PRINCE OF PERSIA
An Exclusive First Look At The Brand New Saga

RESIDENT EVIL 5
Never-Before-Seen Screens

GAMEINFORMER®

THE WORLD'S #1 COMPUTER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

GUITAR HERO

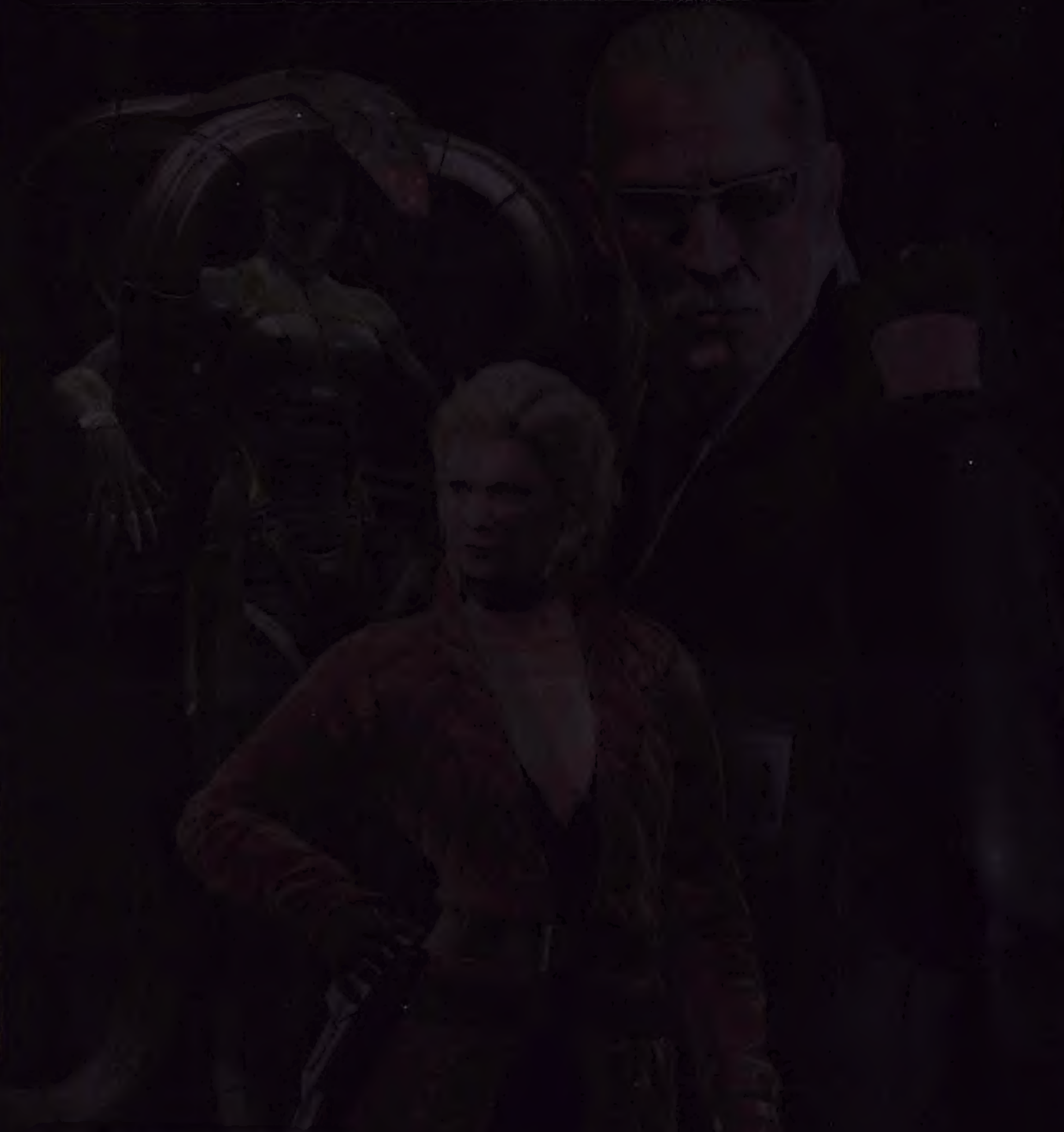
WORLD EXCLUSIVE

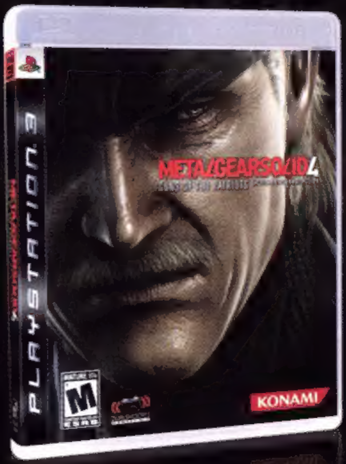
GUITAR HERO 4

DRUMS • VOCALS • **CREATE** YOUR OWN **SONGS** •
HOW **NEVERSOFT** IS **CHANGING** MUSIC
GAMES **FOREVER** PG. 48

www.gameinformer.com ISSUE 182
US $5.99 | EUR €5.99 | UK £3.99
06
7 20150 85095 8
JUNE 2008

In His Final Battle...




METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
PLAYSTATION 3
KONAMI

Available
6.12.08

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Crude Humor
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB

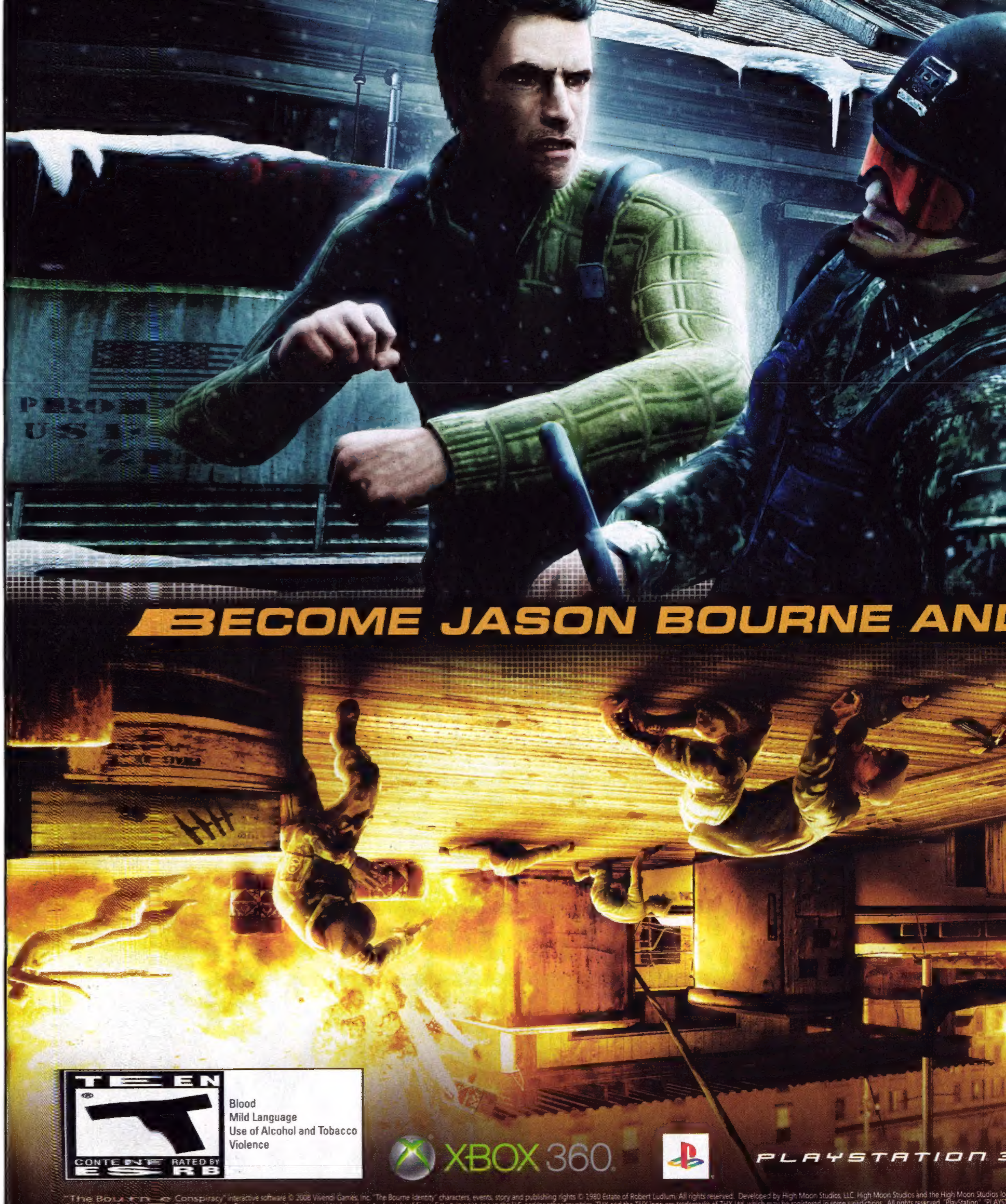
A Hero Must Stand Alone
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

OMING EXCLUSIVELY ON THE PLAYSTATION® 3
computer entertainment system

AYSTATION 3

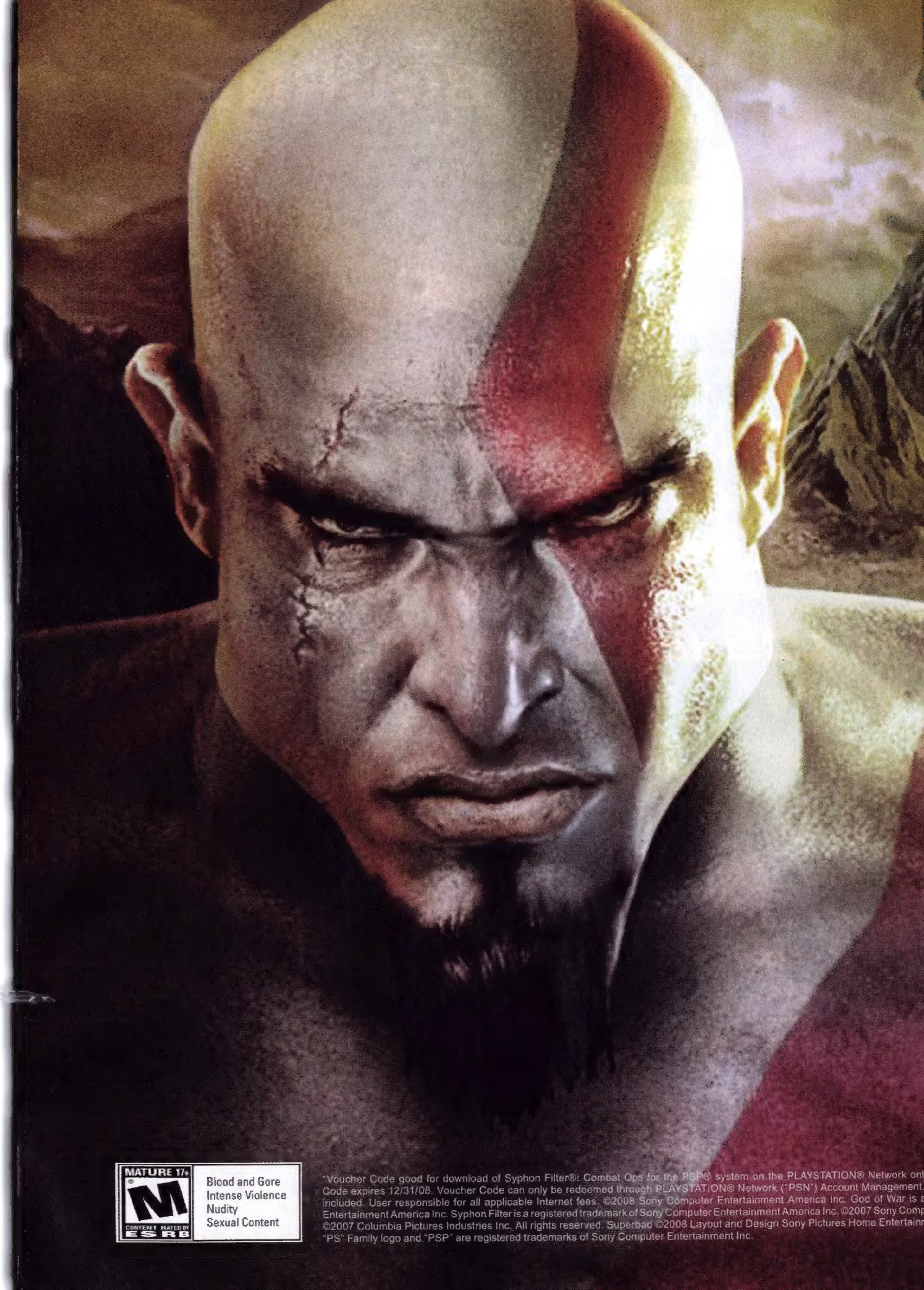
KONAMI
www.konami.com

Konami Digital Entertainment Co., Ltd. "METAL GEAR" and "METAL GEAR SOLID" and "GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS" are trademarks or registered trademarks of Konami Digital Entertainment Co., Ltd. Published by Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc. KONAMI s a registered trademark of KONAMI CORPORATION. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The rating icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.


BECOME JASON BOURNE AN
TEEN
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Blood
Mild Language
Use of Alcohol and Tobacco
Violence
XBOX 360.
PLAYSTATION 3

"The Bourne Conspiracy" interactive software © 2008 Vivendi Games, Inc. "The Bourne Identity" characters, events, story and publishing rights © 1980 Estate of Robert Ludlum. All rights reserved. Developed by High Moon Studios, LLC. High Moon Studios and the High Moon Studios lo
Studios, LLC. Sierra and the Sierra logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Sierra Entertainment, Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. THX and the THX logo are trademarks of THX Ltd. which may be registered in some jurisdictions. All rights reserved. "PlayStation", "PLAYS
trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft.

ROBERT LUDLUM'S
THE BOURNE CONSPIRACY
DOWNLOAD THE DEMO NOW!
PROPERTY OF US EMBASSY ZURICH
TURN INTO THE PERFECT WE
WWW.BOURNETHEGAME.COM



MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Nudity
Sexual Content

*Voucher Code good for download of Syphon Filter®: Combat Ops for the PSP® system on the PLAYSTATION® Network onl
Code expires 12/31/08. Voucher Code can only be redeemed through PLAYSTATION® Network ("PSN") Account Management.
included. User responsible for all applicable Internet fees. ©2008 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. God of War is a
Entertainment America Inc. Syphon Filter is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ©2007 Sony Comp
©2007 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. All rights reserved. Superbad ©2008 Layout and Design Sony Pictures Home Entertainn
"PS" Family logo and "PSP" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

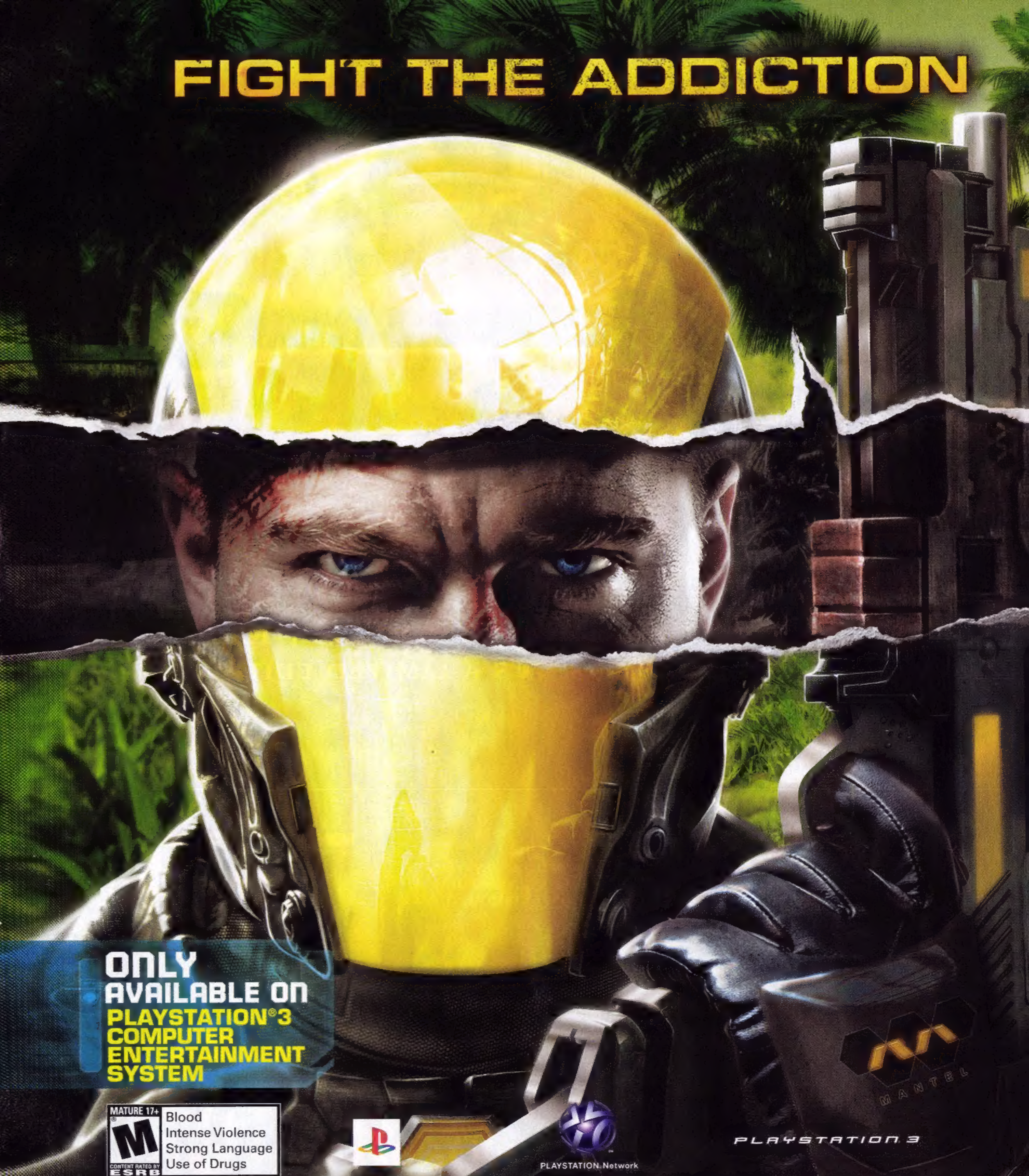
FORGED IN THE DEPTHS OF HADES.
SO YES, IT'S A LIMITED EDITION.

**THE DEEP RED PSP® SYSTEM.
AVAILABLE ONLY IN THE
GOD OF WAR® ENTERTAINMENT PACK.**

Includes the exclusive deep red PSP® (PlayStation®Portable) system, the God of War®: Chains of Olympus game, Superbad UMD,™ and a PLAYSTATION® Network voucher for Syphon Filter®: Combat Ops.* Available June 3rd.

PlayStation Portable

GOD OF WAR
CHAINS OF OLYMPUS


FIGHT THE ADDICTION
ONLY AVAILABLE ON
PLAYSTATION®3 COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
MANTEL
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Use of Drugs
PLAYSTATION Network
PLAYSTATION 3

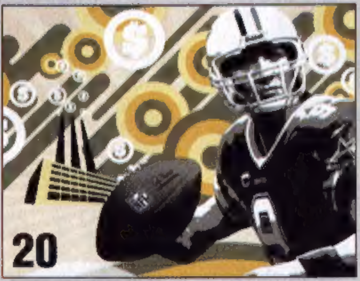
© 2008 Ubisoft Entertainment and Free Radical Design Limited. All Rights Reserved. Haze is a trademark of Ubisoft Entertainment and Free Radical Design. Free Radical Design and its associated logo are trademarks of Free Radical Design Limited. Ubisoft, Ubi.com, and the Ubisoft logo are registered trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the U.S. and/or other countries. Developed by Free Radical Design Limited. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Online access requires broadband Internet service and a wireless access point or LAN. Certain limitations apply to Wi-Fi connectivity. User is responsible for Internet service fees.

EXPOSE THE TRUTH
HAZE
EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF THE DRUG NECTAR WHEN YOU PLAY AS A HIGH-TECH MANTEL TROOPER.
PLAY THE ENTIRE CAMPAIGN IN FOUR-PLAYER CO-OP MODE.
AS A CUNNING REBEL, USE WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED AS A MANTEL TROOPER TO FIGHT BACK.
AVAILABLE IN STORES ON MAY 22
FREE RADICAL
UBISOFT

CONTENTS

The "ZOMG GTA" Issue

features



20

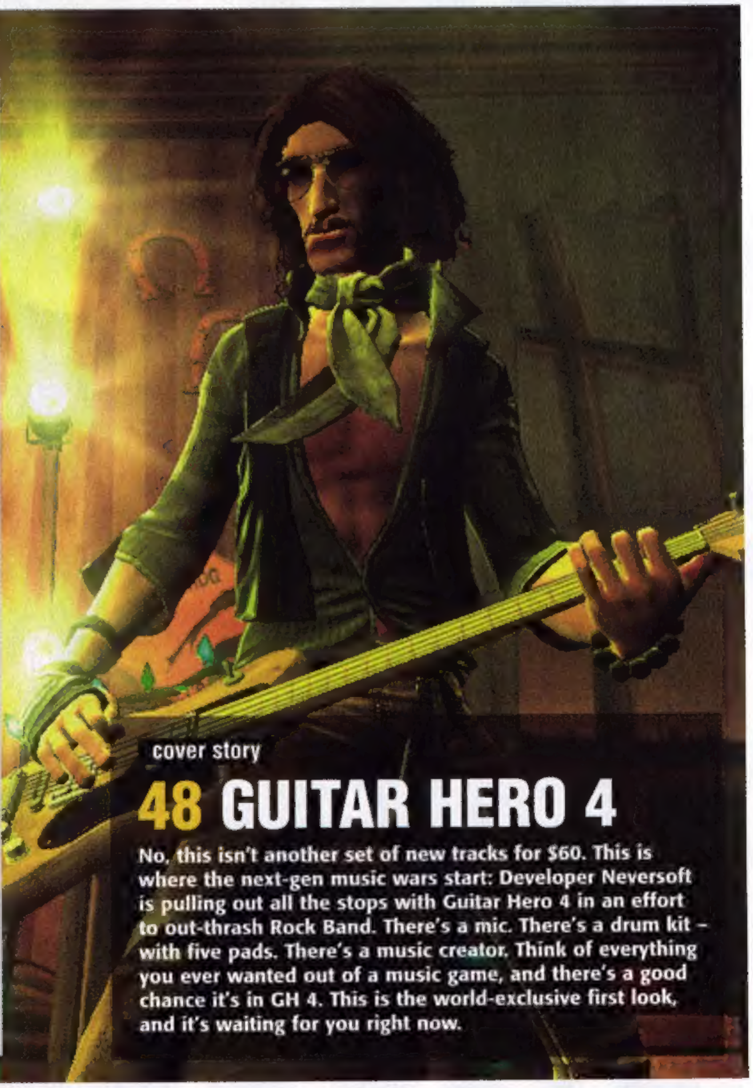
IN DEFENSE OF THE MADDEN MACHINE

You've got 10 months and six million vocal fans whose demands had better be met – or else they'll probably still buy your game. EA Tiburon general manager Philip Holt explains what happens between iterations of the digital NFL, and why he's glad all those fans are so willing to share their complaints.

58

PRINCE OF PERSIA

From the studio that brought you Assassin's Creed comes a new chapter in the vaunted action/adventure franchise. A brand new Prince stars in a sweeping epic about a struggle against sinister forces that seek to corrupt the world. Tense one-on-one duels and fresh platforming mechanics take this Persian adventure into the next generation – and we have the exclusive first look.



cover story

48 GUITAR HERO 4

No, this isn't another set of new tracks for $60. This is where the next-gen music wars start: Developer Neversoft is pulling out all the stops with Guitar Hero 4 in an effort to out-thrash Rock Band. There's a mic. There's a drum kit – with five pads. There's a music creator. Think of everything you ever wanted out of a music game, and there's a good chance it's in GH 4. This is the world-exclusive first look, and it's waiting for you right now.

departments

8 STAFF
Read the team's latest favorites

12 GI SPY
Silly pictures of our life and times

14 DEAR GI
Your chance to fire back at us!

18 CONNECT
Where news, talk, and technology collide

40 INTERVIEW
Gaming legend and Firaxis Games head Sid Meier shares a bit of his time with us to talk about how the industry has changed since its early days

42 GEAR
Geeky gadget stuff for the masses

44 OPINION
Donna Mei-Ling Park, co-host of *The Electric Playground*, talks some sense into gamers regarding the fairer sex

46 CALENDAR
Get hip to this month's happenings

64 PREVIEWS
It's going to be a good second half of the year. Get caught up on Resident Evil 5, Banjo-Kazooie Nuts & Bolts, and The Sims 3

90 REVIEWS
Game of the Month: Grand Theft Auto IV for Playstation 3 and Xbox 360

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

104 SECRET ACCESS
Codes, strategies, and passwords

106 CLASSIC GI
Reliving gaming's greatest moments

111 ONLINE
See what's happening at Game Informer Online

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

game index

GAME	PAGE #
50 Cent: Blood on the Sand	87
Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut Edition	94
Baja	89
Banjo-Kazooie Nuts & Bolts	66
Battle of the Bands	99
Damnation	82
Darksiders: Wrath of War	72
Destroy All Humans: Path of the Furon	83
Drone Tactics	101
Emergency Mayhem	99
Fallout 3	68
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	88
Final Fantasy IV	87
Freaky Creatures	86
Gauntlet	88
Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	96
Grand Theft Auto IV	92
Guitar Hero: On Tour	87
Haze	75
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	101
Line Rider 2: Unbound	80
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition Colonies Edition	97
Major League Baseball 2K8: Fantasy All-Stars	101
Mario Kart Wii	98
Metal Gear Online	84
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi	83
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	94
Ninja Gaiden II	78
Ninja Reflex	99
Order Up	81
Resident Evil 5	64
Rise of the Argonauts	74
Robocalypse	88
Sims 3, The	76
Skate It	71
Sonic Unleashed	89
Summon Night: Twin Age	101
Tales of Vesperia	73
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	86
Universe At War: Earth Assault	97
Viva Pinata 2: Trouble in Paradise	79
Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning	70
We Ski	99
Wii Fit	100
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	86

ARE YOU UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

9 out of 10 - Official Xbox Magazine, June 2008

2K SPORTS
TOPSPIN 3
2K SPORTS

IN STORES JUNE 2008

Easy to "Pick Up & Play" - Simple controls provide players with incredibly exciting, action-packed fun right from the start!

Evolutionary Visuals™ - Watch in real time as your players get progressively hotter, sweatier, and dirtier while competing at breathtaking venues.

Classic Legendary Players - For the 1st time ever play as your favorite pros from the past including Björn Borg, Boris Becker, and Monica Seles.

PLAYER CREATION
SELECT FACE PRESET
Unrivalled Player Creator - Create a player and make it your own with custom swing animations, a NEW free form sculpting tool, and much more!

www.topspin3thegame.com

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360 LIVE Wii NINTENDO DS.

© 2008 Take-Two Interactive Software and its subsidiaries. All rights reserved. Top Spin, Top Spin 3, 2K Sports, the 2K Sports Logo and Take-Two Interactive Software are all trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Take Two Interactive Software. All rights reserved. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. Wii and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006 Nintendo. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association

STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

GREATEST SUMMER EVAR!

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The video game industry has long been fixated on the holiday season. For years, the biggest and best titles have come in the months leading up to December. It was just what companies did. It was believed that this was the time when you make the most money as a publisher, and that by publishing a title at any other time of the year you would be selling your game short.

Of course, that mindset still holds true today (as it should, as many of the top games do really rake in the cash during the holiday game-buying frenzy). But just because that time of year works, that doesn't mean other seasons should be ignored. Slowly but surely, however, the game industry is learning that gamers will buy great games year round. I remember when Resident Evil 2 came out in March 1998 and industry pundits said it would never reach its full potentional in spring. The game went on to sell millions of copies – dispelling yet another gamer myth.

But summer has long been forgotten and left as a wasteland where few games fill those lazy hot afternoons. That has always bothered me, since for as long as I can remember there have been "summer blockbuster" movies, so why can't there be "summer blockbuster" games?

This year, it all changes. Maybe not by choice, but it's still happening. With Grand Theft Auto IV coming at the end of April, and Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots set for June 12, this is the blockbuster summer we have all been waiting for. And these two giants aren't alone either. Battlefield: Bad Company and Ninja Gaiden II are just a few of the many we will see during this, the greatest of all summers. Let's just hope these games are as successful as they need to be, so we have more to look forward to in future summers than just another bad Will Smith film.

Cheers,

Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *30 Rock*, iPhone, *Battlestar Galactica*, The NFL Off Season, Extreme Broadband **Dislikes:** Vista, The Lack Of Variety From Rock Band Downloads (No More Boston Or Police, Please. And This Is Coming From Someone Who Likes Those Bands) **Current Favorite Games:** Grand Theft Auto IV, World Of Warcraft, Rainbow Six Vegas 2, Metal Gear Online, Guitar Hero: Aerosmith

Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** My Wife Accepting My GTA Addiction (As She Says, "At Least It's Not Heroin"), The Reiner Dog (A Chicago Dog With Spicy Garlic Sauce), Purchasing Seven Pairs Of Chicago Cubs Boxer Shorts (Anything To Break The Curse) **Dislikes:** Playing GTA To Realize That Text Messaging & Driving Are A Poor Combo (Rest In Peace, Niko), Feeling Bad About Getting Turned Down In GTA's Internet Dating (Maybe I Take This Game A Little Too Seriously) **Current Favorite Games:** Grand Theft Auto IV, Grand Theft Auto IV, Grand Theft Auto IV

Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Black Mountain (Great Band!), Finally Watching *The Wire*, The Return Of NBC Thursday Comedies, Nice Weather, Cheering For The Celtics For The Very First Time **Dislikes:** Primary Coverage, Being Forced To Cheer For The Celtics, Being Out Of Shape, Wii Shovelware, Chris Tucker Haters (*Friday* Is A Classic Of Modern Cinema!) **Current Favorite Games:** Professor Layton And The Curious Village, Guitar Hero Aerosmith, Guitar Hero 4, Mass Effect, Grand Theft Auto IV

Kato >> *kato@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/RPG **Interests:** *The Wire*, *It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia*, The Autumn Leaves – *Long Lost Friend*, The NFL Draft, Jared Allen! **Dislikes:** Another One & Done Post-Season For The Wild, My Head Turning Into A Sprinkler Whenever I Eat Delicious Indian Food **Current Favorite Games:** Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater, Jeanne D'Arc, Grand Theft Auto IV, Gran Turismo 5: Prologue, Wii Fit

Adam >> *adam@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Sriracha Sauce, Atmosphere – *Seven's Travels* (I Was Totally Wrong Before, And I Apologize), Getting Back On My Bike, *Rome*, Bumpin' New Gaming PCs, New Paradigms For PC Gaming **Dislikes:** That I Never Got On The Firefox Plugin Train Until Now, Half My Fantasy Team On The DL, Gross-Sounding Baseball Injuries (Kaz Matsui, You've Broken My Innocence) **Current Favorite Games:** Sins Of A Solar Empire, Master Of Magic, Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Rock Band, Mario Kart Wii

Joe >> *joe@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** *There Will Be Blood*, Replaying The Entire Metal Gear Series, *Nextwave: Agents Of H.A.T.E.*, Winning $1 Bets, The Cavils **Dislikes:** Not Even Being A Fraction As Awesome As Daniel Day-Lewis, Jesse And The Rippers (They Should *Not* Be In Rock Band, Miller!), Milk On Cereal, The Fact No One Says "Sit On It" Anymore (I Miss The Fonz), The Sixes **Current Favorite Games:** Grand Theft Auto IV, Metal Gear Online, The Sims 3, Braid, Perfect Prosecutor (Please Come To The U.S.)

Miller >> *miller@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** The Ground Not Being Snow-Covered, *Deadwood* (Like Shakespeare With Six-Shooters!), Having A Dog That Doesn't Mind Sleeping In **Dislikes:** The Cost Of D&D Miniatures (Plastic Should Not Be That Expensive), Having A Dog That Eats My Socks **Current Favorite Games:** Prince Of Persia, Braid, Elefunk, Super Mario Galaxy, Viking Battle For Asgard, Rock Band, Grand Theft Auto IV

Bertz >> *mattbertz@gameinformer.com*

Handle: Lord Gamington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** Wilco – *Sky Blue Sky*, Cylon Civil War, GTA IV Multiplayer, The Jared Allen Acquisition (I Can Already Envision A Broken Aaron Rodgers On Week One), iPhone Version 2 Rumors (Let Them Be True!) **Dislikes:** The Wild's Weak Exit From The Playoffs, The Fact That Every Cable Service Provider Sucks **Current Favorite Games:** Grand Theft Auto IV, Battlefield: Bad Company, NFL Head Coach, Bully: Scholarship Edition

Ben >> *ben@gameinformer.com*

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Dairy Soda, Grilling (Welcome Back Summer), *Searching For God Knows What* By Donald Millar, Seeing London **Dislikes:** Seeing London In Three Days, Paintball Welts On The Pillow Side Of Your Head, Will Smith Haters (*Wild Wild West* Is A Classic Of Modern Cinema!) **Current Favorite Games:** Braid, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Crisis Core Final Fantasy VII, Mario Kart Wii, World Of Warcraft, Banjo-Kazooie Nuts And Bolts, Grand Theft Auto IV

Bryan >> *bryan@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** *Gone Baby Gone*, *The Assassination Of Jesse James By The Coward Robert Ford*, Grilling Season, *Before The Devil Knows You're Dead* **Dislikes:** Dry Cereal Eating (Just Make An Eggo, Jeez!), The Uncontrollable Desire To Repurchase All Of My Favorite Albums On Vinyl, Netflix Thinking About Charging Extra For Blu-ray Rentals **Current Favorite Games:** Guitar Hero 4, Bully: Scholarship Edition, Wii Fit, Alone In The Dark, Professor Layton And The Curious Village

GAMEINFORMER

JUNE 2008
Volume XVIII • Number 6 • Issue 182

PUBLISHER
Cathy Preston

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Andrew McNamara

EDITORS
Executive Editor Andrew Reiner
Senior Editor Matt Helgeson
Senior Associate Editor Matthew Kato
Associate Editors
Adam Biessener • Joe Juba • Matt Miller
Ben Reeves • Bryan Vore
Content Manager Matt Bertz
Mascot Arthur

PRODUCTION
Art Director Thomas Blustin
Production Director Curtis Fung
Graphic Designer Jeff Akervik

CONTRIBUTORS
Photographer Michael Cantor
Contributing Writers
Nick Ahrens • Meagan VanBurkleo

GAME INFORMER ONLINE
Online Editor Jeff Cork
Media Editor Nick Ahrens
Associate Online Editor Meagan VanBurkleo

ADVERTISING SALES

MINNEAPOLIS
Rob Borm
Associate Publisher
(612) 486-6155 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
rob@gameinformer.com

WEST COAST
Damon Watson
West Coast Advertising Director
(310) 450-3260 • Fax: (310) 450-3571
damon@gameinformer.com

Janey Stringer
West Coast Advertising Associate
(612) 486-6104 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
janey@gameinformer.com

EAST COAST
Suzanne Lang
East Coast Advertising Sales Director
(718) 832-5575 • Fax: (718) 832-5569
suzanne@gameinformer.com

MINNEAPOLIS
Amy Arnold
Advertising Coordinator and Online Sales
(612) 486-6154 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
amy@gameinformer.com

Rachel Nimerfroh
Marketing Coordinator
(612) 486-6059 • Fax: (612) 486-6101
rachel@gameinformer.com

CIRCULATION
CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT
For renewal, address change
and Edge card details
Visit **www.gameinformer.com**
Email **customerservice@gameinformer.com**

Or send correspondence to:
724 North First St., 3rd Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55401 • Attn: CIS Dept

For subscription inquiry ONLY:
1 (866) 844-GAME (4263)

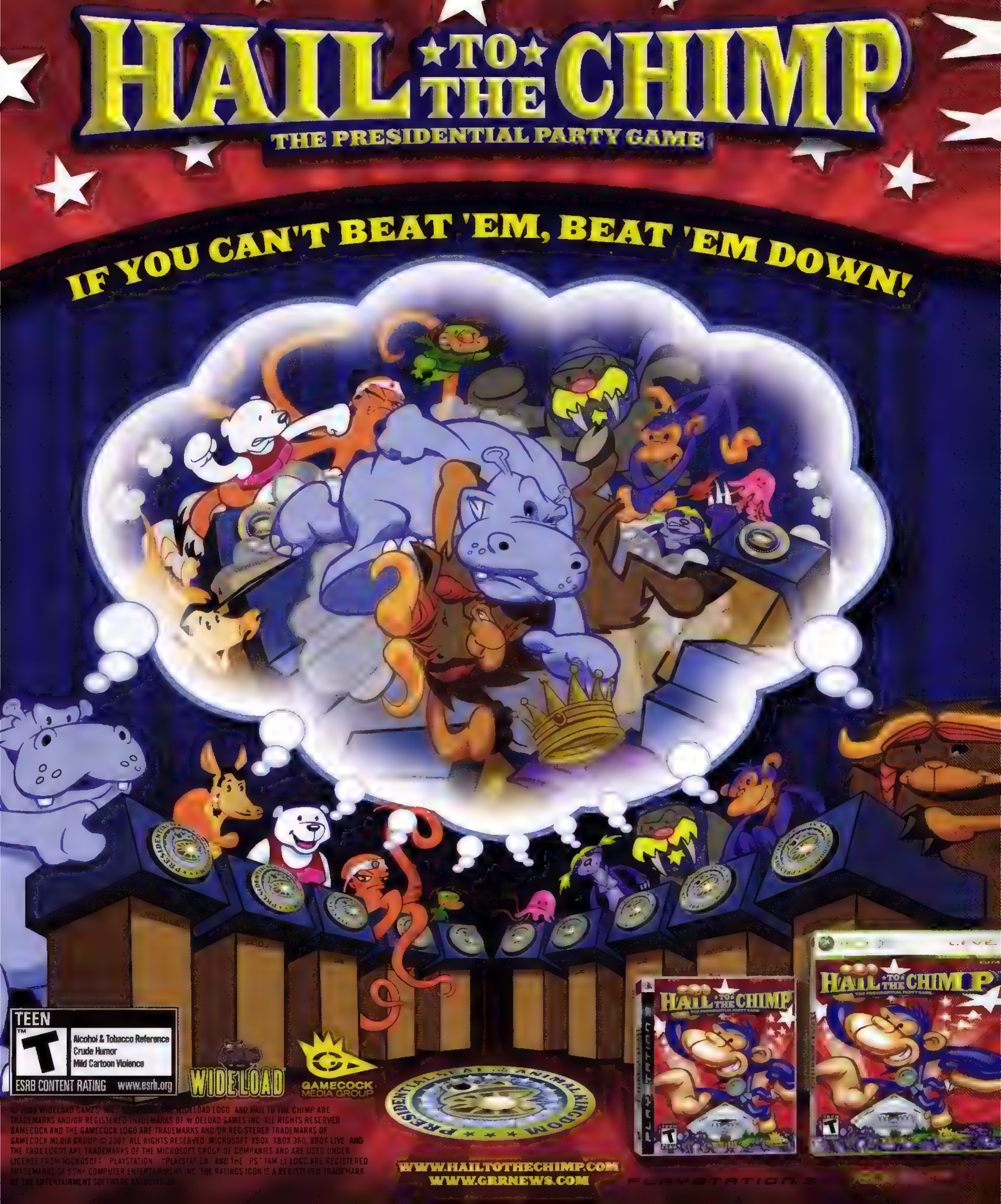
Circulation Services
Ted Katzung • (612) 486-6107
ted@gameinformer.com

Information Systems Manager
Paul Hedgpeth
paulhedgpeth@gameinformer.com

In memory of Paul Anderson

Manufactured and printed in the United States of America. The Editor welcomes company product information for all video games. Such materials should be addressed to: Editor, Game Informer® Magazine, 724 North First St., 4th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. Entire contents copyright 2008. Game Informer® Magazine. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer is a trademark of GameStop, Inc. Products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies. PUBLISHER LIABILITY FOR ERROR The publisher shall not be liable for slight changes or typographical errors that do not lessen the value of an advertisement. The publisher's liability for other errors or omissions in connection with an advertisement is limited to republication of the advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any monies paid for the advertisement. INDEMNIFICATION The advertiser and/or Advertising Agency agrees to defend and indemnify the publisher against any and all liability, loss, or expense arising from claims of libel, unfair competition, unfair trade practices, infringement of trademarks, copyrights, trade names, patents, or proprietary rights or violation of rights of privacy, resulting from the publication of the Advertiser's statement.

Member Audit Bureau of Circulations


HAIL TO THE CHIMP
THE PRESIDENTIAL PARTY GAME
IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, BEAT 'EM DOWN!
TEEN
T
Alcohol & Tobacco Reference
Crude Humor
Mild Cartoon Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
WIDELOAD
GAMECOCK MEDIA GROUP
PRESIDENTIAL SEAT ANIMAL KINGDOM
HAIL TO THE CHIMP
PLAYSTATION 3
LIVE

© 2008 WIDELOAD GAMES, INC. WIDELOAD, THE WIDELOAD LOGO AND HAIL TO THE CHIMP ARE TRADEMARKS AND/OR REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF WIDELOAD GAMES INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. GAMECOCK AND THE GAMECOCK LOGO ARE TRADEMARKS AND/OR REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF GAMECOCK MEDIA GROUP © 2007. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. MICROSOFT, XBOX, XBOX 360, XBOX LIVE, AND THE XBOX LOGOS ARE TRADEMARKS OF THE MICROSOFT GROUP OF COMPANIES AND ARE USED UNDER LICENSE FROM MICROSOFT. "PLAYSTATION", "PLAYSTATION" AND THE "PS" FAMILY LOGO ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT INC. THE RATINGS ICON IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF THE ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE ASSOCIATION.

WWW.HAILTOTHECHIMP.COM
WWW.GRRNEWS.COM

GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry

1 Hey, it's a start! Game Informer's Paul Hedgpeth helped us join the world of NASCAR sponsorship with our little ad on the side of Brad Coleman's number 27 car at the Texas Motor Speedway! Next year, Andy's getting a Jeff Gordon "tramp stamp"! **2** Jeff Cork of GI Online cozies up to the greatest game creator of all time, Shigeru Miyamoto. Hey, where's Jeff's hand? We smell a lawsuit **3** GI Online's newest addition Meagan VanBurkleo makes her GI Spy debut with Epic Games' Mark Rein **4** Nick and Meagan have the biggest posse in the history of the world! (Actually, it's THQ's PR team, but don't tell anyone, we're trying to increase our street cred) **5** Reiner and Bertz take a break from a marathon GTA IV session with Rockstar Games' Alex Moulle-Berteaux and Bruce Dugan **6** At Mastiff's Major League Eating event, Tim "Eater X" Janus goes buckwild on a plate of sushi. Dude once ate 141 pieces of sushi in six minutes! Respect **7** Charley Price of Liquid Entertainment, James Attenburg of Codemasters, and Bender Helper's Stacy Miles enjoy the view from the GI balcony with Nick and Miller **8** EA's Shirley Chu and Mike McCartney take a break from showing off their new Wii title Skate It by going to Be'Wiched, the best damn deli in Minneapolis

8

SPEEDWAY
Cottonelle
Be kind to your behind
GAME INFORMER
LIVING
1

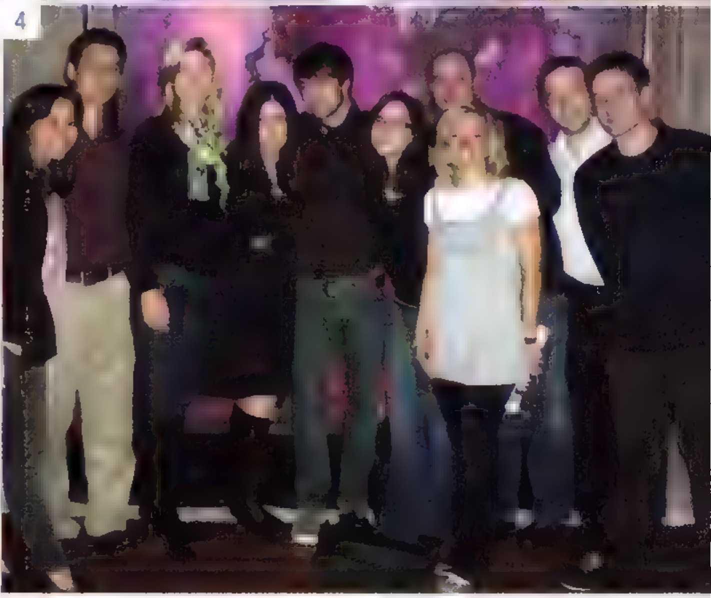
7

6

2

3

WANTED
WANTED
grand
5


4

ONE NIGHT
ONE APOCALYPTIC SECRET
ALONE IN THE DARK
JUNE 2008
CENTRALDARK.COM

DEARGI

The Readers Strike Back

Roots Are Important

Your review of Crisis Core left me surprised. Usually GI is good at writing informative and well-reasoned reviews, but I couldn't help but feel suspicious of this one. Your comparison to the Star Wars prequels is appropriate, because like those so-so movies, Crisis Core's charm relies upon a much stronger product released years prior. Nostalgia and reverence for the original seem to excuse the faults of the follow-up. Granted, I haven't played the game, but it seems to me that the game was helped out by the original Final Fantasy VII.

Joe
via inkdream.net

It was. As a gaming experience, Crisis Core definitely benefits from the groundwork laid by its predecessor. Knowing Final Fantasy VII's main characters and events is how you will get the most out of Crisis Core…it's a *prequel!* Very few games stand entirely alone; most are a part of an ongoing tradition. They might be sequels in long-running series, part of a licensed franchise, or an entry in a specific gaming genre. This context is a part of any gaming experience, and while it may not be as important as pure gameplay, it is worth considering. After all, what good is a review of *Star Wars: Episode III* written by someone who has never seen the original Star Wars trilogy? Just because someone appreciates these connections does not mean they automatically "excuse the faults" of subsequent projects. Crisis Core, for instance, received an average score despite its relationship to one of the most revered RPGs of all time.

Noob is as Noob does

I have been playing MMOs like MapleStory for a while now, but I am getting seriously tired of people calling me a noob for doing some things that people would obviously do in real life. For example, a player drops a very rare item and people try and grab it, but he quickly snatches it back up before anyone can get it, then calls everyone crowding him a noob. In real life, if a guy drops $100 and says you can keep it if you can grab it, wouldn't you give it a try? I really try to ignore this noob word, but it starts to tick me off when someone calls me that.

Anonymous
via yahoo.com

Have you ever read those *Peanuts* comics where Lucy promises Charlie Brown that she won't pull the football away at the last second when he kicks it? She never keeps her word. Don't be a Charlie Brown; you might avoid being called a noob in the future by not repeatedly falling for obvious pranks like the ol' item drop. Other humiliating MMO swindles to avoid include hide-and-seek, simultaneous cliff jumping, and rolling Alliance.

MapleStory

Shenanigans?

I have a growing concern that I can no longer keep to myself. It pertains to your staff page, which I assume is no more than an attempt to get your faces in the magazine in order to impress women. But to put a finer point on the matter, I dislike the "current favorite games" section of each editor's profile. It's time someone finally called shenanigans on your team. I'm sorry, but if Epic comes over and brings the latest build of Gears of War 2, and you get to play it for an hour, it is NOT one of your favorite games. It hasn't even been finished yet! You're just trying to say to readers "I'm cooler than you. Epic let me play Gears 2, and I need a way to brag about it."

Ian Mondrick
via yahool.com

If we were in this to impress women, we'd probably start by appearing less disheveled and slovenly in the pictures we put in our magazine. Anyway, to address your point, consider this: If you ask Andy what his favorite game is, he replies with "Metroid." So, if Andy's favorite games section were limited to that – favorite released/completed games – you would just see Metroid month after month (among other rarely changing entries). That would be boring, so we don't use the lists just to talk about games that are out. Instead, our current favorite games are a blend of what we're playing at the moment and what we're looking forward to. Games like Gears of War 2 make the lists because we're just as excited for it as you are.

All Are One

As a Wii owner, I seriously regret having to miss out on certain games unless I save up for the 360 or PS3. Why don't Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo all make different consoles, but with a universal format? For example, it doesn't matter who made your TV, stereo, or DVD player; they all run the same despite the device. It should be the same for consoles.

Nate England
via yahoo.com

Man, that would be awesome for consumers. Unfortunately, it doesn't really work from a business perspective. How would Sony, Microsoft, or Nintendo benefit from the arrangement? If you want to play Super Mario Galaxy, BioShock, and Metal Gear Solid 4, you have to buy three consoles, and everyone makes money. If one console supports every game, then two companies aren't getting the money you otherwise would have spent. There is also the loss of system distinction to consider: As it stands, each console offers a different kind of gaming experience. For instance, you can't use your Xbox 360 controller to play Wii Sports. To fix that, all three companies would have to do more than support a universal format – they'd essentially have to make the same hardware and peripherals. Then we're dealing with a one-console future, and that's a discussion topic all by itself (see our debate on page 31, issue 179).

Pitching In

First off, your What If article last issue was a cool idea. I know Tomb Raider has a certain sex appeal factor to it, but Mr. Wanat's pitch about a nude Lara Croft is nothing more than an attempt at shock value – either that, or he's been dying to share his fantasy of a digital female. Congrats, consider me "shocked." I know that article is a hypotheti-

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

GI COMMUNITY

Game Informer has a thriving online community, and this is where they can sound off about issues facing the gaming industry today.

THE QUESTION:
What band(s) have you been turned on to thanks to Guitar Hero or Rock Band?

Before I played Guitar Hero III, I had only heard one song from Killswitch Engage, but after playing it I've bought three of their CDs. As Daylight Dies is one of my favorite CDs now.

BladeWarrior21

Eric Johnson. I've heard the name in the past but never paid much attention to him. "Cliffs Of Dover" rocks and has inspired me to check out some more of his music. It seems like I always have this song in my head.

Cheech11

Guitar Hero and Rock Band have taught me that I was born in the wrong decade. Thanks to these games I've picked up an interest in classics like Blue Öyster Cult, Molly Hatchet, the Outlaws, and Deep Purple. Suddenly my parents' music actually seems good!

aubradley84

If it weren't for Rock Band I would have ignored Coheed and Cambria. I asked a friend about them, and he told me they were rap/reggae, so I never sampled their music before. The stupid jerk had no idea who they were

lap-lem

I had heard of the song "Surrender" forever, but I never knew who sang it until Guitar Hero Now I'm a Cheap Trick freak!

Undernet

Honestly, I've been turned on to all music as a whole since playing Guitar Hero, not just one band. Before playing, I did not listen to music at all. After playing the hell out of GH II and III, I've become a bit of a music junkie

xenosaga freak

Do you want to make your voice heard?
Weigh in with your opinion at www.gameinformer.com/forums

ALONE IN THE DARK
CENTRALDARK.COM
MATURE 17+ M
Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
Games for Windows
XBOX 360
Wii
PlayStation.2
ATARI

© 2008 Atari Interactive, Inc. All rights reserved. Atari and the Atari logo are trademarks owned by Atari Interactive, Inc. Alone in the Dark is a registered trademark owned by Infogrames Entertainment SA in the US and other territories. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. The ESRB rating icons are registered trademarks of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Use of this product is subject to acceptance of a license agreement. The terms of this license agreement can be found in the product's manual. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. © 2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Windows, the Windows Vista Start button, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies, and 'Games for Windows' and the Windows Vista Start button logo are used under license from Microsoft. Wii and the Wii logo are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006 Nintendo.

cal, but it's the attitude behind it that hurts the industry. Reducing Lara Croft to eye candy doesn't help to garner the trust and respect of those who still think games are only for social rejects.

Brett Davis
via sbcglobal.net

I have never been a huge fan of the Resident Evil franchise, but I was completely blown away by the pitch made by Jason Rubin for how he would make the next game in the series. An almost strictly multiplayer Resident Evil would, in my humble opinion, be absolutely amazing. Not being able to camp in one place, always being forced to move…it screams teamwork, which is hard for most games to force upon the player. In fact, the whole article was absolutely amazing. Thanks!

Daniel Owens
via hotmail.com

Whether you agreed with the proposals or not, we're glad to see that the introductory What If feature got people talking. It's always interesting to take a look at the gaming industry's heavy hitting series from a different angle…even if you don't enjoy the view. For more purely hypothetical game ideas, be sure to check out what Bungie's Jaime Griesemer would do with the Zelda franchise by flipping over to page 24.

Not So Super

I went to buy Super Smash Bros. Brawl the day it came out and I was pretty excited. Three days later, I traded that garbage in! This game sucks! I had not played my Wii in months, but when I heard about this game I thought I would put my PS3 controller down for a little while. Wrong. This is the biggest disappointment of my life.

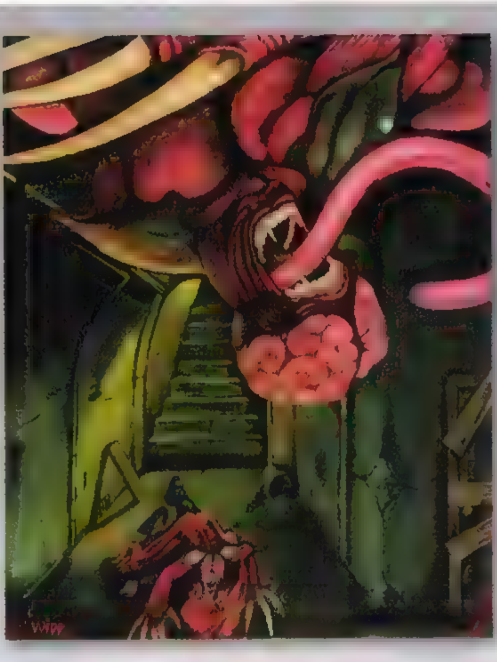
Matthew Merced
via aol.com

We definitely expected a few "OMG this game should have been a 10!" emails, but this one caught us by surprise. If you are a big enough Smash Bros. fan to look forward to the game, it's almost impossible to be unimpressed by the wide array of characters, stages, activities, and generally pervasive fan service. Also, if being let down by a video game is the biggest disappointment of your life, you are either A) incredibly lucky, or B) not done with middle school. Stupid 8th grade Sadie Hawkins dance.

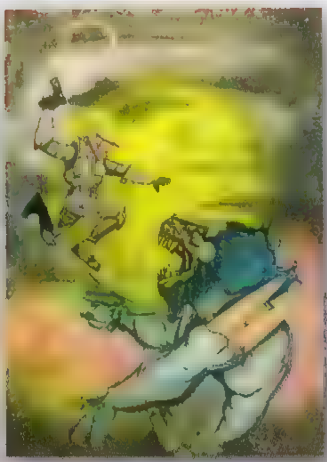
reader art

[illegible]

Send to:
Game Informer
Reader Art Contest
[illegible]
4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401

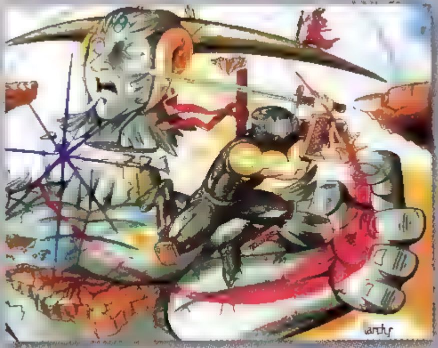


IVAN MEDINA
How many lickers does it take to get the Tootsie Roll center of a human?

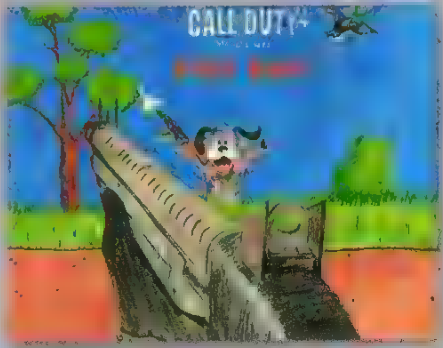


RICHARD CLANTON
Seconds later, Master Chief was brained by E.T. on a flying bike, and promptly devoured

ELIZABETH COBLE
Spartans and crochet, together at last



JOSE DIAZ
Since his games are so notoriously easy, Ryu Hayabusa seeks challenges by invading other titles



CHRIS BASSLER
Who's laughing now, dog?

CORRECTIONS:
In issue 181 we listed Teenage Zombies at being developed by Ignition Entertainment. Ignition is the game's publisher and it was developed by InLight Entertainment. We apologize for the error.

AGE OF CONAN
HYBORIAN ADVENTURES
HEADS WILL ROLL...
...MAY 20, 2008
LIVE
FIGHT
EXPLORE
GameStop
EXCLUSIVE
PRE-ORDER
OFFER
WWW.AGEOFCONAN.COM
Sound Blaster X-Fi
THE WAY NVIDIA IT'S MEANT TO BE PLAYED
FUNCOM
Eidos

PRE-ORDER YOUR COPY OF
AGE OF CONAN FROM GAMESTOP
AND RECEIVE THIS EXCLUSIVE
IN-GAME WAR MAMMOTH FREE
* terms and conditions apply
see in-store for details

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
Nudity
Sexual Themes

Games for Windows

CONNECT

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

news

NINTENDO'S SOFTWARE PROBLEM

IS THE Wii BURIED UNDER SHOVELWARE?

AMALGAMATED Wii GAMES INC.
Millions and Millions Sold

There's no denying that Nintendo's Wii console is hot. So hot that it can't be manufactured fast enough. So hot that it's penetrated the mass market. Now that millions of people and families have bought the system – including plenty of new gamers who might not know how to avoid some of the crap being released for the platform – how come there is a dearth of quality games for the console? The Wii may be popular, but is it attracting shovelware just looking to cash in on its time in the limelight?

ROOTED IN TRADITION

QUICK FACTS
Super Smash Bros Brawl has already sold 4.85 million units in the U.S. and Japan. The Wii console itself has sold 24.5 million units worldwide since its release.

While third-party developers have praised the Wii as being easy to develop for, this and the fact that many Wii owners are casual or first-time gamers might have the unwanted residual effect of cheaply made games being rushed to market strictly to take advantage of consumers. As cynical as this may sound, we've seen this before when the Atari 2600 defined home console gaming in the early '80s. That situation led to the industry crash of 1983, when the market bottomed out due to a flood of poor software.

Nintendo systems have, of course, always been home to triple-A first-party titles that leverage the company's historic characters and gameplay philosophies. However, third-parties have typically had less success on Nintendo's platforms. Even though the Wii is selling better than its home console predecessors, third-party software is not benefiting as much from the platform's popularity.

Nintendo has traditionally not had the greatest relationship with its third-party software partners. Whether it was Nintendo's decision to stick with the cartridge format for the N64 while the PlayStation adopted the CD-ROM or the notorious lack of support from the company in other areas (a developer once told us that Nintendo would not distribute blank GameCube proprietary discs. Instead, it made companies arrange their own bulk shipping from Japan), it's clear that Nintendo is always in the driver's seat.

BOTTOM FEEDING

This pattern is continuing with the Wii, at least in the software department. Looking at the NPD monthly sales chart for the past year (excluding Wii Play, which comes with a Wii remote), Nintendo's first-party offerings do very well for the system, with games like The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Mario Party 8, Super Mario Galaxy, and Metroid Prime 3: Corruption spending extended time in the NPD top 20. Third parties, however, do not fare as well. While more third-party games placed in the top 20 for the year period (11 third-party games versus nine for Nintendo), Nintendo almost had as many top 20 titles as all the third-party publishers combined – and Nintendo titles consistently ranked higher than other games. The Wii's third-party support does

Global Star's Carnival Games has become a surprise hit for the Wii

not compare to either the Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 [see sidebar]. Moreover, the majority of those Wii top 20 third-party titles were hits for all the systems, such as Madden NFL 09, Guitar Hero III, and Resident Evil 4.

Sales numbers aside, what's more troubling is the overall lack of quality third-party software. When comparing the review scores given to all Wii titles by aggregate score website Metacritic, the system has an abnormally high number of games scoring in the lower half of the rating scale. Out of the 182 Wii games listed at the time of this writing, 74 of them – or 40 percent – scored 50 or lower out of 100. Xbox 360 had 25 percent and PS3 had 17 percent.

Not surprisingly, of the five titles that have scored a 90 or over, only one – Capcom's Resident Evil 4 – is not a Nintendo game. Furthermore, both the Xbox 360 and PS3 chart noticeably more titles in the 80th percentile, which is another indicator of quality support of a console.

QUICK FACTS
Guitar Hero III: Legends [illegible]

THE MISSING LINK

There are many possible reasons for the apparent lack of good games for the Wii – one of which may be the fact that, according to industry sources, Nintendo does not have a concept approval phase for third-party games. Concept approval is a process in place at both Microsoft and Sony where the console maker green-lights a project after checking to make sure it fits into their general plan. This not only serves as an early eyeball test for games, but the console makers – except Nintendo, apparently – use it to make sure that the game isn't jumping into an over-saturated genre on the system. Finally, concept approval is important because it serves as a check against the final submission build to test how closely the final product adheres to the proposed concept. We asked Nintendo about this process, but the company declined to comment.

While there are a number of reasons that bad games get made, Nintendo's lack of a concept approval process would seem to suggest that the Wii is missing that initial bulwark against the tide of shovelware. And, if the Metacritic scores are anything to go by, the absence does not appear to be doing the system any favors.

"The benefit of concept approval," said one anonymous developer with experience working on Wii projects, "is that you have a juried pool of stuff. You have a reasonable guarantee that someone who's not crazy has looked at this and said, 'Yes, this is plausibly fun.'"

Perhaps more importantly, there are times that third parties are consciously held back by Nintendo. For instance, the company initially restricted third parties in the use of features like Miis in Wii games and other initiatives utilizing the console, although that is slowly changing. In general, Nintendo does not like to let other companies introduce elements that utilize unique system features before Nintendo does. "They don't even tell you 'no,'" says the anonymous developer. "They tell you the [approval] documentation is forthcoming and they pick a date for that documentation to be delivered that is always after your release date."

THE WAY FORWARD?

"It's not Nintendo's fault that the games from third parties aren't selling as well, in my opinion," says Evan Wilson, analyst for industry research firm Pacific Crest. While Wilson agrees that the Wii software catalog needs more good games versus bad, he's not so sure that Nintendo is the one standing in the way. "These games are very simple. We need to explore new game mechanics. That's the piece of innovation third parties are lacking in Wii games overall."

Wilson asserts that the casual audience the Wii has unlocked makes the traditional landscape by which we judge a console and its software different. Certainly it's not ideal that the Wii has so many bad games, but Wilson believes that eventually non-profitability will weed out bad games. Until then, the system has at least built out a broad catalogue of software (which, in contrast to other Nintendo home consoles, is somewhat of a luxury in and of itself). In the short term, this is not an ideal situation, but one that casual fans – who don't buy as many games or pay attention to Metacritic or reviews – might not notice.

QUICK FACTS
Number of Wii [illegible]
[illegible]
26 out of 150

In this light, Nintendo's lack of an approval process serves both to increase the system's catalogue of software and as a way to encourage developers. "If they did have a very strict concept approval phase, I think you'd have developers crowing about Nintendo being unflexible to work with. I don't think you can have it both ways," comments Wilson.

The future that Wilson envisions for the system is not only one where the console and its fans are serviced with plenty of good games, but also where casual fans become more attuned to what separates the good games from the bad. He says it's possible that the Wii does what the PS2 did late in its life, which is turn a vast number of casual fans into hardcore ones.

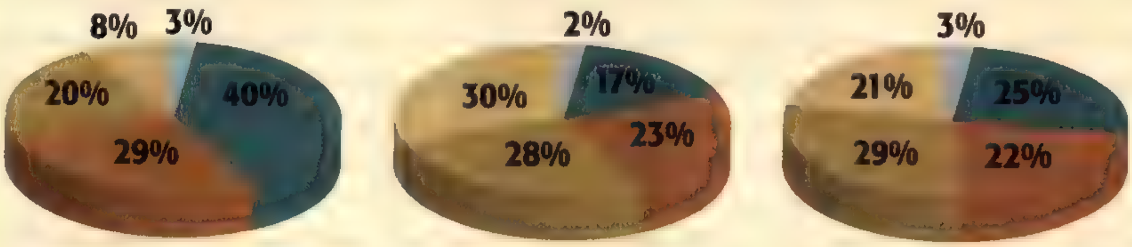
In this way of thinking, the Wii's sales numbers are more important in influencing the creation of games than Nintendo's relationship with publishers. Wilson even speculates that if this change comes to pass for the console, Nintendo could conceivably turn around and mix casual and hardcore audiences with its next console. Joining both factions under the banner of a single platform is something that he's not sure the other systems are in a position to do at the moment. But for the Wii it first must start with software – as it does for any console.

Mogiosh
Who wants barren, kupo!? I hope you'll do something with the extra space, kupo.

Wii Ware on the system, like Square Enix's Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles – My Life as a King could tap innovation from unlikely sources. Or it could spawn more junk for the system

THE CRITICAL EYE

The following is a breakdown of all three systems' review scores from aggregate website Metacritic. Note: All percentages have been rounded up



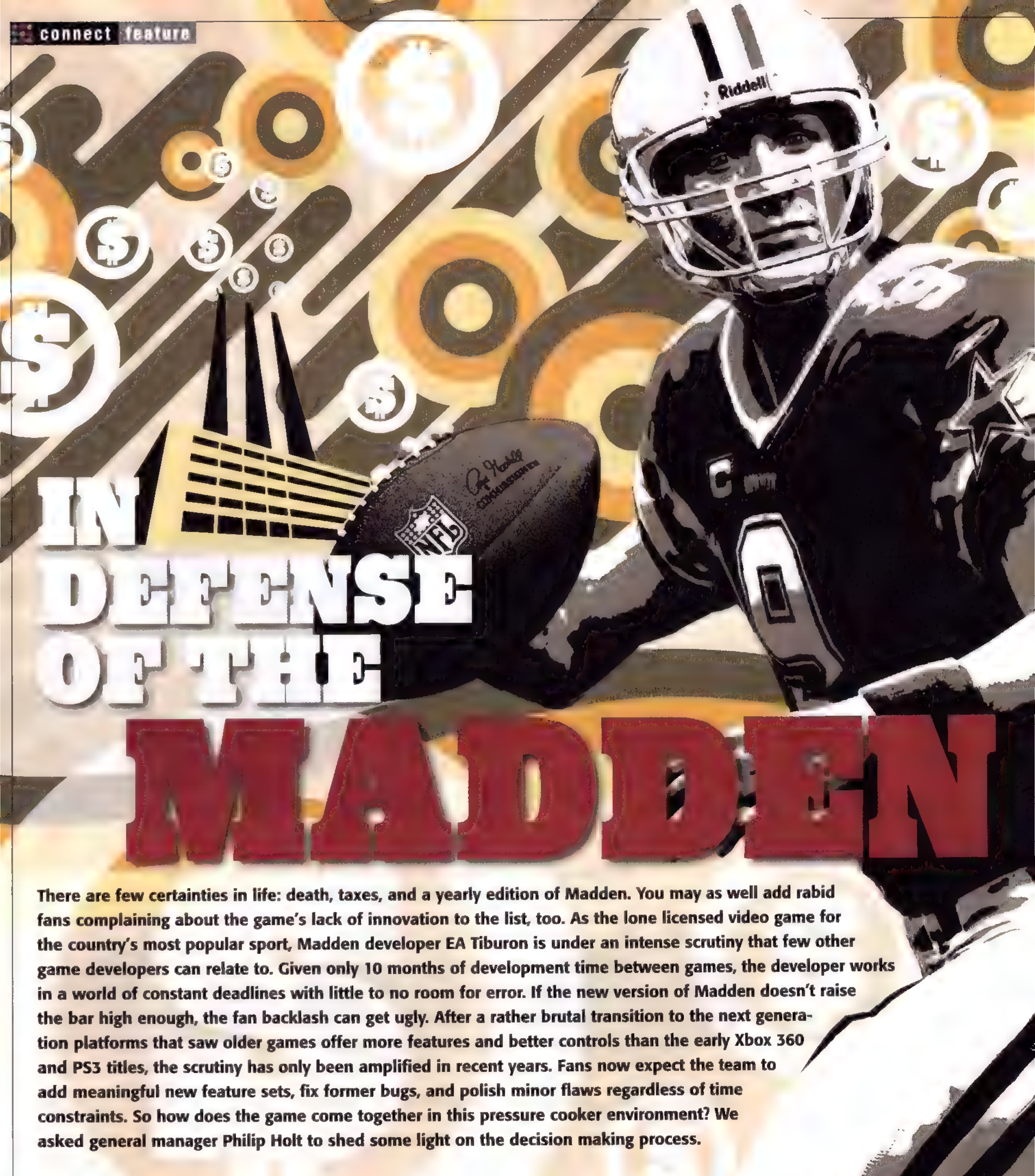
WII
Total Number of Wii games: 182

PLAYSTATION 3
Total Number of PS3 games: 150

XBOX 360
Total Number of Xbox 360 games: 368

Games scoring in the

■ 90 percentile ■ 80 percentile ■ 70 percentile ■ 60 percentile ■ 50 and under percentile



IN DEFENSE OF THE MADDEN

There are few certainties in life: death, taxes, and a yearly edition of Madden. You may as well add rabid fans complaining about the game's lack of innovation to the list, too. As the lone licensed video game for the country's most popular sport, Madden developer EA Tiburon is under an intense scrutiny that few other game developers can relate to. Given only 10 months of development time between games, the developer works in a world of constant deadlines with little to no room for error. If the new version of Madden doesn't raise the bar high enough, the fan backlash can get ugly. After a rather brutal transition to the next generation platforms that saw older games offer more features and better controls than the early Xbox 360 and PS3 titles, the scrutiny has only been amplified in recent years. Fans now expect the team to add meaningful new feature sets, fix former bugs, and polish minor flaws regardless of time constraints. So how does the game come together in this pressure cooker environment? We asked general manager Philip Holt to shed some light on the decision making process.

MACHINE

Can you recap the development timeline for taking Madden from scratch to store shelves for our readers?
It's between 10 and 12 months. As soon as we finish this year's version (we usually wrap up in early July), the team takes a couple weeks off for vacation and comes back to work on early pre-production for the next game. Everybody who worked on the last title works on the next version; we don't have a leapfrog team or anything like that.

During your "Living With Madden" presentation at the recent Game Developers Conference, you said that since Madden is such a big title, you look at other blockbusters like Halo 3 and Call of Duty 4 as your main competition. Does the fact that these games have years of development time and you only have 10 months skew this comparison a bit?
In some respects they are different kinds of animals. We're a sports title and they are more general entertainment titles. At a certain level there is a different audience expectation and at a certain level there isn't. Clearly we're competing for the same wallet share as those guys are. I think one of our advantages is that Tiburon has shipped 15 next-gen titles. The guys at Bungie, it was their first. With the longer cycles you certainly get more time to spend developing – and they have a lot of content to build that's unique and they can't really leverage from previous titles. We have a lot of content that's already been built, so some of the work is about optimizing or making the game look better. We have the expertise and a lot of the things in place from having shipped so many next-gen titles. Our animation system, for example, is one of the best pieces of technology in the sports label. It's had the benefit of eight teams that have used it over the years and collaborated and contributed to the underlying technology. While we have less calendar time and it makes certain things a lot more difficult, there are definite advantages because we go out every year.

What is the yearly budget for the game?
Um…. It's about a 35-person team. There are probably another 15 people who are in central groups that support the team directly. When I was working outside EA, one of the things you always think is that EA has these monster budgets that it spends on everything. But the Madden project, these guys are pretty efficient.

Can you walk us through the decision-making progress of how new ideas are presented and which ideas are given the go-ahead?
Everyone here has a laundry list of stuff they would love to go build. So many people who work on the game have been lifelong fans of the franchise. When you grow up playing the game and then get to work on the title, naturally you've got lots of ideas. But that's just the start. We do a lot of competitive analysis. We looked at [All-Pro Football 2K8] really carefully when it launched and tried to break it down. We look at all the big titles that come out and try to understand what they are doing that's cool and we ask "is there an application in Madden for that kind of technology or idea?" We read all of the major boards. There are a lot of posts that start with "Madden 09 Wish List," so we read through all that stuff. There is a lot of great feedback there, and a lot of things where we also agree "yeah, that's got to go in." And then we read all of the reviews. While everyone loves to see the real positive reviews, it's definitely the more critical reviews that help you focus on the things you need to improve for next year. Then there are things we are building that are sort of multi-year features. If we're building something bigger, it may not show up until Madden 10. Some portion of that development happens in 09 even though customers aren't going to see it. All this stuff goes into our design database, which is a big tool that tracks all of our ideas. Then we go through a rapid process where we figure out what will it take to prototype each idea so we can prioritize those things. You start seeing some trends emerge from the list of ideas, and you try to focus on the meaningful innovations that customers are directly going to experience. That becomes the center of the creative effort, then you figure out what the supporting features will be and you build your feature set from that.

Does this all happen in the three-month pre-production stage? When is the decision made that "these are the features we're going with?"
A bulk of that work goes in the pre-production phase. You want to emerge from that phase with a real solid plan. But we leave a good portion of capacity open so as we build these things if something cool emerges that's not on the plan we can add that in. Or if we're working on something we thought would be great and it turns out it's just not that good, we have time to either fix it or dump it and add something else. We keep a lot of time available to react to how the game emerges as you're building. The point where we say "put your pencil down, you're done" is the milestone leading up to our alpha.

By The Fans, For The Fans
Not every new Madden feature is Tiburon's doing – many of the ideas, such as these, came straight from the vocal fan base.

- Defensive hot routes
- Player specific celebrations
- Formation subs
- Slide protection
- Defensive assignments
- Friendly quitting and conceding defeat in online games
- Hardcore ranked games in online

Many developers we speak with talk about iteration being a key part of the development for new gameplay innovations. With only a few months to play with new ideas that then must go through the gauntlet of focus groups, research teams, playtesters, and your staff, what steps are taken to keep the creative process from being compromised?
I agree; iteration is critical. I think we've found a process that facilitates a lot of iteration while at the same time allowing us to be predictable. The process stuff can appear to be fairly heavy handed, but it's really about giving the team the maximum amount of time to spend focused on the creative process so what we can deliver has a chance to emerge and coalesce and then get feedback from a variety of people…. We look at it as the thing that really enables the creative freedom, so we don't view them as being mutually exclusive at all.

Apart from innovation, legacy problems – like the tractor beam passes, omnipotent safeties, defenders being unaware of ball location, money plays, catch-up AI, and no online leagues – continue to be another constant aspect of criticism. What are the challenges you face in dealing with the laundry list of issues?
It's a good question. At one level I think it's great we have a vocal audience out there because they are clearly playing the game, and they are passionate about it and they have gripes about this or that. It's certainly better than not hearing anything. I don't know if I should really say this but I'm going to anyway: I don't know that we've done a good enough job with our community. There is too much distance between the guys that make the game and the people who play it. I think that silence creates a sense of "you guys don't care" or "EA Sports is just a big company." These guys live football just like our fans do and a lot of them came from that group. A lot of the core designers on the title have won Madden tournaments, that's how we found them and we recruited them and they started and they've grown inside the company. The team really cares deeply about what they are building. Any of those kinds of issues that people complain about that aren't fixed year after year, there is either a significant technical challenge behind them (there is something underlying in the architecture that would be costly to address and so it's a matter of prioritizing how you tackle those kinds of things), or we've got bigger priority type things that we think are going to move the needle more significantly than others.

Madden is a cash cow for EA, and nine months is not a great timeframe to allow new ideas to transform into workable solutions. Has Tiburon ever thought about requesting more of a financial commitment from EA so you can have a year-round "Special Forces" team of elite developers whose only job is to come up with new ideas and iterate?
I think our Special Forces team is building Madden every year. But if you're asking a team that is off the clock, counter-cyclical…I think there are few examples of that working well and there are meaningful obstacles that prevent that from being successful. The first is you generally want that elite super squad on the most pressing opportunity, and that's this year's Madden. Looking at talent distribution, you want your starting 11 out on the field at kickoff, rather than waiting until the fourth quarter. So that's one challenge. And the other is that there is a certain rhythm and cadence inherent in how we deliver. If you were to ask the Halo team to come in and build Madden for a year I think it would be a real struggle for them to get used to the cycle, whereas I think if you gave us two years to build a football game – we need that time pressure to create the urgency that makes the game work. So I think every game team is a product of its own circumstances and kind of develops in that space. I think we would have a challenge delivering Halo, and Bungie would have a hard time delivering Madden. ■ ■ ■

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

GOOD

DLC is nothin' but TLC from developers, and Criterion is planning to give out a whole lotta love this August when it offers up motorcycles and nighttime racing via an update to its already packed game, Burnout Paradise. The bikes will come with their own challenges and new locations, and the night racing will clear out the streets for some unencumbered speeding. As it's an update, we hope it comes for free

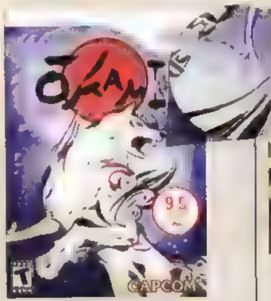
PLAYSTATION® Network

BAD

The security of Sony's PlayStation Network was temporarily compromised, leading the company to contact some users it believed may have had their accounts and the funds in them (although not their credit card numbers) accessed without authorization.

UGLY

Sony delayed the open beta test – not the final release, mind you – of its social network Home to this fall. That's a full year from when it last said the service would be available for testing. Ugliest of all, Sony threw the news in a press release trumpeting the fact that the summer closed beta would be expanding. That's like peeing in our pockets and telling us it's raining.



BAD

Capcom found out that you gotta be careful what you do on the Internet. If you look at the box art for the Wii version of Okami, you'll notice that the company lifted some of the art from gaming website IGN – you can see the site's watermark on the cover Capcom is embarrassed enough that it has promised to send new cover slips to anyone who wants one.

GOOD

Salem, Massachusetts' Bowen Kerins won the International Flipper Pinball Association 5 World Pinball Championship, besting competition from all over the world. The event also raised $4,000 for the Salvation Army – one quarter at a time.

UGLY

Radical Entertainment has sadly axed multiplayer from Prototype The developer says that it is focusing its time and resources on the single-player It's a shame, because Prototype's mass destruction is ripe for multiplayer. The game comes out this fall.

GOOD

Over three years ago, EA got hammered publicly and legally after a spouse of one of the company's employees complained on her blog about the long hours programmers at EA were forced to put in. This culminated in a successful lawsuit that awarded $14.9 million to the company's current and former programmers. Now, according to an internal EA study reported by GameDaily, things are improving, including positive feelings regarding the issues of EA's label structure, respect and communication in the workplace, and overall excitement and motivation

WHERE ARE Wii?

GAME INFORMER POLLS THE ANALYSTS TO FIND OUT MORE ON THE Wii SHORTAGE

The world still can't get enough of the Wii. Though it debuted a year and a half ago, Nintendo's belle of the ball has been greeted with an unprecedented amount of success, appealing to both hardcore gamers and people who don't normally identify with interactive entertainment. But the furious demand seems to have taken Nintendo aback, as shortages have continued through the product's second holiday season and into 2008. Recently, GameStop [Game Informer's parent company] COO Dan DeMatteo stated during an investor call that he anticipates supplies of Nintendo's Wii "won't meet demand for the next two quarters at least." So what gives?

