The Apocalypse Is Coming:
X-Men Legends II [PG.68]

Exclusive First Look
Call Of Duty:
Big Red One [PG.64]

The Master of Horror:
George A. Romero Presents
City Of The Dead [PG.61]

Shocking New
Details & Screens
SSX 4 [PG.74]

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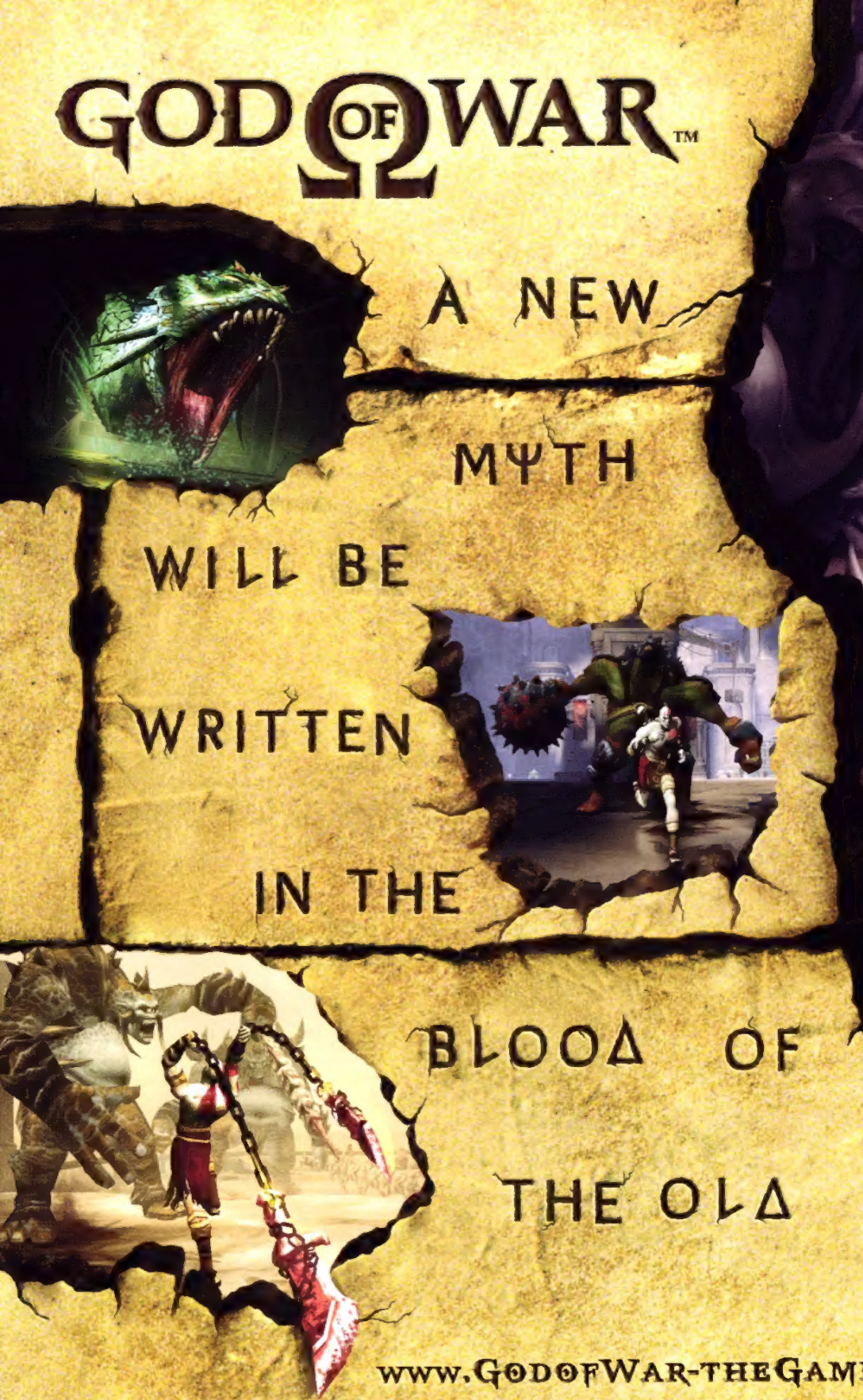

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Nudity
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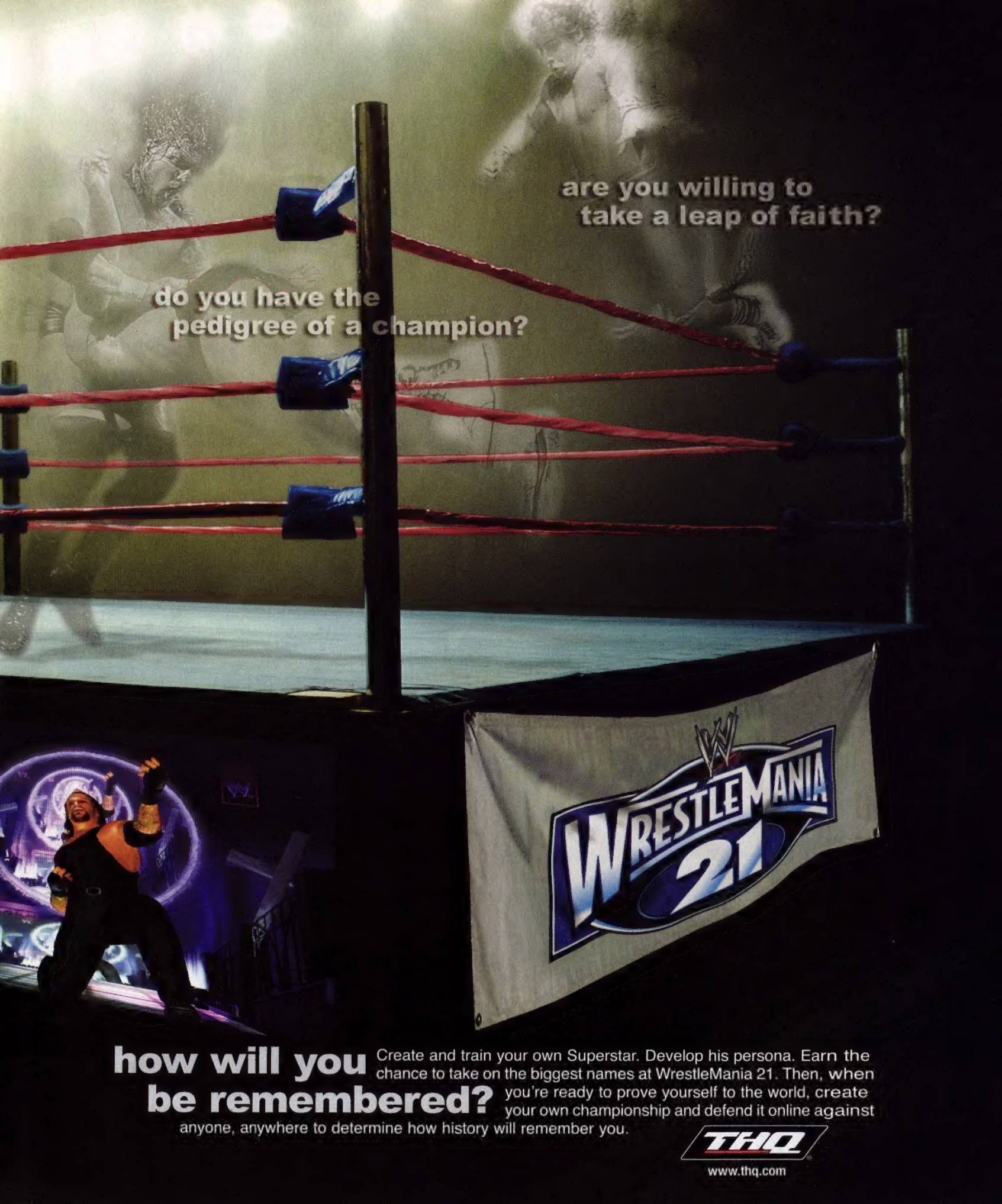

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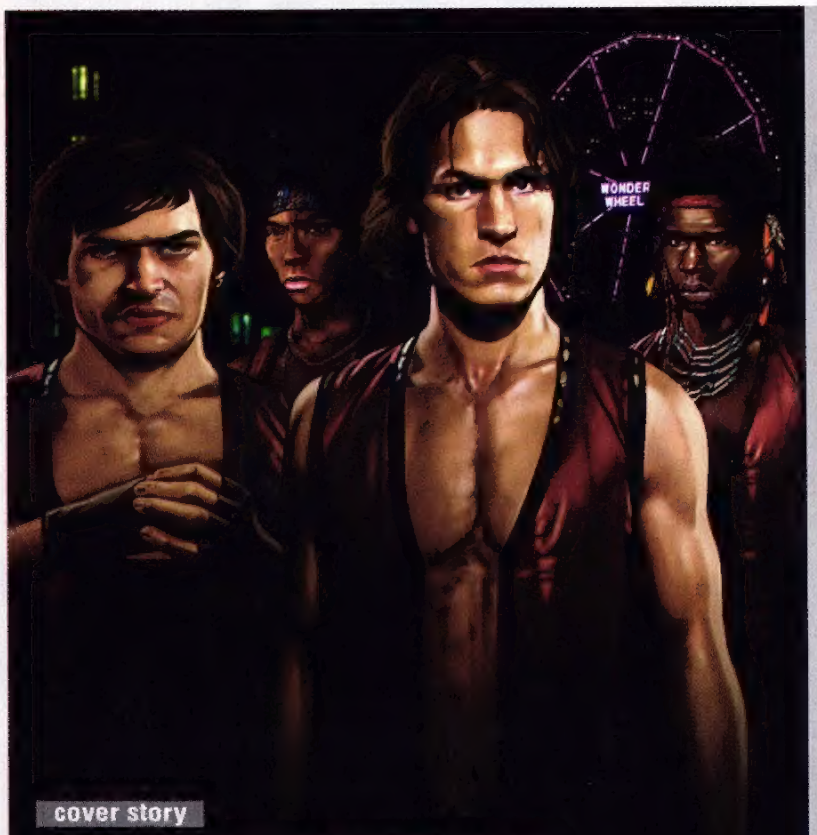
CONTENTS

The "PSP Extravaganza" Issue



cover story

44 THE WARRIORS

After revolutionizing the action genre with the Grand Theft Auto series, Rockstar Games has decided to take a crack at the classic brawler. By opening up the world, adding team mechanics, cinematic style, and the trademark Rockstar attitude, the company is taking street fighting to the next level. With so many new additions to an intrinsically enjoyable framework, plus the benefit of a cult-classic film license, The Warriors could very well be Rockstar's grand finale for this round of consoles. Check it out on page 44.

features

CALL OF DUTY: BIG RED ONE

Developer Treyarch hopes to bring even more emotionally involving action to the acclaimed Call of Duty franchise.

GEORGE A. ROMERO PRESENTS CITY OF THE DEAD

City of the Dead places horror fans into the bleak world crafted by *Night of the Living Dead's* George A. Romero.

X-MEN LEGENDS II: RISE OF APOCALYPSE

With new playable characters and an even deadlier adversary, Activision is uniting former foes to battle a new threat.

departments

10 STAFF
Read the team's latest favorites

12 GI SPY
Silly pictures of our life and times

14 DEAR GI
Your chance to fire back at us!

18 CONNECT
Where news, talk, and technology collide

32 INTERVIEW
Clothing impresario Marc Ecko discusses the perils of breaking into games with a completely new type of game

34 GEAR
Geeky gadget stuff for the mass

38 OPINION
Ara Shirinian shares his experiences about getting hired in our beloved gaming industry

41 CALENDAR
Get hip to this month's happenings

74 PREVIEWS
This month is packed with both new and returning franchises, including a new look at a certain hotly-anticipated GameCube title with a buttkicker who looks good in green

104 REVIEWS
Game of the Month: Jade Empire for Xbox

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

144 SECRET ACCESS
Codes, strategies, and passwords

148 CLASSIC GI
Reliving gaming's greatest moments

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

game index

GAME	PAGE #
America's Army: Rise of a Soldier	96
Area 51	108
Arthur Maclean's Mercury	130
Atari Retro Classics	128
AutoAssault	87
Battlefield 2	96
Black & White 2	97
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	121
Call of Duty 2	94
Close Combat: First to Fight	121
Cold Fear	110
Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower	130
Drive to Survive	113
Dynasty Warriors	132
Dynasty Warriors 5	116
Empire Earth II	124
Evil Dead: Regeneration	82
FIFA Soccer	138
Gretzky NHL	136
Haunting Ground	116
Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, The	92
Indigo Prophecy	102
Jade Empire	118
Legend of Zelda, The	76
LEGO Star Wars	111
Lumines	130
Madden NFL 2006	90
Marvel: Nemesis	86
Metal Gear Acid	126
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	106
Nanostray	103
NARC	112
NBA	136
NCAA Football 2006	100
Need For Speed: Underground Rivals	132
NFL Street 2: Unleashed	136
Nintendogs	98
Okami	103
Pac-Man Pinball Advance	136
Pac-Pix	103
Pokémon Dash	132
Psychonauts	120
Rayman DS	134
Raze's Hell	100
Ridge Racer	138
Rise of the Kasai	114
Riviera	102
Samurai Western	101
Shadow the Hedgehog	87
Soul Calibur III	84
Spartan: Total Warrior	80
Spider-Man 2	134
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	114
SSX 4	74
Stacked	98
Star Wars Galaxies: Episode III Rage of the Wookiees	102
Stella Deus: The Gate of Eternity	116
SWAT 4	122
Tiger Woods PGA Tour	136
Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix	136
Twisted Metal: Head-On	128
Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade	134
WarioWare Twisted	128
Wipeout Pure	132
World Tour Soccer	138
Yoshi Touch & Go	126

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

PSP REDEFINED HANDHELD GAMING

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It's been a long grind this last month, as we spent most of our time knee deep in PSP games. In fact, we have over seven pages of reviews to give you the ins and outs of the launch titles. But if you are anything like me, you already know you love Sony's sexy little machine.

The Nintendo DS is certainly a crafty little piece of hardware, but Nintendo could learn a thing or two from Sony in how to launch a system. Tons of great games – some old, some new – that cross all genres and showcase what the system is capable of doing.

While I was excited to hear that Nintendo finally announced that it would have Wi-Fi online gaming with the DS, trickling out the information is not the way to go about doing things, especially when Sony is already out there doing it.

Regardless of how enamored I am with the PSP personally, eventually the consumer will determine which handheld comes out on top. Rumors have surfaced lately that Nintendo may make the choice even more difficult by introducing a high-tech follow-up to the Game Boy at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in May.

However it plays out, I am certain of one thing: The PSP has changed the way we view handheld entertainment. The bar has been raised. The days of handhelds sporting graphics ten years behind the current console generation are long gone. Gamers are more sophisticated and we now can expect the same kind of innovation in our handheld devices as we find in our home entertainment.

Enjoy the issue, and make sure to check out our killer contest on page 129 where you get a chance to win a custom Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition motorcycle from Aprilia.

Cheers,

Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** My PSP (Never Will We Part), *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith* (Further Proof That Good Is Dumb), *Sin City*, Cherry Vanilla Dr. Pepper **Dislikes:** Spending Over Three Hundred Dollars In One Day On Star Wars Toys, Spending Over Three Hundred Dollars In One Day On PSP Games, Not Being Able To Afford My House Payments **Current Favorite Games:** Lumines, Jade Empire, Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition, X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse, TimeSplitters Future Perfect, God Of War

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Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** *Naturally* By Sharon Jones And The Dap-Kings, *Some Cities* By Doves, The Minnesota Connection, *Owl & The Pussycat* By Lois Maffeo, PSP, Smoot Smack **Dislikes:** TV Shows About Lawyers, Mysteries, Cops, Doctors, Spies, Families, Or Reality, People Dissing Reviews Before They've Played The Game, The Upcoming Tucan Invasion **Current Favorite Games:** Madden NFL 2006, Jade Empire, Psychonauts, Need For Speed: Underground Rivals

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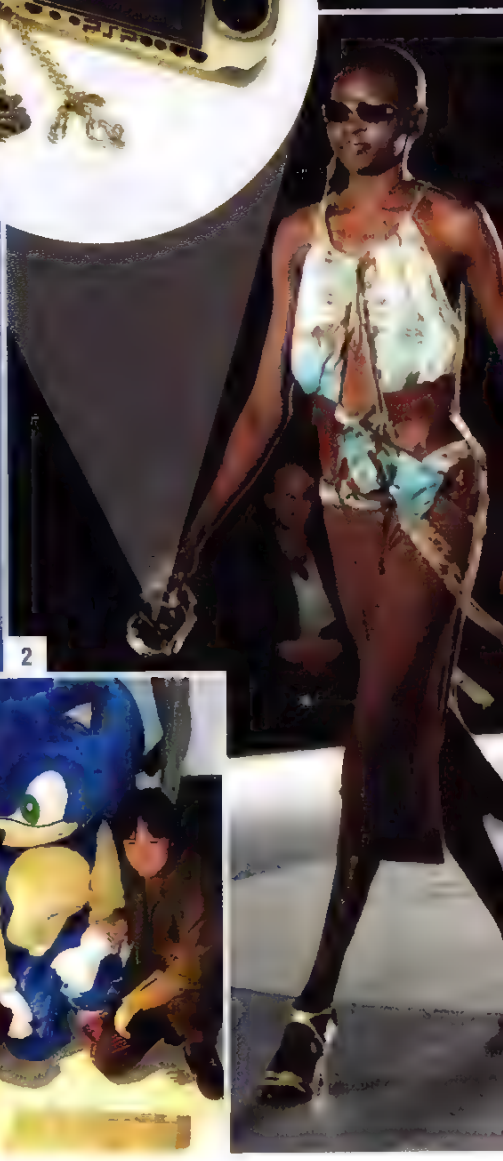
Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry

1 Ubisoft's Loic Gounon and Tyrone Miller attempt to save the Prince of Persia from Kato and Miller's wandering hands – he's not a piece of meat, guys! **2** Supermodel Alex Wek struts her stuff with a gold-plated Baby Phat special edition PSP. Honestly, we've never seen anything so sexy...the PSP, we mean **3** Sega COO Simon Jeffery and Sega Studio USA game director Yakashi Iizuka are on hand to watch Sonic the Hedgehog get inducted into the Metreon Walk of Game in San Francisco **4** Journalist Gregg Orf and freelancer/CNN reporter Marc Saltzman hang at a recent Sony event in Santa Monica **5** Billy and Charlie Martinet (the voice of Mario) show us their Fonzie thumbs at GDC **6** Adam represents with his Call of Duty brothers in arms: (left to right) Thaine Lyman, Christian Busic, Mike Mantarro, and Robb Alvey **7** Backbone Entertainment's Mike Mika, Chris Charla, and Planet Moon's Aaron Loeb: thoughtfully pondering the future of interactive entertainment **8** To celebrate the launch of its Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition, Rockstar commissioned Aprilia to make this one-of-a-kind sport bike (Which you can win on pg. 129). Warning: do not drive this while playing your gold-plated PSP



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DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

PSYCHO SEMANTIC

I was reading issue 144 and noticed something not right. In the Classic GI entitled "A Link to Link's Past," you said that the ocarina first appeared in the Game Boy game Link's Awakening. Wrong! It actually first appears in A Link to the Past on SNES – you'd use it to call the bird to move around the map faster.

Jeff Watson
via mail.com

Hold on – just give us a second to fasten our nerd-hats. [squish] There we go. Now, about the ocarina: Tracing the evolution of wind instruments in the Zelda franchise can get a bit tricky. In the original NES entry, there was the whistle. In Zelda II, it was called the flute. Now, both of these items looked like those recorders they made you play in fourth grade, but that changed in A Link to the Past. You are correct in saying the game had an item that would summon a feathered friend; however, despite looking like an ocarina and sounding like an ocarina, it was actually referred to as a flute in-game. Link's Awakening on Game Boy marked the first time the ocarina appeared both in form and in name.

THE WUSSIE'S PLIGHT

I think I have a problem. Whenever games involve a choice between light and dark, I can never take the evil path. If I'm playing Knights of the Old Republic, I just can't let some kids pick on a poor, defenseless alien. If I'm playing an FPS, my fingers absolutely refuse to pull the trigger when the reticle is green. In RPGs, my party often consists of the most useless characters so they don't feel left out. Can anyone relate to this?

Micah Coleman Campbell
via email

Aww, aren't ethics just precious? Don't worry, you aren't alone in your sympathetic tendencies; some gamers simply aren't interested in exploring content that involves needless brutality or cruelty. In fact, there are several people in the GI offices who still cannot bring themselves to play a Dark Side character in KOTOR. It appears that the recent emphasis certain titles have placed on the player's choice between good and evil has split the gaming populace neatly into two factions. Some, like you, embrace the decision to remain heroic, and through rejecting the darker temptations become even nobler. Then there is the other group, which basically just makes fun of those wieners while slaughtering townspeople. From a design standpoint, the reason developers provide these multiple paths is so that gamers can tailor the gameplay experience to their personal tastes. If you don't want to bathe in the blood of the feeble and helpless, you don't have to. On the other hand, if you're having a rough day, there's nothing quite as satisfying as killing the first poor merchant who tries to send you on a fetch quest. Let's see you deliver your Lingonberries now, chump!

"YOU'RE GONNA DIE, CLOWN!"

I've been wondering why no one has developed a mini-golf game. Putt-putt is way more fun than regular golf, but publishers just keep churning out yearly versions of the same boring stuff. Will we ever see a title that captures the unique mini-golf style?

Will Brann
via hotmail.com

Will, you win this month's "Hey, somebody listen to this guy!" award. We had a great time back in the day with Kirby's Dream Course and EA's long-forgotten Zany Golf. Plus, considering niche hobby titles out there such as American Chopper and World Championship Poker, we agree that this classic vacation pasttime and rite-of-passage deserves a decent digital treatment this generation. Hot Shots Golf Fore did include a mini-golf mode, and Mario Golf has long tried to capture the lighter side of the sport, but we have yet to see a title dedicated to the total putt-putt experience – complete with windmills, dinosaurs, and other animatronic hazards. It's possible that developers are just taking time to hone their methods, lest we end up with a disappointing and joyless mockery of this venerable psuedo-sport, like Gould City's Michihistrigan (the history of Michigan as told through 18 holes of mini-golf).

XENOPHILE

The reviews in your magazine sometimes tick me off, but this sets a new record. I am referring, of course, to your asinine review (if you can even call it that) of Xenosaga Episode II. Your commentary was devoid of any merit. The battle system requires you to optimize each character's skills, the voice acting is a necessary improvement, and what you call a "repeated dungeon" was far more creative – one iteration took place in the summer, the other in the winter. While I'm writing this fury-induced letter, I may as well say this: Jin Uzuki is awesome. Long hair, a calm demeanor, and to top it all off – he wields a sword! Namco pretty much summed up everything I like about effeminate male characters with him.

Megan Beck
via snail mail

We can understand your affection for the fictional Mr. Uzuki, but you might be taking this a little too personally. All we did is give his game a decent score; it isn't like we went to your brother's school play and booed him off the stage (unless your brother was in the Duluth Elementary production of "Brigadoon." If so, Reiner sincerely apologizes). Plus, you should really ask yourself whether Jin is worth such steadfast loyalty. Heck, on the last episode of "Effeminate Male Challenge: Swords and Long Hair Edition," he didn't even place in the top five. After getting schooled by characters like Sephiroth and Vampire Hunter D, the only person ranked lower than Jin was Raiden from Metal Gear Solid 2. A laughable showing, indeed. Oh, and for the record, we only watch "Effeminate Male Challenge" because it comes on right after "The Dukes of Hazzard."

INTERNET, EH?

Why, in this age of great online play, are we unable to explore the Internet on the consoles? I remember the time when you could surf the web on the Sega Saturn and Dreamcast in addition to playing online games. Why did video game console companies quit doing this? Will this feature return in upcoming consoles?

Jesus Martinez
via excite.com

There was a period in the '90s when the general perception of the internet was as a multi-tentacled, insidious, inaccessible creature. While computers

UNDEAD REVIVAL

[illegible] hilarious.

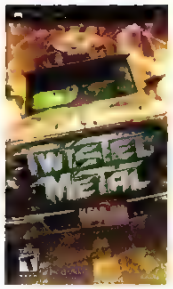
Ben Harvith
via Yahoo.com

Given our fondness for both zombies and eating, no one would like to see this happen more than us. Unfortunately, you'd have a better chance of spotting a unicycle at the No-Unicycles Jamboroo than seeing a new version of ZAMN. LucasArts (who developed the title, though Konami published it) seems to have turned its back on the zany, tongue-in-cheek humor that set its games apart a decade ago. Last year's cancellation of the new Sam & Max: Freelance Police would appear to be the final nail in the quirky coffin. However, if you're looking for another game that takes a similar '50s B-movie approach to gaming, keep an eye on THQ's upcoming Destroy All Humans. It doesn't have brain-eating or shuffling corpses, but it does have telekinesis and anal probe jokes. Classy.

(Continued on page 17)

Send your comments to Game Informer. Snail Mail: Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 Email: deargi@gameinformer.com

SONY



TWISTED METAL: HEAD ON

Sweet Tooth and company are back, so take cover and get behind the wheel of one of 14 fully armed vehicles. Upgrade your weapons, battle across deadly arenas, discover bonus levels and go head to head with wireless connectivity for up to 6 players. With Twisted Metal: Head On, a path of destruction follows you wherever you go.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence
Drug Reference

"PSP" is a trademark and the PS Family logo is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Twisted Metal: Head On™ & ©2005 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Developed by Incognito Entertainment. Memory Stick Duo™ may be required.

(Continued from page 14)

were the most effective way to tame the beast, many were reluctant to pay for such expensive machines. The solution was to web-enable certain cheaper and more welcoming home fixtures, like game consoles and televisions (the ill-fated WebTV was another product of this mindset). This was a valiant effort, but customers soon found that conventional TVs weren't (and for the most part, still aren't) designed for the resolution needed to properly display the text of webpages, which led to a lot of squinting and some awkward work-arounds. Plus, once computers became more widespread and people realized the Internet was just a big teddy bear, these simplified approaches to the web fizzled out. So, though we can't definitively say what the distant future will hold for console capabilities, it's probably best that companies aren't asking themselves "How can we be more like the Saturn and Dreamcast?"

SIMPLY PERPLEXING

The name "Game Boy Advance SP" normally brings smiles to gamers' faces. Not mine. Even though I enjoy the hours I spend playing GBA games, I lay awake at night as I tirelessly try to figure out what the "SP" stands for. Please enlighten me so I can sleep peacefully again.

Seth Bowers
Virginia Beach, Va

Your days of fabricating contrived meanings are over! No longer do you need to burn the midnight oil mulling over the significance of "Soiled Pastry" and "Sneaky Pantaloons." Surprisingly, the mysterious letter designation doesn't even break down into two separate words; it stands for "Special." Go forth with this new knowledge and sleep in peace. Even knowing the true meaning, we still like to imagine more colorful epithets for the handheld. For instance, we've convinced ourselves SP also stands for "Substandard Pillow." Have you ever tried falling asleep on a GBA during a long flight? Uncomfortable.

HOLIDAY SNEER

Michael Pachter, the research analyst in your "Christmas Clash" article in issue 143, is the most outrageous analyst I've ever seen. Pachter is clearly a PS2 fan who uses his profession as a way to get a cheap bash against Microsoft. Whether or not a company makes money off a system isn't the point. The object of the hardware game is simply to get as many consoles into as many homes as possible. That way, more profits can be made from the sale of games. That's the true indication of success.

Tim Lewis
via gmail.com

Despite what is undoubtedly an appealing theory for Xbox fanatics, Sony fanboys are not covertly infiltrating the nation's top financial analysis firms. As a research analyst, one's job is to examine and interpret concrete data, and while a certain level of personal bias plays a role, it is difficult to make claims that the numbers don't support. So, when Pachter claims that Sony is still ahead (at least for this generation), he does so with the support of an array of statistics, not unswerving devotion to a single company. As you acknowledge, Tim, the main goal is to get as many users buying software as possible, and while Xbox did outsell the PS2 over the holidays, it doesn't change the fact that Sony still has an installed user base several times larger than Microsoft's. That's not a malicious bash against Xbox – it's a fact.

ENVELOPE ART

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

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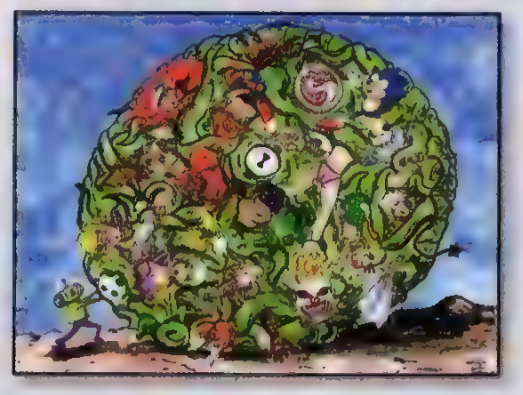
Envelope Art Contest
724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401

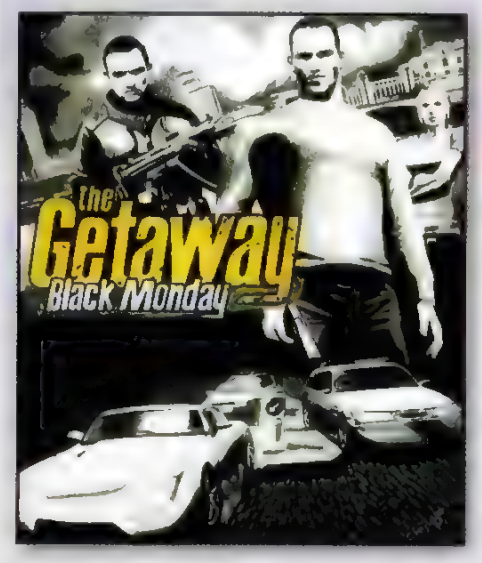
MAY WINNER!

RANDAL RACINE

GUS SMITH III
Despite all of the armor and flame jets, she just wants to be loved



CHARLES ATKINS
The Prince crashes E3, with hilarious results



ALFONSO ELIAS
This would be a perfect Guy Ritchie movie. We hope Madonna's in it; we loved *Swept Away*!

ALEX MERCHANT
Nice jammies, dork

STEVE NYTKAS
"In all my life I shall see /naught finer than than a daisy/stained with blood from CQC."

NINTENDO DECLARES REVOLUTION

WI-FI AND BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY SET

Nintendo president Satoru Iwata

Iwata and members of the crowd race each other via Mario Kart DS's Wi-Fi feature

"On my business card, I am a corporate president. In my mind, I am a game developer. But in my heart, I am a gamer." Nintendo president Satoru Iwata may have been speaking at the Game Developer's Conference, but he spoke to game creators and players alike during his keynote speech, talking about the direction the company was going in – including details on the Revolution, its next-gen console.

Iwata started out by chronicling his passage through the industry, from being one of the founding members of Kirby developer HAL ("...when I told my father this, you can imagine, it was not the happiest moment in the history of my family") to taking over for the iconic former Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi. He also wowed the crowd with footage of the new Legend of Zelda game for the GameCube (turn to page 76 for more) and set the stage for the coming of the Revolution. Iwata reaffirmed the company's direction, which seeks to create a balance between capturing casual gamers and maintaining its hardcore audience. "Core gamers have a huge appetite for challenge and casual gamers want less difficulty," he explained. "At Nintendo, we believe it is our responsibility to make games for all skill levels. And that includes people who are not playing our games now. [But] if we were not interested in core gamers, GameCube would not be home to the first big hit of 2005 here in America, Capcom's Resident Evil 4. It's a sign that not only do we care about core gamers, but core gamers care about Nintendo."

In an attempt to please both crowds, Iwata announced that both the Nintendo DS and The Revolution (which executive vice president of sales and marketing, Reggie Fils-Aime told us would not come out in 2005) would aggressively utilize Wi-Fi. Iwata stressed that wireless play would occur without having to use security protocols and would be free, although he did not offer any specifics. Without the need for security keys, can you only play your Nintendo DS in unsecured, open hot spots such as coffee shops? Is Nintendo creating a back end to give gamers a lobby and a way to hook up with other players? Despite these moves in Wi-Fi, it is doubtful that Nintendo is building its own dedicated worldwide network.

After demonstrating wireless play with Mario Kart, Nintendogs, and Electroplankton for the DS and mentioning that a new Wi-Fi-enabled Animal Crossing is coming for the system, Iwata shed some more light on the Revolution. IBM is creating the core processor, which is codenamed Broadway ("because Broadway is the capital of live entertainment," explained Iwata), and ATI is designing the graphics chipset named Hollywood. Development has already begun on Revolution games, although Iwata didn't elaborate on its touch screen controller (see last issue, page 22 for more). Still, he was confident that third-parties would find developing for the system to be easy. "Even though the game experience enjoyed by players will be far different on Revolution, developing for it will be familiar. It will not require a steep new learning curve. In this way, just like Nintendo DS, it's a place where the best ideas – not the biggest budgets – will win." Finally, Iwata announced that the system will be backwards compatible with GameCube software.

In an interview with Game Informer Online, Reggie Fils-Aime confirmed Nintendo's focus on strengthening its relationships, whether that was with developers or with third-party publishers. "We're pushing the envelope with all of our conversations with third parties. We did that with the DS and we're doing that with Revolution." Fils-Aime also acknowledged that the company's virtually non-existent online presence with the GameCube wouldn't hamper Nintendo's efforts with Wi-Fi. "What I think is driving this is the recognition that we've always been about having a sense of community and we didn't deliver that with the GameCube. And I think there's an acknowledgement that that was a mistake."

MICROSOFT TALKS NEXT XBOX

FIRST OFFICIAL DETAILS SPILLED

Rumors about Microsoft's next-gen system, Xbox 360, (which is the official name as of press time) have been flying around for months, but at the Game Developer's Conference (GDC) in San Francisco, J. Allard, corporate vice president, set the record straight on the platform – at least some of it. Allard did not elaborate any of the console's rumored specs other than mentioning it would "deliver over a teraflop of targeted computing performance." He did, however, go into some detail for the attending developers about Microsoft's expanded online gaming focus and what Allard dubbed the "HD Era."

Microsoft is pushing developers to include a host of features across all the titles to appear on Xbox 360 including high-definition (HD) resolution (480p, 720p, 1080i), digital surround sound, and 16:9 widescreen dimensions. Of course, to view any of these Xbox 360 games in high-def resolution for Microsoft's self-proclaimed HD Era, you'd first need an HDTV. Besides that, if reports that the Xbox 360 will contain a DVD-9 optical drive are true, the system won't support the next generation of high-def retail movies set to hit the marketplace within the next five years. Whether or not these HD Era features are absolutely mandatory is not known, but Microsoft certainly is providing companies with uniform tools (such as XNA Studio) to implement them without extraordinary effort. Allard also alluded to the system's use of wireless controllers. "We're going to get rid of the wires."

Apart from the visual quality of titles in high-definition, Allard characterizes the future as one where the rest of the digital media in your home – whether it be music, photos, or television – is swappable through different devices in your abode. Turning your Xbox 360 into a media center is consistent with what we've heard about the system, as rumors heavily suggest the presence of a removable hard drive.

Despite these teases, Allard did make clear some concrete facts about Xbox 360's online component. He named a list of features that would all be "persistent across all games and media experiences" known as the Xbox guide.

Gamer Cards. These virtual ID cards provide info on your Xbox Live profile, giving you space to display your gaming feats and trophies, motto, and other info. If you have a digital camera, you can put your picture onto your card. Through these you will also be able to search out other gamers of similar skill and interests.

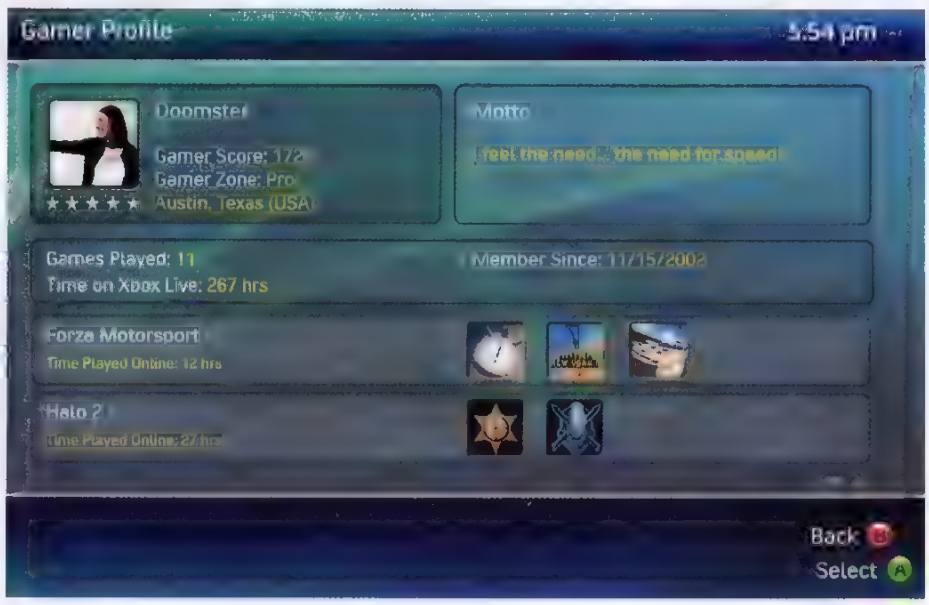
Marketplace. Just as it sounds, this is a shopping area where you can pick up new levels, maps, weapons, vehicles, and other episodic content. The Marketplace will be based on a "microtransaction" business, where publishers and developers can charge as little as they want for various Marketplace downloads.

Custom Playlists. If you have songs on your hard drive, these can be brought into any Xbox 360 title.

Above and beyond these features, Microsoft also says that every game will automatically feature voice chat, the Xbox Live Friends list, and be Live Aware at the "chip level," which means that developers don't have to institute it themselves.

Microsoft says that it has sent out 3,000 dev kits so far, and that the system itself has been in development by 1,000 engineers over the last three years. We expect to learn much more about the Xbox 360 this May at E3.

Microsoft corporate vice president J. Allard talks about Xbox 360



Your Xbox Live Gamer Profile on Xbox 360 shows the world info such as your Gamer Score (earned by racking up good performances in games), motto, Review Rating (a starred evaluation of you similar to user feedback on eBay), and the medals and achievements you've garnered in Xbox titles. You will also be able to see which of your Xbox Live friends are online. Your Gamer Profile will be accessible from your Home screen, as will your customizable soundtracks

INTERVIEW: J. ALLARD

Game Informer Magazine sat down with Microsoft corporate vice president J. Allard to discuss Xbox 360.

Are you nickel and diming people with microtransactions?

There are going to be all sorts of different transactions online. But the game designers are ultimately the ones who are going to decide if they are going to nickel and dime. I think we're in big trouble if the game development community says that the only way to finish the game is to pay more money. The tolerance for inappropriate nickel and diming is very, very low. Broken business model? You fix it overnight.

Are there going to be any community lobbies?

I think that's a natural outgrowth. We've started with the identity, and that's that Gamer Tag. Now we're going to the next level, which is your reputation, your Gamer Card. Then the next is your Gamer Avatar. Now that we know a little bit about each other, how do we gather up and decide what we want to do next? I think that's a natural next step.

Does a standardized online experience leave room for innovation?

Not everything is standardized. The fundamentals get standardized. If anything we're trying to take the experience off the rails to give people more freedom. But to do that, you want to take the things that are established – find your friends, build groups, spend microtransaction points, replace your music – we know all that's going to be common. But then there is that special stuff, and people are going to take it for a new twist and innovate on top of that foundation. Some of it will work, some of it won't. Maybe next generation or even this generation we'll decide, "Hey, that's a great idea, let's standardize on that now."

Can you sell songs through the new interface?

Users are going to get their music from the sources they want to get their music from. I'll just say that.

Would there be a source from Microsoft that would handle music downloads?

Interesting idea. Maybe we'll talk more about that some other time.

If you had music you could get, where would you store it?

A lot of times you'd just stream it. There are music services that stream. Who cares where you store it?

Although you've proclaimed the Xbox 360 as ushering in the "HD Era," its optical drive doesn't utilize high-definition playback.

Should we wait for Hollywood to make a decision? [Hollywood has yet to agree on a standard format disc format like DVD for high-def movies such as Blu-Ray or HD-DVD – Ed.] Are we leaders or are we followers? There are different ways to think about HD movies. One way is On-Demand. The cable industry didn't wait for a new disc format to go broadcast HD. The satellite guys didn't wait for the cable guys to have enough bandwidth, they just said, "We'll go put satellites into space."

" IN MIDNIGHT CLUB 3, THE SENSE OF SPEED IS, IN A WORD, INCREDIBLE. " - PSM

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Mild Violence

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XBOX LIVE

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DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

NEW ESRB RATING

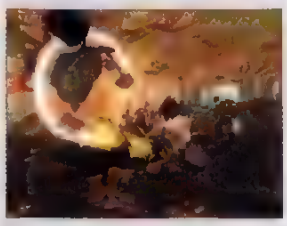
The ESRB has inaugurated a new video games rating category called "E10+". This new designation is for games between the "E" for Everyone and "T" for Teen ratings containing "moderate amounts of cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes."

UBISOFT'S NEXT-GEN SCHEDULE

Ubisoft has thrown its hat into the next-gen ring. The company has announced Peter Jackson's King Kong for the end of this year, while Killing Day (an FPS) and Splinter Cell 4 will appear before March of 2006. No specific next-gen system is listed for the games, but since PlayStation 3 isn't expected until mid to late 2006, we believe these titles will appear first on Xbox 360. Appearing for the current systems before the end of the year are the third Prince of Persia game, an expansion for PC's Far Cry, King Kong, and a new Brothers in Arms adventure.

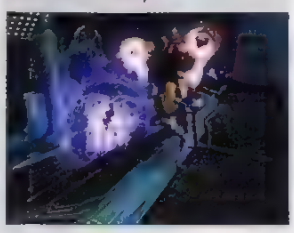
NEW FABLE FOR PC/XBOX

Peter Molyneux's Fable is heading to the PC with some alterations from the Xbox version. Fable: The Lost Chapters will appear this fall and contain new quests, regions, spells, creatures, weapons, and more not in the console edition. Game Informer has learned that an Xbox iteration of The Lost Chapters is also being planned for the future.



CHALK ONE UP FOR THE GOOD GUYS

A U.S. district court judge in LA dismissed half of the claims by Marvel against NCsoft and its City of Heroes MMORPG. Marvel claimed that players' created super heroes infringed on its own characters. Nice try.



MAJESCO ENTERS THE DARKNESS

No, Majesco and Chronicles of Riddick developer Starbreeze aren't making a game about prancing around in sparkly spandex and sounding like a crappy Queen cover band. They are, however, doing a next-gen console game based on *The Darkness* comic book in 2006.

games

NEW HALO ON THE WAY

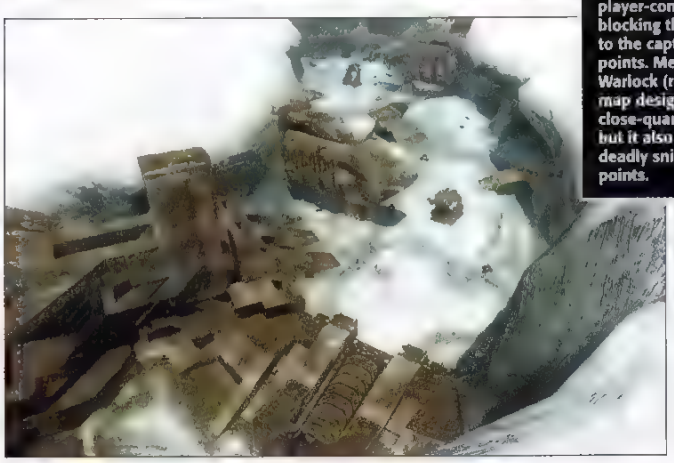
BUNGIE DELIVERS NEW MAPS

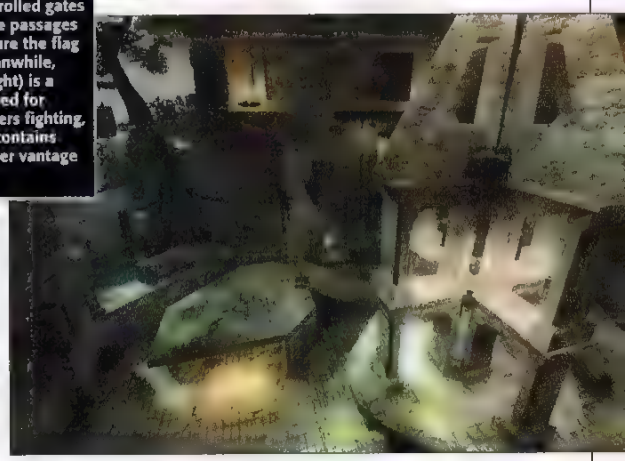
Okay, so our headline is a little misleading. While Bungie and Microsoft aren't talking about the next installment in the famous franchise, on May 28 gamers can get their hands on nine new multiplayer maps in the Halo 2: Multiplayer Map Pack (for $19.99 at retail). This expansion will be available both through stores and via download. This month four maps will be released early to Xbox Live subscribers. Two of them, Containment and Warlock, will be for free.

The other pair of early maps, Sanctuary and Turf, can be downloaded for $5.99. Finally, on June 28 fans can get the remaining five for $11.99.

Meanwhile, retail buyers will get some extra goodies in the form of two new videos: a side-story from the single-player campaign in New Mombassa and a documentary about the new maps. The Multiplayer Map Pack can also be played offline via system link and/or split-screen.

One of Halo 2's nine new multiplayer maps, Containment





New multiplayer map Containment (above and also left) takes place on Delta Halo and features indoor and outdoor areas, with huge player-controlled gates blocking the passages to the capture the flag points. Meanwhile, Warlock (right) is a map designed for close-quarters fighting, but it also contains deadly sniper vantage points.

TOMORROW'S WAR HAS BEGUN
IN STORES NOW

"Nothing less than an early candidate for strategy game of the year."
– Gamespot.com

"Greatest cinematic display in all of videogames."
– Gamedaily.com

"Based upon my experience, this game is the best representation of the terrorist threat/military response matrix."
– General Barry McCaffrey, USA (Ret.)

ATARI.COM/ACTOFWAR

ACT of WAR
DIRECT ACTION

ATARI

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Language
Violence

POWERED BY gamespy

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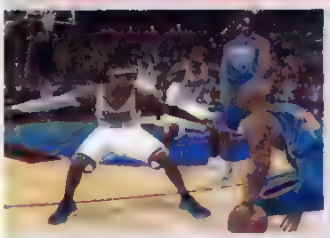
THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



GOOD

Despite the NFL going exclusively with EA, the NBA is thankfully not as restrictive. The league has inked a multi-year deal for EA, Take-Two, Sony, Midway, and Atari to make official basketball games. Absent are Microsoft, Nintendo, and Ubisoft – which last month signaled its entry into the sports market with a deal with golfer Vijay Singh.

GOOD

Bono bids for Eidos! A bidding war has broken out for Eidos between Conflict: Vietnam developer SCi and Elevation Partners, a venture capital group with U2 singer Bono and former EA head John Riccitiello on its board of directors. Eidos is mulling over the offers. Meanwhile, the next Tomb Raider has been pushed back into next year and is slated for the Xbox 360 and PSP.

GOOD

Microsoft continues to build allies for its Xbox 360 console. Lumines' Tetsuya Mizuguchi and Game Republic's Yoshiki Okamoto have both signed up to make games for the system. Given the pedigree of both of these talents (Okamoto worked on Resident Evil for Capcom), this is very good news.

BAD

Falling off the Final Fantasy VII wagon like a box of rotten tomatoes is Final Fantasy VII: Snowboarding, a mobile phone game slated for Japan and America later this year. Face-Plant!

UGLY

The Burning Legion strikes EA! Electronic Arts CEO Larry Probst partially blames MMORPG World of Warcraft for a downgrading in EA's quarterly profits forecast from $700 million to $525 million, saying the game has taken over the PC space from EA's The Sims series.

BAD

Angry over its sagging profits and the lack of cooperation between its electronics and entertainment divisions, Sony has appointed a new chief executive – Englishman Howard Stringer (the first non-Japanese person to hold the post). PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi (pictured) was tapped for the role, but he is being relieved of his semi-conductor duties and reassigned to his old position as head of Sony's video games division.

UGLY

The only thing more corrupting than The One Ring is money. *The Lord of the Rings* director Peter Jackson is suing New Line Cinema for not giving him profits from the movies, including those pertaining to the use of the films' scripts in the video games published by Electronic Arts.

Silicon Knight's Eternal Darkness for GameCube

news

SEGA GETS SILICON KNIGHTS

DUO WORK ON NEXT-GEN PROJECT

Expanding its Western development base, Sega of America and Sega Europe have announced that they have teamed up with Canadian developer Silicon Knights for an upcoming undisclosed next-gen game. Although details are scarce, the press release regarding the deal specifically mentions multiple next-gen systems. The developer has been working on its mysterious Too Human project for some time now, but it is not known if this announcement with Sega refers to that game.

Previously, Silicon Knights had been a Nintendo second-party developer, meaning that although it made games exclusively for the company's consoles, it wasn't owned by Nintendo. Silicon Knights made its name with GameCube titles Eternal Darkness and Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes.

This new partnership gives Sega a stronger, non-Japanese developer base to draw from as the company attempts to move away from its dependence on its bread-and-butter franchises. It already has deals with Warner Bros. Interactive (Matrix Online), Monolith Productions (Condemned), and The Creative Assembly (for more on Spartan: Total Warrior, turn to page 80).

R & D

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

Yourself! Naked

People love finding new ways to get in shape, from diabetes-inducing diets to video game workouts. With all these popular approaches to personal health, one time-tested method has fallen by the wayside: abject shame. Expanding on the content of last year's Yourself! Fitness and utilizing the EyeToy peripheral, Yourself! Naked will force you to strip down and stand vulnerable in front of your television and submit to a variety of humbling calisthenics. Your virtual trainer Maya returns, but instead of leading you through jumping jacks and crunches, she critically assesses your nude form as you watch yourself perform step touches, sidekicks, and other degrading activities that expose your glaring physical imperfections. Depending on what Maya sees, she either doles out disparaging comments regarding your sexual attractiveness or backhanded compliments like "You're doing great! You're getting less repulsive every minute!" Focused on punishment rather than encouragement, if you miss a scheduled workout the game digitally adds 40 pounds to your on-screen image, instilling the unshakable notion that no matter how much you jiggle and jump, the second you stop you swell to titanic and abominable proportions. Mental anguish is the price you pay for physical perfection – there is no other way.

STEP IN. KNUCKLE UP. BEAT DOWN.

How is *Tekken*® celebrating ten years of genre domination? With better graphics, more playable characters, all-new customization modes and over-the-top combos that will bring even the strongest fighters to their knees. Plus, a bonus action game, ***Tekken: Devil Within***, reveals the secrets of Jin's past. Settle your differences on the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system. **DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?**

TEKKEN 5

tekken5.namco.com

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Language
Sexual Themes
Use of Alcohol and Tobacco
Violence

PlayStation 2

namco

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news UNLIMITED ENABLED ! PRINTABLE, STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS FROM GAME INFORMER ONLINE

OTHER THAN GAMES

LOOKING AT HOW TO MAKE THE PSP DO MORE

So you finally picked up a PSP, played the dickens out of some of the launch titles, and now you'd like to check out the other features that Sony packed into the unit? While the path to digital media nirvana isn't necessarily user-friendly right now, there are a few easy ways to get your pics, tunes, and video clips onto that gorgeous widescreen.

The basic operation is simple – make sure that you have a memory stick inserted into the PSP, connect it to the USB port of your computer, switch the PSP to USB mode, and start dragging computer files onto the memory stick. But, in practice, it can be less than intuitive. Currently, Sony of Japan is promising that an iTunes-like application to manage digital media on the PSP will be available by the end of the year in Japan, but a release anywhere else in the world is unconfirmed. So, in the meantime, here's an overview of how to get it to work.

Basically, you're going to need to get the computer storing your pictures, music, and video files to talk to the memory stick on your PSP. There are two ways to do this – follow the directions above by using a Mini-USB cable (available at almost any electronics store) or pick up a USB Memory Stick reader. To use the second option, you'll pop the card out of the PSP, into the reader, and skip straight ahead to copying files.

Third party applications like iPSP can help users manage their libraries by providing one interface and simple drag-and-drop functions. The program takes care of converting any of your files to ones that the PSP can read (video, in particular, requires a bit of configuring to work properly) and also automatically copies any of your game saves to the computer's hard drive. While we haven't had any problems with Memory Sticks needing an unexpected wipe to fix problems, they can occur and backing up save files is always a good idea.

Besides using your existing collection of pictures, music, and videos as a font of alternative entertainment, there is a cottage industry of websites popping up all over the place to help you access whatever you want it. Sony's Connect online store is already pumping out legal album downloads and more video content is promised in the near future. Also, sites like PSP-Vault.com are offering game save downloads from other members of their community.

Like we said before, the step-by-step operation is a little complicated and involves more specific actions than we can cover in these pages. To get the minutia of the process, go to Game Informer Online, where our able team has tested the waters and come out victorious – they're sharing the secrets of their success and making sure that everyone can copy their procedure.

THE NITTY GRITTY

The PSP officially supports MPEG-4 (video); MP3 and ATRAC3 (audio); and JPEG (images) file types, among others.

To use the PSP as a Memory Stick reader, you'll need a USB cable that has a "Mini-B" end and a "Standard-A" connector (the normal USB form factor). Plug the Mini-B side into the top of your PSP system and the Standard-A side into your PC.

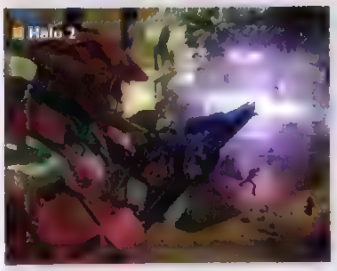
A full-length (90-minute) movie at a reasonable compression rate will fit on a 512MB Memory Stick – look online for specifics on configuring video files.

As of press time, video files aren't supported on the PSP in as user-friendly a manner as photos and music. To get a step-by-step authorized tutorial, go to www.connect.com/psp (Sony's Connect Store page for the PSP). There are also video files to download that will be updated weekly.

The mini-USB jack plugs into the top of the PSP while the full-sized USB end plugs into your computer. After it's connected, go into the System Settings menu on the PSP and select "USB Mode." The PSP will show up as a removable drive where files can be added or removed

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



HALO 3 WATCH

Even with the news this month of a Halo 2 expansion pack, rumors are still churning regarding the next full-sized installment of the FPS franchise. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported that developer Bungie is actively hiring staff, with the goal said to be hiring 60 people and doubling the number of positions at the company. Microsoft won't comment on the matter, and it remains to be seen when the next full Halo offering will hit the public. Loose Talk has heard consistent chatter that says that Microsoft will release Halo 3 day and date with Sony's PlayStation 3.

IBM ENTERING GAMING?

Loose Talk has heard that IBM is considering entering the gaming market for next-gen home consoles. Although IBM has a role as a chip-maker, the company's involvement is said to be beyond just technology. Whether they would publish and develop their own titles or just publish work from other studios is unknown. In the past, IBM has mainly made kid-centric home computer games.

NEW GBA THIS YEAR?

CNN is claiming that the new version of the Game Boy Advance will be out by the end of 2005. The unit would have increased multimedia capabilities to compete with the PSP. Industry analyst P.J. McNealy predicts that the unit would retail for $99, while the GBA SP would be cut to $49.

