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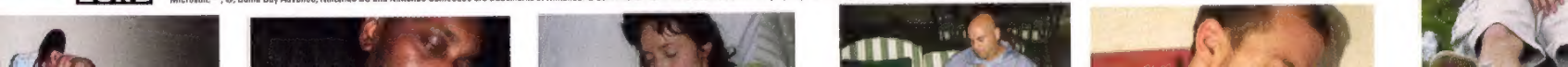




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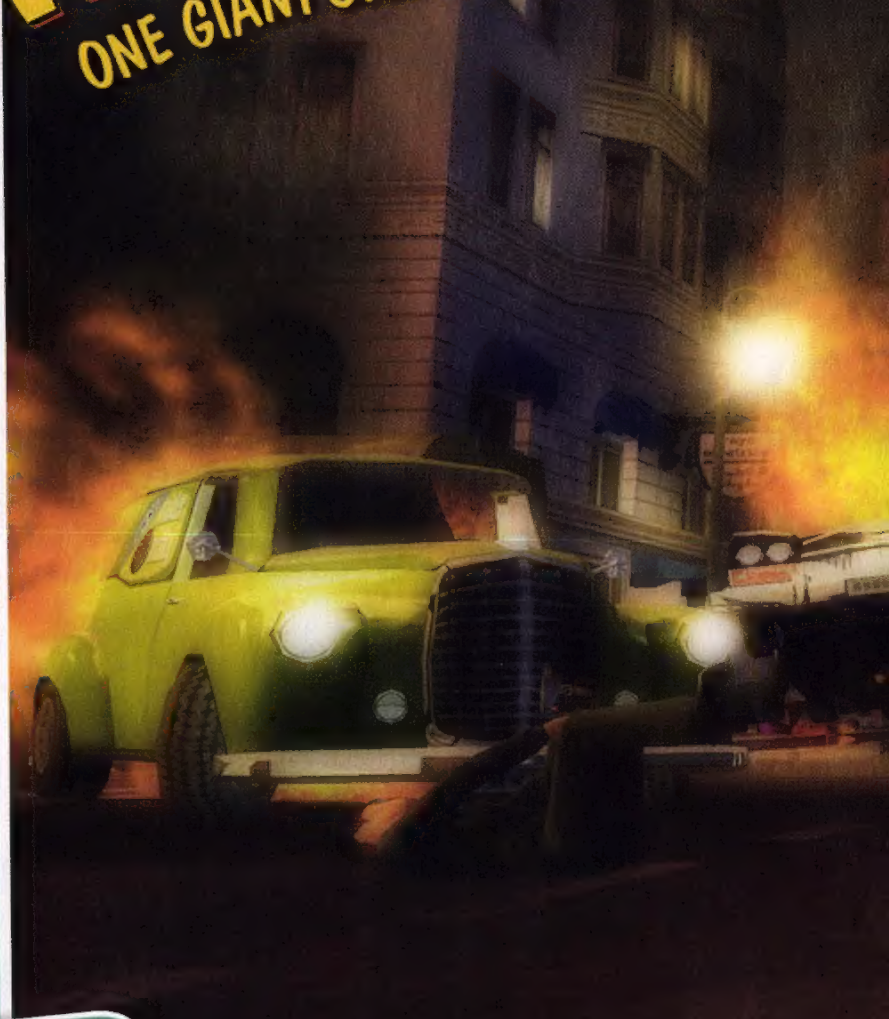


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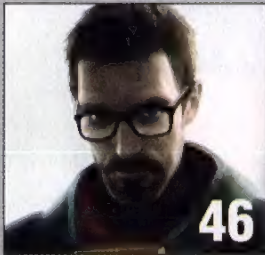


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# STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



## AS BIG AS BIG GETS

**ANDY McNAMARA**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

King Kong. He's larger than life. He's a giant gorilla that is famous for climbing the side of the Empire State Building – no easy feat, even if it is a fictional one.

But even Kong isn't as big as the movie-making giant, Peter Jackson, whose name gets top billing for the upcoming video game. As a fan, I think Jackson deserves all the accolades he receives. Sure, he wasn't the only one that made *The Lord of the Rings* or the upcoming *King Kong* movie (or game) what they are, but he is the visionary – the icon that stands for the sum of all the work. And an awesome guy to boot!

I must admit, Hollywood has it right. It promotes its talent. Not only does it help you sell more product, it gives the industry a personal touch and lets people follow the personalities behind the product. A *King Kong* movie I don't care about, but one by Peter Jackson? I'll be there at midnight.

Unfortunately, more often than not in the video game world, the visionaries that make some of the greatest games in history rarely get the credit they deserve. While it might be easy to blame the media, often times it's the publishers that don't like to promote their own talent. I've never quite figured out why, but I can only guess that the publishers are worried that they might lose their leverage if someone gets bigger than the machine. As you can guess, whenever I try to investigate the situation, few have an answer (or at least a consistent one).

Thankfully, there are some developers out there getting the credit they deserve – Hideo Kojima, Sid Meier, and American McGee have their names right on the package. And there are others who are synonymous with their company's logo like John Carmack with id, Gabe Newell with Valve, Shigeru Miyamoto with Nintendo, and Yu Suzuki with Sega who are each most certainly doing it right.

Perhaps it's because video games rule my life that I want to see these guys being the superstars of the world instead of the likes of Tom Cruise or Nicolas Cage. Today's game developers are on the cutting edge of entertainment, and publishers, developers, and consumers need to recognize them for their amazing contributions. It will all come in time, I know. But there is no better time to start than the present.

I can see it now... *Shinji Mikami's Resident Evil: The Movie The Way The Guy Who Made It Wanted It To Be*. I can't freaking wait.

Cheers,

**Andy >>** [andy@gameinformer.com](mailto:andy@gameinformer.com)

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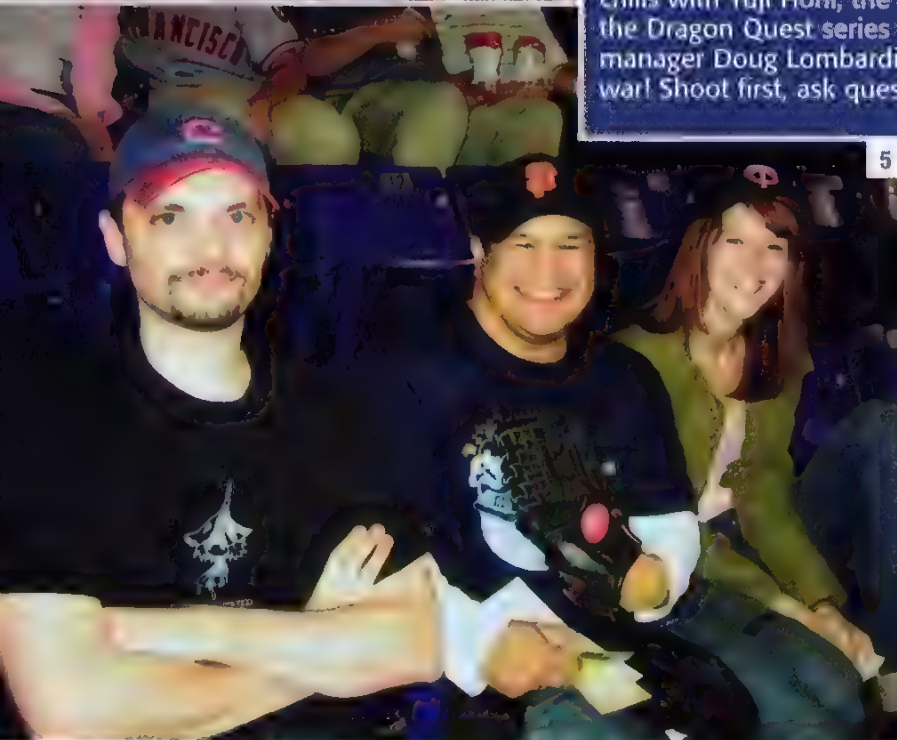
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6

1 A true legend, Final Fantasy composer Nobuo Uematsu is kind enough to hang with the GI Spy crew 2 GI Online's newest editor, Bryan Vore (second from left), gets a brutal hazing from Reiner and Activision's Brian Pass and Aaron Grant 3 It's summertime, and the GI crew has baseball fever! Here, Andy and Billy get to hang on the grass at Safeco Field in Seattle, which is nice but not quite as nice as the Metrodome. Real grass? Yuck! 4 Billy pals around with Nintendo localization master Bill Trinen and Zelda mastermind Eiji Aunoma 5 Ubisoft's Michael Beadle enjoys Twins/Giants night game with Lisa and Reiner at The Greatest Stadium in Baseball™ (a.k.a. the lovely Metrodome in Minneapolis). Cubs fan Reiner can't hide his joy at being in the heart of Twins Territory! 6 Joe chills with Yuji Horii, the creator of the Dragon Quest series 7 Valve PR manager Doug Lombardi is ready for war! Shoot first, ask questions later

3



5 4





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### WHIP IT GOOD

Charles Hirschhorn's comments regarding *The Whip Set* on G4 (Interview, issue 146) disgust me. No, Mr. Hirschhorn, gamers are not interested in this kind of content. Just because drift racing and import tuning video games have become the new ninja/pirate craze, you should not insult the intelligence of your viewers with such horrible tripe. Why don't we see shows devoted to military stealth techniques or the history of feudal Japan — relevant trends that emerge in countless video games? Please continue focusing on games and not some misguided conception of what you believe to be gamer culture.

Anonymous  
via gmail.com

■ **As gaming weaves its way into the mainstream and players become more diverse, it is increasingly difficult to pinpoint the shifting "gamer culture." You may not be interested in import tuning, but another gamer may be similarly bored by a show that reviews recent anime releases, even though both topics are widely considered to be key aspects of the gaming lifestyle. If you look on the racks at your local game store, you'll see these varied interests represented in the myriad genres available on the shelves — from tactical shooters for the history buff to quirky oddities for the Japanophile. Whether shows relating to these subjects belong on G4 is another discussion, but it seems to be a more severe "misguided conception" to assume that gamer culture is still the same insular, esoteric entity it was years ago. On a related note, an "insular, esoteric entity" would make a great final boss. Quick, to the Kojima-phone!**

### HALO-CENTRIC UNIVERSE

I just got done reading the Gears of War article, and in the opening paragraph you couldn't have described Halo in better words. Seriously, didn't it ring a bell that Gears is basically copying everything from Halo? "The age of man is coming to an end," and "fighting for freedom in the remnants of once-great civilizations"? Don't get me wrong — Gears of War looks amazing and I can't wait to play it, but it is clearly a "me-too" title. But then you go and add insult to injury: "dropships, lesbian commandos, and cigar-chomping drill sergeants." That's obviously a straight shot at Halo. Just wait until Halo 3 comes out; you guys are gonna take these comments back!

Anonymous  
via gmail.com

■ **Look, we love Halo. We love Halo 2 (it was our 2004 game the year, remember?), and we are excited for Halo 3. But at some point — and we mean this in the nicest way possible — you'll have to realize that Halo is not the shining beacon at the center of the science fiction world. To a certain degree, video games are an imitative art; Halo was not the first sci-fi FPS, and many of its elements are**

**directly lifted from other games, films, and literature. One could argue that the whole "space brigade fighting an alien menace" schtick was born in Robert**

**Heinlein's 1960 novel *Starship Troopers*, which in turn served as inspiration for the whole Alien series (renowned for its dropships and butch female commandos, by the way). To deny that Halo is largely a result of these pre-established concepts coalescing into game form is like claiming that the universe didn't exist prior to your birth. So, before you label Gears of War a "me-too" title, understand that even Halo owes a tremendous amount of its success to its forbears. Now, if Gears has Bill Paxton running around yelling "Game over, man," then you can call it a copycat. But, then again, who would complain? Hudson ruled.**



### VIGIL-PANTY JUSTICE

My boyfriend and I were playing through Resident Evil 4, and we noticed that Ashley is apparently programmed to call you a pervert if you try to look up her skirt. She even screams at you if you so much as accidentally raise your head up if she's above you. The panty bit doesn't bother me (we're all pervs anyway, right?), but she does it even when Leon is getting ripped apart by a scythe. Something tells me Leon has more important things to worry about than your underwear, sister. However, out of curiosity I scoped her with a rifle and noticed they were white with lace on top, if anyone's interested.

April Kwon  
via yahoo.com

■ **Sorry, we don't have any clever response or witty insight for this one. We just had a sneaking suspicion that, despite what we want to believe, there are probably people in the gaming community who would be greatly interested in this information. We knew that we would be doing the world a huge disservice if we didn't share the wealth. Happy scoping, and keep that trigger finger in check, soldier.**

### LUMINES BEINGS ARE WE

I saw the Game Informer review on Lumines and noticed the top score in the screenshots was around 358,000. Is this the highest score anyone on the GI staff has achieved? If not, what is the highest score?

Jin Pak  
via email

■ **The screenshots that accompanied the Lumines review were not taken directly from any of our bouts with the insanely addictive puzzler. Still, it remains one of our favorite PSP titles, and we try to spend time with it whenever we get a chance. Just for fun, if you want to see how your skills stack up to ours, here's a list of the top five scores in the Game Informer office so far. So pick up your PSP and teach us a lesson!**

Joe: 999,999  
Chris (GI Online): 821,501  
Jeremy: 357,225  
Reiner: 307,968  
Miller: 289,725

### COLOR ME MADD

How come in all PSP advertisements, including the picture on the actual PSP box, the background color of the PSP's main menu is blue? The system itself has a purple background, and there doesn't seem to be an option to change it.

Bryan Leones  
via email

### PSYCH!

I saw a video from E3 that really surprised me: the Final Fantasy VII remake for PlayStation 3! I am very excited that Square Enix is planning on remaking the best Final Fantasy of all time. But there's a problem: I keep hearing rumors that this video was just a demo, not actual game footage. Is this true? Will there be a remake of FF VII for PS3 or not?

Rolando Scattolery  
via email

■ **Welcome to what was simultaneously the most exciting and disappointing E3 moment for many gamers like yourself, Rolando. Square Enix dangled those beautiful graphics in front of us like a cruel overlord taunting his feeble subjects and then poisoned the euphoria by emphasizing the fact that the company currently has no plans to remake the seminal RPG.**

But sometimes we wonder. Not to give the legions of Final Fantasy addicts false hope, but creating such impressive visuals is a lot of work — work that it doesn't make sense to waste on one short tech demo. Remember when Epic first showed Unreal Engine 3.0? Those astonishing character models were supposedly only for demonstration purposes, but lo and behold, we learned that the exact same designs are appearing in Gears of War. Hopefully the effort that went into Square Enix's E3 video will pay off similarly somewhere down the line.



■ Still from Final Fantasy VII demo



■ In addition to its attractive media capabilities, the PSP is also a complicated, high-tech mood ring. Intricate and technology-laden sensors in the shoulder buttons sense your disposition and adjust the background accordingly. It's purple with sensual anticipation when you boot up the handheld. While you're playing, getting all sweaty and agitated, it changes to red. Then black when you get a game over (for negativity, you see). While you don't notice these hue switches (since you are no longer on the menu screen), they are totally happening. Would we lie to you? Yeah, we just did. Actually, the background just changes automatically at the beginning of every month. We fibbed because we hoped you would think we were cool and give us one of your ice cream sandwiches. We are ashamed.

**TOMORROW COMES TODAY**

I have to say that I am troubled with Microsoft's decision to lead the next-generation campaign when the stakes are so high. The very trait that made Xbox a contender – raw power – is being dangerously undermined by the 360's early launch. The PS3, with its staggering tech specs and third-party support, could blow apart the 360. Will the head start be enough to cement them as a viable console, or will my beloved 360 go the way of the Dreamcast? Am I alone in fearing for the future of the Xbox brand?

Katie M.  
via email

In case you (along with the rest of the gaming world) have forgotten, there are three next-gen consoles. Nintendo isn't out of the running yet! Everyone seems to debate whether Microsoft or Sony will be the leader; people aren't even considering the fact that with a back catalogue of classics and an innovative controller, the Revolution will rise to be the dominant gaming force. Be more grateful for what Nintendo has given to the industry and just trust them!

Derek Bleskin  
Omaha, NE

I really enjoyed your article on the Xbox 360 (issue 146), but I'm not sure I like the way people are already taking sides for the new consoles. The next-generation console "war" hasn't even gotten good yet and I'm already sick of hearing about it. Will Sony stay on top? Is 360 coming out too early? Gaming should be full of surprises, and I think we would be better off to wait and see what happens instead of preemptively determining the champions.

Plan D.  
via email

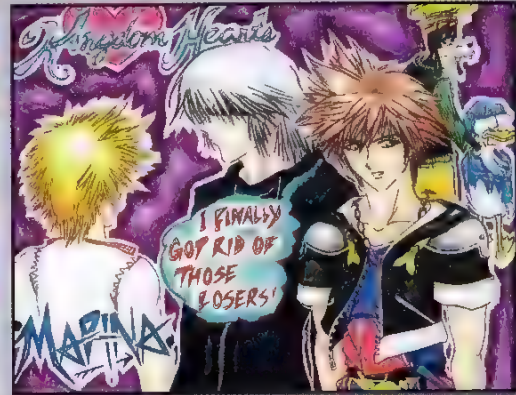
■ This year's E3 felt a lot like Ben Affleck's film career – a few blockbusters afloat in a sea of unremarkable mediocrity. Still, though it may have been underwhelming in the groundbreaking game department, it certainly gave us plenty to look forward to. The revealing of the next-gen consoles has compelled many individuals to evaluate the state of the industry, and this analysis has caused some gamers to stray from their favorite companies, while others cleave even tighter to their previous alliances. However, these choices are based on very little concrete information; the 360 was the only system truly unveiled at E3, while Sony had visual targets and Nintendo had a hollow black case with a blue LCD light. While it can be fun to speculate on the outcome of the looming competition, blindly devoting yourself to an unreleased console doesn't make you hardcore. It's still too early to make any judgments, and it's never wise to place bets before any cards are on the table. You never know – if you give someone a chance, they might surprise you. Hey! How'd you get in here, Affleck? We've told you, you're not allowed back in the office until we see a *Forces of Nature 2*. Now scam!

**ENVELOPE ART**

**AUGUST WINNER!**  
**KRISTOPHER M. JUSTICE**  
A carton of milk and a...  
white top? It's just a...  
Friday night...

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

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



**MARINA FLECHA**  
Sora finally realizes that hanging out with pantsless talking ducks is just plain weird

**RYAN SIZEMORE**  
Kratos' fury was forged on the playground where other kids made fun of his stubby legs

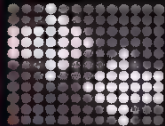


**FOUNG ENG**  
We'll take any chance we get to print a picture of Jean Reno, thank you very much



**ANONYMOUS**  
Smoking doesn't make you cool, but it does make you the general in a droid army





## SONY'S SUPER PS3 AMBITIONS

### LINUX FOR OPTIONAL HARD DRIVE?

**S**ony's PlayStation 3 was the talk of E3, but some questions still remained, particularly about the system's hard drive. The company has been talking more about the spring 2006 system, including some interesting tidbits from creator Ken Kutaragi.

The PS3 has a two-and-a-half inch slot to accommodate a hard drive, but Kutaragi has told the Japanese press that it will be sold separately. "When we release [the PS3], we won't need an HDD," Kutaragi went on to confirm what Sony Computer Entertainment America president Kaz Hirai told us last month—that the company was considering offering different

HDD sizes, such as 80 or 120 GB.

Kutaragi also revealed that he wants a hard drive so the system can run an operating system (OS)—possibly Linux—in order for the unit to be commercially recognized as a computer. This simple designation would entail lower import tariffs from other countries, and pre-installation of Linux means that through the open-source OS, PS3 owners could gain access to any number of free or low-cost home computing applications ranging from word processing to HD video-editing software. In effect, PS3's use of Linux would not only make the system much more versatile and attractive, it would also be a swipe at Microsoft's Windows OS. Kutaragi even said that the PS3 could run multiple

operating systems. "Of course, if Linux can run, so can Windows [a variety of Linux emulating the usability of Windows].

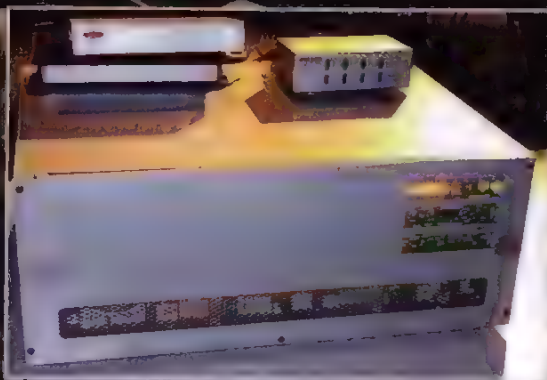
Other PC operating systems can run

too, such as Windows and Tiger [Apple's OS X 10.4], if the publishers want to do so. Maybe a new OS might come out." Kutaragi was derisive of Nintendo and Microsoft, labeling their upcoming next-generation systems as "toys" as compared to the PS3 as a "supercomputer."

Interestingly, in Sony's push to make the PS3 more of a home computer, one such company already in that space—Apple—has rejected the PS3's Cell processor. Kutaragi approached Apple boss Steve Jobs about using Cell in his future computers, but *The New York Times* reported that Jobs was "disappointed" by the design of the processor. This opinion, apparently, led him to opt for Apple's deal with Intel instead.

As for the system's gaming applications, Sony says that the console is still evolving. As long ago as May, the company changed the GPU in the first PS3 dev kits from NVIDIA GeForce 6800 Ultras to 7800 GTXs. Other changes to the GPU will have to be made in order for the system and its RSX graphics processor to reach the 550MHz clock speed and utilize its other unknown capabilities. Sony claims that the E3 demos of Cell had the processor running at only 75 percent. Kutaragi says that there are 100 kits out worldwide, with demand outstripping supply.

Despite all the talk of the platform's larger possibilities, Sony Computer Entertainment chief technical officer, Masa Chatani promises, "Make no mistake—games will be the killer app for the PlayStation 3."



■ This demo was used at E3 by NVIDIA to show the RSX GPU's shader capabilities. (inset) A shot of a PS3 dev kit from the blog of IT Media's Honda Masakazu. Recently, the GPU in the kit was re-fitted with 7800 GTXs from NVIDIA, although the drive was only a 1x Blu-Ray.



news

# XBOX 360 STILL HAS SECRETS

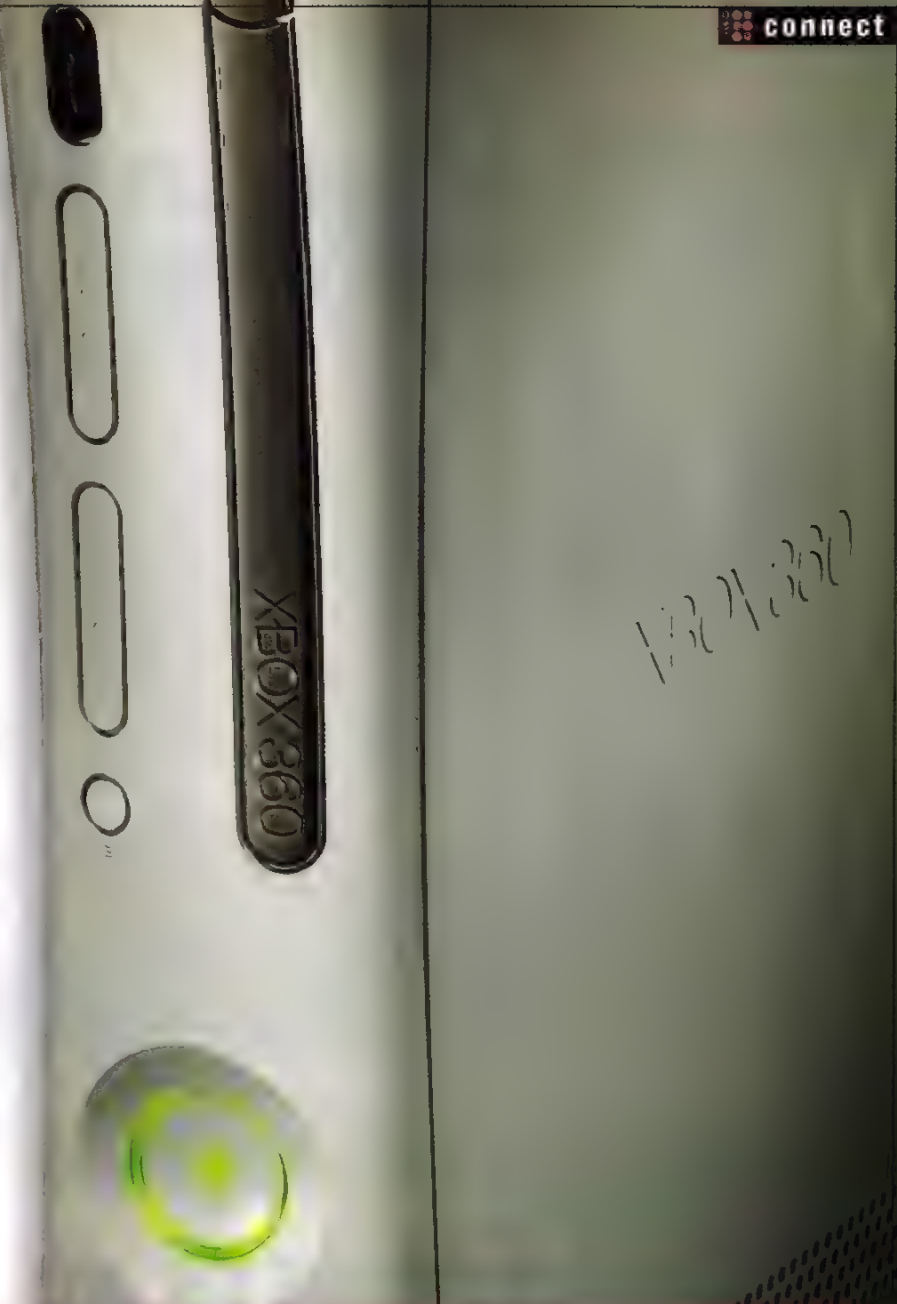
## MUSIC SERVICE FOR SYSTEM?

**M**icrosoft's presentation at E3 fell a little flat simply because the company had already unveiled the console in an MTV special that aired the week before. That doesn't mean, however, that details aren't still coming out about the system.

Microsoft has just signed a deal with Xbox chipmaker NVIDIA for backward compatibility of old Xbox games with the Xbox 360. This was necessary because the next-gen version of the system utilizes a PowerPC CPU and a non-compatible graphics chip by another company, ATI (the original Xbox has Intel chips and an NVIDIA GPU). At E3, Microsoft announced that only "best-selling" Xbox games would be playable on the 360, but this new deal opens up the possibility for more titles. However, not all Xbox games will be playable on the new system. Microsoft is not commenting on the situation, but word is that patched versions of Xbox games will be made available over Xbox Live to allow play on the 360. Patches for some titles will also come pre-loaded on the next-gen system's hard drive.

In other hard drive news, Xbox 360 owners may be one step closer to being able to purchase songs for their system via Microsoft's MSN Music download service. Chief Xbox Officer Robbie Bach will take over the company's digital music business, which is currently spread out over multiple divisions within Microsoft. It's not hard to imagine that the company wants to make the console, with its 20 GB hard drive, a music machine. Via its USB ports, devices like an iPod or even a PSP can be connected to the platform.

Currently, 25 to 40 games are expected at the launch of the Xbox 360 this holiday season, and Japanese magazine *Famitsu* even says that Microsoft has "secret" special features for the system planned that will be available via download a year after the system's release.



1/22/06

## THE DISC DRIVE WAR



**T**he ongoing war over the next DVD format has a real relevance to the battle between PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. Sony's unit supports the Blu-Ray format, which uses a different laser than your current DVD, allowing for discs that can hold more information. With the PS3 using Blu-Ray, while the 360 utilizes DVD-9, it would seem that PS3 is the clear winner in this category, but it might not be that simple.

Game Informer has learned that at the time of this writing, the PS3 dev kits only utilize a 1x Blu-Ray drive, which runs at 6.75 MB/sec, versus 360's use of 12x DVD (at 16.65 MB/sec). Thus, if the PS3 sticks with a 1x Blu-Ray drive, although it'll have more capacity than a DVD, the Xbox 360 would access the info on its discs faster. Sony may use a 4x Blu-Ray drive in the PS3, which would run faster

than the Xbox 360 at 27 MB/sec.

Recently, Sony's Ken Kutaragi admitted that the attempt between Blu-Ray and competitor HD-DVD to unify into one format failed, making it likely that there will be a VHS versus Betamax-style war when both players hit the market at the end of this year. This lack of a unified format could put the PS3 in a bind, where some consumers might not want to buy it and therefore commit to Blu-Ray. Part of the PS2's success was because it was both helped by and drove the popularity of the DVD format.

Theoretically, Xbox 360 owners could still enjoy Blu-Ray or HD-DVD movies. Since computer companies will use whichever disc drive is more popular in their PCs, and given the 360's hook up with a Media Center PC, it would be possible (albeit expensive) to play Blu-

Ray or HD-DVD movies through your PC, despite the Xbox 360's DVD drive. Of course, this solution wouldn't solve any potential storage problems that Xbox 360 game discs may encounter versus Blu-Ray.

Despite the possible effects of the DVD format wars, developers in Japan are eagerly pursuing development on both systems. A poll by magazine *Famitsu* says that while 28.2 percent of developer respondents are currently making games for the Xbox 360 (as opposed to 12.8 percent working on PS3), 38.5 percent say they will develop titles for the PlayStation 3 in the future (versus 12.8 percent for the 360). Otherwise, 17.9 percent say they will consider making PS3 games, versus a close 15.4 percent for Xbox 360.

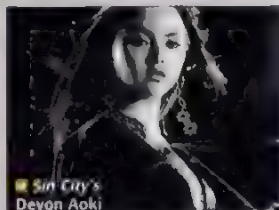


## DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

## CAMERAS ROLL ON DEAD OR ALIVE; CHRONOS TO 360

Shooting has begun in Hong Kong for the movie adaptation of Tecmo's *Dead or Alive* series. The film stars Jaime Pressly, Devon Aoki (Miho from *Sin City*), and Eric Roberts (I). The movie's production company, Constantin Film, is also overseeing two more *Resident Evil* films. In other *Dead or Alive* news, series creator Tomonobu Itagaki has declared that *Dead or Alive Code: Chronos* will now come out on the Xbox 360.



*Sin City's*  
Devon Aoki

## MARC ECKO TAGS XBOX, PC

Graffiti game *Marc Ecko's Getting Up* was formerly a PlayStation 2 exclusive, but the title has recently jumped on to the Xbox and PC. The PS2 version should hit the streets this fall, but the other versions aren't expected until later.



## DIESEL TAKES A STAB AT HITMAN

A far cry from his role as babysitter in *The Pacifier*, actor and video game fan Vin Diesel is starring in a movie based on Eidos' *Hitman* franchise. Diesel will play Agent 47, a guy who hands out lethal force like it was candy.

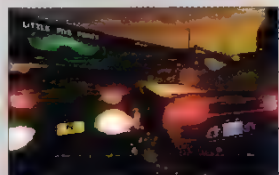


## VIDEO GAME MUSIC TO YOUR EARS

Famed video game music composers Tommy Tallarico (*Advent Rising*) and Jack Wall (*Jade Empire*) are launching a national tour performing current and classic video game themes (*Halo*, *Castlevania*, *Donkey Kong*, *Legend of Zelda*, and more) with the support of a full orchestra and choir. Video footage and a laser and light show will also accompany the sounds. For more info, go to [www.videogameslive.com](http://www.videogameslive.com).

## REGION-ENCODING FOR PSP

Those of you who bought a Japanese PSP may feel the region encoding axe falling. Despite early statements that games for the handheld would be region-free, allowing users to play games from around the world, new titles such as *Rockstar's Midnight Club 3, DUB Edition* will feature region encoding similar to DVDs.



## NEWS

## NINTENDO SHOOTS DOWN HD

## NO FREE DOWNLOADS, EITHER

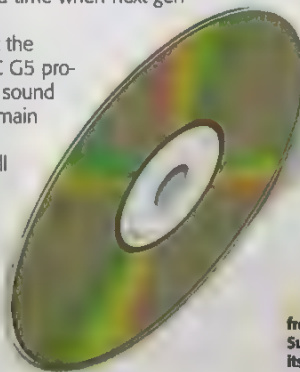
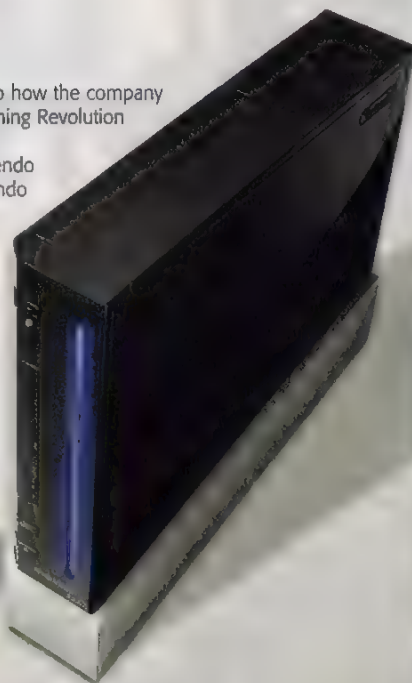
Nintendo has proven over and over again that it likes to go its own way when it comes to how the company does business. Whether it's backward compatibility or high-definition gaming, the upcoming Revolution system is no different.

Nintendo president Satoru Iwata recently shot down the rumor that downloads of old Nintendo games would be free. However, he did not detail an alternate price structure. Currently, Nintendo is in negotiations for the rights to old third party titles for the Revolution. Iwata has also hinted that downloaded classic titles may receive a graphical facelift. Meanwhile, standard online play of first-party Nintendo games (current, not classic titles) will be free, but third-party ones may charge a fee. Nintendo also says it will offer a wireless USB network adapter that can be hooked up to your PC as an access point for your Revolution and Nintendo DS.

Despite the Revolution's enticing offering of classic games, the recent news that it will not support high definition resolution has some gamers disappointed that the system is at stark odds with both Microsoft and Sony's demand that games mandatorily utilize HD. Nintendo believes that the console's games will still look great without HD, and says that it doesn't want to incur greater costs for either developers or consumers. Does this mean that Nintendo will pass the savings on to the consumer at a time when next-gen games are expected to hit \$60?

Recently, reported specs leaked online claiming that the Revolution was powered by two 1.8GHz IBM PowerPC G5 processors, a 600MHz ATI graphics chip, and a 7.1 digital sound chipset. The platform will apparently have 128 MB of main memory and 256 MB of embedded DRAM.

Whether these specs are true or not, Nintendo is still working on the system, with Shigeru Miyamoto stating that the Revolution's controller is the unknown ace-in-the-hole. Early on, it was believed to be a large touchscreen with configurable virtual controls, while recent rumors say the system's controller will be gyroscope based.



Already confirmed titles for the Revolution include games from the *Legend of Zelda*, *Metroid*, *Donkey Kong*, *Mario*, and *Super Smash Bros.* series. Square Enix has also committed its *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*

## NEWS

## SOE GETS DC COMICS

## WARNER BROS. ALSO GIVES THE MATRIX ONLINE

Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment has ceded the rights to *The Matrix Online* PC title and DC Comics license to Sony Online Entertainment (SOE). SOE president John Smedley says that players of *The Matrix Online* need not worry. "The same high level of service that subscribers have come to expect [will continue]," he said in a statement. *The Matrix Online* will be added to SOE's Station Access subscription plan. Unfortunately, this move will result in the layoff of an estimated 80 employees, 25 of which are being asked to report to SOE's Bellvue, Washington office.

Warner Bros. Interactive's senior vice president, Jason Hall, says that the move will only help the title as it will increase exposure and benefit from SOE's guidance. Hall has also said that developer Monolith's other projects, *F.E.A.R.* and *Condemned*, will not be affected by the move.

More interesting is the door this opens for SOE with online titles based on DC Comics' properties. SOE isn't saying much on this move, other than it is planning on PC and next-gen console titles for a release in late 2007.





# ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN™

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PlayStation 2



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## THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



EverQuest II would be nothing without Heather Graham

### UGLY

The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) are divided over an agreement reached with the video game industry for a 36 percent wage raise increase (over three and a-half years) for voice actors. After a negotiating board representing both unions accepted the deal, SAG executives went against the recommendation of their own negotiating body and voted down the proposal. Meanwhile, the AFTRA has accepted the deal, and since many actors are members of both unions, they will be able to do voice work without crossing union lines. Currently, all parties are meeting to figure this mess out. We can only hope that this doesn't keep top-notch talent like Heather Graham from her valuable contribution to games like EverQuest II. Besides, without a 36 percent raise, how can she afford to eat?!



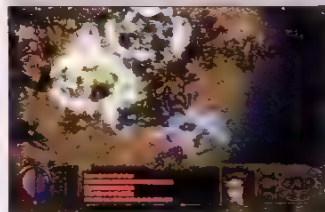
### BAD

Capcom, Grand Theft Auto III's publisher in Japan, is considering legal action against a local Japanese law that restricts sale of the game to minors. The publisher points out that a rating system is already in place to warn consumers of content (similar to our ESRB), and that the local government in question, Kanagawa prefecture, came to the decision without discussion or precedent. The nearby prefectures of Saitama and Osaka are also banning the game.



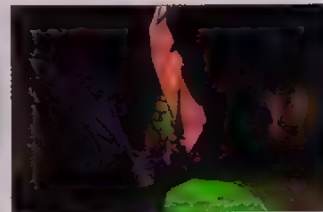
### GOOD

As perhaps a sign that UMD movies really are the wave of the future, Japanese PSP owners will soon be able to buy adult movies for their handheld. Sorry of Japan says that while it finds porn for PSP "utterly undesirable," it could do nothing to stop companies from releasing such movies. The power of porn rules once again.



### UGLY

Shanghai gamer Qui Chengwei has been given a suspended death sentence for killing Zhu Caoyuan after Caoyuan sold Chengwei's virtual sword from Legend of Mir 3 for approximately \$473. Don't tell Joe we ate his lunch.



### GOOD

World of Warcraft's lead producer, Shane Dabiri, has said the company is working on an expansion pack to the wildly popular PC MMORPG. Adam's retreat from society continues.



### GOOD

Receptionists of Hollywood's major studios got a shock when messengers dressed up in full Master Chief garb delivered a script treatment for a Halo movie written by 28 Days Later screenwriter Alex Garland. Microsoft reportedly wanted at least a \$10 million advance and a \$75 million budget. At the time of this writing, 20th Century Fox and Universal were said to be negotiating to team up to finance like films.

### UGLY

A European study found that a majority of parents are aware of video game ratings, but "divorce themselves" from deciding what their children play, even though the parents don't like what games they buy. Great to know hypocrisy rules the angry mob.



games

# SHOOT ANYTHING THAT MOVES

## XBOX 360, PC HIT BY MONSTER MADNESS

Nothing brings the party to a halt like hordes of monsters hell-bent on destroying everything in their path – unless you're the person who pukes all over the host's bed, of course. Artificial Studio's *Monster Madness* posits the more exciting (and realistic) former scenario, dropping you and three other friends in front of a mass of monsters in this top-down shooter for Xbox 360 and PC. The game is without a publisher at the moment, but Artificial expects to release it in the first quarter of next year.

Mowing down the zombies, undead samurai, vampires, and other beasts requires that you pick up weapons (like baseball bats, shotguns, etc.) which can be upgraded and attached to the vehicles you'll use throughout the game's five locations. Online play is also enabled, with co-op play between off- and online gamers possible.

### R & D

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



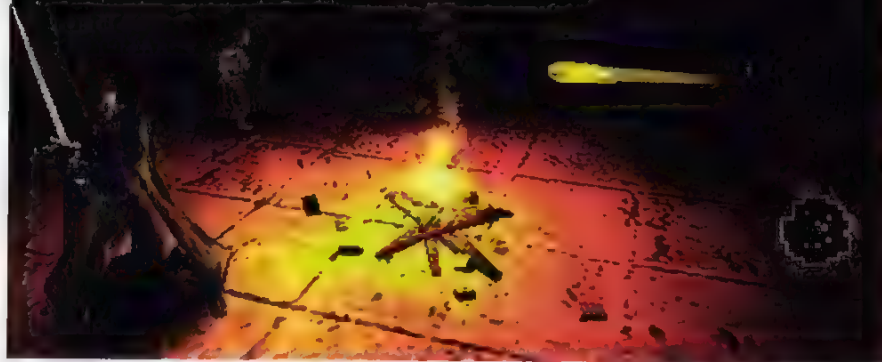
### Hobo Sapien

Everybody knows that aliens like to abduct people; it happens every day. Heck, you probably know somebody who has been abducted, or have been abducted yourselves. Anyway, we know that aliens tend to pick up suave, sophisticated types to add to their interstellar zoos, but what if they picked up someone a little less...refined? In *Hobo Sapien*, players would take on the role of Scratchy Bill, a railway-riding bum accidentally beamed aboard an alien spaceship. Unaccustomed to Bill's cuss words and overpowering odor, his alien captors dump him on a planet occupied by a classy, dignified yet repressed humanoid race called the Conformatroids. An open-world action game, *Hobo Sapien* would charge players with figuring out how to most effectively beg for alien change, which of the various galactic foodstuffs in the garbage are edible, and avoiding flying hovercops. As Scratchy Bill interacts with the Conformatroids, they will gradually become less offended by his cantankerous ways and let down their guard. They will then become receptive to the magical lessons about life that only a wizened hobo can teach, and cast off their stuffy alien traditions in favor of a more carefree and spontaneous existence, just like good old Scratchy. It would be a lot like *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, only in space.



games

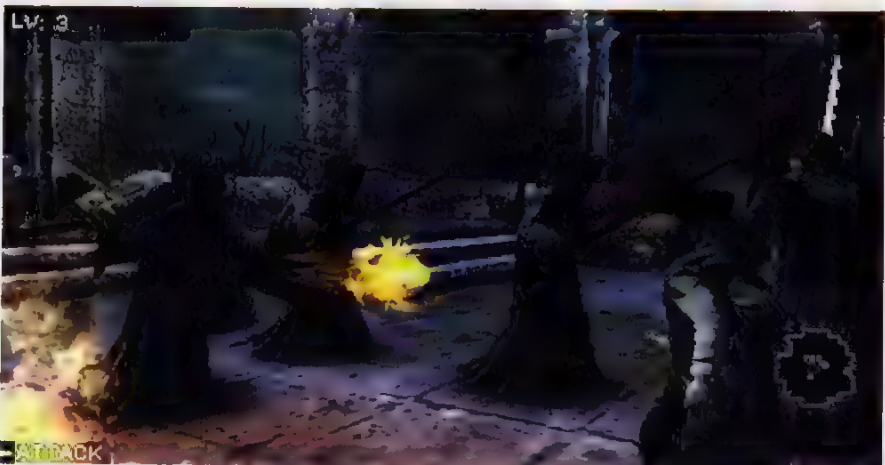
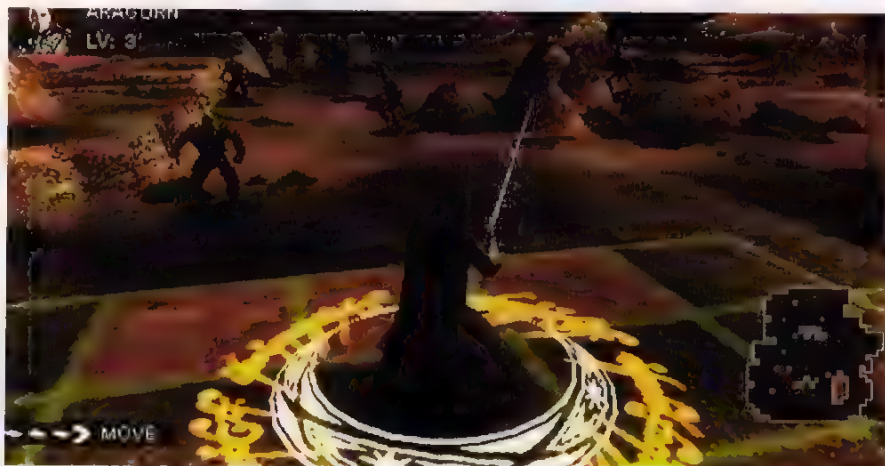
# KEEP THIS RING IN YOUR POCKET



## LORD OF THE RINGS TO PSP

**E**A's Lord of the Rings: The Third Age was a solid, if little-noticed title on the GameBoy Advance, but the company has a similar Strategy/RPG game in the works for the PSP. The Lord of the Rings Tactics is scheduled for release this fall by developer EA Redwood Shores.

Unlike the GBA title, EA hopes to make Tactics a strategy title that isn't devoid of a little personality. Using clips from all three of Peter Jackson's movies, the company is making this more than just a grid game. Expanding the gameplay is a system of upgrades, items, and skills for the likes of Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, Sauron, and others. In all, EA says that Tactics will contain dozens of characters from both the movies and the book. Your heroes will have to strategically deal with the topography, as well as set up traps and ambushes for the enemy. Players can even take their customizable characters into four-player ad hoc multiplayer battles via PSP's Wi-Fi function.



## LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



## FINAL FANTASY LOOKS TO NEXT GEN

In an interview in Japan's *Famitsu* magazine, Final Fantasy XII producer Hironobu Sakaguchi said that he and his team are working on an MMORPG for next-gen consoles. However, it is unknown whether this upcoming title will be a Final Fantasy one or not. In other Final Fantasy news, after whetting our appetite with its Final Fantasy VII PS3 trailer, FF X producer Yoshinori Kitase has said that Square Enix is indeed working on an FF title for the PS3, but he wouldn't divulge if it would be FF XIII.



## MORE FROM MOLYNEUX

Lionhead chief Peter Molyneux has gabbed once again, this time promising four more installments of PC god game *Black & White*. Previously, Molyneux admitted he had the bad habit of talking too much about games early on, something that got him into trouble with fans of Xbox title *Fable*. Don't listen to them, Peter. Feel free to spill the beans anytime you want.

## HALO 3 DETAILS LEAKED?

Everyone wants to know what Halo 3 is going to be all about, and a fresh batch of rumors have been making the rounds — many of which don't sound that far-fetched. Word is that the game will include both a map editor and a movie-making function, which will come on a separate disc. Players will be able to send their creations to each other via Xbox Live. For multiplayer, some maps will hold over 50 players, there will be tie-ins to the single-player campaign, and maps such as Zanzibar, Sidewinder, and Hang Em High will return in re-worked fashion.



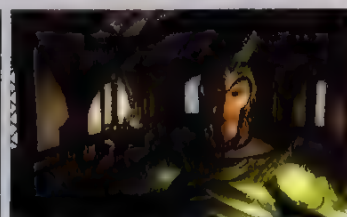
## XBOX 360 FOR \$299?

The *Toronto Globe and Mail* has reported rumors that Microsoft's Xbox 360 will sell for \$299 (US dollars) and initially cost \$375 to produce. The paper also estimates that around a million units of the system will be available in 2005, although with a simultaneous launch in North America, Europe, and Japan planned, this number seems way too low.



## MEDAL OF HONOR PS3'S OPENING SALVO

Despite taking a beating in recent years, Electronic Arts' Medal of Honor franchise is dressing its wounds and preparing for the next generation. Rumor has it that the company is preparing Medal of Honor: Airborne as a launch title for the PlayStation 3. No word as to whether the game will be exclusive to the system, although we doubt it.



## NO OBLIVION FOR PS3?

Bethesda's *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is an eagerly awaited Xbox 360 title, and when we did the exclusive cover story on the game (see issue #138), it was also being slated for PlayStation 3. Loose Talk has heard, however, that the title is being pulled from Sony's platform because the system will not have an out-of-the-box hard drive.

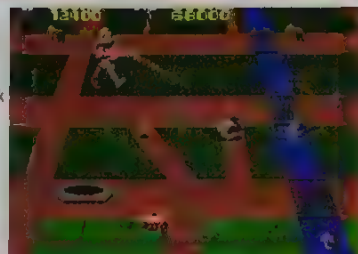
Got some insider info? Email us at [loosetalk@gamerformer.com](mailto:loosetalk@gamerformer.com) and we'll be all ears.

## NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Put out by Japanese developer Nichibutsu for the arcade in 1985, this game was similar to top-down game *Xenious*, except it was a side scroller. But that wasn't the only difference. The game lets you traverse between surface- and underground levels through portals. Players could also pick up pieces to augment their ship, with each one granting new firepower. These extra stages allow you to construct a full robot with legs and a wave-beam gun.

(Answer on page 25)







**NCAA 06**  
FOOTBALL







# HEISMAN

THE CATCH. 1991. Notre Dame at Michigan. Fourth and one, twenty-five yards out: 9:02 left.







games

# "I'M THE BUS DRIVER, I TAKE EVERYONE TO SCHOOL"

## UBISOFT'S AND 1 STREETBALL MIXES IT UP



Forget everything you know about video game basketball. Newcomers on the sports block (Ubisoft) are debuting in style with the ankle-breaking basketball stylistics of *And 1 Streetball*. The game comes out this November for Xbox and PlayStation 2, and is being developed by Black Ops.

The game's fancy moves are done by using both analog sticks. Use just the right and you'll access the first level of tricks. When used in conjunction with the left analog, your game is taken a notch higher. Using both when holding down one of the shoulder or trigger buttons unleashes your sickest moves. By stringing enough combos together you'll

build Respect points while simultaneously draining your opponent's Ankle-Breaker meter. Once this hits zero, he'll fall, leaving you with a clear shot at the hoop.

The game's story mode puts you in the shoes of a potential *And 1* streetballer, looking to get a spot on the company's road show. You'll start playing normal pick-up games where you'll hopefully have enough talent to catch the eye of the *And 1* pros. Real life *And 1* ballers like Baby Shack, Spinmaster, and Helicopter are in the game. Some of their real-life moves are even included. Online play is also planned, including tournaments and ranking boards so you can publicly humiliate opponents.

games

# WATCH YOUR BACK

## NAMCO'S FRAME CITY KILLER ON THE HUNT

It's tough hunting down drug lords in 2047. Namco's *Frame City Killer* puts you in the shoes of Crow, a shades-wearing secret agent on his own in the rough-and-tumble city. Your target is Khan, a terrorist and drug kingpin who has taken over the city. With little help from the cops, Crow must do what he can in this Xbox 360 title scheduled to hit shelves before the end of the year.

*Frame City Killer* uses Unreal Engine 3, and despite its by-the-numbers look, it does contain an interesting gameplay premise. Besides just dismantling Khan's empire with your

guns, Crow must rely on his wits. This entails tracking and tailing your various victims in order to study their movements to expose a method of attack and the opportune window for striking. Some of Khan's cronies might best be taken out with a sniper shot, while others leave themselves vulnerable to other planned "accidents." Although not much is known about the game's geography, you'll visit different parts of the city. Crow will have a vehicle available to him, but it is not known just yet how he'll be able to use it.

## TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

**DEVELOPER**  
ALEX TROWERS  
Lead Designer, Kuju  
Games

**READER**  
ALEXANDER  
SCOTT  
Richfield, MN



- 1 *Elite* - PC
- 2 *Syndicate* - PC
- 3 *Star Wars: X-Wing Series* - PC
- 4 *Command & Conquer* - PC
- 5 *Super Mario 64* - N64

- 1 *Chrono Trigger* - SNES
- 2 *MVP Baseball 2005* - PS2
- 3 *Contra III: The Alien Wars* - SNES
- 4 *Age of Mythology* - PC
- 5 *Call of Duty* - PC

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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

## TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

## Top 10 Shameful Accomplishments Appearing On Your Xbox Live Gamer Card

- 10 Died 59 times on *Call of Duty 2*'s first level
- 9 Logged over 600 hours on *Brute Force*
- 8 More betrayals than actual kills in *Perfect Dark Zero*
- 7 Played *Kameo: Elements of Power*
- 6 Downloaded 3 *Doors Down*'s entire back catalogue
- 5 Entire friends list consists of variations on the name Goku
- 4 Most Frequented Gamer Zone: Furryville
- 3 Sold "John Tesh Rocks!" shirts for use in *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland*
- 2 All attempts at Camera Chat are met with resounding laughter and pointing
- 1 Had short FF XI marriage to *VelocityGirl* - before finding out she was a dude

Name: That Game Answer: MagMax



## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

## 1980 Data Flow (1980)

Getting into the booming telecommunications industry, Stocks begins his career at AT&T, where he would go on to hold a number of positions, including area manager for the Data Sales Group



## 1984 Advanced Studies

To supplement the undergraduate work he'd done at the University of Minnesota and Gustavus Adolphus College, Stocks attended the prestigious Cambridge Institute to be certified in Management Information Systems

## 1991 Music Tech

Stocks joins Navarre Corporation, a major music and digital entertainment firm. At the company he wears many hats, overseeing major label music distribution, computer software products, and eventually becoming the vice president and general manager of Navarre's Digital Entertainment subsidiary

## 1996 Entering the Game

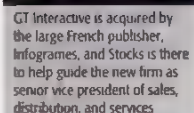
Stocks takes his extensive sales and marketing know-how into the rapidly evolving video game market, becoming a senior vice president at GT Interactive's value division. Later, in 1998, he is put in charge of all the company's sales and marketing, including Humongous Entertainment

## 1999 Tanner!

GT Interactive releases the game that puts it in the limelight of the industry, *Driver*, which goes on to massive sales and helps birth the "open world" racing genre

## 2000 Going Global

GT Interactive is acquired by the large French publisher, Infogrames, and Stocks is there to help guide the new firm as senior vice president of sales, distribution, and services



## 2003 Rebuilding an Icon

After rebranding Infogrames as Atari in hopes of revitalizing gaming's most legendary brand names, Stocks is promoted again to executive vice president of sales, licensing, marketing, distribution, and logistics. Here, Stocks helps guide the company through a troubled period and corporate restructuring

# WIMSTOCKS

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING/ATARI

>> **It's no secret that the last few years have been difficult ones for Atari. However, following a recent restructuring, Atari's executive vice president of sales and marketing, Wim Stocks, feels that the company is now leaner, meaner, and more focused on creating quality video games than ever before. Recently, we sat down with Stocks to find out his views on Atari's past and present.** <<

## What do you think about Microsoft's strategy of coming out first?

I think they had to. They had to establish their beachhead, so to speak, by getting out in front, not only with the announcements but also with their launch. The announcement was the week before E3, but we, as a publisher, had been hearing Microsoft walking us through up to that point for quite some time. We'll see how that strategy plays out. I think one thing Microsoft has done very well is support third-party publishers. They have been very communicative, and this goes back even to the first [Xbox].

