HALO 2, METROID PRIME 2, GTA: SAN ANDREAS REVIEWED!

ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

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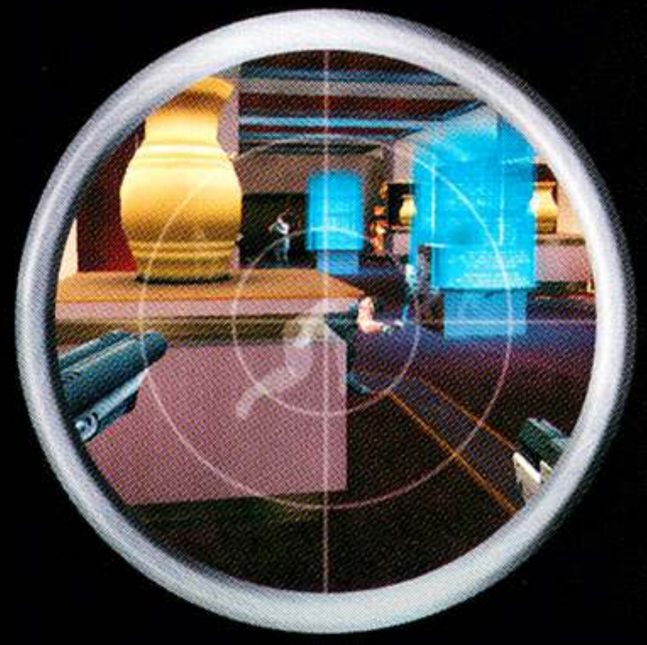


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XBOX

XBOX LIVE

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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Violence
Game experience may change during online play.

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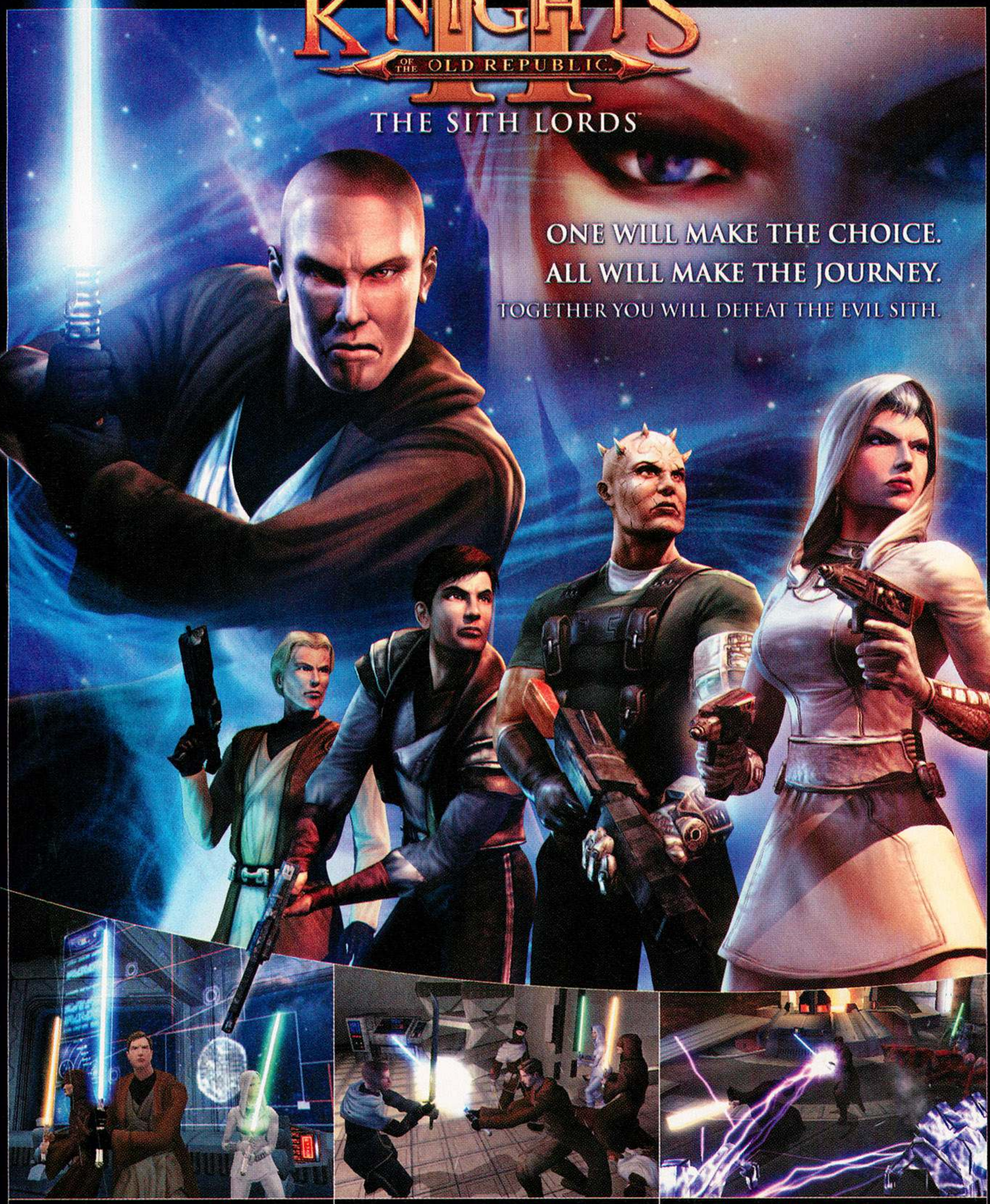
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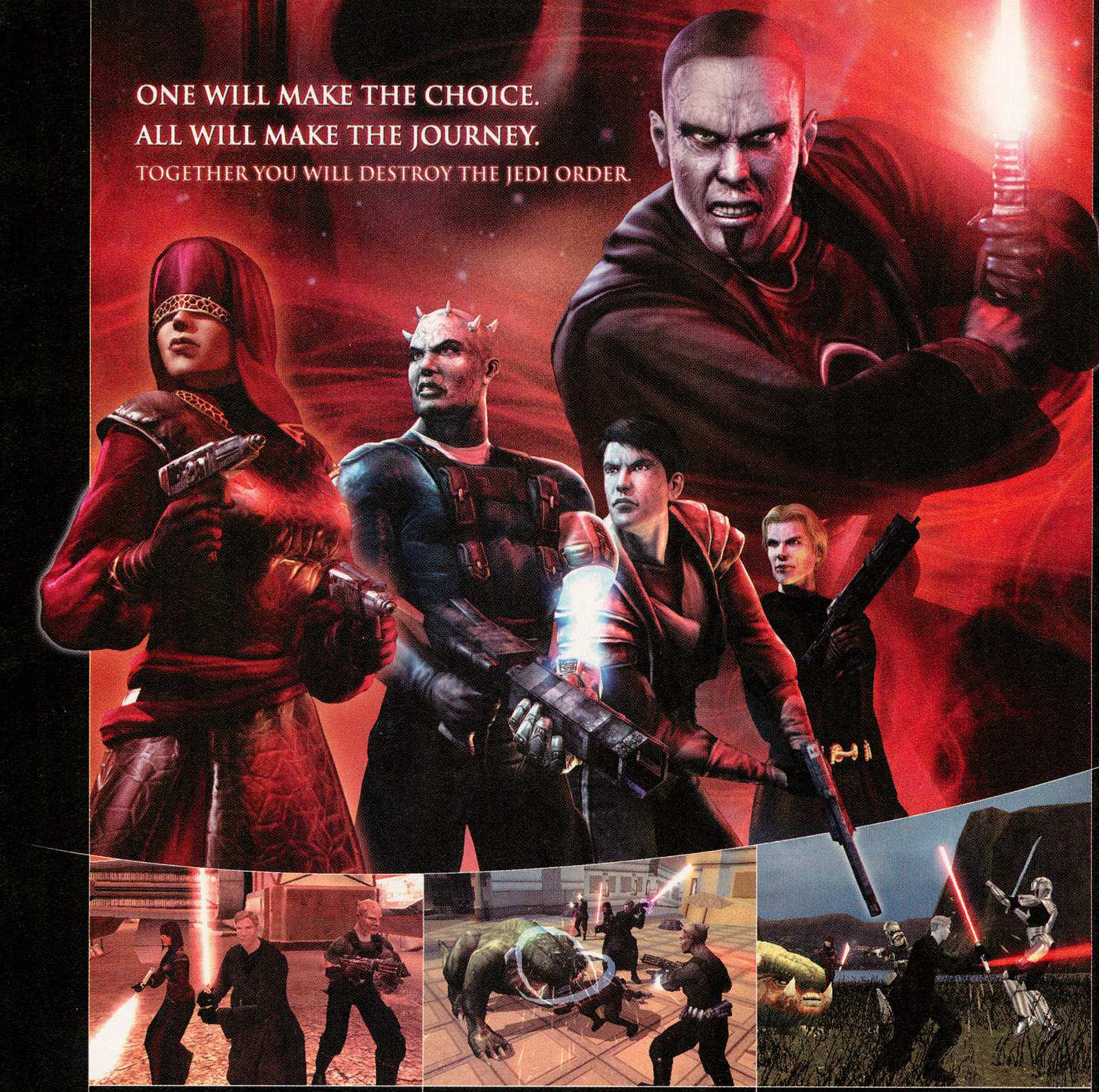
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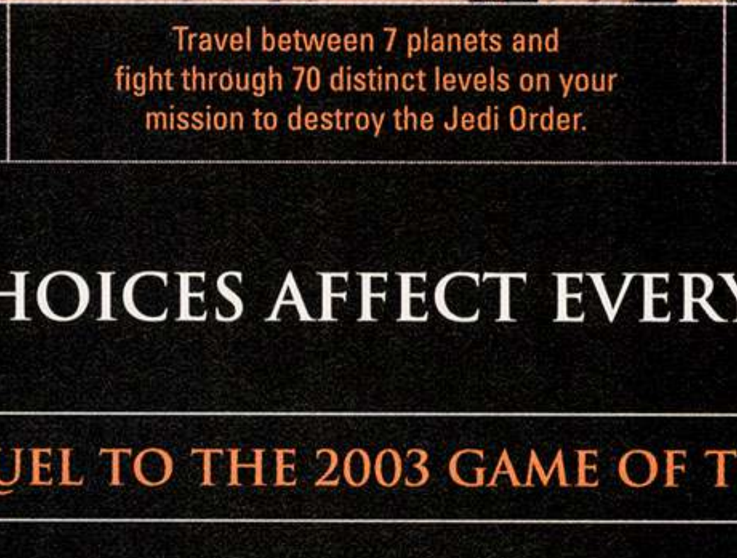
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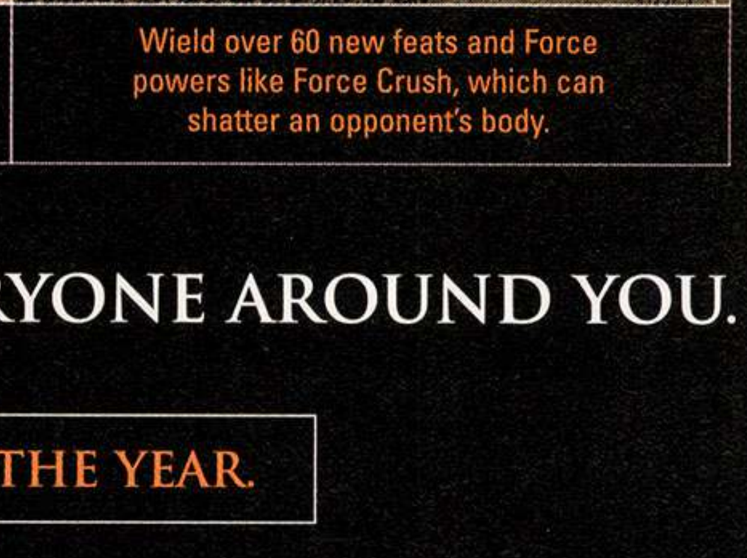




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OR DESTROY IT?



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Escape from the Ordinary

"Riddick is a must-see, must-play, must-buy Xbox classic."

—Electronic Gaming Monthly—

Available on PC December 2004

MATURE 17+

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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issue 186 · holiday 2004

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COVER STORY:
METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

The original king of stealth has returned and we have the exclusive review! Get the full scoop on the new gameplay, old setting (chronologically speaking), and the rest of Snake's trip into the jungle.

REVIEW CREW
Best review issue ever

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editorial



My eyes are droopy, my hair is frazzled, and I can barely straighten out my clawed, feeble hands to type these words. Just how long have I been working this deadline, anyway? I barely summon enough energy to turn my groggy head to look at a calendar—holy crap, it's October already. Oh, now it makes sense. I'm in the worst month of the year for game journalists...the month we have to review most of the major holiday releases due for November. That means four hours of sleep each night, missing *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* because we're still working, and enough caffeine to kill a hundred elephants.

But it's also the most awesomest, most kick-assiest month of the year for game journalists. In the last two weeks, I've played through *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal*, *Killzone*, *Halo 2*, and later tonight, I start on *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. If you swim through all the haze and fog in my brain, you might—just might—find a semblance of a thought that knows just how cool all of this is.

But it's not all fun and games, folks. Well actually, it is all games, but what I'm trying to say is, we're dead serious about this business. With *Halo 2*, for example, you're reading reviews from three critics who have each played through the campaign mode independently, then tested every multiplayer mode available (co-op, team, free-for-alls, etc.). In other words, you're not just getting our impressions of the first hour or two of play; you're getting the full and real deal with *EGM*'s reviews. Whether it's *Halo 2* or some no-name game from some no-name company, our reviews are the most thorough, honest, and unbiased you'll find anywhere—and I'll stake my personal reputation on that. So enjoy our 42 pages of reviews this month. We've sacrificed small portions of our brains to bring them to you, but it was all worth it.

I think that aforementioned semblance of a thought just brought a smile to my face. Either that or I'm totally delirious and about ready to pass ou....

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

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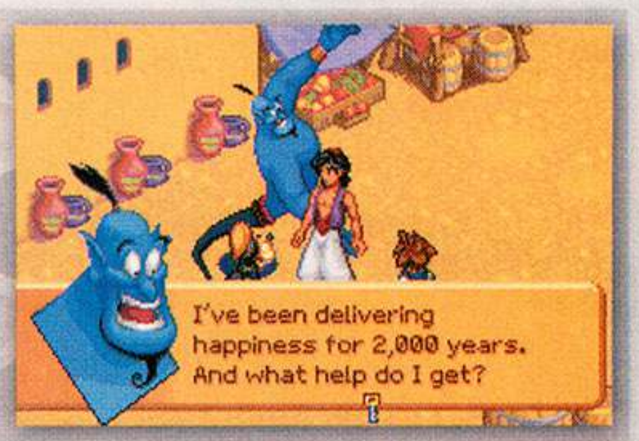
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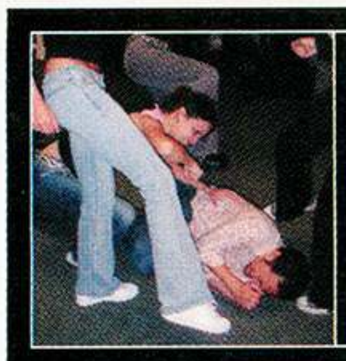
Fantasy Violence
Mild Language

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staff

The best there is at what we do, and what we do ain't pretty

the review crew



DAN "SHOE" HSU, Editor-in-Chief
Shoe complained about all the games he had to review this month, so the Frag Dolls (see pg. 64) whupped his sorry ass. Check out his Now Playing list...that's nothing to bitch about!
1UP.com Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Halo 2, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal, Metroid Prime 2, Burnout 3*
Fave Genres: Just about everything

MARK MACDONALD, Executive Editor
All the king's horses and all the king's men finally put Mark's head back together after last month's "incident." Then he reviewed his Now Playing games, all in the course of two weeks, and this happened. Who's going to clean that up?
1UP.com Blog: Mark doesn't believe in blog
Now Playing: *Metal Gear Solid 3, Halo 2, Metroid Prime 2*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Shooters





JENNIFER TSAO, Managing Editor
This is what it looks like when a managing editor takes a two-week vacation in the middle of her magazine's busiest time of year. (Not pictured: Bitter Jen at the moment she realized she wouldn't be here to review some of the year's hottest games.)
1UP.com Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com
Now Playing: *The Urbz: Sims in the City, Karaoke Rev. Vol. 3*
Fave Genres: RPG, Adventure, Action Sports, Rhythm-Action

CRISPIN BOYER, Senior Editor
You think this holiday season is crazy with megabig games? Crispin time-zipped to Space Century 3240 and meta-played *Halo 34*, *Super Mario 65*, and *GTA: Cirrus Star Cluster*. The verdict? Eh, kinda derivative. But the Soylent Green...delicious!
1UP.com Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com
Now Playing: *GTA: San Andreas, Halo 2, Metroid Prime 2*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, RPG





SHANE BETTENHAUSEN, Previews Editor
Dealing with the sweltering heat, massive crowds, and rock-steady nightlife of the Tokyo Game Show took its toll on Shane, who returned to the States with a brutal case of jet lag, a hacking cough, and this really silly photo taken in a bar at 4 a.m.
1UP.com Blog: egmshane.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Metal Gear Solid 3, Metroid Prime 2, WarioWare DS*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, RPG, Fighting, Karaoke

DEMIAN LINN, Reviews Editor
This month we reviewed *Halo 2*, *Metal Gear Solid 3*, *GTA: San Andreas*, *Metroid Prime 2*, *Killzone*, *Ratchet & Jak*, that new *Need for Speed*...the rest of Demian's bio will be a collaborative effort between his forehead and his keyboard: gbgffh hnbvb n.
1UP.com Blog: egmdemian.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Halo 2, GTA: San Andreas, City of Heroes* (PC)
Fave Genres: Action, Hockey, Racing, Fighting





BRYAN INTIHAR, News Editor
Metal Gear Solid 3, *Metroid Prime 2*, *Ratchet*, *Jak*—Bryan got plenty of triple-A titles to play this month. Unfortunately, he came up a few bucks short when it came time to pay off Demian for the chance at reviewing *Halo 2*. Damn bills....
1UP.com Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com
Now Playing: *MGS3: Snake Eater, Metroid Prime 2, Halo 2*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Sports

The Contributors

■ Since the *EGM* editors are allergic to sunlight, we sent tech writer **JOHN BRANDON** to explore the new wave of real-world games you can play in the great outdoors.
■ Naughty? Nice? A little of both? Doesn't matter. Gear guy **SHAWN SMITH** has assembled a holiday shoppers' guide that'll satisfy your inner angel and/or demon.
■ What if the PlayStation never existed? Freelancers **ROBERT ASHLEY**, **GEOFF KEIGHLEY**, **MARC SALTZMAN**, and **SCOTT STEINBERG** explore that alternate reality and many others on page 50.

Guest Reviewers



ROBERT ASHLEY
Robert's dad's visit sabotaged productivity with Maker's Mark and *AntiGrav*.



JOSHUA CAIN
After some wine and sweet talk, Seanbaby swept young Joshua off his feet.



JON DUDLAK
We left Jon behind to protect our Chicago offices from scavengers.



GREG FORD
Apes, giant lizards, aliens...if it's got an animal, "Ranger" Ford will play it.



KEVIN GIFFORD
After four RPGs in a month, Kev wants to play something a bit simpler.



NICH MARAGOS
Nich loves princesses and puppets, but not playing house in *The Urbz*.



PATRICK MAURO
Pat bashed some nerds after not reviewing any "real" sports games.



JOHN RICCIARDI
John lives in the exotic orient, where he trades in rare spices and games.



JUSTIN SPEER
With no one to snap a photo, Justin resorted to self-indulgent photography.



EVAN SHAMOON
In addition to games, Evan collects medallions and fine wines.

■ Every month we get swamped with more games than our staff could possibly ever play. Some of us tried, but we just ended up with bloodshot eyes and a severe case of the shakes. To help deal with the flood of games, we employ a crack team of highly trained freelancers, but even they can't always get it done. That's why we get help from the staff at **GMR**, **OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE**, **XBOX NATION**, and **1UP.COM**.

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letters

rants, queries, and fashion faux pas



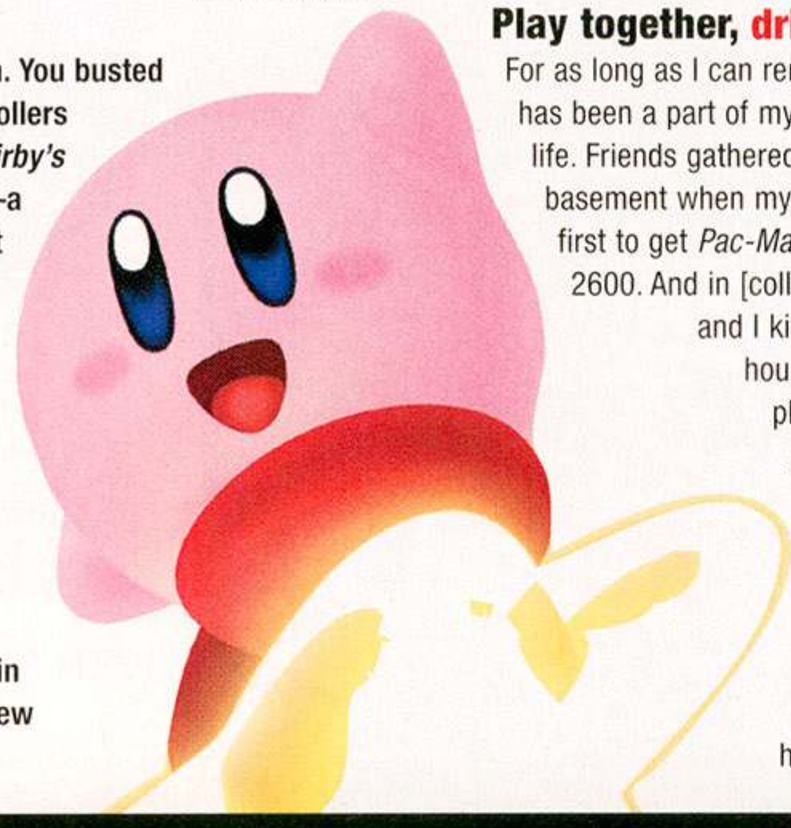
■ We hope we can play from this perspective.

Supersmashed controllers

It all started out when *Super Smash Brothers: Melee* came out. I got it and played it...a lot. So far, I have about 6,000-plus hours, way too many considering that my data got erased a year or so ago. It seems, though, the more I play the game, the more my controllers need replacing. I've gone through 13 controllers, as of a few days ago. Now, I recently bought a copy of *Kirby Air Ride* and played the hell out of it. I've already lost two controllers to that game. I don't understand how these games kill my controllers.

—Jon Contreras

Yikes, Jon. You busted two controllers playing *Kirby's Air Ride*—a game that uses only one button? Were you exposed to a heavy dose of gamma radiation in the past few years?



Big, beautiful women

I heard that out in Japan there is a game kinda like the movie *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman*. Is this true? If so, sign me up for a copy, please! I can just imagine how it would be to play as a gigantic 50-foot babe who walks around wrecking the city.

