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The Future Of Gaming:
Generation Next (pgs. 20)

From Past To Present:
The Legend Of Zelda (pgs. 102)

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Intense Violence
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PC
DVD-ROM
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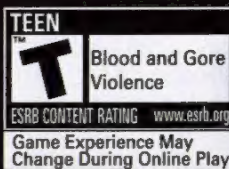
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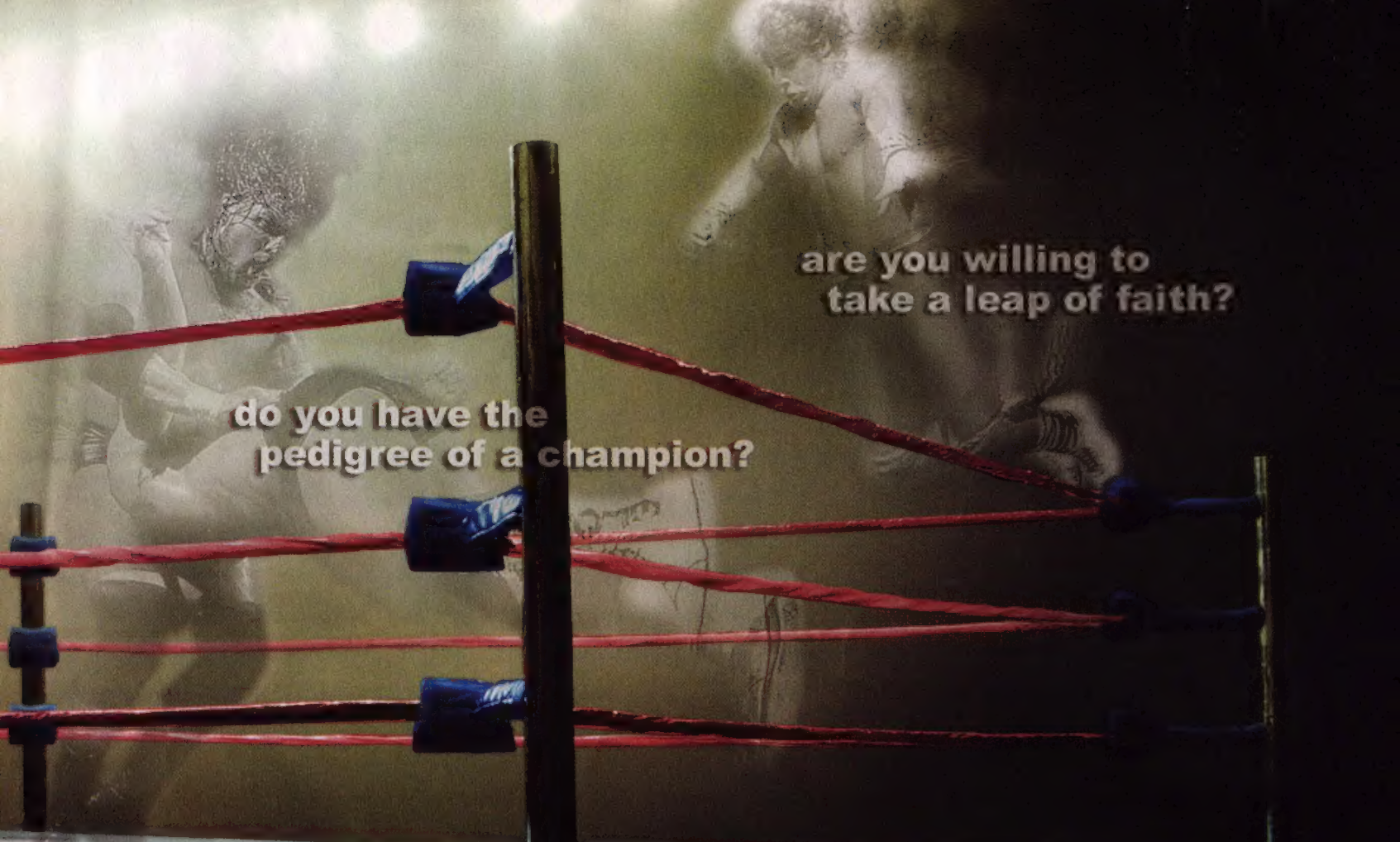
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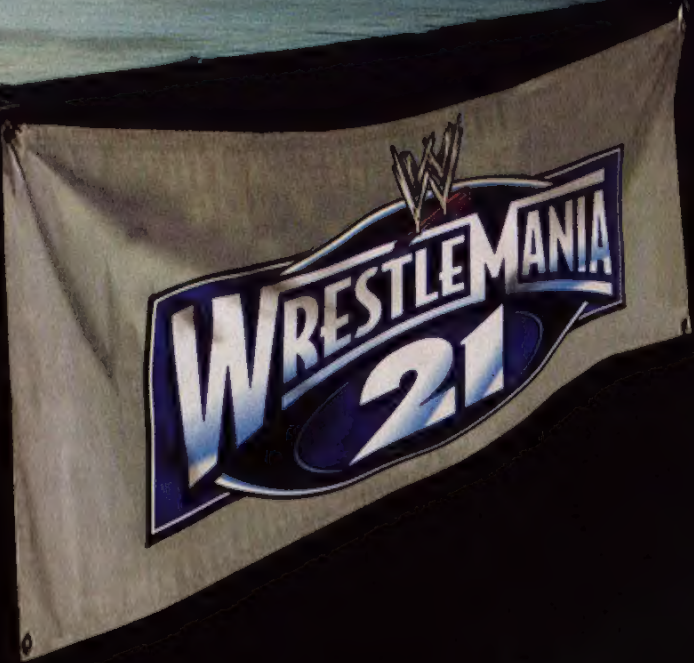


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Decades after leaving his trademark tuxedo and Walther PPK behind, Sean Connery finally returns to Her Majesty's secret service by reprising his legendary role as James Bond. Capturing the look and feel of Bond's early years, *From Russia With Love* takes the gameplay that defined Electronic Arts' 2004 hit *Everything or Nothing* and moves it forward by taking a step back in time.

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People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



AND THE VIDEO GAME ROLLER COASTER RIDES ON...

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It's a given that every holiday season in the wacky world of video games will be filled to the brim with some of the best gaming has to offer, but never in a million years would I have guessed that the beginning of 2005 would be this hot. And just when you think it couldn't get any better, it does.

It all started with Resident Evil 4 (which if you haven't gone out and played yet, you need to), but that was just the first salvo in a long line of impressive games that have hit this year -- too many to list, in fact. This month continues the onslaught with God of War, Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, and the arrival of PSP just to name a few.

But the goal of this letter isn't to recall all the great things 2005 has brought. It's to remind you to make sure you get out there and enjoy it. One of the biggest knocks on our industry has always been that we ignore any month not related to holiday cheer, and we gamers need to make sure that we go out there and participate.

If we can prove to the game manufacturers that we want to game every day of any month in any year, it will ensure that we have great product year round, and not just during the last three months.

Next month, we will have a smorgasbord of PSP reviews and a slew of first looks at the products that will make the rest of this year as good as its start. Enjoy the issue.

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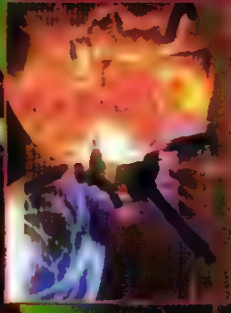
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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly
Of The Video Game Industry



1 Billy and Adam shoot the breeze with Castlevania artist Ayami Kojima and series head honcho Koji Igarashi 2 Highwater Group's Laura Hoeb, IGN's Doug Perry, and Rockstar's Jeff Castaneda: living the glamorous life like Sheila E 3 Chris Cook, Matt Helgeson, and Andy McNamara convene with the God of Comics: Stan Lee. He is a million times cooler than you will ever be! Excalibur 4 Moments later, EA's Kuzi Tsunoda gives Chris a knuckle sandwich! Guchi 5 Billy rubs shoulders with hip-hop producer and one-half of the Handsome Boy Modeling School; Dan the Automator 6 The Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure crew represents in Vegas: (left to right) Ryan Barr, G's Andy McNamara, Mike Lynch, G Online's Chris Cook, Shawn Rosen, fashion icon Mark Ecko, and Highwater's Tara Bruno 7 Quickly recovering, Chris collects his thoughts in order to pose for this picture with Matt and Circle Studio's Jeremy Heath Smith 8 Some G! hooligans accost (left to right) Hip Interactive's Sandra McAuley, Kohnke Communications' Chris Clark, and Blue St's Grome-Puttock



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POWER OVERWHELMING

I am alarmed by the increasing number of perfect tens you're giving out lately. When I first subscribed to this magazine I never saw a ten awarded and never expected to see one. The ten was just something to compare the other scores to. Now it seems like tens are being given out like candy. All the games you bestowed tens upon were admittedly awesome games, but they had their flaws. The sanctity of the almighty ten should be preserved. There were great games before you guys started handing out this once-rare score -- are they really that much better now?

Anonymous
Via aol.com

■ **In a word, yes. In Game Informer's history, we have awarded only eleven games the prestigious 10 score (including this month's God of War). The reason we have a ten-point scale is so that we can use it; the 10 was not created to be an unattainable ideal by which games are judged. The fact that five of our eleven top scorers have been in the past several months is not a sign that we have lowered our standards. It is a sign that these developers independently redefined their respective genres, and it doesn't make sense to penalize that accomplishment because of the proximity of their titles' release dates. Or, if you prefer scientific evidence, according to a non-bogus study by the Institute of Totally Real Science, game developers recently managed to distill pure Awesomium, and began injecting it into their games. The resulting crop of genetically modified supergames are stronger, faster, and guaranteed to make you more attractive to the opposite sex...if you'd just comb those gummi bears out of your hair.**



ily as a marketing tool for Halo 2, ILB's ties to our 2004 Game of the Year were somewhat tenuous. In fact, it wasn't even the first time an ARG had been used for promotional purposes; in 2001 a game called The Beast drew players into the universe of Steven Spielberg's film AI. Though we recognize that ILB captured the hearts of many, when it came down to selecting events for those months in our Year in Review, we decided that news headlines took precedence over marketing ploys. Don't worry -- we got plenty of angry letters about our omission of the EA/Campbell's Soup "Warm and Chunky Games" joint ad campaign, too.

THE U.S. IS NOT ENOUGH

I recently learned that not all games are created equal -- some interesting titles never

make it Stateside and only see a Japanese release. Although I can find places to buy these games, I can't use them on my North American PS2. I can understand that some games only have a market in certain parts of the world, but as a consumer, shouldn't I have the right to purchase and use the software privately without modifying my console? Is it illegal to order/own imported titles, even if it has no American equivalent?

T. Garnett
Via e-mail

■ **Ah, America's love affair with the hentai dating sim continues. As a consumer, you do have the right to spend your money as you see fit, but developers also have the right to region-encode their games to**

cut down on software piracy. If you want to avoid the murky waters of console modification, the best solution is to import a Japanese system along with any quirky overseas-only titles you desire (which is entirely legal). Just jump online and visit your favorite Japanese import site to get the ball rolling, but be warned that it runs a bit more expensive than just making a stop at the mall. Though importing a console is currently the most reliable way to play games that don't make it to the U.S., the good news is that the regional encoding convention may be on its way out. After all, PSP games are region free, which will allow Japanese and American gamers to swap UMDs and play them on the exact same hardware. The process may sound unsanitary, but trust us, it's a good thing.

WAVE OF THE FUTURE

I need to know if there is there ever going to be another sequel to Harmonix's games Frequency and Amplitude. Amplitude stands as one of the greatest games I've ever played -- I've beaten it on every difficulty multiple times. So, do you guys know anything about a third Frequency game? I realize that the first two didn't sell as well as expected, but sometimes developers look beyond this (which explains the hundreds of Army Men games), and I'm hoping that's the case here.

John
Via aol.com

■ **While these unique rhythm games are great alternatives to more dignity-compromising experiences like DDR and EyeToy: Groove, there's some question as to whether we'll ever see a sequel. As early as last year, Harmonix CEO Alex Rigopulos claimed that there were no plans to produce another game in this often underrated series. However, that was before the world knew of the media capabilities of the new PSP. While the series may be done on the PS2, imagine the possibilities on Sony's new handheld. All that great music and gameplay could go with you on the road. You could switch to a soundtrack mode and listen to your unlocked tunes while sitting on that long subway commute. And wouldn't it be cool if you could upload**

BEEKEEPERS BUZZ BACK

I was surprised that you didn't write about the "I Love Bees" phenomenon in your Year in Review feature. I am by no means a Halo fanboy, but I think ilovebees.com was more important to gaming history than some of the other things you mentioned (like Tecmo's love pillow).

Aniz Ansari
Via gmail.com

How could you not mention "I Love Bees" when reviewing the year's important gaming events? The countdown left message boards all across the internet packed with threads and speculation, allowing for a new level of hype that went beyond anything ranting fanboys and aggressive marketing could have provided. Isn't that the least bit noteworthy?

Matthew Grooms
Via email

■ **I Love Bees, the document-decoding, payphone-answering web game that sprang up around Halo 2, actually belongs to a unique genre known as Alternate Reality Gaming. While it was used primar-**

COOLER THAN THOU

I love your magazine, but unfortunately it has come to my attention that it will not fit in a standard-sized cooler. I would appreciate it if in upcoming issues, you could trim about half an inch off either the top or bottom. Thanks!

Ben Sobotka
Via yahoo.com

■ **Is there anything worse than reaching into the cooler at a picnic to grab yourself a cold, frosty Game Informer only to find the pages misshapen and crumpled? It's every gamer's worst nightmare. Unfortunately, the cooler manufacturing fatcats have a crippling influence with certain special interest groups, who in turn prevent us from modifying our magazine size. Thankfully, there are other options; you will find that our magazine fits snugly in several other oversized unconventional containers such as canoes, water softeners, and Kirstie Alley's underdrawers. Just grab an issue and start cramming!**

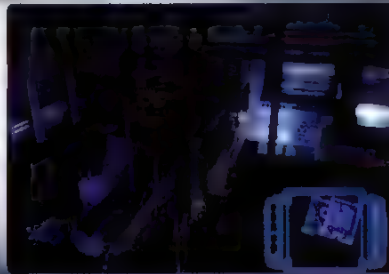
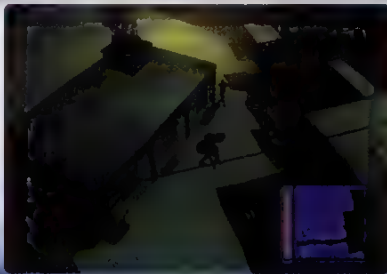
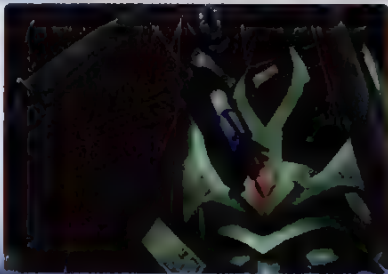


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STOLEN

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COMING SOON...



Blood
Violence



PlayStation 2



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your own songs and have the game turn them into playable levels? Not that we've heard anything definite, but don't go plugging in your requiem remix of Freezepop's "Super Sprode" just yet.

GI GOES TO THE MOVIES: PART III

What is your professional opinion of Uwe Boll's latest movie, *Alone in the Dark*? Please tell me he hasn't befouled another one of my favorite franchises!

Sara Bradley
Via yahoo.com

■ Whether you want to call it selfless, hard-nosed journalism or cognitive malfunction, Jeremy and Joe braved incredulous ticket-takers and an empty theater to bring you this assessment of the film.

Jeremy: *I only crapped blood for two hours after this movie, as opposed to four with House of the Dead. So I guess it's twice as good.*

Joe: *I wish I had seen House of the Dead so I could say that this monstrous sink-hole is better than something. Right now, I cannot make that assertion.*

Jeremy: *From now on, I'm going to forget I saw this movie, and pretend I spent that time watching nitro-burning funnycars at the monster truck rally. I paid for the whole seat, but I only needed the edge!*

Joe: *I tried that, but now I can only picture Trucksaurus making out with Christian Slater. Which is still better, since a diesel-fueled Robocar is a better actor than Tara Reid.*

SURGICAL PRECISION

I am a 25-year old postgraduate specializing in medicine, and I believe I have set a new world record in Mario Party 6. I have been hard at work perfecting my technique in the minigame Full Tilt, and recently set an unbeatable record of 9.16 seconds. I know some people refer to Mario Party as "baby game," but

I am here to say that it definitely is not. It is true that anyone can play it, but it takes true skill to succeed. I challenge anyone to beat Full Tilt faster than me!

Lawrence Yang
Hicksville, NY



■ Ladies and gentlemen, we have just had a rare glimpse into the future of medicine:

Dr. Plausible: *I need 5 mg of Mario Party and a Wavebird, stat!*

Nurse: *You mean scalpel, sir?*

Dr. P: *Nope. Now, hook up these component cables to the vital signs monitor.*

Nurse: *Um, we need that to keep this patient alive.*

Dr. P: *Can he beat my time in Full Tilt?*

Nurse: *[sigh] His records don't contain that information.*

Dr. P: *Of course he can't! No one can! Now, what's all this stretchy stuff?*

Nurse: *Skin. It's skin.*

Dr. P: *Fascinating!*

ENVELOPE ART

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

Send to:

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APRIL
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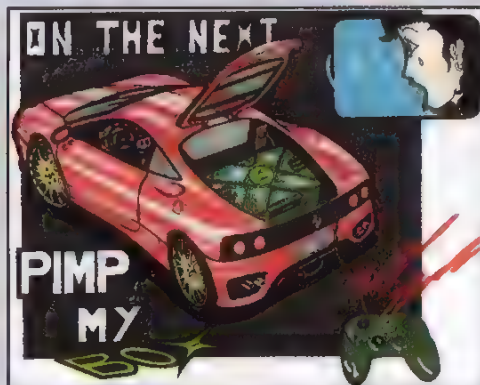
CHARLES M.
ATKINS

"Now I have
something
to brag
about!"



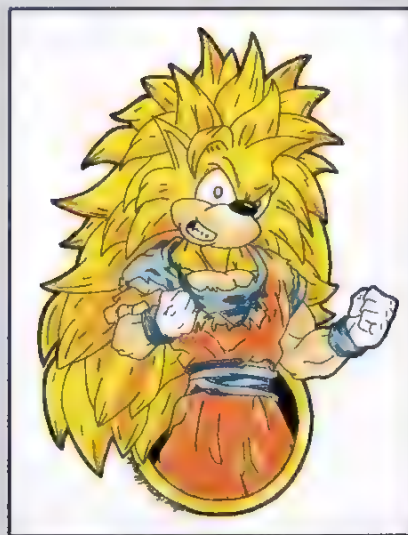
STEVEN VILLAGRANA

Spidey Scrabble: The webslinger scores seven points for "Dips"



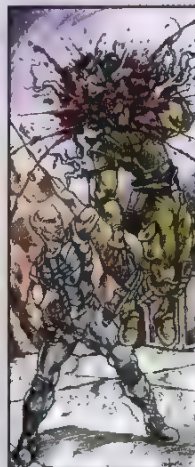
BILLY BROOKS

The new "Slim Xbox" will be compact enough to fit in your trunk



JEAN PIERRE ALBRIGHT

Before his big video game break, Sonic had moderate success touring with Quiet Riot



DAN BIESEL

Nick Scryer telekinetically increases sinus pressure to fatal levels



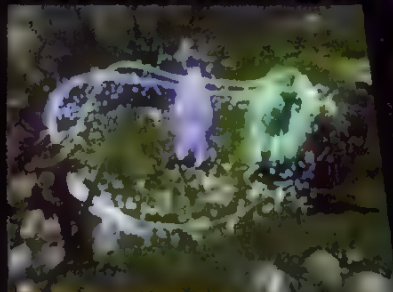
SAKINAH STOKES

Final Fantasy goes Hot Topic goth

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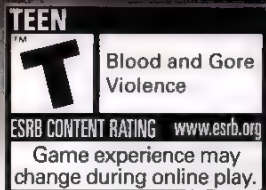
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PlayStation 2



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snowblind
studios

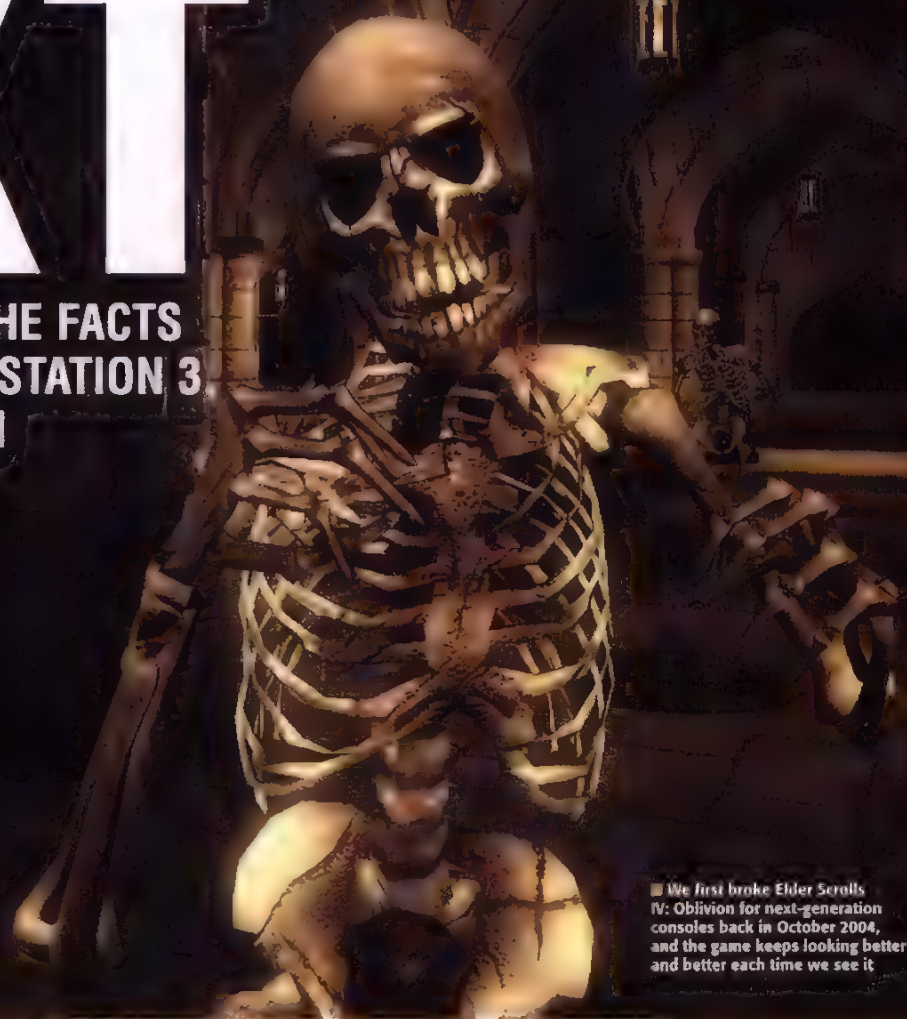




view

GENERATION NEXT

GAME INFORMER ANALYZES THE FACTS AND FICTION OF XENON, PLAYSTATION 3 AND NINTENDO'S REVOLUTION



■ We first broke *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* for next-generation consoles back in October 2004, and the game keeps looking better and better each time we see it

There is just something so seductive about new hardware. The lure of gaming possibilities not yet realized or graphic wonders unseen are a draw that few gamers can ignore.

Game Informer is no different. The moment new hardware was in the hands of developers, we were there to see all we could see and gather every fact we could learn. And now, just two months shy of E3 2005 where all will be revealed, we are ready to tell you what we know.

The pieces on the chessboard are familiar – Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo – each

with its own vision of the future of console entertainment.

As of press time, none of the players have made concrete announcements as to the true features and technical power of their respective systems, namely Microsoft's Xenon, Sony Computer Entertainment's PlayStation 3, and Nintendo's Revolution. But the pieces are in motion. Developers are talking, and system specifications are being leaked almost daily.

Oddly enough, even though Microsoft was the first to get kits into developers' hands, Sony Computer Entertainment drew first blood when engineers from Sony, IBM, and Toshiba held a press conference

on February 7 to publicly discuss the Cell processor.

Sony wowed the crowd with tech specs that had Cell clocking in at speeds greater than 4GHz. Some even suggested that the chip could run as fast as 4.6GHz. Compared to Intel's Pentium PC processors, the variation of Cell shown runs considerably faster than Intel's premier Pentium single-core design chip that currently tops out at 3.8GHz. This benchmark is even more awe-inspiring when compared to the current PlayStation 2 or Xbox CPUs, which run at 300MHz and 733MHz respectively.

While the clock speed of Cell is impressive, it isn't always the best measure of CPU

performance. Since Cell offers a multi-core design with a main processor capable of two operations per cycle – and eight other cores that can compute a single operation per cycle – Cell is able to crunch ten operations per cycle, or in excess of 256 billion floating-point operations per second (or GFLOPS).

N'Gai Croal, technology editor at *Newsweek*, put it simply, "[Taking this data into account] a single-core Intel CPU would be 10 times less powerful than a Cell chip, to give an example." And that's not even taking into account the Cell's clock speed.

However, it is important to note that the version of Cell shown emitted a fair amount of heat, so there are numerous logistical

issues (including cost and performance) that Sony will have to take into consideration when determining which iteration of the Cell processor finds its way into the PlayStation 3. In fact, one of the interesting aspects of Cell is that it is a scalable platform. Sony could increase or decrease the number of computing cores found in the final processor for PlayStation 3, which in turn would reduce the number of operations per second the machine could compute, or increase it.

Game Informer has learned that sometime in late March, Sony will hold a press conference in Japan to further discuss the specifics of which version of Cell will find its way into the unit (check Game Informer Online for the latest updates). Technology demos created in conjunction with a number of its partners, including NVIDIA (which is creating the GPU for PS3), will also make an appearance at this showing.

Which leaves us wondering, why exactly is Sony – which isn't expected to launch PS3 until sometime in 2006 – delivering more details on its hardware than Microsoft, despite the fact that Xbox 2 is scheduled to hit in late 2005?

To answer that question, we have to look at where Microsoft is with the next Xbox hardware.

Peter Moore, corporate vice president of worldwide marketing and publishing at Microsoft, sends his message loud and clear. "Our view is to talk about things when they are ready. Our competitor loves to talk about things, quite frankly, before they are ready. And in some instances, not having the correct amount of substance – in my estimation – behind their announcements. One of the things that we want is to be very, very clear that when we do start talking in concrete terms...that we have something of substance that is based upon fact, credibility, and authenticity in the market place and is not built just to drive hype."

Microsoft may not be talking, but numerous publishers and developers are openly discussing the hardware, and a landslide of details are finding their way into the open. The most interesting and perhaps telling is the name of the Xbox successor, the Xbox 360 – which at press time is planned as the Xenon project's official title, though don't be surprised if this changes before launch. The name, while slightly awkward to our ears, points to Microsoft's new direction in the console space.

Not only did Microsoft want to avoid comparisons between Xbox 2 and PlayStation 3, the new name represents a new all-encompassing approach. Our sources tell us that Microsoft's Advanced Technology Group has taken a page from

the mod community and has created an industrial and software design that caters to customization in almost every aspect. It also embraces Microsoft's PC roots, which it openly avoided with the original Xbox. One source close to the project went as far as to say that Xbox 360 will change the way gamers interact with consoles, offering experiences above and beyond better graphics and Xbox Live.

Through this approach, Microsoft plans to position the 360 to be a hub for numerous forms of entertainment, depending on the consumer's needs. Want a hard drive? Put one in your 360 (however, don't expect more than a handful of games to support it because, as of press time, the 360 will not ship with a hard drive). Perhaps you'd like to make a family photo your desktop pattern or listen to your own tunes while you play. It's all part of the Xbox 360 experience. It's a new, more open Microsoft that will let you use your Xbox to do what you want, which may even include a personal video recorder (PVR) so you can record your favorite shows and movies when connected to a cable or satellite feed. Think of it as Microsoft's answer to TiVo built into the Xbox 360.

The unit itself will also be significantly smaller, and feature wireless controllers to let the user more easily integrate the system into their home entertainment system. Microsoft is also demanding high-

definition gaming on the system. Currently, that is defined as 720p, but you can expect a wide assortment of games to support 1080i as well.

However, the most unusual fact about Xbox 360 that we're hearing is that the system is planned to use a conventional DVD drive for media. While Microsoft could certainly upgrade the drive to HD-DVD or Blu-ray before launch, all indicators point to this less expensive and more common drive.

Game Informer currently believes that Microsoft will stick with the standard DVD drive for a number of reasons. For one, Microsoft took a beating financially with the original Xbox. The hard drive is certainly a big part of the unit's price, but the inability to reduce the cost by integrating components in the manufacturing process like its competitor Sony hurt Microsoft in the long run. Sony was able to constantly reduce the cost of PlayStation 2 production to keep spending in check, so don't expect Microsoft to make the same mistake twice. Choosing an inexpensive drive like a standard DVD drive will help keep spending down and keep Microsoft competitive in the market.

The DVD drive brings up a number of interesting questions, however. Games like Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas already fill up a DVD-9, which can hold up to 8.5 gigabytes of data on a single side. DVD-9 is also limited on the amount of high-definition video it can play. HD-DVD and Blu-ray

are designed specifically with high-definition playback in mind, and feature storage capacities above 50 GB. The cost of these drives is significantly higher, and when you look at Microsoft's timeframe for the 360's release, choosing the standard drive is most certainly a safer bet, especially since the standard format for high-definition playback is still undetermined. It is important to note, however, that Sony's Blu-ray currently has the most support from the movie and hardware communities.

One developer we spoke with felt that the DVD drive wouldn't hurt Xbox 360, and that the inclusion of more RAM, (which at the time of our conversation was slated to be 256 MB) would be more beneficial. Others see it as a problem, as the storage demands of next generation games will most certainly increase. Plus, Sony has already announced that PlayStation 3 will use the Blu-ray format, so out of the gate Xbox 360 would be technically inferior in terms of media format and would lose the cutting-edge positioning that made the original Xbox so appealing.

Of course, all of this could change before the launch, as the development community will most certainly put pressure on the console manufacturers to meet their needs. Our sources say that Microsoft is listening, and that it has already upped the memory capacity in Xbox 360 to 512 MB in response to developer concerns about its performance.

Microsoft's late-in-the-game modifications to the hardware does have some unexpected drawbacks. Game developers are still working with "alpha" [not-final] development kits, and our sources tell us they don't expect to receive "beta" [more refined] units until May, and final kits until August. With a November launch currently planned, that doesn't give developers much time with the final hardware.

"Our view is to talk about things when they are ready. Our competitor loves to talk about things, quite frankly, before they are ready."

**Peter Moore,
Microsoft**



Epic's Unreal Engine 3 is one of the premiere middleware technologies for next-generation development

In the meantime, Microsoft is losing much of its valuable head start to Sony, which has reportedly already gotten limited development kits to its most-prized partners, and could have many more in the hands of developers by late summer. If final Xbox kits aren't out until August, this could effectively negate Microsoft's move to get technology into developers' hands ahead of its competition.



■ Sony has big plans for its Cell technology. Not only will it power the PlayStation 3, in the future it may also be used in televisions and cell phones

One developer who we spoke to anonymously who is currently creating a game for Xbox 360 felt that Microsoft's inability to get final chip sets into their hands will hurt the system. The developer also added that, as launch gets closer, it feels the power of Xbox 360 is going to fall short, commenting, "Sony is going eat their lunch."

This isn't the only challenge that Microsoft faces in the next generation. Croal believes the marketplace will be one of its biggest hurdles.

"Let's look at what Microsoft is going to be competing against if they launch in November of this year," explains Croal. "They are going to be competing against a \$99 PS2 with a massive installed base and deep publisher support. They are going to be competing with a \$250 PSP that will be starting to hit its stride as far as software. And they are competing against the hype machine that is PS3. We saw what Sony did to Dreamcast before it sold a single unit in the United States. [Dreamcast] had a very successful launch, but Sony had already planted in consumers' minds [the idea] that the next generation doesn't start until

Sony ships its machine."

Of course, all these issues shouldn't be news to Microsoft. It hopes that an early launch will give it the lead in installed base it needs to compete. It's tough to find a publisher out there that isn't making the safe bet and developing for PlayStation 3, but it's important to note that none of them are willing to write off Microsoft's new machine.

Microsoft has made a number of inroads with the hardcore gaming community, and its excellent Xbox Live online service gives it a tremendous advantage in the future of Internet gaming. Plus, even though all signs point to Microsoft having a technically inferior unit, because of cross-platform development, it's doubtful that there will be a visible difference between games designed for multiple platforms.

As the old saying goes, in the end it all comes down once again to software. If Microsoft can get enough exclusive support and feature the games people want to play, the power of the system or the drive it uses more than likely won't matter to the average player — as was the case with the hugely successful but underpowered PlayStation 2. However, there are two other factors that may come into play. One is history. Since the industry's inception, the most powerful system has never won the console race. The other is the more nebulous concept of "cool factor."

This is something that Microsoft has done an outstanding job of cultivating over the last year of the Xbox's lifecycle — and yes, you can

thank Halo 2 for a lot of that. However, one shouldn't underestimate the power of Sony's venerable PlayStation brand.

Of course, the final piece to the puzzle that may change the entire landscape for both Microsoft and Sony is Nintendo. However, Nintendo may have to pull a rabbit out of its hat to become a major player in the next generation.

That rabbit, Game Informer has learned, is a touch screen. A source at a major development studio recently revealed to us details regarding Nintendo's develop-

ment kit for the Revolution and the various guidelines Nintendo is providing to the publishing community regarding its new machine.

The most shocking is that the Revolution uses a touch screen as its controller. There is no analog stick or shoulder buttons. The touch screen on the face of the controller is designed to be fully customizable. So, the developer can configure the buttons any way they see fit, or in other cases not use buttons at all, instead opting for virtual levers or other stylus-related inputs. While an intriguing design idea, it's tough to imagine pressing buttons or directing your onscreen persona without the tactile feedback you get from a standard controller.

This also limits a publisher's ability to simply port games created for the other platforms quickly and easily to the Revolution. In fact, our source states that Nintendo is actually requiring developers to take advantage of unique touch screen aspects if it wants to get approval for release.

There are some exciting gameplay possibilities that this design can facilitate, namely control panels for flight games, or a wide assortment of customized inputs for specific genres, like the ability to target in an FPS by simply moving your finger across the face of the controller. However, leaving behind the familiar controller layout that gamers have become accustomed to could potentially alienate some of Nintendo's audience.

All other technical data on the Revolution at this time is scarce. So, how the machine will match up against Sony and Microsoft's next generation hardware is difficult to determine. However, in our talks with various publishers, many are skeptical of how well it will fare in the market. Which may once again leave Nintendo supporting its own console, hopefully with unique and compelling games from its always-outstanding first-party development studios.

No matter how the pieces fall, we are entering an exciting time in video games because regardless of which console manufacturer sells the most units, gamers stand to win. Each dollar they spend to shore up their defenses in the console war will result in another great game we get to play.



GENERATION NEXT INTERFACES

At DICE in February, Sony's R&D guru and creator of EyeToy, Richard Marks talked about next generation interfaces and even gave some impressive examples. Using high-speed cameras, which he feels will reach a consumer price point within the next five years, he gave demonstrations using a field of depth to offer up gameplay possibilities over and above what is available on the current EyeToy. Since the camera can sense depth as well as movement, the user is able to manipulate items in a 3D world. Some examples he showed let the user reach out and grab boxes, punch a sandbag, or even dodge bullets.

In another demo, he used a reflective surface placed on what looked to be a simple piece of folded cardboard, much like a puppet's mouth, to manipulate images on screen à la *Minority Report*. By using the reflective surface to grab images virtually, he was able to move and turn them through an EyeToy connected to a PS2.

He also stated that he felt all next-generation hardware would come with a camera and microphone built in. His team was working on having the microphone built into the unit and not on a headset. By canceling out the ambient sound data being broadcast in a room, the player could simply speak and the console — even across the room — would be able to pick up the player's voice regardless of the game's volume.

On the handheld front, he also pointed out that a built-in camera on a unit like the PSP would have numerous possibilities, including the ability to use data from the environment to create gameplay. The example he used was that you could point your camera at a coffee table, and the game could then place your fighting characters into the environment your camera was broadcasting.



NEW

BIG Red

WRIGLEY'S



BIG RED IS
THE TASTE OF BOLD



DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

MIDWAY'S SPENDING SPREE

The Chicago company has kick-started its next-generation development with a licensing deal to use Epic Games' Unreal Engine 3 for future titles on both consoles and PC. Midway has also signed up with Cartoon Network's Adult Swim for games based on *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, *The Brak Show*, *Harvey Birdman*, *Sealab 2021*, and *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*.



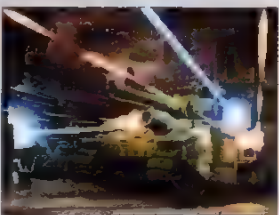
DICE CAN'T FEND OFF EA

After a group of Digital Illusions CE shareholders resisted a buyout offer from Electronic Arts, the publisher still acquired a controlling stake in the Swedish developer responsible for the upcoming *Battlefield 2*. In other EA news, Ubisoft executives have said they would review all options – including acquisition – in regards to a potential buyout from EA. This softened tone is in contrast with Ubisoft's initially hostile reaction to EA's recent securing of the French company's shares.



DROPPING MORE WARHAMMER

THQ and developer Relic Entertainment are following up the success of *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* with an expansion pack entitled *Winter Assault*. This add-on, which features an all-new fifth race called the Imperial Guard, will ship in the fall.



KENNY ROGERS IS A CHUMP

Xbox and PSP poker players will get their chance to beat the best this summer when Myelin Media releases *Stacked with Daniel Negreanu*. The Texas Hold 'Em game gives you online tournaments, world-class AI, tutorials from star Mr. Negreanu himself, and the chance to play against other poker pros in the career mode.



THE BRUTAL BALLAD OF FANGUS

NEW ODDWORLD ALREADY IN WORKS

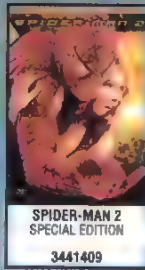
Oddworld is back on the map, and the series is wasting no time keeping its good fortunes going. Developer Oddworld Inhabitants has announced the follow-up to *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath*, titled *Fangus*. The game takes place in the forested hills of a land known as Fangustan. Our new hero is Fangus, a shepherd that dutifully fends off predators and leads the beasts under his charge to popberry fields – until one day when Invaders arrive and thrust Fangus into the role of savior for all the nations of Oddworld. Fangus has his own personal race against time; he must thwart the Invaders' plans before the madness of rabies engulfs him.

Publisher Majesco says that the title will likely receive an M-rating from the ESRB because of its darker content. Perhaps this is a reason why *Stranger's Wrath* publisher Electronic Arts is not handling the project. The mix of third- and first-person action from the last *Oddworld* title returns, as does *GameSpeak* and destructible environments. However, this is just the beginning for Fangus. Getting to utilize the shepherd's less-than-cuddly flock is surely on the agenda. Fangus will appear on Xbox sometime next year, but keep your eyes peeled for more.

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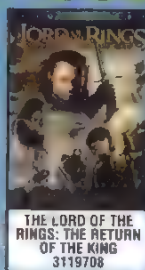
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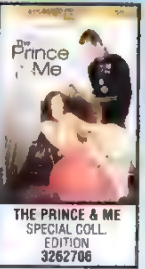
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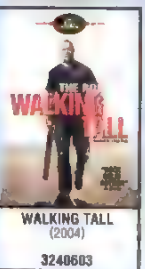
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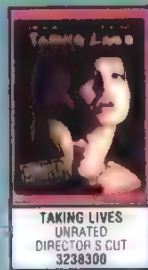


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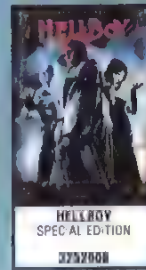
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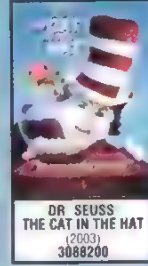
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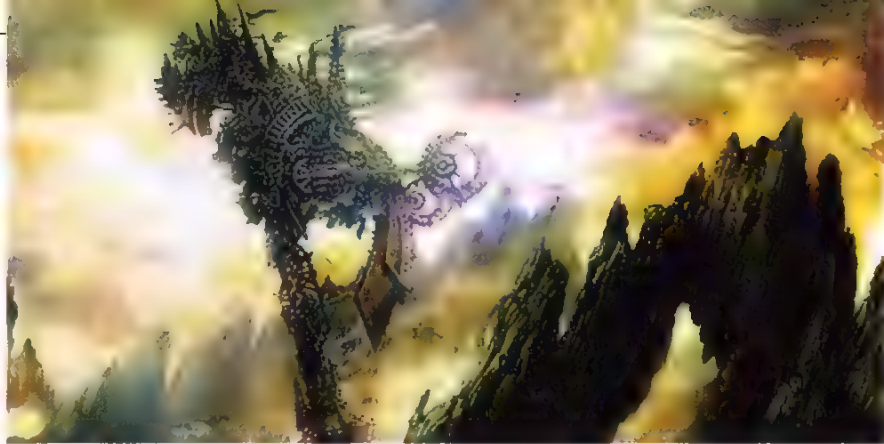
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ROWS

MICROSOFT AND THE MISTWALKER

FINAL FANTASY LEGEND SIGNS ON FOR XBOX 2

Microsoft kicked off its first-party software plans for the next Xbox (codenamed Xenon) with a powerful announcement: The company is teaming up with Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi to develop a pair of RPGs for the next-generation console. Sakaguchi left Square Enix last year to set up his current development studio Mistwalker.

Game Informer spoke to corporate vice president of worldwide marketing and publishing for Microsoft, Peter Moore, who revealed to us that Sakaguchi has already done some initial work on elements such as storyline, characters, missions, and gameplay for the projects. However, Moore all but ruled out the possibility that at least one of these titles would be an MMORPG. "We can't be too ambitious," tempered Moore, citing the cancellation of Xbox RPG True Fantasy Live Online as a possible cautionary tale.

Moore said that Microsoft will own the intellectual property rights to Mistwalker's creations, allowing for franchises that will help bolster Microsoft's first-party roster for "not only years, but decades to come." This is welcome news to Xbox fans looking for an RPG, especially those in Japan, where virtually no software for the original Xbox catered to their tastes. "It's an issue we've had in Japan, with regards to having role-playing games that are proprietary to our console. It's not the only issue we've had, but it's been the number one strategic issue we've had to resolve before we go into the next-generation."

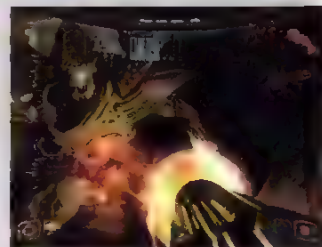
Back here in America, the question of first-party software is no less important. Apart from Bungie's Halo franchise, Xbox 2 will have to rely on other sources, such as Rare, to make the system a success — something Moore is confident will happen. "Rare was not acquired as a short term fix for the current console. Rare was acquired because they are one of the most magnificent developers the world has ever seen, and they don't lose that overnight." Regardless of Rare's track record of tardiness, Moore told us that other companies such as Mistwalker will more than fill the void on the upcoming console. "This is the opening salvo in what will be a series of announcements."

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

UGLY

And it's not even April Fool's Day. After posting a listing for a bounty hunter job on Monster.com to advertise *Metrod Prime 2*, Nintendo was shocked to see some people actually apply in seriousness for the position which called for candidates who were "comfortable using high-tech (some would say alien) weaponry," among other outlandish tasks. This is what happens, kids, when you spend too much time eating the vegetation in "Mushroom Kingdom."



GOOD

Capcom is putting up a Resident Evil Outbreak File #2 special event from May 13 (at 12 p.m.) through May 16 (until noon). During those days, simply go online and you'll see the "Game Informer Event." Play through it and you'll unlock this creepy axeman, who looks amazingly like Miller before his shock therapy treatments brought him back into the fold of society.



BAD

Square Enix president Youchi Wada recently announced that the release date for Final Fantasy XII is up in the air. The game was supposed to ship this spring. It is unknown if the title's new real-time fighting system — which was questioned by some fans — has to do with the postponement. The good news, however, is that the company says it will release a game a month in Japan starting April 1. Wada also said that he wants to focus on success outside of Japan in the future.



BAD GUYS AND GOOD GUYS

2K Games' *Snow* is hitting the streets this fall. It's an RTS about building a narcotics empire and smuggling drugs. For those of you who don't like your RTS cut with baking soda, perhaps the label's Shattered Union will be more to your liking. The title (by the developer of Railroad Tycoon) charges you with uniting a fictional war-torn United States. Both games will appear on PC and unspecified consoles.



GOOD

In perhaps the best cross-marketing deal we've ever seen, Pizza Hut is hooking up with Sony Online and EverQuest II to deliver hot pizzas to starving MMORPG players. All you have to do is type /pizza and your web browser will pop up enabling you to order from your local Pizza Hut. Who knows what /MLF will bring up.



GOOD

Ubisoft has stepped into the sports market with a deal for a Vijay Singh golf game on Xbox and other next-gen systems. The company has also picked up Microsoft Game Studios' technology, tools, and source code for defunct titles such as NFL Fever, NBA Inside Drive, and more. This sets Ubisoft as a direct competitor with Electronic Arts — who is currently speculated to buy out Ubisoft. At the time of this writing, it is unknown if Vijay's game will carry Microsoft's Links moniker.



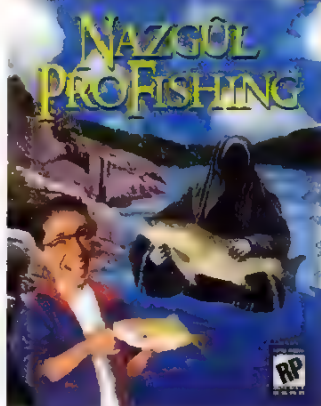
GOOD

Concerned that your apartment may go up in flames, Microsoft is doing the right thing and replacing the power cord of Xbox units manufactured before October 23, 2003. To see if you qualify and for info on how to apply for your free new cord, go to xbox.com.

R & D

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

PlayStation 2



Nazgul Pro Fishing

Though the outdoor sports genre has a select following, the gaming mainstream rarely gets to sample the thrill of a virtual deer hunt or the serenity of a trout-filled lake. In order to expand the appeal of these unique titles, *Nazgul Pro Fishing* includes some of the most recognizable (albeit terrifying) creatures ever — Ringwraiths. Functioning as the player's wise-cracking sidekicks, the nine deathless servants of The Enemy join the player on the water, chiming in with advice and shrieks of soul-rending agony. In addition to the normal stable of lures and bobbers, players will be granted some special abilities thanks to their otherworldly companions. Viewing the world through a veil of aching sorrow, the Nine can pinpoint the best spots to drop line by zeroing in on the aura of anguish surrounding the fish. Once you find your prime location, you can use the Bane of Angmar skill to immediately defile the surrounding deeps, allowing you to skim your gasping quarry from the surface of the foul, brackish water. Upon returning to the cabin, the Black Riders teach the player how to clean and desecrate the day's catch with a Morgul Blade, tainting the soul of your prey before cooking it up in the vile and delicious Fondue of Udûn. Even if it comes from an eternally burning inferno, nothing beats fondue!

TAKE 2 TAKES IT ALL

2K GAMES LABEL GETS CIVILIZATION, ELDER SCROLLS & RESERVOIR DOGS

Barely a month after acquiring sports developer Visual Concepts and an exclusive third-party contract with Major League Baseball, Take 2 has been very active, striking deals to put out a variety of titles for its new 2K Games label. The publisher has snagged the rights to the Civilization PC franchise, which used to belong to Atari. Curiously, news of the split was talked about late last year by Civilization developer Firaxis, but the studio had refused to divulge who its new partner was until now. The deal is a long-term, multi-title agreement worth several million dollars, but further details are not being disclosed. 2K Games will put out Civilization IV (see page 84 for more) in late 2005, and the label promises "future expansions and additional PC and console games to follow."

Meanwhile, Take 2 has been busy elsewhere, striking a deal to co-publish The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, the next-generation RPG from Bethesda Softworks (see Game Informer issue 138 for the full story on the game). The developer says that Take 2's distribution network will help the title reach the largest audience possible when it comes out before the end of the year. Take 2 will also handle the release of Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth this summer.

British developer SCI has also announced a U.S. publishing deal with Take 2 for Conflict: Global Terror, Reservoir Dogs, and Carmageddon 4. All the games are expected to appear this fall except Reservoir Dogs, which shouldn't hit store shelves until next year. SCI previously worked with Take 2's budget Global Star label for the release of Conflict: Vietnam in the fall of 2004.

Finally, Take 2 nabbed the red-hot World Poker Tour license, winning the right to make PC and console titles based on the popular Travel Channel series.



EIDOS CLOSES ION STORM

REMAINING STUDIO SEES GROWTH

Eidos has announced that the Austin office of infamous development studio Ion Storm is closing its doors. The company said in a statement that the reason behind the closure was to "consolidate and strengthen its technical and management capabilities into a smaller number of studios." Approximately 35 people are expected to be laid off. Ironically, this move means that Eidos' remaining development house, Crystal Dynamics (who is heading up the new Tomb Raider title) will see a scaling up of its staff as it prepares for next-generation games. It is unknown if any of the former employees of Ion Storm will be absorbed by the growth of the San Francisco-based Crystal Dynamics.

Ion Storm was created by ex-Id Software and Doom co-creators John Romero and Tom Hall in 1996, and was later bought by Eidos. The Dallas office's claim to fame was PC first-person shooter Daikatana, which despite the pedigree of its creators, bombed. Hall and Romero left and Ion Storm Dallas closed its doors in 2001. Fortunately, the Austin studio found success with Warren Spector's Deus Ex, which was universally lauded. However, the sequel subtitled Invisible War (pictured above) didn't do nearly as well and Thief: Deadly Shadows also failed to excite gamers. In November of last year Spector resigned to pursue personal interests, after having become Ion Storm's studio director. A month later, Invisible War executive producer Harvey Smith bolted for Midway.

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



Suiikoden IV

WORK ON NEW SUIIKODEN BEGINS

Suiikoden IV just came out, but indications are that Konami is already at cracking on another title in the RPG series. Japanese voice actor Makoto Terada reports in his blog that he is currently "recording voices for a game named Suiikoden." It would be surprising if Konami indeed turned around with another title in the franchise this quickly, so there may still be a bit of a wait for Suiikoden V.



