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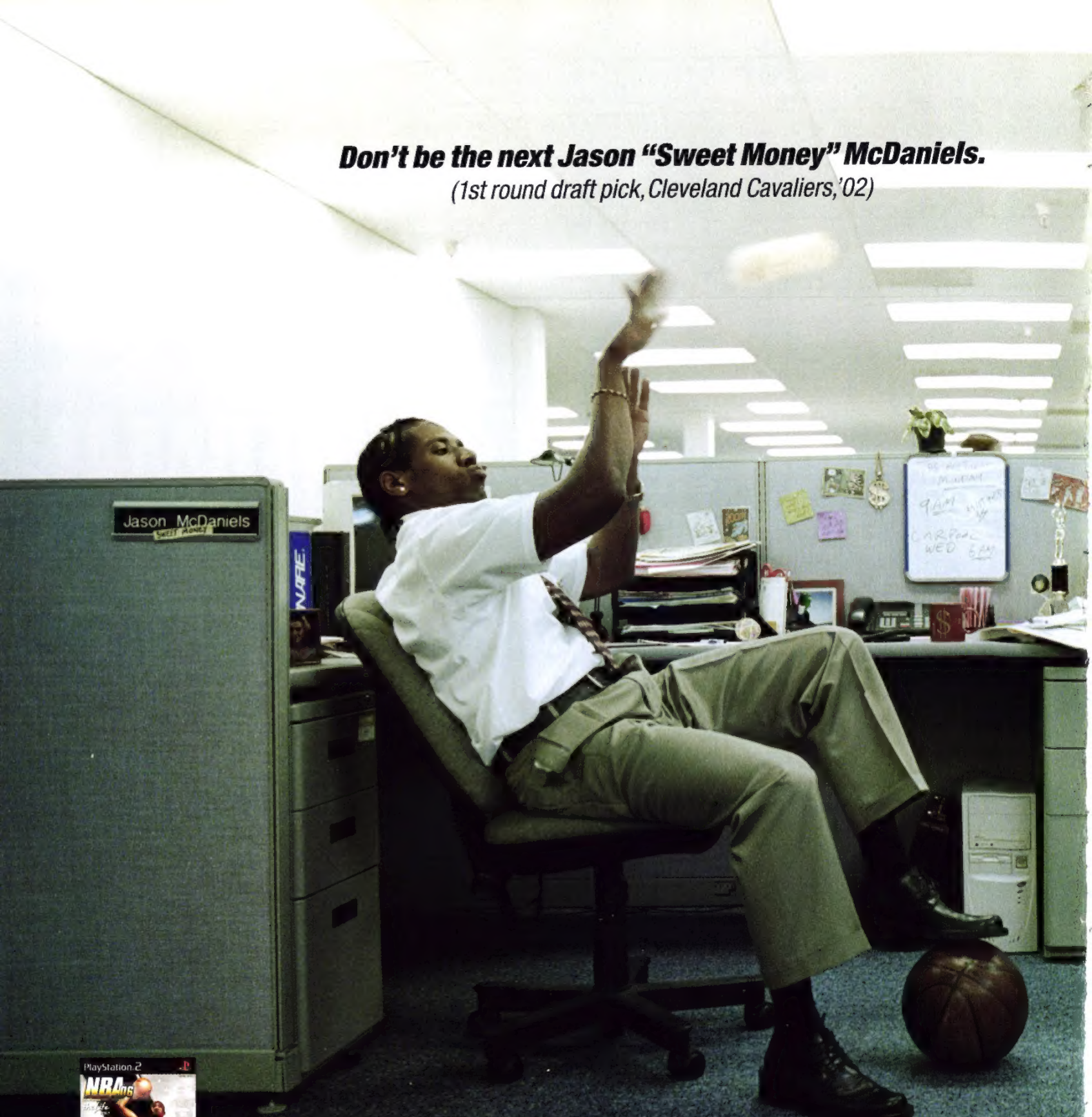
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NOVEMBER 2005

Don't be the next Jason "Sweet Money" McDaniels.
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PlayStation 2



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To find out more about Jason "Sweet Money" McDaniels, log on to www.dontbethenext.com.

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LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
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A close-up, high-contrast photograph of two characters from the Mortal Kombat series. On the left is Liu Kang, a Shaolin Monk with a red headband and a determined, intense expression. On the right is Kung Lao, also a Shaolin Monk, wearing a wide-brimmed black hat with a glowing silver ring around its edge. The background is dark and moody.

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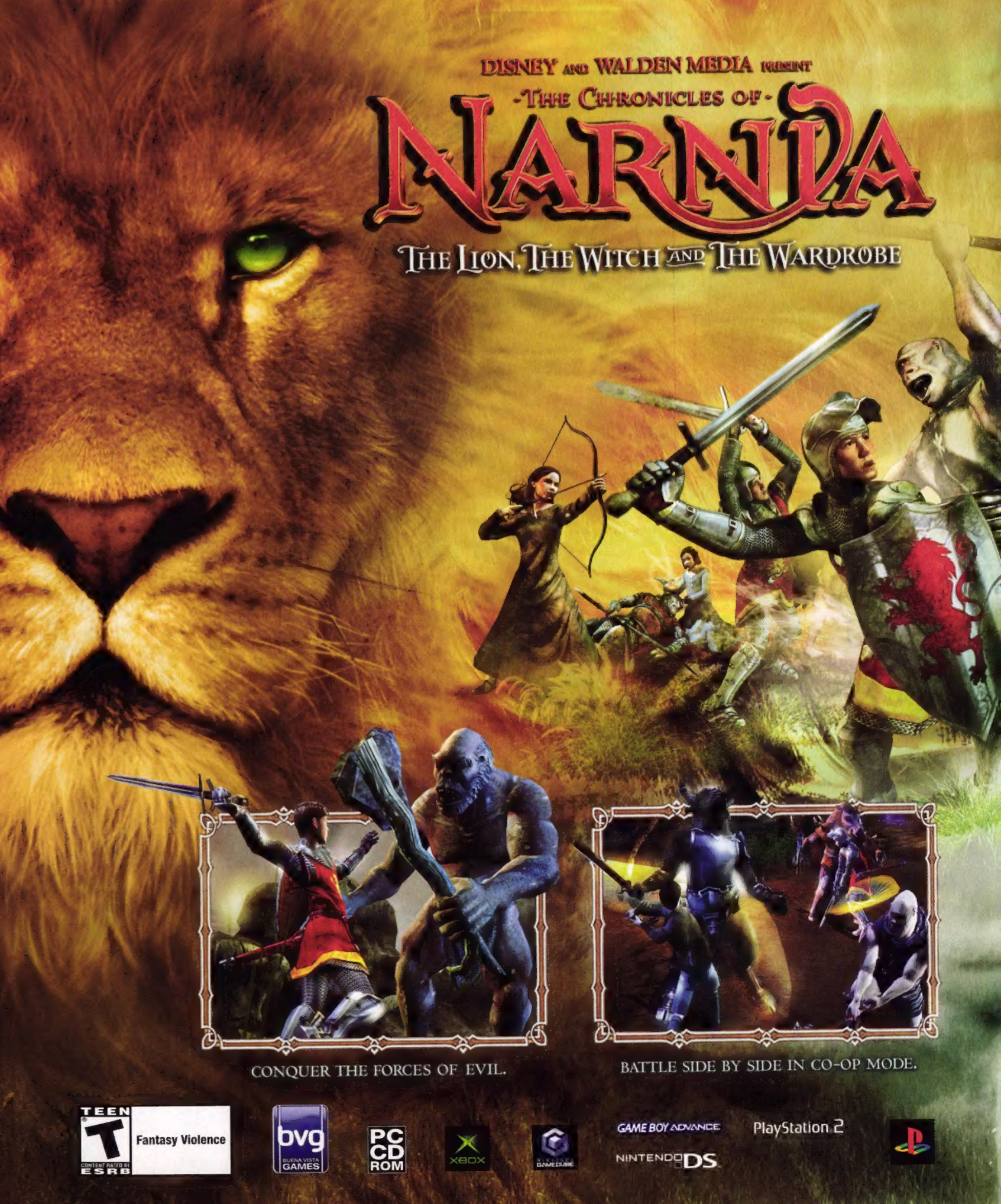


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Football Cleats

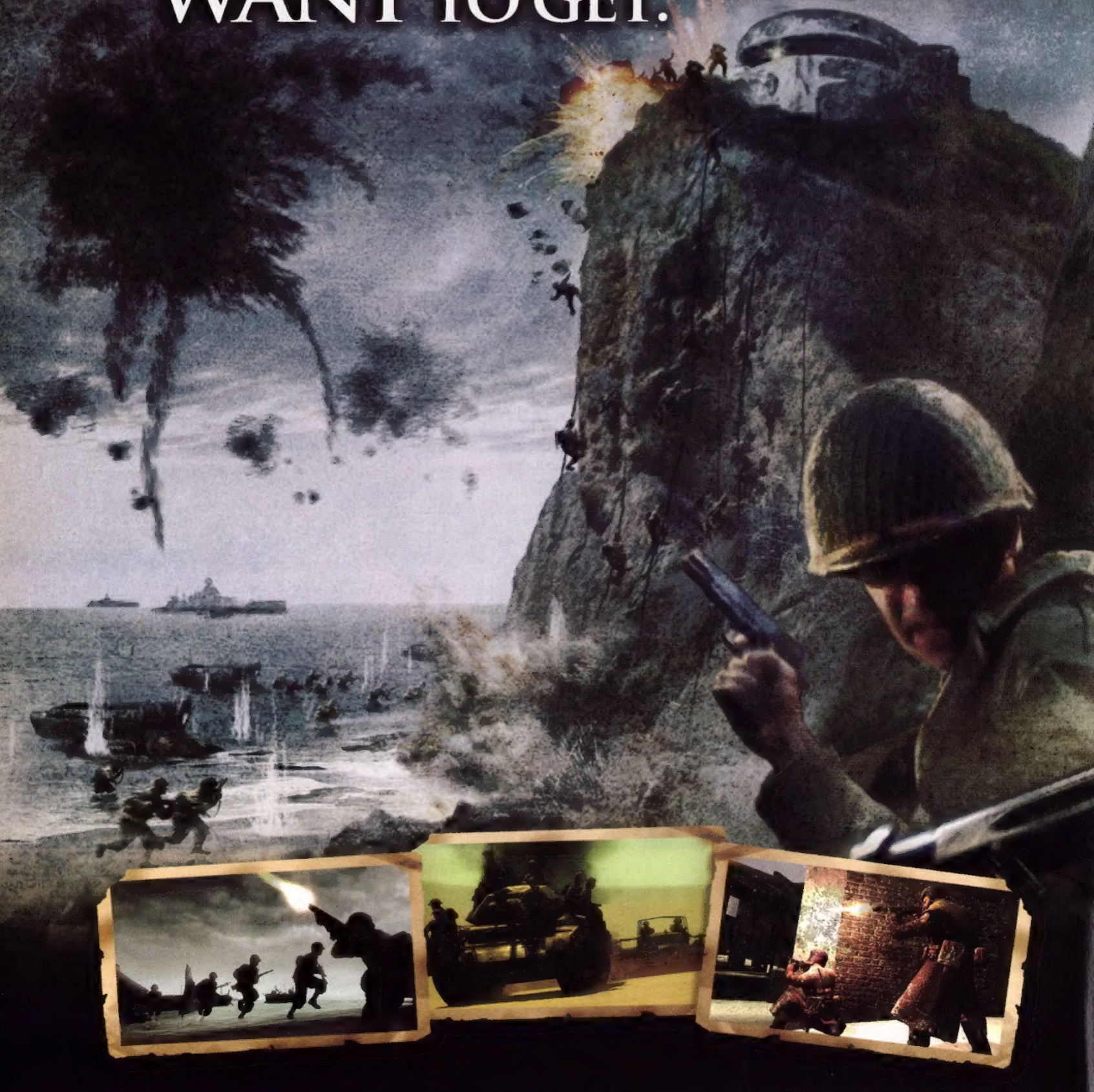
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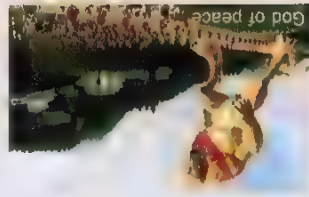
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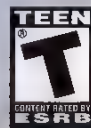
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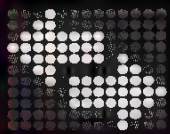
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Crude Humor
Use of Alcohol
Violence



God of War



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cover story

64 SUPERMAN RETURNS

EA Tiburon's next-gen foray away from the football field is laid bare for your consumption. The crown jewel of the industry's biggest publisher is taking on the original superhero and hopes to make the first cool game starring the Man of Steel. Can this multi-million dollar development studio break Superman's curse? Read more and decide for yourself.

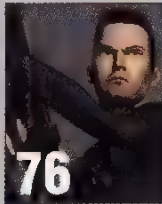
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TOKYO GAME SHOW

Direct from the Land of the Rising Sun, we dissect Nintendo Revolution's recently revealed controller. And, of course, details and screens of all the hot games shown at the expo await you.



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This PSP game ain't your daddy's Syphon Filter. Sony is taking the series back to its character-driven roots and making a brand-new game just for its slim, sexy handheld.



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DEAD OR ALIVE 4

Under a veil of secrecy, Team Ninja and Bungie have teamed up to add a Spartan from Halo to the roster of Dead or Alive 4's fighters. We get to the bottom of this historic meeting of superstar developers.

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The end...or is it?

THE CITY HAS ITS DEMONS... BUT SO DO YOU.



THE SUFFERING

TIES THAT BIND

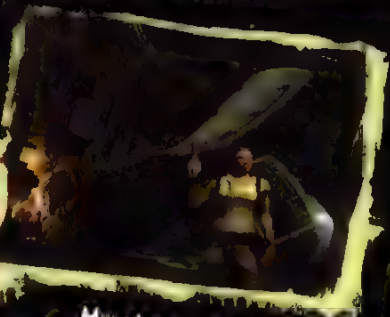
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PlayStation 2



STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



OH NO, THEY DIDN'T!

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

You have to give Nintendo props. The Revolution controller is most certainly different. When I first saw it, I must admit that the first words out of my mouth were, "Nintendo is..." well, I'll let you finish that sentence. But you get the idea.

While my first instinct may still come to be a reality, I must admit Nintendo certainly did what it said it was going to do -- it has changed the way games can be played. The real question is: Are gamers and the rest of the world ready to make this leap?

There are a couple of problems that I see. For one, you have to set up sensors for the controller to work. Not that difficult to do, but for some this will be troublesome. Number two, since you actually have to hold the controller with your arm up in the air to use it, many gamers may find this to be too much exertion when we all play games to relax.

To argue my own points, PlayStation's EyeToy -- which I consider to be a similarly unique interface -- required gamers to jump around and flail their arms like mad and still people fell in love with it. Of course, the one major difference would be that the EyeToy was a peripheral, much like a dance pad, that can be used for certain games, so that gamers can at any time can go back to the tried and true controller.

The Revolution controller also offers up some challenges for third-party developers who will need to make changes to most of their games to have them work with its design. So on one hand, Nintendo is forcing change. And I don't think anyone would argue that change is a bad thing. On the other hand, Nintendo is going out on a limb where none may follow and that's always a dangerous place to find yourself -- especially when your competition is the likes of Sony and Microsoft.

I personally can't wait to see what games will be like with the Nintendo controller. If I can swing that thing around to slash Link's sword, that will be an amazing experience. But I can't lose that tingling feeling in the back of my head that after about an hour of swinging the controller around, I'll be ready to sit back once again in my easy chair with a controller in my lap.

I've got a solution to both our problems, Nintendo, and I give this advice to you free of charge. Include an upgraded GameCube controller with four shoulder buttons with your crazy remote-nunchuck-thing, and you just might have something. That way we get the best of both worlds.



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Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** *Lost* (if They Don't Get Off The Island This Year, Some Random Person Gets Punched), Alex Ross' Work On *Justice*, The Revolution Controller (Just Thinking How It Could Be Used For Lightsaber Combat Makes Me Weak In The Knees) **Dislikes:** The Exercise I'll Have To Endure To Use The Revolution Controller For More Than 30 Minutes At A Time (Exertion Is Poison To Gamers) **Current Favorite Games:** Ratchet Deadlocked, Gun, Far Cry Instincts, X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse



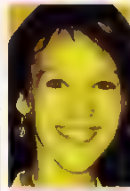
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CHRISTMAS
Oogie's Revenge

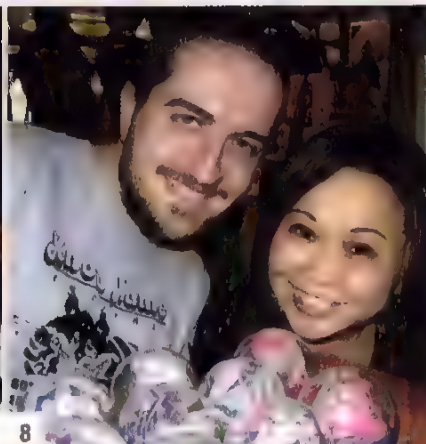
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GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly
Of The Video Game Industry



1 Team's infamous DOA creator Tomonobu Itagaki politics with action star Kane Kosugi, who will be playing Ryu Hayabusa in the *Dead or Alive* movie 2 Castlevania mastermind Koji Igarashi sings a tune from *Aladdin* with the series' composer Michiru Yamane 3 Lisa and Miller audition for roles as playable characters in Hideo Kojima's upcoming Nintendo Revolution project, *Metal Gear Solid: Twin Dorks* 4 Miller, GI's wine connoisseur, hangs with Konami's finest in San Francisco 5 Konami's Marc Franklin, EA's Pete Nguyen, and Ubisoft's Cindy Lum chillin' to the max 6 Sony's CJ Conroy, Alex Armour, Ryan Bowling, Kyle Shubel, and Reiner pose in a lineup worthy of *Law & Order: SVU* 7 Sega's Bret Blount loves meatcides! Next year, we're taking him to the Minnesota State Fair to try deep fried pork chops on a stick! 8 Jeremy and a bunch of Godzilla capsule toys hang with Sega's Jenny Sue in Tokyo



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AN OLD FRIEND

With all the talk of the Xbox 360's release, I'm sick of people comparing it to the Dreamcast and saying the Dreamcast was less powerful than its competition. This is just not true. Its competition was Nintendo 64 and PlayStation. Dreamcast is better than PS2 anyway; better games and better controllers make a better system. PS2 still uses the same, lame, worst-ever controllers in history, and it still only has two controller ports. Dreamcast has the best memory cards, plus it can be hooked into a VGA monitor. The PS2 also has the longest, most annoying start-up system logo animation that is just to show off that it's made by Sony (which likes to put its name on everything instead of making quality products).

Dallas Eli
via earthlink.net

You are a clearly a very reasonable and unbiased resource, Dallas...or should we say Killian, The Jaded, Hardcore Gamer! That's right, the former Game Infarcer editor (fired in 2004 after calling Shigeru Miyamoto a "two-bit hack" in a review of *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*) appears to have resurfaced under a new alias. You can't fool us, Killian. No one else could truly believe that start-up logo animations are a valid argument for system superiority or that memory cards are system-selling peripherals, could they? We're not going to explain this to you again: the PS2 didn't "murder" the Dreamcast, so stop trying to avenge it. By all means, fondly reminisce about the dearly departed console, but then move on. Oh, and just so you know, your fellow Game Infarcer editors did terrible things to your Seaman microphone when you weren't looking. Terrible things.



■ Killian

ESCAPE VELOCITY, GIRLS!

I just wanted to write in and thank you for pointing out Microsoft's stereotyping of female gamers. Too many people are quick to jump to the sad assumption that video games are male territory, and that females are all just VelocityGirls who love to shop. Hopefully the phrase "girl gamer" will eventually be retired in favor of "gamer girl." I'd rather have the fact that I'm a gamer define me as a girl than the fact that I'm a girl define me as a gamer.

Tiffany Tackett
via clinically-cynical.com

■ You make an excellent point. Unfortunately, it could be a while before attitudes start to shift in the direction you're suggesting. As long as the game companies keep making a big deal about female gamers (through plays like *VelocityGirl*), they will continue to perpetuate the notion that it is a "weird" thing. By drawing special attention to the gamer girls, these campaigns encourage a view of the industry that is split along gender lines, rather than a more unified approach. On the other hand, it's impossible to ignore the growing number of females involved in a traditionally male-dominated hobby, so we're in a bit of a tricky spot. Gaming definitely has the potential to be perceived as a genderless pastime, but it will probably take a period of adjustment, meaning that we may have to suffer through a few more embar-

assing marketing blunders before the lesson is finally learned.

THE EA METATRON

Every time that I pick up an Electronic Arts game these days and turn it on, there's always a person to greet me with the famous words "challenge everything." Perhaps you could do one of your interviews with the voice of EA.

Chad Batten
via aol.com

■ We couldn't actually interview the haunting, determined whisper that so often accompanies the EA logo, but we did the next best thing: we plugged in an EA title and asked the voice a bunch of questions as the game was starting up. Strangely, only one of these questions prompted an appropriate response, which we'll print for you here:

GI: What are your feelings on challenges? Some believe that only select things should be challenged (and even then in moderation), while others espouse a more all-encompassing view of the issue.

The Voice: Challenge everything.

GI: Of course. Thank you for your time.

Worst. Interview. Ever.

PITY THE FOOL

I always feel sorry for people who say how great the NES era was. I'm not saying the NES was bad - I actually enjoyed it. But it was definitely a fad, and I think the people who played NES and nothing else at the time (like Commodore 64, which looked remarkably better) don't realize that it was kind of insignificant.

Francis Farkas
via email

■ You're absolutely right...if by "insignificant" you mean "responsible for single-handedly dominating the home gaming market for seven years and rescuing the industry from apparent doom." While there were ways to play games with better graphics, none of them

resonated with people like the NES. It was affordable (especially compared to computers), accessible, and featured arcade classics like *Donkey Kong*. Plus, it established Nintendo as the industry's major player for the years that followed. In fact, the entire culture of gaming is still wrapped up in the NES and its repercussions - so if it is a fad, it's officially the longest fad in history. Nintendo may not be number one this generation, but even the most hardcore Xbox or PS2 fanatic will bow in reverence to foundations laid by the home console that defined video games for a generation. Just a word of warning: If you go around calling the NES insignificant the next time you're at the game store, don't be surprised if you wake up in the alley with Power Glove-shaped bruises where your face used to be.

CORRECTING THE INCORRECTION

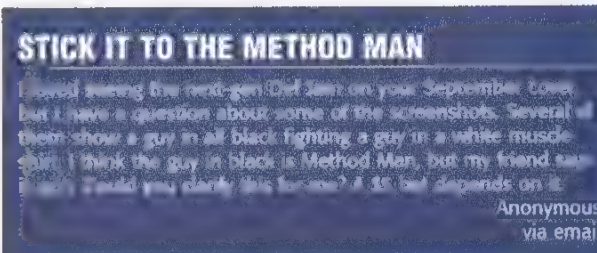
I would like to give Chris Edwards from issue 149 an astronomy lesson. He tries to correct you by saying that our solar system is the only one actually called a "solar system." This is patently untrue. Any star that has planets floating around it (in something astronomers like to call orbits), can be (and are) called solar systems. Therefore, you could travel to other solar systems. Chris, my advice to you is go grab a book by Stephen Hawking called *The Universe In A Nutshell*. It is revered as one of the most informative yet easy to understand astronomy books ever written. It should help to get you clued in.

Jason Woods
via hotmail.com

■ You may find this hard to believe, but we aren't astrophysicists. In fact, pretty much all of our knowledge of outer space is derived from the 1988 blockbuster *Earth Girls Are Easy*. So, unless the question is related to Jim Carrey's early career, we can't really weigh in on the debate. But our hearts swell with great pride to see our loyal readers firing back at esoteric criticisms with increasingly obscure knowledge. Way to defend our honor! You are all officially awarded five astronaut points.

THE HULKING GOBLIN PHENOMENON

I was reading your preview on *Ultimate Spider-Man* in issue 149 and noticed a mistake in the caption on the lower left of the page. You made a crack about the Green Goblin, when it is so obviously the Hulk whose well-muscled form is aflame. Anyone who has had any kind of exposure to Marvel



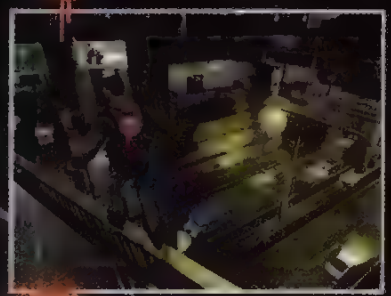
■ You win. It's Method Man. At the time of the article's writing, EA couldn't officially confirm involvement of most of its stable of popular urban brawlers, but you can undoubtedly count on seeing some new faces alongside favorites like *Method Man* from previous entries. Now, please mail us 100 percent of your bet proceeds. We want to buy some Cheddar Cheese Pretzel Combos.



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PlayStation 2



comics over the years would be capable of this recognition, including my four year-old son who answered "It's Hulk, Mommy!" when I asked him.

Kristin Kramer
via email

In your September 2005 Issue of GI, you have a picture captioned "As Green Goblin soon learned, gasoline is not a suitable deodorant." In this picture you can clearly see Spidey and a huge, green-skinned, purple-short-wearing character on fire. Which made me wonder: How dare you say gasoline doesn't make a good deodorant!

David Elton
via optonline.net



Well, Kristin, your four year-old obviously doesn't read the *Ultimate Spider-Man* comic series on which the game is based. If he did, he would have known that the character depicted in that screen is actually the Ultimate version of the Green Goblin (who, incidentally, does look a little like the Hulk). Regardless, please kindly inform your son that he just got owned. However, we were technically wrong about gasoline not making a good deodorant. After all, its thick, noxious fumes are pretty much guaranteed to wipe out any pervasive B.O. classified as Level 7 (Catastrophic) or lower. Maybe even higher if you happen to get engulfed by purifying flames. So, what we should have said is that gasoline doesn't make a good deodorant for Kato, who clocks in at a solid Level 11.

SUCKS TO THE CORE

Why would anyone want the Core System of the Xbox 360 over the Premium Edition? The Premium Edition has a 20 GB hard drive to speed up loading, not to mention allowing for backwards compatibility. Once you add in the extras like the remote and headset, it's a pretty good bargain. On the other hand, the Core System has a wired controller (way to give us the future of gaming, Microsoft), and nothing else. Microsoft said that we would be pleasantly surprised to find the price of the Xbox 360 in the neighborhood of \$300. Yeah, \$300 for a useless piece of junk and \$400 for a real console.

anonymous
via email

There is a wide variety of consumers who would be drawn to the unique, crippled gaming experience offered by the Core Package. Like, people who are just plain ignorant. Otherwise, we'd have to agree with you. Any gamers who want backwards compatibility with the Core System will have to shell out an extra \$100 for the hard drive anyway, so why not get more goodies for the same price? Of course, the whole pricing structure is really an elaborate scam to fool well-meaning grandparents into buying the Core System for their grandkids, who will in turn trade in the fake system for the Premium Edition, thus officially scoring two Xbox 360 sales. Curse you and your marketing acumen, Microsoft!

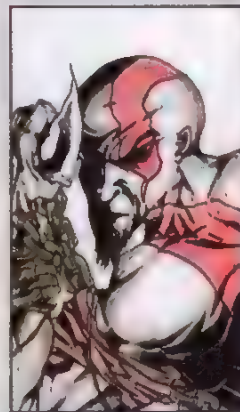
ENVELOPE ART

NOVEMBER WINNER!
JONATHAN KLEIN

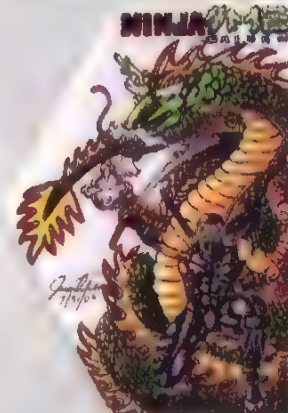
"This is me, the Grim Reaper, and I'm here to take you to hell!"

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KEVIN HANG
Kratos, a.k.a.
The Ghost of
Sparta, a.k.a.
The Beard of
Skeeze



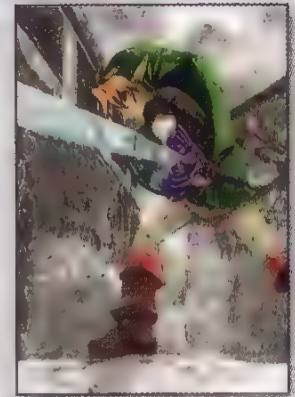
JASON WHITE
Ryu, could you
do us a favor and
kill that stupid
Dragonball Z while
you're over there?
Thanks, buddy



MATT McMANIS
SNAKE has a fever. SNAKE has died



ODALIS URIBE
"Pssst! Hey Riku! Let's ditch Kairi and
make out!"



SHARECE OVERMYER
"See you in 2006, suckers!"

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CONNECT

Breaking News, Views, And Technology From
The Cutting Edge Of Gaming

TOKYO GAME SHOW 2005



Second in size only to E3, the annual Tokyo Game Show is the site of many exciting announcements, as well as a place for the gaming public to get their hands on hot upcoming titles. Although this year saw the announcement of Nintendo's Revolution controller, the debut of Konami's stunning Metal Gear Solid 4 trailer, and a collection of playable Xbox 360 games, the general consensus was that TGS generated less excitement this year. Although the Revolution controller and the Metal Gear trailer were hotly discussed, there was no playable game on the floor that produced a similar buzz. Some in attendance speculated that the presence of the Xbox 360 in playable form wasn't enough to make Japanese gamers consider this show a "next-gen" TGS, and that the show will attract more people when they can get their hands on the PlayStation 3. Regardless of the somewhat lackluster reception of this year's convention, there were still several items of note to come out of the Tokyo Game Show.

NEWS

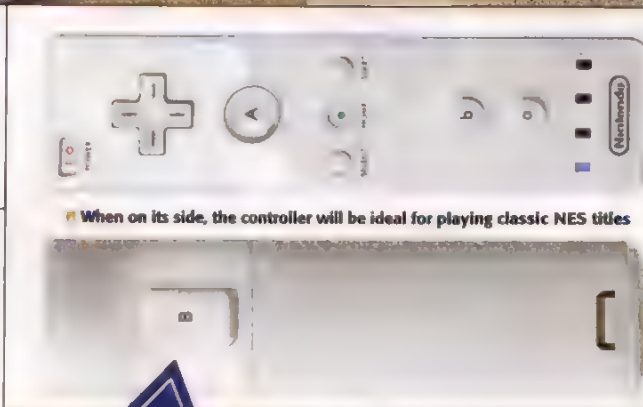
NINTENDO SHOCKS WITH REVOLUTIONARY NEW CONTROLLER

COMPANY PROMISES REVOLUTIONARY GAMEPLAY

■ Nintendo president Satoru Iwata finally unveils the mysterious Revolution controller



► The Revolution console should be available in the same colors as the controller



■ When on its side, the controller will be ideal for playing classic NES titles

If our years of covering Nintendo have taught us anything, it's to expect the unexpected. The company had long suggested that the controller for its upcoming Revolution console would be unconventional, leading to many months of Internet rumors, hoaxes, and leaked patent filings. Two of the most popular theories held that the new controller would feature a touch-screen similar to that of the Nintendo DS or a gyroscopic tilt controller akin to the technology pioneered in the GBA title *Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble* and the recent *Yoshi: Topsy-Turvy*.

On September 16, during a speech at the annual Tokyo Game Show, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata quickly cut through all the speculation when he revealed an actual working prototype of the Revolution controller. Needless to say, it was nothing like we imagined it, resembling at first glance little more than a DVD remote control (We'll be honest, at first it gave us a nasty flashback to the days of the Philips CD-i). However, like most things in the Nintendo universe, this surface simplicity belies some innovative and unique functionality.



■ Nintendo's video showcased a wide variety of gamers using the new Revolution controller

In keeping with the company's stated philosophy of streamlining game control, there are a minimum of face buttons, only a d-pad and large A button on the front and a B trigger on the underbelly of the unit [See picture]. The B and A buttons are also repeated, in smaller form, at the bottom. This allows players to turn the controller side-

ways and use it as a NES pad, presumably for playing older titles on Nintendo's promised download network.

The big news regarding the controller doesn't involve any face buttons at all. In fact, the unit itself will serve as a motion sensitive "wand" of sorts. This is the big innovation that Nintendo has been hinting at. The company revealed that development of the technology was started way back at the launch of the GameCube, spearheaded by the R&D team that made many of the company's old

controllers, under the close supervision of Shigeru Miyamoto.

By positioning two black bar sensors above or below your television, you can use the controller in a sword-like fash-

ion to manipulate the action onscreen. By flicking and twisting the completely wireless unit, you can manipulate onscreen characters and implement in a full 360 degrees of motion. Quite honestly, it's like nothing we've ever seen before, and appears to track quite accurately to the action onscreen. According to Nintendo, the sensors

do not use conventional RF or light-gun technology and should allow you to play from 10 to 15 feet away from your television. The unit's battery life, and whether or not it will use a rechargeable internal battery or standard batteries, has yet to be announced. Like the GameCube controller, rumble functionality is built-in.

The unit also features an input bay for expansion devices at the bottom. Although there will presumably be a number of peripherals for the unit, the only one shown addressed the most conspicuous omission from the base controller—the analog stick. Called the "Nunchuck", this detached analog stick plugs in with a cord and features two Z-triggers on the bottom of the unit. This will give the unit a bit more flexibility, and allow it to be used with more conventional games. While it looks a bit strange, Nintendo did show a demo of *Metroid Prime 2* that demonstrated how it might be used in the first-person genre. While controlling your movement and strafing with the analog stick, you manipulate your view and aiming by pointing the main controller, then using the four buttons to fire and scan. Miyamoto claimed that *Metroid Prime 2* is already being designed to use this same control scheme.

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■ "Nunchuck Style" won't be the only way to use an analog stick. Another rumored plug-in peripheral, called "The Shell" resembles a conventional controller, and will probably be the best way to play Nintendo's promised back catalogue of classic titles



There were a variety of other demos that pointed out the versatile functionality of this new motion-sensitive control dynamic. Some were simple, like using the controller as a light gun in a gallery shooting game called Cubes or an air hockey demo in which you controlled your paddle by moving and twisting the controller. There was also a fishing game on display, in which you used the unit to cast, jiggle your bait, and set the hook when you got a bite. Other demos included "Find the Pokémon", where you used the controller as a pointer to highlight certain Pokémon hiding in a large picture (think *Where's Waldo?*) and Kuru Kuru Kururin, an adaptation of a Japanese-only GBA and GC title.

Most interesting was *Airplane*, a demo inspired by the classic *Pilotwings* set in the Isle Delfino level of *Super Mario Sunshine*. Again, the direction of your craft is guided solely by the motion sensor, allowing you to flip, turn, and dive at will. Although you can hold it as you do for most games, like a television remote, the best way to approach the demo was to grip the unit from the bottom as if you were throwing a paper airplane.



Nintendo is trying to attract gamers of all ages

Inevitably, this announcement leaves us with more questions than answers. It's clear that with this controller – and the Revolution in general – Nintendo is making a colossal gamble. While each console generation has seen its share of changes in control schemes, this seems to be an entirely new paradigm for controller design, probably the most drastic change since Nintendo pioneered the d-pad/button configuration with the NES or debuted the analog stick with the N64. Will this new design be as successful? Right now, it's hard to tell.

While it's certain that Nintendo itself is working on many games that will utilize the controller's abilities to their fullest, third-party support (a long-standing problem for the company) could be difficult to garner. The most obvious case would be large companies like Electronic Arts, Ubisoft, and Activision, which are increasingly releasing essentially identical versions of games for multiple consoles.

Even if the Revolution has the graphical horsepower to run Xbox 360 and PS3 titles, the sheer novelty of the controller will make it difficult to easily adapt games built for a conventional scheme to the system without serious changes in gameplay design.

Also, even with the analog stick add-on, the Revolution will only have four controller buttons, making us wonder how genres like sports and fighting games (which tend to use most of the buttons on current-gen controllers) will be able to be implemented on the system. We have no doubt that Nintendo will make ingenious use of these new gameplay mechanics, as it has with the DS's touch screen. However, we wonder how many third-party developers will be willing to spend the time and money to tailor their games to this new experience – especially if Nintendo lags behind Sony and Microsoft in market share as it has in this generation. However, it's possible that developers could make games that use *The Shell* controller (a rumored, more conventional interface), although we suspect that Nintendo might require publishers to use the new controller in order to get approved for the system. Despite these concerns, developers we talked to at TGS were very positive about the new controller, and Metal Gear creator Hideo Kojima is already working on a project for Revolution, being done by the *Metal Gear Acid* team.

Still, the opportunities for new gameplay styles are definitely intriguing. Just imagine a *Star Wars* game with wild, free-swinging saber-play. Considering Nintendo's commitment to changing the way we game, one also has to imagine that most, if not all, of its next-gen versions of its most popular franchises – from *Mario* to *Zelda* – will feature new mechanics tailored specifically for the Revolution controller. It's too early to tell if its bold Revolution plans will pay off, but one thing is clear – these next few years will be interesting ones for Nintendo fans.

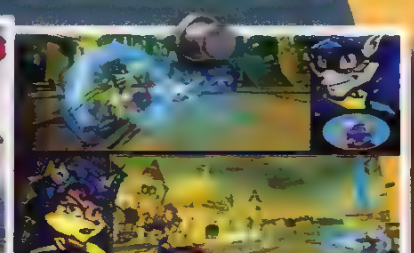
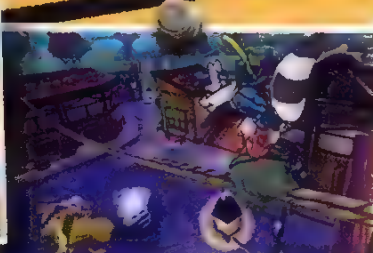
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JAPANESE STRATEGY OUTLINED



XBOX 360



The day before the start of the Tokyo Game Show, Microsoft revealed crucial details about

the launch of the Xbox 360 and its plans to help the console find an audience in Japan. At its press conference in the Shibuya district of Tokyo, the General Manager of the Xbox division of Microsoft Japan Yoshihiro Maruyama announced the release dates of the new console: November 22 for the U.S., December 2 for Europe, and December 10 for Japan. He stressed that the order of launch dates does not reflect the order of importance of the different regions, and emphasized that success in Japan was critical to the console's performance in the next round of the console wars.

The press conference largely relied on the same talking points as Microsoft's showing at E3 earlier this year: high definition gaming, online, and customization. It was no surprise that the company stuck to the same message as before, but what was shocking was that in Japan the console will only be released in a single bundle for the price of 37,900 yen (roughly \$350). Much like the U. S. Premium

Edition, Japan's single bundle will include the hard drive, a wireless controller, the media remote, cables, and

the Xbox Live Headset. Maruyama stated that the decision to release only one version in Japan had a lot to do with the belief that Japanese gamers would gravitate towards games like Final Fantasy XI, which will require the hard drive. He also stated that the high penetration of broadband internet in Japan influenced the decision. There are currently no plans to release the hard drive-free Core system in Japan, although Maruyama would not rule out the possibility.

Of course, Maruyama stated that the key to the console's success in Japan is the games, and touted the increased support of Japanese developers. Seven titles will be available at launch, although 20 should be available by the end of January. After a demo of Gears of War by Epic's Cliff Blezinski, the audience was treated to a live demo of Ninety-Nine Nights, the new action title from Tetsuya Mizuguchi and Phantagram (see below). Missing in action were the two

titles from Japanese developer Mistwalker: Blue Dragon and Lost Odyssey. The final game footage shown was a montage of clips, including familiar titles like Call of Duty 2 and Project Gotham Racing 3, as well as some new titles like Bomberman Act: Zero and the RPG Far East of Eden: Zira. It also included high-profile titles like Resident Evil 5, Ridge Racer 6, and the next-gen Sonic game, simply titled Sonic the Hedgehog. Between the impressive demonstrations of Gears of War, Ninety-Nine Nights, and the video montage, the press conference far outshined Microsoft's showing at E3, which many considered weak.

Many 360 titles were playable on the floor at TGS, and Japanese gamers will have the chance to get their hands on even more this November, when Microsoft will open the Xbox 360 Lounge in Shibuya, a building with the sole purpose of allowing Japanese gamers to play 360 games. With multiple demonstration units, the Lounge will serve as a place for gamers to learn about the 360, and will host events for upcoming games. It is clear that Microsoft is dedicated to improving their standing in Japan with the 360, and the Lounge is but one branch of their strategy, as is the single bundle and the Japanese-developed games. Only time will tell if their focus on Japan will pay off.

HANDS ON WITH NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

The only game demonstrated live at Microsoft's press conference, it quickly became obvious why Ninety-Nine Nights was chosen. Not only does the game look gorgeous, it is reminiscent of a series that is quite popular in Japan: Dynasty Warriors. Ninety-Nine Nights (or N3) looks to play much like that series, but with even more characters onscreen. This is not surprising, considering that N3 is being developed by Q Entertainment in conjunction with Phantagram, the developer of the Dynasty Warriors-esque Kingdom Under Fire series.

But just because N3 looks familiar doesn't mean that gamers don't have good reason to be excited. N3 looks to have a deeper combat engine than Dynasty Warriors, as well as some team-based features like Kingdom Under Fire. The demo also revealed a feature called Over Attacks, which can be used to eliminate massive numbers of enemies at once. We actually witnessed a combo that took out 500 enemies, and the bodies of each and every one remained onscreen after they died!



After my car broke down my mission was to meet and woo every beautiful creature I could encounter. I was going to collect phone numbers. I went to the saloon and had a drink. It was a happening spot. I did a little line dancing and met a girl. Believe her name was Christina. I forget. She had a nice neck. I had to give it a bite. I was feeling a little devilish. She said she had been abducted by aliens. Later one of the aliens followed me into the bathroom and I had to taser him. I moved on and stole some more kisses, but it's some more relationships. Then I met Mama Lou. She wanted to tell me something about myself. But I saw Bella and I had some things I wanted to say to her. We rapped for a minute. I noticed she was distraught but I chose to ignore it because most women are a bit unstable.

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CHROMEHOUNDS

Xbox fans disappointed that no new MechAssault title has yet been announced for the 360 can relax, because Sega's Chromehounds should fulfill all their giant robot needs. Developed by Armored Core creators From Software, Chromehounds was playable at TGS and offers a nice take on the Mech combat genre. Chromehounds is primarily an online title that puts players in the role of a HOUND pilot (the game's name for Mechs), who battle each other as representatives of three warring nations. With a persistent online world, winning fights will actually claim territory for your country.

This MMO-type world is not the only innovation that Chromehounds is bringing to the genre: there are six distinct types of Mech, and you can actually build your own machine from scratch. Whether you build a light, agile fighter or a lumbering weapons-laden destroyer is all up to you. Regardless of what type of HOUND you pilot, communication with your team will be the key to success. With six-on-six combat, only a team's commander can see all 12 HOUNDS at once, and must dispatch his team to find the enemy.

Chromehounds feels a lot like MechAssault, and its visuals are solid, though short of some other next-gen games. Even so, we have a lot of hope for this title. Set for spring in the U.S., Chromehounds has time to get polished further, and could be a solid hit on the next-gen version of Xbox Live.



MICROSOFT'S HEAVY HITTERS

GI GETS HANDS-ON WITH WHAT'S HOT

Although many playable 360 games were on display at TGS, Microsoft's roster of first-party games easily outstripped the rest. Those on the floor, such as Ninety-Nine Nights and party game Everparty drew respectable crowds, and some behind closed doors appointments revealed the impressive progress of games like Gears of War, Project Gotham Racing 3, and Kameo. Project Gotham Racing 3 looked far smoother and faster than the other 360 games on display, such as Ridge Racer 6 and Test Drive Unlimited, which both looked slow and unpolished in comparison. Bizarre Creations also has some impressive plans for Xbox Live, including global tournaments and the ability to broadcast a race to

30,000 people online with Gotham TV.

Kameo was easily the most improved game showcased, with beautiful new visual effects added and new gameplay scenarios revealed. A truly gorgeous underwater level was demonstrated, and new transformations were revealed. Some of these creature types were used in combination, such as quickly switching to a dragon after spewing oil as an aquatic character to light the pools of oil on fire. With such impressive progress, Kameo and Project Gotham Racing 3 are looking like incredibly solid launch titles, and their progress indicates that the 360 will have a nice lineup of games available on November 22.



GEARS OF WAR

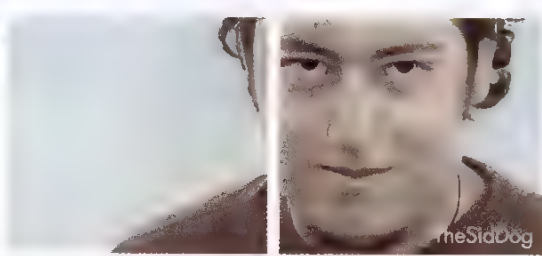
It is clear that Microsoft has a lot of confidence in Gears of War, as it was the only western-developed game that was highlighted at the TGS press conference. Although the same demo was shown at E3, there was one important difference this time – the game was running on the actual Xbox 360 hardware and looked better than ever. The much-discussed framerate was greatly improved, and should get even better over the next few months.

The day before the press conference, Game Informer was granted the rare treat of actually playing through the Gears of War demo level on the 360. We can therefore safely say that, in action, the game looks every bit as gorgeous as the screenshots and videos suggest. A few new effects have been added since E3, including a subtle motion blur. Gears of War continues to impress, and more details will be released at the upcoming X05 event in Amsterdam. You can be certain that we will bring you the latest details.

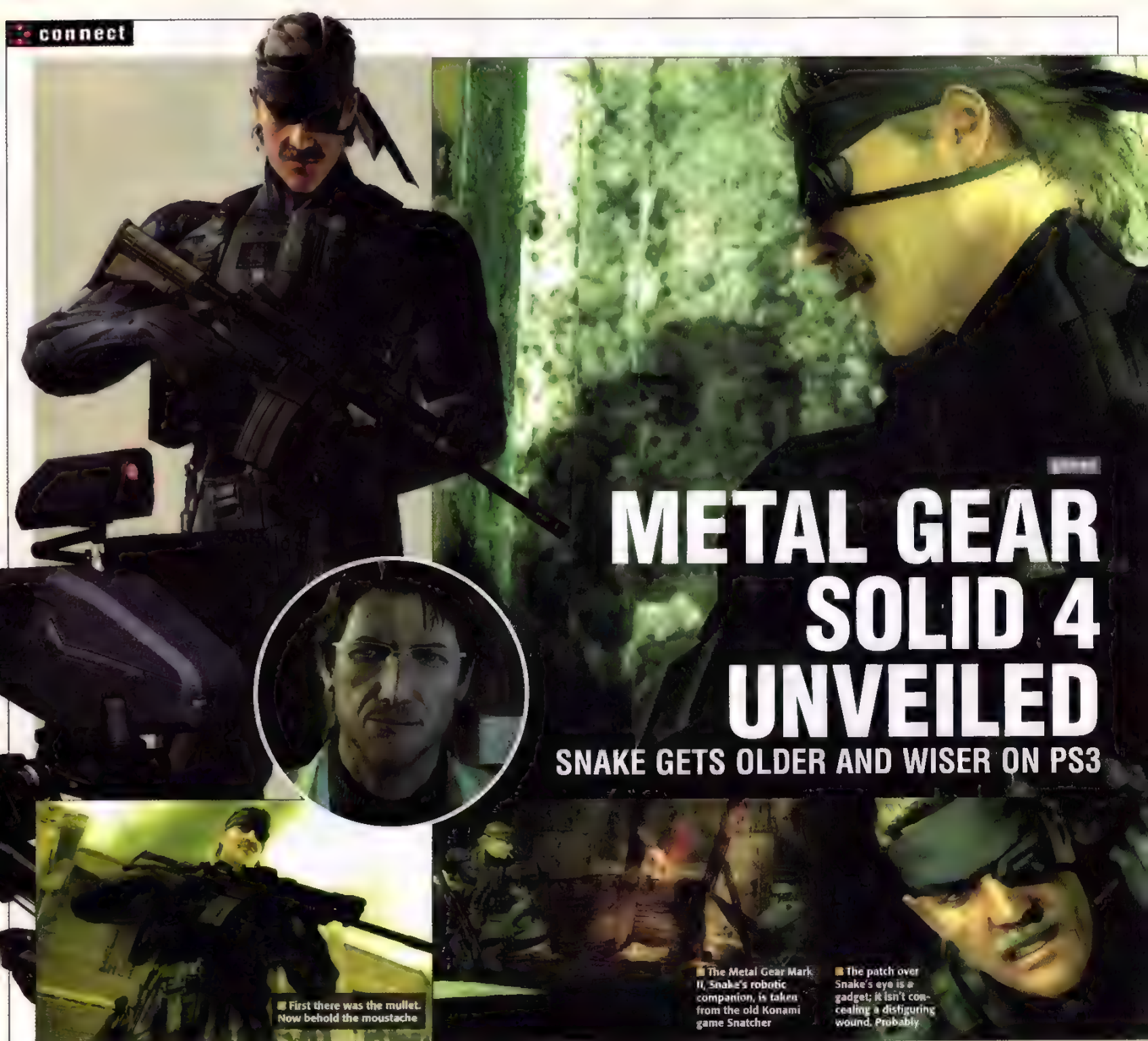
■ This scene is a serious contender for best screenshot of TGS



THE SIMS
 Played by



Clyde, the big, slow one in the group, lost his best friend – a sock puppet named Stinky Bob – when The Bully, a neat freak with a fetish for fire, burnt it up. That was the last straw for The Jerk, The Tease and poor Clyde.



METAL GEAR SOLID 4 UNVEILED

Snake gets older and wiser on PS3

■ First there was the mullet. Now behold the moustache

■ The Metal Gear Mark II, Snake's robotic companion, is taken from the old Konami game *Snatcher*

■ The patch over Snake's eye is a gadget; it isn't concealing a disfiguring wound. Probably.

This year's Tokyo Game Show was easily dominated by two topics: the Revolution controller and the Metal Gear Solid 4 trailer. Subtitled *Guns of the Patriots*, MGS4 was unveiled in a nine-minute video that misleadingly begins with what looks like a first-person shooter segment. As the scene of a battle unfolds in first-person, phrases with the letters "FPS" flash on the screen, such as "Finally, a Policy Shift?" and "Forget Pre-rendered Stuff!" It quickly becomes obvious that Metal Gear Solid 4 won't be a simple shooter when a familiar face ambushes the camera. It's Snake, and the message "Not FPS – MGS" flashes on the screen.

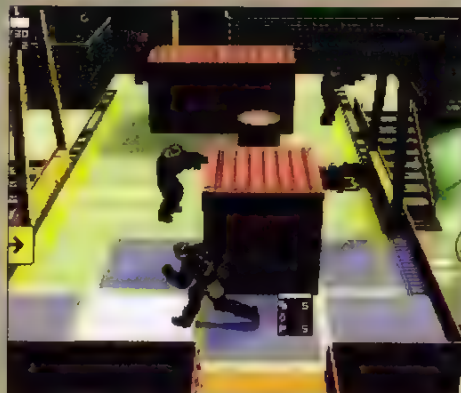
However, this is not the Solid Snake that gamers are used to. He's clearly aged, and is sporting grey hair and a moustache, as well as a high-tech eyepatch. Using some

CQC moves, Snake dispatches the soldier whose eyes we've been seeing through up to this point and takes his gun. He then retreats to the relative safety of a nearby ruined building because more enemies are on the way, including tanks and a new, smaller Metal Gear.

As Snake peers out of the building to formulate a plan, he is overcome with a coughing fit that drops him to his knees, and administers a remedy for the attack by shooting a mysterious drug into his neck. His attack subsides, and he scans the situation outside by switching on the device over his eye, labeled the "Solid Eye System." It gives him a tactical readout of the situation, and quickly thereafter Snake realizes that he's not alone. Something mechanical has been watching him, and the small, two-legged machine rolls towards him. Suspicious, Snake draws a bead on it, but hears a familiar voice. A panel on

the side opens up, to reveal the face of Snake's long-time ally, Otacon. They exchange a few words, and Otacon reveals that his remote device is equipped with a Cell Processor, an obvious nod to the game's PS3 home. The Otacon-controlled machine hands Snake an ammo clip, and he loads up, preparing to head out onto the battlefield. He lights up a cigarette and, with Otacon in tow, rushes out from the building into the midst of the combat. The video fades to black, and the game's subtitle, *Guns of the Patriots*, is revealed. In voice-over, Snake asks Otacon about the Cell Processor, and Otacon calls it "the key to winning the console war." The trailer ends with a close-up of Otacon's video screen, showing a clip from the PS3 EyeToy and Killzone trailers to demonstrate what the Cell Processor can do.

Obviously, the trailer looks stunning, as these



Guns of the Patriots was only one of the Metal Gear games on display at TGS. Along with Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence, the second Metal Gear PSP game was shown. Metal Gear Acid took the franchise in a startling direction with its card-based strategy play, and Metal Gear Acid 2 has another big surprise in store: it's in 3D!

Using a peripheral device called Solid Eye (Kojima liked the name so much he borrowed it for MGS 4) that will be packaged with the game, players will be able to see the game with depth unlike any other title. Unlike traditional 3D glasses, the Solid Eye does not use red and blue lenses. The game displays two separate images, and the clear lenses combine them into one and creates the illusion of depth. Also unlike classic 3D glasses, the Solid Eye is easy to look through without eyestrain or headache. In fact, Shinta Nojiri, the producer of Metal Gear Acid 2 is confident that players will want to keep using the device, and has included cinematics from other Metal Gear Solid games as unlockable bonuses. We witnessed the opening scene from Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater in 3D, and it is definitely a whole new way to experience Metal Gear Solid's trademark movies. Of course, the game can be played without the Solid Eye, but who would want to do that?

It might not be easily portable, but the Solid Eye promises new experiences on the PSP



Is that a mass-production REX model in the background?

screenshots clearly show, and reaction to the dip was uniformly positive. But in traditional Kojima fashion, it raises more questions than it answers. Who is the new enemy that Snake is fighting? Why does he appear to have aged so much more than Otacon? Who is controlling the new Metal Gears? We're certain that gamers all over the world will be clamoring for more information, which is why we're pleased to announce that next month's issue of Game Informer will feature a world exclusive Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots cover story, with new screens and new information straight from series creator Hideo Kojima himself. Game Informer Online will also exclusively host the internet's only high-res version of the MGS4 trailer, so you can check out the clip for yourself. As Otacon says about the game at the end of the trailer, "it'll be worth the wait!"



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#1

on the tour.

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

PSM

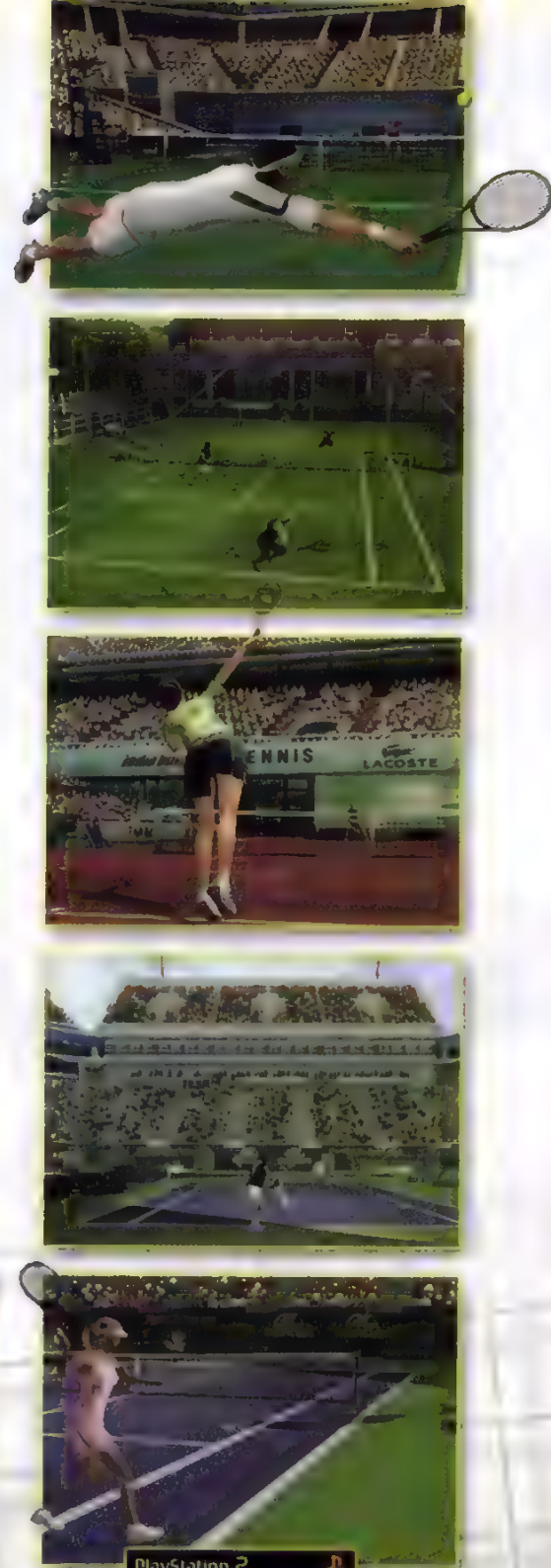
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PlayStation 2



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TGS REVEALS

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR PSP



Of the three hardware manufacturers, Sony offered the least new information on their next-gen console. In a large theater, the company played a montage of PS3 game trailers, most of which were also shown at E3. No other information on the console was given, although a few new trailers did debut—most notably *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*, easily the most talked about game of the show. But other new games were revealed as well, including *Devil May Cry 4*. The trailer, shown in both Sony and Capcom's booths, showed a snarling Dante walking through an alley towards the camera, then proceeding to beat it with his trademark moves. The trailer details from a first-person perspective what it would be like to be on the receiving end of Dante's fury.

Despite the impressive visual quality of the trailer, the *Devil May Cry 4* footage was definitely not taken from actual gameplay, and Dante's look is merely conceptual at this point. One video that appeared to show actual PS3 gameplay was the trailer for Incognito's *Warhawk*, which showed a plane swooping and maneuvering through a vicious dogfight over a photorealistic ocean. Although the footage was exciting and seemed to be in-game (a targeting reticle was clearly visible), there is no way to confirm that at this point.

Ubisoft unveiled a mysterious new trailer for *Project Assassins* (working title), the new game from the Prince of Persia team. Strangely, the video cut between a medieval knight and what appeared to be a present-day hospital. The trailer definitely raised more questions than it answered, so you can be sure we'll be watching this one closely.

Other new trailers included *Armored Core 4* and a new

Mobile Suit *Gundam* game. Both of these were shown in Microsoft's theater as well, as was the next-gen *Sonic the Hedgehog* trailer. Given that identical videos were shown for the two next-gen systems, the speculation that cross-console releases such as these will look very similar on 360 and PS3 seems reasonable.

Sony did have a small booth for highlighting some of its current-gen and PSP projects, although the handheld saw a larger share of new titles. The PS2 largely featured games like *Shadow of the Colossus* and *Ratchet: Deadlocked*, as well as a few new titles like *Rogue Galaxy* (see page 116), *Xenosaga III* (page 128), *Suikoden V* (page 38), and *Tourist Trophy* (page 46), the new motorcycle racing game from Polyphony Digital, creators of the *Gran Turismo* series. Although some, like *Suikoden V*, were playable on the floor, many of the PS2's titles were simply announced, and information on them was scarce.

The PSP, however, had a few interesting new titles playable on the floor, such as the translation program *Talkman*, which can convert speech between English, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean by using a new PSP microphone. Another unique title was *Portable Resort*, a vacation simulator that basically lets users look in on a virtual tropical island whenever they want a break from the real world. Although there aren't many details on what types of activities you can partake in on the island, one mode lets you play your



PSP like a ukulele by strumming the analog stick and hitting notes on the face buttons.

But the one PSP title that had the most people talking was *Loco Roco*. Probably the most buzzed-about playable title at TGS, *Loco Roco* looks poised to be the hottest PSP title of the next year. The premise is simple: you must move a colorful blob through a level to the exit. The blob itself cannot move, so the player must tilt the world with the shoulder buttons to get it moving. The mass can also split into several smaller blobs in order to get through smaller spaces, then reform again into the original mass.

With bright, cheerful visuals, unique gameplay mechanics, and the addictive quirk factor of *Katamari Damacy*, *Loco Roco* is just the type of game the slumping PSP needs.

Speaking of *Katamari*, the cult series' first PSP entry was playable at the show...and it sucks. A bizarre control scheme utterly ruined the great visuals (it looks better than the PS2 games) and well designed levels. Hopefully Namco will fix the controls before its release. *My, My, Katamari Damacy* (the U.S. title for the PSP version) is exactly the type of game the PSP needs, and it would be a shame for it to not turn out. With Sony's somewhat low-key presence at TGS, people weren't distracted enough by exciting announcements to overlook disappointments like *My, My, Katamari Damacy*.

