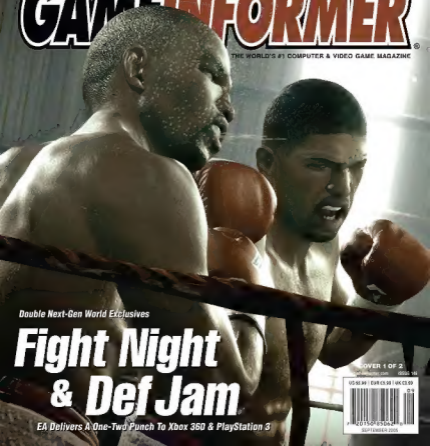


An Exclusive Look At The PSP Sequel
Untold Legends: Warriors' Code (P. 84)

NEXT-GEN: RESIDENT EVIL 5 & RIDGE RACER 6
Must-Save Screens of These Classics Coming to Xbox 360 & PlayStation 3

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COVER 1 OF 2

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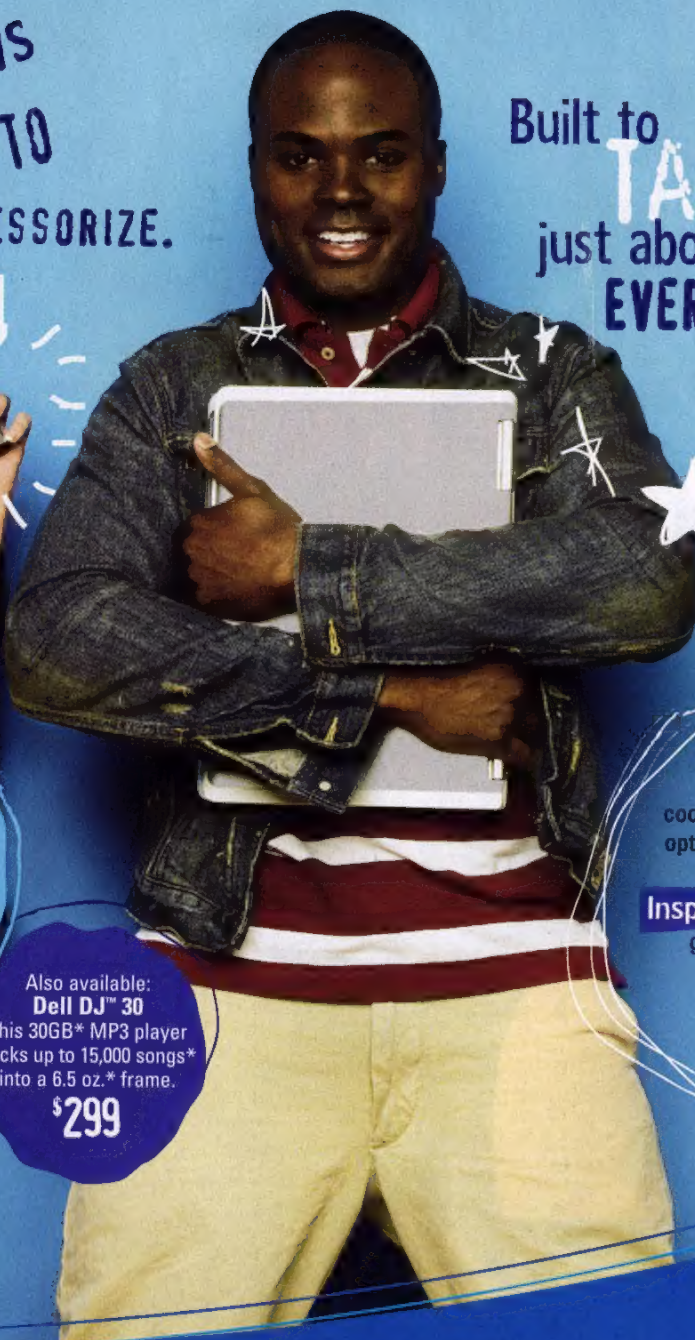
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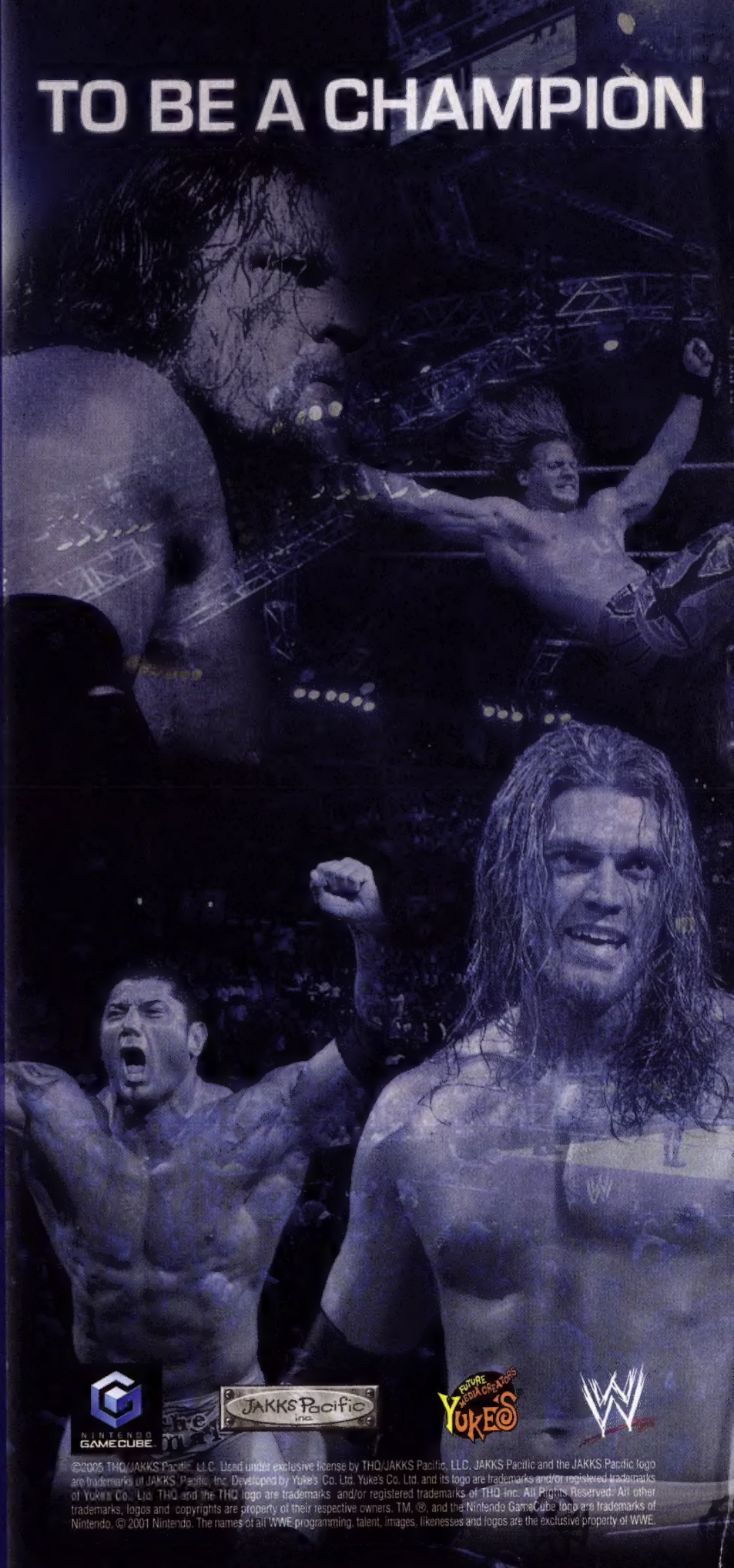
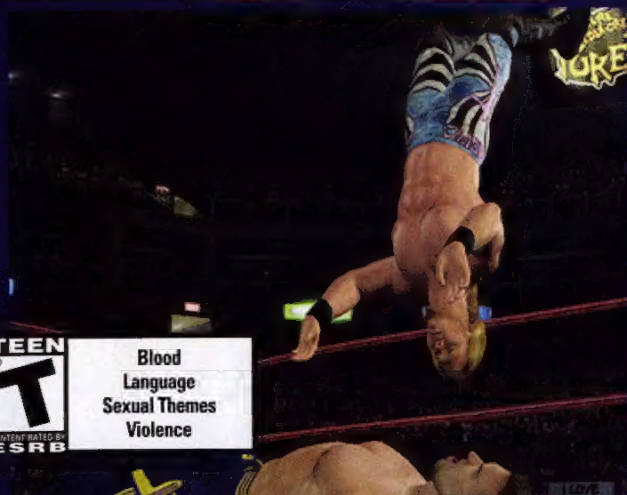
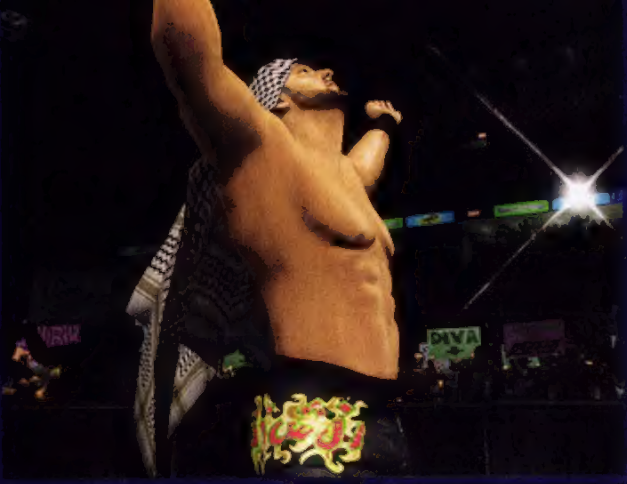
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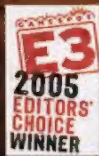
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MY NAME'S JACK CARVER. GOD KNOWS HOW I WOUND UP IN THIS HELLHOLE. IT'S CRAWLING WITH MERCS. THEY'RE HUNTING ME FOR SPORT. BUT THEY GOT A SURPRISE COMING. I CAN FEEL MYSELF CHANGING. I CAN SMELL THE BAD GUYS' BLOOD. THEIR SWEAT. AND I CAN KILL. I'M GETTING REALLY GOOD AT KILLING. TRUTH IS, I'M STARTING TO LIKE IT.

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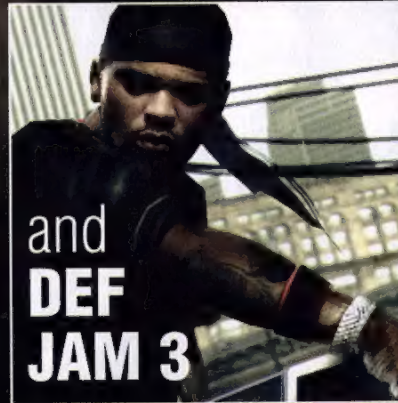
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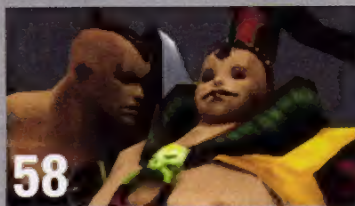
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We went out to EA's Chicago development studio and got the exclusive insider scoop on these next-gen blockbusters. EA Chicago mastermind Kudo Tsunoda and his teams plan to take these two fighting franchises far beyond what gamers expect out of the next wave of console titles, and we break it down for you.



and DEF JAM 3

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UNTOLD LEGENDS: WARRIORS' CODE

Sony Online has got more than MMO trickery up its sleeves, but online is still the key word – *Untold Legends: Warriors' Code* is fully Internet-functional. We bring you the exclusive first look at the publisher/developer's hot new PSP dungeon crawler.

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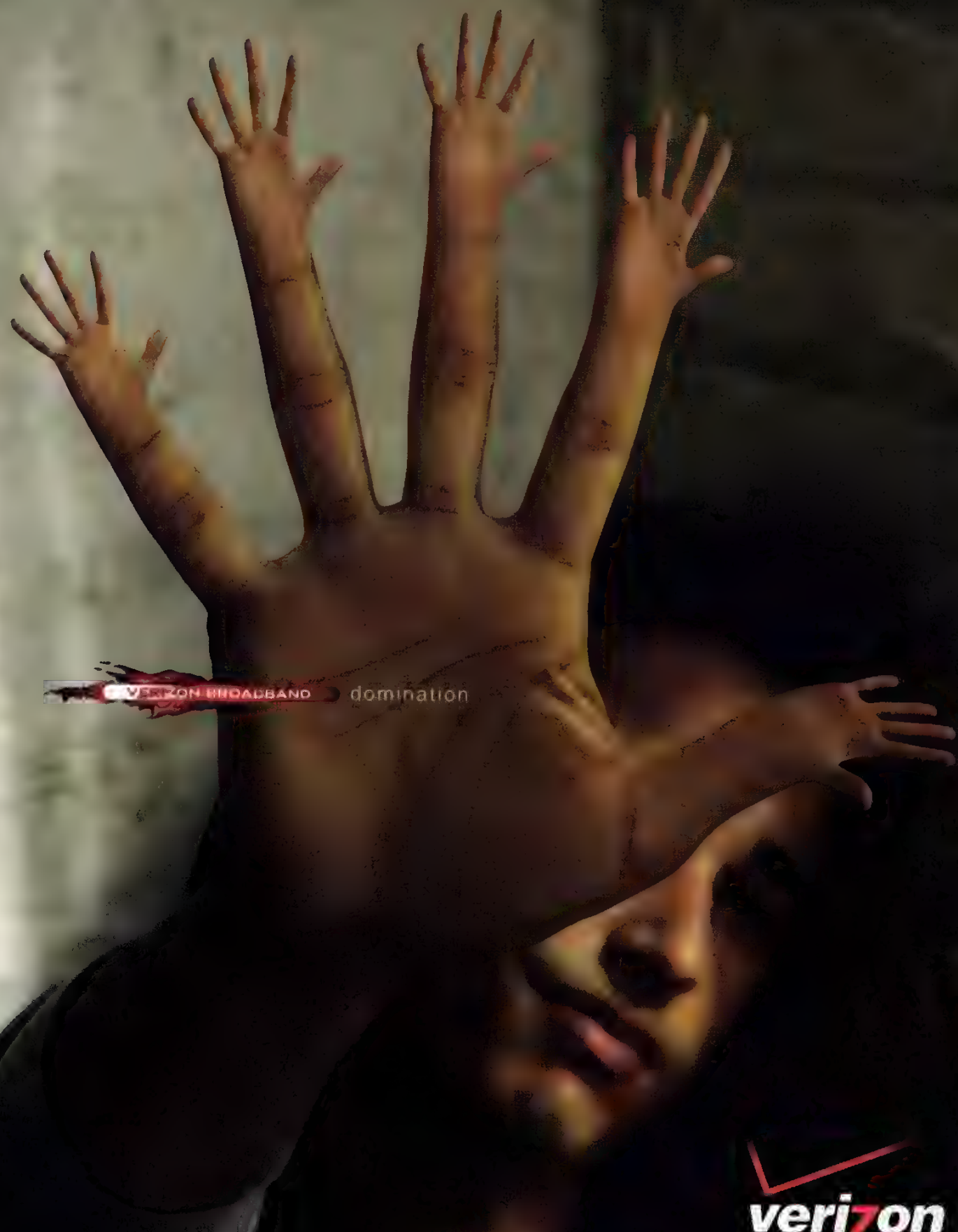
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The end...or is it?

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



A CALL TO ACTION

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The gaming community has quickly found itself the whipping boy of politicians, and I can't say that I blame them. Gamers, as a political force, have yet to show their ability to stand up for what they believe in.

"The Man," as I like to call the powers that be, doesn't understand what video games are, or why capping some fool can be considered entertainment. He sees what the mainstream media shows him, which is GTA: San Andreas' Carl Johnson doing something completely outrageous and out of context.

Or even worse, he sees some extreme fringe mod like Hot Coffee, and thinks that video games are destroying America's youth. Even though the game was clearly marked "M" for Mature gamers. It doesn't matter, video games to The Man are what is destroying America's moral values, much like that evil idol Elvis did with his rock 'n roll and gyrating pelvis.

Gamers obviously know that all this talk is completely absurd. But we need to do something about it. It sounds stupid, but write your congressmen. Be heard. Let people know that video games are a viable part of pop culture and entertainment for the masses. Don't let The Man keep us down, just because we love something he doesn't understand.

I highly recommend that you read this month's opinion as it addresses this very issue. It sounds silly, but this stuff is important if you want to play the games you want to play, not the games some house committee wants you to play.

In more uplifting news, come back next month when we'll bring you the first look at another hot Xbox 360 title.

Enjoy the issue.

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** NASCAR Pit Passes, Google Earth, STUNNING (Local Minneapolis Band - Check'em Out), Entourage (The Best Show On TV), Lance Armstrong (Yes, I Watched Bicycle Racing) **Dislikes:** Sun Bum, Basement Flooding, Perpetrators, Team Killers, Jack Thompson's Insane Rantings **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft (Warsong Gulch FTW), Far Cry, Advance Wars: Dual Strike, Tony Hawk's American Wasteland, Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee



Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince, The New Metal Gear Toys, Superdew (The Best Hotdogs In The World), The Globe Pub, Stargate: SG-1, Starscream **Dislikes:** Hearing Matt Say "Sit" Roughly 5,000 Times A Day While Playing Nintendogs, The Fact That I Couldn't Poison Matt's Nintendog While He Was Away At Lunch **Current Favorite Games:** Madden NFL 06, NCAA Football 06, Darkwatch, Halo 2, Gun, Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories, Peter Jackson's King Kong, We Love Kataman



Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Shaun of the Dead, Recording, Core Fitness, R. Kelly's "Trapped In The Closet" (The Most Significant Song Of Our Time) **Dislikes:** Ex-Models That Drive Into Awesome Musicians And Kill Them In A Botched Suicide Attempt (RIP Michael Dalaquist Of Silkworm), Games That Waste Good Ideas, The Fact My Nintendog Is Better Trained Than My Real Dog **Current Favorite Games:** Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy, Psychonauts, EyeToy: Play 2, Darkwatch



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Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Delicious Home Cooking, Buffy The Vampire Slayer (Like It Wasn't Already Clear That I'm A Big Nerd), My New DS, Unrealistically High Expectations For The Vikings **Dislikes:** The Chicago White Sox (Small Ball My Arse), Service Pack 2 (I'll Never Download You! Never!), Bored Level 60 Alliance **Current Favorite Games:** Meteos, Kirby: Canvas Curse, World of Warcraft, Untold Legends: Warriors' Code, Master of Magic, Advance Wars: Dual Strike



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Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** Dead Like Me: Season 2, Installing My Own Armblades And/Oro Botonic Tentades, Me Being Rated PG-13 For Comic Mischief and Western Violence (Yee-haw!), Cydonus And His Sweeps **Dislikes:** My Preoccupation With Harry Potter's Love Life, Decoys (You Suck, Canadian Film!), Perceptor (The Only Autobot Worse Than BUMBLEBEE), Zephyr, Waiting For Book Seven **Current Favorite Games:** Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana, The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, We Love Katamani



Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Google Earth (Coolest Free Download Ever), Ice Cream Makers, Puppies When They're Sleepy, My New Music Video Career **Dislikes:** Wolverine In Too Many Comics, Profound Concerns About The Future X-Men Movies, Running Out Of Milk, Cheaters On Halo 2 **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 2, Chrono Cross, The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, Jade Empire, Super Mario Bros. 3, Guitar Hero

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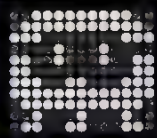


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PlayStation 2





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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



8



1



2



3

1 Billy and Jeremy hang with the living legend of B-movies, Mr. Bruce Campbell 2 Tom Russo of G4 Television - YOU GO, GIRL! 3 Sega's Ethan Einhorn, seconds before brutally beheading Kato. Thankfully, we reattached Kato's head. Hope he doesn't notice that third ear we added! 4 GI Online's Bryan Vore rocks out with Red Octane's new Guitar Hero controller, much to the delight of Miller, Reverb's Doug Kennedy, and Red Octane VP Charles Huang 5 It's not often that you get to have a drink with a fake Han Solo and Chewbacca, so savor every moment, Jeremy! We said savor it, you ingrate! Start savoring now! Savor! 6 Miller hangs with Gene Mauro, CEO of Myelin Media, and Sharon Wood, president of Stone Creek Marketing 7 EA's Dave Silverman, Billy Berghammer, and Kato beat down Alex Ward of Criterion. This is part of a gang initiation ritual for the Rolling 30s Mushroom Kingdom Crips 8 Kato tells his hero, NASCAR driver Ryan Newman, another dirty joke about Jeff Gordon



4



6



5



7

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ACTIVISION

activision.com



INCORRECTIONS

In your feature on Neversoft's Gun (issue 147), you claim that it takes place in a "newly reunited, post-Civil War nation." However, as ruled in the Supreme Court case Texas v. White, secession by any state is unconstitutional, and thus technically impossible. Regardless of the controversy surrounding this issue, that ruling still stands, clearly making a "reunited" America inconceivable as the states were never legally separated.

Rory Varrato
via hotmail.com

I am writing to inform you of an error in one of your recent issues. The bottom left caption of your Spore preview reads "or better yet, travel to different solar systems." The problem? There is only one Solar System. The Solar System is our star system, which orbits around Sol. So unless you travel to different (but identical) versions of our star system, the usage is wrong. Now, if you do travel to multiple (and identical) versions of our star system, the quote has another typo, for the words 'solar' and 'system' would need to be capitalized.

Chris Edwards
via gmail.com

■ Every month we get letters from concerned readers who spot typos and other errors in the pages of our magazine. Rest assured, we check our facts and do our best to ensure the Game Informer that shows up on your doorstep delivers relevant and accurate information. However, some things will inevitably slip through the cracks, and we will freely own up to a mistake (yes, Destroy All Humans is rated T, not M). But these two letters simply break all previous records in both the "Pickin' Nits" and "Too Much Information" categories. Of course, we're not entirely convinced these "corrections" are true, but still, if this much brainpower is spent scrutinizing each word of the magazine, the stuff that doesn't get torn apart by astute readers must be pure gold, right? Right?

L33T AND INT3LL3CTUAL

I recently read Adam's opinion page about PC Gaming and the global underground (issue 147). I wholeheartedly agree with his claim that PCs are "as much projects of love as pieces of electronics," especially since I just spent a great deal of time customizing my own gaming machine. I would also like to add that the PC gaming world is more elite and intellectual than the thousands of goobers out there that are proud of the fact that they can button mash their way through a million-point combo on Tony Hawk or cheat their way into invincibility in Grand Theft Auto – and I think other PC gamers would agree with me.

Jose Jimenez
via email

■ Do you hear that, console gamers? You're goobers! According to Jose here, you could learn a thing or

two from your obviously superior PC-enlightened overlords. However, it does seem odd that this "elite and intellectual" group also contains countless PKing toolboxes, level one naked dwarves who whisper "can I hav sum goldz plz," and mentally sterile opponents who still think the SCV rush is the best Starcraft strategy ever invented. In truth, the culture of gaming is growing more diverse every day, and you're going to run into a fair share of dimwits regardless of your preferred platform. Fortunately, there is still a wide array of sharp-minded, non-annoying gamers in both the console and the PC realms with whom you can join forces in a crusade against ignorance. So, please, get out there and crusade! If "-XXor" is tacked on to any more words, the English language could very well buckle from exhaustion.



ART GAMEFUNKEL

I have been an avid gamer since the beginning of the modern gaming era. I can vividly remember my first experiences with the NES (and the now-iconic Mario) as a mesmerized four-year old waiting to get his hair cut at the local barbershop. I am proud of the success the industry has had over the past 15 years, but I am alarmed at the swift judgment being passed by zealous game journalists across the world that video gaming has arrived as an art form. Though I wish it were so, the few remaining differences between video games and art are still keeping the industry from being a medium of artistic expression. Video games focus on competition, strategy, ability, and mechanics rather than storytelling, imagery, and theme. A game could have a narrative worthy of a Pulitzer or visuals worthy of being displayed in the Louvre, but if it has clunky controls or a shoddy multiplayer it would be completely ignored by the industry. Gaming right now is more analogous to sport than art, with its focus on competition and skill. It will take true works of beauty rather than technical and competitive phenomena for mainstream acceptance of game creation as a valid art form.

Brandon Kemp
via hotmail.com

■ Thanks for sharing your thoughts, Brandon. It isn't really our place to resolve the centuries-old debate of what defines art, but there are some important distinctions to keep in mind before you altogether dismiss games as a form of artistic expression. For instance, the fact that many games focus on competition does not automatically disqualify all titles across the board. Not every painting is necessarily a work of art, and neither is every game. But anyone who has played through ICO, Final Fantasy X, or Killer 7 can attest to the fact that there are games intently focused on narrative, visual, and thematic elements. Furthermore, these titles have been known to inspire powerful emotional responses in gamers across the world (ICO even made Andy "Stone Cold" McNamara teary-eyed). It is understandable to feel that video games have not yet reached their full potential, but be careful not to judge the artistic merits of the industry as a whole based on the many games that are ultimately intended to be pure entertainment.

VIDEO GAMES KILLED THE RADIO STAR

I'm concerned about the future of video game music. With the Xbox 360 allowing players to have their own custom soundtracks in any game, will developers put as much effort into music for the next generation? There have been some great game soundtracks (like the Zelda and Final Fantasy series), and I would hate to see this aspect of gaming not get the same careful attention just because some people decide to listen to their own CDs instead of the music that people worked hard to produce for the game.

Matthew Maciejewski
via yahoo.com

■ Microsoft is certainly touting this Xbox 360 capability as a herald of the next generation of gaming, but it has recently come to our attention that every current-generation console has prototype versions of this amazing technology embedded deep within its hardware. Here's how you can access this revolutionary feature without waiting for the 360: turn on your console, turn off the volume on the TV, and fire up the stereo with a CD of your choice in the tray. Behold, the future is now – and it works for every game, not just the select Xbox titles that support custom soundtracks. It might not be super high-tech, but gamers have been choosing their own music like this for years. Even with customization showing up in nearly every aspect of games these days, there are still plenty of gamers committed to experiencing a title the way it was intended. In other words, the type of person who can't wait to

SOMETHING'S MISSING

I found your review of the game but I was disappointed with the score. An 8? Come on! It deserved at least an 9. You people know good games. This is one of them.

Cody
via verizon.net

■ You make some excellent and irrefutable points. We hereby rescind our previous score for the game in question and assign it the 9 it so rightly deserves. We apologize to all who were misled by our lack of discretion.



pick up Mistwalker's upcoming RPG Blue Dragon probably won't sideline Nobuo Uematsu's compositions in favor of blaring the newest Limp Bizkit album. Of course, anyone listening to Limp Bizkit under any circumstances needs serious medical attention, so that might be a bad example. The point is that gamers still care about quality original music, and as games continue to become more cinematic, the impact of this crucial ingredient will only grow more prominent. Also, if Fred Durst is reading this, we're *Cat Fancy Magazine*, and all threats should be directed accordingly.

MORE SPORE GALORE

I was reading your preview on Spore in issue 147, and it says that it is possible to make anything in the game. Anything? I don't mean to question your journalistic skills, but I have a hard time believing that's true.

Austin Wood
via yahoo.com

I just finished reading about Spore, and I can't wait to travel to other planets to see what other players create. I'm just curious about one thing, though: Will Spore work without an internet connection? Do other creatures still pop up in the galaxy if you can't connect to the main server where everything is stored?

Vince Pena
via hotmail.com

After Spore received several accolades at this year's E3 (including the prestigious "Best of Show" award), we are all anxious to see how Will Wright's latest creation will evolve. It was Wright himself who said that Spore will allow you to "create anything that you can imagine," and though that could be a slight hyperbole (alas, our imagined *Kramer vs. Kramer* game may never become a reality), it emphasizes the fact that the game is aiming for an unprecedented level of player control and customization. The toolset will let you breathe life into the most bizarre beasts you can imagine; Wright's E3 demo showcased everything from multi-legged abominations to adorable teddy bears. While Spore will allow you to share the denizens of your worlds via a central server, downloading other players' created content is not a requirement. Our sources at EA tell us that there will be plenty of worlds and creatures generated automatically in-game to accommodate those without internet connections (i.e. gamers in Siberia and Louisiana). We'll continue to keep you informed on all the details as Spore sprouts more legs to stand on in the coming months.

LA BLOWS

I'm sick and tired of you guys talking smack about Los Angeles. I've seen an LA dis in almost every issue of GI (especially around E3). Don't be jealous just because we keep it real on the west coast while you guys are stuck in Minneapolis.

Marco Jauregui
via aol.com

[The city of Los Angeles, Toys for Tots, and Randy Quaid's publicist have all requested that our original response to this letter be replaced with something less belligerent, insulting, and containing fewer swears. So here's the chorus from some Seal song:

*I compare you to a kiss from a rose on the grey.
Ooh, the more I get of you...
Stranger it feels, yeah.
And now that your rose is in bloom.
A light hits the gloom on the grey.]*

ENVELOPE ART

SEPTEMBER WINNER!

DAN YANG

Upon viewing the previous 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.

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

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



JUDAS P. DEAN

A pathway to many abilities some consider to be unnatural, like Crazy Straws sprouting from your fingertips



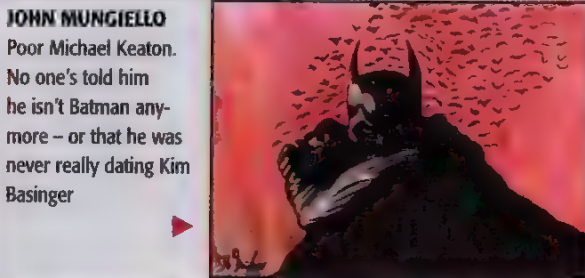
IASON SANABRIA

The Baseball Furies will win against your favorite sports team



ASHLEY GIPSON

No, Sora! No! Pigeons and fire-crackers don't mix



JOHN MUNGIELLO

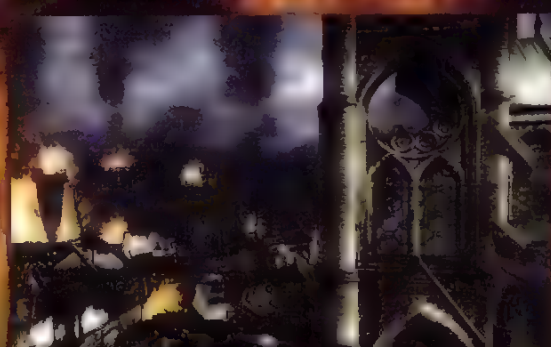
Poor Michael Keaton. No one's told him he isn't Batman anymore -- or that he was never really dating Kim Basinger



KEVIN GROTZKE

Leon gets punished for making fun of the fabled "Burlap Hood of Retribution"





Winner, Best RPG of E3

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

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

— Xbox.com

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

— GamePro Magazine

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

— GameInformer

The RPG for the Next Generation

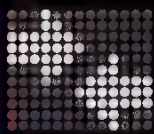


XBOX 360.





The Elder Scrolls IV
OBLIVION™



games

A NEW MENACE

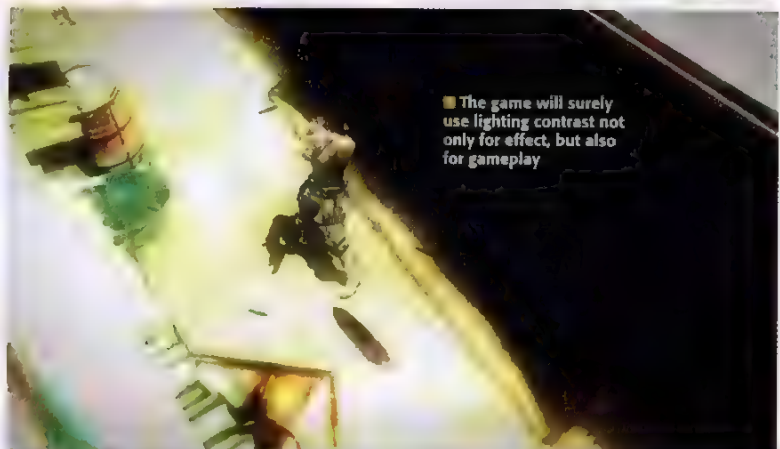
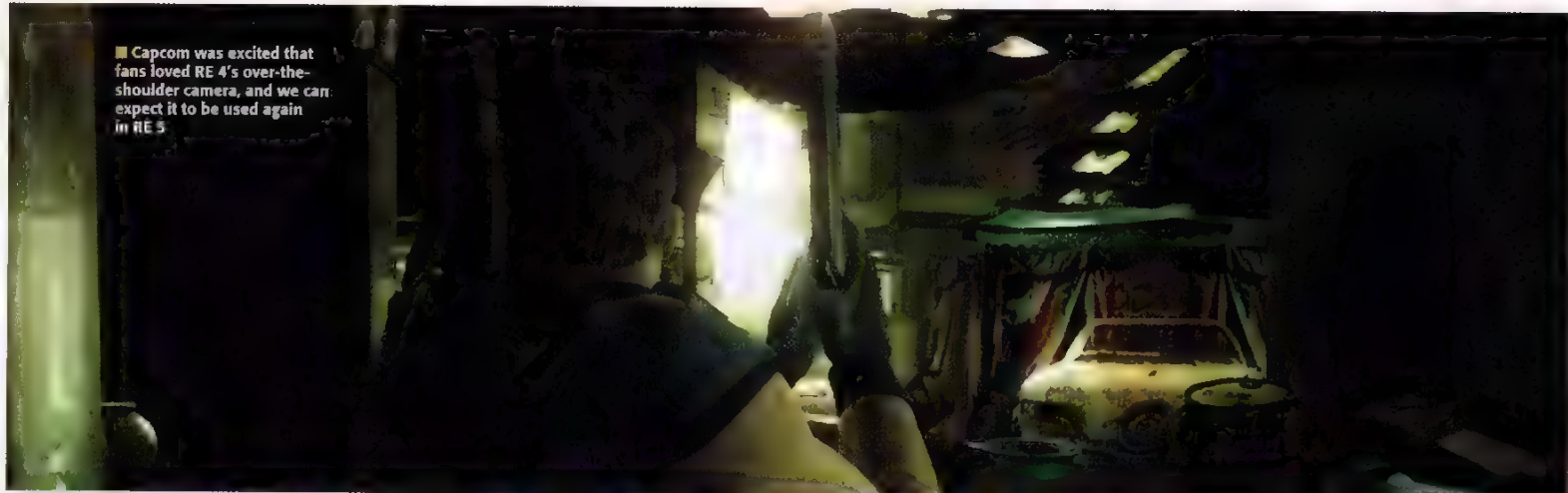
RESIDENT EVIL 5 FOR
PS3 AND XBOX 360

The new directions that Resident Evil 4 took the venerable series were warmly received by critics and the public alike, and Capcom is already charging ahead into even more frightening territory with Resident Evil 5. The game was unveiled in trailer form at back-to-back Sony and Microsoft conferences in Japan recently for both the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. Previously, Capcom had a deal for Resident Evil 4 with Nintendo, but the company has yet to announce a version of RE 5 for the Revolution.

The teaser trailer doesn't tell us who the game's seemingly new protagonist is, and though rumors are swirling that it's Chris Redfield from the first Resident Evil, that hasn't been confirmed. The short clip of RE 5 shows the hero stalked in daylight by the silhouettes of a pack of slow-moving zombies. As RE 4 opened up the game with bigger, outdoor environments, this newest installment in the series looks to expand this direction with its dichotomy between sun-drenched expanses and dark shadows. But that's not all that's new about this title; at the end of the trailer the fear of being stalked by a pack of stumbling undead turns into sheer panic as they start running towards the protagonist like the enraged zombies of *28 Days Later*. What happens next remains to be seen.

■ Who is this mystery man? Rumors are that it's Chris Redfield from the original Resident Evil

■ Capcom was excited that fans loved RE 4's over-the-shoulder camera, and we can expect it to be used again in RE 5



■ The game will surely use lighting contrast not only for effect, but also for gameplay



■ It remains to be seen what, if any, differences there will be with the game on PS3 and Xbox 360, and whether Nintendo's Revolution will also host the title

NEWS

360 GETS SPECTRUM OF SUPPORT

RIDGE RACER 6, PRE-PACKAGED HARD DRIVE COMING



Ridge Racer 6 - Namco

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICROSOFT'S J. ALLARD

Will the Xbox 360 be sold in different models, one with a hard drive and one without? What about different sized hard drives?

It's something we're not ready to announce yet. We've been getting good feedback from people at E3 and a lot of retailers. Look at the success the iPod has had by having different offerings. That is something we have looked at, sort of on the long-term horizon. We want to go get everybody out there that likes to play, and make them an Xbox customer. How do we do that? I don't think it's a one-size-fits-all [approach] over the next five-year horizon. I think we'll enter the market in a very conventional fashion, and from there it's all about listening to gamers. That's what we do. Until we have the first couple of million customers, it's hard to say how we might further the audience.

We've heard from developers that because there will be some customers without hard drives for their 360s, that developers are mad that they can't automatically utilize the hard drive like in the original Xbox.

I think what you want to do is leave the option open. One of the things we did with the first Xbox was we said, "Look, party on the hardware all you want. You can use 100 percent of the resources in the very first Xbox." And that locked us in to having the exact same spec going forward for the first five years. We can't take the hard drive out of the Xbox because it breaks Halo. It breaks launch titles. And so we didn't want to have that constraint again, so we've been selective this time, and we've said [to developers], "Hey look, don't

bank on the hard drive always being there. There may be a scenario in the future where we don't want to have a hard drive, and in that case, we have to make sure that the games that you've created are accessible to the broadest possible audience." And that's what they want as well. So we're saying, "Don't bank on it, but use the crap out of it, because there's gonna be a ton of machines with hard drives no matter what happens in the future."



Microsoft corporate vice president J. Allard talks about developing for the Xbox 360 and the decisions that Microsoft made which will shape the console's future.

We worked on it with them, and one of the things we did was we ended up going with a high-speed optical drive; a dual-layered DVD solution, which is 12x read speed on both layers. That gives them really good read-through performance, and allows them the ability to do a lot of things they used to do on the hard drive on the disc. It also gives them more capacity on the disc with some of the compression stuff that we did that they used to use the hard drive for.

What I won't do is what PlayStation did in this last generation, which I think is really dangerous, which is to say, "Use the spec of the machine, and we're gonna keep selling more machines that you can sell more games on," and then redesign the system in a way that you can't play that game anymore. If I was Square, I'd be furious at the PS2 redesign [Final Fantasy XI was only playable with a hard drive, which the redesign did not support - ed.]. Great, you redesigned the system and lowered the price to get a broader audience for [Sony], but not for me? That's terrible.

So the first Halo, or any Xbox title, won't be backwards compatible if you don't have an Xbox 360 hard drive?

Yeah, it won't work. Backwards compatibility is going to require a hard drive. We've been talking a little bit about la-la land, and saying, "Maybe there's someday that [an Xbox 360] doesn't come with a hard drive." Actually, the very first one we sell is going to have a hard drive. It doesn't mean that the hard drive is always going to be attached. The owner can take it to a friend's house, and the other people [in the owner's house] can still use the 360 to play games.

How much space is there on the Xbox 360 discs?

It's hard to say. It's still the same manufacturing technology, so technically, the physical disc will have the same number of bits on it. We actually ended up using some of those bits last time for stuff like copy protection, etc. So we're reducing some of the footprint that we put on the disc. But the more important thing is that we're doing a bit of hardware-accelerated compression, and things like that, so the physical footprint changes even though the disc doesn't.

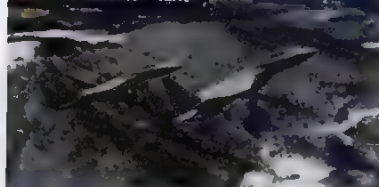
Some have criticized Microsoft for going with DVD-9 instead of HD-DVD. Are developers disappointed in the choice?

I'd be lying if I didn't say there were a handful. My question to them always is, "Well, what's the budget for your game?" We had DVD-9 this last generation, and over 90 percent of the games fit in under three GBs. I think it's one of those intellectual things, where developers say, "Gee, I wish there was more. If there was more, I'd use it." The reality is, these guys cut about 15 percent of the game that they conceive of in the beginning to get it out the door. You look at it, and basically 70 percent of [the space on most] Xbox discs are blank. The stuff we're focused on, and the stuff that matters, that all fits.

Xbox Summit 2005 was all about the games and the developers behind the system in Japan. Here's a collection of them, including Tecmo's Tomonobu Itagaki (front row, third from right) and Capcom's Keiji Inafune (back row, second from left) who is working on zombie-fest *Dead Rising*.



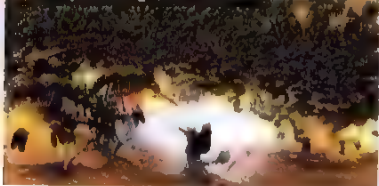
■ *World Airforce* – Taito



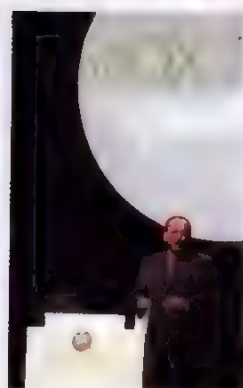
■ *Final Fantasy XI* – Square-Enix



■ *Ninety-Nine Nights* – Microsoft



■ *eNCHANT arM* – From Software



Microsoft corporate vice president Peter Moore

At the Xbox Summit 2005 in Japan, Microsoft made some moves to bolster the chances of Xbox 360 in a country that never warmed up to the original Xbox. Apart from the signing of Resident Evil 5 to the 360 (see page 18), the system will also host Namco's Ridge Racer 6. Details regarding the new racer were unfortunately not announced. Although these two deals are important steps towards building a Japanese fanbase, they are not exclusives.

Tecmo was the most generous publisher at the Summit, committing *Dead or Alive 4*, a new *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, *Project Progressive*, *Code Cronus*, and a secret fifth *Team Ninja* title to the system. Beyond that, the biggest announcement for the Japanese audience was that Konami would bring its world-renowned *Winning Eleven* soccer series to the Xbox 360. The company is also offering wrestling title *Rumble Roses XX*. The event was a showcase of titles coming to the system from Electronic Arts, Bandai, Genki, developer Yuke's, Taito, From Software, Activision, and more.

Also in attendance at the Summit were Microsoft's first-party peripherals, including extra hard drives, wired controllers, memory units, and a USB wireless adapter. The Japanese package of the console will include (apart from the 360, of course) a wireless controller, a headset, an Ethernet cable, and a hard drive.

Some had hoped that Microsoft would give more info on the Xbox 360's pricing and launch date, but no details were given. Rumors have been floating around that the unit would debut on November 4 for \$360 US dollars, but that couldn't be confirmed at the time we went to press. There is also word that the Xbox 360 hard drive will come pre-loaded with over 100 minutes of audio and video. Microsoft is very close to unveiling the final details on the system.

Did you consider using HD-DVD?

Yeah, we did. We considered it really carefully. We've been working on the project now for about three years, and the blue laser technology has been around for about that same amount of time. The first thing we looked at was what the developer need was. That's why I can quote and say that 90 percent of Xbox games are under three gigs. We talked to developers and said, "Hey, what are your needs, what do you think about storage?" The number one thing everyone comes back with is through-put. They say, "It's all about streaming performance. I want to be able to make games more like *GTA*, with these open-ended environments, where I'm streaming off the disc. I need high through-put." So, we took that development need, which 80 percent of developers would agree on. Unlike the [disc] capacity thing, which only five percent of the developers were worried about. You expect that these first Blu-ray drives or blue-laser drives are going to be 1x or 2x through-put instead of 12x, which is the best you can get with a red laser. The voice on the other shoulder says, "Well what about this hi-def movie thing, and if that really takes off, aren't you gonna screw yourself?" No, because we have a flexible system, and we can just build a system with that kind of drive if that takes off.

How does the Xbox 360 decompress data from the discs? Is it at a disadvantage because of the system's use of conventional DVD discs?

On the CPU architecture, we've built a really high bandwidth access to memory [and decompression technology on the hardware]. And a very general, all-purpose computer architecture that basically allows you to write your own decompressors to decompress however you want. This is one of the reasons we went to the multi-core architecture and said, "Hey, if you're id or you're Tiburon or you're Rockstar, you can go build a streaming decompression system that works for your environ-

ment, and we'll give you the bandwidth to do it" [It's] a very similar design to the original Xbox or to PC, where it's very easy to program to and you can use one of those other cores and have your Rockstar I/O developer create this streaming system that's totally customized to your needs, because we've got the bandwidth and memory, and you've got the CPU horsepower. We've architected it in a way where you can go pick up one of those CPUs to do unbelievable decompression, and there's another CPU over there that doesn't affect the game loop.

Can you talk about the Xbox's three core architecture versus PS3's single core and its seven less-powerful subcores? There's a lot of discussion about which approach is better and which one is easier to make games for.

The architectures are so dissimilar that it's impossible to have a fair comparison. You have a choice, either you say, "Trust us. It's all about the games. Just trust us, we built the better system." Or you can say, "When you add up all the calculations this thing is capable of, here's how it nets out." The truth is in-between those two statements. The important thing is how much can game creators actually leverage out of that theoretical performance. The truth is, you'll never really utilize the theoretical performance. We basically developed two different architectures [for the Xbox 360] in parallel with the game designers, and then we sided with the one that was going to give us the best overall performance when we calculated not just the theoretical performance, but things like cost and flexibility with partners. I think we've come as close to realizing the theoretical performance of a machine that you can design in 2005 for game development as anyone else on the Earth could.