—Keyblade Master

It's true. Publisher D3 has a budget line of often campy games that includes *The Giant Beauty*, in which you guide tanks and aircraft to stop a supersized woman's sexy, destructive rampage. Ah, we've all been there.

The good news for you is D3 should be opening a U.S. subsidiary soon.

Letter of the month



Mod as heck

Games like *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* are making games look hip to mainstream audiences, but gaming loses all credibility when TV networks do something as laughable as MTV's *Videomods*. The whole show is made up of random videogame characters singing to music videos in an incredibly uncool manner. It's hard to believe that the videogame companies would even create the CG footage for the show. In the one and only episode I endured, BloodRayne "sang" an Evanescence song while other characters stupidly played instruments in the background. Later, the random dudes of the *Fight Club* game rapped and break-danced while *Tribes* characters "rocked out" to the Von Bondies. Hilarious? Yes. Intentionally hilarious? Uh, no.

While the show will definitely appear ridiculous to a hardcore gamer, imagine how stupid it must look to casual gamers. How will gaming ever achieve the art-form status that music and film have when pop culture insists on doing dumb crap like this?

—Vincent Cimino



Congrats, Vince! Your righteous indignation has made you a member of the Letter of the Month club. We're not sure if your prize game will qualify as art, but we hope you'll enjoy it anyway.

Play together, drink alone

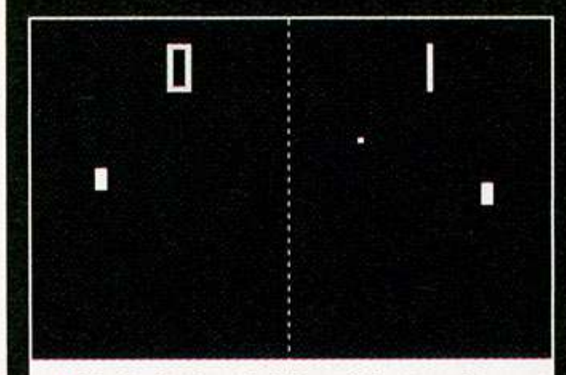
For as long as I can remember, gaming has been a part of my social life. Friends gathered in my parents' basement when my family was the first to get *Pac-Man* for the Atari 2600. And in [college], my friends and I killed countless hours and brain cells playing *NHL Hockey* and drinking beer. However, many of the guys that I have gamed with over the years have moved across the country. This is why I am thankful for Xbox Live. With it, I am able to get together with my buddies with a few simple button presses.

A while ago, I was playing *Rainbow Six 3* with a bunch of friends online. One of them told us that he was going to get a beer. It sounded like a good idea, so a few of us did the same. One drink turned into many, and more than one of us got quite tanked while talking trash into the wee hours of the morning. Everything seemed fine until I turned off my Xbox. It was then that I saw the large number of empty bottles on my coffee table and I was the only one in the room. My question is, do I have a drinking problem?

—Drunken Canuck ➤

POST OFFICE

Ranting and raving from our message boards, **boards.1UP.com** (look for *Electronic Gaming Monthly*'s forums)



■ Each electronic "bloop" is a cry for help gone unanswered.

Gamers have tear ducts, too

Glutted on a massive dose of *Halo 2* and *GTA: San Andreas* info, board posters at 1UP.com relived tearful gaming moments of yesteryear....

PaperCut XXX: "[*Final Fantasy VII*'s] Aeris dying is off-limits—if that is your moment, pick your No. 2."

FrigidSpartan: "Story line from *Pong*...sniff. That poor small mass of pixels called a ball, getting hit all over the place...so sad...sniff."

da_berserker: "*Final Fantasy IV*, aka *FFII* on the Super Nintendo, brought tears to my eyes at a lot of different spots."

Solidsnake 64: "The scene from the original *Metal Gear Solid* when Sniper Wolf dies always gets me. And the scene where Gray Fox dies."

Passion of the Gamer: "*Karnov* from the NES brought me to tears. After weeks and weeks of torture, you get to the end and...'CONGRATULATIONS!' Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Lethal weapons

The topic: your favorite brand of virtual destruction. Pick your poison, stranger.

contra jc: "RCP-90 from *GoldenEye 007* (Nintendo 64), MD pistol from *Halo*: Tie."

NeoMaximum: "I like the Gunblade from *FFVIII*. Call me an *FF* freak, but that was awesome. Combining two of the most badass weapons since...ever...into one cool thing."

PaperCutXXX: "Definitely the rabbit from *Whiplash*."

CONTACT EGM

Carrier pigeons, smoke signals, string and styrofoam cups, messages in bottles, and the Pony Express won't cut it. Contact us at **EGM@ziffdavis.com** or:

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Touching is not good.

Or so we're told. Please do not touch ...
yourself, your nose, wet paint, that zit,
grandma's best china. You name it,
you can't touch it. We think that's wrong.
Why shouldn't you touch what you want?
What if you could touch the games you
play? What if you could make something
jump or shoot or run just by touching it?
Let's face it, touching the game means
controlling the game. And when we say
control, we mean precision control.
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universe. One wrong touch and you're toast.
Forget everything you've ever been told
and repeat after us. Touching is good.

Touching is good.



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➤ **If you can still hold on to the controller, you're fine. This does raise an interesting question, though: Is online gaming a legitimate social activity? Is Canuck drinking alone or with pals? You make the call.**

Time for real time

I was looking at all the tech going into the new Nintendo DS, and the touch screen really caught my eye. Having a touch screen makes the system really cry out for real-time strategy games. Give us *Command & Conquer*, *StarCraft*, or *WarCraft*! Even if they only had graphics on par with the original *C&C: Red Alert*, that would be a great leap in handheld history.

—John

You're in luck, John. Nintendo is bringing strategy game *Advance Wars DS* (below) to the system early next year. As for other war games, the DS is just a newborn. Give it time.

Sleep it off

I received a PlayStation 2 for Christmas last year, and I have to ask—what is the best way to turn off the system? One friend says that since the PS2 is a computer, I should put it into sleep mode (hold the reset button for 3 seconds) every time I stop using it. Another friend says that I should just hit the switch in the back, but another friend says I should put it in sleep, then hit the switch. Personally, I use the first method. But, I just want to know what the *EGM* editors do to take care of their PlayStation 2s.

—Ross

Our friends at Sony Customer Service were happy to answer your question. "If you want to play it again in a couple of hours, you can put it in standby," a rep tells us. "Otherwise, you can just go ahead and turn it off using the switch on the back." But is it bad to leave your PS2 in perpetual sleep mode? "That's OK too, as long as you see the red light," says the Sony rep.

"People have already laughed at us and mocked us...."

—Controller-wearin' Joe Skoufes



■ **War gaming: perfect for the DS**

No love for bots

I made every case I could think of to Bungie for them to include A.I.-controlled bots in the upcoming *Halo 2*. I felt they were vital for the sake of offline multiplayer enjoyment. When I found out they decided against including them, I was very disappointed. Will bots ever be more than an afterthought with developers? I hope so, but probably not until the next console generation, when more memory and processor power will allow them to be the cunning offline opponents gamers like me have always wanted.

—Aaron Marshall

We have to agree that it never hurts to have some artificial tail around to kick, but about those memory and processor constraints...have you ever faced off against a team of DarkSims in the N64 shooter *Perfect Dark*? Or a band of Elites in *Halo*? Pure computer-driven evil. Check out *Killzone* for PS2, too—you can add up to 14 bots.



■ **Women only *wish* they were old school enough for these strapping young studs.**

Fashion neckwear

This is a photo of me and my buddy Tonio Souri sporting our new fashion style. I want people to know that this is the new style to be reckoned with—and we invented it. We are the first to wear Nintendo controllers around our necks to show our dedication to the old school. If Flava Flav can wear a huge clock around his neck, why can't we wear Nintendo controllers? People have laughed at us and mocked us for this, but we truly are old school and we are proud.

—Joe Skoufes

We're not going to laugh at you and mock you for your fashion choice (we'll let the readers do that). Instead, we're going to point you to our holiday buyers' guide—specifically, page 92—where you will find a belt buckle designed exclusively for dorks of your caliber.

No strings attached

With Nintendo making so much money off its nearly perfect wireless controller, Wavebird, you would think that Sony and Microsoft (selling a lot more systems than Nintendo) would get the hint and make their own wireless controllers. These third-party products feel nothing like the controllers I've grown to love.

—K-ronnickelz

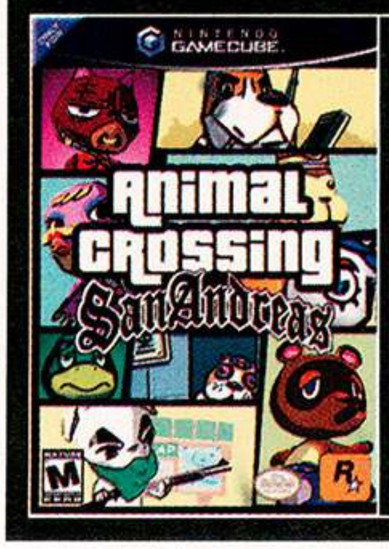
We do know that both companies are looking into wireless options, but we're likely to be tied up until the next generation of consoles.

Oops

A mischievous gnome slipped into the gears again, creating a terrible mess and a slight production error. In *EGM* #185's *Blood Will Tell* review, the third reviewer's text is attributed to Giancarlo Varanini over at *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*. It was actually written by 1UP.com's Dave Smith.

GAME DESIGN-O-RAMA

Got proof that game design is best left to the pros? Send your concept (with art) to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject: design-o-rama



ANIMAL CROSSING: SAN ANDREAS

It's the follow-up to the popular sim *Animal Crossing*—with a mature twist. You and your handy hatchet can go anywhere and hack anything in your peaceful animal village. Hold up Tom Nook's store ("Put the bells in the bag, pal!"), steal all of your neighbor's furniture to make your house more feng shui, or kill your friends who give you yet another stupid 8-ball T-shirt as a reward. Let the killing sprees begin!

—Jonathan Jacquet



Tattoo: The Revenge

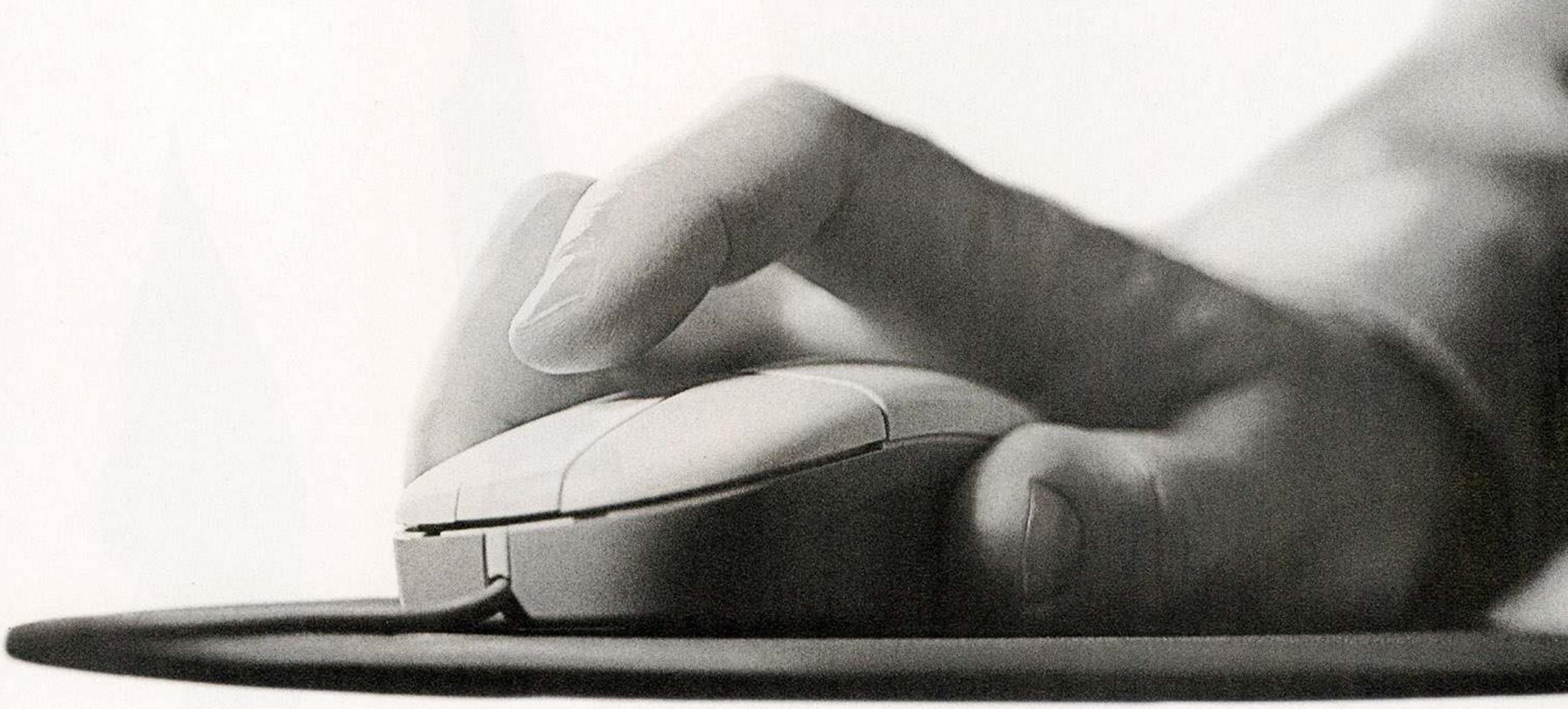
Every now and again I see a gamer send in a pic of his crazy game-related tattoo. I would like to join that throng—take a look at this one. As any avid *Final Fantasy* gamer should recognize, this is the emblem of Balamb Garden's SeeDs, the elite fighting force of *Final Fantasy VIII*. The tat is on my right calf, cost 250 bucks, took two and a half hours, and was worth every penny and every second of my time. Hope you like it. If you don't, then you can sod off—I didn't get it to please you anyway!

—Cory Stoker

Well, we didn't print this letter to please you either, so we're even.

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EASTERN FRONT

Surprises abound at the 2004 Tokyo Game Show

Does the Tokyo Game Show still matter? In recent years, the answer seemed to be no—the majority of hot new games have debuted at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in the U.S., and heavy-hitter Nintendo doesn't even bother attending TGS. This year's show shirked that trend, however, offering plenty of reasons to get psyched for new games from Japan. The hands-on debut of Sony's PlayStation Portable lineup garnered most of the attention (turn to page 76 to get the PSP game details), but *EGM* scoped several new PS2 and Xbox titles deserving of your attention.

ITADAKI STREET SPECIAL

PS2 • Square Enix • December 2004 (Japan)

The 2003 merger of role-playing giants Square and Enix hasn't produced any wacky *Dragon Quest-Final Fantasy* crossovers…until now. In this latest version of Japan's popular *Itadaki Street* board game series, lovable characters from both franchises do battle in a *Monopoly*-style contest. Dice roll, chocobos and slimes battle for supremacy, and superdeformed versions of your favorite *FF* and *DQ* heroes move around various themed boards (including the city of Mldgar from *FFVII*). What's even zanier is that it might come Stateside….



RADIATA STORIES

PS2 • Square Enix • Spring 2005 (Japan)

The team behind Squeenix's recent PS2 roleplayer *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time* returns with another epic adventure. *Radiata* pits two rather unfortunately named heroes, spunky lad Jack Russell and his female friend Ridley Timberlake, in a massive conflict against a tribe of vicious fairies. Some familiar *Star Ocean* traits carry over here: Battles unfold in real-time bouts where you run around thwacking foes, and you'll be able to recruit scads of different characters to join your party. Given the success of *Star Ocean*, *Radiata* seems destined to make the journey to U.S. shelves.



>> THQ MUST FEEL THE JUICE IS WORTH THE SQUEEZE, AS THE COMPANY HAS RECENTLY PICKED UP THE PUBLISHING RIGHTS TO ACCLAIM'S STREET RACER *JUICED* (PS2/XB). THQ,









■ Vincent was actually an optional character in *FFVII*: You can finish the game without ever getting him.

DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII

PS2 • Square Enix • Fall 2005

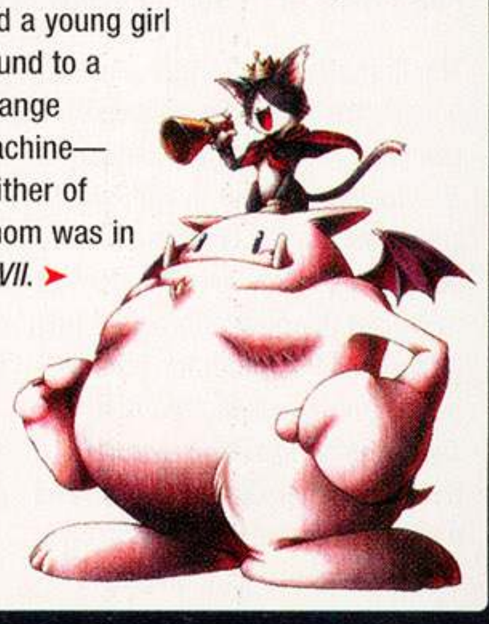
Prepare to return to the world of Square Enix's most successful role-playing game of all time—*Final Fantasy VII. Dirge of Cerberus* picks up three years after *FFVII*'s ending (which is a full year after the events of the upcoming *Advent Children* CG-animated movie, if you're keeping track), as the surviving citizens continue to rebuild after the cataclysmic confrontation between Cloud's party, Sephiroth, and that titanic meteor. Reconstruction halts, however, when a group of renegade troops known as the "Deep Ground Soldiers" emerges from beneath the planet's surface to wreak havoc. *FFVII*'s mysterious vampiric antihero, Vincent Valentine, rises to the occasion to face these strange new foes.

Why Vincent? It's simple: *Cerberus* is a shooter, so it requires a hero who deals in lead. (Spiky-haired *FFVII* poster-boy Cloud fights exclusively with a sword.) Concrete details on *Cerberus*' gameplay remain nebulous, but it's definitely not an RPG—expect a full-on action experience blending first-person shooting and *Metal Gear Solid*–style stealth elements. While that might have uncoordinated role-playing grandpas (a real gaming sect, honest) waving their fists in protest, the genre shift could create legions of new *FF* converts.



Also Starring

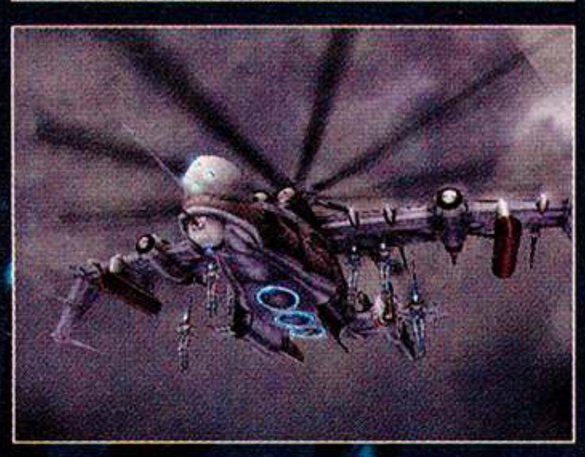
Vincent Valentine sits squarely in the *Cerberus* spotlight, but early footage shows at least one other playable character—*FFVII* goofball Cait Sith. Yep, the bizarre robotic cat returns (sans the massive moogle doll he once rode upon) to provide support and comic relief. The trailer also shows two new characters—a beefy bruiser and a young girl bound to a strange machine—neither of whom was in *FFVII*. ➤



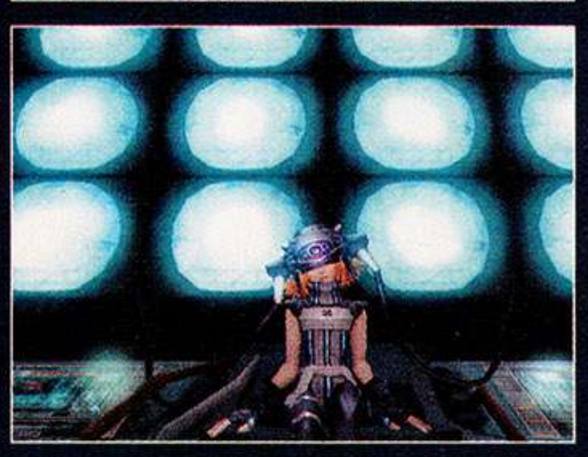












HOWEVER, HAS PUSHED BACKED THE GAME'S RELEASE UNTIL SOMETIME NEXT SUMMER, SO THE DEVELOPERS CAN GET UNDER ITS HOOD AND FINE-TUNE THE GAMEPLAY.... >>



■ Scaling the giants requires plenty of skill—they're constantly trying to shake you off.



WANDA AND THE COLOSSUS

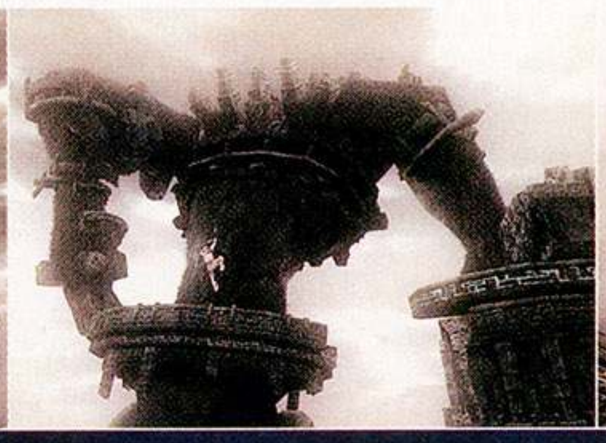
PS2 • Sony CEI • Fall 2005

Despite what you might have heard (or read) elsewhere, this isn't the sequel to Sony's fan-favorite PS2 adventure, *Ico*. *Wanda* hails from the same development team and shares that game's unique visual style, but it's assuredly not *Ico 2*. "*Ico* was more than complete both in terms of gameplay and story," says Producer Kenji Kaido. "This made production of a sequel very difficult, and we actually questioned whether players even wanted a sequel."

Wanda opens, like *Ico*, with a brave lad discovering a young girl. But this time, the boy isn't weak and the girl isn't just a "special needs" case—she's dead. He places her on his horse and rides to a crumbling shrine amid a vast, bleak plain. Setting her body atop the altar, a voice from above tasks him with destroying the ancient giants roaming the wastelands. Only by felling them all can the girl be revived, so he sets out on horseback to down these terrifying behemoths. Some of the giants are craggy humanoid titans, while others are massive serpents and sleek winged beasts.

Before you can engage the colossi in combat, you must first reach them. That's where your honed skill of animal husbandry comes in. "The horse is like *Ico*'s Yorda," explains Designer Fumito Ueda. "In addition to being the main character's companion, he has a supporting role in battle." As you approach a colossus, your horse switches to autopilot, allowing you to leap onto the giant's leg, scale its body, and vanquish it with well-placed stabs to the head. And if that horse is really like Yorda, expect lots of obnoxious whinnies, a few grunts, and a loving nuzzle or two.