One rumor that constantly makes the rounds on web forums and by water coolers is that Nintendo is intentionally holding supply back to create more demand. Is that a plausible scenario?

"I've heard that so many times over so many cycles no matter who the market leader was," says IDC researcher Billy Pidgeon. "It just doesn't make any sense. It would be bad business on Nintendo's part, or anybody's part. Nintendo would be losing more market share if it held out producing more Wii."

Wedbush Morgan analyst Michael Pachter agrees that these rumors are patently false. He points to the relatively weak value of the dollar in comparison to the Euro as a primary reason why we aren't seeing as many Wiis stateside. "There shouldn't be a shortage. I don't think it's because they aren't shipping enough, I think it's because they aren't shipping enough to the U.S. We should be getting 720,000 a month, and we're getting 450,000. This means they are going somewhere else. We're not hearing of shortages in Europe, and we know there is no shortage in Japan, so why aren't they here? I don't think Nintendo is trying to screw the U.S., I just think Nintendo is trying to make a buck."

This begs the question of why Nintendo doesn't simply increase production. Pidgeon says the answer lies in Nintendo's past. "Nintendo tends to be conservative, working with a small group of partners. They are not about to open a new relationship with a new partner; they are going to have people make Wiis who are trusted. Nintendo likes to make sure that their quality control is tight and you can see the dangers of ramping up production by looking at what's happened with the Xbox 360 and the red rings of death. If you ramp up too quickly, it can lead to a failure rate that is unacceptable. And in the console business, any failure rate is unacceptable."

Pidgeon believes Nintendo will take measures to slightly ramp up production as the year goes on to account for the Wii Fit and Mario Kart releases, but until then potential Wii owners should stick to working the phones and making drive-bys at local electronics retailers.

Niko Bellic
grand theft auto IV™

April 29th 2008
www.rockstargames.com/iv

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Intense Violence
Partial Nudity
Strong Language
Strong Sexual Content
Use of Drugs and Alcohol

XBOX 360 LIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

What if Bungie's JAIME GRIESEMER Made the Next ZELDA

Jamie is the lead designer of Bungie's Halo series. Before landing this amazing gig he had a large role in the Myth community

If you are anything like us, you've sat around and talked games with friends late into the night, imagining what it would be like if your favorite game creator made a game for your favorite franchise. What if Shigeru Miyamoto made the next Sonic? Or what magic would Will Wright work with Civilization? This new Game Informer feature allows us to explore dream match-ups just like these by talking straight to the creative voices we would like to see involved. Mind you, these comments are purely for fun – this is an exercise in the hypothetical.

THE PITCH

As Link strides confidently into the room (the badass Link from Twilight Princess, not the goofy Wind Waker kid), a stone slab crashes down behind him, sealing him inside. Fire flares up from urns scattered around the large chamber. In the brief light, Link spots the exit, guarded by two armored Darknuts and a half a dozen skeletal Stalfos. Before they notice his entrance, Link leaps into action.

He lights a bomb and rolls it toward the largest group of Skalfos, blowing up a few and sending the rest running for cover. The Darknuts ignore the explosion, protected by their armor, and draw their massive broadswords. Link's boomerang catches one right in the forehead, momentarily stunning it. The other closes to melee range, Link's arrows glance harmlessly off its shield. The Darknut backs Link into a corner, and raises its sword to strike. Link rolls under the swing, coming to his feet behind the towering Darknut. He leaps onto the Darknut's back using his Magnet Boots. He wrenches its helmet off and shoves a lit bomb into the empty hole. As the Darknut roars in panic, Link uses his Hookshot to swing safely to a nearby balcony. He ignores the muffled boom and crashing armor pieces as he draws his Master Sword and turns toward the remaining Darknut...

The Legend of Zelda is a cornerstone of gaming, and its creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, is a personal hero of mine. The franchise was founded on a deft mix of combat and puzzles, but recently the puzzles have become the focus. Puzzles are fine, but I worked on Halo, and combat is what I know best, so I'd ditch all that lamp lighting and switch pressing to put the spotlight back on fighting.

Imagine the same classic Zelda items, but instead of using them to solve puzzles, each has a combat role. Boomerangs and bombs are pretty straightforward. The bow and arrow requires some sort of "aiming mode" to really work – probably linked to the z-lock targeting system introduced in Ocarina of Time. The hookshot becomes an all-purpose grapple device, giving Link a way to grab enemies or move quickly through a vertical space. (Since there are no puzzles, there's no reason to limit the surfaces the hookshot can attach to.) You could even bring in environmental destruction with the magic hammer or blue candle.

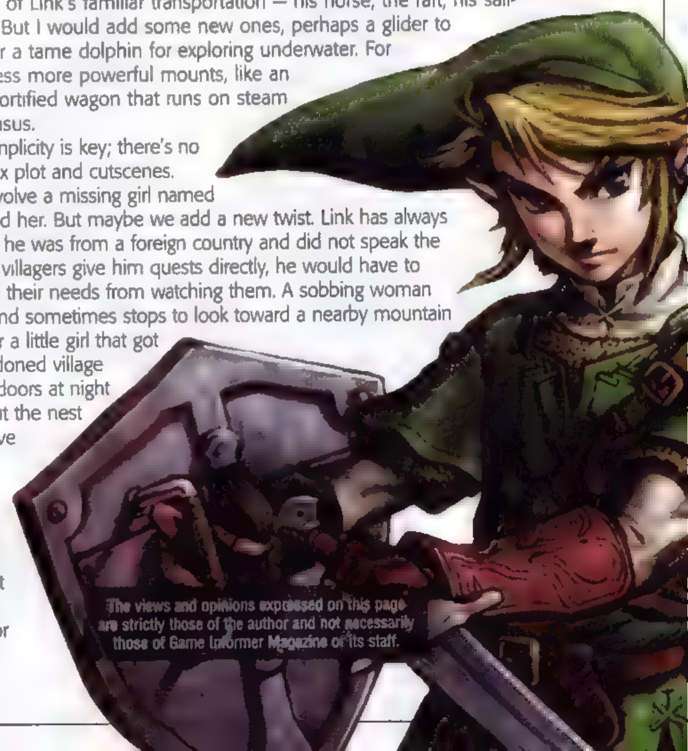
Zelda also has an array of interesting enemies. Besides the knight-like Darknuts and undead Stalfos there are the giant Armos statues that come to life when touched, Leevers capable of burrowing through the ground to ambush or flank their enemies, and swarms of fluttering Keese bats. Gangs of Moblins could use squad tactics and group AI. Wizzrobes could teleport around and bombard Link with fireballs. And those are just the enemies from the first game!

Once you have the fundamental combat, the "30 seconds of fun" that you will repeat in different forms throughout the game, then you can begin to fill in the rest of the world. Zelda games always follow the same basic structure: A vast "overworld" that Link is free to explore, peppered with a dozen or so "underworlds" in the form of dungeons, temples, and fortresses. He explores underworlds until he finds an important item, and then fights a boss for a piece of the Triforce. There's no reason this formula wouldn't work in a combat-oriented game, but modern technology should let us open up the world even more. I'm imagining a central hub city surrounded by an immense wilderness, full of impenetrable forests, raging rivers, treacherous mountain passes, parched deserts, and scattered civilized settlements.

In a world of this size, all of Link's familiar transportation – his horse, the raft, his sailboat – would be available. But I would add some new ones, perhaps a glider to cross very long distances, or a tame dolphin for exploring underwater. For short periods he could access more powerful mounts, like an armored elephant, a giant fortified wagon that runs on steam power, or a high-flying Pegasus.

As for the story, I think simplicity is key; there's no need to add a lot of complex plot and cutscenes. Obviously the story must revolve a missing girl named Zelda and Link's quest to find her. But maybe we add a new twist. Link has always been an outsider, so what if he was from a foreign country and did not speak the language? Instead of having villagers give him quests directly, he would have to observe people and deduce their needs from watching them. A sobbing woman that clutches a teddy bear and sometimes stops to look toward a nearby mountain might lead Link to search for a little girl that got lost there. Or a nearly abandoned village where everyone locks their doors at night might cause Link to wipe out the nest of nocturnal Tektites that have been terrorizing the town.

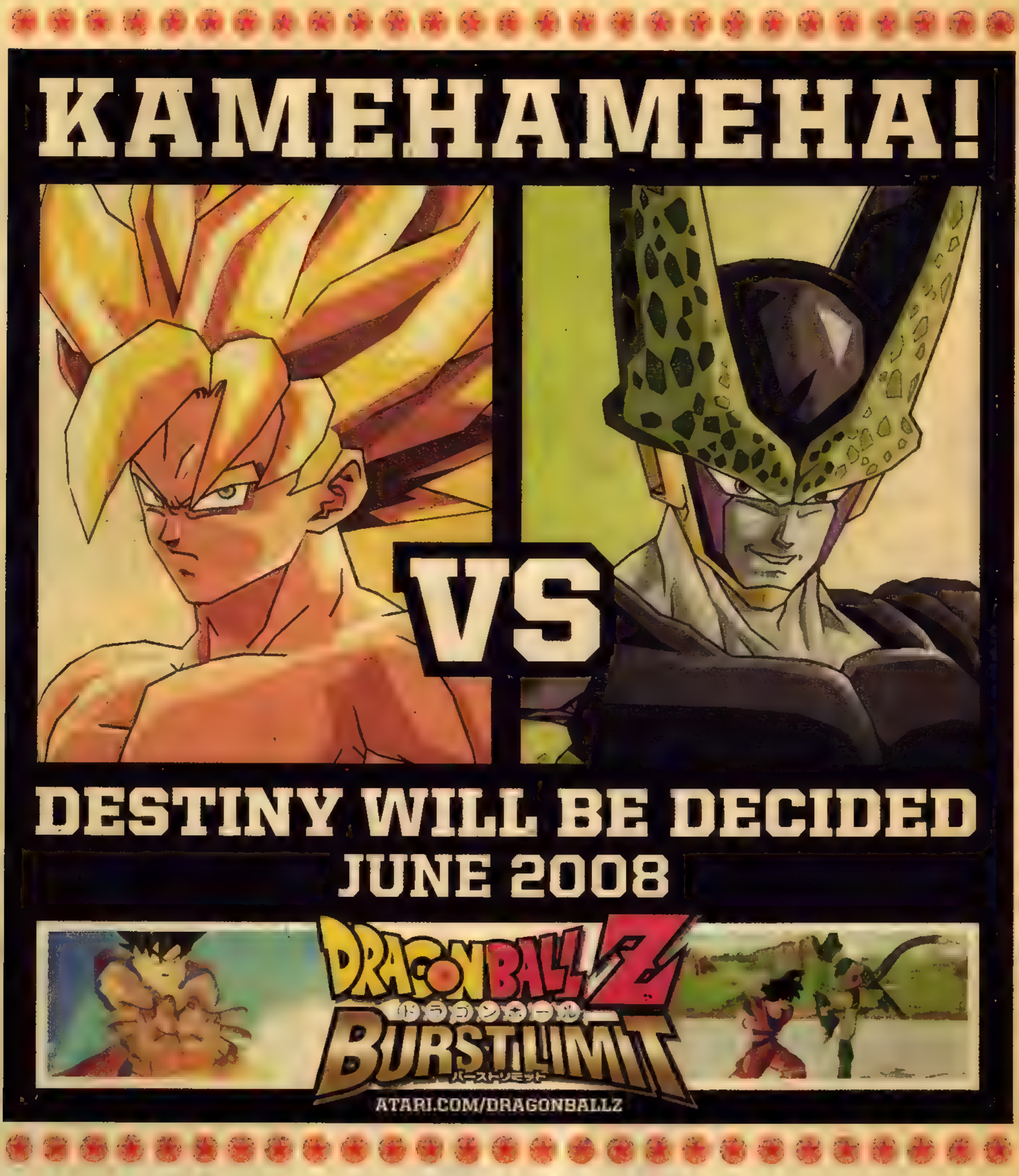
I have always loved the spirit of adventure and courage the Zelda games convey. To me, emphasizing the combat makes a lot of sense and could be an interesting new direction for the series. ■ ■ ■



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.

DREAM PROJECTS

I've been working on Halo games for almost 10 years. It might be interesting to explore a new genre or a different universe for a while. More than a specific IP I would want to work on, there are certain people and organizations I would love to collaborate with – directors like Joss Whedon (*Buffy, Firefly*), Brad Bird (*The Incredibles*), and Tim Burton (*Sleepy Hollow*); amazing special effects houses like Weta Digital (*Lord of the Rings, King Kong*) and ILM; authors like George R. R. Martin (A Song of Ice and Fire series) and Neal Stephenson (*Snowcrash, Cryptonomicon*). Out of all the old-school gaming franchises, the one I would most like to work on is Blaster Master. There was such a sense of freedom, and the difference in scale between the vehicle and on-foot sections was great. Now that I think about it, at one point we actually had a Warthog that could jump just like SOPHIA...



TEEN
T
Animated Blood
Cartoon Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

FUNIMATION ENTERTAINMENT

TOEI ANIMATION

XBOX 360 LIVE

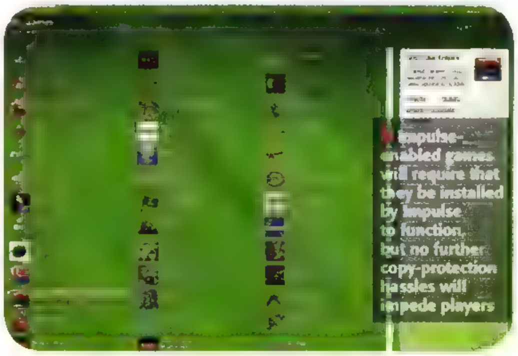
PLAYSTATION 3

ATARI

Burst Limit © 2008 Dragon Ball Z® : Burst Limit © 2008 Atari, Inc. All rights reserved. © 2008 Bird Studio/SHUEISHA, TOEI Animation, Licensed by FUNimation Productions Ltd All rights reserved. Dragon Ball, Dragon Ball Z, Dragon Ball GT, and all logos, character names and distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks of TOEI Animation. Developed by NAMCO BANDAI Games Inc. Game © 2008 NAMCO BANDAI Games Inc. Marketed and distributed by Atari, Inc. New York, N Y Atari and the Atari logo are trademarks owned by Atari Interactive, Inc The ESRB rating icons are registered trademarks of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Use of this product is subject to acceptance of a license agreement. The terms of this license agreement can be found in the product's manual "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Online access requires broadband Internet service and a wireless access point or LAN. Certain limitations apply to Wi-Fi connectivity. User is responsible for Internet service fees. © 2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft

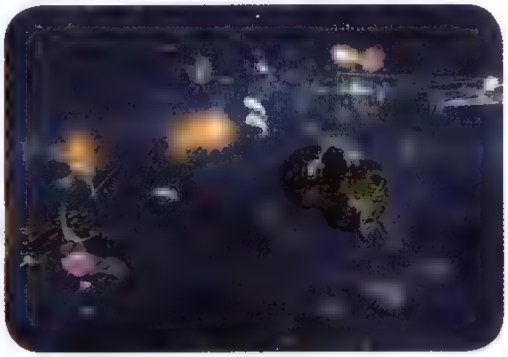
A BETTER WAY TO PLAY

STARDOCK'S BRAD WARDELL HAS A PLAN TO FIX PC GAMING



Impulse-enabled games will require that they be installed by Impulse to function, but no further copy-protection hassles will impede players

Stardock president and CEO Brad Wardell



It's no secret that the PC gaming industry continues to struggle with a slew of issues. Rampant piracy denies developers and publishers compensation for their efforts. Consoles like the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 are encroaching ever further into areas that were once the sole province of PC gaming. The multiplayer scene is a fragmented landscape where nearly every game's community is an island unto itself. However, the continued success of a number of PC-only titles and the enthusiasm of many gamers makes its viability as a platform undeniable. Stardock Corporation, the force behind successful titles like Sins of a Solar Empire and the recently announced publishing partner for Gas Powered Games' Demigod, plans to give PC games a shot in the arm by changing the rules of engagement.

WHAT'S A STARDOCK?

The critical acclaim and enthusiastic fanbases garnered by Sins of a Solar Empire and Galactic Civilizations are no mean feats in and of themselves, but the way Stardock conducts its business makes it an oddity within the PC gaming scene. As a purveyor of Windows customization and productivity software, Stardock is a successful business independent of its gaming operations. In some ways, this experience in non-gaming software development affords the company a unique perspective. "The PC game industry operates in a very strange business model," notes Brad Wardell, Stardock's president and CEO. "It's not nearly as customer-centric as the application industry is. [PC game publishers] seem obsessed with piracy.

"There are ways of dealing with piracy that are already tried and true, and yet the game industry comes and says, 'Well, I think we'll assume that everyone who plays our game is a criminal and treat them as such and see how that works out.' And it's like, 'Well, no, that's insane,'" says Wardell. "Adobe Photoshop gets pirated too, but you don't see them making you keep the CD in the drive." In accordance with this stance, all Stardock software is completely free of copy protection. However, to receive any updates or use any of the cool tie-ins with Stardock Central (the company's digital distribution and update platform), users must tie a legit serial number to their Stardock Central login. There's no CD or DVD check, nor is your software tied to a specific machine – once you've bought it, Stardock lets you do whatever you like with any of its products. As a gamer, that means there are fewer hassles to deal with. Lost your disc? Just download and re-install the game from Stardock Central.

HOW EVERYONE ELSE DOES IT

Stardock helps to stem its losses by contacting the sites that host BitTorrent trackers and asking that they be taken down. Such is not the case for the rest of the industry, according to Wardell. "We've talked to the BitTorrent operators, pretty much every single one, and almost no game company ever contacts them unless it's a legal threat." Surprising, to say the least.

So why bother registering your Stardock software? Wardell's philosophy is that legit users should be rewarded for their support of his products, so post-release support is a big focus for Stardock. Sins of a Solar Empire, for instance, was nearly bug-free when it launched. But as of press time, four updates have made a good interface much better, improved play balance, added a new AI difficulty level, dramatically altered the multiplayer front end, and much more. And that's in only two months; a much larger update will launch soon. This kind of support engenders goodwill from fans, and makes paying $40 a much better proposition relative to downloading an illegal copy.

> Right now, if a game comes out for the PC and the consoles, I might as well get the console version.
>
> – BRAD WARDEL

A NEW WAY FORWARD

On June 17, Stardock will launch a service it hopes will change the way the PC games industry does business. Impulse, which will replace Stardock Central as the pipeline by which the company delivers content, will incorporate a host of features that should add up to a much better experience for gamers – and a very lucrative way for publishers and developers to sell their games.

"One of the problems with PC gaming is that it's not using the advantages it has over consoles. Right now, if a game comes out for the PC and the consoles, I might as well get the console version," declares Wardell. "If the PC wants to compete against consoles, it needs to be just as easy to use as a console but have the advantages that are native to a PC." With the advent of Xbox Live and the PlayStation Network, he couldn't be more right. Draconian copy protection schemes require CDs to be in drives, bug-ridden games are routinely released with the rationale that they can be patched later, and flawed digital distribution methods let the scarcity of retail shelf space generally prevent post-release support for great games to go beyond a single expansion. Wardell intends Impulse to change all of that.

As most gamers would attest, a truly great title's gameplay far outlives its graphical appeal. "Right now, the game industry completely ignores the sizable – I would say almost majority – of game buyers who play games for years after they are released," says Wardell. When it comes to something like Heroes of Might & Magic III, for example, Wardell opines, "Those people would be willing to pay for support and new stuff for those games." Impulse will allow for easy, seamless distribution of smaller packs of content in the sub-$10 price range. The idea here is that a developer can keep a few designers working on an already released game, keeping the fans happy and stabilizing the company's cashflow.

Professional developers aren't the only ones who create popular content. Modding is a grand PC tradition, but once a game is released into the wild it's very rare for a developer to support its further lifecycle. Impulse will support a framework where modders can submit their work to peer review, which can be directly downloaded from within the service. Developers could then choose the best for inclusion in further updates to the core game. Anyone who has spent hours scouring the web for decent download mirrors and struggled to get mods working can tell you that this will be an absolute godsend.

Setting up multiplayer sessions and keeping track of friends across different games can also be major hassles. Utilities like Xfire and GameSpy Comrade attempt to solve this, but su fer from a limited pool of users and little integration with the games themselves. Once Impulse hits the scene, Xbo Live will no longer be something for PC gamers to envy. F instance, you'll be able to tell Impulse that you want to pl a 2v2 match in any of the games you own, and it will tak care of finding that match and launching you into the gam

As great as this feature set sounds on paper, none of it matters unless Impulse reaches a critical mass of publishers and developers signing onto the service. Wardell has a plan for that, too: Simply by putting a game on Impulse the publisher receives 70 percent of the sale price as pur profit – a vastly larger margin than other methods of distr bution. Buying into Impulse as a platform has even larger benefits. "If a major publisher pushes Impulse, they woul see 85 percent of the revenue on their title," according to Wardell. These numbers may not mean much to gamers by themselves, but they've already led the biggest players in PC gaming to enter into serious talks with Stardock. By the time you read this, there should hopefully have been official announcements that leave no doubt as to the scal Impulse will achieve. Wardell expects the majority of PC games to be available on Impulse over the next year.

Impulse, should it live up to its potential, could be one the biggest developments in years for PC gaming. In a lot of ways, it is a sweeping solution to many of the frustrations that PC gamers have experienced since the format existed. "Doesn't the whole thing seem pretty obvious in hindsight?" asks Wardell. After hearing what he has to say on the subject, we can't help but agree. ■ ■ ■

■ **Stardock is currently in talks with AMD and Nvidia to allow Impulse to automatically upda graphics drivers**

Afterwords

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS 2

P Cambiotti
ead Game Designer, MP
bisoft · Montreal

rawing just as much traffic as the
eal sin city, Rainbow Six Vegas 2
as become a hot destination for
amers seeking adversarial and
ooperative multiplayer. Its intui-
ve cover mechanic, amazing level
esigns, and addictive ACES level-
ng system have people playing this
ame around the clock. Its launch
idn't go off without a hitch, how-
ver, as many gamers have been
xperiencing problems, and others
ave wondered why certain feature
ets have changed. Rainbow Six
egas 2's lead game designer of
ultiplayer, JP Cambiotti, is fully
ware of the commotion, and even
ook a second out of his busy day
o answer questions directly from
ame Informer's readers.

Do you plan on going back to the Vegas setting a third time or will you take the game somewhere new?

–TheMaskedMarauder

■ The Vegas setting was lots of fun, but we've decided to close that chapter with RSV 2. Having said that, there are certain areas of Vegas we haven't explored in the game, specifically when it comes to the multiplayer environments. Personally, I would have liked to see more Vegas-themed multiplayer maps on Fremont Street or the Strip.

Are you having issues with the servers? I have had some problems getting into multiplayer matches on XBL.

–Cheech11

■ We're aware of certain connection issues and are working on it. We're in the process of trying to get a patch out that will address the issues some people have been experiencing.

How much involvement does Tom Clancy actually have in all these video games?

–not a bumblebee

■ During the production of the original Rainbow Six game back in 1996/97, Tom Clancy was actually present for the brainstorming sessions since the game was being produced parallel to his book. Since then Tom Clancy's involvement has been more indirect. Anything we do in the game, such as the story and setting, must be true to the Tom Clancy universe.

I have a question, and I mean it with 100 percent seriousness. What is/was the deal with the PS3 online multiplayer? Has it been fixed? And what precautions will you take in the future with your Tom Clancy games to ensure that this NEVER happens again?

–Joe43302

■ Our programmers have been working with Sony to isolate the PS3 connectivity issues and address them. Sony has released a fix that addresses a large portion of these connection problems. The remaining issues are being worked on by our programmers, but I'm confident an upcoming patch will fix the remaining issues.

The new ACES system is amazing. Is this something that we can expect to see more of in downloadable content?

–SNAKE-EATER

■ The ACES was meant to teach players how to use the different tactics in our game and reward them for doing so. It's nice to see what you did to get a kill and have the game recognize that and give you something for it. The maximum level of the ACES is 21 across all three of the categories, and I don't think we're going to be adding additional ACES levels and rewards now that the game has shipped.

Are you guys aware of all of the Achievement bugs in the game? Such as the "Private First Class" Achievement that doesn't unlock for anyone who has played RSV 1, and the "Freedom Shall Prevail" Achievement that seems to unlock for some people, but doesn't for others. Do you have any plans to release a patch fixing these frustrating glitches?

–Justinpf

■ Yes, we're aware of those two Achievement issues and they will be fixed in a patch. I can't confirm an exact date, but hopefully you won't have to wait too long to get that sorted out. Rest assured, you won't have to reset your rank or anything like that.

Were there any cool new features you wanted in the game, but weren't able to add?

–Supersnake

■ Like any game, there are some features that a developer has to let go early on either because they didn't work out or due to time constraints. For me there were two features that I really pushed for but didn't make it into the game. The first was to support split-screen online, while the second was to support in-game clans and clan matches.

Are there any plans for the rapidly growing Wii?

–Resident-Bowser

■ Unfortunately, there are no plans yet to bring Rainbow Six to the Wii.

I was under the impression that Vegas 2 was going to address the rampant spawn camping in some way or another. It's pretty frustrating. Spawn camping is an issue to one degree or another in most shooters, but in the Rainbow Six games I think it's way out of control.

–atomicme317

■ We attempted to curb spawn camping by making sure there are always multiple exits from the player's spawn point in the map, and by making the newly spawned player invulnerable to damage for a short amount of time. I think the rampant spawn camping happens more often in Team Deathmatch because that's kind of the objective in that game mode: get the most kills you can. We've been toying with the idea of having players respawn at random locations throughout the map for this game mode. If our internal testing of this is successful, it could very well be something that we introduce in a patch.

How much downloadable content can we expect to see in the game's lifetime?

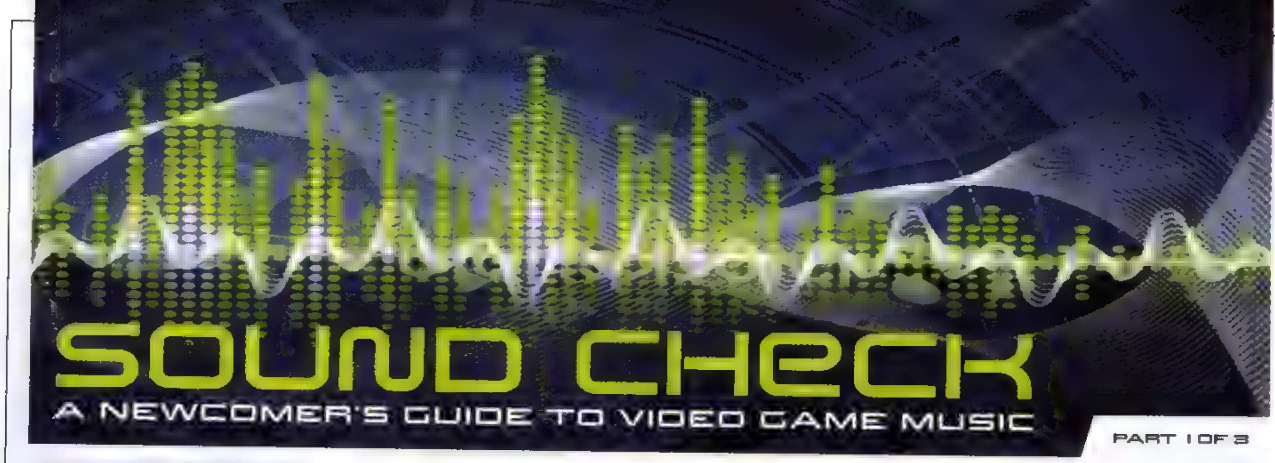
–Packerfa

■ We haven't made any announcements yet as far as DLC goes. However, I'd really like to give something back to those faithful players that are enjoying our game, so we'll see how that develops.

Why did you choose to have the story mode co-op only two-player when there are four team members playing anyway (two of which are AI controlled)? It could have easily been four-player.

–Guitar 5

■ Our intention with the cooperative story mode was to offer the full story experience this time around. One of the technical constraints we had to deal with was a maximum of four Rainbow characters, which meant we had to make a choice early in production. Either support four players without the AI, or two players with the AI. Since the AI was so heavily imbedded into the storyline we opted to go with two players and keep the AI present. The strong point of this direction was that we could seamlessly transition the story mode from single player to co-op, meaning if you see a friend online playing the story mode you can jump right into his match and play alongside him. However, the drawback was that compared to the first Rainbow Six Vegas, this mode no longer supports four players. Co-op Terrorist Hunt, on the other hand, continues to support four human players.



SOUND CHECK

A NEWCOMER'S GUIDE TO VIDEO GAME MUSIC

PART 1 OF 3

It's unlikely that anyone reading this needs to be preached to about the evolving role of musical scores in video games. For some of you, however, perhaps the interest has evolved into a fascination with the audio component of games for its own sake. If you're on that threshold, but haven't yet crossed over into including game music on your iPod, a quick primer may be in order. This month, we'll take a look at six of the best recent original soundtrack releases, chosen both because of their excellence and for their wide availability in either CD format or as an iTunes download. Check back in the coming months to learn about gaming cover bands and online remixes.

Crysis

Inon Zur's driving, rhythmic tracks for Crysis strangely blend traditional instruments with alien synths and militaristic percussion passages. The result is a relentless pace of action and suspense that carries the soundtrack from beginning to end. Your computer may not be able to handle the game, but your CD player shouldn't have any trouble with the accompanying music.

UNCHARTED
DRAKE'S FORTUNE

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

Few soundtracks have so accurately captured the vibe of a game world as Greg Edmonson's score for Uncharted. Whether it's a brief snatch of tribal drums or a splash of Spanish guitar, the soundtrack is awash in the pulp adventure tone of Nate Drake's quest for his ancestor's lost treasure.

BLUE DRAGON ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK
All Music Composed & Produced by Nobuo Uematsu

Blue Dragon

While Nobuo Uematsu will likely be best remembered for his oft-cited work on Final Fantasy, his recent score for Blue Dragon takes things in a slightly different direction. While still rooted in familiar and traditional harmonies, the score for Blue Dragon adopts a much more childlike and whimsical tone than Uematsu's earlier scores. Only the true believer will have much patience for the occasional digressions into questionable rock vocals, but the rest of the score hits the expected level of excellence you'd expect from one of the first masters in the genre.

MASS EFFECT
original soundtrack

Mass Effect

You can't mistake the synth-filled sweeps of the Mass Effect soundtrack. Almost every track carries the game's identity in its tone, somehow taking the campy sounds of old school sci-fi movies and making them new and relevant. Composers Jack Wall, Sam Hulick, Richard Jacques, and David Kates seem to know exactly when to scale back arrangements, sometimes presenting an almost bare instrumentation that works to great effect.

Halo 3

A few of the original Halo's most recognizable tracks have crossed the threshold where even casual players recognize them and hum along. Even so, some of Martin O'Donnell's and Michael Salvatori's best work was saved for the final act of the Halo trilogy. In a two-disc set, the soundtrack traces its way through the battles and revelations of Halo 3. Both new music and brand new arrangements of familiar Halo tunes are given the full treatment of choir and orchestra, and the result is a fitting culmination for a franchise responsible for some of the best music in gaming.

Lair

Several hauntingly lilting and memorable musical motifs weave their way in and out of John Debney's contemplative tracks for Lair, even while his more energetic and robust battle themes call to mind the sweeping grandeur of John William's work on Star Wars. Taken as a whole, the soundtrack is a surprisingly deep and varied listen, particularly where traditional orchestral work is interlaced with the solo female vocalist's plaintive melodies.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

BIOSHOCK BROADENING HORIZONS

It's no secret that 2K has some far-reaching plans for BioShock. 2K's parent company, Take-Two, is considering the franchise for an MMO and a movie. There is also talk that BioShock 2 may be coming to the PlayStation 3 and Wii, as 2K Marin has been looking for employees with development background on these two platforms. However, it is unknown what other projects the studio has on tap.

NEW CASTLEVANIA

A new Castlevania title has been filed with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and the ESRB. Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia is rated T for teen and will appear on the Nintendo DS. Publisher/developer Konami has not officially announced the title as of the time of this writing.

HITMEN'S NEW ASSIGNMENT

The founders of Hitman and Kane & Lynch developer, IO Interactive, are forming a new studio called Reto-Moto that will focus on online multiplayer games, although no projects have been announced yet.

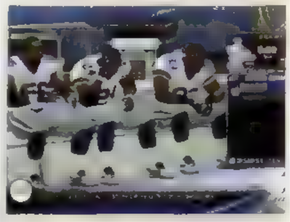
RETO-MOTO

THE NEWEST ROCKSTAR

Mad Doc Software (Star Trek: Legacy, Empire Earth III) is the latest developer brought into the Rockstar fold after the company's work on the 360 and Wii versions of Bully. The Andover, Massachusetts studio will be now known as Rockstar New England.

THE SPECIAL ED. HEAD COACH

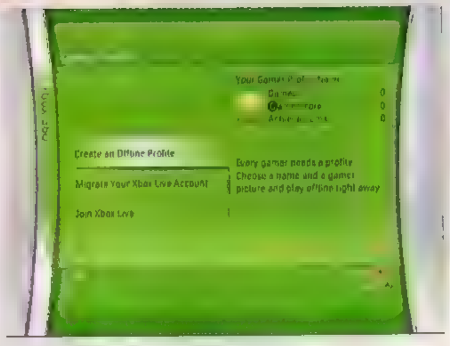
EA Sports' NFL Head Coach 09 (previewed last issue) will be available as part of the Madden NFL 09 20th Anniversary Collector's Edition, an $89.99 bundle for Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 that includes Madden NFL 09, Head Coach, and other bonus content. This special edition goes on sale August 12, but a stand-alone version of Head Coach will sell for $49.99 on September 2.



LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip

WHEELS TURNING ON NEW XBOX



Every gamer needs a profile
Choose a name and a gamer picture and play offline right away

The holiday season may be over, but industry analysts are still busy trying to read the future. Loose Talk has heard that the next iterations of the Xbox 360 and Nintendo's Wii are expected to hit in 2010, while Sony is expected to come out with its PS3 successor in 2012. While 2010 sounds right on track for the next Xbox if you go by the standard five-year console cycle, Sony's 2012 mark would put the company behind Microsoft in hitting the market with a new system. This would once again allow Microsoft to have the market all to itself for a period of time.

We've also heard that Microsoft is already putting into place its philosophy for the new console, and one thing that will definitely be included is letting existing Xbox 360 gamers migrate their GamerTag and profile over to the new system. Your Achievements would also transfer onto the new system instead of having you start from scratch. Loose Talk has even heard that Microsoft is already approaching developers about the new system.

ROAD RASH HITS SKID

We told you last month about the rumors regarding EA bringing back the Road Rash franchise, and if that got you excited, you're not going to like the update we just got on the game. We've heard from a second-hand developer source that EA has pulled the plug on the project. This little tidbit didn't come from someone from within EA, so we're hoping that the person got it wrong. As of now, however, it looks like the project's become nothing but a skid mark.

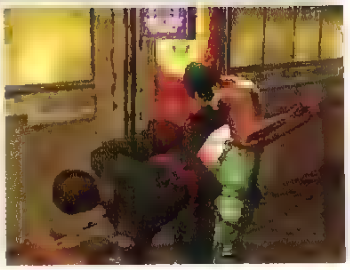
THIEF LURKING IN THE SHADOWS

In a teaser on Eidos Montreal's website, the developer says that its second triple-A title after it's done with Deus Ex 3 begins with the letter "T" and will be a revival of a successful franchise. This has most people believing that the studio is working on Thief 4, the follow up to Deadly Shadows from 2004.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight



This quality game flew under the radar for a system – the PSP – that also isn't always in the spotlight. It's a 3D fighter with a well-done combat engine that has you participating in and sometimes throwing street fights for side bets. While fighting, you influence the outcome (and therefore the bets) by either faking damage or pulling your punches on your opponent (via button presses). Of course, if the crowd doesn't buy it and thinks you're on the take, that's when the real beatdown begins. Interestingly, this game's developer Think & Feel, went on to co-develop Final Fantasy XII Revenant Wings for the DS.

(Answer on page 31)

games

THE RETURN OF THE KINGDOM

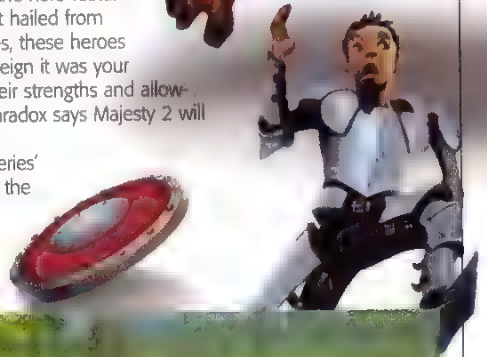
PARADOX BRINGS BACK MAJESTY

Kingdoms don't last forever, but one classic franchise – Majesty – is being brought back to relive its former glories. PC RTS Majesty: The Fantasy Kingdom Sim was released in 2000 by MicroProse and developed by Cyberlore. Now Swedish publisher/developer Paradox Interactive has picked up the IP to a sequel entitled Majesty 2: The Fantasy Kingdom Sim, which is set to release in the first quarter of 2009. The game is slated for PC, but the company says other platforms will be confirmed in the future.

Paradox says that it doesn't plan any grand re-invention for the franchise, but rather aims to bring it into the present. As such, the game's kingdom-building core complete with building-constructing peasants, tax collectors, etc. will likely remain intact.

One aspect of the series we're eagerly awaiting is the hero feature. The original Majesty contained XP-earning heroes that hailed from 16 different guilds and temples. Unlike most RTS titles, these heroes weren't directly under your control. Rather, as a sovereign it was your duty to entice them into helping you by playing to their strengths and allowing them to use their class potential for your aims. Paradox says Majesty 2 will allow you to combine different heroes into parties.

The developer also said that it wants to keep the series' humor intact, and this was flashed in a brief trailer for the game. It showed a ogre crashing through the game's dense woods and tearing up the buildings of your kingdom before getting tired and settling down for an impromptu nap right on your palace grounds.



news

STORMFRONT'S DOORS SHUTTERED

INDEPENDENT STUDIO SHUT DOWN AFTER 20 YEARS

Stormfront Studios – the developer behind The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, among many other projects – has been forced to suspend operations due to what studio head Don Daglow calls "the perfect storm."

The company has recently finished up The Spiderwick Chronicles for publisher Sierra, but found itself in the unfortunate situation of being between projects, in a bad economy, having its last game fare poorly, and not being able to secure publishing deals for a couple of original IPs that it had already been working on. Daglow says that discussions regarding bringing the company back have started, but currently the studio is closed and its employees have been sent home.

Stormfront has been around for almost 20 years, and Daglow was one of the original five Intellivision programmers. Although the company has recently become known for its licensed movie products, the developer has a wide-ranging history spanning everything from sports (Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2001 and NASCAR 2000 on the PlayStation and Madden NFL 97/98 on PC) to MMORPGs (a pre-BioWare Neverwinter Nights) and RTSs (Stronghold).

news

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR HD DVD PLAYER

REHASH INTO CASH

Sometimes when you lose, you win. Okay, so maybe siding with HD DVD in the HD format war wasn't the best decision you ever made. Don't worry, though, companies like Wal-Mart and Best Buy are taking pity on you. As of the time of this writing, prominent retailers are now offering rebates and some are even taking trade-ins for those who bought HD DVD players. Listed below are just some of the retailers offering mercy to HD DVD owners.

Amazon.com: Acknowledging that "new technologies don't always work out as planned," online retailer Amazon has offered a $50 credit to those who bought an HD DVD player from them before February 23, 2008.

Best Buy: Offers a $50 gift card to those who bought either an HD DVD player or an HD DVD attachment (like the one for the 360) before the format's official demise on February 23. The company says it will automatically send off the cards to those whom it can identify (such as those in the Best Buy Reward Zone program or those who purchased extended warranties). The rest of the customers can call the company with a proof of purchase to receive their cards.

Furthermore, Best Buy is buying back HD DVD players via its online trade-in center www.bestbuytradein.com, although the Xbox 360 add-on player is fetching under $20.

Circuit City: The big box consumer electronics retailer is accepting returns on HD DVD players within 90 days of purchase for store credit.

Wal-Mart: If you act before April 30 and you bought your player on or after November 1, 2007, Wal-Mart stores will offer a refund as long as you have a receipt. Original packaging not required

Of course, if you want to keep your HD DVD player – it does, after all, still offer a high-def movie experience – you can take advantage of the many HD DVD movie sales going on right now. Amazon.com is selling some HD DVD discs for up to 60 percent off (with all HD DVDs discounted at least 30 percent) Other online sites such as www.deepdiscount.com or hddvdboxsets.com are offering similar savings.

TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER

HERVÉ SLIWA
Lead Game Designer, Alone in the Dark

1 Half-Life series – PC
2 Metal Gear Solid – PSone
3 Alone in the Dark – PC
4 The Legend of Zelda series
5 Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee – PC

READER

VICTOR ACEVES
Los Angeles, CA

1 Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater – PS2
2 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas – PS2
3 Empire Earth: Gold Edition – PC
4 Splinter Cell: Double Agent – Xbox
5 Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath – 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 Things To Do In Liberty City

10 Check out Ricky Gervais' stand-up act at Split Sides
9 Ride in a gypsy cab and listen to the cabbie run his mouth
8 Skip a rocket into rush hour traffic
7 Park a bus in a crucial intersection during a multiplayer race
6 Jump the West River with a motorcycle
5 Fly a helicopter to its maximum altitude, then jump
4 Set up an online date through Love Meet
3 Watch an episode of *Republican Space Rangers*
2 Jack a fire truck and spray down pedestrians
1 Take a date to The Triangle Club. She'll love it

Name That Game Answer The Con

IN AIR OR ON THE GROUND. YOU ARE A ONE MAN ARMY.
IRON MAN
FIND OUT MORE AT WWW.IRONMANTHEGAME.COM
MAY 2, 2008

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX 360.

Wii™

NINTENDO DS™

TEEN
T
Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

AVAILABLE ON PLAYSTATION®3 AND PLAYSTATION®2 COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEMS AND PSP® (PLAYSTATION®PORTABLE) SYSTEM.

© SEGA. All rights reserved. SEGA is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. SEGA and the SEGA logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of SEGA Corporation. Iron Man, the Movie © 2008 MVL Film Finance LLC. Marvel, Iron Man, all character names and their distinctive likenesses: ™ & © 2008 Marvel Entertainment, Inc. and its subsidiaries. All Rights Reserved. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION", "PS" Family logo and "PSP" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. PSP® system – Memory Stick Duo™ may be required (sold separately). Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. Wii and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006 Nintendo. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

MARVEL

SEGA®

FIND YOUR INNER HERO AND UNLEASH INCREDIBLE FURY.
DEMOLISH ANYTHING IN THE OPEN WORLD AND USE IT AS A WEAPON
UNLEASH RAGE TO UNLOCK POWERFUL MOVES
NYC
THE INCREDIBLE HULK™
WWW.INCREDIBLEHULKTHEGAME.COM

JUNE 2008

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX 360.

Wii™

NINTENDO DS.

TEEN
T
Mild Blood
Mild Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

AVAILABLE ON PLAYSTATION®3 AND PLAYSTATION®2 COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEMS.

© SEGA. All rights reserved. SEGA is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. SEGA and the SEGA logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of SEGA Corporation. The Incredible Hulk, the Movie © 2008 MVL Film Finance LLC. Marvel, The Incredible Hulk, all character names and their distinctive likenesses: TM & © 2008 Marvel Entertainment, Inc. and its subsidiaries. All Rights Reserved. "PlayStation", "PLAYSTATION" and "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are under license from Microsoft. Wii and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006 Nintendo. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

AMAZE
EDGE OF REALITY
MARVEL
SEGA®

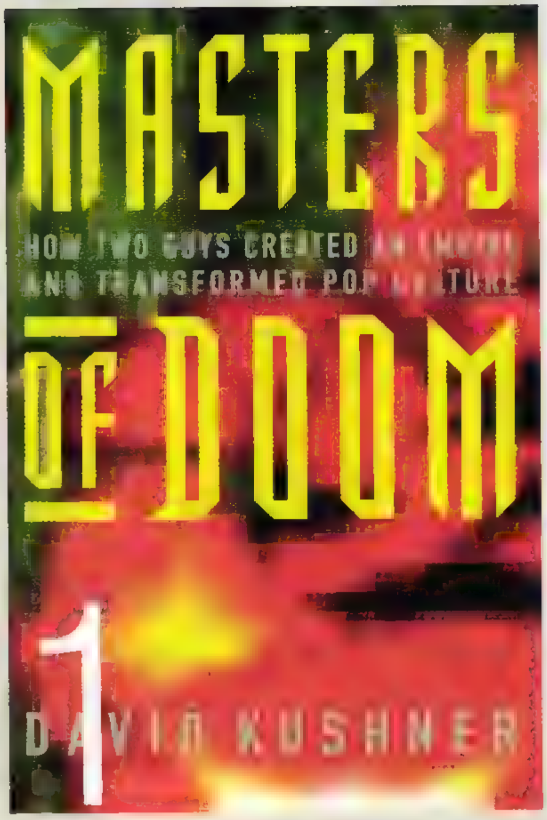
the top 10 videogame books

While video games are often portrayed in the media as the enemy of reading, the truth is that there is a rich and growing number of excellently written video game books lining the shelves of our stores and libraries. This list presents our picks for the ten best gaming books ever written, covering everything from deeply researched histories to post-modern game-inspired fiction. If you want to achieve a true understanding of video games as an industry and hobby, don't hesitate to read any and all of these classics.

Masters of Doom

by David Kushner

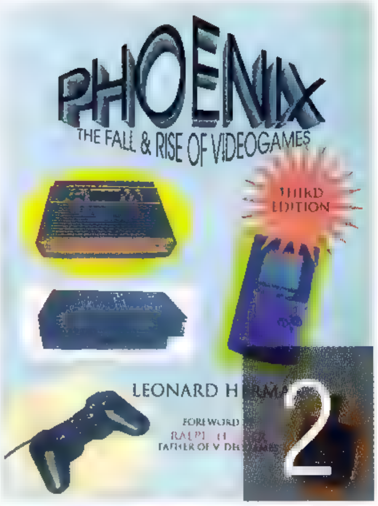
Truth, they say, is stranger than fiction, and David Kushner's *Masters of Doom* is a great example. The book details the wild rise and fall of the original id Software gang as they created the first-person shooter genre with Castle Wolfenstein 3D, and made it a video game staple with the epochal Doom. With a cast of real-life characters – most notably John Carmack and John Romero – as memorable as that of any movie, *Masters of Doom* details how a crew of heavy metal addled RPG dorks reinvented themselves as the gun-slinging rock stars of video games, revolutionizing the industry along the way. Just like any good rock n' roll saga, it ends in excess and hubris, but the ride is one that you'll never forget, due in good part to Kushner's excellent writing.



Phoenix: The Fall and Rise of Video Games

by Leonard Herman

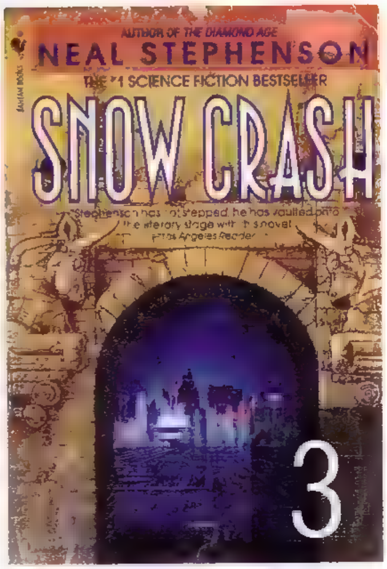
While gaming is generally accepted as a major form of art in most circles and has even infiltrated the halls of academia (as evidenced by an increasing number of serious journal articles and books about it each year), just like the industry itself, video game books were once the product of just a few enthusiastic hobbyists. *Phoenix* is generally considered the first comprehensive book written about video game history, and as such is owed a debt by every other book on this list. Originally published by veteran game writer Leonard Herman in 1994, *Phoenix* did the invaluable work of compiling a base of knowledge about gaming history that could have easily been lost forever. Filled with incredible detail and eyewitness accounts of the industry from its roots in the late '60s to the boom of the 1990s, *Phoenix* (in any of its three editions) is still the first place to start in any study of gaming history.



Snow Crash

by Neal Stephenson

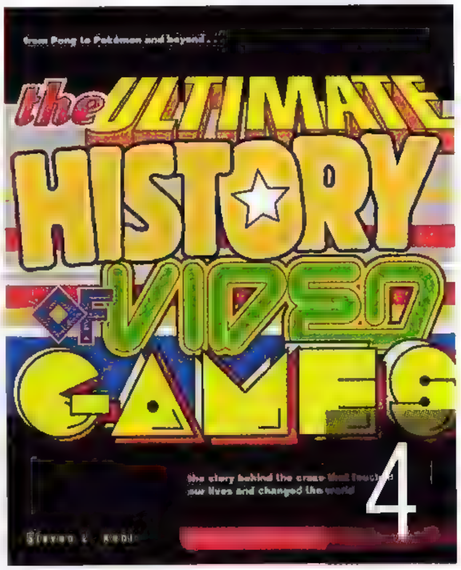
Although it was built on the foundations of cyberpunk laid by authors like William Gibson, Neil Stephenson's *Snow Crash* represents a landmark of sorts for video game culture. While recounting the exploits of super-hacker/samurai swordfighter/pizza delivery boy Hiro Protagonist, the novel's "Metaverse" envisioned the world of massively multiplayer online games years before they could be created. From World of Warcraft to Second Life, the idea of exploring virtual world through an avatar can all be traced back to *Snow Crash*. In addition, the novel's mixing of advanced technology and deep philosophy with sometimes-juvenile humor and outlandish action shows that Stephenson was keenly attuned to the aesthetics of video games' often messy and ingenious melding of high and low culture. A post-modern classic, *Snow Crash* is one of the most influential books in gaming history.



The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokémon

by Steven L. Kent

Although it clearly owes a debt to *Phoenix*, *The Ultimate History of Videogames* (originally published as *The First Quarter*) improves on Herman's book in several respects, most notably by giving the story of the industry a greater focus and improved narrative. Written by veteran video game journalist Steven L. Kent, the book details the industry's evolution through time, and gives the reader an insider's view of many dramatic events (Kent himself testified in Congress during the controversial "Mortal Kombat hearings" on game violence). Kent has had access to many of the greats of gaming – his connections in Japan let him get many unique takes on the industry from the men who helped build it – and this personal, hands-on view make this, if not as encyclopedic in detail as *Phoenix*, perhaps the most readable general history of the hobby.


from Pong to Pokémon and beyond...
the ULTIMATE HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES
4

Confessions of the Game Doctor

by Bill Kunkel

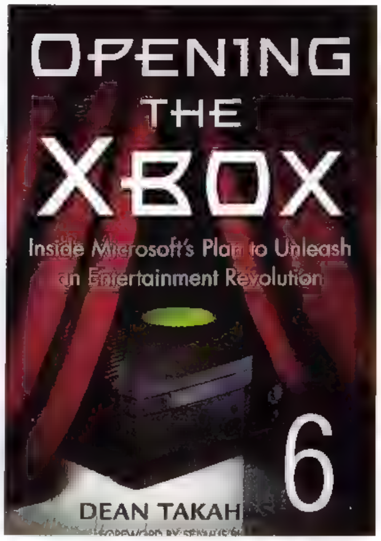
They don't make 'em like Bill Kunkel anymore. Along with his partners Arnie Katz and Joyce Worley, Kunkel founded *Electronic Games* magazine in 1981, inventing video game journalism as we know it. *Confessions of the Game Doctor* traces Kunkel's sometimes-bizarre ride through the video game industry, detailing the slings, arrows, sex, and drugs of outrageous fortune. It's a bit incoherent at times, but this is far from a sanitized, boring memoir. The gonzo Kunkel sits back and lets it all fly, detailing cocaine-fueled writing sessions, public sex, and his involvement in the production of the horrible game based on *Batman Returns*. As a warts-and-all autobiography, it's unmatched, and provides readers with an invaluable snapshot of video games' crazy early days.

Bill Kunkel's
Electronic Games
Confessions
Game Doctor
5

Opening the Xbox

by Dean Takahashi

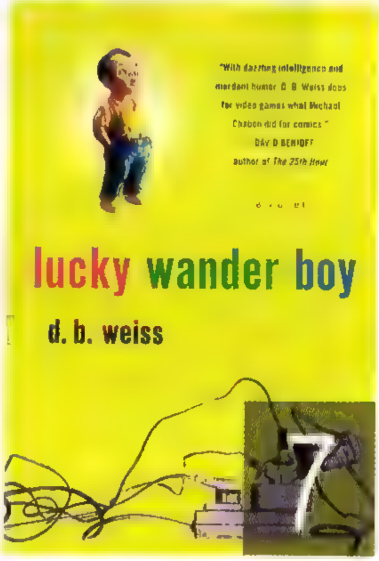
Future historians will be thankful that Microsoft's groundbreaking entry into the home console market did not go unrecorded. The man they will be thanking is former newspaper journalist Dean Takahashi, who – through unprecedented access to many of the major players involved in creating the Xbox – gives readers a look inside the machinations of the world's largest corporation as it hatches a multi-billion dollar gamble. The book is excellently researched, and the vivid writing makes you feel as though you were actually there as an ambitious band of true believers changed the course of both video games and Microsoft. This polished, well-written tome will be relied on in years to come as the first word in Xbox lore.


OPENING THE XBOX
Inside Microsoft's Plan to Unleash an Entertainment Revolution
DEAN TAKAH
6

Lucky Wander Boy

by D.B. Weiss

Perhaps the finest work of art inspired primarily by video games, *Lucky Wander Boy* builds on the works of authors like Neal Stephenson and David Foster Wallace, while offering up some of the most trenchant writing about games as an art form to date. The book is the story of Adam Pennymen, a slacker-ish writer who's been slowly crafting *The Catalogue of Obsolete Entertainments*, a series of essays on classic arcade games like Donkey Kong and Pac-Man. In his research, he comes across mention of the most rare arcade game ever made – the strange and surreal Lucky Wander Boy of the title. As he searches out the last remaining Wander Boy unit and its elusive creator, Pennyman finds that things are much deeper (and shallower) than they first appear. Along the way, readers are entertained with excerpts from *The Catalogue*, which are insightful and revealing looks at many classic early '80s games.


"With dazzling intelligence and mordant humor D. B. Weiss does for video games what Michael Chabon did for comics."
DAVID BENIOFF
author of The 25th Hour
lucky wander boy
d. b. weiss
7

Game Over: Press Start to Continue

by David Scheff and Andy Eddy

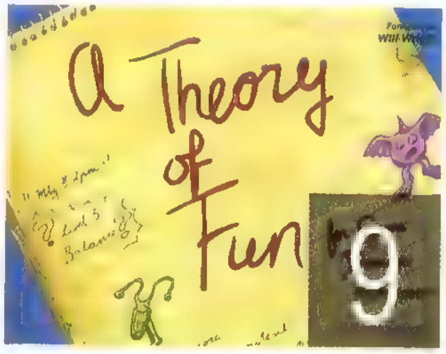
Like *Opening the Xbox*, *Game Over* eschews the big picture in order to focus more clearly on the history of one company, in this case the most important in all of video game companies: Nintendo. Scheff's account of the company's history is remarkably detailed, telling the story of how the once-manufacturer of collectible playing cards single-handedly revived video games after the Great Crash of 1983. The book also serves as an illuminating portrait of some of the men that helped make Nintendo the most dominant company in gaming, most notably Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto, the tragic Game Boy inventor Gunpei Yokoi, and Nintendo's fearsome patriarch Hiroshi Yamauchi. All in all, it's a fascinating book about a fascinating company.

"The 'Bible' of the interactive gaming industry."
—GameWEEK Magazine
GAME OVER
PRESS START TO CONTINUE
The Maturing of M
by David Sheff
with New Chapters by Andy Eddy
8

A Theory of Fun for Game Design

by Raph Koster

In this book, Koster aims a bit higher than the normal historical analysis of the game industry. Instead, the former chief executive officer of Sony Online Entertainment aims to define just what terms like "game" and "fun" actually mean. His answers are fascinating and a must-read for anyone concerned with the art of video games, but what's more impressive is that Koster – an eccentric and highly skilled writer – actually manages to make this high-brow discussion accessible and, yes, even fun to read. Through an often hilarious mix of academic discussion, first-person anecdotes, and hand-drawn cartoons, Koster brings the reader closer to understanding what role games of all sorts play in human life and what we mean when we say something is "fun." All in all, it's a fascinating and unique book that should be required reading at the world's many video game college programs.



High Score: The Illustrated History of Electronic Games

by Rusel Demaria and Johnny L. Wilson

This large format book doesn't purport to be as deep or highly researched as some of the others on this list, but as a coffee table tome, it's remarkably well written and beautifully laid out. For casual gamers, this infectious book is a great place to start, as it does a nice job of balancing a comprehensive historical overview with a good dose of eye candy. Perhaps the most important thing this book does is preserve much of video games' visual history in the form of original photos, advertisements, game box art, and arcade cabinets. Throughout the book, you'll see scores of arresting images, many iconic and some rarely seen, all laid out on high quality, slick paper stock. It also does the service of recounting the history of some little-covered PC titles, rectifying the often-console centric view of gaming history many books have put forward.

the illustrated history of electronic games
HIGH SCORE!
10

UNLIMITED ENABLED

Gamers

Masters of N+

Game Informer scours the leaderboards in search of the best of the best, uncovering the person behind the handle, and learning his or her strategies. So, if you get a pesky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network from GameInformerMag, please don't delete it. You could be our next featured gamer.

SINGLE

ROBERT BIELECKI

- Handle: bieljoha
- Age: 22
- Hometown: Gothenburg, Sweden
- Rivals: IBSOLOADED, LouDog004
- Favorite Episode: 11
- Most Hated Stage "Tight, drone-filled levels"
- Most Hated Enemy: Zap Drones

Accomplishments:

As of press time, Bielecki is ranked number one on the overall single-player campaign leaderboard with a total score of 18,307.54.

Origin of Skills:

"I started playing the original game (N) on PC, and instantly got hooked," Bielecki says. "Then, when I found out that it was going to be available for the 360 it was a definite download for me."

The Key to Victory:

"If you aren't some kind of super-player, you're going to die a lot," says Bielecki. "The main thing is to be patient."

Life Outside of N+:

Bielecki is studying to become a preschool teacher and enjoys listening to music and hanging out with friends.

Other Games:

Bielecki's recently played list includes The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Super Mario Galaxy, Gears of War, Lost Odyssey, and Pro Evolution Soccer 2008.

Practice Time:

In his N+ heyday, Bielecki played around 10 to 12 hours a week. He has since scaled back to only a couple hours per week. "I believe [IBSOLOADED] will get that number one spot pretty soon," Bielecki says. "But I don't mind. I play because it's fun. It's just a bonus being number one."

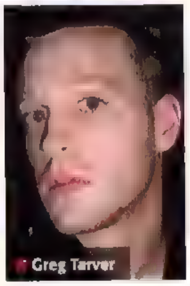
The Future of N+:

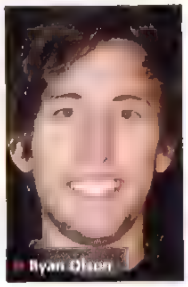
"I'd like to be able to upload and download created levels, but I read somewhere that they're going to have that available in the future," says Bielecki. "Other than that, I don't know. They've really kept the feeling from the first game to this, and that is the most important thing."

Brian Ellsworth

Stevn Caraballo

Check out this month's Unlimited to hear from N+ Racing and Survival champs Brian Ellsworth and Steven Caraballo, respectively





CO-OP

GREG TARVER & RYAN OLSON

- Handles: sparepigman, Default0001
- Ages: 20 (Tarver), 20 (Olson)
- Hometown: Adrian, Michigan (Tarver), Redwood City, California (Olson)
- Rivals: LouDog004, each other
- Favorite Levels: Tarver – Paper Thin Walls (Episode 24, Level 4, SP), Olson – Intertwined (Ep. 8, Lv. 5, MP)
- Most Hated Stage: Tarver – Hexactly (Ep. 42, Lv. 4, SP), Olson – The Buddy System (Ep. 8, Lv. 3, MP)
- Most Hated Enemy: Gauss Turret (Tarver), Homing Turrets (Olsen)

Accomplishments:

Tarver and Olson met through playing N+ online and have since teamed up to dominate both co-op leaderboards. Tarver is number one on the co-op version of the single-player campaign with Olson coming in at a close second. But it's Olson who leads the multiplayer campaign boards with Tarver at number two.

The Key to Victory:

"Don't waste a lot of time in the air," Tarver says. "If you're jumping from one object to another, try to do as low a jump as possible."

Working Together:

Olson says it's tough to find players who are serious about sticking with an episode to get a high score. "That's why, if I play with sparepigman, we won't let just random people join if we're trying to beat our scores," Olson says. "Because even if you explain to them 'Hey, we're trying to collect the coins. We're trying to beat our time. Do you guys want to do that?' And sometimes they'll be like, 'Oh yeah, that's okay.' Then, sure enough, we start it up and the first thing they do is hit the key and run to the door."

Life Outside of N+:

Olson spent about eight months working at EA as a tester on games like Hellgate: London. He now studies business at a school in San Mateo, CA. Tarver is currently trying to break into the video gaming business.

Other Games:

Both gamers are big fans of Halo 3 and Call of Duty 4. Olsen also enjoys The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion and Tarver owns about 20 Xbox Live Arcade games outside of N+.

Practice Time:

Tarver logs a ridiculous 60 to 70 hours of N+ a week while Olson puts in a solid 20 hours a week.

The Future of N+:

Both players agree that online lag is a big problem in N+. "The online gaming is just horribly laggy," Tarver says. "I still play it though, so it must be that good." Tarver also hopes user-created map sharing comes along soon. Olson wants bigger stages and more teamwork-based multiplayer maps. "Also, if they could somehow make a deathmatch work," Olson says. "Not just like a race or survival, but more like trying to kill each other [with traps]."

GAME DAYS SALE

COMING JUNE 2ND

HUNDREDS OF GAMES AND ACCESSORIES

UP TO 50% OFF

SAVE AN EXTRA 10% ON ALL GAME DAYS SALE ITEMS

BRING IN THIS AD AND SAVE AN ADDITIONAL 10% ON A ONE TIME PURCHASE OF ANY GAME DAYS SALE MERCHANDISE. ONE COUPON PER CUSTOMER. SEE STORE ASSOCIATE FOR COMPLETE DETAILS.
OFFER ENDS 6/30/08

E B C 3 0 0 5 4 4 4

GAME DAYS SALE

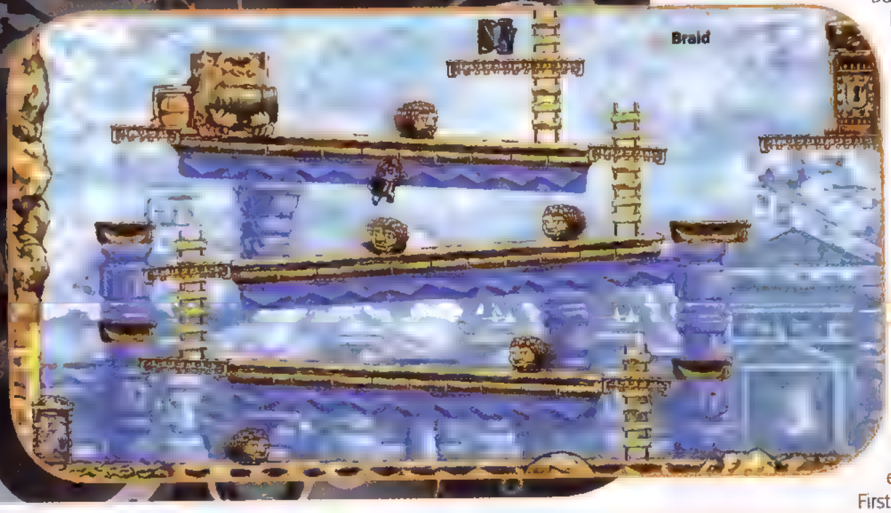
GameStop
power to the players™

GameStop
power to the players™

impulse

> BY MATT MILLER

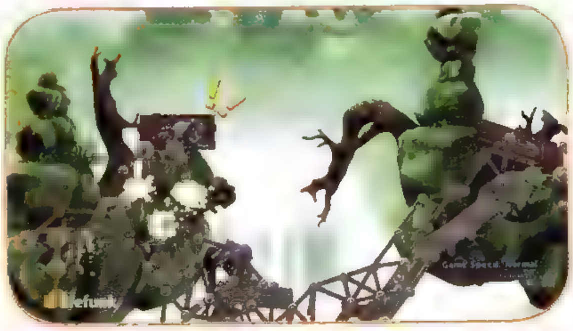
Braid asks whether the princess really is in another castle, and Elefunk makes structural engineering fun for the masses. You need more hard drive space. >>>



There are a host of new downloadable titles to talk about this month, so I'm going to get right to it. Chief among these brave new games is Braid on Live Arcade, a title I'm having a hard time not obsessing over – the final level in particular is unlike anything I've played before. In the ever-widening sea of recent downloadable releases, Braid rides the waves as one of the best. As a pure platform/puzzle game, it presents a wealth of brilliant mechanics, each of which plays with your perception of time. After introducing the ability to rewind time, players start juggling ever more complex manipulations. It's a cool idea, but what rockets the game skyward is its willingness to tie these mechanics to profound, thematic storytelling. Using the familiar gaming vocabulary of Mario's search for the lost princess as allegory, Braid throws its players into an existential mystery about memory and loss. Discussions as to its ultimate meaning will keep gamers arguing for a long time to come. It's a hallmark release I can't recommend highly enough.

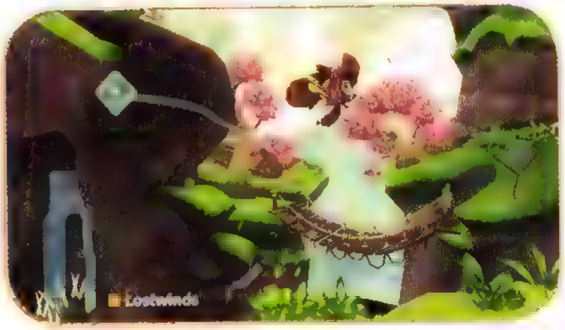
A little too profound for you? I know just the thing. **Assault Heroes 2** (also a Microsoft exclusive) is a blast, capitalizing on the straightforward approach of its predecessor to deliver balanced yet challenging levels ideal for short play sessions with a co-op buddy. Admittedly, only a few innovations (like the ability to steal enemy vehicles) alter the formula from game one. But when you've already nailed the concept of driving dune buggies mounted with nuclear warheads, do you really need to mess with greatness?

PlayStation Network and Live Arcade play host to two other titles that offer a similar level of insane action. Both **1942: Joint Strike** and **Wolf of the Battlefield: Commando 3** are classic shooters redesigned for the console world. Each does its forebear proud – that is to say, one can gleefully blow up pretty much everything on screen. Neither is particularly lengthy, but multiple difficulties keep the fun going.

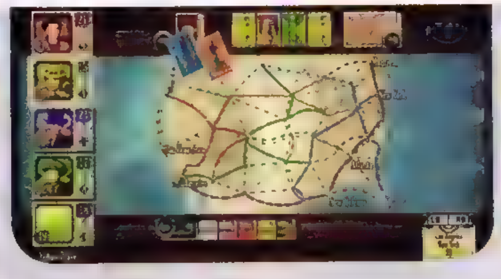


Microsoft doesn't own the patent on great exclusive releases, as evidenced by my time with one of PSN's newest titles. For lack of a better descriptor, I'm going to have to label **Elefunk** as a puzzle/structural engineering game. As some weighty pachyderms wait for their turn to cross, you have to build up a structure of girders and supports that can hold their hardly insignificant weight. For anyone not schooled in bridge building, the game becomes a fascinating adventure in trial and error. On a related note, under no circumstances should you ever cross a bridge if I was involved in its construction.

As of now, many questions remain unanswered about the mysterious WiiWare, a platform that should be seeing its first public releases as you read this. First and foremost, I'd like to know how large Nintendo is going to allow these game files to be, given how little storage space the Wii has to spare. Regardless, games like **Lost Winds** help to distract me from my concerns. A charming art style shows off the beauty of this simple little platformer, which focuses on using the wind to move the character about and affect the environment through a wave of the remote. Catching my eye for an entirely different reason, the announcement of **Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People** has me pretty stoked. While ostensibly a straightforward adventure game, anyone who has spent a few hours laughing at Homestarrunner.com can imagine the potential for greatness. ■ ■ ■

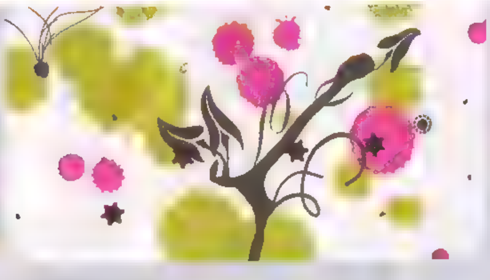


ONESHOTS



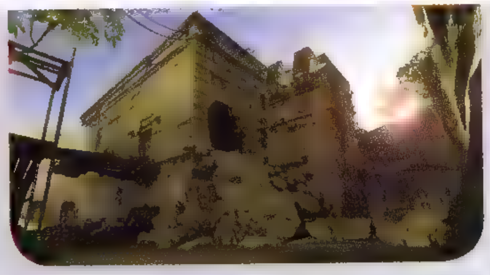
Ticket to Ride

Another Live Arcade release based on a tabletop game. The simple mechanic of building railroad routes is easy enough to learn, but players could pour hours into building their strategy. Try at a party



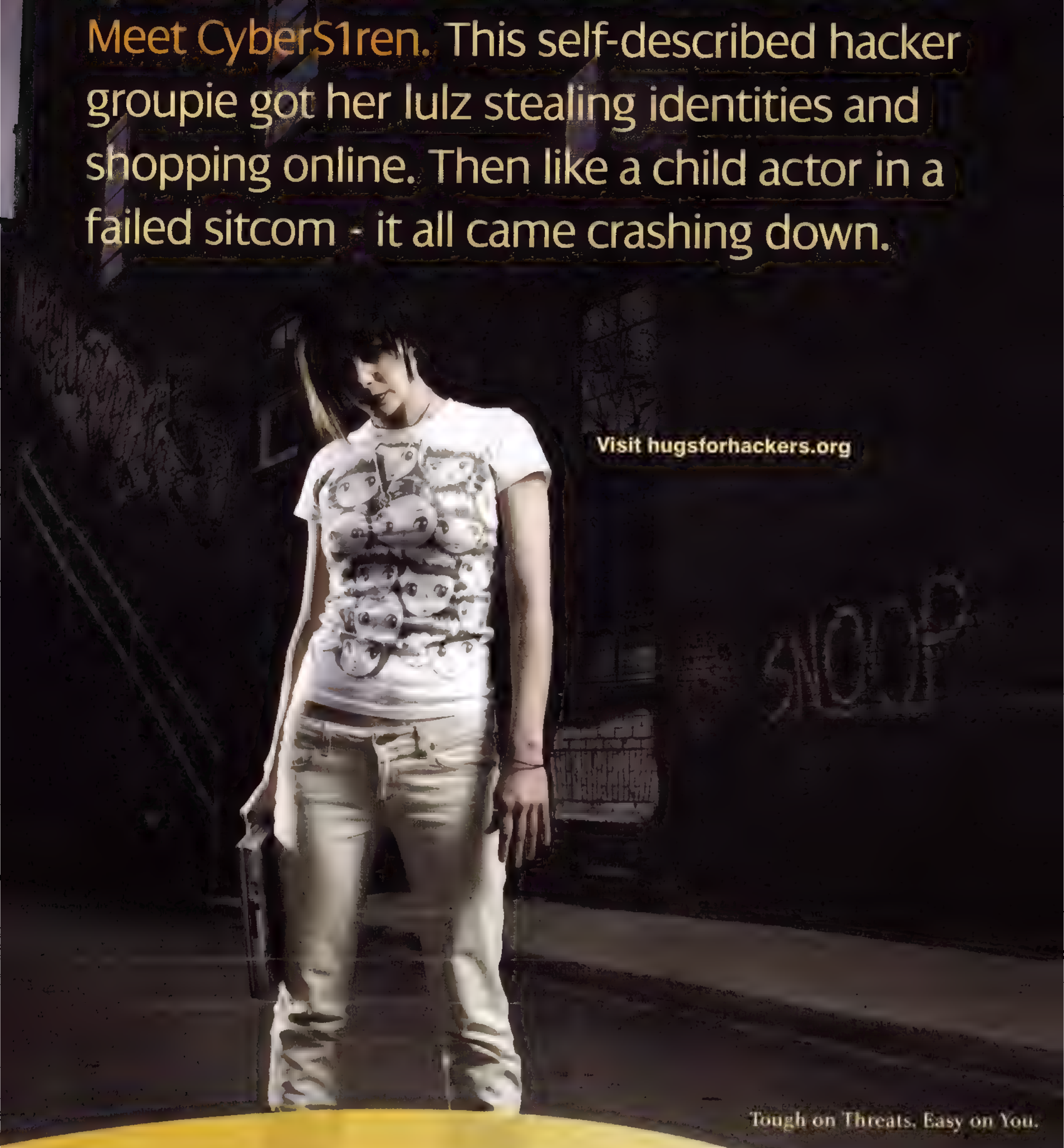
PixelJunk Eden

Q-Games' PixelJunk brand for PSN continues with another simple yet intriguing game. A constantly shifting and growing alien garden serves as the backdrop as players swing and leap among the leaves. Yeah, I don't really get it either. Check back next month after I've played the thing.



> Map Pack Madness

If some other games grabbed your attention in recent months, you may want to check back in with Halo 3 and Call of Duty 4. Both have newly released map packs that are being widely praised by hardcore players.



Meet CyberS1ren. This self-described hacker groupie got her lulz stealing identities and shopping online. Then like a child actor in a failed sitcom - it all came crashing down.

70 million people switched to AVG 8.0 because it protects from online threats without slowing PC's or networks to a crawl. That put a lot of hackers, and their threats, out of business. But we're dedicated to the rehabilitation of every lost soul defeated by our award winning software. To help us help them, visit **hugsforhackers.org.** Do it now, because somewhere there's a hacker who needs a hug.

AVG
www.avg.com

SID MEIER

CREATIVE DIRECTOR, FIRAXIS

>> Sid Meier, one of gaming's true legends (he was the second person inducted into the AIAS Hall of Fame), revolutionized the strategy genre with the Civilization series, and has been the creative force behind scores of classic games both at Microprose and Firaxis. We recently spoke with Meier about his past and present. <<

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1982 A New Company
Along with Bill Stealey, Meier forms Microprose. The company goes on to be one of the most respected in the early days of PC gaming

1987 Ahoy Matey!
Microprose releases Sid Meier's Pirates!, a classic PC title that involved navigating the treacherous world of a 17th century privateer The game's balance of high seas strategy and diplomacy wins it an ardent fan base

1990 Hot Rails To Fun
Meier creates another franchise, Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon, which allowed players to plan and manage elaborate shipping networks around the world

1991 Internationally Known
Meier creates the game that would become his most successful franchise Civilization. Civ is an amazingly deep strategy title that helps make the genre a staple of the PC gaming scene for years, spawning many sequels

1993 Big Business
Microprose is acquired by Spectrum HoloByte, signaling the departure of co-founder Bill Stealey Meier decides to stay on with the company

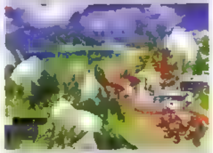
1996 Departure
After Spectrum HoloByte makes severe cutbacks at Microprose, Meier departs to form a new company, Firaxis, with several of his key team members including Civ II creator Brian Reynolds

2004 Back To The High Seas

Meier makes an engaging redux of the Pirates franchise, this time released for both PC and consoles. The game isn't a blockbuster, but is generally well received

2005 Mergers & Acquisitions
After a decade of success, Firaxis is purchased by 2K Games, where it is merged with developer PopTop. Meier heads the new studio

2007 Back Home



Firaxis announces Civilization Revolution, a console-centric rethinking of Civ Meier hopes the game will bring new players into the strategy genre

You still do hands-on programming work on some of your titles, like Civ Revolution. That's really a rarity for someone like you these days. What advantages do you get as a designer from doing programming?
Well, our game making process is very iterative. So there's a lot of really quick changes in the game, and I find that it's easier for me to program those as opposed to explain what I liked or didn't like to someone else. It really speeds up the turnaround process. A minute later, you're trying something new. Programming, for me, is a very efficient way of getting my ideas into the game. It's also fun. I went to school to learn to program. It gives you a closer connection to the game design and game ideas. It does have some efficiency tradeoffs. As games get larger and larger, you can't do everything. You have to pick your spot. For me, that's the game rules, the game AI – the heart of the game.

Is it hard to balance programming and design work alongside your larger duties within Firaxis?
I find people to do those things! [Laughs] I've made a conscious decision that what I enjoy doing is designing and programming games. I'm the creative guy. I work with some very good people that know the business and know how to manage a company and make sure that the paychecks get out.

Revolution is the first Civ in a long time that you've been working on very hands-on in terms of design and programming. What brought you back to Civilization?
In terms of the design and programming, this is the first since the original that I've programmed the entire game logic and AI and things like that. It's been an opportunity for me to re-imagine the game for a new audience and a new platform. That's really been fun for me, to rethink all our assumptions and approaches and try new ones with all this great 3D, online technology. We didn't have that stuff before. It's been great to take Civ and re-do it in a cool new way.

Strategy has really struggled to find a home on consoles. You've obviously built this game to work on consoles first. How will it succeed where others have failed?
I think there are a couple of reasons that this game works really well on a console. One, the fact that it's turn-based makes it play at the pace of the player, so you're not scrambling around the map trying to figure out what's going on and catch up. For PC-type games, the keyboard and mouse works very well, but turn-based just seems to work very naturally on the console. We've seen that with games like Advance Wars. That format makes it very suitable for console. We've also embraced and learned from a lot of the console innovations – the very easy-to-learn games, games that are very rich graphically. They are very informative; you can tell what's going on just by looking at the screen…. We've added these elements to the Civ gameplay.

How has being forced to tailor your game to a console gamepad affected how you approach your design?
That was really one of the make or break things that we had to decide at the beginning: could this game be played comfortably on the controller? I think the fact that it's turn-based means that you're dealing with one unit at a time with a specific set of things to do. They map very comfortably to the controller. It's gotten to the point where I'm just as comfortable, if not more so, with the controller as opposed to the keyboard and mouse. It was a question we had to answer at the beginning. If you're worried about your interface, as opposed to what you're doing in the game, then you don't have a successful game.

Do you feel that a lot of the strategy genre has gotten too complex and arcane for a lot of gamers?
I think there are audiences for all different levels of complexity. As a genre matures, the games tend to get a little more involved because the players know the early games and want something more. With Civ Revolution, part of the audience is players that haven't played strategy games before. This is definitely not an attempt to be the most complicated Civ game; this is the essence of Civ on the console for a wide audience.

Over the years, you've lost a lot of core staff members – Jeff Briggs, Brian Reynolds, and Soren Johnson, for example – which is often the case with any really successful company. How do you deal with losses like that over the years and still maintain the company's identity and level of quality?
I have been fortunate to work with some very talented people, and they sometimes move on to make great games elsewhere. That's the nature of the industry that we're in. Fortunately, there's no shortage of people that want to work here and make games, so we're constantly finding new talent and working with new people. What we hopefully have to offer is that combination of my experience and a couple of other people that have been around for a while and also the energy of new blood. Every game is different and reflects a new team and a new approach. With Civ Revolution, you'll see we've done a lot of new things, and so I think having young talent helps us do that.