How long before it hits that theoretical max? Are launch games going to be as good as games a year or two from now?

That's a great question. I think it's got in some ways infinite capacity, because I think our biggest constraint now is creativity. I think in this generation, you look at it, and say, "Where are the new boundaries?" Because graphics are going to be good enough. Where you are going to reach the limit in graphics is that no developer is going to make a \$200 million game, which is what it's going to take to bring the graphics system down to its knees. When we look at the future and say, "What's part of the creative pallet in this next generation that's going to offer a lot of potential?" We think it's online. When you say, "When do you think you're gonna reach the limits of the system?" When's the Internet gonna run out of gas, man? It's not! We've got plans for Xbox Live that say when nine GBs not enough, there's a server out there. Online gives us this infinite potential.

By Microsoft's own admission, the good majority of Xbox players don't play online. Is banking on the possibilities of online too far forward thinking for a console that will have a five-year lifespan?

I don't know, you're talking to the guy who thought that the Internet was going to be big. We're betting on the future, rather than waiting for the future. We're going to be more ambitious than reality, and think that's a good thing for gaming and gamers in general, and I think Live has done more for gaming this generation than any single thing that has happened in the console space. That's me as a gamer, not me as a guy who's been involved in this stuff. You say, "By your own admission, it's only a fraction of what we have." The second better is the first loser. Do I feel bad about being the first better and being a little ahead of my customer? No way! I like my odds.

1-877-LI



TL-HELP

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



BAD

Daikatana and Doom creator John Romero is no longer involved with Midway's Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows, although it hasn't been determined whether he quit or was fired. Also abandoning ship is the game's lead designer J.E. Sawyer. Midway, however, says the game will still hit shelves in November. As for Romero, we're sure somewhere there's a Monkeystone he can crawl back under.



GOOD

Last month we told you that games such as Rockstar's *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition* were being region-encoded on the PSP. Thankfully, that's not exactly true. However, Japanese versions of the system do require you to download Sony's 1.5 update (via a USB cable and Internet-connected PC) before you can play certain titles. Check the Network Update section of your PSP for any potential firmware updates.



UGLY

After being delayed and missing the beginning of the MLB season, *Nintendo Pennant Chase Baseball* for the GameCube has been indefinitely shelved. The company says that the title's release date is officially "To Be Announced," but there are a lot of rumors that it may be switched to the Revolution or even outright cancelled.



GOOD

After years of cryptic silence, *Dragon Quest VIII/Dark Cloud* developer Level 5 has unveiled its new RPG adventure for PS2 entitled *Rogue Galaxy*. Like the *Dark Cloud* franchise, the title will feature random dungeons. It is expected to hit Japan this winter.



UGLY

The last time we checked in with Sony's first-party football crew, they were canceling *GameDay NFL 2005*. Now they're also killing off their non-licensed pigskin PS2 title *Road to Sunday*. Move over, Madden cover boy curse...



GOOD

80-year-old Doris Self is aiming to be the world's oldest video game champion. Self is traveling to London with gaming legend Billy Mitchell (shown) to compete for a listing in the *Twin Galaxies*' world record book. She is attempting to win the Q*Bert scoring title of 1.8 million points. Some grandmas hand out ribbon candy. Other grandmas hand you ass in Q*Bert.



GOOD

The addictive gameplay of EA's PC title *Battlefield 2* is claiming more lives than the bullets in the game do, and we imagine that the casualty rate will only get higher with the fall release of the *Battlefield 2: Special Forces* expansion pack. The game features six new character classes, maps, and a bevy of items, everything from 10 new vehicles to zip lines and grappling hooks.

PS3 DEVELOPMENT TAKES SHAPE

UNREAL AND HAVOK ENGINES LICENSED



At the annual PlayStation Conference in Japan, Sony and system creator Ken Kutaragi fleshed out the development schedule for the PlayStation 3, as well as announced a few partnerships that should help studios with achieving their aims on the console.

Sony has signed up Epic Games and its Unreal Engine 3 to a sublicensing deal that allows Sony to send out an "evaluation" (non-final) version of the engine to PS3 developers along with the software development kit for the platform this September. The final version will follow in November. "Now, every PS3 developer will be able to try out Unreal Engine 3 and be productive on their very first day of PS3 development," said Epic Games' CEO Tim Sweeney. The company's work with the engine and the PS3 was showcased at E3, but it also has multiple agreements to provide its engine for Microsoft Xbox 360 titles.

At the conference, Sony also announced partnerships with Ageia and Havok. Both companies will provide physics engines for the PS3 software dev kit. This middleware will help companies with PS3 development directly out of the box. Sony has also acquired Britain's SN Systems for its middleware and support programs.

Besides this round of support for PS3 development, Kutaragi also shed light on the schedule for the kits themselves. Still aiming for a spring launch, Sony expects to ship out the final dev kit with the system's full specs by the end of December. At the moment, the evaluation system (codenamed Cytology) is being sent out. The Cell processor in this kit runs at 2.4GHz and is not using the final RSX graphics processor. In July, Sony sent out 450 of these kits, while August and September will see 500 units make their way into the hands of developers. Over 6,000 are expected to be sent out in October and November, leading up the completed dev kit in December.

Sony will likely have playable PS3 games at this September's Tokyo Game Show, and it says that it is planning another PlayStation Conference in Japan in February of 2006.

news

MARVELOUS MICROSOFT XBOX 360 GETS EXCLUSIVE MMO RIGHTS

Strengthening an already-proven dedication to its online strategy, Microsoft has signed up the exclusive rights to develop and publish massively multiplayer online titles based on Marvel Comics' superheroes for the Xbox 360. Microsoft clarified that its exclusive rights extend over all consoles. Although Game

Informer was told that the agreement was for multiple years, terms and further details of the deal were not elaborated upon.

In other Marvel video game news, Majesco is planning to put out a *Ghost Rider* title for the PS2, Xbox, and PSP to coincide with the theatrical release of the movie starring Nicholas Cage in the summer of 2006.

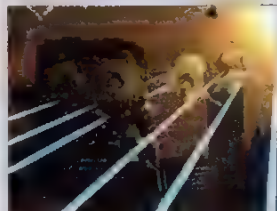


DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

FROM SOFTWARE'S
OPENING SALVO

At Sony's recent PlayStation Conference, Armored Core makers From Software unveiled their first PS3 title, Project Force. True to form, the game contains beautiful mechs wreaking havoc in environments made to be destroyed.



SEGA'S SECRET LEVEL SECRET

San Francisco developer Secret Level (America's Army: Rise of a Soldier) has been enlisted by Sega to "reinvent" one of the Japanese company's old properties. Which franchise Secret Level will perform the makeover on is not yet known, but it will specifically appear on the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

HIP BECOMES CITY
OF THE DEAD

Canada is the home to many successful video game companies, but Toronto's Hip Games is unfortunately not one of them. The former North American publisher for George A. Romero's City of the Dead (check out our feature on this game in issue 145) had to declare bankruptcy. Developer Kuju Interactive is currently shopping for a new publisher.

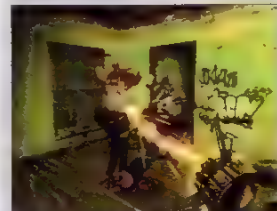


THE FIRST MMORPG FOR PS3

Huadey developer Webzen is throwing its hat into the PS3 ring with the MMORPG Endless Saga. The title will also appear on the PC. Both versions are coming in 2007.

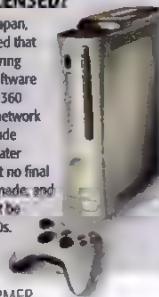
VALVE TURNS TO EA

After having extracted itself from a bad partnership with Vivendi Universal, Half-Life 2 developer Valve is turning to Electronic Arts for the distribution of Half-Life 2 for Xbox and Half-Life 2: Game of the Year Edition on PC. Valve will continue to hold control over Steam, its digital distribution channel.



XBOX 360 LICENSED?

At a conference in Japan, Bill Gates commented that Microsoft is considering offering the basic software license for the Xbox 360 with its media and network functionality to outside companies. He did later stress, however, that no final decision had been made, and that there would not be third-party Xbox 360s.



games

BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH CONTINUES

EA GETS LORD OF THE RINGS BOOK RIGHTS



After some very lackluster Lord of the Rings titles based on the Tolkien books by Vivendi Universal, Electronic Arts – which previously could only make Rings games based on the movies – is now in sole possession of all of the Lord of the Rings franchise rights. Its first title utilizing events in the books is The Battle for Middle-earth 2, a sequel to last year's successful RTS game on PC.

Using the license now afforded to them, the development team at EALA has decided to explore some conflicts that take

place in the northern part of Middle-earth during the Third Age that were only briefly mentioned by Tolkien. To go along with the freedom available now that they aren't tied to the movie, the team is also expanding the gameplay. Unlike in the first Battle for Middle-earth, players can build their faction's fortress wherever and however they like. The spring 2006 title even lets you create your own hero, complete with a custom upgrade tree. Look for more on The Battle for Middle-earth 2 in future issues of Game Informer.

Emails, blogs and text messages.

I played *Zombie Feeders* and tried to get the proper number of living people to the Zombies' city for food. To get them there, I have to drive the live people in a big bus. But whenever more than ten live people come to *Zombie City* and the bus exceeds 65 MPH, it crashes and the screen goes dead. Is the irony accidental or designed into the game?

ZOMBIE DRIVER

Dear Bus Driver,
Maybe you should drive yourself to *Zombie City*. And please don't exceed the speed limit.

On the 12th level of *Burger Blow-out*, I noticed a secret passageway under the deep fat fryer. It takes you to a lightning croquet match with the wallaby boss, but you can't utilize your tornado wind powers. I've built up these powers after my duel with the pyramid people, but I can't seem to make any progress. Is there a secret code to get my powers back?!

LOST IN LAS VEGAS

Dear Loser...err, Lost Guy,
If we just gave you the code, it wouldn't be a secret code, would it? Try LLR, Up Down Down Up. That should get you some attention that'll help with the people.

I just heard a...
claiming that...
and watch...
you smart...
given...
spent...
here...
Histo...

Dear B...
There are...
are book sm...
seems you...

I've been into the wireless controllers since our TV is one of those

mounted Hi-Def jobs, but unfortunately, the wireless signal won't make it up there because the ceiling fan keeps breaking it up. Bummer city. Are there any wireless controllers out there that can work with these fancy new TVs or am I doomed to an old-fashioned cord?

WILL,
WAUKEGAN, WI

Dear Wireless,
Although it sounds like money is no object and you like to spend it, we're gonna help you out on this one. Look for the round switch on the wall - you know, the one that controls the fan. And press it in once. Problem solved. Please send the extra money we just saved you to the magazine, care of me:)

My brother has had some weird reactions to the *Goblin General* game. Every night he sleepwalks downstairs and eats a handful of dog food. He then makes all these weird, growling noises and sleeps in the hallway. Every morning my mom says to stop playing the game because it's causing my brother to act weird, but I think it's just puberty. Any thoughts?

TOMMY

Dear Tommy Boy,
It is the game, but don't tell your mom that, tell her it's a phase he's going through and that she needs to give him attention...that should free you up for your play time.

means get the...
TV is not?...
ere. I mea...
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n. I do...
another g...

TIMOTHY

to Guy,
obvious. They do every...
wards. And yes, no matter how...
much we persist, they still drive on the...
wrong side of the road as well.

I was playing *Space Clowns* the other day and when the Grand Poobah went into

warp drive, the power in Austin went out. I was reading the manual with a flashlight, and it said that every 20th time the *Space Clown* ship goes into warp drive, the engines will fail. Does this have anything to do with blowing the power out in Austin for six hours? I want to play again tonight but I don't think I can go another six hours without air conditioning.

ELECTRICITYLESS IN AUSTIN

Dear Heat Miser,
While playing *Space Clowns* for six hours straight does have an affect on your electric bill, it won't cause black outs... at least not the electric kind.

I was playing *4th Dimension Wizards* and I dropped the control stick. A few things here and there were pushed and a character that looked like my Dad appeared in the game telling me it was time to go to bed and stop playing with video games. They wouldn't actually put an anti-game message in their games would they? If I'm wrong, explain to me how they knew what my dad looks like.

CONFUSED 8TH LEVEL WIZARD

Dear Late Nighter,
Yeah, actually it is your Dad. He wrote a letter to us a few months back asking if there was anything we could do to get you to put down the game. We told him we'd look into it. Oh yeah, wait till you talk with your mom.

ne and I...
ful review...
nd I were...
really hot...
appeared...
to play on...
appear, but as...
ne train...no

GHOUL

talk people outside the...
game, too? Please get out and meet...
some real-life Zombies. It's healthy.

And I thought I was freaky.

IT COMES WITH ITS OWN SPK CARD:
TWO 35,000-LB.-THRUST PRATT & WHITNEY F119 TURBOFANS.



U.S. AIR FORCE
CROSS INTO THE BLUE

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NEWS

LOOK OUT FOR WHITEY!

NEW COLOR AND INTERNET FUNCTIONALITY FOR PSP



Sony has been emphasizing style and customization with the PSP since the unit's unveiling, but only recently did the company make it official. At a recent event in Tokyo, Sony announced that it would release a white version of its successful handheld on September 15 (though a Stateside release has not been determined). This newer, paler PSP will carry the same price tag as the basic black unit, and will not have any additional features apart from the milky hue.

A new disguise wasn't the only change announced for Sony's handheld. Starting July 27th, Japanese PSP owners will have the opportunity to download the version 2.0 firmware via the Japanese Sony website which, while it may frustrate those gamers intentionally not updating their hardware, will open up a variety of new features. The upgrade will finally implement an official Sony web browser (the exploit in Wipeout Pure doesn't count), along with other new features like wireless photo sharing, support for media formats like MPEG4 and the iTunes-friendly AAC, and the ability to set photos as background wallpaper. As of this printing, it is unknown when this update will be made available to U.S. gamers.

In the shadow of the looming next generation, flashy new colors and firmware may not be enough to draw significant attention to the handheld market, however. Below we've included a short list of upcoming PSP releases to watch this fall, hopefully staving off the inevitable onset of next-gen fever as the holidays approach. Truth be told, this is the best of an unfortunately short list of quality titles for the handheld.



1 Advent Children (UMD)
Releasing on September 13, this long-awaited CG movie will finally explain how the world of Final Fantasy VII has adjusted to the defeat of Sephiroth, and possibly why Cloud never developed severe back problems from that Buster Sword.

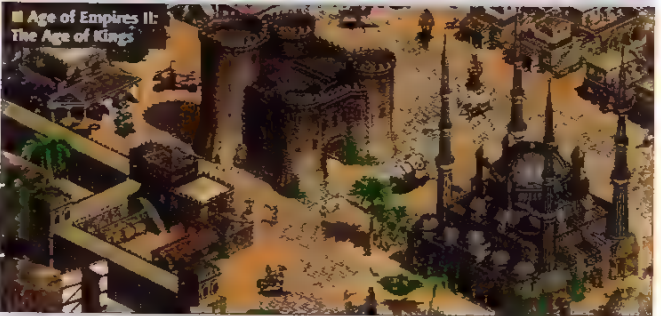
2 Madden NFL 06
Not only can you play spawned games from your PS2 Franchise mode starting September 20, but this pint-sized pigskin also includes new features such as a practice squad for each team, 10 exclusive minigames, and assistant coaches. These blowhards put forth goals each week through which you can earn skill points for your players.

3 SmackDown! vs. RAW 2006
Designed by wrestling game veteran Yuke's, this fall title is a scaled-down version of its PS2 counterpart in many ways. However, it will contain some exclusive content and even connectivity options with its console cousin.

4 Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories
Boasting the same kind of expansive content we have come to expect from the GTA series, Liberty City Stories will feature a cast of familiar characters from GTA III. Don't count on any explicit mods this time around, though.

LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



ENSEMBLE TO MMORPG

Ensemble Studios, makers of the Age of Empires RTS series, is diving into the MMORPG space for an as-yet-unannounced title. Ensemble's website is posting a job listing calling for those with experience in the genre. The hope is that it's a new direction for Age of Empires, although the developer does have other franchises it could utilize. Or perhaps it'll be a new title altogether.

NINTENDO SLIPPING?

At a Nintendo shareholders' meeting in Japan, president Satoshi Iwata admitted the possibility that the release of next-gen console Revolution may trail the PlayStation. Sony's system is currently slated for a spring release. "It won't be extremely late, but it's possible that it will trail a little," he said. Previously, Nintendo has promised that the Revolution would be released at the same time as its competitors Sony and Microsoft.

PS3 AT \$399?

Financial analysts at Merrill Lynch Japan are estimating that Sony's PS3 will debut for \$399 - \$100 more than the believed retail price of the Xbox 360. Merrill Lynch calculates the cost of the PS3 to be around \$490, which would add up to a \$1.8 billion loss for its first year if Sony's prediction of selling 14 million units comes true. For comparison, the PS2 took a \$500 million loss its first year, but was profitable its second.

RESIDENT EVIL ON DS

Capcom is working on another remake for its survival horror classic, Resident Evil, according to British magazine NCG. This wouldn't be a straight port, however, as the title would use the over-the-shoulder camera system from RE 4, although it is not known how the title would make use of the DS's touch screen capabilities.

360 BETA KITS AWOL?

Loose talk talked to a prominent developer, who said that it had just received its Xbox 360 beta dev kit. The problem? The kit was supposed to be in the hands of developers months ago. With the debut of the system just around the corner, could getting beta dev kits out this late pose a problem for the system's upcoming launch games?



BIOWARE PLANNING NEXT MOVE

Jade Empire developer BioWare is gearing up for the company's next project with publisher Microsoft Game Studios on Xbox 360. Although we haven't heard what the game is, odds are that it won't be Jade Empire 2. Historically, the company is loath to directly develop sequels, and we've heard that Jade Empire was just one of the many new properties the company couldn't wait to get started on.



XENOSAGA BACK ON TRACK

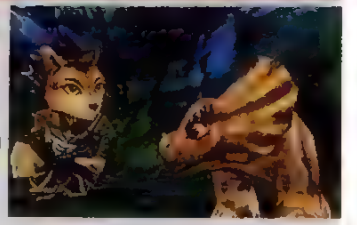
Despite the downturn of the RPG series, Namco is apparently going forward with a third installment in the Xenosaga franchise. On his website, Japanese voiceactor Koji Tsujitani says he is lending his voice to the character of Voyager in Xenosaga Episode III. No crazy German subtitle has been assigned yet, and it is unknown if original Xenosaga creators Tetsuya Takahashi and Soraya Saga will be involved in the game.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

With the release of Rare's Conker: Live & Reloaded, we've decided to take a look back at another of developer Rare's blasts from the past. This month's game was originally scheduled to come out for the N64 back in 2000. However, in usual Rare style, the game was delayed to the point that it had to be released on a whole other console. By Es of 2001, the title had been announced for the GameCube. It even lost its original moniker, as it morphed into and was eventually released as Star Fox Adventures. What was its first name?



(Answer on page 30)

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

**YOSHITSUNA
KOBAYASHI**
Director & Producer,
Nippon Ichi Software

READER

**CHRISTIAN A.
PEÑA**
Bronx, NY



1 Wizardry

Series - SNES

2 Super Robot

War - GB

3 Tetris - Arcade

4 Cabal - Arcade

5 Hiroshi2 - PC

1 Final Fantasy

VIII - PSone

2 ICO - PS2

3 Super Smash Bros.

Melee - GC

4 Dead or Alive 2:

Hardcore - PS2

5 Final Fantasy X - PS2

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Things Missing From Nintendogs

- 10 Expanded dog doo interactions (e.g. flaming bag, "delicious pudding")
- 9 The ability to socialize with Steve Martin's dog from *The Jerk*
- 8 "Sic 'em!"
- 7 Playtime with the Slogs from *Oddworld*
- 6 "It's baccooooon!"
- 5 Rims and spoiler accessories
- 4 The fun "Hey boy! Run across this busy highway" game that we all teach our puppies
- 3 Butt-sniffing competitions
- 2 Nothing (according to Billy, who liked *Catwoman*)
- 1 Dinosaurs

Name That Game Answer: Dinosaur Planet

NEWS

ROCKSTAR IN HOT COFFEE OVER MOD

GTA: SAN ANDREAS' HIDDEN SEX GAME SCANDAL

Rockstar Games is no stranger to controversy from politicians and parents groups over the content of its games. However, a whole new furor has erupted over *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* that has resulted in the game getting slapped with the taboo Adults-Only ESRB rating.

The outrage is over a sexually overt minigame that was unlocked by a PC mod called *Hot Coffee*. When the non-Rockstar approved mod is installed on the PC version of the game, it enables players to engage in provocative mimed sex acts between main character C.J. and any of his girlfriends. Normally, the game would cut away when C.J. and one of his ladies went back to her place for coffee. Since the initial outbreak of this mod for the PC edition, enterprising gamers have found ways to manipulate the save data from the PlayStation 2 and Xbox console versions in order to participate in the racy content. However, one either has to have a modded Xbox or a cheat peripheral for the PS2.

Needless to say, this discovery has landed *San Andreas* publisher/developer Rockstar Games in some trouble. Politicians (as well as lawyer blowhard Jack Thompson) have already had a field day with this latest controversy, and the ESRB video game ratings board has investigated the matter. The result is that Rockstar must re-classify existing copies of the game with an AO, or adults-only, rating (via a new label) for those retailers still willing to carry the game. Many, including GameStop, Wal-Mart, Target, and Best Buy have pulled the newly christened AO version off the shelves.

Before the end of the year, Rockstar says that it will come out with a new version of the game that will be impervious to the *Hot Coffee* mod, and therefore be M-rated. Although it is unknown how much this process will cost Rockstar's parent company, Take-Two Interactive, the effect of the announcement was immediate, with its stock going down almost five percent in the initial aftermath. Also, the company lowered its guidance by \$40 million for the fiscal third quarter. Game Informer attempted to speak with Rockstar representatives about the matter, but they could not return our inquires by the time we went to press.

As quick as the ESRB and Rockstar were to re-classify the game, some politicians were just as quick to insinuate themselves into the situation. The House of Representatives passed House Resolution 376 in order to launch a Federal Trade Commission (FTC) inquiry into whether Rockstar committed fraud upon the ESRB.

New York senator and rumored 2008 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton (D-NY) used this latest controversy to call for federal and state laws to make it a crime to sell M-rated titles to minors. Several attempts to uphold this kind of legislation on the state level have already failed. Clinton has also sent a letter to the FTC, calling on it to examine the video game rating process in general.

Entertainment Software Association president (which established the non-profit ESRB ratings board in 1994) Doug Lowenstein has responded to Clinton's call with a belief that this latest move to get governments on the state and federal level involved in video games will fail like previous efforts. "While we understand Senator Clinton's motivation, in the end her solution will never pass constitutional muster and thus will do nothing to help parents raise their kids."

Despite its investigation and action on the matter, some, including San Francisco politician Leland Yee, claim that the ESA has a conflict of interest in rating games through the ESRB. The charge is that the ESA doesn't want to put the AO rating on titles because it knows those games won't sell.

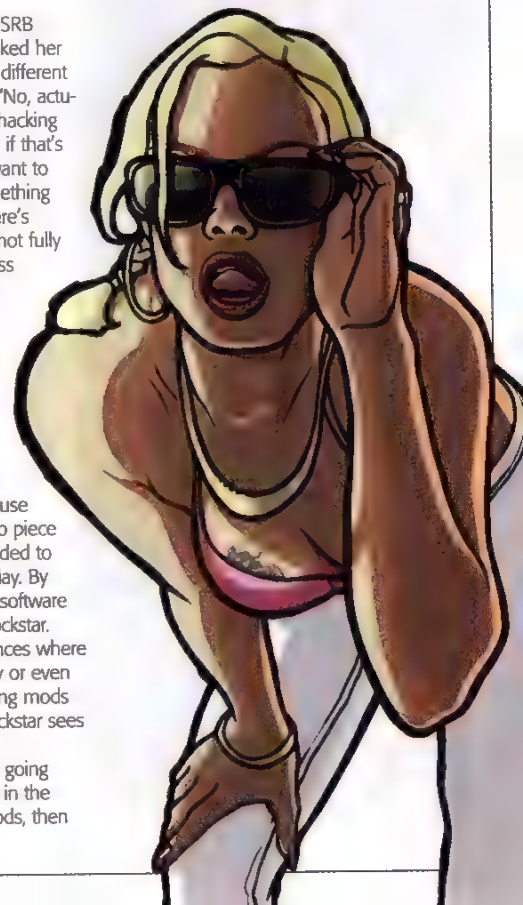
Game Informer spoke with ESRB president Patricia Vance, and asked her if the review process would be different in light of these recent events. "No, actually not. We're not going to be hacking into code for every submission, if that's what you mean. If publishers want to take the chance of leaving something in, chances are we'll find it. There's no incentive for a publisher to not fully disclose to the ESRB." Regardless of the swiftness of the ESRB's response, Vance admits that Rockstar has not put the board in an easy situation, saying that a developer does have a responsibility for its product.

Unfortunately, one of the things being overlooked in this political chess game is that fact that this mod solely exists because someone went to great effort to piece together code that wasn't intended to be accessed by normal gameplay. By definition, this mod breaks the software user agreement set forth by Rockstar. Certainly, there are many instances where a publisher looks the other way or even benefits from its fanbase creating mods on its existing products, but Rockstar sees itself as a victim in this case.

If the ESRB or politicians are going to hold publishers accountable in the future for any unauthorized mods, then

the video game-rating business is going to be a dangerous one indeed. Not only did Vance assure us that the board has no plans to change its ratings process, but she said that it won't cave to pressure to re-rate other titles. Vance cited independent research that showed that parents agreed with the ESRB's ratings 83 percent of the time (with another five percent believing they were too harsh), to show that the current system is one that works.

Will publishers and developers be held accountable for the actions of a small set of unauthorized hackers? Lawyer and self-professed video game hater Jack Thompson has already called for an investigation of EA's *The Sims 2* due to a user-created nudity mod that the publisher had absolutely no part in. Undeterred by this fact, Thompson tried to take EA to task for not going after the modders themselves. This kind of blind hysteria is surely just a taste of the indignation to come, and may point to serious First Amendment challenges in the industry's future. With the attention of politicians focused so intently on video gaming, this latest furor and the questions it brings could be just the beginning of a very ugly battle.



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A Vast Arsenal of Powerful Weapons - Each
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AUGUST 2005

DARKWATCH

DEATH FEARS THOSE WHO WEAR THE BADGE.

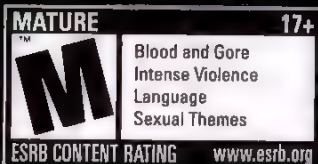
PlayStation 2



16 PLAYERS VIA XBOX LIVE®



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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1989 **The Force Is With Him**
Landing a job in the rapidly expanding video game industry, Schafer begins working at LucasArts, which would be his home for more than a decade.

1990 **Adventuring**


Schafer's first project is released, the hilarious adventure title *The Secret of Monkey Island*. Schafer wore a number of hats during the production, including programming, art, and crafting the comedic dialogue.

1993 **Grabbing the Reins**
Finally allowed to head up his own title, with partner Dave Grossman, Schafer hit a home run with *Day of the Tentacle*, an amazingly inventive and funny adventure title, published by LucasArts. GI's Andy McNamara remembers this as the first game to make him laugh out loud.

1995 **Gaining Speed**
Schafer goes from strength to strength with his next work, the equally revered *Full Throttle*, which featured a surly biker named Ben and a stylized look reminiscent of Sam & Max.

1998 **Death Becomes Him**


Taking inspiration from Mexican folklore and the annual *Day of the Dead* festival in Latin America, Schafer creates what is to this day one of the most uniquely artistic games ever released: the strange noir *Grim Fandango*.

2000 **Going Solo**
After 10 years at LucasArts, Schafer grabs many members of the *Grim Fandango* team and forms his own studio, Double Fine Productions.

2005 **Another Masterpiece**


After being dropped by Microsoft, the quirky and ingenious Xbox/PS2 platformer *Psychonauts* is released by upstart publisher Majesco. As is typical of a Schafer product, critical raves follow.

TIM SCHAFER

CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS

>> Since his storied days at LucasArts, Tim Schafer has had a reputation as one of gaming's most unique visionaries. Now proudly independent, his company Double Fine Productions is basking in the glow of the critical praise surrounding its most recent game, *Psychonauts*. We recently spoke to Tim about his career, the industry, and the challenges of being creative. <<

What was your background before games?

There was a computer club in high school, and I was in that. We had a little portable building back behind the school with six TRS-80s. In college, I did major in computer science, but, as I got older, I was getting more into my creative writing classes and my psychology classes and anthropology classes. I think that stuff actually helped me more in making games than my programming classes.

How did those other disciplines carry over into creating games?

For example, all the ideas for *Grim Fandango* came from this one folklore and anthropology class I took — one section we did on [the Mexican festival] *The Day of the Dead*. A lot of the ideas for *Psychonauts* came from this psychology of dreams class I took. And just English classes and all the great books you're exposed to taught me so much about storytelling. I think a lot of programmers go to college and they don't want to learn anything outside of their major, and I think that really cuts them off if they want to

and the dependency that sets up is a character thing — but it's not done with dialogue, it's done with how you interact with that character. I think there's so much that we haven't even started to do yet in games that we can do to tell stories without having eight paragraphs of text in between every level.

One of the things that *Psychonauts* did very well was that every time you went into a new person's head and saw their neurosis, it was a totally different look and experience.

We had a rule in making *Psychonauts* — no lava level and no ice level! [Laughs] And that just led us to, "Well what else can we do?" We had a desire to do levels that hadn't been done in games before — like a world made of black velvet.

Was the milkman level inspired by MC Escher and his paintings?

You know, we first developed that tech for the *Sasha's Cube* level. In *Sasha's Cube*, you can run on all sides of the cube. So, we had to make the game

The press has always been really supportive of what we're trying to do. When they see you're trying to do something original, they go out of their way to try to tell your story to people. For reviews, they have to write something appropriate to the reader of their magazine, so it's more about "Should I buy this game or not?" But the critic was definitely not a job at game critics — that's Gloria's inner critic. The words that he spits out at you, the effects artist actually took those words from a review of the movie *White Chicks*. [Laughs]

How difficult is it to get creative ideas approved in the industry today?

As long as I'm still able to do it, of course I'll feel that it's just fine, and as soon as I'm not able to get creative ideas out there, I'll feel like it's all gone to hell. [Laughs] Publishers are definitely looking to mitigate risk and are not necessarily looking to try something new. It's great that smaller companies like Majesco have supported a lot of creative games. But there are a lot of really big publishers out there and it seems

The challenge is to figure out what's special about our medium.

get into design, because design comes from more of a breadth of experience.

Speaking of your influences, your games are known for having great writing. Who are some of the writers who have influenced your work?

Well, during *Grim Fandango* I was reading a lot of Raymond Chandler and hard-boiled detective stuff. That worked well for that style of game. During *Psychonauts*, I couldn't do anything except write on writing days; I could only take a break if it was to watch *The Simpsons* on TiVo. I thought that was kind of inspiring. They put so much effort into being entertaining.

Often games that are tagged as having "good storytelling" in the industry are games that feature very long, elaborate cutscenes and lots of dialogue. Do you feel that's the right approach?

It's definitely a mistake to assume that storytelling means long, boring cutscenes — or even long, good cutscenes. The challenge is to figure out what's special about our medium. What can we do that movies and books can't? We have so many devices at our disposal. If you think about something like *ICO*, where you're dragging Yorda around the castle,

accept any sort of arbitrary gravity position. Once we had that, we thought of what we could do with that. As far as the design for [the milkman level] goes, it comes from thinking about something someone said to me once, that paranoid people are the most self-centered people. They think everything revolves around them. So, the clouds and roads of that level form what looks like a spider web around his house. We're trapping him in his paranoid delusions.

How does your creative process work? Do you create really elaborate backstories for everything?

I created really fully fleshed-out backstories for all the characters. I have a document that has all of the backstories for all the characters, all their parents, what their names were, what their grandparents were like for the major characters. That allows you to create characters that are real and then tell a little bit of their story. And when you get a few details of a life that somehow hook up with each other, even though you don't see the whole picture, you imagine the whole picture behind the scenes.

I really enjoyed the boss battle with the theater critic in Gloria's level, which was a nice jab at critics in general. What's your opinion of game journalism?

like they could put a certain allotment of their efforts into creative experimental games. Maybe not all of them will be blockbuster hits, but eventually one of them could lead to something that would be really profitable for them, and in the long run it would be a good financial investment for that company.

Has the licensing of entertainment brands gone too far? Is it hampering the establishment of new, original properties?

Like I've said before, we don't want to end up being the t-shirt manufacturers of the movie industry. They make up the ideas, and we just make licensed properties, and along with the lunch pail and the t-shirt and the toothbrush, you get a video game.

Traditionally, you haven't done many sequels. Would you consider doing another *Psychonauts*?

I like the *Psychonauts* world because you can do anything in it. I'm always kind of tom; it's not that I'm against doing sequels, I would like to spend more time with those characters. But at the same time, I have new ideas I'd like to do. If I'd done a sequel to *Day of the Tentacle*, there wouldn't have been a *Full Throttle*, and if I'd done a sequel to *Full Throttle*, there wouldn't have been a *Grim Fandango*.

■ Tim Schafer is one of gaming's most distinctive and unique creative game designers

DEFENDING CREATIVITY

AREA-51 7500



Manufacturer: Alienware
Website: www.alienware.com
List Price: \$4,422

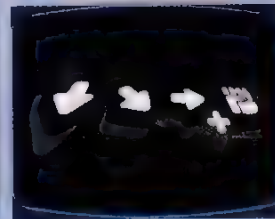
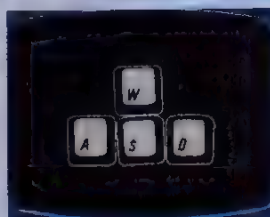
Pimping it big time, this Alienware is one of the first to market with dual NVIDIA GeForce 7800 cards and a dual-core 3.2GHz Pentium processor. Without being explicit, this babe will make your friends (and your checking account) undulate in sweet agony. The boutique PC manufacturer's usual bells and whistles are, as expected, included in the package, and a \$500 mail-in rebate lessens the financial blow. But isn't good tech always worth any price?

etc.

GAMESKINS T-SHIRTS

Manufacturer: Gameskins
Website: www.gameskins.com
List Price: \$18.00

The folks at Gameskins have been putting out a nice t-shirt line for ages now. Inside jokes are always a plus in our book, and the fact that many of this company's designs come in girlie and hoodie styles is also a feature worth praise.



etc.

PLAY ME CHARM

Manufacturer: White Trash Charms
Website: www.whitetrashcharms.com
List Price: \$37.50 (mini necklace), \$50 (medium necklace), \$87.50 (medium earrings)



For the ladies, you know? Enameled and slightly suggestive for the mind-in-the-gutter set, this wee charm is delicate enough to wear with either casual or semi-formal attire. At least we think it would be appropriate — the fashion thing isn't always our forte. Okay, just wear it and almost no one will laugh, point, or bring your worst childhood fantasy to life.

etc.

ROBORAPTOR

Who wants some pansy puppy or a snobbish kitten? No one cool, that's who. We, as cool people, want a little dinosaur to call our own. Capable of running, walking, and a somewhat alarming tug of war game, Wow Wee's Roboraptor will hopefully distill those rugrats hanging around into whimpering fear sacks.

Manufacturer: Wow Wee International Ltd.
Website: www.wowwee.com
List Price: \$119.99





FRED WIPTON HAS DEFEATED AN ARMY OF EVIL SQUID.

What have you done lately? Accomplish the impossible in online gaming with high-speed SBC Yahoo! DSL Pro, just \$24.99 per month for a full year when ordered online or with qualifying services. With speeds up to 3 Mbps, you'll be able to destroy the competition, whether it's down the street or halfway around the world. For details visit sbc.com/gamer.

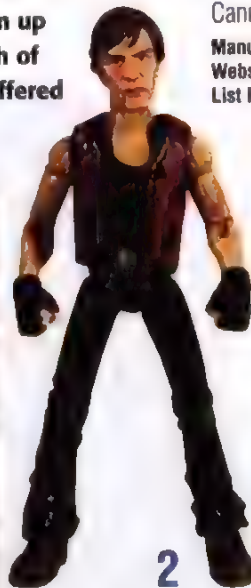


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toys

THE TOYS OF COMIC-CON

This year's San Diego Comic-Con was even more game-centric than in the past, and the action figures from the show took inspiration from a number of video game franchises. Here are a handful of the exclusive toys offered just at the show, but don't fret if you couldn't attend; you can usually pick them up online after the booths are packed up. Also, for each of the franchises listed below, a full line of figures is offered besides these SDCC-exclusive ones.



1 HALO 2: Master Chief (Active Camouflage)

Manufacturer: Joyride Studios
Website: www.joyridestudios.com
List Price: TBA

2 THE WARRIORS: Ajax Summer Exclusive

Manufacturer: Mezco Toyz
Website: www.mezcotoyz.com
List Price: \$20

3 STREET FIGHTER: Cannon Spike Cammy

Manufacturer: Sota Toys
Website: www.solatoys.com
List Price: \$20

4 BATMAN BEGINS: Pre-Suit Bruce Wayne

Manufacturer: Mattel
Website: www.mattel.com
List Price: \$19.99

5 KILLER 7: Dan Smith Translucent Blood Red Resin Statue

Manufacturer: Kinetick Toyz
Website: www.kinetickomicz.com
List Price: \$100

tech

PLAYGEAR PORTABLE SPEAKERS

Manufacturer: Logitech
Website: www.logitech.com
List Price: \$79.99

What comes next is an authorized, notarized, and entirely unquestionable statement: The PSP is an accessory muse rivaling the king iPod, the previously unchallenged leader of coordinating doodads and windings. We're not saying Apple's music player is readying a step down the leader board, but the mind boggles when new accessories are both this plentiful and this useful. Logitech's sound dock particularly caught our fancy because of the great design the company always puts out, but also because of the speaker's reasonable price point and included carrying case (which is downright dandy, if we do say so ourselves).

(shown with PSP unit,
not included)





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To activate your monthly plan

Chart Ringtones¹ poly

75555*

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more Jamster! at
www.jamster.com

- 1) Just A Lil Bit poly4930
- 2) Wait (Whisper Song) poly4931
- 3) Candy Shop poly4932
- 4) Oh poly4933
- 5) Drop It Like It's Hot poly4934
- 6) James Bond poly4935
- 7) Trapped In The Closet Chapter 1 poly4936
- 8) Let Me Love You poly4937
- 9) My Boo poly4938
- 10) Disco Inferno poly4939

All Time Favorites⁴

Another One Bites The Dust	poly4940
Beat It	poly4941
Between The Sheets	poly4942
Breaking The Habit	poly4943
Cars	poly4944
Chariot	poly4945
Ghostbusters	poly4946
God's Will	poly4947
Holiday	poly4948
If You Don't Know Me By Now	poly4949
Let's Get It On	poly4950
Like Glue	poly4951
Lonely No More	poly4952
Miss You Much	poly4953
My Girl	poly4954
Numb/Encore	poly4955
Pinky And The Brain	poly4956
Remember When	poly4957
Super Freak	poly4958
Sweet Home Alabama	poly4959
The Devil Went Down To Georgia	poly4960
We Will Rock You	poly4961
We're Off To See The Wizard	poly4962
Word Up	poly4963

Top Sound FX⁴

Captain Abu Dai-Air India Flight 26	fun3400
Indian Comedian	fun3401
Indian Gobbledigook	fun3402
Indian Phone Advisor Pt. 2	fun3403
Please Want You Pick Up	fun3404
Press Little Button	fun3405
Airline Entertainment Program	fun3406
Indian. Answer The Phone	fun3407
Indian: Please Pick Up, Thank You!	fun3408
Basic Horn Police Operation	fun3409
Air Raid Siren Alert	fun3410
Cartoon Twitter	fun3411
Cartoon - Mouse Laugh	fun3412
Giggling Boys	fun3413
Mosquito	fun3414
The Crazy Frog Goes To Hawaii	fun3415
Drunk Tarzan	fun3416
Listen Here Frog - Why Don't You Get A...	fun3417
Bomb Dropping	fun3418
Buzzer Loud	fun3419

Realsounds⁴

Grind With Me - Pretty Ricky	real2780
Give Me That - Webbie	real2781
Back Then - Mike Jones	real2782
Grind With Me (Pick Up...) - Pretty Ricky	real2783
Still Tippin' - Mike Jones	real2784
Gotta Make It - Trey Songz Feat. Twista	real2785
Get It Poppin' - Fat Joe	real2786
U Don't Know Me - T.I.	real2787
Sugar (Gimme Some) - Trick Daddy	real2788
Some Cut (Screwed) - Trillville	real2789
Down With The Sickness - Disturbed	real2790
ASAP (Screwed) - T.I.	real2791
Shorty Da Mine - Pretty Ricky	real2792
American Idol - Green Day	real2793
Knuck If You Buck - Crime Mob	real2794
Dem Boyz - Boyz N Da Hood	real2795
Bring Em Out - T.I.	real2796
ASAP - T.I.	real2797
Neva Eva - Trillville	real2798
I'm Not OK (I Promise) - My Chemical Romance	real2799

Hip Hop & Soul⁴

Diary	poly4964
Fallin	poly4965
Frontin'	poly4966
Get It On The Floor	poly4967
GIN And Juice	poly4968
Grey Goose	poly4969
Headsprung	poly4970
I Believe I Can Fly	poly4971
If I Ain't Got You	poly4972
Ignition	poly4973
Karma	poly4974
Let's Get Blown	poly4975
Milkshake	poly4976
Ruff Ryder's Anthem	poly4977
Southern Hospitality	poly4978
Ten Crack Commandments	poly4979
Thaia Thoing	poly4980
U Don't Have To Call	poly4981
U Got It Bad	poly4982
What's Your Fantasy	poly4983

Cool Wallpapers³

Wallpapers³

Animated Screensavers⁵

Sound FX⁴

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75555*

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How to download...

Message Center

Browser Web Sites

Message 1

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3 Polyphonic Tones + 6 Mega-Wallpapers + 6 Standard Software (unavailable for T-Mobile customers) & Musicians	8 Jamster! Tones + 8 Mega-Wallpapers + 8 Standard Software (unavailable for T-Mobile customers) & Musicians	4 Color Wallpapers & Gossipnews	6 Sound FX & Gossipnews	4 Animated Screensavers & Gossipnews	+ 2 Mega-Wallpapers (Musicians)
\$ 5.99 per plan					

Animated Screensavers⁵ Movies

move1530

move1531

move1532

move1533

move1534

move1535

move1536

move1537

move1538

move1539

move1540

move1541

POLYPHONIC RINGTONES: LG 64011, 64015, 64020; MOTOROLA V180, V220, V300, V400; NOKIA 3100, 3595, 6010; SAMSUNG X426, X427, X427M; SIEMENS A56, CF62; SONY ERICSSON T226, T237; REALSOUNDS: LG 64015; MOTOROLA V180, V220, V400; NOKIA 3100, 3595, 6010; SAMSUNG X426, X427, X427M; SIEMENS A56, CF62; SONY ERICSSON T226, T237; SOUND FX: LG 64015, 64020; MOTOROLA V180, V220, V300, V400; NOKIA 3100, 3595, 6010; SAMSUNG X426, X427, X427M; SIEMENS A56, CF62; SONY ERICSSON T226, T237; COLOR WALLPAPERS: LG 64015, 64020, L1150; MOTOROLA V180, V220, V300, V400; NOKIA 3100, 3200, 3595, 6010; SAMSUNG X426, X427, X427M; SIEMENS C61, CF62; SONY ERICSSON T226, T237; ANIMATED SCREENSAVERS: LG 64015; MOTOROLA V180, V220, V300, V400; NOKIA 3100, 3595, 6010; SAMSUNG X426, X427, X427M; SIEMENS C61, CF62; SONY ERICSSON T226, T237

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THE MODERN GAMER'S POLITICAL MANIFESTO



DENNIS MCCAULEY, EDITOR,
GAMEPOLITICS.COM

There was a time, and not so long ago, when the words "video games" and "politics" were never spoken in the same sentence. It just didn't happen. In those relaxed days, gamers had only to worry about keeping themselves well stocked with junk food and caffeinated beverages while power-leveling their EverQuest avatar or taking on the next wave of marauding zombies in Resident Evil. Those days are long gone, my friends.

As we rapidly close in on the next generation of consoles, it's clear that Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and Nintendo's Revolution will be launched into a video game landscape that has become increasingly politicized.

Why should you care? As gamers, we ignore the new politics of the video game world at our own risk. Politicians, child advocates, tycoons, labor organizers, health-care bureaucrats, religious fanatics, lobbyists, special interest groups and yes, even wild-eyed, self-righteous Florida attorneys are all scrambling to put their stamp on our gaming. If we merely sit back, controllers in hand, and allow it to happen, gaming may be a very different — and not necessarily better — animal by the time the PlayStation 4 rolls around.