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THE ZOMBIE RENAISSANCE

DEAD RISING BITES DOWN HARD

The survival horror genre is growing, new zombie movies are in the works, and the shuffling undead are experiencing a resurgence of popularity. While it may be easy to confuse upcoming zombie-related titles amid the sprays of gore and improvised weapons, this year's Tokyo Game Show called our attention to one of the genre's most promising titles: Capcom's *Dead Rising*.

Ever since we first saw the title at E3, we were intrigued by this next-gen take on how one reporter survives while surrounded by hungry former humans. While morality does

come into play (allowing you to help people or sacrifice them so you can get a grade-A scoop), the most recent build is intriguing on a very different level. It's a simply gorgeous game about creatures who love to eat flesh. Even more amazing than the stunning character models is the terrifying sea of zombies around you; creator Keiji Inafune has said that he hopes to fit approximately 1,000 enemies onscreen at one time.

Of course, that just means that players will have more targets to hit as they plow through to their objectives. *Dead*

Rising taps into a unique visceral rage as players crunch and squish their way through the mob with weapons like pipes, paint cans, and even cash registers. There may be a handful of zombie games on the horizon, but none that we've seen come so close to replicating the darkly comical feeling of classic films like *Dawn of the Dead*. No definite release date has been set, but look forward to getting this Xbox 360 exclusive sometime in 2006.

games

SUIKODEN SWINGS!

ALREADY ANNOUNCED FOR U.S.

While we were at Tokyo Game Show, Konami was nice enough to announce the American release of *Suikoden V* here in the States on the PS2, although the company curiously didn't specify any timeframe for when the game would actually come out. Like previous entries in the RPG series, this fifth installment will feature the 108 Stars of Destiny. The game takes place in the kingdom of Falena during a time of unrest involving one of the 27 True Runes, the Sun Rune.

Although loading times of the TGS demo were long and combat wasn't fully revealed, the battle system revolves around six-member parties (where you'll get to set up their tactical formation). The game also features a handful of minigames and a homebase system where your allies hang out. The TGS demo was fairly short and didn't show off much, so we're anxious to hear more about the latest installment to this respected RPG series soon.



■ The six-character party will let you bring along more of these cosplay fanatics



SONIC BLURS INTO NEXT-GEN

YUJI NAKA INTRODUCES NEW HEDGEHOG



■ Unsurprisingly, next gen Sonic delivers an astounding sense of speed

Sonic Team lead and blue blur creator Yuji Naka was on hand at TGS to personally demo the hedgehog's new next-gen game. Titled simply *Sonic the Hedgehog*, this Xbox 360/PS3 title looks to be taking good advantage of the capabilities of the beefier hardware. Havok physics give Sonic's world a much greater feeling of interactivity, the environments bristle with detail that simply wouldn't be possible in this generation, and the time of day is reflected in both lighting and shadows.

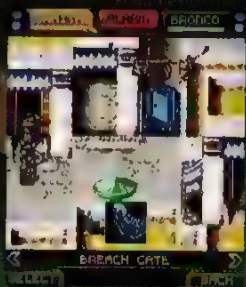
While the gameplay looks startlingly similar to *Sonic Adventure* at this point, the demo we saw was very early and could easily change drastically by the time the game ships to retail. Hopefully we'll finally have the quality 3D Sonic title that fans have been eagerly awaiting for years when this next-gen *Sonic the Hedgehog* is finished.

HOOYAH!

SOCOM

U.S. NAVY SEALS

MOBILE RECON



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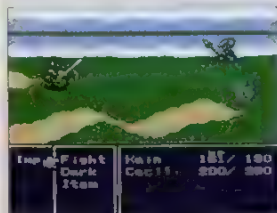
MTV LOVES THE SUFFERING

MTV films has picked up the option to make a film out of Midway's horror action title *The Suffering*. The company promises to work with Midway on the movie, and developer Surreal is also eager to lend a hand. MTV and Midway already have a relationship to put MTV branding into games like *LA Rush*.



FF IV FOR GBA

Square Enix is releasing a handheld version of RPG *Final Fantasy IV* (originally released as *FF II* in America) in Japan this December. The game will feature a few new locations and characters—some with different abilities. No U.S. date has been announced just yet, however.



GRADIUS GOES TO PS3

Everyone's excited to see what new frontiers are opened by the next generation of gaming, but we're just as excited to see genres from the past make an appearance on the new consoles. Konami is helping us out by announcing that its hardcore shooter franchise *Gradius* is coming to the PlayStation 3.

DUAL XENOSAGAS FOR DS

Both *Xenosagas I & II* are coming to the Nintendo DS courtesy of Namco and developer Monolith Soft, to be released in a single cartridge. Although these games use differing battle systems on the PS2, this title will utilize the one from the first *Xenosaga*. The DS can't replicate the series' detailed look, so the 2D characters will be more comic-like than in the original titles on PS2. Also making things interesting are new scripts for the games, which will follow their original storylines.



MAKAI WARS SPREADS TO PSP

Reports of publisher/developer Nippon Ichi's move away from Sony and its PlayStation lineup have been greatly exaggerated. The company has just announced that *Makai Wars*, first scheduled for the PSP, is being switched to the PlayStation 3.



The original teaser art for *Makai Wars* when it was slated for the PSP.

news

ROCKSTAR PLANS MORE GTA

BULLY DELAYED INTO 2006



A recent conference call by parent company Take-Two Interactive showed Rockstar Games busy building future plans to overcome the recent furor over the *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* Hot Coffee mod. The PC version has already been patched to make the adults-only content of the game inaccessible, the newly M-rated Xbox version is now on shelves, and Rockstar expects the PS2 edition to hit before October 31. Although sales were up for the last quarter compared to the same time last year, Rockstar showed a loss of \$28.8 million for the quarter. Part of this loss is being attributed to the Hot Coffee controversy.

Irrespective of the company's recent stumble, PS2 and Xbox title *Bully* (which has also come under some heat for its content) is seeing its previous fall 2005 release date pushed back into spring of next year.

For the future, Rockstar tantalizingly teased that a "sequel of a Rockstar brand" would ship later in 2006. Speculation is that this might mean that a follow-up to *Red Dead Revolver* could be in store for the launch of the PlayStation 3—which is expected to come out in America in the fall of 2006. Rockstar showed teaser footage of the title at this year's E3.

As for the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, Rockstar would only say that the next fiscal year will see "extensions" of the popular series. This doesn't sound like sequels to us, but rather something else. Perhaps the company will expand the universe of

GTA on the PSP like it has already done with *GTA: Liberty City Stories* for the handheld. *Liberty City Stories* takes place in the location of *GTA III*, but isn't the same storyline. In the conference call, Rockstar promised two new titles for the PSP.

In other *Grand Theft Auto* news on October 18 Rockstar is putting out two GTA bundles for eager fans. One is *Grand Theft Auto: The Trilogy* for Xbox, and the other is *GTA: San Andreas Special Edition* for the PlayStation 2. Both are M-rated. At the time of this writing, the suggested retail price for both the *The Trilogy* and the *Special Edition* was unknown.

Befitting its name, *GTA: The Trilogy* features all three current-gen entries in the open-world crime franchise. Meanwhile, over on the PS2, *GTA: San Andreas Special Edition* features *The Introduction*, which is a movie short using the game's graphics engine showing the events leading up to the beginning of *San Andreas* featuring the intertwining of several stories from the vantage point of characters in the game. *The Introduction* was also featured with the previously released *San Andreas* soundtrack.

Also being added to *Special Edition* is a copy of Rockstar's debut documentary film entitled *Sunday Driver*. This documentary, directed by Carl Strong, follows the Compton/Watts chapter of low rider car club *The Majestics*. It features first-person interviews as members talk about what it means to be in the club that's dedicated to "the definitive modified automobile." *Sunday Driver* is rated R, and will also be sold separately on UMD.



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CHILDREN?
A PLAYGROUND?
A PARK?

I SEE
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MY COUNTRY
MY FUTURE
AND IT'S ALL WORTH FIGHTING FOR.



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57

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



SEGA

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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin



BAD

Myst V: End of Ages developer Cyan Worlds laid off most of its staff – ironically – over Labor Day. An official statement from publishing partner Ubisoft confirmed the decision to “close the doors of their games production unit,” although a few members of the company remain on staff and founder Rand Miller says that the possibility exists that things could be up and running again.

UGLY

First the Xbox, now the PS2. Sony has issued a recall for 3.5 million PS2 AC adaptors for the new slimline version of the system. The company says that those power cords manufactured between August and December 2004 could overheat. Please go to www.us.playstation.com/Adaptor/ to see if you need a new adaptor.



UGLY

Executives of former publisher Acclaim are facing allegations of corporate malpractice to the tune of \$150 million. The court-appointed trustee overseeing the financial mess due to the company's declaration of bankruptcy charges that co-founders Greg Fischbach and James Scoroposki, among others, laundered money, granted themselves large raises during Acclaim's severe financial difficulties, and treated the company as if it were “a personal piggy bank.”



Acclaim co-founder Greg Fischbach

GOOD

Halo 2 developers Bungie are calling on gamers to do their part to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. It is selling “Fight The Flood” t-shirts for \$19.99 on its website, with all of the profits (about \$15 per shirt) going to the Red Cross. Bungie also donated the profits from its online store for the month of September to the effort, and has also sold charity auction items.



HALO FIGHT FOR HURRICANE PRIST 2005



BAD

Marvel may be bringing its b- and c-squad superheroes to your video game console in the future. The comic book company has just announced that it will self-finance up to 10 films based on so-called superheroes like Ant-Man, Hawkeye, and Power Pack. Who gives a s— about Power Pack for crap's sake?! On the bright side, Captain America, The Avengers, and Nick Fury are being tapped, so there's a chance that some of these movies won't totally eat it.

GOOD

The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) says that it will sue the state of Michigan if it enacts a law that restricts the sale of games with vaguely defined violent content. Meanwhile, the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association is calling on California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to veto a bill which would fine retailers for selling M-rated video games to minors.

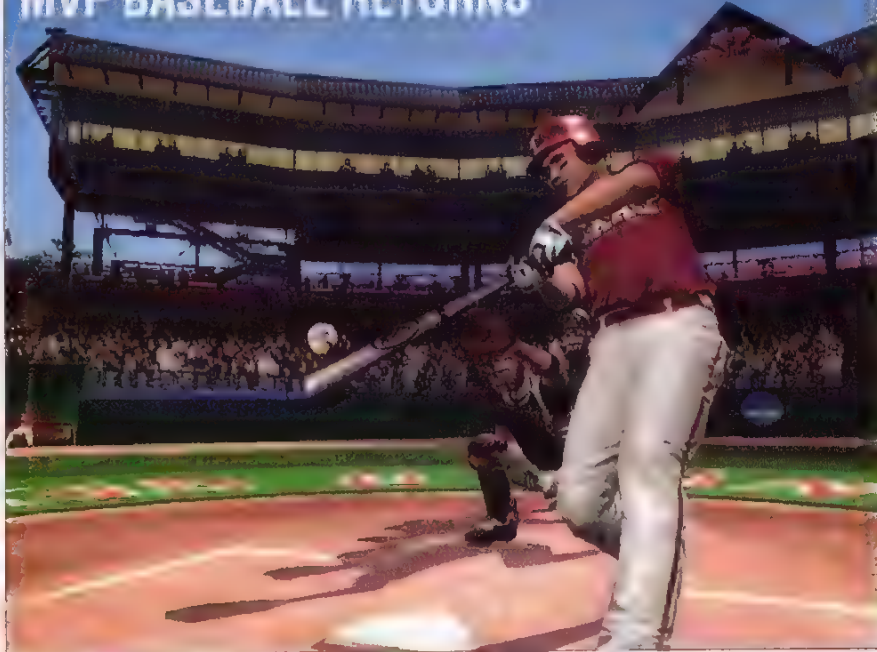


GOOD

Get marching with Sony Online's Field Commander for PSP this February. The game puts you in charge of 15 Army divisions over land, sea, and sky over a period of 30 missions. Field Commander's maneuvers extend to wireless multiplayer, so you can get your turn-based strategy groove on while you're waiting in line to take your turn at collecting unemployment.

EA SWINGS COLLEGE BAT

MVP BASEBALL RETURNS



Striking out on Major League Baseball due to 2K Sports' exclusive third-party baseball deal with the MLB, EA Sports is regrouping and coming back with MVP 06 NCAA Baseball for PS2 and Xbox this spring. While the college World Series is only viewable on The Ocho, whether you're into college baseball or not this title will at least give gamers the chance to play EA's excellent MVP baseball engine (hence the name of the game).

EA Sports has not announced which schools will be featured in the game, but if the publisher's NCAA Football title is any guide, then we can expect all the major Division I teams to be included, as well as those from some of the lower ones. ESPN's Mike Patrick and former Stanford pitcher Kyle Peterson will team up in the booth, and the game will also feature create-a-player and create-a-stadium options. MVP's Dynasty Mode is being dubbed Road to Omaha.

Back in April, Collegiate Licensing Company CEO Pat Battle told Game Informer that a deal for college baseball title was “pretty far along” at that time, and disclosed that other discussions for collegiate hockey and lacrosse video games were also ongoing. Hopefully we'll hear about these soon.

破壊へ向から



鮮血大山斬り



血の橋を渡る



首斬り盆栽



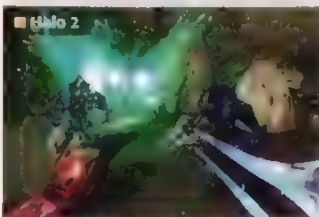
LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



OFF-SEASON FOR NFL STREET

The last NFL Street title by EA Big was rushed to the market and it showed in the game's lack of substantial improvement over the original NFL Street. Heading this, publisher EA and developer EA Tiburon are taking their time with NFL Street 3, which is not scheduled to come out until January 2007. We presume by this time PlayStation 3 will be out here in America, so it is reasonable to expect the game to be on all the upcoming systems.



HALO 3 PARANOIA

Halo developer Bunge is so paranoid about the storyline for Halo 3 leaking out that two different storylines are being worked on so that even the company's employees are in the dark as to the plot of the game. Halo 3 is heavily rumored to be coming out to compete day and date with the launch of the PlayStation 3 console, which is expected for fall 2006 in America.



FORZA 2 ALREADY WARMING UP

Recently, some screenshots claiming to be of Forza Motorsport 2 car models showed up on the Internet. Although there was some discussion of whether they were real or not, Loose Talk did hear from a good source that the second iteration of the car sim series is being worked on right now and is expected to show up for the Xbox 360 in 2006. We don't expect the game to hit before spring.



NINJA GAIDEN 2 IN DEVELOPMENT

Team Ninja recently released a list of its upcoming projects, and the sequel to the Xbox action title Ninja Gaiden wasn't amongst them. However, Loose Talk has heard that a sequel is indeed in development, and will integrate the combat more completely with the platforming elements. Team Ninja's Tomonobu Itagaki has stated that he only wants to develop for the most powerful hardware available, giving rise to the rumor that Ninja Gaiden 2 will appear on PS3. However, we have reason to believe that the action sequel will soon be announced for Xbox 360.

XBOX 360 PRICE DROP, ALREADY?

In a statement to Reuters, Todd Holmdah, corporate vice president of the Xbox product said that it will cost Microsoft less and less to make the Xbox 360 every year. Could we see this savings passed on to consumers in the form of a price drop? Speculation abounds that Microsoft plans to do this once sales on the console cool sufficiently.



MICROSOFT'S \$49.99 XBOX 360 GAMES?

In the press release for the collector's version of Perfect Dark Zero, publisher Microsoft lists the price of this limited edition release at \$59.99. The regular Perfect Dark Zero will hit shelves for \$49.99. Publishers have been saying for a while now that next-gen games would likely retail for \$59.99, meaning that Microsoft could be pricing its first-party titles at \$49.99, similar to Sony's \$39.99 first-party pricing structure for this generation.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

This early Xbox title tried unsuccessfully to establish the fighting genre on the system. We'll give you a hint—it isn't one of the Dead or Alive games. This Microsoft Games Studio title was made by Studio G-gante, and spearheaded by John Tobias, one of the creators of Mortal Kombat. Legendary image aside, this game's attempt to use interactive environments in a fighting title failed miserably. The company tried to make a comeback with WWE Wrestlingmania 21, but that wasn't fun either.

(Answer on page 48)



games

POLYPHONY'S NEW NEED FOR SPEED

GT MAKERS GO TWO WHEELING

For those who've beaten every inch of the Gran Turismo franchise, the developer of that vaunted car racing series, Polyphony Digital, is offering a two-wheeled challenge with Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Simulator. The game presents motorcycle racing with all the simulation characteristics and attention to detail that the developer has brought to bear upon Gran Turismo. Tourist Trophy is appearing on the PS2 this winter in Japan, although an American release is unknown at this time.

Apart from looking pretty good as you flirt with certain death around switchback turns, the game sports real-life bikes such as the 2005 Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10R, and the title offers a selection of helmets, gloves, and equipment from the best brands.

Although most Gran Turismo fans would rather have seen Polyphony deliver online play for GT 4 or GT on PSP, anyone who's raced into the early hours of the morning determined to collect all of GT's cars will surely be excited by Polyphony's newest ode to the altar of speed.



Tourist Trophy
THE REAL RIDING SIMULATOR

RIDGE RACER 6 TEST DRIVE
FIRST LOOK/FEEL OF 360 RACER

Namco's Ridge Racer series is famous for both its early launch support of new consoles and its fast and furious drifting. Here's a first look at Ridge Racer 6, which was playable in a limited form at Tokyo Game Show. The game is expected to be ready for the Xbox 360 launch on November 22.

If you're wondering if this Ridge Racer is going to be wildly different than all the previous ones, you need not fear. The game's traditional drift feel is intact, and RR 6 includes the boost button from the PSP edition. Namco has online plans for RR 6 that include head-to-head races (a first for the series), a persistent leaderboard, downloadable ghost cars, and rides that you can purchase in the Marketplace.



THE BEAUTY OF REDEMPTION



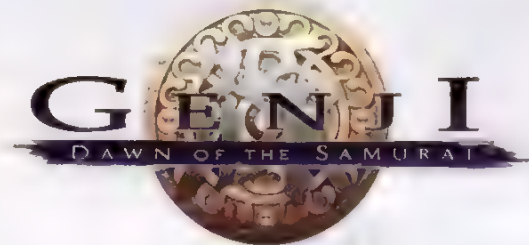
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TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

RICHARD ROUSE III
Creative Director,
Midway Games



- 1 The Sims - PC
- 2 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City - PS2
- 3 Half-Life - PC
- 4 Centipede - Arcade
- 5 Railroad Tycoon - PC

READER

MEGAN BURGER
Barrington, NJ



- 1 Final Fantasy II - SNES
- 2 Ms. Pac-Man - Arcade
- 3 Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic - Xbox
- 4 The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past - SNES
- 5 Soul Calibur 2 - Xbox

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 Attachments We Want the Nintendo Revolution Controller to Have

- 10 A pressure-sensitive touch screen for punishing Nintendogs
- 9 "Nintendo r0x0r5" personally written on each controller by Miyamoto
- 8 Chrome rims
- 7 Circular analog input devices, a.k.a. buttons
- 6 Nougat
- 5 Kleenex dispenser. To dry the tears
- 4 Sai, katana, and bo staff styles to complement nunchuck style
- 3 Not gyroscopes - Gyros!
- 2 Something that lets you control Jak, Master Chief, and Waluigi together somehow. That would soooooo kick ass.
- 1 "Summon Reggie" trigger

Name That Game Answer: Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus



Spark Unlimited, creator of Call of Duty: Finest Hour, is suing publisher Activision for \$10 million, alleging that the company not only renege on a deal between the two for Call of Duty sequels, but that it also owes Spark money.

According to the lawsuit filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court, Activision and Spark cemented a deal in late 2002 (which was officially announced in the spring of 2003) for the developer to create three Call of Duty console titles. The first of which, CoD: Finest Hour, was delivered last year. However, the suit alleges that for the second title in the deal, Activision took Spark's proposal for what would become Call of Duty 2: Big Red One and handed it to internal developer Treyarch. Using some pretty aggressive language, the lawsuit claims, "Activision had already decided to bring the development of the sequel in-house at Activision so it could realize an even higher level of profit on the sequels than it had on

the original game." Big Red One, set to release in November, could be prevented if Spark's lawsuit is successful.

Monetary compensation is being sought by the developer over a variety of disputes. Spark says that not only did it lose money for not being able to develop Big Red One, but that Activision reduced its royalty rate and failed to provide funding between projects (known as bridge funding). The lawsuit also contends that the publisher tried to hire key employees away from Spark "hoping that if Spark was sufficiently crippled, [it] would be unable to protect its rights." Part of this monetary compensation would be for Finest Hour's multiplayer portion, which Spark says was not in the game's original design, but was created at the last minute out of the developer's own pocket.

Activision has not commented on the lawsuit.

games

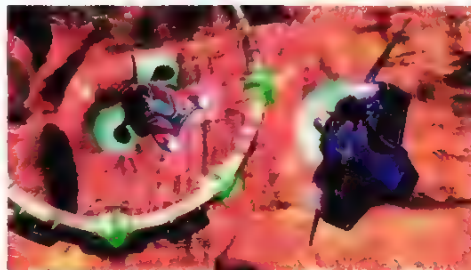
KOEI'S RACING AHEAD BRANCHES OUT FOR NEXT-GEN

Koei is infamous for its penchant for historical series like Romance of the Three Kingdoms and Dynasty Warriors, but the company is looking to break away and expand its horizons via next-gen systems like Sony's PlayStation 3 with futuristic racer Fatal Inertia. Koei says that the game will be ready for the launch of the system, and that it has been designed with the Western audience in mind. In fact, the game is being developed in Koei's new studio in Canada - a rare move for the company, which until this point has focused almost solely on Japan.

Fatal Inertia aims to mix futuristic racing with combat

elements, and both will be wrapped up in a physics engine borrowed from Sony. Koei is stressing the game's environments, not just because the "nature-based" locations look pretty, but because it is making them integral to play. For instance, a rockslide can be triggered along a canyon wall to take out an opponent. Multiplayer is promised as well, but specific online details for the title weren't specified.

Continuing the East-West action is Blade Storm: Hundred Years War, which is being developed by Dynasty Warriors developer Omega Force. One of the themes of the game will apparently be the integration of the East and West.



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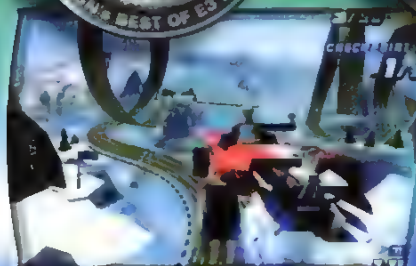
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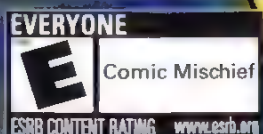


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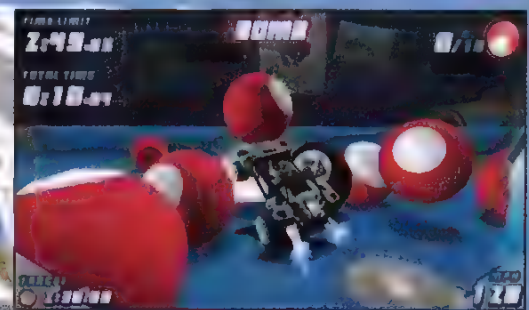
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- MATT MILLER,
GAME INFORMER MAGAZINE

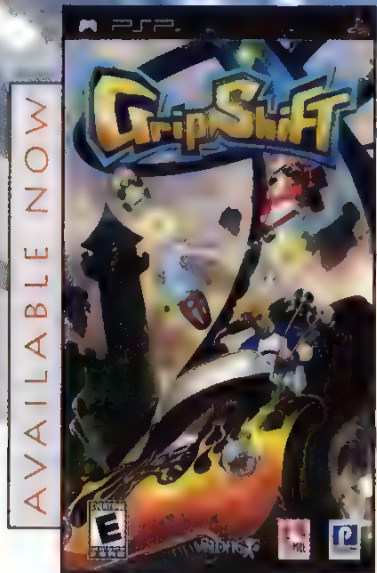
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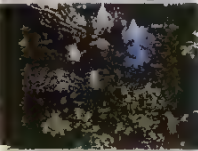
CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1994 **Foot in the Door**

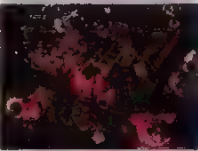
During college, Pardo gets his start at the now-defunct Interplay Productions doing game testing on long-forgotten titles Cyberia and Voyeur, as well as the much-loved Descent. Quickly rising in the company, he later works as a producer on Whiplash and Tempest X3.

1996 **School's Out**

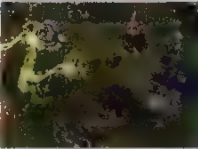
Pardo graduates from the University of California, Irvine, with a bachelor's degree in Criminology, Law, and Society.

1998 **Storm's Coming**

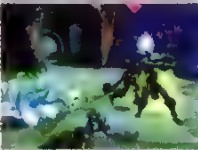
During the development of Starcraft, Pardo is hired by Blizzard to work on game balance. Later that year, he helps the expansion, Brood War, in the role of lead designer. Incidentally, hundreds of thousands of current and past Starcraft players hold the game up as the pinnacle of well-balanced competitive RTS to this day.

2002 **Chaos Supreme**

Pardo's role as lead designer on Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos cements his status as one of PC gaming's luminaries. Warcraft III goes on to critical acclaim, massive consumer support, and even now is the focus of a huge community of competitive players, mod-makers, and enthusiasts.

2003 **Getting Colder**

Continuing his streak of fantastic titles, Pardo works as lead designer on Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne. This expansion is as well-received as the original, beloved by fans and critics alike.

2004 **A New World**

Once again the lead designer, Pardo's latest project, World of Warcraft, finally goes live. The game quickly leapfrogs all other MMOs in terms of subscribers, and receives rave reviews across the board.

ROB PARDO

VICE PRESIDENT OF GAME DESIGN, BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

>> With a leading role on the design front of some of the most popular, successful, and downright fun PC games of the last decade, Rob Pardo has helped shaped the fates of two key genres. We got the chance to hear his thoughts on game development firsthand. <<

Blizzard is about as famous as a development company gets in this industry. What's it like to work where your every decision and line of code is expected by the fans to be of the highest quality?

I think it's actually very cool. I think it brings out the best in all of us to be under that sort of pressure, because there is such a built-in audience that it really pushes you to bring out your best work.

Is there any difference between working for Blizzard back when it was an independent studio and how it works now, being part of Vivendi Universal?

The only real difference is the size of the company itself. There really hasn't been a lot of difference between who has owned us and how we operate. We've always operated the same way, it's just that the size of our company has grown larger, which

The biggest problem with the level 60 game is that there wasn't enough content when we shipped the game. We suspected that that was probably the case, and we wish we would've gotten more in there. But there's definitely a game mechanic change: you stop leveling, which is a lot of what people enjoy about the game going up. Unfortunately, when it comes to being able to craft that sort of content, we're never going to be able to stay ahead of the players. So, our goal has been to try to provide a lot of interesting different types of content for players when they get up to 60, and we're going to continue to try to add that.

As a designer, how does it feel to have the vocal WoW community tearing apart everything you do? Does that affect the decisions you make, or do you just have to rely on your own judgement?

Speaking hypothetically, the biggest problem is just development time. When we developed WoW originally, we weren't taking consoles into account at all. So, as far as how it would all be architected or how it would work, I wouldn't even be prepared to offer an idea of how long it would take to actually translate. Another aspect is the download needs of an MMO. Our patches usually run somewhere around 50 MB, because we're bringing down new content all the time. If you have a console, where does that content go? You don't have hard drives. So those are a lot of the bigger hurdles. It'll be interesting to see with the next-generation consoles whether or not they take enough of those things into account to allow something like an MMO to cross over to console.

So right now there are no plans to bring WoW to console?

If you want to be successful in the job of game designer, you have to develop a very thick skin.

has of course brought new challenges. The development teams have grown larger and larger, but from a corporate ownership standpoint, we're pretty sheltered from any sort of decisions that happen at that level. All of our various owners have been pretty understanding in allowing us to operate how we normally operate.

Over the last few years, Blizzard has seen the departure of some key staff members. How has that affected the day-to-day workings of the company?

It always affects us when you lose staff members and key people. I think that the departures of our staff members are just more highly publicized. When you get to be as large of a company as we are, you have some turnover, and there are some people that want to try other things, start their own companies and what have you. We've also had some people that have done that and come back to the fold. So it's affected us, but two of the three founders are still with the company, and a lot of the really core people who go back through all the 'Craft games are all still here.

One of the big criticisms of WoW has been how the game changes when you hit the level cap. Is that something you're satisfied with right now, or do you want to change it?

One thing I've definitely learned, and this dates all the way back to game balance in the Starcraft days, is that if you want to be successful in the job of game designer, you have to develop a very thick skin. I don't mean that you get to the point where you ignore people, because that's the wrong approach. A lot of times I see designers do one of two things: either they'll become hypersensitive and defensive to criticism, or they'll go the opposite route and just assume that no one knows what they're talking about. What I feel that the right approach is, is that you have to read [fan criticism], but you have to try to understand that all criticism is good criticism. It's not that we're going to fix or change everything in the game that people talk about, but it does give you a good barometer of what people are talking about and concerned about. Often times, if we see something in the forums that's exploded into a big topic, we'll pretty carefully look at what people are saying and talk about it. Sometimes we will make changes and sometimes we'll stick to our guns, but it's more of an early warning system than anything else.

Lots of PC developers are looking at consoles these days - even Blizzard has Starcraft: Ghost in the works. What are the potential allures and pitfalls of bringing WoW over to console?

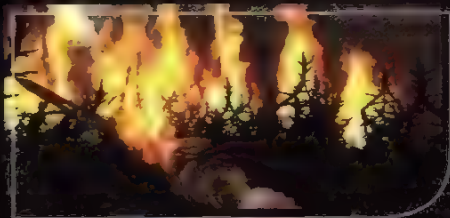
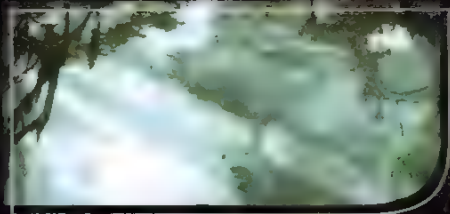
No, sir. It'd be great for us to pierce that market; it'd be a Herculean effort, though. We're in the midst of trying to get our service to the point where we're caught up on patches and content and our servers are rock-hard stable, so more than anything else it's a matter of priority. Even if we were to think about it, who knows how long it would take? [laughs]

What do you see as the next step for the MMORPG genre?

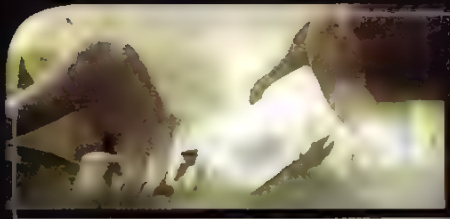
I think there are a lot of different motifs out there. I don't think there's an obvious next step; if you look at a lot of the different games coming out, people are exploring a lot of different directions. What I'm the most interested in seeing is the MMO that finally allows users to create content themselves, trying to come up with that kind of gameworld that was immortalized in *Snow Crash*. I don't know if that's in the near future; I think it's a little further out. At some point it's going to evolve to there. You can see games like *Half-Life 2*, or *Warcraft III* for that matter, that have these really active mod communities, and they almost grow into that already. So when someone can harness that and put it in an MMO, I think that will be a pretty interesting evolution of the genre.

THE MAN BEHIND THE BLIZZARD

■ Running the world's most successful massively multiplayer online game is the latest feather in Rob Pardo's cap



LOOK INTO THE EYES OF THE



THINK YOU KNOW KONG? THINK AGAIN.

**BREATHING HEAVILY, YOU TROUEN IN A THICK
THICKET OF JUNGLE VINES.** Twenty yards away, a
hungry Tyrannosaur roges through the trees, hunting
for his dinner. Fear pierces your gut as you realize
your trusty weapon is empty. Suddenly, an impossible
huge ape bodyslams the T-Rex, sending it sprawling.
And a titanic struggle erupts before your eyes.
Welcome to Skull Island - and the unforgettable world
of Peter Jackson's King Kong.

BEAST



K

ING KONG FIRST MADE HIS CINEMATIC DEBUT in 1933, thrilling audiences with a powerful story and

groundbreaking special effects for its time.

Peter Jackson's current reimagining promises to do no less, bringing the perilous world of Skull Island to life as only Jackson can – Jackson and famed game designer Michel Ancel, that is.

+ + + + + + + +

AN AVID GAMER, PETER JACKSON STARTED DREAMING UP IDEAS

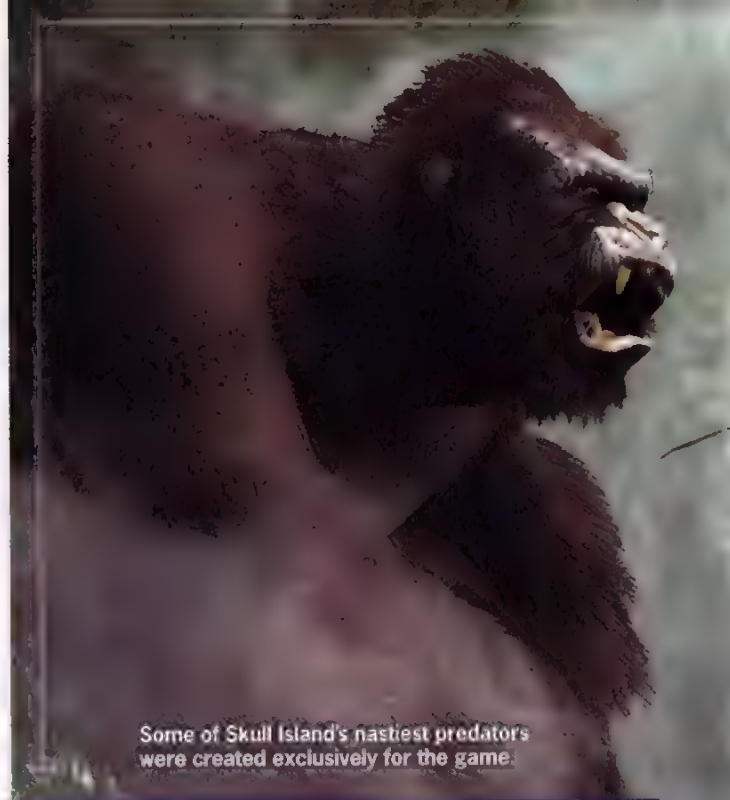
for a King Kong video game as soon as he started the movie. But to make a video game as memorable as the movie, he needed a creative partner with a true talent for rendering both fantasy and emotion. Then he played *Beyond Good & Evil™*, an epic adventure crafted by renowned game designer Michel Ancel. Right away, Jackson knew he'd found his man. And, judging by the jaw-dropping beauty and intensity of the gameplay, Jackson and Ancel have succeeded brilliantly.

BREATHING LIFE INTO A LEGEND

Jackson and Ancel set out to create a game deeper and more immersive than the film itself. So the game had to look and feel just as convincing as the "real" world captured on film. To achieve this, the development team used every trick in the book – plus a few that aren't.

A rare technique called "inverse kinematics" adds frightening realism to the behavior of Skull Island's predators. This technique varies and synchronizes the animations used for each type of creature, depending on the creature's AI. For example, if you're detected by a T-Rex, you'll see the monster turn its eyes and head directly toward you, lunging over rocks and smashing through the jungle in a convincing attempt to make you its dinner.

But techniques like inverse kinematics would mean little without a sophisticated AI system governing the behavior of Skull Island's denizens. Some species attack alone, while others use clever pursuit tactics to attack in groups. Fortunately, your enemies aren't the only intelligent creatures on Skull Island. Your crew will protect you, suggest solutions to problems, and generally react as real humans – real scared humans – would.

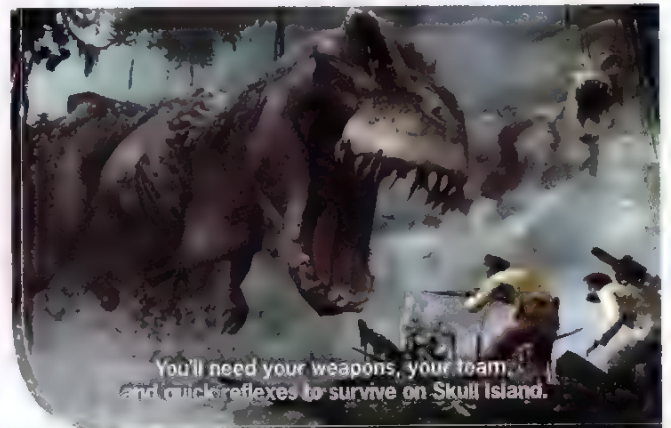


Some of Skull Island's nastiest predators were created exclusively for the game.

"[Ancel] has just a great storytelling skill in making you so involved in the game as a player that you actually become emotionally attached to the characters that you're playing with." – Peter Jackson.

And just wait till you feast your eyes on the stunningly detailed jungle of Skull Island. Thanks to clever layering of the largest number of 2D sprites, filters, and effects ever used in any video game – including meteorological effects like water, fog, wind, fire, and smoke – you'll almost be able to feel the hot, humid jungle air. Blades of grass rustle convincingly around your legs. Sunlight patterns shift subtly. In short, this jungle doesn't just look pretty. It feels alive.

Perhaps the greatest creation of all is Kong himself. Agile and powerful, Kong moves through Skull Island with remarkable force and speed. And take a close look at his fur; the dev team used intricate 3D effects to actually animate each separate strand. The overall effect is breathtakingly real.



You'll need your weapons, your team, and quick reflexes to survive on Skull Island.



Where guns fail, brute strength often prevails.



with the weapons you can carry, you'll never win just by fighting. To stay alive, you'll need other strategies, such as tricking predators into battling each other and using the environment to set clever traps.

At a key moment, you begin playing Kong in third-person. When the camera pulls back to reveal Kong's mighty perspective, you feel a rush of freedom and power. Delivered from the harried perspective of Jack, you inherit swift movements, powerful battle attacks, and the gratifying ability to smash, throw, and scale just about everything around you. But playing as Kong isn't just a walk in the park. Confronted by multiple enemies with clever attack patterns, you'll have to fight hard to defeat huge T-Rexes and outsmart swarms of smaller predators.

The alternating gameplay intensifies the emotions already inherent in the story. Ancel, like Jackson, never loses sight of his audience, meting out new challenges just when you want them the most. The result is nothing short of an unforgettable game experience. ■

A MASSIVE STEP FORWARD: INNOVATIONS IN IMMERSION

Every technical decision for Peter Jackson's King Kong has been made with an eye to thoroughly immersing the player in the world of the game. For example, you can still move and look around while scripted plot events occur, unlike nearly all other games. And the absence of a heads-up display makes the action feel more immediate. For example, when your character suffers an injury, you won't see any shrinking "health bar." Instead, your vision will blur and turn red.

The game also offers new experiences that don't appear in the movie. In addition to movie creatures, Jackson added beasts not seen in the film. Multiple pathways offer you a different experience every time you play, so that you'll never have to play the same game twice. The difficulty level scales fluidly according to your performance, growing more challenging as you improve.

Most impressive of all is the range of emotions evoked by the alternating gameplay possibilities. By inviting you to play as both Jack Driscoll and Kong himself, the game delivers an unforgettable mix of intensity, realism, and entertainment through a rare combination of first- and third-person play.

PLAYING WITH POWER: HEROES GREAT AND SMALL

Conceived by Jackson and realized to phenomenal effect by the development team, the dual gameplay between Jack and Kong delivers a dramatic shift in perspective and power.

As Jack Driscoll, you're outnumbered and overpowered by predators bigger, stronger, and faster than you. To heighten the sense of fear and danger, you play Jack's role in first-person. You'll have to advance through a dense jungle, never knowing what lurks behind the next tree. Armed only

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG



XBOX 360

PlayStation.2



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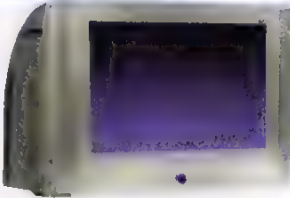
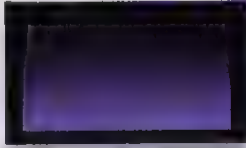

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tech



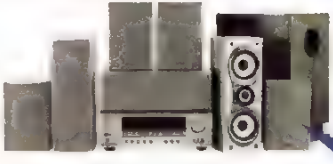
HIGH DEF ERA?

If you want to buy a next-generation console and take advantage of what it can do (i.e. high definition video and surround sound audio), how much is it going to cost from square one? Here are a couple of guidelines that will get you at least 720p video resolution and 5.1 surround sound. Mix and match to figure out what matters most to you and how you game. Also keep in mind that prices can vary wildly - we've listed the manufacturer's price, but do some shopping and you can save hundreds.

TELEVISIONS

	What's Available	What To Look For	What's Missing	Suggestions
GOOD	Small LCDs (think around 15 to 17-inches) and moderately sized tube sets (high 20s to low 30-inch sizes)	Check for deep, solid blacks and high refresh rates on the LCDs. Keep an eye on the weight and case sizes for CRTs	At this price, you'll be limited on the number of high-def inputs and will be lucky to get emerging stuff like DVI and HDMI (i.e. fully digital signal streams)	 <p>TX-P2675WH 26" WIDESCREEN DYNAPLAT HDTV Manufacturer: Samsung List Price: \$799.99</p>
BETTER	Medium-sized LCDs and plasma sets	Make sure that your chosen set has as many component, DVI, and HDMI inputs as you can get. Also keep an eye out for the black level and refresh rate issues	Inexpensive sets in this size range (mid 30-inches, give or take) save money with cheaper case materials and design as well as menus that limit picture customization	 <p>TH-37PX50U 37" WIDESCREEN PLASMA HDTV Manufacturer: Panasonic List Price: \$2,500</p> <p><i>A high refresh rate means less motion blur and a sharper picture.</i></p>
BEST	DLP technology, that's big advantages are light-weight cases and great picture in most any light, and big plasmas	These technologies will give you a lot of size for your money, but consider the room you're putting it in, the amount of tweaking you can do to the picture, the number of inputs (again, component and DVI/HDMI), and case design	The really big LCDs can run in the tens of thousands, so at this level you're really just losing the biggest sizes on the market	 <p>HL-R6178W 61" HIGH-DEFINITION 1080P DLP TV Manufacturer: Samsung List Price: \$4,499.99</p>

SURROUND SOUND

	What's Available	What To Look For	What's Missing	Suggestions
GOOD	Remember that you often get what you pay for - cheaping out can yield sub-par speakers and receivers that do little but route sound	70 watts per channel isn't floor-shaking, but will provide nice sound for an apartment or enclosed entertainment room - above that is gravy. You can get some of the bells and whistles like video switching and a powered sub in this price range, and you should	More power, more inputs, and what can be much better case design for the speakers, sub, and receiver	 <p>HT-DDW660 Manufacturer: Sony List Price: \$199.99</p> <p><i>Small footprint with big, full sound</i></p>
BETTER	More power, better looks, extra inputs (including HDMI), and video switching (so you don't have to get an extra switchbox if your TV is short on inputs)	Check that the display gives adequate information and instruction, that the components look at least decent, and above all, let your ears be your guide	High-def video switching is a rarity at this mid-range, and you won't get that "this could set off a car alarm down the street" feeling either. Then again, maybe your neighbors would thank you for that...	 <p>YHT-160 5.1-CHANNEL HOME THEATER Manufacturer: Yamaha List Price: \$329.99</p>
BEST	Great look, and great-sounding components that pack tons of the newest features into a smaller form factor	High definition (and maybe even DVI/HDMI switching) means that you can plug a lot of stuff into the receiver, but only have to run one line to the TV. At this price, each of the pieces in the box will be good enough quality that you can upgrade part of the system later and keep some of this equipment to save money in the long run	You're saving money by buying a packaged unit, so you lose a bit of freedom to mix and match. Audiophiles may still be dissatisfied with one part or another, but 99 percent of the population will just sit back and let the sound pummel their chests	 <p>HT-S780 7.1-CHANNEL HOME THEATER Manufacturer: Onkyo List Price: \$499.99</p> <p><i>Can be used as a component video switcher (three inputs, and one output)</i></p>

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IPOD NANO

Manufacturer: Apple
Website: www.apple.com
List Price: \$199 (2 GB), \$249 (4 GB)

Replacing the iPod Mini and splitting the difference size-wise between that now-defunct top seller and the screenless Shuffle, the new Nano is downright bewitching. Flash (not hard drive) memory boosts the battery life to 14 hours and shrinks the case to a size suitable for that stupid fifth pocket in a pair of Levi's 501s. It even comes in two high-gloss colors: iPod white and death-dealing black.

toys

GRAND THEFT AUTO KUBRICKS

Manufacturer: Medicom Toy Co./Rockstar Games
Website: www.rockstargames.com/warehouse/ **List Price:** \$40.00

Medicom's long-running Kubrick line has covered topics from Rocky to Planet of the Apes, and now the toy company is teaming up with Rockstar to bring us some GTA figures. Grand Theft Auto 3, Vice City, and San Andreas will each get their own set, starting this fall with GTA 3 and finishing up by the middle of next year with San Andreas' edition. Only 3,000 of each set will be made and each offers five of the main characters for the seminal scapegoat franchise.



■ (Left to right) Salvatore Leone, the lead character, Donald Love, 8-Ball, and Misty

toys

RESIDENT EVIL 4 SERIES 1 FIGURES

Manufacturer: NECA
Website: www.necaonline.com **List Price:** TBA

Even with an initial release in the first two weeks of the year, Resident Evil 4 is still holding up as a serious contender for Game of the Year accolades. That was the GameCube release. To commemorate the PS2 edition's launch, a first wave of highly detailed and downright swoon-inducing figures are coming to store shelves in October. Series 1 will feature Ada Wong, Leon S. Kennedy, Chainsaw Ganado, and the fearsome Verdugo. Expect them to be tall (the Verdugo is around 9 inches), movable, and the unquestioned envy of your friends.



peripherals

ACTION REPLAY MAX FOR PSP

Manufacturer: Dattel
Website: www.codejunkies.com
List Price: \$39.99

Cheating is something that each gamer has to make their own choice about (except online cheaters – we hate you and we're not afraid to say it). The new Action Replay for PSP certainly does provide a bounty of difficulty-altering and area-unlocking save files just ripe for transfer to your memory stick, but it also manages your media files and keeps real saves backed up to a computer.



peripherals

GBA MICRO SLEEVE

Manufacturer: Bensussen, Deutsch & Associates
Website: www.bdainc.com
List Price: \$9.99

Even though the unit comes with interchangeable faceplates, that doesn't mean the Micro couldn't use a good support system of pleather, nylon, and a sturdy carabiner. While there are others out there right now, they're dam ugly and this is the only case that you can keep on while you play. Keep an eye out for something prettier, but this will get you through the current drought.





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Chart Ringtones¹

poly

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- 2) Candy Shop poly6981
- 3) Naked poly6982
- 4) Grind With Me poly6983
- 5) Pimpin' All Over The World poly6984
- 6) Wait (Whisper Song) poly6985
- 7) Back Then poly6986
- 8) Listen To Your Heart poly6987
- 9) Drop It Like It's Hot poly6988
- 10) Pon De Replay poly6989

All Time Favorites¹

- All Star poly6990
- Baby Mama poly6991
- Switched (TV Theme) poly6992
- California Dreamin poly6993
- Can't Get You Out Of My Head poly6994
- Clint Eastwood poly6995
- Dancing Queen poly6996
- Electric Avenue poly6997
- Fighter poly6998
- Funky Town poly6999
- Live And Let Die poly7000
- Mam Vice (TV Theme) poly7001
- Midnight Train To Georgia poly7002
- Power Rangers (TV Theme) poly7003
- Pump Up The Jam poly7004
- Rock The Casbah poly7005
- Start Me Up poly7006
- Sunday Morning poly7007
- The First Cut Is The Deepest poly7008
- The Gambler poly7009
- The Reason poly7010
- Toxic poly7011
- Trying To Find Atlantis poly7012
- What Is Love poly7013

Top Sound FX⁴

- Airline Entertainment Program fun4860
- BurgBling - Textmessage fun4861
- Catch This Text If You Can fun4862
- Crazy DJ Frog - Wupidwup fun4863
- From Hell fun4864
- Hey Girl - Check Your Text fun4865
- He On Line 1, 2, 3, 4 & 6 fun4866
- La Cucaracha Frog fun4867
- Mamma Calling fun4868
- Old Telephone Ringing 05 fun4869
- Pick Up Pick Up The Telephone fun4870
- Pouca Sren fun4871
- Reggae Sing fun4872
- Sweetie - Hi Sweetie I Love You fun4873
- The Annoying Thing 01 fun4874
- The Crazy Frog Goes To India fun4875
- Time Is Money fun4876
- Turn Your Phone Off Next Time fun4877
- U Have A Phone Call fun4878
- Yiehha Get That Phone Cowboy fun4879

Realsounds⁶

- American Idiot - Green Day real4230
- ASAP - TI real4231
- Back Then - Mike Jones real4232
- Boulevard Of Broken... - Green Day real4233
- Dem Boyz - Boyz N Da Hood real4234
- Don T Trip - Trina real4235
- Down With The Sickness - Disturbed real4236
- Get It Poppn' Fat Joe real4237
- Give Me That - Wobbie real4238
- Grand Theft Autumn - Fallout Boy real4239
- Grind With Me - Pretty Ricky real4240
- Helena - My Chemical Romance real4241
- Holiday - Green Day real4242
- I'm A King - P5C real4243
- Motivation - T.I. real4244
- Nothing But A Number - Pretty Ricky real4245
- Pick Up The Phone - Pretty Ricky real4246
- Sittin Sideway - Paul Wall real4247
- Wake Me Up When... - Green Day real4248
- We Be Burnin' - Sean Paul real4249

Rock Ringtones¹

- Ace Of Spades poly7014
- Beautiful Day poly7015
- Cold poly7016
- Crawling poly7017
- Eat You Alive poly7018
- Heaven Is A Halfpipe poly7019
- I Just Wanna Live poly7020
- I Want You To Want Me poly7021
- Immigrant Song poly7022
- Jerk It Out poly7023
- Just Like You poly7024
- Numb poly7025
- Party Hard poly7026
- Predictable poly7027
- Right Here poly7028
- Rock And Roll All Nite poly7029
- Vertigo poly7030
- When I Come Around poly7031
- With Or Without You poly7032
- You Really Got Me poly7033



- Crazy Frog - Axel F**
- Crazy Frog - Axel F frog2223
 - Crazy Frog - Axel F Speed frog2224
 - Crazy Frog - Axel F - Hipopod frog2225
 - Crazy Frog² frog2210
 - Crazy Frog - Axel F frog2211
 - Crazy Frog - Remix³ frog2212
 - The Crazy Frog - Original frog2215
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CAN A VIDEO GAME MAKE YOU CRY?



BY HUGH BOWEN, FOUNDER,
BOWEN RESEARCH

Why do some video games move people at a gut level, while others don't? It's a question that those of us in the business of developing and marketing games should be able to answer.

Twenty years ago, as a young producer at Activision, I'd written in my college reunion notes that I hoped to work with the Hemingway of developers. But really, have any of us?

My great grandfather served alongside his brothers in the Civil War. I can't get enough of Civil War novels. The best of these transport me to a place of sacrifice, purpose, trial, and honor. They evoke feelings. Can games do that? Games like Medal of Honor deliver some of the thrills of combat, in my view, but none of the pathos.

I'm not the first to ask such questions. Walt Disney had wondered if his early cartoons could make people cry.

I MADE MY BOSS CRY

I recall the 1982 Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago. That summer I'd spent far more time working on Space Shuttle than with my family. Finally taking the game to CES, I was demoing late at night, in a dark room, filled with 50 people. I took off in the spacecraft, docked, managed to re-enter the atmosphere and land – without the game (or me) crashing. When the shuttle tires touched down safely upon the tarmac, parachute billowing behind, the room exploded in cheers. My boss cried. It was a moment.

The feeling of heroism, the obsession of most 14-year-old boys, is the basis of most games. It's precisely what I felt that night in Chicago.

The feelings aspect of games has always seemed crucial to me. So, I decided to field a national online survey with 535 gamers to explore how important the range of emotions is to the success of any particular game. Here's what I found.

WHAT ROLE DOES EMOTION PLAY?

Over a third of the participants report that games are indeed an emotional experience. Eight percent responded that games are tremendously emotional, 29 percent said they were quite affecting.

As an art form, movies, music, and books rank higher – today – than games. Heavy gamers reported feeling more emotion with movies. Lighter and younger gamers report more emotion for music.

Among genres, I thought MMOs would top the list, but RPGs are the runaway winner – by far the most emotional genre. Interaction with computer characters seems richer than the interaction with people in MMOs, at least at this stage of development. After RPGs, the most emotion-evoking genres were, in order: first-person shooters, action, adventure, fighting, sports, and MMOs.

Among individual titles, a role-playing game, Final Fantasy, ranked far and away the richest emotionally. It received four times as many individual mentions as the next title, Resident Evil.

Role-playing games clearly wind people up. "You see life and death and magical things occur," one gamer wrote. Players report getting involved with the characters due to the depth of the stories (that "rival novels"), cutscenes, "sweeping" musical scores – and of course the dozens and dozens of hours of play.

The death of the character Aeris in Final Fantasy VII, in which a sword is thrust through her, appears to be a defining moment in video game artistry. It was mentioned in the study time and time again. Many reported crying. People spent months trying to revive her, appealing to Square for a reprieve.

About Aeris' death, gamers said: "I couldn't play the game for like a week after that, because I was so depressed." Another commented, "Friends still talk about their surprise, shock, and denial when they reached that point in the game." A father played the game with his two young sons, and apparently Aeris' death was too much for them: "For months, we couldn't even listen to the musi-

The feelings aspect of games has always seemed crucial to me.

cal theme... without one of the boys bursting into tears."

First-person shooters, as you might imagine, "get your rage and blood pumping."

Action games "can lead to a state of frustration, panic, exhaustion, exuberance, and suspense. Then, anger, spitefulness, relief, and worry kick in."

Massively multiplayer online games evoke emotions chiefly due to interaction with other real people. If someone kindly takes time to help you with a spell, or is a lying cheat, you have an emotional reaction.

SO HOW IMPORTANT IS ALL OF THIS, ANYWAY?

Half of all gamers say emotion in games is extremely or somewhat important.

For me, the most startling survey result was that two-thirds of all gamers believe games already exceed, could exceed or could equal the emotional richness of other major forms of art and entertainment. Nine percent said they believe games already exceed the other art forms. About a third say games could exceed the other forms, and a third say games could equal the others.

Feelings of competitiveness, violence, excitement, and accomplishment top the list as you might imagine, but things like honor, awe, wonder, and delight did land in the middle. Unfortunately, the bottom two were love and spirituality.

I've spent a career in the game industry, mostly conducting research and talking to gamers. But I really didn't realize how emotional games are for people. I suppose gamers, like most humans, don't often share their innermost emotional life. But it looks like games really do touch people.

I'm reading Jane Austen's books 200 years after she wrote them. Maybe games can someday reach that depth of meaning.

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

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

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PlayStation 2



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From Russia With Love 11/01

02-04

NEW RELEASES

- America's Army: Rise of a Soldier - PS2, Xbox
- Battlefield 2: Modern Combat - PS2, Xbox
- Bust-A-Move DS - DS
- Cabela's Dangerous Hunts: Kill or Be Killed - PS2, Xbox
- Call of Duty: Big Red One - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Elected Unkown - DS
- Fable: The Lost Chapters - Xbox

- Free Running - PSP
- From Russia With Love - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers - Xbox, PC
- Guilty Gear: Dust Strikers - DS
- Guitar Hero - PS2
- The Incredibles: Rise of the Underminer - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA, PSP
- King of Fighters '94 Reboot - Xbox

- Mega Man Battle Network 5: Double Team - DS
- Okami - PS2
- Pac-Man World 3 - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Pursuit Force - PSP
- Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends - PC
- SBK: Snowboard Kids - DS
- Shrek SuperSlam - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA, DS
- SpongeBob SquarePants: The Yellow Avenger - PSP

- Star Wars: Battlefront 2 - PS2, Xbox, PC, PSP
- Tokobot - PSP
- Vanguard: Saga of Heroes - PC
- Without Warning - PS2, Xbox



08-09

NEW RELEASES

- Castlevania: Curse of Darkness - PS2, Xbox
- Donkey Kong Country 3 - GBA
- Dynasty Warriors 5: Xtreme Legends - PS2
- EyeToy Kinetic - PS2
- Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Gun - PS2, Xbox, GC, PC

- Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA, DS, PSP
- Karaoke Revolution Party - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Mario Party 7 - GC
- The Matrix: Path of Neo - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Movies, The - PC
- Painkiller - Xbox
- SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs: Fireteam Bravo - PSP
- The Sims 2 - PSP

- SpongeBob SquarePants: The Yellow Avenger - DS
- Suikoden Tactics - PS2
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3: Mutant Nightmare - PS2, Xbox, GC, DS
- Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble - GC

Killer board games return to theaters with the release of Zathura. Over half of the people that see the movie pay for their tickets with Monopoly money.

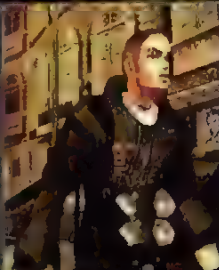
The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe releases on PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA, DS, and PC today!

Gun 11/08 (PS2, Xbox, GC, PC) 11/20 (Xbox 360)

13

AMERICAN'S VIDEO GAME EXPO (12-13)

Now entering its sixth year, this expo has always been a great spot to go for collectors. Held in Fort Washington, PA, you'll find everything from berrani tournaments to rare prototypes. This expo is well worth the trip.



Mark Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure 11/15

15-17

NEW RELEASES

- Aeon Flux - PS2, Xbox
- Battlefield 2: Special Forces - PC
- Civilization IV - PC
- Dance Dance Revolution: Ultramix 3 - Xbox
- Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows - PS2, Xbox
- Half-Life 2 - Xbox
- Kingdom of Paradise - PSP
- Magna Carta: Tears of Blood - PS2

- Mario Kart DS - DS
- Mark Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure - PS2, Xbox
- Mega Man X Collection - PS2, GC
- Midway Arcade Treasures: Ultimate Classics - PSP
- Need for Speed: Most Wanted - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA, DS, PSP
- Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis - Xbox

- Shadow the Hedgehog - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Sonic Rush - PSP
- Tony Hawk's American Skatland - DS
- True Crime 2: New York City - PS2, Xbox, GC
- WWE SmackDown Vs. Raw 2006 - PS2

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire casts a spell on audiences today. The spell makes you believe that Ron is still 15 and not actually 32.

18

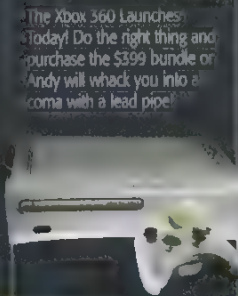


20-21

XBOX 360 LAUNCH LINEUP

- Call of Duty 2
- Condemned
- Dead or Alive 4
- The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
- Frame City Killer
- Gun
- Kameo: Elements of Power
- King Kong
- Madden NFL 06
- NBA 2K6
- NBA Live 06

- Need for Speed: Most Wanted
- NHL 2K6
- Perfect Dark Zero
- Project Gotham Racing 3
- Quake 4
- Ridge Racer 6
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06
- Tony Hawk's American Wasteland
- Top Spin 2



22

The Xbox 360 Launches Today! Do the right thing and purchase the \$399 bundle or Andy will whack you into a coma with a lead pipe!

23

NEW RELEASES

- 50 Cent: Bulletproof - PS2, Xbox, PSP
- Dragonball Z: Supersonic Warriors 2 - DS
- Dragon Quest VIII - PS2
- King Kong - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA, DS, PSP, PC
- Stacked - PSP

THANKSGIVING

As we learned last year, there's no better way to celebrate this holiday than a real-life Katamari Damacy tournament. Just get some glue, a basketball, and start rolling across the table! We recommend starting with stuffing and yarns.

24



Kameo: Elements of Power 11/22

29

NEW RELEASES

- Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children - DVD
- Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time - DS
- Viewtiful Joe - DS



The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion 11/22

november

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD.



