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PlayStation.2



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Dwyane Wade: Miami Heat / HIGHFLYER

(Freestyle Superstar No. 4) Cutaway



- 1 Internal shoulder protector
- 2 Exterior chest hatch



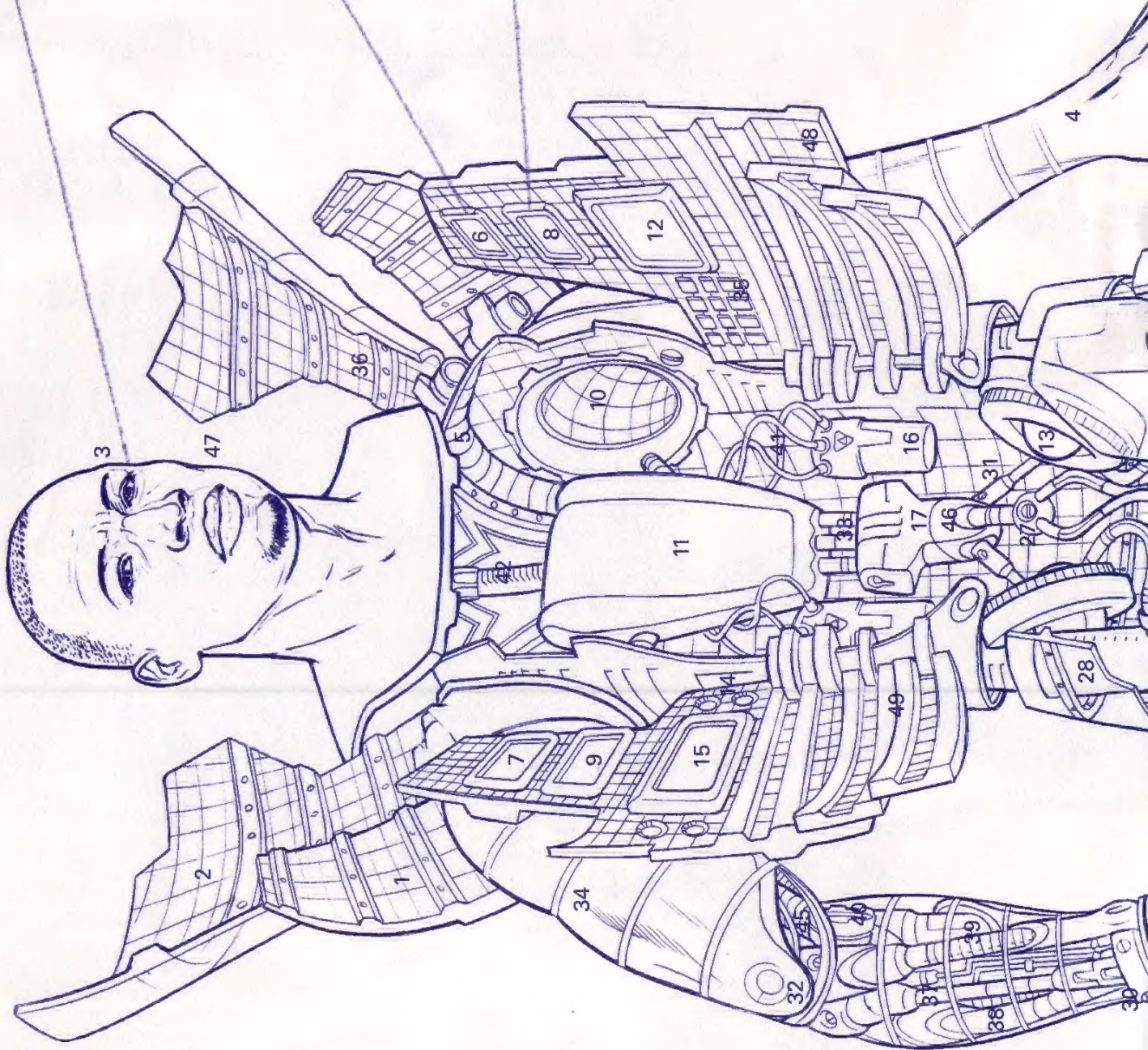
- 3 Full-court floor vision display
- 4 Silicone-based breathable skin
- 5 Internal shoulder padding



- 6 Monster-jam playback screen
- 7 Front court radar display



- 8 Shotblock advanced targeting system
- 9 Rear court radar display
- 10 Anatomic auto-adjusting arm sleeve
- 11 Upper ergonomic backrest
- 12 SCORER high-accuracy repeater
- 13 PLAYMAKER 360° quick-spin hip joint
- 14 Quick-eject release toggle
- 15 SHOOTER 3-point targeting computer
- 16 Aerobic/anaerobic oxygen respirator
- 17 Lower ergonomic backrest
- 18 Hydraulic thigh musculature
- 19 Titanium femur
- 20 Pilot's foot hold
- 21 Knee cover
- 22 Breathable mesh outer layer
- 23 Ankle cover
- 24 HIGHFLYER achilles jump mechanism
- 25 Quick-jump neuro-muscle response unit
- 26 Anatomic leg holds
- 27 Leg hydraulics processor
- 28 Reinforced screen protective plate
- 29 Instant-response nerve connectors
- 30 Reinforced rim-crashing wrist
- 31 Pelvic shock absorbers
- 32 Fully articulated elbow joint
- 33 Spinal shock absorbers





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KAREN LIGHT AT 8.4.05

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PlayStation 2



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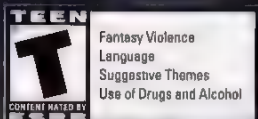
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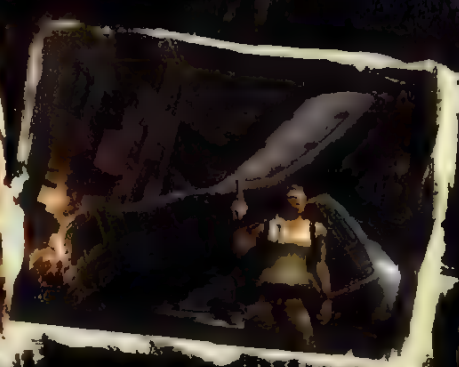
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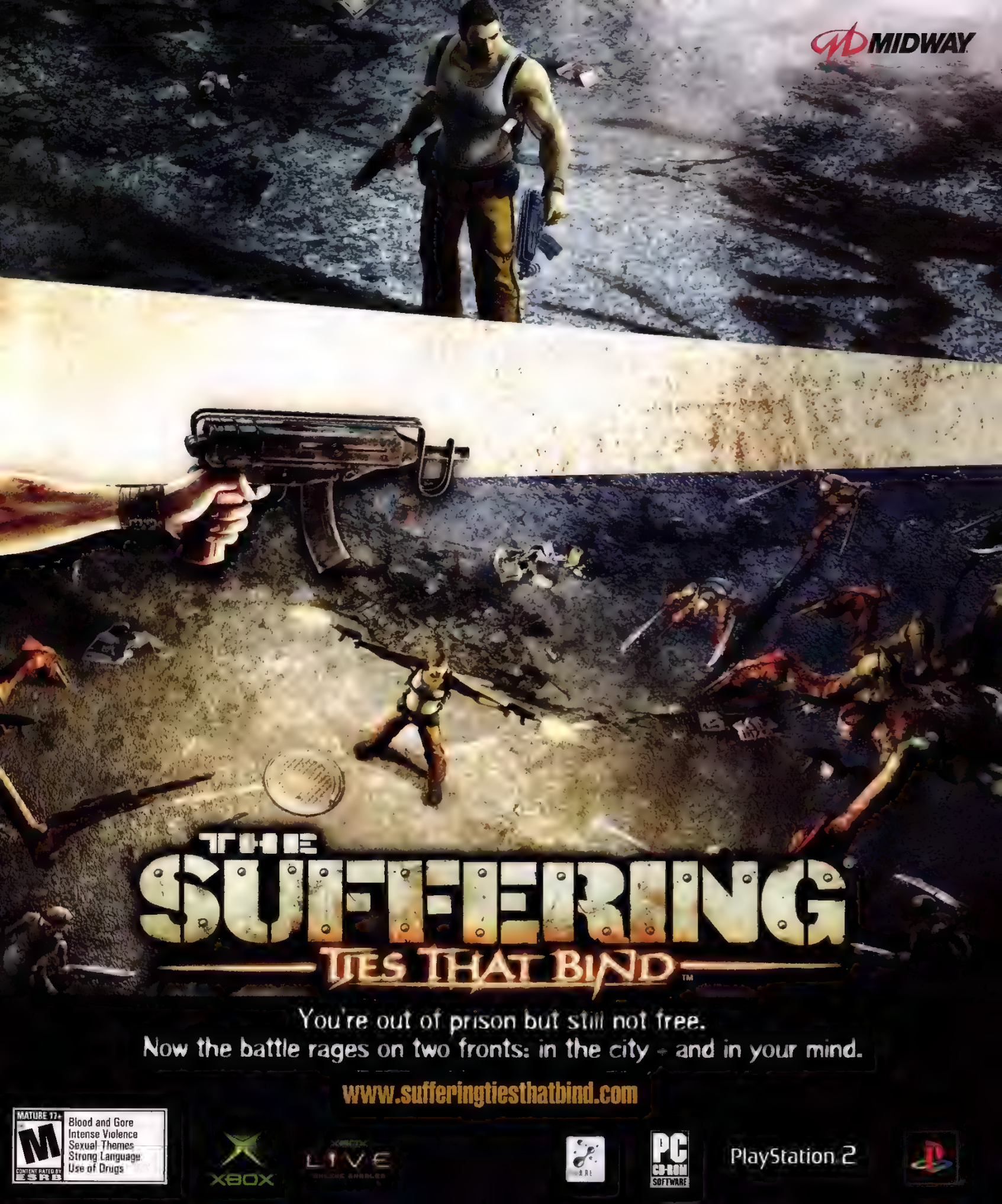


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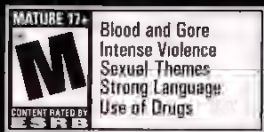


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People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



A SIGN OF THE TIMES

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

With Microsoft's recent announcement of Xbox 360 bundles priced at \$299 and \$399, there has been a lot of talk on the boards and in the bars of this new generation of high-powered, but high-priced, machines. While no price point has been announced for Sony's PlayStation 3 or Nintendo's Revolution, many expect the PlayStation 3 to come in at least a \$399 price point here in the U.S.

I may be stupid or not understand the value of 100 dollars, but I don't actually think the new price point is a bad thing; in fact, I think it's a good idea. Gamers have long asked for more and more out of their game machines. And typically, from the Super NES to the PlayStation 2, the industry has been able to deliver fantastic new technology at a reasonable launch price point of \$299.

While these machines certainly weren't cheap to manufacture, they didn't feature many of the things that gamers today are demanding. Hard drives, wireless controllers, Ethernet ports, USB connections, etc. You name it, we want it.

We want more, and we want it cheaper. I'm all for a new standard – a higher standard. One where my video game system is the center of my entertainment world – because quite frankly, it already is. I play games more than I listen to music or watch movies. If I have to pay a hundred extra dollars just to make sure my machine can do all the things I want it to do, so be it.

But don't shortchange things on my end. If you put in a hard drive, make it standard and let it make my games better. If you are going to give me wireless controllers, give me rechargeable batteries. Video gamers are reasonable people. Explain to us the value of the higher-priced product, and if the value matches the price it won't matter what you sell it for, because people will want it. I gladly paid \$400 for an iPod. It's a hard drive that fits in my pocket and plays all my tunes. It was worth every penny. Prove your worth and gamers everywhere will gladly pay for the next level in entertainment.

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Vince Vaughn In *Wedding Crashers* – Pure Genius, Harry Potter, That George R.R. Martin Is Close To Finally Giving Us *A Feast Of Crows* (About Time) **Dislikes:** Moving, Crybabies, Political Powers Using Gaming As A Sacrificial Lamb For Election **Current Favorite Games:** *Dungeon Siege II*, *World Of Warcraft*, *Advance Wars: Dual Strike*, *Shadow Of The Colossus*



Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** The \$399 Bundle For Xbox 360 (It's A Steal), Baseball At Wrigley Field (A.K.A. Heaven), *A Tale Of Two Sisters* And *Phone* (Great Foreign Horror), My Secret Headquarters On Neptune **Dislikes:** Gas Prices Cutting Into My Game Budget, People Saying That "Snot Rag" Is Not An Acceptable Name For A Cat, Earthlings **Current Favorite Games:** *Radiata Stories*, *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks*, *The Suffering: Ties That Bind*, *We Love Katamari*, *Burnout Revenge*, *Heroes Of The Pacific*



Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** The Return Of The American Version Of *The Office*, Going To Paris, *Konono No. 1 – Congotronics*, *Croc Surt – Complete Recordings Vol. 1*, *Wedding Crashers* (Damn That Was Funny) **Dislikes:** Missing Oterio Smith (Come Back, You Crazy Whizzinator), People I Like Leaving The Industry, The End Of Summer, The Packers **Current Favorite Games:** *Urban Reign*, *The Warriors*, *We Love Katamari*, *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*



Kato >> kato@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Kurt Busch To Penske (Could Be Good Or It Could Be Very Bad), The Suave And Mod Sound Of Rinaldi Swings, *Love & Poison: The No-Holds Barred Autobiography* Of Suede, Not Eating Fast Food For At Least A Month **Dislikes:** Beck Fans, Sharon Osbourne Trying To Stop Iron Maiden From Rocking (Can't Be Done!) **Current Favorite Games:** *Gun*, *NASCAR 06: Total Team Control (Totally, Man)*, *Rebelstar Tactical Command*, *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, *The Warriors*, *Burnout Revenge*



Lisa >> lisa@gameinformer.com

Handle: La Game Nikita **Expertise:** Survival Horror, Adventure, RPGs, Action/Platform, Racing **Interests:** The Green Motorola Pebble, The Next Gen Looming Ever Closer, Fabulous Faux Painting Techniques, *Craigslist*, Surprise Un-Birthday Parties **Dislikes:** Ticketmaster (Not Even For Any Particular Reason, I Just Hate 'Em In General), That Michael Bay And Uwe Boll Still Get To Make Movies **Current Favorite Games:** *Resident Evil 5*, *Fatal Frame 3*, *We Love Katamari*, *PoPoLoCrois*, *Indigo Prophecy*, *Burnout Revenge*, *Shadow Of The Colossus*, *Condemned: Criminal Origins*, *Genji: Dawn Of The Samurai*



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Handle: Gamezilla **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Survival Horror, Action/Platform, Fighting, Strategy/RPGs **Interests:** My New Badass PC (A.K.A. "The Punisher"), *The 40-Year Old Virgin*, Slowly Winning The Battle Against My House, The Perfectionist **Dislikes:** Bands That Write "Clever" Lyrics (Fountains Of Wayne? More Like Fountains Of Suck!), Having Nowhere Near Enough Money For The Xbox 360 **Current Favorite Games:** *Prey*, *Heroes Of The Pacific*, *Ninja Gaiden Black*, *Burnout Revenge*, *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks*, *Condemned: Criminal Origins*, *The Suffering: Ties That Bind*



Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Quality Home-Cooking, *Ghost In The Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, The Use Of Photoshop Filters To Make Things Look More Awesome, Everything About My DS **Dislikes:** Tom Hanks (He's Been Downhill Since *Dragnet*), The Continuing Lack Of Anything I Care About On PSP, Unfixably Vague Computer Problems, Noise Levels Higher Than They Need To Be **Current Favorite Games:** *World Of Warcraft*, *Advance Wars: Dual Strike*, *Spartan: Total Warrior*, *Dungeon Siege II*, *Unreal Tournament 2004*



Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Strategy, Platform, Puzzle **Interests:** *Arrested Development*, *A Confederacy Of Dunces* By John Kennedy Toole, Smacking People On The Forehead With A Cane, Old Man-Style **Dislikes:** The Word "Kamui," Online Petitions (No One Cares, Losers!), Alan Alda (He Knows Why), Jeremy Fishing For The Toys On My Desk, My Increasing Knowledge About Baseball **Current Favorite Games:** *Radiata Stones*, *Shadow Of The Colossus*, *Indigo Prophecy*, *Crackdown*



Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Expensive Steak Houses, Finishing Season One Of *Lost* Before Season 2 Starts, The Ease Of Clicker Training, Introducing A New Generation To Games **Dislikes:** Being Hungry, Rereading Books From Childhood That Have Lost Their Charm, Trying To Scrape Together Enough For A Real 360 (The One With A Hard Drive) **Current Favorite Games:** *PoPoLoCrois*, *Fable: The Lost Chapters*, *GripShift*, *Genji: Dawn Of The Samurai*, *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, *Halo 2*, *Ridge Racer*

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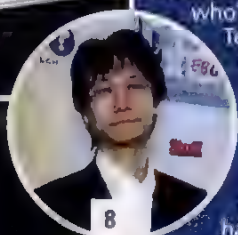
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GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



1 C4 executives Debra Green (COO) and Charles Hirschhorn (CEO) hang with rocker celebrity couple Dave Navarro and Carmen Electra at G-Phoria. We'll let you figure out who's who. **2** Here's an impromptu shot of Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the man who created Game Informer's greatest addiction: Lumines. Well, second greatest after gummi bears...sweet, sweet gummi bears **3** Electronic Art's Tiffany Spencer and Abby Topolsky hang with *NYPD Blue/Silver Spoons* legend Rick Schroder. Back in the day, he had video game machines and a train in his house! **4** Raven Studios vice president Brian Raffel poses with a custom-made Falcon Northwest computer, built for showing Quake 4 at QuakeCon. No, it's not for sale **5** One of *GI Spy's* favorite people, Matt Schlosberg of 2K Games, poses with the crew during his farewell tour. Matt is leaving the industry to go sell liners and napkins to Mafia-controlled restaurants! We'll miss you, Matt, and stay out of the East River! **6** World renowned poker champion Chris "Jesus" Ferguson stopped by the Game Informer offices to promote Activision's World Series of Poker and demonstrated his infamous "banana trick." Which is a CARD trick, people – get your minds out of the gutter! **7** Joe enjoys a tasty bite of Scotland's national delicacy, haggis, with Microsoft's Craig Evans and Real Time Worlds' Dave Jones **8** Metal Gear Solid mastermind Hideo Kojima is excited to be at G-Phoria! **9** Here's a shot of the two big moneymakers at QuakeCon 2005 accepting their prizes, Doom 3 champion Gopher and Ms. QuakeCon winner Ms. X (of the Girlz Of Destruction clan)



CRYING OVER SPILLED COFFEE

I can't believe that GTA: SA has been reclassified by the ESRB from Mature to AO because of the Hot Coffee mod! My parents already didn't like me being in possession of M-rated games, and now that it's AO, my copy of GTA has just been ceremoniously cremated. Why would ESRB do that when the explicit material wasn't accessible through normal gameplay? That game was one of the best out there, and now countless teens are going to have their copies destroyed like mine thanks to some stupid idiots who thought that they should re-rate it just because people could make the conscious choice to download objectionable material.

Mitch Jones
via msn.com

I'm sick and tired of people in the government trying to regulate video games. First there was Lieberman, and now we have Hillary Clinton trying to shut down Grand Theft Auto. I've played my fair share of M-rated games, and I haven't seen anything that I hadn't already seen a hundred times in my local movie theater. I don't know about you, but when I load up a game, I want to do something entertaining and extraordinary; I don't look forward to asking people nicely if I can please borrow their car. Why can't we just be left to game in peace?

Jordan K. Parmenter
via gmail.com

Rockstar claims that no one was meant to find the Hot Coffee content, but I say to hell with the facts! This is the ideal stepping stone that uninformed parent groups need to come closer to ruling the world with an iron fist! With Hillary Clinton and Jack Thompson policing the industry with their immense knowledge of the issues, we may never have to read ESRB ratings ever again! So what if a game was never intended for minors? This isn't about facts – it's about self promotion! We have an important issue here. Health care and gas prices be damned, we have pixilated jubbies to worry about!

Kyle Vincent
via aol.com

■ **This just in from the Department of No Surprises: almost all of the people who feel motivated to write letters to a magazine called Game Informer are staunch supporters of gaming as a hobby and an art. As Dennis McCauley**

articulated in last issue's opinion piece, games are becoming a highly politicized subject and are currently being demonized at every turn by uninformed pundits. Unfortunately, as the industry's most popular game, GTA has become an easy scapegoat for any reprehensible act with even the most tenuous ties to video games. By extension, Rockstar is viewed as the mastermind behind this moral degradation – and creating a game depicting school violence isn't helping that perception. Yes, you can find far worse things in digital form, but it's difficult to rally troops to fight a war against the Internet or Hollywood. It may all boil down to self-promotion and voter-courting, but that doesn't mean the fiasco can't have long-reaching effects on the industry. We appreciate your feedback on these issues, but instead of preaching to the choir, consider writing to your government representatives to express your opinions on the matter. If you quietly wait for the storm to pass, you may be surprised by the damage once the weather clears.

A SIMPLE ASSESSMENT

Hey, it's me! I have a collection of racing games since I know a lot about cars. I have Midnight Club 3, NFSU 2, Juiced, and Gran Turismo 4 (well, I'm getting it soon, probably). Can you tell me if my collection is any good?

C.A. Smith
via email

■ **Yes we can; your collection is not good. You have one good racing game, two mediocre racing games, and a nebulous plan to acquire another good racing game in the uncertain future. You do have a decent start, though. Build on your current assortment with titles like Forza and Burnout Revenge, and then throw in some quirky abomination like Chocobo Racing just for kicks. You haven't experienced the true thrill of racing until you've slammed gysahl**

greens at 90 mph with feathers sticking out of your drawers. Take that, *Days of Thunder!*

GAMES IN TOYLAND

I recently read your article in Connect (issue 148) about the PS3 and [creator Ken] Kutaragi's desire to make it more similar to a PC. The need to make a more complicated system seems foolish to me. If someone really wants to edit photos, have video chats, or do word processing nonsense, then they can just buy a PC. A console is made for gaming, and it seems this idea is rapidly getting lost amid talk of revolutionizing the industry. I am perfectly content with graphics being the only upgrade the next generation receives. I don't need the gadgets; all I want is a console that can play games. That's what it's for, right?

Devon Richmond
via hotmail.com

■ **It's true that the main concern of hardware manufacturers should be games, but just because there are additional bells and whistles**

being added to the consoles doesn't mean that the games are necessarily going to suffer. Plus, you can't count on graphical upgrades forever; as visuals continue to improve and become more lifelike, the step up from one generation to the next will become less pronounced. The notion of "revolutionizing" gaming isn't some pie-in-the-sky concept that Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo are chasing instead of pursuing great games. It is fueled by the fact that, somewhere along the line, stunning graphics simply won't be enough. When that times come, the various technical doo-dads you didn't think you wanted will be what determine how gaming evolves. Better graphics don't mean better games. The direction games go in the future depends on how they can innovate, not how they can give you prettier versions of things you've played before.

LATE TO THE PARTY

You guys are really dropping the ball when it comes to timely reviews. Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith was out for nearly two months before you finally reviewed it, but Destroy All Humans was only out a few days when it was reviewed. I could have really used you guys so I wouldn't have bought that crappy Star Wars game. Come on, get with it.

Jason Byrd
via email

■ **We're sorry we couldn't be there for you when you needed us, Jason. The thought that we failed to save an innocent gamer from that infection of Force-sca-bies wounds us deeply. However, there is a perfectly reasonable explanation as to why some games' reviews don't exactly synch up with their release dates: We just can't get them in time. In order to put a whole magazine together, we need to work a little bit ahead of schedule. In fact, the October issue you are currently holding in your hands (or**

TWO LEFTS MAKE A RIGHT

I was reading the review of *Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana*, when I noticed something very strange about the picture of Zeldalia at the bottom of the page. She has two left hands! One hand is placed under her chin, and her other hand is holding the book, but look at the thumbs – they're both in the left-hand position. Is this central to the storyline?

Jeri Palmer
via email

■ **At first, we considered responding to this observation with some lie about how the plot in *Atelier Iris* is all about how Zeldalia feels inadequate due to her inability to do the Hokey-Pokey properly ("Put your right hand in, Zeldalia! Your right! You shame us all. I have no daughter."). Not only would that have been lame – not to mention offensive to Hokey-Pokey enthusiasts – but it simply can't compare to the natural hilarity of the fact that the only hand-related letter we've gotten in months is from someone whose last name is "Palmer." Priceless.**

THE FATE OF THE WORLD IS IN THEIR HANDS.
THEY JUST DON'T KNOW IT.



SURFACE

THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE WATER.

MONDAYS 8/7c  NBC

NBC.COM

having held in front of you by simpering minions, if you're an evil overlord) was actually mostly written in August – and even a little in July. Given that lead time, if we were to wait until every game was available on store shelves, we would constantly be a month or so behind the current releases. Instead, companies send us advance copies of their titles to ensure that the review hits about the same time as the game. Then again, sometimes they don't. With Episode III, for example, we didn't get anything early because the game contained a healthy portion of movie footage that LucasArts didn't want to leak. So, if the review for [insert your favorite game here] isn't right on time, it's not because we hate it; it's just because the timetables didn't line up. Unless you inserted Chicago Enforcer in those brackets. That we hate.

GANONICAL LORE

I'm sorry for being picky, but in the Game Over section of issue 148 it says "Return of Ganon" at the top. The true spelling is "Gannon" according to the intro screen from the original NES Legend of Zelda.

Alejandro Falconi
via aol.com



■ **False.** Though you did correctly read the intro screen of the first entry in this 10-game franchise (Twilight Princess and the Philips CD-i garbage excluded), any references to the series' classic villain in every other title are spelled "Ganon." In fact, the phrase you reference from the Game Over section is a direct quote from *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link* game over screen. Just as a general rule, it's a poor idea to take spelling lessons from '80s video games. After all, they aren't renowned for their impeccable use of English. I feel asleep! This story is happy end! A winner is you!

ESCORT SERVICE

Of all the various tasks that video games have presented to players over the years, there is one in particular that always acts as the kiss of death for any game: escort missions. I'm sorry, but no one wants to protect some pants-wetting executive or put-upon farmer when there's mayhem to be had. I will tip my cap to anyone who can recall a task in any game on any platform that involved guiding a helpless mass of quivering pixels from point A to point B that actually retained any sort of entertainment value.

Keith Richards
via gmail.com

■ **Get ready Keith,** because you're about to have the tippin'-est cap this side of the Casey Creek, Kentucky (home of Amiable AI and his heartfelt "how d'you do"). A healthy portion of Game of the Year contender Resident Evil 4 has escort segments, as do Metal Gear Solid 2 and 3, Half-Life 2, and the oft-lauded ICO. While these games are examples of escort missions at their best, we understand your frustration with the typical protect formula. It is difficult to allow your success to depend on the boneheaded misadventures of a sub-par AI construct. You tell them to stay put, and a second later they've decided to grenade themselves. We agree that when these tasks are poorly executed, they are some of the worst experiences to be had outside of square-dancing, but not all escort missions are as bad as a kick in the dosie-does.

ENVELOPE ART

OCTOBER WINNER!
RYAN SIZEMORE



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

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

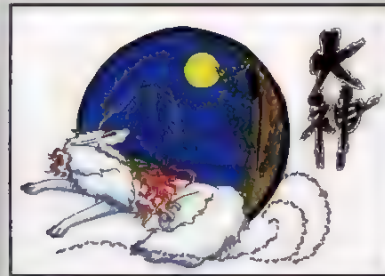
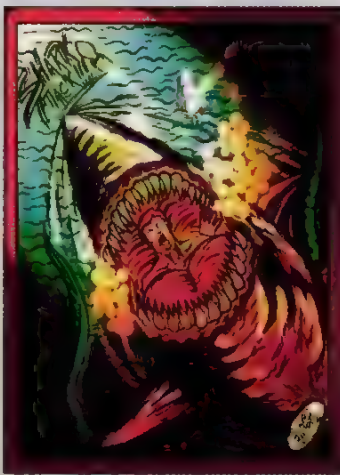
BRANDON NEBITT

"Let's see you play Hunters without your stylus cannon, sucker! Pac n' Roll forever!"



RICHARD RAMIREZ

A piece of advice: never let your overbearing mother convince you to go into shark dentistry



YIHYOUNG LI

"I will bring magic back to the world... then lick my crotch."



JACK SAINDON

As if the Mario brothers weren't homoerotic enough. No, Mario, we don't need a "package" delivered.



KATHRYN DeFEO

Battle of the hats: Reptile vs. Amphibian – Fight!



MATURE 17+
M Violence
Blood and Gore



news

XBOX 360 PRICING SET

CONSOLE COMES IN TWO FLAVORS

Xbox 360 Premium Edition – \$399

- Xbox 360 Console
- Hard Drive (20 GB)
- Wireless Controller
- Faceplate
- Headset
- Component HD-AV Cable (Not Shown)
- Xbox Live Silver Membership
- Universal Media Remote (available for a limited time, this universal remote controls DVD/music playback, as well as access to Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005-based PCs)



As of this printing, Microsoft still hadn't announced a release date for its Xbox 360 console, but the company did recently clarify two price points for the platform – expected to debut sometime in November.

The Xbox 360 Core System will hit shelves for \$299, and befitting its name and price, is the more stripped-down bundle. The Core System features the Xbox 360 console, a wired controller, white faceplate, standard AV cable (your original Xbox cables won't work), and an Xbox Live Silver membership. Silver membership only allows for online chat and access to Xbox Live Marketplace demos and the Xbox Live arcade. Online play requires at least an Xbox Live Gold membership.

For \$399, consumers get the Xbox 360 Premium bundle, which includes the system, a 20 GB hard drive, a wireless

controller (works at approximately 30 feet for a running time of about 30 hours on two AA batteries), white faceplate, headset, universal remote (for a limited time only), high-definition component AV cable, and an Xbox Live Silver membership.

Microsoft's decision to offer two price points has angered some gamers. Although you certainly can buy the Xbox 360 for \$299, many feel that the Core System is a poor value since it doesn't include the console's hard drive (which is required for backward compatibility with Xbox titles), a wireless controller, or the HD cables – all components that Microsoft had very much implied would be necessary to take part in its much-hyped "HD era of gaming." Anyone who buys the Core System will naturally have to also get a \$39.99 Memory Card (since there is no hard drive to save data on), making it almost impossible to walk out of the store without paying at

least \$339. In a quick poll of 1,614 people on Game Informer Online, 57 percent of respondents indicated that they would buy the \$399 bundle versus only five percent who preferred the Core System. Furthermore, only three percent voted for buying the Core System and the separate \$99 hard drive together, opting out of the HD cables and wireless controller. Thirty-five percent indicated that they didn't plan on buying the Xbox 360 in any form. Microsoft has not specified what percentage of Xbox 360 units at launch will be the Core System and how many will be the Premium Edition.

Although some think that \$399 is too expensive, and claim that Microsoft is nickel-and-diming consumers, console launches are never cheap affairs. Gamers traditionally have had to pay extra for everything from memory cards to games to second controllers. One Xbox 360 developer, who wished to remain anonymous, told us that they liked the options

Xbox 360 Core System – \$299

- Xbox 360 console
- Standard AV Cable (Not Shown)
- Wired Controller
- Xbox Live Silver Membership
- Faceplate



available. "Actually, I do like the ability to customize the system in many aspects, including the hard drive. While it would be easier to develop games knowing that a consumer does or does not have the hard drive, I applaud attempts at keeping the prices down by allowing options."

The fact that some consumers may have an Xbox 360 without a hard drive brings up the question of whether or not developers will utilize it, knowing that some gamers won't be able to reap the benefits. Microsoft has addressed this problem by requiring that all titles work with both bundles. The difference being that if a developer is utilizing the hard drive; then those particular Xbox 360 owners will have advantages such as shorter load times. Our anonymous developer didn't believe that game development would suffer because only a portion of consumers will have a hard drive. "As a game maker, I believe that good software can sell hardware. So, if

we come up with compelling features that require the hard drive, people will buy the hard drives and use them."

Game Informer talked to a trusted source within Microsoft who told us that the company is offering two price points so that it can say that the 360 only costs \$299 – an attempt to avoid being perceived as breaking current pricing conventions. Public perception of price was apparently a stronger concern than what developers wanted or what was best for the system.

Regardless of what consumers think of the Xbox 360's price points, Sony could stand to reap the benefits of Microsoft's strategy. With a planned launch date of spring 2006 (depending on where in the world you live – see Loose Talk for more), Sony is keenly watching how the Xbox 360's launch goes with consumers, and will use it as test marketing to see how attractive or unattractive a \$399 price point is.

XBOX 360 ACCESSORIES

- Hard Drive (20 GB) – \$99.99
- Memory Unit (64 MB) – \$39.99
- Wireless Networking Adapter (allows for a wireless network connection, as well as video and music streaming to the 360 from a Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005-based PC) – \$99.99
- Wireless Controller – \$49.99
- Wired Controller – \$39.99
- Play and Charge Kit (includes cable allowing you to play and charge your wireless controller simultaneously. Also comes with rechargeable battery pack) – \$19.99
- VGA HD AV Cable – \$39.99
- S-Video AV Cable – \$29.99
- Universal Media Remote – \$29.99
- Headset – \$19.99





NEED FOR SPEED
MOST WANTED



DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

VIVENDI SPIES LUDLUM'S THRILLERS

VU Games has inked an exclusive deal to turn the works of author Robert Ludlum into video games. Ludlum has sold more than 290 million copies of his books, and has had titles like *The Bourne Identity* and *The Bourne Supremacy* turned into movies.



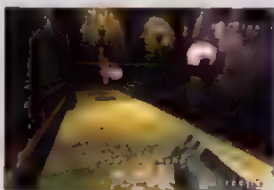
BOX OFFICE GOD OF WAR

Universal Pictures has secured the rights to Sony's *God of War* video game, although no cast, director, or release date is known yet. Meanwhile, a sequel to the action game is a distinct possibility. For more, check out our exclusive interview with *God of War* producer David Jaffe on page 44.



QUAKE III ARENA OPEN TO ALL

At this year's QuakeCon, id Software released the source code for its PC FPS *Quake III Arena*, leaving it free for manipulation by any would-be developers. Check it out at www.idsoftware.com/business/techdownloads/



BACK TO WORK!

The war between the Screen Actors Guild and the video game industry is over. Over 81 percent of voting Screen Actors Guild members approved a referendum (binding until 2008) addressing voice actors' pay.

ASHERON'S CALL 2 SILENCED

Developer Turbine has decided to shut down the MMORPG *Asheron's Call 2* on December 30 due to its lack of profitability. "Until then," read a statement from Turbine CEO Jeffrey Anderson, "we plan to run live events, but will not be adding any content or features." Turbine says that the original *Asheron's Call* will continue.

RESIDENT EVIL DS IN MOTION

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the *Resident Evil* series, Capcom is putting out a remake of the original game for the Nintendo DS called *Resident Evil: Deadly Silence* in Japan. The game not only features first-person knife fights that are different from the original on PSone, but the touch screen also requires you to wipe off blood from the screen. Wi-Fi will also be featured, but details regarding that or a release date have not been announced.



games

GUN GETS ITS MAN!

THOMAS JANE LEADS ALL-STAR CAST FOR WESTERN



Colton White - Thomas Jane



Ned White - Kris Kristofferson



Thomas Magruder - Lance Henriksen

The cowboy is a powerful American icon, and developer Neversoft's exploration of the western in *Gun* is attracting some big-name Hollywood actors anxious to get involved with the game. Thomas Jane from *The Punisher* plays the role of Colton White, bringing a gravity to the character that surely stems from Jane's love of westerns (check our interview with Jane at right). Meanwhile, the legendary Kris Kristofferson imbues Colton's father Ned White with all the experience of an aged mountain man.

The game starts out with Colton and Ned tracking some wild game and tangling with a pack of wolves - a good introduction to *Gun*'s living world, where hunting for your life may be quite necessary. Of course, you could also take a swig of whiskey for a quick health boost. Later on, a character named Honest Tom will get you a steed and teach you how to ride like a pro, racing with you (don't run your horse too hard or you may kill the nag) and introducing you to some horse-on-horse action - combat, that is. Further in the adventure, flaming arrows and even dynamite arrows will make you deadly on horseback.

Gun releases this fall from Activision on the Xbox 360, Xbox, PlayStation 2, and GameCube.



Hoodoo Brown - Ron Perlman



Reverend Josiah Reed - Brad Dourif



Clay Allison - Tom Skerritt

'YOU'VE GOTTA BE A TOUGH S.O.B.'

Actor Thomas Jane talks about bringing Colton White to life



What attracted you to the project?

I've always been a big fan of westerns. I don't play many video games, but this story was really great. The cast is tremendous, and I just love the story - somebody should grab it and make it a film. It's like *Indiana Jones in the Wild West*. I've seen a lot of westerns growing up as a kid. It's kind of in our DNA as American men. It gets ingrained in us at an early age. They don't really make many westerns anymore, so I thought it would be a really cool thing to do, and I don't know if I'll ever get to make one. It seems like nobody's really making decent westerns, and the few that have come out in the past couple of years have been abominable. So we're still waiting for that film that's gonna reinvigorate the western. The last great western was *Unforgiven* with Clint Eastwood. So for me [*Gun*] is great fun and a great way to get into that.

What's your read on your character Colton White?

He's born of tooth and claw, as they used to say. He's born out of the wild of the west, and I think that in a lot of what made the west the new frontier was this kind of pioneering spirit that people had. Breaking out of society and moving west and looking for new frontiers. You've gotta be a tough son of a b—, and I think he's kind of like that.

Did you improvise any of your lines?

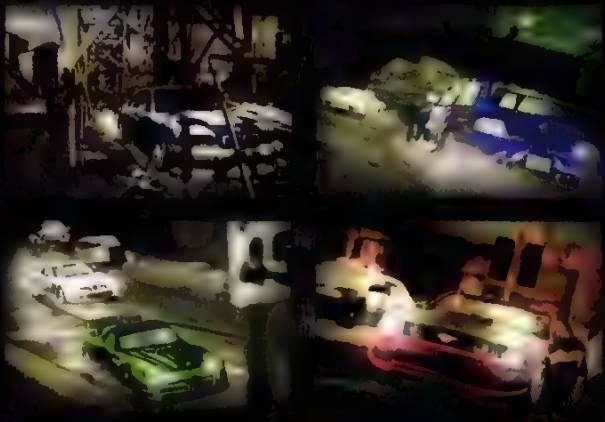
Yeah, I tried to change stuff to make it work for me. Video game acting right now is rather difficult. I do it all by myself, not really knowing what's going on in a scene until they render it. You're literally acting with yourself. It's not an ideal situation to an actor. In this game, I got to schedule some of my scenes with Lance Henriksen. So I actually got Lance in the studio with me, and we got to act some of our scenes together, and that is an incredible improvement over what we'd done previously. Not only did I get to act with Lance, but we got to see the fully rendered scene that [Neversoft] had finished. So, we got to act to the picture that we had as well. That was almost an ideal situation. I saw a lot of the gameplay, and it looks bad-ass. With Lance Henriksen, Kris Kristofferson, and [Brad Dourif], man, it's gonna be great!

Do you have any other video game voiceovers planned?

Well, we're making *Punisher 2*, and the *Punisher* game sold very well, so the plan is to do another *Punisher* game, and I'll certainly do that because I enjoyed that very much. I'm gonna do a movie called *Kill Shot*, an Elmore Leonard movie. I'm gonna do it with Mickey Rourke and Diane Lane. It's gonna be a lot of fun. We shoot it in October and then I shoot *Punisher 2*.



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 for updated rating
 information.

INTERNET CONNECTION required. Online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor for PlayStation®2 and Memory Card (NFS) for PlayStation 2 (sold separately). The Online logo is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Online play not available on all platforms. See product pack for details.

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HAND to HAND COMBAT

GI Examines the DS/PSP War

When Sony's PlayStation Portable debuted in Japan on December 12, 2004, the company dared to go where many before it had failed: into a head-to-head handheld battle against Nintendo. Nintendo had just released its dual-screen DS system, and the public eagerly pitted the two companies against each other, like they had been doing for the last two home console generations. Sales leader during the PSone and PS2 eras and buoyed by the success of the PlayStation brand name in general, Sony vowed that the PSP would not be another insignificant challenge to the handheld dominance of Nintendo. Although Nintendo had a headstart with sales of the GBA, which weigh in at a hefty 25 million, the new battleground was between the DS and PSP. It's almost a year in, and this fight is just getting started.

On the sales front, both systems are not too far apart at the time of this writing. Nintendo cited 1.97 million units sold in America for the DS; while Sony would not specifically tell us how many have been sold in this country, it did say it has sold 1.95 million PSPs in North America. Interestingly, Nintendo internally estimates that Sony has sold approximately 1.7 million PSPs in America since its March launch here. After giving the DS a five-month headstart, the PSP has closed the sales gap in North America.

In Japan, however, it's a different story. The DS has a larger installed base and it consistently sells more per week than the PSP. In fact, the DS even moves more units per week than the current leading home console, the PS2. It also enjoys a headstart in Europe, where the PSP is poised

to release. The Dual Screen's triumph in Japan could have a marked effect on Japanese developer support for the system.

However, in terms of American software sales, it appears that PSP is pulling away from the DS, despite having sold

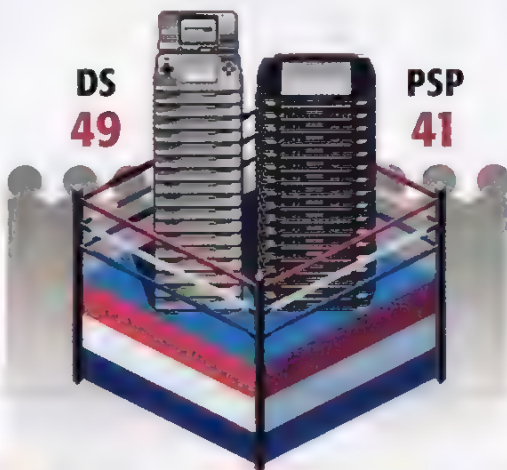
fewer units. Looking at the NPD sales chart over the lives of both systems shows that while the DS has scored three games in the top 20, the PSP has doubled it with six.

Of course, the rap on the PSP has always been that despite its attractive screen and tech specs, it simply doesn't deliver a new gaming experience — especially when stacked against Nintendo's touch screen. Public perception on this point is telling. Regardless of its software sales numbers, some PSP gamers we talked to were disappointed that they were still playing their favorite launch title instead of eagerly buying a host of new titles for the console. This is perhaps due to the fact that the PSP has fewer titles for it than the DS at the time of this writing, although there are over 40 games available. The system's lack of original franchises certainly adds to the perception that the PSP doesn't have the software power behind it. Seventy-six percent of PSP games are versions of existing titles, whereas that figure stands at only 51 percent for the DS.

Why does the PSP attract so many ports? Foundation 9 executive producer Chris Charla (Death Jr.) thinks it's too early to give up on original games for the handheld. "I think it's a little light on the IP [intellectual property] side right now, but that's more an artifact of the rushed development schedule to get stuff out for launch. I think going forward you'll see publishers using PSP as a good, relatively inexpensive testing ground for new IPs."

Charla also pointed out that the PSP has more performance left in it than is currently being utilized. "Sony has left a lot of power in the system that hasn't been given to developers yet. For instance, the CPU is switchable

Number of games scheduled to come out before the end of the year: ★



The Top 5 Games To Look Out For On...

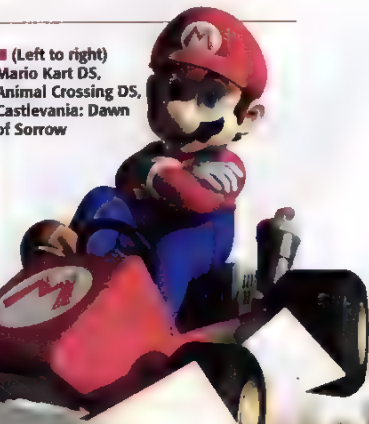
NINTENDO DS

- Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow (10/4)
- Trauma Center: Under the Knife (10/10)
- Mario Kart DS (11/14)
- Mario & Luigi 2: Partners in Time (11/28)
- Animal Crossing DS (12/5)

(All release dates are subject to change)



■ (Left to right) Mario Kart DS, Animal Crossing DS, Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow





between 111MHz and 333MHz, but is currently locked by the Sony-provided development libraries to 222MHz. So, at some point in the future, the system will likely get a third more CPU speed. Of course, this will hurt battery life, so hopefully we'll see this change coincide with the release of higher capacity batteries, and not just because a high-profile title needs the extra speed. That's not the only area for improvement in the Sony libraries, either."

Game Informer asked Sony senior PR manager Patrick Seybold about this perception of the PSP's lack of compelling software. Seybold admitted it has been a problem, but defended the system's launch, despite its ports. "I think it's important [at launch] to stay with that familiar range of titles and fuse in new IP content to build new franchises," he offered. "That's how PS2 has been successful. I think it would have been more difficult if we'd launched the PSP with 25 brand-new franchises that nobody had heard of."

Fortunately for the Nintendo DS, it has overcome its slow start and already hit its stride, with titles like Advance Wars: Dual Strike, Nintendogs, Meteos, and Kirby: Canvas Curse recently coming out to rave reviews. It has also dropped its price to \$129 in America. The system's Wi-Fi network was also clarified recently, allowing free play (third parties may charge for titles like MMORPGs), extensive matchmaking, easy-to-set-up buddy lists, and multiple user IDs over different games.

Whereas the DS's dual-screens give gamers and developers something different to play with, PSP is trying to build a fanbase by offering non-gaming content like movie and MP3 playback. Arguably more than actual video

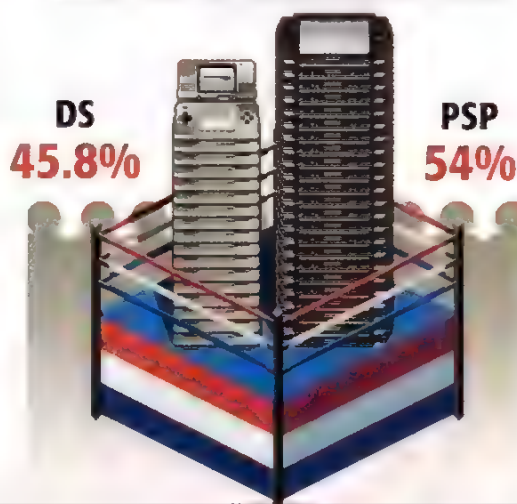
games, UMD movies for PSP seem to have caught the public's imagination. Sony's Seybold told us that over 10 movies had registered sales of over 100,000 units each. To put that in perspective, it took nine months for the first DVD to reach 100,000 (*Air Force One*). One corporate

employee from a large, non-specialty retailer told Game Informer that their company makes more money on UMD movies alone than what they make from the sale of anything related to the DS — including the hardware itself.

Despite the success of UMD movies, not all see this as a good thing. We spoke with one industry analyst who told us under the condition of anonymity that UMD sales have adversely affected PSP game sales. "I think it's definitely hurt game sales, because it's an out-of-wallet type of experience. You've only got so many dollars to be entertained on our PSP. I think it's a little worrisome that there are so many movies coming out. I think there's something like a hundred movies planned; where [are retailers] going to put those?"

Even with the PSP vs. DS war not yet a year old, the pair's first Christmas showdown together could be very interesting. Both have a large number of games scheduled to appear before the end of the year (49 for DS and 41 for PSP). Thankfully, a relatively low number of them are ports (45.8 percent of those for DS and 54 percent for PSP). Industry analysts Frank Magid Associates recently announced a poll of perspective handheld buyers that showed that 18 percent of those likely to buy a handheld this Christmas will probably purchase a PSP, versus 12 percent for the DS. With a handful of eagerly awaited games for each system slated for release, the Nintendo/Sony handheld war looks to reap good things for gamers of either persuasion. ■■■

Percentage of holiday games that ★ are ports from console titles: ★



The Top 5 Games To Look Out For On...

SONY PSP

- Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories (10/24)
- SSX: On Tour (10/24)
- Lord of the Rings: Tactics (11/8)
- SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo (11/8)
- Viewtiful Joe: VFX Battle (12/6)

(All release dates are subject to change)





MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Drugs



PlayStation.2



HOW TO SURVIVE IN MEXICO'S
DRUG-UNDERWORLD

LOCO MOVE #1:

TORNADO SPIN

STEP 1:



Cut out targets on opposite page.
Fold along the dotted lines.
Arrange at various distances in a
circle surrounding yourself.

STEP 2:



Crumple other game ads into small wads to
build up your ammo supply. Jump and spin
360° while trying to hit as many targets as
you can.

STEP 3:



Tally points and reward yourself with
a shot of tequila (if you're of legal
drinking age, of course). If you are in
a group, the lowest score buys more
tequila. If you are alone, make friends.



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A GUNSLINGER'S TALE IN MEXICO

Got this move nailed down? Congrats amigo, this is your first step to surviving the open-ended world of Los Toros, a drug-infested town south of the border. No rules exist in Los Toros – hijack any vehicles you need and arm yourself with an arsenal of illegal weapons.

Master a series of deadly, freestyle kill moves and you might survive as you work your way through Mexico's top drug cartel in the search for your father's killer.

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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



■ Tecmo's Dead or Alive 4 for Xbox 360

NEXT-GEN GAME BUDGETS

A developer told Loose Talk that game budgets for your average title in the next-generation will probably cost around 12 to 15 million. Our source put current generation development at around 10 to 12 million. If these estimates are correct, next-gen development doesn't sound as costly as some of the figures we've been hearing in the 20 million-plus category. Interestingly, publishers have been using the estimated big budgets of next-gen games to justify to consumers why their price tag might be \$59.99.

PS3 FOR FALL

A number of rumors are swirling around regarding the PS3 and what it will and won't do, according to *PlayStation Magazine*. The Memory Stick Duo will store save data, and not your old PS2 and PSone memory cards. Meanwhile, the console's hard drive will not be used for games, but instead will be simply for storage. A TiVo-like peripheral will allow you to put TV programs on this hard drive. Finally, although most games will target the 720p hi-def resolution, there will be an option for titles to use 480p so they can run faster. Another rumor we've heard is that despite Sony's proclamation at E3 that the PlayStation 3 will come out in spring of 2006, the system will not come out in the U.S. until the fall of next year. It is expected that the "spring" label actually refers to the Japanese launch of the system.

XBOX 360 AND THE HD-DVD DECISION

Microsoft has chosen to go with DVD-9 for its Xbox 360, despite the possibility of using the larger storage capacity of HD-DVD. We've heard that this decision wasn't about the right format for the system or even money. Microsoft chose not to use HD-DVD because of the run-up time needed to manufacture the drives given the system's November launch. HD-DVD players are expected to hit shelves starting this Christmas.



NINTENDO'S NEW GBA

Nintendo's GBA Micro is grabbing all the headlines, but the company is quietly putting out another new product on retail shelves. In October, two new GBA SP colors will be released: pearl blue (shown) and graphite.

The noteworthy thing about these additions is that they use the superior LCD screen technology that's used in the Micro, making the GBA titles you play on the unit look better than ever.

CAPCOM CLASSICS FOR PSP

Capcom has delighted gamers with its Capcom Classics titles on PS2 and Xbox, and now the PSP is getting its turn. Aside from offering old gems like 1942, Final Fight, and Street Fighter II, this handheld collection will throw in titles like Strider and Sidearms, which weren't on the compilations for the larger systems.

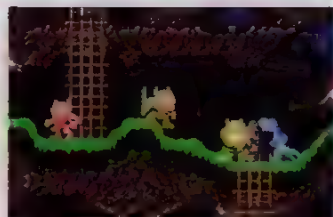


Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gamerformer.com and we'll be all ears.

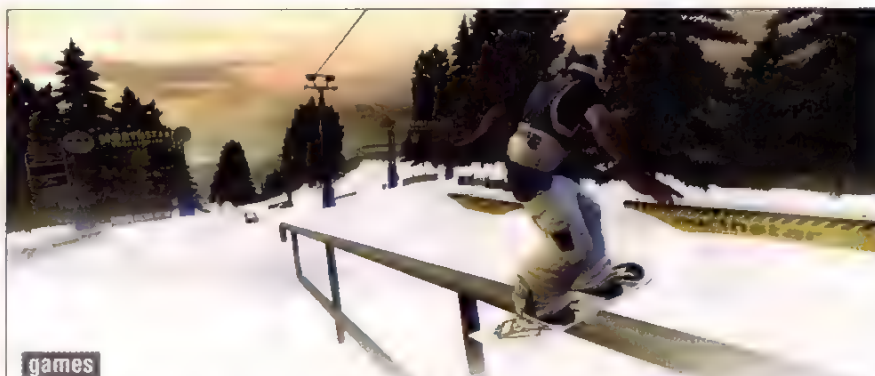
NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Totally out of their element, this game threw Vikings Olaf the Stout, Erik the Swift, and Baleog the Fierce in different settings through time and space. The only way for these warriors to get back home was for them to cooperate with each other. However, even though each one has their own special skills, the trick to this game is that you can only control one of them at a time. Thus, you must strategically figure out how to use this trio to maneuver each one to the end of the game's 43 levels.



(Answer on page 42)

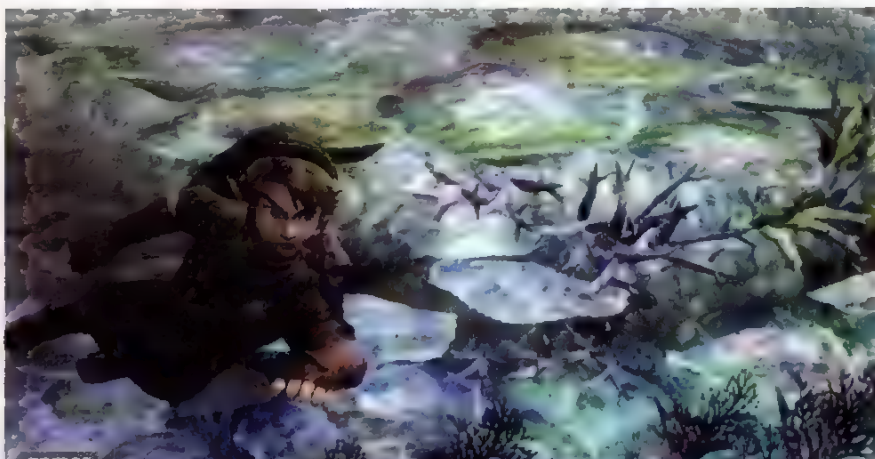


games

AMPED 360 DEGREES
SNOWBOARDER RETURNS WITH 2K SPORTS

When Microsoft tried to go extreme with the Amped snowboarding series, the franchise got pushed face-first into a snowbank like a little kid. After two failed iterations, Amped 3 is set to release on the Xbox 360 before the end of the year. The difference this time around? The game is under the aegis of 2K Sports, a publisher who knows its way around a sports title or two.

We got a little behind-closed-doors action with the game at E3, and were quickly struck with how much more easier the game was to control than the previous titles in the series. Also immediately apparent is the art style, which is very flippant and fantastic. Amped 3 as a whole follows this stylistic cue, with such diversions as minigames where the goal is to cause as much bodily damage to your sledding partner as possible. It's not a day on the slopes unless someone gets hurt.



games

ZELDA AND METROID
FALL INTO 2006
GAMECUBE, DS LOSE HOLIDAY TITLES

Nintendo has delayed *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* into 2006 for quality reasons. "After much discussion," read a statement from Nintendo of America's vice president of corporate affairs, Perrin Kaplan, "the Zelda development team has requested extra time to add new levels, more depth, and even higher quality to *Zelda: Twilight Princess*." Kaplan's statement went on to state that the game is expected to come out sometime after the company's fiscal year, which ends on March 31, 2006.