Unfortunately, gamers are not, by nature, political. We like to play our favorites, read up on previews in magazines like GI, and challenge our friends to online deathmatches. Politicians consequently pay no heed to "the gamer vote," since there really isn't one. Candidates do their homework, of course, and their research tells them that while gamers don't vote, certain demographics that do are very concerned about pop culture in general and video games in particular. The Progressive Policy Institute, a Washington, DC think tank aligned with the Democratic Party, openly advises candidates to reach out to married parents by taking more conservative stands on cultural issues, including games.

It's clear that this message has resonated. In 2005, Democrats led efforts to pass video game legisla-

tion in California, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, Georgia, and Washington, D.C. New York Senator Chuck Schumer took Eidos to task for the cop-killing scenes in 25 to Life. And perhaps most famously, Senators Joe Lieberman and Hillary Clinton weighed in on the Hot Coffee scandal surrounding GTA: San Andreas.

Many gamers perceive censorship afoot in these efforts, of course, and the game industry will continue to mount First Amendment challenges to laws that restrict anyone's right to buy any game. The industry has never lost one of these cases. But even if we believe that politicians are simply currying favor with the electorate, some critics are nonetheless well-intentioned. Pushing the content envelope too far can lead to highly charged political dustups that have the potential to affect us all. Hot Coffee, anyone?

While over-the-top game content will continue to be the hot-button issue that whips up the talking heads on cable news, it's far from the only political concern for today's generation of gamers. Labor issues will become an increasingly important factor as game developers, programmers, level designers, and other industry workers battle game publishers for a bigger slice of a \$10 billion pie.

In fact, the opening salvos in this labor struggle have already been fired. Two pending class action suits seek overtime for EA employees made to work long hours on game projects without compensation. As gamers, should we care about how the games are made? Most of us would agree that game industry professionals should be paid fairly. A healthy, happy game development community will only bring us more enjoyable gaming experiences.

The other side of the labor coin is outsourcing. With programmers in places like India, Vietnam, and China willing to work for a fraction of what their North American counterparts earn, game publishers are obviously studying their options. We live in a global economy, and the video game business is no different. How will globalization affect the individual gamer? It's too early to tell, but we can certainly

GG
Pushing
the
content
envelope
too far
can lead
to highly
charged
political
dustups...
GG

expect some gaming jobs to follow cheap labor. The effect this will have on our game play experience remains to be seen. Can a foreign developer create the right feel for an NBA game or one based on life in urban America?

Healthcare policy considerations in relation to video games will become increasingly important in the next few years. On the worrisome side, experts are concerned that excessive gaming may contribute to America's national obesity epidemic, with commensurate increases in diabetes and heart disease. Video game addiction, especially in relation to MMOs, likewise has some experts concerned. The good news from a healthcare perspective is that games have been shown to help kids tolerate pain and adapt to their surroundings more readily during hospital stays. Many progressive children's hospitals now consider game consoles part of their patient rooms' standard equipment.

While these are some of the more pressing political issues surrounding the gaming scene today, there are certainly others. As a matter of public policy, for example, should prison inmates be allowed access to video game systems? Matt Blunt, the Governor of Missouri, would say no. Earlier this year he yanked PS2s from the Jefferson City Jail. But would the facility be safer with inmates passing their slack time playing Madden or conspiring in the prison yard? North Carolina State Senator Austin Allran tried to pass a law to uninstall Solitaire from every single computer owned by the state government. Pennsylvania State Representative James Casorio wrote earlier this year, "I am not aware of any evidence that shows video games, no matter what their content, to be constructive forms of recreation or learning." Sadly, among political figures Casorio is hardly alone in his complete lack of knowledge about video games and their place in modern culture.

And that's why gamers need to become politically aware. ■■■

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.

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN™



BE LEGENDARY

UltimateSpiderManGame.com



PlayStation 2



ACTIVISION

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sun mon tue wed thur fri sat



Dragon Con

september

01

NEW RELEASES

- Call of Chulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth - Xbox, PC
- Crime Life: Gang Wars - PS2
- Evil Dead: Regeneration - PS2, Xbox
- Front Mission Online - PS2
- Half-Life 2 - Xbox
- Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life Special Edition - PS2
- NHL 2K6 - PS2, Xbox

02

- Origin of the Species - PC
- River King: A Wonderful Journey - PS2
- RPG Maker 3 - PS2
- Spartan: Total Warrior - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Top Spin - PS2
- Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War Winter Assault - PC
- World Poker Tour - PS2, Xbox
- Zoo Tycoon - DS

03

DRAGON CON
SEPT. 2-5

Only two words are needed to describe this year's show: Kevin Sorbo. It's Hercules in the flesh, people! Embrace your nerdism by throwing on a costume (preferably of Sailor Moon or the character you play in D&D) and head to Atlanta, GA for the biggest gathering of geeks since Joe's birthday bash.



Only tough people hang out at Dragon Con

6

NEW RELEASES

- Danny Phantom: The Ultimate Enemy - GBA
- Gretzky NHL 2006 - PS2
- Indigo Prophecy - PS2, Xbox, PC
- One Piece: Grand Battle! - PS2, GC, GBA
- Radiata Stories - PS2
- Rebel Star: Tactical Command - GBA



Dragon Con



Marc Ecko's Getting Up

13

NEW RELEASES

- Burnout Legends - PSP
- Burnout Revenge - PS2, Xbox
- Cold War - PS2, Xbox
- Dynasty Warriors 5 - Xbox
- EverQuest II: Desert of Flames - PC
- Final Fantasy: Advent Children - DVD, UMD
- Frantic - PSP
- Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes - Xbox

15

- Marc Ecko's Getting Up - PS2
- Medieval Resurrection - PSP
- NHL 06 - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Ninja Gaiden Black - Xbox
- Sims 2: Nightlife, The - PC
- SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALS 3 - PS2
- Stacked - PS2, Xbox, PSP
- Tecmo Classic Arcade - Xbox
- Ultimate Spider-Man - PS2, Xbox, GC

16

TOKYO GAME SHOW
SEPT 16-18

Rumors abound that Sony will have playable PlayStation 3's on the show floor. If that's not reason enough to hop on a plane and travel to Japan, we hear that Microsoft has some special Xbox 360 surprises lined up to rain on Sony's parade. It should be one of the best gaming shows yet.

17

SWAMP FALL
COMMODORE EXPO
SEPT. 17-19

Take a seat, Atari! This show is all about the king of the pixel, Commodore! If you want to show your appreciation, pack your bags and travel to the Fairfield Inn & Suites in Lombard, IL.



Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks

20

NEW RELEASES

- Battalion Wars - GC
- Donkey Kong: King of Swing - GBA
- Dungeons & Dragons: Dragonshard - PC
- EyeToy: Kinetic
- Genji: Dawn of the Samurai - PS2
- Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex - PSP
- GripShift - PSP
- Legend of Kay - PS2

23

- Lunar: Dragon Song - DS
- Madden NFL 06 - PSP
- Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks - PS2, Xbox
- Myst V: End of Ages - PC
- S.L.A.I. - PS2
- Tak: The Great Juju Challenge - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour '06 - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Whack-A-Mole - DS



Tim Burton's newest claymation film *The Corpse Bride* opens in theaters today.

27

These Dragon Con social dynamos obviously misread the instructions for the sexiness potion



X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse

27

NEW RELEASES

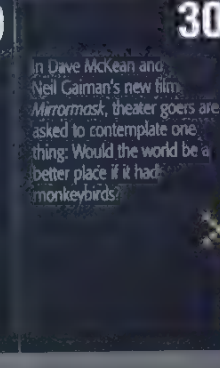
- Commandos: Strike Force - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Far Cry Instincts - Xbox
- FIFA Soccer 06 - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Lost in Blue - DS
- Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects - PS2, Xbox, GC, PSP
- Midway Arcade Treasures 3 - PS2, Xbox, GC

29

- NBA Live 06 - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Romancing SaGa - PS2
- Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves - PS2
- Suffering: Ties That Bind: The - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour '06 - PSP
- Trace Memory - DS
- X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse - PS2, Xbox, GC

30

In Dave McKean and Neil Gaiman's new film *MirrorMask*, theater goers are asked to contemplate one thing: Would the world be a better place if it had monkeybirds?



MIRRORMASK

NEIL GAIMAN, DAVE MCKEAN AND THE JIM HENSON COMPANY

COMING SOON TO

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

BE PREDATORY

BE BOTH

SEPTEMBER 2005

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KNOCKOUT KINGS:

FIGHT NIGHT AND DEF JAM GO NEXT-GEN

(Both *Fight Night Round 3* and *Def Jam 3* are working titles)

Amongst the video game industry and its fans, this year's Electronics Entertainment Expo has been a topic of much heated discussion. Some were disappointed with it, claiming that there were few surprises. Others were thrilled with the announcements of three new gaming consoles, and some even went as far as to make predictions on the winner of the next console war. No matter how they felt about the show as a whole, nearly everyone who attended E3 agreed that Sony's reveal of the PlayStation 3 was a highlight, thanks to some truly stunning videos of the PlayStation 3 in motion. One such video was EA's *Fight Night Round 3*, which featured fast and furious footage of two photo-realistic boxers, suggesting a real-time boxing game. Commented by EA Chicago studio head Kudo Tsunoda, the video amazed viewers with its realism, with details like boxer's expressions changed as the fight progressed to the way their flesh rippled when punched in the face with a devastating hook. There was no denying that the footage looked great - the game, some claimed. Some when the footage was released onto the internet, rumors began swirling about its origins.

The story was the demo that skeptics immediately decried it as a time-consuming pre-rendered sequence designed to overstate the capabilities of the PS3 and generate hype. Rumors of a deal with a movie star to produce a boxing game were also spread, but EA's website (www.ea.com) has since posted the official version of the game, which is EA's own creation.

DEF JAM 3

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING
(MULTIPLAYER TBA)

> PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS

> DEVELOPER EA CHICAGO

> RELEASE TBA

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

conference. It's an elaborate fake, they said. Guess what? It isn't. We're playing Fight Night Round 3 in the real deal, and those who couldn't believe that the PS3 could perform such amazing games are about to get another shock: Fight Night Round 3 is also coming to Xbox 360.

The talented crew at EA's Chicago Studio began working on the 200 version of Fight Night more than a year ago, and already it looks nearly identical to the PS3 version shown at E3. When finished, the two versions should be practically indistinguishable. EA's Toronto studio would have been expected from both versions of the game, but he didn't stop there. The game's art director (who will have been involved a few months ago) had to triple-check the graphics. I had to check it out myself. I simply produce two versions of what will undoubtedly be one of EA's best-selling games this year. Although it's early in the development process, EA Chicago is also producing the latest iteration of one of Electronic Arts' younger hit franchises: Def Jam. Taking over development duties from Japanese studio Spike, EA Toronto and the

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

- XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3
- > STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
- > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
- > DEVELOPER EA CHICAGO
- > RELEASE WINTER 2006 (XBOX 360), TBA (PLAYSTATION 3)



FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

Both the Fight Night and Def Jam franchises have been well received by gamers and critics alike. Fight Night, with its groundbreaking all-analog controls, is easily the most immersive and realistic boxing franchise ever, while Def Jam carved out a unique place in the fighting genre with its hip-hop flavor, character customization, and brutal combat. It would be easy to simply stick with the formulas that worked

for both series, improve the graphics, and leave it at that, but that's not what EA Chicago has planned for these games. Next-generation games aren't simply about better graphics, says Tsunoda. They have to look next-gen, but they have to feel and play next-gen, too. "A big part of making games for us is always providing a new, innovative, fresh way of looking at what you're working on," says Tsunoda enthusiastically. "Going into the next gen, people are really, really

focused on the graphics, but not enough people are paying attention to the innovation of the gameplay as well as the graphics." Our time at the studio began with an in-depth examination of Fight Night. Obviously, the game has the next-gen look down, but there's far more to the visuals than one might expect. The team's idea for the graphics is to make the player feel that he



or she is actually in the ring, facing off with a live opponent. To meet this lofty goal, every element of the visuals has to look perfect. The human eye is adept at picking up details that don't look right, so seemingly minor aspects of a fight need to look just as good as the major ones. The gloves and shorts on the boxers and the ropes on the ring have to be every bit as impressive as the boxers themselves, and the studio has achieved this with extensive photo documentation of everything in the game.

Like the previous entries, real-life boxers will appear in the game, and the team

Getting hit in the face will cause hundreds of individually-created sweat particles to fly dynamically from a boxer's head



hopes to fill the gaps in the roster to include nearly every fighter the public can name. Fighters like Mike Tyson and Oscar De La Hoya have yet to appear in the series, and you can be sure that EA Chicago is working to remedy this.

To create the amazingly lifelike digital pugilists, the athletes appearing in the game have had every contour of their bodies captured with a laser scan, and high-resolution photographs capture the smallest details of their skin. Their physiques are recreated with high-polygon models, and the digital photos are converted to textures and wrapped around the models. Additional details are added with normal maps, spectral maps, and other graphical processes that further enhance the realism. The result is some of the most detailed and believable digital characters ever. When throwing a punch, you can actually see the muscles moving underneath their skin, tendons flexing, shadows moving across their bodies in real time as they shift positions, and light glinting off of sweat as it rolls down their backs.

Everything in the game has been created with the same attention to detail. The venues, from a warehouse to Madison Square Garden and everything in between, have been recreated by consulting the blueprints for the actual buildings and then using digital photos as the textures for the environments. The artists then tweak certain aspects to enhance the emotional quality of the scene. For example, dust par-

To create the amazingly lifelike digital pugilists, the athletes appearing in the game have had every contour of their bodies captured with a laser scan, and high-resolution photographs capture the smallest details of their skin.

ticles and intense beams of light float through the air in the warehouse to emphasize the gritty feeling of the location. Similarly, every item in the game, from the boxers' shoes and gear to the material of the ring has been recreated using photographs of the actual items as textures. The result is a game that looks stunning, but having great graphics is only part of the team's goal with Round 3. The higher concept is to have these graphics be a vital part of the actual gameplay.

Those who have played the previous two Fight Night games will notice that the familiar heads-up display is gone. In previous entries, the HUD indicated the player's health and stamina, and, in Round 2, the Haymaker gauge. Although the HUD will be included in Round 3 for those who feel they need it, the game is designed to be played with absolutely no onscreen icons or indicators. Instead, the fighters themselves will tell the story.

The high level of detail in the fighter's faces is only the start of what makes them so eerily realistic. What is even more impressive is the way their facial



(continued on pg. 47)



■ While these fighters look amazing, they are even more stunning in motion. Thanks to an elaborate physics engine, their movements are frighteningly lifelike.



“If you’re not delivering the innovative gameplay that matches the big step up in graphics, you’re totally failing in the opportunity to make a true next-gen game. —Kudo Tsunoda”

(continued from pg. 45)

expressions change as they fight. A snarling lip may be a sign that you’re throwing a particularly powerful punch. Getting slammed in the jaw will cause him to wince and clamp his eyes shut. When your fighter tires, you’ll see the despair on his face. Every move you make will be reflected in your boxer’s face, and the dynamic reactions of his expression are now the key to his condition. Just like in real boxing, *Fight Night* is now a game of reading your opponent, gauging his condition,



combat feel as immersive as possible, to put you in the ring facing off against another fighter. By removing the HUD and focusing solely on the actions and reactions of the fighters, Tsunoda and the rest of the EA Chicago team hope to make *Round 3* as emotionally involving as possible. Although graphics are typically thought of as the biggest improvement in next-

generation gaming, Tsunoda and the team see these more powerful machines as a chance to involve players in the action on a more emotional level, providing an intense gameplay experience that simply isn’t possible on the current round of consoles. “It’s not enough to just deliver with graphics,” says Tsunoda. “If you’re not delivering the innovative gameplay that matches the big step up in graphics, you’re totally failing in the opportunity to make a true next-gen game. The graphics are the minimum bar. But you’ve got to be able to top the graphics with the innovation that you’re bringing to the gameplay.”

Although the dynamic reactions of the fighters



looking for openings, and being aware of your own situation. Although it is deceptively simple on the surface, boxing is an incredibly sophisticated and strategic sport in reality, hence its nickname “the sweet science.” *Fight Night Round 3* is the first boxing game to capture the true complexity of the sport.

This deep system of gauging your opponent’s status is now tied to the audio portion of the game as well. The grunts and groans he emits dictate how much punishment he’s dishing out, as well as how much he’s taking. Your boxer’s breath will become more labored and ragged as he tires, and the disgusting crunchy, juicy noises that emanate from a stiff hook to the jaw are a great indication of how much damage you’ve taken.

This combination of visual and audio clues to your boxer’s state is designed to make the



■ Superpunch mode replays a critical blow in agonizing detail

Thanks to the extensive photo documentation of the fighters, character models are accurate down to the pores on their faces.



are the key to pulling the player into the game, they aren't the only additions the team has planned to involve them in the world of professional boxing. Just as Round 2 added Haymakers and Cutmen (both of which will return with improvements) into the mix, Round 3 has a host of new features that add to the atmosphere and realism, flesh out the career mode, and otherwise improve on the solid foundation of the franchise. The camera has been pulled in closer to highlight the action and capture the details, and there will now be a greater variety of minigames between rounds. But perhaps the most major addition is the new focus on rivalries.

In real boxing, the advertisements for the matches emphasize the animosity between the combatants, playing up any history between the two contestants. Rivalries between fighters are common, and it's not unusual for one fighter

to show up at his opponent's press conference to talk a little smack and get under his skin. Boxers will routinely make disparaging remarks about their future opponents to the press, and otherwise antagonize them into making a mistake.

Round 3 will make rivalries a major component of the career mode, adding much-needed drama to what has been, up until now, a rather shallow experience. By taking advantage of EA's recent partnership with ESPN, fights will now begin with a video montage that explains the history between the two fighters and end with a similar segment that breaks down the fight and replays the highlights – the

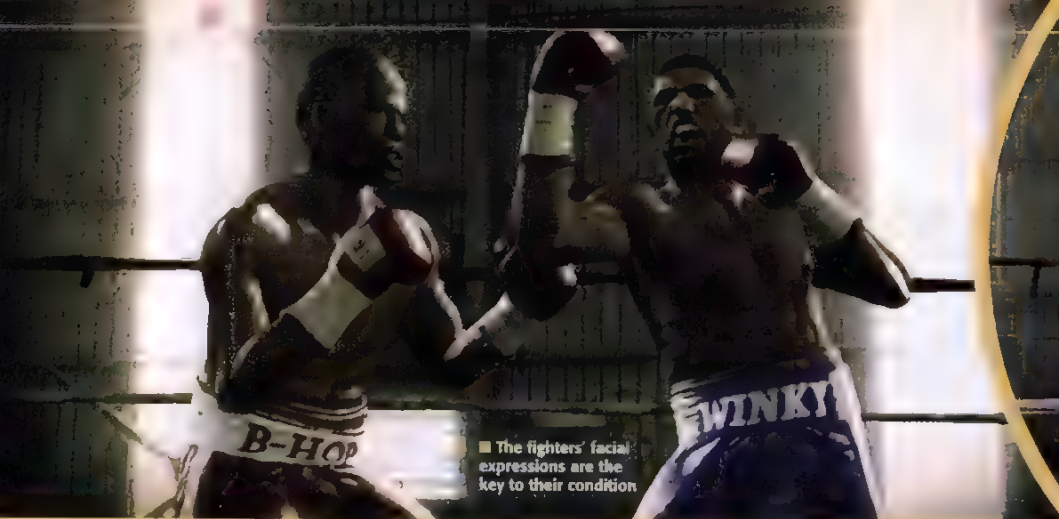
game will actually record the entire fight and play back the best moments. During matches, commentators will continue to discuss the competition between the two contestants, and will even appear in a picture-in-picture window

onscreen, emulating the look of a televised match. Sometimes, one of your scheduled opponents will show up at one of your fights to comment on it, talk a little smack, and distract you from the fight at hand.

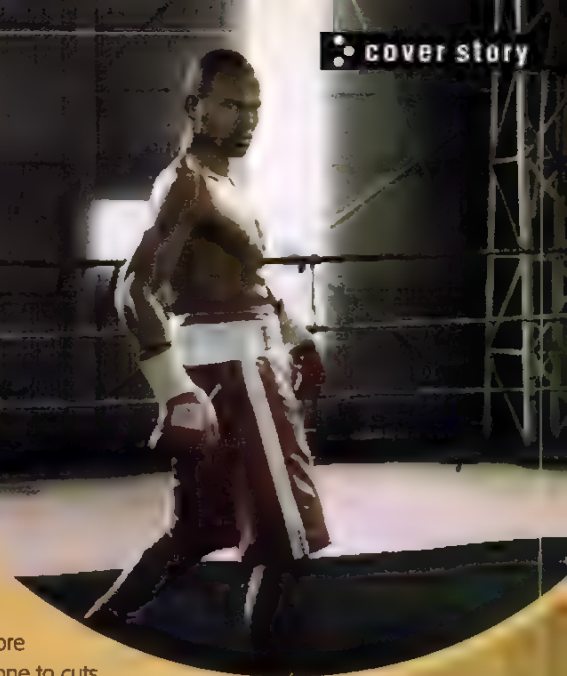
Between your scheduled bouts, rivalries and ESPN's video footage continue to come into play. In Round 2, you could choose from a small selection of training exercises to bulk up your fighter, and you'll still be able to do so. But there are now far more targeted exercises that you can choose instead. For example, you can actually watch tapes of an upcoming opponent to learn how he fights. Doing so will grant your boxer bonuses in the upcoming match, which will help you to counter his style. Although every boxer in the previous games fought in pretty much the same style, the pugilists in Round 3 will behave far more like their real-life counterparts. Even though he was known for his fast feet and quick hands, Round 2's Muhammad Ali simply fought like any other fighter. The goal with Round 3 is to capture the styles of each boxer so exactly that they are all identifiable simply by the way they move and fight.

Every boxer in the game will now have an individual fighting style, with unique strengths and weakness. By studying their tapes and working with experts in different aspects of boxing,





■ The fighters' facial expressions are the key to their condition



“During matches, commentators will continue to discuss the competition between the two contestants, and will even appear in a picture-in-picture window onscreen, emulating the look of a televised match.**”**

you can learn to better cope with their advantages. For example, the highlight reel of a boxer may reveal that he throws a lot of power punches. You can then go and work with a trainer who is a master of taking big shots to learn how to minimize the damage your opponent inflicts. You'll then head into the fight with a bonus to your attributes.

The gear you choose will also play into the individual strengths of your fighter. Whereas equipment in the last game would give the same bonus to any fighter, you'll now have to choose gear based on what is best for your character. For example, if your fighter has long forearms, wearing longer gloves will give you a natural advantage when blocking. The unique characteristics of each fighter even extends to how you bleed and bruise. If you've taken a lot of shots to one side of your face, that side will

be more prone to cuts and bruises.

As with the last *Fight Night* title, your boxer's face will dynamically bruise, swell and bleed based on where and how hard he's punched. One new feature in the game, lovingly referred to as “the super-punch” has been designed specifically, it seems, to highlight this aspect. Whenever a boxer is knocked down, the blow that deals the damage is replayed several times in slow motion. Inspired by a special effect seen in the third *Matrix* movie, members of the special effects team that created the effect actually worked on the effect for the game. In these brutal close-ups, you can actually see the glove and face mold



■ Cuts and bruises develop on each fighter in real time

around each other, and the force of the blow sends actual ripples through the victim's face. The programmers at EA Chicago created an elaborate physics model that dictates how different parts of a boxer's body react to heavy impacts. Thanks to this model, your boxer's flesh deforms realistically to each punch, and the superpunch replays perfectly highlight the reaction. A strong blow to the lower face will cause shockwaves to travel through a boxer's cheeks, but a blow to the forehead will result in little movement. A punch to the stomach will make the

protective layer of fat on the midriff ripple, and you can see these reactions with each and every blow in the fight. However, the superpunch mode highlights these moments in staggering detail.

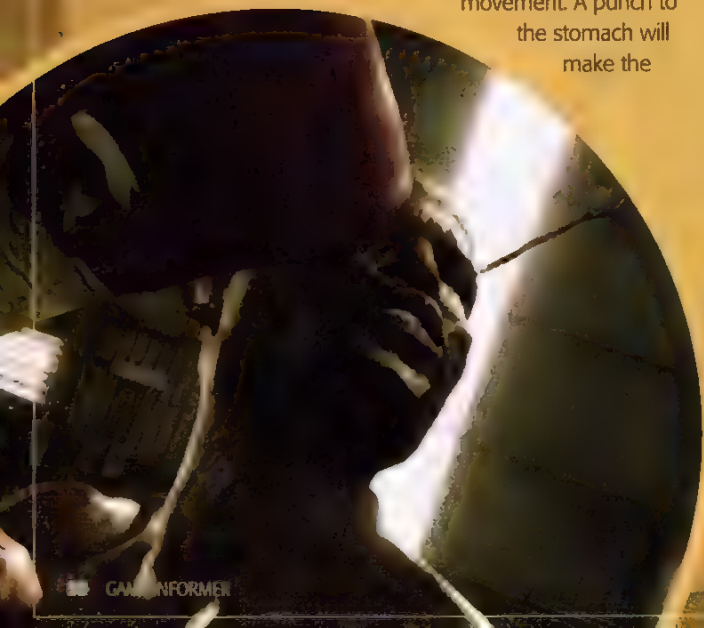
With the superpunch, individualized fighting styles, ESPN presentation, HUD-less gameplay, and focus on rivalries, it's obvious that the Fight Night team at EA Chicago is aiming to make a game that's far more than a prettier version of the earlier titles. Their enthusiasm for the project is obvious, reflected everywhere in the countless boxing posters that line the office. They are dedicated to improving the franchise on every level, which should make Round 3 one of the hottest 360 titles when it launches in the early part of next year. Of course, since the video played such a key role in the success of Sony's E3 press conference, it will no doubt be greeted just as enthusiastically on PS3. We have a feeling that the studio's other project, Def Jam 3, will be just as well received. Unlike the previous two Fight Night games, EA Chicago did not develop the first two Def Jam games, and they are approaching it as a brand new start for the series.

Whereas Round 3 is a natural evolution of the series, the first next-gen Def Jam game will look, feel, and play quite differently

than the last two games. While Def Jam: Fight for NY was a fun game that was a hit with both critics and gamers, Tsunoda sees significant room for improvement in many aspects. "Hip-hop and wrestling is a weird creative combination," he says. "Basically you had a wrestling game with rappers that had hip-hop elements in the story mode. We're trying to make a fighting game here. And we're going to get the hip-hop elements into the actual fighting."

The core combat in Def Jam 3 will lean away from the wrestling roots of the last two games and towards a more traditional fighting game formula, but with a greater emphasis on the music aspect of the franchise. Although Def Jam featured a hip-hop soundtrack and popular clothing lines like Phat Farm, the integration of the culture basically ended there and didn't carry over into the actual gameplay. Def Jam 3, Tsunoda promises, will integrate the music and lifestyle into the core fighting mechanic. And unlike other hip-hop games, it won't be all about life in the ghetto, urban crime, or gang conflict. Def Jam 3 is all about aspiring to the MTV vision of the hip-hop lifestyle.

The basic goal of Def Jam 3 is to start a record label and build yourself up into a music mogul. Along the way, you will acquire riches that you can use to buy houses,



yachts, cars, and all the other accoutrements that rappers buy to flaunt their millionaire lifestyles. Of course, Def Jam 3 is still a fighting game, and all the combat will tie into your climb up the ladder to the top of the music biz. You won't be duking it out in cramped underground fight clubs any more — each battle will have a purpose. You may have to brawl with the bodyguard of a rival mogul, or simply "convince" a new talent to join your label through force.

No matter who you're fighting, the team is laying out some lofty goals for Def Jam's combat. "We have a totally new way of looking at the fighting genre. Not just through

the controls, but also how we're integrating the music into the gameplay," says Tsunoda. "And it's a fighting game, it's not a wrestling or grappling game. It'll be a totally new fighting game that's different than any fighting game that's come before." Although we pressed him on the matter, Tsunoda wouldn't reveal how

the music would be worked into the actual combat, saying only that the two elements will be combined in way that makes sense, is surprisingly simple, and unlike anything you've ever seen in a fighting game. His comments make us wonder if your fighting moves affect the soundtrack, as a big score does in the PSP

Unlike other hip-hop games, it won't be all about life in the ghetto, urban crime, or gang conflict. Def Jam 3 is all about aspiring to the MTV vision of the hip-hop lifestyle.



■ Def Jam will use the same technology as Round 3 to create life like fighters and highly detailed environments



puzzer Lumines, or if your moves require some kind of rhythm to pull off properly. Either way, we're anxious to know more.

"We're trying to make Def Jam with the same level of innovation and creativity that we brought to Fight Night," he says, admitting that the controls would utilize the controller's buttons as well as the analog sticks. For those who haven't played Fight Night, the right analog stick is used to throw punches, and the movement of the stick dictates the style of attack. While Def Jam probably won't use exactly the same system, its analog attacks will likely function in a similar way.

While the actual functionality of the controls and how they will incorporate music into combat is still a mystery, Tsunoda and the Def Jam project's producer Michael Mendheim were happy to share some other elements of the combat. It will place a huge emphasis on defense and countering, but won't be a button-masher by any means — responsive and precise controls are the key idea. Fight for NY's main shortcoming, they both felt, was that it took you out of control of your character for long chunks of time. Some styles caused you to throw long combos which couldn't be interrupted, while the Blazin' moves were entirely prescribed, and thus completely out of the players' control. With Def Jam 3, the goal is to never have players lose control of the characters and arm them with the fastest, most responsive controls the genre has ever seen. Considering how the studio accomplished this same objective in the boxing genre, we have little doubt that they can achieve this aim. "If you look at the fighting genre as a whole, the general controls have not changed in years and years and years," says

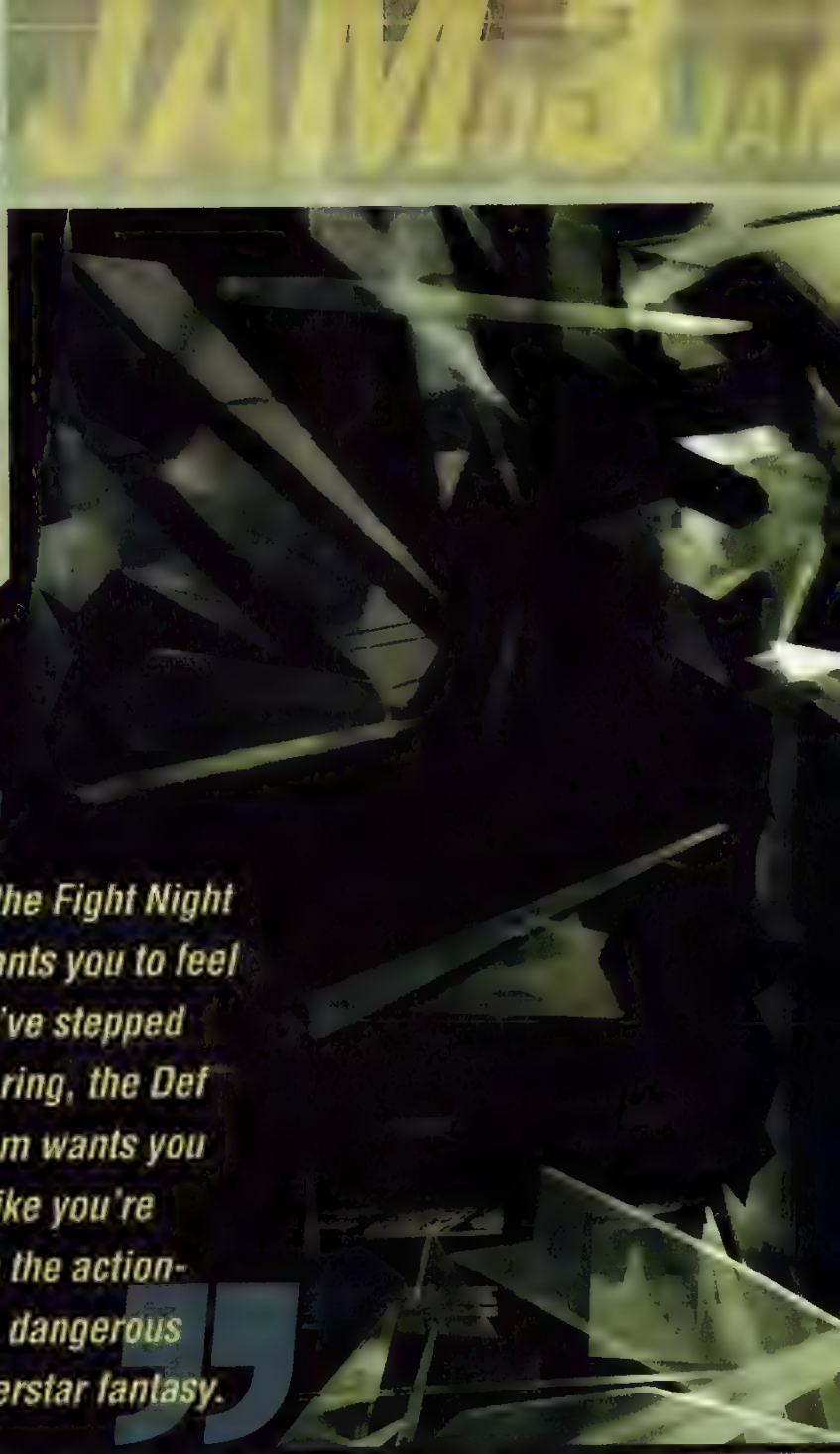
“Just as the Fight Night team wants you to feel like you've stepped into the ring, the Def Jam team wants you to feel like you're living in the action-packed, dangerous rap superstar fantasy.”

Tsunoda. "It's the same gameplay. You can add swords or this and that, but it's the same basic mechanic, so we're putting a new way of doing fighting games into the fighting genre."

The duo felt that Fight for NY had another shortcoming in its cramped and limited arenas, which were admittedly quite small. The levels in Def Jam 3 will be at least three times as large, and feature tons of destructible objects. For example, while you may begin fighting in a large room, the battle can quickly spill outside by throwing your opponent through the drywall and out into the street. Any object you break will shatter into fragments that can be picked up and used as weapons to cause

further destruction. "Fragments are what make destruction look cool," Mendheim explains. A stage will never look the same after a fight as it did before. Every level should deliver what they call "Hollywood-style action." Like the insane stunts seen in big budget action movies, every stage will be filled with breakable objects, environmental attacks, and even explosions that can radically alter the landscape. Just as the Fight Night team wants you to feel like you've stepped into the ring, the Def Jam team wants you to feel like you're living in the action-packed, dangerous rap superstar fantasy.

As with the previous Def Jam titles, this next-gen entry in the series will feature the like-





loved that game needn't worry. Much of what made it so appealing, such as the extensive character customization, will return. This time around, however, the items your character dons will have an actual impact on your fights. For example, big flashy rings will do more than get the crowd cheering your style; they will actually add damage to your punches. Neither Tsunoda nor Michael Mendheim offered any further examples, but we'd imagine your clothing choices could affect both your defense and mobility as well.

Def Jam 3 certainly has more surprises in store, and the EA Chicago team promises to deliver a unique fighting game that fully embraces the hip-hop culture while innovating in the fighting genre with unique controls, amazing graphics, and Hollywood-style action. "Our studio has built a really good expertise through the Fight Night franchise, which is a type of fighting game," says Tsunoda. "We've gained some really good core knowledge through this franchise, and we're not just going to deliver some cookie-cutter version of another fighting game. We're taking that creativity that we developed with Fight Night and are applying it to another type of fighting game. You're going to get a totally new and innovative kind of fighting experience."

With two new next-gen fighting games on the way, one would think that EA Chicago is trying to position itself as the new king of the genre. While Tsunoda certainly wouldn't mind that title, that's far from his ultimate goal for the studio. He wants the Midwestern developer to be known more for their passion and creativity than a specific genre

nesses of many famous rappers. Since the game is so early in development, the only performer confirmed to return so far is Method Man. However, many more will certainly appear, both male and female, and they will look more realistic than ever. Def Jam will use the same technology as Fight Night to reproduce the faces of real people with startling accuracy, and will also feature more tricks to further accent the believability. For example, every character's eyes will track movement! Not only will they actually look at the people they speak to, they will actually scan the environments to pick up threats.

Although Def Jam 3 sounds like it will be significantly different than Fight for NY, those who





■ In action, Def Jam 3 is the fastest, most fluid fighting game you've ever seen

of games. "Our long term plan for this studio isn't only doing fighting games," he explains. "We'll always have that fighting game core. We can do a lot with fighting games, but we'll be looking to expand that expertise into more general action games. We want to be known as a studio that can bring a level of creativity and innovation to any game we tackle." With the first Fight Night game, the studio revolutionized how boxing games were played with its all-analog control, and in its sequel, they polished that formula while expanding the career mode to create a more immersive boxing experience. With Round 3, they've added a whole new level of depth and realism by stripping away familiar video game conventions and forcing players to think like real boxers. Their first crack at the Def Jam franchise promises not only to rewrite that entire series, but to change the way fighting games are played. Both titles will feature everything that discerning gamers have come to expect, including create-a-character modes and online play, among others. It is obvious that the team at EA Chicago is dedicated to bringing innovation back to gaming, something that Kudo Tsunoda sees as the only real way to approach the industry. "Everyone here," he states matter-of-factly, "is here to make great games." ■■■■

As if next-gen entries in both the Fight Night and Def Jam franchises weren't enough, both of these series are bound for the PSP. Each is headed for a handheld for the first time, and Electronic Arts has slightly different plans for the games. Although there is still a lot that we don't know about these titles, here is a basic breakdown of each of these upcoming games.

Fight Night and Def Jam Go Mobile

Fight Night Round 3 (Working Title)

This PSP title is the first we've heard of that is based on a next-gen console game. It will offer most of the same features as the Xbox 360/PS3 version, and will launch in early 2006, in conjunction with the 360 release. While the PSP version won't look quite as stunning as the console version, it will include exclusive game modes, including head-to-head wireless play.





■ Every stage in Def Jam 3 will feature multiple sections. The inside of the gas station can be opened up by throwing your foe through the glass.

Def Jam PSP (Working Title)

Unlike the Fight Night PSP release, Def Jam will be based on its most recent current-gen version, Fight for NY. It should be fairly similar to the console edition, although it will also sport additional features. Along with head-to-head wireless modes, the PSP release will also feature exclusive venues, characters, and moves. Although a release date hasn't yet been announced, it should hit stores sometime early next year.



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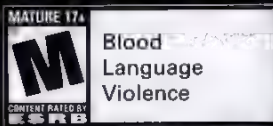
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Blood
Language
Violence



PlayStation 2



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UNTOLD LEGENDS WARRIORS' CODE

A New Story to Tell

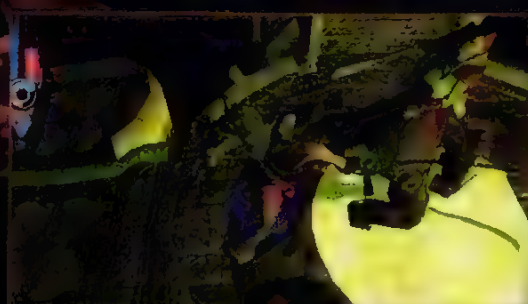
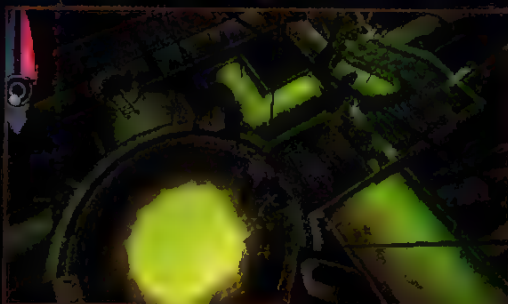
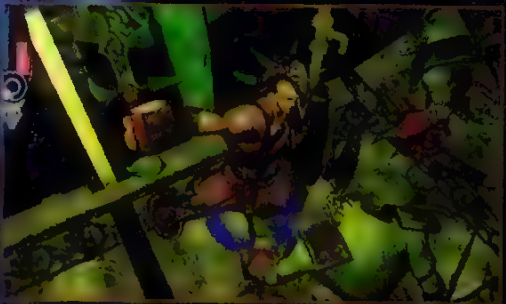
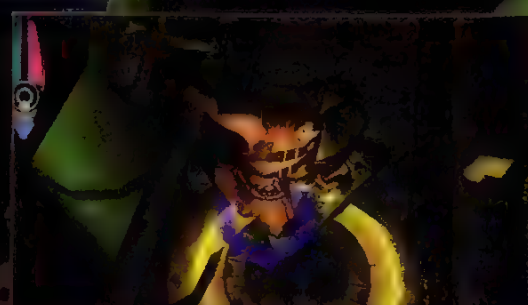
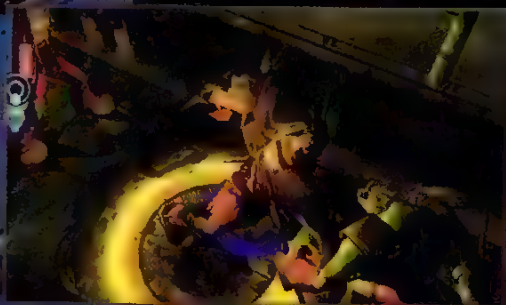
It's fairly well known that, with over 200,000 copies sold, Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade is one of the most popular titles in the PSP library. What may not be so obvious, though, is that the entire game was made from scratch in under six months - and only four of those with a PSP development kit. This time around the technology is already proven, the hardware is familiar, and the development cycle is longer. Sony Online Entertainment has big plans for the sequel, and invited Game Informer to its offices in sunny San Diego to relay the early word on Untold Legends: Warriors' Code to the masses. From what we've seen, the word is very good.

In contrast to the full suit of blue and gold San Diego Chargers gear he was wearing last time we saw him, lead designer Bill Trost is lounging behind his desk sporting a [San Diego Padres manager Bruce] Bochy For Mayor t-shirt in honor of the baseball season. However, the selection of tabletop RPG books and library of design materials on his shelf denote his fierce interest in classic fantasy and role-playing. "With the Untold Legends franchise, we're pushing away from a lot of the fantasy stereotypes and exploring the potential of what fantasy can be away from just elves and dwarves," he tells us in the hurried, excited voice he lapses into when talking about his

current project. This philosophy is apparent in the direction the sequel is taking – the gameplay tweaks, revamped character progression, unconventional storyline, and distinctive art style all proclaim Untold Legends: Warriors' Code to be much more than another uninspired sequel.

Though still an action/RPG in every sense, Untold Legends: Warriors' Code will focus more on the story behind the hack n' slash combat than the original. Rendered cutscenes and voice-acting are a far cry from the occasional chat bubbles of its predecessor. In addition, the characters are much more intimately involved with the plot. Rather than wandering heroes who get suckered into helping a city with some neb-

ulous monster problems, the protagonists are part of an ancient race that is being systematically killed off by the evil empire in control of the lands. Though your avatar lives among and looks just like humans, you play the part of something more – something magical. When you gather your power (represented in-game by collecting glowing spirit orbs to fill a meter), you're able to assume a far more powerful beast form and really tear it up for a while. The nefarious fiend-run empire doesn't want your kind around, so you'll meet up with the resistance and embark on a grand adventure to stop the fiends and restore the rightful heir to the throne.

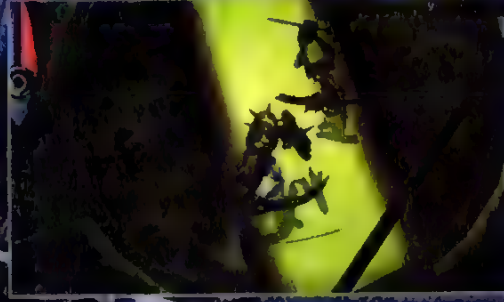
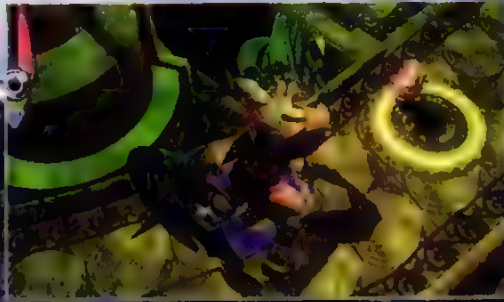
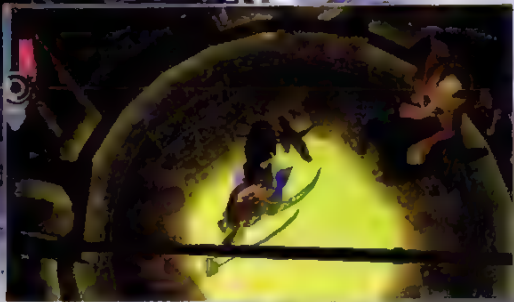
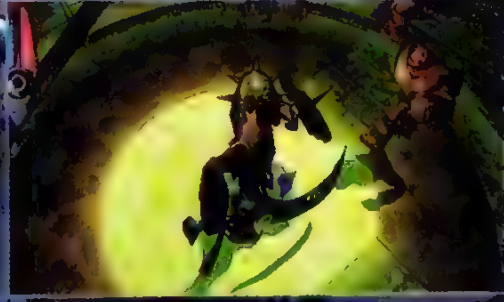
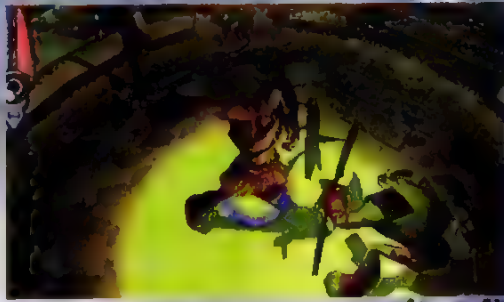


Adding a story that players will care about is certainly a big step for the franchise, but there's a lot more going on with this sequel than that. The menu screens are a prime example: gone is the obnoxious mouse-like interface of the original, replaced by a much smoother grid system that is far faster and easier to use. Also, as anyone who played the original can tell you, much of the combat of Untold Legends revolved around running and mashing the X button to hack apart monsters. While Untold Legends: Warriors' Code still has the soul of an action/RPG – kill baddies, find better loot, level up, repeat – the team is taking great pains to add a little more meat to the gameplay. This won't consist of anything along the lines of Street Fighter-style combo attacks, though. "It's supposed to be fun and entertaining, not complex and challenging," says Trost with a laugh. "We're trying to update what action/RPG combat means, without losing that fast and frenetic feeling." Part of this upgrade consists of improved skillsets for the heroes, but there are two things that should help relieve the monotony of piling up dead fiends.

