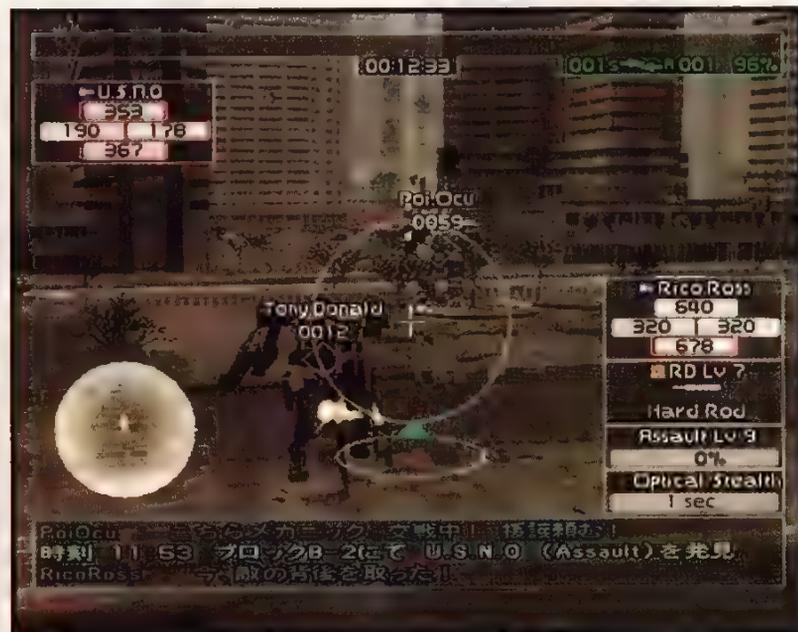
The conflict in FMO revolves around a newly discovered island, rich in natural resources. Two nations are fighting a war for control of this land. Players are able to enter battles either as part of an army unit or on their own. Reportedly, winning on the battlefield will award you cash to spend on

upgrading your wanzers (Front Mission-ese for giant fighting robot). We're confident that coming off of FM 4, Square Enix will include extensive customization options, though the publisher has remained mum on any details. Several different types of wanzers are confirmed, including Missileer, Recon, Sniper, and Assault.

How much deeper the gameplay goes than blowing up enemy wanzers with the ordnance of your choice is unclear, but we've seen some interesting things in screenshots: Pilots doing pushups around a sergeant-looking person, high-tech mission briefings, and impressive-looking hangar buildings. So it would seem that there's potential far beyond an online Armored Core-esque slugfest, but we'll just have to wait for Square Enix to confirm our hopes.

PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** 2005



FINAL FANTASY VII: DIRGE OF CERBERUS

VALENTINE'S DAY

Only one Square Enix Project is more mysterious than Advent Children – Final Fantasy VII: Dirge of Cerberus. A trailer was shown at this year's Tokyo Game Show which revealed a handful of details about the title. Not an RPG by any means, Dirge of Cerberus is an action game starring Final Fantasy VII's undead buttkicker, Vincent Valentine. Taking place three years after Final Fantasy VII, (which would put it about one year after Advent Children), Vincent finds himself sucked into a plot that involves the magical destruction of a town and a group of ruthless mercenaries called the DG. The

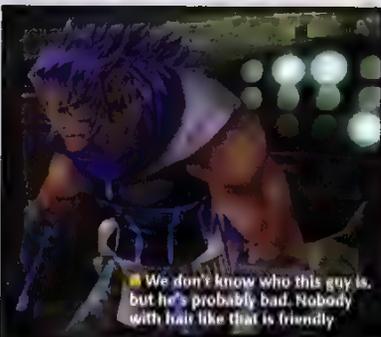
trailer emphasizes Vincent's heavy use of various guns, which suggests Dirge may play much like Devil May Cry. However, certain footage clearly shows a first-person view, so the exact nature of the gameplay can't yet be confirmed. No matter how it plays, Vincent will find himself battling all sorts of new villains, as Dirge of Cerberus looks fairly removed from the areas and characters of Final Fantasy VII. However, a few familiar faces will show up – Cait Sith can be seen below. Hey, it's something, right? Dirge of Cerberus is slated for release in 2005 for the PlayStation 2 and PSP.

PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP

> STYLE TBA > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX > RELEASE 2005



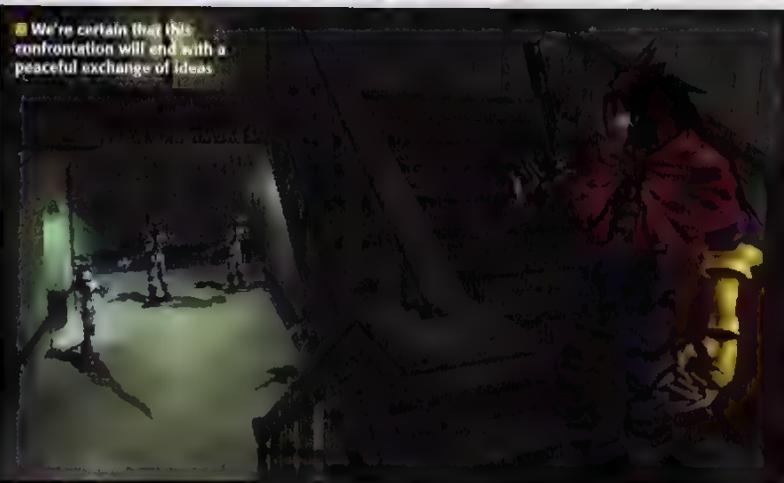
"This sturdy barrel should protect me from those flimsy bullets."



"We don't know who this guy is, but he's probably bad. Nobody with hair like that is friendly."



"Who has come to help Vincent in his quest? Cloud? Barret? Tifa? Nope, it's the cat in the cape."



"We're certain that this confrontation will end with a peaceful exchange of ideas."



"Step away from the show in Lase o Guy in 10 Days DVD. Don't make me shoot you."



"It's a well-known fact that vampires hate guys from Tron."



"Vincent vows to get into the Delta Phi Beta house any way he can."



"Hey, shouldn't we have chutes? Crap."

One Fate.

RATING PENDING

RP

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org
for updated rating
information.

PC
CD-ROM
SOFTWARE



LIVE
ONLINE ENABLED

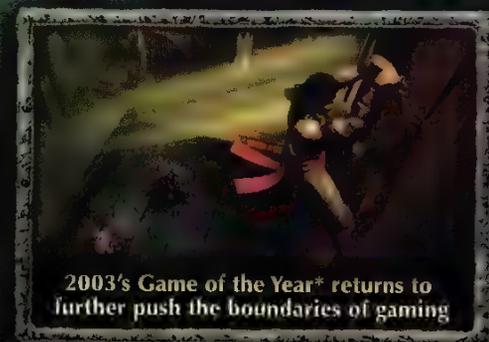


PlayStation 2



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NOVEMBER 2004

princeofpersiagame.com



*Game of the Year: Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences, U.S.; Official PlayStation Magazine, Electronic Gaming Monthly, Official Xbox Magazine (Gold Peak), "EGM"
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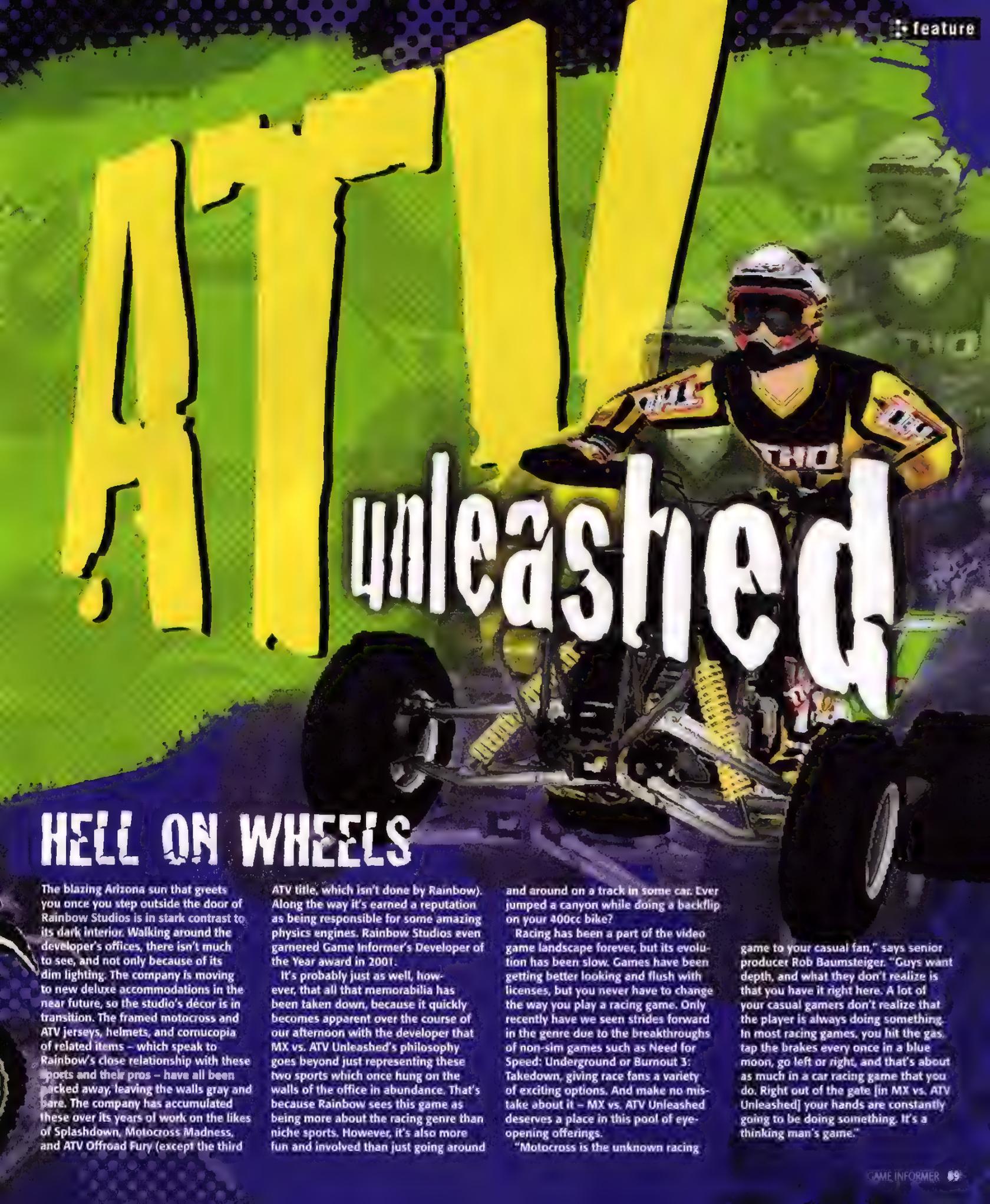
VS.



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

- > STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING
(UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 DIAL-UP OR UP TO
8-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND, XBOX LIVE
OR XBOX SYSTEM LINK/LAN)
- > PUBLISHER THQ
- > DEVELOPER RAINBOW STUDIOS
- > RELEASE FEBRUARY 2005



ATV unleashed

HELL ON WHEELS

The blazing Arizona sun that greets you once you step outside the door of Rainbow Studios is in stark contrast to its dark interior. Walking around the developer's offices, there isn't much to see, and not only because of its dim lighting. The company is moving to new deluxe accommodations in the near future, so the studio's décor is in transition. The framed motocross and ATV jerseys, helmets, and comucopia of related items – which speak to Rainbow's close relationship with these sports and their pros – have all been packed away, leaving the walls gray and bare. The company has accumulated these over its years of work on the likes of *Splashdown*, *Motocross Madness*, and *ATV Offroad Fury* (except the third

ATV title, which isn't done by Rainbow). Along the way it's earned a reputation as being responsible for some amazing physics engines. Rainbow Studios even garnered *Game Informer's* Developer of the Year award in 2001.

It's probably just as well, however, that all that memorabilia has been taken down, because it quickly becomes apparent over the course of our afternoon with the developer that *MX vs. ATV Unleashed's* philosophy goes beyond just representing these two sports which once hung on the walls of the office in abundance. That's because Rainbow sees this game as being more about the racing genre than niche sports. However, it's also more fun and involved than just going around

and around on a track in some car. Ever jumped a canyon while doing a backflip on your 300cc bike?

Racing has been a part of the video game landscape forever, but its evolution has been slow. Games have been getting better looking and flush with licenses, but you never have to change the way you play a racing game. Only recently have we seen strides forward in the genre due to the breakthroughs of non-sim games such as *Need for Speed: Underground* or *Burnout 3: Takedown*, giving race fans a variety of exciting options. And make no mistake about it – *MX vs. ATV Unleashed* deserves a place in this pool of eye-opening offerings.

"Motocross is the unknown racing

game to your casual fan," says senior producer Rob Baumsteiger. "Guys want depth, and what they don't realize is that you have it right here. A lot of your casual gamers don't realize that the player is always doing something. In most racing games, you hit the gas, tap the brakes every once in a blue moon, go left or right, and that's about as much in a car racing game that you do. Right out of the gate [in *MX vs. ATV Unleashed*] your hands are constantly going to be doing something. It's a thinking man's game."

RHYTHM RACING



The title's tracks, filled with series of towering jumps, high-banked turns, and demanding "whoops" (sequences of four-foot high bumps requiring riders to pull up their front wheel to skim across the top like a pebble skipping across a pond), conspire to put any player ill at ease with every turn. As soon as you land a jump, for example, you may have to navigate a tight turn the moment your wheels hit the ground, get a wheel against another rider on the outside to hold your inside line, and then size up and strategize how you are going to tackle the upcoming series of jumps. Mastering all that a track will throw at you (including having to deal with rapid changes in elevation) requires a certain rhythm.

Let's say you launch off the first in a sequence of four hills. If you land at the top of the third hill, for example, your momentum will be totally broken up. You will have to ride down and then up the top of the fourth to build up enough speed again. However, if you land at the backside of the second hill, your momentum will carry you up the third hill, allowing you to jump completely over the rest of the area. Therefore, every jump and turn is a crucial opportunity

to either make up or lose time on the competition. If you think that concentrating on hitting the apex of a turn correctly five or six times per lap in a normal racing game is hard enough, imagine tripling that number for MX vs. ATV Unleashed. Your timing on every jump and series of whoops has to be spot-on, or you'll find yourself falling back in the field very quickly.

That's not to say, however, that there's only one line around a track.

Also crucial to establishing and maintaining your rhythm out on the track are the clutch and pre-load

controls. Popping the clutch lets you get a little extra kick after you come out of tight corners, while hitting the pre-load button while ascending a jump gives you added height and distance. Beware, however, as sometimes (such as the example outlined above) going higher and farther will actually cause you to miss the correct landing point and break up your rhythm. At times it's better to kick out your back tire in mid-air in order to cut a low profile and get your wheels back on the ground as soon as possible. Understanding these dynamics is all a part of how Rainbow's latest creation gives gamers all the thrills of a normal racing title, but adds an extra dimension that has been ignored by many due to ATV and motocross' "extreme sports" image.



■ Rainbow has tweaked the AI to encourage less pack racing and multiple lines through a track

■ Yes, you can take that guy out with the monster truck - if you can catch him



Nothing demands good rhythm racing more than a tight supercross course.

Of course, demanding tracks are nothing new to either motocross or ATV. This new game not only combines two of Rainbow's vehicles into one title, but it expands upon the open-ended structure of last year's *MX Unleashed*, which was a good step forward for the developer, but one whose free, objective-filled levels had been done before in the *Tony Hawk* series. For *Motocross vs. ATV*, you will start out by choosing to be an ATV or motocross rider. As you progress, you'll come across varying kinds of races. Sometimes you'll be doing something standard like indoor supercross, other times you may be challenged to a race by an ATV pro (there are ten from either side) while you ride your motocross bike. Facing off against different kinds of vehicles

is what this new title is all about.

MX Unleashed did feature vehicles like the monster truck and biplane, but they were restricted to isolated races. Rainbow now wants to integrate them into the larger fabric of the entire game and let players really cut loose with them. Not only could you get a biplane vs. a baja truck vs. a dune buggy race, but each type of vehicle will have some tracks that were specifically designed for it, such as the biplane, which will be featured in canyon bombing races. Baumsteiger used the monster truck as a good example of this game's new focus. "Instead of putting the vehicles in a monster outdoor environment where you're just going through waypoint gates [like in *MX Unleashed*], we've gone back and looked at a monster truck and said, 'Okay, what do people really want to do with

a monster truck? They want to crush cars. So we've given them sort of a monster jam-style feel. We've put [the new vehicles] in the environments you expect to see them in." In all, Rainbow estimates the game contains over 55 tracks, with 14 types of racing. However, the open-world format introduced by *MX Unleashed* is still in place, only it's better structured. For instance, in the Outdoor Nationals series of races, you'll probably go race an outdoor track. Afterwards, you may be approached by a pro

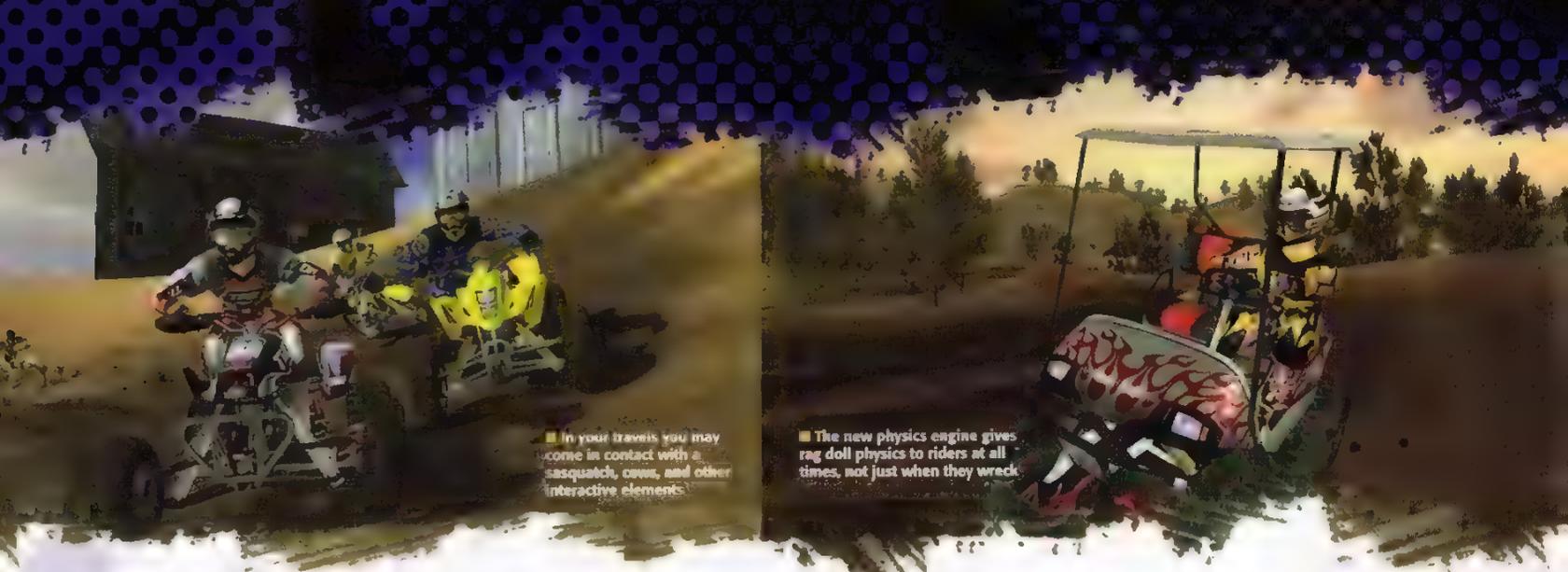
who will challenge you to a short course race (which are tight tracks with little banking that require a more technical approach) or hill climb. You'll then ride to that track in the world without going to a loading screen. Rainbow says that its worlds (the exact number is still to be decided) should have two or three different races in each location. Those that loved the freestyle nature of *MX Unleashed*, however, can still roam around the massive environments and find the secret gaps and hit zones to their heart's content.



Despite the new career structure, roaming around is still definitely encouraged.



You know you want it: Golf cart racing is a blast.



■ In your travels you may come in contact with a sasquatch, crows, and other interactive elements.

■ The new physics engine gives rag doll physics to riders at all times, not just when they wreck.

Gamers always talk about physics, but what do we know about how an ATV, race car, or even spaceship should feel? The fact is, the vast majority of gamers have never actually parked their asses in any of the ships or vehicles they control in games. So, how can we purport to understand what a motocross bike feels like? Well, don't worry, because Rainbow spends as much time in the saddle as you do in front of the TV. Everyone we ran into had raced either motocross or ATVs extensively, and we got the feeling that if they weren't busy making quality games, they'd just as soon be carving out a living skidding in the dirt.

The public should have a say in whether Rainbow's physics feel right, whether we've ridden an ATV or not. That's because at the

end of the day, realistic or not, a video game has to feel like it makes sense to players. And that underscores what an excellent job the developer has done by being able to merge the actual physics of a vehicle with that almost undefinable, comfortable "feel" factor that video game players will expect. In fact, Rainbow rebuilt its physics engine from previous titles just to get everything feeling right.

One invaluable part of the entire process is getting input from the pro riders themselves. We're not just talking about a couple guys spending five minutes with the game and smiling for the cameras; Rainbow has unique access to them, since it sponsors the THQ WorldSupercross GP motocross tour. The developer sets up kiosks at events, and Baumsteiger told us it's a great situ-

ation for everyone. "You'd see all these guys in parkas walking over and knocking on the trailer saying, 'Hey, can we come in and play a few laps? We just need to relax.' They'd come over and [before you knew it] start running tournaments." Baumsteiger told us that thousands of dollars sometimes changes hands. Pros have even called out other racers in magazines, looking for the money that's owed to them. "I'd be willing to bet that the riders are easily as much video game players as your average video game player is."

The input from these world-class riders is more than just visual, as they will sometimes suggest what kind of control scheme would best suit a particular trick in the game. However, all the nuances are taken into account, says Baumsteiger. "We find the guy

that does [a trick] the best. Brian Deegan can do the 360 backflip. Well, his may not look the best, so we'll go to a Travis Pastrana or a Nate Adams and look how they do it. You take the little quirks, the little leg kick out, and we'll add that little touch." In a great tribute to the developer and its games, Baumsteiger says that pros have even tried some tricks in Rainbow's titles before they attempted them in real life in order to get a feel for it first. "Seeing guys take the game and turning it into real life is pretty cool. It's that arcade factor that you thought never would have come about, and now it's like those guys looking at us instead of us looking at them, so it's pretty cool."

STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE



■ Pro rider Stéphane Roncada helped design the tracks.

■ Dangerous mountains like this host the hill climb events.

Running the rather large and detailed open environments in MX Unleashed created some visual and technical problems. However, the developer feels that it has solved many of these. In a first look at the title in action, it did indeed seem like there was noticeably less fogging in the game. As far as detail is concerned, Rainbow is using a detail pass that's five times as good as MX Unleashed's. The developer describes it as a kind of a terrain embossment that gives the illusion of true bump mapping. In sum, not only are there gorgeous vistas to run rampant over, but you'll quickly see how detailed the undercarriage of a monster truck can be. The game will also take advantage of its newfound power in other ways. One level in particular,

with an Egyptian theme, will feature a complex system of lighting and shadows for riders and the environments around them.

And the fans will surely notice. Rainbow says that its community of hardcore enthusiasts is very dedicated. Not only are some still obsessed with making tracks for Motocross Madness 2, released for the PC in 2000, but they are always looking for any line on the track that will shave off precious seconds from their lap times. Baumsteiger even embarrassingly confessed that a fan recently whooped his butt by ten whole seconds on a particular track. Perhaps he can get his



revenge playing Motocross vs. ATV Unleashed online. This new mode will be supported with full global rankings and stats, and other features such as leagues

and downloads are still being considered. Throughout our time at Rainbow, Baumsteiger excitedly refers to the company's new spacious office that's being worked on, waxing of not only how it'll look from an aesthetic standpoint, but how there's so much room that everyone could be riding around on those popular little 49cc pocket bikes – which is more of a realistic threat

than a daydream. Mixed in with these snapshots of the new digs, we can see that he and everyone at Rainbow has a vision for the company that is more than just the next motocross or ATV title. He even hints, with a barely contained grin, that non-racing games may be in store. We get goosebumps thinking about this possibility when Baumsteiger tells us that there's a whole floor of Rainbow offices that we haven't even seen in our visit. However, the company's first hurdle is to single-handedly change public perception with Motocross vs. ATV Unleashed. Daring people to see the game not as a sports title, but a creation of depth and fun from a company that can offer racing thrills and much more. We don't doubt them for a second. ■ ■ ■

■ For those hurting for punishment, Pro Physics can be unlocked for the hardware.

VENGEANCE REIGNS FROM ABOVE.



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TRIBES

VENGEANCE

Destruction. Chaos. Retribution.



o. dhad dæl mab' nraawj pæd' ysbawj d' y.

TWO GAMES TO RULE THEM ALL

EA'S JOURNEY INTO NEW REALMS

When it published the critically acclaimed games based on Peter Jackson's film adaptations of J. R. R. Tolkien's classic tale, Electronic Arts made great strides in disproving the common conception that licensed games couldn't be top-of-the-line products.

Now, with the action genre all but conquered, the series stands poised to move into two of the most crowded and competitive areas in gaming: Real time strategy and role-playing. In the pages that follow, you'll get a chance to see how EA is blending its legendary production values with Tolkien's

epic in an effort to break into genres where its presence is largely unknown. Are *The Third Age* and *The Battle for Middle-earth* the titles EA needs to command the world of gaming in a Sauron-esque rise to power? Let's just say that you should probably keep a couple of Hobbits on standby just in case.

abs qva' qaa' dydwbabn gawad' bpa' ba



■ Elephant or Oliphaunt, these things are enormous



■ "Yikes! A Dementor riding a Dragon! Oh, wait, it's just a flying Nazgul"

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE THIRD AGE

UNLIMITED ENABLED

> **FORMAT** PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE > **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EALA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2

FELLOWSHIP OF THE SECOND STRING

We've all had the dream before. You're standing beside Gandalf on the Bridge of Khazad-dum, he pleads for your help, and as you draw your sword, Kenny Loggins rises from the chasm singing "Danger Zone." Well, maybe the dream differs slightly from person to person, but it can't be denied that many people have wished to be a part of Tolkien's universe. EA will be attempting to grant that wish in a new way with its upcoming RPG, *The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age*. We recently had a chance to spend some time with this title, and it certainly seems to be EA's most ambitious application of its movie license yet. Recreating key locations and events from the films with an emphasis on story rather than frantic button-mashing, *The Third Age*

presents a much more calculated approach to chaotic events surrounding the rise of the Dominion of Men.

Over the years, EA has carved a place for itself in many gaming genres, from sports to simulation, but it has yet to produce a definitive entry in the RPG arena. What better way to break into this competitive market than with the property that sparked the whole fantasy/role-playing phenomenon? Every time you see an orc or ranger, you are witnessing the impact that this legendary story has had on video games. Therefore, given the lack of success previous Middle-earth RPGs have seen, it seems fitting that this timeless adventure should finally get EA's royal treatment. With *The Third Age*, the *Lord of the Rings* franchise finally makes a full-fledged transition into the genre that it all but originated.

Many RPGs have a tendency to try to reinvent the wheel in an effort to stand out, resulting in mediocre titles with innovative concepts that aren't fully realized. One of the strengths of *The Third Age* lies not in its ability to innovate, but rather in the way it wisely borrows from already proven titles – most notably the *Final Fantasy* series. Anyone who has played an RPG before will feel right at home with the graphics and interface, especially when it comes to the battle system. Using an action queue instead of a gauge, the battles are never rushed, and give players ample time to evaluate their options and select their actions from a series of menus. You'll see all of the mainstay commands like special moves, magic, and summons, each imbued with *Lord of the Rings* flavor.

Even more familiarity can be found among the game's cast of characters. Though the likes of Aragorn, Legolas, and Eowyn will make appearances, all of the lead players are new and conceived exclusively for the game. How does that make them familiar, you ask? Each one was clearly modeled after an existing Middle-earth legend, allowing the player to identify with them immediately while still leaving room for a unique backstory and personal revelations (see page 100 for more details on the heroes).

Apart from their histories, the characters also set themselves apart by their abilities in battle. Though they all possess some level of combat prowess (they'd be pretty lame heroes if they didn't), each party member also has special ways to



contribute to the cause. For instance, Berethor can use his leadership skills to inspire strength among his companions, Idrial uses Elven magic, and Elegost has special archery skills as well as the ability to detect enemy weaknesses. As you advance in levels, you increase the stats of your party and expand your array of attacks. Eventually you'll be dealing big damage by calling on the aid of an Ent for a devastating assault, ordering a volley of arrows from Helm's Deep, or using magic to summon the fury of Loudwater.

Many of the characters are helpful beyond the battlefield as well. Given that Middle-earth is a land of many regions and inhabitants, it makes sense that some know certain areas better than others. Hadhod serves as your guide through the treacherous mines of Moria, Elegost's home territory is the lands of Hollin, and only Idrial can lead you through Lothlorien. Players can expect

to see a wide variety of locations, both major and minor, as the group progresses and the story unfolds; this is just a sample of the available places, all steeped in Tolkien's distinctive mythology.

Despite the epic scope of the game, the details certainly haven't been forgotten. Each character has a wide array of unique armor and weapons, and you'll see cosmetic changes depending on what you're wearing, right down to the bracers and tiaras. There are even smaller touches that highlight EA's goal of recreating a living Middle-earth, like the fact that once you've fired an arrow into an orc, it remains lodged in its torso for the remainder of the battle. Plus, fans will undoubtedly love the range of useable items, from Old Toby to Morgul Rust, and their surprisingly logical effects.

As you progress through the main story, you'll also unlock tons of extras,

from little bits of Middle-earth history (narrated by Ian McKellan) to the ability to play certain encounters cooperatively, with each player controlling certain members of the party during pivotal battles. The coolest parts of the expanded content, though, are the missions you can unlock that put the forces of Sauron under your command. Using orcs, trolls, and other agents of evil, you'll be able to witness assorted scenarios through the eyes of the enemy. Now, before you get too excited about slaying filthy Hobbitses, keep in mind that these bonuses will essentially just be fun little diversions, with the primary focus remaining on the story at hand.

However, the premise could be the biggest potential problem facing *The Third Age*. After the first two hours of gameplay, the party consists of a gruff dwarf, a solemn ranger, an honorable Gondorian, and a wise elf. Since the

composition of this new group is nearly identical to the original, many players might be left wondering why the game isn't just focused on the real Fellowship rather than the Junior Varsity squad. To address this issue, EA is ensuring that these new characters blend seamlessly into the world of Middle-earth, each with their own motivations and reasons for coming along on the journey. However, it just so happens that these motivations lead your party to follow directly in the Fellowship's wake, conveniently encountering the same iconic enemies like the Watcher in the Water and the Balrog. Of course, the appeal of Middle-earth's creatures and lore has been proven time and time again, so we'll just have to wait and see if EA can weave an engaging original tale around these familiar and beloved concepts.



The detail in each piece of armor is astounding.



Eye of the tiger!



WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

Enthusiasts of *The Lord of the Rings* films will certainly appreciate the chance to see their favorite parts from a slightly different perspective, but some things might prove too outrageous for the hardcore Tolkien bookworm to swallow. Certain liberties were taken to enhance the story and the gameplay, resulting in a few inconsistencies. For instance, your party will fight the Balrog alongside Gandalf, have the usually-aloof Eagles at your beck and call, and cast spells that summon Water Steeds — a feat typically reserved for the likes of Gandalf and Elrond. When you encounter these anomalies, you have two options: you can win nerd points by explaining why they shouldn't happen, or you can accept that the adaptation won't be exact and just enjoy the new context created around these classic characters.



ELEGOST
DUNEDAIN RANGER
OF ARNOR

Elegost's small band of Rangers protects the area east of the Shire from attack, but he faces a difficult decision when forced to choose whether to follow orders by remaining at his post or going to battle the gathering storm at Minas Tirith.

HADHOD
CLAN OF FUNDIN

A dwarf whose ancestral home lies in Moria, Hadhod is a grumpy battletank of a warrior. Hungry for combat and eager to fight all orc-kind he encounters, Hadhod is a good ally to have. Once he discovers the sad fate of Moria, he continues traveling in Berethor's company.

MORWAIN
MAIDEN OF ROHAN

After her village is burned by Saruman's horde, only cold determination and revenge drive this beautiful warrior forward. Realizing that she can slaughter more of her enemies with Berethor's help than riding alone, she decides to join the party's ranks.

CAST OF

o. dhad d'ed mub' g'awaj p'ad' q'sh'aj d' y.



ÍDRIAL
ELF OF LOTHLORIEN

Meeting Berethor south of Rivendell, Idril only plans to accompany the party as far as Lothlórien; she needs to warn Galadriel that elves migrating for the Grey Havens are being slaughtered on the road. However, like many others in Middle-earth, Idril also has her own hidden agenda.

EODEN
ROHIRRIM OUTRIDER

This rider of the Riddermark is an elite soldier, and also bears a secret that will bring to light the events of Berethor's past. As the final character to join the group, these revelations will need to be dealt with quickly as the battle at Pelennor Fields looms.

BERETHOR
CITADEL GUARD
OF GONDOR

Noble, brave, and unfazed by the most overwhelming of odds, Berethor makes an ideal captain to command the group on its way to Minas Tirith. Initially ordered to search for his lord, Boromir, you will soon discover that this warrior is not all that he seems.

CHARACTERS

abs qm' qay dydwbabn gawd' bpa' ba

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

LORDING IT OVER THE MASSES

UNLIMITED ENABLED

> **FORMAT** PC > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EALA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16



Electronic Arts' treatment of the license to Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings films has, to this point, been both respectful to the original work and awesome in the execution of the games themselves. With *The Battle for Middle-earth*, that trend continues. Running on the latest version of the Sage 3D engine (which was born for *Command & Conquer Generals*) and featuring among its creators much of the C&C Generals design team, this title is well on its way to bringing gamers that much deeper into the world of Tolkien's mythos. Our recent hands-on time with an early version of the game was impressive on a number of levels, not the least of which was how well the flavor of the films has been integrated into gameplay.

First in a series of events that took more and more of our breath away while playing was the overworld map. To our mind,

it is the best rendering of Middle-earth around, bar none. In full 3D, the Misty Mountains soar above the somber pillar of Orthanc, lending that much more majesty to the sweeping plains of Rohan. Minas Tirith stands defiant and pure, opposing a looming Minas Morgul from across the disputed vale of Ithilien. And, of course, mighty armies bearing the standards of Gondor, Rohan, Isengard, and Mordor march across the lands, bringing freedom or death as is their wont. All of this taken together is one of the most impressive sights to see in the world of video games — it's seriously not to be missed.

From this vista of unparalleled beauty, you'll command your armies to assault or defend a region, which logically takes you into the meat of the game: the RTS battle map. We're pleased to say that all of the grandeur of Jackson's films is present here too, from the delicate Elven city

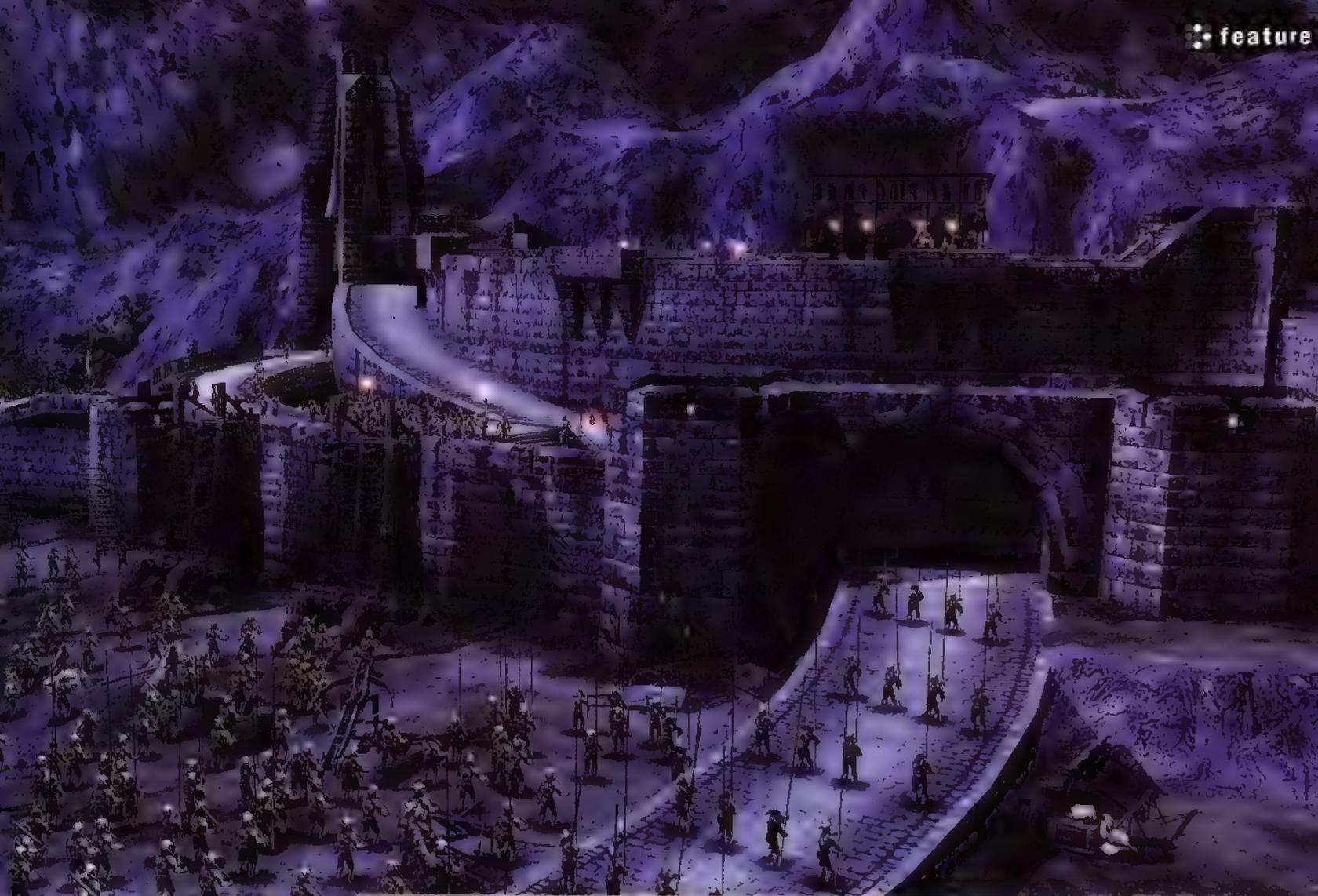
of Lothlorien to the stalwart fortress of Helm's Deep. And, obviously, seeing a Balinog or flying Nazgul dominate the field of battle is an imposing spectacle. To top it all off, during certain moments of the campaign missions (which follow the scripts of the films pretty closely), related footage from the movies will play in the corner of your screen. However, all of this would be for naught if there wasn't good gameplay to go with it. Fear not, this isn't a problem.