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4-player multiplayer over 3 modes

From the creators of *TEKKEN*® and *Soulcalibur*® comes the ultimate street brawler: the first multiplayer fighting game to unleash never-before-seen action at 60 frames per second. Issue commands to your partner to deal double-team combos for maximum damage. You better come looking for a fight. urbanreign.com

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SUPERHERO



XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PSP | DS
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EA TIBURON
> RELEASE SUMMER 2006

BRM MAN

A HERO REBORN

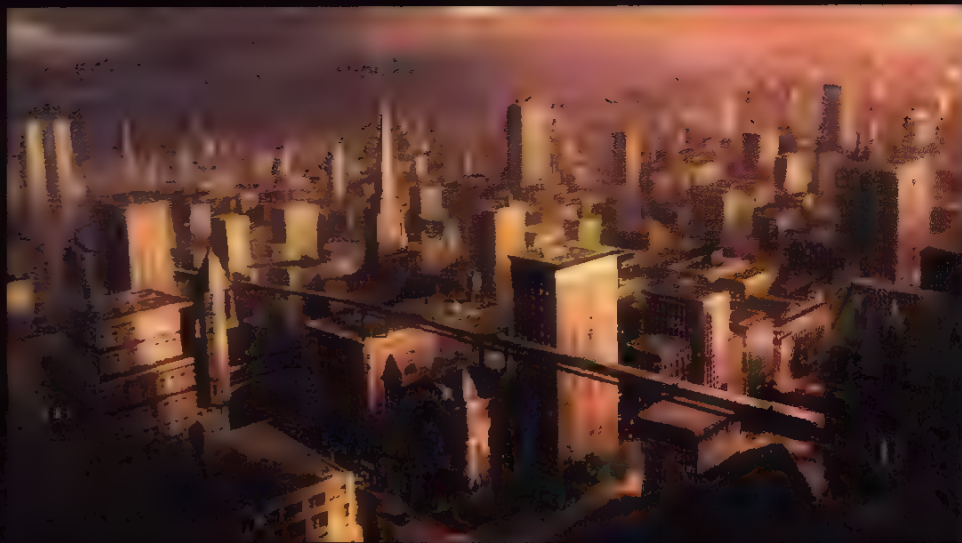
SUPERMAN HAS SOMETHING TO PROVE. FOR ALL HIS FANTASTIC POWERS AND HEROISM, HE'S NEVER MANAGED TO EMERGE IN A VIDEO GAME AS ANYTHING MORE THAN MEDIOCRE. IT'S A LONG HISTORY, PEPPERED WITH CONTRIBUTIONS AS FAR BACK AS THE ATARI 2600 AND AS RECENT AS CURRENT-GEN MACHINES — EACH WITH THEIR OWN BRAND OF GETTING THE MAN OF STEEL NOT QUITE RIGHT. IT ALMOST SEEMS AS IF A CURSE HANGS OVER THE FRANCHISE, AND THE GREATEST SUPERHERO OF THE MODERN AGE HAS BEEN LEFT OUT IN THE COLD. MEANWHILE, TIBURON STUDIOS HAS AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT POINT TO PROVE. FAR FROM BEING LABELED MEDIOCRE, THEY'VE CONSISTENTLY OFFERED UP SOME OF THE FINEST SPORTS GAMES EVER SEEN, YEAR AFTER YEAR UPGRADING AND IMPROVING THE BEST-SELLING SERIES OF ALL TIME — MADDEN. HOWEVER, UNKNOWN TO THE PUBLIC, TIBURON HAS BEEN STRUGGLING FOR YEARS FOR A CHANCE TO BRING FORTH A NEW IDENTITY FOR ITS STUDIO, AND TO PROVE THAT IT'S A COMPANY THAT CAN MAKE MORE THAN SPORTS GAMES. IT WANTED SOMETHING UNIQUE — A CHALLENGE THAT WOULD LET IT TRULY FLEX ITS CREATIVE MUSCLES BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF WHAT ANY STADIUM COULD HOLD. AND WHEN THE NEWEST SUPERMAN MOVIE FINALLY BEGAN ITS PRODUCTION, TIBURON'S MOMENT HAD ARRIVED. GIVEN THE TASK OF BRINGING A GAME TO LIFE THAT WOULD MATCH THE EXCITEMENT OF BRYAN SINGER'S EPIC NEW TAKE ON THE LAST SON OF KRYPTON, TIBURON SET OUT TO MAKE SUPERMAN COOL AGAIN.

RETURNS



"EVERYTHING IN THE GAME SHOULD BE SOMETHING HEROIC AND CHALLENGING TO A DEGREE THAT ONLY SUPERMAN COULD DEFEAT IT. IF IT'S SOMETHING THAT SPIDER-MAN CAN DO, OR BATMAN, OR EVEN THE INCREDIBLE HULK, IT'S PROBABLY NOT BIG ENOUGH FOR SUPERMAN."

-CHRIS GRAY
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



There was a time when Superman was synonymous with the word "hero" in the mind of the public. The blockbuster film series begun by Richard

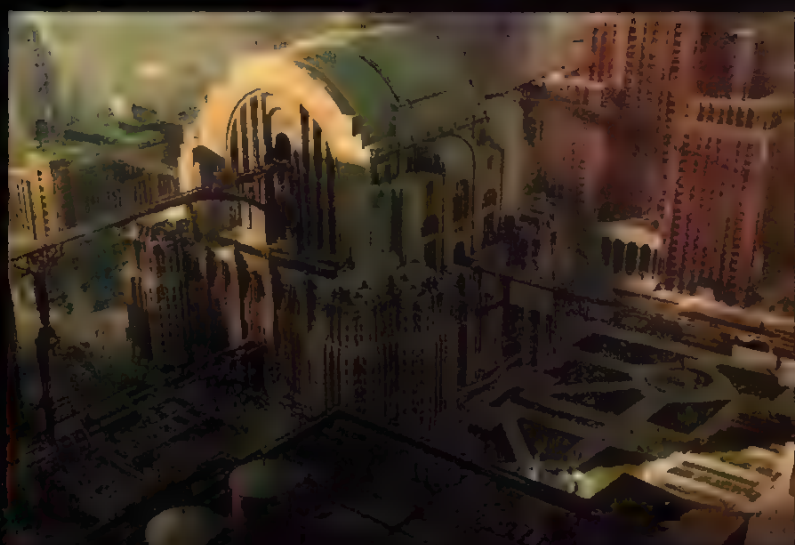
Donner captured the imaginations of a generation and had children across America dressing in their blue and red-caped pajamas. However, as the movies wore on, their quality dropped and the fans dropped away as well. Since the film franchise tapered down and finally collapsed with 1987's *Superman IV*, a seemingly endless stream of attempts to resurrect it have come and failed. It wasn't until the summer of 2004 that Bryan Singer took a huge chance when he pitched to studio executives his own idea for reviving Superman. It would mean abandoning the established and popular X-Men films, and starting fresh with a character that hadn't shown up on the silver screen for almost two decades. Nonetheless, the production was approved and filming soon began in distant Sydney, Australia. The film exists as a semi-sequel to the first two Christopher Reeve films, and tells the tale of Superman's arrival on Earth after five years away in space. In his absence, Earth has moved on without the aid of a superhero protector, and so has Lois Lane. Superman returns to find a changed planet, and the woman he loves in the arms of another. The one thing that apparently hasn't changed is the scheming machinations of Lex Luthor, and Superman is confronted not only with a threat to his love life, but one to the world as well. Singer's production (which includes a crew of over 700 people) has been wrapped in mystery since filming began. However, when Singer took time off from his exhaustive shooting schedule in Australia to visit this year's annual San Diego Comic-Con, his appearance was greeted by massive fan enthusiasm as thousands

crowded the presentation hall. A tiny glimpse into the movie was offered via a teaser trailer that concluded with Superman bursting down from the sky as a sonic boom cracked in his passing. The response was immediate and overwhelming as the crowd roared its approval, and they were only sated when Singer showed the trailer a second time.

It's this kind of excitement that Tiburon hopes to match with the game that will accompany the film when it releases early next summer. From the outside, EA Tiburon might be the last place one would look to produce the next great superhero game. Upon entering the posh office complex situated in the heart of sunny Florida, visitors are immediately bombarded by giant banners emblazoned with this year's Madden logo; posters for NASCAR and NCAA Football hang in the waiting area. But venture deeper and you emerge into a darkened upper floor, filled with sketches of alien menaces and robotic machines of destruction. Behind Tiburon's jock persona beats the heart of a true comic book nerd, and it is gearing up to share its secret with the world. An incredible degree of cooperation from the film production has meant that Tiburon has access to a wide range of artistic and creative assets flowing up from Australia. Even so, the team knew from early on that they wanted to try something different. "Movies are movies and games are games. We didn't want to try and make a game version of a film," comments Chris Gray, executive producer on the project. While the events of the movie are certainly present, *Superman Returns* the game will be a gigantic expansion of that world, bursting past the boundaries of Singer's movie to tell a story much more deeply rooted in the dozens of years of comic continuity that the character has to draw on. "The key thing for us was to explore the fiction and get back to what

makes Superman interesting," Gray continues. Knowing full well that the core target for their game needed to be the true comic fans, the team at Tiburon set out to bring Superman to life. Whether jetting across the city, saving a bus toppling off a bridge, or striking down a gigantic foe, Gray wants the scale of the action to be enormous. "Everything in the game should be something heroic and challenging to a degree that only Superman can defeat it. If it's something that Spider-Man can do, or Batman, or even the Incredible Hulk, it's probably not big enough for Superman."

To confront the mammoth threats facing Metropolis, Superman needs the full spread of his otherworldly powers. Tiburon has been adamant that The Man of Steel have all his amazing abilities from the very beginning of the game. Of course, the first and perhaps most awe-inspiring is flight. Superman moves through the air half with the grace of a swimmer through water and half with the force of a jet in flight. Launching like a coiled spring from the ground, Superman can immediately accelerate to a scale speed of 300 mph within the game world. The left analog stick controls basic forward and backward movement, as well as strafing. Meanwhile, the right analog will adjust your pitch and bank as you maneuver about obstacles. Further manipulation of the controls enables a complex array of tricks and dodges. Since both sticks will be kept busy with your flight controls, Tiburon has designed a camera system that is neither fixed nor entirely user controlled. Instead, using cues based on Superman's body position and movement, the camera automatically adjusts to give players the best view of the action, moving fast enough to create a cinematic feeling but gradually enough to keep from being nauseating. If 300 mph is too slow for you, a single button press launches the hero into



As you slip into super speed you'll hear sonic booms crack as you pass and the wind rush by in an endlessly rising pitch

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"IT'S A LEVEL-BASED GAME, BUT IT'S INTERSPERSED WITH FREE FLIGHT IN THE CITY. SO IT'S AN INTERESTING COMBINATION OF OPEN WORLD PLUS VERY DEFINED STORY ELEMENTS"

- CHRIS GRAY

NOTE: All the screens shown in this article are taken from the Xbox 360 version. "Our leading platform is next-gen. A lot of games start work on current-gen and then upgrade. We're not. This is a next-gen product and a next-gen experience," says Nigel Cook, senior producer on the game.

super-speed, instantly pushing you up past the sound barrier to a whopping 700 mph. The standard third person camera falls away and you drop into an insane first-person view as buildings flash past and the edges of the screen blur. "The moment you click that button you're going roughly three times faster than any racing game on the market would go at top speed," explains Gray enthusiastically. "So, if you ever felt you were going fast in Burnout, Forza, or Gran Turismo, just imagine instead going six to eight hundred miles per hour through a city – it's kind of insane." The development team at Tiburon has worked to make this feat both exciting and imminently useable. The game constantly attempts to predict your movements as you approach an obstacle. If you begin to bank away from a looming bridge truss, Superman will veer away and move on to your desired path. Approach a building and pull back on the stick, and the computer will know your intent was not to slam into a brick wall, but will instead adjust to move you into a steady climb. But don't worry. If you're truly intent on hitting that wall, the game certainly won't stop you, and the cracked mortar will serve as evidence of your passing. With this power, you can whip across the city in seconds, slam into enemies at incredible velocity, or even skim along the surface of rivers as you literally run on water.

Superman's powers afford him much more than the capability to move fast

Pull the right trigger on the Xbox 360 controller to send forth a burst of heat vision. The power is analog, meaning a gentle press sends out two twin laser-like cutting beams, while full force creates a fiery spinning blast that surges towards your foes. Beyond its obvious use against supervillains and their minions, heat vision can be put to more subtle use. We saw how careful application would actually slowly melt down a car into slag at low power, or instead instantly burst the engine into flame at full intensity. If the fiery wreck is too hot, flip over to super-breath and send out a streaming cone of air-distorting cold that freezes anything in its path. Superman's hyper-attuned senses are also available. X-ray vision lets the player see through buildings and identify threats even behind solid walls. Meanwhile, super-hearing actually replaces the traditional radar by acutely pinpointing danger within the city.

More than all of these, it is Superman's untested limits of strength and fortitude that set him apart from other costumed heroes. His might within the game is such that Superman can stand beneath a falling building and hold it up as pedestrians escape or lay across the gap of a disconnected railroad as the train passes over him. From the force of his own body to a conveniently placed empty vehicle, Superman uses everything at his disposal to beat down a threat to the people. One move shatters the ground and sends a shockwave out to

scatter surrounding foes. Another sends Superman head-on into an enemy, then carries both individuals forward as they slam into a wall at full flight speed. The most exciting actions even allow for innovative power combinations. Uppercut a menacing robot high into the air, and you can freeze it with your breath weapon before flipping into heat vision to watch its frozen form shatter.

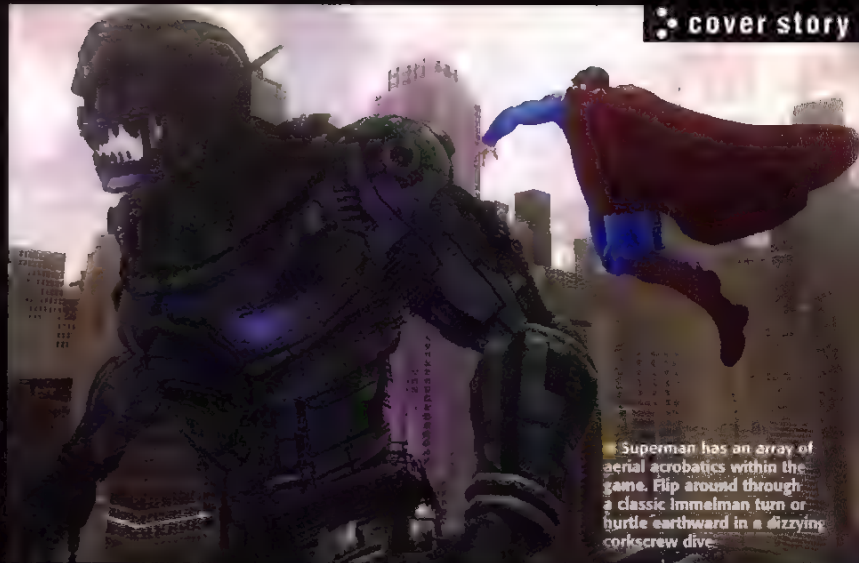
With a nearly indestructible hero who has access to such incredible powers, how do you create a challenge for players without falling into the inappropriate cliché of a simple life bar to indicate success or failure? Tiburon's answer is collateral damage. Since Superman is the sworn protector of the people, his central purpose is to keep them safe. Thus, injury to Metropolis or its people must be avoided at all costs. Let too much catastrophic damage come to pass, and Supes will be truly defeated. While a life bar might not be present, Superman's ability to serve and protect is limited by his stamina. He'll fight tirelessly for the citizens of his city, but even he has limits. Many flight and combat powers drain stamina, and a steady recharge rate holds you back from constant combat. However, in true acknowledgement of comic book mythology, Superman can rapidly refill his stamina by lifting high into the stratosphere towards the source of his power – where the sun of his adoptive home lets him dive back into the action.

"It's a level-based game, but it's

interspersed with free flight in the city. So it's an interesting combination of open world plus very defined story elements," Gray told us. As gamers explore and examine the world, they'll encounter numerous sandbox areas — playgrounds where dimly suggested ideas present themselves for your recreation, such as a junkyard filled with cars just begging to be frozen, immolated, or thrown towards the distant horizon. More structured fun is available in the form of numerous minigames, where upgrade points can be earned to increase stats. Many of these minigames will encourage the further development of your numerous powers, and one is even a humorous side mission where Clark Kent must outwit a certain bothersome supervillain. And yes, a phone booth will be involved. However, the majority of your time is likely to be spent completing story-based missions. Many of these will be confrontations with the full cadre of Superman's rogue's gallery, each largely independent from the others, like individual issues of a comic. These supervillain encounters are often far more than simple boss fights. Instead, whole levels revolve around a single enemy as his minions attempt to subdue you, and the villain himself will often be fought in multiple stages. Beyond these encounters with Superman's nemeses, other missions will pit Superman against nature itself as he seeks to keep the city safe from any number of natural disasters. We saw evidence of several potential cataclysmic events while at Tiburon. In one place, it looked as if a tornado

was planned to sweep into the city. Other indications reveal an earthquake site. Even the distant outline of a volcano ominously hangs over a distant suburban section of town. The game will continually weave in and out of its own version of the story from the movie, adjusting it slightly in order to always allow for what makes for a great game.

If ever there was a character that needed a big playground, it's Superman. "We have a premise of a very large open-ended world. Metropolis is about 100 square miles in scale and space," explained Nigel Cook, senior producer on the game. Far more than an interconnected sequence of streetways and skyscrapers, the game world for Superman Returns is an intricate recreation of the city from the comics, expanded and surrounded by miles of landscape, mountains, and terrain for exploration. Wide rivers emerge from a high outlet in the mountains, and a well-placed dam almost seems to assure the inevitability of heavy floodwaters surging down and immersing the city. High plateaus look primed to be a giant arena for some unknown battle. At the center is the teeming mix of metal and swarming people that is the island of New Troy. From the futuristic buildings of the Hyper Sector to the dark, run-down dregs of Suicide Slums, every area is meant to offer both variety and truth to the comic source material. Sleek cars cruise the roadways and blimps float above. Hundreds of individually designed billboards dot the buildings and aerial bridges rush trains to and fro. As



Superman has an array of aerial acrobatics within the game. Flip around through a classic Immelman turn or turtle earthward in a dizzy corkscrew dive.



Pick up a gigantic object like this obelisk, and the camera will automatically pan back to give you a better view.



Unmanned helicopters under the control of Metallo sweep in to assault the Man of Steel.



METROPOLIS

THE CITY OF TOMORROW



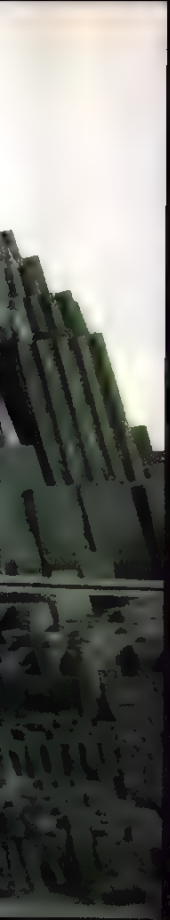
you explore the vast space in and around Metropolis, the citizens of the city will go about their daily lives, occasionally stopping to snap a picture or point as their hero passes in the sky above. If Superman fails to halt an alien invasion from destroying part of the city, the fickle pedestrians will change their tune and begin to jeer instead of cheer. From the city to its people, Metropolis feels timeless and ambitious on a huge scale.

Even Superman needs a place to retreat from his adventures from time to time. When players have had their fill of wandering the skyways of Metropolis they can depart for the Kryptonian's Fortress of Solitude. "I love the Fortress. It's going to look absolutely brilliant," Cook tells us. "It's Superman's home. It's his place to brood and think away from the people of the world." The crystal-like base serves multiple game purposes, not the least of which is basic save functionality. The Fortress is also an upgrade shop of sorts. Both stamina and speed can be increased here, and newer, more complicated flight and combat moves may also be learned. Additionally, the solitary confines of Superman's base serve as a compendium of knowledge from both Krypton and Earth. Here Superman will gather and collect relics from his home world that he finds throughout the game, as well as other unique objects from his experiences. Unfortunately, there's no word yet on the presence of Krypto the Super-Dog.

An incredible degree of technical expertise

is required to bring this expansive game to life. Luckily, the studio that each year brings a new version of Madden to home consoles is used to a big challenge. Conceptual artists visualize Metropolis with dozens of sketches, paintings, and even complex clay and wood models. One artist we spoke with spent months designing the character model for Superman that would eventually be passed on to animators. There, animators create a seemingly endless sequence of movements to make the character come alive on screen. Whether standing idle or catapulting into the air, every motion aims to feel natural and fluid. A particular focus has been placed on procedural animations, so that when Superman picks up a car we see his muscles strain and the car smoothly transition into his upheld arms. The artists and special effects wizards of the studio spend their time refining the unique look of the game – taking cues from famous illustrators to use shadow and light to dramatically illuminate scenes and faces.

Meanwhile, equal attention is being paid to the audio portion of the game. Lead sound designer Peter Lehman and his sound team won an Oscar for their work on the sound effects editing on the movie *Braveheart*, and he now works to bring that same expertise to bear on the new Superman game. The sound capability of the Xbox 360 in particular has allowed for incredible strides forward in the audio effects around the city. "Everything automatically



■ Conceptual artists for the game created these massive models to visualize Metropolis. One shot shows the central island of New Troy. Notice on the larger topographical map how small that island area is in comparison to the rest of the world. Every area you see will be fully playable and open for exploration – almost 100 square miles in all



tracks in space. Our goal is to have none of these sounds ever be like sound effects in a game, but instead immerse you and make you feel like everything is dynamic and happening in real time," Lehman told us. In simple terms, it's like a microphone is attached to Superman's back as he flies, and sound alters based on his location and speed. Pass a blaring streetside dance club and you'll hear the music quickly fade in and back out as you pass, with a mild Doppler effect thrown in for good measure. A missile launch can be dimly heard in the distance, and as you attempt to dodge it you'll hear it circle around you in surround sound. Altogether, it means that sound effects will almost never sound repetitive. Each audio moment is unique, just like in real life. Emmy-nominated composer Colin O'Malley will further enhance the experience with an entirely original soundtrack including over two hours of music, half of which will be recorded with a live orchestra. Finally, to round out the package, deals are being finalized to include all of the actors from the film voicing their own roles in the game.

As we toured and met with the various creative forces that drive the Tiburon team, it became more and more clear that the ambitious plans for the game might actually be within reach. However, it was by far the end of the day that

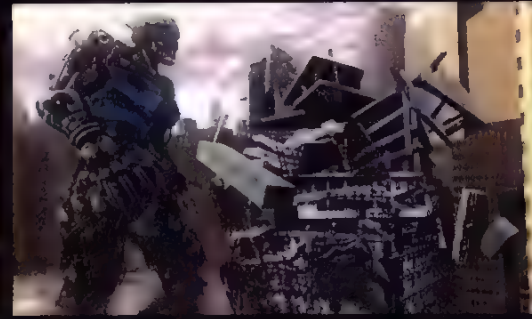
brought the greatest surprise – a chance to play a short slice of the game on the Xbox 360. The robot villain Metallo should be familiar to any comic reader. With a heart formed of pure Kryptonite, Metallo possesses the ability to both control and meld with any form of metal around him. His level shows up later in the game when Superman hears of trouble at a gigantic auto plant in the Industrial District. Upon arrival a host of robotic minions assault him, formed from the engine blocks and robotic cranes that fill the building. Here, a 15-foot tall Metallo begins a transformation of epic proportions. Sweeping up huge amounts of steel and iron, the villain grows to a whopping 60 stories tall before he's done. Green kryptonite-infused energy courses the length of Metallo's massive frame, and huge vortexes surround his feet, devouring metal and carelessly flinging away the rest. Metallo begins a destructive rampage through the city, halting at times to tear apart a skyscraper, sending gigantic chunks of rock to the ground, where cars hopelessly careen away. In pursuit as Superman, the player must assault seven distinct weak points to defeat the robotic menace. In the section we played, Metallo lumbered into a large open square and let loose with his Kryptonite Laser Beam, crumbling our defenses and tossing Superman away. As the robot

called forth unmanned helicopters, we were assaulted by rockets and gunfire until we targeted each one-by-one and used heat vision to send them flaming to the earth. Metallo will suck up cars and turn them into makeshift missiles, and will occasionally launch a powerful projectile at a distant landmark, at which point Superman must sling himself after it at super-speed to halt its progress. Superman can depart the scene to find something with which to combat the threat, like a giant crane he can swing at his opponent. However, every second spent away means even more collateral damage to the city. Finally, after repeated assaults with blazing heat vision, Metallo appears to temporarily power down, and we spy a nearby weapon. A massive Washington Monument-like obelisk juts from the earth, and we rip it away with one hard pull. Swinging the weapon like a 100-foot tall baseball bat, we slam it into Metallo's chest and watch as the monster crashes down.

While we only saw in-depth info on this one magnificent super-foe, we caught tantalizing glimpses of all sorts of other surprises throughout our time at Tiburon. We learned that Lex Luther will not be identical to the billionaire in the comic, but instead more like the criminal mastermind of the movie version. On a sprawling map of Metropolis, we spotted a location marked with the name

**"EVERYTHING
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EVERYTHING IS
DYNAMIC AND
HAPPENING IN REAL
TIME."**

**- PETER LEHMAN
LEAD SOUND DESIGNER**



Bizarro, helping to assure the presence of Superman's misguided and imperfect duplicate. On one wall we saw depicted the malformed body of the radioactive Parasite, a villain that sucks the very life force of his victims. An unnamed sketch of a diminutive gnome-like creature made us wonder whether Mr. Mxyzptk might make an appearance. And while images of the futuristic mastermind Brainiac were nowhere to be found, we saw a suspicious number of toys and statues of the villain scattered about the area. Finally, we couldn't help but notice a mysterious folder atop one table that read, "A Place Where Only One Thing Matters - Warworld". Depicted below the wording was a huge muscle-ridden beast of a humanoid who we could only guess must be Mongul. Beyond these hints

at potential villains, we also heard from one developer that the game has brought on two well-known movie scriptwriters to help bring the story to life, which will apparently include an end game twist that should surprise even those who've seen the movie. One last piece of info gave us the longest pause. In answer to an almost offhand question about online functionality, we not only learned of planned downloadable content, but also discovered that the team is tentatively considering a multiplayer mode. How this is possible with only one Superman makes us wonder, but it's certainly an interesting prospect. In fact, since none of these brief glimpses were confirmed, we'll all have to wait and see what makes its way out of the concept phase and into the final game.

Does the Man of Steel have what it takes to prove himself to the gaming public? More importantly, is Tiburon prepared to step out of the sports limelight into an entirely new role? Our early impressions can be summed up simply: The game has remarkable potential to redefine a genre, and is at the same time remarkably early on in the process. Most of what we saw was in its fledgling state, and we can't wait to see more of the game once all the disparate puzzle pieces begin to fit into place. A tremendous amount of work lies ahead for the developer. However, the confidence and commitment that every member of that team exhibits seems set to prove that superhero games are ready to make the building-high leap into the next generation. ■■■



■ When a building falls apart, mammoth individual pieces of scrap can be picked up as weapons. Much of the damage done to Metropolis in an individual battle will stay persistent throughout the rest of the game.



A NEW VISION FOR THE MAN OF STEEL
GAME INFORMER INTERVIEWS
BRYAN SINGER

From the mind-twisting mystery of The Usual Suspects to his total reimagining of the X-Men universe for the big screen, Bryan Singer has gained a reputation as a committed director with an eye for complex and interesting characters. We asked him about the process of working with EA, the appeal of Superman, and the potential power of video games.

How involved will you be in the Superman Returns video game? Are you offering input or suggestions to the development team?

It's a pretty collaborative effort, so I get to see a lot of what they're coming up with and offer my advice, but they still have a lot of freedom to come up with original ideas and characters to help the game stand on its own. I'm more of a guiding force, trying to make sure that the film and game have enough in common to feel like they're part of the same world, yet are different from each other at the same time.

How closely are the game and movie productions working together? Are any art or other assets being shared between the two?

EA has been sending us a lot of their conceptual art, and we've been doing the same, which is a great way for both teams to stay inspired. The collaboration helps EA capture the essence of some of the film's production design, so something like the Fortress of Solitude might feel the same in the game and in the film, but the game will also feature designs for fun things we won't get to see in the movie.

Peter Jackson has said that he feels that storytelling in games has a more interesting future than it does in movies. Would you ever want to be more directly involved in video game projects in the future?

Absolutely. It's hard not to see the potential video games have for storytelling. The great thing is that games have gone from being simple, linear distractions to becoming complex, immersive stories filled with the things we typically go to see movies for — character, action, drama, suspense, even horror. I don't necessarily think films and games compete with one another, but rather complement each other. Like theater or television, video games are just another medium for people to tell a good story.

What's going to set the Superman Returns video game apart from previous games starring the Man of Steel?



Well, besides having a strong relationship to the film, I think it will be the first time you'll feel that Superman is a real character.

He'll not only look more real than he has in the past, but also have character traits and dilemmas that set him apart from previous Superman games.

What is it about Superman that makes you believe that he can make for a great video game character?

Powers! Whether it's flying, strength, speed, or invulnerability, Superman is someone people wish they could be. With a film you're watching a movie. ABOUT Superman, but in the video game, you ARE Superman.

From what you've seen of the game, what aspects of it are you most excited to see in the final version?

I think what I'm most excited about is the sheer freedom the player has in the game. As Superman, you can literally fly almost anywhere you want to go and use whatever powers you want to try out. Obviously, there will be different missions, obstacles, and objectives, but you

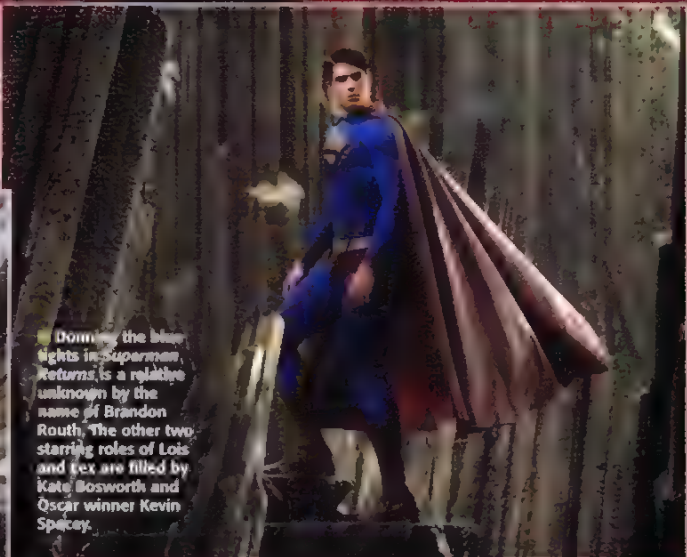
have so much freedom in the world we're creating that the options will really feel endless.

How familiar are you with games? Would you consider yourself a gamer? And if so, what are you playing these days?

I've been playing games ever since the days of Pac-Man and Space Invaders. I still find myself playing my old Defender machine for at least an hour a night. Although I familiarize myself with as many of the current games as possible and the gaming industry, compared to my friends I cannot officially hail myself as "a gamer." But I'd never read a comic before making X-Men, so I catch on fast. And working with the brilliant gang at EA has been a great experience.



Early details about the movie reveal that Superman may very well have visited the shattered remains of his home planet Krypton, only to find an empty graveyard with no answers.



Donning the blue tights in Superman Returns is a relative unknown by the name of Brandon Routh. The other two starring roles of Lois and Lex are filled by Kate Bosworth and Oscar winner Kevin Spacey.





The main illustration features a young male character with a red headband, a yellow vest over a blue shirt, and a sword on his back. He is holding a map and looking towards the right. The background is a stylized, painterly landscape with trees and a large blue circular frame.

DRAGON QUEST

TM

VIII

Journey of the Cursed King

Be The
HERO



OVER LAND, ACROSS THE SEA, AND BEYOND THE HORIZON



PlayStation 2

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THE JOURNEY BEGINS NOVEMBER 22 2005



DRAGON QUEST
VIII
Journey of the Cursed King

UNLEASH THE
MAGICIAN





DRAGON QUEST
VIII
Journey of the Cursed King

COUNT ON THE
BANDIT



PSP

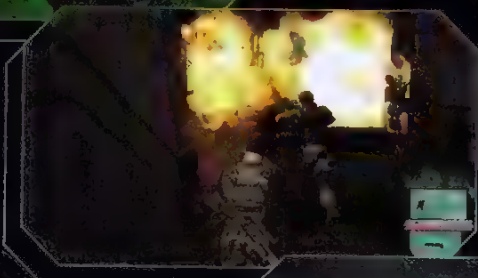
- > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
- > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
- > **DEVELOPER** SONY BEND
- > **RELEASE** SPRING



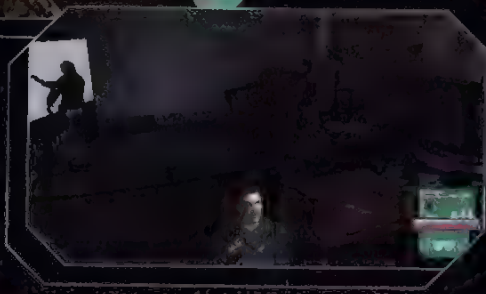
syphonfilter DARK MIRROR



■ You'll be able to shoot grenades on soldiers' belts to take out groups of foes

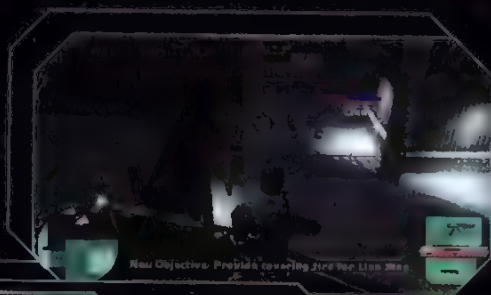


■ Gabe's new wall hug technique is more useful for shooting from cover than stealth



SINCE ITS NORTH AMERICAN RELEASE IN MARCH, THE PSP HAS BEEN HAUNTED BY THE PERCEPTION THAT MANY OF ITS GAMES ARE SIMPLY PORTS OR DUMBED-DOWNED VERSIONS OF THEIR "REAL" CONSOLE COUNTERPARTS. WHILE THIS ASSERTION CERTAINLY ISN'T TRUE ACROSS THE BOARD, RECENT MONTHS HAVEN'T EXACTLY BEEN A SHINING EXAMPLE OF

SONY'S SPY SERIES HITS PSP



■ The higher your ratings, the more weapons and secrets you will unlock

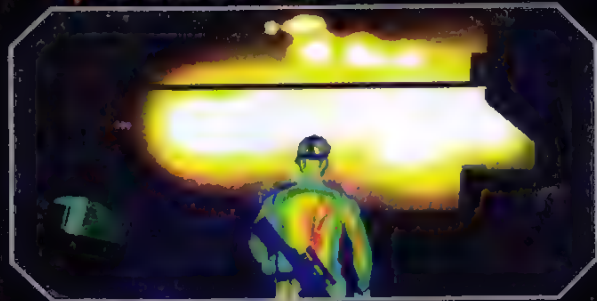


■ Nearly every enemy can be disposed of through environmental kills. Some of them even have special contextual melee kills

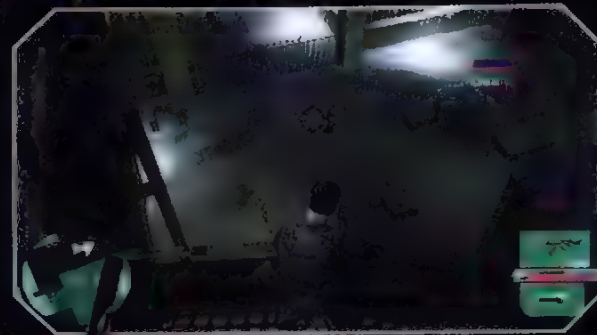
WHAT IS POSSIBLE ON SONY'S HANDHELD. FORTUNATELY, THERE IS AT LEAST ONE EXCITING TITLE ON THE HORIZON THAT PROVES THE PSP CAN BE USED TO ADVANCE AND EXPAND A FRANCHISE RATHER THAN JUST REHASH IT. IN SYPHON FILTER: DARK MIRROR, GAMERS WILL ONCE AGAIN TAKE CONTROL OF SECRET AGENT GABE LOGAN AS HE STARS IN A BRAND NEW PORTABLE ADVENTURE THAT CONTINUES THE SAGA OF THE SYPHON FILTER UNIVERSE.



▲ Infrared and thermal vision modes will help Gabe assess his options.



▲ Sometimes you'll be fighting alongside partners, while other situations may have you defending them.



When the original Syphon Filter released for PSone in 1999, it contributed to carving out a space for the 3D action/stealth genre (alongside the legendary Metal Gear Solid). Now, after three more entries and some departures from the series' traditions in last year's Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain, the development team at Sony Bend is determined to return to the series' roots, starting with a focus on Gabe himself and the events that surround him. "We have a really killer story to tell. We really wanted to focus on the single-player experience," says John Garvin, creative director for Dark Mirror. "That was one of the hallmarks of Syphon Filter 1, 2, and 3. We wanted to get back to one of the real strengths of the

Syphon Filter series. The most obvious change is to the control system; the game will utilize the classic GoldenEye controls, with the analog stick being used for movement and the face buttons for aiming. Players will be allowed some flexibility within that framework with the ability to invert the aiming, switch to a left-handed scheme, and adjust sensitivity sliders for your movements.

Apart from necessary modifications to accommodate the PSP's single analog stick, the team has abandoned the option of a lock-on system, emphasizing more challenging gameplay. "There are a lot of games on the PSP that are using target lock, and we specifically chose to keep it skill-based," clarifies Garvin. "Our tagline is 'precision strike operative.' For us, what that means is that we've given Gabe

"WE'VE GOTTEN AWAY FROM THE VIRUS. WE PUT THAT TO REST AT THE END OF OMEGA STRAIN."

franchise, which is a character-driven game." Of course, a character-driven game means that the customized agents of Omega Strain are out, paving the way for a return of familiar faces in an all-new setting. "We've gotten away from the virus. We put that to rest at the end of Omega Strain," explains Garvin. "It's a brand new story. We've got Gabe Logan, Lian Xing, and Theresa Lipan all returning. They have a new case they have to solve." The game's events revolve around a company called KemSynth Petroleum that has mysterious ties to a corporate-owned research effort called Dark Mirror. While the details of project Dark Mirror are unknown, what is certain is that the military group Red Section is trying to take control of it — an action that calls the government's attention to the situation and necessitates Gabe's involvement. It may sound like your typical spy tale, but there are plenty of aspects of Dark Mirror that will come as surprise even to veterans of the

some really powerful weapons and a lot of vision devices, and set him in an environment where he can use them."

The key to making these tools fun to use is by giving the player a number of clever opportunities to implement them. It may have become an industry cliché to claim that the player can approach any obstacle from multiple angles, but Dark Mirror is not only providing those opportunities, it's tracking how players handle them. At the end of each level, Gabe is given a rating in categories like infiltration and executions. For instance, if you approach a room with guards near a television, the game remembers if you tore in guns blazing, if you quietly snuck by, or if you used the TV remote to distract the sentries while you pumped them full of poison gas. Each method will earn you points to be tallied later. This way, if you choose to play through the level again, you can use different tactics, gain additional points, and unlock special features (including

THE TOOL OF THE TRADE

A super-sneaky operative is nothing without a belt full of high-tech weaponry. Fans of the series are undoubtedly familiar with Gabe's trusty taser by now, but in Dark Mirror he has access to a much more versatile weapon: the MB-150 (affectionately called the "uber-rifle" by the development team). In addition to firing rounds like a normal sniper rifle, this weapon has a special modification that allows darts with varying effects to be fired at unsuspecting foes from a distance. An explosive dart, though noisy, will get the job done, while a poison gas dart is the best way to silently incapacitate foes. Or, if you're looking to buy some time, you can temporarily stun your attackers with a taser dart (much like Sam Fisher's sticky shockers) that you can either activate immediately or remotely trigger at your whim. No matter what other weapons Gabe may procure during his adventure, the MB-150 will always be at his side, allowing for a range of strategic options at all times.

a bonus mission that ties up the loose ends from Omega Strain). Still, no matter how good you get at handling a situation, sometimes you're going to need a little help from a friend.

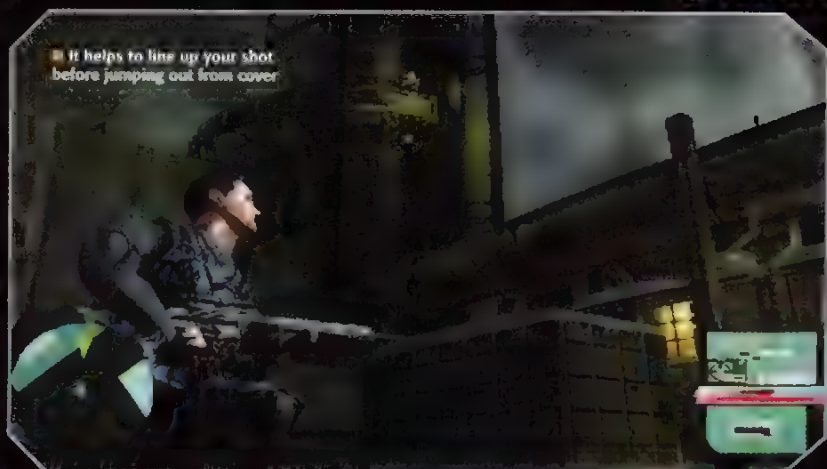
Buddy AI has always been a part of the Syphon Filter series, but it is taking on a special significance in Dark Mirror. At various points in the mission, you'll be paired up with a partner to help you accomplish your tasks. Unlike previous entries, Dark Mirror will allow you to give instructions to your companions. The commands you can issue are context sensitive, and you'll only have one available at a time to keep things simple. For instance, if Gabe and Lian are under fire, Gabe may have a command telling Lian to advance and attack. If he is covering her with sniper fire from afar, he could tell her to hold back until the coast is clear. This kind of interaction will be important not only for Gabe's survival, but also the survival of his partners. "Lian's got a gun, so she'll do her own work," laughs producer Darren Yager. "In fact, if you're not careful, she'll sometimes go a little gun crazy, and maybe go out and get herself killed."

Not all of your combat buddies will be as adept as Lian, however. Sometimes, you may even get unexpectedly saddled with a traveling buddy, like Private Janzen – a soldier that Gabe encounters during the course of his mission. "You can tell Janzen where to go, where to stop, when to hide, and when to run," says Yager. "You're his protector for that level." Thankfully, Gabe will be paired with several more capable partners along the way who won't require the same level of babysitting.

Even though Dark Mirror is returning to its roots with the characters, story, and partner interactions, that doesn't mean that it won't integrate elements from Omega Strain's gameplay formula. For instance, Omega Strain was the first game in the series to utilize online multiplayer, which had teams of four players taking on AI-controlled opponents. The development team is taking this idea and

expanding into both ad hoc and infrastructure PVP. "It's going to be objective-based PVP, which means competing teams have specific objectives they're trying to complete," confides Garvin. While he couldn't divulge any more details quite yet, we can expect more info on this aspect in the months to come.

In addition to taking a multiplayer cue from

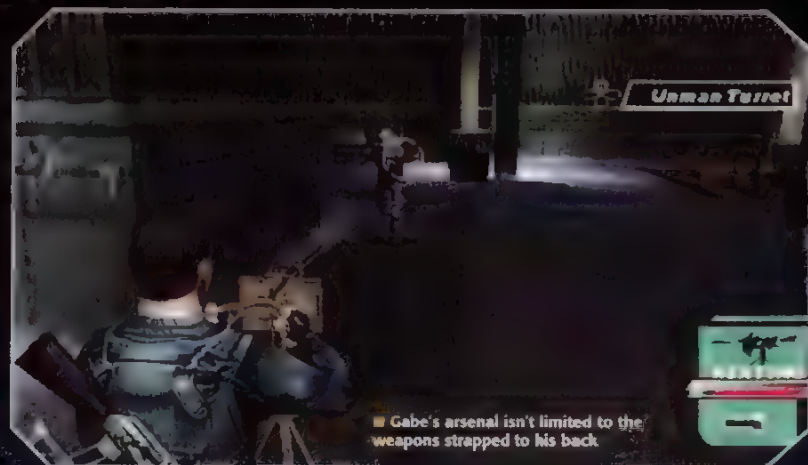
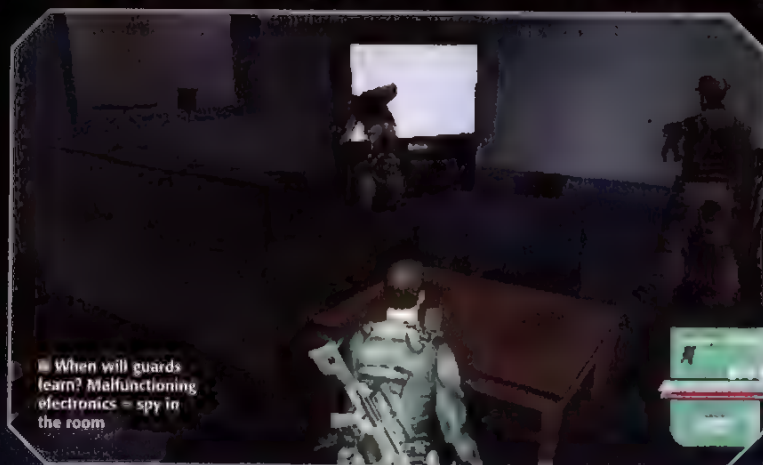


Omega Strain, Dark Mirror may share even more than expected with its console brethren. The PSP has seen its fair share of PS2 adaptations, and in one sense, Dark Mirror isn't even an exception. "We actually prototyped most of this technology on the PS2," admits technical director Chris Reese. "Instead of working within the limits of the PSP and building it up, we got the look that we wanted and brought it down to the PSP." So, while the gameplay is designed specifically for the handheld experience, the visuals are impressive even by PS2 standards.

Dark Mirror's console origin brings up a major concern, however. The most visually stunning titles on the PSP have typically carried daunting

load times, which can make or break even the most compelling game. Of course, the team is well aware of these problems, and already working on possible ways to curb the loading. "We're currently looking at solutions that involve a lot of background loading," explains Reese. "So, as you're playing through a level, it actually starts loading the next level." How well these strategies are implemented will only be seen in the final version of the game, but if Sony's treatment of Dark Mirror as a triple-A title is any indication, gamers shouldn't count on being able to make a sandwich between levels.

Apart from dealing with these PSP-specific technical issues, Garvin insists that "the hardware is kind of irrelevant." The team at Sony Bend is primarily concerned with creating a title that contains classic elements of the Syphon Filter franchise, while simultaneously enhancing the gameplay and the experience. The fact that it is on a handheld means that PSP owners have a high-quality action title to anticipate, but the system itself doesn't define the game. Gabe's missions won't be three-minute jaunts you can complete while waiting at a red light. The story is complicated, the weapons are numerous, and the levels are a mix of strategy and firefights. In short, it's unmistakably Syphon Filter. Just a bit smaller. ■■■



ONE MAN'S CREATION IS ANOTHER'S DEMISE.

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PlayStation 2





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XBOX 360
> STYLE 1 3D BRAWLER FIGHTING (UP TO)
16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
> PUBLISHER TECMO
> DEVELOPER TEAM NINJA
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 22

DEAD OR

SLUGFEST

At this year's Tokyo Game Show, the Xbox 360 made a bold attempt to win some much-needed points with Japanese gamers. Many games designed for Japanese consumers were playable on the floor, and even more games were unveiled at special events. One such title was Dead or Alive 4, the first next-gen entry in the acclaimed fighting series. After the first day of the show closed, Game Informer and several other media outlets were invited to play DDA 4 at a nearby hotel. We were obviously excited to get our hands on the game, but became even more excited when we overheard series creator

ALLIANCE

Tomonobu Itagaki mention that a secret character from another series was going to be included as a new fighter. Before we got a chance to ask him about it,

Itagaki was swept away by other journalists eager for a moment of his time.

4



■ Despite looking just like Master Chief, Spartan-458 is female. Perhaps we'll finally get a look under a Spartan's helmet?



■ The new motion blur effects add to the cinematic look of the game



■ The returning characters look every bit as exciting as the new ones



■ Environments are incredibly detailed and more interactive than before

Days later, we were invited by Itagaki to visit Team Ninja, play DOA 4 again, and interview

him away from the madness of the show. Of course, our first question was, "Who is this mysterious character?" After a little coaxing, Itagaki finally revealed that the surprise addition to the game is a character from the Halo universe. Not only that, but a stage would be included based on a familiar location from the Halo games. Shocked, we took it upon ourselves to find out how this project came to be. In the course of our investigation, we spoke with Itagaki, got in contact with Halo creators Bungie,

and, of course, played a little DOA 4.

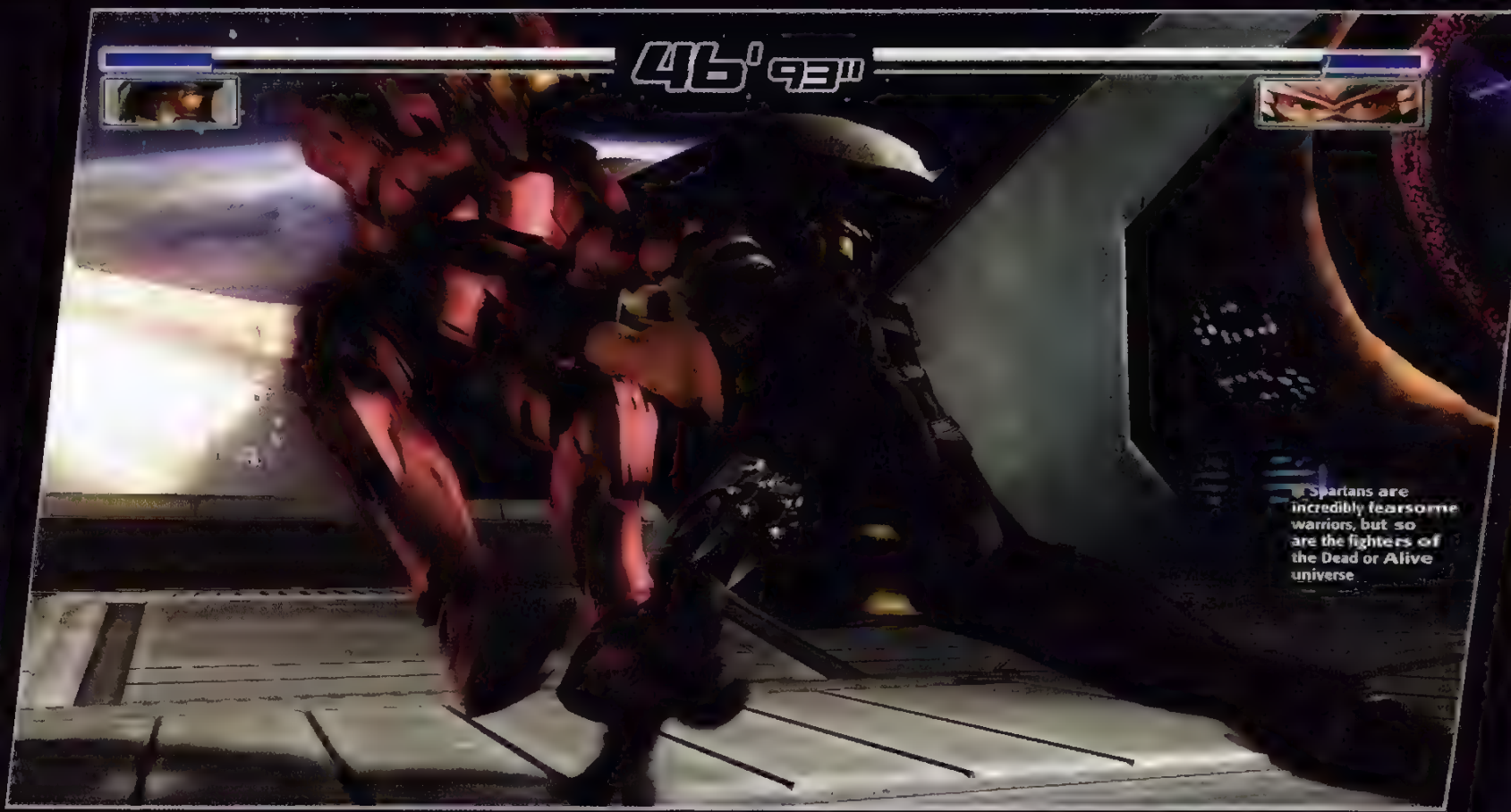
When we heard that a Halo character was going to be included in Dead or Alive 4, we of course imagined Master Chief going toe to toe with Ayane and Lei Fang. However, the Chief hasn't even been born in the time of the DOA games, nor has Halo 2's other star, the Arbiter. As it turns out, the Halo character in DOA 4 is a new one: Spartan-458, a character created by Bungie specifically for DOA 4. Since the DOA and Halo games exist in very different universes, we asked both Itagaki and Bungie how this character would fit into the story. According to Bungie, the team "worked very closely with Team Ninja to provide what we feel is a logical explanation for why Spartan-458 is appearing in

this game, while also remaining true to our own universe and our loyal fans. As fans of the Halo novels know, we have a very rich universe to draw upon and the Spartan program produced more than just Spartan-117 (who appears in the Halo games). Spartan-458 is a new character – this is NOT Master Chief."

As it turns out, this Spartan is very different than Master Chief, but should fit right in with the cast of DOA 4. Like most of the DOA series' most famous characters, Spartan-458 is a woman. Although we won't know more about Spartan-458's story until we review the game, it seems possible that this lady travelled through time to join the cast of DOA 4. Her high number designation might also mean she is a Spartan from

further in the future of the Halo universe. That's purely speculation on our part, but it would help explain how and why a futuristic character like a Spartan coexists with other characters from the present day. And, of course, rabid Halo fans certainly wouldn't hesitate to pick up any game that revealed more details about their beloved franchise.

We may not know the specifics on the character's story, but we did learn a bit of the tale of how this meeting of the Xbox's two biggest franchises came together. In typical Bungie fashion, the team explained: "The initial idea came up around two years ago during a casual conversation between Bungie studio manager Pete Parsons and Itagaki-san during E3. We have always been huge



Spartans are incredibly fearsome warriors, but so are the fighters of the Dead or Alive universe.



The sci-fi look of the Halo stage is a stark contrast to the bright colors of other levels like this one

DOA 4 will be a great opportunity for Halo fans to duke it out on Live in a whole new way

fans of Team Ninja and have the utmost respect for the work they've done. The opportunity to work with Team Ninja and combine our powers to strike yet another blow in our quest for world domination was too alluring to pass up. Plus, we just think the idea of putting a Spartan into a DOA game totally kicks ass."

The two teams worked together in secrecy to make this project a reality. However, to keep this surprise under wraps, the team-up was only referred to by the codename "Slugfest," even among the teams at Bungie, Team Ninja, and Tecmo. With two heavy-hitting franchises coming together in one game, the code name seems most appropriate.

Says Itagaki on the subject of working with Bungie, "It is very difficult to explain to the players about the kind of communication that takes place between game developers. Specifically, I doubt that there is anyone in this world who can accurately imagine what kinds of conversations are had when members of Bungie and Team Ninja meet up!" He laughed, then continued, "The only answer that I can give you right now is to say that this is going to be really hot. I want to leave the rest of the discussion for a later date, after everyone has the game in their hands."


Naturally, one question that came to our minds upon learning about this collaboration was how elements of the two franchises would need to

be changed in order to work together seamlessly. Obviously, Halo and Dead or Alive have completely different visual styles and gameplay, and we asked both developers how they could be merged and still recognizable as parts of both franchises. When asked this question, Itagaki simply answered, "It is not that difficult a thing to do. Think about it for a second: Do you honestly believe there is anything out there that can't be accomplished with the technologies of Bungie and Team Ninja put together?" He continued on to talk about the process of redesigning someone else's character to fit into his franchise. "Our first priority is, above all else, to remain truthful to Bungie's original design and background material,"

said Itagaki. "Then, ideally we are able to add a bit of Team Ninja's distinctive flavor on top."

Bungie offered up a few more thoughts on the subject. "Team Ninja is an expert in the fighting genre and we trusted their suggestions and ideas to properly integrate the Spartan into DOA 4. Our Spartan character did have to undergo some minor adjustments — namely the removal of the standard issued weapons. We all agreed it would be a bit unfair and not true to the spirit of DOA if we introduced rocket launchers and assault rifles into the mix."

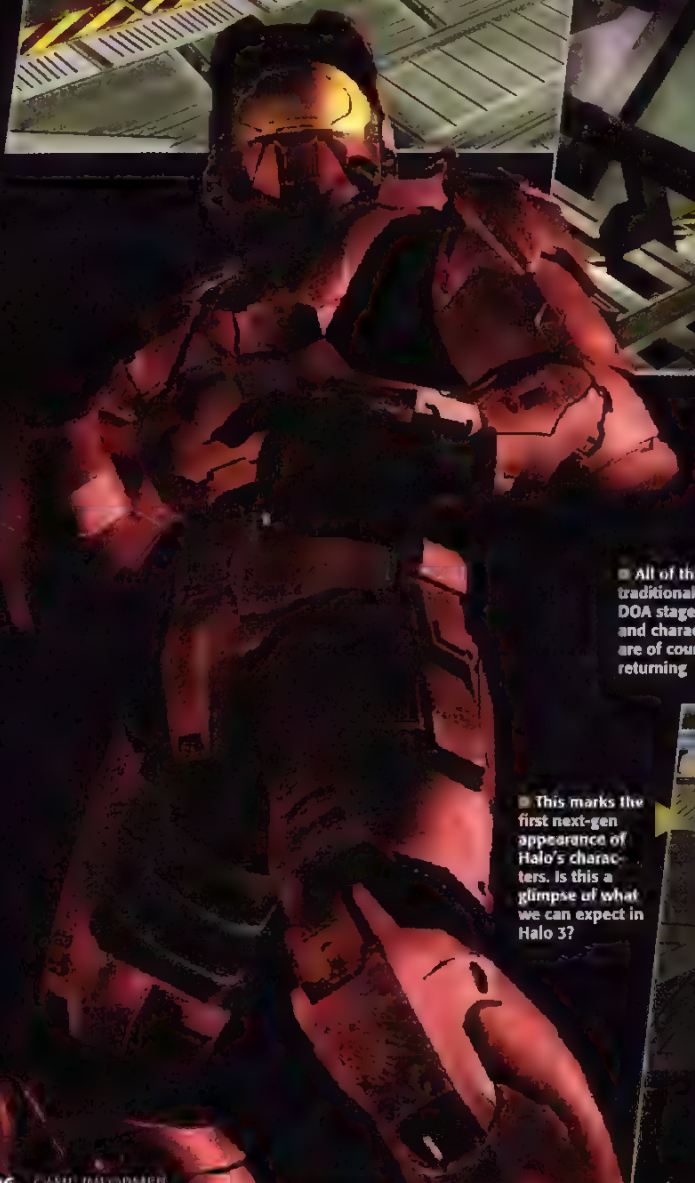
(Continued on page 87)



■ This stage should look familiar to anyone who played through Halo 2


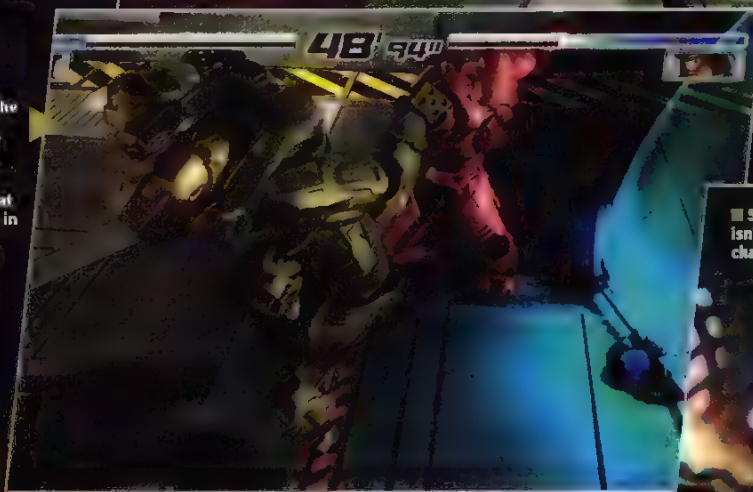


■ Now we'll finally have an answer to the age-old question of who would win in a fight between a Spartan and a ninja



■ All of the traditional DOA stages and characters are of course returning

■ This marks the first next-gen appearance of Halo's characters. Is this a glimpse of what we can expect in Halo 3?



■ Spartan-498 isn't the only new character in DOA 4

(Continued from page 85)

Although most of Halo's weapons certainly wouldn't work in a fighting game, Bungie did hint that Spartan-458 would have a few advantages over the other fighters. "DOA 4 is a game based on hand-to-hand combat," said the developer. "However, it may be okay to bend the rules every once and a while." Although they didn't elaborate any further on the subject, they did say that players won't see any elements of the Halo universe outside of the character and the level, but we will hear some. Could the sounds of Halo's weaponry have anything to do with how Spartan-458 will bend the rules of the Dead or Alive universe?