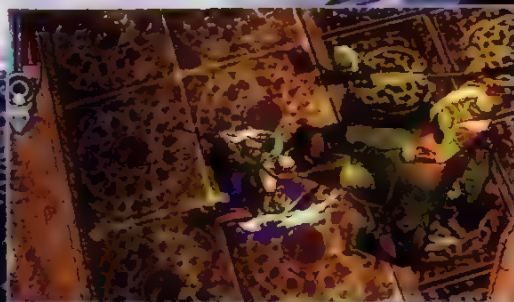
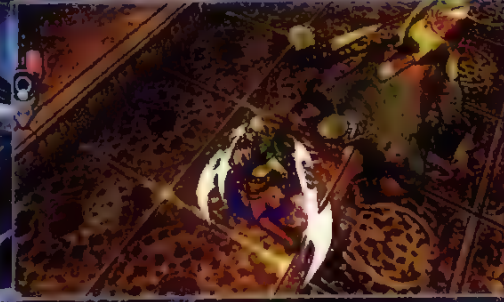
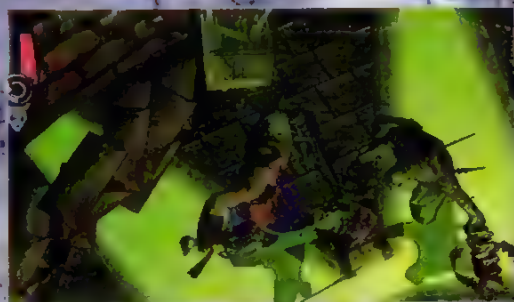
One of these is improved AI – we were assured at many points during our time with Sony Online that enemies will do far more than simply attack or run away. Though we didn't get to see it in action, we're quite hopeful about this change. The other is what Trost terms "attacks of opportunity." During certain points in monster attack animations, they'll be vulnerable to a special attack. By tapping or holding down the square button while they're in this state, you'll pull off one of three super moves with effects like critical damage, area-effect knockdowns, and extra loot drops. The example we saw was an ogre flailing away with a huge hammer. Suddenly, when he went for a big overhand smash, his weapon was stuck in the ground for a couple seconds, which was capitalized upon with a spinning crush attack from the hero, sending a crowd of enemies flying. This simple mechanic, along with all of the other tweaks and improvements to the gameplay, should make combat in Untold Legends: Warriors' Code a much more interesting affair. According to Trost, "It's enough that it feels like you're doing something a little more than just pressing X, but not so much that you feel like, 'Oh crap, I have a bunch of combos to memorize.'"

■ As with the first Untold Legends, this title features some unconventional character classes. Though development is early enough that Sony Online was reluctant to give out specifics on how each hero functions, simply taking a look at the character models can offer some insight. The Disciple (right) brandishes a gigantic polearm and presumably uses some magic to supplement his melee abilities. The other four classes are similarly unique, from the tiny little Scout and her huge crossbow to the lithe Prowler with his dual wrist-blades.

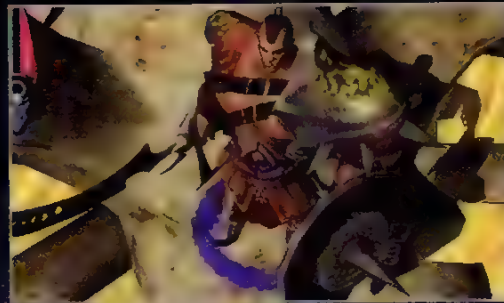
(Continued on page 61)



“ ...exploring the potential of what fantasy can be away from just elves and dwarves... ”



The environments vary in theme and appearance just as the character classes do. Shown here are a small subset of the levels that will be in the final game, and already there are such diverse locales as the skeleton of a huge desert beast and an ancient, decrepit sewer system. Since the concept of Untold Legends' world is that of an unimaginably old planet that has seen the rise and fall of countless civilizations of many different species, the designers have a ton of fictional space for their imaginations to run wild.



(Continued from page 59)

It has long been a complaint of some people that Sony Online's fantasy games have lacked a distinctive art style, opting instead for a generic western fantasy look. Untold Legends: Warriors' Code bucks this trend. The art team took the additional time they had in the concept phase to develop a new flavor for this title — according to senior artist Todd Luallen, "We really wanted to say, 'Okay, let's really develop a style and make it unique.'" As you can clearly see from the concept art and character renders, everything in Untold Legends: Warriors' Code has exaggerated proportions and more sweeping, organic shapes. The goal was for people to be able to look at any model from this game and recognize where it came from, and in our minds it has largely been achieved.

Warriors' Code's new face doesn't stop there, though. Each character has its own style of weapon to use exclusively. For instance, the Prowler uses odd Asian-style bladed devices, while the Disciple has huge polearms. Fortunately, this doesn't cut into the vast amount of customization that is a staple of the action/RPG genre. Equipping a new weapon doesn't just give the model a different texture; there are several weapon models for each hero type, and we were honestly surprised at how different they look from one another. And of course, as with all equipment, each new weapon you find will have wildly varying stats.

Limiting the weapon selection by character class pays great dividends in the anima-

tions that the team can implement. Attack animations can carry much more flair, since they're not bound by having to accommodate weapon models of greatly different dimensions — when the same swing has to look good with everything from a quarterstaff to a dagger, it's much harder to make an expressive, distinctive movement. Thus, the team can make the Prowler come across as a speedy, fast-hitting combatant while having the Disciple attack with wide, sweeping blows that fit his style. All of this translates over to the beast forms, too, which makes them look even cooler — as if turning into a big werewolf and mauling your enemies unmercifully wasn't cool enough. Trust us, when you see it moving you'll understand just how much a relatively small design change like this can impact the look and feel of a game.

Changing the way that characters and monsters look onscreen isn't the only way to give Warriors' Code a unique ambience, though. Since the team actually has time to do it for the sequel, they're scrapping the random map generation of the original and doing hand-crafted environments. "We're playing with a lot more depth and the 3D nature of the game," Trost informs us. Because the engine is smoother and more efficient, the designers are able to create levels that really feel like crazy fantasy settings. One map we saw was an old abandoned sewer complex, a relic from one of the world's many lost ancient civilizations. Leaking pipes and ooze flows ran through

both the foreground and background, and the hero and his foes moved through areas of radically different lighting that played off of their models beautifully. The boss our adventurer finally faced was a gruesome sludge beast who climbed and jumped around the platforms made by huge sewer pipes. It's quite obvious that creating the levels by hand has paid off; the team is able to mold interesting encounters and complex mazes to explore. No more wasted time wandering through endless loot-free dead ends is certainly a good thing in our minds.

Improved character progression and customization is another large part of what makes Untold Legends: Warriors' Code a drastic step up from its predecessor. Rather than another iteration of the 20-point tree system that has been handed down from Diablo II through Champions of Norrath all the way to the first Untold Legends, skills are advanced with a tier system. For example, let's say your character gets a fireball spell to start with. Putting points into the first tier of the skill will increase its damage, but upon reaching a certain level and unlocking the second tier of the fireball spell and placing your points in that, it might gain an area of effect. At the third tier, perhaps a burn effect that does damage over time will become available. This way, you will never have to "waste" points in pre-requisite skills that you might never use. The team is hoping to get around 15 skills per character class into the game, which will lead to a vast array of ways to build a hero.

Passive effects, like a chance to get a critical strike on each attack or a mana regeneration bonus, have been moved off of the skill tree entirely. In Warriors' Code, your character has two inventory slots for runes, which duplicate these effects. These runes are found in the world just like any other loot, and you can overwrite an old one with a different effect at any time. They even level up with you, so you could feasibly keep the same bonus throughout the entire game and have it scale in power with you. The idea is to make each point you spend feel important, says Trost: "If you're spending points, you need to feel like it's doing something every time."

The icing on the cake of Warriors' Code is the fact that the team at Sony Online is really focusing on adapting the game to the PSP platform in ways that they simply didn't have time to do for the original. All of the little things — menus, better multiplayer functionality, smoother controls, etc. — really do add up to making a significantly better game. There's little we could ask for that isn't on the menu for Untold Legends: Warriors' Code, and our appetite for video games is formidable indeed. We came away from Sony Online's offices quite impressed with the direction that the Untold Legends franchise is moving, and all signs point to an extremely fun dungeon crawler with an engaging story coming to the PSP next February. ■■■

It's A Party In Your PSP

One of the absolutely most exciting features of Warriors' Code is the multiplayer. While the ad-hoc mode multiplayer of the first game was serviceable, it did suffer from some problems — namely slowdown with multiple characters onscreen and a fairly basic implementation. Happily, the team is pulling out all the stops for the sequel. Full infrastructure mode support is part of the deal, meaning you'll be able to connect through the Internet for some co-op dungeon crawling. Also, Sony Online will be providing matchmaking services to help you hook up with appropriately leveled players. We didn't see it in action, but the team promised that the slowdown issue is being attended to as well. Also, much like Diablo II, you'll be able to start up a multiplayer game and host it, playing by yourself, and other players will be able to jump in at any time.





PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming

■ By completing goals around LA you unlock pieces of the environment that are dragged back to the skate ranch for you to thrash



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER NEVERSOFT > RELEASE FALL

“GO BACK TO KENSUCKY, FARMBOY!”

At this year's E3, Activision and Neversoft wowed its fans with the announcement that the newest installment to the Tony Hawk series would feature a load-free Los Angeles for virtual skaters to grind to their hearts content.

The story is simple. You start as a weak-sauce skater who comes to LA for a fresh start. Once you arrive and get a dose of the locals, you meet Mindy, a Betty who starts you down a path that leads to skater legend Tony Alva, and eventually your quest – to rebuild the legendary skate ranch.

Game Informer got a chance to put the game through its paces and we must say that we are quite happy with the results. The biggest additions to this year's game are three new moves: the bert slide, bank drop, and grind stall. The bert slide is basically the old school surfer move where you get low

and kick out wide sweeping turns. Pulling off this move is easy, simply using R1 with the X button on the PlayStation controller (the version we played). Using the L1 button will modify the action, giving you a tight spin.

The grind stall is just that, a stall. And the bank drop is essentially the acid drop, but you can pull it off on inclines instead of the previously required quarter-pipe. We immediately started to work these new moves into our routines. First of all, the new levels are fantastic. For the seasoned player, the larger levels with multiple branches (see the map on the opposite page to get an idea of just how big America's Wasteland is) make it easy to find killer lines. But the move that we quickly fell in love with was the grind stall.

We quickly had this new move worked in with all the classic moves, and you can

use it to great effect. You don't need a big series of grinds to rack up huge scores, with this new move in your arsenal you can basically work a series of smaller grinds into big points. We were quickly able to grind into a stall, then launch in a different direction just as fast. It's almost pinpoint control that lets you surgically tear up any rail – definitely very sweet.

But that's not the end of all the new content. The on-foot portion has been upgraded with "free running" or "parkour" inspired moves including a back and front flip. This may sound pretty useless, but once you hop off your board mid-line, run up a wall and backflip into a Natas spin on a nearby fire hydrant, it doesn't seem so sissy anymore.

As you cruise the streets of LA, you can also find bikes that you can ride. Featuring a dual analog control scheme, hitting the

pedals is a completely different experience.

The final bit of good news is that Classic mode is back once again, and this time you can take the goals cooperatively with another player. Neversoft was tightlipped about what levels we could expect to see in Classic mode, but we did manage to discover that both the Downtown Minneapolis and Mall levels from the original Tony Hawk's Pro Skater would be making a return.

After putting the game through its paces, we can't wait to get more time with American Wasteland. The grind stall really will change the way you play the series, and that's just the beginning of the innovations for the title. We know we can't wait to do a combo from one side of LA to the other. ■ ■ ■



■ The dual analog controls for the bike give it a completely different feel



■ Not only is the grind stall extremely useful, it looks good too



Los Angeles

■ To give you an idea of the scale of American Wasteland, Neversoft inserted an over-view of Boston for comparison

Boston From THUG 2

Villains fighting villains!
Of course!



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

City of Villains

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLL-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NCSOFT
> **DEVELOPER** CRYPTIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 31

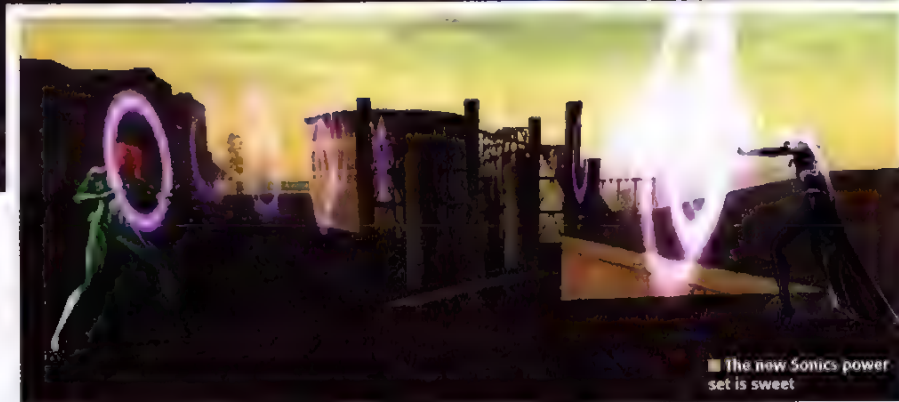
EMBRACE THE DARK SIDE

Cryptic Studios' first project, *City of Heroes*, brought something new and awesome to the MMORPG scene. Its fast-paced action and quick early leveling were a breath of fresh air in the well-established genre. And let's not forget the thrill of donning a pair of tights to live out those superhero fantasies that had been stuck in the back closet of every nerd's mind since childhood. More than a year later, *CoH* is still going strong (it's about to get its fifth major free content expansion) and Cryptic is nearly ready to release a sister game: *City of Villains*. Though this upcoming title runs on the same engine as *City of Heroes*, the directions Cryptic is taking its online world are very exciting — with new stories to tell, different factions to join, and the guilty pleasure of being a diabolical evil mastermind, *CoV* is an experience unto itself.

Making your avatar is awesome (see sidebar). Rather than using the classes from *CoH*, you'll pick from one of five new roles and a large power set, each unique and cool. After the tutorial sequence in which a mysterious group called Arachnos busts your newly created villain out of jail, you'll be taken to the Rogue Islands, an archipelago

mostly controlled by your benefactors. Here you'll take on missions and fight other villains as well as meddling NPC hero groups to prove yourself to the leadership of Arachnos. This all takes place in zones inaccessible to heroes, and plays much like *City of Heroes* but with a decidedly different tone. Upon reaching the initial level cap of 40, you'll have the chance to align yourself with one of three warring factions within Arachnos, and embroil yourself in a cool high-end storyline involving the struggles within a super-criminal organization. However, while this is largely analogous to the content that *City of Heroes* launched with, it's only a part of what's possible in *City of Villains*.

There is little purpose in having super-powered heroes and villains cohabiting a digital realm without a way for them to unleash their mutant (or magical, or technological) abilities against each other. To this end, Cryptic is introducing several distinct PvP zones with *City of Villains*. Unlike regular zones, these are accessible to both heroes and villains, and some will be a free-for-all where anarchy is the rule, while others consist of hero-versus-villain conflict. In each of these, there is both an underlying story and



WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Existing *City of Heroes* players will likely want to pick up *CoV*, even if they lack the desire to be a bad guy. With both titles installed, you'll gain access to all of the PvP zones, secret base building, and all of the new features of *City of Villains*. Of course, if you decide not to purchase *CoV*, you'll be able to continue adventuring in the existing world.

a sort of minigame for players to take part in. Rather than just smashing each other to bits, do-gooders and crooks will clash in the context of trying to take over bases, retrieve artifacts, or otherwise accomplish some larger goal.

Furthermore, supergroups on either side of the law will be able to build customized secret bases and fill them up with trophies and mementos of their adventures. Should you win a prize that someone else wants, though, an opposing group will be able to schedule a base assault to attempt to wrest it from your control. Your team will have to show up and defend your territory against an invasion of foes, ideally using any crazy traps and power-boosters you've built to your advantage.

There are tons more improvements, from new badges to earn to brand-new power sets to develop. *City of Villains* looks even cooler than *City of Heroes*, and might be just the thing to get former *CoH* players back into the game as well as convince other, more evil-minded folk to give Cryptic's colorful world a shot. ■■■



A VILLAIN OF YOUR VERY OWN

CREATE YOUR COSTUME



Creating a supervillain in CoV is easily one of the coolest parts of the game. As you can see, you have the option to customize just about anything you can think of. It's fully possible to make anything from a sleek-looking ninja assassin, complete with hood and black pajamas, to a hulking werewolf-like brute with skulls for shoulder pads and furry goat legs. A total of 13 scale sliders for your character let you tweak everything from nose length to hip size, and the color palette is large enough to accommodate any taste. If you're strapped for ideas, the random generator is surprisingly good at creating a decent baseline to work from. All in all, this is definitely one of the most robust and easy-to-use character generators we've ever had the pleasure to play with.

CREATE YOUR COSTUME



The environments are appropriate to the subject matter



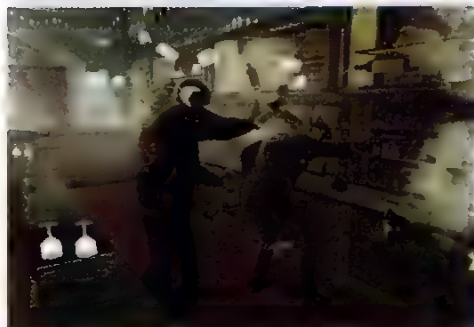
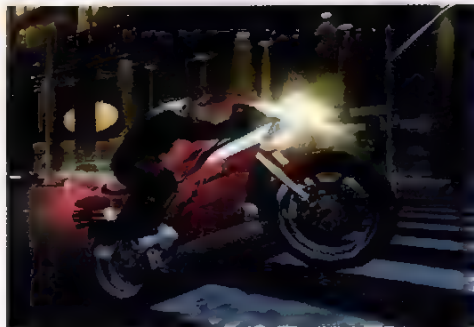
In many zones, there are ongoing fights you can jump into



Enemy design is... creative, to say the least



This is an example of how cool the player-created bases can be



For some reason, all the stores closed on the corner where Marcus Reed randomly punches everyone in the face

UNLIMITED ENABLED
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

True Crime: New York City

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER LUXOFLUX > RELEASE FALL

LIFE IN THE BIG CITY

Although many games based around the open-world concept popularized by the Grand Theft Auto franchise have been released in the last couple years, only a select few outside of that series have been bonafide hits. True Crime: Streets of L.A. offered players something more than just a rehash of Vice City by putting them on the good side of the law, and was greeted with a positive critical response and strong sales. Therefore, it's no surprise that the series is returning for a second outing, but this time the franchise is ditching sunny Los Angeles for the Big Apple.

As with the last title, True Crime: New York City will recreate its setting with stunning accuracy. Promising GPS-accurate streets, the digital version of New York will include all its familiar landmarks, a subway system, and recognizable neighborhoods like Times Square and Harlem. Although it has yet to be revealed how large of a chunk of New York will be included, the game seems to be set primarily on the island of Manhattan, but there's no word on if you'll be able to visit other boroughs like Brooklyn or Queens. Yet even if players are confined to the island, there will be plenty for them to do there. Not content to simply change the setting, developer Luxoflux has included plenty of new features as well.

As Marcus Reed, a former criminal turned police officer, players are tasked with hunting down the killer of Marcus'

mentor while tackling the various crime rings in the city. As before, you can do things by the book, or cross the line into bad cop territory – which honestly sounds like more fun, because Luxoflux has added cool new environmental interactions to use on the local crooks. You can take out a criminal by pressing his face against a lit stove burner, force his head into an oven, toss him into a walk-in freezer, and more. But even without these brutal tools, you'll still be able to lay down the law. Marcus can switch between multiple fighting styles on the fly, allowing you to tap into a huge array of punishing moves. But if that's not your style, both police-issued and black market weaponry is at your disposal. You

can take on criminals with everything from a sword to a grenade launcher.

Whether you see battling random street crime as a noble cause or a distraction from your core mission, your decisions will have an actual effect on the neighborhoods you visit. If you choose to ignore street crime, neighborhoods will grow considerably worse; the crime rate will rise, seedy characters will flood the area, and potholes and litter will accumulate in the streets. But if you choose to strictly enforce the law, crime will drop and rough neighborhoods will start to look cleaner. Combined with a night and day cycle, the virtual New York could easily be one of the most realistic game settings ever. ■ ■ ■



The sequel to Taxi ended well for everyone except Jimmy Fallon



■ Marcus foolishly believes that people who ride the bus are worth impressing



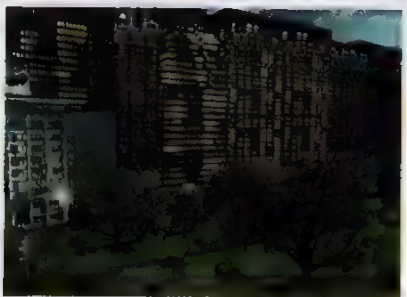
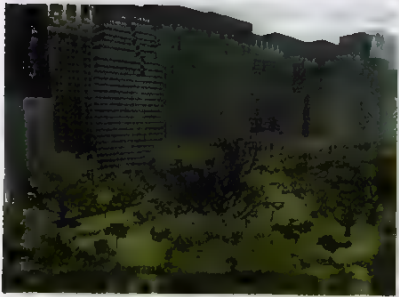
■ We are sure that this vehicle was acquired legally after a thorough credit check



■ "Whoa! That's not a wallet!"



■ Having successfully peed on an electric fence, Marcus tempts fate for the final time. By the way, it was a normal fence



■ PDNY actually stands for Please Don't Neuter Yourself... a wise public service announcement



■ Farting on a motorcycle after eating Taco John's acts exactly like a nitro boost



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PSP

SSX On Tour

> **STYLE** | TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** EA BIG > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA (CONSOLES), EA MONTREAL (PSP) > **RELEASE** OCTOBER

HOT DOG THE GAME

Gamers used to EA Sports' schedule of yearly installments for its titles may be bummed that EA Big's SSX series isn't in their grubby little hands more often. However, the extra time lets the team sit back and take a hard look at what needs to be done to the franchise to move it forward. The addition of skis to the series hardly sounds like an earth-shattering development move; but then again, you haven't gotten your hands on it like we have.

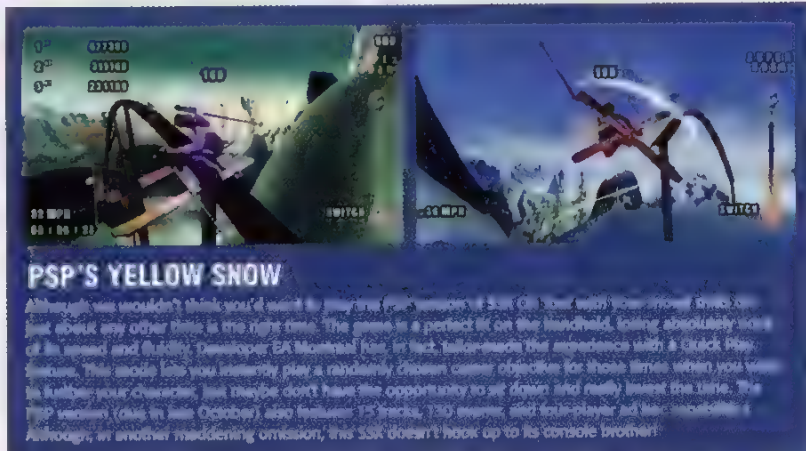
Skiing is, of course, older than snowboarding, but whereas the latter sport was once considered cutting edge, skiing is enjoying a renaissance as of late. Wild, stylish skiers are pushing the envelope and redefining what can be done on the slopes. This movement is also re-energizing SSX. In our time with the game, we found that while skiing felt familiar enough to us, it was different enough to seem like a totally fresh approach. It was incredibly smooth, and the fact that you could ride and switch in and out of fakie (riding backwards) moves opened up new trick possibilities. We predict that once you strap those suckers on, you won't go back to your boring old snowboard.

Both styles of riding benefit from the new way to initiate Monster tricks in the

game. These are available once you charge up your rider after pulling enough cool moves. Time will slow down, allowing you to focus on pulling off new right analog stick tricks. Pushing the stick in one of eight directions does first level Monster tricks. Turning and twisting the right analog around after you pull the first trick accesses the second and third levels.

The SSX On Tour experience is also being expanded through sheer size. The game not only contains the usual races and medal competitions of past SSXs, but it also includes Shred events, which are more one-on-one challenges like finding icons in a race through an environment or a trick-off with another character. Due to the more seamless nature of the game, these Shred events are merely smaller sections of much larger runs — ones that you can bomb straight through if you so choose.

Unfortunately, we're a bit baffled by EA Canada's decision not to include online multiplayer. Apart from the sheer fun of it, it seems like a natural fit for On Tour's focus on individuality through customization. What better way to show the world what you're made of? This hiccup aside, it's hard to deny the exciting new directions the series is going in. ■■■



Adding to the series' already famous death-defying courses is a sense of speed that will blur the edges of your screen. Also notice the icon to the left of your Uber Meter — you select this at the beginning of the game as the personal marker for your character.





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The environment more colorful and than the previous



Players can select characters other than the classic prince to roll the katamari



What waiting for cream?! Best game ever!



Hi, My name is 王様. Katamari Damacy is nice game.

PLAYSTATION 2

We Love Katamari

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NAMCO > DEVELOPER NAMCO > RELEASE OCTOBER 3

ROLLIN' ROLLIN' ROLLIN'

We'd argue with this game's title, but frankly, pretty much everybody got a kick out of last year's surprisingly entertaining Katamari Damacy. It's hard to hear those catchy tunes and witness the trials of the young prince without starting to get attached to the little guy. We recently spent some quality time with the Japanese version of We Love Katamari, and though we get the sense that the story is largely incomprehensible in any language, we were more than happy to bask in the bizarre glory of this anticipated follow-up.

Fans of the first game will be delighted to learn that the addictive core gameplay hasn't changed. The prince still doesn't have any secret weapons, power-ups, or busy squadmates; he just rolls around. However, the missions have taken a much

more inventive turn, occasionally straying away from the simple "get this big in this amount of time" objectives. One level has the prince collecting flowers, and in another the katamari is replaced by a snowball, which the prince must roll around until it is big enough to complete a snowman.

If you ever get sick of these single-player tasks, you can also team up for some co-op as you and a friend both maneuver the same katamari (one handles acceleration, the other direction) in a truly chaotic multiplayer mode.

While none of these new features are revolutionary, they definitely add some variety and give the game a bit more longevity.

Also punctuating the game's events are a series of scenes that appear to tell the story of a



younger, more naive King of All Cosmos. Unlike the last game, these vignettes are a cohesive narrative detailing the future king's upbringing by an imposing, unappreciative father figure (it must run in the family). He causes mischief, participates in sports, and eventually falls in love. Maybe he's not an uncaring monolith as the first game led us to believe.

After only a few minutes of playing, we were humming several new interpretations of the infectious theme song (including one sung entirely by animals) and marveling at the improved graphics. Not only is the color palette brighter and more vibrant,

but a considerable amount of detail has been added to most of the environmental katamari-fodder. Also, people still scream in terror when you roll them up. Hilarious.

While Katamari Damacy may have changed the perception of what a successful game could be, We Love Katamari isn't out to shatter any expectations. It seems focused squarely on delivering exactly what we have been clamoring for: more of the unique Katamari personality in a longer and more expansive package. And dancing Jumbomen. ■ ■ ■



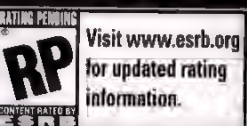
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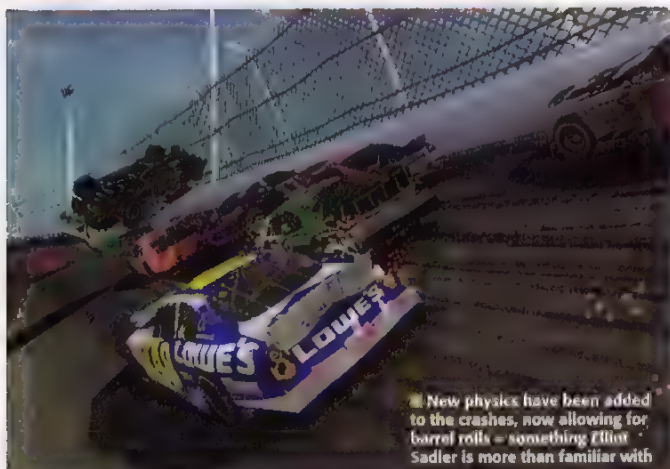


PlayStation 2

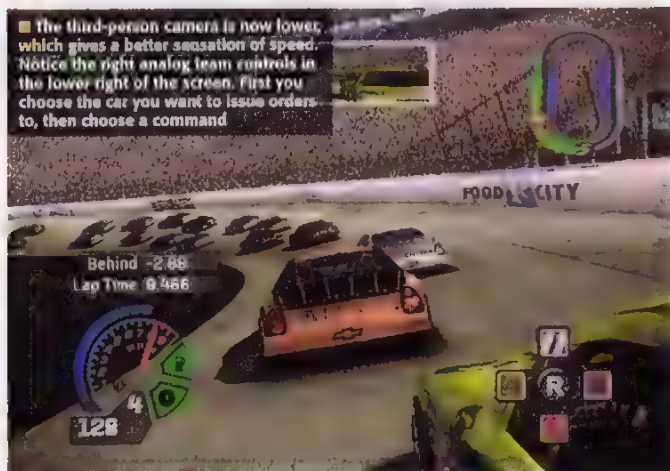


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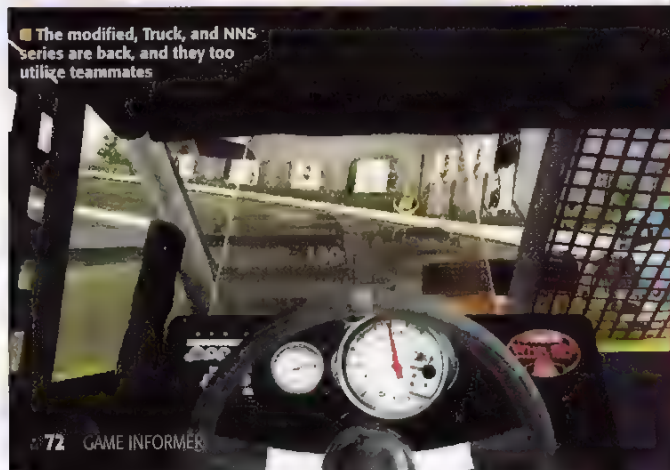




■ New physics have been added to the crashes, now allowing for barrel rolls – something Elliot Sadler is more than familiar with



■ The third-person camera is now lower, which gives a better sensation of speed. Notice the right analog team controls in the lower right of the screen. First you choose the car you want to issue orders to, then choose a command



■ The modified, Truck, and NNS series are back, and they too utilize teammates

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NASCAR 06: Total Team Control

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** AUGUST 30

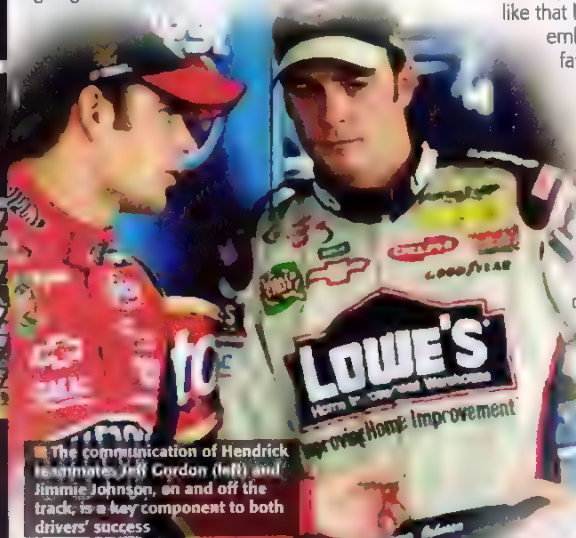
THE WELL-OILED TEAM MACHINE

NASCAR isn't about going around in circles. It's about survival. Try racing at almost 200 mph with 42 other hot shots for 300 laps. You're bumper-to-bumper and door-to-door with them the whole race; and each driver is perfectly willing to put you into the wall if it means that you're out of their way. In this death-defying spectacle, sometimes you've got to call on help from a friend. That's when you look for your teammates on the track. See if he wants to draft with you or if he could block the traffic coming up behind you. Then again, the word "friend" in NASCAR is always temporary. With 10 laps to go, it's every man for himself. This seemingly odd mix of competition and cooperation is a huge part of the sport. In his last moments before the crash that took his life, it has been said that Dale Earnhardt was blocking a pack of cars at Daytona so his son Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Junior's teammate Michael Waltrip could race ahead and duke it out to the finish.

After having introduced a friends and enemies system in the past, this year the team at Tiburon is going one

step further with teammates. Not only are there eight commands you can issue that teammates may or may not respond to, such as to pit together or to have them move to the side to make way for you, this feature extends down to even the research and development for your cars. Want to have a dominant program like Hendrick Motorsports or Roush Racing? Then play nice and get along with your teammates on and off the track. Otherwise you might ask for drafting help and end up being left high and dry as the field railroads past you.

The game lets you switch at any time to a teammate's car, which could be very useful if you want to drive up a car to help you when there are no friends around. Or should you fall back in the pack or crash, you could grab victory with a different driver. This may not feel as good as winning with your own guy, but the game will reward you for fulfilling team objectives. A voice-recognition headset can be used to issue the on-track commands (including some that can only be accessed with a headset), but we suggest you do this when nobody's around so you don't get caught acting like that big of a dork. Fight to the Top mode also embraces the team concept by letting you join famous teams and even possibly own them. It's easy to think of a NASCAR game as literally going around in circles year-in and year-out, but over the past few installments the team at Tiburon has actually tried to imbue some AI into the other cars. Other games brag about how many real-life cars they've got, but then driving around the track is like being a ghost town – it's just you and a bunch of hunks of metal. Hopefully, Tiburon can implement the AI for your teammates, as well as your other friends and enemies on the track, skillfully enough to really make it about the drivers and not the cars. After all, that – and sheer survival – is what NASCAR's all about. ■ ■ ■



■ The communication of Hendrick teammates Jeff Gordon (left) and Jimmie Johnson, on and off the track, is a key component to both drivers' success



NINTENDO DS

New Super Mario Bros.

[Working Title]

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO
> RELEASE TBA

BACK IN THE DAY

There's a revolution afoot. Sure, the upcoming Nintendo console goes by that moniker, calling forth visions of change and entirely new gameplay mechanics, but enduring icon Mario is set to make a similar shift even before the updated home console hits store shelves. Yet the design isn't spitting in the face of old-school conventions. Instead, this as-yet-untitled DS game is a classic 2D platforming adventure, with flashy new tricks to bring the concept up to date.

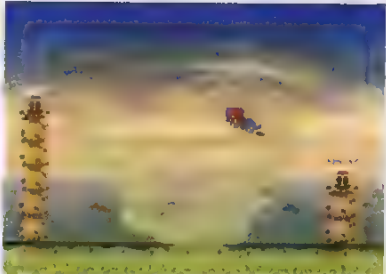
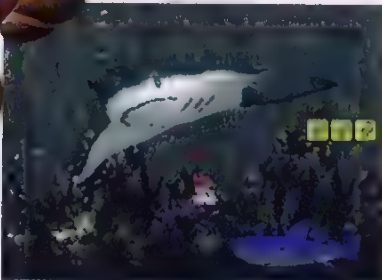
Has it really been that long since we got an all-new 2D Mario adventure? As a matter of fact, not since 1991's SNES opus Super Mario World debuted has the plumber done the side-scrolling walk on his own two feet [the 1995 follow-up to Super Mario World, Yoshi's Island, had players predominately controlling the trusty Yoshi]. To this we say, "It's about freaking time." Recently, Nintendo offered up a few demo levels to get the idea across that, while this is a lot of sprinting to the right, new technology offered up by the DS and 3D graphics hardware are making the classic ideas feel fresh.

Mario will adopt a handful of moves from

his 3D adventures like the butt slam, wall jump, and backflip; but if all of these have been done before in other franchises, could this game suffer from a been-there-done-that feel? By using the bottom screen for inventory management and underground levels; the wireless connectivity for head-to-head races; and the formidable graphics for camera swoops, polygonal enemies, and increased environmental physics;

it seems that the design team is on the right path to innovation and old school fun.

Clearly, systems sell with or without a brand new Mario platformer (the Advance line has yet to see such a title and is doing well, to say the least). No one should be surprised, though, when the new side-scrolling jumper sells a bucket of DSs come game launch time. ■ ■ ■



XBOX LPC

Fable: The Lost Chapters

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER LIONHEAD STUDIOS
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER (PC), OCTOBER (XBOX)

Being evil never looked so good



RETELLING THE STORY

Last year, Fable finally released on Xbox to success in both the reviews and sales categories, despite the fact that a fair number of originally-promised features didn't quite make it into the game. Soon, Fable: The Lost Chapters will come to PC as well as Xbox (at a lower price than the standard \$50), and include a bunch of content that wasn't part of the original Xbox version. After spending some quality time with the latest build of The Lost Chapters, we are happy to say that this title is shaping up nicely and should prove a worthwhile time for fans of the original and new players alike.

Playing Fable on PC with no gamepad is, surprisingly, acceptable. While it's not as smooth as using the Xbox controller, mouse/keyboard control is far from terrible. It's considerably harder to pull off some of the more ridiculous feats that experienced players can do on the Xbox, such as take on 15 enemies without getting hit, but it certainly doesn't ruin the Fable experience. Unfortunately, it

looks like this release will not support PC gamepads. However, anyone with a moderately beefy gaming PC will certainly appreciate the extra sparkles, smoother lighting, and decidedly shorter load times.

The new content in The Lost Chapters fits seamlessly into Fable's core adventure. Rather than being appended to the story as a normal expansion would be, The Lost Chapters' additions are woven into the original quest from the very beginning. New NPCs, zones, quests, and spells await freshly-created heroes as well as battle-scarred veterans. While it's probably not best described as earth-shattering, the new content is certainly interesting and serves to flesh out the world of Albion. Whether or not some new things to do are enough to get you back into Fable is up to you, but this is more than a couple tacked-on extras to get a few more of your dollars. And, if you haven't checked out Fable yet, this should give you that much more reason to. ■ ■ ■

Paying money to be called "Piemaster" should be an option in more games



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Company of Heroes

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER RELIC ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE 2006

BACK TO THE BEACHES

Our goal with Company of Heroes is to bring the RTS genre kicking and screaming into the next generation," proclaims Josh Mosqueira, the game's lead designer. And, after looking at the screenshots, it's hard to argue with him. Relic Entertainment, developer of the Homeworld series and last year's excellent Dawn of War, is hard at work on this new WWII RTS, and speaking to Mosqueira and multiplayer lead designer Jay Wilson is enough to get us revved up for this 2006 title. A brand-new game engine (that incorporates the Havok 3.0 physics system) and the team's extensive RTS experience are shaping up to be a definite winning combination.

The eye candy in this self-described next-generation RTS is an end in itself, but the technology behind Company of Heroes doesn't stop there. As in war, the battlefield in this title is a living thing. Everything is destructible, and explosive ordinances do much more than add a little splash damage to attacks. "The manipulation of the battlefield plays enormously into how you engage your enemy, set up emplacements, move your troops, and approach hostile targets," says Wilson. "Blow apart a building and your enemy can't hide behind or in it. Knock down a wall and it will no longer impede the passage of your troops. Large debris like destroyed tanks provide effective cover from enemy fire." Anyone with a strategic bone in their body can immediately

see the impact this will have on gameplay, and it's a very good thing.

Another little piece of tech that should help Company of Heroes push the envelope is the unit AI. We've all heard the claims by developers before, about how your troops will react intelligently this time, and you won't have to babysit them. This time, though, it just might be the real deal. "One of the main goals of Company of Heroes is to do away with the robotic and lifeless units that plague other RTS games like hordes of shambling zombies," says Mosqueira. "Our squad AI allows the player to work on commanding his squads, not babysitting them." With these strong words, and the evident quality of Company of Heroes, we're willing to give Relic the benefit of the doubt on this one.




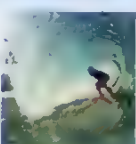
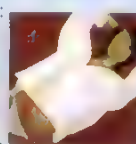
Helpful tech is one thing, but making a fun game requires much more than that. Fortunately, Relic has this one more than covered. "Strategic decisions will be done quickly and easily, and in every case can be made with the player never having to take their eyes off of the front lines of combat," says Wilson. "We want the player to spend their time deciding what their units do, not telling them the details on how to do it." As RTS players ourselves, that's exactly what we wanted to hear. For our money, Company of Heroes belongs near the top of any list of anticipated 2006 PC titles. ■ ■ ■



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XBOX | PC

Stubbs the Zombie in "Rebel Without A Pulse"

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ASPYR MEDIA > DEVELOPER WIDELOAD GAMES > RELEASE FALL

I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE

Although there is still a lot we don't know about the next generation of gaming, one thing we've noticed is that zombies seem to be one of the most popular concepts for the next round of games. We're certainly excited to see these next-gen undead in all their detailed glory, but that doesn't mean we're going to overlook the living dead happenings still scheduled for the current generation. Specifically, we're talking about Stubbs the Zombie in "Rebel Without A Pulse," the game that puts you into the rank, decayed shoes of a very unusual protagonist. As Stubbs, a murdered traveling salesman who returns from the dead to wreak havoc on the futuristic town built over your shallow grave, you must use your zombie abilities to do battle with the living.

Shambling, suave, and as strong as Tiny Lister, Stubbs is not your garden-

variety zombie. Far from mindless, Stubbs has a host of unique abilities at his disposal, including deadly zombie gas, a detachable arm that can be used to possess people, and his most crucial power: the ability to create an army of walking corpses by eating people's brains. The victims are reborn as zombies, who can then be coaxed into doing Stubbs' bidding. Although you have some rudimentary control of the horde, not all zombies are as smart as Stubbs, so don't expect incredibly sophisticated squad controls. Stubbs can draw the mass around himself for protection, and even use them as cannon fodder. By getting behind another zombie, Stubbs can actually shove the brain-dead walking corpse forward into the waiting barrel of a farmer's shotgun, giving himself an opening to attack from the side.

This is obviously a fairly different

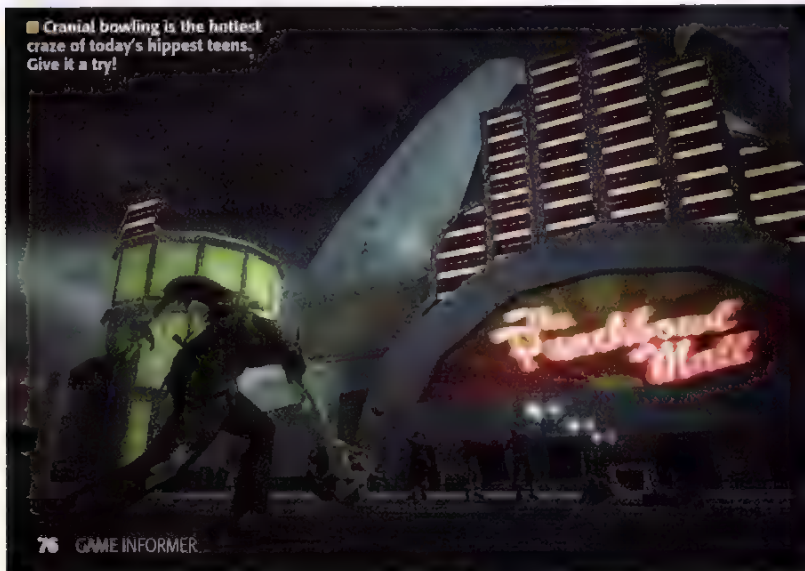
type of action game, but it's one that promises as much humor as it does gooey, blood-spurting gore. Set in 1959, the main story concerns Stubbs taking on the inhabitants of Punchbowl, Pennsylvania, the ultra-modern town built over his grave. The idea of an undead traveling salesman coming back from the grave to take on the citizens of a town built around an antiquated vision of the future is simply ripe for comedy. This fusion of zombie horror and humor has worked in the past (give yourself a thousand bonus cool points if you include *Night of the Creeps* in this category), and we're confident that the crew of ex-Bungie employees at developer Wideload Games can find the right balance. Zombies may well be the wave of the future, but we can't wait to see how they fare in this vision of the past. ■ ■ ■

STUBBS' SOUNDS

To fit with Stubbs' late-fifties setting, the soundtrack will feature several of the biggest hits of the day. But rather than use the original recordings, each track has been re-recorded by some of today's most popular indie rock bands. Even if the game's blend of humor and gore isn't your thing, the unique soundtrack may be.