PS3 PUT ON SHELF? XBOX 360 AT E3

Last month we told you about a Sony conference that was supposed to happen in Japan that was going to talk about which specific version of the Cell processor would make it into the PlayStation 3. However, the press conference was scrapped because some at Sony didn't like how the tech demos were shaping up. Hopefully this doesn't mean a setback for the console's expected unveiling at E3 in May. Speaking of E3, a source has told Loose Talk that we shouldn't expect to get our hands on playable copies of many Xbox 360 games at the convention. Developers haven't received beta development units to run any software just yet, so expect to see a lot of movies of games instead.

PSP GTA TAKING SHAPE

Rockstar hasn't been taking about the PSP edition of Grand Theft Auto very much, but it looks like the game will still have all the great features of the big brother PS2 version. One element in particular is the radio stations. Rockstar is currently recording all-new voicework to keep you company while you cruise around for your next thrill.

GT 4 ONLINE NOT COMING?

Late last year, Polyphony Digital's Kazunori Yamauchi stood on a Sony stage at the Tokyo Game Show and told the world that the online component for Gran Turismo 4 would come separately from the title, since it was being dropped from the game. Many, including us, took this at face value, thinking Sony was going to offer online functionality at a later date. However, this might not be the case. Citing the fact that Sony Computer Entertainment of America (SCEA) has never put out an official press release backing Yamauchi's claims, the company isn't currently acknowledging that online functionality is coming for the game. SCEA could certainly announce it for the series at E3, for example, but Sony's silence on the matter surely is a sign that it isn't just around the corner. Coupled with the rumors that online is being planned for the Gran Turismo 5 on PlayStation 3, we suggest you don't hold your breath for the feature.

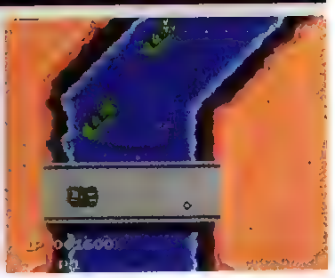
Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Back in the day when Konami's logo was golden, this top-down shooter in the mold of Ikari Warriors was a pretty good time on the NES. You'd tool around in a green army attack jeep blowing stuff up and rescuing hostages for bazooka power-ups in the depths of Cambodia. The game took you through six distinct enemy territories and let you shoot your machine gun in one direction while throwing a grenade in another.

(Answer on page 29)



SONY

MLB

Step up, dig in and swing for the fences. MLB puts you in the majors with innovative new gameplay. Take the mound with Release Point Pitching, command the field with Play Maker Fielding or swing from your heels with Total Control Batting. From the bullpen to the batter's box, MLB puts America's pastime in the palm of your hands.

news

BREAKING THE CYCLE

IGDA DISCUSSES IMPROVING DEVELOPER WORKING CONDITIONS

Last year news broke of a class-action lawsuit filed by some Electronic Arts' employees for overtime compensation. Since then, the company has differentiated between salaried employees and hourly workers who could get overtime (with software engineers not overtime-eligible), but the topic of poor working conditions in the video game industry has not been solved. The International Game Developers Association (IGDA) recently tackled the problem at The Game Developer's Conference, with several major companies participating in a summit to tackle the problem. Game Informer took the chance to sit down with Jason Della Rocca, IGDA program director, to discuss this fundamental problem facing the industry.

Is there an opportunity for change? Or are companies telling employees, "If you don't like it, leave"?
That, to some extent, is what's happening. Your benefit is keeping your job. On one level, that's true. This is a stimulating, exciting industry that we're all happy to be a part of. At the same time, where do you cross the line at exploiting that passion? Extreme working conditions is symptomatic of root issues in the industry. It's not because, "Hey, I'm an a$$%&@*, and I'm going to drive my guys into the ground." What happens is that the business risks, the challenge of the industry, poor production practices, etc. quickly take away the niceness. Most producers or project managers have no real management training, no real experience in managing resources or multi-million dollar projects with hundreds or dozens of people. There is a lot of pressure coming from the executives. Then you've got these managers in the middle who have no clue what they are doing. And at the bottom, you've got the complexities of games, and they are only getting more complex, as you know.

What's the answer? Some companies have brought in managers and said, "These guys don't know games."
If you are just a gamer-head, and you have no real skill or talent then you're useless. And if you're just textbook guy, with no real knowledge of games or how they are made, then you're just as useless. Where do you find that middle ground? To some extent, the growth in education that's coming through curriculum in various universities will help. And that's only one aspect of the issue. Bringing in people with MBAs isn't going to solve the problem. Another aspect is business models. The fact that we're over-reliant on Christmas. The fact that we're over-reliant on movie licenses and tied to movie ship cycles. The fact that the business is still run by traditional publisher models; there's not alternate sources of funding. That in and of itself has it's own bumble of rifts and issues that you cannot get away from.

IGDA Program Director Jason Della Rocca

What can developers or the IGDA do to change the lifestyle?
A lot of it comes through awareness and education, through telling people that they are doing things wrong, and there's a better way to do it. Fundamentally, these companies are in business to make money. And if you can prove to them that they can reach their end goal by treating their employees better, having mature production process, and improving the quality of life – and by doing that, they'll get a better project [that's] on time with profits and success, unless I'm a jackass [that's the way I'm going to do it].

What about creating a game developers' union?
I don't know if a union actually solves any of the problems we've been talking about. A union doesn't educate producers. It can't go in and deal with business models, and production cycle issues and the market. It doesn't do those things. It's a band-aid to make sure you get paid and have your benefits. I don't think that plugging in a union is going to solve the problems that need to be solved. Poor quality of life is a symptom of fundamental issues.

Are some developers resistant to a change?
We did get some flak from our members, saying, 'Hey man, this is games. If you love it, you put in the sweat. If you can't deal with it, then we don't need you.' There are a lot of people with that attitude. There's some truth in that, but developers in many cases are overly-passionate, and are blinded by their passion. And in the end, they are hurting themselves. They don't realize that they can be more productive and do better work if they just put their things down and go home. Instead we take two hours putzing around with Nerf guns and three hours over lunch doing Doom 3 over LAN tournaments. And then we're all proud of ourselves for being in the office for 20 hours and sleeping for four. It's unfortunate you can't break the cycle.

Do you think companies will just fire all the malcontents and hire more eager replacements?
Many of the large companies view their employees as peons. When you take that view that workers are a commodity – that's one way to approach it. But some other companies want to reap the investment in you as an employee. When you view the workers as the talent; as the lifeblood of the industry, it's a whole different mindset. There are companies out there that take that approach and are hugely successful – and ship their product on time, on budget, and are making a killing as a business and their employees are happy.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
JOHN CHOWANEC
Producer, Crystal Dynamics

1 Syndicate – PC
2 Vib Ribbon/Rez – PSone/PS2
3 Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus – PS2
4 Metal Gear Solid – PSone
5 No One Lives Forever 2 – PC

READER
DUSTIN GRIFFIN
Roanoke, VA

1 Ninja Gaiden – Xbox
2 Metal Slug 3 – Xbox
3 Super Mario Kart – SNES
4 Ninja Five-O – GBA
5 Mega Man Zero 2 – GBA

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:
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Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: tophve@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Tips For New PSP Owners

10 Your DS may feel jealous about the new addition to the family. Ignore it
9 There's no shame in pawning family heirlooms to afford launch titles
8 Setting your PSP's screen name to "My Precious" is normal and healthy
7 You may notice analog nubs growing in strange places. Consult a dermatologist
6 The PSP becomes surly and irritable if not played for six hours each day
5 While you can download TV shows to your memory stick, the PSP will refuse to play episodes of *Mama's Family*
4 It can smell your fear
3 Though the unit plays MP3s, import versions will only play Bachman Turner Overdrive
2 The state of becoming one with your PSP is NOT called "PSPness"
1 Despite the technical specs, the PSP is powered by love

Name That Game Answer: Jackal

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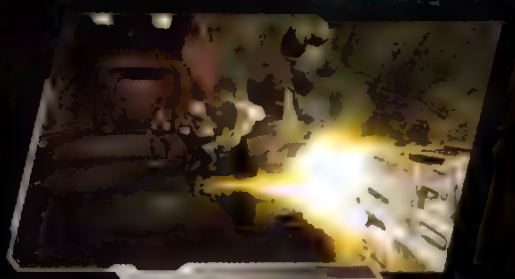
"A NON-STOP EXPLOSIVE THRILL RIDE THAT'LL SHAKE YOUR PC AND XBOX TO ITS VERY CORE..."
GAMEDAILY.COM

"PARIAH IS READY TO STAND TALL AS THE NEXT BIG STEP IN SHOOTERS."
OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

PARIAH

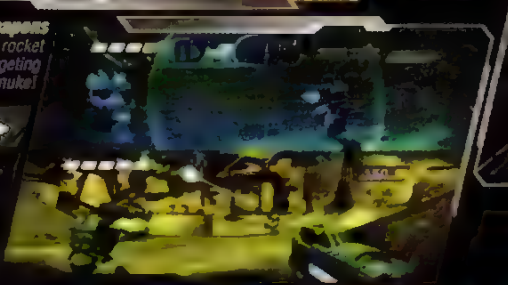
ATI GAC CTC

Roar Through The Vast Wastelands of Earth
crushing enemies under the treads of your armored and heavily equipped vehicles

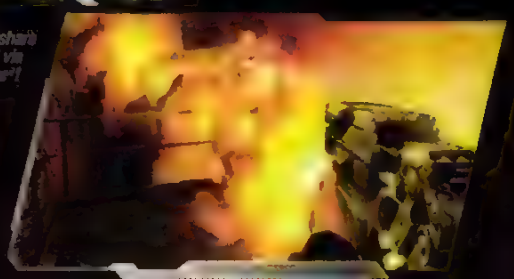


The Ultimate Arsenal of Upgradeable Weapons
to suit your gaming style. Your already deadly rocket launcher becomes a quad-warhead multi-targeting heat-seeking shoulder mounted nuke!

New Twist On Classic Multi-player Action
with vehicles and upgradeable weapons in Capture-the-Flag, Death Match and Team Death Match plus the all new **Front Line Assault** and **Siege** modes.



Create Unlimited Battlegrounds
with the exclusive M.A.P. Editor and share them with your friends and the world via system link, memory unit or Xbox Live®!



MARC ECKO

FOUNDER, ECKO UNLIMITED/DIRECTOR, MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP

>> Marc Ecko, starting off with self-made t-shirts, has built *ecko unlmtd. into one of the most lucrative urban fashion brands in the world. He's now set his sights on another one of his passions: video games. In partnership with Atari and the Collective, he's launching the urban sci-fi epic Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure in September. <<

What was your motivation for getting into games?
It's one of those hard things to describe – that desire to fill a void. I saw a window of opportunity and had a creative itch that I wanted to scratch. As a gamer, it was just one of those things that felt like something I had to be a part of.

What's your take on the game industry in 2005 as an outsider?
We're in this sort of "me too" cycle where, despite all the technology, there's not a lot of innovation. Once there is one strong new concept, every publisher has to try its iteration of that rather than trying to bring really new, original content. I think a lot of it has to do with how expensive it is to build an original title. Nobody is willing to take a risk in terms of investment, so they say, "What kind of layers of culture can I put in to make a game be a mass market title?" So you see a lot of celebrity involvement and "safe bet" film franchises. Whether it's *The Godfather* or *Scarface*. Everyone's trying to hedge their bets, and unfortunately, the consumer doesn't always benefit from that.

Since the success of GTA 3, there's been an increased movement towards a lot of publishers doing urban-themed games. Do you think that's a postive thing or do you find that to be exploitative?
In what way? Number one, it's typical of the gaming industry. A couple of years ago, it was military first-person shooters, on the dawn of post-9/11, and everyone was rushing to get their version of that game out. It's probably unintentionally exploitive, but I don't think the publishers are like, "Oh, let's exploit! Let's take advantage!" But I think it's indicative of the industry. It's kind of like, "Oh, here's this trend," and everyone tries to get in.

Let's talk about the game. One of the things you've stressed is that you want to get across the height and verticality of the city. How are you doing that?
A lot of what we wanted to do was sell a sense of vertigo. It's been a really interesting challenge in the way you design the levels. It's also interesting in how you design the gameplay camera. How do you make it functional, and not annoying or disorienting, but at the same time give you a sense of peril of what's below while you're engaging in graffiti or navigating up that high in the universe? There are some interesting dynamic experiences that are coming from that which are really trying to step out in terms of what's been done before in the traditional platform realm.

The other big challenge of the game is getting across the concept of graffiti culture. In games where there's been some tagging, like San Andreas or Jet Grind Radio, it's always been a simple mechanic – where your arm moves and the graffiti magically appears out of a cloud. How are you going to address the actual tagging in terms of gameplay?
I'll tell you this: We would never put the kind of product that you just described out on the market, because I think we'd get panned. We have to make the graffiti [writing] actual gameplay. We can't make it a button that releases a pre-baked animation. I can liken it best only to Tony Hawk and skating. In playing Tony Hawk, fundamentally, the button sets were the same despite all the different types of tricks. They're basically action buttons that were related to skating. And you learned about skate culture. There are a lot of people who never skateboarded in their life who learned a lot of the lingo and the DNA of skate culture. Our game does the same thing for graffiti, plus makes for a fun, quick experience that you get better at.

What are some of the games over the years that have inspired you? What are your influences?
If you want to go way back to the early consoles, it was the platformer. It was Colecovision's Donkey Kong and all those great platforming games. I really became a huge fan of sports games in the mid-eighties, early football games like Tecmo Bowl and the Madden franchise. All throughout college, sports games were what drew me to gaming. It was the gratification of pick-up-and-play value, and the social interaction – to be able to sit with three or four guys and talk and drink a beer. The watershed moment of understanding what games could do in terms of really getting you romanced into an action/adventure game was Metal Gear Solid. That's something that I remember – I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It was so cinematic.

You've also talked about how players today always need to be approached with something that is fun without a high learning curve. Can you expand on that?
I don't think that once you've spent $50 bucks you should be punished, to not be able to play the game. It's no fun building a game with 20 hours of unique gameplay and then the average gamer only gets through the first two or three. There's a lot of great gameplay out there that no one has ever seen. You should never feel like you can't make that jump or can't get out of this one area.

That's the challenge of game design, isn't it? To let people know what they have to do, while at the same time making them feel smart for knowing what they're supposed to do.

> ***"I saw a window of opportunity and had a creative itch that I wanted to scratch."***

For me, I never felt that the benefit, in terms of gratification, [was feeling] smart. It was about whether I got an emotional high. I've always gotten more of a gratifying experience from gameplay. If it was me juking a tackle in football or making a kill at the right time – it's always that moment for me that has drawn me to games. It's never been a feeling of, "Oh, I broke the code!" I suppose there are gamers out there who read what I'm saying and would say that I've got it all wrong. But I would just challenge them to look at the mass consumer. People want a rush, and they don't want to have to wrack their brain to get to it.

That's interesting. Being from the game world, we think a lot of people want that mental challenge, but maybe that perception needs to change.
Look, I've never been one not to have an opinion. I don't know everything. I'm going to attempt something with this title that I believe is going to be a fun and interesting experience. Consumers have to vote. They're the ones that are either going to like it or hate it. I'm not glomming onto my brand, treating my consumer like they're dumb. You're not going to play this game and win an Ecko sweatshirt at the end of the level. I'm trying to build a product that, if it didn't have my name on it, would still be good. That's my job.

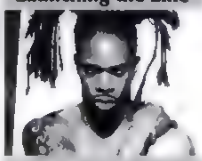
CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1993 ▶ Getting Up

*ecko unltd.

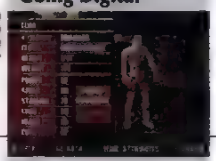
Taking his business of self-made t-shirts mainstream, Marc forms *ecko unlmtd., a street-oriented line of t-shirts and sweatshirts.

1996 ▶ Launching the Line



Expanding *ecko unlmtd. into a full-fledged fashion company, Ecko launches his first full collection of fashion. The launch coincides with a major ad campaign featuring hip-hop icons Busta Rhymes, KRS-One, and Rakim.

1999 ▶ Going Digital



Ecko makes his first foray into the world of video games, appearing as a hidden character and designing a ring for EA Sports' Knockout Kings 2000.

2002 ▶ Front Page

Expanding his empire, Ecko creates a general interest men's magazine, *Complex*, which hits newsstands in 2002. The publication is a success with circulation of over a quarter million.

2003 ▶ Power Player

Marc is selected as one of *Details* magazine's Most Powerful Men Under 38.

2003 ▶ Strictly Business

As the company's apparel line continues to grow, *ecko unlmtd. reports earnings of over $1 billion.

2004 ▶ Game On

Adding another facet to his growing media empire, Ecko announces that he has entered into a partnership with Atari to produce an urban graffiti game entitled Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure.

CHANGE THE GAME

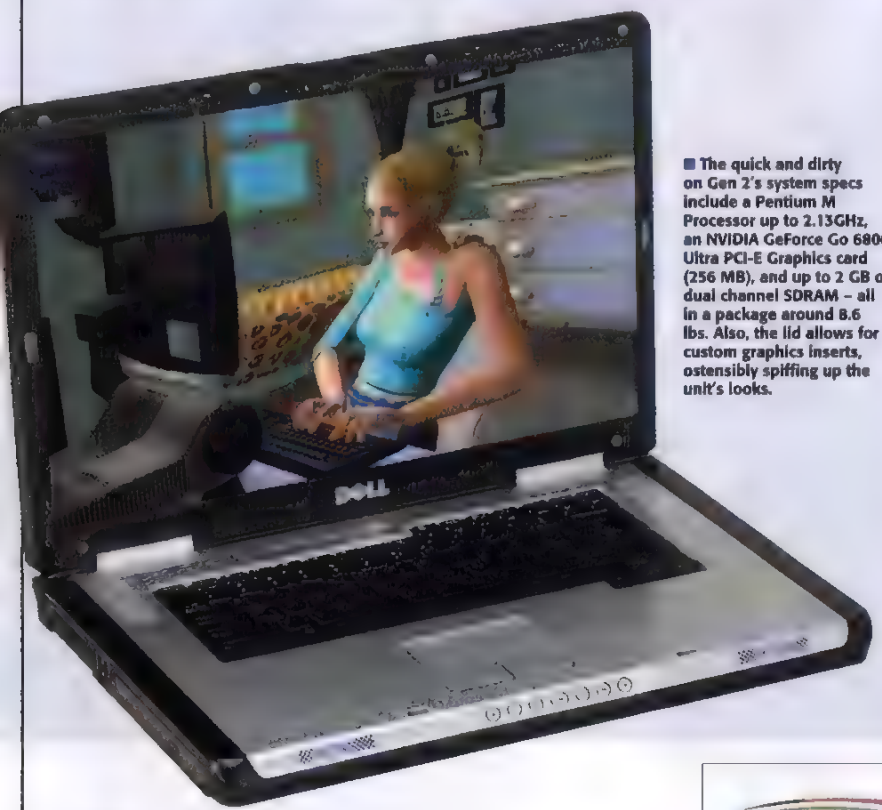
Fashion designer Marc Ecko hopes to become a player in the game industry

pc

INSPIRON XPS GEN 2

Manufacturer: Dell **Website:** www.dell.com **List Price:** $2,749

In the last few years, Dell has been trying hard to woo the gamer crowd. The cynic in us says that this is because we gamers are known for having some degree of expendable income and at least a passing interest in spending it on gear (all of you folks that paid $250 to import the Final Fantasy Bee controllers – we're looking at you here). While America's biggest PC manufacturer is still kind of sucking it up when it comes to industrial design and naming conventions, its XPS Gen 2 is one seriously smoking machine. A whopping 17" screen (without the anti-glare coating that tends to mute colors and blur sharp edges) tops the lightweight, but powerful unit. And since Dell has finally gone with the Pentium mobile chips, the battery life is approaching the realm of respectability (around two hours, which is actually really good).



■ **The quick and dirty on Gen 2's system specs include a Pentium M Processor up to 2.13GHz, an NVIDIA GeForce Go 6800 Ultra PCI-E Graphics card (256 MB), and up to 2 GB of dual channel SDRAM – all in a package around 8.6 lbs. Also, the lid allows for custom graphics inserts, ostensibly spiffing up the unit's looks.**

tech

W800I

Manufacturer: Sony Ericsson
Website: www.sonyericsson.com
List Price: TBA

Sweet Sony Ericsson, you've made the phone for us to lust after every day this year. Set to launch in the fall, the W800i is the first Walkman-branded phone in what will surely be a growing line for the company. Featuring a 2.0 megapixel camera and quick buttons for music access, the unit has a slot for Memory Sticks (like the ones PSP uses) so users can load MP3 or AAC music files. The phone will pause tunes when a call comes in, and car audio and stereo adapters are planned accessories for the unit's launch.

■ **Music playback is the big thing for cell phones this year, since most will already have decent cameras**

peripherals

VERTICALMOUSE 2

Manufacturer: Evoluent **Website:** www.verticalmouse.com
List Price: $74.95

Evoluent's VerticalMouse 2 is like the long-lost soul mate of the ergonomic split keyboard. Essentially, it's a high precision optical mouse turned on its side that we found surprisingly comfy. While the buttons and scroll wheel work with the same fingers and in the same manner as a conventional mouse, we found that the slight amount of retraining made us less effective in the FPS realm. But, the comfort upgrade allowed World of Warcraft sessions to last longer and be more satisfying.

ALL 4 ONE. ONE 4 ALL.
UNTOLD LEGENDS
BROTHERHOOD of the BLADE
Action RPG Combat
Wield your blade and cast powerful spells in this action-packed, hack 'n' slash RPG.
Wireless Multiplayer Gameplay
Connect directly to other PSP handheld systems and play with your friends.
Original Fantasy Adventure
Battle powerful creatures and save the city of Aven to unravel the mysteries of an ancient planet.
Untold Legends™: Brotherhood of the Blade™ is classic RPG action available at launch for the PSP™ handheld entertainment system. Choose from among four unique character classes and journey to the fantasy world of Aven to battle powerful creatures and unravel the mysteries of an ancient planet. Experience on-the-go hack 'n' slash combat or join cooperative multiplayer battles via wireless gameplay as you venture through beautiful 3D environments and discover rich treasures in this completely original fantasy adventure.
SOE SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
PSP
WWW.UNTOLDLEGENDS.COM
TEEN T Fantasy Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
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consoles

NINTENDO DS

Manufacturer: Nintendo **Website:** www.nintendods.com **List Price:** $149.99

As of press time, these four new Nintendo DS colors are only confirmed for Japan. Graphite Black and Pure White were released on March 24th. On April 21, Turquoise Blue and Candy Pink are making their debut and all four colors are the same price as the big N's Platinum Silver launch color. Hopefully, these new models will make their way stateside.

peripherals

GAMEGLASS

Manufacturer: Pelican
Website: www.pelicanperformance.com
List Price: $139.99

The redesign of Sony's PS2 into a slim, sexy, hardcover book-sized unit made a big splash with people looking for a little more portability in their home game consoles. Adding to that "take it anywhere" appeal, Pelican is releasing the GameGlass – a 7" TFT-LCD monitor with speakers and two headphone jacks. Popping this onto your slim PS2 makes the unit a handy portable DVD or CD player in addition to those gaming features we've been told that it has.

misc.

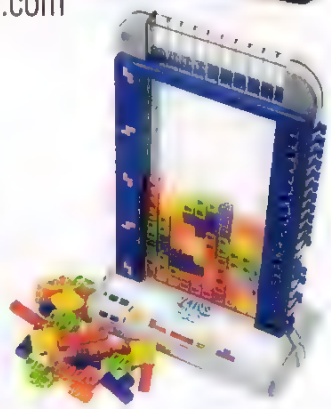
DOOM: THE BOARDGAME

Manufacturer: Fantasy Flight Games
Website: www.fantasyflightgames.com
List Price: $54.98

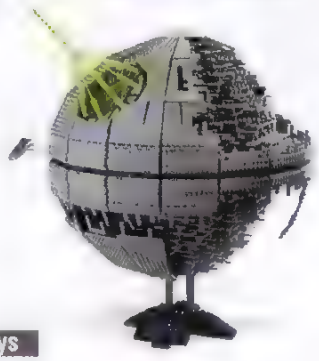
misc.

TETRIS TOWER

Manufacturer: Radica
Website: www.radicagames.com
List Price: $24.99



What do you do when lightning knocks out the power grid? Break out the flashlights and set up either of these no-juice-required interpretations of classic video game franchises. Doom: The Boardgame lets players simulate id's Hell battle as either the Marines or monsters – complete with detailed plastic miniatures. Tetris Towers is a one- or two-person take on the classic that functions sort of like Connect Four.



toys

DEATH STAR II

Manufacturer: Lego
Website: www.lego.com
List Price: $299

This behemoth of a Lego set won't be out until September, but we're clueing you in now so all those nickels and dimes you collect until then can go towards it. Trust us, this will be worth it. With the stand included, the completed model's 3,400 pieces will construct a replica measuring 25 inches high and 19 inches wide.

peripherals

JEDI HUNTER 2.4GHZ WIRELESS CONTROLLER

Manufacturer: Intec
Website: www.inteclink.com
List Price: $29.99

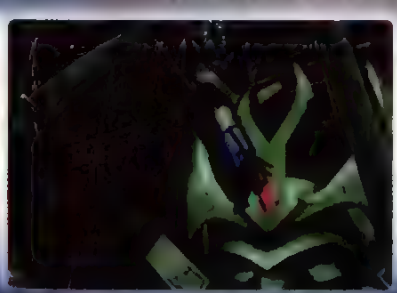
Now-standard features of wireless controllers like long battery life (60 hours with two AAs) and play distance (around 30 feet) join with kitchy Star Wars-specific details in Intec's Star Wars line. The rubberized hand grips feature portraits of a burning Darth Vader helmet and both PS2 and Xbox offer an exclusive "Light Sabre" [sic] button. Apparently, pushing this will give players an edge during the Episode III game's many saber locks, but will it allow them to sense a disturbance in the Force? This we cannot answer.

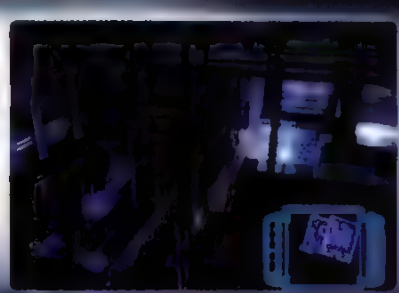
"Stealth with a sexy twist" XBN

STOLEN

THEY SAID IT COULDN'T BE DONE.

www.stolen-game.com





COMING SOON...

PlayStation 2

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SO YOU WANT TO WORK IN THE GAME INDUSTRY

BY ARA SHIRINIAN, GAME DESIGNER, RAINBOW STUDIOS
WWW.SHIRINIAN.NET

Breaking into the industry can be an extremely tough endeavor. As someone who has been an outsider, a game journalist, and finally a game designer, I'm going to tell you a bit about my own "breaking-in" experience. The advice that follows is far from exhaustive, but hopefully it will arm you with more knowledge than I had in the pursuit of a career in video game development.

Since I was already a video game journalist of several years when I decided to actively pursue my dream of actually making games, I thought I would have an easier time than a total outsider would. Unfortunately for me, that wasn't the case at all.

At first, all I knew was that I wanted to make video games badly, but I didn't know exactly which road to follow. Associate Producer? Designer? Product Manager? Marketing? Who had time to ponder such details, I just wanted in!

It's often been said that the best way to get in is through testing. It requires the least amount of experience, and allows you a great deal of opportunity just because of your physical proximity to the rest of the team. Plus, it will give you an important perspective of the development process. But there are compelling reasons to avoid testing as a primary method to break in: First, there are far more testers than there are former testers who have been able to make the jump. Second, because of the way the industry tends to pigeonhole one's skills, you will have to work even harder to distinguish yourself as being more suited for non-testing work. Third, a lot of your time will be taken up by your immediate tasks, leaving less of it for you to develop your other skills. Becoming a tester guarantees you nothing except testing, and that's why I focused my efforts in other directions.

After several feeble attempts at interviewing, a high ranking producer at one of the major studios gave me this piece of advice: You might not know exactly what you want, but don't let anyone else know that.

I learned that if you don't communicate a clear vision of what kind of job you want, in the interview process you will likely end up looking like an unsuitable candidate. Even if you are a multi-skilled individual, don't leave it up to the interviewer to figure out what you're going to do once they hire you. Research the various positions well (for example, on gamasutra.com), pick one that you are best suited for, and focus on that when you present yourself.

Taking that producer's words to heart, I spent a lot of time thinking about precisely where my passion was strongest, and I made up my mind: I was going to be a game designer. But something essential was still missing. I continued to have unsuccessful interviews, despite my press experience and newly refined focus. Then, one interviewer gave me another piece of advice that seemed like the most obvious thing in the world after the fact: Go buy Unreal Tournament, install the level-building tools that it comes with, and make a level yourself.

That's when I realized my passion for game design wasn't enough to convince anyone to hire me. It didn't matter how smart I was. It didn't matter that I had a bachelor's degree in computer science from the University of Maryland and a background in user interface design. It didn't matter that I had published articles about game design or that I was in the press. None of that matters. The missing piece was that I didn't have anything specific to show for myself. It doesn't necessarily have to be an Unreal level; any exposition of your own work that directly relates to the position you are seeking will do. So I got Unreal Tournament 2003, taught myself the tools that it came with, and after six months and approximately 300 hours of work I had a level that I was satisfied enough with to call "finished."

Next, I made a web page to advertise my skills, experience, and of course the Unreal level I had just finished, clearly positioning myself as a video game designer. I visited every video game studio's website I could think of and sent my resume and website links to the ones that were hiring game designers. Despite several more rounds of interviews, I still didn't get any real results until I got a call from somebody at Acclaim who had seen my web site.

> "You must resign yourself to keep trying and to continuously work on a relevant portfolio."

To my surprise, I got through the multiple levels of interviews and was finally offered a job as a designer on The Red Star. It took me roughly 40 direct contacts over a few years before finally hitting the one that led to a real job offer. It might take you less or more, but the fact of reality is that the job application process will be totally unfair.

You must resign yourself to keep trying and to continuously work on a relevant portfolio. The ease or difficulty of your career search is absolutely not a measure of how good a game developer you are. And don't immediately discount companies based on their image. The Red Star was such an incredible experience for me, there was no other development project in North America that I would rather have worked on. It was totally contrary to the types of games Acclaim was known for. I didn't even learn about how cool it really was until the second round of interviews.

After Acclaim shut down operations, I found myself in a very familiar predicament. But the trouble I had gone through the first time around really prepared me to do the same thing all over again. Throughout my own efforts, the most important thing I learned was best expressed by Sylvester Stallone: Success is usually the culmination of controlling failure. If failure deters you, maybe you aren't suited for this line of work. No matter how many times it happens, if you can learn from failure, then you have a chance to succeed. Do you have what it takes?

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1R0 : 35
SONY

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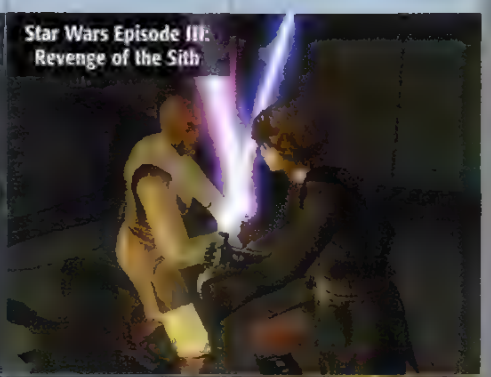
may

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
25 to Life	**02** NEW RELEASES • Grand Theft Auto – PSP • 25 to Life – PS2, Xbox • Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition – PSP • Puyo Pop Fever – PSP	**03** NEW RELEASES: • Enthusia Professional Racing – PS2 • Forza Motorsport – Xbox • Ghost Recon 2 – PC • Rainbow Six 4 – PC • Pariah – Xbox, PC • *Spaceballs Collector's Edition* – DVD		**05** NEW RELEASES • Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith – PS2, Xbox	 Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	
08 It's Mother's Day! Show her you're thinking of her by making as many "your mom" jokes as possible. Seriously, those never get old.		**10** NEW RELEASES • Donkey Konga 2 – GC • Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex – PSP • Haunting Ground – PS2 • Metal Slug 4&5 – PS2 • Juiced – PS2, Xbox • Wild Arms: Alter Code F – PS2	**11** 	**12** Our second-favorite Estevez, Emilio, turns 43 today. For the record, our favorite Estevez is his younger brother Joe, star of *Werewolf* and *Vampire* [illegible] 	**13** *Unleashed* opens in theaters today, teaching audiences nationwide an important life lesson: If you treat Jet Li like a dog, he whomps you up.	
Madagascar	**17** NEW RELEASES • Mega Man Anniversary Collection – GBA • Sid Meier's Pirates – Xbox • Madagascar – PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA, DS • *Scrubs: Season One* – DVD	**18 – 20** ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO The industry's biggest event of the year, E3 happens to be the only place on Earth where video games, booth babes, and bacon-wrapped hot dogs collide. 05/19 The journey towards the Dark Side is complete. *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* opens in theaters.				
22 Today is national "Buy a Musical Instrument Day," and Donkey Kong Bongo sales are expected to skyrocket. Take that, ham-fisted drummer!	**23** NEW RELEASES • WarioWare: Twisted – GBA • Fire Emblem: Sacred Stones – GBA • Need for Speed: Underground 2 – DS	**24** NEW RELEASES • Destroy All Humans – PS2, Xbox • Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana – PS2 • Glimmerati – N-Gage • *Samurai Jack Season Two* – DVD	Destroy All Humans	**28**		
	31 NEW RELEASES • Advent Rising – Xbox, PC • Digimon World 4 – PS2, GC	Advent Rising	Haunting Ground			

"It's Simply Brilliant."

10 out of 10

9 out of 10; 9.5 out of 10

Electronic Gaming Monthly

Unpredictable enemy encounters through multipath levels.

High-adrenaline stealth kills, submission strikes, and firefights.

Coordinate all-new co-op multiplayer infiltrations.

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What if an algorithm could crash the stock markets, black out New York, and hijack ballistic missiles? **This is 2007. This is reality.** The one programmer who has the key to this algorithm has vanished. Find him at any cost. Bring the battle closer to the enemy - bring it to their soil before the chain of chaos becomes unstoppable. You are Sam Fisher. You are a Splinter Cell.

BRING THE BATTLE CLOSER. NOW!

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

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY

PlayStation 2

UBISOFT

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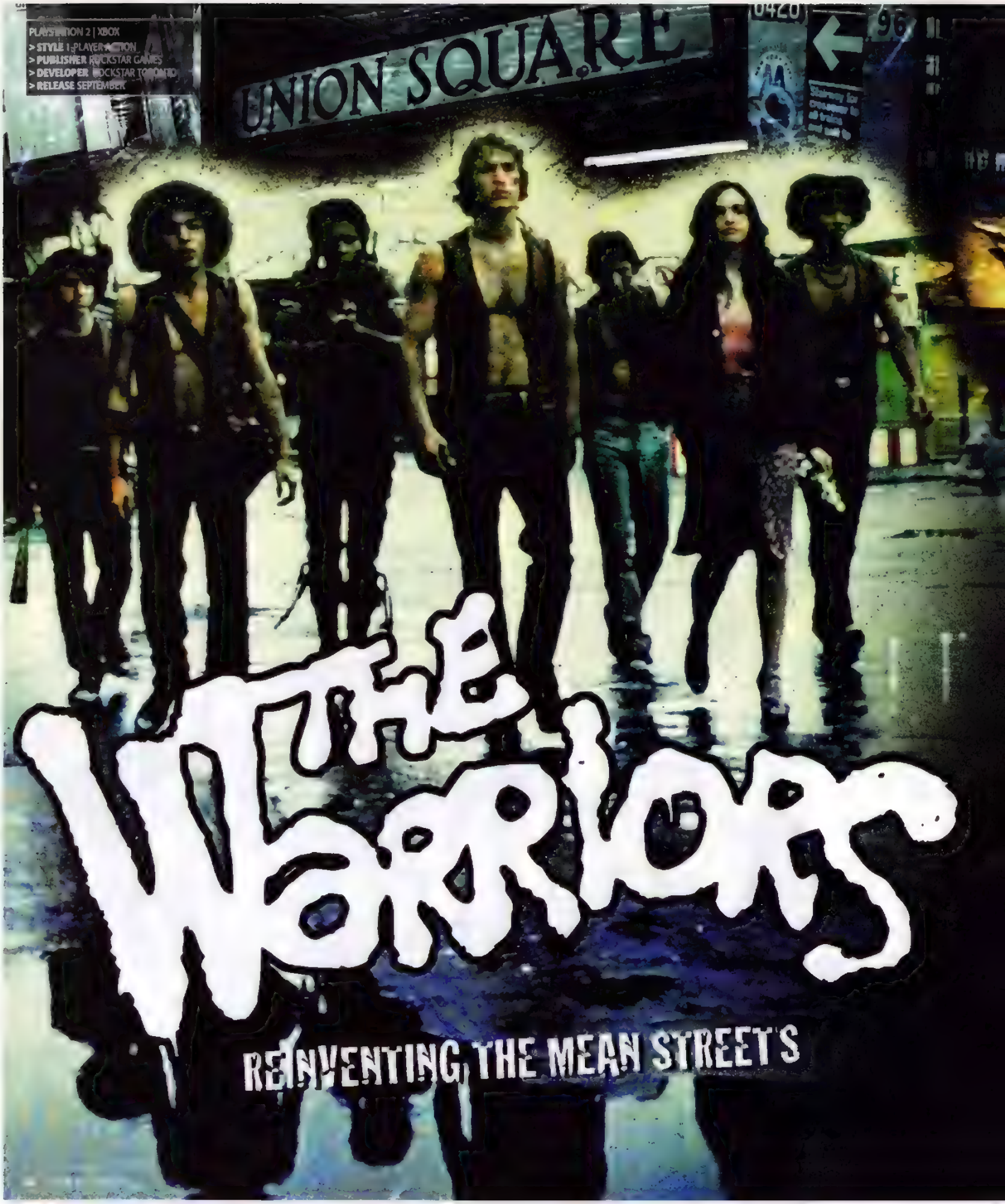

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX
> STYLE 1 PLAYER ACTION
> PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES
> DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR TORONTO
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER
UNION SQUARE
THE WARRIORS
REINVENTING THE MEAN STREETS

New York City. The name itself evokes a wide range of emotions. It's the United States' only truly international city, home to the United Nations and the gateway to America for the immigrants from over 180 countries who reside in its five boroughs. More than any other urban area, New York encompasses the sum total of the American experience, from the exclusive Upper East Side of Manhattan to the rough projects of the Bronx.

Whether or not you've ever been to New York City, you have a picture of it in your head. Thanks to the thousands of films and television directors that presented us their vision of the city, from Woody Allen's Manhattan to Spike Lee's Brooklyn to Scorsese's mean streets, these visions of New York are a part of America's collective unconscious. The strange thing is that many of those images of are a city that no longer exists, a city that has vanished.

For those of our readers not old enough to recall, the New York of the 1970s bears little resemblance to the clean, tourist-friendly city that we visit today. As with many urban areas in the U.S., the '70s were a tumultuous decade for the city, marked by decay and crime. Following the race riots that rocked most of the country in the late 1960s, many affluent New Yorkers fled the city for the suburbs of New Jersey, a phenomenon known as "white flight." As the economy was wracked by a devastating recession, the city fell into disrepair and lawlessness. Times Square, which today is a family-oriented shopping and entertainment district, was dominated by porn theaters, drug dealers, and hookers. In 1975, New York actually came within inches of total bankruptcy, as then-mayor Abe Beame was forced to cede control of the city's finances to the state government.

At the same time, the '70s were also one of the most vibrant periods in New York's cultural history. Low rents allowed a new class of writers, artists, and musicians to overtake whole areas of the city. The East Village gave birth to a thriving art community. Manhattan's cocaine-fueled club scene, especially the iconic Studio 54, was in the thrall of the glamorous disco era. In the Bowery, the so-called "Blank Generation" pioneered punk and new wave music, a phenomenon centered around the legendary CBGB club and musicians like Richard Hell and the Voidoids, Television, the Ramones, and Blondie. Perhaps most importantly, a Jamaican DJ named Kool Herc began throwing parties in the Bronx, jumpstarting hip-hop music and b-boy culture, which today dominates pop music worldwide.

Following the reign of mayor Rudolph Guiliani in the '90s, the city underwent a fundamental change. Crime fell to all-time lows. Graffiti-proof trains and better law enforcement cleaned up the city's notorious subway system. Neighborhood revitalization and rising real estate prices have resulted in a safer, more livable city, but also one that has been somewhat stripped of the mystique that still exists in the imaginations of millions the world over.

Thankfully, the era is preserved for posterity by any number of classic movies. One such film is Walter Hill's *The Warriors* (1979). The Warriors is considered a classic of urban filmmaking, presenting a stylish reinterpretation of the classic western for a different era while also serving as a time capsule of the gritty and gang-infested New York of the late '70s. Now, Rockstar Games, the company that has redefined gaming for the new century, is hard at work on a title that will reintroduce The Warriors to a generation weaned on Grand Theft Auto. However, The Warriors is a game that will defy the expectations of those expecting "Grand Theft Auto: 1979." Because, as Rockstar is bringing back to life a cherished part of pop culture from the past, it is also attempting to envision a new future for a gaming genre that has long fallen into obscurity: the brawler.

The Warriors at their Coney Island home base

On its surface, The Warriors seems like an odd choice for Rockstar. The company is not known for making licensed games, and the license in this case is a film that was only a modest success at the box office over 25 years ago. While the movie does enjoy a tenacious cult following [see sidebar on page 48], it's hardly a blue-chip commercial property the likes of James Bond or Spider-Man.

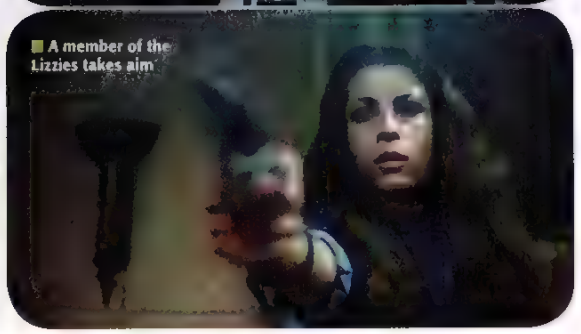
However, for Rockstar, it was a perfect fit. "It had a really big impact. It's permeated pop culture, even to this day. You'll see it referenced constantly in music, fashion, and art," explains Rockstar's Chris Carro. "The guys here and the guys at [Warriors developer] Rockstar Toronto have loved the movie for a long time. New York in the '70s is a very interesting and very different place. It's something that they thought would be pretty cool to share. And the story really…let us have the opportunity to try a different type of gameplay by using what the movie set up."

For those of you who haven't seen *The Warriors*, the film tells a tale that, while perfectly capturing the mood and feel of late '70s New York, is as timeless as any classic outlaw tale. The film starts by following a small group of representatives from the Coney Island Warriors to a gang summit in the Bronx. As it happens, Cyrus, the charismatic leader of the powerful Gramercy Riffs, has summoned nine delegates from each of the over 100 gangs in the city to the meeting. Delivering an impassioned speech, he details how the tens of thousands of gang members of New York could work together to bring the city to its knees. However, as the cheers of the assembled crowd reaches a fever pitch, one of the violent Rogues gang pulls a pistol, shooting Cyrus dead. Soon, cops swarm the park and the gangs, still in shock at the shooting of Cyrus, scatter like roaches. During the confusion, a member of the Rogues claims to have seen a Warrior pull the trigger.

The leader of the Gramercy Riffs

The Turnbull A.C.'s

The Baseball Furies



A member of the Lizzies takes aim

In an instant, the citywide gang truce has been shattered. A police crackdown on all gangs is in full swing. The Warriors are over 50 miles from their Coney Island turf, surrounded by a city full of violent criminals who think they killed Cyrus. With a bounty on their heads, they must survive by any means necessary, relying on their fists and their wits to return home safely.

Along the way, the Warriors encounter a colorful rogues gallery of the city's most vicious gangs. It's these imaginatively costumed toughs that have proven to be the film's most enduring images. Many of the most memorable gangs have become pop culture icons. Among the most popular with fans are the baldheaded Turnbull A.C.s, the Hi-Hats (top-hatted villains perhaps inspired by *A Clockwork Orange*), the sexually ambiguous female gang the Lizzies, and the legendary Baseball Furies, bat-wielding thugs who patrol the streets in ersatz Yankees uniforms and ghoulish face paint.

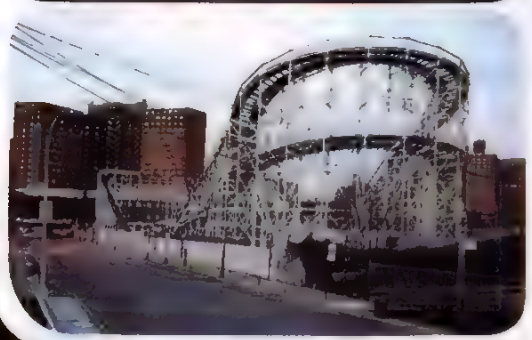
It's this mix of campy theatrics and grim violence that has proven to be the film's true legacy. Filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino and John Woo have cited *The Warriors* as a seminal influence on their filmmaking. Watching *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, it's hard not to see the shadow of *The Warriors* in characters like the Crazy 88.

While viewed from a modern-day perspective *The Warriors* might seem a bit quaint, the late '70s gang violence it depicts was all too real. Speaking with Dick Zigun, a long-time resident and curator of the Coney Island Museum, he recalls the controversy surrounding the film.

"Things were rough in 1979, which is when I came to Coney Island and which is when the movie came out," observes Zigun. "The day it came out, Hollywood was one of the places it did very well, with gangs coming out to see it. There were three different cities where people got stabbed. There were politicians calling for the movie to be banned, that it glorified gang violence."

Walking around the boardwalk with Zigun, he points out actual (now revitalized) Coney Island landmarks that appear in the film, like the Wonder Wheel and the legendary Cyclone roller coaster. We walk down the very same alley where the infamous "Warriors, come out and play!" scene was shot. Along the way, Zigun regales us with stories of the old, seedier Coney Island of the '70s. He recalls being threatened by members of a real-life gang called the Homicides outside of a dancehall and the roving peeping Toms that used to hide under the boardwalk hoping to look up women's skirts. At the time, the decrepit old amusement park and abandoned buildings were a perfect backdrop for criminal activity of all kinds.

"If you aren't from here, it's hard to look at New York now and get any sense of what it was like in the 1970s," says Zigun. "Part of the reputation of the Warriors is that it's a great, stylized art film, but it's the stylization of the truth. Gangs



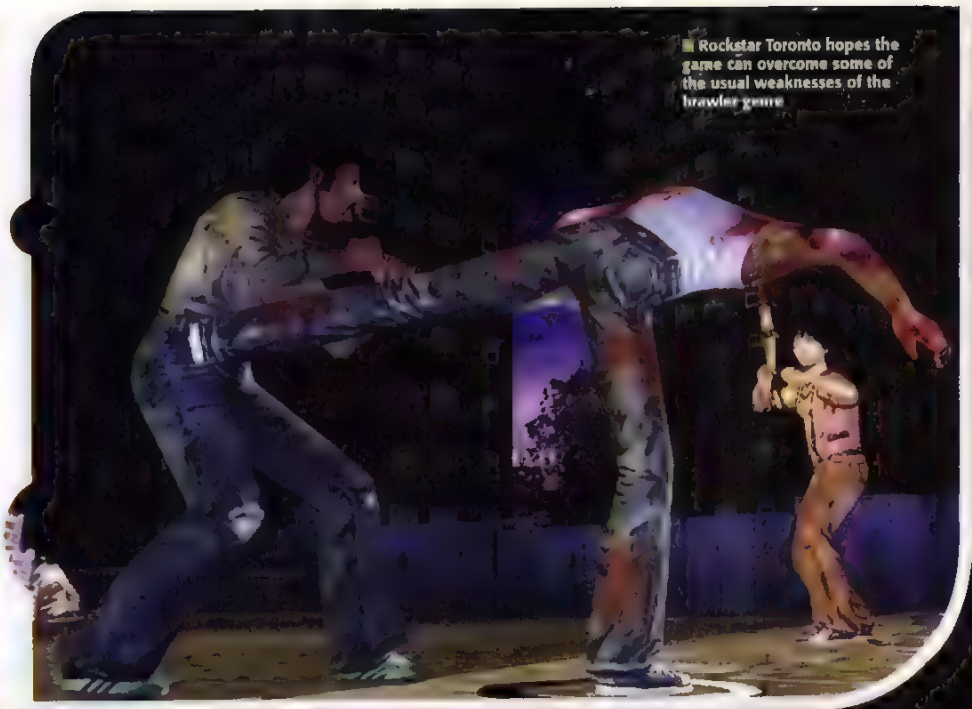
Rockstar has installed this Warriors mural on Coney Island to promote the game

Anatomy of a Cult Classic

While *The Warriors* was by no means a box office blockbuster, the film has maintained a special place in movie history, making it one of the most beloved cult films of all time. Although not shocking by today's standards, in its day *The Warriors* was a frank and controversial look at the gang lifestyle, years before movies like *Colors* and *Boyz 'N The Hood* brought street life into the mainstream. Through its depiction of the emerging hip-hop culture and memorable costuming, *The Warriors* has become an enduring part of movie history.

Although the influence of *The Warriors* can be felt throughout popular culture – from punk bands like The Baseball Furies to Michael Jackson's iconic "Beat It" video – the film's continuing popularity is largely due to a generation of hip-hop artists who have referenced, sampled, and quoted the film in video and in song. From Ol' Dirty Bastard's memorable exclamation of "Warriors come out and play!" on the classic *Enter the 36 Chambers* to Puff Daddy's bottle-clinking appearance at the beginning of the video for Craig Mack's "Flava in Ya Ear (Remix)" video, rap artists have consistently shown their love for the film. Besides *Scarface*, probably no other movie has been referenced in hip-hop as many times as *The Warriors*. The love continues to this day, as evidenced in the Diplomats' recent hit video for "Crunk Musik", where members of the group appear in Baseball Furies makeup.

However, the cult of *The Warriors* extends far beyond hip-hop. Dozens of fan sites for the movie exist around the world. The film is often the theme of Halloween parties and special events, including a huge bash hosted in Brooklyn last year that featured such trendy guest DJs as The Rapture's Matt Safer and Tim Sweeney of the hot dance music production team DFA. Hoping to cash in on the enduring trend, Mezco Toyz recently announced that it is releasing a line of Warriors toys this summer.



■ Rockstar Toronto hopes the game can overcome some of the usual weaknesses of the brawler genre

weren't quite like that, but much more so than you might realize looking around Coney Island now."

As rich as the source material is, Rockstar Toronto realized that the video game market would demand a saga that stretched far beyond the bounds of a two-hour film. At the same time, the team wanted to remain true to the original story arc. To solve this conundrum, they've come up with a clever solution that should please both gamers and fans of the film.

Besides providing the game with a rich historical backdrop, *The Warriors*' bare-knuckled street fighting made the property a perfect fit for a brawler title, a genre that the Toronto team feels is in dire need of an overhaul.

> "This game, at its heart, is a brawler. We love Streets of Rage; we love Double Dragon. We wanted to take that to the next level."

"*The Warriors* has always been a favorite film of a lot of us," comments Warriors producer Jeronimo Barrera. "What we wanted to do was to take everything in the movie, make it interactive, and then expand on [it]. The movie takes place in the course of one night. That's great, but it's not going to make much of a game. So, what we decided to do is make a whole universe around the Warriors. What do they do from day to day? We're putting the player in the Warriors. You get to reenact the stuff from the movie, plus you get to understand who the Warriors are and how they came together. We really explore and expand the mythos of the world."

Instead of altering the plot, Rockstar has conceived a lengthy script that takes place in the months leading up to the events of the film. This story comprises the first portion of the game. During these stages, you'll learn how the Warriors came together, as well as learn more about their place in the complex hierarchy of the New York gang system. In one scene, we saw Rembrandt, the fresh-faced graffiti artist from the film, earning his gang vest by fighting members of the Warriors as a right of initiation. In these early stages, you'll be able to explore the Warriors' world, freely going in and out of missions via a vintage New York subway map that hangs on the wall at their hangout, which serves as the game's hub. However, in order to preserve the integrity of the original script, after the Bronx meeting where Cyrus is killed, the levels will unfold in a more linear fashion, following the film's plot, as the Warriors fight their way through New York back to Coney Island.

For Rockstar, the way to revitalize the brawler was to follow the path that the company has carved out over the course of this console generation. Perhaps more than any other publisher in video games, Rockstar defines itself not by genres or styles of gameplay, but by an overall aesthetic. By sticking to a few core principles – most notably cultural relevance, freedom of choice, and adult-oriented content – the company has developed a real identity. A Rockstar game feels like a Rockstar game, whether it's a racing title like Midnight Club or a western shoot 'em up like Red Dead Revolver. It's also not afraid to share ideas and concepts amongst its titles and development houses. At the launch of the PS2, Midnight Club became the first real open-city racer, setting the stage for Grand Theft Auto III. More recently, elements of the grim stealth title Manhunt surfaced in San Andreas, in

the form of stealth kills. Despite the fact that the brawler is a genre the company has yet to tackle, Barrera feels confident that they can make a game that's true to the company's heritage.

"In terms of gameplay, we really wanted to do something unique," he states. "We're always raising the bar and taking it to the next level with all of our stuff. And, in the same way we've taken the driving genre off the track with the Midnight Club series, or with the cinematic storytelling of the GTA series and the interactivity that it brings to the world – we wanted to do that with the brawler."

Based on an early demo of the game we saw at Rockstar's New York headquarters, The Warriors looks to accomplish the team's lofty goals through a design that plays to the traditional strengths of the brawling genre while offering gamers more than they've ever seen in a title like this before.

As you might expect, Rockstar is approaching the game's basic fighting mechanics with an emphasis on the bloody, visceral action that permeates much of the company's work. "The fighting is really brutal," explains Chris Carro. "We really want the player to wince in pain."

In crafting the combat system, the Toronto team started with the basic building blocks of any brawler: basic heavy and light attack buttons. Using a couple face buttons, most players should be able to quickly pummel their opponents. However, what might initially seem like a fairly shallow beat 'em up eventually reveals many more layers of depth, something that the developers are intent on delivering.

"We want people to be able to pick this up and button mash and look awesome," comments Barrera, "but we also want people that are more familiar with fighting games and the timing elements of fighting games to be able to [do counter attacks]. It gets pretty deep."

Here's where things get interesting. Inspired by the classic kung-fu films of the '70s and the over-the-top fighting in the original film, The Warriors allows players to perform what are being called "snap attacks". These moves allow you to take on multiple enemies at one time, which is necessary given the fact that you'll often be outnumbered by rival gang members. It works like this: through a savvy, proximity-based auto-targeting system, the player will focus his main attacks on a specific enemy. Although your primary target can be toggled on the fly, sometimes a swifter countermove is called for. In the instance that you see an enemy assaulting you from behind, by correctly timing the press of an attack button and a backwards flick of the analog stick your character will quickly deliver an elbow or fist towards the oncoming foe. Imagine many of Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan's signature moves, and you'll get an idea of what snap attacks are all about.

Another main focus of The Warrior's combat system is groundwork and grappling. During a brawl, getting your opponent off his feet and onto the hard pavement is often key to success. By simple controller inputs you can grab, throw, and tackle your opponents. At this point, things get bloody. During our demo, we watched as Warriors mercilessly pummeled rival gang members, holding them down on the ground and delivering vicious punches, face stomps, and body blows. By swinging the analog stick, you'll also be able to use grabs to throw your opponents into walls and through crates or drag them across the ground. Of course, enemies can grab you as well, but with an expertly timed press of the top button you can often reverse the hold and gain the upper hand.