Battles play out in fairly standard RTS fashion, but with some interesting twists. For one, as you dispatch enemies you gain access to your choice of awesome global powers. Some of them are on cooldown timers, like the Rohirrim Reinforcements or Heal abilities. Others are passive like Elven Gifts, which gives your heroes defense and regeneration bonuses. This is likewise true of special abilities on heroes, from Legolas' active Double Shot to Eomer's passive

Horse Lord skill. Some active powers can also be auto-cast, where the AI will use them whenever their cooldown is over.

The economy and base construction facets of *The Battle for Middle-earth* are fairly basic, but that's not a bad thing as they free your attention up for the crushing of your opposition. There's only one resource which is used for everything, but there are different ways to obtain it. Rohan, for instance, can build farms which generate it over time. Eomer also gets an ability that grants extra loot whenever a Rohirrim near him scores a kill. You can find chests full of gold on the map and there are reportedly other means to beef up your treasury that we haven't seen. Bases are built on "camp" sites, which are little nodes on the map that you can use once you have control of the immediate area — there are no workers as such, and secondary buildings like barracks are

... d'bad d'ad mab' g'away pad' y'g'bay d' y'



raised on dedicated construction plots within an already-created camp.

The draw of taking control of Theoden's defense of Helm's Deep or Faramir's assault on Osgiliath is a strong one, and has been known to drive gamers to play otherwise sub-par titles in order to experience it. EA, however, seems to not be content with merely pushing something with the LOTR logo on it out the door in hopes of some quick cash – *The Battle for Middle-earth* is a bona fide triple-A title. From what we've seen, the polygamous three-way marriage of RTS experience from the C&C *Generals* team, an improved version of the technology behind that same game, and Jackson's masterful treatment of the definitive fantasy epic is a happy one. We'll be able to enjoy the fruits of that union this November, even if the film trilogy is regrettably over. ■■■



■ This iconic showdown has had some liberties taken with the location

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GAMECUBE

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

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

THEY'VE STILL GOT IT

Say what you want about the challenges facing the GameCube. It's still the only place you're going to get to play Metroid – and with what we've seen, that's worth quite a lot indeed. Prime 2 has even more of the depth, intelligence, and power of the first game; while it further expands its scope with a dual-dimensional storyline and a robust multiplayer feature. After playing several levels of this new Nintendo masterpiece, we can't wait for the final version.

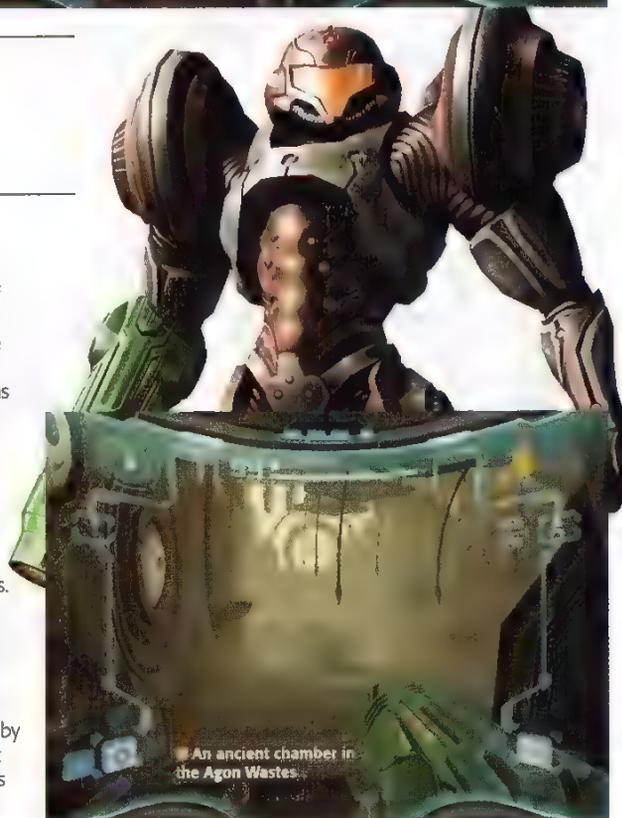
The planet Aether has been split in two. A light and a dark world struggle for dominance, and without the aid of Samus Aran, it looks as if the darkness is going to win. When the famous bounty hunter is sent on a routine rescue mission, she suddenly finds herself in the midst of this inter-dimensional conflict, and must fight to contain the Dark Ing creatures before they begin to spread across the galaxy. With this setup, you are dropped into the exquisitely detailed dual-world of Aether, a complex land of new creatures and mysteries. This time around, Samus has more personality than in earlier games – different expressions can be seen on her face behind the visor, and she'll interact with more characters who will communicate directly with her. The environments of Aether are highly interactive – more objects are scannable, and many actions you take will alter the environment as you destroy obstacles and manipulate ancient machinery.

We saw one level called the Agon Wastes, filled with relics of an ancient civilization. It was here that we first saw the unwanted incursion of dark matter onto the light world, where creatures from the light side were infected and mutated into dangerous new forms by the ethereal essence from the alternate dimension. Later we encountered a gigantic boss beast called Amorbis, a multi-segmented worm whose devastating attacks could only be silenced by a judicious combination of Samus's varied arsenal. Later, after acquiring the insanely sweet looking Dark Suit from the fight, we trudged through the Torvus Bog, a damp and sunless place where rain splattered against our visor as we were

forced to move back and forth between dimensions to solve the puzzles blocking our way. We saw the return of the Space Pirates, and the continuation of their twisted experiments with the Metroids. In another encounter, we came face to face with Samus's twisted doppelganger and were forced to battle Dark Samus until one of us was destroyed. All told, the single-player experience seems more detailed than in its predecessor, and enemies are more aggressive and intelligent in their attacks.

It was with equal enthusiasm that we tackled two of the new multiplayer levels in the game. The Shooting Gallery level showed the intense and constant action of a four player deathmatch, but with the added spice of Metroid power-ups like Super Missiles and Power Bombs. Sidehopper Station introduced a huge structure hanging in the empty void of space, where morph ball launchers threw us across the stage, and a foolish maneuver could send us hurtling off into emptiness.

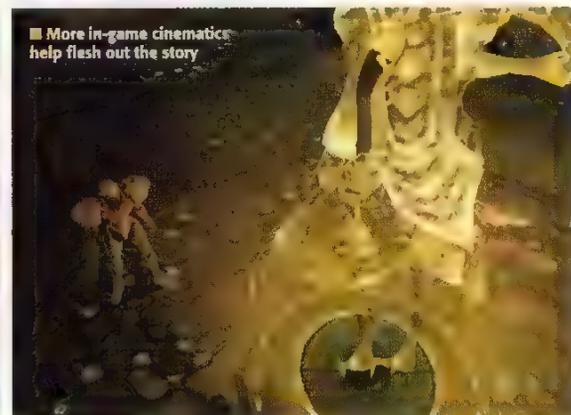
Between the intricate living world that has been newly created for the game and the enhanced action available by yourself or with friends, there seems to be no doubt that Metroid Prime 2 is going to be more than able to hold its own in this incredible season of gaming ahead. ■ ■ ■



■ An ancient chamber in the Agon Wastes.



■ The Space Pirates return, except now they can be mutated by the dangerous effects of the dark matter



■ More in-game cinematic help flesh out the story



■ Why climb a mountain? Because it is there



■ We saw power-ups that couldn't be reached without the long-awaited Screw Attack



■ Amorbis is one of the huge bosses you'll face



■ The echu visor lets you see sound



■ Four-player deathmatch is... out of control - in a good way



■ One more shot of grape jelly ought to finish him off



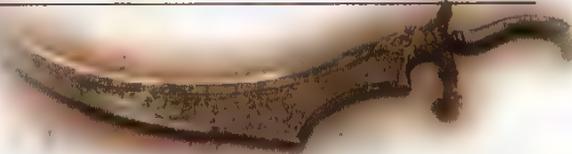
Sweet, sweet platforming

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Prince of Persia: Warrior Within

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE NOVEMBER 16



ROYAL EVOLUTION

Everyone has to grow up some day, and that includes Ubisoft's critical darling Prince of Persia. The new title, Warrior Within, is meant to be cryptic ("You'll have to figure out for yourself what it means" was a common line we got when asking about the new moniker), but also illustrate the part of the game that has changed the most — the combat.

We recently had some hands-on time with the beginning levels of the game, and came away glowing with anticipation. Enemies attack in swarms, circling players and forcing them to use the most efficient means possible to survive. What's most impressive about this is that "most efficient means possible" turned out to be different for each

player. Some liked taking enemies as human shields, others relied on the environment for aid, and another group just hacked and slashed their way to freedom. Warrior Within offers a seemingly infinite number of ways to get out of a combative jam, and it is exhilarating.

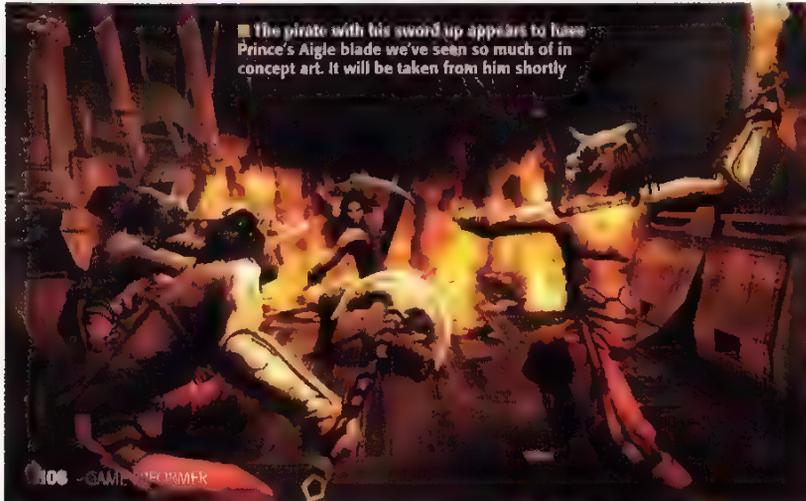
The focus of the development for this title has clearly been updating and expanding the action mechanic, but does that mean that the things we loved best in Sands of Time have fallen to the wayside? Is Warrior Within the fruition of our worst fears that the new Prince game is bloody and brutal for the sake of being more "hardcore"? Judging by what we've seen, this isn't the case at all. The platforming elements are just as fluid,

engaging, and central to the gameplay as the earlier outing, but players are quickly shifted between action and platforming through a level. Sands of Time's method of isolating each gameplay type is gone, and the feel is even better.

One other feature we noticed during our playtime is the interactive cutscenes. Earlier, we had seen that players could fight during a scripted event [check out our coverage in issue #134 for more info]. The new sequence we played was the first mini-boss battle with a nefarious super-vixen. Inserted between the regular combat sequences, the camera would pull in close as the Prince and his foe pressed their swords together. Although the game doesn't instruct you to

do so, players can press the action button repeatedly to "win" these little encounters and break the stalemate. If they don't, the enemy will push away and slash at the Prince. It didn't appear that there was a measurable effect on health or abilities with either outcome, but it's a nice touch to keep players pressing the buttons and lessening the disruption of these scripted sequences, while still allowing the development team to make the game seem more cinematic.

We're obviously excited for Warrior Within, and it's nice that the wait isn't too long, because if it's anywhere near as good as the first from a storytelling point of view, this could easily be one of the best games of the year. ■■■



The pirate with his sword up appears to have Prince's Aigle blade we've seen so much of in concept art. It will be taken from him shortly



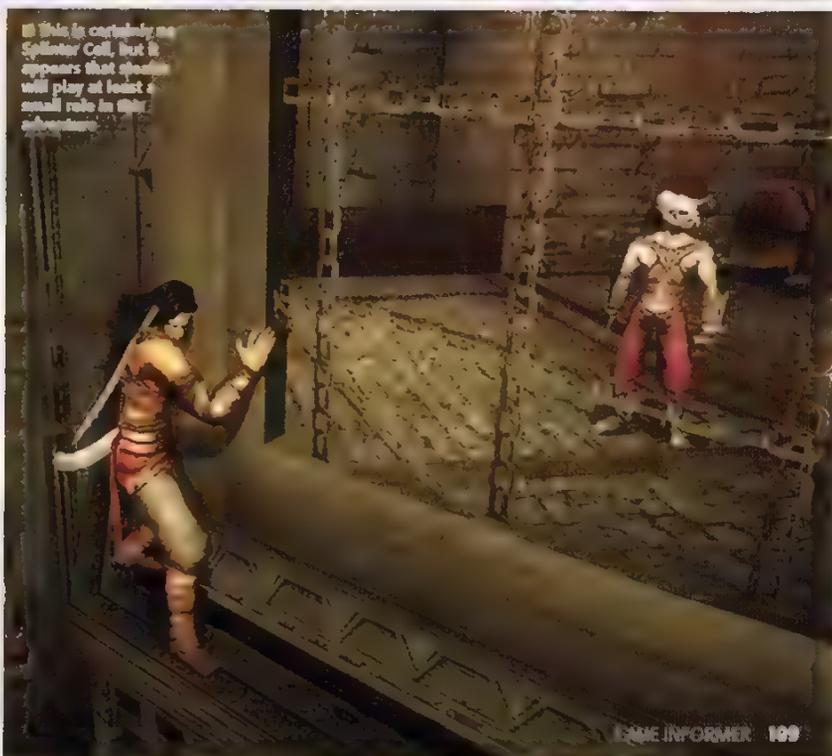
Here we see the Prince dual-wielding weapons



■ The Prince and the world he's fighting through aren't more graphic and mature to be exploitive, but because it fits the story being told in *Warrior Within*



■ See that big guy in the back? He misses his mommy



■ This is certainly no *Splinter Cell*, but it appears that stealth will play at least a small role in this adventure

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PlayStation 2





XBOX

Jade Empire

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER BOWARE > RELEASE MARCH 2005

THE BUILDING OF A DYNASTY

Jade Empire's journey toward video game domination has been carefully plotted out. More than a year ago we brought you the exclusive first look at the game, and in our time spent up in Canada with developer BioWare, we couldn't believe the things we were hearing. Listening to the frightening depth of combat moves wrapped in the shell of an expansive, freedom-filled RPG sounded simply too good to be true. Of course, at E3, BioWare pulled the curtain on the game and backed up every single claim made in our feature by giving us extensive hands-on time with it. Now, with the game's release around the corner, we talked to Jade's producer, Jim Bishop, who was willing to shed even more light on this much-anticipated Xbox exclusive.

"Unlike our last game, the realities of good and evil are much muddier," Bishop warned. "The choices much harder—people in Jade Empire sometimes do terribly bad things for what seemed like good reasons at the time." Naturally, the game lets you play it

as saintly or devilishly as you like, but with these ambiguities of truth in place, we expect the story to soar. Similar to Knights of the Old Republic, the initial path is set. Soon, however, you'll be able to explore lands at your leisure in the Marvelous Dragonfly. Travelling in this ship triggers a top-down, scrolling minigame similar to Galaga, which is optional. However, this is more than a pleasure cruise. Your ship's weapons can be upgraded, special attacks can be performed, and you can even switch fighting styles on the fly—just like in the main game—to change up your tactics and defeat waves of oncoming ships. Bishop hints that there are other minigames within Jade Empire as well.

Along your travels you will pick up followers. When we first told you about Jade, their role was seemingly to offer you missions—that's it. But that's not what BioWare wanted. "We initially thought that adventuring and fighting with followers wouldn't be possible—that they might get in the way," confessed Bishop. Overcoming their hesitation,

the developer has now allowed one follower to fight by your side in missions. From what we've played of the game, it's a pretty glorious sight to see, when you and your companion take on almost insurmountable odds, all the while flipping through fighting styles and dispensing justice with extreme prejudice. Gamers will have their choice of a dozen followers, and we even hear there are some surprises in store.

During combat, one of the more alluring options you can utilize in Jade Empire is the transformation power, which lets you assume the form of monsters you have slain. Originally we believed that this could only be done with the bosses you'd bested, but Bishop told us it applies to all of your foes. However, there is a catch. When you defeat an enemy, he says that there is a small chance of them releasing their spirit. In fact, some baddies will only release their spirit if you defeat them in a certain way. Once



Monk Zeng shows this bandit his fist, then promptly beats the bejesus out of him with it.

this happens, you can access them in your style-switching interface and select them at will. Transforming costs you Chi energy, so naturally becoming an iron golem is more expensive than being a rat. But smashing a foe from above with a mighty fist is much cooler than nibbling on someone's bum.

With Jade Empire releasing in March, we've no doubt that this already massive title still holds some secrets from our eager, outstretched hands. Over the last year since we first discovered it, we knew that the game was going to be good, and as more and more details appear before us, it becomes clear that it will be even better than that. Could it be the stuff legends are made of? ■ ■ ■



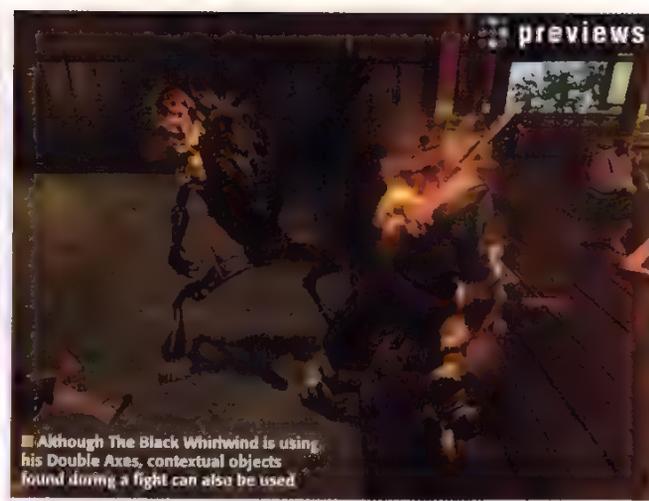
Notice the fighting in the background. Action-packed battles like this are the norm.



This is what we do to Jeremy twice a day—whack him in the head with a bamboo stick.



■ This elephant is the product of an experiment by Lord Lao and his celestial Wondrous Furnace.



previews

■ Although The Black Whirlwind is using his Double Axes, contextual objects found during a fight can also be used



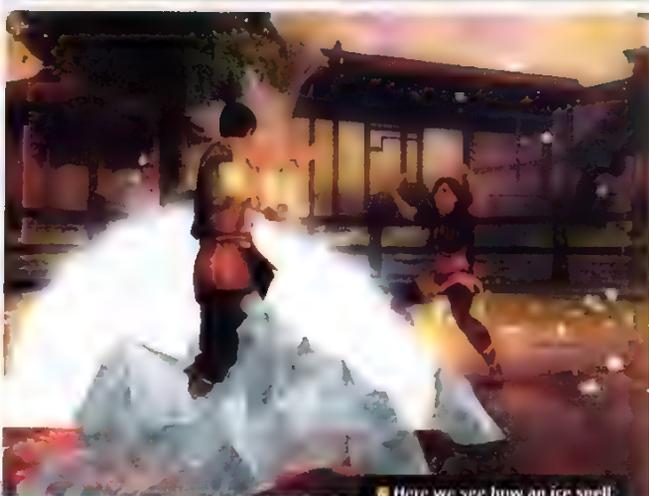
■ Wu the Lotus Blossom's Double Sabre style is deadly



■ "Hug me! I love you!"



■ The Transformation power lets you assume the form of your enemy. You have to beat it first, however



■ Here we see how an ice spell can freeze an enemy in place so you can whack it senseless





PLAYSTATION 2

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES > DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR NORTH > RELEASE OCTOBER 26

SIN CITY NIGHTS

Although the game has slipped one week farther away – it's now being released on October 26th instead of the 19th – we recently had the opportunity to get our most in-depth demonstration of the game to date, one that revealed the last remaining piece in the San Andreas puzzle: Las Venturas.

As we left the smoggy streets of Los Santos on the Wayfarer, a classic early-'90s touring motorcycle, we trekked through the countryside of San Andreas looking for an oasis of sin in the desert. A few minutes later, at the fall of night, we finally began to see the bright lights of the Las Venturas strip in the distance. Cruising the gaudily lit streets, we witnessed all the neon glitz of the real thing and close approximations of many iconic casinos, including Caesar's Palace (humorously dubbed Caligula's Palace), the Excalibur, the Mirage, and the Hard Rock Casino (now the V-Rock casino in tribute to the popular metal station from Vice City). Other nods to GTA's past were noticeable, including a giant billboard advertising an appearance by Candi Suxx.

Heading into a casino, we were awestruck by just how large the interiors in San Andreas are. Encompassing a huge area, the casino had the full complement of gambling tables, all of which are playable and will give you the chance to strike it rich or blow your hard-earned cash. Available games include craps, roulette, blackjack, video poker, slot machines, and wheel of fortune.

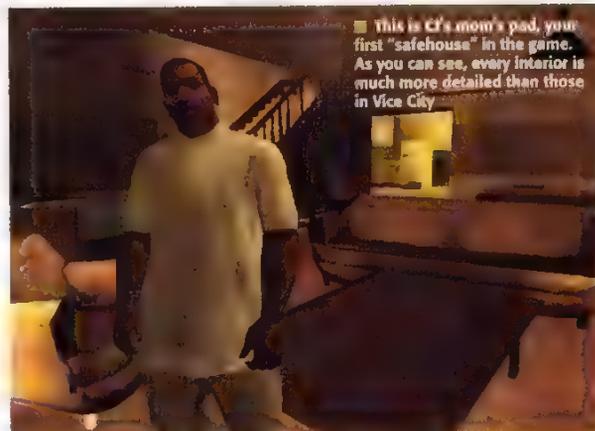
As with all of the game's skills, your gambling acumen will actually improve over time, allowing you to wager larger and larger amounts of cash.

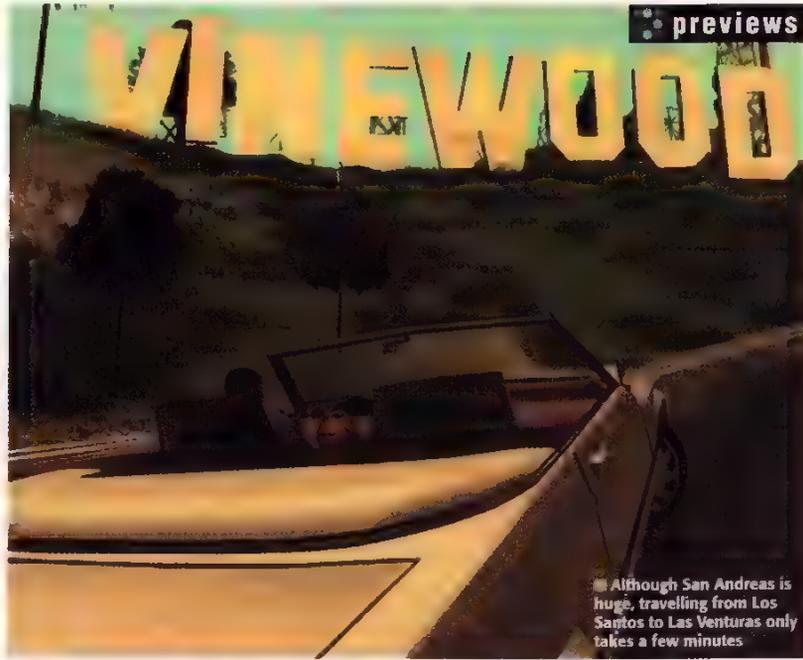
In addition to San Andreas' dazzling adaptation of Sin City, we also got insight into some of the game's more subtle improvements, most notably Respect points (brought back from Grand Theft Auto 2) and the complex system of territorial control. Respect is paramount to your success in the gangland of Los Santos, and can be earned by completing missions or by side activities like "tagging" Orange Grove Families graffiti and offing rival gang members. As your respect grows, you can begin to recruit greater numbers of OG members to assist you on missions. To do this, all you have to do is walk up to a pedestrian wearing the Orange Grove's trademark green colors, target them and then press up or down on the d-pad to attempt to recruit them. If they flash a gang sign back at you, they are now on your squad and can be commanded to follow, defend, or attack with the d-pad. During drivebys, this teamwork is invaluable, as your NPC homies will actually shoot at threatening targets on their own.

Of course, growing a criminal empire is what San Andreas is all about, and we also saw how CJ and the crew can expand their turf. The onscreen map now shows certain areas shaded to indicate that a particular gang controls a region. We entered a purple-colored area, which alerted us that we were

entering a hood affiliated with CJ's fierce enemies, the Ballas. You won't instantly be attacked upon arrival, but once CJ started blasting, the map screen flashed red to indicate that a territorial battle had begun. Now, it's simply a matter of kill or be killed. Enemies come in waves, and if you survive each successive onslaught, you'll achieve control of the neighborhood and its color will switch to OG green. Of course, other gangs will also make assaults on your turf, so you'll frequently have to come to the aid of your homies in order to maintain your spot in the hierarchy of the streets.

What more can we say? If this doesn't convince you that Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas should be at the top of your "must play" list this fall, it's likely that nothing short of a sawed-off shotgun will. While we've already uncovered a ton of tantalizing details about this would-be epic, we can expect that the ever-secretive Rockstar Games is keeping many of the most impressive features under lock and key until the day San Andreas hits the streets. ■ ■ ■





■ Although San Andreas is huge, travelling from Los Santos to Las Venturas only takes a few minutes



■ In this early sequence, CJ and his posse have to flee the Ballas on bicycle



■ In the background, you can see your squad, which can be commanded with the d-pad



■ Many of Las Vegas' famous landmarks have been recreated. Here's the ship in front of the Pirates in Men's Pants casino



■ You can purchase new clothes and accessories at Los Santos' most exclusive boutique, Victim. Unfortunately, the snooty employees will probably mock your wardrobe



■ "C'mon tallas, it's killer time."



PLAYSTATION 2

Devil May Cry 3

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

YOU SAUCY DEVIL

Ever wonder how the legendary demon hunter Dante became the spicy bowl of chili that kicked ass through the first two Devil May Cry titles? Capcom has heard your questions and decided to let you in on his past. But rather than release his high school yearbook photo, the company has chosen to go one better and chronicle Dante's younger years in its upcoming prequel, Devil May Cry 3.

Taking place right as a young Dante is starting up his buttwhooper-for-hire business, DMC 3 pits the demon slayer against his twin brother Virgil, an evil half-demon. While this is the first time Virgil has been formally introduced in the series, astute fans will recognize that Virgil and Nelo Angelo (from the original Devil May Cry) are one and the same. Along with Virgil, Dante will encounter several new characters, such as the mysterious Lady, a woman on a mission to eradicate all demons — including Dante.

Unfamiliar characters and a new story aren't all that Capcom has planned for this entry — Devil May Cry 3 is, in many ways, a complete relaunch of the series. The old graphics engine has been scrapped and replaced with superior new technology, which allows for improved detail in both the backgrounds and the characters, more environmental interaction, and (finally!) the ability to tweak in-game camera angles with the right analog stick. While the camera can only be moved slightly from its fixed angle, it does wonders for keeping tabs on the action. And what impressive action it is. The fast-paced combat of Devil May Cry 3 feels much like that of the original game, if not a little faster and more intense. The spacious areas of the second game are gone, replaced with the tighter, more claustrophobic levels seen in the first. As a result,

combat feels more urgent and dangerous, as the enemies will use their numbers to box you in and come at you from all sides. But even though he's young, Dante still has the moves to dole out the hurt to all challengers. He can carry up to four different weapons (two ranged and two melee), which can be switched on the fly, and can choose from four different combat styles at the start of each level. Each style (Swordmaster, Gunslinger, Trickster, and Royal Guard) can be upgraded to learn new moves, so not only can players choose how they take down their foes, they can grow more badass in their own customizable style.

If there is one thing that Devil May Cry 3 has in spades, it's style. The new graphics engine improves on the gothic flair of the first two games significantly, and the driving metal soundtrack fits perfectly with the intense battles. The action itself adds the most flair to the proceedings: The return to more enclosed areas and the new selectable combat styles make for core gameplay that is every bit as fresh and compelling as the original game. The second DMC game may have disappointed many gamers, but the third one should win them all back. There's nothing disappointing about Devil May Cry 3 — except possibly Dante's hair. The page-boy cut went out decades ago, dude. ■ ■ ■



■ Although it hurt, Dante knew that Old Yeller simply had to be put down

■ Dante supplemented his income as a demon hunter with his popular "Disco Combat Aerobics" class



■ As a youngster, Dante's favorite game was always "Kick the Scarecrow." Dante was a stupid, violent child



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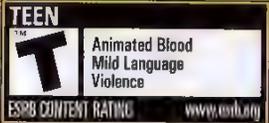


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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Call of Duty: Finest Hour

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

THE HOUR IS NIGH

We're sure that the point has been made numerous times before, but it bears repeating — Call of Duty: Finest Hour is in no way, shape, or form a port of last year's Call of Duty for PC. This title has been built from the ground up by Spark Unlimited, and according to the developer, is pushing the PS2 right to its limits in delivering what they hope will be the definitive World War II console FPS. We recently got the chance to see an early build in action, and it's certainly living up to the hype so far.

For those of you who don't already know, Finest Hour counts among its developers many key members of the Medal of Honor console teams, and it's obvious that they know how to build a console FPS. From what we saw, the gameplay is as tight as can be, and Spark is dedicated to injecting a lot of variety into the levels. Thus, a full one-third of the game will take place on vehicles, and yes that goes all the way up to player-driven tanks in enormous armored conflicts.

It's clear that Finest Hour's presentation has been

given as much love as the gameplay. The score is being written by Michael Giacchino of Medal of Honor fame, and performed by a full 88-piece orchestra. Soldiers have separate animations mapped to each AI state — hurt, frightened, etc. The cathedral in Remagen (a location in the latter stages of the campaign, and a famous battlefield of the war) has been modeled to the point of having the actual stained-glass design in the game. And, if the screenshots here aren't proof enough, take our word that this title is friggin' gorgeous.

Authenticity is just as important to Spark as presentation or gameplay. Everything down to the way a tank crew disembarks from their ride has been painstakingly researched and implemented. Beyond that, one of the things that Spark wants to do is to "give war a face," in the words of CEO Craig Allen. That's why Finest Hour tells six different stories about characters on every front. This whole title is nothing if not ambitious, and from where we stand, it looks like the goods are well on their way to being delivered. ■ ■ ■

STRAIGHT FROM THE TRENCHES

Thaine Lyman, executive producer at Activision, took some time off from the front lines of game development to share with us some thoughts on Finest Hour's multiplayer component. Check it out.

GI: We know there will be online on the PS2 and Xbox. Are you planning any split-screen modes?

TL: As far as split-screen, we shied away from it. The Call of Duty experience is all about creating the most intense action onscreen — dropping the player into the heart of the war, surrounding them with allied and enemy soldiers, and overwhelming their senses with the sights and sounds of the battle. We're tapping every ounce of the console's power on both the visuals and the audio experience. When you've got that kind of cinematic experience, splitting the screen in half is like splitting the experience in half.

GI: How much multiplayer content are you planning?

TL: We've all seen that in multiplayer games, after a short time playing with the various options, the community tends to settle in on a few favorites, playing a select number of maps and modes in any one game almost exclusively. So we're being pretty picky about our multiplayer content, testing to make sure every map and mode we include is going to be fun and have a shot at that kind of longevity, to deserve the space on the disc. At this point, you can count on multiple gameplay modes, including deathmatch and team deathmatch, and objective-based team modes, including capture-the-flag and search-and-destroy modes, where one team assaults the other team and tries to destroy strategic targets.





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Melee combat adds a whole new layer to the frenzy



Each character has their own unique capabilities



This is as close as Unreal gets to a love scene



Increased agility allows for more dodging

XBOX

Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA SYSTEM LINK OR XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER MIDWAY
> DEVELOPER EPIC GAMES > RELEASE FEBRUARY 5

BRING A KNIFE TO A GUNFIGHT

Keeping with the tradition of bringing you as much information as we possibly can, not only did we sit down and play several hours of Unreal multiplayer mayhem this month, but we also got all our questions about the game answered by lead designer and president of Epic Games, Michael Capps. What we found was a brand new style of fighting combined with an engine that has been optimized for the Xbox to truly make UC 2 a sight to behold.

Fans of Unreal have been cautious about throwing their support behind the third-person mode available in the newest iteration. After trying it out, we can honestly say it weaves seamlessly together with the traditional first-person view, and adds tremendously to the overall experience. Capps explains, "Third-person was a pretty unpopular suggestion at first, but once folks gave it a chance, they preferred it almost across the board. And once we started toying with melee combat, it all really came together. We definitely still support traditional first-person play for the people who wouldn't have it any other way."

This time around, there's been a special focus on creating unique characters with their own special abilities and styles of combat. "When I want to dance around other characters, I'll pick a nimble character like Lauren, and when I want to smash stuff, I'll pick Arclite (a Juggernaut) or Szalor (a heavy Skaarj warrior). And we've recently included a character from the Mortal Kombat franchise, and that's just too cool," Capps offered. When playing the game, we found these character differences had a profound effect when in one-on-one encounters, where the outcome is now based on your skill with the

character as much as how fast you can pull the trigger.

Environments in UC 2 are looking fantastic. With the added mobility afforded by jumping off walls and moving to higher areas, the frag-fest has become much



more three dimensional than in previous Unreal games. Most of the arenas we tried out had a fairly equal mix of indoor corridors and open outdoor areas, and everything from characters to backgrounds looked incredible since it was made to run on the Xbox. Capps adds, "The entire story takes place on the Nakhti planet, and the team designed totally different looks for the Nakhti ruins, cities, and high-tech areas, and the Liandri factories and ships."

Weapons are uniformly sweet both in the melee and ranged variety. Melee weapons are of course the biggest change, allowing for a clever opponent to slip past your ranged barrage and drop you with a Necris Sword or a Skaarj Blade. Many old favorites have returned, including the Stinger, which now has an overheating

mode and an alternative fire that shoots homing Tarydium crystals. Each of the three primary races now has their own infinite ammo pistol set to use as well.

Capps helped describe how UC 2 plans to distinguish itself in the crowded genre it seeks to usurp. "The focus on Xbox play has really paid off; it's not a port, it's been built from the ground up to make this console sing. It's breathtakingly beautiful – the artistic polish shows across the board, from characters to weapons to environments. And of course the mix of melee and ranged weapon fighting – 'bring a knife to a gunfight' as we've been saying – gives UC 2 a nice twist that has been incredibly addictive." Personally, we couldn't agree more. ■■■



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PlayStation.2



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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Scarface

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > DEVELOPER RADICAL GAMES > RELEASE WINTER 2005

SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE GAME

With the popularity of gangsters in both video games and popular culture in general, it was only a matter of time until the seminal crime film *Scarface* entered the digital realm. What's next, a *Godfather* game? Oh wait, that's happening, too. While some may decry Tony Montana's title as yet another entry in a long string of Vice City clones, Vivendi Universal hopes to bring enough new material to make *Scarface* its own unique monster.

While Al Pacino's character died at the end of the movie, the *Scarface* game will propose that Tony Montana survived the massive firefight and has returned to once again make his way up the ladder of organized crime. The story will build off the movie while telling a completely new chapter in Tony Montana's life. Screenwriter David McKenna, writer of films like *American History X* (as well as *Body Shots* and *S.W.A.T.*) will pen the story, and Hollywood talent will voice the characters, although no names have been announced.

It's doubtful that Al Pacino will voice Tony Montana, but regardless of who plays him, the



character will have some interesting lines. As Tony tries to rebuild his criminal empire, he'll have to negotiate with various thugs along the way. In every conversation, players will

have two dialogue options: one polite and one... less so. Tony's filthy mouth can be used to intimidate his business partners and get his way. Expect to hear more f-bombs than you've ever heard in a game before.

Every single task that Tony will undertake boils down to one main goal: profit. However, before he can spend the money from a score, Tony will have to launder the money through crooked bankers so it can be spent without fear. Again, Tony can choose how he deals with the bankers, and once the money comes back clean, players can spend Tony's dough on the finer things, like cars, mansions, boats, pet tigers, and all the other amenities that make a gangster's life complete.