- Ben Kweller: "Lollipop"
- The Raveonettes: "My Boyfriend's Back"
- Death Cab for Cutie: "Earth Angel"
- Rogue Wave: "Everyday"
- Cake: "Strangers in the Night"
- The Walkmen: "There Goes My Baby"
- The Dandy Warhols: "All I Have to Do Is Dream"
- Oranger: "Mr. Sandman"
- The Flaming Lips: "If I Only Had a Brain"
- Clem Snide: "Tears on My Pillow"
- Rose Hill Drive: "Shakin' All Over"
- Milton Mapes: "Lonesome Town"
- Phantom Planet: "The Living Dead" (original song)

■ Cranial bowling is the hottest craze of today's hippest teens. Give it a try!



■ Granting driver's licenses to the undead was not the smartest move the DMV ever made



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PlayStation 2



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UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

24: The Game

A DAY IN THE LIFE

■ 24 features some explosive action! No, wait! Crap, that was horrible! Forget we ever said that



While we were intrigued by the announcement of Sony Europe's Cambridge Studio's 24: The Game, we wondered if the show could be translated into a game that was anything more than "Jack Bauer running around with a gun." The announcement that Sony America had passed the game on to 2K Games didn't do much to assuage our doubts.

However, some recent hands-on time with the game revealed that, if nothing else, Cambridge is attempting to capture all the elements of the show, not just the gunplay. Although the first level of the demo was exactly what we expected — Jack disposing of terrorists with an assortment of weapons — subsequent stages revealed some unique mechanics that expand elements of the show into real gameplay.

After capturing a suspected terrorist in the action sequence, we entered an "interrogation" level, an interactive cutscene of sorts. By selecting one of three types of questions (calming, coaxing, or aggressive), you finesse a line depicting the suspect's stress level into

the "cooperation" zone. Once you've broken him down, hitting circle will close the deal (in this case, by placing Jack's gun at the terrorist's head). With this information, Jack ran off to foil an assassination attempt on the President, and we took the role of Sean Walker, a CTU technical agent. As Walker, we used a satellite picture of the motorcade route and thermal imaging to mark targets in the area that had a clear shot at the President. Finally, with this data uploaded into our GPS, control switched back to Jack and we sped towards the President, played out through a hectic driving sequence.

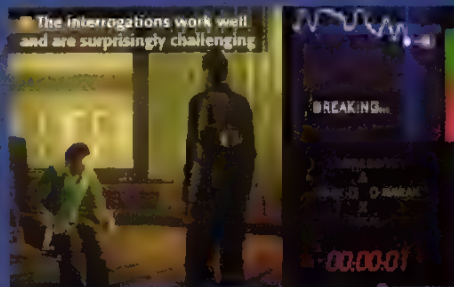
Although the game clearly needs some polish (especially in the gun combat sections), it does do a good job of incorporating clever touches from the show, like split-screen cutscenes, the famous beeping digital clock, and cliffhanger endings at the end of each hour of gameplay. It's nice to see that Cambridge Studio has a few new ideas for the action genre, and we're certainly curious to see how this thriller turns out. ■■■



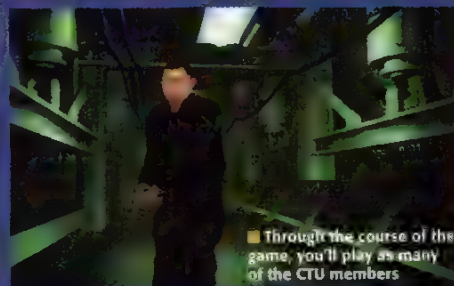
■ With satellite imagery, you'll be able to spot targets for the ground team



■ The driving segments, although not spectacular, have a solid and fun feel

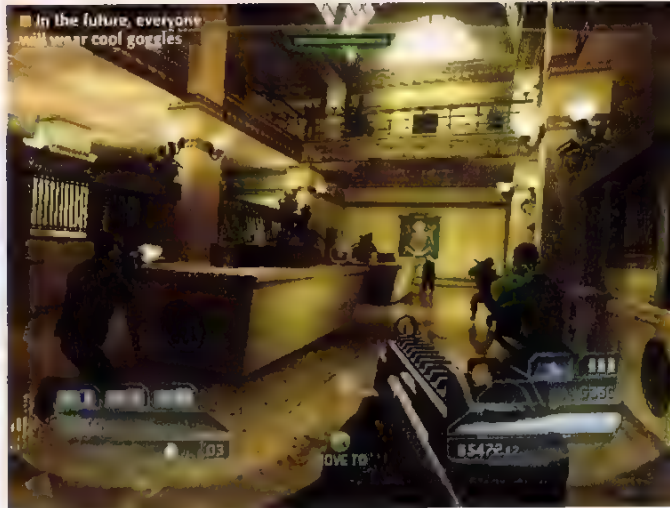


■ The interrogations work well and are surprisingly challenging



■ Through the course of the game, you'll play as many of the CTU members

■ In the future, everyone will wear cool goggles



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Rainbow Six: Lockdown

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (PS2), 1-PLAYER ACTION (XBOX/GAMECUBE) (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL/RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 6

TERRORISTS BAD

Rainbow Six 3 (and its expansion, Black Arrow) provided some seriously awesome gaming on Xbox, both online and off. The PS2 and GameCube versions, however, were a bit lacking. We're hoping that this next installment in the series will bring the other versions up to par, and it looks like it definitely has a chance. Particularly in the PS2 online arena — with a feature list that rivals SOCOM on paper, Ubisoft is hoping to play with the big boys.

From what we know, Lockdown's single-player won't do anything drastic to rock the boat other than sprinkle some dedicated sniper missions throughout the campaign. Cool, yes, but we all know that online is where it's at with this series — and that's exactly where Lockdown is prepped to deliver. Co-op is a major item, with all of the non-sniper levels available for split-screen (on PS2 at least), Xbox system link, and online for both systems. And the competitive multiplayer has an even beefier feature set.

Friends lists! Player-created clans

(called squads, because we're not sick enough of that word yet) with their own insignia and chat lobbies! Ranked ladders! Stat tracking for yourself and your squad as a whole! Voicechat! If you want it, it's here — and on PS2 as well as Xbox. Furthermore, you'll be able to customize and power up your online avatar in the Xbox version to do more damage and unlock new goodies. This shouldn't undermine the balancing, though. "The balance is an issue that we really had to heart throughout the project," explained lead designer Phil Therien of Ubisoft's Montreal studio. "Power comes in the form of diversified skills and abilities that let you approach a level with more versatility."

However much the poor GameCube is being left out in the cold in terms of online capability, Lockdown looks like it'll make for a heck of a play when it ships in a mere few weeks. We'll be sure to let you know our final thoughts on the matter in the review next month. ■■■



■ Hmm, is there any game that's used this sort of helmet-like HUD before?



Big armies look much cooler in the new graphics engine



Don't think about the scale of these things - it'll only make your brain hurt

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Sid Meier's Civilization IV

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES > DEVELOPER FIRAXIS GAMES
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER

WORLD DOMINATION FOR EVERYONE

The Civilization franchise has long been the final word in the empire-building genre. Come September, the next installment of this seminal series will hit store shelves, and looks to be well on track to reminding everyone of just why Sid Meier's Firaxis Games is one of PC gaming's most acclaimed developers. Barry Caudill, senior producer at Firaxis, took a moment to answer some of our questions about Civ IV, and we came away from the interview even more excited about the title than before.

The first thing you'll notice about Civ IV is the brand-new 3D look. And, while this will undeniably make the game easier on the eyes, it serves a larger purpose as well. "The biggest benefit of the switch to 3D is that we finally can make a WYSIWYG [What You See Is What You Get] world. Our goal is to make it possible to get the vast majority of the information you need from the main view," explains Caudill. This will translate into much less time spent digging through sub-screens to get the info you need - simply glance at an area on the world map, and you'll have a general idea of the situation. Between this and the revamped RTS-like interface, Civ IV should be a much more streamlined experience, especially for new players.

On the strategy side, according to Caudill, "We really wanted to expand the choices and allow people to make the best possible government for their situation." To allow this, Civ IV sports the Civics system: As you progress through the tech tree, you'll unlock a total of five choices in each of five categories (Religion, Economy, etc.). Though this type of framework has often lead to imbalances and clear optimal setups, Caudill doesn't see it as an issue for Civ IV. "Soren Johnson, our lead designer, is constantly balancing the attributes to make sure that all of the

choices are viable in the right conditions and that there are no magic bullets." In a game that consists of almost nothing but pure strategy, these are comforting words indeed.

Single-player should be better than ever with the new AI for computer-controlled opponents on top of everything else. "Depending on your opponents, you can have drastically different challenges and you will probably be unable to use your favorite strategies in all situations," says Caudill. Requiring varying strategies will go a long way toward giving Civ IV even longer legs than its predecessors, no doubt. For more multiplayer-oriented players, Civ IV has been designed from the ground up with online play as a core feature - a first for the series. Honestly, it sounds like this title has it all.

If all this still isn't enough to satisfy you, an entire slew of additions to the mod support will ship with the game or shortly afterward, as well. The Python scripting language, SDK to allow tweaking of the AI, and many more tools will be available to modders to make their designs come to life. We will be greatly surprised if a robust community doesn't form rather quickly. If you thought that Firaxis was too comfortable with its place as a triple-A developer, think again - Civ IV looks primed to plant the Sid Meier flag on top of the strategy heap once again. ■ ■ ■



Great People like this prophet can give your empire a needed boost



For some reason, other players tend to get nervous around large military build-ups



Keep in mind that every single unit onscreen has animations running constantly as well



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

L.A. Rush

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
> **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY SAN DIEGO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 10

THIS GEN'S BULLIT?

Rush is a good old boy of an arcade franchise trying to make the switch to a sassy, fun-loving, console-worthy racer. Midway's San Diego studio is taking the franchise from San Francisco and tailoring the experience to sessions longer than what \$1.50 in quarters will buy you, and it has a lot of plans to claim your living room.

Never known for its complexity, the Rush series made its name in arcades for fast-paced and high-fueled runs through the hilly California metropolis. With the console version, more complex game modes and over-the-top action are planned. When talking about the current market for racing games, senior vice president of marketing Steve Allison tells us, "It's always the same,

[but] we couldn't do that with Rush coming back in a very competitive genre, so we took the chance on investing in the big open-world game."

We had some hands-on time with a demo level of the title, and it's obvious from the first moment of play that the world of L.A. Rush is truly destructible and entirely open to exploration. With a story premise that starts when your stable of high-end customized rides is stolen, one of the gameplay modes involves getting your cars back. Allison says, "You have multiple bad guys chasing you down and you can weave in and out of traffic or trees to get them off of your back. It's always a cool moment when you see one of your pursuers taken out by

slamming into a tree you led them into."

During all of the game's modes, the world offers an unprecedented amount of destruction. The Hollywood sign can be crashed through piece by piece, the Santa Monica pier offers a literal carnival of large-scale objects to be toppled, and ritzy Beverly Hills can be picked apart tree by tree and overpriced retailer by overpriced retailer.

Our favorite mode at this point is the Cruise option. Obviously inspired by Sandra Bullock's bus-driving adventures in *Speed*, the requirements are that players keep their cars from getting totaled while staying above a specified speed (usually around 55 miles per hour) until they reach the end point. These sections throw some

intense action your way, while keeping up a required pace that the free roaming exploration can't match.

The game certainly is worth watching on its own high-speed racing merits, but it's also making news because of a high-profile contract with MTV. The channel's *Pimp My Ride* crew will make appearances as the customizers of choice for players and the game will also benefit from MTV's connections in the music world. It's certainly not new for a game to have product tie-ins, but this could be one of the biggest mergers of game, television, music, and lifestyle of this console generation. ■ ■ ■



touching is good.



ADVANCE WARS DUAL STRIKE

The twisted Black Hole Army has returned, and this time you'll need both screens as the war rages on two fronts. It's up to you to command your troops on the ground, in the air and at sea as you engage in dual-screen combat in order to fend off the deadly invasion.



NINTENDO DS

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Cartoon Violence



■ While the Prince's speed kills aren't terribly nice, the Dark Prince's are brutally efficient



■ Added elements to the combat make attacking multiple foes a joy



■ Sneaking up offers more one-hit kill options



■ The new Dark Prince design

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

Prince of Persia 3

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL > RELEASE DECEMBER 1

BAD INFLUENCE

An old, grizzled man tells the tale with a raspy voice and sharp breaths marked by a sickly rattling deep inside his chest. Babylon is under siege, its people on the run, and an otherworldly army is flowing through the streets, burning everything in its path. The Prince of Persia's home city is nearly a lost cause and he has been, for lack of a better word, infected by the Sands of Time. This infection creates a brutal split in the Prince's psyche, leaving him with a growing core that is nothing short of ruthless.

The as-yet-untitled third entry in the Sands of Time saga has a mix of old and new characters -- the ancient man described above is the sage from Warrior Within, and the Dark Prince is an all-new playable character. This unconscionable warrior is a personification of the Sands of Time's infection in the Prince. Dark, cruel, and brutal, his control over the Prince will be absolute if left unchecked.

While the mechanism of changing between the characters (as well as the look of the Dark Prince) has been in a state of flux since work on PoP 3 began, the team has devised an interesting mechanism to explain these dual personas. Holding back the Dark Prince is a matter of pure will, meaning that while the Prince has the level mindset of a warrior, the personification of his baser instincts can't come forward. But if a situation strikes terror or hatred in our hero, the Dark Prince then becomes the dominant force.

From a gameplay standpoint, the differing facets of the Prince have more in common than just the goal to save Babylon. They will both use the acrobatic fighting style made famous in the first game, as well as the Speed Kill system introduced in this entry. The main advantage the Dark Prince has (besides his bloodlust) is his Daggertail weapon. A mid-range chain-like device, it is used for exploration as well as grabbing, moving, and throwing enemies.

Historically, the Prince is a nearly silent character. The conflict within his own psyche could lead to some interesting banter as the sly, conniving, but strangely charming Dark Prince makes increasingly aggressive bids to become the dominant personality in the Prince's physical body. We've heard that multiple endings are possible for this finale, and with these dueling main characters, we're excited to see the differences between these conclusions. ■ ■ ■



■ Projectile weapons are back to complement the expanded combat system

TOP SPIN

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PSM



on the tour.



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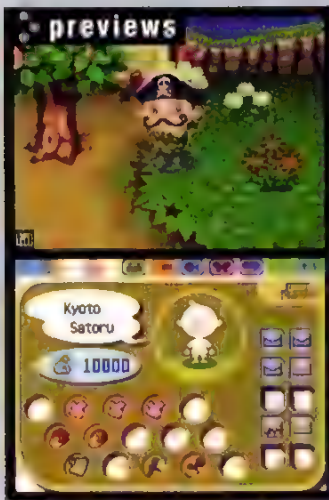
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PlayStation 2



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NINTENDO DS

Animal Crossing DS

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO
> RELEASE FALL

SPIN THE GLOBE

On paper, Animal Crossing was the stupid-est game design in ages. Action-packed highlights were fishing and reading letters, digging up fossils and shopping for wallpaper. But it turns out that Nintendo's cloister of savants are just a lot smarter than we are — these ridiculous activities in Animal Crossing's universe are compelling, joyful, and alarmingly addictive. Now they're heading to DS with added features we wished had been there from the start, and one option sadly omitted.

The biggest of the title's additions is online play. In practice, this means that any four people (each in a Wi-Fi hotspot anywhere in the world) can visit and explore the same village. Item trading, chatting, and "accidental" head and shovel contact are each possible with either the stylus controls or GC-derived



and lots of new clothes options, there is one thing missing — classic NES games.

These smatterings of nostalgia quietly integrated into the console version were a great reason to keep coming back to one's village, but we suspect that the future Revolution-offered downloads of such titles probably has something to do with the decision to leave them out.

Despite this one omission, the added features are more than enough to get excited residents back in line for one more go with the animal neighbors, and the crucial return of our favorite supporting character — Mr. Resetti. ■ ■ ■

■ A neat graphical effect where it looks like the village is built on a large sphere makes the geography a little more interesting. Characters are moved either with the d-pad or by stylus strokes that dictate both speed and direction



button shortcuts. The only things limiting which villages you can explore are that the creator must be on your Friends list and use the same keyboard language as yourself.

While the game is packed full of extra household items, better pattern design with the stylus,



GAMECUBE

Battalion Wars

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER KUJU ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 19

MY BATTALION IS BIGGER THAN YOUR SQUAD



Previously known as Advance Wars: Under Fire, Battalion Wars is gearing up to bring a little something different to the GameCube in September. Developed by Kujū Entertainment, this hybrid action/strategy title retains the cartoony goofiness of the Advance Wars franchise but doesn't look to feature any recognizable characters, story, or anything else besides the general tone of the series. Hopefully, Battalion Wars will be able to carve out its own niche regardless of its lack of a big name.

In Battalion Wars, you'll take direct control of one unit in your strike force at a time, but with the ability to switch to a different soldier or vehicle (or, on bigger rides, specific positions like driver and gunner) on the fly. The rest of your troops will follow you around as best they can, or follow simple "charge" or "stay put" orders. Fortunately, you'll be able to give these orders to specific units on an individual or group basis to meet whatever strategic needs are

most pressing. Clearly, this new style of gameplay requires a new control scheme, and Kujū is confident that it has crafted one that fits the bill.

In the course of roughly 20 missions, you'll have to use the troops given to you to tackle various objectives. Escorts, base assaults, and hectic hold-the-breach scenarios will all need to be conquered in order to beat the game. We don't know yet if there will be any more to the gameplay beyond the campaign, other than the fact that multiplayer was sadly scrapped due to the lack of necessary development time. Given Battalion Wars' imminent release date, though, we'll be sure to give you the whole scoop soon. ■ ■ ■





Here's an exclusive first look at Ultimate Silver Sable. If Marvel chooses, the company may even use her in the comics



The combat engine now features charge-up attacks

UNLIMITED ENABLED
PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Ultimate Spider-Man

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER TREYARCH > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 13

FOR THE TRUE BELIEVERS!

Comic book fans can finally breathe a sigh of relief. Tobey Maguire is not actually Spider-Man. After getting caught up in the movie hoopla, Activision is turning to the material that truly matters, the comics. While the geek inside of us would love to see a game based on the wall crawler's long running continuity in *Amazing Spider-Man*, the life that comic phenoms Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Bagley has infused into the new *Ultimate Spider-Man* series is hard to deny. For those of you who are not familiar with Marvel's *Ultimate* line, it's a modern day retelling of classic character origins and stories. This line has become so popular, in fact, that the first issue of *Ultimate Spider-Man*, which released in 2000, is already valued at \$175.

Marvel is taking its time letting this new universe develop, which shows the great focus that is being applied to developing the characters. Bendis didn't waste any time offing Gwen Stacy (this time at the hands of Carnage), but Peter Parker is still in high school, and it doesn't look like he will be graduating any time soon.

To capture the art style, Treyarch is applying six lighting sources to the character models, including something the developer likes to call "3D Comic Inking Technology," which really highlights the muscle tone of the characters. Treyarch is also blending animated sequences with flashy comic panels to bring the story to life. When all of these elements come together, it feels like Bagley's artwork has come to life on your television. The story that the game tells is completely new,



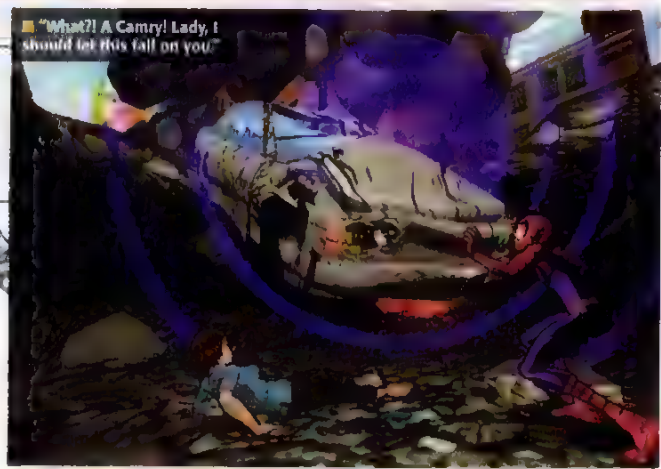
As Green Goblin soon learned, gasoline is not a suitable deodorant

taking place shortly after the *Venom* arc. As it turns out, Peter still has remnants of the *Venom* suit inside of him. Interestingly, whenever Peter gets close to Eddie Brock, he is crippled by intense migraines. The suit wants to become whole again. To give gamers the full effect of the story, the gameplay will switch between both Spider-Man and *Venom*, given the particular situation. Who knows, this tale may even reveal further details as to what happened to Peter and Eddie's fathers.

Rather than applying a comic coat to the city that it created for the *Spider-Man 2* game, Treyarch has built a new version of New York that expands further into Queens, allowing players to travel to the Parker homestead, the school, and of course, Peter and Mary Jane's secret hangout. The game will also feature the largest rogues gallery in any super hero game. You'll have to dodge Rhino's wild tossing of cars in a used car lot, take the charge out of Electro's blasts in a Times Square showdown, and follow Green Goblin through a high speed tour of the city. Marvel, with the consent of Bendis, has granted Treyarch the unique privilege of creating new characters for the *Ultimate* universe, one of which is Silver Sable, a weapon expert who hunts down criminals. You'll also see a number of cameos outside of the Spider-Man family. Here's hoping for Thor!

Regarding the differences in characters, Spider-Man is equipped with all of the web swinging activities that we've seen in the previous games, but he can now spring off of walls during combat and charge up his attacks. His movements are very graceful and true to the comic series. *Venom*, on the other hand, is more akin to a living wrecking ball. He travels great distances by performing super locomotion jumps and wild tentacle zips. He can also dig his hands into walls to ascend skyscrapers, carelessly ripping chunks of concrete out as he goes. Since his suit needs to feed, *Venom* has the ability to suck up and drain the life from frightened citizens.

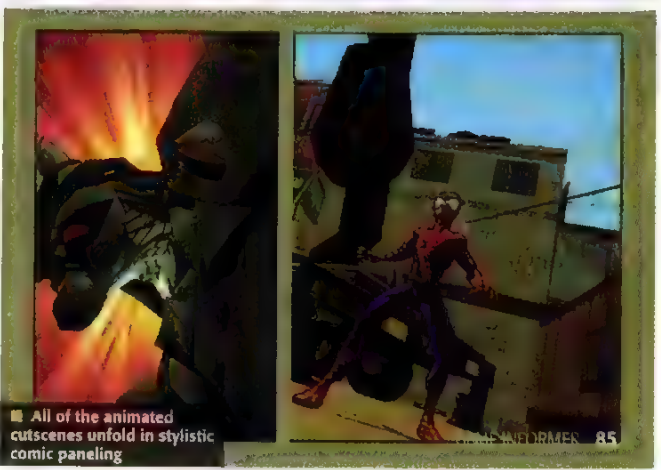
The combination of Brian Michael Bendis' sensational writing and Treyarch's ability to capture the arachnid's acrobatic finesse has our spider sense tingling in anticipation of this game's September release. ■ ■ ■



"What?! A Camry! Lady, I should let this fall on you!"



Unfortunately, there will be no eating of brains in this game



All of the animated cutscenes unfold in stylistic comic paneling



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT > DEVELOPER PHANTAGRAM > RELEASE SEPTEMBER

WAR!

It may not have been a runaway hit, but many gamers received a pleasant surprise last year when Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders hit the Xbox and presented players with a new take on classic

hack 'n slash warfare. Adding an engaging RTS element to frantic button mashing, the title provided a depth to mass warfare that has been sorely lacking in similar titles like Dynasty Warriors. With Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes, this unique series is delivering a sequel with more characters, new units, and expanded features where it needs them most – online multiplayer.

One of the strangest things about Crusaders was how a title seemingly built for expansive multi-army clashes only supported four players online. Fortunately, Heroes now has expanded the battlefield to include six players over Xbox Live in variety of game types. The Troop Battle focuses more on the RTS elements, allowing you

to direct the actions of your different units and play off enemy weaknesses to achieve victory. The Hero Battle is centered on the action of your chosen champion, and the Invasion mode is more of a team-based affair.

These game types, along with the addition of more participants, are shaping up to make Heroes the exciting online experience that many didn't find in Crusaders.

Of course, more players means more characters to choose from. Heroes will introduce a stable of seven new main warriors (several of which you may recognize as sub-heroes from the

previous game) to drive the single-player campaign forward. From the darkly sexy Morene with her creepy wrist tentacles to the noble knight Walter, each character has different combos and special abilities to mow down the opposition. There should be no shortage of foes to smite, either – the game's engine can support 200 soldiers onscreen at once, so every wild swing of your weapon is bound to draw blood from someone.

Amid an overabundance of generic action titles, we are certainly happy to see that Kingdom Under Fire is continuing its attempts to add dimension to the largely repetitive genre. Even though Heroes uses the same engine as its predecessor, it appears to have improvements in several key places, filling in the gaps of The Crusaders while providing a few new thrills for series fans and action-game enthusiasts alike. ■ ■ ■

Who Misses Gerald? Anyone?

Players who got attached to the warriors from the last game won't have to abandon them entirely. Though Heroes' story campaign centers around different main characters, the four commanders from The Crusaders (Gerald, Lucretia, Regnier, and Kendal) will be playable over Xbox Live and in custom missions. In fact, astute fans will notice that these classic combatants even have a few new tricks up their sleeves, so it should be worth revisiting them to see how they stack up to the new crop of heroes.

COLOSSEUM -ROAD TO FREEDOM-



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Attack in 360 -dodge, parry and execute your opponent, but never surrender.

LIVE TO FIGHT.

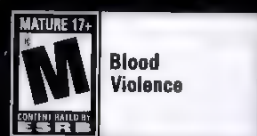
Create your own gladiator based on birthplace, philosophy and beliefs.

Dress to kill - buy and sell weapons, shields and armor or snatch them in combat.

An Action RPG Available Now

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PlayStation 2





PHOTOPHILE

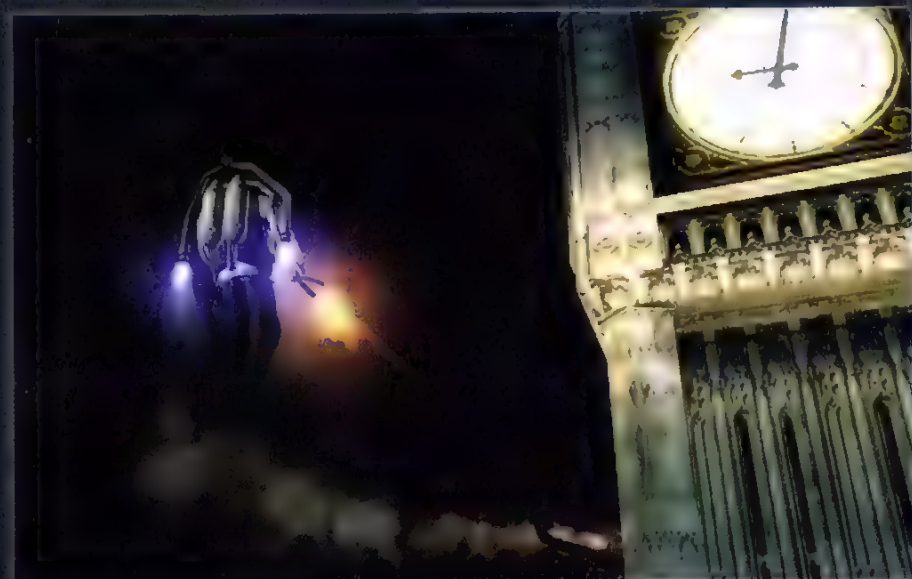
Mini Previews With Big Pictures



PC

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War – Winter Assault

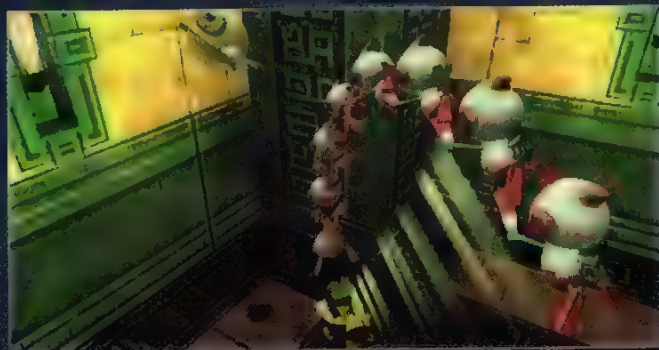
Relic Entertainment's fine RTS, Dawn of War, was a pleasant surprise last year, offering some amazing real-time strategy action both online and off. This expansion pack, due out in September, is looking more than worthy of the Dawn of War name. The couple of missions we recently played attested to the quality of the single-player game, which consists of two separate campaigns this time around. Multiplayer also sports some nice improvements like an observer mode and friends lists. Between these additions, another race (the Imperial Guard, a defense-oriented faction), and new units for all the original races, Winter Assault is shaping up to be a no-brainer for anyone who enjoys Dawn of War's excellent brand of sci-fi mayhem.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

From Russia With Love

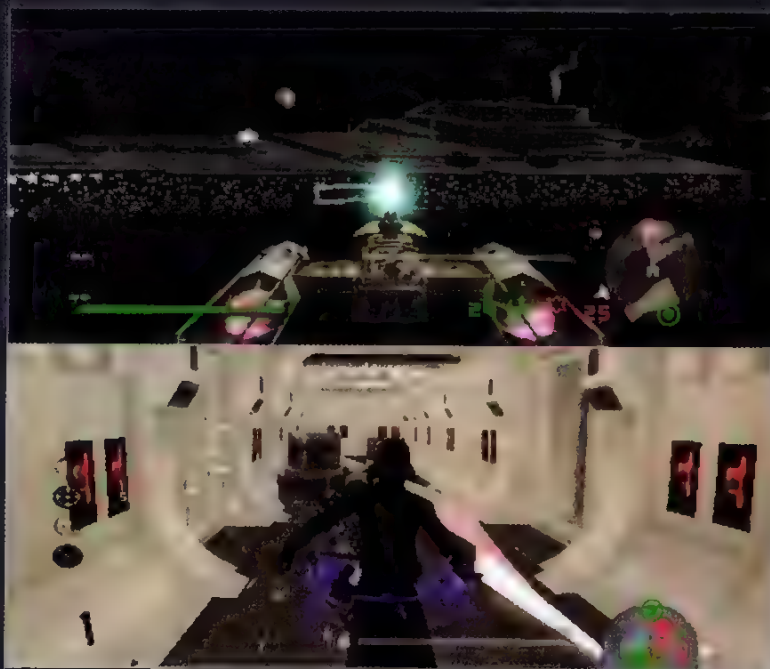
We recently got a look at EA's From Russia With Love, and the game is coming along pretty well for a November title that we've been told is not even pre-alpha yet. We witnessed some of Bond's close-quarter melee moves, where you are prompted to hit certain buttons as they flash on the screen. Like previous Bond titles, players will get points for handling themselves in a manner befitting of James Bond himself, such as using the pinpoint targeting of Focus mode. As for the driving segments, EA told us that there will be around four segments integrated seamlessly into the levels, with tire punches, rocket launchers, and machine guns bolstering the horse power of your Aston Martin. Unfortunately, a lack of online multiplayer seems to be the one hair out of place in this Connery confection.



PSP

Tokobot

Tecmo has a quirky new idea headed to the PSP in November with the release of Tokobot. First glance draws quick comparisons to Nintendo's Pikmin franchise, but Tokobot has its own special flavor that defies easy classification. You play as Bolt, who must utilize his discovery of some tiny advanced robots to help him save the world. Fine. So the story seems a little silly, but it's the gameplay that has us intrigued. You'll start with a team of six tokobots, and your roster will expand as you advance. Your little mechanical buddies can be combined in different ways to let you move through an area, turning into a ladder at one obstacle or wings at another to cross a perilous gap. Your ultimate transformation is into one giant robot! If Voltron's Blazing Sword doesn't make an appearance we might cry.



PSP

Star Wars Battlefront II

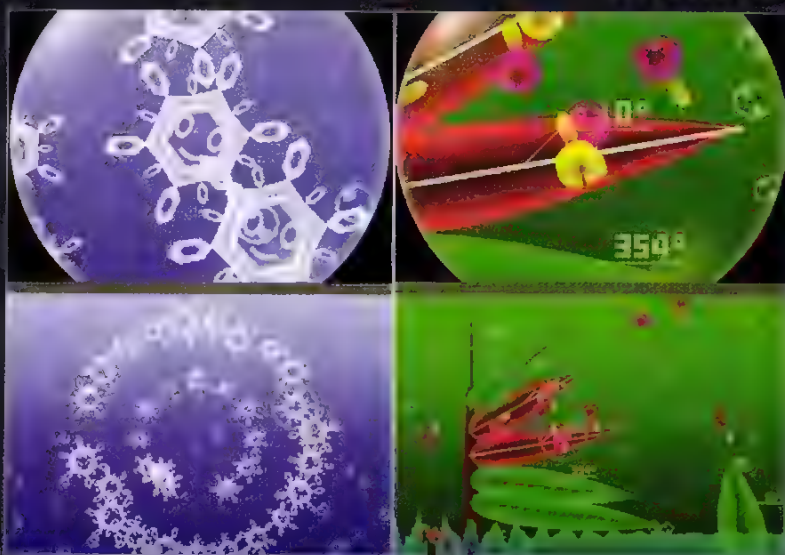
Epic space battles in a Jawa-sized package? That's exactly what Savage Entertainment and Pandemic Studios are working to deliver with the upcoming Star Wars Battlefront II for PSP. Settings like the Death Star and the Tantive IV (a.k.a. The Rebel Corpsewagon) will be the new arenas for the mini-campaigns that decide the fate of the galaxy. Plus, just like the game's console brethren, you'll be able to take control of Jedi characters, including the intimidating Darth "Noooo!" Vader. Of course, the PSP's Wi-Fi capabilities will also provide the perfect chance to turn your friends into enemies by blasting them in four-player co-op and competitive modes. While the game's November release date may seem far out, in the meantime you can let go your conscious self and reach out with your feelings or something. When was the last time you made time for that, huh?



NINTENDO DS | PSP

Black & White Creatures

If you wish that the cuddly little pup you raise in Nintendogs had the power to rain down suffering upon hapless worshipful villagers, then Black & White Creatures may be the perfect game for you. Coming late this year for DS and PSP from Masjesco, Creatures (based on the Black & White PC series) lets you raise god-like beings and put them on a path towards good or evil. Ten different creature types are included, as well as a host of game types. Our favorite is Creature Dance, which has you train your pet to get funky! The DS version even has specific touch screen features, like a "God's Hand" cursor and custom tattoo design. The way you raise your creature will ultimately determine whether villagers fear it or worship it. Think of it like "Nintendogs."



NINTENDO DS

Electroplankton

If you buy only one microscopic organism music creation title this year, make it Electroplankton! Seriously, though, Nintendo is on some other s--- with this one, a strange DS title made in collaboration with Japanese visual artist Toshio Iwai. Basically, by using the DS stylus, players can manipulate the movements of 10 different types of Electroplankton which produce their own unique sounds when they interact with each other and the environment. Strange concept aside, it's actually very intuitive and more than a little addictive in practice. For more musically adept players, one type of Electroplankton can even be used to sample new sounds and layer them over drum loops, making this an almost endlessly deep experience on the DS.



PLAYSTATION 2

Kingdom Hearts 2

Disney characters don't mix well with everything (that Snow White/John Waters movie was terrible. Or would be, if it existed), but they fortunately get along well with Square Enix. As Kingdom Hearts 2 draws closer to its holiday release, more information about the game's new settings and features have been falling into fans' greedy hands. When we saw it at E3, we were treated to scenes in which Sora was performing a dual attack with Auron, talking to Captain Jack Sparrow, and keyblading his way through a heartless army composed of, literally, hundreds of soldiers. These tantalizing events give us high hopes for this sequel, though all signs seem to point to another conspicuous absence of characters from *Pete's Dragon*. Travesty!



REVIEWS

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Advance Wars: Dual Strike

Nintendo's Intelligent Systems studio stands tall among the best of the best strategy developers, and this latest project simply adds to the legend. Advance Wars: Dual Strike takes great advantage of the Nintendo DS hardware and continues the stellar Advance Wars legacy in perfect style. Simply put, this is easily one of the top strategy games in recent years (including PC titles!), and is not to be missed. Check out the review of the new must-have game in the DS library on page 112.

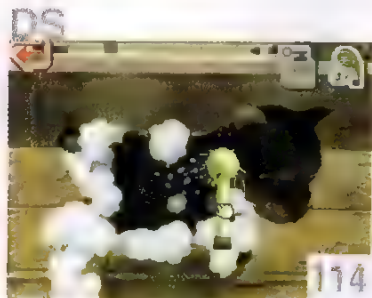
Our crack (or crackhead, we can never decide which) review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put 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** Gary, Indiana. A desolate wasteland devoid of charm and full of toothless hillbillies trying to sell you discount raccoon fur and empty Shasta cans.

- > **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**

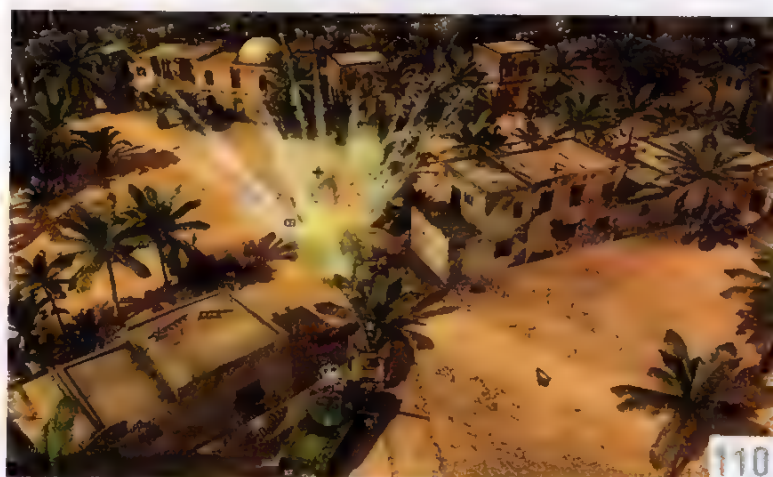
- High** - You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.
- Moderately High** - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
- Moderate** - Good for a few months or a few times through.
- Moderately Low** - After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
-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



Nintendogs



Death Jr.



Codename: Panzers – Phase 2

Sure, we only reviewed one PC game this month due to an extremely slow release schedule, but fortunately it's a respectable title. Codename: Panzers – Phase 2 is a good old-fashioned RTS, which does a fine job of treading the fine line between realism and fun. From the deserts of northern Africa to the bitter fronts of eastern Europe, Panzers puts you in control of both sides of World War II. A tried-and-true concept to be sure, but Panzers' nicely polished gameplay and emphasis on scouting and maneuvering makes it more than worthwhile. Lock and load over on page 110.

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pg. 97

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

This is where all breaks down when you form games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

C CONTENT RATED BY ESRB CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 3 AND OLDER	M MATURE CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS 17 AGES AND OLDER
E EVERYONE CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 6 AND OLDER	A ADULTS ONLY CONTENT SUITABLE ONLY FOR ADULTS
E ESRB RATED CONTENT SUITABLE FOR PERSONS AGES 10 AND OLDER	RP RATING PENDING PRODUCT IS AWAITING FINAL RATING
T TEEN 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 (= interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Everlasting Throatjabber – An unpopular candy that, when sucked, gives the same sensation as playing Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

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.

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 hires 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 Crusius.

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL.

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

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



BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: One of the most ambitious Maddens in a long time. There's something here for everyone.

> Graphics: There are tweaks here and there, but you'll notice some of the animations and the new presentation more.

> Sound: You'll still turn off the commentary after a few games.

> Playability: I wish defensive line moves weren't mapped to the right analog, and that the Truck Stick had more moves.

> Entertainment: NFL Superstar is a blast, and the on-the-field fixes make this game solid.

> Replay Value: High.

Second Opinion 9.25

When EA secured the exclusive rights to the NFL license, many speculated that the company would rehash the same Madden game year after year. Delivering a spine-shattering hit to all of the dissenters, EA has tapped the creative well and thrown a near-perfect spiral with this year's installment. The new passing system, which factors in the quarterback's line of sight and throwing placement, is easily the most impressive new feature that this series has brought to the gridiron since it made the jump to 3D. The running game has also been retooled. The new back juke is incredibly effective and something that I've craved since I first saw Walter Payton use it to leave a DB in the dust. Unlike Randy Moss, it's also nice to see that receivers actually put forth an effort in converging on the ball. NFL Superstar mode will keep you playing for seasons on end and is definitely worth a look, but it may be a bit too comical for hardcore football fanatics. This series may have shown signs of exhaustion last season, but EA has really turned things around, creating what I feel is one of the best entries yet. —REINER

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Madden NFL 06

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

GET DRAFTED

The Madden franchise's years of iteration have brought it to this moment: A point where seemingly the only place for the venerable series to go for evolution and inspiration is the next generation of systems. The truth, however, is that Madden 06 is far from being a current-gen dead end. If anything, the development team at EA Tiburon has used the fact that Madden is a well-worn franchise (and the only NFL football game on the block) to channel their energy into some exciting new directions.

As a hardcore franchise player, I am surprised how absorbing NFL Superstar mode is. Although not terribly deep, it ignited my imagination and stands as a compelling alternative to the grind of Franchise Mode. Surprisingly, NFL Superstar in some ways offers more depth than Franchise due to its day-to-day nature. I liked having to practice between games in order to keep my attribute levels from dropping, as well as going through the mode's more lighthearted aspects. I can't wait for this mode to receive a more extensive treatment in the coming years, and I imagine everyone will be having fun with it. What did you score on your IQ test? Where were you drafted?

When I wasn't auditioning for a voice part in *Conservation Act*, an animated film about some farm animals (and the ensuing hilarity), I was learning to become a better QB. The optional Vision Control mechanic helped me scan the field instead of locking in on one receiver. While I love

the idea, I have a few issues with its implementation. Although you do take a penalty for throwing the ball to someone you aren't directly looking at, I was surprised how often I was able to complete a pass to a receiver without looking at them at all. Moreover, this mechanic was not useful in looking off safeties like in real life, nor did they react much if I stared down one receiver. This feature needs more work before it performs to its potential. One of the few new gameplay features that worked exactly as it should was the new positional throwing. It was very helpful to toss a ball high, low, or to the side to avoid it from being intercepted. Otherwise, I found that the offensive line slide protection and defensive backs' shade coverage option subtle to the point that I didn't use them much.

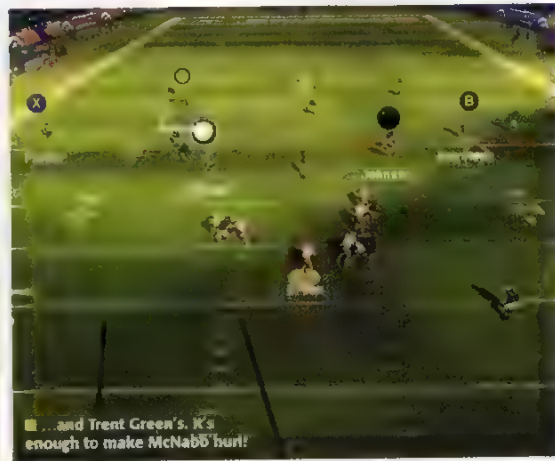
One thing that fans will notice about the gameplay, however, are some of the fixes that have been made. Receivers can once again jump for the ball, and they will be much more aggressive in blocking out cornerbacks and coming back for

the ball. Also, DBs can no longer defend against an oncoming ball unless they turn their head (at least on the middle AI slider level). Unfortunately, offensive line blocking (particularly for running backs) is still hit or miss.

The growing of this franchise sounds inevitable, but one only has to remember last year's Madden to know that this isn't always the case. Although the series could certainly improve some gameplay problems here and there, we're not only seeing its betterment with this year's installment, we're seeing real growth. Whether it's the first steps of an online franchise via your EA Locker or your life as the equivalent to Budweiser's Leon in NFL Superstar, Madden's exploration of new areas is not to be missed. —KATO



Notice the stark difference in McNabb's vision cone...



...and Trent Green's K's enough to make McNabb's hurl!

The edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Like many sports titles, the amount of precision and control is often in the controls, and what your innate preferences are. I found that the Xbox's Q3 Vision lock-on with the right trigger was superior to using the PS2's R2 button. However, on the GameCube you have to use the c-stick, there is no secondary method. If you have a PSP, I'd definitely go with the PSP edition, where you can unlock and play your PS2 franchise games on the handheld.

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-game rankings.com

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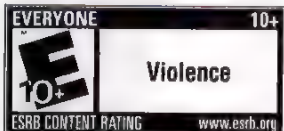


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PlayStation 2



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BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: A vampire cowboy rides a vampire horse with the intent of seeking revenge on other vampires. The only thing missing is vampire tumbleweeds

> Graphics: A bit behind the times in terms of detail, but where else will you see horses explode into mounds of red goo?