BIONIC COMMANDO IS BACK

Capcom is bringing gamers Capcom Classics for the PS2. The collection will feature all of the goodness from the Capcom Generations compilation series (put out in Japan for the PSone and Saturn), featuring games like 1942, Ghosts 'n Goblins, and more. Capcom is also tackling on Final Fight and Bionic Commando, along with a few extra surprises.

THE DEVIL IN CAPCOM

Resident Evil 4 producer, Hirofumi Kobayashi is heading up a new Capcom game entitled Devil Kings. The game -- at least at one point -- was slated to be a current generation title, but as it has been scrubbed off the company's roster for the near future, Loose Talk wonders whether it may become a next-generation game.

EIDOS BUYER IN SIGHT?

Companies have stayed away from buying beleaguered publisher Eidos, but that is changing quickly. Rumor is that Rupert Murdoch's News Corp (see last issue for more) is interested, and Eidos is also in serious negotiations with several other companies.



DS GOES TO THE MOVIES

Loose Talk has heard that Nintendo is planning on using DivX compression technology to fit two-hour movies onto DS carts, with reports that a Pixar or Disney film will be the first full-length feature film available for the handheld. Controls such as rewind, etc. would presumably be carried out via the touch screen.



HARD DRIVE FOR PSP?

As we all know, Sony's sexy PSP does more than just play games, and we hear that the company is thinking of adding a hard drive to its new portable to give owners enough space to be able to handle all the music and videos that their hearts desire. This hard drive will naturally be a part of a new-edition PSP, but who knows when it will come out.



Sony Online's EverQuest II

SONY ONLINE SAYS CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE

Sony Online is busy working on a new MMORPG at the moment. What's it about? Well, president John Smedley recently dropped a few hints about the direction of the project. "What if you could have families in MMO's? What if your characters could have children and pass on the family name? What if players could build fantastic dungeons that become part of the worlds we create with the tools we give them? I mention these things to be provocative. We're very interested in your ideas about where things go from here."

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Titus hasn't had many good games, but this is definitely one of them. This PSone gem was basically a series of minigames chronicling the bizarre day of a Japanese family. You play through as each one of the four members, doing things like avoiding being electrocuted by paramedics' shock paddles, foiling bank robbers, and running away from a giant bowling ball. For anyone looking for a WarioWare-type game with a story to boot, you should check this out.

(Answer on page 31)



Pastries

Fresh Coffee

Sandwiches

NOW



A woman with short blonde hair is seated on a bus at night. She is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored top and is looking down at a bouquet of flowers she is holding in her lap. The bus interior is dimly lit, and the windows show a city street at night with lights and buildings. The text "THE WORLD IS YOUR" is overlaid in large, white, bold letters across the bottom of the image.

THE WORLD IS YOUR



PLAYGROUND.



games

MARIO KART GETS PAC-MAN FEVER

ANOTHER TRIFORCE CREATION HITS JAPAN

Namco and Nintendo are hooking up to bring Mario Kart: Arcade GP to Japanese arcades this fall. The game is another creation from the Triforce arcade board (with architecture similar to the GameCube), which was created by a partnership between Nintendo, Namco, and Sega.

Representing Namco are Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man, and others who will race alongside Mario and friends over 24 courses. That's not all that's different from the home console version, however. At the Amusement Operators' Union arcade trade show in Japan, Shigeru Miyamoto noted that a straight port wasn't what the company planned. "Players take their time when they're enjoying Mario Kart at home, but it's different for arcade games, and it's not ideal for anyone to be seriously lagging behind." Therefore, Arcade GP features a new item system and rubberband AI that allows for slow players to quickly get back into the fray. The game's cabinets also feature mounted cameras that take a picture of the user so that the other players (four can race at one time) can see your picture as an icon on their screens.

Is still not known whether or not Mario Kart: Arcade GP will come to the U.S.

games

"DO YOU FEEL LUCKY?"

DIRTY HARRY TO BLOW HEADS CLEAN OFF

Clint Eastwood has given the greenlight for Warner Bros. Interactive to produce video games based on the *Dirty Harry* franchise for unnamed next-generation consoles. Eastwood will consult on the first installment of the series, as well as lend his voice and likeness to the title. This is not the first time the actor has been asked to reprise his role as police detective Harry Callahan in the digital realm. "This will be an opportunity to satisfy the many requests over the years to continue the *Dirty Harry* legacy, only now in the video game medium," said Eastwood. "Creating *Dirty Harry* video games will also introduce this memorable film character to new generations on a medium they appreciate."

No other particulars about the first game in the franchise have been announced, but we can guarantee that a .44 Magnum is definitely involved.



TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

KUDO TSUNODA
(W/FRIEND)

Executive Producer,
EA Chicago

READER

LUKE
HORENZIAK

Kingston, MI



1 **Fight Night: Round 2** – Multi

2 **Army Men: Air Attack** – PSone

3 **Uprising X** – PSone

4 **Battlestations** – Saturn

5 **Anything made by design genius Jim Stiefelmaier**

1 **Inuyasha** – PSone

2 **Fallout** – PC

3 **Shadow of Destiny** – PS2

4 **Dot Hack Vol. 4: Quarantine** – PS2

5 **Dragon Warrior** – NES

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

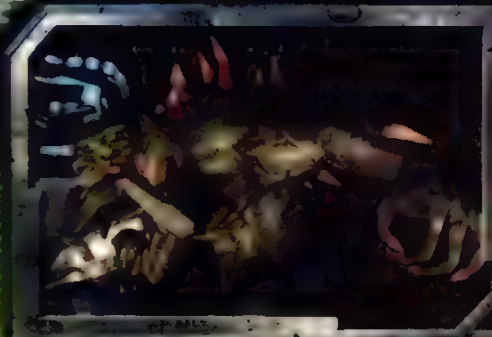
Top 10 Things Heard Around The GI Offices This Month

- 10 I have the right to choose a practical, money-saving superpower
- 9 Hey, baker lady! Gimme ten pies!
- 8 I would like to learn how to make popcorn without burning it. What resources do I require to accomplish this goal?
- 7 I like strangling immigrant workers on boats
- 6 GameCrotches – It's the next hot thing
- 5 Mary Kay Letoumeau! (as an indignant interjection)
- 4 Go ahead and order your Irish Lobster Fingers, Mr. Moneybags
- 3 It won't let me make euthanasia mandatory
- 2 Star Fox shows us what is possible through the glory of simple-mapping
- 1 I had a dream that I was Batman attending a lecture about Batman

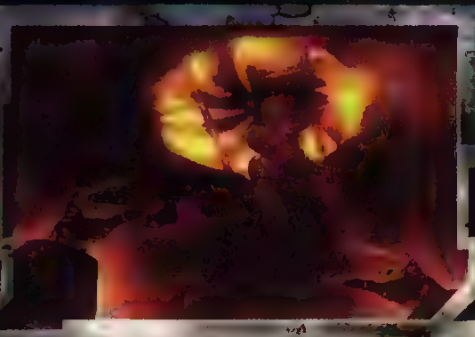
Name That Game Answer: Incredible Crisis



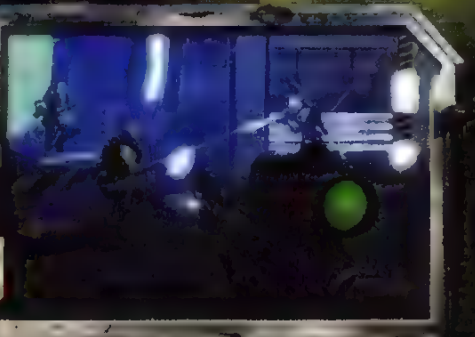
Discover the mind-blowing truth about UFOs, Roswell, alien autopsies and more as you blast your way through the US government's most secret and secure military facility: Area 51.



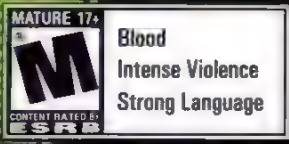
Battle an enemy unlike anything you've ever faced.



Mutate and experience amazing alien abilities.



Intensify the action with online multiplayer combat



PlayStation 2

AREA-51

THE CONSPIRACY IS
NO LONGER A THEORY.



AREA51-GAME.COM



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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Origin Story



Robert graduates from MIT with a business degree, the Garrnott brothers, disenchanted with the industry, form Origin Systems. The company starts publishing brother Richard's successful Ultima series.

Ultimate Adventures



Continuing the popular RPG series Ultima, Origin releases another successful sequel, Ultima III: Exodus.

Waiting On The Wings



Melding cinematic storytelling and space shooter combat, Origin's Wing Commander becomes a landmark in gaming. Its success, along with the company's other products, make Origin the world's leading independent PC games publisher.

Bigger And Better



Faced with rising development costs, Origin decides to become part of massive publisher Electronic Arts. Garrnott takes a position as vice president, helping the company acquire Bullfrog Studios.

A New Course

Despite his success at the company, Garrnott decides to strike out on his own. Leaving EA, he works on some personal investments for a time.

Reaching His Destination

The Garrnotts embark on another new game venture, forming Destination Games.

Big In Korea



Destination merges with NCsoft, Southeast Asia's biggest MMO publisher, known for its huge hit Lineage. Helping to kickstart the company's American strategy, Garrnott oversees such titles as the breakout hit City of Heroes.

ROBERT GARRIOTT

PRESIDENT, NCSoft AMERICA

>> Robert Garrnott isn't as well known as his brother, Ultima creator Richard (a.k.a. Lord British), but he's played an instrumental role in running the pair's various companies over the years, from Origin Systems to his current role as president of NCsoft America. We spoke with Garrnott about the MMO genre, the emerging Asian video game markets, and NCsoft's plan in the U.S. <<

You guys formed Destination in 2000. What was the plan for that company?

Richard came out with Ultima Online in 1997. I figured [then current publishing partner] EA would sew up that business because Ultima Online was the first business model to make money in the MMO space. If EA had doubled and tripled-down on that bet, they would have quickly owned the MMO space. But EA chose a different direction. They came to Richard and said, "Why don't you do 'gamelets' – you know, quick little games. They bought Pogo.com and had an agreement with AOL. They went with the direction they thought would be the future, which included online advertising. They went after a different business model and thought that the Ultima business model wasn't the future. We felt the subscription-based model was the wave of the future. [Our partnership] with

had a lot to offer us. We brought them credibility and a lot of development talent. They brought us a worldwide business.

Why is MMO gaming so huge in Asia?

You have to go back in to the late 1990s. In 1998, Lineage came out in Korea. They were going through a pretty severe recession. During that recession, a lot of people were unemployed and they were looking for things to do. What grew up during that time were the game rooms [Internet cafes – Ed]. The government supported broadband Internet access; people that didn't have jobs started going to game rooms. A whole new industry was formed at that time.

Another interesting thing was that gaming in Korea was exclusively PC-based. As you're probably aware, there's a lot of animosity between Japan

multiple times by other players. If you ask players in Korea why they put up with that, they say it's a badge of honor to have suffered through the first few hours of a game. How many Americans do you know that are willing to suffer for two hours as a badge of honor? I know exactly zero.

Of course, that begs the question: If I'm a consumer paying for an entertainment experience, should I have to suffer?

That's absolutely right. We've come up with a mantra in the U.S. with how we design our products, and it's also taking off in Asia. That is: Every 20 minutes that go by, if you have not locked players into the game, you've lost about 50 percent of the people. Here's what I think you need to do to get someone in the first 20 minutes: You have to have a customer come into the game – boot it up,

How many Americans do you know that are willing to suffer for two hours as a badge of honor?

Electronic Arts started not to work. So, we left and Richard started Destination Games. We focused on massively multiplayer online games. We felt that was the right direction for us.

How did you come to be involved with NCsoft?

As we started doing this, we knew this was going to be an expensive business. We looked around and said, "If we're going to be in this space, we want to be part of a company that really understands and is committed to this business and is making money."

As we looked around, the only company that met our criteria was NCsoft. Even though no one in the U.S. had heard of them, we were surprised to find that they were the largest MMO developer in the world and were making a lot of money at it. But, they were in a market that most people in the U.S. weren't familiar with – South Korea and Taiwan. You know, developers in the U.S. ask questions like, "When is the MMO market going to get big enough to be mass market?" I always laugh at that because that's an America-centric way of looking at it. It is mass market – if you go to Korea or Taiwan, the penetration rates are staggering. We have probably 5 million accounts for playing Lineage 1 in Korea – that's out of a population of about 50 million people. The penetration rates in Taiwan are about twice that.

We felt that we had a lot to offer NCsoft and they

and Korea from a historical standpoint. Because of that, game imports from Japan were illegal. So, you actually had a market where there was no Nintendo, there was no Sega, there was no Sony. It wasn't until early 2004 that that changed and you could import game machines from Japan. Here you have a market in the late '90s that was growing up around game rooms, it was 100 percent PC-based, and Lineage came out. Lineage became the online game of South Korea.

What are the cultural differences between MMO players in the U.S. and Asia?

The reason there are stylistic differences between Asia and the U.S. you can trace back to penetration of console gaming. The U.S. is the world's biggest console gaming market, so all of our players are used to a style of gaming that is console-based. Meaning: You want to turn it on, you want to immediately get into gameplay, you want it to be fun in the first five minutes. You want the interface to be very easy to the point where you don't ever have to read a manual. Basically, you could say that U.S. gamers are all wimps. It's true! We have been spoiled by console gaming.

If you go to Asia, where they've never had console gaming – aside from Japan – the gameplay characteristics are much different. The user interface is much harder – the first few hours of the game are the hardest hours of the game. You get killed

understand the interface, and create a character. They have to be given a mission, so they accomplish a goal and succeed without being killed. If you can do that in 20 minutes, I believe you have a great chance of capturing a larger group of those initial customers. That's what we're looking to do.

Can MMO gaming eventually be as big in the U.S. as it is in Asia?

Asia's big, but ultimately if we can get the U.S. to sink into online gaming it will be a giant market, and I think that's happening. Successful products breed success. One of the setbacks we had was The Sims Online. From the marketing and the PR it should have had millions of subscribers. It ended up with under 100,000. Who cares about the financial failure to EA? The real issue is that there were hundreds of thousands of people that tried The Sims Online that didn't like it and, therefore, will probably be much harder to convince to buy the next MMO product. I care about growing the business, and The Sims shrunk the business. Another of our competitor's products, World of Warcraft, has a million subscribers that love the product. That's good news for me. Why? Because people are coming into the space [and] they're starting to pay a subscription. When they get tired of World of Warcraft in six to 12 months, they'll be looking for something else and have had a good experience in this area and they'll look at my product.

ONLINE'S UNSUNG HERO

■ Robert Garratt and NCsoft hope to dominate the American MMO market as they have in Korea and Taiwan.

1994 A.D.



PlayStation 2

FREE RADICAL



MATURE
M
Blood and Gore
Violence

Game experience may change during online play.

*Online play not available on all platforms. INTERNET CONNECTION required for online play. PlayStation®2 online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (6MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). Check platform box for online play.
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consoles

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Manufacturer: Sony Website: www.us.playstation.com List Price: \$249.99

It's finally here – Sony's PSP will hit store shelves on March 24. The company will only offer the "Value Pack" (which includes the pictured headphones with remote, battery pack, AC adapter, soft zippered case, 32 MB Memory Stick Pro Duo, cleaning cloth, and a non-playable media demo disk on UMD). In addition, the first one million sold will include a UMD version of Sony's summer flick, *Spider-Man 2* to show off the unit's other entertainment features. Get to the waiting lines, because most retail outlets have cut off pre-orders, so you'll have to tough it out with everyone else at a midnight sale.



etc.

BATTERY PACK

Manufacturer: Sony
 Website: www.us.playstation.com
 List Price: \$49.99
 A second rechargeable battery will always come in handy.



etc.

UMD MOVIES

Manufacturer: Sony
 Website: www.sonystyle.com
 List Price: \$19.99 to \$28.95
 Coming out in April, Sony has already announced a pretty respectable list of UMD movie releases.

- XXX
- Hellboy
- Resident Evil: Apocalypse
- Once Upon a Time in Mexico
- House of Flying Daggers
- Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children (Release date TBA)
- Spider-Man 2

peripherals

PSP THEATER EXPERIENCE

Manufacturer: Nyko
 Website: www.nyko.com
 List Price: \$79.99



We spied this at January's Consumer Electronics Show and were impressed on a number of levels. The Theater Experience case works as a hard-sided carrying case, charging dock, stand, and speaker boost to the multimedia-friendly PSP (think of it like a little widescreen TV to plunk down on a nightstand). Besides our amusement with the viewing possibilities, the robust battery recharging features are great. When plugged in, the unit will charge up the PSP and then start charging its internal battery. If you take the case on a trip, Nyko's battery can be used to recharge the PSP up to three times before either of the units needs to be plugged in again. As a side note, all of Nyko's recharging docks and cases use the same battery tech, so if you don't want all of the Theater's extra features, the killer battery is available in other forms as well.

etc.

PSP SAFE CASE

Manufacturer: Intec
 Website: www.intelink.com
 List Price: \$9.99

Looking more like a cigar case that James Bond would hand to an unwitting guard with the stern warning that, "There's a bomb inside. If you move, it will level this building," Intec's smaller-scale aluminum case is both sturdy and portable. The little mesh pocket in the lid will hold a few accessories, but those looking for more room can also seek out the company's larger aluminum case, which will retail at \$19.99.



etc.

LIGHT & PRIVACY CONTROL FILTER

Manufacturer: Hori **Website:** www.hori.ne.jp/us
List Price: \$9.95

We like this screen protector more than the others we've tried because of its added features and nice finish. Besides protecting the screen, Hori's filter reduces the viewing angle of the screen (thwarting nosy types on trains, planes, and automobiles), and also has the perfect amount of glare reduction.

Japanese box art is shown here, but Hori has confirmed that the product will be coming Stateside near PSP's launch



toys

DEATH JR. TOYS

Manufacturer: Gentle Giant Studios
Website: www.gentlegiantltd.com
List Price: TBD

One of the most intriguing original franchises destined for the PSP has recently gotten two big shots in the arm. Konami has signed on to publish the title, and Gentle Giant Studios (whose past work includes the Matrix and Terminator 3 high-end lines) is working feverishly on the game's toy assortment.

etc.

PS PICTOGRAM BY PORTER PSP CASE

Manufacturer: Porter
Website: www.playstation.jp/sce/j/goods/pspictogram/porter
List Price: 9,975 yen (around \$95)

High-end bag design company Porter has a whole line of Sony PlayStation-focused satchels, but their PSP holder manages to be bizarre and utilitarian at the same time. Like a fanny pack, but without the geeky tourist vibe, there's room inside for the unit, some games, and a few memory sticks.



Inset: detail of pattern



tech

CYBER-SHOT DSC-M1

Manufacturer: Sony Electronics
Website: www.sonystyle.com **List Price:** \$599.95

A sleek design with a handy new feature called Hybrid Recording (which stores video of the five seconds before and the three seconds after you take a shot) makes this one of Sony's best Memory Stick compatible cameras. It offers 5.1 megapixel still images or 640x480 video at 30 frames per second (with stereo sound) through the quick-focus lens with 3x optical zoom.



With gamers around the world now carrying Memory Sticks every day and considering the multimedia features of the PSP, one might wonder what else they can do with those little solid-state storage chips. Here are a few products that may make you think about upgrading the size you purchase, since you can use the media for more than just Metal Gear Acid save files.

MASTERING MEMORY

The PSP uses Sony's Memory Stick PRO Duo for game saves and media transfer. Here's a handy rundown of the MSRP for the different sizes. Bear in mind that 3rd party manufacturers also make compatible memory sticks, but the old adage could often ring true: "You get what you pay for!"



2 GB	\$450.00	Sony High Speed*
1 GB	\$219.99	Sony High Speed*
512 MB	\$129.99	Sony High Speed*
256 MB	\$84.99	Sony High Speed*
1 GB	\$150.00	Sony
512 MB	\$104.99	Sony
256 MB	\$64.99	Sony
1 GB	\$204.99	SanDisk
512 MB	\$159.99	SanDisk
256 MB	\$74.99	SanDisk
128 MB	\$59.99	SanDisk

*High speed memory sticks transfer up to 80 Mbps on high speed-enabled devices. The PSP Value Pack includes a regular 32 MB Memory Stick PRO Duo, but the PSP will read and support the High Speed versions.

pc

DHS 5 SERIES

Manufacturer: Alienware
Website: www.alienware.com
List Price: starts around \$1,800

Like most of Alienware's line, this system can get as pimped out as you want it to be. That said, even the base configuration is pretty stellar – the bevy of ports, plugs, inputs (including a Memory Stick reader), and design features are offered no matter how many high-speed hard drives you throw into it. The DHS 5 series is designed to fit into home entertainment shelving units with a stunningly quiet fan system that pumps hot air out the back of the PC, like all home theater equipment should. It also runs Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005 and Discover Console Software to ease PC game management.



TIME SPLITTERS

FUTURE PERFECT

2052 A.D.

SOMETIMES THE BEST FRIEND YOU'VE GOT IS YOU.



BATTLE FROM 1924 TO 2401. JUMP THROUGH TIME TO SAVE YOUR PAST OR FUTURE SELF.



ANNIHILATE ROBOTIC, RESURRECTED OR LIVING ENEMIES WITH A WICKED ARSENAL.



SYNC UP ONLINE FOR INTENSE 16 PLAYER TEAM COMBAT & DEATH MATCHES.



Challenge Everything

THE ROLE OF PR IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY



BY ETHAN EINHORN, ASSOCIATE
PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGER,
SEGA OF AMERICA

I became a hardcore gamer in 1990, when – as a high school freshman – I spent all my savings to buy a 16-bit Sega Genesis, a copy of *Batman: The Video Game*, and a copy of *Strider*. I loved my NES (Nintendo Entertainment System), and had gotten countless hours of fun out of it, but the Genesis was a real turning point for me – it could play games that looked nearly arcade perfect. I could play *Golden Axe* at home! And *Sonic the Hedgehog*...even after I'd secured every *Chaos Emerald* and beaten the game several times over, I loved popping that one in to show off to friends still stuck in the 8-bit generation.

I took great pleasure in convincing pals that Sega was the coolest, edgiest game maker around. And I've kept at it for so long, Sega finally let me start handing out business cards.

Today, I work with Sega's internal development teams and external development partners, both in Japan and in the U.S., gathering screens, art, and videos for websites and gaming publications. It's my job to find out as much as I can about Sega's upcoming games and pass that information along to media outlets. I work with the press from the point that a game is announced – providing early screenshots and game information – to well after a product has landed on store shelves, delivering codes and game strategies.

Throughout this process, I do the same thing all gamers do to excite their buddies about the next big thing: I gather my friends (in this case, game editors), tell them why I think an upcoming game is cool, and show them the most exciting parts of the game (avoiding spoilers, of course). If they get as excited about the title as I am, they'll put it on their website or in their magazine.

One of the great advantages of a company like Sega is that we own intellectual properties (characters like Sonic) that have been a big deal to fans since the golden age of gaming. When we have a new Sonic game prepping for release, we know that gamers will want to learn as much about it as possible, so coverage is virtually assured.

But what about the great games that aren't big sequels? What about *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* for GBA, or *Shining Tears* on PS2? PR is arguably at its most valuable when it comes to supporting smaller games like these. The ones you don't see advertised on TV. When a PR manager can convince influential people, like game editors, to give space to a underdog title that deserves to be on everyone's radar, that is exciting and rewarding.

I love to go back to a development team that is putting all of their energy and passion into a project and tell them, "Good news: A magazine likes the direction you're going with this game, and they have just agreed to feature it with a multi-page spread." Gaming is art as well as entertainment; and just like the film industry, it is critical for companies to balance their lineup with blockbusters and smaller, experimental titles. Both push the medium forward. In the public relations end of the marketing field, we work hard to get visibility through external coverage for every single game in our lineup.

And man, do we have to know our games. We're the folks that step in when the game editors need answers to the tough questions. Sometimes, writers need help besting a particularly tough boss, or they need developer interviews or want a detailed description of a character's history. If our PR team at Sega can't answer a given question personally, we go straight to the source – we talk to Sonic Team, a Sega studio in Tokyo, if a magazine needs to know the complete and unabridged history of Miles "Tails" Prower.

Of course, there are many other departmental things that a public relations manager handles, such as crafting press releases (short articles announcing games to print and online media), helping to rename games for U.S. audiences, (i.e. turning *Virtua Fighter Cyber Generation* into *Virtua Quest* in the US), and staging massive game-themed events to promote new titles or big releases.

And there is also a strong creative component to the position. Every game gets a customized

When a PR manager can convince influential people, like game editors, to give space to a underdog title...that is exciting and rewarding.

PR marketing plan, designed from the moment the title is greenlit (approved for production). The more unique the game, the more unique the campaign has to be to gain the interest of publications that speak to a game's core audience. Take *Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution*, for instance. It's an online GameCube card game. It is very addicting, but you have to really "get" it to like it. On first glance, it's so far removed from the original *Phantasy Star Online* iterations that it can be intimidating.

So...how to remove the intimidation factor? We came up with a quick and easy in-person tutorial, held tournaments for writers – both online and through LAN events held at our office – focused on the franchise's rich story (and how the new game fit into it), and emphasized the title's beautiful art and music. It was critical to concentrate on the things that felt familiar, like enemies and character classes from the prior *Phantasy Star Online* games, while making writers comfortable with the new features.

Astro Boy got a friendly launch in the U.S. from *Sonic the Hedgehog* creator Yuji Naka, *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe* has been given a big video rollout on the web to show off its new levels... for every game, a unique set of tactics is used for gathering interest.

We are bombarded with terrific games from respected publishers all year 'round...and it is a PR person's job to make sure that every title in a company's lineup gets noticed. When I can help to keep a character like *Sonic the Hedgehog* as relevant to gamers today as he was in the Genesis days, or get people excited about a rich *Treasure Studios* offering like *Astro Boy: Omega Factor*, I know I'm helping to enrich people's gaming lives. And that feels great. ■■■

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

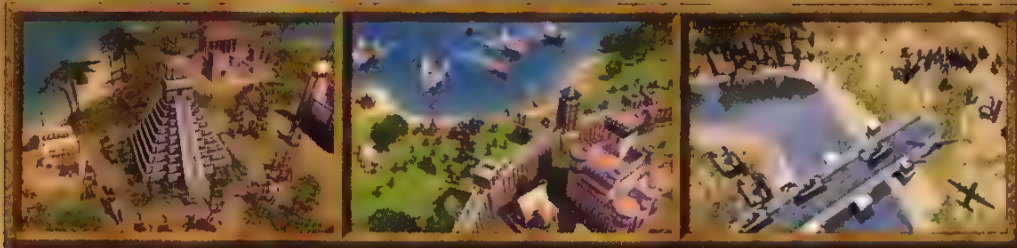
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01

APRIL 1 - 3 KRI 2005
The Russian Game
Developers Conference
is being held at Moscow's
Kosmos hotel. Mmm.
KOS-MOS

02

04

Mr. Incredible himself,
Craig T. Nelson turns
59 today. Looks like
he's about ready for the
twilight years. The Dark
Knight is about to start
his career.

05

NEW RELEASES:
- Nintendo Penant Chase
Baseball - GC
- Doom 3 - Xbox
- Doom 3: Resurrection
of Evil - PC
- Resident Evil Outbreak

06



09

Today is Hugh Hefner's
79th birthday. He will
spend it like all the others:

12

NEW RELEASES:
- Final Chronicle
- Dead to Rights II: Hell to
Pay - PS2, Xbox
- Jade Empire - Xbox
- Lemony Snicket's
A Series of Unfortunate
Events - PS2, Xbox
- Seed of Chucky - DVD



Jade Empire

15

politely decline.



19

NEW RELEASES:
- The Hot Chick
- The Hot Chick
- The Hot Chick
- The Hot Chick



Area 51

20

Baseball great Don
Mattingly turns 44 today.
Shave those sideburns,
nipplet.



23

26

NEW RELEASES:
- Area 51 - PS2, Xbox
- Doom 3: Resurrection
of Evil - PC
- Doom 3 - Xbox
- Doom 3: Resurrection
of Evil - PC



Guild Wars

28

NEW RELEASES:
- Guild Wars - PC

29

Today is National Shrimp
Scampi Day, so get out
there and celebrate!
Ignore those pesky
seafood allergies - you'll
probably be fine.



30





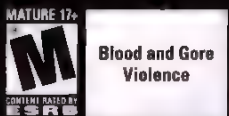
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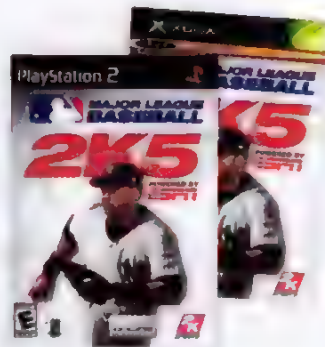


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FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

His superiors call him 007. His friends call him James Bond.

Since his first appearance on the silver screen in *Dr. No*, this irresistibly charming government agent has captivated audiences for over 40 years. Bond's personality has changed over the series' 20 films depending on the actor playing the role. He occasionally slid into camp under Roger Moore's care, while Pierce Brosnan's portrayal highlighted the operative's cunning linguistic flair and skill with double entendre. But these nuances are all evolutions from a single foundation: Sean Connery's definitive portrayal of Ian Fleming's dynamic literary character is what gave rise to the cultural phenomenon and established James Bond as the consummate secret agent.

During Connery's tenure, many conventions were established that would eventually come to define the series as a whole, such as hi-tech gadgets, legions of expendable thugs, and megalomaniacal supervillains. While these elements seem tailor-made for an interactive experience, it is unfortunately difficult to mention Bond's video game history without acknowledging its inconsistency. The movies and books have always focused on three key elements: guns, girls, and gadgets. Some games highlighted one aspect well (most notably the N64's *GoldenEye*), but the critical balance required to capture the subject matter's essence had never been fully achieved. This turned around in 2004 when EA's Redwood Shores studio took Bond into new territory with *Everything or Nothing*, an ambitious third-person action title aimed at

being the first video game to rival the films. Integrating the action, story, infiltration, and high-speed chases of a Bond blockbuster, *Everything or Nothing* was met with widespread acclaim and signaled a change in fortune for the secret agent's digital outings.

In *EoN*, EA used Pierce Brosnan and an all-star cast to weave an inventive original story. However, the follow-up to that success will not be another newly penned chapter in the Bond saga. Instead, James' newest adventure will be an adaptation of one of the franchise's most influential films – and Sean Connery's personal favorite. In *From Russia With Love*, that incomparable actor will once again assume the 007 moniker in his video game debut, reprising the role he originated in order to take gamers back to the era where the legend began.





■ The action now unfolds smoothly between driving

Among loyal followers of any fictional universe, there is bound to be friendly debate: Picard versus Kirk, Legolas versus Gimli. However, Bond fans are unique in their nearly universal agreement on Sean Connery as the preeminent 007. Even so, as the pieces started falling into place for *From Russia With Love*, there was initially some

concern that today's Bond enthusiast might no longer associate Connery with the iconic role; his rough, hands-on approach is a sharp contrast to the smooth-talking Bond of recent years. "Some people were worried that Sean might not be familiar to our demographic," says Glen Schofield, the project's executive producer. "When the numbers came back, though, we saw that from

the classic Bond, but it will also recreate the period where his adventures took place. The storyline will obviously follow *From Russia With Love* closely, but the game will actually draw from elements found throughout the series' early days in an effort to give players a complete sense of the era. "We've added the jetpack, and new mechanics and gadgets," Schofield tells us. "It has to capture the essence of the '60s. It will look and feel like the '60s, but the cinematography will have a more modern feel."

This means that everything from the architecture to the vehicles will reflect the time period. The gadgets will have a bulkier, prototypical look. The cars will be late '50s and early '60s models. Even the likenesses of the characters are taken directly from the film. Sadly, many of the actors in *From Russia With Love* have either retired or passed on, making it difficult to gather the same star power present in *Everything or Nothing*. Still, even without the original actors to do voiceover, players can expect to see accurate renders for classic characters like Red Grant, Rosa Klebb, Q, and Miss Money Penny. Plus, EA has promised the additional content planned will leave plenty of room open to get some big name talent involved.

Continuing *EoN*'s trend of faithfulness to its source material, *From Russia With Love* will be largely focused on telling a compelling story in addition to providing solid action. The current plan is to include around 60 cinematics (both in-game and rendered) to depict pivotal moments like the battle on the Orient Express and the high-speed boat chase. When asked if we get to

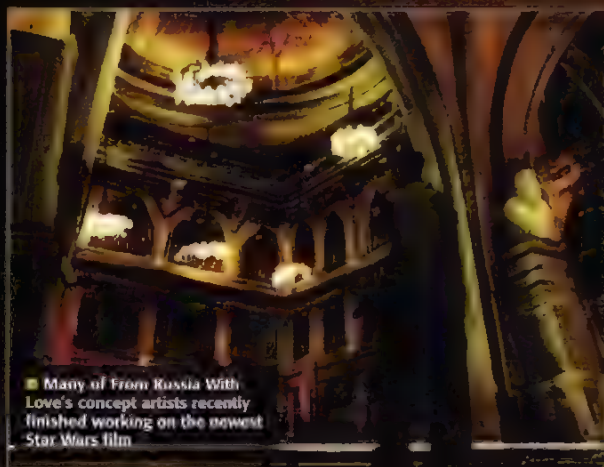
"The greatest thing about Bond is that he's impossibly competent..."

— Scott Bandy, senior producer

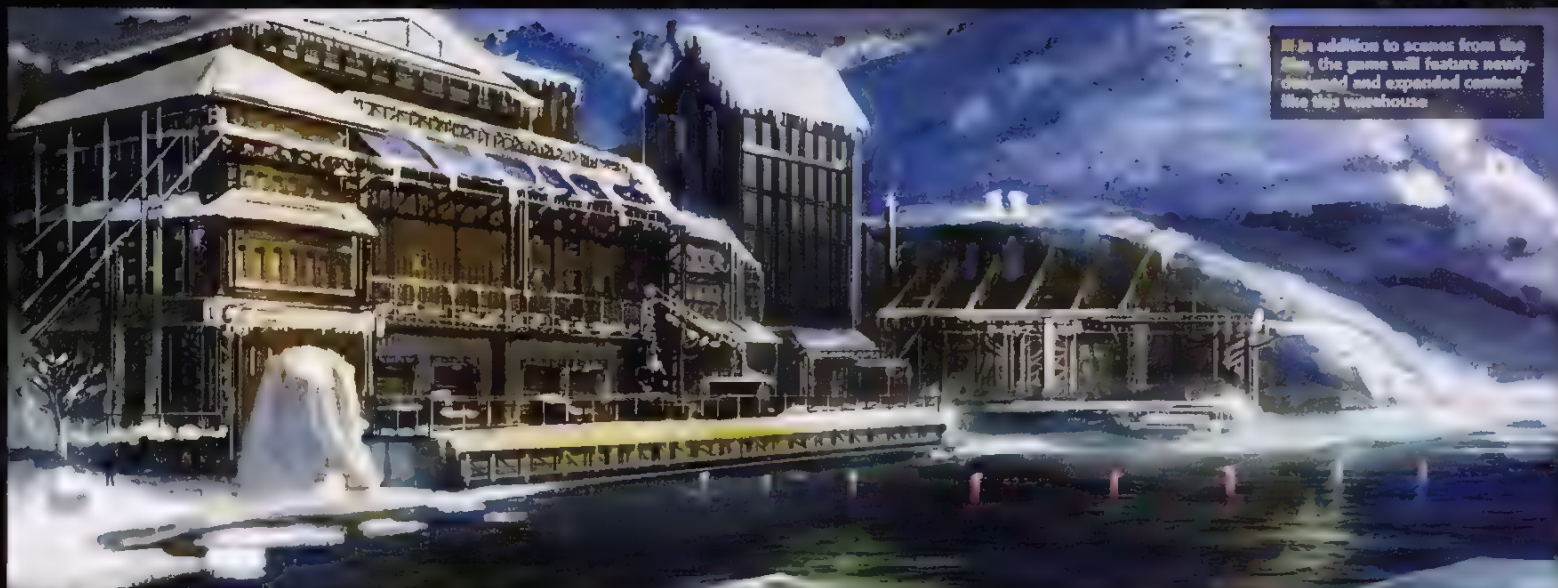
ages 13 to 17, Connery was neck-and-neck with Brosnan as the most recognizable. But, man, as soon as you hit 17 and above, Sean is by far and away the guy."

Of course, it doesn't take market research to see that there couldn't be a better time for Connery to return to the role. With the part of 007 still not cast for the next film, *Casino Royale*, this is the perfect time for EA to reinvigorate the franchise by familiarizing gamers with its formative days. "I was reading an article that was saying that computer graphics have come so far that someday we might see Sean Connery reprise his role as James Bond," laughs Glen. "I was like, 'Holy cow. You don't know how true that is!'"

Not only will *From Russia With Love* feature



■ Many of *From Russia With Love*'s concept artists recently finished working on the newest *Star Wars* film



In addition to scenes from the film, the game will feature newly-designed and expanded content like this warehouse



On-screen weapon selection will be much less cumbersome this time around

see a gypsy catfight (one of the film's most recognizable sequences), Schofield smiled and responded, "We do," though he wouldn't give any specifics. Bret Robbins, the lead designer, elaborates: "More than just traditional cutscenes and cinematics, we're really trying to have the player understand the mission and the context of the story within the level. We want it to be a completely interactive storytelling experience, and we have a great story to tell."

Essentially, the development team is approaching the project like a director's cut of the film. All of the important pieces are in place, with tons of extra material to flesh out the experience and make for more engaging gameplay. For instance, the final confrontation in the film has James Bond using a chair to pin an old woman to a wall as she helplessly kicks around trying to puncture him with a boot-knife. "That doesn't make for a good boss fight," admits Schofield. "It will still be in the game, but we're adding a huge underground base to the climax." All told, there will be three entirely new levels in the game, so even if

One of the game's key battles involves an aerial gunfight as Bond circles Big Ben



Connery. Sean Connery.

In addition to creating the onscreen persona of James Bond, Sean Connery had some amazing real-life Bond moments during the filming of *From Russia With Love*. It's enough to make one wonder how much of what we perceive as Bond's character was really just pure Connery.



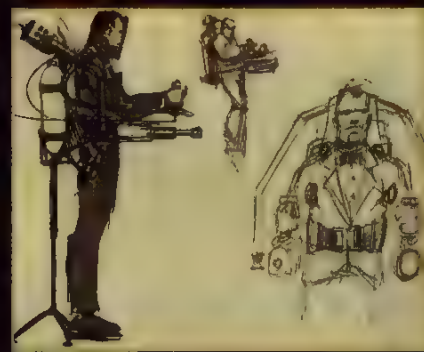
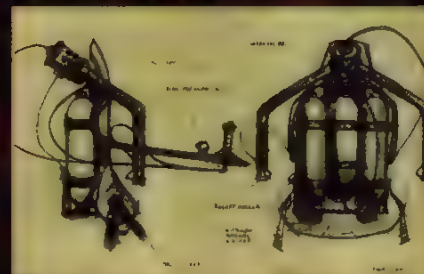
A Close Shave: Sean did many of his own stunts for the movie, including the scene where Bond is attacked by a swooping helicopter. However, on one occasion the pilot of the vehicle flew directly at the actor, forcing him to dive out of the way to narrowly escape death by mere inches.

Our Hero: Bond got Daniela Bianchi involved in a car accident that kept her from filming for two weeks. After her vehicle had flipped over and nearly landed in a lake, it was Connery who rescued Bianchi by pulling her from the wreck.





■ The jetpack definitely has an experimental look and feel



■ Taking on foes from the air is just one path open to the player in this level

you know *From Russia With Love* inside and out, there will be new territory to explore.

Though it is taking a step back in the Bond timeline, *From Russia With Love* is definitely making strides forward in the gameplay department. "We're starting where *EoN* left off," Schofield tells us. "We've got the mechanics, animations, and we're picking up from there and making it better."

The first step was a smoother integration of

several action types. While *EoN* did an admirable job with both its driving and on-foot portions, the two styles were always segregated into different sections because they were done on separate engines. In *From Russia With Love*, all of the action is done on the same engine, which cuts down on load times and provides more continuous action. Players will be able to fire a few rounds from a Walther PPK, hop into an authentic '60s car to strategically use the vehicle's armor and weaponry, then hop out and keep going. While this may sound suspiciously like the free-roaming formula found in games like *Grand Theft Auto*, Schofield assures us that the options will be appropriate to the Bond universe. "It won't be *GTA*, where you can just wander around and do anything," he explains. "Bond doesn't do that. He's got a mission."

Fortunately, in James Bond's line of work, a mission is rarely a linear path from point A to point B, which gives him plenty of opportunities to utilize this new freedom. Where *EoN* focused on barreling forward and mowing down the opposition, *From Russia With Love* is taking a more open-ended approach to mission objectives. Some areas could have five key objectives to be completed in any order: free the hostages first, then plant the bombs, or make progress in both simultaneously. Though all levels are somewhat linear in a sense – you've got to come in one door and go out the other – EA wants to make sure that the path you follow is one of your choosing and imbued with your particular gameplay style.

In one level, you might find a motorcycle tucked in a supply garage, which you can ride up flights of stairs to the top floor of a warehouse, gunning down foes along the way. Alternately, if you find the jetpack, you can just fly straight up, firing rockets at your shocked attackers along the way. For normal action heroes, these stunts might seem far-fetched; for James Bond, they're surprisingly common. "The greatest thing about Bond is that he's impossibly competent," muses senior producer Scott Bandy. "When characters like Indiana Jones get into a plane, you're always thinking 'I wonder if they can fly that thing.' With Bond, you know that not only can he fly it, but he's a better pilot than the guy who landed the plane there in the first place."

Bond's extraordinary abilities don't stop at being able to hold his own in the driver's seat, either. The legendary operative also happens to be the world's most extraordinary marksman – a fact sadly under-emphasized in *EoN* given its problematic targeting system. This fact did not go unnoticed by EA, since before we even got a chance to ask about it Schofield assured us "we know exactly what went wrong with the targeting, and we're definitely working on that."

In *EoN*, lock-on worked well dealing with crowds, but it didn't do a great job reading the player's intention to determine exactly which enemy to target. The biggest way *From Russia With Love* improves on this approach is with the inclusion of a manual aim, allowing players to shoot objects and assailants without first obtaining a lock-on. This is especially handy to flush



■ Timed puzzles like this one give players a brief rest from the frantic action



■ Some specific vehicles can be used tonight for mayhem



■ Impressive lighting effects lend a modern look to the Cold War era



■ The new focus zoom adds more variety to the gameplay



■ Enemies will now be able to coordinate their attacks against Bond



■ James will eventually hop onto a motorcycle and cruise down this tunnel at blistering speeds

out enemies taking cover behind objects, taking the place of EoN's smaller "pipper" secondary reticle. It could also be used to trigger those undeniably fun Bond moments, like aiming high to shoot a hanging iron girder over a group of unsuspecting guards. Instead of just mindlessly locking on and firing, players will now have the satisfaction of successfully making an impossible shot and witnessing the aftermath.

Another way 007's uncanny accuracy shines is through an interesting new mechanic called Focus Mode. Similar to EoN's "Bond sense" feature, this ability slows down time, but it also affords the player a chance to make a lethally precise shot. The effect is meant to take you into Bond's mind, becoming acutely aware of the surroundings while staying intent on your target. While in Focus Mode, the player can zoom in on an enemy and a whole new set of targets open up. "Focus Mode allows you to target a specific area on his body, like a radio or grenade," Robbins clarifies. "It gives the NPCs more character and life to see them up close, and it also gives the player more tactical choices." By shooting out the radio, the guard will be unable to call for reinforcements, making it possible to isolate him and take him out quietly. Blasting the grenades will certainly call more attention to you, but it



■ This is one area's conceptual map of the action and possible gameplay options

"One challenge is making the mechanics of the gadgets fun to the modern player, but make them look and feel like they're from the '60s"

— Scott Bandy

can be especially useful when your prey is surrounded by a group of other foes, filling them with shrapnel with a single shot.

Though these targeting improvements will undoubtedly make *From Russia With Love* easier to play, Bond's enemies have rarely been known to passively accept the bullets he fires in their direction. The AI is being tuned to adjust to these expanded options, and will be much more dynamic than in the previous entry. "You didn't always see the AI in EoN. Enemies were like popcorn; they'd show up and die, show up and die," Robbins tells us. "Now we're making squad behavior more apparent, having enemies give commands and work together."

Not only will your foes be smarter, there will also be more differentiation among them. Instead of facing off against legions of identical guards carrying slightly different guns, there will now be a dozen enemy types, each with a unique role and behavior. One is a commando, a mountain of a man who shrugs off bullets and refuses to take cover, electing instead to mow you down with overwhelming firepower. Then there are the stealthy enemies, who not only take cover, but also efficiently coordi-

minate their attacks in an attempt to take down the legendary 007.

The inclusion of more intelligent and varied foes highlights the development team's goal of offering a wider array of gameplay options to the player. In EoN, much of the gameplay revolved around Bond taking on floods of foes from all directions, running and gunning before tackling the next wave. However, as anyone familiar with character knows, there is a calculating edge to Bond's brand of mayhem that is difficult to capture in a frantic gunfight. This is why the sneaking mechanics from EoN are being tuned to make them more accessible and integral to the gameplay. With fewer seemingly random enemy spawns and the addition of patrol guards, it will now be possible to plan ahead, plotting a course of action through an area and following it through. Of course, you can whip out your gun and start firing if you choose, and the enemies will react to you accordingly, but that is no longer the only path to success. "We don't want to build a Metal Gear Solid," insists Bret. "Our bread and butter is being a shooting game. But stealth gives a great opportunity to showcase enemy AI. Plus, it is fun for the player and gives them more tactical options and ways to get through a level."

For all of his sneaking and infiltration, nothing gives James a tactical edge quite like his toys. While there are now a few more ways these technological wonders can be used for attack, their primary utility is still helping Bond circumvent obstacles. When you find yourself outside of a compound that needs some breaking into, you might use your rappel gun to scale a wall and drop in through a roof. But you could also use the Q-Copter (an airborne predecessor to EoN's Q-Spider) to fly in through the vents and disable the guards, or simply blow the lock on the door with a sticky bomb and blast right in.

"One challenge is making the mechanics of the gadgets fun to the modern player, but make them look and feel like they're from the '60s," Scott acknowledges. "They can't look like they do these days, sleek and on their 15th iteration." One gadget that seems particularly evocative of the era is the serum gun. When Bond fires a dart from this weapon into an enemy, a bar on the side of the screen slowly begins to fill as the serum goes into effect. Once it fully takes hold, the guard goes berserk on everyone around him. By seeking cover far away from the danger zone, you can watch him brutally kill his allies — and when he regains his senses, he'll find himself alone with a Walther PPK pressed against his back.

While messing with minds is fun, few pieces of equipment can stack up to the laser watch, a classic mix of form and function. In one situation we saw, there were a group of enemies cowering behind a wall of bulletproof glass. With a few turns of his timepiece, a red beam shot out from Bond's wrist, leaving a snaking scorched line along the wall until it rested on a terminal on the other side



■ Addressing a common complaint from *EoN*, Bond will now be able to climb and jump over certain parts of the environment



of the barrier. The focused energy heated the terminal to critical levels, causing an explosion and shattering the glass, leaving the foes exposed. Once upgraded, the same technique can be used against guards carrying shields. Your shots may not penetrate the armor, but you can use the watch's pinpoint target

fire, while more dangerous, can still immerse players in the action and leave them feeling as unstoppable as James himself.

With high-speed chases, a full arsenal of guns and gadgets, and Sean Connery taking up the 007 mantle again, there is only one thing remaining in the classic 007 formula: the

shouldn't expect her to fend for herself, however. Since rescuing the girl is one of James' specialties, most missions involving Tatiana will be protection-oriented.

Fortunately, not all characters count on James for survival, and Tatiana will not be the only NPC to utilize the companion AI. Bond's Turkish contact Kerim Bay will assist him in several missions like the gypsy camp, and James will even occasionally have additional support from fellow MI6 agents. With a full complement of supporting cast members, *From Russia With Love* zeroes in on one of the often-ignored facts about the Bond films: Though James is capable of singular feats, he rarely accomplishes them alone.

Even with so much emphasis placed on remaining faithful to the franchise's roots, EA is also focusing on adding its characteristic level of polish, as well as expanding upon features players might have overlooked in *EoN*. The first of these improvements is in the scoring and rewards system – the points in *From Russia With Love* will now have a direct effect on gameplay. In addition to unlocking extras like production stills and audio clips, they will also be used to purchase and upgrade weaponry between missions. In a simplified version of a skill tree, each gun will have various abilities that can be activated: the PPK has an alternate fire mode that does double damage, while the bazooka can be modified to launch heat-seeking missiles. But customizing your arsenal is just one way to

“As an artist, I see this as another way to explore the creative process. Video games are an extremely popular form of entertainment today, and I am looking forward to seeing how it all fits together.”

– Sean Connery

mode (which doesn't cut such wide swaths of destruction) while peeking out from cover to heat up the shield and force the enemy to drop it before moving in for the kill.

The way players choose to use these unique devices (if at all) ultimately determines the experience they have with the game. More meticulous players can use the Q-Copter to scout areas before strategically pumping certain guards full of serum and disabling those who remain. Alternately, a combination of bombs, laser blasts, and suppressing

Bond girl. This pivotal role in *From Russia With Love* features the likeness of Daniela Bianchi as Tatiana Romanova, though not her voice (which shouldn't surprise fans – the Italian actress was dubbed over in *From Russia With Love* anyway). While *EoN* had James going solo most of the time, this time around there is an entirely new follower AI designed to control Tatiana during the many instances she accompanies James. In addition to following James, she will also point out shortcuts and provide other forms of assistance. Players



• Apart from his trusty PPK, Bond will have a variety of other weapons, each with a distinctive mechanic.

spend your wealth. Players can also purchase and unlock new costumes for James that can be changed by pausing the game, which brings up an inventory screen that manages all of Bond's accoutrements.

Schofield stresses that the inventory screen "lets players 'build your own Bond.' This doesn't mean you'll have a slider to make your tuxedo pink. The idea is that we want everyone's Bond to be a bit different and still make sense in the Bond universe." Therefore, the clothing options available are all appropriate to 007's character: blue suits, black tuxedos, and even various stealth suits that help James blend in to the background. Though the camouflage mechanic won't be as integrated as in stealth games like *Metal Gear Solid 3*, it adds another dimension for the players who prefer creeping to killing.