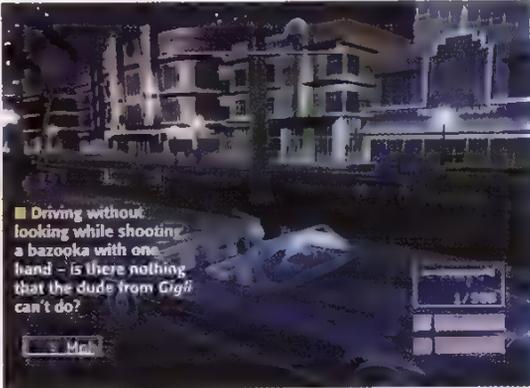
The environments will make you want to listen to Miami Sound Machine, but then again, what doesn't?

Living the high life is the objective, but don't expect to get it without spilling a little blood. Vivendi Universal claims that *Scarface* will be one of the most violent and shocking games ever. Inspired by Tony's coke-fueled rampage at the end of the film, a mode called *Blind Rage* will be included, which transforms Tony into a nearly unstoppable killing machine. While cocaine turned Tony into the juggernaut that he was at the film's finale, don't expect to see him take any drugs in the game. Drugs will be a key component of the business deals, but Tony, it seems, is now sober. He also won't be able to kill any civilians, because of his strong (but twisted) moral code.

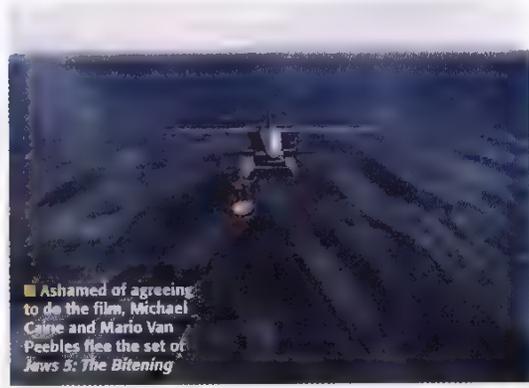
Although drug use and wholesale slaughter won't be part of Tony's repertoire, there will be no shortage of bloodshed and action. *Scarface* will be filled with gunfights, car chases, and plenty of other movie-inspired scenarios. Players will be able to hire goons to do their bidding and take to the high seas in a variety of boats. Vivendi Universal wants the game to be every bit as shocking and influential as the movie, but with so many gangster-themed games out there, it may be difficult. But if anyone out there knows how to climb the ladder of organized crime, it's Tony Montana. ■ ■ ■



"You! You're the one who wrecked my sandcastle!"



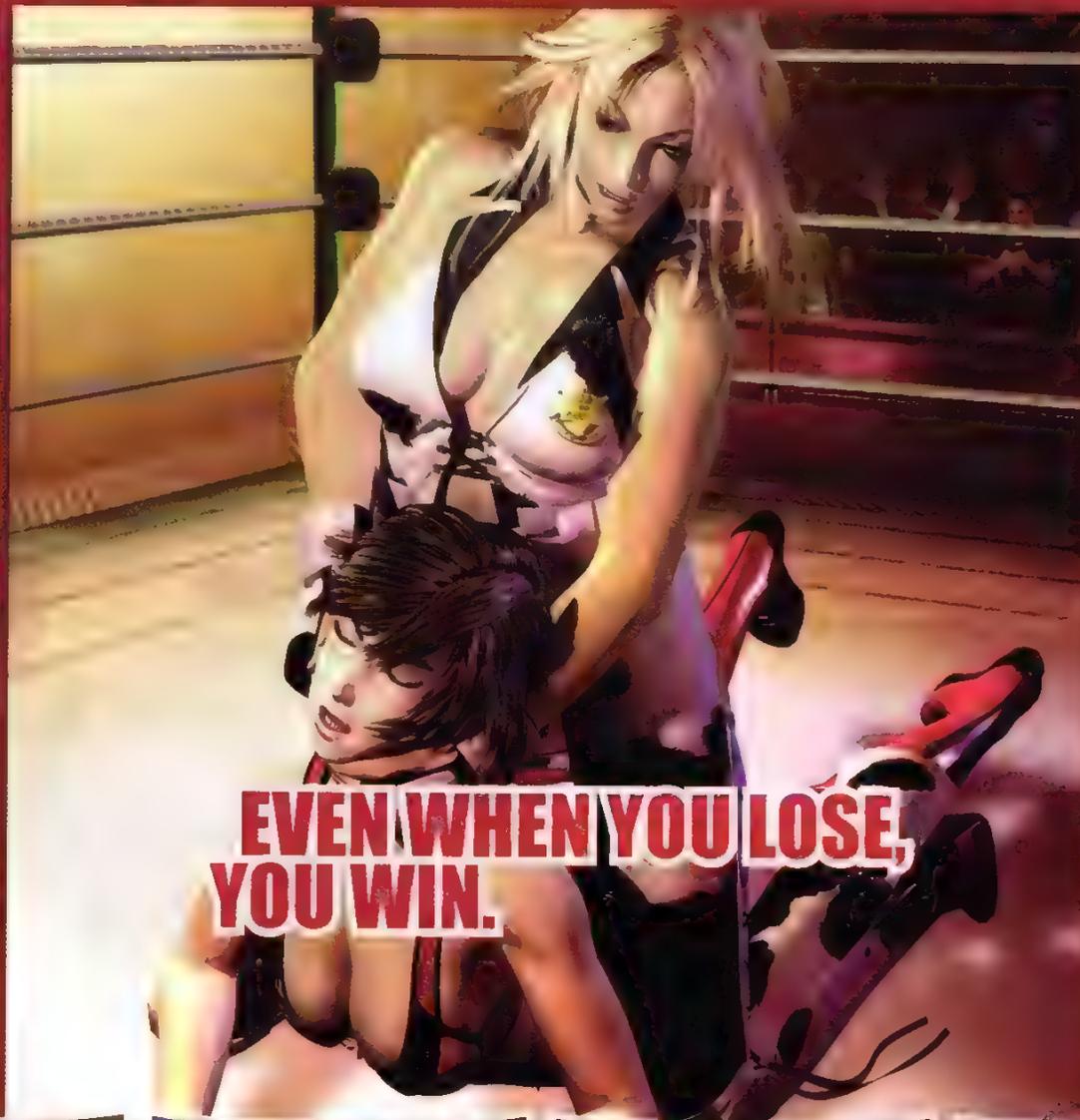
Driving without looking while shooting a bazooka with one hand - is there nothing that the dude from *Gigli* can't do?



Ashamed of agreeing to do the film, Michael Caine and Mario Van Peebles flee the set of *Jaws 5: The Bitening*

"We're impressed... the game plays as good as it looks." - PSM

"Looks amazing... plays fantastic." - Play Magazines | "Face It. You've always wanted this." - 1up.com



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PlayStation 2





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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

The Punisher

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER VOLITION > RELEASE SPRING

FRANK'S GREATEST HITS

Early next year, actor and comic book fan Thomas Jane will be reprising his role as the Punisher. While the movie received mixed reviews from fans, THQ's ultra-violent take on the character should delight and shock comic book dorks

everywhere. Starring Jane as the Punisher and featuring a story written by revered (and twisted) comic book scribes Garth Ennis and Jimmy Palmiotti, The Punisher looks certain to please even those that the movie left cold.

Though Thomas Jane is involved, the game is definitely NOT based on the movie. It is an original story, but will feature some of the most memorable moments and characters from the Punisher comics. Over the course of the game, Frank Castle will take on the Gnucci family (yes, the infamous zoo sequence will be included), Bullseye, Kingpin, Jigsaw, and more. But villains aren't the only Marvel characters who will show up. Nick Fury will lay down suppressing fire in one stage, and a terrorist attack on Stark Tower brings Iron Man out in the open. Frank will also take on thugs in cheery levels like the crack house, the chop shop, the mortuary, and many more.

Don't expect to see many of Marvel's biggest stars, however: The Punisher is far too dark a game for characters like Spider-Man. While The Punisher is a



THE MASTER OF MAYHEM

While he first appeared in a Spider-Man comic in 1974, much of the game is inspired by Garth Ennis' version of The Punisher. Ennis, best known for writing *Preacher* for Vertigo Comics, has been writing *The Punisher* since the turn of the century, and has brought new life to the character. Ennis' Punisher stories are available at a comic shop near you and are highly recommended.



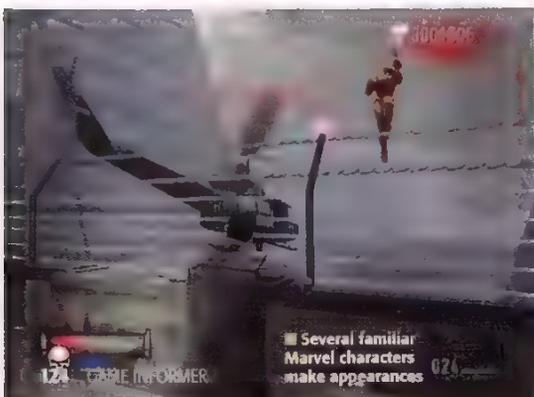
Some of the interrogations can be pretty intense

third-person action title at its core, there is so much more to it than shooting. Frank can grab enemies to use as human shields, and while holding them can initiate a quick kill or an interrogation. The quick kills finish off Frank's hostage instantly, while the interrogations can yield information. Controlled with the analog stick, the player decides exactly how much punishment Frank inflicts on his captive. Since he's a somewhat twisted individual, interrogating thugs actually fills Frank's life bar.

The interrogations can be so intense that this title may be a bit much for some players. There are four basic interrogations that Frank can bust out at any time, and several special ones that can be initiated at certain locations. These are especially gruesome, and include pushing a thug's face into a circular sander,

slamming a goon's head with a coffin lid, and even burning someone's face with a blowtorch. There are special quick kills as well, such as throwing a guy off a building or into a spike. Obviously, this game is not for kids.

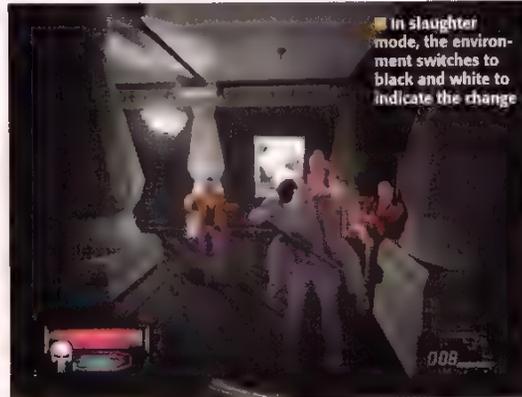
Only a sicko like Frank Castle would behave in such a way, and THQ has made sure that players understand how unbalanced he is. Gamers can enter slaughter mode, in which Frank whips out some combat knives and goes to town on his enemies. While he dishes out more damage in this mode, players will hear the cries of his dead children the whole time. The effect is, to put it gently, unsettling. But this just illustrates how deeply THQ understands the character. The game may be ultra-violent and somewhat disturbing, but that's exactly what Punisher fans want. ■■■



Several familiar Marvel characters make appearances



Gameplay is fast and intense, but Frank hands out a lot of damage



In slaughter mode, the environment switches to black and white to indicate the change

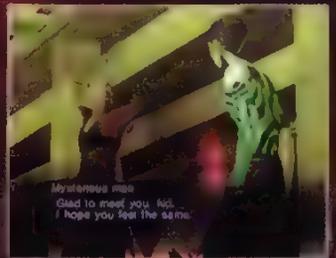
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PlayStation 2





■ "Oh, your armor just looks fabulous!"



■ Kath learns that "Dumbo" isn't a form of endearment among elephants.

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PC

EverQuest II

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15

THE FUTURE OF NORRATH

We recently got the chance to play the latest build of EverQuest II, one of this holiday season's most anticipated sequels. We can now say with authority that all of the hype over this title's graphical prowess is well deserved. Also, we learned some new details on gameplay, and have an exclusive first look at the unlockable Froglok race.

If you should ever think to take a look at the lovingly rendered sky of EQ II, you'll see that the moon has blown up. Obviously, this has had a rather cataclysmic impact on Norrath, leveling many cities and driving the people from their homes. The refugees, depending on their ethical bent, are gathering in one of two towns: Qeynos or Freeport. The types of quests you'll embark upon depend in large part on which path you choose during character creation, so don't expect to make a Dark Elf who skips along in meadows and rescues lost lambs — unless you replace the "rescue" with "cook," at any rate.

One of the new features of EverQuest II's combat system that promises to make things a good bit more interactive than "/assist main tank" is the heroic opportunity. These events are triggered during combat by party members (or a single character, if soloing) performing certain spells and combat arts in a specific order. When this happens, another set of abilities must be executed, which then produces a cool effect. The Scout classes, however, will be able to shift opportunities to get a different result should the need arise.

Another area that's been drastically improved on is the enemy AI. For one, different monsters will have dramatically

different ways of trying to beat you down. Dumb ones might simply rush you, smart baddies could try and off your healer first, and underlings may wait for orders from their boss. Of course, in that situation, dropping the general or chief will demoralize his troops and play hell with their organization.

Between the obvious splendor of EQ II's visuals and the promised refinements and improvements to the gameplay, as well as the 130,000 lines of spoken dialogue, this title looks to be on track to live up to its massive expectations. Organize your guilds now, because the servers are set to go live on November 15th. ■ ■ ■

■ See the thing in the sky? That's what's left of the moon

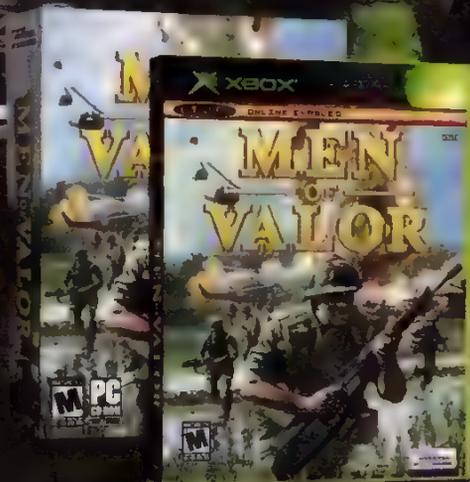


FROGLOKS

All of the races from the original EQ will be returning for this sequel, but one — the Frogloks — got exceptionally screwed in the upheaval of the exploding moon. So dire is their situation, in fact, that they're not initially available as playable characters. On why they're in such a bind, EQ II Community Relations Manager Steve Danuser said that "the cause dates back to the Rallosian War, during which the Ogres attacked the city of Gukta and drove the Frogloks deep into the tunnels of their former home, Guk. When the Frogloks emerged at the end of the war, something happened which led to their current plight." As for how this will impact EQ II players, Danuser said, "Only a very few Frogloks made their way to Qeynos and are currently living in Castleview Hamlet. Players will need to uncover the mystery of what happened to the rest of the race by following a series of clues." Once players have completed the quest that this state of affairs presents, everyone on that server will be able to create Froglok characters — though Danuser promises that some grand rewards await the intrepid adventurers who unlock the Frogloks.

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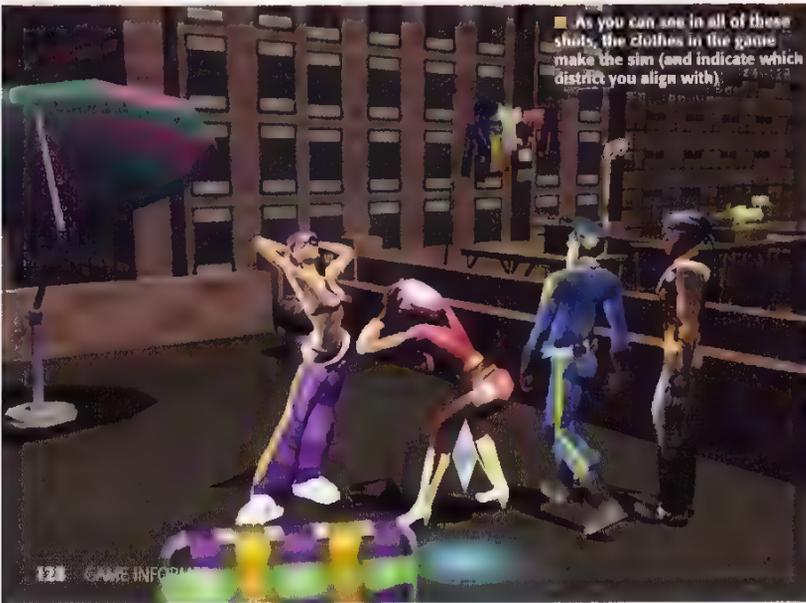
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■ The game is really a satirical look at a handful of different subcultures.



■ While the hipsters study, we admire the game's unique look, marking a big departure from earlier entries in the franchise.



■ As you can see in all of these shots, the clothes in the game make the sim (and indicate which district you align with).

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

The Urbz: Sims in the City

► STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION ► PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS ► DEVELOPER MAXIS ► RELEASE NOVEMBER 9

INSERT IRONY HERE

For a long time, the Sims franchise was just a PC base game and a cornucopia of expansion packs. That all changed with the release of the series' console editions in early 2003. Now the game will go through another revolution with *The Urbz: Sims in the City*, which puts players and sims into the middle of a sprawling urban metropolis.

Gameplay in *Urbz* borrows heavily from *Bustin' Out*, especially the Game Boy Advance version (twitchy minigames make up your job responsibilities). Your main goal and mark of achievement is earning rep (reputation) with residents of the city's many districts. In an isolationist sort of way, each district plays host to a specific subculture, and your goals revolve around looking the part, making friends, and becoming well-known to each group.

We had a chance to play with an early alpha build of the game, and were pleased with the returning features and delighted with the new ideas that play so heavily into the experience. The gameplay is still mission-based, guiding players through the story of three villains making trouble in the city. Your ultimate task is to defeat the three baddies by using one of the game's new "power socials" which will embarrass the bigwigs and get them to leave. Humiliation is a powerful weapon indeed.

To get started, you have to look the part, and while the character customization is exponentially more involved than earlier console entries, you will not have clothing options from the start. Instead, these and all other items are acquired in each district, which means that you also have an inventory system.

Let's say that you go to a shop and there's a lamp that you like. You can buy it and put it in your apartment or in the bar where you work the night shift. That's right, you can customize almost anything in the game, and that includes any of the many places to visit in each district. The only real limitation we found was exterior walls, which cannot be modified because there are rooftop areas to explore as well.

This inventory system and the freewheeling vibe to the city are major departures for the series, but the break from convention also includes the general look of the game. To keep up the idea that this is an ironic, satirical look at the subcultures represented, the game has a much more stylized look. Windows have wonky angles and the characters look more cartoony.

While *Urbz* is clearly a big change, we're looking forward to what the game can bring to the Sims universe. We still want our old-school suburbs for sure, but a change of pace is always welcome. ■■■





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UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Act of War: Direct Action

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER EUGEN SYSTEMS > RELEASE SPRING 2005

NEITHER SWORDS NOR SORCERY

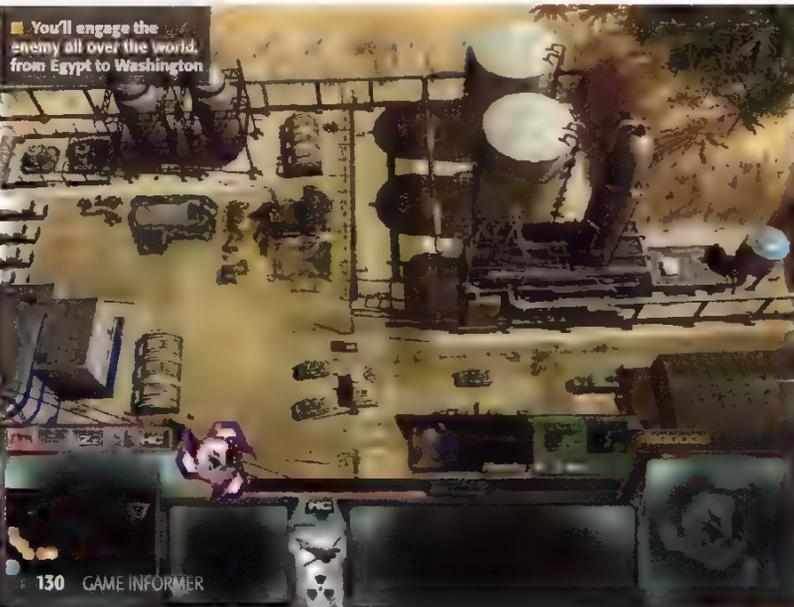
The debate on the War on Terror is one that doesn't belong on the pages of this magazine, but Act of War: Direct Action, a forthcoming real-time strategy game from Atari, makes the excellent point that it would probably go a lot more smoothly if Marines went into battle in armored exoskeletons. This title is set in the very near future, and has players controlling both regular armed forces and the fictional super-elite Task Force Talon to thwart the schemes of a nefarious global oil cartel. The story is being written by bestselling military suspense author Dale Brown, which should lend the single-player campaign a more interesting plot than RTSs are typically known for. Also, even in its pre-alpha state, the graphics are eye-popping and the gameplay runneth over with RTS goodness.

One thing is clear about Act of War: The engine that it runs on is already a work of art. Yes, it's got full camera control and pretty shadows and all that, but the real draw is the incredibly detailed modeling that it is capable of displaying. The in-game Washington, D.C. map was like nothing we've ever seen in a RTS — it was very easy to recognize (and destroy) landmarks like the White House or Smithsonian Museum. Each and every building can be reduced to rubble, which is particularly useful when the enemy has infantry entrenched within and you don't feel like sending your own guys in to clear them out.

However, if you go the high-explosives route like Joe always does, you'll have a much harder time capturing enemy soldiers. Why capture them when you can

blow them up, you ask? Because you can bring them back to your base and either have them generate money at your hospital (terrorists have really good health insurance, apparently) or pump them for information on enemy troop locations. In fact, the word is that in longer games, after most of the resources on the map have been used up, players' primary source of income will be from POWs. Conversely, if you're sadistic enough, you can certainly off your own wounded soldiers to deny them to the enemy.

Act of War is still a ways out, but it already looks great and can only improve between now and its spring 2005 release. We'll be sure to keep you up-to-date on details as they become available, but feast your eyes on these lovely screenshots in the meantime. ■■■



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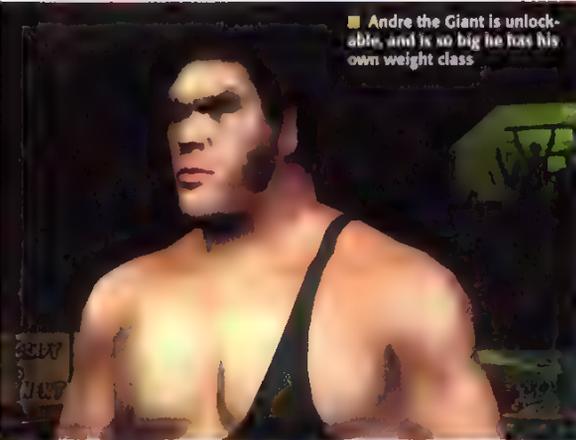
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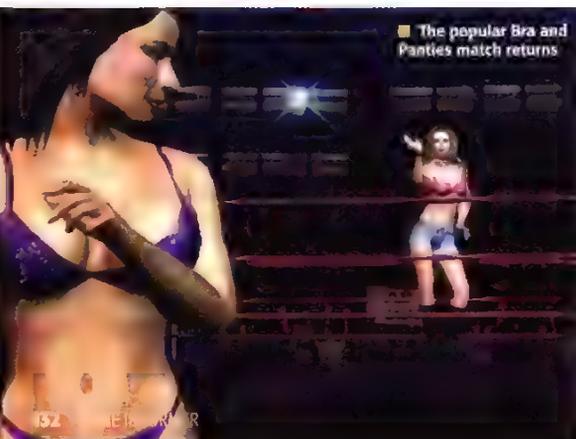




■ Andre the Giant is unlockable, and is so big he has his own weight class



■ Each wrestler's entrance has been fully recreated



■ The popular Bra and Panties match returns

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW

> STYLE 1 TO 6-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER YUKES > RELEASE NOVEMBER 2

WRESTLING MANIA

It's a glorious time to be a wrestling fan. With every new release, THQ's WWE games get closer to the real thing and offer even more of what fans desire. GameCube fans recently received the excellent WWE Day of Reckoning, and WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW is about to be unleashed on PlayStation 2 owners. THQ's goal with its latest title is to build on the solid foundation of the last PS2 WWE game and create an experience that more closely approximates the explosive energy of a televised WWE event.

Although the basic gameplay is quite similar to Here Comes the Pain, several new features have been added for a more immersive experience. For the first time ever, every single WWE star has recorded full voiceovers. You will talk to wrestlers in the locker room, chat with management about your matches, and listen as opponents talk smack about you in the ring. The commentary team from both shows has also been included, so Smackdown! vs. RAW is easily the best sounding wrestling game yet.

Of course, the sound isn't the only area that received an upgrade. At the start of each match, you can choose either a clean or dirty fighting style, and using certain moves fills your clean or dirty meter. Use a lot of cheap moves, and you'll be rewarded with a special "low blow" attack when your meter is full. Fight cleanly, and your meter reward will be an adrenaline rush that lets you deal out more damage. And while it may sound strange, some minigames have been incorporated as well. At the start of a match, one of three minigames will be chosen at random: showing match, staredown, or test of strength. Quick and easy to figure out, these minigames determine who gets the upper hand at the start of the match. Another minigame is initiated when you try to reverse a submission hold, and there is even a spanking minigame in the Bra and Panties match.

All of the popular match types from previous entries are back, as well as a new parking lot brawl, in which players duke it out amidst a circle of cars. Of course, the vehicles become deadly weapons as you throw your opponent through windows, slam doors and hoods on them, and whip them into the sides of cars. As cool as this new match type is, THQ didn't stop there. A new mode has been added that allows play-

ers to create their own Pay-Per-View event. The number and types of matches can be set, and a special belt can be designed specifically for the show. The size, material, and decorations of the belt can all be customized, and it can even be lost to another player. While playing this mode with a second player, the created belt will be saved to the winning fighter's memory card. Just like in the real WWE, you may see the belt that is rightly yours taken away.

The new material doesn't even stop there. Smackdown! vs. RAW also features online play, classic wrestlers, an improved character creation system, and a dynamic Story mode that encourages finishing the game several times. All told, this might be the most fully stacked wrestling game yet. ■ ■ ■



■ The Superstar models are more accurate than ever before

PLAYSTATION 2

Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER NIS AMERICA > DEVELOPER GUST
> RELEASE 2005

A STRATEGIC RETURN



With a roster of acclaimed titles like *Disgaea: Hour of Darkness*, *La Pucelle: Tactics*, and *Phantom Brave*, Nippon Ichi is becoming the most respected name in strategy role-playing games. Fans of the genre await the release of each of its titles with bated breath, as the company consistently delivers both quality tactical gaming and unique settings and characters. Now fans have another title to crave: *Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana*. While this title will certainly offer the same appeal as previous Nippon Ichi games, it is unique among the company's American releases in that it is part of a long-running franchise.

The *Atelier* series has a long history in Japan. *Eternal Mana* is the sixth game in the series, which focuses on alchemists. The star of this entry is Krein Kiesling, a young alchemist adventuring through the world of Regallzine. Alchemy grants Krein the ability to create items by mixing elements and objects with the power of Regallzine's Mana fairies. Players will be able to create over 300 unique objects,

which should provide the depth that Nippon Ichi fans expect.

As with the company's other releases, *Eternal Mana* will feature impressive hand-drawn environments, an isometric view, and countless hours of gameplay. However, combat will be markedly different. Switching to a side view camera in battle, characters will be able to run, jump, and attack, just like in an action game.

Another way in which *Eternal Mana* seems to be breaking from convention is its title. The *Atelier* games historically feature the name of the main character in the title (previous titles include *Atelier Marie*, *Atelier Elie*, *Atelier Lillie*, and more). There are several possible reasons for this break from tradition: Iris may be a character who shows up later in the game, the title may be changed, or this may simply be an attempt to take the series in new directions. Whatever the reason, what we know now about *Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana* offers both enough information and mystery to get strategy RPG fans truly excited. ■■■



UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAMECUBE

Killer 7

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURER INC > RELEASE SPRING

PRODUCT OF A TWISTED MIND

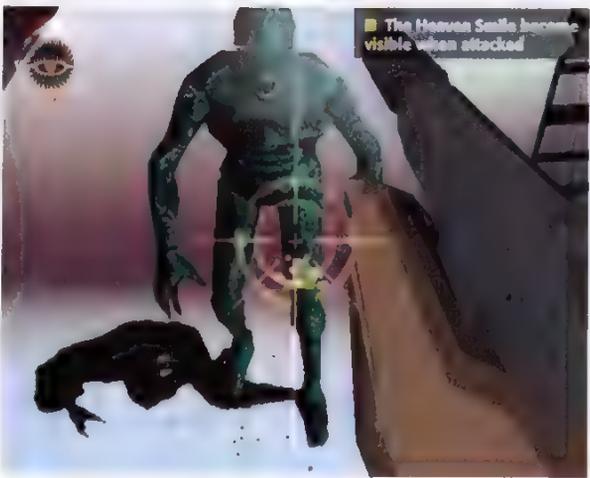
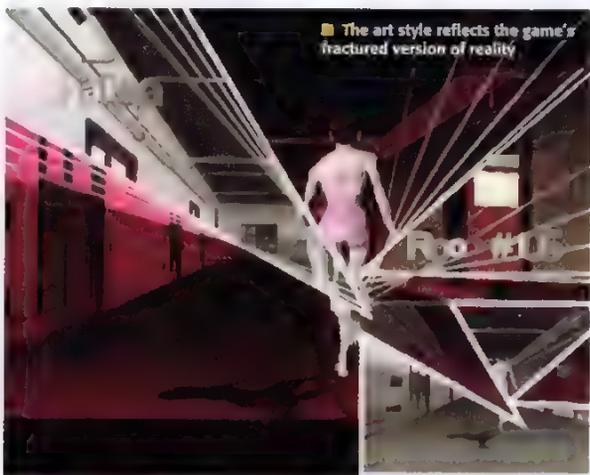
What was once one of the GameCube's most high profile titles has become its most mysterious. While certainly still anticipated, *Killer 7* is shrouded in a thick cloak of secrecy. Details are scarce and delays have been frequent. What does the twisted world of *Killer 7* hold in store for gamers? Here's a quick overview of what we know.

Killer 7 is the story of Harman Smith, a 60-year old wheelchair-bound man who also happens to be one of the world's greatest assassins, and has seven distinct personalities other than his own. These identities (Garcian Smith, Dan Smith, Mask De Smith, Coyote Smith, Kevin Smith, Kaede Smith, and Con Smith) can actually take physical form and enter the real world. Each has his or her own distinct traits, weapons, and skills. Harman and his alter egos are on a quest to defeat the mysterious Kun Lan, a terrorist who has unleashed a bizarre force called the Heaven Smile upon the world. The Heaven Smile are invisible humanoid creatures who prey on those that are unlucky enough to cross their path.

The story is certainly unique, as is the purported gameplay. Word is that *Killer 7* is a track-based first-person shooter. You choose the direction you want to walk, and the game guides your character automatically until you discover a fight or other significant moment. More details will certainly unfold as the game draws

closer, and many answers should become clear. It has been long rumored that *Killer 7* will come to the PlayStation 2 as well as the GameCube (it has been confirmed for PS2 release in Japan and Europe), but a U.S. date has

yet to be announced. We are eager for answers about this and many other issues regarding this title, for the one thing we know for certain is that nothing is what it seems with *Killer 7*. ■■■



Begin Your Journey



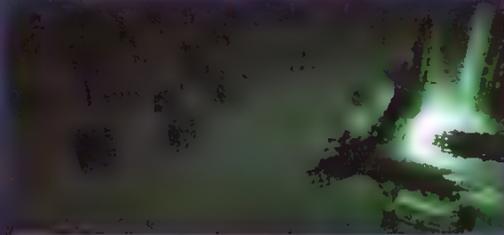
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unfolding mystery to confront.



PlayStation 2



For Windows



Game Emulation May Change Device Drive Play

PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



XBOX

Chicago Enforcer

Late this year, Kemco will unleash Chicago Enforcer, a budget title for the Xbox. We wish it was called "Chicago-style Hot Dog Enforcer." If you've never had a Chicago-style hot dog, then you're missing out. Mmm...Vienna Beef is the best. And get some chili fries while you're at it. Dang, those are good. Anyway, we're pretty sure this game has nothing to do with hot dogs or chili fries (which is a shame). We think it has something to do with gangs in the thirties. Kemco promises it will offer intense action, intelligent enemy AI, and several different online modes. Hey, any game that has tommy guns in it has to be cool. But you know what would make it cooler? That's right - hot dogs. Man, we're hungry.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Constantine

European publisher SCI will soon be taking gamers to hell and back (in a good way) with Constantine, a third-person action game tied to the upcoming movie. Based on Vertigo Comics' Hellblazer series, the story revolves around John Constantine (a character created by comic book legend Alan Moore) confronting demonic forces while trying to unravel the mystery surrounding a bizarre suicide. With weapons like the Holy Shotgun and the Crucifier, the game promises to stay true to its source material's darker themes. Expect to see Constantine on store shelves in February, the same time the film hits theaters. Will Keanu Reeves be believable as a man who's been through hell? Well, all we can say is, if there's anything that undoubtedly burst forth from Satan's loins, it's Sweet November.



XBOX

Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut

In a pattern that's by now overly familiar to Xbox owners, another highly praised PlayStation 2 title is making it late to the party wearing a fresh new set of duds. Dubbed the "Director's Cut," this enhanced port adds a heaping helping of goodness to the already stellar survival horror game, including a new first-person mode, a survival challenge which pits players against both hordes of ghosts and the clock, and alternate costumes for the main characters, twins Mayu and Mio. Given that this is Tecmo, what do you think the new attire will be? Business casual? Sweatpants? Nope - bikinis! Wow, who'da thunk it? Fatal Frame II will hit retail shelves on October 26.

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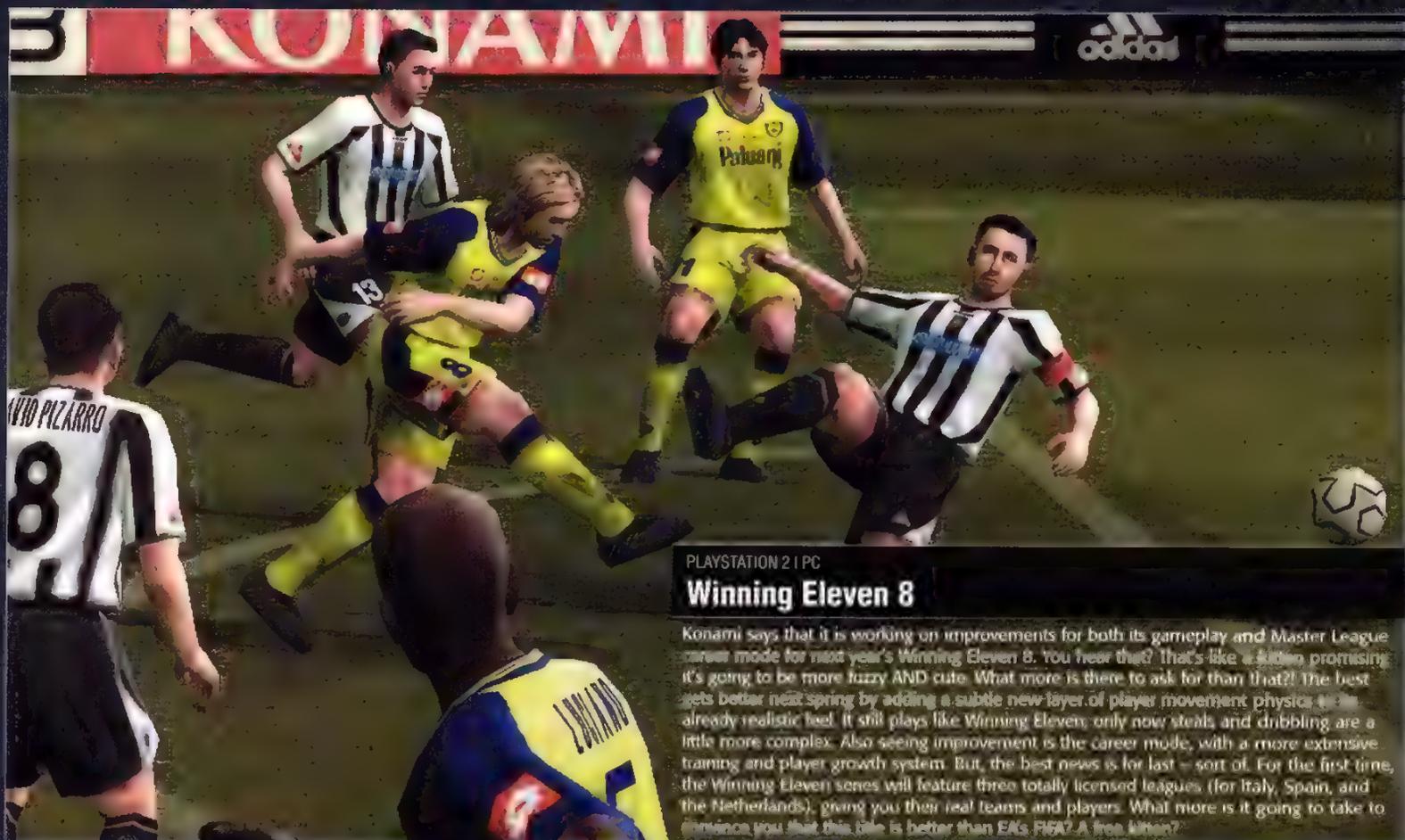
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PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

Winning Eleven 8

Konami says that it is working on improvements for both its gameplay and Master League career mode for next year's Winning Eleven 8. You hear that? That's like a *sliver* promising it's going to be more fuzzy AND cute. What more is there to ask for than that? The best gets better next spring by adding a subtle new layer of player movement physics to an already realistic feel. It still plays like Winning Eleven; only now steals and dribbling are a little more complex. Also seeing improvement is the career mode, with a more extensive training and player growth system. But, the best news is for last — sort of. For the first time, the Winning Eleven series will feature three totally licensed leagues (for Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands), giving you their real teams and players. What more is it going to take to convince you that this title is better than EA's FIFA? A free kitten?