> Sound: Very disappointing. The supporting cast is annoying as hell and the western soundtrack is completely underplayed

> Playability: Hit detection is a bit questionable, but the play nps at breakneck speeds and the action really couldn't be much more explosive

> Entertainment: A fun little shooter that delivers something that you haven't seen before

> Replay Value: Moderately High

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Darkwatch

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX) (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
> PUBLISHER CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** HIGH MOON STUDIOS **> RELEASE** AUGUST 16 **> ESRB** M

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE BLOODY

Since the dawn of civilization, a clandestine federation known as the Darkwatch has protected mankind from the insatiable hunger of the undead. Wearing the hides of their vampiric enemies as cloaks, the Darkwatch move through the black of night, blending with the shadows, striking fear into the dark souls that run the plains. Even the man with no name would soil himself if he got a good look at these dark drifters, and you are their surest shot.

Unlike most shooters, Darkwatch has a face that gamers can get behind. Main character Jericho Cross never utters a word, yet through actions like tearing into the neck of his faithful steed to feast, he becomes a gaming legend. He's conflicted, torn between his vampiric temptations of flesh and the humanity buried within his desire to keep this world

pure. Rather than just watching which way Cross turns, players actually have a hand in his fate. Your interaction in this regard isn't nearly as intricate as it is in Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, but you will have to make critical decisions like purging a woman's soul of infection, or simply sucking it dry for your own personal benefit. Depending on which way you lean, you will be rewarded with unique powers for both the dark and light sides. He may be undead, but there's a lot of life in this character, which interestingly, has relevance in the gameplay.

Although each weapon that Cross wields is extravagantly detailed, the selection of arms is actually quite ordinary. The rifle, which looks like a guitar that Iron Maiden's mascot Eddie wouldn't mind wailing on, doesn't shoot fire or anything cool like that. It's just a plain old rifle. While most of the game utilizes the traditional FPS conventions that we've seen a hundred times over, it does veer off of the beaten path to give you something that you haven't experienced before. Holding down the trigger to fan the pistol (thus making it shoot three times faster) is a cool idea that works well, and being able to drop to the side of your horse for cover is just flat-out badass. Cross' vampiric strength allows you to effortlessly leap high atop buildings and canyons, which

in turn gives the game a unique vertical dynamic. Darkwatch also pushes you to use melee attacks whenever you can, which is something I never expected from a shooter. It's also not shy about turning up the heat and burying you in a sea of chaos. Many of the missions have tense "protect the Alamo" or "do whatever you can to survive" vibes to them, which makes for some great sweat-inducing moments.

The multiplayer component does a great job of tapping into this title's unique features. The verticality in many of the maps hones in on the double-jump maneuver, producing wicked aerial firefights and some of the most amusing rocket launcher deaths around.

The game definitely has a lot of great things going for it, but it's far from perfect. I watched many crossbow shots that were clearly off of the mark magically hit the target. Although Darkwatch rewards you with powers, you never really have to use them. It would have been nice to see some stage designs that tap into this aspect of the game. Furthermore, by the end, you'll grow tired of beating on the same grunts.

You'll be seeing sickle-wielding zombies in your sleep. Speaking of repetition, each level could carry the title "rickety old ghost town." The atmosphere is certainly taut, but there's no denying that the entire game feels like one big zone.

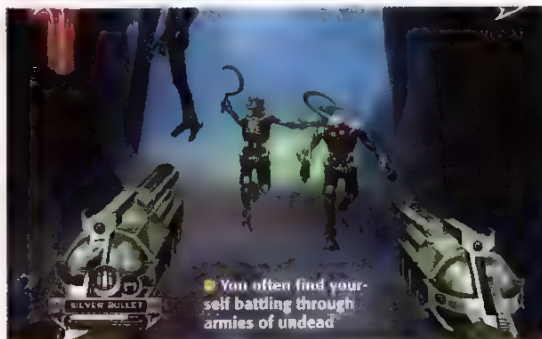
In terms of gameplay quality, this may be another middle-of-the-road shooter, but the unique premise sets it aside from everything else out there. If you've grown tired of science-fiction or military-based FPSs, Darkwatch is definitely worth sinking your teeth into. —REINER

Second Opinion 8.5

I've been waiting for a supernatural-themed western shooter ever since my ritual to bring Jack Palance back from the dead went horribly awry, so naturally I've been eagerly anticipating Darkwatch. Fortunately, the game turned out quite well, and you don't have to be a horror or western aficionado to enjoy it. At its core, Darkwatch is all about the action. With nicely polished gameplay, cool weapons and powers, and a great cast of villains, Darkwatch is a fun, fast-paced shooter that's tough to put down. There are some truly inventive scenarios, and the horseback sections are a hoot. Its flaws aren't many, but do prevent it from meeting the high bar established by other shooters: story mode is short (it can be beaten in one or two long sittings), Jericho Cross lacks personality, and multiplayer is a little wobbly. Regardless of its few shortcomings, Darkwatch is definitely recommended for shooter fans looking for something with a little different flavor. —JEREMY

The Edge
 When All Games Aren't Created Equal

There are a number of differences between the two versions of the game. Xbox is outfitted to take advantage of online play. It boasts 16-player online and 4-player spitscreen, whereas the PS2 only offers two-player spitscreen. While the PS2 loses out in this area, it soars elsewhere. Unlike the Xbox, the entire Story campaign can be played cooperatively through spitscreen. There's also an exclusive horseback mission called War Train, and this is the only version with Splinter Grenades.



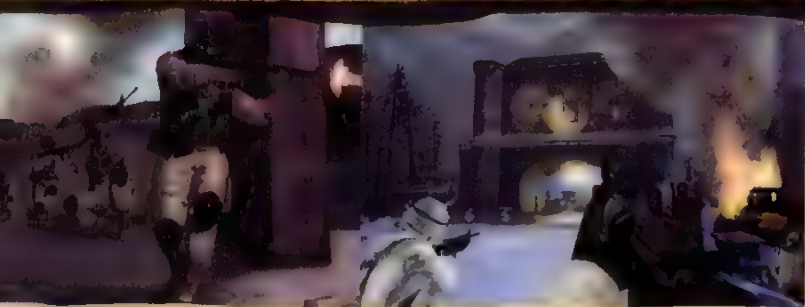
You often find yourself battling through armies of undead



Cross cannot regenerate health or double jump while in sunlight



OUR GAME DEVELOPERS DON'T RELY ON IMAGINATION.

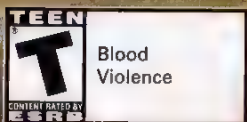


Advance from recruit to Special Forces in Career mode.

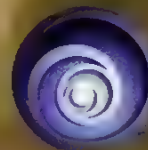
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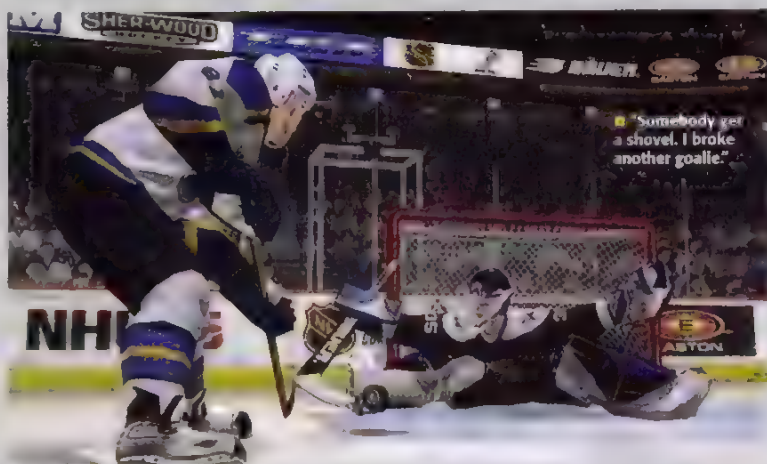
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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NHL 06

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX, GAMECUBE) (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 13 > **ESRB** E



ANOTHER SNAPPED TWIG

Locked out for 301 days, the National Hockey League and the NHL Players Association have finally inked a new labor agreement. The question is, do people still care about hockey? I sure as hell do, and I'm sure there are at least a dozen people living in Canada who are counting the days until the puck drops again as well. With interest waning to the point that curling may have a larger fan base, I was hoping that this year's batch of video games would give the NHL a much-needed jolt. Unfortunately, this effort from EA just drives the sport further out of your mind.

Before I drop my gloves and completely beat the tar out of this game, EA did manage to fire a few rockets directly toward the net. Scrums along the boards feel more natural, and you can really feel the weight of the players being factored into the physics (especially on the turning radius). Being able to substitute created teams into Dynasty mode is another nice

perk (so long, Mighty Ducks!). Now comes the bad news. In an attempt to add some flash to the offensive game, EA has altered the functionality of the right analog stick. Rather than performing manual stick movements as it did last year, now when you tap this stick in a direction, your player will unleash an elaborate special move. This is the kind of stuff you want to see in an All-Star

game, not a game that is tied with two minutes left in the third period.

You never want your hockey game to draw comparisons to figure skating. Eric Daze just nailed a triple lutz, and now here's his shot! Adding to my disdain, some of these flashy moves actually shoot the puck for you. This could be, in my humble opinion, the biggest load of crock in all of video game sports. Why am I even holding the controller if the game is going to do everything for me?

I better conclude this review before I break something.

This is a complete turnaround from last season, and a direction that I hope EA steers clear of in the future. The user should always have control over the most basic of gameplay functions.—REINER



BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** All about the razzle-dazzle. With huge rebounds and automated deke shots, scoring is through the roof and skill is on the way out

> **Graphics:** Smoother movements and greater depth in the player creator, but little else has changed

> **Sound:** Even the commentators sound depressed and unfulfilled

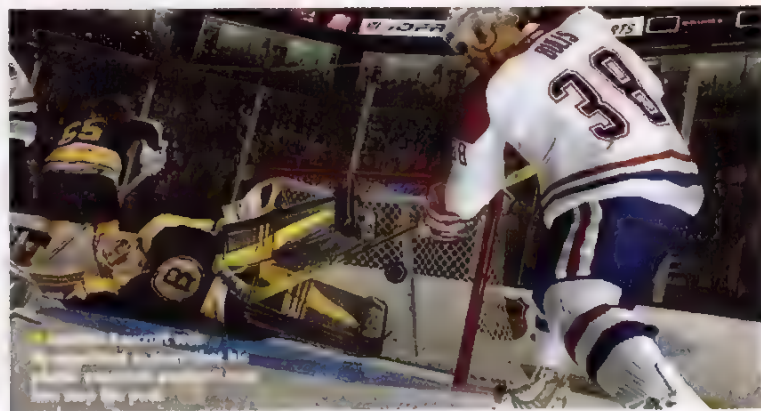
> **Playability:** The turning radius feels more authentic, but replacing the manual stick movement with flashy deke maneuvers removes a lot of strategy from the game

> **Entertainment:** Still a decent play, but for fans of the series, it will feel like Chns Pronger just smashed your face on the ice

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

The biggest loser in the NHL strike between the rich owners and rich players was — of course — the fans. Well, the losing streak continues. NHL 06 is not the triumphant return of hockey. Although hooking and tie-ups along the boards are better, and the goalie animations are sweet, I don't like any of the new analog moves. Gone is the freestyle puck control via the right analog. In its place is a system of automatic jukes that are ridiculous in their need to showboat. Some even shoot the puck for you, which isn't always what I want to do when I simply want to get by a defender. Hockey may be back, but I guess it's like they say, "It's gonna get worse before it gets better."—KATO



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NHL 2K6

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** KUSH GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 1 > **ESRB** E

HOCKEY FOR THE SOPHISTICATED

As EA Sports entertains the idea of integrating moves from the NBA dunk contest into its NHL title, developer Kush Games has made the wise decision to invest in content that actually fits into the context of professional hockey. A new icon passing system may not sound as exciting as a flashy behind-the-back wrist, but it is easily the most meaningful addition that has been implemented into either of these games.

Icon passing is nothing new by any stretch of the imagination, but being able to rifle the puck in succession from player to player, then as the goalie starts to cheat to one side, send it back across the ice to a winger that is wound up for a one timer is a thing of beauty. This system allows for quick, crisp passing and opens up the gameplay to a handful of new offensive strategies. Tapping the button dishes the puck, double tapping it sets up a one-timer. If you can work the passing lanes, you can conceivably set up four passes and a shot all within the blink of an eye. You can also call up the on-the-fly coaching to alter your offense mid-strike. For instance, you

can pass along the perimeter, then when a defender falls out of position and a gap appears, have a wing crash the net for a deadly blast near the crease. This system may sound overly complicated, but it's actually quite easy to grasp.

Kush has also made strides to give enforcers some clout this year, but I found that I really had to go out of my way to intimidate the opposition. The idea of throwing off a shooter's game by checking them into the boards repeatedly certainly brings a smile to my face, but Kush needs to find a way to make this tactic work without having to put your game plan on hold. Additionally, Kush may want to look into different avenues for new material in Franchise mode. If the effectiveness that coaches have throughout the season and necessary team practices are the best that this team can bring to the table, it really needs to apply the precaution: "Warning: You may die from yawning if you use this mode."

There's no question about it, when it comes to action on the ice, Kush's game delivers a lights-out blow to EA's. This is the hockey game to get this year.—REINER



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Delving into the finer of points of passing may seem like suicide for a developer, but Kush found a way to make this aspect of the game exciting

> **Graphics:** The goalies steal the show, not just because little else has changed visually, but because their animations are smokin'

> **Sound:** The new commentators are insightful (and Canadian), but the delivery of the dialogue is often very choppy

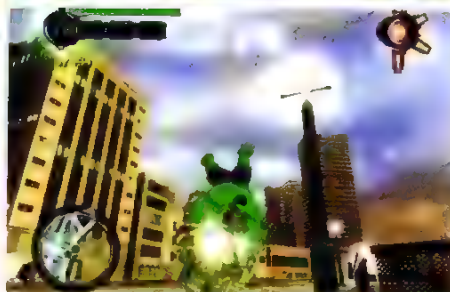
> **Playability:** Passing is finally fun! No seriously, it really is. The remainder of the game has been fine-tuned as well

> **Entertainment:** This is the only hockey game that is worth playing this season. Kush really did a bang up job

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.75

2K Sports would have you believe that this year's game is a significant step forward for the series due to all the additions. And yes, the on the fly coaching, icon passing, and intimidation via enforcers are cool. However, it's not light years from last year. The defensive AI can be particularly frustrating in its effectiveness. Work has been done on the players' movements, but they are still floaty, like they aren't carving into the ice. Although EA's game takes stick dekes to an unwanted extreme, I also feel that 2K's moves on this front are almost too slight to have any effect on play. It seems the more the NHL changes, the more things stay the same.—KATO



BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

- > **Concept:** You are the Hulk. Act accordingly without remorse
- > **Graphics:** Finer details suffer at the expense of being able to obliterate practically everything (though most buildings stubbornly remain standing)
- > **Sound:** Hulk smash! Brilliant roars, explosions, and thuds accompany you every crushing step of the way
- > **Playability:** Tons of combos and special moves can be pulled off with ease, though the way you scale buildings needs some serious work
- > **Entertainment:** A chain of hilarious and implausible mayhem that is only broken by the necessity of the uninspired story missions
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately High

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** AUGUST 3 > **ESRB** T

I LIKE HIM WHEN HE'S ANGRY!

Throughout my gaming career, I've stood amidst roaring flames and smoldering wreckage with police sirens blaring in the distance more times than I can count. I've carried out incredible displays of unbridled destruction in innumerable ways, though the aftermath is typically the same regardless of the game. As I played *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, I once again found myself surrounded by screaming civilians and the twisted shells of vehicles, but I can say without reservation that I've never had this much fun getting there.

The key to this wildly entertaining smashing spree is the way it totally transforms the player into the unstoppable force of nature that is the Hulk. Taking a cue from *Spider-Man 2*, the simple act of moving from place to place is immediately thrilling and puts you directly in the ripped shorts of a superhero; the Hulk's titanic leaps from rooftop to rooftop will make you feel like a disgruntled freight train of annihilation. And jumping is only

where the fun begins.

Ultimate Destruction's smooth controls allow you to effortlessly execute an array of special moves that, if performed by anyone but the green machine, would seem totally ridiculous. However, the game manages to make surfing on a flattened bus through traffic, whipping flailing soldiers at helicopters, and smashing cows with other cows feel like entirely natural and intuitive aspects of the gameplay experience. Smashing cows! While you only have a measly two environments in which to exercise your might (with a few smaller ones later on), every second that you spend on a free-roaming rampage or doing clever side-missions (soldier baseball should be a professional sport) is mindlessly entertaining and filled with cackles of delight. Unfortunately, when you aren't doing those things, you run into some problems.

In order to balance the playground elements, the game utilizes story missions that advance the paper-thin plot and unlock new powers for

purchase. In these missions, the game abandons its best features in favor of standard "go here, destroy this" objectives that rarely require the Hulk to use his full range of powers. In fact, using your advanced abilities will often make you more vulnerable to never-ending salvos of missiles that frustrate your every attempt to do cool stuff. Hulk's expanded arsenal is perfect for indiscriminate carnage, but it is ill-suited for the precise and focused combat required by these tired tasks and occasional one-on-one boss fights.

By zeroing in solely on the catastrophic potential of the Hulk (no Banner stealth garbage this time), Radical has succeeded in providing a depth to demolition that similar sandbox titles have yet to achieve. If you can tolerate the emptiness and imbalance in the story-based missions, *Ultimate Destruction* will have you embracing the berserk, violent creature that lurks just beneath the surface of your mind. Not like that do-gooder Bruce Banner. Wuss. —**JOE**

Second Opinion **8.75**

If you're talking about what makes the Hulk a great character, Radical's new game has it in spades. I can't think of a more cathartic and enjoyable vent for rage and stress than the one offered as you hurtle through the city of the green goliath's latest adventure. *Ultimate Destruction* profoundly succeeds at exactly what a sandbox game like this should; it makes the gamer feel a sense of total freedom to move, act, fight, and play. Simultaneously, every one of the side challenge missions have the ability to make you smile, whether you're batting soldiers into the sea or piling cars on the top of a building. The main story missions are certainly fun for a while, but they end up serving mainly as an excuse to break more stuff—which, incidentally, is just fine with me. Nonetheless, as the game continues even the endless explosions can start to wear a little thin, and a couple of frustrating boss battles slow down the action. With that said, you owe it to yourself to check out the lawless havoc that is Hulk, since that onscreen chaos is exactly what makes this one of the best comic book adaptations to make the switch into the interactive world. —**MILLER**



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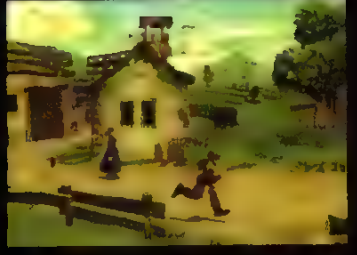
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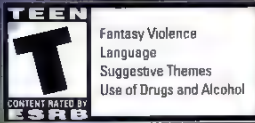
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PlayStation 2





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MULTI QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Beatdown: Fists of Vengeance

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAVIA > **RELEASE** AUGUST 23 > **ESRB** M



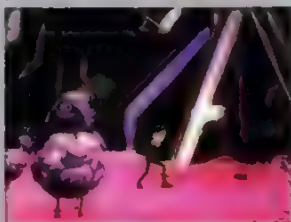
BOTTOM LINE
5

Every bit as generic as its title implies, *Beatdown: Fists of Vengeance* is a dumb, forgettable game and nothing else. A 3D brawler with a few additions to the basic face-punching formula, *Beatdown* reaches the low bar it aims for, and some people will certainly appreciate its mindless button-mashing content. Unfortunately, there's nothing to overcome its simplistic core; the graphics are muddy, the characters are bland, and the "mature" language sounds more forced than a nun dropping the f-bomb. It looks like *Beatdown* is going to have a very short trip to its final destination: the bargain bin. —**JEREMY**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
> **PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE
> **DEVELOPER** HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** JULY 12 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE
4.5

Oh Charlie, what have you done? I appreciate the fact that this is a licensed product aimed at a young audience, but this has to be one of the worst games I've had the displeasure of playing in quite some time. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* puts the "Wonka" back in "wonky controls" and the "Willie" back in "willie, willie owappy wevel design." Honestly, an early sequence that has Charlie turning robots into giant hairballs and then rolling them into a series of vents was as frustrating and pointless as gaming gets. It's interesting that the opening sequence features Charlie desperately chasing a dollar bill down the street, which is a great metaphor for the fact that this game exists in the first place. —**MATT**



The humor is so willfully "edgy" that it comes off as mean-spirited and cliché.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Outlaw Tennis

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** HYPNOTIX
> **RELEASE** JULY 26 > **ESRB** M

RACQUET ATTACK

The *Outlaw Golf* series has been known for delivering a healthy dose of adult-only humor and over-the-top gameplay to the normally staid links. Now, developer Hypnotix has set its sight on another snooty pastime: tennis.

Like its sister title, *Outlaw Tennis* aims at giving players an alternative to traditional sims like *Top Spin* and *Virtua Tennis*, cranking up the action and replacing real-life pros with a host of fictional hot babes and ridiculous studs. This approach succeeds in some ways, and fails in others, resulting in a mixed bag of racquet action that is ultimately unsatisfying.

On the positive side, the core tennis gameplay is fairly well done. Using mechanics familiar to anyone who's played similar titles, you can execute slices, top spin, and flat shots, as well as thundering serves and overhead smashes. Fair enough. They've also added some new twists, both good (a cool turbo button) and bad (a spectacularly bad fighting engine that lets you duke it out during matches). However, in its thirst for adrenaline, I think Hypnotix went a bit too far in attempting to make tennis more fast-paced. The players,



The AI can baseline forever, so charging the net is basically your only workable strategy.

although they are nicely animated and make good adjustments to the ball, feel overly twitchy and hard to control, making it too easy to overrun shots or get out of position. In addition, the AI seems almost infallible during service returns and baselining, meaning that the only real way to win is to charge the net on every point.

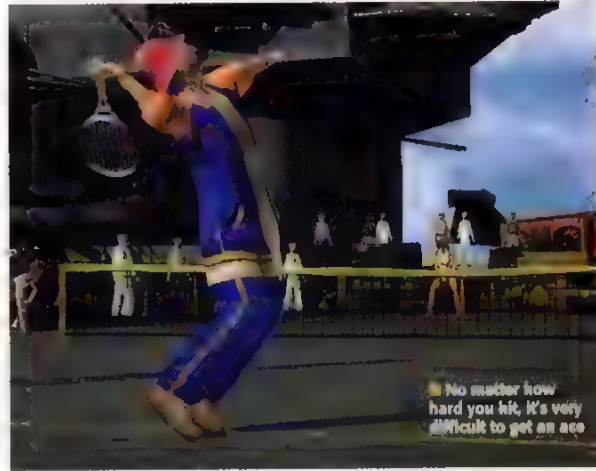
The other half of the *Outlaw* equation, the humor, left me cold. In this console generation, we've learned that video games can talk dirty, but if it's not going to be any funnier than this sub-*Maxim* frat guy humor, I'd just as soon they shut up altogether. The game seems to take a particular delight in humiliating its attractive female characters (low points include

a Native American woman being literally s— on by a bird), displaying a disturbing misogynistic streak. Now, I'm all for offensive humor that's actually funny, but *Outlaw Tennis*'s gags seem forced and stale ("Oh look! It's a white guy who acts like he's black! How outrageous!"). It's all the more disappointing considering that the normally hilarious Steven Colbert from *The Daily Show* does the voiceovers.

If you're a fan of the series, *Outlaw Tennis* might just be the game you're looking for. However, if it's top quality tennis you seek, there are better options on both PS2 and Xbox. —**MATT**



The turbo button can be useful in during slow balls.



No matter how hard you hit, it's very difficult to get an ace.

BOTTOM LINE
6.5

> **Concept:** A titillating tennis game for the *Girls Gone Wild* set

> **Graphics:** Good animations and good character models make this a nice-looking tennis title

> **Sound:** Bad music, some mildly amusing voiceovers, and "funny" dialogue that often falls flat

> **Playability:** Some of the gimmicks, like the fighting, don't do much for me, and the amped-up gameplay feels a bit twitchy

> **Entertainment:** Although I'm getting beyond tired with the *Outlaw* series' "edgy" schtick, the base gameplay is solidly mediocre

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

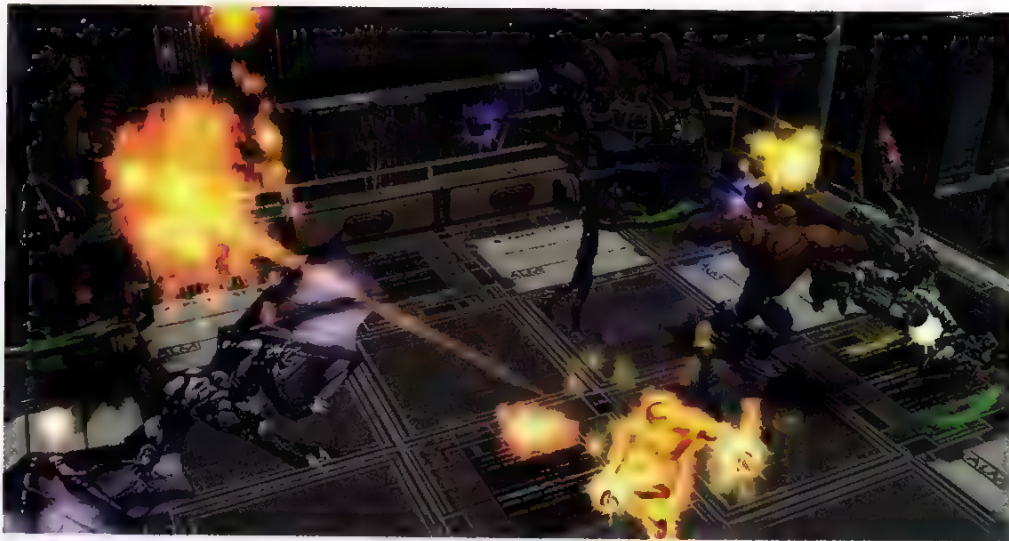


Second Opinion 6

As with the *Outlaw Golf* series, this game sacrifices the gameplay fundamentals of the sport for periphery kitsch that barely adds any fun. It needlessly complicates matters because the responsiveness and timing of your swing doesn't determine where you want to hit your shot (unlike in real life). Instead, you have to rely on the game to calculate and run stock swing animations that are often slow — especially when you're at the net. Here overheads are a crapshoot, and it's almost impossible to hit a ball if it's coming right at you. The game's reliance on the hand of divine intervention also includes annoying catch-up AI for when your opponents are down. In a final stroke of utility, *Outlaw Tennis* can't even strain spaghetti like a real racquet, so what's the use? —**KATO**



A little shot at Mortal Kombat?



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Fantastic Four

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** SEVEN STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JUNE 27 > **ESRB** T

FOUR CHARACTERS, TWO PLAYERS

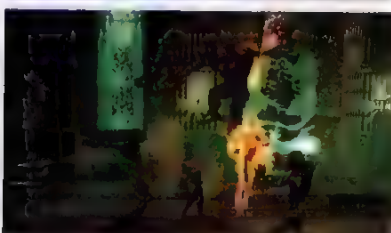
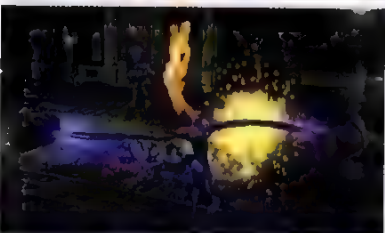
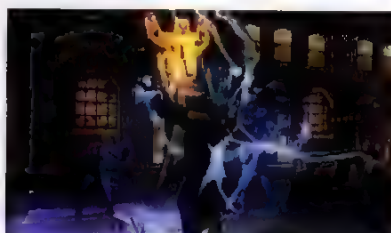
Years ago, the Fantastic Four were the first out of the gate of Marvel's super-teams. As Stan Lee's counter to the Justice League, they were different than heroes before them — no secret identities or hidden agendas. They were a family, and they worked together. Too bad you can't do that in the game, at least not with more than one friend. In what seems like a profoundly misguided step, four players can't play as the Fantastic Four.

On its own terms, beyond that initial gripe, I honestly think several hours of your life could be spent enjoying this game. There's certainly nothing here you haven't seen before, but the brawling superhero genre has seen far worse entries than this one. Powers and attack moves look quite sweet, and there really isn't any one character that shines above all others. All four have been well balanced, making it exciting to try each of them out. The relatively threadbare story gives at least a passable excuse to expand the movie plot so that several of the FF's more memorable villains can show up. There's also an attempt to include minigames where each character can exhibit

their skills by overcoming a particular obstacle. These little events end up feeling far too repetitive, especially the incessant computer hacking sequences, and all of them serve little use except to pull you out of the action.

There's an odd disparity between single player and co-op modes when you play through it. Taking on the game solo has the advantage of a nicely detailed and close-up view of the action with a decent camera throughout. Playing co-op, both of these advantages disappear as the view pulls back to what is usually a distant top-down perspective with consistently frustrating and wonky camera issues. However, it's a necessary evil for the joy of having a two-player mode, an inclusion that at least dulls the pain of not having a four-player game to enjoy.

A long list of unlockable secrets adds some decent replay potential, but it's debatable whether you'll really want to keep at it for that long. As a movie license, the game is certainly not the disaster it could have been. But as a re-imagining of Stan Lee's first classic superteam, it could have been so much more. —**MILLER**



BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Relive the movie plus several loosely connected plots as Marvel's first superteam

> **Graphics:** Backgrounds are pretty standard, but character animations and effects are terrific

> **Sound:** The movie actors bring their talents to bear with mixed results while a constant background drone pretends to be music

> **Playability:** For a brawler, there's a good mix of moves and powers that can be learned at a steady pace

> **Entertainment:** Like the movie — not as bad as you might have thought, but still not as good as you hoped

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **6.5**

There are a number of things that you can blame cosmic radiation for: three-legged frogs, Lindsay Lohan losing one hundred pounds in twenty minutes, and the arrival of country music. Nevertheless, not even harmful space rays can be held accountable for Fantastic Four not having a four-player mode. Sadly, the entire game is plagued by poor choices in design. It does boast nice balancing between the four characters, visually stunning powers for each, and fairly enjoyable button-mashing combat. However, the memories you'll walk away with are of the painfully generic levels, the uncooperative multiplayer camera, terrible minigames, and the desire to understand how you just fought dinosaurs, mummies, and robots all in a 15 minute span. The only dlobberin' that this game does is on your ego for playing it. Marvel's mighty first family has essentially been reduced to a poor man's X-Men Legends. —**REINER**

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These games (like Soccer, shown here) have a neat Superman II-like pane of glass effect.

PLAYSTATION 2

EyeToy: Play 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SCEE LONDON
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 16 > **ESRB** E

SPIRIT FINGERS FIND A HOME

Welcome to EyeToy: Play 2. Here you will find impressive technology seamlessly enabling madcap party game hijinks, instinctive multiplayer action, and simple everyday events transformed into creative gaming experiences. In short, it's a blast for those with a soul and a sense of humor, so vampires and self-important blowhards need not apply.

To my mind, sequels to party

games bring up two questions: if you already have the first entry, do you need this one; and if you've missed the boat, is the sequel good enough that you should jump on? In this case, my answer to each is definitely in the affirmative. To those with spirit finger experience (i.e. waving one's digits back and forth to select options with the EyeToy), there is more than enough here to bring the camera peripheral back into its place of glory on top of the TV. Newcomers will

either marvel at the tech or revel in the collection's easy fun.

A dozen new games have players salting fries and grating cheese as a short order cook or sawing wood and placing bricks as a crafty weekend warrior. There are also less real-world activities like defeating one serious hydra or collecting keycards while search cameras hunt for any body movement. It's nonstop wackiness, and while some games succeed more than others, there aren't any that I would call outright duds.

The Playroom has changed focus from trippy old music video effects into a series of tech demos and concepts pulled from the unbelievably creative Sony Europe offices. Cameo walks players through setting up a 3D model of their own heads, which then animates with different emotions and can be grafted into an in-game punching bag. Citrus Warriors puts wee fighters onto three pieces of fruit held by players, who move the fighters around the screen to attack. Are all of them fun? Not necessarily, but each is impressive and shows off what EyeToy could do for gamers in the future.

Being both forward-looking and instantly accessible is something that video games haven't pulled off in a long time. Play 2 succeeds handsily in each arena, and in doing so, earns a rightful place in everyone's collection. —LISA



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Make the EyeToy truly relevant again with a solid collection of minigames

> **Graphics:** Much improved from the earlier outing in both style and fidelity

> **Sound:** Generally forgettable quirky beats and bleeps, but they're not annoying either

> **Playability:** Customized sensitivity and faster selections make the whole experience better

> **Entertainment:** A laugh not for those playing, and maybe even more so for those watching their friends flail about

> **Replay Value:** High



Second Opinion 8.5

Sony's EyeToy: Play 2 evokes the spirit of the early days of the video game industry better than almost anything on the market today. Like those early arcade and home console innovators, the developers at Studio London seem to be having a ball, taking their new toy and thinking of the crazy things they can do with it. While the technology behind the game is impressive (even allowing players to make detailed 3D models of their faces), EyeToy: Play 2 expands on the promise of the original, with contests that are more intricate and infinitely more playable than the first edition's EyeToy. Play 2 offers real innovation in the guise of a damn fun party game. —MATT

PS2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

Graffiti Kingdom

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
> **PUBLISHER** HOT-B
> **DEVELOPER** TAITO
> **RELEASE** JULY 28 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE

6

Calling a game "charming" is sometimes the equivalent of saying that a heinous psycho hose beast has "a good personality." Graffiti Kingdom (the follow up to Magic Pencil) follows this formula — it seems conscious of the fact that it has awful controls and branddead combat, so it overcompensates with a nauseating quirk factor. The easy-to-use creature creator is fun, and it is extremely satisfying to watch your demented aberrations come to life (especially in versus mode), but everything else about it is just plain no good. —JOE

PLAYSTATION 2

Armored Core: Nine Breaker

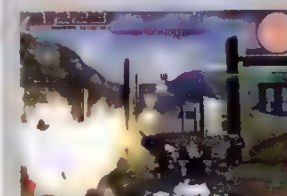
> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** AGETEC
> **DEVELOPER** FROM SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 9 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE

6

If you want to play something that feels like an expansion pack without an original game at its core, Nine Breaker is the perfect choice. The latest Armored Core title has no story mode at all, instead focusing only on versus combat (without online functionality, of course). The intricate mech customization that has always been the heart of the Armored Core series is still intact, but in this case the heart is trying to pump blood to severed limbs, hemorrhaging entertainment amidst stale arena combat and dull training challenges. —JOE



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ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org



GAMECUBE

Mario Superstar Baseball

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NAMCO > RELEASE AUGUST 29 > ESRB E

SOMEBODY BENCH THAT PLUMBER

Call me old school, but even in this day and age where developers are making great strides to capture the authenticity of the sport, I still feel that *Baseball Stars*, a game that released for the NES in 1989, is one of the most enjoyable baseball titles out there. Nowadays, we have different timing-based meters that determine release point, trajectory, and accuracy. We even have to keep an eye on fatigue and composure. Pretty soon we'll have to make sure that the players are eating healthy meals and paying their taxes on time. Whatever happened to the day where you could just tap the button to throw the ball, then in a bid to make the batter look like a two-bit chump, change its trajectory mid-flight?

When I heard that Mario was stepping up to the plate, the nostalgia in my blood started racing. Nintendo had already delivered entertaining arcade-style gameplay for *Mario Tennis* and *Mario Golf*, and it only made sense that the same development philosophy would be applied to the diamond. True enough, *Mario Superstar Baseball* is a flashback to the golden age of video game baseball. Balls cut on a dime and dip in and out of the strike zone, batters can lean onto their back feet to charge up their swings, and you never know when a fielder, who is giving chase after a lazy fly ball, will be knocked unconscious by a ravenous Chain Chomp.

The duel between the batter and pitcher rekin-

dles the skill and trickery that made *Baseball Stars* a blast to play. Pitchers have an arsenal of junk to unleash, including character-specific techniques like Mario's ability to throw a fireball that rips through the strike zone before you can even get the bat off of your shoulders. Since the ball is always twisting and turning, batters have complete freedom to reposition themselves in the box. Each pitch is an exercise in trying to deceive your opponent — such as crowding the plate, then when the ball is thrown, backing out, extending your arms, and getting the barrel on the ball. Whether it's the first out that you take or the thousandth, the thrill of batting doesn't diminish and is the highlight of this game.

A nice swing may turn some heads, but in the grand scheme of things, it doesn't account for much. When the ball is put into play, you'll feel like assaulting your game with the rage of Kenny Rogers. Fielding is so mechanical and stiff that you'd think Nintendo was trying to make a sequel to *Base Wars*. The batting and pitcher mechanics convey the thought that the development team spent months polishing them to perfection. On this note, you get the feeling that fielding was thrown into the mix a week or two prior to the game hitting retail shelves. Simply said, it's absolutely atrocious.

Base running is another area where you just have to lean back and scratch your head in confusion. Players don't retreat on fly balls (that's right, for the

first time in twenty years of video game baseball you have to do this yourself), and the icons on the map don't accurately depict where your players are on the base paths. A player may look like he's reaching second, but in actuality, he's a good five steps away. Nice.

While I would like to say that Nintendo needs to send this game down to the minors, the amount of depth that is provided is so insubstantial that it might get booed off of the field at a tee-ball game. Rather than focusing on what baseball is all about (such as playing a ton of games in a season), you simply must win a handful of games against familiar Mario characters, then battle Bowser for a trophy. If you win, you unlock another difficulty level. This mode makes the NFL season seem long. How pathetic is that? Adding greater disinterest to the mix, most of the characters that you unlock are erased when you graduate to another difficulty level. That's like stealing a lollipop from a baby. You can't give a reward, then snatch it away!

I never would have thought that Mario and Jose Canseco would have a lot in common, but they both tamish this great sport. I was really looking forward to an arcade-styled baseball game that revitalized the twitch gameplay of old, but in Mario's case, this is just a pipe dream. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** A throwback to yesteryear that ends up being more of a bean ball from the spotty gameplay than a sweet pitch to hit

> **Graphics:** All of Mario's friends are here looking the same as they always do. Outside of the crazy stadium designs, there really isn't much here that catches the eye

> **Sound:** Another killer score consisting of familiar Mario melodies

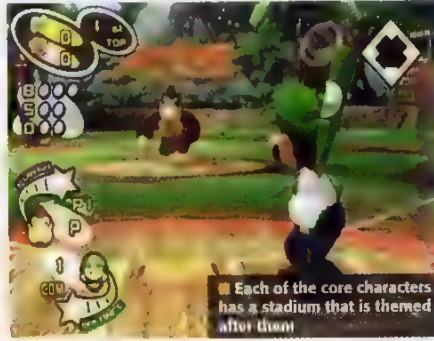
> **Playability:** Batting and pitching are executed quite well. The remainder of the game is as disgraceful as Bill Buckner

> **Entertainment:** Even if the kinks in the gameplay were ironed out, there isn't enough game here to warrant extended play

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.75

It seems that Nintendo feels it can throw Mario and the crew on any kind of sports field, include some power-ups and gimmicks, and the rest will just fall into place. However, this one-size-fits-all approach doesn't serve this game. *Superstar Baseball* just doesn't have the constant action of *Mario Tennis*, and it's not just because baseball is a slower sport. The fielding dawdles, but what's worse, the base running is a mess. The controls often leave you in the lurch and susceptible to the double play or a late jump off of the bases. Also, the map of the bases gives you so poor a representation of what's going on that you'll get thrown out often. If this sounds like nitpicking, let me say that these frustrations take place in a game that just isn't that fun to begin with. You may feel inclined to pick this title up, but if Mario fever grips you, you'd be better served by playing one of his classic titles. The rest is just scenery. —KATO



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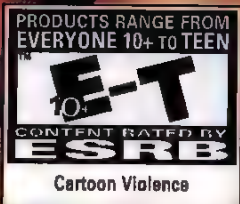
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PlayStation 2



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■ Most of the boss battles involve simple, repetitive formulas



■ The dull AI means that guards are often stationary until you shoot them

GAMECUBE

Geist

> STYLE | TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER N-SPACE > RELEASE AUGUST 15 > ESRB M

NOT A GHOST OF A CHANCE

I've been in the unfortunate position in the last few months of giving poor reviews to games that have genuinely unique and creative premises. *Advent Rising* was the first, and now I'm going to be the one to tell our GameCube fans that *Geist* is not nearly the great game that it could have (and should have) been.

In concept, *Geist* is a fairly interesting hybrid of a standard sci-fi FPS with a supernatural twist. Through a series of seemingly random and nonsensical plot points, Raimi, *Geist*'s protagonist, is separated from his body by an insane scientist in a mysterious weapons facility and becomes a ghost capable of possessing people's bodies. The catch is that he can only do so if the individual in question is extremely frightened. To make sure that your quarry is suitably scared, you'll need to shock them by possessing a wide array of mechanical devices. Throughout your time in *Geist*, you'll inhabit various objects and animals, including a bowl of dog food, a rat, a paint can, a microscope, and various soldiers and guards.

At first, the possessions give *Geist* a genuinely novel feel, as you scour the environment for new items to take control of in order to freak out the guard or scientist you need to advance to the next

section of the game. Unfortunately, as time wears on, the extremely arbitrary limitations placed on your ghost form begin to reveal that—in practice—*Geist*'s riddles are little more than camouflaged versions of the same old switch puzzles we've come to know and hate. Each opportunity for a "scare" can only be performed in one way, and in a specific order. Knock down a ladder to force a guard over to a fire extinguisher, then discharge the extinguisher to make him run towards a valve, which you then burst, leaving him shaken and ripe for possession. This is interesting at first, until you realize that you can only control certain items at certain times, which takes away the feeling that you're actively experimenting with the environment. Why can I possess one bowl of dog food but not another? Why can my ghost form pass through chain link fences but not ventilation shaft grates? Why is the environment littered with strange portals that allow me to transport to other areas? It's inconsistencies like these which totally broke the illusion for me, and drove home the fact that *Geist* really represents nothing more than staid action game conventions in a supernatural disguise.

Unfortunately, the other main portion of the

gameplay—the first-person shooter segments that occur after you've possessed one of *Geist*'s various guards or super-soldiers—doesn't even rise to the level of mediocrity. Simply, this is some of the worst enemy AI I've seen in years. Most guards appear to be heavily sedated, standing by idly as you shoot their teammate two feet away from them, only reacting once you've introduced yourself by plugging a bullet in their chest. On the other hand, a few are strangely aggressive, shooting the moment you come onscreen, despite the fact that you are inhabiting the body of one of their coworkers (or in some cases, their superior). The boss battles are perhaps worse—managing to be both extremely simple and horribly frustrating.

Despite a few memorable sequences, the occasional good puzzle, and some barely adequate multiplayer modes, *Geist* fails in most respects. The game certainly doesn't live up to the promise of its premise, and at the same time can't manage to deliver even basic first-person action in a competent manner. I expect more from a Nintendo-published title, and so should you.—MATT



■ Your ghostly powers allow you to get a rat's eye view of the game



■ Some of the weapons, like this rivet gun, have painfully slow firing and reload rates

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** A would-be epic that casts players as shapeshifting ghost

> **Graphics:** It's hard to believe this is on the same system as *Resident Evil 4* and *Metroid Prime*

> **Sound:** The lack of voiceovers really detracts from the storytelling, and a sudden burst of crappy metal mars an otherwise solid soundtrack during the last scene

> **Playability:** The FPS action feels more 1995 than 2005

> **Entertainment:** N-Space's interesting ideas are wasted in an unpolished action title saddled with arbitrary puzzle design

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

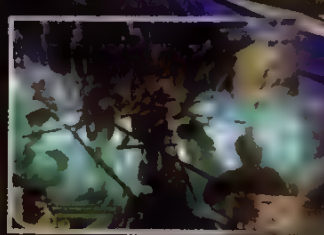
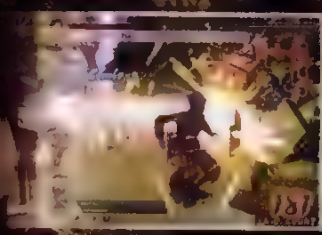
Second Opinion 6

It is natural to fear death, but *Geist* has given me a whole new reason to dread the great beyond: it's insufferably boring. Apparently the afterlife consists solely of average FPS action and a lot of insipid puzzle solving. The story stars Ghosty "Spooks" Ghosterson (or something like that. The plot really sucks) on his quest to regain his body by possessing a ton of lame crap in the environment. Speak this sentence aloud: "I can't wait to harness the awesome powers of dinner plates and file cabinets." If you said that with a straight face, you may enjoy the overly linear and laborious process of wading through *Geist*'s many inconsistent challenges. It does have a handful of clever sequences that really shine, but the coolest mechanics are generally relegated to predictable errands you've run a thousand times before. In the end, *Geist* is just a dated and frustrating chore—and surprisingly unpolished—for a Nintendo-published title.—JOE

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Use of Alcohol Violence



PlayStation 2



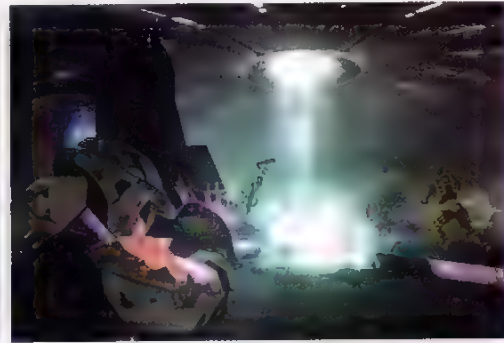
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XBOX

Halo 2: Multiplayer Map Pack

> STYLE 2 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT > DEVELOPER BUNGIE > RELEASE JULY 5 > ESRB M



REINFORCEMENTS

It's not that Halo 2 didn't have enough maps. In point of fact, it had quite a few, some of which made for some of the best multiplayer gaming that any of us have yet had the joy of partaking in. The problem, of course, is that really great games get played a lot. And that means, particularly for devoted Xbox Live junkies, that a deep and anxious need has arisen for something new to satiate the masses. Enter the Multiplayer Map Pack.