Unfortunately, this deals a major blow to the GameCube's holiday season, leaving titles like *Battalion Wars* and *Mario Super Strikers* to try and fill the void. Frankly that doesn't sound like nearly enough to assuage our desire to hop on Epona and ride through Hyrule. Furthermore, DS fans will be disappointed to hear that *Metroid Prime Hunters* is also being delayed into '06. W-Fi play is being added, however.

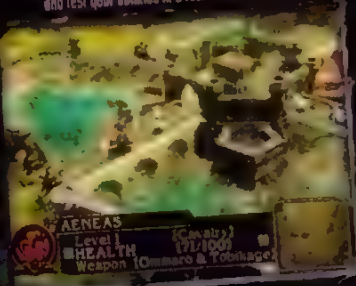
Back in April, Game Informer reported that *Twilight Princess* would not see the light of day until 2006. Nintendo also has other titles, such as *Nintendo Tetris* (Nintendo DS) and *Metroid Dread* (a 2D *Metroid* title also for the DS) still slated to come out sometime in the future.

ONE MAN'S CREATION IS ANOTHER'S DEMISE.



The battle begins anew in SOULCALIBUR III when Nightmare returns to a world inhabited by classic and new warriors. Create and play with a character, choosing the face, hair, armor and weapons you want in "Character Creation" mode. Employ strategy and classic combat to lead your original character and the team to victory in "Chronicles of the Sword" mode. Experience the world of SOULCALIBUR like never before.

Explore the SOULCALIBUR world in "Chronicles of the Sword" and test your abilities in a real-time simulation.



Battle classic SOULCALIBUR warriors like Nightmare to stand off against newcomers such as Zoroark, Serrano and Tim.



Create your own character and battle other players or legendary SOULCALIBUR warriors.



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PlayStation 2

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THE ARCHITECT OF DOOM



UNLIMITED ENABLED

Famed developer John Carmack talks about the creative flexibility of mobile games, his future projects, and what's next for the gaming industry

What do you think the appeal of the Doom series is?

I think the core premise of Doom has always been something that you can sum it up into a sentence and it resonates really well. And that is "marines against demons" — when you take the artillery and armament and the military might against creatures from hell, and it's something you can grasp really, really quickly. And when we were doing it, Doom was always a kind of combination of *Aliens* and *Evil Dead*, which we were watching at the time back when we were creating it. And I've always thought it's had a really strong hook. It's a simple plot and an environment that people can pick up immediately. You know what should be going on in there and you want to fight back powerfully against it and there's the opportunity to do damage against the worst foes. I've always thought it had a lot going for it.

The new mobile game is definitely a gameplay departure from the other Doom games. What prompted the switch to the RPG style?

I didn't really set out by saying that I wanted to take Doom to a new platform. It was more the other way around, when I got a random itch to write something on the cell

phone. I got a new cell phone, and I thought it would be kind of neat, because the games on there really kind of sucked. My thought process was basically, what would be a good game for the platform? There was no grand

master plan where we mapped out a huge strategy so we could enter the mobile market with a bang. It's just a random set of circumstances. The last game I played was an RPG, I got a little bug to go do something on

the cell phone, I sat down and thought what would be an appropriate thing for that platform. Then it was like, well, if you're going to do some kind of move-around RPG game, we might as well try to find some way to tie it up and get some leverage from our id background and all of that.

How long did it end up taking to do the whole thing?

It took about four months.

Were you pleased with the results?

I think the game

actually turned out really neat. I've always thought it's a neat thing to be exploring this little virtual world on something you're holding in your hand. The great thing about cell phone development that I'm most happy

about is that the short cycle time allows us to try out more experimental ideas and actually evolve the gameplay concepts a whole lot faster. Like what we're working on right now in the mobile space is a follow up that is similar to Doom RPG but in a fantasy theme, a traditional sort of Dungeons & Dragons theme game. There were things we were able to roll immediately into this next project, which again will only take another four months to actually put out. So in the



space here of less than a year we'll actually be able to get a full evolutionary cycle, whereas on the big spaces now we're spending three to four years on every project. A lot of companies don't even have people that have been there

from the beginning of a project to the end who have learned all the lessons. So, I'm a big proponent of these short development cycles where you can actually be creative and try some different things — because the conservatism that's forced on you on the high-end development is really pretty stifling in a lot of ways. When you've got budgets in the tens of millions of dollars you really don't just go off and try radically different ideas.

There's a huge amount of pressure to stay with something that you have high confidence is going to work.

It sounds like you're pretty interested in continuing to do work on the mobile platform. Are there particular ideas you'd like to try out?

Yeah, I've actually got a number of ideas that I'm kind of excited about. One that I'd actually like to do is a fighting game where you've got paper doll animation. Instead of being a full 3D engine, you take 2D graphics and you basically just build a character up by pinning together things, like sticking pins through paper dolls. And I've sort of just had an itch to do a close-quarters fighting game for a while. Then we might pick that as a direction for something we might do on the high-end platforms later on down

On the upcoming Doom movie:

I was basically hoping to myself, please just don't let it be miserable.

the line. Right now, everybody goes the other way. If you've got a front line title on the PC or console, you'll see some really cut down crappy versions on the mobile platform. But I think there's some potential interest for going the other way — for trying all of your wacky

experimental things on the low development cost platforms, and if it works right, maybe you don't make tons of money, but you might have a lot of people seeing it and you can tell if it's something that people appreciate as a direction and you can get a little bit of mindshare there. And that might give you the confidence to then be able to say, "Let's go ahead and sink 10 million or 20 million dollars into something like this," and build a big version for the consoles and the PC.

Were there unique challenges associated with programming for the mobile platform?

It was interesting in that it felt less different than I expected. It comes down to the fact that programming is programming, and you're solving problems, and it doesn't feel that much different when you're solving a problem of trying to shave a couple of K [kilobyte] off of a Java executable versus trying to get your 10 millionth polygon in a frame or something on an Xbox 360. It's not all that different. I mean the scope of it is hugely different. It's great to work on a project where all of the source code just fits in one directory, rather than sprawling over this huge tree, so there are aspects of that. You don't have the absolute shock and awe and impressiveness of a graphical tour de force on something modern, but it's still definitely interesting from a programming perspective.

The mobile game will coincide with the release of the Doom movie. Have you gotten a chance to see a cut of the film?

I've actually not gone to see any of that.

I've kept myself purposefully sort of distant. You know this movie thing has been dragging on — the initial option was picked up over eight years ago. A lot of guys would get excited about it. But I just kept myself back, because I know the way the odds

go on these sort of things. A few of the guys did go over to the set in Prague and looked over some things, and we got to see the script and got to put in a little bit of input, but it's not our movie. It's their movie based on our setting. I was basically hoping to myself, "please just don't let it be miserable." So, I was actually really happy when the guys that have seen it came back and said it's actually

On developing for PS3 and Xbox 360:

The Microsoft dev kits for the Xbox 360 are much nicer.

pretty good. It's not *Aliens*. It's not likely to be something that is looked back as a classic masterpiece of the genre, but if it's a fun movie, and it doesn't embarrass us, it's going to be just fine with me.

Are you getting a sense at all whether the

movie will fall in line with your own vision of the Doom universe, or do think it's going to be in a totally different direction?

It's in a fairly different direction. It's got some of the same feel with what goes on in there. From the little bits and pieces I have picked up, I would have probably liked it better if they could have actually played up that these were supposed to be demons from Hell — Satan and biblical horror and all that. Whereas the movie is really more science fiction. I can see their reasons for wanting to do it that way because there always have been a certain set of people that Doom was intentionally designed to offend early on, and they probably just did not want to go that route, but I probably would have been a little happier if there had been a bit more of that coming in, rather than it being kept at a more subtle, inferential level. But the great thing is a lot of the stuff they literally built out of Doom 3. A lot of the scenes are just built up from screenshots out of Doom 3. I'm sure our artists can take a little bit of pride there, as they're sort of uncredited art directors for a movie now.

We'd heard that one of the very first PS3 dev kits showed up at your door. Any truth to that?

Yes, we have PS3 dev kits here.

How are those working out?

The Microsoft dev kits for the Xbox 360 are much nicer. I'll say that. We do intend that on our next project, we are intentionally targeting all three platforms — PC, PS3, and Xbox 360. I've actually just this last week or two started moving my development focus from the PC to the Xbox 360. Microsoft has done a spectacular job of making that an easy move. You get to use the same tools, the same environment, the debugging is great, and the performance analysis tools are great.

In regards to the PS3 dev kit, has it been a big challenge from a technological standpoint?

It's actually not going to be that bad in the larger scheme of things. If you look at the previous generation, the PS2 was not a good platform for developers to work on. From a hardware standpoint, the PS3 is a lot nicer, because it essentially has a PC graphics accel-

DOOM RPG

Style: 1-Player Role-Playing game
Publisher: Jandag Mobile/id Software
Developer: id Software/Fountainhead Entertainment
Release: October



The first glance at the latest incarnation of Doom may not look like much, until you compare it to all the other mobile games that have graced your cell phone in recent years.

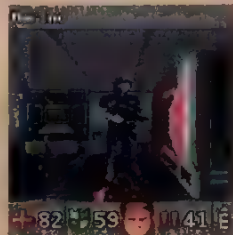
Pushing existing mobile technology to the limit, Carmack and his team at id have crafted an honest-to-goodness Doom game that fits neatly onto most existing JAVA or Brew enabled phones. The result is a surprising mix of old school PC-style RPG and the classic monsters, weapons, and vibe that has always characterized the Doom games.

The first dilemma to address when placing the franchise on the cell phone was how to adjust the twitch shooting genre to a platform where the control options and technology simply weren't up to the task. The turn-based RPG style that emerged allows for the same familiar illusion of three dimensions, but now challenges gamers to upgrade their character and carefully search out hidden secrets. Older gamers will immediately be familiar with the grid-based movement reminiscent of the old Bard's Tale or Wizardry games. However, instead of swords and spells, you'll now be wielding shotguns and BFGs.

The game finds you once again on the cursed surface of Mars, where the foolish experimentations of naive scientists have resulted in a portal to Hell, and demonic legions have emerged to sweep the UAC complex of life. We got to play a good chunk of the game, which exhibits a surprising degree of variety both in its environments and the accompanying action. Each of the 10 levels of the game hides an abundance of discoveries. Computer terminals contain emails, often with special clues as to secret doors and items, while other displays include classic Doom trivia for fans. Still other consoles let you upgrade your stats or buy new weapons and armor. Strength, Defense, Agility, and Accuracy are all upgradeable as you gain levels, helping to assure a genuine sense of classic RPG gameplay.

A version of the original Doom HUD continually graces the bottom of the screen as you go into battle, and id has made sure that the monstrous forces you encounter make for a compelling challenge. Each one of the 10 weapons can be best used only against certain enemy types, and several of them have unique uses. The extinguisher doubles as a weapon against fire-based enemies, while the ever-popular shotgun appropriately bases damage upon distance. There's even a dog collar that allows you to take control of one of the possessed demonic canines and turn it against your foes. Equal work has gone in to creating worthwhile monsters that feel more reminiscent of console enemies than the mindless automatons of many mobile games. In one encounter, we seemed to be encountering an endless stream of demons until it became clear that the Infernis that had been hanging back was continually resurrecting its allies. Hell hounds, imps, mancubi, and even the fearsome Cyberdemon make appearances, and the variety of enemies keeps the experience varied throughout.

While mobile phone offerings like Doom RPG may not be for everyone, they do at least prove that exciting development is occurring even on lower-technology platforms. Each year the wireless game market is growing by leaps and bounds, and Doom's latest iteration seems to be at least one good example of how that growth is continuing.



YOU vs. TIGER

Keep it simple, Steve. Remember to keep the back leg fully weighted.



Your heart will pound. Your hands will sweat. Your mind will race. That's what it's like to play golf with Tiger.



TIGER WOODS



Nice. See that there is more width at this point compared to the old swing?



Perfect shot. Just put this in your muscle memory, and remember to remember.



All-new dual analog swing



All-new dual analog putting



Call your shots and win big

Available on PlayStation® 2 computer entertainment system and PSP™ (PlayStation® Portable) system. Internet Connection required. Online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). The Online icon is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Not all features available on all platforms. See back of respective product packs for details.

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(Continued from page 35)

erator in it and it has ample memory. I think Microsoft made a better choice with processor technology than Sony did. But, to a first approximation, they are both plenty capable systems. I was much more down on the PS2 than I am on the PS3. I definitely did prefer the Xbox over the PS2 by a wide margin. I think I prefer the 360 over the PS3 by a less wide margin.

What are your thoughts about the potential of these two systems in the overall market?

I don't like how the hype is always so ridiculous at new console launches. Because the truth is, by the time any of these things ship, you will be able to buy a higher end PC. It won't have better cost performance – the value won't be as good, but for the people that try to make it sound like the PS3 is going to be an order of magnitude better than anything else, it's just not true.

Everyone in the industry recently has been observing the rising political tension over game content. Historically, Doom has been one of the primary targets.

Yeah, Rockstar makes us look like good upstanding citizens. (laughter)

Why do you think opponents of certain content have come down so hard on Doom in the past? With Doom showing up on such an accessible platform as mobile phones, do you think that's going to intensify the debate?

You know, people like scapegoats. And, to a first approximation, it really is just a lot of noise. It's people trying to make themselves look good by saying "Won't someone think of the children?" and "Look how good I am." We've been sued a couple of times, like



with Columbine and Paducah, and they don't even go to trial. We went on summary judgment. They are just unrealistic cases. It's people trying to make a little media spectacle of it, and it's just stupid. It doesn't make sense. There

certainly has been a bit of a difference from the early days. There was an actual aspect way back when we were doing Doom, and we were all much younger, we were specifically trying to poke fingers at a certain crowd of easily offendable people. And we really are kind of past that now. Now, things

that we put in the game are specifically there to affect the player, not to make any specific statement on things. And in the case of Doom RPG, there's really nothing offensive in it. There are monsters and blood. But we simply did not have the space to do anything graphically offensive. If we had a bunch more space, we probably would have played up the hellish and satanic things, which I consider to be fairly core to the Doom story. But we only had 300 K for the JAVA version, and we were fighting for every last K.

Where would you like to see the Doom franchise go as we move into the next couple of years? Are there particular technological challenges you'd like to break through?

You know, we haven't made a firm decision about things. It's likely there will be a Doom 4, but id probably won't make it. It'll probably be kind of like with Quake 4 where we had Raven, who is our closest partner, working on it. And Quake 4 looks awesome by the way. They're doing a great job with that. So we know the franchise has a lot of value, and there's a lot of people that really like it and would be happy to see another

On the future of Doom:

It's likely there will be a Doom 4, but id probably won't make it.

game. So I'm sure there will be additional Doom games, but nothing is in production right now, and we don't really have imminent plans of starting something.

Do you have any particular plans on expansion packs for existing games, or other mobile ideas?

One idea we've been sort of tossing around that is just a random idea is possibly doing some kind of super edition of the Doom 3 stuff for the PS3. It's something we'd kind of like to do. There's also the possibility of extending our fantasy-themed Doom RPG-based engine thing into something that's a multiplayer online game in a way that doesn't require simultaneous action. It'd be a way of sharing a world without actually being interactive at the exact same time. We've got some interesting ideas that would work well for platforms like that. I literally have got a half dozen things that I could choose after this current project, and it's just going to depend on what the interests of the publishers are, and what our interests are. And we probably won't figure all that out for another couple of months. ■■■



HELLISH MOVIE OR SCARY AS HELL?

Details are scarce on Universal's adaptation of the Doom license into film form, set to release on October 21. Nonetheless, we plumbed the depths of Hollywood and came out with some details on the script and storyline. Staying at least partially true to the established Doom plot, the movie details the nightmarish events that occur within the Olduvai Research Station on Mars after a team of scientists decode the final 10 percent of the human genome. Early reports seem to indicate that the resultant grisly deaths and gruesome monsters are less Hell's denizens and more mutated research members, but we'll have to wait and see on that score. The limelight seems to be split between the Rock's role of Sarge and Karl Urban's Reaper character. While the Rock's unique name and face are familiar to all wrestling fans, you're most likely to

recall Urban's role as Eomer in *The Lord of the Rings*, as he led the Rohirrim against the orkish hordes. In the Doom movie, both are part of the Rapid Response Tactical Squad that is sent in to investigate and eliminate the devilish Martian problem. One highlight of the movie should be the creature effects, which are being put together by Stan Winston, who has helped bring everything from Predators to Terminators to life before. As we've seen in the recent trailer, the movie will attempt to make use of a "first-person camera" as an homage to the source material, and we're interested to see the results. If nothing else, we should be in for at least a moderately bloody and violent time of it, as the movie is well on track for an R rating when it shows up at theaters in a few weeks.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



Final Fantasy XI for Xbox 360

GOOD

Square Enix's president recently told the press in Japan that the company is considering spreading stalwart franchises such as Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest to multiple consoles beyond Sony's PlayStation brand. Square Enix has already said that a version of Final Fantasy XI will appear on the Xbox 360.



Halo 2

GOOD

The Halo movie has been slated for a launch year of 2007 by studios Universal and 20th Century Fox. The movie is being produced by Peter Schlessel (*Stay Alive*), and the script is being handled by Alex Garland (*28 Days Later*). The question now is whether Halo 3 will try and coincide with the film's release, although Bill Gates himself has said that he wants Halo 3 to come out the same day as Sony's PlayStation 3. The console is expected to come out in 2006. In other Halo news, Halo, Halo 2, and the Multiplayer Map Pack are going to be bundled together for \$60, making for a whole lotta Halo on October 4.



GOOD

Sony is bringing over the PSP title Kingdom of Paradise this November. The game features created combat melee and sword moves, as well as custom combos. Sony says that skills and items will be downloadable via Infrastructure mode, and you can also play against friends in ad hoc.

UGLY

Losing its bottom-basement battle with handheld obscurity, Tapwave has killed off its Palm-powered Zodiac system. Somehow, the N-Gage still lives.



UGLY

Majesco has cancelled its Advent Rising million dollar contest due to "technical issues." Maybe it's because Majesco doesn't have the million dollars, or maybe it's because nobody wants to admit they play Advent Rising. Majesco is offering contestants two free games as compensation. "I'll take Psychonauts and...nevermind."



BAD

If you were iffy about EA's excursion into Arena Football, you might be downright scared when you hear that Arena Football developer EA Tiburon has teamed up with Outlaw Tennis/Gold developer Hypnotix. It gets worse. Hypnotix's unfortunate influence will extend to games other than Arena Football in the future.

news

GBA MICRO PRICING

NEW GAME BOY OUT SEPT. 19



Nintendo has announced that it is releasing the Game Boy Micro to stores on September 19 for \$99.99. The 4"x2" system plays all existing Game Boy Advance games, and will be available in either black or silver. Each color comes with three removable faceplates. The black Micro includes the flame, camouflage, and silver faceplates; the silver unit comes with the ammonite (a dark blue swirling pattern), ladybug, and black faceplates. Apart from adding some style to your Micro, these faceplates also protect your handheld's screen, as they snap on over it.

Although the Game Boy Micro plays GBA titles, users will have to buy sold-separately cables for the Micro if they want to communicate with friends. A Micro-specific link cable and wireless adapter lets you hook up with others who have a GBA SP, GBA, or Micro.

R & D

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

Super Lucha Grande



We were thinking that there simply aren't games that combine our two favorite things: Mexican wrestling and horrific mutations caused by toxic waste. So we thought we'd combine the two in one kickass fighting game. In Super Lucha Grande, the action would begin when a busload of travelling Luchadores accidentally drive their bus into a pool of toxic waste on their way through New Jersey. Growing to enormous size, the towering masked wrestlers gain special powers, but are also overcome with the urge to battle each other. But rather than fight in a ring, the whole world becomes their wrestling mat. Characters like El Gargantua will do flying body tackles off of a skyscraper into his mortal enemy, Humongo Loco. The matches between these towering grapplers will take out everything around them, and the combatants are free to use fallen radio towers to beat each other over the head. With enormous mutant characters, high-flying wrestling moves, and fully destructible environments complete with tiny people that flee in horror, Super Lucha Grande would be the perfect game for those who share our same bizarre preoccupations. Perhaps Godzilla, Rodan, and Ultraman will even join in the carnage as hidden characters!

"Halo with chips"

Maxim magazine

"Bottom line: STACKED with Daniel Negreanu will make you a better Hold 'em player. Period."

TeamXbox.com

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STACKED™

WITH DANIEL NEGREANU



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Compete online in massive multi-table tournaments with in-depth statistics and ranking systems, or invite your friends to a private game.



Raise your game against an exclusive artificial intelligence system that learns from your playing style and adapts its strategy in real-time.



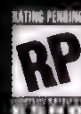
Player of the Year Daniel Negreanu guides you from the basics of Hold'em to advanced tournament strategies with full motion video and detailed in-game tutorials.

Running on PC, Xbox, PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system and the PSP™ (PlayStation Portable) system.

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FALL 2005

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view

CHALLENGING THE VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE CONNECTION: HOW REAL IS THE LINK?



Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

In the wake of the Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas' "Hot Coffee" scandal, video games are once again being demonized as a corrupter of youth by the mainstream media. Although this recent furor has revolved around sexual content in games, it is only a matter of time before the old sentiment that violent video games incite real life mayhem reemerges amongst anti-gaming crusaders. Indeed, infamous Florida attorney Jack Thompson has already decried Rockstar's next game *Bully* for its violent content, despite the fact that the title is months from release. Well, we have bad news for Mr. Thompson: There is no conclusive link between video games and violence. In fact, while video games have steadily increased in popularity since the early 1990s, violent crime amongst youths has decreased dramatically during the same time period.

Based on statistics provided by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, violent crime has been on the decline for the last decade. According to Mike Males, senior researcher at the Justice Policy Institute and author of *Framing Youth: Ten Myths about the Next Generation*, this trend towards less violent youths extends back nearly 30 years. Not only has violence amongst the young decreased, but so has drug abuse, youth arrests, and violent deaths. During this same period, video games have grown exponentially in popularity. These two trends suggest that the link between games and violence is not as strong as is usually reported in the media.

Although some studies have suggested a tie regarding video

games and a temporary increase in aggression in very young players, others have shown absolutely no link between the two. A study by the Washington State Department of Health found that "current research evidence is not supportive of a major public concern that violent video games lead to real-life violence." Another study by Marko Skoric of the University of Michigan observed the effect that playing Asheron's Call 2 two hours a day for a month had on subjects who did not consider themselves to be gamers. No changes in their levels of aggression were detected.

Video games have, however, been linked to several beneficial side effects. Not only have games been tied to increased motor dexterity and observational skills, an educational game called *Cool School* has been shown to increase the conflict resolution skills of elementary school students. The book *Got Game* by John Beck and Michael Wade claims that video games provide excellent preparation for the business world because they encourage the player to multi-task, evaluate risks, and to be flexible in the face of changes or setbacks.

Despite the positive benefits of gaming and the fact that the connection between gaming and violence is much more tenuous than the mainstream media would have you believe, concerned politicians and parental groups seem convinced that games are a powerfully sinister force. But just as rock and roll music, comic books, movies, and other popular yet demonized forms of entertainment have before them, video games will inevitably overcome those who seek to stifle their creativity.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

ERIC HOLMES
Lead Game Designer,
Radical Entertainment
(standing to the right of some
random fanboy)

READER

LAURA JOHNSON
Larkspur, CO



- 1 *Elite* – Commodore 64
- 2 *Cholo* – Commodore 64
- 3 *Metal Gear Solid* – PSone
- 4 *Power Stone – Dreamcast*
- 5 *Half-Life* – PC

- 1 *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* – N64
- 2 *Final Fantasy VIII* – PSone
- 3 *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening* – GBC
- 4 *Pokémon Yellow* – GBC
- 5 *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* – GC

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 Names We've Heard For The Xbox 360 "Core System"

- 10 Xbox Three-S...ty
- 9 Special Needsbox
- 8 Xbox Lite (Now With Less Halo 2!)
- 7 "Ha ha, your parents are poor" box
- 6 Oliver Twistbox
- 5 "VelocityGirl doesn't date cheapskates" box
- 4 Xbox 270
- 3 Terence
- 2 Nickel and Dimebox
- 1 "We've gotta feed Rare" box

Name That Game Answer: The Lost Vikings

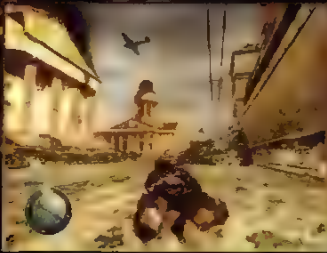
DESTINY HAS CHOSEN ITS MESSENGER

"Sniper Elite™ takes combat to the next level."

-IGN

ONE BULLET CAN CHANGE HISTORY

SNIPER ELITE™



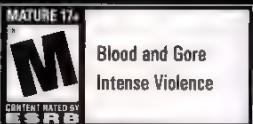
TENSE MULTIPLAYER SNIPER BATTLES.



REALISTIC SNIPING WITH ADJUSTMENTS FOR GRAVITY, WIND, HEART RATE AND MORE.



28 SINGLE PLAYER AND CO-OPERATIVE MISSIONS.



namco

PlayStation 2



REBELLION



CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1994 ▼ Foot in the Door



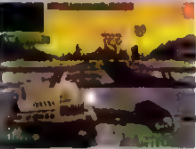
Jaffe gets his first crack at game development as a designer on Sony Imagesoft's Mickey Mouse: The Timeless Adventures of Mickey Mouse

1995 ▼ The First Hit



Jaffe works as lead designer on his first blockbuster, Twisted Metal. The game also marked the start of his long-running partnership with SingleTrac (later renamed Incognito)

1996 ▼ A Stellar Sequel



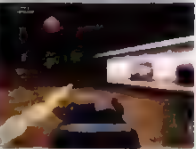
SingleTrac and Jaffe score again with Twisted Metal 2

1997 ▼ Dark Days

A troubled period in Jaffe's career is marked by the cancellation of Dark Guns, a 2D shooter project for PSone



2001 ▼ None More Black



Jaffe returns to the famous car combat franchise with Twisted Metal: Black, one of the early PS2 classics

2005 ▼ A Masterpiece



Jaffe creates his greatest work to date, God of War, a game that received Game Informer's highest honor: a perfect ten

2005 ▼ A Promotion

Based on his track record of success, Jaffe is promoted to creative director of Sony's Santa Monica Studio, overseeing development of all the studio's titles

DAVE JAFFE

CREATIVE DIRECTOR, SONY SANTA MONICA STUDIOS

» In just over a decade's time, Dave Jaffe has risen from the rank of game tester to being regarded as one of the industry's best and most-passionate game creators. Fresh off the success of God of War, we sat down with Jaffe to discuss his past, present, and future. «

What was your background prior to Sony?

Sony is definitely the first and only game company I've worked for. Prior to that I was in college at USC. I went there to learn to make movies, but I never got into their film school because my grades weren't good enough. I ended up as an English major and spent a whole lot of time trying to go into movies. While I was waiting, I saw an ad for a game tester at Sony. Then things at Sony took off. But before that it was all about movies, I wanted to write movies and direct them. At the same time, I played tons of games, I made them on my computer, but I never thought it was going to be anything I did other than something to mess around with. Obviously, it ended up being a career, which I'm pretty grateful for.

Today, in your career, how do you draw on your love of film and your film background? Does that inform the games you make?

I think it infuses every aspect of it, my love of film. For example, I just got out of a meeting five min-

and really seemed to enjoy the game. It validated this idea that I have, that there are game players who are looking for games to be treated with the same level of respect by the creators as you have a lot of filmmakers or authors treating their material with. We carried that philosophy over into God of War. The hope is that eventually we really will hit on a commercial idea and mix it with artistic, soulful gamemaking and expand the audience for games beyond what it is currently.

But God of War has sold well, hasn't it?

We've done well... We did amazing critical numbers, we got a lot of rabid fans for the series, and that's very exciting. But you want to be a huge hit, not just a nice hit. We're not hanging out in the realm of GTA or SOCOM or GT 4, and those are the places we want to be.

Is there a sequel planned for God of War?

Nothing's been announced. The current plan is [that] we're looking at the market trying to see

I ran to. I think it has so much amazing potential. Also, as much as I love to hang out on my beanbag and play a PS2 or Xbox game, the reality is that most of my game playing time is when I'm lying in bed and my wife's reading her book and we're kind of spending a little time apart but together. It's how I can play games...it suits my lifestyle now. I'm really excited to try and bring the same kind of passion for interesting experiences that I feel we've brought to the earlier games to the PSP audience.

One thing we've noticed in PSP games is that the lack of two analog sticks is making camera control difficult for some games.

I'd love to have two analog sticks. But, it hasn't really bothered me. One of the things [people] talked about with Coded Arms was "Oh, you need a second analog stick." Well, I played plenty of really good first-person shooters on the PSone, like the first Medal of Honor and Disruptor, which only had one analog stick. I don't feel [Coded

A lot of games feel really soulless and heartless to me.

utes ago. It was a game design pitch. It was clearly a pitch that came from some guys who were into programming and code. It was cool, there were some neat ideas there, absolutely — but it clearly wasn't my cup of tea. I really like stuff that starts with the ideas or the concept, the characters or the story. Then, the gameplay comes out of that. That's really where you can see my influences from my love of film. I'm really into the player caring just as much about the world and the experience as they do about the nuts-and-bolts play mechanics.

Twisted Metal: Black really put your name on the map. Could you talk about the experience of that game and how happy you were with the end result?

It was a really tough experience, only because we were trying to both reestablish the brand of Twisted Metal while at the same time trying to bring a dark and disturbed voice into the series. Bringing voice into games is something I feel really strongly about. A lot of games feel really soulless and heartless to me. I think we did a pretty decent job, and I think what was really exciting was that a lot of game players bought the game

where the fans are with it. If there's a desire for it, I think we'd be foolish not to look at it.

If there is a sequel, would you be more of an artistic director and less hands-on with the project?

Yes, I would be creative director on it. I would be overseeing another director that we would go out and find, because internal development proved to be too much. I have two daughters now. I put on 40 f— pounds doing the thing, and it was just too stressful to be in for three years again. I don't think I could be involved to that level.

Were there any ideas from the first God of War that got cut that you'd like to see in a sequel?

There were a few. If you watch the bonus material on the God of War disc, you'll actually see a lot of those ideas. We intentionally planted a lot of seeds in there with the assumption that we might be able to make a part two someday.

Right now, you're working on a PSP game with Incognito. How do you like the PSP so far?

I absolutely love it; PSP is definitely the system

Arms'] control system necessarily benefits the pacing of the game they've created. I think it's a matter of retraining ourselves to make PSP games that don't simply rip off the template of PS2 games or Xbox games. We have to tune our games to accommodate the fact that this is what the hardware has.

What's your take on PS3?

I've seen enough to get me excited and proud of the fact that I work for a company that's going to have the best f— hardware on the planet. Let's put it this way, for Microsoft to say there's no difference is as stupid as Sony trying to say there's no difference between PS2 and Xbox. But, if you actually look at it from a technical standpoint, I think you're kind of smoking the crack if you think that the Xbox 360 is totally equivalent to the PS3. That's just PR spin, and they know it, and your readers should know it, too.

■ After the success of God of War, Sony's Dave Jaffe has his sights set on the PSP

SONY'S OUTSPOKEN VISIONARY

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TIANAN-MAN

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02.23 PST

**LIVE WITH
Ken Chappel**



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PlayStation 2



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REACT TO THE ACTION AND TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

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*INTERNET CONNECTION required for online play. PlayStation®2 online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (for PlayStation 2) (both sold separately). Online play may not be available on all platforms. See product pack for details.



tech

DELL DJ 20

Manufacturer: Dell
Website: www.dell.com/dj
List Price: \$249

A more affordable answer to that other flashy MP3 player making the rounds, the Dell DJ line is now in its second iteration. This new version has a sturdier case, smaller form factor, longer battery life, and a similarly easy to use interface. They may not be shilling it with repetitive loops of a certain U2 song, but what it lacks in marketing it makes up for in value and usability. Oh, and 20 GB stores just shy of 10,000 songs. Throw your game soundtracks on there and strut like the pimp you are.



etc.

JADE EMPIRE AND ADVENT RISING ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACKS

Manufacturer: Sumthing Else Music Works
Website: www.sumthing.com
List Price: \$15.98



Produced by video game music savants Tommy Tallarico (Advent Rising) and Jack Wall (Jade Empire), these two scores rank among the best of the year. We're thankful that Sumthing Else is kind enough to put them out at a reasonable price. We're less than enthused, though, by the weird looks of pedestrians when they see us rocking out to the drum-heavy battle intro from Jade Empire. We try to blend more subtly into the horde.

etc.

ATARI: ASTEROIDS

Manufacturer: Fossil
Website: www.fossil.com
List Price: \$125

A gaming-related watch that's actually stylish enough to wear in the real world? Thank you Fossil! The black leather strap and brushed metal case are understated and the face features a mad Asteroids frag-fest for that touch of classic appeal. Fossil is only making a limited number (5,000 worldwide and only 2,000 of those for the States), so buy early.



SUPER POINTERS

pc

MIGHTY MOUSE

Manufacturer: Apple
Website: www.apple.com
List Price: \$49

pc

COPPERHEAD

Manufacturer: Razer
Website: www.razerzone.com
List Price: TBA

These are two sweet pointers – one the workhorse of switching between multiple everyday applications, and one the single-minded queen of gaming. Apple's MacOS/Win2K-compatible Mighty Mouse looks like a single button unit, but offers massive configuration options with the four touch-sensitive buttons (finally, a right-click) and a scroll nubbin that is just as comfortable going up and down as it is sliding left to right. Razer's Copperhead upgrades the company's earlier entries with a high-resolution laser, 32 KB of onboard memory to store one's settings when moving the mouse from computer to computer, and three customizable weights to get the feel just right.

etc.

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GAME MACHINES

Manufacturer: Gameplan
Website: www.gameplan-books.com
List Price: \$32.00

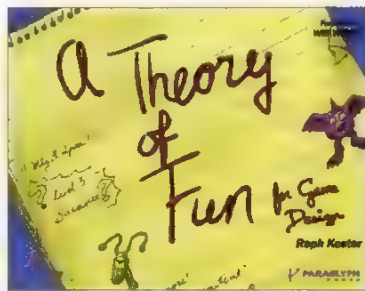


Covering the litany of video game consoles and software from 1972 through the Nintendo DS, *The Encyclopedia of Game Machines* offers up full-color pictures of consoles, their variant designs, and selected games. Our gaming past isn't always pretty, and there's a preponderance of gray plastic that we all need to come to terms with, but the depth of this material is not to be missed. Raph Koster (of Sony Online and issue 138's Opinion column) outlines a convincing manifesto for why people do or don't have a good time in games in *A Theory of Fun*. He also makes us feel very, very not smart.

etc.

A THEORY OF FUN FOR GAME DESIGN

Manufacturer: Paraglyph
Website: www.paraglyphpress.com
List Price: \$22.99



peripherals

COMFORTSTYLUS

Manufacturer: Prime Global Enterprises
Website: www.comfortstylus.com
List Price: \$5.99

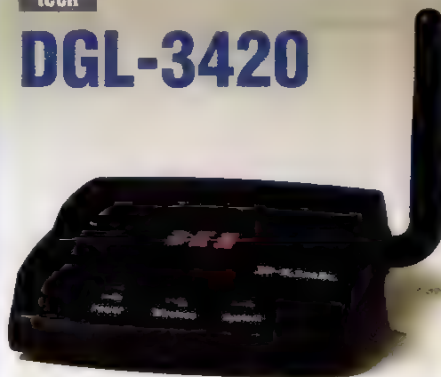
It's kind of goofy, and not perfect for all DS applications, but for many tap-happy titles the Comfortstylus is pretty handy. Essentially a bendy piece of metal wrapped in sturdy foam and topped with a stylus tip, it's wacky enough for an informal and cheap enough to keep around as a backup.

Manufacturer: D-Link
Website: games.dlink.com
List Price: \$99.99 (DL-3420),
 \$149.99 (DGL-4300)

This wireless gaming setup from D-Link offers all of the bells and whistles you would expect (802.11g support and four ports on the router), but the best feature is how easy it is to set up. Honestly plug and play, these babies will get you wired up in no time. The company also touts something called GameFuel technology, which is supposed to prioritize gaming traffic on your network and lessen possible lag issues.

tech

DGL-3420



tech

DGL-4300





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www.jamster.com

Chart Ringtones poly

- 1) Grind With Me poly6040
- 2) Sugar, We're Goin' Down poly6041
- 3) Just A Lil Bit poly6042
- 4) Candy Shop poly6043
- 5) Pimpin' All Over The World poly6044
- 6) Back Then poly6045
- 7) Drop It Like It's Hot poly6046
- 8) Wait (Whisper Song) poly6047
- 9) Get It Poppin' poly6048
- 10) Touch poly6049

All Time Favorites

Alcohol	poly6056
All Star	poly6051
Baby Mama	poly6052
Bewitched (TV Theme)	poly6053
California Dreamin	poly6054
Cry Me A River	poly6055
Dancing Queen	poly6056
Diff'rent Strokes (TV Theme)	poly6057
Electric Avenue	poly6058
Fighter	poly6059
Funky Town	poly6060
Good Times (TV Theme)	poly6061
Heaven	poly6062
Hella Good	poly6063
Jeopardy Theme	poly6064
Miami Vice (TV Theme)	poly6065
Power Rangers (TV Theme)	poly6066
Pump Up The Jam	poly6067
Rock The Casbah	poly6068
Start Me Up	poly6069
Sunday Morning	poly6070
Toxic	poly6071
Trying To Find Atlantis	poly6072
What Is Love	poly6073

Top Sound FX

BlingBling - Textmessage	fun4200
Catch This Text If You Can	fun4201
Drunk Tarzan	fun4202
From Hell	fun4203
Go Skate	fun4204
Good Morning - Its Your Mom	fun4205
La Cucaracha Frog	fun4206
Laughing Horse	fun4207
Mail Mail	fun4208
Mommie Your Phone Is Ringing	fun4209
Offensive Language	fun4210
Please Pick Me Up!	fun4211
Police Horn	fun4212
Reggae Sax	fun4213
Tennis Cry	fun4214
The Annoying Thing 01	fun4215
The Crazy Frog - Teasing	fun4216
Turn Your Phone Off Next Time	fun4217
U Have A Phone Call	fun4218
What's Up?	fun4219

Realsounds

Dem Boyz - Boyz N Da Hood	real3550
Back Then - Mike Jones	real3551
Grind With Me - Pretty Ricky	real3552
Give Me That - Webbie	real3553
Sittin' Sidewayz - Paul Wall	real3554
ASAP - T.I.	real3555
Motivation - T.I.	real3556
Get It Poppin' - Fat Joe	real3557
Helena - My Chemical Romance	real3558
Gotta Make It - Trey Songz Ft. Twista	real3559
I'm A King - P4C Ft. T.I. & Lil' Scrappy	real3560
Bad Chick - Webbie	real3561
American Idiot - Green Day	real3562
Right Here - Staind	real3563
Shut Up - Lil' Kim	real3564
Grind With Me - Pretty Ricky	real3565
Still Tippin' - Mike Jones	real3566
U Got Me - B5	real3567
One - Metallica	real3568
Get A Little Closer - Pretty Ricky	real3569

HipHop & Soul

1,2 Step	poly6074
Bad	poly6075
Can't Knock The Hustle	poly6076
D12 World	poly6077
Diamonds From Sierra Leone	poly6078
Happy People	poly6079
Insane In The Brain	poly6080
La La La	poly6081
Let Me Love You	poly6082
Lick Shots	poly6083
My Boo	poly6084
No More Drama	poly6085
Oh Sheila	poly6086
Open (Oh My)	poly6087
Papa's Got A Brand New Bag	poly6088
Sex Machine	poly6089
Sexual Healing	poly6090
The Way You Make Me Feel	poly6091
U Got A Problem	poly6092
What's Going On	poly6093



Crazy Frog Axel F

Realtones	
Crazy Frog - Axel F	frog1763
Crazy Frog - Axel F Speed	frog1764
Crazy Frog - Axel F	frog1765
Realtones	
Crazy Frog - Axel F	frog1750
Crazy Frog - Axel F	frog1751
Crazy Frog - Axel F	frog1752
Sound FX	
The Crazy Frog - Grind	frog1753
The Crazy Frog - Nuts	frog1756
The Crazy Frog - Motor	frog1757

Wallpapers

Animated Screensavers

frog1758 frog1759 frog1760 frog1761 frog1762

frog1753 frog1756

Cool Wallpapers

wall7680	wall7681	wall7682	wall7683	wall7690	wall7691	wall7692	wall7693
wall7684	wall7685	wall7686	wall7698	wall7699	wall7700	wall7701	wall7702
wall7687	wall7688	wall7712	wall7713	wall7714	wall7715	wall7716	wall7717
wall7689	wall7730	wall7731	wall7732	wall7733	wall7734	wall7735	wall7736
wall7740	wall7741	wall7742	wall7743	wall7744	wall7745	wall7746	wall7747
wall7748	wall7749	wall7750	wall7751	wall7752	wall7753	wall7754	wall7755

How to order...

Messages

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How to download...

Message Center

Download My Messages

Message

1 go to Inbox

2 select link

3 start download

4 save & enjoy!

for more details see manual of your mobile phone or visit www.jamster.com

Animated Screensavers

move1810

move1811

move1812

move1813

move1814

move1815

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THE DEVELOPER OF THE FUTURE

HOW THE LITTLE GUY IS GOING TO HELP OUR INDUSTRY TAKE THE NEXT STEP FORWARD



BY JOHN BAEZ AND TOM FULP,
CO-FOUNDERS, THE BEHEMOTH

Every new round in the console wars brings faster hardware and graphics that look more and more like the real thing. If the current trends continue, we'll soon be at the apogee of video game graphics – hyper-realistic and on par with film. Gamers will expect and demand that anything that is supposed to look realistic does, in fact, look realistic. But where does all this eye candy leave gamers?

In some respects, every game being drenched with perfect graphics will be a good thing for gamers. If every game that is supposed to look realistic looks great and they all look equally fantastic, there will be little to differentiate them beyond story and gameplay. But will large publishers really now focus on innovative gameplay or daring rendering styles? If the latest round of sequels and licensed properties are any indication, innovation is far too risky to be at the top of their lists.

We're already experiencing it with Alien Hominid. After no one believed in our odd little idea of making a 2D game, they all now want to throw money at us to make a sequel. We're more excited about the new game we're making. We know it will be a huge hit. It's hard to convey that to businessmen who just want to see sales data on the franchise. Alien Hominid has gone from a big risk to a sure thing in their minds, and it doesn't matter whether they have played the game or not.

So who will take these risks and help the industry innovate?

As graphics reach the limit of what a 2D television screen will accommodate, another phenomenon is taking place in the industry; there is a record number of game developers.

All those kids who grew up playing games are joining in. The growing team requirements for next-generation games has created tons of jobs, and an increasing number of game development programs at colleges and universities are pumping fresh blood into the business.

More developers will inevitably mean there will be more start-ups. More start-ups will mean more innovation, as the start-ups will have to compete in a new way with established franchises and licenses. At the Behemoth, we make video games that are collectible because for the most part a single artist draws them and a very small team creates the game. Tying the creation of the game to a very small number of people allows us, the developer, to connect with the player in a manner similar to how an independent filmmaker connects to an audience by making niche films for a targeted fan base.

The rise of the independent film industry over the last decade has left many lessons for small- and mid-sized game developers. The cost of professional film equipment continues to drop, the technology keeps getting better, and a surge in the number of people who want to break into the industry has resulted in many more independent films finding distribution. These filmmakers know they can't go head to head with the summer blockbusters, so they build their fanbases through the growing number of independent film festivals and through innovative marketing strategies to get the word out on their films. Earlier this year we were invited to participate at the Slamdance Game Competition that is held concurrently with the Slamdance Film Festival, an alternative festival held during the Sundance Film Festival in Park City. (Lesson number one: piggyback on large tradeshows/festivals for increased

audiences.) It was truly remarkable how much energy these filmmakers had to promote their films. They did everything to get people to come watch their films, and made us realize that as game developers, half the fun of making games should be informing fans about our work.

We've had great success finding fans at the San Diego Comic-Con. In 2003 we unveiled an early demo of Alien Hominid and gave a sneak peak of our new game this past summer. Lyndon Johnson said a handshake is worth 250 votes. By that logic, we could argue meeting a fan is worth 250 sales. If you can't afford a multi-million dollar ad campaign, you better be ready to shake a lot of hands; the new game industry is all about making that personal connection.

Like the film industry, small, agile developers will ultimately have better, less expensive tools at their disposal. They will be able to take advantage of increased rendering power and experiment in ways publisher-owned developers cannot. Experimentation will be key for the small developer and the best way to experiment will be with alternative rendering and gameplay styles. You don't always need to take a step forward; sometimes you can take a step back. We took a shot at revisiting an old 2D genre with updated graphics and the result was a hit. There wasn't any sort of spreadsheet that said a hand-drawn 2D game with an unknown character would sell well, but anyone with a real passion for gaming probably could have guessed it. Fun isn't defined by increasing complexity and realism.

Don't people still enjoy checkers, after all? ■■■■

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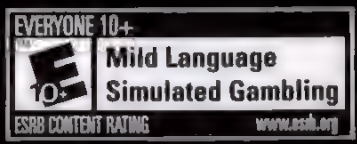


LIVE



ACTIVISION

Online play requires internet connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). ©2005 Activision, Inc. and its affiliates. Activision is a registered trademark of Activision, Inc. All rights reserved. World Series of Poker, chip logo and related marks are registered trademarks or trademarks of Harrah's License Company, LLC. and used under license. All rights reserved. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners. "PSP" is a trademark and "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Memory Stick Duo™ may be required (sold separately). The Online Icon is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox Live, the Live Logos and the Xbox Logos are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries and are used under license from Microsoft. TM, ®, and Nintendo GameCube are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2001 Nintendo.



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Quake 4 10/10

01

Dog Soldiers: Fresh Meat opens in theaters today. If you haven't seen the first *Dog Soldiers* yet, expect a beating from Romer and Henry.



Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow 10/03

03-04

NEW RELEASES

- America's Army: Rise of a Soldier - PS2, Xbox
- Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow - DS
- Conflict: Global Terror - PS2, Xbox
- EyeToy: Chat - PS2
- FIFA Soccer 06 - DS
- LEGO Star Wars - GC
- Mario Tennis Advance - GBA

- Moonlight Fables - DS
- MX vs ATV Unleashed - PSP
- NBA 06 - PS2, PSP
- NBA 2K6 - PS2, Xbox
- Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Shattered Union - DS
- PoPoLoCrisis - DS
- Skateboard Unleashed - PS2
- Vapors - PS2
- Virtua Tennis - PSP
- Warriors, The - UMD
- WWE Smackdown vs RAW 2006 - PS2

05

WATCHMEN: THE ABSOLUTE EDITION

Celebrate the 20th anniversary of this brilliant Alan Moore comic with this deluxe hardcover release that features over 48 pages of supplemental material including conceptual art by Dave Gibbons.

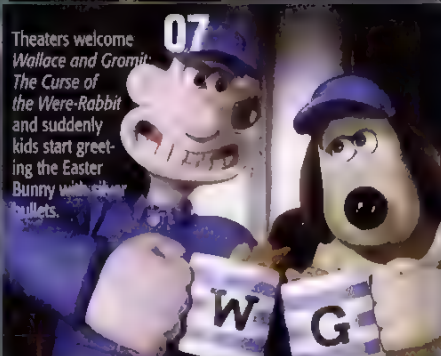
06

NEW RELEASES

- Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge - PS2
- Nightmare Before Christmas: Pumpkin King - GBA
- Underworld - UMD

07

Theaters welcome *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* and suddenly kids start greeting the Easter Bunny with silver bullets.



L.A. Rush 10/10

10-11

NEW RELEASES

- Black & White 2 - PC
- Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth - Xbox
- Devil Kings - PS2
- FEAR - PC
- Gretzky NHL 2006 - PSP
- L.A. Rush - PS2, Xbox
- NCAA March Madness 06 - PS2, Xbox
- Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - DS
- Quake 4 - PC

- Real Time Conflict: Shogun Empires - DS
- Serious Sam 2 - Xbox, PC
- S.TALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl - PC
- SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs 3 - PS2
- Wild Arms: Alter Code F - PS2
- Trauma Center: Under the Knife - DS
- Zoo Tycoon - DS

12

GREEN LANTERN: REBIRTH

Hal Jordan is back! Read about his return in this collected volume.



13

NEW RELEASES

- Chicken Little: Deep Dive - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA

14

The remake of *The Fog* hits the silver screen. Will it be as good as the John Carpenter original? Hell no, but we'll still see it anyway.

15

FUTUREPLAY 2006 (13-15)

This three-day international academic conference about the future of game design and technology will be held at Michigan State University. Keynote speeches by a bunch of people with Ph.D. at the end of their names will outline the future of gaming as they see it. Smart people rule!



Shadow of the Colossus 10/25

17-18

NEW RELEASES

- Age of Empires III
- Blitz: The League - PS2, Xbox
- Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Guac, The - PS2
- Gears for Hire - PS2, Xbox, PC
- FIFA Soccer 06 - PS2, Xbox
- Fire Emblem - GC
- Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex - PS2, Xbox, PC

- Legend of Heroes - PSP
- NBA Live 06 - PSP
- Romancing SaGa - PS2
- Rome Total War: Barbarian Invasion - PC
- Samurai Shodown V - Xbox
- Shadow of the Colossus - PS2
- Shining Force Neo - PS2
- SpongeBob SquarePants: Lights, Camera, PANTS! - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
- Stubbs the Zombie

Rebel Without a Pulse - Xbox

- Tony Hawk's American Wasteland - PS2, Xbox, GC, DS, GBA
- Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble - GC
- Warriors, The - PS2, Xbox
- Wild Arms: Alter Code F - PS2
- X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse - PSP



The Colossus 10/17

21

The video game-inspired film *Doom* opens in theaters today. Expect a plot as deep and moving as those from the games.

22



30

31

SERIOUS GAMES SUMMIT WASHINGTON, D.C. (OCT 31-NOV 1)

25-26

NEW RELEASES

- 25 to Life - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Battlefield: Modern Combat - PS2, Xbox
- Call of Duty 2 - PC
- Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories - PSP
- Gunstar Super Heroes - GBA
- Jak X: Combat Racing - PS2
- Jaws - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Mega Man X Collection - PS2
- Metroid Prime Pinball - DS

- Neopets: The Darkest Faerie - PS2
- Ratchet: Deadlocked - PS2
- Resident Evil 4 - PS2
- Sims 2, The - PS2, Xbox, GC, DS, PSP, GBA
- Soul Calibur III - PS2
- Spartan: Total Warrior - PS2, Xbox
- SSX On Tour - PS2, Xbox, GC

27

WOMEN'S GAME CONFERENCE & GAME WRITERS CONFERENCE (26-27)

What's the current video game market for females? Do you have a great idea for a game? These shows held in Austin, TX are open to anyone interested in the industry. A great place for women and writers seeking recruitment into the game business.



29

2005 TEXAS PINBALL FESTIVAL (28-30)

Fact: Texans love to wrack balls. Fact: Texans love it when visitors slap their balls too. With over 100 machines, balls will be flying all over the place at the Luxurious Holiday Inn in Irving. TX! Load up the camper and go, go, go!

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD.



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- > DEVELOPER REAL TIME WORLDS
- > RELEASE SPRING 2006



THE OPEN WORLD EVOLVED

CRACKDOWN

The phrase "go anywhere, do anything" has lost its luster. Since the runaway success of Grand Theft Auto III, the free-roaming genre has expanded from being defined by a single title to encompassing a broad spectrum of freeform gameplay ranging from superhero exploits to alien invasions. Gamers have come to expect more than the simple freedom to explore virtual cities, and with the next generation of home consoles nearly upon us, many are wondering what the future holds for this relatively young genre. Crackdown will be the first next-gen title to deliver a vision of that future. Conceived by David Jones, creator of the Grand Theft Auto franchise, this Xbox 360 exclusive is the evolution of the free-roaming formula gamers have been waiting for. Familiar elements like expansive cityscapes and superhuman strength combine with new advances like online multiplayer (including co-op), in-depth character progression, and an array of Xbox Live community options to immerse gamers in a digital metropolis like never before.



DOWN

Formed in 2002, Crackdown developer Real Time Worlds may be new to the industry, but its staff has years of collective experience on titles that have shaped gaming as we know it. David Jones founded the company after selling his previous enterprise, DMA Design, which is now known as the famed Rockstar North. While at DMA, Jones created two of the most influential series in gaming — *Hemlock* and *Grand Theft Auto* — and several key staff members from those teams accompanied him in his move to Real Time Worlds. Even though *GTA III* was only about halfway through development at the time of his departure, Jones' role in bringing open-world games to the forefront of the industry is undoubtedly significant. With *Crackdown*, he and his staff are squarely focused on innovating within the genre they helped originate.

Of course, the first step in creating a free-roaming game is crafting a compelling world and ensuring that the players are given the capability to explore it in exciting ways. To this end, Real Time

Worlds created the Agency in *Crackdown*. The last safe refuge in a city overtaken by oppressive and violent criminal organizations, the Agency is a secret government organization that is about to unleash a last-stand experimental procedure on the increasingly corrupt city: you. As a volunteer pumped full of experimental drugs, the player is set loose on the streets as an Agent of Justice. These law-enforcement officers exhibit extraordinary powers rivaling those of comic book superheroes as they leap over buildings, hoist vehicles in the air, and carry terrifying heavy weaponry in their crusade to clean up the city. "Our ultimate goal is to make the agents so powerful that they could replace an entire police force," Jones tells us. Eventually, it will be possible for an agent to pick up a car, carry it to the top of a building, drive it off the edge, bail out in mid-air, and then precisely shoot the gas tank on the way down, which turns the plummeting vehicle into a burning, explosive wreck as it crashes into the side of a building.