GENJI

PS2 • Sony CEI • Summer 2005 (Japan)

The first title from former Capcom honcho Yoshiki Okamoto's new company looks...well, a lot like *Onimusha*. But hey, go with what you know, right? Japanese history buffs will salivate over the rich narrative set during the turbulent Heiji Disturbance of 1159; the other 99 percent of us will dig the tight *Dynasty Warriors*–style combos, deep character customization, and multiple playable characters. Odds of a U.S. release look favorable.



HAUNTING GROUND

PS2 • Capcom • Summer 2005

With *Resident Evil 4* bound solely to the GameCube, Capcom wisely tosses PS2 hounds a ghastly new survival-horror bone. *Haunting Ground* casts players as Fiona, a spunky 18-year-old gal who awakens in a spooky castle after a car accident. Together with her trusty dog, she must outsmart the palace's ghoulish inhabitants (including the grotesque *Goonies* reject shown here) and escape to safety. Surprisingly, the visuals and gameplay seem a tad more *Silent Hill* than *Resident Evil*....

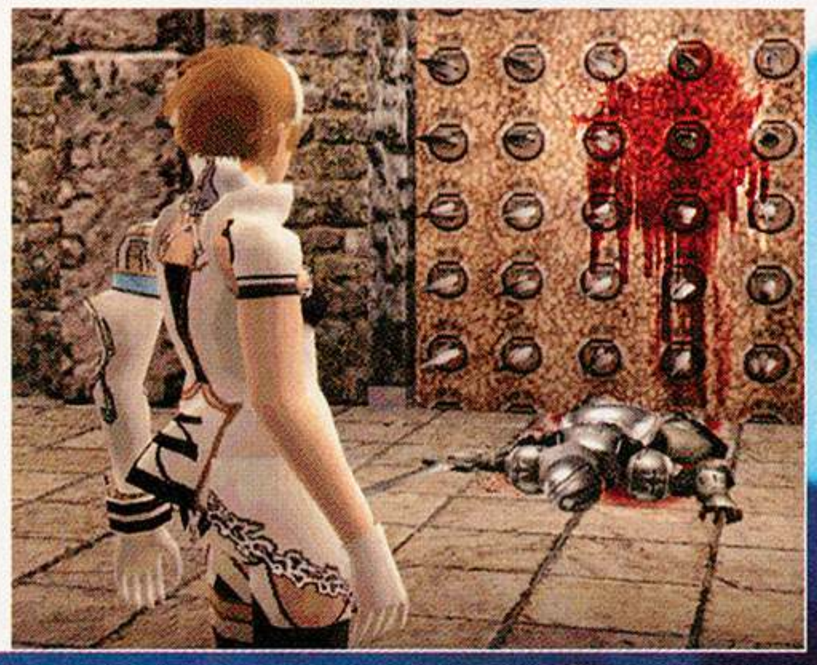


>> THE FORCE IS IN YOUR HANDS—STARTING THIS FALL, INTEC WILL RELEASE *STAR WARS*-BRANDED CONTROLLERS AND OTHER PERIPHERALS FOR BOTH PLAYSTATION 2 AND XBOX....>>

CODE: KAGERO

PS2 • Tecmo • Summer 2005

Sadistic gamers will welcome this new chapter in Tecmo's diabolical *Deception* series (dormant since its three controversial PS1 iterations), in which you once again lure unsuspecting heroes into various grisly deathtraps. Some of these devices—hidden pits, bear traps, and explosives—kill simply, while other setups offer Rube Goldberg-esque methods of taking a life (one example, a spiked wall that spins around, impales its victim, and then spins him into a waiting cage). Expect this murderous romp to brandish its "Mature" rating with pleasure.



SEGA RALLY 2005

PS2 • Sega • Summer 2005

In a surprising move, Sega revives its fan-favorite rally racing series on the PS2 with this all-new installment. So far, it appears to stick closely to the established series norms: Standard rally cars (Subaru Impreza, Citroen Xsara, Toyota Celica, and Lancia Stratos), tracks across the African savannah and European mountains, and constant chatter from your passenger. Microsoft's excellent *Rallisport Challenge* series has seriously raised the rally-racing high-water mark during Sega's absence, so it's unclear if the genre's progenitor can keep up....



SUPER MONKEY BALL DELUXE

PS2/XB • Sega • January 2005

Here's a nice treat for patient PS2 and Xbox owners who may have missed out on the GameCube monkey-rolling gems: *Deluxe* collects all of stages and stupidly addictive minigames from *Super Monkey Ball 1* and *2* and throws in some bonus content for good measure. Whether you're gliding through the air in Monkey Target, felling pins in Monkey Bowling, or guiding your sphered simian through the 300 maze-like main stages, you will know the true joy of monkeys in balls. Sadly, Sega doesn't plan to add online play—the final *Super Monkey Ball* frontier—to this release.



SHINING FORCE

PS2 • Sega • Summer 2005 (Japan)

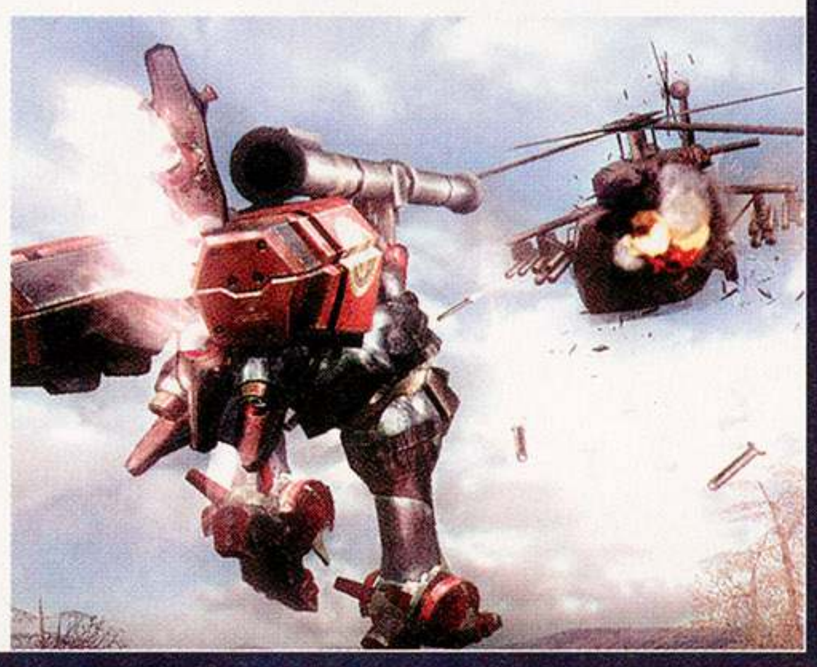
Sega's old-school Sega Genesis tactical RPG franchise has changed with the times: The hex-based strategic battles have been replaced by more action-oriented melees against massive groups of foes. This new chapter also alters the traditional *Shining Force* aesthetic, using older-looking characters, realistically detailed environments, and even space travel to impart a look more akin to *Final Fantasy*'s than the series' cartoony look of yore. Another *Shining* title, *Zelda*-esque action RPG *Shining Tears*, will hit America in Spring of 2005, long before *Force* does.



METAL WOLF CHAOS

XB • From Software • December 2004 (Japan)

Outside of Team Ninja's excellent titles, you don't really see a lot of Japanese Xbox games. (The console is a massive flop in Japan, so it's not too shocking, really.) Thankfully, that didn't stop intrepid developer From Software from making games like *Metal Wolf Chaos*, in which the U.S. president is on a one-man quest to save America by riding around in a giant killer robot. Yep, *Chaos*' plot is that insane. Awe-inspiring visuals, tight controls, and creative missions set this title squarely apart from the mech-game pack, so expect a domestic release very soon.



OZ

PS2 • Konami • Summer 2005 (Japan)

Sorry, it's not an Adults Only–rated actioner based on HBO's hard-hitting prison drama. Instead, *Oz* is Konami's new entry in the increasingly ubiquitous "sword action" genre. Two twists set it apart from *Dynasty Warriors* and its ilk: You can quickly switch between three warriors for some aerial combos that bat enemies back and forth, and it's apparently (ever-so-loosely) based on L. Frank Baum's classic book *The Wizard of Oz*. High-action games with this much polish tend to be safe bets for American release, so don't be surprised to see this one sometime in 2005.



>> PLAYSTATION 2 DOESN'T GET STRANGER—ELECTRONIC ARTS HAS CANNED ITS PLANNED PS2 VERSION OF ITS UPCOMING XBOX FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER *ODDWORLD: STRANGER*.... >>

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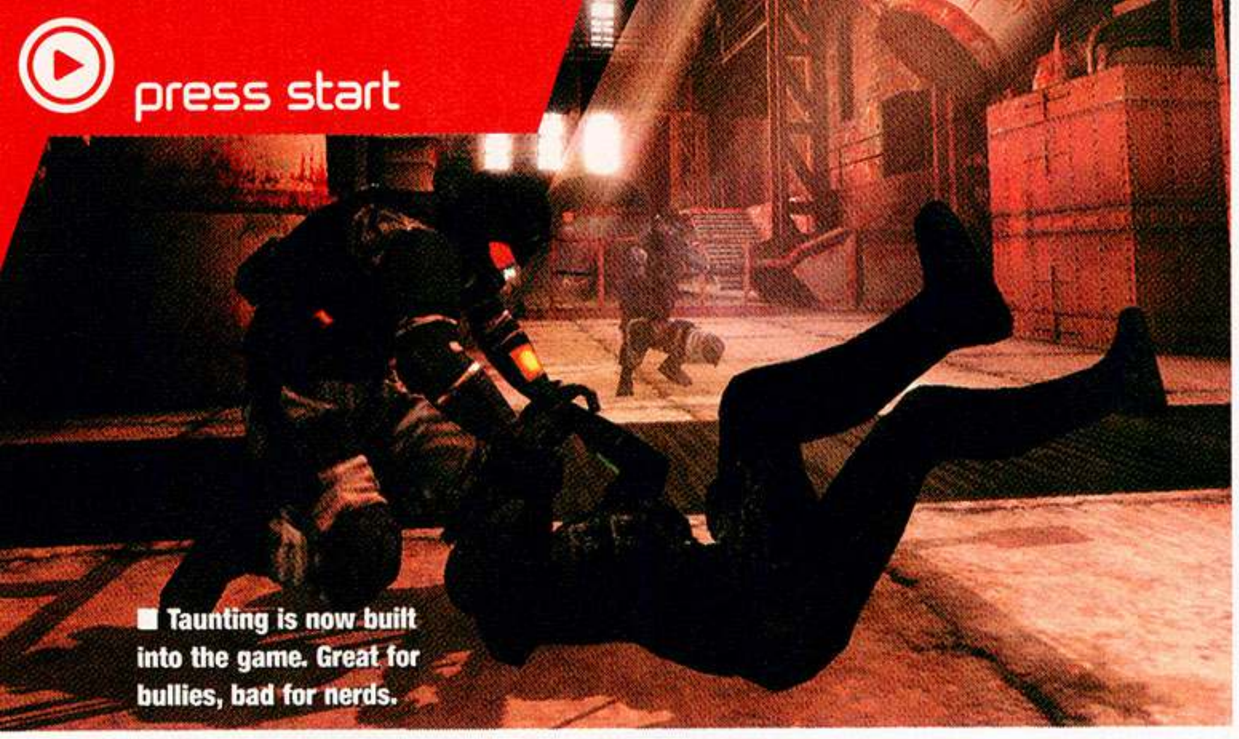
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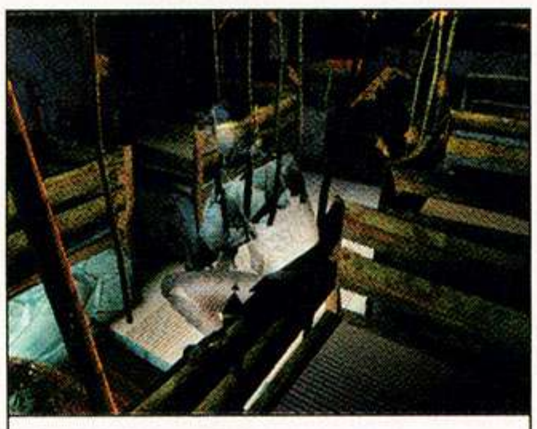
Taunting is now built into the game. Great for bullies, bad for nerds.

PS2/XB/GC

SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

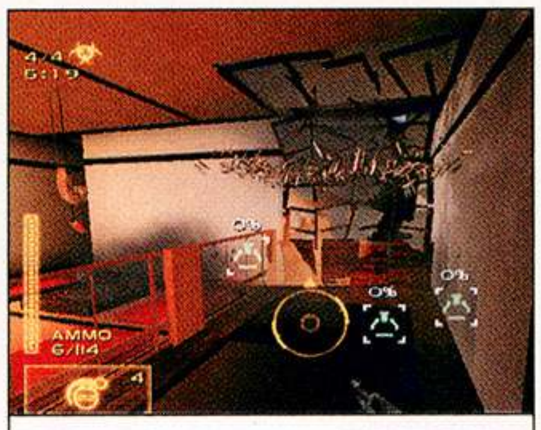
Spy vs. spy vs. merc vs. merc

It's not enough for stealth games to remain stealthy these days. This year's *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* (PS2/XB) proved that direct confrontation and heavy firepower have a place in the world of shadows and sneaking around—at least in the game's critically acclaimed multiplayer mode. The famous four-man spies-versus-mercenaries gameplay is returning for sequel *Chaos Theory*, on top of the previously announced two-player cooperative mode. Let's take a look at some of the new improvements for this March 2005 release (though expect the GC version to slip *and* not include four-player support).



Go go gadgets

New toys include shotguns and Uzis (for the mercs), thermoptic camouflage suits (to let spies go Predator-invisible), camera network browsing devices (to peep through the stages' camera systems), heartbeat detectors, and gas masks. Old gadgets get upgrades, like the spy trap, which can now tag the opponent on your radar or stay in place to let you know that spies are walking by. You can now trade devices with a teammate, too.



Level up

The stages in *Chaos Theory* are very dynamic: Open an access door for a teammate, drop a crate on a merc, run a train through a wall—the real estate can go through explosive makeovers to reveal new areas or shortcuts, altering players' strategies as the game progresses. Weather will be a big factor, too, as rain can put a damper on things by making characters cold, revealing footprints, obscuring merc visors with droplets, and more.

GRUDGE MATCH

Reality check



GTA: SAN ANDREAS **GTA: LOS ANGELES**

We know it can be tough sometimes to distinguish between reality and those videogame tapes you love so damn much. So this Grudge Match will help redefine that line between reality and the game, as we see how the new *Grand Theft Auto* compares to stealing a car in the real-life city of Los Angeles.

SELECTION



SUVs with 23-inch chrome rims, pimpmobiles, and bicycles
Advantage: Draw

SUVs with 23-inch chrome...wow—same thing as *GTA: San Andreas*
Advantage: Draw

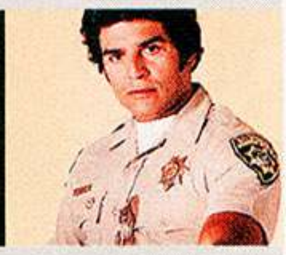


OPPOSITION



The fuzz, irate car owners, and their "boyz"
Advantage: Draw

Mostly just the fuzz, but otherwise the same
Advantage: Draw



ACCOMPLICES

Yourself, or a small "posse" of your peers
Advantage: Draw

Ditto
Advantage: Draw

ESCAPE PLAN



Hide out in the cover of the city, its quiet outskirts, or another town entirely
Advantage: Draw

Yup—same
Advantage: Draw

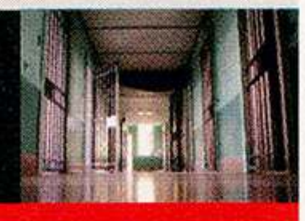


PENALTIES IF CAUGHT



Getting whacked
Advantage: Draw

Five to 10 years in the clink and/or getting whacked
Advantage: Draw



WINNER: DRAW

Looks like this one's just too close to call. Guess the politicians were right—games are inspiring crime. Or, wait—is it crime inspiring games? Oh well, at least we still have that assault rifle ban to keep us safe, right? Right? Hello?

NEWS TIDBITS: START THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE



PS3 Backward Compatible?

Sony Computer Entertainment President and CEO Ken Kutaragi, whom you probably know as the father of all things PlayStation, confirmed that Sony is working to make its next console compatible with both PS1 and PS2 software. "[Backward compatibility] is our desire and something we need to take on," said Kutaragi.



Sorry, all that's out there are PC screens.

The Elder Scrolls Brings Roleplaying into the Next Generation

Bethesda has just revealed the fourth installment in *The Elder Scrolls* series, *Oblivion*. But it'll be a while before you pick up your sword and shield to play this RPG, as the game is currently in development for an unannounced next-generation console (though our money is on Xbox 2).

>> CRAVING MORE PLAYSTATION 3 NEWS? HERE YOU GO: THE CONSOLE WILL USE BLU-RAY DISCS, WHICH CAN HOLD MORE THAN SIX TIMES THE AMOUNT OF DATA AS PS2 DVDS.... >>

"Check out this wicked team move from Crash & Cortex!"

HUMILISKATE

We give this game 10 out of 10 crutches!

Steve-O

Chris Pontius

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VIVENDI UNIVERSAL games

PlayStation.2

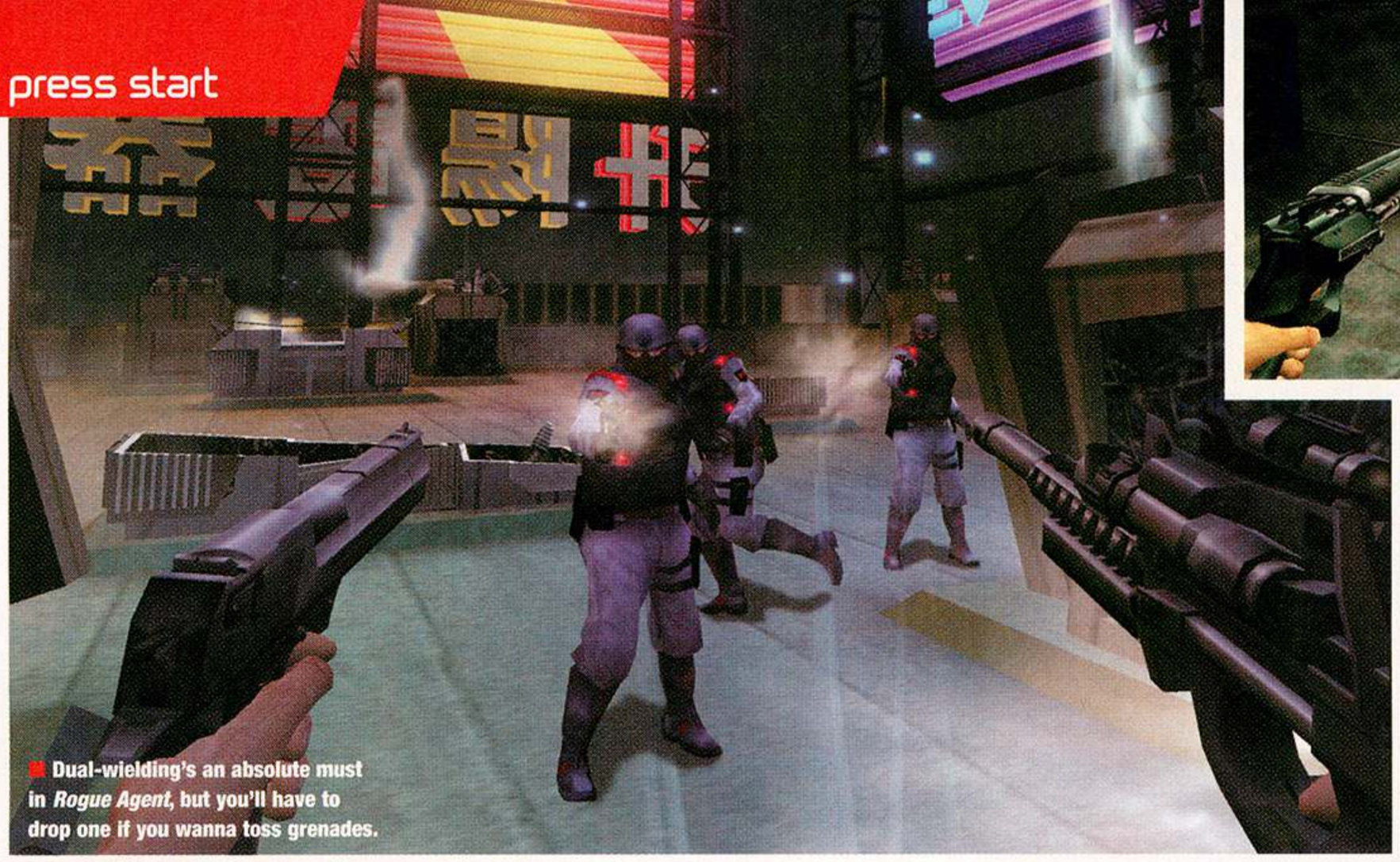
XBOX

EVERYONE

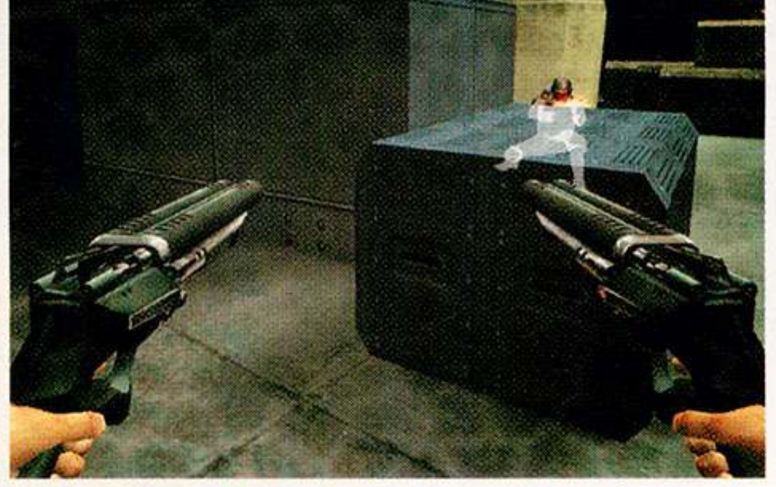
E

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Cartoon Violence



■ Dual-wielding's an absolute must in *Rogue Agent*, but you'll have to drop one if you wanna toss grenades.



■ GoldenEye's er...golden eye allows him to do cool stuff like see behind crates, hack enemy weapons, and create a force field.

■ PS2/XB/GC

GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT

Killin' like a villain

No, the name's not Bond. It's... *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*. And instead of serving Her Majesty, seducing beautiful women, and sipping shaken vodka martinis, EA's latest *007* shooter (due in November) puts you behind the guns of the newly minted Bond villain. "The idea [to play as a villain] had circulated for a while," comments Chris Plummer, senior producer of the title. "Villains define the Bond universe." A high-tech, multipurpose optical enhancement, courtesy of gold-loving megalomaniac Auric Goldfinger, and a gun in each hand should help you gain some respect amongst the likes of Scaramanga, Oddjob, and Pussy Galore.