Although the basic attacks for each character are fairly similar, each of the Warriors does specialize in one of three unique fighting styles: street fighter, kung fu, and brawler. Street fighter is a balanced, boxing-oriented style,

■ The game focuses on brutal grapples and ground attacks

with a more reckless and powerful approach. Kung fu characters rely on finesse, dispensing painful chops and more acrobatic special moves. As you become more acclimated to the control scheme, you'll begin to discover elaborate, multi-tiered combo strings, all of which are different depending on the position of you and your enemy, resulting in hundreds of possible variations.

As expected, The Warriors will also feature another staple of the brawling genre: the Rage meter. As you continue fighting, your meter will fill and when you've accumulated enough Rage, pressing R1 and L1 simultaneously will send your Warrior into murderous frenzy. At this point, you'll be able to pull off outrageous special moves that quickly dispense your foes. Because you are so often fighting large groups of enemies at once, using your Rage meter judiciously will be key to surviving the in the urban jungle. Rage also serves as a way of giving an extra advantage to truly skilled players. "Rage mode is something to reward the player that learns the combo system," comments Carro. "If you're just button mashing, it will be more difficult to get into Rage mode."

Of course, in this world of no-rules street fighting, you won't have to rely solely on your fists. Numerous objects in the environment can be turned into makeshift weapons – blunt armaments like baseball bats, pipes, broken bottles, and planks. Although Rockstar wouldn't confirm any other types of weapons, we expect to see a number of other implements of destruction in the final build, perhaps even guns.

Throughout the development process, the team has taken care to make sure that combat is finely tuned and free of the poor collision and sloppy animation that plagues many brawlers.

Barrera explains, "We've spent a lot of time working on the combat to get all these situations right. Every time you add a move, you have to say, "We've got hundreds of moves, how do you get them to line up together?" You literally have to sit there and make sure they all [work]. It's not automated. There's all these people out there with their fancy physics systems, and I think in the next generation you'll see a lot more of that, but right now it's just literally looking at each animation, making sure that every react works with every punch."

As much care that is going into perfecting the core brawler mechanics, Rockstar Toronto wanted to make a game that gives players the feeling of being a part of a gang, not just a lone combatant. "Not only [do we have] an easy, pick-up-and-play sensibility like those old fighting games," reveals Barrera, "but we are also adding the gang element to it. You run with a gang; you can give them commands."

During the course of the game, you'll play as each of the Warriors, acting as "War Chief", a battlefield designation that means you're calling the shots for the gang for a temporary period. As War Chief, you can issue commands to your fellow members through a radial analog-stick menu that is activated by holding the R2 button. Although, based on the quick glimpses we saw of the onscreen command menu during our demo, there looks to be somewhere in the neighborhood of six to eight squad commands, Rockstar would only confirm the existence of three: "Let's Go", "Hold Up", and "Trash". Let's Go and Hold Up are exactly what you'd expect – simple orders to either follow your lead or stay in the current position. Often, you'll find it best to have the gang hang back while you advance ahead to inspect the situation.

The Trash command is aptly named. Basically, it allows you to sic your street soldiers on whatever hapless target you see fit. Once you issue the order, your crew begins a brutal attack on everything that comes in its path. However, your AI teammates are very aware and will take cues from your behavior. We watched as the Warriors tore apart a parked police car. Then, as the War Chief punched through a window of a nearby store, the Warriors took that as a signal and began destroying the store, throwing garbage cans through its plate-glass windows.

The gang dynamic extends throughout the game, as the AI system in place is sophisticated enough to let you work in tandem with other Warriors during battle. Just as you can place enemies in holds and grapples, your teammates will frequently grab a rival gang member, allowing you the opportunity to team up for brutal co-op attacks.

Gameplay elements like these help build a strong sense of brotherhood between you and your computer-controlled cohorts, and you'll frequently be called on to come to the aid of another Warrior in need. In combat, you can heal another gang member with a drug called "Flash" (Rockstar's version of the popular '70s inhalant amyl nitrate or "poppers"). If another of your number is pinned down by the police or being attacked by another group of thugs, it's your job to go save him. This group mentality adds a new layer to the usual brawler formula, and we expect that this aspect of the game will be greatly expanded upon by the time The Warriors releases in September.

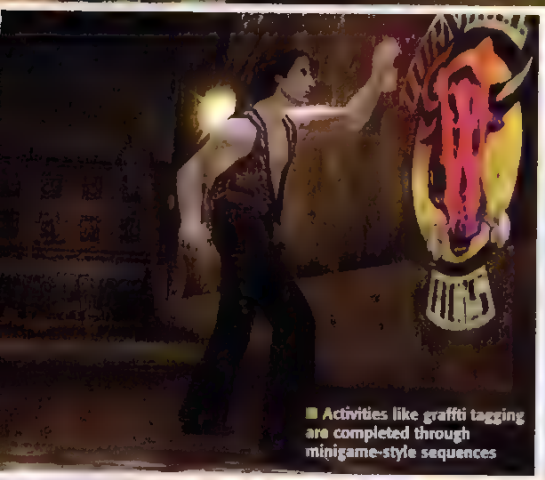
While much has been done to make sure that the fighting is compelling in its own right, Rockstar Toronto also saw another area in which the brawling genre could be moved forward. For the most part, the typical brawler

(continued on pg. 52)

> "...in the same way we've taken the driving genre off the track with the Midnight Club series, or with the cinematic storytelling of the GTA series and the interactivity that it brings to the world – we wanted to do that with the brawler."

As War Chief, you'll command your fellow gang members

Characters will display progressive damage like cuts and bruises



Activities like graffiti tagging are completed through minigame-style sequences

Steal car stereos for extra cash – just make sure it's an 8-track

■ The game has very accurate character models

"The key to making this game successful is variety," comments Barrera. "We will do whatever it takes with all our mechanics to give the player something to do besides walk around and beat up people."

is only nominally "3D", as the player is confined to a series of very linear and closed-in streets and platforms. This is about to change.

"There's this common creative thread that runs through our games," observes Barrera. "We love that aspect of trying to make it feel real. And we're going to try to do the same thing with The Warriors. . .All those [other brawlers] are isometric, where it's like you're in a maze. In this, with the full camera control, we want the player to explore the environment."

In other games of this nature, the concept of "exploration", if addressed at all, has been limited to a few instances where a character can climb up on a ledge or box at certain predetermined points. In The Warriors, the large environments are there for the player to navigate at will. You'll be able to vault over fences and scale ladders, run over rooftops and jump across the gaps between buildings. Most levels are large enough to incorporate multiple paths for each mission, and observant players will find that this virtual New York holds many secrets to discover. Besides making the game seem more real to the player, learning the expansive levels will be necessary to your survival.

"You see the Warriors [in the movie] and you see what they do," claims Barrera. "We needed to capture all of that – running from police, jumping over fences, and hiding. These guys are outnumbered most of the time, so they really knew how to use their environment to get out of situations, and we needed to get that across in the game as well."

As the saying goes, discretion is often the better part of valor, and to that end The Warriors has taken a few cues from Rockstar North's Manhunt. Although the game's focus is on fighting, sometimes using stealth can help you get the drop on a rival gang. Enemies are extremely aware, but by staying in shadow and out of their field of vision, you and your crew will be able to turn the tables on your foes. As in Manhunt, you'll also be able to throw small objects like glass bottles to distract an opponent before you attack. This is especially important considering that NPCs will call for backup, turning a three-on-one advantage into a 13-to-three mismatch in an instant. Catching enemies by surprise will help you take them out before they have time to shout for help.

With this much effort being expended to create environments that capture a truly realistic look and feel, it should be no surprise that The Warriors offers players more to do than just skulking around vacant alleys.

■ This looks like trouble

"The key to making this game successful is variety," comments Barrera. "We will do whatever it takes with all our mechanics to give the player something to do besides walk around and beat up people."

As the Grand Theft Auto series has demonstrated, the success of a game depends on making the audience feel that they are a part of a living, breathing world. The Warriors accomplishes this in a number of ways. The most notable of these are the numerous illegal activities you'll be able to take part in on the streets of New York. To afford more Flash, which you purchase from dealers who man street corners throughout the city, you'll have to earn money any way you can. Some of the ways to grab a quick buck include mugging, robbing stores, and stealing car stereos.

Ingeniously, all of these activities are accomplished through brief minigame-style sequences. During a mugging, you'll grab an unsuspecting mark, which will bring up a small circular meter. At this point, you have to tweak the analog stick until your controller vibrates and the meter resets. After a few chokeholds are applied in this fashion, your victim will give up whatever cash and information he has.

Although it's easy enough to pull a smash-and-grab break-in, sometimes a more subtle approach will pay off. Picking the locks of stores and even police handcuffs is done through timed button presses, as you line up the notches on the rotating lock mechanism. To extract a car stereo, it's a simple matter of twirling the analog sticks to unscrew it from its mounting. You'll also be asked to commit petty crimes, like tagging Warriors graffiti in rival turf. This is done by tracing a "W" onscreen with the analog stick. By doing activities like this, you'll gain money that can be spent on Flash and paid out to bums for inside information, as well as access to bonus missions in the level.

This commitment to creating a truly immersive experience extends to the game's production values. Rockstar Toronto has made a tremendous effort to capture the visual atmosphere of the film. Running on a highly customized version of Renderware, The Warriors displays the same gritty-yet-exaggerated vibe that Walter Hill perfected in the film version, staying true to his original vision. The character models for all the Warriors look eerily accurate, and during battle you'll see their faces become bloodied and bruised through a progressive damage system.

The levels themselves display a near perfect mood and look, based on Rockstar's extensive photo research of the neighborhoods that make up the settings in the film. Walking through the game, observant gamers will notice a wealth of small touches that help create the illusion that you're really exploring 1970s New York. On Coney Island, you'll hear the faint echo of carnival music in the background and, if you gaze up at the Wonder Wheel, even see the individual baskets on the ferris wheel swaying in the breeze.

"We've tried to recreate the neighborhoods," claims Barrera. "It's not like you can take a map of the Bronx and say 'This is where we're at," but we've worked hard to capture the vibe of the different neighborhoods. We went and took all the photographs. There are a lot of landmarks, so if you've been to the Bronx you will recognize it."

Although the game uses no full-motion video footage, many of the most famous scenes for the film are recreated using in-game graphics. We were lucky enough to see Rockstar's interpretation of Cyrus's iconic "Can You Dig It?" speech at the gang summit, and would have been hard-pressed to tell the difference between the game and the real thing. Although it appeared to be a shot-for-shot duplicate, Barrera confirmed that several minutes had been trimmed for brevity's sake.

Although the developers, who have full access to all the art assets from the film, are hoping to use as many of the original actors' voices in the game as possible, the passage of time has made this impossible in some cases. Given that the film was shot over 25 years ago, many of the actors' voices sound much different today. More sadly, some of the cast members have died, including Lynne Thigpen, who played the film's mysterious DJ. Given the expanded role the DJ will play in the game, serving as a narrator and providing information on missions over the radio in the Warrior's hangout, pulling audio tracks from the film isn't an option. Chalk it up to the challenges of making a game based on a classic property, but Rockstar feels confident it can secure voice talent that's appropriate to the source material. For the musical portion of the game, The Warriors will feature all the original score and memorable songs (including Arnold McCuller's version of the Motown classic "Nowhere to Run" and Joe Walsh's "In the City" as well as new tracks that emulate the eerie synthesizer throb of the film's soundtrack.

It's this kind of attention to detail that the team feels will separate The Warriors from the forgettable beat 'em ups that have been released to poor sales and lukewarm reviews in the last few years (anyone remember The Bouncer? Didn't think so.) "We needed to raise the bar on brawlers and that's what we're trying to do," claims Barrera.

However, despite the considerable effort and resources that Rockstar is putting into the project, the question remains: Can The Warriors revive a genre that's been commercially and artistically moribund for the last decade?

Based on what we've seen, we suspect that they've got more than a fighting chance. If anything, the genre's sagging fortunes is more an indication of the lack of imagination and ambition on the part of the game industry. As other genres evolved towards providing more intense and cinematic experiences, the brawler was allowed to stagnate, with title after title that delivered nothing more than more graphically pleasing versions of 16-bit game design. With The Warriors, Rockstar is hoping to build a brawler for the 21st century. If they succeed, it could be a new beginning for genre that's been out of the spotlight for far too long.

CALL OF DUTY:

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD)
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** TREYARCH
> **RELEASE** FALL

There are some storied military units that have left a legacy of respect and admiration in the minds of the nation. *Band of Brothers* recently pulled the exploits and heroism of the 101st Airborne into focus. The Light Brigade's final charge in the Crimean War is memorialized in poem. Frank Miller's comic mini-series *300* retells (and fictionalizes) the true story of courage shown by a troop of Spartan warriors that has percolated down to us through the centuries. And now, Activision is honoring a group that stands easily in this elite company: the United States Army's First Infantry Division. Known to some as the Fighting First, their crimson insignia has also earned them the simple moniker of the Big Red One.

BIG RED ONE

RETELLING AN AMERICAN LEGEND

One Squad, One Story

"When they talk about the 82nd Airborne or the 101st Airborne paratrooping, it was the First that was there first," Treyarch creative director Christian Busic informs us. Deep inside Activision's sprawling complex in sunny Los Angeles, Busic, executive producer Thaine Lyman, and senior producer Robb Alvey are waxing eloquent about their plans for this next step in the acclaimed Call of Duty franchise on consoles (see page 94 for details on the next PC title). And from the camouflage netting that drapes cubicle walls to grandiose plans for ordering a bona fide .50-cal machine gun nest to decorate the team's work space, it's clear that there is a lot of passion in this building. Not just for the game, though – as Busic details the accomplishments of the First, the light in his eyes matches the fervor of a Red Sox fan recounting the 2004 World Series. "I had this huge document of all of these surviving Big Red One veterans. Reading down their bios it's like, 'Medal of Honor, Medal of Honor, Medal of Honor,'" says Busic. "That was one of the things that motivated me – these are amazing people....*Band of Brothers* came out, and that really glorifies [the 101st Airborne]. And they were great! But no one glorifies the Big Red One, and they were just as great if not greater."

Of course, the mere fact that the team admires the Big Red One isn't the reason that this new Call of Duty title follows the unit. It's quite the opposite, in fact. The concept for the game came first, when Activision decided to go with a more story-based approach rather than the constant character-switching in Call of Duty: Finest Hour and the PC games. After that decision was made, the Fighting First was a natural fit with what the publisher wanted to do with this title. "With Big Red One, we're going with a little bit of a departure from the previous games in the series," says Lyman. "We're really digging more into that squad experience and keeping you as a member of the same squad as the same character the entire way through the game." This approach allows Activision to address one of the primary concerns players had with Finest Hour – a lack of connection to the characters.

However, Big Red One is as much about seeing different facets of the war as its predecessor, which is yet another reason to showcase the Fighting First. According to Busic, "One of the hallmarks of Call of Duty is historical accuracy, so when we sat down to do this one, we were like, 'Okay, we really want to show these different theaters of operation. Who was actually there?' The game design itself came from history." The campaign in Big Red One faithfully follows the First throughout the course of the war, and it truly is surprising how much action this unit saw. From the first beachhead in North Africa to the Allied assault on Sicily and Italy to D-Day and the final offensive against Germany itself, the First's tour of duty provides ample opportunity for the game to explore a large variety of settings. "If you look at a lot of the other WWII games out there, the large majority of them start with D-Day, and that's what a lot of people think of as the start of American involvement," declares Busic. "This gives us a chance to follow the beginning of America's involvement in the European and Mediterranean theaters." And if you're wondering whether or not this focus on the First will live up to the Call of Duty standard of epic conflict, the team has that covered as well. "One of the sort of unique moments is that there was a volcano that was active at the time that the First was in Sicily," says Lyman. That's right, there will be a volcano blowing up in the background to accompany the Nazis blowing up in the foreground.

All of this new emphasis on telling the story of one soldier and his squad is for naught if Big Red One doesn't make some serious strides forward in the way war games present characters. Fortunately, nobody knows this as well as the team at Treyarch. "One of the things that we do with [Big Red One] that hasn't been done in any WWII game to date is that our characters change through the course of the game. You see them get older. You see them get wizened," says Busic. "At points through the game their outfits show wear, the guys will show facial hair growth, things like that." As cool as this sounds, the true value of this feature is in the contrast it highlights. As the death toll mounts, new faces are shipped in from the States to replace your fallen brethren. And, obviously, they look quite a bit different than the guys who have been at war for a few years. "You know they're replacements – as soon as you see the guy come in in the crisp green uniform, and he still actually has his can for his gas mask, he's got the cover for his rifle…because you've played through the game, your guys have ditched all that," says Busic. "You'll see a very stark change in the looks on their faces, and how they look, by the time that they're pushing towards Germany." This character progression isn't limited to a few changes in the models, either. "You can actually see them progress as a fighting unit throughout the game," says Busic. In other words, their AI will literally change as they learn more about being soldiers.

Another way that Activision is trying to define the characters is through animation. All of the things a soldier carries – helmet, canteen, various bags, and etc. – are animated separately and have sounds synched to those movements. Each of the major characters has their own motion-capture actor, which allows them to have their own distinctive set of movements. From the way he adjusts his helmet to his firing stance, the goal is to have every guy be recognizable just by watching him move. "When you see a guy running, you're going to know who he his," says Busic. Additionally, everybody will be fully lip-synced, lending that extra immersive touch to the in-game scripted cutscenes that Call of Duty is known for.

But what's a sequel without gameplay improvements to go along with the changes in design philosophy? Two major additions are being grafted onto the Call of Duty formula that have great implications for the meat of Big Red One's FPS action. First, we got a small glimpse of what Treyarch is calling "targets of opportunity." These will be small sidequest-like events that occur on or close to your path through a level and present a chance to demonstrate your heroism. Whether it be assisting a separate pinned-down squad or dealing with a unit of enemies that aren't necessarily in your way, taking advantage of a target of opportunity will award points that can be used to purchase rewards – though Activision won't say what they will be quite yet. The other change, which likewise could be awesome, is that Activision assures us that levels are being designed in such a way that players will be able to complete tasks through different means. You'll still have to accomplish your goals, but how you go about that should be much more up to your discretion than was the case in Finest Hour.

The Fighting First

To get a sense of the extent of the First's contribution to WWII, consider these numbers:

- Over 50,000 members of the division took part in World War II
- The First had around 21,000 casualties during the course of the war, some of them to the same soldiers multiple times
- All told, the unit accumulated more than 20,000 medals and awards including literally dozens of Medals of Honor
- In addition to all this, the First took approximately 100,000 enemies prisoner

The Sweet Symphony of Battle

From the orchestrated score to the chaotic melody of battle, sound design has definitely been a strength for the Call of Duty franchise. In this as in all things, though, Activision and Treyarch aren't satisfied with maintaining the status quo. The new offices housing the team include a brand-new sound studio with the latest equipment (built from the ground up to take full advantage of 5.1 surround sound), and you'd better believe that it is being put to good use. It could be completely new samples to work from ("I don't think that [the MP40] has ever sounded very good in any of these games," says audio director Tom Hays) or vast technical improvements to the internal workings of the game's audio, but the sound in Big Red One looks to be getting major upgrades. "We're really trying to give [Big Red One] a dynamic range," says Hays. For us non-audio professionals, this means that a lot of work is going into getting away from the "wall of sound" that smashed players over the head in Finest Hour. If Hays has his way, you'll be able to easily tell the direction and distance of pretty much any gunshot, shout, or explosion that happens, provided you have the requisite speaker setup, of course.

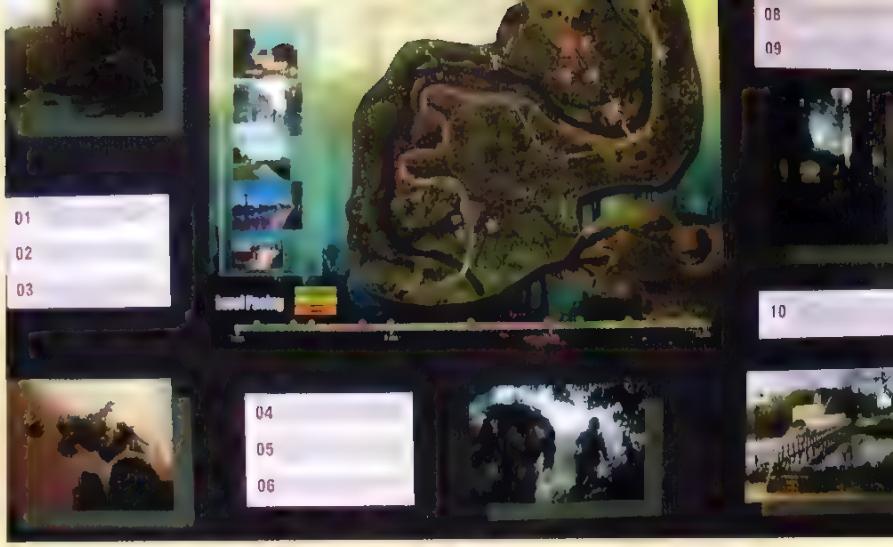
Knowing where a gunshot is coming from is all well and good, but doesn't add a ton to the experience if it sounds like a wussy little cap gun. "There's a lot of sounds for these weapons that even movie studios don't have," says Dan Moditch, the self-described "gun guy" of the project. "*Saving Private Ryan* used the wrong .30-cal, for instance." How does he know this? Because he's shot one at a firing range -- that's how hard core this guy is. The firing range experience is invaluable, and not just for the high-fidelity recordings that become the gunshot samples. Some things, like finding out that the Thompson doesn't have as much recoil as you'd think or that a .30-cal is actually possible to fire from the hip, are best learned firsthand. With this knowledge, and approximately 300 reference photos he takes of each gun he models, Moditch is able to recreate firearms to an astonishing level of detail. Everything down to the scratches from the bolt-action motion and the serial number molded into the stock gets translated into the game. Even the muzzle flashes are different depending on the time of day and lighting conditions.

When asked about any improvements to the often-clumsy tank controls in Finest Hour, Lyman simply smiled and said, "Our tank controls are good."

> "The game design itself came from history."

Soldiers they may be, but a lot of these guys are a mere 18 or 19 years old

A Battle Of Wits



These storyboards lay out everything about a level, from pacing to graphical style

"One of the things that was less well-received about Finest Hour was the AI," says Lyman. It's no surprise that improving this aspect is a big part of the creation of Big Red One. "That was job one, to get that AI module working," adds Busic. Especially since it ties in so directly to the goal of enriching the squad and character elements of the game. After all, it's tough to give a damn about your mates if they insist on charging into enemy fire constantly. Lyman and Busic assure us that this will definitely not be the case in Big Red One. "We've taken the Call of Duty PC AI from [the PC expansion pack] United Offensive and adapted that for consoles," says Lyman. "Especially on the squadmember side, we're really using it to ensure the goal of getting you more into the squad." The primary effect of this, besides cutting down on the idiocy that's so detrimental to immersion, is the chatter of your squad.

For one thing, the outside-of-combat banter between the guys promises to be much truer to the reality of WWII than anything to date. Alvey outlines the philosophy behind this: "nineteen-year old kids didn't talk like they do in most other games. You know how you talked when you were 18 or 19. You f***ed around with your friends and made smartass comments, and that's what we're trying to bring to this." Also, because of the robust adopted AI system from United Offensive, each member of your squad has his or her own situational awareness in Big Red One. If your pointman sees a Nazi ducking behind a wall up in front of you, for instance, he'll say just that. Plus, your guys will react according to the situation as they see it – laying down suppressive fire, seeking cover points, all that good stuff. And it's all possible because of the newly-formed team working on Big Red One.

For those who follow the ins and outs of development companies, the choice of Treyarch (the internal Activision studio that worked on Spider-Man 2) for this project would seem a bit odd. With the lack of FPS credentials on the studio's resume, why in the world would Activision assign it to one of the company's flagship franchises? The answer is simple: The team behind Big Red One isn't just Treyarch personnel, it contains the recently acquired Grey Matter staff as well. Grey Matter, you may recall, created the very same United Offensive that is contributing its AI system. In addition to its familiarity with the Call of Duty franchise, the former Grey Matter team brings a deep knowledge of FPS gameplay to the table. Along with Treyarch's console expertise, including the studio's proprietary rendering system that frees Big Red One from the bonds of Renderware, Activision deems this a winning equation. "We've put together a team with top-level talent, the best of both worlds," says Lyman.

A large part of why this huge (the team currently numbers above 60 people) amalgamation of creative people can tackle the Herculean task they've set for themselves is the way that Big Red One's workflow is streamlined. Before anything at all gets set down in the game's code, a massive amount of preproduction work is done. A poster-sized map [see inset] of each level is made detailing the layout, pacing, and key events. Reference photos and concept art are pasted on to make sure the vision for a level is clear. Everything has to be accurate, right down to the types of trees that grow in the area. "I've been on a lot of developments where you sort of create games on the fly, and a lot of times that doesn't work. You end up throwing away a lot more than you keep," says Lyman. "This studio has the philosophy that we make a lot of great stuff; we don't want to throw any of it away. So we try to minimize that very early in the project."

Not only is this massively beneficial in terms of not wasting time ("What ends up on screen will end up being 75-80 percent of what's on these boards," according to Lyman), they're also part of Treyarch's core design strategy. "The guys that build this are actually the guys that build the map, so they feel an ownership of what's going into that level," says Lyman. Busic adds, "These teams will work on this map all the way from conception to completion. It's going to be their level." It seems obvious that when you involve someone's personal pride in the product, the results can only improve. Of course, the work doesn't end there – team leads and department heads iterate the design of a level several times, making sure that it's becoming the best it can be. During this phase Hollywood-style tricks and techniques, like facades and forced perspective, are added to increase the cinematic impact of the setting, as well.

The first natural reaction of many gamers, on hearing about Big Red One will no doubt be along the lines of, "Oh, great. Another WWII game. Gee, I've never played one of those before." With the myriad improvements and new features that are on the table for Call of Duty: Big Red One, however, the prospects of a deeper and even more visceral experience coming our way look mighty fine. In the words of Lyman, "Just making it through, and making sure your buddies make it through – that's really the centerpiece of Call of Duty." ■■■

Every one of these soldiers will move in a distinct way

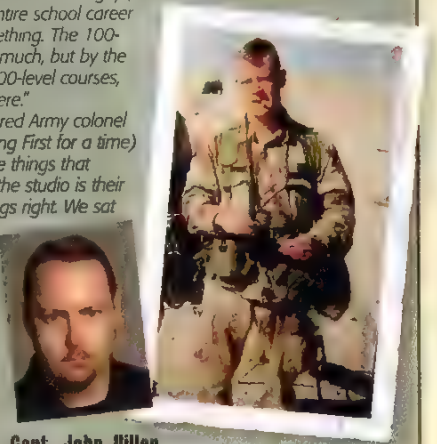
The amount of chaos that unfolds onscreen is truly impressive given the capabilities of the PS2

★Authenticity At Any Cost★

Besides the hours and hours of research about the Fighting First done by the team at Treyarch, including an extended visit to the Fighting First's museum, the advice and feedback of two military advisors are integral in the creation of Big Red One. Captain John Hillen and Colonel Hank Kiersey have been on board since the inception of the franchise and lend a certain authority to the claims of accuracy made by Treyarch. Lyman likens this extended relationship to academic study: "It's one thing to get a class with these guys, but when you get to spend an entire school career with them, you really get to something. The 100-level course is only gonna be so much, but by the time you get into the 300 and 400-level courses, you've got some real material there."

Col. Hank Kiersey

It's no small feat to have a retired Army colonel (who even served with the Fighting First for a time) make comments like, "One of the things that impressed us about the guys at the studio is their absolute commitment to get things right. We sat down one time to talk with them for about 30 minutes and it turned into more like four hours." Capt. Hillen adds, "If veterans of the division see the game as almost all of the other veterans that we've talked to and brought into the network, they'll see it as an extraordinary tribute to their actions."



Capt. John Hillen

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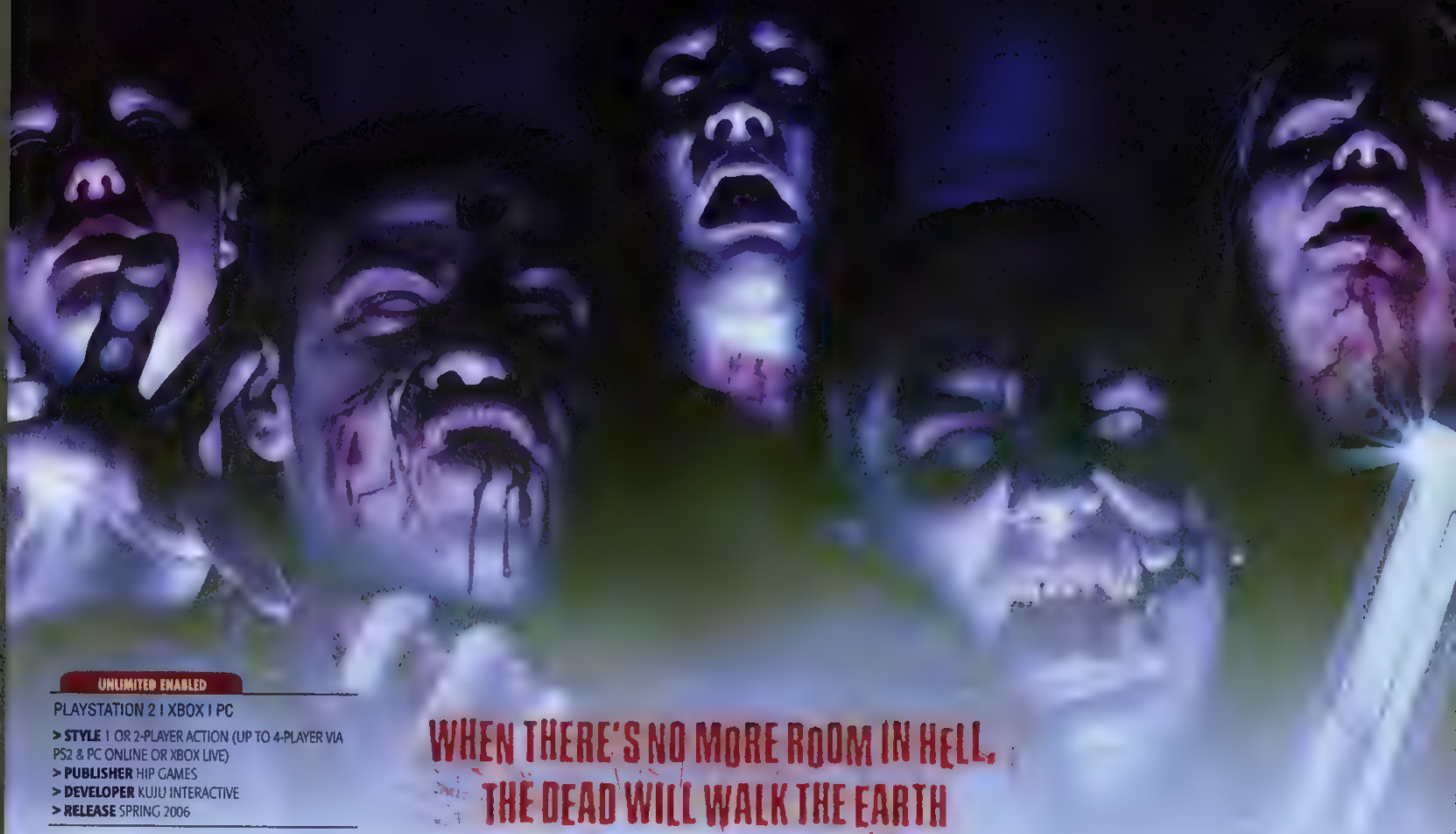
GEORGE A. ROMERO PRESENTS

CITY OF THE DEAD



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WHEN THERE'S NO MORE ROOM IN HELL, THE DEAD WILL WALK THE EARTH

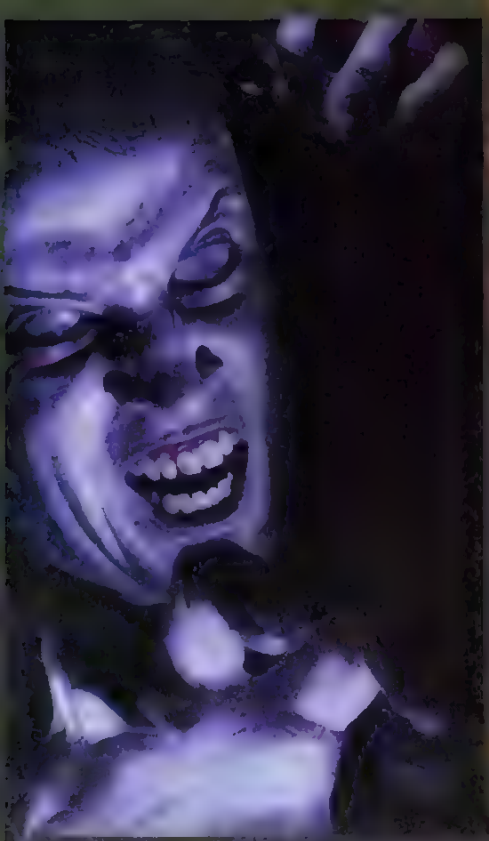
Amongst fans of the horror genre, those who produce works so frightening that they become permanent parts of pop culture are revered as gods. Stephen King, Wes Craven, and John Carpenter have all managed to create books and films so successful that even those who avoid horror know their names. But before any of them made an impact with their tales of terror, there was George A. Romero.

Now and forever, George Romero's name will be synonymous with zombies. As director and co-writer of the seminal 1968 zombie film *Night of the Living Dead*, Romero created the blueprint for all zombie films to follow. At the time, the film was viewed as shockingly graphic, nihilistic, and surprisingly intelligent. It was successful enough to spawn two sequels (with a third on the way shortly), ensuring that Romero's legacy would forever be centered on the walking dead.

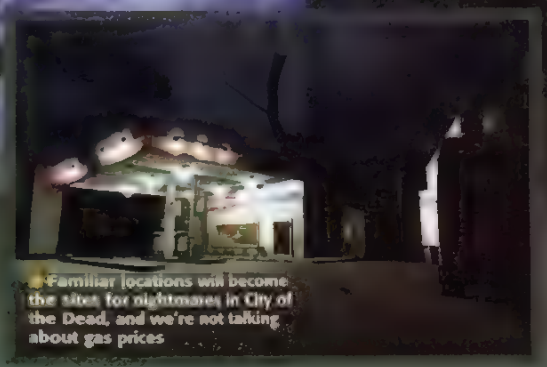
With the renewed interest in zombie films thanks to the popularity of *28 Days Later*, *Shaun of the Dead*, and the remake of Romero's own *Dawn of the Dead*, the time is right for a zombie video game backed by Romero himself. Although Romero's fourth *Dead* movie, *Land of the Dead*, is scheduled for release this year, the game is not directly based on any of the films, but rather takes place in the George A. Romero universe. This means, of course, it is a world without hope, without reason – a world of fear. It is a world where walking corpses hunt down and feast on the living. Welcome to the City of the Dead.

Developed by veteran U.K. studio Kuju Interactive, City of the Dead places gamers in a zombie-infested world where no one is truly safe. While the basic story, its characters, and locations have been created by Kuju, Romero is giving his input into every aspect of the game, making sure that it fits with his vision of zombie horror. The director has stated that there are certain things that he's always wanted to do in movies that are simply not possible, but are perfect for video games. He isn't giving any specific examples yet, but assures us that they will reflect his love for the horror genre. But the team at Kuju was happy to fill us in on how they are recreating the mood and feel of Romero's films.

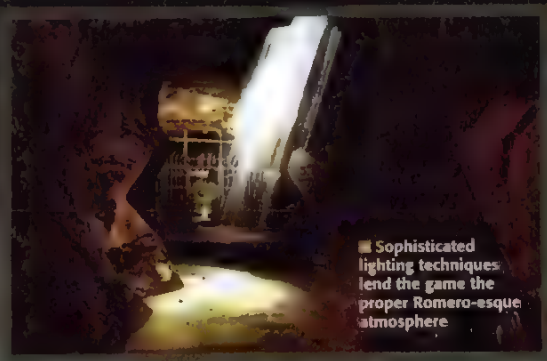
Unlike the bevy of survival horror games on the market, there will be no outlandish environments or convoluted door-opening puzzles. The entire game will



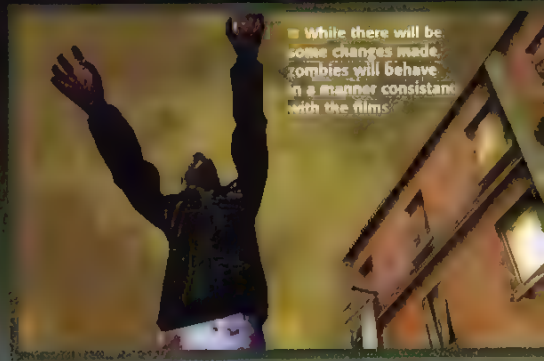
Zombies will attack in groups, and can come at you from all sides



Familiar locations will become the sites for nightmares in City of the Dead, and we're not talking about gas prices



Sophisticated lighting techniques lend the game the proper Romero-esque atmosphere



While there will be some changes made, zombies will behave in a manner consistant with the films

take place in realistic areas, and your goal in each will be to stay alive. In true Romero fashion, ordinary places will be transformed from the mundane into the sites of horrible acts and unthinkable tragedy. Players will battle the undead in locations like hospitals, old houses, abandoned urban areas, and, of course, a mall. Along with blood-spattered playgrounds and ruined airfields, players can also expect to see more traditional horror settings like a cemetery and a creepy laboratory. But no matter what area you're in, no place is ever truly safe.

As in the Romero films, there is no end to the flood of the undead that will hunt you down. Regardless of how many you blast, eventually more of them will shamble out of the darkness, hungry and hunting. Although there are many different types of enemies in the game, all of them were once human. There will be no zombified dogs or mutated creatures, just those unfortunate people who have died and risen again. The zombies you will face are firmly rooted in the traditions established by the films, but some minor concessions have been made to make them fit with the video game medium. While not as quick as the ravenous creatures in films like *28 Days Later* or the *Dawn of the Dead* remake, these zombies are decidedly faster than those in Romero's films. They are also a bit more evolved and attack in a larger variety of ways. There are certainly the familiar shuffling zombies, but others will scurry quickly on four legs and leap at you like animals. Zombies that have been in an explosion may catch fire and continue towards you, spreading flames as they go. Some zombies even emit noxious clouds, and the poisonous gas will linger in an area long after the actual creature is killed. Others throw random objects at you (such as the limbs of other zombies), and some of them even use weapons -- although not in the same way as a traditional FPS enemy. Zombies that would have logically carried guns in life, such as cops, may be armed and randomly squeeze off shots. Sometimes,

Just like in the films, there will be no explanation as to where the zombies have come from

One way or another, the zombies will keep coming after you until you destroy the brain

Undead police officers may randomly fire off shots from their guns

the bullet may fire harmlessly into the ground, other times it will hit other zombies, and other times it will come flying straight at you.

Just like how a bullet indiscriminately hits whatever is in its path, everything in City of the Dead's world will behave like it does in real life. Every object and character in the game features Havok physics that ensure that it reacts realistically to the forces applied to it. Zombies will drop to the ground if you shoot them in the knees, and limbs can be torn clean off with a well-placed round. Dropping items like boxes onto zombies can crush them, and they can be kept at bay by barricading doors with crates or furniture. Anything that blows apart will send shrapnel flying unpredictably, meaning that you're as likely to be killed by it as your enemies.

Thanks to the combination of realistic physics, intelligent AI, and ragdoll technology, players will see events that would normally be scripted occur organically. A downed zombie in the playground level may slump onto the seesaw, causing the other end to shoot up and knock another zombie down, or a horde of undead may plow through a pile of boxes you've stacked for protection. Thanks to the complex zombie AI, the creatures will constantly be coming at you from different angles, so just because a trap you lay works on one playthrough doesn't mean it will work the next.

Every stage in the game features an open layout, meaning the entire level is available from the start, and there is no set linear path through the stage. There will be established objectives in each area, such as finding a specific point or protecting civilians, but the primary goal is to survive the flood of undead. Playing in first-person perspective, zombies are just as likely to come from behind as they are from the front, so the open-world layout adds to both the player's freedom and the danger.

City of the Dead begins at dusk and tasks players with surviving through the night and dawn until day. Although details on the characters are scarce, Kuju has confirmed that more than one will be playable – most likely there will be five, each with different traits. All of the characters will evolve over the course

A Dead Name Comes Back to Life

Many gamers and horror fans will remember the announcement of a game called City of the Dead several months ago, which was a collaboration between George A. Romero and game designer American McGee. While they share the same name, Hip Games' City of the Dead is not the same game as the announced American McGee title. We'll spare you the legal talk of licensing agreements and simply state that the American McGee version is completely dead (pun intended), and that the demise of that project has allowed Hip Games' Romero project to use the snazzy City of the Dead title.

■ The team wants to include as many zombies onscreen as possible to truly replicate the helplessness of the films

Weapon concept: Super Nova Shotgun

Weapon: Electro Lance

Weapon: Machine Gun

Weapon: Raptor 45 Dual Pistol

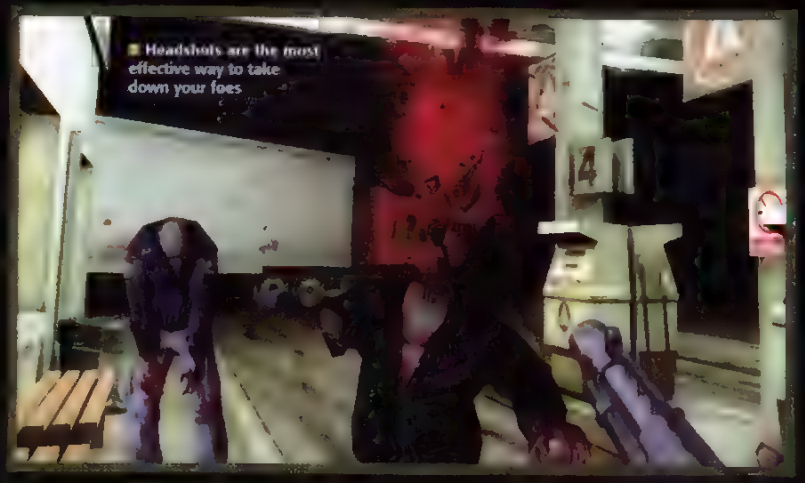
of the game - not only will their skills improve, but the actual character models will change based on how much strain the characters go though. A character who is impeccably dressed at the start of the game may be reduced to a thin suit of rags by the end. But fortunately, their aim will grow more accurate as handguns are used, melee attacks will become more deadly, and other skills will progress as the story unfolds.

The gameplay centers on first-person action, and shooting zombies in the head is key. Unlike the movies, they can be destroyed by causing enough damage to the torso, but the amount of ammo required to do so is ridiculous. Headshots are the easiest and most efficient way to kill zombies, and limbs can be blown clean off to slow a creature down and get a good shot at its brain. Melee attacks, such as a rifle butt to the skull, can also be used to take out the walking dead. Like the characters, your weaponry will change and improve over the course of the game. Guns can be tweaked to increase their firepower, and additions like barbed wire around the barrel can even be added to increase the melee abilities of a weapon.

While the familiar FPS arsenal of dual handguns, shotguns, rifles, grenades and the like will certainly be present, a few more esoteric weapons will be included. Although Kuju maintains the game will have a realistic feel, the story will allow for a few science fiction-influenced weapons like the void bomb, a hand grenade that creates a small singularity and sucks everything towards it, consuming all caught in its pull. Mines that throw spikes in every direction are likely to be included, as are traps that freeze anyone who steps on them with an intense spray of liquid nitrogen. These unique weapons will definitely be fun to unleash on the hordes of undead, but can just as easily take out a human companion if you're not careful. You certainly wouldn't want to take out your friend – or would you?

The protagonists of Romero's movie have seldom faced down the unquiet dead alone, and you don't have to either. The game will support both two-player split-screen and four-player online co-op. The cooperative campaign will feature many of the same levels as the story mode, as well as several unique levels. Obviously, having friends at your side will help you deal with the attacking hordes more efficiently – until someone gets bitten. As all horror fans know, anyone bitten by a zombie will eventually become one, and that's no different in City of the Dead. Every player has both a health meter and an infection meter, which will constantly rise after a bite. Once the infection level reaches the player's health level, he or she will become one of the undead. Then the player is free to run around as a zombie, attacking his former teammates.

When one of your squad is bitten, you'll be faced with a choice. Do you kill your friend immediately so he doesn't come back to attack you, or do you wait until he changes, so he can back you up with additional firepower for as long as possible? By giving players this choice, Kuju



Headshots are the most effective way to take down your foes

"Brains!"

hopes to replicate the moral dilemma presented in each of the *Dead* films. The team also hopes to include the clashing personalities featured in the film through intelligent scriptwriting, and also plans on casting some personalities well known to horror fans. Longtime Romero standby Tom Savini has signed on to lend his voice to a character, which should bring a wicked smile to Romero's followers. Not only has Savini worked with Romero on the special effects and stunts in his films for years, he has also appeared in front of the camera in films like *Dawn of the Dead*, *From Dusk Till Dawn*, and *Creepshow*.

By casting Savini, allowing gamers to play as zombies, and, of course, securing the involvement of Romero, Kuju is obviously crafting a game that will serve as a love letter to horror fans. The team is taking care to capture the intensity of the films, offer up shocking moments, and let gamers revel in the fact that destroying zombies is inherently fun. Romero's contributions revolutionized films about the walking dead, and it looks like his first entry in the video game world is likely to be received as the ultimate zombie shooter. We, like all true horror fans, cannot wait to see what new horrors the master of fear is preparing to unleash. ■■■

An Interview With George A. Romero

Nobody has done more to make the living dead into sources of sheer terror than George A. Romero. Not only did the legendary director agree to collaborate on his first video game, but he also took the time to speak with us about the process and discuss spreading fear in a whole new medium.

How involved are you in the development of the game? Are you doing any scriptwriting, or are you involved on a more conceptual level?

I have approvals over the games and storyline and I am in the process of reviewing the game concept. After that I will be sitting down with the development team, to give the project that Romero touch.

What freedoms does a game allow that film does not?

The list is endless! You don't have to worry about actors for one. [Laughs]

The great part is that you don't have to worry about getting the shots. Filmmakers can pretty much do anything they want with computer images, but with games it's all the way. The other thing is that you can really involve the audience. When you're working in the horror genre, your big reward is standing in the back of the theater and watching everybody jump. [Laughs] With gaming, it's totally interactive. The cool part is that the audience is part of the story. I think it's terrific.

Did you do any research into games when starting this project?

I have a 13-year-old at home who is like a fanatic. I worked for a while on the film version of Resident Evil, but they didn't like my ideas. What I liked about the game is that it was involving, instead of just watching a movie passively, you're part of it. I didn't think it was as scary as it could have been. It's great to finally try to create a game experience that would really be terrifying.

How did your experience on the aborted Resident Evil adaptation affect your decision to work on City of the Dead?

It didn't at all. I'm just fascinated it by it as a medium. I can't wait to be more involved in the actual development and to become more educated in the field.

With the new movie, the game, and the *Toe Tags* comic book (from DC Comics), it seems that you're rather busy lately. Has the recent success of horror (and zombie movies specifically) helped you get new projects off the ground?

Things are pretty crazy right now with the movie coming out in the fall. But, this project was already in the works before the latest batch of zombie movies came out. Of course, whenever horror movies make money, horror directors get phone calls.

Has working on comics and video games changed the way you approach filmmaking?

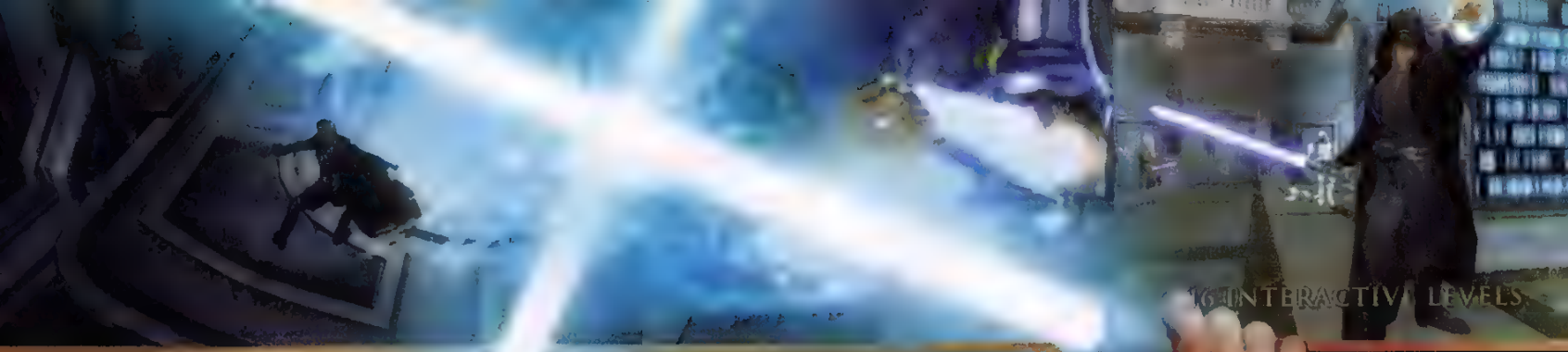
I've been focused on finishing the *Land of the Dead* movie, so my involvement with the game has been pretty focused on the game concept and storyline approval. This will certainly change in the next few weeks as I sit down with the development team. As for *Toe Tags*, it hasn't influenced my film work. I just had fun doing it.

How is *Land of the Dead* coming along?

We're plugging away, we're editing. It's a long process. It's coming along well.

What is your opinion on the current state of the horror genre? Any movies you've really liked?

I'm not a student that way. I don't sort of keep up with the stuff. It seems they're all ripping off all Japanese films and taking out the poetry, going back to the same basic horror stuff that American audiences like. Generally I'm not a big fan of traditional big market horror stuff.



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> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** FALL

UNIFYING THE CHILDREN OF THE ATOM

Born in New York City on December 28, 1922, Stanley Martin Lieber, the first son of Jewish-Romanian immigrants Jack and Celia Lieber, found comfort in the writings of Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Inspired by these literary masterminds, young Lieber took to penning stories at a very early age. His writing skills won talent contests in newspapers, and landed him a job at the tender age of 17 at Timely Publications as an assistant to comic book editor Joe Simon. Lieber kept the coffee running, swept floors, and made sure that the artists had plenty of ink to dip into.

Within a week, Lieber asked for a raise. Impressed by the confidence of the young lad, Simon offered Lieber the chance to write a two-page filler text story that would be included in the third issue of Captain America. At the time, comic companies included these stories to qualify for cheaper mailing. The piece that Lieber presented was "The Traitor's Revenge." It was well received, but oddly, Lieber chose to author the composition under the pseudonym, Stan Lee. At the time, it wasn't uncommon for a comic creator to Americanize his or her name to cover their ethnic heritage. After all, Jack Kirby (Jacob Kurtzberg) and Bob Kane (Robert Khan) both did.

In an industry obsessed with noble heroes and patriotic warriors, Lee shied away from the current trends, and opted to use reality as the muse for his stories. While most of his characters gained unique powers by being exposed to some form of radiation, they also had to deal with the problems of real people. When the masks and costumes came off, these characters had romantic interests, families to care for, bills to pay, and ordinary lives to lead. Lee's unique approach to storytelling set the comic industry ablaze. Within a matter of a few years, he created Spider-Man, The Incredible Hulk, and the Fantastic Four.

In 1963, he took it upon himself (with the help of Jack Kirby) to assemble another team of heroes. Feeling that he had run out of ways to irradiate his characters, Lee stepped back and took a shot into the dark. What if a character's unique super powers were innate? What if these powers could only be unlocked when they reached puberty? What effect would this have on the character and his or her life? Would the world have prejudice against people with genetic differences? Lee ran with this concept. He originally envisioned this book being called The Mutants, but his publisher hated the name and rejected it. Consequently, the X-Men were born.

With five different comic titles currently on the top 10 best-selling list, two feature films grossing over $700 million in the worldwide box office, and a cartoon series being picked up for its fourth season, Lee's children of the atom are still going strong today. While video games seem like the perfect playground for Xavier's extraordinary pupils, it is the only entertainment medium that the X-Men have yet to conquer. In the three decades that developers have attempted to bring this legendary team to life in pixel form, the lasting effect has been that of mediocrity.

The reason for this is quite simple. None of the X-Men games had been true to Lee's vision. Through countless brawlers and fighting games, the video game industry simply focused on the individual characters, rather than the team.

As gray tones seeped into the hair of X-Men fans and the hopes of having an interactive experience worth noting began to fade, no one expected to find salvation in Madison, Wisconsin. Raven Software may reside thousands of miles from the heart of the industry, but this company knows how to dig into a license and transfer the core material to video games. Previously, Raven had worked wonders with both Star Trek and Star Wars, and has made a name for itself as a company that geeks can relate to. Enlisted with the task of creating an X-Men game for Activision, Raven knew exactly what had to be done – focus on the extraordinary team chemistry that Lee had put on paper decades ago. It was as simple as that.

After years of development, Raven unleashed X-Men Legends on September 22, 2004. With team tactics taking center stage, and Lee's strong themes of societal discrimination fueling the fight, this was the first X-Men game that held true to the source material. Even though Legends falls into a genre that has not generally been known for strong sales, fueled by fan enthusiasm, it has already become the best-selling X-Men game of all time.

Even before X-Men Legends was finished, the development team was itching to begin work on a sequel. Not only does the expansive history of the comic open the doors for nearly endless story options and playable character choices, the team at Raven knew that the first game was but a small taste of what could truly be accomplished. With development of the sequel well underway, and enhancements lining every inch of the coding, Raven is confident that if Legends made fans shake with excitement, this second offering will simply make their heads explode. As X-Men Legends II's project lead, Dan Vondrak, pointed out, it all begins with one word: "Apocalypse."

What kind of evil could force bitter enemies who have been locked in war to put aside their differences and unite? Apocalypse is such a monster. Born thousands of years ago in Egypt, Apocalypse struck fear into the hearts of his people from the moment that he opened his eyes and cried. Mangled beyond comprehension, he was born so ugly that his tribe, the Akkaba, abandoned him at birth and prayed that he died quickly in the desert heat. From that day forward, hatred flowed through his veins. As he aged, his dormant mutant ability was eventually unlocked and he vowed to use it against the inferior human race. With the ability to psionically draw strength from outside sources, Apocalypse's might is immeasurable. He is the first mutant, and he is the most powerful mutant. Without the unification of the mutant forces, humanity is all but lost.

"To set the story for you on X-Men Legends II, Apocalypse has attacked both the Brotherhood and the X-Men," comments Vondrak. "It's such a devastating attack against both of them that they have no other option but to join forces." After this cataclysmic introduction, the war to save the planet begins. From the very moment that players put their hands on their controllers and begin to make the difficult choice of which character they would like to play as, they will run into a huge surprise. As you scroll past the familiar faces of Wolverine and Cyclops, and new additions like Bishop, you'll eventually run headlong into the master of magnetism, Magneto. Xavier's sworn enemy and his devout Brotherhood are among the 16 playable characters and can be chosen from the outset.

Seeing these rivals fighting back-to-back on the battlefield is an amazing sight to say the very least. In a level set within the Madri Temple (comic fans may recall it as a haven for a religious cult from the Age of Apocalypse series), we looked on with unbound jubilation as Wolverine unsheathed his claws and lunged toward a group of hooded disciples. As his razor-sharp adamantium cut deep into the flesh of his attackers, Magneto, with his crimson cape flowing effortlessly behind him, raised his arms high into the air. A metal canister lifted off of the ground and with a god-like fury was hurled at an attacker. The impact of the canister lifted the enemy off of his feet and sent him sailing a good ten feet into a wall, showering bricks and debris onto the battlefield.