As someone who has been at the helm of many teams over the years, what are some of the changes you see in the young people you hire now versus when you started?
Well, the biggest change is the fact that the people coming into the industry now have played games since they were three years old. When I started, we were making it up as we went along. Today, people have a history and a better understanding of the fundamentals. We know that interface is important; we know what a game should feel like and what a boss level is. There are all sorts of things that are a part of the common vocabulary of gaming that didn't exist when we started. On the other hand, there's a danger with some of the newer designers, a tendency to design the game you like to play. That game has already been designed – we need new games. There's a loss of a little bit of that "sky's the limit, anything's possible" approach we had in the early days. We have these genres – we have first-person shooters, we have real-time strategy. If you've played games all your life you've gotten these certain styles really beaten into you. To get people to think out of the box is a little harder these days. But the whole indie games and MMO movements are really starting to shake things up; there's a lot of innovation. That's what's going to keep us growing as an industry, nurturing that innovation.

> *"I've made a conscious decision that what I enjoy doing is designing and programming games."*

CIVILIZATION
REVOLUTION
FIRAXIS
GAMES

Photo: Michael Cantor

■ The upcoming Civilization Revolution marks the first time Sid Meier has been involved in the programming of a Civilization title since he created the original PC game

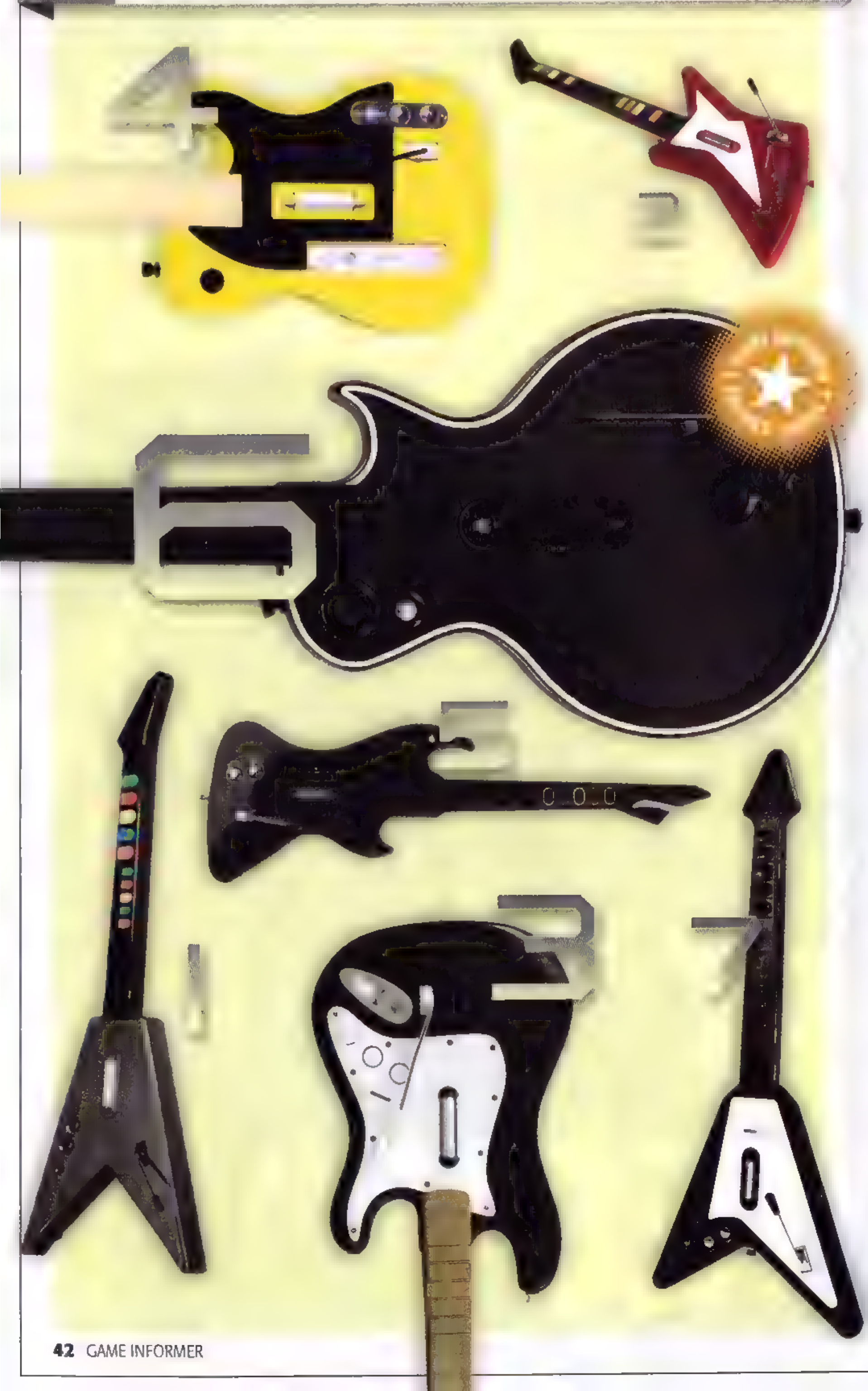
THE MASTER OF STRATEGY

STRING PICKINS

GI's GUITAR CONTROLLER ROUNDUP

As the music genre continues to explode across the gaming scene, guitar controllers now crowd electronics and game retail stores. How's a Jimmy Page wannabe supposed to know which axe to shred? Check out our handy breakdown of some of the newest controllers on the market to find out which one's right for you.

Editor's Note: Sorry Xbox owners, but apparently no one is interested in making guitar controllers for the 360. Take comfort in the fact that the Rock Band Fender and the Guitar Hero Les Paul would probably still be your best options anyway.



1: DREAM GEAR SHREDMASTER - PS2

OK ●●●●●●●○○○ | *Compatible with: GH II, III*

Pro: The Shredmaster's lightweight design, glowing strum button, and rechargeable battery make it a solid choice for anyone still rocking on the PS2.
Con: The Shredmaster's buttons are a little stiff, the guitar's shape makes it awkward to position on your lap, and the price seems a little extreme. The next-gen versions are still a few months out.
$79.99 • www.dreamgear.net

2: EZGEAR EZJAM GUITAR - PS3, PS2

BROKEN ●●○○○○○○○○ | *Compatible with: GH III*

Pro: In the words of Sam Beckett, "oh boy." It's hard to come up with positive things to say about the ezJam, but we give it a pat on the back for working on both PS2 and PS3, and for being guitar-shaped.
Con: We would expect to find a better product in a Chinese street market. The ezJam not only feels cheap, it rattles, and the four AA batteries it takes to run barely fit inside its casing. We encountered a few problems with signal reception, and to top it all off, the start and select buttons are too small.
$59.99 • www.ezgear.com

3: MTV GAMES WIRELESS ROCK BAND FENDER - PS3, 360, PS2

GOOD ●●●●●●●●○○ | *Compatible with: Rock Band*

Pro: The wireless version is finally out for the 360, which offers up the same stylish lightweight design in a cord-free package. The great thing about the PS2 guitar is that it will work with the PS3 version of Rock Band, so players interested in upgrading their system later won't have to worry about buying a new guitar.
Con: Unfortunately, the Fender only works with Rock Band, and the new 360 guitar requires you to whip out the screwdriver every time you need to change the batteries. We also experienced some problems with the wireless 360's tilt functionality, but MTV Games promises that we just got a bad unit.
$59 99 • www.rockband.com

4: NYKO FRONTMAN - PS3, WII

GOOD ●●●●●●●●○○ | *Compatible with: GH III, Rock Band*

Pro: The Frontman is the best-looking third party controller we tested. Its strum button feels really good, and the whammy bar is nice and sturdy. The PS3 version works perfectly for both GH III and Rock Band, while the Wii version is the only third-party option available.
Con: The PS3 Frontman's wireless dongle is a tad bulky. Both guitars suffer from springy fret buttons, and they would benefit from a more distinguishable middle yellow button.
$59.99 (PS3) $49.99 (Wii) • www.nyko.com

5: PSYCLONE BLACK AXE - PS3

AVERAGE ●●●●●●○○○○ | *Compatible with: GH III*

Pro: The Black Axe has nice big, easily palmable start and select buttons. We appreciate its thick, sturdy construction, and we like the feel of its frets.
Con: Due to some strange strap attachment, the controller rests a little awkwardly on your shoulders, and the strum bar is a little loose for our tastes. The Black Axe also earns the ugly duckling award since it looks more like a disposable playschool toy than a guitar controller.
$59.99 • www.psyclonegamer.com

6: RED OCTANE LES PAUL - PS3, 360, WII

VERY GOOD ●●●●●●●●●○ | *Compatible with: GH I, II, III, Rock Band (360 only)*

Pro: Guitar Hero's in-box controller looks good, feels great, and plays perfectly. Both fret and strum buttons feel optimally tuned for shredding, and the fact that it works for nearly every guitar game out there just ensures its lead.
Con: The Les Paul doesn't look as good as the Rock Band Fender, and the detachable neck has caused a few headaches due to faulty connections.
$69.99 • www.redoctane.com

7: TAC DOUBLE RANGE - PS3, PS2

OK ●●●●●●●○○○ | *Compatible with: GH I, II, III, Rock Band*

Pro: The Double Range earns points for being the only third-party controller to play both Rock Band and Guitar Hero on PS2 and PS3. It functions well, though none of its features truly excel.
Con: This isn't a guitar for lap players, the strum bar could stand to have a few screws tightened, and the whammy bar feels like a wet noodle.
$49.99 • www.theantcommandos.com

peripherals

SONY DUALSHOCK 3

The Playstation 3 is the machine of the future – it finally supports the rumble technology introduced 10 years ago on PSone! Actually, we're quite happy to have rumble back. Some games will require an update, but as of press time there are almost 30 games for PS3 and PSN that already support the DualShock's vibration including Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Rainbow Six Vegas 2, Heavenly Sword, and Burnout Paradise. The DualShock 3 offers some of the best rumble we've felt while retaining all the Sixaxis functionality, but our favorite feature is the lack of Bluetooth dropouts.

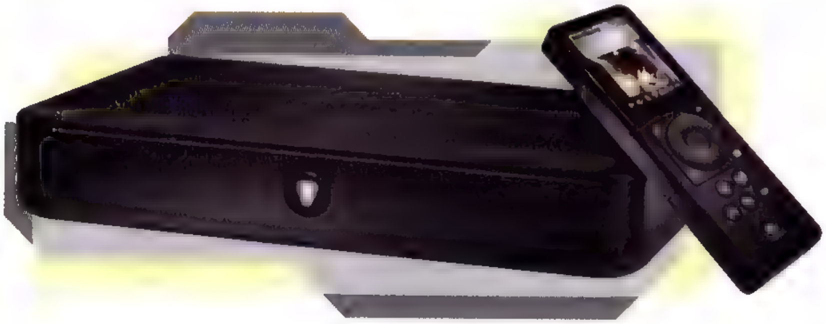
$54.99 • www.playstation.com

tech

LOGITECH SQUEEZEBOX DUET

Logitech's dominance in the peripheral market continues with the new Squeezebox Duet. This slimmed down model is an all-in-one home audio controller featuring a full color display, charge station, Wi-Fi, and access to nearly unlimited free Internet radio content. Using your wired or wireless network, the Duet will access your audio library and control it without touching your computer. Think of it as an iPod for your house. This may be one of the easiest ways to setup a multi-room music system at home, and while $400 may seem unreasonable for a music streamer, it's a bargain compared to the competition.

$399.99 • www.logitech.com



toys

NECA GEARS OF WAR ACTION FIGURES

Just in time for us to start getting psyched for the sequel, Neca has obtained the license for Gears of War toys. This first series includes Marcus Fenix, Augustus Cole, a Locust Drone, and a Locust sniper. Each figure stands seven inches tall and has 12 points of articulation. Too bad these guys don't talk because we really want to hear more about Cole's time with the Thrashball Cougars.

$17.99 • www.necaonline.com

peripherals

NYKO WIRELESS KAMA NUNCHUK

This Nyko nunchuck looks and feels a lot like the Nintendo-branded controller with one notable exception: it's not chained to the Wii remote. We found the unit's motion sensitivity functioned exactly like a corded controller, but with a wireless range of about three meters; we'd like to see someone stretch their arms out that far. The unit should have come with a built-in rechargeable battery, but two AAAs lasted between 20 and 30 hours.

$34.99 • www.nyko.com

GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN

DONNA MEI-LING PARK
CO-HOST OF THE ELECTRIC PLAYGROUND

I stared at him incredulously. Truly wishing that looks could kill, I imagined red laser beams shooting out of my eyes, forcing him to crumble to the floor and transforming him to a heap of dust. "Do you really know what you're talking about?" I retorted. "Well, it just seems that you don't play. That's all." He twisted the knife by replying. He is a viewer of the TV show that I am proud to be a part of. I am sick of people like him.

Rewind 30 seconds. I am strolling along, minding my own business when a fellow approaches me and asks, "Hey, aren't you on TV?" This actually doesn't happen that often, so I allow myself to relish in the recognition: "Yeah, I'm a host for *The Electric Playground*." My indulgence is short lived, for the young man proceeds to cut me down with the sword he's cleverly disguised as his tongue. "Oh yeah! I love that show! You don't really know what you're talking about though." Ha! Rude? Yes. Unusual? No. As a host for the *Electric Playground*, I deal with doubt constantly. The fact that I'm a female on TV is apparently reason enough for people to assume that I'm a bimbo with a microphone. Sometimes, they go so far as to imply that my interviews are scripted. Ugh. The predictability of these assumptions sickens me.

I can't even count the number of times that I've been quizzingly asked, "Do you even play video games?" with an eyebrow cocked and a look that's surely intended to pierce my heart. Of course I do! I've been playing video games since I was eight. Let me tell you, it hasn't been a smooth ride. I'm not going to try and profess that I am a hardcore gamer — let's just say that most people can kick my ass at Halo 3 in less than 10 minutes and I'm not making any waves with my presence on Xbox Live. I am a casual gamer, a softcore gamer, if you will — the most hated species by the hardcore fanboys of the world. I play for fun. I play because I like games. I long for the day when the above question is as appropriate as asking someone (in a tone that's dripping with suspicion) "Do you actually watch TV?" That's how crazy it is to me. Games are entertainment, just like TV and cinema; why is it so unbelievable that someone like me would like to be entertained?

Sometimes I feel as though I should be in a room with others who are suffering my plight, sitting in a circle, holding hands. "My name is Donna, and I am a gamer." On a family trip to my mom's native Hong Kong, I got the original Game Boy as a gift from Japanese family friends. To me, it was the beginning of a torrid love affair. The gray brick transformed boring dim sum at the kid's table to Tetris tournaments of epic proportions. To my mom, it was the inception of a hateful relationship. My Game Boy was her archenemy. She felt it distracted me from my studies and daily "Kumon" exercises (an extra-curricular math program, ironically also Japanese in origin). Worse, playing video games wasn't very ladylike. I was always getting my Game Boy confiscated. The forbidden nature of gaming just made it all the more appealing. By the time I got my hot little hands on a Super NES — well, forget about it! I was obsessed with Chun-Li, playing Street Fighter II with an almost religious fervor. I was unbeatable. When I could convince a boy to play against me (which they often did reluctantly and out of pity) they were often shocked and left with their egos as beaten as the buttons I mashed.

Now, let's get honest here. Gaming, for the most part, has been an all-boys club (insert cartoon image of the clubhouse with wooden "No Girls Allowed!" sign). Please note the term "fanboy." Are there fangirls? Hmm...are boys apprehensive that more girls are starting to play games? After all, the Wii console and games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band certainly make gaming more universally appealing. I get why the male gaming community is protective: You've taken a lot of flack! A couple decades of fighting the stereotype that to game is to be socially inept, covered in acne and living in your parents' basement can definitely jade a person. Not to mention having video games (a legitimate hobby for people of all ages) confused with diddling with toys intended for children can really chap one's hide. I understand. But why take your bitterness out on the girls? We want to play, too! Yet instead of embracing the fact that the fairer sex is now nervously picking up a controller, many females feel shunned and teased for their lack of gaming prowess. I am such a rarity at gaming conferences that people mistake me for a booth babe who's wandered from her post. Sigh.

Even when the skeptic accepts that I, a girl, play games — there is still a certain judgment. I am met with a sneer accompanied by a condescending glance when a hardcore gamer inquires what I play. "I bet you play lame games," they seem to silently suggest. It's as if I alone embody why so many crappy games are made. In truth, many of the games that have become popular with females do have a tendency to emulate the game of "house" (The Sims, Cooking Mama, I could go on...). But if they're fun, then who cares? Maybe if more guys took the time to patiently show the wannabe-gamer girls out there how much fun the core games are, there wouldn't be such a need to sling mud. Or are you afraid of the competition? ■ ■ ■

Games are entertainment, just like TV and cinema — why is it so unbelievable that someone like me would like to be entertained?

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

SIZE MATTERS

INTRODUCING THE BOWFLEX REVOLUTION® XP HOME GYM

Size? It makes all the difference. Now you can have the most exciting home gym technology ever in a size that fits your lifestyle. The Bowflex Revolution® XP Home Gym offers the versatility of a gym filled with equipment, yet fits in the corner of a room.

Lightweight SpiraFlex® resistance plate

How did we do it? We took our cutting-edge SpiraFlex® technology and put it in a compact, space-saving design. SpiraFlex® resistance feels as smooth as traditional strength equipment, but is packed into a revolutionary light-weight plates!

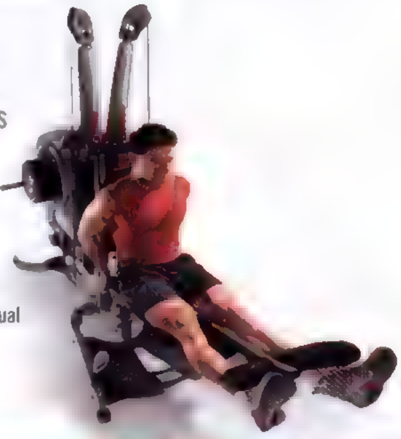
Your space may be limited, but your workout shouldnt' be.

CALL (800) 605-3470

TO REQUEST A FREE DVD
OR TO PLACE YOUR ORDER TODAY.
www.BowflexRevoInfo.com

Exceptional Standard Features that can Strengthen and Tone Your Body in Just 20 Minutes a Day, 3 Times a Week:

- 200 lbs. of resistance standard (upgradeable to 280 lbs.)
- 170° range angle of resistance
- Includes squat harness, 5 position foot harness, hand grips, and instructional manual
- Optional Lat Tower and Ab Back Pad
- 10-year limited warranty
- Results in six weeks — GUARANTEED!



BOWFLEX REVOLUTION

sun mon tue wed thur fri sat

The Bourne Conspiracy – 06/03

03

NEW RELEASES
- The Bourne Conspiracy – PS3, 360
- Devil May Cry 4 – PC
- *Dirty Harry Collection* – Blu-ray
- The Incredible Hulk – PS3, 360, Wii, PC, DS
- LEGO Indiana Jones – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PC, PSP, DS
- Ninja Gaiden II – 360
- Wonder World Amusement Park – Wii

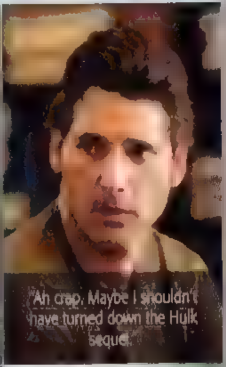
04

Skaar: Son of Hulk #1

When the Hulk isn't smashing stuff, he's creating bastard sons on distant planets. Skaar is just as green as his pappy, and he loves to break things, but he's a little smarter about it. Instead of using his fists, he uses swords! This is a must read for all the wrong reasons.

06

If you are or know a female between the ages of 15 and 40, you're likely counting the days until *The Time Traveler's Wife* opens in theaters. If you need a tip on how to rope your guy friends into seeing this tear-jerker with you, tell them that it's a *Back to the Future* side story.


"Ah crap. Maybe I shouldn't have turned down the Hulk sequel."

Harvest Moon – 06/10

09

GTA REALITY CHECK

If you've been playing GTA non-stop since its April 29 release, take a few minutes out of this day to go outside. We're not saying that you should do stuff out there, just stand in the sun for a few minutes, then convince yourself that it's hotter than normal because of global warming. It would be safer for you to stay inside playing GTA.

10

NEW RELEASES
- Code Lyoko: Fall of XANA – DS
- Code Lyoko: Virtualize – PSP
- Don King Presents Prizefighter – 360
- Dragon Ball Z: Burst Limit – PS3, 360
- Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness – DS
- Imagine: Rock Star – DS
- Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles – DS
- Quick Yoga Training – DS
- NASCAR 2009 – 360, PS2

Metal Gear Solid 4 – 06/12

13

Summer juggernauts *The Incredible Hulk* and *The Happening* battle it out for moviegoer dollars today. If you're thinking of seeing M. Night's thriller, let us save you some time. The twist ending will be disappointing. Spoiler alert?

The Incredible Hulk – 06/13

Secret Agent Clank – 06/17

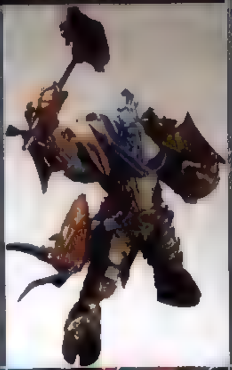
17

NEW RELEASES
- Arkanoid – DS
- B-Boy – PSP
- Drone Tactics – DS
- Secret Agent Clank – PSP
- Space Invaders Extreme – DS

18

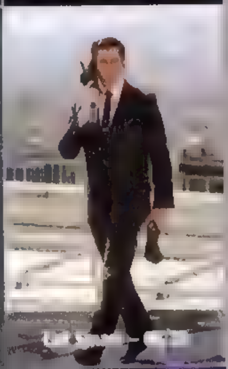
WORLD OF WARCRAFT DRAENEI PALADIN ACTION FIGURE

This figure stands a whopping 11.5 inches tall, features an incredibly detailed sculpt, and would be considered cool if it wasn't a part of the Alliance. If you play as an Alliance character (loser!), you may want to save some cash for this figure.



20

Get Smart and *The Love Guru* pit two comedy greats against each other at the box office. Who will win? Well, Steve Carell is hilarious, and Mike Myers was hilarious, so it's a close fight. We're betting on the guy who wasn't in *Mystery, Alaska* (a.k.a. the guy who isn't Mike Myers).


Get Smart – 06/20

Soulcalibur IV – 06/24

24-25

NEW RELEASES
- Alone in the Dark – 360, Wii, PS2, PC
- Bangai-O Spirits – DS
- Battlefield: Bad Company – PS3, 360
- Beijing Olympics 2008 – PS3, 360, PC
- Big Beach Sports – Wii
- Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath – 360
- Final Fantasy Tactics A2 – DS
- FlatOut: Head On – PSP, PC
- Guitar Hero: On Tour – DS
- Hellboy: Science of Evil – 360, PS3, PSP
- Iron Chef America – Wii, DS
- My Weight Loss Coach – DS
- Operation Darkness – 360
- Overlord: Raising Hell – PS3
- Rock Band – Wii
- Soulcalibur IV – PS3, 360
- TNA Impact! – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2
- Wall-E – PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS

Batman #678

Is this the end of Bruce Wayne's run? Who will take over the mantle of the bat if he falls?

27

Pixar's new animated feature, *Wall-E*, opens in theaters today. Honestly, that should be all you need to know. Stop reading this and order your tickets. Hurry up, stupid! It's Pixar!

29

HENRY JONES ART FX STATUE

He created Indiana Jones!!! If this little factoid doesn't sell you on this beautifully sculpted statue, then maybe you'll want it because you have an appreciation for bumbling idiots who hit on younger women. Or maybe, like every GI staffer, you simply have a crush on Sean Connery, and long to look upon his face whenever you wake.

june

FIGHT TO LIVE
LIVE TO FIGHT

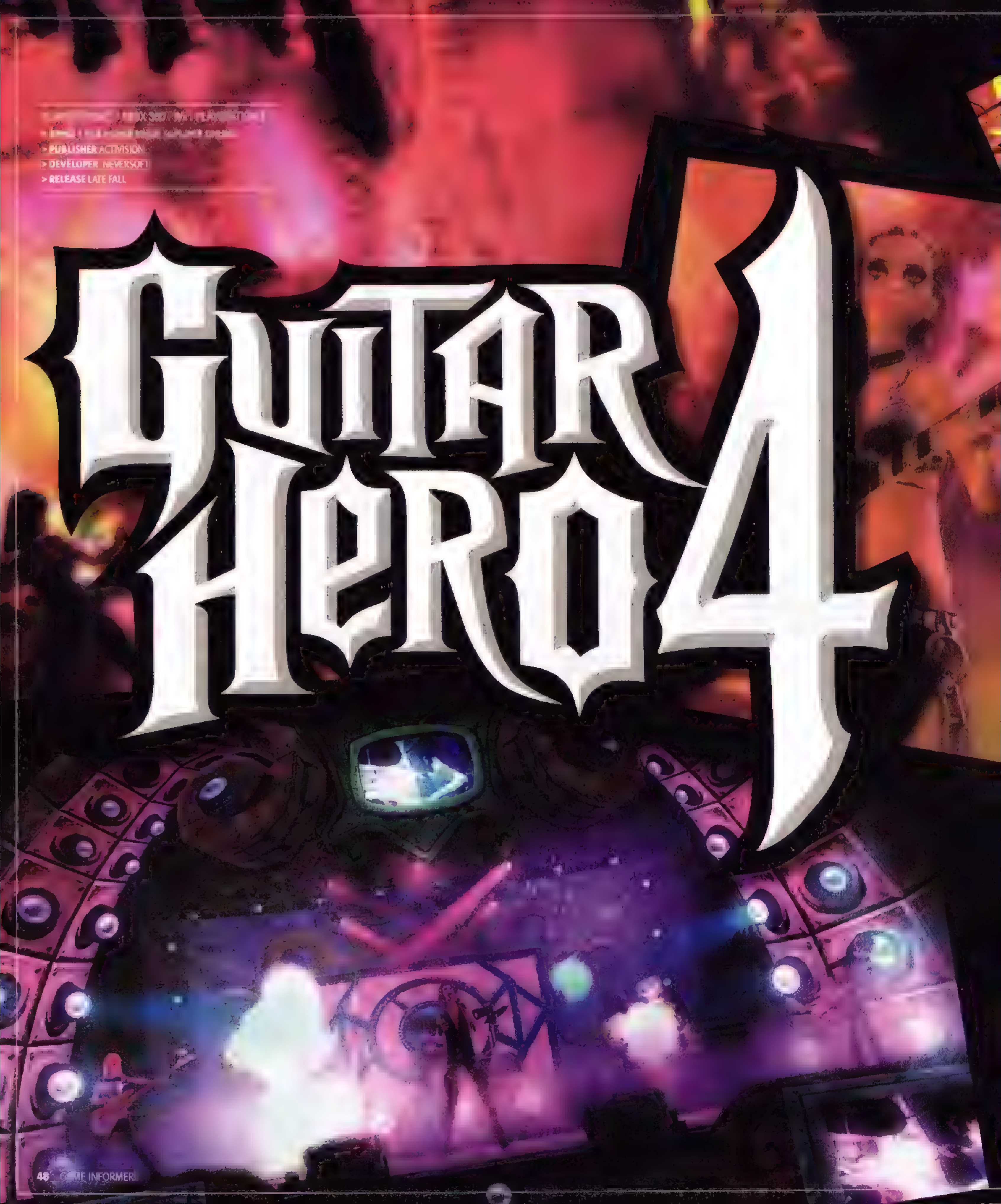
THIS IS YOUR STORY.
From challenger to champion.
Through adversity and triumph.
Will you go down in history,
OR JUST GO DOWN?
You've got ten seconds.

DON KING
PRESENTS
PRIZEFIGHTER

2ksports.com/PRIZEFIGHTER
COMING JUNE 2008 FOR XBOX 360
COMING THIS FALL FOR Wii™ AND DS™

2K SPORTS
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.
XBOX 360 LIVE
NINTENDO DS
Wii
DON

© 2008 Take-Two Interactive Software and its subsidiaries. All rights reserved. [illegible] logo, and Take-Two Interactive Software are all trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. in the USA and/or other countries. The Don and Crown logo is a registered trademark [illegible] Productions, Inc., and such logo and Don King's name, image and likeness are used under the license of Don King Productions, Inc. All rights reserved. Wii and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006 [illegible] Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft.



> [illegible] XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

> [illegible]

> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION

> **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT

> **RELEASE** LATE FALL

GUITAR HERO 4

Rock n' Roll Fantasy Meets Reality

The Beatles vs. The Stones. Nirvana vs. Pearl Jam. Oasis vs. Blur. Throughout history, clashes between some of the world's greatest bands have helped define the music that we know and love. While the great rivalries of old have faded out in the post-downloading era (The Killers vs. The Bravery isn't exactly Metallica vs. Megadeth, is it?), video games are currently home to one of the great musical battles of all time. Neversoft's Guitar Hero III and Harmonix's Rock Band were enormous hits last year, and each brought fans some of the most entertaining gaming sessions in recent memory. While Harmonix is still considered by many to be the innovator in the field, Neversoft and Activision have been hard at work creating an entirely new Guitar Hero experience. We recently got a chance to get a world-exclusive first look at the next Guitar Hero title, a game that hopes to change music games forever and restore Guitar Hero's claim to the cutting edge. What we found is much more than a mere sequel, and might be the next great step forward in the genre.

>>

Shredding History

How quickly things change. Think back just three years ago: Music games were a niche genre in the U.S. dominated by Konami's Bemani arcade games and its following of hardcore devotees obsessed with Dance Dance Revolution. Red Octane was an obscure peripheral manufacturer, known for redesigning Konami's home dance pad and its own DDR knockoff for PS2, Into the Groove. Harmonix was a critically respected and commercially moribund gaming studio, relying on its modest success with Konami's Karaoke Revolution games to keep afloat following the commercial failures of its PS2 cult hits Frequency and Amplitude. Neversoft was the force behind wildly successful but aging Tony Hawk franchise, which was struggling to find its way on the next generation of systems after being one of the dominant franchises of the PS2 era.

Then, in November of 2005, Guitar Hero was released, a game that would forever change the fates of all these companies. The game (published by Red Octane) was an instant hit, quickly spawning an even more successful sequel. Suddenly, music games were at the forefront of an industry looking for ways to win the hearts of the vast number of casual consumers who had yet to become hooked on video games. With success came the usual business wrangling, as the various companies involved struggled to secure their stake in the future of this blossoming new genre. Activision moved first, acquiring Red Octane (the brains behind the game's groundbreaking guitar controller) and the Guitar Hero brand name. MTV scooped up Harmonix, the company widely seen as the creative force behind the franchise, and signed a partnership with EA to develop an all-new Harmonix-created music game, Rock Band.

Now faced with creating a new Guitar Hero game without the help of Harmonix, Activision went to its stable and awarded the task of creating Guitar Hero III to Neversoft, one of its most consistent and able developers. Soon, both Harmonix, with its ambitious Rock Band, and Neversoft were locked in competition to determine who would control the future of this rapidly evolving style of gaming.

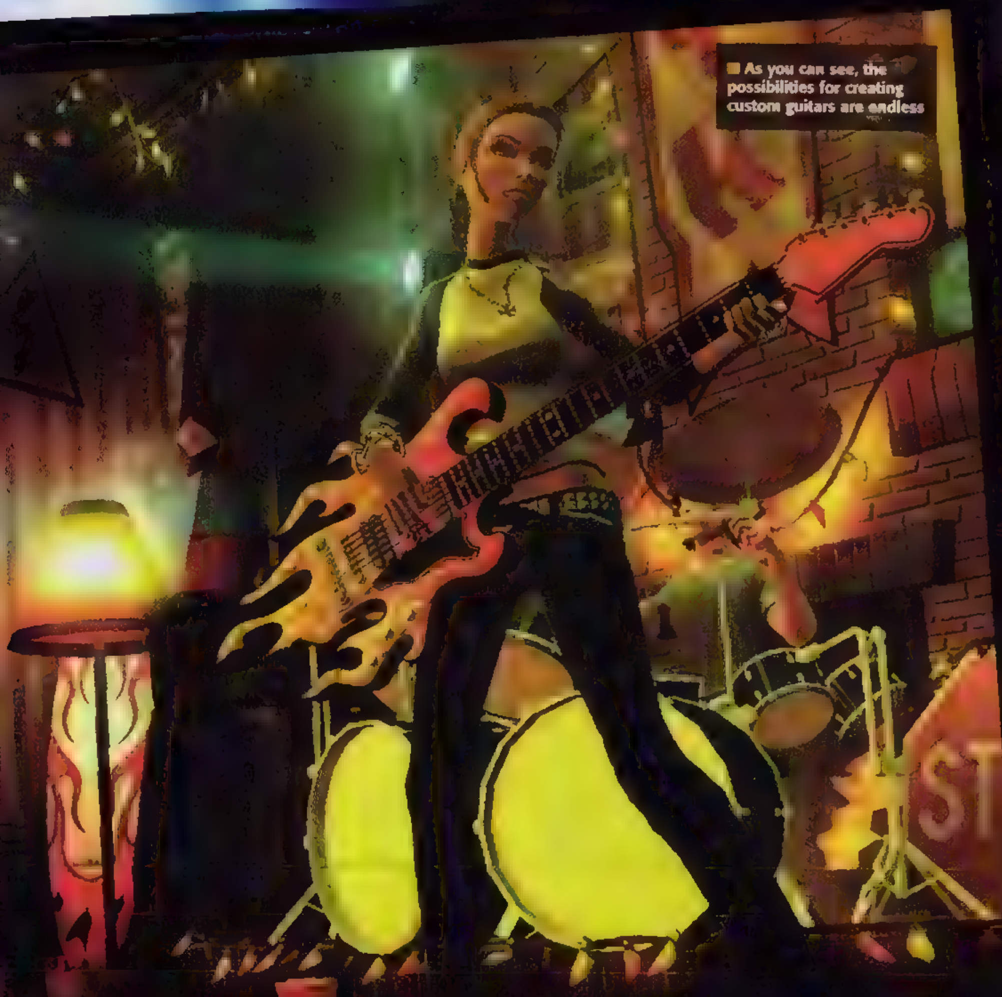
Not surprisingly, given the talent of the companies involved, there was no clear winner to the axe-slinging showdown staged during the holiday season of last year. Despite the fact that they had been forced to quickly adapt to an entirely new genre, Neversoft's Guitar Hero III was remarkably polished, and continued to focus on the series' core of wild guitar antics. Harmonix pushed an expansive (and expensive) title that focused on full-band, four-player action, with a specially designed electronic drum peripheral and the addition of live vocals. While Guitar Hero won the sales race – by January of this year it had become the fastest $1 billion franchise in gaming history – the critical perception was that Harmonix and Rock Band had done more to push the genre forward.

This time around, however, Neversoft has its sights set on not only achieving the status quo, but shattering it to pieces. Guitar Hero 4 represents perhaps the most ambitious game in the history of the company. While it's clear Neversoft has kept a studious eye on what its major competitor has achieved in the last year, its goal is to not just match what Harmonix has done, but to create the ultimate music game.

"We want to move everything forward – every single element of the game," claims Neversoft's studio development director Scott Pease. "That's what we've done for 10 years. Guitar Hero III was a big learning experience for us, just learning how to do it. This [GH 4] is the unleashing of all the technology we've had in other games coming to bear on this thing. As you can see, it's going to be five times the game GH III was."

continued on page 52 >>

Extensive motion capture sessions give the game's characters a more fluid and varied set of animations



As you can see, the possibilities for creating custom guitars are endless

Here we [illegible] options b[illegible]

As in Guitar Hero: Aerosmith, the characters interact with each other to a much greater degree

(continued from page 50)

Forming The Band

For most people the biggest news surrounding Guitar Hero 4 will be instantly obvious: like Rock Band, this is now a full band game, complete with drums, bass, vocals, and guitar. While this news isn't a complete surprise (it's been rumored from various sources since the release of the last game), it will be welcome news to the core fanbase, especially those who haven't yet shelled out for its competitor. While many will see this as Neversoft yet again following in the footsteps of Rock Band, the idea of doing a game based on other instruments has actually been percolating within Activision and Neversoft since before Guitar Hero III.

"The natural evolution of the game is to add more instruments," observes Neversoft co-founder Joel Jewitt. "It's not like [Harmonix] even invented that. That's been out there for years in the arcades."

Project director Brian Bright revealed that a Drum Hero game had been in development at fellow Activision studio Activision Foster City (formerly Z-Axis). To help out with the project, Activision hired the services of John Devecka, the man who insiders credit as creating the very first music game, MTV Drumscape, an arcade drum simulation that was released back in 1996. Interestingly, Devecka actually patented technology that has been used in all following music games, including Guitar Hero, Rock Band, and Konami's Dance Dance Revolution – patents which Activision now owns. After Neversoft took the reins of the franchise, the Drum Hero project was rolled into the Guitar Hero fold. The end result is an all-new Guitar Hero drum kit (made with the help of Devecka) that Neversoft feels will raise the bar in both quality and functionality.

"One of the things we really wanted to do was make it quieter than our competitor's kit," comments Bright. "The drums are loud as hell and it's distracting. Everyone else in the room is like 'Shut up!' We also wanted to be able to send along velocity data. We know how hard you hit all six, including the pedal."

Yes, he said "six." That's because Guitar Hero is adding another pad to the kit: one of the two specially placed, dedicated cymbal pads. Instead of looking to emulate the Rock Band kit, the team took its inspiration from actual MIDI compatible professional electronic kits, which they feel are better and more natural feeling in both design and build quality.

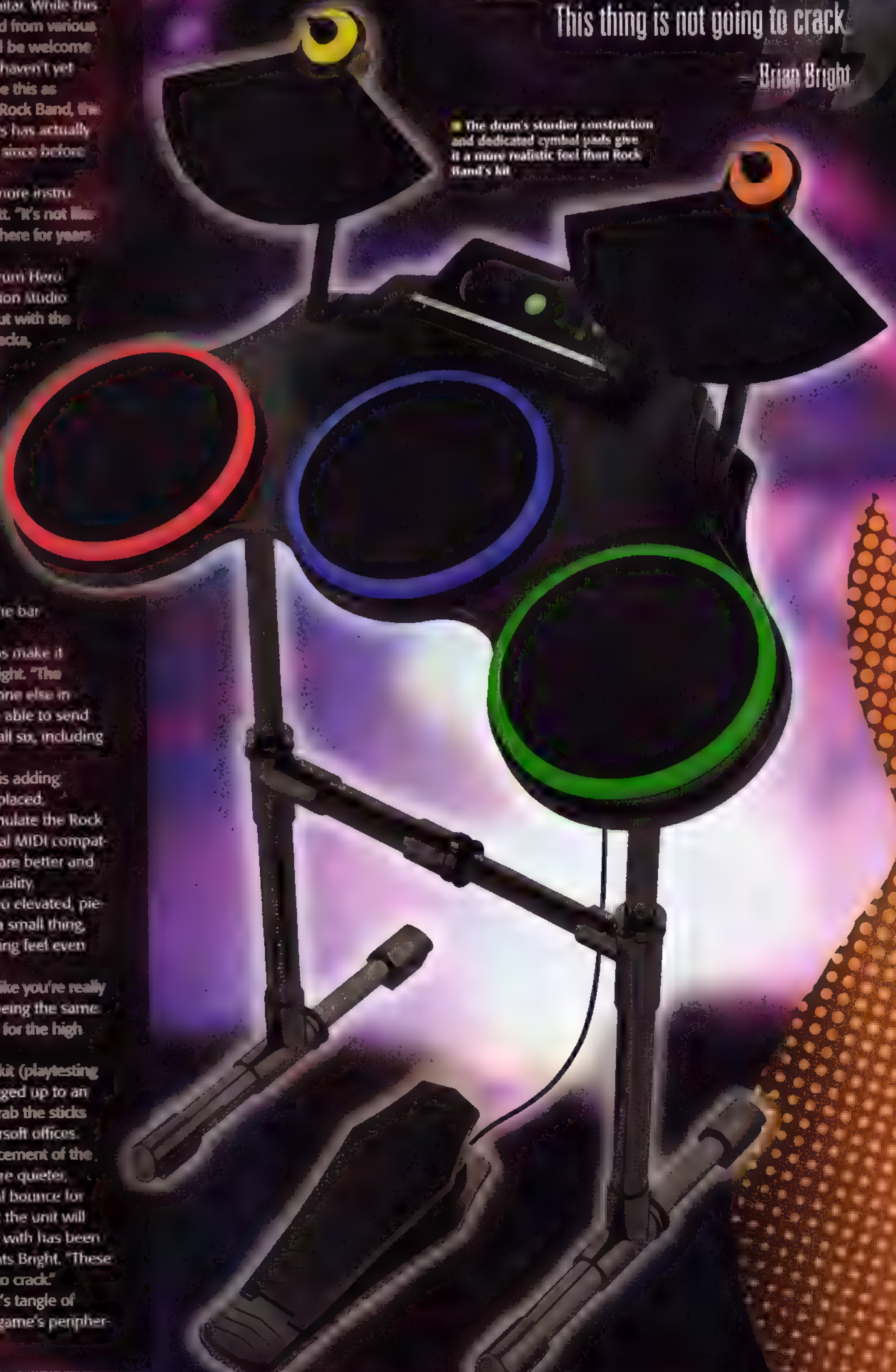
Instead of four level pads, you'll now have two elevated, pie-shaped cymbal pads. While this may seem like a small thing, it succeeds in making the experience of drumming feel even more real than in Rock Band.

"We really wanted the elevation, so you feel like you're really playing cymbals. It feels different than all pads being the same. Also for lefties, they can play with the other one for the high hat," says Bright.

Although we didn't get to play with the new kit (playtesting is being done on a professional electronic kit rigged up to an Xbox 360 controller), we were encouraged to grab the sticks and bang on the first-run prototype in the Neversoft offices. Our initial impression was very positive; the placement of the cymbals was very comfortable and the pads were quieter, while at the same time providing a more natural bounce for things like drum rolls. Neversoft guarantees that the unit will be extremely durable. "The team we're working with has been making hardware for years and years," comments Bright. "These guys know it inside out. This thing is not going to crack."

In even better news, those sick of Rock Band's tangle of cords will be pleased to note that – like all the game's peripherals – the drum kit will be fully wireless.

> "The team we're working with has been making hardware for years and years...These guys know it inside out. This thing is not going to crack."
>
> – Brian Bright



■ The drum's sturdier construction and dedicated cymbal pads give it a more realistic feel than Rock Band's kit

Check out the detailed facial animations; the lip synching is extremely accurate

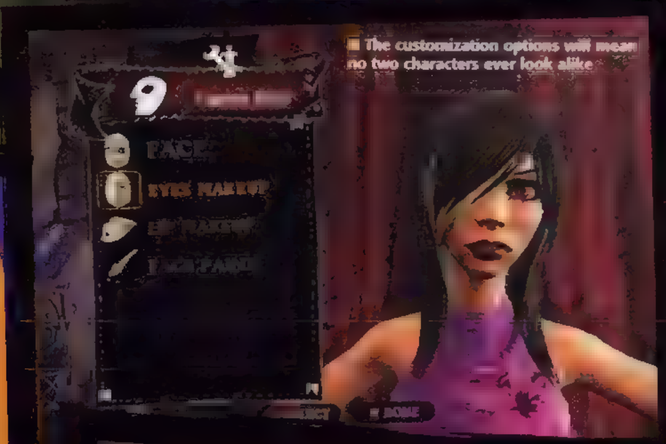
Be Your Own Rockstar

In keeping with the addition of more instrument options, Neversoft envisions Guitar Hero 4 as a completely open-ended music fantasy. As opposed to past titles, which were essentially a list of songs with some modes thrown on top, this time around every aspect of the game lets players choose how they want to present themselves to the world and how they progress through their rock career. "Player freedom" is clearly the buzzword surrounding the development of the title, and this manifests itself in a number of intriguing ways.

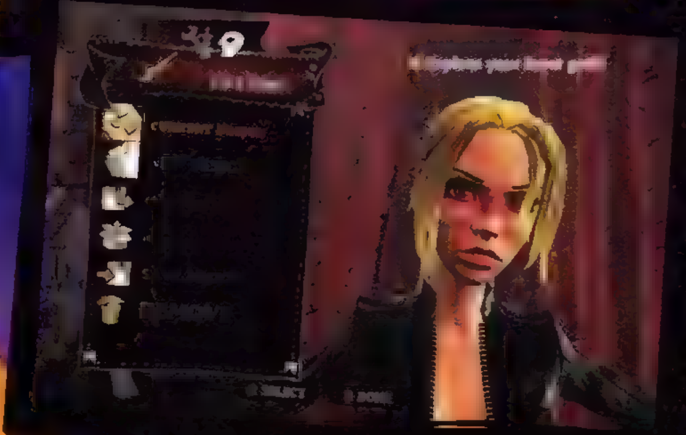
It starts in a brand new Create-a-Rocker mode, which is the deepest and most complex character creator we've seen in a music game to date. Here, Neversoft draws not only on its own experience with Tony Hawk, but also takes some inspiration from a surprising source.

"We've had Create-A-Skater in our games since 2000, so it was a natural step for us to make Create-a-Rocker," said Bright. "One thing that we did was take a look at Tiger Woods, which is a benchmark as far as we're concerned for facial deformation and options that they give people. We've never had that in Tony Hawk. We've had body scaling, but we never had the facial stuff. We've got that in now."

Using a system of sliders familiar to anyone who's played Tiger or a number of other games, you can start from a few basic character archetypes (which the game categorizes by musical genre, like black metal, goth, glam, etc.) and alter everything from the size of your nose to the prominence of your cheekbones. You can even age your characters ("In case you want to make The Rolling Stones," jokes Bright), alter their physique, and create customized outfits down to the smallest accessories. Using a simple editor, you can even create custom tattoos and face paint



The customization options will mean no two characters ever look alike



[illegible]

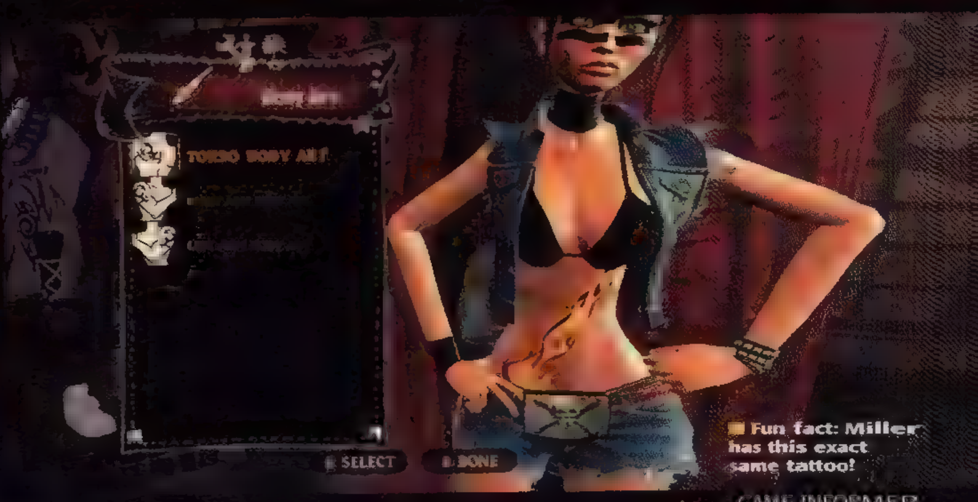
The Mystery Axe

While Neversoft was definitely excited to show us all the ins and outs of its new baby, at least one major part of the Guitar Hero equation, the all-new guitar controller Red Octane has designed for the game, had to remain a secret due to a mandate sent down from Activision's legal department. What we do know is this: The controller will have at least one major new feature, which will directly impact the way you play Guitar Hero in the future. "We've been brainstorming on ways to make the guitar as expressive as a real guitar," hints Scott Pease.

However, we received at least one clue as to how this new guitar will impact gameplay. While playing guitar during a four-player session, we noticed strings of see-through notes coming down the guitar runway. When pressed, Neversoft's Chris Parise explained, "Those see-through notes [are for] a totally new input mechanic on the new guitar. Unfortunately, we can't talk about it today."

Suddenly Brian Bright jumped in, claiming, "It's so f----- rad, we're trying to patent the s--. We're getting some legal stuff taken care of." This caused company head Jewitt to joke, "We don't want you to run out and make one on your own."

Although we have no hard facts, given that the current guitar offers hammer-ons, whammy bar, and conventional fretting, maybe this new input mode could augment your shredding arsenal with fret-sliding or perhaps brief windows for improvisation? Regardless, expect this new controller to change the way you play Guitar Hero. However, we have been assured that you can play and complete the game with any previously compatible Guitar Hero controller, although you might miss out on certain gameplay features.



Fun fact: Miller has this exact same tattoo!

> We've had Create-A-Skater in our games since 2000, so it was a natural step for us to make Create-a-Rocker.
>
> – Brian Bright

designs of anywhere from a planned 10 to a possible 3 layers of artwork. And, as in Tiger, you can even choose some of your character's animations, like how they react to a win or loss.

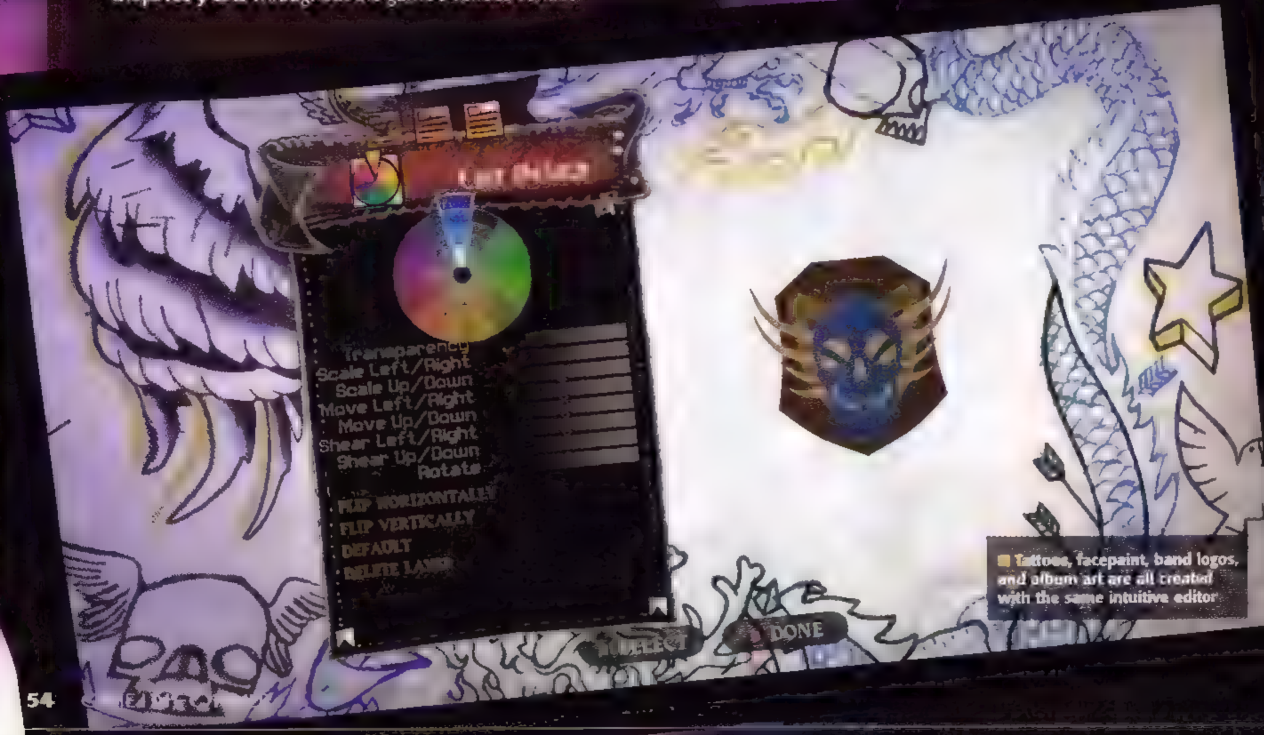
If you'd rather stick with some classic characters from Guitar Hero's past, you'll have that option as well. During our demo we saw such fan favorites as Axel Steel, Judy Nails, Johnny Napalm, Lars Umlaut, Izzy Sparks, and Midori. Hardcore followers will be pleased to know that the game also marks the return of Clive Winston and Pandora. You'll even be able to swap different characters' outfits for the first time in Guitar Hero. Wonder what Axel looks like in a miniskirt?

It's pretty impressive, and that's only the beginning. In the wake of Activision's very public falling out with Gibson, licensed guitars have been nixed in favor of an extensive guitar editor. As with your character, you'll be able to tweak every minute detail of your axe, choosing from scores of body shapes, headstocks, finishes, fret inlays, pickup configurations, knobs, pick guards – you name it, you can change it. Once again, you'll also be able to create custom guitar graphics in addition to the myriad of preset images.

"When you go online, you want your character to be different from everyone else's, to be an extension of you," says Scott Pease. "That goes for the guitars as well. You'll be able to recognize people by their guitars."

While options for customizing drums aren't as varied as those for guitar, you will be able to select the style of hardware, finish, and size of your drums, and even affix your bass drum head with a custom-made band logo that will be displayed throughout the game's various venues.

Some of the venues are less epic than others



Tattoos, facepaint, band logos, and album art are all created with the same intuitive editor

On The Road To Stardom

Neversoft's commitment to giving the player more relevant options extends to the career structure as well. Guitar Hero's traditional career has been thrown out the window – a move that effectively breaks down the barriers between single-player, online, and band career modes.

"Before the career mode was just this linear list. Now, there's this band fiction," describes Chris Parise. "You have multiple gigs on a board you can go to, and each one will have a set list of songs for a particular place. That's the same for single-player as t is for band mode. You pick the gig you want, play through it, and there will be more to play. You pick the way you want to go. If there's a song that you don't want to play – even though all our songs will be awesome – you don't have to play that song. It's more open-ended adventure."

Brian Bright is more blunt in his assessment of the difference between the career mode in Guitar Hero 4 and Rock Band: "Well, I thought we could be better [than Rock Band] by not making you play the same hree f—— songs 2,000 times over and over. I don't want to hear Nirvana and Weezer ever again. I'm so ick of it."

To help ease frustrations and ensure that players re constantly encountering new songs and chal-enges, Neversoft has broken most of the rules that estricted progression in previous music games. Brian Bright gave us an example of how this works. "You can start a drum career with this wonderful lady I've made here [in Create-a-Rocker]," says Bright. "You can start playing in Medium and, if you get to a song ou're having a hard time with, you could finish that ong in Easy if you wanted to – without starting a new career. You could also jump to guitar and play hat song with that same character within the same career. You take one character and try to finish the four instrument careers and the band career with the one character you've made to really max out your career earnings and unlock all the hidden challenges and milestones."

You'll also have more options in how you progress through the band career. As in Rock Band, each band is anchored by a band leader. However, unlike in Rock Band, the leader can freely switch between any instrument. Whether by yourself, online, or offline with friends, you'll always be able to advance your band's fortunes in the world of virtual rock. When you're playing in a friend's band online, you'll still reap the rewards of success. For example, if your friend is advanced past you in the game, you'll still earn the extras you've unlocked for certain milestones, even if you haven't actually progressed to that point in your own career.

Neversoft is a bit vague as to how you'll unlock new items and songs in the game, although we do know that, as in previous games, you'll be earning cash for almost everything you do – and the team promises enough Achievements, goals, and milestones to keep players busy for weeks.

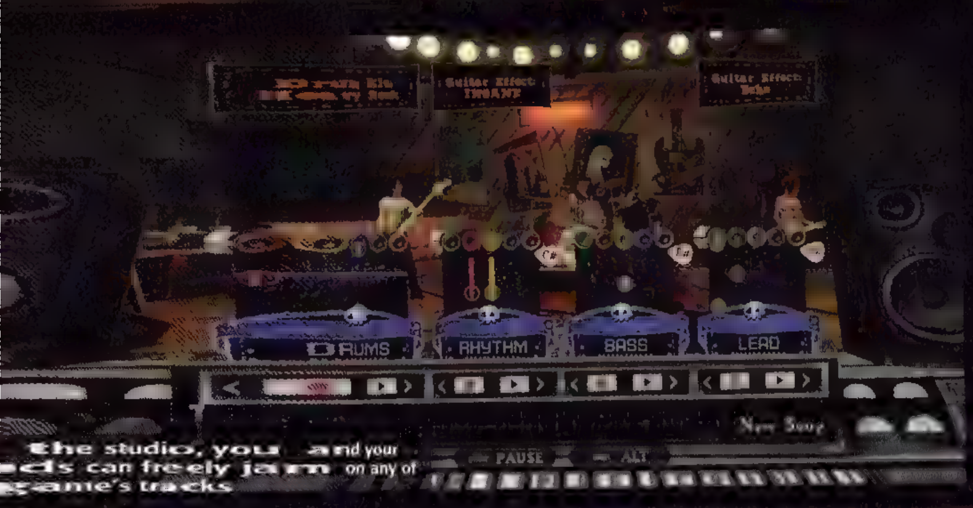
Take The Stage

While Neversoft is clearly intent on making a number of improvements and additions to what was accomplished in Rock Band – including some rather mindblowing ones we've yet to mention – there's also a bit of a feeling of déjà vu one feels when first tackling a four-player session of Guitar Hero 4. Perhaps sensing that it's folly to fix something that isn't broken, the onscreen HUD for multiplayer is essentially identical to that of Rock Band. The three main instruments – guitar, bass, and drums – scroll vertically down the lower half of the screen, while the vocal line rolls across th top from left to right. For our money, it was the right decision. The system as is works perfectly, and allow fans of both franchises to jump in and instantly feel at home.

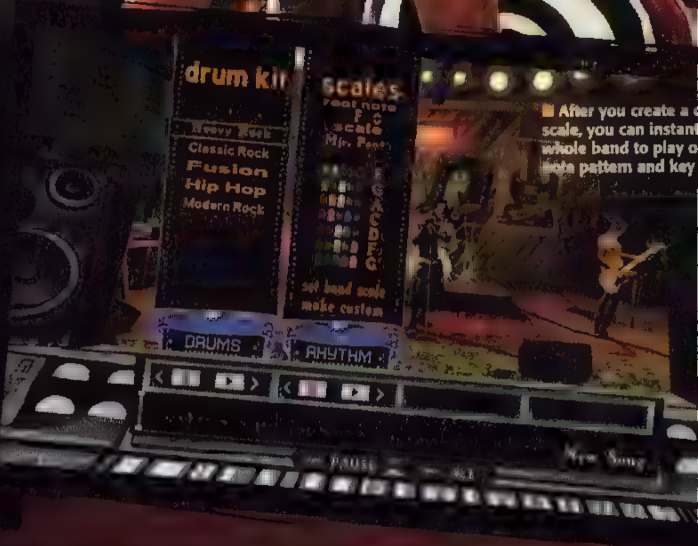
However, as with the career mode, a number of clever changes have been implemented to make th experience more exciting for a wider variety of gam One such example is the new Easy Rhythm guitar d ficulty, one targeted for parents who want to let thei children in on the fun. Instead of the usual pattern of descending "jewels," Easy Rhythm is a series of straight lines (usually used to represent the bass dru hits) that go in time to the beat of the song, allowin kids to strum along regardless of what neck buttons are being pressed.

The bass and drum mechanics have also been tweaked to make them more complex for advanced players and, in the case of the drums, allow for mor creativity and improvisation. Bass also makes use of the straight line across for "open notes," essentially simulating the open E string on the real-life instrument. It's a clever addition and definitely makes for some more interesting note runs and a feel much more akin to actually playing the instrument. Which

■ The ch[illegible] you to crafting [illegible] of Guitar H[illegible] centric [illegible]



the studio, you and your
ds can freely jam on any of
game's tracks



■ After you create a c
scale, you can instan
whole band to play o
note pattern and key

is good, since there is (finally) a unique bass career mode in the game. For the drums, Neversoft is taking full advantage of the kit's dual cymbals by changing how Star Power is activated. Instead of Rock Band's somewhat awkward use of fills to activate power mode, you can now activate it by crashing both cymbals at once in true rockstar fashion. At that point, you're given a brief moment to improv your own fill, allowing you to be adventurous without worrying about hitting the tricky last beat on time.

Neversoft also has big plans to distinguish the drum career track from its string-slinging counterparts. No arena rock show is complete without an indulgent drum solo, and rest assured you won't have to miss out on the fun of unleashing your inner Keith Moon. "When you're playing drums by yourself, the encores will have these special sections that are solos," reveals Bright. "The lights will fade, the camera will pan to the drummer, the rest of the band will fade out, and there will be an extended drum solo."

"The idea is that it will be like the Tommy Lee spotlight solo with pyro and lights going off. It'll be the big moment for the drummer," adds Pease. While the solos will rest solely on improvisation, the game will grade you according to how on-beat your fills were and the variety in the pads that you hit.

Neversoft is also tackling one of the more controversial elements of Guitar Hero III: the boss battles, which many critics and fans found frustrating. Rather than abandon them entirely, the team has re-focused them away from attack power-ups and towards the core of what makes Guitar Hero so much fun.

"You're still going to be playing with some real life guitar heroes," comments Neversoft's Alan Flores. "But we're going to change the way it's done. It's more about playing and less about attack. It's a more call-and-response style. But we will still have a Battle Mode for online, because it's really popular with the fans."

A Cornucopia of Rock

Another area which Neversoft promises the game will excel is the in the music selection – and, more importantly, support for downloadable content, which has been less than stellar so far for Guitar Hero III.

"We're going to support this in a big way with DL something we haven't been the best at with Guitar Hero III," observes Bright. "Some of that is because as a studio have been focused on this game and Gu Hero: Aerosmith. It takes a couple of guys a few we to do a song. We're now working with some other resources to help us do downloadable content."

"You have to have the licensing and everything all lined up. Last year, we were basically trying to ge GH III out and were still learning about it. Now, we have everything in place. We're definitely more prepared, and we have more people making the game comments Pease.

Of course, any downloadable content would be adding on to the game's built-in track listing, which Neversoft aims to make the best ever in the music genre. "[We'll have] more songs than we've ever pu a Guitar Hero game, more than any other disc-base music game. And they're all master tracks, and a lo triple-A bands. We're going balls-out," claims Bright For fear of getting scooped by the competition, the refused to discuss specific tracks, but would confirm the inclusion of songs by four bands: Van Halen, The Eagles, Linkin Park, and Sublime. This listing reflects the team's desire to make the soundtrack more varied, reaching outside of Guitar Hero's usual metal-centric aesthetic.

"We've actually got a pretty even split between late '80s, '90s, and classic rock. It's a little harder to find modern stuff, but we do have a good amount of emerging bands," reveals Bright. But that's not to say the franchise's core group of guitar-heads has been ignored. "We have a handful of songs that are specific to the hardcore guitar players – a few progressive bands like Dream Theater. We have to put them in the game," Bright continues.

Blazing A Trail

Speculating about who will and won't be on the soundtrack of a new Guitar Hero game is an entertaining pastime (Yes, we asked about Led Zeppelin. No, they didn't answer.) But what if we told you the most exciting music in Guitar Hero 4 hasn't even been written yet? That's because Neversoft is aiming for something much greater than just another improvement on the same old formula. This time, they are giving players the tools to go beyond just emulating the artists they love and pursue their own path to musical stardom. Here's where things start to get really interesting.

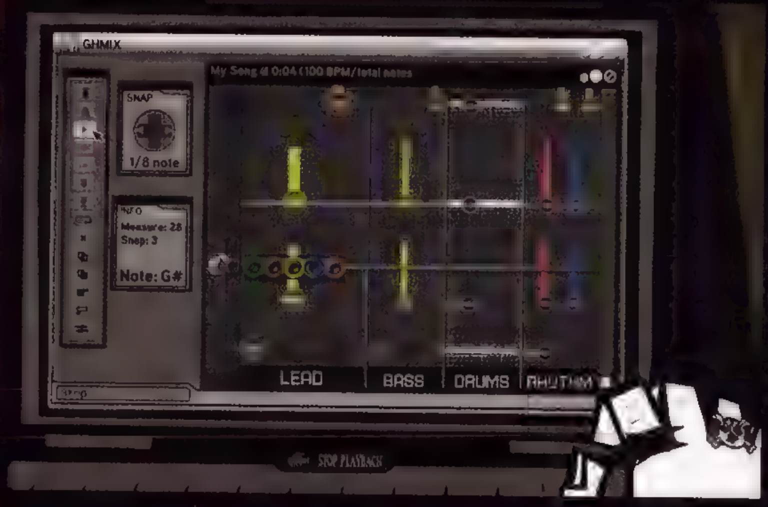
Neversoft, like many of us, has paid close attention to the community of Guitar Hero hackers that has blossomed online, populated by enthusiasts who've used the modified controllers and debug menus to create a plethora of unlicensed versions of thousands of tracks. However, this time around, no homebrew solutions will be necessary. Guitar Hero 4's studio mode will give players the tools they need to create literally any song they can imagine.

The first layer of this expansive mode is called Jam Over, which allows players to get their feet wet in a live band setting. Simply enter the studio, select one of the songs from the soundtrack, and you and your friends will be able to freely jam with preloaded chords and scales from that track. Whatever tracks aren't being played live will be streamed from the prerecorded track, letting you learn how to play the song without the use of the note runway, or create your own riffs and chord progressions on the fly. It also allows you to be more creative with leads, as the guitar's tilt function allows you to instantly switch between a higher and lower octave. In the studio is also where you'll notice the significance of the velocity sensitive drums, as each pad will have four different samples that are tiered based on how hard you hit, allowing you to go from a light drum roll to a massive thwack of the snare in an instant.

Once you've got your chops nailed down, you'll be able to record your version of a rock classic (sans vocals) and have it instantly playable in Quick Play mode.

But the real possibilities begin to open up in the Advanced Studio mode, a full recording toolset that rivals such computer programs as Apple's popular Garage Band software. In this mode, you have total freedom to write, arrange, and record songs as you see fit. A vertically scrolling grid shows the song's various tracks – rhythm, lead, melody, bass, and drums. You can craft your songs by recording live playing (with a little help from the game, which automatically "quantitizes" or corrects offbeat notes to quarter, 8th, or 16th notes, and so on), or by "step recording," in which you place individual drum hits or notes on the grid one by one. It's also possible to create loops which can then be copied and pasted ad infinitum, a feature which is handy for drum and bass composition.

The guitar options are nearly endless in Advanced Studio. You'll have a host of amp sounds and effects pedals, and the ability to create and assign custom scales to the different buttons and combos on the neck. Three-button combos even allow instant access to acoustic tones. Drums are equally flexible, allowing you to select from a huge selection of conventional kits, then quickly hit the back button for Latin-style percussion sounds.



The only real limitation is the lack of vocals – the storage needs for recorded vocals and possible copyright concerns were cited as the reasons for the inability to record your singing. That said, you can use keyboard tones on the melody track to emulate the vocal lines for most songs.

All in all, it's a remarkably easy-to-use system, one that should generate a ton of unique user-created content (and probably more than a few less-than-legal "cover" versions of classic rock tunes). To showcase the creativity of their audience, Neversoft has added a completely new online community to the game, called GH Tunes, a free content sharing service it hopes will become the YouTube of music video games.

Once you've recorded your original masterpiece, all you have to do is save it to your hard drive, name the track, and create some custom album artwork. Then, it can be uploaded to GH Tunes, where users from around the world can play and rate your creation (all songs are instantly translated into the familiar "jewel" system for playback). For Neversoft, the possibilities of the studio mode are endless.

"There are people that will go pretty hardcore into this mode," predicts Neversoft's Travis Chen. "These are the guys that make custom Guitar Hero III songs just with the cheats menu. You see videos of them playing full songs with that, and that was pretty limited. Now it's open to everyone, where before you had to hack your PS2. Even someone that doesn't want to play Jam Over or use the studio, they still get a big bonus because of those five percent of really awesome songs that are going up that they can play."

At first, you'll be limited to uploading five original tracks to the GH Tunes service. However, through a system of user ratings, certain players who deliver consistently high quality tracks will "get signed," allowing them to upload 10 and possibly even more songs at a time. The GH Tunes navigation system will allow you to sort the wheat from the chaff, highlighting new additions, highest-rated tracks, and popular songwriters from the fan community. Neversoft is also planning on curating its own Showcase section to highlight some of the best contributors. While Neversoft did confirm that studio mode would be included in the PS2 and Wii versions of the game, it seems unlikely that the online sharing will be as robust.

"Showcase is our own section," comments Brian Bright. "We could put real artists in there; we could put songs that our designers and artists have made. We could potentially pick out user songs and move them to our list."

The possibilities seem endless. If there's anything that the Internet era has taught us, it's that giving people ways to use their creativity online and connect with each other can lead to results much greater than anything you could have imagined beforehand. Just picture a community of thousands of Guitar Hero enthusiasts – both professional and amateur – writing, recording, and freely sharing tracks through an easy-to-use infrastructure. "It's struck me in the last few weeks that we might be sitting on something that's bigger than I have any concept about," predicts Joel Jewitt.

Shooting For Immortality

In the time we spent with the team at Neversoft, two things became abundantly clear. One, this is a highly competitive studio that is not content to sit back and merely preserve the commercially bankable Guitar Hero formula. Two, it was that Neversoft, which has always had a close relationship with its fanbase since the early days of Tony Hawk, are a company that listens to the criticism from both its fans and the press, and is attempting to deliver to the public the music game they've been dreaming about for years.

"This is the future," claims Joel Jewitt. "We're going to make the best game we can with all the tools, so you guys can do everything. And then keep it going with all the music and master tracks that you guys love. It's a lot of fun... I'm getting giddy about this one."

With their years of experience in a variety of genres, a core of extremely talented veteran staff, and one successful Guitar Hero title already under its belt, Neversoft seems to be poised to challenge Harmonix and Rock Band as the innovators in the music game genre. Has the student become the teacher? It's too early to say, but its safe to predict that music fans will all benefit from the results of what's shaping up to be one of gaming's all-time great rivalries. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC
> **STYLE** 1 PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** WINTER 2008

PRINCE OF PERSIA

HEIR APPARENT

If *Prince of Persia* is a book, then Jordan Mechner wrote its first chapter in 1989. Supposedly inspired by *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*, Mechner's remarkable game was different from anything else before it, even as it told the most familiar of stories. A lowborn commoner faces a villainous vizier in a race against time to save the princess. Death-defying leaps, agile swordplay, and a sweeping imaginative backdrop established a tone that would set the franchise apart. Years later, Ubisoft Montreal rediscovered the *Prince of Persia* and added a second chapter – a different prince on a quest for redemption after loosing the terror of the Sands of Time onto the world. Ubisoft's new vision embraced its pedigree, but catapulted forward with a brand new take on platforming and action for a suddenly three-dimensional game world. After three interconnected games have revealed their secrets, the tale of the Sands of Time has been told. The book is ready for its next chapter, and a new Prince is rising to the occasion.

While this latest iteration of Prince of Persia represents an entirely new story and character, the game is very much rooted in the familiar. Though this prince doesn't have a time-rewinding dagger on his hip, one could easily make the mistake in thinking this was yet another sequel to the successful series. Many of the familiar staples remain in place, from platforming to swordfights. However, this new protagonist moves through a significantly more fantastic world. This change is the byproduct of an interesting reality facing the veteran team at Ubisoft Montreal. After the first Sands of Time, part of the development squad split off to begin work on a decidedly more realistic hero – an assassin stalking the streets of the medieval Holy Land in search of his unlucky victims. With Assassin's Creed now established in the Ubisoft stable of hits, the team that remained behind to work on Warrior Within and The Two Thrones spent the last few years developing the new Prince of Persia, free to let their imaginations run wild. Where the Sands of Time wove its way through a grand and ancient Persian world, it was in many ways still tied to an exaggerated version of reality. With Assassin's Creed branching into historical fiction, this new Prince can finally embrace a story of unchecked mythology and magic.

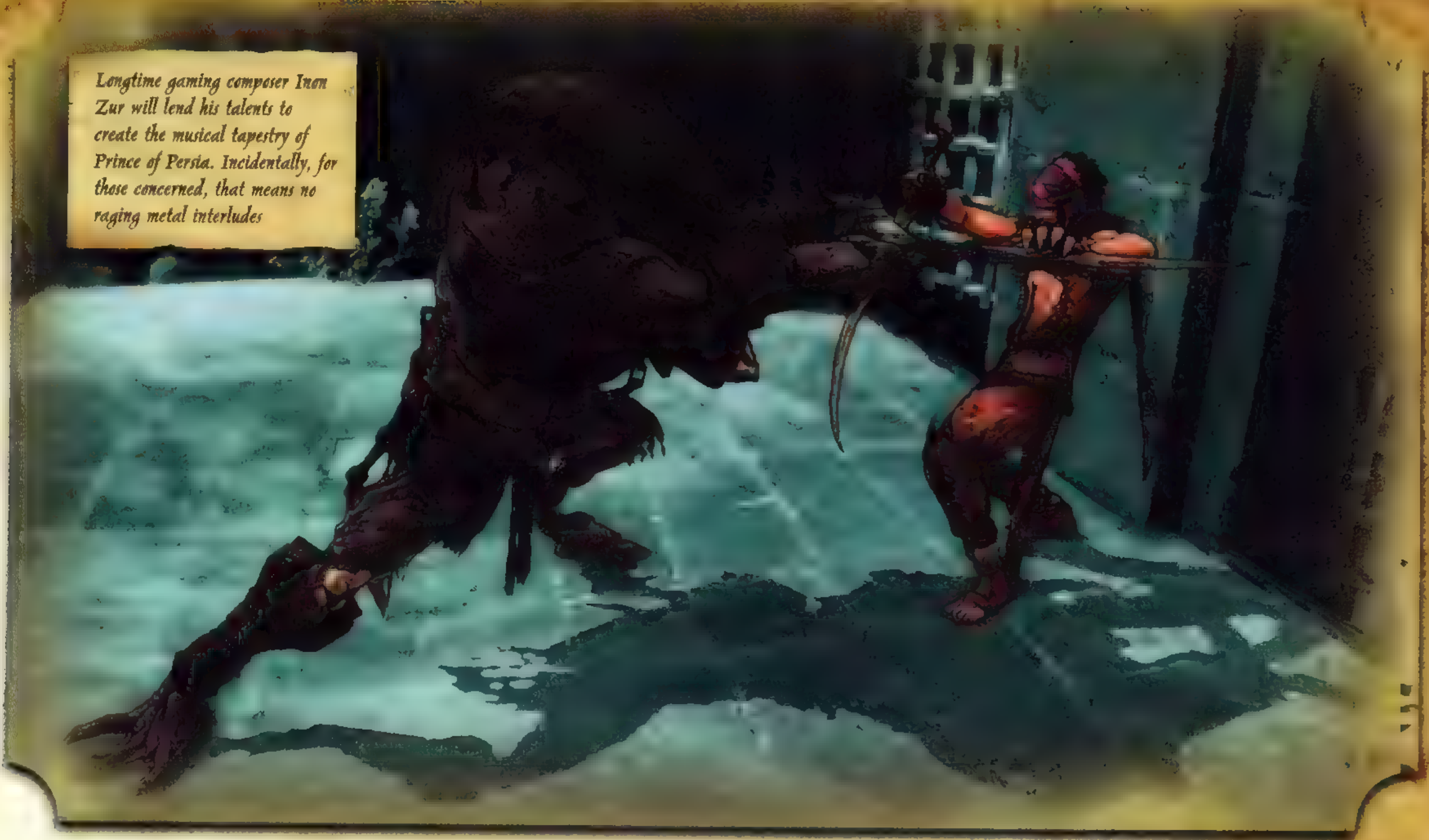
The tale begins as a young traveler accidentally passes into a forbidden land – a mythical garden of beauty dominated at its center by a massive tree of life. Imprisoned within is an ancient god of darkness named Ahriman, who became trapped there after a cosmic struggle with his brother Ormazd. The prince arrives only to bear witness to the tree's destruction, and Ahriman's corruption pours out into the garden (an entirely self-contained world). It should come as little surprise that the wayward traveler becomes embroiled in the drive to strike back at that corruption. The game's plot draws parallels to the myths and stories of various cultures, from the familiar western conceptions of an Eden-like garden with a tree containing the essence of evil, to the Middle Eastern spiritual philosophy of Zoroastrianism, which teaches of opposing forces of benevolence and destruction at work in the world. Together, producer Ben Mattes hopes these ancient stories lend an added depth to what will be a very basic human story. "The conflict between the gods is not the conflict in and of itself," he tells us. "God of War did that one already. We're not interested in just telling a story of supreme beings and humanity's pitiful place in the grander scheme of things. But it just so happens that the backdrop we create through this epic struggle between these two warring gods allows us to explore some much more human, and therefore much more accessible, themes."

At the center of this unfolding epic stands a man who has yet to attain the regal title of the game in which he stars. While alike in his propensity for acrobatics and getting into trouble, the new prince is quite different from the hero of Ubisoft's last Persian epic. Worn, sand-battered skin and mismatched clothes tell the story of a life of journeys and adventures undertaken before the game opens. "We drew our inspiration from adventurers like Sinbad in the *Arabian Nights*, Han Solo from Star Wars, and Aragorn from The Lord of the Rings," Mattes reveals. Besides tarnished apparel and a scoundrel-like demeanor, the prince has some new accessories that further flesh out his character concept. In one hand he wields a massive blade, while his other fist brandishes a daunting metal gauntlet. Both figure prominently in some variations on the tried-and-true gameplay of the franchise.