Being able to use two guns at once in various lethal combinations is a big part of *Rogue Agent*. It's also a tip of the hat to the esteemed Nintendo 64 hit *GoldenEye* (based on the film of the same name). But don't expect a retro rehash: *Rogue* adds the ability to take hostages, which provides you with a portable but temporary human shield. Then there's "the eye," which sees past obstacles with MRI vision, as well as providing a personal shield and the ability to hack into computers and enemy weapons.

The team behind the game is working to make sure that these techniques you use to further your criminal career work well when playing against fellow members of the cyber-eye club in multiplayer mode. Both the Xbox and PS2 versions sport 16-player matches with full voice-chat support, but EA isn't forgetting about the offline guys (or GameCube owners). "We're not just designing levels for 16 players," says Plummer. "We'll also supply a lot of splitscreen content, in classic *GoldenEye* style." This includes intimate 1-on-1 levels inspired by memorable Bond movie duels, like the trap-filled fun house from *The Man with the Golden Gun*.

With all the overt action and that gleaming eye embedded in your head, standard Bond music just wouldn't seem appropriate. Euro trance/progressive DJ Paul Oakenfold handles the soundtrack, weaving nefarious beats into familiar themes. The tunes reflect the overall scope of the game: "It's not like you're Bond, you're a remix of Bond," mentions Plummer. —*Justin Speer*







>> AUSTRALIA'S OFFICE OF FILM AND LITERATURE CLASSIFICATION HAS BANNED *LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE* (PS2/XB) FROM BEING SOLD IN THE COUNTRY. LUCKY THEM.... >>

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MATURE 17+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Strong Language
Violence

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SOUNDS BEST ON Sound BLASTER 24-bit

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX

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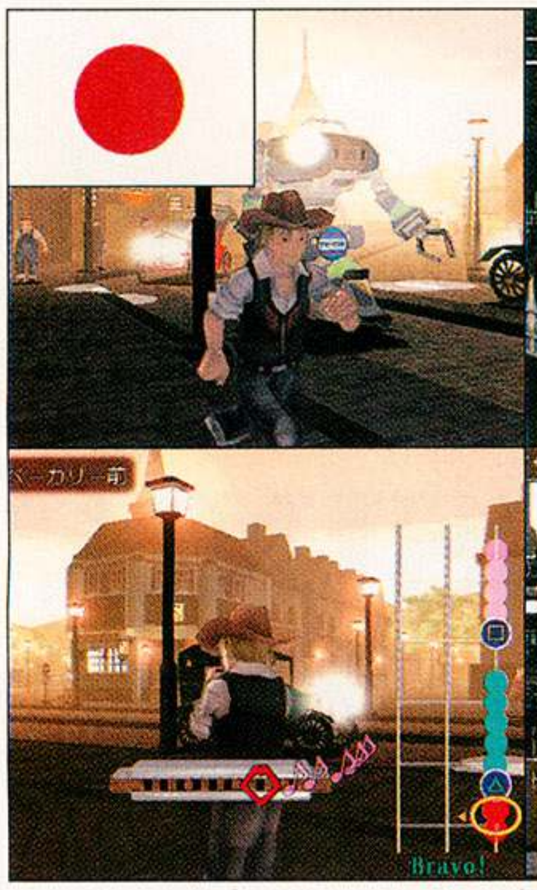
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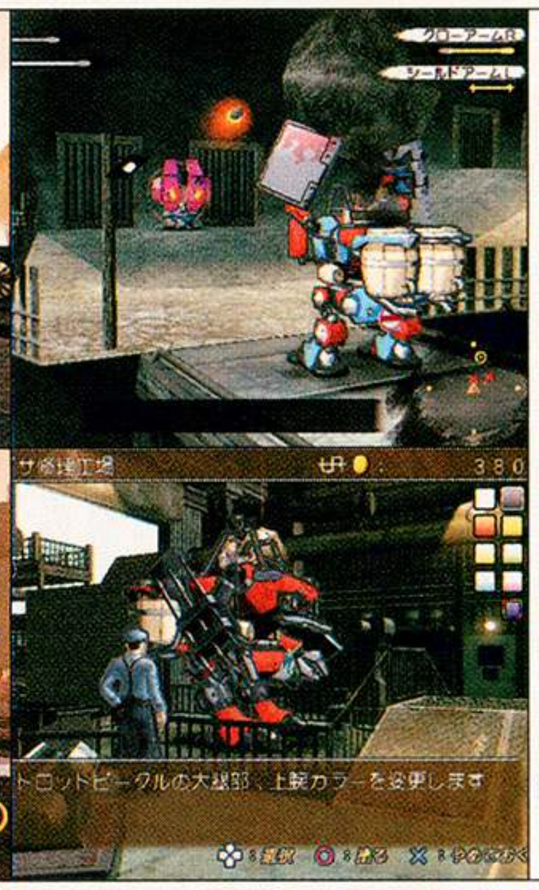
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EGM INTERNATIONAL

Two games to enjoy with your bean-jam buns





■ PS2

BUMPY TROT

Er, *Bumpy Trot*? Yes, *Bumpy Trot*—and no, it's not an amusement park bumper-car simulator. Set during a fantasy Industrial Revolution, the latest from the folks behind *Disaster Report* (PS2) is an action-RPG of sorts, where "trot vehicles" (two-legged personal robots) are the only way to go and yours is one lean, mean, fully customizable fighting machine. Imagine a game based on the robot that *Dark Cloud 2*'s hero had, and you aren't far off the mark.

With a name like *Bumpy Trot*, how can you go wrong? Indeed, how can you? There are even musical interludes where you "play" the harmonica or piano with a *Dance Dance Revolution*–like interface. It's just like the real Old West, except with little *Star Wars* AT-ST walkers instead of horses.





■ PS2

THE SURGEON

Wow! A game starring a large freshwater fish? Nope, that'd be *The Sturgeon*. This one is an adventure game starring Yukio Togashi, a doctor at a hospital trying to make a name for himself. Although most of the game features Togashi roaming the halls and talking to nurses and patients, the real draw here is the operation sequences—follow the directions, complete a set of minigames, and you can take out somebody's swollen appendix, too!

So can I slice people to ribbons in the operating room? Not directly. *ER* fans, though, will really dig its relentlessly depressing politics—doctors take bribes, and Togashi has to fight for the operations he's assigned...between dates with cute drug reps, of course.

PREVIEW GALLERIES: YOU'LL DEFINITELY SEE RED

COLD FEAR

PS2/XB • Ubisoft • March 2005 — Not since dashing heroine Jessifer (her real name, honest) braved a zombie-filled boat in the Sega Dreamcast stinker *Carrier* has an ocean voyage gone so awry. Here, you play Tom Hansen, a Coast Guard solider adrift on an oil rig teeming with undead crewmen and various other nasty hellspawn. Expect survival-horror gunplay with a mild case of the bends.



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

PS2/XB • Eidos • Spring 2005 — During these tough economic times, even the world's most aerodynamic contract killer is in desperate need of work. So Agent 47 decides to pack a bag for the United States and take some jobs that'll surely line his pockets with blood-soaked Benjamins. And just how he spends his "earnings" will determine the game's final outcome.



OLD SCHOOL

Looking back at 1994

The Covers

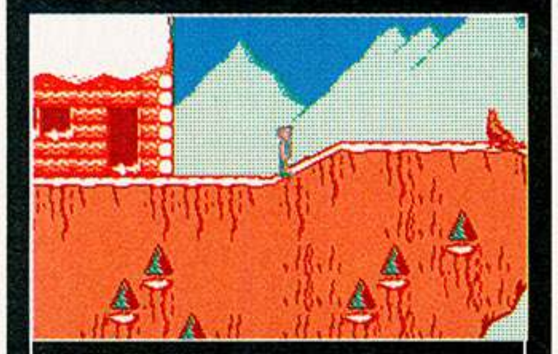


Even though fighters stole the show (half the covers starred a game from this genre), '94 remains the only time when a sports title, the arcadey *NBA Jam*, graced the front of the mag.



Highest-Scoring Game: Sonic the Hedgehog 3 (Genesis)

The Review Crew rewarded the blue blur's platforming prowess with three scores of 10 out of 10 and another at 9 out of 10, which, when totaled, was just enough to edge out SNES hits *Super Metroid* and *Final Fantasy III*.



Lowest-Scoring Game: Cliffhanger (NES)

Poor Sly Stallone—several games based on the actor's early-'90s action flick received poor scores, but the worst performance was this 8-bit version, which earned 3 out of 10 from each reviewer.



Making the Headlines

It was only a decade ago that Forrest Gump taught us "stupid is as stupid does," O.J. fled the feds in his white Ford Bronco, and, in the gaming world, the 32-bit era was born, with the unveiling of Saturn and PlayStation.

>> ANOTHER KIND OF FOOTBALL HITS THE STREET: EA WILL RELEASE *FIFA STREET*, A FOUR-ON-FOUR ARCADE-STYLE SOCCER GAME, SOMETIME NEXT YEAR FOR ALL MAJOR CONSOLES.... >>

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GameCube

MEET THE RESIDENTS

Resident Evil 4 shakes up survival-horror standards

Leon Kennedy knows how to deal with zombies: He fought a city full of the buggers back in 1998's *Resident Evil 2*. To him, and to any fan of publisher Capcom's genre-defining horror series, it's familiar territory. That's why *RE4*, hitting the GameCube this January, is so shocking—it's not the decapitations and exploding torsos, it's the way Capcom opted *not* to phone it in this time.

For the first time in the series' history, *Resident Evil 4* truly feels like a brand-new game. Yes, you still control Leon like a Sherman tank, but here it feels natural—the static-backdrop nonsense is replaced with full 3D graphics, and your viewpoint is now set behind Leon as he pokes around the back forests of Europe. Besides eliminating *RE*'s old "Where the hell is it?!" item hunts, this lets you mess around with your surroundings to a far greater degree than before. If you're under siege in an abandoned house, for example, you can push bookcases against doors, knock ladders off the roof, and even burst through a second-story window once the zombies start firebombing the place.



■ The mayor of Pueblo greets Leon with his quaint country town's "welcoming committee."

>> GET READY TO GO BANANAS ON YOUR CONSOLE, AS UBISOFT HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IT'S WORKING ON A GAME BASED ON UNIVERSAL PICTURES' UPCOMING FILM *KING KONG*, WHICH

Except they aren't zombies. In fact, this is the most un–*Resident Evil Resident Evil* ever created. Our hero, sent to the sleepy European village of Pueblo to recover the president's kidnapped daughter, is dealing with some disturbing new enemies—farmers in overalls, milkmaids in long dresses, and guys with chain saws and potato-sack masks. You'll spend half the game figuring out why all these shambling country folk are out to kill you and the other half trying to get that defenseless first daughter out alive. "You must protect her while also protecting yourself," explains *RE4* Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi. "If the enemies grab her, you'll have to shoot them in the leg so that she can escape safely."

Resident Evil's schlocky horror-flick values are well and truly gone here—thanks to the 3D landscape, muted colors, and incredibly eerie background noise, the mood's a little more *Blair Witch Project* than *Night of the Living Dead*. The new camera perspective isn't quite perfect—close-quarters fighting is tough, and someone at the CIA really should've taught Leon how to strafe—but it still marks a major turnaround for a series that sorely needed one. —*Kevin Gifford*



Pause to Reminisce

If it seems like *RE4* has taken forever to come out, you're right—Capcom first revealed it over two years ago, and it's suffered countless delays since then. What went wrong? "We had to go back to the drawing board four times," explains Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi. "This is actually the fourth attempt at making *Resident Evil 4*." Each version offered a different take on the camera, controls, and story line. "I'm already starting to flesh out ideas for *RE5*," adds Kobayashi. Good luck with that.

IN THE HOT SEAT: BIOWARE



Every so often, *EGM* sits down with gamemakers and asks for their preferences on different topics. Now up: BioWare joint CEOs Ray Muzyka (left) and Greg Zeschuk (right), who have gone from working with the Force in *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* to martial arts in upcoming Xbox action-RPG *Jade Empire*. Check out where these doctors-turned-developers agree and disagree.

Role-playing Style



[X] *Final Fantasy* [ ] *The Legend of Zelda*

Ray Muzyka: The story and character interaction are a little more detailed, plus *Final Fantasy* games tend to last longer.

Martial Arts Star



[X] Jet Li [X] Jackie Chan

RM: Jackie Chan. I enjoy the physical slapstick humor of his films.
Greg Zeschuk: Jet Li. His moves are so incredible.

Star Wars Bad Boy



[X] Darth Vader [X] Darth Maul

RM: I really liked Darth Maul's double-bladed lightsaber and costume design.
GZ: I'd go with Vader because Maul doesn't have any big scabs or weird skin problems.

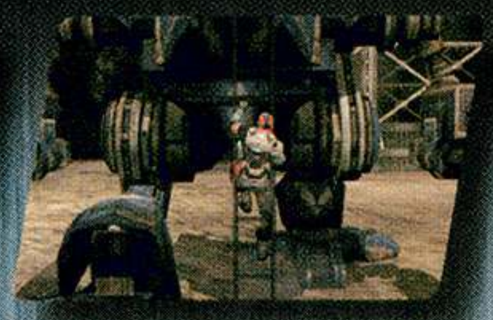
IS BEING DIRECTED BY PETER JACKSON OF *LORD OF THE RINGS* FAME. THE GAME IS EXPECTED TO LAUNCH AROUND THE SAME TIME AS THE FLICK (DECEMBER 14, 2005).... >>

ONE MAN. MANY WEAPONS. INFINITE DESTRUCTION.

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TEEN
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Blood
Violence
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Microsoft game studios

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XBOX

it's good to play together

XBOX LIVE

CELEBRITY GAMER: BAM MARGERA

Inside the fun house with Bam and fam

A fractured foot isn't breaking wild man Bam Margera's stride. It was the demanding weekend spent launching crappy cars over a toolshed at his Pennsylvania home that led MTV's *Jackass* alum and *Viva La Bam* star to oversleep on the afternoon of our scheduled chat. If broken bones paid for the prankster's 14-acre estate, perhaps it was coinage from his role in *Tony Hawk's Underground 2: World Destruction Tour* (PS2/XB/GC) that helped cover the cost of a used car lot's worth of lemons. With the help of parents Phil and April, we woke him up to find out.

—Shawn Elliott

EGM: You're obviously not much of an early bird, but can you take Hawk at his own game?
Bam Margera: No. He's the master. Nobody can beat him.

EGM: You screw off for a living, we play games. Who's got the better gig?
BM: [Looking at his leg] You. Maybe you have a thumb blister, I don't know. But if I try a boardslide down a 14-stair handrail, I could rack my nuts.

EGM: True. Has anything about a videogame ever shocked you?
BM: The best thing ever was this guy at a party [who] made it so far in some game...I think it was *Resident Evil* or *Tomb Raider* or something. He made it all the way to the end, and he was battling some snake or some dragon or something and started screaming, "Oh my God, I'm gonna f***ing win! Thirty hours of this bulls***, and I'm gonna win!" So the snake or dragon was almost dead when Blaine, the dumbass who ran over my foot with the ATV, comes walking in. He's like, "What's up, fellas?" and trips over the cord and unplugs the whole thing. Dude, that was the best. That was the highlight of my goddamn year.

EGM: So your friends like the snake-or-the-dragon-or-something stuff—what's in your game library?
BM: *Tony Hawk's Underground*, *ATV Off-Road Fury*, and *Grand Theft Auto III*. I have other games, I think, but my friends will come in and take 'em and think that they're theirs. All my friends do that.

EGM: Word is you didn't write your own dialogue for *THUG2*. Did you object to any of it?
BM: Yeah, they wanted me to go up to Tony Hawk and be like, "What's up, butt muncher? Did you just crooked grind that rail?" I was like, "You really want me to

>> MIDWAY ENTERS DA HOOD—THE PUBLISHER RECENTLY ANNOUNCED *FEAR & RESPECT*, A THIRD-PERSON ACTION GAME THAT PUTS YOU IN THE MIDDLE OF A GANG WAR IN SOUTH



■ Bam says he's not interested in the rumored *Jackass* game: "I'd make more money if I came up with my own [game]. I've already been talking to companies about it."

Photographs by Ryan Gee

say butt muncher?" But I heard the other guys [recording their lines] and was like, "Man, you guys sound terrible and cheesy, too, so I don't care. We'll all be terrible and cheesy together."

Phil Margera [who also appears in the game]: They told me that my voice work sounded the most natural and I did it quicker than anyone.

BM: Even better than Tony Hawk?

PM: They said that.

BM: I talked to Tony, and he said they told him that, too. They tell everybody that.

PM: [Decidedly disappointed] They do?

EGM: Has Phil played the game yet?

BM: Phil can't even sign on [to] a computer. He can't even control a mouse. It's pathetic. I tried to teach him how to listen to Elvis [on his computer], and he couldn't even click on the song. He can't even control a CD player. He has to look for the Play button for like two hours.

EGM: You're known for tormenting your family. Did they ever punish you?

BM: One time my mom tried to ground me, but that lasted 15 minutes.

April Margera: You mowed your name in the front lawn.

BM: I was like, "Are you serious? I have to sit in my room? That's so boring, let me go do something." So she opened the door.

Random person: Bam, are you doing an interview right now?

BM: Yeah, you're ruining it.

RP: Sorry, but there's an 80-year-old lady from Belgium out here with 15 grandkids who want to meet you. If you're busy, they said they could just take pictures of themselves skateboarding here.

EGM: It's a setup. One of these kids is gonna break his arm and sue you silly.

BM: Seriously? You think it's a setup?

EGM: No.

BM: This interview's gonna sound like s***.

AM: Yeah, but leave that off the record.

BM: Leave it on; it'll be funnier.

AM: Then have me tell that old lady to f*** off back to Belgium!

CENTRAL LOS ANGELES. *BOYZ N THE HOOD* DIRECTOR JOHN SINGLETON IS ALSO WORKING ON THE GAME, WHICH WILL COME TO BOTH PLAYSTATION 2 AND XBOX LATE NEXT YEAR.... >>

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SOME SEND YOU THERE.

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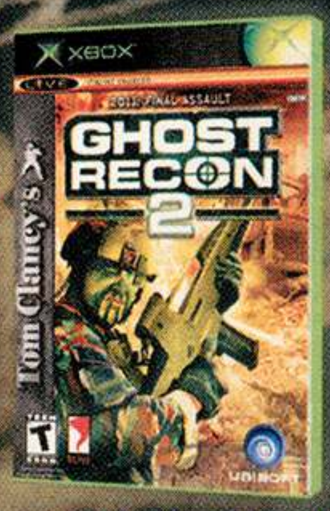


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SHOW AND TELL: KOTOR 2

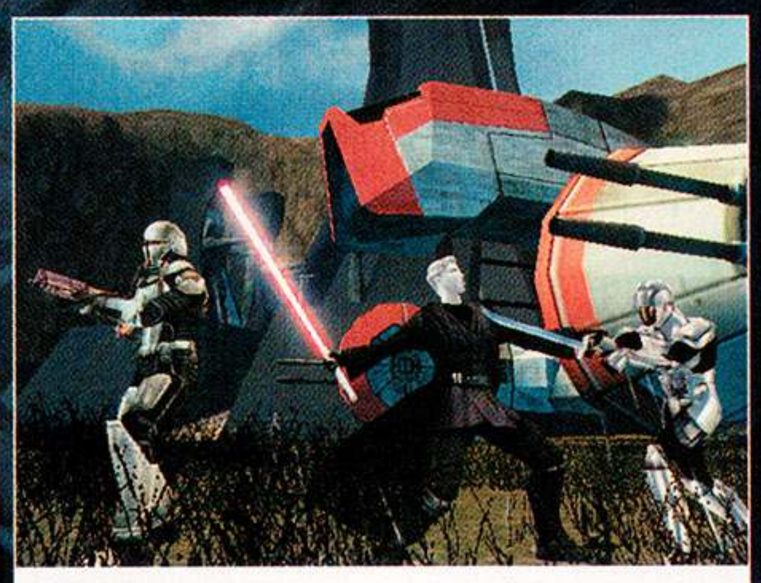
The Star Wars sequel worth waiting for

Once upon a time, a new *Star Wars* game was something sophisticated gamers approached with wary trepidation, not hushed anticipation. 2003's *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* proved that old-fashioned *Wars* still rules—no crappy Gungans, Genosians, or pod races to spoil the fun. *KOTOR*'s sequel, *The Sith Lords*, strikes the Xbox this December, and it appears to offer similarly classic role-playing thrills. We asked one of the game's producers, Mike Gallo from LucasArts, to talk us through some of this epic role-playing sequel's more exciting moments. No surprise they involve cool new Force powers, light- and dark-side choices, crafty droids, and a bunch of exotic new worlds to explore. The big surprise? The new battle meditation Force power looks uncannily like '80s night at the local dance club. ***—Jennifer Tsao***



Land o' Lakes

Mike Gallo: Why's our heroic Jedi so pale? He's obviously taken a trip down the path of the dark side, resulting in some changes to his appearance. Now, he needs to stop mugging and take on that boma beast.



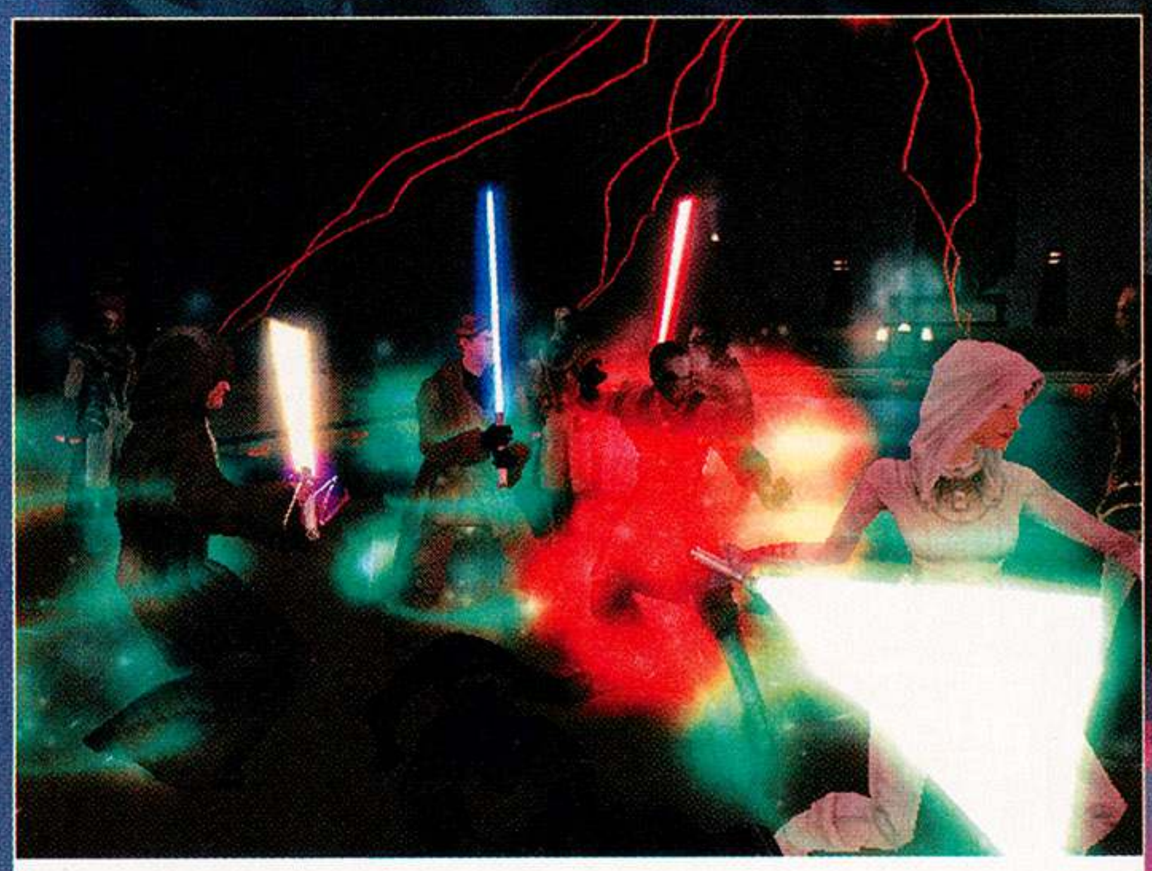
Stellar Combat

MG: The battle rages on in front of a mysterious temple on the planet Dxun. *KOTOR 2*'s combat system offers many subtle changes, including new character combat animations that change as you grow stronger.