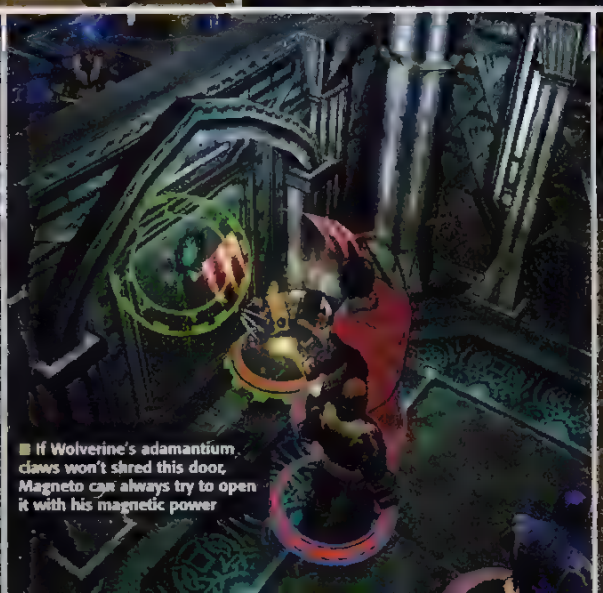
"It's a lot of fun being able to write for the Brotherhood," says Legends II's script writer, Bob Love. "It's even more fun to have them working together. In mission briefings you really get to see the tension between the two [groups]. They don't necessarily play nice together."

Apocalypse's surgical strike against his foes is only the beginning of the chaos that will spread throughout this massive game. As players work their way through catastrophic events that are erupting across the globe, Raven promises that this is a story that comic fans will remember for a lifetime. Since Raven isn't bound to the current continuity of the comic lines and has chosen to make Legends its own standalone universe, the unexpected can happen at any given time. "We do original stuff, and we borrow from some existing storylines," injects Love. "Marvel was really great about allowing us to drift from one story line to the next. We tried to bring in some of the history, and people that really appreciate the X-Men will get that thrill." Whether you recognize certain events that unfold, locations that you visit, or characters that you meet, Raven is loading this game down with an extensive amount of comic material.

"One thing that we are really focusing on is cameo appearances," adds Vondrak. "When you least expect it, someone that you wouldn't anticipate may show up." While the team wouldn't reveal too many secrets about the full cast, they were quick to point out that the list is expansive and will include characters even rabid fans wouldn't expect to see in a game. Given the content of the game, our minds immediately fathom characters like Scarlet Witch, Cable, Sinister, and Quicksilver being involved in some form.

When the Brotherhood are on the field with the X-Men, Raven is planning to include playful banter between the two factions

Combo attacks between characters are still available, and yes, the Brotherhood and X-Men can unite attacks



If Wolverine's adamantium claws won't shred this door, Magneto can always try to open it with his magnetic power

In addition to Apocalypse, players will face off against his Four Horsemen as well as other formidable foes like Lady Deathstrike

One of Storm's new attacks channels lightning through one enemy and onto another

When the odds are clearly not in your favor, you can always tap into an extreme attack to even the playing field

Each of the 16 playable characters will control a little bit differently. For instance, Storm's chain lightning now requires that players hold down the button to continue the electrical stream

No matter which character you select, your time with X-Men Legends II will prove to be a much different experience. "We want players to use the characters differently," explains Vondrak. "Last time, there was really only one way to play Cyclops. You really didn't have a choice." By expanding the arsenal of mutant abilities from four to ten, players can now customize their characters and approach their foes in a multitude of ways. "Powers are now unlocked in tiers," adds Vondrak. "At tier one, you'll have three powers available. At tier two, you'll have another three. You always have choices to make throughout the course of the game."

If a player decides to suit up as Bishop, they can either tap into his kinetic energy powers or focus on his weapon abilities. Nightcrawler just isn't about teleporting any more either, as he can now dual-wield sabers. Each character should present a number of interesting options along these lines. "Everyone really seemed to like the way that Wolverine felt," says Vondrak. "So we really tried to make each character idle how they should and run more like they should. We've really wanted to make them feel more like the characters you see in the comics."

Raven is also determined to give each character a gameplay functionality that will separate them from the rest of the pack. Storm can now unleash an enhanced version of the last game's Chain Lighting. Rather than just tapping the button to activate it, players must hold the button down to continue the electrical stream. "Picture the Emperor from *Return of the Jedi*," injects Vondrak. "Her lightning can transfer to different enemies, objects, and pretty much anything in the area if the player holds the button down." Wolverine presents another interesting gameplay mechanic. His Claw Frenzy attack increases in speed as he cuts into more enemies and objects. Continue using this technique and his speed of movement will escalate. "You just gotta keep slamming on that button to keep him going," jokes Vondrak.

In addition to making the gameplay more varied, Raven is hoping that the items that players unearth in the levels will generate just as much excitement. As Vondrak points out, "Last time, the equipment kind of got repetitive after awhile. In Legends II, all of the gear is randomly generated. So, the variation that you can get is unbelievable. You can get your basic armor, enhanced, rare, unique. You never really know what will drop." At any given time, an Excalibur-like item with immense power might drop off of a fallen foe. If you happen to pick it up, you'll be the envy of all your teammates.

"Another concept that is brand new to Legends II is hub levels," says Vondrak. "Before you were in the mansion and that was supposed to be your base, but you could only go there at certain points. Now, at the beginning of every act, you start out in a hub level, and it won't be just the mansion. For instance, we have Weapon X as another. You actually get to use Weapon X as your base. You'll see that the X-Men have tried to make it their home as much as possible." From the hub, players will have the ability to select which mission they want to undertake. Interestingly, once they are underway, if they forgot to go purchase some wares or feel that a better character is needed for the forces they face, they can hop into the menu and activate a mechanism that opens a portal to the hub. You can return whenever you please.

POWER FLUX

All of the characters in X-Men Legends II now boast over 10 different mutant powers. While only four can be used at a time, players can freely select which powers they bring to the battlefield from the menu screens. Below is a listing of all of the abilities that Cyclops can tap into. Of course, most of these powers are locked from the outset and are obtained by gaining experience as the game progresses. Cyclops can also upgrade his visor technology to amplify the damage that his beam unleashes.

Power 1: Optic Beam – A quick laser shot that damages the enemy.

Power 2: Optic Slam – By widening his beam, Cyclops can hit multiple foes with this attack.

Power 3: Optic Flash – A blast that is shot directly into the ground with the hope of stunning foes.

Power 4: Tactics – When applied, this power raises the defense of the entire team.

Power 5: Pylon Deploy – Cyclops throws out an auto-turret that deals damage independently.

Power 6: Command – Boosts the skill level of the entire team. This power is incredibly effective and can be tapped for three skill level raises.

Power 7: Radiation Beam – When an enemy is tagged with this laser, they become diseased and take gradual damage over time.

Power 8: Focused Beam – This powerful blast pierces through enemies.

Power 9: Polarized Beam – When this laser hits a foe, it splits into three additional beams that shoot in different directions.

Extreme Attack: Optic Rage – A fierce laser shot that makes quick work of all adversaries on screen.

Passive Power 1: Leadership – With this power, the chance of critical attacks is raised for the team.

Passive Power 2: Mutant Master – Cyclops can regain mutant energy quicker.

Passive Power 3: Defense Grid – Allows Cyclops to dodge projectile attacks.

Cyclops' Radiation Beam poisons enemies

■ All of the characters will start off wearing their Ultimate X-Men outfits

■ Each of the 10-plus powers that your characters can tap into can be leveled up

■ Pretty much everything in an environment is destructible to some degree

■ Many of the returning characters have been reworked to offer a more rounded battlefield presence. Nightcrawler is now a great brawler

Dramatic changes like those to the hub system can be found throughout all of the environments. "The levels are much bigger in this game. They can be roughly three to four times bigger this time around," comments Legends II's art lead, Dan Hay. "Another thing that we are really trying to get across is the sensation of height and depth. You are not just going through a linear game. You are going all over the place, up and down, into big rooms, small rooms, and vast spaces. Your perception of it is totally different."

The narrow hallways from the original game brought about an unprecedented level of destructibility, but also made co-op a fairly claustrophobic experience. By opening up the battlefield, players can now move about more freely and have a better sense of the action since it's not crammed into small spaces. Of course, Raven wouldn't go in this direction if it meant that walls wouldn't crumble as frequently. "We tried to play up the destructibility of the levels as much as possible," states Hay.

One of the biggest focuses of the Legends II development cycle was to enhance the visual details. Gorgeous lighting effects dance across metal walls and tile floors, rooms are littered with objects and intricate details, caves are dimly lit by fox fire and stalactites hover above. What Raven has done is eliminate the sensation that you are running through mouse tubes. The visuals in the first game were modeled with colorful comic books in mind. In the sequel, reality is the backdrop. Inserting vibrant cel-shaded characters into these lively worlds produces an interesting effect, but it definitely fits the game.

> **"WE TRIED TO PLAY UP THE DESTRUCTIBILITY OF THE LEVELS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE..."**

Many of the rooms that you traverse are not just static, either. Traps along the lines of collapsing floors will make your quest a bit more difficult. You really have to be on your toes and keep an eye on your surroundings. If you see a trap before you trigger it, you may be able to use an ability, such as Magneto's power, to disable it. On this note, Raven is making a strong focus to include more power-related puzzles. To get past certain roadblocks, you'll need to tap into the skills of your team. Vondrak elaborates, "One power puzzle we have is a magnetically sealed door that is powered by a generator. Bishop is able to drain the power of the generator. The interesting thing is, if you don't have Bishop, there's still another way through this door. It will take longer, but you can still get to the next point in the game. We don't want to force players to change characters."

"We've also tried to add little hidden goals to collect," states Vondrak. "Players will need to keep their eyes peeled for Data Discs that are spread throughout the entire game. For every set of four that you collect, you can turn them into Forge. Each time you do this, something new gets unlocked – such as all of your potions providing more regen than they did before."

The detail that went into the stages isn't the only graphical enhancement, either. Each character animation is much more fluid and dramatic, the effects that rain down on the battlefield are all the more vibrant, and within the 100-plus enemy types that are being included into the game, randomization is ever present. Within a group of adversaries, you may see one with a genetic mutation, another wielding a different type of weapon, and one denoted as the leader of the squad.

As the battle unfolds, you'll enter 70 different zones including Egypt and the South Pole, as well as familiar X-Men locales like Genosha and the Sublime Factory

For those of you who enjoyed playing X-Men Legends as a single-player game, and intend to do so again, Raven is making great strides to improve the teammate AI. "Our team has done a tremendous job of making the supporting cast more helpful now," says Vondrak. "They will tap into their powers more often, and they are a little bit more intelligent about when they will use them. They will also know whether or not to do area effect attacks."

When the subject of multiplayer came up, Vondrak was quick to point out that "there is no more forcing you to be just one player in certain sections of the game." If you have four players, there will always be four characters onscreen. Raven has also ironed out the character switching issues. If you pick Wolverine, you will be Wolverine until you choose to hang up your Canadian trunks. Also, if you don't want four characters, and would rather it just be you and a friend, you don't need to have AI teammates at your side. You can run-and-gun with as few characters as you want.

The biggest change, however, which is perhaps the most exciting element embedded in this sequel's coding, is the addition of online play for PlayStation 2 and Xbox. "The online is an absolutely huge portion for us," states Vondrak. "The way online is going to work is that you are going to load up your game so that everyone plays inside your game. Picture it like the normal co-op only online. Everyone plays within the host game, and uses the items and characters from the host game." Even though online could conceivably allow players to run in any direction in a level, Raven is still restricting the character movements to the frame of the TV screen. As Vondrak says, "This game just wouldn't work out if people were running all over the place. It's all about working as a team."

Although most of the playable characters are unlocked from the outset, there are a few faces that must be earned as you work through the game. Regarding hidden goodies and bonuses, Raven has done away with the flashback stories. "We've in turn made bonus quests a part of the story," adds Vondrak. "If you're playing through the game as the Brotherhood, you don't want to be thrust into a classic good guy story. It just doesn't make sense with what we are doing this time around." Of course, Raven has devised an alternate method of rewarding players. Each character in the game boasts a number of different classic costumes. You may even see some getups from the new Astonishing X-Men series.

According to Raven, however, the biggest reward that players will stumble across is the FMV videos. The same company that developed the incredibly detailed CG commercial for the first X-Men Legends game is making lengthy CG cutscenes for this sequel. Each act begins with a movie that illustrates the story and sets the tone and mood for the forthcoming action. On top of this, Raven is fleshing out the in-game story material. "We heard a lot of complaints about the hands looking like boxing gloves in the last game, so we've addressed this and are really going all out with it," comments Vondrak. "We actually outsourced high-poly models for these sequences."

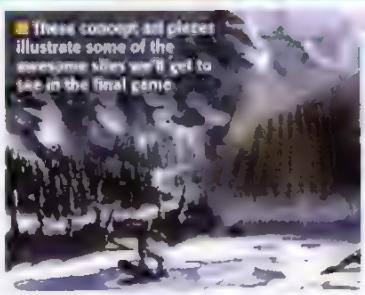
Beads of sweat will form on your brow when Apocalypse glares unfavorably upon you. Your fingers will blister from the relentless action that unfolds. At the end of the day, when the war is all but lost, and the forces of evil have you pinned in a no-win situation, one thought will enter your mind. "Wouldn't it be great if every day was like this." X-Men Legends II is more than a sequel. It's a bold, new chapter in the X-Men mythology. ■■■

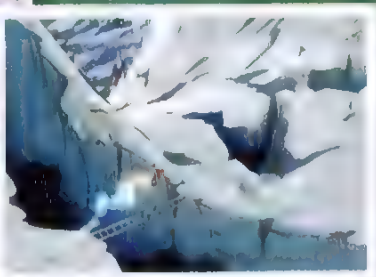
Some of the locations that you explore are quite unique. Could this be a sign of the Brood being involved in the story?

In addition to being able to play through the entire main quest, the online portion features exclusive items, as well as online-only levels in the Danger Room

How long have you been waiting for a great skiing game?

Create a new character from scratch or tap your favorite returning cast member


These concept art pieces illustrate some of the awesome sites we'll get to see in the final game



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | NINTENDO DS | PSP

SSX 4 [Working Title]

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** EA BIG > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** FALL

BACK TO THE PIPE

That's right. It's time to hit the powder yet again. We were excited enough when we got word of this eagerly awaited sequel. But now that we've seen the game in action, we literally can't wait for the snow to fall so we can shred the slopes again.

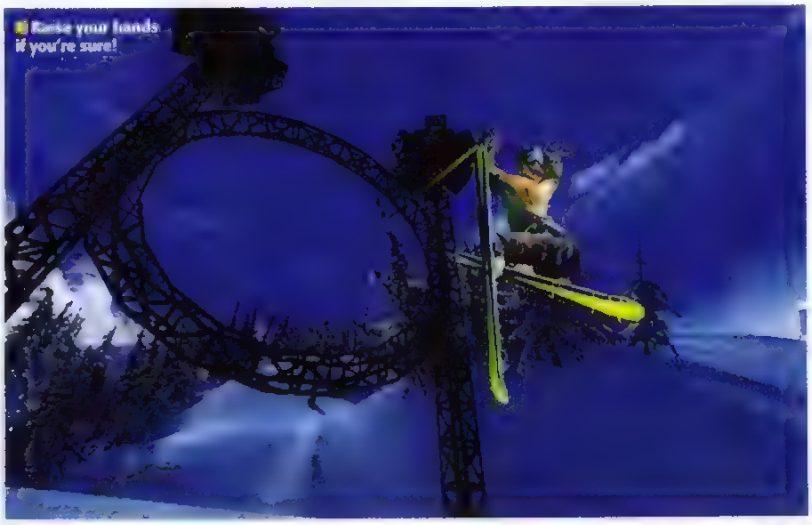
SSX 4 is all about more. More of what everyone has loved about the series from the start, and more of what fans have been asking for since the games became a hit. We were lucky enough to get to talk with Steve Anthony, the associate producer on the new game. He filled us in on the return to the mountain. "The biggest change for the gameplay this year is the emphasis on speed. In the past, even though you were tearing down the mountain, the player never really got the sense they were in fact going as fast as they were. This year we have built an entire system around speed, with various layers of visual and audio effects that will kick in as the riders hit speed thresholds." Footage of the game we saw reflected this evolution. As the skier weaved his way through trees and down the hill, the screen began to blur and we could hear the air rushing by. Launching off a wicked jump took us into the stratosphere, where only the lonely bird cries carried over the mountain wind. It is, to say the least, a spectacular effect.

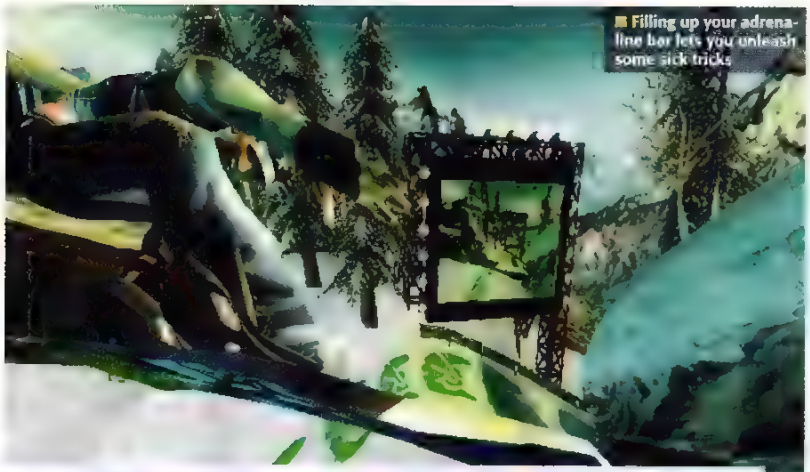
Did we say skier? Yep. Anthony filled us in. "Skiing has been a great addition to the game this year. We have a unique set of animations around skiing, with different grabs, wipeouts and landings. Additionally, skiers will have the ability to initiate skiing specific Monster Tricks." Purists needn't fear, however. All the intricacy of the hallmark snowboard options remains intact. Now you'll just have another choice of how you flex your muscles on the snow.

Customization options don't end with your choice of locomotion. Due to fan demand, there will finally be an incredibly flexible create-a-character mode, allowing you to throw your own boarder/skier up against the best the mountain has to offer. Initiating such a challenge will also be easier than before, since the new mountain has been designed for fluidity, flexibility, and freedom. "One of the biggest differences this year has been the removal of the connector pieces that we used last year to move between one track and another. This year there will be much less of a break in the gameplay as the rider is able to seamlessly move down the mountain. Additionally, we have redesigned the gameplay to incorporate both race lines and freestyle lines within one track, much like you'd expect to find on a real mountain," Anthony explained.

As a quality sort of wrapping paper to the excitement of the new action, there's a brand new menu system that's original enough to deserve attention. The new menu navigation is handled via a system Anthony calls the "living scrapbook." Scribbles and pencil doodles fill the book, and new menus are like different pages. While the images look hand-drawn, they animate in response to your choices, like your imagination coming to life on the page. Innovations like these are always a good sign in our minds, as they show a willingness to take something great like the SSX games and make them even better. ■■■

A sequel to *Hot Dog: The Movie*? Only in our dreams


Raise your hands if you're sure!


Filling up your adrenaline bar lets you unleash some sick tricks

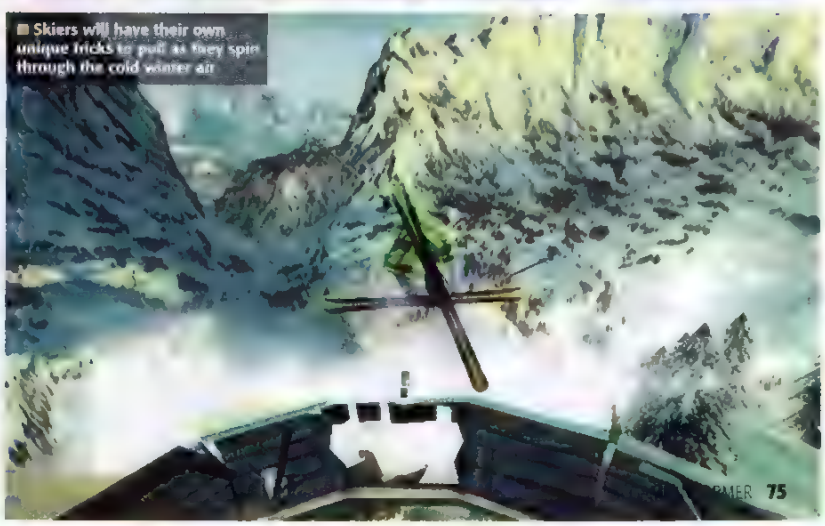
Every course is now specially designed both for speed and freestyling

Nothing says good boarding like icy precipices that promise almost certain death

This grid-iron girder looks safe enough

You played Burnout 3, right? Think speed like that

This can't end well


Skiers will have their own unique tricks to pull as they spin through the cold winter air

GAMECUBE

The Legend of Zelda

[Working Title]

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

PROPER CARE AND FEEDING OF FRANCHISES

Passionate, long-term fans of the Zelda franchise and those hungering for a mature twist on the classic's aesthetic will have something in common by the end of the year. At the recent Game Developers Conference in northern California, the enigmatic Nintendo aimed to prove its loyalty to these groups by showing a new two-minute trailer of the upcoming Zelda title.

After watching (and re-watching and rehashing and re-examining, repeatedly – yup, we're dorks), a few things became clear. First off, we've got nothing when it comes to plot. We don't know where Link is, why he's there, or what in tarnation is going on. But within this cloud of vague illusions, it is becoming increasingly clear that while the game changes art style and Link's age, there are a lot of themes (both old and new) making their presence known.

With a rich orchestral score, the trailer sets a mood of greater spaces, an even more heroic quest, and a wider set of skills for our hero Link. Every shot in those few minutes of footage clearly highlights the larger scope of areas – Link gallops across expansive plains, runs through clearings ringed with gigantic and ancient trees, swims the waters deep, and looks on as a wolf howls against a looming moon.

The trailer's images are truly striking, but the wolf's silhouette also brings to mind another theme that presents itself over and over during the trailer: animals and possible gameplay surrounding them. Link is shown riding both a horse and a large boar – his moveset while atop either looks to be a mix of close-range swordsmanship and long-range archery skills. In addition, there are the repeating wolf appearances and a handful of other woodland creatures that either surround our hero or are carried by him. Could we be reading too much into this? Perhaps, but animals show up so often in the trailer that it's hard to imagine they won't play a huge role in the new game.

As we learn more about the still untitled adventure, it's becoming clear that Nintendo is taking this "adult Link" idea to heart and building for him a world closer to our own reality. More realistic and dramatic lighting effects, an impressive weather system, and more integration of his equipment (it appeared that, while riding, the shield stored on his back was deflecting arrows) all point toward an overall maturity for the title.

As many questioned Nintendo's wisdom when Wind Waker's graphical style was first shown, some are now expressing doubt about the newest look for the series. Will the turn towards what is now a conventional look for an action/adventure game make the title blend in with the crowd, or will the proven genius of this series and its caretakers defy what some now see as a hurdle for the game? The final result, obviously, remains to be seen, but it's unquestionably clear that this new Link isn't just grown up – his world is expansive and sometimes quite dark, but always filled with adventure. ■■■

While there isn't any blood or gore in the trailer, the action looks to be more brutal than earlier games

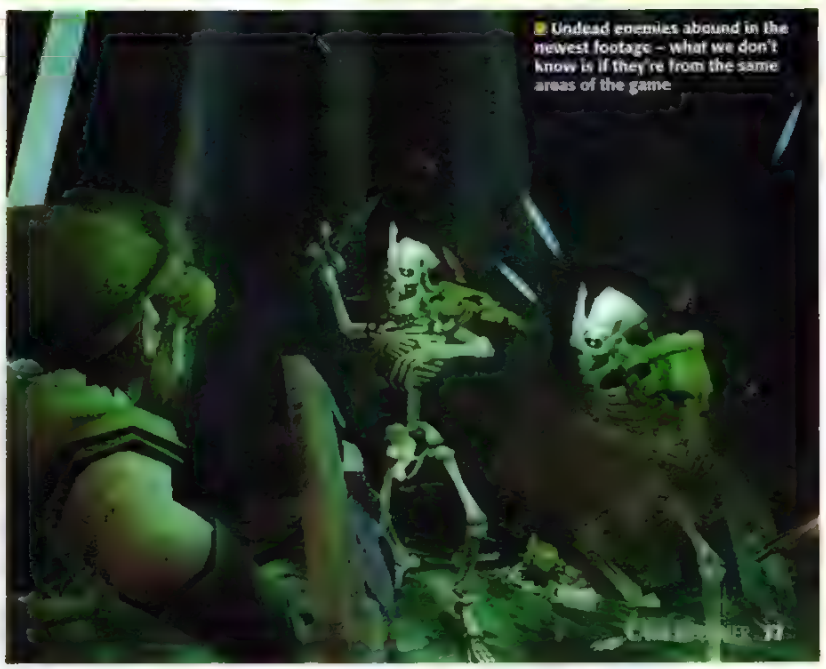
Swimming makes a welcome return and the animations for it look great

There are many shots with a much larger sense of scope and more emphasis on organic environments

Link is clearly a "cat person." Dog people are skeptical that kittens could provide the same joy of companionship as a puppy

We're glad that at least some of the enemies maintain the more whimsical parts from Zelda games of yore

It's abundantly clear that riding combat is much more involved than we've ever seen



Undead enemies abound in the newest footage – what we don't know is if they're from the same areas of the game

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PlayStation 2

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Use of Alcohol
Violence

Produced by Force

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Language
Sexual Themes
Violence

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Spartan: Total Warrior

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

WITH YOUR SHIELD OR UPON IT

Total wars are fought by total warriors. No one knows this better than The Creative Assembly, whose Total War franchise on the PC has long focused on the strategic manipulation of legions of warriors from a wide array of historical periods. In Spartan: Total Warrior, this combat-hardened developer will take its veteran experience onto a whole new battlefield: individual-oriented action on the home consoles.

While this new series moves away from Total War's massive strategic conflicts, the battles will certainly not be lacking in epic scale. As a single Spartan solider during the age of the Roman Empire, players will constantly find themselves faced with staggering hordes of enemies. "Spartan's core gameplay is combat against many opponents," says Ian Roxburgh, Creative Assembly's marketing manager. "Spartan is the only game to feature hundreds of combatants fighting each other in real time around the player. The gameplay is tailored to these situations." Initially, this may seem strikingly similar to the stable of other hack 'n slash titles like Dynasty Warriors or Drakengard. However, Spartan's unique approach promises to add a whole new dimension to the fray.

First of all, Spartan is far from a simple button-masher. Because hostile targets will frequently surround the player, observation will be imperative. Only by defending yourself and waiting for an opening to attack will you be able to take on the aggressive legions. Roxburgh outlines the philosophy behind this method: "Our system is one of action and reaction: When the player is surrounded by a horde of enemies, using tactics and maneuverability will turn such combat situations to their advantage."

Though the player controls just one hero, the battlefield is swarming with allies in addition to foes. But they aren't allies that just stand around like decorations, leaving you to all of the dirty work; they will play a prominent role in every fight's outcome. "The player will learn to stick with their armies," Roxburgh tells us. "It is the Spartan's responsibility to keep his allies alive; it is the duty of the allies to protect the Spartan so that he can carry out his missions to turn the tide of the battle." The Spartan's specific tasks could range from tipping over barrels of boiling oil to operating a ballista, so it will be important to have all the support you can get.

Of course, sometimes your allies will have more important things to do than play bodyguard, like defend against an entire attacking force. Roxburgh explains, "The AI will combat each other, with up to four different sides in any battle. They don't just stand around waiting to be attacked – they use group tactics and engage enemies, so if you wait around and watch, you will see battles won and lost before your eyes."

By creating a genuine sense of the mass battles occurring around the player, the Total Warrior franchise hopes to create an unparalleled experience in overwhelming action. And while there are plenty of other time periods that the series could tackle in the future, beginning with a war-centered nation that breeds its soldiers for combat from childhood definitely seems like a promising start. ■■■

■ The game culminates with a final battle in the Coliseum

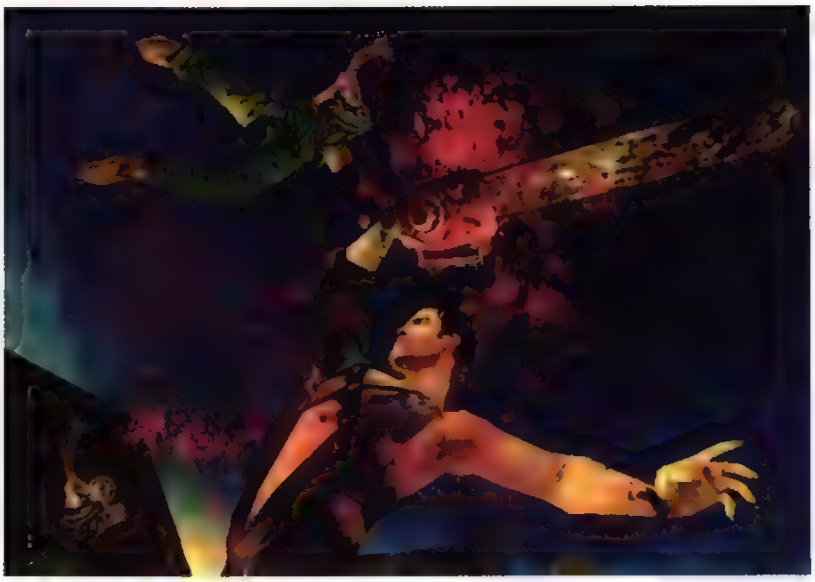
■ Sparta's tragic Head-Mounted Scrub Brush Riot

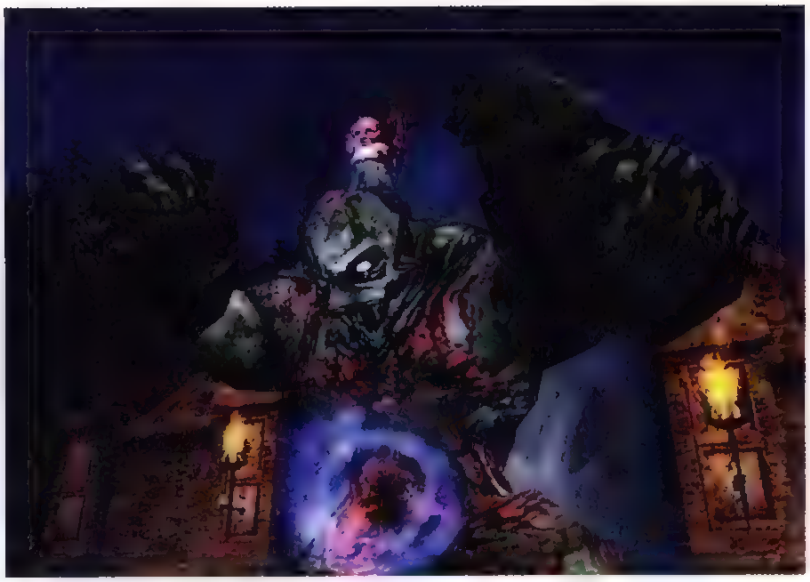
■ Players will combat mythical beasts as well as opposing armies

Enemies won't just wait to be sliced in half. You'll have to stay on your toes to keep yourself and your allies alive

Up to four AI-controlled armies will square off while you cut foes down individually

"For the last time, Fredicus, you are NOT too sexy for your armor."

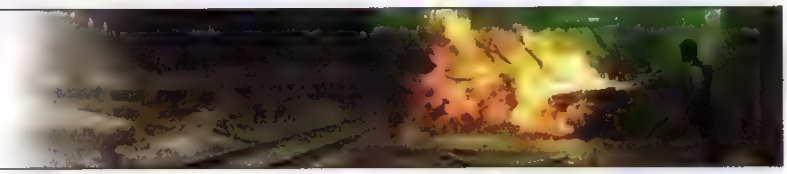




UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Evil Dead: Regeneration



> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** CRANKY PANTS GAMES **> RELEASE** FALL

UNLEASH THE HORDES

What could have happened after the killer night portrayed in the *Evil Dead* movies? What if, rather than our hero warping back to medieval times, the law showed up to retrieve Ash and witness the gory aftermath? Developer Cranky Pants Games, in association with THQ, aims to answer the question with a shotgun, a wink, and a series of innuendo-laden one-liners. Their take on the next chapter in the Evil Dead mythos starts at the notorious cabin as Ash is being arrested and charged with murder. After clearly explaining the events of the night to law enforcement, he is unceremoniously acquitted by reason of mental defect and ferried off to Sunny Meadows, a dubiously named insane asylum. This is where he meets Sam, a deadite smallfry who will become the bold one's first wingman.

Wait. Stop that. Back it up. A sidekick? David Bollesen of Cranky Pants tells us about how Sam was first thought up. "Somebody said, 'What if he had a sidekick?' That was quickly followed by, 'What if he was a dwarf?' And that was followed by, 'What if you could kick him?'" Clearly, this is a team with good heads on their shoulders. So Sam is going to be a big part of Evil Dead: Regeneration, contributing to puzzle solving, enemy combat management, and ridiculous comedy. But what, pray tell, did the originators of Evil Dead think of this new addition? Turns out that Bruce Campbell was such a fan of Sam that he hooked Cranky Pants up with Ted Raimi (of the Spider-Man movies and *Xena: Warrior Princess* TV series) to do the voice work for the character.

While earlier Evil Dead games have produced action in spades, none of them have truly captured the magic of the films. "We really felt the previous games had missed communicating the comedy associated with the movies. There was verbal one-line humor, but it wasn't being translated into anything physical," says Bollesen. To that end, almost everything in the game is being translated to the universal language of funny – slapstick-inspired exaggerations of situations, enemies (some are over 20 feet tall), and character movements. The first time that Sam and Ash step outside of the asylum, for instance, the deadite companion steps in a steaming pile of dog poo. This isn't the whole joke, though. The real funnies come throughout the rest of the level as Sam's walking and idle animations show the character trying repeatedly to wipe the stinky mess off of his foot.

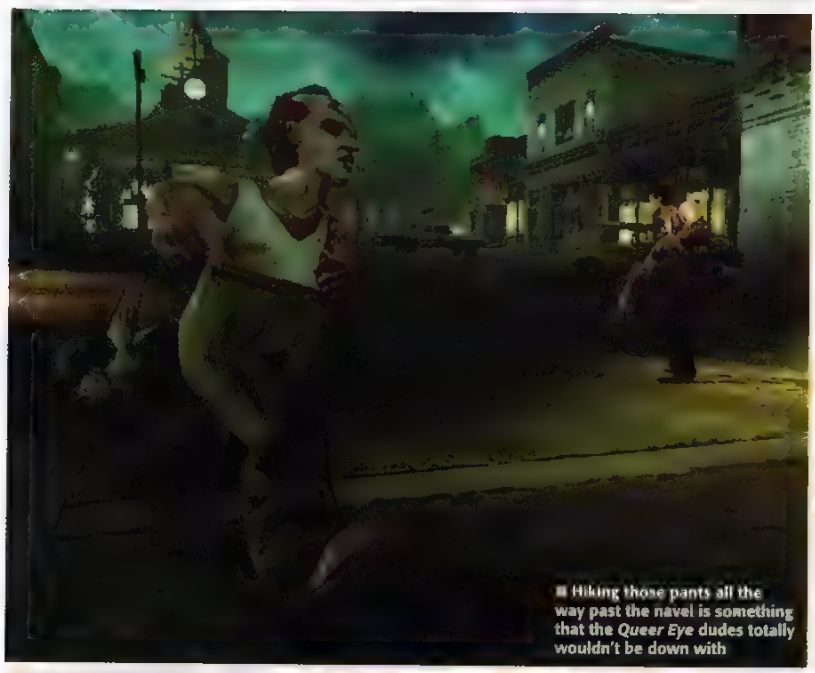
Hilarious hijinks aside, the other core trait of the Evil Dead universe is over-the-top action. We players and fans want limbs flying, buckets of spent ammo littering the ground, hordes of undead being hewn, and the maniacal laughter of a normal man at his hilarious psychological breaking point. The team knows this well. "[Ash's] constant battle with his sanity plays well because you're never really sure how he might respond next. But in the end, he's got a prosthetic chainsaw and a shotgun, and [he's] not afraid to use either." Amen to that. ■ ■ ■

■ Chainsaw juggling is a uniquely Evil Dead experience

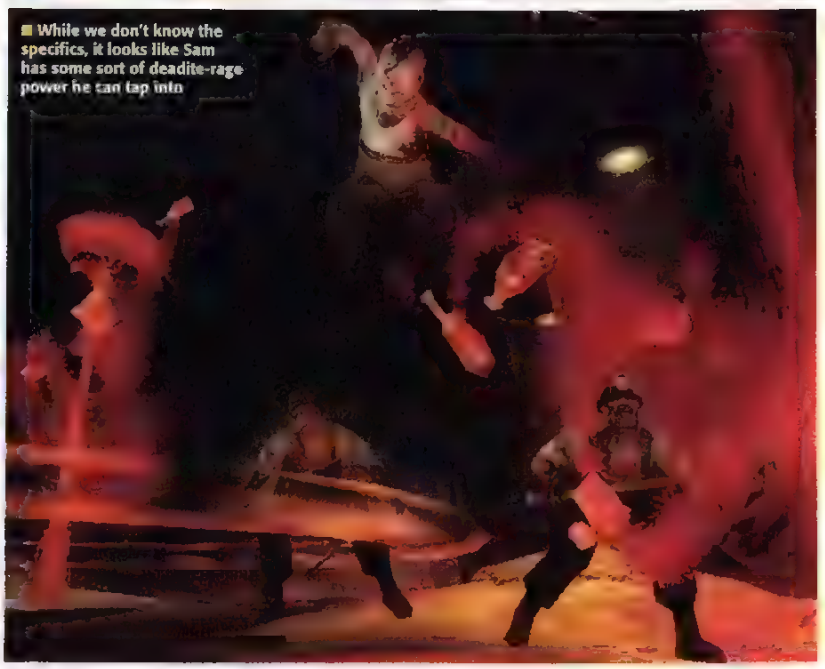
■ Some enemies must be killed by Ash, some by Sam, and others require a tag-team approach

Doesn't this look more than a little like the cabin? Maybe we'll get to go back

This high-level dismount should not be attempted at home. In fact, the Olympic committee is still debating whether pyrotechnics should be allowed in amateur gymnastics



Hiking those pants all the way past the navel is something that the *Queer Eye* dudes totally wouldn't be down with



While we don't know the specifics, it looks like Sam has some sort of deadite-rage power he can tap into

They say that Pelé can do anything with one ball. Look what Ash can do with two!

Liberal use of Ash's chainsaw arm is promised

PLAYSTATION 2

Soul Calibur III

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO **> RELEASE** 2005

THE SOUL STILL BURNS

In 2003, Namco released the excellent weapon-based fighting game Soul Calibur II for all three major consoles, each featuring an exclusive character. The game sold strongly on all platforms and received high praise from critics and the gaming public alike. Another entry in the series became a foregone conclusion. But somewhat surprisingly, there won't be three versions this time around – Soul Calibur III is coming this year, exclusively for PS2.

The Soul Calibur III team realizes that some people may be disappointed to see the game limited to one console, but focusing on a single version is allowing them to create the best fighting game they possibly can. Details on the game are still scarce, but it certainly sounds like Soul Calibur III will be packed with plenty of exciting new features. For starters, for the first time in the series players will be able to create their own characters. Appearance, gender, weapon, and even occupation can be tweaked, and these created characters will be the center of a new mode called Chronicles of the Sword. How exactly this mode will function is still unknown, but it will be only one of the many ways to play, including the standard Vs. mode, World Competition, Practice, and Soul Arena mode. There's even a Museum mode to view the history of the franchise.

Of course, new play modes aren't the only addition in Soul Calibur III. Expect to see many new arenas and three new fighters, bringing the roster up to over 25 playable characters. Setsuka, Tira, and Zasalamel have joined into the competition, each bringing something different to the table. Setsuka looks like some sort of sword-wielding fashion model, Tira fights with a huge circular blade, and Zasalamel appears to be some kind of grim reaper in training.

Namco seems to be adding a lot of new elements to Soul Calibur III to help it compete against the recent slate of quality fighting games. We'd like to know more about many of its new modes and features, and will certainly follow its development until it hits later this year. We'll also admit to being a little disappointed that we won't be seeing it come to multiple platforms, but if concentrating on one version helps Soul Calibur III be the best fighting game it can be, then we're all for it. ■ ■ ■

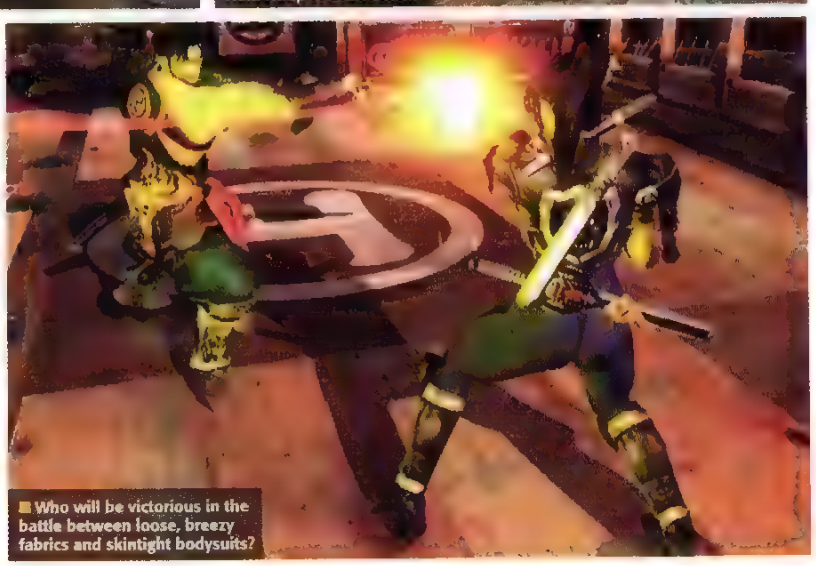
SOLO CALIBUR

Since Soul Calibur III is exclusive to PS2, there obviously won't be another round of exclusive characters in the series. However, that doesn't mean there won't be high-profile guest stars. Although it's just a rumor, word is that Capcom's star demon hunter Dante will be a playable character in Soul Calibur III. We'd certainly love to see him square off against Nightmare.

■ Expect to see several new fighting arenas

■ "Behold! The Legendary Hula Hoop of Destruction!"

■ "Come on, jump through the ring! You will be the hit of the circus.



■ Who will be victorious in the battle between loose, breezy fabrics and skintight bodysuits?

She has seen her brother's fate. Her fight
All her life Rau has watched over her. Now Tati is returning the favor. The struggle to prevent the dark magic of Kri from spreading returns, with four playable characters, each with their own menacing weapons and deadly combos. Unique collaborative gameplay pairs you with a fellow warrior, making teamwork essential as you scout, plan and fight your way through breathtaking 3-D environments. This time, the only way to preserve your future is to fight it.
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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PSP

Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects

> STYLE 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** NIHILISTIC SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** FALL

THE OLD VERSUS THE NEW

In a cross-marketing stroke of brilliance, EA has recently announced a partnership with Marvel to create a brand new video game/comic crossover. Marvel Nemesis will start as a six issue comic mini-series that will help to introduce an entirely new group of superpowered characters fit to take on the best that the Marvel universe has to offer. Right around the time the mini-series wraps up, EA will release what looks to be a stunning fighting game that puts the powers of both these old and new characters in the hands of gamers the world over.

First heard as whispers about a game called Marvel vs. EA, Rise of the Imperfects promises to try some impressive feats when it shows up on your gaming screen this fall. There will be more than a dozen supremely powerful fighters, and it's likely we'll see many familiar faces alongside the newly designed characters created especially for the game. As early frames of the comic book reveal, we can be confident that Spider-Man, Wolverine, The Thing, Iron Man, and Elektra are among the cast. We've also heard that the comic series will focus on these characters' struggle against a new villain – Niles Van Roekel is a nefarious alien scientist intent on creating a superpowered army of death-dealing warriors. We've learned that the game will be a direct follow up to the story of the comic series, and current plans have the last issue releasing just days before the game.

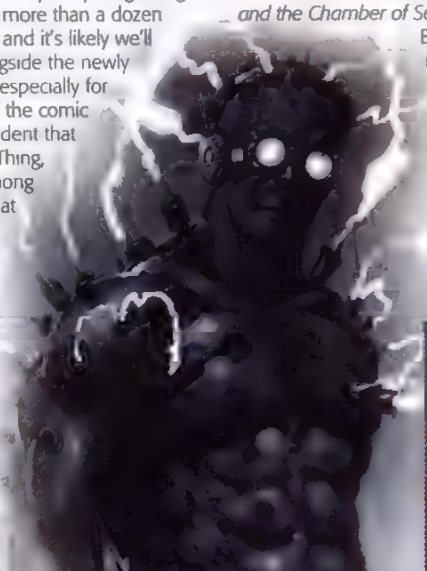
The developers want to focus on creating an authentic superhero fighting engine. Apparently, each stage will be designed so that the unique characters can take full advantage of their amazing abilities. If this means what we think it does, the imagination doesn't have to stretch very far to foresee images of Spidey swinging on a webline across a rooftop and hurtling into his foes, or The Thing smashing through buildings to pursue an opponent.

To create a new story in line with the artistic sensibilities of the Marvel Universe, several well-known comic creators have been tapped to help realize the project. Among these is industry veteran Jae Lee, whose moody illustrations have filled the pages of *Spider-Man*, *Uncanny X-Men*, and *Transformers Versus G.I. Joe*. In addition, renowned concept artist Paul Catling has joined the team, following up his work on movies like *Alien Vs. Predator*, *The Punisher*, and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.

Between the seething hot images you can see here and the impressive combination of EA's and Marvel's talent pool, Marvel Nemesis has us chomping at the bit for some more info. As full fledged, card-carrying members of both the gaming and comic geek clubs, Rise of the Imperfects looks to be a true match made in heaven. ■■■

■ Wolverine explains the finer points of how Canadians are not "wussies"

■ Now is not the time for yoga, Spidey



Meet Johnny Ohm, the mysterious figure is one of the new characters in the comic and game, presumably called the Imperfects, revealing that Marvel's fiercest may have their work cut out for them taking on these new additions to the superpowered family

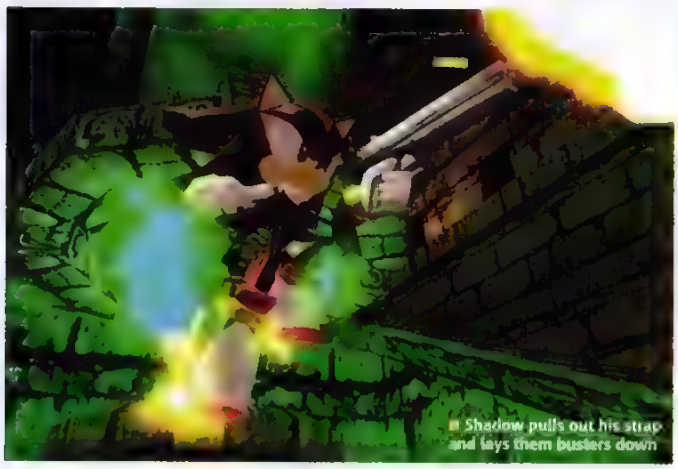
Check out these shots from the upcoming comic. The six issue mini-series will culminate in the release of the game this fall.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Shadow the Hedgehog

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SONIC TEAM > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** WINTER

LIKE KOTOR WITH HEDGEHOGS...AND NO JEDI



■ Shadow pulls out his strap and lays them busters down

Sonic the Hedgehog stands among the most recognizable and well-loved characters in video game history. Perhaps this is why fans of the franchise were taken aback to learn that the next Sonic title stars a different mach-speed-capable hedgehog – Sonic's antithesis Shadow.

Judging from the trailer shown at this year's Game Developers Conference, the lead character won't be the only thing changing. First and foremost, Shadow's packing some serious heat. Armed and dangerous, he'll be able to use his handgun (in addition to other unnamed weapons) to execute various ranged attacks. As if that weren't enough to digest, Shadow will also have access to various vehicles to make him even more mobile.

With the addition of gunplay, it's evident that the series is taking a more mature route. But it doesn't stop there – the game appears to have a darker tone than previous iterations, focusing on Shadow's mysterious past. Judging from lines like "Hero or Villain? You decide," the players will apparently have a role in shaping Shadow's persona, choosing to walk the path of good or evil.

Thankfully, not everything about Shadow the Hedgehog is new and scary; there will still be many familiar elements in place. The series' hallmark high-speed platforming remains intact, and looks to feature gameplay similar to that of Sonic Heroes. With E3 just around the corner, more details will certainly surface about this unconventional entry in the Sonic saga. Though some Sonic devotees may find it difficult to embrace the game's new direction, this deviation could prove the franchise still has what it takes to hang out with the grown-ups. ■■■

■ "Excuse me, but Glowing Golems, Inc. bans [illegible] these premises"

■ Finally, a solution to those SUVs that take up two parking spaces

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

AutoAssault

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NCSOFT > **DEVELOPER** NETDEVIL > **RELEASE** FALL

SHIFT_DESTRUCTION

Massively multiplayer online games need not all be role-playing, according to previously little known developer NetDevil. This gargantuan undertaking, AutoAssault, is attempting to combine the chaotic destruction of Twisted Metal with a robust role-playing element – all within a hugely multiplayer framework. We got a chance to try it out, and though it's playing a little rough at the moment, it definitely has potential.

In this post-apocalyptic world, your mission is clear: Deck out a vehicle with as much armor and firepower as it can carry, and blow the living hell out of everything in your way. Powered by the Havok 2 physics engine, the carnage that gets unleashed in even the most minor encounters is staggering. Nearly everything in the world other than the terrain can be destroyed, and there's no shortage of ways to reduce all that you see to rubble.

Player-vs.-player combat is promised to be a large part of the AutoAssault experience as well. While the developer was reluctant to talk about its not-yet-finalized plans for open-world PvP, we did find out that there will be a full-on arena system in the game. Functioning much like the better RTS matching systems, and with the ability to line up combats between groups on different servers, this could be a unique and truly awesome feature. Tournaments, ladder seasons, and everything else are planned, with special rewards given to winners. The possible sweetness rivals Krispy Kreme.

AutoAssault's launch is still a ways off, and there are some questions yet to be answered. Will the fast-paced combat leave enough room for strategy? Will the control scheme be able to overcome the inherent wonkiness of driving with the keyboard? We don't know, but there are certainly some interesting ideas at work in this title, and it may be just the innovation that massively multiplayer games need. ■■■

■ Blizzard Mode lets you transform into a big, stompy mech. [illegible]

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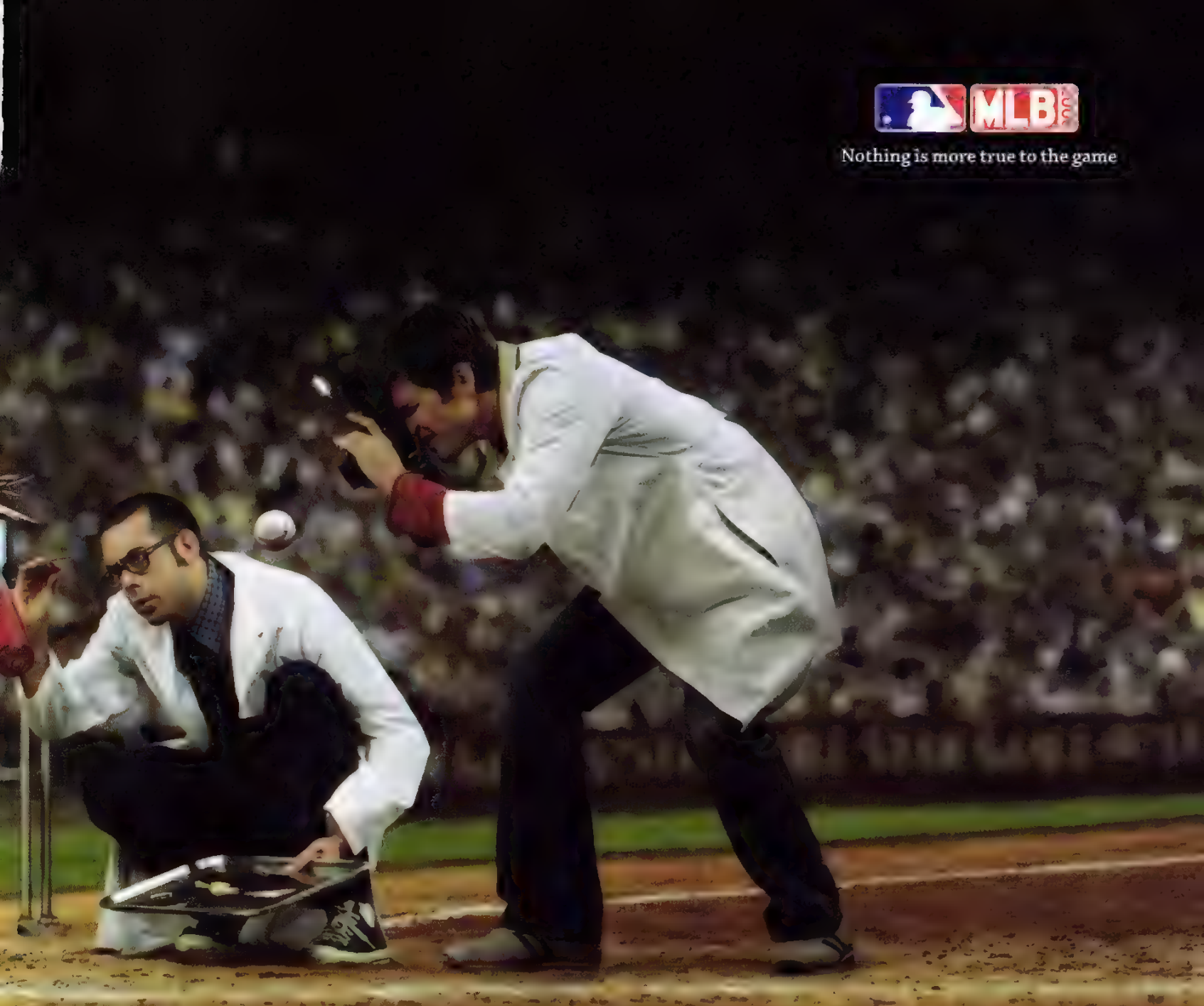
MLB 2005

Nothing is more true to the game



LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

Madden NFL 2006

> STYLE 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (XBOX, GC), 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (PC), (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, XBOX LIVE, OR PC INTERNET) **> PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS **> DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON **> RELEASE** AUGUST

A VISION OF THE FUTURE

Of all the years that EA Tiburon has had to deliver an installment that lives up to the blockbuster status of Madden, this has be the developer's most pressure-filled one yet. Facing scrutiny for its exclusive NFL license, the letdown of last year, and next-gen looming, nothing less than perfection will do. And from what we've seen of the new Madden, this is the installment fans will be talking about for years to come. We're not exaggerating, folks.