As much as we pried, we didn't manage to get many more details on Slugfest's origins from either Team Ninja or Bungie. But we had to take the opportunity to ask if there was any chance the next Halo game would take any cues from Dead or Alive. Itagaki found the idea quite amusing, as did Bungie. The company has a reputation for joking around, and made the following statement: "Obviously we haven't announced what our next game is, but Itagaki-san has promised to share many Team Ninja secrets with us, starting with 'bouncing' and Stair Monkeys. We just have to find a way to incorporate them. But it's all a natural fit if you think about it."

With our questions on Slugfest out of the way, we were free to concentrate on the more tangible aspects of DOA 4. After all, it's not every day that you get a chance to go to Team Ninja and play Dead or Alive with its creator. Before we got into the actual combat, Itagaki took a moment to introduce us to the new online lobby, which surprisingly had a cartoonish Halloween theme. Each player in the lobby was represented by what Itagaki called a doll – an online avatar com-

plete with animations and taunts. In this Halloween-themed lobby, the dolls included ghosts, skeletons, bats, and (for some reason) penguins. In the background of the lobby was a giant pumpkin-shaped TV screen, on which a match between two Team Ninja employees playing online was displayed. In every online session, the current match will be broadcast to the others in the lobby via the TV, so they can keep an eye on who's winning.

There will be several different lobby types available in DOA 4, although not all of them will be available at launch. The game will include a free ninja-themed lobby, and Itagaki confirmed that new lobbies will be available for purchase via Xbox Live marketplace. Every lobby will have its own set of dolls and support text chat via a standard USB keyboard. The current plan is to support 16 players in a lobby, although Itagaki is considering cutting that number to eight. From a technical standpoint, the game can certainly handle 16 players, but Itagaki thinks that such a large number may cause players to have to wait too long between matches. Unlike other online games, this may be one instance in which cutting the number of players online makes a game more fun.

The new online lobbies are amusing, but what really matters in a fighting game is obviously the combat. Dead or Alive 4 may surprise even hardcore fans of the franchise with the new tweaks to the fighting mechanics. Although the basic controls are exactly the same as before, combat is now even faster. You have a much smaller window to block attacks, and attacks flow together quicker, meaning that the action is even more constant and furious than ever before. Every returning character has new moves and counters, so even old pros will have new tricks to learn.

During our matches with Itagaki, we were absolutely floored with the speed of the combat. Although Dead or Alive

Ultimate was itself blazingly fast, DOA 4 feels even faster. However, just because the game moved so quickly at Team Ninja doesn't mean it will be so insanely fast when it reaches stores. To tune the combat to the perfect speed, Itagaki is enlisting the best DOA players from all around Japan to playtest the game. Based on their advice, Itagaki may slow the game down slightly.

Aside from the lightning-quick combat, the other hallmark of the Dead or Alive

series has been its beautiful graphics. Without a trace of doubt, Itagaki stated that no fighting game yet has eclipsed the visuals of Dead or Alive Ultimate, and that the game that will finally surpass it will be Dead or Alive 4. Indeed, the game looks stunning. Although the visual style has not changed much from the two Xbox releases, DOA 4 has many new effects that add to the splendor. The water in several stages looks amazing, motion blur increases the cinematic look of the crazy moves, and hair looks more realistic. There is also a much higher level of interactivity in the levels, which include both new and returning environments. In the new Las Vegas level, you can actually hit your enemy into oncoming traffic! However, most stages won't have such obstacles so that players don't get too annoyed.

Many of the stages feature multiple tiers, each packed with details. Of course, the character models are similarly impressive. The DOA series is infamous for its lovely virtual ladies, and DOA 4 is bound not to disappoint in this area. Then again, it doesn't look likely to falter in any arena: with blindingly fast combat and impressive visuals, DOA 4 is everything you could want in a fighting game. The presence of a new character from the Halo universe doesn't hurt anything, either. The team at Bungie is very protective of the franchise that has brought them to video game superstardom, and they clearly wouldn't lend one of their creations to just any game. Team Ninja has gained a similar level of renown with its incredible work on the DOA games and Ninja Gaiden, and you can be sure these two studios are demanding nothing short of perfection for their first collaboration. It may be an epic confrontation when Spartan-458 faces off against the fighters of DOA 4, but in this battle, the real winner will be the gamers who pick up Dead or Alive 4 with the launch of Xbox 360. ■ ■ ■

Do you honestly believe there is anything out there that can't be accomplished with the technologies of Bungie and Team Ninja put together?

Tomonobu Itagaki



This young man is another new addition to the franchise



"ONE OF THE FALL'S"

"WE HAVEN'T SEEN AN ACTION GAME THIS PROMISING SINCE GOD OF WAR" PS3

"IT'S A PURE ACTION AFFAIR" EG3

"AS FANTASTIC AS IT IS EPIC" NINTENDO POWER



PlayStation 2



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PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



■ The lack of a cockpit turned out to be a fundamental design flaw for the clones



■ The verdict is still out on the space fights



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> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 1

BRIDGING THE GAP

Now that we've all seen the dark conclusion to the epic Star Wars films, a gaping wound in the Force remains that can only be filled by more adventures in that galaxy far, far away. Pandemic Studios has heard our plaintive cries, and seeks to offer a soothing salve in the form of *Battlefront II*, a title that gets us more excited the more we get to see of it. As we played through the most recent version of the game, we explored a host of new features, from the drastically improved Galactic Conquest mode, to finally learning some of the dark history between Episode III and IV. And yes, we got to wield a saber as Yoda.

The main campaign of *Battlefront II* tracks the story of the 501st Legion, one of the original clone units that fought on Geonosis, and later followed Vader in his fateful attack on the Jedi Temple. Through an impressively lengthy string of objective-based battles, the story offers a compelling glance into a different side of the Star Wars epic, much like *Republic Commando* did last year. Unlike the first game, many of the fights in the campaign offer some interesting goals, rather than always being about running to take and hold a spawn point. The real joy of these missions often comes from the playable hero classes. Whether you're striking down droids as Mace Windu or quelling a clone rebellion on Kamino as the mysterious Boba Fett, the cameo appearances of our favorite characters add tremendously to the excitement.

Galactic Conquest mode has returned, but with a dramatic facelift that adds more strategic options to the mix. You'll start out your army with only a basic

soldier class, and be forced to recruit additional units with credits you win. You'll also be asked to maneuver fleets and take the fight to the enemy through careful deployment across the galaxy.

For the more impatient gamer, *Instant Action* lets you jump straight in and set your own options for battles. In our version, two dozen unique maps were available for immediate play, including sites from the Death Star to the volcanic surface of Mustafar. We even played one battle where we pitted the full gallery of hero characters against each other, just to find out what would happen if Darth Vader and Yoda decided to duke it out.

The action itself has remained largely unchanged from before, but a few minor tweaks help to streamline play. A sprint function lets you cross the field quickly, and target tracking helps you keep an eye on your foe. You can also switch character classes at any one of your controlled command posts, fixing a frustration that bothered many gamers in the first title. The other big gameplay shift comes in the form of ship-to-ship space battles, which we have to admit to having some trouble getting used to when we tried it out. Even so, flying into an enemy hangar and turning their own turrets against them was every bit as satisfying as we hoped.

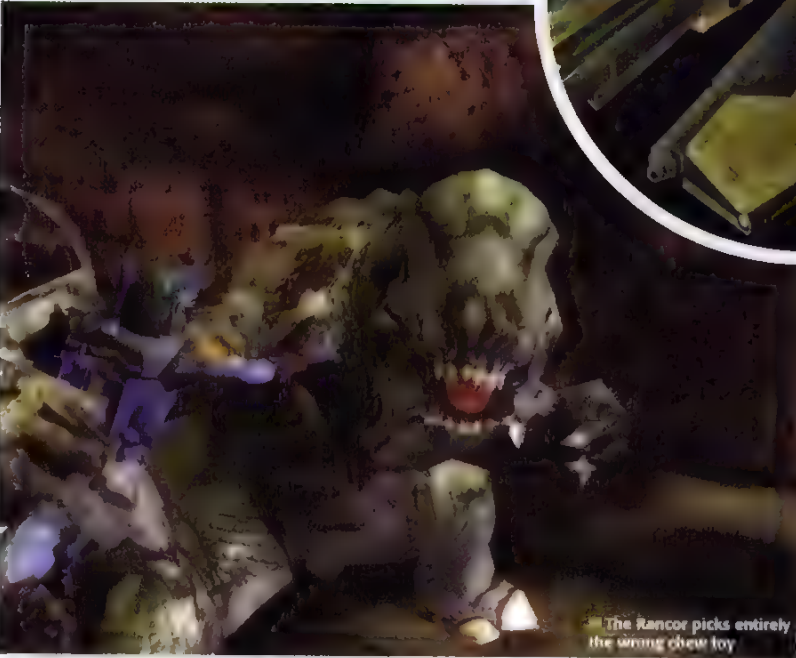
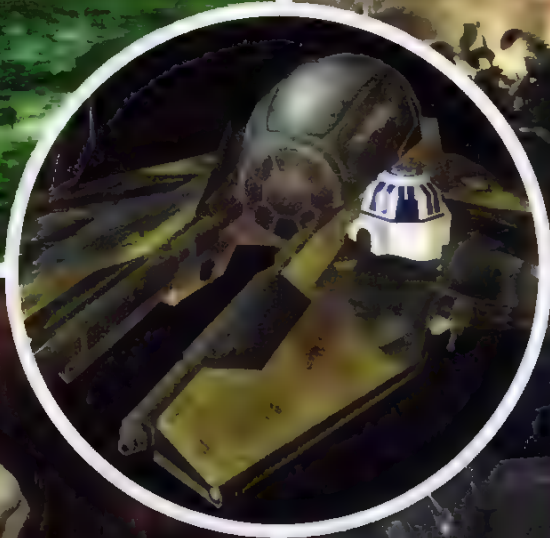
Through what we're sure is only a total coincidence, *Battlefront II* is set to release the same day as the *Episode III* DVD, leaving gamers with a tough choice: Do you watch Padme and Anakin argue over which one of them loves the other more for the twentieth time, or do you spend November 1st executing Order 66 for the good of the Empire? ■ ■ ■



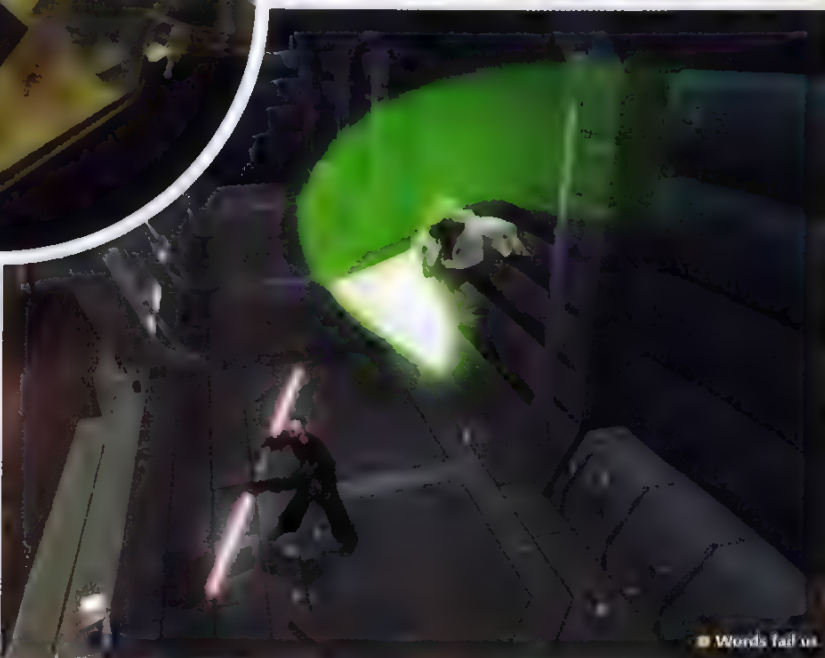
■ New enemy types help expand the single-player experience



■ Fed up with repeated choruses of "Celebrate the Love," Chewbacca boards an AT-ST and takes matters into his own hands



■ The Rancor picks entirely the wrong Chew toy



■ Words fail us



■ Pretty much every large scale battle scene in Episode III makes an appearance



■ V-wing? Sweet

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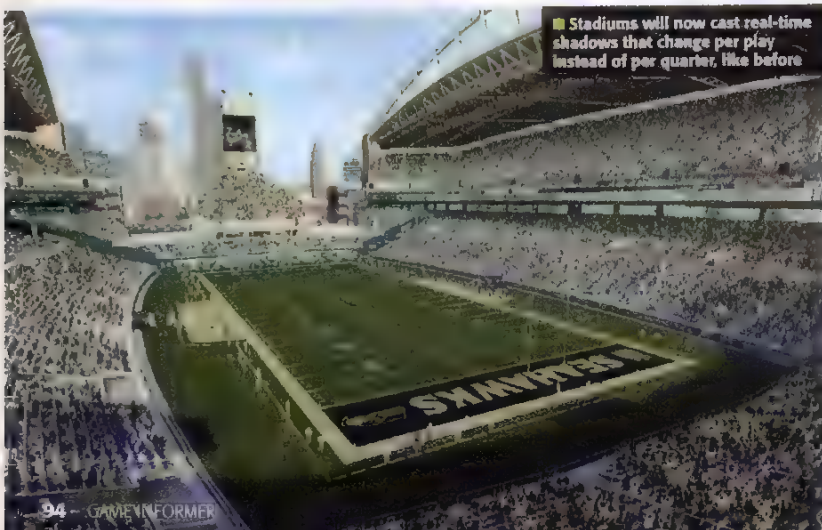
RIDES
MAGAZINE



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EA says that it will not utilize the Xbox 360's hard drive in any meaningful way, and your Xbox save cannot be utilized

Stadiums will now cast real-time shadows that change per play instead of per quarter, like before

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Madden NFL 06

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS > DEVELOPER EA TIBURON
> RELEASE NOVEMBER 21

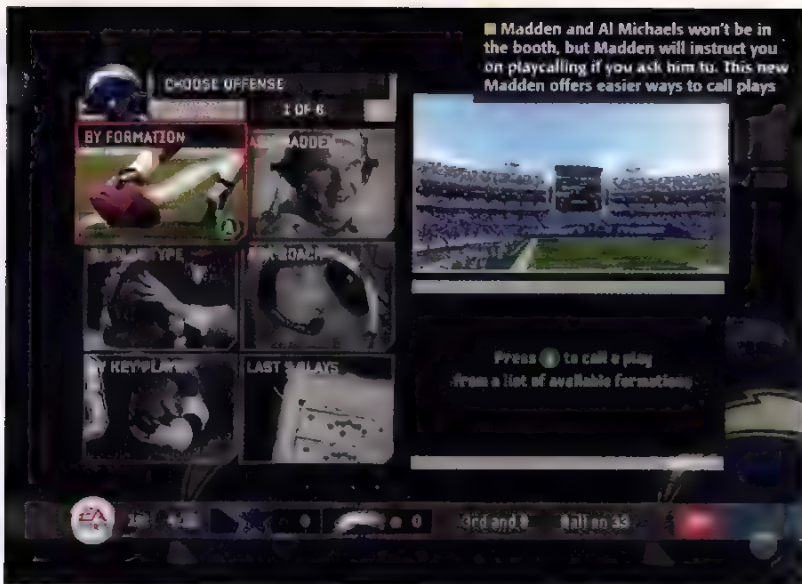
BUILDING THE NEW ERA

We've only had tantalizing glimpses of EA Sports' next-generation version of Madden up to this point: a concept commercial shown once during the telecast of this year's NFL Draft, and a behind-closed-doors session with only two players in a stadium at E3. While the current-gen Madden released to the usual fanfare, the question in the back of everyone's mind was: "Yeah, but what's happening for next-gen?" Game Informer was invited down to EA's Tiburon development studio to see the game first-hand and to learn what secrets it has been keeping.

Madden NFL for the Xbox 360 is neither a continuation of the current Madden, nor is it a start back at square one like the version that debuted with the PS2. It brings over features from the current-gen game such as a Franchise mode, Vision and Precision Passing, the Hit Stick, and Playmaker controls, but drops things like NFL Superstar and create-a-player. Luckily, this edition of the series also gives players gameplay that's being introduced for the first time. What would and wouldn't carry forward from the current-gen Madden was one of our foremost concerns. Explaining why some features had to be dropped, producer Jeremy Strauser told us, "We're

starting from scratch; this isn't a port [with better resolution]. Because of the way the game is being architected from the ground up, we don't bring things forward like Owner mode, Storyline Central, Madden cards, create-a-team, or create-a-playbook. Those are all things that we have to build [again] piece by piece. The goal is to build the next-gen football engine, so this is going to be the foundation for NCAA, NFL Street, Arena Football, etc. We want this to be the football engine for the next decade."

To bring the game into the next generation, the team down at Tiburon had to extensively redo its pre-production assets, capturing new renders of all the NFL stadiums (down to each individual seat and a full 3D crowd), and getting face scans of 150 NFL players. Eleven thousand mocap moves had to be shot over a month straight, even if they already existed in Tiburon's library, just for this generational transition. The results are eye opening. Using a proprietary animation tool called ANT (which will be shared with other EA titles in the future), the studio has added loads of new animations into the game. These aren't just there for the sake of looks — they add to the gameplay because they are tied to your controls. Whereas in previous Maddens, pulling one of the trig-



Madden and Al Michaels won't be in the booth, but Madden will instruct you on playcalling if you ask him to. This new Madden offers easier ways to call plays



There are three times as many polygons in players' helmets as there were in the entire player models from the current-gen Madden

gers automatically initiated a juke at a touch of a button, this next-gen version has more subtlety. Preparation moves have been added for players before they execute a stiff arm, for example. So if you pull the trigger to juke, now you can branch into different directions with an added analog stick command in order to better set up your defender and give you more flexibility with your moves. This is a solid example of how the next generation isn't just about graphics, but how it can change the way a game feels or plays. If you pull down the right trigger to run (it's been re-mapped from the A face button), your player will go through a full cycle of different movements. So you can smoothly transition from a QB jogging

out of the pocket to having him break out into a full sprint. The contextual possibilities of Tiburon's animation work are large, from running backs shimmying through the line to the complex moves and counter moves of the fighting offensive and defensive linemen.

Apart from the high detail put into the players (you can see the stitching in their uniforms, for Pete's sake!), the overall presentation is wholly different. Madden and Al Michaels are no longer doing play-by-play. Instead, the game will use fictional local radio announcers for your team. Also in an attempt to move away from TV-style presentation is the fact that this game will use the tremendous work that's been done on the stadiums to bring the Jumbotrons

to life, livening up that space between plays. Everything from replays to stats to first-down measurements will be shown on these screens, which have been replicated down to the individual bulbs. On the field, player voices are more pronounced than before, and the team is experimenting with things like picture-in-picture for when a QB audibles at the line.

It's easy to say that a new game for a brand-new console is great, because the excitement for the new system itself naturally spreads. But the team at EA Tiburon has worked hard enough on this new Madden to make it more than a title whose bloom will fade after a month. ■■■

MEET EA'S NEW FOOTBALL TITLE



NFL Head Coach - PS2, Xbox, PC

Every Monday morning, millions of football fans wake up second guessing the decisions of their teams' coaches. Now you can call all the right plays and make all the right moves in EA Sports' new NFL Head Coach game. Coming out for PS2, Xbox, and PC this spring, NFL Head Coach puts you in charge of your favorite team as you do everything from designing strategies during the week to coaching your team to victory from the sidelines on Sunday. More than just a menu-driven game, NFL Head Coach provides depth of play for hardcore fans as well as those who want to play football without all the confusing controls. Stay tuned for more on NFL Head Coach soon.

Each field will degrade according to its own characteristics, and the crowd audio will be more reactive



EXPERIENCE THE BRUTAL

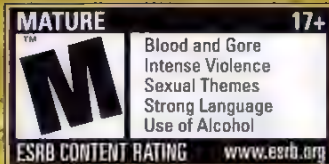


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CITY THAT WAS THE WEST



DIVERSE ACTION PACKED MISSIONS



COMBAT ON HORSEBACK



PlayStation 2



XBOX 360



PC
CD-ROM
SOFTWARE



ACTIVISION

XBOX 360

Perfect Dark Zero

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)

> **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** RAREWARE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 22

BIG PLANS

We've been more than a little concerned for a while now about the impending fate of Joanna Dark — as the launch period for the Xbox 360 continued drawing closer, there seemed to be next to no information from which to get a genuine sense of the game. That all changed this month when we got some juicy new details from Rare. The team filled us in on the high aspirations of its long-awaited prequel.

Set in 2020, three years prior to the N64 game, the young woman Joanna Dark works as a bounty hunter beside her father Jack Dark and another woman by the name of Chandra. As the game story opens, rough-edged Joanna is going on her first real field mission with her dad, and the team gets embroiled in the complex conflicts between the dataDyne Corporation and the Carrington Institute. As before, the story mode is available for play on a number of difficulties. In addition to AI improvements, harder settings also add new objectives that must be completed within the level in order to progress. Additional replay value comes from one of three primary gadgets you'll pick between each level. The demolition kit, the locktopus (for lockpicking, of course), and the data thief each offer different paths through a level, and you can only pursue one on any given playthrough of a stage.


One of the most exciting details about the game is how cooperative play will be implemented. Not only will it be available both split-screen offline as well as online, but each player will have unique objectives when they play. There's a big focus on individual players working together to complete separate objectives. Consequently, you might be playing as Joanna, sniping targets from a roof while your buddy plays her father as he makes his way along the city streets. Due to the power of the Xbox 360, each massive level will completely load from the beginning. Even if you get separated from your co-op partner by a great distance, no teleport function will kick in to bring you back together, as it does in Halo. Co-op players won't automatically respawn when they die, but rather your partner can find and revive you to continue.

Meanwhile, enormous conflicts are expected in the multi-player online arena, where up to 32 players can join a match at one time. Two primary styles of gameplay each offers several variants. Deathmatch games include more classic versions of Capture the Flag and a version of Territories. Dark Ops games are often more complex. Infection sets one player as "it," and if he kills another player, that character will become infected as well, until only one survivor remains. Variants like this, as well as others like Onslaught and Sabotage, are designed to appeal to hardcore players eager for new challenges. Six maps will ship with the game, each with three scaled sizes depending on how many players are joining. Microsoft's new matchmaking service will rapidly divide strong players from weaker ones, helping to avoid some of the mismatched battles that have sometimes frustrated Halo 2 players. The 25 weapons in the game all have secondary functions, and some even include tertiary uses as well. A melee weapon called the Viblade (read: Energy Sword) includes a secondary bullet deflection mode, while the secondary use of your fists enables weapon stealing. Players can also use jetpacks and hovercraft to move around a level.


If everything comes together, rabid Halo 2 fans may actually have a game worth switching to when the 360 finally launches in November. We'll cross our fingers. Rare hasn't exactly inspired great confidence in recent years, but it may be because such an extraordinary effort was going into crafting this launch game for Microsoft's new system. ■ ■ ■



■ Dual wield any combination of two small weapons, even two grenades



■ Bubbie boy here is a little paranoid about touching girls



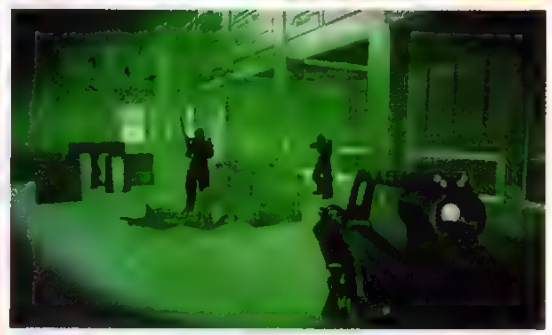
■ The futuristic conspiracy vibe sets the game apart from other shooters



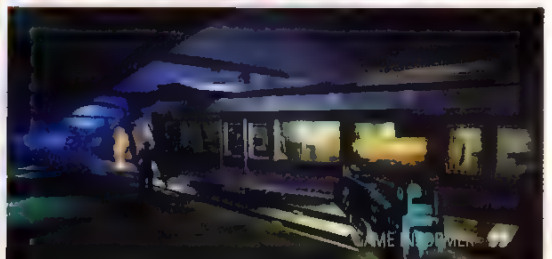
■ The graphical power evident in the game has dramatically grown in recent months



■ Don't expect to jump out of the way of this big explosion; a combat roll replaces the traditional jump button



■ Large guns like this may take up more than one of your four available weapon slots





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TEEN

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Blood
Crude Humor
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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ATTACKS 2
TOTAL DAMAGE 0



TOTAL DAMAGE 0

PLAYSTATION 2

Disgaea 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER NIPPON ICHI > DEVELOPER NIPPON ICHI > RELEASE SUMMER 2006

QUIRK TO YOUR MOTHER

Nippon Ichi's *Disgaea: Hour of Darkness* quickly reached cult hit status after its 2003 release. An unknown game from an unknown developer, *Disgaea* immediately seized the imagination of nearly everyone fortunate enough to give it a shot. Its innovative strategy/RPG stylings, along with a gut-busting hilarious script and more than 200 hours of potential gameplay, were a breath of fresh air for many gamers. We at *Game Informer* have the privilege of sharing this exclusive first look at Nippon Ichi's upcoming sequel, and it certainly looks like *Disgaea 2* will offer just what the fans crave.

Disgaea 2's story takes place after the "good ending" of the first game, and has players controlling the last remaining human on the beleaguered world of Valdimie in his quest to restore the natural order. You see, the evil demon Overlord Zenon has cursed Adell's world with magic that transforms everybody into monsters in his bid to rule Valdimie. Overturning the Overlordship of an ancient demon is a tall order for one seventeen-year-old kid, though, so it's probably a

good thing that the less-evil Overlord Etna (one of the main characters from *Disgaea*) shows up from her alternate dimension with a beef with Zenon. It also looks like Zenon's daughter, Princess Rozalin, will be joining Adell in some capacity. Most everything else about the story is still under wraps, but since Nippon Ichi flatly denied comment regarding the return of *Disgaea* stars Laharl, Flonne, and others, it wouldn't be too surprising if they showed up in some form. The Prinnies (exploding penguin zombies – just go with it) are definitely in, though, so it's likely that *Disgaea 2*'s tone will be similarly light-hearted.

As for the mechanics of *Disgaea 2*, they'll be fairly similar to those of the first title. Nippon Ichi is promising much better customization and distinctiveness for the unique story characters, though, which should be cool – in *Disgaea*, most of the plot-critical heroes were just like anyone

else except for a couple of signature skills. Likewise, battle will function much the same with Team Attacks, Combo Attacks, and a grid-based movement system. The lift and throw techniques, however, are reportedly being overhauled to create new opportunities and tactics for clever players. Regardless, *Disgaea* had one of the best and most interesting combat systems ever, and another iteration of it sounds perfectly lovely.

The final new feature that we've heard about for *Disgaea 2* is the Dark Court. Details are sketchy, but it will apparently function much like an actual court – characters will break laws, get arrested, and have to defend themselves. It may sound odd, but we have faith in Nippon Ichi's ability to turn even this mundane idea into something special; even the *Disgaea*'s Dark Assembly (Congress, basically) managed to be an interesting minigame. More info is undoubtedly being assembled at Nippon

Ichi's Japanese headquarters as you read this, so stay with us for further updates as *Disgaea 2*'s summer release date draws nearer. ■■■



Even with a decent knowledge of kanji, we still don't know what exactly the Dark Court does

■ Both the sprites and the 3D backgrounds should look better in this sequel



ATTACKS 2
TOTAL DAMAGE 0

From the looks of it, there will be several new and unique character classes

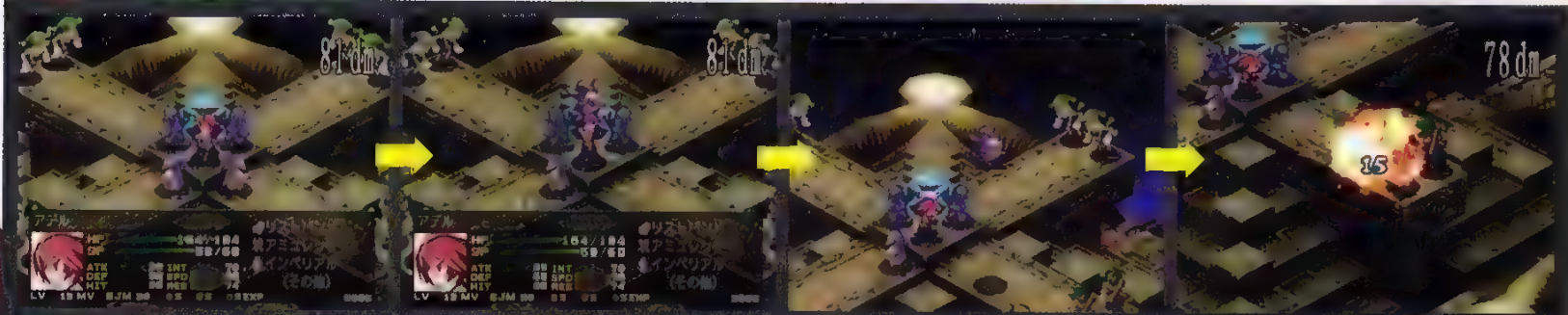
8 dm



The Lift and Throw mechanics are promised to be much more useful this time around

previews

	HP	151 / 151	(武器)							
	SP	40 / 48	(その他)							
	ATK	76	INT	50						
	DEF	56	SPD	75						
	HIT	78	RES	69						
LV	12	MV	5	JM	20	0%	0%	0%	EXP	3365



That's right, you can pick up your allies and throw them across the battlefield. In the case of Priests, they explode on contact – which is inevitably followed by mimical laughter.



The interface should be familiar to anyone who played the first game

12 dm

	HP	151 / 151	(武器)							
	SP	7 / 7	(その他)							
	ATK	11	INT	11						
	DEF	9	SPD	11						
	HIT	11	RES	11						
LV	1	MV	5	JM	20	0%	0%	0%	EXP	



As with the first game, you'll be able to customize your crew to a huge extent



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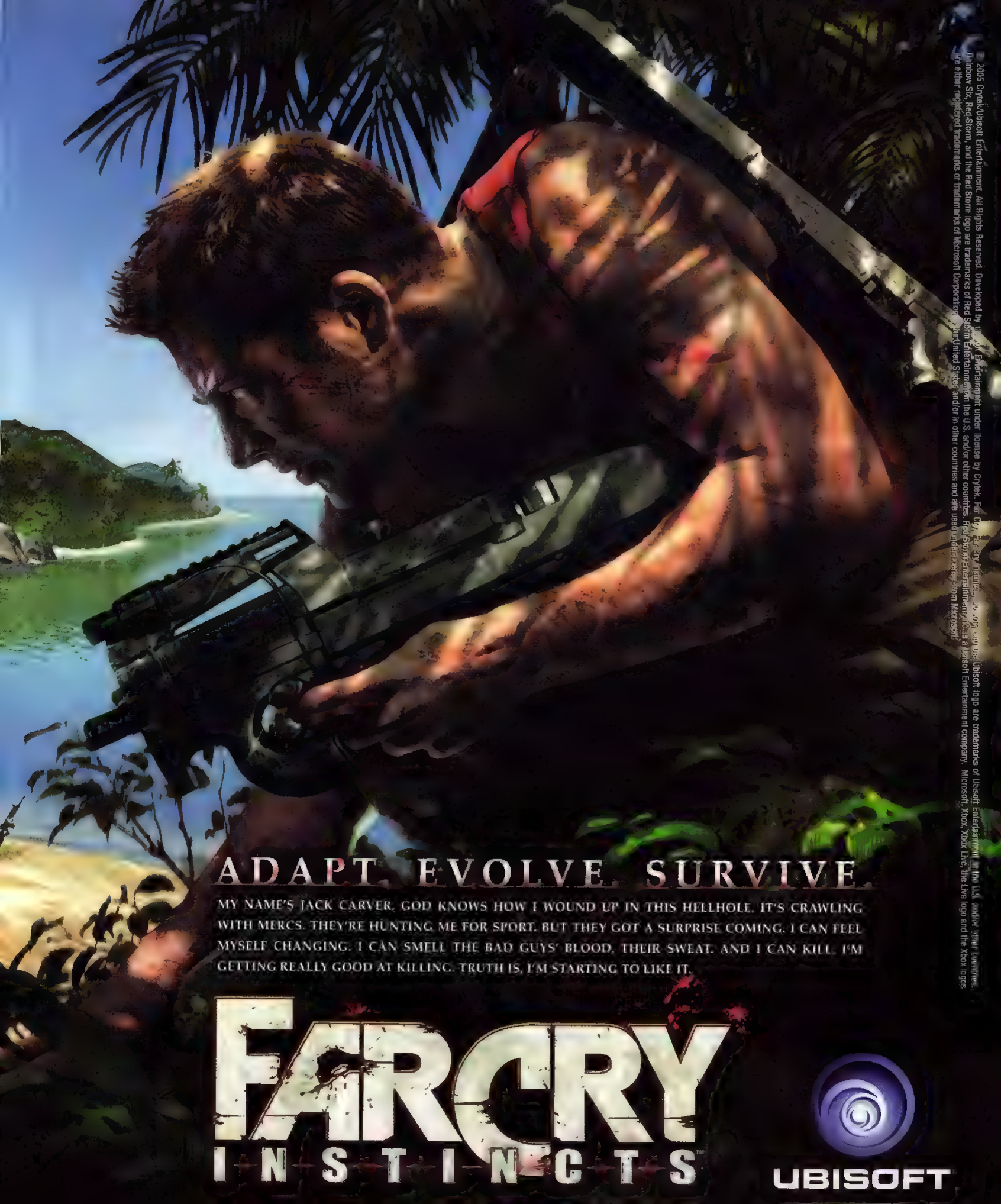
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■ You can use items in the environments or human shields for cover

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

50 Cent: Bulletproof

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES > **DEVELOPER** GENUINE GAMES
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 22



Like most people, the first time we heard about Bulletproof, we groaned. Game Informer recently got a chance to play the game, and we must admit we were impressed. It's not destined for greatness quite yet, but the production values are definitely there, it's just a question of whether Genuine Games can put the gameplay together to back up the high profile star and the game's amazing soundtrack. To learn more we talked with the man himself, 50 Cent, to hear his thoughts on the game and the industry.

BIG PLANS

How long have you been into video games? Did you play them growing up?

Yeah. I always played them coming up. I had Atari way back. Ms. Pac-Man, Centipede. Old school.

We heard that you were approached to be in the last Grand Theft Auto game, San Andreas, but you passed on it to be in your own game. That's a big offer to turn down. Why did you go with your own project?

I didn't want to be a character in a game. There are artists on my label that are able to do that. I wanted to do something a little bigger. I wanted them to create a theme and actually change the technology. Bulletproof is even more edgy than Grand Theft Auto.

In terms of the content?

Yeah.

Were there any games that you looked to as an inspiration?

Collectively, I had Terry Winters, who actually wrote the screenplay for [50 Cent's biopic] *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*. He spent two and a half months with me compiling this information to create the screenplay. I thought he was the

guy to create the theme for the video game. He did a great job. Of course, it's fictional, but it's a great theme.

Does the game tie into the movie, or is it all fictional?

It's more of a fictional tale in the video game, but it's exciting to see myself, Lloyd Banks, Young Buck, Tony Yayo, DJ Whoo Kid, Dr. Dre, [and] Eminem — all of us in the same video game.

What's the basic plot of the game?

The basic plot? You know how certain video games give you missions? There's different missions that you go through to complete the actual video game. There are a lot of things you can do in this game that you can't do in other video games. You can get information out of other characters in the game. In combat, you can utilize the actual environment, things in the environment. If there's a chair, you can turn the chair over and get behind it. They usually don't take the time to make everything in the actual game useable. You can take something off the table and throw it.

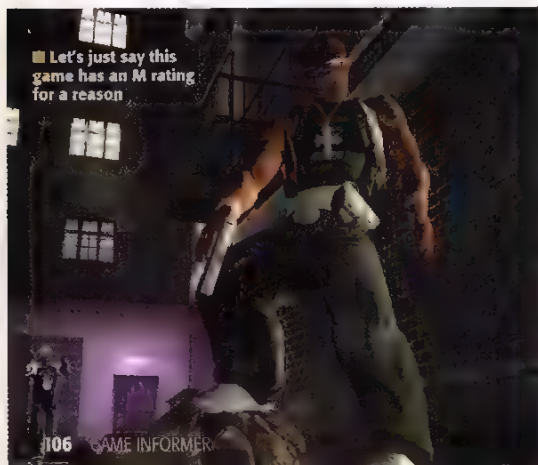
They've talked about the "Living Hood" concept for the game, with different people in the neighborhood

that you can talk, interact, and do business with. How does that work?

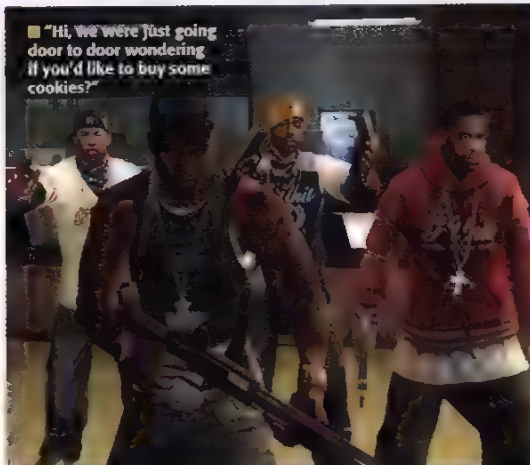
Yeah, you can go to the bootlegger and get music. That thing came from me saying, "I want to be able to give the material that I put out for promotional purposes an opportunity to be heard on a broader scale." So a lot of the material I created for the mixtape circuit, and a lot of the people that are hip to that got wind of it and other people didn't — they only got the commercial material that I release through Interscope Records. There's four additional songs that haven't been heard.

There are songs from your commercial records and the G-Unit records?

Yeah, you get a chance to use all of that music as an option when you play the game. I've always watched [my friends] use another source of music when they play games. You know, these video game companies create these game soundtracks but that's not really the best music. So, people will turn the actual video game sound off and turn up their stereo and listen to their music while they play the game. Video games are a huge form of entertainment; I've seen



■ Let's just say this game has an M rating for a reason



■ "Hi, we were just going door to door wondering if you'd like to buy some cookies?"



■ After you take someone down, you can search them for cash, credit cards, or jewelry to sell



■ Many of 50's attacks are over-the-top...wait, that's Sly's movie

them do it four, five hours at a time and they'll go right back and do it again. Like, when you watch a film, after you've seen it, unless you totally love it, you don't have the urge to watch it again. After you complete it, you're like, "That was cool." But unless it was a great film, you don't say, "Okay, start it over." You know? [Laughs]

You've obviously played the game. Is it cool and reflective of what you wanted?

Yeah, I think it's great. The game itself is actually more than I expected it to be to begin with. It's a step ahead of things that I've seen that will be compared to it.

Is it a mix of gun combat and hand-to-hand fighting?

Yeah.

Any particular cool moves that you thought were unique?

Well, there's like 20 different special kill moves that you can do. You can keep changing the different things. It's cool. Just to entertain yourself and sit there and play the game. It's so far ahead of what I would consider entertainment on the video game level. You know what I mean?

Eminem and Dr. Dre are in the game as McVicar and Grizz. Talk about their parts in the game.

Dr. Dre is a weapons guy. You can go to him and get different weapons. Everybody has their own role in the video game. It was more than I anticipated as far as the amount of work I would have to do for the video game. Even the actual people involved with manufacturing the game, they said I was a little more hands-on than they expected. I spent a lot of time doing voiceovers.

Will other guys from G-Unit go along on missions with your character?

Yeah. Bank's character is a lock specialist. So, sometimes we have to fire pistols to cover him while he opens a door, so we can go to different levels. Buck's character is a weapons guy. Dre's the guy we actually go to to get weapons in the game.

Do you play as other characters in the game, or are you always 50?

Well, I always play me! [Laughs] I like to see me running through the game.

But you can play as other characters?

Yeah.

Is there any other music for the score, movie soundtrack stuff?

There's four original songs from me, and then Sha Money XL is recreating the production for some of the music on the mixtape circuit.

There's been a lot of controversy surrounding video games and violence. You've obviously been the source of controversy yourself. What are your feelings about that? Are these kind of games bad for kids?

I think it's bad for you not to explain it [to your kids]. It's entertainment. If you have your kids sheltered to the point where they don't have cable television, I think it's bad for them to play this. But if you're going to let them watch cable TV, they're going to see everything they see in this video game reenacted to the point that it feels real. They place standards in music as a form of entertainment that they don't place on other forms of entertainment, as far as films and other things. If I take a photograph with guns behind me, they'll say I support "gun culture." Meanwhile, I took that actual photograph - from *The Massacre*, with the guns on the wall - I got that idea from *The Bourne Identity*. It's the exact same room in the film. You see what I'm saying? But they didn't have a problem with that in *The Bourne Identity*, just with 50 Cent. I look at that, and it's just a photograph to coincide with the lyrical content of a song. It's entertaining and people listen to it and enjoy the music. But, at the end of the day, I felt like they should worry about those kids if they don't have any type of guidance around them. I wouldn't let my son play the video game, if they were asking me that, of course. If you allow a nine-year-old kid to play the video game and don't say anything to him, you're allowing his assumptions. You should expect him to make bad decisions, at that point. I think the things you hide from children are more harmful than the things you expose them to and discuss with them. ■ ■ ■



■ The soundtrack in Bulletproof is simply one of the best



■ There is a wide assortment of weapons to use



■ The environments are a tad bland, but the character models are spectacular

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PlayStation 2



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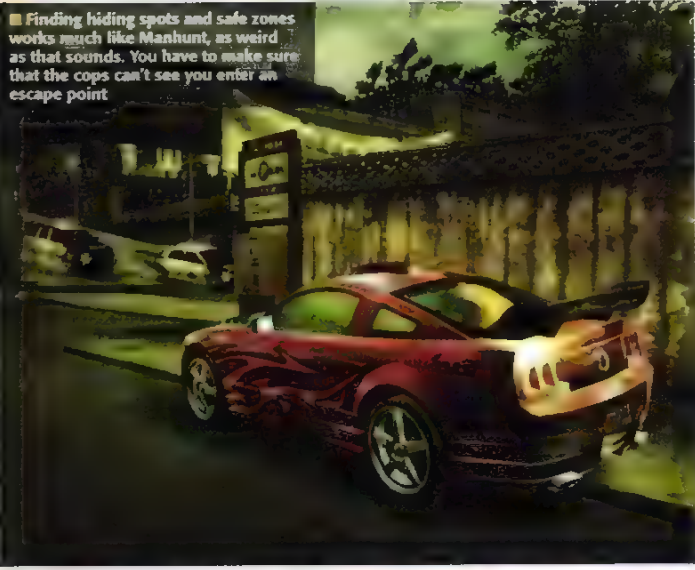
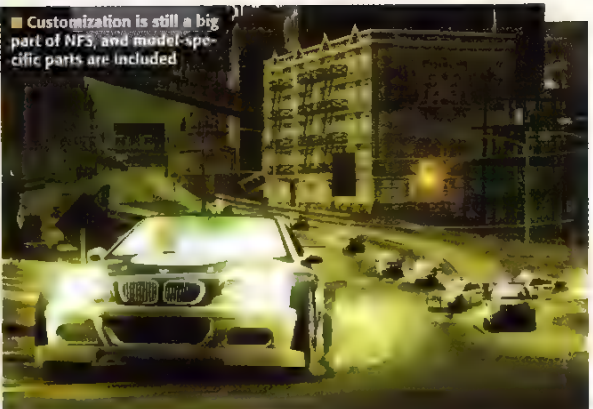
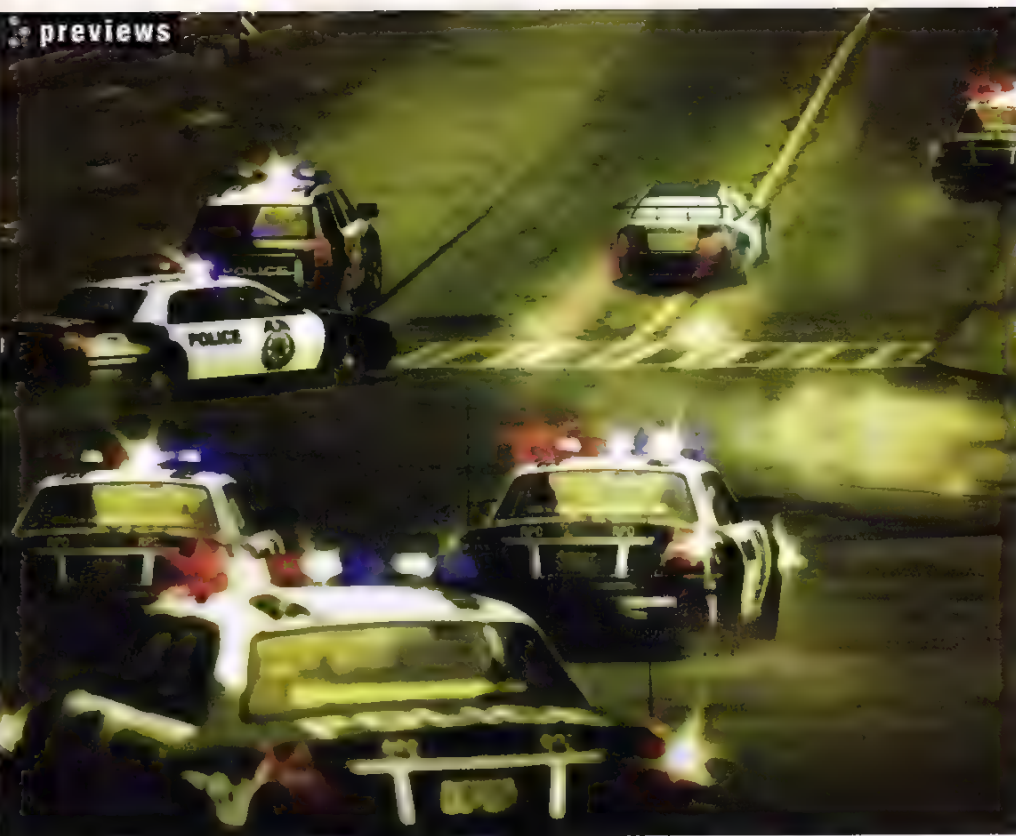


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Award for
Technological Excellence





■ Customization is still a big part of NFS, and model-specific parts are included

■ This is the only screen on this page that is Xbox 360

■ Finding hiding spots and safe zones works much like Manhunt, as weird as that sounds. You have to make sure that the cops can't see you enter an escape point

■ Those cops in the background might have set up a spike strip across the road - going over it blows your tires and is almost assuredly a failed mission

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | XBOX 360 | PC

Need for Speed: Most Wanted

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, XBOX LIVE, OR PC INTERNET) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
 > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15 (PS2, XBOX, GC, PC), NOVEMBER 22 (XBOX 360)

"FASTER, MORE INTENSE"

The Need for Speed series is long-standing (the first came out in 1995). When the series' Underground entry hit the shelves, it was a welcome resurgence for the franchise and added some nice tuner elements that were met with wide acclaim and even wider sales. But the series, which falls somewhere between arcade and simulation racers, is updating the customization schtick by going back to its roots - i.e. putting the fuzz back into the mix.

Most Wanted takes some of the best elements from the Underground entries and brings back one of the franchise's earlier themes: the police pursuit. Mixing car customization with an open city and an ever-present police threat is, in our playtime, a potent combination of over-the-top design, high-speed cruises, and challenging skill-based evasions.

What we got our hands on was a largely unlocked stable of cars and tuning options, and a small smat-

tering of races. Many of these street races didn't end at the finish line, but instead stopped only after the race was won, the cops were foiled, and the pursuit had been abandoned. The contests themselves boiled down to two words: fun and intense. What really kicked us in the pants, though, were those evasion sequences that started right after the race ended. Police tactics are varied, smart, and brutally focused. Zipping down alleys trying to break their fuzzi's line of sight is crucial, they seem to learn your tricks, and higher police levels include helicopters that report your whereabouts and even knock you around a bit in open areas, making freeways a bad idea.

It's unquestionable that a big issue with Underground 2 was the, well, openness of the open city environment. While we haven't gotten to play that facet of this game's design yet, we can testify to the polish that the rest of the title displays. Screenshots are, in this case, a great representation of the current generation builds. There's an oil-slicked appearance to the urban areas and the sections open to us offered a bounty of hiding spots, quick turns, and side streets. It seems that there's always a way to escape, but it's up to your skill to make it work.

Need for Speed may have something of a reputation to overcome, but if the rest of Most Wanted plays as intensely as the selections we played, this iteration will set its own bar in the tuner racing world...a bar that's faster and more intense than its predecessors. ■ ■ ■



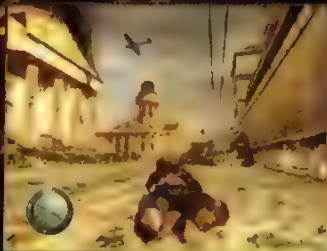
DESTINY HAS CHOSEN ITS MESSENGER

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

"9 out of 10"
- PSM



SNIPER ELITE



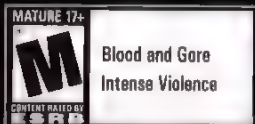
TENSE MULTIPLAYER
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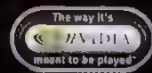


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PlayStation 2



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XBOX 360

■ Steven Spielberg, you've just been owned. If you've been waiting for the day when video games looked just as good as the *Jurassic Park* films, that day is coming on November 22.



■ Where's Turok when you need him?



■ These feisty little guys are called velociraptors. Kong calls them chicken nuggets.

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | XBOX 360

King Kong

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTPELLIER > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 22

NEXT-GENERATION CHEST POUNDING

Ubisoft gave us a more detailed look at King Kong, the game to be released concurrently with the upcoming film by Peter Jackson. Quite a bit of material was already covered (see issue 148), but we received some updated details on gameplay and a chance to check out three playable maps from the Xbox 360 version, which looks absolutely gorgeous.

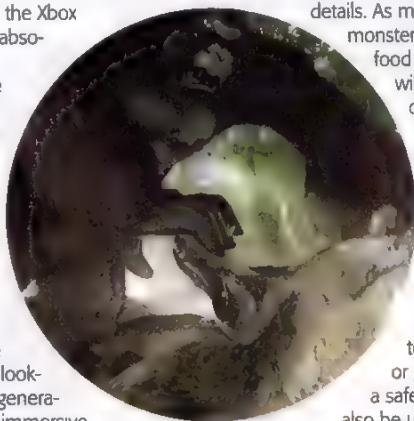
All Xbox 360 games are required to support high definition, and King Kong will not disappoint in stunning 720p. Though the 360 will not sport any additional content, it will be blessed with new textures, incredibly realistic character models, and a dynamic lighting system that make what was already a good looking game for the current generation consoles even more immersive and realistic on the powerful 360.

Character models are being reworked by hand, but the next-gen team was able to develop what they are calling a "displacement tool" to spice up the surroundings. What this tool does is scan a textured environment developed for the old system and automatically add the roughness and depth available with the 360's more powerful graphics capabilities. So a stone floor that would look completely flat on the Xbox or PlayStation 2 will have protruding bricks and actual grooves between the

stones on the 360. It's a simple effect, but it really adds to the realism. Since it is a tool, the development team can add this effect to almost any previously developed surface, making these beautiful textures ubiquitous throughout the game.

We've also been given some updated gameplay details. As mentioned previously, all the monsters on Skull Island exist on a food chain. That is, some animals will feast on others, and if you can maneuver certain creatures together they will fight each other and ignore you. It is also possible to poke a giant larvae or squirming dragonfly onto the end of a spear, and then throw that spear off into the distance or over a cliff. The monsters that feed on that type of bait will swarm to it, allowing you to run away or get off a few clean shots from a safe distance. This technique can also be used to lure monsters out of hiding and avoid what might have been a nasty ambush.

Sadly, none of the sequences where you fight as Kong were ready to be demonstrated on the 360, nor have we caught a glimpse of what the game will be like when it moves off Skull Island and into 1930s New York City. Fortunately, the game will be released on November 22 along with the Xbox 360 launch, allowing gamers to get a taste of Peter Jackson's Kong saga well before the mid-December premiere of the film. ■ ■ ■

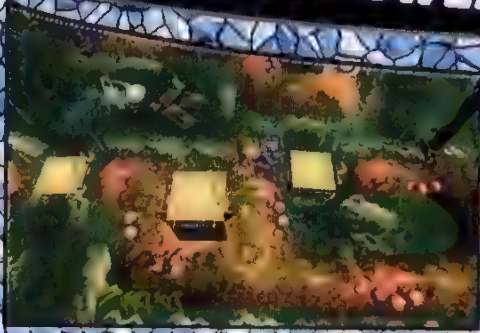


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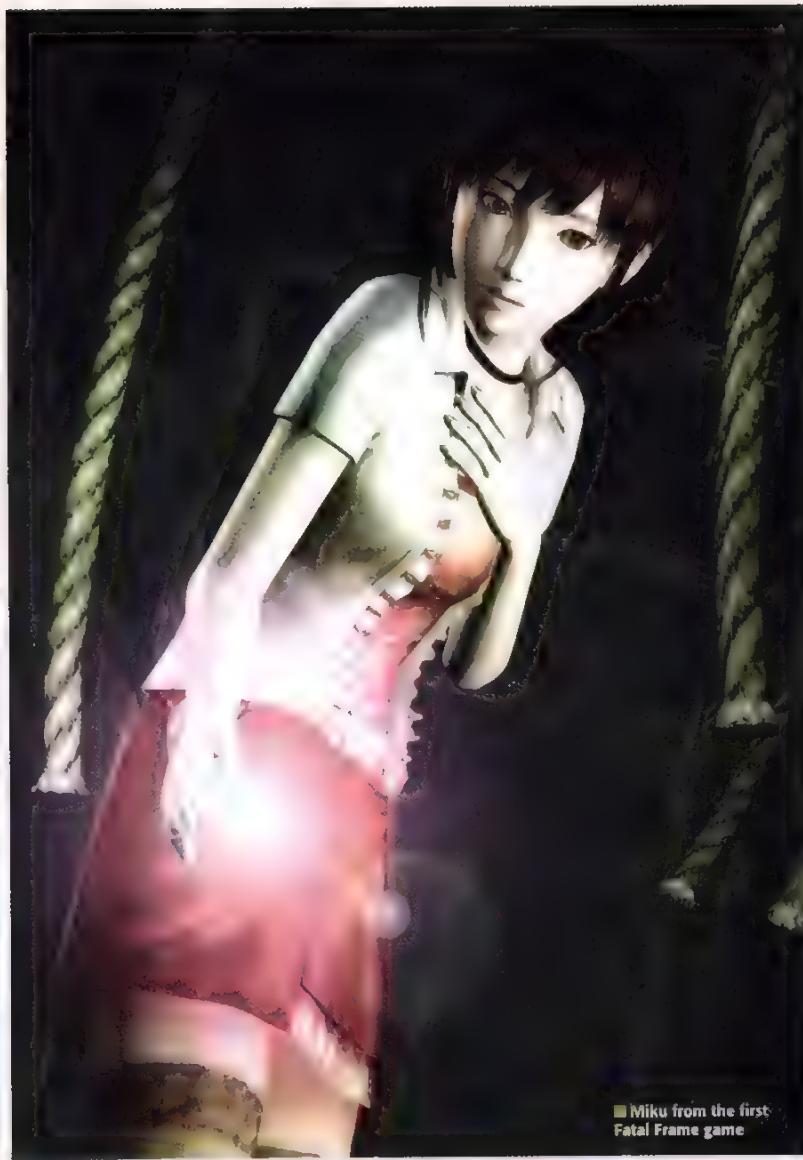
Race against time through 6 surreal worlds filled with obstacles, traps, deadly hazards and cunning enemies.



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■ The ghost's effects are more dramatic and jarring than in earlier games



■ Miku from the first Fatal Frame game

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PLAYSTATION 2

Fatal Frame III: The Tormented

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

SYSTEM SHOCK

The Fatal Frame series pursues the core of Japanese-style horror, where the fear is based on imagining things that can not be seen," says director Makoto Shibata. In the series' past entries, that has meant tense walks through cursed mansions or chasing a twin sister through the winding streets of a long-abandoned village. In Fatal Frame III: The Tormented, the environment hits closer to home.

The game stars a new character for the series, Rei Kurosawa. A photojournalist whose fiancé was recently killed in a car accident, the young woman starts having troubling lucid dreams at the start of the game. This dream world and her real, present-day urban surroundings provide the two main environments for the game's macabre tale. "I wanted to introduce the fear found in everyday life. As I created

the Fatal Frame series, I used some of my own eerie supernatural experiences, so I thought if I used a real-life location maybe I would be able to express my own experiences better," says Shibata. It's probably not based on a true story, but The Tormented promises the subtle chills and shocks popular in Japanese horror films.

In a nod to the successful games preceding this entry, players will tie together the tales of Miku from the first Fatal Frame and Mio, the main character from Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly. Without giving away specifics, The Tormented is designed as a culmination of these characters' storylines, but also should be self-explanatory enough that newcomers to the series will be just as terrified. Shibata hints, though, that "If you've played Fatal Frame II, you will notice many things in the missions that will make you grin."

Followers of the series will recognize not only the characters in many of these screenshots, but also some of the environments.

The reason is that Rei is actually experiencing the dreams of Miku and Kei, a new male character that has ties to Rei's dead fiancé. In typical Japanese horror fashion, Rei's only chance at survival is to piece together these other characters' tales and solve the mystery that is torturing them all.

In these dream sequences, players will control characters other than Rei. While each one has a different skill set and a variety of ways to complete objectives, the

■ Kei, one of the new characters, will provide different gameplay mechanics than the girls do



Fatal Frame series has never been known for amazing gameplay. Instead, the series is rightfully hailed as one of the scariest in games. "Our job as a developer is to plant fear in the player's mind. Even with the advancement of CG, nothing will exceed the imagination of the brain. We like to stimulate the imagination," says Shibata. And we're gunning to play through the ways that this inventive team makes us squirm. ■ ■ ■



FRED WIPTON HAS DEFEATED AN ARMY OF EVIL SQUID.

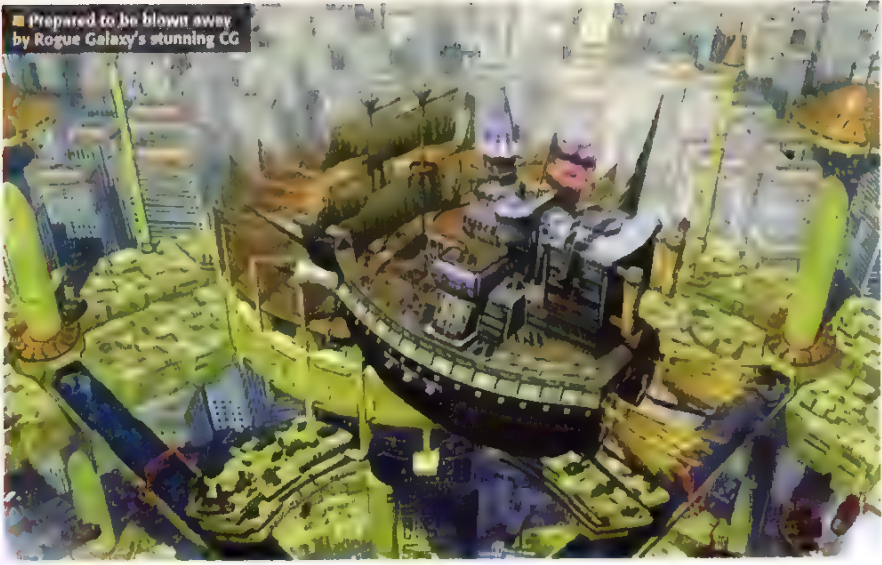
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GOING BEYOND THE CALL.



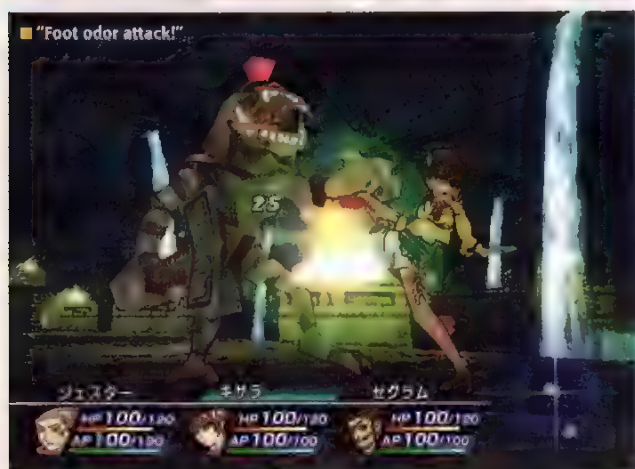
previews



■ Prepared to be blown away by Rogue Galaxy's stunning CG



■ "Hurry! We can't miss the beginning of Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants!"



■ "Foot odor attack!"