Lizards in Space

MG: How did that thing get in here? Although much of the game is spent exploring the surfaces of seven massive planets, you'll also see plenty of interior action. Here, our heroes meet Onderon's welcoming party.



Safety Dance

MG: Using the Force power of battle meditation can change the tide of a fight. This power will boost your party members' stats while reducing the stats of enemies that are near you. In total, *KOTOR 2* boasts over 60 new feats and Force powers.



Lightning Strikes Twice

MG: Once again, dark and light Jedi have access to unique abilities. Here, the dark-side power Force storm fries a couple of helpless cannoks. Dark-side powers tend to be more offensive, while light-side powers tend to focus on defensive and healing skills.

>> MIDWAY BUYS A BUNCH OF ALIENS—THE PUBLISHER HAS ACQUIRED INEVITABLE ENTERTAINMENT, THE STUDIO THAT'S WORKING ON MIDWAY'S SHOOTER *AREA 51* (PS2/XB).... >>



Yo, Robot!

MG: Destroy droid is a useful light-side Force power...well, if you have hate-on for Artoo. Six new classes like the Jedi weapon master and the Sith assassin allow you to specialize your Force mastery.



No Beasts Allowed

MG: Ever wonder why monsters never venture into towns in RPGs? In *KOTOR 2*, some unruly creatures do just that. Here, the local militia helps your party fight back an escaped boma beast on Onderon.



Stop and Smell the Alien Plant Life

MG: Atton Rand and Bao-Dur join your player's character in a picturesque location for a bit of a breather. Form your party with up to 10 different characters, each with his or her own personalities and motivations.



Nice Guys Wear Pantaloons

MG: Bao-Dur and crew pose for a glamour shot in Iziz's town square on Onderon. This time, the light- or dark-side choices you make not only affect your character, but also those in your party and those who may join you in your quest.



Gang Up

MG: Three lightsabers against a mining droid? Doesn't even seem fair. Everyone loved the lightsaber customization in the first *KOTOR*, so we've expanded on it here. Expect new colors and upgrade options for your pimped-out laser sword.

>> IN *NFL STREET 2* NEWS, DEVELOPER EA TIBURON HAS CONFIRMED THAT YOU CAN TAKE YOUR CUSTOM PLAYER AND IMPORT HIM INTO NEXT YEAR'S EDITION OF *MADDEN*.... >>



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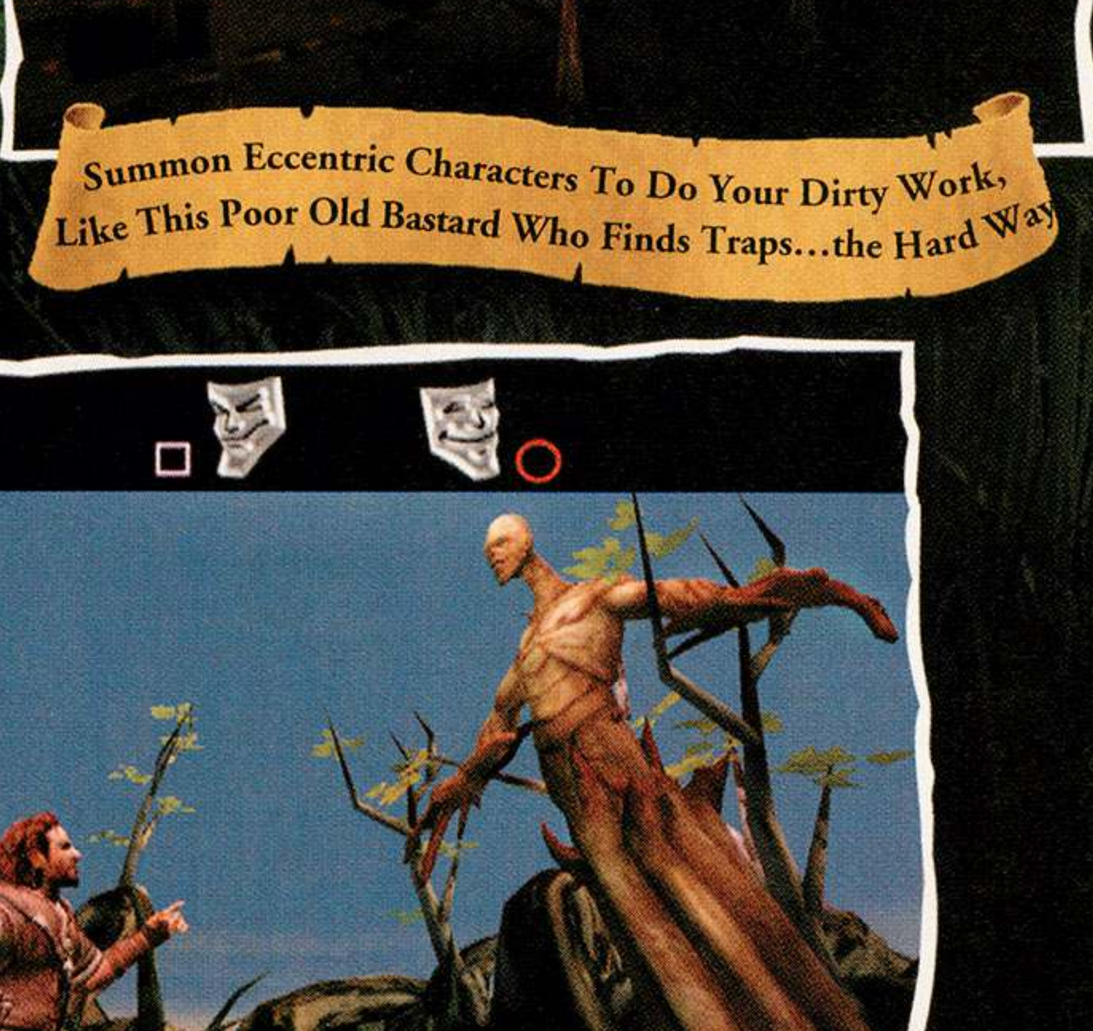
"...Right Now, There Is No Other Game In The Genre That Looks Remotely As Good."
– PSM

"...It Has Skyrocketed To The Top Of My Most-Wanted Games List."
– Gamespy

"Turning RPG Clichés On Their Head."
– Electronic Gaming Monthly

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Summon Eccentric Characters To Do Your Dirty Work, Like This Poor Old Bastard Who Finds Traps...the Hard Way

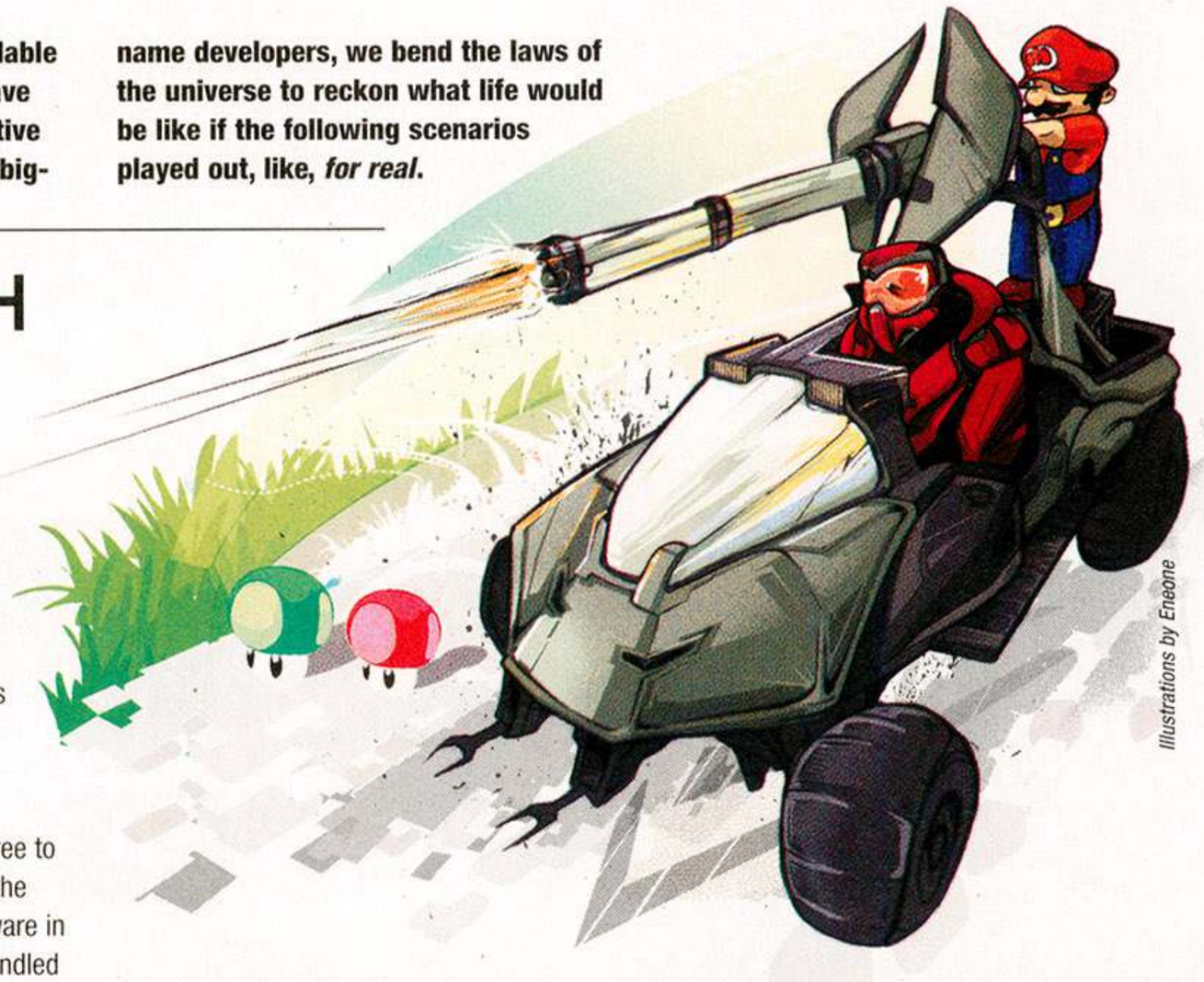
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Advanced Attitude System – Your Snarky or Nice decisions change the course of the game for true replayability.

WHAT IF...?

EGM bends space and time to rewrite gaming history...

If we have learned anything from comic books and the 23 episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in which everybody eats it, it's that reality is one bendable bee-yotch—and we're about to have our way with her. Using the cognitive powers of game-biz analysts and big-name developers, we bend the laws of the universe to reckon what life would be like if the following scenarios played out, like, *for real*.



Illustrations by Eneone

WHAT IF NINTENDO TEAMED UP WITH MICROSOFT TO TAKE ON SONY?

The reality: In this corner, we have Nintendo, an industry pillar that has sold nearly 2 billion games globally since 1983, not to mention more than 172 million Game Boy handhelds. And in this corner, we have Microsoft—traditionally a PC publisher—which laced up for the console wars in 2001 with the launch of its Xbox. Since then, both companies have vied for a distant second place behind Sony, whose PlayStation 2 is a runaway juggernaut. Say, did somebody just holler, "Tag team?"

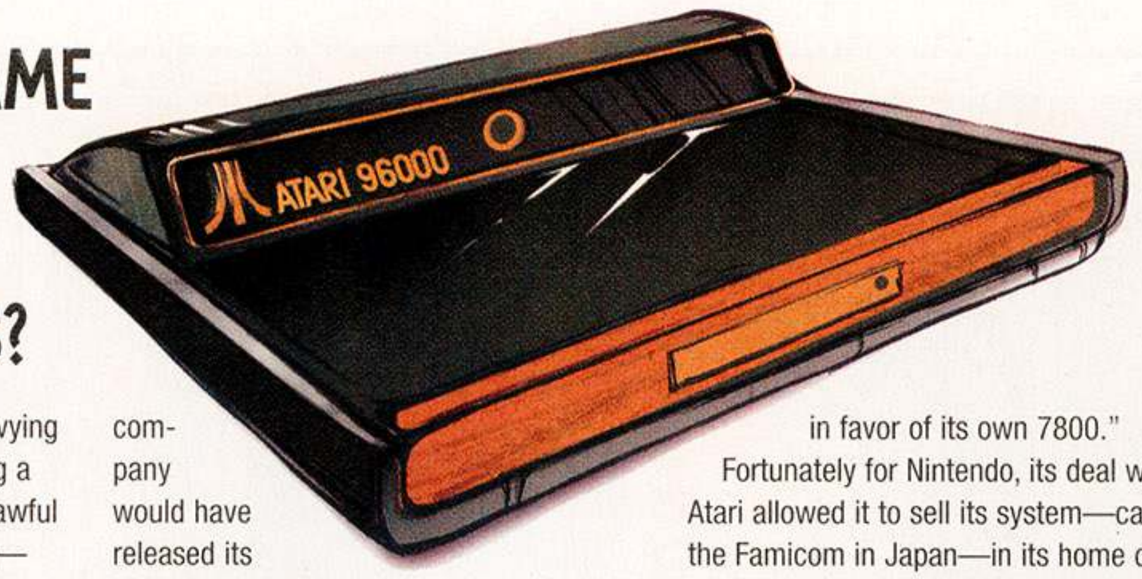
The alternate reality: "Microsoft and Nintendo versus Sony would be a clash of titans," says Schelley Olhava, program manager for game-industry research firm IDC. Just one teensy problem: "Exciting as it sounds, the partnership would likely fail," she says. Despite the wellspring of capital, technological resources, and creative synergy such an alliance would produce, Olhava asserts, clashes between corporate cultures would end the honeymoon fast. Neither firm appears capable of shipping a product they could agree on. Just look at Microsoft's insistence on building a system with online capabilities out of the box, as opposed to Nintendo's cold-shoulder approach. They would also need to agree to split up their markets on each side of the Pacific. "If Nintendo handled the hardware in the Japanese market and Microsoft handled it in the U.S., and they both published games under their own labels, they could indeed do well," says Steven Kent, author of *The Ultimate History of Video Games*. "This would also open Nintendo's handheld market for Microsoft to port some of its titles [to]."

But the biggest issue is brand identification—reconciling Nintendo's family-friendly image with Xbox's hardcore-enthusiast targeted approach would prove a difficult task. But if they could pull it off...boy oh boy. "A Microsoft platform with Nintendo backing should capture two completely separate demographics in the U.S.," says Kent. "It would be both kid friendly and chic—assuming it was marketed properly." In this alternate reality, Sony execs are sweating.

—Scott Steinberg

>> GET BUSY DOWNLOADING—A NEW CAMPAIGN FOR THQ'S SQUAD-BASED STRATEGY GAME *FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR* IS NOW AVAILABLE THROUGH XBOX LIVE FOR $4.99. BUT IF

WHAT IF THE GAME BIZ HADN'T CRASHED IN THE EARLY '80S?



The reality: With too many consoles vying for customers, home computers taking a bite out of the market, and a flood of awful games going straight to discount bins—remember *ET* for the Atari 2600?—people stopped buying games practically overnight in 1984. The videogame "fad" was dead, and it didn't resuscitate until Nintendo fast-talked the NES into stores in 1986.

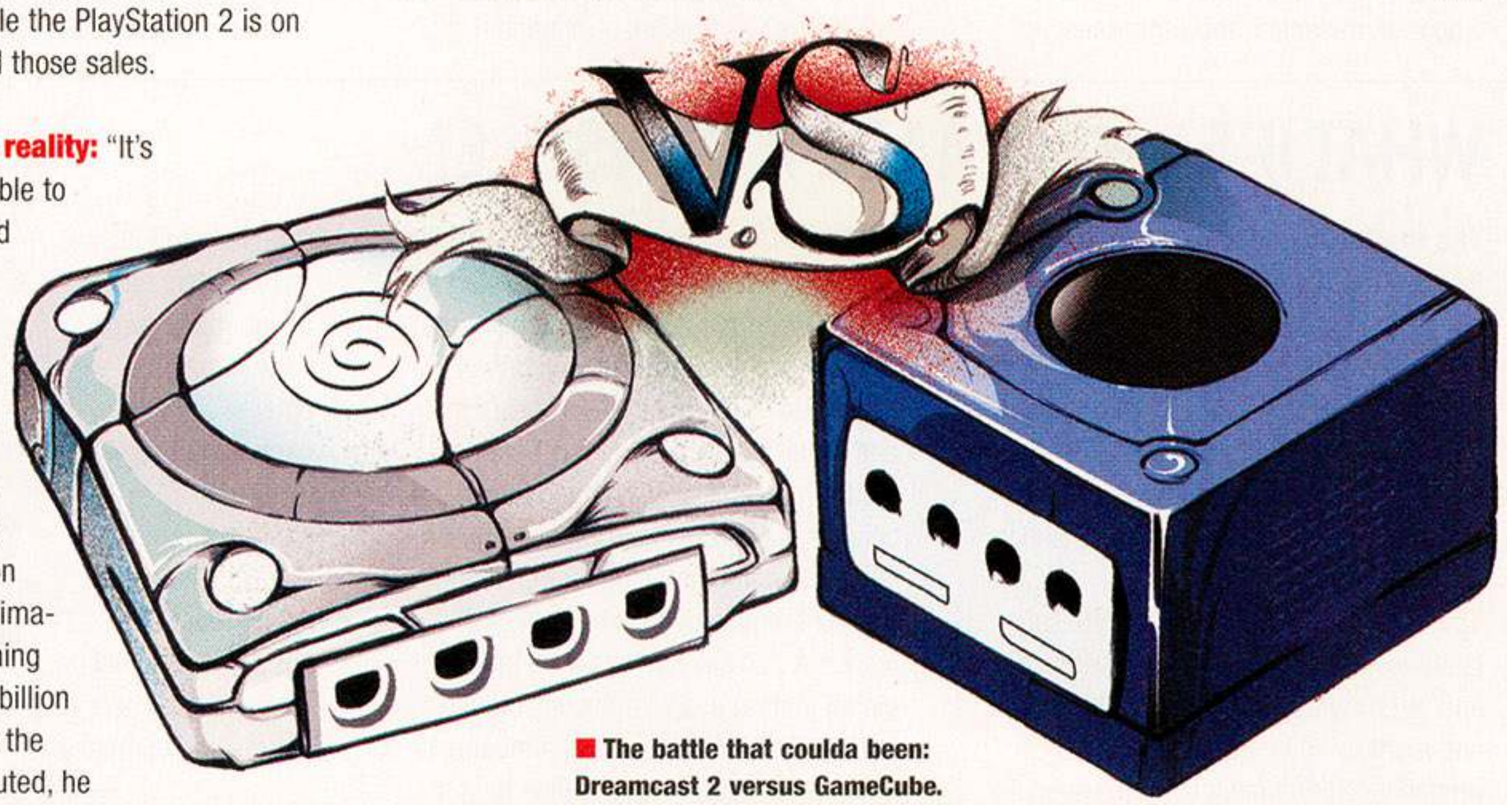
The alternate reality: Kiss your tingly memories of a Nintendo-powered childhood bye-bye. If Atari had thrived during this first "platform shift," as *ET* creator Howard Scott Warshaw calls the crash, the company would have released its 7800 on time, "which probably would have been successful because of its backward compatibility," says Leonard Herman, author of *Phoenix: The Fall & Rise of Videogames*. Also around that time, Nintendo offered Atari the rights to distribute the Nintendo Entertainment System in the United States. "Had there not been a crash, the deal would have gone through," Herman says, "but Atari would have mothballed the NES in favor of its own 7800."

Fortunately for Nintendo, its deal with Atari allowed it to sell its system—called the Famicom in Japan—in its home country. The Famicom would follow its historical course, succeeding in Japan and attracting competition from Sega's Master System. "Sega would then market the Master System around the world and compete with the 7800," Herman says. "Third-party companies, such as Activision, would produce games for both systems." So, instead of today's GameCube, you'd have the Atari 96000, complete with faux-wood paneling, of course. *—Robert Ashley*

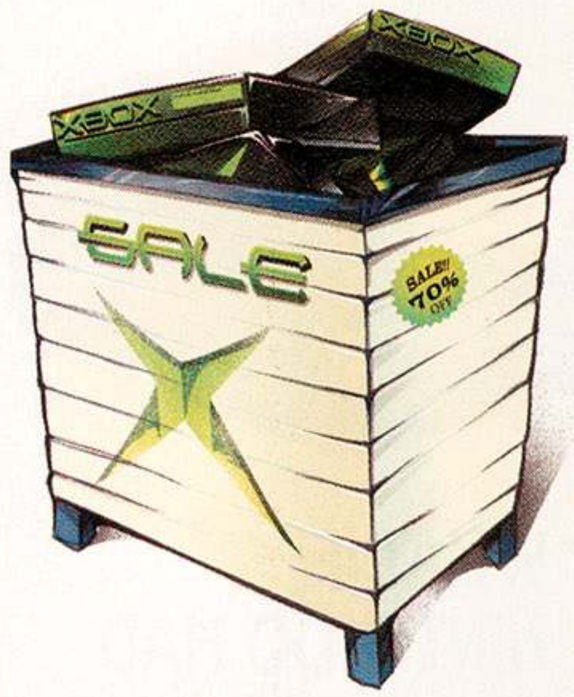
WHAT IF THE PLAYSTATION NEVER EXISTED?

The reality: Launched on September 9, 1995, the original PlayStation quickly became America's best-selling console. Popularizing CDs over game cartridges and promoting adult-oriented subject matter above kid-friendly content, the machine all but monopolized the videogame market. To date, more than 100 million PlayStations have sold worldwide, while the PlayStation 2 is on track to exceed those sales.