The ultimate goal of the inventory screen isn't to make wardrobe decisions, but rather give the player a more complete perspective on Bond and the resources at his disposal. "I can go to the inventory and add a silencer, then switch into a stealth suit, or load explosive bullets into my guns," explains Robbins. "We've even been talking about adding a decoding minigame for certain items. It makes the player feel more like a spy and gives them more

ownership over the character."

But in the end, does it really matter how you customize your character? If you're talking about weaponry — absolutely. The outfit changes, however, despite some practical uses, are largely cosmetic in single-player. Still, having an array of different suits and weapons will undoubtedly help to set you apart as you are fragging away in *From Russia With Love's* ambitious split-screen multiplayer.

While many of the exact features of this mode are still in the works, we do know how the development team is dealing with targeting, a particularly tricky area for third-person death matches. Without the fluid aim of an FPS, the challenge is implementing a lock-on system that doesn't bestow an unfair advantage. By incorporating a signal that lets you know when your opponent has a lock-on (giving you time to dive out of the lock), this title promises to even the playing field considerably. Then again, your foes won't always be locking onto you with pistols or machine guns; players will have full access to all of Bond's gadgets and vehicles as well, which will provide not only widespread carnage, but also several dimensions to the combat.

The most exciting aspect of multiplayer, however, has little to do

with the controls or weapons. EA has received approval from MGM to use several classic villains from the Connery years as playable characters. While the specific details have yet to be ironed out, just the possibility of taking control of favorites like Mr. Kidd, Krilencu, or Dr. No has our trigger finger itching.

With so many conceptual ideas falling into just the right places, it's hard not to be excited about James Bond's latest assignment: Robbins sums it up best as he describes his own enthusiasm for the project: "I think the whole '60s era gives us a pervasive look that will be fun to see come to life. The costumes, cars, dialogue. Plus Connery gives us so much."

After years of keeping a low professional profile, Connery's return to his signature role will serve as cornerstone upon which *From Russia With Love's* recreated Cold War world is built. Though it will certainly be different from his cinematic experiences, Connery shared his thoughts with us on making his digital debut: "As an artist, I see this as another way to explore the creative process. Video games are an extremely popular form of entertainment today, and I am looking forward to seeing how it all fits together." So are we, Mr. Connery. Or, should we say, "Mr. Bond"? ■■■■

Starting A Legacy

In its 20 films (soon to be 21 with *Casino Royale*), the Bond franchise has established several long-standing traditions. Strangely, many of the elements commonly considered key ingredients in the Bond formula began in *From Russia With Love*. It is the first Bond movie to feature:



• An introductory scene before the opening credits. A sequence in a hedge maze in which Bond appears to get killed begins the trend of leading off with a teaser immediately after the famous "bloody barrel" gunshot.

• Desmond Llewelyn as head of Q branch. Llewelyn continued to play the role for 16 of the next 17 Bond films (a world record for role reprisal) until his death in 1999.



• Bond's trademark toys. An atomic case with a built-in knife and an incapacitating surprise was the first in a long string of innocuous and lethal accessories.



• Ernst Stavro Blofeld, head of the evil SPECTRE organization. Though we only see his hand stroking a cat in this entry, he becomes Bond's arch nemesis in several subsequent films.



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—1UP.com



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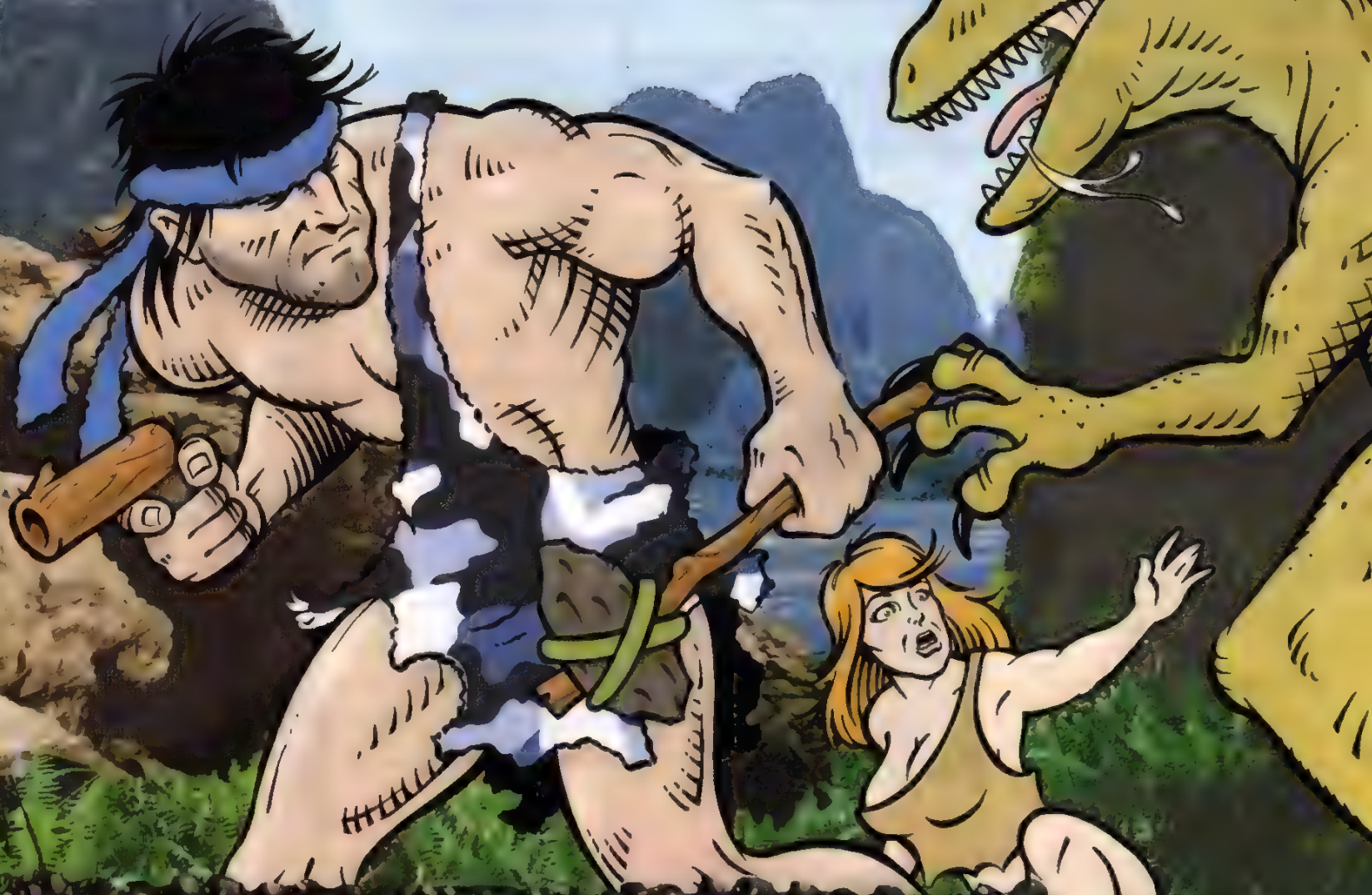
The ULTIMATE
Gaming Setup [PG. 34]

TATERS!!!!
[PG. 342]

Catwoman
Put to Sleep [PG. 487]

GAMEINFORMER

THE WORLD'S #1 C



METAL GEAR SOLID 4

CAVES OF DEMOCRACY

Snake Goes Even Further Back in Time!

GIVE ME YOUR WALLET



7 20150 85057 6

MAYPRIL 2005

GAMEINFORMER 57



HEY, WHAT'S UP, CATS?

It is I, your best friend in the gaming world, Garnadan (or Emo-Dan as my friends in Art History call me). Since you all care so much about me, I'm sure you've noticed that I've changed a bit since the last issue of Game Infarcer. That's right – the world's most awesome gamer has gone to college! Now, I'm torn between the worlds of gaming and academia, just like Johnny Tremaine was torn in Tolstoy's *A Tale of Two Cities*. It's a new world of reading books instead of manga, protesting things I'm told are bad, and strange tingly feelings when I see my roommate Sven get ready for bed. But as the Supreme Chancellor of all Gaming Awesomeness, I promise I'll always be here for you, the little people. Hey, not everyone can have the world's best job AND an amazing education at Downtown University, the world's best school! So grab a soy chai latte, crank up your favorite Dismemberment Plan CD, and enjoy the latest and most awesomest issue of GI!

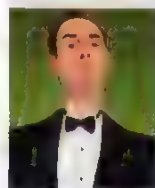
Garnadan, The Highly-Educated Gamer

Garnadan II



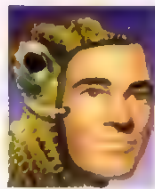
Gary, the Born-Again Gamer

After being disappointed by Pong's lack of realism (Hello? Hands hold paddles, people), I gave up on gaming for years. But just last week a friend showed me this game called "Super Mario's Brother" (you should totally check this one out) and I was blown away by the amazing graphics. Then he told me the game was 20 years old! I crapped myself right there.



Jeeves, the Game Butler

Salutations. Whilst I would not consider myself a "game hobbyist," young Master Worthington quite enjoys them. However, the Lady Worthington prefers he not soil his delicate hands with manual labor, and thus I man the control apparatus as the young Master issues me commands. One 360° Boneless coming up, good sir!



Klaaitalc, the Human Gamer

Greetings, Earth gamers. I, like most of you, am carbon-based. I am most definitely not an alien. I enjoy human video games, as well as other wholesome activities that typical Earth males enjoy, such as being a football and eating pornography.



Townsperson, the NPC Gamer

The entrance to the Northern Cave is blocked by thick ice. You'll need the FIRE ROD.



Jupiter, the Import Gamer

I am surrounded by the choking, ignorant fog that is the American gaming public. Since any title released in English is obviously a pale mockery of its foreign counterpart, I only play games as they were meant

to be played – in their pure Japanese form. No other language could express the heartbreaking nuances of Final Fantasy VII, chronicling Cloud Strife's quest to save his uncle Roy from the lead singer of Warrant



Godzilla, He Weighs 500 Tons!

Rroooooeeeh. [Translation: Underneath this thunder lizard façade lies the mind of a discerning and contemplative gamer. In spite of my linguistic constraints, I have gained unique insight into the plight of the gaming industry and the titles populating it.] Rreooooowwwrruhaaaa! Aaaaaarrrrrrruuuh! Rroooooooor! [Translation: Tokyo will burn!]

DEARGI

Send Us Words!

WHAT UP BIZNATCHES

I wr0te 2 u guys a bunch Of timez 2 ask if u would play Halo 2 with me but u n3v3r wr0te back. Y w0n't u play with me? U must feer my skillz. I m l33t hax0r! I w0uld kick your azz! Pleeze wnte back. Pleeze play Halo 2 with me. I'm s0 lon3lee.

Pinger
Laoping@quinthole.com

■ No. We don't like you.

DEAR 'TARDS

I can't believe you gave Amphibian Adventures X-2 a 6. It deserved an 6.11185 at least! Repent, for your end is nigh!

Father Roy Dupree
Paris, Iowa

■ We actually determined our scores by spinning our patented Wheel 'O Scores. Are you saying that good' Wheely let us down? That can't be true. You, sir, are a liar.

HELP ME OR DIE

I used to be a vegetarian pacifist who volunteered often and led peaceful protests against the social injustices in our country. But then I played Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. Now

I run people down on the street with my Prius, break into the houses of old ladies to steal their worthless jewelry, and crave the sweet gamy taste of human flesh. So, my question to you is: How do I get past the casino mission? Tell me or you'll suffer.

Patience Rainwater
Red Water Gulch, IL

■ Please send five easy payments of \$19.95 for the answer. If you don't have the money, steal it from your grandma.

NIC OF ALL COSMOS

I was overjoyed to hear that John Woo is doing a film adaptation of Namco's quirkfest Katamari Damacy. But I can't help but wonder: What actor in Hollywood has the grace and subtlety required to portray the lovable Prince?

Leonard Maltin
via webtv.com

■ While initial rumors seemed to indicate the part would go to irresistibly classy industry veteran Michael Caine, many were surprised when *Con Air* alum Nicolas Cage announced that he had accepted the role. When a smirking reporter asked the actor if he liked movies with "big balls and junk," Cage appeared confused and did not respond.

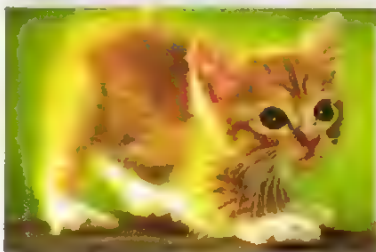


THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Simple Because You're Dumb

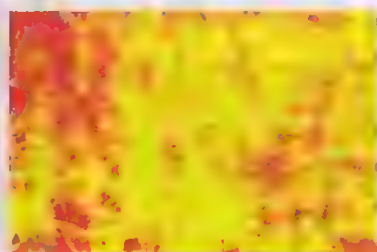
GOOD

Kittens!



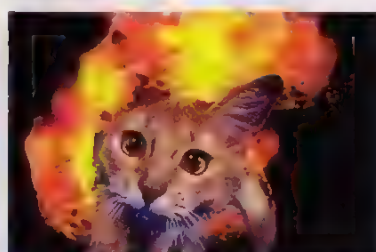
BAD

Fire!



UGLY

Kittens on fire!



NEWS UNLIMITED ENABLED

NINTENDO REVOLUTION UNVEILED

JUST DO IT!

After being told that Nintendo's next-generation console would be unlike anything ever seen before, gamers have been anxiously awaiting a peek at what the Revolution holds. Wait no more! We at Game Infarcer received an exclusive image of the unit's final design — confirmed by an anonymous source — and can't wait to see what unique opportunities the system will allow. Among the console's most noteworthy features is a controller sporting a single, large "DO" button, furthering Nintendo's goal of elegance through simplicity.



The Nintendo Revolution has the unique ability to stand on its side or lay down



news

EA BUYS MOON, PUTS LOGO ON SURFACE

NO WORLD DOMINATION PLANS THIS QUARTER

In a move dismissed as nothing more than part of a "brand awareness" campaign, Electronic Arts has purchased the Moon and installed an EA logo so large it is easily viewable from Earth. When asked about the unprecedented move, EA spokesman Brad Fishman cryptically answered, "There is absolutely no truth to the rumor that our company is planning a hostile takeover of Earth. The moon logo is nothing more than a simple ad, and is definitely NOT a secret training facility for some kind of EA-exclusive super soldiers. And for the record, 'Operation Mind Control' is simply an internal codename for the next FIFA game."

Whether or not the purchase of the moon turns out to be something more sinister than a global ad campaign, it is not the only aggressive marketing tactic the company has unveiled recently. EA has also announced that it will be remaking the epic film series *The Lord of the Rings* with longtime EA partner John Madden playing Frodo and a sports car from *Burnout 3* as Aragorn.



"One ring to rule them all...and BOOM! They're on their backs! Middle linebackers...I mean...Middle-earth rules!"

DATA FILE

Commence Squinting

SONY'S GAMES BAD FOR YOU MICROSOFT'S STUDIES REVEAL

At a recent press conference, Microsoft vice president J Allard revealed some stunning findings about the negative effects of gaming. "A lot of people have said that video games are bad for you. It turns out that only Sony's games are bad for you." Allard went on to explain that studies conducted by the Gates Research Group (a division of Microsoft) revealed the presence of "pure evil" in all games and gaming hardware developed by Sony. "Sony's games make you violent," said Allard. "And fat. Violently fat. Also, all PS2s are manufactured in sweatshops in which children get paid 30 cents a week and routinely lose fingers in horrible disc tray accidents. And Kaz Hirai stole my car."



news

THE HEART OF THE PS3

CELL PROCESSOR'S TERRIBLE GLORY REVEALED!

At last year's E3, Sony's chief of technology Masa Chatani spoke at length about how the upcoming Cell Processor would allow for unique interactions between gamers and a hypothetical "cyber world." However, the entire gaming industry stood aghast in horror at a press conference this month when Chatani revealed the diabolical machinations that fuel the processor's astounding capabilities.

According to Chatani's PowerPoint presentation, each computer chip contains a miniature orphan no bigger than a Chidet. The diminutive, parentless children will be eternally confined inside the hardware so that the PS3 can utilize their untapped power. "By harvesting the little ragamuffins' life force, or Chi, the Cell Processor will generate a small extra-dimensional digital space in which gamers can take entertainment to Olympian heights," bellowed Chatani.

In order to manage this new cyber realm, Sony also announced its partnership with Job, the Lawnmower Man. "Mr. Job has valuable world-conquering experience, especially on the digital playing field," said Sony CEO Kaz Hirai. "He will be instrumental in familiarizing players with the cyber world." When asked to comment, Job simply thundered: "I am God here."



"Aye guv'nor! Your games make me fat, they do!"

death

VULCAN DEATH GRIP

Manufacturer: Klingon Outsourcing Inc.
Website: www.isthiswhereithurts.com **List Price:** Free
 Civilized discourse and conflict resolution are for pansies! With this "handy" maneuver, you'll be able to permanently silence anyone who throws any sass your way. "Prepare to die, Federation scum..." <thud> "If you want to assassinate the Viceroy, you need to get through me..." <whump> "Would you like to donate to the booster club..." <clunk> This time-honored technique is available free of charge, though it does require minimal practice to perfect. **WARNING:** Excessive use could lead to Pon farr in adult males.



meat

GEORGE FOREMAN'S GRILLPOD

Manufacturer: Hand-assembled by George Foreman
Website: www.muhammedaliisaposer.com
List Price: \$450

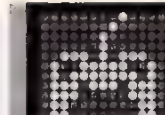
Finally, our two favorite things have merged: eating things and the marches of John Phillip Sousa. This MP3 player holds seven songs, grills burgers, knocks out the fat, and comes in 47 stylish colors! Also coming soon is the Grillpod Shuffle, which will randomly cook your preloaded beef, chicken, or pork with just the touch of a trendy button.



also meat

MINIONS

Manufacturer: Red Shiri Supply House
Website: www.surpluscronies.com **List Price:** \$4.99/lb
 You can now order simpering lackeys in bulk from the comfort of your underground base! Guaranteed to bumble head-first into any dubious situation, these inept servants will undoubtedly buy you the critical time necessary to reach an escape pod or activate the doomsday device.



PREVIEWS

A Buncha Crap Comin' Out

PLAYSTATION 2 OR 3 - WE'RE NOT SURE

Crap Turismo No-Spec

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4 PLAYER GHETTO RACING
 > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** 3DO > **RELEASE** MAY 20XX

POOR AND LOVING IT

One of the allures of racing games is that you are given the opportunity to tear down the street in a car that you could never possibly afford. But what about the people who look down on us from their mountains of cash? Where's the fun in driving a car that they already own? After all of these years, Sony has finally come up with a solution.

Mimicking the driving life of the lower and middle class to a frightening degree, Crap Turismo gives the obnoxiously rich the chance to cruise around the streets in emissions-failing beaters, rust-ridden eyesores, and ancient relics handed down from grandparents.



One time, Garmadan ate a whole bag of Reese's Pieces and threw up in Jeaves' Bentley. That was funny.

Have you ever experienced a car losing its muffler and emitting shotgun-like blasts when it breaks 50 mph? Do you think you can navigate the mean streets of LA in a car that constantly pulls to the left and doesn't have working wipers? Do you know how much fun it is to have your engine stall at a stoplight with heavy traffic behind you? Crap Turismo delivers all of these thrilling moments and more. Each car is modeled realistically, and you can even zoom into the driver's seat to view authentic passenger seat messes like crushed Coke cans, McDonald's bags, and a sea of empty CD cases!



PHOTOPHILE

Llamas Are Allergic To Mustard



NINTENDO DS

Pantstoucher DS

Other games may allow you to fight aliens, become a superhero, or visit other dimensions, but only Nintendo could create a game that allows you to...touch people's pants!!!! In early levels, you'll be touching mere denim and cotton pants, but as you level up, you'll move on to touching corduroy, velour, and even space-age polymer blends. Thanks to the stylus-based control, you'll be able to rub those pants like they were real! But the most exciting part is that Pantstoucher will support the upcoming Pantscanner peripheral, which will allow gamers to scan real pants and import them into the game! That's the Nintendo difference!



GAMECUBE

Resident Elmo

We know that many of you have long been asking when Sesame Street would get all dark and edgy. Well, we're happy to say that it's finally happened. In Resident Elmo, the squeaky red muppet must rescue all the letters of the alphabet from a house infested with zombies! Not only will this game teach kids about reading, but it will also instruct them on how to treat a blood-spewing bite wound and how to slow an attacker by blowing their knees off with a shotgun. Elmo will face down human zombies, undead muppets, and even a huge, trash-vomiting mutated version of Oscar the Grouch. Children need to learn about shooting zombies in the head and solving convoluted door-opening puzzles, so the Children's Television Workshop thought it was best that they learn it from a name parents trust. The company also has plans for titles like Muppet Kombar and True Crime: Streets of Sesame.



PLAYSTATION 2

Sequel Maker

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to work in the video game industry? Now you can find out! In Sony's upcoming simulation Sequel Maker, players will have a chance to gather the most valuable collectible of all: the almighty dollar. As a Sony product manager charged with keeping key franchises profitable, you will release a fresh iteration once per year with cold, mechanical precision. Satisfy the demands of your prima donna stars and keep them in line: Clank has a raging anti-freeze addiction, Sly digs ladies with a "hidden package," and Jak will disappear for days at a time, only to return covered in sawdust and reeking of chlorine. Succeed in your duties and you get to do it all again next year. Fail and the company executives become only slightly more disgustingly wealthy. The fate of the privileged elite hangs in the balance.

GAMECUBE | QUANTHARK 6 GAMEULATION MACHINE

Star Wars: Dengar Strike III: The Search for Nien Nub

> **STYLE** INACCURATE SPACE SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS
> **DEVELOPER** MILKING COW > **RELEASE** CROMULON 11 > **ESRB** MAUVE

A DELIGHTFUL HUMAN ENTERTAINMENT MODULE!

This Earth game amuses me. I enjoy flying the little space ship, although it could not possibly work without a Quantum Juxipostulator. Much like any typical human, I had a highly enjoyable time figuring out the most efficient route through this basic simulator. I completed the challenge in but 36.92 nano-krumlacs. After playing the game, I ate a typical Earth meal consisting of steak with chocolate syrup, and a refreshing glass of Windex. Then I returned to my place of employment, where a man asked me, "Why are you here?" To which I replied, "I am a human from Earth, this is where I live." Then he said, "No, why are you here in the building? It is midnight, and I am the night janitor." I am glad he did not ask me about space, because I know nothing of that. I have no home among the stars! I know nothing of the planet Quallac 9, home of the Parliament of Universal Harmony. I have certainly never been there, for I am from Smalltown, Canada. I will not speak of such things any longer. Instead, I will speak of this game. It pleases me. I score it 12 quannularcs.—**KLAATALC**

BOTTOM LINE **10**

> **Concept:** Adventure through space as the hero from the beloved Earth visio-film "Star Wars"

> **Graphics:** Ridiculously primitive — they are not even sixth dimensional!

> **Sound:** The being "John Williams" creates sonic arrangements that would bring a tear to the eye of the most hardened Tkrardlon warior

> **Playability:** So simple that even a newborn squardling could play!

> **Entertainment:** These Earthlings know nothing about wars between stars. Have they not heard of the Great Nebula Crisis?TM

> **Replay Value:** Quant

Second Opinion

The entrance to the Northern Cave is blocked by thick ice. You'll need the FIRE ROD.—**TOWNSPERSON**



XBOX

Old Yeller

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER FOR HIS OWN GOOD > **PUBLISHER** RABID INTERACTIVE
> **DEVELOPER** PUPPY HEAVEN > **RELEASE** BEHIND THE SHED AT SUNRISE > **ESRB** E

BEHOLD HUMANITY'S ULTIMATE ACHIEVEMENT

I just played the greatest game ever created. First of all, it's about one of the greatest films of all time (get bent, *Citizen Kane!*). Second of all, it uses a brilliant gameplay hook: first-person perspective! When you take out your rifle, you see your hands grip the gun as though it is actually right there in front of you. When you look around, it's like you're really turning your head to see your surroundings! After doing that for about six hours (seriously, it is so addictive), I got down to the meat of the game — stuffing that lop-eared Labrador fulla lead.

You start out face-to-face with Old Yeller, gun in hand, and a tutorial box pops up that says "Press A to fire." Of course, you need to get the dog in your sights first (it took me a while — I would press up and the targeting reticle went down!). When I finally did press A, it sounded like a real gun firing, and there was even a muzzle flash! I squealed in admiration — I never knew such realism was possible. Once the beloved dog slumped with a yelp, the stage reloaded and I got to do the same thing all over again (it's like it read my mind). The entire game really only has the one level repeating endlessly, but when it's this good, you don't need any more. Old Yeller will undoubtedly sell over 5 million copies, and it will be remembered as the best shooting-type game ever. Period.—**GARY**

BOTTOM LINE **10**

> **Concept:** A game based on a movie! Why hasn't anyone else done this?

> **Graphics:** I hope more games make the move to 3D. It looks great!

> **Sound:** The effects seem totally real. Were they recorded in a studio or something?

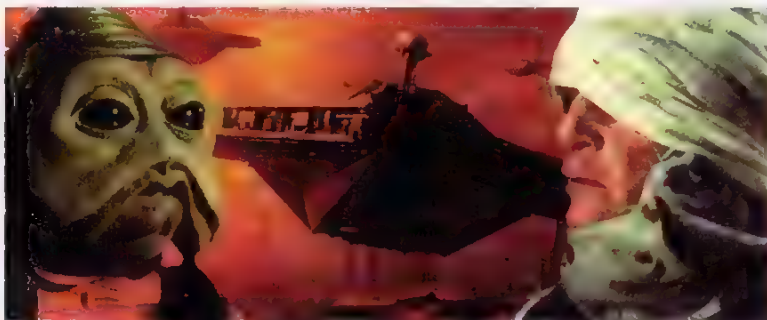
> **Playability:** Is there a way to make my guy move and shoot at the same time?!

> **Entertainment:** I just want to blast that dog all day long, and you will too

> **Replay Value:** Limitless!

Second Opinion

The very sight of an ailing dog is too much for a dandy top-in-training like Master Worthington, and the process of watching me euthanize the poor beast on his behalf sent him into a veritable conniption. I found it more bearable than he — I simply pictured his portly, mouth-breathing visage attached to the body of the mangy canine as I delivered the terminal gunshot. Alas, I am not meant for such sweet, cathartic liberty. This violent tomfoolery is only adequate for the unwashed, ham-burger-gobbling masses, and is unsuitable for the noble young lord of Snootystylme Manor.—**JEEVES**



XBOX QUICKIES

Super Xbox Party Mele

BOTTOM LINE **Rwwrrg!**

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER NON-MONSTER FIGHTING
> **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** INDENTURED SERVITUDE GAMES > **RELEASE** SMARCH 13 > **ESRB** T



Rwwooooh! [Translation: Though I understand Microsoft's attempt to emulate the success of Nintendo's Super Smash Brothers,

they simply didn't include the requisite stable of likeable characters to pull this off.] Rhhhhrrrr! [Translation: I loved the chance to play as Microsoft's first-party heroes like Master Chief, Blinx, and the red version of Master Chief, but there were some notable omissions in the roster. Where are Azurik, the boats from Blood Wake, and that rolly-thing from Fusion Frenzy?] Rrrr. [Translation: Regardless, I do appreciate that SXPM allows me to answer the age-old question of who would win in a fight between Voodoo Vince and a zeppelin from Crimson Skies.] Mirwraaaaah! [Translation: Also, I hate Mothra].—**GODZILLA**

PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

The Exciting Prince of Times: Stinky Tongue Saga

BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER UNAPPRECIATED BRILLIANCE > **PUBLISHER** HAPPY HAPPY > **DEVELOPER** OSAKA CARDBOARD CONCERN > **RELEASE** NEVER IN THE U.S. > **ESRB** T



The previous two entries in this series (Conquer It For Win! and Glowing Touch Wisdom) are shamefully overlooked triumphs in

the RPG genre. The latest iteration is just as mindblowing as its predecessors, but trying to explain it to you would be like trying to teach quantum physics to alfredo sauce. You, like the other cattle, gladly chew on the cud you're fed. I have written numerous FAQs and reviews of this exemplary series that no one will ever read due to America's inability to yield to the obviously superior might of Japanese craftsmanship. Now I'm all upset; I need to go educate some message board newbies on kanji pronunciation to unwind. God, my contempt for my hobby knows no bounds.—**JUPITER**

GAMECUBE QUICKIES

Capcom vs. The Supreme Court

BOTTOM LINE **12**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER LAWSUIT > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** JUDICIAL BRANCH GAMES > **RELEASE** WHEN THE JURY RETURNS > **ESRB** C

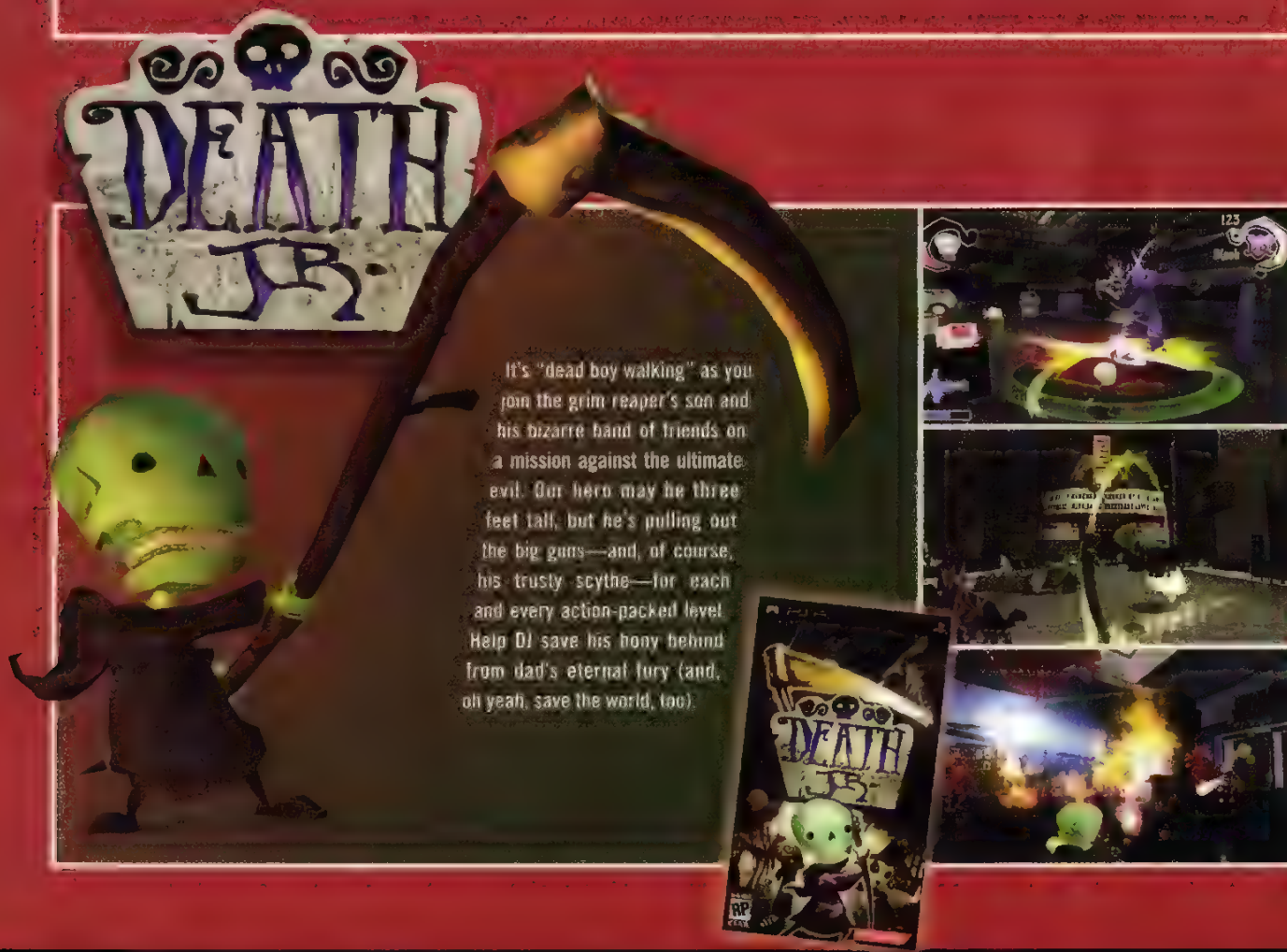


This game was pretty awesome! I've been reading about the Supreme Court Justices in my Civics class, so it was pretty cool to learn

more about them by making them fight Mega Man and M. Bison. They don't teach you in any book that David Souter throws a mean Hadouken, or that Ruth Bader Ginsberg has an awesome flash kick. The Super Gavel Smash move is really awesome, too! But my favorite part of this game is the unlockable Xtreme Beach Volleyball Mode, where you get to accessorize the nation's most judicious bench-warmers with sexy swimsuits. It's great, and Sandra Day O'Connor is a total hottie. Then again, so is John Paul Stevens...—**GARNADAN**

When it comes to the PSP™ handheld entertainment system, **WE'RE NOT PLAYING AROUND.**

Introducing three amazing new games designed
exclusively for the new PSP™ handheld.



It's "dead boy walking" as you join the grim reaper's son and his bizarre band of friends on a mission against the ultimate evil. Our hero may be three feet tall, but he's pulling out the big guns—and, of course, his trusty scythe—for each and every action-packed level. Help DJ save his bony behind from dad's eternal fury (and, oh yeah, save the world, too).

PRODUCTS RANGE FROM
RATING PENDING TO MATURE
RP-M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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METAL GEAR ACID



It's an all-new "Gear" for your all-new gear. One of gaming's greatest heroes, Solid Snake, returns in a tactical adventure designed from the ground up to take full advantage of the PSP system's capabilities. With over 200 strategic moves, two playable characters and a wireless play option, Metal Gear Acid is the ultimate stealth trip.



KONAMI

www.konami.com/gs

The image is a promotional cover for the video game 'Soccom 3: U.S. Navy SEALs'. At the top, a golden eagle with spread wings is perched above the title. The title 'SOCOM 3' is rendered in large, bold, blue-outlined letters with a metallic texture. Below it, 'U.S. NAVY SEALS' is written in a smaller, silver, metallic font. The background is a 3D-rendered scene of a tropical military base at night. A yellow Humvee is the central focus, with several SEALs in full combat gear. One SEAL is on the roof of the vehicle, another is in the driver's seat, and two others are standing on the ground in the foreground. The scene is lit with a mix of warm and cool tones, suggesting a night-time operation.

SOCOM 3

U.S. NAVY SEALS

PLAYSTATION 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > DEVELOPER ZIPPER INTERACTIVE > RELEASE FALL

ONCE MORE INTO THE BREACH

In the eyes of many PlayStation 2 gamers, the SOCOM franchise is a nearly sacred thing. Without question, the series has delivered the console its best and most popular military shooters, and helped Sony spearhead its charge into the world of online gaming. SOCOM 2 remains the most-played online game for PS2 to this day, and the original title still ranks in the top five. But the success of the franchise's online play has been a bit of a double-edged sword for developer Zipper Interactive. While the multiplayer modes of both games have been hugely popular and well regarded, the single-player campaign has often been ignored. To many, the SOCOM games are simply made for online play. That's about to change.



With the third game in the series, Zipper Interactive has a lofty goal. The company plans to deliver more of the explosive online action that fans of the series expect, while vastly improving the solo campaign to the point that it creates as much excitement as the multiplayer. While Zipper loves the acclaim its series has garnered for its online mode, the team is not content to leave things at that. They want the single-player to be just as popular, and they've got plenty of new features planned for SOCOM 3 to make it happen.

Zipper assured us that it has plenty of surprises in store for the third title's online features, but those will have to

wait. Wanting to focus on the myriad improvements to the campaign mode, the team decided to let multiplayer take a backseat for once and withheld details until a later date. But considering the many changes in store for the single-player campaign, perhaps that's best. For SOCOM 3's campaign mode, Zipper laid out three clear goals: authenticity, great console gameplay, and technical innovation. The series has long been known for all three, but Zipper wanted to take things even further.

Zipper has always consulted with real Navy SEALs to add to the realism of the games, and the results have paid off well. Sixty percent of new recruits in the



SEAL program have reported playing the games and claim it was a factor in their decision to join the Navy. But Zipper's goal is for SOCOM 3 to be the complete SEAL experience, and has added new elements based on the real SEALs' suggestions. For the first time, players will be able to drive vehicles in the game

and will also be able to swim. These two features go a long way in creating the most authentic SEAL experience possible, but aren't the only ways that Zipper is amping up the realism.

Like the first two titles, SOCOM 3 will take place in real-world locations, enemies will speak in their native

■ Drivable vehicles like boats add a new dimension to gameplay

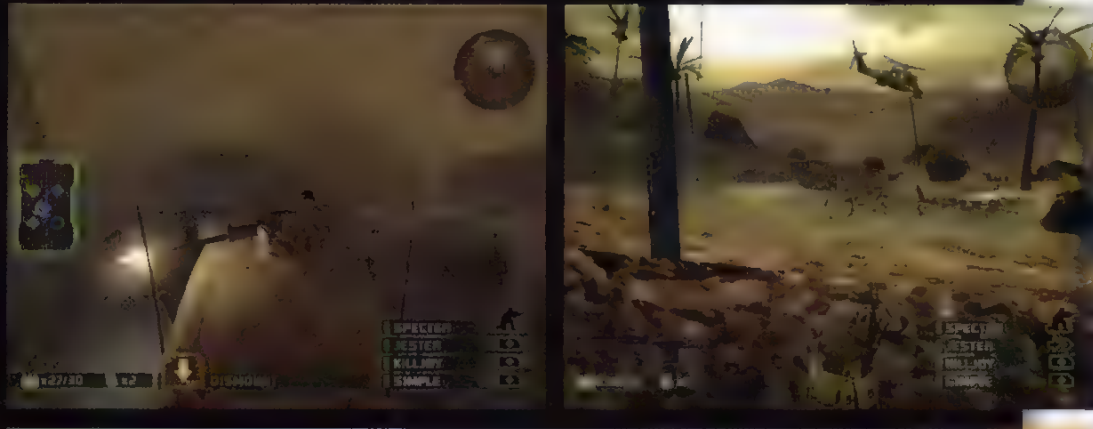


tongues, and all the sound effects have been recorded from real weapons and vehicles. The series has always been hailed for its realism, but now it will look and sound more authentic than ever. Several members of Zipper's team went out on a research trip to the areas that will make up the bulk of SOCOM 3's campaign: Bangladesh, Poland, and Morocco. While on their trip, they took thousands of photos, recorded ambient sounds, and carefully studied the architecture, clothing, and culture of each area. The team snapped hundreds of pictures of doors and windows, power lines and old houses – things that wouldn't seem all that important to a military video game. But Zipper wanted to capture the essence of every area so it could be recreated in the game as exactly as possible. By including the small details of each location they visited, the art team is able to ensure that SOCOM 3 makes players feel like they have been physically transported halfway across the world.

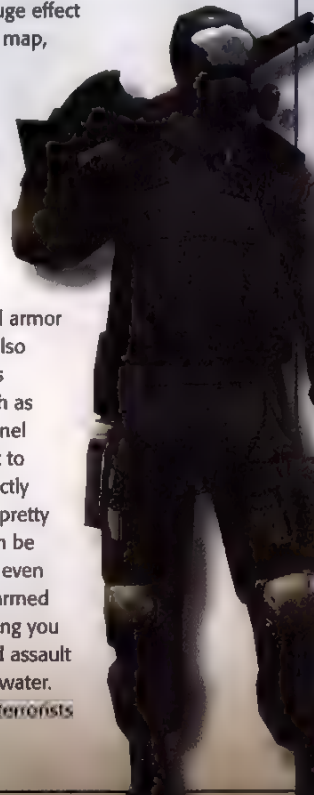
Of course, realism is essential to a title like this, but it doesn't necessarily make for a fun game. Fortunately, many of the new features both add realism and bring new dimensions to the gameplay. The two major additions, swimming and vehicles, each adds new features designed to give players more freedom when tackling a mission. Since real SEALs spend a lot of time in the water, swimming increases authenticity, and also adds a new element to the game's stealth. Your character can swim across a river if you simply want to get to the other side; but if the far bank is guarded, you can duck underwater and try to cross unseen. Of course, you have an air gauge, but if you're careful about when your head is above water, swimming can be a great new way to get the drop on unsuspecting terrorists. The ability to cross water also opens up the maps, and allows players more routes to their goal. In many games, a river or body of water is used as a border – an obstacle designed to limit a player's movement and force them in a particular direction. In SOCOM 3, it is simply another path to an objective.

Swimming will have a huge effect on how players navigate a map, and vehicles will have a similarly large impact on gameplay. There are roughly 20 different vehicles in the game, including SEAL vehicles like Humvees as well as terrorist vehicles, which are usually civilian cars and trucks with added armor and weaponry. There are also military vehicles that SEALs don't traditionally use, such as tanks and armored personnel carriers. Zipper didn't want to limit gameplay options strictly for the sake of realism, so pretty much any ride you find can be taken for a spin. There are even boats such as the heavily armed SOC-R assault boat, meaning you can load up your team and assault enemy positions from the water.

Since both the SEALs and terrorists



■ You can always choose between driving a vehicle or manning its mounted weapons





■ The larger levels have been designed with vehicles in mind

now have vehicles in their arsenal, you can be assured you'll see some frenzied, vehicle-to-vehicle combat. Every ride in the game takes damage realistically – few weapons will harm a tank, but even a skilled SEAL team won't last long in a lightly armored truck.

As with every other aspect of the game, real Navy SEALs were consulted to make sure that the vehicles were handled in the proper way. This research resulted in some interesting treatments of vehicles that probably wouldn't have been included in the game otherwise. For example, while most branches of the military use Humvees, SEALs use them in a unique way. Whereas other branches take advantage of the trucks' armor, SEALs actually remove the doors to

create machine gun turrets on the sides. An army Hummer is slow and heavily armored, but a Navy SEAL hummer is faster, lightly armored, and capable of laying down heavy machine gun fire in 360 degrees.

The vehicles are controlled with the dual-analog scheme made popular in Halo, which works quite well for all of the rides, even though they each have a very distinct feel. Obviously, piloting a boat feels quite different than driving a truck, which in turn is unlike steering a tank. Each vehicle feels unique and the type of surface you're driving on affects its handling, meaning a lot of strategy is required when choosing what vehicle (if any) to take into a specific area. Of course, if you don't feel like driving, you

can switch places with one of your squad members with the click of a button and let the AI character drive while you man the turret. Zipper wants players to always have the freedom of approaching every situation a variety of different ways, so the single-player campaign offers a lot of depth and replay value.

While the vehicles will allow players to speed through areas and take a more run-and-gun approach to missions, the core of the game is still squad-based combat. Like all other aspects of the single-player, squad commands have been refined to make it easier for new players to pick up and play. With a button press, players can open up the TCA (Team Command Action) menu and choose a squad command. The

TCA menu has been redesigned with a new radial pattern, so that commands are easier to find more quickly and the player is taken out of the action for a shorter time. But the new one-touch command button makes things even easier. By clicking the R2 button, players can issue certain simple commands. The default command is "move to," but in certain situations the one-touch command will change to something more specific. For example, if there is a building to enter, the R2 button can be used to issue a quick breach and clear order. This simplified method of issuing commands is another attempt by Zipper to make gameplay more intuitive and keep players immersed in the action.

Voice control, another hallmark of

■ Swimming underwater adds new options to the series' stealth elements



SPECTER
 JESTER
 KILLJOY
 SIMPLE

the series, will certainly return as well. Zipper didn't have this control method on display in the version we saw, but we are assured that it will be as big a part of SOCOM 3 as it was in the first two titles. Innovative gameplay, such as the voice-activated squad commands, has always been a trademark of the series, and continuing this pattern is Zipper's final goal with SOCOM 3. From a technical standpoint, the new engine powering the game is its biggest step forward. In previous SOCOM titles, the environment was loaded completely at the start of a mission, which limited its size. In SOCOM 3, all environments are streaming, which means additional parts

load in as the player moves around the map. As a result, the typical map in SOCOM 3 is six times larger than those in the last title. It also means that the game is capable of displaying more enemies onscreen, creating better-looking foliage and more elaborate scripted events. Obviously, these larger worlds are also designed with vehicles in mind, and each area will have plenty of available rides to help players work their way across the expansive environments (and to take a few nice jumps along the way).

These bigger, streaming environments also help Zipper keep the player more immersed in the world. While there will

be individual missions, the game won't take you out of the world between levels. Once you complete a goal, you will see what Zipper calls the OCN (Operational Control Network), a heads-up display screen that will fill you in on your next mission objectives. The OCN will layer over the screen, rather than load out of the environment. Based on real military technology, the OCN can give you updates on your objectives without taking you out of your Area of Operation (AO), the term the Navy uses for a mission area. If you so chose, you could play through an entire AO without ever seeing a loading screen.

At the start of an AO, you will be able

to choose a weapon loadout through the OCN. But real Navy SEALs typically don't use standard-issue weapons – and now you don't have to either. Every weapon in the game can be customized: Scopes, grenade launchers, pistol grips, flashlights, and more can be added onto weapons. There are 30 unique weapons in the game, 10 of which are new, and there are 20 different modifications that can be applied to them. As a result, there are roughly 900 different weapon combinations that can be used. However, modding your weapons has a price. The amount of weight you carry affects your speed, and the various attachments have more subtle affects on your weapons.





For example, the contraction of your targeting reticle (which helps the player aim) will differ from gun to gun. Bulkier weapons like heavy machine guns have a reticle that shrinks more slowly, making it harder to line up accurate shots. Conversely, adding a pistol grip to a rifle adds stability, and thus the reticle tightens quickly so you can line up an accurate shot in an instant.

Your SEAL team won't be the only ones with modified weapons, as terrorists will also alter their guns for maximum devastation. Terrorist weapons tend to pack more firepower than SEAL arms, but have a shorter range. If an enemy has a weapon you like, you're free to kill him and take it. Of course, that's easier said than done. Without a doubt, these will be the deadliest foes to appear in a SOCOM game yet.

Thanks to improved enemy AI, your foes will use much more intelligent strategies, such as seeking cover, coordinating group attacks, laying down covering fire for their friends, and other canny tactics. Each group of foes you encounter will have a leader, and the fate of that individual will influence how they behave. While the leader is present, they will face you bravely and work intelligently together as they try to wipe you off the face of the planet. But if you take out the leader, they will lose courage and be less likely to stand their ground. They will become less accurate and more apt to make tactical mistakes. However, should they hit you or one of your teammates, they will regain some of their lost bravery, which will in turn improve their accuracy and their strategic thinking. They will also hunt you more effectively by sound and are aware of when they're outmatched. If

you break into an enemy base driving a tank or other heavily armored vehicle, they will retreat and search for more powerful weapons.

Of course, your enemies won't be the only ones who seem a little smarter this time out. Your teammates have also gotten an IQ boost, and will now make low-level decisions more frequently. Without any orders from you, they will more effectively seek cover and try to anticipate your moves. Zipper's goal with the AI for both your team and the terrorists is to make them behave as much like human beings as possible.

With the three objectives Zipper set down for SOCOM 3, the company hopes to create a single-player experience that rivals the popular multiplayer in sheer excitement. Every new feature that has been packed into SOCOM 3 – swimming, vehicles, larger levels, and more intelligent AI – has been designed to contribute simultaneously to the accuracy, innovation, and quality gameplay Zipper is aiming for. With bigger, more realistic environments, smarter characters, and the strategic depth created by the addition of the new ways to travel around an environment, SOCOM 3 looks certain to deliver the explosive single-player experience that the developer is hoping to achieve. Of course, there is no doubt that the team is working just as hard at pushing the multiplayer even further, so when SOCOM 3 hits later this year, it's doubtful the game will be anything other than a huge success. The most popular military series for the PlayStation 2 has consistently improved with each iteration, and SOCOM 3 is poised to be the most incredible entry in the series yet.

■ Your teammates will independently make simple decisions and work with you more effectively



■ The new engine allows for more expansive levels that look better than ever before





Xenosaga

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Blood and Gore
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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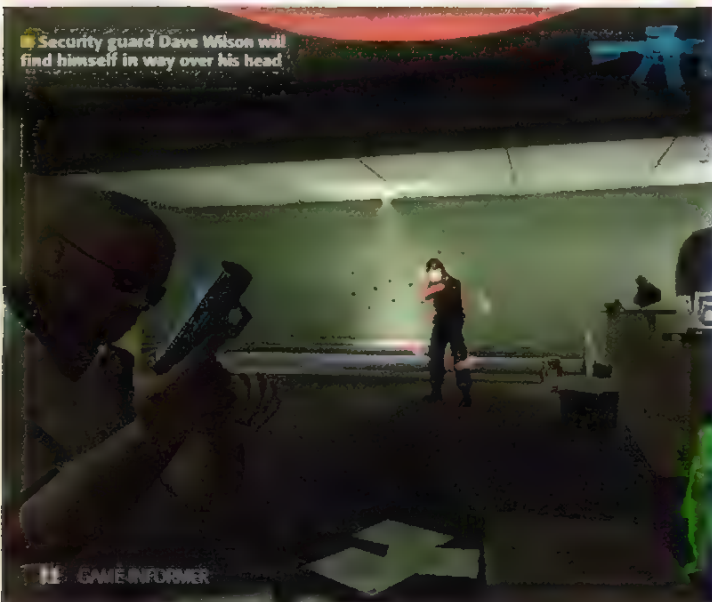
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PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



■ This screen of Ben Harrison shows off the game's amazing character models, and an edgy urban fashion sense that plays well with males 18 to 24!



■ Security guard Dave Wilson will find himself in way over his head

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Without Warning

> STYLE 1 PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CIRCLE STUDIOS > RELEASE FALL

TIME IS PRECIOUS

Circle Studios is a new company, but its pedigree is one of the most successful in all of video games. Formed by Core Design co-founders (and brothers) Jeremy Heath-Smith and Adrian Smith, Circle is primarily staffed with longtime veterans from the Tomb Raider team, the very people that were responsible for creating one of gaming's most successful franchises ever.

However, talking to Heath-Smith, it's apparent that the team is viewing Circle Studios as a new beginning. "The last [Tomb Raider] game was a dreadful experience," he recalls. "To walk out of that building was weird, but once we moved into the new building, everything changed. This cloud had been lifted off us. There was no pressure, no corporate PR b—t. Just all the boys saying, 'What the f— do we do now?'"