■ Several amazing effects make Rogue Galaxy's cel-shaded visuals truly unique

PLAYSTATION 2

Rogue Galaxy

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN > DEVELOPER LEVEL 5 > RELEASE TBD

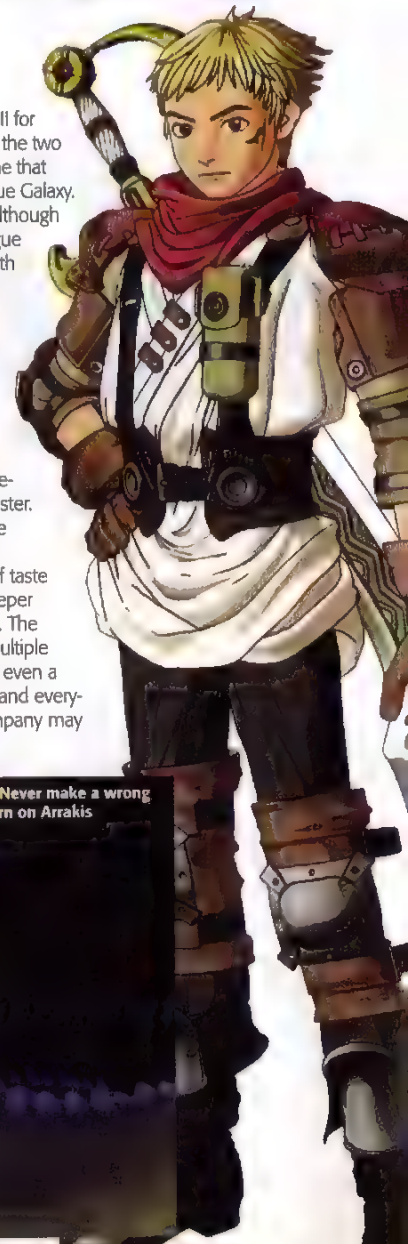
THE NEXT GREAT RPG?

Although they may not be as well-known as Square Enix, Japanese developer Level 5 knows a thing or two about role-playing games. Not only did the company handle development of *Dragon Quest VIII* for the RPG giant Square Enix, but it also created its own hit series with the two *Dark Cloud* games. Now the developer is returning with another new title, one that looks like it may be the last great RPG of this fading console generation: *Rogue Galaxy*.

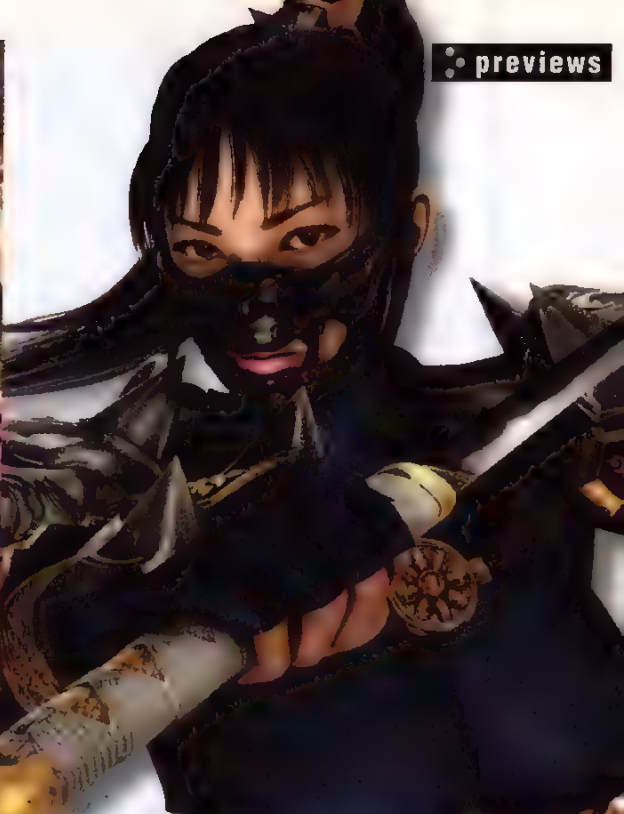
We recently got our hands on this game at the Tokyo Game Show, and although we didn't get a great sense of the plot, we're ridiculously excited about *Rogue Galaxy*. The graphics have a distinctive cel-shaded look that is combined with several layers of effects for a highly-detailed in-game world that seamlessly loads between areas. We witnessed lush jungles, futuristic cities, and more traditional areas like dungeons. Even more impressive than the in-game graphics are the cutscenes, which add even more realism and detail while retaining their unique visual style.

Although in our hands-on time with *Rogue Galaxy* we didn't do much other than talk to townspeople, we did get a brief taste of the combat. Battles load in real time — you'll see a group of monsters approaching, get a warning message, and then combat begins. Although you travel in a three-person party, you only control one character directly: the main character, Jester. The combat will feel instantly familiar to anyone who has played games like *Kingdom Hearts* or *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time*.

Some may wonder why we're so excited about this game, given the brief taste we've gotten. While we may have a lot of questions about the plot and deeper gameplay elements, we're simply stunned by everything we've seen so far. The visuals are amazing, and the cutscenes suggest an adventure that spans multiple worlds and includes space pirates, strange alien races, giant monsters, and even a touch of romance. Level 5 has produced some excellent work in the past, and everything that we've seen about *Rogue Galaxy* leads us to believe that the company may be the next great RPG developer. ■ ■ ■



■ Never make a wrong turn on Arrakis



PLAYSTATION 2

Soul Calibur III

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER NAMCO > DEVELOPER NAMCO > RELEASE OCTOBER 25

STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

It seems that if a fighting franchise wants to change up the status quo for a new entry, it adds small touches peripheral to the core dueling gameplay. With a launch just around the corner, it seems that Soul Calibur III will be doing something like this, but the changes and additions aren't taking convention into consideration.

In earlier coverage of the Namco PS2-exclusive title, we discussed the interesting create-a-fighter features in the new game. It appears that the mode is much more robust than we had earlier been led to believe, though. When starting from scratch, players can go into a character color editor that lets you tweak the palette of any existing character. There is also the fighter creation mode that opens wider the further you go into the story. With roughly a dozen points of customization in addition to costume and weapon choices, this new feature for the series should make for some crazy fighters.

Once you have a fully customized character, you can take them into the Chronicles of the Sword mode. In this strategy-laced, non-linear

option, different means can be utilized to reach a mission's climactic end. Players will move around a fully-3D overworld and select enemy camps to target. Depending on the size and composition of your forces, it behooves your team to choose enemies based on their skill level and job. These head-to-head brawls play out exactly like the regular combat you've come to know in the series, but the game's five different jobs each have different attributes that affect battle. While none of them are pushovers, your chances are better if you've used strategy in the selection process.

In any mode, the game still promises the fast-paced weapon-oriented combat that made the franchise a standout in the crowded fighting genre. Including the three new characters (Zasalamel, Tira, and Setsuka), the roster tops out with more than 25 brutal choices and this entry also offers more arenas than any earlier Soul Calibur game. "More, more, more" isn't just a battle cry for the hair metal bands of our past, it seems that it's also a demand from the fighting fans of our present. ■■■■

After a battle in the Chronicles of the Sword mode, players will have an RPG-like attribute progression dictated by experience points

LV.	21	WINS	63 ↑
EXP	8850 ↑	LOSE	5 ↓
NEXT EXP	9100 ↓	DRAW	3

The 3D overworld shows players a number of options that they can choose from

XIAOXIN

LV.18	[Bandit]
Health	[240/240]
Weapon	[Dark]

The Many Faces of Character Creation



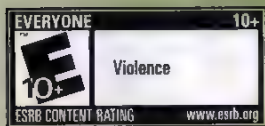
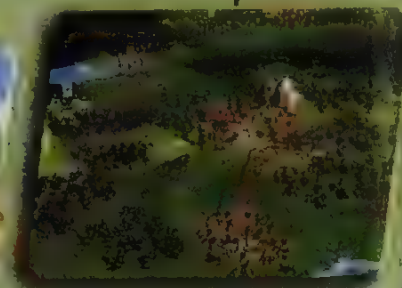
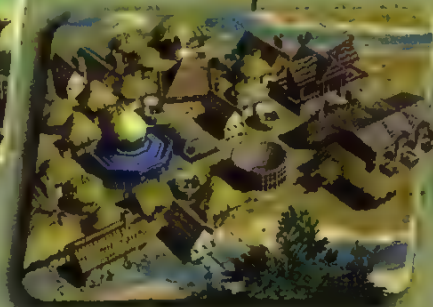


200 BC

216 AD

1206

1334



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Dictate Policy That Will Have The Entire U.S. Seeing Red.

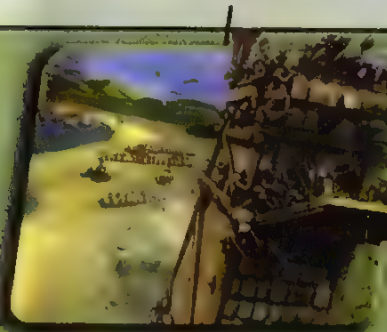
- **OVERHAULED INTERFACE:** RTS style, intuitive interface allows you to manipulate units and cities with greater control and faster speed.
- **3D LIVING WORLD:** Detailed environment where animals roam and smoke billows from small huts, set in a vibrant and colorful world.
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- **MULTIPLAYER:** Built from the ground up with dramatic improvements: Era starts, variable game speeds, hot join, team play and a bevy of connectivity options: LAN, internet, PBEM, hot seat and more.

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION IV

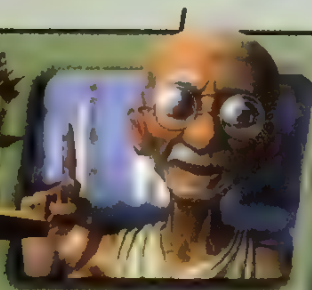
*"It has our dictator glands pumping
conquer-juice into our bloodstream by the gallon."*

— GAME INFORMER

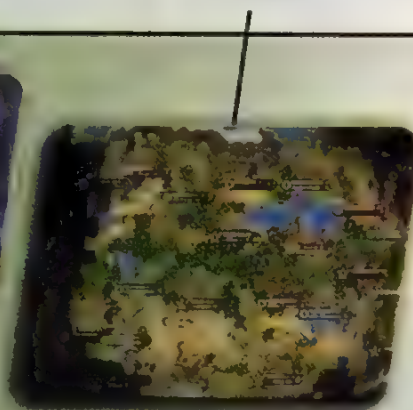
1468



1894



1930



1945



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previews

Who holds up somebody right in front of a cop car? A stone-cold gangsta, that's who

XBOX 360

Saint's Row

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER THQ > DEVELOPER VOLITION > RELEASE NOVEMBER 15

RHYMING AND STEALING

Publisher THQ is stealing a march from Rockstar on the road to the next generation's sandbox. Saint's Row, from developer Volition, should be the first open-world game to market, and it's looking none the worse for the fact. And while it does share many qualities with the seminal Grand Theft Auto franchise, Saint's Row promises to take aspiring crime lords in a few different directions this November.

It should come as no surprise that this title blows previous sandbox games out of the water technologically. The draw distance is already far larger than anything we've seen in the genre, full integration of the Havok physics engine allows for some impressive destruction, and a full day/night cycle (the moon will even change phases!) affects the ambient lighting in spectacular fashion. Also, you'll have complete control over your character's appearance — and, finally, you can play as a woman. Along the lines of EverQuest II or City of Villains, you can adjust numerous sliders to alter how the protagonist looks. Whether you fancy yourself more like The Rock or Christian Bale in *The Machinist*, Catherine Zeta

Jones or Whoopi Goldberg, the character creation system in Saint's Row should hopefully accommodate you.

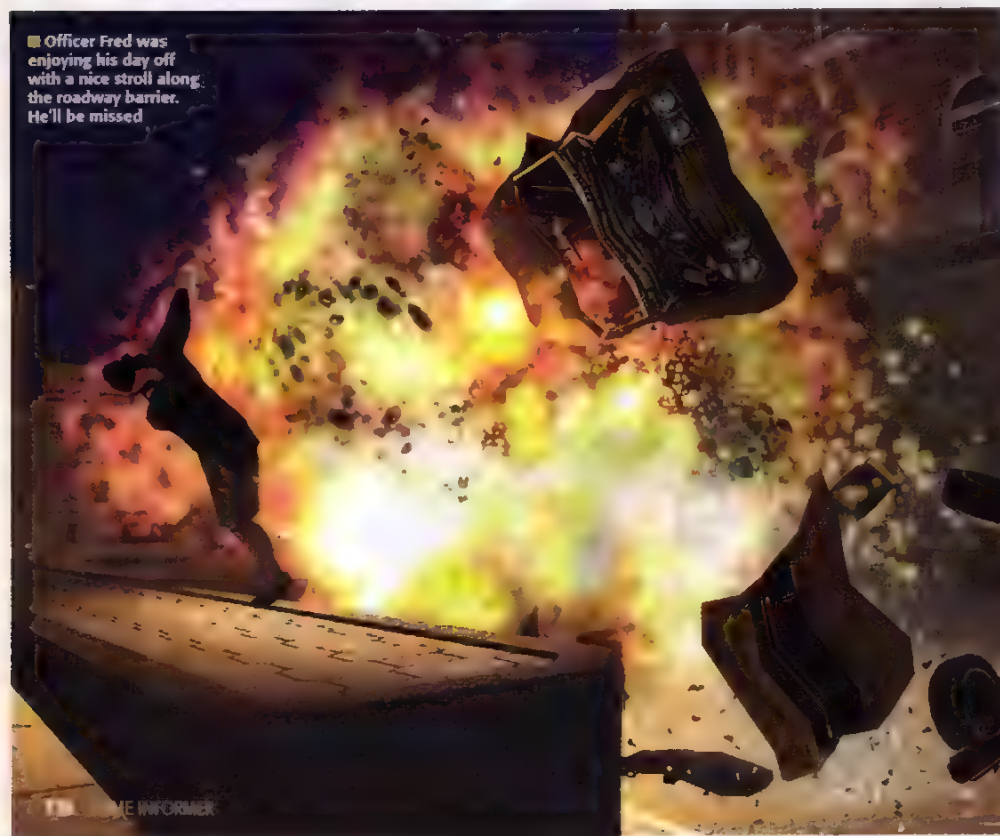
Saint's Row is structured a bit differently than GTA's fairly linear mission-based approach, as well. The entire city will be open for business from the very beginning of the game, and you're welcome to try your hand at any of the dozens of different activities to earn the respect of fictional Stillwater's criminal element. Once certain thresholds of respect are reached, new options will present themselves. Crushing the headquarters of a rival gang, for instance, will only be possible once you've made something of a mark on the city. To be a true underworld kingpin, though, you've got to have homies. These fellow badasses are only a phone call away, and are happy to join you in any mission of mayhem. For maximum vehicular ownage, have them behind the wheel of your (or their) ride while you gun down the opposition, or switch places to let your homie ride shotgun. The city is your playground, and Saint's Row looks all set to give you the freedom and the means to do what

ever you want with it.

Several well-known actors, including the likes of Michael Clarke Duncan, Tia Carrere, and David Carradine lend their voices to Stillwater's inhabitants. Approximately 90 cars, 20 weapons, and 12 radio stations playing 120 songs (or, of course, your own imported tunes) will populate the city. By all indications, Saint's Row has all the goods in place to become the next open-world epic that millions of gamers spend months or years in. Whether or not it can replicate the cultural sensibility and humor that makes GTA such a phenomenon remains to be seen, but it seems likely to be a violently good time regardless. ■■■



The location-specific damage modeling will deform your car depending on how it crashes



Officer Fred was enjoying his day off with a nice stroll along the roadway barrier. He'll be missed



This guy probably never gets beaten up



UNLIMITED KNAGLEO

PLAYSTATION 2

Shadow Hearts: From the New World

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER XSEED GAMES > DEVELOPER NAUTILUS > RELEASE SPRING

AN AMERICAN TALE

Reverent doesn't necessarily mean stupid, and funny doesn't necessarily mean flippant – subtle distinctions that the Shadow Hearts series has brought into focus. The mix of history and over-the-top weaponry, hardcore RPG conventions and the action-oriented Judgement Ring system, and wacky dialogue with complex characters is a stew that only this series seems to have mastered. Thankfully, new entries don't have to simmer too long before we can get our hands on them.

Sometime in the first quarter of next year, Xseed Games will release Shadow Hearts: From the New World, which takes place in a depression-era USA. At this point, it doesn't look like the previous tales' lead character, Yuri, will be the focus. Instead, a 16-year-old detective named Johnny Garland will traipse from New York City to Chicago, the Grand Canyon, and Las Vegas with a Native American bounty hunter named Shania.

Lots of new additions and changes to the locales, timeframe, and characters are in store, but as fans, we're excited that the series' Judgement Ring is back for more action. Two new features for the system have been confirmed. A Stock system lets players perform Combo commands with a second character or use a Double feature that allows one character to do two actions in a single turn.

The last edition of the Shadow Hearts series really got gamers' attention. Its diverse cast of characters, interesting choice of time period, and laugh-out-loud dialogue in addition to well-designed dungeon crawling and the deep Judgement Ring system were standout elements that should all make a return. Improved graphics, new characters, and unique locations are making this entry one to check out early in 2006. ■ ■ ■



Up to 60 hours of gameplay is promised for this continent-spanning tale



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WELCOME TO MEXICO'S DRUG-PUSHING UNDERWORLD



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



PlayStation.2



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■ We can't figure out why foe always plays as the bazooka guy

XBOX 360

The Outfit

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** RELIC ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** MARCH

EAT IT, STEVE MCQUEEN

We know that many of you have had it up to here with World War II action games. For every Call of Duty, after all, there are five uninspired Medal of Honor sequels. Bear with us, though, because Relic Entertainment (of Homeworld and Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War fame) has The Outfit en route to take us away from the glut of derivative, overly-somber garbage that we've had to put up with in recent years. Though the game's tone might not be as light as *Kelly's Heroes*, it's more along the lines of *The Great Escape* than *Saving Private Ryan*. And there's a whole lot of action to keep things rolling in this fast-paced blow-em-up. It's always a good sign when you have infinite ammunition.

Given that The Outfit is an Xbox 360 title, there are plenty of technical details to drool over. Three separate physics engines (one

each for vehicles, building destruction, and soft bodies) ensure that the mayhem plays out beautifully onscreen, and developer Relic's visual pedigree makes itself clearly known in the detailed models and jaw-dropping explosive effects. From what we've seen, the AI is similarly impressive, with allied soldiers doing a good job of finding cover and open fields of fire. But that's all to be expected – what makes The Outfit special is the intensity of its constant action.

As one of three distinct heroes, each with their own specialties and explosive loadouts, you'll command a squad of soldiers in your mission to stop an insane Nazi general from realizing his nefarious endgame. A single platoon can hardly withstand the Axis army, though, so the might of the Allied forces is yours to command as well. By collecting Field Units during levels, you'll be able to



■ This is what's known as "getting the party started"

call in airstrikes and reinforcements to aid in your struggle. You can even airdrop one of the game's 20 or so vehicles in to give your squad some added mobility or firepower (yes, this includes tanks).

During missions, you'll come across in-game events that you can choose to resolve to earn more than 35 medals. For instance, if you successfully help a squad of defecting Germans get away from their army, a heroic commendation is in order. These medals, along with another over 35 that are only available by kicking tail in multiplayer, will

be saved to your online profile so you can back up your trash-talking with some hard facts – or prove that you're worth taking along on a co-op mission. This all sounds pretty good, and hopefully it will add up to some serious Nazi-thwarting entertainment when The Outfit ships sometime this winter. We certainly can't wait to shelve all of the "heroic sacrifice" and "teamwork and planning saves lives" dogma, and solve a few problems with loud guns, big explosions, and good ol' balls-out chutzpah. ■ ■ ■



■ Is it possible to be any more American than this guy?



■ Cover is for wussies and the French

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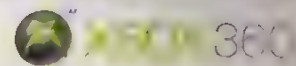
MATURE 17+
M Blind Language Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

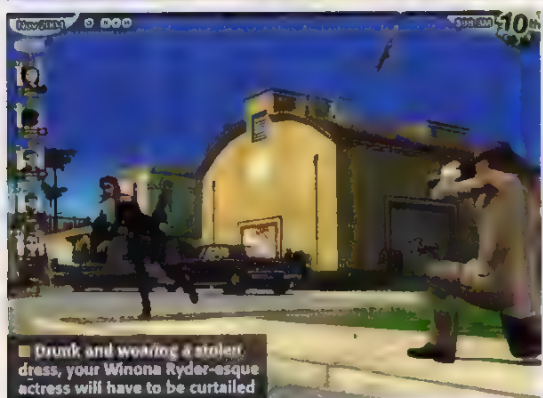
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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

The Movies

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER LIONHEAD STUDIOS
 > RELEASE NOVEMBER (PC), 2006 (PS2, XBOX, GC)

MOVIE MOGULS

Back when we first told you about The Movies in February of 2004, people were excitedly talking about how good Brad Pitt's summer epic *Troy* was going to be and how he and Jennifer Aniston were going to have kids and be in love forever and ever. Well, now that it's almost 2006, quite a bit has changed. *Troy* flopped and Brad's been bewitched by that she-devil Angelina Jolie and her irresistible children. Activision's The Movies, however, remains as exciting of a game as it has ever been. After having recently played the PC edition, we can say that our interest in this title has actually increased exponentially.

Setting out to make the greatest film of all time, Reiner, Miller, and Kato teamed up to make *Alien Hamburger: Medium Rare* (working title: *Plan 10 From Outer Space*). But before they could bring this epic to life, their studio needed to be big enough to truly do this masterpiece justice. After hiring a couple of former deadbeats off the street to construct a few key buildings for the studios (and to help maintain the lot in general), one working stiff in particular

caught their eye. Possessing good looks and half a brain, this carpenter was made a star. Soon enough, with a set built and a script in hand, our auteurs were ready to make their first high budget film. Their early attempts were short affairs that were more about making sure the cameras actually worked rather than shooting "films." This was the 1920s, after all. Between movies, they built a stable of actors, made sure the studio lot was well maintained, had the actors talk to each other to develop chemistry, and built some more sets.

Soon enough, the time was right for *Alien Hamburger: Medium Rare*. Featuring a cast of cheerleaders, dogs, aliens, cowboys, and homy chickens, no expense was spared in costume, props, or sets. Although you as a player can just sit back and watch a scene being shot, detail-oriented players will dive in and choose the costumes, actor intensity, and camera angles. *Alien Hamburger* really came together in post-production, where subtitles were added (you can add your

own voice if you have a mic), sound effects chosen, and scenes rearranged. Lionhead's interface was intuitive and easy to use for both post-production and all other aspects of the game. Wav or Ogg files can even be added to provide a custom soundtrack if the default choices don't suit your needs.

Of course, as much as The Movies is about making films, the game operates just as well as a studio simulator. Sets, research labs, actor trailers (complete with amenities such as cars and basketball courts to keep them busy), and script facilities must be built, and you'll have your hands full keep-

ing tabs on everything from your budget and the business side of filmmaking to playing groundskeeper for your studio lot and making sure your actors aren't getting into trouble. Should these details not interest you, you can even just go into the standalone movie creator and simply make films, ignoring the studio simulation side of the title. Believe it or not, it seems like the promises that Lionhead made way back in early 2004 are all still intact and making for one of the most engrossing games we've seen in a long time. ■■■■



YOU'LL NEVER WORK IN THIS TOWN AGAIN: THE TRUE STORY OF ALIEN HAMBURGER

Taking over four years and millions of dollars to complete, *Alien Hamburger: Medium Rare* is a film that is currently enjoying a renaissance of critical acclaim and a renewal of public interest. Once called "a Frankenstein-like movie that stitches together the worst in cinema" by some fat critic with glasses, *Alien Hamburger's* themes of alienation, human existence, and automotive repair are being re-examined in a new light thanks to a digitally remastered print that recently surfaced. Rumor has it that the three directors are talking about providing audio commentary for a possible DVD release of the film, complete with an explanation of the movie's cryptic teaser ending. Could *Alien Hamburger: Char Sandwich* be in the works?

CALL IT A FRIENDLY GATHERING...

...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.



In single-player, hunt and be hunted by aggressive AI that homes in on the slightest sound.



Customize your operative and build your career on Xbox Live® in the Persistent Elite Creation™ mode.



Challenge friends to operative vs. mercenary firefights in the PlayStations2 Rivalry mode.



Tom Clancy's RAINBOW SIX LOCKDOWN



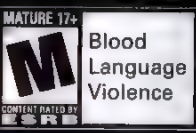
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PlayStation 2



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■ The visual style remains more subdued than Episode I



■ The ES Reuben is a new mech to the series



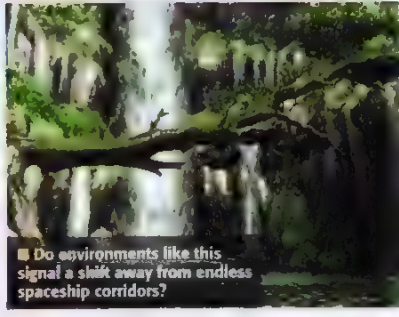
■ Will Virgil's role in the events finally be explained?



■ If KOS-MOS were your girlfriend, she could totally block hostile energy beams for you. One more reason she's out of your league



■ "Would you like to reserve this space for YOUR climactic final confrontation? Call 1-800-LAST-GUY now!"



■ Do environments like this signal a shift away from endless spaceship corridors?

UNLIMITED FRAMED

PLAYSTATION 2

Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER NAMCO > DEVELOPER MONOLITH SOFT > RELEASE TBA



DO-OVER!

Xenosaga has fallen on some hard times. After a brilliant first entry in what was originally intended to be a six-part epic, trouble started brewing for the fledgling series. After the development team saw the departure of several key staff members, the second episode disappointed gamers with some baffling gameplay decisions that made even the most devoted fans of the first game wince. However, the damage done by Episode II is not irreversible, and the newly-announced third (and now final) installment in the Xenosaga tale is set to make amends and end the story on a high note.

The adventure begins one year after the end of Episode II. Shion has resigned from her post at Vector Industries due to her discovery of the company's role in the Gnosis phenomenon, and the funding for the KOS-MOS project has been eliminated. That money appears to have been funneled into a similar venture, however, as players will confront another android female comparable to KOS-MOS in all regards...except she isn't one of the good guys. How the events unfold from there is unknown, but the Zohar will undoubtedly play a central role, as will Shion, chaos, and Wilhelm, the director of Vector Industries. Since this series

is famous for its twisting, philosophically-minded plots, we'll have to wait for some hands-on time to discover how the loose ends are being tied up.

One thing that should excite gamers who were disappointed with the most recent battle system is that Episode III will once again be adopting the powerful tech attacks from the first game. Additionally, the problematic zone system will be abandoned, though there are remnants of the Episode II battle system that still remain. For instance, the on-foot and mech battles are still segregated, but judging from some footage we saw of Jin and Margulis battling in their ES

units, these fights still have great potential. Even though we can only speculate how the series will conclude, these screenshots do provide some enticing clues. It looks as though the entire cast of characters will be returning (though we don't know about their sub-par English voice-acting counterparts), and there have even been rumors that Albedo may not be out of the picture quite yet. The mystery of the series continues to deepen, and we're holding out hope that the mistakes in the second entry were merely a short detour that put us on the path to a thrilling and satisfying resolution. ■■■



■ With each iteration, Shion seems to show more skin. Too bad we'll never see Episode VI



■ Individual tech attacks make a triumphant return



■ Ziggy continues to be an unstoppable cyborg battle tank. Take notes, chaos!



PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures

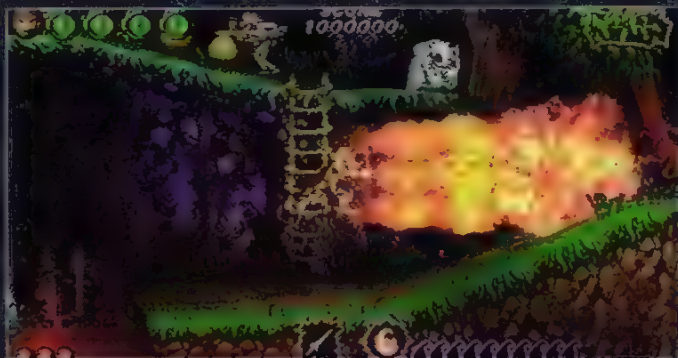


UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Frame City Killer

Hitting stores shortly after the launch of the Xbox 360, *Frame City Killer* should appeal to anyone that has reveled in the gory freedom of the *Hitman* series. As Crow, an agent sent to the East Asian metropolis of Frame City to assassinate Khan (the head of the mysterious Visual Acid cartel) it will be up to players how they want to carry out their hits. You can locate your target by paying informants, intimidating thugs, or scanning the environment for clues. Once you find your quarry, how you take him out is up to you. Snipe them from afar, plant a bomb on their car, or simply bust them up with hand-to-hand combat. *Frame City Killer*'s freetform mayhem will certainly bring out the darker side of many gamers — except for us. We are beings of pure happiness and joy, after all.



PSP

Extreme Ghouls 'N Ghosts

Capcom and the PSP are, like, best friends forever! Capcom is reviving several of its classic franchises on the Sony handheld, including the long-dormant *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* series. But rather than port one of the older games, Capcom has decided to create an all-new one — *Extreme Ghouls 'N Ghosts*. The title will feature classic *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* gameplay, with side-scrolling platforming action, intense difficulty, and knights in boxer shorts. It will also feature several new gameplay mechanics. Your character will learn new abilities over the course of the game (like double-jumping and flight), and the story will feature branching paths and warp points. *Extreme Ghouls 'N Ghosts* will also use the 3D capabilities of the PSP to add a new level of depth to the series. Like *Street Fighter Alpha 3: Double Upper*, this title is scheduled to hit next year in Japan, and we're confident it will head Stateside shortly after.



PSP

Street Fighter Alpha 3: Double Upper

Capcom recently announced the first PSP version of the *Street Fighter* series, entitled *Street Fighter Alpha 3: Double Upper*. A port of *Alpha 3: Double Upper* will feature 37 playable characters, including Ingrid from *Capcom Fighting Jam* and fighters from *Capcom VS. SNK 2*. No official U.S. release date has been announced, but *Double Upper* is scheduled to hit Japanese PSPs next year, and we have no doubt it will quickly find its way into the hands of American gamers eager to battle their friends with *Double Upper*'s Wi-Fi versus mode.



ARCADE

House of the Dead 4

We wouldn't normally be terribly concerned with the announcement of a new Japanese arcade game, except when it's another entry in the ghoulish House of the Dead series. As it is, there's a pretty good track record that says if this series shows up there, it will almost always arrive several months later on American consoles. The focus this time around seems to be the immense number of zombies that assault you in a never-ending flood. The big question isn't so much whether this will come over, but what system it shows up on. With those graphics, could we have a next-gen light gun game on our hands?



ARCADE

Virtua Fighter 5

Yet another Japanese arcade title that will almost certainly find its way to American shores, the new Virtua Fighter looks positively gorgeous. As Sega's premier fighting franchise, the game is being handled by the same team that crafted VF 4. Early info reveals the presence of at least two new characters – the first a dangerous young woman and the second a mysterious male wrestler. The trailer we saw was most impressive in its complex use of light and shadow, but also revealed a number of new movesets for even the most familiar characters in the series. Don't be surprised to see some big announcements on the title as we head into 2006.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

TOCA Race Driver 2006

There aren't many "Buy one, get a second free" deals that are any good. For instance, that one time when we bought a true jam sandwich and got a second one for free didn't turn out as well as planned. But, boy, does Codemasters have a deal for you! TOCA Race Driver 2006 is so jammed packed with racing, it's almost like buying one game and getting another free! The World Tour story mode is back, and it thankfully offers more choices this time around. Also included this year is the Pro Career mode. This basically offers a whole career's worth of racing in six different racing disciplines, like Touring cars or open wheel. While World Tour mode lets you pick and choose what you want to race as your career progresses, offering a sampling of all kinds of racing types, Pro Career mode fleshes out these different racing types, letting you play a full schedule with each genre. TOCA's two giant modes are going to guarantee you're gonna want to have two hands on the steering wheel come February.



CITY MEETS LUSH Fight through the war-torn streets of tomorrow's Mexico City, stunningly recreated on your Xbox®.



GHOSTLY You are the soldier of the future. You are the most lethal, high-tech soldier on the battlefield.



TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON Advanced Warfighter™

PUBLISHER: UBISOFT | DEVELOPER: UBISOFT | SYSTEM: XBOX®



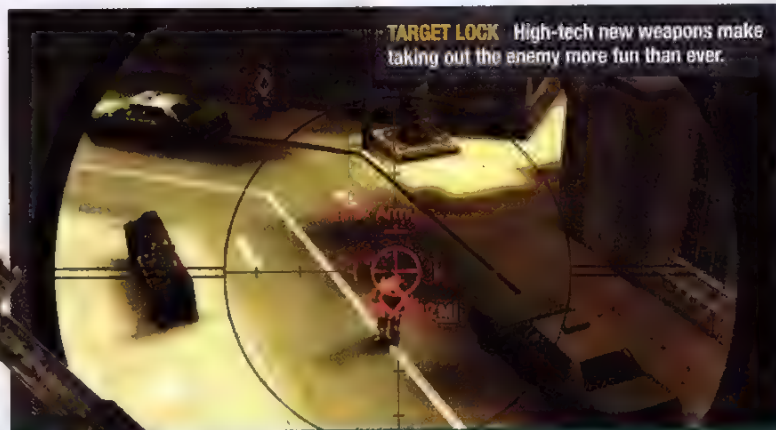
FUTURE PERFECT

Ubisoft set new standards for future-realistic shooters with Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon series.

The fan-favorite franchise focuses on the near-future exploits of the Ghosts – an elite American infantry unit using the most advanced technology the USA has to offer. The Ghosts are the Army's first-response strike team, equipped with weaponry and equipment that may seem like Sci-Fi today, but will be operational and battle-standard in the years to come. And the lat-

est in the franchise, Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter™, is going to hit fans like a gut-punch from the future. 2013 to be exact. And it's all coming to Xbox®!

As the game begins, it's the year 2013 and a splinter faction in the Mexican army has launched an insurrection. The strike is timed to coincide with an international celebration, and the rebel Mexican forces are able to do the unthinkable, killing the leader of Canada, taking the President of



TARGET LOCK High-tech new weapons make taking out the enemy more fun than ever.

the United States hostage, and capturing codes to the US nuclear arsenal. The stakes couldn't be any higher as the Ghosts arrive...

Fitting for a franchise all about the real technologies of the future, Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter boasts innovation in both gameplay and amazing new weaponry. The game gets its very name from the Integrated Warfighter System (IWS) program, based on actual US military research combining advanced weapons systems, satellite communications, and survivability systems including MULTICAM adaptive camouflage to actually evolve what we think of the Modern Soldier.

The CROSS-COM system, obvious in the game's one-of-a-kind HUD, makes for an amazing single-player experience as you freely navigate the wide open levels.

But Xbox Live® fanatics will be glad to know that CROSS-COM is just as effective there, actually allowing team members to update situational awareness live, online. Add to that all-new



multiplayer modes like Dog Tags, a gritty new take on Deathmatch; and Domination, where nothing less than total victory will do. And with the return of favorites like Solo, Team Adversarial, Last Man Standing, and Co-op Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter promises to be a must-have for any Xbox Live® gamer.

Any way you slice it, Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter has the intensity and high-tech realism to maintain the series' hold on the Modern Combat Battlefield. And with its new emphasis on the Integrated Warfighter System and rededication to multi-player innovation, it just may be the best Ghost Recon ever.

EXPLOSIVE You've got 48 hours to save the president, and some really big guns to help the cause.



CROSS-COM

In the future war will look more like videogames, complete with a HUD... which experts say will look something like this...

SATELLITE CAMERA
Live video feed from your squadmate's helmet gives you unprecedented situational awareness.

UPDATED MAP
Spot an enemy and he's tracked by satellites and placed in your map.

TOTAL CONTROL
Effortlessly command your squad and other allied forces. Even call in air-strikes.

HEALTH/STANCE
A quick look and you can determine your position and your health.

FUTURE WEAPONS
Master deadly prototype high-tech weapons that are inspired by actual army research programs like the lightweight XM8 assault rifle.

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RATING PENDING

RP

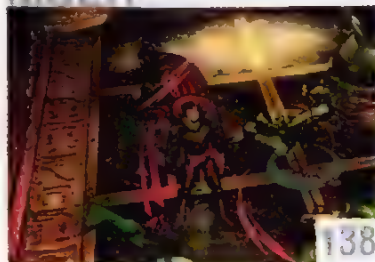
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse

PS2



Castlevania: Curse of Darkness

GO



Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance

XBOX



Far Cry Instincts



Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow

Regardless of what people may say about the various 3D incarnations of Castlevania, Koji Igarashi and crew can still make one fantastic side-scrolling adventure. Drawing heavily from the 1997 classic Symphony of the Night and incorporating several mechanics directly from 2003's fantastic Aria of Sorrow, this latest Castlevania also stamps its own imprint on the hallowed franchise. With some of the best boss battles around and silky-smooth exploration and RPG mechanics, Dawn of Sorrow is yet another must-have title for the DS.

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 | Junk. Some junky junk that's so junky that...forget it. We know you don't read this anyway. |

> **Concept:** What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

> **Graphics:** How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

> **Sound:** Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

> **Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

> **Entertainment:** Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

> **Replay Value**

High - You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.

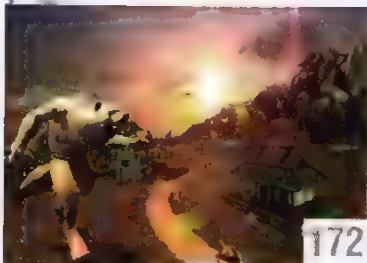
Moderately High - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.

Moderate - Good for a few months or a few times through.

Moderately Low - After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.

Low - You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

PC



172

Black & White 2

HANDHELD



176

Metroid Prime Pinball



170



F.E.A.R.

Little warms our hearts more than a fantastic game without a number in the title. F.E.A.R., from Monolith Productions, is a shining example of the type. A story filled with creepy thrills propels you along as some of the most intelligent and deadly enemies in the history of gaming gun for you in firefights that are visually and aurally astounding events. Find out all the gory details on page 170.

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The Edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

This is where G4 breaks down the form 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 and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.		Content suitable only for adults.
	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.		Product is awaiting final rating.
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

Nintended – Regardless of how innovative it may be, this is how you're going to look as you swing the Revolution controller to and fro.

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 Crusader.

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.



The Gamers Pick

Top 10 PC Games of the Year

The Editors Pick



With a great year in PC Games and more great titles coming soon, the Editors of Game Informer compiled a list of their Top 10 PC Games on tap to be the strongest contenders of 2005.

1	Call of Duty 2
2	F.E.A.R.
3	Quake IV
4	Age of Empires III
5	Sid Meier's Civilization IV
6	The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
7	Battlefield 2
8	Guild Wars
9	Black & White 2
10	City of Villains

SWEEPSTAKES

Now we're giving one lucky reader the chance to send us their top picks for 2005 to appear in Game Informer's December issue!

This grand prize winner and one runner-up will receive an Intel™ "Super PC" loaded with the newest in high-performance components for an extreme gaming experience.



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PC Games Go Extreme:
Game on. Power Up. Take Control with
the Intel® Pentium® processor Extreme
Edition



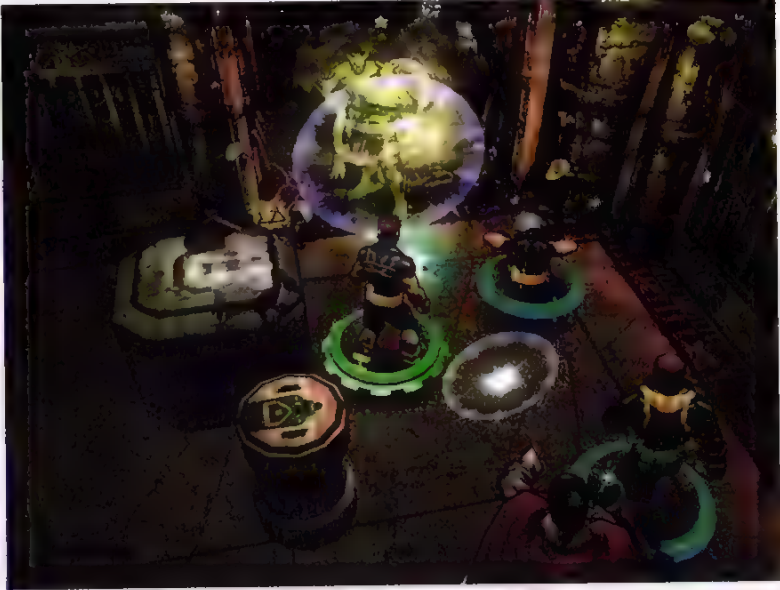
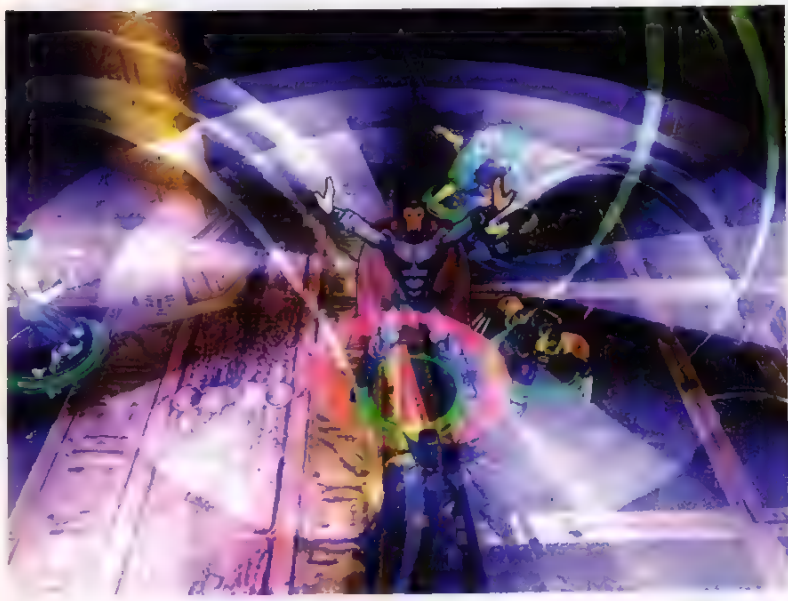
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion 6

Battlefield 2 7

Guild Wars 8

Black & White 2 9

City of Villains 10



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

X-Men Legends II: 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** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** T

HOT MUTANT ONLINE ACTION

What can I say? X-Men Legends was one of my favorite games last year, and the sequel manages to walk that fine line of keeping everything that made the first game great while simultaneously excising almost all of the petty problems and frustrations. Not content to just eliminate those missteps, Raven has upped the ante with a larger game, more powers, and the big kicker of online play. It is, quite frankly, one of the best console multiplayer games available, and still manages to please X-Men fans in all the ways that matter.

It's hard to tell at first glance about the potential fun of the title. Like its predecessor, the lack of detail in the art style certainly isn't going to convert many players. However, it's hard to complain about the graphics when the game simultaneously relays such an exciting display of mutant powers, constant action, and the destruction of almost every object you pass. When playing single-player, the ally AI is certainly more than adequate, but there's something about throwing down lightning bolts and optic beams with three of your best buds that is hard to equal. Like before, up to four players can jump on one machine and play

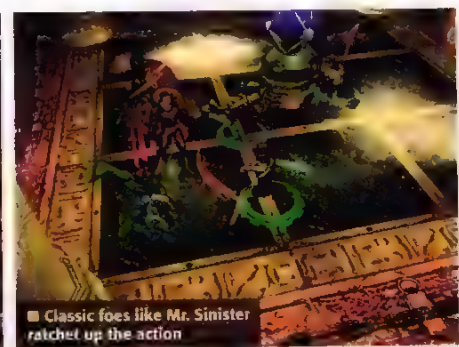
through the campaign together, but now the same number can join together through online functionality. Finding and joining sessions is simple, there's full headset support, and once the game gets going, things flow along as smooth as can be.

A number of technical issues marred the sheen of the first game, and almost all of these have been repaired this time around. It's now nearly impossible to accidentally fall off a ledge to an automatic death, and general AI pathfinding seems significantly improved. The list of powers for each character has more than doubled, and there are now several options for how to level-up your character — one of which completely auto-sets your abilities so you'll never have to pause the game. Finally, combat itself has been rebalanced and improved in numerous ways. Individual characters display unique strengths, and the management of power use and combination melee attacks has dramatically increased in importance.

For the comic aficionado, there's the same attention to detail that the first game offered, and plenty of content placed in purely to satisfy the hardcore. The ability to play as Brotherhood members like Juggernaut or Magneto is alone



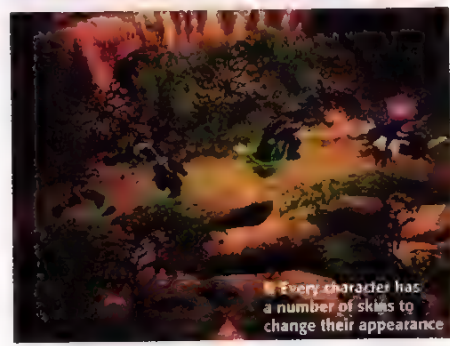
■ Environments now have more variety



■ Classic foes like Mr. Sinister ratchet up the action



■ Character balance has been dramatically improved



■ Every character has a number of skins to change their appearance

worth the price of admission. Add in cameos from lesser-known heroes like the members of Alpha Flight and memorable locations like the Savage Land, and it becomes clear that the RPG elements should at least offer up some fond memories of long-gone comics. Overall, I offer the identical recommendation I did last year — this is pure fun that increases exponentially as you add more friends to the mix. —MILLER



■ Each character has close to a dozen powers to pick from

BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** A second stellar edition of the franchise has the X-Men and Brotherhood joining forces and blowing up everything in sight

> **Graphics:** While still not the highlight of the game, detail has been improved and stages are more interesting than before

> **Sound:** Explosive effects, cheesy (but appropriate) voice-work, and a pretty decent score. No complaints

> **Playability:** Great controls and a steady challenge curve mean veterans and newbies alike should just dive right in

> **Entertainment:** Just as fun as the first one, minus most of the minor frustrations

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **9**

No one could ever accuse the X-Men Legends series of being overcomplicated, or for that matter, nothing we haven't seen before in one shape or another. There is no denying however, that this is one of the best experience-grinding games to ever hit the consoles. Sure, it's not exactly gorgeous to look at, but the graphics are more than satisfactory to deliver what this game does do very well, and that's gameplay. Many of the nagging problems of the first game, like characters that were worthless, annoying interruptions for leveling and item changes, and long periods of boredom during the Mansion scenes have been rectified. But more importantly, you can now take the multiplayer experience online, which simply makes an already great game even better. —ANDY

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PlayStation 2



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

SSX On Tour

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER EA BIG > DEVELOPER EA CANADA
> RELEASE OCTOBER 24 > ESRB E

COMING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

If the movie *Hot Dog* has taught us anything, it's that skiing is dumb. The inclusion of this poser slope style in *SSX* signals an overall shift for this franchise once thought infallible. A change that is equivalent to slipping on ice, hitting your head on a tree stump, then rolling uncontrollably down a hill and eventually off of a cliff where you'll suffer a miserable and bloody death atop jagged rocks.

Now, you are probably thinking to yourselves, "A game that receives a reasonable score like this isn't deserving of parallels to death." True enough, *SSX On Tour* is still one hell of a play that lures you in with a combo-heavy allure, but many of the elements that made *SSX 3* one of the greatest releases of 2003 have been crushed by an avalanche of poor choices in design.

Rather than dropping players into the thick powder of a sprawling mountain, EA has removed the open-ended elements of the game, replacing them with a map that features highlighted events. While it is nice to hop from one event to the next in a flash, I miss

getting to know the mountain and creating new lines as I shredded to my next destination. In this installment, you never really find your bearings, and even if you do choose to enter Free Ride, you won't stumble upon new things to do. The 150-plus bonus goals that were spread across *SSX 3*'s frozen terrain are nowhere to be found in this entry. The most that can be gained from Free Ride this time around is cash icons and photo opportunities. The kicker is, you'll likely snag all of these things while competing in the events. On the plus side, it is easier to bomb the entire mountain, as out-of-bounds is better defined and the game no longer features areas that will suck you into a particular event.

From the map, you'll always have a handful of different events to compete in. The goal of this year's game is to raise your boarder or skier's rank. While you will get new boards and gear as rewards, rank points are earned for the completion of each event. As you surpass other competitors on the chart, you'll eventually gain different titles like Rookie or Pro,

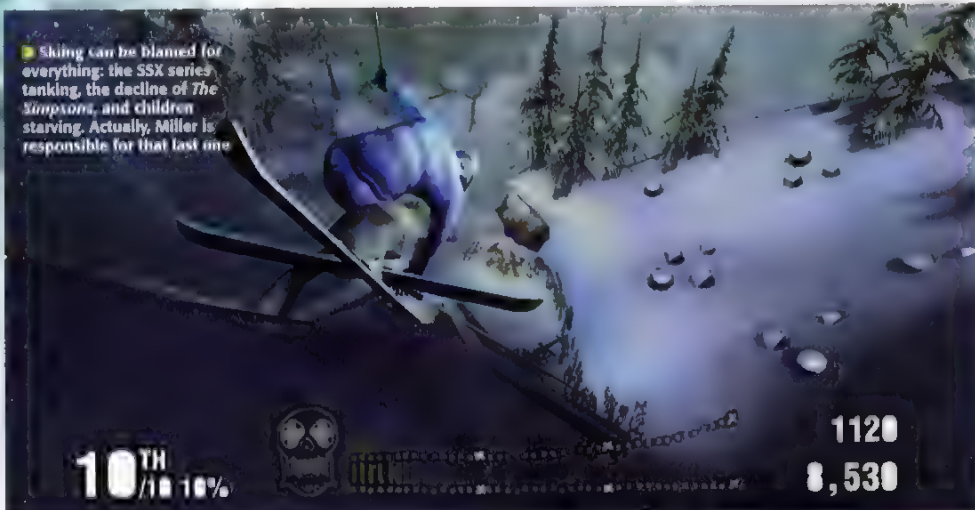
which in turn brings about harder challenges. The problem that this structure runs into is that not all of the events are particularly entertaining. After competing in trick-related matches and head-to-head races, I found that the only options I had available were terribly frustrating rail-based events and mind-numbingly boring collect-a-thons. Later in the game, I had to repeat older events just to raise my rank another notch.

As much as I despise the idea of riding on twin tips as opposed to a board, the skiing element in *SSX* is pretty slick. I love how the forward manual maneuver spins your skier around, and the tricks that you can perform

on these clunky planks are truly spectacular. They also handle better for racing as they can really cut around turns and fly down the slopes.

Mac, Elise, and company make a return, but have been pushed to the side in favor of a crappy create-a-character. The customization options that are available are pathetic and the facial texturing looks like it went through a blender. In another strange twist, EA completely removed the online functionality from the game.

Hurting down the tundra and concocting ridiculously large combo strings remain irresistible qualities, but the torturous design of the game makes you want to take the next flight off of this mountain. If you played *SSX 3*, this release is one of the biggest letdowns of the year.—REINER



■ Skiing can be blamed for everything: the *SSX* series tanking, the decline of *The Simpsons*, and children starving. Actually, Miller is responsible for that last one

10TH 10%

1120
8,530

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Snow melts. Apparently the *SSX* franchise does as well

> **Graphics:** Some of the trees look like cardboard cutouts, but the remainder of the game looks fantastic. You gotta love the ominous mist effects

> **Sound:** Queens of the Stone Age, Iron Maiden, Def Leppard, Jurassic 5, and over 30 other great entries. This is one of EA's best soundtracks yet

> **Playability:** Whether on skis or board, the controls are rock solid, allowing for huge combos

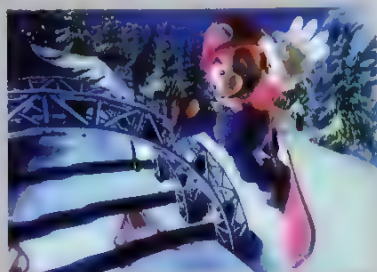
> **Entertainment:** Like a snowball fight that ends with an iceball to the face, this year's installment starts out fun, but in the end hurts

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

To me, *SSX 3* was the greatest moment in snowboarding games. Simply put, it was brilliant. While *On Tour* brings a number of new elements into the fold like skiing and easier accessibility to races and challenges, the game doesn't have that special something that made me fall head over heels in love with 3. That's not to say that this game isn't fun, because it is. The production values are especially impressive with a cool art style and a killer soundtrack. But with each event I completed and each new area of the mountain I rode, I never really found myself saying, "Wow." I just felt like I was going through the motions. Putting my finger on what's wrong is difficult, about the only thing I can say is that without the living, breathing mountain that was the hallmark of *SSX 3*, *On Tour* simply felt like it had devolved. Good game, but it could have been so much more.—ANDY

■ Track designs are still one of *SSX*'s strong suits



The Nintendo Difference

Without online play in the Xbox and PS2 versions, the GameCube game is now the one with the ace up its sleeve. Much like in *NBA Street*, Mario, Peach, and Luigi are available as playable characters in the GC version.

■ Most combos end when you hit a random boarder or skier



■ The created characters look like the ugly people on the street that you avoid eye contact with



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
 > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** E

EA TAKES A MULLIGAN

What immediately struck me about EA's use of time travel to have you and Tiger play through the history of golf was how it skipped the ironic fact that you play at country clubs that not so long ago wouldn't have even allowed Tiger in the door. Social injustices aside, this series' romp through history didn't do much for me. In fact, the structure of the career mode is bogged down in unnecessary and numerous challenges from era-specific goobers. I guess this is a way to divert your attention from the fact that this game is similar to the last Tiger. But apart from being boring, this career structure also overshadows some important gameplay advances that set it apart from the last year's stagnant offering.

I really like the new Shape Stick. It not only makes your swing on draws and fades feel more natural, but it also avoids a lot of the guesswork of translating the putting tips (which was an inexact science) from previous installments of Tiger. Using a

topography matrix similar to Hot Shots Golf, the new putting combines new- and old-school golf very well. Opinions will be mixed over Tiger's use of Gamebreakers (a meter you charge up and cash in when you need a boost), but I guess you don't have to use it if you don't like it. However, I am unanimously in favor of the new skill system, where you apply points from different pools into improving your character. It naturally plays to your strengths and encourages you to work on the shortcomings in your game. Multiplayer fans will dig the four-player online option and the expanded wagering system.

When I think about it, my obsessive collecting of equipment in Tiger's career mode is really what keeps me going, not old golfers. So what did EA do? Perhaps sensing that it had hit a wall with this mode, the developer turned to the gameplay and gave us a (kinda) new way to play a series that was quickly becoming stale. It's not a revolution, but it's an improvement.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

> **Concept:** Tiger takes you in his golf time machine. Don't worry, though, the gameplay doesn't totally live in the past

> **Graphics:** Indistinguishable from the last two editions

> **Sound:** Your character can now speak, but it's very limited

> **Playability:** The new shape stick feels a little weird at first, but is actually a better way to draw and fade your shots

> **Entertainment:** What Tiger does through time isn't as interesting as what the game does with its new putting and spin mechanics

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8**

As I've always said, no golf game is complete without time travel. Seriously, why would you want to play a round against Tiger Woods when you can... um... play a round against Tiger Woods in retro clothing? Much like the calendar events, the era challenges of Rivals mode are fun little distractions, but the bulk of the game is still the PGA Tour, which offers a selection of great new courses. Hitting the links is still a blast, but I don't like the new putting mechanic and the overall quality of the game has deteriorated since the stellar 2004 entry.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Shoot some terrorists with the help of your special-needs squadmates

> **Graphics:** Everything looks good, but there's only so much you can do with the whole "urban war zone" motif

> **Sound:** The very definition of mediocre. I want my guns to sound impressive, not like wussy little things

> **Playability:** Very generous aim assistance doesn't make up for boring gameplay

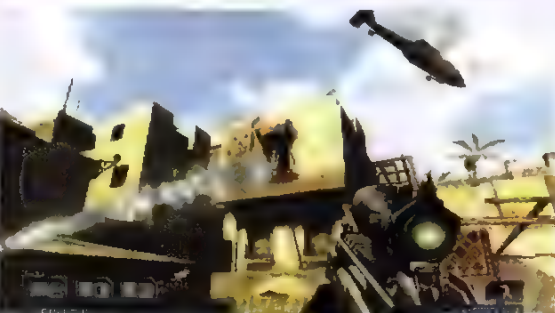
> **Entertainment:** If your allies weren't such idiots, this could be pretty good. They're not, and it's average

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

Given that the best thing about this title is the online play, and the GameCube doesn't have any online support, the dear Edge goes to the PS2. However, the 'Cube's split-screen co-op is good enough to keep it in the same league.



PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Lockdown

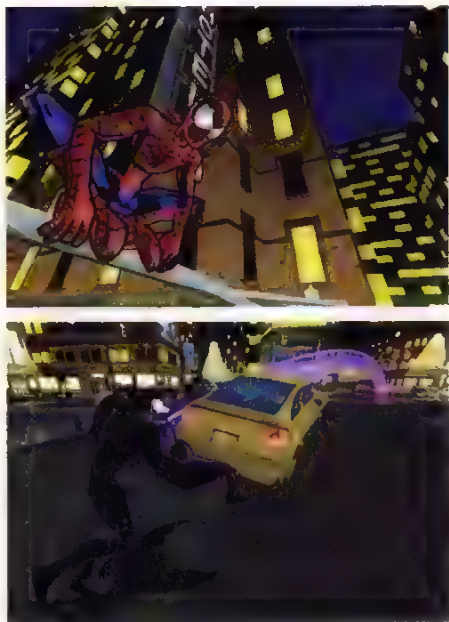
> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR LAN)
 > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT/UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 6 (PS2), SEPTEMBER 27 (GC) > **ESRB** M

BEEN THERE, SHOT THAT

It's too bad that despite Ubisoft's insistence that Lockdown is effectively Rainbow Six 4, it doesn't do anything to differentiate itself from Rainbow Six 3. Sure, it looks better (and is actually playable on GameCube), but the gaping flaws are still there and the levels are just as boring. Frankly, I'm disappointed.

Though the campaign follows that of the Xbox version (see our separate review on page 166) very closely, the difference in gameplay is remarkable. Everything just feels different, and worse—as usual, the PS2 and 'Cube thumbsticks don't allow the same finesse as the Xbox controller does. It's a lackluster, repetitive experience that will only appeal to the most Clancy-crazed gamers. It's not terrible or broken, but I've been doing the same thing, with the same problems and frustrations, for years.

Multiplayer is far better than single-player, but unlike the radical overhaul that the Xbox version received, both PS2 online and GameCube split-screen feel uninspired. Again, both co-op and competitive multiplayer don't suck. They just fail to rock. Hopefully Ubisoft can break Rainbow Six out of its rut in the next round of hardware, but this gen's final iteration is nothing special.—**ADAM**



BOTTOM LINE 8

- > **Concept:** The world of the Ultimate Spider-Man comic comes to life, building on the Spider-Man 2 engine
- > **Graphics:** The cel-shaded visuals and use of comic panels perfectly capture what is so cool about our beloved funnybooks
- > **Sound:** Spidey's clever one-liners aren't so clever after you've heard them 147 times
- > **Playability:** Swinging around the city is a breeze, and the most fun part of the game. You'll feel like you actually are Spider-Man
- > **Entertainment:** One of the best comic-based games around, although that bar has been set pretty low
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately High

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Ultimate Spider-Man

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** TREYARCH > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 > **ESRB** E10+

SPIDER'S WEB

I am Spider-Man. I have powers unlike those of normal people, and swinging through the air is a form of freedom that everyone should be able to experience. But with great power comes great responsibility, and doing what I must isn't always fun.

This is how you too will feel when playing Ultimate Spider-Man. Like the game based on the webhead's last film, Ultimate Spidey excels at making you feel like a superhero by capturing the essence of Spider-Man's powers. Swinging through the city to get where you need to go is a joy in and of itself, but much like Spidey's life, being a hero is both thrilling and frustrating. The presentation of the story is simply amazing – the cel-shaded visuals and "living comic" cutscenes make Ultimate Spider-Man a comic book reader's dream. The story (written by superstar scribe Brian Michael Bendis) focuses on the relationship between Spider-Man and Venom (who is playable in about half the missions), and even features some fun cameos by other Marvel stars. Fans of the comic series will absolutely love the way it has come to life in the game.

Spidey's acrobatic moves are also captured perfectly, and experimenting with his powers is the most enjoyable aspect of the adventure. The game offers a huge chunk of New York to explore – you can even cross the bridge from Manhattan and head into Queens.

However, the duties of a hero are many, and are unfortunately the least enjoyable aspect of the game. I cruised through the Spider-Man 2 game in about seven hours because I didn't enjoy the random street crime missions, and Treyarch has addressed this issue in a profoundly stupid way in Ultimate Spider-Man: It

has made them mandatory. In order to unlock new story missions, you must complete a certain number of city goals first, including races, finding unlockables, and beating up thugs. Don't force me to eat my veggies before I have my cake, people – it's contrary to the whole idea of an open-world game like this one.