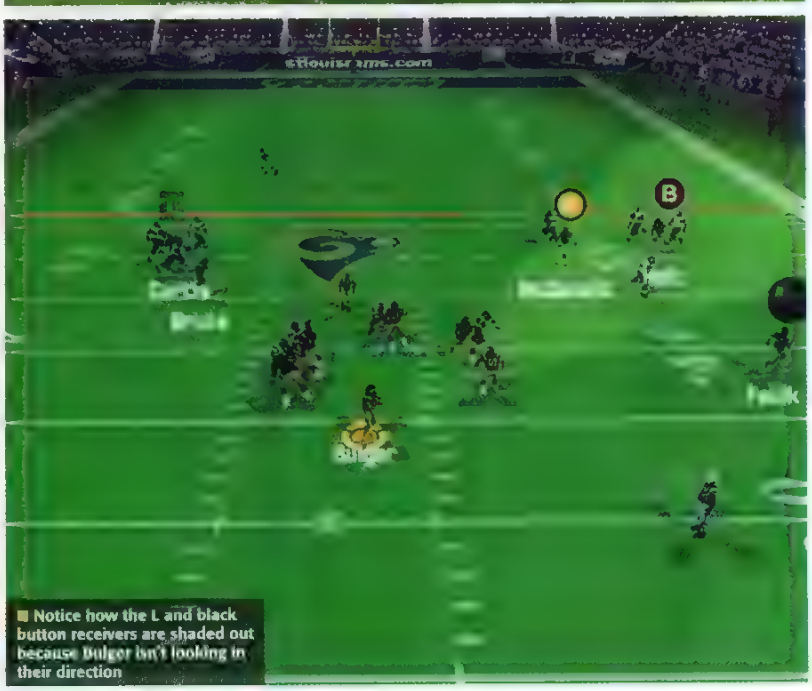
In real life, QBs must understand receivers' routes and be able to decipher defenses in order to know where to throw the ball. Madden 2006 puts this responsibility on your shoulders with Vision Passing. This is an optional gameplay system that shows you what direction the QB is looking in via a highlighted cone of vision. If you attempt to pass to a receiver you aren't looking at, your throw will suffer greatly. Meanwhile, only QBs that pass to players in the cone will be able to use the game's precision passing controls. This makes players have to physically scroll through their progressions just like a QB would in real life. After the snap, your QB will automatically turn his head in the direction of the play's primary receiver (which you can switch pre-snap). To scan the field, you swivel the right analog stick or hold down R2 or L2 and press the face button of the person you want to throw to. Then your QB will swing his head around in their direction. It's a very responsive system that is intuitive to use – even as the pocket collapses. You can stare down the guy you are going to throw to the whole time, but defenders will see this and get a jump on the route. Conversely, you can look the safety off by faking like you are going to throw to a certain part of the field then go somewhere else.

Each QB's cone of vision varies depending on their awareness rating, so guys like Peyton Manning who are already experts at understanding his opponents' and his own plays will fare better than some shaky-kneed rookie. Of course, as your QB progresses, his accuracy rating will increase, and so will his on-the-field vision. Scrambling affects the size of your cone, and those gamers who like to drop back 15 or 20 yards behind the line of scrimmage will find themselves penalized. There is also a gradation of accuracy within your field of vision depending on if someone is on the perimeter or in the middle of your gaze.

If this is getting you excited for the upcoming Madden, we can honestly say that this is only the tip of the iceberg. The franchise has some exciting new features coming your way in just about every area of the game – including some different directions that you might never have guessed, but will be pleasantly blown away by. Instead of worrying about EA taking a year off and phoning in this new Madden installment, the on-the-field changes it's made will make sure you never take a play off. ■■■

■ If you scramble out of the pocket, you will have to re-call up your receivers in order to see their passing icons

■ Duce thought this guy was an over-zealous autograph hound at first, but then he just stiff-armed him to the turf like a dog



■ Notice how the L and black button receivers are shaded out because Bulger isn't looking in their direction

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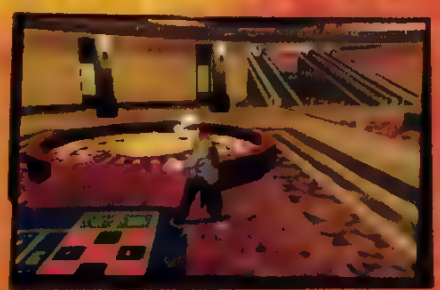

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Wielding a tank is always a possibility

Some buildings can be utterly destroyed and all can be damaged

Large scale enemies are a grevious affile to match the Hulk's strength

Demolishing a city one square block at a time

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** RADICAL GAMES > **RELEASE** SUMMER

MASS WEAPONIZATION

Glancing furtively behind themselves, hoping that their eyes are reading the situation incorrectly, the city's citizens are struck dumb. They stop and gape. The creature barreling toward them, a furious green mass at least resembling a man, can't be possible. He can't be picking up cars, tearing them in two and, when the automobile's pieces are no longer useful, chucking the deformed metal at neighboring buildings that make up the city skyline. This cannot be.

Oh, but it is. And from what we've played of Vivendi Universal and Radical Game's new take on the Hulk mythos, players (as the Hulk) will be able to vent rage at anything in their path. This is more than one of those sandbox games that are so popular these days – this is an unending stream of rampaging fury that you'll be able to manipulate with your very fingertips. Other superhero games have offered free roaming, expansive environments where players can take advantage of the hero's powers. The downfall of this plan can be bland travel between missions, but Hulk takes the commute and gives it a constant flow of destruction that we'd normally expect in straight action missions.

Hurtling down the street, players can pick up anything in their path and wrench it into a shape more suitable to their goals. The team is calling this "weaponization" – we're calling it something you have to see to believe. The Hulk picked up a bus, flattened it, and then rode it like a two-ton surfboard. When spent, it was tossed aside with such little effort that the simple action of throwing away a candy bar wrapper was brought to mind. Later, he uprooted streetlights and launched them away like giant harpoons. He powered up punches and left Volkswagen-sized craters in the asphalt. Incredible charged-up leaps put the Hulk on the side of a building, where his sheer determination took over and the green machine just ran straight to the top

The freedom that The Incredible Hulk offers is downright infectious. While there is an almost unlimited amount of this free-roaming chaos to bring about, the game will also feature a story and continuing plotline penned by Eisner winner Paul Jenkins. Wanting to keep some cards close to the chest, Vivendi and Radical weren't sharing many specifics on the tale, but if the large-scale boss fights and epic destruction we've seen so far are even half-integrated into the story experience, we're in.

The Hulk is a massive, brooding character only understood in the most basic of ways by many of the people around him. He's rash, destructive, inconsolable, and full of rage, but he also sounds like a mighty good time to play. Summer vacation can't come soon enough. ■■■

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Now these are shadows!

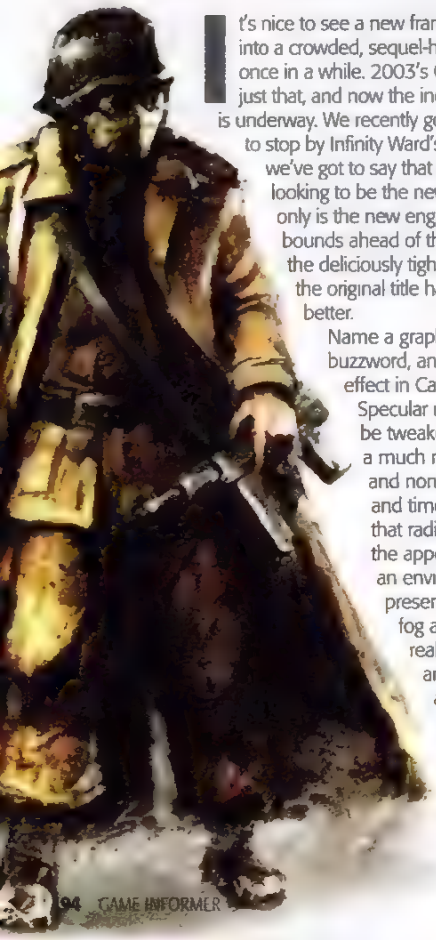
UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC | XBOX 360

Call of Duty 2

> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** INFINITY WARD > **RELEASE** FALL

DUTY CALLS...AGAIN



It's nice to see a new franchise break into a crowded, sequel-heavy market once in a while. 2003's Call of Duty did just that, and now the inevitable sequel is underway. We recently got a chance to stop by Infinity Ward's offices, and we've got to say that Call of Duty 2 is looking to be the new hotness. Not only is the new engine leaps and bounds ahead of the old tech, but the deliciously tight gameplay of the original title has only gotten better.

Name a graphics-related buzzword, and it's in full effect in Call of Duty 2. Specular maps that can be tweaked to present a much more realistic and non-plasticky look, and time of day effects that radically change the appearance of an environment are present. Volumetric fog and smoke, real-time lighting and shadows, and more are also included. These visual improvements are no simple increase in polygon count – the demo we saw literally had our mouths gaping. However, while every gamer appreciates having the onscreen action be as pretty as possible, that's hardly the only defining factor of a game.

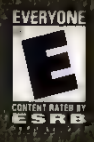
You can imagine the hell that's going to shortly break loose

Infinity Ward has a plethora of gameplay improvements coming our way as well. CoD 2's AI promises to be leagues better than the already-great system in the previous titles, for one. Enemies will move around a lot more and take the fight to you. Friends and foes alike will exhibit much more squad-based behavior, and the combat chatter of all AI-controlled characters should be much more relevant to the situation at hand, giving the player a better tactical awareness. This is necessary, since there are some new elements to combat in CoD 2 for AIs and players to cope with.

Between the vastly improved shadows and lighting effects that affect cover and visibility, smoke grenades promise to add a fair amount of depth to the choices you have in tackling an objective. As anyone who's played Counter-Strike can attest, being able to drop visibility to nearly zero is an incredibly powerful tactical option. To further broaden the available strategies, battlefields in CoD 2 will be far more open than in the original. You'll frequently have multiple directives to fulfill, and it's up to you to choose the order and approach to each of them.

As some people took issue with the fractured, storyline-jumping nature of the original CoD's campaign, Infinity Ward is approaching the sequel in a somewhat different manner. You'll be able to choose different branches of the story to play through based on what you've already done, meaning that you can follow one soldier's story to completion without interruption if you so choose. Between this and the rest of the upgrades to the first Call of Duty (which is still a great game in its own right), the deck looks to be decisively stacked in CoD 2's favor. If this isn't on your 2005 list of games to watch, we recommend you rectify that oversight immediately. ■■■

Soccer. Down to the smallest details. More than 19,000 players from 935 world-class clubs are ready to hit the pitch in World Tour Soccer 2006. Use the new Eye Toy® component to put your face on an animated player before dribbling your way through eight international tournaments. And endless options of play, including Cup Mode and Career Mode, will keep even the most demanding footballers more than pleased.



PlayStation 2

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This engine can render some serious environments

PC

Battlefield 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 64-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE > **RELEASE** FALL

PUTTING THE "TEAM" BACK IN TEAM-BASED

Though Swedish developer Digital Illusions was lately acquired by the monolithic institution that is Electronic Arts, what we recently saw in a playtest of Battlefield 2 would imply that none of the company's incredible design skills have suffered for it. This sequel sports the obvious graphical improvements that come with any iteration of a franchise, but the focus of Battlefield 2 seems to be on streamlining and upgrading the gameplay experience in as many ways as possible, from the subtle to the drastic.

The overall philosophy behind BF 2 is definitely an emphasis on teamwork. Many new systems are in place to help with this, from sharing ranking points with your vehicle-mates to being rewarded for performing your job (medics get points for healing friendlies, for instance). These points are tracked for every category imaginable. Radio messages to your team are now done with an easily accessed radial menu, which is far faster to use than the old way. Having a medic in a vehicle will passively cause any footsoldiers nearby to slowly heal, while engineers do the same for other vehicles. One member of a team can even act as the commander, issuing orders and deploying recon drones and artillery strikes. And finally, players can form squads to more effectively take the fight to the enemy.

The biggest and most glaring change in BF 2, however, is the inclusion of voicechat. And not some half-assed, lag-tastic implementation, either. In order to promote the teamwork and squad play elements that Digital Illusions is pushing for this title, the only voicechat you'll hear is that of your squad. The squad leader, on the other hand, can also hear the voice of the team's commander, preserving a sort of hierarchy and theoretically making it easier to coordinate tactics. If all goes well, this could all result in players having a much less frustrating time trying to get everyone on the same page. Since having a well-organized, effective team is the root of what makes games like Battlefield fun, this looks like just the kind of sequel that players yearn for. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

America's Army: Rise of a Soldier

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** SECRET LEVEL > **RELEASE** SUMMER

TRAINING DAY

Playing your role is the most important thing in AA

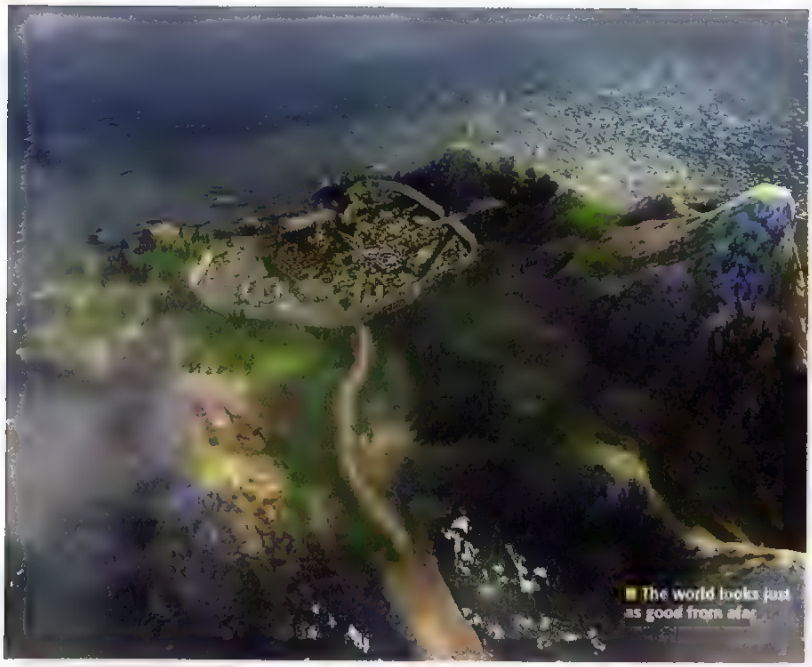
What if the U.S. Army made a game to simulate the infantry experience as accurately as possible (and double as a recruitment tool)? Actually, they already did – America's Army debuted on PC back in August of 2002 as a free download. Now, Ubisoft and developer Secret Level (Star Wars: Starfighter) are cooperating with the Army to bring it to Xbox and PS2. After having a chance to check out the port firsthand, though, we can safely say that this is no simple translation to consoles.

While the PC version is almost exclusively multiplayer-focused, this title will have a significant single-player portion. Consisting of approximately 35 missions (which don't have to be played in any particular order) that run about 15-20 minutes apiece, AA's Career mode looks like quite a lot of game. You'll even accumulate skill points based on how well you fulfill your role, as opposed to how many kills you get.

Gameplay, while largely straight-up (if painfully realistic) FPS, does make a few departures from the norms in AA. By pulling the left trigger your view will snap to the general vicinity of the nearest enemy, and holding it down will drastically lower the sensitivity of the right stick for fine adjustments to your aim. Also, the suppressing fire mechanic has a lot of potential. When under fire, your aim will really go to hell – and this holds true for AI characters, friendly and enemy, as well. Provided it's implemented well, this should add another dimension to the tactical possibilities in AA.

Though America's Army is literally a recruiting tool for the U.S. Army, it looks to be shaping up into, at the very least, a competent war-themed FPS. Be aware, though, that the boot-camp-like rigors of America's Army likely won't suit the casual or action-oriented FPS player. ■■■

Don't green bags defeat the purpose of arctic camo?



The world looks just as good from afar

"That's it, slaves! Clean my litterbox! It's the size of Rhode Island."

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Black & White 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** LIONHEAD STUDIOS **> RELEASE** FALL

THE HAND OF GOD

Legendary developer Peter Molyneux is famous for making grandiose claims about whatever game he's working on (see Fable) and not following through on them – and having the title turn out to be excellent anyway. Having enlisted the talents of Ron Millar (who had a large role in making Warcraft and Starcraft), Molyneux is now seeking to "totally reinvent RTS" with Black & White 2. Given that you literally play the role of a culture's god, he may not be far off base.

On the subject of bringing Millar in to help with B&W 2, Molyneux said with a laugh, "[We had] a pretty interesting discussion about the things we hated about each others' games." The good part of that, of course, is that something interesting is bound to result from the two radically different perspectives of these gaming luminaries. The overall feeling out at developer Lionhead Studios is that the RTS genre isn't evolving like it should be, and that god games (many of which Molyneux created) like the first Black & White lack theme, story, and a motivation for the player. Certainly, if B&W 2 can combine these two genres without getting overly complex, it could be seriously cool. It does have a completely new engine which, besides the luscious graphics, provides full physics modeling for much of the world. City walls will realistically chip and crumble under the assault of catapults, and throwing rocks (or people, if you're sadistic) around will be all the more satisfying.

One way that Lionhead aims to streamline the B&W 2 experience is through the novel interface. Rather than spending lots of time in different windows and menus, something that Millar and Molyneux both abhor, more or less everything is done with a simple mouse point/click/drag system. Need some roads? Simply grab one that you have and drag it around, and your people will build it for you. Need to gather some wood? Pick up a couple of your followers and drop them onto a patch of trees, and they'll go to work on them. All of your divine desires will be able to be accomplished through this quick and intuitive interface. Molyneux intimated that this technology will be used in Lionhead's upcoming film-making game The Movies, as well.

The marquee feature of training a huge creature to do your bidding, whether that be the smiting of your enemies or spreading love and joy throughout your domain, returns from the original. Between that, the possibility of conscripting your people into a conquering army, and the more sim-like development of your civilization, B&W 2 has a lot to offer. "This is what Black & White is about. It's about being the god of war or the god of peace," says Molyneux. We've already got a pretty good idea which path we'll choose. ■■■

Mere mortals have no place in this conflict

XBOX | PC | PSP

Stacked

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 9-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, INTERNET, OR PSP AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** MYELIN MEDIA > **DEVELOPER** 5000FT > **RELEASE** SUMMER

A CHIP, A CHAIR, AND A CHANCE

With Internet poker all the rage and Texas Hold 'em all over TV, it was only a matter of time before someone fleshed it out for video gamers. Developer 5000ft and publisher Myelin Media have hooked up with poker star Daniel Negreanu to give you a chance to rise up through the poker ranks and face the pros.

Stacked utilizes an AI system dubbed Poki to control the rest of the players at your table. Poki was designed by the University of Alberta's Poker Research Group over the past ten years in order to study player tendencies and implement real-time strategies to counter them. However, the basis of good poker still lies in the ability of players to pick up on tells (or facial expressions) from those around the table. Stacked mimics this aspect of the game by letting you pick and visually emote tells in specific situations. This allows you to instruct your character to bluff at appropriate times to lure your opponents to their doom. Of course, don't believe everything you see, because the AI could be bluffing right back at you. And when you go up against the real-life pros such as Daniel Negreanu, Jennifer Harman, Erick Lindgren, and more, you are going to have to be on your toes for every hand and every bet.

Not to be left out of all the action going online, Stacked will also allow you to play with friends, as well as in multi-table tournaments featuring nine players per table. Unfortunately, Myelin Media has yet to spill any more details on this feature of the game, including what kinds of prizes will be up for grabs. Online play will also feature voice chat and text messaging to make the game more intimate than your average poker game on the Internet. Stacked sounds like the perfect game on the go, so PSP players can shout "I'm going all in!" the next time they are at the mall, in the car, or in the restroom of the Blue Oyster bar. With the PSP edition already in the bag, we'd be surprised if the game wasn't also on Sony's other console before long. ■■■

WHO IS DANIEL NEGREANU?

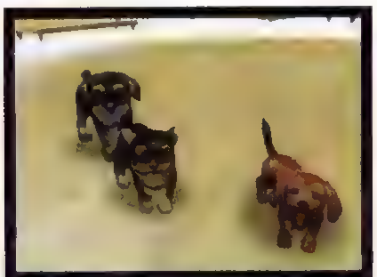
Toronto-born Daniel Negreanu is one of the world's top poker players, winning over four million dollars in tournament winnings last year, and garnering *Cardplayer Magazine's* Tournament Player of the Year award and World Series of Poker's Player of the Year award. Not one to rest on his laurels, these accolades only spur him on. "If I'm not challenged I'm a worthless poker player," he once said in an interview. "I enjoy the thrill of victory, but without the agony of defeat it is definitely less rewarding."

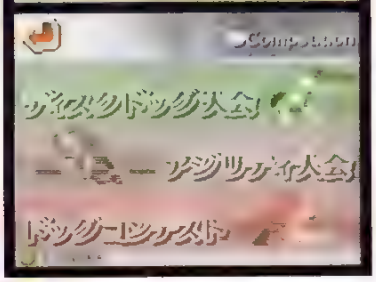
NINTENDO DS

Nintendogs

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** TBA

PUPPY LOVE





You've seen the puppies at the pound with their button noses, floppy ears, and innocent eyes. These little bundles of love seem almost perfect, except for one glaring flaw – the omission of a touch screen. Thankfully, Nintendo will soon be rectifying this blunder of nature with Nintendogs, an upcoming simulator for the DS that's the doggone cutest game we've seen in a long time.

Emulating several aspects of real-life pet care, Nintendogs makes full use of the handheld's unique features to instill players with a true sense of ownership over their canine companions. The microphone is used to name your dog, as well as issue commands (like "sit" or "stay") that it will learn over time. Of course, how fast it catches on will depend on its breed and personality; some dogs are more stubborn, while others are more intelligent and eager to please. You'll only have a few breeds to choose from initially, though more can be unlocked (along with other items and accessories) by entering your pup into certain agility competitions like frisbee-catching.

The touch screen will be even more important in your interactions. Just give the screen a tap, and watch your four-legged friend bound up to the screen and put its paws up. Once you get the dog's attention, you can use the stylus to rub its belly, or even play some fetch with a tennis ball. After that's all done, you can go for a walk outside (be sure to bring a pooper scooper) and give the little guy a chance to interact wirelessly with other users' virtual pooches.

Tapping into the conceptual successes of Seaman, Black & White, and even Tamagotchi, this title promises to offer an irresistible and addictive take on having a pet – with none of the mess or hassle! In fact, for every copy of Nintendogs sold, that's probably one more puppy at the animal shelter that won't find a home. We hope you're proud of yourself for looking forward to this one. ■■■

AREA-51

THE CONSPIRACY IS NO LONGER A THEORY.

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"...NOTHING SHORT OF GORGEOUS."
- OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

"...ONE INCREDIBLE SHOOTER"
- GAME INFORMER

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- PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

"...COULD BE YOUR SECOND HALO"
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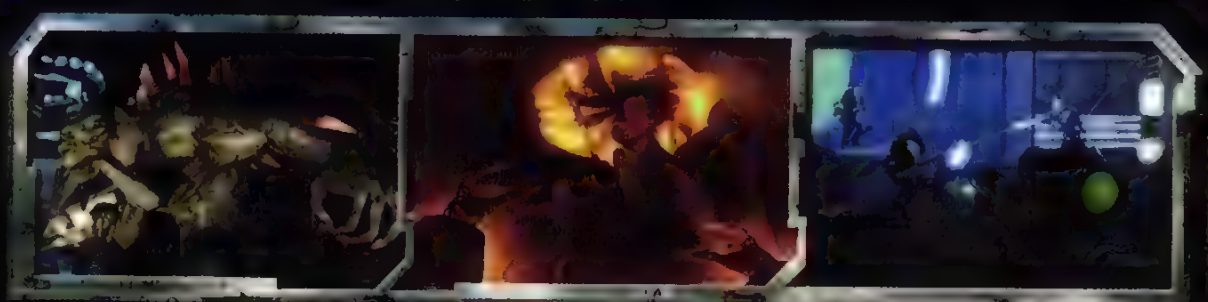

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MIDWAY

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

XBOX LIVE ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY PlayStation.2 PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NCAA Football 2006

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2) OR 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX) (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** JULY 1

HEISMAN HOPES

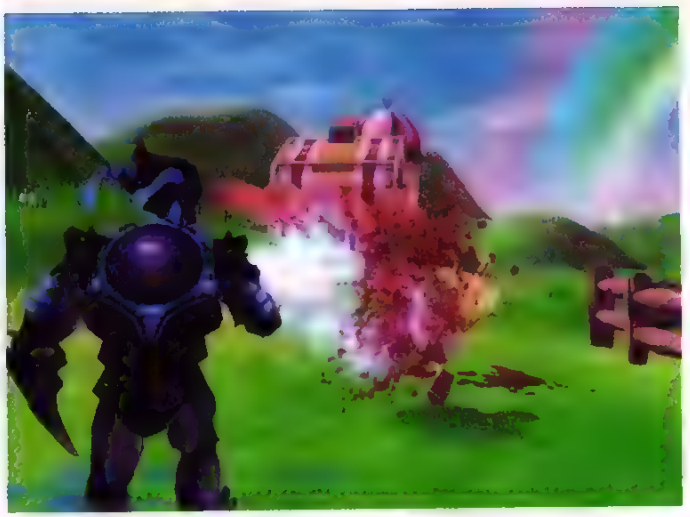
The focus of the NCAA franchise has been the teams: the pageantry, the rivalries, and the dynasties. However, last year's game put the emphasis more on individuals with its Match-Up Stick. Now the series is going a step further by putting you in the shoes of a Heisman hopeful.

When first turning on the game you'll be dropped right into a college football camp for high school kids. As the coach gathers you around with a pep talk, you realize that this is your time to shine in front of the scouts present from the all the best schools. You'll pick a position and run through a pertinent drill similar to Madden's offseason minigames to showcase your skills. If you're a running back, for example, it'll be a between-the-tackles ten-yard fight to the endzone. On the other hand, QBs and defensive backs will have to prove their mettle in a seven-on-seven passing drill. How well you do will determine which colleges offer you scholarships (or you can be a walk-on for any team). You'll then check into your dorm room, signaling the beginning of your quest for the Heisman. As you play through games in this Become a Legend mode (it's completely separate from Dynasty mode), you'll gain skill and see leather couches, new girlfriends, fan mail, and other perks coming your way as you become the big man on campus. Of course, on gameday, you play the game like you would any other, so you don't have to play just as your Heisman hopeful all afternoon. If you do, however, Tiburon has told us you will receive a slight attribute bump as a reward. Do well enough and you'll be a Heisman candidate who can be drafted in the early rounds into Madden NFL 2006, or you can skip the pros and become a coach, which would play out similar to Dynasty mode.

This is just the beginning of the changes for NCAA. What was once just another football game to buy has turned into a glorious quest for the ultimate trophy in college sports. The road to the Heisman has different paths, and NCAA is exploring its own ways of achieving collegiate fame. ■■■

Another afternoon of embarassment for the Badgers

If you think you've got the skills to play with the big boys, you can declare yourself eligible for the draft early



XBOX

Raze's Hell

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** ARTECH STUDIOS > **RELEASE** APRIL 12

MAKE CUTE THINGS BLEED

You haven't known true rage until you've stared into the mocking, condescending eyes of an adorable stuffed animal. If they also happen to be packing energy weapons and planning a hostile takeover of your planet, well, that's just going too far. Welcome to Raze's Hell.

In Majesco's new third-person shooter, players control Raze, an anti-hero who likes his dark, dreary planet, and he will do anything necessary to protect it from becoming cutesy at the hands of the invading Kewletts. Armed with an array of organic firepower (in addition to a stylish arm blade), you'll cut through legions of lethal and lovable fluffy things. Inflate them like balloons and blast them out of the sky. Sneak up behind them and stab them in the head. And when the killing is done, suck up their tender remnants to regain health. Raze may be deplorable and surly, but he certainly promises to add a morbid and quirky twist to the "save the world" story players are accustomed to.

Of course, cute or not, the Kewletts won't simply take Raze's abuse. Carrying weapons like bunny rocket launchers and jack-in-the-boxes that play "Pop Goes The Weasel," they contribute even more unsettling moments to the game. There's just something not right about a cuddly creature that says "I like the taste of sand" before trying to disintegrate you with a musical toy.

Raze's Hell is also adhering to the phrase "Killing as one, tons of fun. Killing as a pair, beyond compare." Okay, we made that up. But it still applies perfectly to the game, which features a co-op mode, along with a healthy lineup of online matches including deathmatch and capture the flag. Not all game types are so familiar, however -- there is a variation of soccer that has players armed to the teeth while trying to score goals with a Kewlett-skin ball.

If you're sick of the numerous titles out there for normal, well-adjusted individuals, or if you've ever declared the Children's Television Workshop your mortal foe, Raze's Hell could be your ticket to heaven. ■■■

Rage, rage against the coming of the light

PLAYSTATION 2

Samurai Western

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ATLUS **> DEVELOPER** SPIKE/ACQUIRE **> RELEASE** JUNE 25

EAST MEETS WEST

Samurai are common fixtures in the video game landscape, but they're seldom seen in settings like this. As the name implies, Samurai Western puts players in the shoes of a Japanese swordsman in the American old west. That's right – we'll finally have an answer to the age-old question of who would win in the eternal struggle between gunslingers and sword swingers. Hey, that rhymes!

We've had a chance to spend some hands-on time with Samurai Western, and its gameplay revolves around simple hack 'n slash action. Enemies swarm at you from all directions sporting firearms, explosives, throwing knives, and more. It's up to you to cut through them in true Dynasty Warriors-esque style, but the addition of a dodge button adds a little depth to the action. By dodging, you can evade the hailstorm of bullets and even deflect them back at your attackers. Combining evasion with your attacks earns points that can be used to upgrade your character and also fills your Master mode gauge. When full, Master mode can be initiated with the click of a button, which turns every attack into a one-hit kill for a limited time.

The gameplay is fairly basic, but there are hundreds of unlockables to spur players forward, including accessories, weapons, and playable characters. A second player can even join in the carnage, taking up the role of a gunslinger for the ultimate fusion of bullets and blades.

Developed by the creators of the original Tenchu and Way of the Samurai games, Samurai Western honestly isn't the most unique or innovative game around, but its fast-paced, visceral combat is satisfying in its brutal simplicity. The setting is also a welcome change of pace from the typical action game locales, and its character customization options add some nice depth. If you like westerns as much as kung-fu flicks, then this title might just be the right game for you. ■■■

The dodge button is great for defense against bullets and pesky mosquitoes

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PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures

PC

Star Wars Galaxies: Episode III Rage of the Wookiees

This May, LucasArts is inviting players to explore the Wookiee homeworld of Kashyyyk. As you mingle with these proud warriors, we anticipate that you'll learn why they don't wear pants, and whether or not they have problems with danglers in their fur. In addition to a reworked combat system, this expansion pack introduces the Space Mining gameplay mechanic (which can be used in all 11 sectors), as well as cybernetic body part replacement. Within over 100 story-driven quests, you'll run into new creatures like the Trandoshans, and will get the chance to pilot new starcraft. You can even take to the skies in Anakin's Jedi Starfighter model.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

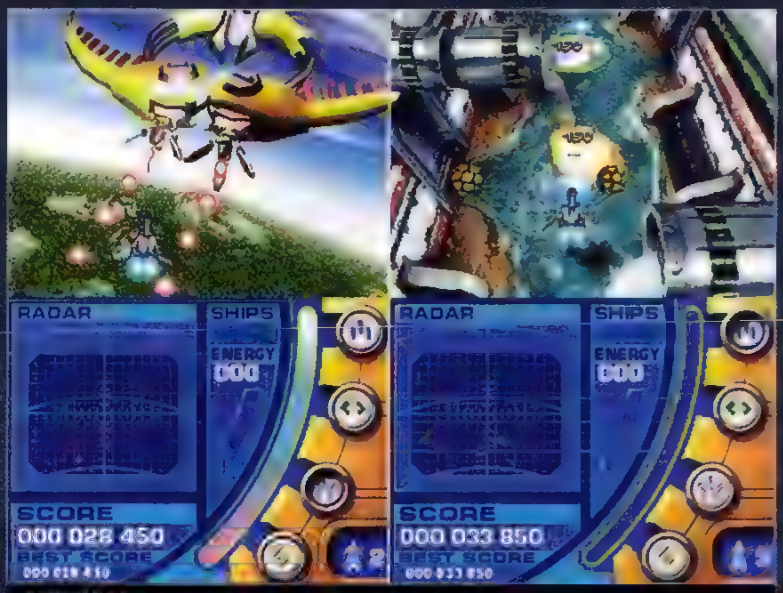
Riviera

Gamers with a post-apocalyptic RPG itch have always been able to count on Atlus to provide creative and unique adventures, and its summer release Riviera is no exception. In a world where the gods perished long ago fighting demons in the war dubbed Ragnarok, the Seven Magi resurrect Grim Angels wielding Diviners (powerful holy weapons) to combat a growing demonic threat. The title features several minigames, plus a battle system that allows items to function differently depending on who equips them. In other news, "Grim Angels wielding Diviners" sounds really sweet.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Indigo Prophecy

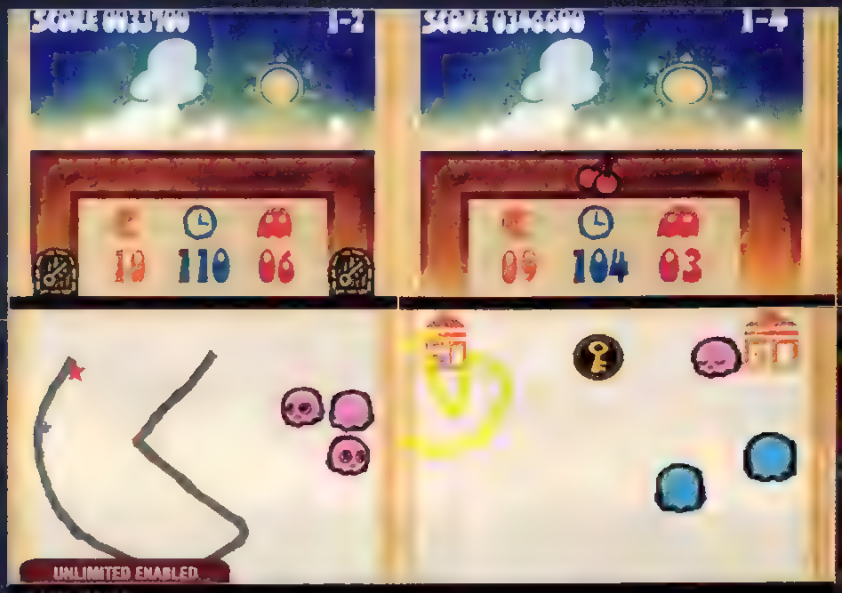
From what we hear, this fall release from Atari sounds like an actual update to the classic adventure game formula. Story-wise, the game is set in a fear-stricken New York City. Reeling from a series of murders where otherwise healthy, well-adjusted citizens kill total strangers, players will take on the roles of four characters trying to solve the crimes. Atari and developer Quantic Dream talk about a variety of film-style techniques the game will use to immerse players and make the experience more intense – things like multi-view, split-screen effects and lots of motion-capture work for the animations.



NINTENDO DS

Nanostray

Shooters haven't traditionally demanded much in terms of control schemes – a fire button and way to dodge bullets and you're good to go. That will change come July when Majesco's Nanostray hits the DS. Using the capabilities of the touch screen, players will be able to switch among the many weapons and sub-weapons, navigate hyperspace, and scan bosses for weaknesses. It also has wireless co-op and head-to-head modes, not to mention the word "nano" in the title, which immediately makes it sound futuristic and awesome.



NINTENDO DS

Pac-Pix

Are you sick of saying "I wish reality were more like *Cool World*"? Of course you are, which is why Namco is finally giving you the chance to bring your doodles to life – providing you exclusively doodle Pac-Mans. In Pac-Pix, players will use the touch screen to draw the yellow dot-muncher, who then springs into motion and changes direction according to the lines drawn in front of him. In a world still feeling the pain of *Monkeybone*, Pac-Pix will hopefully renew interest in living cartoons when it releases later this year.

PLAYSTATION 2

Okami

When them educated types start really discussing the idea of video games as a valid art form, they might have one more title to reference. Capcom's Clover Studios (of Viewtiful Joe fame) has been quietly working on a new title that looks like a Japanese watercolor scroll, weaves ancient legend and symbolism into gameplay, and has characters playing as the earthbound wolf form of Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu. The goddess grows in strength as more people believe in her – this faith is earned by filling citizen's requests or literally bringing color and life to the land. No release specifics outside of a launch this year for Japan have been announced, but an English version is more than likely on the way.

REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI

106

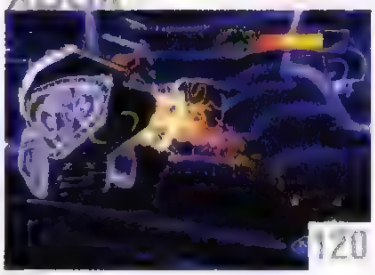
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition

PS2

114

Rise of the Kasai

XBOX



120

Psychonauts

PC

124

Empire Earth II

118

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

Jade Empire

Just as BioWare thrilled us with its good and evil paths in Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, the developer is now bringing even more flexibility via its combat system for Jade Empire. Featuring flowing battles that take advantage of a multitude of fighting styles and strategies, this title has the depth to satisfy fans of both the action and RPG genres. That's no small feat when you consider that Jade Empire's combat alone could constitute an entire game in its own right. Then again, we wouldn't miss the opportunity to dress up in drag every now and again! Find out what the hell we're talking about on page 118.

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	Lutefisk: A substance so foul that no one should be subjected to it. Not even its Norwegian creators can stomach it.

> 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.

NINTENDO DS

126

Yoshi's Touch and Go

PSP

126

Metal Gear Acid

122

PC

SWAT 4

Most PC gamers at this point have a fairly good idea of how a first-person shooter plays. Well, you can chuck those preconceptions out the window when it comes to SWAT 4 – an unyielding enforcement of realism and strict rules of conduct make this title a shooter of a different stripe. Cool innovations like the picture-in-picture window for issuing remote orders and a delightful array of weapons, both lethal and non-lethal, help make SWAT 4 the real deal. Page 122

REVIEWS INDEX

Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition 106
Area 51 108
Cold Fear 110
LEGO Star Wars 111
NARC 112
Drive to Survive 113
Rise of the Kasai 114
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory 114
Haunting Ground 116
Dynasty Warriors 5 116
Stella Deus: The Gate of Eternity 116
Jade Empire 118
Psychonauts 120
Close Combat: First to Fight 121
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30 121
SWAT 4 122
Empire Earth II 124
Yoshi Touch & Go 126
Metal Gear Acid 126
Atari Retro Classics 128
WarioWare Twisted 128
Twisted Metal: Head-On 128
Lumines 130
Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower 130
Arthur Maclean's Mercury 130
Wipeout Pure 130
Pokémon Dash 130
Dynasty Warriors 132
Need For Speed: Underground Rivals 132
Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade 134
Spider-Man 2 134
Rayman DS 134
Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix 136
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 136
Gretzky NHL 136
Pac-Man Pinball Advance 136
NFL Street 2: Unleashed 136
NBA 136
FIFA Soccer 136
World Tour Soccer 136
Ridge Racer 136

pg.110

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

This is where GI breaks down multi-platform games. So whenever you see the logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

EC	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older
E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older
E 10+	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older
T	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.
M	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older
AO	Content suitable only for adults.
RP	Product is awaiting final rating

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

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

480p – Progressive scanning, this option ("p"= progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture, 480i (i = interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting

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

action – A term we use for games like Devil May Cry and Viewtiful Joe

ad hoc: A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity

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

bloom: An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces

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

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

first-party: A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system

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

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

infrastructure: A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances

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

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

MMO: Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role-playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft

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

NARCing ground: A spooky, haunted place where the worst clichés of horror and tough cops collide, and ghostly dealers peddle hauntingly atrocious gameplay on every corner

normal mapping: A graphical technique in which a hi-res skin containing 3D information, revealed by light reflecting off the surface, is wrapped around a low-res model

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

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

pop-up: When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

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

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

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR LAN, OR XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK)
> **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO > **RELEASE** APRIL 12 > **ESRB** E 10+

HIGH OCTANE THRILLS

Playing Midnight Club 3, I can almost feel the determination of the development team at Rockstar San Diego to unseat EA's blockbuster Need for Speed: Underground franchise as the world's most popular street racing game. Building on the strengths of the past, the company has crafted what I think is one of the best racing titles of the last few years.

For starters, the work that's been done with the graphics engine is nothing short of amazing. It was always one of the fastest racing games on the market, but that sense of speed has been tremendously enhanced by new blur effects, sparks, and light trails. No matter how much automotive madness is unfolding onscreen, the framerate rarely slips. Rockstar San Diego is also very adept at using subtle, cinematic shifts in perspective and camera angle to further enhance your perception that you're barreling down an alley at 170+ mph. For me, this is probably rivaled only by the last F-Zero game for overall sense of speed.

The car models themselves are also vastly improved, with highly reflective windows and paint-jobs. This is key to the game's success, because with the involvement of *DUB Magazine*, the customization options have been taken to the next level – and now the cars looks every bit as hot they would in real life. Honestly, there's little that you can't tweak on your car. Everything from paint jobs to hydraulics to small details like badges and stickers can be altered to your liking. This versatility adds a whole new element of fun to the game. For example, Reiner and I spent a few hours crafting cars based on the color schemes of different NFL teams, and then made custom back-window stickers with the franchise name. It's this sort of thing that really makes you connect to your car in a way that you never do in games like Gran Turismo. With over 60 cars and a nearly endless variety of ways to change them, it will be many months before I exhaust MC 3's garage options.

The control, as before, does away with any realism and delivers nothing but high-speed thrills. Accurate physics models? That's for math class. I'd much rather jump a vintage Impala at insane speeds over a shopping mall, thanks. For me, games are about doing things I can't do in real life, and that's what Midnight Club 3 allows me to do. However, that's not to say it's not challenging – many of the open city courses will stretch your nerves (and your eyes) to the breaking point. It's very intense and intensely satisfying when you finally figure out the perfect route or hit that difficult turn into a sweet shortcut.

Also, the new abilities: Roar (which lets you clear a path in front of you), AGRO (a brief burst of invincibility), and Zone (a time-slowing power for hitting tight corners) add some new depth and strategy to the racing.

Given all there is to do in the Career mode, from City Tournaments to vehicle-specific club races to challenging local street racing legends, I suspect this will keep racing fans busy for a long while. Each of the three cities (San Diego, Atlanta, and Detroit) has its own unique feel, and it could take a lifetime to truly learn every little back alley and hidden path. On top of this, the car customization options keeps you motivated to earn more money and unlock new parts. In addition, the robust online mode has been dramatically improved, with new community features like car clubs and wicked new multiplayer power-ups.

In my mind, this is really the complete racing package. There wasn't one moment during my time with this game that I wasn't engaged and having fun. Ultimately, that's the mark of a great title in any genre.—**MATT**

The bikes are much more stable when driving, and the new custom choppers are truly badass

In every city, there will be garage where you can go to get racing tips and custom work done

Few games have ever delivered a sense of speed like Midnight Club 3 does

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Build on the success of Midnight Club 2 by adding comprehensive customization options

> **Graphics:** Really amazing. The sense of speed and lighting affects are gorgeous and the cars are beautiful

> **Sound:** Featuring very cutting-edge selections of rock, hip-hop, dancehall, and techno, this is one of the best licensed soundtracks since San Andreas and THUG 2

> **Playability:** The new abilities add a lot to the gameplay, and the control is capable of dealing with the insane speed

> **Entertainment:** GT 4 might have more cars, but I don't think it's more fun than Midnight Club 3

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.25

Midnight Club 3 races circles around Need for Speed: Underground and raises the bar for what players can expect from street racing. With a heavy focus placed on cosmetic vehicular customization, players will spend just as much time in the auto shop pimping their rides as they will on the streets racing them. This may seem like a major turnoff, but the level of satisfaction that is achieved by personalizing your car is immeasurable. They may just be cars, but you'll love them like you would your very own children. The great thing is, this is only a small fraction of the game. The racing roars with adrenaline-pumping excitement. It's faster than you could possibly imagine, the bikes are much easier to control, and the new power-up system completely changes the way you race with different car types. With a hefty online package kicking replay into high gear, Midnight Club 3 delivers on every front in a big, big way.—**REINER**

True fear lies deep within your mind...

Fear. Panic. Terror.

You're lost in an eerie castle.
You're being chased. There is nowhere to run.
Your only hope for survival lies in the place you'd least expect.

Uncover the secret that brought you there before time runs out.

130+ creepy rooms to explore, fully interactive environments, multiple endings

Develop strong bond with canine ally for protection

Panic Mode creates heightened tension and fear

HAUNTING GROUND

May 2005

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

PlayStation 2

CAPCOM
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UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Area 51

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (XBOX) (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY STUDIOS AUSTIN
> **RELEASE** APRIL 25 > **ESRB** M

WELCOME TO EARTH...PREPARE TO DIE

Conspiracy theorists believe that the U.S. government is harboring alien technology within a secret military facility known as Area 51. While the powers that be refute these claims as UFO folklore, Ethan Cole, a specialist in the U.S. Army's Hazardous Materials Division, is about to learn the truth behind this clandestine operation and why the government is so desperately trying to hide it.

A viral mutagen, which irreversibly alters all life on Earth, has escaped its containment and is working its way through the many layers of Area 51 – transforming anyone or anything that it comes into contact with. It's up to Cole and a small band of military personnel to quarantine the base and prevent the virus from escaping, or life as we know it will cease to be. In an unfortunate twist, those who have been infected are nearly impossible to contain without lethal force. With their sanity stripped away and an alien-like exterior blanketing their humanity, they have become monsters and must be dealt with as such.

From the moment that you step into Cole's shoes, unbridled chaos is quick to ensue. The lights will go out, leaving you in complete darkness as beady, glowing green eyes swiftly approach. Windows will shatter, showering glass and hordes of creatures on top of you. You will even be called upon to place a severed arm on a security panel to grant entry into a new area. Heart-racing excitement like this is hard to come by.

The gameplay that fuels this tension-filled premise is fairly simplistic, falling very much in line with your standard FPS package. In other words, there really is nothing to it other than blowing huge holes through everything that moves. Thankfully, the targeting system is dead-on precise, Cole's movements are swift, and the selection of weapons is well balanced, offering up a nice variety of arms. As much as I love the quest of descending into the depths of Area 51 to learn of mankind's ultimate secret, the aspect of this game that really stands out and puts the "I must have that" thought into your head is how the weapons handle. When you fire the machine gun, it feels like you have a jackhammer in your hand. It's noisy, the recoil is incredible, and the blinding effects that rocket from its muzzle are a sight to behold. Outside of this automated bliss, the pistol kicks like a bull, and even Area 51's experimental weapons offer interesting facets like a laser sight that factors in ricochet rounds. Bouncing a bullet off of two walls and into the back of a creature's head is deserving of applause each and every time you do it.

As the game unfolds, the difficulty ramps up at a nice pitch, new enemies and challenges are thrown your way at the right times, your character evolves in more ways than you could possibly imagine, and the story concludes with a resounding bang. At the end of this journey, I walked away pleased. While I can say that I've experienced fevered gunplay like this before in other games, the detail that went into expanding upon many of the conspiracies surrounding Area 51 really gives this title a unique feel. You'll get the chance to revel in the verity that people have longed to unearth for decades. The Roswell crash...the faked lunar landing...it's all here.

Area 51 doesn't reinvent the FPS wheel, but it doesn't try to, either. It sticks to the genre conventions that we know and love and concentrates on delivering one great firefight after another. With guns firing at full tilt, and mindless carnage taking center stage, Midway has a surefire hit on its hands. Whether you believe in aliens or not, no one can deny the pleasure that comes from blasting them off of our planet.—**REINER**

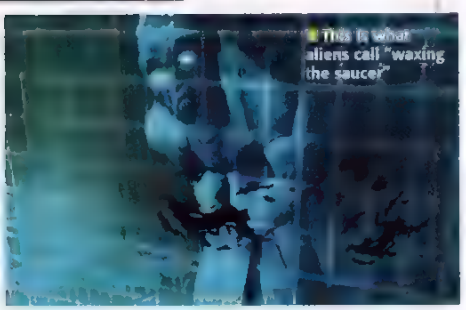
hdedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

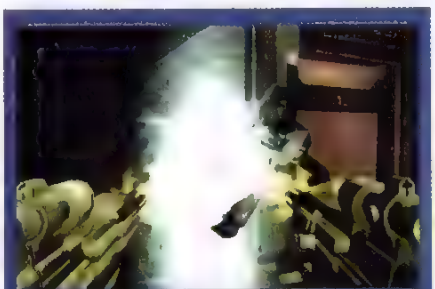
The Xbox version edges out the PS2 by offering four-player split-screen as opposed to two. Additionally, the lighting effects are more vibrant and the framerate doesn't buckle when the action intensifies.

"Holy crap! That *Flight of the Navigator* movie was a true story!"

The ricochet laser sighting can produce some wild shots



This is what aliens call "waxing the saucer"



ALIENS IN CYBERSPACE

Area 51's online offering is just as rewarding as the single-player campaign. It supports up to 16 players for both systems, features 18 maps, and allows players to enter a handful of different match types. In a brilliant move, you can actually scale the size of each map to accommodate the number of players in a game. Matches like Infection, which has players cooperating then turning against each other when they mutate, gives Area 51's online presence a unique angle that ties directly into the single-player themes.

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Enter Area 51 and blow it to bits

> **Graphics:** The detail that went into making Area 51 a fully structured complex is very impressive. The level of chaos that can cloud the screen at any given time is equally as praiseworthy

> **Sound:** The banter between the NPCs is done very well. The ambience and score combine to create the perfect atmosphere for the hunt

> **Playability:** Standard FPS play with nicely designed weapons and excellent controls

> **Entertainment:** Single player can be completed in roughly eight to ten hours (depending on your skill level), but the robust multiplayer package gives the experience some serious legs

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Looking really great whether you pop in the PS2 or the Xbox version, Area 51 is an FPS in the grand style. Mutants, aliens, explosions, and crazy weapons abound. Specializing in throwing a constant flow of enemies at you at any given time, there's just the right combination of action and anticipation to keep pushing you forward through the moderately entertaining conspiracy tale. A couple of ingenious weapons give you some cool options, and the eventual ability to utilize special mutant powers further broadens the gameplay options. There's a sort of summer blockbuster, popcorn scarfing Hollywood mentality to the whole game, which in this case works wonders in keeping you entertained. Online multiplayer is volatile and fast, with the clever option to scale back map sizes to better suit a small number of players. There are times things start to feel a little repetitive, but who am I to complain about blowing up hordes of aliens? This is solid fun, plain and simple.
—**MILLER**

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You are the First to Fight – a US Marine on the front lines of urban combat in Beirut. Lead a 4-man fire team that executes authentic Marine tactics. Move aggressively, knowing your team gives you 360-degree security, and devastate your enemies with precise air and mortar attacks. Experience a first-person shooter so realistic, the Marines use it as a training tool.

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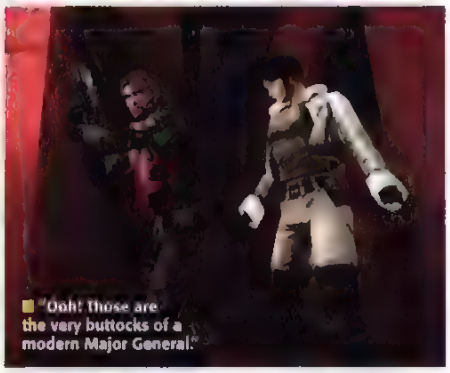
Hansen's about to get a zombie kissing lesson. He deserves it


"Ooh! Those are the very buttocks of a modern Major General."

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

> **Concept:** Survival horror takes a dive into some shallow water

> **Graphics:** Cool lighting and storm effects, but the environments don't have much flair

> **Sound:** Instead of tense ambient music, you're treated to laughable nu-metal

> **Playability:** The game could have saved itself a world of hurt by defaulting to the over-the-shoulder view

> **Entertainment:** All your time is basically spent searching for the one door that isn't currently locked

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Cold Fear

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** DARKWORKS > **RELEASE** MARCH 21 > **ESRB** M

LUKEWARM RAGE

When the main character in a survival horror game works for some sort of law enforcement agency, you would normally expect it to be some super-cool, elite force trained to deal with unnatural threats, like S.T.A.R.S. or the FBI. Tom Hansen, however, works for those arbiters of recreational boating safety, the U.S. Coast Guard. Not that this military branch doesn't have a proud tradition, but they aren't exactly our first line of defense against zombies.

Regardless of whether it falls into his job description or not, Hansen finds himself in the middle of an oceanic maelstrom, fighting his way through a Russian vessel crawling with horribly mutated humanoids. It's a cool, eerie premise, but Cold Fear stumbles through the execution like a drunken sailor.

The only way to fire weapons or explore your surroundings is by using an over-the-shoulder camera reminiscent of Resident Evil 4 (if by "reminiscent" I mean "totally copying"). However, the game constantly defaults to a third-person, fixed-camera angle, forcing you to toggle views whenever you want to shoot, look around, or do anything remotely useful. But even when using the one viable camera, the weapon-switching is clumsy, and the hit detection is spotty at best.

The control problems might be easier to forgive if they managed to take the player through a suspenseful or frightening adventure. Unfortunately, Cold Fear fails to establish any real mood or atmosphere, and just ends up being boring. Most of the enemies look alike, they all seem to carry meat cleavers (apparently the ship's galley contains naught but cutlery), and they spawn in impossible places. Plus, any hopes of livening up the action through the main character's personal story are thrown overboard by the fact that Tom Hansen is an absolute toolbox, first mate aboard the USS Generic Dingus. Every time he got mauled, burned, or tossed into the icy deep, I couldn't help but feel like he had it coming.

Despite some great potential and impressive graphical effects, the fun of Cold Fear gets washed out amidst a storm of other problems. Survival horror junkies should give it a look just to experience something a little different, but don't expect Tom Hansen to deliver a Leon-caliber punch. Unless he's doing some serious interdicting, he just doesn't have the skills.—**JOE**

TAKE A LOOK AROUND

Cold Fear places enormous importance on using the environment to your advantage. With exploding barrels, valves that blast flames, and fire extinguishers ripe for popping, sometimes the best way to conserve ammo in the long run is to judiciously fire off some rounds at these useful hazards. You can also use certain objects (like hand railings) to steady yourself as the ship rocks back and forth. Unfortunately, the game never requires you to use the mechanic, making it one of those things you try once, then pretend isn't there. Like *Eraserhead*.

Second Opinion 6.25

If Resident Evil 4 is the Fonz, getting all the ladies and making all the guys jealous, Cold Fear is that kid who puts on the leather jacket and makes witty comments, but totally misses the point of what makes the Fonz cool in the first place. Cold Fear is pretty – the PS2 version in particular is exceptional, given the limitations of the hardware. It's even got a bunch of different weapons, and offers some nice combat. Combining the spear gun (which attracts all of the bad guys to it) with exploding barrels makes for some good times. However, it never once manages to create an atmosphere of suspense. To make things worse, the gameplay is so nakedly linear it's almost offensive. Add in some wonky control issues and a main character who probably made it through high school without a single date, and Cold Fear lands itself solidly in the "mediocre" category.—**ADAM**

Unit 22 was notorious for their hatred of bald people

Coast Guards – shooting zombies since 1790

By clinging to railings you can steady your aim

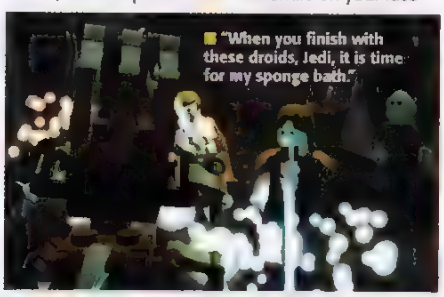
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

LEGO Star Wars

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** GIANT (DISTRIBUTION BY EIDOS INTERACTIVE) > **DEVELOPER** TRAVELLER'S TALES
> **RELEASE** MARCH 29 > **ESRB** E

COMEDY FOR NERDS

I have a sneaking suspicion that embittered Star Trek fans banded together and created this game with the specific intent of humiliating Star Wars fans. When I openly exclaim, "Darth Maul is so adorable! I wish I could hug and squeeze him" with the heart-aching enthusiasm of someone looking at a puppy in a pet store window, I know there are greater forces at work. Emitting a power much like that of the Jedi mind trick, LEGO Star Wars will make you say things that you never thought you would, and will put an ear-to-ear smile on your face as you soak in its satirical storytelling, silly visuals, and entertaining gameplay.