The alternate reality: "It's almost impossible to imagine a world without it today," says Richard Ow, senior analyst for the industry-tracking NPD Group. "The PlayStation is one of the primary reasons gaming became a $10 billion business." Had the device not debuted, he suggests, the 16-bit war between Nintendo's Super NES and Sega's Genesis systems would've continued well into the next cycle of hardware. Systems such as the 3DO, Jaguar, and Neo•Geo may even have thrived up until the late '90s. Moreover, it's all but certain that GameCube's greatest rival in the struggle for your disposable income would've been found in a second-generation Dreamcast. Another fun fact: It's also doubtful the Xbox would exist if Sony's groundbreaking unit hadn't sparked gaming's mainstream success and caught Microsoft's interest. "We'd still be seeing a two-horse race going on in the industry," Ow says. *—S.S.*



■ **The battle that coulda been: Dreamcast 2 versus GameCube.**



WHAT IF XBOX NEVER HAD HALO?

The reality: Without question, *Halo* was the best launch title for Xbox in 2001. But if recent sales numbers are any indication—*Halo* sold an astonishing 90,000 copies just this August—it could also be argued that Bungie's dynamo first-person blaster is still the best game on the system (well, except for *Halo 2*). Since *Halo*'s debut, this futuristic shooter has been viewed as Xbox's killer app—an exclusive blockbuster game that single-handedly positioned Xbox as a cool, hip, and cutting-edge console.

The alternate reality: "Without *Halo*, the Xbox would have gone the way of the Dreamcast or Saturn," says Epic Games' Cliff Bleszinski. Ouch! But he's right: If you took *Halo* out of the equation, Xbox's launch software didn't look very impressive. The second best-selling exclusive Xbox title is *Project Gotham Racing*, a decent launch game that's hardly a system mover. The other nightmare reality: The Xbox Live online gaming service wouldn't get the enormous boost in business that *Halo 2* is bringing this month, either. But look on the bright side, Microsoft: At least Nintendo didn't have *Halo*, which could have been enough to help GameCube overtake Xbox on the sales charts. *Halo*'s success proves that one killer launch game is sometimes all you need to jump-start a console's chances of success. *—Geoff Keighley*

What if *Mario* creator Shigeru Miyamoto had gone into real estate instead of game design?



Fernando Ferrufino, a real estate agent in Arlington, VA, thinks Miyamoto-san could close the deal. "His knowledge of castles would cater to a wealthy clientele," says Ferrufino, "and his ties to the construction industry would prove beneficial, especially his experience with barrel-throwing giant apes. You've got to know how to deal with those big, burly contractors." *—R.A.*

What if kid stuff like *Pokémon* kept getting popular while adult series like *Grand Theft Auto* tanked?



Be glad gamers are getting older. If kiddie titles had trounced Rockstar's megaselling criminal caper, games would still be child's play, says NPD Group Senior Analyst Richard Ow. "[*GTA*] impacted the 18-and-older demographic like never before," he says. The result: One out of every three games is bought for an adult. Still, better a dozen *Banjo-Kazooies* than *BMX XXX*es.... *—S.S.*

What if Lara Croft had actually been Larry Croft?



According to Croft creator Toby Gard, the original game was to be called *Tomb Raiders*, in which players could guide either a female (Lara) or a male (Fletcher). "I became attached to the Lara character, so Fletcher got the chop," recalls Gard, now working on the next *Tomb Raider*. "I think the game would have been successful—but there's no doubt it was Lara that [attracted] a larger audience." *—Marc Saltzman*

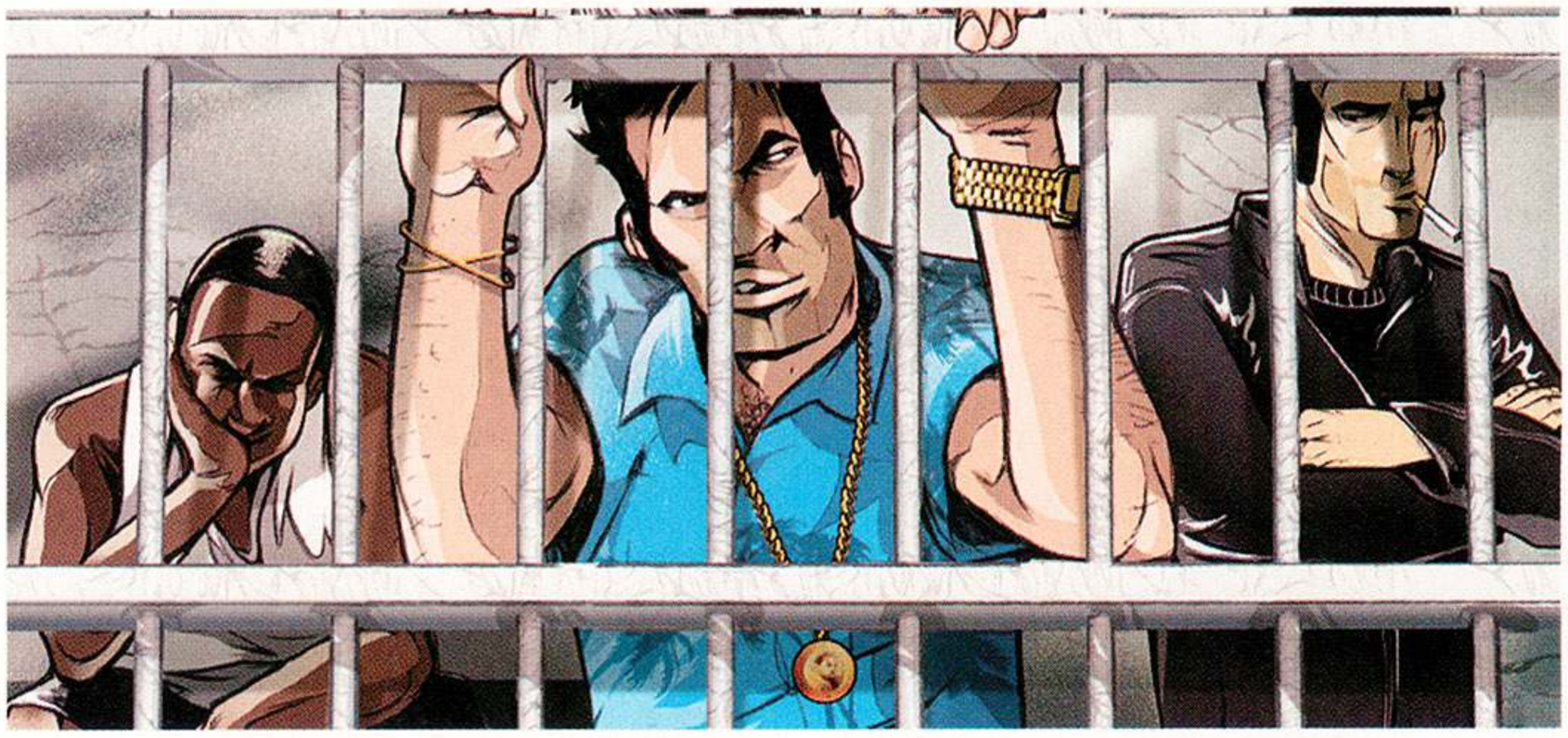
■ Marvel team-up:
The Nintendo PlayStation.



WHAT IF NINTENDO HAD JOINED SONY IN MAKING THE PLAYSTATION?

The reality: As inconceivable as it may sound, there was a point in time when Mario and Crash Bandicoot could have appeared in the same game. (*Super Smash Crash Melee*, perhaps?) Back in 1988, Nintendo and Sony signed an agreement for Sony to create a CD-ROM for the Super NES code-named the "PlayStation." But after three years of work, Nintendo President Hiroshi Yamauchi pulled the plug on the deal in early 1991. Why? Yamauchi reportedly couldn't bear the thought of helping Sony enter the game business.

The alternate reality: If the deal had gone through, the Super NES PlayStation CD-ROM drive would have competed against Sega's CD add-on for its Genesis: the Sega CD. After that, it's possible Nintendo and Sony would have collaborated on a 32-bit system. Imagine the possibilities: Sony hardware mastermind Ken Kutaragi and his engineers could have focused on the hardware while Nintendo hit-maker Shigeru Miyamoto and his designers crafted the first-party software. "Nintendo should have kept that deal with Sony and stayed focused on making great software," says one well-known game designer who works with both Sony and Nintendo. In other words, this alternate reality just might have been the preferred one—especially for Nintendo. —*G.K.*



WHAT IF PUBLISHERS OF MATURE-RATED TITLES LOST THE VIOLENT-GAMES LAWSUITS?

The reality: Rockstar Games, along with its parent company Take-Two Interactive and Sony Computer Entertainment, was named in a $246 million lawsuit after a pair of Tennessee teens killed a woman and critically wounded another, claiming they were inspired by *Grand Theft Auto III*. Meanwhile, shooters such as *Doom* have been named in other suits.

The alternate reality: "It's not a matter of 'if,' but 'when,'" predicts Jack Thompson, the Miami-based attorney who is representing the Tennessee victims. "Remember, the initial suits [against] tobacco companies were all unsuccessful, but it just takes one [winning case] to get through the grid and the floodgates will open." Not one to mince words, Thompson says awarding such a verdict against Rockstar Games could wipe it out financially. "And then the company will say, 'We should have listened to Jack Thompson,'" he adds. "They're being very short term in their thinking and they're going to regret it."

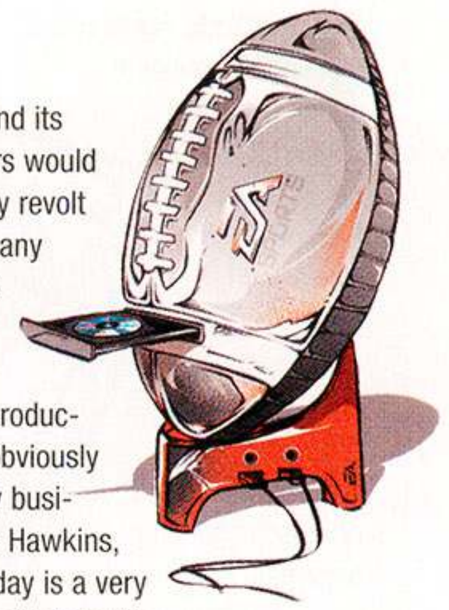
Rockstar declined to comment, but Interactive Entertainment Merchant Association President Hal Halpin defended the publisher with a scenario in which everyone loses. "A successful suit against a publisher, studio, or artist would have a chilling effect on the business as a whole," he says. "The ramifications would be...wide-ranging and only the beginning—leaving movies, then music, and ultimately all forms of creative expression at risk. The ripple effects would be felt from Wall Street to Main Street." Halpin says games, like other entertainment media, enjoy First Amendment protection. —*M.S.*

WHAT IF EA HAD MADE A CONSOLE?

The reality: In 1991, Electronic Arts founder Trip Hawkins left the company to create the CD-based 3DO console. Allegedly, Hawkins wanted EA to launch the system, but EA CEO Larry Probst and the board of directors disagreed. The 32-bit 3DO console was launched in late 1993 but proved to be a commercial flop.

The alternate reality: "Since console launches are extraordinarily expensive and often require two to three iterations and eight to 10 years to get it right, EA probably couldn't have done it," speculates Jeff Brown, the company's director of corporate communications. "When EA might have tried it, they didn't have the resources or the credibility with Wall Street. Now that they've got resources and credibility, their model is built on platform diversity." If EA had launched a console, says Brown, "there'd be no EA."

So the company undoubtably made the right choice by sticking with software. EA currently enjoys a 25 percent global market share in the videogame industry, with $3.2 billion in annual revenues and more than $2 billion in reserves. And its stockholders would undoubtably revolt if the company entered the dangerous waters of hardware production. "It is obviously a very risky business," says Hawkins, "and EA today is a very risk-averse company." —*M.S.*



What if John Madden keeled over?



Why, he would ascend to gridiron heaven while angels croon a glorious rendition of "Are you ready for some football?" But life at *Madden* publisher EA Sports would go on. At a recent financial meeting, company reps said that if Madden passed away, they would either hire a new frontman or just brand the gazillion-dollar franchise *EA Sports Football*. After all, back when the series launched, focus groups actually preferred the simpler title *Electronic Arts Football*.

What if retirees were actually the largest gaming demographic?



Fear octogenarians: Their need for big buttons would've made mammoth Xbox controllers even larger. Forget playing shooters, too—casual diversions (read: board and card games) would dominate. But on the bright side, "Controllers would be wireless or have really long cords," says Schelley Olhava, program manager for research firm IDC. "No one in that age group wants to sit on the floor." —*S.S.*

What if *Bubsy*, *Punky Skunk*, or other lame mascot had eclipsed *Mario*?



"We'd have an inbred industry stuck in a never-ending loop of recycled ideas," predicts Dev Madan, art director on *Sly 2: Band of Thieves*. The dilemma: Heroes of lesser stature are typically designed by committee. In such situations, people look to proven successes for inspiration. While knowing what's worked previously is helpful, Madan says, "the past shouldn't decide the future." Nothin' iffy about that. —*S.S.*

>> PLAY YOU NEXT YEAR—INFINIUM LABS HAS PUSHED BACK THE LAUNCH OF ITS SUBSCRIPTION-BASED PHANTOM GAME CONSOLE FROM THIS NOVEMBER TO SOMETIME IN 2005.... >>





■ To get the secret sidekick Ms. Mowz, watch for an anonymous request at the Trouble Center.

■ GameCube

AFTERTHOUGHTS: PAPER MARIO

A peek behind The Thousand-Year Door

Not very long time past since Japanese games transrated to America sounds like this; stunted speech, mistranslated names, typos—all your common screwups are belonged to us. But if you want to see how far localization has come, look no further than the GameCube's *Paper Mario*. The team at Nintendo of America not only accurately translated the epic RPG's gigantic script (over 15,000 conversations in all), but perfectly captured the irreverent tone—in some cases, even improving on the original. The result is one of the best games you'll ever read, filled with clever dialogue, cheeky humor, and plenty of nods to old-school Nintendo lore. We sat down with Localization Producer Nate Bihldorff to talk about a job well done, Yoshi colors, and how to beat the final boss with just a single attack. For the full conversation, head to egmextras.1UP.com.

—Mark MacDonald

"You'd have to play the game over seven times to see all the text."

—Nintendo's Nate Bihldorff

EGM: Of all the different characters, who was your favorite to work on?

Nate Bihldorff: I flip-flop—they are all so near and dear to me—but Rawk Hawk was probably the most fun to write just because he's a really funny-looking character. I kind of had Randy "Macho Man" Savage in mind with him...but he has so many lines that are just utterly ridiculous. He's like this super-buff guy but he's always poisoning his opponents—he was just really fun to write.

EGM: I was wondering about the part where you name your Yoshi teammate—is there any special name you can choose to trigger something?

NB: No, but you can choose the color. That's based on the amount of time between when you get the egg and it hatches. There's very small windows where you can get blue or black or—there are some very rare colors.

EGM: What's with the lame badge you get for going all the way back through the [wrestling coliseum]?

NB: It's more about building experience. Also, I think it's in the hopes that you'll go back and run into characters and talk to them again. You get a lot of funny text when you fight Rawk Hawk for the second time. But you get much better rewards if you go all the way through the Pit of 100 Trials.

EGM: That's my next question—there's 100 battles, right? What's at the end?

NB: The hardest fight in the game. You get a really cool badge at the end, but mostly you're going down there just to do it, to see that last enemy. Harder than the final boss.

EGM: Ah yeah, so any tips or tricks for fighting the last boss?

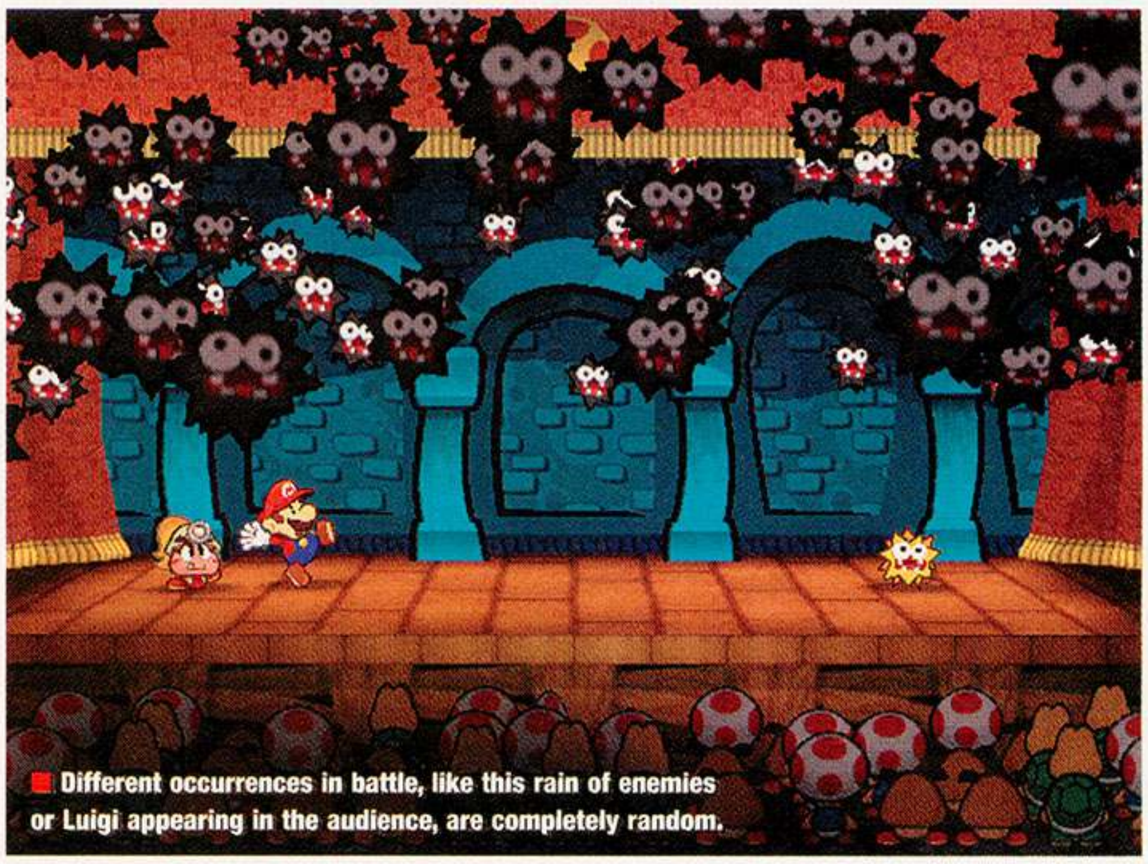
NB: Something I learned from the testers: I don't know if you know this, but you can double up and triple up on some badges. If you unlock some of the minigames in Pianta Parlor and get a lot of money, you can keep buying those Damage Up badges. So you get a ton of those, and then you put on Multibounce, Spike Shield, and Ice Power. Then you put on Close Call, which powers you up when you're low on health and get down to five hit points. Then you can kill anything on the screen in one attack, even the final guy.

EGM: The only major problem I had with the game was a couple points where it felt repetitive—the train and searching the world again for the Bob-ombs to activate the canon....

NB: It seemed to me [the designers at developer Intelligent Systems] were hoping that people would go back and explore these areas, get power-ups they couldn't get before, and chat with people they didn't talk to. You did find the warp zone [in the sewers under Rogueport], right? That comes in handy. Anyway, it's like after the game, you can go back and do all of this stuff, a ton of stuff there's just no way you did all of your first time through.

EGM: I would've preferred they keep it strictly voluntary, but that makes sense. So which of those optional bits do you think players shouldn't miss?

NB: I think some of the best text in the game is if you listen to the crows [in Twilight Town]. You should go back there [at different points in the game] and listen to them—they have some of the most bizarre text. Also, you gotta talk to Luigi and buy all the books about him; you can only get them all after you finish the game. What else...the one guy up on the roof in the east section of Rogueport, you can buy all these tales where you get the entire backstory to this game, about the four heroes who scattered the stars in the first place. And don't miss Jolene's trouble at the Trouble Center, where you have to go clean up all these wrestlers' dirty shorts.



■ Different occurrences in battle, like this rain of enemies or Luigi appearing in the audience, are completely random.