Even with mandatory side missions, I still finished Ultimate Spider-Man in about six hours, and absolutely hated some of the my time with it – the chase missions, of which there are many, just plain suck. But no one ever said that being a hero was always fun. Ultimate Spider-Man does make you feel like a hero, and living in a comic book world is a thrill, despite the frustrations. Offering both Spider-Man and Venom as playable characters is a bonus, especially considering how different they feel, and the comic book version of New York is amazing. I would recommend Ultimate Spider-Man to any comic book reader with one gentle reminder: even great comic characters like Spidey have dark moments. Anyone else remember the Scarlet Spider?—**JEREMY**



Second Opinion

I was literally ecstatic when I first heard of plans to bring one of my favorite comic series to the gaming arena. Ultimate Spidey has consistently been a sure-thing fun read for years now, and the potential for a game to explore the unique style and personality of the title seemed tremendous. Thankfully, the game has indeed managed to capture most of that unique flavor, particularly in the brilliant comic book paneled storytelling that drives the plot. Sadly, the gameplay doesn't manage to keep up the pace – frequently frustrating chase missions are punctuated by equally frustrating boss fights. Luckily, the web-swinging mechanic is as fun as it was in the movie-based games, and the city you careen through is more varied and a lot more interesting to look at than most open worlds. The short length of the game makes it an ideal candidate for a single weekend fling, but definitely not one you want to miss if you're even remotely familiar with the source material.—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NBA 2K6

> **STYLE** 1 TO 10-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX) (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 > **ESRB** E

TOUCHDOWN!

Football fans are in for a real treat! I never thought I would start a basketball review by saying this, but a good portion of what makes this year's installment so compelling has been stripped from Visual Concepts' NFL 2K5. VIP profiling, and my favorite, The Crib, have been resurrected from that sorely missed gridiron classic. Hoopsters can now track and analyze their performances, and then after the game, relax in a house that can be decorated with game-worn jerseys, player standees, and other basketball-related merchandise.

Visual Concepts has also implemented off-day training, which thankfully isn't limited to yawn-inducing menu management. These drills are designed very much like the minigames in 24/7 mode. This element not only adds much-needed variety to the lengthy season, it clearly points out what strengths and weaknesses your players have.

Fans of the College Hoops games will recognize another borrowed feature: the defensive strip and rip system. I like the idea of it, but there still isn't a clear window

for swiping the ball. Even if the ball is clearly exposed, odds still favor a reach-in foul.

While you can still tap a button to shoot, the biggest addition to the gameplay is a new analog shooting system, which has a nice feel to it, but proves to be quite unpredictable. One minute you may hit a fadeaway bomb with two defenders in your face, the next you may clunk a dunk off of the bottom of the rim.

The newly named Aggression button still performs a sprint move, but also acts as a modifier, granting players the ability to perform no-look passes, crossovers, and dunks with ease. As a whole, the gameplay package rocks the rim like no other game can.

Outside of the inclusion of the EBC, 24/7 mode hasn't changed too terribly much. After three years now, I don't see the need in creating another character if I can't load them into my season.

Even with its most exciting features coming from football, NBA 2K6 remains unbeatable. The competition doesn't even come close to touching this release.

—REINER



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Salvages the standout features from NFL 2K6 and continues to improve on the court

> **Graphics:** Product placement can be annoying, but the TV presentation is mighty impressive

> **Sound:** Kevin Harlan is fantastic and the new crowd dynamics really play off of your emotions

> **Playability:** Unparalleled depth and realism, but it can be unpredictable

> **Entertainment:** Achieves the triple crown: best gameplay, deepest franchise options, and most noteworthy bonus features

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Developer Visual Concepts has given us a wealth of gameplay options with just two analog sticks, but I'm not entirely sold on the new defensive maneuvers. They're a little too all-or-nothing, and they end up highlighting this and every other b-ball game's problem of triggering funky animations every now and again. Still, this is clearly the best basketball game out there, and its gameplay options will break ankles before you break the sticks off your controller. —KATO

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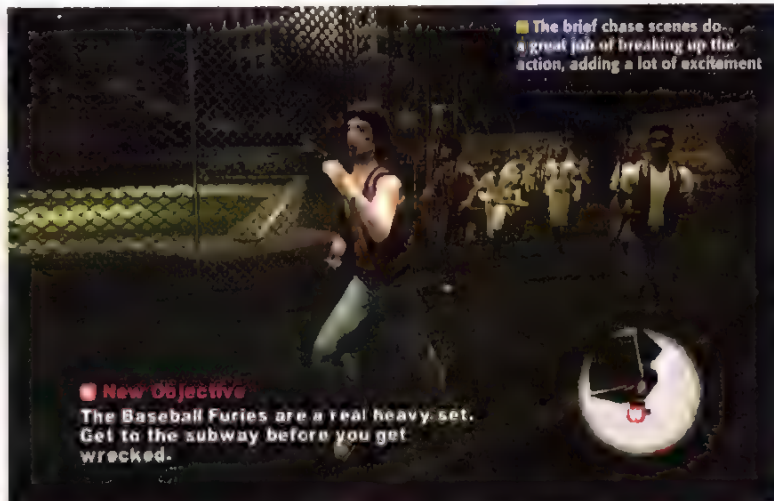
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■ It has a surprisingly deep combat system and is fun to play, but The Warriors does feel a bit sluggish at times



■ The brief chase scenes do a great job of breaking up the action, adding a lot of excitement

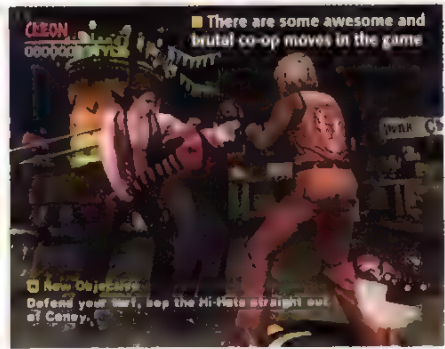


■ It's nice to be able to issue squad commands, but the AI does a pretty good job on its own most times

Click the left thumbstick and select Mayhem with the right thumbstick.



■ The two-player is cool, but the constantly switching camera is disorienting



■ There are some awesome and brutal co-op moves in the game

■ New Objective: Defend your turf, keep the Hi-Hats straight out of Coney.

BOTTOM LINE **8.25**

> **Concept:** Rockstar turns a '70s camp classic into the most ambitious brawler attempted to date

> **Graphics:** Prettier than GTA, and it has a great visual style, but the character models and lip sync are a bit rough around the edges

> **Sound:** Captures the film's odd mixture of '70s AOR rock, disco, and strange, minimal synth score, resulting in one of my favorite game soundtracks ever

> **Playability:** The fighting can feel sluggish at times, visceral at others; the camera could use some work

> **Entertainment:** A flawed, yet compelling attempt to create a cinematic brawler

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High



■ The graffiti writing has been implemented into gameplay in an ingenious fashion

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

The Warriors

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

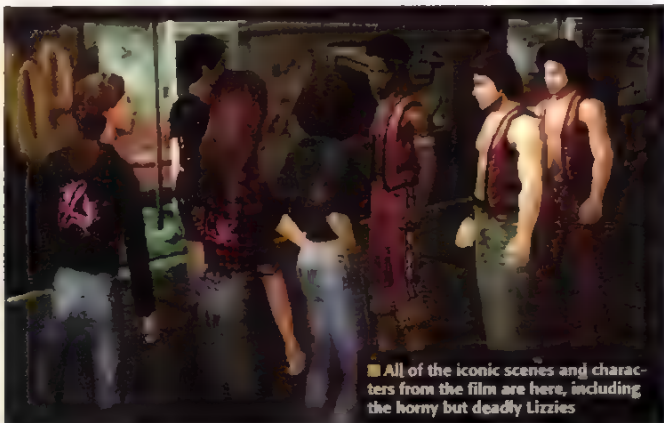
BRAWLING, ROCKSTAR STYLE

Like the best of Rockstar's games, *The Warriors* immerses you in a world that feels at once authentic and highly stylized, and it might just be the best game adaptation of a film ever in terms of capturing the mood of the original movie. Fans will notice that all of the iconic scenes of the film are recreated almost shot for shot. In addition, Rockstar Toronto has gone to the trouble of creating a completely new storyline that shows players how the Warriors came together, and the events leading up to the start of the film.

The developers have also tried to stretch the conventional formula for what's considered a "brawler." Unlike most of the genre, where you

walk down single-path alleyways, *The Warriors*, taking cues from other popular Rockstar titles, creates the illusion that you're in a real, living city. Although, sizewise, the levels are much closer to *Manhunt* than *GTA*, there are areas to explore both on the ground and vertically, hidden items, amazing unlockables (trust us, finish the Story Mode), and numerous side missions. They've also tried to expand the gameplay to incorporate more than just fistcuffs. You can engage in all sorts of petty crime, including muggings, stealing car stereos, lockpicking, and tagging graffiti. Throw in a little more variety in the form of some cool chase and stealth sequences, and you've got something more than a typical brawler. I especially enjoyed the graffiti writing, which is done through an ingenious mechanic.

As much as I love the structure of the game, *The Warriors* does have some serious flaws. The fighting engine itself is fairly deep, allowing you to pull off some very brutal moves with a modicum of button presses (including some cool co-op maneuvers). You'll definitely feel cool kicking ass as a



■ All of the iconic scenes and characters from the film are here, including the horny but deadly Lizzies

Warrior, whether hand-to-hand or with any of the numerous weapons. However, I found the feel of the combat to be sluggish and chaotic at times, especially when fighting large numbers of enemies. The camera doesn't help matters much, as it's sometimes erratic, even leaving my view obstructed in a few instances. Throw in a few aggravating mission goals, and you can expect some serious frustration when completing the lengthy Story mode. The camera also renders the two-player co-op Story mode almost unplayable, as it constantly switches between split-screen and single-screen as you move through the level, leaving you very disoriented. I recommend turning on the option that makes it stay in split-screen, but even that is hampered by your very narrow field of vision. This is a pretty big disappointment for those of us wishing for a return to the days of *Double Dragon*. Thankfully, the Rumble Mode, which has a ton of unlockable minigames, is there for your multiplayer enjoyment.

Although it's certainly not a masterpiece, *The Warriors* gets by on style, flair, variety, and simple fun. The gameplay — while still enjoyable — isn't nearly as polished as it could be, the story and the appeal of the world that *The Warriors* recreates will be enough to pull you through to the end. —MATT

Second Opinion

Rockstar does one thing better than any other company: mood. *The Warriors* practically bleeds time and place. In fact, my favorite thing about the game is the weaving of soundtrack, dialect, environments, and culture to make a compelling portrait of New York during the late '70s. Bringing back the brawling genre is another facet of this, and I think that Rockstar has packed enough innovation in there to bring the classic elements back into the forefront — beating stuff up, after all, is almost always a good time. While I'm glad to see someone resurrect the classic rumble, this update has some of the same problems that the old games did. Frustration often rears its head, the co-op camera doesn't work as well as I'd like, and the combat (while satisfying) could be a little smoother between moves. Kick-ass unlockables and later levels are compelling enough, though, that I'd encourage people to bully their way to its conclusion. —LISA



■ Star players, like Steve Nash, can tap into signature moves

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

NBA Live 06

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR 2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
 > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 > **ESRB** E

IDENTIFYING WITH THE ACTION

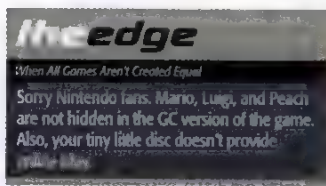
When I first played Lakers versus Celtics on Sega Genesis, I quickly dialed up my friends, offering an invitation to see something extraordinary. As I foolishly claimed, a visual presentation this good was deserving of more eyes than just mine. Back then, we didn't expect players to look exactly like their real life counterparts. We were content with blocky pixel players that could only be recognized by their name. For 15 years now, developers are looking for new ways to harness the realism of the players. Oddly, no one has actually looked at how each player performs differently than the others.

With the introduction of Freestyle Superstars, EA is finally bringing this important aspect to the court. Through eight different star player types, the league's top talent will now be able to tap into their signature arsenal of moves. Duncan is a force inside; Shaq can power his way into the lane; Wallace can bat balls away like flies; Nash can freeze a defender with a behind-the-back toss. Although

limited to only the league's biggest names, this aspect opens up a wealth of offensive and defensive strategies for each team.

Unfortunately, this is the only aspect of this year's game that really got my blood pumping. With each passing release, the gameplay continues to unravel, favoring frantic run-and-gun action. The defensive AI is all over the place, and your teammates would rather run into each other than spot holes in the D. Additionally, I still feel that the dunk contest is a migraine-inducing bore.

EA is definitely focusing on an area of the sport that I feel that all developers should be, but the series has fallen far behind NBA 2K6 in nearly every category. —REINER



BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Moves in a direction that allows the gamer to better identify with the players. Unfortunately, little has done to actually improve the gameplay

> **Graphics:** Wildly detailed dunk animations, but the presentation is lacking

> **Sound:** Steve Kerr is a punk. Seriously, who let this guy on the mic?

> **Playability:** All about exposing the poor AI to gain a dunk

> **Entertainment:** Like Gary Payton, this well-respected series is old and sloppy on the court

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

Like previous games in the NBA Live series, this edition is almost entirely devoid of defense. The result is a highlight reel cliché of the sport that goes from dunk-to-dunk. As such, controlling a playmaker like Jason Kidd is a thrill as you effortlessly pull off moves. Still, it verges on the farcical when you see a guy try to dunk from the three-point line. It also throws the animation and collision system into arrears as it tries to keep up. Fundamentals, people. Fundamentals. —KATO



■ Shaq takes it to McGrady



■ McGrady then takes it to him again later in the game

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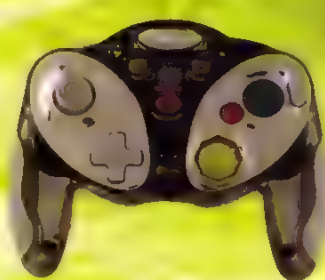
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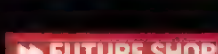
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Serious Sam II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PC ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** CROTEAM > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11 > **ESRB** M

SERIOUS ACTION

Serious Sam is the Mötley Crüe of video games. It's crass, simplistic, loud, and obnoxious. There's lots of noise and big explosions. The lyrics sound like a coked-up three-year-old wrote them — wait, actually that's just the Crüe. I'm all for sophistication and subtlety in both music and games, but there's something to be said for cranking up "Shout at the Devil" and letting both machine guns blast.

Serious Sam II keeps in the tradition of the series, offering copious cannon fodder, oversized weaponry, and loveably cheesy dialogue. The game unfolds at a hectic pace. The plot checks in once in awhile to drop off a joke or two, but largely you're left alone to decimate hordes (and I do mean hordes) of fantastic enemies with a number of ingenious armaments (most creative: a parrot that flies bombs into your foes). Although there is an increased emphasis on gun emplacements and unique vehicles (like a giant spiked roll-cage or small hovercraft similar to the Ghosts in Halo 2), mostly it's just about running and gunning. Serious Sam II knows what it wants to be, and sticks to it, maybe too much. After a while, slaughtering endless waves of enemies gets a bit tiresome. Still, it's a fun way to let off a little steam, and it doesn't take itself too seriously. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Another rootin' tootin' shoot-em-up starring Mr. Serious

> **Graphics:** It's not Halo 2, but it's definitely a solid-looking FPS for Xbox, less so for PC

> **Sound:** The dialogue is both ridiculous and overly serious to comic degree — just like Leslie Nielsen in *Naked Gun*

> **Playability:** It's standard fare as far as the shooting goes, and the vehicles control well

> **Entertainment:** While it's brilliantly simple, the lack of depth gets a bit tiring after awhile

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.25

Sam makes no excuses for the bare bones shooting fest that is his latest adventure. In fact, the game seems to take a perverse joy in its own primitive gameplay, filled with enemies that spawn out of nowhere and a storyline yanked from the finest Kindergarten prose. With your trigger finger almost constantly held down, there's an odd joy in the silly monsters and endless combat, but it's certainly nothing you haven't seen a hundred times before — **MILLER**

MULTI QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Conflict: Global Terror

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** PIVOTAL
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 3
> **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE 6.75

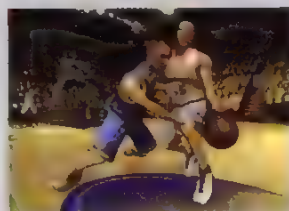
The Conflict franchise has always existed in the shadow of more high-profile series,

particularly Ubisoft's Tom Clancy games. The latest iteration, *Global Terror*, is no different. Improvements have certainly been made to the Conflict formula, but the game is still plagued by mediocrity on several fronts. AI and level design are the biggest offenders, with allies regularly shooting at landscape geometry and missions that fail to do anything new or different at all. However, the action is satisfactory and the multiplayer options are robust, so this isn't a complete bust at its slightly less-imposing \$40 price point. —**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

NCAA March Madness 2006

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11
> **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 7

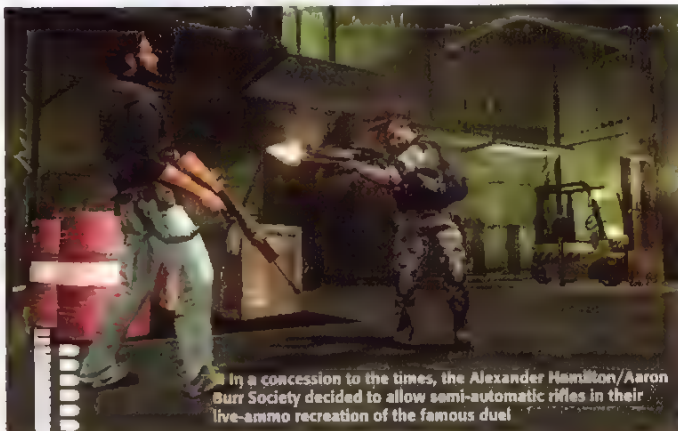
The game controls like an awkward 6'7" giant. Collision and animations often don't match

up between players, making this title all knees and elbows. Moreover, the passing AI is off and the game is very sluggish (even if you bump the game speed up), making fast breaks down the court about as speedy as a geriatric jailbreak. Once you do get to the basket, getting the title to engage a dunk happens too infrequently. I didn't know the WNBA had a video game... I did, however, like the defensive lockdown feature, which mixes strategy and gameplay well enough to give you something to actually do while playing defense. —**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Without Warning

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



In a concession to the times, the Alexander Hamilton/Aaron Burr Society decided to allow semi-automatic rifles in their live-ammo recreation of the famous duel

THE TERRORISTS HAVE ALREADY WON

We all love killing terrorist bad guys in copious amounts, but if we're really serious about protecting the homeland, we are going to have to keep games like this from ever releasing. Like one of the many orange terror alerts that gets thrown out there, this title comes with expectations, but is just better ignored.

Nothing more than a simple run and gun (although there are stealth portions), *Without Warning* fails to even perform this kind of gameplay well. The over-the-shoulder camera is convoluted by the fact that you both aim and control the camera with the right stick. This isn't unheard of, but when the camera automatically pulls back to a full third-person view whenever you reload or aren't actively firing at someone, and also zooms into first person suddenly, the game's running and gunning becomes unnecessarily confusing. Your enemies don't make things easy for you either. You usually have to empty a whole clip to finish them, they have some AI evasion routes, and they will hunt you down if you try to let things blow over by hiding in a closet. Unfortunately, these terrorists show more intelligence and thought than the game's six main characters. With no engaging story or personalities, this title doesn't even come close to hooking you with its shifting, convergent story lines — unlike *Without Warning*'s supposed inspiration, the show *24*. In an attempt to liven its dull center, the game peppers in stealth and minigames which are about as titillating as tic-tac-toe. The developer even tried to act like sliding down a ladder was part of Special Forces' elite training (while normal joes like you and Joe have to take it one rung at a time). Does that mean that pushing a button to look at my map is a minigame or special ability, too?

If generic terrorists are this decade's ubiquitous bad guy like the commies of the eighties, then it's likely that uninspired games like this will continue to use them to such dull effect. Consider this your warning. —**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** The title's characters and minigames offer neither variety nor fill out the story. They're just transparent decoys and poor substitutes for a real game

> **Graphics:** Average as average gets

> **Sound:** There are voiceovers for you objectives, but otherwise, this department is yet another that fails to flesh out the game

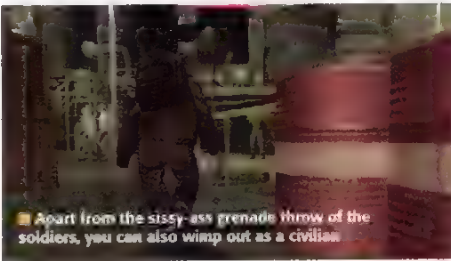
> **Playability:** The camera control with the right analog is annoying and adds next to nothing

> **Entertainment:** It's hard to think that a game this bland could incite anger, but its presumptuous attempt at greatness is insulting

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.75

The easy review for *Without Warning* is to call it *24* without Keifer. On a basic level, it's an accurate statement — the game uses the same clock-ticking plot devices, similar high-level military versus terrorist combat, and also very frequent switches between characters. But Capcom's game and TV's great series aren't even in the same league, and the main reason is believability. Trigger points for enemy encounters can be anticipated a mile away, leaving players with no sense of spontaneity or intelligence in the opposing forces. Mindless shooting is okay, but *Without Warning* doesn't ever hit the threshold of becoming compelling drama. —**LISA**



Apart from the sissy-ass grenade throw of the soldiers, you can also wimp out as a civilian

MULTI QUICKIES

Wallace & Grommit: Curse of the Were-Rabbit

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** FRONTIER > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 7

PS2 XBOX GAMECUBE



I didn't care for the last Wallace & Grommit title, Project Zoo, so I'm glad to see developer Frontier change up its design for Curse of the Were-Rabbit. As before, the cutscenes are genuinely funny and do a great job of translating the distinctive, handmade look of the series into the digital realm. This time around, the focus is much more on puzzle-solving, minigames, and switching between playing as Wallace, Grommit, and Hutch to accomplish different tasks for NPCs placed around the town. Even the platforming has been improved to be at least passable, which is a considerable step up from before. Also, the suction gun (although stolen from Luigi's Mansion) is quite fun to use. Not brilliant, but it's a competent licensed title that should appeal to hardcore W&G fans (i.e. the only people that will consider buying this game in the first place). —**MATT**

Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** BUENA VISTA GAMES > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 6 > **ESRB** E10+

BOTTOM LINE 5

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



Unless you've purchased a lunchbox with the movie's logo on it from Hot Topic, I'd advise you to stay far away from the new Nightmare Before Christmas game. It may replicate the look of the film fairly well, but it utterly fails to capture any of its fun or originality. Instead, Oogie's Revenge offers boring, repetitive combat, an utterly broken camera, and moronic fetch quests. It even ruins the movie's fun music by replaying the same lines over and over until you feel like piercing your eardrums with a Jack Skellington pencil. Although it's the pseudo-sequel to the film fans have wanted for years, Oogie's Revenge stacks up against the original about as well as Devil May Cry 2 or Blues Brothers 2000. —**JEREMY**

Chicken Little

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** BUENA VISTA GAMES > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 6 > **ESRB** E10+

BOTTOM LINE 7

PS2 XBOX GAMECUBE



Based on the upcoming Disney flick, this is a pretty standard rendition of the family-friendly, bite-sized, licensed game. There is a load of personality in Chicken Little, and the large variety of level types and playable characters will appeal to fans of the film. Taking good advantage of the movie's cast and art direction are its two biggest attributes, but thinking back to how even this elementary-sounding achievement has been screwed up in the past, Chicken Little is a serviceable game that juices Disney's storytelling mastery for all its worth. Experienced gamers should, obviously, look elsewhere, but kids and the content-conscious could certainly do much worse. —**LISA**

Sniper Elite

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** REBELLION > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** M

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



It's about time someone made a game solely about being a sniper (or a "stupid cheating bungle," as Halo 2 players call them). Sniper Elite places you in the role of an expert sniper at the end of World War II, and makes you focus on stealth, distance, your breathing, and the other things that make long-range face-shooting more complicated than it seems. The depth is appreciated, but the graphics, camera, and collision could use polish. Although it is definitely not perfect, I'd still recommend Sniper Elite for WWII aficionados looking for something a little different. —**JEREMY**

Blitz: The League

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 17 > **ESRB** M

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



When there's a fast, shifty QB in this game with the last name of "Mexico," then I think you can understand where its head is at. Despite the off-the-field bar fights, buying of equipment to upgrade your team, and other activities, I liked the actual football as well. QB evades are sweet, and their context-sensitive animations trigger and move much better than 2K Sports' attempt at it in ESPN NFL 2K5. I also like the kicking icons, and using the Clash meter for dirty hits is pretty addictive. The gameplay needs some tuning, but if you've got a mind to crush some skulls on and off the field, than I think you're gonna be pretty happy with this title. —**KATO**

Capcom Classic Collection

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ECLIPSE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



There are classic collections, and then there is Capcom Classic Collection -- a disc loaded with 21 games taken from the archives of Capcom's arcade heritage and one (Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts) that was released on console. Highlights include 1942, 1943, Bionic Commando, Commando, Final Fight, Forgotten Realms, Ghosts 'n Goblins, Ghouls 'n Ghosts, Gun.Smoke, Legendary Wings, Mercs, Section Z, and Street Fighter II (in various forms). It didn't take long for me to remember why these oldies are still goodies. From Final Fight to Street Fighter there is a lot to play here, and it all comes at the low, low price of only 20 bucks. A fantastic collection that is a must for any old-school gamer. Ken rules. —**ANDY**

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

The Sims 2

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** MAXIS
 > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 24 > **ESRB** T

FRANKENSIM

As I played *The Sims 2*, I couldn't help but imagine the developers digging through their previous entries in the series, surgically removing some bits, and then combining them into a new creature. It may look and feel familiar, but animating a bunch of stitched-together pieces of other games doesn't always have the best results.

There are some additions that feel right at home in the newest console adaptation. The ability to take direct control of your sim's movements makes it much easier to explore your surroundings, and the wants/fears system means that you always have goals to work toward. While these things are neat individually, they aren't integrated together particularly well. The new control scheme means that you

can't queue up a schedule, and also makes it difficult to tell when a particular action can't be performed. I can't count the number of times I told my sim to socialize with someone only to have him shuffle around for 20 seconds before just deciding to continue standing around doing nothing.

When the socialization works, however, it is one of the coolest features of the game. While interacting with other characters, the rest of the world goes fuzzy so as to focus on the conversation at hand. As the two sims develop a better relationship, their posture and available commands change to reflect their level of intimacy. You can't give the ol' Electrohand to your cuddly lover, and you can't try to smooch your scowling arch rival. While this mechanic separates the game into two distinct modes of play ("talking" and "doing some other things"), it does a lot to highlight the social aspects of the series in a new way.

Where *The Sims 2* suffers most is the lack of ownership players feel in regards to their surroundings. You move from area to area accomplishing certain



objectives, but since each home is a community space, you don't really get any satisfaction from buying yourself that new toilet or easy chair. I didn't drop my hard-earned money on a fancy double bed just to find some hobo sleeping in it when I need to rest. Also, the only thing really driving you forward is fulfilling your sim's main desires; there's nothing that even pretends to be a story propelling you. This may work for the PC versions of the game, but it just makes this console attempt feel undirected.

The Sims 2 isn't solely comprised of used components; the new cooking mechanic is fun once you figure it out, and there are some truly hilarious new object interactions (more games need a "fart on the phone" prank call option). Even with these elements, the game isn't as dynamic or addictive as others in the series, but it does manage to find some identity amid its more familiar features that Sims fans will certainly appreciate. —**JOE**

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

It isn't surprising to see that the Xbox version looks a bit sharper, but the PS2 version does have limited EyeToy support. You can't put your face on a sim, but you can take custom pictures and put them on select objects in the environment. It isn't exactly a dealbreaker, but it's the one main difference among the three versions.



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Collect many successful Sims ideas into one place where none of them shine

> **Graphics:** The sims' facial expressions and body language are impressive, but the other visuals don't really pop

> **Sound:** Incomprehensible Simlish and a wide selection of inoffensive background music

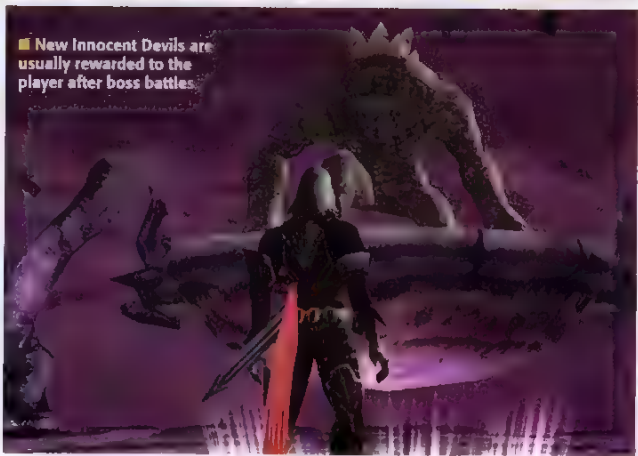
> **Playability:** The direct control is nice, but the classic navigation style is also available

> **Entertainment:** Fun in short bursts, but it lacks the charm to keep you coming back

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion

As an avid player of all Sims variants, it's easy as pie for me to point at the "new" features in *Sims 2*'s console release and know exactly where they came from. The direct control is from the handheld editions, the wants/fears idea is from PC, the goal progression is from *Bustin' Out*. The list could, in theory, go on and on. But, to my mind, making a big list is missing the point. What this *Sims 2* edition does delightfully well is merge all of these great ideas present in the series' other releases into a package tailor-made for the console experience. Direct control keeps things moving and makes the world seem more real. Added levels of interaction encourage exploration of every item in an area. Cooking has hilarious as well as utilitarian effects. The Xbox version in particular looks amazing and the speedy play is a great achievement for a series historically known as having a high learning curve. —**LISA**



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Castlevania: Curse of Darkness

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 8 > **ESRB** M

NOW SERVING DEMON SLAYER #195

Look out, Disney. Dracula's castle has officially become one of the hottest tourist traps across the land. Rather than introducing the great, great grand-nephew of Simon Belmont's cousin twice removed, Konami is straying from this family tree to introduce another bloodline. Another bloodline that just happens to consist of effeminate blonde males. His colors may be bluish and bashful, but Hector is actually a force to be reckoned with. Once you see what he's capable of, the crack of the whip just doesn't seem satisfying anymore.

Trained by Dracula himself, Hector has mastered the dark arts of the Devil Forgemaster and possesses the power to summon demon servants called Innocent Devils to fight at his side. Innocent Devils are essentially Nintendogs that kill. They gain experience with each enemy that is slain, can be given attack orders, and some even have the ability to heal Hector or cure him of any ailments. In other words, you won't find a better battlefield companion. Although you don't have direct control over the movements of your

demonic virtual pets, it is possible to concoct chain attacks with them.

No matter how much damage your sidekicks can deal, Hector's sheer brutality is the main attraction. Whether he's wielding a broad sword, axe, or a staff, Hector is a proficient killing machine that can tear an enemy to shreds with acrobatic attacks. The combat functionality offers great depth and feels superb, but it doesn't even come close to offering the excitement of Devil May Cry or God of War.

Koji Igarashi and his team have come up with some great ideas for this follow-up, but the technology just isn't there to back them up. The graphics engine is as old as Dracula himself. Almost every environment in the game is completely barren, and fogging is used even on interior environments. As you can imagine, little joy is derived from navigating the levels.

Castlevania fans will definitely be pleased with the direction this series is going in. It's a shame that it feels so dated.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Further proof that Dracula needs a new security system on his castle

> **Graphics:** A gothic version of *Tron*. Where the hell is the furniture? Why does every room look the same?!

> **Sound:** Michiru Yamane has put together another brilliant and highly nostalgic score. The voice acting is quite good, too

> **Playability:** Swift-footed and chock-full of amazing combos. Dungeon exploration is still a chore, however

> **Entertainment:** A generation behind the current benchmarks, but still capable of delivering rip-roaring excitement

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **7.5**

In 2D on a handheld screen, traversing rooms on the series' spacious maps is acceptable because the environments are utilized better. But this game's failure to fully use its wide-open spaces makes it kind of boring, and demands a re-evaluation of Castlevania's simple kill-everything philosophy. I will say, however, that Castlevania does an excellent job as usual with its equipment and skill setup. I'm a sucker for weapon building.—**KATO**

PS2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

Gretzky NHL '06

> **STYLE** UP TO 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** PAGE 44 STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE **7** Gretzky might have been called The Great One, but this game bearing his name is anything but. It comes off as a bare bones

approach to hockey that never distinguishes itself, unlike the unforgettable skills of Wayne himself. Although the play is fast (and the one-timers faster), the movement of the players needs work and the defensive AI often leaves you in a lurch. While the other hockey titles have spread out along the margins, Gretzky's franchise mode is pretty basic (despite the inclusion of AHL teams) and does nothing to help the feeling that this game could have been better. I remember feeling bad for Wayne when he was trying to personally get the players and owners to negotiate an end to last year's hockey lockout. Perhaps he should have instead been on the phone checking in on his own game.—**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2

Dance Dance Revolution Extreme 2


> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RHYTHM (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** E10+




BOTTOM LINE **7.5** It has come to this. A new DDR title hitting the shelves incites the same reaction as strolling an isle in the neighborhood grocery and



discovering that macaroni & cheese has a new noodle shape. Sure, it's still cheesy goodness (and DDR is still good rhythm game fun), but it's not like you're going to bring it up at the next cocktail party you attend. It's kind of a non-event. Just rest comfortably knowing that all of the old modes are back (including EyeToy support), and that the difficulty still proves that I have absolutely no rhythm. A two-player online option is new for the PS2, but otherwise, this is business as usual for the techno dancers.—**LISA**

elementandfriends.com





22/26 mpg* is impressive. Myself, I'm not too good on the highway.

*Based upon 2006 EPA city/hwy estimates. Use for comparison purposes only. Actual mileage may vary. 2WD EX-P model shown. © 2005 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.



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Collect Evolution Crystals to enhance your Innocent Devils.



Level up by destroying the creatures of the night.

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Wield the powerful skills of Devil Forgery as you return to the ruins of Dracula's castle in your quest for vengeance against those who took the life of your true love.

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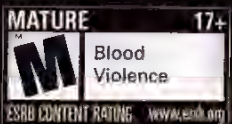
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■ All character faces are terrifying masks of pure evil

PLAYSTATION 2

Romancing SaGa

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11 > **ESRB** E10+

PRINCE CHARMING HURLS

Romancing SaGa is the saddest Cinderella story of the year. Once released in 1992 on the Japanese-only Super Famicom system, this RPG recently got a makeover with updated graphics, expanded quests, and new characters. Unfortunately, it has shown up to the proverbial ball about five years too late, sporting ridiculously outdated fashions and an ugly, ugly face. I haven't felt this sorry for a game in a long time.

The eight protagonists look and act like soulless husks of human beings, and no matter which one you select at the outset, the plot unfolds with all the grace and excitement of the Brick Olympics. The game's "non-linear storyline" simply means that you are given no direction whatsoever, and then become so bored with your artless and uninspired surroundings that you just want to quit. If you don't, you are treated to boring and frequent battles, bland environments, and laughably generic quests.

Romancing SaGa is barely even a game. For each minute you can play it without knifing your own kneecaps, award yourself a point. If you get to three points, just put down the controller. You win. —**JOE**

■ **Boring!**

BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Vie for the title of worst RPG of the year

> **Graphics:** Abominable. RPG Maker 3 could easily make a better-looking game, and probably with less grotesque lead characters

> **Sound:** From voiceovers to soundtrack, it's alternately painful and embarrassing

> **Playability:** If you're playing this game at all, you're doing something wrong

> **Entertainment:** The skill advancement system is neat, but it is never fun to use your abilities...or to do anything else in the game

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 4.75

I used to think that the clown at the end of *Polettergeist* was scary, but Square Enix has easily created something far more frightening. The characters in this game look like demonic Precious Moments. I wouldn't be surprised if they leapt from the TV and tried to eat a baby. Thankfully, Square Enix has given you little reason to even contemplate playing this game. The story lacks depth and carelessly jumps from scene to scene. It makes *Zelda* on the NES seem longwinded. Besides, do you really want to spend time in a place called Shiverland? The remainder of the game can pretty much be summed up as a measureless disaster. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to head to my grandma's house to smash some figurines. —**REINER**

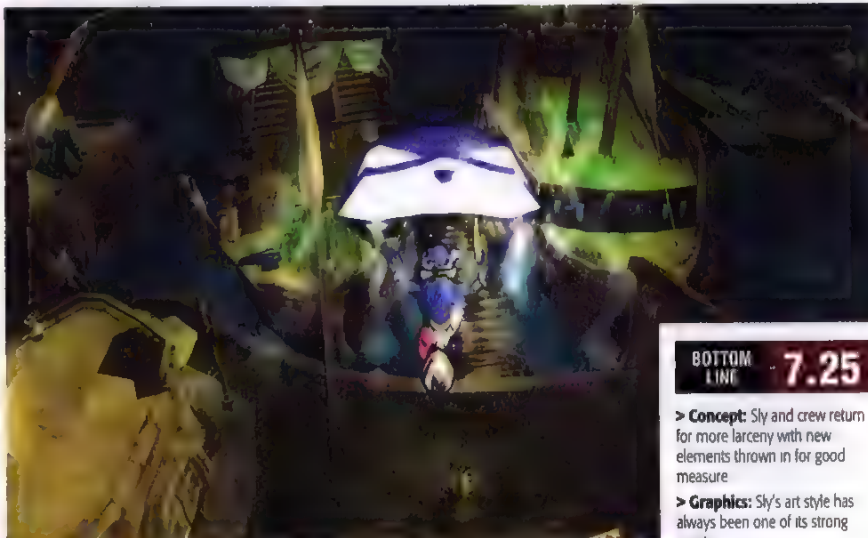


I'll bet he's up to something...

PLAYSTATION 2

Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SUCKER PUNCH > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> **Concept:** Sly and crew return for more larceny with new elements thrown in for good measure

> **Graphics:** Sly's art style has always been one of its strong points

> **Sound:** The soundtrack and voice work is acceptable but by no means exceptional

> **Playability:** Playing as Sly is fun, but the other team mates still lack appeal

> **Entertainment:** With each new addition to the franchise, the series delves deeper and deeper into a children's title

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

IT'S 3, IN 3D (AND NO, WE'RE NOT KIDDING)

I'll admit it. I absolutely adored the original Sly Cooper game. It was a highly entertaining title that got a bad rap for being too short from lots of the media. I, for one, had no problem with the game's length, but apparently the developer took it to heart, and since that time, it has been adding new characters, asinine quests, and unneeded gameplay elements to artificially lengthen the game.

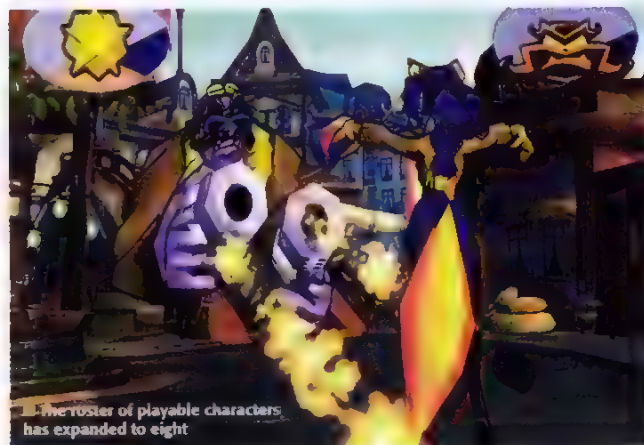
Enter Sly 3. This series has fallen so far as to whip out the old movie crutch of adding 3D levels to the game, complete with those annoying blue and red glasses. I wish I could say that this was the end of the silly additions that you will find to this edition, but it's only the beginning.

You can't move three feet without the once funny sidekicks Bentley and Murray saying something stupid. And while I found these guys to be pretty amusing in the original game and tolerable in the second, these two

goofs are slowly but surely grinding on my nerves like few do. Playing them every once in a while is a nice change of pace. But the frequency that you need to use these two in the game is seriously limiting to the entertainment I have with it. And of course, now there are a total of eight different characters that you can play as, which doesn't make the game better for me. In fact, it's making it worse.

If you haven't figured it out yet, I do enjoy playing as Sly. He's a great character with some really innovative platforming skills. Also, the heists — as silly as they can be — are really fun to pull off.

So, while there are all kinds of new improvements to the game including multiplayer and a plethora of vehicles that you can pilot, it has moved too far away from its core gameplay mechanic and effectively turned a once great game into something disappointingly average. —**ANDY**



The roster of playable characters has expanded to eight

Second Opinion 7.5

While you're in the thick of Sly 3, almost everything feels familiar... a little too familiar. On paper, the gimmicks of *Honor Among Thieves* sound like great fun. 3D-glasses enhanced levels, new playable characters, and two-player modes. But these are all surface additions. And yet the disappointment of familiarity is tempered by the fact that there are great things in this franchise. As the band of thieves grows and we learn more about each of them, the dialogue is amazingly funny and always character (not action) driven — no small feat for Sly's genre. The plundered cities are stylized within an inch of recognition, opening before players as cobbled rooftops and seductive high-tension wires. There is a great freedom of movement that Sly gives gamers. Technology problems like jaggeds and a downward-spiraling framerate are bothersome, but I found repetition and the only okay gameplay by secondary characters to be bigger issues. By all means an able entry, but the 'coon's same old tricks sadly can't be counted on forever. —**LISA**

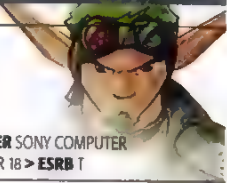


■ Much like CTR, players earn turbo boosts by power sliding and catching air

PLAYSTATION 2

Jak X: Combat Racing

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** NAUGHTY DOG > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 > **ESRB** T



BANDICOOT BURNOUT

Naughty Dog may have shed its orange fur with the creation of the Jak and Daxter trilogy, but this latest effort reeks of the dirty marsupial. There was a time when comparisons to Crash Bandicoot were done in an air of praise, but as time has gone on this goofy orange bastard has become an unfavorable ghost of gaming's past. As much as I enjoyed Crash Team Racing, I don't want to be reminded of it when I play a Jak and Daxter game, especially when Naughty Dog has shown us that it's capable of delivering excitement in ways that you wouldn't imagine.

For all intents and purposes, Jak X is the fusion of Crash Team Racing and Criterion's red-hot Burnout series. Although great effort has been put forth to tie this game into the continuity of the Jak series, the result is a lifeless stretch. Jak continues to age, and Daxter seems entirely comfortable in his new pants, but there's little here that adds to the legacy of the characters. The plot seems to have been blindly picked from the Bucket of Horrible Ideas.

On another down note, success on the track isn't dictated by your racing prowess. In several events, I intentionally ran into walls and drove like a drunken fool for an entire lap, then somehow managed to work my way back into the lead. The AI certainly waited around to make the race exciting, and the weapons that I was armed with simply obliterated the competition. The game leans too heavily on both of these crutches, making the thrill of victory seem cheap and undeserved. Thankfully, not every race pits you against other drivers. In Death Race, you must annihilate as many drones as you can. Rush Hour has players smashing their ride into oncoming traffic. In Freeze Rally, you must collect clock icons to keep your overall time down. These events are immensely enjoyable, but are sadly too few and far between.

The game does shine in online play (human opponents don't slam on the brakes for you), and the single-player campaign is surprisingly lengthy. Like all Naughty Dog releases, Jak X is phenomenally polished and plays incredibly well. It just stalls out early on and gives players little reason to stick with it.—REINER

■ By winning races, players unlock new vehicles and cosmetic parts. Unfortunately, the thrill of earning new rides is dampened by most of the vehicles looking the same



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Blends the traditional kart racing weapon-based play with Burnout-like intensity, but offers little that is truly invigorating or fresh

> **Graphics:** This game is downright gorgeous and the lack of loading is very impressive

> **Sound:** Remember the annoying podrace announcer from *Star Wars: Episode I*? I think he found work. All of the voice actors from the series return

> **Playability:** Nice driving physics, but the game relies too heavily on catch-up AI and weapons

> **Entertainment:** The quirky events are fun. Online is a blast, too. The rest of the game is mediocre

> **Replay Value:** Moderate



Second Opinion 7.25

Kart racing has a few things that must be done absolutely perfectly for the title in question to stand up to the many great games already in the genre. Jak X, sadly, doesn't meet this bar. Liabilities like catch-up enemy AI, the early missions being way too easy, power-ups that are crucial but don't last that long, and the game's utter dependence on weapons really just make it feel cheap. But there is some tremendously fast-paced racing here, and these buggies were fun in Jak 3. They're even more so as the star of the show.—LISA



PLAYSTATION 2

Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** ATLUS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11 > **ESRB** M

MORE CANNIBALISM – LESS FUN

Here's a title tailor-made for a very unique and under-represented minority – the post-apocalyptic human-eating RPG fan should have all they could hope for and more. The problem is, even that tiny group must certainly have already been sated upon the first Digital Devil Saga, which had the advantage of a more interesting story that you could actually get in on the bottom floor of.

The sequel picks up pretty much where the last one left off, but things are not as they seemed throughout the first game. Some unique twists take the story in a new direction, but even the most stalwart RPG gamer would be hard pressed to defend these new plot points as anything but convoluted. The battle system is one of the more interesting features of the game, especially now that the Mantra skill system is more flexible and enjoyable. Unfortunately, the abominable level designs are both totally non-descript and filled with the constant frustration of backtracking. If that wasn't enough, the bland art style took me out of the fun from the start. Some people may like it; to my eye, it seems uninteresting and boring.

The somber feel of Digital Saga is certainly a tonal departure for RPGs, for which I have to give it some praise – no cutesy animals here. Unfortunately, the dark setting just wasn't enough to keep me enthralled, and I found myself longing for an end to the saga.—MILLER

BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> **Concept:** Continue the tale of the man-eating demon people, further complicating what was already a nearly incomprehensible plot

> **Graphics:** Unique art style or drab world with no detail – you decide

> **Sound:** Break out the headphones – then plug them into anything but your TV

> **Playability:** A decent battle system isn't enough to make up for the endless backtracking and endless sense of being lost

> **Entertainment:** If you actually finished the first game, and it wasn't quite cryptic enough, this sequel is for you

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

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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.

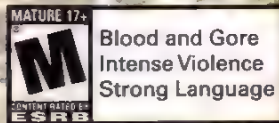
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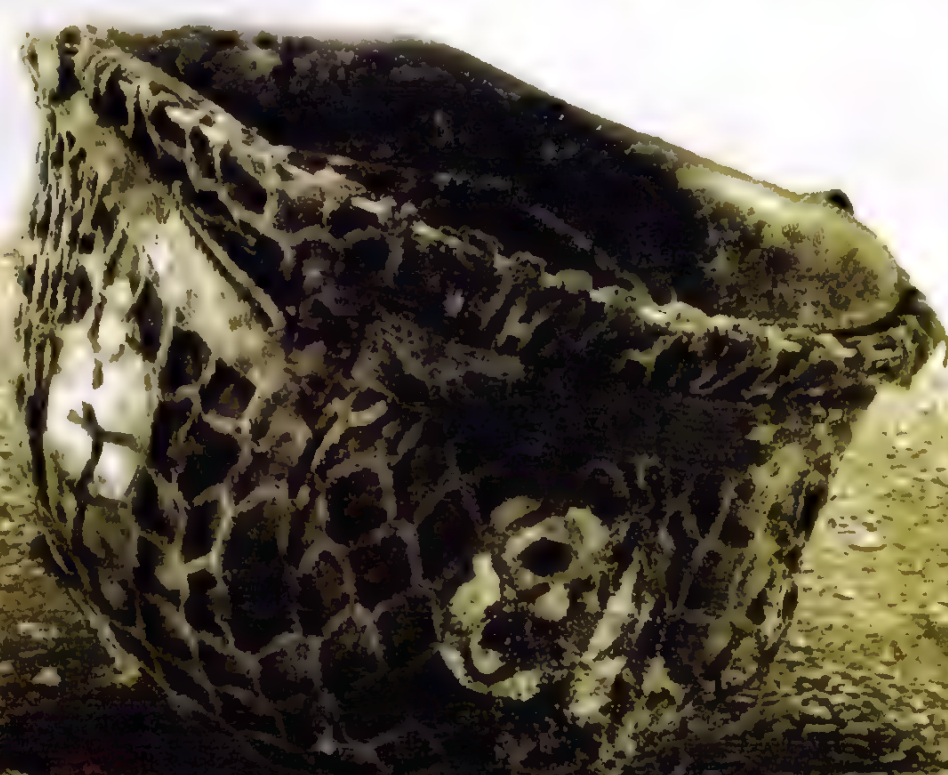


PlayStation 2



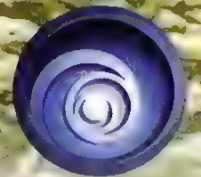
TAKING COMMAND ISN'T EASY.

TAKING THE CONSEQUENCES IS EVEN HARDER.



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PLAYSTATION 2

Resident Evil 4

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

HORROR'S MASTERPIECE LIVES AGAIN

Earlier this year, Resident Evil 4 blew me away when I played it on the GameCube. Never before had I experienced a game that so masterfully balanced between action and atmosphere, between scares and funous combat. The pacing was simply amazing — every time I thought I might grow a little tired of what I was doing, something completely different popped up. Not only is Resident Evil 4 the best survival horror game I've ever played, it's simply one of the best games. Unfortunately, the original version was not the smash hit it deserved to be, and Capcom decided to bring it to PS2 in search of a wider audience. Now, playing it again with slightly downgraded graphics, do I still feel as strongly about it? Yes, absolutely.

As much as some GameCube enthusiasts that are angry about losing exclusivity for

the title would like to claim, the PS2 release looks remarkably similar to the original. The 'Cube version does feature more detail in the character models, but the foreboding atmosphere is still so prevalent that it's hard to notice the difference. Not only do the graphics push the limits of the PS2 hardware, but Capcom has generously included a bevy of extras for this release. There are new weapons and costumes, but the most exciting feature is a new side story called Separate Ways. Starring supporting cast member Ada Wong, Separate Ways revisits familiar scenes from a new perspective, which sheds a lot of light on the story. These extras alone are enough incentive for me to pick this game up again, and the core game is so astounding that even those who've never played a survival horror title before should try it.

Resident Evil 4 is a severe deviation from the series' roots, although in the best ways possible. Gone are the clunky controls, fixed camera angles, and predictable zombies. In their place are fast-paced action, vast environments, and intelligent (living) enemies that hunt in packs with brutal efficiency. I won't spoil the plot for those who are unfamiliar, but although it dumps all the old saws of survival horror games, it is still packed with scares, strange creatures, and so much tension you'll find yourself holding your breath as you struggle in vain to survive.

"...a landmark video game, no matter what system you play it on."



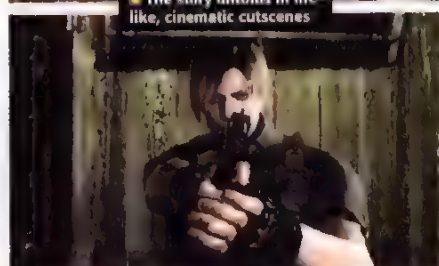
■ The PS2 version looks nearly as good as the GameCube original



■ Ada's Separate Ways campaign features familiar scenes told from a different perspective



■ The story unfolds in life-like, cinematic cutscenes



■ RE 4 features some of the most masterfully tense action of the year



BOTTOM LINE 10

> **Concept:** The criminally underplayed RE 4 comes to PS2, with a host of new features

> **Graphics:** Remarkably similar to the GameCube version. Although the level of detail is lower, the atmosphere remains completely intact

> **Sound:** Unchanged from the original — still creepy as hell

> **Playability:** After a few seconds of adjustment to the unusual control scheme, you'll never think about the controller in your hand again

> **Entertainment:** If you like video games at all, you simply must play Resident Evil 4

> **Replay Value:** High



Second Opinion 10

Without a doubt, Resident Evil 4 is one of the most amazing games I have ever played. In fact, if I had to make a list today, it would make my top 10 of all-time. It's that good! And this is coming from someone who always wanted to play the Resident Evil games, but hated the tank-style control scheme and annoying camera angles that plagued all the previous editions. Resident Evil 4 changes all that, and delivers a thrill ride that simply must be played to be believed. The new content is a nice added touch that will make gamers who played through the GameCube version want to play through it again. If you haven't picked this one up yet, you need to. You won't regret it. —ANDY

THE WARRIORS

COMING OCTOBER 2005

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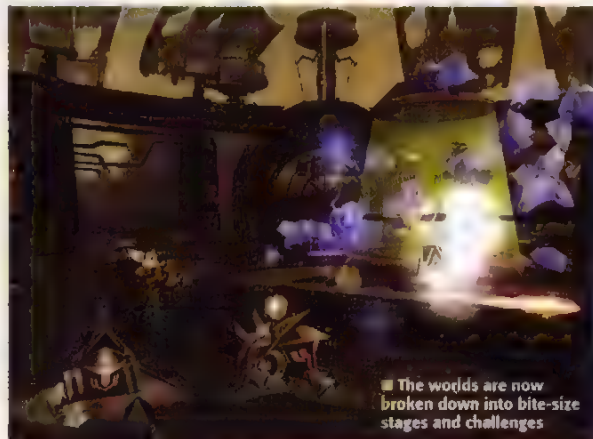




Each of the weapons can be modified in a number of ways



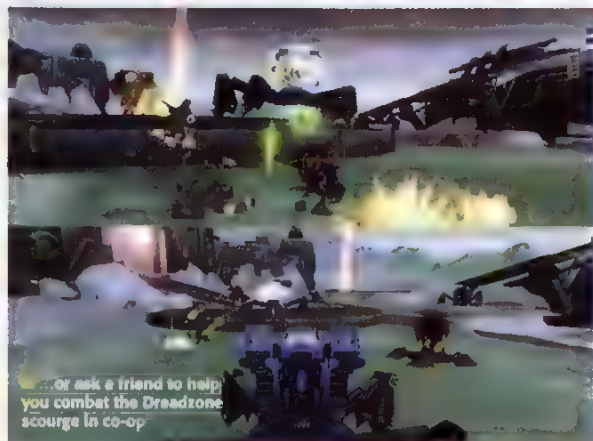
Upon stage completion, players are rewarded with points that can be used to purchase new costumes



The worlds are now broken down into bite-size stages and challenges



Put your skills to the test online against other players...



...or ask a friend to help you combat the Dreadzone scourge in co-op

PLAYSTATION 2

Ratchet Deadlocked

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAC GAMES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 25 > **ESRB** T

LIFE AFTER THE TRILOGY

The floppy elephantine ears that pranced across the cosmos now cower beneath razor-sharp steel. All wisecracking robotic sidekicks have been relegated to an inoperative status. With this fourth installment of the Ratchet & Clank series, Insomniac Games is taking a risk by altering the formula that made the first three games intergalactic blockbusters. Along with the battle-hardened exterior of the protagonist, this entry does away with the gadget-related puzzles, platform-based exploration, and most significantly, the inclusion of the much-beloved helper robot Clank.

While it would seem that Insomniac's office should be transformed into a psychiatric hospital, the series actually thrives from the loss of these elements. Rather than injecting new material, Insomniac has instead chosen to focus on and amplify one element: the weapons. These games have always had a knack for smacking players around, but this time the unbridled chaos never ends. As enemies crawl out of the woodwork and descend upon your location in dropships, you'll find that your trigger finger is constantly twitching. Playing a level in this game can be tiring for sure, but it's also an exhilarating thrill ride.

After each stage, you can't help leaning back in your seat and exhaling in satisfaction. The game still rewards players for their efforts in a number of exciting ways. Within the heat of the moment, your weapon may gain a level, which is displayed through more powerful rounds and larger clips. Each weapon can be leveled up 10 times, and bolts earned can be used to purchase a slew of different mods and new armaments.

Variety is once again injected in the form of vehicles, the most impressive of which is a huge spider-like mech called the Landstalker. It's a bit slow, but it does

possess multi-target lock-on technology that is very similar to that in Panzer Dragoon. As you can probably imagine, it produces some rather explosive and frantic gameplay.

Although Clank is shoved off to the side as a guiding voice for Ratchet, the series' trademark humor is still interwoven with the chaos, and is capable of crippling you with sidesplitting laughter. You'd swear that Pixar had a hand in many of the cutscenes.

The story centers on an illegal combat sport called Dreadzone. Ratchet is forced to compete in this dastardly tournament. Escape is not an option, however, as the Dreadlock collar that is fastened around his neck will bring him certain death if he does not accede to the orders of Dreadzone's higher ups. The framework of the game unfolds through this tournament. Worlds are now broken up into stages and objectives that range from destroying every enemy in sight to laying cover fire for your helper bots as they plant explosives. The series' popular grapple swinging and rail grinding are still in the mix as well.

Some of the objectives go by rather quickly, and without exploration to add longevity, the game suffers from being short — no more than eight to 12 hours. Replay is offered in different difficulty levels and a Challenge mode upon the game's completion. Best of all, however, you can play through the entire game cooperatively with a friend. It's every bit as enjoyable as you would hope, too. Of course, if you are into deathmatching, Ratchet's online presence once again packs a wallop.

Although it can be deemed a somewhat sizeable departure for the series, Deadlocked still feels like another great Ratchet & Clank game. If it were longer, I wouldn't mind seeing another installment just like this one on PlayStation 3.

—REINER

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Strip the game of its exploration elements and focus on the explosive weapons and vehicles

> **Graphics:** A maelstrom of mind-blowing effects hammers the screen at all times. The animation is once again stellar, but the soft texturing is looking a bit dated now

> **Sound:** Absolutely hysterical. The announcer deserves an Emmy

> **Playability:** One of the best playing games out there. It's acrobatic, explosive, and easy to control

> **Entertainment:** A little short, but nonetheless awesome

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

Insomniac had been promising a darker, more adult reinterpretation of its excellent Ratchet & Clank series with Ratchet Deadlocked, and I was worried that it might lose some of the humorous charm that helped make it one of my favorite franchises. Thankfully, the look and tone are mostly the same, featuring a host of hilarious new characters. However, the gameplay is very different. This time Clank, and most of the platforming and exploration, are MIA, and in their place is a greater emphasis on hectic, FPS-influenced weapons combat. Although this represents a bit of a gamble, Insomniac is just too good of a developer to deliver a dud. This is a great action game, with well-designed levels, excellent controls, and a great new weapons customization system. Even better, the online component rivals the best serious FPSs on the market. Although I miss some of the variety that the Clank levels brought to past games, I laud Insomniac for taking chances and succeeding. —MATT



The story for each of the 12 characters is delivered through flashy CG and anime cutscenes



Here's a side-by-side comparison of Dynasty Warriors 5 and Devil Kings

PLAYSTATION 2

Devil Kings

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11 > **ESRB** T

CLONE WARS

Elvis impersonators have been shaking their hips and curling their lips for Las Vegas crowds for decades. With the release of Devil Kings, Capcom is slapping on the proverbial muttonchops and cape. In an act of imitation that will make you rub your eyes in disbelief, Capcom has created a game that is nearly identical to Dynasty Warriors. Rather than locking swords with Koei to see which developer is mightier in a noble way, Capcom threw sand into the eyes of its opponent, stabbed it repeatedly in the back, and then to add insult to injury, ran off with its clothes.

Where Dynasty Warriors uses the history of the Three Kingdoms in a fairly convincing way, Devil Kings simply throws the history of the world into a blender with a splash of fantasy to create a fairly compelling fictional setting. In other words, don't be surprised if you shoot Anubis in the face with a shotgun.

Capcom actually went to great lengths to detail the heroics of each of the 12 playable characters. Although high on camp, the game is loaded to

the hilt with finely produced CG and anime cutscenes, making it well worth your while to play through with all of its warriors.

Unfortunately, the remainder of the game unfolds in painfully familiar fashion...which is essentially using one or two combos to annihilate thousands of troops. Of course, you can always change things up by mounting a horse or unleashing a powerful special move such as a meteor shower. What amazes me most is that Capcom actually managed to replicate the same slowdown and draw distance issues that plague Dynasty Warriors.