## Sony showed some pretty impressive technical demos and specs for PlayStation 3. What was your take on that?

I'm not a technical expert, but it sure sounds as if it's going to be a very powerful machine. I think it's interesting how Microsoft, in their announcements, has played up the technology only to a degree, but has been more about the community and how it will manage any particular player's community. It's almost as if they didn't want it to be too techni-

## Speaking of Nintendo and their online gaming service for old titles, Atari is a similar company in that you have a strong heritage to draw on. Would you consider partnering with Nintendo's service?

I think by all means we'd like to partner with Nintendo. Microsoft has X-Arcade, a means for us to exploit that back catalogue. Today, we do it ourselves in any of a number of different iterations – look at the classic properties that are out there – we have them on PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC, and wireless, PSP, and the Atari Flashback. There are any number of ways by which we can deliver the content, and we're trying to make it widely available across the spectrum.

## Right now, you see a lot of growth in the retro, vintage t-shirt market and '80s nostalgia at stores like Hot Topic. Do you have any plans to further market the Atari brand through merchandising?

That's really a discussion about the brand. There would be lots of opportunities for us to go out and license our brand for a series of t-shirts, but the

former structure. We had bifurcated marketing. We had bifurcated, even trifurcated [product development]. We were not centralized in any sense. So, we've done a lot to pull ourselves together. We think we will gain so much in the way of better quality and better brand representation and better overall marketing by way of pulling everything together in one facility.

## You've released a teaser ad for *Driver 4*. *Drv3er* didn't live up to critical or commercial expectations.

Those are all astute observations.

## Can the *Driver* brand be rebuilt? Is *Reflections* still on the project?

Reflections is still on the project. Reflections is really the soul of *Driver* and we believe that a continued connection there is really important to the brand. *Drv3er* was a disappointment to us – there is no question. It accomplished certain things that were the heritage of *Driver* – the unbelievable realism of the driving simulations and the driving physics, those were *Driver* hallmarks. It failed on some of the

*I think one thing Microsoft has done very well is support third-party publishers.*

cal. That's completely the opposite of what Sony did – Sony went right for the power and right to the technical specs. It's clear that part of this battle is going to be drawn out on paper, comparing specs. I don't think Microsoft was prepared for that. I don't think they expected Sony to come out so aggressive on specs as the positioning for the product, especially this early in the game.

## We also have the third player, Nintendo. Most people seem to be saying it's a two-horse race for number one. Do you think Nintendo can maintain a strong market share in this generation?

The thing about Nintendo is that they speak to an audience. They have, thus far, through Nintendo 64 and GameCube and GBA, spoken to a younger audience. But it's proven that they are resilient to that audience. They have some interesting hooks to the machine, with the big announcement that you can download any of the old Nintendo games, and I think that will have some interest to that audience. They've always been a first-party driven platform, and it will be interesting to see what they do.

brand is really a sacred thing. In many respects, the brand has a great emotional attachment; it's the first video game most people played. So, when you talk about Atari in that perspective, people say, "Wow, what a great brand." But, in some respects, it also means old gaming. We are looking to move the brand forward. Some of the hallmarks of the brand – the innovation and the "maverick" status back in the early days – those are the things we believe we can latch onto as things we can use to move the brand forward. We're looking at pushing into other distribution methods like wireless and electronic software downloads – those are ways to push the brand forward. We are finding that those are real, authentic uses of the brand that will be organic to the consumer.

## Atari has had a tumultuous few years. You've closed a lot of offices and laid off most of your PR staff.

A lot of that was strategic in nature. We had to get our infrastructure in line from a business perspective and overhead perspective, but some of it was that we wanted proximity. We want our marketing and product development and PR and licensing and sales to have a nucleus. We didn't have that in the

out-of-car sequences. It failed on maybe trying to be more GTA-like. In the driving/action genre, *Driver* was really the product that created that genre, and we found ourselves trying to be more than we really should be. *Driver 4* will be a return to the original. It, for sure, will be relying on realistic driving simulation physics, but there are some interesting twists we're not really talking about yet that will bring it forward and make it a more current. [It's] not a reaction to other competing products.

## Atari has really scaled back the number of products it's releasing this year in comparison to years past. Is this something that will continue in the future?

We have been actively scaling back our SKU [release] plan. That's somewhat our plan, but it's also the marketplace telling us [to]. We've had some products that have not performed all that well. It's really a function of the business – what the marketplace will bear and our ability to address the marketplace. In the past, we addressed every segment there was to address in the video game space. Now, we can't afford to be everything to everybody. Just by virtue of that, it means we will be more focused in our offerings and be good in the places where we can be.



# THE NEW ATARI

■ Atari's Wim Stocks, helping to guide a new, streamlined Atari back to the top



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peripherals

# XBOX 360 ACCESSORIES

Manufacturer: Microsoft  
Website: [www.xbox.com](http://www.xbox.com)  
List Price: TBA



The first-party Microsoft accessories for its upcoming console have a few elements in common: nice industrial design, good feature sets, and to-be-determined price points. Hopefully, the prices will be low enough to allow everyone a complete collection by the end of the year.

**MEMORY UNIT**

- Comes with carrying case designed to fit on a key chain
- 64 MB storage size
- Saves games, Xbox Live profile, and other data (although it hasn't been specified exactly what other types of information will be supported)

**UNIVERSAL MEDIA REMOTE**

- Turns the 360 on or off
- Buttons for Xbox Guide, universal TV and console options (volume, channel selection, etc.), Windows XP Media Center controls, and Xbox 360 face buttons for basic menu navigation without a controller
- Backlit keys

**XBOX LIVE CAMERA**

- 640x480 VGA video at 30 frames per second
- Built-in microphone
- Offers video chat and video messaging out of the box
- 1.3 megapixel still photos (can be added to characters in some games)

**HEADSET**

- Adjustable boom microphone with noise-canceling for clearer transmission
- In-line volume controls and mute button
- Direct connection to wireless or regular controller (no module to plug in)

**WIRELESS NETWORK ADAPTOR**

- [not shown]
- Supports 802.11b/g/a
  - Powered through the console
  - Designed to work seamlessly with Media Center PCs

**WIRELESS CONTROLLER**

- [not shown]
- Forty hours of playtime on two AA batteries
  - Can be plugged in when battery power runs low
  - Thirty-foot range with 2.4GHz wireless transmission
  - Adjustable rumble control
  - Xbox Guide Button for access to full media options of the console

etc.

## THE ART OF GAME CHARACTERS and RETRO-ELECTRO: Collecting Technology from Atari to Walkmen

**Manufacturer:** Harper Collins (Game Characters), Rizzoli New York (Electro)

**Website:** [www.harpercollins.com](http://www.harpercollins.com), [www.rizzoliusa.com](http://www.rizzoliusa.com) **List Price:** \$29.95

Video games going mainstream is nice for at least one unexpected thing – an ever-increasing variety of books dissecting and cataloging the minutia of our favorite pastime. *The Art of Game Characters* is a follow-up to the popular *Art of Game Worlds* coffee-table book. It covers all the common types of game characters along with examples and some analysis of what makes one character design more successful than another. *Retro-Electro* taps into the previously under-explored world of “antique” technology pricing and history. Lots of video game coverage, on both the history and evolution of hardware designs, makes this an interesting flip whether or not you want to get into collecting.







etc.

## APPLESEED ON UMD

**Manufacturer:** Geneon Entertainment

**Website:** [www.geneonanimation.com](http://www.geneonanimation.com)

**List Price:** \$19.98

With UMD sales beating expectations, it seems that getting anime onto the format is a natural next step that's finally happening. Geneon is putting the visually compelling *Appleseed* on American store shelves this July. *Samurai Champloo*, from *Cowboy Bebop* director Shinichiro Watanabe and character animator Kazuto Nakazawa [*Kill Bill Vol. 1*'s animated sequence], will also debut at the same time. *Gungrave* and *Hellsing* releases are also planned.

peripherals

## DRAGON CONTROLLER

**Manufacturer:** Philips Electronics

**Website:** [www.philips.com](http://www.philips.com)

**List Price:** \$29.99

Dubious as an everyday controller, but Philips' Freak line does have a certain conversation-starting aspect to it. This Xbox Dragon unit headlines the brand's second series with bejeweled buttons and a highly sculpted fantasy-inspired exterior.



tech

## N91

**Manufacturer:** Nokia

**Website:** [www.nokia.com](http://www.nokia.com)

**List Price:** TBA

The cell phone rumor mill has been abuzz with what could be next for the American market. Cameras are practically standard, as are color screens and multimedia messaging. It looks like larger-scale storage and better media management are the next cellular frontier, and Nokia is beating the competition to the punch with the N91. A four GB hard drive lets users do things that were the domain of PCs and PDAs just a few short years ago. Download music over the cell network, sync up with your home audio library, capture and organize pictures or video with the 2-megapixel camera, and do it all with a customized interface to access the information easily. A standard headphone jack, FM tuner, and audio out could have folks setting their other MP3 players aside this fall, when the set is scheduled to debut.

pc

# GEFORCE 7800 GTX

Easiest question ever: Who doesn't love new graphics cards? No one, because even if you don't have the 600 simoleons to pick up the latest and greatest, you know that with each new card, the previous generation gets cheaper and cheaper. Ultimately, this means that PC graphics are making leaps and bounds each and every year. NVIDIA's smoking new 7800 GTX is proof of that. It is easily the most powerful GPU out there. As Mark Rein from Epic Games states, "It's the warm-up to the PlayStation 3." In fact, it is the very card in PlayStation 3 development kits right now. Touting graphics performance up to two times greater than the NVIDIA's own GeForce 6800 Ultra and a wide range of features including Shader 3.0, you can't help but wonder what this card will do for your computer. Be forewarned however, it only works in computers with motherboards and power supplies that support PCI Express. As always, double check your hardware before you run out and buy one. If your computer doesn't support this card, we recommend that you just build a whole new computer. For those looking for the ultimate in gaming goodness, the new 7800 GTX also supports NVIDIA's SLI (Scalable Link Interface) configuration so you can link up two of these monsters for the very top in PC gaming performance.



**Manufacturer:** Nvidia

**Website:** [www.nvidia.com](http://www.nvidia.com)

**List Price:** \$599

Warning, tech stats incoming: The GeForce 7800 GTX contains eight vertex units and 24 pixel pipelines, and operates at a whopping 130MHz.



# THE "GRAYING OF SUPER MARIO AMERICA"

IS CHANGING TODAY'S VIDEO GAME MARKET



JOSEPH ANTHONY,  
CEO, VITAL MARKETING



I remember 15 to 20 years ago when all the "cool" parents were the ones playing video games with their kids. Today, the parents of today's teens are often the ones buying the games before their children even have a chance to. The days where the video game section of any retail store was mobbed by kids pulling at their parent's sleeves begging them to spend \$50 on Super Mario Bros. and Zelda has been replaced by children fighting with their parents over who gets to be which team in Madden.

During the May E3 conference, it became obvious that the shift in the video game industry has grown quickly from a pre-teen dominated market to one that crosses generational lines. How a marketplace that originally had been designed for such a young age group changed into one of the biggest industries in America is a cultural phenomenon unlike any other in recent history.

The phenomenon, in my opinion, is caused by the aging of the gamers who first became video game consumers in the late 1980s with the Nintendo 8-bit system. The shift in the marketplace has occurred from its original demographics of 8-to-17 year-olds driving the market to today's gamers being well into their mid 30s. As the market ages and older gamers retain interest in video games, it is a shift in demographics that I like to call "The Graying of Super Mario America."

For the \$10 billion video game industry, the marketplace that exploded in the late 1980s among pre-teens has grown up. Today more and more adults are buying video games for themselves, not their children. Whereas with many childhood toys, the core consumers age out and are replaced by new consumers, the video game market has seen dramatically little "graduation" of its consumers. I believe the evolution of the technology is key in this. The technology is advancing concurrently with the aging of the consumer. The video game makers are able to retain older gamers by improving the technology at the same

time that they are acquiring the younger consumer when he or she first becomes old enough to appreciate video games.

Looking at the video game market over the last 15 years, it is very easy to see how the industry has been able to retain its consumers as they grow. When the pre-teens got sick of the 8-bit systems in the early '90s the gamers on the older end of the age scale could have very easily "graduated" from video games for more age-appropriate pursuits (in their parents' minds). However these older gamers were retained through new and better technology. As Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis hit the market, older gamers were able to see earlier incarnations as "kid stuff," but thanks to advancing technology, remain loyal video game players. In the early 1990s Sonic the Hedgehog became Super Mario Bros. for college kids. The same situation took place once PlayStation hit the marketplace.

However, I don't think we would have as many older gamers who stuck with the industry through today's systems if the game makers themselves had not had a change in philosophy. I think PlayStation's emergence into the marketplace was a wake up call to many within the industry that older gamers were and could continue to be an important facet to the industry's bottom line. Seeing that the core demographic of gamers was no longer just eight-to-17 year-olds, they started to adjust to the wants of these older gamers. The sophistication of games like Madden and many of the role-playing games, as well as first person shooters like GoldenEye signaled that older gamers were being catered to. Earlier, these games existed in some form, although the sophistication wasn't there to keep older gamers interested.

Today we see this trend even more as edgier games like Halo and Grand Theft Auto are not being created to acquire new consumers, but rather to retain current ones. The need to create

...the  
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titles like these in the late 1980s and early 1990s didn't exist because there was not a demand for these types of games. Today's older gamer is looking for more sophisticated and mature titles and that is why more and more role-playing and first person shooter games are being created.

Looking at today's 30-something year-old gamer, these individuals have likely gone through four to five systems in their lifetime. The fact that both Nintendo and Sony are pouring so much of their marketing and production focus into their mobile devices is a further example of the power of the older gamer. While sales of video game portable portals since the initial Game Boy in the early 90s have been strong, they have been unable to grab this marketplace as many had anticipated. Systems like Game Boy Advance and Atari's Lynx were geared for the pre-teen taking their gaming on the road, but today's Nintendo's DS and Sony's PSP are being marketed as the video game companion for today's older consumer. The same professional who depends on devices like the Blackberry for his or her email are also looking for a game portal that matches the on-the-go lifestyle. Having the younger consumer, while a priority, will ultimately not determine success for these newer portable systems.

As competition between Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft continues to grow, it will be interesting to see if today's marketing overtures to late 20- and 30-year olds continues. I think we very well could be debating 15 years from now which video game maker is doing the best job in reaching the 50- and 60-year old market.

In that case, I already have my copy of Madden 2018 pre-ordered... ■■■■

Joseph Anthony is the CEO of Vital Marketing, a New York-based advertising and marketing agency specializing in the youth and multicultural space. He can be reached by email at [janthony@thevitalgroup.com](mailto:janthony@thevitalgroup.com)

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

If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Helgeson at [matt@gameinformer.com](mailto:matt@gameinformer.com)



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[foxhome.com/psp](http://foxhome.com/psp)



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01

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06

**NEW RELEASES**  
 • Big Mutha Truckerz 2 – PS2, Xbox  
 • WWE Day of Reckoning 2 – GC

PSP moves *Ghostbusters*, *Guess Who*, and *SWA* to release today.

Tom Brady turns 28 today, which is coincidentally the number of touchdowns he will throw against your team this season. As always, your team totally sucks.



**CALIFORNIA EXTREME (6-7)**

Ever wonder what it would be like to walk into a room with hundreds of arcade and pinball machines set to free play? Many people would call this heaven. If you happen to be in San Jose, CA, it's also known as California Extreme.

# august

09

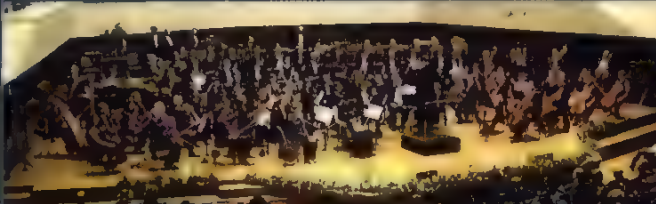
10

11

12

**NEW RELEASES**  
 • Armored Core: Nine Breaker – PS2  
 • Dragon Ball Z: Transformation – GBA  
 • Madden NFL 06 – PS2, Xbox, GC, DS, GBA  
 • Namco Museum Battle Collection – PSP

Although the film is still a ways off, the action figures based on *Final Fantasy: Advent Children* hits stores today. Sephiroth!



Madden NFL 06

16

17

19

20

**NEW RELEASES**  
 • Darkwatch: Curse of the West – PS2, Xbox  
 • Death Jr. – PSP  
 • EyeToy: Chai – PS2  
 • EyeToy: Play 2 – PS2  
 • Gears – GC  
 • King of Fighters 2002 & 2003 – Xbox  
 • Metal Slug 4 & 5 – Xbox  
 • NHL 06 – PS2, Xbox, GC  
 • Pac 'N Roll – DS

**SYMPHONIC GAME MUSIC CONCERT**  
 Held at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, Germany, the FILMharmonic Orchestra will perform songs from Chrono Cross, Dragon Quest, World of Warcraft, Silent Hill 2, Brothers in Arms, and countless others at the Third Symphonic Game Music Concert!

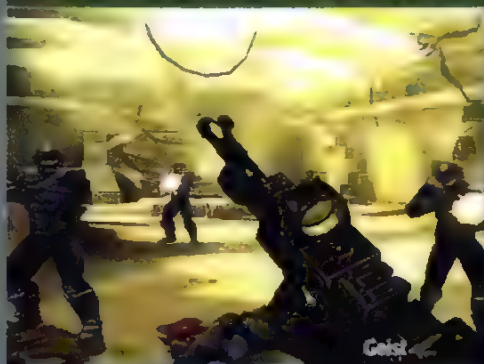


40-Year-Old Virgin

*The 40-Year-Old Virgin* opens in theaters today. If this movie seems like a documentary about you, sign up for online dating immediately.

**CLASSIC GAMING EXPO (20-21)**

Now in its eighth year, this year's Classic Gaming Expo is loaded with excitement! Dozens of industry veterans will be on hand to share their thoughts on the industry, and Messiah Entertainment plans to unveil its new 8-bit Generation NEX console on the first day of the show.



Geist

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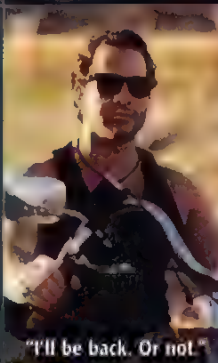
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26

**NEW RELEASES**  
 • 25 to Life – PS2, Xbox  
 • Advance Wars: Dual Strike – DS  
 • Armored Core: Formula Front – PSP  
 • Bounty Hounds – PSP  
 • Dungeon Siege 2 – PC  
 • The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction – PS2, Xbox, GC  
 • Nintendo – DS  
 • Popolocross – PSP  
 • Radata Stones – PS2

Steve Guttenberg celebrates 47 years of trying to score with *Ally Sheedy*. According to Guttenberg, little Number 5 is still alive!

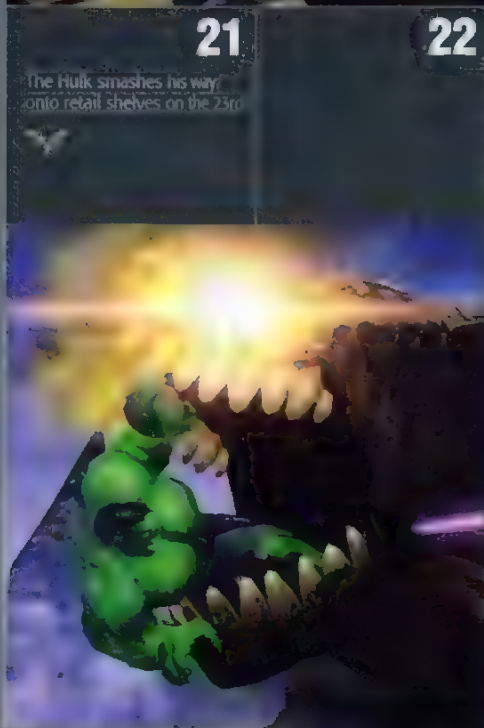


"I'll be back. Or not."

Think-seeking spelunkers team up with the world's best divers to hunt for diamonds in the underground. This sounds awesome! *The Cave* rocks (rocks... get it?) the big screen today.



Super Mario Baseball



30

31

**NEW RELEASES**  
 • Burnout: Legends – PSP  
 • Dynasty Warriors Advance – GBA  
 • Genji: Dawn of the Samurai – PS2  
 • Jaws – PS2, Xbox, GC  
 • Mario Superstar Baseball – GC  
 • NASCAR 06: Total Team Control – PS2, Xbox  
 • Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2 – PS2  
 • Virtua Tennis – PSP  
 • We Love Kataman – PS2  
 • Yu-Gi-Oh: Nightmare Troubadour – DS



Everyone's favorite shark kills tons of people on PS2, Xbox, GC on 08/30

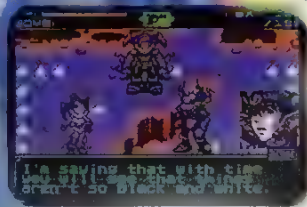
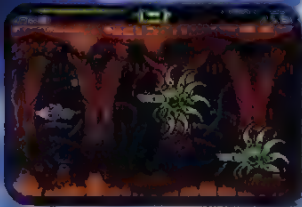


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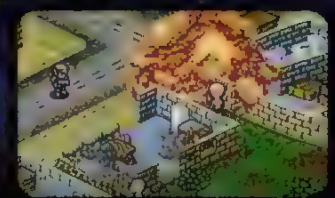
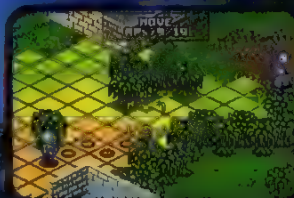
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Peter Jackson's

# KING

HOW PETER JACKSON AND RAYMAN CREATOR MICHEL ANCEL ARE BRINGING HOLLYWOOD'S LEGENDARY APE BACK TO LIFE



# The Rebirth of a Legend

**A**s you struggle against the ropes that bind your hands, the drums of death pound in the distance. The tribe has begun to chant for Kong, hoping the mighty beast might come to take his prize, and let them live for another year. As the smoke rises from the torches lit around the ceremonial altar, a sudden rumbling echoes through the jungle. The ground shakes as if God himself had returned to split open the Earth. At the top of the altar, Ann is screaming, terrified as she attempts to kick herself free.

Suddenly, the rumbling grows louder. In the distance, the trees begin to tremble and bend as he moves closer. Then, the giant ape appears. At the altar, scarred by battle, impossibly large and powerful, stands Kong. The ape stares impassively at the assembled tribesmen, then turns and gazes quizzically towards Ann. For a second, a look of recognition, or perhaps tenderness, passes through his oily black eyes. He does not kill her. Instead, he gently frees her from her bonds, picks her up, and is gone. Shocked, you wonder how such a large creature could move so fast. Suddenly, Carl appears

and frees your hands. Making your escape under a hail of flaming spears, you realize that you're Ann's last hope. And to find her, you're going to have to track the ape through the dense, dangerous jungles of Skull Island.

This is the story of King Kong, the noble, brutal ape who fell in a love with a beautiful woman, and his tragic battle with mankind. This November, Peter Jackson, the director of the universally acclaimed *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, is bringing moviegoers his unique vision of one of Hollywood's most enduring legends. This new film will challenge your assumptions of what King Kong is, and what a "monster movie" can be. Along with Kong's rebirth in film, he's also being brought to life in a new video game, created in partnership with Jackson by Beyond Good & Evil creator Michel Ancel's Montpellier studio. Based on what we've seen of the game so far, King Kong will likely be one of the year's most gripping gaming experiences. Following is an exclusive look at the development of King Kong, and how Ubisoft and Peter Jackson are about to change the way you think about movie licensed games forever.

# KONG





## Anatomy of a MASTERPIECE

The King Kong saga starts in the mid-1920s, when a pair of documentary filmmakers named Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack made a film called *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (1925), which followed the Bakhtiari people (who lived in what is now a part of Iran) on their annual migration to the winter grazing lands. Obsessed with tales of real-life adventure and exotic cultures, Cooper and Schoedsack made a "docudrama" two years later, named *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness*, which merged fact and fiction in telling the story of a tribe in the jungles of Siam. Flush with the popularity of their first two films, the duo began work on a more fantastic concept; one that Cooper hoped would be "the ultimate in adventure."

This saga, heavily inspired by the classic fairy tale "The Beauty and the Beast," told the story of a giant ape that is ultimately felled by his love for a beautiful blonde actress. In 1931, legendary Hollywood mogul David Selznick of RKO Pictures bought the rights to the project, and Schoedsack's wife Ruth Rose (the inspiration for *King Kong's* Ann Darrow) began work on a draft of the script, entitled *The Eighth Wonder of the World*.

Later, at Cooper's suggestion, the film was re-titled *Kong* (the Malaysian word for gorilla), although Selznick

added the "King" prefix to make the moniker more palatable to American audiences. Boasting a huge (for its day) budget of \$650,000, the production used many differently sized Kong models to bring the titular character to life. Special effects wizard Willis O'Brien was called in to do stop-motion special effects, which creates the illusion of movement by taking still photos of small models and subtly tweaking them one step at a time. Even more impressive was the seven-foot-wide model of Kong's face, which was covered in bearskin and operated by six men and 87 motors.

Upon its release, *King Kong* became an instant sensation in a nation devastated by the economic struggles of the Great Depression. Its debut on March 2nd, 1933 in New York at Radio City Music Hall and the Roxy Theater attracted an audience of 50,000 people in the first day alone. The film's release was buoyed by the fact that new President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared March 5th a national holiday to celebrate his inauguration, freeing up the public to see the movie in droves. By the end of the week, over 150,000 tickets had been sold — a huge box office tally for the day.

*King Kong*, in many ways, represents the birth of the modern special effects blockbuster. Although, to our eyes, the film's effects might seem jerky and primitive, they were unbelievable for the time. More importantly, the story was affecting and tragic, proving that an

effect-heavy picture can provoke our hearts as well as our imaginations. Without *King Kong*, movies like *Star Wars*, *Jaws*, and (especially) *Jurassic Park* would likely never have been made. Today, filmmakers like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas owe the team of Cooper and Schoedsack a tremendous debt.

## A Life's DREAM

Years after *King Kong* dazzled audiences in New York, a young boy in New Zealand fell under the spell of the giant ape. A pre-teen Peter Jackson, already showing an interest in fantasy, horror, and monster movies, became inspired to pursue a career in filmmaking after seeing the 1933 classic. In fact, Jackson has revealed that his very first attempt at making a movie was a homemade remake of *King Kong*, done with a Super 8 camera and a cardboard model of the Empire State building.

Not surprisingly, the Kong project has stayed near to Jackson's heart, who was actually close to signing on to direct a remake of the film in 1997, before he inked the deal to direct *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Although he had already co-written a script for the film, the studio scuttled the project because two similar movies, *Godzilla* and *Mighty Joe Young*, were already scheduled to be released around the same time. It's also important to note that, at the time, Jackson was hardly an "A-list" Hollywood director, known primarily for the splatter



classic *Bad Taste* and the strange murder drama *Heavenly Creatures*.

Of course, *Godzilla* and *Mighty Joe Young* were box office disasters, and Jackson went on to massive commercial success with *The Lord of the Rings*, capping his achievements with a win for Best Director at the 2004 Academy Awards for *The Return of the King*. With this newfound clout, Jackson finally had the chance to pursue his remake of *King Kong*, which has finished filming in New Zealand and will release in November of this year.

By all accounts, Jackson is approaching the project in the same manner as he did J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy saga: with heart, imagination, and a reverence for the source material. As is typical for the director, he's also working with several of his longtime collaborators, including screenplay writers Philippa Boyens and his wife, Fran Walsh. As with *The Lord of the Rings*, the wizards at Weta Digital are handling both the CG and traditional special effects. More surprisingly, Andy Serkis, who did the voice and motion-capture for Gollum, will be on-hand to provide Kong's movements for the film, as well as play a human role as "Lumpy the Cook." Reportedly, the fastidious Serkis is so enthralled with Kong that he traveled to Rwanda to observe gorillas in the wild in order to make his portrayal more accurate.

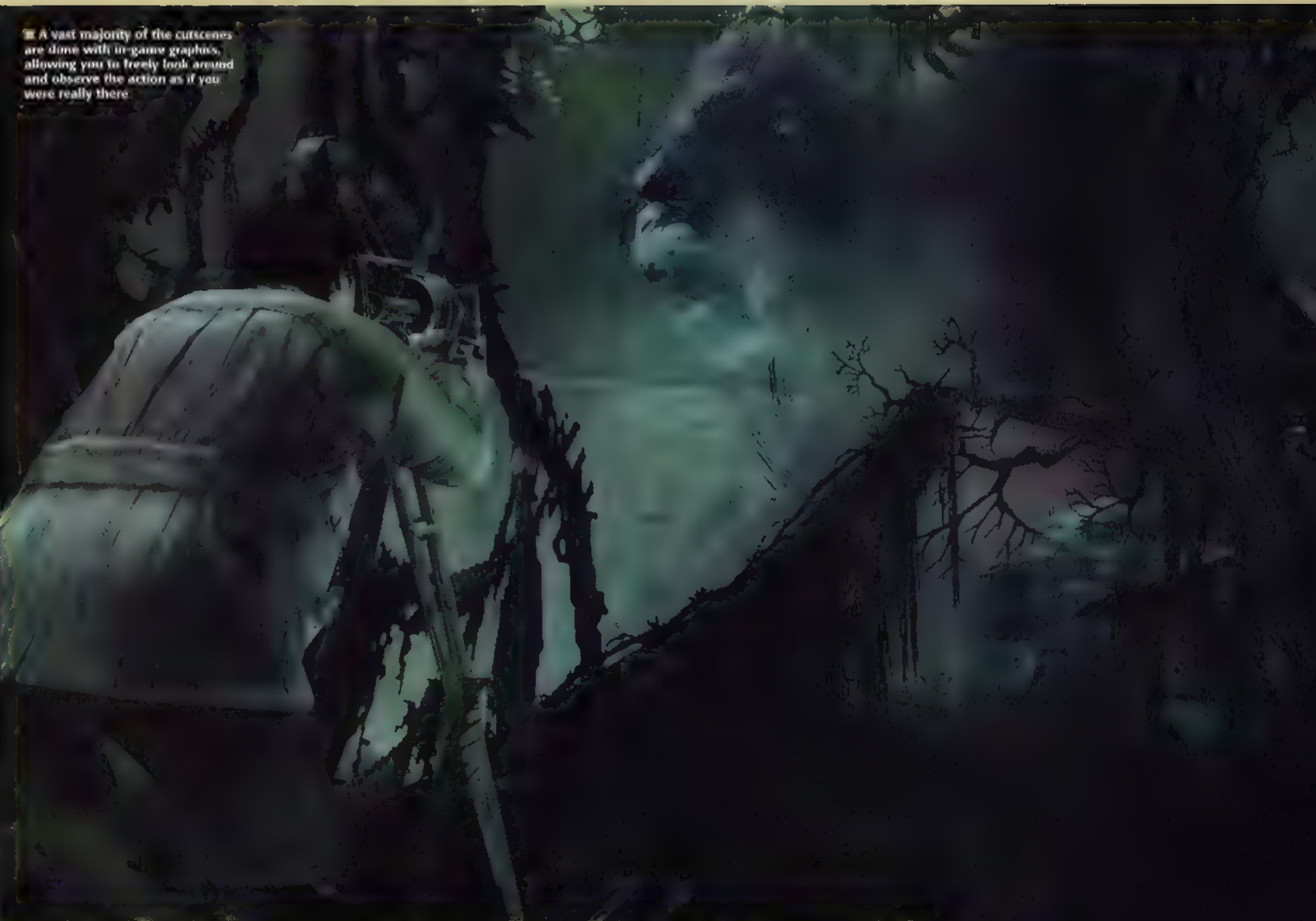
Jackson is a rare director that is as adept at crafting

(continued on page 41)

■ As fierce as he is in battle, Kong is tender with Ann, and you will have to make sure she is safe at all times



■ A vast majority of the cutscenes are done with in-game graphics, allowing you to freely look around and observe the action as if you were really there



■ Kong's battle controls are surprisingly sophisticated, given how simple and intuitive the mechanics are





the human elements of his films as he is with digital trickery. A top-flight cast has been assembled; featuring Adrien Brody (*The Pianist*) as protagonist Jack Driscoll, backed up by Naomi Watts as Ann Darrow and Jack Black as documentarian Carl Denham.

Reports have indicated that the filming has been a massive undertaking, with intricate sets of Skull Island's tribal villages and New York City being built in New Zealand. Weta Digital is promising that the number of special effects shots will outnumber those of any of *The Lord of the Rings* movies. Clearly, *King Kong* is a labor of love for Jackson, who is reportedly pushing himself and the crew to the brink of exhaustion in the hopes of creating an adventure for the ages.

## A True PARTNERSHIP

Given the level of commitment that Jackson has towards pursuing his singular vision of *King Kong*, it's no surprise that the director, an avid gamer in his spare time, has equally grand ambitions for the video game adaptation of the film. While the *Lord of the Rings* games were certainly competent hack n' slash titles, they did fall somewhat short of the grandeur and drama of the movies on which they were based. In hopes of creating a Kong game that will be a masterpiece in its own right, Jackson enlisted the help of another auteur, famed game creator Michel Ancel.

Ancel has long been considered one of gaming's most unique figures, one whose offbeat sensibility has been seen throughout the *Rayman* franchise and the more recent *Beyond Good & Evil*. The latter title, although not a commercial success, was beloved by hardcore gamers and critics alike, and stands beside *ICO*

■ Michel Ancel



as one of this generation's true cult classics. Fortunately, one of *Beyond Good & Evil*'s most passionate fans just happened to be Peter Jackson.

"He contacted several companies [about making the Kong game]," recalls Ancel during an exclusive interview with *Game Informer*. "Ubisoft sent him some games. He played all of them; he really plays a lot of games — it's incredible. He finished *Beyond Good & Evil*, which is a long game, while he was finishing *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. Then we had a meeting and very quickly we were talking about the game more than the movies."

Impressed by *Beyond Good & Evil*'s epic storytelling, gorgeous visuals, and unique gameplay mechanics, Jackson felt that Ancel's Ubisoft Montpellier studio was the perfect fit to execute a playable version of his film. In turn, Ancel and his team have a tremendous amount of respect and love for Jackson's work and the world of *Kong*.

"I think it's great," comments Ancel. "Because the movie takes place in 1933, there is this kind of exotic aspect that we really appreciate in the Montpellier studio. It's an old-time, fantastic island. We are really connected to this world. It's quite easy, because it's not like you have something to do but you don't appreciate the world or you're not a fan of this kind of thing. We are in the same mood. We really appreciate the art and direction of *The Lord of the Rings*, and we knew

this would be of the same [quality]."

Because of the mutual respect these two creative minds have for each other's work, Jackson and his production crew's involvement with the game goes far beyond the usual licensing deal. Periodically, Jackson will be given a milestone build of the game, which he reviews, giving feedback and suggestions to make sure that it's in line with the overall feel of the film. Also, the dialogue and voiceover sessions for the game are being overseen by Jackson's long-time screenwriting partner Philippa Boyens. Although Jackson clearly has a passion for making sure the game is everything it can be, his respect for Ancel's work means that he is allowing the team at Montpellier to run with their interpretation of his work.

"It's less [giving us] direct things to do; it's more the overall way of doing things," observes Ancel. "He told us about the way that *Kong* moves, for example, and the description was so precise that we just had to imagine the actions. He didn't tell us, 'Do these actions.' The fighting rules and all these things, we had the freedom to create them in the right mood."

With Ancel's history of imagining unique and creative universes for his games, one wonders if he has found the process of creating a major license difficult, given the multitude of approvals that guide every step of the development process. Surprisingly, Ancel feels quite the opposite, and hopes



■ Despite the fact that Kong is completely a CG creation, he's very expressive



■ Ubi's Jade Engine, which powers King Kong, is capable of rendering some amazing graphics, even on current-gen systems



that King Kong can show the industry the way to make a licensed product that's both true to the franchise and a genuine work of art in its own right.

"I think that sometimes it can be too easy to translate one game design from another game to a movie license... For me, it's a nightmare to see an incredible character collecting coins or diamonds," he says. "It's very important for us to have the right gameplay elements for this movie."

More interestingly, he feels that the limitations that a license creates can actually spur creativity. "I think a license can be very interesting, because it's a world, a very detailed frame," Ancel comments. "It's creating constraints, which make us think differently. With King Kong, I really wanted to understand the world - it's the last century, so there's no technology. It's very direct and organic and I wanted the game to be like that. So, I think that a license can be a launching point for making an innovative game."

In addition to Jackson's guidance, Ancel and his Montpellier team also benefit from the

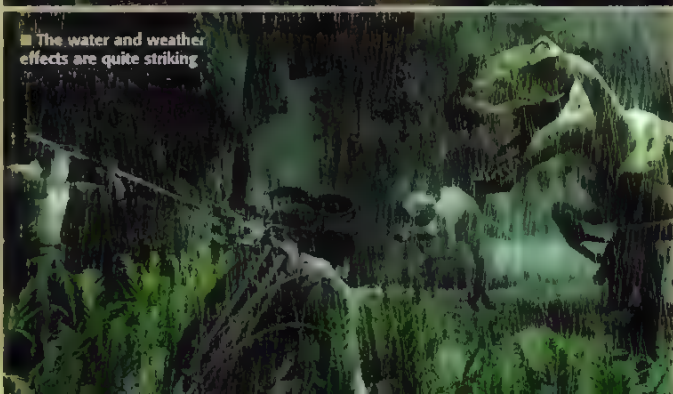
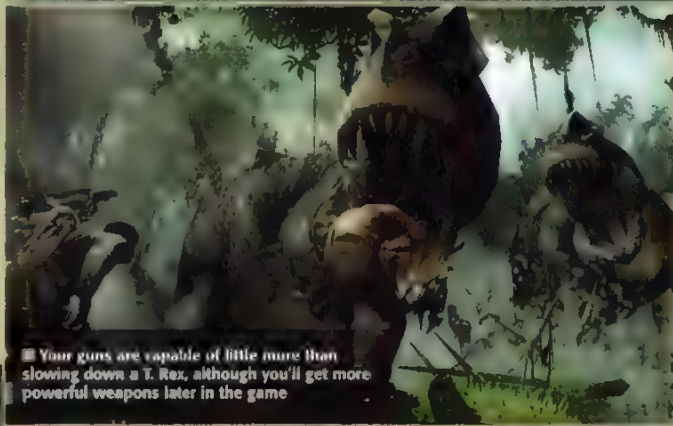
something along the lines of Atari's Godzilla games, an action free-for-all focused on Kong's destructive powers.

However, Ancel has created something very different. While massive action sequences will be at the heart of the experience, like Jackson, Ancel is intent on delivering real, human storytelling. By building the player's empathy for Jack, Ancel hopes to highlight the odd love triangle that is at the heart of Jackson's film.

"You are Jack. You are really connected to Ann," observes Ancel. "There is a dynamic between the three characters, in fact. Jack is connected to Ann. Kong is connected to Ann, too. But Jack and Kong are not connected. It's an interesting emotional system."

While Universal and Jackson have been largely mum regarding the details of Kong's plot, we do know that it will follow the basic arc of the 1933 film (and thankfully ignores most of the tepid 1976 remake that starred Jessica Lange).

*Note: The following paragraph contains plot spoilers. At the outset, Jack Driscoll, crass*



experience of Weta Digital, which is providing the studio with extensive art and technical assets from the film. In addition to voluminous photographic assets of both the actors and sets, digital imagery and characters are being given to Montpellier for them to adapt for its in-game models. Interestingly, Weta is also using the game as an outlet for some of its creative efforts that have been left on the cutting room floor. Ancel tells us that his team has access to several Weta-created creatures that Jackson was not able to incorporate into the film, and many of those will be making appearances in the game. With Weta's help, Ancel is creating a game that he feels will (especially on the Xbox 360) "approximate the graphics of the movie."

## Adventure on a GRAND SCALE

In his search to find the gameplay formula that will best capture the film's spirit, Ancel has made some unexpected choices. When the game was announced, we anticipated

documentary filmmaker Carl Denham, and Ann Darrow set out to Skull Island on a ship to explore and film the mysterious civilization and large creatures that populate the dense jungles. On the island, a tribe of savage natives captures them, and Ann is offered up as a sacrifice to Kong. Strangely, the ape falls in love with Ann, takes her away, and Driscoll has to fight his way across the island, which is populated by huge dinosaurs and other prehistoric monsters, in order to save her. Eventually, Kong is captured and Denham brings him back to New York City to be exploited in a crass media sideshow. Of course, Kong escapes, clearing a destructive path through the city with Ann in his palm. Eventually, the giant is cut down by man's military might, tragically shot down from the Empire State Building by fighter planes.

Ancel, who has seen some footage of the film, feels that "[Jackson is] giving the best of himself to this movie. When we see the work that he's doing, we know that the quality will be there. He has respect for the old movie, otherwise he would have made King Kong in



2005, a new King Kong with hip-hop music and things like that. But that's not what he did. We can see that it's very close to the original movie. It's a very high-quality movie."

Because of his respect for Jackson, Ancel is sticking close to the film's script, although there will be some "sandbox areas" where the player will be able to further interact with the inhabitants of Skull Island and explore some additional content added specifically for the game. In order to increase the feeling of immersion in the story and the environment, the tale will be told primarily through in-game graphics, allowing players to freely move the camera and observe the events unfolding before them just as a real person would.

## A Different Kind of TENSION

While it's clear that Jackson's involvement is helping Ancel create a title that will have all the drama and emotion of the film, the developer, known as one of the most creative in the industry, is doing his part to ensure that King Kong's gameplay is uniquely compelling. To accomplish this, he's conceived an ambitious game

create something of similar quality."

However, one thing is clear: Ancel has not just dropped typical FPS level designs and gameplay into a tropical jungle setting. While played from a first-person perspective, surviving Skull Island as Jack Driscoll is quite different from anything you've experienced before.

The first-person view is perhaps the most intimate in gaming, allowing the players to truly imagine themselves, not as a digital avatar, but as the actor in the events onscreen. Ancel has gone about heightening this effect, making every part of the interface feel natural and realistic by eschewing the traditional video game onscreen heads-up display.

"I think it's creating something different by having nothing onscreen," comments Ancel. "In ICO, for example, you use what you see. Like in real life, if someone is looking in a direction, you know there is something dangerous in that direction. We don't need a big arrow showing you the danger in this direction."

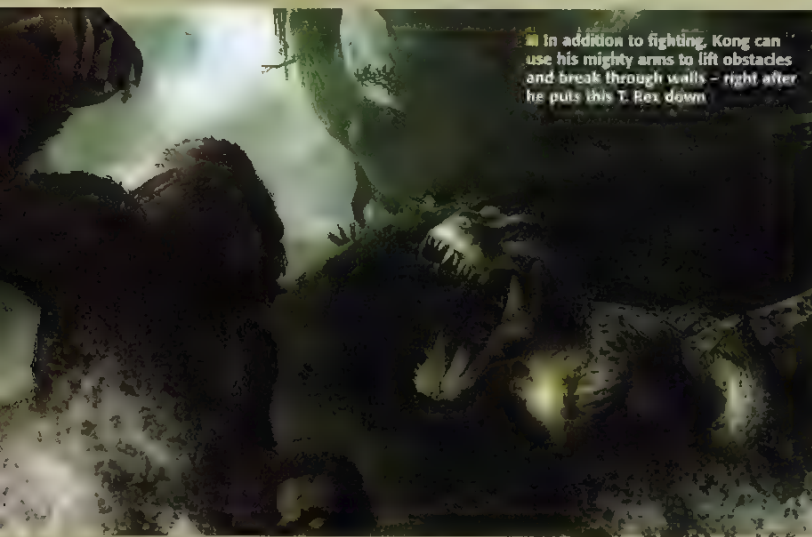
While some might worry that a lack of onscreen indicators will hinder the gameplay, running Jack through his paces assuaged any doubts we might have had. Navigating the gorgeously rendered jungle (the current generation versions run on an improved form of Ubi's

your rifle or pistol. In default mode, there isn't even an aiming reticle onscreen, although Ancel revealed that some degree of HUD may be added by the player in the options menu.

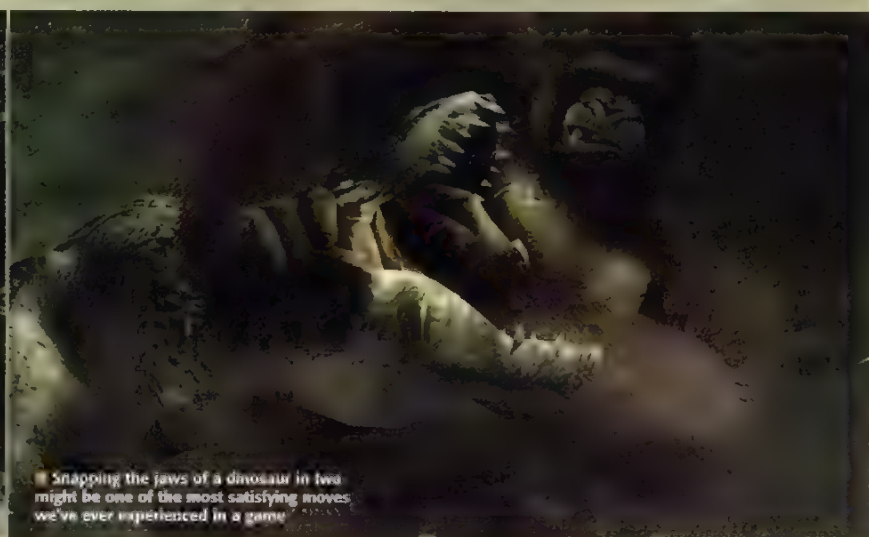
King Kong's break from genre conventions doesn't stop there. Unlike in most first-person titles, Jack is not a superhuman killing machine, capable of taking down large monsters with a simple rifle. On Skull Island, humans do not sit atop the food chain, and you'll find yourself outnumbered and overpowered, surrounded by strange creatures more powerful than you can imagine.

This is not Turok; you will not down a T. Rex with a bow and arrow. In the levels of the game we played, the overwhelming feeling was one of being not the hunter, but the hunted. The dinosaurs are large and surprisingly swift, attacking with lightning speed and deadly strength. In the earlier stages of the game, you'll be able to do little more than survive from moment to moment, distracting and slowing down the progress of the pursuing beasts as best you can.

This sense of dread and desperation pervades King Kong, resulting in many unforgettable moments. Riding a raft down the river, we helplessly shot into the maw of an advancing T. Rex in a desperate attempt to impede



In addition to fighting, Kong can use his mighty arms to lift obstacles and break through walls – right after he puts this T. Rex down.



Snapping the jaws of a dinosaur in two might be one of the most satisfying moves we've ever experienced in a game.

design, one that blends the third-person and first-person action genres into a gripping new experience.

Ancel's most surprising decision was to make a game that is focused much more on the experience of the human protagonist Jack Driscoll than it is on Kong.

"It's like chocolate – if you eat too much chocolate, you don't like chocolate," laughs Ancel. "It sounds stupid, but that's a very simple [concept]. [The game is] 70 percent Jack and 30 percent Kong. Then, it's a real reward when you're Kong."

This unconventional approach has also pushed Ancel and his team into unfamiliar territory: the first-person genre. Although he's known for making some of the finest third-person titles around, Ancel felt that a more immediate point-of-view would suit the movie and the game's tense atmosphere.

"I decided to make it an FPS," he comments. "I really appreciate the fact that the player is controlling the camera and the character at the same time. I wanted the game to have this feeling of 'It's me. I'm exploring and discovering a missing world.'... Halo, for me, was incredible when I saw it for the first time. I appreciate the fact that you can look at what you want at any time, and that it's very rich visually and the action is sustained. All of these things are great features and I wanted to

Jade Engine which powered Beyond Good & Evil and the Prince of Persia series), you find yourself taking note of the small details around you – the lush ambient sound and the meticulously detailed blades of grass you clear out of your way with your hand.


Throughout the experience there are no contrived mechanics or graphics that take you out of the context of the game. When taking damage, you'll see Jack's vision blur and turn slightly red. Health is recovered by taking a rest out of harm's way or by conferring with Ann, who has some healing abilities. Instead of timers or bars that show you are progressing in opening a gate, you'll actually have to drop your rifle and push levers to mechanically open them, or have your comrades do it for you while you defend them from oncoming raptors. Since Jack cannot carry more weapons than a real person could, item management is accomplished through a sharing system, which lets you swap weapons with your companions through a couple quick button presses. Want to check your ammo? Simply push a button and you'll bring up your weapon to see how many rounds you have left.

Even the basic gameplay shows this commitment to realism. Rather than having your weapon onscreen at all times, you must depress the left trigger to raise

its inevitable progress. While our friends feverishly worked to open a door, we ran out to distract the giant beast, blasting at him until he gave chase, then taking cover under a ruined doorway – until the frustrated Rex toppled the arch, leaving us racing for shelter. At the top of a ravine, a hoard of giant bats attacked our party; one grabbed Carl in its talons and flew away, leaving us to chase after him down a dangerous trail crawling with deadly raptors.

Due to the game's 1930s setting, your weapons are older and less powerful than is usual in an FPS – there are no beam rifles to be found on Skull Island. In addition, ammo and weapon pickups are not plentiful, meaning you'll often utilize the most primitive weapon of all: spears. Fortunately, the lowly pointed stick proved to be a surprisingly versatile armament. We quickly became accustomed to the mechanic for picking up, aiming, and launching spears, allowing us to rapidly take out multiple toes by throwing, pulling the spear out of the downed raptor, then firing it into the next adversary in quick succession. The visceral thud of the spear proves to be very satisfying as you land a well-placed shot to the skull of a smaller dinosaur for a one-hit kill. You can also jab the spear to fend off an enemy while you regain your composure, a tactic we found especially





■ This screen suggests that Ann and Kong's relationship is much more complex than that of captor and prisoner.

effective against the enormous bats.

By using the tools you have at your disposal and observing the environment, you'll learn to take advantage of your surroundings. By lighting a spear on fire, we discovered that we could use it to set a patch of grass alight, making the path impassible for the approaching dinosaur. Other times, it's better to let nature take its course. Since all the creatures on Skull Island have their own innate strengths and AI behaviors, they will often fight each other. By leading two natural enemies into one another's path, you can let them fight each other to the death rather than wasting precious ammo. Mastering these organic strategies, based on Skull Island's complex ecosystem, will be key to survival in what is often a harried, tense journey.

This dynamic of tension and release serves to pull the player through the story, making every step of the way seem like a genuine accomplishment — every kill matters in King Kong. After making a dangerous trek through a high mountain pass armed with only a spear, finding a shotgun on the ground feels like an event — a brief moment of godlike power as you effortlessly lay waste to the oncoming flock of bats attacking you. As Jack gains experience, his acumen and access to better weaponry like machine guns increases.

"Jack Driscoll is not a hero, he's a scriptwriter in the

movie," said AnceI. "Everybody's not a hero in real life, but during the game you will become a hero. By the end, you'll be able to do heroic things."