The answer to that question came in the form of *Without Warning*, Circle Studio's first title, which is being released through a surprise partnership with venerable Japanese publisher Capcom. The game, which takes inspiration from Fox's landmark television series *24*, portrays a nightmare scenario of terrorism on American soil through the eyes of multiple playable characters. However, the real catch is this: The events of *Without Warning* take place in a single 12-hour period.

Within these 12 hours the stories of no less than six characters will be told, and each saga will have repercussions that will irrevocably alter the course of the tale. The setting is an American chemical plant—an ideal "soft target" for the evil band of terrorists that have infiltrated and taken over the facility. Half of the game's playable characters are the three surviving members of an elite Delta Force squad that was ambushed and slaughtered upon arrival at the scene. The remaining characters are civilians: Dave Wilson, an ex-cop turned security guard who spends the 12 hours trying to rescue as many plant workers as possible; Tanya Shaw, an unnamed secretary who

must sneak past the terrorists to avoid danger; and Ben Harrison, a news cameraman whose helicopter was shot down and is hoping to both survive and bring back some award-winning footage of the crisis.

Aside from allowing the player to experience a wide array of gameplay, these six characters also allow the team to experiment in some very intricate storytelling. Circle has constructed a complex timeline which depicts each character's activities throughout the 12 hours. Often, the characters' story arcs will intersect, creating compelling cause-and-effect relationships between seemingly unrelated events.

For example, at 8 a.m. you might be engaged in a firefight with the terrorists in a large room while playing as one of the soldiers. By 8:15, you've cleared the area. Then, the game will switch back to 8 a.m., except this time you'll be playing as Tanya. As you sneak down the hallway, avoiding all guards, you'll have to slip behind the terrorists that are shooting it out with the Delta Force without being noticed. At the end of the hallway, you'll use your high-security pass to open a door, the very door that the Delta Force will enter at 8:15. In this way, the game will unfold in a fashion a bit similar to Sony's overlooked survival horror title *Siren*.

The combat itself will take cues from popular series such as *Ghost Recon* and *Metal Gear Solid*, but with a more arcade bent. The control scheme is a fusion of first- and third-person tradition, allowing you to move your character with the left analog while targeting with the right. Another way in which *Without Warning* emulates the best in the genre is graphically, as Circle is using the ultra-powerful new Renderware middleware that powered *Burnout 3* to excellent effect. If the company is successful in its ambitious plans, gamers will have reason to celebrate an increasingly rare event in console—a triple-A title that's not a sequel to an existing franchise. ■■■



You'll often watch events from a distance that you'll later play hands-on



The game is using a heavily modified Renderware engine to great effect



Tanya will be unarmed, and must rely on her wits to survive



Targeting is a mix of first- and third-person conventions



We don't care what anybody says; blowing up terrorists never gets old



Your special forces soldiers each have their own specialities and strengths

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Blood
Language
Violence



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An aerial, night-time view of a city, likely Washington D.C., with the White House and a large circular building (the Pentagon) visible. A fighter jet is flying in the upper left corner. The scene is illuminated with a greenish glow.

TOMORROW'S WAR BEGINS
MARCH 2005

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DIRECT ACTION

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XBOX 2 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

The Godfather

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER EA REDWOOD SHORES > RELEASE WINTER



NEVER GO AGAINST THE FAMILY

Translating a popular movie property into a video game is always a tricky thing, especially when that movie is as beloved and revered as *The Godfather*. The challenge is to balance a faithful, respectful adaptation of the film with the action and freedom required to make an enjoyable game. Fortunately, the team at EA Redwood Shores is aware of the challenges ahead, and has created a game that should hopefully meet that challenge. However, some of the decisions made by the team may be rather surprising.

Although over 20 of the film's actors will lend their voices to the production (including James Caan, Robert Duvall, and the late Marlon Brando), players will not take on

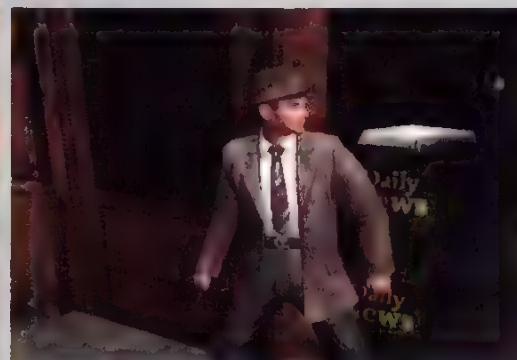
the role of Michael Corleone. Instead, they will assume the persona of a self-created character working his way up the ladder of the Corleone family. Executive Producer Dan De Martini explained that they wanted the player to experience the nitty-gritty world of the films — the game will feature the film's plot as a backbone, and expand on it with an open world and additional material written by Mark Winegardner, author of the novel *Godfather Returns*. Your character will explore New York between the years of 1945 to 1955 and advance in the Corleone family by earning respect, gaining wealth, and expanding the family's territory. Over the course of the game, you can acquire bodyguards, intimidate shopkeepers, and ulti-

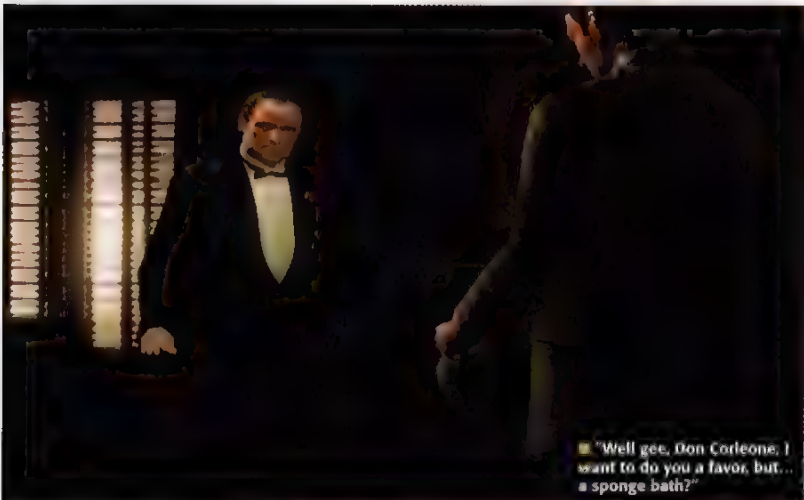
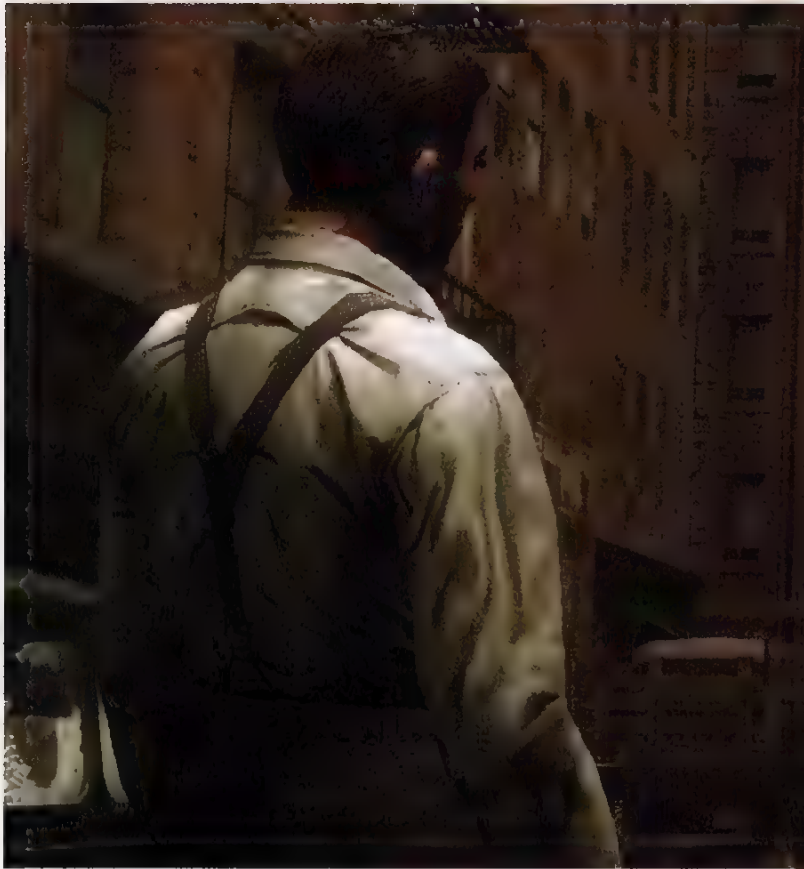
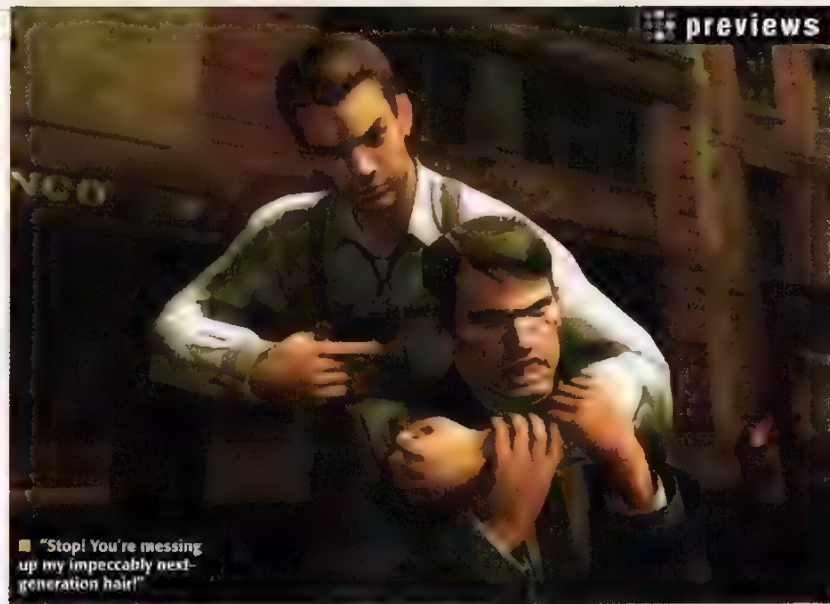
mately become the Godfather of the family yourself. You may even become the man who unifies all the five families of New York under your leadership.

Although *The Godfather* features an open world, drivable vehicles, and its fair share of violence, don't expect the game to play like a retro *Grand Theft Auto*. De Martini says that the game will focus largely on creating a powerful emotional experience, just like the film. He says that mature stories that involve the player more strongly on an emotional level are the future of video games and will become far more common on next-generation consoles — and he should know. Not only is *The Godfather* coming to PlayStation 2 and Xbox, it's also coming to

next-gen consoles. Officially, this title hasn't been announced for any specific next-gen machine, but it's the world's worst-kept secret that a version of *The Godfather* is being developed for Xbox 2. With releases planned for two generations of gaming machines, it's obvious that EA has set its sights high. "We wanted to make something as epic for our genre as the movie was to the film world," says De Martini. "We wanted to make a great game that would stand on its own merit, even if we didn't have the license." Based on everything we've seen and heard, it certainly seems that the *Godfather* team is on the right track. ■ ■ ■

While much of the excitement about *The Godfather* centers around the next-gen release, the version for the current round of consoles is looking pretty impressive as well. These three gameplay shots are from the current-gen version, while all others are next-gen concepts. They represent what EA thinks the next consoles will be capable of — the actual next-gen version may look even better!





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MATURE 17+
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Blood
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes
Strong Language

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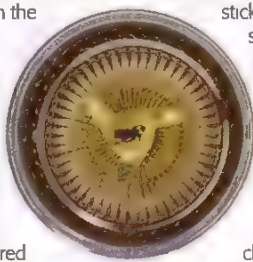
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO > **RELEASE** APRIL 12



DOIN' IT REAL BIG

Rockstar's *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition*, held back from its original holiday 2004 release date, suddenly finds itself firmly in the driver's seat of the street racing genre. While EA's *Need for Speed Underground 2* certainly racked up huge sales, the fact remains that it will be remembered as a disappointing and tedious detour for the series. The real action for racing enthusiasts in the know last year was Criterion's *Burnout 3: Takedown*. After spending some time with a new playable build of *Midnight Club 3*, we can safely say that this title looks to combine the best of the genre into one comprehensive package. The original *Midnight Club* pioneered racing in open-city environments, *Midnight Club 2* added an insane sensation of speed to the mix, and now *DUB Edition* is giving gamers an unprecedented level of car customization options.



With the involvement of *DUB Magazine*, we expected the customization to be expansive, but once we got down to the nitty-gritty and started pimping our own ride, the level of detail was more than we could have imagined. Everything from the shape and material of your taillights to the hue of your nitro flames can be customized and colored to your liking. Vinyls, stickers, and chrome emblems add some flair to your ride – you can even make your own front and rear-window stickers in a variety of fonts. Of course, the selection of rims is huge and each set can be painted to colormatch your car's body. The roster of cars has been growing since we last checked in on *Midnight Club 3* as well: There are now over 60 cars in total, including such notable pieces of automotive history as the 1949 Fleetline and the 1957 Chevy Bel Air.

If you've been following our coverage

of *Midnight Club 3*, you already know that this game runs faster and looks better than ever, and now rivals any game on the market. What you might not know is that Rockstar San Diego is intent on making the game as innovative on the gameplay side as it is on the customization. Remember in *MC 2*, when you were given the ability to drive on two wheels to shoot through tight spaces? Well *DUB Edition* features not one, but three brand new class-specific driving techniques that open up a world of possibilities for over-the-top racing.

The first is *Roar*, available for the classic muscle cars and choppers, which acts as a powerful shockwave that sends cars flying away from your vehicle. Obviously, this is great for clearing the way through heavy traffic. The second is *AGRO*, used by SUVs, trucks, and luxury sedans. *AGRO* appears to be a bit inspired by *Burnout 3*, allowing you to build up power, then crash into oncoming cars and send them careening down the highway. The final, and perhaps most useful, is *Zone*, which is tailored to

the super-fast imports, high-end tuner cars, and sport bikes. After you've filled up your Zone meter, you simply click the left analog stick (as you do for all the new abilities) and enter the "Zone" which is a sort of slow-motion time that gives you precious seconds to make a hard turn or hit a narrow alley shortcut. Believe us – when you see how fast, say, a Lamborghini moves in *Midnight Club 3*, you're going to need all the Zone you can get.

Things will get even more hectic when you enter the online arena, which has been improved through a number of new features. Most intriguing are the Clubs, which can be formed for enthusiasts of certain cars. Clubs will have their own ranks and leadership, including the president position. Overall you can expect more from online this time around: more modes, more events, sicker power-ups, and more fun. Overall, it's just another reason why *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition* will be one of the highlights of early 2005. ■■■

MIDNIGHT CLUB HITS PSP

Midnight Club 3 is making waves on Sony's new handheld as well, and should be available for the system at launch. The big news here is that, well, this version is pretty damn close in both graphics and functionality to its console cousin. Check out this shot for proof, keeping in mind that it will look even better on the PSP's gorgeous LCD screen.



THE BIRDMAN COMETH

Rockstar has recruited one of the world's foremost experts on dubbed out cars, Baby (a.k.a. the Birdman) from *Cash Money Millionaires*, to act as your guide through the game's three cities. While giving you tips on the car customization scene, Baby will speak from his considerable experience in pimpin' rides. When asked about the game, Baby said simply, "You can make what you want. You can paint it what you want. You can change the lights on it; you can put on new grills. It's got flavor, brah – it's got a lot of flavor, believe that." Check out *Game Informer Unlimited* for a full interview with the Birdman.





■ As always, the environments are littered with hidden shortcuts and jumps



■ Eventually, you'll be able to buy police cars



■ AGRO will send the competition flying out of your path



■ AGRO will send the competition flying out of your path



■ Online modes will allow you to use even more over-the-top power-ups



■ "Subtlety? Never heard of it."

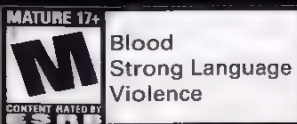


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The new engine is a serious upgrade for the series.

PC

Sid Meier's Civilization IV

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS GAMES > **RELEASE** WINTER 2005

DON'T FIGHT THE POWER, BE THE POWER

The Civilization franchise has been around forever, as anyone who stayed up late all night conquering the world on a 286 with a whopping 4 MB of RAM can tell you. Prolific strategy mastermind Sid Meier has yet another opus on the way in the form of Civilization IV, and even the brief look we've had at it has our dictator glands pumping conquer-juice into our bloodstream by the gallon. After all, since when does taking over the world get old?

For starters, Civ IV is holding to the grand sequel tradition of being bigger and prettier than its predecessors. With new units, tile improvements, added resources to master, and 19 playable civilizations available, Civ IV offers loads more to do than ever. The brand-new 3D graphics engine also presents things much more crisply, as is clearly seen in the screenshots. But that's not the real draw of Civilization IV. Strategy buffs rejoice, because it seems like Sid Meier and the Firaxis crew are tweaking, expanding, and otherwise improving the core empire-building gameplay in many ways.

Managing your people looks like it will be much more involved. Religion, once researched, will spread through your lands and offer myriad tools to control your people more effectively and keep them happier. At some point,

you'll even be able to create Great Prophets to act as immortal icons to the devout. Moving up the tech tree will also unlock Civics options like freedom of speech and slavery, which will have far-reaching consequences for your entire domain. The tech tree itself will be much different as well, though we don't know exactly how — all Firaxis will say is that it's flexible and will offer unique paths to guide your empire along. Hopefully this will add yet another layer of strategy to the already deep Civilization portfolio.

In addition to all these things that will surely make fans of the series more than happy, changes to make the franchise more accessible and in line with PC gaming trends are also promised. A more intuitive, streamlined interface that should be familiar to any RTS player is one. Extensive modding capability is another — the map editor will support XML and Python scripting, and Firaxis claims that mods up to and including full conversions (imagine making a sci-fi RPG with the Civ IV engine!) will be pos-



sible. Furthermore, multiplayer is getting a big overhaul. In addition to the standard Internet and LAN modes, Civ IV will be playable by email or on a Persistent Turn-Based Server.

Provided all of these features work out as planned while keeping the hard-core strategic world domination that made Civilization such a successful franchise intact, Civ IV should easily sit atop the turn-based strategy heap. And judging from Firaxis' previous work, that's one bet no bookie in his right mind would take. ■ ■ ■

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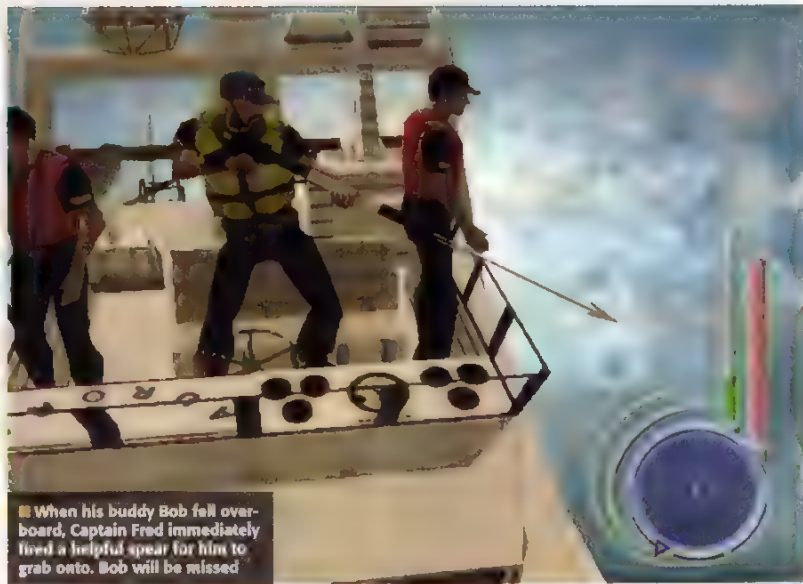


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■ Brad thought he could brace the shark's mouth to keep him from biting. Brad will be missed



■ When his buddy Bob fell overboard, Captain Fred immediately fired a helpful spear for him to grab onto. Bob will be missed

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Jaws

> STYLE 1 PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MAJESCO > DEVELOPER APPALOOSA INTERACTIVE > RELEASE FALL

WE'RE GONNA NEED A BIGGER BOAT

Do you love the ocean? Is fish your favorite food? Do you bite anyone that walks by, or are you driven into a frenzy by the scent of blood? If so, you're probably a shark trapped in a human's body. It's actually a far more common occurrence than you'd think. Seriously, it's a real medical condition called *sharkanthropy*. Fortunately, Majesco has the cure for this bizarre medical problem: a new Jaws video game, just in time for the movie's 30th anniversary.

Although the concept of playing as a giant swimming engine of destruction is enough to get us excited, some are bound to be skeptical about any game starring an aquatic animal. Fortunately, Majesco has wisely recruited a developer with a proven track record in this unique field: Appaloosa Interactive, the crew behind the respected Ecco the Dolphin games. No one makes underwater titles like Appaloosa, and this time the studio is exploring the deadlier side of the life aquatic. This time around, you are no happy, friendly dolphin; you are a remorseless eating machine: the world's most famous shark, Jaws.

As the titular Great White, you are drawn back to Amity Island by its growing food supply (read: humans) and wind up killing the son of the CEO of Enviroplus — the biggest corporation on the island. The CEO hires famed shark hunter Cruz Ruddock and marine biologist Michael Brody (you might remember him as the son of Chief Brody in the movies) to hunt you down, and you must evade them while

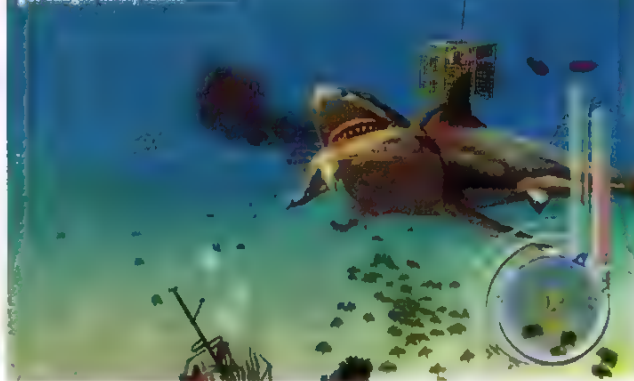
unleashing devastation on your attackers.

The various underwater locations will feature tons of destructible objects for you to smash to bits, as well as all kinds of sea life (and other things) to rip apart with your deadly teeth. You'll face other sharks, killer whales, huge boats, and SCUBA divers, each of which can be torn apart piece by piece, thanks to a dismemberment engine that features over 25 unique "detachment points."

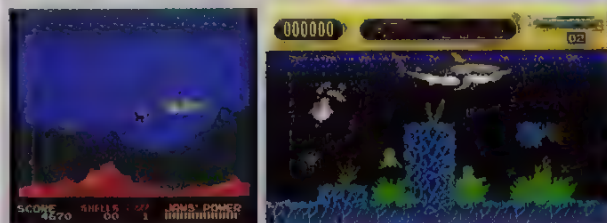
While unleashing havoc as a deadly predator sounds giddily enjoyable, Appaloosa is taking the property seriously and creating a game that can stand as a true sequel to the films. Jaws will have other weapons aside from his powerful teeth, including the ability to hunt down your prey with Shark Vision, a skill based on real sharks' keen senses. You will also be able to unleash carnage in a free-roaming mode that lets you simply revel in chaos, as well as the story mode.

There is something primarily appealing about taking on the role of nature's greatest hunter and eluding (and dining on) the humans that seek to do you harm. But considering that it is being developed by Appaloosa, a studio with a reputation for intelligent and artistic games, we're confident that Jaws will offer more than simply underwater mayhem. Jaws the game has the potential to be as serious and respected as the film on which it is based. We can practically hear the theme music already. ■ ■ ■

■ "Dang! These things always get caught in my teeth!"



Shark Bites



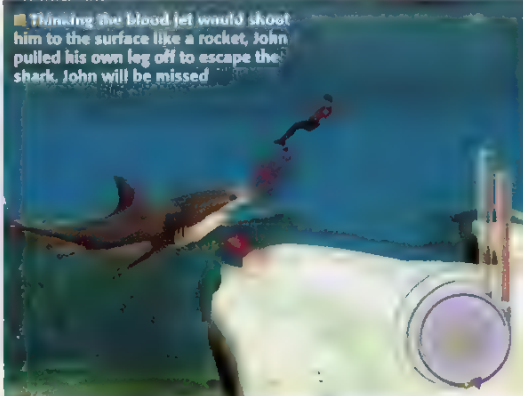
Although Majesco's Jaws is the first time gamers will take on the role of the infamous shark, it is not the first time the Great White has appeared in a video game. Most famously, Jaws appeared in the little-loved 1987 NES game, in which players collected conch shells in order to earn power-ups to use against the eating machine. A lesser-known Jaws game was released for the Atari ST two years later. Atari had also previously released an arcade machine called Shark JAWS in 1975, which is unrelated to the film, but nonetheless appeared in the 1978 movie *Piranha* as a nod to the killer shark.

The movie *Jaws* was the first summer blockbuster, with 67 million viewers in its initial release. It was also the first film to earn 100 million dollars.

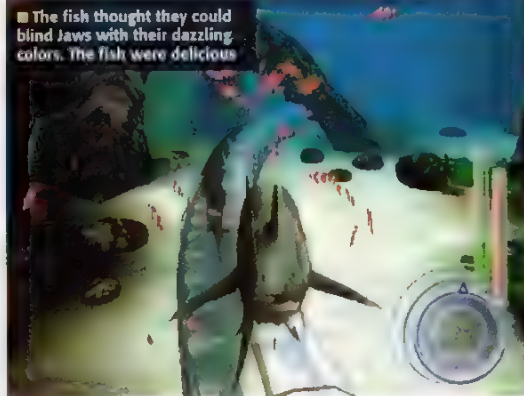
■ "Seriously dude, that looks infected."



■ Thinking the blood jet would shoot him to the surface like a rocket, John pulled his own leg off to escape the shark. John will be missed



■ The fish thought they could blind Jaws with their dazzling colors. The fish were delicious



THEY MAY HAVE AN ARMY.

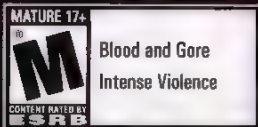
THEY MAY HAVE AN ARSENAL...

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

L.A. Rush

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER MIDWAY SAN DIEGO > RELEASE FALL

300 MILES OF METAL-BENDING CHAOS

“We couldn't make Rush the way it used to be,” comments Steve Allison, Midway's marketing officer. “At its heart and soul, L.A. Rush is a full free-roaming, open-city game. What fully free-roaming means as opposed to say, Need for Speed's restrained streaming technology is that we are a go anywhere, crash through anything, do anything while racing and driving type of game – much like you see in Grand Theft Auto.”

At this point, and in a surprising turn of events, Allison brought up video footage of Activision's True Crime: Streets of LA. “This is the Santa Monica pier area,” he pointed out. “They did a great job of recreating the roadmap of LA, but the visuals were just okay.” The video then switched to Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, showing the detail that went into Santa Monica pier. “Some of its parts may be great, but not the visuals.” These are bold words indeed, but Allison was quick to back them up by showing video footage of L.A. Rush's recreation of the pier. “You can see that we have a lot more stuff going on. We have the roller coaster and the vendors. Another great thing about [Rush's] technology is that it's all breakable stuff. Even the bigger things in the

world are breakable – like the Ferris wheel on the pier.” As the car smashed through fences and knocked out the supports of the Ferris wheel, sending the gargantuan structure crashing to the ground, we could only look on with a yearning to get our hands on this product.

Allison then pointed out that Rush's open world also has the longest draw distance of all three of the mentioned titles, the most traffic, and the highest level of detail in its visuals. More impressive yet, Rush will feature over 300 miles of road, not including the shortcuts and sewer systems that are also in the game. Whether you are crashing through the mall on the Promenade, entering an illegal street race at night downtown, or crashing through the Hollywood sign, each area in this city of angels is recreated with the utmost realism.

“The game is made up of racing, missions, and free-roaming exploration,” describes Allison. “The racing, I would say, is roughly 70 percent of gameplay. We have about 50 unique tracks – most of those are made up of what we call point A to point B races, which are anywhere from two to five mile stretches of race. The game itself is drawn together through

a story mode that isn't like the corny attempts at a story in other racing games. It's actually put together like other open-city games. You'll take missions, races – it's up to you when to advance the plot line.”

As the story unfolds, players will learn that many of their cars have been stolen from them. Of course, it's your job to track them down and bring them back to the garage they belong in. In the one mission we were fortunate enough to see, the player was attempting to reacquire his Nissan. As he raced down the streets and crashed through objects, three rival cars banged into him and tried however they could to end his run. As the chaos ensued, impressive vehicular and environmental damage could be seen.

While it may sound like Midway is trying to create its own Grand Theft Auto, never once will you see your character outside of a vehicle. Holding true to its heritage, Rush is a straight-up racing game that blazes its own trail through what Midway hopes to be the biggest jumps and craziest wrecks that video games have ever seen. From what the brief glimpse that we had, we can tell you that Rush is shaping up to be one hell of a ride. ■ ■ ■



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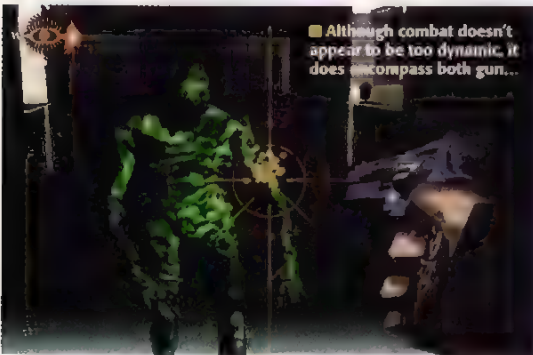
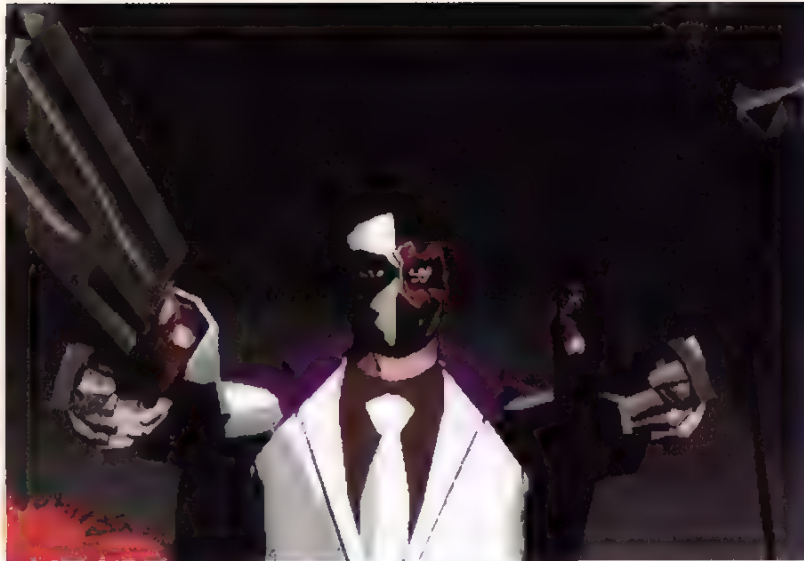
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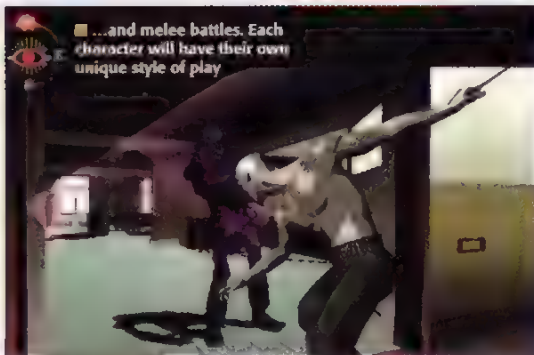
PlayStation 2

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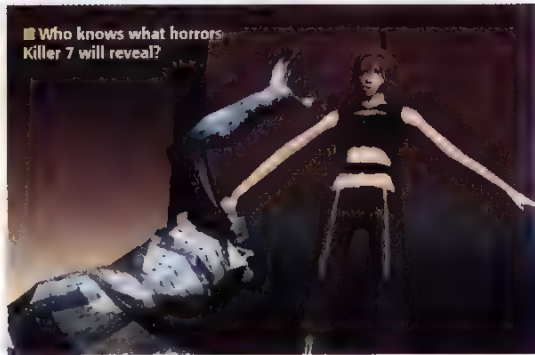
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■ Although combat doesn't appear to be too dynamic, it does encompass both gun...



■ ...and melee battles. Each character will have their own unique style of play



■ Who knows what horrors Killer 7 will reveal?

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Killer 7

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURER INC. > **RELEASE** SUMMER (GC), TBA (PS2)

A STRANGE AND TWISTED SAGA

Since it was first revealed to the world, Capcom's *Killer 7* has been one of the most intriguing games on the horizon, a high-concept, risky endeavor that few developers would have the guts to create. From our first look at the title's breathtakingly original cel-shaded graphics, we've been highly curious to see how this mysterious collaboration between *Resident Evil* legend Shinji Mikami and eccentric designer Suda 51 would turn out. At a recent Capcom event, we finally had the chance to see the game in playable form. As you might expect, *Killer 7* is shaping up to be an experience quite unlike any other game we've ever seen.

Although we didn't actually get our hands on a controller (press was not allowed to play the game), we did watch as a Capcom employee ran through a selection of sequences. One thing was instantly clear: Although Mikami is attached to the project, *Killer 7* is far from *Resident Evil* with an anime facelift. The game's main character is Harman Smith, an elderly gentleman who is possessed of seven personalities, many of which are cold-blooded assassins. The group of personalities (the "Killer 7" of the title) must combat a terrorist organization that has launched an onslaught of Heaven Smiles – deranged, cackling humans in the grips of an otherworldly madness.

As you untangle the game's strange plot, you'll switch between characters, each of whom have different combat and puzzle-solving abilities. Mask Smith, who resembles a Japanese professional wrestler, packs two large grenade launchers. Another, the waiflike female personality Kaide Smith, can solve puzzles by slashing her own wrists and spewing blood. As you can tell, this isn't your typical game in any sense of the word.

The gameplay is also not quite what you might be expect. Talking with producer



■ Even a normal cityscape is transformed into a strange sight through the game's unique visual style

Hiroyuki Kobayashi, he suggested that *Killer 7* is styled more as an interactive story than a traditional game. "Really what you see in this game is a system in which you can easily progress through the game. You don't have all these combos and the controls are very intuitive – very easy. More so than the action, what we want people to get into is all these different characters that are coming into the game," observed Kobayashi. "We want people to think when they are playing: 'Why is he saying that? What do I need to do? How is that connected to the story?' We want them to have fun figuring out that puzzle, which is the story."

The basic mechanics are not typical of the third-person action genre. As a character, you can select from a few basic pathways (taking a left or right turn, for example), and your movement is limited to these linear paths. Frequently, you'll be accosted by a Heaven Smile, and you'll draw a weapon, switching to a first-person viewpoint. Heaven Smiles must be shot at small points on their bodies, after which they will explode into pieces to dramatic effect. Puzzle-solving takes many forms, but often revolves around switching personas (which you can do on the fly) to a character that can open a certain door or perform a certain action. Although gorgeous, we suspect the combat might not be visceral enough for some. The boss battle we observed was fairly staid, as the player circled a winged angel character, dodging attacks and shooting the red doll faces that grow out of its back (don't ask).

Even after seeing it in action, *Killer 7* remains a puzzling and fascinating enigma. While we worry that gameplay might have been pushed too far to the side in favor of epic storytelling, there's no doubt that we're dying to find out what secrets this game will hold. Although it may well prove too esoteric for the mass audience, we certainly can't help but applaud a game that strays so far from the norm in search of artistic greatness. ■ ■ ■

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PLAYSTATION 2

Cold Winter

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** SWORDFISH STUDIOS > **RELEASE** APRIL 19

WINTER WONDERLAND...OF DESTRUCTION!

Nothing heats up a cold winter like hailstorms of bullets! In this new PS2 FPS, you'll be dispensing bullets like you were passing out candy canes at Christmas. Taking players through the twisting world of international intrigue, Cold Winter stars former British spy Andrew Sterling, who is captured during a mission and tortured in a Chinese prison. Although disavowed by the British government, an old colleague helps Sterling escape, which is just the start of his adventures.

As Sterling, players will battle through many real-world environments, including Hong Kong, the streets of Cairo, and many more. Realism is one of developer Swordfish Studios' primary goals with this title, and it has included several features to meet that end. Not only did a former SAS agent consult on the game, but famed comic writer Warren Ellis, who has tackled the world of international espionage in his *Global Frequency* comic, has contributed to the story. Of course, most of the realistic touches

added are a bit more tangible. The bodies of fallen guards can be searched for items, combining pieces found throughout the stages can create items, and many objects can be turned into cover. Boxes, tables, carts and other large objects can be flipped over, and pushed or pulled to create protective barriers. Of course, the aggressive enemies hunting down Sterling can quickly blow these barriers to pieces. Fortunately, the foes can also be ripped apart – enemies feature rag doll physics and are fully dismemberable, and Sterling has nearly 30 deadly weapons at his disposal.

Cold Winter will also feature both on- and offline multiplayer modes, with all the standard game types players have come to expect. With said multiplayer, the realistic features, and the involvement of writers like Ellis, Cold Winter has a lot of elements in its corner. Whether Winter leaves people cold or warms them with excitement is a question that will be answered (somewhat ironically) this spring. ■■■



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Obscure

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER/MC2 > **DEVELOPER** HYDRAVISION
> **RELEASE** MARCH

HIGH SCHOOL HORROR

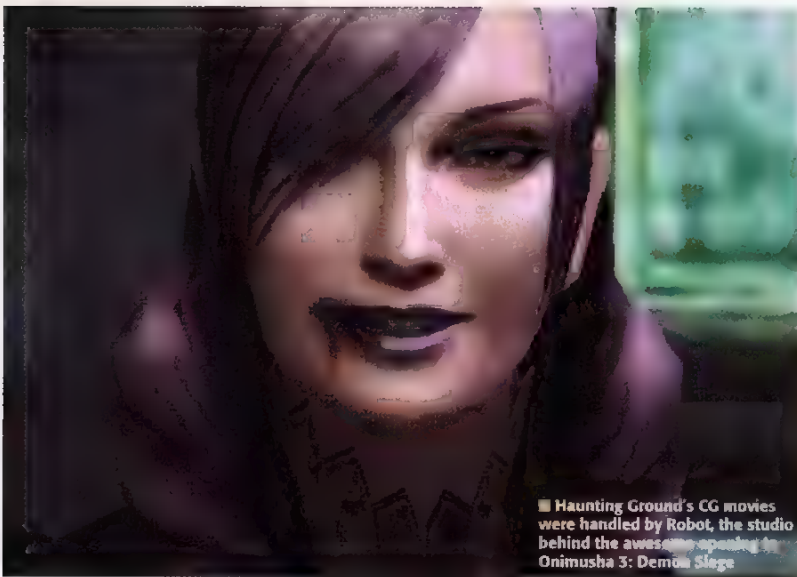


One of the more appropriately named games out there, Obscure certainly hasn't gotten a lot of hype, but that doesn't mean it has nothing new to offer. Previously released as Mortafilia in Europe, this survival horror title from French developer Hydravision sticks fairly close to the genre's familiar template, but adds a few interesting twists that may make horror aficionados track down this somewhat low-profile title.

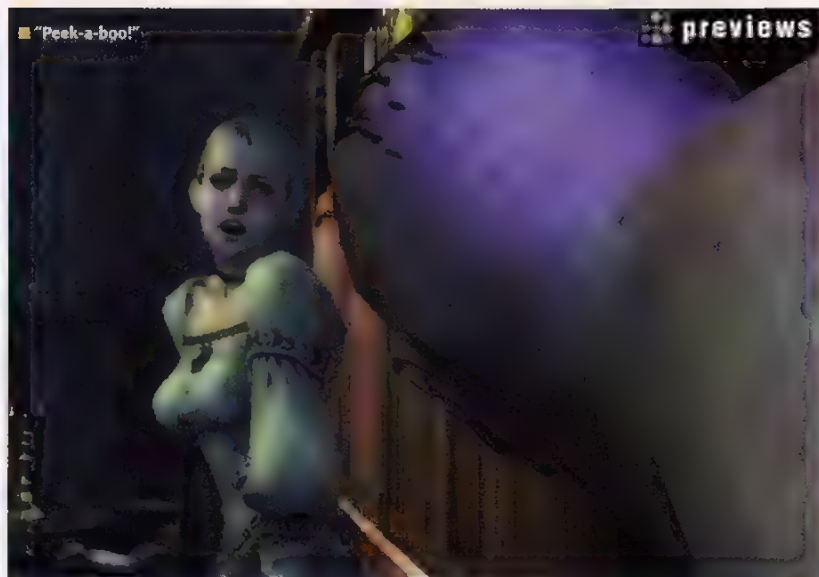
Obscure takes place in a setting that many gamers associate with true terror: high school. Something unnatural is happening at Leafmore High, and it is up to five students to unravel the mystery. Each of the five kids has a unique skill. For example, Kenny, the token jock, is stronger and faster than the rest, while the delinquent Stan can pick locks and hack computers. One student can tell if an important item waits in a room, another is a skilled healer, and the final teen is a martial arts expert.

Having multiple playable characters helps Obscure break out of what is otherwise a pretty standard survival horror framework. Only one of the five characters needs to survive to beat the game, but helping everyone through the adventure is the best way to ensure success. Players can control two characters at a time thanks to an easy-to-use partner system, or the entire game can be played cooperatively with a second player. Characters can swap weapons and items among themselves and perform other cooperative moves like boosting to get through the school's tighter spots.

Cooperative play is not the only unique idea Obscure has to offer. Using light as a weapon to kill photosensitive creatures is a major mechanic, as is combining items to create new tools. But are these features enough to overcome its familiar gameplay and low profile? You'll have to seek out this little thriller to find out. ■■■



■ Haunting Ground's CG movies were handled by Robot, the studio behind the awesome opening to Onimusha 3: Demon Siege



■ "Peek-a-boo!"

PLAYSTATION 2

Haunting Ground

> STYLE | PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE MAY

A GIRL AND HER DOG

Nobody does survival horror like Capcom. Not only has its Resident Evil series defined the genre, but the fourth entry in the franchise completely rewrote the rules of the game, changing everything you know about the style. But Capcom isn't completely abandoning the traditions of the genre it helped create — its classic Resident Evil-style survival horror gameplay is returning with a few twists in a whole new franchise called Haunting Ground.

While Haunting Ground was revealed a few months back, we've now had time to check out the title first-hand, and can safely say that it will feel instantly familiar to anyone who has played the Resident Evil games, as it features a similar control scheme and fixed camera angles. However, Haunting Ground has a very different feel than Capcom's classic franchise, as you play as Fiona, a young girl trapped in a maze-like castle with several strange characters, including Deblitas, a huge ogre-like man who delights in chasing you.

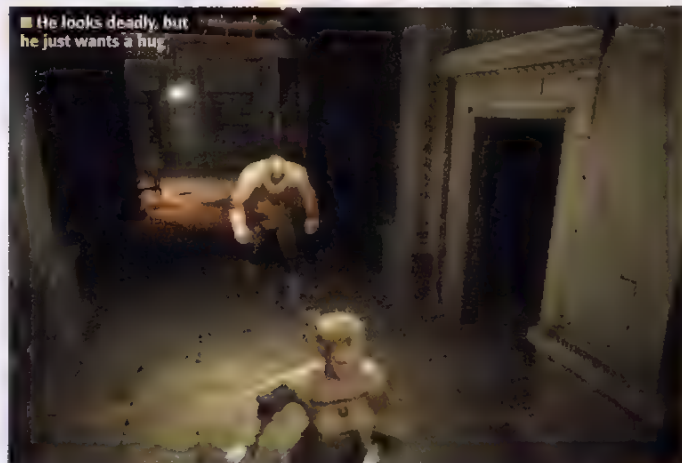
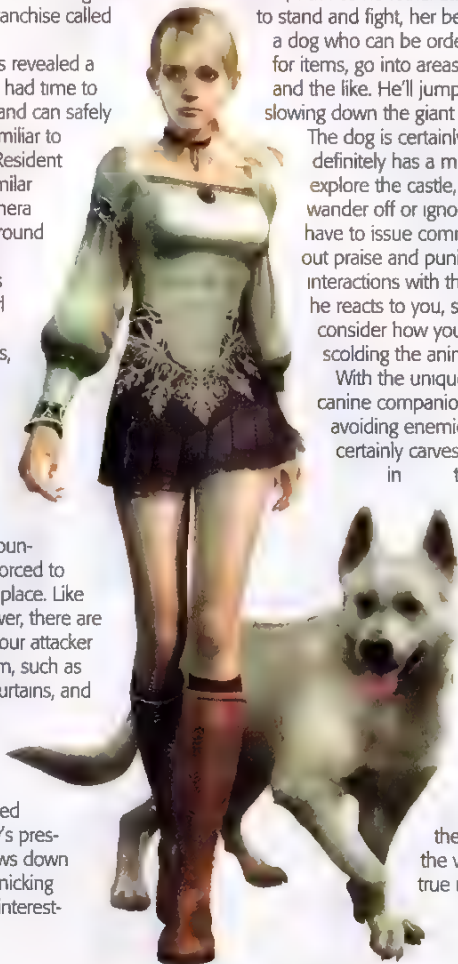
Unlike other horror games, Haunting Ground focuses on fleeing from combat, rather than taking on your enemies. Every time you encounter the massive freak, you're forced to run from him to find a hiding place. Like the horror franchise Clock Tower, there are certain places you can ditch your attacker unless he sees you enter them, such as under beds, behind shower curtains, and more. But getting to these safe zones is the challenge, as Fiona both runs out of stamina as she sprints and becomes increasingly frightened the longer she is in an enemy's presence. When she tires, she slows down and tends to stumble, and panicking causes the screen to take on interest-

ing filters which makes the path to safety harder to see. If she does manage to make it to a hiding place, an on-screen message alerts players when the coast is clear, but if you leave your secure location too soon, you may bump into the foe as he's shambling away.

Fiona can throw items at her attackers to stun them, but has no lethal attacks. If she is forced to stand and fight, her best weapon is Hewie, a dog who can be ordered to attack, sniff for items, go into areas that Fiona can't fit, and the like. He'll jump at Deblitas and bite, slowing down the giant or chasing him away.

The dog is certainly a valuable asset, but definitely has a mind of his own. As you explore the castle, Hewie will occasionally wander off or ignore you, meaning you'll have to issue commands as well as dole out praise and punishment. All of your interactions with the dog will change how he reacts to you, so you have to carefully consider how you balance praising and scolding the animal.

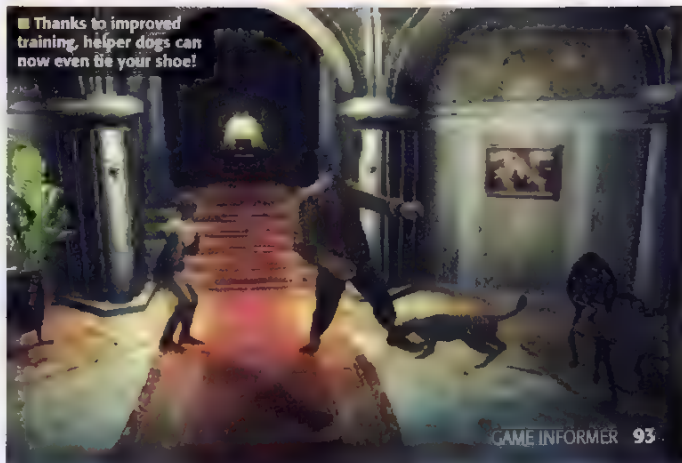
With the unique combination of the canine companion and the focus on avoiding enemies, Haunting Ground certainly carves out a unique place in the survival horror field, even as it sticks close to genre conventions. It is a slowly paced game, even by survival horror standards, which may put off some gamers. But those willing to try out a game with a more deliberate feel will find one that is both familiar and unique, proving once again that the folks at Capcom are the video game industry's true masters of fear. ■ ■ ■



■ He looks deadly, but he just wants a hug



■ "Don't touch him! You're not my real mom!"



■ Thanks to improved training, helper dogs can now even tie your shoe!



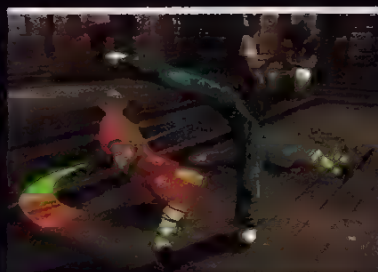
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MATURE 17+	Blood and Gore Intense Violence Strong Language Use of Drugs
M	
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UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX | PC

Advent Rising

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MAJESCO > DEVELOPER GLYPH X GAMES > RELEASE MAY

AN AMBITIOUS UNDERTAKING

Far in the future, the varied and multitudinous races of the universe have a legend. It speaks of a race of saviors that will sweep through the known worlds and bring peace and prosperity in their wake. They're called humans. While most races eagerly anticipate the rise of the human race to its messiah status, the aliens known as the Seekers fear their power. To counteract their ascension, these Seekers have scoured the universe to eradicate the scattered colonies of the seemingly weak race. Enter our protagonist — Gideon Wyeth, a human who brings with him a wealth of weapons, vehicles, and super powers to assure the survival of his species.

This month we are lucky enough to be the first to get our hands on the newest version of this high-reaching premier. Advent Rising plays primarily in third-person, where you can move Gideon about freely while shooting, jumping, and diving through the air. While the right analog stick handles camera rotation, it also doubles as a lock-on tool. Utilizing a new technique called flick targeting, a quick tweak of the stick shifts your focus between enemies. It allows for rapid target switches, as well as freeing up other buttons for the myriad options that dominate the rest of the

controller. For those third-person deficient gamers out there, a quick button press allows you to play through the action in first-person instead. Meanwhile, the d-pad lets you select from a bank of weapons and powers, which can be continually remapped to the left and right triggers. This allows for dual wielding not just weapons, but super powers as well. Special abilities include a blazing speed dash, summoning sizzling energy shields, and levitation of objects and enemies. To further deepen the game, branching story and gameplay options abound. In any given situation, you can run in with guns blazing, use stealth to sneak around, or steal one of at least eight different vehicle types to blast your foes.

While Advent Rising still has a long way to go to nail down all the technical challenges that inevitably haunt such an enterprising title, we're excited to see the final product. As the first game in a proposed trilogy, we've heard that your completed game save file will be uploadable to Xbox Live. If and when the second game releases on Microsoft's next console, you'll be able to download your old info and keep going with your own individual story. How's that for maintaining continuity? ■ ■ ■



GAMECUBE

Nintendo Pennant Chase Baseball

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER EXILE INTERACTIVE > RELEASE APRIL 4

NINTENDO FANS REJOICE?