Going after Koei this aggressively certainly proves that Capcom has celestial-sized gonads, but considering that the gaming market is already polluted with roughly 300 Dynasty Warriors sequels, you can't help but question the timing of this release. Regardless of whether you've played through Dynasty Warriors 47 Extreme Edition or not, Devil Kings is here to give fans of this series the same hack n' slash thrills, only in a slightly different light. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** A blatant rip-off of Dynasty Warriors. Seriously, Capcom totally pimp-slapped Koei
> **Graphics:** Decent effects and models, but the framerate chugs just like Dynasty Warriors does when too many characters crowd the screen

> **Sound:** The voice acting is terrible, but it would seem to be intentional given how comedic the story is

> **Playability:** Kill 'em all. You'll hit square so much that the icon on your controller will wear off

> **Entertainment:** It's monotonous, yet loaded with longevity. The CG cutscenes warrant multiple comebacks to see them all

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 6

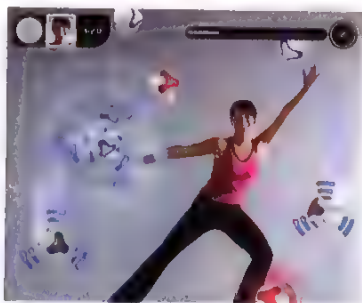
I'm seriously questioning Capcom's sanity. Why on Earth would you make a shameless copy of Dynasty Warriors when Koei has already been beating that series to death with sequels on a tri-annual basis? It's almost like Activision deciding to release a game called "Super Green Plastic Soldier Dudes" in the midst of 3DO's Army Men obsession. I'd be hard-pressed to tell any differences between the two, right down to the shallow combat and poor draw distance. —MATT

PS2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

EyeToy: Kinetic

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE > **DEVELOPER** SCEE LONDON
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 8 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 8
Inspired by the personal trainer program Yourself Fitness, EyeToy: Kinetic aims to strengthen the link between player and virtual gym instructor with the PS2's camera. Although Yourself Fitness provides a more authentic workout, Kinetic is more fun, as it focuses on point-based games that work your body. Kinetic will easily make most gamers sweat, and the fitness routine incorporates everything from yoga to boxing. I had some trouble aligning the camera to work best for some routines, but Kinetic is still easily the best way to fight the physical inactivity we gamers are prone to. —JEREMY

PLAYSTATION 2

Top Spin

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** POWER AND MAGIC/INDIE BUILT LTD.
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 26 > **ESRB** E 10+



BOTTOM LINE 8.75
This is pretty much the exact same game that was released for the Xbox under the late, but not particularly lamented, XSN Sports label. Thanks to a fire sale in which 2K Sports acquired Top Spin, PS2 players can now experience what I still feel is the best tennis sim on the market. Not much has been lost in the translation (EyeToy support for character creation has been added), but the graphics have taken a considerable hit in the porting process. Also, load times seem to be worse. However, the fluid control and excellent career and online modes are still in, making this a great purchase for any PS2 tennis fan. —MATT

ELEMENT

I have a clamshell tailgate.

I'm sorry. I don't see the resemblance.

elementandfriends.com

L4WD EX-P model shown. All models available with 2WD.
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GAMECUBE

Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS > RELEASE OCTOBER 17 > ESRB T



FANS REJOICE

By my watch, it's about time that the GameCube got a properly kick-ass first-party game. Unlike the stinker that was *Battalion Wars*, *Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance* delivers the goods. After a few weak tutorial battles, you're thrown into a raging conflict with only your skills as a commander to protect your army from utter destruction. While there are only a few new features that weren't found in the recent *Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones* for Game Boy Advance, they're interesting enough to give fans a reason to play through *Path of Radiance*. Plus, the balancing act between intense difficulty and frustration is done with the usual Intelligent Systems grace, and that's really the heart and soul of a strategy game at the end of the day.

At its core, this is the same *Fire Emblem* that we've been playing for years. Losing a unit means it's dead forever, and the enemies are more than happy to gang up on that lone knight you charged too far beyond your lines. The protagonist starts off as a doddering milksop with all the martial prowess of your kid sister, and ends up single-handedly holding off ravenous hordes of monsters. Princesses are kidnapped, worlds saved, and

evil empires crushed. But, as has been the case with the *Fire Emblem* series, the process of doing all this is so varied, and so much bloody fun, that it's impossible to really hold the iterative nature of the gameplay against *Path of Radiance*.

Each scenario presents a different challenge. Whether it's holding a castle against impossible odds for a number of turns, or cutting a bloody path through an occupied port to make it to a ship before unending waves of reinforcements bury you, your skills will be put to the test in every way. Managing experience is also key — since you can't replay missions, using your über units too much will leave your other soldiers as easy pickings. The simple fact is that *Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance* is yet another exquisitely crafted offering from arguably the most talented developer working in the genre. Unless strategy games hold no appeal whatsoever for you, this will be \$50 well spent. —ADAM



This black knight plays a key role in the story. Incidentally, he also stars in one of the game's coolest cinematics

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Take *Fire Emblem* from its old-school (and Game Boy Advance) roots onto modern consoles at long last

> **Graphics:** It's a little disappointing that more wasn't done to take advantage of the 'Cube's power, but the full-motion cutscenes are fantastic

> **Sound:** If only there were more voiceovers. Reading conversations is so 1999

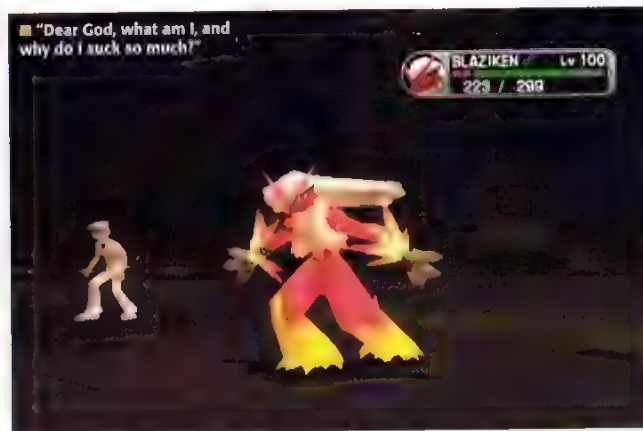
> **Playability:** Everything is easy to navigate and understand, which is really all you need in a turn-based environment

> **Entertainment:** You have to play everything Intelligent Systems makes, including this. Trust us

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

I had hoped that the move to the GameCube would give the *Fire Emblem* series an opportunity to take its intricate strategy gameplay to the next level. Instead, I was treated to a game that, but for the amazing (and infrequent) cutscenes, could have been plugged into a GBA player. Then again, with such solid gameplay, I can't complain. The story may be painfully predictable (I've got 5:1 odds that the kind, noble girl you find in the woods is a princess. Any takers?), but all of the hallmarks of the series remain pleasantly intact in the combat department with a few new tweaks. *Fire Emblem* may not be making giant strides forward, but it is still undoubtedly moving in the right direction. —JOE



GAMECUBE

Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness

> STYLE 1, 2 OR 4-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER GENIUS SONORITY, INC. > RELEASE OCTOBER 3 > ESRB E

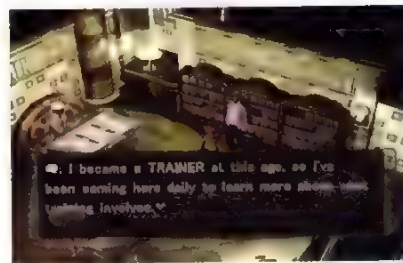
WHEN THE DREAM DIES

Long have I been a fan of the *Pokémon* series. For that same length of time I have wanted a full-featured console version that would bring to life all of the things that I've found so compelling in the handheld RPG series — epic adventure, wacky villagers, interesting monsters to train, and an open world to explore. The last GameCube *Pokémon* game didn't do it for me, but I had hoped that its sequel, *Gale of Darkness*, would reverse the flow of poor execution and give me what I really wanted. It doesn't. In fact, I think it's worse than its predecessor.

While never being known for a lush graphical presentation, this world seems even more flat and uninteresting than that in *Colosseum*, even though it's supposed to be the same geographical region five years after the end of the last game. Textures are uniformly dull and muddled. There's little for ambient life in the environment, and character models are blocky, to be kind.

While the battle system is the same as the series has always been, the limited focus of collecting and rejuvenating Shadow Pokémon lessens the feel of creating your own team to tackle the challenge at hand. Instead, there is substantially more handholding in every facet of the game's journey. To be blunt, I've played a bunch of these games, and I don't need the freaking babysitting.

I'm not knocking this game for not being what I personally want. Instead, I'm frustrated because what they've done is stripped out the only parts of the *Pokémon* series that are defensible. It looks like crap. It plays like a crippled puppy — darn cute but requiring constant and mind-numbing repetition. As before, you can import Pokémon from the handheld entries for mini battles in 3D — which is the only thing that this game does well. —LISA



BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> **Concept:** Pen a sequel to the icky *Pokémon Colosseum* that's even worse

> **Graphics:** The N64 was a lovely system. Using its level of graphics on the current gen is not

> **Sound:** Shamefully using the same growl for each critter is only the start of the dumbed-down audio presentation

> **Playability:** The menus work as intended, and I guess that's a compliment

> **Entertainment:** Games are supposed to be fun, right? *Gale of Darkness* does not meet this primary threshold

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.5

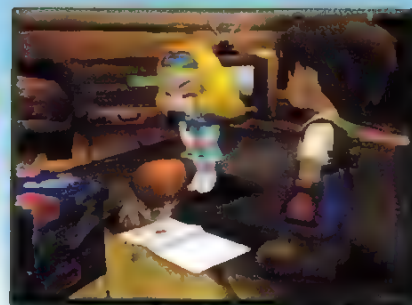
Despite the stigma attached to *Pokémon* and its enthusiasts, there have been some pretty addictive and fun games based on the franchise. *Gale of Darkness* is not one of them. In fact, this game does more to bolster the "Pokémon fans are vapid, hollow drones who'll buy anything that says 'pika'" theory than any previous entry. With a lifeless story, recycled visuals from *Pokémon Colosseum* (or is it *Pokémon Stadium?*), and the fun factor of a bag of oats, *Gale of Darkness* is drawing from an obviously dry well. The only enjoyment I got from this title was the sadistic pleasure in watching my creatures get slashed, bitten, and immolated. Serves you right! Now you suffer like I have suffered! —JOE

HARVEST MOON

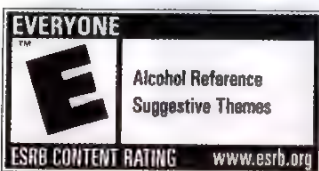
SPECIAL EDITION

A Wonderful Life

A Harvest of a Lifetime!



A lifetime of farming takes on new meaning in Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life Special Edition. Besides planting crops, raising animals and rebuilding your father's farm, you'll make friends in Forget-Me-Not Valley, find your future bride and hopefully cultivate a happy family! You create the happy ending in this game!

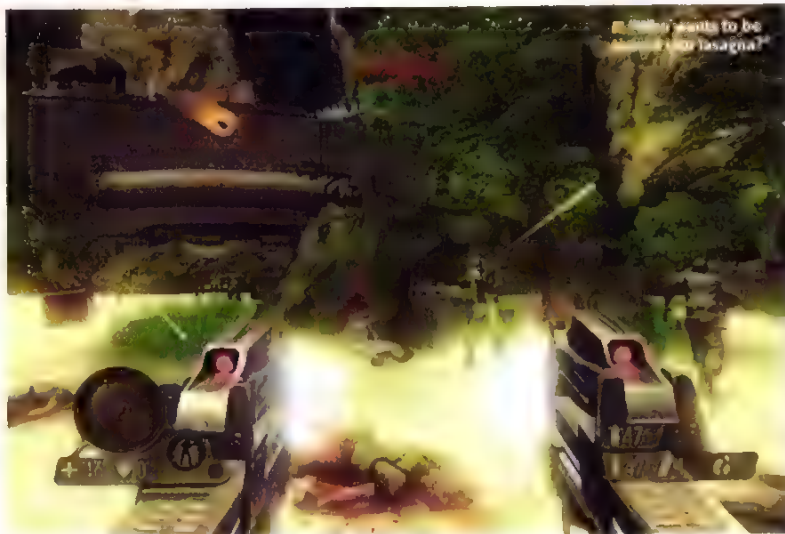


PlayStation.2

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XBOX

Far Cry Instincts

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** M

HUNTER OR HUNTED?

Within the first few seconds of gameplay, main character Jack Carver is thrown off of his boat and the sea that consumes him is riddled with machine gun fire. There is no hope of retaliation. The only option available to you is to swim to shore and seek cover within the dense jungle. It's at this moment that your survival instincts flare into effect. You'll find yourself crawling through tall grass, ducking behind trees, tossing rocks to divert the attention of soldiers, and setting up booby traps along patrol paths. You'll even have the chance to scramble under a hut, flip onto your back, and snipe the unsuspecting residents through the floorboards. It's your duty to turn Jack Carver into a ghost as the game pushes you to use stealth at every opportunity.

Given how highly the game touts its covert tactics, the thought of sprinting through a sea of bullets so that you can brutalize a soldier with a bone-shattering uppercut may seem absurd. Early in the game, if you attempted this feat, the jungle would become your grave. As Carver works his way deeper within the enemy's operations and begins to unravel the mystery as to what the clandestine organization is doing on this island, a terrible yet miraculous fate befalls him. Interestingly, once this occurs, the game asks you to forget everything that you've learned with the hope that you'll now rely

on your primal instincts to progress. The hunted becomes the hunter.

By tapping into an adrenaline meter, Carver can perceive scents, his eyes can focus in the darkness, he can run at great speeds, leap across 30 foot chasms, and regain his health. Stealing a mechanic directly from Halo, within close proximity an icon will appear if the player's targeting reticule crosses over an enemy. By tapping the melee button at this time, Carver will lunge at the foe and knock them high into the air with a powerful uppercut. This action feels exactly like Halo's energy sword, and is only slightly different in the fact that if two enemies are near each other when this strike is initiated, Carver will automatically throw a quick second uppercut.

As you can see, Instincts is not a direct port of the PC game. The core story line is similar, but developer Ubisoft Montreal is taking the characters into uncharted territory in ways that you wouldn't expect. The result is a much different, but equally engrossing game.

Although auto-aiming is a little generous and the selection of vehicles can be difficult to control, the gameplay is incredibly smooth and loaded to the hilt with thrilling sequences that will make you want to play the game multiple times. It's also one of the most gorgeous games to grace the Xbox.

Bloom lighting is used to such great effect that the sand on a beach will actually hurt your eyes. Unfortunately, with the stunning visuals come a price. Each stage takes roughly two minutes to load. The levels are incredibly large, often taking 30 to 40 minutes to complete, which makes the loading seem infrequent, but you'll still find yourself making dinner as the game prepares your next destination. The big killer, however, is that you'll have to sit through this extensive delay whenever you boot up the game or select different game types. Even if you only spend five seconds in the map editor tweaking a spawn point, you'll have to watch a two-minute demo as the menus load.

I had a great deal of fun with Pariah's map editor, but it pales in comparison to tools that Ubisoft Montreal is providing players to tinker with in this game. The map editor is easy to use and all of your creations can be shared online.

Concerning multiplayer, the selection of matches is lean but mean. The preset maps that are included are the perfect fit for any strategy that you and your team may concoct and are second only to Halo 2's.

Far Cry was a hit on PC, but I think it will find a better home on Xbox. Ubisoft Montreal has done a bang up job tailoring this release with all the bells and whistles that the will keep the Xbox faithful salivating for months on end. —REINER

BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

> **Concept:** Anything but a remake. Instincts shares the same story as the PC game, but twists the plot in different ways to open the doors for entirely new and exciting gameplay

> **Graphics:** Sets a new benchmark for console lighting. Loading is ungodly, however

> **Sound:** Rockin' but repetitive beats, amusing banter between NPCs and a nice ambiance

> **Playability:** Sleek controls, but auto-aiming assists too much. Weapons are balanced nicely and the feral abilities allow players to complete stages without firing a round

> **Entertainment:** The final battle is a letdown, but the remainder of the game (including multiplayer) rocks

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8**

I'm a huge fan of the original PC Far Cry, it was ambitious, innovative, and a ton of fun. Far Cry Instincts shares these qualities with its PC namesake, but injects them into a completely different game with a few technical issues to boot. Crawling through the jungle this time around ends up focusing much more on the run-and-gun element of first-person shooting, rather than the unique mix of stealth and action in the older game. This isn't necessarily bad — heck, I'm a huge Painkiller fan, too — but I can't help but take issue with the lackluster weapon selection, obscenely huge amount of aim-assistance, and horrendous vehicle controls. The feral abilities you develop during the game are cool and certainly serve to shake up the FPS formula, but loose control and a total lack of workable stealth mechanics hold back Instincts from the greatness of its PC forer. —ADAM

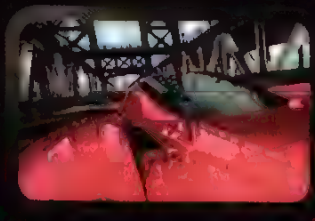
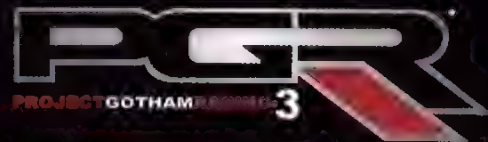




SPEED MEET STYLE

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XBOX
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UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX

Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood

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



BROTHERS OF A FEATHER STICK TOGETHER

Seeing as how the story for Earned in Blood closely mirrors — and even replicates — some of the events in the first Brothers in Arms, it's fitting that the two games have a lot in common apart from just the story. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, as they say. The two games aren't identical, but at times you wouldn't know the difference.

The FPS squad play of the series is as fun as ever, and with some of the tweaks that have been put in for the enemy AI, Earned in Blood is a somewhat hairier experience than the first title. German squads will often reposition themselves according to the situation, requiring that you think on your feet. More than a few times I would set up my troops in the perfect position. Seconds later, when the Germans changed their tactics to adapt to what I was doing, I would find myself torn between moving my guys and keeping on the same tack. On more than a few occasions, stubbornly sticking to the original plan turned into a disaster, as events quickly spiraled out of control.

As much as I enjoyed the improvements to Brothers' tactical gameplay,

I feel the game didn't go nearly far enough in fixing some of the problems with the first one. Hit detection for bullets is still notoriously sloppy, the camera for the situational awareness map could be easier to use, a better lock-on would be helpful for assigning fire commands, and the game needs to add more to its bread-and-butter gameplay (you don't control a tank until almost halfway through). Although reacting to the new enemy AI made the game fun, my squadmates sometimes had trouble keeping up. Because of the heavy crossfire situations that Earned in Blood sets up, my CPU squads often got picked off because they couldn't position themselves behind cover effectively enough. Playing through the co-op Skirmishes is a good way to get the job done, even if your AI allies still act like boobs sometimes.

Earned in Blood is the second Brothers in Arms title in less than a year, and I know that Ubisoft wants yearly installments to this series. However, even with the improvements made to this title, it's going to take a more than tweaks to justify buying this game on such a rigorous schedule. —KATO

PS2 MIA

Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood also appears on the PS2, but due to circumstances beyond our control, we could not review it in this issue. In the future we will analyze it, and if there are any notable differences we will follow up with a separate review. If there aren't any major differences, please take this as our definitive review.

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Adds co-op and new enemy AI routines to the first Brothers, but it's not enough

> **Graphics:** Much the same as the last one, which is a good thing

> **Sound:** The triggered voice-acting is often repetitive and inaccurate. I'm going to shoot the next soldier who says "can't"

> **Playability:** Activating fire and movement orders has its problems, but they usually get the job done

> **Entertainment:** A solid premise, but without much fixing up or expansion from the last one, it's fun that doesn't last forever

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion

I have a strange relationship with Earned in Blood. Part of me adores the tactical intelligence that the enemy exhibits. On the other hand, I hate the feeling that sinks in when you know that the game's AI has just outwitted you. Garry Kasparov and I now have something in common. There were times, however, where my death seemed unjustified, as hit detection is still difficult to recognize. The single player experience delivers one intense level after another, but doesn't come close to delivering the thrills that co-op and versus do. Earned in Blood is a step forward for the series, but it's a miniscule one. —REINER



XBOX

Rainbow Six: Lockdown

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 6 > **ESRB** M

GET LIVE, OR GET BORED

I'm starting to get real sick and tired of squad-based shooters that feature allies with all the intelligence of a leprous sheep. Throw in uninspired level design and tired terrorist clichés, and you've got pretty much every squad-based shooter this generation. Rainbow Six: Lockdown is a shining example of every one of these problems. Seriously — don't go near this title if you don't want to take the war to Xbox Live. But it's all better once you jump online and experience just what Xbox Live can do for a first-person shooter.

Now that that's out of the way, let's talk about why this can hang with Halo 2 in terms of Xbox Live play. First you create an online persona for yourself, with one of four specialties (engineer, medic, commando, or spec ops). This influences the equipment you start with, since there are no pickups on the maps. Then you find a match to join and shoot some fools for a while in the context of one of several gametypes, which is fun in a classic sort of way. All of a sudden, though, you level up with the experience you gain for performing well. Then, the glorious realization hits you: You've got thousands of dollars to invest in better ways to shoot people, and a bunch of training points to beef up your proficiencies in dozens of categories. It's like RPG heaven — but in an online first-person shooter. I haven't had this feeling since Deus Ex, and it's a great one.

These cool features would be a temble waste if the gameplay wasn't there, but there are no worries that front. Basically, think of it like Rainbow Six 3 (which was fantastic), but tweaked and better. I dare anyone to put some time into learning the maps and modes, leveling up their avatar, and argue that this is anything but one of the best online titles on consoles. —ADAM



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Okay, so there are some bad guys who hate freedom or something. Guess what? You get to shoot them

> **Graphics:** Not bad, but I expected more out of the sequel to Rainbow Six 3

> **Sound:** Explosions sound unfortunately wussy, but otherwise it's the old rat-a-tat-tat of automatic weapons fire

> **Playability:** Giving commands works just fine — if only your team would follow them

> **Entertainment:** I'm starting to sound like a broken record here, but don't bother with this unless you plan to go online

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion

After reviewing roughly 4,700 Tom Clancy tactical shooters in the last few years, I'm running out of ways to say that they're all the same. Fortunately, Lockdown actually displays some innovation. Just in time, too — I was about to start making up stuff about Tom Clancy eating the souls of the elderly to fill up space. Glad I don't have to do that now. Lockdown's new multiplayer innovations are the biggest change the series has seen in a long time, and I'm thrilled to see it. Not only are the new game types fun, the P.E.C. feature gives you a good reason to keep playing them. I do wish this feature carried over into the campaign mode, which still has all the problems of the previous titles. Regardless, Rainbow Six is baby sleeping towards improvement, and I'm happy to see it. —JEREMY

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■ The larger enemies are practically walking battle stations



■ These things are freaking evil



PC

Quake IV

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE/ID SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 11 > **ESRB** M

BY THE FANS, FOR THE FANS

Back in the day, Quake made a name for itself by blowing the doors off of the online FPS genre. Single-player has never been fantastic in the series, but from Quake to Quake III Arena, the multiplayer has been top-of-the-line in every way. I bring these things up because basically nothing has changed for Quake IV. The graphics are far better, obviously, and the campaign clearly had a lot of tender loving development, but at the end of the day this is as old school as it gets. However, Raven Software's FPS expertise is clearly present in every facet of play, which makes this one of the tightest, most polished games I've ever played.

Barring a handful of hellish encounters, crap-your-pants moments, and spectacular boss fights, single-player in Quake IV is a by-the-numbers slaughterfest. There's an overarching story, but half the time I was playing I couldn't have told you what my objective was, other than finding the next open door. Linear to a fault, lacking the kind of enemy AI that makes F.E.A.R.'s battles so dynamic, and

without the outstanding atmosphere and shock value of Doom 3, Quake IV's offline mode is the sort of basic fun that makes Painkiller entertaining. By no means is it bad; it's just that anyone who has played a modern FPS won't find anything especially worthy of note here.

Similarly, multiplayer is very well put together and tons of fun, but doesn't take a single risk anywhere in the entire implementation. The maps are clearly designed by pros, and the lightning-paced damage will certainly satisfy anyone's bloodlust, but it feels an awful lot like Quake III Arena on the Doom 3 engine. Fans will no doubt appreciate it just for that, but compared to Unreal Tournament's gazillion options, Battlefield 2's incredible team-based play, or Half-Life 2's plethora of mods, I can't help but feel that Quake IV is a bit lacking. However, if it's old-school deathmatching or capture-the-flag you're looking for, this title does it arguably better than any other. It's very much a matter of taste, and Quake

■ The interlude where you get "Stroggified" is rather disturbing



IV will surely satiate a great many players. But when there's literally nothing in here that I haven't done a million times before, I have to confess to being a little disappointed. Especially since none of the vehicles are usable in multiplayer.

The Quake formula has reached a level of refinement and polish in this offering that few series ever do. Old-school FPS fans and gamers looking to get back to the roots of online fragathons will undoubtedly find a lot to love in Quake IV, and the game has perhaps fewer flaws than any I've ever reviewed. On the flip side of the coin, though, this is one of the least innovative titles I've ever played. Now, let's just hope that the soon-to-be-released SDK propels some mod makers into integrating the fantastic core mechanics with some new ideas. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Shoot stuff. Lots of stuff. Evil stuff.

> **Graphics:** Surprisingly, the Doom 3 engine still looks fantastic, especially with the recent tweaks for this release.

> **Sound:** Effects are par for the course, but the music is excellent.

> **Playability:** Combat feels tighter than it ever did in Doom 3, and the weapons behave very well.

> **Entertainment:** This might not be breaking new ground, exactly, but smooth, fast FPS action is rarely done this well.

> **Replay Value:** High.

Second Opinion 8.5

From the first screenshot I'd seen of Quake IV, I couldn't help but say to myself that the game looked like Doom 3.5. While the two worlds aren't directly tied, you can see the influence famed developer id has on the title. The art style screams Doom. The frantic gameplay is classic id through and through. This, of course, is not a bad thing. The graphics shine with some fantastic art direction, and the levels are both challenging and fun. However, throughout my entire playthrough, I kept waiting for the twist that was going to set Quake IV apart — be it multi- or single-player — and it never happened. Quake IV is a solid, extremely sound FPS that delivers exactly what you would expect. Sadly, I hoped for a bit more, but I did enjoy what is here — especially the fast-paced multiplayer. Fans of Quake will not be disappointed, just don't expect anything revolutionary. —ANDY

■ Straight-up deathmatching doesn't get any better than this



■ Some of the setpieces are nothing short of fantastic





The power-armored enemies are no joke

BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: Discover the secrets of your past (and shoot a ton of guys) in an action-oriented paranormal thriller

> Graphics: This easily hangs with the Half-Lives and Doms of the world, even if some of the environments get horribly repetitive

> Sound: I literally cannot think of a game with audio design as good as this. This proves that sound can add a whole new dimension to the experience

> Playability: As usual, once you configure the buttons to your liking, this is as smooth as whipped cream smeared over pound cake

> Entertainment: Beg, borrow, or steal a robust gaming rig to play this on – you won't be disappointed

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 9

F.E.A.R. starts off like a rocket with a machine gun spray of intense combat and creepy story segments that had me jumping out of my seat. In the first couple of hours I literally had my heart stop at least twice, and I can't even begin to count the number of profanities that spewed from my lips. At its core, F.E.A.R. is basically your standard gorgeous first-person shooter with a mix horror à la *The Ring* movies and *Max Payne* bullet-time. A good combination if you ask me. The game does suffer from a bit of repetitiveness towards the middle as the story slows down and the action becomes regimented, but thankfully it does pick up again towards the end. I was a tad disappointed that your powers never really develop past the ability to slow time, and that the game doesn't deliver enough boss encounters, but these are small complaints. Fantastic game, and a must for FPS fans—**ANDY**

PC

F.E.A.R.

> STYLE 1 PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** SIERRA
> DEVELOPER MONOLITH SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 **> ESRB** M



FACE YOUR DEMONS

I thought I knew about creepy games. I thought that I could stay cool through the worst that Hell could throw at me – hey, I did it in *Doom 3*, after all. I thought nothing could intimidate me after staring down the Strider onslaught in *City 17*. I thought I was a stone-cold badass with the headshot and strafing skills to laugh in the face of death and come out the other side of any dark tunnel covered in the blood of my enemies and grinning.

Then I played F.E.A.R. Like no other game I've played, F.E.A.R. grabbed me by the throat, punched me in the gut, and made me pay attention and become my onscreen character. The intensity of the firefights, the constant mocking psychic whispers of my quarry, and the frequent spooky head trips that Monolith has so skillfully woven together make an experience that demands to be played. Even if the story is somewhat poorly paced through much of the game and doesn't make the most sense, it's got enough hooks to keep you going until the brilliant climax. But the paranormal conspiracy plotline isn't F.E.A.R.'s greatest weapon – not by a long shot.

You would think that having a limited number of enemy types and a small weapon selection would handicap the combat, but you'd be wrong. For one, the bad guys are hands down the smartest AI-controlled opponents I've ever faced. They flank, they throw grenades, they lay down suppressing fire – basically, they do all the things that newbs don't in *Battlefield*. And

they're accurate with their nasty weapons, which are the exact same guns that you have access to. Having it out with these enemies in F.E.A.R.'s cover-laden environments is a rush far beyond what most action titles deliver, thanks to the fantastic engine the game runs on.

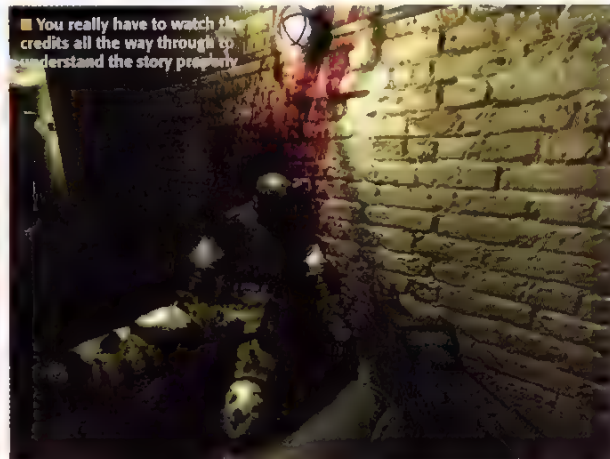
Getting into a firefight in F.E.A.R. is much more than the standard "put a couple shotgun rounds into some dudes" method of FPS action. When you fire a weapon, it's noisy, smoky, and blows a big ol' hole in whatever you hit. Debris showers from damaged walls, smoke clogs your vision, and the screams of the wounded and dying echo through your stunned ears. It's intense almost to the point of sensory overload. And it all gets that much cooler when you activate the Slo-Mo power, with the red-shifted odd

specularity of all the lighting and slowed-down distorted sounds of battle changing the whole ordeal.

The overall experience that is F.E.A.R. is fantastic, but that's not to say it's without its issues. In fact, the entire middle third of the game is poorly paced and repetitive. Level design is incredibly linear yet somehow confusing, and getting through certain parts of the game is needlessly frustrating and arbitrary. It's also incredibly disappointing that you never gain access to any more powers than the Slo-Mo that you start with. That's easily forgotten when you're in the throes of any of F.E.A.R.'s innumerable "Oh s—!" moments or crazy-awesome action sequences, though. If you have access to the kind of beastly machine this title needs, nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of playing it through.—**ADAM**



When hell breaks loose in F.E.A.R., it doesn't hold back



You really have to watch the credits all the way through to understand the story properly



PC

Black & White 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** LIONHEAD STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 4 > **ESRB** T

SHADES OF GRAY

As I always suspected, I am a terrifying and awe-inspiring deity. Amazed by my sheer magnificence, settlers from surrounding villages flocked to my town, and my noble emissary (a hulking bipedal lion) greeted them at my borders. As they pleaded to be accepted into the fold of my glorious civilization, my creature ate a few of them, took a dump on others, and let the rest starve to death outside the city walls. Such is the extent of my mercy.

While I clearly lean towards the evil side of the moral spectrum, there is an immense amount of content to enjoy in Black & White 2 that doesn't involve terrorizing townspeople. With a greater focus on building a thriving civilization than babysitting an overgrown animal, this sequel feels more reined-in than its predecessor. You still have the ability to cast miracles and command the forces of nature, but you do it all within the more familiar framework of resource-gathering and city-building. Granted, this will probably make the game more accessible to some, but it comes at the expense of making the overall experience slightly more conventional than its innovative precursor.

This trade-off is most apparent in the way

Lionhead has largely abandoned the idea of making conscious choices between good and evil. Instead of being given various sidequests to exercise your good and evil whims, your style of play essentially determines your alignment. Do you want to take advantage of the new RTS features by building armies? You do? Well, then you're evil. Obviously, no benevolent nation in the world's history has exerted military force. On the other hand, if you want to be good, you'll spend all of your time building junk in hopes of impressing your foes enough for them to defect — which, by the way, takes about five times longer than winning a military campaign. Nice guys finish last, chump.

As you conquer and convert the many tribes loosely based on historical races, you'll notice many similarities to great RTS titles like Rise of Nations and Warcraft. The emphasis is definitely on the dynamics of building a civilization (with the aid of a godly creature), with some optional detours into simplified army management. While this is certainly a gear change, I was happy to find many of the fun moments that defined the original game intact. Your worshippers' reactions to your exploits — from fear to wonder — are priceless, and even with its diminished



CREATURE TEACHER

Anyone who played the first Black & White became well-acquainted with the punishment/reward system of teaching your avatar. This time around, much of the guesswork is taken out through the addition of text bubbles that tell you what your creature is thinking. If it wants to eat a tree, you can intervene before the action takes place. Also, you'll always see what behavior you're encouraging or discouraging, making training less arbitrary. The following phrases are my creature's thoughts about numerous actions taken several hours of play.

- "I'll eat as much power as I can. I make me feel good. I can't help myself."
- "I'll grind up some rocks. You know how much I love to see them!"
- "I'll poo on an opponent's altar as much as I can."
- "I'll never eat rocks. After all, I might get gall stones."
- "I'll rip out any tree I find and use it as a toothpick."
- "I'll always eat our villagers, even if I'm already stuffed."

importance, your creature's antics will have you laughing out loud. It may not be as ambitious as the original, but it is a fun, clever, and intricate strategy title deserving of your divine attention. —**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Guide your worshippers to glory using intimidation or wussiness

> **Graphics:** The beautiful scenery and gorgeous lighting can be enjoyed equally from high above the world or zoomed in on a single villager

> **Sound:** Funny voices and ambient angelic music surround your godly self

> **Playability:** Picking things up is still too finicky, as is throwing them. The new menus and creature interactions make the rest of the game a breeze, though

> **Entertainment:** Fun and challenging, though good-aligned players will be frustrated by the extra work required of them

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8.75**

From the moment that the lifting soundtrack begins to play as that first plaintive prayer was offered up to me, I felt totally drawn into my role as the guiding hand in my little growing culture. All the wit and humor we've come to expect in a Molyneux game is present here, from the antics and personality of your creature to the strange sighs and sounds of the lands you seek to populate. Most of the more egregious frustrations from the first game have been fixed, but the unique hands-on control system still takes a lot of getting used to. My only big complaint is the disparity between playing as good or evil. Any military action at all labels you as a big old baddie, and completing the game without ever fighting is incredibly difficult, not to mention kind of boring. With that said, I couldn't help but admire the beauty and power of this game, in everything from its graphical grandeur to its addictive and novel gameplay. —**MILLER**



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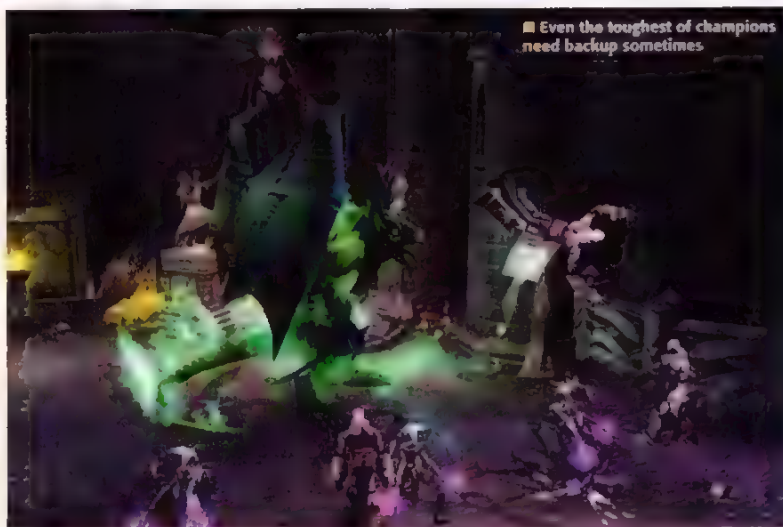


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■ Even the toughest of champions need backup sometimes



■ The world of Eberrow is a cool twist on standard western fantasy

PC

Dungeons & Dragons: Dragonshard

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** LIQUID ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** T

POKE A BEHOLDER IN THE EYE

I've been playing real-time strategy games for a long, long time. Managing resources, teching as fast as possible, and micro-managing my units to focus fire and minimize casualties is second nature to me at this point, and these skills have served me well through a broad range of titles. Problem is, the only one that did me a tiny bit of good in *Dragonshard* was micromanagement — the structure of this game is so radically different than any other that I had to learn it from the ground up. And that's a good thing.

Dragonshard puts a huge emphasis on going out and killing things with your army. Camping out and hogging resource nodes doesn't work, because there aren't any. Gold and experience come from cleaning out monster lairs underground, and dragons rain from the sky in spectacular meteor showers every few minutes. There really isn't a tech tree to speak of (other than leveling your units, which you do from a global experience pool) and build times are very short, so there's nothing to stop you from churning out an army and getting out there to mix it up. This puts the focus right where it belongs, and where the most fun of RTS is anyway: smashing stuff. And the smack certainly does get

laid down — from hordes of enemy-controlled units to impressively huge NPC monsters, there is a lot of killing to do in a round of *Dragonshard*. And, as you can imagine, it's entertaining.

The two single-player campaigns are spiced up from the usual RTS fare by the addition of a persistent "Reward Points" pool that you increase by performing well in each mission. These points allow you to buy permanent upgrades for your heroes as well as consumable items such as potions, which can make a huge difference in the outcome of battle. It also serves to push you to do your best in each scenario, since you get bonus points for completing side missions, losing fewer units, and the like. Even if the story blows and the characters are as flat as a vampire's pulse, this one simple system makes the campaign mode better than the vast majority of RTS single-player gametypes. And while multiplayer may not have the legs of *Starcraft*, it's definitely a nice break from trying to repel the thirtieth Zergling rush of the day.

Unfortunately, a veritable host of small technical problems keep *Dragonshard* from reaching the potential created by its innovative design. Unit AI sucks, as evidenced by the many troops I've lost

due to their brilliant notions to run through already-detected traps. Surface-world engagements of any size quickly become far too difficult to meaningfully control because of the mediocre interface, which dumbs down the tactics to simply giving attack-move commands and hoping. These issues aren't enough to break the game, though, and mastering *Dragonshard*'s unique brand of strategy is definitely a good way to while away your gaming hours. —**ADAM**



■ One look at these guys and you know they're cannon fodder



■ You mess with the beholder, you get the laser eye beams



■ Finding the fallen Dragonshards is a huge part of the game

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Turn the RTS formula on its head and throw in some D&D-related monsters for flavor

> **Graphics:** This looks a lot like *Warcraft III*, but with more detail. Then again, *Warcraft III* still looks pretty good

> **Sound:** iTunes for the win. Generic and boring is an understatement

> **Playability:** Why can't I set my units to hold ground? And why must I mouse everything? Bah

> **Entertainment:** A fine time both solo and multiplayer. The wonky interface still frustrates after hours of playtime, though

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.25

Had *Dragonshard* shown up four or five years ago, I would have hailed it as one of the premier RTS games of its generation. As it is, the game releases at a time where a slew of excellent games have shown up in the genre just in the last year, and *Dragonshard* falls just shy of complete greatness. I adored the way this game has finally brought the D&D game into the strategy genre, and the result is a lot of fun, especially for long-time tabletop fantasy gamers. The fantastic monster designs add a lot of excitement, and the dynamic between above ground troop movements and below ground dungeon crawling is positively brilliant. From the warlike musical score to the nicely varied backgrounds, the game pulls you into its world even if the graphics seem a bit dated at times. A blatant attempt to play and feel like *Warcraft III* limits the game somewhat, but it also makes it an ideal title to check out for fans of Blizzard's premier series. —**MILLER**

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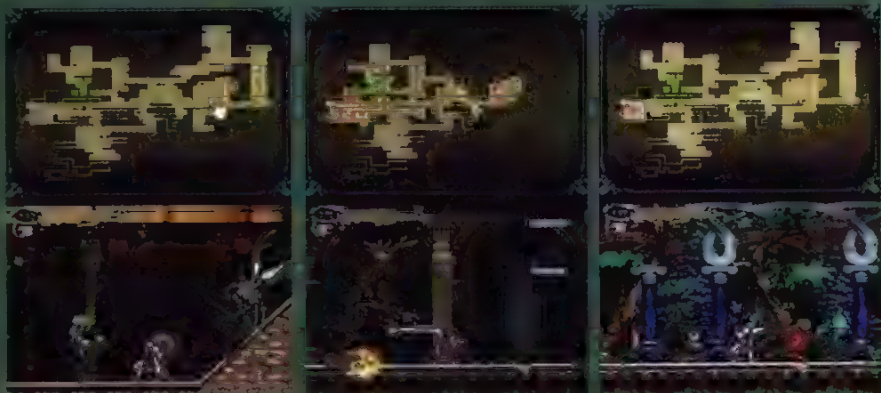
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NINTENDO DS

Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow

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



ANOTHER BRILLIANT QUEST

I've been a fan of 2D Castlevania since the days of the NES. Among some odd Japanese-only titles, I've played through them all multiple times and unlocked the majority of their secrets. It is with this experience that I tell you that Dawn of Sorrow is possibly the best game of them all. Its sublime mix of puzzles, great bosses, perfectly paced exploration, and enormous variety make this an utterly amazing adventure.

Anyone familiar with Castlevania post-Symphony of the Night will instantly be at home in Dawn of Sorrow. The quest leads through a labyrinthine castle full of monsters, traps, and puzzles. Every time you learn a new ability, you'll be able to access a new area of the castle. Levels are gained, new arms and armor acquired, and enormous abominations vanquished. Protagonist Soma's unique heritage (he's the reincarnation of Dracula) allows him to consume the souls of downed enemies, and the powers these confer are incredibly varied. Developing a new strategy for each set of demons you face and using whatever souls and weapons you have access to lends the combat a depth sorely lacking in so many action games.

There's nowhere that this feature is more evident than in the boss fights. Because the bosses do a ton of damage and show no mercy, you're forced to find an efficient method of fighting them. Sometimes you'll be lucky and have an attack soul that totally brutalizes whatever you're facing, but most of the time you'll have to improvise a style using the

tools at hand. Frustration could very well set in at some point, but the feeling of triumph upon successfully stomping any of the incredibly tough bosses is well worth it.

In a genre that has been iterated on for the better part of two decades, Dawn of Sorrow manages to feel fresh and new. It's not perfect — it could be longer, the story still fails to impress, and some horribly imbalanced combos (go get a Skelerang soul and a Throwing Sickle, and you'll understand) are around — but there's not a DS owner I wouldn't recommend this title to. —ADAM

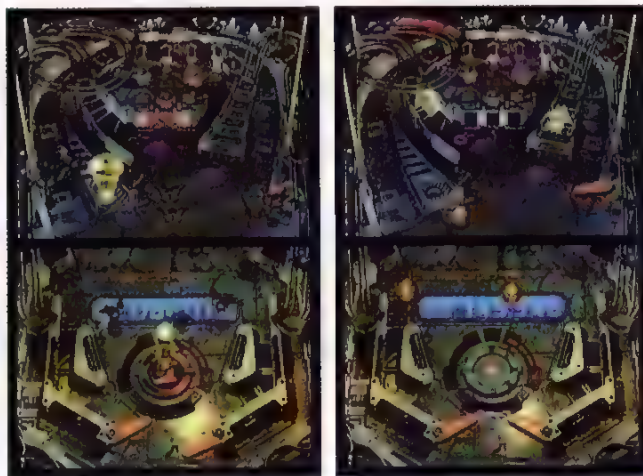


BOTTOM LINE 9.25

- > **Concept:** Take the Symphony of the Night formula and apply it to a direct sequel to Aria of Sorrow.
- > **Graphics:** Lots of nice touches and animations make this one fine looking 2D game.
- > **Sound:** As always, Castlevania music is some of the best to be found in gaming.
- > **Playability:** Being able to switch between two different equipment/soul setups at the touch of a button is a godsend.
- > **Entertainment:** This is yet another reason to go buy a DS if you don't already have one.
- > **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9

You can add my voice to the overwhelming chorus of 2D Castlevania fans who could care less if this series exists in 3D. With pacing, level design, and addictive gameplay that is air tight, this game offers more in 2D than most titles can deliver no matter the number of dimensions. It relentlessly drives you on with room after room of delights, whether it's a boss, puzzle, or new enemy. For every monster and conundrum that is thrown your way, however, Dawn's soul system and array of arms (I'm a sucker for weapon forging) are more than up to the task. The "DS" in Nintendo DS doesn't stand for dual screen, it now stands for "Dawn of Sorrow," 'cause this game owns. —KATO



NINTENDO DS

Metroid Prime Pinball

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > PUBLISHER NINTENDO
> DEVELOPER FUSE GAMES LIMITED > RELEASE OCTOBER 24 > ESRB E

BUMP HER

I have to admit to being a bit suspicious ever since I heard of this concept. Take one of my favorite series and characters, and drop them into a pinball game? No thanks. As it turns out, I couldn't have been more wrong. In some strange way, the pinball formula works really well within the Metroid universe, perhaps because of the commonalities between the two, in particular the focus on discovering secrets around the stage. Whatever the reason, Samus' adventures in pinball land are more fun than expected, and the DS ends up being the perfect platform for the concept.

Putting the two screens together as one long pinball table manages to approximate real pinball remarkably well, already giving this title a head start over other video approximations of the game. More than that, the ball physics throughout the game are spot on, so you rarely feel that cheap loss that often comes from a bounce that goes off in the wrong direction. Nonetheless, there are plenty of lost balls to be had, as even the first couple levels can be pretty tough. It's also a big pain unlocking additional stages, which bothered me to no end. Some levels have actual boss battles, which are actually way cooler than you might suspect as you try to repeatedly hammer your foe with your speeding sphere.

I definitely would have had more fun with Metroid Prime Pinball if I'd had access to a little more content right from the start. Even so, the pinball player in me thrilled at both the clever table designs and unique use of the characters and world, and I have to add this to a growing list of titles that should please fans of Nintendo's latest handheld. —MILLER



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Samus is perpetually in morph ball mode, and you must bounce her off the walls — have fun

> **Graphics:** If you thought the Metroid Prime universe couldn't become a pinball table, think again — the game looks great

> **Sound:** Remixes of the classic Metroid themes and explosive sound effects work better than you might expect

> **Playability:** Great ball physics and easy controls, but unlocking levels is a pain

> **Entertainment:** A surprise but welcome addition to the Metroid family is also one of the best video pinball games to date

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

It was only a matter of time before Samus hit tilt. Thankfully, her ability to morph into a ball isn't the only connection that this game makes to the Metroid franchise. Holding true to the series' illustrious heritage, she can leap from wall to wall up vertical spaces and even has the ability to uncurl to spray laser blasts at enemy hordes. Some foes will destroy your ball. Others will send it flying in unanticipated trajectories. Even within these hostile environments, I was pleasantly surprised to see that balls last much longer than a normal game of pinball. Defensive assistance such as a force field that blocks the gutter keeps the score wheels spinning. Mario and Pikachu both gave the silver ball a whirl, but neither delivered satisfying results like Samus has. This is a well-made and highly addictive pinball title. —REINER

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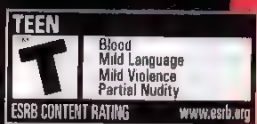
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Using both screens for super big sprites is a nice touch

NINTENDO DS

Lunar: Dragon Song

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** JAPAN ART MEDIA/GAMEARTS
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** E10+

DESIGNING AGONY

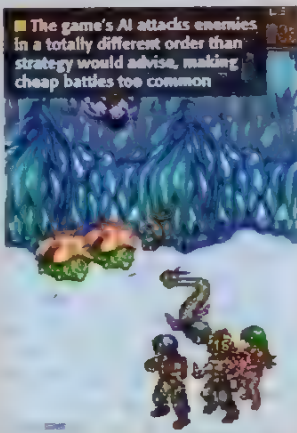
Textbook examples of classic game genres have the double-edged development problem of keeping with their roots, while still offering something interesting and new. I, for one, don't envy their position, but I also can't recommend what has been done with the classic RPG series Lunar. If someone had sat me down and asked for a list of the most hysterically awful gameplay ideas for an RPG, far too many of the most outlandish suggestions I would have are not only in Lunar: Dragon Song, they are unavoidable and integral parts of the experience.

How about the great plan that one can get either experience or items in battle (but never both), meaning that players have little indication of what kind of experience level they should be at for a new zone? Can you imagine if it cost you hit points when you ran? And what if, when you're in a battle, all you can do is attack...and you can't pick your target? Wait! Let's make a secondary character with neither combat power nor magic points—she's not any good at all until level 10! I don't know what they were thinking, but even freaking dragons are missing until a dozen hours in.

Most of the time I was playing (or more aptly,

struggling through) Lunar, I just couldn't figure out why a game would try to do this to fans. I can understand wanting to ensure that the experience is fresh, I can even almost buy the idea that limited strategic options in battle makes the process more user-friendly in a genre beloved almost exclusively by the hardest of the hardcore. What I can't understand, though, is how anyone would think that this was fun.

Dogged on all fronts save graphics and music, which are both done nicely, Lunar: Dragon Song is one of a rare breed. I don't use this example lightly, but think back to Grabbed by the Ghoulies, a similarly good-looking, but unfun and almost unplayable nightmare of gameplay design missteps.—**LISA**



The game's AI attacks enemies in a totally different order than strategy would advise, making cheap battles too common

BOTTOM LINE 4.75

> **Concept:** If it's true that you always hurt the ones you love, then the keepers of Lunar must really, really love their fans

> **Graphics:** Nice big sprites are, by far, the best part of this game

> **Sound:** A rare RPG feature is the option to just play a game's soundtrack. Lunar offers this and the music is good enough to warrant it

> **Playability:** The buttons work as intended, that much can be said with certainty

> **Entertainment:** Please don't make me use the words "fun" and "Lunar: Dragon Song" as correlating terms

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 5.5

So many fundamental flaws plague Dragon Song that it's hard to know where to start. While an attempt to apply several new ideas to the classic RPG formula could have been admirable, the blundering design innovations that pervade this game serve two consistent purposes: to bore or frustrate players. The inability to run without causing health decay, the endless stale fetch quests, and the inflexibility of the battle system each hold a special place in my heart that I hope to lock away forever and never be forced to recall. Honestly, I can't even pick my targets in a fight! I'm so angry that this sucks so hard.—**MILLER**

PSP

The Con

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 18
> **ESRB** M



THE FIX IS IN

I love my PSP, but in all honesty, it hasn't been getting a lot of use lately. I simply haven't been that excited about many of the games recently. But that's all changed, thanks to The Con. Its deceptively simple premise hides a fighting game that is actually much deeper than it looks—the Con adds true innovation to the somewhat stagnant genre, and the result is the most refreshing fighter in a long time, on either handhelds or console.

The goal of The Con is to battle your way through street fights until you earn enough money and respect to compete in a final big money tournament. You earn respect by winning and money by betting on the fights. You can bet on either side, and can even choose when in the fight to place your bet. To earn more money, you can intentionally take hits and "sell" them by hitting the Con button, which makes you look like you're getting your butt whupped. Conversely, you can hold down the Con button to pull your punches so the other guy can win while giving the appearance that you're dishing

it out. But if the crowd doesn't buy it, they will beat you down after the match, which results in injuries that must be treated between fights.

As cool as the fight manipulation system is, it's also the most frustrating part of the game. It's hard to throw a fight successfully, as each hit you take brings down your credibility. You must constantly land shots of your own without beating the other guy to keep the crowd on your side, which is much tougher than it sounds. Sometimes you may even get beaten down after a fight you didn't even cheat in, because you took too much damage. But if you don't want to bother fixing fights, the combat is still fun, thanks to a solid fighting engine and an incredibly deep character customization system (you can create your own combos, train to pump up stats between fights, and tweak appearances). The Con may not be for everyone, but it's definitely the most fun I've had with a fighting game in a long time, and it's also the one title that's managed to bring my PSP out of storage.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Gamble your way through a street fighting competition, and don't feel shy about cheating

> **Graphics:** Reminiscent of Def Jam: Fight for NY. It has a stylized look that works well for the game

> **Sound:** One part of the Con that is forgettable: You may as well fire up the iPod while playing

> **Playability:** The d-pad controls are unique, but work perfectly for the game. The face buttons are mapped just like Tekken

> **Entertainment:** The fights are fun, the betting is tricky, and character creation is deep. The Con isn't perfect, but it is tough to put down

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 7.75

Any game where you beat people up and sucker losers out of their money is cool in my book. While The Con's approach to gameplay is pretty clever, it doesn't give you much of an incentive to keep playing. Clothes are the only thing you can really spend money on, and their effects are purely cosmetic; unlike real life, you don't get any stat bonuses for having the hottest fashions (+5 Hawaiian shirt, baby!) This means that the whole process of conning the crowd only results in you acquiring new outfits slightly faster. The combat engine is unique enough to make the whole process fun, but the payoff is a bit lame.—**JOE**



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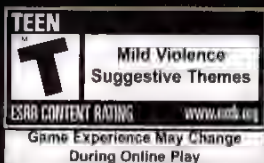
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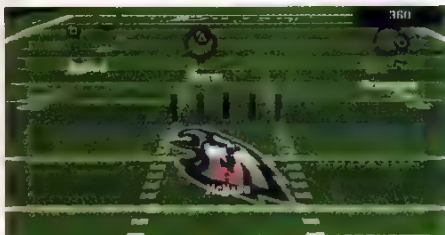
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PSP

Madden NFL 06

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** E

IS THAT A FOOTBALL IN YOUR POCKET, OR ARE YOU JUST HAPPY TO SEE ME?

The fact that you can play franchise games from the PS2 version of Madden on your PSP (and then export them back onto your PS2 memory card) may sound like going from a Cadillac to an El Camino, but the sensation once you're in the driver's seat isn't that dissimilar. Apart from being a nifty feature, this fact only highlights that the handheld is capable of fidelity high enough that you can have confidence in playing your console franchise games on it.

What surprised me most was just how fast it played. Dropping back in the pocket, the edge rush of a defensive end or a blitzing linebacker tearing through my offensive line (no thanks to the AI!) afforded me no more time to scan my receivers than normal. The game will slowdown occasionally and has a pause between plays, but the passing game has a good amount of zip and I didn't feel

cheated by the experience. Although this version doesn't include absolutely everything from the new console version (like vision passing, replays, or any right analog control) it gives you almost all of the pre-snap commands. Best of all, it includes weekly Gameplan plays, new drills, and it finally introduces assistant coaches and a practice squad to Franchise mode — something that you won't find on the consoles. Not yet, anyway. The practice squad lets you store away younger players who don't count against your active 53-man roster. You can even train them using the minigames.

When you think about the exclusive additions and the fact that you can get just as sucked into this version of football as you could on the consoles, then you can see that this is a quality title. —**KATO**



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** This may seem like a straight port, but there are a couple PSP-only goodies that are worth the purchase

> **Graphics:** Some of the fine detail on the uniforms isn't there, but this game looks pretty good

> **Sound:** For what it's worth, the commentary from Madden and Michaels is included

> **Playability:** The analog nub is just a titch wonky, but you won't notice it much

> **Entertainment:** This game is solid enough to warrant being the second Madden you buy this year

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.35

It wouldn't be fair of me to simply say that Madden on the go is just as invigorating as it is at home. Realistically, this is the end of your lives, football fans. Whether you are taking a break at work or are sitting on the can, Madden can now be played anywhere at any time. Although the gameplay moves with the swiftness of Michael Vick, moments of Grady Jackson-like slowdown do occur. Vision passing is absent, but all of the other gameplay complexities have been replicated without alteration. The only thing that EA needs to figure out now is how to deliver Madden while we sleep. —**REINER**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 6.5

Eliminating the lousy brawler aspects and focusing solely on one-on-one fights makes the PSP version of *Marvel Nemesis* better than the console release, but that's faint praise. The basic fighting engine and graphics are decent, but *Marvel Nemesis* is still a below-average game that offers some fleeting entertainment in spite of its flaws. The camera is troublesome, hit detection feels odd, and the characters are completely unbalanced. We all know that some sucker named Johnny Ohm could never beat Iron Man. —**JEREMY**

NINTENDO DS

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3: Mutant Nightmare

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 8 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 4

Flush the toilet — then the turd'll disappear. You might need a plunger or something to break up *Mutant Nightmare* though, since it is dense with the most boring, tedious, and limp gameplay this side of sewer-water. The side-scrolling action is worse than *TMNT* for the NES, and I'd rather get nunchucked in the shells than do another bland touchscreen minigame. This aptly-named mutant nightmare is all kinds of tangle, and only one kind of good: no good. —**JOE**

PSP

Armored Core: Formula Front Special Edition

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** ACETEC > **DEVELOPER** FROM SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE 3.75

By Special Edition, Agetec really means to say "Now with partially broken gameplay!" When this title originally released in Japan, players couldn't control the ravens. The entire game was an AI-based simulation. Manual control is included in this enhanced port, but would appear to be based on the response speed and motor skills of a sloth. It's so stiff and sluggish that you'll often find yourself wondering if the buttons on your PSP are shorting out. So, unless you have three toes, hang upside down from trees, and enjoy eating leaves, might I suggest that you avoid this release. —**REINER**

NINTENDO DS

Megaman Battle Network 5: Double Team

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 8 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 7.75

This is one of the few cases where the DS suffers a little bit from port-itis. Double Team is the DS version of the recent *Mega Man Battle Network 5* on Game Boy Advance, and it's the exact same game. Sure, it has a map now and (gasp!) touch screen menu support, but other than that it's pretty much identical to its GBA cousin. It's still fun in a simplistic sort of way, the battle system is fast-paced and interesting, and the story is as banal as can be. The biggest difference is the much better audio that the DS is capable of — the music has been re-written and sounds great, though the limited voiceover is uniformly terrible. —**ADAM**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Zoo

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SUCCESS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 1 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 7

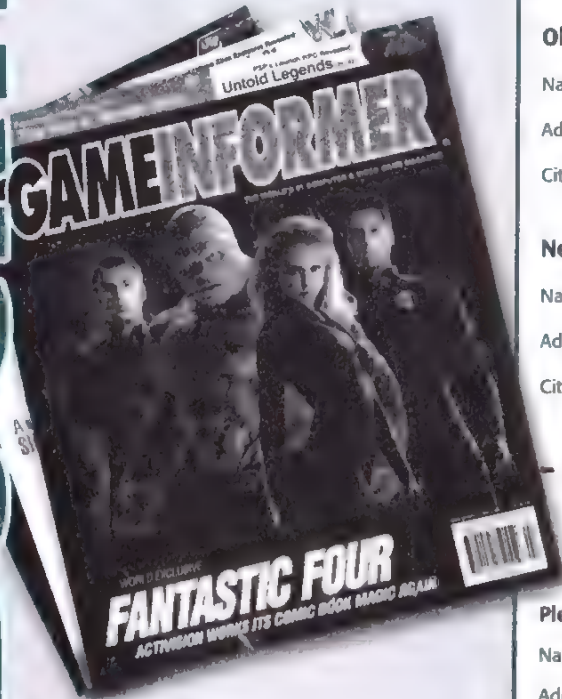
Sony folks, the petting zoo is closed. *Zoo* is exactly the same game as *Zoo Keeper* for the DS, minus the touch controls. Gameplay based on lining up rows of three of the same animal certainly doesn't sound like anything special, and that's because it isn't. This Bejeweled clone brings nothing new to the puzzle game table, but is nonetheless a fairly addictive little title. You can pick it up for a few minutes and have fun with it, but if you lose the cart for a few months you definitely won't miss it. There are far better puzzle games, and there are far worse. *Zoo* is simultaneously fun and forgettable, and to me that's the very definition of an average puzzle game. —**JEREMY**

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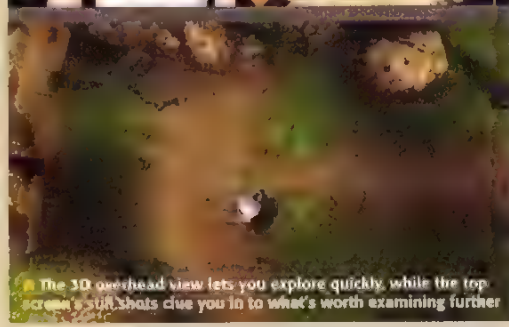


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The path is blocked by all these rocks.



The 3D overhead view lets you explore quickly, while the top screen's still shots clue you in to what's worth examining further.

NINTENDO DS

Trace Memory

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO/CING > **RELEASE** AUGUST 26 > **ESRB** T

BUT WAIT...THERE'S MORE!