Of course your sense of powerlessness as Jack is contrasted by the experience of playing as the mighty Kong, whose immense size is conveyed by a switch to the third-person perspective, which allows you to take in the grand scale of the prehistoric beasts and the environments. Far from the lumbering beast of the original film, Jackson's Kong is as quick as he is powerful, moving with swift, monkey-like movements, effortlessly swinging through gorges and damboring across vine-covered cliff walls. AnceI has translated this perfectly into the game, creating an intuitive and fluid control scheme that gives the player a sense of mastery over the giant ape's domain. This feeling of omnipotence is important to AnceI, who has made the platforming sections not tests of skill, but moments of pure exhilaration.

"I didn't want the player to fall because of bad execution," reveals AnceI. "It's not a platformer, because in terms of gameplay, you can't fall when you play. Because Kong is the king, and the king can't fall in a hole just because he didn't see the hole — it's stupid for a king to do this kind of thing. It's creating for us a way to play very smoothly with a lot of camera angles without the fear of falling for a simple mistake."

Instead, your challenge with Kong will be to test your might against the most fearsome creatures that populate the lost jungles of Skull Island. As tender as he is in protecting Ann (who accompanies Kong

through much of the game), in battle he is a fierce warrior, attacking packs of giant T. Rex with little regard for his own safety. At this point, the game transforms into a dramatic and brutal brawler — imagine Def Jam Vendetta with combatants the size of office buildings.

In keeping with AnceI's overall design, the basic moveset for Kong is elegant and simple, forcing players to rely more on their wits and reflexes than on complex combos. Although there are only two basic attack buttons, the game's contextual combo trees will allow players to use a wide variety of tactics depending on how the onscreen characters are positioned and their current level of health.

Using his fists like battering rams, Kong throws brutal punches and overhand smashes to his foes. By pressing two buttons at once, he can also throw a hard shoulder block into his opponent, sending a pair of T. Rex flying to the ground. As with every part of the game, the environment will also dictate what tactics are most useful. Swinging into a combat area, Kong can perform a downward smash as he lands, gaining an instant advantage over his enemy. In other locations, the cliff walls are covered with vines, allowing Kong to climb a wall in the middle of a battle, then perform a number of airborne slam maneuvers.

As your opponents lose strength, Kong will be able to tap into a number of punishing special and finishing moves. By grabbing an enemy, you'll be able to throw and push them into rock walls. By pressing the Y or triangle button to beat Kong's chest, he will go into a savage rage, making it easier to perform moves like a bodyslam or (our favorite) actually pull apart the jaws of a T. Rex by jamming on a button, similar to the brutal kills in God of War. In all, it's a tremendously exciting experience, and one that perfectly offsets the tense nature of the first-person sections.

While the sections of Kong that we've played have already whetted our appetite for both the film and



## An Interview With Peter Jackson

Among gamers, perhaps no director other than George Lucas garners as much respect and admiration as Peter Jackson. A generation weaned on role-playing games thrilled to his epic *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the best fantasy films ever brought to the big screen. *Game Informer* was lucky enough to get a chance to interview Jackson about *King Kong* and his passion for video games.

the game, there are so many more possibilities for even more dramatic gameplay that will be revealed later, once Universal is more willing to spill details regarding the plot of the film. In all likelihood, the game, like the film, will move from Skull Island to New York City. The thought of Kong rampaging through a dense urban area, as well as the possibilities for a completely different first-person experience, is certainly intriguing.

### Getting It RIGHT

For all the struggles video games have had in working with major motion picture properties, *King Kong*, along with recent titles like *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*, seem to point the way forward for two industries whose futures are inextricably joined. True partnerships between game developers and movie professionals, much like the one that Peter Jackson and Michel Ancel have formed, will ensure that movie-based titles fulfill their potential as both vehicles for emotional storytelling and compelling gameplay.

Based on everything we've seen so far, *King Kong* will very likely succeed in both these respects. Jackson's version of movies' greatest fable looks to bring to a new generation a timeless tale of love, adventure, and tragedy. Thanks to today's computer animation techniques and the mastery of Weta Digital, Jackson finally has the means to reinterpret *King Kong* for today's audience, while still remaining true to the source material, something he accomplished so brilliantly in his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

At the same time, Jackson had the wisdom to enlist the help of another creative artist to help make the video game *Kong* experience the equal of his film. For Michel Ancel, whose reputation among hardcore gamers has far eclipsed his commercial might, it's a chance to work on a potential blockbuster while maintaining the creativity and innovation that he's staked his reputation on. Together, the duo seems to be on track to deliver any publisher's dream: a title capable of garnering both huge sales and critical respect. This fall, Ubisoft will likely add another huge franchise to its already strong lineup of triple-A titles, and gamers the world over will set out on the ride of a lifetime. ■■■

**What made you choose Michel Ancel and Ubisoft to do the game? What did you feel that they offered over other studios and designers?**

I first became aware of Michel Ancel's work because I had a wonderful time playing *Beyond Good & Evil*. It was a wonderful adventure, it was imaginative and there were great characters. I thought, "Wow, if somebody this imaginative can take that story and actually get me so involved in it, this is the sort of person I'd love to work with on *King Kong*."

Ubisoft and Michel Ancel offered me a chance to work collaboratively and have direct involvement and input into the creation of the game. They have a proven track record of making excellent games that really grab players and thrust them into a dynamic story and this is what was a priority for me in making a *King Kong* video game.

**You've talked about how the future of storytelling has more opportunities in video games than movies. Could you talk about how you think these mediums are different from a creator and participant point of view?**

From a creator point of view, movies are stories controlled and told via directors and cinematographers who are experienced in a passive manner by an audience. Video games, however, have the ability to expand upon that story, give players a sense of ownership and control, and are completely interactive for players. The other major difference between movies and video games in regard to storytelling is that you have a limited amount of time in a movie, while a video game can be a broader, ongoing experience.

**What is it about *King Kong* as a story, character, or universe that attracted you to the franchise?**

I fell in love with *King Kong* as an eight-year-old boy, and if I hadn't seen that movie at that particular time I probably wouldn't be making movies today. I was just so inspired by the imagination, the escapism, the incredible adventure. To me it captures everything...the great escape of cinema.

**Are your goals for the game and the film different, or is one an interactive, extended version of the other?**

One of the great things in working with Michel Ancel and his team is that he understood my vision in wanting the movie and the video game to feel like a brother or sister of one another, but would also bring a new approach that would make it a compelling and unique game experience.

It was our collective goal to have players experience key moments of the film and feel the characters' emotion, tension, and place those key decisions in the hands of the player. All the key film moments will be included, but the game will also include additional areas undiscovered in the movie that will make it a deeper experience.

**How is your collaboration with Ubisoft going? Describe your involvement with the game. Do you suggest gameplay ideas or oversee any other aspect of the game?**

The collaboration with Ubisoft has been going great. We've given the team absolutely unlimited access to every creative aspect of our film production. They've come down here for meetings during pre-production, and looked at artwork. They've visited New Zealand while we've been shooting, and we opened our doors to our art department and digital workshop.

I provide direct input into ways to approach a particular scene or portion of the game to ensure it matches the tension and tone of the movie. In addition, I also provide ongoing approvals throughout the production process as they send me builds of the game, and I play through it and provide my feedback.

**Do you feel like the interactivity of video games is a challenge or benefit to eliciting emotion from players? How do you see action in video games adding to the story you're trying to tell?**

Video games themselves are interactive and therefore automatically elicit emotion from players from both a gameplay perspective, as well as creating a strong connection to the characters in the game beyond that of other mediums such as movies, television, or music. Action in video games helps usher players into the big fight scenes, challenges them to take risks, and pushes the story forward by leaps and bounds. A player becomes committed to the characters and their cause beyond just wanting to make it to the next level and this is where interactivity can add to the story as players become even more engrossed.

**Did you approach the production of this movie differently, with the game and its design in mind from the start?**

We didn't approach our production any differently, but we did give Ubisoft unfettered access to all aspects of the movie process. They were able to take our Weta concept art and work directly with those assets to create the in-game environments, tones, and give the sense of scale and depth.



■ (From top to bottom) *King Kong* stars Adrien Brody, Naomi Watts, and Jack Black



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

▶ **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION

▶ **PUBLISHER** VALVE SOFTWARE

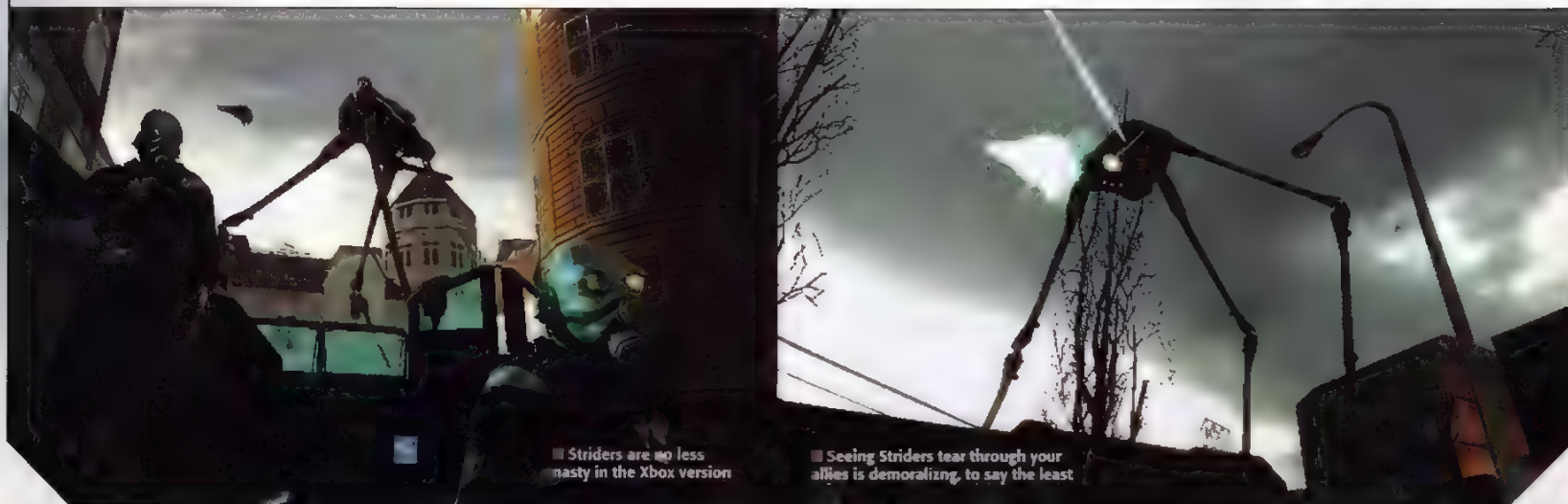
▶ **DEVELOPER** VALVE SOFTWARE

▶ **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

# HALF



Last November, Valve Software released its long-awaited opus, *Half-Life 2*, on PC to critical and commercial success. Though it took several years of development to complete, gamers were more than forgiving once the final product was in their hands. As with most triple-A PC titles, though, the experience was only available to those with \$1,000 or more recently sunk into their machines. This September, the barrier to entry into Valve's vision of an apocalyptic Earth will drop down to a more affordable range with the launch of *Half-Life 2* on Xbox. This is no dumbed-down PC port, however. After spending an afternoon at Valve's posh Bellevue, Washington office playing an early build of the Xbox version and talking to Jay Stelly, senior engineer and project lead on the title, we can offer our full confidence that the game has lost virtually nothing in the transition. Not only that, but Valve assured us that this is merely the beginning of the famed developer's work on consoles.



■ Striders are no less nasty in the Xbox version

■ Seeing Striders tear through your allies is demoralizing, to say the least

# HALF-LIFE 2

## VALVE'S MASTER PLAN

■ **RELEASING HALF-LIFE 2** at this point in the Xbox's lifecycle begs the question: Why not move it over to Xbox 360 and take advantage of that machine's power? The answer to this, as we've already mentioned, is that the game is already looking great. It would be foolish to scrap all of the work that's been done on this version — development of the Xbox port started way back in 2001, and the team has slowly ramped up to its current composition of ten or so staffers, all of whom worked at some point on the PC original. But how in the world is it possible to fit the immensity of *Half-Life 2* into Microsoft's 64 MB console, where the minimum spec for the PC game was 256 MB of RAM?

"A level of *Half-Life 2* takes about five or six Xboxes worth of data, so that makes it a little bit harder. On the

PC we just have that much memory," says Stelly. What this means is that Valve had a choice: spend huge amounts of time and resources optimizing the Source engine for the peculiarities of a console's inner architecture, or simplify the graphics to the point that they are barely recognizable as *Half-Life 2*. Obviously, the developer went with the first option, since it was in no way willing to sully its name with a substandard offering of any kind. But this decision meant that one of the biggest buzzwords of this generation — streaming — had to be applied in a major way to an engine that isn't known for it, by a company that hasn't worked much on consoles previously.

You would assume that for a programmer, working on the Xbox would be far inferior to creating games for high-end PCs. However, Stelly informed us that such is not the

case. "One nice thing is that a bunch of those problems are more straightforward to solve on the Xbox," he proclaims. "We can get a lot more direct control over all of our assets going in and out of memory. It makes a lot of that stuff possible, so we can get consistent performance and consistent response on everybody's Xbox." Basically, the brains at Valve are able to use the fact that every single Xbox is more or less the same to really push the hardware to its limits. In PC development, one must create an engine that will run well on several different configurations of CPUs, hard drives, and graphics cards, which obviously results in some potential performance being lost. "Things get a lot simpler on the Xbox, because we can target just the Xbox hardware and spend all of our time on that," says Stelly. "As an engineer, it's a lot simpler to get what you want."



# FINGER ON THE TRIGGER

■ **WITHOUT QUESTION**, the big unknown about Half-Life 2 on Xbox is whether or not the gameplay will do justice to the masterpiece it is on PC. After all, many gamers consider a mouse and keyboard intrinsic to the FPS experience, citing the lack of sensitivity of a dual-analog control scheme as why they get schooled in Halo. An FPS can certainly be done, and done well, on the Xbox (see franchises like Halo, Rainbow Six, Ghost Recon, and any number of other excellent shooters), but when a title is designed with a mouse and keyboard in mind, some issues remain. How many years passed between Halo's announcement for Mac and eventual release for Xbox?

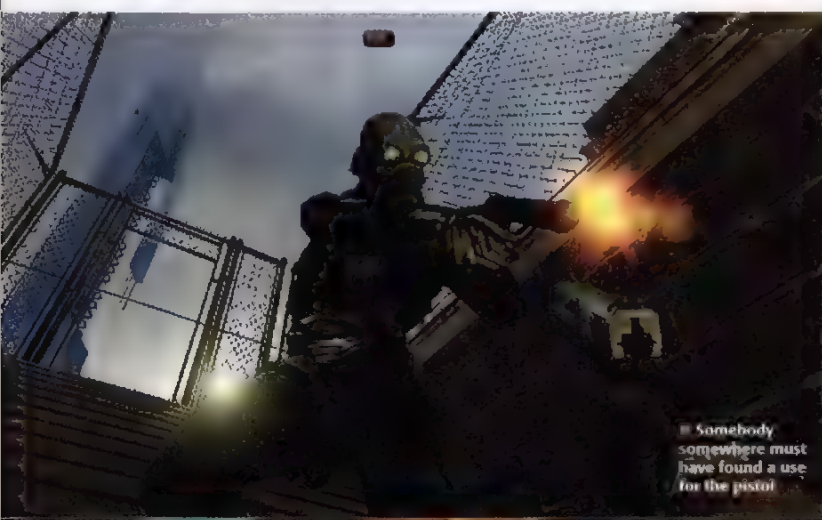
Overall, Half-Life 2 plays pretty well on Xbox already. It certainly looks and sounds amazing, running in 480p with Dolby Digital surround sound. The excellent physics are wholly intact, and it honestly feels a lot like playing the PC version with an Xbox controller. Surprisingly, the nuances of facial expressions that were such a great new feature last

year on PC are still there, and add the same immeasurable impact to the story. Loading times weren't terrible, and should be quite reasonable in the final build, since Valve still has a lot of optimizing to do in that department before release.

A few issues did become apparent after a bit of playtime. Expectedly, the framerate was somewhat inconsistent in larger scenes with lots of ambient things happening – particularly in the beginning of the game when you're still in City 17. Valve was confident in its ability to hold a constant speed of 30 frames per second, though, and given the developer's record of achievement, we're more than willing to give it the benefit of the doubt. Also, the imprecision of movement with a dual-analog scheme made some of the more platform-oriented bits overly difficult. Again, Valve is aware of this common console FPS pitfall, and we have no trouble believing that this will be addressed as well.

Something a bit trickier to solve on Valve's part will be

the pinpoint accuracy required by some of Half-Life 2's puzzles and enemies. It's bad enough to have to use the gravity gun to build a bridge out of rubble in order to cross an electrified pool. Doing it with the Xbox controller, barring some tweaking to the level design and/or control, could be downright painful. The biggest offender, however, is definitely going to be the head crabs. These little buggers are tiny, hop all over the place, and generally make your life miserable. Plus, when you kill a zombie, unless you shot the head crab instead of the body, the alien will disengage from its human vessel and come after you. Suffice it to say that we hope that Valve takes a long, hard look at just how frustrating these things can be. However, as Stelly reminded us with a chuckle, "Turns out we took a pretty long time [creating Half-Life 2], and we got to do most everything we wanted to do." So we wouldn't expect any significant changes to the gameplay.



## PC HALF-LIFE 2: LOST COAST

■ **THIS FREE, SINGLE-LEVEL** PC download is little more than a showcase of new rendering technology developed by Valve. However, that doesn't mean it's not cool. If you have the DirectX 9-capable card, 3+GHz CPU, and 2 GB of RAM that Lost Coast requires, it's an amazing testament to what the next generation of rendering technology can do.

As much as Sony would like you to think that high dynamic range (HDR) lighting is a PS3-only thing, that's not the case. Valve is doing HDR and much more with Lost Coast (and, obviously, upcoming projects as well). Using a technique the developer calls "dynamic tone-mapping," the Source engine's latest revision is able to more accurately mimic the human eye. Depending on what sort of lighting is hitting the camera, the rest of the lighting will be toned up or down, so that dim rooms will appear better-lit and high-brightness situations, like high noon outside, will feature a much greater contrast between light and shadow.

Possibly the most telling point about Lost Coast is that the entire level has only one light source: the sun. The rendering software knows enough about the various surfaces and how light behaves to create far more realistic lighting conditions than ever before possible. You can be sure that any next-gen console projects from Valve will include this amazing technology.

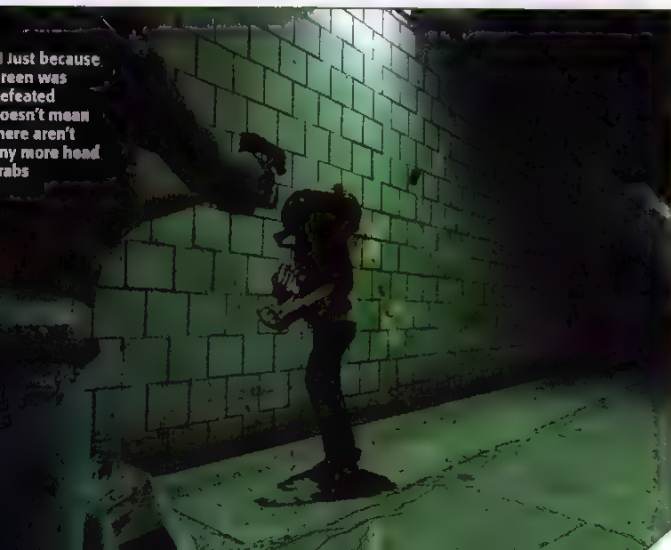






“*Something a bit trickier to solve on Valve’s part will be the pinpoint accuracy required by some of Half-Life 2’s puzzles and enemies.*”

■ **EVEN WITH THESE** minor concerns, we couldn’t be more excited for Valve’s console debut. The development obstacles that the Xbox version of Half-Life 2 has yet to face are far less daunting than the hundreds (if not thousands) of hurdles the developer has overcome in the past. Plus, as a herald of things to come from the company, it brings joy into the heart of any gamer – as Stelly said, “It’s a longer-term strategy for us, bringing the technology in complete form over to consoles.” Even for just this single game, release isn’t the end of the road. Some of the brilliant mods that have come out on PC could even make an appearance. “All that content can move over. It’s not a dead end,” says Stelly, citing the fact that all of the core functionality of the Source engine is fully present on the Xbox. These are leading and promising words, to be sure, but the fact that one of the very best PC developers has long-term console plans is nothing but good news for gamers everywhere. ■■■



## PC HALF-LIFE 2: AFTERMATH

■ **WE KNOW**, you want a full-blown 12-hour expansion to let you explore Half-Life 2’s world some more. Valve, however, has different ideas. Utilizing the power of Steam (the developer’s online distribution, certification, and matchmaking service), the company plans to release periodic movie-priced story extensions. Aftermath will only take three or four hours to complete, but on the other hand will be priced in the eight-dollar range. Initially it will only be available for download via Steam, but plans are in the works to include it in some form of retail compilation package with Half-Life 2 and other Valve titles.

Aftermath picks up directly where the original game ended, with the destruction of the Citadel and the fate of Gordon Freeman, Alyx Vance, and the nefarious Dr. Breen unknown. Since answering questions posed by HL 2 (and creating some new ones in the process, of course) through the continuing story is a large part of Aftermath’s draw, Valve is reluctant to talk much about the story. However, it is known that Alyx will play a huge part in Aftermath’s events, and is the main focus of the title. Also, Dog the giant awesome robot will return, and players will once again assume the role of Dr. Freeman. When asked whether or not Aftermath will ever be available to Xbox users, Valve wouldn’t say anything other than that it’s something they’d definitely like to do. Whether or not it’s practical remains to be seen.



*In simplest terms, life is nothing more than the sum of an individual's choices. While some may be mundane and immediate, others have ripples that will only be seen years down the road. Every day you reap the rewards of good choices and suffer the penalties of poor ones, and though you may feel a tinge of regret for missed opportunities, the best you can do is trust your instincts and hope that you make the best of the diverse options that lay in front of you. At first, this mantra may sound like an excerpt from a trite high school graduation speech, but it is actually an exciting trend emerging in game development that is poised to change the way we interact with our favorite form of digital entertainment.*

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC  
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE  
> PUBLISHER ATARI  
> DEVELOPER QUANTIC DREAM  
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER



# INDIGO



**A**s video games have grown more intricate in recent years, there has been an increasing drive to integrate the sense of causality that comes with making decisions.

However, no titles have been able to capture these subtle nuances of personal choice within the constraints of conventional storytelling. French developer Quantic Dream is hoping to change this trend with its upcoming paranormal thriller *Indigo Prophecy* (previously known as *Fahrenheit*). Created as more of an interactive cinematic experience than a traditional adventure title, *Indigo Prophecy* is a compelling game of cat and mouse, where your actions as both predator and prey shape the malleable tale and drastically affect the lives and well being of the main characters.

The theme of hunter versus hunted is an old one, appearing in classic novels like Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, as well as Hollywood blockbusters like *The Fugitive*. These stories often revolve around wrongly accused protagonists assembling clues while evading capture by a fiercely intelligent nemesis.

*Indigo Prophecy* follows a similar formula, except for an intriguing twist – Lucas Kane is not wrongly accused. The game's opening movie portrays a dingy restroom of a New York diner where Lucas, in some kind of trance, brutally stabs an innocent person in the chest in what appears to be a ritual sacrifice. Though he does not understand his own actions, there can be no doubt that Lucas is a killer. His mission is to piece together the elaborate and sinister plot of which he is now an integral part – and the only task more daunting than proving one's innocence is uncovering the mystery surrounding one's guilt.

The other side of the hunter versus hunted dichotomy comes in the form of two NYPD detectives assigned to the diner murder investigation, Carla Valenti and Tyler Miles, who the player will also guide through the events of the game. Essentially, *Indigo Prophecy* puts players in control of two parallel stories that stem from the same crime: Lucas' search for answers, and the detective's increasingly disturbing investigation. It may sound bizarre at first, but this design choice pays off – especially later in the game as the two paths draw closer together. By placing you in the shoes of both suspect and investigator, *Indigo Prophecy* effectively puts players in the unique position of trying to outwit themselves while simultaneously tracking themselves down. When controlling Carla and Tyler, you will encounter evidence

that you left behind while playing as Lucas. Similarly, while Lucas is under your command, you'll need to be careful not to carelessly drop critical clues that will bring the NYPD to your doorstep before discovering why you inexplicably killed a man in cold blood.

David Cage, writer and director of *Indigo Prophecy* (and CEO of Quantic Dream) observes: "Most video games today are based on repetitive patterns of actions that the player must enter in a specific order or timing, generally to kill or destroy. Very few people have invested in using this wonderful media to tell a story and generate more complex emotions." His vision for *Indigo Prophecy* is to create a game that plays like a movie, providing a deep connection to the characters while also giving players a sense of ownership over events as they unfold. Seemingly harmless choices, like taking a cab versus riding the subway, can have branching paths and even affect the main story arc hours down the line.

"The idea is to consider the story as a rubber band," explains Cage. "It has a start, middle, and end. The player, by his actions, can stretch the rubber band or deform it. Whatever he does, the rubber band is always there. The structure, the pacing, and the consistency of the story are protected whatever happens, which guarantees the quality of the storytelling while offering real differences depending on the player's actions."



# PROPHECY

## CAUSE & EFFECT



**T**he best scenario to illustrate the interconnectedness of the characters' actions is the opening sequence in the diner. As Lucas regains consciousness next to his bloody victim, he slowly realizes where he is and what has happened. Faced with the necessity of escaping a murder scene, the player has a multitude of options: If Lucas simply leaves the bathroom and strolls into the diner, the patrons (including an off-duty police officer) will notice his bloodstained hands. The better option is to tidy up both himself and the crime scene in hopes of buying some time — but it must be done quickly. The off-duty cop will eventually get up to use the bathroom, so Lucas will need to think fast to cover his tracks. He can move the body, wash his hands, hide the murder weapon, and mop up the bloodstains before returning to his table. All that is then left is to pay his bill and catch the subway, presumably getting away scot-free.

After Lucas' escape, players will assume the roles of both Carla and Tyler as they arrive at the scene of the grisly crime. As you guide them to various clues and order fingerprints and phone lists, it will be important to

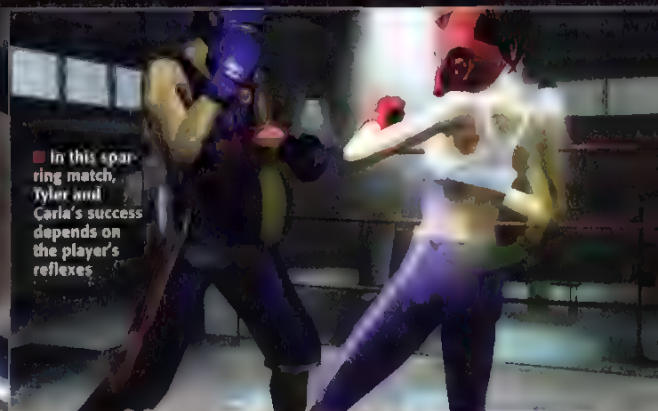
toggle between the two detectives while exploring the area, since each one has an eye for different details — but keep in mind that the presence or absence of certain clues are contingent on your previous actions as Lucas. If you neglected to mop up the bloodstains, that's one piece of evidence the investigators can use to link Lucas to the crime scene later in the game. If you attempted to make a phone call before leaving, Carla will track down the number you dialed. Also, if Lucas casually paid for his meal and left, no one remembers his face — he was just an inconspicuous stranger in the herd. But if he dashed out of the restaurant without settling the tab, the waitress tells the detectives that she will "never forget that face" (which allows you to create a composite sketch of Lucas to either help or hinder the investigation). Even after several hours of playing the game, you will continue to notice repercussions of this pivotal first scene; these traces, all consequences of your own decisions, help to determine when and how Lucas' and the detectives' paths eventually cross.

"There is no wrong choice, there are just different stories. By their actions, players just define the story they want to tell," insists Cage. "Lucas' decisions will deter-

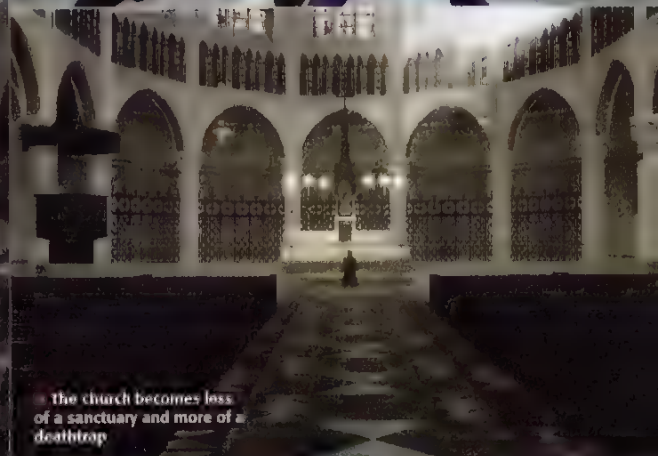
mine the plot and the consequences. Of course, depending on their choices, the players will see a specific scene or another, or may even totally miss a scene." While the concrete results of your decisions could take hours to manifest, there is a more immediate indicator of the impact they have. After some activities, a mental health meter will appear in the lower right corner of the screen, increasing or decreasing depending on how your choices affect your current character's disposition. For instance, if Tyler gets scolded by Carla for turning on a jukebox during the diner investigation, his mental health takes a small hit. Alternately, if you manage to reunite Lucas with his ex-girlfriend for a night of nookie (which requires some deft dialogue selection), his state of mind is understandably improved. While Cage wants players to enjoy the level of freedom *Indigo Prophecy* offers, this is not a free license to act with reckless abandon. Consistently making poor decisions will result in dramatic mental health loss, which can culminate in the characters taking drastic steps — like Lucas turning himself over to the cops, or Carla committing suicide. Even seemingly insignificant acts can add up to disaster.



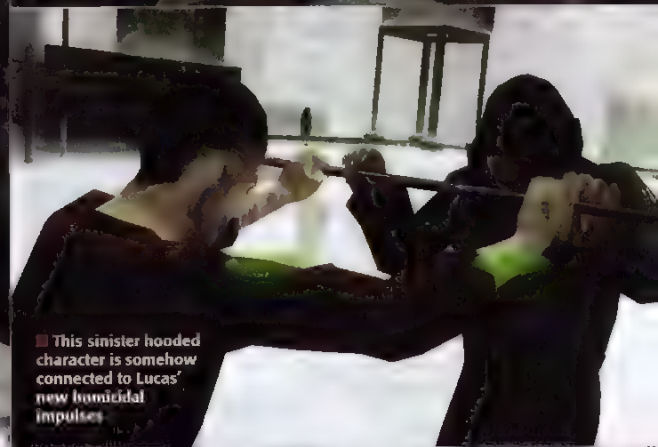
■ Lucas begins to gain supernatural abilities after his inexplicable actions in the diner



■ In this sparring match, Tyler and Carla's success depends on the player's reflexes



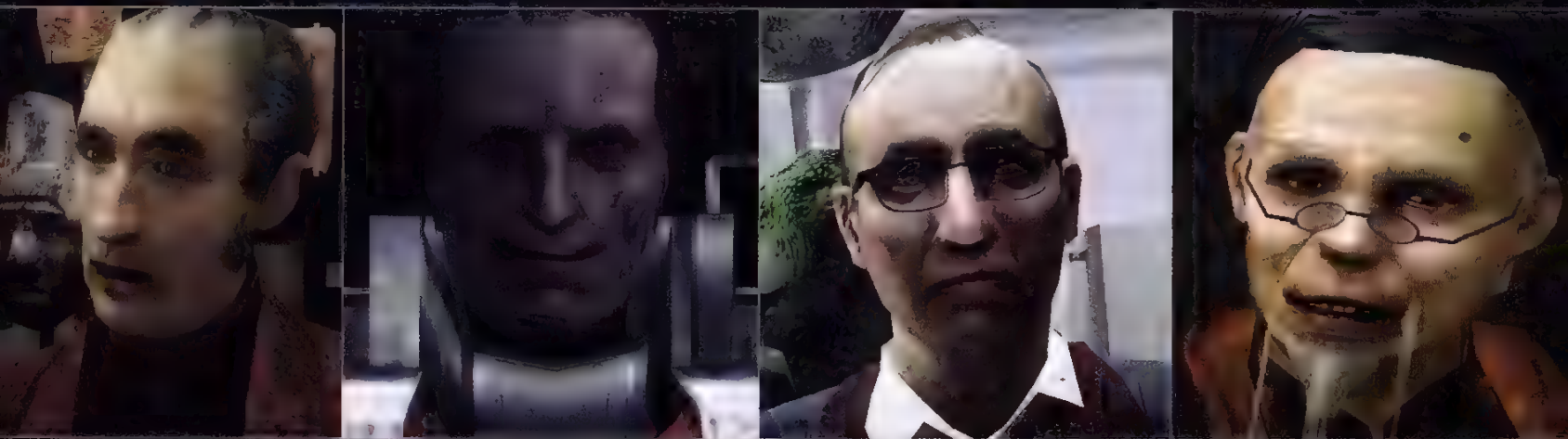
■ The church becomes less of a sanctuary and more of a deathtrap



■ This sinister hooded character is somehow connected to Lucas' new homicidal impulses



■ The police chief is supposed to guide the detectives' investigation, but he basically just hollers a lot.



Accompanying every choice, whether helpful or harrowing, will be an ambient and eerie soundtrack by renowned composer Angelo Badalamenti. Famous for his collaborations with David Lynch on projects like *Twin Peaks* and *Mulholland Drive*, not to mention his work on the recent horror film *Dark Water*, Badalamenti has distinguished himself through his evocative and mood-setting music. "I was looking for something really unique, based on emotion rather than loudness, sensibility rather than horsepower," describes Cage. "I fought hard to get [Badalamenti] on board, because I knew he would bring to the game exactly what I was looking for."

In addition to an atmospheric professional soundtrack, *Indigo Prophecy* also borrows another slick stylistic tool from film and television. After Lucas exits the diner (and at several points later in the story), the screen fragments into a stylish multi-paneled view

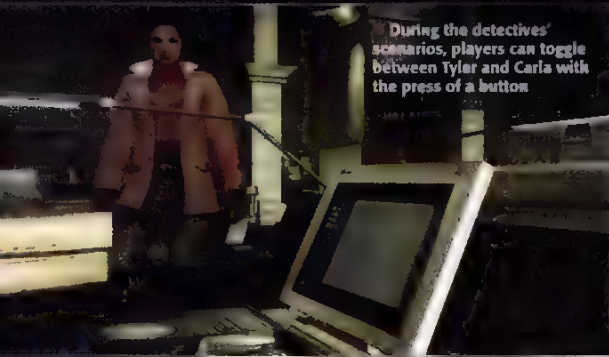
Very few people have invested in using this wonderful media to tell a story and generate more complex emotions.

that simultaneously shows Lucas in one frame and the police officer heading to the bathroom in the other. The technique will be immediately familiar to anyone who has seen the show *24*, and is a visually intriguing way to punctuate the flow of the action. "You can control your character in one window while seeing what is happening somewhere else in real-time," details Cage. "Where other games are using non-interactive cutscenes to show you something, we let you play and watch at the same time."

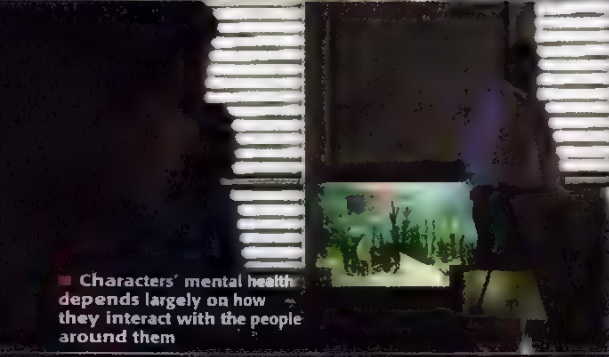
PAR sequences, two circles appear onscreen (each corresponding to one of the analog sticks), and as various directions flash, the player mimics the combination to succeed. This aspect of the gameplay allows you to spar in the gym, escape from paranormal horrors, and even beat a group of surrounding policemen into submission, all without resorting to run-and-gun segments that could detract from the story that is the core of *Indigo Prophecy*.

(Continued on page 55)





During the detectives' scenarios, players can toggle between Tyler and Carla with the press of a button



Characters' mental health depends largely on how they interact with the people around them



This isn't the only type of "action scene" between Tyler and his girlfriend



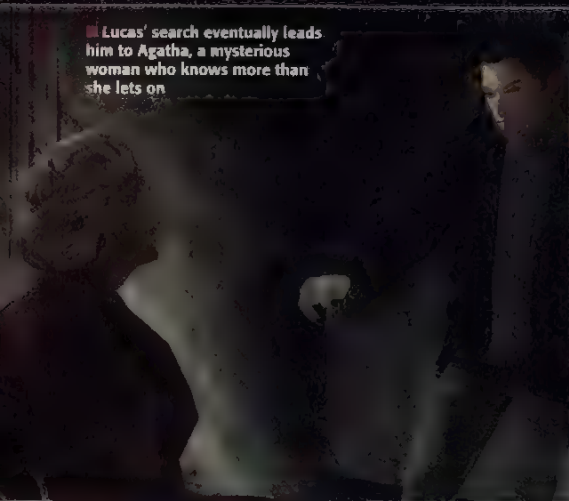
In one segment, you'll control young Lucas as he attempts to save his friends from an inferno



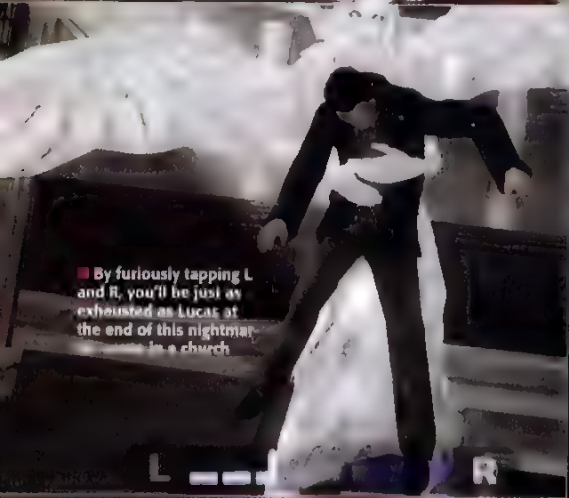
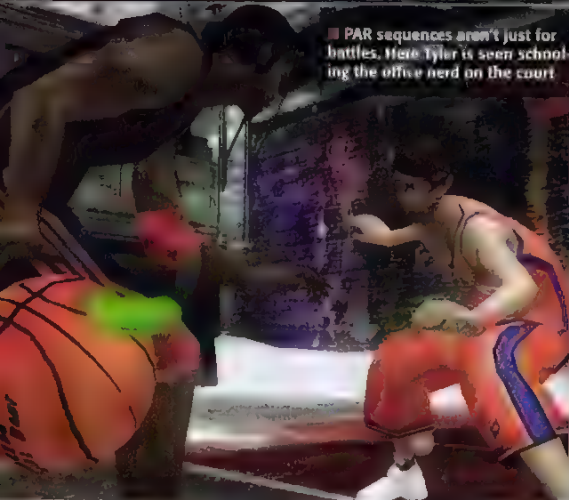
If you thought Neo was tough, just wait until you see how Lucas dispatches this police officer



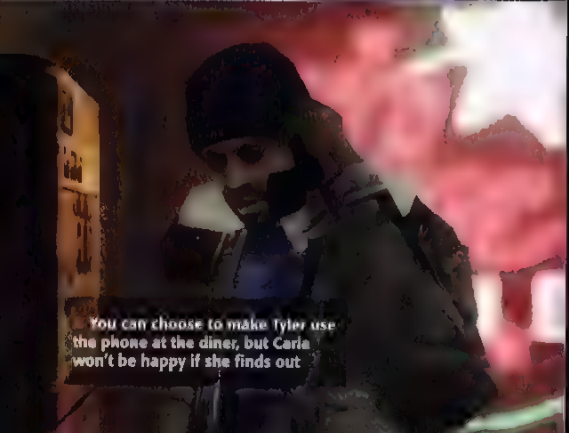
Lucas' search eventually leads him to Agatha, a mysterious woman who knows more than she lets on



PAR sequences aren't just for battles. Here Tyler is seen schooling the office nerd on the court



By furiously tapping L and R, you'll be just as exhausted as Lucas at the end of this nightmare in a church



You can choose to make Tyler use the phone at the diner, but Carla won't be happy if she finds out

part from the PAR sequences, all of the characters' actions are carried out in a rather familiar adventure game style, with one notable change: all interactions are controlled by moving the right analog stick in particular directions or motions. If you are standing in front of a bathroom sink, icons in the upper section of the screen will appear indicating that you can press down to use the sink, or up to open the medicine cabinet. To vault over the top of a fence, you'll need to push right, then continue making a quarter-circle upwards. These sequences are far from arbitrary; the actions are assigned to intuitive and location-specific movements that attempt to convey a sense of actually performing the action.

A similar mechanic is adopted in the conversations with other characters, with one-word summaries of the dialogue displayed underneath the cardinal directions as a timer pressures you to choose your words quickly. While this method of conversation may not allow players to select precisely what they want to say, it is definitely in line with Cage's vision for the game. "I wanted

want any inventory or puzzles, or any of the usual stuff you typically find in adventure games. I only want the player to play, almost in a physical sense, with the story. I want the player to stretch the story, deform it, tear it – to use it as an interactive material."

With so many variable elements, one design challenge the team faced was ensuring that players are never railroaded into a dead end. "You cannot get stuck because you made a wrong choice five hours earlier," Cage assures us. "You may not like the story that you told through your actions, but it will always be consistent." Similarly, though the PAR sequences will happen frequently, Cage believes they will never escalate to a level of difficulty that prevents a player from progressing through the story. "I am fed up with games with an increasing difficulty until most gamers just stop playing because they are stuck. I hope that 99 percent of the people who will see the opening scene of Indigo Prophecy will see the end credits."

Of course, in the world of Indigo Prophecy, even the way you get to the end credits is influenced by innumerable factors. It should take approximately 15 hours to reach the game's conclusion, and even then

There is no wrong choice, there are just different stories. By their actions, players just define the story they want to tell.

the conversations to be spontaneous and fluid," he tells us. "I was comfortable with the idea that you may not always know exactly where the keyword would lead you. I wanted the player to influence the dialogue rather than be in total and full control, browse quickly through the dialogue topics rather than extensively read the lines. It maintains the player's attention – they have to think fast." It is important to keep in mind that this interface is used for more than casual conversations about the weather. In one encounter about halfway through the game, Carla tracks Lucas down to his workplace to interrogate him, and you need to react quickly and intelligently to her queries; if you let the wrong information slip, you'll find yourself staring at a game over screen. No matter the character or the situation, conversing with others requires reflection, an awareness of the windows of opportunity, and the ability to adapt.

This accelerated, flexible approach to the gameplay is a welcome change from the deliberately dawdling pace of many recent adventure titles. "I have tried to break with most of the conventions," Cage admits. "I did not

there are still some surprises in store. Multiple endings branching from various points in the storyline (and dependent on particular actions) are just the beginning. While Quantic Dream is reluctant to discuss the specifics of the tale's climax, Cage does reveal that each ending is distinct, and will "retroactively change your perception of the whole story." This cryptic statement foreshadows a drastic endgame revelation, but we'll have to wait until the title's fall release to learn the details in full.

While it contains many innovative elements, Indigo Prophecy does not herald itself as a gaming revolution. Instead, it is more like an evolution – the next step for a gaming style that has remained stagnant for too long. It channels predecessors like Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers and Phantasmagoria to weave an intricate story that the player can influence more directly than ever before. Adventure gaming is not dead. While it may have been overshadowed in recent years by other genres with better graphics and bigger guns, Indigo Prophecy could prove that this dynamic breed of game still has many stories left to tell. ■■■

## Gaming Goes To Film School

Since Indigo Prophecy seeks to create a cinematic experience unlike any previous title, it shouldn't be a surprise that writer and director David Cage cites movies rather than games as primary inspirations. "My movie influences include David Fincher works like *Se7en* and *Fight Club*, Adrian Lyne's movies like *Angel Heart* and *Jacob's Ladder*, and tons of other individuals that help me to structure my thinking in matter of directing or writing, like Orson Welles (in how to use the camera to tell the story) and Alfred Hitchcock (where the audience knows more than the characters)."

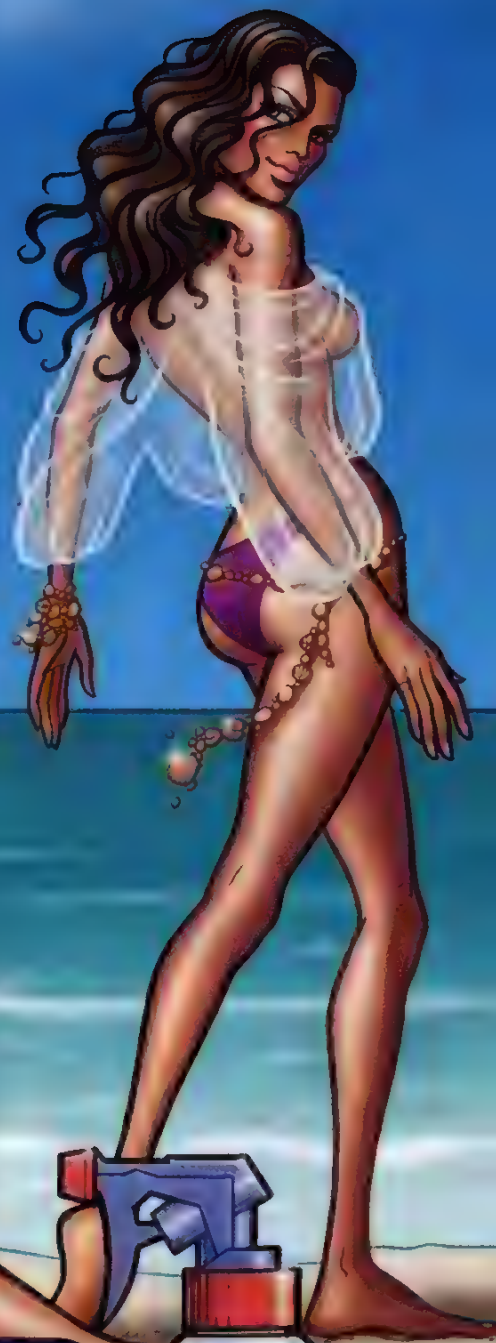






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> PUBLISHER UBISOFT

> DEVELOPER RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT

> RELEASE WINTER

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The screens on the next few pages certainly speak for themselves, but talking to Robbie Edwards, producer of *Advanced Warfighter* at developer Red Storm, gives new meaning to the astounding graphics.

All widescreen (16:9 aspect ratio) shots are from the Xbox 360 build, while the normal (4:3) are from the PC version

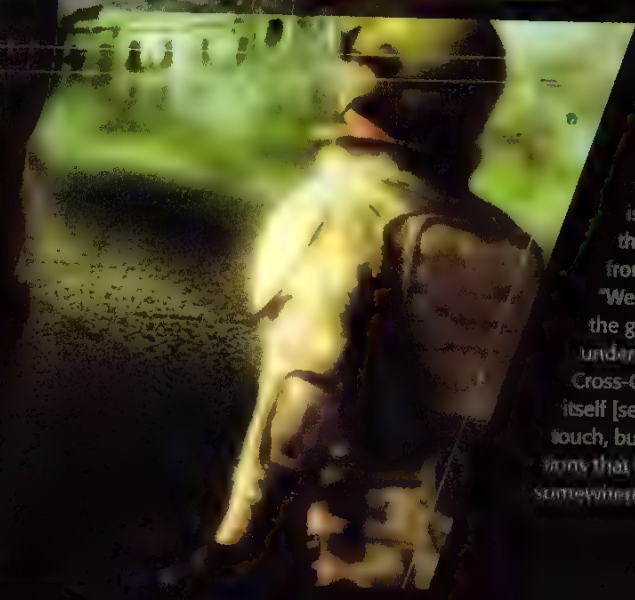
# AT THE GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER





**Y**ou've no doubt already heard about the loading-free Mexico City where *Advanced Warfighter* takes place and the lack of pre-rendered cutscenes or other immersion-breaking constructs within the game. This is just the first step that Ubisoft is taking to ensure that players feel that they're one of the ghosts. The interface, dubbed the Cross-Com, allows the developers to infuse your squadmates with a level of personality previously only dreamed of. "In previous versions, there were only rare opportunities to interact closely with your squad, to see their faces and hear their voices," says Edwards. "[In *Advanced Warfighter* when your squadmate is under heavy fire, for example, he'll be updating you and you can see the emotion in his face and hear his voice." Going hand-in-hand with this improved portrayal of your allies is their advanced AI. "We're adding new capabilities and behaviors to the AI. For instance, team members will do much better in seeking cover, finding, and using cover," adds Edwards. After all, it's difficult to empathize with your squadmates if they're just grinding themselves at inopportune moments.

## THE NEXT GENERATION OF WARFARE



Another thing that the team AI in this title helps with, other than the obvious reduction in swearing at your allies, is in the level design. According to Edwards, "We're looking at ways to improve the AI pathfinding so we can create even more complex and interesting levels. As anyone who's played previous iterations of the series can tell you, that will be a huge boon to players — overly linear, highly scripted level design is the bane of player creativity and in many past cases severely hampered the overall entertainment of the games. But, of course, improved AI is far from the only addition contributing to better, more interesting map design. "We let the players choose how they might attack their objectives and play the game the way that's most fun for them," says Edwards. This philosophy underlines much of the development of the game, from the structure of the Cross-Com to the weapon selection and obviously the layout of the environment itself [see sidebar on page 60]. Edwards informed us of what seems a subtle touch, but which has us drooling at the implications: "All animations and interactions that happen in the Cross-Com window are really happening in real-time somewhere on the map." Combined with the lack of loading and commitment to





Nothing is more nerve-wracking than crossing a big open area.



No matter where you go, you'll never sit through a load screen in Advanced Warfighter.

## WE'RE ENTERING AN EXCITING ERA, WITH ARTISTS BEING HELD BACK LESS AND LESS BY TECHNOLOGY...

Immersion in everything about Advanced Warfighter brings the dream of a truly living digital world one giant step closer to reality.

We've seen how a veteran development studio can use its knowledge and experience to leverage the power of new hardware to upgrade the gameplay of a franchise. A next-gen console is obviously also going to have great graphics, and while beautiful visuals don't make a game good alone, they certainly don't hurt. And the Xbox 360 is an artist's paradise, Edwards believes. "We're entering an exciting era, with artists being held back less and less by technology, able to push the limits closer and closer to what they see in their mind's eye as the perfect visual realization of our game." Other than the obvious increase in polygon counts and resolution, the new hardware really takes the shackles off of the development team and lets them implement their imaginations onscreen. "With the power available to us on the Xbox 360, we can make a no-compromises, no-holds-barred approach to art and graphics," says Edwards. "We don't have to agonize over whether to add specular highlighting, normal mapping, and detail textures to something



A city in chaos is tragic, but at least the rubble provides some cover.

## The Freedom To Defend Freedom

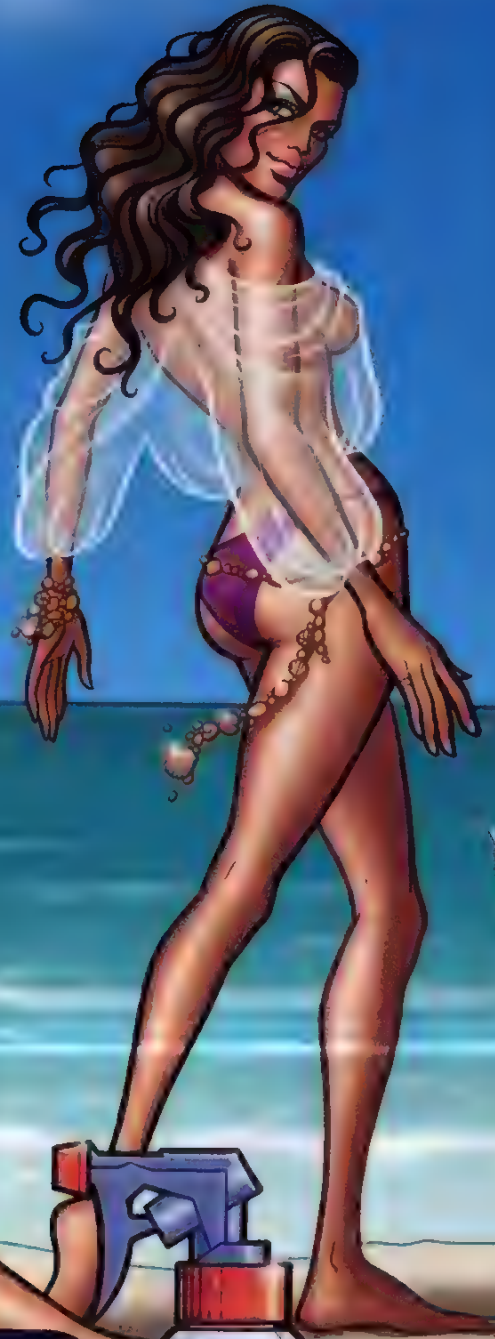
In the interest of allowing players to tackle obstacles as they see fit, Advanced Warfighter will give you a number of tools to diversify your tactical options. Based on what we've seen and heard, the combat will be much more freeform and frankly more awesome than in any previous tactical shooter. For instance, after receiving your objective from your commanding officer, your first step might be to send out some futuristic drones to scout your operation zone. After reviewing that intel (which will appear in a window in the Cross-Com), you can deploy your squad accordingly. Also, you have the option to call in both near support (other squads) and far support (airstrikes). As the operation progresses, you'll be able to monitor both your teammates' status and that of any support you radioed for through both their voice transmissions and visual feeds (which again display in a separate window in your Cross-Com). Speaking for ourselves, we can't wait to watch from a plane's-eye camera as the enemy emplacements get bombarded into rubble. Using the cover provided by the environment or creating your own via gorgeous-looking smoke grenades, the outcome of the mission will depend both on your tactical decisions and your skill with a rifle. That, and the grenades, explosive charges, pistols, and other toys a Ghost carries into battle, of course.