This breaks the top-down, comic mentality of

clearly reflected in the game's distinct visual style. It may not have that next-gen look players have come to expect from titles like *Gears of War*, but, just because a game isn't using Unreal Engine 3 doesn't mean it can't distinguish itself graphically. In fact, the decision to go with the drawn, stylistic look was a very deliberate one on the part of the developer. "It's difficult, when you're doing a very large and open freeform game like this, to push toward photorealistic visuals," explains Jones. "It's not really possible to do that on the scale we're talking about, but we wanted to come out with something that is still visually very appealing, so we went for things like outlining, strong use of color, and multiple detail maps. It gives very clean edges to the environment, and crisper edges to the characters and vehicles." This means that, despite its lack of realism, the game will have a certain flair that makes it instantly recognizable as *Crackdown*. Additionally, one of the major concerns about next-gen titles is that too much emphasis is placed on graphics while the gameplay is allowed to



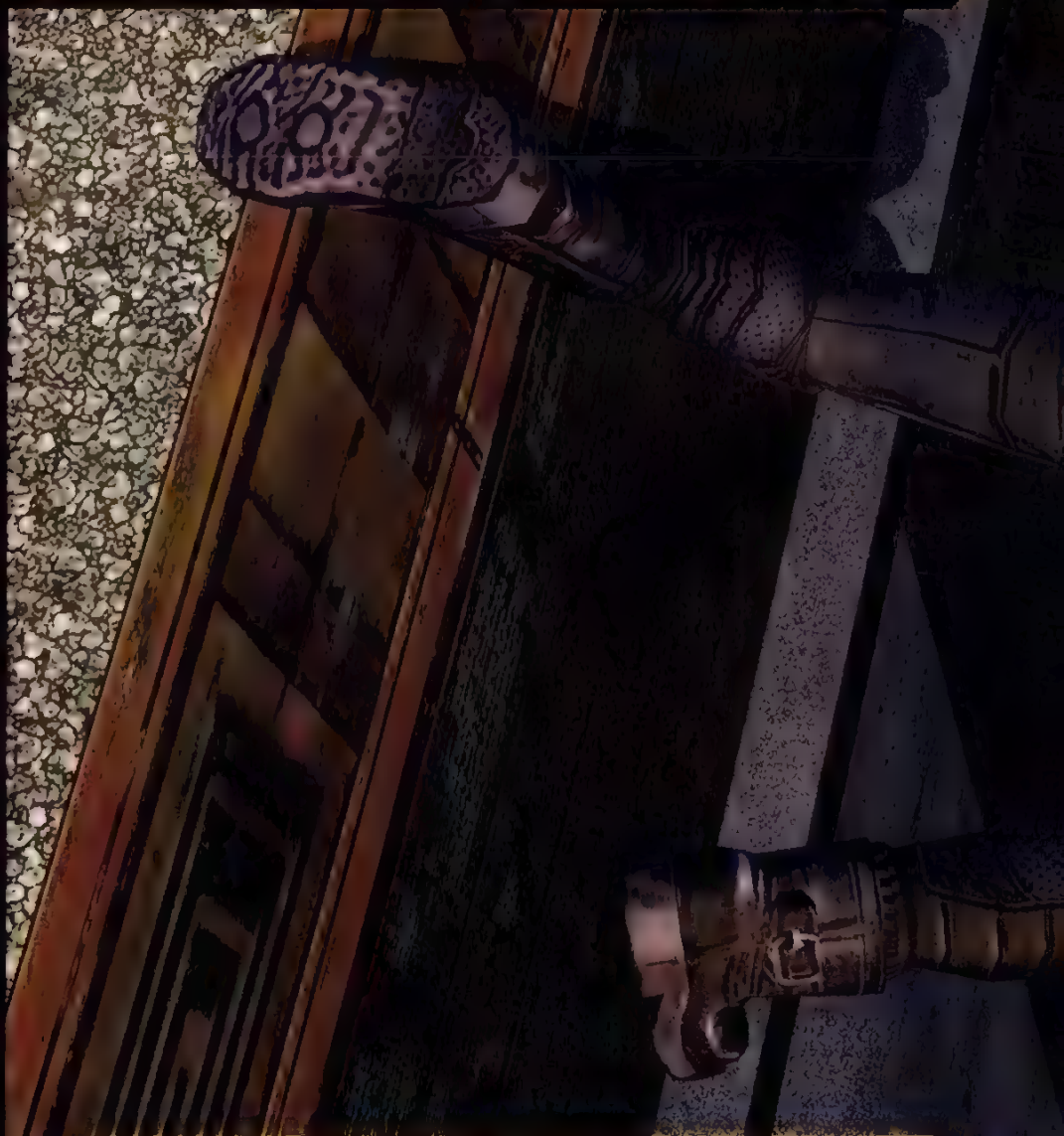
stagnate — an issue Crackdown is tackling head-on.

In order to provide players with fresh gaming experiences, one must first take a look at the once-innovative aspects of the genre that have grown tired over the years. One convention that was immediately earmarked for change in Crackdown was the basic mission structure. Regardless of the subject matter, many sandbox games have a restrictive linear pattern that forces players into a common routine: go someplace, pick up a mission, complete mission, and return. While these tasks often serve to acquaint players with the city's geography, they also segment the title into two gameplay styles: doing missions and just playing around. Fortunately, Crackdown will now meld these previous divided elements into one continuous process. "The typical missions do not have a start, a middle, an end, or a fail and succeed. We wanted to get away from that completely," Jones reveals. "We wanted to create a game where the freeform nature actually enhances and feeds back into the character."

In essence, this means that the part of the open-world games that players have embraced the most — experimenting with weapons and vehicles (and their effects on civilians) — will no longer be an isolated diversion. It is essential to the process of strengthening your agent. Each character has five key skills to improve: strength, agility, firearms, explosives, and driving. As you kill criminals with these abilities during your exploration, the corresponding skill increases. If you want to increase your accuracy and firepower, you use guns to neutralize the enemies. If you want to become a better driver, you run some suckers down. Jones enthusiastically sums up the philosophy behind this process: "The character progression is purely driven by the freeform nature of the game. So the more you enjoy doing something, the more it reflects on your character, and the better your character becomes at doing that thing." Unlike similar mechanics in other titles, these stats aren't just for novelty; if you want to advance in the game, you need to pump yourself up. After all, if you're going to eradicate evil from the city, you must be ready to face some heavy opposition.

The crime infestation is the result of three specific gangs vying for power, each with an intricate hierarchy and chain of command. "Every gang has seven key members, and each of those members plays a special role," clarifies Jones. "If you manage to take out a key member, that will have a radical effect on the gang's structure. They all have a job to do — they're all supplying the gang with something." For instance, if you take out a gang's vehicle specialist, all of the members on the streets will suddenly be stuck behind the wheels of patched-up heavers instead of the customized rides they normally drive. Or, by taking out the recruiting officer, you can drastically diminish the number of foes you encounter. With each lieutenant killed, your foes become

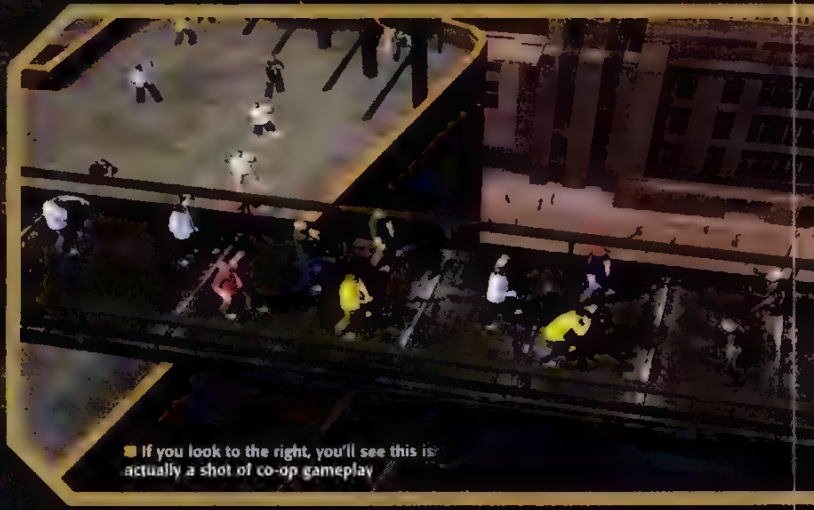
continued on page 60 ▶



■ There will be plenty of civilian vehicles to "borrow" for both driving and throwing purposes



■ The city's verticality plays a major role in how players get around



■ If you look to the right, you'll see this is actually a shot of co-op gameplay

increasingly unable to defend against your onslaught, resulting in your eventual infiltration of the gang's base of operations. This reductive process comprises the core objective of Crackdown: eliminate the kingpin in each of the three gangs by dismantling its infrastructure before going in for the big kill. It sounds simple in theory, but as you might guess, you can't begin the game and make appointments to murder the most powerful people in the city.

"The first part of the game is getting your skills up so you can reach new places and actually find key criminals," describes Jones. "You may start the game at the bottom of a five-story building, and one of the kingpins you have to confront could just be right above you. Now you've got to figure how to get up there and take him out." This is where the game's freedom character progression really comes into play; only by taking out street thugs with a variety of tactics will you be able to advance your skills to the point where you can gain access to the key gang members. In a way, it is similar to the exploration method

pioneered by Metroid: From the start of the game you may be able to see a door that you need to go through, but only after acquiring certain abilities will you be able to reach the door and break it open.

However, unlike Nintendo's classic franchise, Crackdown is giving players a great deal of freedom in how they ultimately choose to open that door. If you want to break into a gang compound, you have an array of options depending on how you have developed your character. If you have high skill in athletics, you can attempt to scale the walls. If you've been driving, you may be able to just take a truck and ram your way through the front door. Alternately, a firearms-focused agent could snipe the grounds from afar, clearing out most major threats before even setting foot in harm's way. Jones assures us, "We've made it flexible, and we're sure that players will come up with ingenious ways of doing the job." Many gamers may be wary of this claim, having heard it before in reference to several unremarkable GTA clones. However, by making the city as intricate

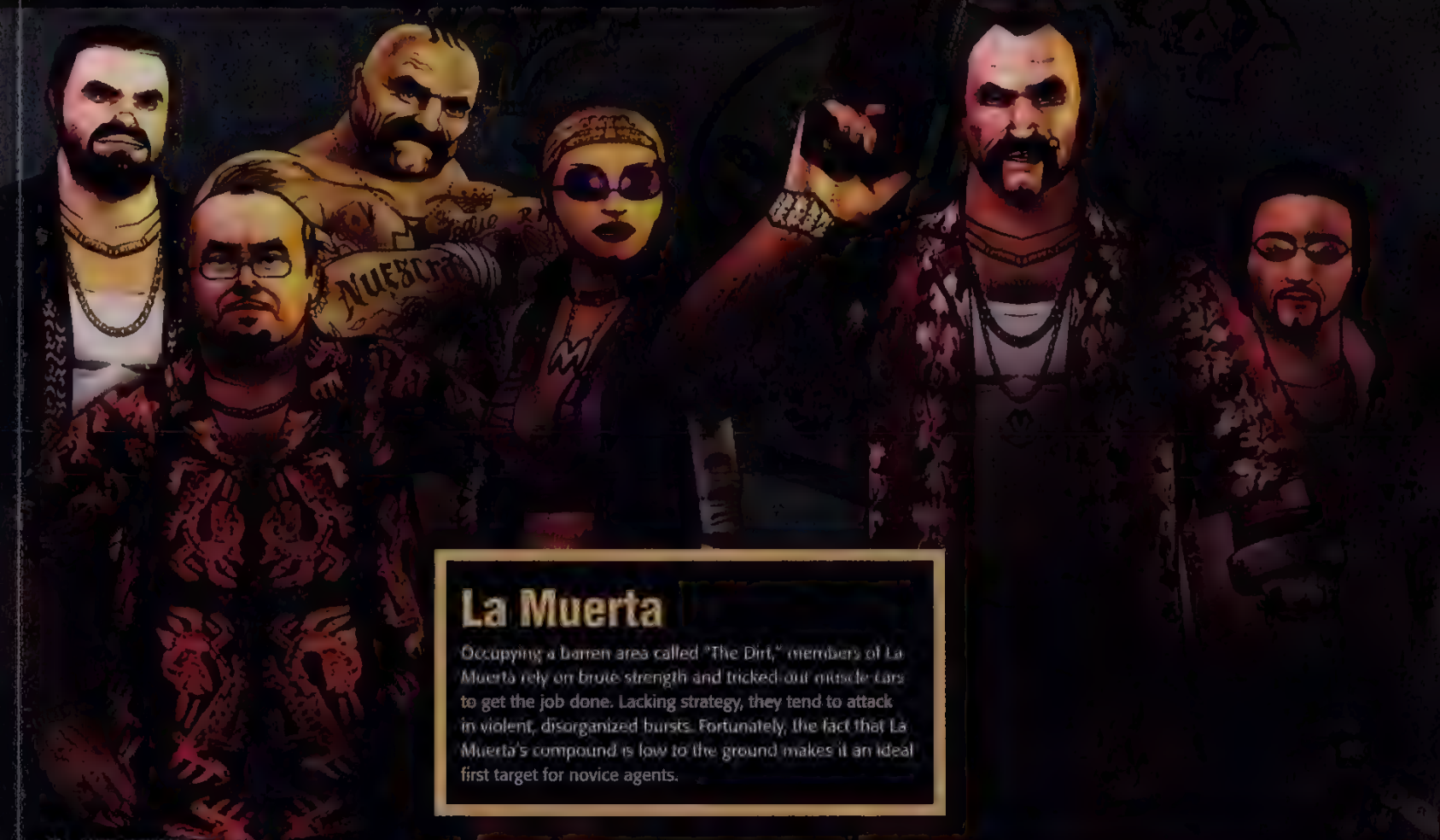
and interactive as possible, the Crackdown team is diligently working to make this promise of flexibility a reality, not just an empty marketing boast.

The most apparent way the city is designed to accommodate these open-ended scenarios is by emphasizing the verticality of a crowded metropolitan area. Instead of storming a stronghold from the ground, it can easily be assailed from above or from afar. "Crackdown is about play volume, not just play area," Jones proclaims. "Typically developers tend to spread cities out, but we're spreading them up. Up is the way where the action is — there's actually stuff like props and bodies up there, and it's great to watch them rain down." Of course, since height is one of the many elements limiting players' access to the gang kingpins, you'll have to level up your character in athletics if you plan to fully appreciate the urban peaks and valleys of the city — but there are still ways for agents focused in other areas to take to the rooftops.

"We've tried to design the whole city as a big platform game," describes Jones. Just like in a real city,

THREE'S COMPANY

The three gangs choking the streets and alleys of the city each have a distinct style and method of operation. Players won't just be fighting the same goons with different skins; the characteristics of each group affect their tactics in battle, as well as the way they formulate retaliatory strikes against you.



La Muerta

Occupying a barren area called "The Dirt," members of La Muerta rely on brute strength and tricked-out muscle cars to get the job done. Lacking strategy, they tend to attack in violent, disorganized bursts. Fortunately, the fact that La Muerta's compound is low to the ground makes it an ideal first target for novice agents.

there are an assortment of ledges, fire escapes, and dumpsters that players can use to scale the heights to get a better view (or a better place to whip a car onto the populace). An agent's agility affects how quickly and easily they can ascend, with many elements similar to the Prince of Persia franchise: shimmying across ledges, jumping between build-

acrobatic type, you can instead opt to pick up a few trucks and crates to create a mighty scalable pile. In fact, this is one of Jones' personal favorite activities in Crackdown: "It sounds nerdy," he confesses, "but I love saying 'Well, I can't get up there, but I reckon if I bring four cars and stack them up, I can get to places I'm sure I'm not meant to get to.' It's very

refreshing the location and state of its objects. This is why when you wreck a car in GTA, it isn't there five minutes later. While the living world of Crackdown still undergoes the same housekeeping, the game keeps track of the player's interaction with various objects. In effect, the system watches what the player touches and assesses the importance of the interactions. If you just hit a crate with a car, it is given a lower priority and is cleared out quickly. However, if you pick up the same crate and try to stack it, the world recognizes that action as deliberate. This allows you to stray further away in search of more things to pile up without fear of your hard work being undone.

Another thing Crackdown will deliver that current-gen systems simply can't provide is a diverse and dense population in the city. Whether it's on the streets or at different heights as you scale the buildings, you'll see randomly generated crowds of people stretching out to the horizon. The civilian models are assembled on the fly from a varied pool of clothing, accessories, and faces, which

continued on page 63 ▶

We wanted to create a game where the freeform nature actually enhances and feeds back into the character.

ings, and swinging around on ropes suspended several stories over a busy street. But these circus tricks are just one way to move up in the world, thanks to the high level of interactivity in the environment. "Everything in the game can be broken down to bits, stacked, or used as a weapon," says Jones. This means that if your agent isn't the lithe,

satisfying to realize that you can 'break' the system to that level."

It may not seem like it at first, but the game's ability to keep track of these objects as you stack them is one of the features that defines it as a distinctly next-generation title. In current free-roaming games, the World needs to clean itself up constantly



Volk

As a group of eastern European ex-soldiers, the Volk employ a militaristic approach to gang management. Loading its members down with ridiculous firepower and deadly explosives, the Volk's tactical prowess makes them formidable foes. They reside in a cold, industrial complex known as "The Den."

Cai-Shen Corporation

Cool and calculating, the Cai-Shen Corporation is a much more professional variety of pure evil. Using its business in the Corridor City as a front for countless illegal operations, members of the Cai-Shen Corporation use company funds to purchase superior technology and sleek cars. While not as violent or brash as the other gangs, they will gladly put off an immediate attack in favor of striking you when you least expect it.



IF THE FREEDOM IS TOO MUCH

While the main story of *Crackdown* is freedom, the game hasn't entirely abandoned mission-oriented gameplay. Punctuating the time between the big gang hits, players will encounter certain challenges as they roam around the city. While these tasks are purely optional and peripheral to the plot, they do provide some unique challenges for players who want to take a break from skill progression. You may find another agent who wants to race you across the city (car not required — it's possible to outrun him on foot if you're athletic enough), or take part in the much-beloved tradition of escorting a gangway to its destination. These conventional activities may seem counter to the team's goal of unrestricted gameplay, but Jones claims that it is important to balance that against the need to provide interesting content to explore. "We didn't want to be so reform that the player had nothing to do or things to accomplish."

■ The Agency's SUV would make great delivery trucks.

■ Life on the street is randomly generated to ensure variation.

■ Some vehicles physically transform to reflect your driving prowess.

■ Citizens will be randomly generated to reflect your driving prowess.

■ Using the environment, it is possible to scale every building in the game.

■ Reaching the tops of buildings will involve platforming reminiscent of the Prince of Persia series.

makes instances of identical twins roaming the streets highly unusual. Additionally, the number of people strolling around you is affected by other factors in the world, like time of day, whether people are going to or from work, and how dark it is outside. This kind of population management makes the world of Crackdown seem more like a living city. However, even though citizens exist primarily to make the surroundings more believable, they may also act as playthings for the more sadistic players and serve as innocent victims for depraved lowlife thugs. "They get mugged a lot. We don't allow you to target the civilians with the targeting system, so anything you do to them will be incidental damage...which is acceptable," laughs Jones.

One of the most entertaining and time-tested methods of causing severe incidental damage, to both pedestrians and environmental objects, is through the use of vehicles. While the traffic will be just as abundant as the citizens, an elite agent shouldn't be relegated to driving an ancient, puttering piece of junk. While you're welcome to take any car you come across, your unique skills will be much better utilized behind the wheel of three Agency-designed rides made specifically for your law-enforcement crusade. The SUV is perfect for off-roading, the semi is a mobile battering ram, and the sports car has unnatural down force, allowing it to grip the road through tight turns at ridiculous speeds.

At first, these characteristics may sound like they could be applied to any number of vehicles from free-roaming titles, but Crackdown is offering something new; the Agency's modes of transportation will increase in power along with your agent. As your driving skill increases throughout your purge of the gangs, the vehicles physically change form once you hop aboard, immediately advertising your prowess behind the wheel. A sleek convertible becomes a Batmobile-esque (Michael Keaton era) street rocket at higher levels, while a normal flat-front semi becomes an immense armored terror. These transformations change the uses for the vehicles, as well. In its most advanced form, the sports car acts as a high-speed scoop that launches oncoming vehicles into the air, while the ram protruding from the front of the semi is the only thing that will allow you to drive straight into the fortified gang compounds.

The vehicles aren't the only thing to cosmetically change according to your character's abilities. In fact, each of the five skills has an immediate visual representation on your agent, indicating the level of proficiency with that skill. "We spent a lot of time looking at how we can show how players are evolving," declares Jones. "It's easy for strength, the character just puts on bulk. For athletics, we've actually done that through costumes. The bigger the guns, you tend to know the player has specialized in firearms." In addition to the stat bonuses, these aesthetic enhancements are like badges of honor, making an agent progressively more badass and intimidating as the game goes on.

Now, the burning question is why it is important for an agent's skills to be visually represented at all. A feature like that has only one practical use: advertising your level and abilities to other players. Unfortunately, Real Time Worlds is keeping quiet on the kinds of gameplay that will happen in the dedicated multiplayer arena, but we did learn about something even more exciting. For the first time in a 3D

continued on page 65

CORPORAL



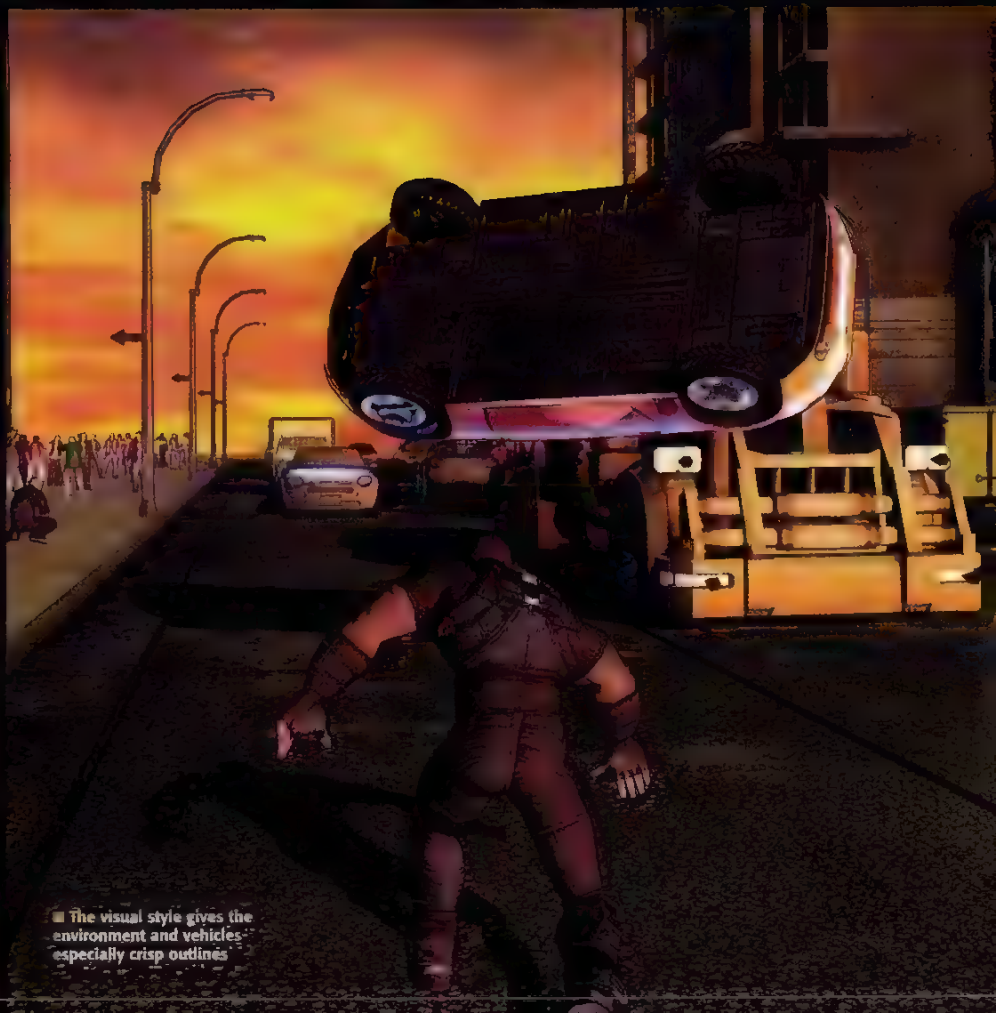
■ Even though you won't be able to lift cars when you begin the game, other objects around you can still be used as weapons



■ The agents' athletic skills are indicated by the coolness of their armor



■ You won't be able to target civilians directly, but that doesn't mean they can't feel your wrath



■ The visual style gives the environment and vehicles especially crisp outlines

open-world title, Crackdown will feature online co-op play. "The whole single-player game can be played by two people over Xbox Live," Jones states. "Using the voice capabilities of 360, you can just ask a friend to lend a hand. If he's high on strength, he can just pop in, throw you up someplace you couldn't reach yourself, then pop out again." Of course, the co-op interactions aren't limited to a short rendezvous. You could start the game with a friend and play through it front to back, or just send out a call for help when you're in a sticky situation. Either way, there are no restrictions on the co-op play that aren't in the single-player experience; the two agents might choose to stay close and do an assault together, or split off to explore entirely different areas of the world. But keep in mind that there are definite advantages to working together.

The co-op mechanics allow for some unique opportunities that players won't encounter while

says Jones. "With Live, we'll be passing messages between all the players all the time. If your friend has an achievement, like he's managed to fall to his death from 1,744 feet, that gets transmitted to your game and you can view it as a challenge." Since the Agency is a covert branch of the government, however, it can't simply send you a memo with this information. Therefore, all of these challenges are transmitted to players through a kind of subliminal advertising. The many billboards scattered about the city, when observed through a special view mode dubbed Agency Vision, transform into dot matrix scrolls informing the Crackdown community at large of the achievements. If you don't feel like assassinating gang kingpins, take a closer look at these advertisements to see what your fellow agents are doing. For interested players, these accomplishments can provide hours of replay as they

continually up the ante and test their skills against other Crackdown players around the world.

Highlighting this emphasis on community, Real Time Worlds has also concocted an inventive use for your friends list. Utilizing a technique called Absorption, at any time in the game your agent can briefly take on the abilities of any other agent on file. This means that, for about 30 seconds, your character can benefit from the experience that others have gained. Fortunately, anyone on your friends list can send you the DNA of their agents. This means that if you just need a higher firearms skill for a quick assault, you can infuse yourself with one of your friends' trigger-happy operatives, giving you the boost you need to get the job done.

Absorption isn't limited to other players' characters, though. If you have multiple agents on file with different skills, you can use your own saves to bulk up your current agent to god-like status. "If you finish the game with an explosives character, and then start a new agent focusing on acrobatics, you can actually go back and absorb the skills of any save game characters," Jones clarifies. "One of our goals is to have people build up a war chest of agents and find exciting ways to use them." In addition to absorption, this war chest will undoubtedly come in useful for the inevitable multiplayer combat, but we'll have to wait until Microsoft's X05 event for full details on what that mode will have to offer.

Even as we wait for the multiplayer pieces of the puzzle to come together, Crackdown still presents an intriguing approach to the next step in freeform gameplay. It's an expansive world unlike any other, and chances are we'll see downloadable content in the future – like additional gang compounds and more skills to develop – that expands it even further. Intently focused on letting the player's whims and desires shape the gameplay experience,

Real Time Worlds is doing whatever it takes to provide self-motivated exploration in a world with a life of its own. "We wanted to make a completely nonlinear, completely freeform game unlike any other," insists Jones. That's a lofty goal, but after years of Grand Theft

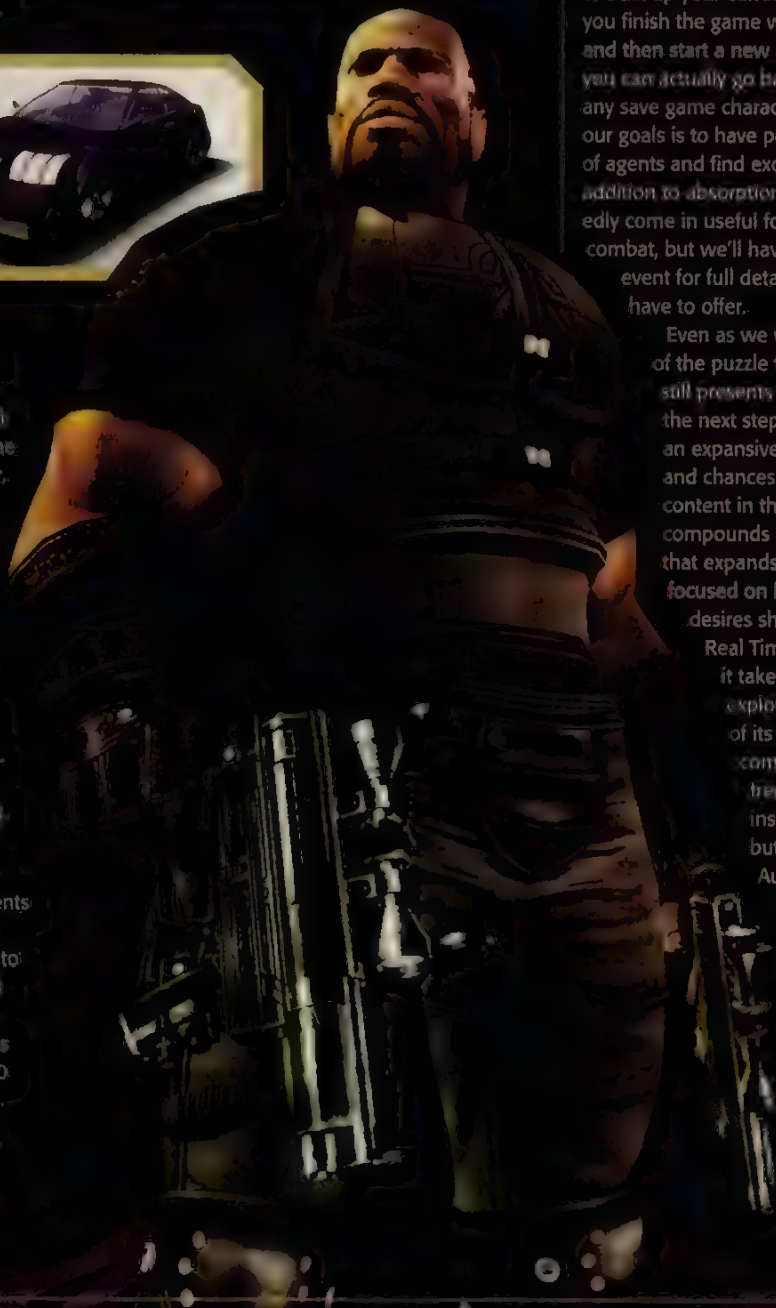
Auto knock-offs and pale imitations, gamers realize that open worlds are growing stale. With Crackdown, it is time for the genre to evolve and step into the next generation under the guidance of the man who originated the most successful free-roaming franchise in gaming history. ■■■



playing solo. For instance, if you are trying to get a particular vehicle into a heavily guarded area, driving it in isn't the only option. One agent could get in the driver's seat while the other picks up the entire car and chucks it over the defensive barrier. Alternately, you could plan a dual-pronged assault, with an explosives expert blasting into a base at one end, while a firearms specialist mows his way through goons at the front door. "Hopefully we'll see a lot of interaction. We're trying to really break the lines down between single and online play." This philosophy is why some aspects of Crackdown – like a living world and cooperative raids – may sound like they belong in an MMORPG instead of a free-roaming title.

In another effort to expand its online functionality, there are other elements of Crackdown that fully utilize the new features of the Xbox 360 and Xbox Live. For instance, remember the achievements that can appear on your Gamer Card? Well, Real Time Worlds has built hundreds of achievements to be attained by ambitious agents. One of the most prestigious is ascending to the top of the Agency tower itself, but there are also community goals as well, like players collectively killing a total of 5,000 kingpins.

"We want to make every player feel like a part of the Agency – part of a community of agents and players who are doing the same things,"



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PC | XBOX 360
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
(UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE,
PC INTERNET, OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** HUMAN HEAD STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** 2006

PREY

It Came From Outer Space

In a time of high-profile sequels, big-budget productions based on famous franchises, and rock star developers with devoted fans, games with backgrounds that deviate from this formula are a risky proposition. Fewer publishers are willing to work with smaller teams or to revisit old properties with a troubled past. But 2K Games is doing both of these things with its new first-person shooter, Prey.

After a decade of false starts, scrapped technology, and shifting development teams, the game that began life as 3D Realms' answer to Quake will finally see the light of day courtesy of developer Human Head Studios. Housed on the second floor of a small office park in Madison, Wisconsin, Human Head has neither fancy offices nor a huge team of well-known developers, but it certainly isn't lacking in talent. While a small studio and a property that has been shelved for a number of years may seem like a questionable venture, *Prey* is shaping up to be one of the most exciting FPS games in years, and looks destined to become the next huge PC shooter. Also scheduled for Xbox 360, the console version will be identical to the PC release, save for a few control tweaks.

Although many gamers had never heard of *Prey* before the demo unveiled at this year's E3, the project was originally conceived in 1995. A dark sci-fi game starring a Native American character, development continued on *Prey* until August 1996, when most of the team quit 3D Realms. After this setback, the team was rebuilt, and development continued on the project. The *Prey* engine was shown off at E3 in 1997 and 1998 to positive feedback. But in late 1998, the team leads on the project parted ways with the company, and the *Prey* engine was scrapped. A new team leader was hired in 1999, but was quickly let go. 3D Realms hired Human Head in 2001, and the team has been developing *Prey* ever since using the Doom 3 engine.

The early concepts for *Prey* involved a Native American character, a living spaceship that abducts creatures from all over the galaxy, and portals that allow the player to jump from one place to another. All of these concepts have been retained, but Human Head is adding several more prominent features to make *Prey* one of the most exciting

and innovative shooters in a long time. From the moment you begin *Prey's* adventure, you'll know you're in for something different.

Prey stars Tommy, a young mechanic who has turned his back on his Cherokee heritage. Leaving his reservation, Tommy serves a term in the military and then returns to find his girlfriend and take her away with him. But his plans are quickly disrupted when the reservation is visited by an alien force - one that isn't friendly. This otherworldly presence is The Sphere, a living ship that has traveled through space for thousands of years, collecting living creatures along the way. The Sphere uses its captives for food, slaves, or experimentation, and beings from across the universe live within it. The Sphere abducts several residents of the reservation, including Tommy and his girlfriend. Tommy escapes from confinement, allowing him to run freely in The Sphere. Battling through the living corridors of the ship, Tommy will face all sorts of hostile beings, do battle with the ship itself, meet intelligent alien life, and much more in an effort to save both his girlfriend and the Earth itself.

Aboard the ship, Tommy discovers a bizarre world with its own set of rules. The living mass that makes up the inside of The Sphere is filled with mechanical structures built by the creatures that live within, and the very ground he walks on is a hazard. Wiggling, tongue-like structures called cilia stick out from some surfaces, alerting the ship to your presence when touched. Orifices shoot out eggs that hatch into ravenous monsters when you draw near, and living doors will actually react to your approach. As strange as the ship is, the creatures that live within it are even stranger. Many are bio-mechanical, having been altered in The Sphere's sinister experiments. Some will use portals to tear a hole in the fabric of reality to get the drop on you, literally appearing out of nowhere.

Of course, these portals go both ways, and are a huge component of Prey's gameplay. Any portal you see can be entered, transporting you instantly from one place to another. Combat can even be carried out through these portals—you can leap through one, fire on the enemies on the other side, fall back to the original room, and continue shooting through the rip in space. The use of portals allows the team at Human Head to create some truly unique combat scenarios and levels. For example, there may be an enormous room inside what looks like a tiny space, and one level will even feature a portal maze, which should be an incredibly mindbending experience. In the maze, you may find yourself looking through a portal that leads to the room that you are currently standing in—which means that you may glance into a portal and see yourself looking back!

Although the portals allow Human Head to do things that have yet to be done in an FPS, there are several more features that make Prey stand out from the crowd. Gravity plays a huge role in the gameplay, and will be used to unique effect. Some surfaces allow you to Wall Walk—your feet stick to these paths no matter where they go. Many will lead up a wall and onto the ceiling, letting you experience a room from a whole new

perspective. However, these Wall Walk surfaces require power. During our visit to Human Head Studios, we witnessed an enemy switch off the Wall Walk power while Tommy was hanging upside down from the ceiling, causing him to tumble to the ground where the enemy was waiting.

The Wall Walk surfaces aren't the only ways Prey plays with gravity. Some rooms have switches that reverse gravity. When hit, the player (and all other characters and items that aren't fastened to the ground) will suddenly fall towards the ceiling. Hitting the switch again will instantly correct gravity, sending everything back to the ground. Expect to see many areas of the game that make this gravity reversal system essential to progression.

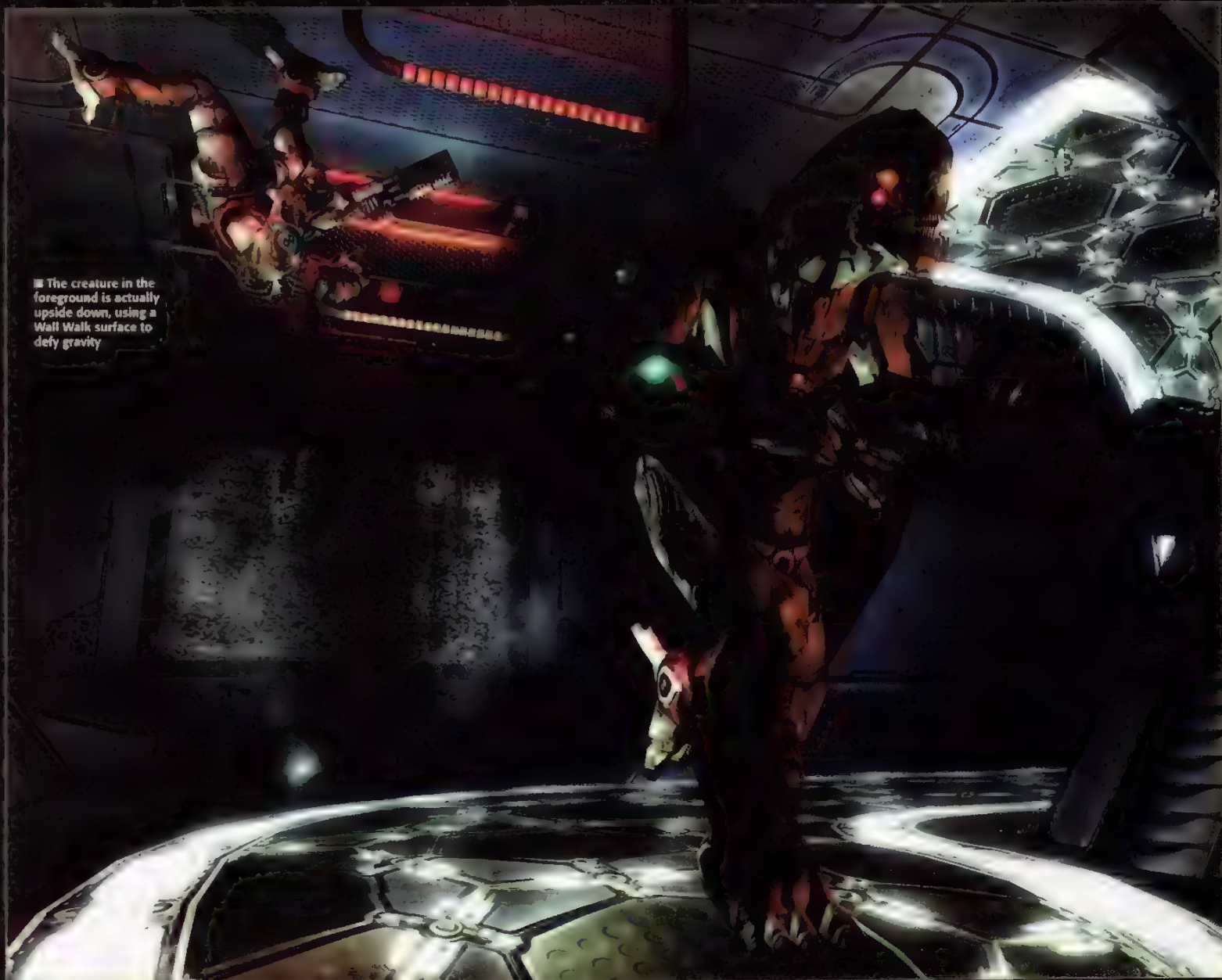
In some areas of the game, Tommy will take to the skies in a small flying vehicle that allows him to zoom through the open spaces that make up much of The Sphere. These areas are often filled with asteroids or small planets, each of which has its own gravitational field. Tommy can land on these planets and actually walk all the way around their surfaces.

Obviously, The Sphere has several properties that lend themselves to interesting new gameplay mechanics, but Tommy has unique abilities of his own that take things even further. Although he has forsaken his Native

American heritage, Tommy discovers his true powers aboard the ship. Early in the story, Tommy will find himself transported to the Land of the Ancients, a desert area sacred to the Cherokee people. There he encounters the spirit of his grandfather, who teaches Tommy to tap into dormant spiritual abilities. Human Head went to great lengths to assure that Tommy's powers are based on actual Cherokee legends, and include abilities called Spirit Walk and Death Walk.

Spirit Walk allows Tommy to leave his physical body and explore the ship as an intangible ghost. In this form, Tommy is largely invulnerable to harm, although some attacks will cause him to leap back into his body. During Spirit Walk, Tommy is armed with a mystical bow that is incredibly powerful, but quickly drains his spiritual reserves. He can also see objects that are invisible normally, including platforms that can only be traversed in this form, allowing his spirit access to places his body can't go. The spirit form can also go through force fields and other barriers that Tommy's body can't, making intelligent use of Spirit Walk essential to puzzle-solving. However, Tommy's body is vulnerable to harm while Spirit Walk is being used, so it's unwise to leave it too far behind.

(Continued on page 73)



■ The creature in the foreground is actually upside down, using a Wall Walk surface to defy gravity



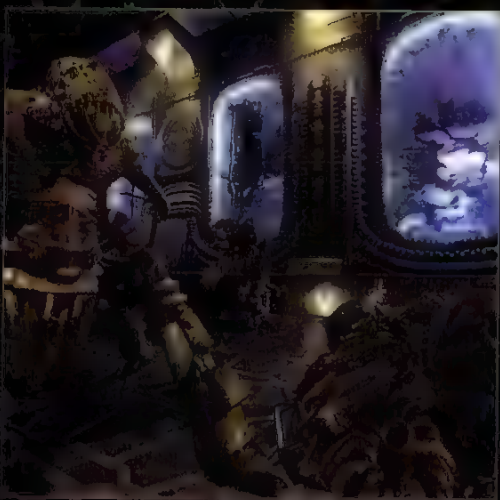
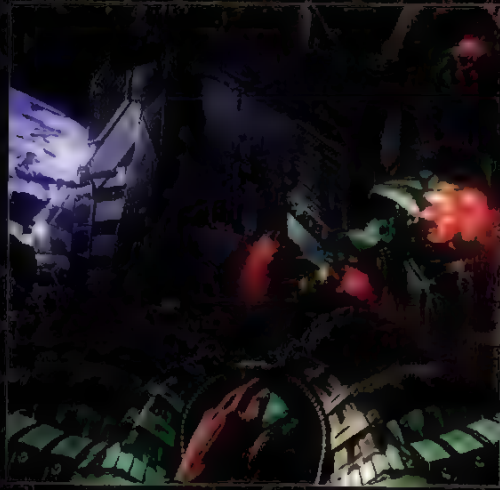
■ Guarded by two Harvesters, this portal leads to an entirely different area of the ship.



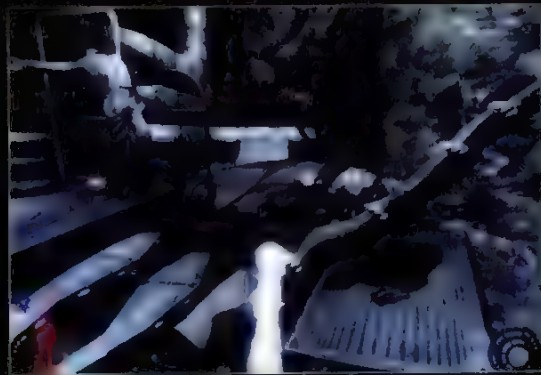
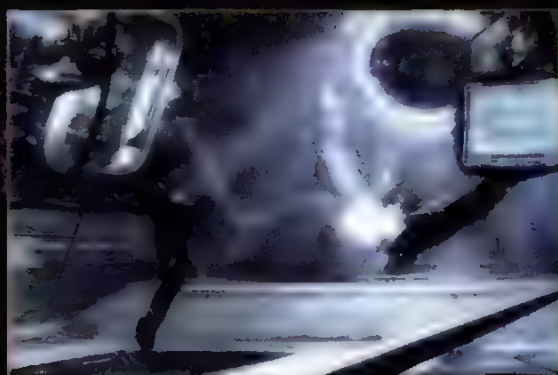
■ In this shuttle, Tommy can explore a small planet housed within the ship itself.

ton Integrity

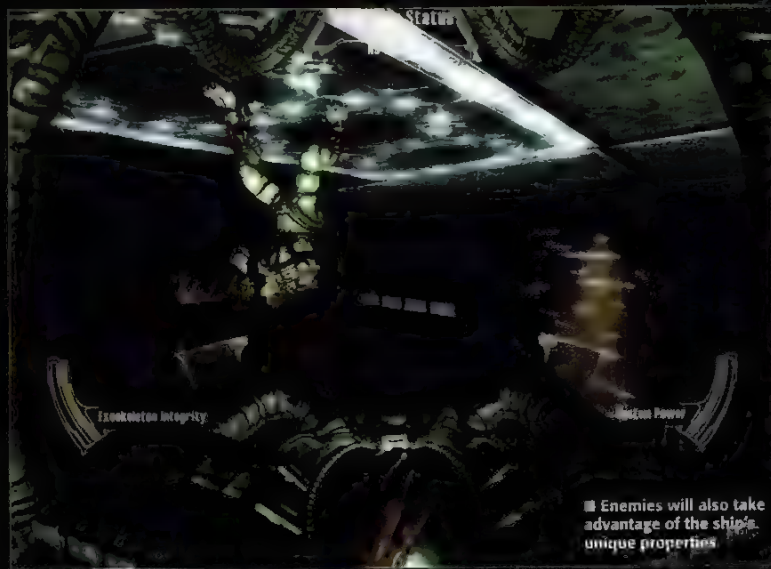
■ Although the weapons have a unique look, their functions will be instantly familiar.



■ In the Chamber of the Ancients, Tommy will learn his true power from his grandfather



■ Many of the creatures have a troubling bio-mechanical look



■ Enemies will also take advantage of the ship's unique properties

When Tommy loses eventually succumb to damage and die, you won't get kicked back to the last checkpoint or be forced to reload your game. Dying triggers Death Walk, Tommy's other primary power. In Death Walk, you find yourself in the spirit realm looking at your floating body. Spectral wraiths fly around your corpse, and shooting them down with your Spirit Walk bow will return you to the world of the living. The more you shoot, the more hit points you will return with.

Using your powers in combination with the ship's unique attributes is the key to making your way through Prey's deadly world. You may be required to Wall Walk up to a platform on the ceiling, then exit your body with Spirit Walk to hit the switch that causes the platform to move along a track, and then return to your body. You can Spirit Walk through portals and even walk on the ground in this form when gravity is reversed. It is the combination of these gameplay mechanics that promises to make Prey a hit, because as much fun as things will be in the single-player mode, imagine what they will be like in multiplayer.

Human Head has confirmed that Prey will support up to eight players on both PC and Xbox Live, and hopes to up the player count even further. Every special mechanic in Prey's single-player mode will be included in multiplayer, with the exception of Death Walk. This minigame is being excluded simply to get players back into the action faster. Prey will ship with deathmatch and team deathmatch modes, with multiplayer-exclusive maps. We witnessed early versions of two maps, each of which couldn't work in any other game. One featured two small planets in a large enclosed area. Here, players will be able to battle on the surfaces of both planets, run along the walls, and knock each other into space. Given that the flying vehicle has been confirmed for multiplayer, we wouldn't be surprised to see the spacecraft appear on this map.

The other multiplayer map can only be described as a playable version of an M.C. Escher drawing. A large,

sprawling area with nooks and halls heading in every direction, several surfaces in this level have their own gravity field. You may try to jump down to a lower level only to find yourself twisting in space and landing on a

“...one of the most exciting and innovative shooters in a long time.”

wall instead. In this stage, expect to see people running on the ceilings, walls, and every other surface imaginable. If this level sounds crazy, imagine what it will be like once portals and Spirit Walk are added into the mix.

It's obvious that Human Head cares about creating a title with innovative gameplay mechanics and stunning visuals, but the studio isn't stopping there. It wants to create an entire universe, one that's believable and tells a compelling story. To this end, the studio is packing the game with tons of details and telling the story entirely in-game. One stage will, in a flashback, reveal the abduction of Tommy and his friends. In a small roadhouse bar on the reservation, the player can talk to people, play arcade games, turn on the jukebox and otherwise interact with the environment until The Sphere arrives, sucking up all the people and objects inside. As you progress through the game, you will find many of these objects, as well as other items from Earth scattered around the ship. Radios on the ship will still receive transmissions from Earth, and Art Bell, the creator of the paranormal-themed radio show "Coast to Coast AM" will lend his voice to the programming. You will meet other humans The Sphere has abducted, and even encounter people that have been subjected to horrifying experiments. All of the weapons that Tommy wields have the same creepy, bio-mechanical look as the ship itself, and the enemies take on some truly frightening forms. One creature we saw was a cybernetic being with four mechanical spider legs that would pop out of a wound-like gash in the ship's wall to attack, and then slip back inside when damaged to repair itself. We expect to see many other creatures that are just as eerie.

Although Prey has had a long and troubled development cycle, the game seems to finally be in the hands of the proper development studio. Since signing on to the project in 2001, Human Head has transformed the property from a relic into one of the most impressive shooters we've even seen. Prey looks able to stand alongside high profile PC games like Half-Life 2 and Doom 3, and the Xbox 360 version should easily compare to the best shooters on the console. Prey may have been a long time coming, but it should definitely be worth the wait. ■■■





THE ULTIMATE DANGER CALLS FOR

TEEN
T Mild Language
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 Game Experience May Change
 During Online Play

This title is available for the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system and PSP™ (PlayStation®Portable) system.



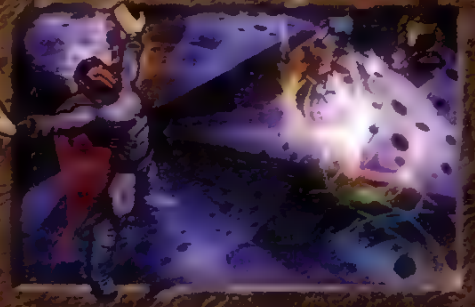
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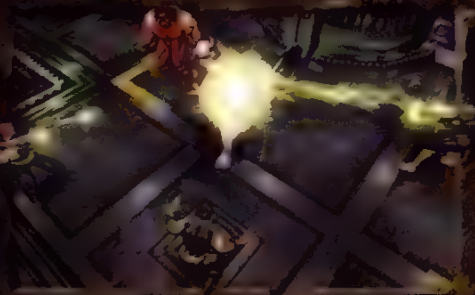
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PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



■ Never before has smoke played such a huge part in a game

XBOX 360 | PC

Call of Duty 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (PC), 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (XBOX 360) (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PC INTERNET OR LAN, UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** INFINITY WARD > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 1

SHELLSHOCK IN A BOX

In many ways, Infinity Ward's inaugural Call of Duty set a new bar for wartime first-person shooters in 2003. This fall will see the studio's second title come out on PC as well as bolster the Xbox 360's launch catalogue. We recently got the opportunity to spend some hands-on time with both versions of the game, and after we regained the ability to speak coherently, decided that it is looking amazing on both platforms. We're all familiar with the serious graphical cojones that Call of Duty 2 sports – it is a next-gen game, after all – but the less tangible upgrades, like vastly improved AI and level design, are what

make this title truly shine in our eyes.

After sitting down with Call of Duty 2, the experiences you've had in previous titles seem about as compelling as a faded and torn grade-school photo. Many WWII games of all genres have put gamers in the thick of famous battles like Normandy, Stalingrad, and the Battle of Britain, but this time it honestly feels different. Fighting street-to-street in the ruins of Stalingrad does replicate the "fish in a barrel" feel of more traditional action-oriented FPS – except that you're the fish. Rolling into an ambush with a British armored column and being pinned down by MG-42s before

you can do anything but hit the tank is beyond harrowing. Your intestinal fortitude will be put to the test when you have to cross those 10 yards of no-man's-land, but you must succeed in your mission

■ Having tanks at your back is a good feeling



■ The battle for Stalingrad is fought down on the ground and dirty

if the Allies are to prevail. Once again, the Call of Duty franchise is rewriting the rules of engagement for intense first-person shooting, and we couldn't be more excited.

AI, a definite strength of the first Call of Duty title, is even better in Call of Duty 2. Soldiers will actually respond to being under suppressive fire, work together in squad units, and fall back if their positions become overrun. Smoke grenades, beyond being visually outstanding, truly create a zone where neither human nor AI-controlled characters can target anything. Enemies will react dynamically to the situation on the battlefield – in one mission we played, there was a particularly nasty squad of Nazis who hosed down our whole squad with MG-42 fire from a well-protected spot. After getting wiped out a few times, we realized that they didn't show up to kill us until after we got halfway

across an open square that was under fire from other enemies. Finally, we got our act together, made it across the killing zone with the help of several smoke grenades, and took over the position before they could get there. Rather than blindly charge at us with the intent of setting up in their preferred spot (or worse, spawning on top of us), the MG-42 squad recognized that their position was taken and set up in a far inferior spot, which we dealt with easily. This kind of scenario is what makes Call of Duty 2 far more than just another WWII shooter.

We got to play a mere slice of the game, and already we're salivating for more. With all of the improvements to the already-strong Call of Duty formula, in addition to the sexy new graphics engine, this title is looking more and more like a no-brainer for anyone who enjoys FPS. ■ ■ ■



■ Allies and enemies both are very smart about using cover.



■ The gorgeous sky could prove a deadly distraction for the likes of Miller.



■ There's nothing more welcome than the sight of allied planes.



■ Which car can you find for something?

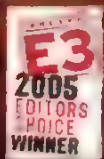


EVERYTHING YOU WANTED AND MORE

We were able to use the final design of the Xbox 360 controller in our playtest of Call of Duty 2, and it exceeds our expectations of what a next-gen gamepad should be. Though we didn't really get to mess around with the Circle of Light or Xbox Guide button functionality, the basic controller action is smooth as butter. More ergonomically pleasing even than the current Controller S, the 360 pad features the same excellent analog sticks and triggers. Having the two additional shoulder buttons instead of the ill-advised black and white keys is as nice as everyone hoped for. Simply put, this controller just feels great and reacts perfectly.




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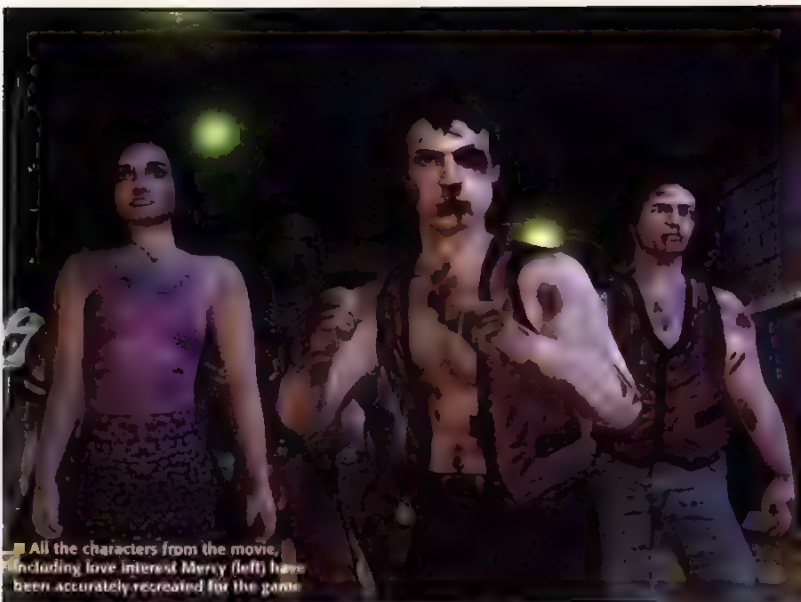
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All the characters from the movie, including low interest Mercy (left) have been accurately recreated for the game.



Co-op will take place on one screen while players are in the same area, but will switch to split-screen on the fly.

PLAYSTATION 2

The Warriors

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES > DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR TORONTO > RELEASE OCTOBER 17

BEYOND BRAWLING

Anticipation surrounding *The Warriors* is running high, and recently we had the opportunity to check out a new build of the game, one that revealed several new gameplay modes and some previously unseen levels.

Because the missions based on the events of the film don't begin until two-thirds of the way through the game, the team has constructed a complex backstory for all of the characters, played out in levels called "roots missions." These optional missions reveal how the Warriors came together and earned their reputation as one of the city's toughest gangs. We saw Cleon's origin saga, as he and Vermin quit a rival gang (created specifically for the game) called the Destroyers after being set up by their alcoholic leader Virgil to deliver counterfeit drugs to the violent Satan's Mothers.