What was I thinking after eight hours of gameplay that mainly consists of reading? Mostly that Trace Memory doesn't really end where it should (expect a good 40 minutes of straight text and no puzzles as the conclusion to the title), but also that the DS and this game in particular are giving adventure games a new lease on life. A good, vital, and creative lease at that.

Trace Memory has, hands down, some of the most unique puzzles I've ever seen. "Thinking outside the box" is a crappy dot-com buzz phrase, but this game's kind of innovation is what those heady days were all about. Without spoiling it, the innovative Feel the Magic XY/XX entirely missed out on a few incredible uses for the DS hardware, but Trace Memory makes you think about every single facet of the handheld.

While the mindbenders kept me going, that isn't to say that the game is without issues, and some are pretty serious. Cheap locations for crucial items show up a couple of times, and frustration is a given for those not thinking creatively enough.

I played through to the end, and I think that most who pick Trace Memory up will do the same, but that's with the caveats that there is some serious frustration in the quest. Struggle through, though, and you'll be rewarded with a few moments of pure puzzle transcendence. —LISA

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Discover the mysteries of a young girl's parents and a young dead boy's past

> **Graphics:** A nifty art style bridges the gap between comics, anime, and classical watercolors

> **Sound:** Soundtrack repetition overload. Ever heard of that in a handheld adventure game?

> **Playability:** Stylus controls are easy, but using the d-pad for interaction isn't nearly precise enough

> **Entertainment:** Despite its flaws, the game is compelling both for innovation and storytelling

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.75

When a game has to give you quizzes on the plot to keep you from forgetting it, you know you've booked a first-class ticket to Boreville (sleeping car, please). Nothing excites the kids more than a good pop quiz! Trace Memory's occasionally cool puzzles are often muddled by generally boring exploration periods that are made cumbersome by repetitive and unnecessary menu navigation. Even though this game plays to the DS' capabilities, I hope that second-rate adventure titles like this don't become the standard fare for the system, because Trace Memory proves that being creative at using the system doesn't necessarily make for an entertaining game. —KATO

HANDHELD QUICKIES

DK: King of Swing

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** PAON COMPANY/NINTENDO > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 20 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 7.75



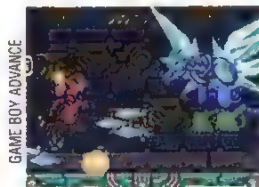
GAME BOY ADVANCE

We all have our problems with Nintendo, but it's impressive the way that, while the rest of the industry is chasing epic gaming experiences, the company continues to innovate with simple, addictive new gameplay formulas on a small scale. King of Swing follows this pattern, using the shoulder buttons to control Kong's arms as you navigate through a series of increasingly complex platform-style levels. Although it takes a bit of getting used to, after an hour or so I was hooked, as I swung from peg to peg, dodging obstacles and figuring out clever action-puzzles. The great single player mode is also fleshed out by some nice multiplayer and minigame modes as well. The only downside is the sometimes-frustrating level of difficulty and obtuse level design. —MATT

Mega Man Zero 4

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 4 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 8



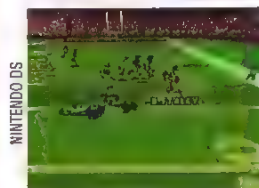
GAME BOY ADVANCE

It's nice to see the GBA still getting some love during the PSP vs. DS showdown. Zero 4 delivers what fans expect out of a Mega Man title — namely, cool boss battles and hectic side-scrolling action — and addresses some of the issues of previous entries in the series. Normal mode will still send you crying for mommy after you die 15 times on the same segment, but the Weather Changer (which lets you effectively set the difficulty of a stage) and Easy mode settings bring the challenge down to a reasonable level. Zero 4 still runs into some problems with overly generous hit detection and not allowing you to see far enough ahead to plan out your moves, but if your GBA hole needs plugging, this is a good choice. —ADAM

Madden NFL 06

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA GAMES > **RELEASE** AUGUST 9 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 5



NINTENDO DS

Uglier than a 400-pound lineman, this game is a total mess from top to bottom. The introduction of Franchise mode does little to alleviate the gameplay pain. The new touch screen controls split your attention between the top screen (where the action is going on) and the touch screen, which runs a real-time Xs and Os diagram of the play and is where you must input your commands. This makes even simple tasks such as throwing the ball or switching players on defense a total mess. Even though touch screen control is optional, the normal gameplay still plays like it's the PlayStation era. Like Joey Hamington, this game is totally worthless and not worth \$40. Do not buy this title. —KATO

Virtua Tennis: World Tour

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 4 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 8.5



PSP

An addictive and incredibly solid game that mixes it up between tournaments and minigames in its World Tour mode, Virtua Tennis for the PSP is not only a great pick-up-and-play title, but one that offers depth through both its structure and its gameplay. The balancing among the shots and playing styles is good and will have you always thinking a few strokes ahead while on the court. If there's one small complaint I have, it's that you can't book your male and female players for training/tourneys simultaneously during the same week. Also, the CPU AI lets out a brain fart every now and again. That aside, this is a fast and furious title that also allows for some exciting multiplayer doubles matches. —KATO

Donkey Kong Country 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (2-PLAYER VIA LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** RARE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 7 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 8.5



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Now I'd hate to say that a robot or a trained monkey could easily replace me, but reviews like this do tend to write themselves. Nintendo has a very lucrative hobby, and it's not selling Beanie Babies on eBay (although that is how I put myself through college). No, its jones is for re-releasing the company's classic 8- and 16-bit era games for the GBA. This is the latest DK Country title to be resurrected for the handset, and like its two predecessors, this is a great port of a great old-school platformer. An excellent purchase if you're looking for a little nostalgia or a first-timer wanting to see what all the fuss is about. Games of this era hold up well even today, and the excellent two-player mode is nice for those of you (all seven!) that still use your GBA Link Cables. —MATT

FIFA Soccer 06

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD-HOC OR 2-PLAYER VIA INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 18 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 7.5



PSP

In some ways, porting this game to the PSP is perhaps easier because the graphical detail needed on the pitch is minimal. With the same first-touch controls as the past two FIFAs, this game also feels similar to the consoles and is just as smooth. As such, it's vastly superior to EA Sports' first effort on the PSP. It's fun to play, even if the managerial options of your season are missing. An option to speed up the pace of play would have been welcome, as would a break from the series' reliance on set animations for the players and better defensive AI, but this game does well to recover the series from its disastrous beginning on the handheld. Expect more next year. —KATO

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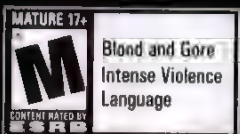
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CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For August 2005 Based On Units Sold

1 MADDEN NFL 06 (PS2)



Behold! The ancient and desiccated sages of Game Informer, locked away in the vault next to Custer's Revenge, have unleashed a startling prediction. Given the recent trends, celestial alignment, and thermal winds, they proclaim that at this time next year, Madden NFL 07 will occupy the #1 spot in the sales charts. So let it be written, so let it be done.

2 MADDEN NFL 06 (XBOX)



In honor of Madden nabbing the top two spots, we made up a song about football set to the classic, somber tune of "Amazing Grace." Feel free to sing along: Hey, Football, you're so fine! You're so fine you blow my mind! Hey Football!

3 NCAA FOOTBALL 06 (PS2)



Hey, that reminds us: Did you know that you can sing the lyrics of "Amazing Grace" to the theme song from Gilligan's Island? It's true! Surprisingly, we discovered this phenomenon one lonely night as we sat in the basement, quietly singing various popular tunes to the theme song from Gilligan's Island. Imagine that!

4 GHOST RECON 2: SUMMIT STRIKE (XBOX)



If any game ever has a final boss that is just a giant mountain, it would be cool if one of the attacks the boss had was called Summit Strike. Yeah, and while we're dreaming, Joe could use some clothes that aren't made from burlap.

5 NINTENDOGS: DACHSHUND & FRIENDS (DS)

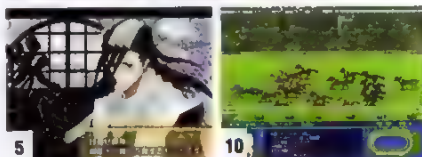


Nothing is more heartwarming than flipping open your DS looking deep into those adoring puppydog eyes. "Please, paste me in the face with a frisbee," they seem to say.

Rank	Title	L Mo	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Madden NFL 06	N/A	PS2	9	08-05	\$49
2	Madden NFL 06	N/A	XBOX	9	08-05	\$49
3	NCAA Football 06	1	PS2	8.5	07-05	\$48
4	Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike	N/A	XBOX	8	08-05	\$30
5	Nintendogs: Dachshund & Friends	N/A	DS	8	08-05	\$31
6	Pokémon Emerald	4	GBA	7.75	04-05	\$35
7	Madden NFL 06	N/A	GC	9	08-05	\$49
8	Star Wars Battlefront	10	PS2	8	09-04	\$20
9	Nintendogs: Labrador Retriever & Friends	N/A	DS	8	08-05	\$31
10	Halo 2: Multiplayer Map Pack	3	XBOX	9.25	07-05	\$20
11	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	17	XBOX	6.75	07-05	\$50
12	Nintendogs: Chihuahua & Friends	N/A	DS	8	08-05	\$31
13	NCAA Football 06	N/A	GBA	N/A	08-05	\$30
14	NCAA Football 06	2	XBOX	8.5	07-05	\$48
15	Darkwatch	N/A	XBOX	8.5	08-05	\$49
16	LEGO Star Wars	8	PS2	7.5	03-05	\$40
17	Burnout 3: Takedown	20	PS2	9.25	09-04	\$20
18	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	N/A	PS2	6.75	07-05	\$49
19	Advance Wars: Dual Strike	N/A	DS	9.25	08-05	\$35
20	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9	PSP	8	06-05	\$49

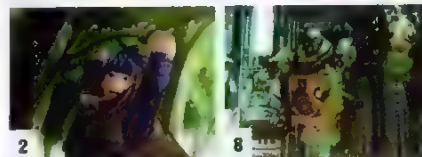
TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Tales of Legendia	PS2
2	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain	DS
3	Gentle Brain Exercises	DS
4	Gundam Seed Destiny: Generation of C.E.	PS2
5	Bleach: Heat the Soul 2	PSP
6	Jump! Super Stars	DS
7	Winning Eleven 9	PS2
8	Naruto: Uzumaki Minden	PS2
9	Beetle King Mushiking: Way of the Greatest Champion	GBA
10	Winning Post 7	PS2



TOP 10 GI

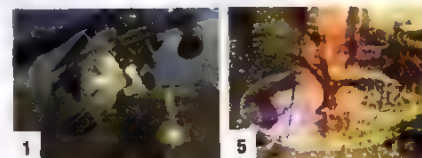
Rank	Title	L Mo	System
1	Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow	N/A	DS
2	Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance	N/A	GC
3	Ratchet: Deadlocked	N/A	PS2
4	Burnout Revenge	2	Multi
5	X-Men Legends 2: Rise of Apocalypse	N/A	Multi
6	Radiata Stories	1	PS2
7	F.E.A.R.	N/A	PC
8	Quake 4	N/A	PC
9	The Warriors	N/A	Multi
10	Shadow of the Colossus	5	PS2



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L Mo	Price
1	Battlefield 2	1	\$48
2	World of Warcraft	2	\$48
3	RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	8	\$30
4	Guild Wars	3	\$49
5	Dungeon Siege 2	N/A	\$50
6	The Sims 2	5	\$49
7	The Sims 2 University	4	\$33
8	The Sims Deluxe	6	\$20
9	Half-Life 2	7	\$48
10	The Sims: Unleashed	9	\$10



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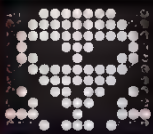
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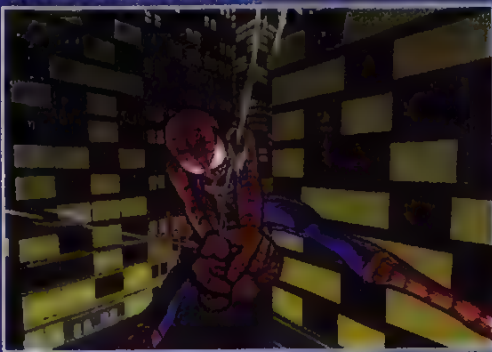
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Ultimate Spider-Man

Tips From Both Sides of the Story

By Lead Designer Brian Reed



Ultimate Spider-Man gives you the chance to be legendary or predatory, playing as either your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man or the dark and twisted monster Venom. Each character offers a very different experience, each with their own challenges, risks, and rewards. Mastery of both Spider-Man and Venom's combat and locomotion will mean mastery of the game. This series of tips is exactly what you need to get the most out of your time as hero or villain.

SPIDER-MAN - SWITCH TARGETS

In the comics, Spider-Man never just runs into a group of thugs and punches on one guy repeatedly, so why should you? Do what Spider-Man does: after landing a hit on one thug, quickly switch targets and hit another thug. Every time you quickly switch targets, Spider-Man does more damage. An added effect of all this moving around is that Spider-Man becomes harder for the bad guys to hit. You can tell if you're doing it right because words like "Good," "Great," and "Amazing" will appear at the top of the screen. The best you can get is an "Ultimate" bonus where most thugs will go down in a single hit!

VENOM - CLOSE AND LONG RANGE COMBAT

Venom's claws are powerful and can put down a group of low-powered enemies in a single swipe, but he also has the ability to shoot tentacles out at his enemies, hitting targets too far away to simply swipe at. Attacking with a tentacle, then following up with a grab is a great way to pull an enemy close to you. Repeatedly attacking with tentacles will clear out large groups of enemies spaced too far apart for claws alone to work.

SPIDER-MAN - SWITCH ATTACKS

Like switching targets, switching between attacks rewards you with more damage per hit. The best part is that the damage bonuses for switching targets and attacks stack! So, if you punch Bad Guy A then kick Bad Guy B, you'll cause far more damage than if you had punched both bad guys. Something to keep in mind about switching attacks: Performing a grab will cause all of your combat bonuses to zero out, but grabs always result in putting Spider-Man high up in the air, where you are safe from attack and able to pick a new target with ease.

VENOM - DON'T HOLD BACK

Unlike Spider-Man, Venom doesn't get damage bonuses for switching targets, but his claws and tentacles do much more damage than any of Spider-Man's punches and kicks. Use that to your advantage. Experiment with each enemy you encounter and figure out if they are weakest against claws or tentacles. Or, maybe a combination is the way to go? Once you've got your enemy figured out, go after them with everything you've got, holding nothing back, hitting them as hard as you can.

SPIDER-MAN - BOUNCING

If Spider-Man has an enemy nearby, don't wait your attack on an enemy, but a nearby wall instead! Punches and kicks aimed at walls near enemies will result in Spider-Man bouncing off of that wall and attacking the enemy! As soon as Spider-Man's attack lands, quickly punch or kick again to get a powerful follow up attack. Wall attacks are key to defeating bosses in one-on-one combat since they do more damage than a regular punch or kick. As an added bonus, you don't even need a wall to accomplish the attack. Spider-Man can bounce off of cars, newsstands, and even lampposts with enough practice!

VENOM - THROWING CARS

Venom is considerably stronger than Spider-Man. Venom also has less respect for other people's property and safety. Use this power and lack of morals to your advantage by grabbing hold of passing cars and throwing them at your enemies! Venom has two styles of throwing: aimed and quick. Simply pressing the grab button once will result in Venom performing a throw that you can aim with the aid of a purple arc showing approximately what the car's trajectory will be. If you're in a hurry, double-tapping the grab button will result in a quick throw, sending the car flying almost as soon as you've grabbed it. The quick throw is great in boss fights when Venom will automatically throw the car at his enemy without need for you to aim.

SPIDER-MAN - WEB SWINGING

Spider-Man can do more than just swing from that web line. If you release from a swing and realize you're not quite going to make it to where you were going, press the web swing and web attack buttons at the same time and Spider-Man will perform a web zip. This is handy for moving straight ahead with a good deal of speed, and it can also help you to scale a tall building quicker than just climbing. But Spider-Man also has the ability to reel up on his web line. This is great for clearing obstacles while swinging, but you can also use it to quickly



gain altitude. While swinging forward, reel up. As you reel up, release the web and watch Spider-Man go flying. You can double jump after a web release like this for even better distance and height.

VENOM - JUMPING

Unlike Spider-Man, Ultimate Venom doesn't have webs to swing on. So he relies on powerful legs to get him where he's going and razor sharp claws to help him stick to walls. Experiment with Venom's locomotion jumps and do your best to learn how to be the airborne beast. It's possible to leap from rooftop to rooftop with ease, getting surprising agility out of such a large creature. Venom's locomotion jump can also be used to scale buildings in a lightning fast manner. If you do find yourself missing your target with Venom's jumps you can whip his tentacles, performing a move much like Spider-Man's web zips.

SPIDER-MAN - BOSS TIPS

These are for just some of the bosses you'll encounter.

- **Rhino:** Once you've figured out how to hurt him (hint: Pay attention to what Spider-Man says at the start of the fight), dodge until the sparks on his back go away, then jump in and do some damage.
- **Green Goblin:** Learn Goblin's fireball pattern and respect it. If you're sloppy, you'll find yourself recovering from damage when your window to hurt the green giant is rapidly closing.
- **Beetle:** Watch how he flies around and keep an eye on your surroundings. Bounce attacks are critical to surviving this fight.
- **The Final Battle:** I don't want to spoil anything, but hitting and running are your best bet for this incredibly tough fight.

VENOM - BOSS TIPS

And now, some tips for the bosses that stand in venom's way!

- **Wolverine:** If you can knock him down long enough, feed on the gang members in the room to give yourself an advantage. Just watch out for Wolverine's own healing power.
- **Electro:** During the fight in Times Square, Electro is able to recharge on the large glowing neon signs. Venom is able to destroy the large glowing neon signs. Now put two and two together.
- **Silver Sable:** While the fight is short, Sable is still a force to be reckoned with. Just throwing cars at her isn't enough. You'll need to go toe to toe with her if you're going to take her out.



Dungeons & Dragons: Dragonshard



Take Your D&D Skills From Table To PC

By Designer **Charley Price** and Assistant Producer **Steven Parker**



KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Each unit in Dragonshard has a given damage type and set of resistances to other damage types. Once you know the types of units your enemy has chosen to make, you can consult the King's Screen in-game to determine exactly what their strengths and weaknesses are and adjust your forces accordingly. As such, reconnaissance is vital, and sending scouts or early harassing parties to determine your opponent's plan of action can often be the key to victory.

CHOOSE WISELY

While Dragonshard allows you to produce any unit right off of the bat, you should be wary of spreading yourself too thin. Most successful strategies tend to focus on a few unit types early on and then diversify as the game progresses. Generally, I will pick a main unit type to serve as the core of my army (such as the Sorcerer) into whom I will focus most of my experience, and two secondary unit types (such as the Barbarian and the Cleric) to add a variety of damage types and abilities to my force. As experience comes rolling in, I first level up each of my units to level 2, unlocking their secondary ability (and thus avoiding the requisite resource cost of constructing another building), and then focus on leveling up my main unit type to level 5, at which point they gain their ultimate devastating ability.

ITEM USE AND COLLABORATION

An intrepid adventurer will come across many strange and powerful artifacts in their journey throughout the forgotten continent of Xen'drik, but if they never leave your backpack, they are useless — so don't be afraid to use them! Using buff items on your Champion is rarely a bad idea, since they tend to be your most survivable unit. However, they are also the most likely target during battle. As such, using damage bonus items on your ranged units or energy bonus items on your healers and spellcasters will often ensure that you will get the most out of an item before the unit falls in battle.

If you are in a team game, don't hesitate to share the wealth! By clicking an item and then ALT-left-clicking on any terrain within line of sight, you can drop the item on the ground. You can use this to delegate tasks, allowing one player to focus on harassing your enemies and monitoring Shardfalls above ground, and another to loot the treasure troves that lie below, thus keeping each player in supply of valuable items and resources.

KNOW EACH UNIT'S POTENTIAL

Be sure to use the King's Screen to see the abilities your units gain as they level up. By setting goals, you can plan an emergent strategy that changes as the game progresses and your units unlock different abilities.

The scoundrels of the Order of the Flame, Rogues, are an irreplaceable part of any dungeon party. They can spot, disarm, and re-arm traps, open treasure chests, and gain a passive cloaking ability as they level up. With so many utilitarian roles, the average player might overlook the combat strengths of this unit. To do so would be to succumb to folly.

COMPLEMENTARY ABILITIES

The true strength of a Captain often comes to its greatest fruition when it is leveraged against the strength of an ally. For example, two Lizardfolk units, the Pteranodon Rider and the Fire Drake, have moderate siege potential individually, but together they are devastating. When the Pteranodon Rider achieves Level 2, it gains an ability called Rotgrubs, which swarm a building, undermining its strengths and allowing units to deal 25% more damage to it for the next 20 seconds. While this is potent on its own, take into account the abilities of the Fire Drake as well. The Fire Drake has a Level 5 ability called Molten Blast. This unleashes a hellish inferno on any enemy structure, dealing 300 damage. Combine Rotgrubs with Molten Blast and you will quickly see your enemy's city walls begin to crumble. Level up the Pteranodon Rider to Level 4 and it gains the Ravenous Rotgrubs ability, boosting their debilitating powers to fifty percent! Even a small group of these Captains can breach a city wall in seconds, opening the path for ground units to pour in and wreak havoc.

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, DISPEL!

While many units wield devastating abilities in battle, many of the more potent effects, such as Feel No Pain, Cheat Death, and Stunning Blow, can be instantly nullified with a simple cast of Dispel Magic. As such, when used at the right time, this basic, level 2 ability that is available to all factions is effectively as powerful as the high-level abilities it is countering.

SHADOW SCRY AND ANIMAL COMPANION

Items allow you to use their effect anywhere that you have line of sight. Using this fact in combination with the Shadow Strider Shadow Scry ability, which grants you Line of Sight on the targeted unit, or the Ranger's Animal Companion, which gives you a rapid creature that you can use to scout, can allow you to direct a barrage of attacks upon your opponent when they least expect it.



First, acquire a number of targetable items, such as the Ring of Fireball, Scroll of Summon Monster, or, if you're especially cruel and fortunate, the Scroll of Finger of Death. While engaged in combat, use Shadow Scry on one of your opponent's support units, and then use Blink to rapidly flee from combat (or simply send your Animal Companion into their camp). Now wait until their support units are clustered together at a moment of weakness, such as in the middle of battle with monsters in the Underworld or camping to regenerate (a damage bonus is granted if you attack an opponent while camping), and then unleash everything you've got. With any luck, they won't know what hit them.

MIND FLAYERS

These deadly creatures use their psionic abilities to stun adversaries, rendering them helpless as they use their tentacles and hidden, toothy maws to bore into the skulls of their opponents, slowly wrenching out their brains for sustenance. Much like with the Gelatinous Cube, micromanagement of your units is key. Damaging a Mind Flayer in the act of draining or healing an ally who is being subjected to their attacks will cause the Mind Flayer to release. Pay close attention to any units that have become entangled by the Mind Flayer's tentacles and focus your fire on that adversary. In addition, a backup relief force with healers and area-of-effect damage dealers will definitely get you one step closer to victory.



BEHOLDER LORD

One of the most terrifying inhabitants of the depths of the Underworld are the massive Eye Tyrants known as Beholder Lords. Not only can they attack opponents from any direction with their eyestalks, but they can also periodically Disintegrate foes with a thought, charm adversaries to aid them in battle, and bite down on foes who get too close with their massive jaws, inflicting heavy damage. Furthermore, their central eye emits an Anti-Magic Cone, removing all enchantments (and curses) from foes directly before them. Although the rewards for defeating this creature are impressive, battle with such an adversary is not to be taken lightly.

With a creature this powerful, the best strategy is to come prepared and to assault it in waves. Level up your Captains by fighting lower level monsters first, as this will give your Captains the abilities that they will need, as well as provide an assortment of low-level items that can aid in the upcoming assault. Once you have made your preparations, a series of staged attacks is key. An initial wave of melee units should swarm in first, taking the brunt of the eye-stalk and biting attacks. If you have a melee Champion, hold them back until the first Disintegration ray fires off to spare them an untimely demise. Casters and ranged attackers should stay at a safe distance, dealing damage, providing healing, and rebuffing units who have come under the affects of the Cone of Anti-Magic. Any melee fighters that have lost a substantial amount of their health should be pulled back for rapid healing before being thrown back into the fray.

GELATINOUS CUBE

At first glance, the infamous Gelatinous Cube is a slow, cumbersome monster, but don't let your guard down, as an unprepared or arrogant party can easily be consumed before they know what hit them. Gelatinous Cubes deal damage to your units by grabbing one of them and pulling them into its acidic form to be digested. The inherent weakness in this fiend is that it can only deal damage to a single Captain at a time. As such, it is often wise to keep your units in the back (Champions, Healers, etc) and lure the Cube out with a less-important unit, such as a summoned monster, that will occupy it while the rest of your forces engage it in battle. Should you wish to free a unit from within its depths, an attack that deals knockback damage or a heavy barrage exceeding 400 damage will free your unit — if they survive that long...

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Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance

Nintendo's Developers Lay Down the Battle Plan



By Tim O'Leary, Associate Localization Producer, Rich Amtower, Associate Localization Producer, and Alan Averill, Senior Writer

SMITING: IT'S NOT JUST FOR FOES ANYMORE

At first glance, Shove (and its powered-up big brother, Smite) can seem like a confusing ability — after all, it does no damage, and pushing, like attacking, ends a unit's turn. So why bother wasting a perfectly good attack opportunity to shove someone around? (Other than for the personal satisfaction of it, of course.) Well, the nice thing about Shove doing no damage is that you can use it on friends and foes alike. If you want to take out a specific enemy, for example, you can shove his buddies out of the way and clear a path straight to him. More importantly, though, you can use Shove to shave a little time off your own advance. Suppose you see something on your first turn that you need to reach in a hurry — either a treasure chest being threatened by a thief or a potential ally who's about to come under attack. If you can't quite reach it in one turn, try using your other units to shove someone a few spaces closer — shove, change units, and repeat — those few spaces might give you the reach you need to close the gap and chat up that ally, swipe that swag, or punish that pirate. We'll get into more shoving strategies later, but this little primer should help unleash your inner bull.

FLOW CONTROL

It may seem obvious, but the key to victory is deciding when and where you fight. The problem, though, is knowing how to make that decision. First off, scan the battlefield and check out your enemies' positions. By moving the cursor over them, you can see their movement and attack range—but you can only check one unit at a time. By pressing the A Button, however, you can lock their attack range on-screen — a red outline of the area that unit can attack on its next turn. The best part is that you can lock multiple enemies' ranges, so that you can see every single threatened and safe space available to you. Once you've locked your ranges, you can move your units without fear of roach and pick the perfect time to strike.

ARE YOU BONUS EXPERIENCED?

If you're a Fire Emblem junkie, you probably know the pain of trying to level up your healers by having them wave their wands for 10 experience over and over and over again. Well, worry no more. There's a new tool in your Fire Emblem arsenal, and its name is Bonus Experience. As you play through missions, you can perform certain actions that will grant Bonus Experience to your entire party (and no, we won't tell you the exact conditions for earning such treats — that's what strategy guides are for). After the battle, you can then distribute Bonus Experience to any character you like, which is an incredibly handy way to level up those characters who don't gain much experience during a battle. (We're looking at you, Mr. I-Don't-Like-To-Use-Weapons-Healer-Guy...) Though your first instinct may be to hoard the Bonus Exp. so you have some left over for emergencies, we suggest spending it as soon as you have it, as it will come to you in fairly sizeable chunks throughout the game. Cram your Bonus Experience down one character's gullet until they grow fat with power, or spread it out judiciously among the entire group. The choice is yours.

KILLING THEM SOFTLY

Characters in Fire Emblem gain experience in many different ways — such as attacking, defending, and healing — but the best way to quickly earn massive amounts of experience is by killing some poor sap on the battlefield. If you keep this in mind when you're trying to level up a weaker character, you can use it to great advantage. Use a powerful unit to attack an enemy and take away most of his health, then move the weaker character in for the killing blow. This is another place where Shove and Smite come in handy, as you can bump the strong unit out of the way to clear a path for your low-level thug. If your powerful unit is a little too powerful and keeps killing the intended victim by accident, equip them with a weak iron weapon so they don't do quite as much damage. Oh, and if your weak character is really weak, check the stats before you attack — you don't want him to be cleaved in two by a counterattack if he swings and misses the first time.

BUILDING THE ULTIMATE WEAPON

One of the great things about Fire Emblem is the different ways you can customize your characters and personalize your party to match your own combat style. Along with tons of weapons, spells, and magic items, the latest installment in the series introduces a whole new way to power up your forces with skills. Skills are equipped items that grant characters unique abilities. For example, Stealth allows characters to move without being detected, while Vantage lets characters attack first all the time. Imagine if you will, a thief who can move about at will and who always gets the drop on opponents. Yeah, it's as fun as it sounds. A note of caution, each character has a limited capacity for the number of skills he or she can use, and some skills are restricted to specific classes. Despite these limitations, skills are amazing and you'll need to master using them if you hope to succeed. Another point of customizable fun is the forge, where you make your own unique weapons and magic items. Choose your weapon type, material, and then adjust its weight, critical hit percentage, speed, etc. to make a weapon that's just right for you. You can even name and color your one-of-a-kind creation. Warning: forged items don't come cheap, so plan your purchases carefully.



TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK

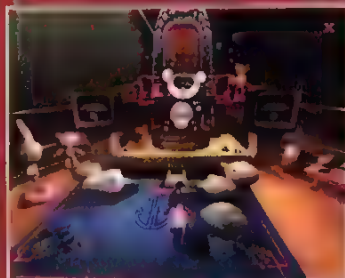
Believe it or not, sometimes the best offense is no offense. By unequipping all of a character's weapons or magic, you effectively nullify the character's ability to attack. Why would you want to do this, you ask? Well, it's really helpful if you're being attacked by someone you don't want to hurt, like a possible new party member or someone being forced to fight against his or her will. Don't worry too much, a character who has no weapons or magic equipped has an increased chance of dodging enemy attacks. One other way to use this strategy is to place an unarmed character with great defensive stats in an area that blocks enemy progress, then use archers and mages to pick off the bad guys from behind their living shield. The unarmed character receives experience points for dodging attacks, and the other characters get much-needed experience points without being put in harm's way.

Mod World

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

CuteXdoom

<http://www.sikofshadows.com/cutexdoom/>



It's not often that the full weirdness of fringe Japanese culture makes its way onto the desktops of western PCs. Sure, we get the occasional Katamari Damacy or Seaman on consoles, but you really have to go looking (and no, we're not going to tell you where) for odd Japanese games on PC. Well, a collection of four programmers out of Australia and Canada have hooked up your inner Japaphophile with this UT 2003 mod, CuteXdoom.



According to the mod's homepage, "CuteXdoom is where nu-wave extremists rubs and consumerable plush icons unwillingly collide." Seriously; we couldn't make this stuff up. Furthermore, "Your mission is to become a member of the toy worshipping yumi-co cult and gain access to the exclusive temple-quarters. To accomplish this, you must collect enough toys to make an offering and please the robotic panda guru."



This is one of those rare occasions where even we have to question the lengths that some people will go to. We don't even necessarily recommend installing this mod; it apparently overwrites some base textures used by UT 2003. It's just that the absurdity of CuteXdoom cannot be borne by our minds alone.

ampedsnowboarding.com

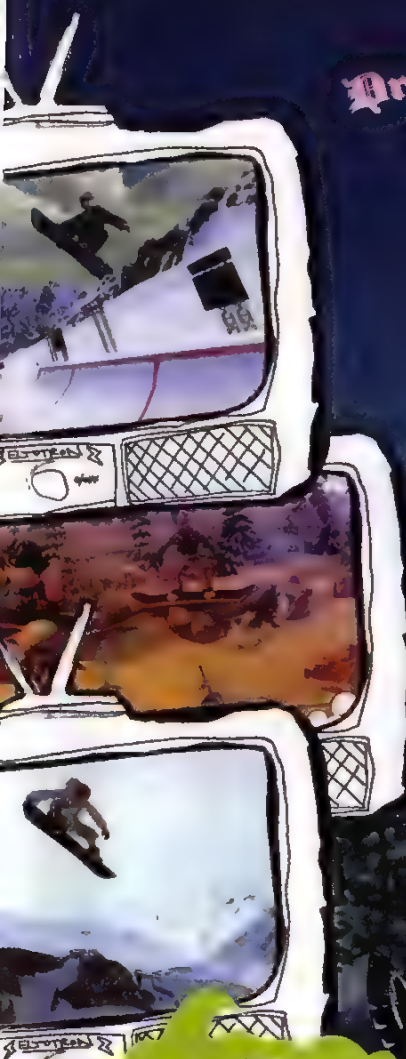
AMPED

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Jeremy Jones
 David Benedek
 Mikey LeBlanc
 Marc Frank Montoya
 Torah Bright
 Ville Tii-Luoma
 Devon Walsh
 Travis Parker
 Greg Bur
 Steve Davis

On Shelves This Season

Kempner Park
 Arvix, France
 Laax, Switzerland
 Valle Nevado, Chile
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 DC Mountain Lab, Utah



XBOX 360

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RP
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SMART BOMB

A lot has been written about the history of video games, the intellectual dissection of the medium's impact on society and pop culture, and insultingly broad-stroked stereotypes of who a gamer is. "We wanted something in the middle – to educate new people and also offer a different way of looking at the personalities of gaming," says Smartbomb co-author Aaron Ruby. He and Heather Chaplin set out in spring of 2001 to chronicle and research the people who make games, who play games, and who care about them. "Respect was a big part of it," says both Chaplin and Ruby. While there is a lot of researched history in the book, the bigger goal was to present the creators, the players, and the events more as portraits than dissertations. In doing so, the hope is that gaming newcomers would understand the passion of the medium, while entrenched veterans could see a different slant on topics they've already considered.

The Quest for Art, Entertainment,
and Big Bucks in the
Videogame Revolution



SMARTBOMB

HEATHER CHAPLIN & AARON RUBY

CHAPTER 3 (Excerpt)

The Legend of the Last Toy Maker

Shigeru Miyamoto was a small child, with bright onyx eyes and a mischievous smile. He grew up in Sonobe, a small, rural village of rice fields and rolling hills off the coast of western Japan, alongside the Runkei Valley, which is famous for its unusual rock formations. His parents' paper and cedar house was tiny, even by Sonobe standards. But Miyamoto didn't notice the smallness. The house had sliding shoji doors that Miyamoto loved to pull open slowly—in case another world had appeared on the other side since he'd last checked.

Miyamoto was born November 16, 1952, at a time when Japan was still recovering from the penalties imposed on her as a former Axis power. Shigeru's father earned a living for the family by teaching English. His mother took care of the house and of Shigeru and his siblings. They had neither a car nor a TV, but sometimes they would take the hourlong train ride to Kyoto, the nearest major city, to see the newest Walt Disney movie, such as Snow White, which Miyamoto loved.

During school hours, when he was supposed to be studying, he instead drew pictures. At night, when he was supposed to be doing homework, he built models of wood and metal. During meal times, when he ought to have been eating, he longed for his comic books, which his parents thought were particularly bad for him. Sometimes his father scolded him for spending so much time on these things

instead of addressing more serious matters. They certainly didn't approve of the flip books he made, but nonetheless Miyamoto thought they were delightful: simply sliding the tip of one's thumb over the edge of the book brought whatever it was he had been drawing to life—creatures jumping, funny men dancing, babies smashing rice bowls on the floor.

It would be a mistake to think that Miyamoto spent all of his time indoors buried in books and drawings, however. Although he did carry drawing pens and paper with him when he left the house, he spent as much time as he possibly could outside. There was a bulldog that belonged to a neighbor that he liked to walk past, to see the dog leap to the edge of its leash. Shigeru would walk as close to the animal as he dared, and although his heart pounded as he did so, he marveled at the dog's curled lip and gnashing teeth, its glittering and narrowed eyes. In the summers he liked to play baseball in the dormant rice fields near his house, climb trees, and fish in the nearby river. Sometimes, when the summer nights grew long, traveling troupes would put on Kabuki plays and long Noh operas for the town.

These festivals made a big impression on Miyamoto—the actors in their billowing black and red costumes, their faces meticulously painted in deep rainbow stripes of color. The starry night sky haunted and enchanted him. At home Miyamoto made puppets and covered them in whatever

scraps of finery he could find, and he dreamt of becoming a puppeteer, painter, or some other kind of entertainer.

One afternoon when he was not in school, young Miyamoto made a discovery that was to leave a lasting impression on him. Strolling at the base of the mountains near Sonobe, Miyamoto happened on a cave. It was dark inside and full of echoes, but Miyamoto longed to go inside. He imagined what he might find there—magical creatures, strange crystalline worlds, perhaps a universe governed by rules entirely different from our own. Though he was old enough to know that little boys should not go throwing themselves into unexplored caves, he was just young enough to contemplate doing so anyway. Nearly paralyzed with excitement, hovering on the edge of action, the young Miyamoto drew a breath and then raced home as fast as he could. In bed, the loudest thing he could hear was his own heart pumping away.

The next day Shigeru built a lantern out of some brown paper and headed back to the foot of the mountains. This time he entered the cave, lowering himself in slowly, trembling a bit at first. He found that what lay before him was not a single cave but a labyrinthine network of caves. He was scared, of course—caves are dark, closed-up places—and he had no idea who or what he might encounter around the next corner.

Shigeru ended up spending much of that summer in

those caves. He declared one corner the lair of a monster, and another room the summer palace of a creature king. He poked and pressed auspicious-looking crevices in cave walls in search of secret passages, and as he explored, his imagination constructed an elaborate alternate world where there was only granite and limestone.

When his parents decided to move to Kyoto, Shigeru found things in the city that were delightful, too. Instead of a neighbor with a bulldog, now he had a neighbor with an Akita, a breed of dog that had once guarded royal families, and this thrilled Miyamoto. At his new school, he started a cartoon club and helped put on a show at the end of each school year. He joined a secret society made up of other boys who would meet in people's attics, exchanging code words and foraging for treasure.



■ Authors Aaron Ruby and Heather Chaplin

When it came time for Shigeru to go to college, he chose the Kanazawa Munci College of Industrial Arts and Crafts in Kyoto. But, just as when he was younger, school was not the primary thing on his mind. Shigeru taught himself to play the guitar and the banjo and put together a duo that played American bluegrass music at local coffeehouses. He wore his hair long, letting it fall backward over his collar. It was quite a statement in 1970s Japan. There, unlike in the United States, long hair was considered neither romantic nor bohemian, just messy. The fact that it took Miyamoto five years to finish college only encouraged the opinions of some of his peers that he was simply a bum. Miyamoto himself didn't know what he wanted to do as a grown-up. The idea of a lifetime devoted to corporate drudgery terrified him.

One day in 1977, the year British and American kids discovered the Ramones and the Sex Pistols, Miyamoto remembered that when his father was young he had been friends with a boy who now ran one of Kyoto's biggest businesses, a company called Nintendo. The company was founded in 1889 by the boy's great-grandfather, a craftsman named Fusajiro Yamauchi. Yamauchi created beautiful hanafuda, or "flower cards," out of a paste he initially prepared from the bark of mulberry trees in his backyard. Japanese families bought them for their elegance and used them to play simple matching games. The yakuza used them in more complicated bridgelike games in their gambling parlors. The elder craftsman Yamauchi-san became so wealthy manufacturing his hanafuda that he eventually bought a castle that had formerly belonged to the fifteenth-century emperor of Japan. In the ninety years since Yamauchi-san had started the company, Nintendo had become quite an institution around Kyoto.

Shigeru's great idea of 1977 was that his father get him an interview with Hiroshi Yamauchi, the elder Yamauchi's great-grandson, with whom Miyamoto's own father had grown up, and who was now running the business. Under the reign of Hiroshi Yamauchi, Nintendo had become a powerhouse of toys. Mr. Yamauchi was a man who very much wanted to leave his mark. He wanted to dominate an industry.

Mr. Yamauchi had turned to toys after trying taxi services, instant rice, and rent-by-the-hour love hotels (of which he

was said to be his own best customer). He'd arranged for Nintendo to become the distributor of Disney character cards in Japan, and he brought together a team of toy engineers who have often been described as samurai-like in their fierce dedication to their work and their leader.

Miyamoto's father agreed to approach Mr. Yamauchi about Shigeru. By this time, Mr. Yamauchi knew all about things like microprocessors and what they were doing for elec-

tronic games in the United States. He'd even become the Japanese licensee of a machine called the Magnavox Odyssey. Yamauchi-san had begun to suspect the whole notion of toys was changing. He watched with great interest when Space Invaders caused a shortage of hundred-yen coins in Tokyo. And when the city resorted to passing ordinances to keep children out of arcades during school hours, he

became convinced that a shift in the business was inevitable. Yamauchi had his engineers make him a game machine of his own, called the Color TV 6. It sold rather well, but not well enough for Yamauchi-san. Not well enough for Nintendo.

So when Miyamoto's father approached his childhood friend about a job for Shigeru, Yamauchi simply replied, "We need engineers, not painters."

Nevertheless, as a favor to his friend, Yamauchi agreed to meet with Shigeru. Shigeru arrived for his interview with a bag full of toys he'd designed, child-size wooden coat hangers painted bright colors to look like elephants and chickens. He'd even designed a special way of snapping them to the wall with little hooks he carved out of wood.

It's not clear why Yamauchi-san decided to hire the son of

his childhood friend as Nintendo's first staff artist. Maybe he saw a glimpse of a future that would require Shigeru's offbeat brand of enthusiastic creativity. Perhaps it was merely a gesture of loyalty to his friend, Shigeru's father. Nevertheless, when Mr. Yamauchi offered Miyamoto a job at Nintendo, all Shigeru could do was smile. It was a smile that would come to be compared to the cat that has just swallowed the canary—a wide, twinkling smile that would become synonymous with its owner. For his part, Yamauchi-san simply blinked back at Miyamoto from behind his yellow-tinted glasses. Little did he know he had just made one of the greatest hires of all time.

Shigeru worked for almost three years producing art for the sides of arcade game machines and other novelties, until one day in 1980 Yamauchi-san called him into his office. Mr. Yamauchi's engineers had

made him an arcade game called Radarscope, but the game had not sold nearly as well as Mr. Yamauchi demanded. He was especially peeved because the game was not selling in the United States, a market he was determined to crack. He called in Shigeru Miyamoto because he had no one else to spare.

From across a long expanse of mahogany, Yamauchi-san informed the young Miyamoto that he was to resuscitate the game. Shigeru was ecstatic. He loved arcade games, and he could not keep from bursting out with his own humble opinions on the subject, even against this most formidable



■ Shigeru Miyamoto

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(Continued on page 196)

of bosses. Shigeru told Yamauchi that videogames had not yet learned from their media cousin, the cinema, how to create memorable characters or how to produce artistically polished products. He said they relied too much on violence instead of drawing from the classic literary themes of good and evil, honor and disgrace, beauty and horror. He brought up Shakespeare; he brought up the Bible; he brought up King Kong. Mr. Yamauchi listened to him in silence and then told him to get busy turning Radarscope into something that would sell.

As Miyamoto got to work on Radarscope, he couldn't stop thinking that, with the exception of Pac-Man, which had been a surprise hit for Namco earlier that year, videogames were painfully unimaginative. He had a vision of a game that would



be delightful to play rather than nerve-racking, with characters that could leap around the screen, like in the flipbooks of his youth. He wanted to make people smile and feel like children again while they played—inquisitive, experimental, capable of being captured by the whimsy of a moment.

The game Shigeru ultimately made for Yamauchi-san had nothing to do with the designs he'd been handed for Radarscope. Miyamoto's game featured a protagonist named Jumpman, a mustachioed carpenter who wore bright red overalls and a bright red cap to match. The garish red outfit was not simply the product of whimsy, it was the result of a trick Miyamoto had learned from Nintendo engineers: they'd shown him how bright colors help characters stand out best against the black background of the video monitor. Miyamoto very much wanted Jumpman to stand out so that the player could follow his movements easily during the game. After all, Miyamoto hadn't named his carpenter Jumpman for nothing.

Of course, Jumpman was not just any old carpenter gifted with a vertical leap equal to his own height. He was a carpenter on a mission. Jumpman's quest was to rescue his lovely girlfriend from the clutches of Jumpman's own pet gorilla, who had stolen her away and now stood gloating atop a mountain of metal girders. The challenge for the player would be to race Jumpman up the steel switchbacks while avoiding barrels and other obstacles thrown at him by the errant simian.

To name the game, Shigeru consulted the office copy of an English/Japanese dictionary. Along with the company's export manager, Shigeru selected the name "Kong," which was designed to evoke the runaway gorilla. Next Miyamoto searched for a word to describe the gorilla. Nearly frustrated, he finally hit upon "donkey," which Miyamoto thought would accurately describe the ape's stubbornness and stupidity.

When Nintendo's American sales force was introduced to Donkey Kong, they thought Yamauchi-san had lost his mind. They thought the title was stupid and, worse, hated the way the game played. Even the music, which Shigeru had composed himself on a synthesizer hooked up to his computer, was scorned. "Where are the aliens, the ballistic missiles, the nefarious laser guns from outer space?" the salesmen complained.

Donkey Kong was unlike anything that had come before. The only arcade game that had even come close to the surreal dilemma of Jumpman was Pac-Man. The very first character ever featured in a videogame, Pac-Man had been inspired by the image of a pizza pie with a slice missing. Sure,

Pac-Man had been monstrously successful and had even become something of a cultural phenomenon in the United States, but clearly that was a novelty. Donkey Kong's skeptics explained. Donkey Kong had more in common with a Bugs Bunny cartoon than an apocalyptic science-fiction saga, and that made them nervous. Given the choice of preventing Armageddon as a starship commander or playing a pudgy little man with a black mustache and overalls, who would ever choose Jumpman?

Now, it should be noted that Mr. Yamauchi has always contended that he has never played a videogame for fun in his entire life. He claims no interest in them other than as a commodity. Yet the decision of what games went to market always rested solely with him. Yamauchi is known far and wide for never having let anyone talk him into or out of releasing a product. And so it was with Donkey Kong. Ridiculous or not, Yamauchi-san decreed that Donkey Kong would be the game Nintendo would ship to America. And ridiculous or not, Donkey Kong, released in 1981, became Nintendo's first big arcade hit.

Had Miyamoto never made another game, he would still be remembered today as a genius of game design. But it was only after making Donkey Kong Jr., the sequel to his debut smash, that Shigeru began the work that would immortalize him as the Homer of videogame design.

Miyamoto's Super Mario Bros., his first console game, was not complicated, but it certainly was epic. And like most classic toys, the game was based around a handful of small elements joined with an elegance that allowed the sum to far exceed the components. Jumpman would again be the star of the show, but Miyamoto had reworked him into a plumber rather than a carpenter and rechristened him Mario. In addition, he gave Mario a brother, Luigi, who sported bright green in contrast to Mario's red, and was tall and thin instead of short and dumpy.

Miyamoto dropped both of them into an imaginary world rife with gigantic pipes, underground cisterns, caverns, and sewers. The game was again driven by the need to save a kidnapped girl, but this time it was a princess. Miyamoto then populated his world with strange reptilian creatures with funny names like Sidesteppers and Shellcreepers. There were gold coins and magic mushrooms to collect, hidden areas to explore, and each stage ended with a battle against a "boss," who had to be defeated before the player could continue Mario's quest. Like an epic poem, Super Mario Bros. was quite long, with many, many stages, and though simple to learn, the game was difficult to master.

Mr. Yamauchi bundled one copy of Super Mario Bros. with every one of his samurai engineers' new game machines, which they called the Family Entertainment System. In Japan, it was common for families to sit down and play games together; Mr. Yamauchi saw Mario and the Famicom system as the modern-day version of the hanafuda cards that had made his great-grandfather rich one hundred years earlier.

What Mr. Yamauchi didn't realize as he prepared for the release of his wonderful new toy was that the videogame industry had begun to fear for its very existence. Soon word flew to Kyoto that videogame companies in the United States were folding like houses of cards, and analysts were beginning to wonder whether the games might just go the way of the hula hoop and the Pet Rock. Yamauchi-san waved away the foreboding news of the "Great Videogame Crash of 1983" like an emperor dismissing a troublesome dignitary. Nintendo went ahead and released the Famicom. ■ ■ ■

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GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Alex Green



XENOGEAR

> **FORMAT** PSONE
> **PUBLISHER** SQUARESOFT

For a long period of time I believed Chrono Trigger to be the best video game ever on the face of this earth. But a friend of mine had been going on and on about some game called Xenogears. His endless rambling on the game forced me to pop it into my PSone and give it a try. I was a skeptic when I started playing, but when the first anime sequence rolled along, the only thing going through my head was, "Woah."

The first thing you notice that is different in the game is graphics. While Final Fantasy VII has the spiffy graphics, Xenogears has the good old 2D that we all love. The graphics really don't hurt the game in any way, for those of us who are fans of games from the Super Nintendo era, it puts us right at home. The only things that aren't 2D are the gears, which are the modern weapons of war in the game.

The next thing that really sticks out is the combat. It is also different than your usual RPG. Instead of having to choose to attack or use an ability, you are able to choose from a set of attacks: a weak one, a medium one, and a strong one. Depending on the order you do these, you can use a special combo. This helps keep the combat new and exciting – you want to learn more so you actually want to get into a fight, not avoid it. To top it all off, the attacks even look cool, so battles never really drag on or get boring. That is just the combat when you are out of the gear. While in the gear you have to worry about your fuel, as each attack takes up a certain amount.

This puts a little bit of strategy into the fights. Combat in Xenogears never gets old, which is rare for RPGs.



I saved the best part of the game for last, and that part would have to be the story. The game is pretty lengthy, but you never really realize that when you are playing it. The story is what really keeps you going. You always have questions in your mind that need answering, and once they are answered, more questions arise. Plot twists are in abundance. Things leave you astonished because you never saw it coming, and that is what makes the game so great. You never know what is next, and can't stop playing until you have figured out what is. It's like reading a great novel: You can't put the controller down, and it really makes you think about what is going on. You get the better of two worlds in this game. One being great gameplay that would do well without a story, and the second being a great novel that could do well without the gameplay. The whole game just doesn't rely on one aspect; it's all good.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

Presented the week before Thanksgiving (November 15-19) in 1996, the CBS morning show *The Early Show* announced the results of a unique toy test. In an arcade set up at the Pacific Science Center in Seattle, Washington, more than 3,000 participants rated the 57 games available for play. Super Mario 64 for the Nintendo 64 took



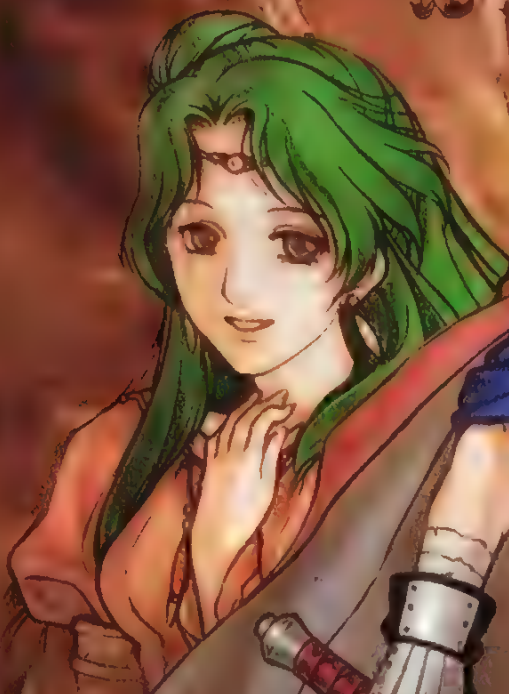
Square Soft's Tobal No. 1

top honors, but Sony's PlayStation console accounted for six of the top 10 games. Crash Bandicoot, Tekken 2, Project: Horned Owl, Star Gladiator, Tobal No. 1, and Twisted Metal 2 were the PSone winners.

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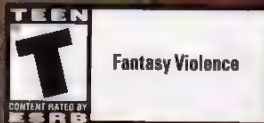
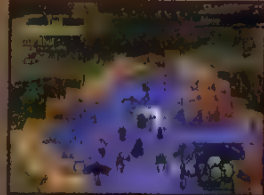
FIRE EMBLEM

PATH OF RADIANCE



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IN A LAND OF MAN AND BEAST, YOUR SMALL BAND OF MERCENARIES MUST NOW SAVE THE WORLD FROM A REAWAKENING EVIL FORCE. YOU'LL MAKE YOUR FIGHT ON THE 3D BATTLEFIELDS OF TELLIVUS, WHERE STRATEGY IS ESSENTIAL AND DEATH IS FINAL. SO SHARPEN YOUR AXE. DRAW YOUR SWORD. IT'S TIME TO IGNITE THE FLAMES OF WAR.





DREAMCAST

SEAMAN

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER VIVARIUM > RELEASE 2000

Ugly as sin, but charming like a surly southern debutante, Seaman is one of the first super-weird Japanese games that many less hardcore Americans played. Working from egg to whatever it is that he becomes is laid out as a quick daily ritual. In fact, if you play for 10 minutes at a time, turn off the Dreamcast and move the clock forward, you can get through the little jerk's whole lifecycle in just one long sitting. This relatively short playtime and iffy voice recognition are the biggest areas where Seaman shows his years. While the environment is seriously bland, the creature himself is serviceably lifelike and his daily evolution is interesting enough to revisit. Nintendogs might be the first time that this brand of voice recognition has really worked as intended, but Seaman is a surreal adventure with a certain brand of humor that is rarely achieved today.

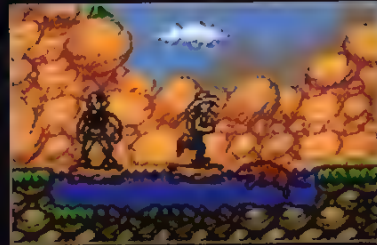
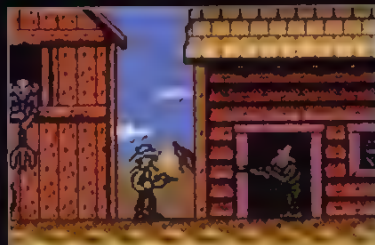


GAME BOY COLOR

LUCKY LUKE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER INFOGRAMES ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER INFOGRAMES NORTH AMERICA > RELEASE 1999

Remember the wacky adventures of Lucky Luke? No? Good. Based on a European comic book character, this cowboy loser actually had games on several systems, none of which were very good. In this side-scrolling platformer for Game Boy Color, players must take on such amazing tasks as jumping over tumbleweeds, punching sleepy Mexicans until their pants fall down, and collecting bullets and stars. Some of the side-scrolling stages manage to produce a tiny iota of enjoyment from the platforming parts, but the "duck-and-punch-groin" combat sucks all the enjoyment out of these stages. These levels are broken up with track-based stagecoach and horseback stages, but these still revolve primarily around jumping over things. Dodging vultures and hopping over signs simply doesn't generate any thrills. Lucky Luke isn't a broken game, just one without a single scrap of creativity or ingenuity. If you've played this by-the-numbers platformer, consider yourself very unlucky indeed.



PLAYSTATION

VALKYRIE PROFILE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ENIX > DEVELOPER TRI-ACE > RELEASE 2000

There's nothing quite like smokin' hot Norse women in action — but this isn't about Jeremy's questionable DVD collection; it's about a rare gem among the sea of PSone RPGs called Valkyrie Profile. From the creators of the Star Ocean series and last month's Radiata Stories, this unique Tri-Ace title is steeped in the legends of Norse mythology. As the goddess Lenneth Valkyrie, players scour the earth to harvest the souls of great warriors about to fall in battle so that they may be used as soldiers in a looming celestial war. Dungeons are explored through 2D gameplay mechanics that resemble Mega Man or Castlevania more than a standard RPG, though the battles are fast-paced with a focus on combining multiple strikes to trigger damaging special attacks. Unfortunately, this fusion doesn't work perfectly, and it makes for a lot of aimless exploration and leveling up without much of a plot to hold the adventure together. If you stick with it, you'll have the chance to see one of three endings and be treated to more Nordic fantasy than Jeremy on his birthday.



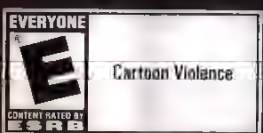
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October 2005



PlayStation 2



XBOX LIVE



MIDWAY

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VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

With platforming veterans **Jak** and **Ratchet** each starring in games that stray from their familiar territory, we couldn't help but wonder what other franchises will soon head in shocking new directions. The answers lie in our grueling trivia challenge. The higher you score, the more appalling and stupid the departures become.

1 Not only has the GameCube seen fewer titles than the other consoles, a large chunk of its scheduled games were cancelled. Which of the following games is the only one to actually be released on the system?

- A. RTX Red Rock
- B. Driv3r
- C. Bad Boys: Miami Takedown
- D. Legends of Wrestling: Showdown

2 The Adventures of Willy Beamish stars a young boy who dreams of entering a video game championship. What is Willy's console of choice?

- A. Der Kommissar 64
- B. Gentendo
- C. Segasm
- D. Nintari



3 The Nazi soldiers in *Wolfenstein* may have been evil, but they weren't liars. When you pumped them full of bullets, what were their dying words?

- A. Es ist fertig! (It is finished!)
- B. Ich bin tot! (I am dead!)
- C. Mein Leben! (My Life!)
- D. Ich möchte ein Luftkissenfahrzeug mit Käse! (I would like a hovercraft with cheese!)

4 We know of two people who have played *Dead Man's Hand* – **Jeremy** and **Archimedes** “I'm not Jeremy” **McFakename**. By what handle is the main character of this western shooter known?

- A. Red
- B. Buford “Mad Dog” Tannen
- C. Jesse James
- D. El Tejón

5 These days, **Electronic Arts** is mainly associated with big-budget, high profile games that appeal to a broad audience and usually sell well, but that was not always the case. Which of the following digital turds was NOT published by EA?

- A. Psychic Detective
- B. Normy's Beach Babe-O-Rama
- C. Sports Car GT
- D. EA published all this junk, yo!



6 Time for your daily dose of **Vitamin Ninja**. Three of the following ninja abilities can be learned in *Wrath of the Black Manta*, but one is from *Ninja Gaiden*. Can you spot the one, grasshopper?

- A. Art of the Spider
- B. Art of the Inferno
- C. Art of the Fire Bomb
- D. Art of Invisibility



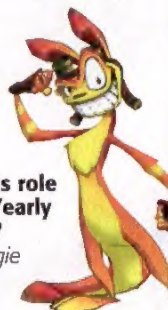
7 What is the “**Fifth Freedom**” – which **Splinter Cell** agents like **Sam Fisher** are employed to protect?

- A. The freedom to protect the dominance of the United States military

- B. The freedom to influence the course of world events
- C. The freedom to do whatever is needed to protect the security of the United States
- D. The freedom to let American tourists act like jerks in foreign countries

8 **Max Casella**, who voices everyone's favorite orange furry thing **Daxter**, is best known for his role as what late '80s/early '90s TV character?

- A. Winnie on *Doogie Howser, M.D.*
- B. Lowell Mather on *Wings*
- C. Herman on *Herman's Head*
- D. Kirk on *Dear John*



9 Which of the following third-string **X-Men** characters offered **Activision** a big enough bribe to get included as a playable character in *X-Men Legends*?

- A. Maggot
- B. Psylocke
- C. Multiple Man
- D. Shatterstar

10 Nothing says “I'm awesome” like the ol' soup-strainer. Which of the following video game characters is NOT cool enough to have a mustache?

- A. Mike Haggar (*Final Fight*)
- B. Jimmy Lee (*Double Dragon*)
- C. Jinborov Kamovski (*Kamov*)
- D. Soda Popinski (*Punch-Out*)



BREAKDOWN

15% of American DS owners bought *Nintendogs* in its first week on sale.

9,072 Xbox 360s will be given away during the Microsoft/Mountain Dew “Every 10 Minutes” joint promotion.

25.3% of the \$2.6 million being spent to train employees at EA's Montreal studio will be paid for by the government of Quebec.

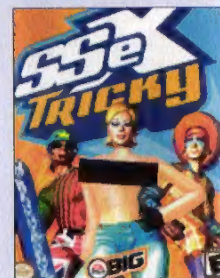
150 copies of issue 150 were printed on solid gold paper. Andy has them all. Jerk.

11% of *Game Informer* editors will be *Rainbow Brite* for Halloween. It's Miller.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



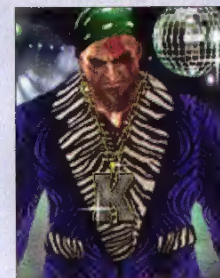
0-1
Crash Budgetcoot



2-3
SSeX Tricky



4-5
Midnight Club:
LAW Abiding Edition



6-7
Pimp of War



8-9
Big Top Splinter Cell



10
Metroid Prime Pinball
(wait a minute...)



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NO TIME FOR SECOND CHANCES

22

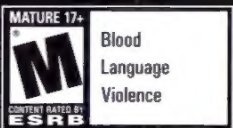
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PlayStation 2

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