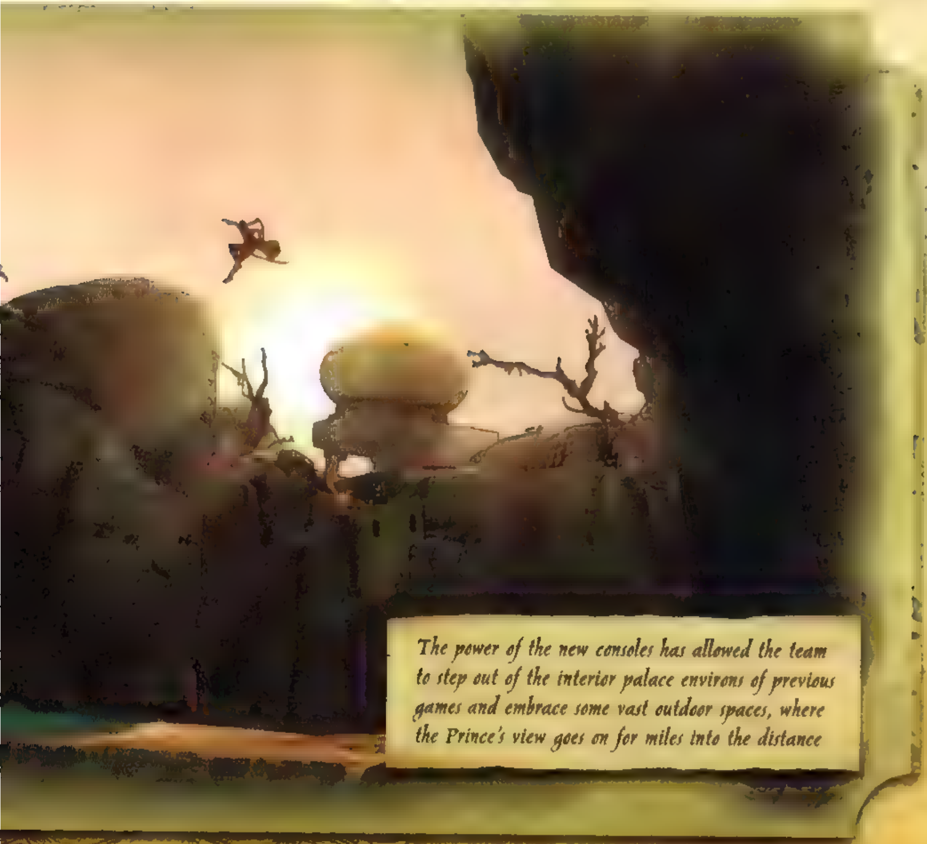
The sword is the prince's main implement every time combat begins in the new one-on-one duel mechanic. Rather than focus on large groups of circling enemies, Prince of Persia only sets players against one opponent at a time. Part fighting game and part cinematic movie duel, these conflicts are fast-paced and frantic struggles for supremacy against an individual and cunning foe. "Enemies will be intelligent enough to lure you into a false sense of security if you're not paying attention," Mattes says. Combatants will fall back and feign weakness to

continued on page 62

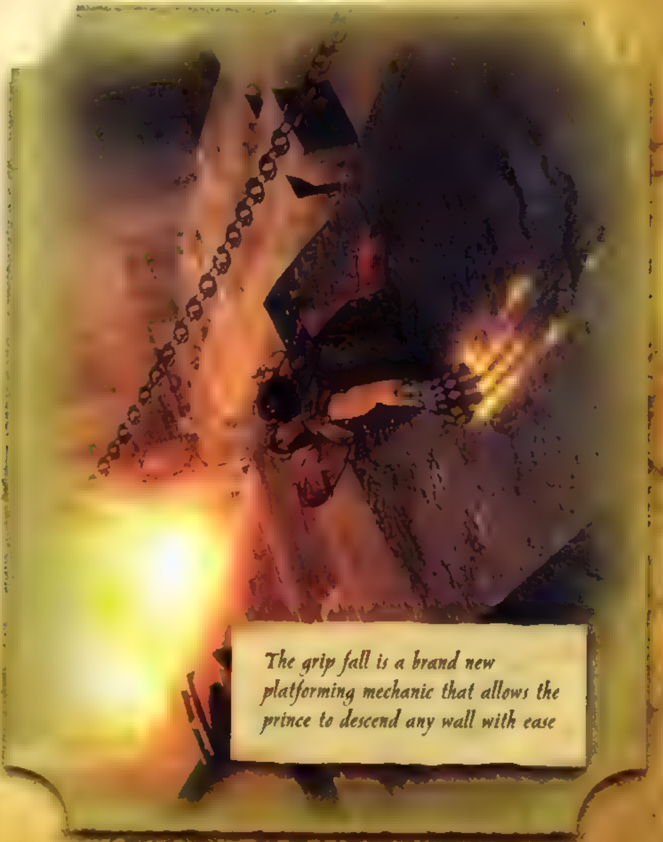
Players will encounter dangerous bosses like the Hunter multiple times, as they repeatedly try to thwart your efforts



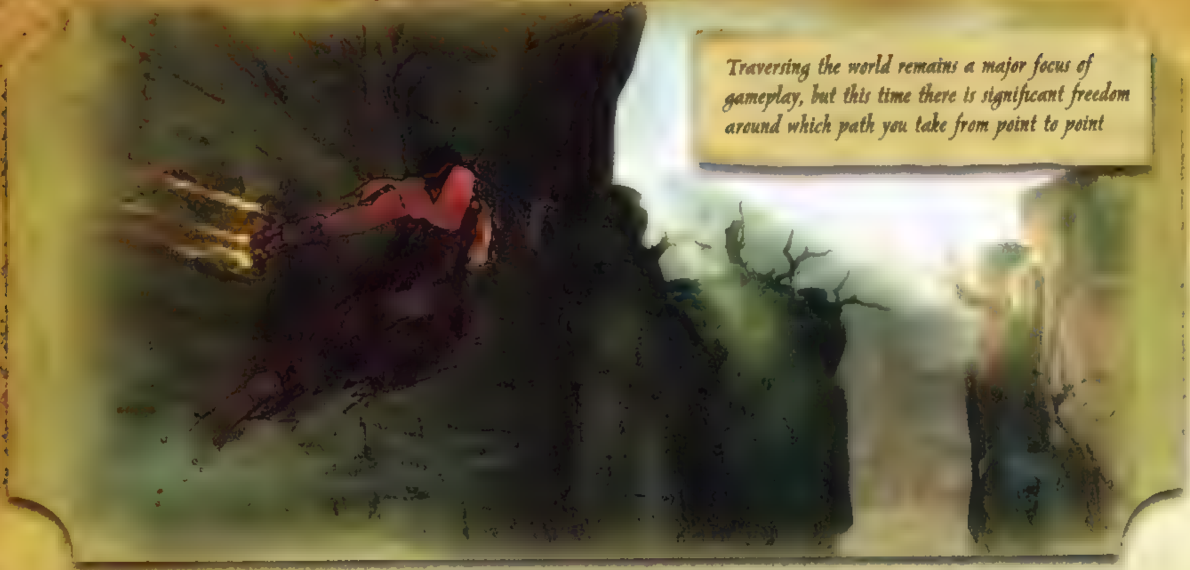
Longtime gaming composer Inon Zur will lend his talents to create the musical tapestry of Prince of Persia. Incidentally, for those concerned, that means no raging metal interludes



The power of the new consoles has allowed the team to step out of the interior palace environs of previous games and embrace some vast outdoor spaces, where the Prince's view goes on for miles into the distance



The grip fall is a brand new platforming mechanic that allows the prince to descend any wall with ease



Traversing the world remains a major focus of gameplay, but this time there is significant freedom around which path you take from point to point

continued from page 60

lure you into a trap, or constantly vary their attack technique to keep you off guard.

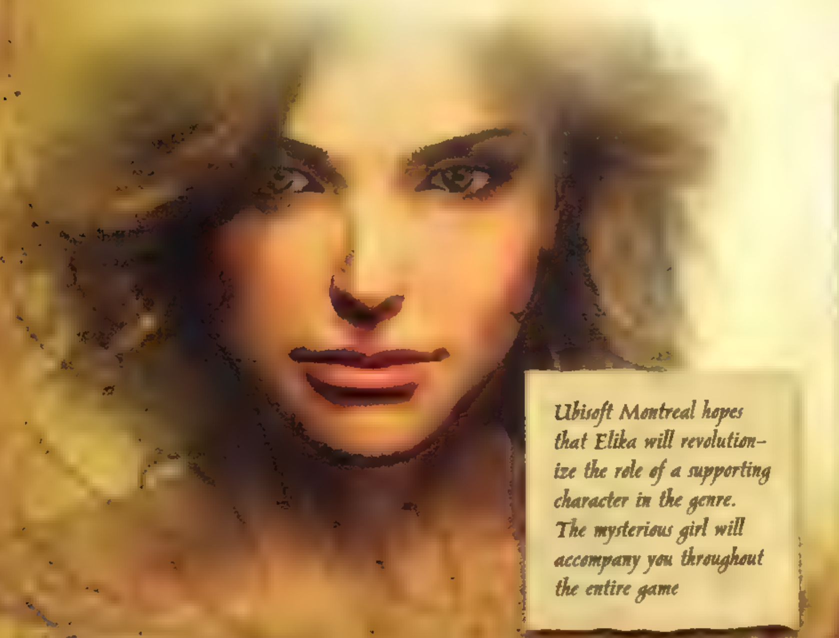
Without the need to focus on multiple enemies, the fighting mechanic is in many ways a true successor to the tense face-offs of the original Mechner games. Simple one-button commands will string together into juggling combinations, and the complex animation system will interconnect each move with whatever action follows it. One button on the controller is a sword swing, another jumps, and yet another grabs or manipulates with the other hand. To chain these individual actions together, you must carefully observe the enemy's weaknesses. It creates an exciting, spontaneous fighting style rather than requiring the memorization of long combo strings.

The glove comes into play most prominently while platforming. "The prince has this powerful gauntlet that he has found on a previous adventure. He can slam the claws of that gauntlet into a vertical surface and slow his descent," Mattes explains. Recall the moments of ripping down a curtain with the Dagger of Time in previous entries, but add a full range of movement back and forth along the surface as the prince falls. "We really liked the verticality that added to levels, but it was done in a very contrived linear fashion," Mattes admits. "The grip fall allows you to turn any vertical surface in the game into a slide."

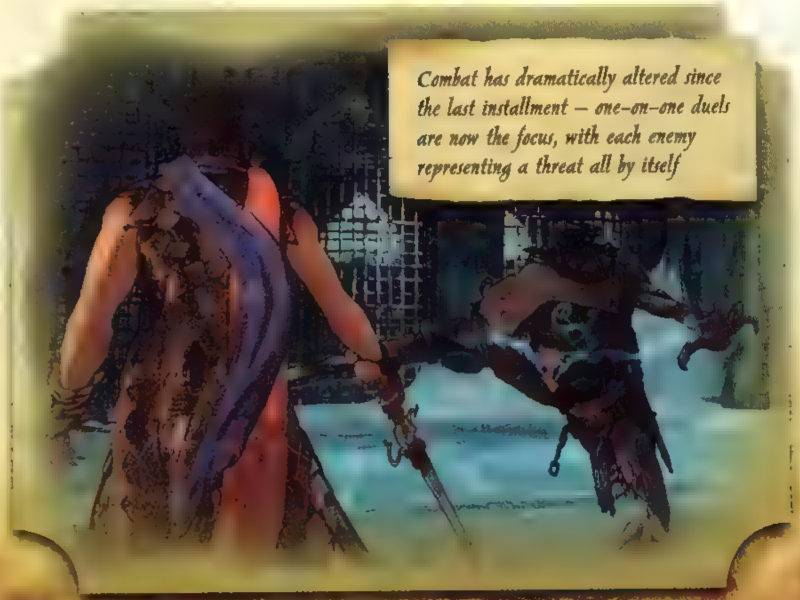
The freedom afforded by moves like the grip fall is only a microcosm of the larger philosophy to give players more genuine choices in the game world. "I really feel like we have found a way through a variety of means to give a very crafted experience, the type that people would expect from a single-player linear game, that's going to appeal to people who want that epic narrative-rich game, but at the same time give people lots of choice if they want to take advantage of it," Mattes tells us. The massive mythical garden where the prince finds himself features cities and varied landscapes. In any given hub of that world, the prince will confront the Corruption of Ahriman and drive it out. As he escapes the traps and defeats creatures that oppose him, the Corruption will become ever more concentrated in a given place, like dirt gathering in a drain. When the prince cleanses that last part of the world, he'll be doing so in a profoundly dangerous locale, filled from top to bottom with the contamination of the dark god. Alternately, at any time, players can abandon a hub and move on to a different place in the world and begin tackling the corruption that has emerged there. While it's not exactly a sandbox game world, players can choose where to go next and move there via several routes. Previously visited areas will morph, becoming more challenging to traverse with more difficult enemies to confront, until the zone is finally cleared of Ahriman's corrupting influence.

The Corruption is far more than dark colored coating on the game world. Rather, it is a tangible force in the world that takes on multiple forms. In its base state, the Corruption is a sort of inert goo that coats the world. Since touching it is dangerous, designers can make any given path more difficult simply by layering more of this dangerous dark matter along the character's route. Its second form is that of a non-sentient creature, the answer to the spinning blade traps and falling block obstacles of previous entries. These writhing masses of Corruption seek to snag the prince, and only careful timing and platforming will save him. Finally, the Corruption's ultimate form is that of battle-ready enemies, including the elite servants of Ahriman. You'll encounter these boss characters, such as the feral Hunter seen in the surrounding images, repeatedly throughout the journey.

The prince has no Sands of Time to call upon this time around, which doesn't bode well for his chances to confront the dangers before him. Thankfully, the team at Ubisoft Montreal has a secret weapon that may fill the void nicely.



Ubisoft Montreal hopes that Elika will revolutionize the role of a supporting character in the genre. The mysterious girl will accompany you throughout the entire game



Combat has dramatically altered since the last installment – one-on-one duels are now the focus, with each enemy representing a threat all by itself

FIGHT TO LIVE
LIVE TO FIGHT

THIS IS YOUR STORY.
From challenger to champion.
Through adversity and triumph.
Will you go down in history,
OR JUST GO DOWN?
You've got ten seconds.

DON KING PRESENTS PRIZEFIGHTER

2ksports.com/PRIZEFIGHTER
COMING JUNE 2008 FOR XBOX 360®
COMING THIS FALL FOR Wii™ AND DS™

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
May contain content inappropriate for children
Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.

XBOX 360 LIVE
NINTENDO DS.
Wii

Take-Two Interactive Software and its subsidiaries. All rights reserved. [illegible] logo, and Take-Two Interactive Software are all trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. in the
d/or other countries. The Don and Crown logo is a registered trademark [illegible] Productions, Inc., and such logo and Don King's name, image and likeness are used under the license of Don King Productions, Inc. All rights
d. Wii and Nintendo DS are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2006 [illegible] Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (4-PLAYER ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT
> [illegible]

GUITAR HERO 4

Rock n' Roll Fantasy Meets Reality

The Beatles vs. The Stones. Nirvana vs. Pearl Jam. Oasis vs. Blur. Throughout history, clashes between some of the world's greatest bands have helped define the music that we know and love. While the great rivalries of old have faded out in the post-downloading era (The Killers vs. The Bravery isn't exactly Metallica vs. Megadeth, is it?), video games are currently home to one of the great musical battles of all time. Neversoft's Guitar Hero III and Harmonix's Rock Band were enormous hits last year, and each brought fans some of the most entertaining gaming sessions in recent memory. While Harmonix is still considered by many to be the innovator in the field, Neversoft and Activision have been hard at work creating an entirely new Guitar Hero experience. We recently got a chance to get a world-exclusive first look at the next Guitar Hero title, a game that hopes to change music games forever and restore Guitar Hero's claim to the cutting edge. What we found is much more than a mere sequel, and might be the next great step forward in the genre.

>>

Shredding History

How quickly things change. Think back just three years ago: Music games were a niche genre in the U.S. dominated by Konami's Bemani arcade games and its following of hardcore devotees obsessed with Dance Dance Revolution. Red Octane was an obscure peripheral manufacturer, known for redesigning Konami's home dance pad and its own DDR knockoff for PS2, Into the Groove. Harmonix was a critically respected and commercially moribund gaming studio, relying on its modest success with Konami's Karaoke Revolution games to keep afloat following the commercial failures of its PS2 cult hits Frequency and Amplitude. Neversoft was the force behind wildly successful but aging Tony Hawk franchise, which was struggling to find its way on the next generation of systems after being one of the dominant franchises of the PS2 era.

Then, in November of 2005, Guitar Hero was released, a game that would forever change the fates of all these companies. The game (published by Red Octane) was an instant hit, quickly spawning an even more successful sequel. Suddenly, music games were at the forefront of an industry looking for ways to win the hearts of the vast number of casual consumers who had yet to become hooked on video games. With success came the usual business wrangling, as the various companies involved struggled to secure their stake in the future of this blossoming new genre. Activision moved first, acquiring Red Octane (the brains behind the game's groundbreaking guitar controller) and the Guitar Hero brand name. MTV scooped up Harmonix, the company widely seen as the creative force behind the franchise, and signed a partnership with EA to develop an all-new Harmonix-created music game, Rock Band.

Now faced with creating a new Guitar Hero game without the help of Harmonix, Activision went to its stable and awarded the task of creating Guitar Hero III to Neversoft, one of its most consistent and able developers. Soon, both Harmonix, with its ambitious Rock Band, and Neversoft were locked in competition to determine who would control the future of this rapidly evolving style of gaming.

Not surprisingly, given the talent of the companies involved, there was no clear winner to the axe-slinging showdown staged during the holiday season of last year. Despite the fact that they had been forced to quickly adapt to an entirely new genre, Neversoft's Guitar Hero III was remarkably polished, and continued to focus on the series' core of wild guitar antics. Harmonix pushed an expansive (and expensive) title that focused on full-band, four-player action, with a specially designed electronic drum peripheral and the addition of live vocals. While Guitar Hero won the sales race – by January of this year it had become the fastest $1 billion franchise in gaming history – the critical perception was that Harmonix and Rock Band had done more to push the genre forward.

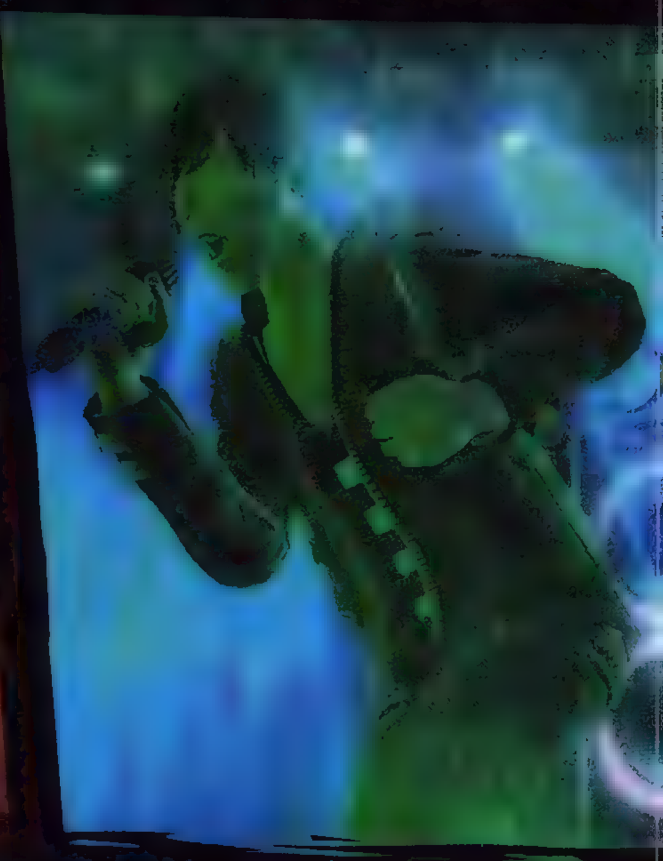
This time around, however, Neversoft has its sights set on not only achieving the status quo, but shattering it to pieces. Guitar Hero 4 represents perhaps the most ambitious game in the history of the company. While it's clear Neversoft has kept a studious eye on what its major competitor has achieved in the last year, its goal is to not just match what Harmonix has done, but to create the ultimate music game.

"We want to move everything forward – every single element of the game," claims Neversoft's studio development director Scott Pease. "That's what we've done for 10 years. Guitar Hero III was a big learning experience for us, just learning how to do it. This [GH 4] is the unleashing of all the technology we've had in other games coming to bear on this thing. As you can see, it's going to be five times the game GH III was."

continued on page 52 >>

Extensive motion capture sessions give the game's characters a more fluid and varied set of animations

As you can see, the possibilities for creating custom guitars are endless



Here we [illegible] options b[illegible]

As in Guitar Hero: Aerosmith, the characters interact with each other to a much greater degree

(continued from page [illegible])

Forming The Band

For most people the biggest news surrounding Guitar Hero 4 will be instantly obvious: like Rock Band, this is now a full band game, complete with drums, bass, vocals, and guitar. While this news isn't a complete surprise (it's been rumored from various sources since the release of the last game), it will be welcome news to the core fanbase, especially those who haven't yet shelled out for its competitor. While many will see this as Neversoft yet again following in the footsteps of Rock Band, the idea of doing a game based on other instruments has actually been percolating within Activision and Neversoft since before Guitar Hero III.

"The natural evolution of the game is to add more instruments," observes Neversoft co-founder Joel Jewitt. "It's not like [Harmonix] even invented that. That's been out there for years in the arcades."

Project director Brian Bright revealed that a Drum Hero game had been in development at fellow Activision studio Activision Foster City (formerly Z-Axis). To help out with the project, Activision hired the services of John Devecka, the man who insiders credit as creating the very first music game, MTV Drumscape, an arcade drum simulation that was released back in 1996. Interestingly, Devecka actually patented technology that has been used in all following music games, including Guitar Hero, Rock Band, and Konami's Dance Dance Revolution – patents which Activision now owns. After Neversoft took the reins of the franchise, the Drum Hero project was rolled into the Guitar Hero fold. The end result is an all-new Guitar Hero drum kit (made with the help of Devecka) that Neversoft feels will raise the bar in both quality and functionality.

"One of the things we really wanted to do was make it quieter than our competitor's kit," comments Bright. "The drums are loud as hell and it's distracting. Everyone else in the room is like 'Shut up!' We also wanted to be able to send along velocity data. We know how hard you hit all six, including the pedal."

Yes, he said "six." That's because Guitar Hero is adding another pad to the kit: one of the two specially placed, dedicated cymbal pads. Instead of looking to emulate the Rock Band kit, the team took its inspiration from actual MIDI compatible professional electronic kits, which they feel are better and more natural feeling in both design and build quality.

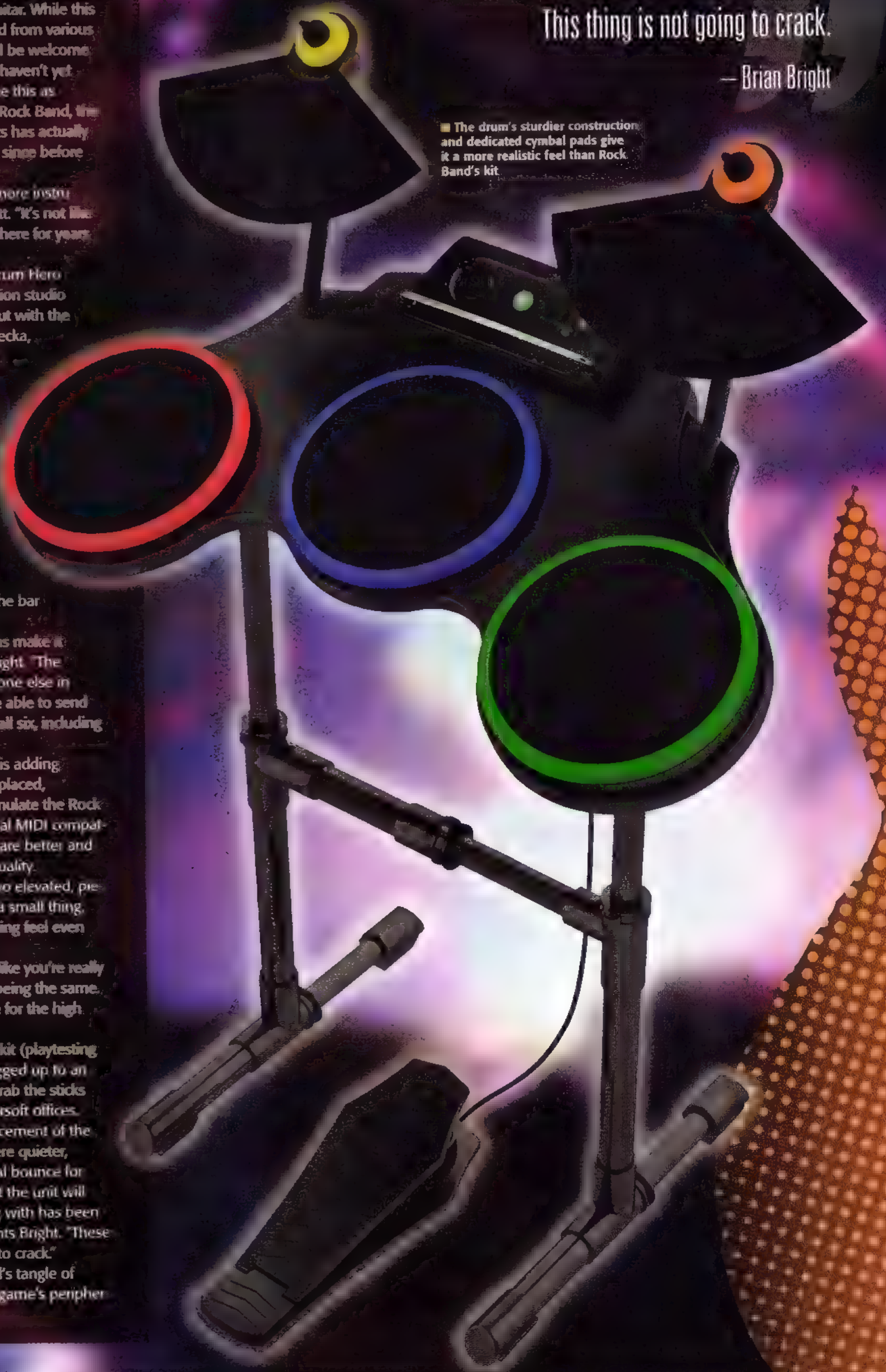
Instead of four level pads, you'll now have two elevated, pie-shaped cymbal pads. While this may seem like a small thing, it succeeds in making the experience of drumming feel even more real than in Rock Band.

"We really wanted the elevation, so you feel like you're really playing cymbals. It feels different than all pads being the same. Also for lefties, they can play with the other one for the high hat," says Bright.

Although we didn't get to play with the new kit (playtesting is being done on a professional electronic kit rigged up to an Xbox 360 controller), we were encouraged to grab the sticks and bang on the first-run prototype in the Neversoft offices. Our initial impression was very positive; the placement of the cymbals was very comfortable and the pads were quieter, while at the same time providing a more natural bounce for things like drum rolls. Neversoft guarantees that the unit will be extremely durable. "The team we're working with has been making hardware for years and years," comments Bright. "These guys know it inside out. This thing is not going to crack."

In even better news, those sick of Rock Band's tangle of cords will be pleased to note that – like all the game's peripherals – the drum kit will be fully wireless.

> "The team we're working with has been making hardware for years and years...These guys know it inside out. This thing is not going to crack."
>
> — Brian Bright



■ The drum's sturdier construction and dedicated cymbal pads give it a more realistic feel than Rock Band's kit

Check out the detailed facial animations; the lip synching is extremely accurate

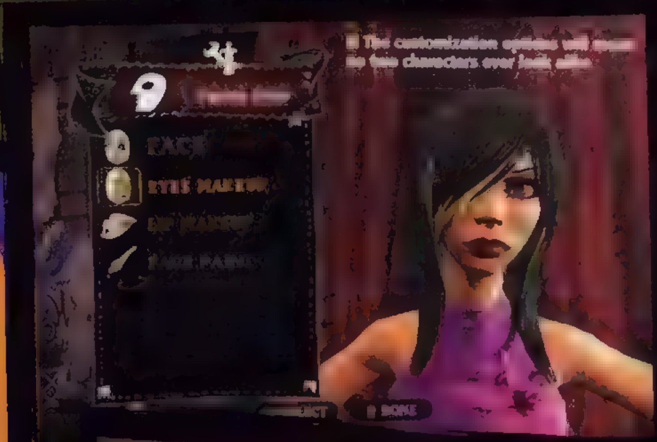
Be Your Own Rockstar

In keeping with the addition of more instrument options, Neversoft envisions Guitar Hero 4 as a completely open-ended music fantasy. As opposed to past titles, which were essentially a list of songs with some modes thrown on top, this time around every aspect of the game lets players choose how they want to present themselves to the world and how they progress through their rock career. "Player freedom" is clearly the buzzword surrounding the development of the title, and this manifests itself in a number of intriguing ways.

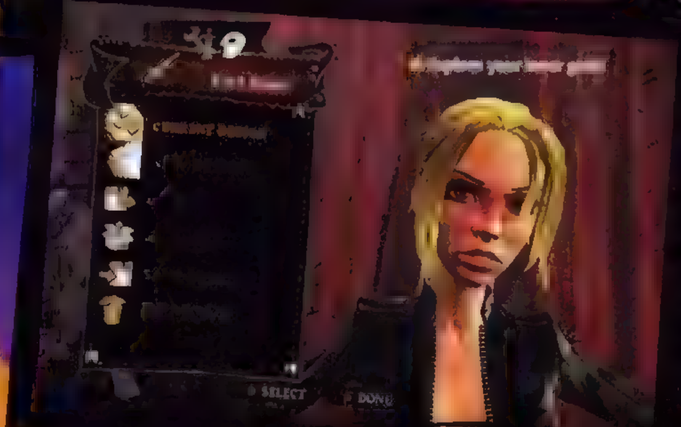
It starts in a brand new Create-a-Rocker mode, which is the deepest and most complex character creator we've seen in a music game to date. Here, Neversoft draws not only on its own experience with Tony Hawk, but also takes some inspiration from a surprising source.

"We've had Create-A-Skater in our games since 2000, so it was a natural step for us to make Create-a-Rocker," said Bright. "One thing that we did was take a look at Tiger Woods, which is a benchmark as far as we're concerned for facial deformation and options that they give people. We've never had that in Tony Hawk. We've had body scaling, but we never had the facial stuff. We've got that in now."

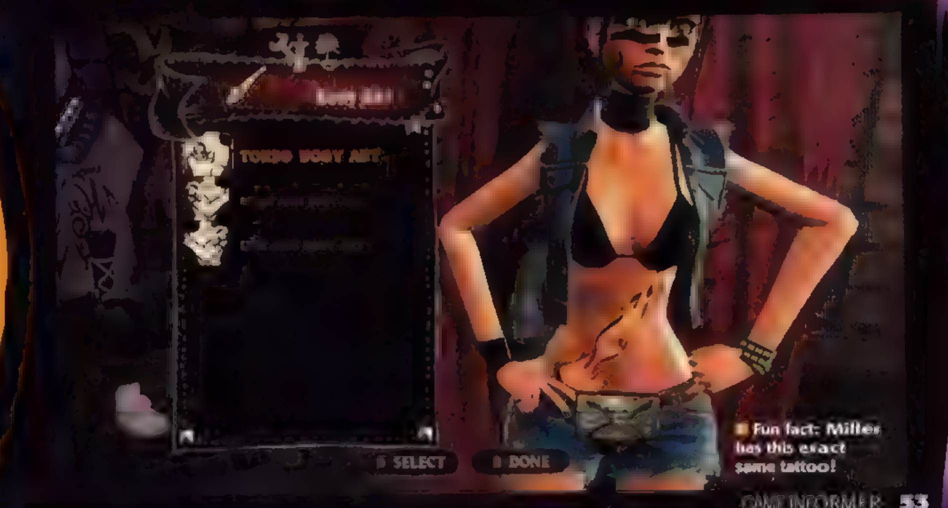
Using a system of sliders familiar to anyone who's played Tiger or a number of other games, you can start from a few basic character archetypes (which the game categorizes by musical genre, like black metal, goth, glam, etc.) and alter everything from the size of your nose to the prominence of your cheekbones. You can even age your characters ("In case you want to make The Rolling Stones," jokes Bright), alter their physique, and create customized outfits down to the smallest accessories. Using a simple editor, you can even create custom tattoos and face paint



The customization options will mean no two characters ever look alike



[illegible]



Fun fact: Miller has this exact same tattoo!

The Mystery Axe

While Neversoft was definitely excited to show us all the ins and outs of its new baby, at least one major part of the Guitar Hero equation, the all-new guitar controller Red Octane has designed for the game, had to remain a secret due to a mandate sent down from Activision's legal department. What we do know is this: The controller will have at least one major new feature, which will directly impact the way you play Guitar Hero in the future. "We've been brainstorming on ways to make the guitar as expressive as a real guitar," hints Scott Pease.

However, we received at least one clue as to how this new guitar will impact gameplay. While playing guitar during a four-player session, we noticed strings of see-through notes coming down the guitar runway. When pressed, Neversoft's Chris Parise explained, "Those see-through notes [are for] a totally new input mechanic on the new guitar. Unfortunately, we can't talk about it today."

Suddenly Brian Bright jumped in, claiming, "It's so f—— rad, we're trying to patent the s---. We're getting some legal stuff taken care of." This caused company head Jewitt to joke, "We don't want you to run out and make one on your own."

Although we have no hard facts, given that the current guitar offers hammer-ons, whammy bar, and conventional fretting, maybe this new input mode could augment your shredding arsenal with fret-sliding or perhaps brief windows for improvisation? Regardless, expect this new controller to change the way you play Guitar Hero. However, we have been assured that you can play and complete the game with any previously compatible Guitar Hero controller, although you might miss out on certain gameplay features.

> We've had Create-A-Skater in our games since 2000, so it was a natural step for us to make Create-a-Rocker.
>
> an Brig

designs of anywhere from a planned 10 to a possible 50 layers of artwork. And, as in Tiger, you can even choose some of your character's animations, like how they react to a win or loss.

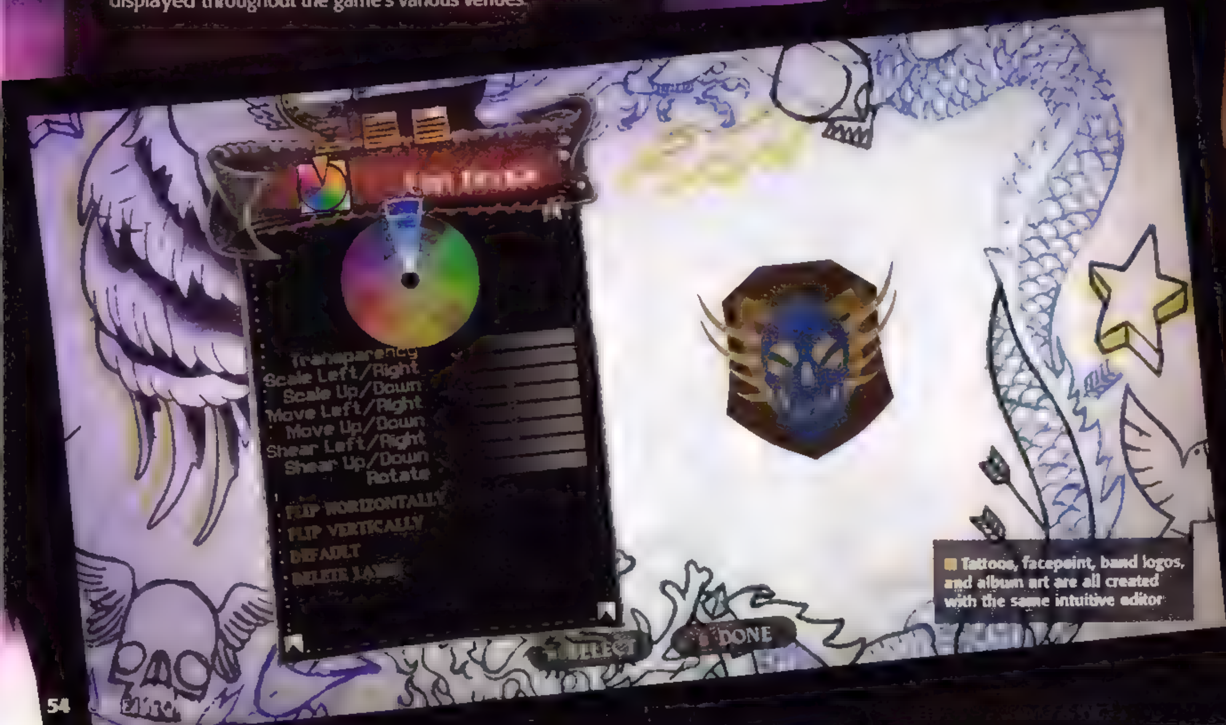
If you'd rather stick with some classic characters from Guitar Hero's past, you'll have that option as well. During our demo we saw such fan favorites as Axel Steel, Judy Nails, Johnny Napalm, Lars Umlaut, Izzy Sparks, and Midori. Hardcore followers will be pleased to know that the game also marks the return of Clive Winston and Pandora. You'll even be able to swap different characters' outfits for the first time in Guitar Hero. Wonder what Axel looks like in a miniskirt?

It's pretty impressive, and that's only the beginning. In the wake of Activision's very public falling out with Gibson, licensed guitars have been nixed in favor of an extensive guitar editor. As with your character, you'll be able to tweak every minute detail of your axe, choosing from scores of body shapes, headstocks, finishes, fret inlays, pickup configurations, knobs, pick guards – you name it, you can change it. Once again, you'll also be able to create custom guitar graphics in addition to the myriad of preset images.

"When you go online, you want your character to be different from everyone else's, to be an extension of you," says Scott Pease. "That goes for the guitars as well. You'll be able to recognize people by their guitars."

While options for customizing drums aren't as varied as those for guitar, you will be able to select the style of hardware, finish, and size of your drums, and even affix your bass drum head with a custom-made band logo that will be displayed throughout the game's various venues.

■ Some of the venues are less epic than others



■ Tattoos, facepaint, band logos, and album art are all created with the same intuitive editor

On The Road To Stardom

Neversoft's commitment to giving the player more relevant options extends to the career structure as well. Guitar Hero's traditional career has been thrown out the window – a move that effectively breaks down the barriers between single-player, online, and band career modes.

"Before the career mode was just this linear list. Now, there's this band fiction," describes Chris Parise. "You have multiple gigs on a board you can go to, and each one will have a set list of songs for a particular place. That's the same for single-player as it is for band mode. You pick the gig you want, play through it, and there will be more to play. You pick the way you want to go. If there's a song that you don't want to play – even though all our songs will be awesome – you don't have to play that song. It's a more open-ended adventure."

Brian Bright is more blunt in his assessment of the difference between the career mode in Guitar Hero 4 and Rock Band: "Well, I thought we could be better [than Rock Band] by not making you play the same three f—— songs 2,000 times over and over. I don't want to hear Nirvana and Weezer ever again. I'm so sick of it."

To help ease frustrations and ensure that players are constantly encountering new songs and challenges, Neversoft has broken most of the rules that restricted progression in previous music games. Brian Bright gave us an example of how this works. "You can start a drum career with this wonderful lady I've made here [in Create-a-Rocker]," says Bright. "You can start playing in Medium and, if you get to a song you're having a hard time with, you could finish that song in Easy if you wanted to – without starting a new career. You could also jump to guitar and play that song with that same character within the same career. You take one character and try to finish the four instrument careers and the band career with the one character you've made to really max out your career earnings and unlock all the hidden challenges and milestones."

You'll also have more options in how you progress through the band career. As in Rock Band, each band is anchored by a band leader. However, unlike in Rock Band, the leader can freely switch between any instrument. Whether by yourself, online, or offline with friends, you'll always be able to advance your band's fortunes in the world of virtual rock. When you're playing in a friend's band online, you'll still reap the rewards of success. For example, if your friend is advanced past you in the game, you'll still earn the extras you've unlocked for certain milestones, even if you haven't actually progressed to that point in your own career.

Neversoft is a bit vague as to how you'll unlock new items and songs in the game, although we do know that, as in previous games, you'll be earning cash for almost everything you do – and the team promises enough Achievements, goals, and milestones to keep players busy for weeks.

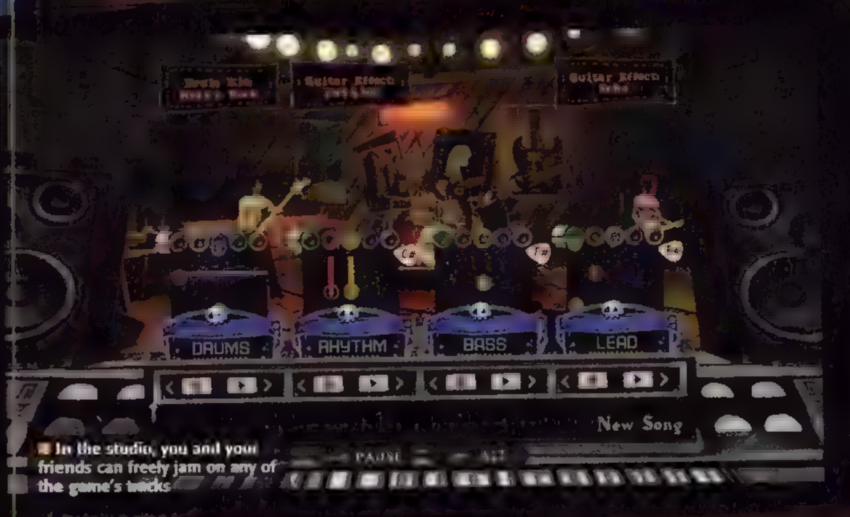
Take The Stage

While Neversoft is clearly intent on making a number of improvements and additions to what was accomplished in Rock Band – including some rather mindblowing ones we've yet to mention – there's also a bit of a feeling of déjà vu one feels when first tackling a four-player session of Guitar Hero 4. Perhaps sensing that it's folly to fix something that isn't broken, the onscreen HUD for multiplayer is essentially identical to that of Rock Band. The three main instruments – guitar, bass, and drums – scroll vertically down the lower half of the screen, while the vocal line rolls across the top from left to right. For our money, it was the right decision. The system as is works perfectly, and allows fans of both franchises to jump in and instantly feel at home.

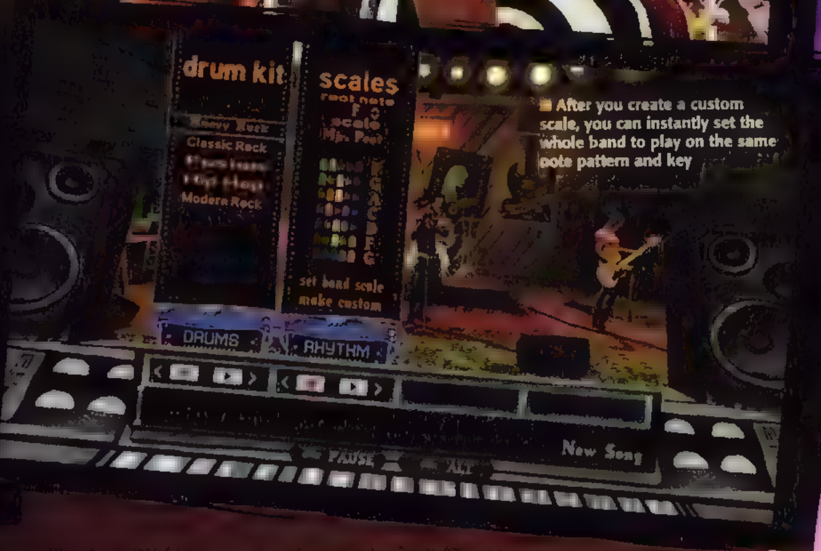
However, as with the career mode, a number of clever changes have been implemented to make the experience more exciting for a wider variety of gamers. One such example is the new Easy Rhythm guitar difficulty, one targeted for parents who want to let their children in on the fun. Instead of the usual pattern of descending "jewels," Easy Rhythm is a series of straight lines (usually used to represent the bass drum hits) that go in time to the beat of the song, allowing kids to strum along regardless of what neck buttons are being pressed.

The bass and drum mechanics have also been tweaked to make them more complex for advanced players and, in the case of the drums, allow for more creativity and improvisation. Bass also makes use of the straight line across for "open notes," essentially simulating the open E string on the real-life instrument. It's a clever addition and definitely makes for some more interesting note runs and a feel much more akin to actually playing the instrument. Which

The [illegible] you to cr[illegible] of Guitar [illegible]



In the studio, you and your friends can freely jam on any of the game's tracks



After you create a custom scale, you can instantly set the whole band to play on the same note pattern and key

is good, since there is (finally) a unique bass career mode in the game. For the drums, Neversoft is taking full advantage of the kit's dual cymbals by changing how Star Power is activated. Instead of Rock Band's somewhat awkward use of fills to activate power mode, you can now activate it by crashing both cymbals at once in true rockstar fashion. At that point, you're given a brief moment to improv your own fill, allowing you to be adventurous without worrying about hitting the tricky last beat on time.

Neversoft also has big plans to distinguish the drum career track from its string-slinging counterparts. No arena rock show is complete without an indulgent drum solo, and rest assured you won't have to miss out on the fun of unleashing your inner Keith Moon. "When you're playing drums by yourself, the encores will have these special sections that are solos," reveals Bright. "The lights will fade, the camera will pan to the drummer, the rest of the band will fade out, and there will be an extended drum solo."

"The idea is that it will be like the Tommy Lee spotlight solo, with pyro and lights going off. It'll be the big moment for the drummer," adds Pease. While the solos will rest solely on improvisation, the game will grade you according to how on-beat your fills were and the variety in the pads that you hit.

Neversoft is also tackling one of the more controversial elements of Guitar Hero III: the boss battles, which many critics and fans found frustrating. Rather than abandon them entirely, the team has re-focused them away from attack power-ups and towards the core of what makes Guitar Hero so much fun.

"You're still going to be playing with some real life guitar heroes," comments Neversoft's Alan Flores. "But we're going to change the way it's done. It's more about playing and less about attack. It's a more call-and-response style. But we will still have a Battle Mode for online, because it's really popular with the fans."

A Cornucopia Of Rock

Another area which Neversoft promises the game will excel is the in the music selection – and, more importantly, support for downloadable content, which has been less than stellar so far for Guitar Hero III.

"We're going to support this in a big way with DLC, something we haven't been the best at with Guitar Hero III," observes Bright. "Some of that is because we as a studio have been focused on this game and Guitar Hero: Aerosmith. It takes a couple of guys a few weeks to do a song. We're now working with some other resources to help us do downloadable content."

"You have to have the licensing and everything all lined up. Last year, we were basically trying to get GH III out and were still learning about it. Now, we have everything in place. We're definitely more prepared, and we have more people making the games," comments Pease.

Of course, any downloadable content would be adding on to the game's built-in track listing, which Neversoft aims to make the best ever in the music genre. "[We'll have] more songs than we've ever put in a Guitar Hero game, more than any other disc-based music game. And they're all master tracks, and a lot of triple-A bands. We're going balls-out," claims Bright. For fear of getting scooped by the competition, they refused to discuss specific tracks, but would confirm the inclusion of songs by four bands: Van Halen, The Eagles, Linkin Park, and Sublime. This listing reflects the team's desire to make the soundtrack more varied, reaching outside of Guitar Hero's usual metal-centric aesthetic.

"We've actually got a pretty even split between late '80s, '90s, and classic rock. It's a little harder to find modern stuff, but we do have a good amount of emerging bands," reveals Bright. But that's not to say the franchise's core group of guitar-heads has been ignored. "We have a handful of songs that are specific to the hardcore guitar players – a few progressive bands like Dream Theater. We have to put them in the game," Bright continues.

Blazing A Trail

Speculating about who will and won't be on the soundtrack of a new Guitar Hero game is an entertaining pastime. (Yes, we asked about Led Zeppelin. No, they didn't answer.) But what if we told you the most exciting music in Guitar Hero 4 hasn't even been written yet? That's because Neversoft is aiming for something much greater than just another improvement on the same old formula. This time, they are giving players the tools to go beyond just emulating the artists they love and pursue their own path to musical stardom. Here's where things start to get really interesting.

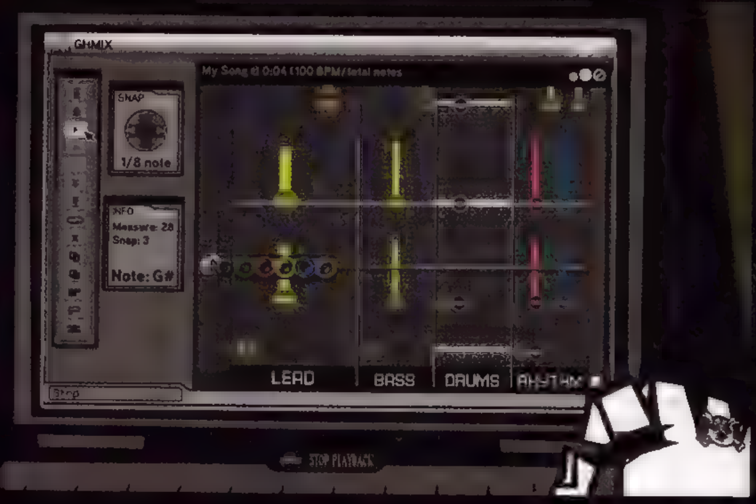
Neversoft, like many of us, has paid close attention to the community of Guitar Hero hackers that has blossomed online, populated by enthusiasts who've used the modified controllers and debug menus to create a plethora of unlicensed versions of thousands of tracks. However, this time around, no homebrew solutions will be necessary. Guitar Hero 4's studio mode will give players the tools they need to create literally any song they can imagine.

The first layer of this expansive mode is called Jam Over, which allows players to get their feet wet in a live band setting. Simply enter the studio, select one of the songs from the soundtrack, and you and your friends will be able to freely jam with preloaded chords and scales from that track. Whatever tracks aren't being played live will be streamed from the prerecorded track, letting you learn how to play the song without the use of the note runway, or create your own riffs and chord progressions on the fly. It also allows you to be more creative with leads, as the guitar's tilt function allows you to instantly switch between a higher and lower octave. In the studio is also where you'll notice the significance of the velocity sensitive drums, as each pad will have four different samples that are tiered based on how hard you hit, allowing you to go from a light drum roll to a massive thwack of the snare in an instant.

Once you've got your chops nailed down, you'll be able to record your version of a rock classic (sans vocals) and have it instantly playable in Quick Play mode.

But the real possibilities begin to open up in the Advanced Studio mode, a full recording toolset that rivals such computer programs as Apple's popular Garage Band software. In this mode, you have total freedom to write, arrange, and record songs as you see fit. A vertically scrolling grid shows the song's various tracks – rhythm, lead, melody, bass, and drums. You can craft your songs by recording live playing (with a little help from the game, which automatically "quantizes" or corrects offbeat notes to quarter, 8th, or 16th notes, and so on), or by "step recording," in which you place individual drum hits or notes on the grid one by one. It's also possible to create loops which can then be copied and pasted ad infinitum, a feature which is handy for drum and bass composition.

The guitar options are nearly endless in Advanced Studio. You'll have a host of amp sounds and effects pedals, and the ability to create and assign custom scales to the different buttons and combos on the neck. Three-button combos even allow instant access to acoustic tones. Drums are equally flexible, allowing you to select from a huge selection of conventional kits, then quickly hit the back button for Latin-style percussion sounds.



The only real limitation is the lack of vocals – the storage needs for recorded vocals and possible copyright concerns were cited as the reasons for the inability to record your singing. That said, you can use keyboard tones on the melody track to emulate the vocal lines for most songs.

All in all, it's a remarkably easy-to-use system, one that should generate a ton of unique user-created content (and probably more than a few less-than-legal "cover" versions of classic rock tunes). To showcase the creativity of their audience, Neversoft has added a completely new online community to the game, called GH Tunes, a free content sharing service it hopes will become the YouTube of music video games.

Once you've recorded your original masterpiece, all you have to do is save it to your hard drive, name the track, and create some custom album artwork. Then it can be uploaded to GH Tunes, where users from around the world can play and rate your creation (all songs are instantly translated into the familiar "jewel" system for playback). For Neversoft, the possibilities of the studio mode are endless.

"There are people that will go pretty hardcore into this mode," predicts Neversoft's Travis Chen. "These are the guys that make custom Guitar Hero III songs just with the cheats menu. You see videos of them playing full songs with that, and that was pretty limited. Now it's open to everyone, where before you had to hack your PS2. Even someone that doesn't want to play Jam Over or use the studio, they still get a big bonus because of those five percent of really awesome songs that are going up that they can play."

At first, you'll be limited to uploading five original tracks to the GH Tunes service. However, through a system of user ratings, certain players who deliver consistently high quality tracks will "get signed," allowing them to upload 10 and possibly even more songs at a time. The GH Tunes navigation system will allow you to sort the wheat from the chaff, highlighting new additions, highest-rated tracks, and popular songwriters from the fan community. Neversoft is also planning on curating its own Showcase section to highlight some of the best contributors. While Neversoft did confirm that studio mode would be included in the PS2 and Wii versions of the game, it seems unlikely that the online sharing will be as robust.

"Showcase is our own section," comments Brian Bright. "We could put real artists in there; we could put songs that our designers and artists have made. We could potentially pick out user songs and move them to our list."

The possibilities seem endless. If there's anything that the Internet era has taught us, it's that giving people ways to use their creativity online and connect with each other can lead to results much greater than anything you could have imagined beforehand. Just picture a community of thousands of Guitar Hero enthusiasts – both professional and amateur – writing, recording, and freely sharing tracks through an easy-to-use infrastructure. "It's struck me in the last few weeks that we might be sitting on something that's bigger than I have any concept about," predicts Joel Jewitt.

Shooting For Immortality

In the time we spent with the team at Neversoft, two things became abundantly clear. One, this is a highly competitive studio that is not content to sit back and merely preserve the commercially bankable Guitar Hero formula. Two, it was that Neversoft, which has always had a close relationship with its fanbase since the early days of Tony Hawk, are a company that listens to the criticism from both its fans and the press, and is attempting to deliver to the public the music game they've been dreaming about for years.

"This is the future," claims Joel Jewitt. "We're going to make the best game we can with all the tools, so you guys can do everything. And then keep it going with all the music and master tracks that you guys love. It's a lot of fun.... I'm getting giddy about this one."

With their years of experience in a variety of genres, a core of extremely talented veteran staff, and one successful Guitar Hero title already under its belt, Neversoft seems to be poised to challenge Harmonix and Rock Band as the innovators in the music game genre. Has the student become the teacher? It's too early to say, but its safe to predict that music fans will all benefit from the results of what's shaping up to be one of gaming's all-time great rivalries. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** WINTER 2008

PRINCE OF PERSIA

HEIR APPARENT

If Prince of Persia is a book, then Jordan Mechner wrote its first chapter in 1989. Supposedly inspired by The Book of One Thousand and One Nights, Mechner's remarkable game was different from anything else before it, even as it told the most familiar of stories. A lowborn commoner faces a villainous vizier in a race against time to save the princess. Death-defying leaps, agile swordplay, and a sweeping imaginative backdrop established a tone that would set the franchise apart. Years later, Ubisoft Montreal rediscovered the Prince of Persia and added a second chapter – a different prince on a quest for redemption after loosing the horror of the Sands of Time onto the world. Ubisoft's new vision embraced its pedigree, but catapulted forward with a brand new take on platforming and action for a suddenly three-dimensional game world. After three interconnected games have revealed their secrets, the epic of the Sands of Time has been told. The book is ready for its next chapter, and a new Prince is rising to the occasion.

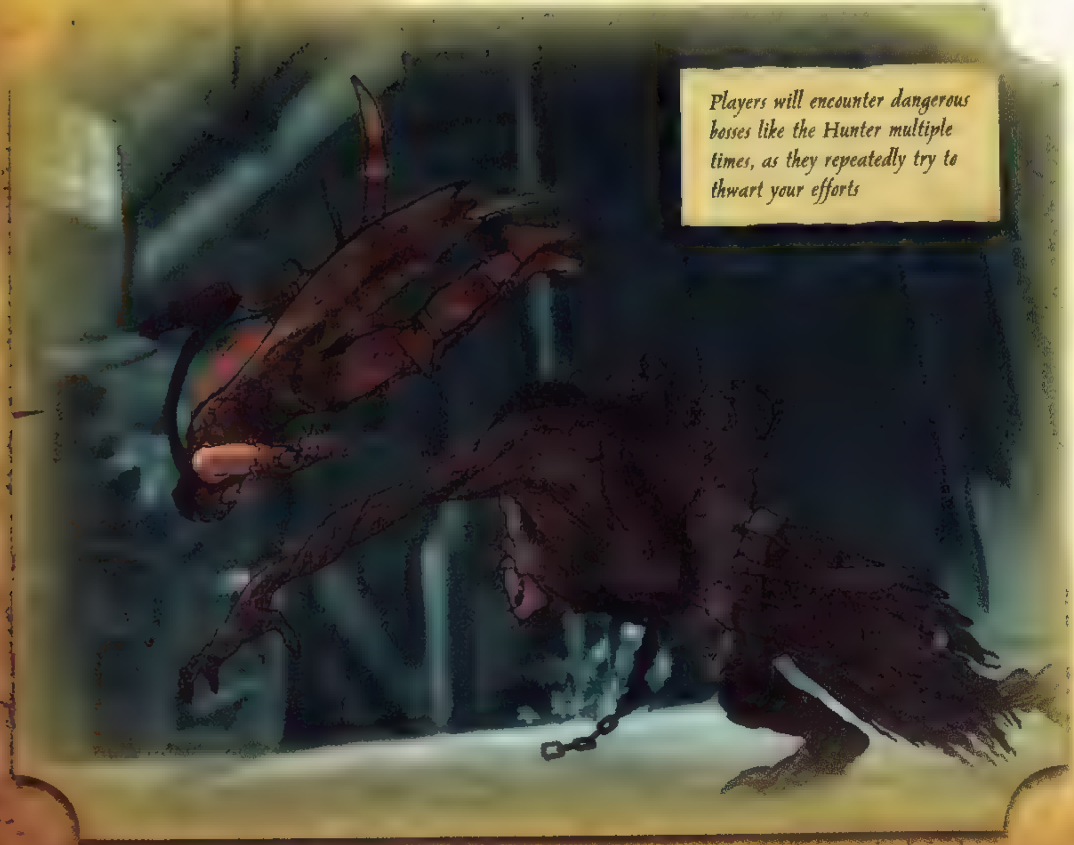
While this latest iteration of Prince of Persia represents an entirely new story and character, the game is very much rooted in the familiar. Though this prince doesn't have a time-rewinding dagger on his hip, one could easily make the mistake in thinking this was yet another sequel to the successful series. Many of the familiar staples remain in place, from platforming to swordfights. However, this new protagonist moves through a significantly more fantastic world. This change is the byproduct of an interesting reality facing the veteran team at Ubisoft Montreal. After the first Sands of Time, part of the development squad split off to begin work on a decidedly more realistic hero – an assassin stalking the streets of the medieval Holy Land in search of his unlucky victims. With Assassin's Creed now established in the Ubisoft stable of hits, the team that remained behind to work on Warrior Within and The Two Thrones spent the last few years developing the new Prince of Persia, free to let their imaginations run wild. Where the Sands of Time wove its way through a grand and ancient Persian world, it was in many ways still tied to an exaggerated version of reality. With Assassin's Creed branching into historical fiction, this new Prince can finally embrace a story of unchecked mythology and magic.

The tale begins as a young traveler accidentally passes into a forbidden land – a mythical garden of beauty dominated at its center by a massive tree of life. Imprisoned within is an ancient god of darkness named Ahriman, who became trapped there after a cosmic struggle with his brother Ormazd. The prince arrives only to bear witness to the tree's destruction, and Ahriman's corruption pours out into the garden (an entirely self-contained world). It should come as little surprise that the wayward traveler becomes embroiled in the drive to strike back at that corruption. The game's plot draws parallels to the myths and stories of various cultures, from the familiar western conceptions of an Eden-like garden with a tree containing the essence of evil, to the Middle Eastern spiritual philosophy of Zoroastrianism, which teaches of opposing forces of benevolence and destruction at work in the world. Together, producer Ben Mattes hopes these ancient stories lend an added depth to what will be a very basic human story. "The conflict between the gods is not the conflict in and of itself," he tells us. "God of War did that one already. We're not interested in just telling a story of supreme beings and humanity's pitiful place in the grander scheme of things. But it just so happens that the backdrop we create through this epic struggle between these two warring gods allows us to explore some much more human, and therefore much more accessible, themes."

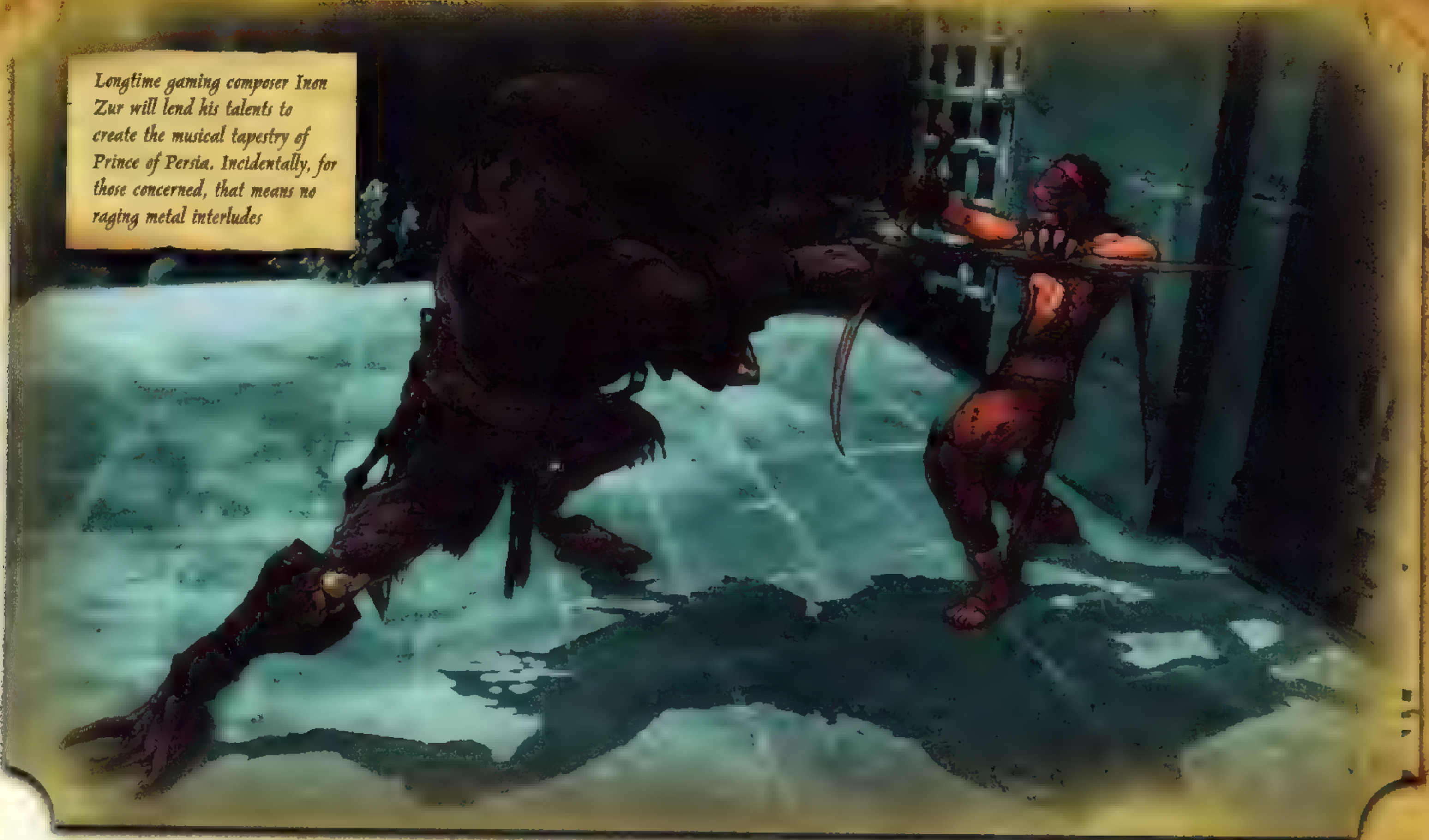
At the center of this unfolding epic stands a man who has yet to attain the regal title of the game in which he stars. While alike in his propensity for acrobatics and getting into trouble, the new prince is quite different from the hero of Ubisoft's last Persian epic. Worn, sand-battered skin and mismatched clothes tell the story of a life of journeys and adventures undertaken before the game opens. "We drew our inspiration from adventurers like Sinbad in the *Arabian Nights*, Han Solo from Star Wars, and Aragorn from The Lord of the Rings," Mattes reveals. Besides tarnished apparel and a scoundrel-like demeanor, the prince has some new accessories that further flesh out his character concept. In one hand he wields a massive blade, while his other fist brandishes a daunting metal gauntlet. Both figure prominently in some variations on the tried-and-true gameplay of the franchise.

The sword is the prince's main implement every time combat begins in the new one-on-one duel mechanic. Rather than focus on large groups of circling enemies, Prince of Persia only sets players against one opponent at a time. Part fighting game and part cinematic movie duel, these conflicts are fast-paced and frantic struggles for supremacy against an individual and cunning foe. "Enemies will be intelligent enough to lure you into a false sense of security if you're not paying attention," Mattes says. Combatants will fall back and feign weakness to

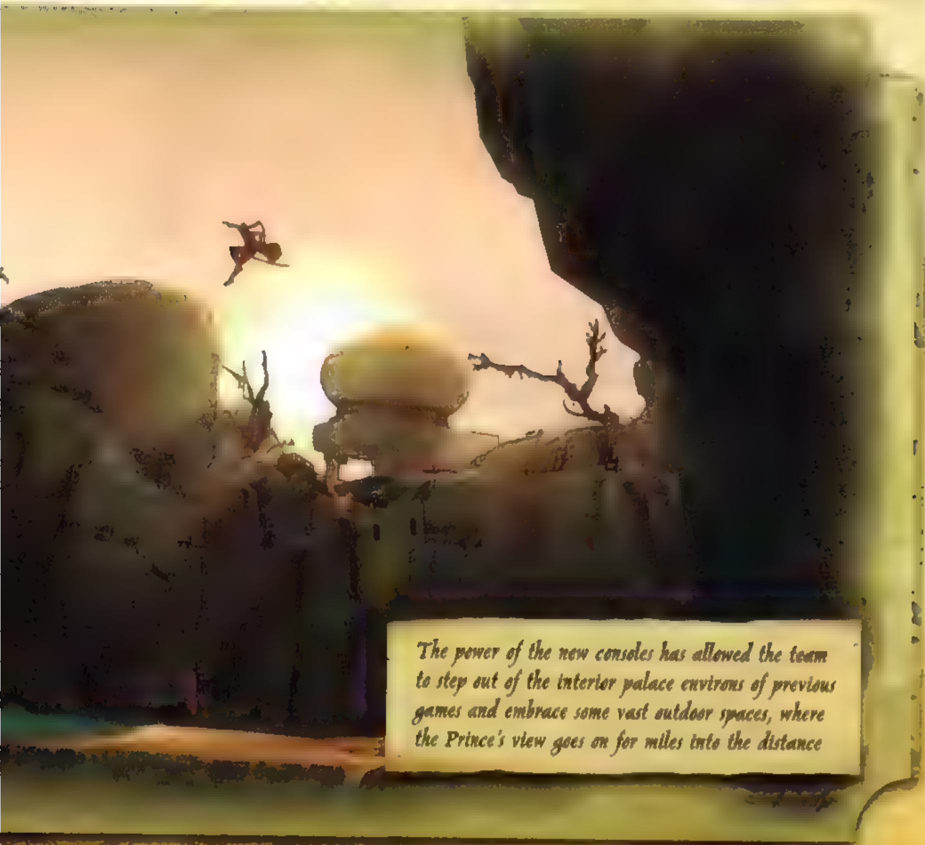
continued on page 62



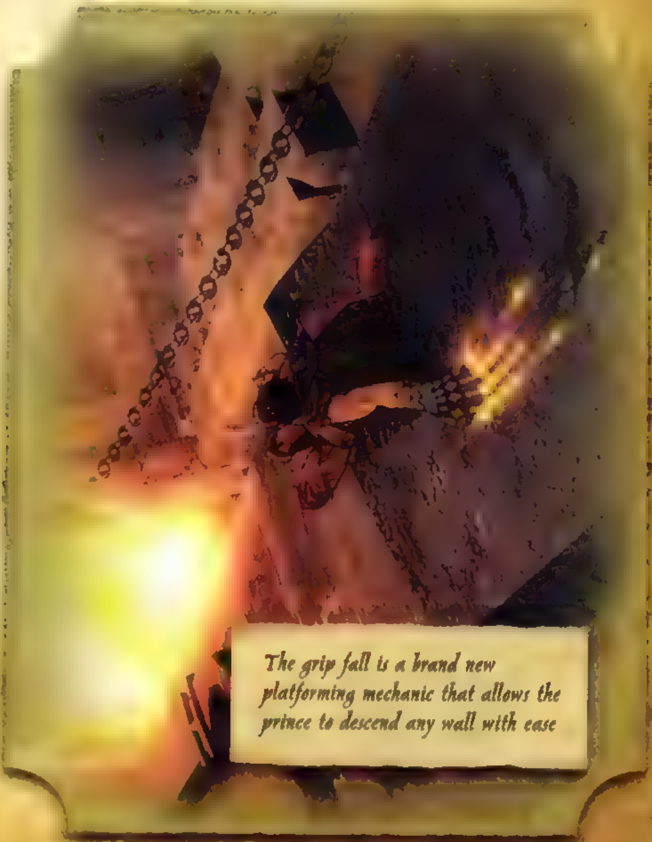
Players will encounter dangerous bosses like the Hunter multiple times, as they repeatedly try to thwart your efforts



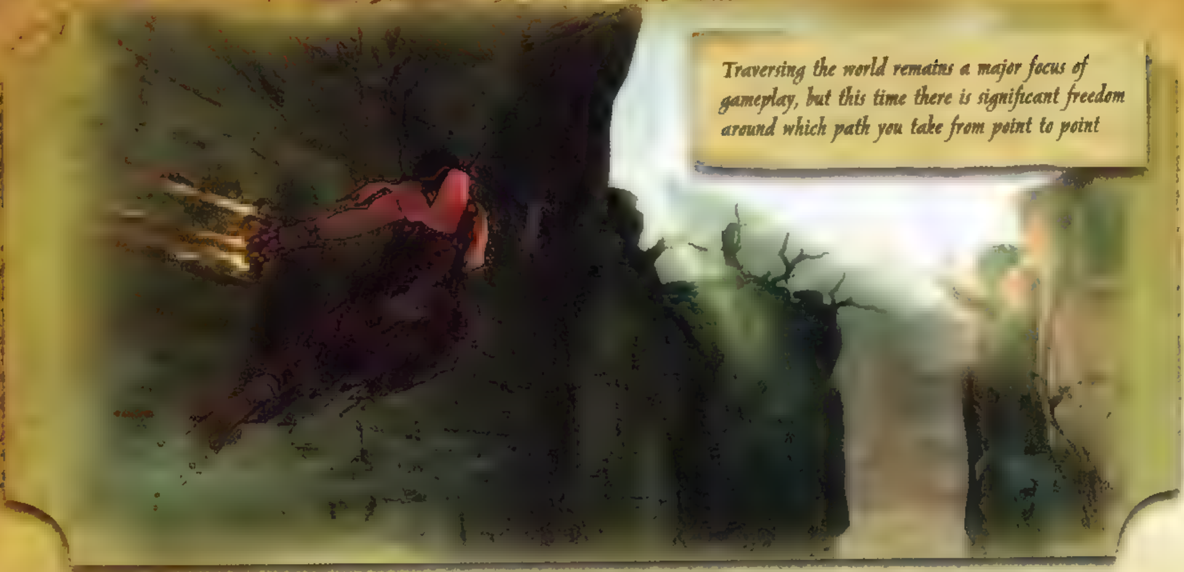
Longtime gaming composer Inon Zur will lend his talents to create the musical tapestry of Prince of Persia. Incidentally, for those concerned, that means no raging metal interludes



The power of the new consoles has allowed the team to step out of the interior palace environs of previous games and embrace some vast outdoor spaces, where the Prince's view goes on for miles into the distance



The grip fall is a brand new platforming mechanic that allows the prince to descend any wall with ease



Traversing the world remains a major focus of gameplay, but this time there is significant freedom around which path you take from point to point

continued from page 60

lure you into a trap, or constantly vary their attack technique to keep you off guard.

Without the need to focus on multiple enemies, the fighting mechanic is in many ways a true successor to the tense face-offs of the original Mechner games. Simple one-button commands will string together into juggling combinations, and the complex animation system will interconnect each move with whatever action follows it. One button on the controller is a sword swing, another jumps, and yet another grabs or manipulates with the other hand. To chain these individual actions together, you must carefully observe the enemy's weaknesses. It creates an exciting, spontaneous fighting style rather than requiring the memorization of long combo strings.

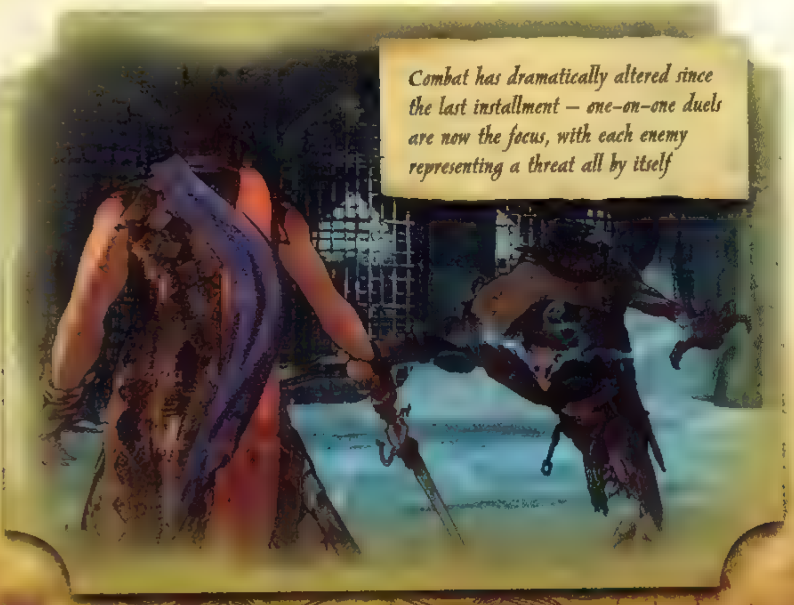
The glove comes into play most prominently while platforming. "The prince has this powerful gauntlet that he has found on a previous adventure. He can slam the claws of that gauntlet into a vertical surface and slow his descent," Mattes explains. Recall the moments of ripping down a curtain with the Dagger of Time in previous entries, but add a full range of movement back and forth along the surface as the prince falls. "We really liked the verticality that added to levels, but it was done in a very contrived linear fashion," Mattes admits. "The grip fall allows you to turn any vertical surface in the game into a slide."

The freedom afforded by moves like the grip fall is only a microcosm of the larger philosophy to give players more genuine choices in the game world. "I really feel like we have found a way through a variety of means to give a very crafted experience, the type that people would expect from a single-player linear game, that's going to appeal to people who want that epic narrative-rich game, but at the same time give people lots of choice if they want to take advantage of it," Mattes tells us. The massive mythical garden where the prince finds himself features cities and varied landscapes. In any given hub of that world, the prince will confront the Corruption of Ahriman and drive it out. As he escapes the traps and defeats creatures that oppose him, the Corruption will become ever more concentrated in a given place, like dirt gathering in a drain. When the prince cleanses that last part of the world, he'll be doing so in a profoundly dangerous locale, filled from top to bottom with the contamination of the dark god. Alternately, at any time, players can abandon a hub and move on to a different place in the world and begin tackling the corruption that has emerged there. While it's not exactly a sandbox game world, players can choose where to go next and move there via several routes. Previously visited areas will morph, becoming more challenging to traverse with more difficult enemies to confront, until the zone is finally cleared of Ahriman's corrupting influence.

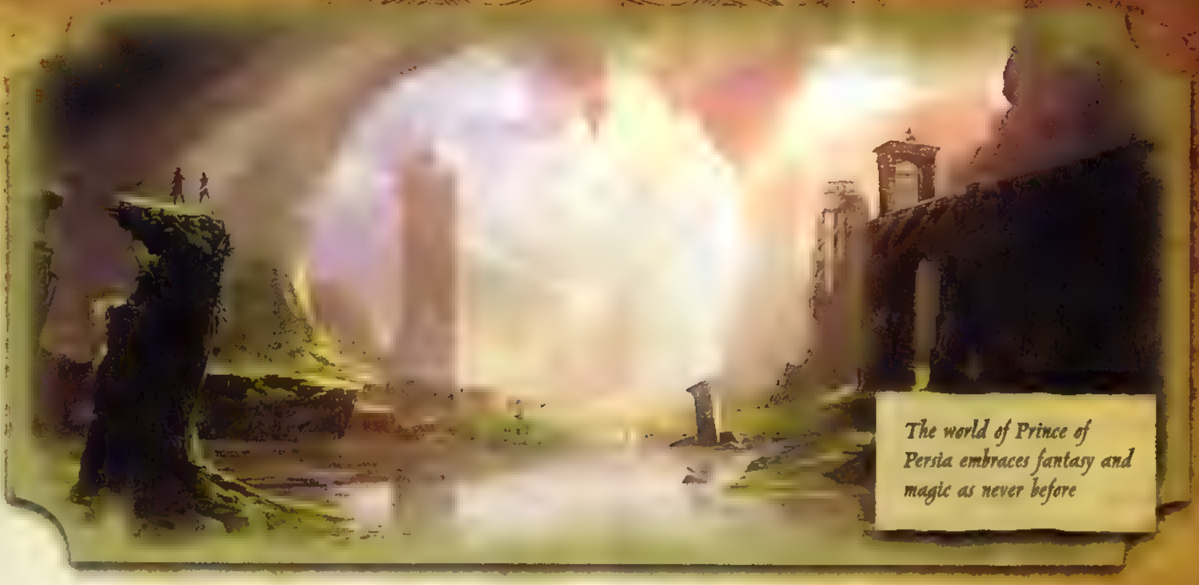
The Corruption is far more than dark colored coating on the game world. Rather, it is a tangible force in the world that takes on multiple forms. In its base state, the Corruption is a sort of inert goo that coats the world. Since touching it is dangerous, designers can make any given path more difficult simply by layering more of this dangerous dark matter along the character's route. Its second form is that of a non-sentient creature, the answer to the spinning blade traps and falling block obstacles of previous entries. These writhing masses of Corruption seek to snag the prince, and only careful timing and platforming will save him. Finally, the Corruption's ultimate form is that of battle-ready enemies, including the elite servants of Ahriman. You'll encounter these boss characters, such as the feral Hunter seen in the surrounding images, repeatedly throughout the journey.

The prince has no Sands of Time to call upon this time around, which doesn't bode well for his chances to confront the dangers before him. Thankfully, the team at Ubisoft Montreal has a secret weapon that may fill the void nicely.

Ubisoft Montreal hopes that Elika will revolutionize the role of a supporting character in the genre. The mysterious girl will accompany you throughout the entire game



Combat has dramatically altered since the last installment – one-on-one duels are now the focus, with each enemy representing a threat all by itself



The world of Prince of Persia embraces fantasy and magic as never before

Early in his voyage, the prince will meet Elika, a mysterious girl who becomes his constant companion in the journey that follows. "She is an absolutely critical innovation for us, who has implications throughout the experience, from A to Z, in terms of acrobatics, combat, puzzles, story – every element of the game is touched by your interactions with this support character," Mattes reveals. "So, obviously, the AI development that went into creating this character is rivaled by nothing Ubisoft has done before."

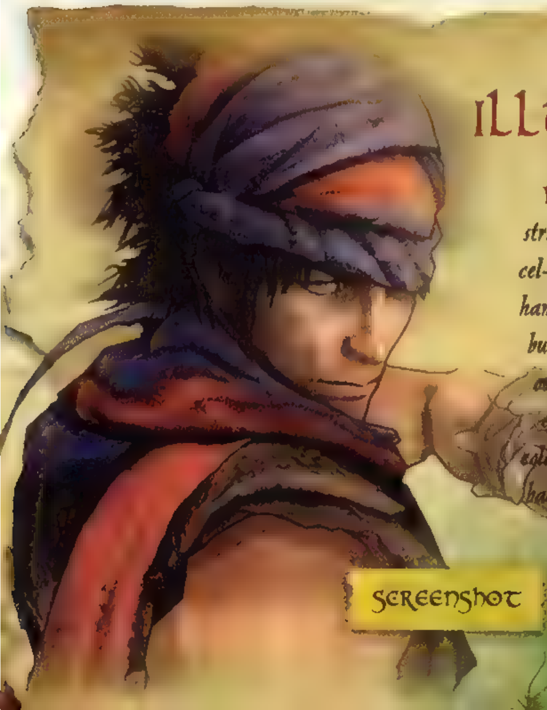
While Elika's specific utility in the game remains classified, her presence and their insistence on the importance of her role leads to some healthy speculation. If she is a true AI companion throughout the game, it's hard to believe there won't be some important ways in which she interacts with the prince, whether trekking through a dangerous platforming segment or battling a corrupted boss. Furthermore, it's unlikely that the team would abandon some of the exciting "save yourself" mechanics of earlier games that encouraged players to take chances on wild jumps and seemingly impossible tasks. If the beautiful Elika is encountered after the prince enters this mythical world, it's not a profound leap to believe she might provide some magical powers to help the prince along. Whatever her exact abilities, and however much the player will control the use of those abilities, it seems clear that the two characters' relationship is at the center of the forthcoming epic. Whether as a romantic interest or something else entirely, Ubisoft Montreal has an established track record on delivering heartfelt narrative – and we suspect those talents won't be wasted in a tale about a desperate couple struggling to survive with only each other to rely on.