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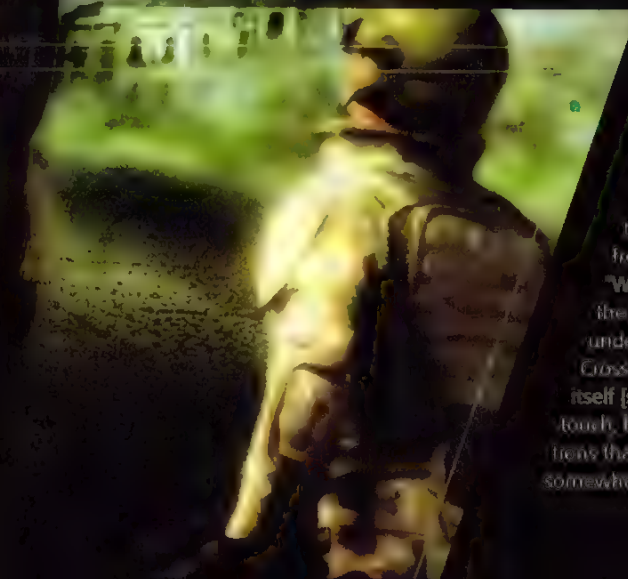
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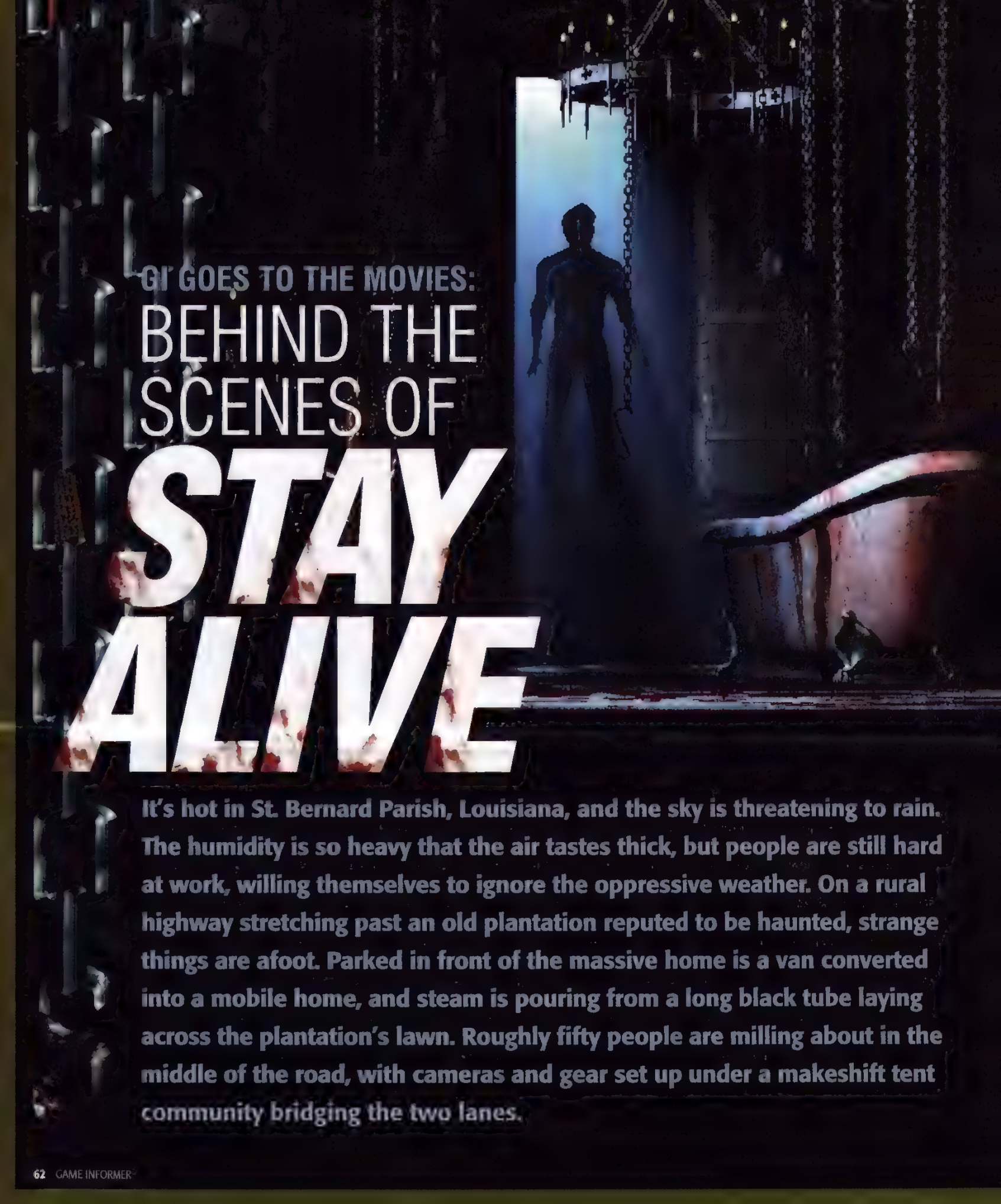


we just do it. Everywhere, for everything." What was once a buzzword for companies to tout what their product contained is now the baseline for a triple-A title. And that does nothing but bode well for what lies in store for gamers.

Besides making this an incredible-looking game, it helps the design as well. Edwards promised more of everything gamers have already seen in this generation — destructible environments, weather effects that actually impact gameplay, and a more realistic stealth and detection system. Layer these on top of what the Ghost Recon franchise is already known for, and you know that Ubisoft and Red Storm have something special brewing. The intense action, suspenseful anti-terrorist special forces operations, and tactical squad-based problem solving certainly aren't going anywhere. All indications point to Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter being innovative as well as smoother, prettier, and bigger than anything we've seen in the genre before — and what more can you really ask for out of a next-gen game? ■■■■



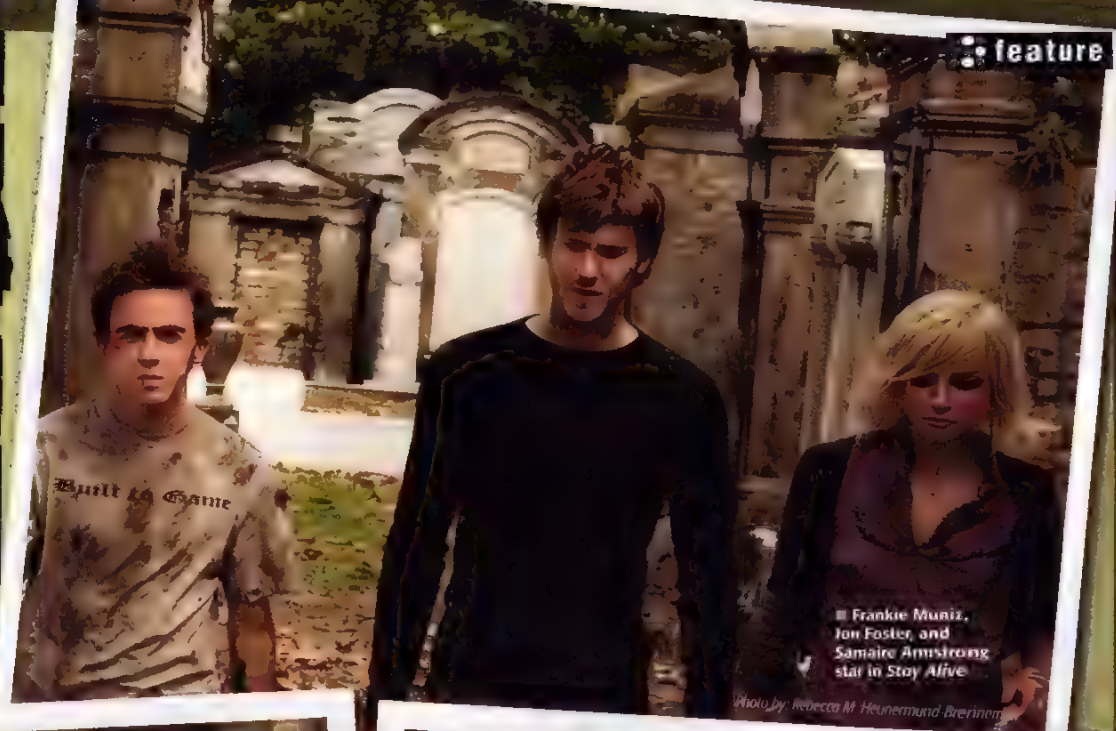




GI GOES TO THE MOVIES:  
BEHIND THE  
SCENES OF  
**STAY  
ALIVE**

It's hot in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, and the sky is threatening to rain. The humidity is so heavy that the air tastes thick, but people are still hard at work, willing themselves to ignore the oppressive weather. On a rural highway stretching past an old plantation reputed to be haunted, strange things are afoot. Parked in front of the massive home is a van converted into a mobile home, and steam is pouring from a long black tube laying across the plantation's lawn. Roughly fifty people are milling about in the middle of the road, with cameras and gear set up under a makeshift tent community bridging the two lanes.





The unusual scene unfolding on this Louisiana roadway is part of the location shooting for a new horror film entitled *Stay Alive*, scheduled for release in the early part of next year. The day's shooting primarily revolves around the van, and over the course of the day the film crew captures actors in and around the vehicle, picking up shots for several different scenes. Most of them feature Frankie Muniz, best known for the title role in *Mean Girls in the Middle*. But it's the chief prop that Muniz interacts with in these shots that initially catches our eye: a one-of-a-kind Alienware laptop. In these scenes, Muniz is advising his friends by playing a game on the laptop — a game called *Stay Alive*.

Gamers are used to hearing about the fusion of the video game industry and Hollywood; it seems that every month another high-profile actor lends his or her voice to a video game, or another title releases in conjunction with a big-budget action flick. We've

even seen a handful of films based on games. But to date, the world hasn't seen a movie about games that really understands gamer culture. The crew behind *Stay Alive* is about to change that.

Written by director William Brent Bell and producer Matthew Peterman, *Stay Alive* involves a group of avid gamers who are invited to beta test a new survival horror game bearing the same title as the film. A next-generation game with dark and bloody action, the characters are all too happy to play the game, until they start noticing a

sinister link between the game and the real world. As characters die in the game, the players turn up dead, murdered in the same way as their avatars expired in the virtual realm. The friends must solve the mystery of the game and figure out how it ties into the real world, all while trying to defend themselves from a malevolent force preying on those around them.

Both gamers and horror movie aficionados are notoriously fickle, and don't react well to those they perceive as outsiders trying to bluff their way into these genres. Bell and Peterman understand this well — they're both gamers and horror fans themselves. Both cite the *Fatal Frame* and *Resident Evil* franchises as some of their favorite games, and are clearly well-versed in video game culture. Peterman proclaims his love for titles like *Unreal Tournament*, and Bell states that he's been a gamer since the days of the *Odyssey*, the first home game console ever released.

The idea for *Stay Alive* germinated with another script the duo wrote

together about video games, which was purchased but never produced. Wanting to try again to bring their love of games to the big screen, they waited a few years until games starting getting more mainstream attention, then began shopping *Stay Alive* around Hollywood. A few investors hopped on board immediately, and before long the project was picked up by Spyglass Entertainment, the producers of such films as *The Sixth Sense*, *Seabiscuit*, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The strength of the script attracted actors like Muniz, who passed up films offering bigger parts and higher pay to be involved. The cast quickly grew to include actors like Jon Foster (*Life As We Know It*, *The Door in the Floor*), and Samaire Armstrong (*Entourage*, *The O.C.*), both of whom were on-hand to film scenes during our visit. Although they were not present on the set, the rest of the cast includes Sophia Bush (*One Tree Hill*), Adam Goldberg (*Saving Private Ryan*), Jimmi Simpson (*Herbie: Fully Loaded*), and more.

**“For the movie, we’re creating this next-generation game...”**





■ Frank Muniz stars as 'Swink'

**M**any of the cast members are as enthusiastic about video games as Bell and Peterman. Lead actor Jon Foster told us that video games are the best thing to have while shooting since there can be so much down time between shots. He cites *Rainbow Six*, *Halo 2*, and *Manhunt* amongst his favorites, but says that "nothing will ever beat *Bust-A-Move*." Foster plays Hutch, the male lead who deals with the hardships of life by escaping into the world of video games. Together with the other characters in the movie, Hutch spends large chunks of time playing games and looks at it like a social activity. This feeling carried over behind the scenes as well. "I just bought *God of War*," Foster says. "And Jimmi Simpson stole it from me! I bought it here while we were shooting, and Jimmi took it from me and started playing it. And then he left and took it with him. But he left his EyeToy, which is almost as cool."

During our conversation with Foster, he lists *The Punisher*, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *Jak 3*, and even *Spyro the Dragon* as games he's played recently, and had plenty of questions for us about the next round of video game consoles. It's obvious to us that Foster is a perfect choice to play a video game-loving character, and Frankie Muniz displayed a similar enthusiasm for gaming. "I play any sports game, any basketball game, any racing game," says Muniz. "Racing is my passion in real life, so *Project Gotham 2* and *Need for Speed and Gran Turismo 4*—anything that involves cars I can play for days. I always play on the set, because you have a lot of free time. I played *NFL Fever '04* for like seven months straight. I find one game and I just stick with it for a long time." Gaming is an even more critical part of his character in the film, says Muniz. "He's smart, and kinda nerdy. He could be at MIT, but gaming is his life. It's all he thinks about."

Out of the three actors we spoke with, Samaire Armstrong is the only one who doesn't consider herself a gamer, but appropriately, neither does her character. "Fortunately for me, she's never gamed either!" Armstrong tells us. Despite her lack of gaming experience, Armstrong admires many aspects of gamer culture, including the mixture of camaraderie and competition, and the astounding lengths some gamers go to in tricking out their custom PCs.

Even standing in the middle of the blocked-off road in the sultry weather, the love of video games is all around us. While filming his scenes, Muniz wears a jacket with the iconic *Super Mario Bros.* 1-Up mushroom, and several members of the crew pull us aside to ask us about next-gen consoles, get our take on the changes in *Star Wars Galaxies*, and inquire about what E3 was like. The crew is obviously excited about the project, and spirits on the set are high despite the grueling pace of the production and the uncomfortable weather. The electricians on the staff have all shown up to the set in Hawaiian shirts, shorts, fake moustaches, and aviator sunglasses—<sup>2</sup> they have each dressed up as *Magnum P.I.* in honor of what they are calling "Tom Selleck Tuesday."

For the electricians and everyone else on set that day, *Stay Alive* is a labor of love. Not just a love of video games, but a love of horror movies as well. Everyone we ask, from the actors to the producers, cites intelligent films like *The Ring* and *The Exorcist* as inspiration and claims that, despite the young cast, they're not inter-

ested in making a "teen" horror movie. Every death scene is elaborate and gory, and a sense of dread and tension is the goal rather than a series of cheap shocks. William Brent Bell, Matthew Peterson, and the cast and crew want to make an intelligent, scary film about a video game, but that's not all they hope to do—they want to actually make the game itself.

Any movie about a video game obviously has to feature shots of said game, and *Stay Alive* should feature a significant amount of such footage. Not wanting the title game to look dated, the crew worked with the digital effects house Pixel Liberation Front to create assets for the game that would look comparable to the next-gen PC and console games that will be on the market by the time *Stay Alive* hits theaters. To ensure that the game didn't look too good (or not good enough), the crew consulted several renowned game creators, eventually settling on Epic's Cliff Bleszinski as their chief game consultant. Known as much for his outspoken ways as his work on the *Unreal* games and *Gears of War*, Bleszinski lent his expertise to make sure that the game shown on the big screen looks like a title that gamers could play at home. And hopefully, they will.

Although it's still in the planning stages, everyone involved in the film hopes to have the video game the characters play in the movie available for purchase around the same time the film hits DVD. Bell and Peterson would love to have the game in stores when the movie initially hits theaters, but realize that few studios would be willing to finance a game based on a medium-budget horror film before it has been proven at the box office. But given the subject matter of the film, the involvement of video game professionals, and the creation of many crucial digital assets for the film, they're confident and hopeful the game will come eventually. "For the movie, we're creating this next-generation game," says Bell. "It looks almost photo-real. We're creating all these pieces for the movie, and we're working in concert with people in the industry. And hopefully, we'll have a demo level to release with the movie. And when the DVD releases, we'll have the full game. There are so many cool opportunities with these two mediums to do something really great."

"We're hoping this whole thing will be something different and unique, but at the same time not so out there that it's not something that people don't want to see," Bell continues. "We hope that the horror audience digs it, and we hope that the video game audience digs it." With video games becoming a larger and larger part of the pop culture landscape with each passing year, this fusion of movies and games was inevitable. But we're happy to report that based on our time with the cast and crew of *Stay Alive*, it's clear that this isn't a case of a movie studio trying to latch onto a trend to make a buck. Everyone involved in the film seems to genuinely understand and share the love of gaming, and that will hopefully translate to the big screen. By respecting the intelligence of both video game and horror movie fans, the crew of *Stay Alive* is creating a film that should appeal to both, while also drawing in a wider audience. Films based on games may have a bad track record so far, but it looks like movies about games are primed for a bright future indeed. ■ ■ ■



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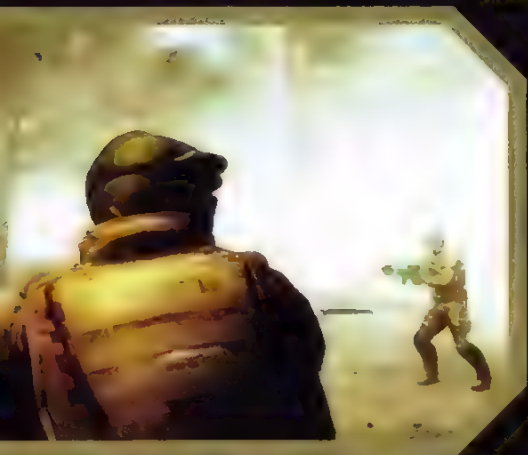
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> DEVELOPER RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT

> RELEASE WINTER

Ubisoft's Tom Clancy-inspired series, *Ghost Recon* and *Rainbow Six*, are virtually a genre unto themselves. Barring the odd competitor (Sony's *SOCOM* springs to mind), those two franchises have immersed millions of gamers in realistic modern warfare settings and provided various flavors of tactical, squad-based action on a consistent basis for the last seven years. With the impending launch of new console hardware in the form of the Xbox 360, *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* will take Clancy's tone universe to the next level. Though versions will appear on current platforms, the power of the Xbox 360 paves the way for real innovation in this long-established genre.



The screens on the next few pages certainly speak for themselves, but talking to Robbie Edwards, producer of *Advanced Warfighter* at developer Red Storm, gives new meaning to the astounding graphics.

All widescreen (16:9 aspect ratio) shots are from the Xbox 360 build, while the normal (4:3) are from the PC version.

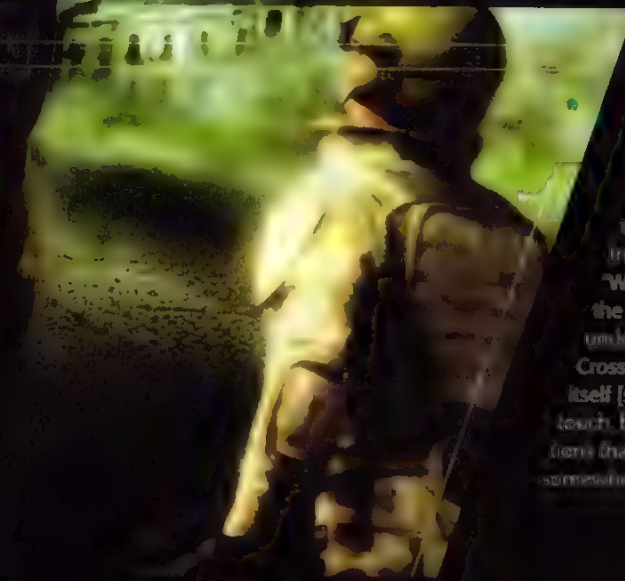


# THE TENSE GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER



**Y**ou've no doubt already heard about the loading-free Mexico City where *Advanced Warfighter* takes place and the lack of pre-rendered cutscenes or other immersion-breaking constructs within the game. This is just the first step that Ubisoft is taking to ensure that players truly feel that they're one of the Ghosts. The interface, dubbed the Cross-Com, allows the developers to infuse your teammates with a level of personality previously only dreamed of. "In previous versions, there were only rare opportunities to interact closely with your squad, to see their faces and hear their voices," says Edwards. "[In *Advanced Warfighter*] when your squadmate is under heavy fire, for example, he'll be updating you and you can see the emotion in his face and hear his voice." Going hand-in-hand with this improved portrayal of your allies is their advanced AI. "We're adding new capabilities and behaviors to the AI. For instance, team members will do much better in seeking, finding, and using cover," adds Edwards. After all, it's difficult to empathize with your squadmates if they insist on grenading themselves at inopportune moments.

## THE NEXT GENERATION OF WARFARE



Another thing that the team AI in this title helps with, other than the obvious reduction in swearing at your allies, is in the level design. According to Edwards, "We're looking at ways to improve the AI pathfinding so we can create even more complex and interesting levels." As anyone who's played previous iterations of the series can tell you, this will be a huge boon to players—overly linear, highly scripted level design is the bane of player creativity and in many past cases severely hampered the overall entertainment of the games. But, of course, improved AI is far from the only addition contributing to better, more interesting map design. "We let the players choose how they might attack their objectives and play the game the way that's most fun for them," says Edwards. This philosophy underlies much of the development of the game, from the structure of the Cross-Com to the weapon selection and obviously the layout of the environment itself [see sidebar on page 60]. Edwards informed us of what seems a subtle touch, but which has us drooling at the implications: "All animations and interactions that happen in the Cross-Com window are really happening in real time, somewhere on the map." Combined with the lack of loading and commitment to





"WE'RE ENTERING AN EXCITING ERA, WITH ARTISTS BEING HELD BACK LESS AND LESS BY TECHNOLOGY..."

immersion in everything about Advanced Warfighter, this brings the dream of a truly living digital world one giant step closer to reality.

We've seen how a veteran development studio can use its knowledge and experience to leverage the power of new hardware to upgrade the gameplay of a franchise. A next-gen console is obviously also going to have great graphics, and while beautiful visuals can't make a game good alone, they certainly don't hurt. And the Xbox 360 is an artist's paradise, Edwards believes. "We're entering an exciting era, with artists being held back less and less by technology, able to push the limits closer and closer to what they see in their mind's eye as the perfect visual realization of our game." Other than the obvious increase in polygon counts and resolution, the new hardware really takes the shackles off of the development team and lets them implement their imaginations onscreen. "With the power available to us on the Xbox 360, we can take a no-compromises, no-holds-barred approach to art and graphics," says Edwards. "We don't have to agonize over whether to add some ambient lighting, normal mapping, and detail textures to something



## The Freedom To Defend Freedom

In the interest of allowing players to tackle obstacles as they see fit, Advanced Warfighter will give you a number of tools to diversify your tactical options. Based on what we've seen and heard, the combat will be much more freeform and frankly more awesome than in any previous tactical shooter. For instance, after receiving your objective from your commanding officer, your first step might be to send out some futuristic drones to scout your operation zone. After reviewing that intel (which will appear in a window in the Cross-Com), you can deploy your squad accordingly. Also, you have the option to call in both near support (other squads) and far support (airstrikes). As the operation progresses, you'll be able to monitor both your teammates' status and that of any support you radioed for through both their voice transmissions and visual feeds (which again display in a separate window in your Cross-Com). Speaking for ourselves, we can't wait to watch from a plane's-eye camera as the enemy emplacements get bombarded into rubble. Using the cover provided by the environment or creating your own via gorgeous-looking smoke grenades, the outcome of the mission will depend both on your tactical decisions and your skill with a rifle. That, and the grenades, explosive charges, pistols, and other toys a Ghost carries into battle, of course.







■ The title's advanced lighting engine will certainly provide ample concealment.

60



■ The President has been kidnapped. Are you a hard enough Ghost to rescue the President?

60



■ In this case, the window in the upper left is giving you a live video feed from a teammate.



■ No one will ever accuse Advanced Warfighter of underusing light bloom.

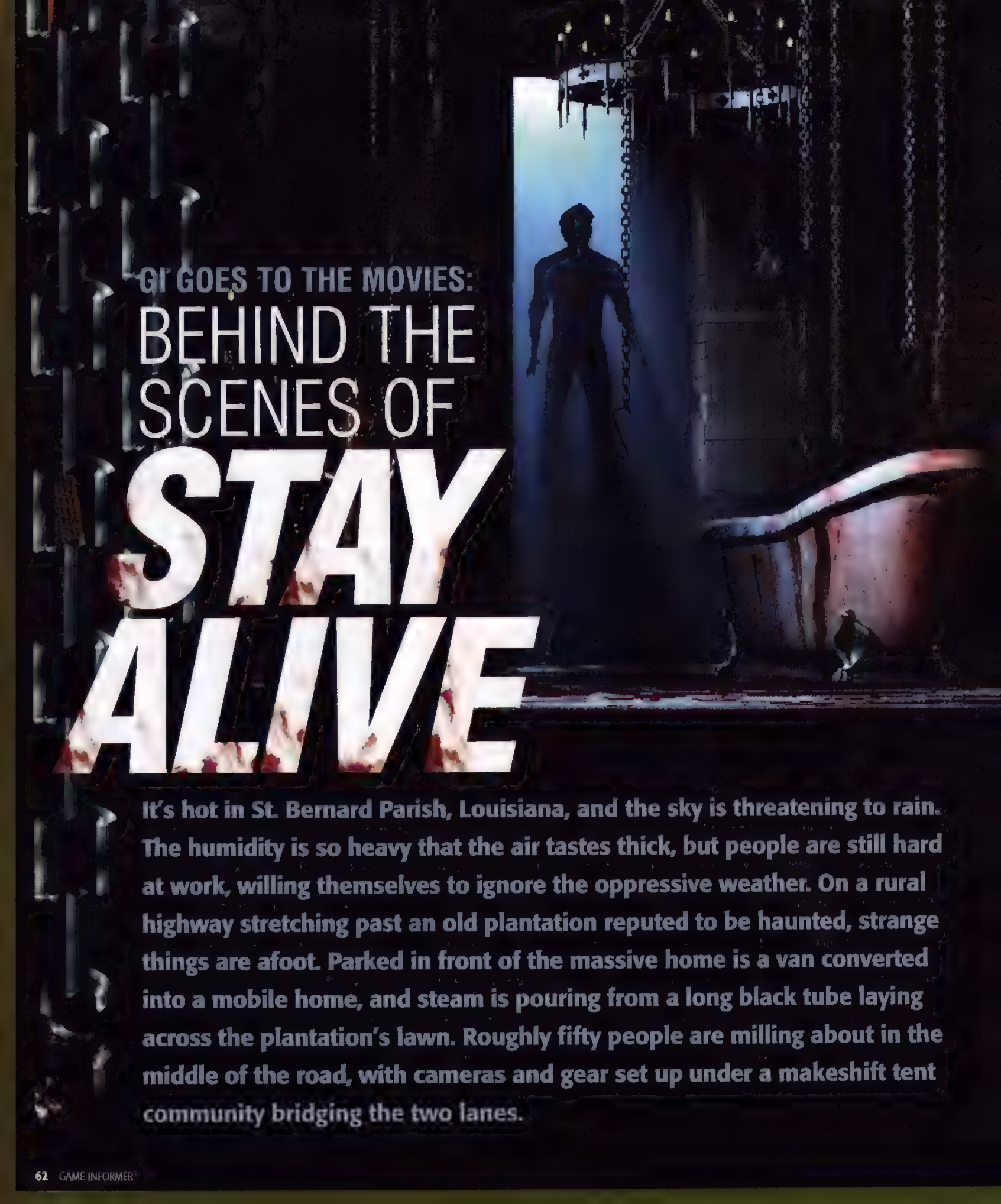
43

"We just do it. Everywhere, for everything." What was once a buzzword for companies to tout what their product contained is now the baseline for a triple-A title. And that does nothing but bode well for what lies in store for gamers.

Besides making this an incredible-looking game, it helps the design as well. Edwards promised more of everything gamers have already seen in this generation – destructible environments, weather effects that actually impact gameplay, and a more realistic stealth and detection system. Layer these on top of what the Ghost Recon franchise is already known for, and you know that Ubisoft and Red Storm have something special brewing. The intense action, suspenseful anti-terrorist special forces operations, and tactical squad-based problem solving certainly aren't going anywhere. All indications point to Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter being innovative as well as smoother, prettier, and bigger than anything we've seen in the genre before – and what more can you really ask for out of a next-gen game? ■■■





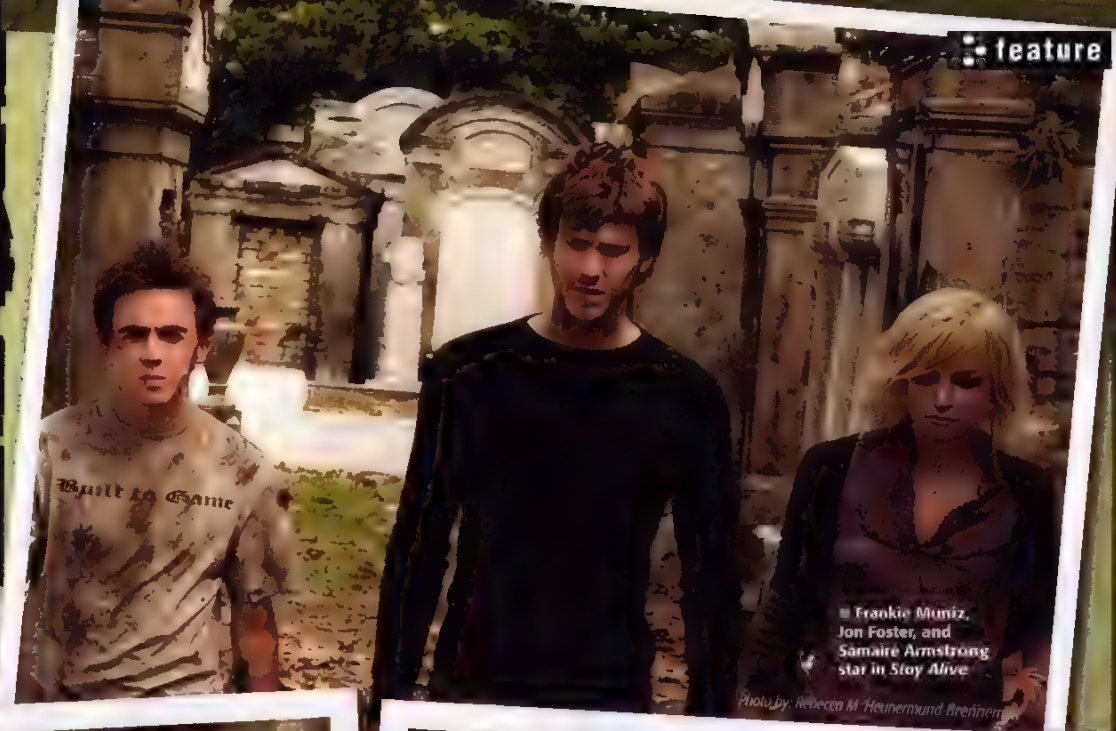
A dark, industrial scene with a figure in a doorway. The figure is silhouetted against a bright light coming from a doorway in the background. The figure appears to be a man in a dark, possibly tactical or military uniform. The scene is dimly lit, with some light reflecting off surfaces, creating a moody and mysterious atmosphere. The overall tone is dark and suspenseful.

GI GOES TO THE MOVIES:  
BEHIND THE  
SCENES OF

# STAY ALIVE

It's hot in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, and the sky is threatening to rain. The humidity is so heavy that the air tastes thick, but people are still hard at work, willing themselves to ignore the oppressive weather. On a rural highway stretching past an old plantation reputed to be haunted, strange things are afoot. Parked in front of the massive home is a van converted into a mobile home, and steam is pouring from a long black tube laying across the plantation's lawn. Roughly fifty people are milling about in the middle of the road, with cameras and gear set up under a makeshift tent community bridging the two lanes.





The unusual scene unfolding on this Louisiana roadway is part of the location shooting for a new horror film entitled *Stay Alive*, scheduled for release in the early part of next year. The day's shooting primarily revolves around the van, and over the course of the day the film crew captures actors in and around the vehicle, picking up shots for several different scenes. Most of them feature Frankie Muniz, best known for the title role in *Malcolm in the Middle*. But it's the chief prop that Muniz interacts with in these shots that initially catches our eye: a one-of-a-kind Alienware laptop. In these scenes, Muniz is advising his friends by playing a game on the laptop—a game called *Stay Alive*.

Gamers are used to hearing about the fusion of the video game industry and Hollywood; it seems that every month another high-profile actor lends his or her voice to a video game, or another title releases in conjunction with a big-budget action flick. We've

even seen a handful of films based on games. But to date, the world hasn't seen a movie about games that really understands gamer culture. The crew behind *Stay Alive* is about to change that.

Written by director William Brent Bell and producer Matthew Peterman, *Stay Alive* involves a group of avid gamers who are invited to beta test a new survival horror game bearing the same title as the film. A next-generation game with dark and bloody action, the characters are all too happy to play the game, until they start noticing a

sinister link between the game and the real world. As characters die in the game, the players turn up dead, murdered in the same way as their avatars expired in the virtual realm. The friends must solve the mystery of the game and figure out how it ties into the real world, all while trying to defend themselves from a malevolent force preying on those around them.

Both gamers and horror movie aficionados are notoriously fickle, and don't react well to those they perceive as outsiders trying to bluff their way into these genres. Bell and Peterman understand this well—they're both gamers and horror fans themselves. Both cite the *Fatal Frame* and *Resident Evil* franchises as some of their favorite games, and are clearly well-versed in video game culture. Peterman proclaims his love for titles like *Unreal Tournament*, and Bell states that he's been a gamer since the days of the *Odyssey*, the first home game console ever released.

The idea for *Stay Alive* germinated with another script the duo wrote

together about video games, which was purchased but never produced. Wanting to try again to bring their love of games to the big screen, they waited a few years until games starting getting more mainstream attention, then began shopping *Stay Alive* around Hollywood. A few investors hopped on board immediately, and before long the project was picked up by Spyclass Entertainment, the producers of such films as *The Sixth Sense*, *Seabiscuit*, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The strength of the script attracted actors like Muniz, who passed up films offering bigger parts and higher pay to be involved. The cast quickly grew to include actors like Jon Foster (*Life As We Know It*, *The Door in the Floor*), and Samaire Armstrong (*Entourage*, *The O.C.*), both of whom were on-hand to film scenes during our visit. Although they were not present on the set, the rest of the cast includes Sophia Bush (*One Tree Hill*), Adam Goldberg (*Saving Private Ryan*), Jimmi Simpson (*Herbie: Fully Loaded*), and more.

**“For the movie, we’re creating this next-generation game...”**





■ Frank Muniz stars as 'Swink'

**M**any of the cast members are as enthusiastic about video games as Bell and Peterman. Lead actor Jon Foster told us that video games are the best thing to have while shooting since there can be so much down time between shots. He cites *Rainbow Six*, *Halo 2*, and *Manhunt* amongst his favorites, but says that "nothing will ever beat *Bust-A-Move*." Foster plays Hutch, the male lead who deals with the hardships of life by escaping into the world of video games. Together with the other characters in the movie, Hutch spends large chunks of time playing games and looks at it like a social activity. This feeling carried over behind the scenes as well. "I just bought *God of War*," Foster says. "And Jimmi Simpson stole it from me! I bought it here while we were shooting, and Jimmi took it from me and started playing it. And then he left and took it with him. But he left his EyeToy, which is almost as cool."

During our conversation with Foster, he lists *The Punisher*, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *Jak 3*, and even *Spyro the Dragon* as games he's played recently, and had plenty of questions for us about the next round of video game consoles. It's obvious to us that Foster is a perfect choice to play a video game-loving character, and Frankie Muniz displayed a similar enthusiasm for gaming. "I play any sports game, any basketball game, any racing game," says Muniz. "Racing is my passion in real life, so *Project Gotham 2* and *Need for Speed and Gran Turismo 4* — anything that involves cars I can play for days. I always play on the set, because you have a lot of free time. I played *NFL Fever '04* for like seven months straight. I find one game and I just stick with it for a long time." Gaming is an even more critical part of his character in the film, says Muniz. "He's smart, and kinda nerdy. He could be at MIT, but gaming is his life. It's all he thinks about!"

Out of the three actors we spoke with, Samaire Armstrong is the only one who doesn't consider herself a gamer, but appropriately, neither does her character. "Fortunately for me, she's never gamed either!" Armstrong tells us. Despite her lack of gaming experience, Armstrong admires many aspects of gamer culture, including the mixture of camaraderie and competition, and the astounding lengths some gamers go to in tricking out their custom PCs.

Even standing in the middle of the blocked-off road in the sultry weather, the love of video games is all around us. While filming his scenes, Muniz wears a jacket with the iconic *Super Mario Bros.* 1-Up mushroom, and several members of the crew pull us aside to ask us about next-gen consoles, get our take on the changes in *Star Wars Galaxies*, and inquire about what E3 was like. The crew is obviously excited about the project, and spirits on the set are high despite the grueling pace of the production and the uncomfortable weather. The electricians on the staff have all shown up to the set in Hawaiian shirts, shorts, fake moustaches, and aviator sunglasses — they have each dressed up as *Magnum P.I.* in honor of what they are calling "Tom Selleck Tuesday."

For the electricians and everyone else on set that day, *Stay Alive* is a labor of love. Not just a love of video games, but a love of horror movies as well. Everyone we ask, from the actors to the producers, cites intelligent films like *The Ring* and *The Exorcist* as inspiration and claims that, despite the young cast, they're not inter-

ested in making a "teen" horror movie. Every death scene is elaborate and gory, and a sense of dread and tension is the goal rather than a series of cheap shocks. William Brent Bell, Matthew Peterson, and the cast and crew want to make an intelligent, scary film about a video game, but that's not all they hope to do — they want to actually make the game itself.

Any movie about a video game obviously has to feature shots of said game, and *Stay Alive* should feature a significant amount of such footage. Not wanting the title game to look dated, the crew worked with the digital effects house Pixel Liberation Front to create assets for the game that would look comparable to the next-gen PC and console games that will be on the market by the time *Stay Alive* hits theaters. To ensure that the game didn't look too good (or not good enough), the crew consulted several renowned game creators, eventually settling on Epic's Cliff Bleszinski as their chief game consultant. Known as much for his outspoken ways as his work on the Unreal games and *Gears of War*, Bleszinski lent his expertise to make sure that the game shown on the big screen looks like a title that gamers could play at home. And hopefully, they will.

Although it's still in the planning stages, everyone involved in the film hopes to have the video game the characters play in the movie available for purchase around the same time the film hits DVD. Bell and Peterson would love to have the game in stores when the movie initially hits theaters, but realize that few studios would be willing to finance a game based on a medium-budget horror film before it has been proven at the box office. But given the subject matter of the film, the involvement of video game professionals, and the creation of many crucial digital assets for the film, they're confident and hopeful the game will come eventually. "For the movie, we're creating this next-generation game," says Bell. "It looks almost photo-real. We're creating all these pieces for the movie, and we're working in concert with people in the industry. And hopefully, we'll have a demo level to release with the movie. And when the DVD releases, we'll have the full game. There are so many cool opportunities with these two mediums to do something really great."

"We're hoping this whole thing will be something different and unique, but at the same time not so out there that it's not something that people don't want to see," Bell continues. "We hope that the horror audience digs it, and we hope that the video game audience digs it." With video games becoming a larger and larger part of the pop culture landscape with each passing year, this fusion of movies and games was inevitable. But we're happy to report that based on our time with the cast and crew of *Stay Alive*, it's clear that this isn't a case of a movie studio trying to latch onto a trend to make a buck. Everyone involved in the film seems to genuinely understand and share the love of gaming, and that will hopefully translate to the big screen. By respecting the intelligence of both video game and horror movie fans, the crew of *Stay Alive* is creating a film that should appeal to both, while also drawing in a wider audience. Films based on games may have a bad track record so far, but it looks like movies about games are primed for a bright future indeed. ■ ■ ■



**“Every death scene is elaborate and gory, and a sense of dread and tension is the goal rather than a series of cheap shocks.”**



Photo by Rebecca M. Houshmand-Benmerah



■ (above) A picture of the actual entryway to Malkus's house. (inset) The CG image of the same entryway in the game



■ Director William Brent Bell (L) and Producer Matt Peterman (R)

Photo by Rebecca M. Houshmand-Benmerah



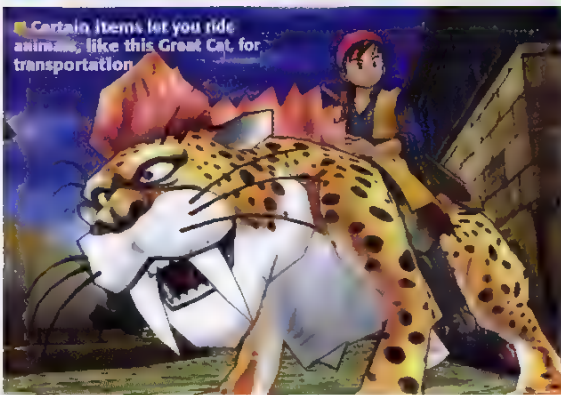


# PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



Eight attacks!



Certain items let you ride animals, like this Great Cat, for transportation.



"Wow! Hill Valley sure has changed! Now, where's my DeLorean?"

<b>Eight</b> HP 253/320 MP 16/120 Lv: 31	<b>Yangus</b> HP 72/322 MP 37/120 Lv: 31	<b>Jessica</b> HP 121/120 MP 12/120 Lv: 30	<b>Angelo</b> HP 121/120 MP 12/120 Lv: 31
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You can select behavior patterns if you don't want to control your party directly.

<b>Tactics</b>
Show no mercy
Fight wisely
Focus on healing
Don't use magic
Get psyched up
Follow orders

Yangus Follow orders  
Jessica Fight wisely  
Angelo Fight wisely

681 GAME INFORMER



\*: By way of thanks for helping me, and as a memento of our... 'encounter'...

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

## Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER LEVEL-5 > RELEASE NOVEMBER

### SSJ RPG

**B**ack in the days of the NES, Dragon Warrior and Final Fantasy stood side by side. However, while Final Fantasy continued to deliver throughout the 16-bit era, North American gamers didn't see the other RPG franchise until it reappeared as Dragon Warrior VII on PSone in 2001. Despite being just as popular as Final Fantasy in Japan, this segmented experience with Dragon Quest has made it difficult for state-side RPG fans to really latch onto the franchise. That's all about to change; with an intense focus on localization, Dragon Quest VIII will finally give the U.S. audience a chance to fully experience the legendary storytelling of Dragon Quest creator Yuji Horii.

As an unnamed hero, players will join forces with three other party members as they try to break the evil spell on a king and his daughter, transformed into animals by the power of a mysterious scepter. All of the main character designs are courtesy of acclaimed artist Akira Toriyama (of Chrono Trigger and Dragon Ball fame). In fact, Toriyama's influence may be most recognizable in one of the new features of Dragon Quest's battle system: psyching up. Players

can sacrifice turns to increase attack power, and when characters psych up to 100 percent (in addition to dealing massive damage) they resemble a Super Saiyan Dragon Ball character. However, despite the visual similarity to that popular anime franchise, gamers should not dismiss this tale as the same mindless pulp.

While many RPGs merely imitate

other games in the genre, Dragon Quest has its own rich traditions to draw from, and tries to tell its story with a unique and humorous style. Jessica, the game's main source of sex appeal (unless talking frogs are your thing), has several suggestive and hilarious attacks like "Queen's Thong," "Lashings of Love," and "Puff Puff." On the other hand, the group's muscle, Yangus, uses special moves like "Typhoeus' Maul" and "Underpants Dance." This lighthearted approach even translates to how the game deals with its more serious themes, giving Dragon Quest a distinct aesthetic and identity.

With a variety of minigames (including item creation, gambling, and arena battles) sprinkled throughout the approximately 50-hour quest, the latest incarnation of this classic series promises to keep players engaged from beginning to end. In a year without Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest VIII's vibrant graphics and clever writing are poised to make this a standout title in the franchise, in addition to raising awareness of the sad lack of underpants-related attacks in gaming today. ■ ■ ■



### GET YOUR SLIMY HANDS ON ME!

Gaming and smiling socks of goop have always gone well together. When Dragon Quest VIII hit Japanese shelves last year, it was accompanied by the release of this controller from Hori portraying one of the most iconic RPG monsters to date: the slime. Fortunately, Square Enix and Hori recently announced that North American gamers will be treated to the same winning combination, giving us the chance to wrap our hands around these lovable blue balls just in time for the game's November release.

These screens are taken from an early translation of the game. Names and text may change for the final version.



■ "When things get real awesome, I go like this!"



Eight's tension increases to 100!!!

previews

Eight

HP 320/320  
MP 105/120  
Lv: 31

Yangus

HP 182/322  
MP 47/49  
Lv: 31

Jessica

HP 117/187  
MP 208/208  
Lv: 30

Angelo

HP 125/237  
MP 151/169  
Lv: 31

■ Many familiar creature designs will make an appearance, along with some fresh, fancy faces.



- Dragon Slash
- Flame Slash
- Metal Slash
- Falcon Slash
- Crosscutter Throw
- Power Throw

A double slicing attack, faster than a f. 0/105

■ Unfortunately, the team needed 123 points to win the Junior Varsity Fighting match. There was no Pizza Hut after the game.

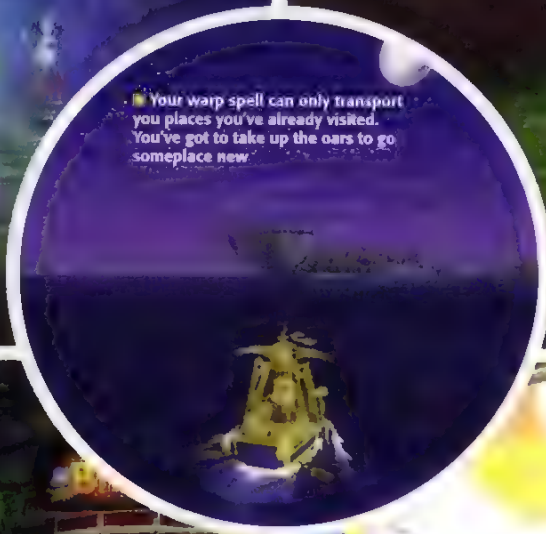


Does 122 points

■ Some enemies, like this knight, can be recruited into a customizable team of monsters to fight for you.



■ Your warp spell can only transport you places you've already visited. You've got to take up the oars to go someplace new.



■ Games like bingo, craps, and roulette await you in the casino.



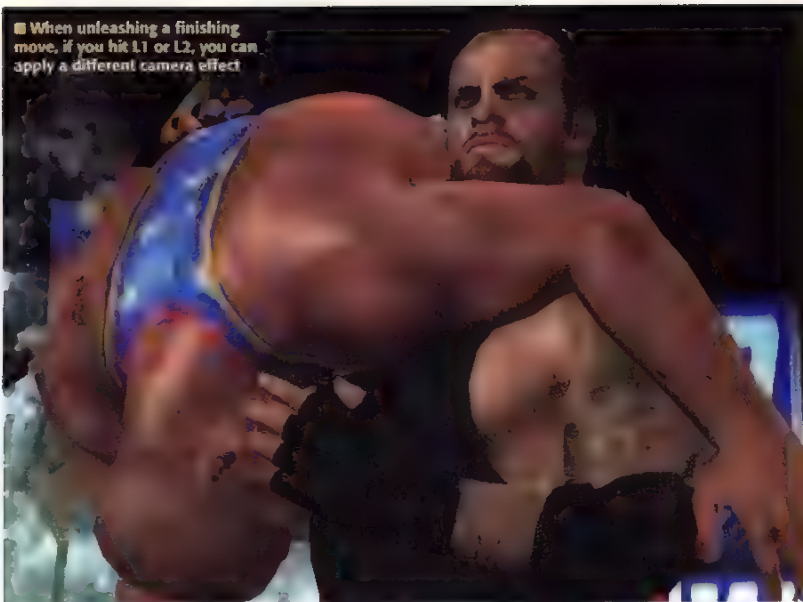
■ Wussy talk like this is why Pavan always got sucker-punched during recess.



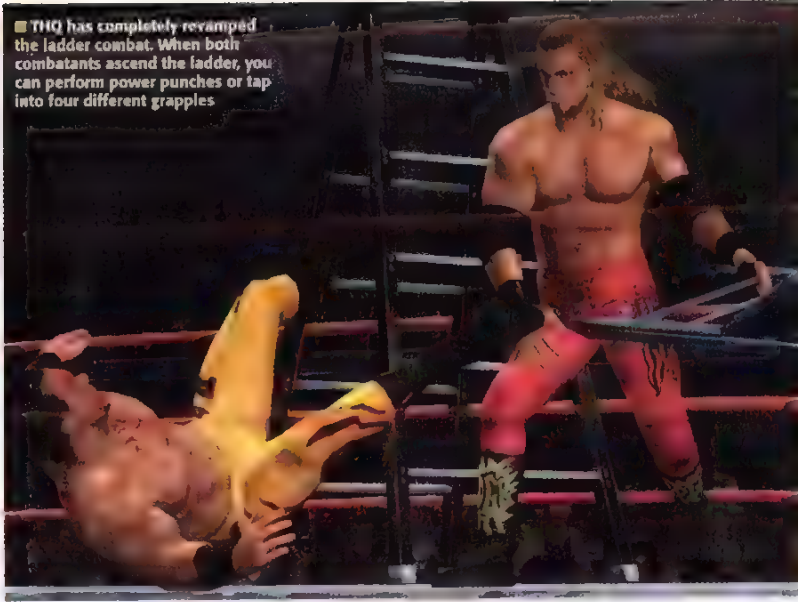
King Pavan: ...I remember. Everything you ever told me lives on inside my heart.



■ When unleashing a finishing move, if you hit L1 or L2, you can apply a different camera effect



■ THQ has completely revamped the ladder combat. When both combatants ascend the ladder, you can perform power punches or tap into four different grapples



PLAYSTATION 2

# WWE Smackdown! Vs. Raw 2006

> STYLE 1 TO 6-PLAYER FIGHTING (ONLINE TBA) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER YUKE'S > RELEASE FALL

## IF YOU WANT TO BE THE MAN, YOU'VE GOT TO BEAT THE MAN

**B**loodied and bruised, THQ's stable of wrestling games has not fared well within the current console generation. Numerous series bearing the WWE name have come and gone, THQ has yet to deliver a respectable wrestling title on Xbox, and EA has muscled its way into the market and hovers over it like a bloodthirsty vulture with its breakthrough Def Jam series. The sagging quality has finally started to affect the sales of the games. Given the current state of things, it would seem that THQ enjoys taking kendo stick shots to the head. Make no mistake, however, this company is well aware of where it needs to position itself in the future and is making great strides to become the definitive developer of wrestling games yet again. Although we won't see the fruition of THQ's plans until the next generation of gaming arrives, the release of WWE Smackdown! Vs. Raw 2006 signals the beginning of things to come.

This is THQ's most ambitious wrestling title to date, and has the potential to become the company's flagship multiplatform WWE franchise – the Madden of wrestling, if you will. With so much riding on this series, it's no surprise that THQ is putting forth such a great effort.

The main goal of development is to create a game that everyone can pick up and enjoy. Rather than just building upon the content that already existed, developer Yuke's took a step back and refined almost every aspect of the game. In many regards, this year's Smackdown! Vs. Raw will feel like a re-launch for the series.