The nine new battle arenas that Bungie has crafted for this console expansion pack are, without exception, phenomenal. The studio's greatest achievement is the way that each map manages to be nearly perfect for one or two particular game types. The rock-strewn island of Relic makes for remarkable One Flag CTF games. The purple-hued Gemini board is perfect for frantic Slayer matches. Meanwhile, scrambling to control three plots on Turf is relentlessly intense. A delicate eye for balance has governed every design decision, and the effort is noticeable. Quite frankly, several of these



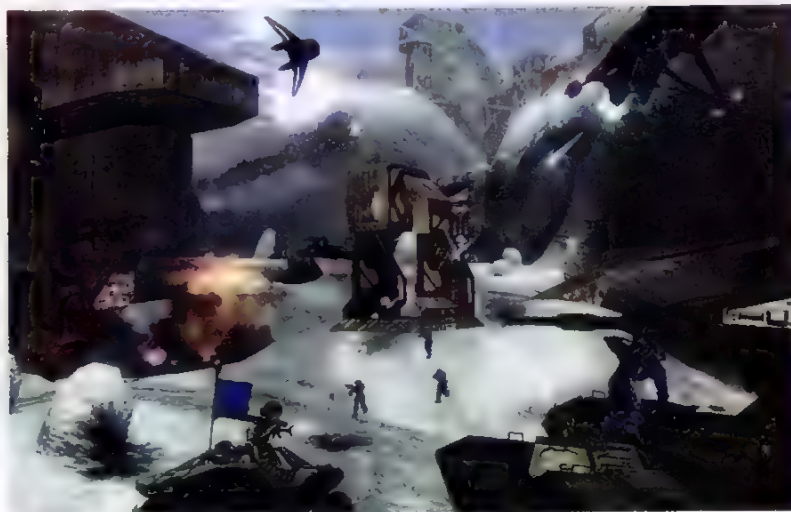
maps play even better than the arenas that first shipped with the game, (even if good old Zanzibar remains my personal favorite).

While Xbox Live users are already tapping the barrel of the newly expanded multiplayer areas, the retail release of the game is of much greater use to the majority of Xbox players without Live. Packed in on the disc is the full set of Xbox Live auto-updates that have refined the balance and feature set of the

game. Also included are some short but exciting videos, including early game trailers from both Halo games, a brief new cinematic, and an excellent behind-the-scenes featurette on the making of the new maps.

It should be mentioned that other than these little

extras, the entirety of the map pack is available for download if you're already online, where the competition is fierce and constant pretty much 24/7. For the hundreds of thousands of offline users still playing small games with their friends on one or two TVs at home or in a packed dorm room, Bungie just sent you a great big present.—MILLER



BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

> **Concept:** More of what made the original title great, this console expansion pack brings new life to the multiplayer side of the game

> **Graphics:** No real changes, although every single new board has its own unique style

> **Sound:** Incredible surround sound design envelops you in battle

> **Playability:** For offline gamers, the expansion includes all of the auto updates from Xbox Live, which further balances the whole experience

> **Entertainment:** If you've fallen off the Halo 2 bandwagon, this is the time to get back on

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **9**

Halo 2 is the undisputed king of console multiplayer, and this expansion pack only strengthens its stance. Little touches like the energy sword hovering ominously over the train tracks on Terminal or the 343 Guilty Spark-like monitor on Backwash show that Bungie obviously had a great deal of fun putting this pack together. Amazingly, none of the new maps feel like rehashes, yet they all complement the original selection and are balanced very nicely. Some of the new arenas, like Turf, are tailored with a specific match type in mind, while others, such as Sanctuary, are suitable for a wide variety of games. The bonus materials on this disc give fans a rare look at the exhaustive development process, and even the manual, which details each map and outlines how they fit into the greater Halo universe, is mighty impressive. This is a must-have for fans, but if you've grown tired of Halo 2 over the months, this is a great way to get back into it.—REINER

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Headlights can be very useful during night missions



Large-scale conflicts can get intense

PC Codename: Panzers – Phase 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** CDV > **DEVELOPER** STORMREGION > **RELEASE** JULY 26 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Fight World War II, RTS-style – but this time with a nice balance between realism and fun

> **Graphics:** Good, if not spectacular. Particle effects for explosions are very nice

> **Sound:** If I didn't lose the scenario for killing off my hero, he'd be so dead. Huge combat bonuses don't make up for his annoying voice

> **Playability:** Being able to pause at any time is crucial offline. Online is crazy hectic

> **Entertainment:** If it's an RTS you're jonesing for, you could do much worse

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

SMOOTH AS BUTTER

Sometimes setting a low bar is the right decision. Codename: Panzers – Phase 2 doesn't exactly reach for the sky in terms of redefining the genre, but it does some cool things and the resource-free gameplay lends itself to some entertaining strategy. If nothing else, it's nice to see a game that really emphasizes range and vision over numbers or brute force. Plus, it's tough to go wrong with the capability to bombard your foes into the Bronze Age with massive artillery strikes that look and sound like the wrath of the gods.

The best thing that Panzers does is strike a nice balance between "twitchy" RTS (e.g. Starcraft, Command & Conquer: Generals) and boring, hardcore, needlessly accurate historical simulation-style RTS (most anything made by Europeans). The result is that Panzers is accessible and fun while retaining the feeling of being grounded in reality that historical games need. Tanks feel like armored steel behemoths, but you're thankfully free from worrying

"I wish there was more meat to it, but this title still comes well-recommended."

about boring necessities like refueling and mechanical failure. Infantry can seize fortifications, adopt one of three stances, and use different weapons, but it's all very easy to do and doesn't take you out of the experience. Of all the World War II RTSs I've played, Panzers is easily the most intuitive and engaging of them all.

Most of the missions are well-designed and present diverse tactical problems to solve. Victory, even on the normal difficulty setting, is a factor of your ability to implement a clever plan, as well as adapt to changing battlefield situations – not using blind force to stomp on your enemies. Some of the scenarios feel a bit contrived, and objectives can be somewhat wonky when you get credit for achieving or failing them, but it's far from gamebreaking. Likewise, the pathfinding occasionally



Objectives are nicely varied

bugs out, but it's rarely a big deal.

Unfortunately, this pick-up-and-play mentality comes back to bite Panzers in the rear a little bit. Once your units are in position, there's little to do besides watch them duke it out and do the regular focus-fire and wounded unit retreat that we've been doing in

RTS for a decade now. Fortunately, there's a lot of maneuvering that happens before going into actual battle, but the fighting itself can be a little boring. Also, the AI is fairly easily exploited; it doesn't do much to adapt to a situation outside the bounds of a pre-scripted scenario. And I fear that there's not enough flexibility in the scenarios to make online play a real draw for Panzers.

However, the basic tactical problem-solving gameplay of Panzers is very well done, easy to control, and fun to watch. There's a huge selection of units to mess around with, which vary between the factions, and it's just a good old-fashioned RTS romp. I wish there was more meat to it, but this title still comes well-recommended. —ADAM



Turning buildings to rubble is the easy way to deal with pesky entrenched infantry



Is there anything better than an airstrike?

Second Opinion 7.25

It's always nice to see original ideas implemented in a real-time strategy game. This particular title's focus on tank combat sets it apart in some interesting ways, and the game is certainly better for it. I like the little details that end up making a big difference. Turn on your headlights and nsk discovery, but have a better sight line. Move your tank line back, but keep the turrets facing forward. Bombard a tank with flamethrowers, and the occupants must eventually abandon their stations. Cool ideas make for fun gameplay, and Phase 2 definitely has a few cool ideas. It's the presentation that disinterested me. Graphical detail and HUD displays were bland, and the voiceover work and music were fairly awful. There's also what will certainly be too much micromanagement of units for many strategy fans. There aren't really any frills, but what's there makes for at least mildly entertaining fun. —MILLER

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Like any good strategy game, all the battles boil down to a classic game of rock, paper, scissors

Taking the battle to two fronts is the genius of Dual Strike

NINTENDO DS

Advance Wars: Dual Strike

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)
 > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS > **RELEASE** AUGUST 22 > **ESRB** E

PUTS THE DS IN THE DS

To be clear, I'm a huge Advance Wars fan. It is easily the best handheld strategy series I've ever played, and my excitement for this new dual screen version couldn't have been higher.

In fact, I consider this to be the first must-have title for the system (with all due respect to Meteos and Kirby: Canvas Curse – both amazing games in their own right).

Thankfully, Advance Wars: Dual Strike delivers at just about every level to meet my very high expectations. As you would expect for a DS title, the big innovation in this game is how it uses two screens to deliver the action. In fact, you can fight the Black Hole army on two fronts. Sometimes you can't control the action on the second front directly, but you can send units up to the second screen to help complete the battles. Other times you are able to switch the two screens so you can control every facet of the battlefield. And winning these skirmishes on the second front is important, as it can disable one of the Commanding Officers (or COs) from the enemy's arsenal.

Players are given the option to play with either the stylus or the d-pad, which was good news for me as I didn't find that the stylus control added a whole lot to the play control.

Thankfully, the second screen and the stylus control aren't the only innovations that have been added to the title. Before each fight, you are given the option to pick which CO or COs you wish to use in battle. By completing missions, your COs gain experience. When they gain a level it unlocks new powers that you can select before each encounter. Powers like Direct Attack +5%, Vision +1, Road Attack +10%, Funds From Bases +100, and Attack in Snow +20% are just a few examples of some of the things you can unlock. You can only enable a few powers at a time, so understanding the battle ahead and choosing accordingly is key to victory.

You can also switch out COs at the end of each turn.

"If you love strategy, it really doesn't get any better than this."

By using your COs equally you can then unlock a Tag Power which essentially lets you unleash two rounds of combat to your opponents' one. But be forewarned, this is a two-way street; the enemy can also Tag Power, which can be devastating if you haven't planned accordingly.

As you would expect, there are also a number of new units that you will encounter during the missions, but I will save that surprise for when you play. I will say that the new units add some unique strategic twists to an already exciting and challenging series.

Ultimately, the gameplay at its core is still the same, but the new additions such as the multi-front battles, CO experience, and wireless multiplayer take the series to all-new heights. If you love strategy, it really doesn't get any better than this. —ANDY



BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** Advance the series with the power of two screens

> **Graphics:** Still the same tried and true 2D sprites that we all love

> **Sound:** Sufficient

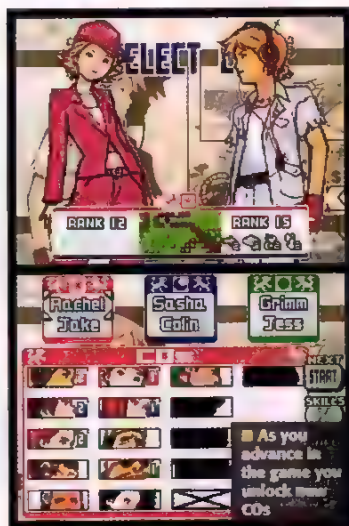
> **Playability:** Strategy doesn't get much better than this, and it can be played with the d-pad or the stylus

> **Entertainment:** The two screens could have been further utilized, but the gameplay additions take the franchise to another level

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.5

This game literally made me go out and buy a DS, I kid you not. The classic Advance Wars gameplay – also known as some of the best 2D strategy available – is in full effect, and the new units and tweaks are simply perfect. Never one to fall into a rut, Advance Wars DS constantly switches up the types of battles you fight by introducing and combining new rule sets (fog of war, dual-screen combats, etc.) Tag-team battles let you experiment a bit with the different COs' strengths, and leveling up your COs is another new feature that adds a nice layer of strategy to an already-great mix. Plus, the music is some of the best found on handhelds, and the several other modes offer even more bang for your buck. It's a little disappointing that nothing was done to update the look of the game on the new platform, but who plays Advance Wars for the visuals anyway? —ADAM



As you advance in the game you unlock new COs



The Stealth bomber is just one of many new vehicles you will find



The maps become more and more difficult as you get deeper into the single player experience



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NINTENDO DS

Nintendogs

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** AUGUST 22 > **ESRB** E

YOUTH CULTURE



Here's a list of things that aren't games: forks, robots, fried chicken, the Nissan 240 SX, and letter openers. One more easy addition to that collection would be Nintendogs. A quirky premise, cute as a button puppies, and some truly impressive technology make this more than a Tamagotchi, but not quite an actual game.

So is that bad? I'd have to say that its lack of most features that define a game doesn't mean that it's not fun or not worth checking out. The training is proof of concept more convincing than any voice

control I've seen in a title. Puppy AI is a marvel of personality, learning smarts, and emotion; and the graphics are tight enough to make each yipper look different without resorting to funny colors or fur patches in the shape of letters.

There's a lot of wacky stuff in Nintendogs, but the core is raising and caring for a very life-like puppy. I really grew to be honestly proud and entertained by Zephyr (my pup), joyfully making sure her fur was clean and her water bowl full. But I was bummed that she'll never get older or change in appearance -- all that will be different for her tomorrow versus today is the possibility of learning a new trick or wearing a series of increasingly goofy accessories we find on the street during our walks.

Like other simulation titles, those wacky accessories are just one category in a long list of unlockables for the completists to latch on to. You can buy new houses, more dogs, toys, care items,

and the somewhat-quirky musical items that have differing effects on the puppy's personality. It all adds up to reasonably rewarding things to acquire. But it also is probably my main knock against the title. I just didn't care about a vast majority of the stuff available. I wanted to play with my pooch, go for lots of walks, and train for the game's agility, disk throw, and obedience competitions.

This just isn't possible. Like a real puppy, the Nintendogs have a short attention span. It's clear that this is designed like Animal Crossing in that you're supposed to play for about an hour a day, every day, for a really long time. After my super-puppy buzz wore out, this play schedule would probably be okay; but in the beginning, I wanted to teach her fifteen tricks, win a contest, and explore the entire neighborhood during day one. These limitations make sense in that they're accurate to the creature simulated, but are a bummer as a game.

There's no denying how adorable the puppies are, how amazing the technology that runs them is, or how much stuff there is to find, but I can't help thinking that bending the rules of reality would have made for a better game, in the traditional sense. But it's not a game, so pick it up on your own criteria -- train a puppy or look elsewhere for a more by-the-books "gaming" experience. —LISA

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Simulate the puppy experience

> **Graphics:** The different breeds and colorations are almost disturbingly lifelike. The accessories are certainly more Nintendo than PetSmart, though

> **Sound:** Barking, street noises, and the repetitive clang of your own voice

> **Playability:** Training is intuitive and rewarding, the menus work well, and the game does a great job of pointing you in the right direction

> **Entertainment:** Depends on how much you love puppies

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.75

I'm not sure what it is, but I like it. Nintendogs isn't a game, per se, but a cross between The Sims and the old kids' craze Tamagotchi. This pet simulator has finally made it to our shores, and I have to admit that, despite my previous skepticism, Nintendogs is a charmer. The voice recognition and training functions are impressive, and I found myself taking a lot of pride in my little pup's performance in the various obedience and agility competitions included in the game. That said, it can get a bit dull and repetitive at times, and most certainly isn't for everyone. I do wish that the game didn't place so many limits on what you can accomplish in a day (it seems geared towards playing for small amounts of time over an extended period). Still, I could easily see this developing a strong following among younger gamers, and those with a taste for non-traditional games. —MATT

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Pac 'N Roll

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO
> **DEVELOPER** NAMCO
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 26 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 6

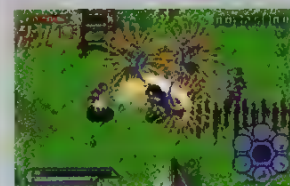
What they say about the DS is true: it does have unique games that no other console

can offer. However, while a game that is basically nothing more than pushing a ball with a stick is definitely different, that doesn't mean it's fun. There is little to this game beyond using the touch screen to roll Pac-Man through maze-like levels -- it's short, simple, and well, boring. The game design just doesn't allow for enough variation to keep things fresh, even with an incredibly short story mode. Pac 'N Roll proves that completely unique games can still be as painfully dull as sweeping your bedroom. —JEREMY

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Dynasty Warriors Advance

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** KOEI
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 29 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 7

Like a needle in the Dynasty Warriors haystack, this game is a glimmer of hope in a sea of gray. Weapons now have some depth thanks to elemental attacks and a requisite proficiency level, but the best thing about this game is the real-time ability meter. You can't power up certain abilities until you've killed enough guys. It's not a huge step, but it's something. Unfortunately, the power of combo attacks isn't balanced enough, and combat's simplicity robs it of rhythm. A similar equilibrium is not achieved by the overhead map, which contains some strategy, but is too restrictive. —KATO



While out for a walk, puppies can do a lot. Finding presents, eating garbage, encountering other canines, and making stinky deposits are all on the docket. You select a route before heading out and can opt to stop by the parks, discount shops, or agility training gym if your dog's endurance allows for a trip long enough.

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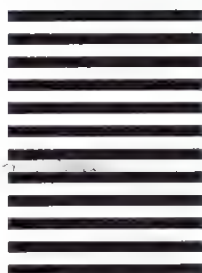
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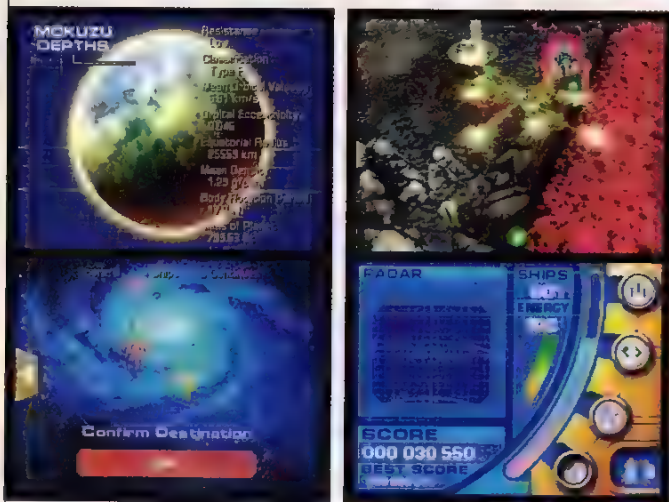


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NINTENDO DS

Nanostray

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SHOOTER (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** SHIN'EN > **RELEASE** JULY 19 > **ESRB** E

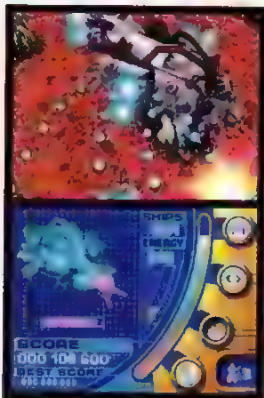
TWIST ON A CLASSIC

It could be argued that the shooter game is the oldest in the hobby. Consequently, it's quite the task to actually innovate within the genre. It's a feat that's accomplished at least partially by Nanostray, even while it maintains the best aspects of traditional space shooters. This isn't the crown jewel of hardcore fans' dreams, but it is yet another solid reason to own a DS.

One of the things I like about Nanostray is the way it uses the touch screen as a secondary aspect of gameplay rather than the central focus. You'll use the touch screen primarily as a tool to switch between four unique weapon sets on the fly, each of which has a different use in battle. Personally, I found the mechanic to be a little tricky to get a handle on, but once I did it offered some great flexibility. There are also some largely non-interactive features like radar, weapon energy, and shield power on the touch screen, but kudos to you if you can split your attention enough to take notice of them.

Most of the time your eyes will be glued to the top screen, where gameplay fits in pretty closely with long-held conventions. Still, the levels and enemies are well designed and make for both a fun time and a hefty challenge on higher difficulties, and two-player wireless is always a plus. Like many shooters, Nanostray falls on the incredibly short side, and the extensive replay value comes

through trying to conquer the Challenge mode — mainly unique conditions on levels you've already beaten. Even with the touch screen, there's not a lot new here, but it's definitely an engaging addition to the DS family. —MILLER



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Classic vertical shooting with some minor but interesting tweaks

> **Graphics:** Vibrant weapon and explosion effects couldn't be better, except when occasional slowdown rears its ugly head

> **Sound:** The entire eighties decade would be proud

> **Playability:** The touch-screen functionality can take some getting used to, but ultimately it's a pretty helpful control scheme

> **Entertainment:** Immensely enjoyable for genre fans, but it's not a very long ride

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

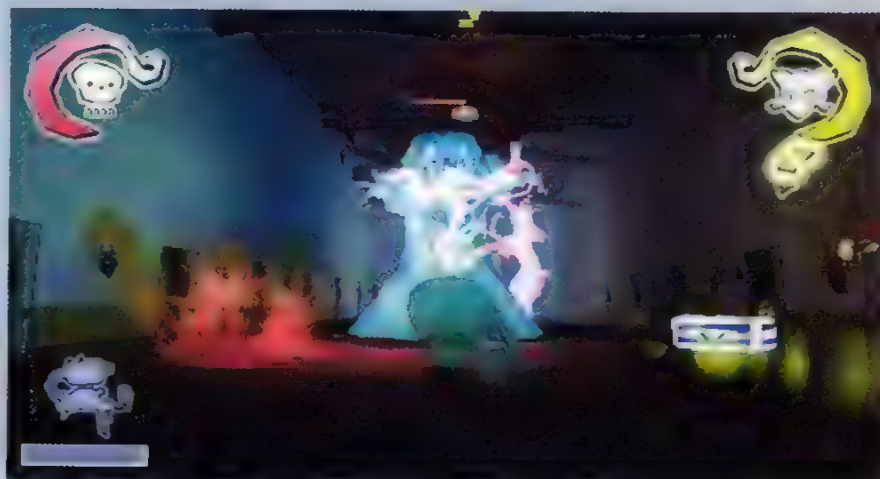
Second Opinion 7

Nanostray is a gorgeous little shooter that, while lacking Ikaruga's hardcore appeal, still captures some pleasant old-school charm. I disagree strongly with Miller about the functionality of the touch screen weapon selection, it forces you to either crab-daw the DS or stop firing altogether (which is always a dynamite idea when being assaulted from all sides by hostile alien spacecraft). However, the weapons themselves are pretty slick — if somewhat unoriginal — and the alternate fire modes for each one add a clever dynamic. Nanostray is shameless classic shooting, but it lacks the difficulty or inventiveness to make it stand out on its own merits. —JOE

PSP

Death Jr.

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** AUGUST 16 > **ESRB** T



TURN AROUND

There's a lot of heart and ambition in Death Jr. A bold plan to bring 3D action and platforming to a handheld system is one feat that even the genre master, Nintendo, hasn't been able to do perfectly. With a gentle hand, I don't blame Death Jr. or its creators for making something that is just plain average; as a first attempt, this game is nothing if not admirable.

The problems in Death Jr. are many. Story-wise, DJ (as his friends call him) is the sole playable survivor after opening Pandora's Box. Essentially, the game alludes to all sorts of funny, interesting things that this morose breakfast club could do in the next seven hours, and then plucks them all away. No comic foils, no additional points of view on the situation, and (most importantly from a mechanics standpoint) no alternate gameplay types.

It's in this staid net of FPS-styled gunplay and clunky platforming controls that

Death Jr. loses the most steam. Some of the problems, like inefficient camera controls, very well may dog designers for the rest of the PSP's days just because there aren't enough buttons on the darn thing. But other issues, like enemies who spawn in a circle around the player (and remember, you can't run and move the camera at the same time) feel like arbitrary ways to make the game more challenging. Instead of testing the might of players by exploiting their blind spots, better-made games make the battles obvious and skill-based.

Death Jr. is a study in design peaks and valleys. The universe, main characters, and art style are all a delight and each is a great decision for a handheld game. Controls, on the other hand, offer only one layout, pokey response time for platforming moves, and too little mobility for the shooting action.

Overall, the game is just average, but the potential is there for something really special if a sequel came our way. —LISA



■ Ammunition and health management are key to survival in heated shootouts

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** The next-in-line for that Grim Reaper gig is in school and needs your help

> **Graphics:** Colorful enemies with nice animations are the highlights, while blocky environments are the dark spots

> **Sound:** Original music pieces are great, but repeat too often

> **Playability:** The main area stopping this game from being a sure contender

> **Entertainment:** An interesting universe isn't used fully, but there's a lot of potential with these characters

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

The creators of Death Jr. have succeeded in many ways, and failed in others. On the positive side, I absolutely love the main character and universe. The humorously macabre character designs take the best of Tim Burton and Mexico's Day of the Dead folk art, resulting in a genuinely lovable platformer. I also appreciate the fact that, through a host of weapons and character upgrades, the gameplay actually progresses over time. Unfortunately, Death Jr. stumbles where so many 3D action games do: the camera. Since the PSP has no right analog stick for camera control, you have to use the left trigger to reset the angle, a mechanic some might remember from 32-bit era platformers. Unfortunately, because the game focuses as much on hectic combat as it does on traditional platforming, the result is often frustrating and overly difficult gameplay. Still, Death Jr. is an engaging platformer, and remains charming despite its faults. —MATT

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 GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS (XBOX)



Once again claiming the top spot with a release on Xbox, it seems that Rockstar's flagship franchise is unstoppable. The only thing that could possibly break its momentum would be some sort of nationwide scandal resulting in its removal from most retail shelves. But that'll probably never happen.

2 POKÉMON EMERALD (GBA)



Wow, it sure is good to see Ninja Gaiden back on the charts! Though the game has a steep difficulty curve, the challenges force you to hone your skills and become a better gamer. Wait a second...this is another Pokémon game? Ugh. Let's just pretend it's Ninja Gaiden, okay? Our Pokémon jokes are tapped.

3 STAR WARS EPISODE III: REVENGE OF THE SITH (PS2)



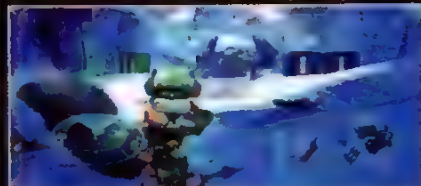
Part of this game's success can be attributed to the fact that it is based on the last of the legendary series' chapters, the conclusion of an epic. Until the inevitable "Special Edition," *Ewok Bounty Hunter Adventures* spinoff, or *Who Wants To Get Force-Choked By A Sith Lord?* reality show projects get off the ground.

4 MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT (PS2)



European Assault? What kind of nonsense is that? Beating the tar out of people with a baguette? Here in the States, we just sucker punch people and steal their wallets. USA! USA!

5 CONKER: LIVE AND RELOADED (XBOX)



We were going to take some digs at Rare here, but we've decided to be positive about it instead. Rare has minty-fresh breath in the morning, mugs vagabonds infrequently, and volunteers as a crossing guard twice per week. Mad props to you, Rare!

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	N/A	XBOX	9.75	06-05	\$50
2	Pokémon Emerald	1	GBA	7.75	04-05	\$35
3	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	2	PS2	5.75	05-05	\$50
4	Medal of Honor: European Assault	N/A	PS2	7.75	06-05	\$40
5	Conker: Live and Reloaded	N/A	XBOX	8	06-05	\$50
6	LEGO Star Wars	6	PS2	7.5	03-05	\$40
7	Madagascar	N/A	PS2	7	05-05	\$39
8	Madagascar	N/A	GBA	7	05-05	\$28
9	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	5	PS2	9.5	04-05	\$48
10	Destroy All Humans	N/A	PS2	8	06-05	\$50
11	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	3	XBOX	5.75	05-05	\$50
12	Destroy All Humans	N/A	XBOX	8	06-05	\$50
13	Medal of Honor: European Assault	N/A	XBOX	7.75	06-05	\$40
14	Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	16	GBA	9	05-05	\$31
15	MVP Baseball 2005	9	PS2	8.5	02-05	\$30
16	Batman Begins	N/A	PS2	7.25	06-05	\$39
17	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	7	GBA	N/A	05-05	\$30
18	Kirby: Canvas Curse	N/A	DS	8.5	06-05	\$35
19	LEGO Star Wars	11	XBOX	7.5	04-05	\$40
20	Forza Motorsport	4	XBOX	8.5	05-05	\$48

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Sakura Taisen V	PS2
2	Gentle Brain Exercises	DS
3	We Love Katamari	PS2
4	Musashiden II: Blast Master	PS2
5	The King of Beetle MushiKing	GBA
6	Gundam True Odyssey	PS2
7	DS Training For Adults: Work Your Brain	DS
8	MAR Heaven: Knocking on Heaven's Door	PS2
9	Genji	PS2
10	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	PS2



Source: Game Japan

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Advance Wars: Dual Strike	N/A	DS
2	Madden NFL 06	N/A	Multi
3	Battlefield 2	1	PC
4	Halo 2: Multiplayer Map Pack	N/A	Xbox
5	NCAA Football 06	2	Multi
6	Darkwatch	N/A	Multi
7	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	N/A	Multi
8	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	5	Multi
9	EyeToy: Play 2	N/A	PS2
10	Nintendogs	N/A	DS



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

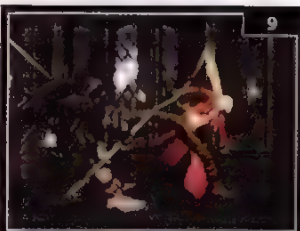
Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Battlefield 2	N/A	\$49
2	Guild Wars	1	\$48
3	World of Warcraft	2	\$49
4	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	N/A	\$48
5	The Sims 2 University	3	\$32
6	Star Wars Galaxies: The Total Experience	N/A	\$30
7	The Sims 2	5	\$49
8	The Sims Deluxe	8	\$20
9	Half-Life 2	7	\$49
10	LEGO Star Wars	10	\$30



Based On Monthly Units Sold

PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	9	Dec-04
Aien Homind	11	Dec-04
Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed	5.5	Jan-05
Arc the Lad: End of Darkness	5.5	Jan-05
Area 51	8.5	May-05
Atan Anthology	8.5	Jan-05
Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana	8.25	Jun-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 Shadow King	8.25	Dec-04



Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening - PS2 - Mar-05

Batman Begins	7.25	Aug-05
Battle Assault 3: Featuring Gundam Seed	4	Jan-05
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
Coossuum: Road to Freedom	7.25	Jul-05
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-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	Jan-05
Drive to Survive	7	May-05
Dynasty Warriors 5	7	May-05
Enthusia: Professional Racing	8	Jun-05
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
EyeToy: AntiGrav	7	Dec-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
FlatOut	6.5	Aug-05
Flippin' Ultimate Pinball	6	Jul-05
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	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
Grosswacker Generators	7.5	Jan-05
Guitar Hero	6.75	Dec-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
Juiced	7.5	Jul-05
Kessen III	7.75	Mar-05
Killer 7	7.5	Jul-05
Kulzone	7.5	Dec-04
LEGO Star Wars	7.5	May-05
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Madagascar	7	Aug-05
Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
Makai Kingdom	8	Apr-05
Chronicles of the Sacred Tome	7.75	Jul-05
Medal of Honor: European Assault	8.25	Jan-05
Mega Man X8	8.25	Jan-05
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	9.5	Jan-05
Metal Slug 4 & 5	8	Jun-05
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9.5	May-05
MLB 2005	8.25	Apr-05
Mobile Suit Gundam: Gundam vs. Zeta Gundam	6	Aug-05
Musashi: Samurai Legend	8.25	Mar-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Apr-05
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05
Nano Breaker	5	Mar-05
NARC	4.5	Mar-05
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
NCAA Football: 06	8.5	Aug-05
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	11	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
Obscure	11	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	Dec-04
Predator: Concrete Jungle	2.75	Jan-05
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Project Snowblind	8.25	Apr-05
Psychonauts	8.5	Aug-05
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
The 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
RPC Maker 3	6.5	Aug-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	5	Feb-05
Shaman King: Power of Spirit	6.5	Jan-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Shining Tears	7.75	Mar-05
Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga	7	Apr-05
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.25	May-05
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-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
Talko Drum Master	8.75	Dec-04
Tekken 5	7.75	Apr-05
Temchu: Fatal Shadows	7	Mar-05
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	6.75	Nov-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
TOCA Race Driver	9.25	Apr-05
Ultimate Racing Simulator	7.5	Nov-04
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.25	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian	6.75	Nov-04
Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
Winning Eleven 8	8.75	Mar-05
World Tour Soccer 2006	6	Apr-05
Worms: Forts Under Siege	5.75	Apr-05
WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW	8.5	Dec-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse	7.75	Mar-05
Ys: The Ark of Napishtim	7.5	Mar-05
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	6	Jan-05
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	3.25	Dec-04

GAMECUBE

Alien Homind	8	Dec-04
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Baten Kaitos: Wings of Eternity and the Lost Ocean	8.75	Dec-04
Batman Begins	7.25	Aug-05
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Donkey Kong Jungle Beat	7.5	Apr-05
Donkey Kong	7	Nov-04
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jan-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	Mar-05
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Madagascar	7	Aug-05
Mano Party 6	6.25	Feb-05
Mano Power Tennis	8.5	Jan-05
Metal: Prime 2: Echoes	9.5	Jan-05
Mortal Combat: Deception	8.5	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	Dec-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



Killer 7 - GC - Mar-05

Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Fox Assault	7	Apr-05
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.5	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.25	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian	6.75	Nov-04
Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04

XBOX

Adventure King	7.75	Jan-05
Area 51	8.5	May-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 Shadow King	8.25	Dec-04
Batman Begins	7.25	Aug-05
Blinx 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	4	Mar-05
Close Combat: First to Fight	6	May-05
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Combat: Task Force 121	4	Jan-05
Conker: Live and Reloaded	8	Aug-05
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Dai Senryaku VII	8	Mar-05
Modern Military Tactics	8	Mar-05
Dance Dance Revolution: UltraMix 2	7.75	Dec-04
Dead or Alive: Ultimate	9	Dec-04
Dead to Rights: Hell to Pay	5	Jun-05
Destroy All Humans	8	Jul-05
Doom 3	9.25	Apr-05
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jan-05
Drive to Survive	7	May-05
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04



NARC - Xbox - May-05

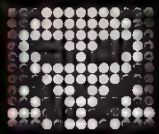
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut	9.25	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
FlatOut	6.5	Aug-05
Forza Motorsport	8.5	Jun-05
Ghost Recon 2	8	Jan-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	9.75	Nov-04
Gungnirion: 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	7.75	Nov-04
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact Maxiax	5.75	Aug-05
LEGO Star Wars	7.5	May-05
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Madagascar	7	Aug-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
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
NCAA Football 06	8.5	Aug-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
Sid Meier's Pirates!	7.75	Aug-05
Sims 2: The Sims 2, The	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: Synbena II	6.5	Nov-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	6.25	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
Top Gear RPM Tuning	5	Apr-05
Torik: Prehistoric Punk	6	Mar-05
Iron 2.0 Killer App	7	Jan-05
Ty the Tasmanian	6.75	Nov-04
Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	7	Dec-04
Ultra Bust-A-Move	7	Dec-04
Unreal Championship 2: The Legend 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

PC

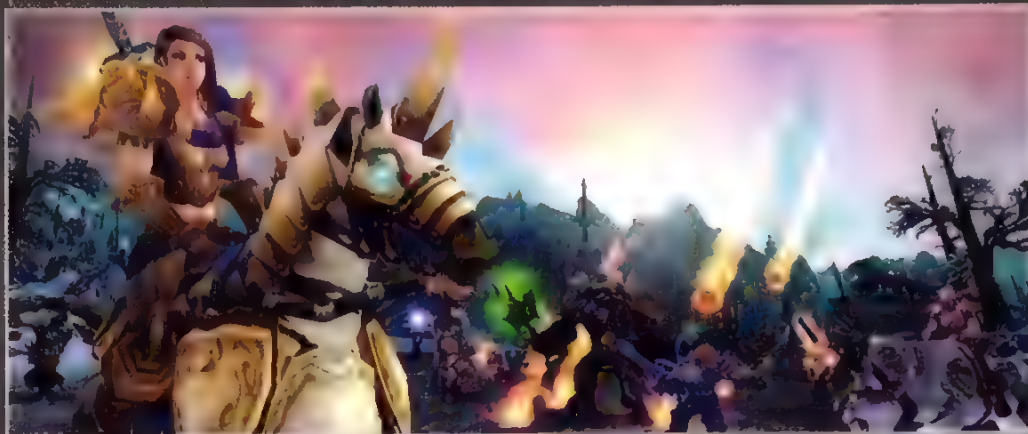
Act of War - Direct Action	8.25	Apr-05
Armies of Exigo	8	Dec-04
Axis & Allies	7.75	Jan-05
Battlefield 2	9.25	Aug-05
Call of Duty: United Offensive	8.75	Nov-04
Chris Sawyer's Locomotion	7	Nov-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay Developer's Cut, The	9.25	Jan-05
Codename: Panzers	7.75	Dec-04
Combat - Task Force 121	4	Jan-05
Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	9	Jun-05
Dungeons Lords	4	Jul-05
Empire Earth II	7.5	May-05
EverQuest II	8.5	Feb-05
Evil Genius	8.5	Nov-04
Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich	8.25	Apr-05
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	9.75	Aug-05
Guld Wars	8.75	Jul-05
Half-Life 2	9.5	Dec-04
Immortal: Children of the Nile	8	Jan-05
Joint Operations: Escalation	8	Jan-05
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
Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell	8	Jan-05
Panah	8.5	Jan-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Political Machine, The	7	Nov-04
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	8.75	Dec-04
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked	7	Aug-05
Rome: Total War	7.75	Nov-04
Scrapland	6	Dec-04
Sid Meier's Pirates!	8.5	Jan-05
Sims 2: University, The	9	Apr-05
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.75	Apr-05
Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed	8	Jan-05
Stronghold 2	6.75	Jan-05
SWAT 4	8.25	May-05
Trackmania Sunrise	7.25	Jul-05
Trinob Vengeance	8.5	Dec-04
Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines	7.5	Jan-05

N



World of Warcraft Battlegrounds

Battlegrounds' Lead Designer Shares His Secrets



By Lead Game Designer Tom Chilton

Blizzard gave us the definitive word on WoW's expanded PvP arenas, and we were especially excited to receive exclusive info on the game's newest Battleground, Arathi Basin.

WARSONG GULCH

Control the midfield.

Generally speaking, the side that can maintain control over the midfield has the best chance to win the battle. Controlling the midfield provides several key advantages, such as allowing you to intercept enemy flag carriers, regardless of which exit they choose to use; quickly transition en-masse to escorting a friendly flag carrier; and, with good use of the restoration "power ups," continue fighting for extended periods of time.

Don't become obsessed with the enemy flag carrier

Once a team spots an enemy flag carrier, there is a natural tendency for all players on the team to focus on the enemy carrier. However, if the carrier is a hard target with healing support, this can be a critical mistake. Healing is usually a stronger mechanic than damage, so a well-healed "tank" with the flag is the least effective target for a team's damage abilities. Instead, it is better to slow or stun the enemy flag carrier while focusing on killing enemy healers.

Anticipate enemy desperation

There are a few situations where teams attempt a "defensive" flag grab. A common scenario where this becomes relevant is in a stalemate between two teams where each team has the enemy team's flag in their base. In this situation, both teams will usually make repeated attempts to attack the enemy base and kill the enemy carrier, thus returning the flag. However, an opposing team will often seek insurance by keeping a rogue or druid (or shadowmelded night elf) in your flag alcove, and should your team successfully return the opposing team's flag to your base, the hidden enemy will immediately pick it up and sprint out of the base as quickly as possible in order to reestablish the stalemate. This tactic is common and can be effective, but fortunately it is easily countered if you expect the enemy to use it.

ALTERAC VALLEY

Support your ultimate units

One of the keys to victory in Alterac Valley is effectively using the high-power NPC units, such as cavalry, rain riders and wolf riders,

controlling, moving away only when the objective is either secure or doomed to be lost.

Establish control early, and don't give the enemy easy captures

Due to the nature of the capturing mechanic, it is easier to prevent a base from being captured than it is to capture an enemy base. Therefore, when faced with the choice between recapturing a friendly base and attempting to capture an enemy base, it is better to favor the recapture. All it requires is 10 seconds of successfully interacting with the banner of a base that was previously under your team's control to regain control of that base. This is considerably easier to do than forcing an enemy base into contention, then holding it for two minutes while preventing the enemy from recapturing it. As a result of this dynamic, it is also of great importance to capture bases as quickly as possible in the early game.

Favor retreating over dying

The battle over Arathi Basin is very fast paced, and its outcome is determined by which team is the most efficient. In most cases, if you see a number of enemies approaching that you cannot defeat, it is far better to mount and retreat for a few moments than it is to stay and fight. In doing so, you can rendezvous with a few more teammates and counterattack or simply move to another contested base and help your teammates there.

Maximize team speed

As alluded to in some of the other Arathi Basin tips, having a speed advantage gives your team a tremendous advantage in efficiency. Therefore, using any method to gain a speed advantage can provide great returns in Arathi Basin. Some of these methods include purchasing the fastest available mount or using enchantments that enhance speed while mounted or on foot (i.e., run-speed enchantment for boots, midrill spurs, carrot on a stick, and the riding-speed enchantment for gloves).

and the "ultimate" units (thus the Forest Lord and Lokkolar the Ice Lord). In order to maximize their use, the team must ensure that they support these units. One of the most obvious ways to do so is to heal them. After all, players "respawn," but these NPCs do not. In addition, it is very useful to assist these units by attacking their targets so they don't get "pulled" deep into enemy territory where the enemy can kill them while under the protection of their own NPC.

Make use of commando tactics

There are several situations in which the use of a small group of players behind the main front can make a drastic difference in gaining ground against the enemy. For example, if your team is having a difficult time making it more than halfway to the next enemy graveyard, a small squad of players (often rogues or druids for their stealth abilities) can move behind the lines to the enemy graveyard. After waiting for a "wave" of enemies to respawn and rush off to the front, the commando team can occupy the enemy NPC defenders and begin the capture process, forcing the graveyard to a neutral state. This in turn forces any recently deceased enemies to respawn at a much greater distance, and it often causes the enemy lines to collapse, as many of their players rush back from the frontline to recapture the graveyard. Timing it such that the last enemy respawn wave is as far as possible (about 30 seconds after resurrection) before forcing the graveyard to its neutral state will maximize this effect.



ARATHI BASIN

Depending on whom you're reading this, Arathi Basin may already or may not yet be in the game. As with all things in World of Warcraft, the content of Arathi Basin is always subject to change, but I hope these tips will nevertheless prove useful for developing some effective approaches for our newest Battleground.

Assign teammates an area of responsibility

Since the primary objective in Arathi Basin is to control as much territory as possible for as long as possible, it is crucial for a team to efficiently distribute its forces. One tactic a team can use to maximize how much time it spends killing enemies rather than chasing enemies is to assign a few players to each capture-able point of interest as their primary responsibility. Using this method, players will know what area they should focus on



Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM

The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

Enter the following codes at the Code Input screen.

All Ambient Vehicles Become Taxis - CABBIES

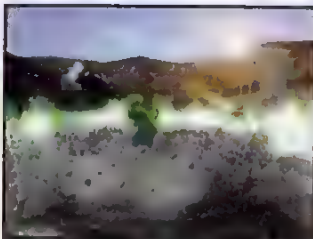
Black and White Graphics - RETRO

Double the Value of Health Pick-ups - BRINGIT

Get 5,000 Smash Points - SMASH5

Get 10,000 Smash Points - SMASH10

Get 15,000 Smash Points - SMASH15



For the following, you'll need to find the corresponding comic book before you can input the code.

All Traffic Replaced With Buses - TRANSIT

Double Hulk's Damage - DESTROY

Low Gravity - PILLOWS

Play as Joe Fixit - SUITFIT



Flatout

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Create a new profile and enter the following codes as your name to enable the cheats. Upon entry, the code will disappear and you can enter your own name and start the game with the codes activated.

Gear-Up Button Launches Ragdoll - RAGDOLL

Start With \$40,000 - GIVECASH

Unlock Everything - GIVEALL

"GI Droid"
(location unknown - last seen getting arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct at Chuck E. Cheese's)

PLAYSTATION 2

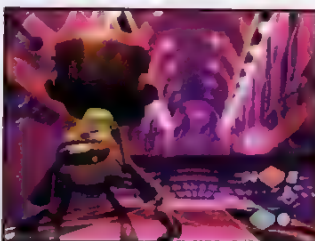
Fantastic Four

Enter the following codes at the main menu. You'll hear a sound if you've inputted them correctly.