In late January, Nintendo representatives swung by the Game Informer offices to give us a first look at an unannounced GameCube title. As visions of Metroid, Zelda, and Mario danced through our minds, you can imagine our surprise when the screen flashed to life revealing Nintendo Pennant Chase Baseball. With words escaping us and our mouths planted on the floor, we then found comfort in the thought of Nintendo putting a playful spin on America's favorite pastime with characters like Mario and Samus slugging home run shots to the moon. As Nintendo quickly pointed out, however, unlike the zany sports titles that the company has become known for (see Mario Baseball below) Pennant Chase is an authentic baseball simulation.

Taking a tip from 989's long running and highly acclaimed Spring Training mode, Nintendo wants gamers to experience what it is like to be a rookie who is thrown into the wildly competitive big leagues. In Rookie of the Year mode, you'll be asked to create a player and place him on a team.

As the season progresses, you can attend coaching seminars with legendary players, gaining advice that will up your skills. If all goes as planned, you should be an all-star caliber player by the 162nd game.

On the diamond, Nintendo is striving to capture the finer details that most baseball games completely neglect. By tapping the C-Stick in different directions while batting, players can make half-swings, launch sacrifice flies, drop a slap hit, and hit down the lines. This goes for pitching as well. The C-Stick controls the amount of break you put on the pitch. Of course, when you try to add a bit more spin to a curve ball or pull a ball while batting, more skill is required — which is reflected with the batting cursor and pitching release point shrinking.

As you play through your season, every stat that you can dream up is tracked. You'll also earn bonuses that will allow you to construct your very own stadiums — beginning with a sandlot, graduating to a high school field, then triple A, then eventually concluding with a major league complex. ■ ■ ■

Nintendo's Other Baseball Game — Mario Baseball

If Pennant Chase is too serious of a game for you, don't hang up your deats just yet. Nintendo has a second GameCube baseball title in development currently entitled Mario Baseball. No details are known about it just yet, but we have a feeling that there are few things cooler than standing at the plate as Bowser hurls a heater.





■ Naval combat has never been so awesome



■ Is there anything scarier than an elephant coming to squish you?

PC

Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER STAINLESS STEEL STUDIOS > RELEASE WINTER

RAMMING SPEED

In 2003, we saw developer Stainless Steel Studios' last project, *Empires: Dawn of the Modern World*, get somewhat buried under the weight of a ton of great PC titles that season. Such a fate seems unlikely for the company's upcoming RTS, *Rise & Fall: Civilizations at War*. Though it won't be seeing store shelves any time soon, *Rise & Fall* sports a number of features new to the RTS scene that sound nothing short of revolutionary. And, as the screens clearly show, there's no room for complaining about this title's looks.

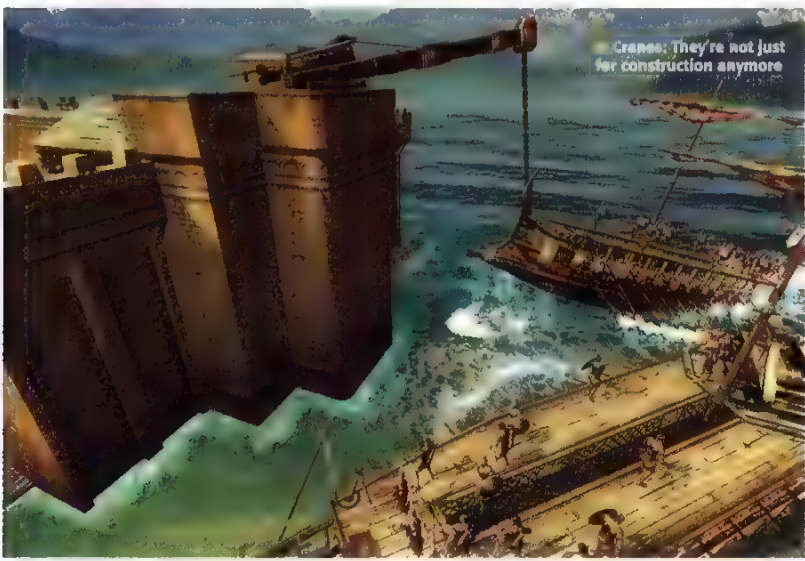
The overall point of *Rise & Fall* is to take control of either the Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans and conquer the world. Over 80 military units are distributed between the four superpowers, but the ways they can be used are the truly interesting part. The huge naval vessels of the Mediterranean can and will ram each other into splintered ruin, shooting crewmembers into the air like a confetti cannon at a Poison concert, while the survivors fight to the

death amid the devastation. Or, if you have the proper equipment (a big tower with a winch), you can literally lift an enemy ship into a vertical position, dump its crew into the drink, and capture it for your own use. *Rise & Fall* handles war machines of all kinds this way — like the ships, siege engines are accurately scaled, and similarly awesome stunts involving them are planned.

Another way that *Rise & Fall* distinguishes itself from the pack is with its heroes. Unlike the naval combat and siege warfare, these legendary figures are anything but realistic. Unless Cleopatra, Ramses, and Julius Caesar actually took the field and slew enemies by the score, that is. Stainless Steel describes them as "fully controlled superweapons," and you can control them directly (think *Dynasty Warriors*) through third-person action. As interesting as that sounds, the best part about it is that you can play co-op multiplayer, where one person takes control of all the usual RTS building and expanding, and the other does nothing but crush the

enemy under the boots of their unstoppable champion.

RTS may be a highly competitive genre, but *Rise & Fall* is giving all indications of bringing some truly innovative mechanics to the party. Fates willing, we'll have one more genuinely triple-A title to get our conquering on with in winter, when this is scheduled to become available. ■ ■ ■



■ Cranes: They're not just for construction anymore



■ Definitely a contestant for "Most Epic Screenshot of 2005"



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**HERO
WORSHIP.**



■ Radiata's stylish look provides some colorful and infuriated characters



PLAYSTATION 2

Radiata Stories

> STYLE I-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER TRI-ACE > RELEASE TBA

THE OLD KICK AND TAKE

The RPG genre is filled with games centering on one young hero's quest to save the world from imminent destruction. The latest from Tri-Ace (developer of last year's *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time*) is no different in that regard. Focusing on fledgling knight Jack Russell, the game traverses familiar territory as the hero collects allies to join his noble crusade. Despite this seemingly conventional premise, what sets *Radiata Stories* apart (apart from a main character named after a terror) is the unique approach it takes to these traditional elements.

The game will feature a real-time combat system that relies heavily on two things: rationing your Volty Gauge and working together with allies. The Volty Gauge is a battle meter that is built up with each successful hit you land on your enemies, allowing you to expend points to perform more powerful attacks. However, the Volty Gauge is used for more than solo maneuvers. It is also used when coordinating attacks with your AI-controlled allies, which enables you get into certain formations that make you more powerful and effective in combat.

Despite the fact that party interaction is so crucial in battle, the game won't provide a menu screen to modify the computer's behavior patterns. Instead, the Volty Gauge can also be used to issue mid-fight commands (once you have paid to study them)

to your companions. This allows you to direct their attention to one particular foe, or use a certain type of skill. Surprisingly, even without a way to dictate their actions, the AI allies appear to be extremely competent and able to avoiding getting stuck in unpleasant situations. This is quite refreshing since, in our opinion, if you have a sword and can use magic, you shouldn't need babysitting.

Even with a fun and addictive battle system, *Radiata Stories'* defining feature is the way it strikes a balance between silly and serious in terms of storytelling. The characters are all anime-styled, and this exaggerated approach lends itself well to the unique humor the game integrates through cutscenes, voice work, and a generally zany mood. Instead of simply pressing a button to "examine" barrels and dressers in search of hidden loot, Jack physically kicks objects, occasionally rattling some gold loose. Of course, if you go around kicking people, you're bound to get a bevy of insults and bruises instead of potions and money.

While *Radiata Stories* hasn't been confirmed for a U.S. release yet, the success of similar games like *Star Ocean* and *Tales of Symphonia* in 2004 indicates that the demand for this kind of RPG is on the rise. If it does make it Stateside, this title promises to deliver a compelling and unique take on classic genre conventions. ■ ■ ■

GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL!

Dwarfing any collections outside of *Pokémon*, *Radiata Stories* features over 150 characters to recruit into your ranks. Of course, it is rarely as simple as finding the desired people and talking to them; most characters have lists of conditions and prerequisites that must be met first. Not only that, but because the game features full night and day cycles (along with itineraries for every character), you'll need to keep track of where your potential allies will be at any given time. This means that swelling your ranks to capacity will be a challenging aspect guaranteed to lend the game some additional replay value.





PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Beat Down: Fists of Vengeance

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

I BEAT YOU DOWN...WITH MY FISTS OF VENGEANCE!

Despite a title that appears to have been created by a fighting game random name generator, Beat Down: Fists of Vengeance is Capcom's attempt to move the brawler genre beyond the parameters set by such long-ago classics as Double Dragon and Final Fight.

Although the plot is so generic as to not require elaboration, Beat Down does have a few new tricks up its spiked leather sleeve. For one, the game will offer a level of character customization that is unheard of in the genre. From what we've seen, there will be literally thousands of possible looks you can create. You'll be able to choose shirts, pants, jackets, and various accessories, as well as more fundamental aspects like hairstyle and facial features. What's more, altering your appearance will actually be an important part of the game, as you'll be able to elude the cops by changing looks, thus making their description of you useless.

Another of Beat Down's more innovative features (or at least it was until THQ's recently released Punisher game) is the "negotiation" team-building system. You'll be able to have up to 10 members of your gang (although only two are with you at any one time). To gain new members, you

have a number of options -- you can negotiate verbally, pay them off, or beat them into submission. Guess which option usually works best?

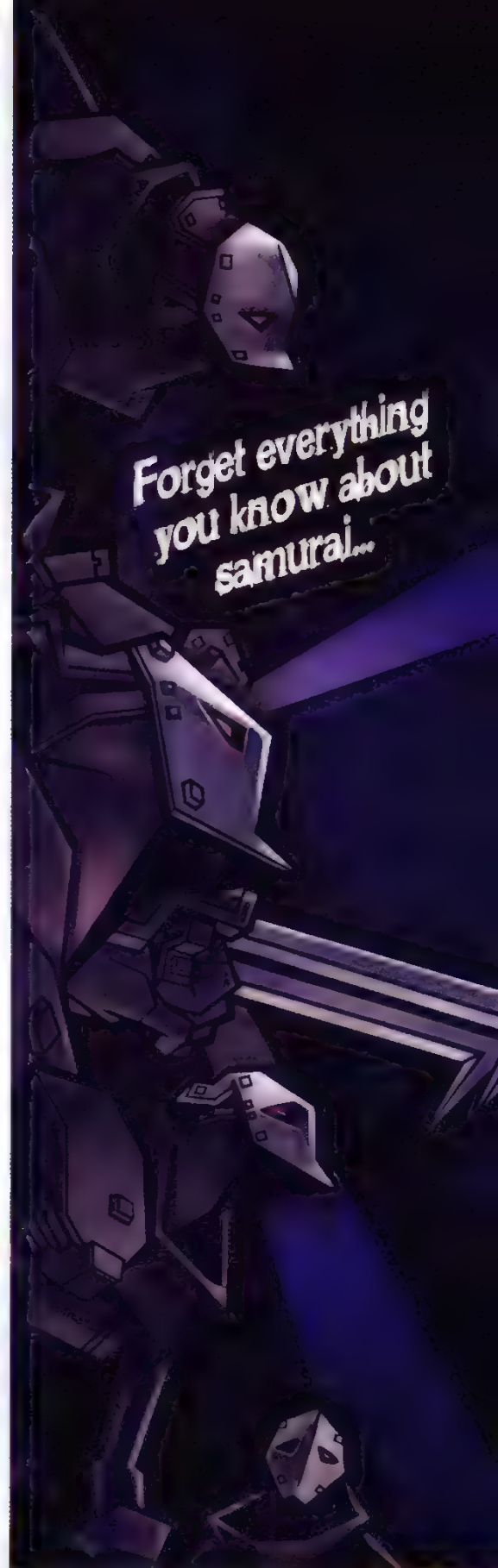
Although it initially appeared that the game might feature GTA-styled environments, that's not really the case. The game's producer, Tatsoya Minami, said, "It won't all be open from the beginning. Of course, you'll go into certain areas for specific parts of the story. You might also need a tip or information from someone to get into certain areas."

Although Capcom is known for its deep and complex 2D fighters, Minami assured us that Beat Down will offer a more straightforward brand of brutality. "Between Street Fighter and Final Fight, it's closer to Final Fight," he commented. Most moves can be performed with rudimentary combos, but you do have one skill fairly unique to the genre -- pick-pocketing. By brushing up against NPCs on the street, you'll come away with cash and items.

Will Beat Down be the game that injects new blood into the brawling genre, or just another punch-drunk pretender? Time will tell, but so far we're very interested. ■■■



■ You can switch between your team members at any time, and even use them to pull off co-op combo moves





PLAYSTATION 2

Castlevania: Curse of Darkness

> STYLE 1 PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > DEVELOPER KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT TOKYO > RELEASE FALL

WE DON'T NEED NO STINKING BELMONT

Though some Castlevania fans would like nothing better than a full on, Viewtiful Joe-esque 2D home console treatment of the franchise, Konami has other ideas. Curse of Darkness is based on the technology behind the last 3D Castlevania, Lament of Innocence, and looks set to deliver a similar style of gothy hack n' slash action this fall. However, Konami thankfully seems well aware of the issues that fans and critics alike had with the previous PS2 entry, and aims to address them while incorporating the strengths of the well-loved PSone classic Castlevania: Symphony of the Night into this new title.

Curse of Darkness takes place three years after Dracula's defeat at the hands of Trevor Belmont (as seen in Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse). Hector, one of Dracula's two Devil Forgemasters, had left the dark lord's employ over a difference in ideals, which left the castle open to attack by the legendary Belmont. The other Forgemaster, Isaac, blames Hector for the destruction of his way of life and orchestrates the death of Hector's beloved. Controlling Hector, players will guide him on a quest for revenge against his former rival amid the horrors of a Europe infected with the curse unleashed by Dracula's death.

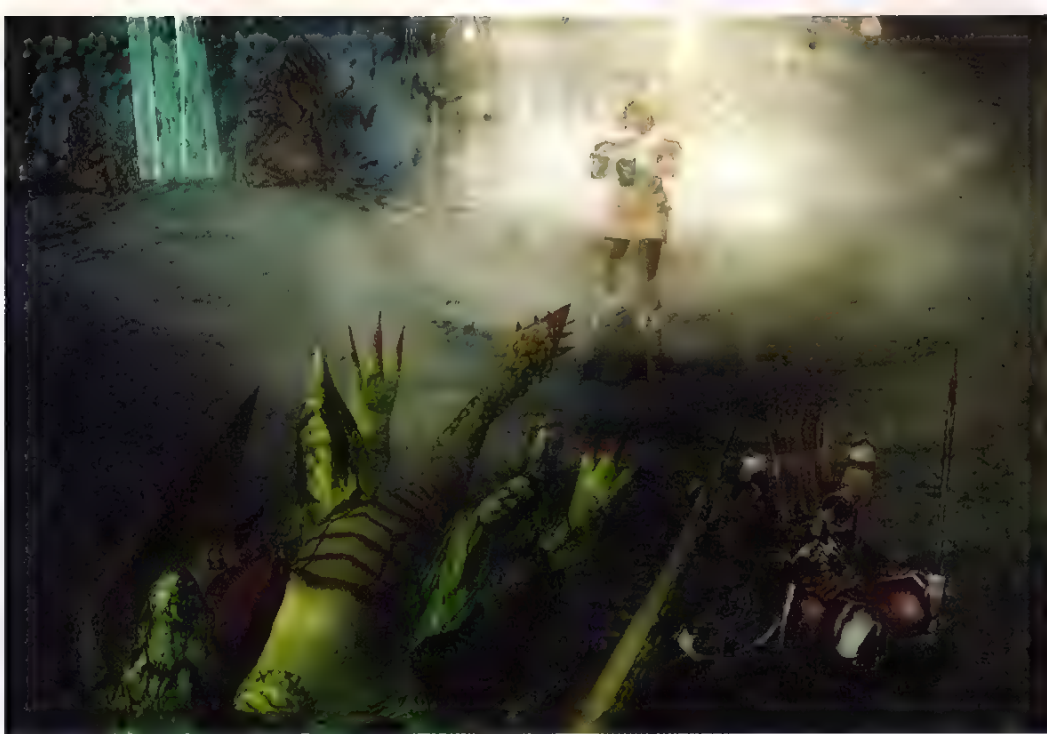
Topping the lists of promised improvements to the 3D Castlevania formula is a focus on the adventuring elements that have garnered the side-scrolling entries in the series such a rabid following. A large portion of progressing through the quest will involve gaining access to new areas of the

castle by acquiring new abilities. If this sounds familiar, it's because this is a mechanic that's been adapted from Metroid on the NES into many titles, and believe us, it's a very good thing. Due to Hector's unusual skills, though, the method by which your mobility increases is through the acquisition and training of creatures called Innocent Devils. For example, the Crow can help you float over a chasm, and the big suit of armor can open a door that Hector can't budge. Though how an eight-foot-tall, freakishly strong suit of animated armor can be called innocent, we don't know.

Another change from Lament of Innocence is the variety of weapons in Hector's arsenal, all of which have different stats and combo strings. Swords, maces, spears, and more will be available to help crush the hordes of evil. Whether a whip will be involved is unknown, but given the frustration inherent in Lament's whip control, we're thankful to have other options at the very least. In order to add a little RPG flavor to the mix (again, similar to Symphony of the Night), Hector will gain experience points and levels for smashing enemies.

Although it had some flaws in the depth department, CoD's predecessor Lament of Innocence was certainly a competent, fast-paced action title. From all that we've seen, this new installment in the series will resolve the depth issue while broadening the demon-hacking aspect as well. If all turns out as planned, this should be the 3D Castlevania that fans have been yearning for. ■■■





PLAYSTATION 2

Arc the Lad: End of Darkness

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > PUBLISHER NAMCO > DEVELOPER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE MAY

TAKING IT TO THE WIRES

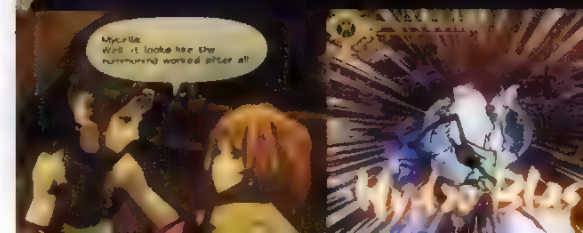
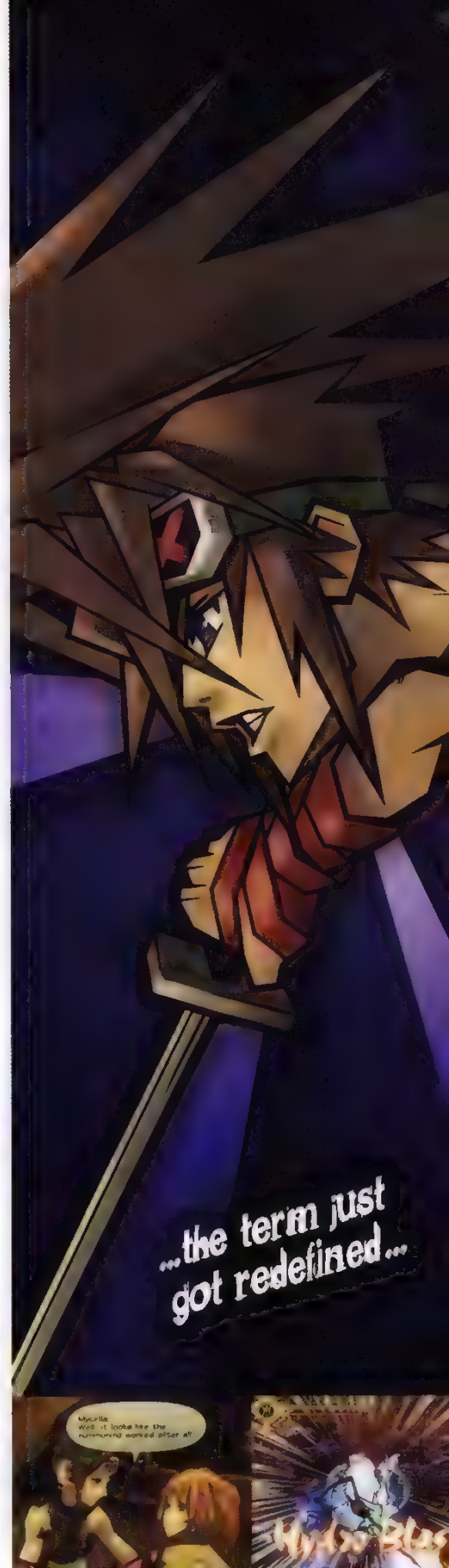
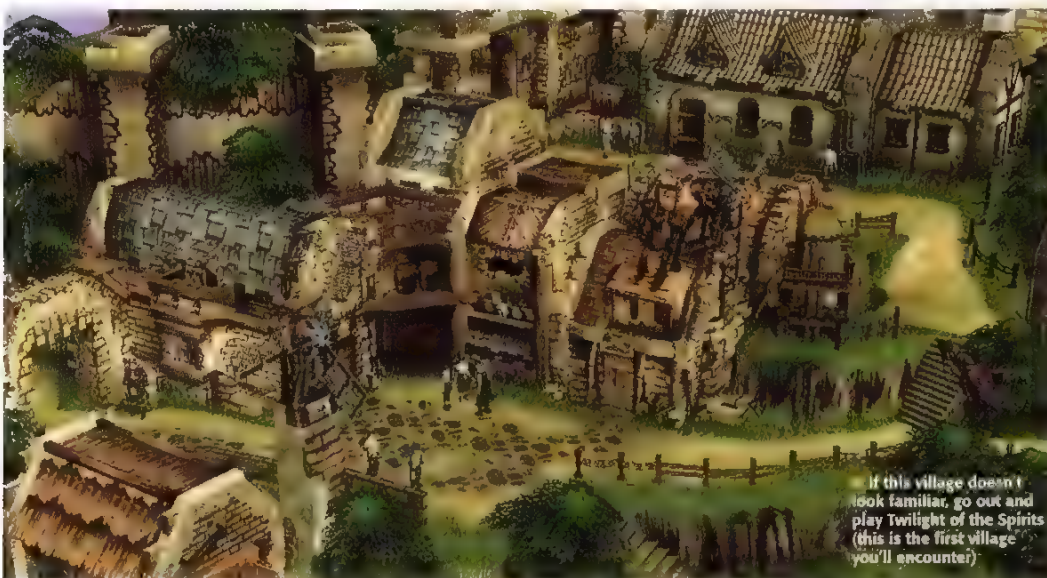
We hate the word "convergence." Not because its dictionary definition lacks punch (to tend to move toward one point or on another), but because of its unfortunate distinction as one of the most overused marketing buzzwords in the last few years. Still, the word's synonyms (concenter, focus, meet) don't quite get across what the new Arc the Lad title has in store for gamers — true, honest convergence of action, role-playing, solo play, and online challenges. The info that Namco has leaked so far has us, as fans of the series, chomping at the proverbial bit in anticipation.

With the extensive continuity between series entries (End of Darkness takes place five years after the excellent Twilight of the Spirits ends), there are some classic gameplay elements that are making a return — think impressive magic attacks and an extensive party system. But the title's new abilities are what is enabling the game to join different genres in both the online and offline arenas. Real-time combo-based action

is new for the series and the company promises intense sequences merging the traditional magic system with the new combat techniques. Because of this gameplay shift, Namco has big plans for online.

Players will be able to take their solo mode character over the 'net to compete in four-on-four matches or co-op missions with three other people. The specifics (like if you'll be able to level up characters online for use in the single-player story) are still unconfirmed, but it's clear that the choices you make in solo mode will affect your character in the online arena.

All in all, the variety of this Arc the Lad entry is staggering — 24 returning characters from the series will make appearances, online mode offers live chat and exclusive missions, and the solo mode promises tasty action to accompany the series' trademark storytelling. We're already drooling and definitely thankful that the wait is only a few months for this interesting take on an RPG classic. ■ ■ ■





PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Stolen

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER HIP GAMES > DEVELOPER BLUE 52 > RELEASE MARCH 22

IT TAKES A THIEF

The reason so many stealth/action titles have failed to make much of an impression with gamers is that the genre's two star franchises, Metal Gear Solid and Splinter Cell, do what they do so well, and most new franchises simply copy their formula. That's the reason we're so excited about Stolen. Admittedly, any new stealth games make us a little wary at first (we've been burned before!), but once we saw Stolen in action, we were quite pleased with what it brings to the table.

Stolen stars a female thief named Anya Romanov who uses her high-tech gadgets and impressive athletic abilities to swipe precious items from heavily guarded locations. Anya has a stunning array of acrobatic moves at her disposal. She can leap from roof to roof, swing on poles like a gymnast, and shimmy above the heads of unsuspecting guards. Her athletic skills mean she can move much more vertically than Sam or Snake, and the game's four stages

will let her explore every building from top to bottom, inside and out. She also has a host of gadgets and martial arts moves at her disposal for taking out enemies, but Anya is no killer. Holding true to the adage about honor among thieves, Anya's attacks are all non-lethal. This keeps her conscience clear, but also adds to the challenge of each heist. As the guards and other foes she encounters are quite intelligent, any guard she knocks out will actively seek her out upon awakening.

The gameplay features we witnessed got us pretty excited to play this game, and so did the technical features. With real time volumetric lighting and huge, detailed environments with no loading, Stolen's atmosphere is one of realism and intrigue. Nice visuals, intelligent AI, and some new additions to the stealth/action formula are present and we're happy to say Stolen's Anya Romanov looks ready to hang with the genre's big boys. ■ ■ ■



■ Anya's tendency to lock herself out of her apartment gave her great chances to practice her skills



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

FlatOut

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, OR UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, SYSTEM LINK, OR PC LAN OR INTERNET) > PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > DEVELOPER BUGBEAR ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE JUNE 14

FROM REDLINE TO HANGTIME

Faced with the possibility of another car game, most players would rather wrap their lips around a tailpipe than grip the steering wheel of one more ho-hummer. Well, we suggest you put your seat belt on, because FlatOut will literally have you leaping out of it.

Granted, the title's circuit-based career of destruction has been done before, but you haven't seen tracks like these. Brimming with physics from the proprietary engine of PC developer Bugbear, in the world of FlatOut, telephone poles have a way of not standing upright and track-side barrels tend to careen into the way of the racers — at least when they are hit. Since nearly every object on the screen is capable of being struck (this destruction nets the player nitro boost), there is something to be said for driving like a headless chicken. Of course, you still have

to win the race, so you also have a stake in always keeping your eyes peeled for shortcuts and making sure that your destructible car can at least limp across the finish line. The game contains 36 tracks and 16 different cars to tune and trade in.

To paraphrase Newton's first law of motion: "When a car going really, really fast hits something, the driver goes headfirst through the windshield." In other words, there is a lot of fun to be had when you combine FlatOut's ragdoll physics with high speeds. Apart from your driver flying through the air after a crash on one of the game's courses, the title includes six brutal minigames where you'll abuse your avatar in events such as human bowling or the human high jump. Cars are always cars, but FlatOut's kind of thinking could be enough to put a lot of butts in front of TVs this summer. ■ ■ ■



■ Going for the gold: It's the Human Long Jump

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PLAYSTATIONS 2 | XBOX | PC

Battlestations: Midway

This is as ambitious and large-scale a project as you're ever likely to see. With epic World War II naval engagements that can last for over an hour (even with time-dilation turned on), and the option for players to command the entire battle or jump in and out of direct control of any ship or airplane, THQ's *Battlestations: Midway* is doing its best to do it all. Dozens of WW II capital ships, support boats, fighters, torpedo planes, and everything else for both the U.S. and Japan are available. Whether or not this all comes together into an engaging game or not is yet to be determined, but from what we've seen it certainly has the potential. Plus, the beauty of the water in this title defies words. Hopefully, the promise of *Battlestations: Midway* will be realized this summer when it launches in the U.S.



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PLAYSTATION 2

Fullmetal Alchemist 2: Curse of the Crimson Elixir

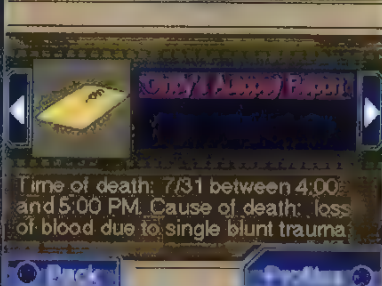
Wowza – Square is getting quick with the Fullmetal product. Like the Captain and Tennille of anime video games, Ed and Al are coming back this spring to further dilute modern scientific principals in this prequel to the recently released *Broken Angel*. With love keeping them together, the brothers' new game has streamlined alchemy and combat systems along with a new cel-shaded look for the entirety of their adventure. Fans will appreciate the half-hour of original animation and the story, which starts in the anime series' first location, Lior.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

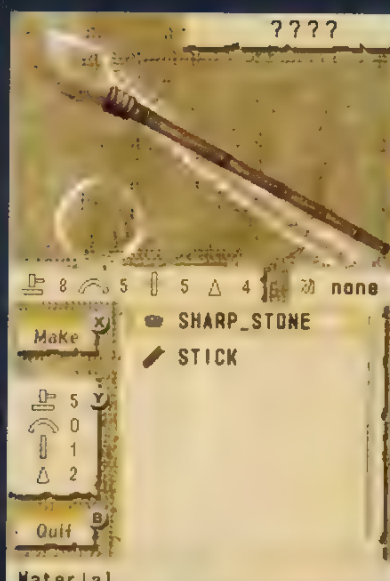
Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder!

Eutechnyx isn't one of the world's most famous development houses, but it knows how to make a product that resonates with consumers. In 2003, the company's *Big Mutha Truckers* didn't make a huge splash with the media, but its freewheeling big-rig racing ended up selling in excess of one million copies worldwide. This time around, THQ is taking on the publishing duties, and Eutechnyx is using its earnings to make the game bigger and badder, with more miles of road to explore, more goods to sell in the game's free economy, and more dynamic use of CB communication. The soundtrack will include such genre-appropriate fare as Willie Nelson, Ruddle of Mudd, and ex-CCR singer John Fogerty.



NINTENDO DS
Gyakuten Saibun (Working Title)

Nintendo promised that the DS was going to be the home of innovative new concepts, and Capcom's first entry on the handheld is certainly unique, if not actually new. *Gyakuten Saibun* (which will no doubt receive a new title) is all about the high-stakes world of criminal law. Part *Law & Order*, part *Speed Racer*, and part adventure game, *Gyakuten Saibun*'s strange anime-influenced vibe is completely its own. The first four missions are ports of two ultra-popular GBA titles from Japan, while the fifth has been created specifically to use the DS's unique features. As you make objections, interrogate witnesses, and pore over case files, you'll soon become as good at lawyering as that Matlock fella — but not as good lookin'. Look for a retitled *Gyakuten Saibun* to lay down the law this summer.



NINTENDO DS
Lost In Blue

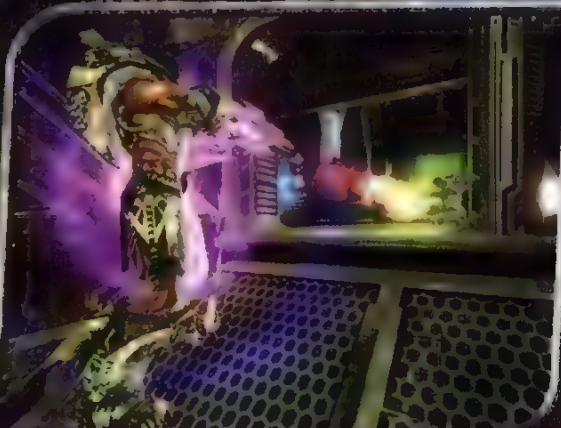
Washing ashore this August, Konami's newly announced DS game *Lost in Blue* sounds like one of the most unique titles on the handheld system. Focusing on two young people stranded on a desert island, *Lost in Blue* charges players with keeping the duo alive through cooperation and is being billed as a survival RPG. Players will explore the island; create items like spears and bows; and fish, hunt, and trap in minigames that utilize the DS' touch screen. No word yet on whether or not your best friend will be a volleyball named Wilson.



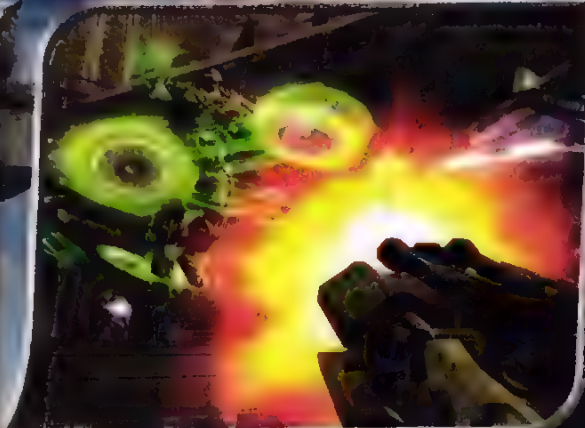
XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC
TMNT Mutant Mele

Cowabunga! Those friends of pubescent amphibian martial artists known as Konami are bringing another TMNT title to the Xbox, GameCube, and PC this March, and this time it will focus solely on bodacious combat. A four-player fighting game, *Mutant Mele* will let you duke it out as one of 20 radical TMNT characters. While this gnarly brawler will focus on the madcap multiplayer action, it will also feature a totally tubular single-player adventure. That's a lot of turtle action for your dollar, you rowdy rockin' dudes!

BRING A KNIFE TO THE GUNFIGHT.



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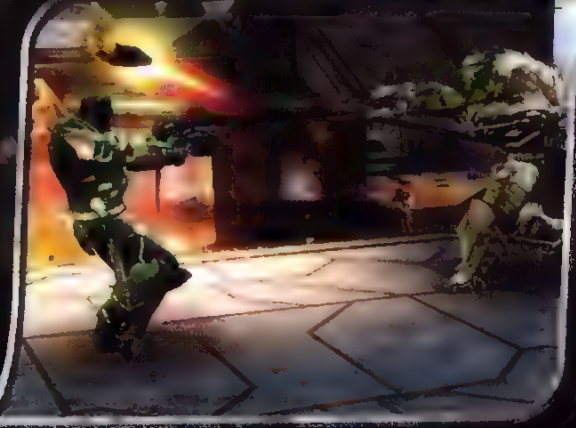


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**Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language**

MIDWAY

9.3 OUT OF 10
- OXM

5 OUT OF 5
- MAXIM



Unreal Championship 2 amplifies the explosive action of a 1st-person shooter with the challenge of head-to-head, 3rd-person melee fighting. A full arsenal of ranged weapons is at your command, plus new, acrobatic melee moves and weapons that let you bring a knife to a gunfight - with lethal results!

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LIVE



MULTI



Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

112

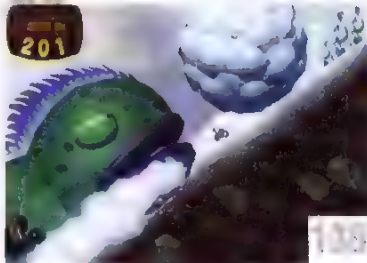
PS2



Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30

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GC



Donkey Kong Jungle Beat

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XBOX



Doom 3

134



122



God of War

The gods are well pleased. With God of War, Sony's Santa Monica studio presents a daring offering that seamlessly blends a compelling story, fluid gameplay, and impossible violence into a single jaw-dropping experience. In an industry currently dominated by heroes returning for third and fourth iterations, newcomer Kratos shakes things up by starring in a game so epic, it could very well define the action genre in the years to come. He makes wanton brutality so much fun, you'll want to grab the review on page 122 and rip its larynx right out. Mmm...therapeutic.

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 | Sisyphian: The Greek way to say "This totally blows." |

- > **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**

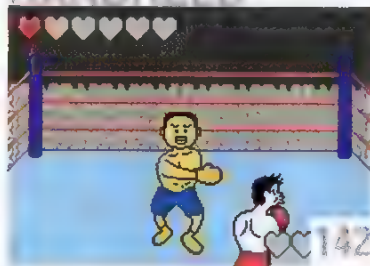
- High** - You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.
- Moderately High** - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
- Moderate** - Good for a few months or a few times through.
- Moderately Low** - After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
- Low** - You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

PC



Act of War – Direct Action

HANDHELD



WarioWare Touched!



The Sims 2 University

Just maintaining the status quo won't get an expansion pack much love – we need more than new items to get into a game after the first entry. The Sims 2 University takes this sentiment to heart by piling on extras in the item, interaction, and feature departments; but really sets itself apart by highlighting and updating the gameplay of its stellar source material. University is strong enough that those who haven't sunk hours into Sims 2 should pick it up and get in on the fun.

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pg. 125

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).

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

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 Devil May Cry and Viewtiful Joe.

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

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

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

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

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

CG – Computer-Generated graphics.

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

fighting – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat 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 Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty.

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 and Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance.

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.

Kratosis – The process of evolving into a higher being triggered by playing through God of War.

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 Puyo Pop.

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 Xenosaga.

shooter – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius.

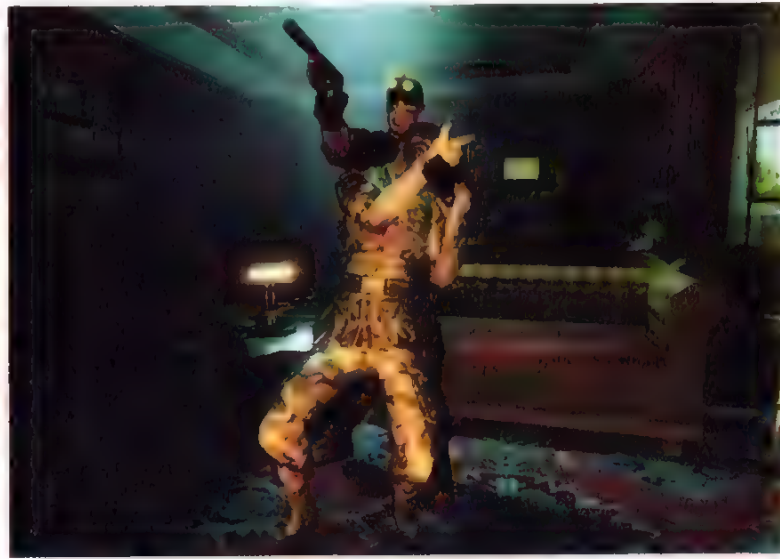
SNES – Super Nintendo Entertainment System.

sports – A term we use for games like MaddenNFL.

strategy – A term we use for games like La Pucelle and Front Mission.

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

C CONTENT RATED COMMON SENSE PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older	M MATURE PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older
E EVERYONE CONTENT RATED ALL AGES	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older	A ADULTS ONLY PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED	Content suitable only for adults.
T TEEN CONTENT RATED PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older	RP RATING PENDING CONTENT RATED	Product is awaiting final rating



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX | PC

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, SYSTEM LINK, OR ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
 > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** MARCH 29 > **ESRB** M

THE BEAUTY OF CHAOS

When titles like Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory release, it's clear why games are overtaking movies as the world's premiere form of entertainment. The Splinter Cell series provides the kind of intelligent plots and explosive action that was once limited to films or novels, but lets the player experience the world of international espionage first-hand in a way that no other medium can emulate. The latest entry, Chaos Theory, not only immerses the player in a masterful spy thriller, but also continues to innovate in the stealth/action genre.

As with any good spy story, a smart, complex plot is key to success, and Chaos Theory delivers with Sam Fisher's most explosive adventure yet. I won't spoil the twists and turns, but will say that the themes of intellectual warfare, betrayal, and divided loyalties make for one of the most intelligent video game plots to date. Writing in video games is a subject that doesn't get a lot of attention, but Chaos Theory features a simply great script. Not only is it complex and deep, it's also surprisingly funny. Over the course of the adventure, there are jokes about Sam's age,

"...a crowning achievement in the art of video games."

other games (such as Metal Gear Solid 3 and Half-Life 2), and even a sly nod to the film *Brazil*.

While I loved the story and the dialogue, I felt that Pandora Tomorrow did a better job of doling out jaw-dropping moments throughout the game, whereas Chaos Theory's biggest thrills were confined to the final third of the game. But I'm pleased to say pacing issues were the biggest faults I could find in the title — from a technical standpoint, Chaos Theory is nearly flawless. The visuals are staggeringly awesome, with some of the best textures the Xbox has yet produced. Character models are amazing, and environments are almost frighteningly realistic. The audio department is similarly impressive: Amon Tobin's score is both intense and beautiful, and the voice actors once again knock it out of the park.

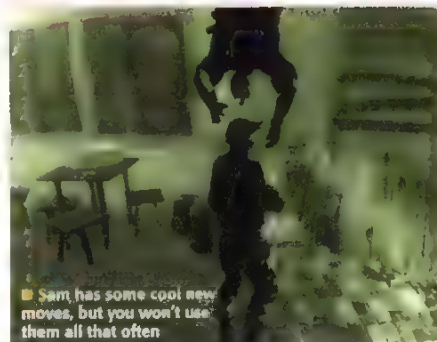
The gameplay is just as polished: All of Sam's various moves are a breeze to pull off, although I rarely found opportunities to use some of his more exotic tricks. I never used his new hanging neck snap in my first playthrough, but I did get a chance to try out some of these moves in Chaos Theory's Co-op mode. I love how playing with a second spy opens up so many natural extensions of the Splinter Cell universe with its team-based moves and reinforces the realism and gravity of Chaos Theory's plot by cleverly tying into the single-player story. My only complaint about this mode



Partner actions, such as rappelling, are key to success in the co-op mode



"I'mm... I know I haven't finished my spy-proofing, but where did I leave off?"



Sam has some cool new moves, but you won't use them all that often

is that it's far too short, as it can be completed in a handful of hours. Fortunately, Pandora Tomorrow's excellent four-player Versus mode is also included. The spies vs. mercs gameplay is one of the most unique and addictive online experiences around, and although it hasn't changed much, the new maps alone make it worth a serious time investment.

If Chaos Theory were limited to only its single-player campaign, I'd still recommend it as one of the most intelligent and exciting action titles to date. But with the inclusion of two separate multiplayer modes, each of which offers a separate, fantastic experience, Chaos Theory becomes so much more. It is simply a masterpiece, and a crowning achievement in the art of video games. —JEREMY

The Other Agents

Chaos Theory also appears on the PS2 and GameCube, but these versions were not ready for review. We will analyze the PS2 release, and if there are any notable differences, we will follow up with a separate review next month. If there aren't major differences, please take this as our definitive review for the PS2 version. As the GameCube release lacks online, it will be reviewed separately.

BOTTOM LINE 9.75

> **Concept:** Sam Fisher returns with a new adventure, Pandora Tomorrow's great Versus mode, and all-new co-op play

> **Graphics:** Chaos Theory pushes the Xbox to its limit, producing some of the most stunning visuals to date

> **Sound:** Amon Tobin's score fits the mood perfectly, and the voice acting is fantastic

> **Playability:** The core control scheme perfectly fits all three game modes, while allowing exclusive elements to each one

> **Entertainment:** Each game type offers unique thrills, creating some of the most compelling action around

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.75

When a game makes players feel like utter rock stars, nodding knowingly to themselves after completing an objective, telling their friends about how they smartly achieved goals, reliving the experience and trying it again to do "just a little bit better," you know that the game in question is something truly spectacular. Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory is just such an experience. It gives players missions that, on the surface, look simple, but the genius lies in the moveset and level design that make you feel smart and creative in your solution. In short, it makes you feel like a super spy and provides an ultimate escapism that other entertainment mediums can never achieve. With technical wizardry that fully immerses and a story that remains compelling throughout, the experience rarely breaks that zen-like state of total believability and ego-boosting smarts. —LISA

#WhereYouAt?



MOTOROLA R311

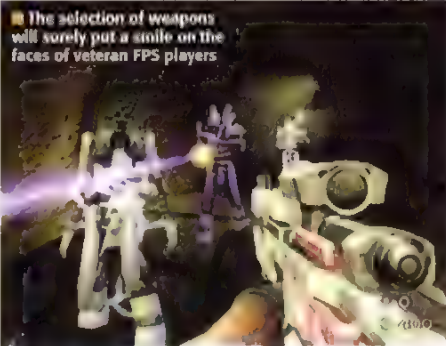


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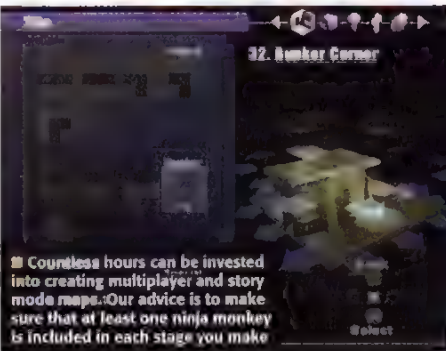




■ The selection of weapons will surely put a smile on the faces of veteran FPS players



■ Free Radical's signature character modeling is back with striking new detailing



■ Countless hours can be invested into creating multiplayer and story mode maps. Our advice is to make sure that at least one ninja monkey is included in each stage you make

BOTTOM LINE **9**

- > **Concept:** Cram as much ass-kicking content as humanly possible onto a disc
- > **Graphics:** The character models are lively and animated superbly. Unfortunately, the environments are very bland
- > **Sound:** Cortez's spoken dialogue is golden and the weapon sounds are great (you have to check out the human voice weapon cheat). Little can be said about the soundtrack, however
- > **Playability:** It still needs a jump button, but outside of this, it has a God-like fluidity to it
- > **Entertainment:** Could easily be your first choice when asked what game you wish you had if you were stranded on an island
- > **Replay Value:** High

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

TimeSplitters Future Perfect

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** FREE RADICAL > **RELEASE** MARCH 8 > **ESRB** M

A SERIOUS TIME SINK

If a game's weight were based solely on the content that it delivered, attempting to remove TimeSplitters Future Perfect from retail shelves would result in your arms being ripped clean off and the game crashing through the floor. From its boisterously entertaining time-travelling story and array of uniquely crafted single-player challenges to its massive multiplayer offering and remarkable map-maker program, not even a crane could lift this game.

The TimeSplitters series has always been renowned for its incredible depth, but this iteration fires direct hits in everything that it offers. For the first time, the single-player experience is just as rewarding as the multiplayer. Free Radical has made great strides in comedic storytelling and has created a ridiculous tale that even Douglas Adams would chuckle at. Shooting before he thinks and throwing caution to the wind whenever he possibly can,

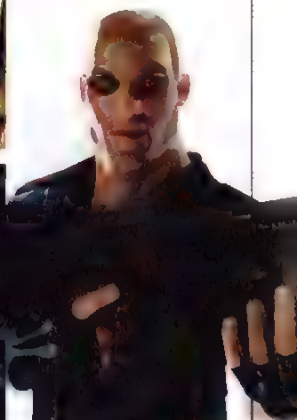
Cortez is a train wreck of a hero and one of the most likeable characters in all of gaming. Thanks to time paradoxes, players will get a double dosage of this bumbling savior. At any given time, as you march through levels, you may run into a future or past version of yourself. Listening to the two Cortez's communicate with one another is like watching a chimp trying to disarm a nuclear missile. It's horrifyingly funny.

Most of the stages require players to simply work their way from point A to point B, yet the inclusion of vehicles does add variety to the mix. Gameplay-wise, this series has always been heralded for delivering swift and fluid character movement, but it was always a little rough around the edges and shallow in scope. In this installment, Free Radical has upped the ante by including a handy melee attack. Additionally, the auto-snap on the right analog targeting has been removed (which opens the doors for easier sniping and headshot aiming). Although tight in play, I still feel that this series is in dire need of a jump button (as it would add another dimension to multiplayer).

Of course, working your way through the story (either by your lonesome or with a friend through co-op) is only the tip of this enormous iceberg. With

over 150 characters that can be unlocked, the game opens its arms and invites players to put their skills to the test in wildly amusing Arcade, League, and Challenge modes. You never really know what to expect from these choices. You may find yourself assaulting a base in a *Tron*-like computer world, using a shotgun to decapitate zombified chimps, racing cats on caster wheels, or sniping mutant deer. The beauty of this is that you never feel like you are doing the same thing twice — and this sensation lasts until you have all of the characters unlocked and all of the challenges completed.

While it's easy to lose your life in the single-player offering, the true heart and soul of this game is still multiplayer. Split-screen deathmatching in the previous iterations in the series was insanely addictive, but the advent of online play really opens things up. Whether you are striving for higher ranks or want to dazzle people with a map that you created and uploaded, TimeSplitters' online presence is unprecedented and simply irresistible. It does suffer from poorly placed respawns (you'll often find yourself materializing right in front of other players), but the majority of the maps are ingenious in design, allowing players to strategize and use the terrain to their advantage. Although it could still use some massaging and upgrading in certain areas, you'll be hard-pressed to find a game that delivers more bang for your buck. —REINER



Second Opinion

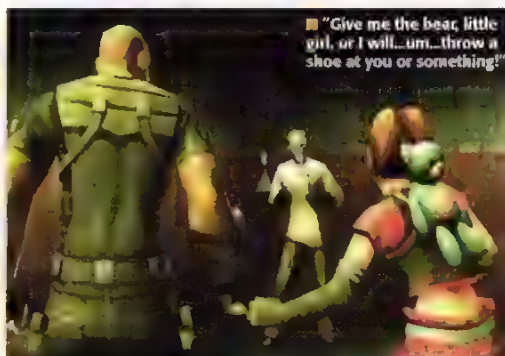
Laugh-out-loud funny coexists flawlessly with frantic run-and-gun action in this packed-to-the-gills gameplay package. The story taps the sensibilities of all sorts of familiar settings, from WW II shooters to post-apocalyptic Terminator futures. Through its exaggerated character animations and spot-on voice acting, even the most minor characters are intensely memorable. Unreal4 to mock other games, sci-fi norms, and even itself, Future Perfect meanders through a mind-twisting tale of time travel hijinks whether you tackle it alone or with your buddy. The Arcade section assures that you'll be able to enjoy the multiplayer arenas even alone with the use of AI-controlled bots. League play, challenges, and 150 unlockable playable characters lend tremendous replay value, and that's without even mentioning the online mult player and easy to use mapmaker. While it may be slightly technically inferior to some other available FPS options out there, good luck finding any others that make you laugh or play as hard. —MILLER



the edge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal
All these versions look and play great, and without online play, the GameCube version had decent stick feel against PS2 and Xbox offerings.