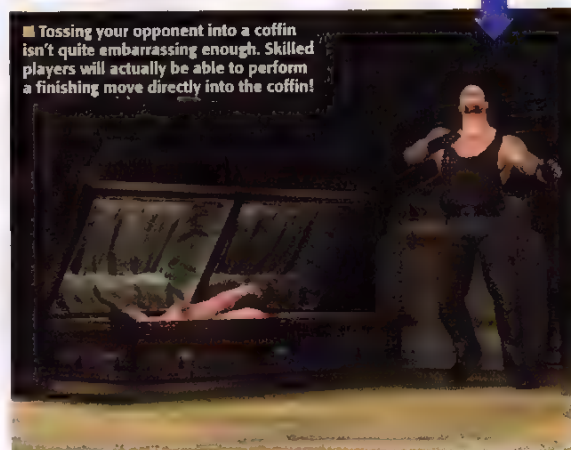
Even the mapping of the controls has undergone significant changes. The functionality of the circle button, which previously performed an Irish Whip, now serves as an additional grapple. This, of course, means that the number of front grapples has grown from a respectable total of 16 to a staggering 25. To perform the Irish Whip, players must now simultaneously press the circle and triangle but-

tons. Interestingly, THQ is also factoring in the amount of muscle that you put behind this useful technique. Tapping the buttons will send your opponent running toward the ropes. Holding it will send them flying over. Of course, this move will come in handy during ladder matches, but since it does grant a great advantage, THQ is balancing its use by making it much easier to counter.

In every wrestling game released to date, stamina has never been a factor. Ten minutes into a match, a wrestler could perform five power bombs in a row and never so much as break a sweat. This is all about to change. To capture the strategy and flow that you see in wrestling matches on TV, THQ is incorporating a stamina meter. If you attempt too many moves in a short period of time, your wrestler will need to step aside and catch his or her breath. Players can strategize how they manage this meter; you can slam your opponent down and hold the select button to take a few deep breaths, or apply a submission rest that gives you a moment to revitalize yourself.

At the request of its fans, THQ is incorporating the popular Buried Alive match into this year's game. Designed just like the Survivor Series arena, the coffin and grave are located to the right of the ramp. When you drag your opponent over to the coffin, you'll need to jam on the buttons to toss him into it, or better yet, simply perform your finisher in the coffin. Once they are inside, you'll need to hit the right analog stick to shut the lid. Of course, your opponent will have a chance to escape at this point. Once the coffin is closed, a cutscene will show the grave being filled.

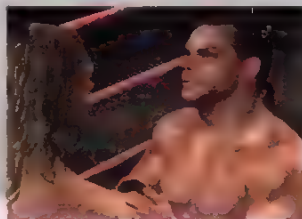
The roster of playable wrestlers has grown to over 60, and Season mode is completely revamped, but we'll have to wait a few months to see exactly how this mode will function. An exact release date has yet to be determined, but THQ hopes to have it on retail shelves this fall. ■ ■ ■



■ Tossing your opponent into a coffin isn't quite embarrassing enough. Skilled players will actually be able to perform a finishing move directly into the coffin!

### GETTING OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Who gets the upper hand at the beginning of a match is now based on player skill. THQ has incorporated three minigames that put different skills to the test. The stare down minigame shows the two wrestlers circling each other for a few moments, then out of nowhere a button appears. The first wrestler to hit that button lands a punch. There's also a typical test of strength button-mashing minigame as well as a grapple-based lock-up game.

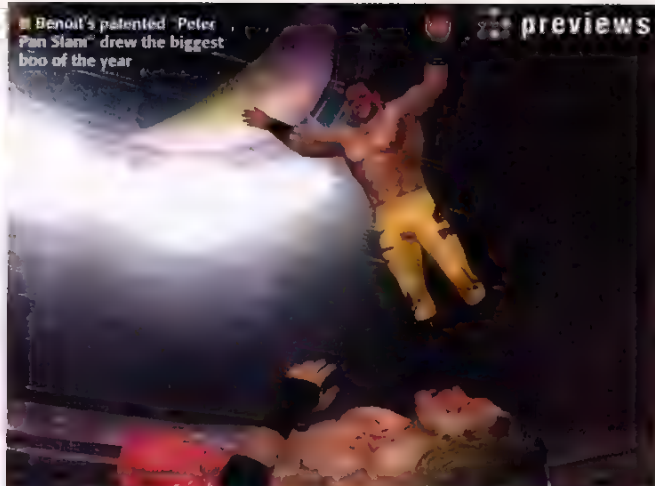




■ "It's my turn to be the caboose!"

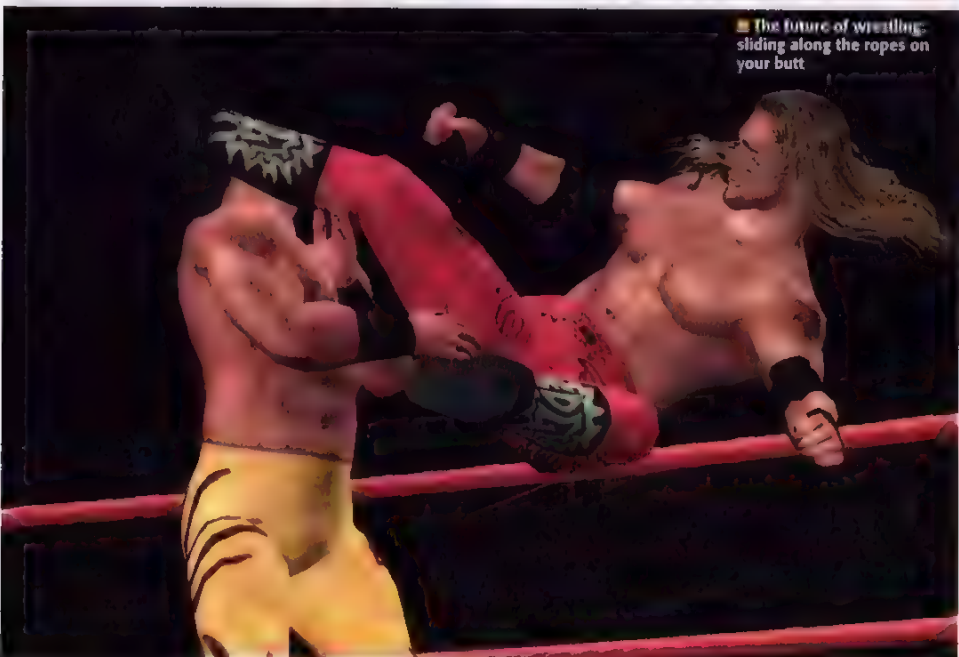


■ Benoit's patented "Peter Pan Slam" drew the biggest boo of the year



previews

■ The future of wrestling: sliding along the ropes on your butt



■ "Um...excuse me. Would you happen to have any tea?"



■ "Before the steroids, I was like this!"



■ Most of the moves in the game have been motion-captured



■ Tonight's main event: A philosophical discussion about the relevance of Nebuchadnezzar in *The Matrix* - just stupid, or really stupid?







UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

# The Godfather

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

## AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE

It would have been easy to make a game just for fans of the fiction, but we've really pushed the limits of the license and made a game for gamers," comments executive producer David DeMartini. The Godfather promises to be one of the most anticipated licensed titles yet to be moved onto the gaming screen. Thankfully, beyond just exploiting the license, the development studio is putting forth a genuine effort to innovate and explore new ways to draw a player into an established world. DeMartini elaborates, "To the credit of EA and the design team, they're pushing the limit and trying to make a great game separate from the license, and then putting the license on top of that great game to make for that one-of-a-kind experience."

Set in an open world that emulates the gangster-filled streets of 1945 New York, The Godfather will retell the story of the first film from an entirely new perspective. "Our story intersects the Godfather story and wraps around the Godfather story," DeMartini says. You'll actually form your own character from scratch using a creation tool similar to the one found in the recent Tiger Woods games. Once satisfied with your gangster-in-training, you'll be put to work enforcing the will of Don Vito and the rest of the Corleones as they vie for control of the city.

"You're going to be organically drawn into mission situations that will be very familiar from the film," explains DeMartini. Through these you'll interact with the memorable main characters and do their bidding as a soldier in the Corleone clan. In addition to these story-based missions, there will be a constant game of what DeMartini calls "interactive Risk" as

you attempt to seize territory from rival mobs. For instance, at a butcher shop, you might smash a meat display case to force the owner to pay protection. Taking over the business may eventually lead you into dealings with one of the numerous illegal rackets around town, including alcohol, prostitution, number running, or gambling. "As you increase respect, the gameplay will evolve and be different," DeMartini adds. "And as your respect goes higher, that's also going to move you through the family ranks." Eventually, you can take over the Corleone family, start your own mob, or even conquer the whole of New York.

The backbone of providing this gameplay will be the Black Hand control system, which focuses on giving players a wealth of choices for how to deal with encounters. Analog controls let you pull a punch back, then release without ever swinging, if desired. With weapons, you might shoot a gun out of an enemy's hand, then shoot his leg to slow him down before you grab him to begin an interrogation. "In any given situation, to maximize the amount of respect you get out of it, you want to be as violent as you have to be without being any more violent than you need to be," DeMartini states. While being totally merciless and cruel is certainly an option, you'll risk creating a huge vendetta with the other families — a price that might only be paid by your own death.

To further deepen the immersion, the team has brought on Bill Conti (*Rocky*, *The Karate Kid*) to compose 100 minutes of new music to interweave with the familiar themes from the original film. In addition, voice talent includes both James



Caan and Robert Duvall, while Marlon Brando even recorded content for the bonus features. Far more than just a cheap excuse to haul out an old license, The Godfather looks like it could be a gamer's paradise in its final state and give us every reason to act like a man and give it a try when it shows up for the holidays. ■■■





■ Being born with a target on his face would ultimately be Bobby's downfall

5-6



■ Threats of violence are often more effective than taking it to the next level



■ In his learning of baseball, Mack had misunderstood some of the most basic concepts of the sport



■ "Are you sure this is Tango? This feels more like the Che-Cha."



■ "Say hello to my little... Oh, wait. Wrong movie."





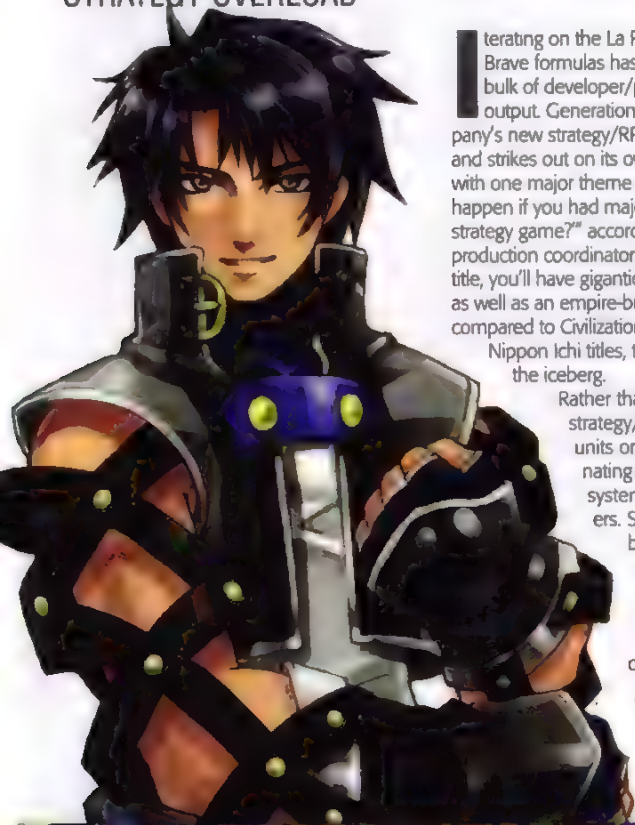
UNLIMITED ENABLED

PSP

# Generation of Chaos

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER NIPPON ICHI > DEVELOPER IDEA FACTORY > RELEASE SPRING 2006

## STRATEGY OVERLOAD



Iterating on the La Pucelle and Phantom Brave formulas has, until now, been the bulk of developer/publisher Nippon Ichi's output. Generation of Chaos, the company's new strategy/RPG, breaks the mold and strikes out on its own. "GoC is developed with one major theme in mind: 'What would happen if you had major group battles in a strategy game?'" according to Hiroko Nelson, production coordinator at Nippon Ichi. In this title, you'll have gigantic 30-on-30 battles as well as an empire-building mode best compared to Civilization. And, as with all Nippon Ichi titles, that's only the tip of the iceberg.

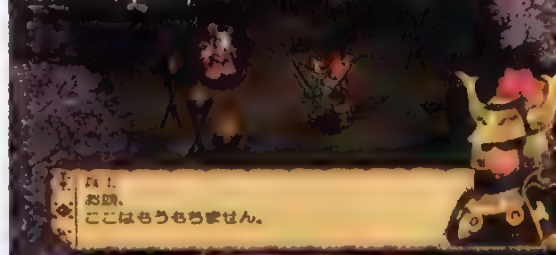
Rather than the normal strategy/RPG cycle of moving units one at a time and alternating turns, GoC employs a system of squads and leaders. Squads form the backbone of your army, and are only commanded on a very general level by telling them which formation and overall tactics to use. Leaders, however, can be directly controlled and used to attack or defend individual objectives or

units. Furthermore, these characters can unleash devastating super moves to wreak havoc with the opposition. The cast of available leaders is very diverse, and some of them, like wizards and certain monsters, can disrupt the enemy's infrastructure on the overworld map.

This strategic mode pushes GoC far beyond the standard paradigm. Here, you have the opportunity to improve your infrastructure (which leads to bigger and better armies, of course), manage the commerce of your empire, and deal with foreign relations – all the good stuff of an empire-building game, conveniently sized for your PSP. There are even weather changes and seasons to keep track of and relationships with your leaders to deal with. With its fantastic subject matter, and the fact that the strategic mode is only half of the game, it shouldn't be too dry or boring either.

So, the very structure of the gameplay is radically different than the established strategy/RPG conventions. It gets even better, though. "The first round of GoC is merely a practice or introduction," says

■ Unlike Digata and Makai Kingdom, this title has a serious, epic story



■ You can choose to play through the game as any of several unique nations

Nelson. The first round is a tutorial? That's pretty standard, right? No: "The main dish of the game comes after completing the game. Many scenarios, characters, and events become unlocked and players will fully experience the character interactions and dramas involved with the story," Nelson continues. And just to make absolutely sure that there's enough replay value to GoC, you can play through the game as any of several kingdoms, all of which have different stories and separate endings to the dramatic plot. Generation of Chaos looks to be set to deliver quite the massive experience, so get ready to wrap your brain around its immensity for its launch early next year. ■ ■ ■



■ Managing the strategic policies of your Kingdom is as important as being a good tactician



■ No, this isn't an evil elf dating sim. Sorry, Jeremy



## ORDERING THE CHAOS OF BATTLE



◀ If you have the chance messing with your enemy on the strategic map before battle begins can give you a large advantage. Certain leaders have special abilities that can damage production facilities, hose their economy, or lower the morale of their troops.

▶ In the strategic mode, battle starts when your forces encounter the enemy. Paying attention to morale, weather, and terrain is highly recommended, as it has a fair impact on the outcome of combat.

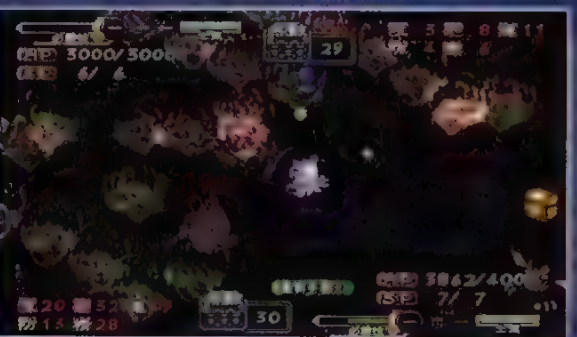


◀ Once on the battle screen, you'll set up formations and orders for your troops. Depending on what you're up against, certain decisions will help a lot – charging in scattered fashion at archers, sticking together against other infantry, etc.

▶ As the fight rages on, you'll be able to change your orders on the fly. You won't control the troops directly, but the fluid nature of battle will no doubt require some adjustment on your part from time to time.

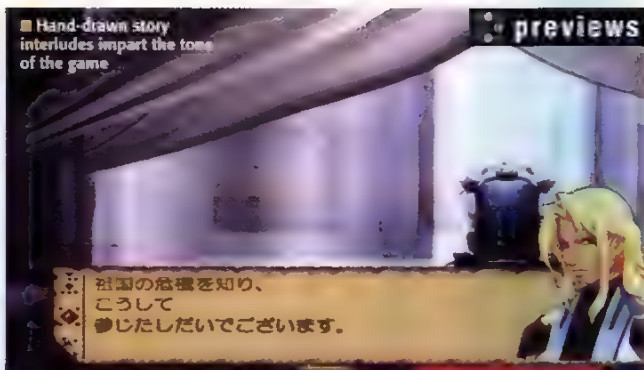


◀ Your commanders, however, can be controlled directly. Between their naturally strong capabilities and their impressive super moves that can devastate entire enemy formations, leaders can change the tide of battle all by themselves.



■ Hand-drawn story interludes impart the tone of the game

previews



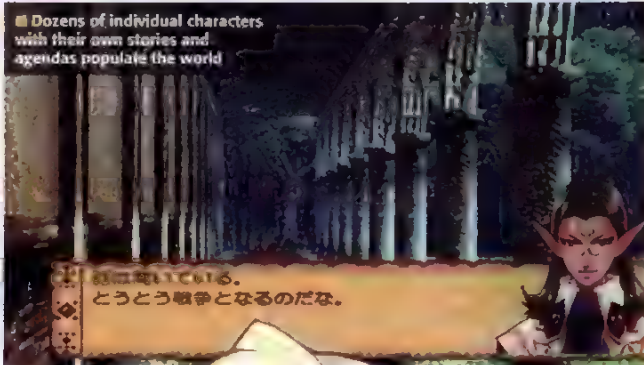
社国の危機を知り、  
こうして  
参じたさせていただきます。

■ It may sound similar, but Generation of Chaos is vastly different than historical titles like Romance of the Three Kingdoms



シェリリク  
兄さん、もう止めてください！

■ Dozens of individual characters with their own stories and agendas populate the world



国は危れている。  
どうとう戦争となるのだな。







Every character has their own unique powers and strengths to tap into



High heels seemed the most practical choice for the upcoming street fight

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PSP

# Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects

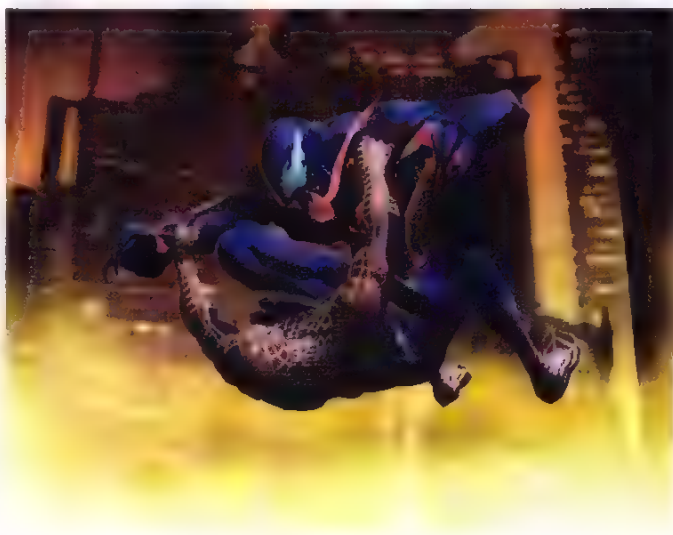
> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER NIHILISTIC SOFTWARE > RELEASE FALL

## GREAT POWER WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY

If the opening issues of the *Marvel Nemesis* comic book are any indication, the game is headed for some pretty titanic conflicts between Marvel's mightiest and these new super-powered heavyweights, the Imperfects. Early parts of that story detailed characters like The Thing and Wolverine as they were abducted by an alien scientist and given a mind and performance altering injection that tore away their inhibitions and tapped the deepest recesses of their powers. Overcoming its effects, they returned to Earth, but an alternate squad of individuals were only waiting in the wings for the same enhancements, and they seem much less willing to abandon the potential power of the strange substance.

Even while we get excited about the direction of the story, we also recently got a chance to play some of the game and try out some of the cool moves and attacks that each hero can perform.

The most intriguing aspect of gameplay is exploring each character's strengths and abilities, since they are all specifically set up to simulate the comics. Utilizing the environment to your advantage is a major component of the fight, and surprising your opponent by switching up your techniques seems to be the key to victory. We're curious to find out more about how you target your enemies in the large, open arenas, since the version we played remained pretty freeform in that regard.



Even so, the battles are intense and exciting, and every character seems to have been presented with accuracy and a good sense of balance.

As you can see, the cast of familiar Marvel faces continues to grow. This month, the most exciting addition is certainly the frightening visage of Venom. Just the thought of playing out a fight between Spider-Man and Venom gets us antsy for release. In addition, we've already seen Elektra, Iron Man, Spider-Man, The Thing, and Wolverine, in addition to the host of new combatants that are being designed by EA.

The partnership between Marvel and EA is certainly heading in some interesting directions. Marvel's characters seem to be getting handled with great care and attention to detail, and the new personas really help to spice up the feel. We'll see the final fruition soon enough, since *Nemesis* should be ready in just a few months. ■ ■ ■

## HEROES IN YOUR POCKET

This month, we got the scoop on the announced PSP version of the game, which, as it turns out, has some pretty exciting features to tout as its own. First and foremost, the handheld version will include a character not available on the consoles: Captain America. In addition, menus and other front end art are being completed by Terry Dodson, who most recently completed work on several of the House of M covers, Marvel's big summer event. In addition, Dodson helped to tweak designs for all the characters, so every one of them should look a little different in the PSP installment.







Iron Man should never have made that crack about who could use some hand lotion



The battle for most scantily clad heroine would be a vicious one indeed





■ This handheld GTA will feature the same large-scale mayhem as the console titles



PSP

# Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES > DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR LEEDS > RELEASE FALL

## THE FIRST PSP BLOCKBUSTER?

It's no secret that Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto series was one of the key factors in the massive success of the PlayStation 2 in this console generation. Along with its record-breaking sales, GTA became a phenomenon, drawing a new audience to Sony's hardware platform and earning a place in the pop culture pantheon. Now, Rockstar is bringing the franchise to Sony's newest system, the PSP, in the form of an all-new title developed by Rockstar Leeds (which did excellent work on Max Payne for the GBA and the PSP port of Midnight Club 3). Although PSP has been a moderate success so far, both Rockstar and Sony hope that Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories will be a blockbuster that will drive unit sales and establish the handheld as a mass-market gaming device.

During a recent visit to the Game Informer offices, Rockstar's Todd Zuniga stressed that, despite the fact that the game is a return to the universe of Grand Theft Auto III, it is not a simple handheld port. "This isn't GTA III," said Zuniga. "This is an entirely new game... It's in the 80 to 100 hour range, comparable to GTA III. There's the hidden packages, stunt jumps, Rampages, taxi missions, vigilante missions - all that stuff's in there."

The game features a new star, Toni Cipriani, who hardcore fans will recognize

as the proprietor of St. Mark's Bistro in GTA III. Although Rockstar is not confirming the voice talent involved with the game, it's worth noting that Toni was originally voiced by actor Michael Madsen. The story is set three years before the start of GTA III, and follows Cipriani's return to Liberty City after an extended absence. Apparently, Toni had pulled a hit for the infamous Don Salvatore Leone, and had to head out of town while things cooled off. Of course, now that he's back in the mix, Toni can't wait to get his hands dirty with some criminal activity. Given the setting, expect to encounter a number of familiar faces from the GTA universe during your adventures in Liberty City.

"There will be crossover with all those characters," confirms Zuniga. "We're going to use the full scope of GTA, pulling [in] things when it makes sense."

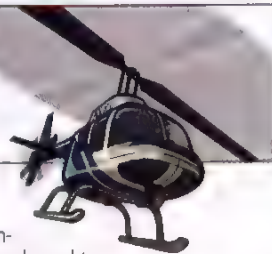
Liberty City Stories will also introduce some of the improvements and additions that have been implemented in the series since GTA III. New vehicles and weapons are planned, most notably the full spectrum of two-wheeled transportation, including motorcycles, dirt bikes, and scooters. You'll also be able to change Toni's appearance through unlockable outfits. More importantly, the targeting system is based on an improved version of the San Andreas

scheme, making for what Zuniga feels is the "the best [targeting system] we've had so far."

Watching the game in action, it's hard not to be impressed by what Rockstar Leeds has accomplished. The entirety of Liberty City has been recreated on the PSP, complete with new storefronts and other subtle changes to reflect the different time period. The cars glisten with reflective maps and sport full damage models including light coatings of dirt and grime. Although pop-up issues are still being addressed, it's quite shocking how good this game looks at this stage in development. The framerate is already stable, and the controls appear to be on par with any game in the series. The missions we witnessed included a supposedly simple cash pick-up at one of Leone's warehouses that resulted in a huge explosion followed by a high-speed car chase with the Triad, and a more complex objective in which Toni had to defend a casino from a series of car bombs.

However well-done the GBA versions of Grand Theft Auto might have been, Liberty City Stories is the first time

that the franchise is being brought to a handheld without compromise. It's not a handheld "version" of GTA; it's simply GTA - with all of the depth, gameplay, and content that gamers have come to expect from Rockstar. At this point, the only question that remains is how the developers will be able to handle the PSP's sluggish loading times and short battery life (the demo we saw was running on a development kit). However, based on what it has already accomplished in the development of this title, we expect Rockstar Leeds has what it takes to bring the game to completion in fine style. ■■■■



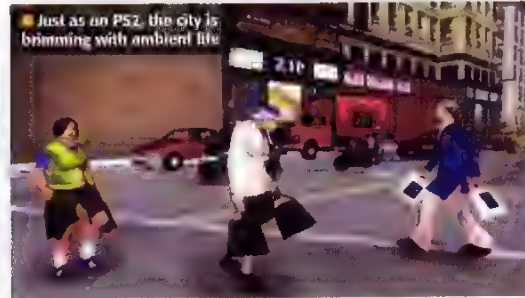
■ This time, you'll be able to cruise Liberty City on a full selection of bikes



■ Rockstar promises all of the cop, ambulance, and side missions from the other GTA titles



■ Although it takes place back in Liberty City, the game's plot is completely new



■ Just as on PS2, the city is brimming with ambient life





ADVENT RISING™



# SOMETIMES THE HUMAN RACE HAS TO START OVER...

The universe is about to uncover a mythical race. A race believed to exist only in fairy tales and ancient prophecies.

A race rumored to possess unfathomable powers.

A race destined to be the salvation of all living creatures.

A race known as Humanity.

# A D V E N T R I S I N G

“INNOVATIVE AS HELL, AND THE MOST EMOTIVE TITLE TO HIT ANY PLATFORM IN AGES.”

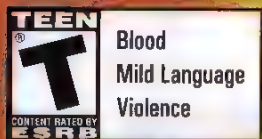
-GamePro

“EPIC IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD.” “A GAME OF EPIC PROPORTIONS.”

-Play

-IGN

Soundtrack Available on Sumthing Else MusicWorks







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PLAYSTATION 2

# Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX > RELEASE TBA

## AUTUMN IN MIDGAR

Even after a climactic battle with Sephiroth and the collision of the legendary spells Meteor and Holy, the details of Final Fantasy VII's conclusion remain somewhat ambiguous. However, amid the questions and untold tales, there is one thing that is certain: The city of Midgar was destroyed – though its story is still far from over.

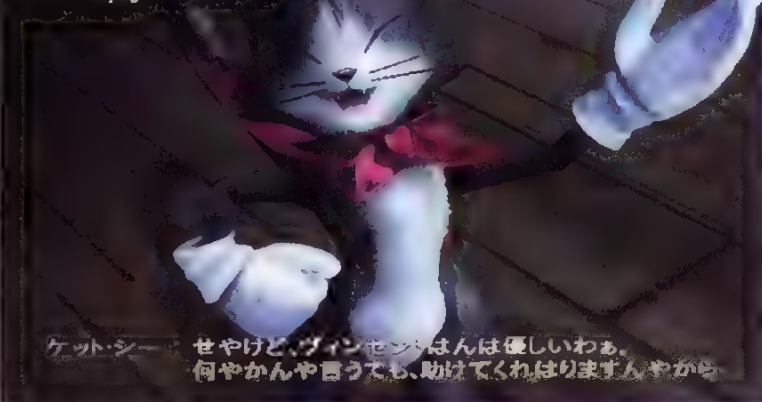
As part of what Square Enix has dubbed the "Compilation of Final Fantasy VII," Dirge of Cerberus elaborates on the events stemming from Sephiroth's defeat by following Vincent as he re-enters the industrial wreckage of Midgar. His mission is to combat the world's newest threat – violent and crazed soldiers, formerly employed by Shinra, who survived for years trapped underneath the

rubble of the once-thriving city.

Of course, to handle these aggressive and militaristic foes, Vincent will be leaving his turn-based ways behind in favor of some big guns and frantic firing. Yoshinori Kitase, the game's producer, tells us "We wanted to make it something like *Escape from New York*. The whole city of Midgar is overrun with crazy survivors, and you have to fight through them." Throughout the third-person adventure, players will be able to use a variety of different weapons and skills. Though many of the tools at Vincent's disposal are still a mystery, we can only hope that his unique ability to transform into terrifying abominations will make an appearance. "You'll have to wait for more information on that," Kitase teases.

Thankfully, Dirge won't be completely

"Pardon me, but have you seen an enormous stuffed moogles? Ugh, I am so annoying!"



ケットシー セやけど、グインセンはんは優しいわあ。何やかんや言っても、助けてくれはりますんやから。

abandoning its roots in favor of twitchy shooting. "There is an emphasis on both the story and the gunplay," explains Kitase. "We want to create something that will appeal not only to an action fan, but also RPG fans." As such, players can expect to learn more about Vincent's shadowy past, including his time with the Turks, his history with the scientist Hojo, and his relationship with Lucrecia.

Though only confirmed as a single-player experience, Dirge's action-oriented gameplay

seems ideal for multiplayer and online options as well. Kitase was reluctant to reveal any specifics about these possibilities, but he did confirm that we still have a great deal to learn about Dirge of Cerberus: "Look forward to hearing more about the game's other features in the future," he tells us. "We want to make a product that will appeal to people right away, and then surprise them." ■■■

Though only confirmed as a single-player experience, Dirge's action-oriented gameplay



■ Being trapped under Midgar's rubble has left these soldiers a bit ornery



■ The gunplay and the story are both key elements of the game



Life  
Death  
Honor



Akira Kurosawa's  
**SAAMURAI 7**

The Legendary Epic Reborn

Available on DVD August 23, 2005







# The Sims 2: Nightlife

> STYLE | PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER MAXIS > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 13

## CAN'T HARDLY WAIT

**S**ome new features of The Sims 2's next expansion pack beg the question, "Shouldn't this be called Sims Lovelife?" Don't get the wrong idea — Nightlife is more about fleshing out courtship than courting players with flesh, but there's a lot of romancing to be had. New locations promise a variety of dating destinations as diverse as '50s-cool bowling alleys, intimate bistros, hipster-friendly lounges, and all-night dance clubs. New items, numbering around 125, will tie into these theme locations while offering new décor and stat-building interactions.

A first for the series is the inclusion of cars. Utilitarian bonuses (getting to work faster than hitching a ride) are coupled with more classic American uses of the automobile, namely hot dates and good-night kisses. How many different rides and the amount of customization available are particulars being kept quiet right now, but there is one generically hot yellow sports car that has shown up more than once in these early shots of the game.

As with University, this expansion pack is more than just extra items and interaction options. A new aspiration joining the base game's Popularity, Romance, Family Knowledge, and Fortune is one called Pleasure — which means devoting one's life to memorable and downright fun moments.

Will Wright's other baby, the innovative Spore, might be getting more buzz right now, but that doesn't mean his revolutionary Sims franchise is on the back burner. Almost a year to the date after the base game's launch, a second expansion pack will be hitting store shelves. Will Nightlife expand on the already immense Sims 2 lifecycle gameplay in the same revolutionary way that University did? Hands-on time is the only thing that will tell us for sure, but the new features are hinting at great and imaginative things. ■■■■



■ "You were in Singles! You can!"



■ More entertainment options are an important part of the new pack.



■ Ladies in lab coats think about lips a lot.

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX | PC

# Snow

> STYLE | PLAYER STRATEGY > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES > DEVELOPER FROG CITY SOFTWARE > RELEASE SPRING 2006

## EVERYBODY MUST GET STONED



**R**unning missions for stoic mob bosses is for suckers. Snow, a forthcoming turn-based strategy game for both Xbox and PC, lets players build their own continent-spanning narcotics empire. It starts with a brick of pot and a corrupt stewardess in 1975, and ends with the riches gained in the cocaine frenzy of the '80s. Fortunately, there's much more to this title than the dry economics simulator that it easily could have been.

Smuggling operations don't run themselves, you know. You'll recruit underlings from an extensive cast of individual characters ranging from dirty cops to street pushers, and forge them into the backbone of your shady outfit. Taking proper advantage of their strengths will go a long way to ensuring a profitable enterprise. Likewise, building struc-

tures like nightclubs and law firms will make their unique services available to you. And, of course, rival dealers have no compunctions about hornning in on your business, so dealing with them in a permanent fashion can be very much to your benefit. There are many pieces to this puzzle, and fitting them together promises to take a sharp mind.

The strategy sounds cool, and there appears to be a lot of game here to make for a good time, but the promise of an interactive story is something a bit different for the genre. Details are scarce, but we're told that the 10-year course of Snow will tell a dynamic story based on your decisions and the conditions of the world around you. For something a bit outside-the-box, keep your eyes peeled for the Snow to start falling next spring. ■■■■



■ Using this title to teach kids how to convert between grams and ounces might not be the best idea ever





■ If those linemen behind LaDainian were doing their job, they'd be out front blocking for him



■ QBs' placement system is refined, letting receivers catch balls at various points around their body away from defenders



■ Similar to NCAA, the Truck Stick lets you perform back jukes to avoid diving defenders

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

# Madden NFL 06

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX, GC), 1 OR 2-PLAYER (PC) (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, PS2 ONLINE, OR PC INTERNET), (XBOX 360 TBA) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** AUGUST 8 > **ESRB** E

## THE NEXT SUPERSTAR

After a sub-par year in 2004, where all we got for our troubles was Tony Bruno (uumrgh!), EA Sports is heaping on the features in Madden NFL 06. We've already told you about the QB Vision Passing in our May issue (#145), but that's not all EA Tiburon is devoting time to in order to make this one of the freshest Maddens ever. The developer has come up with NFL Superstar — a mode similar to NCAA's Race for the Heisman (see page 96 for more), but with more depth.

NFL Superstar isn't just a create-a-player with a jazzy menu, it's the on- and off-field life of an NFL player. It starts with your birth — your randomly selected parents will give you DNA that influences your stats and general personality (although you can re-select mom and dad or import your NCAA/NFL Street 2 character if they suck). From there you'll prepare for the NFL Draft, which includes everything from signing an agent to taking an IQ

test. Unlike other create-a-player modes, you can't choose your team. You'll have to sit and hold your breath like every other kid on draft day. If the Cardinals call your name, then that's whom you'll start your career for. No crying to your daddy like Eli Manning. If you want off the team, you can try and demand a trade or play well enough to garner interest once you hit free agency.

This whole mode is a recreation of NFL life. Get tattoos, cultivate team chemistry, demand playing time, and get tagged with one of 70 influential personas, from Greatest QB of All-Time to Media Darling or Bust. You can even take on movie roles, provided your off-the-field personality is dynamic enough. Here you'll have to memorize a short script against an onscreen clock and spit out the correct lines. This may all sound like fluff, but it's a mode separate from your Franchise that can be enjoyed by casual players yet embraced by the hardcore. For instance, one



of its important components is your agent. A good one will not only be able to get you a better contract, but he'll get you access to prestigious offseason training institutes where you can improve your player.

If NFL Superstar isn't your thing, there is plenty else in Madden 06 to get excited about. Franchise mode has taken a page from 2K Games' old football title via a weekly prep system. Unlike that game's boring

menus, however, Madden highlights three offensive or defensive plays each week that the coaches have picked to attack your opponent's schemes. Practice these enough during the week and, when the other team calls the particular play you've studied, you'll see an icon telling you so. You'll then get a stat bump for that play because you've already prepared for it.

Believe it or not, there is still more in store for this year's Madden. Online lockers will allow players to transfer items and info via EA's servers (there's even a way to set up an online franchise!). The game's use of head-tracking now means that defensive backs can only react to the ball if they see it, and there are a bunch of new pre-snap options. Although we're not sure of the complete feature set for Madden's next-gen appearance on Xbox 360, we have been told that it won't just be a bare-bones version. Stay tuned for next month's issue, when we'll dissect the game from every angle in our review of the current-gen editions. ■ ■ ■

### The Offseason Adventures of Ron Mexico

Although Madden 06 won't let you run over meter maids with your SUV, transport Whizzinator phalli over state lines, or check into the local clinic, the NFL Superstar mode will allow you to get tattoos, haircuts, give interviews to the media, become the Madden cover boy, and more.



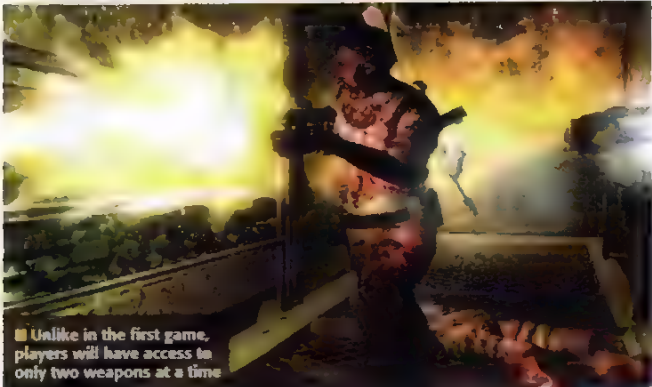




■ Torque holds a gold medal in the 100 meter gun sprint



■ "I told you, no kissing on the first date!"



■ Unlike in the first game, players will have access to only two weapons at a time



■ The streets of Baltimore are the new backdrop for Torque's horrific tale



■ Surreal has gone to great lengths to make Ties That Bind as family friendly as possible

UNLIMITED ENABLED  
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

# The Suffering: Ties That Bind

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER SURREAL SOFTWARE > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 27

## THE MEANS JUSTIFY THE ENDS

**O**f the dark and sordid tales that fill the annals of video gamedom, few yarns are more twisted than the horror story of Torque as told in *The Suffering*. The occasionally insane, but never boring inmate is ready for his return this fall with the release of *Ties That Bind*, which picks up seconds after the end of the first game and continues his horrifying journey.

"In the first game, depending on your morality path, you either ended up killing your family or having some mysterious figures kill your family," Noah Heller is producer on the game, and he offered up some juicy tidbits when we spoke with him recently. "You pick up in the second one

where you left off in the first. So, you can either start off in the neutral morality path, or if you have a *Suffering 1* save game, you can start off as good or evil, depending on how you finished the first game." Choice and consequence seem to be huge aspects of what sets *Ties That Bind* apart from so many other horror titles. With three unique starting points, the game continues to

branch from that point forward. There will even be unique bosses for good or evil players. By the end, you'll finish up in one of nine distinct game endings that are differentiated not only by how you end the game, but the moral path you took to get there.

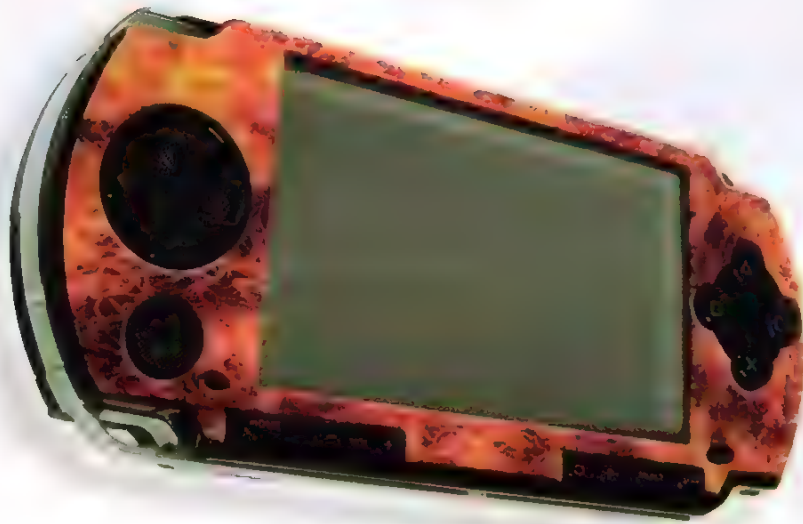
This time, you'll be in pursuit of a crime lord named Blackmore (voiced by Michael Clarke Duncan), a man who may very well have been tied to the untimely fate of your family. No longer confined to the jail of the first game, you'll now wander the streets of Baltimore. "We shifted the focus. The first game was about the horrors of execution and prison life. This one is much more about the horrors of urban poverty," Heller told us. "One of the things we wrestled with early on in development was how do you get that claustrophobic horror feel in a city, which is traditionally really wide open with a lot of places to run and hide. And the answer was making narrow confined streets with a lot of opportunities within the environment to constrain the player." While several areas will be in the dark streets, you'll also descend into the sewers, and at another point venture through the Baltimore docks, where a covert government agency has set up shop to investigate the strange going-ons in the area. But, as Heller points out, "It wouldn't be a *Suffering* game without a prison being involved somewhere." To

that end, a good third of the game occurs in Eastern Baltimore Correctional, the jail where Torque was held while he was waiting to be transferred to the prison of the first game.

While *Ties That Bind* looks to be quite sweet, it's the combat upgrades that are really shaking up the formula, particularly the changes to Rage Mode. "The biggest improvement is probably Rage Mode. In the first game it wasn't really necessary, and some people played through the whole game without really using it. This time around, we decided if we're going to do this, we're gonna make it the coolest weapon in the game or it's not worth [doing]." Depending on your moral choices, you'll actually have a totally different Rage Mode form. As you continue down your chosen path, how far you've gone in either direction will further enhance the attacks of your altered shape.

While *Ties That Bind* certainly won't appeal to the squeamish, horror action fans should be overjoyed, as it looks to be shaping up into a truly impressive affair. Heller summed up his hopes as we wrapped up our conversation: "We have a chance to define our own brand of horror here. What is the American answer to Resident Evil? We're hoping we can be that." ■■■■





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previews



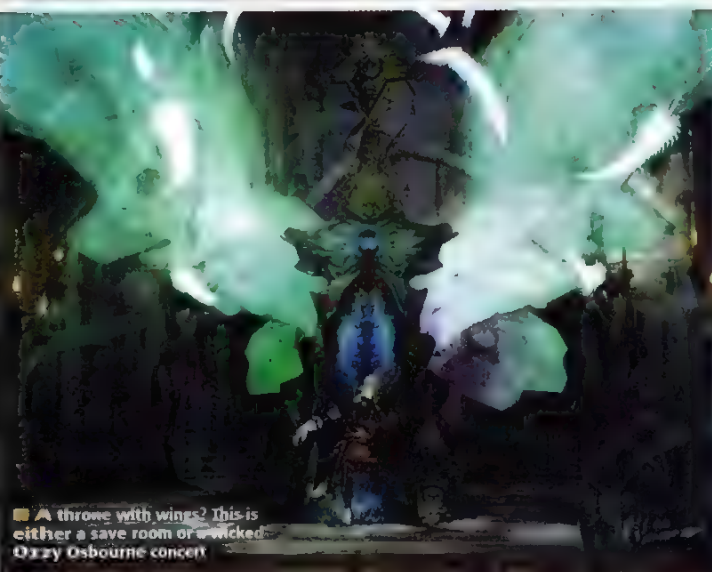
Despite what this screen would have you believe, Orko is not an Innocent Devil.



Hector will encounter new terrors in addition to mainstay foes



Castlevania has always been known for long whips and purple balls



A throne with wings? This is either a save room or a wicked Dizzy Osbourne concert

UNLIMITED ENABLED  
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# Castlevania: Curse of Darkness

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

## ATTACK OF THE INNOCENT

Ever since the series made the jump to 3D, it hasn't been easy to be a Castlevania fan. The substandard N64 titles that followed the spectacular *Symphony of the Night* drained the Belmont clan like a bite in the neck, and *Lament of Innocence* for PS2 wasn't enough to heal the puncture wounds completely. It was a step in the right direction, however, and now Konami is hoping to continue down that path with the upcoming *Castlevania: Curse of Darkness*.

The story follows a new hero, Hector, on his personal quest for revenge, though the events will certainly be closely tied to the rest of the *Castlevania* saga. However, *CoD* will be distinctly set apart by the inclusion of a key gameplay mechanic dubbed "Innocent Devils." These are creatures formed from Dracula's lingering dark energy, and they have an impact on many aspects of the title, from the battles to the exploration.

In combat, the Innocent Devils will fight alongside Hector, acting as support as he unleashes his weapon skills. Using the d-pad, you can give them commands and dictate their battle tactics. In the build we played, we were accompanied by a hulking Devil aggressively attacking foes as we got into the mix with our melee weapons (Hector isn't really a whip kind of guy).

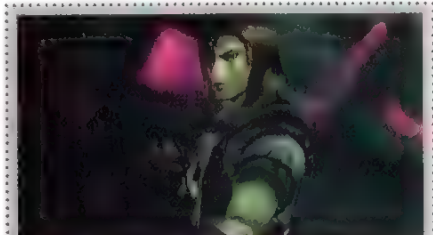
Despite this new element, the combat feels very similar to *Lament of Innocence* — though that isn't necessarily a bad thing. The fights in *Lament* provided some thrills, but the action was brought down by the painfully repetitive level designs. This is where the Innocent Devils come in to save the day in *CoD*.

In addition to the environments being more varied, there will also be a *Metroid*-like way to explore the map. The Innocent Devils you have at your command will determine which parts of the world you have access to. For instance, the hulking Devil can bash open certain doors, while a bird Devil helps Hector glide over gaps to reach new areas. If a path seems to be impassable at first, there is a good chance that you'll find a Devil to help you through later in the game.

By addressing the most grievous design problems in the last game, in addition to harkening back to the series' old-school sensibilities, Konami has *Curse of Darkness* ready to be the first game that finally makes *Castlevania* seem comfortable in a world without sprites. ■ ■ ■



While the castle environments make a return, your battlegrounds will be more varied this time around.



### Don't I Know You?

Though Hector is a newcomer to the series, as Dracula's former Forgemaster he is intricately connected to the events of previous games. As such, fans can expect to see a lot of familiar faces from the older adventures (the Grim Reaper is usually a safe boss bet). In fact, at Konami's E3 press conference developer Koji Igarashi showed a short video of the *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* hero Trevor Belmont making an appearance in *Curse of Darkness*. We've never been this excited by a guy holding a whip! Well, except that one time...



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Blood  
Violence

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PlayStation 2







PSP

# Infected

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER MAJESCO > DEVELOPER PLANET MOON STUDIOS  
> RELEASE FALL

## DOWN WITH THE SICKNESS

**A**s an NYPD officer, it is your solemn duty to chainsaw and shotgun the screaming lunatic masses that roam the Big Apple's streets. Also, it's Christmas. Leave it to hilarious developer Planet Moon (*Armed and Dangerous*, *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*) to take this horrifying scenario and turn it into what could be one of the most delightful and entertaining experiences on the PSP.

Keeping with Planet Moon's tradition of dark humor, a rookie cop named Stevens, like all of New York, is afflicted with a bizarre virus — and only by blasting his way through legions of meaty, infected civilians will he uncover the secret behind the carnage. Of course, one of the great joys of being sick is spreading it on to those closest to you, a sadistic pleasure *Infected* aims to convey. By playing deathmatches against your friends over Wi-Fi (though the precise number of players hasn't yet been announced), you'll fight to saddle others with your particular virus. Keep in mind, however, that you are likewise contaminated if you lose the match. This mechanic grants more than simple bragging rights; it affects the game beyond the multiplayer as well.

Once you are infected, your opponent's custom avatar will appear to relentlessly mock you during the single-player campaign. Thankfully, there are multiple ways to purge your system of this nuisance. The most devious is simply playing against other people and foisting the disease off on them, but you can also just kill the many instances of the offending avatar in-game, or take the easy way out and wait three days for the viral burnout (when it just disappears automatically).

With its focus on community and an intriguing feature set utilizing the PSP's unique capabilities, *Infected* is set to spread its contagious gameplay when it hits later this year. In preparation, we recommend licking every doorknob you see to build up your immune system. Mmm... salty! ■■■■

Stevens will use viral bullets to start violent chain reactions



NINTENDO DS

# Metroid Prime Hunters

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO  
> RELEASE OCTOBER

## HUNTER OR HUNTED?

**N**intendo launched its newest handheld system with a promise packaged inside — a first look at the latest *Metroid* installment. However, as the months have passed, it's become hard to recall that the highly anticipated title is still on its way. Thankfully, new information has recently come to light, and what we've heard has reinvigorated our interest and left us hungry for more details.

The single-player portion of *Hunters* is moving in some cool directions. Samus will begin her adventure with her full arsenal and complement of equipment — except this time she doesn't lose her upgrades after the first five minutes. It's a good thing, too. She'll need all the help she can get, since for the first time, the game puts Samus up against a cadre of other intergalactic bounty hunters who are searching for the same ancient relics that she is after. Interaction with these characters places our heroine both as an attacker and sometimes as prey to these other sinister bounty hounds. It also sounds like Samus will be able to pilot her famed ship for the first time, navigating to several different planets throughout the course of her adventure.

In the multiplayer arena, the most exciting news is the inclusion of multiple playable characters in the form of the bounty hunters from the single player campaign. Each of them has a unique visor, and thus a different HUD display. In addition, each Hunter will have their own alternate form, like Samus' morph ball. One new hunter, Kanden, transforms into a slug-like bug with a tail that acts much like a heat-seeking missile. Another character named Spire can transform into a giant rolling rock to crush his enemies.

The bad news is that *Hunters* won't be taking advantage of any DS Internet capability. On the bright side, Nintendo has prom-

ised to include single-cartridge download play. This means that up to four friends can party together with just one copy of the game, which might very well make this the DS multiplayer game to have as the holiday season approaches. ■■■■







XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

# Tomb Raider: Legend

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER EIDOS > DEVELOPER CRYSTAL DYNAMICS  
> RELEASE WINTER

## THE COMEBACK KID?

It's no secret that after a string of disappointing titles and a high-profile film sequel that flamed out at the box office, Lara Croft has her work cut out for her in trying to win back the hearts of her once-massive fanbase. However, with the franchise now in the able hands of Crystal Dynamics, Eidos is hoping that Tomb Raider: Legend will be a new start for the series.

"What we wanted to do with Tomb Raider is get back to the roots, back to what the character was about to begin with," comments producer Morgan Gray. "[We wanted to] get her off the abandoned streets of Paris and back into the tombs, back to the exotic locales, back where she belongs."

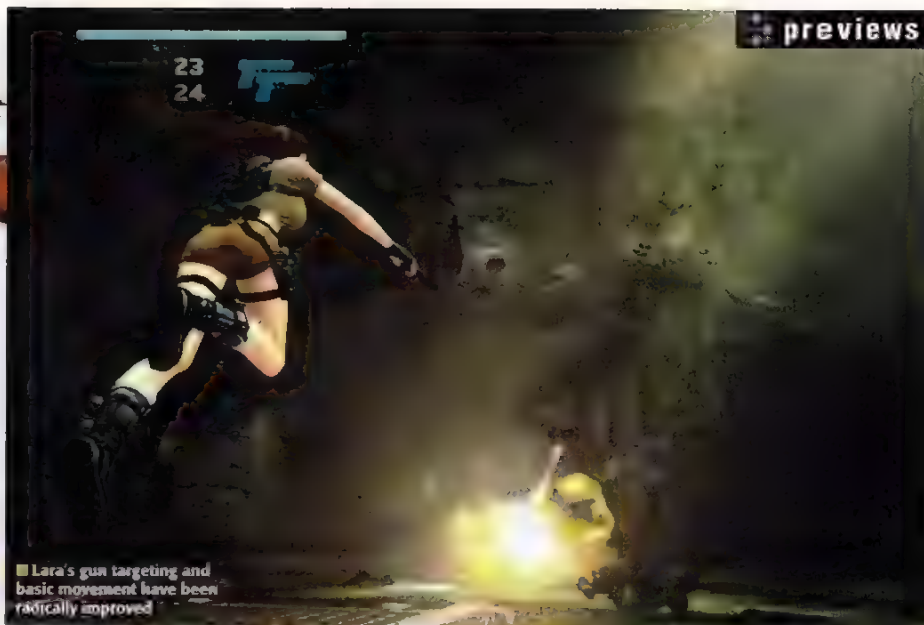
Recently, we got a chance to see a playable demo of the game in action, and were pleasantly surprised with the game's progress so far. It's apparent that Crystal Dynamics knows exactly where Tomb Raider went wrong, and has set about righting the ship by

basically restarting the series from scratch.