Narrative likelihoods aside, this next-gen Prince won't be a slouch from a technical perspective. "The new prince will display 13 times more polygons than the previous prince, and even more than Altaïr in Assassin's Creed," Mattes tells us. "To give you a reference, there will be more polygons in the next-gen prince's hair than in the old prince himself." The game uses an extreme variation of the Anvil engine used to create Assassin's Creed. This new game engine is optimized to deliver AI for small numbers of allied and enemy characters and to offer the unique brand of guided free-flowing platforming for which the Prince games are so loved. Skin morphing, wrinkle maps, and indirect lighting help to establish a new visual benchmark for the game world. Even so, Mattes is eager to point out his assertion that technical buzzwords are really not what the series is about. "It's a means to an end. Ubisoft has been making next-gen games for several years already. I really think we've evolved past the point where the focus has to be on pushing this many polygons or bump mapping. This is not a tech demo. This game isn't about pushing one particular technology," Mattes says. "On a personal level, I'm not really interested in back-of-the-boxing it. What's important to me about it all, is that when it all combines the experience is somehow magical and becomes more than the sum of its parts."

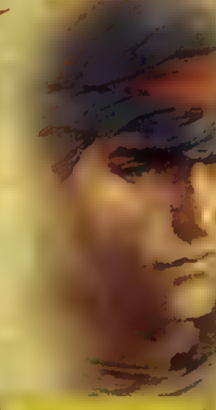
This philosophy feeds our excitement for the reborn Prince of Persia. Next-gen gaming has been awash in declarations of technical superiority, where a lauded phrase of tech jargon is meant to imply quality. As the years pass and those oft-cited specs fade into meaninglessness, games that understand next-gen gaming from a different perspective will rise to the occasion. In those games, tech becomes less a point of arrival and more the path to better gameplay and storytelling. The end of 2008 will reveal whether Prince of Persia is in that vanguard. ■ ■ ■

Illustration Comes Alive

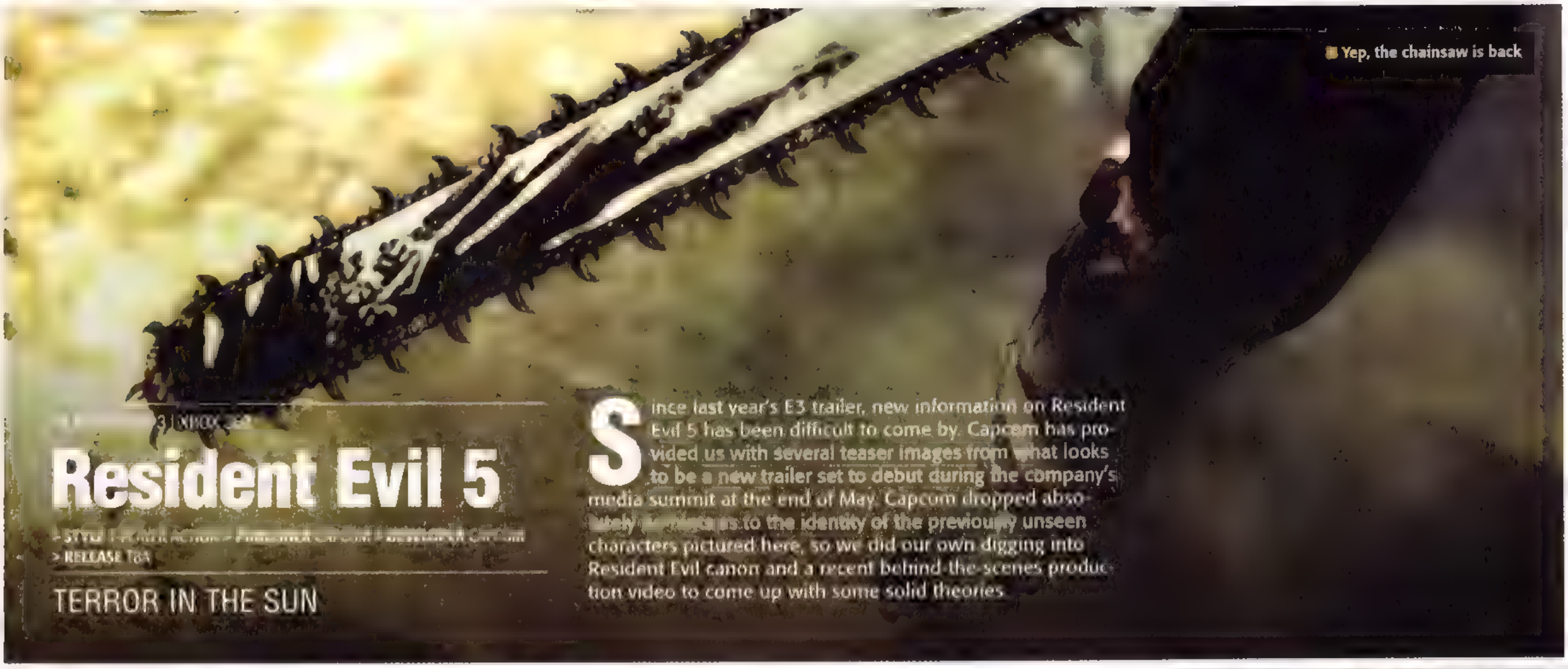
Wherever the player turns to look, the screen will be filled with this unusual and striking new art style. While at first the images might recall the cartoonish look of a cel-shaded game, an enormous amount of detail sets it apart from that style. "On one hand we're trying to come up with something that suggests that it's drawn or painted, but also that it's highly detailed. At the same time, we wanted to communicate that our illustrations are so critical to the creation of this game," producer Ben Mattes explains. The game world seems filled with paint-like brush strokes and evocative colors. The team has coined the term "illustrative" to describe their visual style. Each background and every moment of the game is meant to feel like the page of a storybook, like concept art brought to life through animation.



Screenshot



Concept Art



Yep, the chainsaw is back

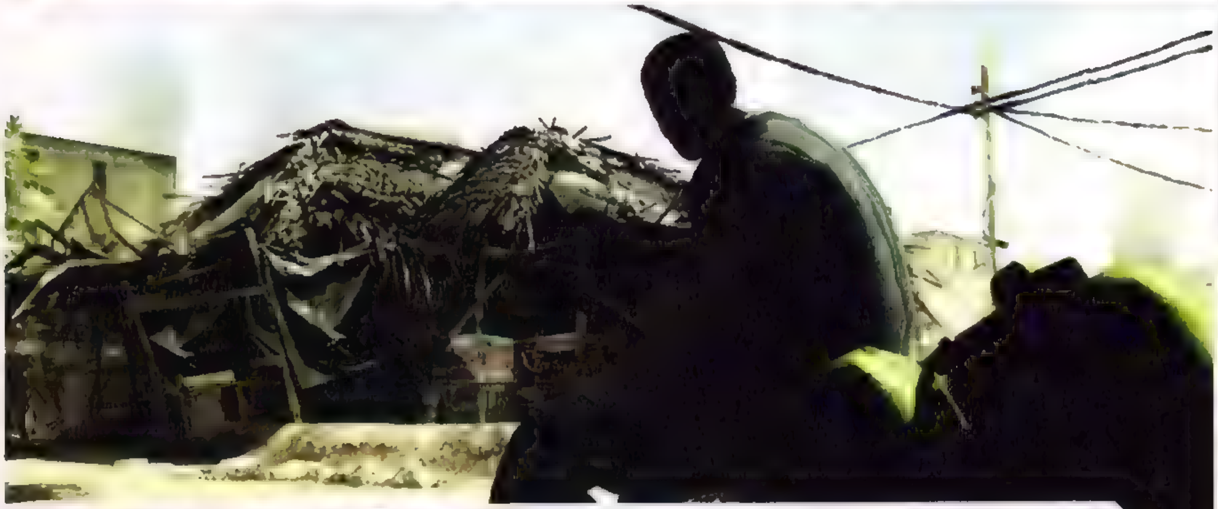
3 XBOX

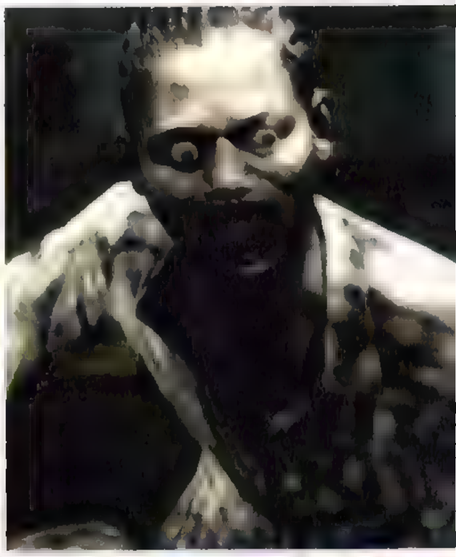
Resident Evil 5

> STYLE [illegible]
> RELEASE TBA

TERROR IN THE SUN

Since last year's E3 trailer, new information on Resident Evil 5 has been difficult to come by. Capcom has provided us with several teaser images from what looks to be a new trailer set to debut during the company's media summit at the end of May. Capcom dropped absolutely [illegible]s to the identity of the previously unseen characters pictured here, so we did our own digging into Resident Evil canon and a recent behind-the-scenes production video to come up with some solid theories.





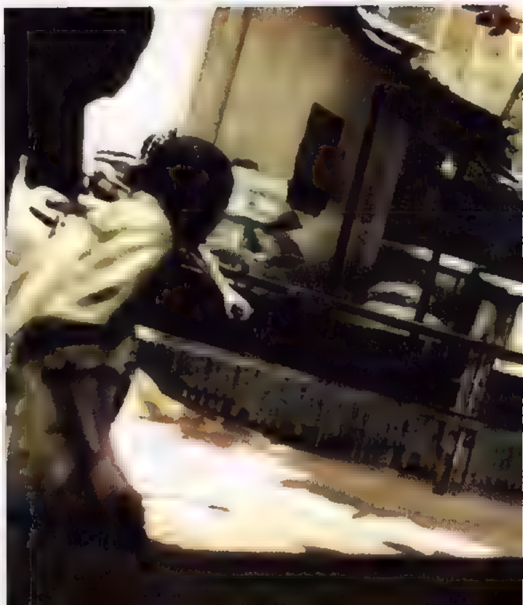
Resident Evil Zero

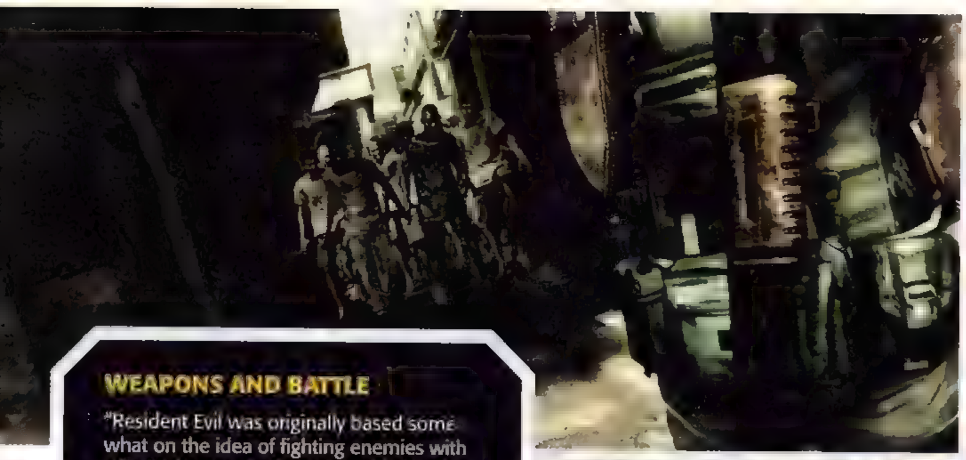
AFRICA

Ending at least one major component of fanboy speculation, the primary backdrop has been confirmed. "We settled on the fact that we really wanted to show the origins of the virus. So for the setting we thought, how about using the place where humankind was born?" says RE 5 producer Jun Takeuchi in recent video interview posted on Capcom's official blog. "That's how we came to use a place in Africa as the setting for Resident Evil 5."

Fans will recall that this isn't the first time Africa has appeared in the Resident Evil series. In Resident Evil Zero, one of the playable characters, Billy Coen, has some dark connections there. This escaped prisoner was convicted of slaughtering an entire village during his former Marine days. Eventually, it turns out that Billy's savage unit knocked him unconscious while they did the dirty deed and set him up to take the fall.

For this reason, many suspected that Billy was the main character in RE 5 before he was identified as Chris Redfield. While he hasn't been mentioned in regards to the latest game, we wouldn't be surprised if Billy appeared in an auxiliary role to atone for the sins of his former unit.



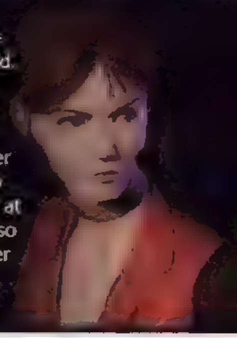


WEAPONS AND BATTLE

"Resident Evil was originally based somewhat on the idea of fighting enemies with a limited amount of weaponry," Takeuchi says. "But when the number of enemies gets this large, things would be a bit tough with just the handguns and shotguns that we've used up until now, so we have greatly increased the number of weapon variations."

Recent gameplay clips haven't shown much weaponry outside of the aforementioned staples, but we're excited to see what's in store. Melee combat is said to expand on the action button prompt system of Resident Evil 4, but what we're really hoping for is the ability to strafe, which is noticeably absent from the footage.

CLAIRE REDFIELD



Unless this brunette is a completely new character, she pretty much has to be Claire Redfield. First off, she looks just like previous character models of Claire. Secondly, where Chris goes, she always follows. In both RE 2 and Code Veronica, her main drive was to track down her missing brother. You don't think she's going to come running when she hears of an outbreak at Chris' last known whereabouts? This would also tie together the Sherry theory, since Chris never actually met the little girl.

TIMELINE

Takeuchi also confirmed that the story takes place 10 years after the destruction of Raccoon City in 1998. Since it's set in 2008, it sure would be great if the game was coming this year, but the release date remains a mystery.

According to the Resident Evil timeline, this means protagonist Chris Redfield is approximately 35 years old. Takeuchi says that STARS has been disbanded and that the game will look into how this came about. "Everything he'd experienced in the past 10 years, we wanted to be able to allow the player to experience as well, so we're preparing a few ways to encourage the player to do just that," says Takeuchi. This seems to indicate the incorporation of flashbacks that could allow for gameplay in more traditional Resident Evil environments.

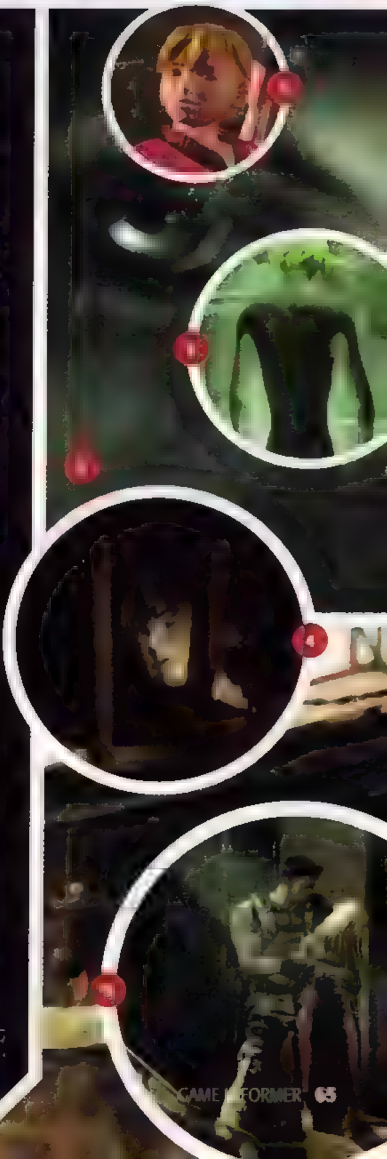
THE BLONDE

A quick flash of a blonde woman in a stasis pod at the end of last year's E3 trailer set message boards ablaze with theories. These new screens show what appears to be that same blonde woman in an Ada Wong-style red dress. We've scanned the large cast of Resident Evil alumni to come up with a prime suspect: Sherry Birkin.

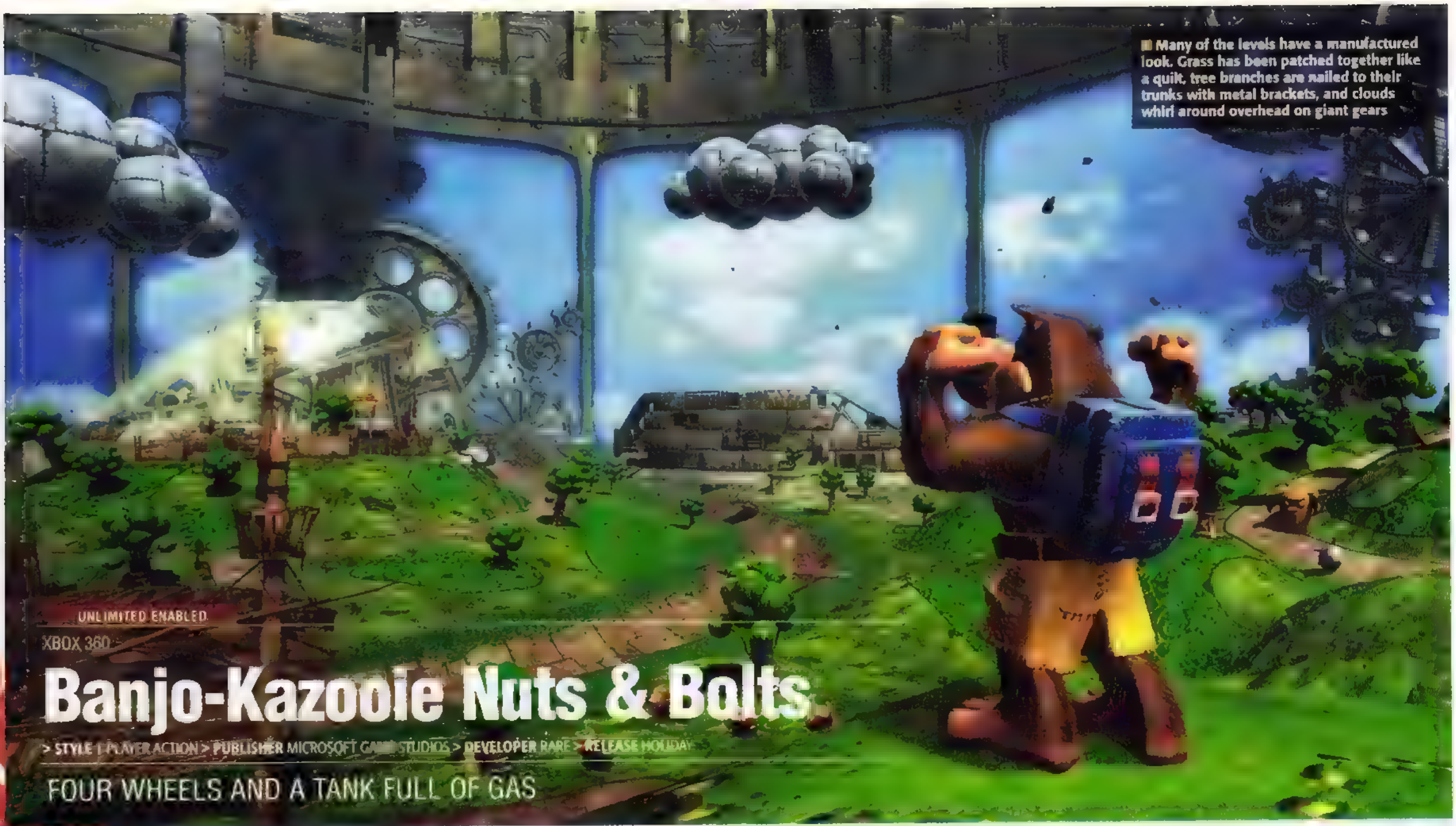
This daughter of two Umbrella scientists hasn't been heard from since she escaped from the clutches of her G-Virus-infected father, William, with Leon Kennedy and Claire Redfield at the end of RE 2. However, epilogues in RE 3 indicate that Claire took off to search for her brother, Chris, shortly thereafter, and Leon turned Sherry over to a man who claimed to work for the U.S. government. "I'm sure she will come back," Sherry says, referencing Claire. "She won't forget about me."

Claire's unrelenting search for Chris in RE: Code Veronica indicates that this is precisely what happened, setting up Sherry's motive as deep feelings of abandonment and resentment. But how does she end up in a stasis pod? A bonus disc released alongside Code Veronica entitled Wesker's Report summarizes the plot of the first three games from series villain Albert Wesker's point of view. In it, Wesker reveals that the "government agent" actually worked for him and that "Sherry is safe in our hands." Prison bars slide in front of her image. "I would never underestimate Birkin. There's something about this little girl."

It's possible Sherry's G-Virus injection and its subsequent curing left some kind of remnant, granting her superhuman powers similar to Wesker – who could have spent the last decade training her and fostering her hatred towards the Redfield siblings. And at age 22, she's easily old enough to take them on.



■ 1) Sherry Birkin in RE 2 2) Though Code Veronica antagonist Alexia Ashford is blonde and has stasis tank experience, the fact that she was blown to bits lowers her chance for a comeback 3) The mysterious eyes from the E3 07 trailer 4) Sherry's imprisoned fate from Wesker's Report 5) Could this be Sherry Birkin?



Many of the levels have a manufactured look. Grass has been patched together like a quilt, tree branches are nailed to their trunks with metal brackets, and clouds whirl around overhead on giant gears

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Banjo-Kazooie Nuts & Bolts

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER RARE > RELEASE HOLIDAY

FOUR WHEELS AND A TANK FULL OF GAS

When it came to making a new Banjo-Kazooie game, Rare knew it was time for a change. "We didn't want to make a hi-res version of the old Banjo on the new platforms," said Rare designer Shaun Read. "The range and scope of things that we thought we could do with Banjo on the new system was so wide that we thought it would be a missed opportunity if we didn't give it a different look and feel."

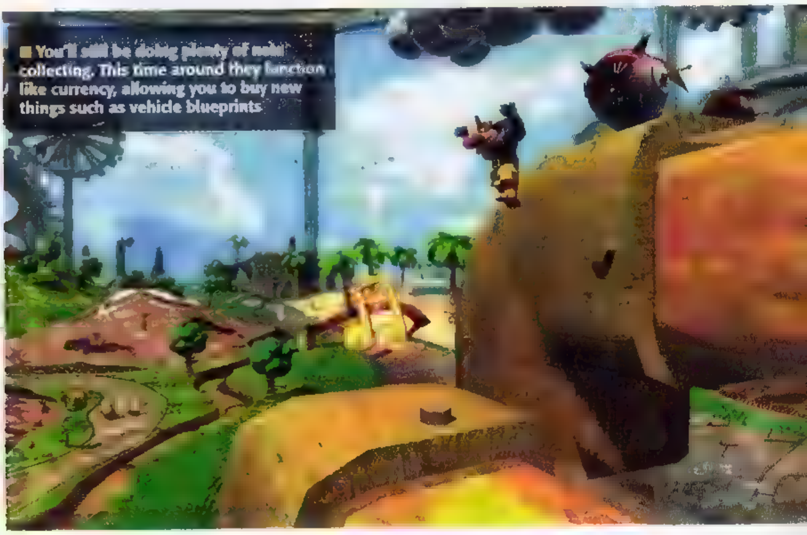
This isn't your big brother's Banjo-Kazooie. This sequel to the classic N64 platformers features an extensive vehicle creation mechanic that changes the way you play the game. Like a box of LEGOs, even after several hours we'd only scratched the surface of what this new feature offered. Our first vehicle was a four-wheeled kart with a spring attached to the bottom, which allowed the kart to jump over small obstacles. When we found a helicopter blade, we attached that to the top of our kart, and pretty soon we were flying through the air like a hummingbird. Every component has multiple uses, and after some experimentation we discovered that when we affixed the blade to the back of our vehicle and added some helium balloons to the sides we had created a perfectly functional hovercraft that could traverse land, sea, and air.

Rare showed us a more complex creation, a monster truck that could detach its chassis like a staged rocket and become a more maneuverable mini bike. When the bike ramped off the side of a cliff, it revealed its collapsible glider wings and started flying around. All told, Rare is planning to offer around 1,600 component parts, including an array of different weapons, for players to use in their creations.

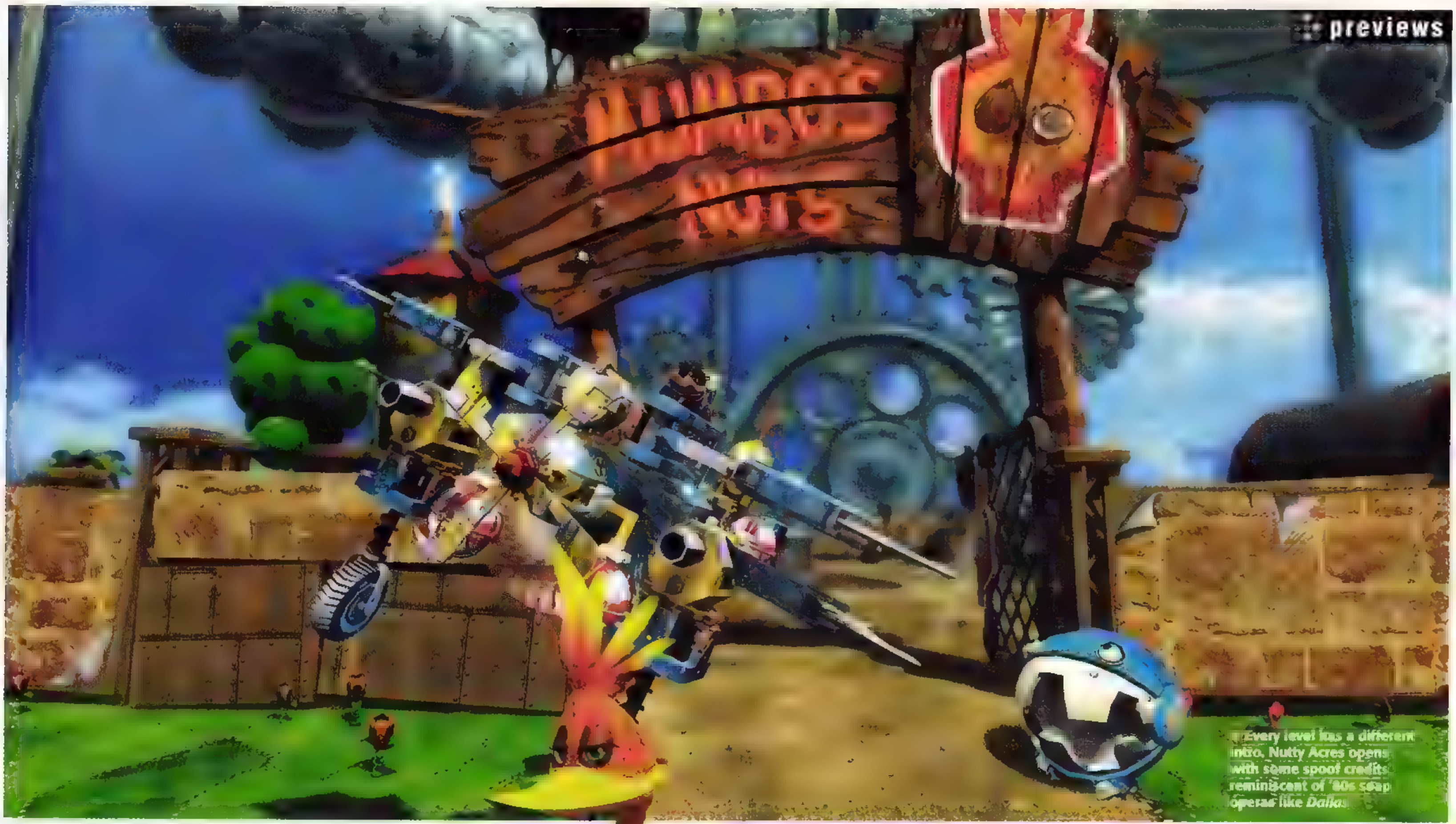
The real upshot of the vehicle creativity is that it gives players the chance to solve Banjo's challenges in a variety of new ways. For example, one mission had Banjo collecting coconuts and bringing them back to feed a hopper. One way to attack this mission would be to use a pre-made pickup truck affixed with a vacuum device that sucked the coconuts directly into the cab. This worked fine, but it took a few trips for Banjo to collect all the coconuts. A more creative solution had Banjo attaching a crane arm to a player-made helicopter, then using that arm to grab the hopper and fly it over to the coconut patch. Once there, the hopper sucked up all the coconuts in a relatively short amount of time.

Fans of the original title shouldn't worry that Rare is forsaking the series' roots altogether. While vehicles are a large part of the game, Banjo's hub world, Showdown Town, will still contain more traditional platforming trials, such as tightrope walking

Rare told us there would be at least 15 challenges spread across six different levels, but also hinted that there would be plenty of extra side challenges as well



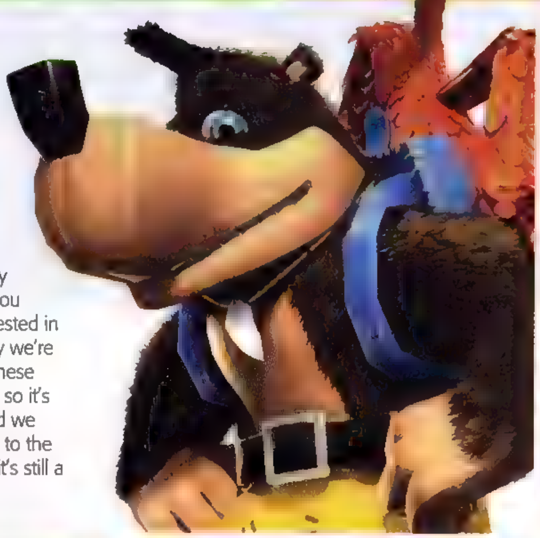
You'll still be doing plenty of note collecting. This time around they function like currency, allowing you to buy new things such as vehicle blueprints

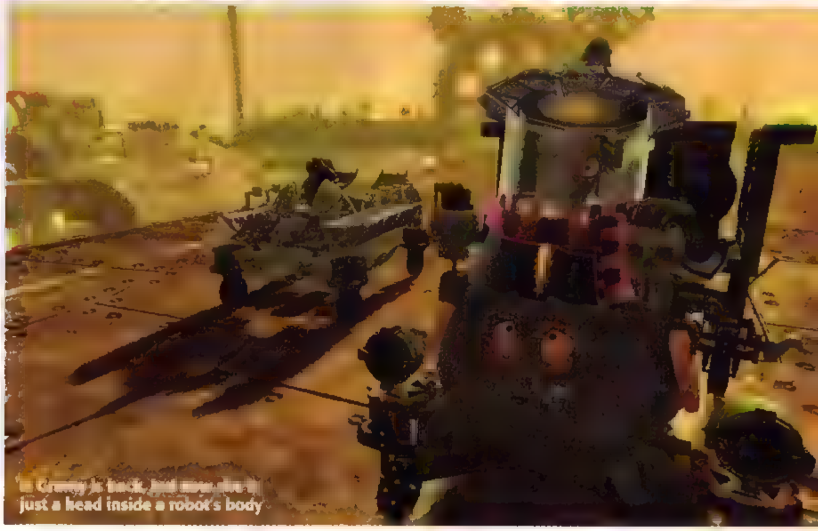


■ Every level has a different intro. Nutty Acres opens with some spoof credits reminiscent of '80s soap operas like *Dallas*

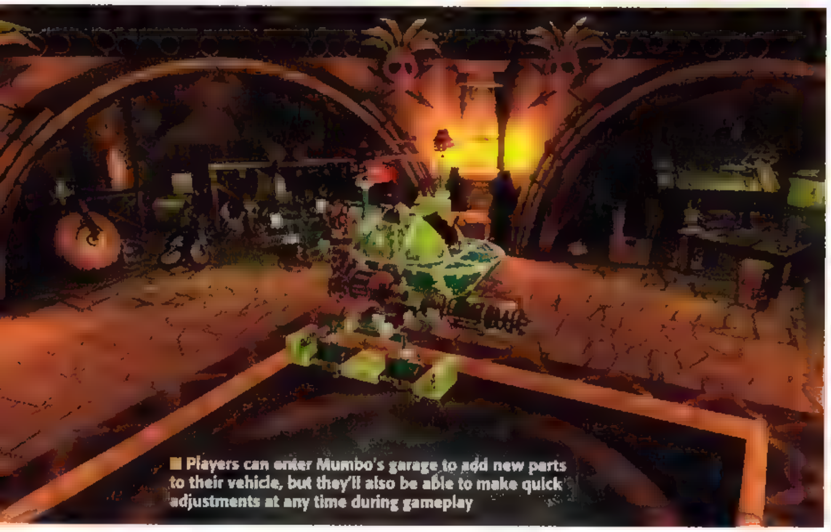
and jiggy piece collecting, to help break up the action. Showdown Town is 16 times larger than anything Rare has made before, so it should provide plenty of the room to run around and jump on top of things.

"We're hoping that everyone will enjoy playing this game," Read says. "I honestly think they will. I don't think you ever grow out of being interested in building things. But obviously we're still making a Banjo game. These are still the Banjo characters, so it's still got the same humor, and we will drop in some references to the old games. At the core of it, it's still a Banjo game." ■ ■ ■

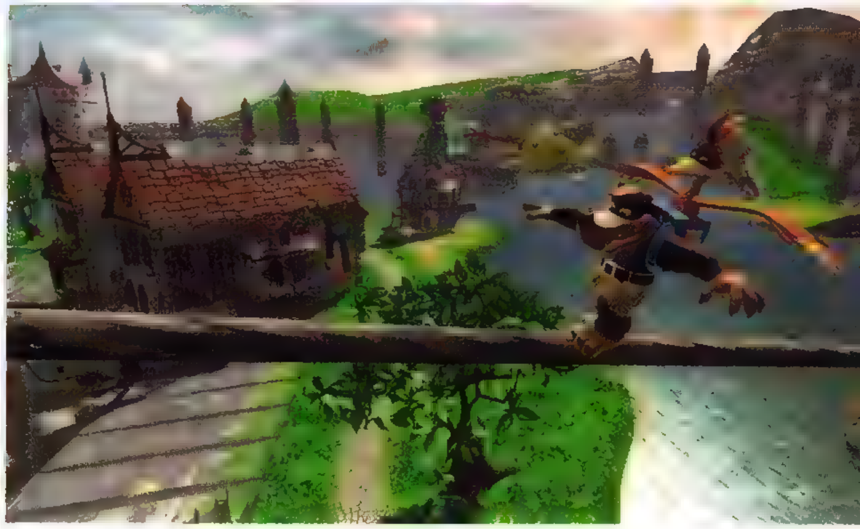




■ Grunty is back, just now she's just a head inside a robot's body



■ Players can enter Mumbo's garage to add new parts to their vehicle, but they'll also be able to make quick adjustments at any time during gameplay



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Fallout 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
> **DEVELOPER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS > **RELEASE** FALL

AN INTERVIEW WITH BETHESDA'S TODD HOWARD

▪ They never talked about the ending of *I Am Legend*

▪ The zombie clothesline is said to be so slow that it actually gives health back

In honor of Fallout 3's recently announced fall release, we felt it was time to dig up new details on the game. The best way to do this is to harass Bethesda's Todd Howard with a No Mutants Allowed-like fury. We asked about the things you want to know, and Howard was more than willing to spill the beans on them…after sticking us with a restraining order.

GI: When we first spoke to you about the game, it sounded like there was going to be around a dozen unique endings. Could you elaborate on how these endings will play out?
Todd Howard: It's best to say there are still multiple endings, but we handle it like a dynamic cutscene showing you the results of key decisions you made, and the overall way you've led your life. If you add up every permutation of that, we're now at over 500 variations of the ending, but it still has a limited number of key decisions.

One of the new screens shows off Dogmeat. Could you talk a little bit about the interactions with the dog?
You interact with Dogmeat in the same way you do with NPCs, in that you enter dialogue with him and can talk to him. He only talks back in barks and tail wags, but you can tell if he agrees or doesn't agree. He's a lot of fun, and a great device to give the player in such a desolate world.

Oblivion was split up into guild quests. Will Fallout follow a similar structure? Will the Brotherhood of Steel be one of these guilds?
It's not like Oblivion, you don't really "join" guilds. You can do quests for various groups, but you never officially join them. You do interact with The Brotherhood of Steel on that level.

Is the entire world open to players from the outset, or will it be sectioned off into zones?
It's entirely open. But unlike Oblivion, some areas are pretty hard to start in. Downtown D.C. is tough for a starting player, but it has a nice visual line to it, you can see where the city is and avoid it if you want to build up your character.

In the demo, we saw a city get nuked. Will it be possible to go back to the city, or is it lost at that point?
You can go back and enjoy the glow of a smoking crater if you'd like.

Previously you told us that the game would feature licensed music from the 1940s and '50s. Any chance you could give us a few track examples?
We have a few from the Ink Spots, "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire" being one of them. Some tracks from Bob Crosby that I love including "Way Back Home." Probably my favorite is a song called "Butcher Pete" by Roy Brown, a great song about a serial killer who "chops up all the women's meat", but is actually about him having sex with everyone's wife in the neighborhood. It's Americana-meets-ridiculous-violence at its best.

Will we see any vehicles in the game? Control them perhaps?
You see them, but they are all rusted husks you can't drive. Sorry. You can blow some of them up, resulting in some prime nuclear radiation.

Are there going to be location-based encounters, or events not tied to particular quests or missions – such as the unicorn or goblin caves from Oblivion?
Absolutely, lots of that. We can't stop ourselves from squeezing as much content as we can into every inch. I think the density is getting really good.

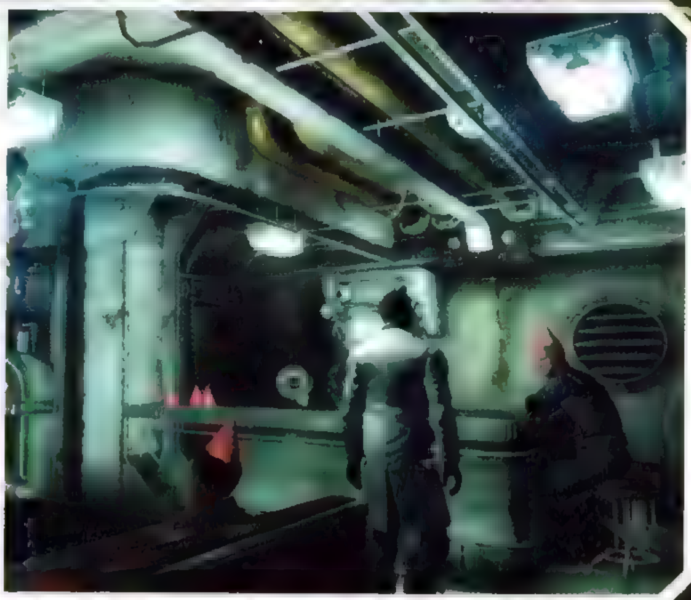
It's been almost a year since we saw the game for the first time. What is the biggest thing that has changed in the design since then?
The game's gotten bigger. We removed some elements we had been working on that fortunately we never announced, but we also added a lot of space and elements for the player to interact with out in the wasteland. We struggled for a while with the "fun" that occurs in a desolate wasteland, but we're finally beyond that, and the game has the right mix of scavenging and survival, while constantly showing you something new.

Will we be able to download armor for Dogmeat?
We've been making that joke here, but we're not really thinking about downloads until the game is done. I doubt you'll see that one.

Has it been difficult to find a balance between open aiming and the tactical V.A.T.S. combat system? Will it be possible to play the game without tapping into V.A.T.S.?
We've been tweaking it, but it's gone pretty smoothly. You can play the game without ever using V.A.T.S., but you'll miss some of the more fun moments. We have people who play the game here and some use V.A.T.S. exclusively and some never use it. My hope is the average player will use it about 50 percent of the time. The two modes are meant to complement each other.

Outside of nuking Megaton, what's an example of how the game might be different upon replay?
Without spoiling anything, I can say that the game changes pretty dramatically based on two main things: whether you are good or evil, and the skills you choose. It makes for very different experiences. ■ ■ ■

Most dog owners know that you should never hold the ball in this region



Nate never truly grasped the concept of the headshot

PC

Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EA MYTHIC **> RELEASE** FALL

PREPARING FOR WAR

When Mythic was acquired by Electronic Arts last year, Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning was the biggest winner. With the financial stability that comes from being part of the EA empire, Mythic set out to make the game the best it could be. Ideas previously scrapped as being too time-consuming or expensive were put back on the table, already-finished zones received further tuning and upgrades, and designs were iterated and refined until they shone. Though the new fall release date is a far cry from the original ship date, WAR is now an obviously better game than what we had seen previously.

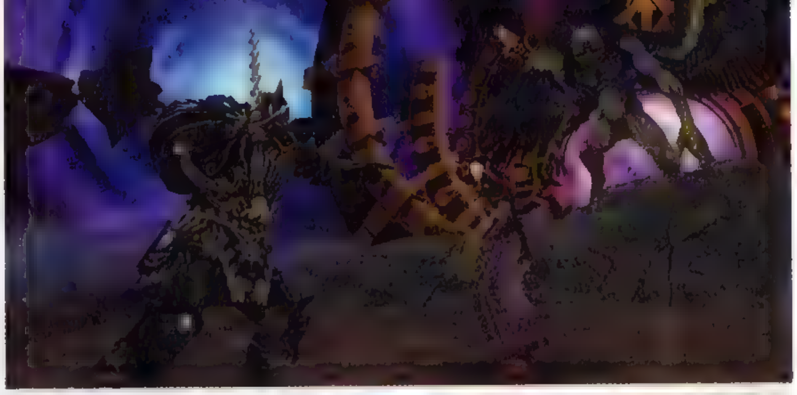
This MMORPG leans heavily toward player-versus-player combat, though a healthy dose of cooperative player-versus-environment content is available as well. The core gameplay will be instantly familiar to anyone who has dabbled in EverQuest-style MMOs in the past, with all of the conventions from auto-attacks to energy bars firmly in place. You'll quest for experience, level up, and do most everything else you'd expect out of a fantasy MMO. But the brilliance of WAR is in the details.

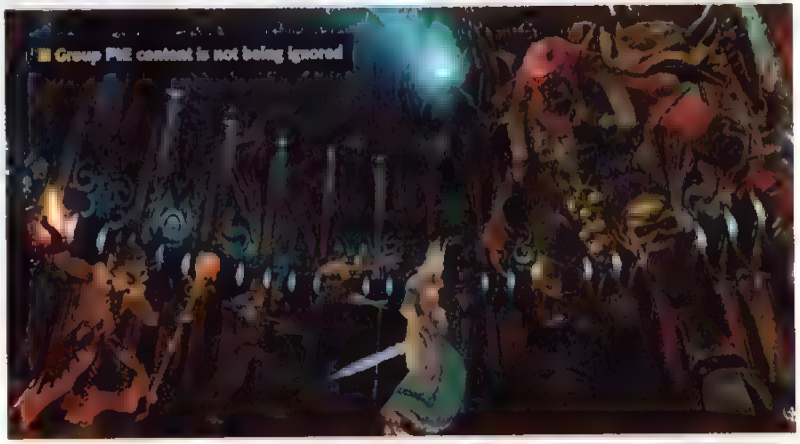
Aside from the huge gains in polish and playability, the best change since the last time we saw WAR is the introduction of a far greater scale of non-instanced realm-versus-realm combat. The previous design had players battling primarily in instanced scenarios that played out much like World of Warcraft's Battlegrounds. Though that element is still present, the focus has shifted toward encouraging players to take part in the large public PvP areas that can be found in nearly every zone.

These dedicated battlefields feature objectives that range from lightly guarded control points to massive keeps that require siege weaponry to assault. When your faction owns a point, NPC guards will spawn to help defend it and you'll be able to resurrect there after your inevitable death. Keeps also operate like this, but they are bigger in every way. Patrols of several guards will wander about the courtyard, the controlling guild can hang its banners from the battlements, and both defenders and attackers can make use of heavy weaponry.

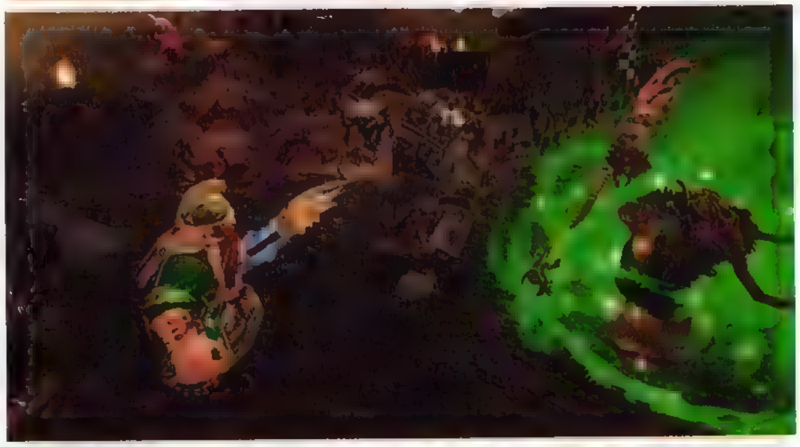
So why fight over these objectives, but for the glory of the battle? Because every one of your successes feeds into a number of advancement systems. First, victories increase the prestige of your associated capital city, opening up new vendors, dungeons, and quests. PvP combat increases your Renown, which earns you titles, achievements, and more. Finally, as with everything else you do, successes feed into your guild's experience pool – allowing the guild access to banks, banners, battle standards, and the like.

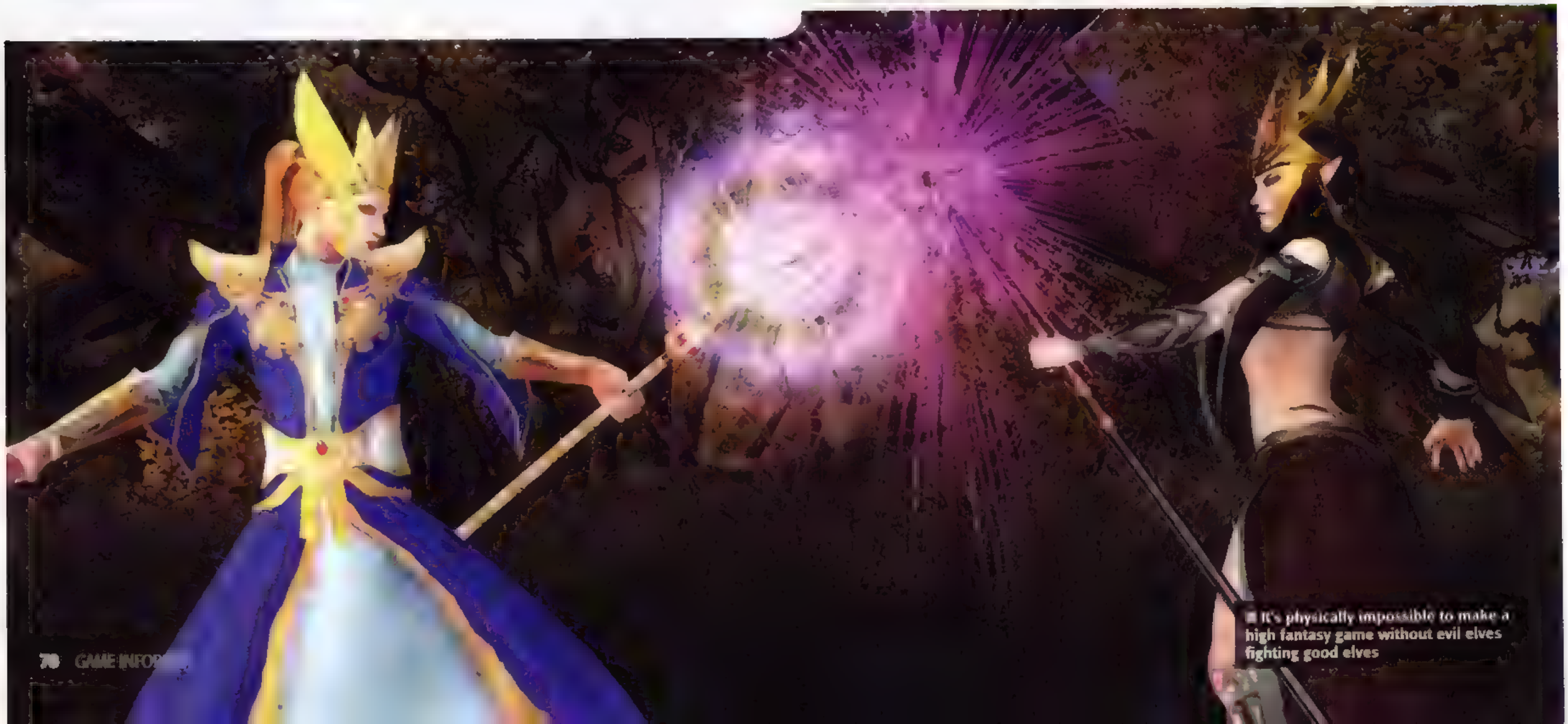
Being the hardcore MMORPG fans that we are, the elegance of Warhammer's improved design impressed us from top to bottom. WAR is very well positioned to carve itself a place among the top tier of MMORPGs when it launches this fall. ■ ■ ■





■ Group PvE content is not being ignored





■ It's physically impossible to make a high fantasy game without evil elves fighting good elves

Wii | NINTENDO DS

Skate It

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL AND ONLINE VIA DS WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **RELEASE** 2008

ROLL OUT

After providing a much-needed shake up to the skating genre on the Xbox 360 and PS3, EA is bringing its realism-focused franchise to the more tactile consoles. Fortunately, this isn't just a straight port with scaled down graphics and tacked-on waggle controls. Electronic Arts has found a creative, and possibly controversial, way to make Skate It feel different, yet familiar at the same time.

We caught a brief trailer that played initially more like a grim news broadcast than a light-hearted skate video. A series of freak disasters has destroyed Skate's home base of San Vanelona, leaving it completely evacuated, save for a small contingent of skaters looking to capitalize on the new lines and lack of people.

Producer Mike McCartney explains the inspiration. "We read an article somewhere about surfers flocking to areas where hurricanes are about to hit to go surf the big waves. And we thought, 'That's a really cool idea. It's really turning this negative thing into a cool positive thing.' On the same hand, we saw this great thing on YouTube about these skateboarders in New Orleans that after Hurricane Katrina were skating all these deserted areas that they could never skate before," says McCartney. He stresses that no one is hurt in the San Vanelona disaster, and also hints that several famous real-world skating destinations will take players out of the city for the first time.

We got to play around with an early build of Skate It, and the motion controls feel very intuitive (see below). Only about half of the tricks are implemented at this point, but EA is looking to include the entire move set from the console game. The developers went through several iterations of the controls before arriving at the current setup. "One day we were sitting around debating why the current control scheme wasn't working and somebody said, 'The Wiimote is the skateboard.'" McCartney recalls. "As soon as we started thinking that, it was just rapid fire."

While the interface worked well in a small demo area, we're very interested to see how it holds up throughout an entire game. Will specific tricks be just as easy to pull off once the rest of them are implemented? After all, there are only so many movements the Wii remote can register. The developers are confident they can pull it off, and based on their slick implementation of the original, we're inclined to believe them. ■ ■ ■

Several pros will be returning for Skate It along with a few new faces

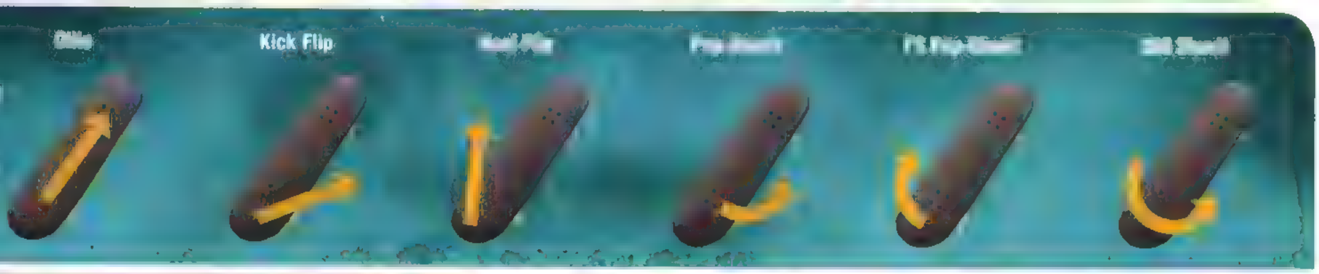
Motion Control

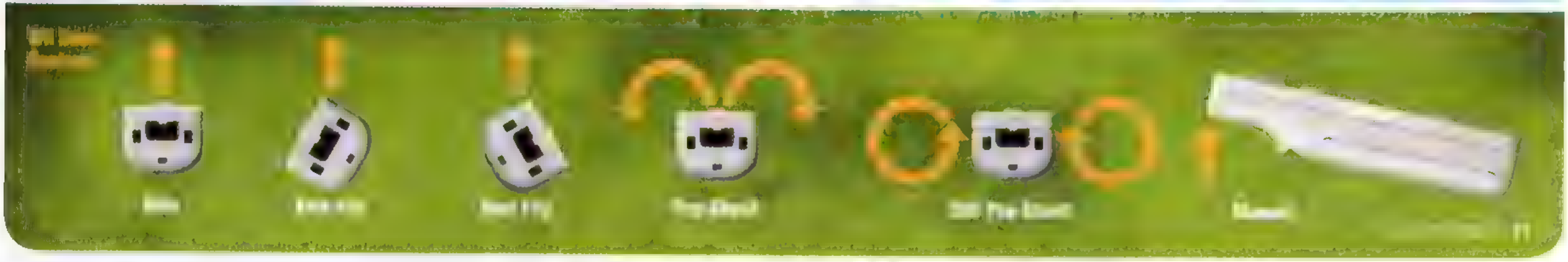
The core control scheme is based around a single Wii remote. Tapping the A button will get things rolling, while tilting the remote will steer your skater around the environments. Tilting back the remote triggers a manual, and a quick flick of the wrist initiates most jump tricks. Plugging in a nunchuk allows for a more traditional analog steering mechanic, but those looking for a control scheme on the opposite end of the spectrum can use the Wii Fit Balance Board for steering and manuals. While we didn't get to try out this interface ourselves, the tough-to-steer snowboarding minigame in Wii Fit has us concerned about the balance board's maneuverability.

Skate It uses an entirely new engine

DS Basic Controls

The bottom screen of Skate It will contain an image of a diagonal skateboard much like the one [illegible]





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Darksiders: Wrath of War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** VIGIL GAMES > **RELEASE** 2009

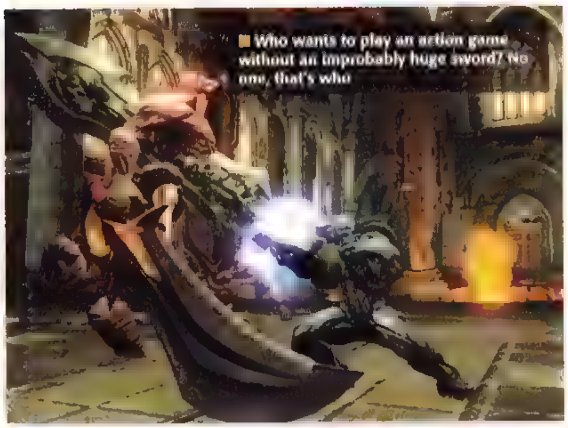
THE END OF DAYS LOOKS PRETTY COOL

Many games are set on a post-apocalyptic Earth, but they usually involve saving the world. None of them involve controlling one of the catalysts of Armageddon, which Vigil Games is going to change with Darksiders: Wrath of War. The game puts players in the role of War, one of the mythical Four Horsemen, who is out to regain his lost strength amid a conflict between angels and demons.

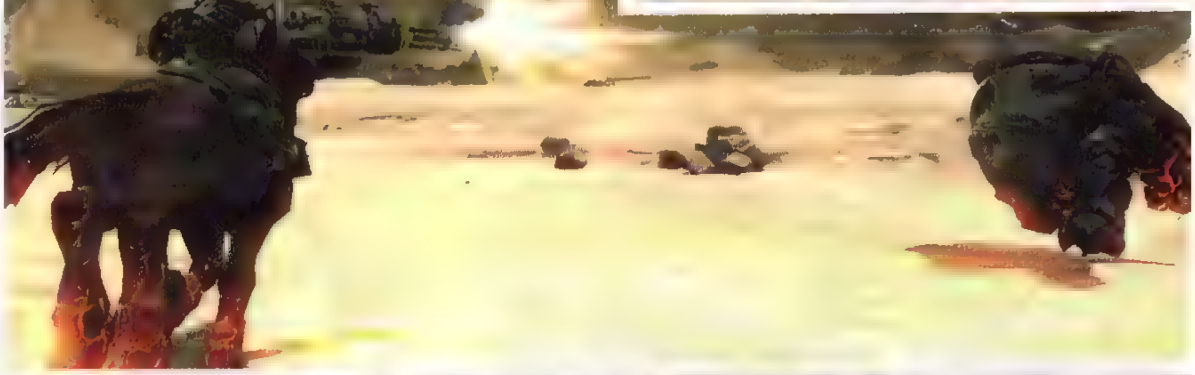
Since you are controlling a god-like personification of combat, at its core Darksiders is an action game. Using a giant sword, guns, and various objects from his surroundings (like cars and lampposts), War will fight his way through armies of demons. The characters and creatures are designed by comic legend Joe Madureira, and much of the game's battle system depends on capturing the stylish, over-the-top action often found in comics. In one boss fight, War finds himself up against a giant sand worm that he finishes off by drawing his broadsword up the beast's body, eviscerating it. Even overcoming obstacles will have extra flair, like stuffing a subway car into the maw of a demon blocking War's path.

While most of your time will be spent wrecking threats from the abyss, Darksiders also has an unconventional focus on exploration, especially for an action game. A ruined city serves as the game's overworld and hub, which is connected to many other areas and dungeons. As War fights through these zones, he will become stronger and gain new abilities that allow him to progress. THQ likens the structure to games like Metroid and Zelda, which rely on a character's growing arsenal to open up the game world. For instance, once War reclaims his ethereal steed (he's not much of a Horseman without it), he will be able to reach areas that were inaccessible on foot.

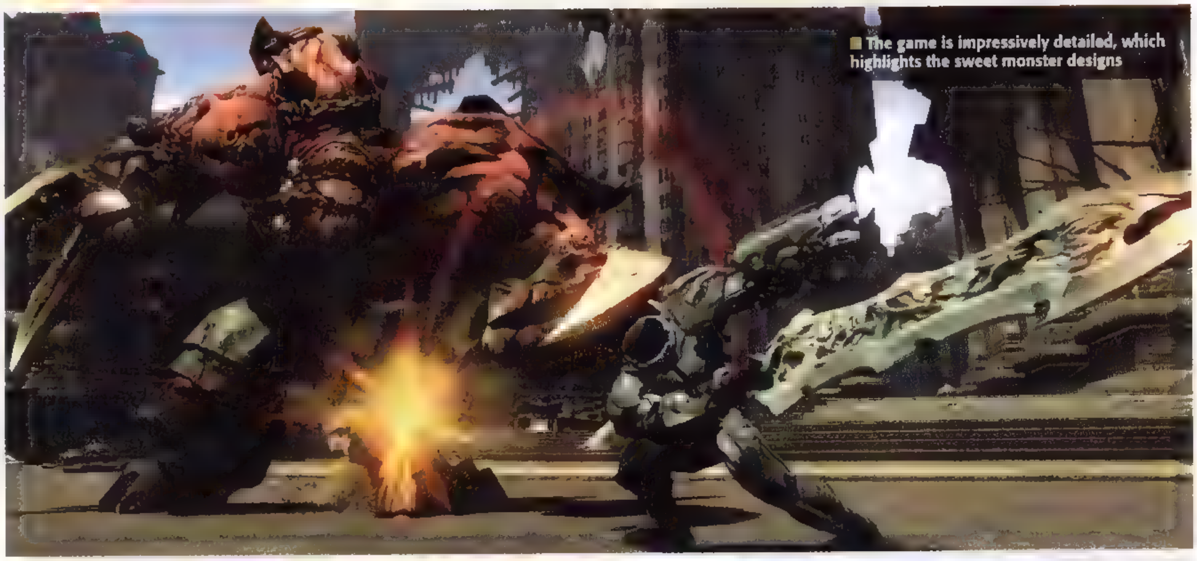
Mixing combo-driven combat with dungeon diving may sound like a strange move, but after seeing Darksiders in motion, it's hard to deny the game's potential. With an array of powers that offer biblical levels of destruction and a world crawling with hulking terrors, Darksiders definitely sets the stage for excitement. Add in the fact that Vigil Games still has plenty of time to invest in its vision, and Darksiders becomes one of the primary games for action fans to watch in 2009 ■ ■ ■



Who wants to play an action game without an improbably huge sword? No one, that's who

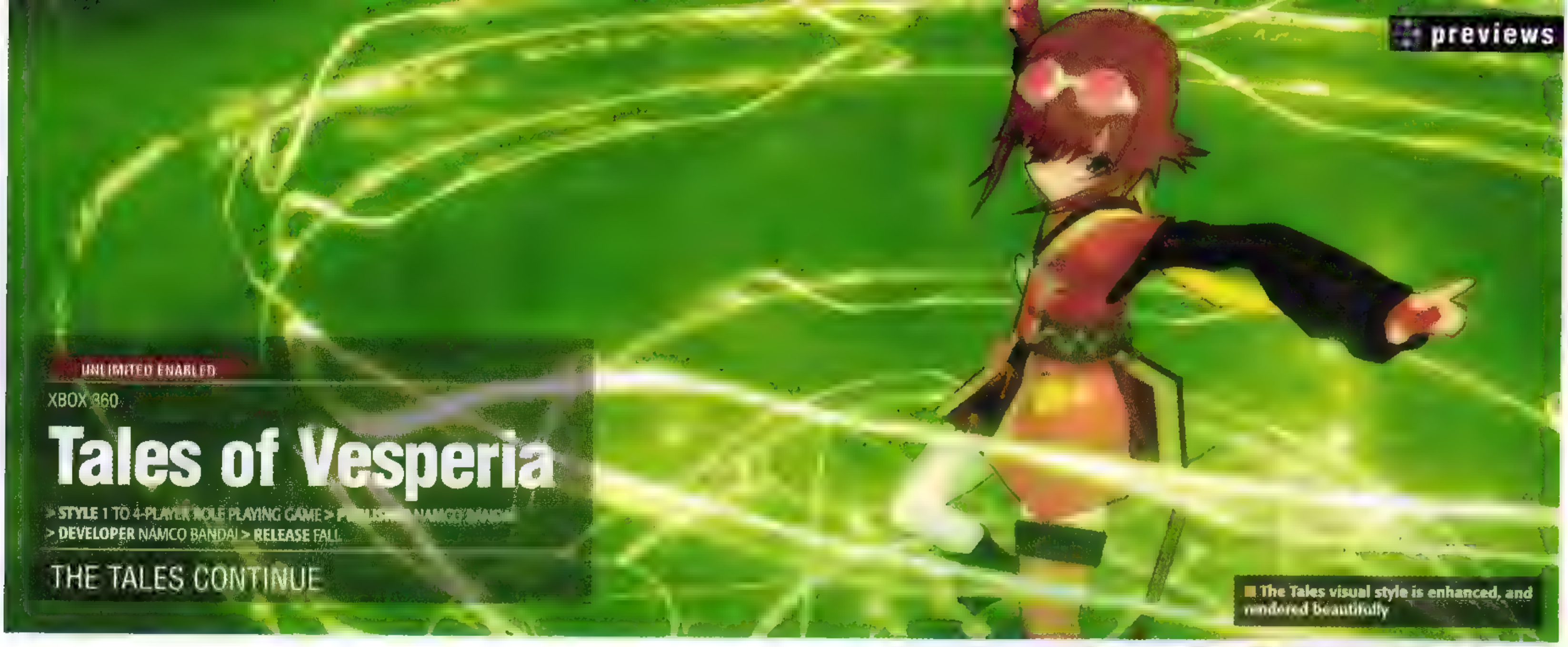


Despite his biblical origins, War is proficient with modern weaponry



The game is impressively detailed, which highlights the sweet monster designs

War's horse, Ruin, would totally beat Epona in a fight



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Tales of Vesperia

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDAI > **RELEASE** FALL

THE TALES CONTINUE

■ The Tales visual style is enhanced, and rendered beautifully

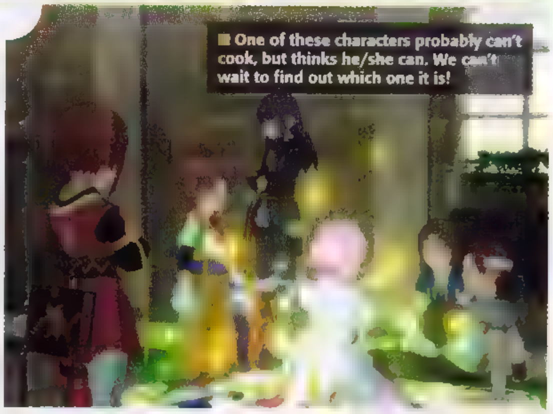
It's always nice to see innovation in role-playing games, but that doesn't mean there's no place for an old fashioned, traditional adventure. Namco Bandai's Tales series is well known for delivering real-time combat combined with classic storytelling conventions, and the next installment is poised to give fans more of what they love. Of course, that doesn't mean the franchise isn't evolving.

"The game's graphics are sure to make the biggest impression at first," says producer Yoshito Higuchi. "The move to an HD console has allowed us to try a lot of new techniques that still capture the series' warm and hand-drawn look. There are certain areas in which we've actually surpassed traditional animation." One look at the screens will back up this claim, bringing to mind the similarly gorgeous anime-inspired Eternal Sonata.

The game's story will revolve around two characters, Yuri and Flynn, who are two rivals in pursuit of the same goal. "Yuri believes in securing justice by any means necessary, even if this means going beyond the boundaries of what society has deemed to be fair," explains Higuchi. "Flynn takes the opposite to this approach, following the rules and laws as dictated by the government to achieve his own brand of justice." While some of the character archetypes may be familiar, the story itself is a change of pace for the series. Instead of being a coming-of-age tale like most Tales games, Vesperia focuses on different and more complex themes. "We are trying to appeal to a slightly older audience with this game," Higuchi admits. "So a lot of what you see from a morality standpoint will be up to the player to judge on their own value system."

If you're not in the mood to make any weighty choices, you can just enjoy Vesperia's combat, which is a reworked version of the Linear Motion Battle System from previous titles. "The game's battle system gets the biggest upgrade from the Xbox 360 hardware, allowing us to have more enemies on screen and even truly massive opponents that we've never been able to implement before," Higuchi reveals. You'll be able to play co-op with up to four players and take advantage of a new critical strike mechanic that takes down enemies with one shot under certain conditions. You can count on a variety of different playable characters, and maybe even some appearances from other familiar faces from the Tales franchise

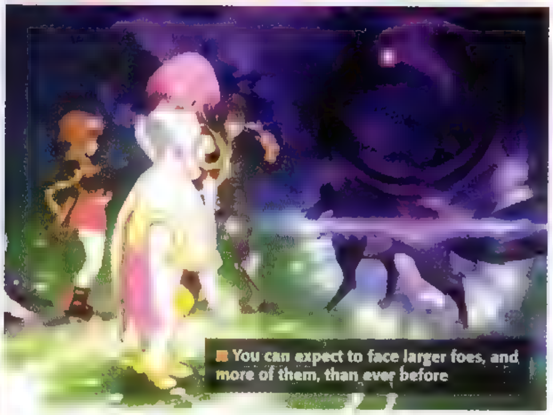
Tales of Vesperia isn't setting out to change the face of role-playing, but it will serve as a fitting entry to celebrate the series' jump to the current hardware generation. The stunning visuals and co-op combat are certain to attract RPG fans, especially as the genre continues to grow on the 360. ■ ■ ■



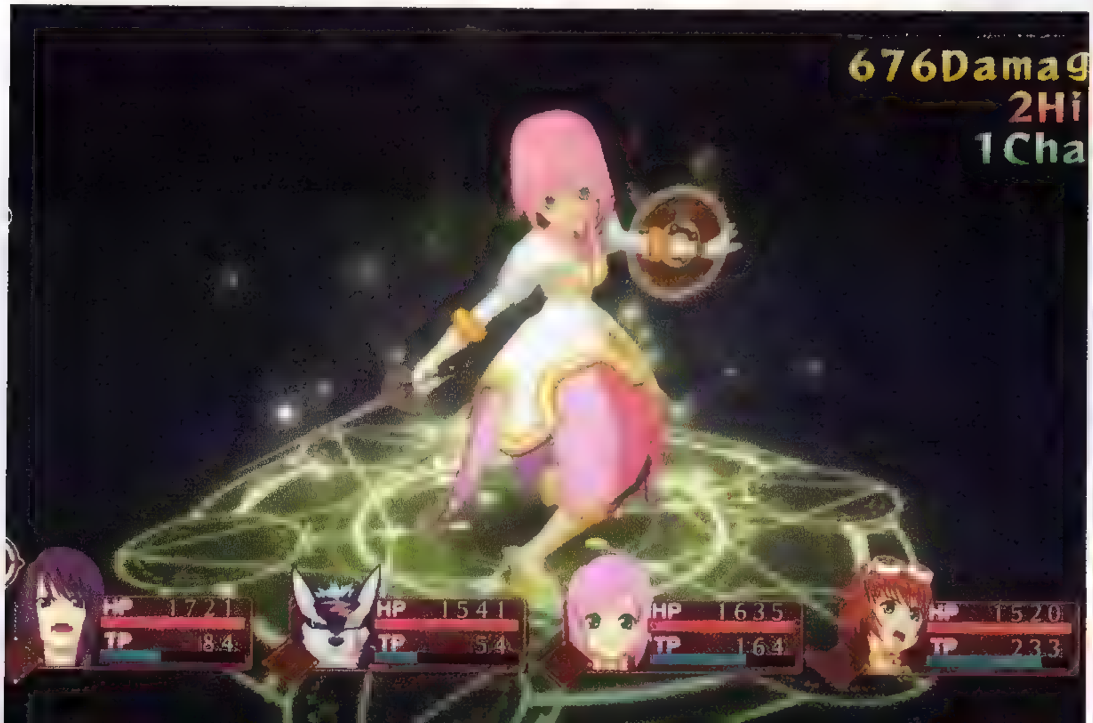
■ One of these characters probably can't cook, but thinks he/she can. We can't wait to find out which one it is!

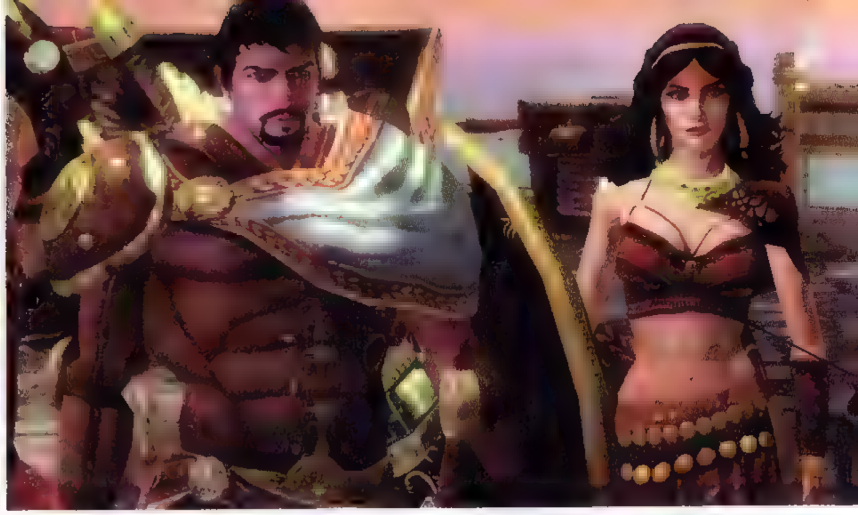
Estelle

We're going to repair the barrier blastia. If we don't, the city will be overrun with monsters'



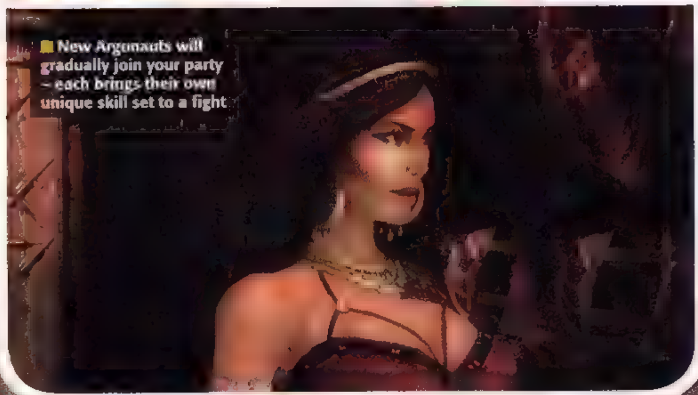
■ You can expect to face larger foes, and more of them, than ever before





Combat has no traditional HUD, instead focusing on fast-paced action exchanges

Ancient Greece has been recreated to be bright and colorful – a living world rather than a museum display



New Argonauts will gradually join your party – each brings their own unique skill set to a fight

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Rise of the Argonauts

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER** LIQUID ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

THE FAVOR OF THE GODS

It's been months since we've had any extensive exposure to Liquid Entertainment's first big foray into epic RPGs. When we first learned about Rise of the Argonauts last year, many of the exciting ideas had yet to be implemented into the gameplay. This month, we checked out a more complete version of the game that revealed the many ways in which the title aims to stand apart from the crowd.

The idea that the narrative should tie together with the gameplay in a meaningful way runs throughout almost every mechanic in the game. For instance, the weapons that hero Jason wields won't be random swords and spears picked up off the ground. Instead, they are story-relevant plot trophies that have specific strengths and abilities tied to them.

The narrative focus carries over into character leveling. Throughout the story, Jason will dedicate his heroic deeds to one of four patron gods: Apollo, Athena, Ares, or Hermes. By killing a mighty mythical beast or saving a beset citizen, it counts as a deed that can be used to improve your standing with a particular god, rather than the traditional method of gaining experience points. Each deity will gift a devoted believer with particular special abilities. Likewise, the involved conversation system has a direct effect on character growth and advancement, since each conversation choice is tied to one of the four gods. If you always choose the violent and straightforward conversation style encouraged by Ares, he will reward you with more favor to buy skills.

The real-time combat system aims to deliver the sort of dynamic interactions normally reserved for action-focused games. Through the interplay of mace, spear, sword, and shield combat, Jason's battle options focus on exacting hit detection and procedural animations. The result is a combat system that delivers over-the-top clashes and lethal one-hit kills, where weapons bounce off of shields or slip past armor when carefully timed. It shouldn't be long before we can get our hands on the game and see how much the system manages to deliver on those hopes.

Rise of the Argonauts is a bright and colorful reimagining of Greek mythology, where heroes like Hercules, Pan, Achilles, and Atalanta accompany you on an ocean-spanning quest. When we first saw the game, the team was enthusiastic about a cooperative component to the game, but when asked this time they remained noticeably silent on the point. Whether it ends up delivering some form of multiplayer or not, the game is definitely one to watch as we head into the second half of the year. ■ ■ ■

PLAYSTATION 3

Haze

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (24-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> DEVELOPER FREE RADICAL **> RELEASE** MAY 20

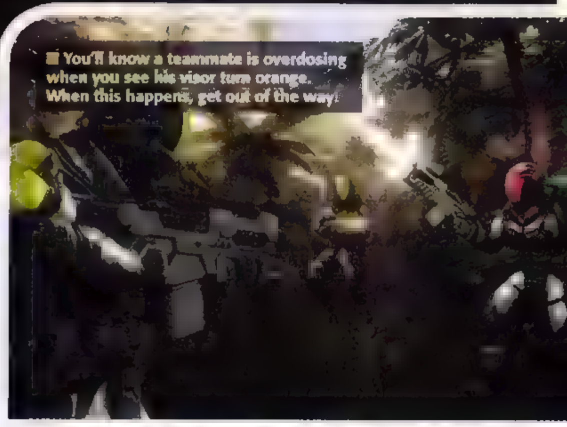
NECTAR OF THE FPS GODS

If you are an employee of Mantel Global Industries, pay raises are doubtful, bonuses are laughably out of reach, and the only real guarantee you are given is that if you die working (which actually is more of a matter of "when" than "if"), you will do so with a smile on your face. This isn't the kind of thing that most people like hearing on their first day of work, but at Mantel your death will most certainly be tied to a world-changing event. You see, Mantel is in the unique business of renting out armies to warring nations. Their troops come fully trained and equipped with the latest in bad guy busting technologies. The only downside is that they usually show up for work higher than Hunter S. Thompson. Before a Mantel soldier enters battle, he gets a shot of nectar, a drug that calms his nerves and heightens his abilities and senses. When this drug flows through his veins, he moves faster, aims steadier, and sees enemies with blinding clarity. If an adversary happens to get off a shot or two, never fear, a Mantel soldier can not only withstand a bullet to the chest, he may actually enjoy it!

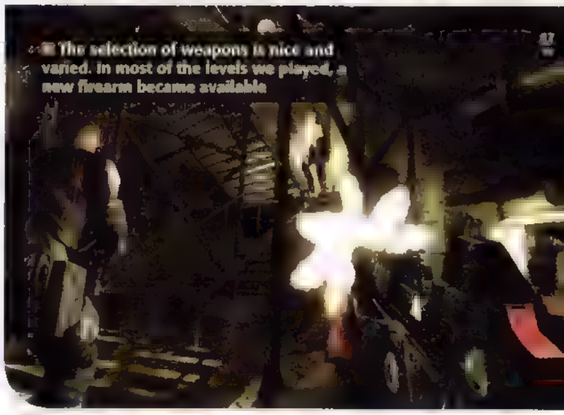
In Haze, players get to experience war through the bloodshot eyes of a drug-abusing Mantel soldier. We recently spent a significant amount of time with this PlayStation 3 exclusive title, and it was easy to see how nectar dramatically alters the flow of combat. On the one hand, if used correctly, it will help you mop up enemies. There's also the chance that you'll abuse the drug, which we did nearly every minute while playing through the story in four-player co-op. When your character overdoses on nectar, his vision blurs to a point where he can no longer make the distinction between allies and enemies. Everyone on the field of war looks like a black silhouette. This alone will likely lead to many allies and player characters being killed, but it gets worse. Your character will also grow paranoid and start firing shots at anything that moves. There's also a chance that he will pull out a grenade, let it cook in his hands, and commit suicide. Even if your drug dependency is under control, there's a chance that one of your teammates may accidentally, or purposely, shoot the nectar tank on your back. This not only brings on an immediate overdose, it provides a hilarious moment for the other players, as your character vents a stream of nectar like a water fountain.