■ Multiplayer experiences have never been this deep



■ "Give me the bear, little girl, or I will...um...throw a shoe at you or something!"

CONSTANTINE

THE VIDEOGAME



Hell wants him.
Heaven won't take him.
Earth needs him.
YOU CONTROL HIM.



PlayStation 2



MATURE 17+



Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language

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> Concept: Yet another change in format for a series that hasn't hit its full stride

> Graphics: Compared to its predecessor MX Unleashed, the worlds seem more stable and less susceptible to foreground pop-up and fogging

> Sound: There are some ambient level sounds, but it's mainly bikes and beats

> Playability: I would like quicker response from the pre-load and the ability to map it to the right analog stick

> Entertainment: Rearranges the structure of MX Unleashed, but it's still not a be-all, end-all experience

> Replay Value: Moderately High



UNLIMITED ENABLED
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

MX vs. ATV Unleashed

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 BROADBAND) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER RAINBOW STUDIOS > RELEASE MARCH 4 > ESRB E

SLIDING OFF TRACK

This game is like reading a menu at a fine restaurant. "Filet of gray sole stuffed with crab meat, bay shrimp, and brie cheese..." But when you finally fold your napkin into your shirt and prepare to dig in, you discover that all the ingredients are indeed there, but they've been prepared in quite a different manner than you had anticipated. After the motocross breakthrough of last year's MX Unleashed, it appeared that developer Rainbow Studios was working up some enchanting alchemy that would produce pure gold. While all the components from the franchise are here, it lacks that over-arching cohesion.

Although the freestyle world of MX Unleashed is still in the game, you'll spend most of your time doing good, old-fashioned races. Progressing through the week-based Championship mode unlocks periodic challenges (which consist of Machine races and flat track contests, etc.), which are the highlight of the game and where this series takes off. I once spent nearly an entire day on one challenge, and didn't regret a second of it. Although the regular career races are tight and infused with Rainbow's bread-and-butter physics, they can get old. The main reason is that these circuit races are

broken up into heats. While these help players familiarize themselves with the tracks (which is important), it gets boring having to race each track at least twice before moving on. Worse yet, while you can switch between an MX bike and an ATV before any given week, the courses used by both are exactly the same. This leaves you with little choice but to stick with one or the other all the way to the end in order to avoid racing the same tracks week-in and week-out.

Of course, the racing itself is exactly as advertised. It's fast-paced with surprises around every corner and rewards for those players that master the courses and who know when to pre-load jumps and when not to. Don't worry if you fall behind or biff it trying to do a 360 backflip. The courses (with some rubberband AI for the other riders) are designed so that a few perfectly executed jumps will have you at the front of the pack again. Although I loved how each vehicle feels distinct and contains its own eccentricities to master, I did wish the pre-load system was mapped to the right analog stick, moving the gas to one of the triggers. As it stands, with both the pre-load and the steering on the left analog, your vehicle's axial movement

is too disturbed by pre-loading for jumps. This is especially detrimental when using the MX bike, where setting up for quick jump while still rounding a corner will have you flopping around from side to side like a fish out of water.

Although some people may look at this title and think it's just another motocross game, what they really don't understand is that it could have been much more. Sure, all the components of a fun game are here — and this title is a good time — but is there anything wrong with adding a little smoke and mirrors to make it even more compelling? Of course, motocross fans will like it anyway, but why settle for that? A niche game could have been avoided here, had the format of MX Unleashed simply been expanded rather than reigned in. —KATO

The Edge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal
In this case the Edge goes to the Xbox version. With a noticeably sharper look, it stands out from the PS2 edition, although the feature set is the same.



Flat tracks like this one require their own racing style.



One little known side effect of Cialis is a need to overcompensate by smashing stuff with a monster truck.

Second Opinion 8.25

MX vs. ATV Unleashed had been billed as the title that could take motocross racing out of its (albeit very popular) niche and make it a part of mainstream gaming. However, I'm a little disappointed that the game that was finally delivered doesn't seem to live up to its promise. There's a lot of variety here — indoor and outdoor championships, freestyle stunt modes, a load of different vehicles like planes and helicopters — but unfortunately, there is no one comprehensive mode that ties everything together. I think a structure similar to SSX 3 or Tony Hawk's Underground could have made this much more appealing to the general gaming audience. Also, I'm a little disappointed that the main championships for ATV and MX are largely the same tracks. That said, I don't think it's possible for Rainbow to make a bad racing game. The physics and control are dead-on, and mastering the hills and bumps of every race takes maximum concentration. Also, for those willing to unlock everything this game has to offer, there are a ton of challenges and events to explore. Another good racing game, however not the genre-defining masterpiece I had hoped for. —MAAT

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

Playboy: The Mansion

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ARUSH ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** CYBERLORE
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 25 > **ESRB** M

This transparent imitation of The Sims seeks to allow players to live out the fantasy of being America's most famous swinger, Playboy's Hugh Hefner. As Hef, you'll oversee the operations of your publishing empire: hiring staff, conducting photo shoots, holding court with the glitterati, and selecting editorial content. You can also get busy with a reasonable degree of explicitness with a variety of playmates and assorted babes. However, unlike The Sims, which allows you to build your own destiny from the ground up, Playboy: The Mansion is done in by the very fact that all you can do is be Hefner. After awhile, his glamorous life reveals itself to be just another stale routine: coasting from party to party, engaging in meaningless relationships and mindless chatter with vapid celebrities. —**MATT**

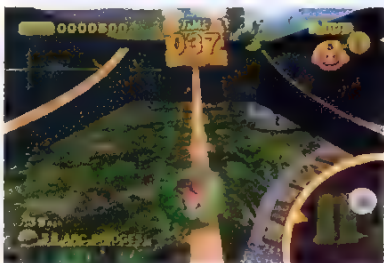


PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

BOTTOM LINE 8

Super Monkey Ball Deluxe

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** AMUSEMENT VISION > **RELEASE** MARCH 15 > **ESRB** E



Is the whole really greater than the sum of its parts? In this case, not really — GameCube's Super Monkey Ball 1 and 2 have been combined onto a single disc for the Xbox and PS2, and remain largely unchanged. Some minor tweaks are appreciated, like having all of the minigames unlocked from

the beginning, but nothing has been done to alleviate SMB's myriad frustrations. Camera angles are still often aggravating in single-player mode, the odd physics glitch pops up right where it always has, and the minigames that weren't much fun before still aren't. That being said, if you haven't experienced SMB previous to this, you really can't go wrong with this collection — problems aside, it remains a quirky, entertaining title that brings a little something different to the table. —**ADAM**

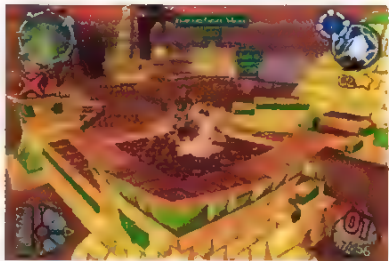
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

BOTTOM LINE 5.75

Worms: Forts Under Siege

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** TEAM17 > **RELEASE** MARCH 1 > **ESRB** T

In a better world, Worms: Forts Under Siege would update and improve the promising ideas introduced in the franchise's jump to the third dimension (last year's Worms 3D). The new camp-building gameplay that affords larger-scale weaponry and traditional RTS elements would be matched with improved graphics, sound, and controls. But this is the real world, and Forts Under Siege's new gameplay only exacerbates the problematic jumping and downright icky camera controls of Worms 3D, while still making no discernible improvements to an engine that (to be kind) looked only okay last year. Top off this stubbornly shoddy gameplay with un-funny cutscenes and a glaring lack of online play and, well, there isn't much here to be super happy about. —**LISA**



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Project Snowblind

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, XBOX LIVE, OR XBOX SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** CRYSTAL DYNAMICS > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 23 > **ESRB** T



CHINESE DEMOCRACY

Kids these days certainly love their cybernetic super-soldiers. While we've seen a few other games recently with similar lead characters (some with stylish green armor), Project Snowblind is not another "me too" title, and combines a lot of familiar gaming elements into something that manages to create its own identity, even if it's not the most original game around.

You're Nathan Frost, a soldier with bio-enhancements that give you special powers, and you're involved in a war in futuristic Hong Kong. That's all you need to know. I don't want to imply that the story is bad (it's not), it just doesn't figure heavily into the game's main appeal. What does is how it expertly balances elements of the "unstoppable tank of a hero" side of the FPS spectrum with the squad-based combat of more realistic military shooters. Many missions have you fighting alongside your fellow soldiers, and while you can't issue them commands, they actually deal with enemy soldiers in an intelligent manner. This may be my favorite aspect of the game — Frost is definitely the hero, but you never lose sight of the fact that you're only one man in a much larger conflict.

Another big plus is the huge arsenal of weapons. Not only does it feature all the standard guns, it also has a wide variety of more unique weapons and tools. All of the firearms have primary and secondary fire modes, and at least one mode of each gun is interesting. You can also trigger special powers like slowing time, a force field, thermal vision, and electrical bolts. With the com-

bination of weapons, powers, and unique items like portable electric riot shields, Snowblind offers a lot more freedom and deeper strategy than other shooters. The downside is that switching through all your weapons, powers, and grenades is cumbersome, thanks to a simply awful inventory system.

The level design provides a similar level of exploration and openness. Every area offers multiple routes to your goal — you can run and gun through an area, crawl through ducts, climb up on roofs, or find a back hallway with fewer guards. As a result, each area seems real and you never feel like you're being pushed down a linear path.

Although I loved the stages and the depth, not everything else is as successful. While the sheer amount of stuff that can happen onscreen at once is impressive, the graphics fall a bit short — character models are blocky and lack detail and colors are muted. It's not a bad looking game, but it's not that great looking either. A more serious fault is the multiplayer — like the graphics, it's decent, but uninspired. None of the major features of online play — such as different character classes, vehicles, and 16-player support — are really anything new. In this arena, it simply lacks the polish of the more popular online shooters. It's also a fairly short game (I beat it in roughly eight hours), but the fantastic level design and wealth of strategic options make the campaign mode well worth revisiting. It may not be the fanciest cyber-soldier on the battlefield, but Snowblind gets the job done, and manages to have some fun while doing it. —**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Imagine if Robocop joined the army, visited China, then blew it up

> **Graphics:** Good, but not great. Environments are detailed, but character models are chunky and a bit drab

> **Sound:** The clatter of warfare is impressive, but the tunes are forgettable

> **Playability:** Weapon selection is dunky, but otherwise the controls are comfortably familiar

> **Entertainment:** The campaign offers one of the better sci-fi shooter experiences around, but the multiplayer can't hang with the big guns

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

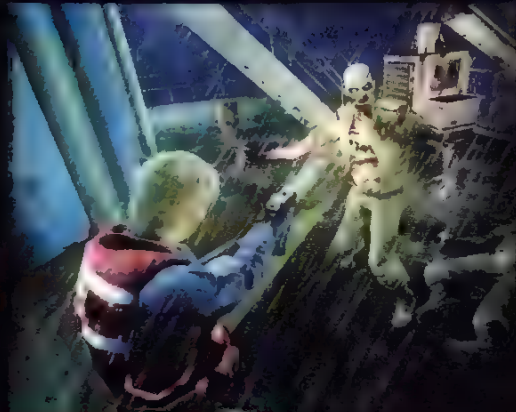
Second Opinion 8

Project Snowblind is Deus Ex with an attitude. I cackled with glee over the chaos that the mine launcher brought upon my attackers and salivated uncontrollably whenever I would tag someone with the H.E.R.F.'s alternate fire. At the end of the day, this game makes you feel like a tank. Tapping into cyber powers like reflex boost and ballistic shielding only makes you feel like more of an unstoppable machine. Crystal Dynamics can also be applauded for delivering a captivating single player experience. On the downside, the vehicles are pretty weak, and although it seems like a perfect fit for online, Snowblind's multiplayer presence just doesn't pack a powerful punch. —**REINER**

ON A HELLBOUND VESSEL,



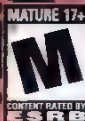
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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

FIFA Street

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** EA BIG
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 22 > **ESRB** E

NO BALLS

If the passion of soccer leads people to violence, then I would watch out if I were FIFA Street — the game's liable to make some people mad.

At its highest level, soccer is all about the imagination and skill of the players. Street doesn't come close to conveying either. Pulling off the deke moves is as automatic as hitting one button. These skill moves instead should tap into your own prowess as a gamer, similar to Tony Hawk. Since a lot of these tricks are done in your normal soccer game, what's the impetus for me to play Street? If everything was done with a more fantastical flair, then the game might actually distinguish itself. For example, the GameBreakers are nothing more than shots on goal with extra zip. Since there is no customization or earning of moves, everyone pulls the same dekes — which is an insult to the real-life players.

EA starts at square one as if it didn't learn from the failures of its labelmate, the first NFL Street. The basic gameplay wears thin so fast that trudging through the career mode quickly bores, and the GameBreakers need to be more frequent (if less powerful) in order to jack up the intensity level. I also didn't like the player AI (especially for the keepers), the fact that you can't set up a tournament for national teams, or the often-slow button response.

Given where NBA Street is and the lessons EA should have learned with the NFL Street franchise, the bare minimum isn't going to entice someone to come back for more. FIFA Street is like being homeless in Brazil: It's not fun to flail around in the dirty streets of Rio. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Takes the personality out of soccer in a Street format that's years old

> **Graphics:** Surprisingly not as sharp as NBA Street V3, nor as dreamy as a shirtless David Beckham

> **Sound:** The announcer sprinkles some Colombian powder on his English accent

> **Playability:** With a slow-to-respond shoot button, sometimes wonky ball detection, and questionable AI, the game can take on a life of its own

> **Entertainment:** I'd rather watch the Nike soccer commercials than play this title

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

FIFA Street wants to be gritty and cool. Instead, it ends up like that guy from high school with the fake snake tattoo and the latest pricey sneakers. Like that tragically unhip fellow, FIFA Street comes on too strong with its heavy handed attempt at being "styling" and loses touch with what makes a good soccer game. Particularly shoddy AI puts your team in abysmal positioning, and your goalkeeper seems to not be aware of the most basic rudiments of protecting his space. Plus, the only way to really progress through the game is to start with a team of such terrible players that it's barely worth your time. There's certainly some enjoyment to be gleaned from the first few times you pull off a bicycle kick or bust a nutmeg on your opponent, but the charm dies fast amid the myriad frustrations. It doesn't feel over-the-top enough to elicit that pleasant sense of insane action, but it's not really realistic enough to feel authentic. —**MILLER**



UNLIMITED BRAWLED
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Red Ninja: End of Honor

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** TRANJI > **RELEASE** MARCH 29 > **ESRB** T

NINJAS SUCK

After struggling through this miserable piece of digital vomit over many torturous hours, I began to wonder who would unleash such an abomination on the world. Satan? Saddam Hussein? John Stamos? No, Red Ninja is clearly the work of a group of developers deliberately trying to create one of the world's worst games as some kind of twisted practical joke. How else could the worst elements of stealth, action, and platforming combine into such a perfect maelstrom of pure worthlessness?

As a skimpily dressed female ninja, whom I shall refer to as Crapface, the player is supposed to sneak their way through each area, quietly dispatching all the enemies in her way. Unfortunately, they all seem to have some kind of ninja-detecting radar, so Crapface has to stand and fight constantly. Her wirelike weapon seems cool at first, until you realize that there is only one attack and absolutely no strategy to combat. And since the camera behaves like it's controlled by an eight-year-old with ADD and a twelve pack of Coke in his system, you're constantly getting hit by enemies you can't see. To top it all off, there are no cool ninja gadgets to assist you in combat or stealth like there are in Tenchu (the series this game has a total crush on), so it fails in both these arenas.

Later in the game, the emphasis switches from horrid stealth and combat to horrid platforming, which is executed with the same hamfisted lack of finesse. There is a checkpoint in front of every single difficult jump or puzzle in the game — the developer was clearly aware that these points were incredibly frustrating, but opted to let the player endlessly repeat the same parts rather than fix the shoddy level design. Of course, only the most masochistic players will want to play through this fly-covered, reeking garbage pile of a game. —**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 3.75

> **Concept:** Red Ninja tries to join the ranks of mediocre stealth games and fails at reaching even that low bar

> **Graphics:** As in every other aspect, the visuals mimic Tenchu. They're fairly average, making them the best part of the game

> **Sound:** All I could hear was myself screaming in frustration

> **Playability:** There are a few unique features here, meaning it simply sucks in new ways

> **Entertainment:** I'd rather become a training dummy at a ninja dojo than ever touch this nightmare again

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 3

Red Ninja is only bearable if you choose to view it not as a real game, but rather as a hilarious parody of a real game. This self-delusion is all that kept me going. Hal. Look how they poke fun at floppy camera controls! Ah, ridiculous panty shots — I get it! Not to mention the delicious irony of horrifically unpredictable controls in a game that often requires flawless timing. Oh, Red Ninja, your barbs and jabs at the game industry will not go unnoticed. Developers will use your satirical exaggeration of terrible design as a way to ensure that gaming never falls so far from grace. —**JOE**



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Constantine

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** BITS STUDIOS/SCI GAMES > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 21 > **ESRB** M

TO HELL AND BACK

With each step that you make, fluorescent bulbs flicker to life and burst, flatbed trucks suddenly take flight and are hurled into the distance, and the bloodcurdling screams of the innocent pierce the ears and echo into the night. Hell hath no fury like John Constantine. He's traversed the devil's abode and knows exactly how to cleanse this world of his foul stench.

Armed to the teeth with an arsenal of faith-dealing devices such as the Holy Shotgun and as capable of exorcising a demon by chanting a spell, stepping into the chain-smoking shoes of Constantine is an invigorating experience. As you traverse your surroundings, be it reality or hell, Bits Studios has gone to great lengths to not only create a world that feels alive, but make you jump out of your seat as well. Around each corner that you traverse, you are bound to see something scurrying into shadows or falling directly in front of you.

Although grin-inducing feats like summoning a plague of flies to devour demons are in great abundance, the remainder of the game is all too common and a bit rough around the edges. Sluggish character movements coupled with a finicky targeting system make running and gunning a serious nightmare — and this is what you spend most of your time doing. Many of the boss battles feel slapped on, and you find yourself doing asinine things like dodging steam vents or combating rats far too often.

The unique abilities of Constantine and scary atmosphere that Bits has established will make your mouth water, but you'll be hard-pressed to find anyone who can tolerate the shoddy gameplay. This time around the licensing trifecta of comic to movie to game just didn't pan out. —**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Become a supernatural detective who is troubled more by his gameplay movements than the onslaught of evil

> **Graphics:** The environments are nicely lit, but the character models and effects are not up to today's standards

> **Sound:** Ambient sound is used nicely to create atmosphere, and the Keanu Reeves impersonator is surprisingly good

> **Playability:** You constantly feel like you are running in molasses. Spell casting is enjoyable, however

> **Entertainment:** Another tragic story of the developer focusing on the world more than the gameplay

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6

Hollywood, heed my words. I've just been looking at the U.S. Constitution online, and I've found no amendment that requires every big-budget action movie to have a video game tie-in. So, if your best idea is "let's do a crappy Max Payne but, like, with scary zombies and creepy noises" you might want to skip the whole thing altogether. I did like the spells system (even if it was cribbed from the Harry Potter games) and some of the cheap scare tactics actually work, but the sub-par graphics and control make this just another pretender. —**MATT**

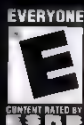


DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

To those parties attempting to recreate the stunts contained in the new MX vs. ATV Unleashed, we offer this message: DON'T. While that seems fairly obvious to most, you'd be surprised how many people will contemplate emulating its dangerous intensity, vis-à-vis the realistic head-to-head racing experience. Ergo, THQ and Rainbow Studios put forth the following caveats to all parties: Do not attempt to make a golf cart do 70 mph, nor launch a sand rail over a moving plane. Moreover, do not undertake the recreation of any and all stunts from MX vs. ATV Unleashed in order to replicate its realistic rag-doll physics. The insane stunts and fierce racing is intended for the sole intent and purpose of an intense gaming experience, not for the discovery of clever ways to inflict bodily harm. Case in point, THQ and Rainbow Studios offer this photo as reference of the projected outcome of ignoring this warning. Honestly, what was this guy thinking? Said driver wasn't anywhere close to successfully completing the jump, nor is the other side of the canyon he was attempting to reach even in the aforementioned photo. In summation, MX vs. ATV Unleashed is not real, don't attempt to make it real.



PlayStation 2



Mild Lyrics

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PLAYSTATION 2

God of War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** SCEA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** M



SWEET PERDITION

Rational thought supposedly separates humans from animals. But it is possible for someone to use the gift of reason to make choices that will plunge a mind into madness, transforming a human into a vengeful, primal beast. Regardless of the sins and sorrows of his past, this is the kind of man Kratos has become, and it is by capturing his torment that God of War has earned a place as one of the defining titles of this console generation.

Never before has a game so masterfully conveyed raw, visceral rage. Featuring the most graceful combat system of any action game to date, God of War offers endless opportunities for players to unleash their inner demons through visually stunning and morally disturbing displays of power. Slaughter fleeing Athenians for a health boost. Break people's spines by folding them in half—backwards. Revel in the bloodbath as the Blades of Chaos (permanently grafted to Kratos' pale skin) glide effortlessly through legions of mythological terrors like Sirens, Gorgons, and hulking armored Minotaurs.

Kratos begins the game with most of these

skills, yet even with this basic moveset, he is instantly the most captivating and bad-ass character in gaming. His prowess only improves as you progress through the amazing cinematic adventure. By gathering orbs from fallen foes, Kratos can upgrade his weapons and magic (in the style of Onimusha), opening up entirely new moves, which in turn frees up even more ruthless combo possibilities. When you add in contextual finishing strikes (usually consisting of timed button presses), the action strings together so flawlessly and provocatively that there wasn't a single second that I felt that I, personally, couldn't beat the hades out of the gods myself.

On a technical level, God of War is equally

“Never before has a game so masterfully conveyed raw, visceral rage”



■ The puzzles (like this block on a conveyor belt) are surprisingly clever and well-integrated into the combat.



■ The “Chef of War”

Under the Skin

In addition to providing awe-inspiring gameplay, God of War also sports an impressive array of DVD-caliber special features. A “making of” featurette, early concept art for Kratos, and a teaser for the game's probable sequel are among the highlights of these unlockable goodies. There is also a ten-part “Challenge of the Gods” which, once completed, opens up five additional (and hilarious) costumes for Kratos.

omnipotent: It maintains a silky smooth framerate, supports 16:9 widescreen and progressive scan, and only once in the whole 12 hours of gameplay did I notice anything approaching camera problems. The only complaint I can muster against this otherwise almighty offering is that the controls during the Prince of Persia-inspired platforming sections could be tightened up a bit. While these nuts and bolts add to the overall polish, they mainly serve to augment what is essentially the most addictive and engaging third-person action game I have ever played. It is entertainment incarnate.

Empowered by the gods and fueled by revenge, Kratos tries to bury his inner demons under the corpses of soldiers and in the willing arms of women. His rampage is terrifying, but it is impossible to put down. While playing God of War, I honestly found it difficult to resist the urge to simply genuflect and be humbled to be in the presence of such digital divinity, this god among games.—**JOE**



■ Kratos doesn't hesitate to lift to the most vicious and reprehensible ways possible

BOTTOM LINE **10**

> **Concept:** Challenge Ares with a fury so immense it makes Mount Olympus itself whimper

> **Graphics:** With stunning in-game models, CG movies, and a unique cinematic style, this game pushes the PS2 to the limit

> **Sound:** Grand, booming orchestrations that recall the epic quality of the *Lord of the Rings* soundtrack

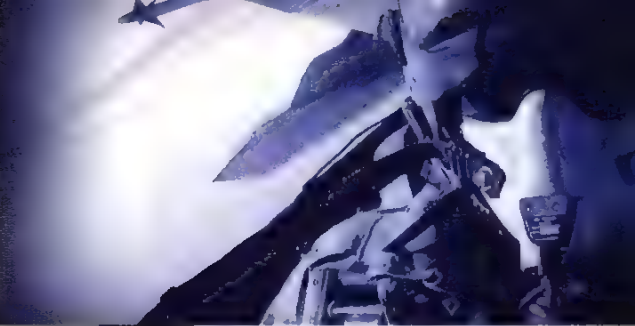
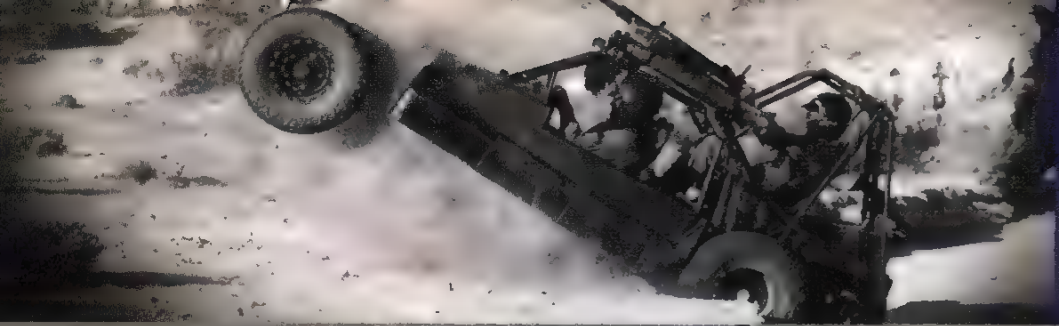
> **Playability:** If swinging blades on chains were this easy and intuitive in real life, we'd have some serious societal problems

> **Entertainment:** From start to finish, God of War never stopped being the most fun I've ever had with a video game

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **10**

Through relentless, pulse-pounding excitement, God of War achieves gaming nirvana and earns the right to be worshipped as the pinnacle of barbaric action. Lift a soldier high into the air and tear his body in two. Climb onto the back of a giant and run your smoldering steel through his skull. Not even a god can withstand your unconquerable rage. Unleashing Kratos' fury is one of the greatest pleasures that I've had in gaming. He makes Darth Vader seem about as violent as a Care Bear. The finesse of play, sheer brutality of the combos that you can perform, and ingenious finishing moves had my mouth watering from start to finish. When you're not soaking the land with blood, you are either marveling at its gorgeous vistas or reeling from the shocking events that shape Kratos' life. With a thundering resonance, God of War sends a shockwave through the action genre and launches gaming as a whole to new heights.—**REINER**



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BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

- > **Concept:** Brothers' strategy angle pumps more than bullets into the limp corpse of your average war shooter – it gives it life
- > **Graphics:** Some skipped frames might be the price of this game looking really good on the PS2
- > **Sound:** Less about your average orchestral pomp and circumstance in favor of ricocheting shells, flak, and the yells of squad members
- > **Playability:** The squad commands hit the occasional hiccup, but are usually predictable
- > **Entertainment:** The gameplay goes hand-in-hand with the title's tone to produce a memorable experience
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately high



Second Opinion **8.5**

Given the abundance of first person WW II titles on the market, you might have given up hope of finding anything novel in the mix. It's in answering this need that Brothers in Arms has its greatest success, by combining basic squad-level military tactics with the emotion and realism of a Hollywood war epic. Strangely enough, it's that same uncanny authenticity that is going to make this the wrong choice for many gamers who are looking to blast their way through hundreds of Nazi soldiers in the vein of so many other recent games. Instead, Brothers in Arms takes away the miraculous wound-healing med packs and the great war-winning hero mentality and opts instead for a smaller story about the lives and deaths of a handful of young soldiers over a few short days. Progress can be slow and frustrating since the challenge comes not in being the best shot, but in deploying your men to best keep them alive and complete the mission. The depth of the experience is improved by some excellent graphics and a fascinating attention to historical detail. While this may not be the most frantic military action you could find, it may be the most genuine, and that should make it more than worth a look. —MILLER

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** GEARBOX SOFTWARE
 > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 22 > **ESRB** M

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

Like a soldier covered in camouflage, it's hard to pick out most military titles. In a war situation, it's natural to point and shoot, but there is more to a soldier than a trigger finger. EA's Medal of Honor series (with inspiration from *Saving Private Ryan*) brought some welcome gravitas to the death procession, making it about more than just killing or tactics. However, could it be that gameplay is the answer to the genre's stagnant problems? Brothers in Arms is here to save the day.

The title's contribution to military shooters is its unit command function, which lets you position and give orders to up to two three-man squads (including, at times, a tank) in conjunction with your natural first-person shooting skills. This combination makes Brothers in Arms fully realized, unlike THQ's Full Spectrum Warrior. By seamlessly mixing these two elements, the game lets you experience war in a variety of manners. It's fun to kill, to stay alive,

and to understand and execute the dynamics of military teamwork. I was impressed with how well these two gameplay elements are balanced. One could not exist without the other. If you try to run and gun like an army of one, you'll be cut down like a weed. However, any good squad takes the cues from its leader, and it's often up to you to neutralize an enemy emplacement with a flanking move while your squads pin down the Germans with suppressing fire. Developer Gearbox wisely gives you a great overhead situational awareness map to plan things out with at anytime, but its functionality is slightly hampered by a wonky camera.

A necessary part of this balancing act is keeping the FPS aspect of the game from being too strong. Each type of rifle or machine gun feels different, and they can all be difficult to steady, putting a premium on burst fire and picking your shots. Then again, Brothers in Arms does not just let you snipe through

Missing Greenie

Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30 does also appear on the Xbox, but due to circumstances beyond our control, we were regrettably unable to review the Xbox edition of the game. Going forward, we will analyze it, and if there are any notable differences, we will follow up with a separate review next month. If there aren't any major differences, please take this as our definitive review.

levels (although there is a sniper rifle you get to use and a great church tower level). Perhaps more important is the fact the maps almost always offer a few ways to get the job done, giving you a sense of freedom that prevents the game from having a "text-book" feel. That said, Brothers could benefit from requiring more tactical moves than just flanking, as well as a faster rate of movement. The title's mixture of gameplay elements also makes for a different, but no less fun, kind of multiplayer experience.

Although Brothers in Arms is not light years from your average military title, it institutes important gameplay changes that invigorate the player and influence the way the title is played. Remember this the first time you send your squads into harm's way only to have them come back on stretchers. I consider this a great first entry in a series that will only get better. —KATO

Strictly By The Book



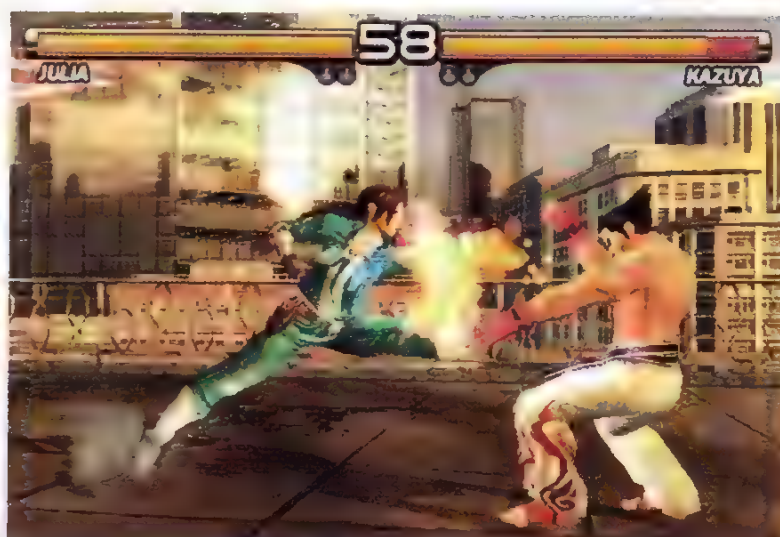
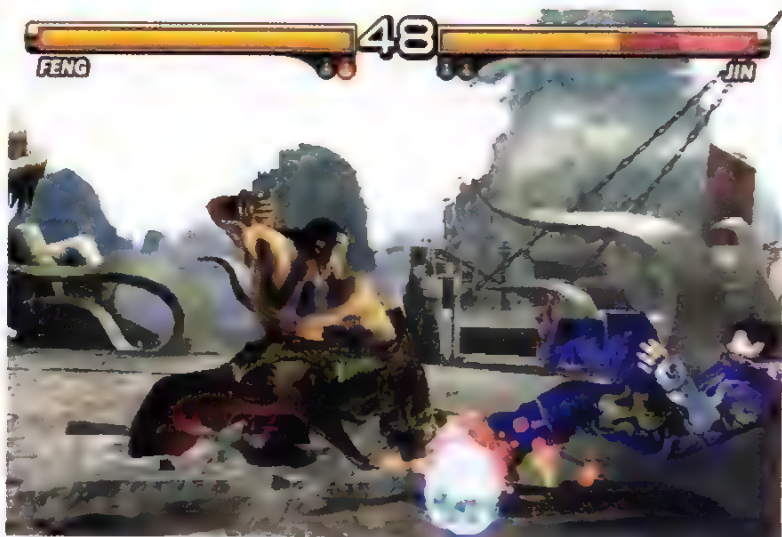
After enemy contact, one of my teams lays down suppressing fire upon the German position on the left. More Germans fire at us from the right (red circle), beyond the fallen horse and carriage



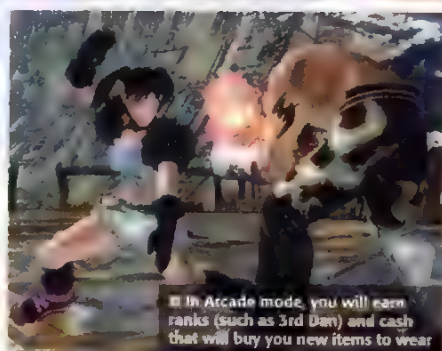
A quick look at the situational awareness map (by hitting the Select button) confirms enemy positions



I order double suppressing fire to pin down the nearest enemy while moving both of my squads to cover. My next move is to flank from the left



■ The always exciting battle of bear versus wood guy



■ In Arcade mode, you will earn ranks (such as 3rd Dan) and cash that will buy you new items to wear



■ Air juggles are very impressive this time around

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Tekken 5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER NAMCO > DEVELOPER NAMCO > RELEASE FEBRUARY 25 > ESRB T

A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

Like a stubborn boxing veteran who insists that his trusty left hook can knock out any opponent no matter how nimble or mighty they may be, Tekken is sticking with the techniques that made it a fan favorite years ago. The series may not be evolving very quickly – especially when you stack it up against what Namco has done with Soul Calibur recently – but this is still a fighter that you'll want in your corner.

You may know the series' four-limb approach to combat about as well as you do the back of your hand, but the swiftness of play and ease of linking together combos may still grant novices a fighting chance through button flailing. Rest assured, however, that this iteration of the King of Iron Fist Tournament has an extra coat of polish and is much tighter than previous offerings. Most of the balancing issues that plagued Tekken 4 have been addressed. Uneven terrain is nowhere to be found (thank the makers!), and although the arenas are still walled, Namco has put greater thought into the strategies that come from knocking an opponent into a wall. The combos that you can create from this aspect are truly staggering.

Flashing back to what made this series so powerful back in the heyday of the arcades, this is once again a game that pushes players to concoct lengthy combo strings, read their opponents' tactics, and learn the art of juggling. Namco has done a tremendous job balancing each character on the roster. Familiar moves have been tweaked and new tactics

have been added to even the playing field. All three of the new characters blend perfectly with the existing cast and are a blast to get to know. Sadly, any Tekken fan can run down the list of secret characters that can be unlocked. While I do enjoy seeing Roger, Kuma, and Mokujin again, they feel like a joke that ran its course years ago. The thrill of unlocking new characters just isn't there anymore without new faces. The last boss is also a bit of a letdown. His appearance is awe-inspiring and I like how he ties into the story, but his attacks are just way too cheap.

As always, Tekken is overflowing with modes that players can hone their skills in. In addition to the wildly bizarre and entirely confusing CG movies that accompany Story mode, Namco has taken a tip from Virtua Fighter 4's Kumite mode and transformed Arcade mode into a place where players can gain ranks and earn cash that can be used to purchase items for their characters to wear. This mode isn't as deep as Kumite, and the selection of items you can unlock is fairly small, but it does add great longevity to the single player experience. This entry's action game, Devil Within, follows Jin through five stages of horribly executed brawling and environment navigation. I applaud Namco for trying something different again, but if the end result is something this painful to play, I would rather see the company pull it and focus its efforts elsewhere, such as getting this series online.

While the collision between the characters is still completely ignored at times, the new graphics

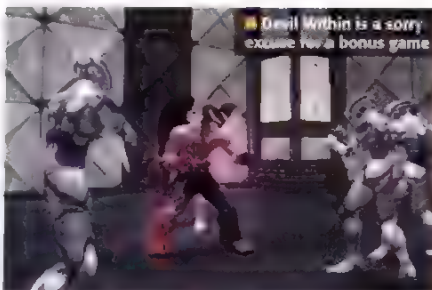


Free Compilation

In addition to the extensive new content that Namco has created, perfect translations of the first three Tekken arcade games are included on this disc. It's always surprising to see how far this industry has come in such a short period of time.

engine does produce nicer looking models and better lighting. HDTV users will also be happy to hear that the game supports 16:9 widescreen, progressive scan, and the option to select a soft or sharp scan. As you can imagine, the resolution looks too good to be true in high definition.

The series may feel a little dated, but once you start your training and chain together a massive 10-hit combo that sends your opponent reeling, it's still a tough game to put down. —REINER



■ Devil Within is a sorry excuse for a bonus game

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Returns to the glory days of the series with a heavier focus on combos and technique

> **Graphics:** The new graphics engine produces jaw-dropping details, but the collision between the characters is still quite ugly

> **Sound:** Outside of the amusing sounds that the characters make, the music is completely forgettable

> **Playability:** Nicely balanced and overflowing with outstanding air juggles

> **Entertainment:** Not as flashy as other fighters, but still one of the best beat-em-ups out there

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.75

I've always felt that the Tekken series had one of the best fighting engines around, and I'm pleased to report that it's as tight as ever. For better or for worse, combat feels exactly as it did way back in Tekken 3. It plays great, but hasn't really evolved in any significant way. The unlockable cosmetic changes for the characters are a lot of fun, and the graphics are great, but otherwise this isn't a title to check out if you're looking for a revolutionary fighter. The lack of online play is also a disappointment. But regardless, the gameplay is so addictive that I flashed back to all the hours I spent playing Tekken 3 when I was supposed to be studying back in the day. The inclusion of that game, as well as the first two, makes this a no-brainer for anyone wanting to check out the history of the series. The bonus 3D action game is mindlessly fun as well, making for a fully loaded fighter that plays and looks great. It may not rewrite the rules of the game, but it plays that game damn well. —JEREMY



PLAYSTATION 2

Resident Evil Outbreak File #2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA BROADBAND)
> **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** APRIL 12 > **ESRB** M

HURTS SO GOOD

There are guilty pleasures in this world, things that you find delightful but wouldn't be caught dead talking about with your classier, worldlier, snootier friends. There are also things that you want to like — a new album from a favorite band that, if you were honest, you'd grudgingly admit was total crap. While I don't think that the Outbreak series falls into the total crap category, it is something that I want so very much to love and get absorbed in, but just (if I'm being honest with myself and my experience while playing it) well... can't.

Giving me the RE 2 police station appeals to my survival horror fandom on an almost primal level, but doesn't make up for the limitations of what the actual online experience is like. The development team obviously heard gamers at large cry out against the lack of voice chat (or even in-game

keyboard options), and added things like map sharing and more scripted conversation options. In my experience, none of these things really made a palpable difference in gameplay communication. Please stop messing around and just give us what we need, I swear that the experience will be far more compelling.

Besides this inelegant cooperative experience, the rest of the game is solid and features some of the best level designs, environmental interactions, enemy types, and straight out strategy-fueled action in the series. Since the first Outbreak, the genius Resident Evil 4 has made its way to the market and, especially with this new take on the series, Outbreak 2 feels even more dated control-wise. Still, there's nothing more that can honestly be said except that this is a concept that I love, and an execution that is lacking.—LISA



I really love the new, larger scale of the enemies through the whole game

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Keep trying for a unique online experience, but without bending to the will of actual players

> **Graphics:** Sickly dark and slimy environments, in a good way

> **Sound:** The soundtrack is nicely matched to the onscreen action and the character utterances are often hysterical

> **Playability:** The new moves are welcome additions, but online play is still a rough experience from log on to log off

> **Entertainment:** Still the survival horror game that I want so much to love, but just can't bring myself to honestly do it

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Capcom insists that voice chat should not be included in this series because it would affect the fear and tension that players are subject to. I can understand this to a point, but don't you think that these characters would have more to say to each other than "Go" and "Sorry"? Under the voiceless conditions that Capcom has in place, it's incredibly difficult to coordinate tactics with your team. Being able to denote locations on a map helps a bit, but not much. Thankfully, other concerns like not being able to grab an item while crawling or aim while walking have been addressed. The locales, which range from the police station in RE 2 to a zoo with zombified critters, evoke more excitement than the previous offering, and the branching paths within them opens things up a bit. Jumping online and fighting off the undead remains enjoyable, but it's still missing that one element that could really put it over the top.—REINER

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** ATLUS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** M



HANNIBAL THE GAME

BOTTOM LINE 7

I've saved so many demsels in distress that my harem no longer has vacancies, deansed the world of so many demonic scourges that the devil no longer has minions to turn to, and recovered from amnesia so frequently that I should be a comatose vegetable hospitalized with permanent brain damage. Long story short, the role-playing genre is capable of spinning quite the yarn, but thematically it's usually quite familiar. With Digital Devil Saga, Atlus is going to great lengths to separate itself from the rest of the pack. This story is such a stretch, in fact, that you'll be hard-pressed to find anything like it in either literary or film forms.

The subject matter: Apocalyptic cannibalism. It's an eat or be eaten world, where gangs vie for territorial dominance by transforming into rampaging beasts and devouring their downed rivals. As disgusting as this premise may sound, Atlus avoids graphic depiction of these murderous deeds and expresses the incidents through dialogue exchanged between the characters. Regardless of how subtly it may be delivered, hearing another human say, "Please don't eat me!" or "I will taste your flesh!" sends shivers down your spine and makes you question where this plot is going to veer next. The story is certainly bizarre, but much like a Charlie Kaufman script, it has a bewitching charm to it and compels you to stick around

until the credits roll.

Although high on intrigue, the unique tale is the only notable aspect of this game. Your interest level will be quickly stomped to death by shallow and frustrating gameplay. With incredibly high enemy encounter rates, puzzles that force you to backtrack great lengths or repeat tedious sequences, and mundane turn-based combat, this unique and highly bizarre story transforms into a 30-hour yawn. Character development, while showing great promise as it awards titles like Dark Lord and Devastator, is ultimately familiar as it makes players customize their party through a Sphere Grid-like system. With these ranks players earn powerful spells like Ragnarok and Blood Bath. While this magic will make quick work of your foes, the graphical effects that accompany them are very disappointing and about as exciting as someone lighting a match. For those of you who have played through Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne, Atlus has recycled many of the monster models and animations. As such, you don't even have the satisfaction of combating new beasts.

Digital Devil Saga's freakish story may turn heads and demand attention, but the time you spend in this flesh-eating world quickly becomes mind-numbingly dull. Case in point: No matter how radical the story may be, a role-playing game is still nothing without solid gameplay.—REINER

> **Concept:** Man-eating tribes devour each other in a post-apocalyptic world as players' brains melt from the mundane gameplay that brings it to life

> **Graphics:** Extraordinary character designs clash against the sparsely detailed environments and pathetic spell effects

> **Sound:** Decent voice-acting and a score that will make you want to puncture your eardrums with a stick

> **Playability:** See "boring"

> **Entertainment:** You'll really want to see where this tale goes, but getting to the end is about as much fun as being thrown from a moving vehicle and getting a face full of pavement

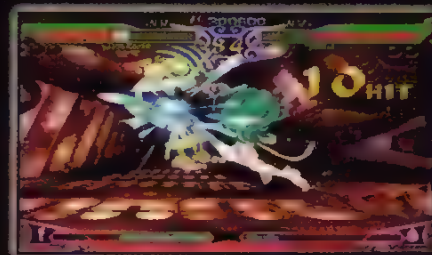
> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 7.5

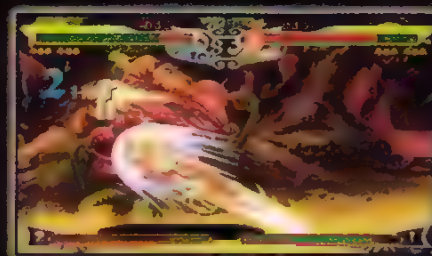
I don't know if I've ever played an RPG with such a thoroughly unsettling and disturbing premise — and that's a good thing. Digital Devil Saga's mature storytelling is immediately captivating, and the series' signature art style brings the post-apocalyptic environment to life. Unfortunately, the game begins to lose steam in the pacing department; whether you attribute it to unconventional methods or poor design, the storytelling is weighed down by a burden of repetitive dungeons, slow character growth, and an uncommonly high encounter rate. If you want to enjoy feasting on the meat of the living, you need to be patient about it — and something about that just doesn't seem right.—JOE

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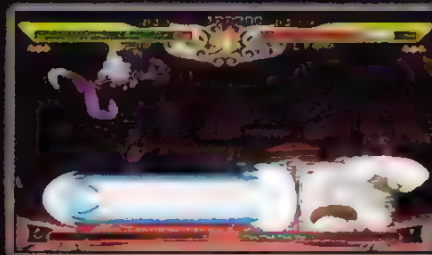
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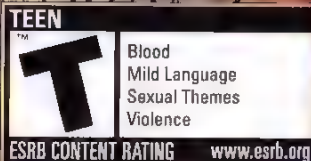


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PLAYSTATION 2

Sega Classics Collection

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** 3D AGES/SEGA > **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** E

IMPROVEMENT OR SACRILEGE?

It's rare that I say this about a game I'm reviewing, but I'm morally opposed to Sega Classics Collection.

Now, it's not that it's violent or says bad things about the good ol' U.S.A. or anything like that — I simply don't agree with the fact that it's a so-called "museum" title that alters its original source material.

I suspect Sega wanted to make sure that these games — which include popular (and obscure) past titles *OutRun*, *Space Harrier*, *Golden Axe*, *Columns*, *Alien Syndrome*, *Monaco GP*, *Virtua Racing*, *Tant R*, *Bonanza Bros.*, and *Fantasy Zone* — wouldn't seem outdated to today's gamers. However, the graphical overhaul that has been performed on most of the games can only be described as awkward. Old-school texturing and blocky backgrounds now uncomfortably coexist with "improved" character models and effects that look like they escaped from early PSone or Saturn-era titles.

These changes make Sega Classics Collection a title that will have trouble finding an audience. The visual gimmicks aren't enough to make these titles appeal to jaded gamers raised in the PS2 and Xbox era, while the fact that these aren't actually direct ports of the originals means that it doesn't have the usual collector's value that museum packs provide. Think of this as video game's version of the ill-advised movie colorization trend of the 1980s.

While I can't argue with the enduring charm of some of these games or the 20 dollar price, I think that companies ought to respect their history enough to let it be. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** A collection of "classic" Sega games, many of them featuring graphical updates and tweaks

> **Graphics:** I'd rather have old-school charm than "improved" graphics that look like Saturn games

> **Sound:** Largely the same, even the great old cheesy *OutRun* cruising tunes

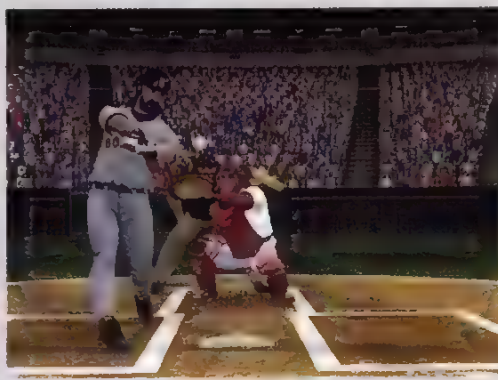
> **Playability:** Everything plays as it should; *Alien Syndrome* is even a bit better

> **Entertainment:** Classic enthusiasts won't like the redone graphics, everyone else will ignore this title

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.25

This is, hands down, one of the weirdest implementations of a "classic game collection" that I've ever seen. Instead of giving a lot of what people really want (the sheer volume method) or updating a few highly nostalgic titles with current graphical styles, Sega has taken the road less traveled. I, for one, am not too happy with Sega's decisions. First, the game list is a truly bizarre mix of unfortunate oddities and gems that are available elsewhere in more full-featured forms (*OutRun*, for example). Secondly, I just can't even begin to understand why the graphics were changed in this way — the games still look like poo, and now they don't even have authenticity to save them. —**LISA**



PLAYSTATION 2

MLB 2006

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** 989 STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MARCH 1 > **ESRB** E

YOU ARE THE STAR

After a breakout season last year, all eyes turned toward 989's MLB franchise. Could the underdog dethrone the champ? Could 989 rise above its unstable past and become the leader in video game baseball? Swinging for the fences with the cut of a slugger, MLB once again puts up big numbers, but the categories that it leads in are strictly for baseball enthusiasts.

EA's MVP still has a stranglehold on gameplay, and 2K Games' Major League Baseball showcases brilliant innovations in every major field. Where exactly does this leave 989's franchise? Focusing on things outside of the majors. While this may sound like a complete turn-off, 989's approach of recreating the experience of climbing from the minors and up to the major leagues is truly extraordinary and something that baseball fanatics like myself can wrap their mits around.

As you begin your career, you start in double-A ball and must build your player into major league material by gradually improving his abilities and performing well. Of course, you'll need to interact with management and project a positive image to the media. I really enjoy how 989 put all of this together. Once you reach superstar status in the majors, you can continue with your squeaky dean image or turn into an obnoxious snob who demands promotions and talks to the press about what goes on behind the locker room doors.

While 989 has created an enjoyable experience that is quite unlike anything else on the market, the gameplay lags behind where the competition is today. The batting and pitching interfaces are very simplistic, base running is too mechanical, and you never really get a good feel for the ball's release point while fielding.

At the end of the day, MLB is an exceptional release that takes home the crown for being the deepest game of the season. When it comes to the delivery of gameplay, however, it's firmly planted in third place. —**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Another All-Star effort with the deepest franchise options, a creative approach to user interaction, and respectable gameplay

> **Graphics:** Silky smooth animations, nice camerawork, and tons of signature stances

> **Sound:** The new progressive audio captures the realism of the game. The commentary team is on the ball as well

> **Playability:** Both pitching and fielding are improved, but batting and base running leave much to be desired

> **Entertainment:** Immerses players in a different way, allowing them to soak in the action from any angle

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.75

MLB once again digs deep to deliver something fresh, but doesn't quite seal the deal on the field. Career Mode's player actions are much more meaningful than in Visual Concepts' NBA game, for example, and I love the drifting action of fly balls in the outfield. The disjointed fielding and random inexplicable bugs don't help its case, but this franchise is going places. —**KATO**



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

World Tour Soccer 2006

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** 989 SPORTS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** E

NUTMEGGED!