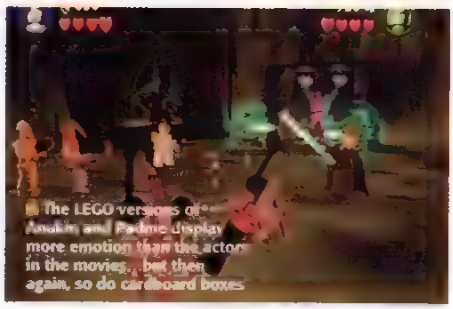


■ "When you finish with these droids, Jedi, it is time for my sponge bath."

From the Trade Federation invasion of Naboo to Anakin's transformation into Darth Vader, all of the memorable moments from the prequel trilogy are recreated in blocky LEGO fashion and look absolutely stunning. The detail that went into the LEGO-made ships is a sight to behold, and watching your lightsaber pop a clone trooper's head clean off brings about a chuckle each and every time it happens.

With only one button to jam on, the combat that you have at your fingertips couldn't be any more simplistic. However, there really is no need for it to be any deeper. Your enemies are easy to dispose of, and if you do perish in a battle, you simply re-spawn in the same room. The game does delve into a fair shake of platforming as well, but again, nicely placed restarts take away any frustration that the slippery jump mechanics and troublesome camera angles may bring.

This isn't a game that is meant to be challenging. It's built in a fashion that allows everyone to get through it. Even your great-grandma, who has never touched a video game before, could conceivably give this game a good run for its money.



■ The LEGO versions of Anakin and Padme display more emotion than the actors in the movies... but then again, so do cardboard boxes

The gameplay may be mindless, but never once is it dull. Just seeing familiar characters such as Ki-Adi-Mundi or Luminara Unduli in LEGO form will have you rolling with laughter. Rather than creating each sequence from the film frame for frame, developer Traveller's Tales took a more comedic route and replaced all of the dialogue in the film with hilarious pantomiming between the characters. Scenes that were once serious, such as the death of Qui-Gon Jinn, are now entirely comical. It's moments like these that keep you glued to the TV and wanting more.

Although it can be completed in a measly four to five hours, this is one of those games that you're going to want to keep around to pop in from time to time or show to your friends and family. In a sense, it's the perfect party game for nerds. —**REINER**

■ Amidala burst through her bedroom window and belted, "Don't cry for me, Naboo!"

■ Jedi can use their force powers to manipulate blocks in the environment. Here, Qui-Gon constructs a bridge. Obi-Wan wishes he made a spaceship

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Concrete proof that everything in this world needs to be LEGOized. It's easily one of the funniest things to come along in a long time

> **Graphics:** The visuals are the true star of this game. The animations are hysterical, the environments look fantastic, and the story sequences are too funny for words

> **Sound:** Farcical sound effects and much laughter on behalf of the players accompany John Williams' familiar scores

> **Playability:** Pong simple Even with puzzles and platforming thrown your way, there really is nothing to it

> **Entertainment:** It's easy to get through, but finding all of the hidden objects in the levels to unlock the Vader level does add a bit of replay

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

Considering that LEGOs, Star Wars, and video games all had equally frightening roles in my early development, I was delighted by this title's irreverent twist on the saga's pivotal events. Still, despite a lot of laughs and some jaw-dropping moments (even in LEGO form, General Grievous is a terror to behold), this is ultimately a very short and simplistic experience. Even with a slew of unlockable characters, a co-op mode, and Yoda in all his acrobatic glory, this game reminds me of those adorable yellow LEGO heads – a colorful, contented smile wrapped around a hollow core. —**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NARC

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** POINT OF VIEW
> **RELEASE** MARCH 21 > **ESRB** M

A TRUE CRIME

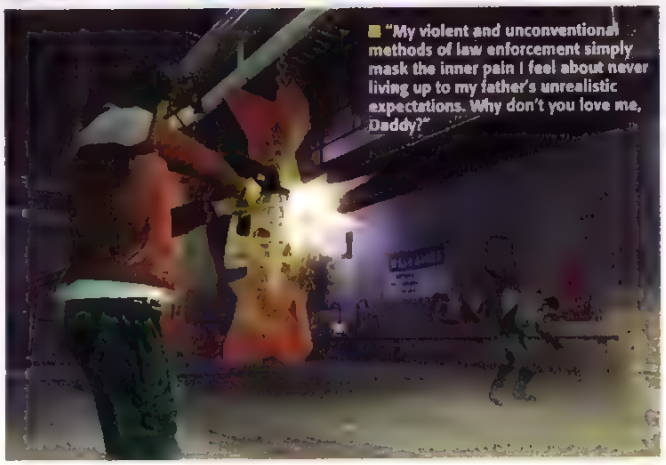
NARC is a game that's bound to offend a lot of people. It features tons of brutal violence, harsh language, and the most candid drug usage of any video game to date. But all of this mature content pales in comparison to NARC's most heinous offense: its horrendously broken gameplay.

There are a lot of interesting concepts at work in NARC, but none of them have been executed with any degree of finesse. As either of the two playable cops, you can run around an open world making arrests, transition from a good cop to a dirty one, and even take drugs as power-ups. The problem is that each of these features is far too basic to have any real merit. If you take too many drugs, you become addicted, but you can kick it with a simple minigame. If your Badge rating falls too low, you get demoted, but you can simply start busting random civilians to get back on the right side of the law, as roughly half the citizens are carrying drugs. Even if you go around shooting other cops, a few good collars will get you in good with the chief again, as if you're saying, "Hey boss, sorry I killed all those people, but I've learned my lesson!"

As if relegating its only interesting elements to ineffectual afterthoughts wasn't bad enough, NARC commits several other felonies. The targeting system is one of the worst I've ever seen and the melee combat is simply awful. The AI is just as bad – in one scripted event, a bunch of police officers ran into a room, only to bump into each other like the Keystone Kops.

Put simply, NARC is a mess. Every time it starts to show a little potential, it blindsides you with a nearly unplayable mission, amazing camera failure, or a flat-out boring sidequest. Unlike other low-scoring games, NARC doesn't amuse me with its awfulness or enrage me, it just makes me sad to see some interesting concepts go to waste and fills me with revulsion at the thought of ever playing it again.—**JEREMY**

"Come back! Don't run from my crappy game!"



"My violent and unconventional methods of law enforcement simply mask the inner pain I feel about never living up to my father's unrealistic expectations. Why don't you love me, Daddy?"

BOTTOM LINE 4.5

> **Concept:** Hit the streets and be a good cop or a bad cop. Smoking up is optional
> **Graphics:** Some of the drug effects are interesting, but overall it's a pretty blah affair
> **Sound:** There are some great songs on the soundtrack, but the same ones play over and over until you want to stab your eardrums with a pencil
> **Playability:** The targeting system is about as fluid as a monkey having a seizure
> **Entertainment:** I'd rather watch Harvey Keitel's naked *Bad Lieutenant* dance for hours than play this again
> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.5

NARC has high ambitions that it fails to deliver on in almost every instance. The dark and uninteresting urban landscape is populated by a paltry supply of character designs. Targeting and camera usage are abominable. The predictable story is rife with cliché and driven forward with banal dialogue. While the ability to brutalize the citizenry as a crooked cop may hold your attention for a few sadistic minutes, NARC's limited execution doesn't even deserve the title of being a poor man's GTA. —**MILLER**

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■ Most of the game is played with a blimp-like isometric view – the camera is high and the angles are weird, but I think it was actually a good decision

earn points by breaking from the pack, knocking people off of the , or destroying their cars, among other things

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Drive to Survive

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** EMPIRE INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** SUPERSONIC
> **RELEASE** JUNE > **ESRB** T

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

Let me get this out there straight away – do not, even if under extreme mental duress where the only cure would be the solo play of a car demolition game, play Drive to Survive's single-player mode. Just don't do it – not at all. The experience highlights the many technical issues that this game has. In fact, the single-player mode does nothing but shine a light on the annoyingly repetitive trash talking voice overs, the blocky car models, the jerky physics, and the terrible tiling on the environment's texture maps. It's just not good.

But, if a gamer skips this portion and then jumps over to the multiplayer side, there's an almost inexplicable fun factor to be experienced. A basic round pits two to four players in either a free-for-all or team race around a small but curvaceous course. You can ram opponents off the track using mad driving skill or pick up any of the ample weapon drops to equip mortars, flamethrowers, or homing missiles and try to blast one another into oblivion. Yes, this is as much fun as it sounds.

While the multiplayer games do feature the same issues present in the single-player mode, the competitive and fast-paced action of the gameplay makes up for some of these faults when you're clustered with a group of like-minded friends. There are also some really clever and/or interesting features in the multiplayer modes that are worth trying out. The best of the list is the ability for ousted players to send airstrikes on those still left in the match, which keeps it interesting even if you got knocked out early (which will surely happen to even the best drivers, as the controls are a bit inconsistent).

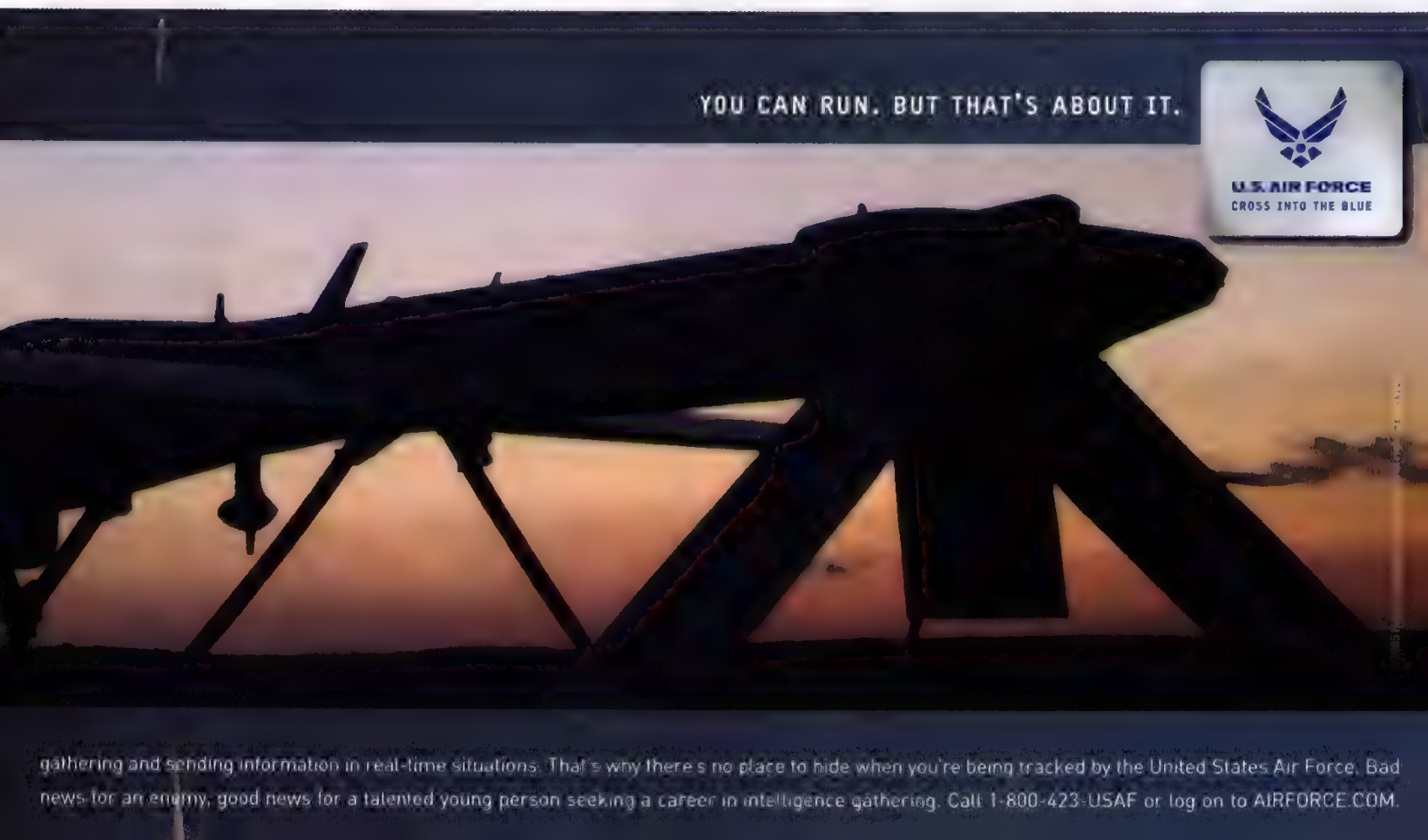
I'm not saying that this should jump to the top of anyone's must-buy list, but I am totally comfortable with the statement that Drive to Survive taps into something almost primal in appeal – blowing your friends' cars up is always fun.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE — 7

> **Concept:** Race, destroy, talk some trash, and repeat
> **Graphics:** Icky, blocky cars and obviously tiled textures make the whole thing look downright bad
> **Sound:** Repetitive trash talking commands are more annoying than funny
> **Playability:** No car drives like this, but the weapons are uniquely enjoyable and the action is nothing if not fast-paced
> **Entertainment:** Serious multiplayer options and variables add to this title immeasurably
> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion — 7

Feeling like an R.C. Pro Am title, this game is all about multiplayer. Despite the power-ups and simple format, Drive to Survive relies quite a bit on your driving skill since you can lose some of its varied challenges pretty quickly if you get banged around by the competition or take a turn wrong. Despite taking some getting used to, the isometric camera is actually important to the game and provides some challenge. This is not the world's deepest title, but it beats renting *Maid in Manhattan* with your chums on a Friday night for the millionth time.—**KATO**



PLAYSTATION 2

Rise of the Kasai

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** BOTTLEROCKET ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** APRIL 5 > **ESRB** M

BEEN THERE, KILLED THAT

Rise of the Kasai's story takes place over a 20-year time span, but one has to look no further than the past couple of years in video games to really understand what's going on. Since the 2002 debut of this title's predecessor, The Mark of Kri, the action genre has taken huge strides forward. Instead of keeping up with the pace or helping define it (like The Mark of Kri did), this game has actually lost ground.

With high-quality titles appearing in the genre since The Mark of Kri's release such as Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone and God of War, I feel that developers have successfully figured out how to handle having multiple enemies besieging players at one time. This makes Kasai's analog system (which assigns specific controller buttons to enemies) too deliberate compared to those other games, which handle how your character attacks multiple foes seamlessly from behind the scenes. Kasai's approach is akin to watching an action movie and seeing the fishing wire that holds up the model airplanes.

Although the button-assigning method limits the combos you can perform when engaged by several enemies (since the buttons you'd use in a combo are already spoken for), it does have its benefits. I like how you can battle with one foe in front of you, and then with a single button press strike at the guy behind you, possibly surprising him with a one-hit kill. It's moments like these that are the title's saving grace. The combat animations are fluid and responsive, making new girl Tati a fun instrument of destruction.

Rise of the Kasai attempts to make up for dropping its planned online co-op feature by having an AI-controlled ally follow you in the levels. Unfortunately, this doesn't work as well as planned because your friend will often blow your stealth cover. When you throw in the very underwhelming boss battles (no more freakin' tentacles!), basic environment interactions, and repeated levels (two are pinched from the first game), Rise of the Kasai fails to pack a punch at several turns. It's designed to have you play through it multiple times, but I don't know if you'll come back for more after the first pass.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **Concept:** Make few improvements or changes to a series that wasn't a huge hit the first time around

> **Graphics:** Kasai's cartoon-like graphics can't hide the fact that the game looks dated

> **Sound:** The storytelling benefits from the excellent voicework of the narrator

> **Playability:** The battle system is fluid, but the camera can hang up on the environment or obscure offscreen enemies

> **Entertainment:** The smoothness and ferocity of the battle animations are the only main attractions here

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

Face-stabbing! Groin-skewering! Boredom! Rise of the Kasai delivers all these things in spades thanks to its totally passable yet unremarkable action. The mechanics from the previous game (like the targeting and combat) are unchanged and feel antiquated, while the new additions just call attention to other shortcomings. As Tati, when I used the new "remote viewing" to see what Rau was up to, I was treated to an image of his thick self hopelessly trying to hoof it across a gaping chasm to attack an enemy. Good to know he's got my back. The best parts of the whole game are the living-sketchbook style cutscenes and their narration – especially the one that says "someone was amassing a library of evil," which I assume to be shelves upon shelves of Dean Koontz and Jane Austen.—**JOE**

UNLIMITED STAMINA

PLAYSTATION 2

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

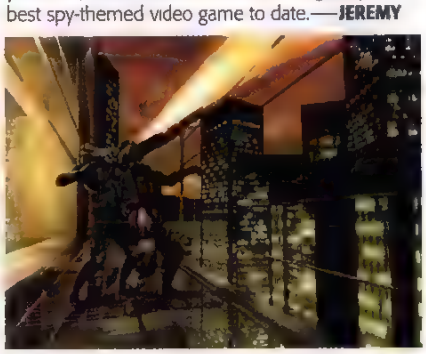
> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK)
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** MARCH 28 > **ESRB** M

ANOTHER SOLID CELL

The Splinter Cell games are something of a conundrum. On any system, they offer intelligent storytelling, great gameplay, and impressive visuals. However, the Xbox version of each entry has clearly been the best, and Chaos Theory is no different. But that doesn't mean that the PS2 version isn't a hell of a game in its own right.

Obviously, the PS2 version of Chaos Theory doesn't look as great as the Xbox version, and this is one of those rare instances where the graphics really affect the gameplay. In the Xbox version, most of the lights can be shot out, creating additional darkness for über-spy Sam Fisher to sneak through. The lighting is a lot less interactive in the PS2 version – only certain types of lights can be broken. As a result, there are far fewer ways to approach situations in this version, and the open level design heralded as Chaos Theory's biggest change has been simplified and streamlined. So not only does the Xbox version look better, but it offers a more complex gameplay experience as a result.

But that doesn't mean that fans of the series with only a PS2 are out of luck. This version still offers the most realistic and intense espionage gameplay around, and with its co-op mode, Chaos Theory is the most developed entry in the franchise yet. Co-op mode feels like the natural evolution of the stealth genre (although its campaign is too short), and Versus mode is one of the most unique online experiences around. The single-player campaign packs huge thrills as well; overall, Chaos Theory is the total package. Play it on Xbox if you can, but if you can't, don't miss out on what is arguably the best spy-themed video game to date.—**JEREMY**



BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

> **Concept:** Sam Fisher returns with his most dangerous mission ever and two awesome multiplayer modes

> **Graphics:** Not as sharp as the Xbox, but still solid. Although light and shadows are less interactive, they're still used to great effect

> **Sound:** The voice acting for this series gets better and better with each installment

> **Playability:** Even stealth novices will feel like the world's most bad-ass spy after just a few minutes of play

> **Entertainment:** With three different ways to get your spy on, Chaos Theory is a must-play for stealth/action fans

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.5

The newest Splinter Cell game, Chaos Theory, is one of those rare examples of story, gameplay, presentation, and multiplayer longevity fusing into a nearly perfect gaming experience. The development team has gone all out in making players feel like the greatest spy on Earth, and an overwhelming amount of the time they do this with fierce success. Limited by hardware, certain cuts were made from the feature list. Of these, loading and the lighting engine (which changes the level design) are the biggest to me. Mid-mission loads make the areas feel less like a real location and more like a series of checkpoints, which is where my quarter-point dock from the Xbox version is mostly coming from.—**LISA**

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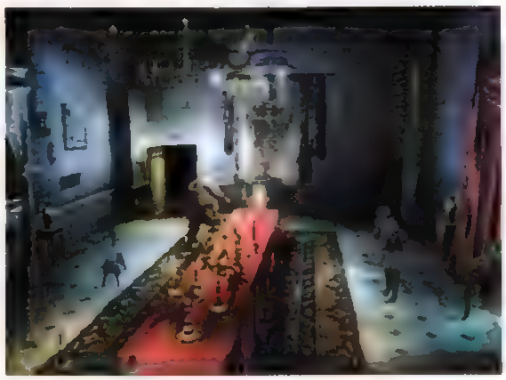


PLAYSTATION 2

Haunting Ground

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** MAY 10 > **ESRB** M

LESS FUN THAN TAX PREPARATION

Capcom's promising merger of the adventure and survival horror genres doesn't weave the complex puzzle solving and rich worlds of an adventure title with the tense action and otherworldly scares of a survival horror game. Instead, Haunting Ground highlights the worst conventions of these camps and produces an experience that is unquestionably less fun than doing one's taxes.

From the survival horror corner we get an unending series of lock and key "puzzles," fixed camera angles, and intensely bizarre architecture. The adventure genre donates its worst offenses in obtuse inventory items, entirely too much backtracking, and an itty bitty skill set.

In the first six hours I encountered two enemies (not two enemy types, but two total foes), unlocked innumerable doors, and was chased so many times for such long durations that my only form of expression became a string of nonsensical curses tied together.

When presented with a shoebox of receipts and the siren song of long division, go with the trusty companionship of a 1040 form over Haunting Ground every time. You'll thank me for it and be a responsible member of this nation at the same time.—**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 4.75

> **Concept:** Escape the castle and try to stay interested in the task

> **Graphics:** Overall, the look is incredible – the small cast of characters looks great and the environments are really creative

> **Sound:** Someone should have made sure that all of the pieces fit in this area. Weird industrial/techno moves just sound odd with the otherwise ambient score

> **Playability:** Every decision brings the worst parts of survival horror and adventure games to the forefront

> **Entertainment:** There is none to be had in this game

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5

Haunting Ground embodies everything that people hate about survival horror games, although it's not scary or suspenseful in any way. Thanks to constant backtracking, endless lock and key puzzles, minimalist story, and the smallest roster of enemies since the heyday of Atari (seriously, Pac-Man faced a wider variety of foes!) Haunting Ground is easily one of the most boring games I've ever played. With all the fast-paced thrills of an archaeological dig, Haunting Ground utterly fails as entertainment.—**JEREMY**

The dog is an interesting sidekick, but is used in completely familiar ways

PLAYSTATION 2

Dynasty Warriors 5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KOEI
> **DEVELOPER** OMEGA FORCE > **RELEASE** MARCH 29 > **ESRB** T

HACK, SLASH, YAWN

Every time I review a Dynasty Warriors title, I have to think of new ways to say that it hasn't changed at all since the last game. If Koei spent as much time dreaming up concepts for this series as I spend thinking up new ways to say "stagnant, familiar gameplay," then this series would be changing significantly with every release.

To be fair, there are a few improvements in Dynasty Warriors 5. As always, some new characters have been added, and each one has a unique story. There are also some tweaks to the weapons, bodyguards, and the like. But most importantly, Dynasty Warriors 5 has a better framerate, vastly-improved draw distance, and can display twice as many characters onscreen as the previous entries, thanks to a new engine. These are certainly nice improvements, but don't do anything to switch up the stale gameplay, which just flat out refuses to evolve. Sure, you can now hack through larger groups of foes at once, but it doesn't change the fact that it's exactly the same hacking and slashing as before. The Dynasty Warriors games are brain-dead fun, but each new title is no more or less fun that the one that came before or the 30 that will come after.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** I had a dream that Dynasty Warriors 5 was an online-enabled pie-baking simulator. In reality, it's just the same old thing

> **Graphics:** The draw distance and fogging are much improved, but everything else is pretty much unchanged

> **Sound:** Throw on your favorite CD while you play, because you won't miss anything

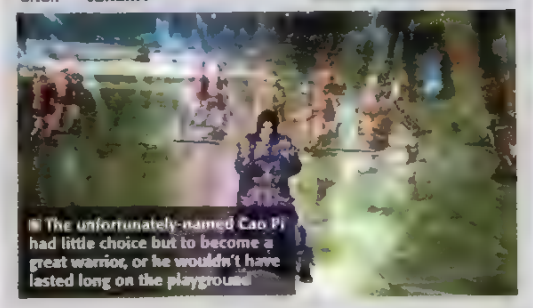
> **Playability:** If you can mash buttons, you can handle this

> **Entertainment:** The pleasure you derive from this title is directly tied to how much you enjoy mindless, repetitive violence

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.5

Like the slow insanity of Chinese water torture, this series relentlessly continues with no end in sight. DW 5 adds some weapon-specific attacks, bodyguard tandem combos, and pre-mission inventory options, but it's just a shuffling of the same deck that's used for the other DW titles. One definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. If you love hitting the square button this much, then you must be crazy.—**KATO**



The unfortunately-named Cao Pi had little choice but to become a great warrior, or he wouldn't have lasted long on the playground

PLAYSTATION 2

Stella Deus: The Gate of Eternity

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS USA
> **DEVELOPER** PINEGROW > **RELEASE** APRIL 26 > **ESRB** T

STRATEGICALLY SOLID

Strategy games typically require the patience of a saint, the mind of a general, and the open social schedule of a computer nerd. As such, they're certainly not for everyone, and Stella Deus isn't going to bring anyone new into the fold, but those who enjoy the mental stimulation of a good turn-based battle will certainly be pleased.

Strategy fans will quickly be able to pick up on Stella's few additions to the standard turn-based action, such as team attacks, combining items, and a flexible system that allows characters multiple actions per turn. It's not particularly innovative, but it does allow for some great, challenging strategy. The enemies are tough enough that leveling up through sidequests is helpful after only a few hours of play. Also, the hand-drawn environments are great, but the characters are refugees from the 16-bit era, complete with jaggies and chunky animation. The old school look certainly has its charm, but cleaning the characters up a bit wouldn't take any of it away. Overall, Stella Deus is like that old man that sits on his porch at the end of the street: Past his prime, unwilling to change his ways, but still inherently likeable.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Turn-based strategy in its purest form

> **Graphics:** The environments have a great hand-drawn look, but the characters look primitive

> **Sound:** Having voice actors for all of the characters is certainly a nice touch, even if several of them annoy

> **Playability:** If you like strategy games, this one feels instantly familiar. If not, you'll be lost at sea

> **Entertainment:** The story is dichéd RPG junk, but the gameplay offers up some smart, challenging strategy

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

Stella Deus manages to emulate Nippon Ichi's strategic masterpieces fairly well. Unfortunately, it doesn't do anything to make it noteworthy over titles like Disgaea and Phantom Brave. The strong battle system just isn't enough to carry the mediocre localization and PSone graphics of this game. And for the life of me I can't figure out why the worst voice actor in the game plays the main character.—**ADAM**

Dr. Chuck really misunderstood the concept of acupuncture

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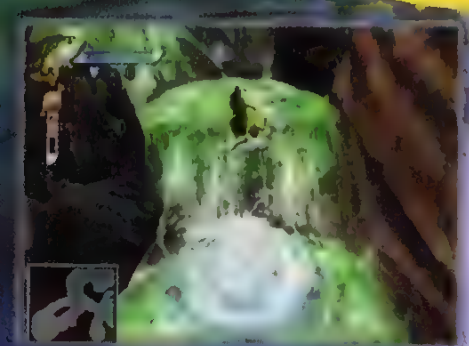

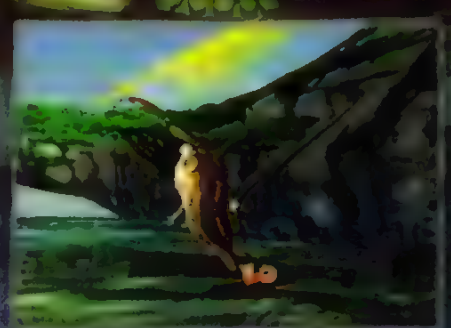

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PlayStation 2

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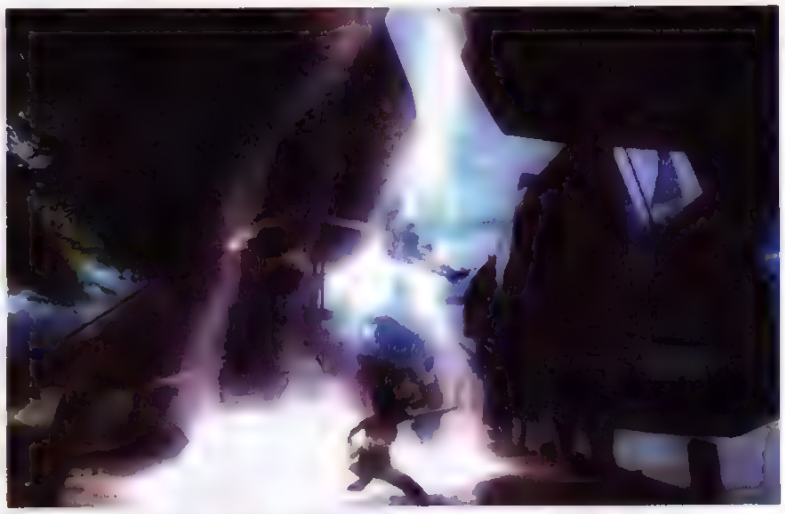


XBOX

Jade Empire

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** BIOWARE > **RELEASE** APRIL 12 > **ESRB** M

GAME OF THE MONTH

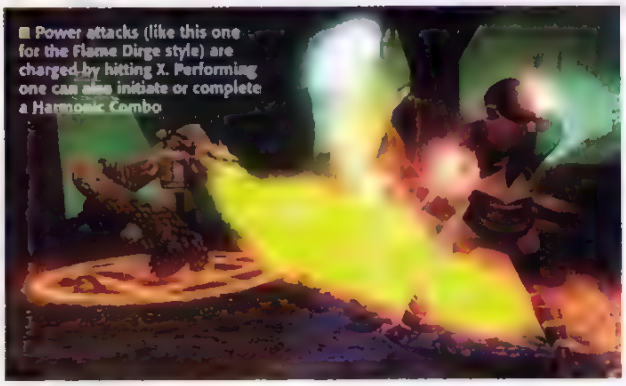
LONG LIVE THE EMPIRE

Jade Empire developer BioWare has been associated with some pretty storied licensed material – D&D and Star Wars. However, this game proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the company is more than capable of standing on its own two feet. If anything, this game is the best it has ever done precisely because they are free to let their imaginations run wild. This pays off handsomely in a rich adventure that puts destiny at your feet and power in your palm.

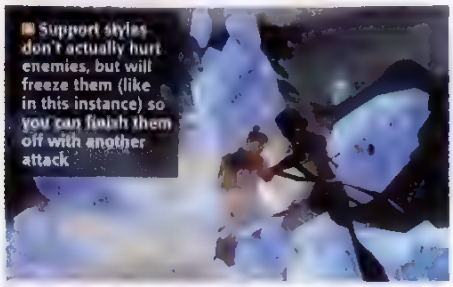
Gone is the point-and-click scaffolding that had the computer executing attacks for players in Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, keeping you at arm's length from the action. In its place is a battle system giving you a multitude of choices. Jade Empire doesn't focus on strings of button-heavy combos, instead putting its variety and skill in the combat powers you use. By game's end I had dabbled in or mastered over a dozen different fighting styles, with a bunch more in the game that I never learned. I not only like how you can customize the evolution of these powers in terms of their damage, speed, and the physical drain on you, but I love how your character's base attributes shape your fighting styles. So if you want to build up your Chi meter at the expense of your Focus, it doesn't cut you off at the knees, it only means that you'll be better at the fighting styles that transform you into beasts rather than the weapon-based ones. My Chi and Focus were evenly balanced, so I was able to freely morph into a Jade Golem as well as rock foes back with my blunderbuss gun. If I ever ran out of Chi in battle, I always had another style I could call upon.

The gamut of powers at your fingertips works flawlessly during combat. You can call up and map any of your fighting styles to the d-pad in the middle of a battle, and you must choose wisely. Some enemies are impervious to weapons, while others aren't phased by status-changing attacks like Paralyzing Palm. Combat is fast-paced (gone are the chugging frames of KOTOR) and exhilarating as you flip through your arsenal of skills, blocking, counter-attacking, and calling upon your considerable prowess to exploit your enemy to their death. My only gripes with Jade's combat are that the targeting system could select foes better, movement is a bit slow when locked on to an enemy, and the camera can get weird.

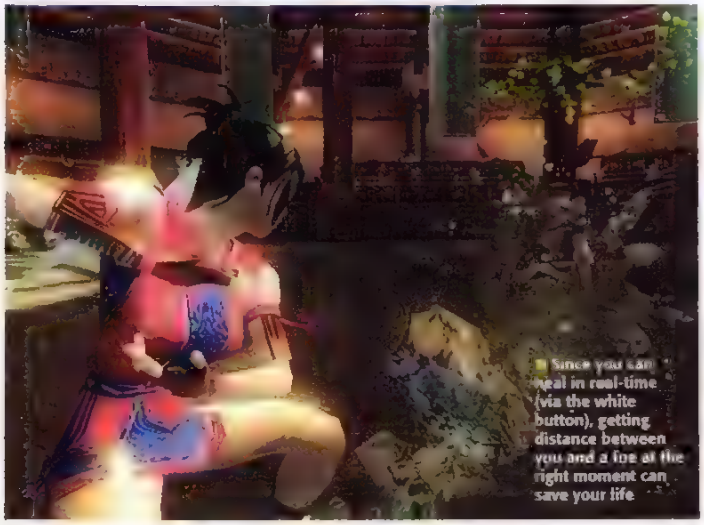
BioWare has not only made a sweet combat system, but the game's universe itself is a joy. From the trademark dialogue to memorable characters at every turn, the story is replete with humor, surprises, and sidequests. As for the latter, I don't know which was my favorite: dressing up in drag as a thespian or putting Sir Reginald the Bastard in his place. Of course, Jade Empire also lets you influence the plot through your "good" or "bad" character development, but it's not as black or white as that. In fact, once you understand the philosophies present and their true significance in the plot, you'll see that it's about more than choosing to kick peasants or not. Much like the choices put before you in Jade Empire, BioWare has made its own to further enrich and diversify the RPG genre. Embrace this power put before you and wield it as you might.—**KATO**



■ Power attacks (like this one for the Flame Dirge style) are charged by hitting X. Performing one can also initiate or complete a Harmonic Combo



■ Support styles don't actually hurt enemies, but will freeze them (like in this instance) so you can finish them off with another attack



■ Since you can heal in real-time (via the white button), getting distance between you and a foe at the right moment can save your life

■ Here we see one foe emitting an Area Attack in a radius around him, while the other immobilizes you by turning you into a tree

BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

> **Concept:** Make the game's combat as open-ended as the player's moral choices, giving you unbelievable power

> **Graphics:** The team has really brought to life their fictional re-creation of ancient China

> **Sound:** Your player's muteness is annoying, but the old-school language Tho Fan is pretty cool

> **Playability:** BioWare's move into the action genre isn't without its hiccups, but those looking for fists of fury won't be disappointed

> **Entertainment:** Jade lives up to its promise and delivers in unexpected ways

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.5

In the mythos of Jade Empire, the martial arts strive for balance above all things. I have to think that this philosophy translated to BioWare's design plans as well. Taken as a whole, the game skillfully dances back and forth between the storytelling and action camps, weaving a tale and experience that expands on each side with equal measure. While the story is grand in scope, it also features personal tales and some laugh-out-loud humor, balancing the instant gratification of learning an NPC's whole story with an epic overarching quest. The combat has this same ebb and flow of instant accessibility rolling into a system with such subtlety that, even in a second pass at the game, players probably won't discover all its depth. Jade Empire's biggest strength is its balance – and that balance can carry players through the entire journey multiple times, making it an entry worthy of the time it consumes.—**LISA**

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

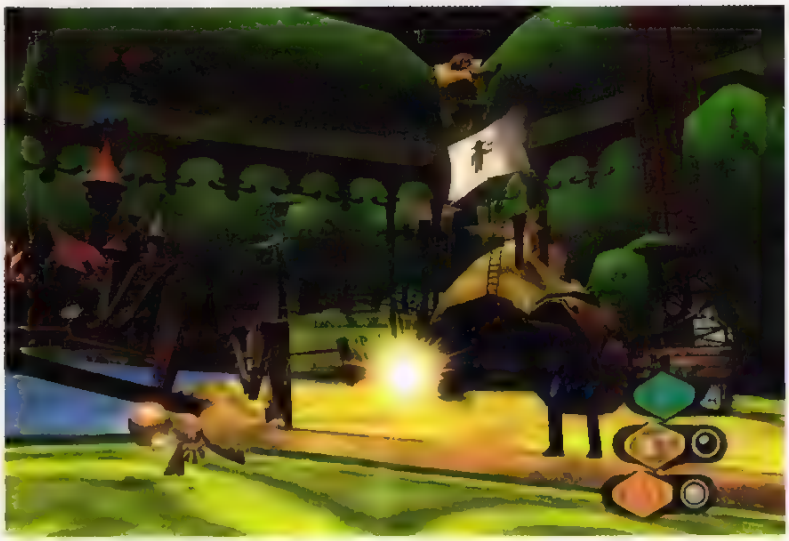
GM

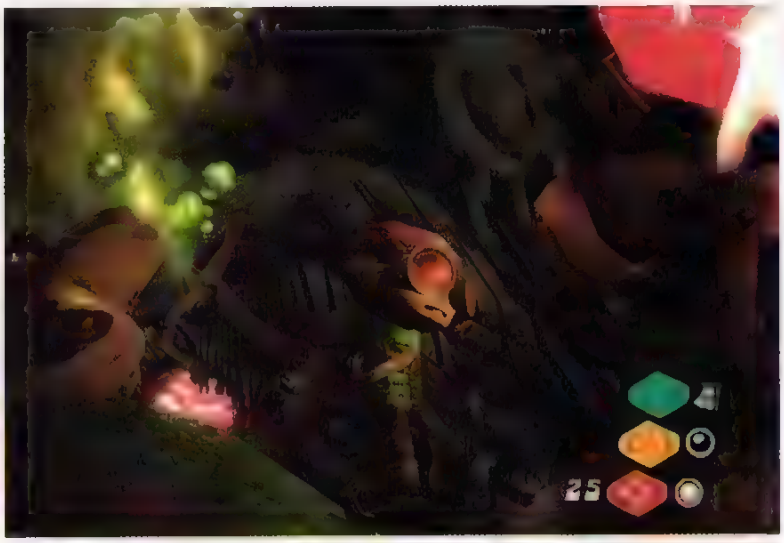
Ferrari

XBOX

it's good to play together

XBOX LIVE





XBOX

Psychonauts

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** DOUBLEFINE PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** APRIL 19 > **ESRB** T

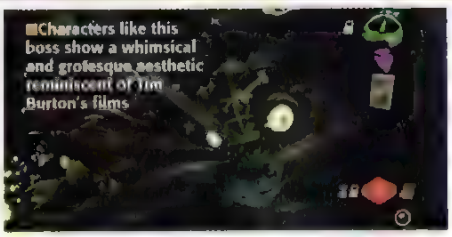
MIND BLOWING

Sometimes, I start to feel as though I've seen everything video games have to offer. After awhile, every terrorist cell I've thwarted, every princess I've saved, and every dragon I've slayed starts to blend together into one digital blur. Thankfully, every so often a title like Psychonauts comes along, one which offers a truly unique and interesting premise. I can guarantee you this: You've never played a game quite like this.

The game casts players as Raz, a young man possessed of paranormal ability who has left his parents in hopes of being trained as a "Psychonaut" (a type of psychic super-cop) at a camp for kids with mental powers. Of course, mysterious happenings soon begin occurring and Raz must save the camp and his fellow campers from harm.

Here's where things get interesting. While some of the game occurs in the physical world, much of your time will be spent in the brains of a host of disturbed individuals. These settings allow the designers and art team to run wild, creating some of the most memorable and surreal levels I've ever seen in a game. You'll stare in awe as you explore the psyche of a paranoid milkman, which is portrayed as a skewed, strange parody of suburbia populated by black helicopters and campy '50s secret agents in trenchcoats. It's as if *X-Files* creator Chris Carter, Salvador Dali, and MC Escher collaborated on an episode of *Leave it to Beaver*. Another character's rage is depicted as a bull rampaging through the streets of a Spanish city from a black velvet painting.

Throughout the game, the developers do a tremendous job of visualizing various mental neuroses. From figments of the imagination to emotional baggage, the whole of pop psychology is cleverly implemented into real gameplay. One boss battle even skewers egotistical critics like myself, as an obese theater writer shoots insults like "trite" and "clichéd" out of two fountain pens attached to his ship. An easy target? Sure, but we deserve it.



Characters like this boss show a whimsical and grotesque aesthetic reminiscent of Tim Burton's films

From an art direction and script standpoint, Psychonauts is nearly flawless. The characters and dialogue are crafted with wit and ingenuity, making this a high point in game storytelling. However, the gameplay itself hews more closely to convention. The missions are largely fetch-quests and the familiar theme of collecting various doo-dads (albeit "mental" doo-dads) is still central to progressing. As with many platformers, the camera is not always perfect, causing some infrequent bouts of frustration.

Still, those that stick with the adventure will be rewarded. As Raz learns new mental powers like telekinesis and clairvoyance, the traditional platforming controls open up to reveal deeper and more novel gameplay. I can tell you this: I was always motivated to continue my travels in the twisted world of Psychonauts, if only to see what bizarre sights I would witness next. Few titles have ever inspired in me this genuine sense of discovery. —**MATT**

Every level has a unique and striking graphical style

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** A stunning look into the strange world of mental illness

> **Graphics:** Vibrant, colorful graphics meet a truly inspired and varied art style

> **Sound:** Excellent, movie-quality sounds

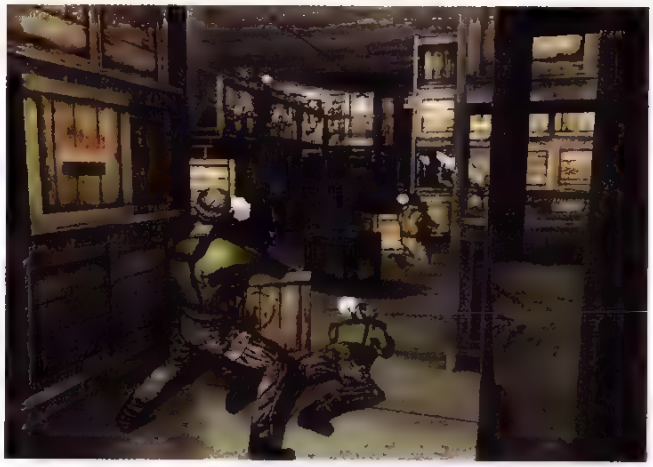
> **Playability:** Some familiar foibles rear their head (spotty camera for one) but overall it's top-flight platforming

> **Entertainment:** More groundbreaking in concept than in gameplay, but a memorable experience nonetheless

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 9

Here we have a true gamer's game. Managing to avoid the stale platforming level designs we've been seeing for years, Psychonauts is stuffed full of more originality, ingenuity, and humor than you could shake a mental stick at. Every level is artistically unique, and you'll find yourself continuing to play just to see what sights and sounds are around the next bend. Each mind you delve into has been cleverly arranged to perfectly reflect the individual character's persona, memories, and mental defects – the effect induces more laughs per minute than the best stand up comedian. Even with all of this going for it, the game still falls prey to some of the same dilemmas that so many 3D platformers face. There are some noticeable camera problems, frequent ebbs in the action, and some occasionally frustrating objectives. Despite these sporadic issues, this is still one of the most memorable games I can think of. Quite frankly, there's no gamer I know to whom I wouldn't suggest a playthrough. —**MILLER**



XBOX

Close Combat: First To Fight

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK)
> **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** DESTINEER > **RELEASE** APRIL 12 > **ESRB** T

SNORE

In case you've ever wondered what would happen if you took Rainbow Six 3, downgraded the graphics, and surgically removed all the fun, First to Fight offers a pretty good answer. I appreciate the realism and effort to include bona fide U.S. Marine Corps tactics and equipment, but this simply plays like a buggy military training application, and forgets to deliver the entertainment that you'd expect to find in a video game.

The whole point of this title is the AI, both for your squad and enemies, which makes the constant inexplicable idiocy on their parts all the worse. More times than I care to count, I saw a squadmate of mine stand not three feet away from a bad guy and take five or six seconds to shoot him. Hostiles seem to vacillate between ungodly accuracy and total blindness, which is incredibly jarring. Also, Close Combat often falls into the common trap of making the player feel extraneous to the mission – frequently, your squad can and will take care of business without your help. Inexplicable terrorists spawning out of thin air when taking an alternate path through a level don't help any in the realism department, either.

The significant online support (which includes Four-player co-op) is nice, but I really don't see anyone putting aside Halo, Rainbow Six, or Ghost Recon for this mediocre effort. Likewise, the realism in cones of fire, movement speeds, and weaponry is fine; but without anything approaching good level design or AI to back it up, it just doesn't matter. While First to Fight falls short of truly sucking, the availability of far superior alternatives makes this a title worth skipping over.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Fight a fictional war as a Marine fire team leader, but don't expect to have any fun doing it

> **Graphics:** Easily this title's biggest strength. Nice models, in particular

> **Sound:** It's a war game. What do you expect?

> **Playability:** Besides the annoyingly slow movement speed, the control has no major issues

> **Entertainment:** I guess this is better than actually going to war and getting shot at, but there are several better titles in the genre

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.25

I'd love to get behind a game made in my hometown of Plymouth, Minnesota, but this ain't exactly filling me with local pride. Close Combat's Marine Corps training tool roots are obvious, since it captures the drudgery and routine of the military, but none of the entertainment value of a real video game. The squad mechanics are okay, but the grungy looks, technical stutters, and creeping gameplay pace simply don't make for a very fun game. Authenticity is supposedly Close Combat's main selling point, but it feels no more realistic than Ubisoft's squad-based shooters. Sadly, it's gonna take more than a dusty thrift-store version of Rainbow Six 3 to turn my little Minneapolis suburb into a game development Mecca.—**JEREMY**

XBOX

Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30

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

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

The Xbox is commonly known as the console for first-person shooters, and for good reason – maybe that's part of the reason that Brothers in Arms fits so well on the system. But that's a simple answer that doesn't do justice to the many things that developer Gearbox has done with this title to make it noteworthy. Besides, it uses first person shooting as a springboard for gameplay that goes beyond easy definitions.

It is common for military titles to put you in the shoes of some super soldier, but Brothers in Arms strikes a nice balance between letting you be a god in green and a no-name grunt. You won't get very far trying to take on the whole German army by yourself, so the game gives you some tactical tools to make it out alive. A typical situation requires you to consult the overhead map and figure out how to have your squads (which sometimes includes a tank) engage the enemy on one front while you flank from another. Unlike most squad-based titles, Brothers in Arms does a pretty good job of breathing some sense into your comrades. Although you direct them to points in the environment, they are smart enough to take appropriate cover, are capable marksmen, and will stick with you over stretches of terrain without getting hung up on bushes or whatever. Because of this AI, you really feel like you are a commander of men and not a babysitter to a bunch of nincompoops.

Gearbox Studios was more hands-on with the Xbox version as opposed to the PS2 one, and the difference shows. Whether it's the color palette, graphical flair, or some slightly different enemy placement, the game is definitely at home here. On the downside, I didn't like that the targeting reticle on the Xbox wouldn't lock-on to targets you wanted to give a fire order against, but it works just as well as on the PS2 and is just my personal preference. Overall, I would also have liked a touch more variety in the missions, although the tower sniper level later in the game and the tank missions were welcome.

Other military games might be more gung-ho or more over the top, but Brothers in Arms gets closer to the tactics and camaraderie of working as a well-oiled machine in the heat of battle. It's this shift in focus that brings it alive more than your usual bloodbath, and makes it better than your average game.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Punctuate the need for military teamwork and the responsibilities of command by giving you control over ally squads

> **Graphics:** Has a color palette different from the PS2 edition

> **Sound:** German sounds even funnier when it's coming from a man who just got shot in the jimmie

> **Playability:** I wish that the target reticle would lock on to the enemy troops

> **Entertainment:** Although it's not as dramatic as other military titles, it finds its own ways to be just as gripping

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.75

While most of the differences between the PS2 and Xbox versions of BIA are cosmetic, that may be worth a lot. Of particular notice is the phenomenally diverse color palette that is visible in the Xbox version – making the PS2 edition seem washed out in comparison. This difference, along with some improved character modeling and animation, make the Xbox my preferred machine on this one, but not by much. The squad mechanic remains an excellent and simple way to gain tremendous control over your allies. The emotional story seems quieter and somehow more human than many other games that have tapped the Second World War for inspiration. It's not always the most action packed title, but it is consistently absorbing.—**MILLER**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

SWAT 4

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** IRRATIONAL GAMES > **RELEASE** APRIL 5 > **ESRB** M

WARNING: NOT A SHOOTER

Contrary to what the screenshots would have you believe, SWAT 4 is anything but what most people think of as a first-person shooter. The core gameplay is much more about tactics and atmosphere than run-and-gun firefights. Much of this has to do with the scoring system. It's not enough to neutralize all of the suspects; you and your team must gather evidence, rescue hostages and bystanders, report your progress to headquarters, and do your damnedest to capture rather than kill any hostiles. If this sounds like a tall order, it's for good reason. You've got to do all this under the constraints of one of the most realistic game engines around, and without saving mid-mission. Being a SWAT officer is far from easy.

The difficulty, fortunately, rarely feels cheap. The amount of mission failures I got due to my own impatience or mistakes far outnumbered the times I lost through little or no fault of my own. This ties in directly to the major draw of SWAT 4: The title is so unforgiving, so unbendingly realistic and occasionally even brutal, that it manages to completely sell its gritty concept. For instance, a sudden catastrophic loss occurred because I got ambushed while charging ahead at the very end of a level, making me start the 15- to 20-minute mission over. My first reaction was a rueful "Well, guess I learned a lesson there." That really says something. It's not often that a game comes along which can make me completely re-think the way I approach an objective, and it's a great feeling.

Much of this stark realism is made possible by SWAT 4's great AI. Your squadmates, on top of carrying out your orders with precision, always make sure to give you audible updates of their status. Enemies will fight, flee, or surrender based on the situation and their own state of mind, and their decisions usually make sense. Another major factor in the success of SWAT 4 is the varied arsenal at your disposal, both lethal and non-lethal. Every armament has its use, and knowing which choice to make (such as the type of grenade to deploy) is crucial in accomplishing your objectives. Finally, the smooth graphics and aforementioned delightful sound design do an amazing job of sucking you into SWAT 4's urban setting. Strong multiplayer options, both competitive and cooperative, round out the SWAT 4 package. To be honest, I really don't see people giving up Counter-Strike to jump on this wagon, but the option is there and it's fun.

While all of this is well and good, there are definitely points where this title falls apart and reminds you that you're playing a video game. For one thing, wandering through a labyrinthine house or office building trying to find that one final suspect or civilian can be a real drag after you've already cleared 99 percent of the mission. Also, though the AI is usually great, it certainly has its weak moments. Trigger-happy squadmates that cost you points and the occasional egregious pathfinding issues can be a total pain. Plus, things tend to get formulaic after a while – the sequence of "find door, use optiwand to scout other side, toss gas grenade, arrest fools" can get a bit old.

At the end of the day, SWAT 4 is a very competent title that breaks from the FPS mold and mostly succeeds at what it sets out to do. A little more polish and variety to missions and AI could have made it a landmark, but this release is far from disappointing.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

> **Concept:** Defuse the worst of urban situations while doing everything in your power to preserve the lives of everyone involved

> **Graphics:** Half-Life 2 this is not, but it's still a very fine-looking game

> **Sound:** Some of the best sound design to date – from ambient music to team chatter, everything is nigh perfect

> **Playability:** Contextual squad commands are great, but the overall feel is a little clunky

> **Entertainment:** If a totally different type of first-person action sounds appealing, you can't do much better than this

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

A lot of what I like about SWAT 4 is how it stands apart from the crowd. Whether it's the cool non-lethal weapon options or the intensely detailed mission areas, everything makes you feel like you're in the midst of an honest-to-goodness SWAT mission. The fantastic visuals are only the first way that the game lends authenticity to its world. Pre-mission, your briefings will often include the audio of the frantic 911 call. Other times your only map to a danger-fraught interior is scribbled on a napkin by an off duty bartender of the business in question. The missions themselves reset enemy locations at each restart, lending an element of surprise and excitement even on the replay. While the squad controls are particularly excellent, the ally AI starts to show its weakness in the more difficult later levels, when teammates are too fragile and foolishly brazen to survive. Despite this drawback, the level of immersion here is unbelievable, exhibiting way more substantive edge-of-your-seat thrills than anything Hollywood has offered up about this field of work.
—**MILLER**

JADE EMPIRE
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proves himself to be immortal.
Only the hands of a true master hold the fate of the Jade Empire. Perfect your skills with over 20 fighting styles. Battle your way through a mystical world where the boundaries between natural and supernatural are broken. The final test of your skill is passed when your journey becomes legend.
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Each epoch has a very distinct look and feel

The scale of battles quickly gets out of control

PC

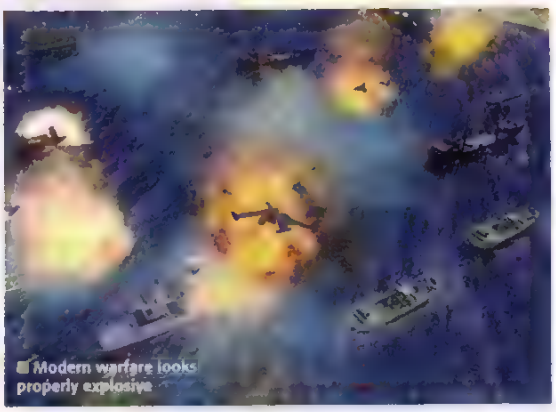
Empire Earth II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
> **DEVELOPER** MAD DOC SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** APRIL 26 > **ESRB** T

MICROMANAGEMENT IS FOR SUCKERS

RTS these days comes in two major flavors: lower-level tactical slugfests such as anything by Blizzard or the Command & Conquer series, and more complex generation-spanning titles like Rise of Nations, Age of Empires, and Empire Earth II. And while EE II brings some very nice improvements in terms of interface to the table, it's still making small talk with the ambassador from Monaco while RoN and AoE discuss international trade agreements with the U.N. Security Council.

Much like its competitors, EE II features a large tech tree divided among several epochs, going all the way from spears and bows to stealth bombers and near-future mechs. EE II's greatest strength lies in the detailed relationships between economy, military, science, and imperialism. No other title makes it quite so easy to deal with major policy decisions while leaving the nuts and bolts of your empire's operation up to the AI, thanks largely to the planning screen where you can manage workers, review your allies' war plans, and easily see where the resources are. This reduced emphasis on micromanagement is a definite plus, since trying to accomplish anything in EE II's clunky combat engine is a mind-twisting chore.


Modern warfare looks properly explosive

There are so many aspects of combat in need of tweaking and polishing that it would be futile to list them all here. Topping the list, though, are the apocalyptically bad pathfinding and unit AI. I eventually gave up on trying to command battles in any real sense, and simply amassed big armies and gave an attack-move command into the heart of enemy territory. I know that this is anathema to any seasoned RTS player, but between the framerate issues with lots of onscreen action and the nonstop idiocy of your troops, your time is better spent adjusting your economy and managing expansions. I honestly would have preferred to not have the option to directly control troops – as it stands, battles are a massive exercise in frustration as you attempt in vain to maximize your army's effectiveness.