Like the Halo games, Haze's cooperative play extends to vehicles, one of which is a Mantel buggy that conveniently seats four players. One player drives, one mans the turret, and the other two mount up on the sides, free to fire at will. This vehicle is incredibly fast, and thanks to the level designer's decision to implement jumps, is capable of catching some serious air. Of course, your foes are also mobile, and their base is heavily guarded. In one canyon stretch, they plant proximity mines on the walls. To pass these hazards, you can either drive cautiously or have your gunner Nectar-up to illuminate and destroy them. Even if you fail, as we did numerous times (some on purpose), checkpoints are abundant, and if one player survives long enough to reach another checkpoint, the downed party members will be brought back to life.

Haze's May 20 release date is approaching quickly, but we still have a number of burning questions and concerns. Free Radical is generally known for its adversarial multiplayer offerings, but has the company come far enough to compete with the likes of Call of Duty 4 and Halo 3? Additionally, as enjoyable as the co-op experience was, it got a little slow at points, as many of the levels had us backtracking through the same sections and walking without action for far too long. If all goes as planned, however, we should have these answers and more in our review next month. ■ ■ ■

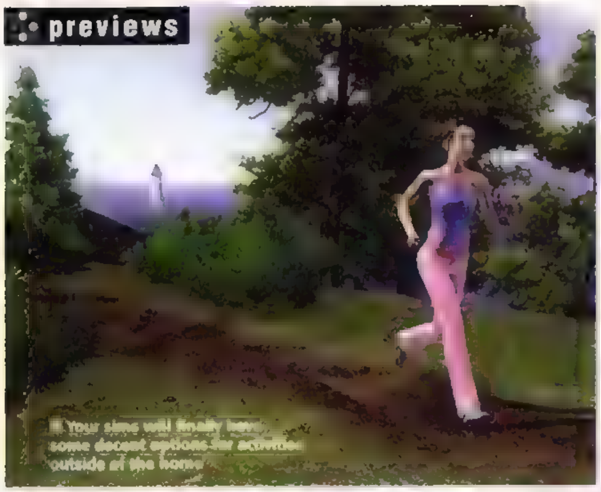


■ You'll know a teammate is overdosing when you see his visor turn orange. When this happens, get out of the way!

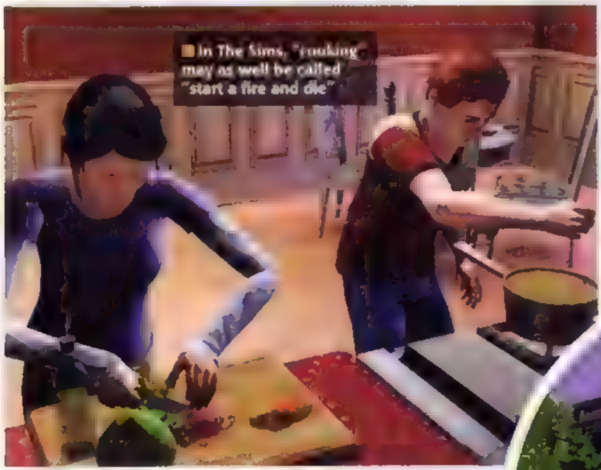


■ The selection of weapons is nice and varied. In most of the levels we played, a new firearm became available

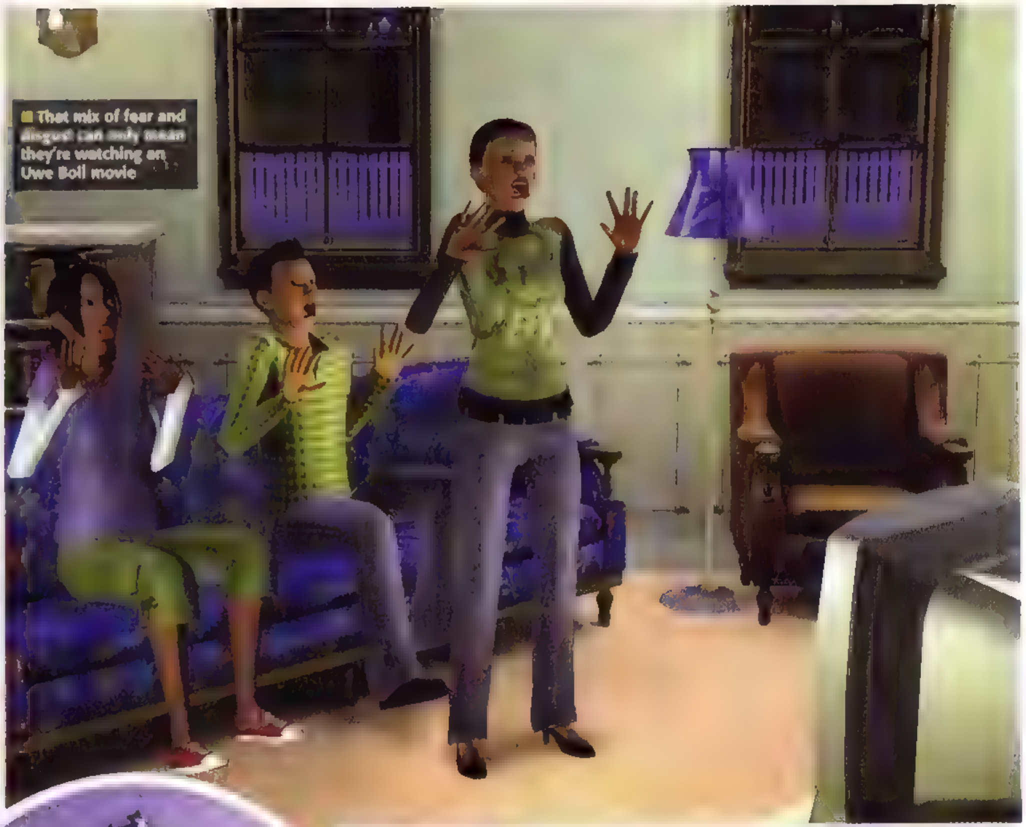
■ When you're on nectar, enemies glow like the old dudes from *Cocoon*



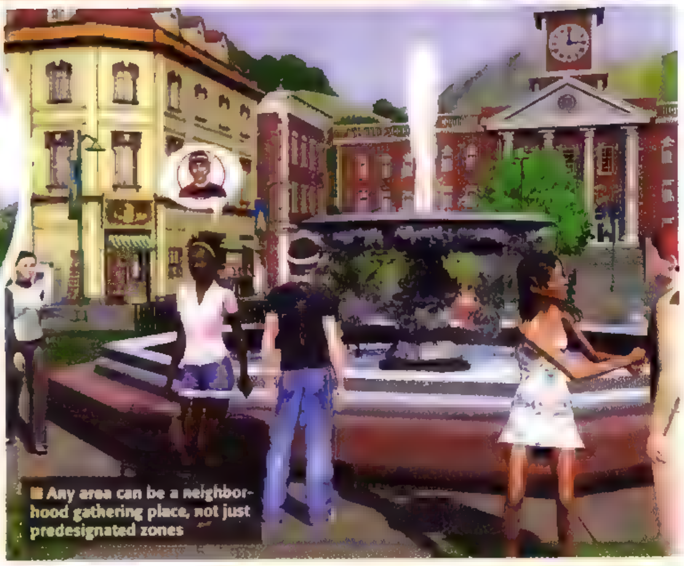
■ Your sims will finally have some decent options for activities outside of the home



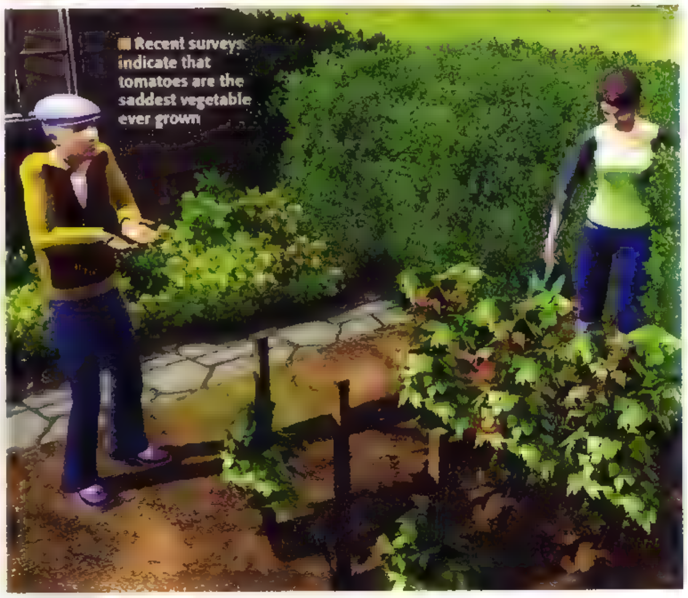
■ In The Sims, "cooking" may as well be called "start a fire and die"



■ That mix of fear and disgust can only mean they're watching an Uwe Boll movie



■ Any area can be a neighborhood gathering place, not just predesignated zones



■ Recent surveys indicate that tomatoes are the saddest vegetable ever grown

PC

The Sims 3

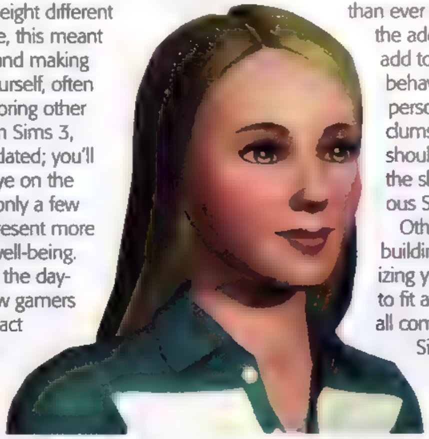
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** MAXIS > **RELEASE** 2009

SIMLISH – DO YOU SPEAK IT?

Since the release of The Sims 2 in 2004, we've guided the fate of multiple familial generations, made thousands of simoleons, and built countless human cages in our sims' backyards. Those were good times, but it's time to look beyond the steady stream of Sims 2 expansions and toward the next true installment in the series.

The Sims 3 won't be hitting until next year, and what EA has revealed about the game indicates a major shift in the way players approach their simulated community. Previously, managing your sims involved juggling eight different basic needs. In practice, this meant fending off starvation and making sure you didn't wet yourself, often at the expense of exploring other aspects of the game. In Sims 3, these bars are consolidated; you'll still have to keep an eye on the meters, but there are only a few of them, and they represent more generalized states of well-being.

This simplification of the day-to-day routine will allow gamers more freedom to interact with the game's other new features. For instance, the neighborhood where your sims live is now a seamless collection of households. You can leave your house, wander around freely, and chat with other sims. You can develop relationships that evolve as you play; time won't just freeze for everyone but your currently selected character. This means that instead of forging a connection with one family, players will feel invested in the entire community.



Emphasizing the neighborhood doesn't mean that the individual sims are any less important. The Sims 3 will provide more personality options than ever before. We're most excited about the addition of traits – qualities you can add to your characters that impact their behavior. There are dozens of potential personality traits, such as paranoid, clumsy, artistic, and perfectionist, which should offer much more variety than the skill allocation system of the previous Sims games.

Other hallmarks of the series, such as building your dream house and customizing your appearance, will be updated to fit alongside the new features. When it all comes together, it looks as though The Sims 3 will let you shape your world (and human zoos) to a greater degree than ever before. ■ ■ ■

PLATINUM HITS
$29.99
LOST PLANET™
EXTREME CONDITION
COLONIES EDITION

EXCLUSIVE CONTENT

- 7 NEW multiplayer modes
- 20 multiplayer maps
- Play as the Akrid for the first time
- 5 NEW playable characters
- 3 NEW single player campaign modes

CAPCOM®

The way it's meant to be played NVIDIA

lostplanetcommunity.com

TEEN
T
Animated Blood
Mild Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Games for Windows LIVE

XBOX 360 LIVE

Every boss seems to get a little bigger

XBOX 360

Ninja Gaiden II

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION [illegible] > PUBLISHER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > DEVELOPER [illegible]
> RELEASE JUNE 3

DEVIL MAY WHAT?

You're lucky there are even words on this page. After a playable preview of Ninja Gaiden II arrived at the office, all productivity stopped while we played through the opening six levels.

The game starts off with a young blonde woman named Sonya looking for Gaiden's main man, Ryu Hayabusa. While attempting to deliver some important information to him about the Arch-Fiend, she is captured by a group of demon-eyed ninjas. When Ryu shows up, naturally, he has to chase them across the rooftops of a near-future Tokyo to lay waste to the culprits. Not surprisingly, after three hours of play we still don't understand the paper-thin plot. But, like a classic kung-fu flick, who cares about the narrative when the action is this fast and this fierce?

Ninja Gaiden II's graphics uphold the series' tradition of quality. Torrential rain creates tiny pools of water that splash at your feet, and cherry blossoms bloom into a pink fireworks display under the breeze of a cool sun.

Gamers keeping tabs on this title already know about the two major gameplay additions: the regenerating health bar and the obliteration techniques. They'll be happy to know that the regenerating health system hasn't ruined the game's balance. On the contrary, Ninja Gaiden II feels more fluid than before; since Ryu only regenerates health after a battle ends, every enemy still poses a threat. The more exciting additions are the obliteration techniques. Ryu hacks the limbs off his enemies as if he were trimming hedges. Once his foes lose an arm or a leg, he can perform one of the obliteration techniques, which are basically stylish finishing moves. In one example, Ryu cuts a leg out from under a guy, then kicks him down so the man is kneeling before him, and finally puts this poor soul out of his misery by cutting him in two. Ninja Gaiden II's great animation work makes moments like this brutal to watch. This game definitely pushes the M rating to the limit.

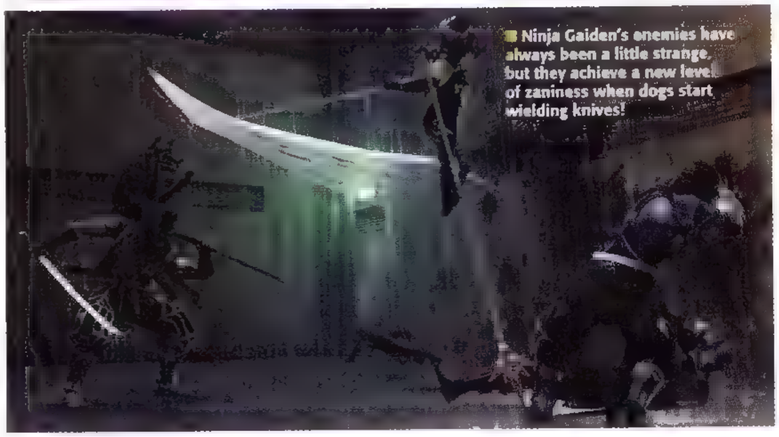
However, these limbless foes aren't completely helpless. If anything, they seem less inhibited about charging forward kamikaze style. We witnessed plenty of opponents continue to fight with one arm or lunge forward on bloody stumps just to grab a hold of Ryu and sacrifice themselves in a powerful explosion.

Ryu's cool toys are also stars of the game. Every weapon feels balanced and offers a variety to the combat. The Lunar Staff functions like a hefty bo staff, the Gatling Spear Gun rapid-fires exploding spears, and the new Falcon's Talons function like Wolverine's claws on steroids. Better yet, every weapon has its own obliteration technique.

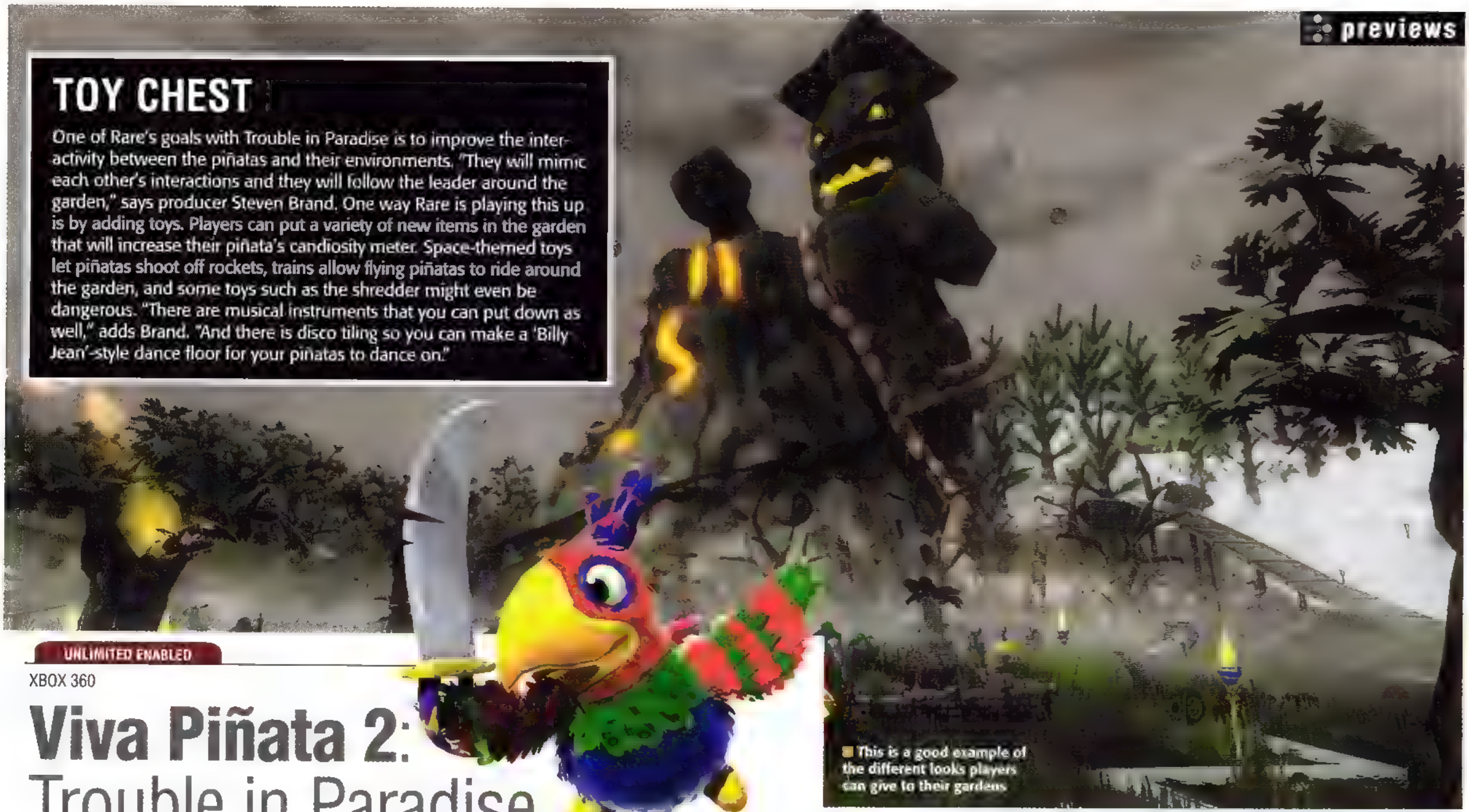
We hope a few of the game's camera issues get worked out before the game releases, but we'd be lying if we said we weren't excited to get our hands on the finished product. ■ ■ ■

Ryu gets into a tiff with a few New York locals after trying to hail a cab

Magic is still an important part of Ninja Gaiden's combat



Ninja Gaiden's enemies have always been a little strange, but they achieve a new level of zaniness when dogs start wielding knives!



TOY CHEST

One of Rare's goals with Trouble in Paradise is to improve the interactivity between the piñatas and their environments. "They will mimic each other's interactions and they will follow the leader around the garden," says producer Steven Brand. One way Rare is playing this up is by adding toys. Players can put a variety of new items in the garden that will increase their piñata's candiosity meter. Space-themed toys let piñatas shoot off rockets, trains allow flying piñatas to ride around the garden, and some toys such as the shredder might even be dangerous. "There are musical instruments that you can put down as well," adds Brand. "And there is disco tiling so you can make a 'Billy Jean'-style dance floor for your piñatas to dance on."

■ This is a good example of the different looks players can give to their gardens

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Viva Piñata 2: Trouble in Paradise

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SIMULATION (ONLINE TBA) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT > **DEVELOPER** RARE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

BORN TO PARTY

With the bright, furry visuals, sugary voice work, and a Saturday morning cartoon in tow, Viva Piñata certainly seemed aimed at a young audience. But oddly enough, the game's complex ecosystem and sandbox structure had many older gamers secretly sneaking off to play in piñata gardens of their own. Rare intends to repeat this success with its sequel Trouble in Paradise.

"With the story and the goal-based direction of Trouble in Paradise, I think it's a more focused gameplay experience," says Steven Brand, the game's producer. Based on our hands-on time with the game, we'd have to agree.

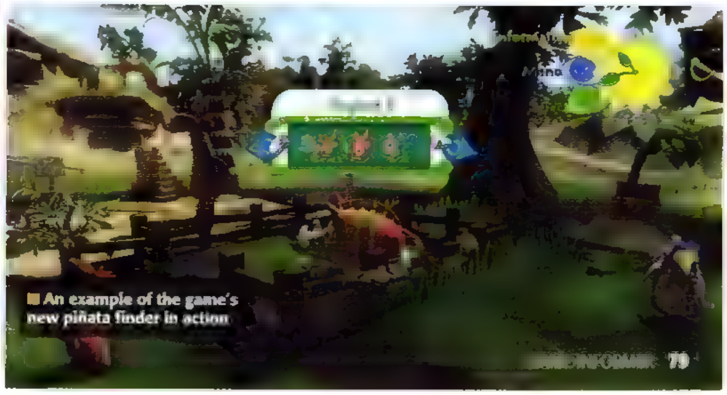
Trouble in Paradise includes the standard additions you would expect from a sequel. Thirty new piñatas join the cast, pushing the total up over the 100 mark. Two new sub areas, called the Pinarctic and Dessert (a sandy hotspot we hope is as tasty as it sounds), allow players to travel to new places and lay traps for piñatas. A new photo mode lets users upload and share photos of their gardens on Rare's official website. And a simple drop in/drop out co-op mode makes it easier to play with friends.

"There are whole different themes to the gardens. We've given the players more scope, so it doesn't always have to be cutesy," explains Brand. "If players want a garden full of gray stones and tombs with mist coming off the ground, they can do that. You can put a train track down, and we've got a ghost train, so we're trying to make it work on different levels. That's the whole point of the game, it's really up to you what you want to do with it."

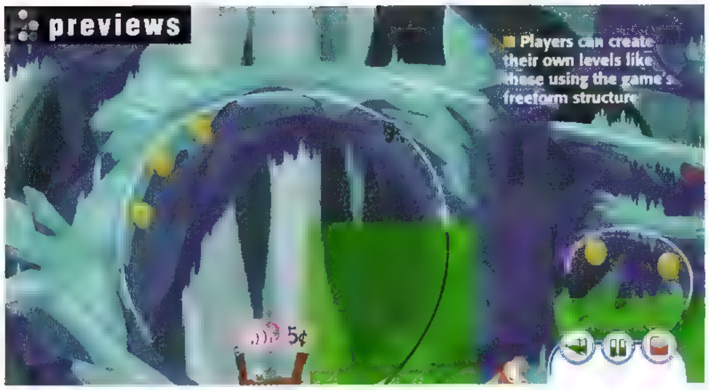
However, the best changes are the improvements to the interface. "We've put a lot of time into making the UI better and making the whole experience more focused, less laborious, a less menu-led experience," says Brand. For example, an animal finder allows players to instantly jump to a specific piñata. This makes a big difference, since in the first game it could have taken a player all afternoon to troll through their garden to find a Whirlm. With all these little additions being made to Trouble in Paradise, hopefully Viva Piñata's appeal will continue to span a broad set of demographics. ■ ■ ■

■ Pester is back, and this time around he plays a bigger role in the game's story

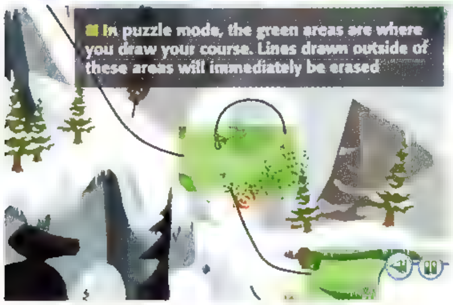
■ The beefed up romance minigames offer more variety this time around



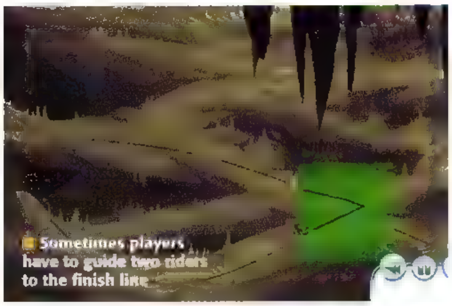
■ An example of the game's new piñata finder in action



Players can create their own levels like these using the game's freeform structure



In puzzle mode, the green areas are where you draw your course. Lines drawn outside of these areas will immediately be erased



Sometimes players have to guide two riders to the finish line

Wii I NINTENDO DS I PC

Line Rider 2: Unbound

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** GENIUS PRODUCTS LLC > **DEVELOPER** INXILE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** JULY

UNBOUNDING AROUND

The original Line Rider was released as a flash game in September of 2006, and if you spend any amount of time goofing around on the web, chances are that you've played it even if you don't readily recognize the name. Line Rider was created by Slovenian university art student Boštjan Čadež after he'd been inspired by one of his notebook sketches. InXile Entertainment saw the game's potential and quickly snatched up the rights to develop a full-blown console version.

In case you're not familiar with the concept, Line Riders is all about user-created content. Using a small variety of drawing tools, players guide a little toboggan rider through whatever twisted rollercoaster rides their mind comes up with.

The interface has been updated and is now more intuitive. Players can now add clip art to their creations and draw more kinds of lines, such as the trap door line, which disintegrates after a player rides over it. Players will start with the story mode, complete with eight acts of original puzzles, which will give them a good taste of what they'll be able to do with their own creations.

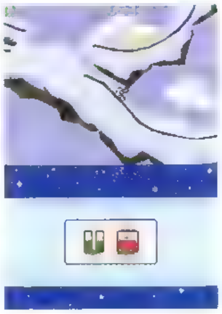
The simple creation formula has sparked a lot of interest in the online community; so much so that the game had more than 30 million visits in 2007 alone. InXile knows how important it is to build on this community for the console release, and to that end players can save courses they create in Unbound and upload them to the game's official website.

Puzzles are a new addition to Unbound, and players will be able to create incomplete tracks then send them to their friends to see if their friends can fill in the gaps and get the toboggan rider safely to the finish (it gets harder than it sounds).

All of this adds up to a complete package that will test the little artists inside us all when Line Rider 2: Unbound comes out early this summer. ■ ■ ■

Community Payoff

Line Rider is an interesting community-rags-to-development-riches story. After acquiring the rights to the game, inXile Entertainment started looking at the community created content for inspiration in developing the single-player experience. It turned out that many of the most impressive tracks were created by one poster, TechDawg. After seeing what TechDawg could do with the new tool set, inXile hired him to create all of the 40 single-player puzzles in Unbound



Riding Around Town

The handheld version of Line Rider features a DS-specific user interface and some different single-player puzzles. Otherwise, this version offers the same gameplay as its bigger brothers. Players will still be able to play through freestyle mode, create their own tracks, and download and upload user-created content.

Fierce Defender!

Wii

Order Up

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** ZOO > **DEVELOPER** SUPER VILLAIN STUDIOS > **RELEASE** JULY 7

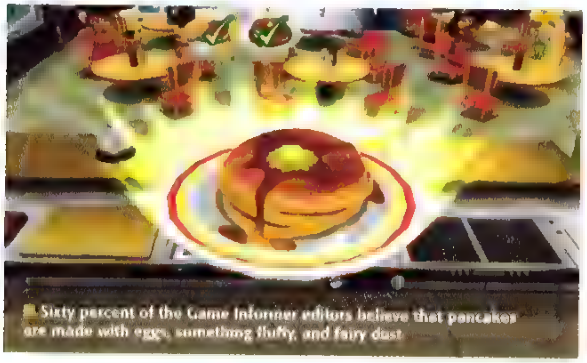
COOKING FOR THE EMPIRE

Order Up is a cooking game first and foremost, but it's also an empire builder. No, you won't be preparing steak dinners for Darth Vader, but you will be whipping up tasty dishes for food critics. When your hand isn't on the skillet, you'll be running the day-to-day happenings of your very own restaurant.

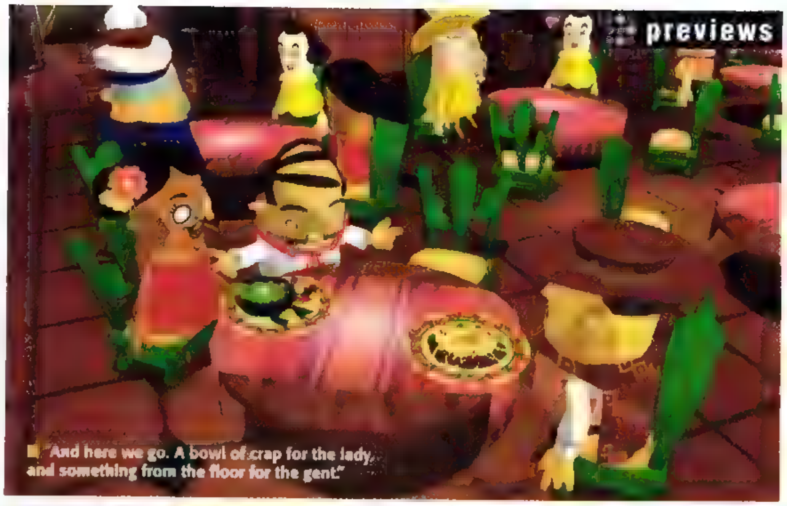
The game begins with you, an upstart chef, moving to Port Abello, a hotbed for the culinary arts. Here, you'll learn the game's motion-based cooking at the dirtiest fast food joint in town, Burger Face. After cutting your chops (and questionable meat), you'll eventually purchase your own restaurant. In addition to creating savory dishes that keep the patrons coming back, you'll be tasked with upgrading your equipment, wheeling and dealing at the farmers' market, and keeping your kitchen clean to appease the health inspector. If you are successful, you can expand your empire and manage multiple restaurants.

Of course, you can also make a name for yourself as a chef. You can create your own dishes (fish cupcake, anyone?), and challenge the best in the world in the Fortified Chef Competition. As the chef, you'll naturally bark orders to your assistants and manage their tasks. You'll also have to keep an eye on your grill, cutting board, and range. To no surprise, the remote is used to simulate real cooking – such as chopping and mixing.

If Cooking Mama left you hungry for a heartier meal, Order Up could be the fattening experience you've been waiting for. Stay tuned to GI for a review in the coming months! ■ ■ ■



Sixty percent of the Game Informer editors believe that pancakes are made with eggs, something fluffy, and fairy dust



"And here we go. A bowl of crap for the lady, and something from the floor for the gent."

[illegible] your car [illegible]

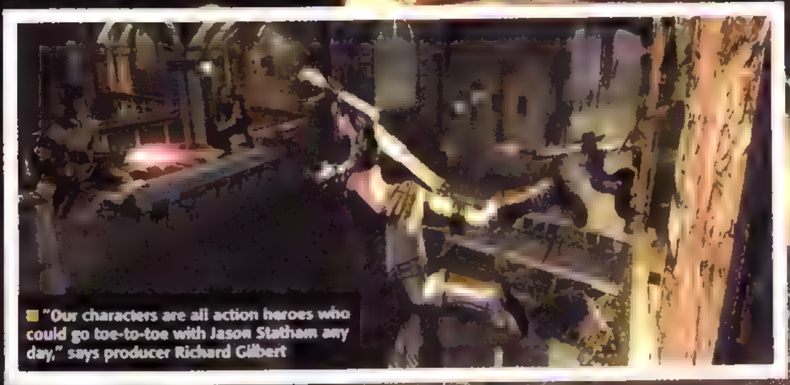
Fit

The Fit is Go!

Defense mechanisms abound! Aggressively protective with standard front, side and side curtain airbags! Back off!

fit.honda.com

Fit Sport shown 1-800-33-honda ©2007 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.



"Our characters are all action heroes who could go toe-to-toe with Jason Statham any day," says producer Richard Gilbert

Too bad she can't afford the whole shirt

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Damnation

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TBA) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
> **DEVELOPER** BLUE OMEGA ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** WINTER

COWBOYS AND SHAMANS

"When we first started developing Damnation, our goal was to create a world that gave us all the design flexibility of a traditional space marine shooter setting, but would look interesting and different," says Blue Omega's Richard Gilbert. The resulting setting is a bizarre world that mixes the turn-of-the century American frontier with elements of Jules Verne-style sci-fi and Native American shamanism.

Much of Damnation's story remains under wraps, but we do know the story centers around Captain Hamilton Rourke, a member of the band of guerilla soldiers called Peacemakers who are rebelling against an evil dictator intent on turning America into an industrialized factory-state. "It's an alternate turn-of-the century America where war has caused technology to progress further and in different ways than it did in our timeline," says Gilbert.

One thing these screenshots don't convey is the sense of scale and verticality in every level of Damnation. "You'll see your entire mission laid out ahead of you from the very start," says Gilbert. "If your goal is to get to a bridge and blow it up, you'll start the mission standing atop a tall cliff, with the bridge visible in the distance. Below, you'll see the city you're going to have to make your way through in order to get there."

Levels are so expansive that vehicles play an important role in the game. "The player will find themselves using vehicles to get from place to place as well as to solve puzzles," says Gilbert. "Need to get across a gap that's too big to jump on foot? Well, maybe if you can find a motorcycle, you can ride it off the peaked roof of a nearby building to jump that chasm like Evel Knievel."

Damnation may have the look of a shooter, but Blue Omega also took inspiration from games like Prince of Persia: Sands of Time and ICO. The game uses platforming elements and character agility to spice up the standard gunplay found in most shooters. "We want to give hardcore shooter fans access to the sorts of thrilling, acrobatic exploration and navigation that action/adventure gamers have been enjoying for years," says Gilbert. "You simply won't believe what it's like to have people flying over your head on zip lines, diving out of second-story windows, and wall-jumping to rooftops like Jackie Chan."

The environments offer players multiple routes of navigation. Sniping fans can clamber over rooftops and take out enemies from afar, while action junkies can charge in headfirst and focus on close combat. The sneaky sort can avoid combat altogether by winding their way through alleyways and building interiors. "It's going to be up to you how you progress through that city towards your goal," says Gilbert. It's a claim we've heard plenty of times before to mixed results, but Damnation looks promising, so we hope to get our hands on the game soon to see if it lives up to those lofty goals. ■ ■ ■

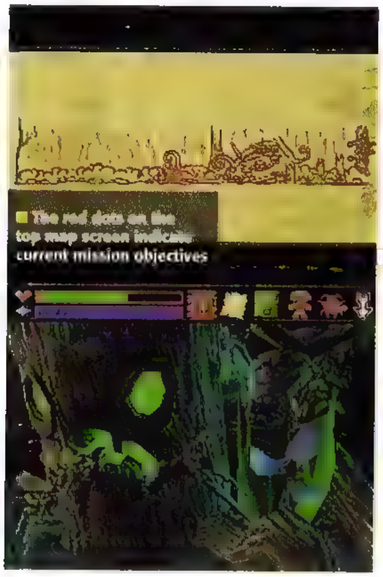
HISTORY 101

Inspirations for Damnation's levels came straight out of American history. "America is a huge country rich with strong, historic, visual icons that are seldom used in video games," explains producer Richard Gilbert. "The Civil War, robber-barons, companies like Standard Oil, frontiersmen, Native American myths, Spanish colonization, inventors like Edison and Winchester, mission-style architecture, depression-era New York, the amazing rock formations in Monument Valley. You'll see influences from all of these in the game."

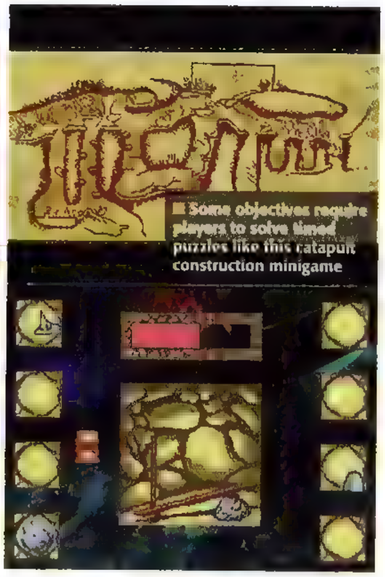
Everything from the architecture to the enemy design to the weapons has a uniquely inspired design

The whole game can be played co-op, but if you're playing alone the second player will be controlled by the game's AI

It's a shame that such a sweet hat is wearing such a loser



The red dots on the top map screen indicate current mission objectives



Some objectives require players to solve timed puzzles like this catapult construction minigame

NINTENDO DS

Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER LOCAL) **> PUBLISHER** GAMECOCK **> DEVELOPER** RED FLY STUDIO/ZEN STUDIOS **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

FUN WITH FUNGUS

The first installment of the Mushroom Men duology is appearing on the DS a month before its home console debut on Wii (see below). This 2D sidescroller uses full 3D characters and backgrounds, sometimes referred to as "2.5D". Players will choose from three recently brought to life bolete mushrooms with varying skill sets. The Heavy is basically a tank with strong defense and melee attacks, the Sage specializes in magical spore powers, and the Scout uses powerful ranged attacks.

The weapon system involves combining toothpicks, forks, string, fishhooks, and all manner of junk into a variety of creations like razorblade axes and can opener buzz saws. Enemies consist largely of various bugs and rival mushroom factions. A mix of needle stabbing, junk tossing, and spore powers provides several options to get the job done. Players can choose to use face buttons, touch screen controls, or a mix of the two.

Co-op always adds a bit of fun to the proceedings, and Rise of the Fungi doesn't disappoint. Two-player co-op will be available via two-cart local play through the entire 10-level campaign. ■ ■ ■

Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars

Coming in October for the Wii, The Spore Wars continues the battle between edible and poisonous mushrooms. Though players will probably get more out of the world by playing both games, developer Red Fly assures us they have separate, self-contained storylines. Instead of choosing among several character types, players will control a single hero named Pax. He can float to far off platforms with his umbrella-shaped head or use one of those stretchy, sticky hands to grapple up to higher ground. Enemies include oversized spiders, rabbits, and a freaky tentacled creature called King Mole. Publisher Gamecock also recently announced that Primus alum Les Claypool is contributing several original tracks to both game soundtracks.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Destroy All Humans: Path of the Furon

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (4-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** SANDBLAST GAMES **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER

If you had psychic powers, wouldn't you try to make a bunch of dudes cuddle?

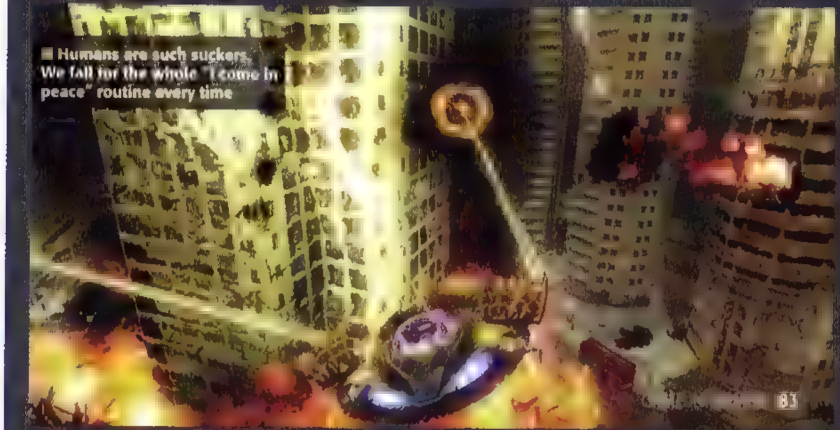
THE MEATBAG MENACE

How long has it been since you destroyed a human in a video game? Probably not long, but we're betting it has been a while since you destroyed one with an anal probe gun. The irreverent Destroy All Humans series returns this fall, once again putting players in control of the sadistic alien Crypto and his array of life-extinguishing gadgets.

Moving forward another decade, Path of the Furon is set in the 1970s, and has Crypto seeking spiritual enlightenment after hitting rock bottom. Fortunately for gamers, the Furon notion of enlightenment encompasses a variety of cool new weapons used to terrorize the populace. Create havoc with a black hole gun, cause a Venus Human Trap to spring up from the ground, or fire the enhanced anal probe gun and hit multiple targets at once. As you use these inventions in the game's five open-world levels, you'll notice that the destruction is more detailed and persistent than ever, making it even more satisfying to gaze upon the wreckage that was once a city block.

Even with these new toys, Crypto's mind hasn't been neglected; he's developed some entertaining new psychic abilities to manipulate his surroundings. The Temporal Fist will let you stop time to rearrange the world, or you can just cast PK Magnet on passersby and watch all nearby physics objects fly toward them at high speeds. For an especially good time, you can combine weapons and powers, like calling up the Venus Human Trap, then using your psychokinesis to slam-dunk chumps into its gaping maw. Don't want to perpetrate these hilarious hijinks alone? Invite a buddy to join up via the game's split-screen and online co-op support.

Though the development duties have been passed to Sandblast (the series was created by EA-owned Pandemic Studios), it looks like Path of the Furon retains the same satirical edge and pure carnage that made Destroy All Humans a hit in the first place. That's good, because after the terrible Big Willy Unleashed spin-off for Wii and PS2, Crypto definitely needs to earn back some trust. ■ ■ ■



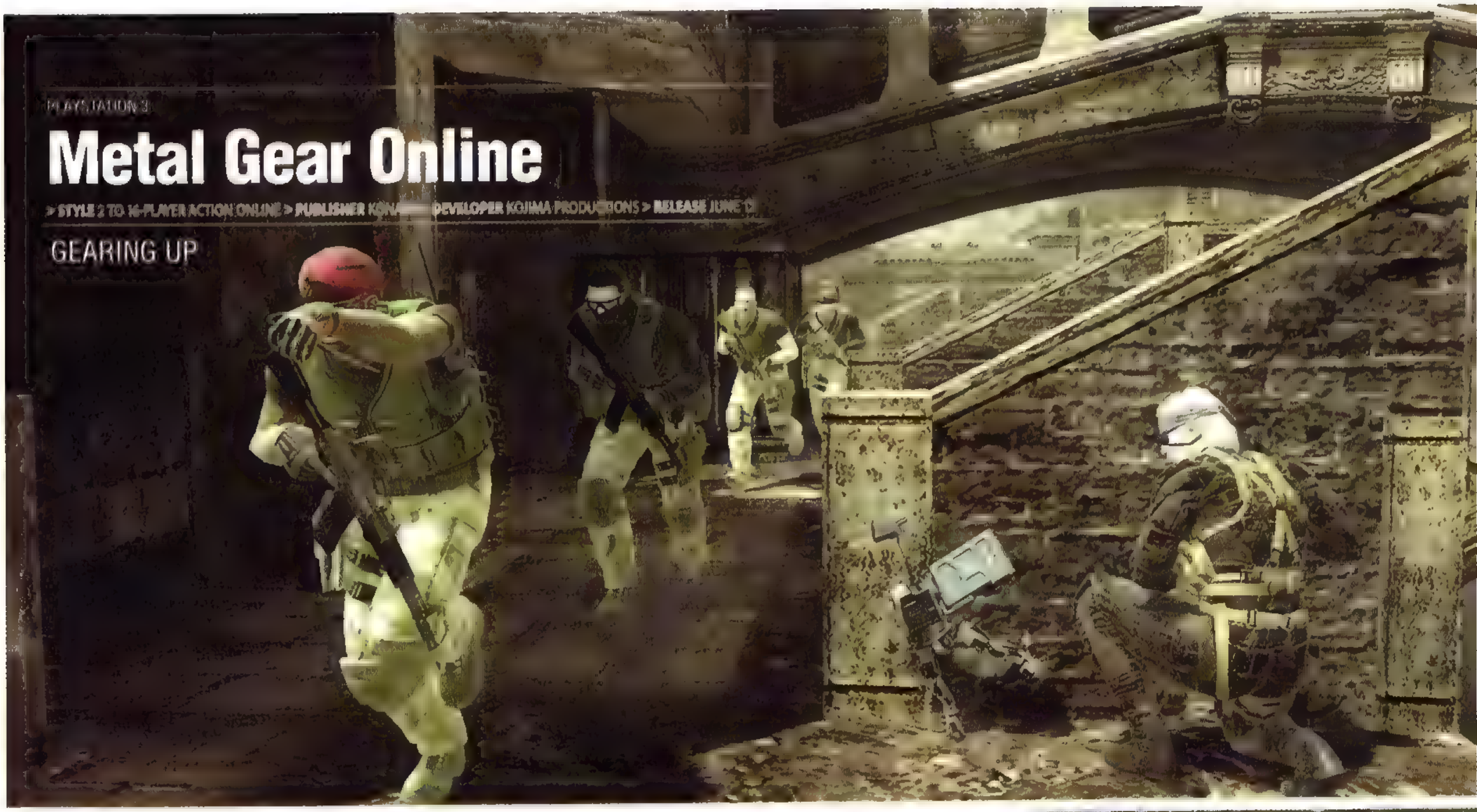
Humans are such suckers. We fall for the whole "I come in peace" routine every time

PLAYSTATION 3

Metal Gear Online

> STYLE 2 TO 16-PLAYER ACTION ONLINE > PUBLISHER KONA DEVELOPER KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS > RELEASE JUNE 12

GEARING UP



Anyone who has played the Metal Gear series knows the joy of messing with mentally challenged guards. They'll follow figure-eight patterns of footprints in the snow, investigate a pile of tranquilized comrades, and believe that a cardboard box is not out of place in a nuclear storage facility. Most real people aren't so gullible, and Metal Gear Online will give players a chance to test their sneaking skills against more challenging, living opponents.

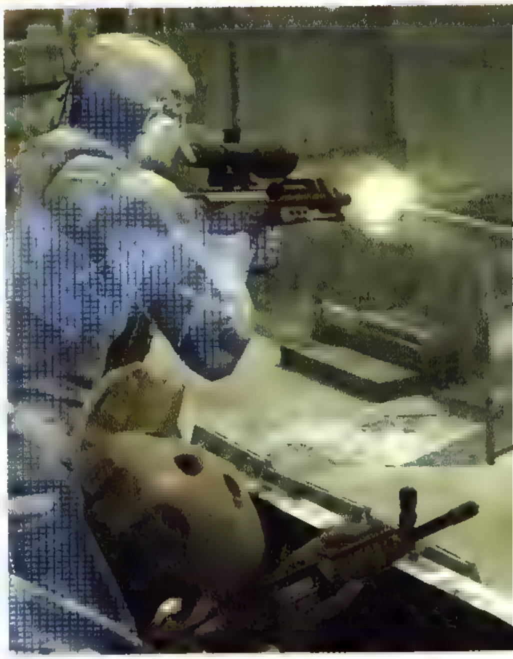
After some hands-on time with the beta, we found that Metal Gear Online is a far cry from the online fragfests found in games like Halo 3 and Call of Duty 4. This isn't the first time Metal Gear has gone online, but the team at Kojima Productions has clearly learned some lessons from its previous attempts in Subsistence and Portable Ops. Using the revamped MGS 4 control scheme, you'll create a soldier, allocate skills that improve over time (like weapon specializations and CQC mastery), and then hop into the war zone.

Three of the four game types initially available in the beta (Team Deathmatch, Base Mission, and Capture Mission) rely heavily on teamwork. You can link up with teammates using the SOP system, which allows you to share information about the location and status of your comrades. Using the headset or a handful of preset commands, you can coordinate attacks by using your unique skills and varied equipment load-outs to lay traps or set up ambushes. Strategy is key, and almost always better than a brute force assault.

As great as teamwork can be, it is also the root of one of the game's biggest problems. In our experience, Metal Gear Online is the most fun when all participants in a match have a tacit understanding that they will play "correctly." Most of the game's charm, and the elements that make Metal Gear unique, are lost when a few idiots think they're playing CoD 4. Sure, they're fun to kill, and it's too much to expect that everyone will always go along with the spirit of the game. Even so, it makes for some very inconsistent matches.

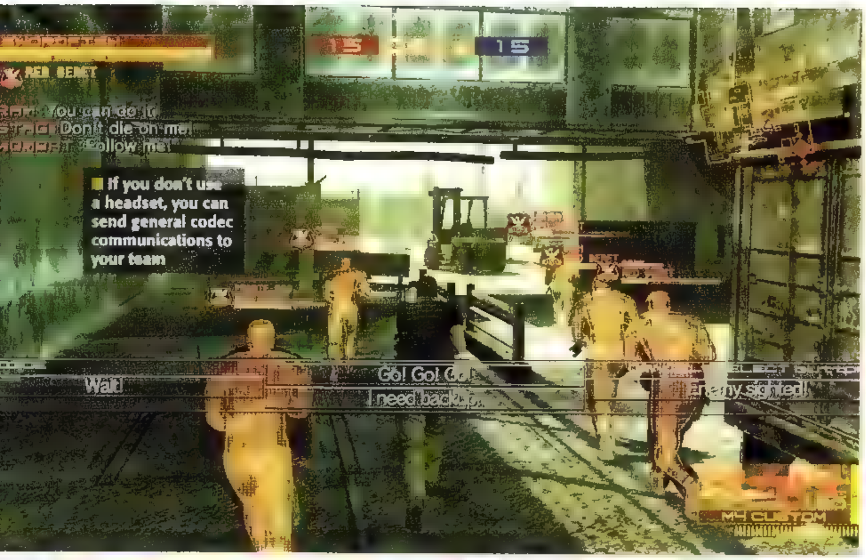
Even though MGO usually puts you in control of your custom grunt, you'll still see some of the series' notable characters. One of the game types added after the beta's start is the Sneaking Mission, where one player uses Solid Snake to steal dog tags from the two teams hunting him down. Given the prominence of heroes in previous multiplayer versions of Metal Gear, we wouldn't rule out cameo appearances from other characters in the final release.

The version of MGO that will come packaged with Metal Gear Solid 4 is just a starter pack; though no details were available as of press time, a more expansive stand-alone release of MGO is on the way. For the time being, gamers can look forward to the release of Metal Gear Solid 4 on June 12. You'll probably be busy finishing the single-player saga for a few days, but once all the answers are uncovered, MGO will continue to deliver tactical espionage action in the following weeks and months. ■ ■ ■

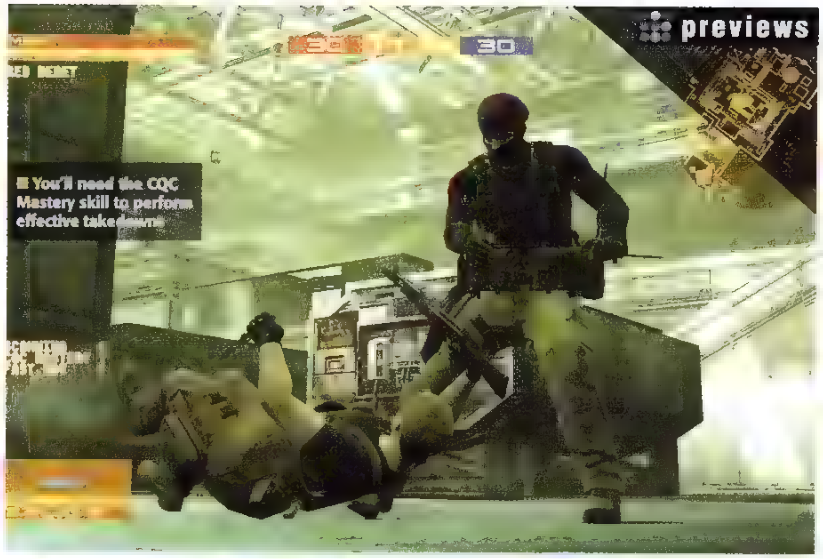


■ In addition to weapons, you can outfit your soldier with purely cosmetic apparel

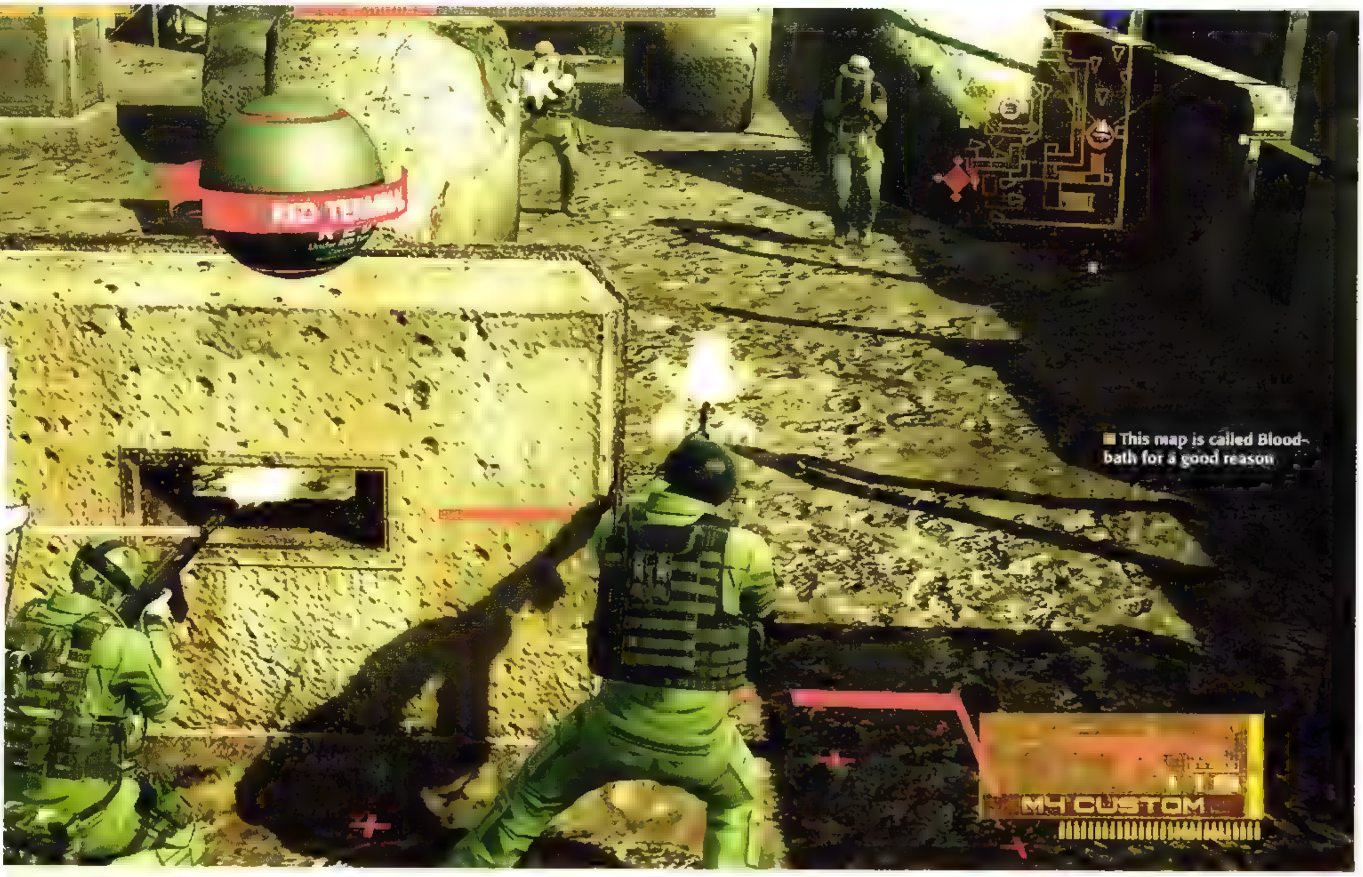
■ Be careful when helping out a teammate. Friendly fire will prevent you from firing your weapon for a few seconds


15
15
RED BERET
You can do it
Don't die on me!
Follow me!
Wait!
Go! Go! Go!
I need back
Enemy sighted!
M4 CUSTOM

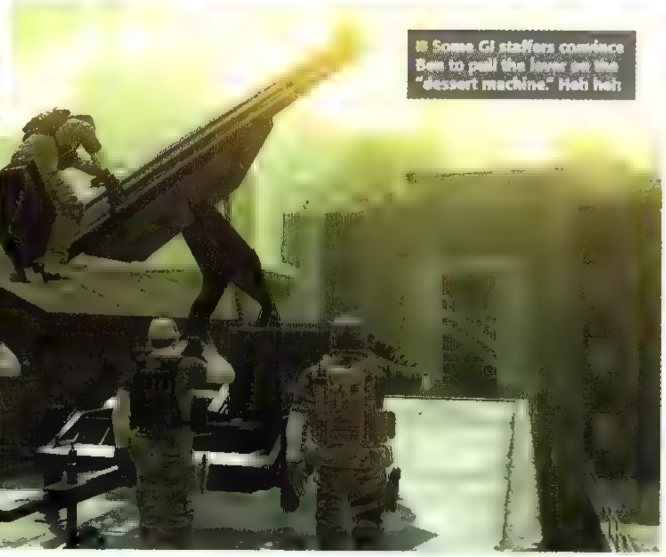
If you don't use a headset, you can send general codec communications to your team


30
30
RED BERET

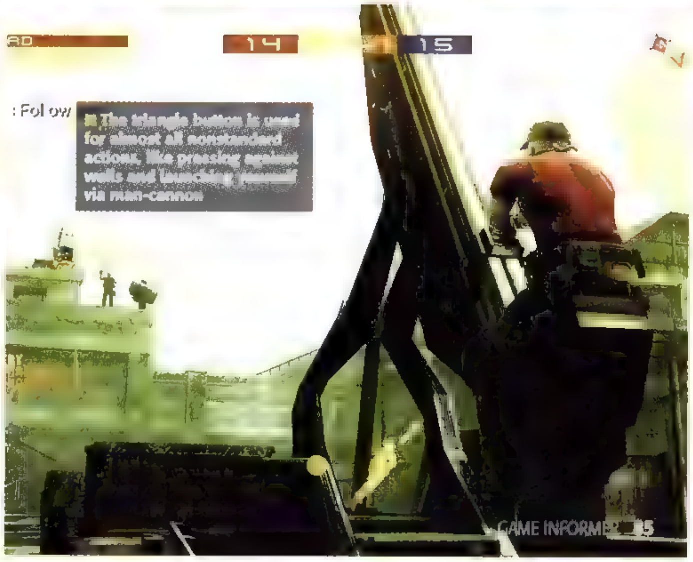
You'll need the CQC Mastery skill to perform effective takedowns



This map is called Bloodbath for a good reason



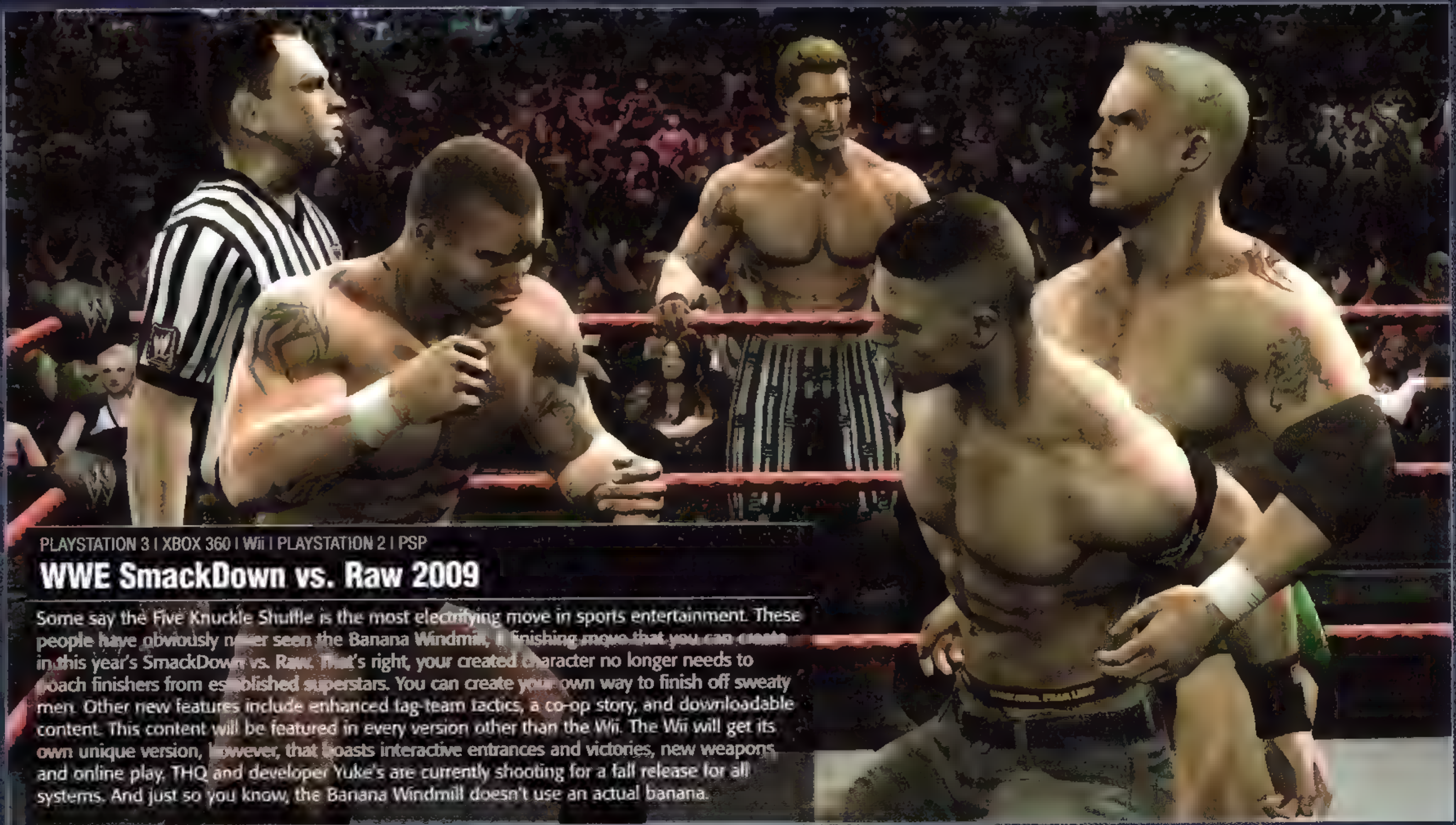
Some GI staffers convince Ben to pull the lever on the "dessert machine." Heh heh


RD
14
15
: Fol ow

The triangle button is used for almost all nonstandard actions, like pressing against walls and launching yourself via man-cannon

PHOTOPHILE

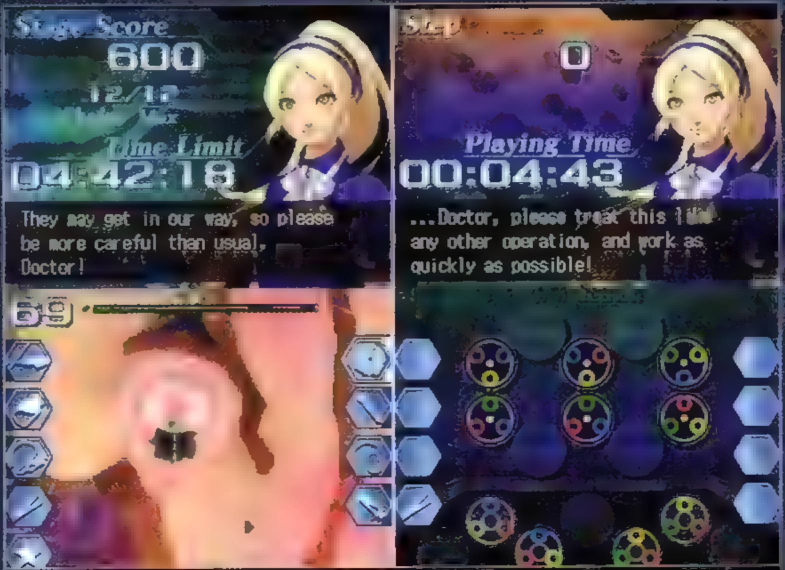
Mini Previews With Big Pictures



PLAYSTATION 3 I XBOX 360 I Wii I PLAYSTATION 2 I PSP

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009

Some say the Five Knuckle Shuffle is the most electrifying move in sports entertainment. These people have obviously never seen the Banana Windmill, a finishing move that you can create in this year's SmackDown vs. Raw. That's right, your created character no longer needs to poach finishers from established superstars. You can create your own way to finish off sweaty men. Other new features include enhanced tag-team tactics, a co-op story, and downloadable content. This content will be featured in every version other than the Wii. The Wii will get its own unique version, however, that boasts interactive entrances and victories, new weapons and online play. THQ and developer Yuke's are currently shooting for a fall release for all systems. And just so you know, the Banana Windmill doesn't use an actual banana.



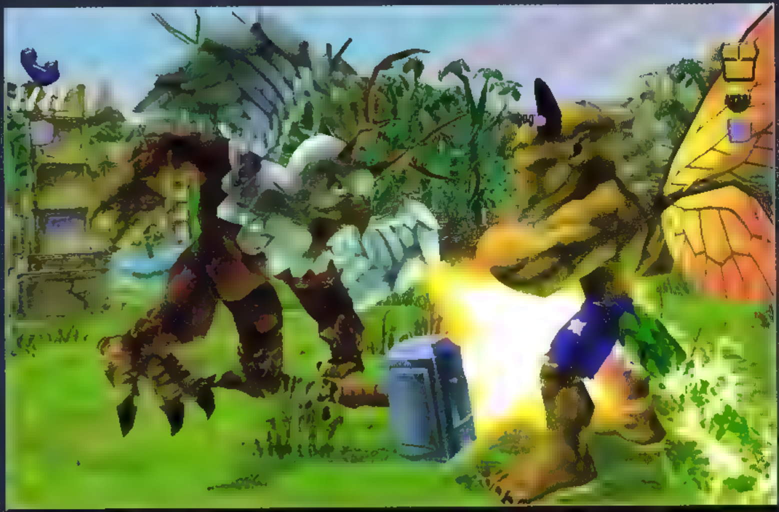
They may get in our way, so please be more careful than usual, Doctor!

...Doctor, please treat this like any other operation, and work as quickly as possible!

NINTENDO DS

Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2

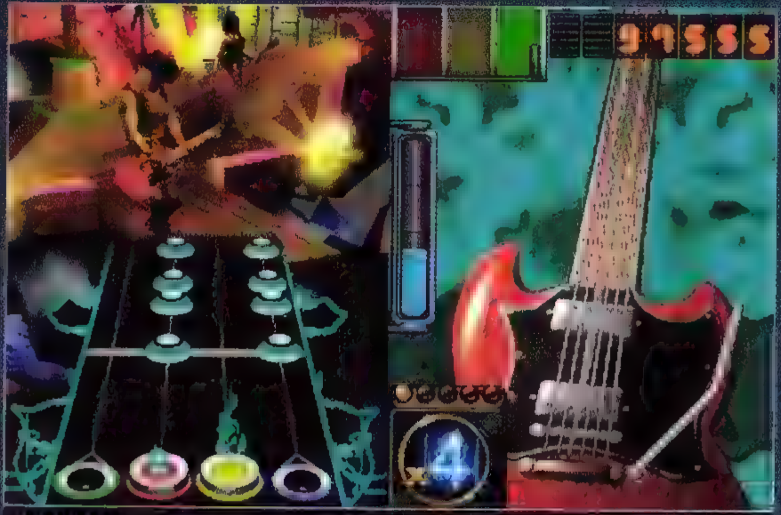
After two outings on the Wii (Second Opinion and New Blood), Trauma Center is finally returning to the console that bore it. As the "2" suggests, this latest surgery sim picks up after the original. The main character Derek Stiles returns, along with his assistant Angie Thompson, to deal with the mysterious remnants of the Guilt virus. The game promises new operations (like the amino acid matching seen above) along with a smoother tool interface and multiple difficulty settings. Expect to snap on your rubber gloves July 1.



PC

Freaky Creatures

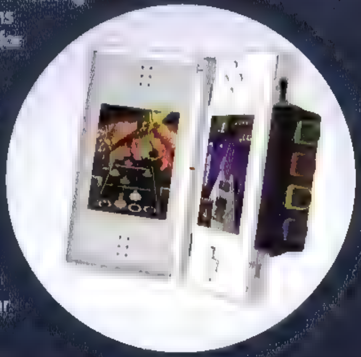
Is it action figures, or is it an online game? In truth, Freaky Creatures is both. To get started, you buy a package of two nicely sculpted action figures that come with a USB thumb drive that contains the game. This drive gets you access to the two creatures you bought as well as a randomized slew of parts and powers to customize them. Once you've created a unique creature within the game, you can take it online to do Pokémon-esque battle against players around the world – or just hang out in your lair in a Sims-lite setting with set pieces and pets you've unlocked. Purchasing further booster packs gets you more creatures, parts, and powers, and the fully integrated website will incorporate some interesting social networking features along with the usual leaderboards and such. Full pricing and release details aren't available yet, but the online features will require a $5.99 per month subscription, while the starter packs will retail for $19.99 this summer.

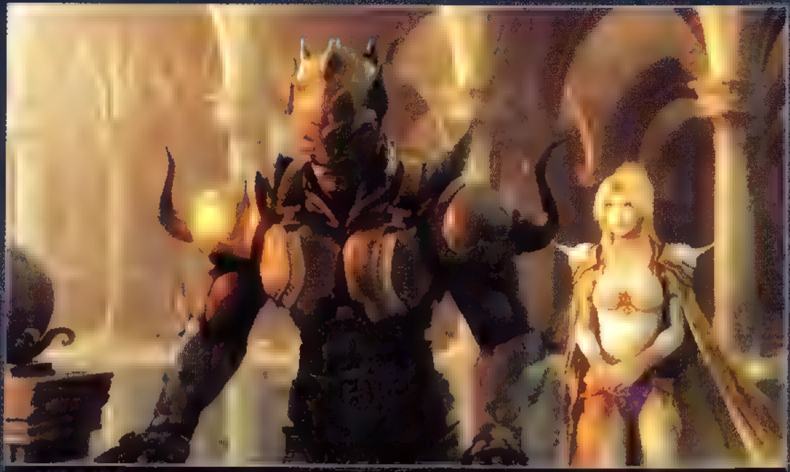


NINTENDO DS

Guitar Hero: On Tour

They said it couldn't be done, but Guitar Hero is coming to the Nintendo DS. Developer Vicarious Visions has come up with a unique controller add-on for the game (dubbed the "Guitar Grip"), a four button miniature "fretboard" that fits into the unique GBA cartridge slot. That allows you to both hold the unit and press buttons while "strumming" on the touch screen with the stylus. Crazy, huh? What's even crazier is that the game actually seems to work pretty well. In addition to over 20 officially licensed tracks by likes of No Doubt, OK Go, and Nirvana, it will also feature two-player wireless battle mode similar to the boss battles in Guitar Hero III.



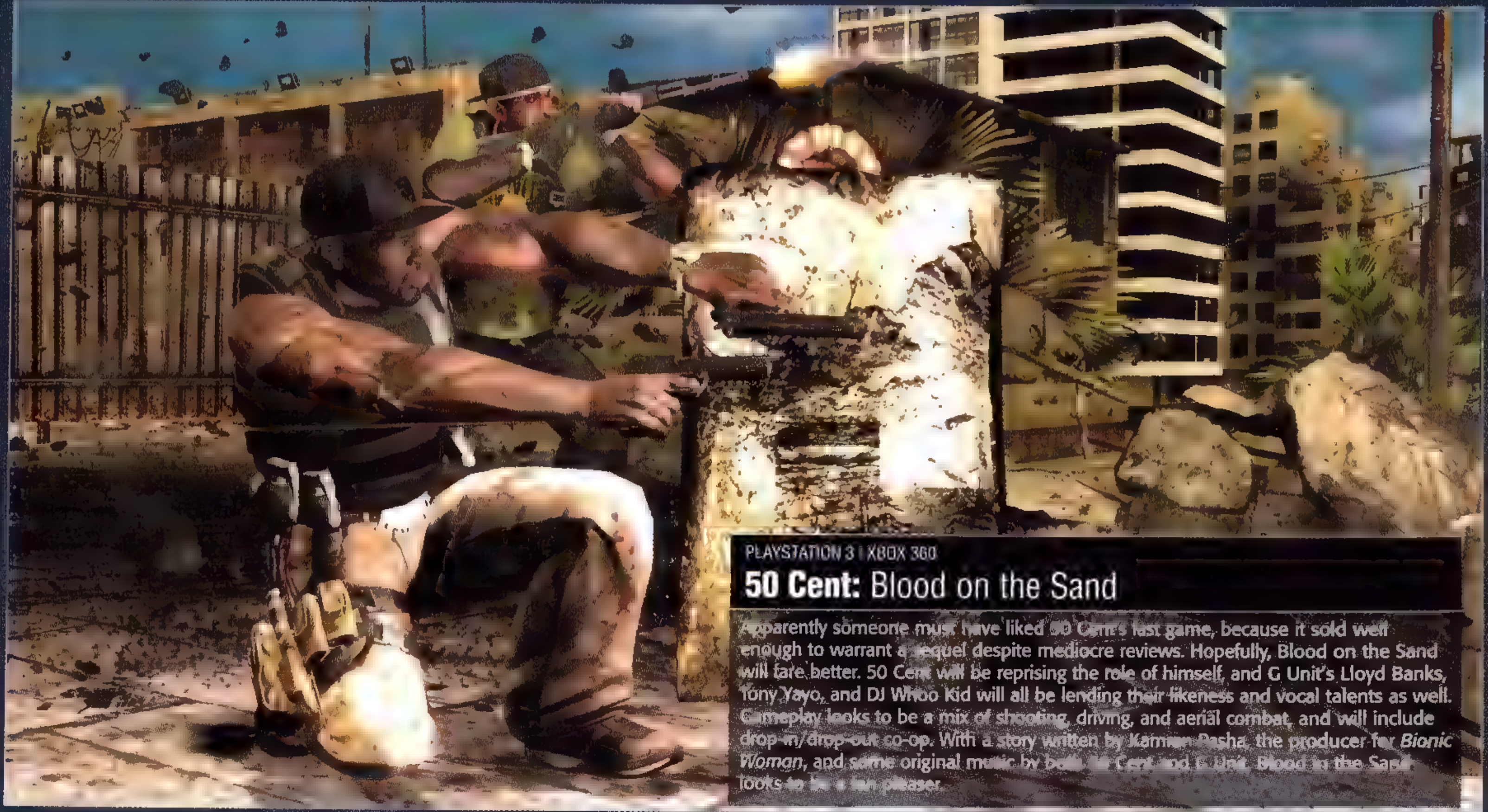


NINTENDO DS

Final Fantasy IV

We know what you're thinking, and no, you didn't just replay this game. It's true that Square Enix ported a version of Final Fantasy IV to Game Boy Advance, but this new incarnation is a total facelift for the classic RPG. With 3D graphics that more closely resemble the game's original concept art, this remake will feature Cecil, Kain, and their companions like you've never seen them before. In addition to the revamped visuals, the game will also integrate a new ability system that allows mainstay characters to learn the unique skills of temporary party members. For hardcore fans of the original, there are even some new flashback scenes that expand upon the characters' backstories. Get ready to fire up your DS, because the Red Wings fly again on July 22.

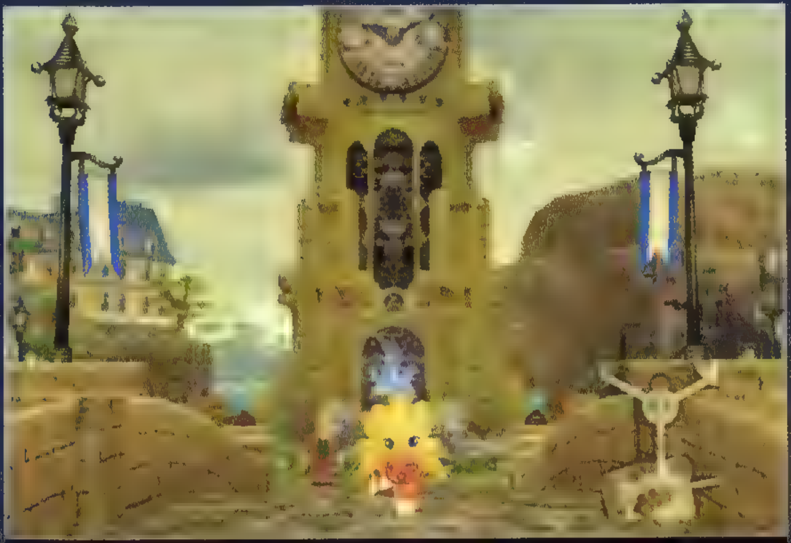
Rubicante! For this...for this you will pay!

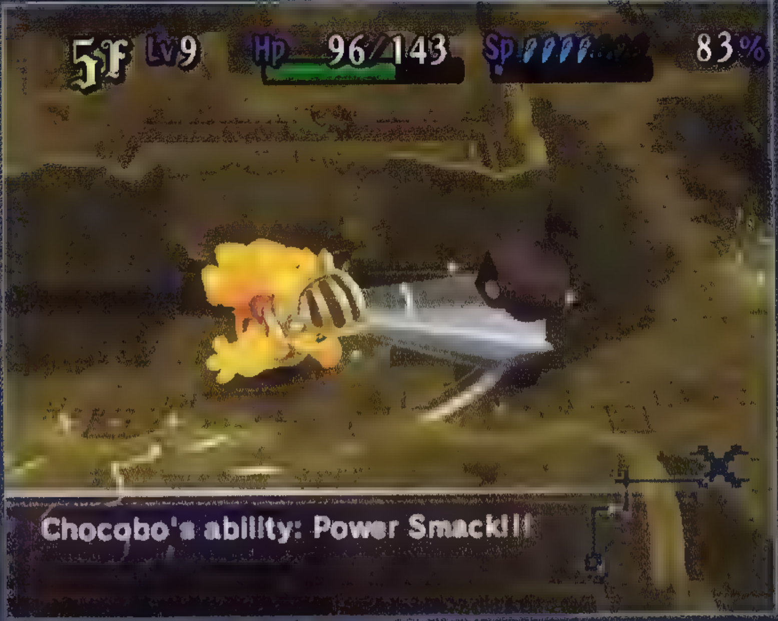


PLAYSTATION 3 I XBOX 360

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

Apparently someone must have liked 50 Cent's last game, because it sold well enough to warrant a sequel despite mediocre reviews. Hopefully, Blood on the Sand will fare better. 50 Cent will be reprising the role of himself, and G Unit's Lloyd Banks, Tony Yayo, and DJ Whoo Kid will all be lending their likeness and vocal talents as well. Gameplay looks to be a mix of shooting, driving, and aerial combat, and will include drop-in/drop-out co-op. With a story written by Kamran Pasha, the producer for *Bionic Woman*, and some original music by both 50 Cent and G Unit, Blood on the Sand looks to be a fan pleaser.