PLAYSTATION 2

Nano Breaker

You might be thinking, "The PS2 needs another third-person hack 'n' slasher like it needs a 5 1/4-inch floppy drive!" However, be informed that Nano Breaker is being guided by a video game legend — none other than Castlevania mastermind Koji Igarashi, a man who knows more than a little about cool swordplay. This title traces the saga of a cyborg who must defend the world from some evil machines that are harvesting the planet's iron and human blood (!!) resources. You are armed with a Plasma Blade that changes forms to allow for myriad vicious attacks and grab moves. The game even keeps track of the number of gallons of blood...er...machine oil...you've spilled in the course of your violent adventures.



REVIEWS

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Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal

Insomniac has already provided us with two very memorable entries in the Ratchet & Clank series, both of which could be considered among the best action/platform games of this generation. However, the company has achieved absolute perfection with Up Your Arsenal, a mind-blowing adventure packed with finely tuned gameplay, variety, massive firepower, and even strong online multiplayer. Turn to page 150 to see the latest masterpiece to hit the gaming scene.

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** Gangrenous. A fetid, decaying game that ensures the necessary amputation of any body parts used to play it. Gives any collection that "stink of death" charm.

- > **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



165

Call Of Duty: United Offensive

HANDHELD



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F-Zero: GP Legend



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Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

This game has received a lot of hype over the last six months, but it turns out that it was all worth it. Unparalleled graphics, tons of content, and some of the deepest gameplay around push Dawn of War right to the top of the real-time strategy heap. Find out the how and why of the best RTS to come along in quite a while on page 164.

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theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal
 This is where we break down multi-platform games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older		Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older		Content suitable only for adults.
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older		Product is awaiting final rating

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

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

480p – Progressive scanning, this option (“p”= progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture. 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 Gauriet

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

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

board – A term we use for games like Jeopardy, and Mano Party

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

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

CG – Computer-Generated graphics

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

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

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

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

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GBC – Game Boy Color

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

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

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

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

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

minigame – A small, simple game within a larger one

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

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

N64 – Nintendo 64

NES – Nintendo Entertainment System

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

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

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

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

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

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

PSone – Sony PlayStation

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

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

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

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

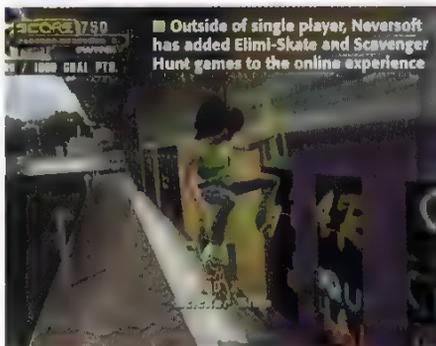
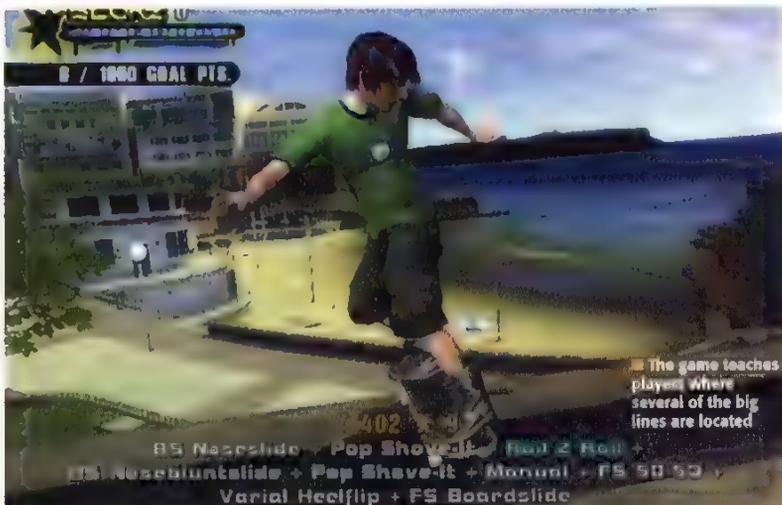
Slapping the Grimlock – The hip new phrase that all the cool people are saying. If you have to ask what it means, you'll never be cool

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

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



UNLIMITED ENABLED
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Tony Hawk's Underground 2

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 4 > **ESRB** T

THE PERFECT BALANCE

Within a matter of hours, I found myself terrorizing Barcelona with Steve-O on a mechanical bull, tossing beads at girls to make them lift up their shirts in New Orleans, and performing massive combo strings in the streets of Berlin with a nearly mummified child in a wheelchair. In a similar amount of time, I also busted out a beautiful McTwist in Australia, chained together a million-point combo in Boston, and found an amazing new gap in the classic Warehouse level. In many ways, fans of the Tony Hawk series have split into two camps. On one side, you have thrill seekers that are looking for outrageous, death-defying stunts. On the other, you have purists that claim that these goals have nothing to do with skateboarding whatsoever. With THUG 2, Neversoft has found the perfect balance between these two elements.

Rather than tweaking the goals so that half appease one audience and the other half makes the other happy, this driven developer has done the unthinkable. Within the span of just a year, Neversoft has essentially created two standalone games. Story mode basically boils down as the next installment in the Underground series, whereas the newly implemented Classic mode emerges as the next Pro Skater game. Both modes are equally as lengthy, and both bring something different to the table. The wild side will still get their kicks from the mayhem that erupts in Story mode, whereas those who simply want to tear things up and improve their skills will cherish the nostalgia that unfolds in Classic. The two-minute time limit, retro goal set, hidden tape, and obtainable stat points are all a part

of the mix. You'll also run into fan favorite locations such as Canada, Philadelphia, and the School. There really is nothing like battling the clock as you strive to achieve the Sick score, or snag the last letter in the SKATE goal.

In Story mode, insanity once again reigns supreme. You'll be asked to grind on a wire to splatter seagull droppings on sun-tanning beauties, acid drop into the world's largest fruity drink, and tame some of the craziest vehicles known to man. I've never really enjoyed the crazy aspects of the series, but to some this is why they keep coming back for more. As much as I despise the vehicular portion of the game (riding the bull is one of the stupidest things that I've ever done), Neversoft has improved upon this element by making sure that players can perform tricks and grinds with every ride in the game. As hilarious or downright bizarre as many of the goals may be, I did find that a number of the objectives are instrumental in teaching players where a number of the larger combo chains originate — which helps you appreciate Story mode even if you haven't before.

If you stand back and take a look at this game... or should I say games... you can't help but admire the craftsmanship of it. No matter which way you turn, you're going to run into huge thrills, monumental challenges, and an addictive quality that most games never come close to achieving. Intersecting both choices is a revamped gameplay engine that simply soars. If you were thinking to yourself that Neversoft had tapped its creative well, you're in for quite a shock. New gameplay mechanics like the Natas Spin, the handy Sticker Slap wall bounce, amusing Freak Out board-bashing, and the Focus meter (a slow-motion technique that makes landings and balancing a hair easier) completely change the way that you approach your runs.

Although I've described the game as two separate entities, Neversoft has bridged the gap between them to create an irresistible package born of the classic mold but with an invigorating twist. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 9.75

> **Concept:** Neversoft listened to its fans and took a tip from yesteryear to create the ultimate Tony Hawk experience

> **Graphics:** A bit more colorful and cartoonish than previous entries, but the sights are still stunning

> **Sound:** Sinatra... Faith No More... Ween... The soundtrack is loaded with variety and great songs to skate to

> **Playability:** Tricking out has now hit a sickeningly deep level. The new moves really open things up

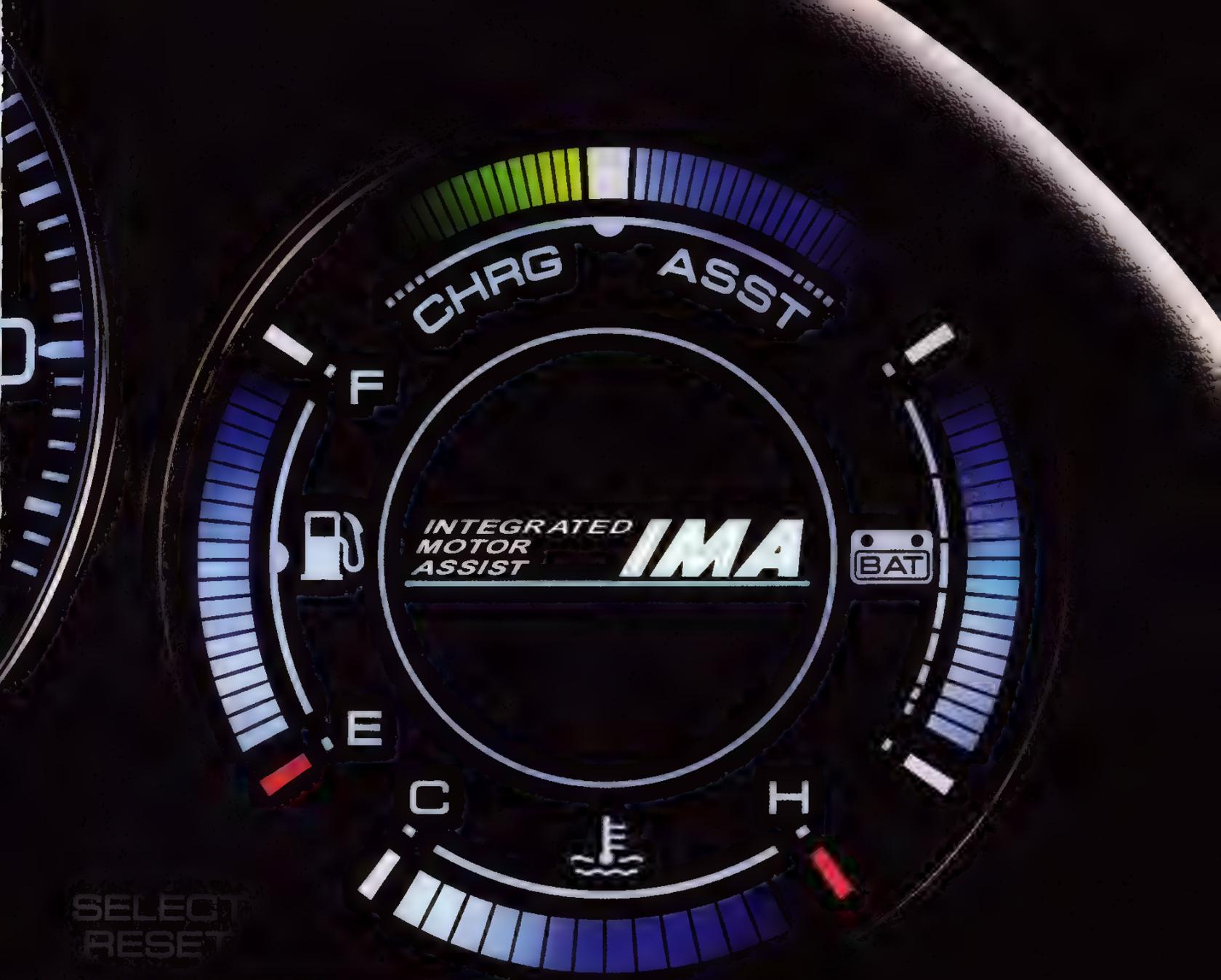
> **Entertainment:** In the future, when you look in the dictionary for the description of 'longevity,' it will say "see THUG 2"

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.75

Awesome. There really isn't a better word to describe this year's edition of THUG. Not only did Neversoft rework the Story mode to greatly improve it over last year's, it added almost an entire second game with the Classic mode. I still have some problems with the Story mode, namely the annoying vehicles that Neversoft still tries to work into the gameplay. Sure, some of them manage to work (barely) but most, like Steve-O's mechanical bull, annoy beyond belief. All complaints aside, this mode is now much better, and the Classic mode is pure genius. Being able to revisit old levels (oh, how I love Canada and the Warehouse) with all the new moves is something I have been begging for year after year, and this mode alone is worth the price of admission. If you love the Tony Hawk games, this is by far the pinnacle of the series and a must for fans. —ANDY

the edge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal
The Xbox may have custom soundtracks and a slight graphical advantage over all three versions, but the PS2 incarnation trumps it with ease, as it is the only system with online play. Through the PS2, players can also use the Eye-Toy to upload their likenesses into the game.



SELECT
RESET



A fuel gauge? Or a gauge of intelligence?
47 city. 48 highway. The Civic Hybrid.  **HONDA**



PLAYSTATION | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NBA Live 2005

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR 2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 5 > **ESRB** E

FAST BREAK CITY

With Nick Van Excel frozen in his tracks, Allen Iverson flew into the lane and collided mid-air with Shareef Abdur-Rahim and Darius Miles. Upon contact, Iverson spun away from the basket, brought the ball down between his legs, then tossed up a blind over-the-back prayer that rolled across the rim and hugged the backboard before hitting net. As miraculous as this shot was, I found myself more impressed with the technology that made this play seem so lifelike. The speed of impact, weight of the players, and collision between them were all orchestrated perfectly. Even the player reactions were right on the money.

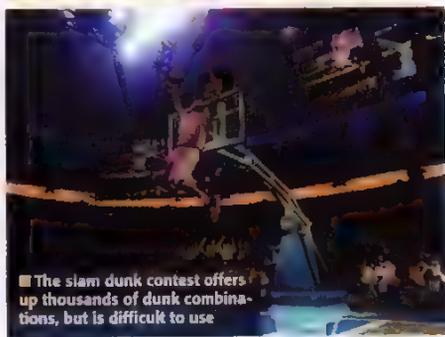
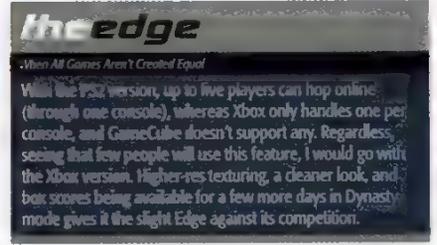
From little transition animations to acrobatic dunks, developer EA Canada has absolutely captured the on-court authenticity of the sport with this season's Live. That's not to say, however, that the gameplay follows suit. Once again, the inspiration of gameplay seems to stem more from NBA Street than the actual NBA itself. Almost every play has an epic feel to it. Aggressive moves into the paint, rim-rocking slams, high-flying blocked shots, and rocket-fueled fast breaks are the order of the day. It's like a non-stop highlight reel. While it does rely on the run-and-gun mentality a little heavily, it is a nice alternative to ESPN's sim formula — making for a more entertaining 'brag-worthy' multiplayer experience.

In terms of visuals and pace, Live runs circles around rival ESPN, but the gameplay is still a distant second in terms of execution. The new rebounding mechanic (which allows players to perform a standard rebound, tip-on, or rebound dunk) offers up a wider selection of options, but doesn't fix the prob-

lem of actually getting your hands on the rock. Given just how difficult it is to discern where a rebound is going, the CPU still has a huge advantage. The flashy Freestyle Control hasn't improved, either. Redirecting shots works very well, and you gotta love the array of new dunks and alley-oops, but dekes leave much to be desired. Even if I had a defender leaning the wrong way or facing in a different direction, I couldn't seem to get past him. Other times, I'd bear down a double team and somehow manage to spin past. The percentage of blocked shots remains incredibly high as well.

Honing in on the All-Star festivities, EA has implemented the rookie-sophomore game, dunk contest, and three-point shootout (which are laced into the schedule of Dynasty mode). As impressive as the presentation for the dunk contest is, I grew frustrated by its complexity rather quickly. If dunking is this difficult in real life, then hats off to Vince Carter for making it look easy. It's a real pain in the ass. Additionally, Dynasty mode now boasts better trade and free agency logic, plus all of the statistical bells and whistles that you could want. Unfortunately, out-of-game cutscenes are still nowhere to be found. Sound is also lacking. Marv Albert and Mike Fratello call a decent game, but crowd noises are mostly static and the soundtrack is largely forgettable. Unlockables are abundant, but are limited to Nike shoes and retro jerseys.

It may look too good to be true, but Live is still a bit rough around the edges. It's a great multiplayer title (online is available for both Xbox and PS2), but if you're not in the market for a pick-up game or two, ESPN's authentication of the sport remains far superior. —REINER



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Up the visual realism and let players touch the sky with new Freestyle dunks

> **Graphics:** So realistic that you'll find yourself questioning whether you are playing a game or watching tiny people in a box

> **Sound:** Marv Albert puts the bite back into the NBA with great commentary. Arena sounds are lacking, however

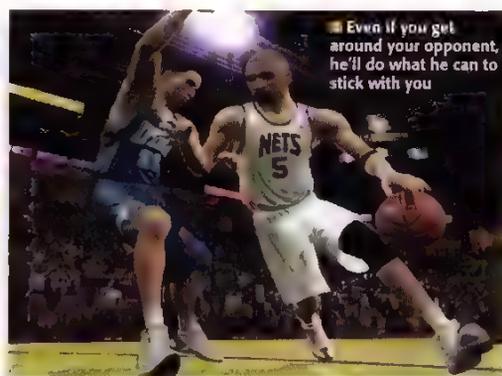
> **Playability:** Showtime is the name of the game. If you want to see fundamentals, play ESPN

> **Entertainment:** A more exciting play than ESPN, but it's not nearly as challenging or as rewarding

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

There is little doubt that NBA Live 2005 is better than its 2004 counterpart, but that doesn't mean it captures the true spirit of basketball. Without a doubt, this game does have its moments. The animations, the defense, and even the movement of the players away from the ball is simply spectacular. I'm even impressed by how the players dive for the ball on the floor, and how realistically they rebound the ball (something that is very difficult to do in video game form). But for all the things NBA Live and all video game basketball games do well, the interaction between the players when facing off is still flawed. Sure, the freestyle moves allow you to create separation and make some spectacular moves, but the game still suffers from players who stick to each other in an attempt by the game to limit the non-stop score-est that would happen without it. Until the developers solve this puzzle, I can only say this game is good, not great. —ANDY



BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: A tighter-playing game that focuses on the realism of the sport and ways to keep players coming back for more

> Graphics: Transition animations are a bit off at times and the collision isn't the best, but the details in the player models are superb and the 3D crowds look amazing

> Sound: The commentary team calls a great game and the crowd reacts appropriately to situations

> Playability: Polished heavily to allow players greater freedom on both sides of the court. 24/7 mode is not as frustrating, either

> Entertainment: Doesn't offer the flashiest of dunks, but it has everything else

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.75

On Xbox in particular, ESPN's visuals give it the swagger of a king. Roll in the gameplay, and NBA 2K5 is a pretty tight package. I was most impressed with the on-court options. Charging is called less frequently this year, which means you really have to work your offensive skills to score. Thanks to the new IsoMotion moves, mid-air adjustments give you a wealth of options and the hop step is done just right. If there's a fault here, it's that, because what your guys do with the new IsoMotion is contextual, sometimes players will start animations you don't want them to. Also, because charging isn't as sensitive, a kind of "stone wall" collision can occur. Rounding out the gameplay highlights are the pressure/tempo strategy settings. 24/7 is back and still brilliant, but I'm undecided about player personalities in The Association mode, which can be unbalanced. On the other hand, simulating games via Full Authority is a lot of fun, and I suggest you take advantage of it, just like this title as a whole.—KATO

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION | XBOX

ESPN NBA 2K5

> STYLE 1 TO 10-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX) (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
> PUBLISHER ESPN VIDEOGAMES **> DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 6 **> ESRB** E

THE HOOP AUTHORITY

Taking a good hard look at last year's game and listening to the feedback that it had accumulated from its fans, developer Visual Concepts went into this season's release with the intention of tuning it to perfection. Seeing that the game already offered the most realistic playing experience, the widest assortment of franchise options, and an unparalleled depth within its revolutionary 24/7 mode, there really was little more that Visual Concepts could do.

With the competition focusing on how many windmills and double pumps can go into a dunk, Visual Concepts is looking at the little details. As a point guard brings the ball up court, you'll notice that he is fully aware of where the defense is as he spins his body subtly and extends his free arm to protect the ball and keep his opponent in check. Additionally, players who get beaten by spin moves no longer resemble deer caught in headlights. They will cut back, throw out their arms, and do everything in their power to stick with their man. As fatigue sets in, keen eyes will notice that sweat stains appear on the jerseys.

Outside of the cosmetic touches, Visual Concepts has implemented a system that grants complete control over the flow of the game. At any point during play, sliders for offensive tempo and defensive pressure can be altered. By raising the tempo meter, your teammates will drive the lane and transition for fast breaks. For instance, not as many men crash the defensive boards as they are already breaking down court for the outlet pass. When you lower this meter, they will simply converge on the box. The pressure mechanic works similarly. When it is maxed out, your teammates will play tighter defense, giving the offense little breathing room to work with. When this meter is low, your players will stand back and play the passing lanes, hoping to intercept a pass. I didn't know what to think of this aspect at first, but I soon learned that I couldn't live without it. It really makes you aware of

countering your opponent's approach to the game (especially for multiplayer), and also allows you to turn it up a notch when behind or slow it down when protecting a lead.

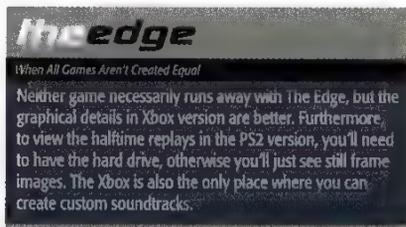
Two aspects that I felt degraded last year were the loss of the post stance button, as well as the customization of the camera view. Hearing our cries, Visual Concepts has reinserted both features. Additionally, the player can now pick from four different options for shot direction, and tap into a new IsoMotion head fake for posting up. I also really like how you can subtly drift in directions when performing a jump shot. I don't know how many times this saved me from a certain blocked shot. The new hop and spin step techniques also come in handy and show great balance with who can use them successfully. Some of the transition animations are a bit

funky, and sometimes my teammates wouldn't react appropriately, like blocking out rather than grabbing a ball two feet from their face.

Franchise mode shows even greater depth with weekly training and interaction with players. After a game, one of your players may want to have a word with you. When this happens, you'll have to follow up with a response that can be good, middle of the road, or bad, which works based solely on your player's personality. With a guy like Iverson, you never really know what to expect. Your input, and the way that training went, will directly affect the team's chemistry. You can also hire supporting staff like dietitians, masseuses, master chefs, and player mentors.

Over 200 new unlockable items have been included into the street ball-like 24/7 mode. You'll also get the chance to create your own shoes! Thankfully, the challenges in this mode are no longer so frustrating or time-consuming. Training is now formatted as two-minute matches opposed to playing to 21.

The changes are not as drastic this time around, but Visual Concepts' efforts are just as praiseworthy. This is still the best playing, most rewarding, and realistic basketball game that money can buy.—REINER





PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

X-Men Legends

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
 > **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** T

EVERYTHING YOU'VE HOPED FOR

Never have I encountered a game that so perfectly caters to its rabid fan base as X-Men Legends. From the moment you start to play, it's apparent how much the developers care about the characters, the background, and the essence of what has made the X-Men the most beloved superhero group in comic history. But more than that, Legends is a game of phenomenally intense action that manages to maintain its momentum through a surprisingly lengthy story – even with over a dozen playable characters to level-up and enjoy. While several technical issues are apparent, it's amazing how much you're willing to forgive when a game is as ridiculously fun as this one is.

So, let's get those gripes out of the way right off the bat. Dealing with cameras is a tricky business, and you'll be reminded of that frequently as you try to maneuver Legends' to your desired angle. There are some mildly contrived missions from time to time, which is unfortunate in a game that purports to be an RPG. Plus, you'll occasionally encounter confusing objectives, where you won't be sure where to go next or what to do. Perhaps the most glaring error in the game occurs in the single-player arena, where the ally AI alternates between extremely useful and almost completely ineffective.

The more time you spend with the game, the more you notice these glitchy issues, and it holds the game back from the perfection it might otherwise have achieved.

With all that said, I'll move on to gushing about how everything else redeems those errors and makes you forget them in a mutant-powered optic blast of awesome to the face. Much of the game has you alternating between large, battle-filled missions and smaller role playing sequences where you adopt the role of Magma, who some of you may remember from the original *New Mutants* series. As a recent addition to the X-crew, Alison can explore the three-level Xavier Mansion, and can eventually join the team on missions, (where she kicks way more ass than you'd expect). Details at the mansion abound – walk into Cyclops' room and you'll find a loving note from Jean, while Wolverine's wall has a Canadian flag signed by the members of Alpha Flight. You can talk to all the X-Men individually, learn their histories, and ask their opinions. You can even work out in the Danger



BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** Play a fanboy's dream version of the X-Men through a huge 20+ hour storyline in one of the best comic book adaptations ever

> **Graphics:** While the characters lack some detail, they nonetheless look extremely cool. Plus, mutant powers appear fantastic amid the huge and varied environments

> **Sound:** Music is a mismatch of forgettable tunes, but the voice-work and effects are incredible

> **Playability:** An excellent control scheme has you punching, kicking, throwing, and blowing up nearly everything with ease

> **Entertainment:** You will collapse with glee. It's that fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **9**

I imagine the release of X-Men Legends will garner a response similar to The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Only it won't be teenage girls who are screaming their hearts out and collapsing to the floor. It will be comic geeks. True enough, this game made me shriek with glee more than I care to admit. From Wolverine's in-your-face savageness to Cyclops' long-ranged blasts, Raven has absolutely nailed the characteristics of each of the X-Men. Mutant powers blend perfectly with hack n' slash melee to create a gameplay package that is simply divine. Apply missions that are modeled after fan-favorite stories, surprising cameos by lesser known characters, and comic-styled graphics to the mix, and you're looking at one mother of a dorkgasm. Not only is Legends one of the best comic book games to date, it's one of finest dungeon crawlers as well. Excelsior! —REINER

Room, where you can literally spend hours going through the different training programs.

Battle is just as chaotic as you've always thought and hoped an X-Men fight would be. Walls explode, enemies are flung high in the air, explosions abound, and mutant powers crackle through the air. The onscreen action is mind-blowing. Every one of the X-Men has been handled with care, making each a worthy and important addition to the squad. While single-player battles allow you to flip between the other AI-controlled characters, the true joy of the game is undoubtedly the multiplayer component, where teamwork and power combinations make for a fantastic time. Leveling-up turns Wolverine from a feral animal into an unstoppable force of nature, just as Storm moves from a wind witch to the all-powerful weather goddess we know her to be.

With surprises galore, I constantly felt myself giggling like an extremely geeky schoolgirl as new characters showed up and storylines unfolded before me. There's an impressive melding of the different X-universes here, so that someone who has just seen the movies should feel comfortable, but someone who has read every X-Men issue since the '60s will be more than content. Almost all of the well-known characters make an appearance, and many of the lesser known allies and foes do as well. With over 20 hours of gameplay, and one of the most enjoyable cooperative multiplayer experiences I've had, I couldn't recommend Legends more highly to fans and newbies alike.—MILLER



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE OCTOBER 19 > ESRB E



YOUR KUNG FU IS NOT STRONG

As a kid, I was a pretty big Ninja Turtles fan. I bought all of the toys, watched the show religiously, and declared the Hostess Turtle Pie to be the best dessert ever. I saw the movie in the theater and loved it. A year later, I went to the second film and liked it, but never bothered to see the third. I had lost interest in the franchise that I was once so enamored with. When Konami's new Turtles game came out last year, I was pretty thrilled to see the Heroes in a Half Shell make a comeback. But after playing Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus, I feel my interest in green ninjas dying off once more.

The sad thing is that Konami deary listened to complaints about the first title and tried to address them. Four-player mode has been added, and the basic gameplay has been completely overhauled. Unfortunately, many of the changes were steps backward. Of course, not everything about Battle Nexus is bad: co-op is far superior to the first title's, the combat engine is deeper, and the block button is a big plus. But these tweaks aren't enough to overcome this title's myriad shortcomings.

The biggest issue is the level design. In an

attempt to deliver a more open experience, Konami opted to create dozens of small levels and give the players some flexibility in how to tackle them. This leads to bite-sized gaming — most stages take only a minute or two to finish (Reiner and I played through the entire game in about three hours). Some levels contain truly awful platforming elements, while others force you to hunt down and kill every foe. There are even a few lame vehicular bonus stages thrown in for good measure, but none of the various stage types offer anything close to depth or originality.

The simple button-mashing combat worked better in the first title because the longer stages played more like an old-school brawler. While the combat is tighter this time out, the enemies feel more like a nuisance than a threat. The first game wouldn't let you progress until you cleared an area, this one lets you dash past your foes and race to the exit. The story is also nonsense, and the sound is obnoxious, and the shift away from cel-shading means this title looks noticeably worse than the first. But despite all the problems present in this title, Turtles fans will still get something

out of it — the unlockable Ninja Turtles arcade game is a treat, even if it's not an exact port (the music and some sound effects have been changed). This, along with all the other extras (such as concept art, toy pics, and a tournament mode) show that Konami really cares about treating Turtles fans right. Some day, I expect to see a game that turns me into a true TMNT fan once again. — JEREMY



BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Four turtles and their rat buddy take on aliens, ninjas, and alien ninjas. It's really high concept stuff

> **Graphics:** The character models are nice, but most stages look about as exciting as a piece of white bread

> **Sound:** Much like the current TMNT show, the voiceovers suck, the sound effects are annoying, and the soundtrack will make your ears cry

> **Playability:** The hardest part is telling who is controlling which little green blob in multiplayer

> **Entertainment:** Only worth playing through to unlock the classic arcade title

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 8

If I ever see a turtle again, I think I've earned the right to give it a swift kick into a lake. Dare I say it, but this sequel is even worse than its predecessor. Not only are the graphics barely passable by today's standards, the combat system is a migraine-sized mess, and the platforming segments reek more than a turtle pancake on the interstate. Even with four players running amok at once, you'll be lulled into a coma by the repetitive combo sequences and abysmal boss fights. The obnoxious spoken dialogue and confusing animated cutscenes simply add insult to injury. The only joys that this game brings are the unlockable TMNT arcade game (which you can beat in 30 minutes), and a brief chuckle when Donatello says, "I'll give you a good taste of my staff." — REINER

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When six people see the game and instantly want to head to a water park, you know it's an awesome water level.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** AVALANCHE SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11 > **ESRB** E

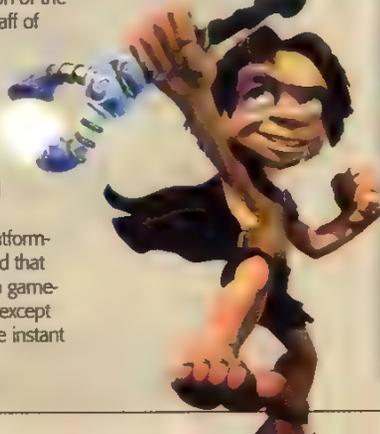
THAT WEIRD LITTLE DUDE IS BACK

Within minutes, Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams will show players two of the coolest things ever — some cutscenes that obliterate the competition in the humor and artistry departments, and one seriously bitchin' water course. Tak's first outing featured amazing cinematic sequences and the sequel quite possibly improves on the earlier's quality. Without question, it improves in quantity. I suspect that the actual number of CG minutes is probably equal for the two titles, but the second has many shorter ones at much more frequent intervals. Since the gameplay is only so-so (more on that later), the real reward for any semi-experienced player will be these sequences and, in many cases, they are worth it.

The flip side of all of this is that, with the exception of the whitewater course, Staff of Dream's gameplay is the consummate example of derivative. Like The Power of Juju, this feels like one big fetch quest mixed with button-mashing combat and floaty platforming. It should be noted that there technically is no game-wide item to collect (except for feathers, which are instant

health boosts, and potion ingredients used to unlock special features), but many of each level's tasks are "I need some of these, go get them for me." Last time I checked, that was collecting, and Staff of Dreams feels like it's got a lot of it. One thing to remember is that derivative isn't necessarily the same thing as bad, it's just all been done before.

I do think that the franchise has a lot of room for improvement, but that doesn't mean that Tak is without his charms. The art direction, character design, and storytelling are all top notch. For those who don't have a lot of platforming experience or just want to hear a funny tale, this certainly isn't a bad choice, but I'll be looking forward to the upcoming TV show more than playing this game again. —LISA



BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Bring Tak back — with nearly everything (good and bad) from his first outing

> **Graphics:** Gorgeous. Some of the best art direction I've seen in any game

> **Sound:** The music is subtle and really nice. Enemy sounds are equally well balanced

> **Playability:** Controls, in nearly every regard, take a while to get used to but you will eventually get into the groove

> **Entertainment:** A better game in many areas from the original, but still has a lot of room for improvement

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

The first Tak game was a funny, kiddie platformer with some issues. Tak 2 is a funny, kiddie platformer with issues. My, how far we've come. Like the last game, Tak 2 looks great and made me bust out laughing on several occasions. However, the gameplay is just too familiar, the controls are a bit sticky, and several portions are truly frustrating. The rumored Tak TV show has yet to materialize, but if it ever does, I'll certainly watch it. The characters are endearing, the writing is genuinely funny, and the CG is beautiful. Sadly, I just don't want to play the game. I've played too many superior platformers to want to spend time with Tak 2, but I honestly hope this series lives up to its promise. —JEREMY

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Crash Twinsanity

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 28 > **ESRB** E



Sliding down an icy slope at 60 mph on your face is less painful than playing this game.

DOUBLE YOUR DISPLEASURE

In television, former child stars have the decency of fading into total obscurity... or at least showing up on the WB from time to time. In video games, there really is no salvation for washed up characters. Take Crash Bandicoot, for example. Back in the day, he made a splash and gave Mario a run for his money. Unfortunately, time has not been kind to the famed orange marsupial. Over the last few years, he's seen his star fade, going from a Johnny Depp to a Richard Grieco. While it pains me to say this, maybe Crash should make like the entire cast of *Blossom* and disappear.

As if I need to say it, *Twinsanity* is another steaming pile of failure. The only thing that is truly appropriate is the name of the game. Not only does it replicate the gameplay of yesteryear, the abysmal camerawork, slippery platforming, and unforgiving level designs will drive you to the brink of insanity. The only area where this game emits a faint ray of light is within the injection of humor. Turning Cortex into a cross-dressing lunatic brought about a few chuckles.

I also got a kick out of the jabs that the game took at itself by mocking the poor sales of *Wrath of Cortex*, and having a random enemy voice his disapproval of having to walk back and forth on a path over and over again. The wildly inventive doo-wop and choral music-influenced score (and nice vocal arrangements) are equally as amusing.

Spinning into enemies, activating TNT boxes, and repeating patterns in boss fights are still the order of the day concerning the action at hand. With age, however, these actions are no longer as precise and user-friendly. Throughout the majority of the game, it's difficult to gauge the distance of jumps and the space between you and your adversaries. I can't even begin to tell you how many times I died because I performed a spin attack too early or jumped over a platform.

John Travolta vanished from the public eye and came back stronger than ever. Perhaps the same theory will work for Crash. For now, heed my advice and turn your back on this washed up 32-bit sensation. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Throws in a twist by combining Crash and Cortex, but neglects to expand upon the series in any other way

> **Graphics:** Crash has a signature look. Signature meaning old-fashioned and slightly 32-bit

> **Sound:** Video game soundtracks don't get much better than this. The spoken dialogue is also quite good

> **Playability:** A faint echo of the brilliance of yesteryear. Almost every action would seem to be developed with the intent of driving gamers nuts

> **Entertainment:** Comedic, but also highly painful

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low



Second Opinion 6.25

I think that *Twinsanity* just missed a step — it doesn't fall into a bottomless pit or scale any pinnacle of goodness — the game falls somewhere in between these two fates. Parts of Crash and Cortex's adventure honestly cracked me up. I like the *Odd Couple* dynamic they have going on, and I think that Traveller's Tales plays it up with skill. On the other hand, the controls feel uniformly sluggish — making the interesting (and refreshingly difficult) level design an utter pain rather than a good time. —LISA

The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Neither system features any enhancements or exclusive features, but there is one slight difference between the two. For FMV movie sequences, the Xbox version supports Dolby 5.1, whereas the PS2 is Dolby Pro Logic II. The Edge is simply determined by your sound preference.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

BloodRayne 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** TERMINAL REALITY
 > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 5 (PS2), OCTOBER 12 (XBOX) > **ESRB** M

BLOOD FETISH

Not for the faint of heart, BloodRayne 2 surprised me with both its gratuitous violence and its several highly worthwhile gameplay ideas. A poster-child for why we need the M rating, this title fully embraces its adult content through frequent dismemberments, excessive gore, and a heroine who quite literally gets off on the pain and death of her victims. Many aspects of the game have been vastly improved since the original, most significantly the lustrous graphical veneer over everything and the notable flexibility of the combat system. Still, this sequel continues to fall short of gaming brilliance when everything starts to feel the same after a while, and advancing through the levels becomes equal parts chore and enjoyment.

In case there was any doubt in your mind, Rayne is supposed to be a new sex symbol — at least if this game has anything to say about it. And while Rayne's varied outfits are indeed alluring in that tight leather, dominatrix sort of way, the all-pervading sexuality of the game ends up being a little too much. Instead of erotic, her sadism seems slightly ridiculous. Nonetheless, the main character does look really good and is certainly unique in a way. Even though overall animation is occasionally a little rough, her movements are usually smooth, and combat is often genuinely entertaining to watch as she lithely cuts down her foes.