Infinite Cosmic Power - Up, □ (x3), Left, Right, ○

Unlock Bonus Level "Hell" - Right (x2), □, ○, Left, Up, Down

Unlock "The Barge" Arena and Stan Lee Interview 1 - □, ○, □, Down (x2), ○, Up



Psychonauts

During gameplay, hold down L1 and R1, and then quickly press one of the following. You'll hear a voice proclaim "You cheated!" if you entered the code correctly.

All Major Items - R3, ○, R2 (x2), L3, △

All Powers - ○ (x2), △, R2, L3, △

All Powers Upgraded - L3, R3, L3, R2, ○, R2

Full Ammunition - R3, X, L3 (x2), △, ○

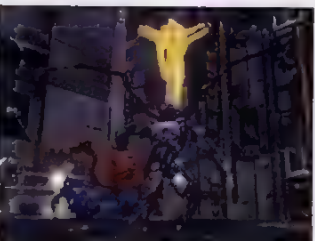
Full Arrowheads - X, R3 (x2), R2, △, □

Full Lives - L3, R2 (x2), ○, X, R3

Invincibility - ○, R2, ○ (x2), △, L2

L33T Text - R2, X, L3, R2 (x2), ○

XBOX



Fantastic Four

Enter the following codes at the main menu. You'll hear a sound if you've inputted them correctly.

Infinite Cosmic Power - Up, X (x3), Left, Right, B

Unlock Bonus Level "Hell" - Right (x2), X, B, Left, Up, Down

Unlock "The Barge" Arena and Stan Lee Interview 1 - X, B, X, Down (x2), B, Up

Psychonauts

During gameplay, hold down left trigger and right trigger, and then quickly press one of the following. You'll hear a voice proclaim "You cheated!" if you entered the code correctly.

All Major Items - R3, B, White (x2), L3, Y

All Powers - B (x2), Y, White, L3, Y

All Powers Upgraded - L3, R3, L3, White, B, White

Full Ammunition - R3, A, L3 (x2), Y, B

Full Arrowheads - A, R3 (x2), White, Y, X

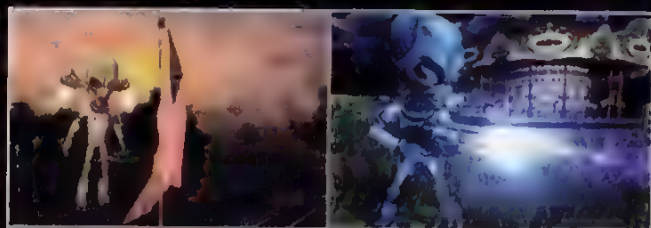
Full Lives - L3, White (x2), B, A, R3

Invincibility - B, White, B (x2), Y, Black

L33T Text - White, A, L3, White (x2), B

Code of the Month

Destroy All Humans



Those pesky homo sapiens don't deserve your pity. Silly hairless apes deserve everything they get from you. Up the body count with a couple of these tempting cheats and get destroying!

For the following, pause the game and hold down the left trigger while you enter the button sequence. When you're done, release the trigger and you should see the cheat name flash across the top of the screen.

Ammo-A-Plenty - Left, Y, White, Right, Black, X

Aware Like A Fox - Right, X, White, Black, Right, White

Bulletproof Crypto - X, Y, Left (x2), Y, X

Deep Thinker - Black, White, Y, Right, White, Y

Nobody Loves You - White, Right, White, Black, X, Right

These last two cheats need to be entered while you're at the menu in the mothership. You'll still need to hold down the left trigger for correct entry.

Find Key to Orthopox's Lab - X, Y, Left, Left, Y, X

Mmm...Brains! - Black (x2), White (x2), Left, Right, Left, Right, White, Black

Tom Hammond
Portland, OR

WORK FOR GAME INFORMER!

GAMEINFORMER

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Dislikes: Zelda's New Name (It Might As Well Have Been Tinkerbell Princess), Grande 4 Plex In LA (Worst Theater Ever)

Current Favorite Games: Tony Hawk's American Wasteland, Gears of War, King Kong, The Warriors



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The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

Insider Tips on Hulk's Brutal Smashfest



By Game Designers Dave Forsey, Eric Holmes, and Greg MacMartin

CRITICAL MASS

Everyone knows that the madder Hulk gets, the stronger he gets. This is true for the game too, so get into Critical Mass – and stay there. When you're in Critical Mass, all your attacks will do additional damage – combine this with Charging and Crusher moves, and you have the ability to unleash hell on demand. Even some of the more powerful enemies can be defeated with a single blow when you max charge the right crusher when in Critical Mass. You'll be ripping tank armor like it was tissue paper.

WHEN IN DOUBT, DEVASTATE

Devastators are your friend. Make sure you buy the "Critical Atomic Slam" in chapter one as soon as you can. Armed with this, you'll be nearly unstoppable. When Hulk is in Critical Mass, he can unleash a single devastating attack that will obliterate the opposition, tossing cars for blocks and toppling buildings like a house of cards.

REGENERATE

Did you know that Hulk can regenerate tissue faster than Wolverine? It may seem a little un-Hulk-like, but if you're feeling the hurt you should run like hell. Find a quiet spot – wait a few seconds, and you'll see your health will quickly regenerate. The good news: If Hulk hasn't taken damage for a few seconds, he'll quickly heal back to near total health. The bad news: To get back into Critical Mass you're going to have to break some heads. Hmm... is that really bad news?

AIR RECOVERY

Floated into the air? Buy "Air Recovery" to stay in the fight. With Air Recovery you can immediately upright yourself, and go straight into a counter attack or a dodge. If you fight the MLRS launchers or a crowd of Hulkbusters and don't have this move, you're going to hurt. Rather than being the green punching bag, I suggest you air recover – and rewrite the book on pain. This move is critical! I can't stress it enough. Buy it. Buy it now.

CRUSH – AND DESTROY!

Crusher moves are the "Achilles heel" techniques that match to specific enemy types. You're going to have to work for it – these techniques can usually be bought around one chapter after the enemy has been introduced – but hey, that gives you time to save. For example, the Air Spike move is a Crusher against enemy aircraft, or try the Hammer Toss against tanks.

EXPLORE

Hitting the agony wall on some mission? Fear not! Exploring the city and outskirts is a goldmine of smash points.

Hidden throughout the city and outskirts are a total of 204 smash point "coins". Each of these will yield you 2,000 smash points. In the city, look for them at the end of alleyways, on ledges, and high up in the air. In the outskirts, look for them hidden on rock walls

and hovering over rock hoodoos scattered all over the environment.

Hulk need to smash? There are many destroyable "Division Buildings" in the city. Destroying each of these will yield you a collectable worth 10,000 smash points each, but you only get the reward for destroying each building once.

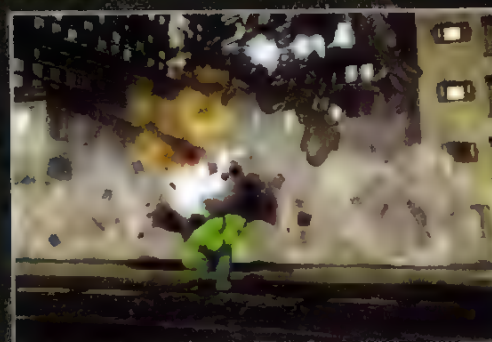
Finally, there are comic books scattered all over the game. While most of these unlock special/bonus content, 16 of them will reward 10,000 smash points upon being collected. That'll buy more purple pants than you can eat.

DISMEMBER – AND DESTROY

Larger mech enemies can have sections broken off of them, denying them access to that specific weapon system. This sort of "dismemberment" is essential against larger foes such as the Titan or Destroyer, where they can be effectively kneecapped by taking out the weapons. Use the Air Cannonball, max-charged throws or any Devastator for maximum effect on the weapon modules, then move in for the kill.

GOTTA GRAB ME SOME!

Hulk's mighty mitts can mangle the most massive mechs around. Grapple your opponents with the grab button whenever you can. Once you've got your opponent by the throat you're free to deliver some extra-special damage. Finish off by hurling your now-limp baggage at his friend's head. Use your Smash Points to upgrade your powers so that you can grab opponents on the run or in the air.



CHOOSE YOUR BATTLEGROUND

Even the Hulk can feel crowded at times, so when the military starts ganging up on you, choose where to fight. Use buildings to block your opponent's movement or take to the air where tanks can't follow. Use your speed to hit 'em hard and fast – then duck for cover.

FIND YOUR STYLE

The Hulk is such a flexible fighter you'll find you favor certain moves. Experiment with everything you unlock, in particular with charging the moves. If you have trouble on a certain mission, buy a new move or mix it up and use an old move you retired – there are different techniques that are more powerful against each enemy type. If you keep repeating the same old moves, the enemies will take pleasure in handing you a large green ass – i.e. yours.

IT'S NOT THE FALL – IT'S THE SUDDEN STOP

Picture two tons of green muscle hurtling out of the sky from the top of the tallest skyscraper. Now imagine what happens when it hits ground. Now imagine that it's you. Some of Hulk's moves (like the elbow smash) do extra damage when you perform them from on high. Target your pitiful enemy on the ground, run up the side of a

handy nearby building and let loose – he'll never know what hit him.

HULK LIKE SIDE MISSIONS

Besides being fun all on their own, you can earn extra smash points for completing side missions. Once you have played a side mission (unplayed side missions are represented on your HUD map as a !), the mission becomes accessible through the front-end menu, making it easier to go back to play previously played side missions in order to beat your high-score and earn more smash points.

Side missions are a major source of smash points; if you want to unlock the cool moves early, hitting the side missions is a great way to fill your warchest.

Additional side missions are unlocked as the game story progresses. It is important to note that side missions that are unlocked later reward you more smash points than those available earlier.

YOU CAN'T HURT WHAT YOU CAN'T TOUCH

Hulk is fast, very fast, and when he's moving at full speed and changing direction his enemies have a difficult time locking on to do him damage.

Standing still during an intense combat scenario is a sure-fire way to get pelted with multiple projectiles at once, increasing the possibility of death. Keep moving around; jump and run constantly; even the most advanced military hardware strains to target a fast-moving Hulk. Once you've gotten this technique down, you can turn the tables on the masses of military opponents – a timely dodge can bring "friendly fire" to bear, where enemies damage or destroy each other.

Thanks for sticking with us so far, and we hope you enjoy playing this game as much as we did making it. Excelsior!



Madden NFL 06

The Way to NFL Superstardom



By Producer Phil Frasier

NFL Superstar Mode for Madden NFL 06 is a new gameplay mode that allows you to step into the shoes of an NFL player from the start of his career to the finish. Here are a few ways to stay on top of your game in NFL Superstar mode.

THE KEY TO SUPERSTAR IS YOUR DNA

In NFL Superstar, your talent means a lot. When you start a Superstar from scratch, you'll need to choose a set of parents. Parents determine your physical skills, start you off with initial boosts in popularity and exposure; and determine your starting awareness level. There is a risk-reward involved with selecting your parents. If you choose a Hall of Fame WR as your father and a sprinter as your mother, you'll have amazing physical skills but really high expectations. Expectations determine your goals every year and they affect the chance that you'll become a failure. If you choose parents that are slightly less noticeable, you'll have close to the same physical skills but lower expectations.

LOG ON TO "MY WEB"

When you start your career, former NFL running back Terrell Davis helps you set up your first apartment. One of the first things he buys you is a computer and internet access. When you start your rookie career, you'll notice that "My Web" features very few websites. As you progress throughout your career, you'll notice that more and more websites appear. You'll receive a voicemail/text message every time a new website is found or created. Pay attention to your fansite. In it you'll find game-by-game stats for every game you've ever played, your new ratings (exposure, marketability, popularity, visibility), and your college stats if you imported a player from NCAA Football 06.

UNLOCK THOSE PERSONAS

As your Superstar's career moves along, you'll unlock Personas that are stored in the fansite in My Web. There are over 60 different Personas that can be unlocked by your Superstar. These are basically meant to represent stages or moments in your Superstar's career, and they range from Hall of Famer to Millionaire. Most Personas can be unlocked by any position, but there are some that are position specific. You obviously won't unlock the "Clutch Kicker" Persona if your NFL Superstar is a QB.

APPEARANCE MATTERS

Make sure to spend some time in front of the mirror.



Changing the equipment you wear on the field can decrease or increase your appearance. Appearance is also affected by tattoos that you wear and the haircut you choose. These can be changed in the city map. A higher appearance will help sell your image to the media and make you more appealing to sponsors and movie industry buffs. The higher your appearance the more likely you will be sought out.

WATCH WHAT YOU SAY

Interviews are a crucial part of NFL Superstar. The more your name is recognized by the media, the more they will want to interview you. Make sure that you answer the questions based on how you want your Superstar to be perceived. Answering all questions like an ego maniac will only garner negative attention from the press. Try experimenting with your Superstar to get right where you want to be.

PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE

There are three ways to increase your Superstar's attributes on a weekly basis. You can either practice, gameplan, or work out at the Performance Institute. Practicing every week will give you boosts in awareness, stamina, and other position-specific attributes. Gameplan gives the same boosts for certain plays. The Performance Institute allows your Superstar to run drills to increase physical attributes for that week's game.



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

NFL Superstar offers a new scoring-based practice mode that can be accessed in the calendar. Make sure to take your time in these practices and complete as many of them as you can. Each practice is scored and you can see the result in the Practice Results web page that is unlocked for you after a few practices. You need to make sure you run at least 10 reps and try to score as high as possible. You will be assigned a letter grade as well as an average. Keeping these as high as possible will ensure that you receive an increase in your awareness and overall attributes for that week. For a really good practice on offense, try to average around seven to eight points per play. On defense, try to average six to seven.

GAMEPLAN, GAMEPLAN, GAMEPLAN

"Those who fail to prepare... prepare to fail." This holds true for the Gameplan feature in NFL Superstar. Each week your Superstar is given the opportunity to gameplan against his next opponent. When you enter Gameplan, three focus plays will be displayed. When you practice these successfully, you will notice that your Superstar has increased attributes only when that play is run in-game.

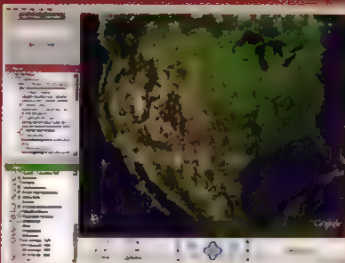
DON'T BE CONTENT WITH YOUR AGENT

When you first start off in Superstar, you have a limited amount of agents that are willing to work for you. As your play and status increases, more agents will start to look your way. Make sure to check the agent directory and try to hire the best one for you. All of them have different strengths and weaknesses, but only a few have access to the Performance Institute. Hiring an agent with the right credentials will help you become an NFL Superstar.

Mod World

GOOGLE EARTH

<http://earth.google.com/index.html>



It's hard to quantify just how entertaining this is. Imagine the whole of Google packed in and cross-referenced to a stitched-together fully zoomable satellite image map of the Earth. Then make it part of an application that's incredibly easy to use for anything from flying through the Grand Canyon to finding directions to the nearest Blockbuster Video. Detailed, high-res photos of every region of the Earth are streamed to your computer from a broadband connection – and it's free! There was noticeable streaming/rendering lag even on our super-fast gaming PC on a lightning-quick connection, so if you don't have the power you might not be able to experience Google Earth in its full glory. If you do, though, it's quite the sight to behold.

A FEW GOOD G-MEN

Half-Life 2

<http://www.nailbiter.net/gman/>

This probably isn't the most ambitious project ever, but it's a good study of how far graphics have come – and pretty cool to boot.

A Few Good G-Men is a short six-minute movie using Half-Life 2's Source engine to recreate the courtroom scene from *A Few Good Men*, with the original film's audio running over the CG video. It's only a 40 MB download, so go check it out.

DOSBox

<http://dosbox.sourceforge.net>



Playing old school (as in pre-Windows) PC games can be a real headache. Workarounds have been around forever, but the whys and hows are frequent enough queries that we decided to share our favorite solution with you. DOSBox is a free, open-source DOS emulator for Windows, MacOS X, Linux, and even weird old operating systems like BeOS and OS/2. The homepage at the URL above has all of the different versions available for download, as well as easy step-by-step instructions on how to get those old games working.

STEVE KENT

MY LIFE IN GAMES



Steve Kent has been one of gaming's most respected journalists for years, with a career stretching back to the early days of the industry with *Electronic Games* to his more recent work for *USA Today*. One of his most notable accomplishments is writing the comprehensive *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, an indispensable history of the business. However, this year will mark Kent's last as a dedicated game writer as he moves on to other interests, including his budding career as a novelist. In this month's *Classic GI*, Kent looks back at his time in video games, reminiscing on some of the important events of the past and looking forward to where this unique form of entertainment is headed in the future. Included are some exclusive pictures from Kent's archives, showing some of the most notable video game figures from the last 20 years.

In the not too distant future, historians will look back on the years from 1985 through 2005 as the toddler years of video gaming. Since you and I live in the middle of this era, we cannot imagine what the adult years will hold, but the following is a brief look back at my life with games.

1984 – 1986: The 'Tween Years

THIS WAS THE era of the Commodore 64, laserdisc games, and the Adam Computer. The arcade business was coming off its third bad year in a row. As the big arcades died, smaller arcades lived on their crumbs.

Plain old video games were no longer enough. *Dragon's Lair*, *Space Ace*, and the onslaught of laserdisc games proved that video games could look like cartoons. Sadly, these games also played like cartoons.

Coleco hoped to salvage its sagging business by building its ColecoVision console into the Adam Computer. Poorly designed and hastily manufactured, the Adam turned out to be the Yugo of home computers. Even owning the rights to *Cabbage Patch Kids* could not save the Connecticut Leather Company.

After Atari took its Humpty Dumpty-esque fall, Warner Communications sold its home division to Jack Tramiel, the ousted founder of Commodore Computers, for \$240 million in promissory notes based on future earnings.

The Tramiels had a draconian reputation. As they entered Atari, some joker hopped on the PA system and shouted, "Imperial stormtroopers have entered the base."

The Tramiels turned Atari into a computer company, ultimately releasing the Atari

ST computer – a good computer at an excellent price. Jack Tramiel may be the game industry's answer to Count Olaf, but he made Atari temporarily profitable. Under his twisted leadership, Atari staggered on for 10 more years.

In 1984 and '85, Minoru Arakawa and Howard Lincoln added the "Robot Operating Buddy" to the Nintendo Entertainment System and called it a "robot game." Retailers shunned them and software publishers laughed with scorn. Bad move. Lincoln has a very long memory.

Off in Japan, Sega hired two polar opposites – Yuji Naka and Hisao Oguchi. Naka, a brooding and detail-oriented genius, went on to produce *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *NIGHTS*. Hisao Oguchi, a jovial sort with a knack for delegation, led the team that created *Crazy Taxi* and *Virtua Tennis*.

Naka is Sega's last remaining star designer. Oguchi is the president of the company.

I wrote my first article about video games in 1985, but that one doesn't count because it was an editorial about how I was going to kick the video game habit. I was in college, spending all of my free time in the campus game room. I bought an Atari 5200 and returned it the next day because my parents threatened to stop helping with my tuition if I kept it.



■ Mario and Donkey Kong at a Seattle hotel for the launch of *Super Smash Bros.*

1987 – 1990: Nintendo Daze

THE MOST EXCITING time to own a home console was the late '80s. Nintendo owned the business. Atari and Sega tried to horn in, but that was joke. People didn't just love video games, they actually loved Nintendo. Nintendo was Mario and Zelda and Donkey Kong.

People did not know much about the games at the time. Nintendo executives ran focus groups and learned an important lesson that would later backfire. They learned that they knew more about games than their customers, and that giving their customers innovation was better than giving them what they asked for.

This approach translated into a monochrome Game Boy with really cheap games and great battery life. It resulted in the NES's Super Mario Bros. 3, the most successful non-packed-in video game of all time. (Nintendo made more copies of Super Mario Bros. and Tetris, but those games came free with hardware.)

There were other beloved companies, too. Capcom made Mega Man, Disney games, and truly wonderful arcade ports. Tecmo made great sports games. Eighteen years after its release, Tecmo Bowl is still a fun party game. Konami, with its Contra, Gadius, and Castlevania games, was hot. Even after Bayou Billy and that first Ninja Turtles game, people loved Konami.

Then there was Acclaim – which published all kinds of games. Double Dragon II, the only Double Dragon from Acclaim, was one of my personal favorites on the NES.

In 1989, NEC released the TurboGrafx and Sega released Genesis. Nineteen-ninety, the first full year for the 16-bit systems, was the NES's most profitable year. Like I said earlier, people loved Nintendo. That romance, however, was soon challenged.

Me...I was off getting my master's degree. I was writing a thesis on the Soviet Union's use of American public relations techniques. The topic bored me. Unbeknownst to my parents, I bought an NES. I let myself play 15 minutes of Mario or Mega Man 2 for every hour of work I completed. Within another three weeks, the thesis was done.

My thesis committee was impressed. They might not have been had I told them about my Mega Man addiction.

1991 – 1994: Turmoil

IN 1990, SEGA of America hired former Mattel CEO Tom Kalinske. During his tenure at Mattel, Kalinske engineered a resurgence of Barbie. He launched He-Man and the Masters of the Universe.

Because of his association with Barbie, some people referred to Kalinske as Sega's "Ken doll." He did not know much about video games when he started, but Kalinske was a quick study. By lowering the price of Genesis and packing Sonic the Hedgehog in with the hardware, Kalinske's Sega jumped from five percent of the console market to 52 percent. Nintendo was stunned.

Sega opened an American games studio, published dozens of games in-house, ported arcade hits, and created an attitude-intensive advertising campaign. Sega had its "Sega Shout" Nintendo had a commercial in which people danced around a giant Super NES holding plungers. Sega made gaming cool and raised the age of gamers from 11 to 15. Many of the techniques that Sony does right were developed by Sega. The Nintendo vs. Sega rivalry was one of the high-points in gaming.

One company that started well and stumbled during this time was Acclaim. Acclaim Entertainment published ports of Midway arcade hits like Mortal Kombat and NBA Jam. The world was Acclaim's oyster, and then Midway decided to publish its own console games and Acclaim began its 10 year slide into oblivion.

In 1993, Mortal Kombat caught the eye of Senator Joseph Lieberman, who was genuinely disturbed by the violent fighting games of the time. He was blissfully unaware of Doom – a little shareware game that was released shortly after he and Senator Herb Kohl began their congressional joint hearings about video game violence.

Computer games overshadowed video games during this

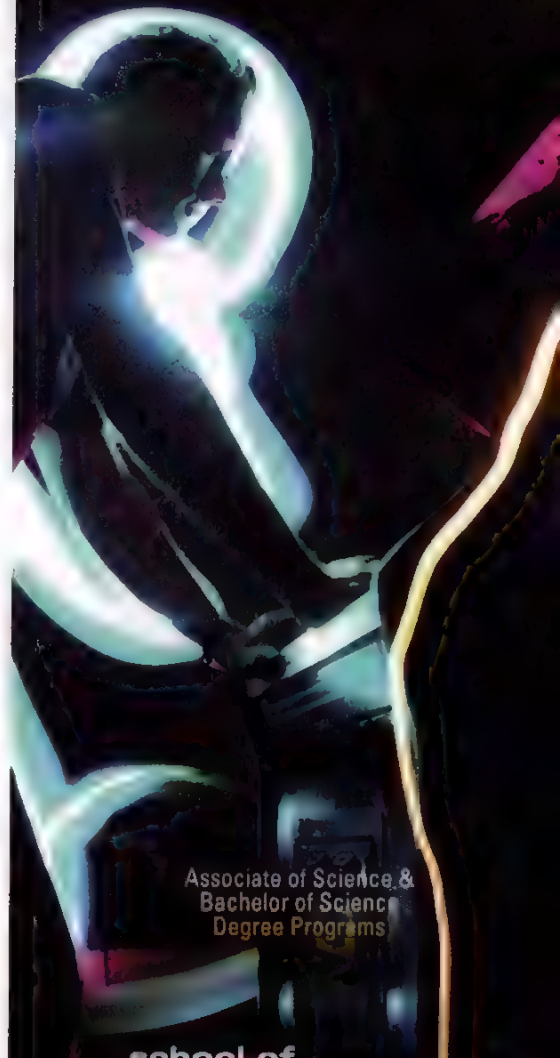
(Continued on page 124)



1 Namco's now defunct WonderEggs theme park 2 Lumines creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi, during the time his Space Channel 5 was released 3 A rare photograph of prototype models for the original Xbox controller 4 Kent and legendary Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto 5 Some comely Links celebrate Zelda at Spaceworld 2000 6 The Planet of the Apes invades E3 7 Kent chats with Senator Joe Lieberman before giving a presentation on game violence 8 An early photo of DOA creator Tomonobu Itagaki 9 Yar's Revenge creator Howard Scott Warshaw speaks at the Classic Game Expo 10 This is the computer that Tetris was created on

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period. CD technology had existed for years, but there was no compelling reason to upgrade. Then came *Myst* and *The 7th Guest*. Today, people complain that *The 7th Guest* had a silly story and *Myst* was a slide show, but those games made multimedia computers a household item. They also gave birth to terms like "interactive movies" and "full-motion video." People now realize that interactive movies are a bad idea. "Full-motion video" is the Joey Buttafuoco of gaming.

It's October, 1993. I work for a Seattle PR agency and I have written a couple of book reviews for the *Seattle Times*. I call my editor at the *Times* and ask, "How would you like a review of virtual haunted houses for Halloween?" I made the call because I wanted free copies of *The 7th Guest*, *Legacy*, and *Alone in the Dark*. *Alone in the Dark* was the best of the three, by far.

Later that year, Joyce Worley of *Electronic Games Magazine* called the PR agency and I talked her into letting me write a game review. Joyce and her husband, pioneering game journalist Amie Katz, took me on as a regular contributor.

1995 – 2000: A New Beginning

IN 1995, SEGA had a few too many systems on the market – Game Gear, Pico, 32X, SegaCD, Genesis/Nomad, and Saturn. Sega all but abandoned its thriving Genesis business that year and concentrated on launching Saturn. Big mistake.

Many of the things that Nintendo does wrong were pioneered by Sega. With Game Boy Advance, DS, GameCube, Game Boy Micro, and the upcoming Revolution, Nintendo has too many systems.

Back to Sega... Saturn was the best 2D game system ever made, but it came out at a time when people wanted 3D games. Thinking of *Virtua Fighter* Remix, *Daytona*, *NiGHTS*, *Panzer Dragoon* Saga, and *Burning Ranger*, I cannot believe Saturn failed.

Super Mario 64 and *Ocarina of Time* are also among my favorite games, but this is the era when Nintendo's habit of ignoring people's requests and telling them what they "really" want became problematic.

People said they wanted big games, good sound, and cheap prices – things made possible by CD-ROM technology. Nintendo told gamers that what they really wanted was no load times, the sole consumer benefit of cartridges. Nintendo 64 games booted up instantly. They also cost as much as \$79.

Nintendo was not listening when it released a cartridge-based console. Looking at DS, I do not think Nintendo is listening now.

Competing against Sony, Nintendo's share of the market dropped to 33 percent. Sega's share of the market dropped to zero.

During this period Sega released two systems, Saturn and Dreamcast. Both systems had wonderful games. Neither system was as powerful as its competitors.

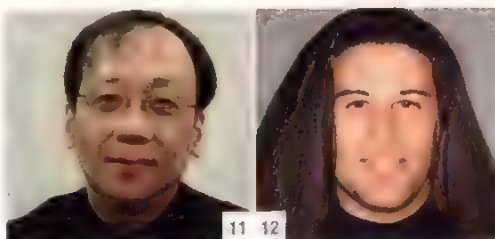
Sega's fall was not due to hardware. Sega was poorly managed. Even when Genesis ruled the U.S. and European console markets, Sega did not turn a profit. Despite its troubles, the company never learned to manage responsibly. It wasted money on systems and peripherals that should never have been made. The most expensive game in history, *Shenmue* (\$45 million), was a Dreamcast disaster.

Now a word about Sony. Sony was never infallible. What Sony has done right is that it has listened to the market. With PlayStation, Sony released a good product at a good price. Sony supported third-party publishers and companies like Namco, Square, and Capcom rewarded Sony lavishly.

Like Sega before it, Sony realized that gamers did not necessarily want to quit playing just because they got older. Sony responded by making games college kids and graduates could love.

Sony made mistakes, but it always listened and adapted to the market. People used to love Nintendo and Sega. I do not believe anybody loves Sony, though I think there are millions of people who love their PlayStations. As Nintendo and Sega proved, love can be fleeting.

During this time, I wrote Christmas lists for *Parade*



11 12



13



14

11 *Dragon Quest* mastermind Yuji Horii **12** *Doom* co-creator John Romero, in his long-haired days **13** *Tetris* programmer Alexei Pajitnov outside of the Elorg Building in Moscow **14** Yu Suzuki, pictured before the launch of his ill-fated *Shenmue* project

Magazine, published a history of video games in *American Heritage*, and wrote weekly columns for *React* and the *Los Angeles Times* syndicate. A former editor from the *Seattle Times* asked me if I would review football games for a new website called *MSNBC*. *MSNBC* reviews turned into a weekly gig that lasted for seven years.

Not everyone agreed with my stuff on *MSNBC*. *GI*'s Andy McNamara once asked me if I "actually played games." He thought I was the Joey Buttafuoco of gaming

2001 – 2005: Today

I SPENT LESS than 10 minutes looking at *Grand Theft Auto III* when it debuted at E3 2001. I don't think anybody paid much attention to it. That was the year of *Metal Gear Solid 2*. *MGS 2* was the game that mattered.

Take 2 Interactive, the company that gave the world *Star Crusader*, *HELL*, and two previous *GTA* games, schooled the entire industry. *Take 2* was one of the first companies to follow Sony's lead and adapt to the changing industry.

So did Electronic Arts. Electronic Arts had long bobbed up and down near the top of the industry; but in 2001, EA shed its Shaq Fu/Michael Jordan and *Windy City* heritage. It left behind all the nerdiness that was 1990s gaming and became the chic megalopolis it is today.

Electronic Arts is slick and insincere, the video game version

of a Madison Avenue advertising agency, but it makes good games. You can keep your *San Andreas* and *Halo 2*; *Burnout 3* was my runaway favorite game last year.

It's hard to condemn Sony for a success that is based on listening to customers. Despite everything, Sony still comes across as an electronics company. Unlike Sega and Nintendo, I do not think Sony has etched out an identity as a software company, but games like *Ratchet and Clank*, *Twisted Metal*, and *God of War* are impressive. For the record, I do not like *Gran Turismo* – driving real cars on real roads under real conditions is a gaming idea I consider only slightly duller than a college trigonometry class simulator.

Sega, of course, has not lived up to its potential since going software-only. The truth is, once console manufacturers stop making hardware, there is no need for them to take the risks that made their games great in the past. A company that once encouraged its game designers to push the envelope, Sega has gone in the opposite direction. Rikiya Nakagawa (everything from *Golden Axe* to *House of the Dead*) is no longer with the company. Neither is Tetsuya Mizuguchi (*Space Channel 5*, *Rez*). Hisao Oguchi no longer makes games. The independent houses like AM2 have all been closed down have been closed and designers like Nagoshi and Yu Suzuki have been moved in house where their work can be watched. Is this really Sega?

And then there is Nintendo. I am losing faith in Nintendo. If the company that resurrected video games, invented the handheld market, and pulled me through my master's thesis ever comes back, it will be a welcomed return. But I do not believe that it is the same company that gave us the Nintendo DS and *Star Fox Assault*.

So how do I feel about Revolution? Revolution gives me a small ray of hope. Buying a new generation of game hardware so that I can play 20-year-old games would not be a reason to buy at all if those games were not from Nintendo. But *Donkey Kong*, *Donkey Kong Jr.*, *Super Mario Bros. 3*, *Super Mario World*, and the original *Star Fox* are good enough that getting them online is reason enough to keep me around for one last dance with Nintendo.

A word to Mr. Iwata and Reggie – fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Fool me three times I'm permanently scared. After N64 and GameCube...

One company I have not mentioned in all of this is Microsoft. Xbox is a great system. I wanted Microsoft to prove itself, and it has. I have many questions, however, about the future of Xbox 360. I did not like the way Microsoft unveiled it on MTV, and Microsoft's last E3 press conference was a disaster. Did they really think their presentation would be so bad that they needed to hire a pit filled with attractive young hardbodies to sit at the top of the stage and applaud?

Xbox 360 does not appear to be as powerful as PlayStation 3, but it doesn't need to be...just as PlayStation 2 did not need to be as powerful as Xbox. What must be more powerful is Microsoft's marketing effort. They must convince people to jump the moment they see Xbox 360, and above all else, Microsoft must not allow Sony to erode people's interest in 360 the way it eroded people's interest in Dreamcast.

If E3 was any sign of what is to come, I am not sure of Microsoft's ability to do that. Sony looked far more polished and confident showing smoke and mirrors at E3 than Microsoft looked showing a supposedly completed product.

As for me, last summer I sold two science fiction novels to the Ace Books division of the Penguin Publishing Group. I have a third book, a historical novel, under consideration at this moment.

My covering games has included the publication of a book on the history of video games, writing video games entries for two encyclopedias, an annual speech on video game violence in Washington D.C., regular pieces in *USA Today*, a column in the *Japan Times*, and being quoted in *Newsweek*. I am cutting back from games to focus on a new career in fiction. I will still do an occasional games piece, including an ongoing column for *Boy's Life*.

So what do you say after spending thousands of hours on games? What else but, "Thanks, it's been fun." ■■■

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



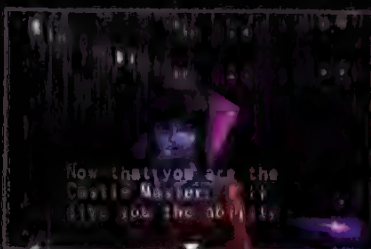
PSONE

TECMO'S DECEPTION

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER TECMO > DEVELOPER TECMO > RELEASE 1996

If you're a gamer with a sadistic streak, Tecmo's Deception might sound too good to be true. As an executed prince seeking the ultimate dark power, your character takes control of the Devil's castle and lays traps to capture and kill invaders who seek the fortress' tainted treasure. Though it sounds diabolically fun in theory, in practice you're the one who ends up feeling the pain.

To effectively spring a trap, you need to wait until your target is directly underneath an indicator arrow before triggering it. Of course, you need to be right next to the trap to activate it, which means that if you miss your targets (or if they dodge the trap) you're under attack and defenseless until you can lure them towards another deadly machine. Once you get accustomed to some of the game's general clumsiness, however, you'll find a distinct diabolical joy as you electrify and skewer the simple-minded dopes who stumble into your lair. There are certainly less frustrating ways to be a jerk, but not many can make you cackle like Deception.

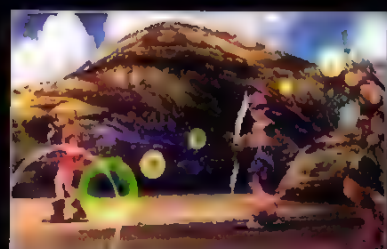


PSONE

CHRONO CROSS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SQUARESOFT > DEVELOPER SQUARESOFT > RELEASE 2000

In the vast sea of RPGs that have graced our shores, few are as grand and powerful as Chrono Cross. Its genius is dimmed only slightly by the years, as a brief glance at the game's graphics may quickly reveal. Even under the handicap of PSone visuals, the bright color palette and unique world of the game manages to shine through. Playing with the concepts of time, fate, and dimensional travel, the plot twists and turns pull you in and refuse to loosen their grip until you're done. They may very well keep you going past that, since repeated playthroughs offer new characters and paths. While there are quite literally dozens of these characters to recruit into your party by the end, each of them feels distinct and memorable in their own right. A brilliant combat system encourages regular use of spells and special techniques, and an intuitive tool lets you customize each character's abilities at any time. Battles may feel a tad on the easy side for RPG veterans, but they never fail to remain exciting and worthy of attention. Chrono Cross sits with Final Fantasy at the highest rungs of the classic RPG ladder, and you should almost be angry at yourself if you haven't conquered this true classic. Play it.



SNES

KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 1994

Remember Golden Axe? Knights of the Round sure does. Don't be fooled, though; despite King Arthur's attempts to emulate the classic Golden Axe formula, this game lacks even a rudimentary semblance of variety. Choosing from among Arthur, Percival, and Lancelot (who totally has bosoms), you'll slash your way through legions of enemies with such clever names as "Tall Man," "Fat Man," and "Magician" (not to mention their more difficult, differently-colored clones). On a few occasions you'll even have the opportunity to mount a horse, which is an utter waste of time and effort. The only things this title has going for it is the two-player co-op and the fact that as your characters increase in level, their armor grows slightly cooler (or their bosoms grow bigger, in Lancelot's case). While it may recall the glory days of side-scrolling arcade-style titles, Knights of the Round succeeds mainly in reminding you of the better, more entertaining entries in the genre. Ah, King of Dragons, where are you now?



GAMEOVER

Fission Mailed

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

With San Andreas' explicit Hot Coffee mod receiving national attention, we have to wonder what other unknown content could be buried in our other favorite games. The more of these questions you nail correctly, the deeper you penetrate the code. Read on to discover which software secrets will be laid bare!

1. Which of the following voice actors did NOT lend his talent to Super Mario 64?

- A. Tim Curry
- B. Dan Castellaneta
- C. Phil Hartman
- D. Harry Shearer

2. This developer served as a driving creative force behind many of Capcom's most successful franchises like Resident Evil and Devil May Cry. Who is he?

- A. Yoshiki Okamoto
- B. Shinji Mikami
- C. Tsuyoshi Tanaka
- D. Suda 51



3. If it has Sephiroth, it must be good! This screen is from which terrible (though highly sought after) arcade/PSone game starring characters from Final Fantasy VII?

- A. Einhander
- B. Ehrgeiz
- C. Einlanzer
- D. Growlanser



4. The Xbox and the GameCube both hit shelves in November of 2001, but how many days apart were their releases?

- A. 2
- B. 3
- C. 7
- D. Prime numbers are stupid

5. Due to a bug, which of the following games for the Atari 7800 were players unable to beat when it first released?

- A. Karateka
- B. Dark Chambers
- C. Double Dragon
- D. Impossible Mission

6. Ahoy, admiral! In addition to raving about traps aboard Mon Calamari cruisers, admirals are also found on submarines. In which of the following games does the player NOT control a submarine?

- A. In the Hunt
- B. Silent Hunter
- C. The Hunt for Red October
- D. Tiger Heli



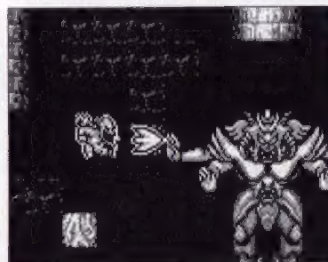
7. If you feel the need to listen to the Corey Hart's timeless song "Sunglasses at Night" (who doesn't!), which radio station would you turn to in Grand Theft Auto: Vice City?



- A. Wave 103
- B. Flash FM
- C. Fever 105
- D. Emotion 98.3

8. This is a shot from the final battle of the Game Boy classic Gargoyle's Quest (sorry, spoiler alerts are void after 15 years). What is the boss's name?

- A. Rushifell
- B. Breager
- C. Fortinbras
- D. Chef Boyardee



9. Electronic Arts put an NFL running back on the package of Madden 2001 (instead of Madden himself). Which player was the first cover boy and the originator of the "Madden Cover Curse"?

- A. Daunte Culpepper
- B. Eddie George
- C. Air Bud
- D. Marshall Faulk

10. The only cool game ever to involve a pink jogging suit, Punch-Out, had a wide array of quirky characters. Which of the following boxers was NOT one of the title holders?

- A. King Hippo
- B. Piston Honda
- C. Bald Bull
- D. Super Macho Man



BREAKDOWN

75% of households with a gaming system expressed confidence in the ESRB and its rating system, according to a new survey

60% of surveyed Japanese consumers see the PlayStation 3 as the most appealing next-gen console, according to a recent poll. Revolution garnered eight percent, with Xbox 360 coming in at a pitiful two percent

169 Minnesota lawmakers voted in favor of allowing horseracing video games back into arcades across the state. Finally, Reiner can play Derby Owners Club again!

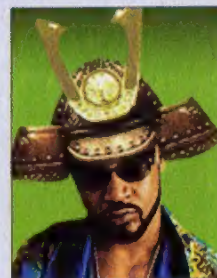
11% of Game Informer editors have been burgled, though 100 percent of the GameCubes in our residences remained unburgled

71% is a pretty good percent

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:
Army Men:
The Lonely Bunker



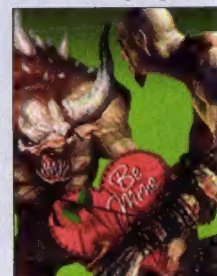
2-3:
Dynasty Warriors:
Wu Tang Dynasty



4-5:
Gran Turismo 4:
TMNT Party Wagon



6-7:
Killer 7: Something that
makes a lick of sense



8-9:
God Of War:
Sex Minigame #2

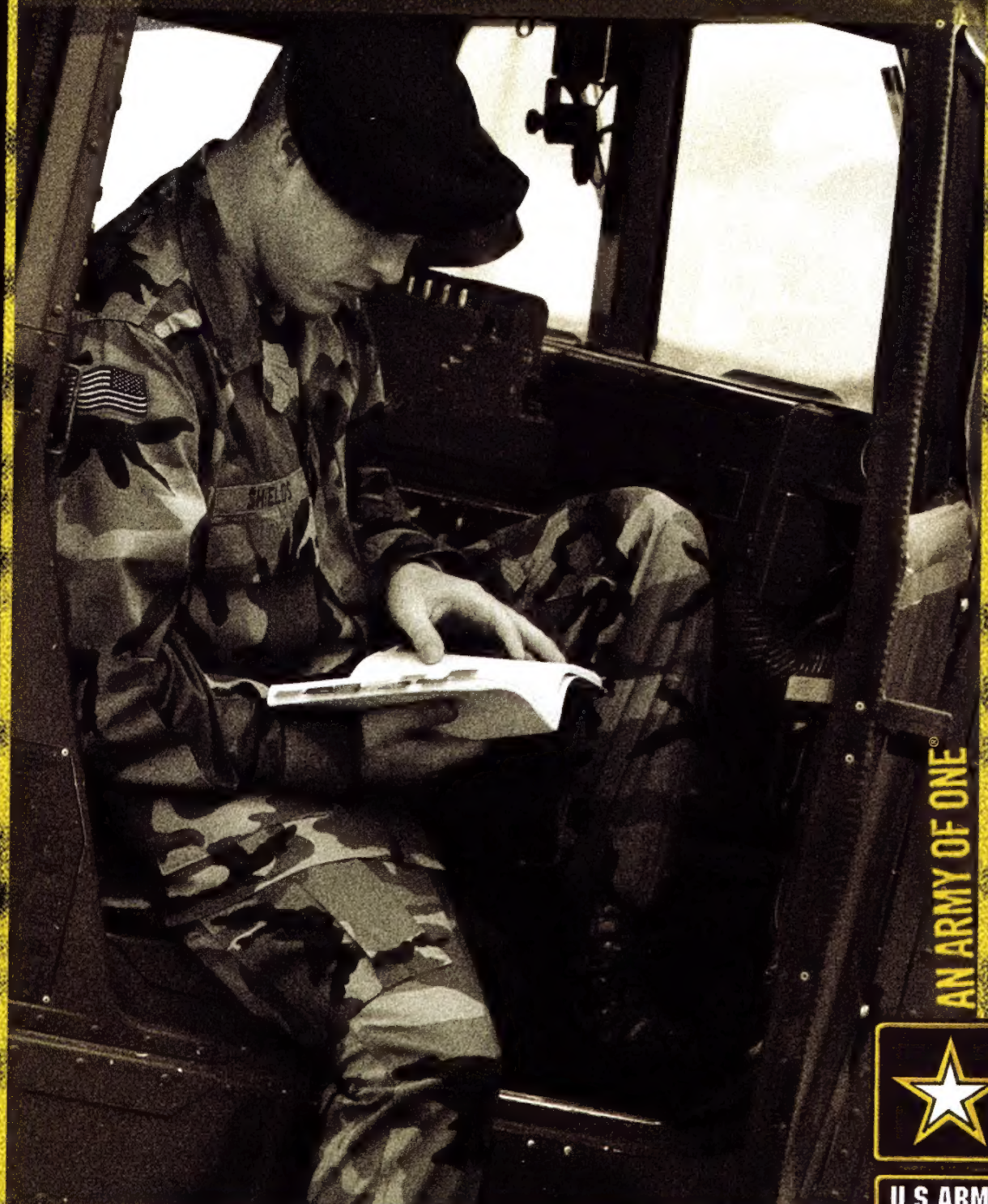


10:
Grand Theft Auto:
Actual Hot Coffee

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Private First Class. Ryan Shields. 11B Infantryman.

I'M GETTING A LOT OF THINGS OUT OF COLLEGE. DEBT JUST ISN'T ONE OF THEM.



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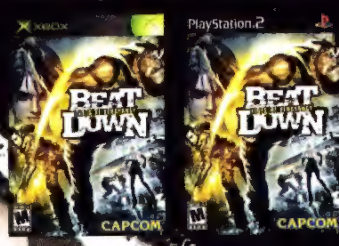
www.capcom.com/beatdown



Gina



Raven



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



PlayStation 2



CAPCOM

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