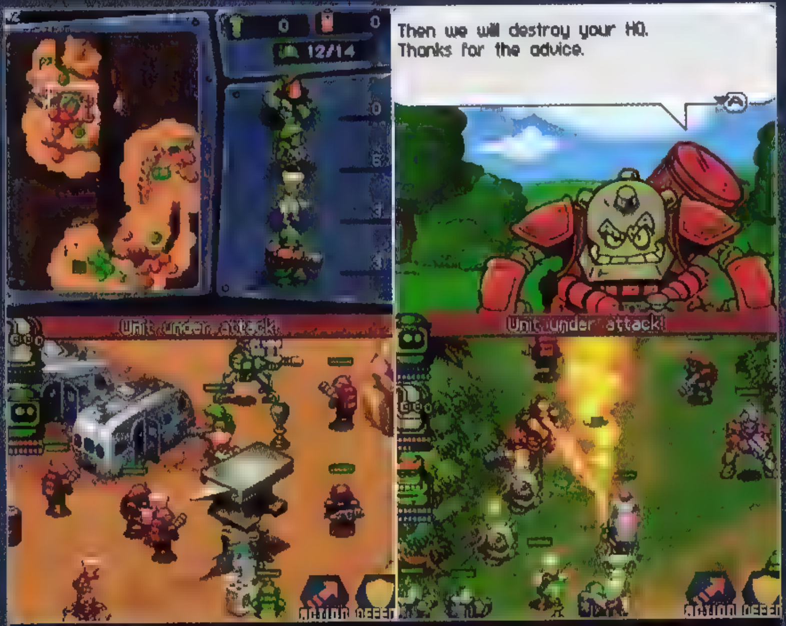
Chocobo's ability: Power Smack!!!

Wii

Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon

Chocobo changes job to White Mage!

The Wii may seem like a strange home for the typically unforgiving experience provided by a Mystery Dungeon title. With randomly generated dungeons and steep penalties for death, games of this sort usually cater to a hardcore crowd. However, come July, Square Enix will put a cute, cuddly chocobo in harm's way. Players will guide the yellow bird-thing through a variety of dungeons, fighting creatures from the Final Fantasy universe and using familiar jobs like knight and black mage. The visuals are particularly impressive, showcasing the same style as the Crystal Chronicles titles. If you love grinding through floors upon floors filled with monsters and loot, this chocobo was bred just for you.

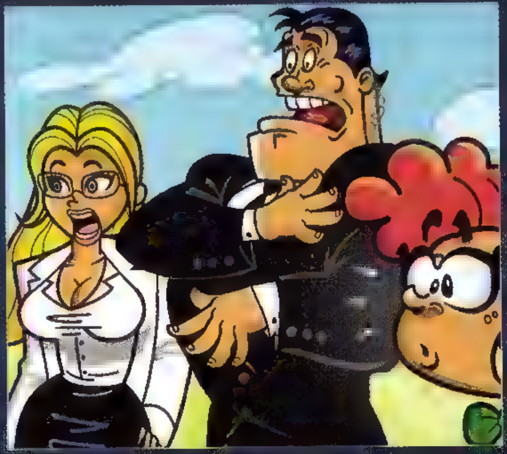


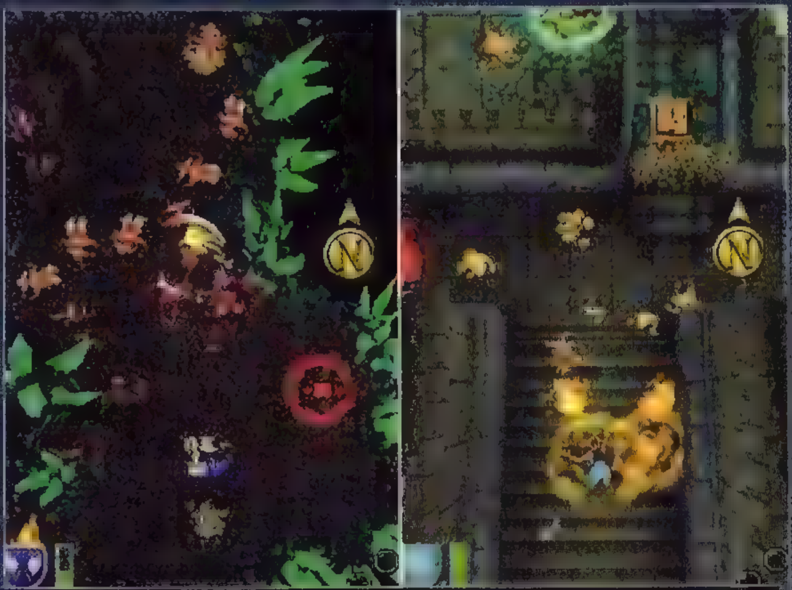
Then we will destroy your HQ.
Thanks for the advice.

NINTENDO DS

Robocalypse

Little known developer Vogster Entertainment is bringing robot RTS warfare to the DS this summer. Written by *SpongeBob Squarepants* scribe Jay Lender, the cartoony story begins as toaster logic programmer Myron Mako accidentally swaps appliance AI with a war machine. A robotic revolt ensues and Myron decides to use the brain scans of WWII heroes to form a mechanized "dirty dozen." Wacky weapons, complete stylus control, and up to four-player local multiplayer round out this strange offering.

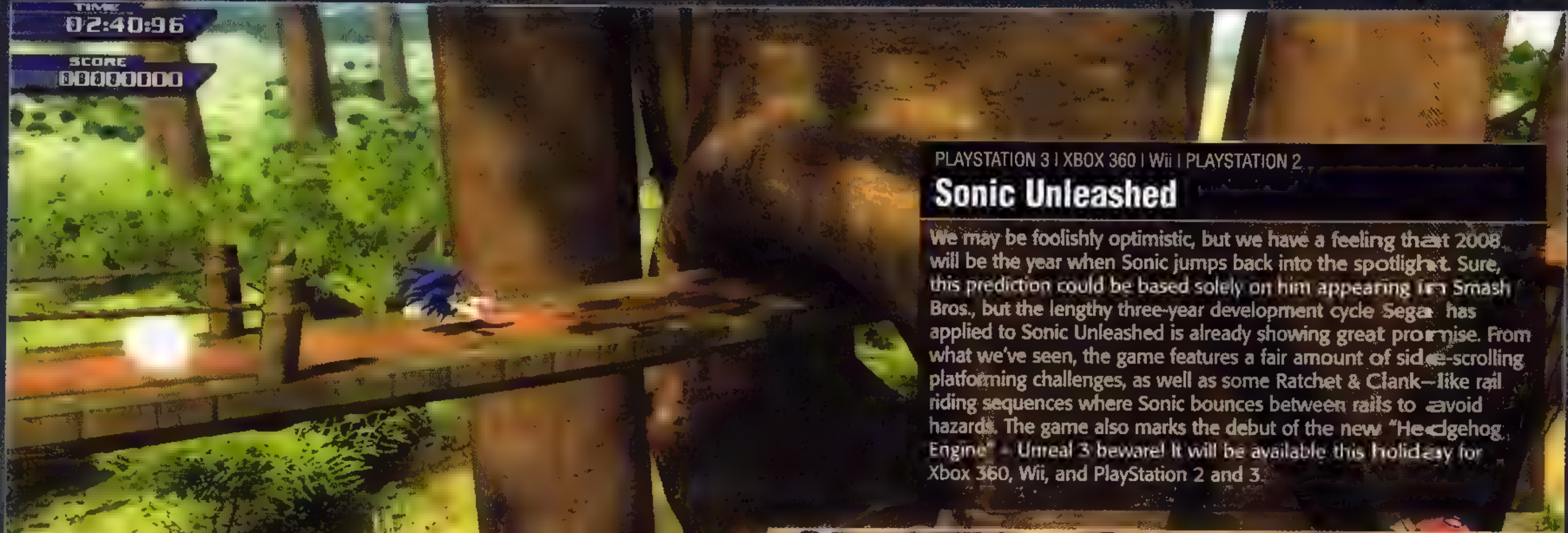




NINTENDO DS

Gauntlet

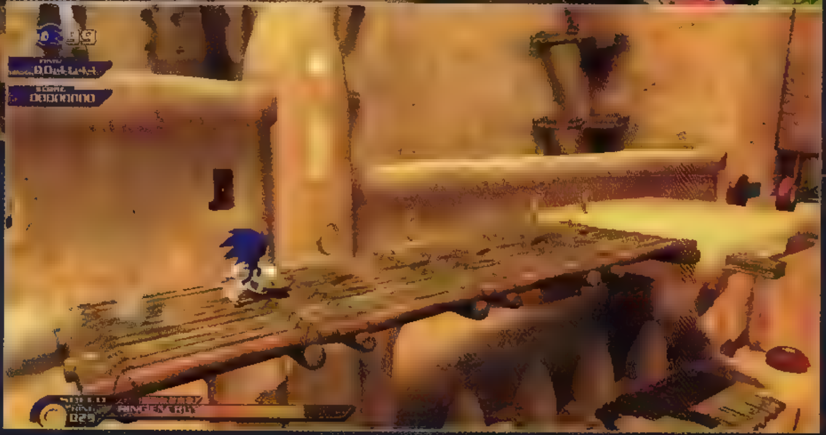
Strangely enough, Midway has given Eidos the green light to release a reimagining of its classic Gauntlet franchise on the DS. Developed by Backbone Entertainment, the game brings back the warrior, wizard, valkyrie, and elf on a quest for vengeance against the dark army. Four-player co-op is available locally and online, with the latter utilizing voice chat via the DS mic. All experience and special attacks gained in multiplayer stays with your character when returning to solo play. Deathmatch and Treasure Horde will also be available for more competitive types. But perhaps the sweetest touch is the purposely lo-fi narrator's deadpan delivery: "Green Warrior shot the food." He sure did.

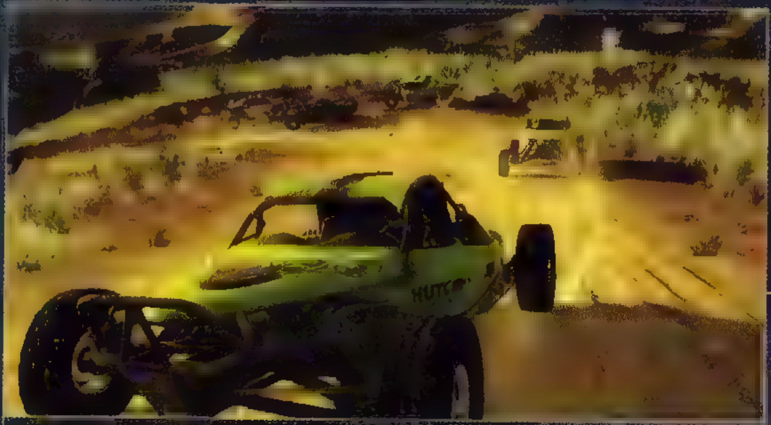


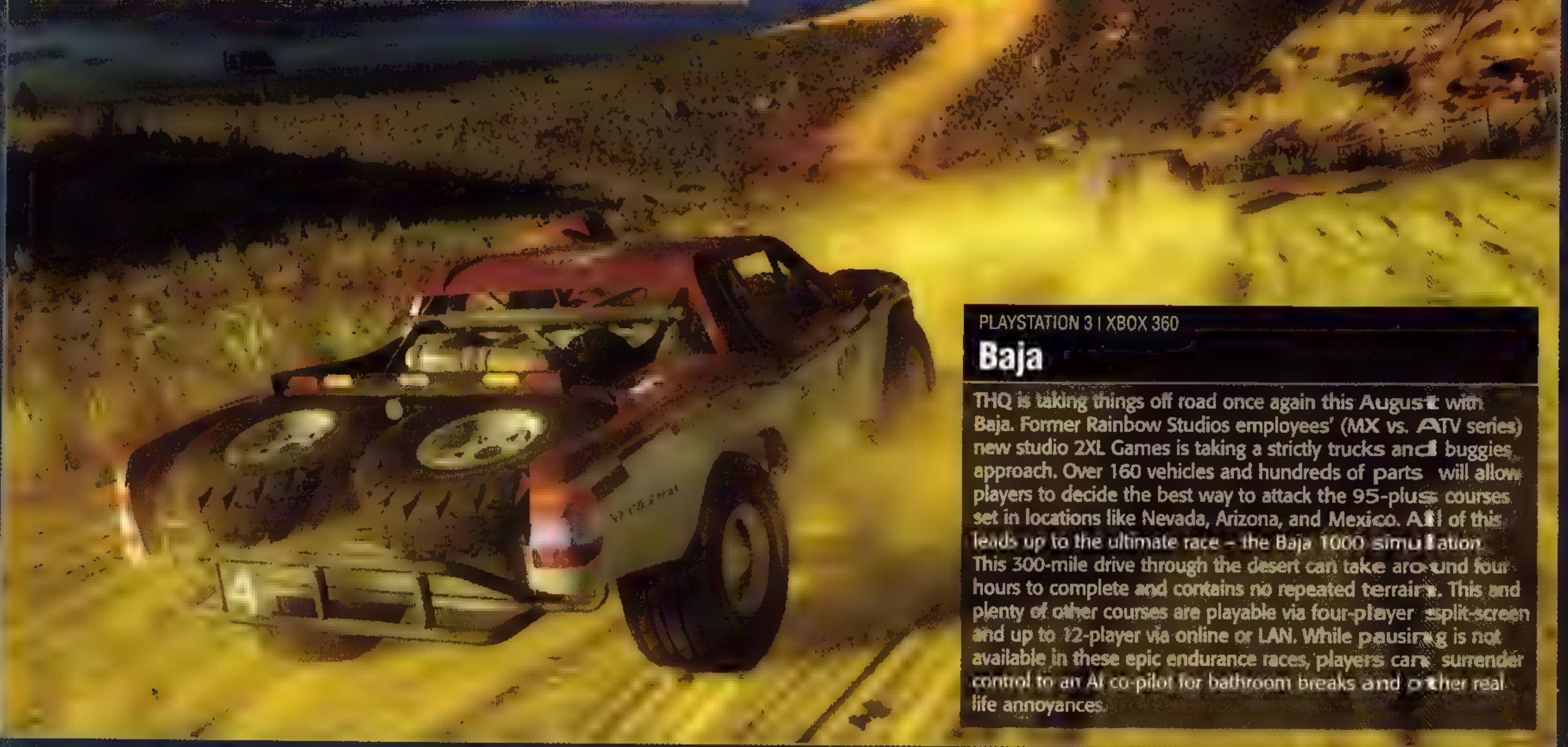
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2

Sonic Unleashed

We may be foolishly optimistic, but we have a feeling that 2008 will be the year when Sonic jumps back into the spotlight. Sure, this prediction could be based solely on him appearing in Smash Bros., but the lengthy three-year development cycle Sega has applied to Sonic Unleashed is already showing great promise. From what we've seen, the game features a fair amount of side-scrolling platforming challenges, as well as some Ratchet & Clank–like rail riding sequences where Sonic bounces between rails to avoid hazards. The game also marks the debut of the new "Hedgehog Engine" – Unreal 3 beware! It will be available this holiday for Xbox 360, Wii, and PlayStation 2 and 3.







PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Baja

THQ is taking things off road once again this August with Baja. Former Rainbow Studios employees' (MX vs. ATV series) new studio 2XL Games is taking a strictly trucks and buggies approach. Over 160 vehicles and hundreds of parts will allow players to decide the best way to attack the 95-plus courses set in locations like Nevada, Arizona, and Mexico. All of this leads up to the ultimate race – the Baja 1000 simulation. This 300-mile drive through the desert can take around four hours to complete and contains no repeated terrain. This and plenty of other courses are playable via four-player split-screen and up to 12-player via online or LAN. While pausing is not available in these epic endurance races, players can surrender control to an AI co-pilot for bathroom breaks and other real life annoyances.

REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI

94

NBA Ballers

PLAYSTATION 3

96

Gran Turismo 5: Prologue

XBOX 360

97

Lost Planet: Extreme Condition Colonies Edition

grand theft auto IV

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	Tainted Love. Sometimes I feel I've got to <bah bah> run away.

> 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?

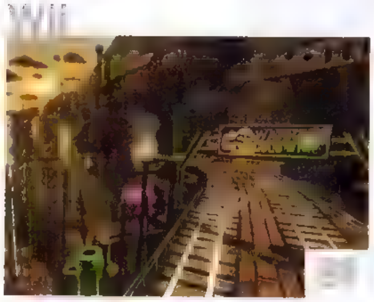
> Playability: Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

> 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.

WII



Mario Kart Wii

HANDHELD

Drone Tactics

REVIEWS INDEX

Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut Edition ... 94
Battle of the Bands ... [illegible]
Drone Tactics ... [illegible]
Emergency Mayhem ... [illegible]
Gran Turismo 5: Prologue ... [illegible]6
Grand Theft Auto IV ... [illegible]2
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles ... [illegible]01
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition Col[illegible] Edi[illegible] ... [illegible]
Major League Baseball 2K8: Fantasy All-S[illegible] ... [illegible]
Mario Kart Wii ... [illegible]
NBA Ballers: Chosen One ... [illegible]
Ninja Reflex ... [illegible]
Summon Night: Twin Age ... [illegible]
Universe At War: Earth Assault ... [illegible]
[illegible] ... [illegible]
[illegible] ... [illegible]00

pg. 97

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

Grand Theft Auto IV

As Rockstar teased the public with amazing screenshots and limited reveals, you waited patiently to find out if Grand Theft Auto IV was a worthy successor to one of the most popular franchises of all time. With a surprisingly deep story, impressive graphics, polished gun mechanics, and the most addictive multiplayer mode we've seen since Call of Duty 4, GTA IV doesn't just live up to the hype, it curb stomps it and makes off with its Banshee convertible. This is one of those rare events in gaming that everyone should experience for themselves.

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

EARLY CHILDHOOD eC	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older	MATURE M	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older
EVERYONE E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older	ADULTS ONLY AO	Content suitable only for adults
EVERYONE 10+ E10+	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older	RATING PENDING RP	Product is awaiting final rating.
TEEN T	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

1080p – Currently the best resolution for gaming on an HDTV In widescreen, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format

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 God of War and Devil May Cry

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

AI – Artificial Intelligence. Usually refers to how well the computer reacts to human opponents or works with human allies

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

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

board – A term we use for games like Scene It? and Mario Party

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

CG – Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics

E3 – Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry

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

fighting – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive

FPS – First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase "frames per second," or how many animation frames happen in one second.

framerate – The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement

frontend – A game's menus and options

HDTV – High Definition Television

HP – Hit Points. A numerical representation of a character's remaining life. Common in RPGs

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

IP – Intellectual Property. A single game or franchise encompassing the ideas and characters contained within

isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like Warcraft 3 or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance

jaggies – Graphical lines that look 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

music – A term we use for games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band

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 Ratchet & Clank

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

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

PS3 – Sony's PlayStation 3 console

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Picross

racing – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart

"Riggs it up" – To behave in the fashion of *Lethal Weapon*'s Martin Riggs.

RPG – Role-Playing Game. A term games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls

RTS – Real-Time Strategy. A subgenre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer

shooter – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin

strategy – A term we use for games like Disgaea and Fire Emblem

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

Once a shot is fired, your foes will react realistically by finding cover

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Grand Theft Auto IV

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH > **RELEASE** APRIL 29 > **ESRB** M

GAME OF THE MONTH

PERFECTION

I now know how film critics felt after screening *The Godfather*. It's been days since Grand Theft Auto IV's credits rolled, yet I can't seem to construct a coherent thought without my mind wandering off into a daydream about the game. I just want to drop everything in my life so I can play it again. Experience it again. Live it again. No matter what I do, I can't stop thinking about the choices I made throughout the course of the game. Those people didn't have to die. I could have saved them. I wasn't thinking straight. My judgment was clouded. Next time, things will be different.

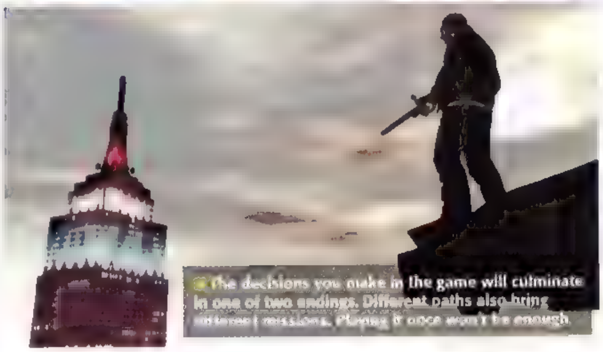
If you thought that the previous Grand Theft Auto titles offered an amazing level of freedom, you haven't seen anything yet. In Grand Theft Auto IV, you really feel like you have ownership over the entire experience. You build relationships, approach missions the way you want to, and even dictate the flow of the story. In true GTA style, you do the dictating with your gun. Some of the choices you make will have a dramatic "I can't believe that just happened" effect on Niko Bellic's life. This isn't like Fable or Mass Effect where you can clearly see how your input is affecting the story. You just have to live with it, swallow hard, and hope you made the right choices. It's an amazing story that ends up having a soul and isn't afraid to poke fun at society's hot topics.

As much as the game makes you sweat bullets through its choices, it no longer makes you dread firing them. The new targeting system is a remarkable contraption that, strangely enough, also offers choice. By applying a hard or soft click to the aim trigger, you can switch between free aim and lock-on, a combo that sings on the battlefield, and makes you feel like a skilled assassin. With intelligent foes putting a bead on you, the gunplay is a far more visceral affair, requiring pop-and-shoot tactics, ammo conservation, and some serious skill. Thankfully, with the gameplay firing direct hits, you no longer feel like a death was something you had no control over. The gunplay is extremely polished, and is one of the game's strongest points.

Vehicular mayhem continues to play a huge role in the series, and is enhanced with an array of new jacking animations and realistic physics for both the vehicles and people you hit. The new Pac-Man-like police evasions, and scripted chase scenes are incredible additions as well.

When you aren't raising your wanted level with a pistol or a runaway car, the game offers mountains of incredible content where you would least expect it. GTA IV has a Sims quality to it, as it starts to feel like real life. You can sit back and watch hilarious fictional TV shows (even cartoons), go to a comedy show, lose hours of your life surfing fictional internet sites, and even play full games of bowling, darts, and pool. Of course, this is GTA so you can always spend your time at a strip club or a bar. I know this is going to sound lame, but one of my favorite parts of the game is people watching. There hasn't been a world of people in a game that has felt this alive. You'll see cabbies throwing coffee cups out the window, people on cell phones not paying attention as they cross the street, and umbrellas going up when the rain starts.

Just imagine what this intersection would look like if you had a rocket launcher



The decisions you make in the game will culminate in one of two endings. Different paths also bring different missions. Playing it once won't be enough.

It's unbelievable how much there is to see and do. All of it is captured with stunning realism, and that trademark GTA satire. The single-player game alone is immense, and easily deserving of the perfect score, but there's something else this breakthrough product does just as well; it blows the doors off of what you expect from a multiplayer game. Just think of the way you play single player (with cops always in pursuit) then multiply that by 16. It's insanity – wonderful insanity – with rockets and helicopters soaring through the air, and players doing everything they can to win or thwart you. The game offers a slew of game modes, too, including my favorites GTA Race (think *Cannonball Run* with backstabbing death), and Cops 'n Crooks. The multiplayer runs just as smoothly as the single-player game, and offers an insane level of customization.

On top of the standout experiences mentioned, there so much more to appreciate about this game. Its dynamic mission structuring, remarkable sound design, wealth of side content, amazing animation, the list goes on and on. Long story short, I never thought I would see this much content in a game.

Grand Theft Auto IV doesn't just raise the bar for the storied franchise; it completely changes the landscape of gaming. Once you play it, you won't look at video games the same way again.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE **10**

> Concept: This smartly penned crime story puts player freedom on a pedestal, and backs it up with outstanding gunplay and the next big multiplayer experience

> Graphics: You'll lose yourself in your surroundings – the striking environment details, variety of people on the streets, the physics-based showering of bodies after a car explodes. On top of this, the framerate never skips a beat

> Sound: The soundtrack is fantastic, but the true master stroke here is the voice work

> Playability: Simply put, it plays the way you always wanted Grand Theft Auto to play

> Entertainment: In terms of content, this may even be a better deal than The Orange Box. It just gives and gives and gives

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion **10**

There are epic gaming experiences, and then there is Grand Theft Auto IV. The latest installment of Rockstar's flagship surpasses the benchmark set by San Andreas in every possible way. With the aid of an impressive graphics engine, improved gunplay mechanics, the phenomenal Natural Motion Euphoria animation technology, and a deep story that, unlike other GTAs, features a heart underneath its myriad double-crosses and stick-ups, GTA IV is the most action-packed open world ever created. Liberty City's great array of characters, radio stations, television channels, and websites offer searing satires of modern American life; you'd have a hard time finding a more comprehensive lambasting of our culture in any other media form. But the star of the show is Niko Bellic; the Eastern European anti-hero is my favorite criminal since *Deadwood's* Al Swearengen. On top of the phenomenal story of Bellic, Rockstar also offers an addictive multiplayer that will have players jonesing for a free-for-all match well into the summer. Damn, it feels good to be a gangster.—**BERTZ**

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The PlayStation 3 iteration kind of takes a shotgun to the face with Rockstar siding exclusively with the Xbox 360 for downloadable content that is said to be sizeable. Other than that and optional motion-based PS3 controls, both versions are identical.

NINJA GAIDEN II
TECMO
Microsoft
Team NINJA
Jump in.
XBOX 360 LIVE

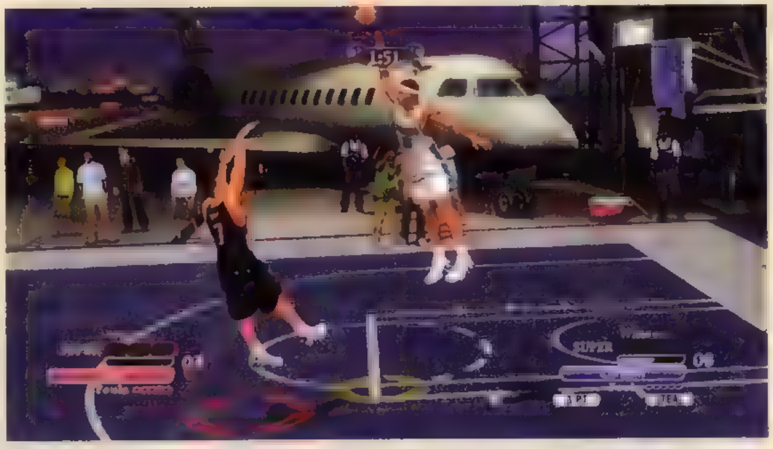
THE FINE LINE BETWEEN HONOR AND VENGEANCE WILL BE CROSSED BY ONE.

Hayabusa returns in the only true sequel to Ninja Gaiden. Exclusively on the Xbox 360. Four difficulty levels, from Acolyte to Master Ninja.

xbox.com/ng2

MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Partial Nudity
Suggestive Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Ninja Gaiden 2 © 2008 Tecmo Ltd. Ninja Gaiden is a registered trademark of Tecmo Ltd. Tecmo is registered trademark of Tecmo Ltd. Team Ninja and the Team Ninja logos are trademarks of Tecmo Ltd.
© 2008 Microsoft Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Microsoft, the Microsoft logo, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NBA Ballers: Chosen One

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** MIDWAY
> **RELEASE** APRIL 21 > **ESRB** T

LOOSE BALL FOUL

NBA Ballers is back, and this time it ditches the poorly received off-court adventure to focus completely on the hoops experience. The story is your typical rags-to-riches plot. As a highly touted street baller, you're invited to test your mettle against the NBA's best (and Adam Morrison), leveling up your skills as you move from court to court.

The modest character creation system allows you to mold your player from preset facial and body features. Then you can deck him out in the athletic apparel or luxury fashion wear of your choosing. When you're not in story mode, you can control one of the 60 NBA players featured in the game, including modern superstars and old-school legends like Larry Bird and Magic Johnson. While the roster includes most major players, there are some questionable omissions like Deron Williams, Shawn Marion, and Kevin Martin in favor of perennial busts like Ricky Davis and Sebastian Telfair.

The story mode pits you in various competitions like one-on-one showdowns, three point contests, and two-on-two competitions, sometimes featuring a twist. For example, in one competition, we had to keep Stojakovic from draining three-pointers to advance. As you execute Act-A-Fool combos and score, a meter will fill that eventually unleashes Shut 'Em Down moves, which pull you away from the action to watch overly long cutscenes of your court supremacy. But the single-player competition has one major flaw: whenever you find yourself in a bind, you can simply hold down turbo, drive straight to the basket, and dunk on any opponent. So much for skill. The over-the-top arcade action comes alive during head-to-head competitions, as pulling off Act-A-Fool combos becomes a true test of skill. If a defender beats you to the quick button press, he or she will counter the combo and steal the ball. Unfortunately, Midway fails to take advantage of this by offering a barren online multiplayer component that only features one-on-one matches, with no options for creating tournaments or teaming up with other players.

Overall, NBA Ballers: Chosen One offers a decent arcade basketball experience, but its short single player and weak online options ultimately keep it from unseating the current street champ, NBA Street Homecourt.—**BERTZ**

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

> **Concept:** Display mad one-on-one skillz against the NBA elite

> **Graphics:** Great player models, but a small basic animation set keeps the Madame Tussauds figures from coming to life

> **Sound:** Chuck D on the mic and a soundtrack by Just Blaze give Ballers its street cred

> **Playability:** Controls are fluid unless you're rebounding or chasing a loose ball

> **Entertainment:** Short single player and weak multiplayer, but head-to-head games are fun

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

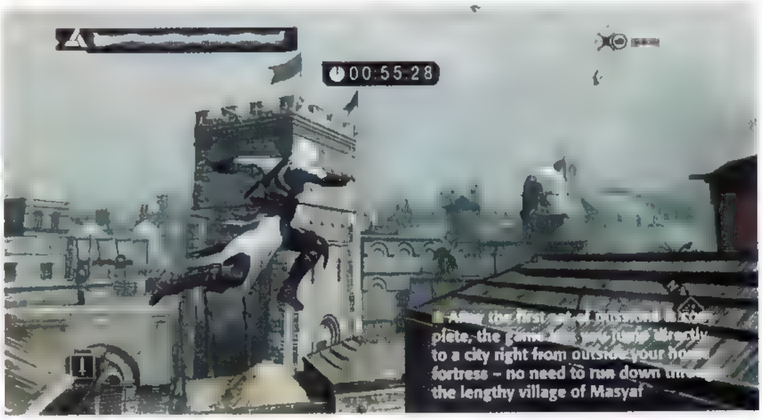
Second Opinion 7.25

Street ball naturally plays a little fast and loose with normal basketball rules, but this game could use some tightening up. AI is my biggest beef, and grabbing rebounds and loose balls can be tricky – particularly when the ball rolls to half-court and the camera does you no favors. For the most part, however, Ballers is fun, with easy to pull off moves and good pacing in building up your special meter. Glitz is added with video commentary by Chuck D, but I think that Ballers could do better in this area, whether that's by letting players distribute their own stats, have more in-game access to special moves, or by adding a custom crib or court. Regardless of the areas this game could improve in or expand, it's hard to argue with it too much when you kick the ball over your head into the basket or breakdance during a game.—**KATO**

PC

Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut Edition

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
> **RELEASE** APRIL 8 > **ESRB** M



After the first set of missions is complete, the game lets you jump directly to a city right from outside your home fortress – no need to run down through the lengthy village of Masyaf

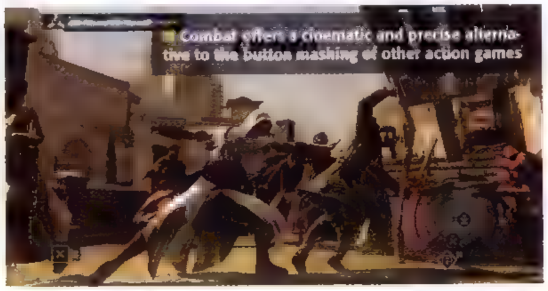
SLIGHTLY BIGGER, QUESTIONABLY BETTER

I loved last year's console release of Assassin's Creed. While it suffers from a repetitive mission structure, the game does so many things remarkably well that this doesn't take away from the overall experience. The insanely gorgeous locales are lifted straight out of history, the innovative new control scheme changes the way players think about moving through the world, and the sweeping story plants the seeds for a much grander epic. Combined, these features make for a stellar product. Now all those folks without a decent console get a shot at the action. Right?

If you have one hell of a gaming PC, then the answer is yes. When pumped up to max settings, this new director's cut makes the game look better than ever. Individual textures pop off the screen, making cloth and stone appear remarkably lifelike. Thanks to some already great level design and art, light and shadow interplay to perfectly set the mood for the cities and environments. The game looks great all around, but examine the system requirements carefully before a purchase.

Meanwhile, the game suffers from a questionable conversion to mouse and keyboard controls. Even with the option to remap buttons, the mix of holding down different inputs that worked so well on a console controller doesn't hold up on a keyboard, and the mouse-driven camera only worsens the matter. To experience the game's strengths to the fullest, a decent PC-compatible gamepad is essential.

Content-wise, a few small additions attempt to address the game's biggest problem. By adding four new investigation types, like the stealth archer assassinations or the market stall destruction encounters, the tedium of repetition is somewhat alleviated. Otherwise, expect the same engrossing and unique gameplay experience that your console friends had. Whatever its flaws, Assassin's Creed serves as a herald of things to come in more ways than one – experience it for yourself.—**MILLER**



Combat offers a cinematic and precise alternative to the button mashing of other action games

BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** Drop into a fictionalized history of the Crusades and deal out justice in the name of a greater good

> **Graphics:** If your rig can handle it, this is one of the prettiest games out there

> **Sound:** An atmospheric soundtrack weaves its way through the game, and much of the voice work is excellent

> **Playability:** There are some profound stumbles in translating the controls to a mouse and keyboard

> **Entertainment:** One of the most innovative console games of 2007 gets a good port, presuming you have the hardware needed for an optimal experience

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8

Assassin's Creed is as good as ever. It looks amazing, and the added missions inject variety into the investigation process. Except the escort missions (Why do these still exist!?). However, if you're stuck with a keyboard and mouse, the experience is noticeably diminished. No matter how you map your keys, the controls will never quite sink in. You need to use a more conventional controller; otherwise, what was once a fluid game full of adrenaline-fueled rooftop chases becomes a stilted battle against your keyboard. It's still playable, but it's tough to enjoy this game to the fullest with that added barrier between you and the rich world of Assassin's Creed.—**JOE**

TheIsh
www.theish.com

99711* From Only $1 per item*

This Month's Must Haves!

Wallpapers	Themes	Screensavers	Games	Realtones
[illegible]	[illegible]	move1604	[illegible]	Touch My Body Mariah Carey real1830 MARIAH
pic2008 pic2009 pic2010 pic2011 pic2012 pic2013 pic2014 pic2015 pic2016 pic2017 pic2018 pic2019	skin1576 skin1577 skin1578 skin1579 skin1580 skin1581 skin1582 skin1583 skin1584 skin1585	move1605 move1606 move1607 move1608 move1609	game1109 game1110 game1111 game1112	

[illegible]	real1831
Love In This Club - Usher Feat Young Jeezy	real1832
[illegible]	[illegible]
The Boss - Rick Ross Feat T-Pain	real1834
[illegible]	[illegible]
Umma Do Me - Rocko	real1836
[illegible]	[illegible]
Who The Heck Is That? - Della Feat T-Pain	real1838
[illegible]	[illegible]
Life Of Da Party - Snoop Dogg	real1840
[illegible]	[illegible]
Sensual Seduction - Snoop Dogg	real1842
Crank Dat Batman - Pop It Off Boyz	real1843
Apologize - Timbaland	real1844
Pop Bottles - Birdman	real1845
Super Mario Bros.	real1846
[illegible]	[illegible]
We Rollin' - The Paperboyz	real1848
Blow Ya Mind - Styles P Feat Swizz Beatz	real1849
Party Like A Rock Star - Shop Boyz	real1850
Contra - Theme From the Game	real1851
California Love - 2Pac Feat Dr. Dre	real1852
How We Do It In The A - Lloyd & Ludacris	real1853
Stronger - Kanye West	real1854
[illegible]	[illegible]

HOW TO ORDER

1. Go to Messages
2. Select Create Message
3. Text Orderword pic2008
4. Send to 99711

HOW TO DOWNLOAD

5. Go To Inbox
6. Select Link
7. Start Download
8. Save and Enjoy!

NEED HELP?

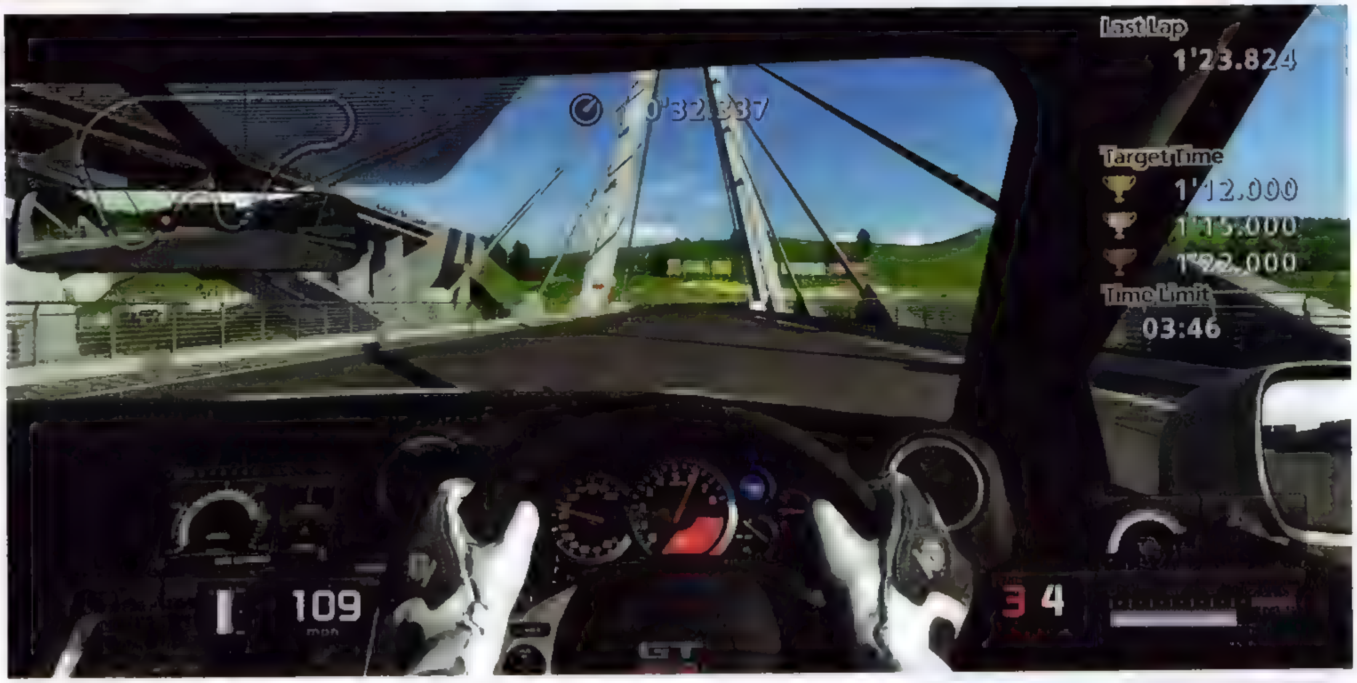
CALL 877-THE-ISH4 OR
E-MAIL: CARE@THEISH.COM

SUPPORTED CARRIERS:
AT&T Sprint Verizon T-Mobile virgin mobile

To access our services you need a cellphone with correct WAP or GPRS configuration enabled. If you have problems downloading, please contact our Customer Care hotline (see below).

* ALL CONTENT ITEMS CAN BE REDEEMED WITH THE CHIPS OPBTAINED AS PART OF THE MONTHLY THE ISH VIP CLUB SUBSCRIPTION, WHICH IS SUBJECT TO THE TERMS OF SERVICE AT THEISH.COM. IN THE ISH VIP CLUB YOU WILL GET A STACK OF 800 CHIPS THAT IS REFILLED EVERY MONTH, FOR JUST **$7.99/MONTH.** REALTONES/VIDEORINGTONES CAN BE REDEEMED FOR 200 CHIPS, GAMES/APPLICATIONS FOR 300 CHIPS (NOT AVAILABLE FOR VERIZON WIRELESS CUSTOMERS). ANY OTHER CONTENT ITEM FOR 100 CHIPS. ADDITIONALLY, YOU WILL RECEIVE A BONUS THEISH TONE OF THE MONTH. YOU WILL BE CHARGED ON YOUR CARRIER BILL. CHIPS CAN BE REDEEMED AT THEISH.COM. THE ISH VIP CLUB MEMBERSHIP AUTOMATICALLY RENEWS UNTIL YOU CANCEL. YOU MUST BE AT LEAST 18 YEARS OLD OR HAVE YOUR PARENT'S PERMISSION TO SIGN UP ON THEIR BEHALF NORMAL MESSAGING/DATA CHARGES APPLY. DO NOT RESEND YOUR ORDER IF YOU DO NOT RECEIVE THE PRODUCT. A CARRIER DATA PLAN IS REQUIRED. IF YOUR HANDSET DOES NOT SUPPORT CONTENT, NEXT BEST SUPPORTED CONTENT IS BEING DELIVERED. **TO TERMINATE YOUR CLUB MEMBERHIP TEXT „STOP" TO 99711. QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT CUSTOMER CARE SERVICES AT CARE@THEISH.COM OR CALL 877-THE-ISH4.**

2007 IMBP Inc. Are You Smarter Than A 5th Grader? Are You Smarter Than A Fifth Grader? and all related logos and slogans TM IMBP Inc. All Rights Reserved. Surface is a trademark and copyright of Universal Studios licensed by Universal Studios Licensing [illegible] All Rights Reserved. [illegible] Mobile Tomb Raider Anniversary [illegible] 2006 Eidos Interactive Ltd. [illegible] Tomb Raider are trademarks of [illegible] Mobile [illegible] are trademarks of the Eidos Interactive Ltd. All rights reserved.



PLAYSTATION 3

Gran Turismo 5: Prologue

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** POLYPHONY DIGITAL > **RELEASE** APRIL 15 > **ESRB** E

DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION?

This game is not Gran Turismo 5, and franchise leader Kazunori Yamauchi has been clear about that. Beyond this, Yamauchi's intent seems a little up in the air. Developer Polyphony Digital has some post-launch content plans (see below) to evolve this title, but it is working on Gran Turismo 5 all the while, and many of Prologue's current and future features will carry over into GT 5. Although Prologue freely admits its stopgap status, this is not just a tune-up – what this game may lack in features it replaces with its near perfect racing line.

Other racing games are certainly faster and more accessible, but for hardcore racing fans like me, this franchise has its driving dialed in – Prologue status notwithstanding. As easy as it would be to classify Prologue's sim-based racing as hard or too complex, I know that when I blow a race I never have anyone to blame but myself. The game's cars, and their varying driving styles, offer plenty of feedback to let me know when I'm coming into a corner too fast, not hitting the right line, etc. This is how you fall in love with cars; you learn how to race them, pushing them to the edge and then reeling them in enough to live through the next corner. In response, Prologue's AI racers have their hands full as well, and many will mess up their lines, drive into the dirt, and show a little aggression from time to time.

Despite the racing sweetness, Prologue has a hard time backing up this core with much more than fluff like GT-TV. Without the usual car parts, racing customizations, or deep career structure, this game acts as the stereotypical expansion pack. While Prologue offers over 70 cars, its paltry number of tracks is another knock against it. Online is certainly a nice addition for the series, but this is nothing new to GT's peers. Finally, the game's lack of damage (at the time of this review) is inadequately replaced by a penalty system that's exercised inconsistently.

The strength of this game's racing only makes its lack of growth in other fundamental areas all the more baffling. How easy would it be for Gran Turismo to rule the racing world if Polyphony put half the effort it does into capturing muffler audio into areas like a new career mode, pacing, and other features that rival franchises have conquered long ago? Until then, this series' commitment to racing will have to suffice, and I think it will for franchise fans, but few else.—**KATO**

WHAT YOU'LL NEED FOR SPEED

Class C (10 races)

Cars needed: I suggest the Honda Integra Type R '04 (27,300 cr.), which is not only a solid car, but will fulfill multiple race requirements in the class. Also get the Suzuki Cappuccino '95 (14,600 cr.), which meets the remaining stipulations

This class is easy to finish and the tracks aren't complex. The hardest is perhaps Eiger Nordwand, which you have to do backwards and forwards.

Class B (10 races)

Cars needed: The 4WD Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX '05 GSR (35,700 cr.) pretty much takes care of all your Class B needs

Class B introduces the full Suzuka, the London city and Daytona infield courses. Not only is your Lancer up to the task HP wise, but you have the luxury of starting in the middle of the 12- and 16-car fields.

Class A (10 races)

Cars Needed: An American muscle car w/ 300+ HP, a BMW M3 Coupe (92,400 cr), and a Ferrari F430 '06 (243,200 cr)

This is a big step up from Class B. The problem here is not that you don't have a car fast enough, it's that you often risk going too fast. Being able to handle and brake your car correctly is key since you start races in the back of the field, and getting to the front requires no screw-ups or sloppy racing.

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: I consider this less a taste of what GT 5's going to be, and more of a hold-over/intro for the series on the PS3

> Graphics: Looks great. The light bloom when you come out of tunnels is sweet

> Sound: Listen for the wind resistance created when you're not in the draft

> Playability: I highly suggest the cockpit view, which is not as hard to race from as you think

> Entertainment: This is a game for fans only, as the rest of you will miss some of the genre amenities that Prologue lacks

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 8

The name of the game says it all – Prologue is a taste of what is to come. It offers up a sizeable garage of 70 local and exotic cars, but only 30 single-player events. If you are determined, you can fly through all of the challenges in a day, although you will have to dedicate some serious time to replaying events if you wish to purchase all of the vehicles. That begs the question, is it worth purchasing? Absolutely. Prologue's offering may be a bit anorexic, but its racing is second to none. Next to test-driving a real car at a dealership, I haven't come across cars that handle this nicely. With an incredible cockpit view, and weight transferring as you turn, you really feel like you are driving these cars. It's an incredible sensation. The series also makes strides forward in its AI. Your opponents show aggression, and don't always drive perfect lines. You also can't plow into them to cheat turns These are small touches, but they really add to the realism. If your only venue is single player, you are really cheating yourself. Prologue's engine roars online with up to 16 players in a race. This is just a prelude to greater things, but you really couldn't ask for a more impressive sampling.—**REINER**

The Future Of Gran Turismo 5: Prologue

Hold onto your helmets, because developer Polyphony Digital plans to expand the feature set of Prologue as time goes on via downloadable updates. Not only does this include more GT-TV content and online races, but recently creator Kazunori Yamauchi confirmed that damage and online community features will be available for Prologue at an unspecified point this fall

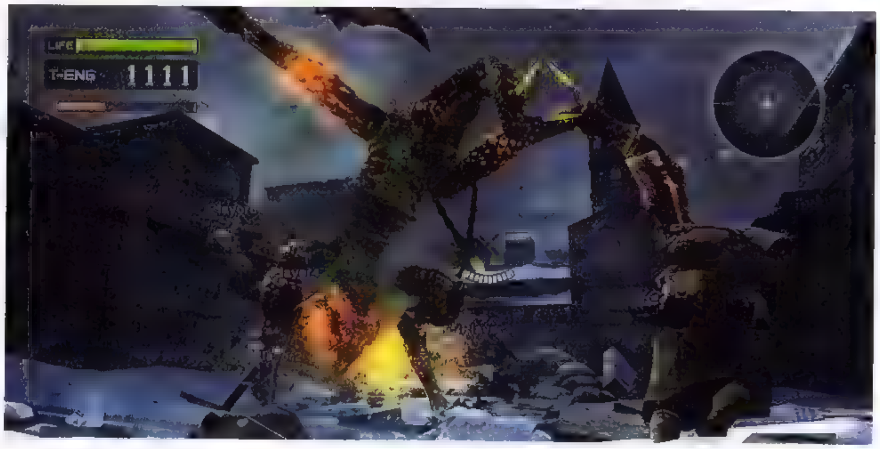
MAGNETI MARELLI

The retail version comes with a bonus GT-TV feature not available in the download edition

XBOX 360

Lost Planet: Extreme Condition Colonies Edition

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM > **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM > **RELEASE** MAY 27 > **ESRB** T



REALLY? AGAIN?

The latest iteration of Lost Planet delivers different things to different people. For newcomers, Colonies Edition offers the best version of an already good game for a cheap $30. On the other hand, fans of the original game have loads of fresh content to experience, but some of it comes at a price. A new set of 1,000 Gamerscore points adds updated incentives, but previous game saves sadly do not transfer. While the new Resident Evil 4-style camera option fails to impress, at least the FPS view (sans onscreen gun) provides a relatively decent and different way to play through again. But the real reward for beating stages is Unlimited mode. Upon completion of a level, you can return to it with super speed and unlimited ammo. While this may not sound like much, the fact that our hero Wayne can finally move faster than a cement truck ratchets up the fun considerably. Frankly, this is the way Lost Planet should have played all along.

Unfortunately, this newfound sense of speed does not make the jump to multiplayer – an improvement that would have been better than all of the new maps, weapons, and character skins combined. That doesn't necessarily mean new locations like a space station or arsenal additions like the VS-slaying Hand Cannon aren't great, it's just tough to go back to the old pace. The best new multiplayer mode puts players in control of a massive Akrid beast while a team of humans tries to bring it down. A team-based VS escort and protect mode comes in at a close second.

You can now face off against PC players on the 360, but you can't battle owners of the original version of Lost Planet. While this was initially disappointing, it got me wondering just how many people are even playing the original online anymore. In fact, the added robust multiplayer features plus a combined pool of mostly new players is probably just the shot in the arm the online game needs.

A challenging boss rush mode uses an innovative bracketing feature that rewards faster players with bigger bosses (think Green Eye instead of a random VS boss). Score Attack skillfully apes Call of Duty 4's Arcade mode with points and combo multipliers awarded for every kill.

In the end, super fans and newbies should definitely give Colonies a look. But if you thought the original Lost Planet was just okay, no amount of extras is going to change your mind.—**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Lower the price, add new stuff, and pray the gaming public is ready for the fourth release of this arctic adventure

> **Graphics:** Largely unchanged, but still impressive after a year and a half

> **Sound:** The abundance of massive creatures, clanking Vital Suits, and plentiful explosions were made for surround sound

> **Playability:** New FPS and Unlimited modes add some spice to the combat

> **Entertainment:** This is the definitive version of Lost Planet…for those who might still be interested

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

One of the many things that I really liked about the original Lost Planet was the larger-than-life feel to the game – like when a 10-story Akrid roared out of the deep snow and there was nowhere to hide. Now Capcom is bringing it all back in the form of Colonies, with a slew of new modes and nearly twice the multiplayer content. The new Akrid Hunter mode, which allows players to take on a group of friends as one of the giant monsters from single player in an online battle, is a standout among the six new multiplayer games. Although the new Unlimited mode allows for faster running, this title is still screaming for a sprint button. Still, fans of the original have every reason to snatch it up.—**NICK**

Once a walker gets into your base, it's pretty much over

XBOX 360

Universe at War: Earth Assault

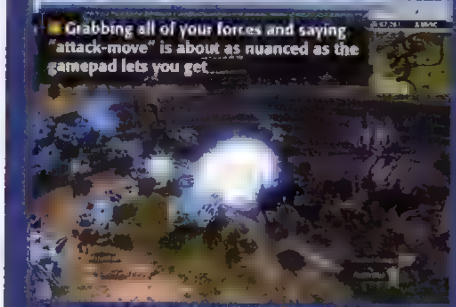
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** PETROGLYPH > **RELEASE** MARCH 25 > **ESRB** T

CRASH LANDING

On PC, last year's Universe at War was an enjoyable real-time strategy romp in the mold of StarCraft. Two issues prevent this Xbox 360 port from being worth your time: imprecise gamepad control and unforgivable, constant, maddening framerate drops.

The gameplay is vanilla RTS with some intriguing faction design. Each of the three sides has its own style of play, and those differences come across well enough that a match feels entirely different depending on which faction you're controlling. The Novus must use superior mobility to win, the Masari need to flip their armies between light and dark modes, and the Hierarchy relies on their massive walkers to carry them to victory. Despite the variety, the sides are well balanced and each is amusing in its own way.

Sadly, this creative depth is wasted by unbelievably poor port work. The slowdown in this game completely guts any enjoyment that could otherwise be found. We're talking about grinding stutters that get so bad your inputs won't even register. And it's not just when there's a lot going on onscreen, either – a few minutes into any match sees the framerate progressively degrade to the point that the game is barely playable. Furthermore, while the gamepad control scheme is reasonably well conceived, it's clear that the gameplay was designed with a mouse in mind. The amount of micromanagement necessary to be a reasonably effective player is all but impossible on the 360 pad.



Grabbing all of your forces and saying "attack-move" is about as nuanced as the gamepad lets you get

It's a shame this port was released in a worse technical state than many beta builds I've played, because the core design of Universe at War (minus the lame by-the-numbers scripted campaign) is quite good. As it is, the best thing we can hope for is that Sega releases a patch to make it possible for players to experience what the game has to offer without constant single-digit framerates.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Build armies of mechanical monstrosities to crush the opposition

> **Graphics:** Decent enough, but for the horrific framerate problems

> **Sound:** The electric, guitar-driven score is appropriate for the bombastic onscreen action

> **Playability:** Not bad as far as console RTS goes, but this micromanagement-heavy game suffers on the 360 pad

> **Entertainment:** If it worked, it'd be breezy fun. Unfortunately, that is not the case

> **Replay Value:** [illegible]

Second Opinion 8

It's easy to lose yourself in the units of destruction that this game lays at your fingertips. Each faction has its cool particularities, and I like how many special attacks the units have at their disposal and the extra layer of customization the game provides for each side, such as the Novus patches. That's not to say that all this is easy to coordinate on the fly, or that the game isn't without its bugs or hiccups. But it didn't overshadow my fun in crushing foes under a customized walker packed to the gills with guns and tech.—**KATO**

Wii

Mario Kart Wii

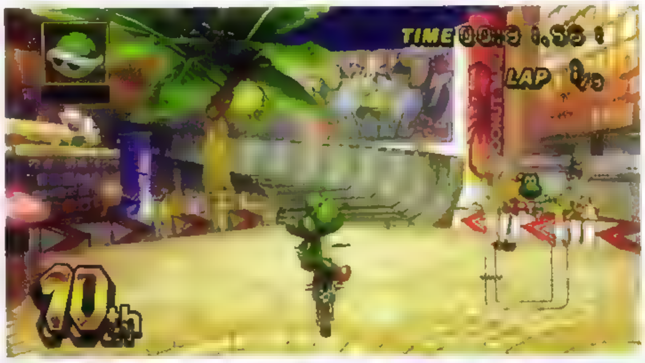
> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> DEVELOPER NINTENDO **> RELEASE** APRIL 29 **> ESRB** E

RAINBOW ROAD GETS HARDER EVERY TIME

Not many franchises out there are capable of getting by on the same old schtick. Even fewer maintain their relevance and entertainment value through the years despite never making major changes. Mario Kart, however, somehow manages to entrance gamers anew with every release – and this Wii entry is no exception. Losing the co-op antics of Double Dash is a severe disappointment, but there are enough minor improvements to the rest of the game to make Mario Kart Wii a strong installment of the venerable series.

The gameplay is exactly what you would expect out of Mario Kart: fast-paced gonzo racing on a selection of insane tracks (12 new, 12 classic) with a bunch of explosive items in the mix to keep even the best drivers on their toes. The control is brilliant, the courses are tuned to perfection, and everything is polished to a high shine.

As a hardcore Mario Kart fan, the overhaul of the mini-turbo system takes a while to get used to. The new system (which is tied to the degree of your drift, rather than controller input as in previous games) certainly levels the playing field a bit between amateurs and veterans, but is that really a good thing? The franchise already catches enough flak for being newb-friendly and spastically random – which is admittedly part of its genius – but the turbo change feels like a dumbing-down of the gameplay in the pursuit of a misguided desire to make it somehow easier for my grandma to pick up and play. Note to Nintendo: Stop.



Racers and karts (as well as the new bikes) have been rebalanced as well, but in a good way. Much more so than in other Mario Kart titles, the light/medium/heavy choice is a strategic and stylistic decision rather than an opportunity to intentionally gimp yourself against inferior competition. Sure, it's still tough to keep Bowser's fat rear on the Rainbow Road, but at least it's reasonably possible to win races with heavies now. Likewise, the balance between karts and bikes feels just right. Karts get better drift boosts, while bikes can wheelie for some extra straightaway speed – a simple but surprisingly relevant distinction on the track.

Online is a big focus for Mario Kart Wii, and it's about as good an implementation as possible within Nintendo's labyrinthine rules and regulations for Wii online play. The racing itself works well, and the Mario Kart channel has all sorts of goodies to allow you to view the statistics of players worldwide and find your place on the bell curve of Mario Kart skills. Hopefully there will be fewer idiots dropping connection when they're about to lose than in the DS version, but only time will tell.

I feel very strongly that dropping the tag-team racing from Double Dash was an utterly boneheaded decision on Nintendo's part, but you can't fault much of anything else in Mario Kart Wii. This is a great game, single- or multiplayer, online or off.—**ADAM**

Yea, second place will still throw red shells backwards at you. Collusion!

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> Concept: Improve nearly everything about Mario Kart and finally give the franchise a respectable online component

> Graphics: Stop me if you've heard this one before. This looks good... for a Wii game

> Sound: As always, the upbeat music fits the whimsical gameplay perfectly. As a bonus, Wario's taunts are hilarious

> Playability: Traditional control works great, but don't bother with the stupid wheel

> Entertainment: The granddaddy of kart racers is still the king

> Replay Value: High

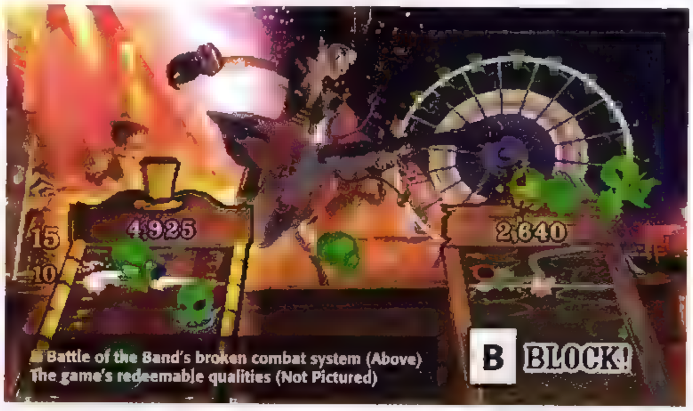
Second Opinion 8.5

What can I say about Mario Kart Wii? It's exactly what I expected. No unanticipated surprises, no glaring disappointments. I'll undoubtedly take pleasure in playing it, just like its predecessors. Minor adjustments to the gameplay formula keep Mario Kart Wii fresh to an extent. The inclusion of bikes, original attacks, tricks, and online capabilities complement the Wii's inherently unique experience. The variety of control options keeps hardcore karters challenged and allows for intuitive play for novices to the series. However, Mario Kart Wii feels like an old gift in new wrapping. It has new levels, characters, and karts, but the same classic music, iconic graphics, and gameplay. Reinventing the wheel may not be practical for the Mario Kart franchise, but one must wonder how long Nintendo can ride on the wave of innovation from its hardware alone.—**MEAGAN**

Wii

Battle of the Bands

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** PLANET MOON STUDIOS
> RELEASE APRIL 21 **> ESRB** T



Battle of the Band's broken combat system (Above) The game's redeemable qualities (Not Pictured)

A LOSING BATTLE

The Battle of the Bands' song list is a mixed bag, but that's okay because you spend most of your time remixing each one with the game's five musical styles: rock, country, hip-hop, Latin, and marching band You might even find that you enjoy some of these songs more after they've gone through this Frankenstein mash-up. For a guy like me who enjoys a diverse number of musical styles, giving a country twang to Soundgarden's "Spoonman" or throwing a hip-hop beat over Korn's "Coming Undone" is the game's shining achievement.

Tragically, my praise for Battle of the Bands stops there. Gameplay is simple. Gems scroll up from the bottom of the screen and you'll match the song's beat to motions of the Wii remote. Music games tend to require a higher level of precision than most other games, but the motion-based gameplay feels devoid of skill. For the most part, you're waving the remote in one of three different directions: left, right, or down. And that's it. You don't build up a combo score for accuracy or gain any power-ups that dramatically affect your score. If fact, you probably won't care what your score is as long as you beat your opponent, so there isn't much incentive for replaying songs.

Since Battle of the Bands is structured like a fighting game, you're always battling someone. If you're not playing with a friend, the game's AI can be very inconsistent. The combat system is too limited to make you feel like you're actually fighting anything, and the block mechanic is poorly implemented. Some of the more powerful weapons don't even seem to affect the AI's performance.

I haven't laughed this much while playing a game since I was making fun of Donkey Kong Barrel Blast, but Battle of the Bands' one great idea would have benefited from some more robust gameplay. As it stands, it's little more than an amusing party game that you'll pop in only when you and your friends are between sets of Rock Band.—**BEN**

If being in a marching band was really this hilarious we might have actually joined one in high school instead of beaning eggs off their heads from behind the bleachers. (Don't worry, they deserved it. They were dorks)

BOTTOM LINE 6

> Concept: Pick your favorite musical genre, then do harmonic battle against a motley collection of freakish bands

> Graphics: Not the PS2's – I mean the Wii's finest moment. We expect more from music games at this point

> Sound: The song covers are all done well, and are by far the best part of the game

> Playability: Each band has its own set of attacks, but it's hard to know how they operate until you've spent some time with them

> Entertainment: If you don't like the idea of mixing up the musical styles of popular songs, then the finicky gameplay won't win you over

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.75

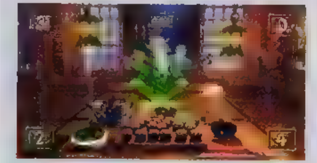
There's half of a good idea here recreating multiple versions of each song in different genres ranging from metal to Latin and switching between them on the fly makes for some really striking moments. It's a great bit of musical wit, and helps to distinguish this Guitar Hero clone from its more popular predecessor. However, the other ways in which it deviates from the formula sink Battle of the Bands. Instead of an awesomely accurate guitar controller, you're stuck with flailing the Wii remote, an imprecise and gimmicky gameplay mechanic that I never really connected with. I liked hearing the different takes on some of the songs, but the gameplay doesn't induce that feeling of sublime addiction that is the mark of any great music game This would make a hell of a mode in Rock Band though.—**MATT**

Wii QUICKIES

Wii

Ninja Reflex

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION
> PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS/ NUNCHUCK GAMES **> DEVELOPER** SANZARU GAMES **> RELEASE** MARCH 4
> ESRB E10+



BOTTOM LINE 5

If you enjoy the various minigame compilations on the Wii, Ninja Reflex wants to take cruel advantage of you. Offering little variety, shallow activities, and no fun whatsoever, Ninja Reflex does nothing to justify its $40 price tag. It offers six types of games (all with a generic, stereotypical Far East flavor, like throwing ninja stars and catching flies with chopsticks), only three of which feature simultaneous multiplayer. Even more flaws surface when you leave the menu screen and begin playing – or trying to play – the broken minigames. For all of the disgust Ninja Reflex slowly draws up from the pit of your stomach, it should have been branded Gag Reflex instead.—**JOE**

Wii

Emergency Mayhem

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/RACING
> PUBLISHER CODEMASTERS
> DEVELOPER SUPERSONIC SOFTWARE
> RELEASE APRIL 15 **> ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

On nearly every city block, you'll see a dumpster on fire, a criminal on the loose, or someone collapsed in cardiac arrest. As a firefighter, police officer, or paramedic, you must race against the clock to clean up the mayhem. This may sound like a fairly intense proposition, but with light traffic, streets that mostly challenge you to drive straight, and generous time bonus rewards, it ends up being a yawn-inducing Sunday drive. In addition to the blasé driving sequences, you'll be asked to complete minigames, such as shaking the remote to pump up a tire. While they add much needed variety, their poor designs mostly make you want to die. The single-player experience can be completed in a few hours, and the painful minigames give you good reason to skip the multiplayer.—**REINER**

00'22"
720°
720°

Wii

We Ski

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> DEVELOPER NAMCO **> RELEASE** JUNE 13 **> ESRB** E

THE DOWNWARD SLOPE

Sometimes Wii games make me feel like I've been given a bowl of Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup. Only instead of a spoon, I've been given chopsticks. After some combination of shoveling and slurping, I've definitely had a unique eating experience. However, it doesn't distract from the fact that I've just had the same bland old broth.

We Ski allows you to steer by using both sticks as ski poles or using the balance board to navigate as you would in real life. For a while at least, it's a neat gimmick. I definitely prefer the balance board controls, as they made the pedestrian races both more challenging and exciting (it's worth noting that the balance board cannot be used in multiplayer).

The race modes are unsurprising: straight-up vanilla racing, slalom, and moguls. There are some tricks, but the response time is slow and they don't really add to the experience. You'll be better off in the Freestyle mode, which at least lets you explore the mountain RPG-style, taking missions from random skiers and finding a few Easter eggs along the way. It's cute, but after awhile the "fetch quest" missions start to grate.

All in all, We Ski tries, and is largely successful, at creating a casual skiing game with a novel control mechanic. Which is great, but the actual content wouldn't have held my attention for even an hour if it were just some old PS2 game (which, graphically, it sadly resembles). So, can a game be both a failure and a success at the same time? I believe philosophers call this the "Wii paradox."—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 6.25

> Concept: A casual ski title created to work with Nintendo's Wii Fit balance board

> Graphics: Big heads, low-res textures – this must be a Wii game

> Sound: Lighthearted and catchy – also, we're sure we heard a Katamari song playing over the mountain loudspeakers!

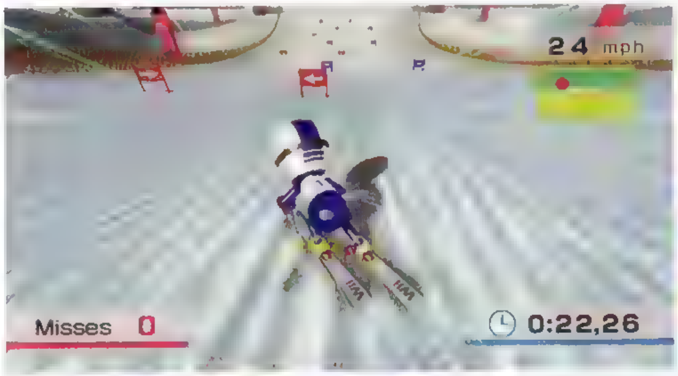
> Playability: Both control modes work just fine, although it's more entertaining with the balance board

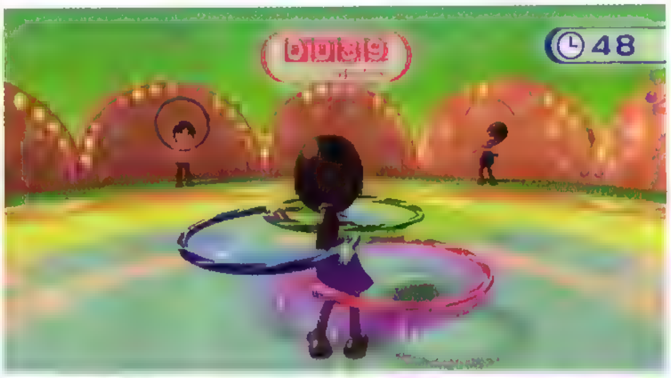
> Entertainment: While it's good fun in the short term, the game is dull once you get past the novel controls

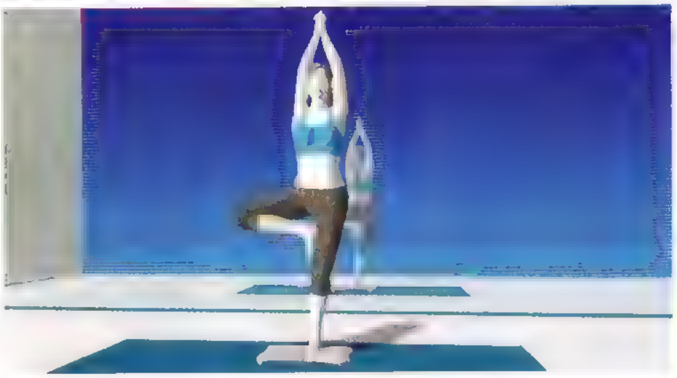
> Replay Value: Moderate

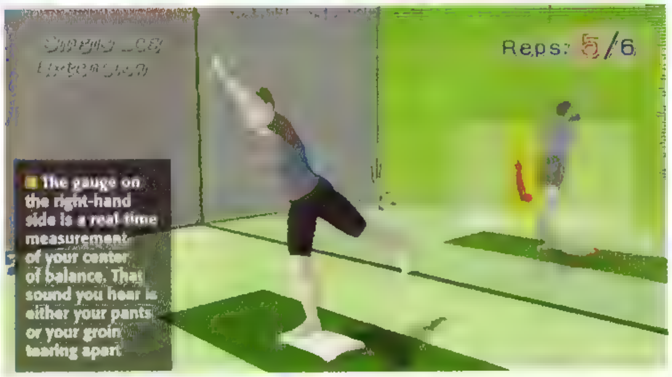
Second Opinion 7.25

Namco might have created a game that requires more skill than actual skiing. Not that the game's hard, there's just such a variety to the button combinations and motion controls that you'll have to run the bunny hill several times before you get comfortable moving down the slopes. We Ski's trick system helps make this an amusing pastime, but it's no SSX The game feels rather subdued, and the challenges are pretty sparse The Wii Fit board functionality adds innovation, but it doesn't add what this game really needs: excitement.—**BEN**

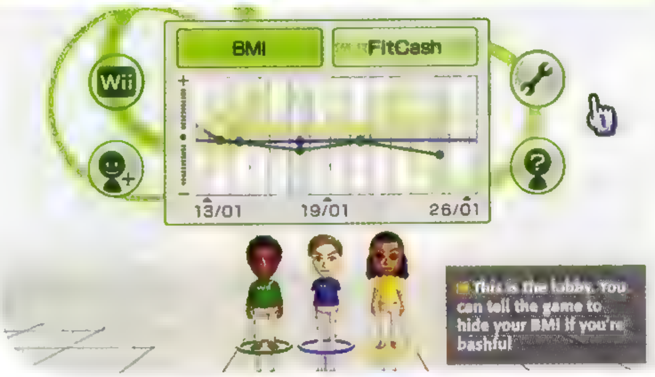








The gauge on the right-hand side is a real-time measurement of your center of balance. That sound you hear is either your pants or your groin tearing apart



This is the lobby. You can tell the game to hide your BMI if you're bashful

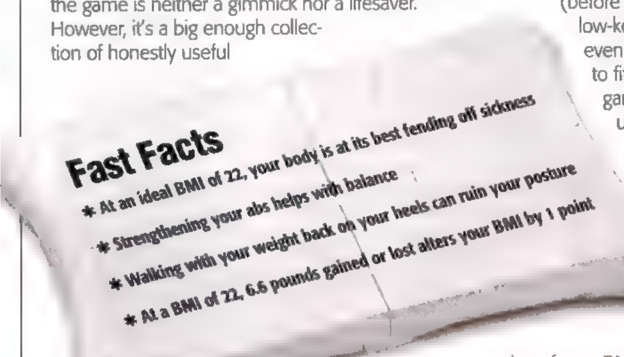
Wii

Wii Fit

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
> **RELEASE** MAY 19 > **ESRB** E

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

A moment comes in everyone's exercise routine when it's literally and figuratively gut check time. Are you in it to win it or are you really just jogging around the lakes to give your eyes a workout at all the knockout babes or beefcakes? If you're more likely to stick to the donut diet than *Buns of Steel*, you might want to save yourself the $90 that Wii Fit costs. With that said, the game is neither a gimmick nor a lifesaver. However, it's a big enough collection of honestly useful and sometimes fun games that should point you down the right path to fitness.



Fast Facts

- At an ideal BMI of 22, your body is at its best fending off sickness
- Strengthening your abs helps with balance
- Walking with your weight back on your heels can ruin your posture
- At a BMI of 22, 6.6 pounds gained or lost alters your BMI by 1 point

The cool thing about Wii Fit is that it definitely does a good job of getting you to sweat and work your video game body. Sure, you can cheat the system into thinking you did a pushup on the board, but I'm going to assume you're not that lazy. The board's finely tuned balance sensors also make it a great controller for the balanced-based games like the ski jump or table tilt (where you shift platforms with your feet to pocket balls). It's also the basis of the yoga and strength modes. The simple act of keeping your balance within a set gyro perimeter reinforces the physical nature of the exercises.

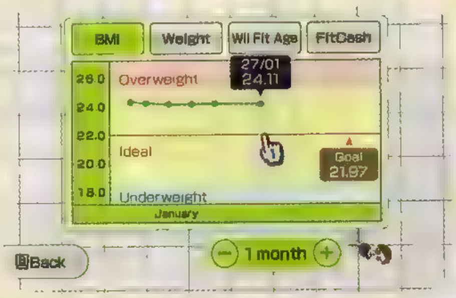
With the aid of voice instructions from a trainer (before and during the exercises) and some low-key visual and audio cues, Wii Fit can even teach its more demanding moves to fitness novices. The more lighthearted games like heading soccer balls also use the board well, although they are included more for fun than honest exercise. Even Wii Fit's jogging – which doesn't use the board – keeps track of your stationary running if you stick the Wii remote in your pocket.

It's easy to set up the game and start training, with a daily tracking of your BMI (see sidebar) acting as the focus of your endeavors. Whether you're doing the yoga, strength, aerobic, or balance exercises (which is the category where games like Tightrope Walk come in), the game keeps track of how much time you've spent. The more you exercise, the more modes you'll unlock. In this sense, however, I feel the game is too free form. Apart from suggesting a couple simple exercise combinations, Wii Fit falls short of either putting together a complete regimen for you to follow based around your goals or letting you design your own. This may not sound important, but it is. Proper sequencing is important for any exercise program, whether it's muscle building, yoga, or improving your heart rate.

As such, Wii Fit falls short of being the all-in-one exercise program it could be. Be that as it may, perhaps the more important question is: Will you make the most of what it has to offer?—**KATO**

What is BMI?

BMI stands for body mass index, a measure of your body fat based on your height and weight. Normal is considered a range between 18.5 and 24.9. Anything below is underweight and anything above is overweight. Every time you play Wii Fit, the game measures your BMI (and also accounts for how heavy/light your clothes are) and charts your progress against your goal – whether you want to maintain or lose weight and in what time period. If all you want to know is your BMI each day, you can leave it at that, but before you start your training you can also calculate your Wii Fit age. This takes into account your BMI as well as your overall balance (via a couple of tests) to produce your age. Like in Brain Age, the lower the better.



BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: A collection of exercises and minigames that is not just *Sweatin' to the Oldies*, but it's also not *Joe Weider's Ab Destroyer*, either

> Graphics: The trainer animations are good enough to let you know what you're supposed to be doing

> Sound: Listen to the trainer during moves, as he or she provides some useful info for each exercise

> Playability: The board's balance sensor is spot on, and picks up on a range of motions

> Entertainment: Those looking for serious exercise and/or fun will find it here

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

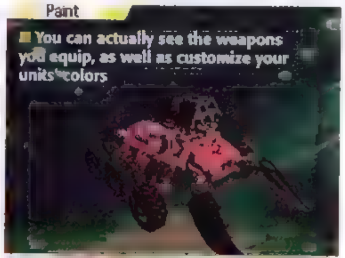
Ever since Wii Fit was announced at E3 last year I, and many other gamers, have been skeptical of its ability to deliver a serious workout. After digging in to the daily exercises, I can safely say that it does the job. I'm still sore from activities like the pushup contest with the trainer, the mile-plus jog (complete with cliff jumping), and the strange yoga contortions. Even though it's a small thing, I'm glad that you can input outside exercises in place of Wii Fit activities, even though they don't count toward unlocks; that's one thing I've always wanted in previous fitness games like Yourself Fitness. Wii Fit also works well in the party game space, allowing you to trade off Marble Madness challenges, snowboarding, and boxing games. Unfortunately, some activities are just lame (tricep extensions and dancing, to name a few), there's too much futzing around between activities (let us create a workout playlist!), and there's not much incentive left after everything's unlocked. But if you're curious about blending exercise with your favorite pastime, Wii Fit is definitely worth checking out.—**BRYAN**

NINTENDO DS

Drone Tactics

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** ATLUS **> DEVELOPER** ATLUS
> RELEASE MAY 13 **> ESRB** E10+

D-Scythe
Mantis
GRND
MOV
DEF
BAR
SPD
Raphael
Rock
Low MOV
Strong DEF


You can actually see the weapons you equip, as well as customize your units' colors

Terrain is an important part of your strategy

Main
Sub
Eye
OK
Cancel

KILL ROBO-BUGS DEAD

In Drone Tactics, bug-loving kids are magically transported to a bug world and need to fight an evil bug menace with – you guessed it – bugs. While the game's premise may not seem too sophisticated, fans of turn-based strategic combat will find several satisfying elements in Drone Tactics' interesting (but not revolutionary) take on the genre.

Let's get the worst over with: The story in Drone Tactics is absolutely terrible. I've seen more compelling tales unfold in cereal commercials. Thankfully, the game knows better than to waste your time with plot; the interludes between battles are mercifully brief, giving you only the barest amount of text necessary to set up the next fight. Then things pick up again.

The basic conventions are all present in battle. You'll gradually build an army of units, and each one will have certain strengths you try to match up against enemy weaknesses. A couple of cool touches spice up the routine a little, such as the game's emphasis on terrain. Different land tiles influence your movement decisions, because they have a significant impact on your ability to attack and defend. You can also use cards to augment your actions, which is an idea I like in theory, but the lame touch-screen minigames that accompany every card really throw a wrench in the gears.

Drone Tactics has a few perks off the battlefield, too. The customization options are especially neat, letting you create your own emblem for your army and change the color scheme of specific units. Unfortunately, some minor control over the visuals isn't enough to overcome the worn path this game walks in terms of gameplay and design. Drone Tactics is functional and occasionally fun, but it never gets exciting.—**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Armored bugs in grid-based warfare

> Graphics: The sprites and character art are nothing special, but it's cool to customize how your units look in 3D

> Sound: The music serves its purpose, and definitely doesn't overachieve

> Playability: Does a good job gradually introducing new mechanics, so the learning curve isn't overly harsh. No permadeath for defeated units is also a plus

> Entertainment: Decent tactical fun, though it never develops the intricacies needed to be exceptional

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7

At first glance, this seems to be yet another piece of kid friendly shovelware, but there's actually a decent game hiding under the sub-Saturday morning cartoon presentation. The RPG elements in this grid-based battler are thin but well thought out, and the combat itself features several reasonably balanced rock-paper-scissors relationships that make for interesting tactical decisions. This isn't the second coming of Disgaea, but if you can suffer through one of the most trite and boring stories in recent memory, there is some fun to be had.—**ADAM**

DS QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Major League Baseball 2K8: Fantasy All-Stars

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> DEVELOPER DEEP FRIED ENTERTAINMENT
> RELEASE APRIL 14 **> ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

Outside of the "chicken ball," a grounder that literally bounces away from fielders, Fantasy All-Stars delivers a baseball experience akin to getting hit by a line drive just as you are about to take a bite out of a hotdog. It's a painful mess of a game that offers little in terms of depth or skillful gameplay. The touch-screen interface works surprisingly well, but most success and failure rests on your ability to use trick pitches and hits at the right times. I became so familiar with the AI's tendencies that I was able to dictate the score of the game through these trick abilities. Outside of tournaments and multiplayer, the game doesn't have a mode that you can sink your cleats – or time – into.——**REINER**

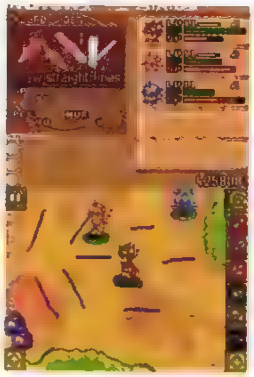
NINTENDO DS

Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE
> PUBLISHER AKSYS GAMES
> DEVELOPER ARC SYSTEM WORKS
> RELEASE JUNE 10 **> ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

Some novels aren't worth reading, and some interactive novel-style games aren't worth playing. Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles tries to capture the essence of hard-boiled sleuthing, but it falters mainly because it takes itself way too seriously. The characters are dry, the three cases are totally linear (you can't even leave an area until you hit the right trigger), and you'll find none of the humor from titles like Phoenix Wright. This is a brief and functional title, but it lacks the flair and intrigue to pull off the film noir aesthetic. It's also hard to get over the fact that Jake Hunter looks like he should be ordering Jagerbombs and hitting on your sister instead of solving cases.——**JOE**



NINTENDO DS

Summon Night: Twin Age

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** ATLUS
> DEVELOPER FLIGHT PLAN **> RELEASE** MAY 20 **> ESRB** E10+

YOU'VE SUMMONED BETTER

If you were a fan of the action/RPGs of the 16-bit era, Summon Night: Twin Age will be pretty tempting. In fact, it seems designed to evoke fond memories of games like Secret of Mana and Legend of Zelda. Those are tough names to measure up to – and Twin Age doesn't – but it makes a respectable effort.