In fact, combat in general is handled quite well, including numerous unlockable moves and special abilities that give you all sorts of options in a serious scuffle. Unfortunately, wave after wave of the same fairly uninteresting enemies really dulls the experience after the first several hours, and you're left longing for the end of a stage so the story will progress forward. The substantial length of the game is therefore a questionable addition, as you have to really like the fighting to want to push through to the end.

Some cringe-inducing one liners and the occasionally poor hit and collision detection don't detract significantly from the dark and gothic atmosphere of the whole game. While this sequel does succeed in proving Rayne is more than a pretty face, a few more tweaks are needed before her playtime prowess matches her dark mystique. —**MILLER**



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Trade blood on the open market as the sadomasochistic Rayne while you embark on a mission of familial revenge

> **Graphics:** Largely polished and impressive, but animations can be choppy and enemies could use some work

> **Sound:** Voices are well done but a little too over the top, and the intermittent metal music doesn't really add very much

> **Playability:** Difficulty ramps up at an appropriate but challenging pace, and controls are accessible

> **Entertainment:** Good gory fun for a few hours, until the shock value wears off and it becomes a fairly standard action romp

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

This is the kind of sequel that I like to see. BloodRayne 2 keeps the core flavor of the original — cool vampiric powers and gory action — and improves the gameplay and presentation immeasurably. I really can't stress enough how much better this plays than the first game. Plus, I'm really enamored of the fact that killing enemies isn't the problem — slaughtering them in style is the challenge. The only real downsides are occasional camera and targeting problems, and one particular sequence which should have been 15 minutes of awesomeness that ended up as two hours of excruciating frustration. Overall, though, BloodRayne 2 makes wading through the (literally, at times) knee-deep rivers of your enemies' blood a surprisingly good time. —**ADAM**



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > DEVELOPER HIGH VOLTAGE > RELEASE OCTOBER 5 > ESRB M

NO INNUENDO

Larry, you've come a long way, baby. Your uncle used to text his way through seedy bars and questionable ladies of the night, and now you follow in his footsteps by dressing up as the school mascot and sexing-up a marching-band alternate through an orgy of acrobatic maneuvers. Wow, there's a sentence that I never thought I'd write.

Anyway, *Magna Cum Laude* is essentially a coming-of-age teen sex romp movie, but with minigames that players complete to get more of the narrative. There are only a few actual games with a couple of different veneers. For example, the rhythm version is used for trampoline jumping and dancing. The whack-a-mole type shows up for mixing drinks, making coffee, and spanking (don't ask). Essentially, you're doing the same thing through the entire game, which isn't necessarily a bad thing because the actions are at least varied, but it's really where Larry's problems start.

I have a strong personal feeling about games where the narrative is the reward (*Beyond Good & Evil* comes to mind as another example), which is that I shouldn't have to stop progressing the narrative to go collect something. I think that if I've completed a section, I should basically have everything that I need to head to the next objective. *Magna Cum Laude* does not follow this rule. Money is really, really hard to come by and the quickest ways to make it are a variety of unlocked minigames where winning gets you five bucks. Well, for the last group of ladies, you need around \$90 each – and that's if you don't have to

retry any of their minigame challenges (you have to pony up \$15 per try for certain activities). This outlay of cash is time-consuming to get, besides the fact that after 20 rounds of the pong-like arcade game or quarters match-up, the activities start to wear a little thin.

"I'm happy about where Larry is heading..."



And, during the conversation minigames where you drive a sperm through good and bad talking points, the little swimmer becomes less responsive with every drink you have. As a big fan of the series since its early days, I'm happy about where Larry is heading in this modern world. There is a lot of room for improvement, but the core of what makes these games so memorable is still there in full force – pretty girls, unspeakably embarrassing sexual acts, and an endearing dorkiness that makes the entire experience feel more charming and humorous than exploitive. —LISA

theedge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal
With smoothed-out edges and snicker-sounding voices, the Xbox wins the console war, but not by such a staggering degree that PS2 owners should feel at all shamed. Just had to get one more pun in there. Sorry.

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Bring the seminal (pun not intended) adult adventure game back into the minds of gamers

> **Graphics:** Some of it is the stylized art direction, but on the PS2 in particular, it looks a little old-school

> **Sound:** Voice actors are uniformly hysterical (in a good way), and licensed tracks are put to good use

> **Playability:** The minigames are repeated too often and the loading is totally, utterly out of control

> **Entertainment:** Laugh-out-loud funny on many occasions, but it does suffer from balancing issues

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **7.25**

Much like the movies that inspired it (such as *Revenge of the Nerds*, *Porky's*, etc.), *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* starts off as pretty amusing. Much of it is gut-bustingly funny, in all honesty. However, once you get past the initial laughs and the shock of seeing stuff you've never seen in a video game before (trust me, there's a lot in this game you haven't seen before), the magic starts to fade. Like the aforementioned movies, the humor starts to fail. Then you notice just how lame many of the minigames are and the ultra-frequent loading screens become really annoying. Sure, you can buy new sexier load screens, but you can only look at them so long before they get boring. If you manage to stick it out to the end, it's a fairly short game, there are three different endings. With a better variety of minigames and more precise controls, Larry could have really been somebody. As it stands now, he's still just a likable loser. —JEREMY

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** KROME STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 > **ESRB** E

Ty 2 starts out strong, with a thrilling introductory sequence. For a second, I thought, "Wow, this is going to rock!" Sadly, this bracing opening is just a mirage, as the game quickly bogs down into a tired mix of poorly executed minigame sequences thrown in for the sake of "variety" (the helicopter controls are pretty annoying and the new cart racing mode is dire) and standard-issue platforming "pizza delivery" missions. Any momentum that Ty 2 manages to pick up is constantly undercut by the level designs — in an ill-conceived nod to Jak II, the environments are "open," which basically means you've got to do tons of boring walking/driving around until you get to a mission start-point à la GTA III. Graphically, it's definitely improved, but that's not going to save Ty from his own mediocrity. —**MATT**



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

King Arthur

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** T



So this movie didn't exactly succeed in theaters. Okay, it pretty much bombed. But don't hold that against the game, which isn't nearly so bad as you might think it would be. While a blatant ripoff of the concept utilized in the excellent Lord of the Rings action games, Arthur succeeds admirably at dishing out an intense fighting

system while melding in clips from the movie. Numerous playable characters are a big plus, but the repetitive enemies and environments are not. However, I'm always a fan of good cooperative play, which this title successfully incorporates. Though it has its flaws, the game almost makes me want to track down and see the film. Almost. —**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

Spyro: A Hero's Tail

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** EUROCOM
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E

I know many of you have faced a tough decision recently. Standing in your local video game retailer, you didn't know which game to reserve on November 9... Spyro: A Hero's Tail or Halo 2. It's moments like these that make life so damn tricky. Having played Spyro, which is essentially the video game equivalent of sleeping with your eyes open, I can safely say that Halo 2 is the way to go. In all fairness, Eurocom did create a decent game. The controls are spot on, the worlds (albeit lacking in detail) are colorful and sharp, and most of the minigames are pretty cool. It's just a slow play. The action never really hits a fevered pitch, there is nothing difficult about it, and the quest is about as exciting as static on a TV. It's a better attempt than Enter the Dragonfly was, but still a long ways from the glorious Insomniac Games trilogy. —**REINER**



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

FIFA Soccer 2005

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER ON (XBOX, GC) > **PUBLISHER** EA GAMES > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 12 > **ESRB** E



STUCK IN SWINDON

EA keeps shuffling around features and gameplay controls in FIFA from year to year, so it's hard to get comfortable. You never know what's been kept and what hasn't half the time (if you're looking for give-and-gos, they aren't here). The cynical side of me thinks that EA does this each year as a shell game to make things look fresh from one iteration to the next. Luckily for you readers, I've got a pretty keen eye.

First Touch Control lets you manipulate the ball in a number of ways as soon as it hits your foot, which is important because it often lets your player retain possession. For instance, you can shield the ball from an oncoming opponent or perform a special move to dribble the ball into space — all done effortlessly with a flick of the right analog. If there's a concern I have here, it's that it doesn't help the game's overall

stiff feel. Players get locked into animations, often making them dribble the ball straight out of bounds or pull the trigger late for shots on goal.

The career structure has been slightly altered, letting you manage multiple teams and buy team upgrades, although weekly training is now gone. Meanwhile, Off the Ball Control from last year isn't as effective because the camera no longer pans out far enough to let you see the rest of the field. Unfortunately, even with a new double team button (which often doesn't work), your defense is as timid and ineffective as ever.

Don't get me wrong — this FIFA is as good, if not slightly better than all the other FIFAs before it. And as long as this is all anyone asks for, it looks like FIFA will crawl along from year to year knowing that it never has to fully pull it all together. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **Concept:** EA makes the most out of the FIFA license, integrating the lower divisions nicely into Career mode. Who wants to work in Macclesfield?

> **Graphics:** Player faces finally look good, but there's way too much repetition of heads.

> **Sound:** Best EA Trax song ever: Morrissey's "Irish Blood, English Heart"

> **Playability:** Despite the First Touch controls (on the right analog), the game still feels a little stiff.

> **Entertainment:** Another year, another fairly solid FIFA title.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately high.

Second Opinion **3.25**

Everything about the new FIFA screams high quality — from the phenomenal international soundtrack to the overall menu presentation. And while the matches hold the same stellar production values, I was still left with a vague sense of disconnection from the game. Player control is sometimes too loose — like you're watching the action more than playing it. I was also disappointed at the lack of tutorials to fill you in on new controls, since the franchise seems compelled to change what button does what every year. Even so, FIFA 2005 is a great play, and comes highly recommended from this soccer fan. —**MILLER**





■ The Battle Missions provide some of the game's most harried firefights



■ Simply put, no game has cooler weapons than Up Your Arsenal



■ Many of the familiar gameplay mechanics are back



■ Qwark's side-scrolling levels are one of the highlights of the game

BOTTOM LINE 10

> **Concept:** Perfect the weapon-oriented platforming of the series, take it online, and create a game that will stand as one of the finest of the PS2 era

> **Graphics:** Detailed, vivid, and about as good as it gets on the PlayStation 2

> **Sound:** Great music, hilarious voice-overs, and the sweet sounds of destruction

> **Playability:** While fine-tuning the already amazing controls, Insomniac took the time to add a new FPS-influenced control option as well

> **Entertainment:** A stunning single-player mission, tons of extra challenges, and a solid online mode make this one of the best in the history of the genre

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 10

The only complaint that I can muster is that I'm not particularly fond of the menu screen color. With that said, I tip my hat to Insomniac Games. Fit to carry the title of perfection, Up Your Arsenal is a towering accomplishment that absolutely blows away the team's previous efforts with its razor-sharp gameplay, diversified missions, and flawless balancing. Even the newly incorporated Captain Qwark minigames are better than most action titles on the market. Whether you are dual welding wrenches or locking onto multiple foes with the Spitting Hydra, the weapon assortment is wildly creative and a blast to manhandle. In fact, I didn't find a weapon that I disliked using. The missions show great variety, online play rocks, and the enhanced controls streamline the experience I went into this review expecting more of the same, but walked away with the feeling that I had just played one of the greatest games of my time. Don't miss it! —REINER

PLAYSTATION 2

Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal



> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND)
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAC GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 > **ESRB** T

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

A game journalist seldom has the opportunity to award a game the elusive "Perfect 10." This is one of those rare moments. In the case of Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal, it simply couldn't be avoided. After a long and successful history, Insomniac Games has finally created its masterpiece, a tour de force that is the zenith of a trio of titles that I feel should be held up in action/platform history alongside the original Super Mario Bros. trilogy on the NES.

The word that keeps coming to mind when I think about Up Your Arsenal is "craftsmanship." I don't mean to make such an outrageously fun and fast-paced adventure sound like a piece of antique furniture, but it really is Insomniac's keen attention to detail that makes this such an amazing experience. I thought the team would have difficulty topping the excellent Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando, but they have gone about making improvements in every area. Some are obvious, like creating a new flight-mission control scheme to correct the previous entry's frustrating space combat. But what really impressed me was the way they fixed things that I didn't even perceive as flaws. Little touches like being able to hit one button at vendors to max out the ammo on all your weapons instantly or the fact that there are now two quick-select circles for inventory management might seem trivial to some. However, it's small things like these that I think best illustrate the care that Insomniac puts into every inch of this product.

Humor has also been a trademark of Ratchet & Clank, and Up Your

Arsenal succeeds in delivering its best storyline to date. Many of the fans' most-loved characters from the past are back, helping our duo defend the universe from Dr. Nefarious and the Tyrannoids. Some of my favorite sequences include a deadly accurate parody of a robotic Britney Spears video, finding a delusional Captain Qwark in the jungles of Florana, and the dry wit of Nefarious's butler, Lawrence. Qwark's adventures also provide one of the new gameplay mechanics introduced, in the form of some nicely done "Vidcomics" that tell the Captain's backstory through excellent 2D platforming levels.

Of course, the main meat of Up Your Arsenal is the intense, combat-oriented Ratchet missions. The galaxy's most heavily armed fury creature does not disappoint in this area, with a host of awesome new weapons, all of which can be upgraded five times. Of course, the enemies are tougher than ever, reacting intelligently and attacking in unrelenting fashion.



■ Once again, Insomniac delivered top-quality visuals



■ A few locales are back from Going Commando, but have been dramatically altered in design

Cut off behind enemy lines with no way to contact help, four young, barely trained soldiers realize their only hope for survival is to head into the heart of darkness. With few rations and dwindling ammunition, the only thing separating them from freedom is 100 miles of ruthless terrain, crawling with unseen enemies and filled with hidden booby traps. Welcome to Vietnam.



CONFLICT VIETNAM™



Get behind the wheel of Jeeps, tanks, helicopters, and river boats.



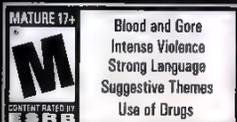
14 enormous missions in jungles, villages, temples, and underground tunnels.



Use experience points after missions to develop characters in 9 categories.



PlayStation 2



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PLAYSTATION 2

Neo Contra

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI
> RELEASE OCTOBER 19 > ESRB T

GUNNING IN NEW DIRECTIONS

As far as revived old-school franchises go, Contra has made a respectable showing on the PlayStation 2. Although it wasn't hailed as an instant classic like the legendary NES game that made the series a staple in 1980s gaming, the 2002 revival *Contra: Shattered Soldier* was a solid entry, and helped do its part to keep classic 2D gaming alive in this high-tech day and age. Oddly, Neo Contra actually turns its back (with a few small exceptions) on its history, and takes a different perspective on the familiar guns-blazing shooter action.

Rather than being modeled on the original Contra, Neo Contra is crafted as an isometric, top-down shooter, more akin to games like *Ikari Warriors*. Now, it's been a long time since I've played an isometric gunfest that was even close to being worthwhile (probably *Silent Gunner* on the PSone). I'm happy to report that Neo Contra succeeds in delivering a very harrowing combat experience, while at the same time avoiding many of the pitfalls of the genre.

I really like what Konami has done with the control scheme. In Neo Contra, you have two main weapons (plus a lock-on special armament),

which can be toggled with a shoulder button and are mapped to the square button. Even better, you have two different lock functions: a strafe lock which allows you to move about the screen while maintaining the same angle of fire, and the other is the movement lock, which lets you stop in place and pivot your character in a full circle. By judicious use of both these functions, you should always be able to have your character firing in the direction you intend, something that's not often accomplished in games of this ilk.

As always, cooperative play is where it's at, and Neo Contra is much better with a friend. However, steps have been taken to decrease the frustration level many had with the insanely difficult *Shattered Soldier*. This time around, you can actually continue at the middle of a level (although hardcore obsessives do have the option of going back to the beginning). Also, each time you blow through your continues, you'll usually earn a few more lives per credit for the next go 'round.

The levels and boss battles are well designed, frequently shifting the perspective on the player and offering up some unique sequences (styled much

like *Gradius*), where you'll perform some crazy feats like riding dinosaurs or surfing on missiles (!?). Sadly, the "story" has obviously been penned by someone that graduated magna cum laude from the University of All Your Base Are Belong To Us. Honestly, I couldn't understand what the hell was happening, which isn't helped by the fact that you can tackle the first four missions (and thus watch the cutscenes) in any order, which doesn't do much for plot continuity — not that it matters much. There was one character that was a talking dog with a German war helmet, though. That was cool.

Overall, Neo Contra is a pretty nice ride — one that will give you the heart palpitations and sweaty palms that are the hallmark of a good shooter. However, this cool ride is also a very short one. I'd estimate that Reiner and I completed the four main missions and fifth bonus mission on normal difficulty in about three or four hours. Yes, you can go back to earn better grades and unlock new weapons, characters, and two more bonus levels, but I really don't think that's going to be enough for most people. Still, Neo Contra is a great way to waste away a Saturday afternoon. —MATT

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** A (mostly) isometric adaptation of the classic Contra carnage

> **Graphics:** The bosses are big and beautiful (they got much back!), everything else is fair to par

> **Sound:** Music: Generic. Explosions: Loud. Ridiculous Voiceovers: Priceless

> **Playability:** I love the strafe- and movement-lock buttons; this is a nicely done shooter control scheme

> **Entertainment:** Extremely fun in co-op, and not as frustrating as the last couple Contra games, I just wish it were longer!

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

In my opinion, Contra is synonymous with side-scrolling action. Konami has experimented with different concepts for this series, but nothing seems to work quite as well as running to the right with your thumb glued to the fire button. Panning out to an isometric perspective not only diminishes the classic essence, it brings about a sensation that you are playing *Ikari Warriors* instead. As you would expect, enemies swarm from every which way, countless rounds are spilled, and outrageous bosses put your evasive skills to the test. Additionally, the game does feature a nifty Panzer Dragoon-like lock-on system, and decent balancing between all of its weapon choices. Much to my dismay, however, continue points are in great abundance. Seeing just how short this game is, I would rather have it kick my ass and make me retry stages than hold my hand and see the credits roll. It's a decent shooter, but it doesn't necessarily fit the Contra profile. —REINER





PLAYSTATION 2

Jak 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** NAUGHTY DOG
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** T

THE EPIC CONCLUSION

A visionary masterwork and extraordinary cinematic experience, *Jak 3* ties the trilogy together with an amazing synthesis of artful gameplay and passionate storytelling. What began as a faceless game of collecting random objects has become the pinnacle example of fusing video games and motion pictures. Just seeing these characters again brings about an emotional response, much like the first time that you saw *Return of the Jedi*. Naughty Dog has done a tremendous job of creating multi-layered personalities that really strike a chord, and plot hooks that will keep you guessing and on the edge of your seat up until the explosive finale.

Fleshed out with finely animated cutscenes that are fit for the silver screen, believable performances by the characters and voice actors, and a moving score, the most ingenious aspect of this game is how it seamlessly blends the story with gameplay. All told, it feels like a good *Mad Max* movie. The missions that you undertake directly tie into the conflict at hand, and you never really view the cutscenes as a reward or separate part of the game. It flows perfectly from one step to the next. Naughty Dog even knew when to slow things down to build atmosphere.

In establishing the sense that you are not just playing a game, but rather living an adventure, the tasks that you are asked to complete are wildly diverse and rarely repeated. You'll find yourself launching over sand dunes in a buggy, soaring through the skies on a hang glider, scaling a temple's walls by foot, cruising through town on lizard back, ascending waterfalls on a hoverboard, and mounting a turret for war. Even Daxter gets more time in the spotlight as a playable character. All of these elements are done quite well. I especially like how the four-wheeled vehicles control, but I continually found myself craving some good old-fashioned platforming. Given just how brilliant this core mechanic is, too much time is spent in vehicles and dabbling with gimmick-driven scenarios.

Weapon play is ever present. The targeting system is still a bit unreliable, but each armament now features two additional mods. Some are as simple as ricochet on shots, whereas others produce glorious effects like mushroom clouds that level everything. As amazing as it is to see the screen light up with an effect-heavy nuclear blast, my favorite new weapon is the Mass Inverter, an upgrade that has a remarkable anti-gravity effect on your foes. The variety in arms really adds another

layer to this aspect of the game.

That said, I was really surprised to see that Naughty Dog toned down the overall difficulty level. Granted, there were a few missions in the second chapter that seemed to be there with the sole intent of driving players batty, but now you rarely find yourself breaking a sweat. If an objective is a bit tricky, checkpoints are in great abundance and Jak can heal himself using his new Light power. Couple this with the fact that the missions now flow into each other — you rarely have long jaunts to destinations — and you'll find yourself whipping through this game in no time. Content wise, it's larger than *Jak II*, but you'll get through it just as quickly since it's a much smoother ride.

Whether you break out in laughter at Daxter's obsession with underpants, find yourself staring at disbelief at the amazing vistas, or pumping your fist into the air as you combat the scourge of the land, *Jak 3* truly does deliver on all fronts and emerges as one of video games' finest accomplishments. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** A rip-roaring finale that ties up all the loose ends and expands upon the gameplay variety

> **Graphics:** One of the most gorgeous games to date. The environments, character models, animations, and effects are loaded with life and attention to detail

> **Sound:** Some of the best spoken dialogue in any game or cartoon. The soundtrack is exceptional as well

> **Playability:** Focuses a bit too heavily on vehicles, but is still a wildly entertaining and balanced play

> **Entertainment:** Impossible to put down and engaging every step of the way

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



Second Opinion 9

Naughty Dog has now stretched the action/platform genre to such epic proportions that its cinematic storytelling and gorgeous cutscenes rival the best RPGs on the market. What's more, it offers so much variety and truly thrilling gameplay that it succeeds in making you feel that you're the protagonist in a big-budget sci-fi action film. As with every title in the series, there are some extremely engrossing platforming sequences, something that *Jak* does better than any other. Even better, there are now vehicles that are actually fun to pilot — the awesome dune buggies. Unfortunately, some of the game's flaws have yet to be corrected. Weapon targeting is still a mixed bag — I'd kill for a strafe function and a lock-on capability. Also, the hoverboard is still largely something that works without actually adding any enjoyment to the experience. If anything, I wish there were a greater emphasis on platforming and less on combat. Still, *Jak 3* is a grand adventure, one I will remember for years. —MATT

PLAYSTATION 2

Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER ATLUS > DEVELOPER ATLUS > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 28 > ESRB M



THE DEMONIC PERSUASION

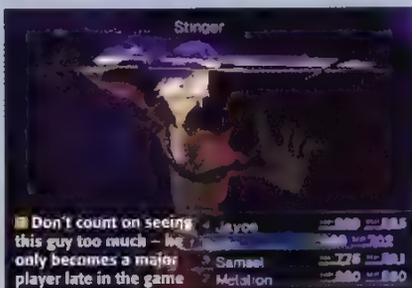
Anyone who has played an RPG is familiar with the concept of the useless party member. Whether it's Carth or Kimahri, I'm sick of lugging these loads along on my adventures like lumpy sacks of obsolete potatoes. Nothing sullies a hard-earned victory like some hoser riding your coattails to glory. Fortunately, you won't have to deal with any of that here; if there's one thing that Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne does better than any other RPG out there, it's party customization.

At first, the system may seem a little too Pokémon-esque for some, since it relies on random encounters (and subsequently turning the enemies to your cause) in order to bolster your ranks. It becomes engaging quickly, though, and as you progress you can convince more powerful demons to fight beside you, all of whom level-up and gain new skills with experience. Plus, if you ever get tired of your set-up, you can join two weaker demons together to form a more powerful creature. The joy of fusing two stupid moochers into one awesome ally is immense, and I was always eager to test out the strengths of my newly formed companions. If I didn't like them, I simply kept fusing them with other demons until I filtered out the chaff and ended up with a reserve of only the most kick-ass warriors in the netherworld. I would have killed for a feature like this in Final Fantasy VI or Chrono Cross.

Unfortunately, everything about Nocturne that isn't a battle is just bothersome filler. The music is dull, there

are no voiceovers, and the story lacks any sense of cohesion or purpose. It starts off cool enough, with your character witnessing an apocalypse that leads to the world's rebirth. After that, however, you just randomly and pointlessly scurry from place to place with no cinematic flair to highlight key events. One example of this is when you meet up with a pre-apocalypse buddy, one of only a handful of humans to survive, and she regards you casually for a few moments, makes some chit chat, and then walks away. C'mon, this is a ravaged, demon-infested wasteland, not the greeting card aisle at the supermarket. Let's see some emotion, people!

Yes, it has a cool party mechanic, stylish visuals and character designs, plus that sassy Dante from Devil May Cry. But there are a few things in this world that, despite some remarkable merits, still have something unpleasant lingering about them. The Paris sewer system is supposedly beautiful and historic, but there's no way I'm venturing down there. Likewise, Nocturne has truly slick and innovative concepts, but you've got to wade ankle-deep through some garbage before you can experience them. —JOE



BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Create an engaging combat system while neglecting to include compelling story to drive it

> **Graphics:** Some sweet lighting effects highlight the impressive character and creature designs. Buckle up for some painfully generic environments, though

> **Sound:** Boning! The soundtrack is dull, and voice acting is nonexistent

> **Playability:** The battles are fast, fusing demons is easy, and everything is generally intuitive

> **Entertainment:** Synthesizing demons is fun and the humorous dialogue is surprising, but the rest of the game gets in their way

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

The story crawls at a snail's pace. The cinematic sequences are about as exciting as C-Span. Combat gives new meaning to the word simplicity. Many of the objectives fall into the excitement level of picking up your allergy medication from the pharmacy. Even with a number of strikes against it, Nocturne will weasel its way into your heart. The interaction with monsters is an immensely rewarding process. I was bored by the tale at hand, but found myself completely obsessed with monster collecting. If you always liked the sound of Pokémon, but were turned off by its happy-go-lucky approach, Nocturne's dark atmosphere will certainly satisfy. —REINER



PLAYSTATION 2

Blood Will Tell

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SEGA WOW/RED ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 21 > ESRB M

CRAP WILL TELL

A lot of gamers are hoping that Blood Will Tell will turn out to be a great game, for various reasons. Fans of the Osamu Tezuka manga series on which it is based simply want a good adaptation of the series, while Sega diehards want to see a solid release from their beloved company. Sadly, both groups will be disappointed, as Blood Will Tell takes an interesting concept and turns it into generic action title #9,987,482.

Blood Will Tell stars Hyakkimaru, a warrior missing 48 body parts, which were sold to demons by his father when he was a child. On his quest to regain his missing pieces and defeat the demons, he meets Dororo, a young thief. The player alternates control between the two characters, but mainly controls Hyakkimaru, who has swords for arms, as well as a built-in machine gun and a rocket launcher in his prosthetic leg. The concept is cool, as is a gameplay mechanic that allows players to input a sequence of timed button presses to dish out tons of damage to an enemy, but otherwise Blood Will Tell has little to offer.

There is no single glaring problem with Blood Will Tell, it's simply a terribly generic action title with enough little issues that it's hard to get any degree of pleasure out of it. The basic combat is wholly unsatisfying: most enemies can be defeated by button-mashing, Hyakkimaru's attacks are sluggish and combos cannot be interrupted — which is a real pain when fighting the faster-moving bosses, there is no block button, and hit detection is pathetically bad. The graphics are uninspired and, thanks to the switches between the two characters, many stages must be ventured through several times. Dororo's sections are mostly basic puzzle-solving affairs that involve finding keys to open doors. Whee.

I feel that the negative points I have mentioned so far are both fair and analytical, however my main complaint is less tangible. I just didn't have any fun playing this game. Honestly, I hated every second of it. I'm not known for my temper when gaming, but several times while playing Blood Will Tell I literally threw my controller across my desk in disgust. Frustrating and boring, Blood Will Tell is one of the least fun games I've ever played. Maybe fans of the manga will like it, but I doubt it. —JEREMY

BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Your dad sold your body to demons, and you must fight them to get your vital bits back

> **Graphics:** Other than some cool bosses, everything looks bland and uninspired

> **Sound:** Like everything else about this title, it's typical and forgettable

> **Playability:** Combat is basic, hit detection is terrible, and platforming sucks. Have fun

> **Entertainment:** This game is so generic and behind the times that every second of playing it was like having a hair yanked from my nostril

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5

Blood Will Tell? More like This Game Smells — like POOP! Okay, I've clearly regressed back to third grade, but that's only because I've been playing yet another crappy anime-themed hack n' slash suckfest that could have been designed by a third grader. Yep, it's more of the same tedious level designs, "puzzle-solving" that involves little more than "kill everything in this area to unlock the door," awkward button-mashing, and graphics that wouldn't have looked good in the first year of the PS2's lifecycle. Aside from some cool-looking bosses, I can find little to recommend in this dreary hackjob. —MATT



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PLAYSTATION 2

Monster Hunter

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** PRODUCTION STUDIO 1 > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 21 > **ESRB** T

THIS WILL MAKE YOU HURT

How do you take huge weaponry, dragons, and co-op conquests, mix them together and make it not at all fun? I thought that this combination could only result in pure goodness, but *Monster Hunter* unequivocally proves me wrong.

The game fails in its basic premise. Players create characters that will improve in no discernable way during the course of the game; instead, they will buy better weapons and armor. How will they pay for these upgrades? By foraging out in the wilderness during contracts for exciting things like mushrooms, berries, and herbs. While the game offers rewards for completing contracts, it's actually more efficient to pay the contract fee and spend your finite amount of time on collecting crap from the base of trees. And here I thought that I was supposed to hunt monsters... I was wrong.

Now, I have really big problems with the game outside of the mission structure (most of the contracts aren't fun, by the way. Why am I tasked with cooking steaks for a festival that I will not be able to attend?). The control scheme is horrific and cannot be changed. To move the camera, use the d-pad; to

move your character, use the left analog stick; to swing or fire your awkward and slow weapon, use the right analog stick. In the hours I spent playing, I never ever got comfortable with this scheme and that is very bad news for an action title.

During my more angry moments with *Monster Hunter*, I really wanted to give it the damning score of two, but the game does have some redeeming qualities that don't make up for the mistakes, yet should be noted. The photographic backgrounds do create an interesting and unique environment (even though the zones are extremely small and you can't go to the places you see), climbing to different elevations is a nice touch not often seen in online action titles, and the creativity allowed when doing four-player missions is really cool. Truth be told, I'm sad that this game is so un-fun. Dragons and swords don't deserve this kind of disrespect. —USA



BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Build a cooperative hunting experience with dinos, big weapons, and a lot of crap you don't want to do

> **Graphics:** Photographic backgrounds make the areas feel a whole lot larger than they really are

> **Sound:** Roars, grunts, and not terribly much else

> **Playability:** Utterly unmanageable — it feels more like I'm trying to manipulate a failed Jell-O salad than a skilled hunter

> **Entertainment:** Painful on a whole new level

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 3.75

Not since the awkward onset of puberty have I been afflicted with such a heinous intrusion onto my peace of mind and happiness. With the exception of a glorious opening onema and some exciting monster designs, every moment I spent playing can best be compared to the final fate of Prometheus on the Mount — agonizing and repetitive. A camera foolishly mapped to the d-pad, an unwieldy combat system so slow it defies the description of "action," and a completely incomprehensible and time-consuming item gathering system are all just examples of the frustration in store if you join in. Clearly, someone must like this title. But with all of my years playing games, I honestly can't tell you why. —MILLER

PLAYSTATION 2

The Nightmare of Druaga: Fushigino Dungeon

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** ARIKA CO., LTD > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 > **ESRB** E



NIGHTMARE, INDEED

Who knew they still made RPGs like this? It's like someone was locked up for the last 20 years as the RPG field matured and blossomed, and then they were let out just in time to make this ramshackle attempt at a new role-playing adventure. Needless to say, the result is a noticeable disaster, filled with gameplay elements that everyone left behind years ago because they didn't work, slowed the game down, or were just not fun.

You are Prince Gil, (short for Gilgamesh), and you must save your betrothed Lady Ki from an evil sorceress intent on gaining power...blah, blah, blah — the story sucks. Where developer Arika could have explored the rich and varied mythology of ancient Sumeria, (upon which this purports to be based), it opts instead for this dry and lifeless tale. Movement is grid-based and combat occurs in turns, giving everything a slow and halting pace. The drab dungeons you move through for the entire game are mazes where you must find the key to open the door to the next floor — again and again. If one of the familiar monsters kills you, you lose all of your inventory and are sent back to town. While walking, you can't

rotate the camera, but instead must pause and then slowly swing it around to your liking. And get this — if you save the game, it automatically quits and forces you to turn off your PS2. I don't mean you quit to the title screen. I mean you have to get up and turn it off. Unbelievable! If you want my advice, I'd say once you flip the switch that first time, just leave it off.

What small enjoyment is to be had won't show up for the first several hours of gameplay, at which point you start to be able to customize and upgrade your equipment. Surprisingly, armor and weapons actually make your character look different, which I count as one of the few attempts the game makes at incorporating modern RPG conventions. While those who fondly remember the original arcade game will recognize the return of many of the monsters and characters that were present back then, the payoff simply isn't large enough to warrant a play-through. So many other titles offer a richer, more fulfilling experience that it's hard to imagine why someone would want to tackle this anachronism. —MILLER

BOTTOM LINE 4

> **Concept:** Take a 1984 arcade game, slap some new paint on it, and release it as a new RPC

> **Graphics:** They look passable, but areas are populated so meagerly that everything seems inadequate

> **Sound:** So forgettable I have trouble remembering the audio portion of this title well enough to comment

> **Playability:** Fights are straightforward, but equipment customization is needlessly complex, and basic game functionality is antiquated

> **Entertainment:** Someone pumped this game full of pure boredom, then let it go, where it will float away to be forgotten

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 1

I haven't seen so many bad ideas in one place since the "Uncle Jesse Fanfiction Anthology." Whether it's sacrificing your hard-earned items for the simple luxury of being able to see or losing almost all of your treasure each time you die, this simplistic dungeon crawler seems to have been forged for the single purpose of eradicating all fun within a two-mile radius. With last-generation graphics, uneven difficulty, and clumsy gameplay, all elements of *Druaga* collide in a conceptual disaster that makes a John Stamos comeback seem like sheer brilliance. —JOE

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PlayStation 2





PLAYSTATION 2
Gungrave: Overdose

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MASTIFF > **DEVELOPER** RED ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** M

SHOULD HAVE STAYED DEAD

This is the most mindless button masher I've come across in a long time. Purely a marketing vehicle to its anime counterpart, *Overdose* fails on almost all levels to be an enjoyable gaming experience, and should be avoided by all but the most fanatical followers of the animated series. For myself, while I call myself an anime fan, I've yet to see an episode, and this game has gone a long way to convincing me I should avoid the series entirely.

My harsh words are fueled by the nagging and aching remains of the headache I developed from the hours I poured into this new installment of the *Gungrave* series. While I hurriedly jammed the fire button, I would pause intermittently to reach out and turn down the TV, just so I could avoid listening to the incessant noise that kept grinding against my eardrums. A hyperactive orangutan could have succeeded as well as I at progressing through the game, so long as he remembered to keep pushing forward and shooting the whole time. As each stage begins, a grammatically questionable suggestion appears on screen that reads: "Kick Their Ass!"; a concept that left me wondering whether all of my carbon copy foes were in possession of a communal rear end. Regardless, I would attempt to follow my order as I moved through each of the sparsely conceived environments, where the word "detail" seemed to have not yet been invented.