In the process of escaping both the Mothers and the police, the demo revealed some of the depth of gameplay that *The Warriors* will bring to the brawler genre. During one section, Cleon had to distract the police so he could enter the drug house to pick up the product. Climbing rooftops and using cover, he blew up police cars with Molotov cocktails and even incited a group of burns to riot. In this section, the influence of Rockstar's *Manhunt* was evident, as he used safe zones (dark spots behind dumpsters and in corners) to hide and wait until the heat was off of his trail. Also, you'll be able to use audio distractions like throwing bottles to create confusion while you slip into the next hiding spot. Although it's not as focused on stealth as *Manhunt*, these sequences did serve to add a degree of pacing and tension that is lacking in most brawlers.

We also got a better look at some of the squad-based elements of *The Warriors*. We already knew about the basic War Chief commands that you enter with a few quick button presses. In addition to the

previous announced directives "Let's Go" (follow), "Hold Up" (stay), and "Wreck 'Em All" (attack), there are three more. These new commands provide even more tactical flexibility. "Scatter" sends your Warriors running in all different directions to hide, a great technique for confusing the police. "Mayhem" is similar to "Wreck 'Em All" except in this case the violence is directed at cars, storefronts, or other objects in the environment. Probably the most useful is "Watch My Back," which makes the Warriors form a circle around you, defending your character as you pick a lock or perform one of the other minigame-style tasks.

We also witnessed some new chase levels, which came as a total surprise and were very impressive. Right after seeing the iconic scene from the movie where the Warriors encounter the Baseball Furies for the first time, the view switched to a side-scrolling perspective and the Warriors were suddenly sprinting through the city, trying to avoid the pursuing Furies. Throughout the chase, the view changed several times, from an over-the-head view to a traditional behind-the-back camera to a sequence where the Warriors were running towards the screen. All the while, you must make timed jumps and

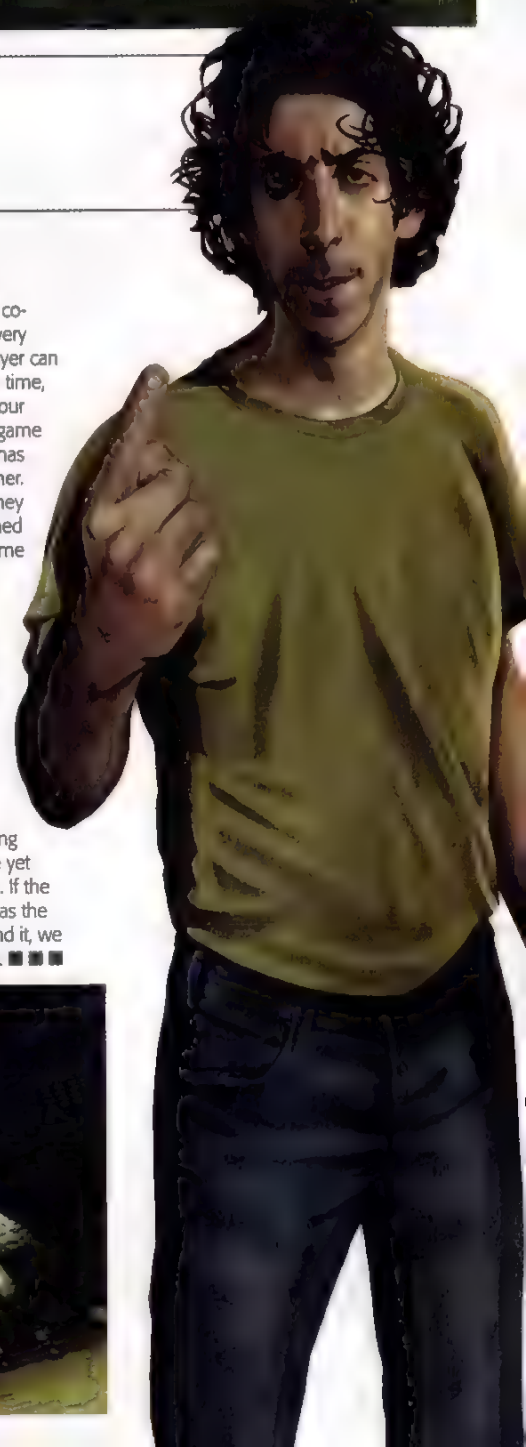
avoid obstacles and attacking Furies.

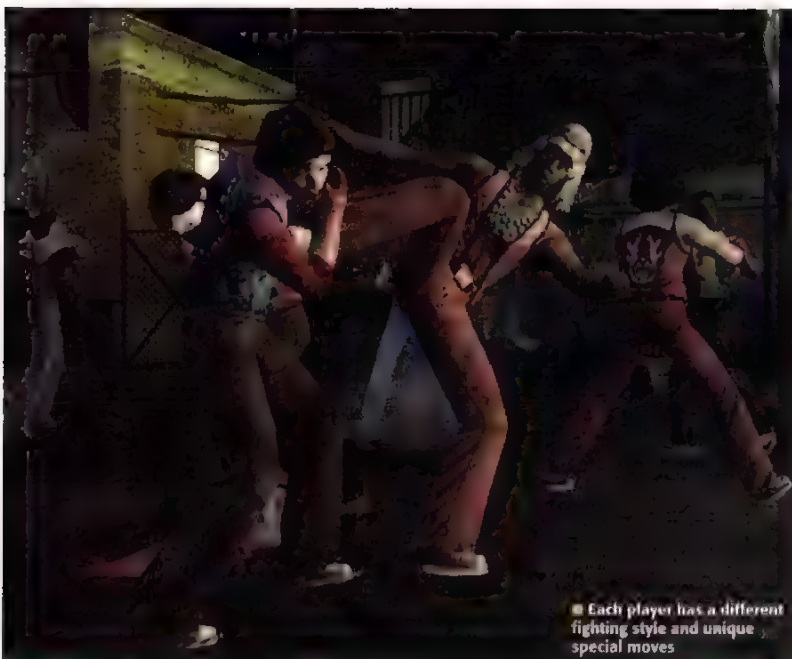
Finally, Rockstar revealed two-player co-op, which is being implemented in a very canny fashion. First off, the second player can jump in and out of any mission at any time, so your friend can help you along in your quest, allowing you to then finish the game by yourself. Also, the issue of camera has been addressed in an ingenious manner. If both players are in the same area, they appear on a single screen with a panned out view. However, if they part, the game switches to split-screen, giving each player their own HUD and camera control. In this way, you'll be able to team up for fights, dealing out brutal co-op special moves, then split up to accomplish different level goals at the same time.

Based on this current build, we're extremely excited for *The Warriors*. By all appearances, it looks like the most significant entry in the brawler market for some time. That said, fighting games are all about feel, and we have yet to get a chance to play it for ourselves. If the combat engine is of the same quality as the game Rockstar Toronto has built around it, we should be in for a treat come October. ■■■



Fan favorites: The Baseball Furies will be one of the nearly 100 gangs that populate the city.





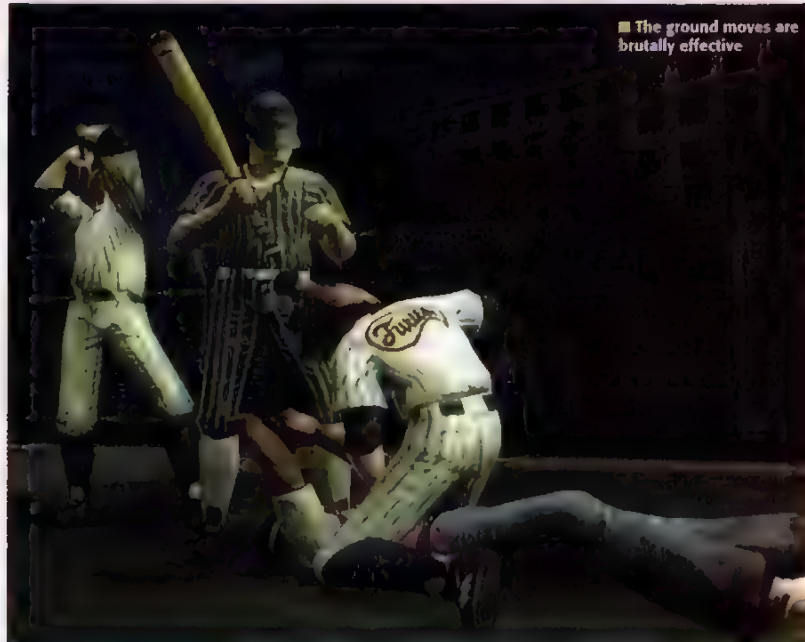
■ Each player has a different fighting style and unique special moves



■ Although the game is free-roaming, some boss battles will take place in closed arenas



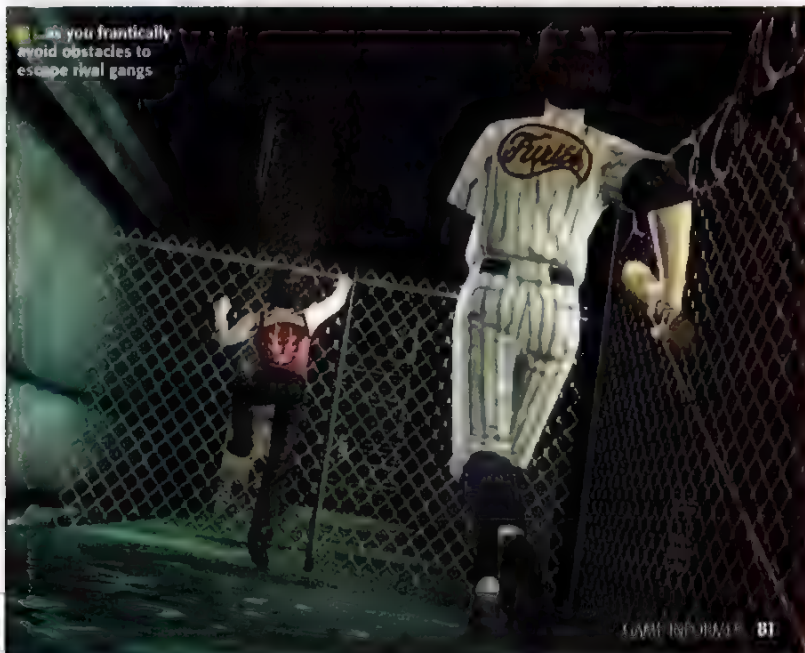
■ The bloody combat and rough language will likely earn The Warriors an M rating



■ The ground moves are brutally effective



■ During the chase sequences, the view will change on the fly.



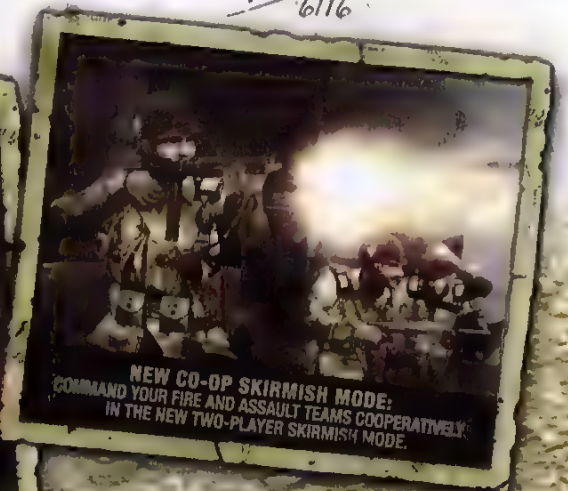
■ As you frantically avoid obstacles to escape rival gangs

BROTHERS ★ IN ARMS ★ EARNED IN BLOOD

1944 St. Sauveur, D-Day +10

I've been out of Baker's shadow for no more than three days now and already I'm feeling the weight of my fear. The fear that around every corner somebody's lying in wait. The fear that any wrong choice could end up killing what I'm trying to save. Well, somebody's got to lead this fight. And if I call this right, my men - the men who have fought next to me - will get out of this hell alive.

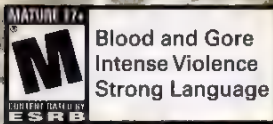
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PlayStation 2



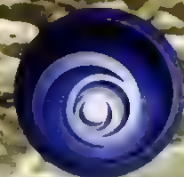
TAKING COMMAND ISN'T EASY.

TAKING THE CONSEQUENCES IS EVEN HARDER.



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XBOX 360

Project Gotham Racing 3

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** BIZARRE CREATIONS > **RELEASE** WINTER

DREAMWEAVER

There are cities that get used over and over in video games because of distinctive architecture or massive roadways. Topography and an iconic skyline are certainly good reasons to select a real-world location, but one in particular has consistently gotten the short end of the stick: Las Vegas. Known too much for its long central strip, the city has been driven predominately as a series of drag races.

But Vegas is joining Tokyo, New York, and a few others as a full-fledged spaghetti plate of asphalt in the next-gen Project Gotham. Alan Mealor, lead artist for the city at Bizarre Creations, talked to us about how this game's take on Sin City should be perceived by

gamers. "The circuit focuses on the strip. [But] it's a misconception to think that the strip is one long, straight road. If you take the driveway at the Bellagio, that's five drivable lanes." The plan is to use the two-mile stretch between Treasure Island and Mandalay Bay and blow it out in ways that other games just haven't attempted.

While players will be able to set up any race type through any path (an option that is available for each of the game's cities), the longest course designed by the team is around the perimeter. The title's 80 licensed cars from manufacturers like Ferrari and Lamborghini will snake back and forth from the wide open strip to the service roads and entrance drive-

ways peppering each of the city's outlandish resorts. "The city is like a theme park you're racing through," says Mealor. "There aren't many cities where you can build the skyline of New York, the Eiffel Tower, and some pirate ships in the same place."

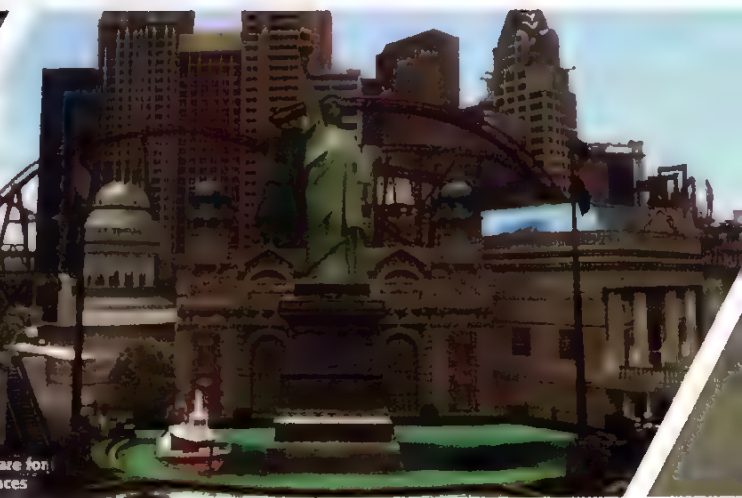
The attractions of Las Vegas will be shown from new perspectives, like zipping underneath the Sphinx or spying an erupting volcano from a rear service road, but the city will also be shown in a new light. For a landscape that's so iconic after dark, it's unusual to see it in the broad desert heat. PGR 3 would be dishonest to its goals of believably presenting the town, though, if it didn't show the glittery night along with the harsh daytime, and so

Vegas will be playable sun up or sun down.

It's nice to see that even though most of us have raced along the manic freakshow that is the Las Vegas strip, PGR 3 will let us see it in a new way and with the unbelievable graphics that the other revealed cityscapes have shown. While the game is still facing some pre-release controversy, it's an enviable argument for the team to have to make. Pundits who have been calling out the title's screenshots as fakes are, apparently, dead wrong. We've been assured that the screens provided for these pages are from the in-game engine, although they're obviously set up for the most dramatic (albeit not most playable) perspectives. ■ ■ ■



■ The roads of Vegas are for more than just drag races

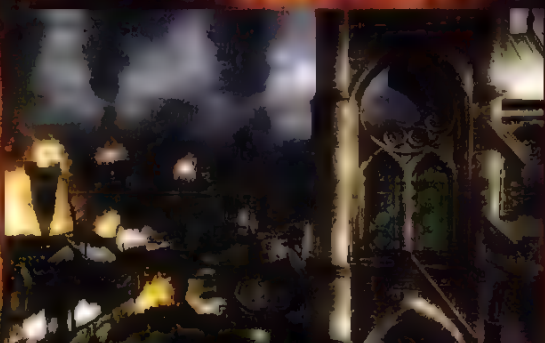
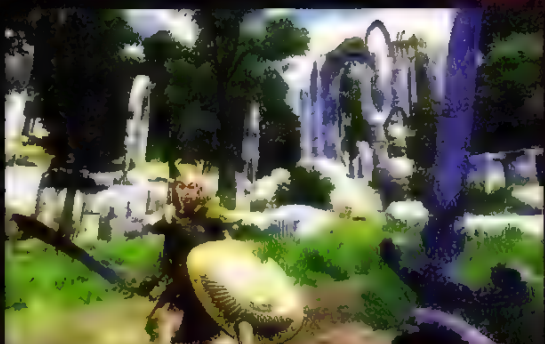
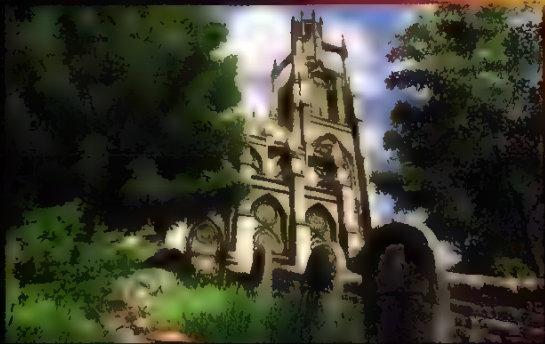




■ The scale of this game is big - big cars, big cities, and big online tournaments



■ The entrance driveways to major hotels are fair game for



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PLAYSTATION 2

Suikoden Tactics

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE NOVEMBER

ANOTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

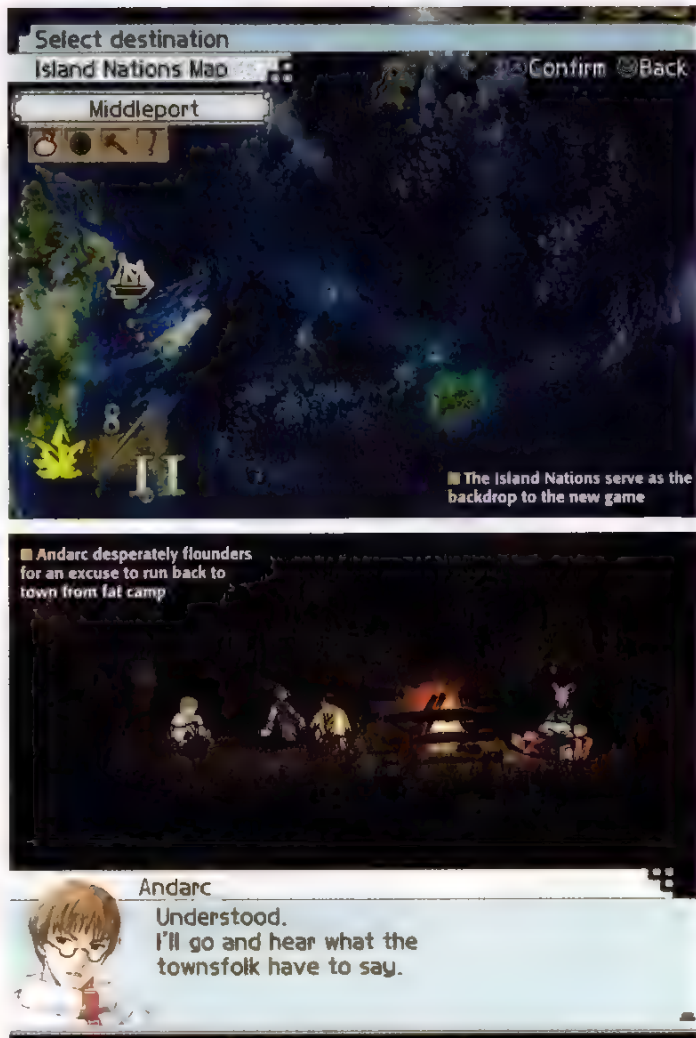
Fans thrilled this year to the successful launch of Suikoden IV, the long-awaited continuation of the popular RPG franchise. Konami has a change of pace in store late this year with the release of Suikoden Tactics, a sort of parallel tale that starts a few years before the events of the fourth game, and moves forward from that point. We played some of the new installment, and were immediately struck not only by the deep strategy elements that are at the heart of the game, but also the high degree of attention being paid to characters, plots, and drama.

The focus on traditional RPG conventions is no accident. While eager to expand the franchise into the strategy arena, Konami's stated goal for this project is to reach beyond the sometimes niche market of grid-based tactics affairs and pull in some of the larger RPG crowd. The focus on storyline is most obvious with the mammoth cast of characters. Fifty familiar characters from Suikoden IV are playable, and at least another 20 are entirely new additions. Consequently, your party is filled with interestingly named personalities rather than the grunt-like classes that so often show up in strategy games.

The focus on storytelling seems not to have made a dent in the impressive tactical elements of the game. When we played the early version, several cool ideas were immediately apparent. In addition to the necessary positioning concerns

normally present on the grid, you'll also be contending with the infusion of five elements into characters, monsters, and even the ground itself. If a particular swath of earth becomes imbued with fire, characters with an affinity for the element will want to move there for added benefits, like healing. Affinity also grows between characters that are frequently used together. Pass a certain threshold of camaraderie, and those characters will automatically move to aid each other when one of them is under duress. These team-ups also extend to offering the combination attacks that should be familiar to fans of the series.

The most intriguing part of the game is likely to be the way it wraps itself around the story of Suikoden IV. While Tactics presents a complete tale all by itself, those who have played the previous game will learn a wealth of new information about the characters and lands of that game. Meanwhile, the new story will detail the adventures of a young hero named Kyril as he investigates the appearance of monstrous creatures in the Island Nations, and how the creature dilemma ties into the secret of the mythic Rune Cannons. We're always up for a nice strategic challenge, and the promised focus on RPG elements puts this high on the list of fascinating but little-known titles for this winter. ■ ■ ■



あと0/5人出撃できます

部隊編成

START

配置



While battles are fought on a grid, the levels themselves manage to keep from feeling confined



The characters you meet will be a mix of new faces and old favorites from Suikoden IV



キカ

こいつらは私の知り合いた。
...古くからのな。

While story elements are a big focus, the tactical battles are still top notch



キリル

HP 281 / 281

MP 9 / 9

SP 9 / 9

EXP 67

高さ 11



Select unit destination

- Move
- Attack
- Rune
- Item
- Coop. Attack
- Status
- Stand By



Here our new hero Kyril slaughters some helpless Tribbles

Kyril

HP 22 / 22

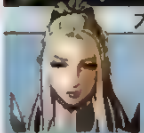
MP 3 / 2


SP 1 / 0

LVL 1 EXP 0



オルネラ
皆、剣をおさめよ!



A close-up, dramatic shot of two Shaolin monks, Liu Kang and Kung Lao, looking intensely at each other. Liu Kang is on the left, wearing a red headband, and Kung Lao is on the right, wearing a black hood with a glowing white ring around his head.

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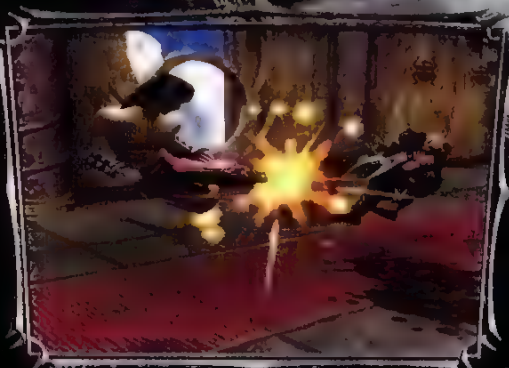


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Condemned: Criminal Origins

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS > RELEASE NOVEMBER

HUMANITY'S JUNK

Wagging a finger at expectations, Sega's *Condemned: Criminal Origins* is differentiating itself as an unusual title for its publisher, an original IP in the 360 launch lineup (thus far dominated by sequels and updated ports), and an entirely different game type from the norm of high-profile releases.

When *Condemned* debuted in our March issue, we learned what lofty goals developer Monolith had for the action investigation game, but when the title showed up on the floor at this year's E3, it was a less than stellar demo. Weapon collision, mobility, and a somewhat dull demo level were big issues. But what we found while recently playing through sections of the nearly-completed game at our office was that E3's noisy and crowded main floor is perhaps the worst place to experience *Condemned*'s perverse scares and moody chills. In the right environment, this could very well be the creepiest psychological horror game to date.

With the lights down low and the stereo cranked, we explored the derelict interiors of a city's dilapidated buildings. The tense sound design and incredible graphics let the building and its decrepit, twisty corridors seem almost as threatening as the sad people attacking us. Limited ammunition ran out quickly, and scouring the environment led to a variety of pipes, cement-encrusted rebar, and wood scraps that could be used for attacking in the name of

defense. The game's combat is visceral, offering a sickly real sense of weight and impact.

One concern that our playtime brought up was whether or not the combat would be fun for the title's estimated 10 to 15 hours of core gameplay. The block mechanic requires precise timing and sets players up for a fast countering move—clearly, a skill that needs to be learned early and used often, given the intense and chaotic melee. The team has also tuned the large variety of weapons to feel surprisingly different in the simple FPS-styled combat controls. The bladed arm of a paper cutter swung faster and in what seemed to be a different arc than the heavier fireman's axe. With combat being less of a priority than creating a mood, this variety is welcome and hopefully enough to keep the experience interesting through the entire tale.

To our mind, the game isn't as much about combat as it is about making a psychological thriller video game. Influences like *Silence of the Lambs*, *Seven*, and the procedural drama *CSI* seemed to share developer headspace with video game revolutionaries like *Eternal Darkness* and *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*. A strange soup, or taut, subversive storytelling for the next gen? Sega hopes to have the title out on day one of Xbox 360's launch, so we'll certainly know soon, but these early playtests point to a unique brew for gamers in just a few months. ■ ■ ■

■ There isn't a single repeated texture throughout the entire game, and it shows when you're wandering through the wasted buildings of this city

■ *Eternal Darkness*-styled head trips constantly make players wonder what is real and what is only in our minds

■ Firearms are so rare that just their presence is a comfort



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■ "That looks infected. Dr. Leon prescribes fire."

■ Ada's Separate Ways campaign includes an all-new battleship environment

■ Lulu is far too sexy and manly to appear on just one console

PLAYSTATION 2

Resident Evil 4

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER PRODUCTION STUDIO 4 > RELEASE OCTOBER 25

THE EVIL RETURNS

To those of you out there who have already played Resident Evil 4, we say congratulations. Not only have you experienced one of the finest titles in the history of gaming, but your good taste has earned you a place in Game Informer's Grand League of Awesome Gamers (GLAG). Membership fees are due in January, people. Judging by Resident Evil 4's somewhat disappointing sales, however, it looks like we didn't recruit too many new members. But now that RE 4 is on its way to the PlayStation 2, those who haven't yet have a second chance to pick up this truly stunning game.

After spending some quality hands-on time with the PS2 version of RE 4, we're confident that even those who have already played through the GameCube release will be tempted to check out this version. Not only have the unique and stunning visuals been recreated with amazing success, there is also a plethora of new content not found in the original release. Some of them are minor additions, such as new costumes for Leon and Ashley. There are also some new weapons, like a laser, to punch up the already killer action. It's rumored that Leon will be able to wield a chain-



■ Ashley's new costume blocks bullets, and absolutely doesn't look totally ridiculous

■ Expect to see a few surprises in this version, such as this dandy laser

saw, and there are even more weapons that we'll leave as a surprise.

As much fun as new firepower always is, the most notable addition is a new campaign called Separate Ways. In these five missions, players control Ada Wong, the mysterious woman from Resident Evil 2 whose path Leon crosses several times in RE 4. In Separate Ways, the player experiences the story from Ada's perspective, and you'll even witness many scenes from the main story from a whole new angle. Once you play through this mode, you'll know exactly how much impact she had on events in the central campaign.

Separate Ways includes an all-new battleship environment, and also unlocks files that flesh out the story even further. All the other bonus modes like Mercenaries are included as well. The PS2 version truly is an excellent iteration of this phenomenal game, and those who are concerned about the title making the leap to a less-powerful machine needn't worry. As we mentioned before, the graphics are largely unchanged — although some degree of detail has been lost, RE 4 is still one of the best-looking games on the PS2. The controls, which were tailored so perfectly for the GameCube, fit just as nicely on the PS2 controller. With such a faithful transition to its new system and hugely compelling bonus content, RE 4 certainly seems worth checking out a second time. And if you haven't played it yet, you simply must. Resident Evil 4 is one flat-out amazing game, and now it's available to even more gamers. Play it, and we might even consider admitting you to GLAG. After a long and degrading hazing process, of course. ■ ■ ■



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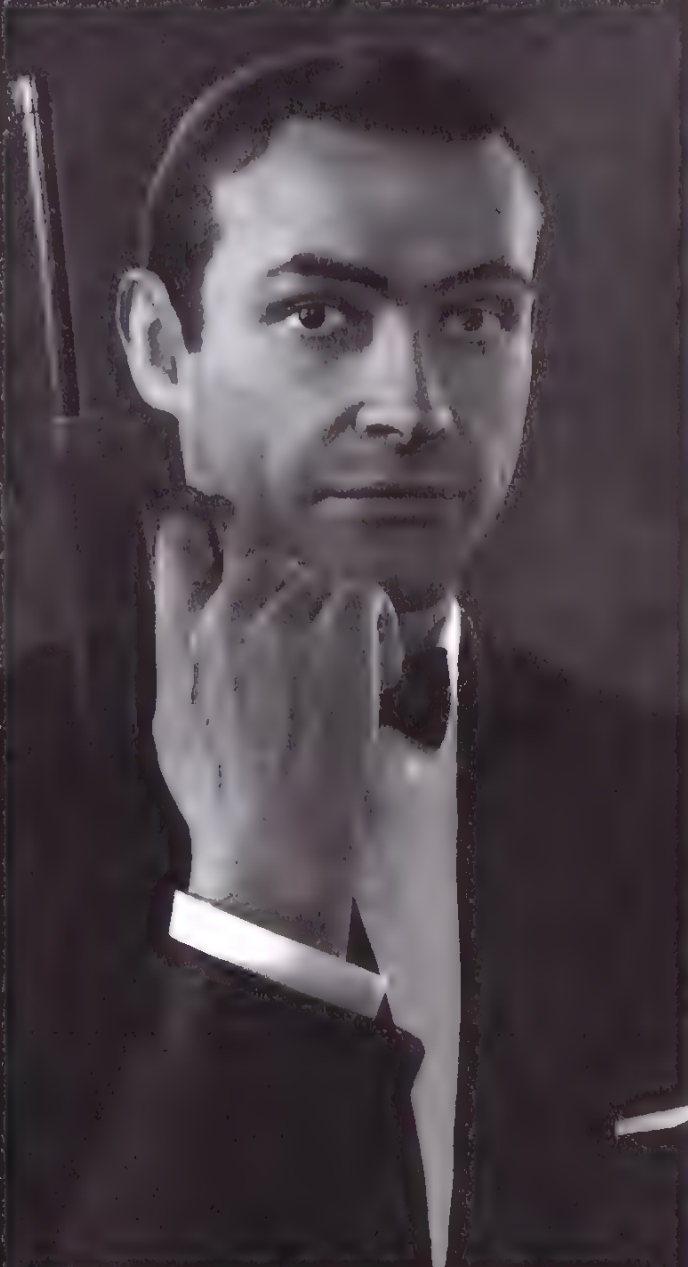
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PLAYSTATION 2

Final Fantasy XII

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

LONG TIME NO SEE

Undeniably the most conspicuously absent game of E3, Final Fantasy XII's prolonged development has been the subject of much speculation. The all-FMV trailer at the show left many unanswered questions, especially amid talk that the new battle system had been overhauled since its last public showing. However, these rumors turned out to be false, as many gamers learned at a recent Square Enix event in Tokyo where the game was presented in playable form for the first time in over a year.

The most unconventional of the changes is the integration of a real-time battle system. Granted, this isn't really new information since the mechanics were in place for the E3 2004 version of the game, but now their presence has been confirmed. This means that all foes will appear onscreen (as well as on a radar), but won't attack until they notice you. Once they do engage you, the controls transition seamlessly into battle, eliminating the separation between "battle time" and "exploration time," much like an MMORPG.

While real-time fights may sound like

heresy, there will still be plenty of classic Final Fantasy touches to please fans – most notably in the summoning of colossal beasts. Instead of previous games, where summons could only score one big attack (or replace the entire party), they are more like partners in battle than isolated warriors. When called upon, summoned creatures will replace two party members, rampaging and unleashing special attacks while the player retains control of the party leader to assist in the carnage.

Its transformation may not be drastic, but our time with the newest form of Final Fantasy XII revealed many intriguing elements that are likely to split the fanbase in two – those who embrace the changes, and those loyal to the traditional formula. At any rate, players won't know which camp they fall into until at least next year; the game hits Japanese shelves in March, though the inevitable U.S. release still hasn't been finalized. You probably shouldn't bother digging out your moogle suit before the 2006 holidays, though. ■■■■



PLAYSTATION 2

Grandia III

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER GAME ARTS > RELEASE TBA



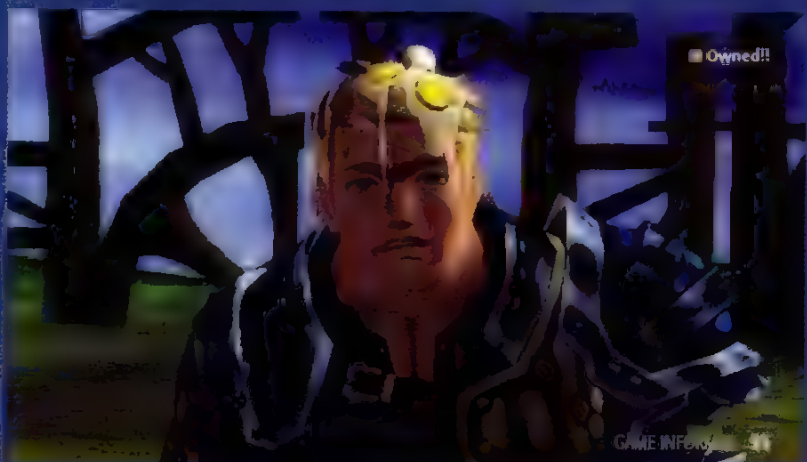
I WANT TO FLY! [BEGIN LIFE-CHANGING EVENT]

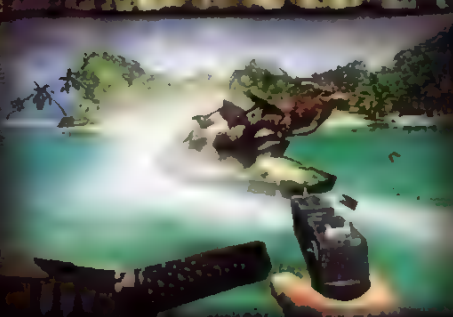
If you ever find yourself living in a small, rural village, here's a piece of advice: entertain seemingly hopeless ambitions to someday pilot your own aircraft. If we've learned anything from RPGs, things always seem to turn out alright for those guys...or at least get interesting around age 18 or so. This rule holds true in the latest installment of the Grandia series, where young sky-happy Yuuki happens to meet a girl looking for her brother and subsequently becomes involved in a quest to save the world with the help of a colorful group of allies.

In addition to phenomenal-looking cutscenes, Grandia III will focus on delivering the classic gameplay that series devotees have grown to love – especially after the somewhat disappointing Grandia Xtreme. A kind of mixture between turn-based and real-time, the cornerstone of the battle system is still the Initiative Points Gauge. Icons repre-

senting all party members and enemies move within a circular meter, and once they reach a point called the Com line, they are given a chance to select an action. However, it isn't until the icons reach the Act line further in the rotation that the action is carried out. One of the new advantages to this system is that characters can now perform aerial combos on foes by coordinating the timing on the gauge.

Fans of the Grandia series can expect to see other traditional elements of the series resurface, like Mana Eggs and lengthy campfire discussions, as well as the return of composer Noriyuki Iwadare (who also did the score for this month's Radiata Stories). Grandia III has been in the hands of Japanese gamers since August 4, but unfortunately stateside fans will have to wait for an official announcement of the game's transition to North America. ■■■■





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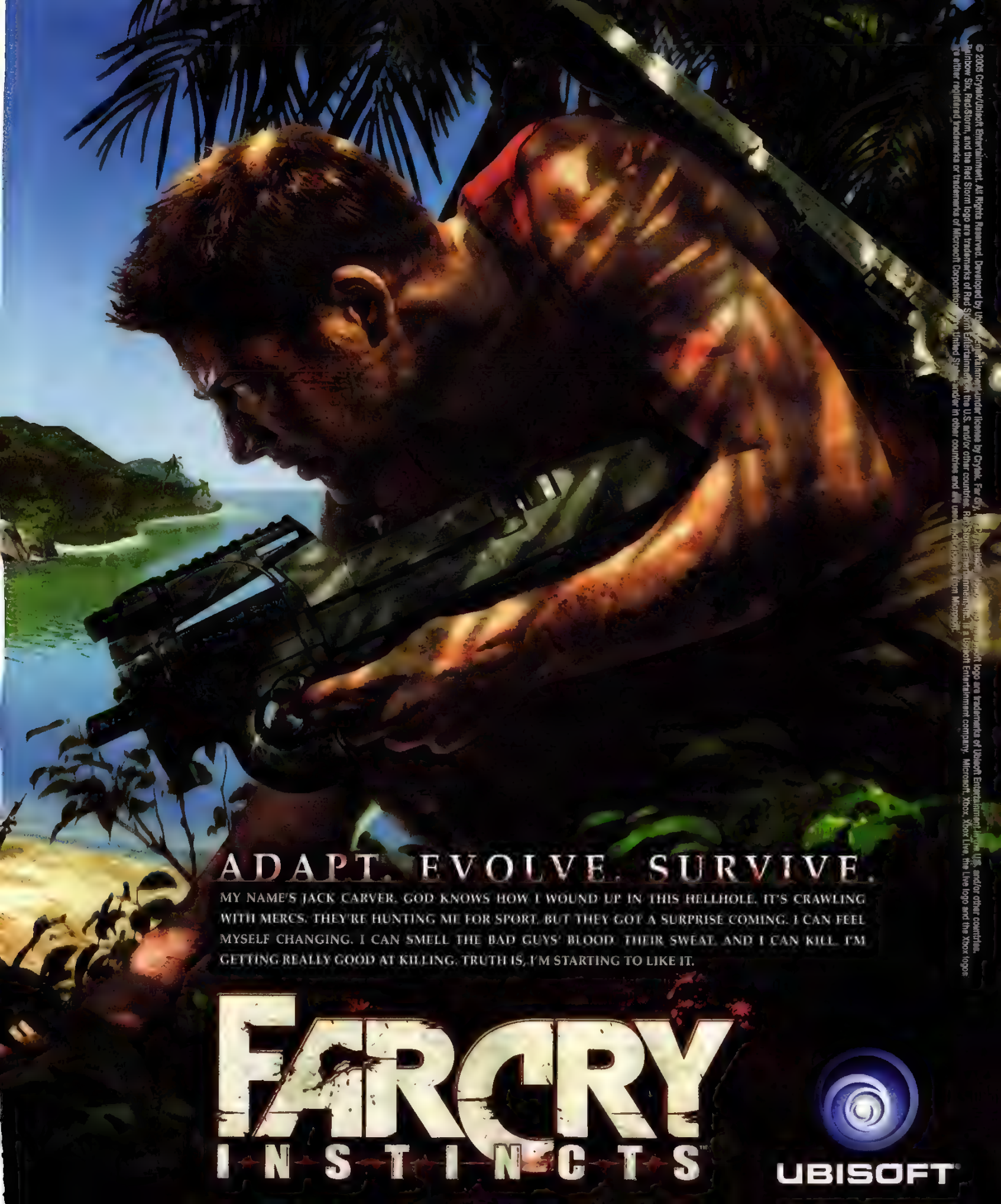
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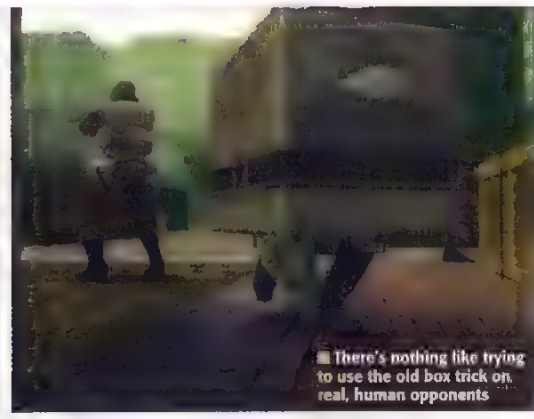
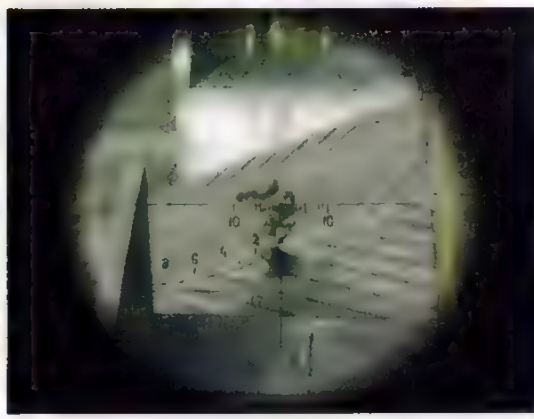
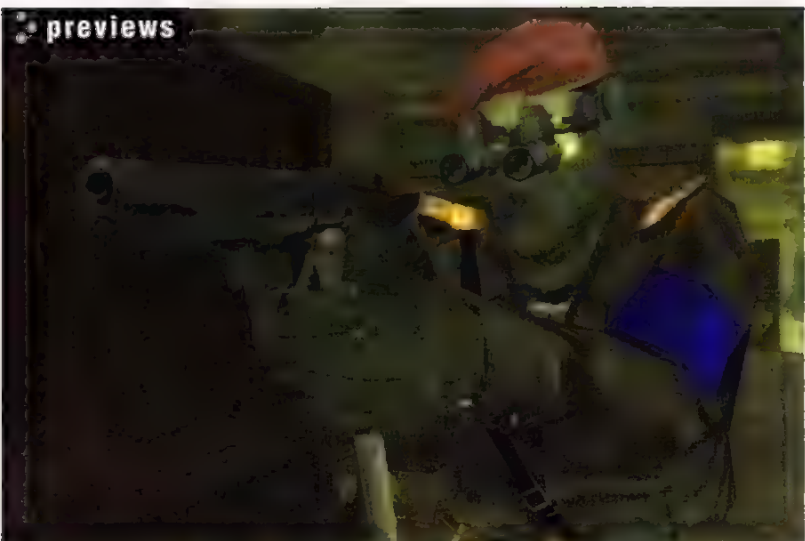
ADAPT. EVOLVE. SURVIVE.

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.

FAR CRY INSTINCTS



UBISOFT



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS > RELEASE FIRST QUARTER 2006

ONLINE SNEAKING

The big word this month from Konami is the expanded details on Metal Gear's new online mode, set to debut with the re-release of Metal Gear Solid 3 early next year. We were treated to a viewing of the newest trailer for the game, and it only solidified our perceptions that the new multiplayer features should be just as exciting as we've hoped.

Online play will support eight-player matches in any of five different game types. There are standard deathmatch and team deathmatch modes, and while both are welcome, neither seem to truly take advantage of the unique gameplay style that has always been a part of the franchise. Luckily, the other three announced modes do exactly that. Sneaking missions set just one player as Snake, while all the other competitors become guards protecting an object. Snake must procure the item to win, while every other human player seeks to take him out. A second style, called Capture missions, expands the concept so that two equal teams are both out to retrieve a particular pick-up and return it to their own base. Finally, Rescue missions place a defending team in charge of delivering an item to a specific location, while the opposition seeks

to destroy it. Mysteriously, players who die in this game mode won't respawn, but will instead show up as ghosts. The purpose and capabilities of these spectral soldiers remains unknown.

Three multiplayer stages taken directly from the MGS 3 solo campaign will show up as arenas, and at least four entirely new areas are also apparent, with environments ranging from forests to downtown city battle zones. All the scenes shown in the lengthy trailer emphasized the need for team cooperation on all the boards, as each group worked towards a singular objective. Konami also announced the interesting tidbit that the top-ranked player on each team will be awarded the chance to play as one of the named characters during the match, such as Ocelot or Snake.

There hasn't been a wealth of new info on the single-player aspects of the game since E3, but we're still eager to try out all the expanded content. The original versions of Metal Gear and Metal Gear 2 will show up for the first time here in the States. Snake vs. Ape mode should definitely offer some laughs. Plus, the main MGS 3 missions have been totally reworked to allow use of a fully rotating third-person camera. If that's not

enough, completion of the campaign will unlock a duel mode where you can fight any of the major boss battles of the game at your leisure.

Sneaking missions were easily one of the most impressive titles to come out of 2004, and

served as a proud rekindling of the much-loved franchise. Obviously, Subsistence is set to raise the bar even higher, and long awaited features like Metal Gear Online should be more than enough reason to check out the new version. ■ ■ ■



Dracula gave him his start.
Now he's back for the finish.

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Castlevania

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PlayStation 2

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Driver: Parallel Lines

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE AND XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** REFLECTIONS INTERACTIVE > **RELEASE** MARCH

LET'S CALL IT DRIVER INSTEAD

In a severe case of GTA envy, the last installment of Atari's Driver franchise strayed from its wheel-bound roots and put its stock into more on-foot missions, which were handled poorly despite numerous delays. With *Driver: Parallel Lines*, developer Reflections is rebounding from the disappointment of *Driv3r* by embracing what distinguished the Driver series in the first place: actually driving.

Set in New York City circa 1978, *Parallel Lines* follows the blossoming career of a young wheelman known as The Kid (or T.K.) as he takes jobs for disreputable lowlifes. Then again, T.K. himself has pretty flimsy moral fiber since players are no longer restricted to playing the charade of an undercover cop penetrating the shady world of downshifting. While players will still have plenty of chances to get out of the car and wreak havoc with various weapons, cruising around a detailed, load-free city will be the big draw for fans of the franchise.

One of the ways Reflections is adding realism to its digital Big Apple is through the use of incidentals – short scripted events that make the ambient life in the city seem more natural. For instance, you might be barreling down the street and see police cruisers parked on the corner, but they're not there for you; the fuzz may actually be trying to talk a jumper down from a building. With dozens of these situations scattered throughout the experience, the game can offer something new each time around the block.

Suicide attempts aren't the only thing changing up the game's pacing. As players roam New York, they will be able to seamlessly jump into multiplayer challenges in-game. If you want to race other drivers, there will be places on the map designated for setting up these matches. As you play the single-player game, you can simply go to the proper location and, without wading through menu screens, you'll find yourself



hubcap to hubcap with opponents. Of course, this transition is contingent on maintaining a constant online connection while you play.

While the multiplayer component is a big step for *Driver*, the question is whether it will be enough in a genre that seems to be moving forward and pushing the envelope. *Driver* is in a tough spot; *Parallel Lines'* new features don't appear to be

particularly ambitious, and it still needs to contend with the debacle that was *Driv3r*. Still, if Reflections can bring the city to life through incidentals, dense traffic, and integrated multiplayer, then the game has the potential to find an audience, get back in the driver's seat, and take the series a few more miles down the road. ■ ■ ■



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Wild Arms 4

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER XSEED GAMES > DEVELOPER MEDIA VISION ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE SPRING 2006

RELOAD YOUR ARM



Like a wacky Neapolitan ice cream sandwich, the traditional layers of a Wild Arms title are an unusual Wild West theme hugged on each side by hardcore RPG character advancement and Zelda-esque dungeon puzzles. Now, just when the western is gaining ground as a compelling locale in other video game genres, one of the few series to use it in the past is letting the era drift into the sunset a bit.

Sporting a much crisper and anime-inspired look, Wild Arms 4 offers a familiar coming-of-age tale with a wide cast of characters. Leading the charge is Jude Maverick, a young teen living a sheltered life high above Filgaia (the world of earlier Wild Arms titles). His floating city is invaded, the boy discovers the series' trademark ARM weapon, and a high-stakes journey begins.

The game changes up the earlier battle system by placing more emphasis on strategy than many other RPGs. The battle arenas are divided into hexagons and players

choose which HEX to interact with. This is an important difference because you're picking an area, not a team member or enemy. Through the system, multiple friends or enemies in the same HEX can be hit or healed with one action.

Options outside the battlefield have been embellished as well. A double-jump, the ability to equip items for puzzle solving, and a new bullet-time inspired feature called Accelerator should make the overworld less of a hassle and more a part of the gameplay.

The Wild West is less prevalent in this entry, but the hardcore mix of RPG and dungeon exploration features make this like a chocolate/vanilla ice cream sandwich instead of the full-fledged Neapolitan, which still sounds mighty tasty. ■■■■



■ Additional actions outside of battles should make the exploration more engaging



■ Different colored HEXs offer different effects



■ The environments on Filgaia still hold some western flair



XBOX | PC

Land of the Dead: Road to Fiddler's Green

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PC ONLINE) > PUBLISHER GROOVE GAMES > DEVELOPER BRAINBOX GAMES > RELEASE OCTOBER 18



MODERN ZOMBIES ARE GROSS

>Loading screen advises, "Always close doors behind you. The withering will eventually break through, but it takes them substantially longer and you can hear them coming." In our hands-on time with the upcoming Land of the Dead: Road to Fiddler's Green, this was proven an abundantly true statement. Huddled with too few bullets, standing with our backs against the furthest corner from the door, all we could see was shuffling shadows from the small crack of light outside, and all we could hear was the sickly gagging and ripping of zombies slowly breaking down the room's only door.

Styled as an expansion of this

summer's *Land of the Dead* movie, the game follows a lonely farmer making his way to the fabled Fiddler's Green, said to be a sheltered city of still-living humans. Walking a fine line between horror movie cheese and truly gory action, Road to Fiddler's Green is a nice change of pace in the FPS market. Jack, the aforementioned farmer, talks idly about how the power goes out sometimes "out here in the country" mere moments before he takes full advantage of the game's body part specific damage system.

Spilling copious amounts of undead carnage doesn't just have to be a solo experience, though. Eight-player multiplayer

in Fiddler's Green will offer deathmatch, capture the flag, invasion, and one other sneaky surprise on its 10 multiplayer maps at launch. Variants will let players decide if they're working for or against their friends in their bid for survival.

Despite these great ideas and cinematic elements whose powerful creepiness we can attest to, there's still some polish to be done. BrainBox needs to get both the draw distance and the framerate up; but if it's done before launch, Road to Fiddler's Green could offer some great moments of humor, horror, and shooting. ■■■■



■ The Backstreet Boys reunion tour wasn't going well and the chaps had to switch to these less-extravagant accommodations

The end of Civilization begins here.

Addicted to Sid Meier's Civilization PC games?
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No more turns.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Enroll before November. Local meetings are filling up.



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Without Warning

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CIRCLE STUDIOS > RELEASE NOVEMBER

AN INTRIGUING EXPERIMENT

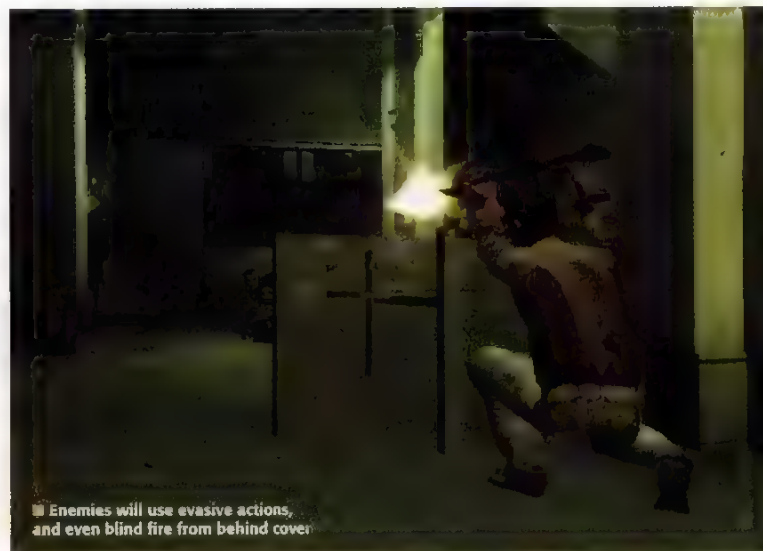


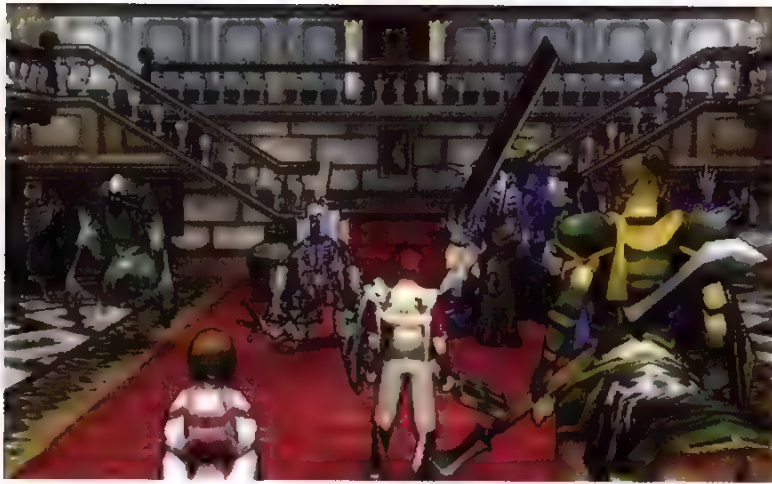
Taking a healthy dose of inspiration from the television smash 24, *Without Warning* follows the stories of six playable characters as they try to survive a terrorist attack on a chemical plant in the U.S. Recently, we had a chance to play a preview copy of the game, which is scheduled to be released in November.

While playing as the more weapons-oriented characters, the three soldiers or plant security guard Dave Wilson, *Without Warning* will be very familiar to anyone who's experienced similarly-themed games like the *Syphon Filter* series. What won't be familiar is the camera and targeting system. On the surface, it's a bit like the FPS-inspired mechanics of titles like *Max Payne*. However, unlike most games of its ilk, the characters' aim and movement is not fixed to the same point. Basically, you control your direction with the right analog, and then can look in anywhere ahead or behind you with the reticle and the left analog. While this does provide some flexibility and allows you to

easily look behind you or run and shoot in different directions, we often found it a bit confusing. Usually simple moves like strafing seem more difficult, although the auto-aim does help a bit. A surprise highlight were the small button-pressing minigames that accompanied actions like defusing bombs or opening doors, which provide a nice respite from the hectic combat.

While the compressed timeframe and multiple storylines certainly have potential, this preview version contained few fully animated cutscenes, and the events leading up to your current sequence were conveyed through loading screen briefings and static text boxes. As a result, the levels felt more like a random collection of missions rather than parts of a cohesive whole. A greater emphasis on storytelling could go a long way in giving *Without Warning* the dramatic heft it needs to be truly compelling. The game certainly has the raw materials it needs to be an excellent action title. Now, it's just a matter of making sure those pieces fit together correctly. ■ ■ ■





PLAYSTATION 2

Shining Force Neo

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER NEVERLAND > RELEASE OCTOBER

TRUE SEQUEL?