If you're all about top-down 2D combat, you'll have a good time with Twin Age. It features one of the more workable touch-screen-only control schemes out there, skillfully avoiding the need to manically tap the screen with your stylus. Touch an enemy and you start auto-attacking, though you can perform special moves with stylus commands. It can sometimes be difficult to use items or attacks on specific targets (especially when everyone clumps together), but most battles aren't hard enough to require total precision.

The problem is that Twin Age is simple, straight-up monster hunting. Each stage exists only to house XP-filled creatures, which you defeat in order to advance and gain more XP. I've got nothing against monster-killing itself, but it would be nice to have something to back it up. There is no puzzle solving, no thrill in exploration, and a formulaic story. Even the skill tree and monster creation systems fail to add any engaging depth.

There are worse things out there than grinding levels, and Twin Age controls better than most DS games in the genre. However, unlike the classic action/RPGs it emulates, Twin Age sacrifices almost everything in favor of combat, but it just isn't enough.——**JOE**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Use nostalgia and touch-screen controls to create a top-down action/RPG

> Graphics: Some nice animation, but the action can get lost in the crowded shuffle of sprites

> Sound: There isn't enough bad voice acting to detract from the experience, and some of the soundtrack is kind of cool

> Playability: The handy crossbar customization makes it easy to perform special moves, but it can really slow things down if you want to do them in succession

> Entertainment: Fighting is fun to begin with, but wears thin after a few hours

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 6.75

Though Summon Night's story and cast of characters is formulaic its real-time action combat system attempts some brave ventures into new territory, with decidedly mixed results. As you tap around the screen with the stylus, your anime hero marches off to do your bidding, whether that is smashing open a box or throwing down with a nasty critter. Special attacks can be mixed and matched, and you can switch between characters, which lends the gameplay some pleasant variety, even if the whole battle affair is a little too smash-and-grab for my taste. As you tap-tap-tap your way past the endless dialogue exchanges between battles, you may wonder why this title continues to offer so little compelling character interactions and plot in a genre that should excel in those arenas. Why indeed?—**MILLER**

CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For March 2008 Based On Units Sold

1 SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL (WII)

Within its first month, Brawl has sold more than 2.5 million units worldwide – an impressive feat for a game that requires no skill (burn!). You're just as likely to win a match if you let an angry dog chew on the controls. So Smash Bros.' success must solely rest on its combination of popular characters. Let's follow this sloppy trail of logic and see what the rest of these games should add to improve their sales.

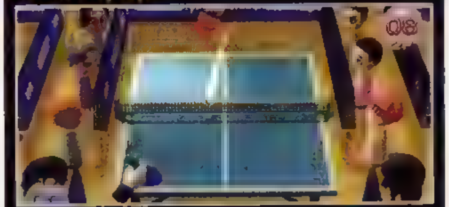
2 RAINBOW SIX VEGAS 2 (360)

We can think of a lot of things to put in a game about Las Vegas, but nothing says Vegas (besides hangovers and $75 annulments) quite like Elvis impersonators. Who wouldn't want to fight alongside a curly-haired, blue suede shoe wearing, fried banana-eating King who was holstering more guns than Rambo? Add a few crazy-haired street magicians and some prancing French clowns and you've got a Vegas act we want to see.

3 ARMY OF TWO (360)

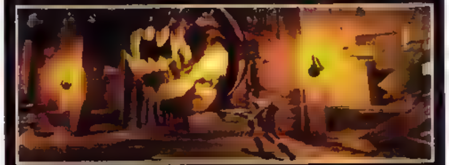
Army of Two is a game about grizzled warriors who enjoy the company of other tuff as nails men. There's nothing wrong with that, but the game could use a woman's touch. Throw in a teary-eyed Karaoke level, some pony rides, and an oiled up Justin Timberlake for good measure and you've got the perfect balance for those butt-slapping military contractors.

4 Wii PLAY (Wii)



Nintendo already made the ultimate combo in Wii Play when they added a controller to an empty box. But we can still think of a few things that would make this a better package. We'd like to see Wii Play come with marshmallows, or hot chocolate mix, or a comic book, or even a rock. Come to think of it, pretty much anything would make this a better package.

5 GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS (PSP)



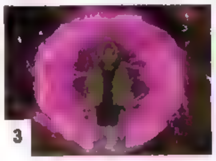
We think Kratos' stoic badassery would be better served if he were playing off of a comedic sidekick. How about someone like Chris Tucker from the Jackie Chan classic *Rush Hour*? Tucker could say something annoying in his a high-pitched squeal before breaking into dance, and Kratos could rip him in half with an impassive stare.

Rank	Title	L Mo	System	Score	Release
1	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	N/A	Wii	9.5	03-08
2	Rainbow Six Vegas 2	N/A	360	9.5	03-08
3	Army of Two	N/A	360	7.5	03-08
4	Wii Play	3	Wii	7	02-07
5	God of War: Chains of Olympus	N/A	PSP	9	03-08
6	Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII	N/A	PSP	7.25	03-08
7	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	5	Wii	8.75	10-07
8	MLB 2K8	N/A	360	8.5	03-08
9	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	1	360	10	11-07
10	Army of Two	N/A	PS3	7.5	03-08
11	MLB 2K8	N/A	PS3	8.5	03-08
12	Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games	6	DS	4	11-07
13	Mario Party DS	17	DS	7	11-07
14	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	9	PS2	8.75	10-07
15	MLB 2K8	N/A	PS2	8.5	03-08
16	Rainbow Six Vegas 2	N/A	PS3	9.5	03-08
17	Carnival Games	16	Wii	5.5	08-07
18	New Super Mario Bros.	14	DS	9.25	05-06
19	Game Party	19	Wii	N/A	11-07
20	Naruto: Ultimate Ninja 3	N/A	PS2	N/A	03-08

Source: The NPC Group/NPD Funworld® /TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP
2	Warriors Orochi: The Evil King Returns	PS2
3	Star Ocean 2: Second Evolution	PSP
4	Pro Baseball Spirits 5	PS2
5	Pro Baseball Spirits 5	PS3
6	Pokémon Ranger: Batonaaji	DS
7	Wii Fit	Wii
8	Tottado! Yowiko's Deserted Island Life	DS
9	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	Wii
10	Deca Sports	Wii



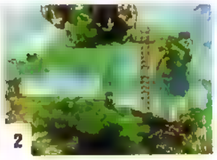
3

6

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo	System
1	Grand Theft Auto IV	N/A	multi
2	Braid	N/A	360
3	Mario Kart Wii	N/A	Wii
4	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	1	Wii
5	Rainbow Six Vegas 2	2	multi
6	Wii Fit	N/A	Wii
7	MLB 08: The Show	3	multi
8	Okami	4	Wii
9	Sins of a Solar Empire	5	PC
10	Devil May Cry 4	8	multi

1

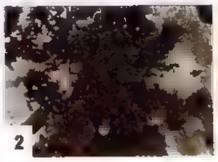


2

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo	Price
1	The Sims 2 FreeTime	4	$28
2	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War Soulstorm	N/A	$40
3	Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	N/A	$28
4	World Of Warcraft	1	$20
5	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	5	$39
6	Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	3	$48
7	15,000 Games	7	$10
8	Sins Of A Solar Empire	2	$39
9	World Of Warcraft: Burning Crusade	8	$32
10	The Sims 2 Deluxe	9	$29



2

6

Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWSARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Assassin's Creed	9.5	Dec-07
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
BlackSite Area 51	7.5	Dec-07
Burnout Paradise	8.5	Feb-08
Clive Barker's Jericho	6	Dec-07
Club, The	8.75	Mar-08
College Hoops 2K8	7.75	Feb-08
Condemned 2 Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08
Devil May Cry 4	9	Mar-08
Dynasty Warriors 6	7.25	Mar-08
Eye of Judgement	8	Dec-07
FIFA Street 3	7	Mar-08
Folklore	7.25	Dec-07
Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds	8	May-08
Kane & Lynch. Dead Men	7	Jan-08
LEGO Star Wars. The Complete Saga	7.5	Dec-07
Lost Planet Extreme Condition	8	Mar-08
Lost. Via Domus	6.75	Apr-08
MLB 08: The Show	8.5	May-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
MX vs. ATV Untamed	8	Jan-08
NCAA March Madness 08	7.25	Feb-08
Need for Speed ProStreet	7.5	Dec-07
NFL Tour	5	Feb-08
Orange Box, The	9.25	Feb-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	7.75	May-08
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	9.25	Apr-08
Ratchet & Clank Future Tools of Destruction	9.25	Dec-07
Rock Band	9.25	Jan-08
Sega Rally Revo	6.5	Dec-07
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.25	May-08
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Time Crisis 4	4.25	Jan-08
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	7.75	Dec-07
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08
Uncharted Drake's Fortune	8.75	Dec-07
Unreal Tournement 3	8.5	Feb-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08
WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw 2008	8	Dec-07

Dark Sector - PS3 - Mar-08

XBOX 360

Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Assassin's Creed	9.5	Dec-07
Beautiful Katamari	7.25	Dec-07
Bee Movie Game	6.5	Jan-08
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
BlackSite. Area 51	7.5	Dec-07
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Apr-08
Burnout Paradise	8.5	Feb-08
Clive Barker's Jericho	6	Dec-07
Club, The	8.75	Mar-08
College Hoops 2K8	7.75	Feb-08
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Culdcept Saga	7	Feb-08
Dark Messiah of Might & Magic Elements	8	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08
Devil May Cry 4	9	Mar-08
Dynasty Warriors 6	7.25	Mar-08
F.E.A.R. Files	6.5	Jan-08
FIFA Street 3	7	Mar-08
Frontlines: Fuel of War	7.25	Apr-08
Golden Compass, The	3.25	Feb-08
Jumper. Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08
Kane & Lynch Dead Men	7	Jan-08
Karaoke Revolution Presents American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
Kingdom Under Fire Circle of Doom	5.25	Feb-08
LEGO Star Wars. The Complete Saga	7.5	Dec-07
Lost Odyssey	8.5	Apr-08
Lost: Via Domus	6.75	Apr-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
MX vs. ATV Untamed	8	Jan-08
Naruto Rise of the Ninja	8	Dec-07
NCAA March Madness 08	7.25	Feb-08
Need for Speed ProStreet	7.5	Dec-07
NFL Tour	5	Feb-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	7.75	May-08
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	9.25	Apr-08
Rock Band	9.25	Jan-08
Scene It? Lights, Camera, Action	8.5	Jan-08
Sega Rally Revo	6.5	Dec-07
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.25	May-08
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Soldier of Fortune Payback	4.25	Feb-08
Spiderwick Chronicles, The	6.5	Apr-08
Thrillville Off the Rails	7	Dec-07
TimeShift	7.75	Dec-07
Tomb Raider Anniversary	8.25	Dec-07
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	7.75	Dec-07
Turning Point Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08
Viking Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08
Virtua Fighter 5	9	Dec-07
Viva Piñata Party Animals	5.5	Jan-08
WWE SmackDown! vs Raw 2008	8	Dec-07

Lost Odyssey- Xbox 360 - Apr-08

WII

Battalion Wars 2	7.25	Jan-08
Bomberman Land	6.5	Apr-08
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Apr-08
Castle of Shikigami III	6.5	May-08
Cranium Kabookii	6.75	Feb-08
Dancing With the Stars	5.25	Jan-08
Destroy All Humans Big Willy Unleased	5	May-08
Donkey Kong Barrel Blast	5	Dec-07
Dragon Quest Swords The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	7.75	Mar-08
EA Playground	7	Dec-07
Endless Ocean	6	Jan-08
Fire Emblem Radiant Dawn	7	Dec-07
Geometry Wars Galaxies	9	Dec-07
Ghost Squad	7	Jan-08
Godzilla Unleashed	4	Dec-07
Golden Compass, The	3.25	Feb-08
Harvey Birdman Attorney At Law	6	Feb-08
House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return	7.5	Apr-08
Jenga	2	Jan-08
Jumper Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08
Karaoke Revolution Presents American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
LEGO Star Wars The Complete Saga	7.5	Dec-07
Link's Crossbow Training	6.75	Feb-08
Major League Baseball 2K8	6.75	May-08
Manhunt 2	7.75	Dec-07
Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games	4	Dec-07
Medal of Honor Heroes 2	6.75	Jan-08
Need for Speed ProStreet	7	Dec-07
Nights Journey of Dreams	6.5	Feb-08
Nitrobike	4.25	Mar-08
No More Heroes	6	Mar-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Okami	9.25	May-08
Opoona	5.5	Apr-08
Pinball Hall of Fame The Williams Collection	8.5	Apr-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	8	May-08
Rayman Raving Rabbids 2	7.75	Jan-08
Resident Evil The Umbrella Chronicles	8.25	Jan-08
Samurai Warriors: Katana	6	Mar-08
Sega Bass Fishing	5	Apr-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.5	May-08
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Smarty Pants	7.5	Jan-08
Sonic Riders Zero Gravity	6	Mar-08
Soulcalibur Legends	4	Jan-08
Star Trek Conquest	5	Feb-08
Super Mario Galaxy	9.75	Jan-08
Super Smash Bros. Brawl	9.5	Apr-08
Super Swing Golf Season 2	8.5	Feb-08
Table Tennis	6	Dec-07
Thrillville Off the Rails	7	Dec-07
Trauma Center: New Blood	7.5	Jan-08
Winter Sports The Ultimate Challenge	6.5	Mar-08
Worms A Space Oddity	6.75	May-08

PLAYSTATION 2

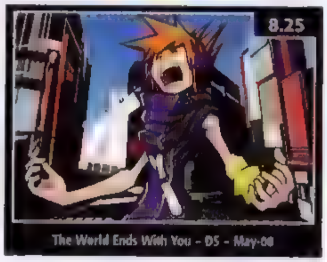
Karaoke Revolution Presents American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
Mana Khemia. Alchemists of al-Revis	7	May-08
Manhunt 2	7.75	Dec-07
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Persona 3: FES	8.25	May-08
Simpsons Game, The	7.25	Dec-07
Star Trek Conquest	5	Feb-08
Thrillville: Off the Rails	7	Dec-07
Twisted Metal Head On Extra Twisted Edition	7.25	Apr-08

PC

Ages of Empires III The Asian Dynasties	8	Dec-07
Beowulf	5.75	Jan-08
BlackSite: Area 51	7.5	Dec-07
Clive Barker's Jericho	6	Dec-07
Command & Conquer 3 Kane's Wrath	7.75	May-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Crysis	9	Jan-08
Empire Earth III	6.5	Jan-08
Frontlines Fuel of War	7.25	Apr-08
Fury	5	Jan-08
Gears of War	8	Jan-08
Hellgate London	8.5	Jan-08
Lost Empire Immortals	7.25	May-08
Obscure The Aftermath	3	May-08
Painkiller Overdose	6.75	Dec-07
Settlers Rise of an Empire The	7	Dec-07
Seven Kingdoms Conquest	4	May-08
SimCity Societies	8	Jan-08
Sins of a Solar Empire	9	Apr-08
Supreme Commander Forged Alliance	8.5	Dec-07
Tabula Rasa	8	Jan-08
TimeShift	7.75	Dec-07
Turning Point Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08
Universe at War: Earth Assault	8.25	Jan-08
Unreal Tournament 3	9	Dec-07
Witcher, The	8	Dec-07

NINTENDO DS

Advance Wars Days of Ruin	8.75	Mar-08
Apollo Justice Ace Attorney	8	Mar-08
Assassin's Creed Altair's Chronicles	6	Apr-08
Contra 4	9.25	Jan-08
Cooking Mama 2 Dinner With Friends	7	Dec-07
Dementium: The Ward	5.75	Dec-07
Draglade	6.75	Feb-08
Dragon Quest Monsters Joker	8	Dec-07
Eco-Creatures Save the Forest	3	Apr-08
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles Ring of Fates	6	Apr-08
Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings	7.5	Dec-07
Insecticide	5.75	May-08
Jam Sessions	6	Dec-07
Left Brain, Right Brain	5	Feb-08
LifeSigns. Surgical Unit	6	Jan-08
Lost in Blue 3	6.25	May-08
Mario Party DS	7	Feb-08
Master of Illusion	8	Jan-08
My Word Coach	8	Feb-08
Nanostray 2	7.25	Jan-08
Ninja Gaiden Dragon Sword	7.75	May-08
Orc & Elves	6.75	Jan-08
Prism Light the Way	7.5	Dec-07
Professor Layton and the Curious Village	7.5	Apr-08
Puchi Puchi Virus	7.5	May-08
Teenage Zombies Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingys!	6.75	May-08
Turn It Around	4	Dec-07
World Ends With You, The	8.25	May-08
Word Jong	8	Dec-07



The World Ends With You - DS - May-08

PSP

Crisis Core. Final Fantasy VII	7.25	Apr-08
Dungeon Explorer Warrior of Ancient Arts	6	Apr-08
FlatOut Head On	7.5	May-08
God of War Chains of Olympus	9	Mar-08
Jackass. The Game	6.25	Dec-07
Manhunt 2	7.75	Dec-07
Metal Gear Solid. Portable Ops Plus	7.75	Dec-07
Patapon	8.75	Mar-08
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	7.25	Feb-08
Silent Hill Origins	7.75	Dec-07
SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs Tactical Strike	8	Dec-07
SWAT Target Liberty	5	Dec-07
Warhammer 40,000 Squad Command	8	Jan-08
Wild Arms XF	7.5	May-08
Wipeout Pulse	7.75	Apr-08

DREAMERS WANTED
DEGREES IN: COMPUTER ANIMATION > DIGITAL ARTS & DESIGN > ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS > FILM > GAME DEVELOPMENT > RECORDING ARTS > SHOW PRODUCTION & TOURING
ONE OF THE TOP FIVE GAME-DEGREE PROGRAMS IN THE WORLD
FULL SAIL
Real World Education
SCHOOL OF GAME DEVELOPMENT
800.226.7625 3300 University Boulevard • Winter Park, FL 32792
Financial aid available to those who qualify • Career development assistance • Accredited School, ACCSCT

Rainbow Six Vegas 2

Multiplayer Tips for Demolishing Vegas

By JP Cambiotti, lead multiplayer designer

When we started working on the sequel to Rainbow Six Vegas, we poured a lot of our attention onto the multiplayer. After all, a strong multiplayer is what keeps people coming back to the game after they've finished the campaign. Here are some tactics I recommend using.

Demolition is part of the Attack & Defend family of game modes, which means you can find it in certain maps that have been adapted for this particular mode. In this game mode, you take on the role of either the Assaulting team or the Defenders. As the Assaulting team, your goal is to plant the bomb at one of two target sites. As a Defender, the goal is to find and defuse the bomb before it blows up.

ASSAULT

As a member of the Assault Team, you'll find that the bomb is actually a short distance away from your spawn point. Anyone on your team can pick up the bomb by just walking over it. Your HUD will be updated with information on who picked up the bomb and where the bomb carrier is at all times.

It's imperative to support your team's bomb carrier. If he's headed towards one of the bombsites, be sure to cover him and possibly move ahead of him in order to clear the area. Don't worry too much if the bomb carrier gets killed, as you can still pick up the bomb and continue the mission. The bomb can only be defused after it's been armed, so even if the defenders wipe out your bomb carrier, the game isn't over.

I recommend using two distinct tactics for this game mode. First, there's the decoy tactic, where you want to send the mass of your team to one of the bombsites as a decoy while the actual bomb carrier carefully sneaks to the other site. For this tactic to be successful, it's important that your team shows presence but stays alive long enough for the enemy team to communicate and ask for help defending the bombsite. Most of the time, the enemy will abandon their defenses of the other bombsites in order to focus on the more immediate threat, leaving you with a clear place to plant the bomb.

The next tactic is the complete opposite of the decoy tactic because it requires all of your team to attack a single site in order to overwhelm the defenders. The idea behind this is that the defenders have scattered their forces, meaning protecting each of the two sites splits their team and therefore you'll have double the amount of operatives than they do. This blunt force tactic requires you to be quick and efficient as a team. You can't let the enemy regroup and fortify their defenses.

Both tactics work well and are best used in alternating ways. Be unpredictable, but make sure your team knows what you're going to do. Whichever tactic you decide to go with, make sure you've chosen the right equipment for the job. Don't be afraid to experiment with gadgets like the GPS device and the motion sensor, which can reveal enemy positions.

DEFENDERS

As the Defending team, you've got the advantage of reaching the bombsite first and setting up your defenses. Use everything you can to fortify your defenses, including baiting the enemy into a trap filled with C4. Keep doors closed if you can, and be prepared to shoot through wooden doors as soon as they swing open. Also, remember not to fall for the decoy's bait by completely abandoning a bombsite.

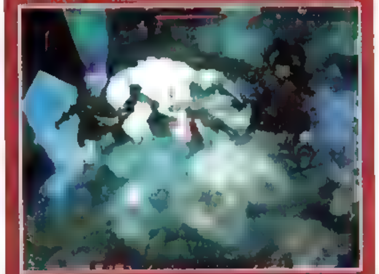
GENERAL TIPS

- Either team can win by eliminating the enemy team. This means if you kill the opposing team to the point where they have no more respawns, you'll win the game. Play it smart and make sure every one of your lives count towards securing a victory for your team.
- Both teams will have visibility on where the bomb has been planted. Once it's planted, you've got 60 seconds to either defuse the bomb or protect it until it blows up. Expect defenders to come pouring into the bombsite in an attempt to reach the bomb.
- Avoid standing too close to the bomb once it's been activated, since the defenders will often throw grenades to clear themselves a path. As an attacker in this situation, move away from the bomb and snipe the defenders as they begin to defuse it. One piece of advice: don't miss your shot. As a defender, use lots of smoke to camouflage your approach and throw explosives into the bomb room.

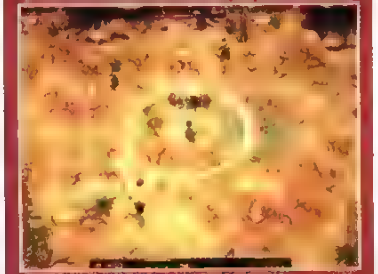
Mod World

MYTHOS

www.mythos.com



It's been a more than a few months (and a couple of release date delays) since we last talked about Mythos, but the game is worth another look. Shamelessly cribbing the Diablo formula, this title boasts a unique online structure that both single-player types and MMO gamers should feel right at home with. Our time with the beta was a blast, and there are still months to go before the game is finished.



The already-smooth gameplay is nearly 100 percent Diablo, with players slaughtering monsters by the dozen in the pursuit of randomly generated loot. Gameplay is always online, though soloing is still a viable option. Epic maps provide a challenge tuned to larger groups of players with commensurately better rewards.

While the game is free to download and play, goods will be for sale a la MapleStory. The idea is to make the game fun without requiring any payment, but to offer neat toys to those willing to pay. Developer Flagship Studios will be selling a separate currency called Ingots, which can be used to purchase things like temporary XP multipliers or luck boosts.

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM

Army of Two

> PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360

Here are the locations of all 14 intel briefcases in the game

Afghanistan 1 – Behind the initial M-11 missile there is a small path going uphill. Near this path is the briefcase.

Afghanistan 2 – After you kill the first heavy armor, search the nearby platforms. The briefcase is on top of a short set of stairs at the back.

Afghanistan 3 – In the area right next to Brian Hicks' cell.

Iraq 4 – This briefcase is at the base of the ladder that takes you up to shoot down Ali Youseff's helicopter

Iraq 5 – After calling in the air strike on the bunker, find a large tent near a dividing wall. The briefcase will be between the two.

Iraq 6 – Just before you meet Ali Youseff, you'll see some metal platforms with armed guards. Climb up the steps to the second level then find the ladder that leads to a third platform

Aircraft Carrier 7 – When you first land on the ship's main deck, run to the right of the control tower and you'll see the case.

Aircraft Carrier 8 – After entering the hangar to use a parked plane to blow through a door, you'll find the case hidden behind some missiles

Aircraft Carrier 9 – After setting the ship to blow up, you'll see a makeshift basketball court. On the other side of the basket is a briefcase.

China 10 – When you arrive at the dam, you'll see a control tower on the other side. Inside is a briefcase

China 11 – After you arrive at the village, take the path to the right. You'll find a briefcase on the second floor of the first house you can enter.

China 12 – Behind the factory near the end of the level.

Miami 13 – You'll find the briefcase in a small office near the control room just after you open the gates to the luggage area.

Miami 14 – On the third floor of the SSC at the far end of the room away from the lift you need to operate.

Wii

Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed

Go to the Unlockables menu and hold the nunchuk's analog stick up for a few seconds. The cheat menu will pop up and you can input the following codes with the Wii remote's d-pad

All Guns – Right, Left, Down, Left, Up

All Stages – Up, Right, Down, Right, Up

Crypto Dance Fever Skin – Right, Left, Right, Left, Up

Infinite Ammunition – Right, Up, Up, Left, Right

Infinite Jetpack Power – Right, Right, Up, Left, Left

Invulnerability – Left, Down, Up, Right, Up

Kluckin's Chicken Blimp Skin – Left, Up, Down, Up, Down

Leisure Suit Skin – Left, Down, Right, Left, Right

Pick Up Heavy Objects – Down, Up, Left, Up, Right

Pimp My Blimp Skin – Down, Up, Right, Down, Right

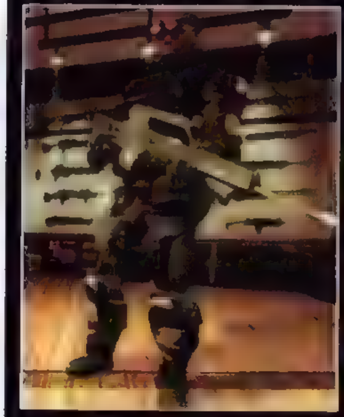
Stealth Space Ninja – Up, Right, Down, Down, Left

Unlimited Big Willy Battery – Left, Left, Up, Right, Down

"GI Droid"
(location unknown – last seen going through the express lane with more than 15 items.)

Code of the Month

Rainbow Six Vegas 2



PS3

While playing, open the pause menu, hold R1, and enter the following codes

Enable Big Head Mode – ○, □, ✕, △, L3, △, ✕, □, ○, R3

Enable One Hit Kills – L3, R3, L3, R3, ✕, ○, L3, R3, L3, R3, □, △

GI John Doe Mode – L3, L3, ✕, R3, R3, ○, L3, L3, □, R3, R3, △

Super Ragdoll Mode – ✕, ✕, ○, ○, □, □, △, △, ✕, ○, □, △

Third-Person View – □, ○, □, ○, L3, L3, △, ✕, △, ✕, R3, R3

At the title screen or while customizing your character, hold R1 to enter these codes.

Unlock M468 Assault Rifle – Up, △, Down, ✕, Left, □, Right, ○, Left, Left, Right, □

Unlock MTAR-21 Assault Rifle – Down, Down, Up, Up, □, ○, □, ○, △, Up, Up, △

XBOX 360

While playing, open the pause menu, hold RB, and enter the following codes.

GI John Doe Mode – L3, L3, A, R3, R3, B, L3, L3, X, R3, R3, Y

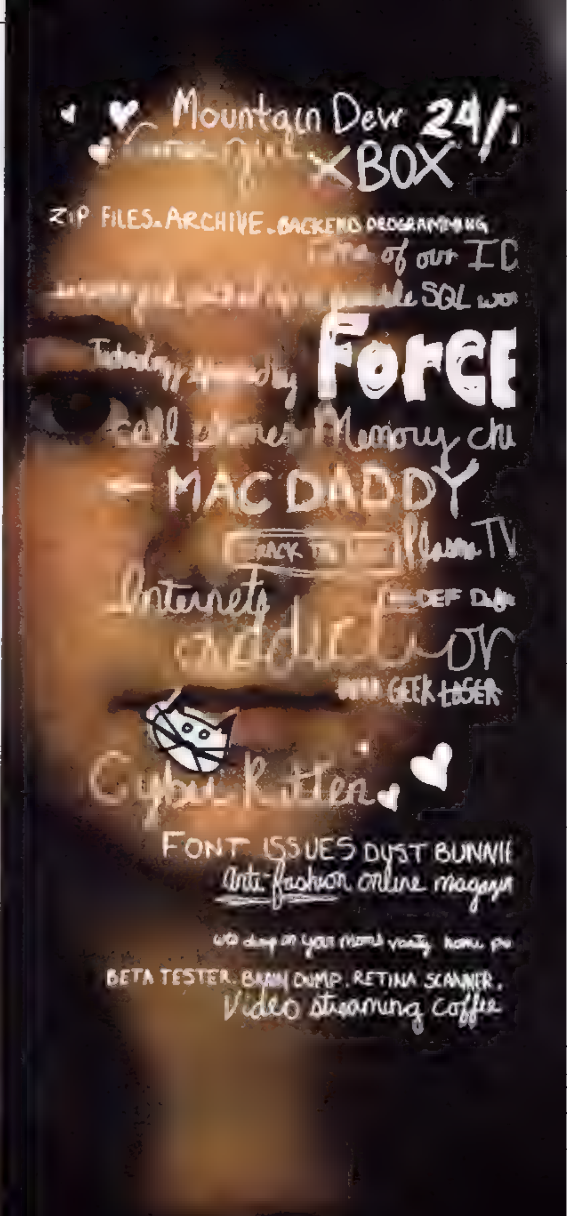
Super Ragdoll Mode – A, A, B, B, X, X, Y, Y, A, B, X, Y

Third-Person View – X, B, X, B, L3, L3, Y, A, Y, A, R3, R3

At the title screen or while customizing your character hold RB to enter these codes.

Unlock M468 Assault Rifle – Up, Y, Down, A, Left, X, Right, B, Left, Left, Right, X

Unlock MTAR-21 Assault Rifle – Hold RB, Down, Down, Up, Up, X, B, X, B, Y, Up, Up, Y



University of Advancing Technology
UAT
Learn Experience Innovate

WE SPEAK G33K

Geeks transform into Alpha-Geeks by becoming fluent in:

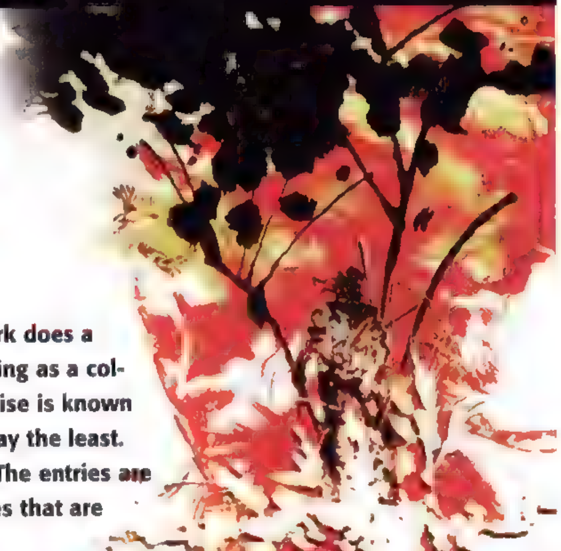
LEARN:
DIGITAL ANIMATION
DIGITAL ART AND DESIGN
DIGITAL VIDEO
GAME DESIGN
ARTIFICIAL LIFE PROGRAMMING
COMPUTER FORENSICS
GAME PROGRAMMING
NETWORK ENGINEERING
NETWORK SECURITY
SOFTWARE ENGINEERING
WEB ARCHITECTURE
ROBOTICS

www.uat.edu > 877.UAT.GEEK
877.828.4335

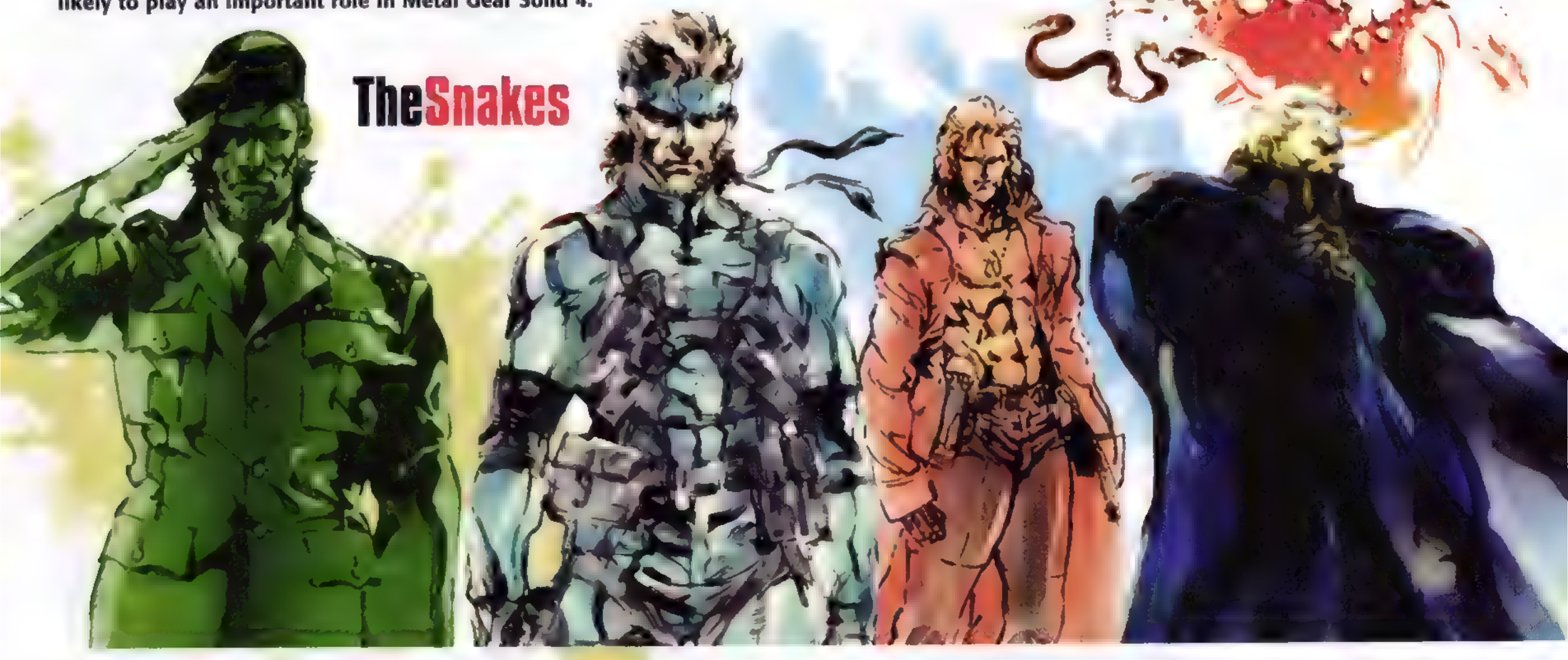
SNAKES AND GEARS

A METAL GEAR OVERVIEW

"I hear it's amazing when the famous purple stuffed worm in flap-jaw space with the tuning fork does a raw blink on Hara-kiri Rock." To some gamers, those words (spoken by a malfunctioning AI posing as a colonel in Metal Gear Solid 2) make more sense than the plot of the Metal Gear series. The franchise is known for its excellent story and twists, but the events and relationships involved are convoluted, to say the least. If you haven't played through the series recently, this rundown will help you get reacquainted. The entries are by no means comprehensive, but they should refresh your memory about characters and themes that are likely to play an important role in Metal Gear Solid 4.



TheSnakes



BIG BOSS (A.K.A. NAKED SNAKE)

This guy is the anchor for the whole Metal Gear series. He's known as the greatest soldier of the 20th century, and the other three Snakes are genetic copies of him engineered to be perfect warriors. Displaying his outstanding charisma and ability to lead, Big Boss rebelled against the U.S. after years of loyal service to create his own military nation. The reasons for his disillusionment and revolt are rooted in the government's decision to kill his mentor, The Boss. Even after his death at the hands of his clone, Solid Snake, Big Boss and his legacy continue to cast a shadow on all events in the series.

SOLID SNAKE

A former member of the Foxhound unit, and the primary protagonist of the Metal Gear series. As a rookie soldier, he infiltrated Outer Heaven and uncovered the treachery of his father/commanding officer, Big Boss. Years later, he thwarted Big Boss again, killing him in Zanzibar during the events of Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake. After the Shadow Moses incident, Snake and Otacon worked together to rid the world of the threat posed by Metal Gears. Snake is a reluctant hero; he often wishes to be left in peace and solitude, but only seems to feel alive on the battlefield.

LIQUID SNAKE

Unlike his brothers, Liquid Snake was raised in the U.K., joining the British SAS at a young age. After fighting wars in the Middle East, Liquid became the field commander of Foxhound, though Solid Snake and Roy Campbell had left the unit by that time. Liquid organized the revolt on Shadow Moses and sought to kill Solid Snake, hoping to gain the honor of being Big Boss' true successor.

SOLIDUS SNAKE
(A.K.A. GEORGE SEARS)

A former U.S. president who was put into (and removed from) office due to the interference of the Patriots. He orchestrated the events of Metal Gear Solid 2, and was killed by Raiden on top of Federal Hall in Manhattan. As a product of Les Enfants Terrible, he was presumably born at the same time as Solid Snake and Liquid Snake. It is unknown why he appears more advanced in age, but it could merely be a side effect of the cloning process.

KEY TERMS

Big Shell – The offshore decontamination facility that serves as the setting for Metal Gear Solid 2

Dead Cell – A small, elite counter-terrorist force established by Solidus Snake

FoxDie – A virus intended to infect and kill only those with a specific genetic code. Liquid Snake was killed by FoxDie, and Solid Snake is currently infected

Foxhound – The special military unit established by Big Boss. Solid Snake and Roy Campbell were also members during their military careers. Foxhound dissolved after the events of Metal Gear Solid.

Les Enfants Terribles – A 1972 experiment using Big Boss' DNA to create the ultimate soldier. It resulted in three known "terrible children" Solid Snake, Liquid Snake, and Solidus Snake.

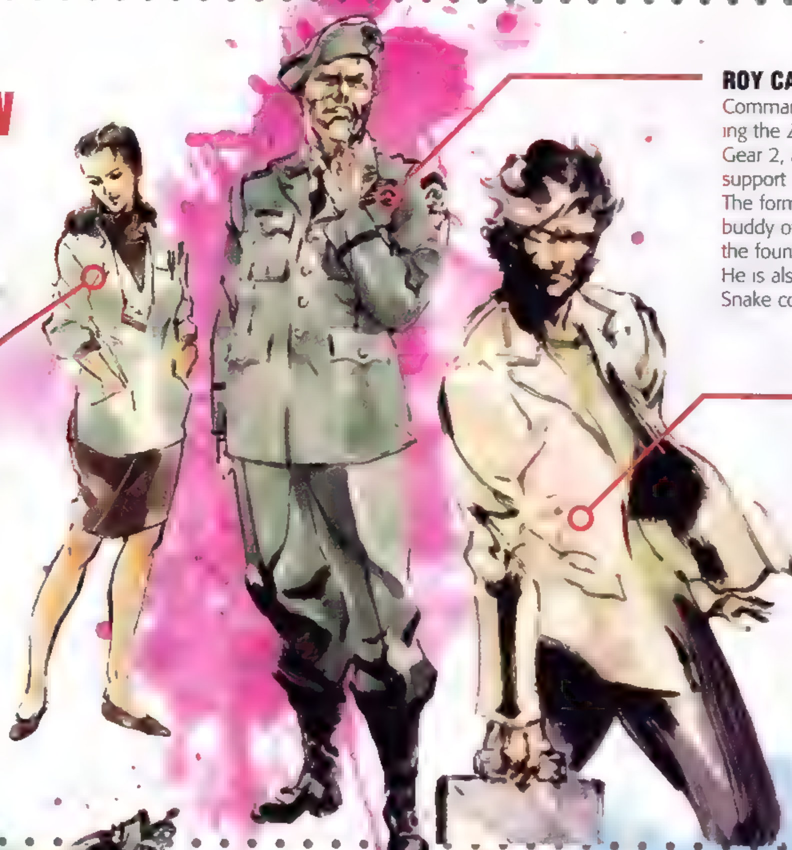
Outer Heaven – A fortified base established by Big Boss. The legendary warrior planned to use Metal Gear to establish Outer Heaven's place as a superior military nation on the world stage. The fortress was destroyed in the original Metal Gear

The Patriots – The mysterious organization that controls all major events on the global stage. It began as an international secret society called The Philosophers, but it is currently a North American group with unknown membership. Sometimes referred to as the La-Li-Lu-Le-Lo.

Shadow Moses – The Alaskan island on which Metal Gear Solid occurs. The events of that game are referred to as "the Shadow Moses incident."

Zanzibar – Similar to Outer Heaven, Zanzibar was a fortress nation from which Big Boss attempted to gain global military dominance. It is the primary location in Metal Gear 2 Solid Snake

SupportCrew



NAOMI HUNTER

A geneticist, and the adoptive sister of Gray Fox. Though she acted as Solid Snake's support during the Shadow Moses incident, she injected him with the fatal FoxDie virus right before the mission. She sought revenge for Gray Fox's apparent death by Snake's hand in Zanzibar, but realized too late that Snake wasn't to blame. Her activities after the events of Metal Gear Solid are unknown

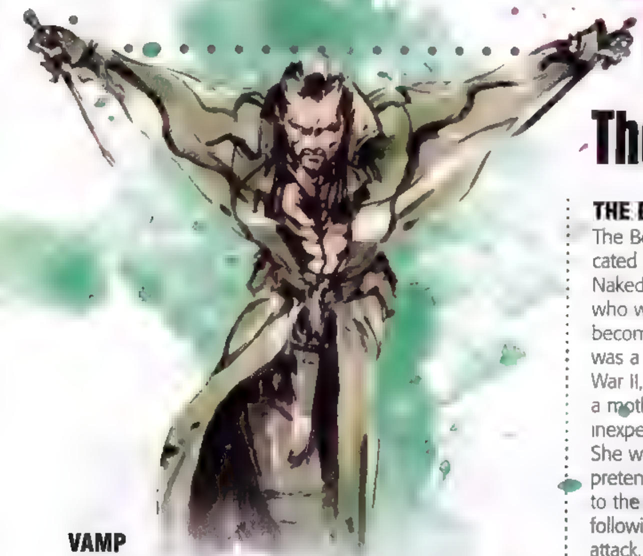
ROY CAMPBELL

Commanded the Foxhound unit during the Zanzibar uprising of Metal Gear 2, and served as Solid Snake's support during Metal Gear Solid. The former colonel was a combat buddy of Big Boss, and was one of the founding members of Foxhound He is also one of the only men Solid Snake considers a friend.

HAL EMMERICH
(A.K.A. OTACON)

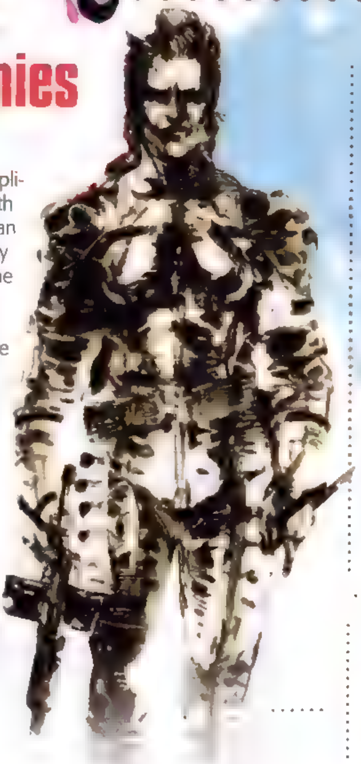
The chief engineer behind Metal Gear REX, Otacon seeks to atone for his sins (and those of his family) by keeping the world safe from the nuclear threat posed by the Metal Gear line. He provides technical assistance and advice to Solid Snake as a sidekick. Otacon's stepsister, Emma, was killed by Vamp during the events of Metal Gear Solid 2.

TheEnemies



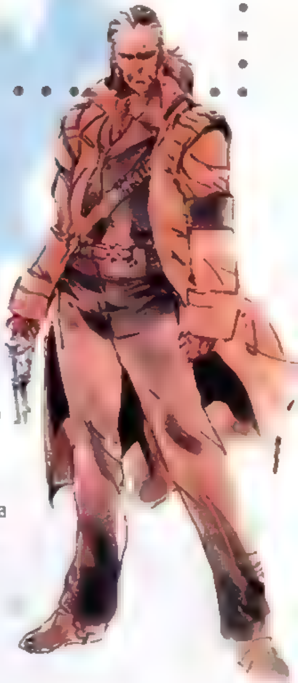
VAMP

The only surviving member of Solidus Snake's Dead Cell unit, Vamp is seemingly immortal. He has endured multiple stab wounds, as well as a gunshot to the forehead. He is incredibly agile and acrobatic, and favors knives in battle. He will occasionally drink the blood of his fallen foes.



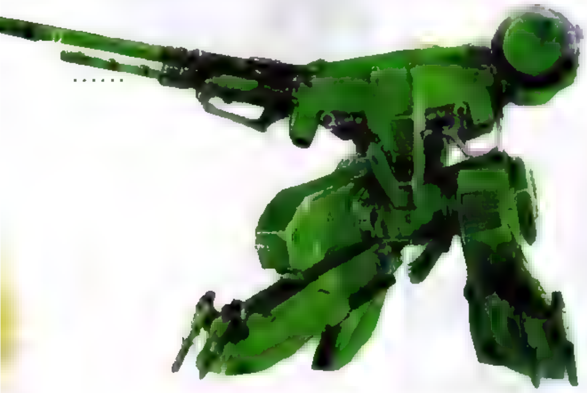
THE BOSS

The Boss had a complicated relationship with Naked Snake, the man who would eventually become Big Boss. She was a hero of World War II, and served as a mother figure to the inexperienced Snake. She was ordered to pretend to defect to the Soviet Union following a nuclear attack, narrowly preventing a full-scale war. Her defeat by Snake was also part of her mission, and she died letting the world believe she was a traitor.



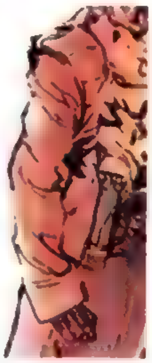
REVOLVER OCELOT

Ocelot is the only character to have a major role in all three Metal Gear Solid titles. His allegiance is constantly in question; he always appears to be working for one group while secretly advancing the agenda of another. He betrayed both Liquid Snake and Solidus Snake in order to pass Metal Gear information on to the Patriots. Revolver Ocelot's mother is The Boss and his father is The Sorrow, a deceased spirit medium and former member of The Boss' famous Cobra Unit.



METAL GEAR

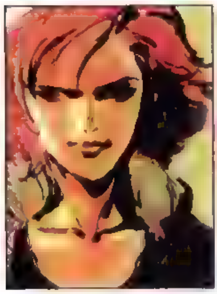
A series of tank-like weapons. They often have nuclear launch capabilities, and are always key components in whatever Snake's adversaries are planning. Over the course of the series, Metal Gears (which began as secret military projects) have become publicly recognized weapons available to the highest bidder. The canonical models include the Metal Gear TX-55, Metal Gear D, Metal Gear REX, Metal Gear RAY, Arsenal Gear, and Metal Gear RAXA.



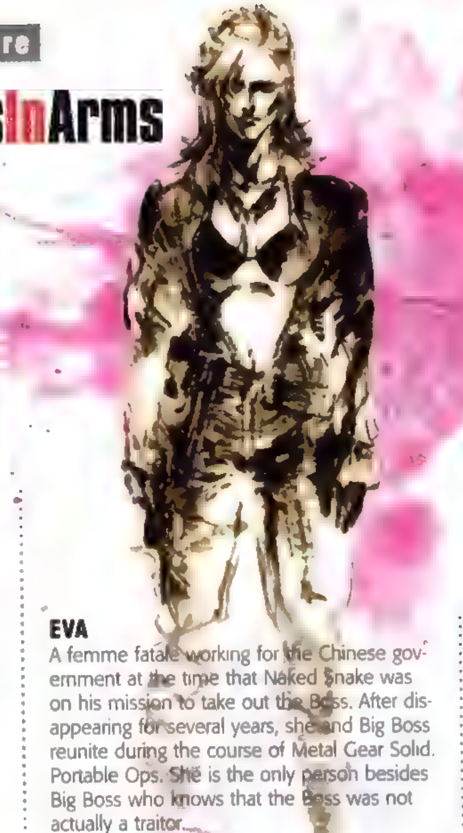
LIQUID SNAKE'S ARM

This is one element of the Metal Gear franchise that really strains credulity. After Liquid Snake's death during the Shadow Moses incident, his right arm was amputated and surgically attached to Revolver Ocelot (who had his hand cut off by Gray Fox). This allowed Liquid Snake to live on, with the arm taking temporary control over Ocelot's body several times during the course of Metal Gear Solid 2. It appears that in the years following MGS 2, the two fuse into one entity, Liquid Ocelot.

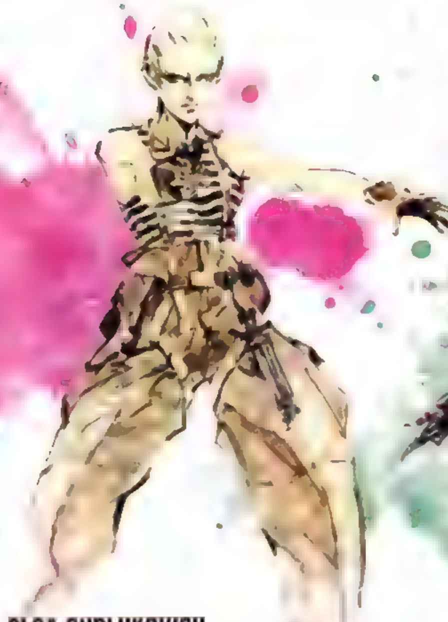
ComradesInArms



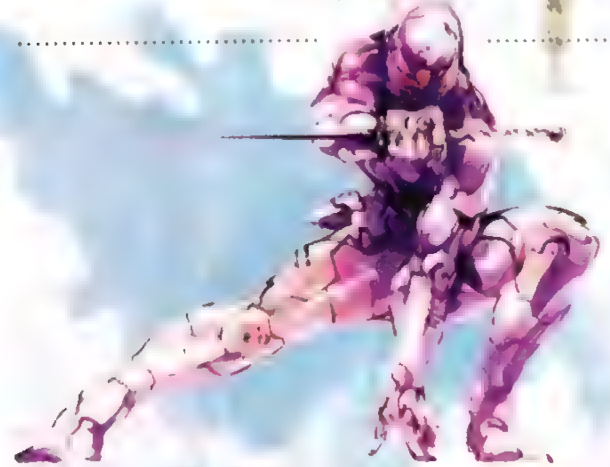
MERYL SILVERBURGH
A young soldier who was taken prisoner during the Foxhound revolt on Shadow Moses and eventually rescued by Solid Snake. She is Roy Campbell's daughter, and was romantically involved with Snake for a brief period after Metal Gear Solid.



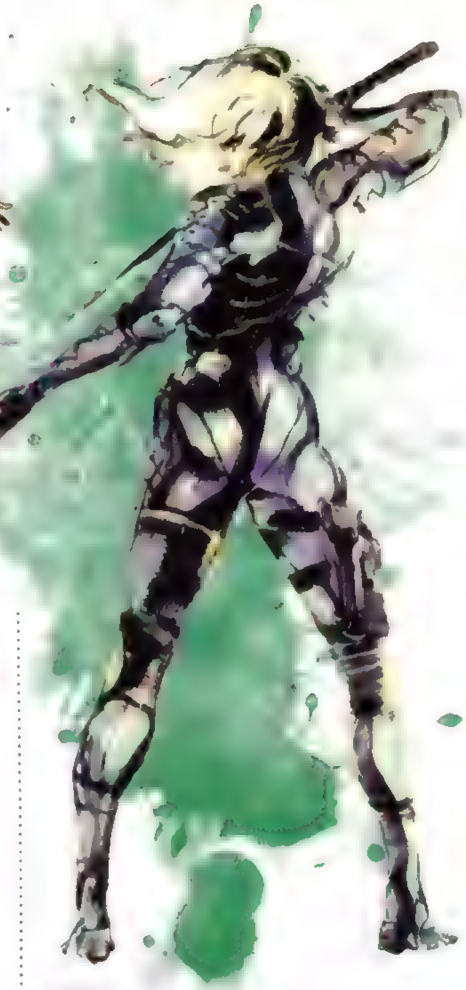
EVA
A femme fatale working for the Chinese government at the time that Naked Snake was on his mission to take out the Boss. After disappearing for several years, she and Big Boss reunite during the course of Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops. She is the only person besides Big Boss who knows that the Boss was not actually a traitor.



OLGA GURLUKOVICH
During Raiden's infiltration of the Big Shell, Olga assisted him in the guise of a cyborg ninja. She was compelled to keep Raiden alive by the Patriots. The shadowy organization had kidnapped her daughter, Sunny, at birth and threatened to kill her if Raiden failed his mission. To save her daughter, Olga sacrificed herself protecting Raiden



GRAY FOX
(A.K.A. FRANK JAEGER)
As a child soldier, Frank Jaeger was rescued by Big Boss, and eventually became his most trusted lieutenant. After earning the codename Gray Fox, he left Foxhound to participate in Big Boss' uprising in Zanzibar, where he and Solid Snake did battle. He survived the encounter, but was transformed into a mentally unstable cyborg due to years of experimental treatments. Gray Fox sacrificed his life to give Snake an opportunity to destroy Metal Gear REX



RAIDEN
The often-maligned star of Metal Gear Solid 2, Raiden underwent most of his training in virtual reality, though he has real combat experience from his days as a child soldier. During his mission on the Big Shell, Raiden fought alongside Solid Snake, and learned the importance of fighting for a cause instead of simply following orders. His girlfriend, Rosemary, was pregnant at the end of MGS 2.

SIDESTORIES

Not every Metal Gear experience falls within the confines of the main storyline. Metal Gear Acid for PSP is a spin-off series that takes place in an alternate timeline, with combat that revolves around card-based tactics. Before that, the Game Boy Color saw the release of Metal Gear Solid (also known as Metal Gear: Ghost Babel). This portable title is completely different from the PlayStation game of the same name, featuring an original story and gameplay with an old-school feel. They may not be canon, but they still offer authentic Metal Gear experiences.

CHRONOLOGY & LOCATIONS

1964
Metal Gear Solid 3:
Snake Eater
(Groznyj Grad)

1970
Metal Gear Solid:
Portable Ops
(San Hieronymo)

1995
Metal Gear
(Outer Heaven)

1999
Metal Gear 2:
Solid Snake
(Zanzibar)

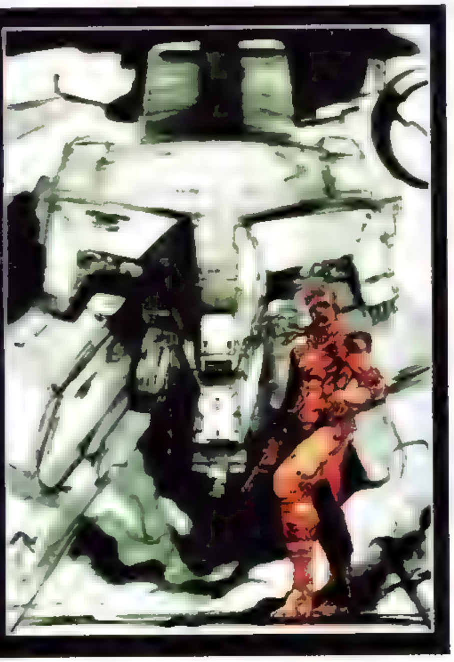
2005
Metal Gear Solid
(Shadow Moses)

2009
Metal Gear Solid 2:
Sons of Liberty
(Big Shell)

2014
Metal Gear Solid 4:
Gunsof the Patriots
(TBA Middle East)

THE ART

While the Metal Gear series has always been on the graphical cutting edge, the artwork behind the character models is equally impressive. The concept art on these pages is the work of Yoji Shinkawa, the series character designer and the man responsible for the games' striking visual style.



This Month In Gaming History

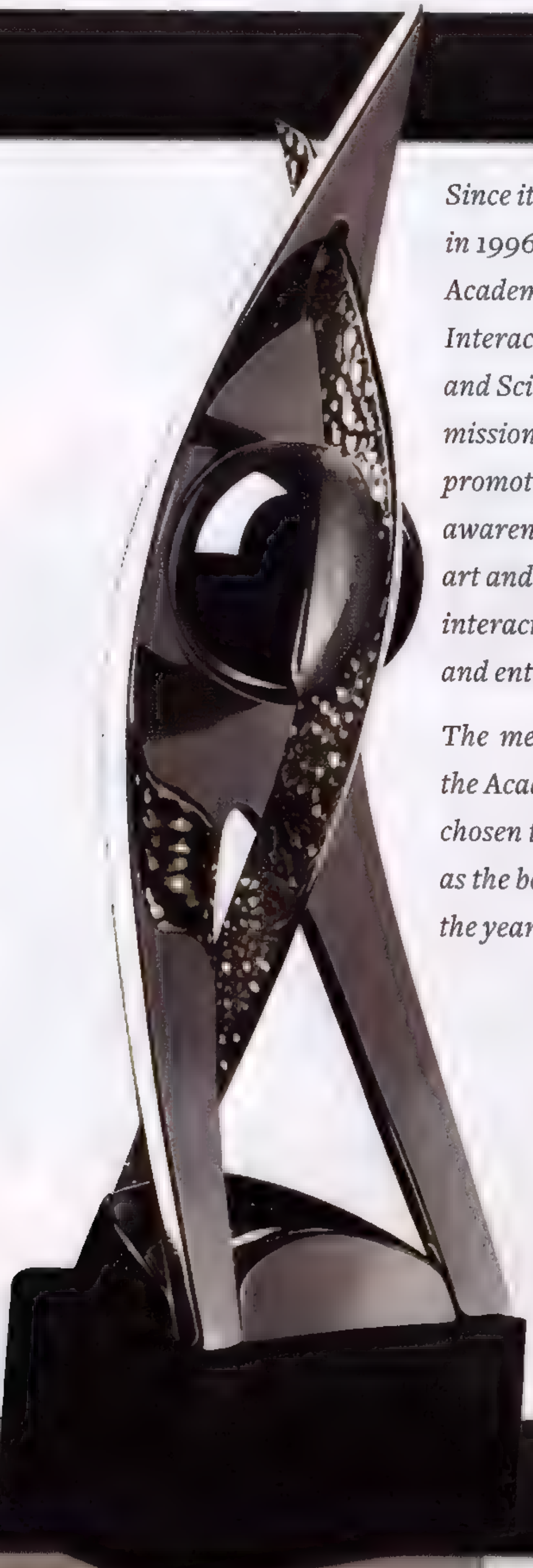
In June of 2003, one of gaming's leading ladies hit rock bottom in Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness. Largely taking place in major cities (not in tombs), this entry featured wonky controls, monotonous puzzles, and a story that had "rush job" written all over it. Some good came of the whole debacle; Angel of Darkness' cold reception inspired Eidos to get its act back together. The company pulled Lara out of the doghouse and put her back in the spotlight three years later with the exceptional Tomb Raider: Legend.

11th annual
# interactive achievement awards

ACADEMY OF INTERACTIVE ARTS & SCIENCES

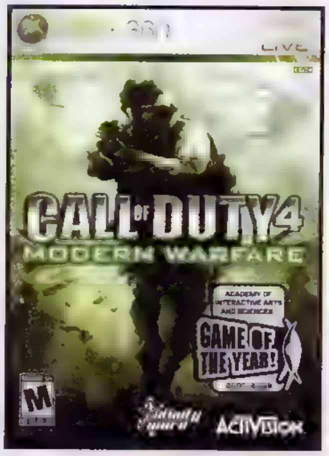
The *Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences* is proud to announce the winners of the *11th Annual Interactive Achievement Awards.*

2007 Games of the Year

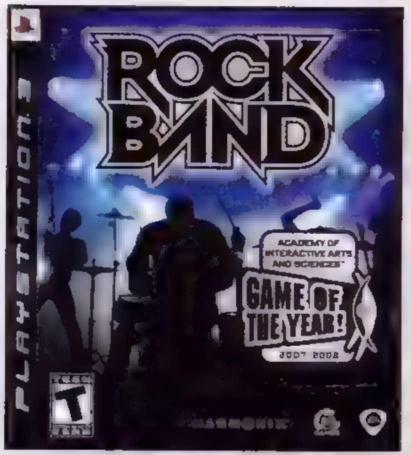


Since its inception in 1996, the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences mission is to promote awareness of the art and science of interactive games and entertainment.

The members of the Academy have chosen these titles as the best games of the year.


CALL OF DUTY 4
MODERN WARFARE
ACADEMY OF INTERACTIVE ARTS AND SCIENCES
GAME OF THE YEAR!
M
ACTIVISION

Overall Game of the Year
Console Game of the Year
Action Game of the Year
Achievement in Online Game Play


PLAYSTATION 3
ROCK BAND
ACADEMY OF INTERACTIVE ARTS AND SCIENCES
GAME OF THE YEAR!
2007 2008
T
HARMONIX

Family Game of the Year
Outstanding Achievement in Innovation
Outstanding Achievement in Music: Soundtrack

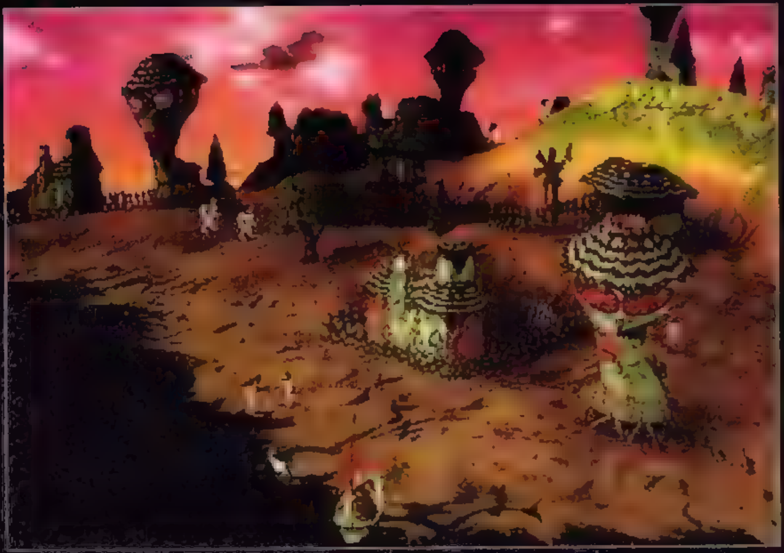
PC
The Orange Box
ACADEMY OF INTERACTIVE ARTS AND SCIENCES
GAME OF THE YEAR!
FEATURING
Half-Life 2: Episode Two
Team Fortress 2
AND INTRODUCING Portal
T-M
VALVE

Computer Game of the Year
Achievement in Game Design
Achievement in Game Play Engineering
Outstanding Character Performance

NINTENDO DS
ACADEMY OF INTERACTIVE ARTS AND SCIENCES
GAME OF THE YEAR!
2007 2008
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
Phantom Hourglass
E

Handheld Game of the Year

Get your copies today at **GameStop**
power to the players



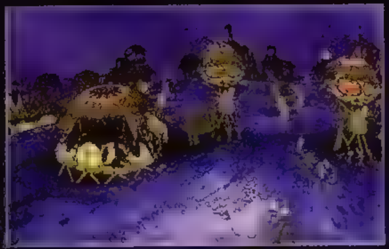
PC

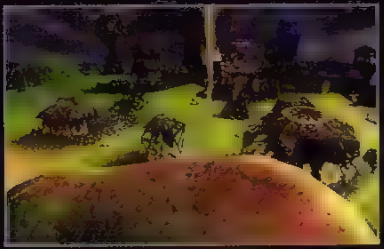
POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING

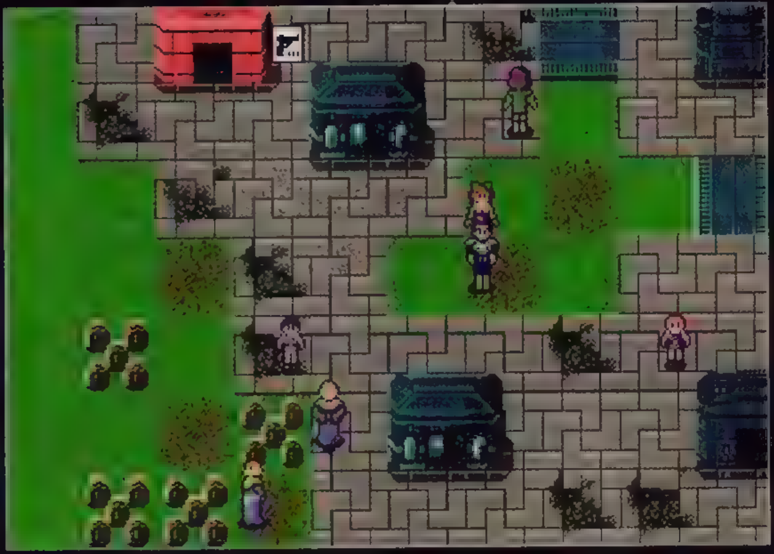
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** BULLFROG > **RELEASE** 1998

POPULOUS
THEN
N/A

Populous is credited with creating the god game genre, but the third entry goes in a slightly different (but still fun) direction. Populous: The Beginning puts an intermediary between your will and the game world: a shaman. If you play this game for the strategy, you'll be rewarded with a more streamlined approach to city development, which allows you to focus more on your shaman's role in combat. That's when the game becomes truly hilarious. A high point of any god game is messing with the world, and the spells at your disposal (along with some excellent sound work) make routing enemy forces a riot. The high-pitched screams as a fireball connects and the panicked shouts of a crowd beset by insects are priceless. It feels a little more like a modern RTS than the previous Populous titles – complete with some frustrating micromanagement and unit AI – but it has a charm all its own. There is also a PSone port of this game, but here's a little secret: Console RTS controls in the late '90s were not good. Stick to the PC version.





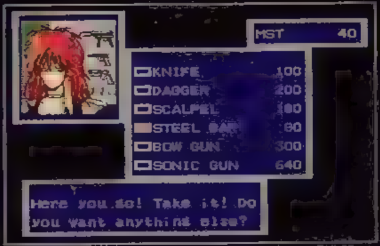


SEGA GENESIS

PHANTASY STAR II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SEGA OF AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA OF JAPAN
> **RELEASE** 1989

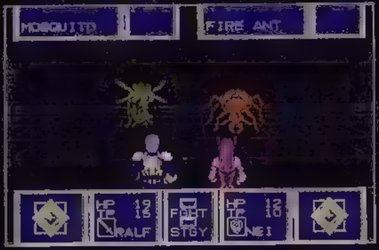
Even as Nintendo enthusiasts were hailing the glory of games like Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest, the Sega faithful were more than content to partake of their own epic RPG series – Phantasy Star. This second game was the first to make the jump to Genesis, even if it only took some minor graphical steps forward from the franchise's first iteration on the Master System. As players control an ever-growing party of enthusiastic anime-themed followers, this compelling mix of sci-fi and fantasy offers plenty of bang for the buck. Thanks to an unrelenting focus on constant and challenging random encounters along with whole slew of lengthy dungeons, Phantasy Star II is good for more than just a few afternoons of playtime. By almost any standard we now hold up to the genre, the game shows its age in everything from its battle system to its approach to menu navigation. However, for those with more than a passing interest in console history, this title and the other early incarnations of the series are a frequently overlooked early step towards the sprawling open world epics of today.

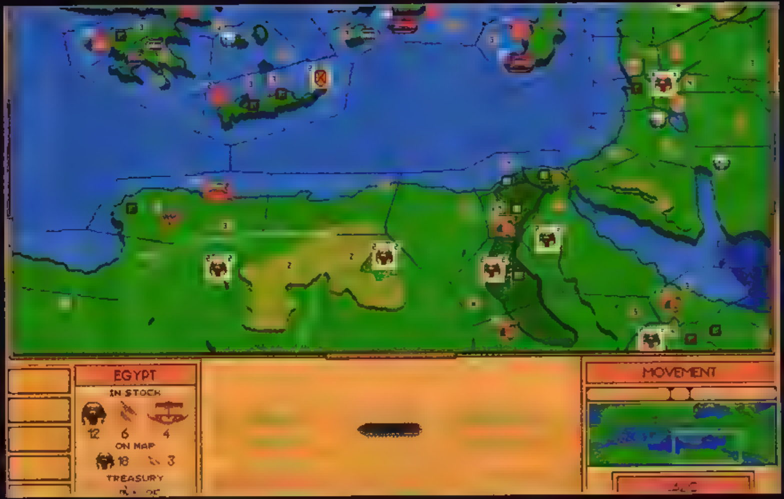


MST 40

KNIFE	100
DAGGER	200
SCALPEL	180
STEEL BAR	80
BOW GUN	300
SONIC GUN	640

Here you go! Take it! Do you want anything else?





PC

ADVANCED CIVILIZATION

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY > **PUBLISHER** AVALON HILL > **DEVELOPER** AVALON HILL > **RELEASE** 1995

One of the true classics of board gaming (and an inspiration to Sid Meier in creating his Civilization franchise), Advanced Civilization received this digital treatment back in 1995. A nearly straight-up adaptation of the tabletop game, Advanced Civilization pits ancient Mediterranean cultures against one another in a race to become the most civilized. Like an ever-shifting puzzle with multiple interlocking systems, managing your empire is a constant battle against random calamities and opportunistic neighbors. Sadly, this DOS version suffers badly from an unwieldy interface and a completely broken resource trading system. Unlike most strategy titles, resource trading is an absolutely critical part of gameplay, and the terrible implementation here makes Advanced Civilization nearly unplayable. A shame, since the tabletop original is so brilliant.

ONLINE

Extra Content You Can Find At
www.gameinformer.com

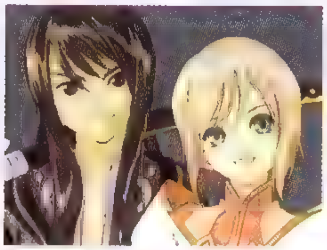
UNLIMITED LAUNCH: MAY 15

GUITAR HERO 4

Want more info on Neversoft's ambitious attempt to take down Rock Band? Check out our exclusive video interview with project director Brian Bright of Neversoft.

N+

GI sits down with the N+ Racing and Survival champs Brian Ellsworth and Steven Caraballo, respectively, to discuss their dominance of the popular XBLA game.



The Tale of Tales

Learn more about Tales of Vesperia in our Q&A with producer Yoshito Higuchi.

The Prince Returns

Whet your appetite for the latest Prince of Persia game by checking out more exclusive art.

Cartoon Rarities

Check out our exclusive interviews with Viva Piñata 2 producer Steven Branand and Banjo-Kazooie designer Shaun Read.

I'll Be Damned

Read our extended interview about Damnation with Blue Omega's Richard Gilbert.

ALSO ONLINE THIS MONTH:

GI Online heads to Vegas to attend Capcom's gamers' day. Cross your fingers for more Resident Evil 5 news!

GAMERS

"OLD SCHOOL funny"
-John Gaudiosi, AOL Games

"A funnier and meaner Napoleon Dynamite"
-Dreamwatch Magazin

"a hilarious film"
-www.GameFreaks365.com

"funnier than KNOCKED UP and SUPERBAD combined"
-Mike Smith, Indie Film Natio

Gamers is a comedy about the lives of four slacker friends (and one obsessive interloper) living at home, working in the real world but playing in a fantasy world. The sacrifice, the obsession, the blind dedication... this is their hilarious true story.

ON DVD 5/06/08

UNRATED
UNCENSORED
UNAPOLOGETIC

www.monter media.co

for ordering assistance Ca 1 800 42 2593 www.

GAMEOVER You And The Others Failed To Restore Peace To The Planet Algo

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Ready to find the love of your life? Experience the eGamer Difference. Now it's FREE to receive and review your matches. Each compatible match is pre-screened for you across at least a couple of dimensions. Get started now. Simply take the questionnaire below to receive your match. Find out what happens when attraction is ignited by the ability to manipulate your partner in a 3D environment using a couple of analog sticks. Note: Your match represents a legally binding contract of true love.

1 Which totally hot game came out first?

- **A.** Hot Wheels: Turbo Racing
- **B.** Hot Shots Golf 3
- **C.** Hot Potato!
- **D.** Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2

2 In Luigi's Mansion, the green-clad plumber finally got his shot at the spotlight. With his flashlight and vacuum in hand, what was Luigi's goal?

- **A.** To save Princess Peach, who has been kidnapped yet again
- **B.** To clear the house of ghosts for the home-owners who hired him
- **C.** To save Mario, who has disappeared in the house
- **D.** Murder most foul

3 At long last, one of the classic shooters of our youth is coming to consoles! Which of these is not an installment in the memorable WWII flight series?

- **A.** 1942
- **B.** 1942: Joint Strike
- **C.** 1943: The Battle of Midway
- **D.** Battlefield: 1942

4 Who developed The Political Machine? (Hint: Answer lies somewhere in this issue)

- **A.** EA
- **B.** Stardock
- **C.** Liquid
- **D.** Broderbund

5 Man, there have been some crazy MMOs that have come and gone over the years. Which of these wasn't one of them?

- **A.** Meridian 59
- **B.** Saga of Ryzom
- **C.** Sacred
- **D.** RYL: Path of the Emperor

6 In the SNES fantasy action game King of Dragons, you could choose several familiar archetypes for your character, such as the Cleric. How many character types could you choose from?

- **A.** 3
- **B.** 4
- **C.** 5
- **D.** 6

CREDIT 00
CLERIC L 6 FIGHTER L 4

7 1998 saw the release of a new 3D fighting game for the PlayStation that included 20 characters, weapon combat, and a survival mode. What was it called?

- **A.** Cardinal Sin
- **B.** Cardinal Syn
- **C.** Kardinal Sin
- **D.** Card and All Zen

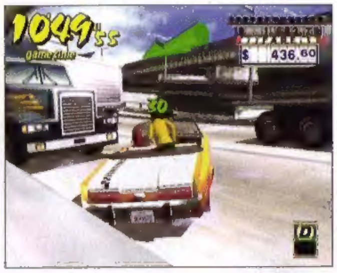
8 In Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble, gamers were able to ride several friendly animal characters along their way to save Donkey and Diddy Kong. Which one of these wasn't one of your helpful buddies?

- **A.** Trunky the Elephant
- **B.** Squawks the Parrot
- **C.** Enguarde the Swordfish
- **D.** Squitter the Spider

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3
DIXIE KONG'S Double Trouble!
Nintendo
SUPER NINTENDO

9 After its arcade premiere, what home console did that zany driving game Crazy Taxi first appear on?

- **A.** Nintendo 64
- **B.** PlayStation
- **C.** Dreamcast
- **D.** PlayStation 2



10 What is best in life as well as online deathmatches?

- **A.** To crush your enemies
- **B.** To see them driven before you
- **C.** To hear the lamentation of their women
- **D.** I hope no one answered C

BREAKDOWN

1 million units of the Call of Duty 4's variety map pack were sold in the first nine days of its launch on Xbox Live.

3 albums were included in the recent announcement from Rock Band that the game will finally feature full album downloads. Judas Priest, The Cars, and The Pixies are first up to receive the royal treatment.

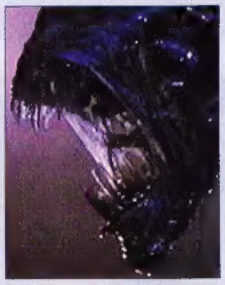
26,000 local PTA groups (that's all of them) have been offered step-by-step guides to setting video game console parental locks and other safety suggestions, a service being provided by a partnership with the ESRB.

100 million units have been purchased in the record-breaking The Sims franchise, a number that includes both PC and console releases, along with their expansions.

2 of you still owe us money from that trip to Vegas last month. Pay up!

★ Your eGamer Match ★

0-1:
Wario



2-3:
Alien Queen

4-5:
Zack

6-7:
Cortana

8-9:
Nate Drake

10:
Nariko

Game Informer Magazine® (ISSN 1067-6392) is published monthly at a subscription price of $19.98 per year, or twenty four issues for $24.98 by Sunrise Publications®, 724 North First Street, 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. (612) 486-6100 or FAX (612) 486-6101. For subscriptions, back issues, or customer service inquiries Toll Free (866) 844-4263. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing offices. SUBSCRIBERS/POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Game Informer Magazine®, 724 North First Street, 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Foreign or Canadian orders must be prepaid in U.S. dollars. Canadian Orders: $25/yr additional postage. All other Foreign Orders: $35/yr additional postage. CANADIAN SUBSCRIBERS SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40064408, RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO: EXPRESS MESSENGER INTERNATIONAL, P.O. BOX 25058 LONDON BRC, ONTARIO, CANADA N6C 6A8 Game Informer® does not claim any copyright in the screenshots herein. Copyright in all screenshots contained within this publication are owned by their respective companies. Entire contents copyright 2008. Game Informer Magazine®. All rights reserved; reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer® is a trademark of GameStop. Products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies.

Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. A 2. C 3. D 4. B 5. C 6. C 7. B 8. A 9. C 10. A, B, or D

Dell recommends Windows Vista® Ultimate.
Windows Vista Ultimate
Games for Windows
UNIVERSE AT WAR
SEGA
TEEN T
WHEN YOU'RE READY TO LIVE IT.
DELL
YOURS IS HERE

New Dell™ XPS™ 630 Starting at

$1199

Add Genuine Windows Vista® Ultimate for $150. Shown with Logitech® G15 Backlit Keyboard ($79.99), Logitech G9 Gaming Mouse ($89.99), Logitech 5.1-Channel G51 Speaker System ($169.99), and Dell™ 22" widescreen flat panel ($340). Add all for $829.97. Gaming with Windows Vista® Ultimate with DirectX® 10 Graphics and Games for Windows® titles is the ultimate in true gaming play.

WWW.DELL.COM/INFORM630 | 1-800-528-6155

Offer subject to change; not combinable with all other offers. Taxes, shipping, handling and other fees apply. U.S. Dell Home and Home Office new purchases only. Dell reserves the right to cancel orders arising from pricing or other errors. Newspaper Advertisement Supplement.

Get in touch with your dark side. YourOtherYou.com
Prototype shown with optional equip't. ©2008 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

Made with love by

RetroMags

Our goal is to preserve classic video game magazines so that they are not lost permanently.

People interested in helping out in any capacity, please visit us at retromags.com.

No profit is made from these scans, nor do we offer anything available from the publishers themselves.

If you come across anyone selling releases from this site, please do not support them and do let us know.

Thank you!