While it manages to offer up a fairly constant flow of action, I still felt myself yawning after every three or four men I slaughtered. Some reasonably decent anime cutscenes and voicework are marred by an abysmal script and hackneyed story. There's little to be enjoyed here. Like its silently morbid hero, the new *Gungrave* shows up dead on arrival. —MILLER

BOTTOM LINE 4.25

> **Concept:** You have been brought back from the dead—apparently to serve as a particularly destructive drug enforcement agent. If you're confused, just start shooting things

> **Graphics:** In-game design fails to look stylized, opting instead for the ugly approach. Meanwhile, the animated cutscenes are one of the few bright points

> **Sound:** Take a tin can full of coins and shake it next to your ear for a few hours to produce the same result

> **Playability:** Way too simplistic controls—especially for a game meant to be played only by those over 18. Also includes everyone's favorite: a constant behind-the-back camera. Blech

> **Entertainment:** No redeeming qualities that can be spoken about without a caveat. Stay away

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5

Do you hate fun? Do you tirelessly scour the bargain bins for titles that have uninspired combat, generic foes, and abysmal targeting systems? With all of these features and more, *Gungrave: Overdose* is a joy-poacher's dream. It does have a couple good points, like cool character designs (courtesy of the anime on which the game is based) and the voice talent of the ubiquitous Cam Clarke, but they are lost in a sea of sub-par execution. Given its \$15 price point, *Overdose* is really more of a pricey gag gift than a cheap video game. —JOE

PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

Time Crisis: Crisis Zone

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 20 > **ESRB** T



If you've ever dumped a dollar into a *Time Crisis* game in the arcade so you could use both guns at once and pretend to be Chow-Yun Fat, then *Crisis Zone* is for you. The new feature that allows you to use two GunCon 2 controllers at once is the big draw of this outing, but outside of that, there's little to separate this from the earlier installments. If you don't own a PS2 lightgun (or two), your enjoyment of this title will be short-lived. Sure, simplistic blasting is fun for a while, but there is no variation to the gameplay, and the bonus modes aren't different enough from *Story* mode to be worth playing. If you love shooting games or need a warm up for your next NRA target practice party, *Crisis Zone* may be worth a look, but everyone else will quickly tire of this one-trick pony. —JEREMY

TOCA Race Driver: Ultimate Racing Simulator

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** CODEMASTERS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 5 > **ESRB** T



Rearrange the letters in *TOCA* and you get the word "Taco." Man, could I go for some Taco John's right about now. I love tacos. While not quite as tasty as a Taco Bravo®, *TOCA* is stuffed with racing goodness, letting you get behind the wheel of a variety of cars. The problem is that the career format isn't nearly as cool as the first *Race Driver*, and despite the extra track just for the PS2, this title doesn't shine graphically as much as the Xbox version. Although track repetitiveness can be a problem, it's one of the best all-around racers you're going to find, and teaches players some easy-to-learn lessons about car physics. If there's a third installment, bringing back the series' personality will undoubtedly move it back to the top. —KATO

Technic Beat

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MASTIFF > **DEVELOPER** ARIKA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 17 > **ESRB** E



Wildly amusing and quirky to the extreme, *Technic Beat* is a flawed but enormously fun music game that should readily appeal to those fond of cult favorites like *Amplitude* or *Rez*. By maneuvering inane characters about a flashy mirrored dance floor, you trigger musical phrases in obscure genres like Ethnic Techno and Bossa Ambient. A good third of the 85 giggle-inducing songs are remixes of old Namco game tunes such as *Dig Dug*, *Rolling Thunder*, and *Ridge Racer*. Unfortunately, only a few of the characters are worth playing as. Also, a "game over" always resets the game to the front end logo screens, which really breaks up the fun. While issues like these, as well as the esoteric music force me to lower its score, I can't help but admit to adoring this peculiar gem of a game. —MILLER

King of Fighters: Maximum Impact

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** SNK NEOGEO > **DEVELOPER** SNK PLAYMORE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11 > **ESRB** T



This game reminds me of that nerd who is always chasing after his buddies yelling "hey guys, wait up," dropping his books, and complaining about his asthma. Lagging behind its 3D fighter peers in every way, *King of Fighters* would have been better off continuing to hone its skills in the second dimension. Plagued by rampant balance issues, miserable AI (particularly susceptible to the "repeat the same move over and over" strategy), and more focus on attacking prone, defenseless opponents than I've ever seen, *Maximum Impact* makes a lot of rookie mistakes. In a genre that has already been well established, you can't expect to stand out with a title that has learned nothing from the games that came before it. —JOE

Kuon

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** AGETEC > **DEVELOPER** FROMSOFTWARE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 > **ESRB** M



I'm a big fan of Japanese horror films (I recommend *Audition*, and the horror/comedy *Happiness of the Katakuris*). As much as I like these movies, they are typically pretty slow. *Kuon* is a lot like these films: it's atmospheric, creepy, and sloooooow, even by survival horror standards. Aside from the setting (Heian-era Japan), everything else is pretty standard: fight monsters, collect items, and find ways to open doors. The familiar nature, combined with the lousy hit detection and the fact that character lip sync wasn't even attempted will probably put off the majority of gamers. But survival horror devotees may dig the eerie story and solid graphics. Like Japanese horror movies, this one is an acquired taste. —JEREMY

Karaoke Revolution Volume 3

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX MUSIC SYSTEMS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 10 > **ESRB** E



Ask and you shall receive. Last time around, with *Volume 2*, we complained about the lack of duets. Sure enough, here we are with *Volume 3* and the *Duet Mode* is most certainly the star of the show. While remarkably little else has been tweaked or improved, the two-mic mode adds tremendously to the value of the party package, enabling friends and couples to harmonize and laugh their way through various famous popular duets. All of the new songs are worthwhile selections, and the sound work is stellar as usual. Now, let's try this again—better lip synching, more musical genres, and a character creation mode, please. —MILLER

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■ Combat isn't necessarily hard, but does require some level of strategy

GAMECUBE

Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
 > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11 > **ESRB** E

THE MILLION-YEAR BORE

Dearly, I think of the time I spent with the recent Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga and an embarrassingly goofy grin seeps across my face. What I wanted with Thousand-Year Door was a big console version of that experience.

What I got was many of the bits and pieces that filled those shoes and a gaping hole where the most crucial part is supposed to be, i.e. witty, tongue-in-cheek dialogue that I'd reference in everyday conversation.

What this second Paper Mario has going for it, in my mind, is an exceptionally well-conceived art style and a nice (if a bit too easy for too long) combat system. This game's look is nothing short of iconic and one of those wonderful instances where our favorite brand of entertainment shows unquestionable artistry. And it makes me very, very happy.

So I play through the prologue and chapter one, really excited about how the game looks and plays. Combat is easy to pick up (especially if you played the first game or Superstar Saga) and the audience participation features are nicely implemented, rewarding you frequently for impressive attack feats. I am sent to kill a dragon who holds the first of sev-

eral Star Crystals, and the fight is bizarre in a very good way.

Then, something terrible happens. I work my way through (I'm not kidding here) 15 minutes of press-A-to-continue-the-dialogue vignettes whose highlights are witless, dull dialogue punctuated with groan-inducing banter. It's terrible, and I'm crushed. I want this to be good, and fun, and rewarding. But all I can think about is "How are the bad guys already looking for the second crystal, but it's impossible to find without the map, and yet they still really need to find Mario so that they can get said map? Huh? And why is a computer in love with Princess Peach? Besides the actual plot points being too far-fetched to even make it on a daytime soap (something that I could easily deal with if the dialogue were good — it is a freaking Mario game and I can be quite accepting if there are other things to make me happy), there isn't a single worthwhile line or quip in any of the exchanges throughout the rest of the game.

Before you fans start typing up those angry letters, let me say that I realize this is an RPG for

the younger set, and therefore shouldn't have Shakespearean dialogue, Ninja Gaiden's level of difficulty, or Final Fantasy's inventory system of epic magnitude. I fully accept this. But go out and watch *Aladdin* and let me know if kids' entertainment can be funny to adults too. It can, and this isn't. Then check out Pokémon and let me know if preschoolers can manage more than 10 inventory spaces and the ability to buy multiple items at one time (four mushrooms means four question and answer sessions with the shopkeeper. It's frustrating to no end). Some of these are clearly lesser and almost nitpicky complaints, but they show a general lack of finesse in balancing the game so that it's fun for kids, RPG newbies, and adults alike.

I know that some people will play Thousand-Year Door and have a good time, and I do not necessarily hate life for playing the title, but the cold hard truth of the matter is that this game falters in a big way. The art and combat are killed in their tracks by the game's downright shameful dialogue.—**LISA**



■ Princess Peach continues to be a total pain in the butt



■ This "boss fight" is actually a trivia game and one of the few great, quirky moments

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

> **Concept:** Bring back the popular Mario RPG from the N64 era

> **Graphics:** The art style is so perfectly executed and unique that each frame is instantly identifiable

> **Sound:** No voice acting, but nice ditties often show up in the game's score

> **Playability:** Closer to the GBA masterpiece Superstar Saga than the painfully easy Paper Mario on '64

> **Entertainment:** Sadly lacking in wit, humor, and intelligence, the dialogue kills the entire experience

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion **6**

I'm fully expecting to wake up with a severed Yoshi head in my bed after this review brands me a hater in the eyes of devoted Nintendo fans. Well, I've got news for you I love Mario as much as you, I just don't love this game. The graphics are admittedly great — this is one of the coolest looking titles I've seen in a long time. However, with a few minor additions, it's exactly like the first Paper Mario. While a lot of you out there loved the first title, I thought it was boring and juvenile. Sadly, I find this one to be just as dull. The story is simplistic, clicking through hundreds of dialogue screens is a drag, there is too much backtracking, and the basic gameplay hasn't evolved. Will any of this matter to Nintendo fans? Probably not — it does have its charm, and I'm sure younger gamers will love it. But for me, charm and interesting visuals aren't enough to get me to play a game that feels the same as one from three years ago. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go check my car for Bob-ombs.—**JEREMY**



BOTTOM LINE 7

- > **Concept:** A bongo-banging rhythm title
- > **Graphics:** It's cute enough, but this genre doesn't exactly lend itself to graphical fireworks
- > **Sound:** The tracks themselves are decent, but not the originals for the most part. Lots of Nintendo-specific tunes for serious fanboys. I like the ability to buy new sound effects to replace the bongo noises
- > **Playability:** Everything seems in order, although I wish the konga controller had a little more tension on the heads
- > **Entertainment:** Great for multiplayer, and good for solo outings in limited doses. Doesn't exactly push the genre forward in any way, though
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

GAMECUBE

Donkey Konga

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** E

COME ON PRETTY APEY WON'T YOU PLAY THAT KONGA BEAT!

Every time the company does something in the least bit novel or wacky, the faithful start hyping the coming of another title that displays that "trade-mark Nintendo innovation." For this reason, expectations about Donkey Konga have been surprisingly high for what is, in essence, a solid yet not very ambitious rhythm game. It's also not a very good example of "Nintendo innovation" — for a couple of reasons. Most importantly, it's not even developed by Nintendo (Namco actually helmed the project). Secondly, it's not particularly innovative, as the game seems content to stick closely to the conventions of the genre as defined by the leader in the field, Konami, the creator of both Dance Dance Revolution and DrumMania.

DrumMania is the most obvious influence on Donkey Konga. Much like that arcade sensation, you must simply bang your bongos and clap in time to the music. There are "notes" that indicate whether you need to

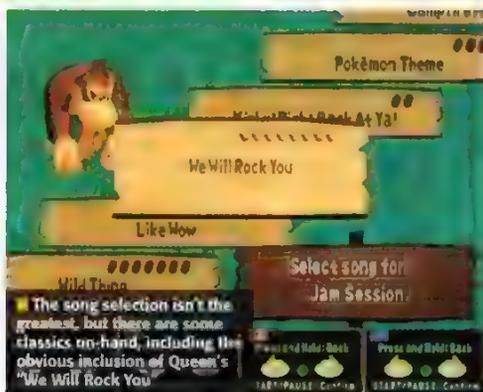
hit the left bongo, right bongo, both bongos simultaneously, or clap (which is picked up through the built-in microphone). As is common in the rhythm or "bemani" style, the symbols scroll towards a target, and you get graded on how on-beat your drumming is. On the easiest difficulty it's a breeze, but unlocking songs in the arduous Gorilla mode ups the challenge considerably.

However, I was displeased to find that it was very easy to "cheat" in a couple of ways, one of which I feel should have been noticed and corrected before the final version shipped. Although the game instructs you to hit either left, right, or both bongos depending on what note is displayed, I quickly learned that it never penalizes you for hitting both bongos when only one was correct. By "doubling-up" in this fashion, the game then becomes a matter of simply double hits and claps, which drastically reduces the difficulty, and will allow nefarious gamers to easily

gain an unfair advantage during multiplayer modes. Also, because the microphone is so sensitive, a slight tap on the side of the drums will substitute for claps.

The multiplayer modes are fairly simple, and all are just slight variations on the single-play Street Performance contest. You can go head-to-head in Battle, which awards a winner based on precision or collaborate in Challenge mode (which lets you see how far into the selection of songs you can get before fouling out) or just plain old get busy in Jam Session. Truth be told, multiplayer is probably where most aspiring skinmen will get their kicks. With four people, it's pretty crazy, with each player adding a new layer to the dense polyrhythmic funk.

As a solo title, Donkey Konga gets old pretty fast. The song selection is decent, but I started to get a little sick



of some of the more kiddie-oriented fare. There's also not much to unlock except for the same songs in Gorilla difficulty (new tracks would have been nice), some admittedly cool new drum set sounds, and a few very pointless minigames. Let me tell you, after spending a good bit of time to unlock what was basically a botched version of Donkey Kong Jr., I was a little miffed.

While I can't fault Donkey Konga's simple brand of fun, especially when playing with a few friends, I also don't think this does much to distinguish itself from the pack. If I wanted a fun, music-oriented party game, I'd much rather play Karaoke Revolution or DrumMania. —MATT

Second Opinion 7.5

I'm not exactly what you would call a rhythm machine. I'm allergic to dancing, and I only got as far as "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and a couple Danzig riffs when I attempted to play guitar. Despite my musical inability, I really enjoy Donkey Konga. It's a fun, unique little rhythm game that's a blast when you have four players — it's nearly impossible not to bust out laughing when you get together as a group and find out exactly why none of you will ever be in a band. However, while Donkey Konga shines greatly as a party game, it struggles as a single-player experience. Solo drumming is still fun, but compared to the addictive experience multiplayer offers, it's a little flat. But regardless of how many people you have to play with, this is a must-have for rhythm game devotees. However, if you don't like music games, this won't sway you one bit until you try it with friends. Then it becomes a whole different story. —JEREMY



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Teeters on that fine line between being "solid" and "average," with just enough Vietnam-ness to make it stand out

> **Graphics:** The jungles don't hit Far Cry levels, but are the best seen on a console

> **Sound:** Sean Astin does a good job, and the original score is excellent

> **Playability:** I like the way it combines zooming your gun and peeking around trees on the controller. The healing system is cool, too

> **Entertainment:** With its dense forests, it delivers a good gameplay experience, but the gravy on top helps set it apart

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

Trying to stay alive in the jungles of Vietnam doesn't exactly sound like a laugh-a-minute riot, but Men of Valor nonetheless entertains. The control is about as tight as console first-person shooting gets, and I deeply appreciate the fact that developer 2015 has made good use of their M rating. Soldiers under fire curse like well, soldiers, gore drives home the brutality of war without being excessive; and enemies shout stinging epithets at the hated invaders. Also, the gorgeous jungle is much more than eye candy - you'll spend far more time trying to see your foes than actually shooting them. This, along with the often-unforgiving difficulty and sparsely placed save points makes for one of the most intense games of recent memory. Plus, the sound the M79 makes when you fire off a round of buckshot into somebody's back online is profoundly satisfying. Overall, this is one of the better console FPSs in quite a while. —ADAM

XBOX

Men of Valor

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR 2-PLAYER VIA SYSTEM LINK)
 > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > **DEVELOPER** 2015 > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 21 > **ESRB** M

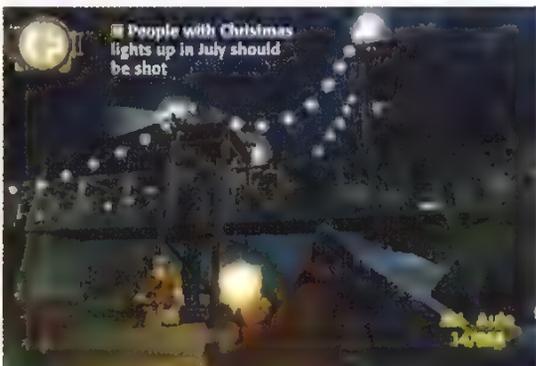
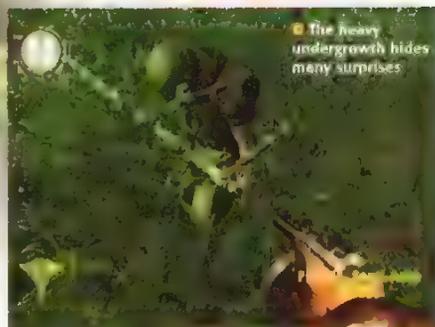
THAT'S AN ORDER, SOLDIER

There are all sorts of gray areas when talking about Men of Valor, beyond whether it's good or bad. The question instead is: Is being good good enough? I think we all know what to expect of Vietnam games. Ambushes and booby traps in the jungle deep, the sometimes ambiguous moral tone of soldiers, and some pretty f'ed-up situations are all common devices. At each turn, Men of Valor did just enough (and sometimes more than that) to take on these core elements and make them worth playing.

You'll be asked to beat impossible odds, such as holding down hopelessly flanked positions, surviving friendly artillery fire, or storming fixed machine gun positions. It can offer some larger areas to explore (and some great battles), which the AI foes will take

advantage of - and which you'd do well to explore, too - but your ally AI will get in trouble because of its general lack of intelligence. It's not uncommon for one of your squad mates to let an enemy soldier walk right by him without firing a shot. And although the firefights can be intense, with rounds going off in every direction, the cones of fire for your foes vary wildly. Sometimes they can't hit thin air, and others you're dead in one shot. Overall, I'd say that for what the combat can lack in execution, it certainly makes up for in enthusiasm.

Some of the moments that stand out in the game don't involve combat. Men of Valor does an admirable job of putting a larger context on Vietnam. One of my favorite examples in the game is when your father asks you in a letter about a news report he saw that said soldiers were burning villages filled with women and children. Of course, you lived it. The camera crews were there when you were ambushed by V.C. in an apparently friendly village - but they chose instead to focus on the necessary razing of the huts. Letters are read by voice actors, and when you hear the doubt in your father's voice when he says he hopes that what he saw wasn't true, and that he wants you to do the right thing, it's well done. Later on you can hear the pain in your dad's voice when your younger brother joins the Marines and gets sent off to Vietnam as he realizes that both his sons may be



lost to this war.

Of course, a lot of the mood, subtlety, and context of the game goes right out the window once you flip over to the multiplayer, which is as it should be. There are exclusive maps, whether you are in co-op or deathmatch, and there is a team component with specific character classes to use.

In the end, periphery elements such as its use of the letters to home and real footage and facts from the time give Men of Valor an extra dimension, but the pure gameplay of shooting whatever enemies come in your path remains the same with its positives and negatives. The game combines the moral questions of Vietnam as best it can, but I don't think that kids who have played shooters for most of their lives are going to be doing any soul searching about whether to shoot something or not - innocent villager or otherwise. At the end of the day, war games are out of necessity a simple "kill or be killed" gameplay proposition, but that doesn't leave too much room for growth in the genre, does it? It is necessary that developer 2015, and anybody else making games in the sub-genre, keep exploring outside and adding to the "kill 'em all" gameplay core, because these days that's about all that is going to separate the average military gun-toter from the good or even the great. —KATO

XBOX

Syberia II

BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** MICROIDS > **DEVELOPER** MICROIDS
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** T

It doesn't seem that long ago when I plodded my way through the first *Syberia* game on Xbox, and it's been even less time since the PC sequel made me want to pull my hair out. Compared to these two outings, the Xbox port of *Syberia II* is a dramatic upgrade from the console edition of its predecessor, and nearly identical (besides some loss of sharpness in the graphics) to the PC version. Still, despite this being a serviceable translation of the game, it doesn't mean that I appreciate *Syberia II*'s pokey storytelling, temble puzzles, and bland gameplay any more than I did on the computer. Technically adequate, exceptionally beautiful, and continuing the story of some great characters...but still no fun.—**LISA**



XBOX

SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** SNK NEOGEO
> **DEVELOPER** SNK PLAYMORE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 28 > **ESRB** T



It doesn't take much to be considered an average 2D fighter; all that fans want is a solid roster and a carefully balanced battle system. The first two SNK vs. Capcom titles had both of these – *SVC Chaos* does not. The lineup is fine, with plenty of familiar faces from both SNK (*Mars People*, *Iori*) and Capcom (*Akuma*, *Zero*), but this game

has more balance problems than *Hugo* on a high wire. Hit boxes are inconsistent, and opponent AI alternates between cheap and downright stupid. Plus, though you can play online, you and your buddies will have to carefully regulate each other's character choices, since there are several alarmingly overpowered fighters. With other exceptional titles out there like *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* and *Guilty Gear X2*, I just don't see a reason to waste your time with this jumble of problems.—**JOE**

XBOX

Wings of War

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** GATHERING > **DEVELOPER** SILVERWISH
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 30 > **ESRB** T

It's right around the first time you jump from one biplane to another while in flight that you realize the line between realistic combat flight sim and arcade shooter has been muddled, confused, and utterly lost somewhere along the way. *Wings of War* isn't really terrible as much as it is uncertain about its own identity. In



the role of an unsympathetic lead pilot, you'll be forced to deal with stiff flight controls and a flimsy targeting system, while embarking on seemingly endless missions that make little to no sense. Plus, the lack of multiplayer on or offline seems truly misguided. The occasional challenging dogfight and the thrill of the open countryside below may entertain for awhile, but if I were you, I'd just go beat *Crimson Skies* again.—**MILLER**

XBOX

Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** PHANTAGRAM
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Calculated strategy and frenzied action team up on medieval battlegrounds.

> **Graphics:** The best in the hack 'n' slash genre, but some variation among the troop designs would have really spiced things up.

> **Sound:** Electric guitar kicks! Where are the cinematic score and visceral sound effects that the graphics tell me should be there?

> **Playability:** I can understand orders getting confused in the chain of command, but this is ridiculous. Your authority is flaunted by all but the one character you control directly.

> **Entertainment:** Do you relish the heat of battle and bathe in the blood of the fallen? You'll love this...even without the bathing part.

> **Replay Value:** Moderately high.

PAGING GENERAL HUGH G. RECTION

When I started playing *Kingdom Under Fire*, I thought "Oh, great. Another *Dynasty Warriors* knock-off." However, after investing a bit more time, it became clear that this game has much more detail and finesse than any of the mindless button-mashers from which it draws inspiration. With a robust online mode, scattered borrowings from real-time strategy games, and that elusive indescribable fun factor, *KUF* is exactly the step-up that this genre needed.

The concept is deceptively simple. You stroll across a battleground until you encounter enemy troops. You then engage them and the gameplay changes from navigation to action as you help your hero mow down entire companies of opposing forces. However, beneath the basic formula is a refreshing amount of depth and customization. Your warriors can advance through a many-tiered skill tree based on your hero's stats, picking up jobs ranging from Paladins to flying dirigibles of death. You can use these units to turn the tide in your favor even before the bloodshed begins; prior to engaging in combat, you can use special skills like flaming arrows and magical networks to cripple your foes. Plus, all of the commands are accessed through a unique interface that, though sometimes clumsy, never removes you from the action.

Mastering this system and being able to reposition units and issue orders on the fly isn't so much of an issue when facing the computer-controlled hordes, but it will be a great advantage when matching wits with other aspiring generals. The heart of *KUF* is undoubtedly its multiplayer, which allows up to four armies to wage war, each with customized troop configuration, special abilities, and a kick-ass hero leading the charge. It is one of those rare experiences that will have you saying "just one more battle" into the wee morning hours. Which is good, because the other half of the game is not nearly so bearable.

The single-player campaign is nothing short of laughable. One of the heroes is named Gerald, he serves under General Hugh, and his closest comrade is Rupert. C'mon! These names sound about as epic as Grand Chancellor Hank. Unfortunately, the names are a highlight when compared to the story and context in which they are placed; the dialogue is spoken with all of the enthusiasm of a doped-up narcoleptic and was most probably written during the course of a middle-school slumber party. Lame.

The other major frustration is the controls. Sometimes troops do nothing even remotely similar to what you intended, and other times they do what you tell them, but they do it so slowly that they can only be trying to spite you. Still, if you use the single-player mode solely to master the occasionally awkward controls, you should be ready to wage war online, and not in that sissy "Mothers Against Madbox" way.—**JOE**



Second Opinion

Listen up Koei, because this is the direction that the *Dynasty Warriors* series should have taken long ago. *Kingdom Under Fire* developer Phantagram does a very good job of taking the glories of mass hack 'n' slash death and surrounding it with other gameplay meat. A tiny amount of RTS lies in the troop grouping and movement system – and I would have liked to see more on this front – but the mixing of genres thankfully works well to bridge the gap between strategy and melee madness. Couple this with a cool job tree for your rank and file soldiers and some special abilities for your commanders, and you'll be hooked. The only problem here is that I wish these special abilities were more integrated into the hack 'n' slash portion of the game. Online play is a blast, and the character models show some good detail, but I wish that this game had a little more budget behind it, as it could have increased the production values (helping the story and ambience) and pushed this game over the top.—**KATO**



PC

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER RELIC ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 20 > ESRB M



A NEW DAY IS DAWNING

Take your pick of seminal games – the ones that defined their genre for a period of time and introduced concepts that worked so well you couldn't help but wonder why they'd never been done before. Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War is one of these. Everything about it is executed with care and precision, stuffed into an unrivaled graphics engine, and coated with a smooth layer of balance that will satiate RTS gamers for years to come.

There will no doubt be fans of one or the other RTS title that refuse to accept that this new franchise can compete with their game of choice. I'm far from an RTS newbie, and believe me – it can. The four factions are each incredibly unique and offer much more than simple choices like which second-tier unit you prefer. The campaign, though it only allows you to play as one race, offers fun missions and acceptable characters and plot. Multiplayer matches serve up plenty of variety, whether in different victory conditions or the plethora of maps. You can even customize your army's colors and symbol, for crap's sake!

Much more than in most strategy games, success in Dawn of War requires that you take a balanced

approach. Defense is certainly important and powerful, but putting too many resources into it will backfire rather badly. Both infantry and vehicles are great, and can do a variety of things, but trying to rely solely on one or the other will ensure your defeat. It's the subtle touches like this that make for an excellent game, rather than a decent one with awesome graphics. Developer Relic Entertainment (which also made the delightful Homeworld titles) has a firm grasp on these concepts, and it shows.

The number of different units, strategies, and technology available to each faction is about perfect – not too many to keep in mind while playing, but enough to enable tons of tactical options. In particular, I love the option to upgrade vehicles and squads with new weapons or augmentations – for a price, of course. Should you have your Marines carry missile launchers, flamethrowers, machine guns, or a mix? Do you want your tanks to be able to really stomp the crap out of other armor at the expense of being ineffective against footsoldiers? This allows

“...will satiate RTS gamers for years to come.”

players much greater control over their forces and adds a lot to gameplay.

The flaws in Dawn of War are few, but they are fairly irritating. As any RTS veteran knows, reaction time is crucial in tight battles; unfortunately, there is occasionally a delay in hitting a hotkey and

having it take effect. For another, units have seven different AI stances they can adopt, but they often don't work as advertised. Also, scrolling the map by moving the mouse to the edge of the screen (my preferred method) sometimes didn't work and I'd have to “bounce” the cursor to make it happen. Finally, I found that support caps were far more limiting than available resources – though that may simply be a design decision that I disagree with.

Even taking these annoyances into account, Dawn of War is awesome on almost every level. To be quite honest, it kicks ass in just about every way a strategy title can. I highly suggest you experience this now, because it most likely will be remembered as a historic entry in the RTS genre. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** You know that whole real-time strategy genre? Do it better than anyone else

> **Graphics:** As good as I've ever seen, particularly the particle and explosive effects

> **Sound:** Space Marines and Orks sound awesome...the Chaos Marines are so annoying they make me wish I were deaf

> **Playability:** If it weren't for the infrequent interface glitches, it'd be perfect

> **Entertainment:** Pretty much the only way you won't like this is if you despise RTS in all of its forms

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.25

I'll be the first to admit that Dawn of War came completely out of left field. When I saw this game at E3, I said to myself, “Yay, another RTS I could care less about.” But I couldn't have been more wrong as Dawn of War is easily the best RTS I've seen this year. From the interface to the AI, every facet of this game is executed to perfection. Sure, it would have been nice to get more than one single-player campaign, but this slight complaint becomes almost moot the moment you bury yourself in Dawn of War's explosive multiplayer. Even if you don't know a thing about the Warhammer universe and have no desire to, if you have any love of the RTS genre at all, you absolutely must check this gem out. —ANDY





PC

Call of Duty United Offensive

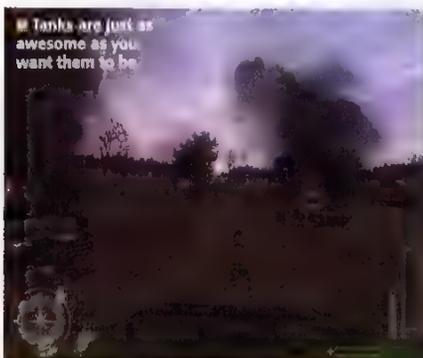
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** GRAY MATTER INTERACTIVE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 > **ESRB** M

SIE REICHEN WIE KÄSE!

Despite the inexplicable fact that the Nazis in United Offensive have a bizarre habit of telling you that you smell like cheese as they try to fill you with hot lead, this title is easily worth it for Call of Duty owners, war aficionados, and for that matter pretty much any PC gamer.

One of the major concerns that players had with last year's base game was that the single-player was too short. To silence this criticism, United Offensive provides a campaign that's at least as long as the original's — and harder to boot. It's not crippling difficult, but a definite challenge even for FPS veterans. They're expertly designed as well, with varied mission objectives through myriad settings. Multiplayer is even better than before, too, with the added modes (CTF, Domination, and Base Assault) being a blast to play. The vehicles are fun, easy to use, and bring extra helpings of both tactical options and explosive entertainment to the table.

There are a few things that could still stand some fixing. Getting unexpectedly caught on the level geometry is a bit too frequent, and AI bots in both single and multiplayer have an irritating tendency to unload whole clips into walls they don't notice. However, neither of these flaws is annoying enough to bring down the amusement factor much at all. I highly recommend this to everyone who has a PC that can handle it. —**ADAM**



BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** More Call of Duty in every way — modes, maps, and a long, tough campaign

> **Graphics:** The new particle engine is awesome. Explosions look far better than they used to

> **Sound:** Call of Duty featured some of the best sound design around, and nothing has changed

> **Playability:** The new sprinting mechanic is surprisingly useful

> **Entertainment:** If war shooters are your thing, there's no finer title on the market

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.75

Like the original Call of Duty, you could complain that United Offensive is short since it only delivers about 10 hours of play for the average gamer in the single-player campaign, but doing so would sell this expansion short. Compared to most expansion packs, United Offensive delivers more than enough to keep fans happy. Not only does it look better than the original; it features longer and more difficult levels. Even the battles are more intense, if you can believe that. Throw in some added multiplayer modes, and the game offers up enough new content that you could almost call this expansion a full-blown sequel. From the explosive sound effects and graphics to the pulse-pounding gameplay, United Offensive is a great roller coaster ride that PC gamers won't want to miss. —**ANDY**

PC

Rome: Total War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** T



ALMOST THERE

I could hardly have been more pumped to play Rome: Total War. It purported to combine the empire-management of Civilization, the combat of WarCraft, and sport a high degree of realism as well. Unfortunately, it only does two of these three things right. The mechanics and strategy of forging your faction into a dominant power are well done and the whole game feels grounded in reality to an extent that I've rarely come across, but a few seemingly minor flaws render the real-time strategic combat almost unplayable.

Like every good empire-building game, Rome: Total War forces you to make decisions and tradeoffs when it comes to policy-making. You are free to recruit a massive army and campaign deep into enemy territory, but you'd better make sure that your situation at home is militarily, economically, and politically secure. Neglect the wants of your people and they're liable to riot or even revolt as soon as your army is out of sight. Soldiers also require rather large amounts of money to keep them supplied and paid, so having a good economy is vastly important.

As you move through the campaign trying to propel your noble Roman family into the Imperial throne, the Senate will assign you missions. While you're free to decline them as you see fit, doing so has a cost — the Senate gets irate, and their goodwill is important to have. Though accomplishing these missions will frequently give you nice rewards, I often

felt pigeonholed into doing what they wanted me to do rather than going about the business of conquering the world my way.

The battles initially appear to be sweet, if a little rough around the interface. The thunder of infantry boots shakes your eardrums as they advance, and that's just the start of little touches that lend verisimilitude to the combat. Elements like troops' energy levels and tons of modifiers for weather and terrain conditions offer up a lot of strategic depth. So all is going well, until a brigade refuses to move because one of its soldiers is stuck behind a wall. Or a lone light cavalryman scatters over 200 archers. Or your general and his bodyguard refuse to withdraw for another charge and get surrounded and killed. Things like this make the "auto-resolve" button a mighty attractive option. This kind of kills the multiplayer, though, since the RTS battles are the only thing you can do online.

This is all really frustrating, because with a working battle engine this could have been one of my top games of the year. As it stands, Rome: Total War is merely a good empire simulation with a minor real-time strategy diversion built in. —**ADAM**



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Conquer the world politically and militarily as a Roman family, or fight famous historical battles

> **Graphics:** A range between average and good, depending on which screen you're on

> **Sound:** Weirdly spotty voice acting, but excellent battle effects

> **Playability:** The campaign map is great, but the RTS battle controls could be a bit tighter

> **Entertainment:** Good for empire-building, bad for nitpicky combat

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

I was a bit surprised when one of this game's loading screens sagely imparted the words of Ovid: "The gods favor the bold" — it's a bit ironic coming from a title that shrewdly builds off of the successes of its predecessors while not making any great strides forward. While the empire-building aspects are on par with games like Civilization, the integration of RTS is a bit slipshod. It still has an intricate and historically-based setting, as well as an engine that allows for a pants-crapping number of troops to advance on your foes, but it also brings along the baggage of substandard graphics, dodgy AI, and the overwhelming feeling that history is repeating itself yet again. —**JOE**



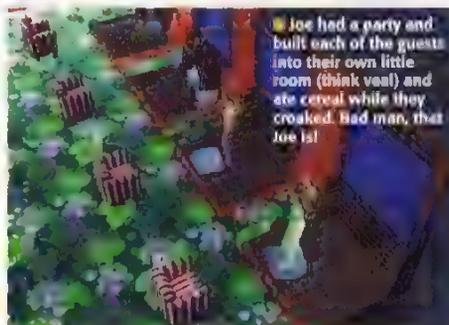
The facial expressions are amazing



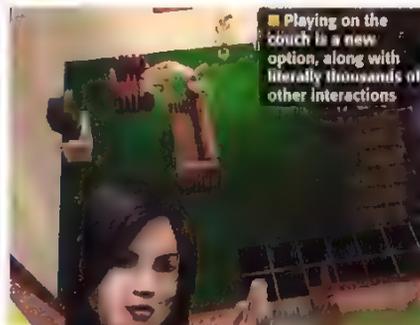
The Money Tree is one of the rewards you can purchase with points earned by completing "Wants"



I wonder what that kid in the back is growing... probably basil



Joe had a party and built each of the guests into their own little room (think vault) and ate cereal while they croaked. Had man, that Joe lol



Playing on the couch is a new option, along with literally thousands of other interactions

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Update the best-selling PC franchise of all time so much that we can't even make "taking in the dough" jokes

> **Graphics:** Un-freaking-believable – players will notice funny, interesting details at every camera rotation

> **Sound:** Sim-speak and jukebox tunes, fun but not revolutionary

> **Playability:** Polished, intuitive menus put a barge-full of info at your fingertips

> **Entertainment:** It's still The Sims, but with enough new ideas that holdouts should give the series a try

> **Replay Value:** High

PC

The Sims 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** MAXIS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 17 > **ESRB** T

CONVERT THE DOUBTERS, APPEASE THE MASSES

Many times, a franchise's success is portrayed through what seems to be excessively specific statistics: "This series is the number one seller for strategy titles featuring donkeys that came out in an August." Well, what the crap does that mean? The Sims, on the other hand, makes it really simple – this is the number one selling PC franchise of all time. See? Quick and to the point, but something that must have put a lot of pressure on the developers. What do you do to change the series, mold it into a new experience, and still maintain all that was good about the idea and execution in the first place? The Sims 2 is quite possibly the best resolution to this problem that I have ever seen.

The differences between the original and this sequel can be sorted into two categories: franchise revolutions and tiny details. Why I like this game so much is that, weirdly enough, each category has an equal effect on my enjoyment.

In the heavyweight corner we have the graphics engine (which is stunning, i.e. totally awesome and/or completely beautiful), family trees with genetic transfer, and the wants/fears slot machine of goals [see sidebar]. The graphics are closely linked with the success of the game's option to raise generations of a family – because the zoom is so aggressive, you can see the shared physical traits of children to their parents and the aging of the family's forebears. I

like this feature a lot because it really changes how people will play the game – the created characters are in a constant state of flux because they reproduce, age, and force you to continue playing with new characters that are subtly different from the ones you started with.



The relationship dynamics are truly awe-inspiring in their complexity and realism

The little bits that really impressed me may seem silly, but are nonetheless important for getting players more involved with their created world. Things like being able to really watch what the sims are watching on TV, checking out the contents of the fridge, and the bevy of new actions that characters can perform (I love making paper airplanes with my newspapers) mean that players are always discovering something new. For a game that goes on as long as an average session of The Sims does, these details aren't only entertaining; they're crucial.

What I really wanted from a long-awaited Sim update is here, but because of the somewhat niche quality of the gameplay, it's still not a title for absolutely everyone. That being said, I do think that the amusement factor and ease of play (see the sidebar for examples of how the quick-play console versions have updated the Sim experience) make this entry more accessible and outright fun than its predecessors. There's still room to rock my world, which is why I don't think that the game is perfect, but it's still really kick ass.—LISA

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COUCH SURFING

The console entries in the Sims franchise are really more like adventure games than simulation titles. While Sims 2 does sit squarely in the simulation genre, it has taken some cues from its console offspring.

POINT OF VIEW – The first PC entry certainly had different camera angles and levels of zoom for players, but the almost limitless control players have over their point of view was pioneered in the console versions. Extreme zoom and camera rotation mapped to the mouse buttons is necessary for this game's family tree and building options to work.

WANTS/FEARS – Spinning slot-machine dials in the onscreen display tell players what each sim is really looking for (earning another cooking point, flirting with their spouse, etc.) and fear (getting sick, being shunned by a friend), building into the game a structure that players can follow or ignore. It's similar to the missions in the console versions, but much less stringent.

WARDROBE ISSUES – When creating a character (a system that is exponentially more in-depth than before) players select standard, formal, sport, sleep, and swimwear which their sims will change into to fit the occasion. The number of options for each type is huge, and allows players to make the characters naughty, nice, or wacky in every situation.