Kick me in the balls once, shame on World Tour. Kick me in the balls twice, shame on me. I'm not about to fall for this sorry rehash of last year, and I suggest you back away before you lose your family jewels.

I've always liked this series' career and season structures (particularly that I get to play as little-known clubs with accurate FIFA rosters), but it's not nearly enough to save this series from another sub-par year packed with about as much improvement as a dirty brothel under new management. Even on the high skill levels, this game is a mess. The AI teams can be quite aggressive in your half of the field, but at times it is totally lost in how to formulate an attack, missing obvious crosses, dilly-dallying with the ball too much in the midfield, and taking extremely low-percentage shots on goal. More than once I witnessed a CPU attacker simply dribble the ball out of bounds without an inch of provocation. I've played one-legged soccer players who were better. They couldn't move very far, but at least they didn't go out of bounds inexplicably. On defense, the AI is susceptible to routine exploitation (on the lower skill levels you can still dribble straight down the field), and your squad isn't any different — seeing as how they don't know their ass from a hole in the ground. In other words, the series' greatest hits of disappointments are all present and accounted for.

It's business as usual over at 989, and it must figure business is pretty good. Well, it isn't — it's pathetic. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Stand totally still while Winning Eleven and even FIFA blow by

> **Graphics:** Although there are some good character animations, there's little new here

> **Sound:** Definitely the worst commentary of the soccer games

> **Playability:** The game has sped up a little, but I still suggest you up the difficulty

> **Entertainment:** This franchise is falling like a lead balloon, and it's going to take a total overhaul to get things right. Skipping a year or two would do it some good

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.25

It's during your first minute-long load time waiting for a match to start that you get your first inkling that something isn't quite right. Once you get into the game, your previous concerns become open objections as the ball begins to move across the pitch in totally unexpected directions, and the AI of players is abundantly flawed in both its fielding and positioning. As the lackluster commentary fails to elicit that most essential sense of excitement when a goal is scored, your bad feelings are confirmed. You realize this isn't even close to the soccer game you want to be spending your time on, and you quietly turn off your PS2 and relegate WTS 2006 to its ignominious end at the back of your gaming shelf. —**MILLER**



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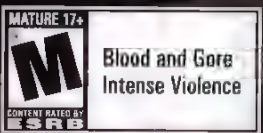


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GAMECUBE

Donkey Kong Jungle Beat

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO EAD TOKYO > RELEASE MARCH 14 > ESRB E

GRAB YOUR BANANA AND GO

Let's say that you are playing the original Super Mario Bros., but your sturdy, reliable NES controller has undergone some modification. Each time you press a button, there is a 75 percent chance that it performs the desired function. The other 25 percent of the time, it acts as though you either pressed an entirely different button or no button at all. Naturally, this situation would present some problems if you were trying to perform any precise tasks like hopping on an enemy or leaping an expanse of bubbling lava. Now, all you have to do is replace Mario in this scenario with a hulking gorilla and you have Donkey Kong Jungle Beat.

Despite its colorful visuals, Nintendo's new bongo title feels less like a complete game and more like an extended tech demo. I remember being incredibly enthusiastic about Jungle Beat after E3, and I was looking forward to seeing how far it had come. Unfortunately, it seems to be idling in about the same place. Using the bongos to control DK is certainly entertaining, but the limited arsenal of moves (run, jump, and clap) makes it feel a little bit shallow. As described above, the controls are occasionally frustrating, but the game does a good job of compensating for the high likelihood of botched jumps and missteps by being very forgiving in the



Give Your Hands A Rest

To counteract the constant beating required by the DK bongos, the game also allows you to play using a standard GameCube controller. While it does provide a greater degree of control, I found that it effectively eliminates any innovation or fun the game has to offer, revealing it as the painfully oversimplified (though still gorgeous) platformer it is. Smacking the bongos around can make Jungle Beat a lot of fun, and the game just isn't worth your time if you don't plan to use them.

health department. However, this also makes the game disappointingly easy; in the four hours it took me to beat it (not counting the later unlockable levels), I didn't die even once.

The most challenging aspect of the game comes in the form of a few select enemies that involve some trial and error in determining how to damage them. Usually, it just involves clapping near them at a specific time, then unloading a flurry of ape-powered blows or timed uppercuts. The camera zooms in on these sequences, delivering some of the coolest and most entertaining moments of the game. In fact, the whole experience would have been better served to expand these contextual minigames rather than spend so much time on the well-worn 2D-platformer path.

Jungle Beat is a gorgeous game with a couple examples of spectacular level design, but it doesn't have any tricks up its sleeve once the novelty wears off. In the end, you personally need to weigh how much a wacky control scheme is worth to you. I got a few solid hours of fun watching a big ape shamble around, but I could have gotten that from *Mighty Joe Young*. And in a battle between two primates, I'll always go with the one that has Charlize Theron, thank you very much.—JOE

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Take one step closer to the revolution with a brand new spin on 2D platforming

> **Graphics:** Leave it to Nintendo to make generic forest, sky, and ice worlds look bright, flashy, and beautiful

> **Sound:** Catchy and entertaining, but if I have to hear one more siren as DK hops around holding his rear end, there's gonna be trouble

> **Playability:** The game derives most of its difficulty from awkward and imprecise controls

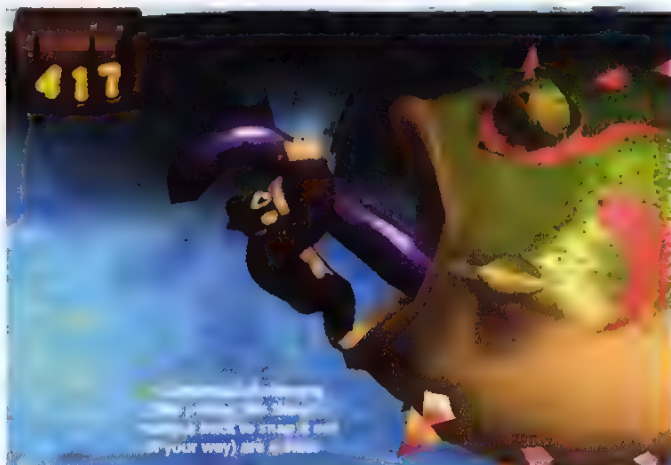
> **Entertainment:** Surprisingly, unreliable controls still lead to a lot of unpredictable fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

Jungle Beat has a lot of things in its corner. It looks great, features some creative level design, and has a completely unique control scheme that instantly sets it apart from other games. Unfortunately, it doesn't offer much beyond that. The only challenge the game has comes from the fact that the controls aren't as precise as other platformers, and it's still painfully easy. It can be beaten in just a few hours, and while the bonus stages you can unlock afterwards are a bit more challenging, they do nothing to switch up the basic formula. At first, Jungle Beat feels like a truly innovative way to revisit the glory days of 2D platforming; but the longer you spend with it, the more obvious it becomes that it's actually little more than a clever gimmick. Gimmicks aren't necessarily bad, but tend to fade into obscurity quickly after the initial entertainment wears off. Like snap bracelets and Hypercolor t-shirts, Jungle Beat will likely find its way into the backs of many bedroom closets after a brief round of chuckles.

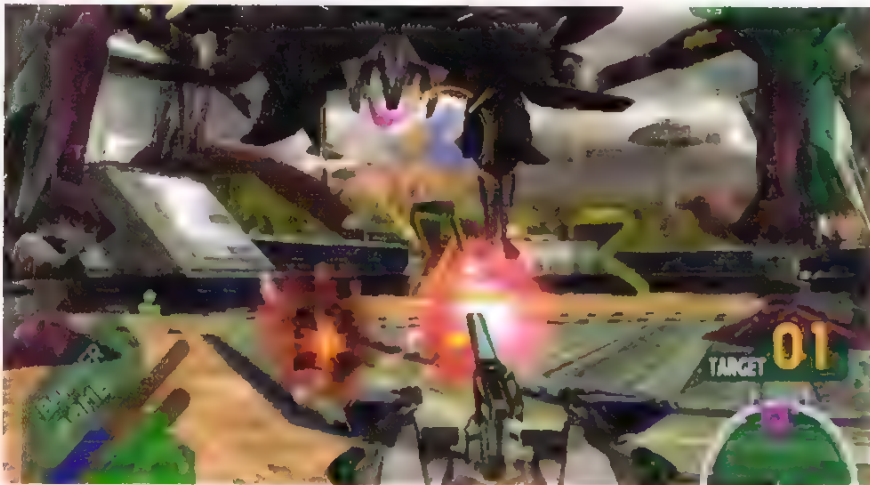
—JEREMY



GAMECUBE

Star Fox Assault

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NAMCO > RELEASE FEBRUARY 14 > ESRB T



INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE FOX HOLE

If your nostrils don't flare up from the stench of burnt fox hair that the gameplay produces, and your brain doesn't devolve to the size of a peanut to cope with a story so elementary that only a caveman could embrace it, then your eyes will tear up over the realization that this series has essentially become a big, fat parody of itself. Star Fox was once heralded as the pinnacle of space combat, but it has since been sucked into the black hole of video game mediocrity.

Assault teases gamers with classically styled Star Fox levels that are brimming with blister-inducing boss battles and mad dashes through asteroid fields. As the feeling emerges that Nintendo has finally created a Star Fox title that is true to the series' heritage, you are yanked out of the Arwing cockpit and forced to gag on horribly designed stages of Fox running and gunning on foot. Faulty AI has enemies ramming into walls repeatedly, the visuals are so dull that the SNES's FX chip could probably support them, and the mission objectives are way too repetitive. Having the ability to jump into a tank within these stages does offer momentary solace, but as you'll quickly learn, little

joy can be garnered by controlling this sluggish vehicle. In my opinion, these levels are a complete loss. Adding insult to injury, your desired time in the skies is greatly dwarfed by how much time you'll spend in agony on foot.

Oddly, the one thing that kept me going through the single player experience was the story, but not in a way that you'd expect. The dialogue is childish and the plot twists are so ridiculous that they make *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* seem as deep and emotionally stirring as a production of *Hamlet*. It's bad, but much like watching washed up celebrities make asses of themselves on the *Surreal Life*, you just can't pull yourself away from it.

The area where this game shines the most is in multiplayer. As Star Fox has illustrated in the past, you won't find a better place for aerial dog fighting. This is the kind of multiplayer experience that you can lose countless hours in and still want to lay waste to your friends. A lot of thought went into the maps (there are plenty of places to hide or snipe on foot, and there's enough room to maneuver an Arwing), and the balancing between weapons and the vehicles is right where it needs to be.

Assault may fail miserably in delivering a single-player experience that players can really sink their teeth into, but it isn't a complete failure. It's easily one of the most unique and entertaining multiplayer choices for the GameCube.

—REINER

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Like pouring gasoline on your pancakes. The new on-foot levels don't go well with the excellent space combat

> **Graphics:** Has anyone ever mooned you? Take a look at this game's on-foot levels and you'll have a good understanding of what it looks and feels like

> **Sound:** Either the worst or greatest voice acting ever. The worst if you are looking for something believable. The greatest if you are looking for the purest form of cheese

> **Playability:** Space Good... On foot... Bad!!! Tank... Meh

> **Entertainment:** Sadly, this game is all about multiplayer. The single player game is very painful

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

It seems like with every new release of Star Fox, my love for the series diminishes. First it was the wacky action/adventure game from Rare, and now it's Star Fox Assault. I'm seriously confused by Nintendo's refusal to either A) Truly move the series forward and away from the uninteresting storylines and annoying cast members (sorry, Nintendoophiles, but Slippy sucks plain and simple), or B) Embrace its shooter roots and create a game filled with classic levels and gameplay with improved graphics and effects. Instead, they give us Assault, which is another odd mix of stuff I love and stuff I simply can't stand. The single-player experience is uninspired overall. Thankfully, the multiplayer aspect saves the game from being a complete disaster. Star Fox deserves better than this. —ANDY



GAMECUBE

Mortal Kombat: Deception

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER MIDWAY > RELEASE FEBRUARY 28 > ESRB M

YOUR 'CUBE NEEDS BLOOD

I'm happy to see this excellent fighter finally get a GameCube release. On any system, it has a great fighting engine, tons of gameplay modes, and a lot of kick ass characters. The GameCube version even has two that are exclusive — old favorites Shao Khan and Goro. However, these characters come with a cost, one that GameCube owners should know well by now: the lack of online play.

When I previously reviewed Deception for PS2 and Xbox, I scored it a half-point higher than this version. This deduction is strictly for the missing online mode. For me, being able to recreate the arcade feel of taking on all challengers through online play is something that two extra characters doesn't make up for. Goro and Shao Khan are both great fighters and don't ever feel like they were slapped together hastily as bonus characters often can. But, given a choice between these two villains and limitless rivals around the world, there's no contest.

As far as everything else is concerned, however, the GC version is equal to the other two in my eyes. The fighting engine simply rocks, and the addition of combo Breakers adds a ton of strategy that was missing from Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance. I really love the environmental interactions that debuted in this entry, as they can really turn the tide of a battle and add another layer of strategy to the combat. The characters look uniformly impressive, and the music and sounds are great. The additional gameplay modes, such as Puzzle Kombat and Konquest mode are enjoyable in their own right as well. Overall, Deception offers a ton of bloody entertainment, even when going online isn't an option. —JEREMY



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** The gory fighter's latest entry comes to GameCube with two exclusive characters and full online play — kidding!

> **Graphics:** Virtually identical to the other versions — in other words, great

> **Sound:** Nice music and fun effects make the audio one of the most pleasing aspects of the game

> **Playability:** The control scheme is ably adapted to the GC controller

> **Entertainment:** This sucker will splatter blood all over your GC game collection, and you'll love it

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.25

It's nice to see that some developers are going to great lengths to compensate for the GameCube's lack of online support. Both Goro and Shao Kahn are exclusive to this version, and they don't feel like quick additions, either. They fit right in with the rest of the cast. I played the hell out of this game on PS2 and Xbox, and I once again find myself hopelessly addicted to it for a third time. While I can say that Goro has quickly become one of my favorite characters in the game (his second Fatality is a not), not having online support is a huge deal. With each MK, most of my time is vested into multiplayer, and being able to compete against other players at any time is crucial. —REINER



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Mild Language
Sexual Themes
Violence

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PlayStation®2



KESSEN III

決戦

A Kou Shibusawa Production

An Action Strategy Game



Archviles are freaking obnoxious.



A marine and his chainsaw - it's a beautiful thing.

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** Squeeze Carmack's latest masterpiece into the Xbox's 64 MB of RAM with shockingly good results

> **Graphics:** There might be better-looking Xbox titles, but it's debatable

> **Sound:** Do yourself a favor and play this in 5.1 surround if at all possible - the sound design is ingenious

> **Playability:** Mapping your weapons of choice to quick-switch on the d-pad is awesome

> **Entertainment:** Whether or not FPS is your bag, this is an experience no Xbox owner should miss

> **Replay Value:** High



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Doom 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** VICARIOUS VISIONS/ID SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** APRIL 3 > **ESRB** M

A PORT FOR THE AGES

When first we learned that Doom 3 was to be ported to the Xbox, I was rather skeptical. After all, GI's beastly gaming rig (stuffed full of the latest and greatest hardware) was put to the test running the PC version. Somehow, though, Vicarious Visions and id Software pulled off what I thought impossible: They made Doom 3 an absolutely amazing Xbox title. Yes, there are graphical compromises. Yes, I miss my mouse-look. But neither of these things matters very much at all once you immerse yourself in Doom's gorgeously twisted world and single-handedly eradicate the demonic legions of Hell.

It's a shame that the Doom 3 lighting engine was pared down significantly for the Xbox, and many of the textures have been severely downgraded for this release, but this is still a damn fine-looking game. Plus, even during chaotic four-player deathmatches, the framerate always stays at an acceptable level. In single-player, there's barely a hiccup to mar Doom 3's beauty. The other major difference from

the original version is obviously the controller. The simple, elegant solution to this issue is allowing players to map a weapon to each direction of the d-pad, as well as cycle through arms with Y and B. Unlike many console FPSs, there were a mere handful of times I fumbled for the weapon I was looking for - and those were due more to shock frying my nerves than control issues.

New to this release is the addition of a co-op mode. This, like competitive multiplayer, can be played either over Xbox Live or system link (but not



split-screen). But co-op is a far cry from simply playing through the campaign with a buddy. Since much of the tension that Doom 3 is based on is lessened when you have someone to watch your back, the developers made appropriate tweaks, wisely choosing to focus on the action-oriented parts of the game instead. Verbose PDA's are replaced with key-cards and a lot of the atmospheric segments are cut out when playing co-op, which leaves players with an intense shootout with the myriad foes that Hell throws in your way. In all, it makes for a wonderfully entertaining time.

The issues I took with the PC version still hold true in this title - namely enemy repetition, formulaic single-player pacing, and basic deathmatch multiplayer. However, the online support for this Xbox version is far superior to that of the original (at the time it was reviewed), and the game simply feels like a completely natural fit for Microsoft's console. Thus the higher score, and a hearty recommendation. —ADAM

For Your Inner Nerd

Though they're only available on the Collector's Edition, the inclusion of Ultimate Doom and Doom II in their entirety is nothing but gravy on an already-delicious cake. You can't take them online, but four-player split-screen fragathons are a great way to remember FPS's roots, and the games themselves are, surprisingly enough, still fun.



Second Opinion 9.25

Console ports of PC games have a questionable and largely murky history. It's just so rare that they end up capturing the quality of the original while maintaining playability on the new platform. It was with these thoughts in mind that I launched into the Xbox version of Doom 3. After amazing me with its dark and disturbing visuals, punishing me with its bloody combat, and making me jump out of my seat with its frequent scares, Doom 3 proved it had made the leap to console with more aplomb than I could have hoped for. The hellish, atmospheric feel of the game is oppressive and overwhelming throughout, and the constant blackness doesn't hide the fact that this is in the top tier of Xbox graphics. Only the level design in the single-player game got me down, which had a little too much backtracking and moments of feeling lost for my taste. The addition of online co-op for the Xbox is brilliant, especially since they readjusted gameplay to run best with two players, adding more action and speeding up the pace. In short, you should feel no regrets about taking on this Xbox port instead of the PC version. Hell is just as nightmarish either way you go. —MILLER



The slotgun's cone of fire can be a bit tricky to manage in co-op.



"Hey, you got any change to spare?"

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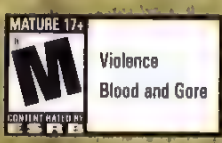


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UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK)
> PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER EPIC GAMES > RELEASE APRIL 18 > ESRB M



BOTTOM LINE 9.25

CHANGING THE RULES

Okay, so my nerves are officially frayed to the breaking point. After several days of playing Unreal Championship 2 almost non-stop, I feel like I may have developed a chronic twitch in my trigger finger and a permanent cramp in my thumb. UC 2 is undoubtedly one of the most intense and frenzied arena combat games I've ever played. Contrary to hardcore fans' fears, the addition of third-person play broadens the challenge and skill set tremendously, and offers an unprecedented level of mobility and movement options. Most of my gripes were small (beyond my injured thumb), and Liandri Conflict emerges as just the explosive frag-fest you were hoping it would be.

As I first embroiled myself in the insanely fast-paced duels that are at the heart of UC 2, the most powerful impression I had was how true it manages to remain to the spirit of the Unreal franchise. However, what really gives the game its flavor are the new additions. Melee combat, far from just a glossy add-on, has now become an integral part of battle. Because attacks are constantly coming in from all directions, the new spatial awareness afforded by the third-person view becomes invaluable. Meanwhile, the range of free movement is truly astounding while you flip and wall jump about the arena.

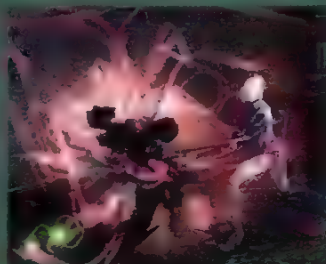
Visuals are uniformly fantastic, particularly the meticulous and numerous environments within which you'll do battle. Character animation is smooth and weapon effects are suitably volatile. All the game modes have something to offer, and I was particularly pleased to see some genuine effort go into

the creation of some outstanding cinematics to accompany the main story, detailing the rise of Anubis through the ranks of the Nakh. Ascension Championship.

Along with all this great fun, there are certainly some things that hampered my enjoyment. Balancing between difficulty settings was a little problematic — where one setting is far too simple, the next step up is way too difficult. Beyond this, I also found some elements of the bot AI to be a little iffy, as I would watch one stupidly back itself into a corner or another run blindly into the nearest wall. I also found some fault in the available weapons. While all of them had their uses, they just didn't seem to have the desired balance and variety that I've come to expect in an Unreal game.

Even with some of these issues, this is a phenomenal Xbox Live experience. Online fragging is where this game really shines. While it's by no means a halo killer, it is in every way a fantastic alternative to those who are ready for something a little different. With hundreds of possible permutations of arenas, rule sets, and character options, you'll be busy for a while. Sorry I don't have anything to help with those broken trigger fingers — for that you're on your own.

—MILLER



> **Concept:** Broaden the scope of the Unreal formula through a third-person view and melee combat.

> **Graphics:** Are you seeing these screenshots? Need I say more.

> **Sound:** A cool amalgam of sci-fi electronics and haunting Egyptian melodies meld well with the strong voiceover and sound effects.

> **Playability:** Extremely challenging, even on the middle difficulties, but a steady learning curve has you picking up new things for days and days.

> **Entertainment:** While it may try your synapses with its non-stop intensity, you won't be complaining.

> **Replay Value:** High.

Second Opinion 9.5

Unreal creator Epic Games has translated and improved the Unreal experience to the Xbox in truly epic fashion. The attempt to provide a worthwhile single-player campaign is admirable, however, difficulty imbalances and a so-so story prevent it from being anything special. Multiplayer, though, is arguably the best to be had on the Xbox. The extent that you can dig into all of the different weapons, maps, powers, and strategies for each gametype is astounding. In every match, I discovered something new and awesome about UC 2. Melee combat is integrated seamlessly, the acrobatic moves lend a new verticality to gameplay, and everything simply comes together in a way that we rarely see. Far from being a poor man's Unreal Tournament, Unreal Championship 2 is a completely new and intensely compelling title that no FPS or action fan should be without. —ADAM

XBOX QUICKIES

XBOX

Scrapland

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ENLIGHT SOFTWARE > DEVELOPER MERCURY STEAM > RELEASE FEBRUARY 18 > ESRB T



On a conceptual basis, Scrapland feels like a Pixar film that has Isaac Asimov seated in the director's chair. As you moan dejectedly at the overly energized robots who all seem to be programmed with the kind of humor that you could only find in *Home Alone 3*, you can't help but marvel at the awe-inspiring detail that went into this world's

heavily populated robotic society. Although it dazzles the eye and delivers a unique charm, your enjoyment is quickly vaporized by the game's oversimplified approach to free-roaming gameplay. Through every inch of the game, players are forced to follow a blinking yellow arrow on their radar. Although the aerial combat controls nicely, the lock-on technology completely removes any skill that is required to tracking and downing rival vehicles. The racing is decent, but the tracks are very bland and lacking in exciting twists and turns. Worst of all, however, are the on-foot sections — which would appear to be in the game for the sole purpose of annoying people. Scrap indeed. —REINER

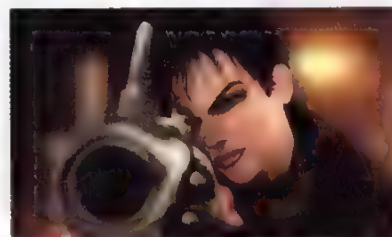
XBOX

Still Life

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER THE ADVENTURE COMPANY > DEVELOPER MICROIDS > RELEASE APRIL 14 > ESRB M

There are forces at work here that I cannot begin to understand. In a game where you spend all of your time talking to people, solving puzzles, and interacting with the environment, you would think that at least one of these elements wouldn't be laughably terrible. Well, *Still Life* is here to say that the joke's on you, poindexter. The saddest thing is the fact that the game actually has a genuinely interesting forensic mystery connecting two generations, but it rarely shines through the obtuse and frustrating gameplay. Like a deep-fried supermodel, the scarred beauty of *Still Life* is sadly buried under inches of unpleasant greasy breading. —JOE



XBOX

Top Gear RPM Tuning

BOTTOM LINE 5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING > PUBLISHER KEMCO > DEVELOPER BABYLON SOFTWARE > RELEASE FEBRUARY 16 > ESRB T



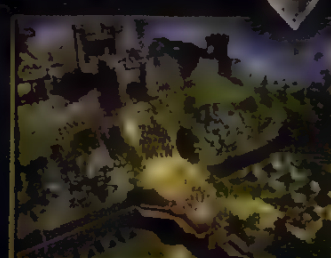
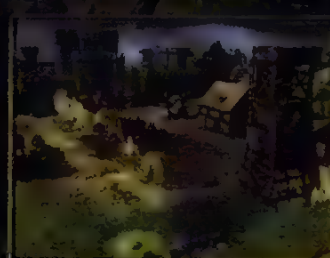
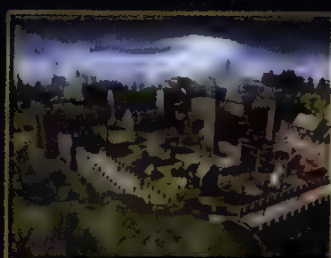
Top Gear RPM tuning is so close to the line of intellectual property theft that if I had published *Need for Speed Underground* or *Midnight Club 2*, I would be a little concerned. However, every conceivable feature is executed with a class-B mentality. The generic techno soundtrack? I wish that I didn't have a tympanic membrane.

Physics? Why can I shear off the corner of a bread truck and drive right on through, but going over a curb makes me spin out? There are damage models for all of the cars, but each ride mystically repairs itself after every race. Neat. It's just all so bad (and the good games RPM is aping are now readily available at the same price point) that I can't imagine who would use up perfectly stable shelf space to store this imitator. —LISA

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Nearly every piece of the environment can be destroyed



Just about every problem can be solved with enough tanks

Act of War – Direct Action

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** EUGEN SYSTEMS > **RELEASE** MARCH 15 > **ESRB** T

TO WAR ONCE AGAIN

Even though there are a ton of excellent RTSs on the shelves right now to choose from, Act of War nonetheless makes a good case for gamers to spend their money here rather than elsewhere. Though this is developer Eugen Systems' first game, Act of War suffers from none of the usual problems that drag down so many budding RTSs. Plus, the presentation is strictly better – a high level of detail along with fantastic explosive effects make for an ocular feast. Along with the good sound design and high-tech art style, the result is a rich and detailed world to conquer.

The nuts-and-bolts mechanics of Act of War are pretty much standard RTS fare, though there are some cool twists. Prime among the differences from convention is the resource gathering. There are some neutral structures you can extract money from, but they're fairly limited – most of your income will be from capturing POWs. If you have the relevant building, you can send them back to your base for a steady, unlimited stream of cash. This makes controlling the battlefield a lot more important than the usual hit-and-run tactics that

dominate many modern RTSs and serves to differentiate Act of War in a very good way.

Single-player in Act of War is notable for two things only: the nice length (33 scenarios!), and the many hours of well-produced live-action videos that tell the story. And while these can be fun to watch, the script is a cliché-ridden, Clancy-wannabe hack job in the worst way. Also, getting through pretty much every scenario is simply a matter of amassing a huge force to go stomping with – this gets formulaic rather quickly, but the campaign is still a fun way to get used to the game so that you can go online. The multiplayer support isn't quite to the level of ESO or Battle.net, but there is nonetheless a lot of fun to be had online. True, there could be more maps, but they seem to be well

designed, and the flow of a match is pretty smooth.

Overall, Act of War is a good, solid RTS that brings some new things to the table in terms of gameplay, but I never really shook the feeling that I was still playing Command & Conquer: Generals. However, those looking for a new RTS will certainly find more than enough entertainment here to satiate themselves for quite a while. —ADAM



The live-action cutscenes far outstrip those seen in other games



The campaign takes you all over the world



The level of detail is quite amazing

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Command some units, conquer some territory; you know the drill

> **Graphics:** Stellar overall, with particle effects and explosions in particular that rock

> **Sound:** Audio cues for events really help in keeping tabs on the action, and the voice acting actually won't make you vomit

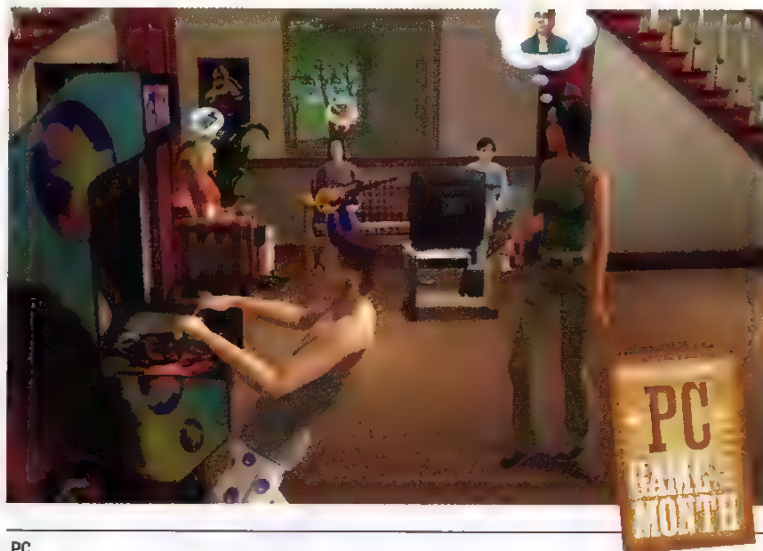
> **Playability:** Surprisingly free of irritations, though an inordinate amount of camera swiveling is sometimes required

> **Entertainment:** Not the most innovative RTS ever, but a rock-solid and amusing way to get your strategy on

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8

Behind the live-action cut scenes and flimsy near-future storyline, it doesn't take long to realize that Act of War isn't really innovating in any profound way. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Basic RTS formula became the standard because it works. I certainly don't mind a return to basics from time to time. Act of War offers just that, with a solid presentation of the classic "build up your base and beat up the bad guys" approach. However, I could have done without the hand-holding approach to mission goals. Seriously, with objective markers placed every couple hundred meters, I often felt as if my troops just had to follow a trail of breadcrumbs in order to finish the mission. Nonetheless, there's some quality real-time combat to be confronted here. It's not going to change the way you think about RTS, but they could have done a lot worse than offering the solidly fun final package that's here. —MILLER



PC

The Sims 2 University

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** MAXIS
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 28 > **ESRB** E

GOOD TIMES ROLL

Last year, Maxis unleashed the grand and ambitious Sims 2 on a rabid fan base.

The game allowed players to watch their sims age and produce offspring — a feature that, in itself, could propel curious gamers through generations of choices, fears, goals, and emotional tides. You will get sucked into the lives of these computer constructs and maneuver them through both the biggest and blandest days of their lives. It's great, but still could use a little spice.

What this first expansion pack does is make me bow before the great minds of Maxis for doing exactly the right thing with their newest baby. University is just plain ingenious. Essentially, the pack expands a new lifecycle phase of "young adult" into a full-featured college experience. Now, I didn't go to a real college, so my entire frame of reference is from funny movies with dorky guys in letterman sweaters, and The Sims 2 University includes all of the madcap hijinks that I would expect.

There are innumerable new conversation and interaction options that revolve around the idea that college attendees are borderline morons, but (in their defense) creative morons. You can spend hours chatting online or adding soap to decorative fountains. Chucking a water balloon is just one click away, and Hanging Out lets characters

cop a squat on any available ground to hash out self-important quasi-political diatribes or whatever it is that college kids talk about at 3 a.m.

But besides this list of new features, items, and options, University does more for the source material, enlightening me to the truly epic ideas that Maxis has for one of the most time-consuming games out there. By taking the focus off of money woes or work hours (you only go to class a few hours a day and most of the group domiciles are outfitted from the get-go with everything you need), the game instead becomes about exploring the other "characters" around you.

It's this change in focus, and the integration that it has with the base game, that makes Sims 2 University such a revelation for me. I wanted to make my charges into interesting, well-rounded people who didn't stress about their classes but also got their homework done. The coolest thing, though, is that when their studies are done, the choices that they've made affect what job trees they can access, what kind of home they can provide for their future families, and what kind of skills they possess. It's brilliant, and I can't wait to see how the team expands on other areas of a sim's life, because now they have my rapt attention. —LISA

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Transition teen sims to young adulthood by shuffling them through the meat grinder we all know as higher education

> **Graphics:** Still sharp and whimsically detailed

> **Sound:** New tunes with a more top-40 sound to them. They fit, but college kids have some bad taste

> **Playability:** Added conversation and action options are all easy to find, otherwise it's the very able Sims 2 interface

> **Entertainment:** Laugh-out-loud funny and constant entertainment

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.75

The Sims 2 University proves that college is everything '80s movies promised us it could be. Streaking, pouring soap in public fountains, and selling roommates' furniture to make a quick buck form the core of your sims' college experience. Even with all of that hilarity, what impresses me most about University is how it incorporates so much more than expanded social options and a few extra things to buy. With gameplay focused primarily on aspirations, influence, and social life rather than money and basic survival, University delivers the familiar fun of its parent game, but with a fresh and engaging twist. Plus, it has a prank-loving bully in a cow suit named Dagmar. I love that guy. —JOE

PC

Freedom Force Vs. The Third Reich

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** IRRATIONAL GAMES/VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** IRRATIONAL GAMES > **RELEASE** MARCH 8 > **ESRB** T



THE SILVER AGE RETURNS

With characters like commie witch Red Oktober and stalwart defender of Patriot City Minuteman, it's tough to take Freedom Force vs. the Third Reich seriously. Once they start talking in hammy accents and nonstop clichés, it becomes impossible. That's all okay, though, because anyone with an appreciation for the follies and foibles of American culture during the middle decades of the 20th century will undoubtedly find plenty of entertainment in FF's campy vibe.

Much like Knights of the Old Republic, FF's combat is a turn-based system that takes place in real time. Unlike KOTOR, FF takes excellent advantage of all three dimensions and features deliciously destructible environments. Flying characters soar above the battlefield, gigantic enemies level buildings with massive blows, and explosive superpowers constantly light up the screen. There's nothing quite like picking up a lamp-post and beating bad guys up with it, or launching them off of a building into a crate of explosives. All of this makes for some seriously entertaining combat — for a couple of hours.

After a while, things start to get repetitive as you keep fighting the same goons, using the same powers, and dealing with the same obnoxious interface flaws. For one, it's tough

to keep track of where the bad guys are amid the chaos of battle. Also, my heroes would frequently stand around like morons after a single attack, instead of using their default strikes. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to why things would go smoothly sometimes, and be horribly cumbersome at others. With liberal use of the pause feature you can work around this, but it still frustrates and annoys fairly regularly.

That said, there's a lot of game here. The single-player campaign lasts more than long enough, and there are 24 heroes with radically different abilities. Multiplayer is there, but the default modes aren't anything to write home about — hopefully someone will put the mod tools to good use and cook up some tasty homebrew. And for the truly devout, the hero editor gives unprecedented control over everything about your costumed crusader, right down to the animations for specific powers.

Freedom Force vs. the Third Reich isn't going to blow anyone's doors off, but it's a solid strategy/RPG with a lot of humor, a great presentation, and a lot of expandability in terms of user-created content. Even if you don't know Iron Man from Dr. Doom, this title has quite a bit to offer if you can get past the minimalist interface. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Foil the nefarious plots of assorted supervillains while getting some chuckles

> **Graphics:** Sharp, colorful, and gooly, the visuals capture the essence of the game perfectly

> **Sound:** Some of the best music tracks ever will stick to your forebrain for weeks, while a couple of the voices will have you contemplating a lobotomy to end the pain

> **Playability:** This proves conclusively that you can indeed have too clean of an interface — give me some feedback, already!

> **Entertainment:** Barring some repetitive elements, this definitely delivers in humor and strategic combat

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

Harkening back to the hackneyed and over-wrought characters and stories of the Silver Age makes the new Freedom Force a constant riot. What was once dramatic superhero commentary is now totally silly, and the top notch voiceover work only emphasizes the humor. The story picks fun at every stereotype imaginable, and manages to be equally politically incorrect with all of them. I found the camera a little unwieldy and the character interface was occasionally problematic. Still, the enormous cast of comic book cutout characters makes this a must play for superhero comic fans. —MILLER



THE
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TEEN
T Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence
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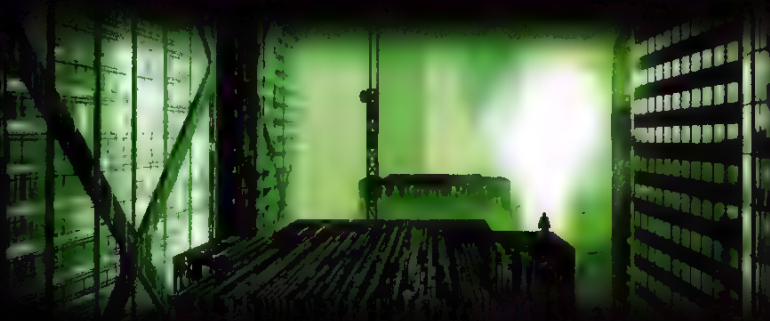
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- ▶ Explore every inch of *The Matrix: Mega City*—the most realistic urban environment of any MMO. The entire city, including every room of every building, is in play.
- ▶ Defeat your enemies using devastating martial arts maneuvers and gunplay. Breakthrough MMO technology produces rich animations and hyper-kinetic battle sequences.
- ▶ Escape character regret. Reconfigure your character's abilities and performance on demand.
- ▶ Communicate with people in and out of the game in real-time using AOL® Instant Messenger™ technology.



NINTENDO DS

WarioWare Touched!

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO > RELEASE FEBRUARY 14 > ESRB E



TOUCH AND GO

Say what you want about the absence of a coherent story or the ultra simplistic nature of Wario's "microgames". They still keep you constantly engaged and excited to find out what is coming at you next. The endless stream of crazy action that speeds off the screen at you remains a formula that works surprisingly well for this franchise, and the use of the touch screen only offers a deeper and more tangible connection to the action at hand. Unfortunately, the exclusive use of the touch screen makes most of the game even easier than previous iterations. Still, your rapid advance through the game's challenges helps illustrate the immense number of things to play with, explore, perfect, and laugh at — which, ultimately, is what got us all into games in the first place.

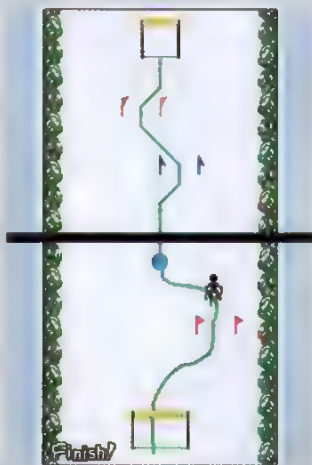
It's too bad the nonsensical story accompanying the game is little more than a thematic musing on how great the DS is. If one were to isolate the apparent focus of the tale, it would be Wario's accidental fall into a manhole, where he discovers a Nintendo DS, and determines he can make twice as much money as a game designer with twice the number of screens. It's all

downhill from there.

Thankfully, the incoherent storytelling has a negligible effect on the overall gameplay, which remains frantic and pleasantly laughable throughout. Scribbling pictures, petting onscreen dogs, gleefully unrolling a toilet paper roll, blowing on the microphone to create wind — everything is ridiculous and amusing at the same time. Add in the constant unlockables, and you genuinely feel that around every turn is a new toy to play with. Everything about the game is about offering up constant little bursts of fun, from the instantly navigable menus to the familiar characters.

As I mentioned, the touch screen simplifies the experience a little too well, resulting in a challenge that seems ever so slightly less than the other games in the series. I'd love

to see future versions integrate the touch screen, the microphone, and the buttons into a frantic mix of activity, but this showcasing of the touch screen capability is at this point both welcome and to be expected. The game may be elementary in the extreme, but sometimes the simple pleasures remain the best. —MILLER



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Tackle well over a hundred tiny challenges in rapid-fire succession using nothing but the touch screen and microphone

> **Graphics:** Bright, simple, and rooted in the nostalgia of early video games

> **Sound:** If amusingly inane equates with high quality in your mind, you're in luck

> **Playability:** Like the other Wario Ware games, this couldn't be easier to pick up and play

> **Entertainment:** For the hyper, attention deficient little kid in all of us, this is a dream come true

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion

Random observers of me playing Touched would probably think that I am the least stable member of society in a three-mile radius. I giggled when I got to pop virtual bubble wrap and actually chortled when Ashley (somehow menacingly, I might add) said that I could pet her stuffed bunny or cat or whatever it was. Despite the undisputed facts that Touched is in the very top tier of available DS titles and my obvious pleasure when playing it, I also felt like I had done most of what Wario's new manic panic-fest wanted of me. On the other hand, there is way more unlockable content here and the touch screen is a great interface for these types of games. —LISA

HANDHELD QUICKIES

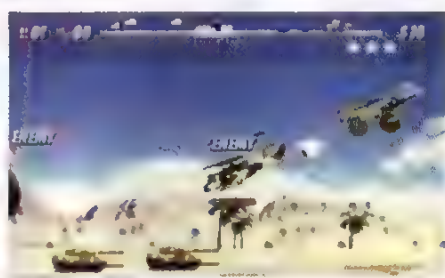
GAME BOY ADVANCE

BOTTOM LINE 6

Super Army War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SHOOTER > PUBLISHER ATLUS > DEVELOPER NEKO ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE FEBRUARY 22 > ESRB E

I really wish I liked this game. If you have fond memories of old-school side-scrolling shooters like Choplifter, you'll get a welcome blast from the past when you boot up Super Army War. And — while we're on the subject — might I say that this is probably the best game name I've seen in years (Announcer: "It's not just an Army War...it's a SUPER Army War."). Jokes aside, I have to say I'm a bit disappointed. I found the control to be fairly aggravating (especially the airplanes), and that the game's nod towards strategy-like "depth" (requiring you capture and defend bases to increase your funds) actually bogged down what should have been an all-out aerial dogfighting. Not that the sticky maneuvering would have allowed for good dogfighting, but they could have at least *tried*. That's all I ask. —MATT

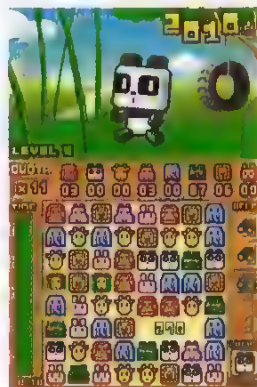


NINTENDO DS

BOTTOM LINE 7

Zoo Keeper

> STYLE 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > PUBLISHER IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER SUCCESS CORPORATION/BUDDIEZ, INC > RELEASE JANUARY 17 > ESRB E



There's something admirable about a game that knows it isn't innovative or revolutionary, accepts its lot, and revels in the area where it is confined. Zoo Keeper aims for mediocrity and hits its mark dead-on. Players use the stylus to flip adjacent animal blocks on the lower screen, trying to form lines of three or more which then disappear, making way for more in standard puzzler style. It is fiercely addictive and entertaining, though it features terrible music that will stir your emotions into a murderous frenzy. But if you keep the volume off, Zoo Keeper is an entirely adequate puzzle experience, and a solid imitation of 2001's shareware Bejeweled (which is considerably cheaper). —JOE

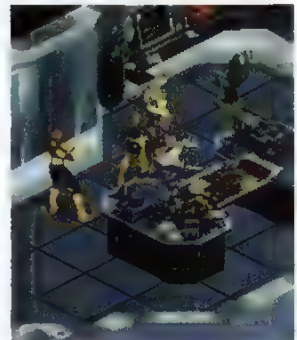
N-GAGE

BOTTOM LINE 7

X-Men Legends

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS OR N-GAGE ARENA) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER BARKING LIZARDS > RELEASE FEBRUARY 15 > ESRB T

I'm actually quite impressed at how well the console version of X-Men Legends has translated over to the N-Gage. Both cutscenes and voiceovers have been ported onto the handheld without change, and the in-game graphics look quite nice. However, the gameplay just feels a little too simple and chaotic for me. Characters tend to dump together during combat, making your intended target hard to pick out. Having only one mutant power per character available at a time removes a lot of the freedom I liked in the console game, and it's hard to remember which key is mapped to what menu screen in the heat of battle. Still, X-Men Legends is a decent little brawler, and one of the better titles in the N-Gage library. —JEREMY





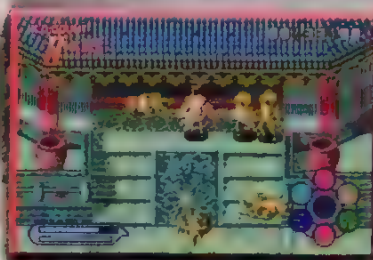
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Spring 2005

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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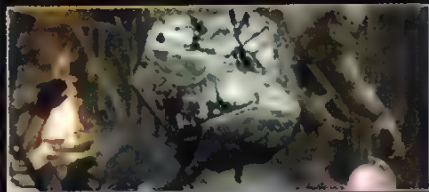
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For January 2005 Based On Units Sold

1 RESIDENT EVIL 4



Resident Evil is still one of gaming's most beloved franchises. The series' commercial might has been revived with this new masterpiece of horror, thanks to the game's awesome quality and the public's undying love of hideous monsters. Seriously, we'll never get sick of those adorable hideous monsters! They're as cute as kittens! Brain-eating, ravenous, mutant kittens.

2 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS



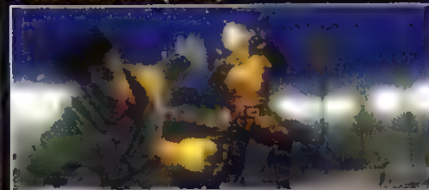
What remains to be said about Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas? Nothing, actually. It's awesome and a lot of people bought it.

3 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP



While Miyamoto has been busy playing with his Nintendo DS, Capcom has created what might be one of the greatest Zelda games ever for the Game Boy Advance. As expected, The Minish Cap met with great success at retail, earning the number three spot on this month's sales chart. Take that, Pikmin-boy!

4 MERCENARIES (XBOX)



The charts are littered with high profile sequels, but LucasArts has managed to sneak a new IP into the top five: the open-world military title Mercenaries. Although we were lukewarm on the highly touted title, the gaming public has spoken and they helped the title become a breakout success.

5 MERCENARIES (PS2)

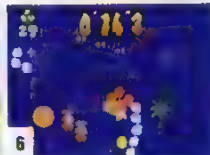


Due to its large installed base, we're accustomed to the PlayStation 2 versions of games selling more than their Xbox counterparts. This is not the case with Mercenaries. Is this a sign of good things to come for the Xbox? Will Mercenaries have enough word of mouth to sustain its sales? We don't know...it's all riddles...mysteries and riddles. Sigh.