Given both its de-emphasis on low-level tactical decisions and its ambitious scope, EE II resides in a bizarre no-man's-land between Civilization III and Kohan II. I'm sure that Empire Earth II will fit very well in certain gamers' collections. Specifically those with little interest in focus-firing, build orders, and the higher levels of play in old-school (read: Starcraft, Red Alert, et al) RTS. The overall clumsiness of EE II is going to be tough for anyone to get around, though. And it's hard to get the Secretary General to listen to what you're trying to say when you've just spilled your drink all over his pants.—**ADAM**

Static defense is ludicrously powerful

...but artillery-type attacks take it down right quick

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Lead your nation to dominance throughout the ages, RTS-style

> **Graphics:** Nice detail, gorgeous weather effects, and obnoxious slowdown are the trademarks here

> **Sound:** So little impact on play that you may as well have a CD on

> **Playability:** All RTSs – all of them – should have a worker manager as useful and well-designed as this does

> **Entertainment:** If it weren't for the overly complicated and clunky combat, we could've had a winner here

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

One of the slickest RTS user interfaces ever governs the massive micromanagement task that awaits you in the new Empire Earth. Diplomacy, trade, technology development, imperialism, and war through land, sea, and air – they're all at your disposal through the many eras of human conflict. Several full campaigns have you take the reins of one of the great developing societies of the world, guiding their fates throughout the centuries. A couple of cool missions even let you take control of either side of major historical events like the Battle of Normandy. Fifteen real world civilizations populate the multiplayer world of the game, which includes some amusing game types like Regicide and King of the Hill. My only complaints lie with the combat implementation. Large troop deployments are often a jumble of confusion thanks to troop AI that is generally unintelligent. That won't disappoint the rabid history buff, for whom this title was tailor made. —**MILLER**

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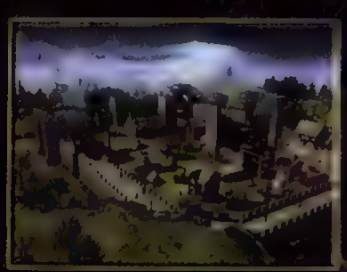
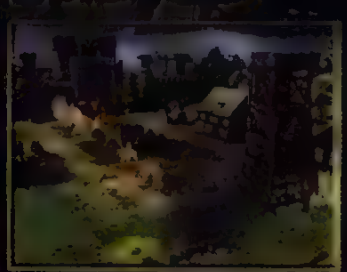
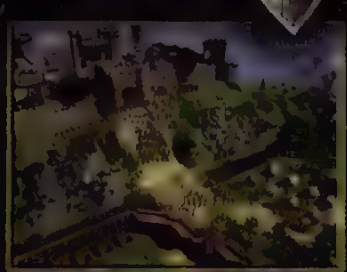
FIREFLY STUDIOS

STRONGHOLD 2







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FIREFLY

2K GAMES

NINTENDO DS

Yoshi Touch & Go

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** MARCH 14 > **ESRB** E

A GOOD START

Cynical as I am, I've been waiting for a game that really sold me on the potential of the Nintendo DS's touch-screen play. Yoshi Touch & Go, through an ingenious control mechanic, manages to do just that. In a manner similar to the old Lemmings series, you use the DS stylus to usher Yoshi and Baby Mario past a series of obstacles and enemies. Here's the rub: There are two basic level types – one in which Baby is falling slowly towards the ground, and one in which Yoshi and Baby are walking through side-scrolling platforming levels. While you don't directly control them, you can guide their movements by drawing lines of clouds with the stylus to steer them away from dangers and towards power-ups and coins.

You can draw circles around objects and enemies, allowing you to quickly toss them towards Yoshi for points. You're also able to tap the screen to fire eggs and poke Yoshi to make him jump. In this way, Touch & Go manages to completely reinvent the familiar platforming experience. As you progress through the stages, you'll start to achieve a welcome "Zen" state, as the once-strange gameplay elements gel into a harried mix of strategy and skill. I must say that I'm impressed.

However, after playing for a number of hours and unlocking everything, you'll find there's just not much variety there. Each mode is essentially identical and there are really only two types of levels. Multiplayer is great, but after awhile the repetitive environments and tiny number of enemy types makes each session feel a bit like you're living out the film *Groundhog Day*.

Touch & Go's unique control scheme opens up a world of possibilities for the action/platform genre, and Nintendo has explored exactly two of them. Still, one can't help but fantasize about a full-blown side-scrolling Mario title using the Touch & Go engine. That could be the DS masterpiece we've all been waiting for. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** A [illegible] action title using a ground[illegible] scheme

> **Graphics:** A [illegible] advanced tribute to [illegible]

> **Sound:** I suppose Nintendo fans will appreciate the [illegible] old school soundtrack

> **Playability:** At last, a game that shows the full potential of touch-screen play

> **Entertainment:** Ingenious. Certainly, but there's just not that much substance to back it up

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5

I think Yoshi Touch & Go is making fun of me. An insipid minigame masquerading as a full-fledged release, it openly taunts and ridicules anyone who picks it up. If it could, it would pants me just to add to the humiliation. Though it is aimed at being a high-scoring puzzle game, the core mechanic feels like it was assembled from the cutting room floor of a 2D platformer, complete with auto-scrolling and one-hit kills. Yes, the control scheme is innovative, but Nintendo is basically just using Touch & Go as a vehicle to introduce it. I'm anxious to see what it can do when there is actually some real content to manage. —**JOE**

PSP

Metal Gear Acid

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
> **RELEASE** MARCH 23 > **ESRB** M

CARD CAPTOR SNAKE

Solid Snake doesn't seem like he has much patience for collectible card games. The image of this legendary soldier calling on the fury of a Blue Eyes White Dragon or swaying to Jigglypuff's hypnotic song is laughable. Still, with a SOCOM in one hand and a booster pack in the other, Snake has made a surprisingly smooth transition into the world of turn-based combat.

Set on a remote South African island, Acid has players infiltrating enemy territory and uncovering the secrets behind the new Metal Gear by customizing a deck of cards and using them to move around. It sounds jarring, but this is still the Solid Snake you love. He sneaks, wears cardboard boxes, and flattens against walls. The only difference is that now he does it on a grid, and you need specific cards to carry out your strategy.

Drawing on material from the entire series (including Metal Gear Solid for GBC and Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake on the MSX), most cards are emblazoned with familiar faces and items that all have unique functions in battle. For instance, the Solidus Snake card delivers a Dual Sword attack for heavy damage, while the CQC cards incapacitate foes. Sometimes cards can even be used on each other: by throwing a grenade, then shooting it with an assault rifle, it will explode prematurely. Add to that the fact that Snake also has a female partner named Teliko with whom to coordinate his attacks, and the strategic possibilities quickly increase in depth.

While Acid does have its faults (like an imbalance between stealth and combat elements, plus the lack of voice acting), whether you praise or vilify this game will depend on which aspects of the Metal Gear series hold the largest places in your heart. If you're after awe-inspiring boss fights and exploratory gameplay with lots of freedom, you will probably be disappointed. But if you like Snake's tactical side and his uncanny ability to get wrapped up in some of the most intriguing stories in gaming, you'll find an engaging and addictive new way to experience his adventures – providing you don't mind laying some cards down. —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

> **Concept:** Solid Snake visits the local hobby shop before sneaking can commence

> **Graphics:** The art style on the portraits is impressive, and the character models look great (though you don't often see them close-up)

> **Sound:** Good for establishing atmosphere, but not especially cool

> **Playability:** The tutorials aren't particularly clear, which leads to some annoying experimentation

> **Entertainment:** Addictive and fun, though it's unlikely to provide any pulse-pounding excitement

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

Even mullet-cut super spies have the sophistication to excel at chess. Turn-based strategy may seem like a strange departure for the Metal Gear franchise, but Konami has found a way to keep the series' trademark stealth action intact. However, the means of executing the tactics demands better preparation and an overall higher level of thought. It's a bit slower than the Solid series, but it still harnesses the same exciting vibe, and the strategies that you can tap into are surprisingly deep. Outside of warfare, the new story is a bit unusual (even for Metal Gear), and not having spoken dialogue to flesh it out is a real buzz kill. Regardless, Konami has succeeded in creating a thinking man's Metal Gear. Much like the Final Fantasy Tactics titles, this is a detour that is worth taking. —**REINER**

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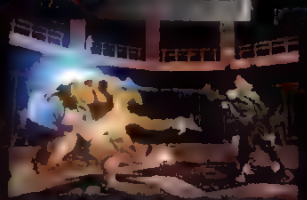
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HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Atari Retro Classics

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)
> **PUBLISHER** ATARI
> **DEVELOPER** TANIKO
> **RELEASE** MARCH 15 > **ESRB** E

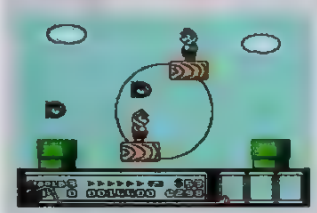
BOTTOM LINE **8**

As one can imagine, playing a game like Asteroids with touch-screen control is imprecise and largely painful – but the classics here with bad touch control work just fine with the traditional d-pad and button arrangement. Those with good stylus support (particularly Centipede and Missile Command) are an absolute blast. The "remix" versions (which feature new graphics) are fairly pointless; I'd rather bask in the retro style of the 2600 than some half-assed attempt at updating the look of Warlords. However, with two great titles, two good ones, and six mediocre games, this cart is easily worth a purchase.—**ADAM**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

WarioWare Twisted

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
> **RELEASE** MAY 23 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

As a gamer, I've taken a certain amount of delight in mocking those who think that making a little hopping motion with the controller or leaning to the side will have any discernable effect on the action onscreen. Now, WarioWare Twisted turns me into that which I have always ridiculed. The new microgames not only introduce a fun motion-based mechanic, but by mixing it with previous incarnations' one-button approach, they add an even crazier dimension to the madness. It's random, wacky, and fun – but it's also just WarioWare all over again.—**JOE**

PSP

Twisted Metal: Head-On

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** INCOG INC. > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** T

MASS CARNAGE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

The bloodthirsty serial killers that gave Twisted Metal: Black such a terrifying face have been incapacitated and locked away safely behind bars. Rather than creating another game loaded with shock-value, such as seeing a hapless bystander impaled on the hood of a preacher's car, developer Incog Inc. has retreated to the glory days of the series and has forged a sequel that feels like the true successor to Twisted Metal 2.

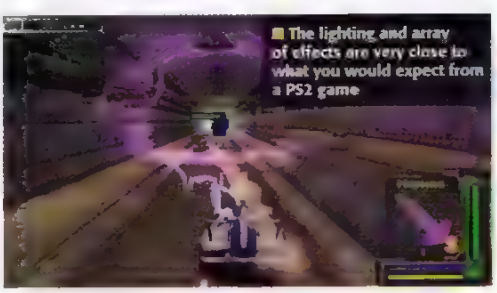
If you haven't spent time behind the wheel of a well-armed vehicle launching napalm blasts at ice cream trucks, Twisted Metal 2 is heralded as the pinnacle of vehicular combat. Just reflecting on the chaos that could be unleashed in that game puts a devilish grin on my face. In life, there are few pleasures greater than watching a missile slam into the exhaust pipe of a car, which in turn sends it sailing off of the roof of a skyscraper, and down 70 stories to a magnificent, smoldering grave. Head-On indulges players in the same maniacal ways.

Melding the vibrant colors of Twisted Metal 2 with the incredible detail of Twisted Metal: Black, players get the best of both worlds in this incredibly gorgeous game. Particle effects dance across the screen with unwavering ferocity, and walls crumble to the ground as explosions blanket the battlefield. All of the outlandish personalities that wreaked havoc on the PSone have crawled out of retirement and are back in their former glory.

While it's nice to see Warthog's Patriot Missiles tearing someone apart, or Mr. Slam's Bucket Slam Shake lifting foes high into the air, the steering for each vehicle is a bit touchy. To compensate for this, missiles seek their targets more effectively and can light up opponents from a multitude of angles. I did adjust to the controls after awhile, and eventually achieved a sense of vehicular combat Zen, but I still found myself turned around and slamming into walls from time to time. If it were just a bit tighter, the gameplay would be pitch perfect.

Twisted Metal has always excelled at rewarding player proficiency, and Head-On is no different. The strategies that you can tap into are immense. Lie low during an assault by tapping into the game's many defensive maneuvers, hoard all of the health power-ups as you slowly pick away at your opponents, or unlock the environmental weapons and rain terror upon the field. Skilled players are justly put into the spotlight, and what better place than in an extensive multiplayer component. You can customize the matches any way you see fit and can even bring this bad boy online to battle five opponents across the country.

If not for the somewhat clumsy control, this could have been the best Twisted Metal yet. The single-player offering is incredibly fun, and the multiplayer bouts bring limitless depth and couldn't be much more contagious.—**REINER**



■ The lighting and array of effects are very close to what you would expect from a PS2 game

■ By scouring the terrain, you will find hidden environmental attacks, plus teleports that lead to a number of minigames that can unlock secret cars

BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> **Concept:** A throwback to Twisted Metal 2 that boasts all of the gameplay advancements and graphical capabilities of the most recent console entry

> **Graphics:** The particle effects are very impressive, and the environments are littered with intricate detailing

> **Sound:** As loud and noisy as you would expect. The soundtrack rocks, and it's nice that spoken dialogue accompanies the endings

> **Playability:** Steering is a bit too responsive, but the action is incredibly intense and pushes players to hone their skills

> **Entertainment:** The addictive gameplay, hilarious endings, and endless fun that online brings will keep this UMD spinning in your PSP for months

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion

Diving back into Calypso's world of vehicular slaughter is a treat like few others on the PSP. Not only is it a trip down memory lane with its mix of returning drivers and classic car-crunching combat, it's an experience that transfers extremely well to the PSP's capabilities. While the single-player mode will offer a ton of playtime if you strive to complete the game with all the combatants, the real charm of this title is its ability to play multiplayer both locally or through the Internet. With a solid soundtrack and more than adequate graphics, Twisted Metal Head-On is like putting a PlayStation classic in your pocket, and it's hard to find anything wrong with that.—**ANDY**

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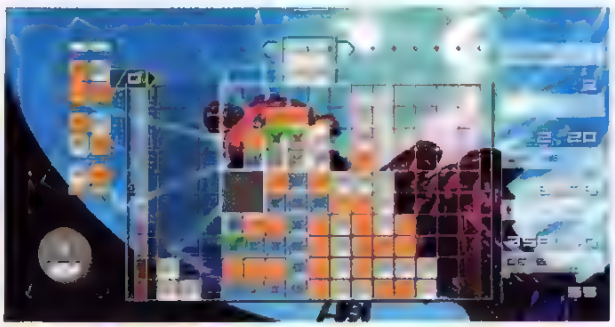
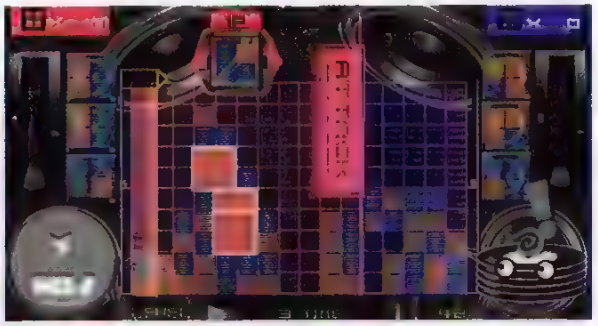
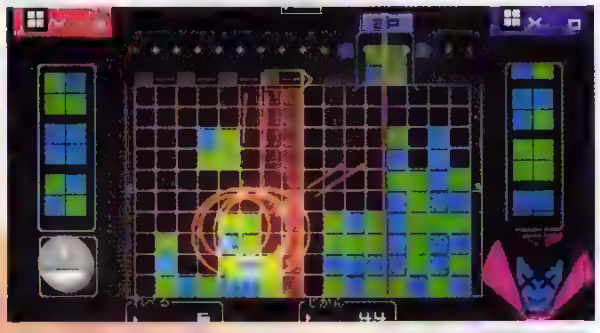





PSP

Lumines

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** Q ENTERTAINMENT/BANDAI
> **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** E10+

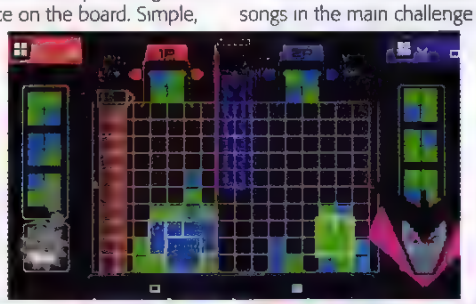
TRANSCENDENT TETRIS

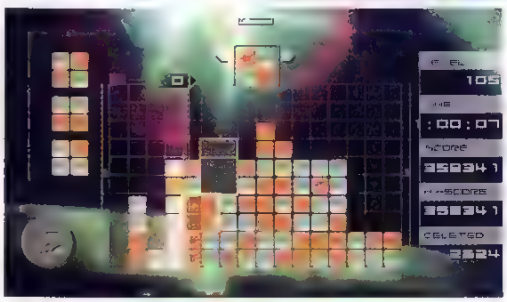
You may be under the impression that you've already played this game before. Perhaps you believe all those silly little block-drop games are the same – that there's nothing new under the sun since you finished with Tetris all those years ago. If I can convince you of anything here, it's that you should erase those thoughts from your mind and grab a copy of Lumines as soon as possible. This is a phenomenally addictive and brilliantly designed masterpiece, and the moment you lay down the bucks for a PSP, Lumines should go in that same shopping cart before you walk out of the store.

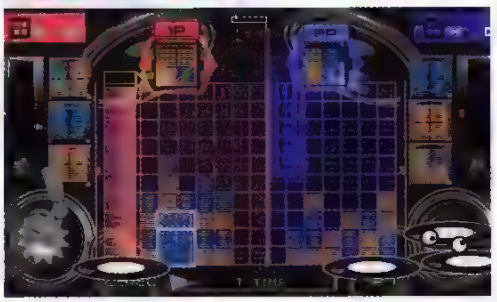
The genius of Lumines lies in its hidden depths. As you begin, the gameplay feels familiar enough. You've got dual colored blocks incessantly dropping from above, and you'll need to create at least a four by four region of the same hue to clear that space on the board. Simple, right? The thing is that as you play, your mind constantly latches on to new and more complex patterns by which you can clear larger and larger sections at a time, thereby increasing your score and moving you closer to the next level. Next, add the occasional availability of special pieces that eliminate any similarly colored blocks to which they are connected. As the hours pass, the mechanics constantly challenge you to think in broader and more precise tactics, and you feel yourself drawn ever deeper into an honest to goodness trance-like state.

This hypnotic quality is magnified ten-fold by the stunning array of music that holds the game together. While the board may remind many of Tetris, others will quickly recognize its similarities to electronic music sequencers. Like those computer programs, a BPM meter continually moves from left to right across the screen, clearing your completed sections away. As each block disappears, it triggers a musical cue in the song. This means that a big combo makes for a literal explosion of music, making you feel as much like a mixmaster as a puzzle genius.

I would have loved to see the game vary the order of songs in the main challenge mode, since you eventually find yourself having to play through the early levels with too much repetition. Thankfully, the numerous game modes help to make up for this lack of variety, and the wireless multiplayer only secures this game's position as one of the must-have titles in any PSP collection.—**MILLER**







BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** The genuine evolution of the Tetris formula

> **Graphics:** Varied "skins" accompany each song/level, surprising your eyes with flashes of light and color

> **Sound:** Without peer, the astounding music and sound design is a fully integrated aspect of gameplay

> **Playability:** The simple to understand initial rules hide one of the most complex puzzlers to date

> **Entertainment:** Visually and aurally hypnotic in every way

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9

Lumines is the next-generation Tetris. In other words, this puzzle game is so addictive that you won't stop playing it until your eyes start bleeding. Even at that point, you'll probably try to continue your game until the blood impairs your vision to the point that you can't make out the different block colors anymore. The killer soundtrack instantly puts you into a trance, making it even harder to put down. Although it is just a game about lining up block colors to clear space for more blocks, the techniques that you can tap into to keep your score running are deeper than you would ever expect from a puzzle game. It's too bad Sony didn't bundle this game in with the PSP hardware, because this is one title that everyone can and should get into.—**REINER**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INFRASTRUCTURE)
> **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 8

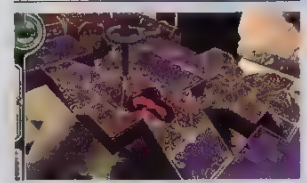
Featuring every character and rule sets based on each game, Darkstalkers Chronicle is a must-have for fans of the series. It's smoother, prettier, and faster than the previous titles, and features a new Tower mode that rewards players with unlockable art based on the franchise's history. Also featuring Wi-Fi play, practice, and standard Arcade mode, The Chaos Tower is a fully loaded fighter. It may not be Capcom's flagship fighting series, but Darkstalkers has certainly gotten one heck of a love letter with The Chaos Tower – one no 2D aficionado should be without.—**JEREMY**

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PSP

Arthur Maclean's Mercury

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** AWESOME STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6.75

Tasking players with the chore of guiding a blob of mercury through obstacle courses, this PSP puzzle game plays very much like a drippier version of Marble Madness. It's certainly a solid enough foundation, but its trial-and-error gameplay seems a bit too old school for the sexy new system. You guide the blob until you reach the goal or you repeat the level until you do. I certainly won't be buying the PSP to play something lifted from a 20-year-old game, especially when the system's other puzzler, Lumines, offers a nearly religious experience.—**JEREMY**

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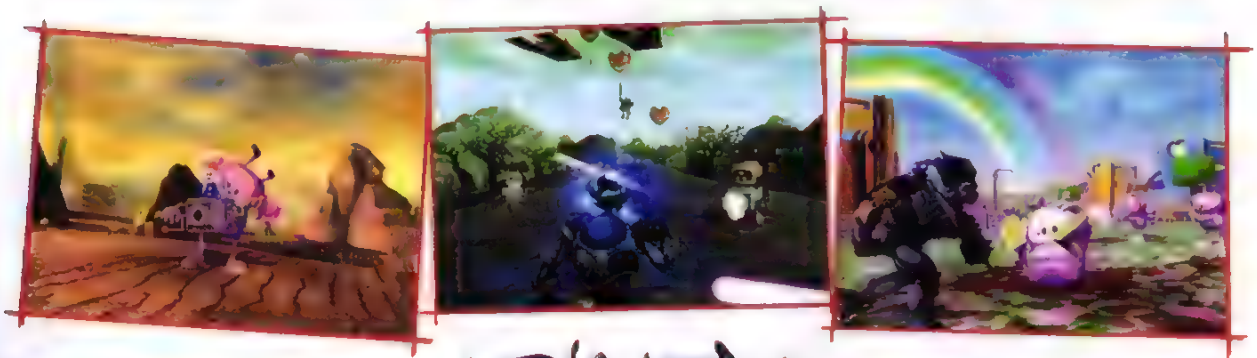

XBOX

XBOX LIVE

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Language
Mature Humor
Violence

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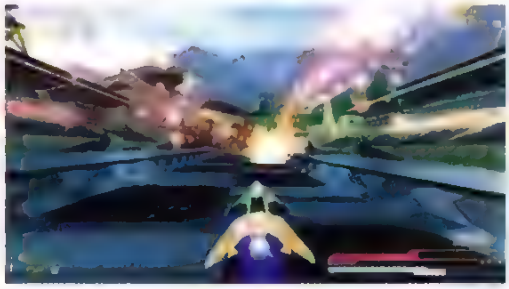


PSP

Wipeout Pure

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** STUDIO LIVERPOOL > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E

STILL SPEEDY

Once I picked my jaw up off the floor after seeing how fantastic this futuristic racer looks on the PSP, I settled down to fall back in love with the Wipeout franchise. The seduction didn't take particularly long, as this first handheld incarnation of the series seems to specialize in grabbing your attention and keeping it there with constant speed, challenge, and action.

As you progress through the modes and courses available in the game, you'll continually unlock higher difficulties that have you driving faster and faster anti-gravity vehicles. Eventually, the sense of movement is truly intense, and you'll have to learn how to stop blinking in order for your reflexes to react fast enough. In keeping with the traditions of the series, a pumping score of instrumental electronica is more than appropriate to the task at hand as it beats along with the explosive sound effects of the FX300 racing circuit.

Several tweaks have helped to streamline the racing experience, but there really isn't a lot I'd label as innovative beyond its excellent appearance on the new handheld. Even so, the game as a whole feels glossy, lean, clean, and abundantly cool in every respect. Fans should be pleased.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Attempt to breach the sound barrier while devastating your enemy's ship in the handheld evolution of the classic series

> **Graphics:** Blazing speed and silky smooth visuals delight your eyes

> **Sound:** A suitable accompaniment to the constant eye candy – the music and sound effects couldn't fit better

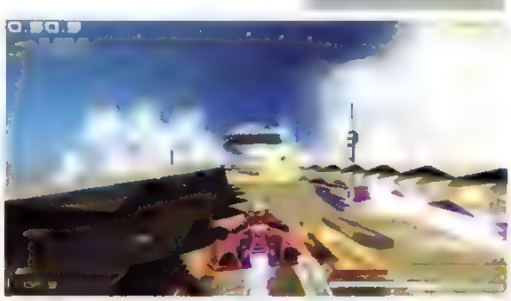
> **Playability:** A steady learning curve eventually slows down as you encounter nearly insurmountable foes – immensely challenging but entirely fair

> **Entertainment:** Fast, furious, and fun – even if there's not much new about the series

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

Heart-pumping speed and techno music go together deliciously like chocolate and peanut butter, and in that regard, Wipeout Pure – like all the Wipeout editions before it – is genius. However, even though this handheld version features new tracks and the mesmerizing Zone mode that constantly pushes the boundaries of speed, the game overall is a tad shallow. Thankfully, multiplayer will give this game legs over and above the single player experience. You really can't go wrong with Pure, but it really could have been so much more.—**ANDY**

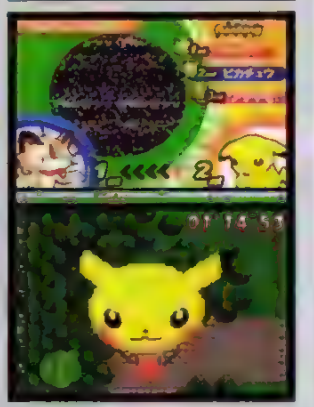


HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Pokémon Dash

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** AMBRELLA (MARIGUL)
> **RELEASE** MARCH 14 > **ESRB** E



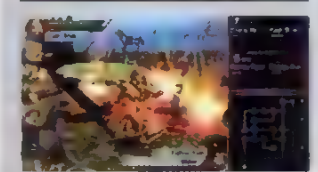
BOTTOM LINE 5.5

After an opening title screen has you blatantly molest a gleeful Pikachu in order to start a race, you'll find yourself furiously dragging the stylus across your DS in order to make the little yellow Pokémon gallop across the non-descript landscapes which he calls home. Occasionally, you'll encounter brightly colored balloons that lift you high in the air, where you'll try to zoom across the board to the next checkpoint. Alas, the game itself seems to thwart your attempts to find these checkpoints at every turn through the use of immovable obstacles and by refusing to show you a clear map of your location. Don't think of it so much as a game, but more as an exercise in anger management.—**MILLER**

PSP

Dynasty Warriors

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** KOEI
> **DEVELOPER** OMEGA FORCE
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 6

For better or worse, the Dynasty Warriors franchise manages to get away with some glaring faults on PS2, but the PSP iteration manages to cram in one more that even diehard fans will have trouble forgiving: crippling slowdown. While I have to commend Koei for adapting the series for a more on-the-go mentality (with most battles taking no more than a few minutes), when a game is unpredictably rendered unplayable, spending even one minute with it is one minute too long.—**JOE**

PSP

Need For Speed: Underground Rivals

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (2-PLAYER VIA INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E

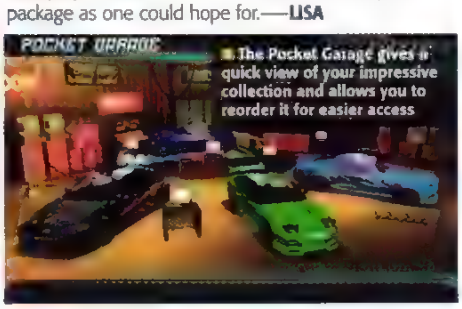
KIT AND CABOODLE

What do you really want out of a racing game? Car variety, interesting courses, and reasonable and consistent physics models? The must-have list for a simple car game is short, and something that the industry has done for a long time with decent success. But what about the added perks that you'd like to see? Good graphics, customizable performance and appearance upgrades, solid and challenging AI, and multiplayer modes? Well, ounce for ounce, Need for Speed: Underground Rivals delivers on all of these points – and maybe even more.

It's not that the game is perfect, but the sheer amount of good-quality features packed in here make the disc well worth your time. That said, there are two areas where the game gives me pause: Rivals only has 10 tracks, but to be fair they're each very different and highly entertaining. Also, I had some minor and very infrequent performance issues, which were mostly an occasional framerate drop.

The sense of speed that Rivals delivers is truly remarkable – barreling down city streets in a stock Focus ZX3 is realistically terrifying. And, as you get into higher-performance vehicles, the change in physics is noticeable and appropriate.

While the whole of this game plays almost exactly like Underground's first console offering (and I mean that as a high compliment), the additions for this handheld outing are both clever in premise and enjoyable in execution. The Owned feature that lists real-life challengers and whether you own them (by winning) or are owned by them (by losing) will foster competition on a whole new scale. Also, in a good move for a handheld game, the session modes allow for every permutation between extended solo play and quick multiplayer matches. All in all, Rivals is as complete a package as one could hope for.—**LISA**



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Edge of your seat tuner racing thrills in the palm of your hand

> **Graphics:** Translating the speed effects and general shininess of the console versions goes off with few noticeable compromises

> **Sound:** While not as robust a selection as we're used to, there is certainly enough variety to please during long play sessions

> **Playability:** The changes in a car's performance upgrades dramatically alters the controls – but in a good way

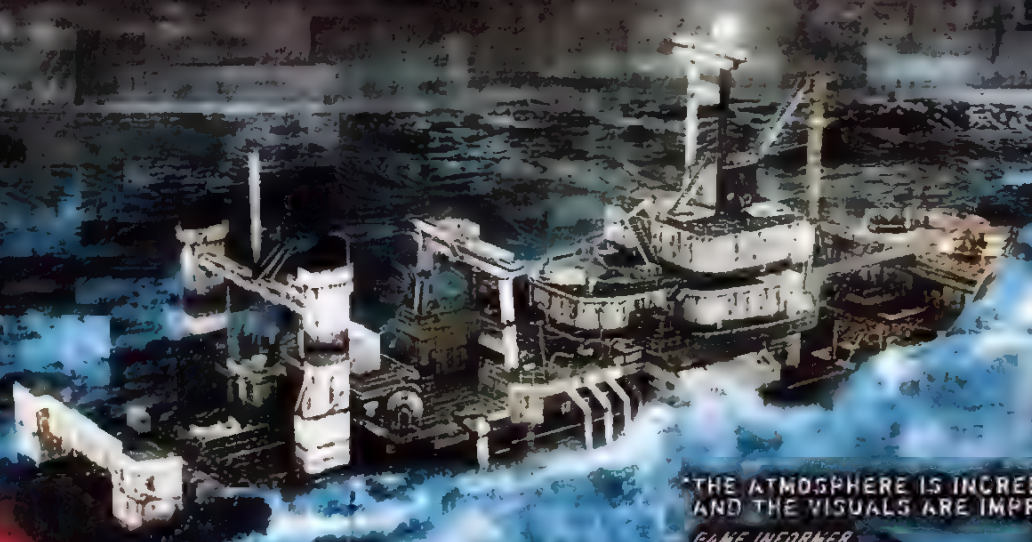
> **Entertainment:** Long legs with tons of game modes and replay value make this a good pick for tuner racing fans

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

This game was made for the PSP, what with its bite-sized racing format and splendid graphics – including bells and whistles such as motion blur, reflections, and road textures. But it's not all flash, as the customizable goodies for your car give it some depth. I was particularly impressed with the game's sense of speed. This is given a boost by the camera shake, which really sucks you into the experience. However, I was disappointed by the over-sensitivity of the analog nub and the catch-up AI, which can be really frustrating.—**KATO**

ON A HELLBOUND VESSEL, EVERYONE IS DEAD WEIGHT.



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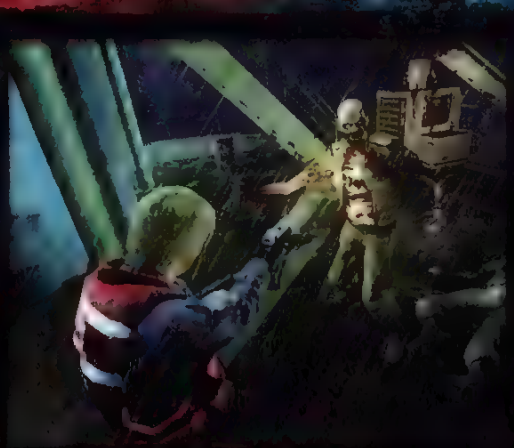

KEEP YOUR BEARINGS
BATTLE AGAINST INCREASINGLY MUTATED ENEMIES IN TREACHEROUS, UNSTABLE ENVIRONMENTS

PlayStation®2 screenshot shown

UNLEASH A TORRENT OF WEAPONS
CREATE FATAL TRAPS AND USE SHOTGUNS, FLAME THROWERS, OR ANY OBJECT YOU CAN FIND TO SURVIVE.

BRAVE DANGEROUS WATERS
ROCKED BY HUGE BREAKERS, YOU MUST STEADY YOUR NERVES – AND AIM – TO EVADE A WATERY GRAVE.

MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
ESRB

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

PlayStation 2

DARKWORKS

XBOX

UBISOFT

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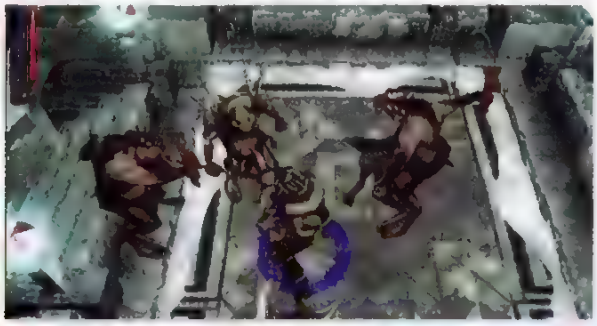
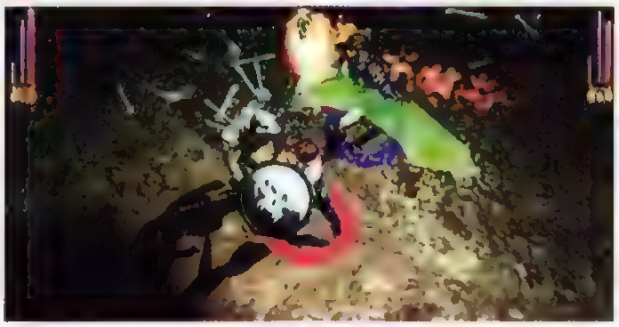
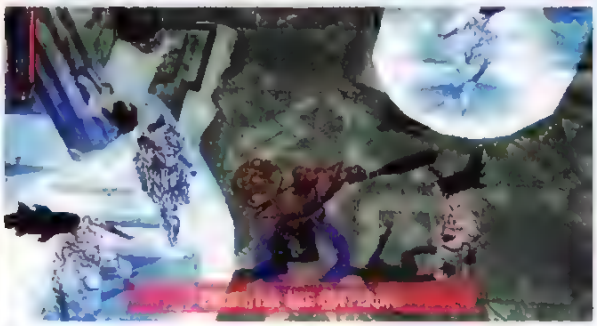




PSP

Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** T

ONE STEP FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK

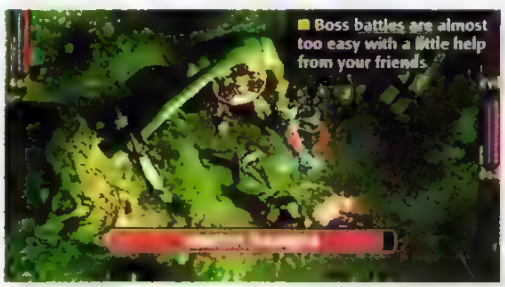
Like so many people, I have a special place in my heart for fighting monsters, leveling up, and looking for that next piece of über loot. At its core, that's exactly what Untold Legends is about, and it executes fairly well in that task. However, due to a couple of unfortunate issues, this title doesn't quite manage to deliver as much entertainment as other similar games.

On a positive note, many minor annoyances present in Champions: Return To Arms (which this title is almost painfully similar to) are nowhere to be found in Untold Legends. Items are color-coded by usability, you can trade items without dropping them on the ground, and this is just overall a smoother play. Also, the class design is refreshing – none of the four available characters feel quite like the fantasy archetypes we're used to. Also, the PSP's wonderful screen is put to great use with the detailed models, smooth animation, and delicious particle effects.

Where UL falls short is primarily in the maps and level design. While it's a great idea in theory to have randomly generated stages, the end result in this case is that the levels, quite frankly, suck. Tons of dead-end paths with no real reward at the end and the same three or four monster types throughout any particular stage don't make for much awesomeness. Plus, the facts that you can see the entire level on your automap, and that bosses and quest objectives are clearly marked, totally negates any enjoyment of exploration.

Nice four-player support and a fairly long quest are definite pluses, but don't make up for Untold Legends dropping the ball so badly on the level design front. If it's action/RPG hacking and slashing you want, this does a credible job of it. Just don't go into Untold Legends expecting to be blown away.—**ADAM**

Getting swarmed is a good way to die


Boss battles are almost too easy with a little help from your friends

Though it's all very pretty, multiplayer often comes at the cost of framerate

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Tweak the Champions of Norrath formula to work on PSP

> **Graphics:** In a word, gorgeous Particle and spell effects are jaw-dropping

> **Sound:** Repetetive and annoyingly reminiscent of the pre-MIDI PC scores of the 1980's

> **Playability:** Were the block button more responsive, the controls would be gravy

> **Entertainment:** It's mindless hack n' slash, but ain't nothing wrong with that

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

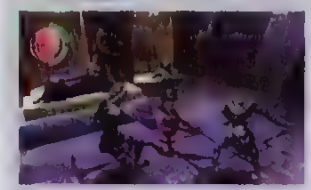
Like the console versions of Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance or Champions of Norrath, Untold Legends delivers hours upon hours of experience-grinding entertainment. So the gameplay is what you think it is, and as such, is something that gamers either love or hate (I am certainly one of the former). So its tried and true gameplay is solid, and gets better if you can play it wirelessly with your friends all huddled around their PSPs. However, that doesn't change the fact that Untold Legends feels rushed and is graphically lackluster when compared to the rest of the launch line-up. The soundtrack's tinny loops ground at my nerves like Ashley Simpson at the Orange Bowl, and the numerous graphical glitches and slowdown in multiplayer are at times unforgivable.—**ANDY**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

Spider-Man 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** VICARIOUS VISIONS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 23 > **ESRB** T



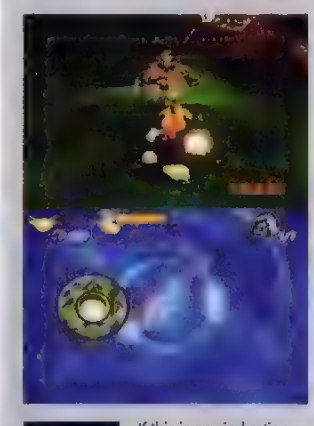
BOTTOM LINE 7.25

The big story with Spider-Man 2 on the consoles was web slinging. There had to be something for you to actually attach to, the physics were great, and you could roam through the entire city almost at will. Sadly, these things are gone in Spidey's PSP adventure, but it is a solid, if unexceptional, action game. Cheers to Vicarious Visions for making this entry look way better than its console counterparts, but I'm sad that the controls didn't fare as well in the conversion. Sticking to walls is entirely too easy and camera control on the d-pad isn't an optimal configuration.—**LISA**

NINTENDO DS

Rayman DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** DC STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6

If this is any indication of Ubisoft's enthusiasm for the Nintendo DS, don't expect any mind-blowing touch-screen innovations to be coming out of France any time soon. Rayman DS is bare-bones port of the Dreamcast/PSone/N64 title Rayman 2: The Great Escape. However, on the DS the once-beautiful pastel graphics are displayed in muted, muddy browns with jagged character models. The only touch-screen feature is an erratic "virtual" analog stick that is absolutely impossible to use accurately. Compared to Super Mario 64 DS, this is a shoddy port that doesn't scratch the surface of the DS's potential.—**MATT**

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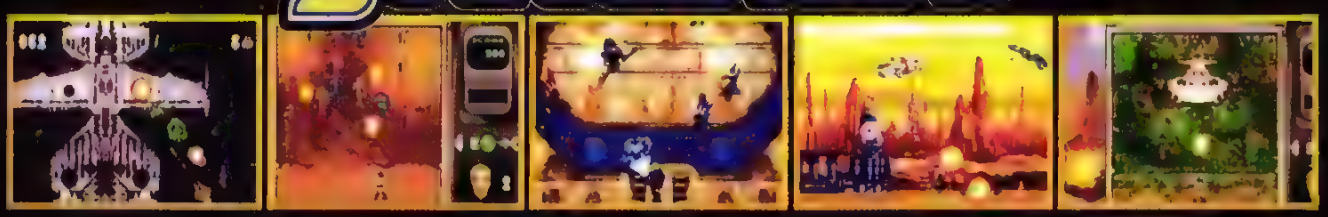

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

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PLUG IT IN & PLAY TV GAMES

PSP

Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (UP TO 3-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** SHABA GAMES/NEVERSOFT > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** T

PINT-SIZED POWERHOUSE

This is one of the hardest reviews I've had to write in a long time – and that's a good thing. Why? Because the usual complaints we journalists wheel out to critique handheld versions of console games have been rendered moot by Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix for PSP. Simply, this is not a "version" of THUG 2, it *is* THUG 2. Everything you expect from the Tony Hawk series – great graphics, refined controls, and huge 3D levels – is here. Amazingly, Shaba Games has squeezed this massive title into a tiny UMD without compromising any of the things that make the franchise great.

If you've already played THUG 2, you know how great this game is. For those of you that haven't and are buying a PSP, this should be at the top of your "must-buy" list. The game streamlines the first THUG's career mode by implementing a better storyline and a more refined difficulty curve. Even better, it brings back the hectic two-minute runs of the first three Hawk titles with Classic mode. Overall, it's the best of the old and the new, making this the ultimate Tony Hawk game. Remix actually offers more content than the console versions, with four new environments: Kyoto, Atlanta, Santa Cruz, and the gorgeous Las Vegas. Also, like most PSP games, it offers smooth-running multiplayer via the system's wireless LAN.

I'm blown away by how well this title has been ported to PSP. Although there are some graphical compromises, with the PSP's bright and hi-res LCD screen it's hard to tell the difference. Playability is also excellent. My only two gripes are the lack of four shoulder buttons and the fact that the PSP forces your hand into a less comfortable position than the Dual Shock controller does. However, the fact that I'm even comparing a handheld title to its console cousins says more about the quality of this game than I ever could.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

> **Concept:** An enhanced port of THUG 2 that simply must be seen to be believed

> **Graphics:** Some of the character models and textures aren't as detailed, but it's frighteningly close to PS2

> **Sound:** One of the best licensed soundtracks ever – Stooges, Joy Division, Germs, Atmosphere, and more classic material

> **Playability:** I miss the extra shoulder buttons, but that's about the only difference

> **Entertainment:** This runt can hang with the big kids

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.5

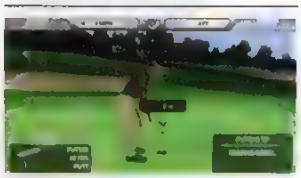
The Tony Hawk games have always been fun, and finally there's a handheld version that's every bit as good as the console counterparts – which, honestly, is blowing my mind. Not only is THUG 2 Remix an excellent addition to the Tony Hawk series, it also perfectly demonstrates how powerful the PSP really is. It's every bit as smooth, fast, and fun as the console release, and the bite-sized, goal-based gameplay is a really natural fit for a portable system. I never thought I'd see the day when I was so impressed by a handheld port of a console game, but that day has indeed come. And I'm very glad it's here.—**JEREMY**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

Tiger Woods PGA Tour

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE **8**

Handheld versions of this franchise haven't fared well, but golf fans on the go can confidently wrap their hands around this game and all its mighty PSPness. Keeping elements like Game Face and legends showdowns from its big brother console version, this PSP title gives you a full feature set. Although gameplay-wise, the system's analog nub can make your swing a little shaky at first. I still think that the series' putting tips for the horizontal axis could use some work, but this game isn't screaming for a mulligan by any means.—**KATO**

PSP

Gretzky NHL

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE)
> **PUBLISHER** 989 SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** PAGE 44 STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E

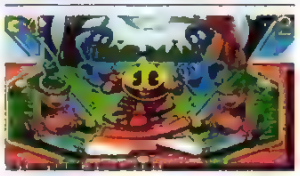
BOTTOM LINE **6**

After playing this title, I walked away with the feeling that Todd Bertuzzi blindsided me on the back of the head, then smashed my face directly into the ice. While I did pull off some pretty shots and found myself in a number of nail-biting games, the abysmal framerate makes it very difficult to comprehend the action. You always feel like you are a little out of control. The poor collision only makes matters worse. Sticks that are four feet away from the puck magically make contact with it, and goalies can apparently use their minds to stop shots. It's fun, but more so chaotic.—**REINER**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Pac-Man Pinball Advance

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO
> **DEVELOPER** HUMAN SOFT
> **RELEASE** APRIL 12 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE **7**

Video pinball is gaming's most reliably mediocre genre. I always seem to have at least a modicum of fun when manning the digital flippers. However, it's also rare that a pinball title really stands out from the pack as exceptional. Pac-Man Pinball holds to this pattern. There are few tables to choose from, all of which are fairly standard in design. Thankfully, there are a few novel ideas that help incorporate the classic Pac-Man gameplay into the table (including short, vertically scrolling sequences and the ability to eat power pellets and ghosts).—**MATT**

PSP

NFL Street 2: Unleashed

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** EA BIG
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** MARCH 21 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE **7**

You'd think that some of the bite-sized challenges in this game (the PSP edition even has some exclusive ones) would make it more conducive to the handheld, but I believe that no matter the system, it all goes back to gameplay. This series doesn't have enough of it. The GameBreakers are unbalanced and the new non-interactive GameBreaker 2's are shameful. Street 2 is fast, but it can be less than smooth in the control department when pulling off some of the style moves.—**KATO**

PSP

NBA

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE)
> **PUBLISHER** 989 SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** SCEA SAN DIEGO
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE **6.25**

As much as I despise the "cha-ching" sound effect that accompanies the perfect release of a shot, I actually had a decent time with this game. There isn't much to it, but the play is solid, the player animations are very lifelike, and the minigames (skill contest, paint, and 3-point) are fun little diversions. Deke moves are limited, and the AI is sometimes questionable, but you gotta love the detail that went into the dunks and extensive list of plays you can choose from. Whether you are playing through a season or are battling someone online, NBA delivers simple but enjoyable play.—**REINER**

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Violence

Available at Launch

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HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

FIFA Soccer

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

The far better of the two soccer games available at PSP launch, FIFA is an excellent port of the recent console title. While the team management options have been thinned out, you can now start playing your favorite team mid-season of their actual '04-'05 run, while Challenges let you reenact historic comebacks and routs of the game. But, by far, my favorite feature is the new Flashback save – you can quit out in the middle of any match and, when you load the game back up, you'll jump right in with a quick five-second refresher of the last few moments of the game. Some hefty load times and dekes awkwardly mapped to the d-pad are my only major complaints in what is otherwise an excellent handheld presentation of the sport.—**MILLER**

PSP

World Tour Soccer

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** 989 STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE **6.25**

A profound step down from the new FIFA finds us in the luke-warm, tepid water of another World Tour Soccer, this time on the fledgling PSP. Animation is generally poor, facial modeling is bland, and the AI manages to feel artificial but without the intelligence. The only flag it has to wave over FIFA is a feature I didn't even like very much – its speed. On-pitch players run so fast it's hard to even know what's going on. Obviously, this was an attempt to make it exciting and quick for the handheld market, but the result backfires and makes the experience feel disingenuous.—**MILLER**

PSP

Ridge Racer

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** MARCH 22

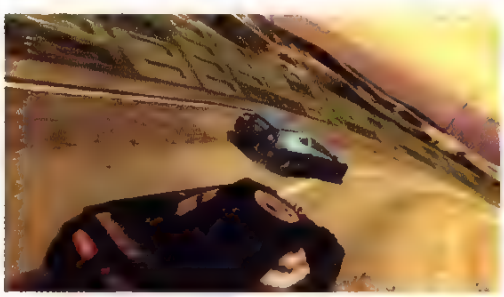
ON THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF

The Ridge Racer series loves console launches. It was there for the PlayStation 2 and Nintendo DS, and now it's showing up for the red carpet debut of the PSP. Although the series loves to hog all the jumbo shrimp at launch parties, I've figured out another reason it likes to show up for day one – to capitalize on the post-launch honeymoon. When a new system releases, people are happy to play anything on their shiny new platform. It's almost like the games themselves are mere excuses to turn the thing on and wave it in front of jealous friends. So here comes Ridge Racer, eager to satiate your desperate need for PSP titles at the expense of itself.

Ridge Racer looks great (almost like a PS2 title), and moves pretty damn fast, but it does little more than meet the average requirements of any car game. It will surely satisfy the appetite of anyone wanting to jump in and race around, but that's about it. For those who want to plow through the whole game, you'll find plenty of circuits to hit, but the title endlessly recycles its tracks to the point that you don't have to bother. I also don't like how it spreads the 11 other AI racers around the track in little groups which you come upon about every half a lap. It means that the majority of the time you're racing alone, which isn't that exciting. And when you actually do compete against another car and run into someone (or the environment), Ridge Racer still clings to old school bumper car physics. However, the game does a good job when it comes to its bread-and-butter: drifting. The analog stick is great for throwing the nose of your car into the corner and pulling it straight again.

"Despite the new-fangled PSP, this game remains stuck in the arcade era."

Despite the new-fangled PSP, this game remains stuck in the arcade era. That's great when you're drifting around a corner at blazing speeds, but it leaves the title lacking after that first hour. I'd imagine that this game's absence of depth will only help its wireless play, where you can just jump in and lay down some rubber with friends. Someone's gotta blaze the racing game trail on the PSP, and Ridge Racer is more than happy to do that. However, it'll only be left in the dust before long.—**KATO**



BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** If you are absolutely terrified by change, then Ridge Racer will fit the bill, because it does absolutely nothing new

> **Graphics:** Looks sweet and gives a good sensation of speed Obviously far superior to the Nintendo DS version that also came out recently

> **Sound:** The in-game announcer is the reason Van Gogh hacked off one of his ears

> **Playability:** Using the analog nub isn't as responsive as it should be

> **Entertainment:** A perfect pick-up-and-play title that you may not be picking up and playing after a few weeks

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

This game is slick. The menus are sharp, the cars look great, the courses are littered with large-scale events that (although they don't affect the actual racing) really add to the experience, and the announcer is at least tolerable. The tracks are awesome and the controls are certainly able (even with the analog nubbin that's given me some problems). That said, I do believe the series won't really feel current until it figures out how to balance the heavy arcade-flavored racing with something more substantial. As it stands, this is a good-looking title that really shows off what the PSP can do, but that doesn't mean that it's more than a casual fling.—**LISA**

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3-18 University of North Carolina at Charlotte

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3-30 Marshall University

3-31 West Virginia State

4-01 Hofstra State University

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4-06 University of Delaware

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CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For February 2005 Based On Units Sold

1 GRAN TURISMO 4 (PS2)

This month's charts data is being assessed by Ernst Topplehaus, a Michael J. Fox-biased research analyst. What do you think of our chart-topper, Ernst? "If there's anything *Doc Hollywood* taught us, it's that reckless driving can strand us in places where our big-city ways have hilarious repercussions. For your own safety, please wait at least 30 minutes after playing *GT 4* before operating a motor vehicle."

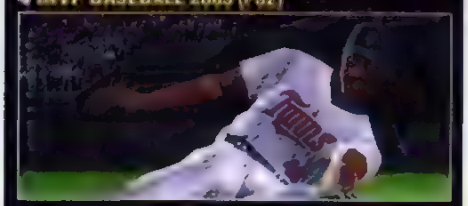
2 NBA STREET V3 (PS2)

"People are sick of these arcade-style sports games. Believe me, I've seen the numbers. If developers want to give gamers a zany basketball game, what about *Teen Wolf*? Any slam dunk is made, like, a hundred times better when performed by that lovable lycanthrope."

3 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS (PS2)

"Trends indicate that gamers are becoming too edgy and extreme. They still need the great gameplay, but with a more wholesome tone. Where else can you find an awe-inspiring GTA-like journey through city and countryside, but without all the swears? *Homeward Bound*."

4 MVP BASEBALL 2005 (PS2)



"Baseball is the great American pastime, and it must be defended from all threats, terrestrial and otherwise, just like Michael J. Fox valiantly protected Earth in *Mars Attacks!* Why didn't that movie get a sequel? Oh, right – Joe Don Baker is box-office poison."

5 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP (GBA)

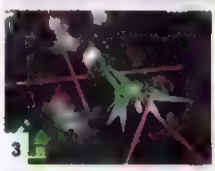
"This is probably the story of a young man in strange clothes exploring an unfamiliar world. And driving a Delorean. And making out with his mom. It's basically *Back to the Future* on GBA."