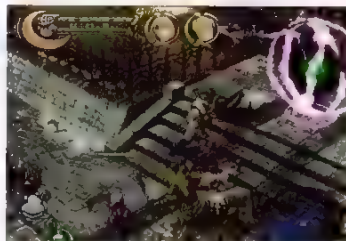
Fans of the masterful Shining Force games might just as well have been in hibernation for the last several years as they waited for a true sequel to their franchise. While Shining Force Neo carries the original moniker, a quick look at the new gameplay reveals that lovers of the old games still have some waiting ahead. That's not to say that Neo isn't any good, but it's certainly a far cry from the strategic offerings of the originals.

The new Shining Force tells the tale of Max, a young man fervently training to become a Force, one of the great warriors of his age. All the requisite RPG elements are present. A strained relationship with his father combines with a desire to discover the whereabouts of his lost brother to fuel Max's struggle to become a soldier. There's even a hometown girl named Meryl that he hasn't seen in years, with whom childhood friendship seems to be blossoming into something more. Thankfully, all these familiar character personas are brought to life through a huge

amount of voiced dialogue, which shows up in frequent cut scenes and anime sequences that move the story along.

We recently got some hands-on time with the game, playing through the first couple hours of the story and testing out the battle system. The game doesn't seek to break any boundaries with its fighting mechanic, which falls squarely in the button-mashing category. Controlling Max, you'll enter a fight against foes that spawn from destructible monster gates. The only noticeable concern during battle was the lack of any clear targeting system, making wild swings and off-target spells a fairly common occurrence.

Our time with the game made it clear that it may not be the sequel fans were expecting, but that might not necessarily be a disaster. We're eager to see more of the unfolding story, and the high production values that accompany the game help set it apart from many hack n' slash fests. We shouldn't have long to wait, as the final version should be in our hands within a matter of weeks. ■ ■ ■



You won't stop playing until you *want* to stop playing.

Addicted to Sid Meier's Civilization PC games? Finally, there is hope.



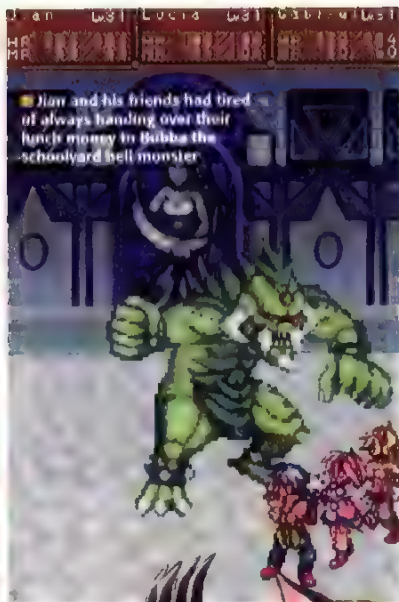
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No more turns.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Enroll before November. Local meetings are filling up.





NINTENDO DS

Lunar: Dragon Song

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER JAPAN ART MEDIA > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 20

NEW IDEAS

It's a real challenge to innovate within the context of a classic-style RPG. If you change too much, purists will cry foul. If you're too formulaic, things start to feel clichéd. It's a tough position. Ultimately, the only real way to judge a new direction is whether the feature makes for a more fun game, and in that regard the new Lunar title has some clear successes and some potential pitfalls.

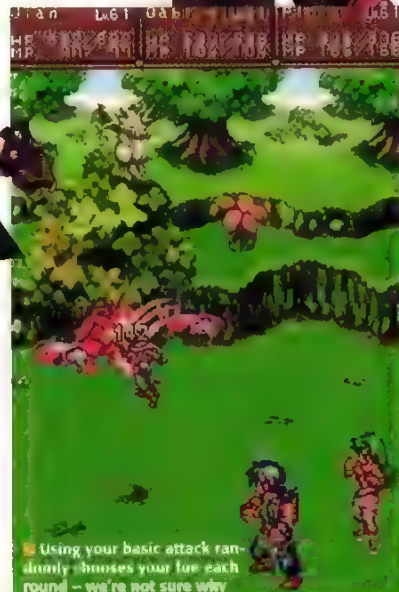
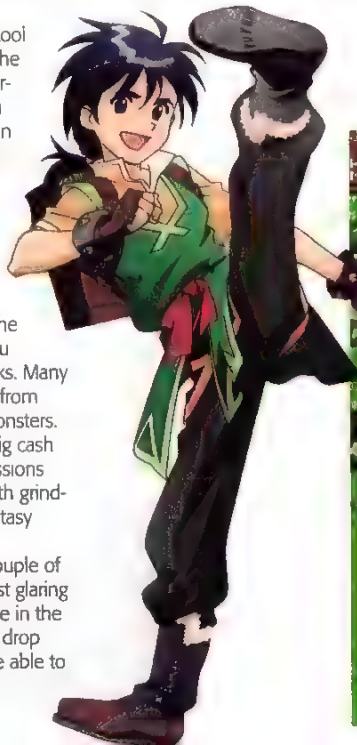
Like any RPG fan would be, we've been anxious to get our hands on this newest take of the Lunar universe. We got our wish this month when we were able to play the first several hours of Dragon Song. Set 1,000 years before the events of Silver Star Story, Dragon Song stars an acrobatic youth named Jian Campbell, who works as a delivery boy alongside his friend and not-so-secret crush, Lucia Collins. In a twist that shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone, while on one of their package deliveries, the two become embroiled in a plot of world-altering consequence. Here's a hint – dragons are involved.

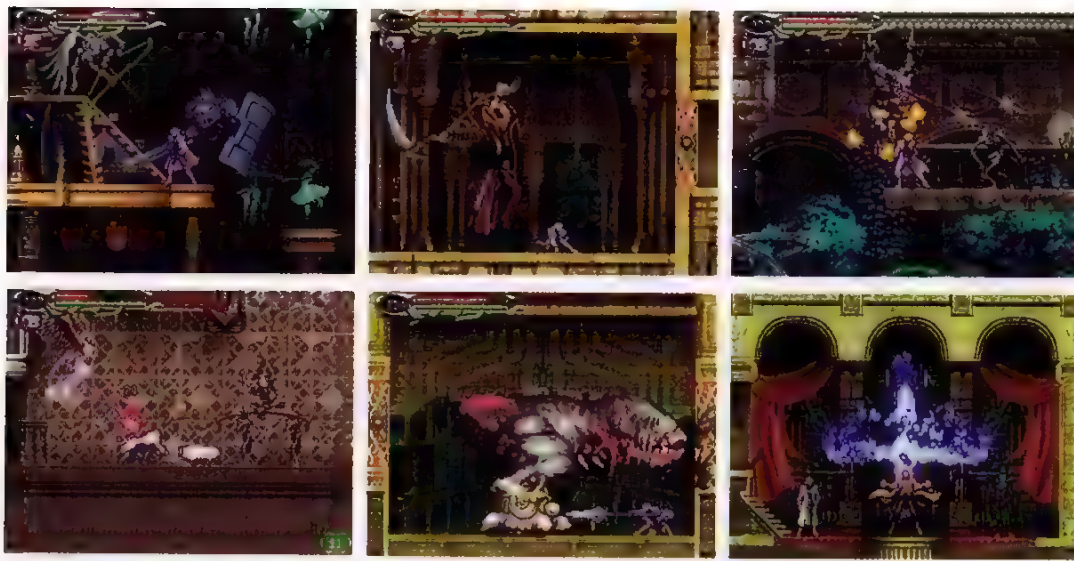
The touch screen is used primarily as a secondary tool for menu navigation and movement during most of the game. However, the basic gameplay holds some interesting surprises. One is the necessary ability to switch between combat and virtue mode by a quick press on the bottom screen. Enemies defeated during combat mode earn you items for your own use or to be sold for money back at town. Only if you fight in virtue mode will you be able to earn Althena Conduct, a point-based system that equates with experience, and thereby gain levels. Knowing when to switch between the two modes becomes an essential tool for advancement. Another interesting feature is the constant availability of delivery jobs. At every town you enter you'll be able to pick between a number of tasks. Many of these involve retrieving a certain number of items from the wilderness, often as pickups from vanquished monsters. Find the right items and you can turn them in for a big cash payout. The constant presence of these little side missions helps ease any of the burden normally associated with grinding for levels, and makes for a fun addition to the fantasy formula.

Alongside these enjoyable new mechanics are a couple of other ideas that made us scratch our heads. The most glaring is the fact that holding down the run button anywhere in the game causes slow health decay. Plus, once hit points drop below a third for any of your characters, you won't be able to

sprint at all. Particularly early on in the game, it makes for some tedious gameplay. We can only hope that later levels and higher hit points will alleviate the frustration. We were also perplexed by the inability to choose targets for attack during battle. We're not entirely sure of the wisdom of not being able to target individual enemies in a fight, even though the developer assured us the feature helps to maintain ease of play for the gamer.

Even with these minor annoyances, we're more eager than ever to get a look at the final version of the game. While not every alteration to the classic RPG formula may strike our fancy, it's great to see game creators trying new things in a genre that is near and dear to more than a few of our hearts. ■■■■





UNLIMITED ENABLED

NINTENDO DS

Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE OCTOBER 4

WHO NEEDS A TOUCH SCREEN?

A direct sequel to the stellar *Aria of Sorrow* (GBA, 2003), *Dawn of Sorrow* retains much of that title's gameplay. However, it also contains quite a few interesting puzzles and segments that keep it from being just another retread of the *Symphony of the Night* formula – but not in the obvious way. *Dawn of Sorrow* makes little use of the unique touch-screen and dual-screen features of the Nintendo DS, but after an extensive playtest of the latest build of the game, we're confident in saying that it doesn't hurt the title one bit.

Dawn of Sorrow offers players a large selection of weapon types to use, from throwing axes to huge two-handed maces. Each category of weapon has a very different attack pattern, and greatly changes the way you play. In typical *Castlevania* fashion, the enemies showcase a wild amount of variety, and include old favorites (such as giant suits of armor that don't even fit on the screen) and new foes alike. In the build we played, you'll need to summon up all your skill and take advantage of whatever you can, because *Dawn of Sorrow* is far tougher than previous entries in the franchise. It's hardly up to *Mega Man Zero* levels of difficulty, but it's definitely

no cakewalk.

Where the innovation of *Dawn of Sorrow* really shows is in the creative boss battles. For one thing, most boss monsters hit hard enough that you won't be able to simply level-up and plow through them without regard for getting hit. Learning the tricks and patterns – like figuring out that the Puppet Master's puppets are a higher priority than the boss himself or watching Abaddon's wand to discern his attack pattern – is a necessity, and exactly what 2D action gaming is all about. Aiding you in these frantic encounters will be any souls you've picked up along the way, which can have effects ranging from standard fireballs to tossing out bouncing fish heads.

The dual-screen and touch-screen functionality (maps and silly drawing minigames, respectively) may be mostly pointless, but *Dawn of Sorrow* is already a solid and enjoyable 2D action/RPG, just like we've been enjoying from the *Castlevania* franchise for years now. Check back soon for the full review. ■ ■ ■



IGA'S SECRET STASH

In keeping with *Castlevania* tradition, *Dawn of Sorrow* features multiple endings and unlockable characters to play as. This time around, upon getting the "good" ending, you'll unlock Julius Mode. Here you can play through the game as Julius Belmont, dispensing justice with the famous Vampire Killer whip. However, in this mode you can also meet up with Yoko and Alucard and use them as well, switching out heroes *Castlevania III* style.



Many old favorite bosses return



Falling 400 feet while fighting this thing is an experience

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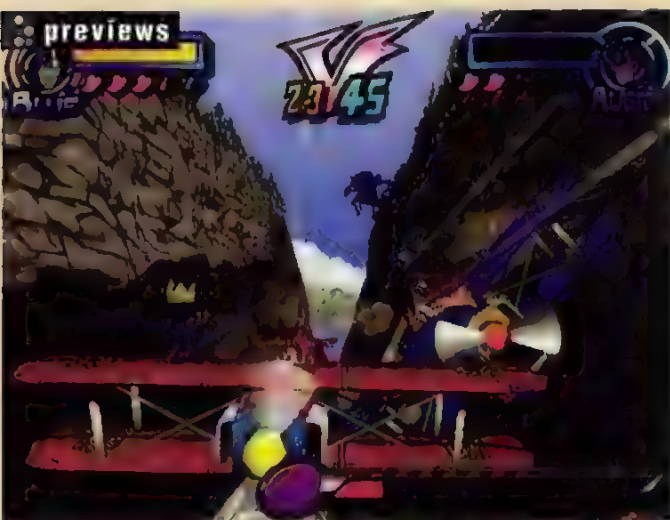
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UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAMECUBE | PSP

Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CLOVER STUDIO
> RELEASE NOVEMBER



THE NEW CHAOS

Remember the frantic craziness that was Super Smash Bros. Melee? You know you still play it. Now, speed it up and double the onscreen craziness and you'll have a decent idea what to expect out of Red Hot Rumble. Set to coincide with the stateside release of the new Viewtiful Joe anime, the new game is so chock full of action it literally overloads your senses at first playthrough.

Well over a dozen characters fill up the roster, each of them with unique moves and powers to help tip the balance in their direction. The heart of the game lies in the four-player versus mode, which unfolds in a number of unique arenas that should feel familiar to players of Super Smash Bros. What sets these stages apart are the constantly changing objectives – you might be fighting each other one minute, then zooming around to collect coins

the next. VFX power pick-ups begin to scatter themselves on the multileveled environments, offering an edge to the combatant quick enough to retrieve them. Boss battles even show up to intensify the chaos; the player who scores the final strike gets a huge bonus. Also switching up the action are the VFX holes; vortexes that pull all the characters into incredibly brief minigames for more added points. One has you hammering as many of the controller buttons as you can for just a few seconds, while another requires precisely timed button presses, just to name two.

All of these elements combine to make for one of the most wild contests we can recall. While it's uncertain whether Red Hot Rumble will manage to ascend to the heights of the game it is so clearly modeled after, what we've seen so far has been positively frenzied. ■■■■

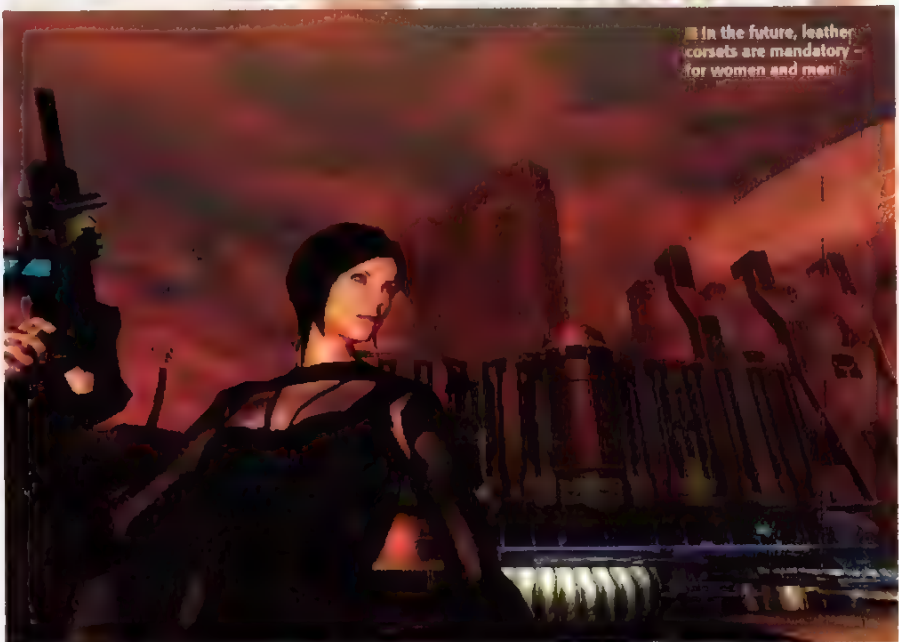


These strange vortexes will pull you out of the arena for some rapid-fire minigame contests

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Aeon Flux

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MAJESCO > DEVELOPER TERMINAL REALITY > RELEASE OCTOBER



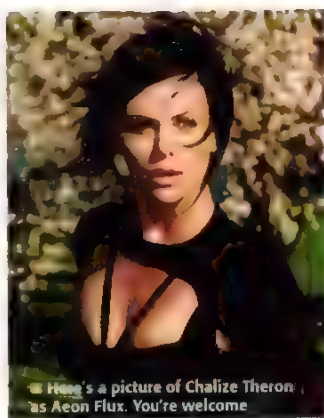
In the future, leather corsets are mandatory for women and men

FLUX CAPACITOR

You can add Charlize Theron to pretty much any project and we're sold.

Charlize starring in the second *Garfield* movie? We're there. Charlize collecting our garbage every Thursday morning? Oh yeah. Hottest sanitation worker ever! As much as we'd love to see her show up at our house on a weekly basis, her involvement in the *Aeon Flux* movie and its accompanying video game is cooler still. Not only will Charlize star as the spindly super-spy in the film, she will also lend her likeness and voice to the game.

Unlike most other licensed video games, you won't simply replay the film's story in the game. This release actually bridges the gap between the film and the mind-bending TV series on which it's based. Filling the time period between the end of the show and the beginning of the movie,

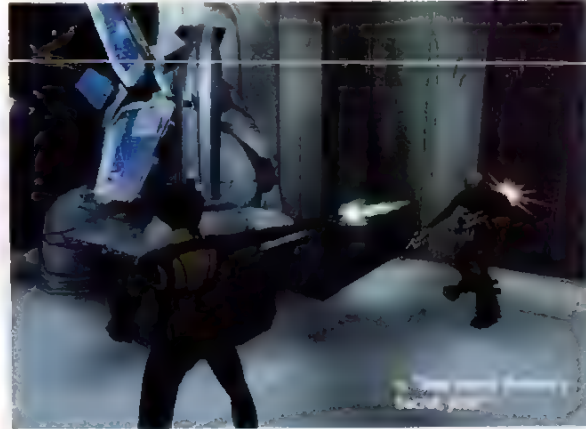


Here's a picture of Charlize Theron as Aeon Flux. You're welcome

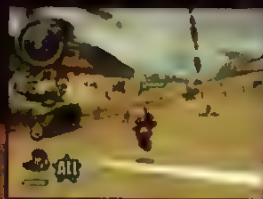
the game is broken up into individual episodes, each with a different complete storyline. Will Aeon die at the end of any of these episodes as she was prone to doing in the show? We don't know for sure, but they will tell a cohesive story about Aeon and her continuing struggle against the armies of her antagonist and lover, Trevor Goodchild.

We recently got a chance to get our hands on Aeon (tee-hee!), and were rather pleased with the results. Just like the character in the show, Aeon has a ton of acrobatic moves at her

disposal. With context-sensitive controls that react differently based on your situation, Aeon gracefully runs up and along walls, vaults off barriers, shimmies along ledges, and even unloads hundreds of rounds into her enemies while sliding headfirst down a rope. She also has plenty of fighting moves, including the ability to snap her foes' necks with her legs. All in all, Aeon moves and fights just like you'd expect her to based on the show, but the controls could use a bit of tightening up. Since Aeon is so quick and each button has so many functions, it is occasionally difficult to make her do exactly what you were hoping to. But with a little more polish, the *Aeon Flux* game could turn out to be everything fans of the franchise could want. And, like we said before, any game with Charlize Theron in it is definitely okay with us. ■■■■



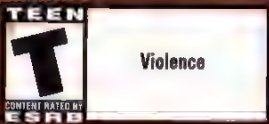
IT'S WAR TAKE COMMAND!

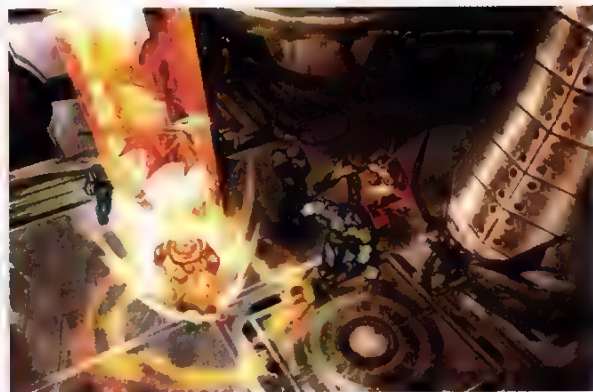


BATTALION WARS



Jump into the trenches and lead your troops through real-time, 3-D combat. Set the strategy or pull the trigger yourself. Either way, it's world war, and you get to decide the outcome.





■ A greater degree of character detail has gone a long way to improving the stylish look of the game



■ All the old characters have upgraded powers – and more of them



■ We see Angel early on in the game, only to fight his altered self Archangel later in the game

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

X-Men Legends 2: Rise of Apocalypse

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** WINTER

THE HORSEMEN COMETH

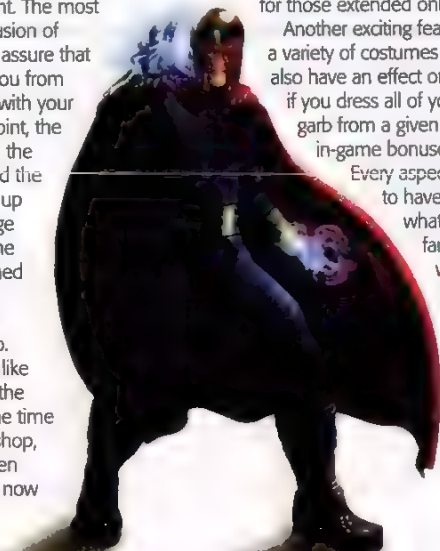
It was only about a year ago that the first X-Men Legends game stormed into the Game Informer offices and assured that we wouldn't get anything else done for at least several days. Already, the time is fast approaching for us to be swept up again, this time with the coming of Apocalypse. We got an early taste of the first portion of the game this month, and if anything, our excitement only doubled with what we discovered.

Legends 2 remains true to everything that made its predecessor so much fun, but has added a wealth of new ideas and features that make the game feel fresh and different. The most obvious addition is the inclusion of online co-op, which should assure that even distance won't keep you from harnessing mutant powers with your friends. From a cast standpoint, the inclusion of characters from the ranks of both the X-Men and the Brotherhood really ratchets up the tension. We spent a large period of time wandering the battle wreckage that remained on Genosha after a titanic conflict between the forces of Apocalypse and Magneto. In addition to familiar faces like Wolverine and Storm from the first game, we also got some time with new characters like Bishop, Juggernaut, Sunfire, and even Magneto. Fan favorite Blink now

acts as an NPC teleporter, allowing you to always have a way to return to base for supplies or rest. Rather than the static Mansion hub we saw in the first game, each chapter of the sequel bases the group out of new areas, like the ruined sanctuary on Genosha from which we started. A profound expansion of the character customization options means that each hero has close to a dozen powers to upgrade. However, in a smart move, there is now an optional automatic leveling system that increases your powers and stats without any need for pausing the game, thereby assuring constant action, a must for those extended online sessions.

Another exciting feature was the inclusion of a variety of costumes for all characters, which also have an effect on gameplay. For example, if you dress all of your characters in matching garb from a given era, you'll receive special in-game bonuses, like health boosts.

Every aspect of the game seems to have this attention to both what's fun and what makes fans feel all fuzzy inside, like when you'll have long-time personality conflicts come out between characters through their dialogue while they're fighting. To put it simply, all signs point to Legends 2 being just as engrossing as its predecessor. ■ ■ ■



MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM SEED™

NEVER ENDING
TOMORROW™

THE SAGA OF THE COSMIC ERA
HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN!



COMING SEPTEMBER 2005

- Featuring the combat system, unique weapons and attacks from the TV series; choose from over 50 playable mobile suits and battle it out!
- 4 game play modes including Story Mode, Mission Mode and 2 player Versus Mode.
 - Select a partner pilot to provide support and weapon upgrades.
- Featuring over 40 minutes of movie quality CGI and cut scenes from the TV show.



Blood
Fantasy Violence
Language
Suggestive Themes



PlayStation 2

As seen on



PLAYING IS RECREATING

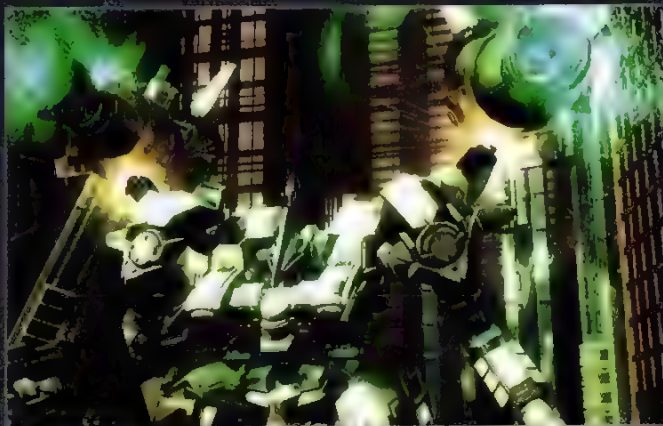
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PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

Endless Saga

At a recent Sony event, Korean publisher/developer Webzen announced that it will be ushering the PS3 into the MMORPG arena with a new game entitled Endless Saga (no relation to Square Enix's SaGa series, which is probably a good thing for Webzen). Though the visuals in the trailer are simply stunning, concrete details about the game are scarce. However, odds are good that gameplay will involve killing mobs, getting loot, and pwnXXoring n00bs (level permitting). If nothing else, calling an MMO Endless Saga seems oddly appropriate, and may inspire more accurately named persistent world titles like "Total Grindfest" and "Let's Get Griefed."



PLAYSTATION 3

Project Force

Shown at Sony's 2005 PlayStation 3 Meeting in trailer form, Project Force dazzled everyone with intense scenes of mechs handing out destruction on an epic scale. Words can't really explain how sweet this looked; the effects on display were truly mind-blowing as the towering war machines blew up each other and their surroundings. Not much else is known about this title from From Software (which also made the Armored Core and Otogi series), but these visuals don't leave a ton of room for argument, especially if the trailer Sony showed was captured from real-time footage. Expect much more on Project Force as the PlayStation 3 launch draws nearer.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC | PSP

Winning Eleven 9

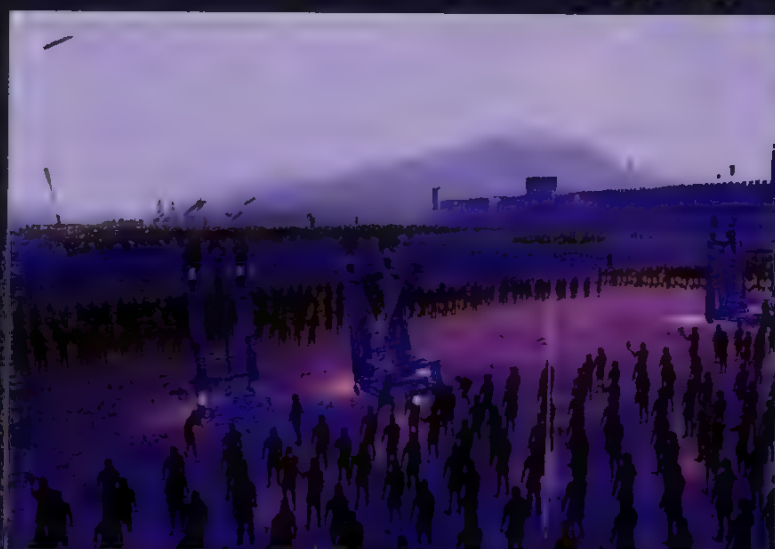
Soccer fans have every reason in the world to rejoice – Konami's Winning Eleven 9 is on track to be the finest presentation of the game yet seen. Beyond the usual precision controls and genuine sense of the game that has been present in the franchise for years, wanna-be goalies and strikers can now go online to compete as well. Beyond this huge (and overdue) addition, the game looks even better than before due to the extensive use of motion capture for on-field players. Incidentally, not only does the PSP version include the option of wireless play against friends, but it also will be capable of sharing saves with its PS2 cousin, so you can take your team with you to the World Cup stands in Germany next year.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Greg Hastings' Tournament Paintball Max'd

It may not have the name recognition of the Tony Hawk games, but Activision's other extreme sports franchise is shaping up to be a very respectable series. The second entry, *Max'd*, is on its way to stores this October for all three consoles, and truly captures the essence of real paintball. With various game types, gear from real paintball manufacturers, a robust career mode, and even online play, *Max'd* is hands down the best video game translation of the popular war game ever. If you're interested in trying paintball, but aren't too keen on the huge, painful welts the real game can (and does) cause, then Greg Hastings' Tournament Paintball *Max'd* is probably the right place to start.



PC

Rome: Total War – Barbarian Invasion

The Creative Assembly, creator of last year's smashingly successful strategy title *Rome: Total War*, is expanding its game's theater of operations this September. With 10 new factions to play and a host of new units and abilities, *Barbarian Invasion* looks like it will easily refresh *Rome: Total War* for another go at conquering the ancient world. As the name implies, the game takes place 350 years after the original, with the Roman Empire split in two and facing extinction at the hands of numerous tribes. Of course, you'll have the option to control any of these tribes and hasten the downfall of Rome rather than save it from collapse. And finally, the Senate won't bug you any more – this is an Imperium, and the politicians do what they're told. We'll have a full review for you soon, so sharpen your swords for another round of total warfare.

XBOX 360

Rumble Roses XX

For all those gamers out there who think the DOA girls are just a little too classy for their tastes, proud 360 owners have a slightly trashier option to anticipate. Konami has kept mum on a release date, but it's safe to assume you'll be grappling in the mud sometime next year. Two big additions for this installment should both be cool. Online play will let you live out your schoolgirl wrestling fantasies even with a friend across the country. Now doesn't that sound creepy? There's also the newly added tag-team mode to check out. That feature will include special team moves along with mistaken teammate attacks and dramatic break-ups. It's like a dating sim, but with punching, piledrivers, and suplexes thrown in. No word on multiplayer, but the tag-team option would seem to imply at least four players, don't you think?



CALL IT A FRIEND



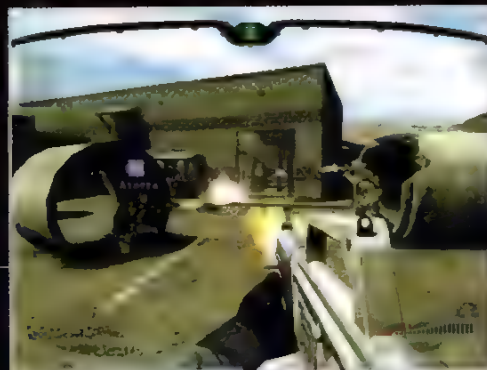
Hunt and be hunted by aggressive AI that homes in on the slightest sound.



New dual gameplay: Play as the lead operative and cover from above as the elusive sniper.



Build your operative's career on Xbox Live® in the Persistent Elite Creation™ mode.



Challenge friends to operative vs. mercenary firefights in the PlayStation®2 Rivalry mode.

...a cheery online battle with a few of your closest pals. You hunt down a few terrorists, blow off some heads with your sniper rifle, and use night vision to stalk each other in the dark. In the world of Rainbow Six, only one rule of friendship applies: watch your back if you want to get out alive.

Play It On
ubi.com

RAINBOWSIXGAME.COM



Blood
Language
Violence



XBOX LIVE

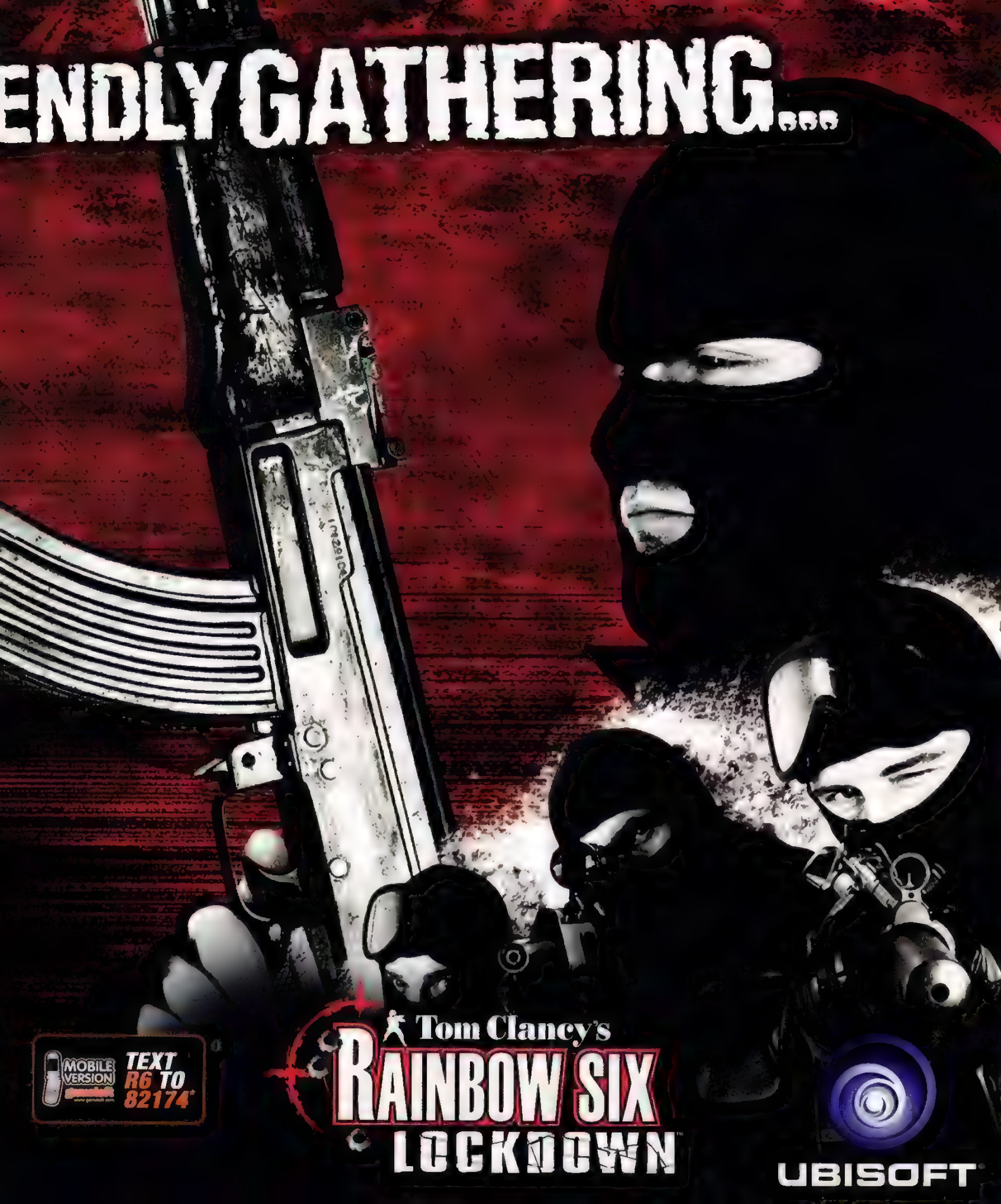


PlayStation 2



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ENDLY GATHERING...



MOBILE
VERSION
TEXT
R6 TO
82174

Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX
LOCKDOWN



UBISOFT

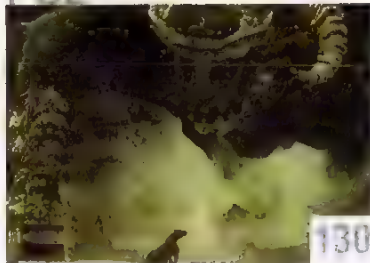
MULTI



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NASCAR 06: Total Team Control

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Ninja Gaiden Black



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Even though *Ninja Gaiden Black* seemed like the winner of the *Games of the Month*, it was later edged out for the next issue. *Burnout Revenge* was in issue 142. Similarly, *Fable* got the title in issue 138, losing it out of this issue for *PC Games of the Month*, if that strategy *Jungles* strategy was over the top. *War of Wills* *Assault* because it's a new title release instead of an expansion.

Burnout Revenge & Radiata Stories

Burnout is back and better than ever! With *Burnout Revenge*, EA has tuned the gameplay of this explosive racing franchise to include even more wanton destruction and fiery pileups, leaving last year's version in the dust. However, if racing isn't your thing, you can check out *Radiata Stories*, the latest masterpiece from RPG savants Tri-ace and Square Enix. Whether you feel like recruiting an army of allies to save the world or just blowing up some traffic, our dual *Games of the Month* offer a little something for everyone. Read the reviews on pages 118 and 132 to find out why both of these games are so great that we couldn't pick just one.

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** Zeldelay. Pain so intense that it drives nerds everywhere to impale themselves on their Master Sword replicas.

- > 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.

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HANDHELD



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Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War – Winter Assault

Gripshift



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Dungeon Siege II

Gas Powered Games' experience grind-a-thon franchise is back with a sequel, and it's some of the best dungeon crawling to be had offline. A slick character progression system, glorious visuals, and more content than just about anything around all make for a long and entertaining fantasy adventure. It's not without its problems, but you can find out why the good outweighs the bad over on page 144.

the edge

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

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

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

150 – A milestone we clearly don't care about
1080i – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced.
480p – Progressive scanning, this option ("p"= progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture, 480i (i= interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting.
720p – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The "p" means that the video is in progressive format.
action – A term we use for games like Devil May Cry and Viewtiful Joe.
ad hoc – A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity.
adventure – A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island.
AI – Artificial Intelligence. Usually used to refer to how well the computer reacts to a human opponent.

bloom – An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces.
board – A term we use for games like Jeopardy! and Mano Party.
cel shading – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels.
E3 – Electronic Entertainment Expo. The world's largest convention for video games.
fighting – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive.
first-party – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system.
FMV – Full Motion Video. Usually refers to an animated CG cutscene.
FPS – Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First-Person Shooters like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty.
framerate – The frames of animation used to create the illusion of movement.
frontend – A game's menus and options.
GBA – Game Boy Advance.
GC – GameCube.
HDTV – High Definition Television.

infrastructure – A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances.
isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like StarCraft or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance.
ISP – Internet Service Provider. The company that provides you with access to the Internet.
Jaggies – Graphical lines that are jagged when they should be straight.
LAN – Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay.
MMO – Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role-playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft.
motion blur – Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed.
normal mapping – A graphical technique in which a hi-res skin containing 3D information, revealed by light reflecting off the surface, is wrapped around a low-res model.
NPC – Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans.

particle effects – Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time.
platform – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Crash Bandicoot.
pop-up – When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance.
PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2.
puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Puyo Pop.
racing – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart.
RPG – Role-Playing Game. A game that involves character improvement through collecting and spending points. A term we use for games like Final Fantasy and Xenosaga.
shooter – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius.
sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL.
strategy – A term we use for games like La Pucelle and Front Mission.
third-party – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer.



FAST TIMES.





The all-new 197-hp Civic Si from Honda. It'll reverse your thinking.





Crashing into traffic is so much fun that Criterion created a race that centers around hitting as many commuters as you can



The new vehicular deformation will make you stand up and kiss your TV

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Burnout Revenge

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
 > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** CRITERION GAMES
 > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 13 > **ESRB** E 10+



EXPLOSIVE VEHICULAR VENGEANCE

The engine roared with the ferocity of an F15 fighter plane when I kicked in the nitrous oxide. As the crippling speeds increased, the buildings liquefied into unintelligible blurs and the wind hissed violently. The highly congested highway that my road rocket barreled uncontrollably toward should have spelled disaster, but rather it opened a window of great opportunity. Although my instincts pleaded to swerve out of the way of the traffic, the drive to win forced my foot onto the gas, hurtling my car directly into the back of each car on the highway. The vehicles that I selfishly brutalized were either sent flying into the air or into other drivers that were making their daily commutes. The blacktop was gripped with an unprecedented level of chaos and the smile on my face stretched so much that it hurt. Within all of this mayhem, I managed to send a car flying directly on top of one of my rivals. As his car exploded into flames, I zipped by into a commanding lead.

In Burnout: Revenge, you no longer need to avoid the cars in your lane. Rather than wrecking when you slam into a vehicle, you can theoretically use it as a four-wheel, 3,000-pound projectile. It's like bowling with cars! This one change to the racing dynamic completely alters the experience. I've always been amazed how games like Activision's Tony Hawk can, with each passing year, raise the bar so high that it's impossible to go back and play the installment that came before it. Criterion Games has accomplished just this.

Almost every little aspect of the game has been tuned up to draw more saliva out of our mouths. Adding a bit of strategy to the mix, players can now select from different vehicle weights and classes. The smaller cars that you'll get behind the wheel of are light, fast, and easy to control. On the downside, if you enter an event where you'll be catching air, the wind will take them for a serious ride. The larger cars in the game are not affected by the wind nearly as much, provide a much stronger Crashbreaker, and can plow through traffic like a lawnmower trimming grass. Of course, most of the races demand sleek, fast rides, but you'll often find yourself changing up vehicles in the fan-favorite Crash mode.

If you enjoyed the 50-car pileups in the precursor, brace yourselves. Criterion has



The computer controlled cars are relentless, giving you a run for the gold from start to finish

torn this mode apart and completely reinvented it. Rather than launching your car at a score multiplier icon, your crashing skills are reflected in the majority of your score. You will get a subtle point boost by taking out the bonus target car, but again playing off of the skills, you'll have to figure out how to include it in your routine. Your reflexes will also be put to the test in a frantic button-mashing sequence that increases the destructive quality of your Crashbreaker.

Once again, all of the tracks in the game are based on three locations (this time being Detroit, Rome, and Tokyo), and are the perfect fit for the event at hand. The courses are grittier in design and are far less forgiving. Wherever you look, it seems like there's a small concrete wall. You really have to focus on staying away from the barriers in this installment.

The opponent AI is also a bit surprising. They know how to rip your car to shreds, thus bringing about the "Revenge" aspect of the title. If a rival takes you out, the game highlights them, allowing you glorious payback. With three times the vehicular deformation, you'll be amazed at the ways in which cars will be shredded. Watching them fall apart in slow motion is fast becoming one of my favorite things to do on a lazy Saturday morning. That's not to discount how profoundly intense Road Rage races are online.

Like a moth drawn to a flame, I can't pull myself away from the incredible explosions, blinding speeds, and impressive vehicular carnage. Once you get behind the wheel, it's almost impossible to turn this speedster off. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** Crash! Smash! Drive like a maniac!

> **Graphics:** The cars look great, but they look even better when they are falling apart and surrounded by flames

> **Sound:** A surround sound dynamo. Objects hiss as they zoom by, you can hear the wind rolling over your car, and explosions make your woofers thump like a shotgun blast

> **Playability:** The first racing game that pushes players to smash into everything. To no surprise, this proves to be insanely fun

> **Entertainment:** The racing is nothing short of exhilarating. There are tons of events to medal in and online is unbelievable


> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 3.5

Burnout 3: Takedown was my favorite game of last year, and while playing it I couldn't imagine being any more addicted to a driving game. Well, Criterion has masterfully topped last year's entry. Burnout: Revenge is nearly impossible to put down, thanks to tweaks to old favorites like Crash Events and new treats like Traffic Attack. The new ability to plow through same-direction traffic had me cackling like a B-movie madman, and brings Crash mode's mayhem into the more standard races. With its car crash carnage and ridiculous speed effects, Revenge is the most over-the-top racing game to date, and its arcade-style action makes it the perfect pick-up-and-play title. I can't imagine what Criterion could add to this franchise to make it more fun, but then again, I never thought Takedown could be topped, and Revenge does that easily. —JEREMY



First there was the Mona Lisa, then The Scream, now this shot which we have entitled "Eat Asphalt, Jerkhead!"



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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NASCAR 06: Total Team Control

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** AUGUST 30 > **ESRB** E

FINDING THE RACING GROOVE

On the track, there is a time and a place for teamwork. Maybe you'll never get the chance to hook up with a teammate and draft your way to the front. Or more often than not, you'll spend the race watching after your own butt. As such, teamwork on the track may or may not be a big factor in a race. This puts the focus of this year's NASCAR game in an awkward position of being only occasionally useful.

I'm glad the teamwork features aren't too powerful, but because this game doesn't explore the depth and importance of teams on a significant scale, it only partially connects players to the critical human factor of teams and the sport. For instance, your R&D program is shallow, meaning that sharing resources is often not very pertinent. In general, the simplicity of the off-track team dynamics makes the career mode little different than last year's. However, while racing, the new team controls do change the way you drive, allowing you to seize opportunities on a chessboard that's moving at dangerous speeds. Despite the usual bonehead CPU AI, the thought-process for your teammates in deciding to help you or not is usually good. If only they were less one-dimensional and actually came alive in your off-track dealings with them (I sense an NFL Superstar-like aspect for NASCAR in the future), then this franchise could really grow and capitalize on the sport's captivating personalities.

People often ask me why I like NASCAR so much. Part of it's the sweet racing, and another part of it is what happens off the track. The engine builders, the pit crews, the driver drama, etc., make this sport about more than what happens one day a week. EA has touched on most of the elements of NASCAR. Now it needs to draw them all together and blow the whole thing out. Then instead of asking me, "Why do you like NASCAR?" You'll wonder, "What kind of setup did you test at Indy?" or "Is Tony Stewart always such a jerk?" —**KATO**

Insedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The edge depends on whether you race with a wheel or a controller. Wheel racers will like the PS2 because with a USB wheel (with a d-pad) you can still use the teammate controls. However, if you use a wheel on the Xbox, teammate controls are out. Still, Xbox has the Edge if you're using a standard controller because it has trigger acceleration and braking which the PS2 cannot do. Both systems enable the use of headsets, but during our review the effectiveness of issuing commands was very spotty.

How important are teammates? Game Informer asked 2004 Nextel champion and former Roush racer Kurt Busch all about them. Read his interview in our Game Informer Online Unlimited feature.

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Teammates give some on-the-track strategy to the usual racing

> **Graphics:** The cockpit cam is back, the framerate is more stable, and some subtle speed effects have been added—but it feels slower than last year!

> **Sound:** Your spotter is better, but he can leave you in some dangerous situations

> **Playability:** Having to pause the game to use all of the team controls blows

> **Entertainment:** EA needs to continue in this direction of putting the drivers front and center

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

With NASCAR 2006 Total Team Control, EA Sports did what it does best: it added enough new interesting features and further smoothed out the gameplay to offer up a compelling product. That said, I didn't really find the team element to be all that interesting. Sure, it was nice when I was completely destroying the field, leading by a lap, and just going through the motions in clean air, because I could hop back to a different car and be driving in traffic, bumping and grinding my way back to the front. Other than that, I didn't give two rips about my teammates or the team challenges. The racing, like the previous editions, is solid, with some outstanding graphics and some great driving physics.—**ANDY**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Spartan: Total Warrior

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 25 > **ESRB** M



Battles are massive, say the least.

BLAH BLAH HISTORY, BLAH BLAH FIGHT

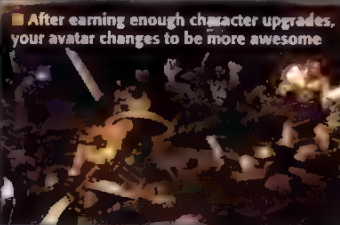
BOTTOM LINE 7.75

The first level of Spartan: Total Warrior does a bang-up job of setting the tone for the game. It gets the famous "shield" quote out of the way before the game actually starts, and the final battle of the level has you firing catapults at a giant Roman golem. At this point, Spartan completely ditches any sense of history and lets you get on with your business of decapitation, limb removal, and general carnage. Though it shares similar massive warfare with Dynasty Warriors, Spartan has you going down a set path (with some secrets to find, of course) and fighting pre-set encounters—and that's a good thing.

Mastering the fundamentals of Spartan's combat is easy and rewarding. Soon you'll be annihilating entire legions of foes on your own, and it's a fact that wreaking havoc on this large of a scale is fun by definition. Surviving in Spartan isn't about knowing how to string combos together or abuse enemy AI, unlike in similar games. Getting surrounded is death, so you have to use your

knockback attacks to create space and manage the flow of the fight. Once you're in the zone, you'll start to feel the rhythm of the battle, and the blood flows like water when the odds inevitably get too overwhelming, rage powers and magic will come to your rescue with the ability to flatten dozens of enemies at once. The combat is very well done, and Spartan gets a lot of mileage out of it.

Unfortunately, the game often gets into trouble when it strays from its basic formula. Sometimes it's a nice change of pace—manning ballistae and mowing down a thousand Romans in two minutes is hilarious. Having to make a series of annoying jumps, however, is awful. The boss fights are frustrating to the point of idiocy, and are made worse by the annoying checkpoint system. They're hard enough without being screwed by starting them off with half health and no arrows, for cripes' sake. These flaws, along with the fact that the fighting never really changes despite some new weapons and enemies, are enough to bang Spartan down out of the "great" category. It sure beats the hell out of another Dynasty Warriors reread, though.—**ADAM**



After earning enough character upgrades, your avatar changes to be more awesome.

> **Concept:** Hack through endless hordes of Romans in the process of doing Ares' bidding

> **Graphics:** Fantastic. Despite all the chaos unfolding onscreen, framerate never suffers

> **Sound:** Ares spurring you on with cries like, "Blood! I need more blood!" is disturbing yet awesome

> **Playability:** But for the idiotic way rage powers are activated, the Spartan controls smooth as butter

> **Entertainment:** Mostly mindless and not without its flaws, but this is still a good solid browser

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

When King Leonidas says you will return with your shield or on it, he isn't joking. Blocking plays an integral role in Spartan: Total Warrior, and consequently sets the game apart from the other button-mashing titles it most resembles. Even so, I can't really call the battle system strategic, since it basically just involves avoiding the countless cheap shots the enemies take—especially during the boss fights (which are all trainwrecks). The numerous weapons and spells add some dimension to the combat, but this is no God of War. Heck, Kratos wouldn't even waste his time slaughtering Spartan's poser protagonist named—wait for it—the Spartan. Clever.—**JOE**

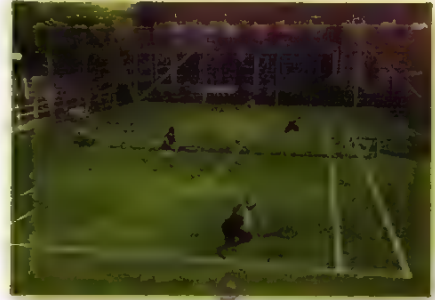




on the tour.

"One of the best tennis games ever created is finally coming to the PS2."

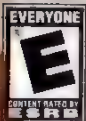
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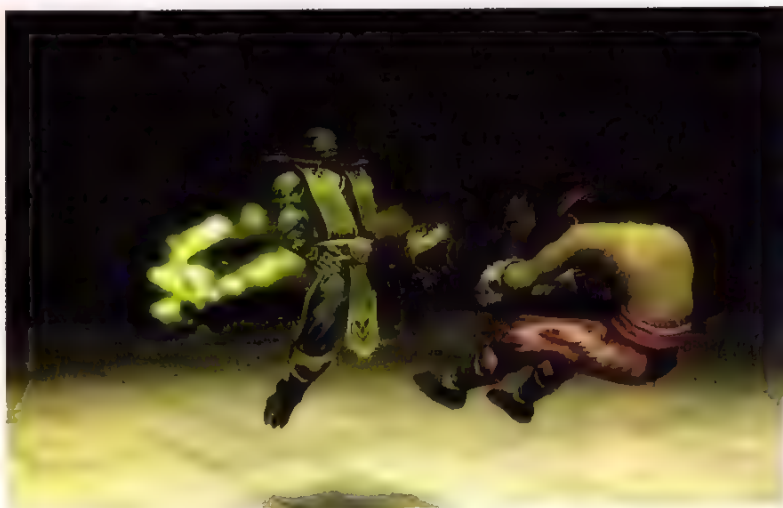
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PlayStation 2



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UNLIMITED FRAGS!

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER MIDWAY LOS ANGELES > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 19 > ESRB M

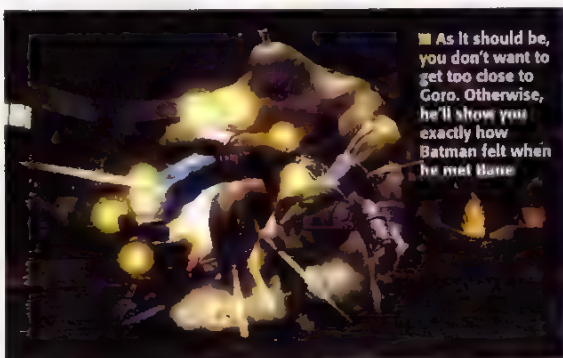
LET THE MULTALITY BEGIN

A little action game known as Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero sucked the life out of this fighting franchise with the brutal efficiency of one of its trademark Fatalities. Shortly after this cataclysmic release, another action game titled Mortal Kombat: Special Forces was met with a reception that included running, screaming, and boards being nailed over doors and windows. Given just how poorly this franchise has fared in this genre, and how devastating of an effect both of these miserable releases has had on the MK name, you'd think that Midway would try its hand at a Mortal Kombat kart racer or a dancing game before bringing it back into the action fold.

As it turns out, some ideas are just too good to pass up. What could have been three strikes and you're out actually turned out to be the third time's the charm for Midway. With series creator Ed Boon personally overseeing the development process, Mortal Kombat has successfully made the jump to the action genre in a way that will

please the most loyal of fans and turn the heads of people who may not have enjoyed the fighting games.

At first glance, Shaolin Monks seems similar in design to a typical brawler like Double Dragon or the more recent The Lord of the Rings titles. Although you do spend most of your time beating the pulp out of every enemy that dares challenge you, this



■ As it should be, you don't want to get too close to Goro. Otherwise, he'll show you exactly how Batman felt when he met Bane



■ The cooperative gameplay is incredible, allowing players to concoct high-flying multi-person cumbres

isn't your typical button-mashing brawler. Keeping its fighting heritage close to its heart, Shaolin Monks features an expansive combat system that embraces complex combo strings, aerial juggling, and even cooperative strikes. For instance, Liu Kang's famous bicycle kick can transition to a flurry of punches that ends in a mighty uppercut. While the enemy is twirling overhead, Liu can leap into the air and toss his opponent across the battleground. If Kung Lao is positioned correctly, he will catch the

enemy and toss him into an environmental hazard like a wall of spikes. The movements are not clunky like those within a typical fighting game. The ease of combat is truly remarkable and something that I'm sure Midway spent most of the development cycle perfecting. Once you understand how the game works, annihilating foes with 50-hit combos seems as second nature as swinging a sword in The Return of the King.

Finesse isn't everything, however. This really wouldn't be a Mortal Kombat game if a body wasn't torn in two approximately every 20 seconds. Each character can tap into 10 different Fatalities that are just as creative and bloody as they are in the fighting games. You'll also be introduced to Multalities, which function like your typical finisher, but against multiple foes. If you can power up your Fatality meter to the third level, you'll unleash a Brutality, which is basically a state of rage that allows you to pummel every enemy that you meet for a set amount of time. Jeremy and I actually put our pride aside to die in each environment and against each boss, as you are usually treated to a different death sequence or boss Fatality.

While the graphics are as grisly as a face that has made the acquaintance of Scorpion's spear, each environment will bring a smile to the faces of the MK faithful. From the Living Forest to the Dead Pool, almost every locale that you enter is a 3D recreation of an arena from MK 1 or 2, but you'll now see where the doors lead and what lies beyond. All of the classic secrets are still in place, such as Santa Claus flying across the moon, but there are now plenty more to find. Amazingly, each area has at least one secret to unearth. Test Your Might is also used in a number of clever ways throughout the course of the game. Its usage in the Scorpion fight is particularly impressive.