"This is 100 percent new code base. Having moved the franchise over to Crystal Dynamics, there is no aspect of previous code that's in [the game]," reveals Gray. In terms of story, it's also a new beginning. "We're sticking to the Lara legacy and her mythos," he continues, "but this is not in any of the timelines of the previous games. This is a completely new storyline kick-off."

Watching the game in action, it looks as though the two major flaws that have dogged Tomb Raider since its inception are being addressed: frustrating platforming and obscure switch and box puzzles. By taking a little apparent inspiration from Prince of Persia, Crystal has recast Tomb Raider's gameplay and level designs into a more intuitive package.

"Most of our puzzles revolve around physics, Lara's weight, and applying force.



Lara's gun targeting and basic movement have been radically improved

Basically, [it's] realistic resolutions to the problems – getting away from random pulleys, switches, and pushing gigantic blocks," observes Gray.

So, much as in Prince of Persia, you'll usually be able to divine the solution to your problem by observing and interacting with the environment. In order to reach a high doorway, Lara can swing into a pillar to topple it (all objects in the game are subject to real physics) and then climb the rubble to her goal. This is made easier by one of her new gadgets, a magnetic grappling hook that can attach to metallic objects in the levels.

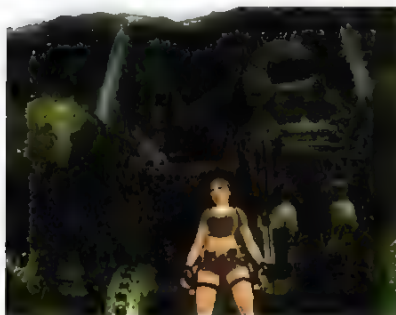
Speaking of gadgets, Lara's still equipped with her two most popular gadgets...meaning her dual pistols, pervert. Thankfully, the previously erratic targeting has been replaced by a new auto-lock mechanic that allows for taking down multiple adversaries at once.

After you lock on to the main target, the AI will sense secondary targets, which will be assigned a face button icon onscreen.

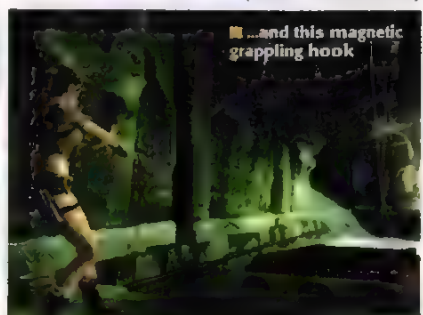
Platforming has also been reinvented, much to the relief of gamers sick of painstakingly lining up the steps and trajectory of every jump in previous Tomb Raider games. "We've eliminated the grid-based movement," comments Gray. "You no longer have to be perfectly aligned to make the jump...she can sense when she's close to something and reach out with one hand and adjust."

Although any new Tomb Raider title must be approached with at least some skepticism, we're honestly pleased with what we've seen of Legend so far. Hopefully Tomb Raider: Legend will be Lara's dramatic return to the top of the gaming world. ■ ■ ■

(PS2 and Xbox screens shown)



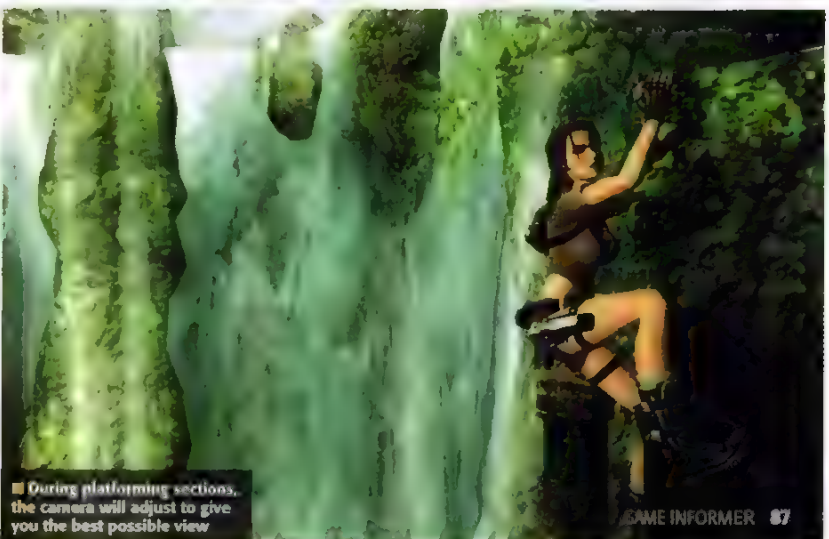
Lara has some new gadgets, like this automatic lamp...



...and this magnetic grappling hook



Jumping over obstacles will be much less frustrating in Legend

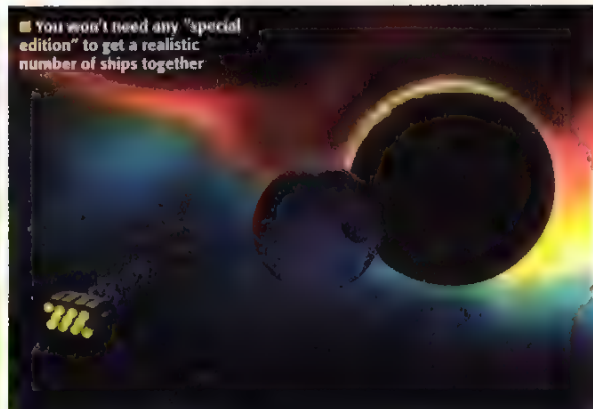


During platforming sections, the camera will adjust to give you the best possible view





■ AT-STs are totally the most practically-designed war machines around



■ You won't need any "special edition" to get a realistic number of ships together



■ Capital ships have hardpoints which can be individually targeted



■ Finally, the ability to slaughter Jawas as a Dark Lord



■ You could say that this title has "destructible environments"

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PC

# Star Wars: Empire at War

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS > DEVELOPER PETROGLYPH > RELEASE SPRING

## FEAR WILL KEEP THEM IN LINE

**S**tar Wars has seen dozens of video game adaptations from both sides of the Force. From the abominable Rebel Strike to the then-amazing Dark Forces, it seems that LucasArts has weathered peaks and valleys like few other publishers in the industry. This real-time strategy title has tons of potential – it's anything but derivative, and it certainly captures the epic mojo of the titanic clashes from the original film trilogy. Much like a certain whiny Skywalker, though, there are many trials and temptations to be mastered before Empire at War can claim any titles for itself.

Most RTS games take place on a single isolated battlefield, with little or no influence from the state of the surrounding war. Empire at War is the antithesis to this – you have control over where your forces move and battle, and you can build an infrastructure much like in Civilization on the real-time Galactic Map. Imagine the impact this has on the gameplay. The Rebels may be scum, but they're everywhere. Crush the Hoth base with your overwhelming war machine, and they just might sneak through the back door to destroy your shipyards and training facilities at Carida. Of course, if the Alliance gets too cheeky with their impudent attacks, sending in the Dark Lord of the Sith is hardly your only option. Slow it may be, and poorly designed exhaust ports it may have, but the Death Star is a fully operational battle station.

Naturally, this is all built on a solid RTS framework. Everything you know and love from Star

Wars is there; from snowspeeders to AT-ATs and Darth Vader himself. Space battles between fleets of capital ships and dozens of fighters sparkle onscreen in all their epic glory. However, though the space combat is modeled in 3D like the rest of the game, it doesn't play like a true three-dimensional game. The fighters and capital ships are on separate horizontal planes to make it easier to wrap your brain around the situation. They can still interact with each other by making bombing runs and such, but simplicity was deemed more desirable than realism.

One of the great things about Star Wars games has always been the radical differences between the crafty Rebels and their Imperial foes. These are definitely on display in Empire at War. Beyond the varying unit types and heroes, the two sides play very differently. It's hard to hide a Star Destroyer, so the Alliance will have access to nearly all information about the Empire's movements. Meanwhile, the Imperials will have to send out probe droids and the like to determine where the Rebels need crushing. This is made up for by the fact that the Empire will have far greater access to production facilities and a vastly larger standing military at the start of the game.

We've certainly been burned before by the promise of yet another Star Wars game, but with ex-Westwood people at the helm of Empire at War, and the impressive early showing this has had, we're willing to give the franchise our attention once again. ■ ■ ■



Winner, Best RPG of E3

— Game Critics Award, GameSpot, IGN, GameSpy,  
Xbox Evolved, Console Gold, Daily Game, Games Domain

"One look at Oblivion will shatter your  
conceptions about what is possible in a  
video game."

— GameInformer

"The biggest title for the Xbox  
360, and the one I'm most  
looking forward to."

— GamePro Magazine

"Oblivion is, at this time, the best-looking  
game I have ever seen in my life."

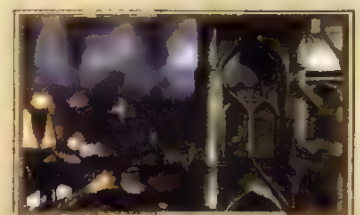
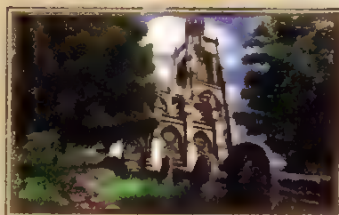
— Xbox.com

"To call the graphics 'amazing' is  
an extraordinary understatement."

— GameSpy

# The Elder Scrolls IV OBLIVION

The RPG for the Next Generation







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XBOX 360

# Test Drive Unlimited

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER EDEN GAMES > RELEASE SPRING 2006

## FIVE-0

**W**ith gorgeous scenery making it one of the world's best vacation destinations, Hawaii's O'ahu island is many a rich traveler's second home. But once Atari and French development house Eden Games (of V-Rally 3 and Kya: Dark Lineage fame) put the twisty roads of the island before gamers, we'll own the streets outright.

Using satellite imagery and GPS data, Test Drive Unlimited will feature a fully realized representation of nearly the entire island, with its forested switchbacks, miles of flawless beaches, urban gleam of Waikiki, and a large volcanic crater. In all, there are nearly 1,000 miles of available road for players to zip through both offline and on.

Similar to the development team's earlier racing efforts, there's a lot going on in addi-

tion to the actual driving. Players will start by making their avatar, a highly customizable character whose single-player appearance will transfer to the robust online play. The menu options are accessed through rooms in the avatar's mansion: a walk-in closet for unlocked clothing and accessories, a posh carpeted garage for admiring one's car, and entertainment areas like pools and home theaters.

The island itself is also a playground. In either the single-player or online experience, players can drive and customize cars from many of the highest-end manufacturers like Lamborghini, Aston Martin, Mercedes, Saleen, Shelby, and Jaguar. Motorcycle manufacturers like Ducati make an interesting addition to the expected 125-vehicle stable.

Online competitions are getting a

unique treatment as well – up to eight players can race in matches where the winnings, track layout, and distance are set up on the fly. Xbox Live players will all cruise the island simultaneously and challenge other racers by flashing one's headlights. Up to eight players can participate in the instanced races.

Details abound in this arcade-flavored simulation title, and what we know about is rumored to be just the start of Test Drive Unlimited's broad feature set. Although it was hoped that the game would make it to shelves in time for the 360's launch, we've recently heard that the title has slipped to the first quarter of 2006 – just in time to finish up the launch games and hunger for something big to sink your teeth into. ■ ■ ■ ■



Racing is clearly the focus of Test Drive's gameplay, but there are also a huge number of peripheral activities to fiddle with. A luxury garage is attached to your created character's mansion where cars can be admired, started up for a test drive, or just sat in. The interiors of each ride are fully modeled with detail and interactivity that rival the rest of the game's fine points.



■ The real-world island was selected because of its diversity in both appearance and elevation

■ We don't know yet if the different weather conditions shown in these screens will change dynamically, but it sure would be nice







XBOX | PC

# American McGee Presents: Bad Day L.A.

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ENLIGHT > DEVELOPER ENLIGHT > RELEASE 2006

## DUCT TAPE AND PLASTIC SHEETING

It's too early to start mocking the reactionary hysterics of what some call America's current culture of fear?

Publisher/developer Enlight and edgy visionary American McGee are hoping not, as the upcoming *Bad Day L.A.* does just that. Putting players into the role of an ex-Hollywood agent now living on the streets, disgruntled and disenfranchised by the commercialism of business, the story of *Bad Day* forces the City of Angels through a set of trials often more absurd than terrifying.

With an ever-growing cast of companions, the lead character (Anthony Williams) will try to get out of the city as zombies, terrorists, natural disasters, and other untold horrors rock the streets. Each supporting member will have special skills and an especially satirical personality quirk (think Valley girls and zombified citizenry) that will add to both the combat strategy and over-

all mockery of modern "culture."

Further differentiating the game from other sandbox of chaos titles is the flat art style. Developed by Los Angeles-based art collective Kozyndan, the neighborhoods and landmarks of the city are portrayed almost as caricatures of themselves. Hollywood Boulevard, Venice Beach, and the ritzy Beverly Hills, among others, should be ravaged and smoldering by the time the game's 10 levels are completed.

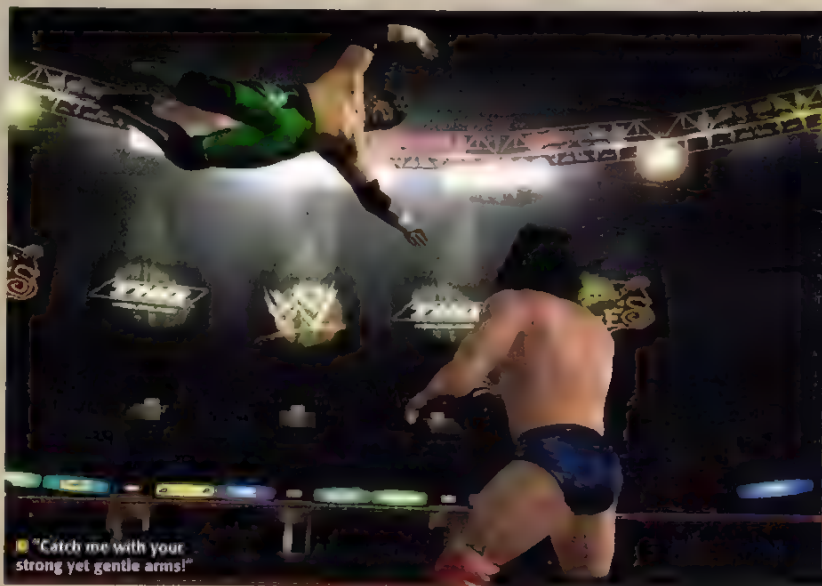
At closing credit time, Anthony will have reluctantly saved a city that he hates desperately, making a character and a story that reeks of dark satire. Hopefully, America is almost ready to start making fun of itself, because if McGee and company succeed, *Bad Day L.A.* could be a smart, unique, and thought-provoking look at the values and personality of this great nation. ■■■



GAMECUBE

# WWE Day of Reckoning 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER YUKE'S > RELEASE FALL



## BACK INTO THE RING

Everyone likes to see an old champion come back for another shot at the title (unless it's Triple H — let someone else be the champ for a while!), which is why we're happy to see the GameCube's exclusive WWE title coming back for another round. *WWE Day of Reckoning 2* will deliver on all the elements that fans liked about the original, while improving on the areas fans felt were lacking.

The first thing that players will notice are the improved visuals — the polygon count in the character models has been increased, new textures have been added, and the lighting engine has been overhauled. The result is one of the best-looking wrestling games ever — the character models even rival those in the visually impressive (although otherwise disappointing) *WWE Wrestlemania 21* for Xbox. The gameplay is similarly impressive — new systems have been added to bring more strategy to the

combat, such as a stamina meter that drops when powerful moves are used. The new submission hold function allows you to apply rest holds, which fills the meter back up. These tweaks are just a couple of the ways that *Day of Reckoning 2* adds new layers to the original's formula.

A true sequel to *Day of Reckoning*, the second game features a story that picks up where the original left off. As a now-established WWE Superstar, you will battle your way through a longer story with more layers and twists. But that's not all that has been improved: The crowds are now fully three-dimensional, AI is more intelligent, and many new characters have been added, including new legends. The result is a sequel that improves on the original significantly, which is a very good thing — *Day of Reckoning 2* may very well be the last WWE title for the GameCube, and it looks like it might also be the best. ■■■







# PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



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XBOX 360

## The Outfit

Ladies and gentlemen, it's time for the unveiling of a new WWII shooter. Is it noon already? But seriously, while there are a ton of games about the Second World War, companies keep finding new ways to approach the subject. THQ's *The Outfit* will offer gamers a few unique twists when it releases right around the launch of Xbox 360. Not only will it feature squad-based combat, but you'll actually be able to switch between two teams at any time, opening up a huge range of strategic options. You'll earn points that can be used to upgrade weapons, purchase tanks and machine gun nests, and even call in airstrikes. Of course, you'll also be able to take *The Outfit* and all its unique features online, disposing of the Nazi menace on Xbox Live.



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3

## Fight Night Round 3

One of the dear highlights of Sony's E3 press conference was the unveiling of a new *Fight Night* game for PS3 (release date TBA), featuring real-time footage demonstrated by the series' producer, Kudo Tsunoda. The astounding realism of the two fighters' reactions blew the audience away with its brutal skull-crushing punches and dynamic facial expressions. We had a ton of new information for you on the game, but forgot it all when we were punched in the head by "Sugar" Shane Mosley. So anyway, we'll just let you look at the pretty picture while we go pick a fight with Oscar De La Hoya. We're pretty sure we can take him.



PLAYSTATION 2

## SpyToy

Hasn't everyone dreamed of being a secret agent at some point? They get all the greatest gadgets, and now Sony Computer Entertainment Europe's *SpyToy* will turn your EyeToy into your greatest asset for undercover work. *SpyToy* will record video, take photos, and set up unique profiles with its facial recognition ability, which means players can create accounts that can only be activated with a facial scan. Finally, our mugs will be good for something besides selling tickets to the freakshow! Of course, *SpyToy* has more traditional gaming uses as well and includes several spy-themed minigames. Our field operatives are pleased, although they have yet to hear of a release date.





UNLIMITED ENABLED  
PLAYSTATION 2

### Guitar Hero

In recent years, no developer has been more innovative or accomplished in the music game than Harmonix, the studio that created *Frequency*, *Amplitude*, and *Karaoke Revolution*. Now, it's setting its sights on the wild world of rock music. With *Guitar Hero*, players will experience familiar timing-based gameplay through a new specially designed guitar controller which will allow them to strum notes and chords as they shred through songs by legendary rockers like Jimi Hendrix, Boston, and Megadeth. This fall, you'll discover that it's a long way to the top if you wanna rock n' roll (Groupies, drug problems, musical differences, ill-advised acting careers, bad concept albums, supermodel wife, and VH1 *Where Are They Now?* special not included).



XBOX

### Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes

Although it's not the most high-profile Xbox game around, last year's *Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders* developed a strong following, even outselling *Halo 2* in Korea (developer Phantagram's home country). Late this year, Microsoft and Phantagram will unleash *Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes*, the sequel with a host of improvements. *Heroes* will sport much stronger Xbox Live features with several new modes, many of which support up to six players. One even allows three gamers to play cooperatively to defend a castle being overrun with AI foes. For those who prefer offline, *Heroes* boasts between 30 to 50 hours of play, and a stronger focus on action. RTS-like elements will become more prominent as the game goes on, making *Heroes* one heck of an enticing title for strategy-loving Xbox owners.



XBOX 360 | PC

### Dogtag

With all the announcements of next-gen games from first-party publishers like Microsoft and software giants such as Electronic Arts, it's easy for smaller titles to get overlooked in favor of those with higher name recognition. One such title is *Dogtag*, a next-gen military game. A tactical shooter set in the near future, *Dogtag* charges players with investigating a rebellion amongst their own military unit – which means the enemies you'll face were once your friends. As such, you'll have to choose between taking them out and using non-lethal tactics. This premise certainly has us interested, and we're curious to see where *Dogtag* goes with it.



PSP

### Pursuit Force

Rocking the PSP with a very positive and realistic law enforcement vibe is... well, not this game. While *Pursuit Force* does feature a commendatory portrayal of those who protect and serve, it's much more interested in keeping our neighborhoods safe by leaping from car to car and depositing a smoldering heap of ruined Detroit mastery in its wake. The Sony-published title is set to make some of the greatest car chases in Hollywood history look like state fair bumper cars when it debuts this November in Europe. A stateside release, though widely expected, has not been confirmed.





# REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

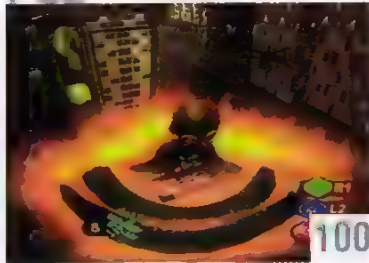
MULTI



97

Batman Begins

PS2



100

Psychonauts

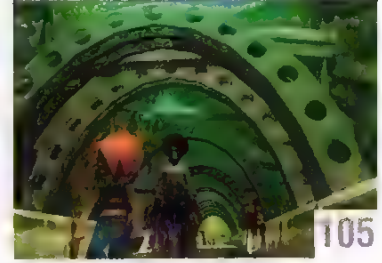
XBOX



102

Sid Meier's Pirates!

PC



105

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked!



96



## NCAA FOOTBALL 06

Jump into the fervor of the Heisman race with EA Sports' newest NCAA football title. Create your Heisman hopeful and perform well on the field to rise up the depth chart and capture college football's most famous trophy. Adding gameplay depth is this year's addition of the Juke Stick, where you can effortlessly dodge tackles and break ankles on your way to the endzone. Madden lite? Not quite. Check out the review on page 96

*Note: Despite scoring higher than NCAA Football 06, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is not eligible for Game of the Month because it is a port, and the original version was awarded the honor competed in a previous issue.*

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** Bumblebee. A party-popping, crybaby mass of electronics masquerading as a noble Autobot. C'mon! He's a transforming robot and he still manages to suck!

> **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.



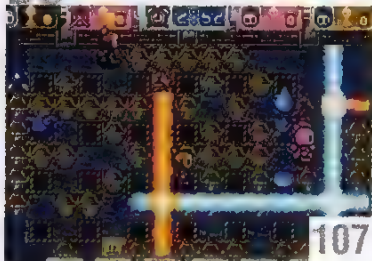
PSP



106

Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition

DS



107

Bomberman



104



## Battlefield 2

The king of huge, realistic online shooters is back in a big way. Battlefield 2 takes the action to modern times and adds enough features to justify its hallowed moniker. Plus, the variety of small tweaks and additions all work perfectly together to take the core Battlefield gameplay to the next level. Positively brilliant level design certainly doesn't hurt either. Check out our latest addiction on page 104.

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### The Edge

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

	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.		Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.		Content suitable only for adults.
	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.		Product is awaiting final rating.
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		

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 Mano Party.

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

**chugly stick** – What developers use to smack a game when they want it to be both ugly and slow.

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

**Ebola** – The sickness that erodes your overall health after a week in LA. Can cause delirium, exhaustion, and toxic body odor.

**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 Baldu'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.

**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 Madden NFL.

**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

# NCAA Football 06

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX) (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE)  
 > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** JULY 12 > **ESRB** E



## WHO WANTS TO WIN THE HEISMAN?

**D**espite being the biggest award in college football, winning the Heisman Trophy doesn't exactly bode well for your future. Sure, guys like Barry Sanders won it, but for every Marcus Allen, there's a slew of Danny Wuerffels and Eric Crouchs — guys for whom the Heisman was less a roadmap to NFL success than a big, dead albatross around their necks. And you don't want to be known as the next Gino Torretta. So, when EA decided to make getting the Heisman a key feature in its new NCAA title, I wonder if it knew what it was getting into.

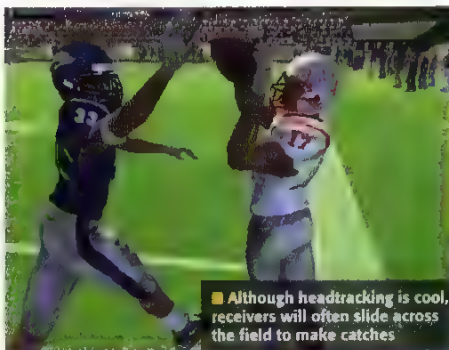
The cynical side of my personality (known to playa-hate with the best of 'em) sees right through the new Race for the Heisman mode. It's basically a spruced up interface for your created player. Your dorm room serves as a smoke-and-mirrors way to access standard features like stats. Although your Heisman-chasing player will get some modest stat bumps to make your pursuit of the trophy a little more exciting, you're still playing the games just like you would in previous NCAA's. There aren't the spring games or off-season drills that would give more depth to your player.

However, if I allow my imagination to take control, I can feel myself wanting to win the Heisman.

I want to make my freshman the cornerstone of the team and only the second cornerback ever to be awarded the trophy. I get excited reading fan mail and watching the Heisman Hype meter in my dorm room increase as my stats inflate with each game. Your opinion of this mode may depend on whether your head or heart rules your thinking.

Similarly, I'm not convinced that this year's Impact Players are necessary. Although it feels great to pull off a knee-buckling juke with the right analog stick or to pound the sprint button for some extra yards, I feel that the Impact Players can be too strong. This is exactly what EA wanted, and it mirrors the divide in college football between the good and the great, but it makes for some lopsided moments.

This year's NCAA does make some strides forward, however. One of the smallest but still important changes is that you no longer have to pull down the passing controls to scramble, making mobile quarterbacks easier and more fun to move around the pocket with. Furthermore, the new in-season recruiting options, as well as being able to talk juniors leaving early for the draft into staying on the team, are cool little wrinkles.



■ Although headtracking is cool, receivers will often slide across the field to make catches



■ Impact players can change during the season, but you'll always have exactly three on your team



■ There's a fine line between pouring Gatorade over someone after winning a game and committing homicide by bashing his skull in with a heavy bronze object

If this franchise truly wants to take a step forward, however, it needs to address the problems that have been plaguing it for years, such as the slowdown (particularly on the PS2) and the oftentimes porous offensive line play. This year I also noticed that receivers will sometimes artificially slide ahead of a defensive back in order to get into position to catch the ball, while the secondary can show very poor AI in defending passes. Finally, the defensive Hit Stick is extremely unresponsive.

NCAA is still a lot of fun to play, but it's more of a 12-yard run on first down instead of the 40-yard TD bomb down the field. —**KATO**

### theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The Edge here clearly goes to the Xbox, simply because there is too much slowdown in the PS2 edition.

**BOTTOM LINE** 8.5

> **Concept:** This year's focus on the Heisman can't obscure its shortcomings

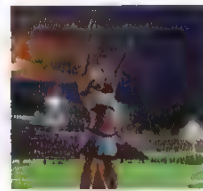
> **Graphics:** A new year brings greater jersey detail, as well as the usual slowdown on the PS2

> **Sound:** Between the commentary, crowd swells, and the bands, it probably has the best sports audio out there

> **Playability:** The Juke Stick and button-mashing tackle breaks are cool, but the Hit Stick is very unresponsive

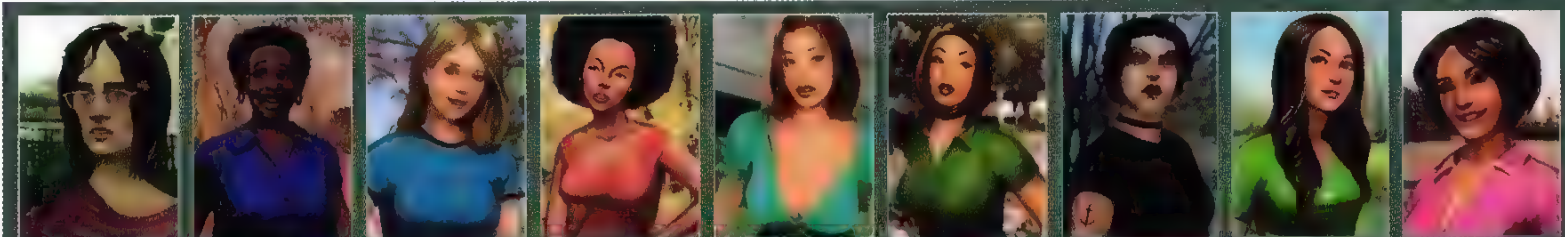
> **Entertainment:** You'll either fall in love with the Race for the Heisman or shrug your shoulders

> **Replay Value:** High



### Second Opinion 9.25

This season, EA is inviting players to enter the mind of a blue chipper. From his humble beginnings at a high school scouting session to the media blitz that unfolds as he races for the Heisman Trophy, you must lead your player to the top of the college ranks. As you'll soon learn, fame and fortune don't come without a price. To ensure that your player is basking in the glow of the spotlight, you may put a game on the line just to pad his stats, or refuse to give the ball to another player who is making headlines. Deserving of deafening applause, this lust for success completely alters the way that you play the game. Great strides have also been made on the field. The laces on the running game have been tightened up considerably, a much-needed emphasis has been placed onto impact players, and the CPU will do everything in its power to rattle your nerves. Both hard hitting and deeper than you could possibly imagine, EA's collegiate gridiron is well worth revisiting. —**REINER**



### THE FAIR AND THE FUGLY

As your created Heisman player gets better and better, certain perks on your team to a bowl game. And the fuglies? Well, they take what they can get.



**BOTTOM LINE** 7.25

> **Concept:** Let the Dark Knight stretch his cape in a fear-fueled, highly interactive, and largely entertaining environment

> **Graphics:** The character models and exterior Gotham environments are great, but like everything else in the game, there's some corner-cutting going on

> **Sound:** The tense noir soundtrack is a nice touch in the game

> **Playability:** Simplicity takes precedence over speed, and some depth is lost in the process

> **Entertainment:** It's Batman, and (finally) it's a pretty good Batman

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



■ The main villains make infrequent appearances



■ Racing sections are too long and too obviously derived from Burnout, but are also fast and easy



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX 1 | GAMECUBE

# Batman Begins

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS/WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** EUROCOM/ELECTRONIC ARTS > **RELEASE** JUNE 13 > **ESRB** T

## GAMING'S SUMMER FLUFF

**T**his is the modern, moody Dark Knight's greatest game — fast paced, stylish, not very brainy, and often an easy, good time. Is it great? Heck no. Does it offer little substance, but an enjoyable handful of thrills? It does, more often than not.

Batman Begins takes just a few parts of the great comic hero's identity and really drives them home. He's only a man, so don't bolt into a room full of armed goons and hope to get out safely. Scared enemies are weak enemies, so freak them out like a bad brown acid trip before they even see you.

In an easy, mass-market friendly way, the game does many of these things just fine. The difficulty is never high, and the interaction points to get large-scale scares going are easy to spot and satisfying to use. The problem for experienced gamers is that each of the game's systems feels dumbed down, and major gameplay elements don't evolve a lick from the first scene to the last. Examples like lock picking and hacking are small; but combat, equipment, and fear-inspiring tactics are bigger areas of lost opportunity.

There are other problems, too. Voice acting by the film's cast is great, but the supporting goons miss more often than they hit. Interior environments feel repetitive and sterile, lacking the scope and detail of the exteriors. The Burnout-inspired driving levels are entirely too long and (again) repetitive. The entire list of things this game could improve on just point to one basic design principle — gameplay, story, and characters really should evolve over the course of the game. In Batman Begins, they do not.

Still, there are some good points and great ideas in here. The rendition of Arkham Asylum rocks. That level, along with the Narrows, is really well designed and takes good advantage of the heights that the Dark Knight will scale. There's a nicely moody atmosphere throughout, and the expansion of areas from the movie is done logically and skillfully.

If Batman Begins were trying to be the pinnacle of stealth action, combat racing, and iconic hero adventure, it hasn't reached any of those heights. Instead it apes some of the most acces-



■ Leading actors provide great voice work and nice facial models

sible and memorable parts from these genre's greatest games (like Splinter Cell's lock picking and Burnout's takedowns) and merges them with interesting, if somewhat underdeveloped, ideas like instilling fear in one's enemies. This certainly isn't the smart, wry Batman game that fans have always wanted, but it is a pretty decent base to build off of. I, for one, hope that EA takes the intelligence and skill of its audience to heart and really delivers a Batman classic the next time around.—LISA

**the edge**  
When All Games Aren't Created Equal  
Graphically, the systems are practically equal (with the Xbox just slightly leading the charge). Control-wise, the PS2 responds faster and the camera seems smoother, but the differences between versions are so slight as to make them essentially identical.



**Second Opinion** 6.75

This game is all about using fear to intimidate your opponents. There are few things more satisfying than the ability to frighten lowly thugs to the point that they cower in the corner and shake in horror. Although this game delivers the sensation that Batman is the most frightening element of the night, it also makes him out to be as cowardly as a kid who throws a rock at you then high-tails it away. If Batman approaches his adversaries prior to inducing fear, he might as well just hop into a body bag. The fact that an overweight toolbox can go toe-to-toe with him is a bit insulting. Pouring salt onto the wound, the combat engine is just as shallow, monotonous, and nauseating as the fighting in the Catwoman game. Spectacular crashes light up the screen in the Batmobile segments, but the horribly designed objectives make this fast ride run out of gas quickly. As enjoyable as it is to lurk in the shadows, this bat is best left locked in the belly away from your systems.—REINER



■ The fear system is a little simplistic, but also sadistically fun



■ There are some really fun level designs (the Narrows and Arkham Asylum in particular)



**MULTI QUICKIES**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

**FlatOut**

- > **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX) (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
- > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
- > **DEVELOPER** BUG BEAR ENTERTAINMENT
- > **RELEASE** JUNE 12 > **ESRB** T



**BOTTOM LINE**  
**6.5**

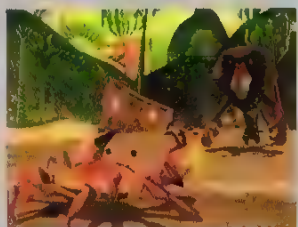
FlatOut subscribes to the Burnout 3 school of racing: Crashing is fun. Every racetrack is littered with obstacles to run into, some of which cause the lifeless corpse of your driver to fly from the car. There are even minigames that revolve around throwing the driver from the car, which are fun, but the racing at FlatOut's core disappoints. The cars feel floaty and unresponsive, and the controls make it difficult to cause the precise mayhem that Burnout 3 so mastered. FlatOut desperately wants to be the trailer park version of EA's slicker racer, but without the polish, it succeeds in being only a pale imitation. —**JEREMY**



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

**Madagascar**

- > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
- > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
- > **DEVELOPER** TOYS FOR BOB
- > **RELEASE** MAY 24 > **ESRB** E10+



**BOTTOM LINE**  
**7**

Adults and children alike will agree on one thing: Brutality against hapless, overweight zoo security guards never seems to get old. Outside of this common thought, however, Madagascar is primarily a game for youngsters. And it's a pretty good one to boot. The gameplay is simple yet heavily varied, which in turn keeps the action fresh and fun. Decent bonus games (like Tiki Mini Golf) keep the thrills alive well after the story has concluded. —**REINER**



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX | PC

**Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RACING > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH > **RELEASE** JUNE 7 > **ESRB** M

**AS GOOD AS IT EVER WAS**

**G**rand Theft Auto sets the bar, and others aspire to it. It's certainly not the graphics that keep people coming back, and anyone would be hard pressed to point out any one action, event, or situation that makes the game so great. What it really comes down to is the relentless fun that assaults you throughout the time you play. Nearly every moment in San Andreas is filled with excitement, humor, or intense action. It lets you try things you'd never do in real life, and always keeps you coming back to see what will happen next.

The tale of Carl Johnson is an incredibly lengthy one, and you can expect to spend dozens and dozens of hours just exploring the main story. Then there's the skydiving, mountain biking, dating girls, working out, and swimming — the list of things you can play around with is far too long to include. Every few minutes San Andreas confronts you with another new situation to try — another challenge to overcome. Nothing is out of bounds, and if there's something you've always wanted to do, there's a good chance you'll find a place to try it.

Even though I was constantly entertained playing through this game again on a new system, there were a couple of issues that came up. On the PS2, pop-up has become an almost accepted part of the GTA experience. While the problem seems to have been partially addressed for this port, the Xbox ver-



sion still has way more draw distance issues than I'd like to see on the powerful machine. Thankfully, the PC version seems to have mostly dealt with this. Otherwise, both new formats show noticeable improvement in the graphics department, particularly in the realm of light and shadow. Then there are the controls. While mouse and keyboard are an option on PC, the whole thing feels pretty wonky (particularly driving), making a purchase of a PC dual-analog almost a necessity in my mind. Meanwhile, on the Xbox, having two of the shoulder controls remapped to the black and white buttons makes for some awkward actions. In particular, shooting while driving has become a major chore. Making up for these minor annoyances are a couple of cool additions. The more substantial of the two is the availability of custom

soundtracks on both Xbox and PC. The second new feature is a replay function that lets you rewatch the last few seconds of gameplay, which is great for showing your buddies that ridiculous jump you made, or the plane crash that made you jump out of your seat.

Overall, it must be said that this is a fantastic port of a stellar game. I would have liked to see a little bit more done to take full advantage of these two more powerful systems, particularly in the control department, but it's a very minor complaint when placed against the mammoth fun and excitement this game offers. I don't know that PS2 players should feel any reason to pick up these new variants, but gamers who missed the boat should make it their highest priority to play this immediately. —**MILLER**

**BOTTOM LINE** **9.75**

> **Concept:** Explore the state of San Andreas in one of the largest and most complex games ever put to disc.

> **Graphics:** A notable improvement over PS2, but graphics still aren't the reason you'll play.

> **Sound:** A gigantic soundtrack, impeccable voice talent, and now even custom soundtracks.

> **Playability:** Constantly challenging but rarely frustrating, even if the PS2 still has the better controller for the game.

> **Entertainment:** This is one of those titles that reaffirms why you love this hobby so much.

> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion** **10**

Only six months have passed since CJ and I ruled the streets in the PlayStation 2 version. Only six months and I once again find myself addicted to the point that the sun is coming up and I haven't moved from my seat for at least 15 hours. Chalk this up to a great game. One of the greatest games of all time, in fact. There's nothing quite like the feeling of evading the police by base jumping off of the city's tallest skyscraper, or soaring on a motorcycle over a canyon. Although the content in the Xbox and PC versions is identical to the original, Rockstar has included a 30-second replay feature that allows players to take another look at the insanity that they've unleashed upon the residents of San Andreas. Trust me, when you see an 18-wheeler launch a hapless bicyclist into orbit, you'll want to watch it again and again. Just like it is on PS2, GTA is one of the largest and most rewarding titles on both PC and Xbox. Don't miss it for a second time. —**REINER**



# ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

## BE PREDATORY

## BE BOTH

SEPTEMBER 2005

[UltimateSpiderManGame.com](http://UltimateSpiderManGame.com)



PlayStation 2



ACTIVISION

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PLAYSTATION 2

# Psychonauts

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS  
> **RELEASE** JUNE 21 > **ESRB** T

## I AM ON THE ROAD CREW

**P**icture yourself at a party, walking around with a plate of delicious cream puffs. Oops! You just dropped one on the floor. As you pick it up and examine it, you realize that it picked up a few errant crumbs and carpet paraphernalia—but as you put it in your mouth, you are pleased to find that the flavor remains largely unaffected. If Psychonauts on PS2 had to be transformed into a dumpty food analogy, that one would fit it perfectly.

Critics and gamers alike sang the praises of this unique title's Xbox incarnation, and Tim Schafer's witty writing and inspired story have remained unchanged during the move to PS2. The jokes are still funny, the level designs are still downright brilliant, and the PS2 controller even improves on the gameplay by mapping all powers to the shoulder buttons. Unfortunately, somewhere in the transition, Psychonauts took a few blows to the cranium from

the chugly stick. Much of the world's luster, from the textures to the character models, is sadly diminished in this version. The abundance of jaggies and muddy complexions is made worse by some disappointing slowdown (especially in the Goggalar level) and a generally choppy framerate. And as if the platforming weren't challenging enough before, now Raz inexplicably loses his shadow when he double-jumps, making it even harder to negotiate a successful landing. Stupid.

If the PS2 iteration will be your only opportunity to play Psychonauts, you owe it to yourself to experience this hilarious and charming adventure; despite some visual issues, it's still an unforgettable game. However, if you can play it on Xbox, you get the whole package with a lot more polish—plus, you don't have

to picture yourself pathetically stuffing floor food into your craw.—**JOE**



**BOTTOM LINE** 8.5

> **Concept:** As a Psychonaut-in-training, Raz delves deep into the buried psychoses of PS2 owners

> **Graphics:** The style is endearing, even though the quality pales in comparison to the Xbox version

> **Sound:** Some overlapping dialogue means you can miss key information

> **Playability:** A questionable camera and dodgy platforming are easy to forgive in the face of such fun

> **Entertainment:** Packed with laughs and one of the most clever games in a long time

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High



**Second Opinion** 8.5

This is one can't-miss adventure. Psychonauts isn't perfect by any means (and, to be honest, even less so on PS2), but the gameplay flaws are made up for with quality writing, great level design, and an undeniably unique experience. Between Xbox and PS2, the Sony version has more aggravating instances of the main tech problems—load times, depth perception issues, and jaggies being the most grating. Still well worth playing on PS2, but if you have a choice, go Xbox.—**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2

# Mobile Suit Gundam: Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** BANDAI > **RELEASE** JUNE 28 > **ESRB** T



## HUNK OF JUNK

**A**bout halfway through my playing time with this game, I thought about gnawing off both my hands so I could flee from the repetitious and shallow gameplay trap that I had stumbled into. For Pete's sake, to show how unimaginative this game is, the word "Gundam" is repeated three times in the freakin' title!

Like some Jean-Claude Van Damme film, this game is nothing more than a series of bad fights—except you don't see any of these robots doing buttock-clenching splits. Regardless of the different character timelines you can pursue, Gundam is a stream of arena battles plagued with small, drab environments, brainless mission objectives, and boring gameplay. The fact that you can switch between supposedly different character arcs only highlights the problem. You think by doing so, you're going to get a new experience, but it's all the same. It's like a house of mirrors showing you the same ugly visage.

Despite the fact that you can transform

mechs and take advantage of secondary abilities, Gundam offers only the worst-case scenario of stereotypical mech combat—slow and dull. Even though you can choose from dozens of machines (as well as upgrade each one), I'd be hard-pressed to be able to tell significant differences between most of them. To top it off, this game doesn't help itself with its sometimes-confusing camera and unbalanced combat.

For the life of me, I can't understand why Bandai hasn't done something significant with this franchise. Instead of the continual stream of extremely limiting games it has pumped out bearing the Gundam moniker, the company needs to invest in more fully using the license. In short, it needs to make a *real* game—one with an intriguing story, gameplay depth, and top-notch assets.—**KATO**



**BOTTOM LINE** 6

> **Concept:** Check your pulse if you can't guess what this game is about

> **Graphics:** The landscape of North Dakota is more interesting than this title's environments

> **Sound:** The voiceovers and sweeping score are major contributors to the little personality this game has

> **Playability:** Evades are better done using the d-pad, which tells you just how un-smooth things are

> **Entertainment:** Although not fundamentally broken, Bandai's beating of a dead horse is only for the sadistic

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 5

Myself, I can't tell a Gundam from a Go-Bot, but I doubt that even the more ardent fan of Mobile Suit Gundam would be able to extract even a drop of enjoyment from this dried up, withered husk of a game. Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam is essentially a Zone of the Enders rip-off, although one that lacks any of the actual fun of that series, replacing thrills with painfully dull gameplay, wonky controls, insanely repetitive battles, and a crappy camera. Put it this way: Unless you have a Gundam tattoo, avoid this product like a White Castle hamburger that's been left out in the sun for three days.—**MATT**



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

# Makai Kingdom: Chronicles of the Sacred Tome

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER NIS AMERICA > DEVELOPER NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE > RELEASE JULY 26 > ESRB 7



## RECOGNIZE AND STRATEGIZE

There are two possible reactions to Makai Kingdom, the first being "Sweet!

Another new strategy game from Nippon Ichi, creators of such memorable titles as Disgaea: Hour of Darkness and Phantom Brave! Here is my money, my dear game store clerk – I would like to purchase a copy of this wonderful little game!" Of course, the other reaction is "Whut da heck izzat?" You either like these games or you don't. I for one love them, and although Makai Kingdom isn't my favorite Nippon Ichi title, it is another worthy entry in their strategy catalogue.

Makai Kingdom combines the circular movement grid of Phantom Brave with a turn-based structure otherwise identical to Disgaea – including that game's unique sense of humor. As the army of Lord Zetta, the goal is to battle through a series of "netherworlds" so that your master can reclaim both his personal netherworld and his body – he's

been turned into a book, you see. I hate when that happens.

You can build your army from typical unit types like fighters and wizards, and can also enlist more esoteric classes like riflemen and walking treasure chests. You can also invite build-

ings onto the battlefields, which lend units unique bonuses. For example, any unit that spends time inside the hospital regenerates health with each turn. By adding modern weapons, buildings, and vehicles into the mix, Makai Kingdom feels completely unique, but still instantly familiar to strategy aficionados.

Unfortunately, Makai won't feel so familiar for those who haven't played many strategy games. The circle-based movement can make it a little tricky to navigate the map, the menu screens are clunky, and the game doesn't do a great job of teaching the player all its intricacies. Coupled with severely dated graphics, Makai Kingdom is hard to get into if you don't have the strategy bug. However, if you have it like I do, then Makai is another deliriously entertaining title that will easily suck up weeks of your life. It's funny, challenging, and complex, and a no-brainer for Nippon Ichi fans like me. —JEREMY



Despite the fact that he was a total jerk, the castle's servants were obliged to put up with the prince's jackassery

**BOTTOM LINE** 8

> **Concept:** Elements of Disgaea and Phantom Brave merge in Nippon Ichi's latest love letter to the strategy game niche

> **Graphics:** Pretty good – for Super Nintendo

> **Sound:** Two language tracks are included for the cutscenes Japanese and severely goofy English

> **Playability:** Strategy veterans will jump right in, while all others will fumble with some fairly obtuse menus

> **Entertainment:** Not recommended for strategy noobs; but for fans, Makai is another dose of that sweet, sweet Nippon Ichi medicine

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 8

Someday, I will stop having to compare all strategy/RPGs to Disgaea. Makai Kingdom, while quite solid and filled with the insane variety of content that makes Nippon Ichi one of my favorite studios out there, nonetheless fails to capture that perfect balance. The wildly diverse combat is great, but the goofy gridless map (lifted directly from Phantom Brave) makes it difficult to set up positioning, which waters down the tactical possibilities. Plus, this might be the worst-looking game on the PS2. This title is solid, fun, and hugely replayable – but Nippon Ichi (and everyone else) still has yet to match Disgaea's brilliance. —ADAM



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

# RPG Maker 3

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER AGETEC > DEVELOPER ENTERBRAIN > RELEASE AUGUST > ESRB E10+

## IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

People with children possess the ability to unflinchingly watch their offspring butcher Beethoven at a piano recital or deliver lines in a school play with a grace that even Jake Lloyd could exceed. It is with this sense of paternal pride that I began to play my own RPG, "Totally Breakfast." But the swell in my heart turned into a knot as I awkwardly plodded through the world I had spent so much time creating, wincing nearly every step of the way and simply feeling ashamed.

Yes, RPG Maker 3 allows you to make a game with your bare hands, but it fails to inspire the forgiveness necessary to play it. After hours upon hours of typing in dialogue, laying out cities, and scripting events, what is the fruit of your labor? PSone-caliber graphics (which is admittedly a step up from the last iteration), terrible controls, and a battle system that chugs more than Lee Marvin at a whiskey party.

Even more troubling is this: In the time it takes to create any sort of viable or interesting content in RPG Maker, you could play through a real game. Instead of messing with tools and settling for ancient visuals, you could actually be experiencing current technology, sophisticated storytelling, and main characters who don't walk like they just filled their pants.

I cannot deny the sheer entertainment of this game as a hobby project; between the slew of characters, monsters, and items, there is enough here to keep you occupied for days. Furthermore, some people will undoubtedly appreciate the opportunity to "own" their gaming experience. So, if ownership is that important to you, then congratulations – you own garbage. —JOE



**BOTTOM LINE** 6.5

> **Concept:** Provide the tools to create a game no one will ever want to play

> **Graphics:** Smoln' compared to its predecessors and awful when compared to its peers

> **Sound:** The in-game music is passable, but the melody that plays endlessly in Editor mode is downright terrible

> **Playability:** Even with a fairly intuitive interface, you absolutely need to have a USB keyboard to get anything done

> **Entertainment:** The process of creating the game is captivating and fun. The game itself blows

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 7.25

When compared with the colossal task of trying to design a game on the earlier RPG Maker games, this third installment is a piece of cake. In fact, while putting together a workable RPG is certainly still challenging, this one is genuinely useable most of the time. I liked the variety of character models and the general ease of placing objects in the environment. Scripting dialogue was a simple affair, but good luck balancing battles. At least now you'll know how hard that task is for real RPG designers. While the graphics and animations definitely look several years old, the move into 3D works surprisingly well. Aspiring designers could do much worse than taking the time to try this out, but only if you head in with great patience and a willingness to learn. —MILLER



XBOX

# Sid Meier's Pirates!

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES > DEVELOPER FIRAXIS GAMES  
> RELEASE JULY 3 > ESRB T



## CLAIM SOME BOOTY ON THE 'BOX

As much as I enjoy the concept of pirates, in reality being one would kind of suck. Getting scurvy and spending months at sea with a bunch of grungy guys with dirty eyepatch funk doesn't really sound like much fun. Fortunately, Sid Meier's Pirates punches reality right in its stupid face and focuses on a more cheesy, cartoon version of pirates. Sailing around its world is a lot more fun than real buccanteers probably ever had.

Pirates lets players explore whatever aspect of the high seas lifestyle they want by allowing them to roam around an open world, picking fights with other ships, trading with townsfolk, searching for treasure, and the like. Each of these is little more than a basic minigame, but can affect all other aspects of the game. What makes the French happy may anger the Dutch, which in turn can tick off the English. For a game with such simple mechanics,

the way everything comes together is surprisingly elegant. Completing different quests leads you up the ladder of notoriety (or "piratosity," as I call it), and the goal is to retire as an old man with hordes of riches. However, few people will ever get to that point.

Each of the minigames is fun a few times, but they are so basic that you won't feel incredibly compelled to keep playing all of them. For example, the ship-to-ship battles are a blast, but the dancing game is nearly unbearable. I appreciate that the ship battles are now available as a separate mode, but the other tweaks for the Xbox port aren't big enough that those who played the PC version will need to buy it again. But for pirate fans, this is a great title to get a little taste of the lifestyle. But rather than spending hours on end in this world, you'll probably only stop by every once in a while for quick visits. —JEREMY



The land battles are one of the more engaging minigames

**BOTTOM LINE** 7.75

> **Concept:** Live the life of a pirate in this Xbox port of the recent PC title

> **Graphics:** Clean and cartoony, but certainly not taking advantage of the Xbox's power

> **Sound:** Weird mumbly gibberish voices add little value to the title

> **Playability:** So simple you can eat a sandwich while playing — a pirate sandwich

> **Entertainment:** A simple game with a good deal of variety, Pirates is ideal for a quick gaming fix

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

### Second Opinion

From the moment that you pick up the controller, your buckles will be swishing as cannonballs blacken the skies and long-forgotten treasures are unearthed. Amid the warring and pillaging, nations rise and fall, legendary sea dogs are slain, and an unstoppable armada is assembled. To say the very least, the intoxicating lifestyle of a pirate is captured brilliantly within this game. From the intensely thrilling ship-versus-ship battles to the political corruption that you nefariously spread, the gameplay is nicely varied and ripe with possibilities. With that said, the high seas can be a little bumpy at times. Some of the minigames are nearly unendurable, and repetition does eventually become a factor. —REINER



XBOX

# King of Fighters: Maximum Impact Maniax

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER SNK NEO GEO  
> DEVELOPER SNK PLAYMORE > RELEASE JUNE 15 > ESRB T

## MAKES GLASS JOE LOOK LIKE A CONTENDER

Those of us who have gotten into fights with siblings back in the day know that real combat is nowhere near as exciting or brutal as it is in movies or games. There's a lot more ineffectual grappling, fewer jaw-cracking punches, and throwing fireballs is never really an option. King of Fighters: Maximum Impact Maniax is a lot like a kid who has gotten in a few schoolyard scraps and decided he's ready for the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

The PS2 version of Maximum Impact was a forgettable fighter at best, and this Xbox port has even less chance of hanging with the big kids. The graphics don't take advantage of the Xbox's power — it's easily one of the worst-looking 3D fighters on the system. I could perhaps forgive that if the fighting was decent, but guess what? It's not. Playing against AI opponents is simply not an option — they're about as smart as brain-damaged rocks. As soon as you discover one simple combo, you can defeat any character in the game by simply repeating it over and over. The only exception to this rule is the final boss, who is ridiculously hard. Sure, that's a tradition of the King of Fighters series, but imagine you're playing a game as simple as Mario Party that suddenly becomes as hard as Ninja Gaiden.