>> NINTENDO EXEC REGGIE FILS-AIME SAYS THAT THE COMPANY IS LOOKING TO LAUNCH ITS NEXT CONSOLE (CODE-NAMED REVOLUTION) AROUND THE SAME TIME AS PLAYSTATION 3.... >>

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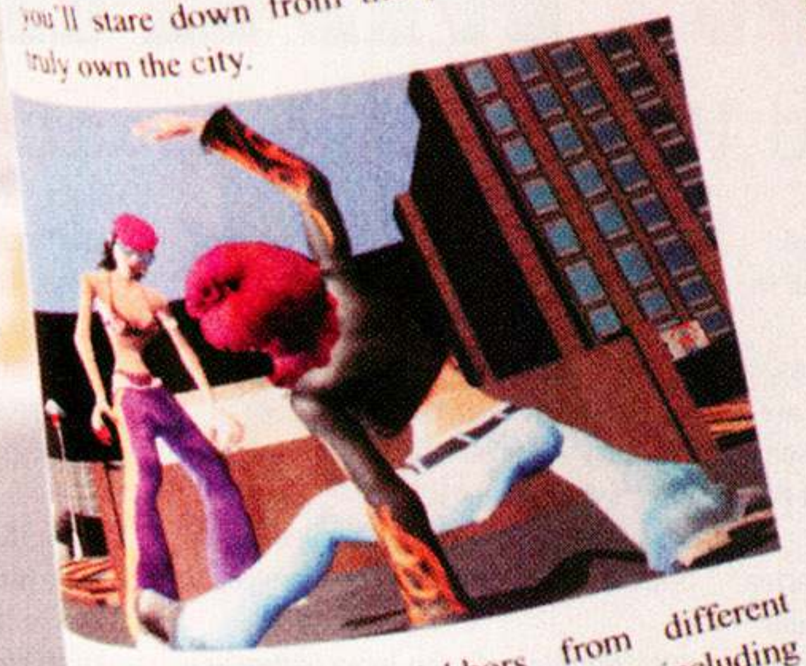
NINTENDO GAMECUBE

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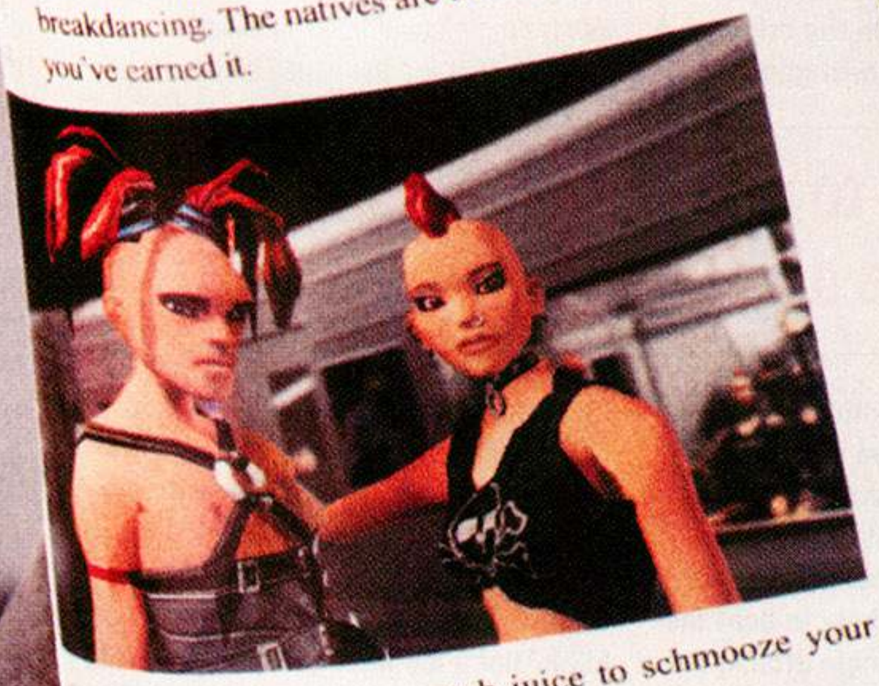
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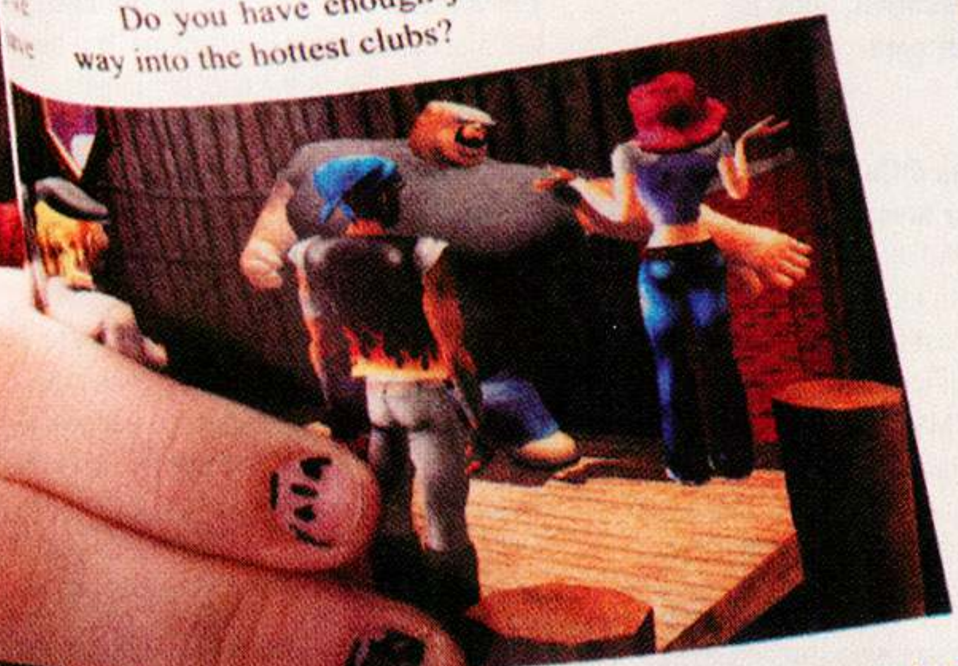
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■ Don't download *Madden's* or *ESPN NFL's* updated rosters if you want to keep running with the newly retired Ricky Williams.

ONLINE THIS MONTH

Are today's sports games dropping the ball on new downloadable lineups?

Not so long ago, the typical early release of sports games often meant obsolete rosters by the season's first pitch, kickoff, opening tip, or face-off. Now that most are online compatible, though, serious sports gamers have come to expect regular roster updates throughout the season. But do they get them? We recently investigated on a sport-by-sport basis.

Pro Baseball

By season's end, *MVP Baseball 2004* had updated its rosters six times. Still, there was a large gap between saves five and six; when we played in early August, the Astros still lacked June pickup Carlos Beltran. Even so, *MVP* was more current than *ESPN Major League Baseball*, whose last update occurred on August 9. And 989 Sports' *MLB 2005*? Well, it doesn't even boast such a feature.

WINNER: ***MVP Baseball 2004***

Pro Football

Though the season was still young when we conducted our experiment, it was encouraging to see that both *ESPN NFL 2K5* and *Madden NFL 2005* featured mid-month updates in August and September. In other words, you'll only light up the scoreboard with running back and recent retiree Ricky Williams if you choose not to update at all. We're told both will continue refreshing rosters throughout the season.

WINNER: Draw between *ESPN NFL 2K5* and *Madden NFL 2005*

Pro Basketball

Since this year's b-ball games were just coming out during this project, we took a look at the 2004 editions of *ESPN NBA Basketball*, EA's *NBA Live*, and 989's now-defunct *NBA ShootOut* series. Again, ESPN Videogames and EA Sports had similar schedules, both offering five updates from October '03 to April '04. *NBA ShootOut*, however, only offered one update, which happened back in February.

WINNER: Draw between *ESPN* and *Live*

Pro Hockey

Ha! If the NHL player strike continues, having current rosters won't even matter this hockey season.

LOSER: Every hockey fan

College Sports

We're calling for an investigation of EA's college sports program, as neither its popular *NCAA Football* nor *NCAA March Madness* series include the option to update rosters. And while the other guys might not exactly be playing like Duke or Kentucky, at least *ESPN College Hoops* (which updated last October and January) and *NCAA Final Four 2004* (December) from 989 Sports came through.

WINNER: ***ESPN College Hoops***

—Chris Baker

must-hit website



ps2rosters.com — College sports junkie DT Lindner runs a site that specializes in providing weekly roster updates, most notably for EA Sports' *NCAA Football* and *NCAA March Madness* franchises (PS2 and Xbox versions). So what's the big deal? His rosters include the names of student athletes (NCAA regulations restrict game companies using players' real names). Putting the list together takes quite an effort. "The initial investment in naming the players is a full week of 16- to 17-hour days," says Lindner, who even contacts sportswriters and consults ESPN.com drive charts for updates. You can even send him your memory card if you don't own the necessary peripherals (Sharkport or Action Replay) to download the rosters from your PC to a PS2 or Xbox memory card.

WHAT'S UP AT 1UP.com™

He's Such a Jackass



Photographs by Ryan Gee

Head to **egmextras.1UP.com** for a slew of must-read material, including the rest of our interview with professional troublemaker and *Tony Hawk's Underground 2* star Bam Margera, who explains how he played *Grand Theft Auto III* for 14 straight hours without completing a single mission. And check out Seanbaby's recap of his dream date with a lovely Frag Doll.

1UP.com Club in the Spotlight: SQueEnix



Those who congregate at this clubhouse (**squeenix-club.1UP.com**) are loyal fans of all things from publisher Square Enix. So it's the place to be if you want to discuss *Final Fantasy*, *Kingdom Hearts*, and if you need help finding the perfect white wig for when you're cosplayin' as bad boy Sephiroth.

Must-Hit Blog

Few videogame industry folk are more in the know than the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*'s John Davison (**jwhdavison.1UP.com**). And don't think our sister mag's editor-in-chief raps only about Sony's system; look for him dishing the dirt on all consoles.

>> MAJESCO REVEALED THAT THE ONCE XBOX-EXCLUSIVE *PSYCHONAUTS* WILL NOW ALSO TEST THE ACTION-PLATFORMING SKILLS OF PS2 OWNERS EARLY NEXT YEAR.... >>

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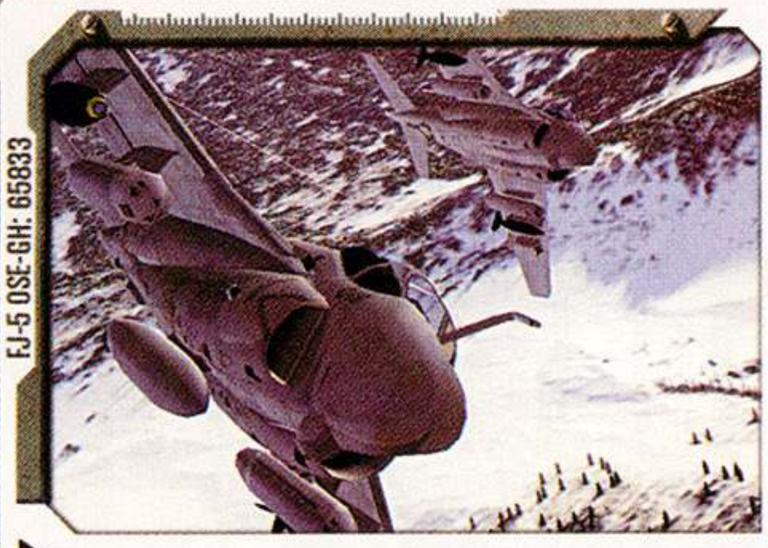
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Strong Sexual Content
Use of Drugs

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M64-2 OSE-GH: 658

Issue orders and coordinate squadron attacks with split-second precision.



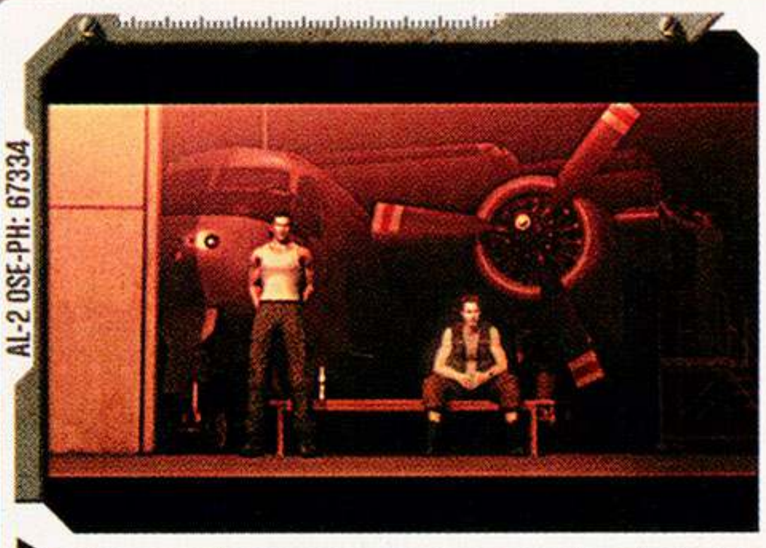
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GO PLAY OUTSIDE

The great outdoors could be your next great game system. We show you the launch titles...

Your mom's right—it's a beautiful day. Why not drop that joypad and go outside? But your game doesn't have to end when you walk out the front door. Tech-savvy individuals are organizing real-world social activities with a decidedly videogame feel. The downside: You may break a sweat playing the following outdoor games. The upside: You'll see the most realistic graphics ever. ***—John Brandon***

MOGIMOGI
www.newtgames.com
What you need: A cell phone or GPS device
Decidedly Japanese in origin and style, MogiMogi has its participants using cell phones or global-positioning systems to find virtual items, which they can collect and trade with other players. The catch: It's only available in Japan but is expected to hit our shores soon.

DODGEBALL
www.dodgeball.com
What you need: A cell phone
Available in about 15 cities, this "mobile social software" lets you broadcast your whereabouts with a text message to find and meet up with new friends who are also using Dodgeball. It doesn't require pricier Bluetooth phones, and it works over 10 city blocks. Maybe you'll score big with a "special friend."

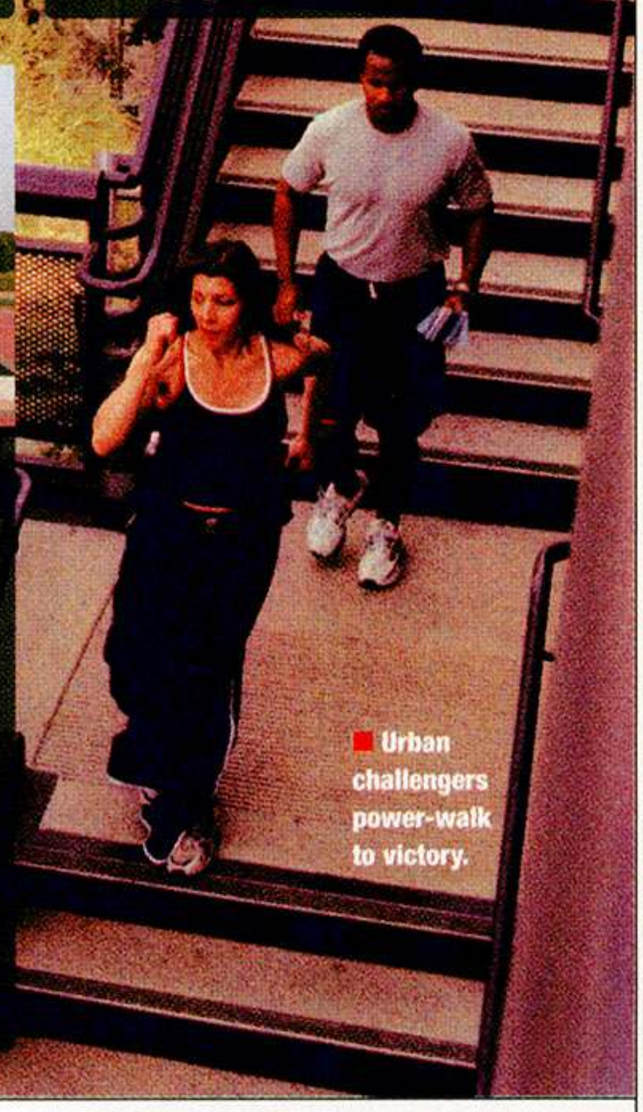
MOBILE HUNT
www.mobilehunt.com
What you need: An e-mail account
This game is a bit more free-form. Once you create an account on mobilehunt.com, you can pretty much develop your own game with maps, treasures, prizes, or city checkpoints. Think of it as a role-playing adventure in which you make all the rules. Mobile Hunt uses text messaging or e-mail.



URBAN CHALLENGE
www.urbanchallenge.com
What you need: A camera phone
Set in major cities throughout the year, these gonzo scavenger hunts give two-person teams clue sheets for finding real-world checkpoints. Participants snap a pic on their cell phones, then find a dude named Skip Man for a pass to the next checkpoint. "So many things are happening at once that teammates are forced to just live in the moment," says spokesman Kevin McCarthy.



GEOCACHING
www.geocaching.com
What you need: A GPS device
You won't find Easter eggs this cool in a videogame: Geocachers hide treasures and trinkets—CDs, PC graphics cards, cameras, etc.—all over the country, and you must find them with a global-positioning-system device. Just tap in the coordinates and off you go. Your quest starts at geocaching.com, which lists the locations of secret stashes. Learn even more at gpsgames.org.



■ **Urban challengers power-walk to victory.**

WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Turn on every television, radio, stereo, and other media device in your home, then crank up the volume and try to listen—that's what the real-time strategy genre gets like every year at this time, a deafening cacophony of disparate entertainment channels all desperately competing for your attention. Which channel should you tune to? Relax, gentle reader, it'll be OK.



■ *Rome: Total War*

TiVo the History Channel? Then you need *Rome: Total War*, an epically sweeping historical game that has you managing the biggest battles on any platform, letting you command thousands of units in glorious 3D. This game has incredible replayability, thanks to a strategic campaign map that adds a big-picture aspect to the nitty-gritty of the battles.

More into PBS? Check out *Kohan II: Kings of War*, the art snob's real-time-strategy (cool kids say it "RTS") game. This fantasy-themed title rethinks the whole genre paradigm, alleviating the micromanagement and churning unit production of standard RTS games with an elegant, unique focus on the big strategic picture. Don't worry, you still get to destroy lots of stuff.

And there's nothing wrong with blowing stuff up—*Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* does it in a delicious, delirious fashion. Dressing up fantasy fare in over-the-top militaristic drag, *Dawn of War* might have the most satisfying action of any RTS this year.

Just stay away from the test pattern that is *Evil Genius*. The only inspiration in this game lies in its premise: You're a Dr. Evil–style villain working toward world domination. But any supervillain game that has you building and managing a hotel when you should be holding the globe hostage, well, it doesn't matter how many nefarious traps you set in your base now, does it?

—Robert Coffey,
Computer Gaming World

REALITY CHECK

Experts explain what happens when videogames get real...

Q: The *Grand Theft Auto* games and similar titles are all about depraved chases and stunts that you know are off-limits in real life. After all, the cars survive falls from parking-garage roofs with barely a dented fender. But let's say you do find yourself in your car on a rooftop and need to hightail it to another building 100 feet away. What are you gonna do?



A: Bob Bondurant, Le Mans champion and founder of the Bondurant Driving School, isn't likely to teach you these stunts at his Arizona facility, but he will say that when jumping from roof to roof, "the car would need to drive off of a ramp at 60 to 80 mph, depending on the angle of the ramp." And as for the parking-garage act, "Just don't do it," he says.

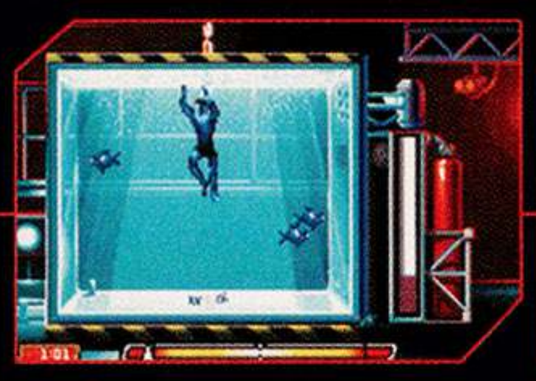
>> *GRAN TURISMO 4* RECENTLY HIT A SMALL SPEED BUMP, AS SONY ANNOUNCED THAT ITS UPCOMING PLAYSTATION 2 DRIVING SIMULATOR WOULD NOT INCLUDE ONLINE PLAY.... >>

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Intense Violence
Language
Sexual Themes

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"Intelligence has confirmed a sudden increase in CHATTER..."

"MGS3 has officially bloWn our socks off. It kickeD our asses."
-PSM

"We'd eat a SNAKE to get our hANds on this one!"
-EGM

"Hideo Kojima is truly a MASTER of his craft."
-PLAY

"MGS3 looks astounding, from its inspirAtion to its stoRy to its gameplay." -GameSpy.com

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PLAY GIRLS

The Frag Dolls fight like girls—and they're looking to kick your ass



Forty seconds. Unless you're an Olympic sprinter, that's not a measurement of time most grown men want to be associated with. But that's how quickly one group of guys got owned in a recent 32-team *Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow* tournament at the Penny Arcade Convention. Their badass foes: the Frag Dolls, a Ubisoft-sponsored clan of hardcore girl gamers who are out to prove they can hang with any gaming competitors out there, male or female, console or PC.

We met up with these tough chicas to get to know them a bit more intimately—and to see if they really are killers on the controllers (they are—check out the scores below). For more stories, background, and, of course, photos, check out our extended coverage on fragdolls.1UP.com and the gaming gals' website, www.fragdolls.com.

—Bryan Intihar and Dan "Shoe" Hsu

JINX

Hometown: Salt Lake City, Utah
Xbox Live gamertag: Jinx FD
She'll school you at: *Unreal Tournament 2004* (PC)
You'll impress her if you've got skills at: *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*. "Snapping my neck is the easiest way to my heart."
Favorite console: GameCube
Can't wait to play: *Brothers in Arms* (PS2/XB)
Girliest girl game ever played: *Final Fantasy X-2*. "I almost overdosed on its girliness a few times."
How to get your girlfriend to play games: "See what she enjoys and show her how fun gaming can be."
Female game character she most identifies with: "April Ryan from *The Longest Journey* (PC) because she never loses her sense of humor."
Proof that she's hardcore: "I played *Final Fantasy X* for 300 hours and got every item at least twice."

EEKERS

Hometown: Inwood, Iowa
Xbox Live gamertag: Eekers FD
She'll school you at: *Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow*
You'll impress her if you've got skills at: *Quake III Arena* (PC)
Favorite console: Dreamcast
Can't wait to play: *Sid Meier's Pirates* (PC). "It's kinda cheesy, but I'm sure it's going to be awesome."
Girliest girl game ever played: *Britney's Dance Beat*
How to get your girlfriend to play games: "Don't totally demolish your girlfriend when she starts playing. Treat her like any other newbie."
Female game character she most identifies with: "That's easy—Samus Aran from the *Metroid* games."
Favorite game of all time: "Well, it depends on the system, but two that really stand out are *River City Ransom* (NES) and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (PS1)."

VALKYRIE

Hometown: San Antonio, Texas
Xbox Live gamertag: Valkyrie FD
She'll school you at: *Rainbow Six 3* and *Halo*
You'll impress her if you've got skills at: *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon*
Favorite console: Xbox. "It rocks my socks."
Can't wait to play: *Halo 2*
Girliest girl game ever played: *The Sims* (PC)
How to get your girlfriend to play games: "Have her play a game that's easy to pick up, like *Halo*. As soon as she starts fragging those Covenant aliens, she'll start foaming at the mouth and be addicted."
Female game character she most identifies with: "*Halo*'s Cortana because I am always leading 'Chiefs' by the noses."
A sample of her trash talk: "How 'bout some coffee to go with those donuts, boys?"

RHOULETTE

Hometown: San Diego, California
Xbox Live gamertag: Rhoulette FD
She'll school you at: *Shadowbane* (PC)
You'll impress her if you've got skills at: *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*
Favorite console: Xbox. "I'm a big fan of Xbox Live."
Can't wait to play: *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*
Girliest girl game ever played: "Probably *The Sims* (PC), but a lot of guys play that game, too, so I'd be hard-pressed to label it 'girly.'"
How to get your girlfriend to play games: "Pick a multiplayer game you'll both enjoy, like *SSX Tricky*."
Female game character she most identifies with: "*Perfect Dark*'s Joanna Dark since she's the first lady of espionage and a kick-butt redhead."
How she would make the world a better place: "I'd make comb-overs illegal."

>> *EGM'S* MEETING WITH THE FRAG DOLLS WENT RATHER WELL...FOR THE DOLLS. GAMES WON: *RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW*: FRAG DOLLS 3, TEAM EGM 2...*SPLINTER CELL PANDORA*

Girls, girls, girls
Left to right: Jinx, Eekers, Valkyrie, Rhoulette, Seppuku, Katscratch, BrookeLyn.