Second Opinion 9

Sometimes I feel sorry for my sims. All they want is a few friends and a decent refrigerator, and instead I make them create human zoos in their homes and starve the mail carrier to death. Though my actions were morally questionable, I was constantly entertained by the many ways The Sims 2 subjugates the will of the sims to the whims of the player, as well as the numerous improved tools and options it put at my disposal. From deep character customization to neighborhood management, this sequel fills in many of the gaps left by its predecessor while continuing to add compelling new content like building family trees and a potentially hilarious Story mode. Add to that the phenomenally improved graphics (complete with emotive gestures and facial expressions), and you have a title that borrows the best parts of the original, its expansions, and console offshoots, forming an engrossing and addictive game that lives up to its legacy.—JOE

PC **BOTTOM LINE 7**
Chris Sawyer's Locomotion

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI
 > **DEVELOPER** CHRIS SAWYER > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E



Yes, this looks like it was made in 1992 for a 486-based system. But the dev team consisted of one guy, so take it easy on him. Those who can look past Locomotion's hideous shell and see its inner beauty will be treated to an economic simulation that is very well-

designed, both detailed and accessible, and a lot of fun once you get into it. Chris Sawyer, the creator of Roller Coaster Tycoon, obviously knows exactly what he's doing — it's just that you'll have to put up with graphics that are well over a decade old to partake in his genius.—**ADAM**

PC **BOTTOM LINE 7**
The Political Machine

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
 > **DEVELOPER** STARDOCK > **RELEASE** AUGUST 12 > **ESRB** T



Although, at its heart, The Political Machine is essentially a more complex version of Risk. I think this bargain-priced title will be a nice purchase for those looking for an easy-to-play and timely strategy experience. Its biggest strength is the premise, as nearly everyone can grasp the

concept of running a presidential campaign — especially since the characters in the game are all real-life politicians. The control scheme is a breeze to master, and soon I was pandering to the electorate, flip-flopping on the issues, bilking money from big campaign donors, and dispatching political hatchet men (a.k.a. "consultants") to battleground states like a real pro. This title's humorous tone and engaging gameplay are charming, even if the game itself is a bit on the repetitive and shallow side (just like real politics!).—**MATT**

PC **BOTTOM LINE 8**
Myst IV: Revelation

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
 > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 28 > **ESRB** T



Here's another one of the classic Myst reviews: "If you like Myst, Revelation will not disappoint. If you don't like Myst games, this one won't change your mind." I hate that I have to put that in each review for a series that I, personally, really dig, but I do. So, for Myst fans, here's my

take on the game. Things that seem like gimmicks (moving the pointer to pull levers and turn pages) aren't — they're awesome. Give it a try, you'll see. Also, the sheer number of things going on in each scene, coupled with the fact that you almost always have control of the camera make this feel like an actual place moreso than any adventure game before it. As a fan, I give this an 8.75. As someone who realizes that the core gameplay is largely a retread of games from 15 years ago, I have to lower it, but that doesn't mean that I didn't have a good time.—**LISA**

PC
Evil Genius

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** ELIXIR STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 28 > **ESRB** T



ALL YOUR BASE

It's a bit eerie how comfortably I slipped into the roll of a megalomaniacal criminal mastermind. I guess I shouldn't be surprised; when I was young and other kids were planning their roller-rink birthday parties, I was designing underground lairs and contemplating my nefarious endgame. Now, after years of biding my time, Evil Genius has allowed me to bring these plans to fruition.

The ultimate goal is, obviously, to conquer the world. But first you'll need a worthy base of operations, and it is this area in which Evil Genius truly excels. By digging deep into the mountain on your personal island, you construct a fortress with all of the necessary amenities: a freezer for storing bodybags, a training room with punching bags and shooting ranges, and your ever-important inner sanctum — complete with an excessively impressive desk. Sadly, building these facilities isn't cheap, and you'll need to send your minions out into the world to infiltrate other nations, siphoning money and committing acts of infamy to gain you international notoriety.

Once you've got a start on your empire, you need to start protecting it. Pathetic government inspectors will soon be investigating your activity, and you need to safeguard your lair against their intrusions. You can rig your corridors with a wide array of diabolical traps, from drop-down gas chambers to the devilishly irresistible "do not press this button!" trap. These machinations will keep most intruders at bay, but your unwitting

followers can also stumble into them, which is typically more entertaining than it is tragic. Simpering lackeys are a dime a dozen, but their screams as a wind trap blasts them backwards into rotating sawblades are priceless.

Of course, like the road to world domination, Evil Genius has some confounding roadblocks. I wanted more detailed interactions with the global conquest screen, as well as increased control over my minions; you can't individually direct their actions, which leads to some very sloppy division of labor. Sure, I could just kill them for their lollygagging, but then the job takes even longer to finish.

Regardless, these issues are soon swept to the wayside amid your grandiose schemes and intricate lair construction. There is no choice between good or evil — you are as moustache-twirlingly wicked as they come, and Evil Genius does an admirable job simulating all of the aspects I expect to come with supervillainy. All that's left now is to surround myself with sycophantic subordinates and practice my maniacal laugh. Personally, I'm a "Bwa ha ha" kind of guy, though the classic "Mwa ha ha" isn't without its charm.—**JOE**



By issuing kill, capture, and weaken tags, you control how your minions deal with intruders

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** It's a bit like The Sims, except with torture and minions

> **Graphics:** The characters aren't very detailed, but their animations are smooth, and your expansive island stronghold looks great

> **Sound:** Hilariously expressive grunts (and screams) from all characters, plus a mood-setting spy soundtrack

> **Playability:** The controls are a sometimes awkward hybrid of RTS and Sim games, but they don't hinder the sadistic fun

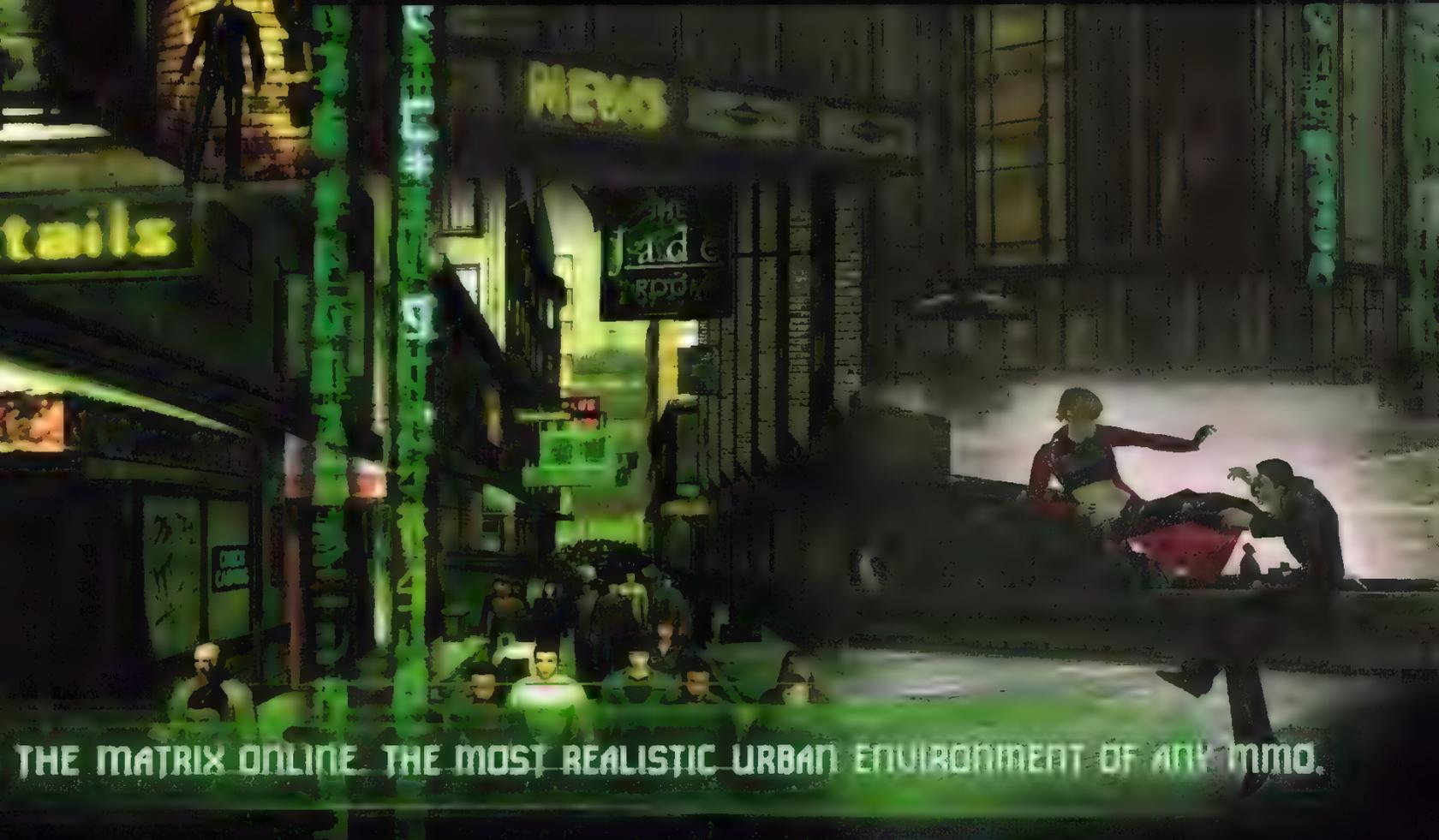
> **Entertainment:** You can execute your own lackeys to inspire loyalty among the others! I could do that all day, but it is really just the tip of the iceberg

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

Taking over the world is something of a hobby with me, I've been doing it in games for over a decade now. The difference about doing it in Evil Genius is that it's so much more... well, evil. This title does an admirable job of making you really feel more demented than Dr. No. Plus, there's a lot more strategy in this simulation than you'd think. Keeping your minions productive is a delicate balancing act, and coming up with the right mix of traps to foil the Forces of Justice is brain-stretching and hilarious. Evil Genius is unique, polished, and more flat-out fun than anything since Painkiller.—**ADAM**

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you how deep the rabbit hole goes.



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GAME BOY ADVANCE

F-Zero GP Legend

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE)
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** E

F-ME? NO, F-YOU!

I find it ironic that a racing series claiming to be from the far future can be so damn rooted in the past. Almost nothing has changed since GBA's Maximum Velocity (which came out at launch), and even that was an attempted homage to the SNES F-Zero. This game has but one feather in its cap: its difficulty. Then again, trying to swallow a bowling ball is hard to do, but you don't see me trying that all day.

The GameCube and arcade versions can hang their hat on being able to induce vomiting due to the sheer speeds evoked. Without that ability, the GBA has resorted to being craftier, but much slower, with its course designs—a concession I'm willing to accept. As the tracks become more difficult and the lap times needed to win get shorter and shorter, you'll find yourself cutting every corner and timing every jump just right. As fun as this sounds, it's just not enough to hold the game up. By the time you get to the interesting courses, you've slogged through most of the Story mode. Although I like playing as the different characters, their stories intersect so much that you often have to race the same courses and see the exact same cutscenes way too much. The repetition of these tracks is only continued in the Grand Prix, Time Attack, and Zero Test modes. Do I expect a GBA title to give me 50 different courses? Of course not. But when you consider that even if it did, I still wouldn't have an abundance of fun with this game, you start to see how this franchise is riding on fumes. —KATO



BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** The Story mode based on the TV show brings mixed results, but it's still F-Zero at the end of the day

> **Graphics:** Not much of a change from the last F-Zero on GBA, but the anime cutscenes aren't bad

> **Sound:** Horribly generic tunes, but I appreciated the voiceover telling me when I had a boost

> **Playability:** I felt that the side attack was inconsistent, but I didn't use it much anyway

> **Entertainment:** The trappings of the show add glitz, but they also make things repetitive

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6

Oh F-Zero, how long has it been? Not long enough for me. Your Mode 7 scaling tricks got old back when Clinton was president. Honestly, the slight alterations to the well-worn formula—a new "story" which essentially clogs up the racing with tons of pointless cutscenes and a new Side Attack move—don't do enough for me to want to return to the bad old days of 16-bit racing. For fans, this will probably be a feast, with its numerous modes and expanded number of playable characters, but I for one am bored stiff by F-Zero. —MATT



GAME BOY ADVANCE

The Urbz: Sims in the City

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION (2-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE)
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** GRIPTONITE GAMES
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E

BUSTED OUT AND BROKEN IN

Last year's The Sims: Bustin' Out surprised gamers with its deviation from the traditional Sims formula by giving players direct control over their sim, and even allowing them to select different dialogue options in conversations. However, with this latest iteration the series has lost its element of surprise, leaving a slow-paced and generally average rehash of the concepts that made the first one unique.

Your goal is to visit as many urban hotspots as possible while managing your standard stats like hunger, bladder, and fun. Along the way you do favors for folks, buy swanky gear to decorate your digs, and build up your street cred until you're the ultimate man-about-town. Like Bustin' Out, you'll also play an assortment of mediocre minigames to make some extra cash, and even link up and play with a friend so you can be mildly bored together.

The problem with Urbz is the way it tries to balance the "no concrete objective" philosophy of The Sims with the goal-based progression of Tony Hawk, resulting in a game that isn't quite a playground, and isn't structured enough to push the player forward. Still, Urbz has a lot to collect and explore, and any game that actually has "talk about ninjas" as a frequently recurring dialogue option is cool in my book. —JOE

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** The Shelbyville of The Sims—things are sort of the same, but without the polish or charm

> **Graphics:** The world looks great, and the close-up character portraits are hilarious

> **Sound:** Grauu! Plenty of simulated speech, but as expected, no one says any real words

> **Playability:** Controls are simple, but it was frustrating trying to find the exact spot to stand in order to activate certain items

> **Entertainment:** Good for a few laughs, but the gameplay just isn't that endearing

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

I played the crap out of Bustin' Out's GBA version, and I suspect that I'll do the same with this entry in a second round. While it could be said that this is just more of the same, I still like the Urbz's flavor, so it's not really a problem for me. The conversation options speed up the play (although the text is far too repetitive) and the economic system is better balanced, which means that this is one mighty fine handheld timesuck. There's room for improvement, but I still can't think of any title that's this game's handheld equal. —LISA



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Tron 2.0: Killer App

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE)
> **PUBLISHER** BUENA VISTA INTERACTIVE
> **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ECLIPSE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 5 > **ESRB** E

END OF LINE

I'm torn between my love of the Tron universe and my mounting anger at much of this game. As it is, several things work as they should, but much of the game is chock full of frustration, and the whole thing ends up feeling like a string of tired minigames. It's too bad, really. There's a lot of potential in this title. There are two fully realized storylines, one for each of the playable characters, Tron and Mercury. These two stories link together, and lend an almost RPG-esque feel to the entire game. In addition, a couple of the minigames are pretty fun the first few times, particularly the ever-popular light cycle mode. There's even an enjoyable multiplayer component for those who want to link up their GBAs. Perhaps the most exciting feature for nostalgia fans will be the full versions of both the Tron arcade game and Discs of Tron, both from the early '80s. Each of these stand up remarkably well to the test of time—adding significantly to the game's value.

The problem with the overall package lies in the execution. Most of the minigames made me want to tear my hair out—some from boredom and others in aggravation. This was particularly true of the most prevalent sequence, involving a timed hacking game that devours fun like a ravenous hyena. And while the isometric view works okay, it gives the controls a stiff and awkward feel, even with the cool disc throwing. The first person vehicle modes fare much worse, utterly failing to create a genuine sense of three dimensional space.

While no one should hate this new Tron game, it's not likely to appeal to anyone outside of its nostalgic fan base, and even they may very well walk away disappointed. —MILLER

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Return to the computer program fantasy in an isometric disc-throwing adventure full of minigames

> **Graphics:** Lots of jaggies and some painful 3D sections really bring it down

> **Sound:** Some of the music has a good kick to it, even if it does repeat too much

> **Playability:** Pretty basic controls shouldn't take long to pick up

> **Entertainment:** While it's initially fun returning to the world of Tron, some frustrating features may make you ready to leave as soon as you arrive

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

So, here's the problem with buffets: they have lots of tasty food, but since there is so much of it, no one dish receives that extra bit of culinary attention it needs to attain deliciousness. This is the dilemma of Tron 2.0. The sheer volume of content this title provides is impressive, but with some shoddy execution in the gameplay department and several infuriating minigames, it doesn't stack up against more mouth-watering offerings. —JOE



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CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For August 2004 Based On Units Sold

1 MADDEN NFL 2005 (PS2)



In a development as inevitable as John Madden kissing Brett Favre's Percocet-riddled posterior during every Packers game he covers, the world's most popular football franchise (Madden NFL) on the world's most popular video game console (PlayStation 2) debuts at the top of this month's charts.

2 MADDEN NFL 2005 (XBOX)



Holy déjà vu, Batman! Madden's done it again, coming in at number two in its Xbox incarnation. This makes Madden NFL 2005 the most dominating gridiron presence since former Minnesota Viking defensive tackle Keith Millard. Unlike Madden NFL 2005, Keith Millard was a mean, nasty drunk. Seriously. That guy was no fun to hang out with.

3 ESPN NFL 2K5 (PS2)



What's this? Only this year's scrappiest football underdog, ESPN NFL 2K5! In the face of the unstoppable Madden onslaught, Visual Concept's highly praised pignskin title hangs tough at number three. It's gritty determination reminds us of former Minnesota Viking Leo Lewis, who made up for his petite size with blazing speed, a great work ethic, and an alliterative name.

4 MADDEN NFL 2005 COLLECTOR'S EDITION



Madden's back, this time in its deluxe Collector's Edition, which features a bonus disc of old Madden titles and documentary materials. This one definitely belongs in the Hall of Fame, much like former Minnesota Vikings safety Paul Krause, who was enshrined in Canton in 1998, largely based on his NFL record 81 career interceptions.

5 ESPN NFL 2K5 (XBOX)



ESPN NFL 2K5 won't back down from a fight, and its Xbox version is holding strong at number five. You know who else won't back down from a fight? Former WWE champion Brock Lesnar, who went through training camp with the Vikings in this year. Yep, he got in a bunch of fights during scrimmages. If only he had been as good at the "playing football" part of the game.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Madden NFL 2005	N/A	PS2	8.75	08/04	\$49
2	Madden NFL 2005	N/A	XBOX	8.75	08/04	\$49
3	ESPN NFL 2K5	2	PS2	9.5	07/04	\$20
4	Madden NFL 2005 Collector's Edition	N/A	PS2	8.75	08/04	\$59
5	ESPN NFL 2K5	4	XBOX	9.5	07/04	\$20
6	Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	N/A	XBOX	8	08/04	\$39
7	Spider-Man 2	3	PS2	8	06/04	\$47
8	NCAA Football 2005	1	PS2	9.25	07/04	\$50
9	Halo: Combat Evolved	12	XBOX	9.5	11/01	\$30
10	Madden NFL 2005	N/A	GC	8.75	08/04	\$49
11	Tales of Symphonia	10	GC	8.75	07/04	\$50
12	Yu-Gi-Oh! Reshef of Destruction	11	GBA	4.5	06/04	\$30
13	Spider-Man 2	7	GBA	7	06/04	\$29
14	Hot Shots Golf Fore!	N/A	PS2	9	08/04	\$40
15	Driv3r	9	PS2	6	06/04	\$43
16	Pokémon Ruby	16	GBA	7.25	03/03	\$33
17	Spider-Man 2	6	XBOX	8	06/04	\$47
18	Spider-Man 2	8	GC	8	06/04	\$47
19	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	N/A	PS2	10	10/02	\$21
20	Super Mario Classic	14	GBA	9	06/04	\$17

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Suikoden IV	N/A	PS2
2	Winning Eleven 8	N/A	PS2
3	Dream Carnival	N/A	PS2
4	Famicom Mini: Super Mario Bros. 2	N/A	GBA
5	Mario Pinball Land	N/A	GBA
6	Nobunaga's Ambition Online	N/A	PS2
7	Famicom Mini: Zelda II: The Adventure of Link	N/A	GBA
8	Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door	2	GC
9	Jissen Pachislot	N/A	PS2
10	Legend of Starfl	N/A	GBA



Source: Game-uptime. Based on Monthly Units Sold

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	N/A	PS2
2	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	N/A	Multi
3	Fable	1	Xbox
4	Burnout 3: Takedown	4	Multi
5	Mortal Kombat: Deception	3	Multi
6	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	N/A	PC
7	Jak 3	N/A	PS2
8	Doom 3	2	PC
9	Call of Duty: United Offensive	N/A	PC
10	The Sims 2	N/A	PC



The Staff's favorite picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Doom 3	N/A	\$53
2	The Sims Deluxe	3	\$20
3	Age of Mythology	7	\$29
4	Rise of Nations	2	\$35
5	The Sims Mega Deluxe	6	\$36
6	Zoo Tycoon: Complete Collection	N/A	\$30
7	The Sims: Makin' Magic	N/A	\$27
8	Halo: Combat Evolved	10	\$32
9	The Sims: Superstar	5	\$21
10	Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	N/A	\$26



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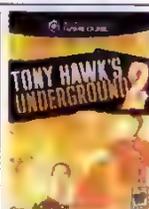


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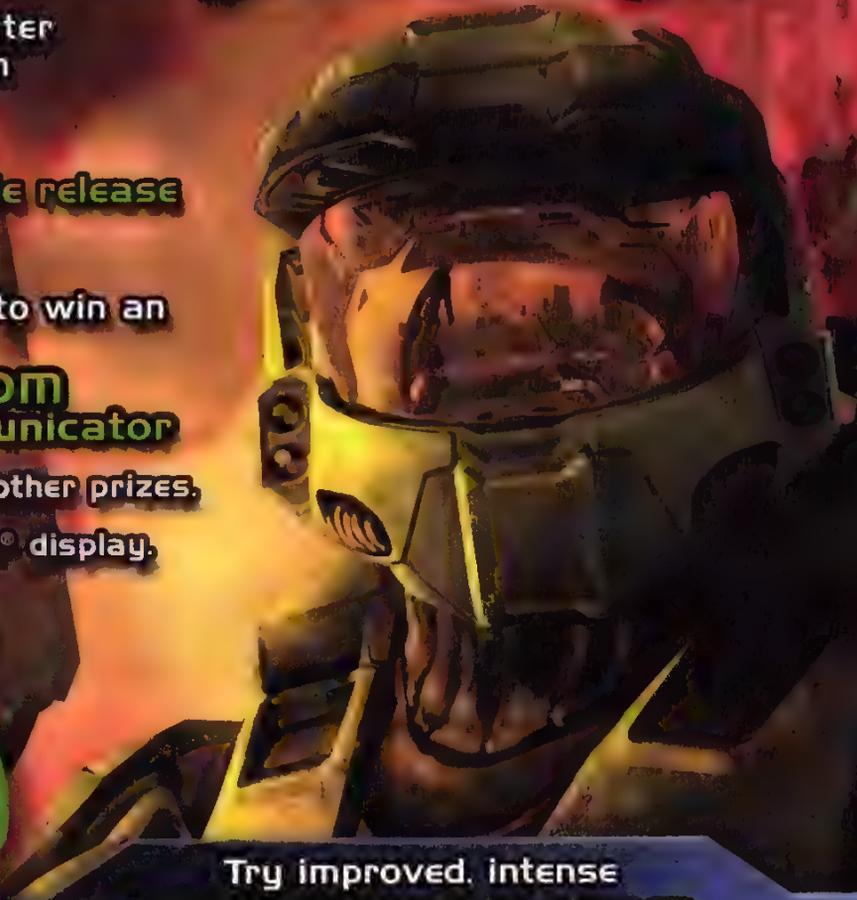
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The Really Ugly Page Where You Can See Lots of Old Review Scores

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Airforce Delta Strike	7	Feb-04
Alias	7.5	Apr-04
All Star Baseball 2005	7	Feb-04
American Idol	6.25	Feb-04
Armored Core, Nexus	7.25	Feb-04
Asterix & Obelix XXL	6	Sep-04
Astro Boy	5.5	Sep-04
Athens 2004	6	Aug-04
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	8.5	Feb-04
Battlestar Galactica	6	Jan-04



Gradius V - PS2 - Oct-04

Burning! The Forsaken City	7.25	Jul-04
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	7	Oct-04
Carman Sand ego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums	6	Feb-04
Catwoman	4.75	Jan-04
Celebrity Deathmatch	2.75	Jan-04
Champions of Norrath	7.75	Jan-04
Chronicles of EverQuest	8.75	Feb-04
CharoZ	6.25	Oct-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Corvette	5	Jun-04
Crimson Sea 2	7	Apr-04
Crimson Tears	5	Aug-04
Cy Girls	4	Mar-04
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme	8.25	Oct-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Destruction Derby Arenas	6.75	May-04
Dog's Life	7	Sep-04
Dot Hack Vol. 4: Quarantine	7.5	Feb-04
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	7.5	Jan-04
Drakengard	7.5	Mar-04
Drv3r	6	Aug-04
Dukes of Hazard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	7	Sep-04
Echo Night: Beyond	6	Aug-04
ESPN Major League Baseball	7.5	Apr-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
EverQuest Online	7.5	Feb-04
Adventures: Frontiers	6	Jun-04
EyeToy: Groove	8	Feb-04
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	9	Jan-04
Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly	9	Apr-04
Fight Night 2004	7.75	May-04
Final Fantasy XI	5	Mar-04
Firefighter FD: 18	8.75	Oct-04
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	7.25	Jun-04
Front Mission 4	5.5	Jan-04
Fugitive Hunter	6.75	Oct-04
FunKamster Flex: Digital Hit Factory	5.25	Jun-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	6.25	Oct-04
Galactic Wrestling: Featuring Ultimate Muscle	4.25	Jul-04
Gallop Racer 2004	8.25	Oct-04
Ghost Hunter	6.5	Sep-04
Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	7.5	Mar-04
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Gradius V	8.25	Oct-04
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	5	Jan-04
Headhunter: Redemption	6.75	Oct-04
Hilman: Contracts	7.25	Jun-04
Hot Shots Golf Fore!	9	Sep-04
Intevision Lives	5	Feb-04
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	8.25	Aug-04
Kataman Damacy	8	Oct-04
La Pucelle Tactics	8	Jun-04
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	8	Jan-04
Lifeline	8.75	Mar-04
Looney Tunes: Back in Action	5	Jan-04
Lounder	5	Feb-04
Lupin the 3rd: Treasure of the Sorcerer King	5.75	Feb-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Mafia	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
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	7.75	Feb-04
M.B. 2005	8.5	Apr-04
M.B. Slugfest Loaded	6.25	Jun-04
Monster 4X4: Masters of Metal	6.5	Feb-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-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
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
Naval Ops: Commander	6	Apr-04
NBA Ballers	8	May-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NCAA March Madness 2004	8.25	Jan-04
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Nightshade	6.5	Mar-04
Onimusha Blade Warriors	8	Mar-04
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	9	Jun-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
Phantom Brave	8	Sep-04
Pitfall: Harry	6	Apr-04
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Puyo Pop Fever	7.25	Aug-04
R: Racing Evolution	7	Jan-04
Rainbow Six 3	7	Apr-04
Rapala Pro Fishing	8.25	Oct-04
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Resident Evil: Outbreak	7.5	May-04
Ribbit King	7	Jun-04
Rise to Honor	7	Mar-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Romance of the Three Kingdoms IX	7	Mar-04
RPG Maker II	5.5	Jan-04
R-Type Final	6.75	Mar-04
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	6	May-04
Samurai Warriors	7.5	May-04
Scoby Dool: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Senous Sam: The Next Encounter	7.75	May-04
Seven Samura 200X	5	May-04
Shadow Hearts: Covenant	8	Oct-04
Shellshock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Sims: Bust'n' Out: The Sims	9.25	Jan-04
Siren	6.25	May-04
Sly 2: Band of Thieves	8.75	Oct-04
Smash Court Pro Tournament 2	5	Jun-04
Sonic Heroes	7.75	Mar-04
Spawn: Amageddon	6.5	Jan-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Spy Fiction	7.5	Oct-04
Spy Hunter 2	6	Jan-04
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	8.25	Aug-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	8	Sep-04
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Strike Force Bowling: Sudeku	8.25	Apr-04
Suffering, The	7.25	Apr-04
Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	8.5	May-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Term nator 3: Rise of the Machines	5.75	Jan-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Tokyo Xtreme Racer 3	6.75	Jan-04
Transformers	7	Jun-04
Trinal Pursuit Unhinged	5	Aug-04
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
UFC Sudden Impact	6.5	Jun-04
Unleash the Skin	5	Oct-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Viewtiful Joe	9.5	Sep-04
Way of the Samurai 2	3.25	Jul-04
Whiplash	4	Jan-04
Winning Eleven 7	9.25	Feb-04
World Cup Soccer 2005	6.5	May-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrath Unleashed	6	Mar-04
X-Files: Resist Or Serve	6.5	May-04

GAMECUBE

1080° Avalanche	6.25	Jan-04
Amazing Island	7.25	Sep-04
Bionicle	6	Jan-04
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Custom Robo	5.75	Apr-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	7	Feb-04
Future Tactics: The Uprising	5.25	Jun-04
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
GoTcha 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 James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	8.5	Mar-04
Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures, The	8	Jun-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	9	Jul-04
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Meta: Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	9.25	Mar-04
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04



WWE Day of Reckoning - GC - Oct-04

Monster 4X4: Masters of Metal	6.5	Feb-04
MVP Baseball 2004	9.25	Apr-04
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Pac-Man Vs	5	Jan-04
Phantasy Star Online Episode III	8	Apr-04
Pitfall: Harry	6	Apr-04
Pokemon Channel	6.5	Jan-04
Pokemon Colosseum	7	Mar-04
Pool Paradise	6	May-04
R: Racing Evolution	7	Feb-04
Rainbow Six 3	5.75	Sep-04
Ribbit King	7	Jun-04
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	6	May-04
Scoby Dool: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Sims: Bust'n' Out: The Sims	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
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	8.75	Aug-04
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Tales of Symphonia	8.75	Jul-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Tony Hawk's Underground	8.75	Feb-04
True Crime: Streets of LA	8	Jan-04
WanoWare, Inc.: Mega Party Games	7	Apr-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
WWE Day of Reckoning	8.25	Oct-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
Army Men: Sarge's War	5	Oct-04
Arx Fatalis	7.5	Jan-04
Aux Modelista	7.5	Apr-04
Battlestar Galactica	6.5	Jan-04
Blowout	6.5	Feb-04
Breakdown	7.5	Apr-04
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	8	Jan-04
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	7	Oct-04
Carve	6.5	Feb-04
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04



Driv3r - Xbox - Aug-04

Celebrity Deathmatch	2.75	Jan-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, The	9.5	Jul-04
Colin McRae Rally 2005	8.25	Oct-04
Colin McRae Rally 4	8.5	Apr-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	7.5	Jan-04
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	6.75	Feb-04
Course: The Eye of Isis	8	Jan-04
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix	8	Jan-04
Dead Man's Hand	7.75	Apr-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Deus Ex: Invisible War	9	Jan-04
Dinosaur Hunting	7	Feb-04
Drake of the 99 Dragons	1.25	Jan-04
Drv3r	6	Aug-04
Dukes of Hazard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	7.75	Jan-04
GOTY Edition, The	7.5	Apr-04
ESPN Major League Baseball	7.5	Sep-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
Fable	9.5	Oct-04
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	8	Feb-04
Fight 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
Callion	4.25	Oct-04
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	8	Jan-04
Grand Theft Auto III/Vice City	10	Jan-04
Gully Gear X2 #Reload	8.25	Sep-04
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	6.5	Jul-04
Haunted Mansion, The	7	Feb-04
The Hitman: Contracts	7.25	Jun-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
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	8	Jan-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Mafia	8	Jun-04
Malice	5.5	Aug-04
Manhunt	9	Jun-04
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	8.75	Feb-04

Maximum Chase	7	Jan-04
Metal Slug 3	8	Jul-04
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
Mission Impossible: Operation Surma	7.75	Feb-04
MLB Slugfest Loaded	6.25	Jul-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-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
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Ballers	8	May-04
NCAA Football 2005	9.25	Jul-04
NFL Street	7.75	Mar-04
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Ninja Gaiden	9.5	Apr-04
Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors	7	Oct-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
Pikmin 2	8.75	Aug-04
Pitfall: Harry	6	Apr-04
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	9.5	Jan-04
Pro Fishing Challenge	4.25	Sep-04
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	9	Jul-04
Pure Pinball	5.75	Oct-04
Rainbow Six 3	8.5	Jan-04
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	8	Sep-04
RallSport Challenge 2	7.25	Jun-04
Red Dead Revolver	8	Jun-04
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Samura Warriors	7.75	Sep-04
Scoby Dool: Mystery Mayhem	4	May-04
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	7.5	Jan-04
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	5.75	Aug-04
ShellShock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	6	Aug-04
Shrek 2	7	Jul-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Silent Scope Complete	8	Feb-04
Spawn: Amageddon	6.5	Jan-04
Spider-Man 2	8	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	9.5	May-04
Spy Hunter 2	6	Feb-04
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	5.5	Apr-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Star Wars: Jedi Academy	8	Jan-04
Steel Battalion: Line of Contact	7.5	May-04
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Strike Force Bowling	5	Jul-04
Sudeku	7.75	Sep-04
Suffering, The	8.25	Apr-04
Tenchu: Return From Darkness	7.25	Apr-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Theft: Deadly Shadows	7.25	Jul-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
TOCA Race Driver 2	7.5	May-04
Trinal Pursuit Unhinged	5	Aug-04
True Crime: Streets of LA	8.5	Jan-04
UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal	7.25	Jul-04
Unreal II: The Awakening	8	Apr-04
Van Helsing	7	Jul-04
Whiplash	4	Jan-04
World Championship Pool 2004	6.75	Feb-04
Worms 3D	8	Mar-04
Wrath Unleashed	7.5	Feb-04
Yager	7	Oct-04
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Dawn of Destiny	6	Jun-04

PC

Aura: Fate of the Ages	7.25	Sep-04
Battlefield: Vietnam	8	May-04
Besieger	6	Aug-04
Black Mirror, The	4.5	Jan-04
Blind	5.75	Jun-04
City of Heroes	9	Jul-04
Civilization III: Conquests	9	Jan-04
Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	6	Jan-04
Contract J.A		



UNLIMITED ENABLED

Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone



Trouble Spot Tips From Development The Team

The team behind *Demon Stone* was kind enough to send us a massive amount of tips on how to get through every challenge that the game throws at you. Since we didn't have enough space to print it all here, we chose select parts to give you with what space we have. The good news, though, is that you can find the entire, unedited document in *Game Informer Online's Unlimited* section.

CHAPTER 2: DESCENT INTO GEMSPARK MINE

The Orc King will not be happy when he finds you in his throne room: He will throw everything he has got at you, and once in a while, a character may become too hurt to fight back. If this happens, you can stay with them until they recover, but it is a better idea to switch over to another character and keep fighting.

CHAPTER 3: ATTACK AT CEDARLEAF

As the game proceeds, the player will have to use Zhai's abilities to reach a gazebo that serves as a control room for a retracting bridge in order to help Rannek and Illius cross a small ravine. Also, throughout chapter three, keep an eye on the HUD at the top right corner of your screen as it counts how many wood elves have managed to safely escape to Cedarleaf's underground refuge (black entrances with scintillating blue specks at the base of trees).



CHAPTER 4: THE WIZARD'S TOWER

When playing through "The Wizard's Tower," you will face hordes of Bugbears and Slaad. To limit the Bugbears' numbers, act quickly to knock down any ladders in sight.

Later on in this particular chapter, Illius will be able to control Khelben's Shield Guardian, a massive, battleaxe-wielding golem in order to clear a path through a huge group of Bugbears on a narrow bridge. During this section, be sure to keep Bugbears away from Illius as Rannek and Zhai offer bare-minimum protection for the sorcerer. Moreover, use the Shield Guardian's huge reach to take out any siege ladders perched on the bridge.

Once you reach the boss, you will find that focusing on ranged combat as opposed to hand-to-hand will allow you to defeat him quicker. However, beware of his paralyzing bolts of electricity that, once fired, cannot be blocked (similar to the boss of Gemspark Mine). Finally, after defeating it, you will be in charge of using either Rannek or Zhai to protect Illius

while he uses Khelben's portal. Although you might be compelled to leave Illius in order to kill Slaad attackers, remain focused on your primary goal to defend Illius.

CHAPTER 5: THE JUNGLES OF CHULT

The mutants you encounter early in the jungle are powerful fighters, and not easily avoided. Fortunately, the jungle also supplies a bit of help in the form of health plants: When your character (or party) is injured, walk underneath a health plant and shoot it with a ranged weapon to regain full health.

Chult is also full of spider webs, not to mention Yuan-Ti traps. When you encounter these, especially in your raft, you will need to cut through them in order to move forward. A sword will do the job, but Illius or Rannek's R2 attacks will get things done faster.

Ultimately, you are going to have to answer for all those spiders you have been thoughtlessly dispatching. Ranged attacks are crucial against the jungle boss, but so is a strong defense: Make liberal use of the block button (□) to keep yourself up and fighting.

CHAPTER 6: THE YUAN-TI TEMPLE

Survive long enough, and you will have to deal with Mershaulk. Remember that stopping the mutants from getting to Mershaulk is your top priority! Once the barrier around the central circle has been lowered, you need to get to the Demon Stone that was used to summon Mershaulk by destroying the shield surrounding it. Anything can be used to break through the shield, but your most powerful attacks (such as the Beads of Force) are the fastest methods. Whatever weapon you choose, do not be near Mershaulk when he decides to fight back - his blows are extremely strong and they cannot be blocked.



CHAPTER 7: MITHRAL HALL

Constant attacks against the trolls can only knock them down. To kill them off for good, you need to plunge your weapons into a flame and

then, while they are still down, into the trolls themselves. Learning to use the Coup de Grace (R1) effectively is crucial to keeping the trolls at bay. Whenever you can, stay away from the fighters and focus on the ranged attackers that pose a more pressing threat to the city.

Once the invading hordes become desperate to break through, they will bring in a catapult that will make short work of the hall's defenses. A series of powerful hits on the front of the catapult and the two wooden flanks will tear it apart, but you will have to move quickly.

Demolishing the Troll Clan is no easy task, and succeeding in it will only bring on the full fury of the clan's king. The king is a powerful fighter, difficult to damage, and regains health when he attacks. If you are going to survive against him, you will need to attack when he cannot return blows, and above all, stay out of his grip.