When I first heard about this game, I questioned Boon's sanity, but once again, he's made me a believer. I haven't had this much fun with a co-op game in quite some time. The inner fanboy in me also got a big kick out of the classic-inspired content. I can't wait to see what comes next. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** A fast-paced yet highly technical brawler that takes place directly after the final blow is delivered in Mortal Kombat 1

> **Graphics:** Comparable to early PS2 and Xbox games. The texturing is decent, but the character models are way too blocky

> **Sound:** The festive score blends nicely with the spirited action, but outside of Johnny Cage, the voice acting is pretty terrible

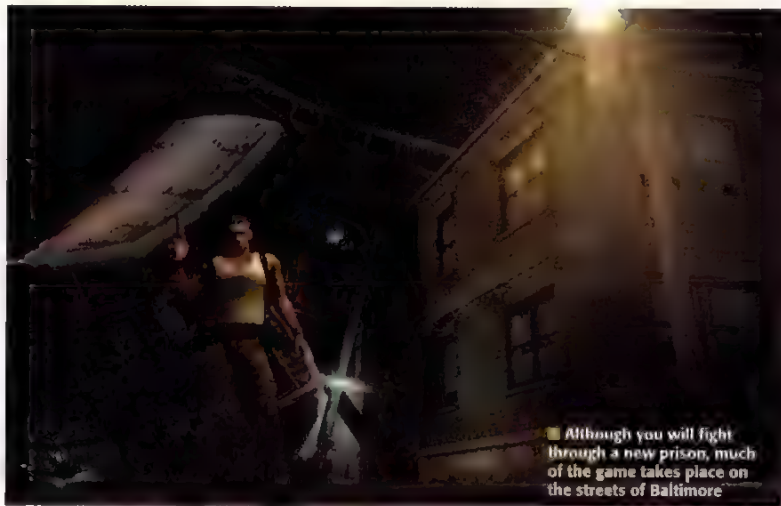
> **Playability:** All about mutilating foes in the most impressive of ways. The controls are incredibly responsive and the moves that you can pull off look incredible

> **Entertainment:** Loaded with secrets and reasons to go through the game again and again

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8.5**

The Mortal Kombat franchise has finally produced a spinoff that shouldn't be used to line the bottom of your cat box. Although it's a fairly simple game at its core, Shaolin Monks has a great combat engine that makes you feel like a total badass, and the fun is further multiplied with two players. Knocking a guy into the air, jumping up, throwing him to your friend and having him thrown back is simply something everyone must try. I also really got a kick out of the way Shaolin delves into the mythology of the series and explains how and why things developed over its evolution, like how Sub-Zero got his facial scar. I don't know that I'll feel compelled to go back and find every one of Shaolin's numerous secrets and unlockables, but it's definitely one of the most enjoyable co-op action titles I've played in a long time. If there's any justice, this will be the Mortal Kombat spinoff that finally is a hit with the fans. —JEREMY



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

The Suffering: Ties That Bind

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

HARD TIME

The original *Suffering* was quite a polarizing game. Those who liked it really liked it, and those who didn't simply hated it. The sequel, *Ties That Bind*, is likely to have the same effect, although for different reasons. The shortcomings of the previous title have been addressed, and new missteps have emerged to take their place. But despite its flaws, I still find *The Suffering: Ties That Bind* to be one of the most interesting and engaging action titles of the year.

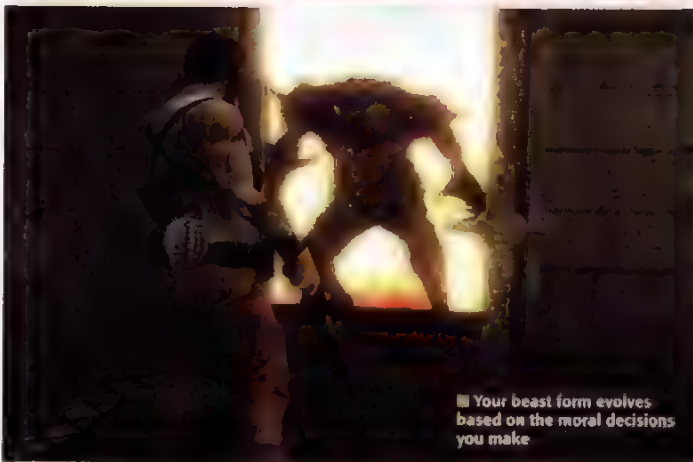
A horror-themed action game, *Ties That Bind* puts the player in the role of Torque, a prison escapee being pursued by both human and inhuman enemies. Fighting through the streets of Baltimore, Torque must use firearms, melee weapons, and his unique ability to transform into a rampaging beast to fight through an adventure that ultimately reveals the truth about his tortured soul. The inventory system that was one of the biggest flaws of the original has been replaced with an item management system lifted directly from *Halo 2*. This functions much more cleanly, but also removes some of the melee aspect. If I can only carry two weapons, I'm certainly not going to waste one slot with a lead pipe.

I was sad to see that melee is far less important in *Ties That Bind* than the original, and the lower occurrence of puzzles is another letdown. As with most third-person action games, there are also some camera issues, and the difficulty

on the default setting is unreasonably hard. But regardless of these drawbacks, *Ties That Bind* largely succeeds thanks to its approach to storytelling.

Like many other recent games, *Ties That Bind* offers both a good and evil path. Your choices constantly affect both the powers that you earn and the way that the plot itself unfolds. Dark and twisted, *Ties That Bind* is scary without resorting to shock moments, and handles its fractured narrative exactly the way a game should: it unfolds in-game, with minimal use of cutscenes. Your choices affect the way the story plays out, and delves into psychological and metaphorical territory with great success. Poverty, drug and domestic abuse, slavery, and mental illness are all explored, and none of these issues are ever exploited or treated lightly. *Ties That Bind* is also the only game I've ever seen that features an Islamic character that isn't a terrorist or a villain. On the flip side, *Ties That Bind* is definitely a hard "M" rating — it is twisted and violent, and features some language that will make even those with the foulest potty mouths wince.

Like its main character Torque, there are two sides to *The Suffering: Ties That Bind*. It is simultaneously fun and extremely frustrating, compelling and flawed, mature and foul, engaging and confusing. As a game, it can be aggravating, but as a piece of interactive storytelling, it flirts with brilliance. —**JEREMY**



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Step back into the twisted mind of Torque as he fights demons in entirely new types of prisons

> **Graphics:** Passable. Character models are only decent, while some environments truly impress

> **Sound:** The creepy voices in Torque's head help the story unfold and change based on your actions

> **Playability:** The new inventory system fixes the main drawback of the original game

> **Entertainment:** If you can struggle through its extreme challenge, *Ties That Bind* is an intelligent, rewarding experience

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Through filthy, stomach-emptying gore, *Ties That Bind* lives up to the blood-splattering excitement of its predecessor. With the most disturbing content this side of Freddy Krueger's basement and dialogue that would make Denis Leary break out the soap, this game gets under your skin, messes with your head, and delivers an experience that you never thought you would live through. Whether you walk in the light or give into your dark temptations, the paths for good and evil are better defined, offering unique demon transformations and significant story alterations for each. If you don't find yourself traumatized by the visual content, this game will slice and dice you with its brutal difficulty level. Rather than stopping the carnage to solve a puzzle, variety is now found in firefights with military forces and vehicle-based track shooting. *Ties That Bind* is a sloppy feast for horror fans and one of the most intense action games of the year. —**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Indigo Prophecy

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER QUANTIC DREAM > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 6 > ESRB M



■ Could this be an Indigo Girl?

CLOSER TO FINE

As I was playing Indigo Prophecy, one thing was abundantly clear: The age of the point-and-click, inventory puzzle-laden adventure game is at an end. Discarding many cumbersome traditions that have dogged the genre in recent years, this title has evolved to the point that it almost stops being an adventure game and becomes something that defies classification.

What sets Indigo Prophecy apart most is the emphasis on player choice. Whether I was gathering clues at a murder scene or fleeing from giant, illusionary dust-mites, I was constantly absorbed in the exploits of the three troubled protagonists because I had ownership over what they were doing. When Caria passed out because of her claustrophobia, that was my fault. When Tyler was late to work because he was making whoopee with his girlfriend, I'll admit I felt triumphant.

The game finds other ways to keep you involved in the events, too. The mood set with the grainy visuals and emphasis on the bitter cold serves as an excellent backdrop for the sinister plot, and the PAR sequences (short, reflex-based minigames) keep players connected to the story even during the cinematics. However, when these things aren't

going on, the game reverts to a fairly standard exploration mechanic that feels dull when compared to the other gameplay elements.

My other problem was that I wanted to see more consequences for my choices. Even though everything you do causes little ripples, few decisions hit hard enough to affect the static plot until you start exploring the game's multiple endings. I commend Quantic Dream for even attempting this level of causality, but to really make it work there should be more branching paths along the way.

In an issue that sees two adventure games reviewed — this title and the latest entry in the venerable Myst franchise — it is undoubtedly the upstart Indigo Prophecy that distinguishes itself with its innovative storytelling and clever mechanics. If you enjoy a good story and don't mind a more laid-back approach to gameplay, this is a title you simply cannot ignore. —**JOE**



■ Split-screen events add to the cinematic flair

The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The PC and Xbox each have a little bit more to offer than the PS2 here. The Xbox version looks a little better and has a widescreen mode, while the PC has remarkably cleaner character models that come at the expense of slightly awkward movement controls. I still preferred playing on the PC, but the game loses little in its transition to either console.

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** An interactive story somewhere between movie and adventure game

> **Graphics:** Not visually outstanding, but the characters' expressive faces and gestures are quite impressive

> **Sound:** Solid voice acting accompanied by an eerie ambient score from Angelo Badalamenti

> **Playability:** Some dunky movement and occasionally finicky object interaction can be a pain, but never interfere at critical moments

> **Entertainment:** Oddly engrossing, due mainly to cinematic rather than gameplay elements

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion

8.5

In the first scene of Indigo Prophecy, one of your main characters slaughters an innocent man. By the middle, you'll be fighting off winged demons in a stark gothic church. Bizarre events are frequent and often nothing short of kick-ass. Let's just say that many of the adventure genre's strongest points are kept alive in Indigo Prophecy, while at the same time adding creative quick-response gameplay mechanics from masterful titles like Resident Evil 4 and Shenmue. For tight storytelling, subtle chills, and gameplay that raises the stakes of each encounter, Indigo Prophecy is a thankful step in the right direction for adventure games. —**LISA**



UNLIMITED ENABLER

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Heroes of the Pacific

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, XBOX LIVE, OR SYSTEM LINK) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT/RED MILE ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER IRGURUS > RELEASE OCTOBER 30 > ESRB T

RULE THE SKIES

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

Although World War II may be the most popular video game setting since the omnipresent lava world, usually we only see combat from the ground. Heroes of the Pacific focuses on the aerial component of that war, and pulls it off with such finesse that it deserves a spot alongside such great WWII titles as the Call of Duty and Brothers in Arms franchises.

Although Heroes is far from the first WWII flight sim, it soars high above other games thanks to its incredible attention to detail. The shifting, multi-layered clouds are truly a sight to behold, and the water below is equally impressive. Of course, what is more stunning is the sight of a hundred Japanese planes barreling down on you.

Of course, looks aren't anything without substance (just look at Paris Hilton), and fortunately Heroes delivers on this front as well. Controlling the various planes is completely intuitive and each one has its own unique handling. The different missions are also expertly paced — dogfights are broken up with bombing runs and a huge variety of other tasks, so you never feel like you're simply shooting everything that flies. There are even a nice variety of multiplayer game modes and bonus missions included.

There is one final thing to bear in mind: Heroes is definitely a difficult game. Almost all missions require you to keep multiple objectives in mind simultaneously, which can be tough — I replayed some missions upwards of 20 times. Fortunately, I had fun every time. If you like flight sims, you will too, although you'll occasionally get frustrated. —**JEREMY**

> **Concept:** Take to the skies and relive the greatest aerial battles of WWII

> **Graphics:** Appreciating how cool these clouds look doesn't make me any less of a man. Does it?

> **Sound:** The banter between pilots really increases the intensity of the missions

> **Playability:** With two different control settings, Heroes lets you choose between more realistic and arcade-style feelings

> **Entertainment:** War is hell oh wait. Actually, it's pretty darn fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion

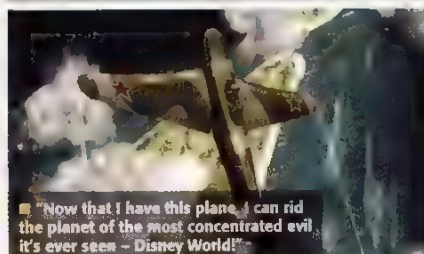
8.5

With a squadron of fighters breathing down my neck, I plummeted carelessly through the clouds to avoid a shower of bullets. As I flipped around for a fierce retaliatory strike, a strange thought entered my mind. I didn't expect to see Japanese aircraft barreling toward me, but rather THE Fighters. A World War II game shouldn't bring about thoughts of a galaxy far, far away, but in more ways than my feeble brain can count, Heroes of the Pacific reminds me of the Star Wars: Rogue Squadron series. The Axis armada may outnumber yours, but they drop like flies. It seriously feels like for every three seconds of play, you down at least one fighter. The variety of the missions is refreshing, there are tons of planes to unlock, and longevity is achieved by replaying missions to unlock much-needed upgrade points. Heroes may have been flying below the radar, but it has "surprise hit" written all over it. —**REINER**



When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Although there's a lot to like about The Edge, the Xbox release supports 480p and 720p HD, as well as Dolby Digital 5.1 and DTS. If you've got a high-end setup, grab this one on Xbox.



■ Now that I have this plane, I can rid the planet of the most concentrated evil it's ever seen — Disney World!



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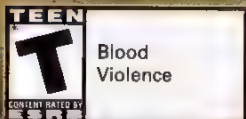


RISE OF A SOLDIER™

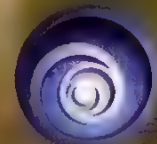
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PlayStation.2



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UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** NIHLISTIC SOFTWARE/EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** T

GENRE BENDER

The harsh reality is that Nemesis isn't as much fun as it could be. This will come as a severe letdown to fellow Marvel fans that had fostered dreams of massive scrapfests between some of the most powerful and popular characters in comics. The thing is, those titanic conflicts are certainly present and accounted for. But somehow they manage to be an equal mix of frustration and fun. So, what's the problem?

Marvel Nemesis is a game confused about its own identity. It wants to be a fighting game, but lacks the skill-driven combos and tricks that make the fighting genre worthwhile. It also wants to be a plot-driven action game, but the story is bland and contrived while the action feels repetitive. A mix of these two genres is certainly a cool idea, but the implementation in this case falls short.

Thankfully, there are a few cool things that save it from disaster. The most noticeable are some stellar character designs. Marvel's finest have rarely looked better in a game, from Spider-Man's acrobatics to Storm's wild-driven flight. And while it would be hard for the new "Imperfect"

characters to feel like anything but pretenders, several of them are downright awesome. Beyond this, it's definitely cool that each of the characters has unique strengths, movement styles, and battle moves. Unfortunately, some horrendous balancing of the single-player game, along with only a tiny handful of enemy types, makes playing through to unlock all these cool fighters a major chore. Meanwhile, the primary versus mode feels shallow and cheap, tending to reward chicken fighting tactics over raw skill.

All of my harsh words are intended to scare away all but the most faithful, for whom I honestly think Rise of the Imperfects might be worth a look. Despite some glaring problems, there's definitely joy to be found in the endless stream of unlockables that the game contains. Keep your expectations in check, and there's some fun in the mayhem. —**MILLER**



BOTTOM LINE

7

> **Concept:** Duke it out between some of your favorite Marvel heroes and some new superpowered folks in a simplistic arena fighting game

> **Graphics:** Character designs and animations are the best reason to check out the game – dark and different

> **Sound:** The standard mix of explosions, scraping metal, and musical drama all feels repetitive

> **Playability:** Here's a case where the controls are actually too simple

> **Entertainment:** A cool idea that should appeal to some fans, but frustrating balance and control issues abound

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5.75

Marvel Nemesis is the equivalent of the world's greatest heroes deciding to spend an entire day playing in the rancid filth at the city dump: some cool characters surrounded by decayed rubbish. The single-player campaign is lower than the lowest generic brawler, and the combat system lacks the depth necessary to make versus mode exciting. Comic fans will appreciate the chance to harness the powers of these classic heroes (plus the well-designed Imperfects), but the game feels rushed and cobble-d together. Like a spandex suit held together with bubblegum and staples, Marvel Nemesis just comes apart in all the wrong places and leaves you dangling. —**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Evil Dead Regeneration

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** CRANKY PANTS GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 6 > **ESRB** M



Ash's Law: Chainsaw + crotch = hilarity

SHOULD HAVE STAYED DEAD

A few years ago, I went to see a screening of *Evil Dead* here in Minneapolis hosted by Bruce Campbell himself. I had already seen the movies in the theater and owned the whole series on DVD, but I still wasn't going to miss a chance to watch it with its star. Obviously, I'm a big fan of the series, which is why I'm disappointed to say that in the video game world, the *Evil Dead* series continues to disappoint.

For those of us able to divorce ourselves from our geekdom, *Regeneration* is simply not that impressive. As Ash, you unsurprisingly get to run around and kill hordes of Deadites with your shotgun, chainsaw, and a few other tools, but this time you've got a tiny undead partner named Sam at your side. While Sam obnoxiously repeats the same lines over and over, he's actually pretty useful, taking on enemies by himself and protecting himself when he should. Ash's dual weapon combat works just fine as well – in fact, the combat engine is pretty solid. What

makes *Regeneration* falter is the fact that it's bland, repetitive, and uninspired – like Carson Daly.

Each section of the game charges you with finding three souls needed to close a portal, and the puzzles basically involve sending Sam to open doors or hit a switch. It's all pretty standard stuff, and fighting the same enemy types over and over doesn't help things stay any fresher. Visually, *Regeneration* is decent, but the camera is a little laggy and many textures are bland. The dialogue between Ash and Sam is probably the best part of the game, but starts to repeat itself quickly and also grows old. There is virtually no challenge to the combat – even the boss fights are a breeze, and the whole game can be completed in a single sitting. Overall, *Regeneration* isn't a truly bad game, just a fairly generic one tied to a revered license. As much as I love the movies, some franchises simply weren't meant to become games, and perhaps the *Evil Dead* series is among them. —**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE

6

> **Concept:** Try and fail a third time to translate what people love about the *Evil Dead* movies into a game

> **Graphics:** Huh, so that's what Bruce Campbell would look like as a cartoon

> **Sound:** The lines spouted by the two main characters are the high point of the game, which is pretty bad considering how annoying they get

> **Playability:** The two-fisted combat works surprisingly well

> **Entertainment:** Hardcore *Evil Dead* fans may be interested in some of the unlockables, but all others should stay away

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 6.5

What is something that's offensively dull? It's a sitcom that never wavers from the "my husband is such an idiot" and "my wife never wants to get frisky" jokes, or an action game so by-the-numbers that you snort sarcastically when the "Loading Sewer Level" screen pops up. In case you hadn't figured it out, *Evil Dead Regeneration* is that predictable action game that isn't broken, but instead is so lacking in intensity and creativity that dullness is its biggest problem. Ash does still have a chainsaw arm, though, and the allure of that might be enough for some people to get past that freshly lobotomized feel that the rest of the game inspires. —**LISA**



HUMANITY

HAS A

NEW

HERO...

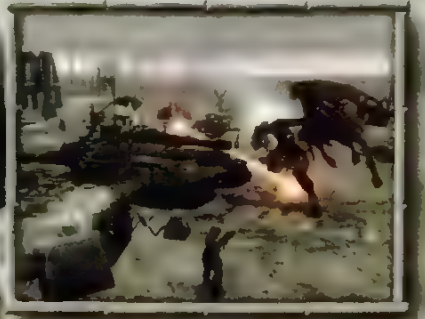
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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Delta Force: Black Hawk Down

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR UP TO 50-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** NOVALOGIC > **DEVELOPER** REBELLION (PS2), CLIMAX (XBOX) > **RELEASE** JULY 26 > **ESRB** T

ENTER SANDMAN

It's bad enough that Novalogic waited this long to release ports of this 2003 PC title, but even if this console title had come out 10, those many years ago, I don't think it would have fared much better in the score department. Not with such generic action as this, it wouldn't.

With startling simplicity, you'll make your way through city streets and countryside villages on a methodical, mindless rampage that's not dissimilar to seeing Miller attack a breakfast buffet. Locals approach in almost a friendly manner, like easy sacrifices to your smoking gun. As if the on-foot action wasn't generic enough, the game even throws in rail-shooting levels on trucks or choppers, but naturally it's like fishing with dynamite. Enemies (not to mention your own comrades) aren't the smartest of adversaries, and the collision is too generous—especially at a distance. The game does offer one noteworthy element, however: I like how you can squad the spacing among your squad mates on the Xbox. The PS2, meanwhile, lets you call for a med pack or ammo from an ally.

After playing games like this, it's almost hard to believe that there are people out there saying that video games cause real-life violence. After squeezing off I don't know how many rounds into untold numbers of bodies, I'm more prone to being lulled into a nice nap than a frenzy. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** A port of a game that's almost two years old, and it definitely shows

> **Graphics:** The graphics show few distinctive features, and many of the animations are downright dinky

> **Sound:** Very generic and dated sounds only make this game more mediocre

> **Playability:** The controls for the PS2 version are more intuitive and offer greater possibilities

> **Entertainment:** With little in the way of tactics or outright thrills, this is just another soldier in the desert

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 6.5

It's hardly rare for a military shooter to bore me to tears with its offline campaign, but *Black Hawk Down* went a step further. The only way to describe the single-player experience here is as a broken, soulless mess. AI problems, buggy objectives, stupid level design—every fault of the genre is well-represented. Online, however, can be a pretty good time if you find decent people to play with. It's nice to be able to play largely latency-free on hosted Novalogic servers, and there are several fun game types to choose from. I can't think of any great reason to choose this over *Halo*, *Unreal Championship*, or the Tom Clancy games, but it's certainly not a bad option. —ADAM

MULTI-PLATFORM QUICKIES

187 Ride or Die

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, XBOX LIVE, OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT > **RELEASE** AUGUST 23 > **ESRB** M

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



If the success of *San Andreas* has opened the floodgates for the game industry to use "urban" and "hip-hop" as buzzwords for its games, we could be in for a deluge of titles like *187 Ride or Die*, which may as well be called *Amoz N' Andy II: G Dizzle, Ya Heard?* Reducing a complex, vibrant culture into a poorly drawn caricature is the wrong way to make our industry more inclusive, if you ask me. The basic racing is fairly well done, if repetitive; but attempts to broaden 187's scope, such as the *Twisted Metal*-style combat levels, serve only to frustrate. I did enjoy the escort missions, and the co-op is decent, but they can't hide the fact that 187 is just plain mediocre. Oops, I meant mediocrizzle. My bad, playboy. —MATT

Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder!

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** EUTECHNYX > **RELEASE** AUGUST 23 > **ESRB** M

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



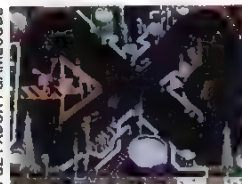
The "Truck Me Harder" subhead sums up this sequel's low-brow sense of humor, which actually does a pretty good job of satirizing the uglier side of what is known as "fly-over country." Again, I found myself surprisingly engaged by the simple economics of buying, transporting, and selling goods (I even broke out a calculator a few times!). However, despite some new trappings in the forms of side missions, bonus goals, and dangers like aggressive UFOs, at the end of the day semis are just plain slow and not that fun to drive. After the novelty fades, *Truckers 2* starts to feel more like a job than a game, as you realize life on the road is just one repetitive haul after another. —MATT

Midway Arcade Treasures 3

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ECLIPSE/GAMESTAR > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** E

PS2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE



This is some seriously addictive stuff. *Badlands*, a couple of *Rush* entries, *Hydro Thunder*, and *Super Off Road* are experiences that jumpstart a fully primal response for me; and *S.T.U.N. Runner*, *Off Road Thunder*, and *Race Drivin'* are also thoughtfully included. As a whole, the nostalgic draw is almost like looking through a high school yearbook: "Badlands, stay sweet! We should party sometime. It was great having you in Science class!" An occasional bug and the clunky menu system are each real issues with this collection, but the games are a blast worth remembering. Old racing is the new hotness. —LISA

Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** AUGUST 30 > **ESRB** E

PS2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE



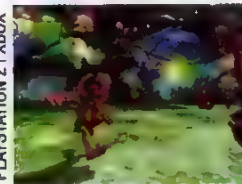
Congratulations to Namco on reaching 50 years, but I'd be more impressed with this collection if these games hadn't already been released in previous Namco compilations. Still, it's impossible to argue with the gameplay of greats like *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Xevious*, and *Galaga*. I even had some fun with titles like *Sky Kid* and the pre-*Robotron: 2084* title *Bosconian*. Although using the analog stick or d-pad doesn't compare to the arcade joysticks of old, I appreciate being able to tweak the number of lives you get for each game. With a nice price under \$20, new-school gamers could learn a trick or two from getting some time in on these timeless classics. —KATO

Tak: The Great Juju Challenge

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** AVALANCHE SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** E

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



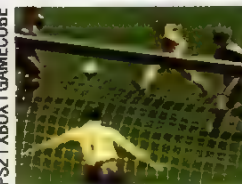
Someday, there will be a great game starring these characters, but I have yet to actually see it. *Tak* and *Lok* (who is now playable) are funny and endearing, but the gameplay has yet to live up to the characters' potential. The new focus on dual character gameplay makes *The Great Juju Challenge* the most fun entry in the series yet, but this is tempered by the fact that the production values are much lower than the previous games—gone are the beautiful CG cutscenes, and the environments don't look as lush. And while controlling *Tak* and *Lok* in the single-player game is fun, the split-screen camera in co-op sucks much of the joy out of it. I look forward to the day when *Tak* gets the game he deserves. —JEREMY

FIFA Soccer 06

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 > **ESRB** E

PS2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE



This is one of the few years in FIFA's seemingly constant restructuring where one of its gameplay elements actually got stronger instead of being ignored or inexplicably dropped. The pace control button, when combined with last year's first-touch commands, gives you a new way to find space in difficult situations. This isn't the only carry-over, however. FIFA is still doomed to feel a little stiff due to its reliance on set animations to govern play, and there are plenty of frustrating AI mistakes that linger. But, throw in some new manager responsibilities and team chemistry considerations, and you've got a franchise heading in the right direction. —KATO

The Edge

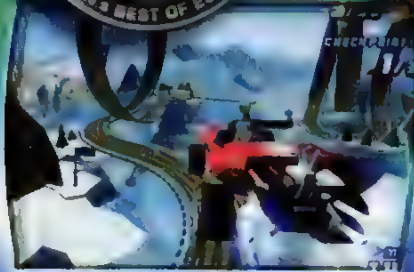
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Unless you need to have Xbox's 50-person multiplayer, I'd suggest the PS2 edition (with up to 32-player online) for a number of reasons. In the campaign mode it lets you spend points on attributes for your character, and its team commands, checkpoint structure, and grenade deployment make things much easier for you.

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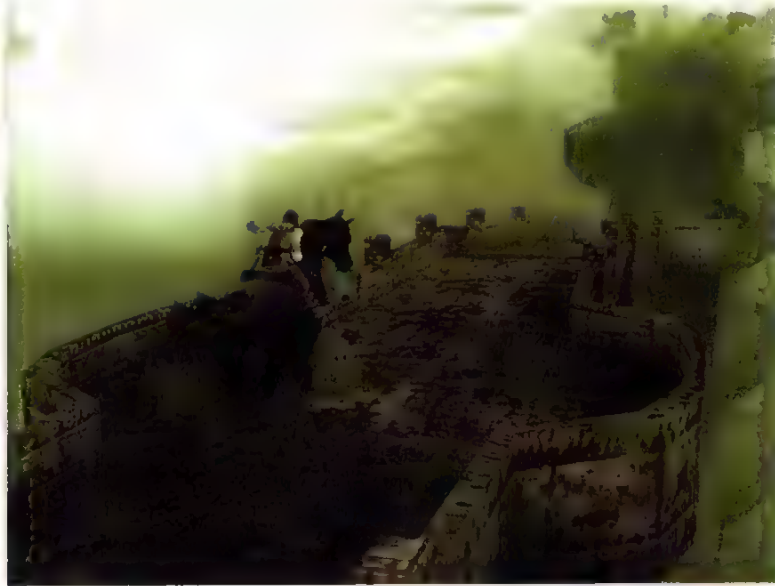
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PLAYSTATION 2

Shadow of the Colossus

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 > **ESRB** T

A CLASSIC TALE OF DAVID VS GOLIATH

Since I fell head over heels in love with ICO for PlayStation 2 back in 2001, I have been waiting patiently for the followup game from the duo of Fumito Ueda and Kenji Kaido at SCEJ. Since its debut at TGS over a year ago, the team has been quiet as to how Shadow of the Colossus fits into the ICO world. Is it a sequel? Is it a prequel? Is it a game all unto itself?

After putting this title through its paces, I can't quite tell you the answer to that, but I can tell you that if you were a fan of ICO, then you need to play this game.

The story is rather simple. It follows the tale of a young boy and his horse as they try to take down 16 colossi to undo the death of a young woman whose relationship to the main character is unclear.

Clarity isn't something this game is fond of, but that is also a big part of its appeal. You really can't tell if you should or shouldn't be killing the majestic creatures. They are both beautiful and deadly. And through some rather impressive artificial intelli-

gence, they also seem full of life. They are lumbering giants that somehow connect to the player like a living animal would.

In this regard, Shadow of the Colossus is pure genius. The game is absolutely gorgeous to watch, with some of the best particle effects I have seen from the PlayStation 2. Dust blinds your view, water spews from geysers in a spectacular display, and your blade cuts a tunnel of light across the sky in artistic fashion. It truly is breathtaking.

Unfortunately, the gameplay is not nearly as tight as the rest of the package. While each colossus is a feat to climb as you try to scheme your way from one side to the other, many portions of the gameplay are lacking. Most notable is the interaction between the player and the giant moving platforms that are the colossi. Basically, you have to hold onto the beasts as they try to kick you off. By holding R1 you get a firm grip, but as the titan moves it forces odd camera angles, and your hold on it goes this way and that. This instantly

turns the controls all around and can make for a bit of frustration. The problem is also highlighted when you need to make a jump from one area to another — the depth perception and camera controls play tricks on you, making it far more difficult than it needs to be.

That said, I completed the game in about 10 hours, give or take. During that time I ran a gamut of emotions, from love to hate and back again. There are certainly a number of technical issues here, but you can't help but appreciate Shadow of the Colossus for what it is — a truly unique experience that inspires emotions in a way few games can. It has its share of problems, but I love it just the same.—**ANDY**

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** A young boy fights 16 colossi for love

> **Graphics:** The kind of quality you would expect from the development team that brought you ICO

> **Sound:** The music is top notch and always seems to reach a crescendo just when things are the most manic

> **Playability:** The controls are simple, but there are a number of issues regarding object interaction

> **Entertainment:** The less than ideal controls and camera lessen an otherwise unique and amazing quest

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 8.75

Shadow of the Colossus is the only game I've ever played that somehow manages to mix awe and frustration into a viable and engaging gameplay formula. At its lowest points, you'll be cursing the camera controls and wondering why the triangle button is used for both jumping and horse-mounting. But when Shadow of the Colossus is good, it is one of the most unique and ambitious experiences of this generation. Triumph mixes with dread as you realize the impossible feats required to defeat the beasts; and as you precariously cling to their bodies, you get the sensation of holding on for dear life. Then, after each fight, you'll endure 20 boring minutes of uneventful galloping and awkward platforming until the next colossus. Still, despite these shortcomings, Shadow of the Colossus provides more "unforgettable gaming moments" per hour than any game I've ever played.—**JOE**

■ The colossi are big. Some even top 300 virtual feet



■ There aren't many things to do in the overworld other than ride from colossus to colossus, but it sure is pretty



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Each character has a powerful limit break attack



Dragons like this become important late in the game



All armor and weapon choices are represented cosmetically on Jack

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> Concept: Create a practically living world and let players explore it at their leisure

> Graphics: Cool anime-styled citizens populate a colorful world that looks like a storybook illustration at every turn

> Sound: The score is a downright masterpiece from composer Noryuki Iwadare (Lunar, Grandia), and the voiceovers are solid and frequent

> Playability: Combat is simple to a fault, though the link and command systems lend some depth. Plus, you can kick all kinds of stuff!

> Entertainment: Constant Jack's madcap antics inject humor even into the segments where you're treading water until the plot advances

> Replay Value: High

PLAYSTATION 2

Radiata Stories

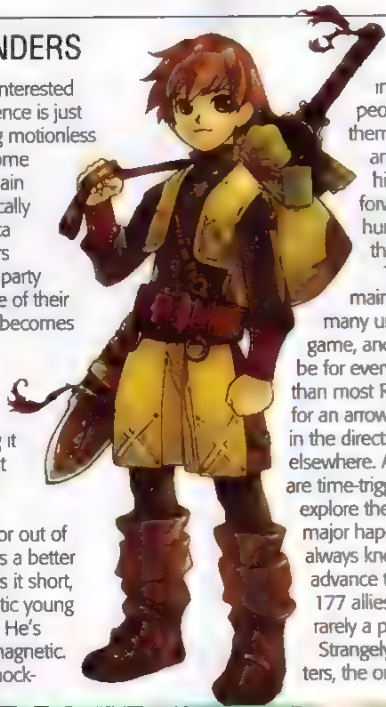
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX **> DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 6 **> ESRB** T



SUIKODEN SURRENDERS

I've never been particularly interested in townspeople. Their existence is just depressingly bleak, standing motionless in hopeful anticipation of some validating interaction from the main character. However, when practically every person you meet in Radiata Stories — from lowly shopkeepers to fabled heroes — is a potential party member with a schedule and life of their own, the whole world suddenly becomes irresistibly engaging.

Granted, this isn't the first game to offer a dump-truck full of allies; Konami's Suikoden series has been doing it for years with decent results. But Radiata Stories expands on that franchise's formula in so many ways that it blows its predecessor out of the water. To think of it simply as a better version of Suikoden actually sells it short, mainly because of the charismatic young protagonist named Jack Russell. He's impatient, boastful, and oddly magnetic. He punches doors instead of knock-



ing, and kicks objects (and people!) instead of just checking them out. In short, he's hilarious, and there's no doubt that his exploits drive the game forward far more than the "save humanity from destruction" plot that kicks in around hour 15.

The delayed onset of the main conflict is just one of the many unconventional choices in the game, and I should warn you, it won't be for everyone. It is more freeform than most RPGs, so if you're looking for an arrow to constantly point you in the direction of your objective, look elsewhere. Almost all of the key events are time-triggered, leaving you to freely explore the vibrant world between major happenings. As such, you don't always know exactly what to do to advance the story — but with a pool of 177 allies to recruit, keeping busy is rarely a problem.

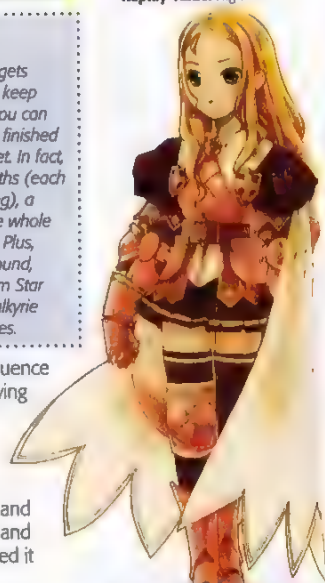
Strangely, even with so many characters, the only one you ever directly con-

RADIATING REPLAY

While kicking people and punching doors never gets old, Radiata Stories provides even more ways to keep the adventure going. After you beat the game, you can start a new game with the money and skills you finished with, though your weapons and level will be reset. In fact, since the game branches off into two distinct paths (each containing unique content and a separate ending), a second run-through is the only way you'll get the whole story and gain all 177 entries in your friends list. Plus, you might find stuff you missed the first time around, like armor that makes Jack look just like Fayt from Star Ocean III and the opportunity to add Lenneth Valkyrie from Valkyrie Profile to your list of combat buddies.

control in combat is Jack. There are ways to influence your party, like the command system for giving orders and a cool link mechanic allowing you to regulate formations and coordinate attacks, but battles typically consist of pressing the circle button to make Jack perform a customized combo string...over and over again. It will frustrate players who demand complexity and total control, but I appreciated it for its fast-paced fun.

Radiata Stories is a perfect example of many elements coming together seamlessly to create a compelling whole. It isn't about the occasionally repetitive combat or the familiar story (which isn't as predictable as you may initially think). It's about all of the pleasant surprises along the way, like funny dialogue, a great supporting cast, and Jack's slow but steady evolution into a decent human being. It's this mixture of personality and content that earns Radiata Stories a place among Square Enix's greatest adventures, and certainly the best straight-up RPG so far this year. —JOE



Second Opinion 9.25

Square Enix to Konami: "Dearest developer of Suikoden, you have created a role-playing series that has basked in critical acclaim and fanfare. Congratulations. Now prepare to be crushed. Violently." Obviously, heavy inspiration was drawn from Suikoden's 108 Stars of Destiny, but Radiata Stories is far more than a clone. The game's stunning storybook world, colorful ensemble of characters, and festive story come together to create an original work of art. While recruiting allies takes precedence, the story is also a compelling and boisterously entertaining aspect of the game, though it can be a bit ambiguous in telling you where to head next. As fast-paced as combat is, you mostly just have to tap circle. It may sound simplistic, but these are minor complaints in another extraordinary release from the role-playing masters. —REINER



You may be sporting a goat... but it beats starting out with a rat-killing quest (that comes later)



The Link system allows you (as well as enemies) to coordinate attacks as a group



PLAYSTATION 2

We Love Katamari

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NAMCO > DEVELOPER NAMCO > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 6 > ESRB E

GREAT BALLS OF DESTRUCTION!

If Katamari Damacy can best be described as innovative, the one word that best sums up We Love Katamari is creative. Although the gameplay is identical to that offered within the previous game, you really get to see how clever the development team is within the new level designs.

In one such stage, your katamari is on fire. If you don't roll up objects, the flame will subside and eventually flicker out, bringing about a game over screen. You'll need to expand the size of the katamari so that it is big enough to light a campfire. In another stage, you'll find yourself on a racetrack. Interestingly, you cannot stop the movement of your katamari. It wants to race! As your ball zooms around the track, your reflexes will be put onto display as you swerve toward objects that are small enough to be consumed. When the ball gets big enough, you'll eventually have the luxury of sucking spectators out of their seats and cars off of the track. Each stage brings about a different setting or goal. As the game unfolds, you'll build a snowman, swim with the fishes, deconstruct a candy house brick by brick, feed a sumo wrestler, clean a messy room, and pick up the kids from school. You'll also develop a great disdain for cows and bears.

Although you do find yourself faced with objectives, the game doesn't move away from the "consume everything" motif. It still delivers that nefarious sensation when cities are crushed and screaming citizens are rolled over. It's the same game that you know and love, but now it has more artistic flair. This has always been a game that has

drawn large crowds when played, and now you can plug in a second controller, allowing someone else to join in for a little co-op. In a twist, both players push the same ball. At first, Matt and I couldn't make our ball do much other than slowly roll backwards. After a few minutes of messing around, however, we were creating mayhem on a grand level. With a little teamwork, co-op is just as fun as the single-player game. Versus mode makes a return, but again, delivers little more than 15 minutes of thrills. There just isn't much to it.

Strange and addictive, We Love Katamari rekindles my fascination with this series and finds itself as a near-permanent fixture in my PlayStation 2. It doesn't offer much in terms of gameplay deviation, but the wildly amusing levels will keep you in a state of awe.—REINER



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Roll huge balls to unlock moves that outline the origin of The King of All Cosmos

> **Graphics:** Bloody, yet charming. Rolling over humans with square heads reduces the guilt that comes with this abominable act

> **Sound:** The original game had the best soundtrack of this console generation. The music in this sequel is just as arty. Dogs barking the Katamari theme? Brilliant!

> **Playability:** Same as before, but you will find that the camera-work is a hair better, especially when you roll into corners

> **Entertainment:** Goatee jokes, talking cats, giant robots—this is gaming Heaven

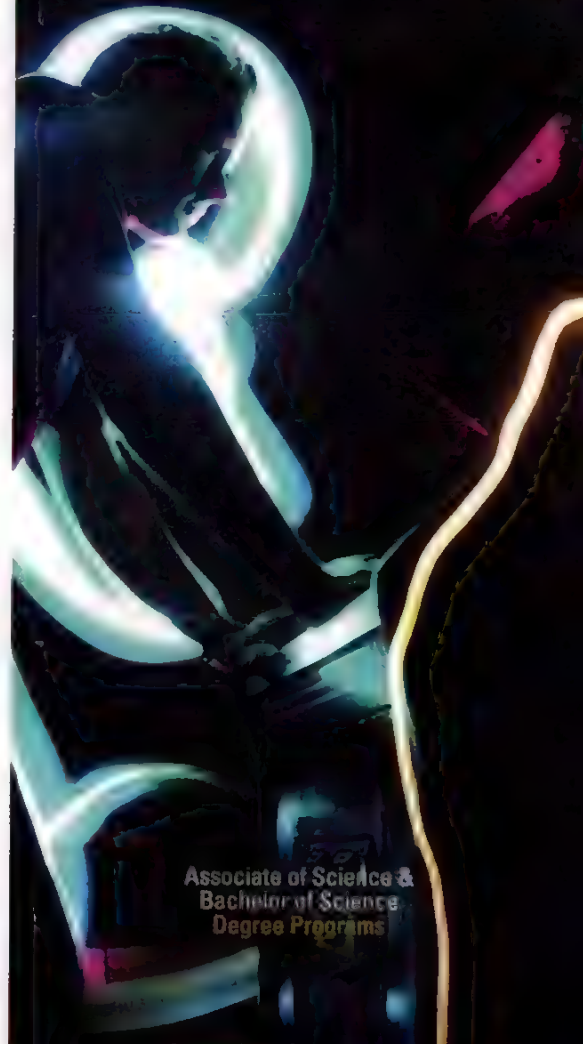
> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion

I like this game, but I don't know why. Actually, that's not quite true. Although the charm of Katamari is hard to define, I think it has something to do with how the series is able to tap into the loveably surreal, whacked sensibilities of the old-school Japanese arcade and 8-bit games that so many of us grew up on. Sure, it doesn't look great, but the bizarre art style and hilarious dialogue more than makes up for it (although the camera could still use some work). This follow-up adds better levels, objectives, and a very fun co-op mode to the mix, but largely We Love Katamari coasts along, riding the goodwill generated by its predecessor. Still, you won't play a funnier game this year (or possibly ever), and I don't mind style over substance when the style is this good.—MATT

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PLAYSTATION 2

S.L.A.I.

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** GENKI > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20
> **ESRB** T

S.L.A.I. IT AIN'T SO

This is the last straw. The next game that tries to cram me into a uninspired, third-rate cyber-world gets a jab to the ol' dual analogs. S.L.A.I.'s painfully generic vision of the future positions you as a rookie SV (formerly Scoobee) pilot eager to become the world rumbling champion — mostly by navigating bare-bones menus.

You can invest plenty of time choosing and customizing your mechanical combatant in these menus, but seasoned veterans will scoff at the disappointing weapon and modification options, especially when compared to similar titles like *Armored Core*.

Once you actually start rumbling, even more problems appear. Optic camouflage combined with no functional radar makes it impossible to track opponents. What's worse is that playing against actual intelligent foes online only amplifies these faults.

Like *Phantom Crash*, you'll quickly get tired of the arenas, and you are still rewarded (with lower repair costs) for chickening out of firefights. So, if you're a cowardly wuss who loves the computer-futureverse, this is your game. On second thought, no. Just rent *Hackers* again and forget about this junk heap. —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> **Concept:** Make a game about menus and selecting things from them. Also, occasional mech combat

> **Graphics:** The mechs themselves look cool, but the environments are drab and uninteresting

> **Sound:** If this is the future of music, you should pour acid in your ears right now

> **Playability:** The quick and responsive controls are easy to learn and not overly complicated. Now, if only the HUD didn't obscure 40 percent of the screen, you'd have a playable game

> **Entertainment:** If you like being frustrated, it's fun. Otherwise, it's just frustrating

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.75

If *Gobots* are a poor man's *Transformers*, then *S.L.A.I.* is a sorry excuse for *Armored Core*. Gear for gear and suck for suck, you won't find a mech simulator that will put you to sleep faster. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't assemble a mech that didn't fall into the "cute" or "wimpy" categories. This game's journey to the junkyard is further highlighted by a frustrating targeting system, pathetic weapons, a confusing HUD, and fidgety movements. —**REINER**



Rumbling would be easier if the HUD didn't eat 40 percent of the screen

PS2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

Urban Reign

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO
> **DEVELOPER** NAMCO
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 13 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 8

Team members from Namco's venerable fighting franchises, *Soul Calibur* and *Tekken*,

worked on *Urban Reign*, and it shows. The developers have come up with an admirable gameplay engine for this brawler, one that provides the fluidity of a fighter, but with a streamlined control scheme that allows rookies to get in and have some fun beating down chumps. There's also some depth, like weapon abilities, specials, and killer co-op moves. Hell, there's even a dodge button that actually works! Like most brawlers, the career mode and "story" are paper thin (although there are a good amount of unlockables). Still, with 100 single-player missions and a decent multiplayer mode, *Urban Reign* is a nice surprise for folks disenchanting with the stagnant genre. —**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2

Legend of Kay

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM
> **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** NEON STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 6.5

The *Legend of Kay* is about a samurai kitty, his people's idyllic homeland being

besieged by animals either brutish or filthy, and the one feline that can save them all. Blah, blah, blah. It's fine, but Kay as a character and as a game does little to stand apart — I swear that you could put the orphaned man-child, the headstrong warrior princess, or any member of a speaking menagerie in Kay's place and you would have already played this game. Besides an occasionally chuggy framerate, there's nothing outright wrong with it...except the utter lack of anything innovative or even interesting. Combat gameplay is hampered by an icky camera. Platforming is similarly marred by poor depth perception. More than any of the technical faults, though, is the problem that Kay is just plain dullsville. —**LISA**

PLAYSTATION 2

Genji: Dawn of the Samurai

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** GAME REPUBLIC/SCEJ > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** M



SAMURAI ROMANCE NOVEL

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

The powers that be may not want you to know this, but the epic story upon which *Genji* is based is actually a torrid romance novel. It's true! The 11th century Japanese classic *Tale of Genji* details one man's quest to bed and wed as many noblewomen as he can find. For better or worse, the game's storyline takes things in an entirely different direction. The result is a refreshing and surprising addition to the action genre, and features among other things some of the coolest sword fights I've seen brought to life in a game.

Immediate comparisons to the *Onimusha* series definitely aren't out of line upon first glance at *Genji*. Famed former Capcom designer Yoshiki Okamoto established Game Republic, and the influence can certainly be felt. The background environments throughout *Genji* are dazzling, filled with drifting cherry blossoms and classic Japanese architecture. The two playable characters also exhibit some impressive detail, thanks largely to how much both weapon and armor changes affect the way they look. But it's the combat itself that is the real stunner. In what often looks like movie choreographed stunt scenes, the heroes and their foes twist and turn through an elaborate dance of weapon play. Also taking a nod from the silver screen, a button press launches your character into *Kamui*, a mode where time is slowed and each of your strikes become devastating preset moves, allowing for some remarkable takedowns of multiple foes at once. Not everything in the game is quite so inspiring, particularly as the the story wears on. The action has the potential to feel a bit stale, since so little changes as you progress. There's also a fair bit of enemy recycling later on, which certainly doesn't help ease the sense of *déjà vu*.

More than anything, *Genji* is totally suffused in the folklore and traditions of the Land of the Rising Sun. From the honor-bound plot to the subtitled dialogue, the game targets a specific audience and sticks with it. Japanophiles will thrill, but traditional action fans would also be remiss if they didn't at least check out what the fuss is about. —**MILLER**

> **Concept:** A true Asian sword fighting game with plenty of style to burn

> **Graphics:** Feudal Japan has rarely looked so fine, even if some pixelation is still present

> **Sound:** You can't argue with a traditional Japanese score that is this beautiful, but dialogue is still in the native tongue if that bothers you

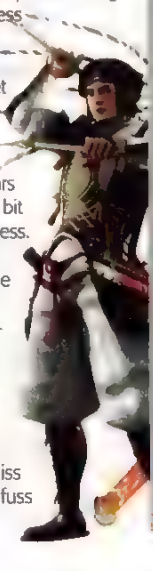
> **Playability:** Great controls, steady learning curve, challenging but not frustrating — no complaints here

> **Entertainment:** A startlingly great mix of cinematic action and beauty should be all the reason you need to give it a try

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

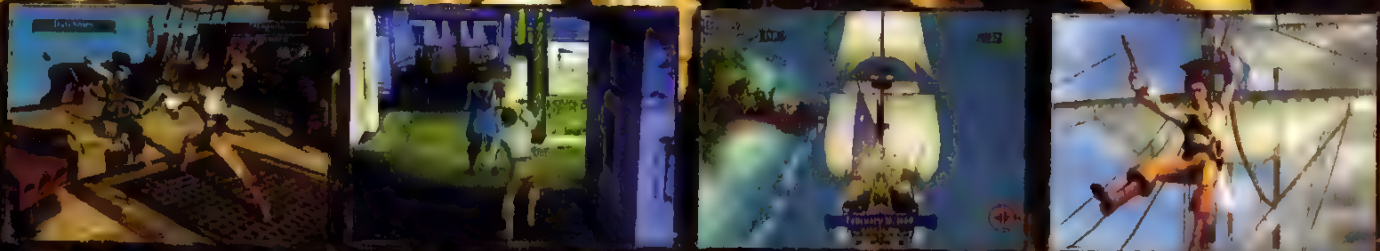
Rich with detail and just the right touch of fantasy, *Genji* isn't a groundbreaking title, but it executes its classic concepts with subtle skill. For the first chunk of the game, the combat is pretty easy and lets you get a hold of the systems built into the action. After that, though, frequent boss fights force you to stick with just one skill and don't (for the most part) encourage players to let loose and try out new tactics. Personally, these one-on-one fights were by far my least favorite part of a game that otherwise let me let loose on hordes of enemies surging forward in increasing waves. Those goon fights made me feel cool, which is really the ultimate goal of any action title. —**LISA**



X marks the spot.

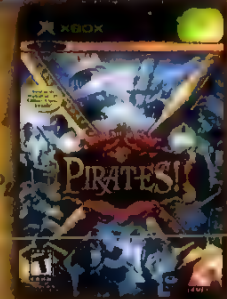


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GAMECUBE

Battalion Wars

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER KUJI ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 19 > ESRB T

NINTENDO AM CRY

It's no secret that the GameCube hasn't seen the kind of support over the last several months that its two competitors have. Some had hoped that this game could mitigate some of that pain, but I'm unfortunately here to tell you that such is not the case. *Battalion Wars* is flawed from every angle of analysis to some extent or another. Conceptually, combining action and RTS isn't exactly the strongest idea. Technology-wise, the AI continually makes some of the dumbest decisions ever, and the target selection is completely hosed. And from an execution standpoint, it's nearly impossible to make any strategy you might come up with happen with

Battalion Wars' messy control scheme. At least the game looks nice, I suppose.

When first popping the disc into the 'Cube, things look fairly good. A short tutorial does a decent job of explaining the goofy control scheme, and the presentation (minus the wretched voice acting) is fantastic, with a bright color palette and cool unit designs. The first few missions slowly acclimate you to the various unit types and how they counter one another, and it's entertaining enough to watch the gorgeous explosions caused by the constant mayhem onscreen. However, the moment a tough engagement arrives, all of the game's problems come into glaring focus.

During the heat of battle it's incredibly difficult to give your troops orders, as neither of the two worthless camera views allow for any sort of acceptable target selection. Targeting a specific enemy unit can take upwards of 10 seconds due to the utterly asinine mechanic for doing so—in the fast-paced world of *Battalion Wars*, this literally breaks the game. By the time you've actually selected a friendly squad and given the attack order, the situation has probably gone to hell. The negative impact of this dreadful system is exacerbated

by the fact that friendly AI, when not under direct orders, is awful. I lost count of the number of times a lone enemy infantryman ran through my entire army and was barely even scratched before I explicitly told my units to deal with him. Not because my men were busy shooting something else—they just didn't notice the bad guy. Needless to say, I shed no tears for my fallen minions.

The broken RTS portion of the game could theoretically be forgiven were the action any good, but sadly it's almost as bad. Vehicles are a total nightmare to drive, though they do pack a fair punch. On foot or behind the wheel, though, it's tough to say which is worse: dealing with the aforementioned targeting interface to lock onto an enemy and shoot it, or trying to fire while free-aiming. With a bit of practice, you can abuse the enemy AI pretty badly by circle-strafing and parking in blind spots, but that's not good tactics—that's bad programming.

Though *Battalion Wars*' eye candy is a treat, it doesn't come close to redeeming the horrid action. Were the level design better or multiplayer present, it could have been at least a passable title. As it stands, though, I can't think of a single part of this I'd like to see again—unless it's the graphics engine being reused in a completely different game. —ADAM



BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> **Concept:** Make *Advance Wars* an action game, realize that it's trash, then remove the franchise's name

> **Graphics:** Easily the high point of the title. I still can't help but giggle as I watch my over-enthusiastic soldiers running

> **Sound:** The trend of terrible voice acting in games has been turning around, but you wouldn't know it from this title

> **Playability:** Gee, who would've thought that a hybrid action/real-time strategy game would have garbage controls?

> **Entertainment:** I can't think of a single reason to play this, no matter what your tastes

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 6.25

The best part of this game is that it is not called *Advance Wars*. I applaud Nintendo for changing the name of the game in the eleventh hour. There's no need to tarnish one of my favorite handheld franchises with a disastrous release like this. The coupling of my incompetent teammates and brain-dead adversaries made me approach the game with the sarcastic thought of "I'll just do everything myself Rambo-style." To much astonishment, tanks couldn't catch up with my circle strafing, and grunts seemed to welcome bazooka blasts to the face. Most of the missions were completed by my courageous yet half-hearted solo efforts. Missing the target again, you often find yourself wrestling with the beastly targeting system. For crying out loud, quit locking onto my troops! The enemy is right there! Stay in your fallout shelters, people. There's no reason in exposing yourself to this bomb.

—REINER

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UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAMECUBE

Harvest Moon: Another Wonderful Life

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER NATSUME > DEVELOPER MARVELOUS INTERACTIVE
> RELEASE JULY 26 > ESRB E

YOU FOUND SOMETHING WEIRD!

The Harvest Moon series begs to make milking cows, watering plants, cooking soup, and buying seeds entertaining and relevant to today's youth. Many may scoff at the entire idea, but while the Future Farmers of America has problems selling this idea, Natsume's simulation title is admirably convincing. It makes the bumpkin lifestyle charming, unique, and (dare I say it) honestly interesting.

Another Wonderful Life is a weird duck to critique, though. Being a remake of A Wonderful Life, there isn't anything substantially different between the versions besides the main character's gender (you now start the title as a young babe, curious about country living). More than a year ago, I gave the original game an eight. Fast forward to today, and I feel like the retreat feel of Another Wonderful Life is mostly made up for by the improvements in usability and extra features. Plus, old-fashioned charm never really dies, does it?

With quirky charisma in bulk, Another Wonderful Life also has a skillfully executed learning curve that will teach you the ins and outs of farming at a pace that has been accelerated from its predecessors, and I for one think that it's now almost perfect. I didn't have to worry about making enough money, but also wasn't rolling in the dough with nothing to buy. The slower pacing of the original version lagged for me on more than one occasion, and didn't seem to force the adoption of new techniques in any meaningful or urgent way.