While technically a port, Maniax does wear a few extra bells on its shoes — most notably Xbox Live tournaments and the option to record your best battles onto your hard drive. Even so, I can't think of a single reason to spend time with Maniax when far more polished fighters like Dead or Alive Ultimate and Mortal Kombat: Deception are available. It would be like choosing a big, steaming bowl of boiled cabbage when you could have a nice, juicy steak. Both ultimately do the same thing, but which will you enjoy more? —JEREMY



**BOTTOM LINE** 5.75

> **Concept:** The first 3D King of Fighters game gets ported to Xbox, with Live play and few other improvements

> **Graphics:** Your eyes will tell you that you're playing PS2. Your eyes are liars

> **Sound:** Open up the dictionary and look up the word "adequate"

> **Playability:** Prepare for the Button-Mashing Festival of 2005. "B-MF '05" T-shirts will be on sale at the concession stand

> **Entertainment:** Multiplayer is passable, but single-player is embarrassingly bad

> **Replay Value:** Low

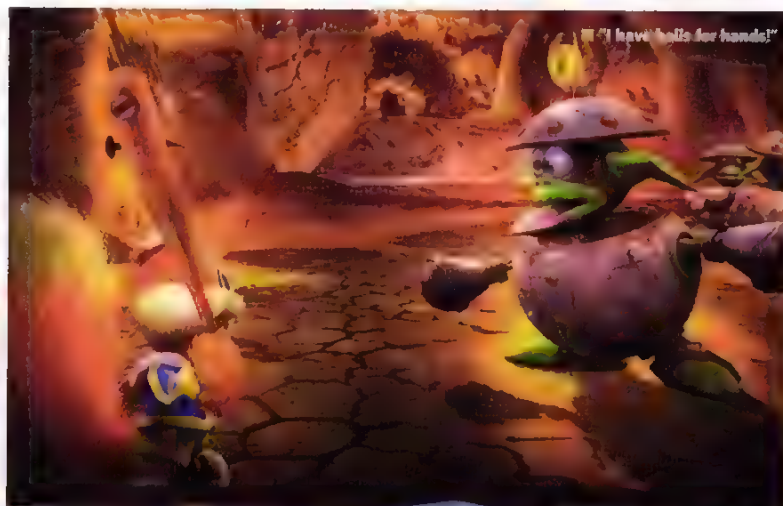
### Second Opinion

The kindest thing I can say about Maniax is that it isn't more broken than its PS2 counterpart that released last year. However, the myriad ways in which it fails are made all the more apparent on the Xbox. The pain the game inflicts is no longer just localized in your living room; now you can have a miserable time with your friends online. Single-player doesn't salvage the experience, either — the AI opponents' tactics are so shallow and stupid that I think it might be politically incorrect to beat them up. They should be under constant supervision, not the fighting arena. All in all, the game's poorly-balanced mechanics and lackluster presentation place it solidly in the bottom tier of Xbox fighters. —JOE





This picture perfectly captures the gameplay grace of Live and Reloaded



"I have balls for hands!"

UNLIMITED ENABLED  
XBOX

# Conker: Live and Reloaded

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT > DEVELOPER RAREWARE > RELEASE JUNE 21 > ESRB M

## IN WITH THE OLD, OUT WITH THE NEW

**S**inging heaps of dung, red squirrels that discharge more fluid than the Manneken Pis, cattle suffering from the backdoor trots, and maniacal weasels with diarrhea of the mouth. The adventures of Conker are obscene, disgusting, inappropriate, raunchy, and above all, classic. From the very day that this foul-mouthed rodent slammed a beer and vomited onto the pavement in his Nintendo 64 debut, gamers have been gnawing at the bit for a second helping of wrongdoing.

The arrival of Live and Reloaded does signal the return of video games' furry bad boy, but not the long-awaited continuation of his story. Rather than following the misbehavior of one wily squirrel, developer Rareware has kicked Conker to the curb and expanded the scope of the game by focusing on the war erupting between the heroic squirrel nation and the nefarious Tediz. Glimpses of this battle were shown within the original Nintendo 64 game, but now you will see it unfold in all of its bloody glory. Explosions blanket the battlefield, fluffy squirrel tails catch fire and burn within the trenches, and teddy bears' corpses are hurled high into the air, leaving nothing but a faint trail of charred stuffing in their wake.

Whether you join the online ranks for matches supporting up to 16 players or seclude yourself in a bunker for a single-player bout with AI-controlled axis and allies, Live and Reloaded's game of war is unlike anything that you've experienced before. Outweighing your ability to fill opponents full of lead is the need to coordinate tactics with your team-

mates. Each of the scenario-based matches pushes the teams to complete a number of objectives, such as disabling the defenses on an enemy stronghold or crippling the opposition before it can launch a strike against your forces. As you strategize your assaults, you'll also have to find the perfect balance for your squad. Each of the six soldier classes varies greatly in both firepower and skill. You may want to send in the agile, saber-wielding Sneeker class to quietly thin out the enemy numbers. On the other hand, you may need a Demolisher to take down a tank, a Sky Jockey to provide air support, or a Thermophile to heal your troops as you push forward.

Although the premise is innovative, the series' trademark humor is nowhere to be found in any of these battles, and has in a sense been replaced by the typical banter of Xbox Live users. Although many of the missions parody familiar films such as *A Bridge Too Far* and *Saving Private Ryan*, the gameplay seems to be modeled after disasters along the lines of *Waterworld* and *Battlefield Earth*. The controls are clumsy to the point that actual squirrels with guns duct taped to their paws could hit the target more often than a veteran gamer. As you struggle with the basic targeting mechanic, the HUD and enemy health meters often blind your line of fire, the bullet effects never seem to make contact with your target, and the diminutive size of your targets makes it difficult to place shots. All told, it plays like the singing pile of crap that Conker became famous for.

Interestingly, the game does have a saving grace,

and it's tucked off to the side as a bonus. For those of you who either missed Conker's first adventure on Nintendo 64 or have a hankering to revisit it, Rareware has included a graphically enhanced port of the original *Bad Fur Day* game. It's not a new game by any stretch of the imagination, but it's still the best that Conker has to offer. It was a must-play back in the day, and — despite being four years old — remains one today. From the adorable angst of Greg, the Grim Reaper, to the somewhat disturbing lust of a king bee, this tale is still laugh-out-loud funny. The gameplay is a bit chaotic (although not nearly as problematic as its online counterpart), and unlike the N64 game, there's a bit of loading in this version. The updated graphics expand upon the personalities of the characters and show just how beautiful this world is.

Rare still hasn't delivered a game for this current generation that is worth talking about, but thankfully, the company has its past to fall back on. Conker didn't get the attention it deserved releasing at the end of the Nintendo 64's lifespan, but will hopefully be thrust into the spotlight on the Xbox as an amazing re-release. —REINER



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** The Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of video games. One game is gorgeous and worth playing. The other is hideous and worth kicking in the shin

> **Graphics:** Don't be surprised if you reach out to pet your TV. The new hair effects that have been incorporated into the original game are absolutely stunning

> **Sound:** This is another area where the game that was made four years ago stomps all over the new one. Nice gun effects, Rare!

> **Playability:** Both games struggle in the gameplay department in different ways

> **Entertainment:** The original game is still wildly amusing. The online game, on the other hand, makes Master Chief cry

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

Live and Reloaded is more like a special edition of Conker's *Bad Fur Day* than a real new game, making it one of the tinker releases I've ever had to review. Despite the visual upgrades to *Bad Fur Day*, it's still the same game it always was, complete with all the flaws of the original version. It's still funny and enjoyable, but the gameplay feels a little aged these days. Of course, the Xbox Live play is the main draw, and its story-based missions are fun, but they suffer from an overall lack of polish. Matches are chaotic to the point of confusion, but the scenario-based gameplay does lend it a ton of personality, and it's nice to see an online game not based around deathmatches. I have a feeling that Conker will deeply polarize gamers: Some will love to see Conker back and enjoy this game despite its flaws, and others will hate that a game which has seen so many delays still feels rushed. As for me, I fall somewhere between the two. —JEREMY



"So I did eat corn last night!"



"I don't remember stepping on that. Ah well, might as well take a whiz on it."



George A. Romero's *Land of the Dead* turned out to be a colossal disappointment





**BOTTOM LINE** 9.25

PC

# Battlefield 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 64-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE > **RELEASE** JUNE 21 > **ESRB** T



## TEAMWORK FOR THE WIN

**E**A and Swedish developer DICE teamed up in 2002 to bring Battlefield 1942 into the world, and the game quickly garnered a huge following with its revolutionary team-based online FPS action. Since then, many titles have tried to replicate the Battlefield formula with varying success. DICE has now unleashed the true sequel (let us never speak of Battlefield Vietnam again), and it's clear that the master has returned to the house. The additions in Battlefield 2 fit like a glove over the enthralling gameplay, and easily make this title the online game of choice for the modern warfare-minded.

Battlefield 2, like its predecessors, is at its core about taking control of a map by occupying scattered control points. Whether it's eight-on-eight or 32-on-32, this can only reliably be done by working well with your team — I don't care how "1337"

your skills are, it's almost impossible to win 3:1 odds. This basic gameplay is strong as ever, but the genius of Battlefield 2 lies in how it both further emphasizes teamwork and makes it easier than ever to coordinate assaults. On the one hand, the ways different kits (assault, engineer, medic, etc.) complement each other makes a diverse squad far greater than the sum of its parts. On the other hand, the addition of the squad mechanic is my single favorite online FPS innovation in years.

You have the option to join a squad at any time



during play. All it really does is let you spawn to your squad leader's position and give you a private voicechat channel. While these may seem minor, the advantages to coordination and position control that organizing into squads confers cannot be understated. It literally changes the game, so that rather than being a cluster of 64 players fragging each other at random, a well-run team will engage the enemy in four- to eight-man squads and really duke it out over positions. Add in the strategic Commander role (which can call down artillery or supply drops, and generally has a much better view of the situation to guide his team), and the potential of Battlefield 2 is immense.

The other great part about Battlefield 2 is the map selection. They're all incredibly well thought-out and feature tons of cover and concealment, as well as a nice verticality in the form of climbable buildings and hills. Also, since they're so large, the ability to use lighting and lines of sight to stay hidden from the enemy is a deadly weapon in the hands of a competent player. Vehicles also play a huge role; not only do they dispense death wholesale, they're vital in transporting the troops. And, for once, they're actually balanced fairly well.

On the down side, aircraft still control terribly. This isn't to say you can't get good at it, but it takes a lot of practice. Also, like all other online games, the experience you come away with depends in large part on the other people on the server. These minor complaints and the moderate learning curve aside, though, Battlefield 2 is a masterpiece. —**ADAM**

> **Concept:** Take the already-great Battlefield gameplay to the next level through subtle tweaks

> **Graphics:** Far from the best-looking FPS around, but having no frame loss when 64-player hell is breaking loose around you speaks volumes

> **Sound:** Hearing that enemy tank before it comes around the corner will save your life

> **Playability:** The aircraft controls still make babies cry, but the new radial communication menu and squad interface do nothing but rock

> **Entertainment:** Lots of fun even on a mediocre server. On a good server, this is entertainment of epic proportions

> **Replay Value:** High

### Second Opinion 9.25

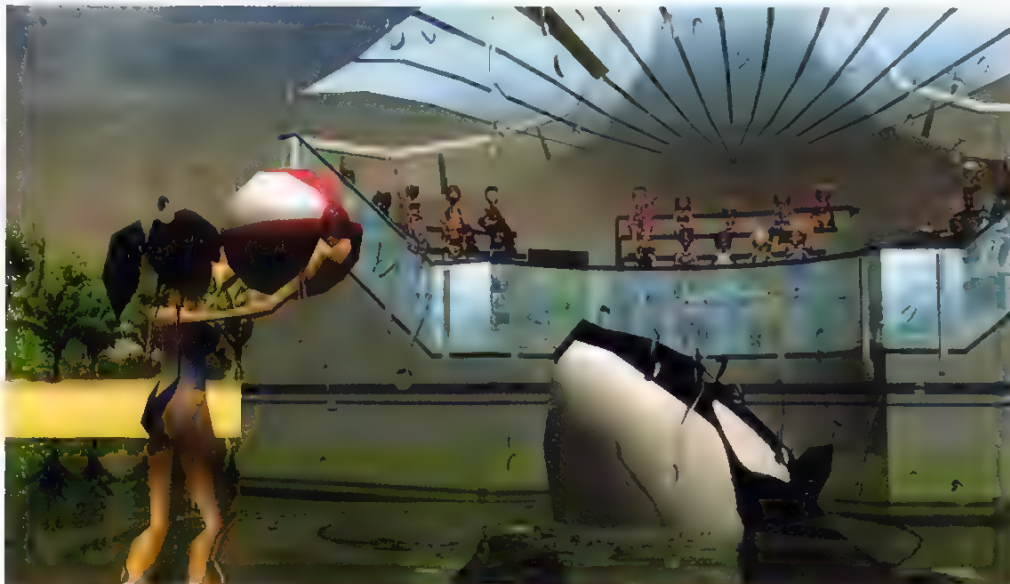
I must give DICE credit on this one. While it can always be said that any online multiplayer game is as good as the people you play with, when you find yourself part of a well-oiled killing machine and the power of a team — Battlefield 2 rocks like few before it (a classic favorite of mine, PlanetSide, is the only one that comes to mind). If you have the hardware, this game is stunning to see, but can be a tad muted on older machines. That said, the graphics aren't what makes this game what it is. Its maps like Strike At Karkand, when you find yourself holed up in an alley with tank shells and gunfire exploding everywhere, and you grit your teeth and dig in for the fight of your life. A thrill ride to say the least. While some of the maps could certainly be better, most are good, and the balance of the kits this round is fantastic. If you have an internet connection and a computer that can play this game on any level, I highly recommend it. Easily the best PC game of the first half of 2005. —**ANDY**



PC

# RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER FRONTIER > RELEASE JUNE 21 > ESRB E



## SLIGHTLY SOGGY

If RollerCoaster Tycoon 3 were a swimming pool, Soaked would be the kid in the far corner with a mischievous grin surrounded by a whiz-detecting chemical discoloration. It doesn't pollute the entire RCT experience, but it certainly doesn't add any content you're eager to drink in.

Soaked is not the kind of expansion pack that changes the way you play the core game; it has a handful of new rides and scenarios, plus the addition of the waterpark features. As the name implies, the pools and water rides take center stage — but they aren't really any different than the options you had before. The process of building them is slightly modified, but otherwise it simply feels like content I had overlooked before rather than being newly created.

The only real gameplay change is the ability to build pools and attractions on multiple elevations, which is executed clumsily and involves a lot of guesswork to match up heights. Once you get it to work, though, it adds a nice aesthetic to your park and gives

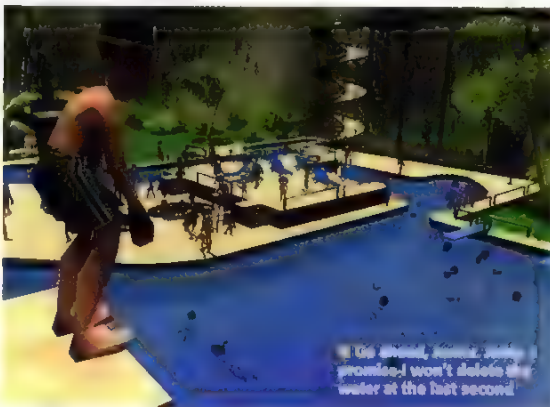


The Karate Kid franchise continues its descent into madness

you plenty of opportunities to make your peeps plummet from high places (which lead to me receiving several fines for being "most criminally negligent").

The fireworks shows also received some special treatment; they can now include lasers and water jets while being synched up to whale and dolphin shows. I have to admit that I never found the fireworks of RCT 3 compelling before, yet I found myself investing a lot of time in Soaked getting the presentation just right — even though it was for a sacrificial ceremony for peeps who unwittingly took flume rides into the middle of the killer whale pool.

I did have hours of fun playing this game, but the vast majority of it was due to the inherently entertaining nature of RCT 3 rather than anything Soaked adds to the mix. While it could breathe some new life into RollerCoaster Tycoon if your interest has been waning, it certainly isn't enough to revitalize the whole experience. —JOE



Oh good, another promise I won't sink in the water at the last second

## BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Add chlonne and Speedos to RollerCoaster Tycoon 3

> **Graphics:** The water effects in the pools are neat, especially since you can manipulate them yourself

> **Sound:** Not much new here. The music is still generic, the screams are still hilarious

> **Playability:** The frustrating camera control doesn't meet the game's new multi-tiered demands

> **Entertainment:** Manages to deliver a brand of fun identical to the core game, but wetter

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

## Second Opinion 7

In the whole of the varied universe, no packaged software so quintessentially exemplifies the "expansion pack" as well as Soaked. It certainly does what it sets out to (i.e. expand on RollerCoaster Tycoon 3's solid core game). It does little more. That's okay, though, because the water-based offerings are fun, work well within the context of the original game, and offer some nicely quirky accessories to throw into your park. Some interface issues still pop up — things like making elevated platforms and constructing your own rides are more frustrating than user-friendly. I must say that I was quite the tycoon until Joe hijacked my park and started killing my customers. Bad job! —LISA

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—Justan Brandt

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PSP

# Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC) > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR  
> **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO/ROCKSTAR LEEDS > **RELEASE** JUNE 30 > **ESRB** E10+



■ You can race and modify vehicles (including bikes and trucks) as you compete in DUB Edition's three cities: San Diego, Atlanta, and Detroit

## AN ALMOST PERFECT CONVERSION

**M**idnight Club 3: DUB Edition on PSP stands just as tall as its console brethren when looked at simply as the game that you play. It truly is fast, frantic, and one of greatest racing franchises out there. However, with this PSP edition also come load times that simply cannot be forgiven and complicate this review on so many levels. Let me explain.

For one, its tough to knock Rockstar for bringing a console game — in its entirety — to the PSP, especially when it's done as well as this one. However, when you start to look at load times that exceed a minute to complete a race that can be defeated in two, I can't help but find myself annoyed. In fact, when I reviewed this game, I literally ran out of things to read on the Internet on my computer

as I sat through long load after long load. The Internet, folks...the Internet!

So, either Rockstar was too lazy and didn't figure out how to get the load times down to a reasonable level, or the PSP simply can't take straight ports of certain games. I'm convinced it's the latter. This is still an outstanding game, even with the extreme load times, but Rockstar should have created a Midnight Club game designed specifically for the PSP, instead of marring DUB Edition by stuffing it into a PSP's shell.

Truly an amazing race game, and the best on the PSP, but I simply can't overlook its one glaring flaw. So while this game deserved a nine, I had no choice but to penalize it heavily for its one and only sin. The sin of wasting your time and mine. —ANDY



**BOTTOM LINE** 8

> **Concept:** Recreate the console game on PSP

> **Graphics:** Surprisingly crisp on the PSP, although as the game gets faster I did find myself squinting more and more to see oncoming traffic

> **Sound:** As always, Rockstar delivers a diverse and outstanding tracklist

> **Playability:** The analog control is spot on

> **Entertainment:** When this game isn't loading, the racing is fantastic

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High



**Second Opinion** 9

This game is an advertisement for helmets and seat belts if there ever was one. It's also a blueprint for how to put your console game on the PSP without the funky port problems. Not only is the title's sensation of speed amazing, but the fine detail in the graphics helps you pick up all the shortcuts out of the corner of your eye. The different AI paths that cars take also makes this game impressive. My first time through an underground parking garage, it was empty. My second time through, it was filled with cars — much to my honor. My only complaints are that some of the tournaments are boring, and I wish more of the multiplayer race types were included in single player. Loading can be an issue, but it didn't detract from my enjoyment or keep me from playing the game. DUB Edition is the best racing title on the PSP, and should remain so for some time. —KATO



PSP

# Dead to Rights: Reckoning

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO  
> **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** JUNE 28 > **ESRB** M

ARFI

**P**erhaps Jack Slate's canine companion Shadow needs to teach his master some new tricks. Reckoning's simple "shoot 'em until they don't move" premise is barely above walking upright on the evolutionary scale. But perhaps the most damning thing about this game is that its simple nature is almost out of necessity.

To go along with its threadbare plot, Reckoning consists of little more than run and gun. But with its genius design decisions, like bullets coming out of your gun if you hit the X button (unless you're out of ammo, of course), there isn't much in this game that isn't touched by the hand of mediocrity. Orientating the camera often doesn't work the way you want, Jack moves like he's a three-wheel car, and cycling through the targeting could use some work. The game isn't broken; it just barely holds its head above water. It does just as much as it has to in order to keep your attention, but gives the feeling that if it were any more ambitious, this house of cards would come crashing down.

Reckoning does give you a few extra moves to try and spice up the gun-heavy combat. You can dive around in slow-mo, send your dog Shadow to take out opponents, and perform lethal disarms against foes close to you. But when you take into account that the latter two moves are auto-kills, the game quickly becomes a lot less interesting. When I found out that you can get through Reckoning easily simply by running straight at enemies, shooting until you are close enough to disarm them, the title became even more of a shell than it already was.

Maybe this game really is all Shadow's fault. If he really deserved the prestigious moniker of "Man's Best Friend," he'd never have let Jack go down this unfortunate road to begin with.

—KATO

**BOTTOM LINE** 6.5

> **Concept:** What kind of sick SOB sends his dog into a hail of bullet fire?

> **Graphics:** Generic character models abound, but the semi-destructible environments contain details here and there

> **Sound:** The guns do all the talking. Some go "Blam!" and others go "Boom!"

> **Playability:** Movement, the camera, and targeting all have their troubles

> **Entertainment:** Reckoning has all the explosiveness of a wet firecracker lit by the dim spark of low ambition

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 5.25

Dead to Rights' most recent foray onto the consoles might best be called lackluster and at worst a sort of train wreck. This PSP follow-up is, at least in my mind, a marginal step up. I actually think that the environments and music are slightly improved, and I could see having some quick fun at a bus stop popping this in and shooting for a few minutes. Nonetheless, the run-and-gun gameplay feels stale and repetitive here just like it did in the last console game. What brings it down is the action itself, which uniformly consists of running into a room, having to shoot way too many guys, and moving on. Repeat. Another problem is the camera controls, or rather the lack thereof. Jack Slate lost my attention the last time he came around, and this return visit hasn't really convinced me to let him back in the door. —MILLER



■ Multiplayer will cause arguments as to who gets to shoot Jack Slate



PSP

# Coded Arms

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI  
> **RELEASE** JUNE 28 > **ESRB** T



## A SHAKY START

There are a lot of great things to say about the PSP. But one thing you can't say is that it's ready-made for first person shooting. Playing without the right analog feels strange after all these years. With that said, Coded Arms does an excellent job of working with the tools it's given, and the game ends up being a totally functional shooter. Too bad it's not much fun.

Ostensibly, Coded Arms supposes that you are a hacker making his way deep into a dangerous Virtual Reality Simulator. In practice, you are moving through an endless series of nearly identical looking rooms shooting mindless AI opponents without any sign of plot or story to sustain you. There are only a few different tilesets to give variety to the otherwise odious level designs. It's a rare occasion that games with randomly generated map layouts are a good idea, and Coded Arms definitely isn't one of those ranties. The marginally increased replay value just isn't worth the odd dead end corridors and poorly placed enemy locations. For what it's worth, the few levels there are look quite nice, with some gorgeous shine off of brightly lit objects and interesting details on the walls and floors. The coolest aspect of the game is the large number of weapons, and the ability to power them up. There's even some strategy to how you use them, since different attacks are marginally more effective against certain types of enemies.

The relatively sparse multiplayer modes might also offer some entertainment, but they have the same generic feel of the rest of the game. I'm immensely pleased that someone out there is brave enough to put forth an honest to goodness FPS on the new Sony handheld. For those waiting for just that, don't be totally dissuaded, because there actually is some cool stuff here. Coded Arms proves it can be done. Now someone just needs to do it right. —MILLER



**BOTTOM LINE** 6.75

> **Concept:** A bona fide FPS for the PSP – even if a genuine storyline is nowhere to be found

> **Graphics:** The game actually looks great, but the minimal number of tilesets gets old really fast

> **Sound:** Pretty standard fare for an action shooter – loud guns and forgettable tunes

> **Playability:** Several worthwhile control schemes help at least give the illusion of dual-analog

> **Entertainment:** This is the gold medal winner in a contest with only one contestant

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

## Second Opinion 6.5

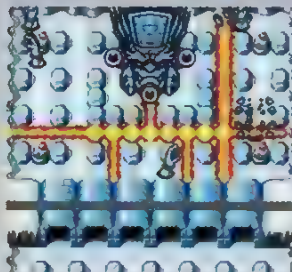
Coded Arms proves that – from a technical perspective – the PSP can handle the first-person genre and handle it well. It's certainly amazing to see a handheld display graphics of this caliber, and with a largely stable framerate. However, underneath the pretty surface lies a game that has some serious faults. For one, it takes some getting used to having only one analog stick, although the developers have given a good selection of customizable control schemes. More glaring is the lack of variety in both the randomized levels and enemies. After you've been impressed by the graphics and gotten used to the odd controls, there just isn't much incentive to keep playing. Multiplayer adds some value to the package, but in the end it just isn't enough. Someday, there will be a great PSP FPS, but Coded Arms isn't it. —MATT

## DS QUICKIES

UNLIMITED ENABLED

### Bomberman

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)  
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT  
> **DEVELOPER** HUDSON SOFT  
> **RELEASE** JUNE 21 > **ESRB** E



**BOTTOM LINE**

6

If you don't have friends who own their own DSs, ignore this game utterly. The single-player is way

too slow to be fun. Being able to store power-ups helps alleviate the frustration of the inevitable cheap deaths, but there just isn't enough to the gameplay to truly engage your brain. Trying to scroll through the available upgrades on the touch screen frequently spells doom, given the fact that death is nearly always just around the corner. To make matters worse, the touch screen implementation feels tacked on and unnecessary, seeing that there are several unused normal buttons. Wireless multiplayer can be a fun diversion, but it's hardly good enough to justify this \$30 purchase. —ADAM

### GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)  
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS  
> **DEVELOPER** LA TIBURON  
> **RELEASE** JUNE 13 > **ESRB** T

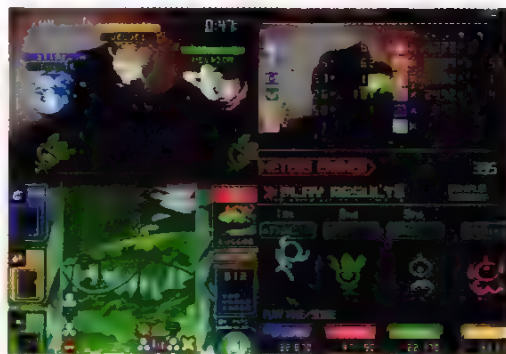


**BOTTOM LINE**

6.75

As it is the first FPS to be released for the platform (other than the Metroid demo), it's nice to see

that Rogue Agent runs quite smoothly on the DS. The dual-wielding is handled nicely, and the framerate is steady, but the overall action is pretty straightforward and familiar. The levels are linear, the graphics are bland, and the three different control schemes each has its own set of problems. In short, GoldenEye demonstrates that FPS games can be done on the DS, but the real question is if they should. —JEREMY



DS

### Meteos

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** Q ENTERTAINMENT/BANDAI > **RELEASE** JUNE 27 > **ESRB** E



## REVERSE TETRIS

For all those DS owners who've been lusting after Lumines these past months, at least now there's a worthy substitute. Where Lumines drops you into a long but rewarding zone that can last for a seeming eternity, Meteos is a frantic trial from beginning to end. Look away for a few seconds and your game will almost certainly be over. It's fast, challenging, and surprisingly different – in short, it's great fun.

Like Lumines, Meteos forces your mind to move in different directions than it's used to. Instead of eliminating blocks where they fall, you're actually orienting them to shoot back up into space. Connect three blocks of the same color, and a sort of rocket boost pushes the section up. To manipulate the board, you'll use the stylus to drag blocks up and down on the field. The intensity comes from the fact that blocks are constantly falling and filling your screen.

The sensation might not be for everyone, since you're constantly under threat of a game over no matter how well you're doing. It's nerve-racking in a way that other puzzle games aren't. This might not be quite the classic that Lumines is, but DS players should still take a look. —MILLER

**BOTTOM LINE** 8

> **Concept:** Another phenomenal puzzler from the mind of Mizuguchi-san

> **Graphics:** Colorful and varied, but we're ultimately still just looking at falling blocks

> **Sound:** Reminiscent of old-style Nintendo games injected with a quirky mix of sci-fi bleeps and bops

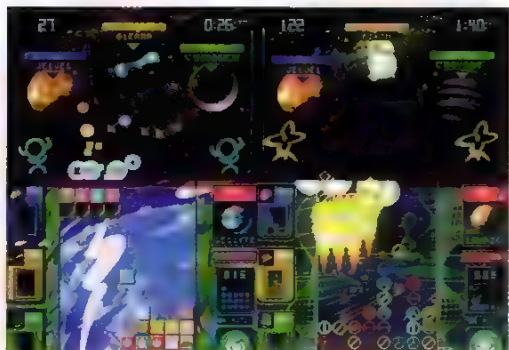
> **Playability:** The basics are instantly clear, but the tutorial should really offer up a little more info

> **Entertainment:** Frankly, but fun, this is the most intense puzzler on the DS

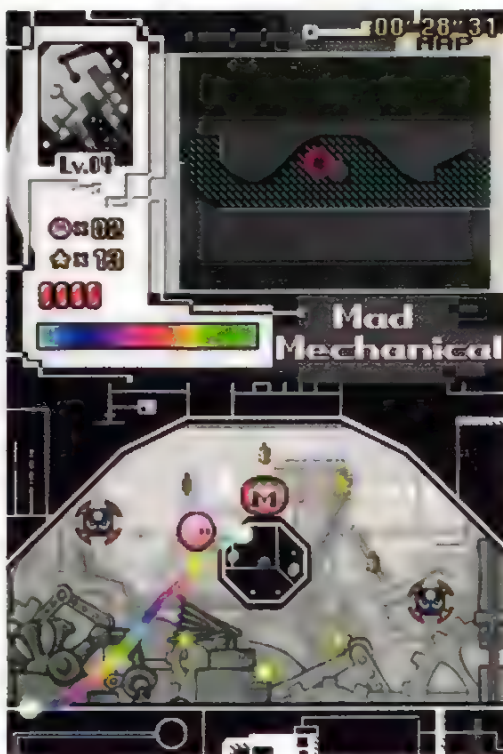
> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

## Second Opinion 8

By the time the "Game Over" screen appears in most puzzle games, you are usually covered in cobwebs, and your eyes have crusted over. In this regard, Meteos is the anti-puzzler. A well-played round will only last a few minutes. By the end of a match, your eyes will be moving at mach five, you won't be able to stop tapping your foot, and you'll be wound up with so much energy that you could probably leap over a skyscraper. It may not have the depth of other puzzlers, but its addictive gameplay puts your hand-eye coordination to the ultimate test. —REINER







NINTENDO DS

## Kirby: Canvas Curse

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO  
> **DEVELOPER** HAL LABORATORY > **RELEASE** JUNE 13 > **ESRB** E

### A TOUCH OF BRILLIANCE

At the end of my review of Yoshi Touch & Go, I wrote, "One can't help but fantasize about a full-blown side-scrolling Mario title using the Touch & Go engine." Well, it's not the same engine, and it's not a Mario game, but HAL Laboratory's Kirby: Canvas Curse grants my wish in fine style, taking Touch & Go's basic concept and expanding it into a dynamic and diverse gaming experience.

The core mechanics are identical: you draw lines onscreen with the stylus to guide the motions of Kirby. However, there are some key differences. Unlike in Touch & Go, Kirby isn't on a forced scroll, so he'll move in the direction in which the line is drawn. You can also use the stylus to break blocks, block laser beams and mounted cannons, and momentarily stun foes. Of course, Kirby still has the ability to absorb enemies' abilities, like beam, wheel, and rocket.

By combining a completely new gameplay style with nicely designed traditional 2D platforming levels, Kirby: Canvas Curse manages to fulfill the true potential of Nintendo's highly touted touch-screen gameplay. —**MATT**

**BOTTOM LINE** 8.5

> **Concept:** Make Yoshi Touch & Go more than a glorified two-level tech demo

> **Graphics:** Just lovely Rainbow effects on your pen strokes and classic 2D Nintendo backgrounds made even better with the power of the DS

> **Sound:** An excellent example of old-school game score craftsmanship

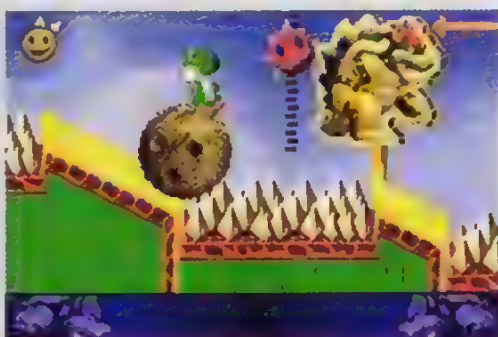
> **Playability:** Finally, a title that gets touch-screen gameplay absolutely right

> **Entertainment:** If you own a DS, there's no debate. Buy this game

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion** 8

Well, color my rainbow and call me Kirby! Canvas Curse combines a delightful old-school sensibility with all-stylus controls for a fast and fun adventure that provides a brand new way to interact with familiar platforming elements. Though the game has a tendency to speed you through levels too fast, the next challenge comes so quickly that you barely even care. It's nice to see a solid DS game that doesn't have touch-screen functionality dangling off its butt like an afterthought. —**JOE**



GAME BOY ADVANCE

## Yoshi Topsy-Turvy

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO  
> **DEVELOPER** ARTOON > **RELEASE** JUNE 13 > **ESRB** E

### TWISTING THE NIGHT AWAY

I was a big fan of Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble, which pioneered the tilting gameplay that powers Yoshi Topsy-Turvy. However, this is not simply just a rehash of that title with a Yoshi makeover. In essence, this is an SNES-era platformer, albeit one that manages to breathe new life into the genre with some fresh mechanics.

Here are the basics: you control Yoshi in the conventional manner, with the d-pad and face buttons. However, the real novelty comes from influencing the environment with the cartridge's tilt sensor. You can swing giant pendulums, roll huge rocks back and forth, unroll platforms, guide a sinking balloon towards coins, and many other cool tricks. You can also tilt the board to allow Yoshi to walk up walls or slide down icy slopes.

All in all, it's a neat trick. Nintendo is really making an effort, in big and small ways, to change the way we play games, and this is another inventive example. Topsy-Turvy will certainly make you approach traditional platforming from a fresh perspective. I just wish as much thought had gone into the level designs, which are, for the most part, pretty standard fare. Still, with the dearth of quality GBA titles on the market, this should be one of the year's highlights for the system. —**MATT**



**BOTTOM LINE** 8

> **Concept:** Yoshi takes a cue from the long-forgotten Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble

> **Graphics:** Vibrant and colorful in the classic SNES 16-bit style

> **Sound:** Nothing particularly special, very typical of a GBA game

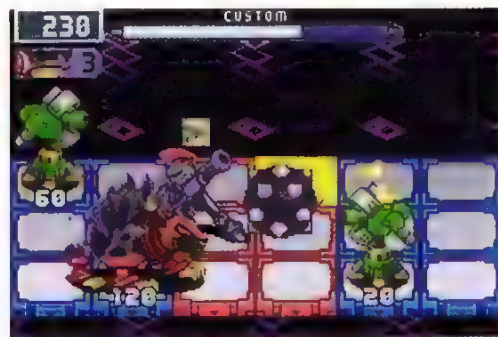
> **Playability:** The tilt sensor works well and the normal controls are solid

> **Entertainment:** A nice twist on traditional platforming

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 8

Innovation is cool. Nicely executed and generally entertaining innovation is even cooler. The twist mechanic is making a reappearance in Yoshi Topsy-Turvy and, besides a few minor gripes, is a really funny, creative use of the gyroscope. Most of the levels and motions are great — unrolling tubes of grass sod to squish enemies is a blast. At just under a handful of hours, the quest is certainly adequate, but feels a wee bit short for my tastes. Also, the difficulty curve is a little too abrupt. But the graphics are cute, and the environment's puzzles twist the brain just enough. —**LISA**



GAME BOY ADVANCE

## Mega Man Battle Network 5: Team Colonel/Team Protoman

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM  
> **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** JUNE 21 > **ESRB** E

### THEY JUST KEEP COMING

If all of the Mega Man games suddenly became tiny little stars, the light they shed would fill the night sky from horizon to horizon. That is to say, there are a lot of them. The Battle Network games are, to my eye, only minor suns in a major constellation. Something about the storylines and gameplay just doesn't vibe with the overall Mega Man feeling, and that remains true with installment number five. While there are some cosmetic differences between these games and the last set that came along, most everything still feels the same.

For the uninitiated, the Battle Network games usually place you in the role of Lan, a young boy in a cyber future where people use artificially intelligent Navi programs to explore the net. For Lan, that role is filled by Mega Man. There's always some threat perpetrated within cyber space, and Lan and his friends use their Navis to save the day. What saves the game from total mediocrity is the battle system, which combines a limited degree of action controls with some interesting weapon implementation. By choosing your attacks carefully, the fights can be reasonably fun, and there are consistently new tactics and items to try out and explore. The fights have been tweaked since BN 4, but the base concept should be immediately familiar to previous players.

Both versions of the game are very similar story-wise, distinguishing themselves primarily by which allies you'll team up with. Those that loved the earlier titles have a lot more of the same to look forward to with BN 5. However, if you're looking for a reinvention of the franchise, you'd best spend your money elsewhere. —**MILLER**

**BOTTOM LINE** 7

> **Concept:** Yet another derivation of the tried-and-true character in blue

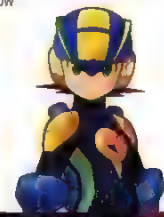
> **Graphics:** Bright and inviting, but not particularly interesting

> **Sound:** Standard GBA fare, but the repetition is grating

> **Playability:** An approachable and relatively interesting battle system is the heart of the game

> **Entertainment:** Only for those who have fond memories of the other Battle Network games

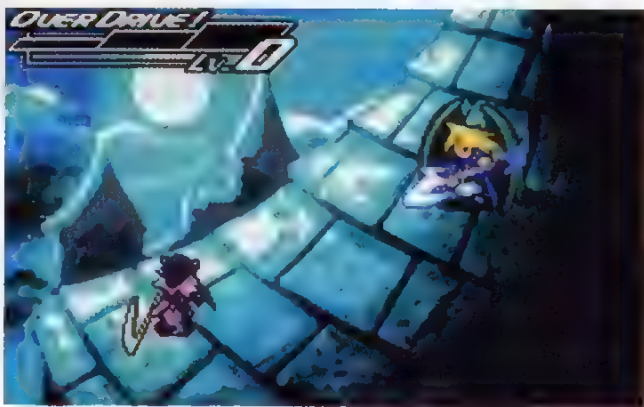
> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low



**Second Opinion** 7.75

Say what you will about the Mega Man Battle Network formula being old and tired, or that Capcom is just trying to cash in on the tried-and-true Pokémon recipe. Accurate though these statements may be, Battle Network 5 is nonetheless a highly polished, entertaining, and addictive RPG. The challenges put before you vary nicely between traditional dungeon exploration, turn-based strategy/RPG-esque scenarios, and small puzzles. Combat is fast and fun, collecting battle chips is as entertaining as ever, and the story is passable in a cutesy children's-anime kind of way. Even though my inner Mega Man fanboy cringes at the thought of Battle Network's kiddie universe, you can do far worse on GBA than Mega Man and Lan's latest adventure. —**ADAM**





GAME BOY ADVANCE

## Riviera: The Promised Land

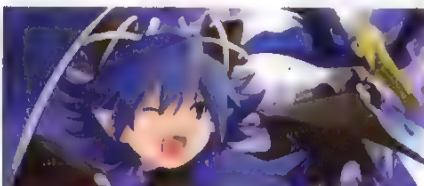
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** STING  
> **RELEASE** JUNE 28 > **ESRB** E10+

### PRETTY ON THE INSIDE

Let's say that you have a handful of rare and beautiful gems, but instead of storing them in an elegant mahogany case with velvet lining, you just dump them in an Adidas box. This is essentially the same feeling I got from Riviera – it is packed with some great mechanics and innovations that are just confined to somewhat unbecoming surroundings.

Riviera's greatest strength is the way it constantly keeps you in the middle of the action. It eliminates tedious wandering, employs a cool way to navigate the environments, and even implements interactive sequences that affect the outcome of certain events. Even the repetitive nature of battles has been tempered by the fact that you are constantly using different attacks. Because your abilities are tied to your mastery of various items (each of which has different properties depending on the wielder), you are always under pressure to change tactics to gain proficiency with a wide variety of weapons.

The game does a great job sustaining this pace, but a lot of its personality and charm are diminished by the little details. The story is standard (Amnesia: check. Ancient plot to destroy the world: check), the characters familiar, and many of the environments look exactly the same. Had these aspects been polished to highlight Riviera's other great qualities, this might have been a must-have title. Regardless, it is still an exceptional adventure and worth a try for any RPG enthusiast. —**JOE**



**BOTTOM LINE** 8.25

> **Concept:** Fuse the good parts of RPGs and tactical fighters into one solid package

> **Graphics:** The hand-drawn style works well, but the same background environments are recycled to exhaustion

> **Sound:** The use of voice is sparse but a nice surprise, while the music seems lifted from an NES-era Mega Man title

> **Playability:** The interface is remarkably simple for such a complex game

> **Entertainment:** The action just keeps coming, and it's punctuated by some pretty funny dialogue

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



### Second Opinion

Riviera has a nice, although clichéd, story where players must root out the truth in a global conflict. Lots of characters and deep strategy keeps things interesting, while the interface makes the sometimes-tired parts of the genre go by quickly (NPC interaction especially). From a design standpoint, the only thing that really got on my nerves was the repetition in environments, attack animations, and enemies – minor things that didn't really break my amusement with an otherwise solid title. —**LISA**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

## Sigma Star Saga

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** WAYFORWARD > **RELEASE** JULY 12 > **ESRB** E10+



### A DOLT IN SPACE

When the main character references himself as "Ensign Expendable" within the first few minutes of play, you can't help swallowing hard. Most games feature protagonists that are confident, unwavering, and vigorous. Sigma Star Saga, on the other hand, places you into the dungy shoes of Recker, a smart-mouthed pilot who finds a way to get knocked unconscious, picked up by the enemy, and fitted with an alien parasite all within a matter of minutes. Apparently, this is all part of his plan. He doesn't necessarily fit the bill for the lead character in a role-playing game, and isn't qualified to do much of anything other than being taken out back and shot, but you just gotta love the inept fool. It's like caring for a cat with three broken legs and a bowel disorder.

In many ways, it would seem that Sigma Star Saga was built with the specific intent of making gamers scratch their brows with bewilderment. Falling in line with the traditions of the role-playing genre, this game clings tightly to the age-old use of random encounters. At any point during Recker's exploration of alien worlds, a flash of light will engulf the dimwit, signaling the advent of a combat phase. Interestingly, the light actually represents alien transport technology. For each battle, Recker is teleported into his starfighter.

The gameplay that follows harks

back to the classic side-scrolling shooter. Players are asked to defeat a set number of enemy ships before returning to the field map. Not only is this unexpected, it's the very definition of excitement. The responsiveness of your vessel is pitch perfect, the battles that you enter are highly randomized, and all of the great elements that come from leveling up and upgrading are included. In most RPGs, random encounters have a tendency to grow tiresome rather quickly. In Sigma Star Saga you welcome each one with open arms.

Although the space combat basks in the spotlight, players will also be asked to hop out of their vessel to battle alien species on the ground. Much like Square Enix's Mana series, these segments boast colorful vistas and characters, as well as top-down exploration and combat. As you would expect, Recker isn't a proficient marksman.

The battles that unfold are mindless, consisting of little else than making sure the enemy is on the same plane as you and pulling the trigger. In other words, there really isn't much to this portion of the game.

The shooter genre is a dying breed, but Namco has found a way to revitalize it and make it contagious for both hardcore role-players who seek something fresh and twitchy fingered gamers who have long waited to see this genre evolve. —**REINER**

**BOTTOM LINE** 8.5

> **Concept:** At long last, someone finally stepped back and thought "What if it would be like if I combined a role-playing game with a shooter?" The result is nothing short of extraordinary

> **Graphics:** The character designs are colorful and lively, and microscopic bullets cloud the screen in the shooter segments

> **Sound:** True to both genres, but both are a bit forgettable

> **Playability:** Classic shooter goodness. It hones in on the speed of your reflexes and your resourcefulness with payloads

> **Entertainment:** Further proof that the classic shooter genre is undervalued and still has plenty of life in it

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

### Second Opinion 7.75

There's a lot going on in Sigma Star Saga. In the beginning, the Star Trek/Nemesis-influenced tale didn't pull me in, but by the time that the RPG and side-scrolling shooter elements kicked in, I was pretty charmed. Lots of weapon customization makes the ship sections (which are used mostly for random encounters and boss-like fights) much more fun as the game progresses and the RPG exploration plants gamers into interesting environments. I feel like some rocky execution (randomized shooter levels come to mind along with chunky on-foot controls) are really pretty minor faults. Fun, quirky, and worth a look. —**LISA**





# CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

## TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For May 2005 Based On Units Sold

### 1 POKÉMON EMERALD



Pokémon may rule the sales charts, but you know what they don't rule? Blendertown. Metapod smoothies, anyone?

### 2 STAR WARS EPISODE III: REVENGE OF THE SITH (PS2)



The Star Wars Fever epidemic has hit the gaming industry hard. Doctors say that in the advanced stages, gamers have a delirious desire to play a multi-console version of the *Star Wars Holiday Special*. They ramble incoherently about a phony celebration called "Life Day," and claim that Chewbacca has a son named Lumpy. Fortunately, such nonsense could never be true, as it would undoubtedly cause fatal damage to the Star Wars franchise.

### 3 STAR WARS EPISODE III: REVENGE OF THE SITH (XBOX)



What can account for LucasArts' chosen one nabbing two top spots? Outstanding gameplay? The thrilling conclusion of an epic fantasy? Paying tribute to flannel-wearing deities? Nope. It's Wat Tambor all the way.

### 4 FORZA MOTORSPORT



If Forza can have Drivatars, we officially declare that we get Lifatars. They'll pay our bills, do our shopping, and otherwise interact with the real world in our stead. That way, we'll have more time to write threatening letters to the Snorks. "Dear Stupid Straws-for-heads..."

### 5 MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION (PS2)



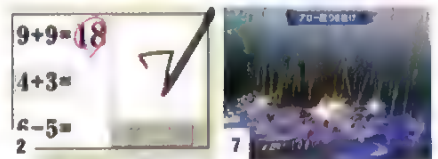
The debate between DUB and SUB rages on. Sure, in dubbed games mouths might not sync up exactly, and certain linguistic nuances are lost in translation, but who wants to play a racing game with subtitles all over the place? Keep your eyes on the road!