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Gran Turismo 4	N/A	PS2	9.25	02-05	$49
2	NBA Street V3	N/A	PS2	9	02-05	$49
3	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	2	PS2	10	10-04	$48
4	MVP Baseball 2005	N/A	PS2	8.5	02-05	$30
5	The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap	3	GBA	9.5	01-05	$30
6	Need for Speed: Underground 2	N/A	XBOX	9	02-05	$49
7	Mercenaries	5	PS2	7.5	01-05	$50
8	Resident Evil 4	1	GC	10	01-05	$50
9	Champions: Return to Arms	N/A	PS2	8	02-05	$49
10	Madden NFL 2005	8	PS2	8.75	08-04	$29
11	Super Mario 64 DS	10	DS	8.5	11-04	$30
12	Mercenaries	4	XBOX	7.5	01-05	$50
13	Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse	N/A	PS2	7.75	02-05	$49
14	NBA Live 2005	12	PS2	8.25	09-04	$30
15	Star Fox Assault	N/A	GC	7	02-05	$49
16	WarioWare: Touched!	N/A	DS	8.25	02-05	$35
17	MVP Baseball 2005	N/A	XBOX	8.5	02-05	$30
18	Halo 2	7	XBOX	10	11-04	$48
19	World Championship Poker	16	PS2	N/A	11-04	$20
20	Need For Speed: Underground 2	6	PS2	8	11-04	$50

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Dynasty Warriors 5	N/A	PS2
2	Tales of Eternia	N/A	PSP
3	Star Fox Assault	N/A	GC
4	Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3	N/A	PS2
5	Jissen Pachinko Slot Plus	N/A	PS2
6	Devil May Cry 3	N/A	PS2
7	Mega Man Battle Network 5: Team Colonel	N/A	GBA
8	Another Code	N/A	DS
9	Rumble Roses	N/A	PS2
10	Namco Museum	N/A	PSP



Source: Game Japan

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	N/A	Multi
2	God of War	1	PS2
3	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	2	Multi
4	Jade Empire	N/A	Xbox
5	Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix	N/A	PSP
6	Resident Evil 4	3	GC
7	Lumines	N/A	PSP
8	Gran Turismo 4	4	PS2
9	SWAT 4	N/A	PC
10	Area 51	N/A	Multi

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	The Sims 2 University	N/A	$35
2	World of Warcraft	1	$50
3	The Sims 2	3	$48
4	Half-Life 2	2	$52
5	Star Wars: Republic Commando	N/A	$42
6	Star Wars – Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	N/A	$42
7	The Sims Deluxe	5	$20
8	Halo: Combat Evolved	N/A	$29
9	Galaxy of Games	N/A	$10
10	Roller Coaster Tycoon 3	6	$38

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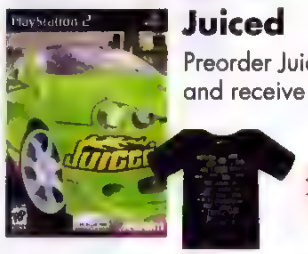

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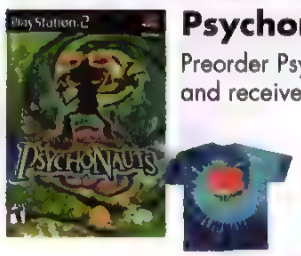

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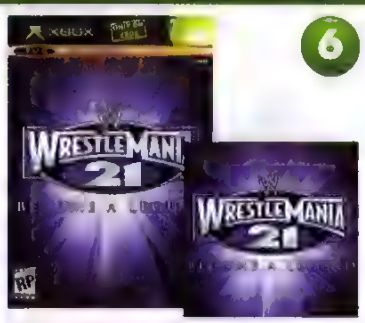

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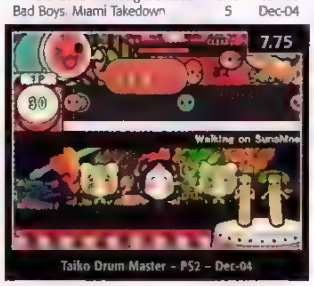

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Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Sukoden IV	8.5	Feb-05
Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	8	Apr-05
Taiko Drum Master	7.75	Dec-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Technic Beat	7.5	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Tekken 5	8.75	Apr-05
Tenchu: Fatal Shadows	7	Mar-05
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	6.75	Nov-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
TOCA Race Driver: Ultimate Racing Simulator	7.5	Nov-04
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Under the Skin	5	Oct-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe	9.5	Sep-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
Winning Eleven 8	8.75	Mar-05
World Tour Soccer 2006	6	Apr-05
Worms: Forts Under Siege	5.75	Apr-05
WWE Smackdown! Vs. RAW	8.5	Dec-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Xenosaga Episode II Jenseits von Gut und Böse	7.75	Mar-05
Ys: The Ark of Napishtim	7.5	Mar-05
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	6	Jan-05
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	3.25	Dec-04

GAMECUBE

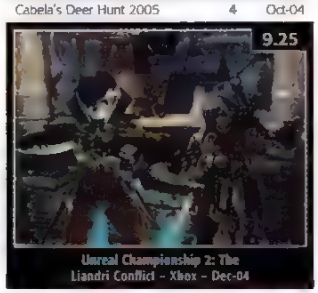
Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Amazing Island	7.25	Sep-04
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Baten Kaitos: Wings of Eternity and the Lost Ocean	8.75	Dec-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04

Mario Party 6 – GC – Feb-05

Donkey Kong Jungle Beat	7.5	Apr-05
Donkey Konga	7	Nov-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
King Arthur	7.25	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
Mario Party 6	6.25	Feb-05
Mario Power Tennis	8.5	Jan-05
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	9.5	Jan-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	8.5	Apr-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Paper Mario 2 The Thousand-Year Door	6.75	Nov-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Rainbow Six 3	5.75	Sep-04
Resident Evil 4	10	Mar-05
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Fox Assault	7	Apr-05
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
WWE Day of Reckoning	8.25	Oct-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04

XBOX

Army Men: Sarge's War	5	Oct-04
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2 There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space	7	Jan-05
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04

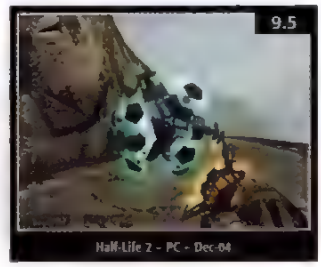


Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict – Xbox – Dec-04

Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Catwoman	4.75	Sep-04
Chicago Enforcer	2	Mar-05
Colin McRae Rally 2005	8.25	Oct-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Dai Senryaku VII Modern Military Tactics	8	Mar-05
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 2	7.75	Dec-04
Dead or Alive Ultimate	9	Dec-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Doom 3	9.25	Apr-05
Dukes of Hazzard Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-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
Fable	9.5	Oct-04
Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut	9.25	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
Galleon	4.25	Oct-04
Ghost Recon 2	8	Jan-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Guilty Gear X2 #Reload	8.25	Sep-04
Gungriffon: Allied Strike	6	Feb-05
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Halo 2	10	Dec-04
Hot Wheels Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Juiced	5.75	Oct-04
Karaoke Revolution	7.75	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders	7.75	Nov-04
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Madden NFL 2005	8.75	Sep-04
Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
Mechassault 2: Lone Wolf	9.25	Feb-05
Men of Valor	7.75	Nov-04
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	8.75	Sep-04
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
NHL 2005	8.5	Sep-04
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath	9	Feb-05
Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors	7	Oct-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
OutRun 2	6.5	Dec-04
Phantom Dust	7	Mar-05
Pinball Hall of Fame The Gottlieb Collection	6.75	Feb-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Pro Fishing Challenge	4.25	Sep-04
Project Snowblind	8.25	Apr-05
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
Pure Pinball	5.75	Oct-04
Red Ninja: End of Honor	3.75	Apr-05
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Samurai Warriors	7.75	Sep-04
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
Scrapland	6.5	Apr-05
Second Sight	8.5	Sep-04
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
ShellShock: Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Silent Hill 4: The Room	8.5	Sep-04
Sims 2, The	8.75	Nov-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.75	Apr-05
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	9.25	Feb-05
Star Wars: Republic Commando	8.25	Mar-05
Still Life	5.5	Apr-05
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Sudeki	7.75	Sep-04
Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	8	Apr-05
SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom	6.5	Nov-04
Sybena II	6.25	Nov-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Top Gear RPM Tuning	5	Apr-05
Tork: Prehistoric Punk	6	Mar-05
Tron 2.0: Killer App	7	Jan-05
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Ultra Bust-A-Move	7	Dec-04
Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict	9.25	Apr-05
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Wings of War	6.5	Nov-04
Winning Eleven 8	8.75	Mar-05
Worms: Forts Under Siege	5.75	
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Yager	7	Oct-04

PC

Act of War: Direct Action	8.25	Apr-05
Armies of Exigo	8	Dec-04
Aura: Fate of the Ages	7.25	Sep-04
Axis & Allies	7.75	Jan-05
Call of Duty: United Offensive	8.75	Nov-04
Chris Sawyer's Locomotion	7	Nov-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay Developer's Cut, The	9.25	Jan-05

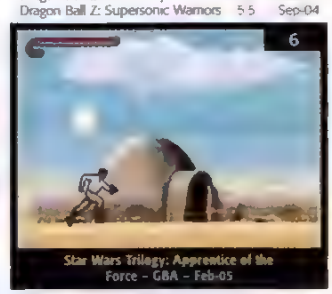


Half-Life 2 – PC – Dec-04

Codename: Panzers	7.75	Dec-04
Doom 3	9	Oct-04
EverQuest II	8.5	Feb-05
Evil Genius	8.5	Nov-04
Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich	8.25	Apr-05
Ground Control II: Operation Exodus	8.5	Aug-04
Half-Life 2	9.5	Dec-04
Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile	8	Jan-05
Joint Operations: Escalation	8	Jan-05
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	8.5	Aug-04
Kohan II: Kings of War	8	Oct-04
Lord of the Rings The Battle for Middle-Earth, The	8.5	Jan-05
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	8.5	Jan-05
Missing: Since January	6.5	Sep-04
Myst IV: Revelation	8	Nov-04
Nexus, The Jupiter Incident	8.25	Mar-05
Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell	8	Jan-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Political Machine, The	7	Nov-04
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	8.75	Dec-04
Rome: Total War	7.75	Nov-04
Scrapland	6	Dec-04
Sid Meier's Pirates!	8.5	Jan-05
Sims 2 University, The	9	Apr-05
Singles: Flirt Up Your Life	7	Aug-04
Soldiers: Heroes of World War II	5	Aug-04
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.75	Apr-05
Star Wars Galaxies Jump to Lightspeed	8	Jan-05
Tribes: Vengeance	8.5	Dec-04
Uru: The Path of the Shell	8.25	Sep-04
Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines	7.5	Jan-05
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	9.25	Nov-04
Warlords Battlecry III	7.75	Aug-04
Will of Steel	2.5	Mar-05
World of Warcraft	9.5	Feb-05

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Advance Guardian Heroes	7	Dec-04
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	8.5	Aug-04
Banjo Pilot	7	Jan-05
Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	6.25	Dec-04
Catwoman	6.5	Sep-04
Donkey Kong Country 2	8.5	Jan-05
Dragon Ball Z: Buu's Fury	4.5	Oct-04
Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors	5.5	Sep-04



Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice of the Force – GBA – Feb-05

Duel Masters: Sempai Legends	7.5	Aug-04
Fear Factor: Unleashed	3	Feb-05
Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls	9	Jan-05
F-Zero: GP Legend	6.5	Nov-04
Grand Theft Auto Advance	7.5	Jan-05
It's Mr. Pants	8	Jan-05
Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories	7.75	Jan-05
Kirby and the Amazing Mirror	7.75	Oct-04
Klonoa 2: Dream Champ Tournament	8.25	Mar-05
Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap, The	9.5	Feb-05
Lord of the Rings The Third Age, The	8	Feb-05
Madden NFL 2005	7	Sep-04
Mario Pinball Land	7.5	Oct-04
Mega Man Zero 3	6.75	Oct-04
Metal Slug Advance	7	Dec-04
Mighty Beanz Pocket Puzzles	6	Sep-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	3.5	Feb-05
Pokémon Fire Red/Leaf Green	8	Oct-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	3.5	Dec-04
Racing Gears Advance	8	Mar-05
Sabrewulf	6.5	Aug-04
Spider-Man 2	7	Aug-04
Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice of the Force	6	Oct-04
Super Army War	6	Apr-05
Thunderbirds	5.75	Oct-04
Tron 2.0: Killer App	6.5	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2 Bush Rescue	6	Dec-04
Ultimate Card Games	7	Sep-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.5	Nov-04
WWE Survivor Series	7.5	Jan-05
Yu-Gi-Oh!: Reshef of Destruction	4.5	Sep-04

NINTENDO DS

Feel the Magic XY/XX	8.5	Jan-05
Madden NFL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits	7	Jan-05
Ridge Racer DS	7	Jan-05
Spider-Man 2	6	Jan-05
Sprung	6	Jan-05
Super Mario 64 DS	8.5	Jan-05
Tiger Woods PGA Tour	4	Feb-05
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	8	Feb-05
WarioWare Touched!	8.25	Apr-05
Zoo Keeper	7	Apr-05

SECRETACCESS

Codes, Strategies, Hints, Droids, And Tips

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM

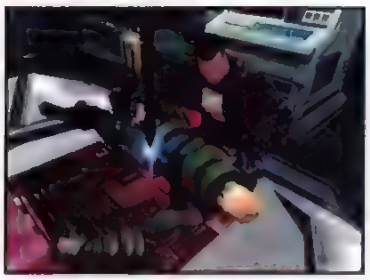
Fight Night Round 2

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

Unlock All Venues – Go the game mode selection menu and hold Left. Wait until you hear a bell

Unlock Mini Fighters – Go to the venue selection screen and hold Up. Wait until you hear a bell

Unlock Fabolous As A Playable Boxer – Go to Create a Boxer and enter "GETFAB" as a first name. Save the profile and you'll have the rapper as a new heavyweight fighter.

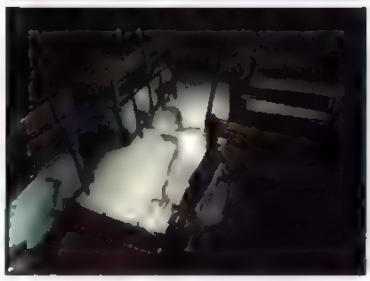


The Punisher

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Unlock All Comic Covers, Concept Art, Flashbacks, Movies And Cheats – Enter "V Pirate" as a profile name

PLAYSTATION 2



Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

Unlock All Levels – At the main solo menu, press and hold L1, L2, R1, and R2. Then, while still holding down the shoulder buttons, press □ (x5), Left (x5), ○ (x5), Left (x5)

Rumble Roses

Unlock Swimsuit 1 For All Characters – At the main menu, press Down, Left, Down, Left, Down, Left, Down, □, Select

Unlock The Hidden Beach Arena in Exhibition Mode – At the main menu, press Down, Right, Down, Right, Down, Right, Down, □, Select

Swap Movie Entrances – Go into Exhibition Mode and start a normal or Title Match. Select the two characters you want to swap entrance movies. Pick your ring. Now hold down L1, L2, R1, and R2 while you select "Play". Each girl will strut their way through their opponent's normal opening cinematic.

Interview The Girls – Enter any one of the wrestler's galleries, then don't press any buttons for about a minute. The screen will change and a personal interview will start.

Clear Pause Screen – Pause the game during a match and press select to see an unobstructed view of the action.

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – last seen dancing the macarena at the Metropolitan Opera)

Gradius V

While in-game, pause the game and enter one of these variations on the classic code. You'll only be able to use the code once per level, but they accumulate after each stage, so if you don't use any codes until level 3, you'll have 3 full power-ups to use. These work in the main game and Stage Select mode, but not on Score Attack.

Power-Up 1 (1 Speed Up, Missile, Double, 4 Options and "?" [Force Field]) – Up (x2), Down (x2), Left, Right, Left, Right, L2, R2

Power-Up 2 (1 Speed Up, Missile, Laser, 4 Options and "?" [Force Field]) – Up (x2), Down (x2), Left, Right, Left, Right L1, R1

XBOX

Star Wars Republic Commando

Enter the following code while the game is paused. When you hear a noise, you'll have refilled your current weapons ammo to full.

More Ammo – Y (x2), X, Down, R, L, R, Up

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

Unlock All Levels – At the profile screen, enter "COOPA22COOL" as your name

Code of the Month

Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening

If there's one thing you can say about Dante's return to your gaming screen, it's that this game is damn hard. If those first few bosses are making you throw down your controller in disgust, then maybe it's time for a little help. Enter the following code and you'll unlock all the game modes, costumes, and the gallery.

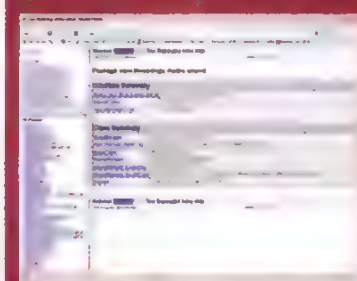
Unlock Everything – At the start screen, hold down L1, L2, R1, and R2. Keep them all depressed and rotate the left analog stick repeatedly. When you hear a voiceover speak the words "Devil May Cry" then the code is complete.

Richie Owens
Canton, NY

Mod World

GAME GARDENS
www.gamegardens.com

This month we've found a bit of a double-whammy for you. First off, at this site you can download free Java-based games to play on your PC. These titles are all user-created from a simple implementation of Battleship to completely original board games. This site just launched, and there are already several games available to play. If it takes off the way Yahoo games did, (which isn't too far-fetched of an idea) this could end up being a daily destination for lots of people.



The really interesting part about this site is the fact that it offers, free for download, a toolkit and pre-built framework for creating your own games. Then, when you finish them, they can be hosted for free on Game Gardens. This service is unique and interesting – the premise, according to Three Rings Design (the site's operator), is "We are hoping to plant the seeds of innovation in this small way and do what we can to smooth the path for new game ideas to be born and grow." And that's an idea worth supporting.

Atlantis, available at Game Gardens, is an original board game in the style of what you'd find at a hobby shop. Players play [illegible] onto the board, which contain features like water, bridges, temples and such. The point is to be the person to "finish" a feature and score points. It's simple, fun, and easy to understand – a refreshing break from the [illegible] thick manuals of modern PC strategy games to be sure.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

Xenosaga® EPISODE II Jenseits von Gut und Böse & © 2001 2004 NAMCO LTD., ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Licensed by Sony Computer Entertainment America for play on PlayStation 2 computer entertainment systems with the NTSC U/C designation only. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners.

PlayStation.2

namco®
http://xenosaga2.namco.com

Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

Epic Games' Lead Designers and Artists Share How They're Kicking Your Butt Online

JIM BROWN, LEAD LEVEL DESIGNER

Timing Is Everything

Many people try to play shooters by spamming the battlefield with a constant stream of firepower. In UC2, you'll be much more effective if you have the patience to time your shots. Waiting that extra second while charging up the Ripjack will double its explosive strength, so take the time you need instead of wasting the ammo. Watch for an opponent's reflect attempt – you'll see their arm swinging out – and if they miss, their reflect ability locks up for a split-second and they'll be vulnerable to your attack. Likewise, don't just spam your reflect if you're on the incoming side of a rocket volley. If you do manage to reflect at the proper time, you gain the benefit of being able to reflect the next incoming shot as well (even when it would otherwise be impossible, such as with the rapid fire projectiles from the Stinger). But if you miss your reflect, you waste your reflect energy, and are penalized for a short (but crucial) moment and will be unable to defend yourself. Many combos are entirely timing based. Don't rush it, or the whole thing can fall apart and some Juggernaut will come along and crush your hopes, your dreams, and your body.

Use Your Offensive Adrenaline Powers

I know that sounds like a common sense statement, but people tend to forget about their special offensive abilities when they're in the heat of combat. Some powers will temporarily disable opponents, giving you the opportunity to get in a quick strike or make a fast getaway. Flash will blind opponents, Concussion will disorient them, or an Ice Burst can freeze them solid. Some adrenaline powers will even go so far as to deal damage directly to your foes. Lightning Burst will electrocute nearby opponents, Sentinel will take them out at a distance, and Siphon will slowly suck away their life. If you forget to use these important abilities, chances are that someone will use them against you, and you won't even realize what happened before you get fragged. More importantly, the bots will always remember, and they tend to deal out some vicious reminders whenever you happen to forget.

DR. MICHAEL CAPPS, LEAD DESIGNER

Know Thine Enemy

If you're familiar with the specific abilities of each character, you'll have a distinct advantage in battle. There's a multi-leveled strategy involved in character selection that goes well beyond their more obvious differences in speed or power. Sobek's EMP ability is great in any number of situations, as it destroys airborne explosive projectiles that come in contact with the pulse. You can really turn the tide of an entire team battle if you time the pulse properly. But what people don't necessarily realize is that the robot characters are highly susceptible to these pulses as well. Firing off the EMP near them actually fries their circuits, and can be an effective way to take them down without ever firing a shot. The Skaarj are resistant to poison, so don't expect to get far with the Biorifle against them. The Necris are resistant to nanoblack, so don't waste a siphon attack on Judas. A highly effective attack against one character can be completely useless against a different opponent, so pay attention and choose wisely before joining a server.

Tailor Your Experience

One of the worst things that you could do with UC2 is to get too attached to any one character or particular set of weapons. We've gone through an extreme amount of effort to ensure that the game is well balanced, and there is no doubt that certain combinations of characters, weapons, and maps will lead to drastically different gaming experiences. We've intentionally designed the game such that playing as Devastation with the Sniper Rifle could give you a huge advantage in one map, but also ensure your downfall in another. Mix things up between rounds, and if one combination isn't working for you, don't be afraid to try another. The Biorifle and Ripjack can be incredibly deadly in maps with close quarters or choke points, and are great for setting up traps in team games. Raptor has a huge defensive advantage in CTF matches, because his Radar ability will let him know exactly where you (and the flag) are even when he can't see you. If you're heading into a match that has the Speedmatch and Vampire mutators enabled, Lauren probably isn't your best choice for a character as some of her strongest advantages are now shared by everyone in the server. Intentionally fighting Skaarj vs. Skaarj can be an incredibly intense experience, much more so than other random character combinations. You'll have a much more rewarding experience if you tailor your game to match your mood, the map, and the opposition.

DAVID SPALINSKI, LEVEL DESIGNER

Heavy Attack Traps

The heavy melee attack deals more damage to an opponent than any other standard melee attack, but it is also the most difficult attack to hit with. If you don't know the right time to use it, the only thing you'll end up hitting is air. Making contact requires being very close to your opponent, and enemies fighting with their ranged weapons will most likely be trying to keep their distance from you, so it is best to use this slow-moving attack against players who are also in melee mode. The best way to connect with your attack is to force your opponent to walk into it through a simple trapping technique. Instead of running after them and trying to hit them, backpedal and make them come to you. Be sure to lock on to them, and as soon as they get close, stop backpedaling and instantly start the heavy attack. You will be lunging forward and attacking before they realize that they should be retreating. A more advanced version of this trap requires even better timing. When you see someone charging up their jump attack, and they're aimed in your direction, chances are that they're locked on for a direct hit. If you lock on to them and start your heavy attack just as they release their jump attack, they'll fly into the wrong side of your weapon instead of hitting you.

Keep Them On Their Toes

The best way to prevent an opponent from developing a strategy to counter your own personal play style is to constantly change it around. Use your explosive weapon for a while, and then switch to melee for a few kills, even if you're doing well with the current weapon. Better yet, switch in the middle of a battle, or when you are walking behind some cover and the transition will be somewhat less obvious. If you've forced your enemy into a retreat by charging at them with your melee weapons, switch to a Sniper Rifle or Shock Rifle and make them run back toward you. Practice, and learn which weapons are best suited to specific circumstances. And when those circumstances present themselves, switch weapons on the fly. Bounce Flak around tight corners, use a drunken rocket lock across wide open spaces, or surprise enemies with a poison cloud that is concealed around a blind corner. Whether you're winning or losing, never make the same move twice. If you're unpredictable, then no single strategy will ever be able to work against you.

MAURY MOUNTAIN, ARTIST

Biorifle Love

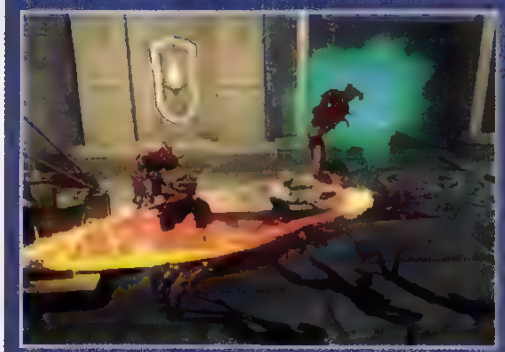
The Biorifle is a very effective weapon, useful in both blowing your opponent to green covered chunks, as well as softening them up for a longer fight over a period of time. For a basic attack, fire a large group of primary-fire goo blobs out at your target. You don't need to be accurate, just get a bunch out there and be sure to lock onto your target. The blobs are semi-sapient, and if you're locked on, they're capable of finding their own way toward your target. This hopping barrage can also restrict your enemy's movement, and the sudden lack of options can really start to psyche them out. For the added insurance that you will score the frag, pull them around a corner and release a cloud of gooey poison mist in the doorway. With their attention on the bouncing blobs dancing around their feet, they'll likely stumble into the poison trap. With the goo nipping at their heels, and the poison slowing their movement and dealing out slow damage, they won't be around much longer. If you're in a rush, feel free to switch weapons and finish them off with your explosive or melee weapons.

Be Jumpy

The levels in UC2 were intentionally designed to be your playground, so use them as such! There are any number of walls, channels, corners, ledges and other areas that will allow you to quickly escape combat. You can also use advanced wall dodging to traverse a level faster than your enemies would expect. Combine these moves with your adrenaline powers, such as Nimble, Speed, or Pounce, and you will soon know the nature of flight. Sometimes you can even use multiple abilities in concert, and the speed and agility with which you can swoop down on your opponents is well worth the cost in adrenaline. Faking wall dodges can also be a good tactic to confuse the enemy that you just bounced over and around. After watching you flying all over the screen, they may try to lead you with rockets or flak fired up into in the air. Imaging their surprise when it turns out that you really didn't dodge off the wall at all, and are standing there ready to put a flak shell in their face.

God of War

The Game's Testers Take You To Task On How To Become A Truly Godlike Force of Destruction



BLOCK AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT (IT DOES)

God of War may seem like a button masher, but furious button pressing will only get Kratos so far before he finds himself on that one way boat ride to Hades. The best thing you can do to stay alive is to block (press L1) as an enemy attack comes in. This can be done at any point in your attack chain, so don't worry about starting an attack and then being caught in the middle of it.

STOP, POP, AND ROLL

The right analog stick works wonders in three ways. First, it's your good old-fashioned evade move, and no attack can hit you while you are rolling. This works extremely well against the Gorgons' freeze beams. Second, rolling can get you out of being surrounded and to a better position to attack from. Third, and most importantly, you can roll a couple times during a combo and keep the combo going. What better way to keep that hit counter rising and the orb bonuses flowing?

LEARN TO COUNTERATTACK

Once you get Kratos up to Level 3 Blades of Chaos, you will then be able to perform Hades' Revenge (after blocking with L1, press Square, Triangle, or R1). This is the buffed out version of regular old block, and with this you can unleash a heavy hit on just about any enemy that dares to swing at you. Use the Square counter when there are multiple enemies and you want to sweep the area. Use the Triangle counter if you're up against one stronger enemy such as a Satyr.

AIR COMBAT (LAUNCH YOUR ENEMIES)

This is the cool way to find unique ways to punish your enemies and you have it from the start. Simply hold Triangle to perform Ascension. You'll fly up in the air with one big swing, as will your enemies. Up there all kinds of combo hits and throws await your foes; especially once you level up and can perform Cyclone of Chaos (L1 + Square) and Falling Helios (L1 + Triangle).

THE FIRST IS THE BEST (POSEIDON'S RAGE)

On Kratos' journey he will acquire many new powers, magic as bestowed by the gods of Olympus. The prices to upgrade magic are steep and you would rightfully be wary of which magics you should be upgrading first. Make sure your priority is Poseidon's Rage, the first magic Kratos receives in the game. When Level 3 is achieved, the amount of damage it deals and the radius that it affects is well worth the orbs you spend on it. Plus, your combos will go sky high.

R2 = CURIOSITY BUTTON

Lots of things to see, lots of things to discover. To get the full experience of God of War, don't be afraid to press R2 to check out paintings on the wall, dead soldiers, and anything else you come across. You might just discover a clue that could help you in your quest.

BE LIBERAL WITH KRATOS' MAGIC

The gods didn't give Kratos these powers for show and tell. There's always a blue orb chest around the corner, and the enemies are more likely to give you blue orbs the more you attack them with magic. Also, remember that the Gorgons will give you blue orbs anytime you rip their heads off. So don't worry about that blue bar for the most part and go nuts!

BE CONSERVATIVE WITH RAGE OF THE GODS

The same cannot be said for the Rage of the Gods, the all-powerful, superspeed version of Kratos. Rage of the Gods is built up from performing combos, and is activated by pressing L3 + R3. Only use it when confronted with really tough gangs of enemies because it doesn't last long enough to justify using it on lesser guys. Too bad, it looks so cool that you'll want to use it and just destroy everything that comes along. But hold out, especially in the later levels, because you'll need it. Get Level 5 Blades of Chaos and Kratos will have Athena's Blessing, meaning unlimited magic during the Rage of the Gods. Awesome.

THEY'LL FALL FOR ACHILLES' FLIP

Don't forget about Achilles' Flip when you reach Level 4 Blades of Chaos! With all the moves at your disposal at this point, you might overlook this beauty. When rolling, press X to perform an uppercut slice at an enemy. This is one of the most unblockable moves Kratos has, and is a perfect combo starter when up against the later enemies that like to block.

SEE CYCLOPS' ONE BIG EYE?

What better to throw at his eye than a giant bolt of Zeus' Fury. Most of the monsters in God of War have their own personal weaknesses against certain types of attacks and magic. So experiment and find out what those weaknesses are and exploit them! A personal favorite is to use the low-cost Medusa's Gaze on Harpies, they'll freeze and shatter quickly and give you Shatter Kill Orb Bonuses. A much tidier alternative to slashing at them wildly, and pays off better too.

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IF ONLY WE KNEW: 1981

There are moments in gaming history that will live forever as irrefutable benchmarks for our industry; but there are also entire years so jam-packed with releases, events, and societal shifts that one singular entry cannot be raised above the rest. On the computer, arcade, and home gaming fronts, 1981 was such a year. Here's a shotgun blast from the past about what went down before the industry's mid-decade fall, after Pong, and around the same time that Chuck E. Cheese started making crappy pizza a birthday party requirement.

Coin-Op Wonderland

With the American gaming public plunging $5 billion dollars (a quarter or two at a time) into arcade machines, 1981 was the most revenue-heavy year yet for companies like Midway Manufacturing Corporation, Atari, Williams Electronics, and Stern Electronics. This begs the question: Which titles came out in this pivotal year that could inspire the public at large to spend an estimated 75,000 man hours in arcades? Here are some of the most impressive coin-op releases of '81.

Donkey Kong – Design legend Shigeru Miyamoto created Donkey Kong from a collection of unsuccessful arcade games. The hero, originally called Jumpman, was renamed by Nintendo of America's staff in honor of their landlord, Mario Segali.

Frogger – Highly imitated, the ingeniously simple premise of keeping your frog from becoming road kill was one of the biggest arcade games of '81. This Sega/Gremlin Arcade game distinguished itself by being one of the few successful titles of the era that didn't involve blowing up lots of enemies.

Centipede – Uncharacteristically, Atari went to great lengths promoting Centipede as the first game designed by a woman. While Dona Bailey (the designer in question) was certainly a key voice in the design aesthetic of the game, she was actually one member of an entire team. Regardless of its feminist significance, Centipede is today known as the second-best selling Atari arcade game, with over 50,000 units sold.

Galaga – Namco's sort-of sequel to Galaxian didn't do as well as the first game, but does offer some interesting arcade trivia. The game was one of the first with a bonus level and was distributed in four formats: the standard upright, a mini cabinet, the classic cocktail, and a "portable" that was designed for use in bus stations.

Ms. Pac-Man – Manufactured by Midway and designed by General Computer Corporation (of Super Missile Attack fame), Ms. Pac-Man was originally called Crazy Otto. Bally Midway changed the name before release and eventually turned the licensing rights over to Namco.

Vanguard – Manufactured and distributed in the US by Centuri, this SNK side-scrolling shooter mixed it up by offering both vertical and horizontal stages, and was the first color game from SNK. The game's most dubious distinction is a level entitled "Styx Zone."

Stargate – Making a name for itself as the sequel to Defender, Stargate also offered a few novel features missing from most arcade titles – namely the player-warping stargate gameplay feature and more complicated controls than any other standup out there.

Tempest – One of the first Color Quadrascan games released, Tempset was developed with the idea of making a first-person perspective version of Space Invaders. The technology was impressive, but also expensive and prone to failure when subjected to the rigors of '80s arcades.

legislation lags Behind Technology

Far more blatant than our mundane, modern piracy, the code theft of the '80s actually involved designing replicas of existing games and selling them to arcade owners across the land. The situation came to a head when the United States District Court, District of Massachusetts began hearing arguments of trademark and copyright infringement shown in General Computer's Super Missile Attack (a conversion pack made to transform Atari's Missile Command cabinets into GCC's game). Atari won the suit and as part of the settlement, General Computer Corp. made Food Fight and Quantum for the company.

Pop Culture

Automobiles made waves with debuts of the two most recognizable rides in history – the Popemobile and the Delorean. One protects the leader of a major religion and the other made Marty McFly a very cool dude.

Financial Facts

• Who says that women don't play games? The generous earnings in the arcade sector during 1981 are largely credited to the fairer sex. In addition to the $5 billion spent in arcades, it is estimated that Americans spent an additional $1.2 billion on home video game consoles.

• The average, run-of-the-mill arcade standup grossed between $140 and $150 each week.

• More than 30 million Americans played an arcade game each week.

• By the end of the year, Bally/Midway sold 96,000 Pac-Man coin operated games. In addition, franchise licenses for products as varied as wrapping paper and jewelry were sold to over 30 companies.

First Come, First Mentioned

The freedom of video games as a new and open entertainment medium let developers try to create unique experiences for their players with interesting technology. Some, obviously, were more successful than others.

Defender II (Williams Electronics) – Originally released as Stargate, the game was renamed by Williams Electronics to play off of the success of the first game. It also included an elaborate code that, if executed correctly, showed players the development credits.

Freeway (Atari) – Essentially Frogger with a chicken playing the part of amphibian, Freeway offered two vertically moving objects and 24 separate moving sprites. On the Atari 2600, this was a very big deal indeed.

Omega Race (Midway) – This title was the only vector game released by the publishing giant.

Shark Attack (Pacific Novelty) – Betting that the terror of noise would heighten the game's otherwise average gameplay, Shark Attack was the first arcade title with quadraphonic sound and also had an actual cassette tape that played the screams of victims when you ate a diver.

Pop Culture

True geniuses looking for a more tactile challenge (or a cheap excuse to remove and reapply stickers) got what they were asking for when the Rubik's Cube hit store shelves.

Computer Space

We don't know how good we've got it with our $99 one-gig flash drives and broadband Internet. Back in 1981, things were different…mostly in that storage was small, machines were slow, and everything was crazy expensive.

It is generally estimated that more than 800,000 personal computers were sold in 1981. Some of them came from Sears and Computerland, who started selling IBM (International Business Machines) computers, beginning the true availability of personal computers to the public at large. From a technology standpoint, big things were brewing on all fronts of the computer experience. Hayes Microcomputer Products developed an industry standard for modems with the company's Smartmodem 300 and the Xerox Star system debuted – it was the first showing of the WIMP (Windows, Icons, Menus, and Pointing Devices) system. The machine would retail for $50,000, fail utterly in the marketplace, and inspire some of the geekiest industrial espionage the world has ever seen.

The IBM PC 5150 (shown above) was among the first wave of home personal computers

Despite being the year of the personal computer, the parts that went into them were still outrageously expensive. Sample prices for the Atari 800 computer include $599 for a 5.25" single-sided floppy disk drive, 16K RAM modules for $199.99, and a 40-column dot-matrix printer that could be yours for a mere $449.

Other firsts for the year included the first laptop (Epson's HX-20, which weighed just under four lbs. and featured a twenty-character, four-line display), the first Apple Computer hard drive (the Apple 5 Megabyte ProFile) hit the marketplace at a paltry $3,499 asking price; and Microsoft released Microsoft-DOS version 1.0, which contained about 4,000 lines of code.

Truly off the Radar

• The popular *Omni Magazine* awarded Larry Pike of Portland, Oregon their "Unconfirmed Rumor" award. The gist of his assertion was that popular video games were used for tracking skilled players, who later disappear under "suspicious circumstances." And we thought that *The Last Starfighter* was a truly original idea!

• Scoring a hit for the video game set, one-hit-wonder team Buckner & Garcia released "Pac-Man Fever" as a single. This fact cements the notion that America in the '80s had terrible, terrible taste.

• *Electronic Games* magazine's annual "Arkies" Arcade Awards for 1981 doled out honors for best arcade game to Asteroids, most innovative game to Adventure, game of the year to Superman, best sports game to NASL Soccer, and best

Pop Culture

The first 24-hour music television channel, MTV, made its triumphant debut in August. Video killed the radio star, but The Real World *killed the "music" channel.*

A lesser-known cover of Pac-Man Fever, this time by German musician Gerald Mann

Couch Surfing

In 1981, the Atari 2600 retailed for about $150 and there were 43 cartridges available by the end of the year. Each game sold for $25 to $35 a piece. During this timeframe, Atari maintained 70-75 percent of the home video game market and spent $22 million on advertising (just under 60 percent of total video game advertising worldwide).

At just shy of $300, Commodore Business Machines' VIC-20 brought Jack Tramiel's (CEO of Commodore) idea of "Computers for the masses, not the classes," to reality. During the highest-volume period of the year, 9,000 VIC-20s were manufactured each day. When introduced at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, the unit was referred to both as the MicroPet and the No Name Computer.

In what would become a much-discussed business decision, Coleco executives traveled to Japan to discuss Donkey Kong. The manufacturer wanted to pack the highly successful title in with a console they were releasing in the next year (the Colecovision), and were pressured by Nintendo execs to make a deal quickly or lose out to Atari or Mattel. The company opted to secure exclusivity and made a killing before porting the games over to other consoles.

Pop Culture

Showing a softer side, Tom Hanks' launch to stardom began with the debut of Bosom Buddies *– true gender bending hilarity that wouldn't be repeated until* Tootsie *in 1982.*

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Promises Broken

Mattel made the promising announcement that a keyboard peripheral would be available for their Intellivision console after a three-city test run. Expected to cost consumers $700, the add-on was never actually released. By the end of 1981, Intellivision held around 15% of the home video game market.

Promising to shake up the way that people played games, Atari announced details on their upcoming Cosmos system. Created by Al Acorn and promised at a $100 price point, the unit would play titles like Asteroids and Space Invaders in 3D by using holograms. The battery-powered device never made it to consumers and only a small number of units are confirmed to exist (five, according to rumors, and only two had electronics in them). Recently, a mock-up of the unit went up on eBay with a Buy it Now price of GBP 9,990 (approximately $18,677).

Gaming in the Public Eye

How to Master the Video Games, published by Bantam Books and written by Tom Hirschfeld, was the first book about video games handled by a mainstream publisher. Others covering topics from Pac-Man strategies to home video game programming also started filling up shelf space in major book retailers.

Over the Halloween weekend, what was supposed to be a media blitz of frenzied coin-op competition turned into an embarrassing dud. Tournament Games Inc. organized the first Atari Coin-Op $50,000 World Championship to take place from October 28 through November 1 and pit an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 gamers against each other for the big cash prize. Despite these lofty goals and a bucket full of money, only 250 players actually participated in the competition.

Pop Culture

The musical Cats debuted on Broadway. In good news, Raiders of the Lost Ark also laid stake to its claim in pop-culture history.

The Internets

Before October, 1981 came to a close, Texas Instruments launched a service to support users of their TI-99/4a home computer. Called TexNet, the service cost $100 to join plus hourly service charges of $7.75 (for weekdays) or $5.75 (on the weekends) and let users download graphics animations, music, sound effects, synthesized speech, and exclusive software. With access speeds capping at 300 baud, we suspect that even the ASCII porn took forever to download.

Predating the World Wide Web and FTP, among other modern amenities, BITNET made its debut in 1981. Initially connecting City University of New York and Yale, the service eventually extended to 500 organizations and 3,000 nodes.

To lure arcade owners to their expensive standup arcade units, manufacturers would send out flashy brochures trumpeting the upcoming title's features. Besides the cover art, the inside would point out how to customize the cost of games to tailor the unit to the market.

Tempest, (at right), was a big game, technology wise. Because of its new features, the brochure for this title was four pages – highlighting such facts as a "3D look" and vector graphics

Atari hoped to change the way people experienced games with their Cosmos handheld, but the unit never actually made it to retail

Guilt Relief

Don't feel so bad about sacrificing your social life and important relationships for video game superiority; this obsessive-compulsive trait existed in gamers long before EverQuest. Take a gander at these prime examples of video game obsession.

Player	Game	Time Spent	Score
David Jamnise	Asteroids	36 hours, 29 minutes	Not Reported
George Pimms	Missile Command	28 hours, 7 minutes	51,952,110
Dennis Hernandez	Asteroids	50 hours, 12 minutes	30,100,000
Kevin Gentry	Asteroids Deluxe	5 hours, 25 minutes	2,117,570

Pop Culture

Proving that geek power doesn't always translate into financial savvy, Microsoft founder Bill Gates made about $1 million in 1981 – he paid out roughly half of that in taxes. Then-President Ronald Reagan sent the entrepreneur a thank you note for his contribution to the American government

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Joel Watt

APE ESCAPE

> **FORMAT** PSONE
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA

What game best defines the PSone? Well, with over 600 titles to choose from it's pretty hard to single out the best – and then to say that it is the best game ever is even more of a challenge. Ape Escape may not be at the top of everybody's list, but those who don't put it there have probably never played it. It was the first game to take full advantage of the Dual Shock controller's two analog sticks. It has incredibly detailed worlds full of vibrant color and imaginative creatures. The gadgets that you have are some of the greatest that I've ever used in a game. And the soundtrack is one of the best that I have heard.

The controls are something that nobody would have expected in 1999. The left stick controls the character and the right controls the gadget. You use the d-pad to control the camera and the face buttons to choose one of eight portable gadgets. You can jump by pushing either of the R shoulder buttons, and the L shoulder buttons offer further camera control. The game even takes advantage of the R3 and L3 buttons. After a few minutes of utter confusion I was able to successfully manipulate the camera, character, and gadgets. If you can get your brain to operate the two sticks at once and not to worry about controlling the camera all the time in this 3D world, then you should be okay.

The look of the game is that of a youth-oriented anime. There are lots of inviting greens and blues. Spike (your character) wears a red shirt and has lots of red hair with bleached bangs. Your energy meter is cookies and the enemies are non-human. There are lots of wide-open spaces to explore, and if you don't use any kind of guide you had better be good at solving puzzles.

Ape Escape even has the best minigames I've ever played. Challenging yet entertaining, they also take full advantage of the analog control sticks. The first is a racing game where you are on rocket skis. Game number two is a boxing game. You move the sticks up and down to make your character's fists swing back and forth. The final game is an Asteroids remake. The left stick moves your ship around the screen, and the right fires the lasers in the direction you point it. Your enemies are more than just rocks however; you have to pop pig-shaped balloons that get bigger as you shoot them.

Ape Escape may not have the best graphics ever depicted or the best storyline ever written, but the replay value and the adventure are beyond belief. So the next time when someone asks you, "What's the best game you've ever heard of or played?" you can tell him or her, with full confidence, that it is Ape Escape.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

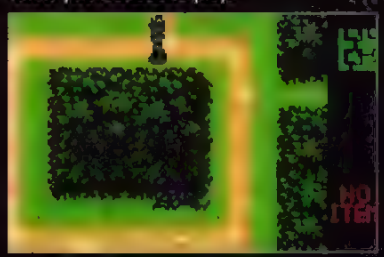
May 11, 1995 was a truly historic day for video games. Sega of America shipped 30,000 Sega Saturn game systems to major retailers with suggested prices of $349 (without software) and $399 (when packaged with Virtua Fighter). In addition, the first Electronic Entertainment Expo opened its doors in Los Angeles. Sony introduced the PlayStation in a $4 million dollar booth that played host to Michael Jackson, Nintendo announced further delays for the Ultra 64, and Atari made waves with Virtual Reality demonstrations.

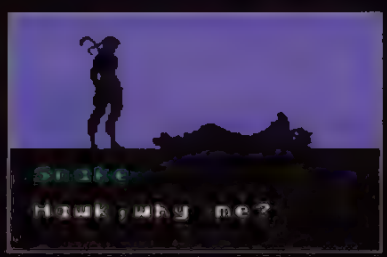
GAME BOY COLOR

METAL GEAR SOLID

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA GAME LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN > **RELEASE** 2000

After single-handedly defining the 3D action/stealth genre, it may seem strange to see Solid Snake return to his 2D, top-down roots. Fortunately, the Game Boy Color's Metal Gear Solid (known as Metal Gear: Ghost Babel in Japan) takes many cues from its console counterpart and becomes an engaging mixture of old and new. Featuring an original story – which takes place at the same time as the PSone Metal Gear Solid somehow – this title finds Solid Snake in Africa infiltrating the fortress Galuade, where the new Metal Gear (designated "Gander") is being held by mercenaries. Snake can crouch and slide along walls as he sneaks through the fortress, plus use a variety of familiar items like chaff grenades and the ol' cardboard box to avoid detection. Also making a return are some impressive boss battles (though with names like "Slasher Hawk" and "Pyro Bison," you'd think this is Mega Man X), complete with revealing death monologues. Though it does fall prey to some extended bouts of aimless wandering, Metal Gear Solid is definitely the Game Boy Color game you never knew you needed to play.



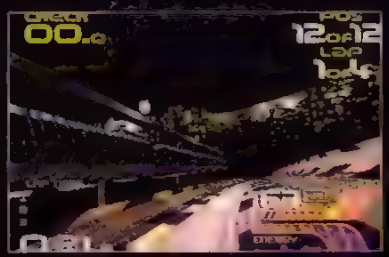


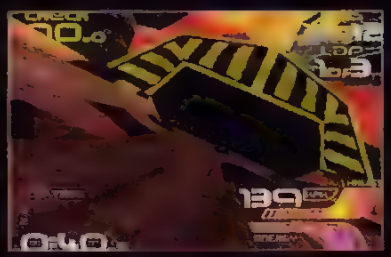
PSONE

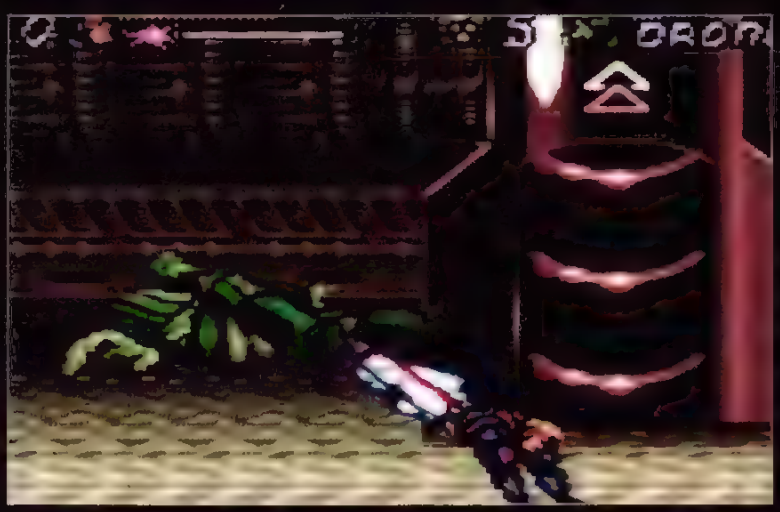
WIPEOUT XL

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** PSYGNOSIS > **DEVELOPER** PSYGNOSIS > **RELEASE** 1996

While the first Wipeout was a great game in its own right, the series really hit its stride with this, its second installment. Even now, the sense of speed is impressive as your futuristic craft zooms its way along the winding courses. Weapon pick-ups offer some added strategy to the competition, and the inclusion of different racing teams (each with their own capabilities) delivers some variety in the way your racer moves on the track. Familiar electronic beats from the likes of Prodigy and the Chemical Brothers accompany your speeding revelry, which should please those who were into that scene. Unfortunately, the racing genre in general doesn't always age well, which is why this title just isn't as good as it once was. The controls feel antiquated without the analog stick control option, and the draw distance just isn't far enough ahead to enable you to plan accordingly. Even so, if you're digging the new PSP version of the franchise, you could do worse than checking out this predecessor.







SUPER NINTENDO

JIM LEE'S WILDC.A.T.S COVERT ACTION TEAMS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** PLAYMATES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** BEAM SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** 1995

Jim Lee may be one of the hottest artists in comics today, but his original creations in the mid-nineties weren't so hot. His WildC.A.T.s comic was little more than an X-Men ripoff with a more "extreme" attitude, so it's not surprising that the game based on that book is nothing special either. A side-scrolling brawler, WildC.A.T.s puts you in control of three team members, Spartan, Maul, and Warblade. Despite the characters' different powers, each plays pretty much the same, as you punch your way through a sparse offering of enemy types. Spartan has a beam attack, but the bulk of the game is melee combat that feels the same for all three characters. The heroes each have unique storylines that are affected by the order you play them, but it doesn't change the fact that the gameplay is pretty stale. The character models are nice and large though, and the graphics are fairly sharp. But like the comic it is based on, WildC.A.T.s doesn't offer much beyond some pretty visuals.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Metal Gear Solid (GI #87 07/00), Wipeout XL (GI #42 10/96)

GAMEOVER

Please Insert Disc 2

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Whenever a game is really successful, other companies learn from that title and try to incorporate some of its best elements into their future games. Oftentimes this results in the whole industry creating better games, but other times you simply end up with a pale imitator that does nothing exceptional – except suck really bad. Take our trivia quiz to see how you stack up against some forgotten game ripoffs. The higher you score, the more blatant of an imitator you'll reveal.

1 What is the name of the Godzilla-influenced lizard creature in King of the Monsters for Super Nintendo?

A. Beetlemania
B. Rockey
C. Astro Guy
D. Geon

2 David Cross (who is much funnier than you, by the way) voiced characters in which two recent video games?

A. Need for Speed Underground 2 and X-Men Legends
B. Halo 2 and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
C. Tony Hawk's Underground 2 and Jak 3
D. Star Wars: Battlefront and The Guy Game

3 Which of the following is NOT a real Tom Clancy game? Don't get this wrong – his spies are everywhere!

A. Tom Clancy's ruthless.com
B. Tom Clancy's Politika
C. Tom Clancy's Storm Eagle: Operation Black Lance
D. Tom Clancy's SSN

4 Hey McFly! I'm talking to you! What NES game was featured in the "Café '80s" scene in *Back to the Future Part II*?

A. Wild Gunman
B. Hogan's Alley
C. Duck Hunt
D. Gotcha!

5 True or False: Sam and Max, the stars of the LucasArts adventure game Sam & Max Hit the Road, also starred in a cartoon.

A. True
B. False

6 This war machine from MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf may look like a typical walking arsenal of mass destruction, but is actually very sensitive and caring. Its feelings will be hurt if you can't identify it properly. What model is it?

A. Hackman
B. Catapult
C. Blood Asp
D. Timberwolf

7 Which of these bosses from Red Dead Revolver uses a coffin with a machine gun in it as his primary weapon?

A. Pig Josh
B. Slade
C. Ugly Chris
D. Mr. Black

8 Although this suave gentleman's name is Vyers, what is the nickname Prince Laharl gives him to purposely annoy him in Disgaea: Hour of Darkness?

A. Sir Chumpsly
B. Mid Boss
C. Love Freak
D. The Dark Adonis

9 Which of the following games did Metal Gear guru Hideo Kojima NOT work on?

A. Snake's Revenge
B. Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions
C. Zone of the Enders
D. Metal Gear Acid

10 Someday we hope to see a game in which Pikmin can perform fatalities on Yoshi, but until then, we'll have to stick with the GameCube's current lineup of fighting games. Which of these is exclusive to the system?

A. Dragon Ball Z: Budokai
B. Bloody Roar: Primal Fury
C. Tom and Jerry in War of the Whiskers
D. UFC: Throwdown

BREAKDOWN

12% of our readers have spotted Winkles, the magical leprechaun who appears in each and every issue of Game Informer. If you see him, you win a prize: a cozy padded room at Bellvue!

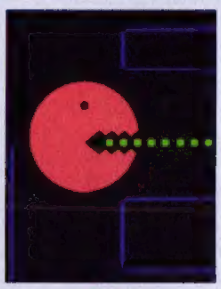
200% The increase in enrollment in computer graphics programs at universities around the country in the last three years. We wish we had real college degrees instead of our homemade "Bachelor of Metallica-ology" diplomas.

96% of the office is gripped with a disease called "PSP madness." Miller didn't catch it thanks to the antibiotics he took to combat his Nintendo DSitosis.

53% of all games sold before the creation of the "E10+" rating were rated "E." Games with the new rating will be roughly equivalent to a PG movie, which our parents still won't allow us to see.

4% of our readers want to see a Game Informer: Special Edition with new and improved space battle scenes and Reiner replaced with a CG Jabba the Hutt.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:
Circular Dot Eater

2-3:
The Adventures of Bayou Billy Berghammer

4-5:
Need for Clean Underwear

6-7:
HayLow Too

8-9:
The Chronicles of Ribwich: Escape from the Butcher Block

10:
Todd of War

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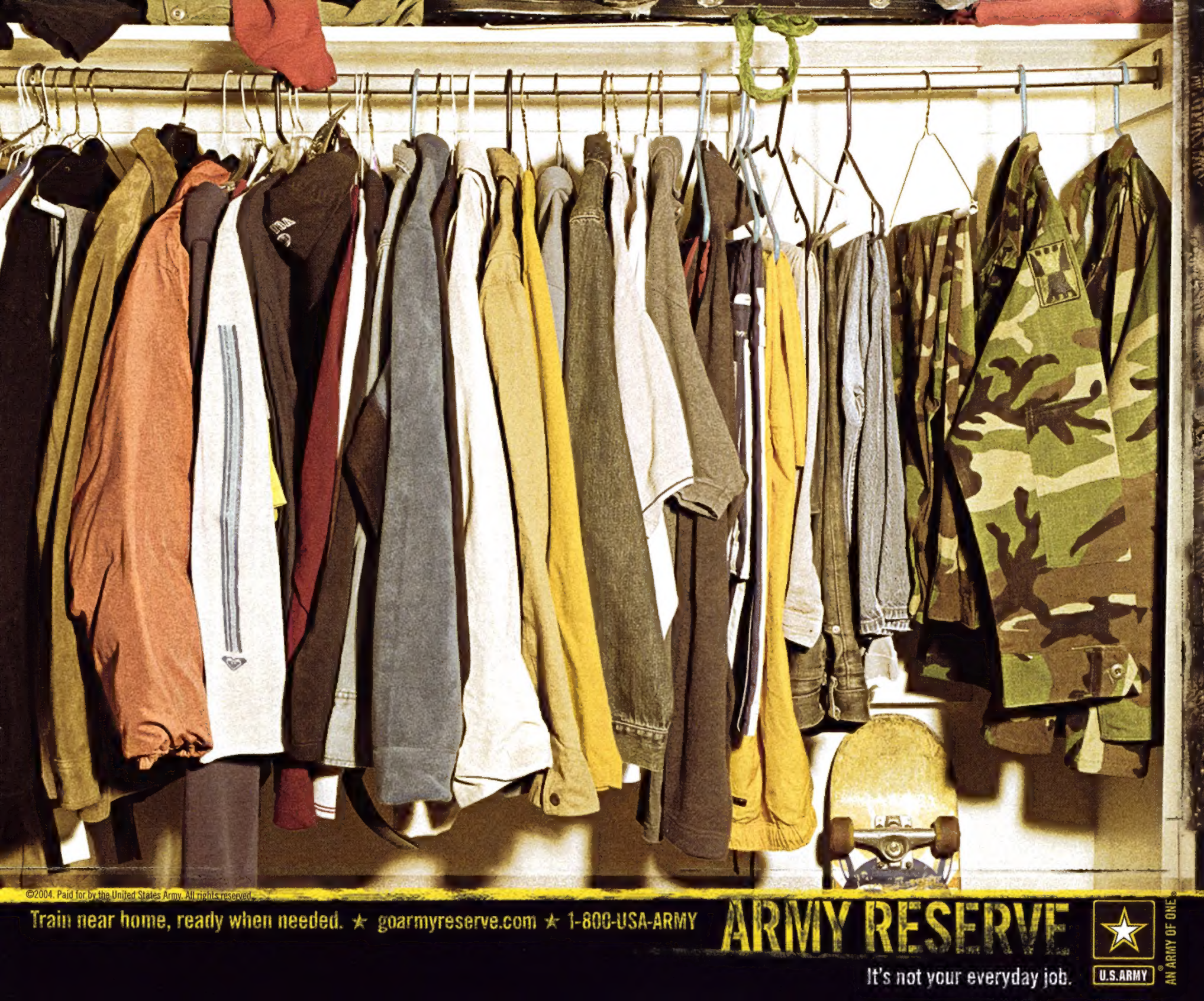
Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. C 4. A 5. A 6. C 7. D 8. B 9. A 10. B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OUTBREAK

FILE #2

TRY AND GET OUT ALIVE

APRIL 2005

MATURE 17+

M

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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