While I can't say that past residents of Forget-Me-Not Valley absolutely have to pick this up (the lack of new content being the sole reason), those who'd like to take out another lease on a family-run fixer-upper won't be disappointed with the return visit.—LISA



■ Training your dog is a new addition but, while amusing, there isn't much to it

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Rock the establishment as a chick running her own ranch

> **Graphics:** A distinctive art style helps this game rise above the muddy textures

> **Sound:** If you want annoying and repetitive, this game's got buckets for ya, but in the grand scheme of things, it's not really a big deal

> **Playability:** Streamlined processes make all of farming's repetition more fun

> **Entertainment:** There's a simple joy here and it kicks in fast

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.5

Harvest Moon: The Exact Same Life In A Training Bra is probably a more apt title for this revisitation of last year's best farming simulation. The content is essentially identical apart from a few activities girls presumably love (like shopping for clothes and critically assessing their own appearance in a mirror) and the new option to sell your goat instead of killing it off by repeated neglect. However, since I found the gameplay of the original oddly irresistible, I can't really complain, all of the harvesting excitement and spouse-courting action remains intact, and I enjoyed them just as much this time around. I did feel a bit dodgy trying to hook the adolescent leading lady up with some thirty-something stud, though. I guess that's life on the farm for you.—JOE

UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAMECUBE

WWE Day of Reckoning 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER YUKE'S > RELEASE AUGUST 1 > ESRB T



WRESTLECUBE RETURNS

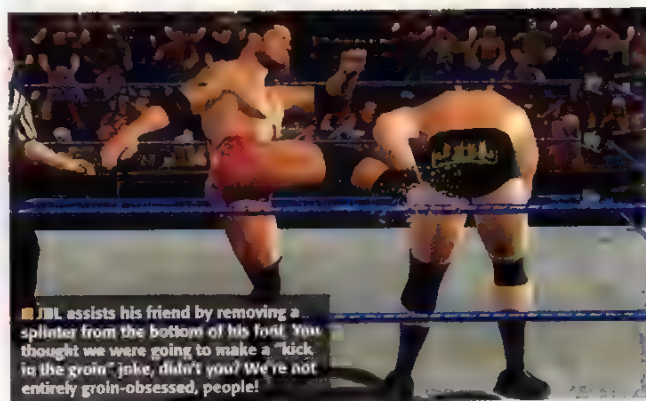
If you love the WWE's unique brand of high-drama, lowbrow sports entertainment and you only own a GameCube, then this game is probably a no-brainer. Given the upcoming release of the Revolution, Day of Reckoning 2 is most likely the last wrestling game the 'Cube will ever see. So get it while it's hot. But if you're only a casual wasslin' fan, is it worth checking out? Eh. Sorta.

On paper, Day of Reckoning 2 is a superior game to the original. It has a fuller story mode, new gameplay mechanics, and some pretty swanky character models. But despite these improvements, I had less fun with this game than the first. Although the new features are obvious (like the new submission hold minigame), they really don't add all that much to the mix, and as a result Day of Reckoning 2 simply feels like more of the same. It's not an outright blimp crash like the Xbox's Wrestlemania 21, but it's also not a real improvement.

For everything that DoR 2 does right, it does something else wrong.

The Superstar character models look fantastic, but the created characters, frankly, look like crap. It's nice to now have some choices in the story mode, but the lack of any voiceovers seems just sad in this day and age. There is a nice selection of match types, but some just don't freakin' work right. The mechanic used to climb a ladder or cage in all of your WWE titles simply has to go in future games. It's awful. Shouting-a-stream-of-obscenities-at-your-TV awful.

It's fair to say that I feel this game has problems, but it's not a total dud. The controls feel at bit sluggish at times (especially during the bra and panties matches), but for the most part it's a fairly respectable grappler. The action is fast-paced and looks good, there is a large selection of wrestlers, and the storyline is dripping with the appropriate amount of WWE cheese sauce. If you're a casual fan, you can probably skip this, but if you're a diehard fan of WWE and Nintendo, pick this up and feel lucky that you don't have an Xbox.—JEREMY



■ JBL assists his friend by removing a splinter from the bottom of his foot. You thought we were going to make a "kick in the groin" joke, didn't you? We're not entirely groin-obsessed, people!

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Wrestling GameCube. That's all you need to know

> **Graphics:** The Superstar models are great, but created characters look like butt

> **Sound:** There's no voice work and no commentary, so you might as well listen to your favorite Billy Ray Cyrus CD

> **Playability:** A bit on the unresponsive side, but everything pretty much does what it should

> **Entertainment:** Like a dull Pay-Per-View, wrestling fans will sit through it, even if they don't really want to

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

Day of Reckoning 2 is the digital equivalent of Edge. It has some decent moves in the ring and a bit of flash, but at the end of the day, the game pokes, prods, and ultimately humiliates you to the point that you just want to punch it in the face. Story mode is longer, but the lack of voice work is surprising, and although it's a continuation of the first game, I find it odd that I can't load my character data. I just have to pretend that this new character is actually the one I created before? Here's to you, Mr. Rogers! I do like the new rock-paper-scissors-type of submissions, and the new damage system is pretty slick as well, but why is ladder climbing the most difficult aspect of the game? It's a ladder! Climb it!—REINER

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PlayStation 2



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XBOX

Ninja Gaiden Black

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER TECMO > DEVELOPER TEAM NINJA > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 13 > ESRB M

NINJA DOG DAYS

When word trickled down the digital grapevine that Tecmo planned to release a new version of Ninja Gaiden that would feature an Easy difficulty setting, I seriously contemplated rallying the gaming nation to help me stage a protest. My battle cry would have been "Learn how to play the game, you whining, sniveling, good-for-nothing sissies!" If a designer like Tomonobu Itagaki, who embraces the notion of pushing gamers to their breaking point, starts neutering his games to appeal to the casual fan, I have a bad feeling about the future of gaming.

Well, Ninja Gaiden Black is upon us, and although I was apprehensive of this re-release, I feel that Team Ninja handled the lowering of the difficulty in the best way that they could. The new Ninja Dog setting isn't available from the outset. Taking a tip from Devil May Cry 3, it won't be presented to you until you die in the same spot repeatedly. If you chose this setting, you will be properly humiliated and heckled. Ayane will appear in a cutscene that has been inserted with the specific intent

of telling gamers how pathetic their skills are. Bloody brilliant.

Throughout the course of the game, you will be reminded of your ineptitude as you communicate with NPCs and acquire additional health potions and accessories from Ayane. Interestingly, the Ninja Dog difficulty setting is still fairly challenging. The enemy AI hasn't changed in the slightest. Hayabusa is just a wee bit stronger. Granted, boss fights won't seem as soul-crushing as before, but don't be surprised if you still find yourself hanging your head dejectedly in front of the TV.

Ninja Gaiden Black isn't just for the gaming wimps of the world, however Team Ninja has inserted a ton of new content that will give skilled ninjas reason to come back for more. A fourth difficulty level, appropriately titled Master Ninja, requires absolute perfection. It is so challenging, in fact, that only one tester at Team Ninja was able to complete it. I couldn't even reach the first boss! This mode is good for a few laughs (and tears), but it will only appeal to a very small fraction of players.

The area where you'll likely sink

most of your time into is Mission mode. Here you will find roughly 50 tough-as-nails mini-stages that pit you against unfathomable combinations of enemies. You'll have the chance to fight the first boss again, but this time he has swarms of henchmen at his side. You'll even spar against two bosses at once and a mirror version of yourself. If you can complete a stage, you'll earn Karma points that can be uploaded online into a ranking system.

All of the handy updates such as the new camera system from the Hurricane Packs are included in this version, and on the outer fringes you'll find the classic Ninja Gaiden arcade game.

Even if you already have a copy of the original game in your library, Black is an absolute necessity. I've probably already invested more time in Mission mode than I have in the entire game, and I haven't even touched the surface of it. On the flip side of the coin, the dented ugly side, if you couldn't get past the second level on Normal, you may actually see the third stage. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** Essentially ninjas with training wheels. This updated version features two new difficulties (one for studs, another for losers), plus a brilliantly conceived Mission Mode

> **Graphics:** Ninjas lopping off heads, ninjas running on walls, gamers weeping over the glorious visuals

> **Sound:** The thumping soundtrack is perfect for the explosive action. Ayane now narrates tips

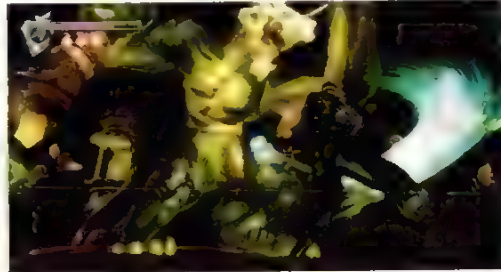
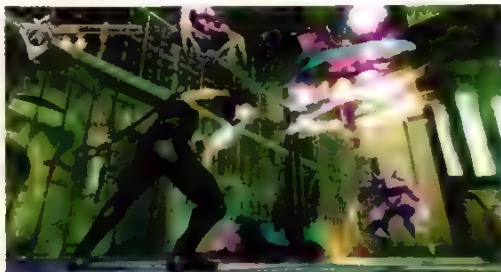
> **Playability:** Incredible enemy AI, varied level design, and some of the prettiest moves around

> **Entertainment:** Well worth revisiting. Hours upon hours can be vested into the new missions

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9.75

I've purchased the same movie on DVD multiple times (No more versions of *The Professional*, please), and it looks like I'm about to do the same thing for a game. Ninja Gaiden Black is like that tasty special edition DVD you just can't resist. Even though you've already experienced its main attraction, you have to get it again for the new content. Or, if you've never played it before, now is the time. The new, easier Ninja Dog mode is a great way for more casual gamers to experience the amazing combat, and even if you've beaten the game on Very Hard mode, it's worth playing through for the new content and disparaging jokes. Plus, with the inclusion of the arcade game and Mission mode, this is all the ninja madness you could ever need on one disc. And if you don't like ninjas, then there's simply something wrong with you. —JEREMY



XBOX QUICKIES

XBOX

Dynasty Warriors 5

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
> PUBLISHER KOEI
> DEVELOPER OMEGA FORCE
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 13 > ESRB T



BOTTOM LINE 6

When one of the few exclusive new features this title can boast about that differentiates

it from the already-released PS2 version is a Japanese language track, you know you've been had. It's like buying a car and finding out that — just for you — the salesman's gonna throw in a steering wheel. You're thinking to yourself, "Wow! I'm really getting a deal here!" Right. Even if you only own an Xbox and haven't already played DW 5, let me tell you that you actually have. It was called DW 4. Or was that DW 3? To be fair, there are a few new elements, such as strongholds and bodyguard combos, but when the gameplay is this stale and DW 5 isn't even optimized for the system (there's no online and the draw distance still blows), there's no reason to take this lemon for a drive. —KATO

XBOX

Tecmo Classic Arcade

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
> PUBLISHER TECMO
> DEVELOPER TECMO
> RELEASE SEPTEMBER 13 > ESRB E



BOTTOM LINE 7

There's no single stand-out title in the mix of eight arcade favorites that fill Tecmo's latest

compilation, but a few that should please those who remember them. Solomon's Key holds up quite well, with some genuinely challenging puzzles. Bomb Jack also maintains some old school appeal, while Star Force remains a decent space shooter. The arcade versions of Rygar and Tecmo Bowl also spark some fond memories, but many will be disappointed to not have the NES versions included. All told, faithful arcade fans should have a look, but no one else should feel the need to drop in their tokens. —MILLER

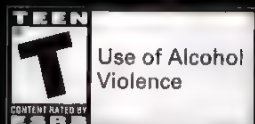


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PlayStation 2



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XBOX

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** AUGUST 2 > **ESRB** T



■ Nobody ever abuses rocket launchers online

CONNECT OR CRY

If there's one thing that drives me bonkers in games, it's cheap deaths. Whether it's a bad camera hosing a jump in a platformer or Joe abusing E. Honda's moving Hundred-Hand Slap in Street Fighter 2 Turbo, it makes me crazy when I lose through no fault of my own. While the online multiplayer is excellent, Summit Strike's single-player campaign is positively infested with these moments, and it ruins the entire experience. There are plenty of things that this title does right. The presentation is first-class, realism is mostly maintained, and squad AI is darn good — but when Fred McTerrorist can see my camouflaged self hiding in a bush from a hundred yards away, and then flawlessly guns me down with a fully automatic rifle, all of those great elements get thrown completely out the window.

However, this is far from the first game that I've reviewed with a temble single-player component and entertaining online play. Battlefield, Unreal Tournament, and Counter-

Strike are all great examples of fantastic titles that fail miserably without other humans to compete against, and while Summit Strike doesn't quite match the brilliance of those classics, it certainly does compete with the better Xbox Live titles. There's a game type for everyone here. It doesn't matter if your thing is co-op missions, co-op minigames, deathmatch, base assault, or capture the flag; Summit Strike has you covered. Combined with the stellar draw distance and graphical detail (not to mention awesome explosions) and well-designed maps, this title is definitely worth its \$30 price point if you're down with the online scene.

It's a shame that Red Storm didn't turn some of its formidable development talents toward fixing the defective enemy AI. With that problem attended to, this could have been a truly outstanding game. As long as you go into Summit Strike knowing that online is the only real draw of the title, though, there's little to complain about. —**ADAM**



■ Someday, AI will react to suppressing fire. That day is not today

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** There's totally a terrorist threat or something. The only way to stop it is to shoot some guys, obviously

> **Graphics:** Ghost Recon 2 was and is a fine-looking Xbox game, and this is no different

> **Sound:** Sometimes things explode, hard-nosed military types spout some tough-sounding jargon, or bullets whiz by

> **Playability:** There's still nothing at all wrong with the Rainbow Six 3 scheme that this title appropriates

> **Entertainment:** If it's Counter-Strike style online play you're after, this is for you. Other folks should keep their distance

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

Some things in life are fairly predictable: All old TV shows will be made into movies that suck, and each of Ubisoft's Tom Clancy shooters will spawn an expansion pack that's simply more of the same. Summit Strike, like the new *Bewitched* movie, retains all the flaws of the original (the AI is as hilariously inconsistent as Jessica Simpson's accent in *The Dukes of Hazzard*), but adds new maps and modes into the mix. To be fair, some of the new online game types are pretty cool, but you really need this new release about as much as the world needs an *Airwolf* film. Sure, there are a few updates, but it's really the same old thing in a brand new box. —**JEREMY**



XBOX

Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** PHANTAGRAM > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 13 > **ESRB** M

LOOK OUT, KOEI!

It's impossible to talk about Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes without mentioning the undying Dynasty Warriors series. It's like Dolly Madison Zingers and Hostess Ho Hos— one will always be compared to the other, even though they have significant differences. But Heroes is unfortunately not as delicious as either of those sweet, sweet snack cakes — although it's not a total crap sandwich, either.

Like Dynasty Warriors, the Kingdom Under Fire games focus on slashing through hordes of enemies with simple, button-pounding combat. The KUF games actually offer a little more depth, as well as some rudimentary RTS elements. But Heroes has veered away from the strategic side of things and focused more on the combat — which gets repetitive and dull incredibly quickly, like *Coldplay*. Many missions do actually engage you to manage

multiple squads, which does take the depth past that of Koei's Warriors games, but the action simply depends far too much on skill-free button-mashing. If you like mindless violence (as some gamers do), then Heroes is a pretty decent time. But if you cherish variety, this is not the game for you.

The thing that disappoints me the most about Heroes is that it has a lot of potential. The ability to upgrade your troops is really cool, the online modes are far more robust than the last title, and any game that pits you against giant scorpions can't be all bad. But with its bone-headed action, nonsensical story, and cheesy metal guitar soundtrack that sounds like it was lifted from Kevin Sorbo's epic *Kull The Conqueror*, Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes has no chance of moving the series outside its cult favorite status. —**JEREMY**



■ "Does anyone have an antidote for scorpion poison... or foot-wide gaping chest wounds?"

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** The sequel to last year's cult hit emerges with expanded online modes and little else

> **Graphics:** The number of characters onscreen at once is easily the highlight of this title

> **Sound:** The wailing butt-rock guitar soundtrack is so out of place that even Yngwie Malmsteen would be ashamed

> **Playability:** Simple squad control and button-mashing combat — two great tastes that taste lame together!

> **Entertainment:** Online play is a blast, but the campaign mode is overly simple

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

After the hard work of breaking into the console action market last year, Kingdom Under Fire must be tucked out. Instead of honing its unique RTS/Action gameplay, it is taking a nap on the action game apathy sofa (right next to Dynasty Warriors). They actually look kind of cute together. Even with a handful of new characters and units, the strategic elements play an even smaller role this time around, taking KUF one step closer to generic button masher. Apart from the expanded online features (which is still the main reason to pick this up), Heroes does as little work as possible to barely distinguish itself from last year's entry. —**JOE**

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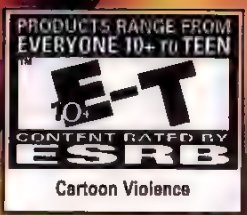
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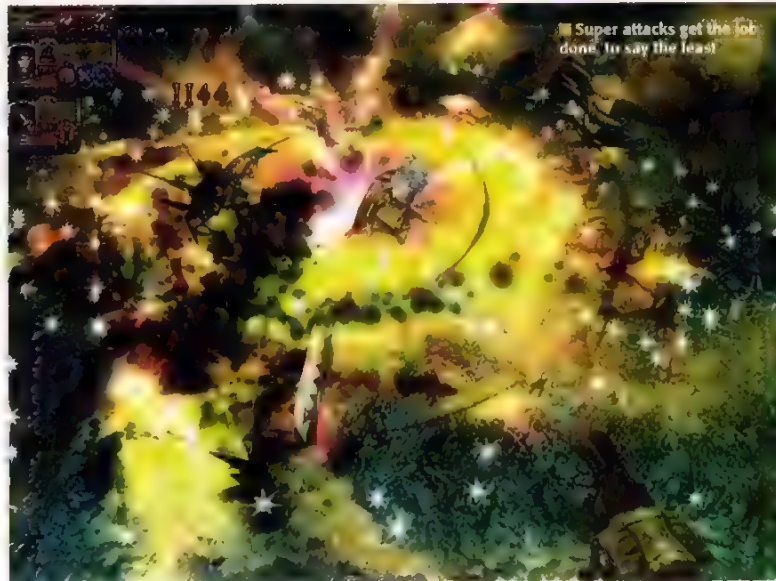


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■ Magic is both impressive and painful



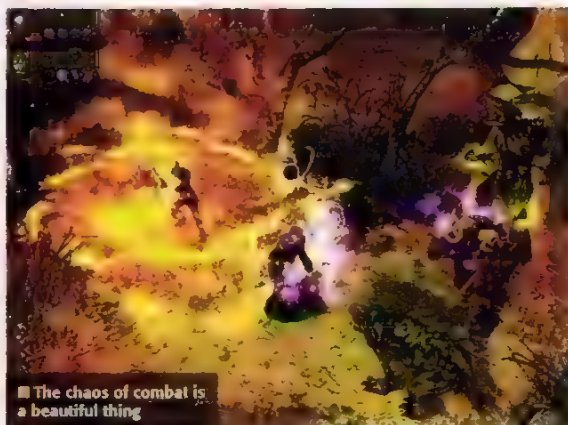
■ Super attacks get the job done, to say the least



■ The array of monsters is very diverse



■ Monsters may look different, but they're all the same under your sword



■ The chaos of combat is a beautiful thing

PC

Dungeon Siege II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN)
 > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** GAS POWERED GAMES
 > **RELEASE** AUGUST 16 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** What would Diablo be like with an awesome 3D engine and a four-player party?

> **Graphics:** Outstanding, especially given the very consistent framerate during the frequent total chaos onscreen

> **Sound:** Generic fantasy tunes and mostly terrible voiceovers aren't exactly the makings of a rich audio environment

> **Playability:** If it weren't for the fact that your target is occluded half the time, this would be perfect

> **Entertainment:** Dungeon Siege II has its faults, but this still gives you the feeling that only the fittest of loots can

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

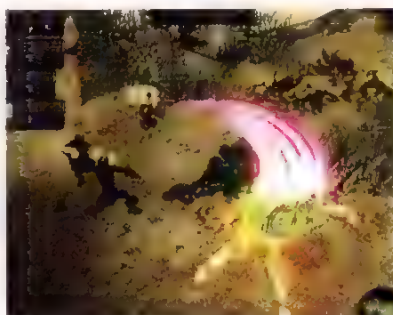
NOSE TO THE GRINDSTONE

The entertainment value of *Dungeon Siege II* follows a weird curve. The first hour or so, which consists of plodding through the tutorial and doing some solo exploration, is extremely tedious and boring. Then, as soon as you start getting some levels under your belt and a few party members to do your bidding, the game explodes into a riot of hack n' slash action. With a bloodlust fueled by the need for the next rare item or just one more level so you can use a fancy new spell, you'll tear through monsters and steamroll dungeons with unvaied ease and excitement. However, once the realization that you've been doing the exact same thing for dozens of hours sinks in, the glow of nifty spell effects begins to tarnish. Several hours after that point, when the gameplay steadfastly refuses to change despite some new spells and maybe even a few different companions, even the siren song of powerful magic artifacts will be hard-pressed to draw you back into the game.

Now, all of this isn't to say that the game isn't without its charms. It's easily the best-looking title in the action/RPG genre, with lush environments, spectacular effects, and smooth animations throughout its massive scope. Leveling-up is done with a nicely open-ended system that avoids pigeonholing heroes into one particular role, and gives you tons of room to customize your party as you see fit. Levels are huge, plentiful,

and well-designed — these dungeons are a definite pleasure to siege. All of the basics of your standard experience/loot grind-fest are in place, embedded in a wonderful presentation. However, the action is to some extent rotten at the core.

The combat of *Dungeon Siege II* is streamlined to the point of ridiculous simplicity. Other than occasionally activating a super-power or switching between a few basic AI settings, all you do is click on a monster until it dies. Tougher combatants, which are few and far between (I fought



maybe three or four in all my dozens of hours with this title), might require a change to the default action of one of your characters, but that's literally about it. While this is fun for a while — rolling through a dungeon is easier than ever here — this simplicity

is ultimately the game's downfall. I lost count of the number of times I wished with all my heart for the tactical control of *Icewind Dale* or *Freedom Force*. It's not possible to give any more refined commands than "fight" or "flee," and eventually it simply becomes boring.

Nonetheless, despite all of these issues and some of the most egregious pathfinding problems in the history of gaming, *Dungeon Siege II* somehow manages to be fun. Its core premise is so strong, and the RPG elements so well-done, that this will definitely scratch any dungeon-crawling itch you have. —ADAM

Second Opinion 7.75

I'm a big fan of the original *Dungeon Siege*, though it does have perhaps the worst ending I've ever had the misfortune of experiencing in the modern era of gaming. That said, I still had a blast with it. *Dungeon Siege II* is also a mixed bag. The graphics and interface are mediocre at best, and the voice acting is just horrid. But for all that's bad there is something truly charming about this title. The environments are much improved this time around, and respawning enemies ensure there is plenty to kill. Simply put, if you are a fantasy fan who loves the experience grid, *Dungeon Siege II* delivers in spades with a longer quest and lots to do. If you don't, this game isn't going to rock your world. It loses points for a number of technical issues, but I loved this game. It's simple, it's addicting, and most importantly, it's fun. —ANDY



PC

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War – Winter Assault

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** RELIC ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 19 > **ESRB** M

MORE, BUT NOT BETTER

I'm a big fan of the original Dawn of War; to my mind it was by far the best traditional real-time strategy title in some time. Obviously, I was very pumped for this expansion to come out. However, while the new playable faction of the Imperial Guard is a worthy addition to the Dawn of War universe, Winter Assault didn't quite live up to my expectations. Though the missions in the single-player portion of the game are fairly long and creative, there are only 12 of them. Also, none of the (admittedly minor) issues that I had with the base game were addressed. This all being said, though, there's no arguing that this is anything but a good expansion to a great game.

The Imperial Guard, which you'll play through the most of the Order campaign, are fairly similar to the Space Marines. Dawn of War players will quickly become familiar with them, and they seem well-balanced with the other factions. However, it's disappointing that they don't open up any really new avenues of play. For someone like me, who greatly enjoys the variety between Protoss and Zerg, for instance, it's too bad that this expansion doesn't do anything to really differentiate the factions to that extent. Not that they're Warcraft II-like carbon copies of each other by any means, but I can't help wanting more uniqueness. The brevity of the campaigns (any serious player will roll through all of the single-player content in the matter of a few days) doesn't help matters, either.

However, these issues are really quite small in the grand scheme of things. More units and maps are always great boons to multiplayer, which is really the big selling point of RTS anyway. If nothing else, this is a solid add-on to a great base game. I just can't think of anything about it that makes Dawn of War any more of a "must-play" than it already is. —ADAM



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Expand on last year's delightful Dawn of War by adding another faction, new units, and two more campaigns

> **Graphics:** It's not like Dawn of War's engine has somehow lost its luster – this is as pretty as can be

> **Sound:** Chaos Marines are as annoying as ever, but otherwise there are no complaints

> **Playability:** Once you get used to the odd way Relic maps the hotkeys, the control is gravy

> **Entertainment:** This is plenty of bang for your buck if you already own the base game

> **Replay Value:** High

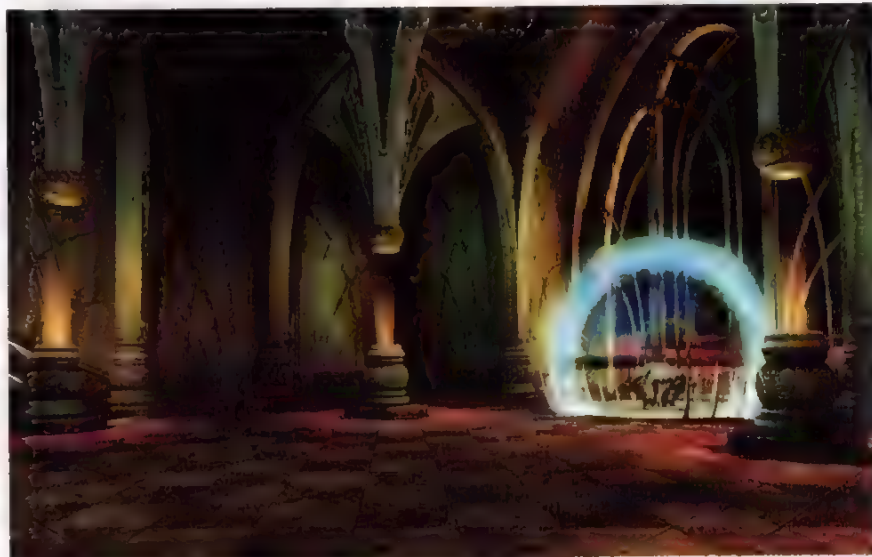
Second Opinion 8.75

Warhammer maintains its hold as the heir apparent to the sci-fi RTS crown with this, the first expansion to one of the best strategy titles in recent years. The new units and campaign offer more of what makes the game so mesmerizing – that is, bigger weapons, battles, and onscreen carnage. The missions this time around manage to convey better than before a sense that each scenario is a truly tremendous conflict. To paraphrase one of the game's characters, every battle is a war unto itself. The onscreen chaos once a skirmish ensues is even harder than before to keep track of. Even so, that's less a complaint than it is a comment on how well the game manages to approximate an intense firefight. If you haven't already, play the original – then follow it up with this as soon as humanly possible. —MILLER

PC

Myst V: End of Ages

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** CYAN WORLDS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** E



ONE LAST ACT

Being beautiful and challenging is just more of the same for the Myst series. As a fan, that's not an issue for me. As a reviewer, I can't really reward a series for resting on its well-established laurels. It is fair, though, to compliment a series sendoff for doing what it does best and waving goodbye to the tale's hardcore followers.

This being the first traditional Myst game from series creator Cyan Worlds since Riven (Uru was also made by the company, but arrived at retail crippled with the loss of its planned online features), it's nice to see the team toying with the ideas it pioneered. Worlds are more imaginative. Puzzles are just as clever. The story, a huge (and some would argue long-winded) part of the series, ties into all of the past games and even some territory only covered by the novels. Truly, this is a fan's game.

But, even as a big Myst dork, I can see that there are problems. For the first few hours, an essentially new character (Esher) shows up entirely too much. He talks and talks...and talks and talks. I dislike not so much that he's one chatty customer, but

more that he's ruining my normally quiet and methodical exploration. I want some time to breathe and get my bearings before this dude starts talking to me about the choices I'll need to make.

Other new touches are less distracting. The multiple control schemes are nice options (classic, Uru-styled FPS, and a middle ground between the two each work as planned). A tablet drawing system opens up new puzzle options by letting players control in-age linking and some weather conditions. Slightly more subtle additions are the 3D modeled characters, improved physics, and additional ambient life.

All of this combines together as a bit of a mixed bag for me. As a fan, I can forgive its flaws and take great joy in the maddeningly logical puzzles. I love 'em. As a critic, there are issues here, but I don't think that any of them are long lasting or severe enough to really ruin the experience outright. This final Myst game truly is beautiful and challenging, and that covers the majority of what I want from Cyan's last dance with the series. —LISA

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Craft a series send-off just for the fans

> **Graphics:** Even the biggest haters can't knock Myst for its looks. The game is gorgeous

> **Sound:** A subtle score for each area picks up the pace when you're on the right track

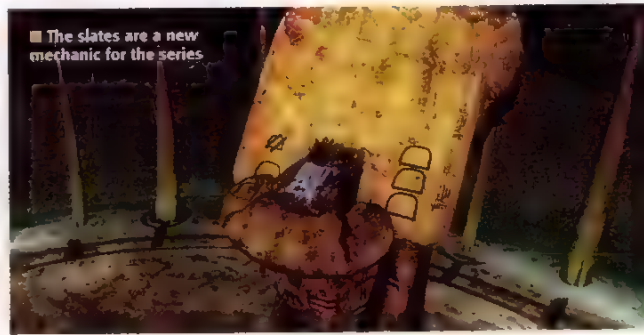
> **Playability:** Different control options should make practically anyone happy

> **Entertainment:** For fans, this is almost an obligation

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

I didn't start playing Myst because I like my hand held. I enjoy the undirected exploration and the piecing together of clues from the pages of forgotten tomes, which is precisely why I was disappointed by the series' final chapter. The puzzles themselves are as compelling and intricate as ever, but everything surrounding them seems tailored to the tastes of adventure game newcomers, greatly diminishing the sense of discovery. Books play a much smaller role, many important clues are planted in obvious places, and some dingus named Esher keeps appearing to pat me on the back for going in the right direction. Still, even if it can't stand up to the likes of Riven, Myst V is a decent adventure and an intriguing end to the saga of Atrus and his progeny. —JOE



■ The slates are a new mechanic for the series

INUYASHA

FEUDAL COMBAT



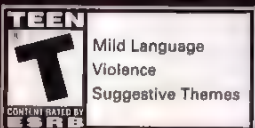
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CALL OF CTHULHU

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STRONG LANGUAGE
USE OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL
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PSP

Gripshift

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING/PUZZLE (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** PLATFORM PUBLISHING/RED MILE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SIDHE INTERACTIVE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 19 > **ESRB** E



SOMETHING NEW

It's not terribly often that a game comes completely out of the blue and totally blindsides you. You know the ones — you've barely heard of it, you give it a try, and you're instantly hooked. Welcome to my experience with Gripshift, one of the smartest, coolest, and most stand-apart titles I've popped into my PSP.

While first glance may draw the eyes of racing enthusiasts, it's another type of fan who is going to feel most at home in the beginning — those who play Super Monkey Ball. Like that game, the core of Gripshift is a sequence increasingly difficult challenges (over 100, if you're keeping count). Each stage has you earning credits to unlock more features by completing simple speed and collection objectives — the puzzle element comes from the path that you navigate through the course. Each of the tiny tracks is wildly diverse, with just the right mix of fun and frustration to keep you retrying again and again.

If you ever tire of the lengthy challenge mode, you will have by then already unlocked several of the clever minigames that populate the title, including a crazy little soccer game with cars for players and another that acts as an homage to the classic Snake Byte game. Both these and the races can be played wirelessly with up to four players. In my mind, the real crown jewel that puts the game over the top is the track editor that is included, allowing you to craft intricate courses from scratch, and then share them with your buddies via ad hoc.

The frustrating and repetitive action that is inherent to Gripshift may be enough to scare off low-patience players, but most gamers will simply use their frequent failures as fuel to keep driving. The simplicity of the game is deceptive; this is immensely entertaining fun in a tight, clean, and ultimately cool little package. —MILLER



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Drive your way through dozens of tiny challenges, minigames, and races in one of the most surprising sleeper hits to emerge for the fledgling PSP

> **Graphics:** Vibrant and fast — what more do you need?

> **Sound:** A surprising mix of beats and tunes works really well somehow

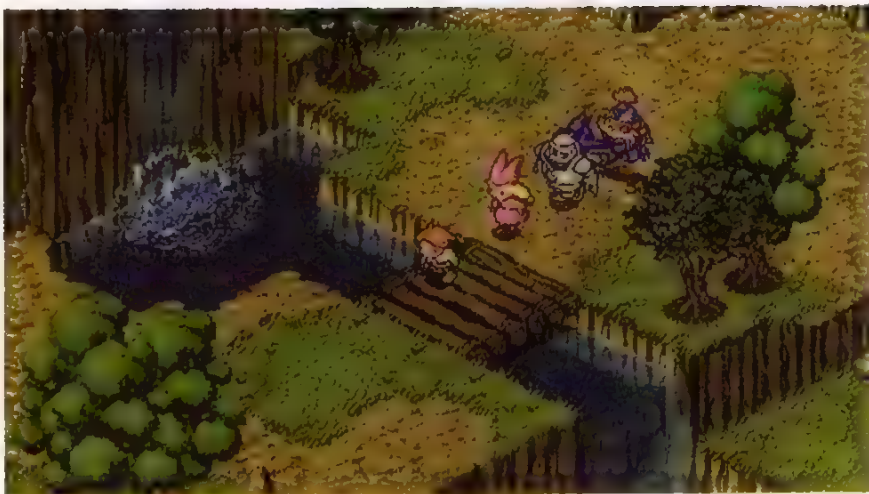
> **Playability:** Throws genuine physics out the window, but it totally works

> **Entertainment:** Tons of fun for both racing and puzzle aficionados — addictive and unique

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion

Gripshift cooks up a strange stew, one that combines the driving and puzzle genres with a little pinch of Super Monkey Ball for added flavor. All in all, it's a pretty tasty dish. At first, I thought the vehicle physics (which allow you to brake in midair, among other oddities) were just plain wrong. But after awhile, I accepted the fact that this is not really a driving title and, as such, the strange feel does make sense in the context of the game. The further I got, the more addicted I became, as I tried to accomplish level goals like collecting all the stars or getting a gold medal for the fastest time. Gripshift forces you to maintain a delicate balance between speed and precision, and maintains your interest by steadily unveiling more complex level designs and cool unlockables as you progress through the Challenge Mode. This is a unique and intriguing game, one well suited for the PSP. —MATT



PSP

PoPoLoCrois

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ACETEC > **DEVELOPER** SCEI > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 4 > **ESRB** E

THE GAMER'S GAME

Much ink has been spent discussing the idea that the PSP is lacking original IPs in its game lineup. Technically, PoPoLoCrois doesn't solve this problem, but for a vast majority of North American gamers, the franchise will be an entirely new (and delightful) discovery.

The long-running and much-beloved series has shown up in Japan as manga, an anime series, and a few classically designed strategy/RPG titles. This wonderfully localized PSP game is actually a retelling of the first two PoPoLoCrois titles released in Japan, with an original tale added to bridge the two. Personally, I think that we're the lucky ones, with our first look at the series being so polished. Here is a fun, old school RPG with the quirky look of 16-bit sprites fancied up with modern technology. Loads of details pepper every environment, a great soundtrack has a selection from practically every musical genre (bagpipes, industrial grind, and flittering lutes are all there), and the quest is long enough to satiate those looking for a

real "gamer's game" on PSP.

Even with a few minor annoyances like forced backtracking, I couldn't put the game down. The young characters whose story plays out over a decade are charming, funny, and believably complex. I'd love to say that the overall plot is really amazing, but the truth is that the major story points are trite and predictable, and yet that didn't turn me off from the universe or characters. They practically begged for me to see their tale out.

A light strategy tint to the RPG combat is a nice touch that makes even the easy first chapter fun and interesting. Placement of your team members is crucial, as is managing magic points. Thankfully, the only major concession made to the normal RPG formula, in terms of difficulty, is the option to save at any time.

There is a slew of console RPGs released every year that aren't nearly as good as PoPoLoCrois. Don't be dissuaded by the kid-friendly appearance, this is a thoughtful game both emotionally and strategically. —LISA



The grid system is basic, but just important enough to add another layer to battles

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Let handheld gamers in on a big secret (i.e. that previously Japanese-only RPG PoPoLoCrois rocks)

> **Graphics:** Old-school flavor with current gen use of color, detail, and the bright PSP screen

> **Sound:** Totally different soundtracks for each zone in the game are really cool, but sometimes jarring

> **Playability:** Easy navigation and battle system controls make for easy and fun exploration

> **Entertainment:** Kiddy and cutesy, but undeniably charming

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion

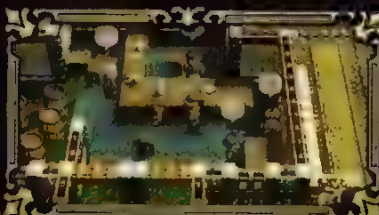
RPG fans have been eagerly awaiting something to sink their teeth into on the PSP, and PoPoLoCrois should fit the bill nicely. The charm of the title lies in its child-like characters, animated cutscenes, and fairy tale world, which remind me more than anything else of a Miyazaki film like *Spirited Away*. The grid-based combat system has just enough strategy to be compelling, so that the overly frequent random encounters are actually pretty fun. The game's story takes several hours to ramp up to speed, but I eventually started to feel genuinely attached to Prince Pietro and his oddly hilarious band of friends. The briefest of load times plague the game, causing pauses for everything from passing into a new room to casting a spell. Even with this minor technical flaw, I still found myself hooked into the simple tale, and I'd be surprised if fellow RPG enthusiasts weren't able to muster equal levels of enjoyment from the game. —MILLER

The Legend of Heroes

On his quest for light, will Avin survive the darkness?

In the post-Gaghav era, the land of El Phildin is consumed by a bitter war. As its citizens fight to survive, one will be taken by the darkness.

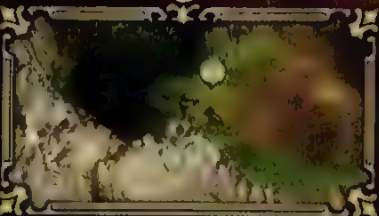
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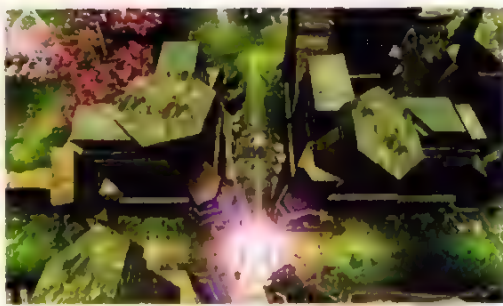


Falcom



PLAYING IS BELIEVING™

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PSP

Frantix

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** PLATFORM PUBLISHING
> **DEVELOPER** KILLER GAME > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 12 > **ESRB** E

BOX PUZZLES AHOY!

This new round of handhelds has seen some great additions to the puzzle genre, and now Killer Game and Platform Publishing are attempting to add an action-oriented twist to the proceedings with Frantix. While I applaud their efforts, Frantix has some problems that keep this game from reaching the heights achieved by titles like Lumines and Meteos.

The game is comprised of more than 150 bite-sized levels, in which your onscreen avatar must reach the final gate by navigating maze-like environments filled with various environmental obstacles, gates, and other dangers like the quick moving "cat dragons." I like the pacing; each level only lasts a couple of minutes at most, making this ideal for quick in-and-out gaming sessions on the train or in a cab.

My misgivings with Frantix lay mostly in the fundamental design. While some of the puzzles are intelligently crafted, their impact suffers for the fact that Frantix largely revolves around pushing boxes, avoiding enemies that run on set pathways, and collecting gems to open gates—all design clichés that have been beaten to death in this generation and the last. Also, the action elements don't really add much more than the occasional cheap death, and the environments often feature window dressing (like trees) that needlessly obscure your view. Still, Frantix is often fun and engaging, despite its flaws. —MATT

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** A collection of action puzzles, reminiscent of many old-school platforming box and collection-style mind-benders

> **Graphics:** Solid, if unspectacular, but considering the genre it looks pretty good

> **Sound:** The music is not notable in any way, and the sounds the character makes when you run into obstacles become grating

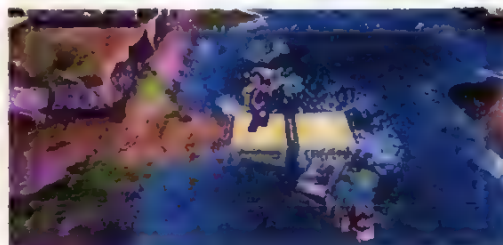
> **Playability:** Managing the camera can get a bit confusing, and there are some cheap deaths

> **Entertainment:** Not really my cup of tea, but fans of this micro-genre may get some kicks out of Frantix

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6.5

Frantix starts out as the vague promise of a puzzle game, but fails to deliver where it counts. Despite the fact that you only manipulate the four directions you wander in through the tiny maze-like levels, the control still feels awkward and imprecise, and the devices and puzzle elements all feel archaic, running along the box and switch variety. There are a lot of levels to keep you busy, but that's exactly how the whole game feels—like busy work. —MILLER

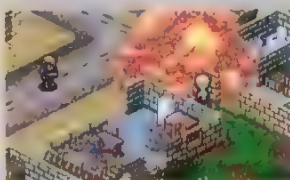


HANDHELD QUICKIES

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Rebelstar Tactical Command

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER STRATEGY
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO
> **DEVELOPER** CODO TECHNOLOGIES
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 6
> **ESRB** E 10+



BOTTOM LINE 9

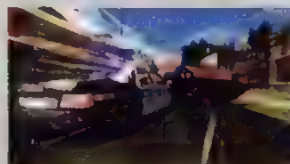
Visions of touch screens and memory sticks may be dancing in your head, but I can

guarantee you that Rebelstar Tactical Command on the GBA is more exciting than just about anything the DS or PSP has offered up so far. This tactical title avoids the tick-tock monotony of most turn-based games by not wholly separating your movement and attacks into different segments. Also, the Overwatch command lets you fire off rounds during your foes' turn. Integrating these options among the many strategic decisions at your feet will have you thinking ahead as a matter of survival. Throw in the different skills and weapons, the destructible environments, and playable characters, and there's quite a lot of game here. Apart from some minor camera issues, Rebelstar is a perfect fit for tactical fans. It proudly proves that even in this era of new handhelds, gameplay is still king. —KATO

PSP

Burnout Legends

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC)
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** CRITERION GAMES
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 13 > **ESRB** E 10+



BOTTOM LINE 8

While the PSP Burnout is truly a marvel (and a blast) in many regards, there are some issues

to contend with when booting up this portable version. First is the loading—expect around 30 seconds per level. Certainly, this isn't too bad when you're doing a two or three minute race, but consider that amount of loading for a three-second Crash mode run. Like other wonderfully ambitious titles (cough, Midnight Club, cough), you're going to have to decide for yourself if loading is a dealbreaker, but make the choice knowing that the rest of the game is as kickass as you would hope. —LISA

NINTENDO DS

Lost In Blue

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** E 10+



BRINGING HOME THE BACON

BOTTOM LINE 7

If someone had asked me a month ago whether or not I'd enjoy a game that consists of simplistic stylus-based minigames sprinkled through a series of repetitive actions, I'd have had a good laugh at what was obviously a joke. This is a pretty apt description of Lost In Blue's feature set, but for some odd reason this title manages to transcend its horrifically boring gameplay and become something more. Guiding two lost teenagers in their quest to not starve to death on an uninhabited island offers its own rewards, which are quite different than what we normally get out of gaming. There's no denying that there's a particular satisfaction to be had when Skye greets you in the morning with a smile and a laugh because you were able to bring home enough food to go to bed on a full stomach.

Unfortunately, even as you master each successive activity (gathering fruit, spearing fish, etc.), the game still forces you to perform it ad nauseum to fulfill your needs. Despite having a barrel in which to store drinking water, I'm still tied to the chore of hauling water a liter at a time between the river and my cozy little cave. It's like that for most needs—firewood, food, tools—and eventually becomes nothing but tedious makework. The utter lack of explanation of new gameplay mechanics (building furniture, for instance) as they come up can be a source of extreme frustration as well.

All of these complaints aside, Lost In Blue is nonetheless innovative, different, and oddly compelling. The game constantly walks the line between being needlessly annoying enough to stop playing and offering you cool enough rewards to keep you glued to the DS. Ultimately this is far from a shining star of the DS library, but if your tastes in gaming lean in the Harvest Moon or Animal Crossing directions, you could find some enjoyment here. —ADAM



> **Concept:** Eke out an existence on a deserted island, and eventually discover its secrets

> **Graphics:** If all DS games looked this bland and boring, it'd be a dead system

> **Sound:** There's a special hell reserved for developers who think that background music that only plays during five percent of a game is a good idea

> **Playability:** Somehow the extremely basic stylus activities convey a sense of connection with your character

> **Entertainment:** If it weren't for the inexplicable bond that can form between the player and two forlorn castaways, this would be total garbage

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6

Lost In Blue is the heart-warming story of two young castaways eating toxic mushrooms until they pass out. At least, it was for the first few hours I played it. Then I got around to exploring the deserted island and pursuing non-poisonous activities like weapon making and food collection. The various minigames for these tasks demonstrate a commitment to using the unique features of the DS without overusing the touch-screen, which is commendable. Sadly, few of these activities are even fun the first time, much less the dozens of times you are forced to repeat them. You need more than extensive rubbing, poking, and blowing to come out satisfied. —JOE

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NINTENDO DS

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 17 > **ESRB** T

PASSING THE BAR

It's a cliché, but Phoenix Wright is perfectly suited to the DS. Interestingly, most people probably wouldn't give this game the time of day if it was on any other system, and therein lies some of the problem in its appeal. How much fun can you have in a game where you're a lawyer with a hair gel problem? Well, more than you'd think.

The fun in Phoenix Wright not only lies in screaming "Objection!" into the DS microphone when some prosecutor tries to bully you around the courtroom, but it's also in the humor and characters that the game uses to fill in the gaps. Although the gameplay while you're in court is the same in each trial, I really liked how the story introduced twists and turns to keep me interested. It was nice to get out of the courtroom and do a little investigating, but eventually I found this segment began to wear a little thin. And that's where this game stands and falls. It's an interesting title that definitely gets your attention, but when it comes down to it, it's the story and not the gameplay that pulls you along. As such, Phoenix Wright is almost worthless a second time around.

For those out there who got a DS because they wanted new experiences, I think that this cart is your chance. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Investigate and solve cases with the style of Jackie Childs, the maverick flair of Matlock, and half the girth of Perry Mason

> **Graphics:** The style is sharp and the direction of the scenes is engaging

> **Sound:** The incidental sounds of the cutscenes are a nice touch

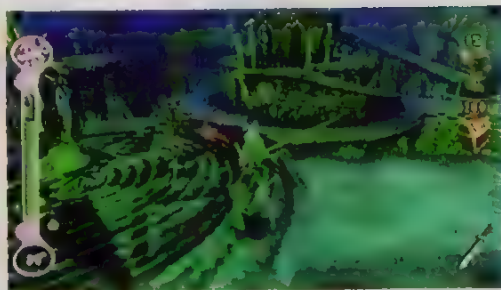
> **Playability:** Court documents and evidence are handily accessed via the touch screen

> **Entertainment:** It can get a little tedious at times, but the game's humor keeps things rolling

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 8

A classic "choose your own adventure" type game is a hidden gem that I always appreciate. In Phoenix Wright, there's no action, no combo system, but a heck of a lot of reading. What usually makes one of these titles better than the other is logical puzzles and the less tangible idea of charm. Wacky cases are the game's mainstay, but the character development is also skillfully done. Thankfully, Wright deftly uses all it can to make a name for itself in a genre often forgotten by modern gamers. —**LISA**



PSP

MediEvil Resurrection

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SCEE CAMBRIDGE STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 13 > **ESRB** E

NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN

I have a lot of fond memories of the original MediEvil. On a recommendation from Reiner, that PSone cult classic was one of the first games I ever checked out of the GI archives to play at home. As you might expect, I was very pleased to see that the series would finally make a return (via the PSP) after the less-than-stellar MediEvil 2. After finally getting a chance to play this new addition to the series, I'm a bit perplexed at my reaction. It's not that it's a bad game. To the contrary, it's a nice, old-school 32-bit action title with better graphics and that same offbeat British humor that has made so many of us fans of Sir Dan. Cambridge Studios has done a great job of translating the MediEvil formula over to the PSP, making good use of its vivid screen and even adding some multiplayer minigames. You're also able to save on the fly, in a nod to the shorter gaming sessions of the handheld crowd.

What they weren't able to overcome is the passage of time. MediEvil 2 came out in 2000, and much has changed in those five years. MediEvil Resurrection is largely based on old hack n' slash design tropes (like collecting runes to open doors and rudimentary arena-based boss battles) that seems a bit dated in this day and age. However, MediEvil still has its charms, and I think that fans like myself will find their time spent with Resurrection well worth it. Everyone else will continue waiting for the PSP's first great action title. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** A semi-sequel to the classic PSone cult hit

> **Graphics:** The series' quirky art style is well represented, with much smoother textures than its console predecessors

> **Sound:** Great score; its macabre whimsy is reminiscent of Danny Elfman's work for Tim Burton's films

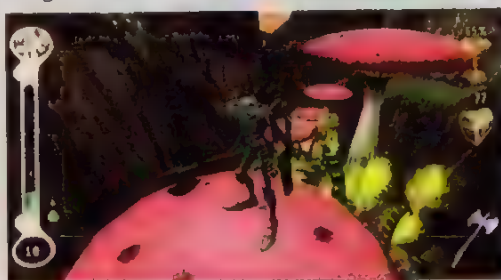
> **Playability:** Camera issues are going to dog most third-person action games on PSP, but generally there are no real headaches

> **Entertainment:** A nostalgic trip back to an old favorite, marred only by the feeling that time has passed MediEvil by

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

A steamer trunk bursting with personality can't quite pull this by-the-numbers action/adventure title from the realm of average. Middling creativity in the gameplay department is its main fault, but what MediEvil Resurrection lacks in updated action it makes up for in dialogue that often made me laugh aloud. This humor and the more elegant way it handles the PSP's control scheme are MediEvil's best achievements. Certainly, it's worth checking out to reminisce about the PSone title, but this follow-up doesn't quite rise to today's expectations. —**LISA**



NINTENDO DS

Trauma Center: Under the Knife

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** ATLUS
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 > **ESRB** T

NO NURSE RATCHED

Is there a more suitable use for the DS' touch screen than saving the lives of innocents? I can't think of one, but it's not because of any highfalutin' moral ideals. Nope, surgeries are perfect for this system because the gameplay is fun, maddeningly precise, and totally unique. What Atlus has proven with this release is that the DS is prime real estate for creativity and true innovation in video games and Trauma Center is an antibiotic to the industry's stagnate design dogmas.

These procedures get to be really hard, the medical stuff at least sounds reasonable, and the dialogue is outright bizarre. It's three degrees away from *General Hospital* and 40 from *ER* — and in my book, that's a good thing. Trauma Center doesn't bother with moral conundrums and malpractice insurance dues, and instead focuses on your magical abilities to slow down time and heal hopeless patients. And it's good fun.

It's the fast-paced, procedure driven puzzling gameplay that really sets Trauma Center apart. Just gross enough to be interesting, this is a clever title with a sprinkling of wacky touches to make it really unique. Just wait for the screen where your main character throws out his hand and says, "It's time to start...the operation!" —**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** A magical doctor finds his focus and the will to save lives

> **Graphics:** Thankfully stylized to make the surgery sections more palatable for us non-MD types

> **Sound:** Utterly lame chirps — most will immediately push the slider to mute and won't miss a thing

> **Playability:** Consistent and precise controls make the slaughter of your patients entirely your fault

> **Entertainment:** Largely holds the right balance between medical drama and Japanese quirk to make a highly original title for the DS

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.5

Wanted for malpractice suits in 12 states, I can find surgery solace in Trauma Center — where my habit of having a sip before slicing doesn't criminally impair my judgement. Actually, this game does require a steady hand and plenty of concentration, making it a challenging, if limited title. Time is usually of the essence, which can be frustrating since the touch screen detection is occasionally a little off. Thankfully, however, prostate surgery isn't your specialty. —**KATO**

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- 9-18 University of Cincinnati
- 9-19 Central Michigan
- 9-20 Syracuse University
- 9-21 University of SUNY-Buffalo
- 9-23 Penn State University
- 9-26 Temple University
- 9-27 Towson University
- 9-28 George Mason University
- 9-29 Wake Forest
- 9-30 Virginia Commonwealth
- 10-04 Florida International
- 10-06 University of Central Florida
- 10-11 University of Texas
- 10-12 University of Texas - San Antonio
- 10-13 Oklahoma State University
- 10-14 Kansas State University
- 10-19 Arizona State University

*Schedule subject to change

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An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For July 2005 Based On Units Sold

1 NCAA FOOTBALL 06 (PS2)



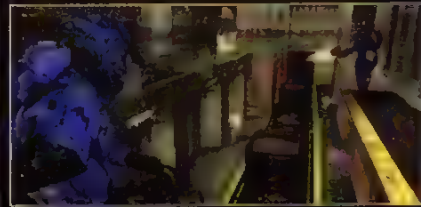
NCAA Football 06 is fine, but we can't wait for NCAA Football 2060. The teams will be comprised of only the richest kings of Europe, since only they will be able to afford college tuition. Of course, cybernetic upgrades will be common, and every team will have a Tyrannosaurus Rex for a quarterback. Yep, the future has dinosaurs.

2 NCAA FOOTBALL 06 (XBOX)



Actually, maybe having dinosaurs in the future isn't such a good idea. You know that all the cute girls will be dating them instead of us. At least in the present, we get rejected in favor of other humans. Future dinosaurs are jerks.

3 HALO 2: MULTIPLAYER MAP PACK (XBOX)



The title of this game is severely misleading. When we opened it, we just found a disc; there were no maps inside at all. Great. Now we still can't get to T.J. Maxx. It's never the same place twice!

4 POKÉMON EMERALD (GBA)



We're pretty sure that *Hotel Rwanda* actor Don Cheadle is a Pokémon. Think about it, all he ever says is "Cheadle, Cheadle!"

5 FANTASTIC FOUR (PS2)



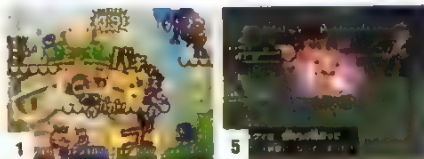
Reed Richards and company are pretty cool and everything, but we all know the identities of the true Fantastic Four: Doritos, Fritos, Bugles, and Fritos Scoops. Man, those are good - especially when dipped in pudding. Unlike Johnny Storm. Too salty.