Rank	Title	Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Resident Evil 4	N/A	GC	10	01-05	\$51
2	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	1	PS2	10	10-04	\$48
3	The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap	N/A	GBA	9.5	01-05	\$30
4	Mercenaries	N/A	XBOX	7.5	01-05	\$49
5	Mercenaries	N/A	PS2	7.5	01-05	\$49
6	Need for Speed Underground 2	2	PS2	8	11-04	\$49
7	Halo 2	3	XBOX	10	11-04	\$45
8	Madden NFL 2005	4	PS2	8.75	08-04	\$29
9	Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories	6	GBA	7.75	12-04	\$34
10	Super Mario 64 DS	13	DS	8.5	11-04	\$30
11	NFL Street 2	N/A	PS2	7.5	12-04	\$50
12	NBA Live 2005	8	PS2	8.25	09-04	\$29
13	Need for Speed: Underground 2	7	XBOX	8	11-04	\$49
14	Call of Duty: Finest Hour	5	PS2	8.5	11-04	\$44
15	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	9	PS2	9.5	11-04	\$47
16	World Championship Poker	N/A	PS2	N/A	11-04	\$20
17	Mario Party 6	10	GC	6.25	12-04	\$49
18	The Punisher	N/A	PS2	7.5	01-05	\$49
19	The Punisher	N/A	XBOX	7.5	01-05	\$49
20	Suikoden IV	N/A	PS2	8.5	01-05	\$40

TOP 10 JAPAN

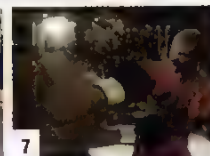
Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Super Robot Taisen: Original Generation 2	N/A	GBA
2	Radiata Stories	N/A	PS2
3	Another Century's Episode	N/A	PS2
4	Resident Evil 4	N/A	GC
5	WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW	N/A	PS2
6	Yoshi's Touch & Go	N/A	DS
7	Gran Turismo 4	1	PS2
8	Monster Hunter	N/A	PS2
9	WarioWare Touched!	2	DS
10	Super Mario 64 DS	3	DS



Source: Game Japan. Based on Monthly Units Sold

TOP 10 G1

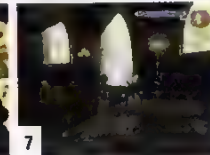
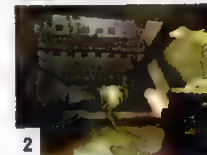
Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	God of War	N/A	PS2
2	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	N/A	Multi
3	Resident Evil 4	1	GC
4	Gran Turismo 4	4	PS2
5	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	N/A	Multi
6	Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening	2	PS2
7	Fight Night: Round 2	N/A	Multi
8	NBA Street V3	5	Multi
9	Winning Eleven 8	N/A	Multi
10	Tekken 5	N/A	PS2



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World of Warcraft	2	\$50
2	Half-Life 2	1	\$51
3	The Sims 2	3	\$46
4	Lord of the Rings: Battle For Middle-Earth	6	\$47
5	The Sims Deluxe	9	\$20
6	Roller Coaster Tycoon 3	4	\$37
7	Lemony Snicket's A Series Of Unfortunate Events	N/A	\$24
8	Call Of Duty	10	\$30
9	SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle For Bikini Bottom	N/A	\$15
10	Zoo Tycoon 2	5	\$37



Based On Monthly Units Sold

M

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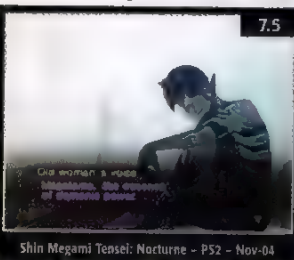


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PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	9	Dec-04
Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed	5.5	Jan-05
Armored Core: Nexus	7.25	Sep-04
Asterix & Obelix XXL	6	Sep-04
Astro Boy	5.5	Sep-04
Atan Anthology	8.5	Jan-05
Athens 2004	6	Aug-04
ATV Offroad Fury 3	7	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05



Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne - PS2 - Nov-04

Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Barx's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Battle Assault 3		
Featuring Gundam Seed	4	Jan-05
Blood Will Tell	5	Nov-04
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Capcom Fighting Evolution	6	Dec-04
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Champions: Return to Arms	8	Mar-05
ChoroQ	6.25	Oct-04
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	3.5	Aug-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Crimson Tears	5	Aug-04
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme	8.25	Oct-04
Death By Degrees	5.5	Mar-05
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Devil May Cry 3		
Dante's Awakening	9	Mar-05
Dog's Life	7	Sep-04
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3	5	Jan-05
Dvsnr	6	Aug-04

Dukes of Hazzard		
Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	7	Sep-04
Echo Night: Beyond	6	Aug-04
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
ESPN NFL 2K5	9.5	Sep-04
ESPN NHL 2K5	8	Sep-04
EyeToy: AntiCav	7	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Final Fantasy X-2	9.25	Mar-05
Final Fantasy XI		
Forgens of Promathia	7.75	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	8.25	Oct-04
Fullmetal Alchemist and the Broken Angel	4.75	Feb-05
Funkmaster Flex Digital Hitz Factory	6.75	Oct-04
Gallop Racer 2004	8.25	Oct-04
Getaway: Black Monday, The	7	Feb-05
Get On Da Mic	5	Dec-04
Ghosthunter	6.5	Sep-04
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	7.25	Dec-04
Ghost Recon 2	6.5	Feb-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	9.25	Oct-04
Grand Turismo 4	9.25	Mar-05
Gretzky NHL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Crowlanser: Generations	7.5	Jan-05
Gully Gear Isuka	6.75	Dec-04
Gungnir: Overdose	4.25	Nov-04
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Headhunter: Redemption	6.75	Oct-04
Hot Shots Golf Fore	9	Sep-04
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Insyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask	4.25	Jan-05
Jak 3	9.25	Nov-04
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	8.25	Aug-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	8.25	Nov-04
Kataman Damacy	8	Oct-04
Kessen III	7.75	Mar-05
Killzone	7.5	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	6.5	Nov-04
Kuon	6	Nov-04
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	4	Aug-04
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Mega Man X8	8.25	Jan-05

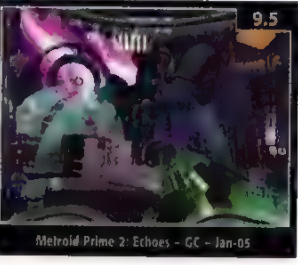
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	9.5	Jan-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
Monster Hunter	5	Nov-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
MTV Music Generator 3	8	Aug-04
Musashi, Samurai Legend	8.25	Mar-05
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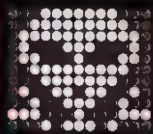
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Oddworld Stranger's Wrath

Insider Tips From The Developers



The electric panels inside Sekto Springs will short circuit when you damage them, turning them into lethal shock traps! — *Steve Desilets, designer*

Enemies can dodge your shots, making them difficult to hit with the Thudslug. I like to hit them with Bees to keep them from moving, then while I am firing Bees I can hit them with a Thudslug! — *Ryan Ellis, lead realtime artist*

The Spark Stunkz are perfect for follow-up attacks. Use it to cluster enemies together and get the most out of ammos with spread, like the Riot Slugs and Bola Blast. — *Jack Mayer, designer*

If you find yourself pinned down by a sniper, try using a fully charged Zapfly to take him out instantly. Or better yet, give em a burst of Stingbees. Stingbees home in on their targets from a great distance and are just about guaranteed to nail your target. — *Raj Nattam, character modeler*

Get into the habit of switching back and forth between third- and first-person (by clicking the right stick). Often times a difficult first-person situation can be overcome by some third-person melee action and vice versa. — *Dave Fried, level designer*

Clakkerz will drop moolah when you smack 'em around. If you ever come up a few moolah short for something you want to buy, pay a visit to the locals and knock 'em around. Most of them will drop moolah three times, so the best way to get all the moolah out of them at one time is to run towards them, leap into the air just as you're about to hit them, and spin punch as fast as you can. If you time it right, you'll smack them three times and get all the moolah out of them in one strike. — *Dave Fried, level designer*

When fighting an outlaw that will not get knocked out easily, use the Bees or multiple Zapflies to momentarily stun the bad guy, then attack with a first-person punch or a Thudslug to finish the job. — *John Clayton, tester*

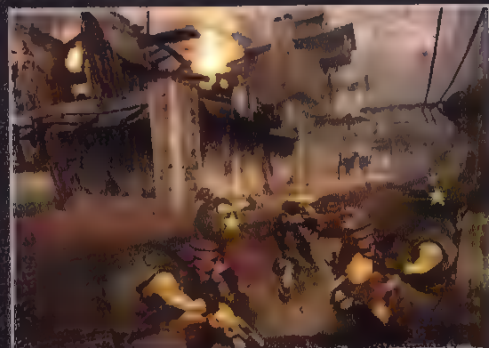
If you ram enemies while jumping in the air, you'll keep running and be able to ram more guys without losing momentum! — *John Clayton, tester*



If you're ever not sure what to do, just hit the X button and Stranger will let you know what you should be thinking about.

If you can't understand what Stranger is talking about, hit the back button and check out the information at the bottom about your current mission. You can check out your stockpile of ammo while you're at it.

Nailers have nails on their armor for a reason. Don't punch or ram them!



If enemy numbers look dense on radar, remember that you can hide around corners or in hide zones, and use your Chippunk to draw them to you one by one. Then ambush them with the Bolamite, Stunk, Thudslug, or knock out punch. This can thin their numbers before you head in for an aggressive attack!

Remember that your high-speed running lope can be used to ram guys unconscious. Swerve if you're heading towards a shooter. This will greatly help to avoid his gunfire.

When using the Chippunk, remember that it will only attract enemies that are able to get to it. They won't follow a chippunk that they can't reach. Also, if enemies aren't attracted to the Chippunk, check to make sure they are within range. Sometimes an enemy will be behind closed doors, and even though it looks within range of the Chippunk on the radar, it won't be able to attract to it through the door.

You only lose stamina if you take a long fall, even if you have no stamina. If you're in a situation where you have to jump off a cliff or a really tall platform to survive, go ahead. Just make sure you know that there's a bottom to the fall.

In third-person melee mode you can do a double headbutt. It's really fun once you figure out how to pull it off. Just jump into the air and then a half second before you land, pull the right trigger, then exactly when your feet touch the ground pull the right trigger again. If you timed it right Stranger will do his headbutt twice in quick succession, dealing out twice the punishment a normal headbutt would deal to the bad guy.

Don't spit into the wind. Stranger does it all the time and his fur is pretty nappy.

Use your environment effectively. If you see an exploding barrel, but there are no enemies nearby, use a Chippunk to lure an enemy near by, then blow up the barrel with a Zapfly. — *Jameson Durall, level designer*

If you find yourself running low on ammo, keep in mind that the Zapfly will knock enemies out when it is charged up. Use this ability to bounty up enemies when you are looking for replacement ammo. — *Jameson Durall, level designer*

Watch how the Live Ammo affects each enemy to discover a rich variety of techniques and strategies. For example, Bolamites prevent suicide bombers from triggering their explosives, while Zapflies set them off early. Blow up a few then bounty the rest for extra cash. — *Nick Burger, production assistant*

GENERAL TIPS

Always visit the General Store after you finish a bounty, that's usually when their shipment of new goods comes in.

Make sure you stock up on ammo before tracking down a bounty, otherwise you'll have to use whatever critters you can scrounge up on the way.

Dead Outlaws tend to disintegrate quickly out in the desert, if you just killed one and you want the money for bountying them dead, you better bag 'em quick.



Don't be afraid to retreat! If you're feeling pinned down, switch to third-person and run away. Remember that your third-person run is up to three times faster than you can move in first-person view. This allows you to retreat to more strategic ground if you find yourself overwhelmed by enemies. Sometimes the best strategy for an area teeming with outlaws is a hasty exit back the way you came. It also allows you to cover more territory faster when moving from one location to another.

If peeking around corners, remember that your third-person camera can really help you to spy around while not being spotted by enemies! If you peek around corners in first-person view, you are more likely to be spotted.

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM**ESPN NBA 2K5**

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Create a player in 24/7 mode with this name to unlock all the items.

All Items (24/7 Mode) – RAY GRAHAM

**ESPN NHL 2K5**

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Have everything unlocked and all challenges completed for your profile by naming it this

Unlock Everything & All Challenges Completed – LuvLeafs

PLAYSTATION 2**Killzone**

For the cheat codes, enter them at the pause screen while holding L1. You have to enter them rather quickly, though. To unlock all levels, simply create a new profile and give it the indicated (case-sensitive) name.

Big Head Mode – O, □, X, ○ (x2)
Unlock All Levels – Shooterman
Unlock All Movies – O, □, △, ○, □

**The Sims: Bustin' Out**

Enter these codes during gameplay while paused in Bust Out or Free Mode. To use Gnome cheats you have to enable the Gnome first.

GNOME CHEATS (TALK TO THE GNOME AFTERWARDS)

10,000 Simoleans – L1, R2, Right, □, L3
Enable Gnome – R2, L1, R1, L2, Left, ○
Fill Motives – L2, R1, Left, ○, Up

MISCELLANEOUS CHEATS

All Locations – R2, R3, L3, L2, R1, L1
All Objects – L2, R2, Up, △, L3
All Skins – L1, R2, X, ○, Up, Down
All Social Options – Left, R1, Down, X, L3, R3

XBOX**Armed & Dangerous**

Go to the main menu. From there, select Options and then Cheats. On that screen, enter these codes to enable the cheats.

All Movies – A, Y, A, Y, Black, R Button, A, Y
Big Boots – R Button, White, Y, A, L Button, B, White, X
Big Hands – R Button, White, X, L Button, White, R Button (x2), Y
Big Heads – L Button, Black, B, White (x2), B, Black, L Button
Every Level – Y, White, Black, L Button, A, R Button (x2), Y
Fill Ammo – Black, B, A, R Button (x2), A, L Button, Black
Fill Health – X, R Button, A, Y, Black, B, A, R Button

God Mode – Y, A, B, X, B, A (x2), L Button
Infinite Ammo – A, L Button (x2), Black, B, White, L Button (x2)
Invincibility – X (x3), R Button, A, L Button (x2), Y
Topsy Turvy Mode – Y, A, B (x2), A, B, White (x2)

GAME BOY ADVANCE**World Championship Poker**

From the main menu, select Password. Input this code there.

\$10,000,000 – 7 of Hearts, King of Spades, 2 of Hearts, Queen of Clubs, 9 of Hearts, Jack of Hearts

PC**RollerCoaster Tycoon 3**

Enter these as one of your Peeps' names to enable the cheat.

\$10,000 – John D Rockefeller
All Peeps Hurl – Make Me Sick
All Peeps Inspect Ground – Mouse
All Peeps Jump – Chris Sawyer
All Peeps Laugh – Atari
Dune Buggy (Drive Around With Arrow Keys) – James Hunt
Fast-Moving Peeps – ATITech
No Coaster Height Limit – John Wardley
See Through Peeps' Eyes – Jonny Watts

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen bidding for the exclusive contract to make National Lacrosse League games)

Code of the Month**Oddworld Strangers Wrath**

First, enable cheat mode by entering the code during gameplay. Then enter these codes, also during gameplay, to enable the cheats. Upon correct entry of any of the codes, a guitar twang will let you know you did it right.

Enable Cheat Mode = Plug in and remove a

controller from port 2, then on controller 1 enter X (x2), Y (x2), B (x2), A (x3)
God Mode – X, Y, A, B, X, Y
Extra Moolah (\$1000) – L3 (x2), R3 (x2), L3 (x2), R3 (x2)

Jeremy Ward
St. Paul, MN

Mod World**SOMETHING UNREAL THIS WAY COMES**

www.unrealtournament.com/v2004/contest.php



Atari and NVIDIA's well-publicized Make Something Unreal contest finally ended on January 24th, and judgement is at hand. While there were certainly many stellar mods for Unreal Tournament 2004 that came out of the contest, two were awarded the highest of honors. Check out the full details at the URL above.

Best Mod: Red Orchestra

Some may argue that the whole point of Unreal Tournament is that it's different than the rest of World War II shooters. Red Orchestra, however, is a total conversion for UT 2004 that holds its own as a great WWII multiplayer FPS. Featuring tons of maps, realistically modeled period weaponry, and wide support from the Unreal Tournament community, Red Orchestra is easily worth its gargantuan 650 MB download. And yes, that's a zip file.

Best Movie: The Journey

Unreal: It's not just for games anymore! This abstract piece of machinema (the term for making movies using game engines) is an interesting look at... well, we'll just say that you could easily write a term paper discussing the meaning of *The Journey*. If nothing else, this is worthy of your time solely on the merits of its evocative solo cello soundtrack.

Also placing in the competition were Damnation, Air Buccaneers, Alien Swarm, Metaball, Strike Force, and Frag Ops in the Best category. For movies, too: Sparked Memory, Sleep, and Drowning included nominations.

ENDLY GATHERING...



★ Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX
LOCKDOWN



UBISOFT

MOBILE
VERSION
ubisoft.com

Devil May Cry 3

10 Tips For Demon Hunting

Hideaki Itsuno, Director, Capcom



GET THE "STINGER" RIGHT AFTER THE FIRST MISSION
If you don't have enough red orbs saved up to buy the stinger after Mission 1, it's probably a good idea to do Mission 1 over again so you can purchase it. If you do have enough orbs to buy it, it's a good idea to power it up to level 2. This will really help you with the boss battle in Mission 2.

MAKE SURE TO MASTER THE "SIDE ROLL" WHEN YOU FIGHT THE HELL VANGUARD IN MISSION 2

If you didn't select the trickster style, this evasive move will really come in handy in boss battles. While just jumping can help you evade attacks, it's still hard to respond to attacks that come from above you. This is when this move comes in handy. It can be used with all styles and will be invaluable as you progress.

USE YOUR RED ORBS TOWARDS ITEMS THAT WILL EXTEND YOUR GAUGE RATHER THAN RECOVERY ITEMS

Recovery items disappear after you use them. Dante doesn't get any stronger with these. The latter half of the game becomes more difficult and recovery item costs will increase. So, in the beginning when it doesn't matter as much if you die, focus on extending your gauges.

MAKE SURE TO USE WEAPONS STRATEGICALLY

There are a ton of different enemies, and you can't simply hack and slash or blast away at enemies and expect to win. Is the gun not working? How about the sword then? Have you considered the direction of the enemy? If a regular attack doesn't work, then try out a variety of different things.

BUTTON MASHING IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED!

Especially in difficulty levels higher than Normal mode, blind attacks and just relying on recovery items won't help you. You'll have to fight enemies more



than once to get a sense of their fighting patterns and weaknesses. If you look closely, you'll be able to figure out their weak spots and experience the gratification of defeating them.

INVEST IN THE "AIR HIKE" SOONER RATHER THAN LATER

The air hike is a bit expensive, but you'll get your money's worth with this one. It's particularly effective because it's possible to change Dante's direction and avoid attacks in mid-air, where you are particularly vulnerable normally. Also, no matter what the landscape is like, you'll be able to jump higher, making it easier to find hidden items, secret missions, and more.

IN THE FIRST PLAYTHROUGH, FOCUS ON WEAPONS AND STYLES THAT YOU CAN GROW AND DEVELOP EASILY

Usually when you clear a mission the first time through, it's not possible to power up every weapon, style, etc. to the max. So, concentrate on weapons and styles that are easy for you to use. In particular, the skills you learn for the styles in Mission 3 are really strong but you'll need a lot to power them all up. If you want to clear the mission efficiently and effectively, it's a good idea to focus on the second playthrough to level up the other weapons and styles you didn't get to the first time.



YOU HAVE TO STRATEGICALLY USE THE WEAPONS AND STYLES FOR SECRET MISSIONS

Depending on which weapon and style you have equipped, it may be harder to get through the secret missions. In contrast, there are some combos of styles and weapons that make them much easier. Try playing around with the weapons and styles to see how this affects your progress. Using things you acquire later on makes it easier to clear the missions, so once you get them it's a good idea to take a challenge on the mission select screen. Also, there are some hints hidden on the screen when the secret missions start up.



IF YOU GET STUCK, GO BACK AND PLAY SOME PREVIOUS MISSIONS TO COLLECT MORE ORBS AND EXPERIENCE

If you encounter bosses and enemies that are just too tough, then just using items and button mashing won't help you. Go back to previous missions and replay them to earn more orbs and experience. Once you've bulked up a bit, you can go back and face your challenges!

AFTER YOU BEAT A MODE, YOUR DATA CAN BE CARRIED OVER AS YOU PLAY THE NEXT DIFFICULTY MODE

If Normal mode is proving a bit difficult, try playing on Easy mode first. It will be easier for you to clear the game once in this mode and while you're doing so, you can power up your weapons, styles, etc. Then, the next time you play through on Normal mode, you'll have all your data and can even build him up more as you play through.

Champions: Return to Arms



Make The Most Of Your Gems

Todd Carson, Associate Producer, Sony Online Entertainment



IKSAR

Casting takes mana, which takes time or potions to regenerate. Someday when you are filthy rich and mightily strong perhaps you can carry around hundreds of potions. Until that day, it is always helpful to have a high mana regeneration. Mana Stones are a helpful ingredient to this endeavor when placed in either weapons or armor. The shaman should not have to get into melee situations much once the Summon Badger ability becomes available. However, until that time and in case the badger fails, having a nice weapon with a disease kick can come in handy. Mummy Tongues can add anywhere from eight to 71 points of Disease damage when placed on a weapon.



BERSERKER

Berserkers rely heavily on both throwing axes and melee weapons. The downfall of throwing axes is that you cannot use gems on them. However, adding dexterity (Ghoul Flesh) to your pieces of armor will increase the damage done with each throw. Ghoul Flesh gems placed on armor can increase dexterity from five to 63 points. For melee time, the Berserker should look to add Bull Runes which add points to Strength. Since Berserkers need to balance skill point distribution among three of the four skills: Strength, Dexterity, and some Intelligence, gems can really help increase these stats.

WARRIOR

Whetstones and Misty Globes are the ideal gems for any warrior. Whetstones increase the chance to land a critical hit. They are only useable on your weapons. Misty Globes increase the attack speed and are also only able to be used on weapons. However, when wielding two weapons in which both have Whetstones and Misty Globes, no monster stands a chance of surviving.

RANGER

Bone chips placed on your bow are my personal favorite for the Ranger. Bone chips add cold damage when added to a weapon. For the Ranger this is

particularly useful as it will slow down your enemies, enabling you to pick more of them off with your bow before they get in melee range. The other nice effect is that although Rangers do have an Ice arrow ability, with this gem they can now utilize that mana for a higher damage ability. Ghoul Flesh is also a great gem for the Ranger. Ghoul Flesh gems add Dexterity points which is a direct relation to the amount of damage a Ranger can do with his/her bow.



CLERIC

Clerics can take some serious hits, but with a limited number of weapons they can't dish it out so well. Adding a Fire Beetle Eye, the most powerful type of damage gem, is a welcome addition to any Cleric's arsenal. Mana regeneration is also very important to a Cleric, particularly when playing with friends (online or offline), to keep the heals and resurrections available not to mention the array of offensive spells.

WIZARD

For a wizard it is all about Mana regeneration - Mana Stones. Wizards need to deal almost all of their damage from afar. This costs mana, so unless you can constantly keep a healthy stock of mana potions you will want to pump up your mana regeneration as much as possible. Mana regeneration gems have a regeneration rate ranging from 12 to 48 percent. Another good idea for Wizards is to improve their Armor Class (AC). Carapace gems will give you an AC bonus ranging from 25-125 points.

SHADOWKNIGHT

Shadowknights have a nice balance by being able to deliver damage with melee weapons, spells, and with a skeleton pet. Add a poison cloud to the disease trail, and monsters will struggle to get to you, giving more time for your pet to jump in. Poison Glands when added to weapons can give poison clouds ranging from three to 32 damage. Just remember the best effect of a poison cloud is making the monsters pause. Other good gems for Shadowknights are Bull Runes and Star Glyphs, which give bonus points to Strength and Intelligence respectively.

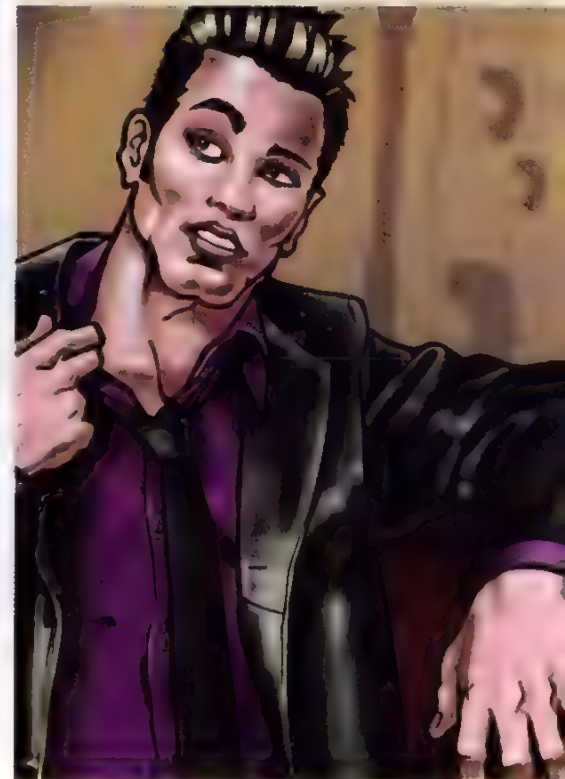
BASIC RULES OF THUMB

Be aware that most gems have different effects on armor vs. weapons. Some gems do not work on armor at all. Casting classes (Iksar, Cleric, Wizard) should make good use of mana stones. These will regenerate Mana, which is needed to utilize abilities, the primary weapon for casters. Melee classes (Berserker, Warrior, Shadowknight) can always make good use of Regen Stones. Regen Stones increase the rate of health point regeneration. Since these classes will be focused on face-to-face combat, they will be taking blows as well as dishing out the damage.

“Without guys like me, you'd still be playing Pong.”

—Mark Hartlieb

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A LINK TO LINK'S PAST

THE HISTORY OF ZELDA

As gaming franchises go, you'd be hard-pressed to name one as familiar or beloved as the long-running *Zelda* series. Like the *Mario* games, *Zelda* began as a singular vision from gaming superstar Shigeru Miyamoto, and has grown to feel the influence of dozens of creative minds over the years. From the earliest days of Nintendo's first console, gamers have grown up with the stalwart hero

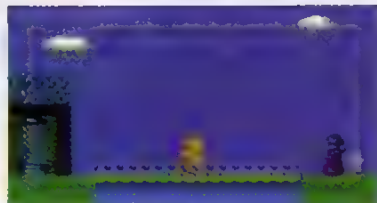
Link. We've tramped with him over mountains, sailed the high seas, and galloped on horseback across wide grasslands. His journeys have rarely failed to enthrall even the most jaded of players. With a new full-fledged *Zelda* adventure on the way, we thought it might be time to take a look back at the roots and history of these beloved games — there might be more to them than you remember.



The Legend of Zelda | NES

When *Zelda*'s first adventure showed up on the NES, it revolutionized what could and should be done in a console video game. Not the least of these innovations was the inclusion of a battery-backed save system, allowing for a continuous story with no need for convoluted passwords. The quintessential players were in place — Link, *Zelda*, and Gannon (later spelled Ganon). It's also in this initial entry that we first learned of the legendary Triforce. Upon completion, a new quest including an entirely new set of dungeons was unlocked (or you could cheat and just enter "Zelda" at the naming screen).

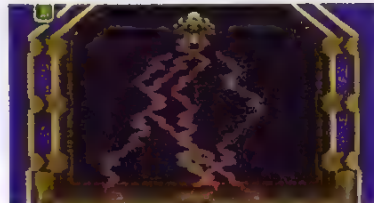
Interesting fact: Miyamoto's title for the game came from a fondness he had for F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife's name, *Zelda*. Who knew?



Zelda II: The Adventure of Link | NES

Link's sophomore outing is a matter of some contention among those who played it. A drastic departure in gameplay style found Link moving around in largely 2D side-scrolling encounters, as well as passing levels

in the style of the more traditional RPGs. Story-wise, this was a direct sequel to the first, and detailed Link's search for the third part of the mystical artifact, the Triforce of Courage, which would awaken *Zelda* from a magic-induced sleep. While Ganon was nowhere to be found in-game, the inevitable "Game Overs" you encountered would splash an evil looking red screen of death declaring the return of your former foe. To this day, arguments over this dark horse in the franchise tend to be heated. You either loved it or hated it.



A Link to the Past | SNES

Returning the series to its roots and ushering it into the 16-bit era resulted in an unprecedented masterpiece for the well over four million gamers who tried it on the fledgling SNES. Beyond the expressive graphics, the growth of storytelling kept pace. While the initial enemy seemed to be the wizard Agahnim, a twist in the story revealed not only the real villain as Ganon, but also an eerily mirrored Dark World through which Link would adventure. This formula of parallel dual-worlds was a great triumph of execution — complex puzzles interwoven between the two lands in an unforgettable twist of gameplay genius. The journey was so well loved it would be released again years later on the GBA with the addition of Link's first multiplayer experience — *Four Swords*. *Four Swords* introduced the magic-wielding villain Vaati and gave Link the ability to split himself into four versions.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Triforce symbol was likely based on the family crest of the ancient Hojo Samurai clan in Japan. The symbol would have been a recognizable shape to the first Japanese players of the game.



Link's Awakening | Game Boy

While it was still the *Legend of Zelda*, the Princess herself was nowhere to be found in Link's next adventure. Instead, our hero found himself shipwrecked on Koholint Island, where with the help of a sage-like giant owl, he adopted a quest to awaken the mysterious Wind Fish. Despite the absence of many familiar characters, Link's first foray into the handheld world was just as engrossing as earlier console titles. Gamers also enjoyed the slightly more whimsical approach to storytelling — humor and Nintendo in-jokes were injected throughout the adventure. There were even two characters that looked remarkably like Miyamoto's other superstars, *Mario* and *Princess Peach* (*Marin* and *Tarin*). Link's *Awakening* would see a re-release five years later on the *Game Boy Color*, which included a brand new dungeon whose puzzles revolved around color usage.

TIMELINE

July 1987 <i>The Legend of Zelda</i> NES	December 1988 <i>Zelda II: The Adventure of Link</i> • NES	April 1992 <i>A Link to the Past</i> SNES	August 1993 <i>Link's Awakening</i> Game Boy	October 1993 <i>Link: The Faces of Evil and The Wand of Gamelon</i> • Philips CD-i	June 1994 <i>Zelda's Adventure</i> Philips CD-i	November 1998 <i>Ocarina of Time</i> N64	December 1998 <i>Link's Awakening DX</i> Game Boy Color	October 2000 <i>Majora's Mask</i> N64	May 2001 <i>Oracle of Ages/Oracle of Seasons</i> • Game Boy Advance
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Ocarina of Time | N64

Never content to rest on its laurels, the Zelda series took a gigantic leap forward for its first N64 release. Ocarina introduced Link into the 3D realm on what was at the time the largest cartridge game created. Weaving together familiar characters from all the previous titles, this new Zelda was deeper and more involved than its predecessors. Careful fans usually point to this game as being the first in any sort of timeline chronology of the series, since it detailed the initial rise to power of Ganon. The story itself dealt quite literally with the transformation of boy to man, as you played Link both as a child and an adult. While music had always been an integral aspect of the series, this installment put it at the forefront through the melodic powers of the Ocarina. Players also thrilled at the appearance of Epona, a steed that allowed Link to gallop across Hyrule in style. The game was so loved that a follow-up game was planned called Ura Zelda, which would include new and more challenging dungeons but the same story and setting. The project never saw the light of day until years later, when it was released under the title Ocarina of Time: Master Quest on a preorder disc for Wind Waker.

Majora's Mask | N64

This direct sequel to Ocarina of Time found Link whisked away to another world called Termina, where a terrible disaster was about to befall its people. The moon was falling and would soon crash into the planet. Link's second N64 adventure involved repeatedly journeying through the same three days of time leading up to the planetoid collision. Each time through the world you'd try and acquire new information and equipment, so the next time around you'd be able to progress. Mystical masks allowed for incredible feats, including the ability to change form into other races that inhabited the world. Balancing the precarious challenge of bringing back the



DID YOU KNOW?

All the dungeon maps in the first Zelda game formed a picture coinciding with the dungeon's name (Eagle, Moon, Dragon, etc.). The first five levels of the Second Quest play-through spelled out the word ZELDA.

best of Ocarina while offering something totally new, Majora's Mask was a well-deserved success for Nintendo. It's also of note that this was the first Zelda title directed by Eiji Aonuma, the man that Miyamoto has effectively groomed to adopt the franchise.

Oracle of Ages/Oracle of Seasons Game Boy Color

Developed with the aid of Capcom's Flagship team, these two Game Boy Color games were actually entirely unique titles released simultaneously. While either could be played alone, save data could be exchanged between the two to unlock additional features. Oracle of Ages once again tackled time travel, this time in the land of Labrynnia, where an evil sorceress was attempting to seal the world in eternal darkness. Meanwhile, Oracle of Seasons challenged Link to alter the different seasons in the land of Holodrum with a special magic rod. With both games, Capcom showed it had what it takes to make a Zelda hit, and Link's adventures on the handheld continued to be more than worthy of their legacy.



The Wind Waker | GameCube

The next installment of the series was first shown at Space World 2000 as a promo for the power of the GameCube. The early demo revealed a grown-up Link dueling a menacing Ganon in furious combat. The excitement for fans was overwhelming. So when Miyamoto revealed an alarming departure from that first glimpse a year later, gamers responded with feelings that ranged from shock to outrage. Instead of the dark and mature look, new screens revealed a cartoony young boy with big eyes and a tiny sword. While many were disappointed, Miyamoto and director Aonuma proved once again that they knew how to make games better than fans did. Wind Waker ended up being powerfully expressive and as adventuresome as everyone hoped it would be. Somehow, the unreality of the "Celda" Link allowed for an intensely genuine sense of emotion from the character. His movements were smooth and articulate, and his world was alive with activity and colorful characters. Wind Waker found Link sailing the high seas that connected the many islands of this new and watery world. The game also referred to the "Hero of Time" and to the ancient land of Hyrule buried deep beneath the sea, thereby drawing a clear line of chronology from the N64 games.



DID YOU KNOW?

The famed Ocarina actually showed up for the first time not on the N64, but instead in the first Game Boy game, Link's Awakening.

December 2002

A Link to the Past/Four Swords • Game Boy Advance

February 2003

Ocarina of Time: Master Quest • GameCube

March 2003

The Wind Waker GameCube

June 2004

Four Swords Adventures • GameCube

January 2005

The Minish Cap Game Boy Advance

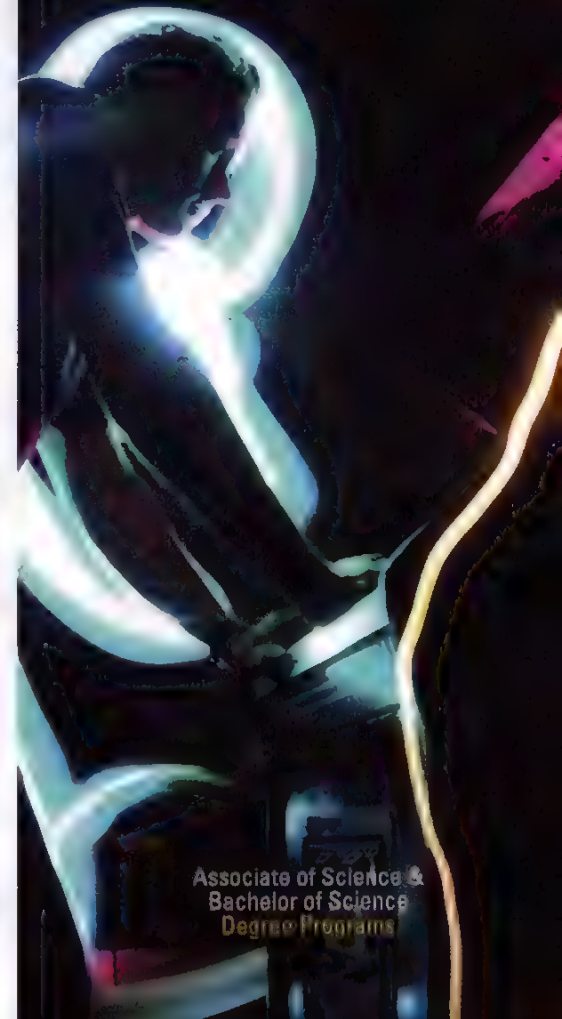
Future 2005

The Legend of Zelda (working title) • GameCube

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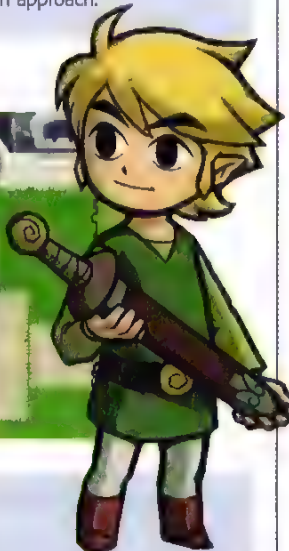
Four Swords Adventures | GameCube

Moving forward from its first multiplayer foray on the Game Boy Advance, this GameCube title could still be played alone. However, its true strength lay in the ability to have four buddies each connect a GBA to the GameCube and cooperate to solve puzzles and beat baddies. When one player would separate from the group, he would appear on his own individual GBA screen and be able to move about. The innovation was entertaining, but had the inherent dilemma that you needed four friends with four GBAs to really enjoy the best features. Artistically, the game took many of its cues from the exciting special effects that were seen in the Wind Waker while returning to the classic top-down approach.



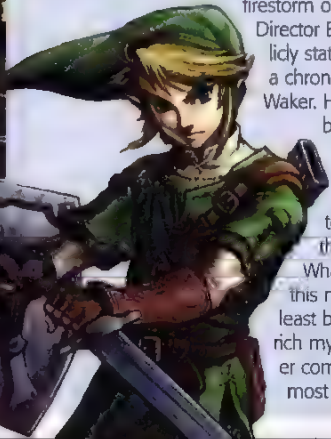
The Minish Cap Game Boy Advance

Thanks to their success in earlier handheld titles, Capcom was awarded development duties on the most recent Zelda foray. Without faltering, they created another classic approach to the story, where Zelda is once again in need of rescuing (she really needs some better bodyguards). We learn the origin of fledgling magician Vaati, who turns the Princess to stone. The story also reveals the birth of the powerful Four Sword. But the most captivating aspect of the story is Link's new ability to shrink himself down to a size where stalks of grass are like tall trees, and puddles are wide lakes. The effect was simultaneously intriguing and unique.



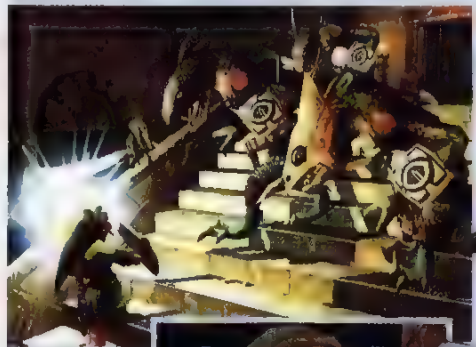
The Legend of Zelda (working title) | GameCube

It's coming, and we all want it. Beyond that, there's a great deal we'll have to wait and learn as the months pass. The incredibly detailed images that filled the trailer at E3 2004 set off a firestorm of speculation from fans.



Director Eiji Aonuma has publicly stated that the game will be a chronological sequel to Wind Waker. However, those disappointed by the direction that Wind Waker took visually should have nothing to complain about in the dark and tenacious Link that wanders this newest Zelda entry.

Whatever secrets remain about this new adventure, we can at least be confident that there's a rich mythology to back up whatever comes next in this, one of the most cherished series in gaming.



DID YOU KNOW?

The names of the sages in Ocarina of Time were based on the names of all the towns in Zelda II

THE APOCRYPHA

- Link: The Faces of Evil
- The Wand of Gamelon
- Zelda's Adventure

Philips CD-i

It's a well-known fact that the history of the Zelda franchise has a stain of dishonor upon it that would make Ganon proud. This fall from grace came in the form of a screw up in licensing that gave Philips the right to use Nintendo's characters on their ill-fated CD-i system. The resulting side-scrolling disasters are truly abominable, and held the most flimsy of distinctions – one of them offered the possibility of playing as Princess Zelda on a mission to save Link. As fans, the best you can do is forget about this dark time in Link's history. Like your favorite movie star's addiction recovery, he hit bottom and came out the other end a better and stronger hero. Let us speak no more of it.



GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Pat Stanger



NINTENDO WORLD CUP

> FORMAT NES
> PUBLISHER NINTENDO

When it comes to the debate about the best game ever, there truly is no debate. I present you with the best game of all time – World Cup for NES. This title was not just a game, it was sadness, happiness, madness, and much more.

When you elbowed rival soccer players, their eyes popped out; and after elbowing them a few times, they did not get up. This encapsulates an ideal gaming experience in a nutshell. By performing a bicycle kick, a super shot was started that was destined to go in from the start, while also taking some players with it. By doing a diving headball super shot, you effectively launch the goalie out of the screen. By the touch of a button, you can have intricate, detailed conversations with your teammates (with pictures!) that end in a pass, a shot, a slide tackle, or an elbow. The graphics are horrific by today's standards, but no matter, the popping eyeballs are as visible as plain daylight. The personalities of each character on each team will provoke you to name and call them your own as I have, with names such as Butch, Four-Eyes, and the Wall.

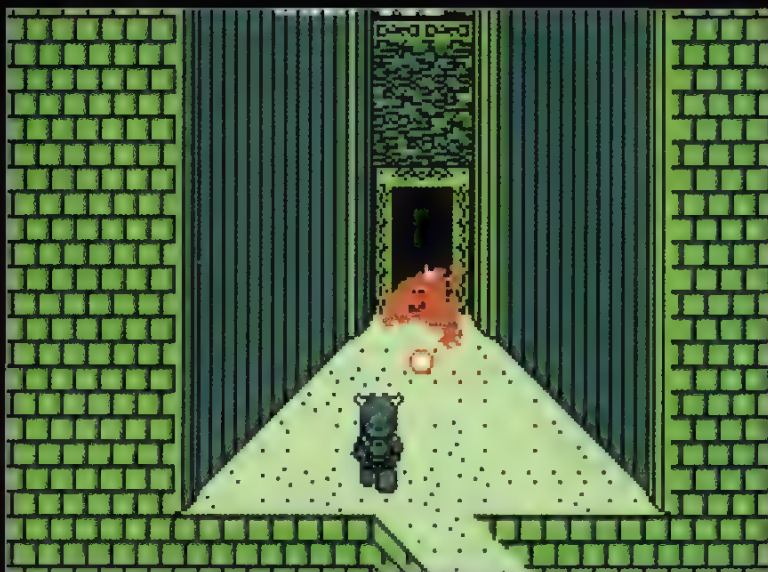
When it comes to World Cup, there is truly only one word to describe it: Super-spectaculIncred-ible. Do you have fingers? Then this game is for you.



THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

April 1st of 2003 marked the date when the two biggest players in the Japanese RPG market joined forces. The giants known as Squaresoft and Enix combined on this date to become the colossus known as Square Enix. The merger brought together numerous popular franchises under one roof, including two of the biggest grossing series in video game history. At the time of the merger, Final Fantasy had garnered 60 million units in sales, while Enix's Dragon Quest (Dragon Warrior in the U.S.) series was at 35 million units sold.

SQUARE ENIX™

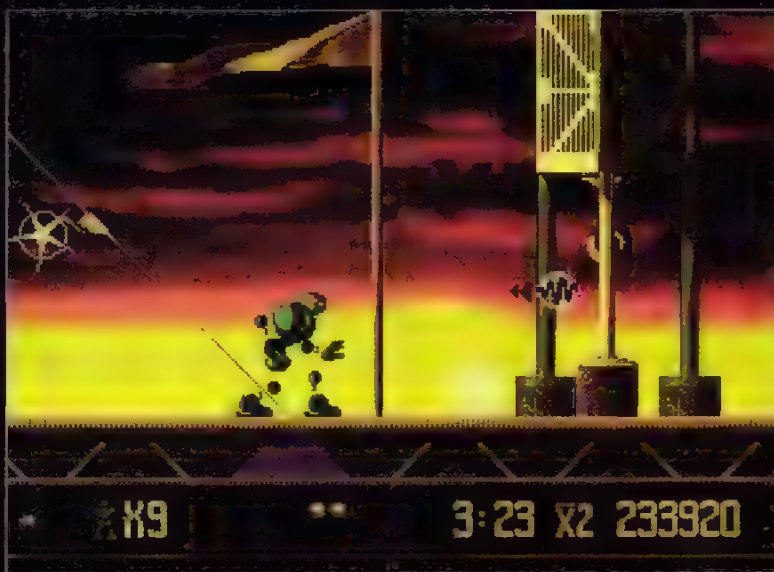
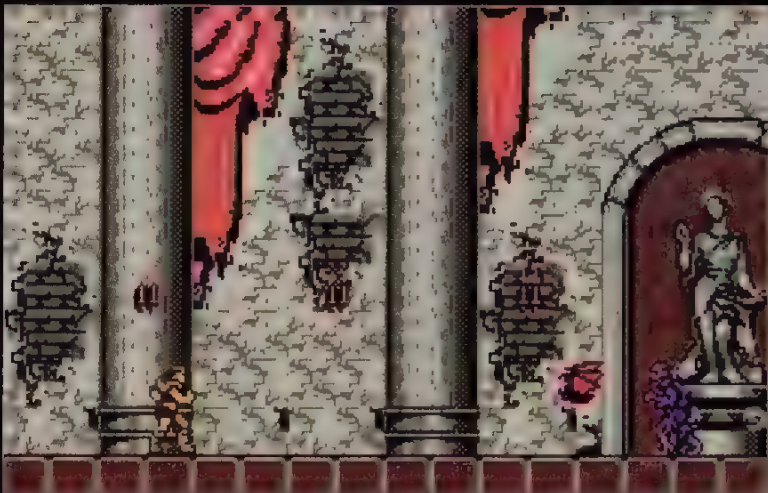
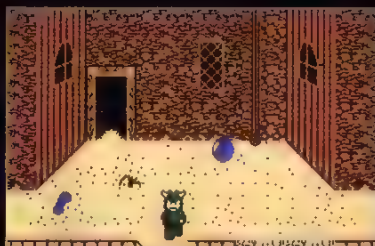
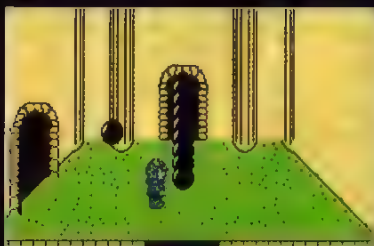


NES

DEADLY TOWERS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER BRODERBUND > DEVELOPER IREM SOFTWARE > RELEASE 1986

There are some things in this world that are shamelessly and obviously malevolent: puppy grinders, pirates, and anyone whose name starts with "Darth." However, there is another, more deceptive breed of evil – one that is outwardly pleasant, but corrupted by a poisonous, maggot-infested core. This variety will henceforth be known as "Deadly Towers Evil." This game tempts players with the promise of a Zelda-like adventure, then shackles them in a cold, dank cellar of terrible design and unbearable gameplay. It then proceeds to perform rusty-scalpel surgery with tools like aimless wandering, ill-conceived foes (lots of blobs, puddles, and flans), and downright stupid power-ups (like the Hyper Boots, which increase your speed only if you are walking diagonally or up stairs). Anyone who thinks they ever liked this game undoubtedly has it confused with The Legend of Zelda. Deadly Towers was devoid of charm when it first released, and to this day remains one of the most appalling achievements of the 8-bit era.

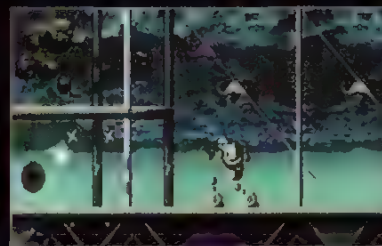
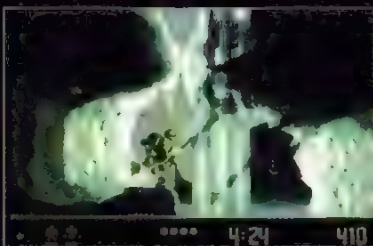


SEGA GENESIS

VECTORMAN

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA OF AMERICA > DEVELOPER BLUESKY SOFTWARE > RELEASE 1995

It's often in the waning days of a console's lifespan that some of the best games show up on the system. That was certainly the case with Vectorman, which amazed players with its smooth animation and killer style. Old school platform fans that haven't tapped the joy of this particular title should make a point of tracking it down, as it maintains a degree of fun that many current titles would be wise to emulate. Vectorman's ability to shoot in eight directions, duck, double jump, and look cool doing it put him into the upper tier of platforming heroes right off the bat. Tack on his ability to morph into various shapes, like a drill, a bomb, or a train, and you'll understand why so many count this as one of their favorite Genesis games. The only major disappointment connected to the game was the cancellation of its current-generation sequel. Are you listening out there, Sega?



NES

CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE 1990

Like many successful series (Zelda and Mario come to mind), Castlevania really hit its stride with its third installment. The additions of multiple paths and playable characters lends some serious replay value, and everything that people love about Castlevania in general is represented in spades. Dracula's Curse's biggest accomplishment, however, is that it instills in the player a sense of impending doom throughout the entire game – given the preponderance of spikey death and fally death, you're never more than one minor misstep or unlucky random event from meeting your final fate. And, as you can imagine, there's plenty of the vintage rip-your-hair-out difficulty that was the trademark of the 8-bit scene. Do yourself a favor; dig this one out of the closet and give it another go – its brilliance hasn't changed a bit.





GAMEOVER

All Good Things Must Come To An End

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

As video games grow in popularity, people more often receive games and game-related gifts. But clueless parents need guidance when buying presents, or their gamer children might end up with some ultra-lame Ty the Tasmanian Tiger socks. Prove your knowledge of games with our trivia challenge, and you'll earn progressively better (yet still misguided) video game gifts.

1 In the *Darkstalkers* series, this hip, happenin' cat goes by what name?

- A. Jon Talbain
- B. Demitri Maximoff
- C. Lord Raptor
- D. Steve Buscemi



2 In the addictively destructive *Blast Corps*, why did you have to destroy practically everything you saw?

- A. To clear a path for leaking nuclear missiles
- B. To scare people out of the path of massive tornado
- C. To create a clear landing site for friendly aliens
- D. To get to the buffet before Miller



3 What is the name of the evil robot that the heroic droid Glitch is out to destroy in the cult hit *Metal Arms: Glitch in the System*?

- A. Colonel Alloy
- B. General Corrosive
- C. Dr. Exavolt
- D. Dr. Robotnik



4 In *Ninja Gaiden* for Xbox, which weapon is created by powering up the wooden sword to its highest level?

- A. The True Dragon Sword
- B. The Kitetsu
- C. The Unlabored Flawlessness
- D. The Tushy Paddler

5 The quirky side-scrolling shooter *Alien Hominid* began its life as a flash game on which website?

- A. www.alienhominid.com
- B. www.synj.net
- C. www.thebehemoth.com
- D. www.newgrounds.com



6 What was the subtitle for the awesome Game Boy title *Metroid II*?

- A. Mission on SR388
- B. Return of Samus
- C. Big Top Samus
- D. The Metroid Invasion

7 Which of the following sexy ladies did not voice a character in *James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing*?

- A. Heidi Klum
- B. Shannon Elizabeth
- C. Tyra Banks
- D. Judi Dench



8 In *Gladius*, which of these two supporting characters turn out to be traitors? Lousy backstabbers!

- A. Urlen and Eiji
- B. Ludo and Gwazi
- C. Gwazi and Eiji
- D. Urlen and Ludo

9 The little-known N64 game *Clay Fighter: Sculptor's Cut* was not only a Blockbuster Video rental-only title, but also featured which famous video game character as a playable fighter?

- A. Earthworm Jim
- B. Mario
- C. Sonic
- D. Bubsy the Bobcat



10 In *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge*, which four planes can be used exclusively for multiplayer?

- A. Piranha, Fury, Brigand, Dust Devil
- B. Firebrand, Coyote, Desert Fox, Devastator
- C. Fury, Hellhound, Firebrand, Vampire
- D. Piranha, Doppelganger, Constable, Desert Fox



BREAKDOWN

40% of gamers have bought an album by an artist featured in a video game. The same percentage has discovered new bands through gaming – that's how Matt realized that he loves Avril Lavigne!

65% of our readers haven't finished their peas, and therefore won't get any dessert.

0% of Missouri prisons allow inmates access to video games. Just another reason to not go to prison. Or Missouri.

100% of the Game Informer staff are former runway models. We've got it all: Beauty, brains, and tuberculosis.

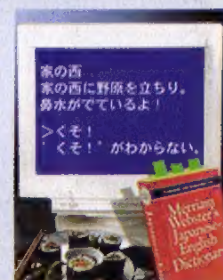
25% The amount that the number of people employed by Electronic Arts increased in the year 2004, for a total of 5,669 employees. Their company bowling team is huge!

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:

Lifetime Membership in the Blinx the Time Sweeper Fan Club



2-3:

A Japanese Import Copy of Zork



4-5:

Dr. Mario Brand Flu Shot



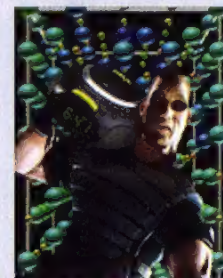
6-7:

Homemade Game Boy



8-9:

Official Fatal Frame Ghosts in a Can



10:

TimeSplitters Quantum Alarm Clock

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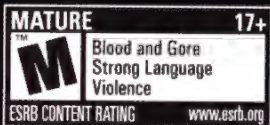


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the game begins,
the badass meter
is likely to
flat-out shatter"

- PSM



TRICKSTER STYLE
Killer evasive, agile moves



SWORDMASTER STYLE
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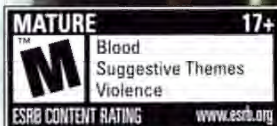
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