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Pokémon Emerald	N/A	GBA	7.75	04-05	\$34
2	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	N/A	PS2	5.75	05-05	\$49
3	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	N/A	XBOX	5.75	05-05	\$49
4	Forza Motorsport	N/A	XBOX	8.5	05-05	\$50
5	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	2	PS2	9.5	04-05	\$49
6	LEGO Star Wars	8	PS2	7.5	03-05	\$39
7	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	N/A	GBA	N/A	05-05	\$29
8	God of War	4	PS2	10	03-05	\$50
9	MVP Baseball 2005	7	PS2	8.5	02-05	\$30
10	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	6	XBOX	9.5	04-05	\$49
11	LEGO Star Wars	11	XBOX	7.5	04-05	\$40
12	LEGO Star Wars	14	GBA	N/A	03-05	\$29
13	Area 51	N/A	XBOX	8.5	04-05	\$50
14	Doom 3	1	XBOX	9.25	04-05	\$52
15	Major League Baseball 2K5	12	PS2	8.5	02-05	\$20
16	Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	N/A	GBA	9	05-05	\$32
17	Area 51	N/A	PS2	8.5	04-05	\$50
18	Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee	N/A	PSP	9	05-05	\$39
19	Need for Speed Underground: Rivals	N/A	PSP	8	05-05	\$50
20	Jade Empire	3	XBOX	9.5	04-05	\$49

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTIS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

## TOP 10 JAPAN

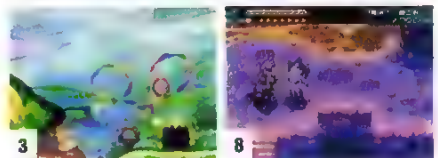
Rank	Title	System
1	Tear Ring Saga Series: Berwick Saga	PS2
2	DS Training For Adults: Work Your Brain	DS
3	Nintendogs	DS
4	Namco X Capcom	PS2
5	Hanjuku Eiyuu IV	PS2
6	SD Gundam G Generation DS	DS
7	Romancing SaGa: Minstrel Song	PS2
8	Yu Yu Hakusho Forever	PS2
9	Racing Battle C1 Grand Prix	PS2
10	Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana 2	PS2



Source: Game Japan

## TOP 10 GI

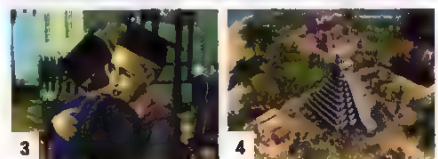
Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Battlefield 2	N/A	PC
2	NCAA Football 06	N/A	Multi
3	Kirby: Canvas Curse	N/A	DS
4	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	2	Multi
5	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	N/A	Multi
6	Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee	3	PSP
7	Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	1	GBA
8	Sigma Star Saga	N/A	GBA
9	Guild Wars	4	PC
10	Riviera: The Promised Land	N/A	GBA



The Staff's Favorite Picks

## TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	Guild Wars	N/A	\$49
2	World Of Warcraft	2	\$49
3	The Sims 2: University	3	\$31
4	Empire Earth 2	N/A	\$48
5	The Sims 2	5	\$48
6	Stronghold 2	6	\$39
7	Half-Life 2	7	\$52
8	The Sims Deluxe	9	\$20
9	SaaWorld Adventure Parks Tycoon	8	\$15
10	LEGO Star Wars	N/A	\$30



Based On Monthly Units Sold



### PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	9	Dec-04
Alien Homnid	8	Dec-04
Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed	5.5	Jan-05
Arc the Lad: End of Darkness	5.5	Jul-05
Area 51	8.5	May-05
Atan Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Atelier Ins. Eternal Mana	8.25	Jan-05
ATV Offroad Fury 3	7	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



Flipnik: Ultimate Pinball - PS2 - Jul-05

Battle Assault 3		
Featuring Gundarm Seed	4	Jan-05
Blood Will Tell	5	Nov-04
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	8.5	Apr-05
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Capcom Fighting Evolution	6	Dec-04
Champions: Return to Arms	8	Mar-05
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Cold Winter	8.25	Jun-05
Colosseum: Road to Freedom	7.25	Jul-05
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Dead to Rights 2: Hell to Pay	5	Jun-05
Death By Degrees	5.5	Mar-05
Destroy All Humans	8	Jul-05
Devil May Cry 3		
Dante's Awakening	9	Mar-05
Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3	5	Jan-05
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jun-05
Drive to Survive	7	May-05
Dynasty Warriors 5	7	May-05
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	8	Jun-05
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Dec-04
EyeToy: AntiGrav	7	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
Flipnik Ultimate Pinball	6	Jul-05
Final Fantasy XI		
Chains of Promethia	7.75	Dec-04
Fu metal Alchemist and the Broken Angel	4.75	Feb-05
Fullmetal 2: Curse of the Crimson Elixir	6	Jul-05
Getaway: Black Monday, The	7	Feb-05
Get On Da Mic	5	Dec-04
Ghost in the Shell		
Stand Alone Complex	7.25	Dec-04
Ghost Recon 2	6.5	Feb-05
God of War	10	Apr-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	10	Dec-04
Gran Turismo 4	9.25	Mar-05
Gretzky NHL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Crownsman: Generations	7.5	Jan-05
Cruelty Gear Isuka	6.75	Dec-04
Cungrave: Overdose	4.25	Nov-04
Haunting Ground	4.75	May-05
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Inuyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask	4.25	Jan-05
Jak 3	9.25	Nov-04
juiced	7.5	Jul-05
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	8.25	Nov-04
Kessen III	7.75	Mar-05
Killer 7	7.5	Jul-05
Killzone	7.5	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	6.5	Nov-04
Kuon	6	Nov-04
LEGO Star Wars	7.5	May-05
Leisure Suit Lamy:		
Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
Medal of Honor: European Assault	7.75	Jul-05
Mega Man X8	8.25	Jan-05
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	9.5	Jan-05
Medal of Honor: European Assault	7.75	Jul-05
Metal Slug 4 & 5	8	Jun-05
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9.5	May-05
MLB 2006	8.25	Apr-05
Monster Hunter	5	Nov-04
Musashi: Samurai Legend	8.25	Mar-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05

Nano Breaker	5	Mar-05
NARC	4.5	May-05
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
Neo Contra	7.75	Nov-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
Nightmare of Druaga		
Fushigun Dungeon, The	4	Nov-04
Obscure	6	Jun-05
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection	6.75	Feb-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6.5	Dec-04
Predator: Concrete Jungle	2.75	Jan-05
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Project Snowblind	8.25	Apr-05
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
Ratchet and Clank: Up Your Arsenal	10	Nov-04
Red Ninja, End of Honor	3.75	Apr-05
Resident Evil Outbreak File #2	7.5	Apr-05
Rise of the Kasai	7	May-05
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Romance of the Three Kingdoms X	7.5	Jul-05
Rumble Roses	7.75	Jan-05
Samurai Warriors Xtreme Legends	6.75	Jan-05
Samurai Western	6	Jul-05
Sega Classics Collection	6.5	Apr-05
Sega Superstars	8	Dec-04
Shadow of Rome	8.5	Feb-05
Shaman King: Power of Spirit	6.5	Jan-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Shrining Tears	7.75	Mar-05
Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga	7	Apr-05
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	7.5	Nov-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.25	May-05
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	5.75	Jul-05
Stella Deus: The Gate of Eternity	7.5	May-05
Stolen	6.5	Jun-05
Suikoden 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
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	6.75	Nov-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
TOCA Race Driver	7.5	Nov-04
Ultimate Raging 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
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	7.5	Jan-05
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtual Quest	5.5	Jan-05
Winning Eleven 8	8.75	Mar-05
World Tour Soccer 2006	6	Apr-05
Worms: Forts Under Siege	5.5	Apr-05
WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW	8.75	Dec-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Xenosaga Episode II: Jenesis von Gut und Böse	7.75	Mar-05
Ys: The Ark of Naphthim	7.5	Mar-05
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	6	Jan-05
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	3.25	Dec-04

### GAMECUBE

Alien Homnid	8	Dec-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
Donkey Kong Jungle Beat	7.5	Apr-05
Donkey Kong 7	7	Nov-04
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jun-05
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
Killer 7	7.5	Jul-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
Mano Party 6	6.25	Feb-05
Mano Power Tennis	8.5	Jan-05
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	9.5	Jan-05
Mortal Kombat: Deception	8.5	Apr-05



Star Fox Assault - GC - Apr-05

MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
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
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
Resident Evil 4	10	Mar-05
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
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
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-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
Virtual Quest	5.5	Jan-05
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04

### XBOX

Advent Rising	7.75	Jul-05
Area 51	8.5	Jan-05
Atan 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
Blink 2: Masters of Time & Space	7	Jan-05
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	8.5	May-05
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Chicago Enforcer	2	Mar-05
Close Combat: First to Fight	6	May-05
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Combat - Task Force 121	4	Jun-05
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04



Jade Empire - Xbox - May-05

Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Dai Sennryaku VII		
Modern Military Tactics	8	Mar-05
Dance Dance Revolution Ultrama 2	7.75	Dec-04
Dead or Alive Ultimate	9	Dec-04
Dead to Rights 2: Hell to Pay	5	Jun-05
Destroy All Humans	8	Jul-05
Doom 3	9.25	Apr-05
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jun-05
Drive to Survive	7	May-05
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-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
Forza Motorsport	8.5	Jun-05
Ghost Recon 2	6	Jan-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Gungnir: Allied Strike	6	Feb-05
Halo 2	10	Dec-04
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Iron Phoenix	4	Jun-05
Jade Empire	9.5	May-05
Juiced	7.5	Jul-05
Karaoke Revolution	7.75	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders		
LEGO Star Wars	7.75	Nov-04
Leisure Suit Lamy	7.5	May-05
Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf	9.25	Feb-05
Medal of Honor: European Assault	7.75	Jul-05
Men of Valor	7.75	Nov-04
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Slug 4&5	8	Jun-05
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9.5	May-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05
Myst IV: Revelation	4.5	Jun-05
NARC	4.5	May-05
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

Obscure	6	Jun-05
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	9	Feb-05
OutRun 2	6.5	Dec-04
Panah	8.5	Jun-05
Phantom Dust	7	Mar-05
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection	6.75	Feb-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Predator: Concrete Jungle	2.75	Jan-05
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Project Snowblind	8.25	Apr-05
Psychonauts	8.75	May-05
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
Raze's Hell	6	Jun-05
Red Ninja: End of Honor	3.75	Apr-05
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
Scrapland	6.5	Apr-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Sims 2: The Sims 2	8.75	Nov-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Spikeout: Battle Street	6.25	Jun-05
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 Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	5.75	Jul-05
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
Stolen	6.5	Jun-05
Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	8	Apr-05
SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom	6.5	Nov-04
Syberia 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
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 Liandril 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	Apr-05
WWE: Wrestlemania 21	5.75	Jun-05
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
AxS & Allies	7.75	Jan-05
Call of Duty: United Offensive	8.75	Nov-04
Chris Sawyer's Locomotion 7	7	Nov-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay Developer's Cut, The	9.25	Jan-05
Codename: Panzers	7.75	Dec-04
Combat: Task Force 121	4	Jun-05
Doom 3	9	Oct-04
Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	9	Jun-05
Dungeon Lords	4	Jul-05
Empire Earth II	7.5	May-05
EverQuest II	8.5	Feb-05
Evi Genus	8.5	Nov-04
Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich	8.25	Apr-05
Gold Wars	8.75	Jul-05
Halo 2	9.5	Dec-04
Immortal Gates: Children of the Nile	8	Jan-05
Joint Operations: Escalation	8	Jan-05
Kohan II: Kings of War	8	Oct-04
Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth, The	8.5	Jan-05
Matrix Online, The	7.5	Jun-05
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	8.5	Jan-05
Myst IV: Revelation	8	Nov-04
Nexus: The Jupiter Incident	8.25	Mar-05
Panah	8	Jan-05
Panah	8.5	Jun-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Postal Machine, The	7	Nov-04
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	8.75	Dec-04
Rome: Total War	7.25	Nov-04
Scrapland	6	Dec-04
Sid Meier's Pirates!	8.5	Jan-05
Sims 2: University, The</		





## Makai Kingdom: Chronicles of the Sacred Tome



### The Master Strategist Speaks

Executive Game Director Yoshitsuna Kobayashi



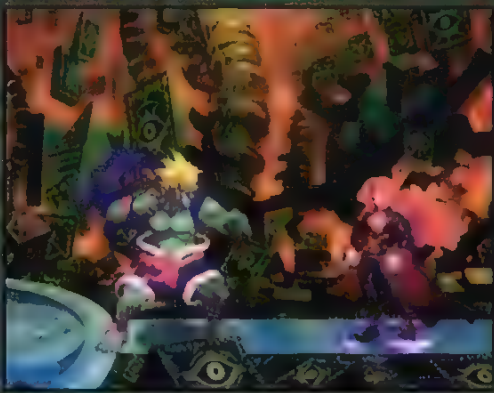
Makai Kingdom: Chronicles of the Sacred Tome delivers many new advances to the strategy/RPG genre. Now you can call in facilities and vehicles to aid you in battle, and with modern weapons and a gridless map, the battles are more furious than ever. What follows are some tips that can help ensure that your kingdom will rise above all others.

#### KNOW YOUR WEAPON MASTERIES

The strongest weapon is only as useful as the person holding it. Without the proper weapon mastery compatibility, a character will only be able to perform the most basic attack with a weapon. Each job class has four weapons they can master. The more a character uses a type of weapon, the stronger attack skills they will learn to use with that weapon type.

#### REINCARNATION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

Reincarnating your characters is an essential way of improving their performance and ability. There are several advantages of reincarnating your characters. The more they reincarnate, the more bonus points you get to add to their base stats. You will also be able to advance your character from the standard job classes that you start off with to more powerful variations that you will unlock through playing the game. The only downside is that your character will revert back to level 1, but they will still have all the skills that they knew before. That is another reason



why weapon mastery is very important; the stronger enemies that you can kill, the more your character will level up, and the faster they will recover from reincarnating. If you've gotten your character up to around level 40, it's a pretty good idea to just let him ride out this reincarnation until you've unlocked some of the higher job levels before reincarnating again. That way, your next reincarnation will be even better.

#### EXTENSION IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

Finding map extensions is a great way to gain extra rewards on the battlefield. Not only can you gain more experience and mana by defeating more enemies, but you can also raise your battle score to earn extra rewards at the end of the stage. You may also find rare weapons and items lying around an extension. Just be careful. The more extensions you open up, the stronger the enemies tend to get. You can also suffer abnormal effects by unlocking special extension maps.

#### FREE DUNGEON EFFICIENCY

Free dungeons are a great way to vastly improve your army. However, efficiently navigating your way through a free dungeon is just as important as destroying everything in sight. For the most part, free dungeons are long and perilous journeys into the



unknown. All of the stages are randomly generated, including the restrictions on inviting your units. However, the rewards for these stages are generally much better than any rewards you'll get from a storyline dungeon. Unless you wished for the dungeon with one of your weaker characters, efficiently beating the stages is your best bet to going further down into the dungeon. It's always a good idea to check the reward bonuses to know just how many points you'll need to get that certain little reward that you desperately want.

The best strategy is to defeat the enemies that are worth the most points, to fulfill the victory requirements on your first turn. Then send out anyone you want to level up out to fight. When you've defeated as many enemies as you could during the first turn, go to Zetta and end the stage before your enemies get to attack. This will keep your units fresh for the next stage. Don't worry about maxing out your rewards, as trying to do

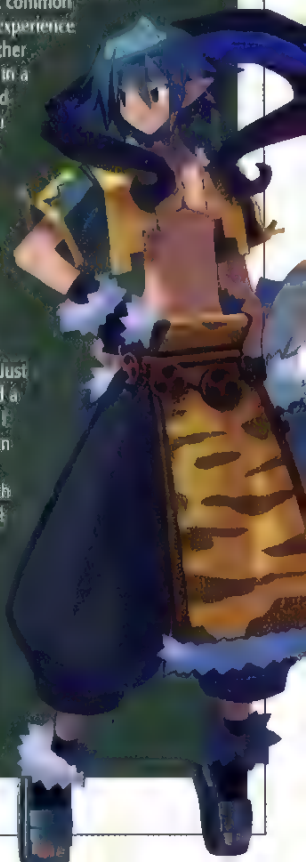


so will usually mean you'll have to ditch out of the dungeon earlier, using a Gency Tonic or a Diver. It's better to get minimal rewards and get farther in a free dungeon because you'll have more chances to get those easy stages where it'll be easy to get full rewards on your first turn of battle. Be sure to give a character a Gency Tonic, as well as loading a facility and other items with them to help you out on the fly.

It's also a good idea to keep several of your strongest characters outside of facilities for the rare instances where you'll only be able to invite characters. With some strong characters to fight on these maps, you'll be able to beat the stage sooner to get to a more desirable stage in the dungeon. It's also a good idea to load a facility or two with characters who you just want to level up, but don't trust to fight in these dangerous places. One of the most common rewards for free dungeons is free experience for all characters on the map, whether they are out on the field or simply in a facility. Toss out the facilities toward the end of the battle and when you end the stage, all the characters in the facility will gain the reward experience, which for lower level characters is often enough to level them up several times over on a single stage.

#### SAMURAI HELL KITTIES

By far, my favorite and most effective character is the hell kitty. Just equip a hell kitty with a katana and a good pair of shoes and watch out. I highly recommend this combination to everyone. This is the best assassination unit in the game. With a quality katana, most enemies will be defeated with a single slash. With a quality pair of shoes, you can make your hell kitty run faster than most vehicles. The only drawback is that they are very vulnerable to enemy attacks. While they will defeat most enemies in one hit, they usually can't take more than two themselves.





### 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](mailto:secretaccess@gameinformer.com) for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

## MULTI-SYSTEM

### Juiced

#### > PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

At the main menu, go into the Extras, then Select Cheats to input the code.

Unlock Arcade/Custom Mode - PINT

## PLAYSTATION 2

### Medal of Honor

#### European Assault

Pause the game then hold down L1 + R1 while you press ○ (x2), Left, △, ○, X and then enter one of the following.

Disable HUD - ○, Down, ○, Up, △, ○

Disable Shellshock - L2, R1, L2, L1, △ (x2)

Get Documents - Up, X, R2, R1, Up, □

Kill Level's Nemesis - Down, L2, L1, Up, □

"GI Droid"

(location unknown - last seen pelting Batman fans with circus peanuts outside the Sheboygan Cineplex)

## XBOX

### Advent Rising

Unlock Cheat Menu - Pause the game and

enter Up (x2), Down (x2), Left, Right, Left, Right, White, Black, X.

### Unlock Level Select and Cinematics

- From the opening screen, select Play Game, and then your profile slot. At the Main Menu that follows enter Black, White, Black, White, X.

### Medal of Honor

#### European Assault

Pause the game, then hold down L and R while you press Down, A, X, Black, B, A. Then enter the following:

Destroy Nemesis - Right, Left, R, L, X, Y

Disable H.U.D. - Black, L, Black, R, Up, Y

Disable Shellshock - X, Y, A, B, L, X

Get Documents - A, B, R, White, Black, L

## Code of the Month

# Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Grand Theft Auto games are always chock full of cool cheats and codes to help spice things up. San Andreas is no exception to the rule, as these secrets for the new Xbox version help reveal. We've picked out our favorites for you to try, which you should enter without pausing during gameplay. Have fun!

**\$250,000 + Full Health And Armor** - R, Black, L, A, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up

**Aggressive Drivers** - Right, Black, Up (x2), Black, B, X, Black, L, Right, Down, L

**All Cars Have Nitrous** - Left, Y, R, L, Up, X, Y, Down, B, White, L (x2)

**All Vehicles Are Invisible (Not Motorcycles)** - Y, L, Y, Black, X, L (x2)  
**Always Midnight** - X, L, R, Right, A, Up, L, Left (x2)

**Attract Escorts** - X, Right, X (x2), White, A, Y, A, Y

**Bikini Mode** - Up (x2), Down (x2), X, B, L, R, Y, Down

**Black Traffic** - B, White, Up, R, Left, A, R, L, Left, B

**Cars Can Fly** - X, Down, White, Up, L, B, Up, A, Left

**Cars Drive On Water (Boat Properties)** - Right, Black, B, R, White, X, R, Black

**Cars Fly Away When Hit** - X, Black, Down (x2), Left, Down, Left (x2), White, A

**Chaos Mode** - White, Right, L, Y, Right (x2), R, L, Right, L (x3)

**Destroy All Cars** - Black, White, R, L, White, Black, X, Y, B, Y, White, L

**Faster Clock** - B (x2), L, X, L, X (x3), L, Y, B, Y

**Faster Gameplay** - Y, Up, Right, Down,

White, L, X

**Full Weapon Aiming While Driving** - Up, Up, X, White, Right, A, R, Down, Black, B

**Hitman Rank (All Weapons)** - Down, X, A, Left, R, Black, Left, Down (x2), L (x3)

**Infinite Ammo** - L, R, X, R, Left, Black, R, Left, X, Down, L (x2)

**Infinite Health (Except Explosions, Drowning, And Falling)** - Down, A, Right, Left, Right, R, Right, Down, Up, Y

**Kill Yourself** - Right, White, Down, R, Left, Left, R, L, White, L

**Killer Clown Mode** - Y (x2), L, X (x2), B, X, Down, B

**Max Fat** - Y, Up (x2), Left, Right, X, B, Down

**Max Out Wanted Level** - B, Right, B, Right, Left, X, A Down

**Max Respect** - L, R, Y, Down, Black, A, L, Up, White (x2), L (x2)



**Max Sex Appeal** - B, Y (x2), Up, B, R, White, Up, Y, L (x3)

**No Muscle And No Fat** - Y, Up (x2), Left, Right, X, B, Right

**Overcast** - Black, A, L (x2), White (x3), X

**Pedestrian Riot Mode** - Down, Left, Up, Left, A, Black, R, White, L

**Pedestrians Are Elvis** - L, B, Y, L (x2), X, White, Up, Down, Left

**Pedestrians Have Weapons** - Black, R, A, Y, A, Y, Up, Down

**Pink Traffic** - B, L, Down, White, Left, A, R, L, Right, B

**Sand Storm** - Up, Down, L (x2), White (x2), L, White, R, Black

**Slow Down Game Play** - Y, Up, Right, Down, X, Black, R



**Spawn Bloodring Banger** - Down, R, R, White (x2), A, R, L, Left (x2)

**Spawn Caddy** - B, L, Up, R, White, A, R, L, B, A

**Spawn Hotring Racer #1** - R, B, Black, Right, L, White, A (x2), X, R

**Spawn Hotring Racer #2** - Black, L, B, Right, L, R, Right, Up, B, Black

**Spawn Hunter** - B, A, L, B (x2), L, B, R, Black, White, L (x2)

**Spawn Hydra** - Y (x2), X, B, A, L (x2), Down, Up

**Spawn Jetpack** - Left, Right, L, White, R, Black, Up, Down, Left, Right

**Spawn Monster** - Right, Up, R (x3), Down, Y (x2), A, B, L (x2)

**Spawn Parachute** - Left, Right, L, White, R, Black (x2), Up, Down, Right, L

**Spawn Quadbike** - Left (x2), Down (x2), Up (x2), X, B, Y, R, Black

**Spawn Rancher** - Up, Right (x2), L, Right, Up, X, White

**Spawn Rhino** - B (x2), L, B (x3), L, White, R, Y, B, Y

**Spawn Stunt Plane** - B, Up, L, White, Down, R, L (x2), Left (x2), A, Y

**Spawn Tanker Truck** - R, Up, Left, Right, Black, Up, Right, X, Right, White, L (x2)

**Spawn Vortex** - Y (x2), X, B, A, L, White, Down (x2)

**Super Jumps** - Up (x2), Y (x2), Up (x2), Left, Right, X, Black (x2)

**Super Punches** - Up, Left, A, Y, R, B (x3), White

**Yakuza Mode** - A (x2), Down, Black, White, B, R, B, X

Louis Schmello  
Milwaukee, WI

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# Halo 2 Multiplayer Map Pack

## Bungie's Developers Share Their Secrets

### BACKWASH

Learn the weapon spawns. You're going to find yourself and your opponents clamoring for any grenades they can find, so it's good to learn where the caches are located and run straight for them. Also learn the location of the shotgun, as many battles will be close encounters and you'll want a short range weapon to keep alive. Keep in mind that the fog won't conceal you at all if you're wielding plasma weaponry.

— Chad "Shishka" Armstrong, artist

If you're playing Slayer, use the fog. Stay still, watch your motion tracker, and attack from behind. If you're playing CTF, go through the middle. It's a deathtrap, but it's the fastest way to make progress.

— Frank O'Connor, editor

In games where it appears, try to control the active camo power-up in the top of the middle structure. It's especially handy in the nearby environment of Backwash. Likewise, the sword on the tree is a huge asset to control. Just don't run around in the open with it out, since people have plenty of room to backpedal away from you and pepper you with bullets.

— Rob Stokes, designer



### ELONGATION

One of my favorite tricks on Elongation is to ride the conveyor belts into the enemy flag base. It works great because you don't show up on the motion tracker, so you can actually take the enemy by surprise. In small games, the motion tracker gives everything away, so being able to be sneaky like this is important to making one-on-one games work.

When the map starts, the conveyor belts are clear, so you can move rapidly to the other side of the map. If charging in isn't your thing, it also means that anyone on the belts is vulnerable to ranged attack. And if you ever find yourself being pushed into the crate disposal because you waited too long on the belt, stay calm and you can still escape with a crouch jump.

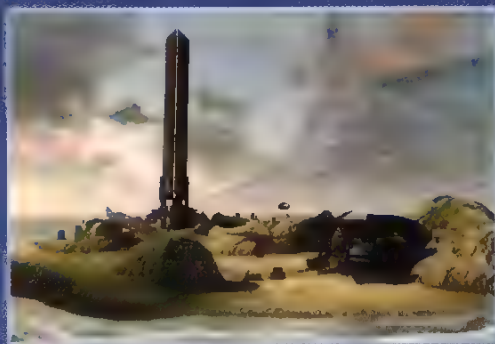
— Tyson Green, designer

Diagonal jumps across the ledges on the top level will confuse your opponents in any game type. Stay high and stay off the conveyor belts.

— Frank O'Connor, editor

The moving crates make for good cover to dodge and weave through when running home with a flag or the oddball. However, I find them more useful for jumping from the lower level of the map to the catwalks, providing you with a sudden and easy change of course in case you need to move back to your team's hallway for defensive measures, or just to confuse the other team.

— Chad Armstrong, artist



### RELIC

Objective games on Relic usually boil down to careful coordination and implementation of the map's "power weapons." The two sniper rifles and the rocket launcher can drastically dictate the flow of the game, and will usually make or break a team. As soon as the match starts, both offense and defense should race to get the rocket launcher. Offense should load into the hog and drive towards the beach as fast as possible. The defensive team has a Ghost that can be used to either nab the rocket or sniper. Both teams also should make sure that someone is grabbing their respective sniper rifles. If they fall into the other team's hands, you can usually kiss the match goodbye. Defenders shouldn't forget the sword that spawns right under the base. Generally it's a good idea to grab it and then retreat back to the flag stand (be wary of snipers though).

The teleporters are also a huge tactical part of objective games on Relic. In the early game, the offensive team should try to activate the teleporter, allowing respawning teammates a much quicker route into the base. On the flip side, defenders should use it to their advantage once the flag has been taken. If the defending team jumps into the teleporter they will emerge on the beach between the retreating offensive team and the score point. Many a game has been lost right at those final few feet.

— Brian Jarrard, community guy

### GEMINI

Gemini is a fairly dark, tight map which means things can get real frantic, real fast. For the most part, I don't recommend even bothering with the sniper rifle—chances are you won't be able to sit still long enough to use it. The real weapon of choice is the sword, which spawns right in the middle of the large tree in the central chamber. Use the teleporters to get up to the upper ledges and then jump down onto unsuspecting foes (you can also land in the tree and hide in the branches). The Brute Shot is scattered around the map as well, and is very effective for both melee and mid-range attacks.

— Brian Jarrard, community guy

### TERMINAL

Control of the Wraith determines a good deal in objective games, but there are also several counter measures...so most strategies revolve around dealing with it.

Capture the rocket launcher as early as possible. It's in the ticket kiosk in the parkade.

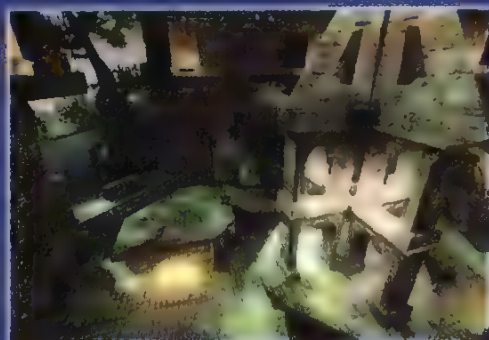
Sniper dominance: There are several snipers, but also protected routes...use them.

Returning the flag via the tracks is the shortest route, but also the most dangerous. If you take it coast to coast like that, you're sure

In Team Slayer, usually the team that owns the plaza wins. Especially if they also own the vehicles. There are too many

boarding opportunities in front of the parkade.

— Mike Zak, environment artist



### WARLOCK

When you're in a close-quarters brawl on Warlock, sometimes you need to back up into cover to recharge your shields. Look for the small triangular holes where the ramps meet the ground—they make great grenade traps, allowing you to drop a frag grenade very precisely where your pursuers won't see it.

— Chris Butcher, engineer

### ASCENSION

When playing Snipers on Ascension, sometimes the best strategy is not to snipe at all. You can lurk around at the bottom of the three-level sniper tower, just popping up for long enough to smack a few unsuspecting snipers in the back of the head.

— Chris Butcher, engineer



### GENERAL

I freely admit that I'm not the greatest Halo player. But, to make myself useful I've found a couple team roles I can play that help comrades get the job done. These don't apply to slayer games—where a useless player is truly useless.

**Human shield**—First guy through the teleport, first into a room, whatever it takes to soak up enemy ammo. I will also throw my body between my flag carrier teammate and his pursuers whenever I can.

**The Guinea Pig**—Need to know if that sniper is still out there? Hang on...I'll just run out and check. This also applies to driving a warthog around solo on Zanibar to blow out the rocket carrier.

**The Decoy**—I have fun with this one, and it works great on Ivory Tower. When one of my teammates has a sword, I'll play decoy and lure attackers to him. They start gunning me down only to be sliced and diced from behind.

— Greg Snook, engineer



**Melee** – Don't forget to use those melee attacks! After the last Auto Update, melee attack damage was given a substantial boost. As such, it's now much more effective to hit someone up close than it is to try and unload SMG rounds. A jumping melee attack will do more damage than a standing one.

**Brute Shot** – The Brute Shot is particularly devastating now that both melee and grenade damage has been increased. The Brute Shot melee attack is one of the most powerful in the entire game use it. When firing the Shot, I recommend firing four shots as fast as possible, creating a flurry of painful explosions for anyone unfortunate enough to be caught in the blast radius. However, be careful, the Brute Shot is agonizingly slow to reload, making you a sitting duck.

**Plasma Pistol** – An overcharged Plasma Pistol can deliver a one-two punch whether up close or at a distance. One popular tactic (though some consider it cheap) is the PP/BR combo. Keep your PP overcharged and ready to fire. Once you encounter an enemy, let the green bolt fly and as soon as it releases, immediately switch to your Battle Rifle and fire a round or two. When timed properly, the plasma bolt impacts, completely reducing their shields, immediately followed by a BR shot which will drop them in the blink of an eye. In closer quarters, use a plasma overcharge followed by a melee punch for instant carnage. Thwack!

**Plasma Pistol Counter?** – Some ingenious players have actually discovered a way to counter the plasma pistol overcharge. The technique requires incredible timing, but in theory could become a standard move with enough practice. First, you must be dealing with a Seeker. Now, when you see the bright green ball of plasma tracking towards you, you can discard your off-hand weapon at the exact instant the bolt arrives, causing the plasma to hit your discarded weapon instead of your body. I admit I haven't personally mastered this, but I have seen videos, so it is possible.

**Sword** – Most people have a love/hate relationship with the sword. When you're the one wielding it, it's great. When you're on the receiving end, it's an entirely different story. The sword's lock-on lunge is rather reliable but it's not foolproof. A sword lunge can be dodged by moving exactly left or right as the attacker lunges. Don't turn your head at all, simply use the left stick and hold left or hold right to slide out of the way as your attacker flies past you. If timed properly, it's possible to dodge the sword multiple times. Nothing is more satisfying than dodging a sword attacker and then finishing them off with a SMG melee to the head.

– Brian Jarrard, community guy

## Advent Rising

### Quick Tips From the Glyphx Gurus



**EMBRACE FLICK TARGETING!!!** Flick targeting is the backbone of Advent's gameplay, and as you master it you will truly become the master of the game. It's what will allow you to do all of the crazy moves, power, and weapon combos available in Advent Rising.

**Dodge, Dodge, Dodge!** Not only does it look cool, but you are much more accurate while dodging. You will take down enemies so much faster by hitting them in the head instead of the body. This strategy is an absolute for the Hard and Ultra difficulty settings.

**Level up your melee!** Gideon is pretty weak at the start of the game. There's no way he can take on a Seeker in hand-to-hand combat and expect to live. Once Gideon receives his first power you can start to level up your jumps and melee abilities. Spend some time doing this because at level five, Gideon's fists become an unstoppable force!

– Donald Mustard, director

**Learn good combinations of weapons and powers.** One powerful combination that I like is using the alt fire of Shatter in my right hand and a power of Power in my left. This way I can flick target an enemy, freeze them in their tracks, and blast them with my gun, shattering them into a million pieces. This is especially useful against big enemies like the Shock Troopers.

– Jeremy Mustard, technical director

**Go sightseeing!** One of my favorite things to do in Advent is surrender to the beautiful universe living and breathing around Gideon. The best (and most tranquil!) use of the FPS camera is to catch some of the scenic vistas we have crafted in some unexpected locations. Stop and smell the Aurelian roses.

– Cameron Dayton, lead level designer

**Go into every battle with certain weapons or powers selected with a strategy in mind.** Then you won't have to worry about what to do in the thick of the fight. Halfway through the game you should make it a point not to use any weapons anymore, and just use your powers. The game is a blast when you only use your powers and dodge your way to victory.

– Nathan Trewartha, lead textures

**Surge is an incredibly useful power when rapidly pulsed.** A full charge isn't anywhere near as effective, and doesn't do as much damage.

– Jared Trulock, textures and design

**Use those place-able shields, especially when fighting large groups.** Hold one out and walk right into a group of enemies and you can bounce them back into walls, off bridges, and into traps. While they're getting back up you'll be able to use that time to your advantage.

**Also, try turning off the "crouch toggle" option in the game options menu.** In the same way one might play Counter-Strike, you can run toward a situation, quickly crouch and head-shot, and pop right back up without losing much momentum.

– Lanny Barrows, lead effects

## Mod World

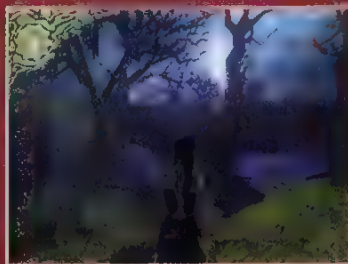
### HALF-LIFE 2

#### Eclipse

<http://students.guilford.edu/~eclipse/eclipse/>



A group of Guilford students got together to create a Half-Life 2 total conversion, make their own studio called CelTech Studios, and build this in a grand total of five months. Peep the URL above for screenshots, FAQs, and details about how CelTech pulled this off. Playing as young sorceress Violet, you'll use her power of Telekinesis to solve puzzles and defeat enemies by her ability to find out what



happened to her father. Eventually, you'll unlock the secrets of Hellstorm, which will allow you to summon up three big fireballs to blow up your opponents. Should you finish the quest, Survival Mode becomes available, where you use Hellstorm to take on infinite waves of enemies and monsters for a high score.

### DOOM 3

#### Terminal DOOM

<http://batfiteam.net/tech/fis/>



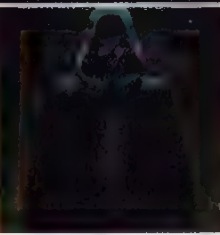
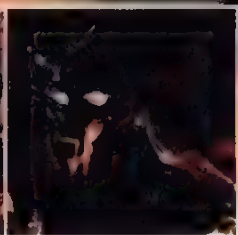
Sure, the super-special omega edition of Xbox Doom 3 comes with Doom 2 and Ultimate Doom, but that doesn't do any good for PC users. Fortunately, some enterprising souls have taken the Classic Doom collection from 1997 and put it into arcade machines in the Doom 3 engine. Genius! There's no multiplayer (obviously, given the restrictions of interactive surfaces in the Doom 3 engine), but this is a concept too quirky to pass on. Downloads, instructions, and boatloads of screenshots are available at the above URL.





CREATOR RICHARD GARRIOTT'S THOUGHTS ON ROOTS AND RELEVANCE

# ULTIMA: BIRTH OF A LEGEND



**W**ay back in the time before Windows, a man had a dream of bringing the magic of Lord of the Rings and Dungeons & Dragons to the digital space. Richard Garriott began his quest to realize his vision in 1979 on the Apple II with Akalabeth. Though little more than a first-person dungeon crawl, it laid the foundation for Ultima – Garriott’s legendary RPG series – and very possibly the root of all western role-playing games. Ultima released in 1980 (recycling much of Akalabeth’s code for its dungeon sequences), and did an unprecedented job of realizing the core ideas of Dungeons & Dragons in a video game. A story-driven quest, a huge world to explore, and a party of characters to level up are taken for granted these days – and it’s all, at least in part, thanks to Ultima.



Richard Garriott is currently working on Tabula Rasa for NCsoft

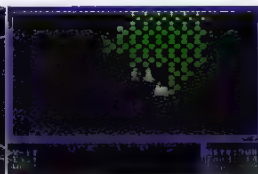
**WHEN ASKED ABOUT** the influences that spurred him to bring interactive epic fantasy to the personal computer, Garriott says, “While in high school in the late ‘70s, three things were happening around me that played a role ultimately in the creation of the Ultima series: The Lord of the Rings trilogy, Dungeons & Dragons, and computers. I created my first games as an expression of creativity on the new machines.” These first games had plots that may sound like any other pulp fantasy: evil sorcerers, noble lords, prophesied heroes, and kingdoms in turmoil. However, as the series continued, these sequential stories began to take on a larger form. The protagonist (the player character, obviously) started to be known as the Avatar, who answers

the call whenever the land of Britannia is in danger. Lord British, the benevolent patriarch of Britannia, became a well-rounded character with his own ideas for how a society should be run. In the coming years, Garriott would take on the persona of Lord British in real life, often appearing in public wearing a regal crown and cape.

One of Garriott’s goals was to make games with worth beyond the digital space. “Many Ultimas involved stories that contained social relevance, and my hope is that those stories became a memorable part for those who played the games,” according to the developer. Indeed, many of the Avatar’s greatest triumphs in his quest to keep Britannia safe result in horrific consequences. For instance, slaying



Akalabeth



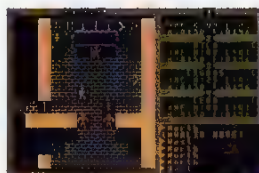
Ultima



Ultima



Ultima II



Ultima III



Ultima IV



Ultima V

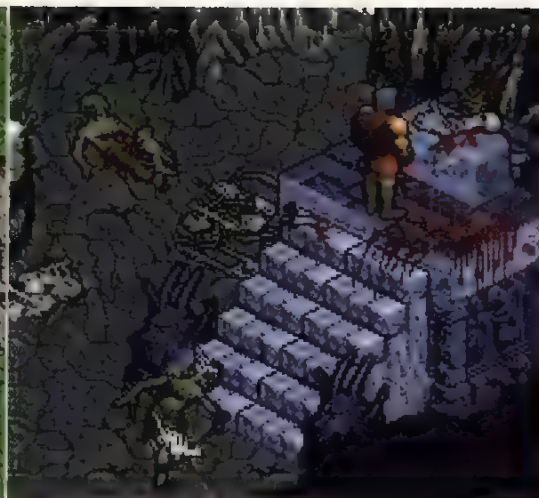


Ultima VI





Ultima VII



Ultima VIII

the evil sorcerers Mordain and Minax in Ultima and Ultima II made an orphan of their unnatural offspring, Exodus, and drove him to bloody revenge in Ultima III. Morally ambiguous situations abound, such as what to do about the hostile Gargoyles in Ultima VI, whose motivation for attacking Britannia is the revenge of the destruction of their home at the Avatar's hand in Ultima V. Thought-provoking moments like this are what make any RPG stand out from the crowd, and are easily one of Ultima's strengths throughout all nine installments of the series.

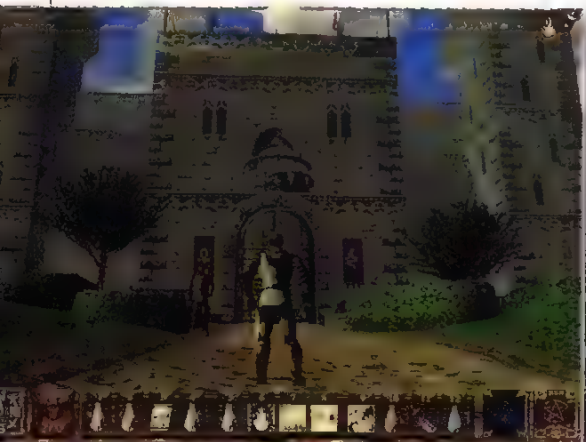
In those early years of PC gaming, there was little of the genre-crowding that we currently see across the board. Thus, it's no surprise that Ultima saw the success that it did. In the words of Garriott, "I was among the very first in the field. However, at the time, I still did not have any expectation of its longevity." This situation didn't hold true for long. Within a few years, Ultima was seeing competition from other companies and other franchises (see sidebar on page 118). Garriott and Origin were, fortunately, up to this challenge as well. With each successive Ultima the engine got smoother and prettier, while keeping the excellence of the series' RPG elements intact. Much of this was no doubt due to Garriott and his team's commitment to the franchise. "I was always excited about building Ultimas," says Garriott. "Our industry moves so fast that I was proud and excited to be innovating the next game alongside the advancement of hardware and game design skills." Ultima VIII could be considered an exception to this trend; fans were put off by more radical changes to the game's design, especially coming off of the stunning successes of Ultima VII and its add-on, Serpent Isle. However, this is all simply part of the lead-up to Garriott and Origin Systems' hands-down most-famous contribution to gaming: Ultima Online.

UO wasn't the first massively multiplayer online role-playing game when it launched in 1997 – both Meridian 59

(1996) and Neverwinter Nights (1991) preceded it along with numerous mostly text-based multi-user dungeons. It was, however, easily the most successful of its time. "Our sales expectations for the game were a lowly 15 to 30 thousand users," recalls Garriott, "That is, until 50,000 people signed up to test it and hundreds of thousands of units flew off the shelves at launch!" While such instant popularity was no doubt welcome, it brought its own set of problems as well. As any MMORPG player knows, there are tons of elements needed and challenges to be met in an MMO that are unique to the genre. Twenty-four hour customer support, little downtime on the massive number of servers that are running, constant bug fixes, and content updates are all things that gamers suddenly expect when they're shelling out \$15 per month on a subscription fee. According to Garriott, "We had no idea what kind of infrastructure we would need. We had to double and triple the staff shortly after launch." The newly-discovered demands of maintaining an MMORPG weren't the only hurdle faced by Garriott and the crew at Origin, though. Some things simply don't work in an environment that's so dependent on player actions: "My favorite example was the elaborate virtual ecology system we spent so much time creating and implementing into the game. As soon as we launched, that system was rapidly overrun by players who killed creatures as fast as we could spawn them, so it was a total waste of time and a feature that got ripped from the game," laments Garriott.

Looking back, it's easy to see how Ultima was historically significant to the development of RPGs on many levels. It's debatable how much influence it had on Japanese series like Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior, but the RPG market is vast and varied, and many games owe much to the vision made real in over two decades of Ultima games.

(Continued on page 118)



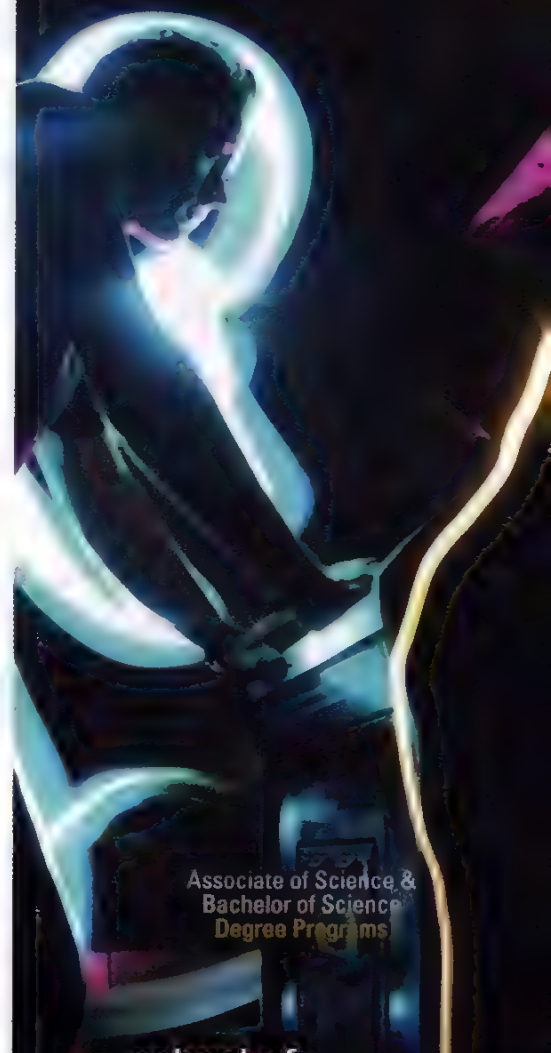
Ultima IX



Ultima Online

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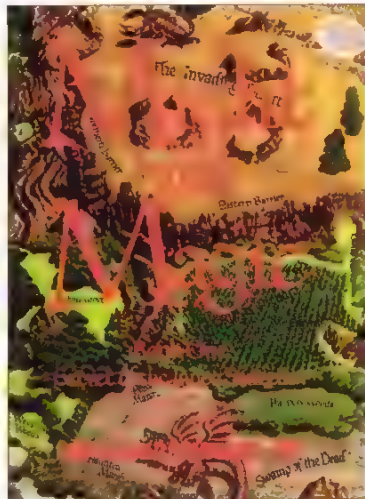
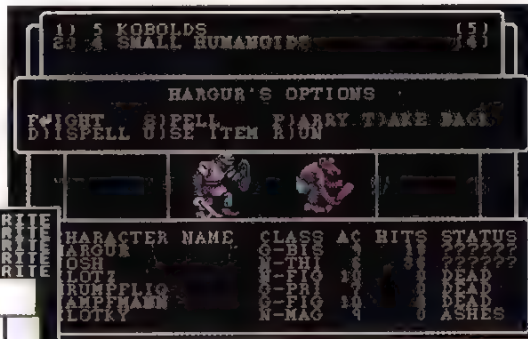
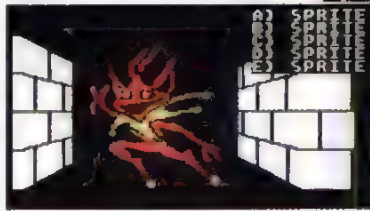
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## EMULATION OR COMPETITION?

### Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord 1981 – Sir-Tech Software

Wizardry played much in the style of Akalabeth, with minimal graphics and a first-person perspective. However, the complexity of character development and combat in Wizardry far outstripped its predecessors. This was possibly at the expense of story, which was largely non-existent in this 10-level dungeon crawl.



### Exile: Escape From The Pit 1995 – Spiderweb Software

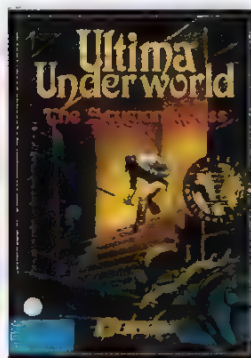
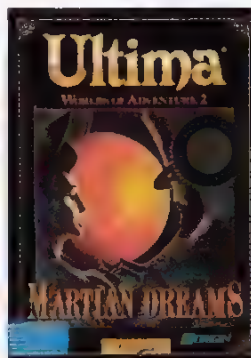
Given the year of its release, Exile is noteworthy more as a shareware revisiting of the glory of Ultima's heyday than really pushing the genre forward. It also gave a generation of upcoming Mac users (including at least one member of the GI staff) a wonderful retrospective on the evolution of RPGs. This series is a shining example of how well-designed gameplay can overcome graphical deficiencies.

### Might & Magic: Book One – Secret of the Inner Sanctum 1987 – New World Computing

Might & Magic was notable for taking the first-person viewpoint of titles like Wizardry and adding nicely detailed (at the time) graphics to the mix. Also, the world of M&M was huge like no other, featuring distinct regions and cultures for the player to visit.

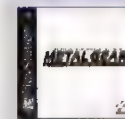
## ABERRATION OR EXPANSION?

Ultima received two spinoff series, for a total of four games. The Ultima Underworld titles were generally well-received, with their harkening back to the first-person dungeon crawls of yore. The two Worlds of Ultima games, however, are a bit goofier. Not content with purging evil from Britannia, the Avatar fights...dinosaurs? And then goes to Mars during Earth's Victorian era and hooks up with historical figures like Mark Twain and Nikolai Lenin? Worlds of Ultima I and II were a bit odd, to say the least.



## GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Brian Blekman



### METAL GEAR SOLID

> FORMAT PSONE  
 > PUBLISHER KONAMI

When anyone asks me, "What is your favorite game of all time?" only one idea comes into my mind. That is Metal Gear Solid. When it first came out in 1998 on the PSone, I had no idea it existed. The closest thing I had to the game was a demo of it. I could not even get past the first level, but later on, as I watched people play the real game, I fell in love with its charm. I eventually got MGS, and it was better than I imagined. As the famous soldier Solid Snake, you have to stop a group of terrorists from activating Metal Gear, the most powerful weapon in the world, in 24 hours. Throughout the game, you meet friends like Otacon and Meryl, and foes like Psycho Mantis and Sniper Wolf. My favorite character is Gray Fox, an old friend of Snake's that was killed, revived, and becomes a kick-ass ninja who helps Snake throughout the mission. In Game Informer's June issue (#134), in a preview for TimeSplitters Future Perfect, it was written that, "The only thing worse than fighting a tank from on foot...is fighting a helicopter." In Metal Gear Solid, you have to do both, fighting Vulcan Raven in his tank and Liquid Snake in his Hind D helicopter, along with battling a giant, nuclear equipped, robot dinosaur, Metal Gear Rex. Metal Gear Solid can satisfy almost any kind of gamer. If you like sniping, mechs, stealth, romance, or just a game with so many twists and turns you won't know what to think, Metal Gear Solid's got you covered. There is so much emotion in MGS that at the end,

you'll be crying like a baby, wishing the game would be longer. But don't worry – there are many different ways to complete the game, each as mouth-watering as the next.



The feeling I got when I played Metal Gear Solid is greater than in any other title. I would have given this game a 10 back then, and I'd give it a 10 now. Metal Gear Solid is perfect in every way you can imagine. If you ever have a chance to get your hands on a copy of Metal Gear Solid, seize it and don't let it go.

## THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

On August 23rd of 1999, Sony lowered its insanely popular original PlayStation to the price of \$99. This seemingly innocuous event may have had a dramatic effect on gaming history as a whole, since the Sega Dreamcast would launch only



two weeks later. While Sega executives denied at the time that the newly price-lowered PlayStation would be a factor in the success of the Dreamcast, it's not hard to tell which company is still making consoles today.



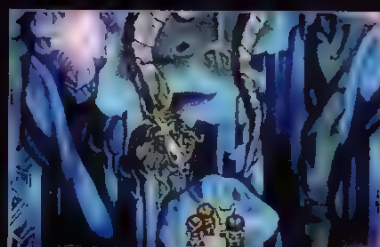


PSONE

## LUNAR: SILVER STAR STORY COMPLETE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER WORKING DESIGNS > DEVELOPER KADOKAWA > RELEASE 1999

In the world of games, it's a rare thing when something older is better. We tend to hunger for the flashiest and most complex plots, with the newest graphics and gameplay devices. Lunar has none of these things, but still manages to be more engaging and charming than a whole slew of modern RPGs combined. The very definition of old-school, Lunar's 2D landscapes, child-like characters, and predictable story manage to be totally refreshing and immediately enjoyable. The dialogue and scripting are clever and witty, with regular moments of laugh-out-loud humor. There's also a gorgeous soundtrack that weaves the whole thing together rather nicely. A surprising degree of challenge and strategy is present in the positional battle system — the cute characters belie the difficulty of some of the harder boss fights. Luckily, there's a save anywhere feature that keeps frustration to a minimum. Simple but rock solid game design governs the whole affair, and makes Silver Star Story one of the great pleasures of its era.

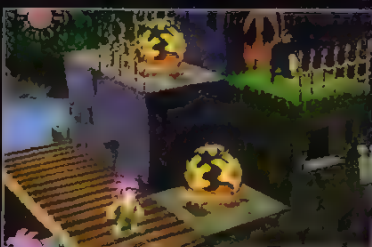


PSONE

## TOMBA!

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > DEVELOPER WHOOPEE CAMP > RELEASE 1998

An often forgotten jewel in the first PlayStation's crown, Tomba stars a pink-haired boy with a penchant for biting pretty much everything he can get his mouth around. The game offers a unique blend of platforming and action, along with some minor puzzle solving and RPG elements, all wrapped up into a neat package. There are dozens of objectives to find and complete, and an amusing mix of characters who all seem at least slightly alarmed by Tomba's primitive nature. While playing primarily as a 2D platformer, the ability to move between the back and foreground quite literally adds a new dimension to the formula. Meanwhile, all the levels are wildly imaginative and filled with all sorts of strange fruits, plants, and creatures. Tomba shows his appreciation for the variety of life by devouring everything he can find, and apparently using his stomach to store items until he needs them later. Locating Tomba's objectives can be mildly frustrating, but it's a small concern that shouldn't stop you from checking out this unlikely hero. After all, anyone who likes to eat this much can't be all bad.



SUPER NINTENDO

## SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 1991

This is one of those gamer badge of honor titles. Beat it, and you've got reason and right to brag. Arguably one of the more blisteringly difficult games to show up on the SNES, Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts remains as instantly addictive and equally frustrating as when it first came out. The series was one of the progenitors of the double jump, and the platforming in this version was the very definition of typical 2D fare in the day. The atmospheric and creepy environments look great throughout the game, managing somehow to feel simultaneously colorful and vivid while still appearing dark and foreboding. Sadly, some horrendous slowdown really mars the gameplay on an almost constant basis. There are few things worse than dropping into slow motion in a level where good jump timing and careful movement are the only things keeping you alive. Purists will say it's just one more challenge to overcome. New players, on the other hand, may just throw down the controller in disgust. Where you lie on the spectrum between the two should give you a good idea whether the game is for you.





## VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Video games are growing more and more profitable, and the many people involved in their production are looking for a bigger slice of the pie. While the fate of professional voice actors in video games is still up in the air, there are plenty of other unions waiting in the wings to claim their fair share. Answer these questions to determine which group will be next to demand more money for its contributions to the industry.

**1** The Japanese word "Nintendo" roughly translates to which of these phrases?

- A. "In heaven's hands"
- B. "Earnest mega fun times unrelenting"
- C. "The friendly wind"
- D. "Master Chief is a pansy"

**2** Nerds are the glue that hold the world together. In fact, one famous nerd even provided the voice of Sonic the Hedgehog in the blue blur's animated series. Who was it?



- A. Jaleel White, "Urkel"
- B. Dustin Diamond, "Screech"
- C. Curtis Armstrong, "Booger"
- D. James Earl Jones, "Mufasa"

**3** Not many people liked yelling at their Dreamcasts; this screen is taken from one of only two titles in the U.S. to make use of the system's microphone peripheral. Which game is it?

- A. Seaman
- B. Blue Stinger
- C. Incoming: The Final Conflict
- D. Alien Front Online



**4** Which of the following heartless, mechanical fabrications isn't a part of Mega Man's posse?

- A. Rush
- B. Beat
- C. Howl
- D. Flip Top

**5** The eighties brought us some wonderful and terrifying things, like this ghastly animated perversion of a classic gaming character. Who is this doofus supposed to be?

- A. Cid Highwind
- B. Simon Belmont
- C. Spelunker
- D. Pitfall Harry



**6** The infamous Konami Code has taken many forms over the years. Which of these two variations will result in extra lives in Contra for the NES?

- A. Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, start
- B. Up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, B, A, select, start
- C. Both A & B, suckers!
- D. Neither. Learn your history, posers!

**7** If your name is Mouse and you hang out with a talking guitar named Pattimo, you are...

- A. Only in Japan and starring in Bahamut Lagoon
- B. The main character in Ephemeral Fantasia
- C. One of the 108 Stars of Destiny in Suikoden IV
- D. Hallucinating and drinking way too much laundry detergent

**8** In Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2, which character was unlocked by getting 100% in career mode with a created skater?

- A. Private Carrera
- B. Officer Dick
- C. Spider-Man
- D. Darth Maul

**9** The rare katana controller, besides being the most unwieldy rubbish since the Power Glove, was also released in conjunction with which of the following games?

- A. Onimusha 3
- B. Dynasty Warriors 4
- C. Leonardo's Street Surgery
- D. NanoBreaker



**10** Double the plumber's cracks, double the fun! In which title did Mario's tagalong brother Luigi make his first appearance (playable or otherwise)?

- A. Donkey Kong
- B. Introducing Luigi!
- C. Mario Brothers
- D. Super Wachowski Brothers



## BREAKDOWN

**20%** the difference in reaction time between gamers and non-gamers, according to a Washington University study

**1,249%** the difference in reaction time between Speedy Gonzales and Slowpoke Rodríguez, according to Joe

**42%** of 8 to 12-year olds declared Nintendo number one in a recent "coolest companies" survey. The big N only garnered 21% among 13 to 17-year olds, though

**18%** of our readers will believe any old garbage we make up for this section

**100%** of your friends love wedgies, but are too shy to ask for them

## ★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



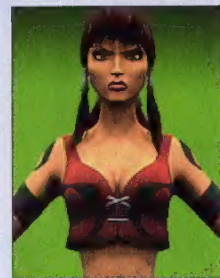
**0-1:**  
Annoying Sidekicks Guild



**2-3:**  
Gold Coin Pressers



**4-5:**  
Pushable Cratesmiths



**6-7:**  
Revealing Adventure Clothing Company



**8-9:**  
Generic Heros Association



**10:**  
Toby Gard





Evil lurks  
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