CHAPTER 8: INTO THE UNDERDARK

There is a full contingent of guards in the entrance hall, and if they spot you, they will call in reinforcements immediately. If you want to catch them all before they see you, you will need to keep track of where they are and what they are looking at, and use Zhai's jump to full effect. Remember, no one ever looks up.

To get through the Githyanki's frozen door, you need to make ranged attacks on the warlocks that are conjuring the ice, while simultaneously keeping the steady stream of guards off of your attacker. Positioning is everything here: Keep your defenders close enough that they can keep you safe without ignoring the warlocks for so long that they have time to recover. Once all the warlocks are knocked out, you have a short window in which to attack the ice directly with your most powerful weapons.

The battle to control the Githyanki portal requires you to destroy the warlocks and then act quickly to take out Cireka. In the final moments of Underdark, you need to keep a flood of creatures away from Illius so he can complete what he set out to do. Keep your attention (and your Supers, and every last bit of your health) on him, or the battle will come to a swift end.

CHAPTER 9: THE DRAGON'S LAIR

The key here is to fight when you have to and run when you can. Keep moving forward, and watch out for the portions of the ground that occasionally erupt in flame. In Zhai's case, they will not only cause damage, but keep her from turning invisible. Get through the halls at your first opportunity, and feel free to explore the rooms. A dragon lives here, and there is plenty of treasure to be found.

Once you move out onto the bridge, you are going to have to deal with attackers from every angle YGorl can conjure up. Your first priority is to get to the end of the bridge alive, smash through the doors of the watch tower, and reach Cireka before the Dragon does.

Unfortunately, it does not take long for the dragon to gain an interest in your party, and you finally experience what it is like to be on his bad side. Smash your way back indoors quickly if you want to keep your party in one piece.

Wave after wave of attackers will come at you as you fight your way through to the end of the fortress. It is a battle of resilience and perseverance, and keeping all your warriors in the heat of things is key. Taking every opportunity to use a Team Super does not hurt, either. Never let a red vial go to waste.

At the end of the long hall, in the crumbling heart of the Dragon's Lair, you will find the portal you need to escape. The Slaad are going to come at you from everywhere, but they are a minor nuisance next to the angry dragon who is trying to roast you alive. A barrage of ranged attacks at the dragon's wings will take him down, but the Slaad will work to keep you from an easy hit, and the dragon's fire attacks will make short work of you if you do not move out of their way. Attack only when you have a clear shot, and before anything else, keep your health up. In the long hall, it is unwise to stay near the dragon's mouth for long, but you will need to take every hit you can get.



CHAPTER 10: THE LORD OF CHAOS

Refer to the skilled combination sets learned in earlier chapters to efficiently kill off the Slaad army. Try to conserve your Supers whenever possible in order to strike your enemies with a much more powerful Team Super (which are most effective against large groups). This tactic should help you quickly take out your Slaad opponents and proceed to the next section.

On your way to the Gemspark Mine platform where you witnessed Cireka and YGorl break free of the Demon Stone, you will encounter a group of Slaad archers. Use your Power Critical (R1) to swiftly kill the first two archers, and then proceed to knock the others off the narrow land bridge leading to the platform.

As in chapter two, you will once again face armies of Slaad, except this time you will also have to defend yourself against slashing Death Slaad and more Slaad archers (which must be defeated with ranged attacks). At the end of this section, the three characters proceed to match YGorl himself in his stronghold - in order to not ruin the climactic nature of this epic battle, the only hint available for you is "Illius is über!"

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@gamerformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

\$10 Million – Walmart NASCAR

Unlock All Thunder Plates – Open Sesame

Unlock Dale Earnhardt, Sr. – The Intimidator

Unlock Lakeshore Drive (Fantasy Track) – Walmart Exclusive

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – last seen hiring NHL players to mow his lawn)

**Street Racing Syndicate**

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

At the main menu, press Up, Down, Left, Right on the d-pad. This will bring you to the cheat entry screen. Enter these there. The cars are only for Arcade Mode.

1996 Toyota Supra RZ

1999 Mitsubishi Eclipse GS-T

2004 Toyota Celica GT-S

Go Free Thrice (Street Mode)

SICKJZA

IGOTGTS

MYTCGTS

LETMEGO

Mazda RX-8

One Free Repair

Police Interceptor

Subaru S202 STI

Unlock Pac-Man Vinyl

RENESIS

FIXTUP

GOTPOPO

SICKGDB

GORETRO

PLAYSTATION 2**Ghosthunter**

Enter these codes during non-paused gameplay. "Yes" will display onscreen if you did it correctly. You have to hold Right on the d-pad and L3 for five seconds, then press the indicated button while still holding them down.

Extra Damage – ○

Immortality – △

Hot Shots Golf Fore!

From the main menu, go to Options and then Password. Enter these codes there. The items will then be available for purchase in the Shop.

Caddie "Mochi"

HSG Music CD

Pinhole Club

Western Valley Country Club

MYPWPA

PAJLI

DGHFRP

LIBTFL

Sly 2: Band of Thieves

Pause gameplay by pressing Start, then enter this code to unlock the Time Rush gadget (accessible through the Gadget Grid).

Time Rush Gadget – Down (x2), Up, Down, Right, Left

GAMECUBE**Pikmin 2**

At the title screen (where it says Press Start), press these buttons to make the creatures appear. You can then move them around with the C-stick, and make the big thing eat the Pikmin by pressing Z.

Big Thing – X

Little Thing – Y

Pikmin Spell Nintendo – R Button

PC**The Sims 2**

Press Ctrl + Shift + C to access the cheat console. Enter these there. Note that the "help" command will display a whole bunch more goofy cheats for you to use. Type "exit" or press Esc to close the cheat console.

\$1,000

\$50,000

Close Console

Display Cheats

laching

motherlode

exit

help

MULTI-SYSTEM**NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup**

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

Enter these as your driver name in Fight To The Top mode. They are case sensitive, and you'll want to enter the two words as first and last name, respectively. You don't have to leave it there; once you Continue out of the Edit Driver screen, the cheat is saved and you can change your name to whatever you like.

Code of the Month**BloodRayne 2**

Sick of looking at Rayne's normal dominatrix self? Want to stomp even more heads than normal? For the low low price of entering these codes in the Cheats menu (from the in-game pause screen, or from the Extras menu off the main menu), all this and more can be yours! Note that you don't confirm the last word in the code; leave the cursor on the final word and press Start to enable the cheat.

Credit Carnage 1,000 Points – Cargo Fire

Imp Kak

Credit Gun 1,000 Points – Late Nurture Qweel

Super

Enable All Combos – Bone This Curry Vote

Enable All Gun Modes – Whiskey Fake Kablow

Shoot

Enable All Powers – Blank Ugly Pustule Eater

Enemies Thawed/Frozen Toggle – Blue Green

Purple Imp

Fill Bloodlust – Naked Juggy Resistance Pacy

God Mode – Uber Taint Joad Durf Kwis

Gratuitous Dismemberment – Dodge This

Moist Pimp

Juggy Mode – Fake Bust Cunningly Distorted

Restore Health – Nurture Happy Pustule Erasure

Refill Ammo – Whack This Molested Ninja

Time Factor – Quantum Lament Distorted

Doting

Unlimited Ammo – Ugly Dark Healed Orange

Quaff

Unlimited Health – Terminal Reality Super

Uber XXX Vacate

Unlimited Rage – Pimp Reap Dark Dark Muse

Unlock Level Select – Anomalies Are Juan

Insulated

Unlock Movies – Pension Reap Super Vulgar

Unlock Overlord Mode – This Dark Distorted

Reality

Unlock Outfits – Whack Lick Erotic Cunningly

Unlock Slideshows – Ardent Hungry Naked

Ninja

Orville Hobart
Bettendorf, IA

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Mod World**STARSLICE: 2045**

A Total Conversion For *Warhammer 40,000*
www.starslice2045.com



How do we undertake writing techs we were unable to secure the review of Tribes Vengeance for this issue. So we did the next best thing – talked with Jake Massie, producer of the forthcoming StarSlime: 2045 mod for Vengeance. This is the real deal: 20 single-player missions, three playable characters, 32-player online multiplayer, and an entirely new story by the author of StarSlime and the first two Tribes games.



Think the last of converting Tribes doesn't it? That's why Clancode Design, the company behind SS: 2045, has a total of 42 people from around the world working on it. According to Massie, "If I listed all the previous mod and actual game industry background experience that our members have we'd need a full page for this article. So I'll just tell you some fun and crazy things I did."



The bad news is that the planned launch for SS: 2045 isn't until mid-2005. But when you consider what it'll have, it looks to be worth the wait. Anyone interested in the Tribes/StarSlime universe will be getting a present better than that pony you got when you were 12, and fans of combined-army action between infantry and mecha should be more than pleased. So check out the website, because there's way more stuff to go on SS: 2045 than we had space for here.

Fable

Moral Guidance From Ben Huskins, Designer on Fable From Lionhead

Being good or evil in Fable isn't just about sporting horns or a halo. It's tied in to everything you do in the game, from combat to village life to fashion and beyond. If you aim to reach a moral extreme, you've got to play the part, and these pointers should help lead you down the path you wish to follow. And it's not just about the notches on your alignment bar either—it's about the way the people of the world perceive you too.

TOP 10 WAYS TO BE GOOD



10. Good Etiquette

Bad manners are the first step towards the dark side, so clean up your act and get down to some seriously good behavior that would make your mother proud. Shower people with gifts (yes, even people you weren't planning on shagging). Say thanks to all and sundry, even if you've never met them before; spreading good vibes is the key to a happier world. If you find yourself drifting into a daydream about prancing through a meadow and making daisy chains, you're on the right track.

9. Heal the World

Yes, you too can make it a better place for both yourself and others. The Heal Life spell is a popular choice for those following the path of virtue. Being such an altruistic person, you'll no doubt be happy to take a break in your journey to heal your followers and any injured people you come across. Medic!



8. Good Diet

Being virtuous is sometimes about sacrifice. Tofu. Vile. Voted number one in a survey of "things that taste most like nothingness." To make matters worse, Albion folk have decided they really like their tofu to retain that oh-so-divine flavorless quality, so don't expect to have it served with anything else. Force it down, now go on. Better than meat, and surprisingly healthy.

7. Defeat Skorm's Acolytes

In order to be good, you must first know its opposite: Killing is evil. Er, but killing evil people is acceptable (because they kill people, right?). In the shadowy recesses of Darkwood lies a haven of evil, within which dwell the acolytes of Skorm. They have a habit of pulling people's limbs off and injecting insects into every orifice they can find, so in the name of good you should rid them of their lives. Skorm has many minions, however, so don't expect them to be gone forever.



6. Look Good

Looking like a paragon of virtue is the first step towards becoming a true hero of the people. You'll find that Bright Will Robes, Bright Armor or even a Bright Dress will convince others of your moral integrity. And you won't just look good, you'll really look good; the Gandalls of this world are particularly popular with the ladies, for example. Those wanting to show off some skin (and, let's face it, we all like to get naked now and again) should try the Golden Harvest and Fire Monkey tattoos.

5. Fair Trade

Some people never learn. Wandering merchants have a nasty habit of walking straight into bandit ambushes... *all the time...* Sure, guards will come along and attempt to rescue them from time to time, but for a moral boost you should make it your job to protect the traders and vanquish those that harass them.

4. Free For All

If you find someone locked up in a cage of some kind, it's generally a good idea to rescue them. Liberate first, ask questions later. In Albion, tyrants rarely end up behind bars, yet innocents are forever stumbling into traps and ambushes. Idiots.

3. Spare and Spare Alike

If your foe buckles beneath you, spare them if you can safely do so. If you're finding temptation hard to resist, you can probably afford to show them the middle finger or expel some gas in their general direction, but a truly moral hero will just walk away.

2. Temple of Avo (Donations Welcome)

Donating money to a worthy cause is always a good thing, and could there be any better than that of Avo, Albion's god of all that is virtuous? If you happen to have a spare 32k in your back pocket, I'm sure they'll be happy to take it off your hands. Come to think of it, what does a god do with all that money? Their shrine to virtue in the depths of Witchwood sure looks shiny...



1. Rid the Land of Evil

There's a *lot* of evil out there. Round every corner, lurking in every shadow, you'll find a plethora of ravenous beasts and villainous outlaws who won't hesitate to tear out your throat and do socially unacceptable things with it. Vanquishing these foes paves the way for a moral world, but expect to have your work cut out for you. Creatures of the wilderness have a tendency to breed like magical sexually-augmented rabbits. The lack of female bandits leads many to ask how they could spread so fast. Life finds a way, that's all I can say.

TOP 10 WAYS TO BE EVIL

10. Vandalism

The people of Albion are actually rather fond of their barrels, so when so-called "adventurers" come wandering into town, prancing around like they own the place, and start shattering barrels and pilfering the contents, the populace aren't best pleased. Don't let that put you off, though. Same goes for locked doors. Oh, and windows too. Perhaps not on a par with mass genocide, but evil has to start somewhere, right? One for evil lightweights.



9. Finger Lickin' Bad

Imagine an adorable baby chick, barely a few hours old and still fresh from the egg; so soft, fuzzy-wuzzy, and cute! It dambers up on to your hand when you reach out to it, snuggles itself up against your chest, and peers up at you with a look of wonder and adoration in its glistening eyes... Now eat it. Go on. Mouth. Chew. Swallow. Yummy. Bandits love 'em, and they're the ideal snack for evil-doers on the go.

8. Look like a Bad Ass

Behaving like a nasty piece of work may be half the job, but looking the part is just as important. There's no point sprouting horns if you then go and ruin it by emerging from your lair clad in a pink blouse and skirt. Try Dark Armor, an Assassin Outfit, Dark Will Robes or a Bandit Outfit. They look mean, and best of all, they don't show the dirt. While you're at it, get yourself a scary tattoo. The Seacorpse and Spiral Dementia face tattoos work wonders.



7. Love Them and Leave Them

Serial monogamy. It's great. Wham, bam, cheerio! And moving on so quiddy means they don't have time to discover that evil Heroes rarely get time to wash their underpants. Marriage can be fun, especially finding new and original ways to wind up your spouse, but divorce in Albion doesn't look good on your moral resumé.



6. Heads Up

As if chopping off someone's head isn't insulting enough, make their day that bit worse by turning the dastardly act into a sporting event. This recipe for evil requires one severed head, two feet, and mix it all together with a nice helping of Slow Time. You may not like football, but 'head keepie-uppie' is much more fun.

5. Booty Call

No, not like that. Every good thief has to start somewhere, and you'll probably start by swiping things from every wardrobe you can find. There's only so much satisfaction you can get from stealing soiled underwear, so ramp up your Guile skill to make things more interesting. When night falls, try out your lock picking skill and soon you'll be emptying shops and watching people sleep like the probrate you are.



4. Show No Mercy

Revenge is a dish best served often, that's my motto. Give Karma a helping hand by laying the smack down on any who would do you wrong; if anyone dares to offend you, shatter their legs! And while you're at it, try not to spare anyone along the way as it could tarnish your Immortal reputation. An adversary overcome in battle deserves one last whack to finish them off.

3. Pied Piper

Clear the "vermin" out of town by getting them to follow you into the wilderness, where you



can then slaughter them without fear of retribution by the town guards. Alternatively, just leave them for Balverine fodder or dump them in the Hobbe Caves.

2. Chapel of Skorm

Evil Jetties always seem to be partial to the odd sacrifice, and Skorm is no exception. Found in the depths of Darkwood, the chapel is home to some of the latest flesh-liquidizers and boning devices the world's torture-boffins have come up with. Worth a visit, especially at night when Skorm's gaze falls on the area.



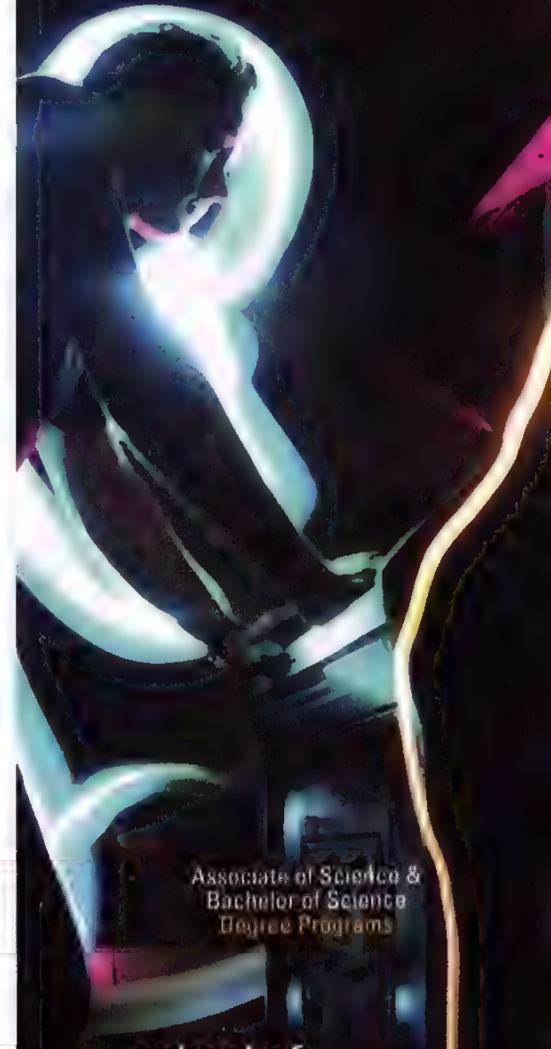
1. Recreate the Raid on Oakvale

Any town will do (except Bowerstone), but Oakvale is a favourite of mine. Hunting down every last villager can take a bit of time, but every evil Hero should give it a try! Hear their terrified squeals as you aim your bow in their direction, watch them flee back to their houses, and let out a depraved laugh as you bash their doors down. Before you know it, the whole town is up for sale, and you've got horns like traffic cones protruding from your head.



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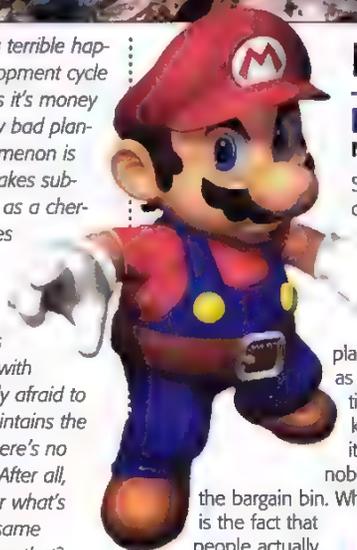
WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?

FRANCHISES GONE WRONG



On occasion, something terrible happens during the development cycle of a game. Sometimes it's money troubles, sometimes it's simply bad planning or execution. This phenomenon is especially disturbing when it takes subject matter that we love, such as a cherished franchise, and desecrates the source material with a game that fails to capture what made the original great. Alternatively, developers are sometimes so enamored with what they've created, or simply afraid to change it, that their series maintains the status quo to the point that there's no reason to play their new title. After all, who wants to shell out \$50 for what's essentially new levels for the same game, and sometimes not even that?

Though you may not want to remember these titles, *Classic GI* is about not only fondly looking back at the good moments in history, but also taking cheap shots at the failures along the way. So read on and enjoy a laugh at the expense of some of the more glaring missteps in the great series of our time.



MARIO

Mario Is Missing NES/SNES, 1993

Shame on you, Nintendo! This was a dirty, dirty trick to pull on gamers — nothing in the previews or marketing for *Mario Is Missing* clued anyone in to the fact that it really isn't a Mario game. *Bad Carmen Sandiego*-esque gameplay has no place in Mario's world of pipes and Koopas, as the rage-inducing experience that is this title proves beyond a doubt. Sure, it's a kids' game, but so are many of our favorites. Plenty of crap games get released that nobody buys and get eventually relegated to the bargain bin. What makes this deserving of a place here

is the fact that people actually bought it. Happily, Mario's name is so beloved that trading a bit of it for some cash here didn't do any real harm, except for in the hearts of certain jaded, angry gamers. But they're dead on the inside anyway.



EARTHWORM JIM

Earthworm Jim 3D N64, 1999

The first two *Earthworm Jim* games had such a unique blend of goofy humor and well-executed gameplay that you can't help but love them. What's not to like about bouncing puppies on a marshmallow to save them from the evil *Psychrowe*, or flinging cows to hit switches? A selection of bizarre puzzles and good enemy and weapon variety kept things interesting throughout the first two games, and they delivered some of the best experiences to be had on the SNES and Genesis. It's a bleeding shame that *Earthworm Jim 3D* was so incredibly painful that it killed the franchise so thoroughly it looks like it's probably never coming back, more's the pity. A terrible camera and bland level design combined to form an inescapable pit of suck that poor Jim will most likely never manage to climb out of.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Since this speedy little bugger practically built Sega into the giant corporation it was in the heyday of the Genesis, it's surprising that he was subjected to the treatment of these pieces of gaming hell. Sonic is about speed and platforming, right? And huge levels that are a blast to explore? Well, try and find any of that in these two missteps for the 'Hog. Good thing that Sonic Heroes seems to be at least moving in the right direction, if maybe not quite there yet.



Sonic 3D Blast Saturn/Genesis, 1996

Okay, so instead of running around at the speed of sound while mowing through hordes of Dr. Robotnik's evil creations, let's have tiny levels with five enemies apiece! This stinker is the poster child for the consequences of

taking a franchise away from its roots. The idea of controlling the fastest character in video games in a bland isometric adventure ought to be repulsive to anyone who has ever indulged in digital entertainment, to say nothing of the people who create it. 3D Blast not only lacked most everything that made the earlier Sonic titles fun, but was ill-conceived in its own right. Where was the genius responsible for Casino Zone?

Sonic R Saturn, 1997

Why the spiky blue blur needed a terrible racing game that simply attempted to cash in on the Sonic brand and didn't even try to be enjoyable, we don't know. With only five tracks and four characters (plus five hidden ones), the amount of content in Sonic R is negligible. Couple this with the fact that it has none of the elements that are associated with Sonic, since it's a racing game and not a platformer, and you've got a title with little initial play value, much less replay. Maybe moving Sonic out of his natural save-the-world-from-Dr. Robotnik habitat wasn't such a good idea. Where more successful titles like Mario Kart took a great idea, implemented it, and then added familiar characters and scenery, Sonic R didn't have the necessary core of enjoyable gameplay.



MEGA MAN

While lack of innovation and poorly planned changes are two extremes of how to kill a franchise, Mega Man does an interesting job of flipping back and forth between the two. On the one hand, you've got the original Mega Man and Mega Man X series, neither of which has ever really changed. On the flip side, you've got several radically different spinoffs, from the horrendous Mega Man Soccer to the tolerable Legends series back to the completely crapacular X7. We're lucky that the Battle Network and Zero series are good enough to keep Mega Man afloat – it'd be a damn shame to see the Blue Bomber go down for good.



Mega Man Soccer SNES, 1994

Oh, if ever a game should inspire loathing, this is a good choice. Apparently, somebody somewhere along the line thought that adding the very bankable Mega Man name to a borderline-unplayable soccer title might result in something positive. How wrong they were. We almost decided not to bring this up, to spare ourselves the misery of thinking about it again. However, it'd be unfair to rail on Sonic R and leave this one alone. On a scale of one to suck, Mega Man Soccer scores a whole lot higher than Sonic R. Suffice it to say that even hardcore Mega Man fanatics should stay away from this and forget that it ever existed.

Mega Man X7 PlayStation 2, 2003

The problem here is that a great idea – take Mega Man X gameplay, update the graphics, and expand on the formula with some new play styles – somehow got corrupted in development hell. X7 feels like it was rushed out the door despite its many delays. Moving to 3D doesn't always mean bad gameplay, but here it does. Every mode of play varies from sub-par to awful. The icing on the cake of pain for this one, though, is the worst voiceovers this side of the first Resident Evil. They're seriously so bad that we'd much rather take the minimalistic grunts and cries of earlier Mega Man efforts. Play with the sound off if you must, or better yet, don't play at all.



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ZELDA

Link: The Faces of Evil

Philips CD-i, 1993

Zelda's Adventure

Philips CD-i, 1995

The unholy bastard children of a weird legal dispute between Philips and Nintendo that left Philips with the right to make Zelda games, these are atrocities unparalleled in the entire industry. Featuring absolutely freaking nothing related to the beloved Zelda franchise other than the name, these titles are so bad they're comical. Basically, take everything else we've said about all of

the other crap games on this list, double it, and apply it here. Seriously, these are that bad. Thankfully, the expertise at Philips that brought these abominations to light was also present in the wretched design and marketing of the system they appeared on. The CD-i imploded rather badly; by its discontinuation in 1996, estimates on Philips' losses on the system were close to \$1 billion. Small consolation to Zelda fans, who have to endure the fact that Link wore pink lipstick.

Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon

Philips CD-i, 1993



MORTAL KOMBAT

During the lean times at Midway (which are happily now over, with great titles like *Psi-Ops* and *MK: Deception from the publisher*), somebody had the brilliant idea to combine the valuable *Mortal Kombat* name and characters with excruciatingly poor gameplay in the hopes of garnering a little cash. As you might guess, it didn't work out and we've got the games to prove it. Fortunately, *Mortal Kombat* hasn't had to suffer through any more weak spinoffs since then, as *Shaolin Monks* looks amazing. These two titles are black marks enough for any series.

Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero

PSone/N64, 1997

Anybody remember *Tekken Force* mode from *Tekken 3*? It was a Double Dragon-style adventure that had you controlling the characters from the real game and beating up a bunch of mooks. It wasn't particularly well-done, and its only real draw was the inadvertently hilarious voiceover when you picked up some chicken. Fortunately for *Tekken*, it was just a minigame within the svelte *Tekken 3* package. Now imagine paying money for that minigame and not getting anything worthwhile with it. That's what owning this spinoff is like. Your money would be better spent destroying any copies of *Mythologies* you come across (like the whole Steve Bartman ball extravaganza) than actually owning the disc.



Mortal Kombat: Special Forces

PSone, 2000

It's really unfortunate when a title comes out at budget price and still manages to not be worth the money. *MK Special Forces* not only falls into that category, it defines it. Probably the nicest thing that can be said about it is that it doesn't crash very often. Choosing whether to fight bad guys hand to hand with lackluster attacks or shoot them with a nearly unusable targeting interface is like picking between hanging yourself and drinking a nice steaming cup of hemlock. One is faster, the other less horribly painful.

Thankfully, after this Midway apparently got the hint that *Mortal Kombat* is, at its core, a fighting game. Heck, we've known that for a long time. They should've just called us.



MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO

Tomb Raider

Talk about an easy target. On the other end of the spectrum from *Sonic*, *Tomb Raider* stands as a series that hasn't moved the barest inch forward since its inception. Fun and original in its first iteration, the sequels have done absolutely nothing except point out the flaws in the gameplay. You'd think that over the course of four titles on the same system, the series would evolve somewhat. Not *Tomb Raider*, though. The final PSone title, *The Last Revelation*, stuck to the established formula like a metroid to Samus's skull. To top it all off, *Angel Of Darkness* for PS2 was so awful that Eidos pulled developer Core Design, the force behind the entire franchise, off of *Tomb Raider* completely. Insult to injury, indeed.



Street Fighter

Much like *Eidos* with *Tomb Raider*, Capcom had what once seemed an invincible juggernaut in its *Street Fighter* franchise. The immense popularity of *Street Fighter II* is the stuff of legends – it is as much of a definitive title of the 16-bit era as *Sonic* or *Mario*. However, Capcom satisfied itself with very incremental remakes from *Street Fighter Alpha* to *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*. None

of these moved the gameplay in any significant direction, and the fanbase steadily eroded until all that's left are SF's hardcore devotees. *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* resurrected SF's main competition, and won its old fans back over while generating a whole host of new ones. *Street Fighter*, lacking any sort of innovation, languishes forgotten and alone.

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Karl Castañeda



DIABLO II

> FORMAT PC

> PUBLISHER VIVENDI-UNIVERSAL

In this sequel to the multi-platform masterpiece (*Diablo* was also available on the PSone), you were given the choice of five character classes to pick from. The Amazon, with her spears and arrow expertise; the Barbarian, with his brutish strength and unmatched stamina; the Necromancer, who had knowledge of curses and summoning skills unrivaled; the holy warrior known as the Paladin, whose faith would present itself through offensive and defensive auras; and finally, the queen of magic, the Sorceress, who was thought of by many as the most powerful of the group. Her elemental magic skills were endlessly useful.

The game puts players in the role of one of these warriors trying to vanquish the three Prime Evils that now threaten the world. After the events of the first *Diablo*, the Lord of Terror manipulated the hero who had defeated him into sharing his own body with the demented demon. Now, much more powerful, *Diablo* traveled throughout the world to release his brothers, Baal and Mephisto. On this journey you must defeat the three Prime Evils, while also dealing with their underlings, ranging from common zombies to monstrous demon lords known as the Lesser Evils.

The cinematics for this game are gorgeous, even today, years after its initial release. The in-game graphics are a little behind the times, but the spell animations are still a sight to be seen, even if the character designs are a little choppy in their less-flattering moments.

Where this title really shines is in its incredibly addictive gameplay. Every time you level up, you are given the choice to learn an all-new skill or increase the power of a current skill. You are also given five points to spread throughout four different types of attributes: Strength (attack damage), Dexterity (attack rating and defense rating), Vitality (stamina and life), and Energy (your mana resource). It is through these customizations that every character can become different. This, along with the incredibly entertaining melee combat combined with the online play is downright spectacular, and can easily cause a person to lose hours of their day just trying to better their skills and maybe one day make it onto the ladder (*Battle.net* lists the top players).



With so many dimensions of gameplay as well as spectacular cinematics, it's an easy choice to name this title "Greatest Game of All Time."

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

In November of 1980, Atari shipped a groundbreaking arcade cabinet called *Battlezone*. Vector graphics presented an actual three-dimensional world from a first-person perspective for the first time, and it even featured red displays for the radar and warning messages players received – thanks to red tape over the screen. So impressive was *Battlezone* that the U.S. Army contacted Atari for a specialized version for training purposes, starting down the path that eventually brought us *Full Spectrum Warrior*.





DREAMCAST

SWORD OF THE BERSERK: GUTS' RAGE

» STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION » PUBLISHER EIDOS » DEVELOPER YUKE'S » RELEASE 2000

The Dreamcast, while short-lived, managed to produce some memorable titles in its brief stay in the video game world. One of the system's better action titles was *Sword of the Berserk: Guts' Rage*. Based on the anime/manga series *Berserk*, *Guts' Rage* puts players in the role of Gutsu, a one-eyed warrior with a ridiculously huge sword. On a quest to cure the insanity of his partner, a former warrior woman named Casca, Gutsu accepts a mission to eliminate the Mandragora, a parasitic plant race. The story is involved and told through countless cutscenes, which, while cool, make up the majority of the incredibly short game – it can be beaten in two or three hours. But the sparse action scenes are filled with intense hack n' slash combat that is truly fun to play. The controls could be a little tighter, but aren't sloppy enough to detract from the experience. The only real shortcomings of this title are its length and the scarcity of the actual gameplay. But even with these problems, *Guts' Rage* is one of the highlights of a system that was gone too soon.



THEN* 8



PSONE

POCKET FIGHTER

» STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING » PUBLISHER CAPCOM » DEVELOPER CAPCOM » RELEASE 1998

The phenomenal success of *Street Fighter II* led to countless spinoffs of the popular game, including some fairly strange interpretations of the core game. Some, like *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*, are pretty decent games in their own right. Others, like *Pocket Fighter*, aren't quite as solid. *Pocket Fighter* is basically a "kiddie" version of Capcom's popular fighter, featuring deformed versions of characters from *Street Fighter II* and *Darkstalkers*. Gems spew from the tiny fighters when hit, which serve as power-ups, but basically *Pocket Fighter* is a typical 2D Capcom fighter with simplified controls. While the game is amusing – the character animation is fluid and humorous, and there are tons of cameos from familiar Capcom stars – the basic combat grows stale quickly. The three button control scheme (plus a taunt button) means matches are as basic as can be. Thus, the only real pleasure *Pocket Fighter* offers is the laughs from the goofy interpretations on the *Street Fighter* stars. Basically, *Pocket Fighter* is Capcom's parody of its own flagship fighting series.



THEN 7.75



SNES

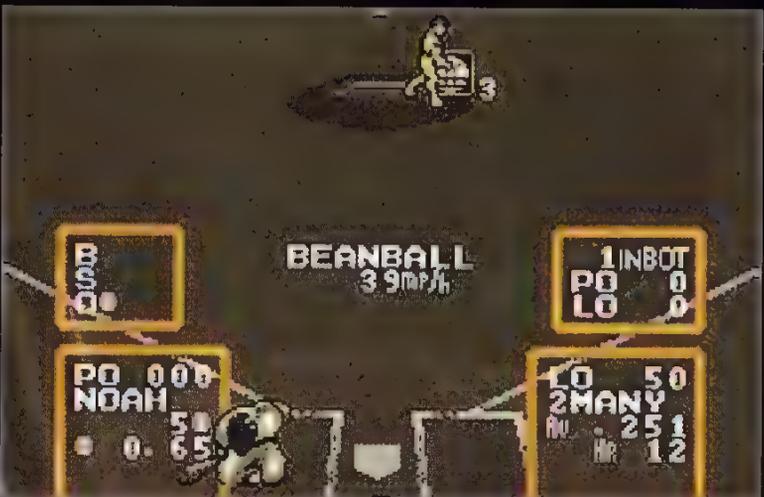
SUPER BASEBALL SIMULATOR 1.000

» STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS » PUBLISHER CULTURE BRAIN » DEVELOPER CULTURE BRAIN » RELEASE 1991

These days, when you see the word "simulator" slapped on a game, it means that it strives to be as realistic as possible. The same holds true for *Super Baseball Simulator 1.000* – if you define realistic as loaded with exploding balls, field-spanning dives, and 190 mph fastballs. Much like its NES predecessor, as well as modern titles like *MLB Slugfest*, this title abandons accuracy for the sake of entertaining gameplay. Though it sports no licensed teams or players, it does have a variety of ways to customize your team, as well as some outrageous ultra moves. A typical at-bat consists of a few pitches that either warp right over the plate or are shrouded in obscuring smoke. If and when a batter gets a piece of the ball, it can fire off like a missile back to the fence, dragging along any unsuspecting fielders in its path. Despite some extremely suspect controls, there is an undeniable fun factor here that is hard to resist. If the Justice League were to say "Screw humanity. Let's play baseball," the games would look a lot like *Super Baseball Simulator 1.000*.



THEN* N/A



VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

The next generation of video game consoles is drawing near and speculation about their features is at an all-time high. How powerful will they be? What will they be able to do? Will they wash your car? Take our trivia challenge to prove your knowledge of the past, and we'll show you the cool new abilities of the consoles of tomorrow. The better you score, the cooler the next-gen feature we reveal will be.

1. The mostly-forgotten series Ikari Warriors placed players in the role of two American soldiers. What were the names of these inseparable life partners?

- A. Arnold and Sylvester
- B. Dolph and Jeff
- C. Paul and Vince
- D. Sarge and Rock



2. Malibu's Most Wanted, which won 43 Academy Awards including Best Picture, featured a conversation about which fake video game console?

- A. GameCast
- B. XCube
- C. PlayBox
- D. GameStation 2



3. Which company published titles such as Karate Champ, Bad Dudes, Karnov, and BurgerTime for the Nintendo Entertainment System?

- A. LJN
- B. Data East
- C. Jaleco
- D. Mattel

4. Marvel Comics' Iron Man teamed up with what lesser-known armored comic book hero in the game Iron Man/_____ in Heavy Metal?

- A. War Machine
- B. Steel
- C. The Guyver
- D. X-O Manowar

5. Without question, Blinx the Time Sweeper is the world's most popular video game character. As such, this one should be easy. Before he became an adventurer, what was his job?

- A. CEO of the Time Factory
- B. Janitor at the Time Factory
- C. Cafeteria worker at the Time Factory
- D. Backup singer for Morris Day and The Time



6. Calypso, the demented individual behind the vehicular combat tournament Twisted Metal, was first playable in which edition of the series?

- A. Twisted Metal 2
- B. Twisted Metal III
- C. Twisted Metal 4
- D. Twisted Metal: Black

7. Which of the following is NOT a real failed handheld game system?

- A. Sega Genesis Nomad
- B. Supervision
- C. Milton Bradley Microvision
- D. Pocket Gamester

8. Name the SNES side-scrolling space shooter shown in the shot below. For a bonus point, read that last sentence aloud without making a mistake.

- A. Darius Twin
- B. Super R-Type
- C. BlaZeon
- D. Gradius III



9. In Liberty or Death, a Koei title for SNES and Sega Genesis, which historical figure was one of the two playable characters?

- A. George Washington
- B. General Patton
- C. Oda Nobunaga
- D. Sigmund Freud

10. What was the name of the main character in the fantastic LucasArts adventure game Full Throttle?

- A. Ben
- B. Patrick
- C. Bruce Campbell
- D. Willard



BREAKDOWN

74% of Midway is owned by Sumner Redstone, CEO of Viacom. Viacom also owns television networks such as MTV, Nickelodeon, and Comedy Central.

40% of the staff is more excited about Wednesdays than Fridays. Why? It's comic book day!

33% The increase in video game sales across all three platforms in the first half of 2004, according to NPD Hardlines Canada.

50% The first week sales of NCAA 2005 were this much higher than the first week sales of NCAA 2004.

92% of the words that come out of Adam's mouth while gaming are unfit to print here.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1

Chooses TV shows for you so you never have to think!



2-3

Buys flowers for significant other



4-5

Knocks out the fat!



6-7

Processes and recycles unwanted pets



8-9

Plays holographic messages from the Emperor



10

Actually plays games!

Light up your Holidays



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for GameCube™



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