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	NCAA Football 06	N/A	PS2	8.5	07-05	\$49
2	NCAA Football 06	N/A	XBOX	8.5	07-05	\$50
3	Halo 2: Multiplayer Map Pack	N/A	XBOX	9.25	07-05	\$20
4	Pokémon Emerald	2	GBA	7.75	04-05	\$35
5	Fantastic Four	N/A	PS2	7.5	06-05	\$50
6	Destroy All Humans	10	PS2	8	06-05	\$49
7	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	1	XBOX	9.75	06-05	\$48
8	LEGO Star Wars	6	PS2	7.5	03-05	\$39
9	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	N/A	PSP	8	06-05	\$49
10	Star Wars Battlefront	N/A	PS2	8	09-04	\$21
11	Coded Arms	N/A	PSP	6.75	07-05	\$40
12	Conker: Live and Reloaded	5	XBOX	8	06-05	\$49
13	MVP Baseball 2005	15	PS2	8.5	02-05	\$30
14	Destroy All Humans	N/A	XBOX	8	06-05	\$49
15	Medal of Honor: European Assault	4	PS2	7.75	06-05	\$39
16	Fantastic Four	N/A	GBA	N/A	06-05	\$30
17	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	N/A	XBOX	6.75	07-05	\$50
18	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9	PS2	9.5	04-05	\$49
19	Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith	3	PS2	5.75	05-05	\$47
20	Burnout 3: Takedown	N/A	PS2	9.25	09-04	\$20

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/FIRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

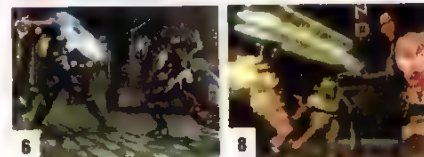
Rank	Title	System
1	Jump! Super Stars	DS
2	Winning Eleven 9	PS2
3	Gentle Brain Exercises	DS
4	Beetle King Mushiking: Way of the Greatest Champion	GBA
5	Pokémon XD	GC
6	Medal of Honor: European Assault	PS2
7	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain	DS
8	Mobile Suit Gundam Giren's Ambition: Zeon's Legacy	PSP
9	Grandia III	PS2
10	Super Robot Taisen Alpha	PS2



Source: Game Japan

TOP 10 GI

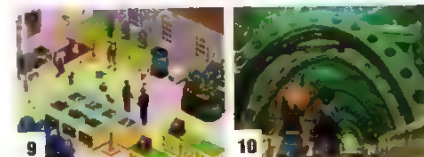
Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Radiata Stories	N/A	PS2
2	Burnout Revenge	N/A	Multi
3	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	N/A	Multi
4	Advance Wars: Dual Strike	1	DS
5	Shadow of the Colossus	N/A	PS2
6	Ninja Gaiden Black	N/A	Xbox
7	Madden NFL 06	2	Multi
8	The Suffering: Ties That Bind	N/A	Multi
9	Fable: The Lost Chapters	N/A	PC
10	Dungeon Siege II	N/A	PC



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	Battlefield 2	1	\$48
2	World of Warcraft	3	\$49
3	Guild Wars	2	\$49
4	The Sims 2 University	5	\$33
5	The Sims 2	7	\$47
6	The Sims Deluxe	8	\$20
7	Half-Life 2	9	\$42
8	RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	N/A	\$39
9	The Sims: Unleashed	N/A	\$10
10	RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked	N/A	\$29



Based On Monthly Units Sold

PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	9	Dec-04
Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed	5.5	Jan-05
Arc the Lad: End of Darkness	5.5	Jul-05
Area 51	8.5	May-05
Armored Core: Nine Breaker	6	Sep-05
Atan Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Atelier Ins: Eternal Mana	8.25	Jan-05
ATV Offroad Fury 3	7	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2		
There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04



Stella Deus: The Gate of Eternity - PS2 - May-05

Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Batman Begins	7.25	Aug-05
Battle Assault 3		
Featuring Gundam Seed	4	Jan-05
Beardown: Fists of Vengeance	5	Sep-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
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	4.5	Sep-05
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Cold Winter	8.25	Jun-05
Colosseum: Road to Freedom	7.25	Jul-05
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Darwath	8.5	Sep-05
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
EyeToy Play 2	8.5	Sep-05
Fantastic Four	6.5	Sep-05
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Flight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
FlatOut	6.5	Aug-05
Fipnic: Ultimate Pinball	6	Jul-05
Final Fantasy XI		
Chains of Promathia	7.75	Dec-04
FuJineta: 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
Graffiti Kingdom	6	Sep-05
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	10	Dec-04
Gra Turismo 4	9.25	Mar-05
Gretzky NHL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Crowlanser: Generations	7.5	Jan-05
Guilty Gear Isuka	6.75	Dec-04
Haunting Ground	4.75	May-05
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredible Hulk		
Ultimate Destruction, The	8.25	Sep-05
Incredible, 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
Killzone	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	8.5	Dec-04
Madagascar	7	Aug-05
Madden NFL 06	9	Sep-05
Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
Makai Kingdom		
Chronicles of the Sacred Tome	8	Aug-05
Medal of Honor: European Assault	7.75	Jul-05
Mega Man X8	8.25	Jan-05
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	9.5	Jan-05
Metal Slug 4 & 5	8	Jun-05
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9.5	May-05
MLB 2006	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	Mar-05
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05
Nation Breaker	5	Mar-05
NARC	4.5	May-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	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
NHL 06	7	Sep-05
Obscure	6	Jun-05
Outlaw Tennis	6.5	Sep-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
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
RPG 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
Showdown of Rome	8.5	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	7.75	Dec-04
Tekken 5	8.75	Apr-05
Tenchu: Fata's Shadows	7	Mar-05
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
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	Jan-05
Winning Eleven B	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
Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse	7.75	Mar-05
Ys: The Ark of Naphthim	7.5	Mar-05
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	6	Jan-05
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	3.25	Dec-04

GAMECUBE

Alien Hominid	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
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	4.5	Sep-05
Donkey Kong Jungle Beat	7.5	Apr-05
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jan-05
Fantastic Four	6.5	Sep-05
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
Gerst	6	Sep-05
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Incredible Hulk		
Ultimate Destruction, The	8.25	Sep-05
Incredible, The	6.5	Jan-05
Killer 7	7.5	Jul-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
Madden NFL 06	9	Sep-05
Mano Party 6	6.25	Feb-05
Mano Power Tennis	8.5	Jan-05
Mano Superstar Baseball	7	Sep-05
Method Prime 2: Echoes	9.5	Jan-05
Mortal Kombat: Deception	8.5	Apr-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05



Fight Night: Round 2 - GC - Mar-05

NHL 06	7	Sep-05
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
Star Fox Assault	7	Apr-05
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05

XBOX

Adventure Rising	7.75	Jul-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	8.25	Dec-04
Batman Begins	7.25	Aug-05
Beardown: Fists of Vengeance	5	Sep-05
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space	7	Jan-05
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	8.5	May-05
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	4.5	Sep-05
Chicago Enforcer	2	Mar-05
Close Combat: First to Fight	6	May-05
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Combat - Task Force 121	4	Jun-05
Conker: Live and Reloaded	8	Aug-05
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Dai Sennyaaku VI		
Modern Military Tactics	8	Mar-05
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 2	7.75	Dec-04
Darwath	8.5	Sep-05
Dead or Alive Ultimate	9	Dec-04
Dead to Rights 2: Hell to Pay	5	Jun-05
Destroy All Humans	8	Jul-05
Doom 3	9.25	Apr-05



Predator: Concrete Jungle - Xbox - June-05

Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jan-05
Drive to Survive	7	May-05
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
Fantastic Four	6.5	Sep-05
Fatal Frame III: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut	9.25	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
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	Aug-05
Gungnorr: Allied Strike	6	Feb-05
Halo 2	10	Dec-04
Halo 2: Multiplayer Map Pack	9.25	Sep-05
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredible Hulk		
Ultimate Destruction, The	8.25	Sep-05
Incredible, 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 of Fighters		
Maximum Impact Manx	5.75	Aug-05
LEGO Star Wars	7.5	May-05
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Madagascar	7	Aug-05
Madden NFL 06	9	Sep-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
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Slug 4&5	8	Jun-05
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9.5	May-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05
Myst IV Revelation	4.5	Jun-05
NARC	4.5	May-05
NBA 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
NHL 06	7	Sep-05
NHL 2K6	8	Sep-05
Obscure	6	Jun-05
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath	9	Feb-05
Outlaw Tennis	6.5	Sep-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
Sonic: Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	6.25	Jun-05
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.75	Apr-05
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-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
Tak 2, The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Top Gear RPM Tuning	5	Apr-05
Tork: Prehistoric Punk	6	Mar-05
Tork 2.0 Killer App	7	Jan-05
Ty the Tasmanian		
Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Ultra Bust-A-Move	7	Dec-04
Unreal Championship 2: The Land 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 B	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

Act of War - Direct Action	8.25	Apr-05
Arms 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
Chns 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
Codename: Panzers - Phase 2	8	Sep-05
Combat - Task Force 121	4	Jun-05
Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	9	Jul-05
Dungeon 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 Cities: 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	Jun-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 Caladwaes		
Jump to LightSpeed	8	Jan-05
Stronghold 2	6.75	Jun-05
SWAT 4	8.25	May-05
Trackmania Sunrise	7.25	Jul-05
Tribes: Vengeance	8.5	Dec-04
Vampire, The Masquerade - Bloodlines	7.5	Jan-05



Genji: Dawn of the Samurai

How To Master The Way Of The Sword

By Producer Kyle Shubel



KAMUI

Kamui is one of the coolest features in Genji. Basically, Kamui is the power given to users of the Amahagane where they can view combat from the "Mind's Eye." This defensive stance allows the player to slow down time and react with counterstrikes against the opposition. If you clear an area of all of the opponents without exiting Kamui, the player will receive additional experience points.

The key to remember here is that Kamui is FREE! Once the gauge is full, use it - you will only get more. Most players just pick up Genji will use it when instructed and forget it is there. The bonus experience points alone are worth using this ability, but couple that with taking less damage, and you get the idea about why it's really cool.

Another point to make about Kamui is if you successfully pull off a Kamui strike on a boss character (the ones with the additional HP bar at the bottom of the screen) there is a chance that you acquire a special item from the boss. Gather a few of these and you will be able to make special items at the blacksmith.

When running around the game world, there will be times where the Amahagane on the character's side will glow, as will the one in the top corner of the screen. You will also feel a throbbing in

the controller. This means that you are in close proximity to an Essence of Amahagane. If you are unable to find the Essence use your Kamui and you will be able to see its hiding place through your "Mind's Eye."

ESSENCE OF AMAHAGANE

The Essence of Amahagane that the player finds around the environment and on enemies gives the player the ability to customize their favorite character. One point to note here is that when the three parts of Essence are "spent" to upgrade Yoshitsune's Attack Power, those Essence are gone with no effect on Benkei. So, if you are having some difficulty with the tide, focus on one of the characters (either Yoshitsune or Benkei) and beef him up a little. This can take the edge off of an enemy making one character a bit more powerful.

Another advantage to the Essence of Amahagane is that raising the character's Health attribute also heals that character entirely. Use this as an impromptu healing potion if you ever run out of said potions and are in the thick of a fight.



CROWD CONTROL

Enemies will circle around behind you, attempt to flank you, etc. In these situations both characters have a crowd control ability which will assist in group fights.

For Yoshitsune, his speed is the key. The player is able to swing his attacks from one side to another in rapid sequence, moving around a circle of opponents to keep them on their heels. This will prevent being slaughtered from behind while he quickly builds up his Kamui gauge.

For Benkei, durability and raw power is the key. When Benkei starts one of his special



attacks, he is not disturbed by minor attacks. So, during the windup he will shrug off attacks from most minor opponents (watch out for bosses though), and the player will still get the shot off. Due to the long buildup of his attack, I find that it is better to string minor attacks together when fighting only a few baddies and wait for a crowd to do the larger attacks. Benkei has some good aerial attacks that inflict area effect damage.

It's all about keeping things in perspective, and choose your fights.



EQUIPMENT

There are many opportunities in the game to go back to the shops to sell off your old gear and things that you have picked up for a little extra cash. Do this and upgrade early and often. The better weapons and armor have a big effect on your fights.

By using Kamui on boss characters (see above) you can get special items (i.e. a broken sword, Nise's Claw). These items are also hidden around the levels. Take a few of these items back to the blacksmith and he may be able to craft you a special weapon (i.e. Nise's Claw Sword from the above items). These are typically better than weapons that are available in the shop. At whatever stage of the game you are in, Nise's toys are always a bonus.

Whenever you end up at the shops, don't forget to restock on potions and other items as well. Nothing pains me more than being in a fight only a couple experience points away from my level (where you get healed fully) just to get punked by some minor bad guy who lands a lucky shot from behind.

LEVELS

Don't forget that you have two characters available to you. When going through a level, there will be occasions where you will find a door that is too tough for Yoshitsune to break down or a bookshelf that is too high for Benkei to jump on. Remember these locations for the next time you can change characters and go back and check them out. Many times there are fun items or entirely different paths available through levels that are only available to one of the characters.

This is also another opportunity to gain experience points, as the levels will be repopulated when you go through. Remember that experience is shared between the characters, if Yoshitsune obtains the ninth level, Benkei is also ninth level. Character levels are the fastest and most efficient way to go up in statistics.

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!

PLAYSTATION 2

Shark Tale

During gameplay, press Select to enter the controller display screen. Then press and hold L1 while you enter your code. Release L1 to receive a confirmation.

Creatures Fly Off Screen When Touched

○ (x4), ×, ○ (x4)

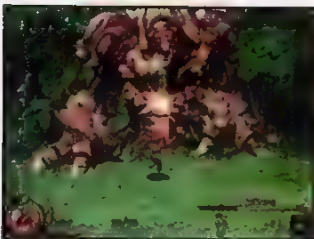
Invincibility - ×, ○, ×, Left (x2), □, R1, Down, □ (x2)

Replace Pearls With Coins - ○, ×, ○ (x3), ×, ○ (x2)

"GI Droid"

(location unknown -- last seen making "hot coffee" outside Starbucks)

Ys: The Ark of Napishtim



When you start a new game, select the Cheat option, then swing your sword at the corresponding gems in the correct order to unlock the cheat. Make sure and enter the master code first, or the others won't work.

Master Code - Red, Blue, Yellow, Red, Blue, Yellow

All Items Cost 1 G - Yellow (x3), Blue (x3), Red (x2), Yellow (x2), Red (x3), Blue (x3)

CG Beach Movie - Blue (x2), Red, Yellow

CG Napishtim Destroyed Movie - Blue, Red, Yellow, Red (x2), Blue, Yellow (x2)

Game Ending Movie - Yellow (x3), Blue (x2), Yellow (x3), Red (x3), Blue (x2), Yellow

Increase Item Maximum by 20 - Yellow (x2), Red (x2), Blue (x2), Yellow, Red

Maxed Out Blirante Sword - Blue (x2), Yellow (x3), Red, Blue, Red (x3), Yellow (x2)

Maxed Out Livart Sword - Blue (x3), Yellow (x2), Red, Blue, Red (x2), Yellow (x3)

Ohla's Bikini - Blue (x5), Yellow (x3), Red, Blue, Yellow (x2), Red (x3)

Opening Anime Movie From PC Mode - Red, Blue, Red

Start at Level 20 - Red, Blue (x2), Red (x2), Blue (x2)

Start at Level 40 - Red (x2), Blue, Red (x2), Blue (x2), Yellow

Start at Level 60 - Red (x2), Blue (x2), Yellow (x2), Red (x2), Blue (x2), Yellow (x2)

PSP

Archer Maclean's Mercury

Access All Worlds and Levels - At the main menu, select 2-Player mode and enter the initials "hg?". Then quit to the main menu and select 1-Player mode. In the main world selection screen hold L and R, and then press Select.

Code of the Month

NCAA 06 Football



Who needs to waste time unlocking stuff when a perfectly good code will do the job for you? Give it the old college try for the best in collegiate ball and use the time you saved to hit up all those frat parties you've been missing. We've heard they're cool. Right? Enter the following codes at the Pennant Collection Screen.

1st and 15 Pennant - THANKS

2004 Alabama All-Time Team - ROLL TIDE

2004 All-Americans Team - FUMBLE

Arkansas All-Time Team - WOOPIGSOOIE

Arkansas Mascot Team - BEAR DOWN

Auburn All-Time Team - WAR EAGLE

Baylor Ratings Boost - SIC EM

Blink Pennant (ref spots ball short for opponent) - FOR

Boing Pennant (opponent drops passes more) - REGISTERING

Clemson All-Time Team - DEATH VALLEY

Colorado All-Time Team - GLORY

Crossed The Line Card - TIBURON

Cuffed Card - EA SPORTS

Florida All-Time Team - GREAT TO BE

FSU All-Time Team - UPRISING

Georgia All-Time Team - HUNKER DOWN

Illinois Ratings Boost - OSKIE WOW

Iowa All-Time Team - ON IOWA

Iowa State Mascot Team - RED AND GOLD

Kansas Mascot Team - ROCK CHALK

Kansas State All-Time Team - VICTORY

LSU All-Time Team - GEAUX TIGERS

Miami All-Time Team - GREAT TO BE

Michigan All-Time Team - GO BLUE

Michigan State Mascot Team - GO GREEN

Minnesota Mascot Team - RAH RAH RAH

Mississippi State All-Time Team - HAIL STATE

Mizzou Mascot Team - MIZZOU RAH

NC State Mascot Team - GO PACK

Nebraska All-Time Team - GO BIG RED

Notre Dame All-Time Team - GOLDEN DOMER

NU Mascot Team - GO CATS

Ohio State All-Time Team - KILLER NUTS

Oklahoma All-Time Team - BOOMER

Ole Miss Mascot Team - HOPPY TOTTY

Oregon All-Time Team - QUACK ATTACK

OSU All-Time Team - GO POKES

Penn State All-Time Team - WE ARE

Pittsburgh All-Time Team - LETS GO PITT

Purdue All-Time Team - BOILER UP

South Carolina Mascot Team - GO CAROLINA

Stiffed Pennant - NCAA

Syracuse All-Time Team - ORANGE CRUSH

Take Your Time Pennant - FOOTBALL

Tennessee All-Time Team - BIG ORANGE

Texas AM All-Time Team - GIG EM

Texas All-Time Team - HOOK EM

Texas Tech Ratings Boost - FIGHT

UCLA All-Time Team - MIGHTY

UK Mascot Team - ON ON UK

UNC All-Time Team - RAH RAH

USC All-Time Team - FIGHT ON

UVA All-Time Team - WAHOOS

VT All-Time Team - TECH TRIUMPH

Wake Forest Mascot Team - GO DEACS GO

Washington All-Time Team - BOW DOWN

What A Hit Pennant - BLITZ

Wisconsin All-Time Team - I RAH RAH

WSU Mascot Team - ALL HAIL

WVU Mascot Team - HAIL WV

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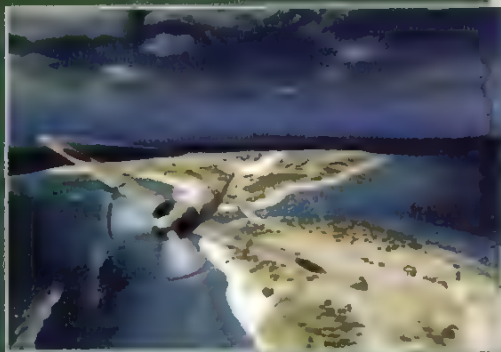
TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

GAME PROGRAMMING

Heroes of the Pacific

The Game's Producer Contributes To The War Effort

By Producer Justin Halliday



DOGFIGHTING

Once you can actually fly your plane comfortably, you need to be able to dogfight. Dogfighting can be divided into a few discrete techniques: Shooting, Maneuvering, and Strategy.

Shooting is relatively self-explanatory; it's the process of putting the lead into the other guy's plane. The keys to effective shooting are the range of your guns and to lead your target properly. Heroes of the Pacific makes both of these easy.

The target distance indicator at the bottom right corner of the screen shows the distance to your currently highlighted enemy target. Generally, your guns are effective to about 1,000-1,200 meters (3,000-3,500 ft.). Once your enemy is within this range, your bullets should be able to hit him or her.

The next thing to do is to lead your target. Because your bullets take time to travel the distance to your target, that plane probably isn't going to be in the same position anymore if you don't lead them correctly. The key here is to shoot where your target is going to be, rather than where he or she is already at. Again, Heroes makes this easy by changing the color of your target red when you're correctly leading your target.

Now that you can actually shoot your enemies, you need to know the best techniques for engaging them. Most of the planes that you'll be dogfighting in Heroes have guns that face straight forward so they are most vulnerable to attack from behind. However, most engagements start with a head-to-head charge, where both planes can fire on each other. This is okay if you have much stronger guns than your opponent, but if you're evenly matched or if you are weaker, then this type of attack should be avoided. Therefore, instead of engaging enemy fighters directly from the front, try flying to one side of them, and then turn in to attack when they're about 45 degrees in front of you. Using this technique, you can attack the enemy plane from the side, and then ease in behind it as it passes.

When flying a U.S. fighter against a Japanese fighter, you'll sometimes find yourself in a tight turnfight. If you're lucky, neither of you will be able to get onto the other's tail. If you're unlucky, the Japanese fighter will be more maneuverable and it'll slowly come around behind you. In these situations the best strategy is to break from the engagement and 'extend away' to put some distance between you and the enemy, then turn around and re-engage. In these uneven fights you need to use your plane's strengths against the enemy's weaknesses. If you're in a U.S. fighter, your strengths will be armor and speed. The Japanese fighters generally have stronger guns and are more maneuverable.

TARGETING AND CONTROLS

Heroes of the Pacific provides you with a set of player controls designed to help you to locate and eliminate your enemies. The first thing you'll notice is that Heroes automatically targets Mission Objectives for you. These Mission Objectives are always

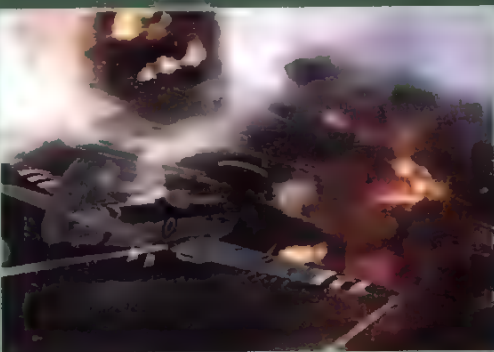
indicated by a yellow arrow. Shoot down a plane with a Mission Objective marker (the yellow indicator) and the next objective is automatically targeted for you.

The next player control function to get proficient with is Weapon Zoom. This function allows you to more accurately aim at distant targets. The default setting for Weapon Zoom is a toggle on/off, so pressing the button once zooms in, pressing it again returns you to normal zoom. When playing on the PS2, I find that Weapon Zoom works better when set to Hold Down, instead of Toggle On/Off (this doesn't apply to the Xbox, where the button layout is different). With it set to Hold Down, you can basically press R1 and R2 at the same time, so you zoom in as you fire. The last important thing about the Weapon Zoom function is to remember to turn it off again when your enemy gets close.

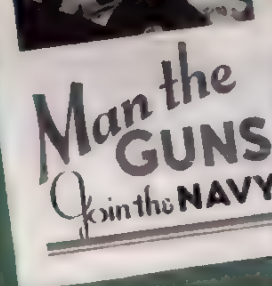
The final player control function that you may want to learn is Look To Target. This button, when pressed, moves the camera so that you can see your enemy's position in relation to your plane. This situational awareness is important when your target is behind you and you need to decide how to maneuver to get back behind him or her. Some players can actually play the game with this camera function activated all the time, which is pretty impressive.

ADVANCED DOGFIGHTING - ENERGY FIGHTING

The technique of energy fighting applies in Heroes of the Pacific as it does in real life. The key principle of this technique is the science of potential energy, and the ability to convert height into speed.



When using energy fighting correctly, you should constantly trade the potential energy of your height for kinetic energy of speed, and then speed back for height. In practical terms, this means that you should approach your enemy from a position of height (with as much speed as possible), and then dive down at him or her to attack. After your attack you should immediately climb again, converting your accumulated speed back into height.



ATTACKING SHIPS

Perhaps the hardest types of enemy units to attack in Heroes are the ships and carriers. These things are floating islands, bristling with guns and covered in thick armor plating. The trick to attacking ships is to use the right plane for the job. Generally, torpedo-bombers are better against carriers, and dive-bombers are better against battleships and cruisers. You can also use fighters to attack ships, but their GP bombs do less than half the damage that a special-purpose dive-bomb can inflict.

The one advantage of using a fighter, or the upgraded Dauntless dive-bomber, is that they have rockets. Rockets are especially useful for individually knocking out small zones on the ships (such as the bridge), and they can usually be fitted to planes along with bombs. With this rocket/bomb combination (set up in the Workshop), you can use rockets as you approach the ship, and then switch to bombs as you pass it, maximizing your use of explosive ordnance.

UPGRADED PLANES

By now you're probably wondering what to do with all these Upgrade Points. The answer is simple: SPEND THEM! Almost all of the planes in Heroes can be upgraded to better and badder versions. The base versions of planes that you unlock as you progress through the missions are the proverbial tip of the iceberg, representing just a third of the total number of planes in the game. The rest of the planes are there to be purchased, for the right price.

If you're playing through the Campaign mode the first time, you'll want to spend most of your upgrade points on the core set of U.S. fighters, and the primary U.S. torpedo-bomber and dive-bomber. These planes are: Warhawk, Wildcat, Corsair, Lightning, Helcat, Bearcat, Avenger, and Dauntless. The most cost-effective upgrades are for the planes that you'll be using for the most missions; Corsair, Lightning, and Helcat. Each of these planes is used in at least four missions.

The best technique for maximizing your Upgrade Points is to complete the first missions of the game on the highest difficulty possible without spending any of your points. If you can use this technique to get through Pearl Harbor and Wake Island on Pilot difficulty, by the time you get to Marshall Islands (and unlock the Corsair), you'll have at least eight upgrade points. If you completed just one Secondary Objective, you'll have enough Upgrade Points to upgrade the Corsair F4U-1 to the F4U-1D and then to the F4U-4, which has a cool paintjob and rockets!

The final trick is to take this plane into Mission Mode and re-complete the Pearl Harbor and Wake Island missions on Ace with this powerful plane. Before you know it, you'll be swimming in Upgrade Points, and you may even be able to upgrade each new plane as you are awarded it.

Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks

The Developers' Brutal Tips For Dismemberment



By Lead Designers Adam Puhl and John Edwards

THE POWER OF THROWS

Throws are a very useful tool in Single Player, Ko-Op, and Versus mode. During a throw, opponents cannot hit you. Additionally, you can aim the enemy you are throwing in any direction, and the enemy being thrown will hit other opponents they come in contact with, causing even more damage. This is a great way to clear a room or activate a puzzle. In Ko-op, throws are a great way to keep a juggled enemy in the air. One of our favorite things to do is to play "catch" by staying in the air performing throws back and forth with an enemy's body. In Versus mode, throws are also very powerful. Running throws and air throws are tough for the opponent to recover from, allowing you to throw an enemy outside of the arena. They also cannot be blocked in Versus mode. However, other attacks will beat the throw to the punch in Versus mode.

LONG JUMP FOR QUICK NAVIGATION

When you feel like getting past an area quicker, try using the Long Jump as a form of quick navigation. It allows you to move faster than just running, and is a great method for those hardcore gamers that want to beat their original playthrough time.

JUGGLE COMBOS AND EXP

It is possible to get hundreds of hits in a single combo if you know how to keep a combo going. One strategy is to always try and keep an enemy in the air. As long as an enemy is in the air, the combo counter will not go away and this also keeps the enemy busy as you attack other opponents. Performing a quick three-hit stun on one enemy then Multi-Directional Attacking other opponents is also a great way to avoid getting hit out of your big combo. Every 10 combo hits and enemy death adds "Multipliers" to the EXP you gain. If you are looking to gain EXP, avoid the background instant kills as those do not add EXP.

In Ko-Op, the best strategy is to try and keep juggling the same opponent. This will build up each individual combo counter as well as give you EXP through the Ko-Op combo counter. Then it just comes down to getting the last hit on the enemy to claim the kill and steal the EXP away from your partner.

ENEMY MANIPULATION

An extra feature in MK: SM is the enemy manipulation system. This allows the player to take control of an enemy and use them as a human shield. By holding down the modifier button and pressing throw, you will grab an opponent and take control of them. This feature works great when you need to bring a live body to a specific area that is required to solve a puzzle. Purchasing upgrades to this ability allows you to perform a variety of attacks on the manipulated opponent and inflict fire damage. Use this feature on opponents to get in a free hit or as a means in Ko-Op to taking down a single opponent quickly. Liu Kang can hold the opponent as Kung Lao unleashes a flurry of uninterrupted combo attacks or vice versa. Also within the Manipulation moves both Liu Kang and Kung Lao have great power attacks that can be purchased in the upgrade system.

BIG ENEMY BATTLES

Fighting large opponents that don't get knocked down easily, such as Goro or the Orochi Hellbeast, can be a tough but rewarding battle. The first strategy is to use the monk's agility against these slower opponents. Running attacks are great ways to slide right under the giant's feet and stay safe from retaliation. Frequently evading and staying away from the front of these large enemies is key to their defeat. A secret strategy on defeating the Orochi Hellbeast is to build up your Fatality meter to level three and then perform a Brutality on a smaller opponent he has around him. This will put you into Brutality mode and allow you to bombard the Hellbeast with unstoppable and powerful Brutality attacks. The large enemies are also great opponents for building up EXP. You can get some huge combos on large opponents and since these enemies reward you with larger EXP the multipliers can give you huge bonuses.

QUICK GET-UPS, GET-UP ATTACKS, AND AIR RECOVERY

Escaping from a combo can become just as important as knowing how to perform them. If you are on the ground, press the jump button for a quick recovery or an attack button to perform a getup move. If you are knocked into the air, press the jump button to perform an air recovery. The player cannot be hit during any of these recovery tactics. In Versus mode you will need to learn the best time to perform an air recovery or you will get caught with a juggle combo again. Watch your opponent and if they try to attack you while you are in the air, press the jump button to recover and then perform an air throw for the best possible results.

BOSS BATTLES

Boss battles are generally quite a bit more challenging than the other enemies in MK: SM. The bosses usually block more, counter more, and hurt more. In some boss battles there may be additional NPCs that can be used to your advantage. Try putting the flaming monks in the Baraka battle out of their misery with a merciful fireball or hat attack to replenish some health. Attacking bosses in the air too often will cause them to counter attack you in the air for big damage. Be sure to mix up your attacks between ground and air to avoid a humiliating defeat.

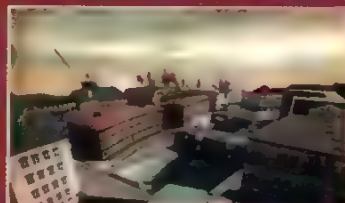
The bosses also learn which attacks you perform frequently and begin to block and counter them more often. If you notice that a boss is constantly blocking your quick attacks begin using launching or power attacks to keep them off balance. After a few of these attacks they will once again be open for the quick attacks. Varied attacks will serve you well in boss encounters. Some of the special navigation abilities can be used in boss battles as well. The Long Jump is great to use to get away from powerful attacks that have a large hit-range, such as Goro's pillar attacks, the Oni Warlord's dubbing attacks, or Scorpion's swinging spear attacks.

Mod World

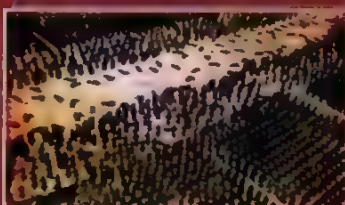
HALF-LIFE 2

Iron Grip: The Oppression

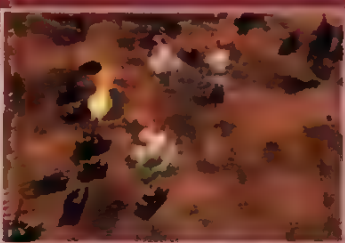
<http://www.isobc.com>



Far from your run-of-the-mill setting change, this in-development conversion of Half-Life 2 is much more ambitious. It's multiplayer only (but who downloads mods without a broadband connection? News, that's who), and the gameplay has one player controlling the defending government forces RTS-style while others take control of a single member of the Resistance and fight the power with their FPS skills. If enough Resistance players join, the general can get another player on his side to be an officer, and lead government forces on the ground in the FPS mode.



Games progress on a timer, with the Resistance trying to neutralize (that's a military term for blow up) a number of power generators in order, and then reach the government headquarters. Should they fail to do so in the time limit, the game ends with an airstrike coming in and owning (that's a nerd term for blowing up) the rebels. Hopefully the game turns out; this could be rather entertaining. Check out the above website for the trailer, news, and more.



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

MidEast Crisis

<http://www.isobc.com>

As long as you're over at isobc.com, why not check out this finished total conversion of C&C Generals? In MidEast Crisis, the two factions of Israel and Syria fight over something or other, but the point is that it's a hypothetical modern warfare setting, and it's free. So give it a shot, would you? Interestingly, the team behind this mod actually traveled overseas to Israel to record authentic Israeli and Arabic voices for use in the game. Finally, the game is thankfully non-political and doesn't cast the Arabs as evil, heartless terrorists - for once.



BONUS GAMES

UNLOCKING THE HIDDEN LIBRARY



As this console cycle draws to a close, developers are pulling off more and more impressive feats of game design, pushing hardware to its limits and creating a flood of staggering games. With so many great games being released on the market, sometimes just having a fantastic product simply isn't enough. One tactic companies are using to get their games noticed are collector's editions loaded with special features, and sometimes, complete bonus games. Often, these games are hidden and unlockable only after completing certain actions in the main game. Other times they are heavily touted as an incentive to buy the game. Either way, there has been a slew of bonus titles included in video games recently, usually a classic iteration of the same series. Some of these games may be so well hidden you don't even know they're there. The following is a breakdown of games that include such bonuses and how to unlock many of them. By collecting these releases, you will be instantly creating a library of classic games, one that allows you to revisit video game history and trace its evolution.

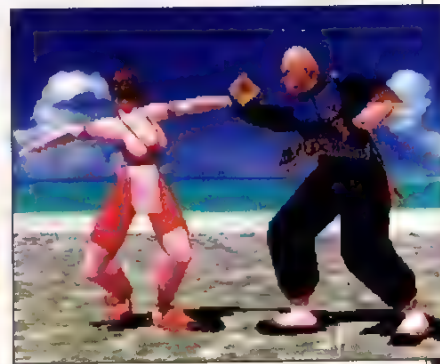
Fighter's History: Bonus Titles in Fighting Games

Recent fighting games in particular have been generous in their inclusion of older versions of the series, perhaps to entice gamers back to a genre that isn't as popular as it once was. The most recent versions of Mortal Kombat, Dead or Alive, and Tekken have all included older games in the series as part of the total package. Tekken 5 is easily the most generous of them all, including the arcade versions of the first three titles as well as the classic Namco shooter Star Blade, which is playable during loading screens. No special tricks are needed to play the

first three Tekken titles – they can simply be selected from the menu screen. Dead or Alive Ultimate features an online-enabled version of the original Japanese Dead or Alive, as well as a rebuilt version of Dead or Alive 2. Mortal Kombat: Deception features a port of the original title billed as "arcade perfect," but it is only included as part of the Collector's Edition, which is slightly higher priced than the standard release and only available on PS2 and Xbox. Mortal Kombat 2 is included as an unlockable bonus in the recently-released Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks.



"Tekken 5 is easily the most generous of them all..."



Familiar Franchises: Revisiting the Roots

Fighting games aren't the only ones revisiting the history of their franchises — many shooters and action games based on older series have included iterations. The Collector's Edition of Doom 3 for Xbox includes Ultimate Doom and Doom 2, as well as some other nice bonus materials. With two complete bonus games and some interesting additional material, the Doom 3 Collector's Edition sports arguably the best bonuses of the recent crop of limited edition games.

However, you don't have to shell out extra cash to get a title with extra games included. Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War (also for Xbox) includes a full version of the classic Wolfenstein 3D, which is unlocked by completing the single-player campaign mode. Both Tides of War and Doom 3 offer a great look at the evolution of first-person shooters.

Other action games offer unlockable titles as well. The PlayStation 2 and GameCube versions of Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time both feature the original game, which can be unlocked when you receive a new sword about a third of the way through the game. Use it to break a nearby wall and the Prince will say, "It's said they built this palace on the ruins of another..." Once you cross the next room, you will find a rotatable switch. Directly behind this switch is a breakable wall. If you hit it three times, you will find another room and you will receive a message informing you that Prince of Persia is now unlocked.

The Xbox version is a little different — it features both Prince of Persia and Prince of Persia 2. By completing the trick above, you will unlock Prince of Persia 2. The original game is unlocked simply by completing Sands of Time.

Unlocking Pitfall and Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns in Pitfall: The Lost Expedition isn't quite as complicated. A separate code unlocks each game, and it is a different code for each of the three versions. All of these codes are readily available online for those who wish to experience these classic Atari games, which are easily the highlight of this otherwise forgettable release. Another less-than-stellar title with a decent unlockable game is Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Battle Nexus, which features a port of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles arcade game. The game is unlocked by finding an artifact in a crate at the start of level 9-1. Show it to April, and the arcade game will be available in the Options menu.

A far better ninja game also has a nice treat to offer. The Xbox's Ninja Gaiden rewards players with the three NES Ninja Gaiden games for those who are devoted enough to earn them. With its notoriously hard difficulty, it's not surprising Ninja Gaiden's bonuses are fairly taxing to unlock. The first game can be unlocked by collecting 50 Golden Scarabs and trading them in at Muramasa's shop (which is harder than it sounds). To unlock the second game, you must have the first title in your inventory, and shoot the clock face of the tower with an arrow in Chapter 4 or later. Stand on the platform above the door that leads to Han's Bar to hit it. A treasure chest containing Ninja Gaiden II will appear on the roof of the building containing the tower.

The third game can be found on top of the pillar that once held a Golden Scarab at the Peristyle Passage in the Aqueduct, but only if you have the second title in your inventory. The three games can be played

in the arcade machine in Han's Bar or selected from the menu screen. The new re-release of the game, Ninja Gaiden Black, features the original Ninja Gaiden arcade game as well as the three NES titles. The arcade game, however, can simply be selected from the menu screen.

"...you don't have to shell out extra cash to get a title with extra games included."



Pitfall



Wolfenstein 3-D



Prince of Persia

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The Glory Days: Nintendo's Nostalgia

Although the Xbox has seen a lot of bonus games in its titles, Nintendo is the one of the companies most focused on preserving its past. Not only has Nintendo released many classic games for the Game Boy Advance, but it has also included many old favorites in its other games. Animal Crossing is perhaps the best example. The title features several 8-bit Nintendo games that can be found or purchased in the game including Balloon Fight, Clu Clu Land, and Excitebike. Many more games can be unlocked by connecting a GBA to the GameCube, and even more can be unlocked with the e-Reader peripheral. Still more can be unlocked with the Action Replay code device, including classics like The Legend of Zelda and Super Mario Bros. Detailing how to find all the hidden games in Animal Crossing would take far more space than is available here, but many fine guides can be found online.

Animal Crossing isn't the only game that uses GC/GBA connectivity as a means of unlocking classic games. Gamers can enjoy the original Metroid by beating Metroid Fusion on the GBA, then connecting to a GameCube with Metroid Prime in it. The original Metroid should then be available to play on the GameCube.



The Best of the Rest: More Hidden Treasures

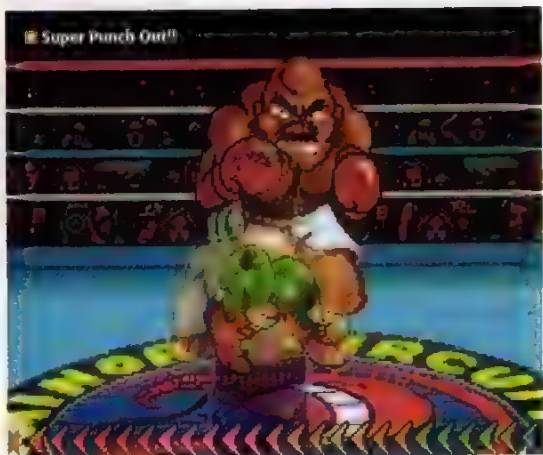
A few other GameCube titles house unlockable games that aren't directly part of the same franchise. Star Wars: Rebel Strike Rogue Squadron III features two games that, while Star Wars titles, go back to days long before the Rogue Squadron series. The original Star Wars and Empire Strikes Back arcade games can both be unlocked with codes ("R T J P F C I G - T I M E W A R P" for Star Wars and "I H I F ? H X S - K O O L S T U F" for Empire Strikes Back). While these games aren't technically part of the same series as the Rogue Squadron games, they do present a nice look at how Star Wars flight simulators have evolved over the years.

The bonus title in the GameCube version of Fight Night Round 2 is related by theme only. Perhaps to make up for its lack of online play, the GameCube version of Round 2 is the only one to feature a bonus game, and it's a good one - Super Punch-Out!! This classic SNES boxing game can be selected from the main menu and its star, Little Mac, can even be unlocked to use in Round 2's Career Mode.

Finally, you will occasionally find a title with a completely original bonus game, such as Project Gotham Racing 2 for the Xbox. In the garage, there is an arcade machine that houses a fun little game called Geometry Wars. While not a real classic game, it has a very old school feel and is quite addictive. Basically an updated version of Asteroids, Geometry Wars may not be an old favorite, but it's still a very decent bonus game that's well worth playing.

There are definitely more classic games hidden away in other recent releases, and many other older games will certainly be included in future entries of long-running franchises. This is by no means a complete list, just a primer to get you looking for the hidden collection of games that you may not realize you own. Not only do these let you revisit the history of a particular franchise, they give you more entertainment value for your money. Enjoy! ■■■■

"...you will occasionally find a title with a completely original bonus game."



■ Geometry Wars



■ Star Wars

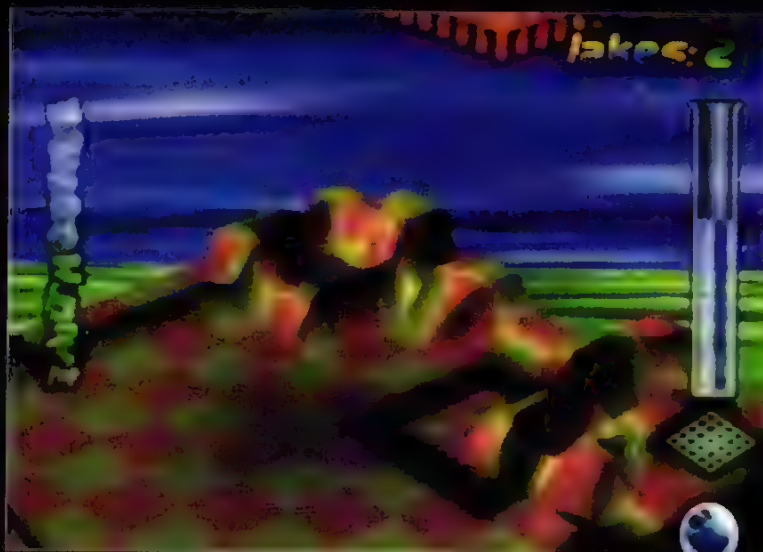
Compilation Discs

Another recent trend has seen the release of compilation discs that collect old titles and typically sell for a budget price. Picking up these games is a great way to start an instant collection of classics. Many even include additional titles that aren't readily available, and must be unlocked. The following is a list of some of the best compilation discs out there today.

- Activision Anthology (PS2)
- Atari Anthology! (PS2/Xbox)
- Intellivision Lives! (PS2/Xbox/GC)
- Mega Man Anniversary Collection (PS2/Xbox/GC)
- Midway Arcade Treasures (PS2, Xbox, GC)
- Midway Arcade Treasures 2 (PS2, Xbox, GC)
- Namco Museum (PS2)
- Sonic Mega Collection Plus (PS2/Xbox)



One of the best recent compilation discs was never made available for individual retail sale. The Legend of Zelda Collector's Edition disc was only available as part of a GameCube bundle, and features four classic Zelda games. The bundle is no longer available, but fortunately the disc is fairly easy to find in used game stores and on online auction sites. Another Zelda compilation was given away as a preorder bonus for Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, which featured both N64 Zelda games. This disc is also readily available secondhand.

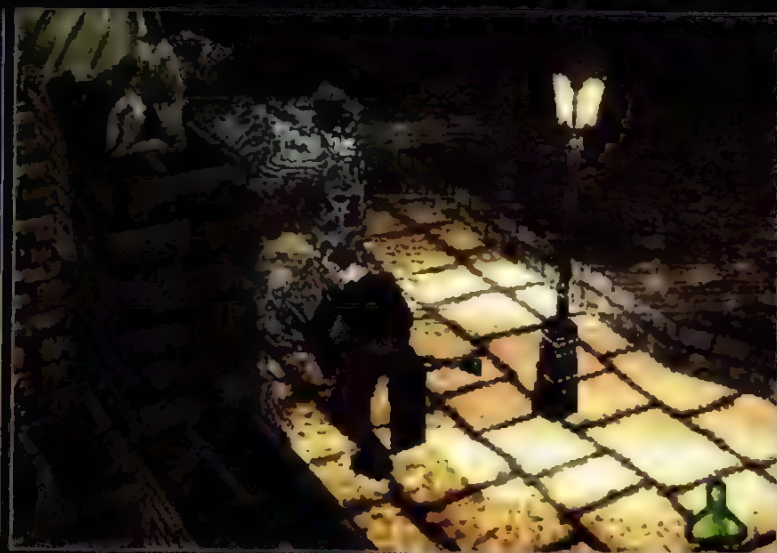
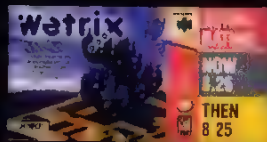


N64

WETRIX

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** OCEAN OF AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** ZED TWO GAME DESIGN STUDIO > **RELEASE** 1998

After Tetris helped the Game Boy become a portable gaming juggernaut, puzzle games became a staple for every system. Wetrix for the N64 is definitely a solidly addictive brain teaser, but doesn't quite reach the classic level of Tetris or the recent Lumines. The goal is simple, but tricky to master initially: use falling blocks to create walls that prevent water from leaking over the side of the board. After a few rounds of falling blocks, water masses of different sizes begin to drop, and you must work as quickly as you can to shore up leaks. Bombs, fireballs, and "downers" that erase walls are all part of the mix, as are ice cubes that freeze water and earthquakes. The large variety of reactions these objects have on the board can be frustrating and can end your best game in seconds. Regardless, once you get the hang of things, Wetrix is hard to resist. With simple goals and short games, it's easy to play a dozen games in one sitting. It may not be a truly timeless puzzler, but it's close.



PSONE

NIGHTMARE CREATURES

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTVISION > **DEVELOPER** KALISTO > **RELEASE** 1999

It's no secret that the PSone's stable of 3D action games hasn't aged well, but Nightmare Creatures may have held up better than most. Unlike many games of the era, replaying this horror-themed brawler doesn't greet the player with constant environmental tearing or an inconsistent framerate. It does, however, still have its share of problems, primarily the terrible Resident Evil-style controls, which are simply not fit for an action game. Although the lack of camera control is sorely missed, the game's camera functions well compared to its contemporaries. And while the graphics now border on hideous, bashing through Nightmare Creatures' lineup of monsters is still fun. There are some nice combos and items at your fingertips, and the boss fights and adrenaline meter (which is tied to your health) display an innovation that's missing in even some of today's action games. If you feel like revisiting the world of early 3D action, Nightmare Creatures is decent choice, but you should be aware that any game you pick might be better left as a pleasant memory.



DREAMCAST

TYPING OF THE DEAD

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SMILE INC/SEGA > **RELEASE** 2000

Imagine how much fun school would have been if all typing classes featured ravenous zombies, axe-wielding freaks, and characters so dull that they actually make your teachers seem cool. Typing of the Dead is undoubtedly one of the strangest games to crawl out of Sega's workshop, but it's also one of the greatest. On an interesting note, it's actually a more addictive and challenging game than the original game that it is based on. Sega simply took House of the Dead 2 and replaced the light gun functionality with typing. When zombies come at you, a word appears on their chest. Type it out and you'll take them down. The faster and more precise that your pounding of the keys is, the better your rank. It's not just a game, however. This odd little title will also improve your typing skills. Game Informer's own Jeremy Zoss actually used Typing of the Dead to better his typing speed prior to applying for his position. Just imagine what it can do for you!





GAMEOVER

Your Disc May Be Damaged Or Dirty

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Every console generation seems to add another poster boy to the industry's stable of iconic characters, from Mario and Sonic to Crash Bandicoot and Master Chief. With the next generation within reach, answer these questions to see which new face will represent your gaming experience in the years to come.

1 According to Ryu's victory taunt in *Street Fighter II Turbo*, who must you defeat to stand a chance?

- A. Akuma
- B. Sheng Long
- C. Wang Chung
- D. Shih Tzu

2 Tag Team Wrestling for the NES had flawless localization, as evidenced by the names of the game's only two teams, the *Ricky Fighters* and the...

- A. Mighty Foes
- B. Strong Bads
- C. Punching Hits
- D. Toughguy Dudes



3 In this shot from the 1989 favorite *A Boy and His Blob*, what flavor of jellybean has the blob been fed to transform it into a ladder?

- A. Licorice
- B. Tangerine
- C. Rootbeer
- D. Vanilla



4 Nothing says "I have problems" better than blood-spattered surgical attire. Speaking of which, what is the name of the creepy doctor that studies *Torque in The Suffering*?

- A. Dr. Feelgood
- B. Dr. Artemis
- C. Dr. Payne
- D. Dr. Killjoy

5 Which of the following Aeon does NOT make a reappearance in Square Enix's girlfest *Final Fantasy X-2*?

- A. Yojimbo
- B. Magus Sisters
- C. Anima
- D. They all return in a rip-roaring Aeon hootenanny



6 Believe it or not, sometimes Hollywood makes mistakes. One of these actors' careers isn't marred by a horrific video game-based movie. Who is it?

- A. Dennis Hopper
- B. Raul Julia
- C. Steven Seagal
- D. Christopher Lambert

7 If you're looking for aggressive aquatic life with pointy tusks, *Riven* is the place for you. This is a shot of which of the *Myst* sequel's fictional beasts?

- A. Sunner
- B. Wahrk
- C. Snipe
- D. Land Shark



8 Name the company that was a subsidiary of Konami in the '80s and '90s, bringing us classics like *Metal Gear*, *Skate or Die*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

- A. Ultra Games
- B. Data East
- C. Taito
- D. Psygnosis

9 Not counting the d-pad or analog stick, how many buttons are on the N64 controller?

- A. 9
- B. 10
- C. 11
- D. Like, a jillion

10 Which of these totally sweet robots starred in a game that scored a 3.5 in May 2003, disobeying the prime directive "Don't suck really bad"?

- A. Gigantor
- B. The Iron Giant
- C. Megatron
- D. Robocop



BREAKDOWN

100% of Game Informer's readers should buy Psychonauts. Seriously.

0% of the Adams in our office are cool.

10% of software engineers are female. The other 90 percent want to date them.

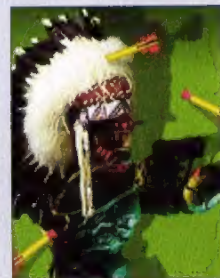
17.5% of consumers don't download mobile phone games simply because they just don't understand what to do, according to a recent survey.

42% The amount of time we were wearing pants while writing this issue.

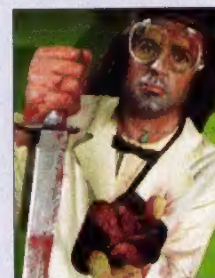
★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:
Poindexter Nerdstrom



2-3:
Maestro Chieftain



4-5:
Professor Rex Napalm



6-7:
The Wumpus



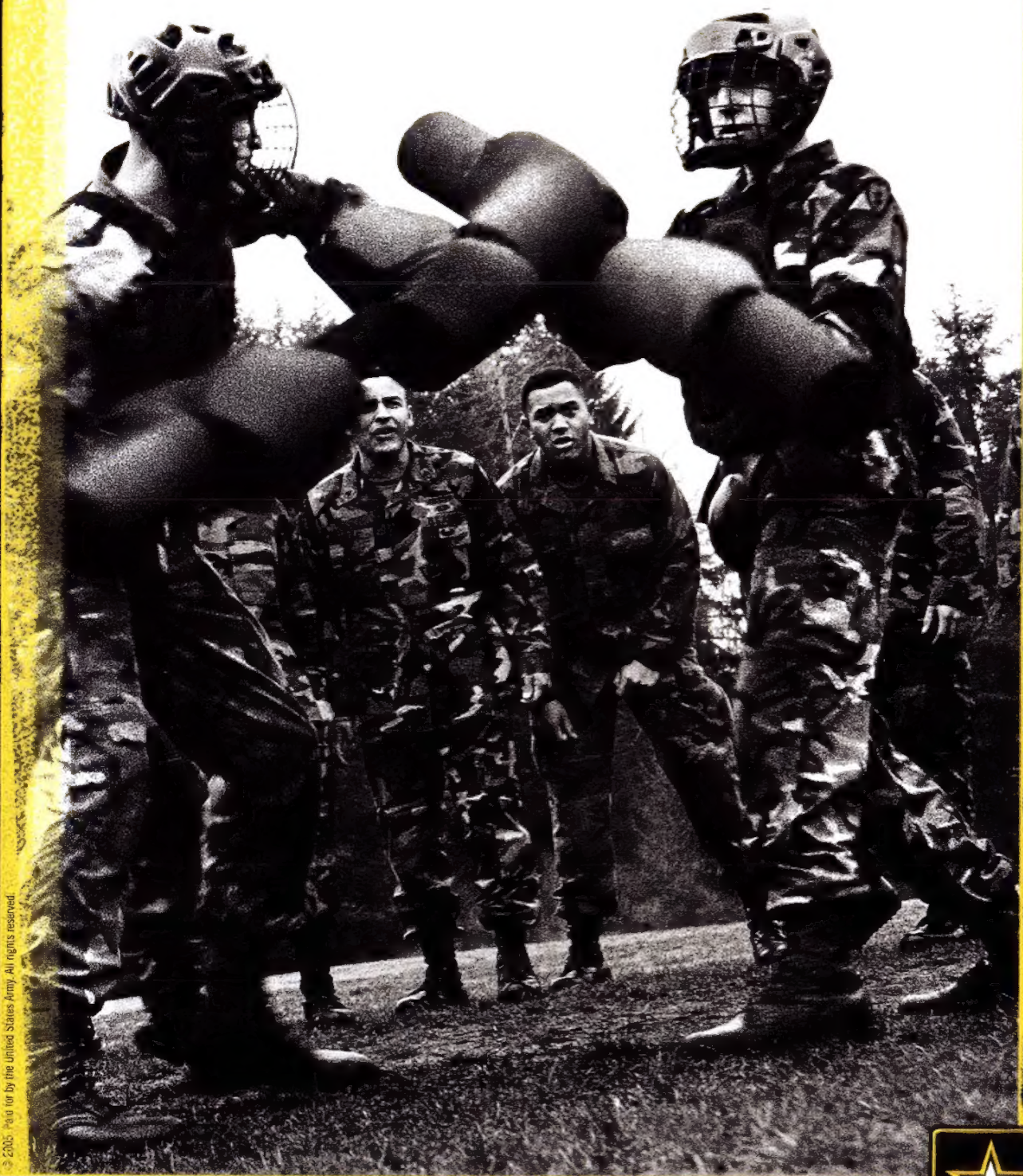
8-9:
EA Man



10:
Waludonkeykong

Sergeant Derek Brame. 11B Infantry.

IT'S NOT ABOUT MAKING THE TEAM. IT'S ABOUT MAKING THE TEAM STRONGER.



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Pugil stick fighting is just one of the many challenges you'll face on your way to becoming a Soldier. It's a drill that requires strength, agility and stamina. It teaches a simple lesson to all who experience it – when an entire team is counting on you to win, that's exactly what you do.



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resident evil®

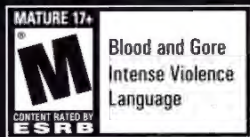
SURVIVAL 101
Rule #1

WATCH YOUR BACK...



OCTOBER 2005

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CAPCOM

PlayStation 2



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