SEPPUKU

Hometown: San Francisco, California
Xbox Live gamertag: Seppuku FD
She'll school you at: *Dr. Mario 64* (N64)
You'll impress her if you've got skills at: *Halo*
Favorite Console: Xbox. "It's got the best graphics and a great game selection."
Can't wait to play: "Even though it's already out, I really want to try *Pikmin 2*—it looks so damn cute."
Girliest girl game ever played: *Bubble Bobble* (NES/GB)
How to get your girlfriend to play games: "Start her off with something that'll appeal to her interests."
Female game character she most identifies with: "*Street Fighter*'s Chun-Li because she's Asian and I've spent numerous hours mastering her moves."
You'd never expect that she plays: *World Series Baseball 2K3*

KATSCRATCH

Hometown: San Francisco, California
Xbox Live gamertag: Katscratch FD
She'll school you at: *Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow.* "You'll be lucky to see the canister."
You'll impress her if you've got skills at: *Chessmaster* (XB)
Favorite console: Xbox. "I never travel without that console. But while I'm away, I do miss my GameCube."
Can't wait to play: *Oddworld: Stranger* (XB)
Girliest girl game ever played: *Doom 3* (PC)
How to get your girlfriend to play games: "First off, some of you need to put down the controller and give your woman some love. Then they'll wanna game."
Female game character she most identifies with: "Was actor Corey Feldman ever in a videogame? If so, then he'd be the one."
She's currently playing: *PaRappa the Rapper* (PS1)

BROOKELYN

Hometown: Wichita, Kansas
Xbox Live gamertag: BrookeLyn FD
She'll school you at: *Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow*
You'll impress her if you've got skills at: *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*
Favorite console: Xbox
Can't wait to play: *Halo 2*
Girliest girl game ever played: *Mario Kart: DD*
How to get your girlfriend to play games: "Leave the house, but keep your console running. I guarantee she'll become curious and try to play it. Hey, that's how I got hooked on first-person shooters."
Female game character she most identifies with: "*Tomb Raider*'s Lara Croft because she's a risk taker."
Prefers gaming by herself or with friends: "I love playing on Xbox Live, but I hate when people just chat in the lobby. Talk to me during the game, please."

Photograph by Whitni Rader on behalf of Ubisoft

TOMORROW: FRAG DOLLS 4, TEAM EGM 2...*HALO*: TEAM EGM 2, FRAG DOLLS 1. APPARENTLY, OUR CONTROLLERS STARTED WORKING AGAIN ONLY WHEN WE PLAYED THE LAST GAME.... >>

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**Make sure you play *Tony Hawk's Underground 2* on a PC powered by
Edition.* Otherwise, it just isn't fair. To get a free download to optimize your**



*Look for systems with the Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology logo which your system vendor has verified utilize Hyper-Threading Technology



the Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology Extreme
motherboard for faster game play, visit intel.com/go/gaming.

Performance will vary depending on the specific hardware and software you use. See http://www.intel.com/info/hyperthreading/ for information.

intel®

THE RUMOR MILL

A gossip turkey full of top-secret stuffing

Gobble, gobble! By the time you read this edition of our mag, it'll probably be close to Thanksgiving. And at The Q's Turkey Day feast, it's customary that we tell each other what we're thankful for this year. For me, that's easy—just take a look at our enormous review section and all the award-winning titles that will surely keep this rumor-monger occupied well into '05. But don't worry. I'll still find time to deliver some tasty gossip and answer the occasional e-mail (send yours to quartermann@ziffdavis.com). Catch you in 30. ***—The Q***



■ This tiny PS2 welcomes more memory.

Extra memory

Hot damn—that new trimmed-down PlayStation 2 unit is definitely gonna be on my wish list to ol' St. Nick this holiday. And after hearing the following bit of gossip, I quickly moved the console up that rather long list: Sony plans on releasing a memory card that can store a ton more data than today's current crop. The company also hopes to make the card large enough so that you can download beefy content like new *SOCOM II* maps or play the massively multiplayer *Final Fantasy XI* without having the expensive hard drive. Sounds goods to me.

More Live enhancements

Xbox Live—it's the best thing to happen to online console gaming since...well, it is the best thing to happen to online console gaming. And the improvements just keep on coming. Word around Bill Gates' camp is that Microsoft is looking to add a spectator mode to the online service so you can watch tournaments and games in progress even if you aren't participating. There's also gonna be a ticker on the bottom of the screen featuring high scores and tourney results. Very nice.

PSP gets shaken, not stirred

It seems like everyday The Q hears of another title in development for Sony's PlayStation Portable. So what's the latest game in the works? Supposedly, EA will release a *GoldenEye* game soon after the handheld's release here, and unlike in *Rogue Agent*, 007 will be back as the leading man. And speaking of PSP, there's been talk of pushing back its launch from next spring to the fall. Please, say it ain't so, Sony....



■ Master Chief eyes a very speedy return.

Well, Halo again

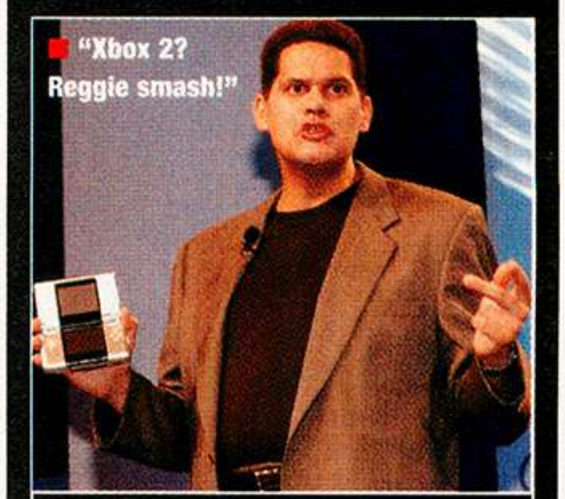
OK, so the most anticipated Xbox game of all time has finally invaded our planet, and thankfully, *Halo 2* was well worth the wait (peep our massive review on page 128). But your time with Master Chief and "friends" is far from over: Apparently, the next game in the series (whether it be *Halo 2.5*, *Halo 3*, or *Halo: Championship Edition*) will arrive much sooner than this one did and it'll be for Xbox 2.



San Andreas: the last GTA

Now, now. Don't get your felonious panties in a bunch—what I'm trying to say is that I have it on good authority that *San Andreas* will be the last game in the *Grand Theft Auto* series to appear on PlayStation 2. So where does the next installment in the megapopular franchise land: PSP or PS3? Hmm, maybe I'll have the answer next issue. All that turkey is making me sleepy.

OVERHEARD



■ "Xbox 2? Reggie smash!"

"We are driving our timetables based on what we believe Sony will do. Not that I want to ignore the Xbox, but certainly we believe that a rush to a new system is a mistake."

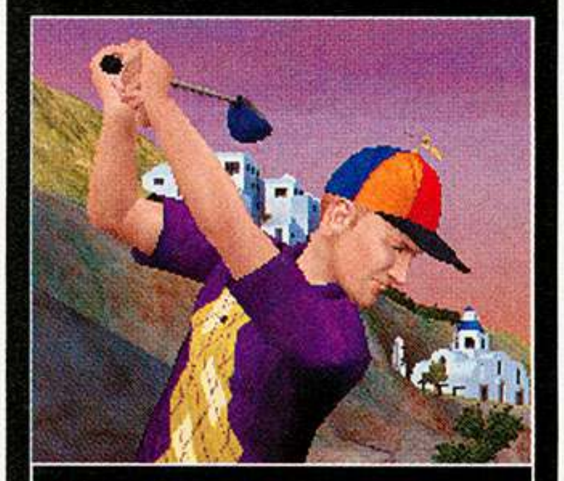
—Nintendo VP Reggie Fils-Aime in an interview with website IGN on wide speculation that Microsoft will launch its next console in the fall of 2005.

■ Please, just not *Oni 2*.



"After *Halo 2*, we are planning to do something different. We will do something else and we have a few ideas."

—Bungie Studio Manager Pete Parsons in an interview with the BBC.



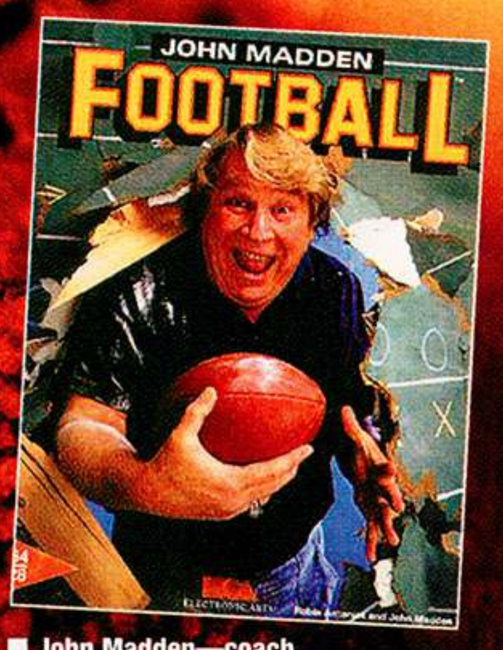
"You can make someone who looks like a stud, or you make someone who looks like you."

—Tiger Woods to Conan O'Brien, talking about Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005*'s create-a-golfer feature.*

BY THE NUMBERS

Maddening figures

1989	The year Electronic Arts released *John Madden Football* (Apple II)
40 Million	Number of units sold worldwide since the series' debut
50,000	Grand prize, in dollars, of this year's Madden Challenge tourney
1	Number of reported riots when a shipment of *Madden NFL 2005* arrived late to a game store



■ John Madden—coach, broadcaster, videogame icon, and Kool-Aid Man stunt double.

Photograph by Steve Cole/Getty Images

>> NO SURPRISE HERE: WORD OUT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IS THAT DEVELOPMENT ON *BURNOUT 4* IS WELL UNDERWAY AND IT SHOULD BE READY FOR RELEASE NEXT YEAR.... >>

BATEN KAITOS™

ETERNAL WINGS AND THE LOST OCEAN

"It's possibly the most beautiful GCN title ever made"

– Nintendo Power

The world of Baten Kaitos exists in an era where lands float in the sky and the once-vast oceans are mere legend. With your help, Kalas and Xelha must struggle to reveal the mystery of the lost ocean and destroy the corruption that threatens their world.



Embark upon an emotional journey across a richly imagined world and detailed character development spanning over 60 hours of gameplay.



Vivid, pre-rendered backgrounds are alive with subtle, ambient animations. Enjoy gloriously rendered battle environments and astounding spell effects.



An unconventional card-based RPG system unites all elements of gameplay with over 1000 types of "Magnus" cards.

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

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THE HOT TEN

Thou shalt covet these games for the foreseeable future

Disagree with the list? You're the ones who created it. Rock your vote at egm.1UP.com.



■ Demon Dante models the latest in hellspawn formal wear.

1. **The Legend of Zelda**
   GC • Fall 2005



2. **Jade Empire**
   XB • March 2005

3. **Knights of the Old Rep. II**
   XB • December 2004



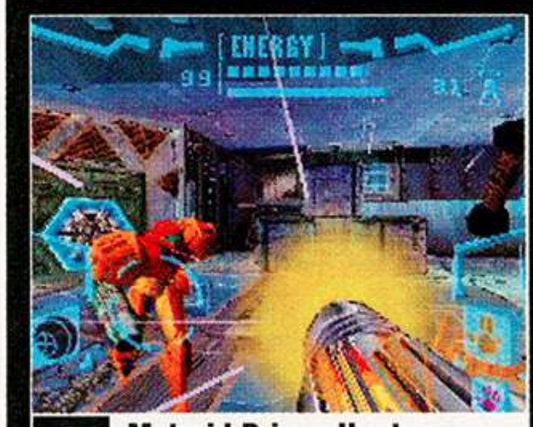
4. **Resident Evil 4**
   GC • January 2005

5. **Final Fantasy XII**
   PS2 • Summer 2005

6. **Devil May Cry 3**
   PS2 • March 2005

7. **Zelda: The Minish Cap**
   GBA • January 2005

8. **Kingdom Hearts II**
   PS2 • Fall 2005



9. **Metroid Prime: Hunters**
   Nintendo DS • December 2004

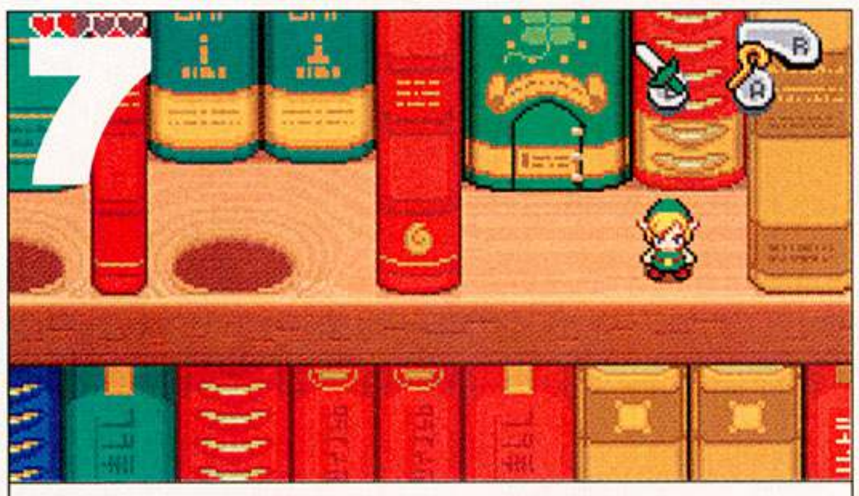
10. **Super Mario 64 DS**
    Nintendo DS • November 2004



■ The essence of *DMC3*: flashy sword moves, nasty demons, and designer jeans.

DEVIL MAY CRY 3

PS2 • March 2005 — In Capcom's latest entry into the "stylish crazy action" genre, image-conscious devil detective Dante fancies up his performance with several combat styles. You can concentrate on artillery in gunslinger mode, switch to swordmaster to deliver punishing sword swipes, leap around as an acrobatic trickster, or get all defensive as royal guard. But when the going gets really tough, Dante tosses his humanity by the wayside and morphs into a nearly invincible Demon Dante form.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP

GBA • January 2005 — As *Zelda* titles go, *Cap* hasn't garnered much hype. Blame it on the wacky name (it references the sentient headgear atop Link's head) or the fact that everyone's too enthralled by the new GC *Zelda* to notice a mere GBA game, but it's high time fans take note—*Cap* launches shortly after the new year. Expect all the usual franchise trimmings, but with a tiny twist: That wacky hat shrinks Link down to itty-bitty size, creating zany *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*–esque hijinks.



KINGDOM HEARTS II

PS2 • Fall 2005 — We can show you *Kingdom Hearts II* hero Sora joining forces with sassy heroine Mulan, but we can't show you the face of a certain M. Mouse. Early rumors pegged Mickey as a playable character in this action-RPG sequel, but so far he's keeping a low profile in *KH2*. We've only seen him lurking in the shadows, clad in a long hooded trench coat with his back to the camera. What gives? Will the famous mouse turn around to reveal a cyborg's face with glowing red eyes? *Matrix*-style sunglasses? Is this actually Minnie? The mystery persists....

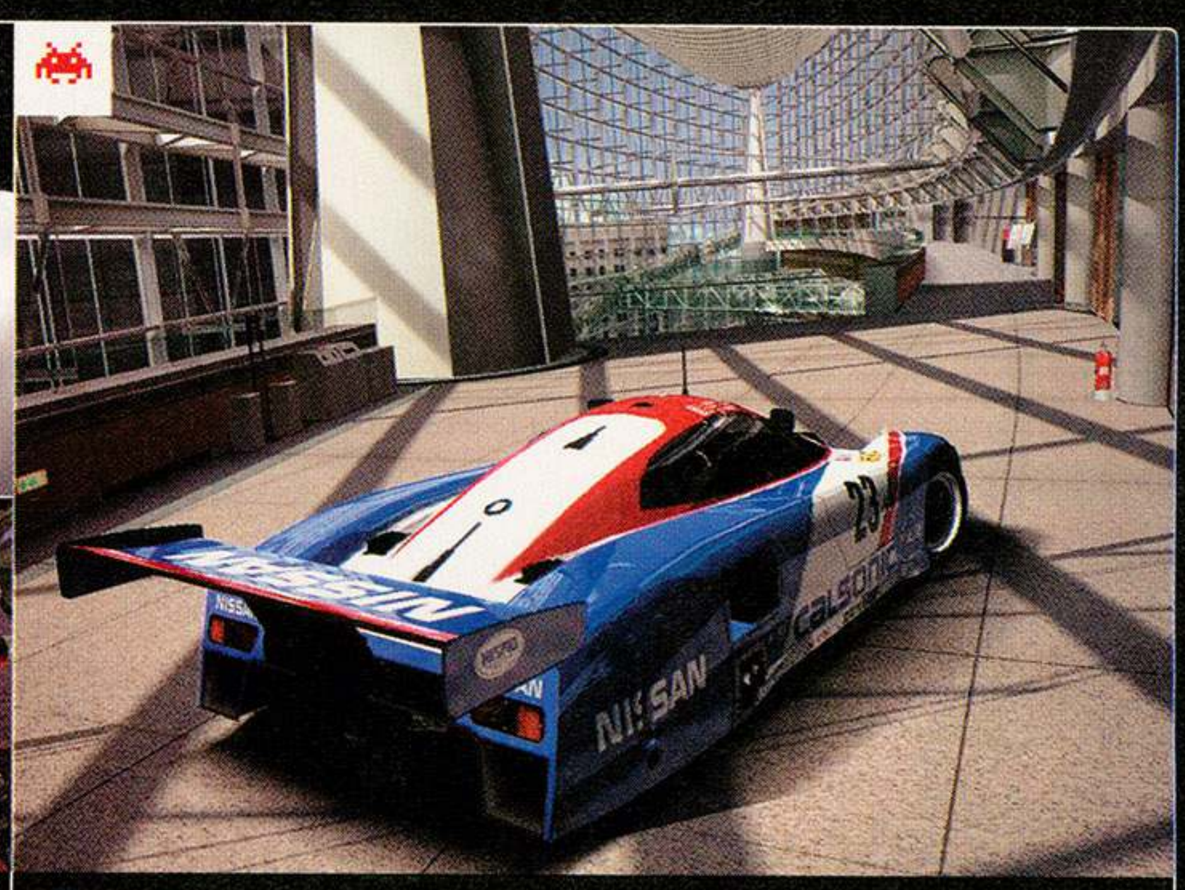
>> THE TRAIL OF BLOOD LEADS TO XBOX—THIS NOVEMBER, UBISOFT WILL RELEASE A GAME BASED ON THE HIT TV SHOW *CSI: CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION* FOR THE CONSOLE.... >>

COMING SOON

Merry Games for Christmas Time

DECEMBER 2004

Luigi does some blow in preparation for the festivities.



Gran Turismo 4
Sony CEA • PS2 — First, the bad news: Sony has rudely removed the promised online play from *GT4*. Bummer. Now, the good news: The game will actually be out this year. Gearheads will still blow their gaskets with 650 selectable cars and 30 tracks to race on.



Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2
Atari • GC — The fireball-tossin' super-dudes rocked the PS2 last fall, takin' their own sweet time to obliterate the Cube.



GunGriffon: Allied Strike
Tecmo • XB — Because the Xbox simply can't have enough mechanized ass-whomping with huge lumbering robots.



Mario Party 6
Nintendo • GC — Mario busts out the keg for another annual multiplayer bash, but this time it's actually different thanks to the snazzy GC microphone bundled with the game. You'll use the mic in various minigames to scream, sing, and speak your way to victory.



Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories
Square Enix • GBA — The only RPG series that might let you beat up the Cheshire Cat goes portable.



Mario Party Advance
Nintendo • GBA — Because minigaming is too big to be confined to just consoles anymore. Make this party a road trp.



Mech Assault 2: Lone Wolf
Microsoft • Xbox — If there's one thing that giant robots on Xbox Live hate it's other giant robots on Xbox Live.



Megaman X8
Capcom • PS2 — Get psyched for this month's Mega offering, complete with tense platforming and ridiculous bosses.



Savage Safari Hunt
Crave • PS2 — Don your pith helmet, we're going on value-priced dinosaur safari, old bean! Jolly good show.



Sega Classics Collection
Sega • PS2 — Gussied-up remakes of *Golden Axe*, *Fantasy Zone*, *Space Harrier*, and *Monaco GP* revive the good ol' days.



Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II
LucasArts • XB — Will you choose light and save the universe, or dark and edit the movie so Greedo shoots first?



Ys VI: Ark of Napishtim
Konami • PS2 — Scientists met in secret to make the title of this latest *Ys* action-RPG even harder to pronounce.



One Fate.

Prince of Persia
Warrior Within

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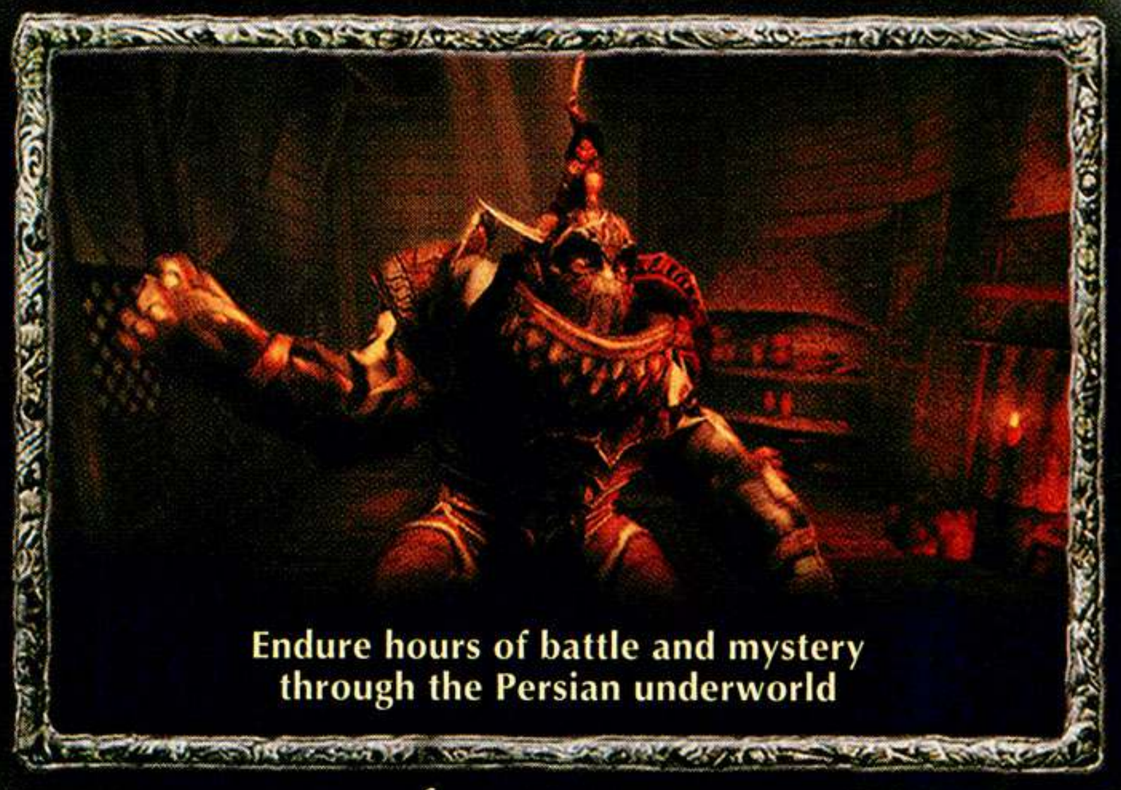
Prince of Persia
Warrior Within



2003's Game of the Year* returns to
further push the boundaries of gaming



Develop unique combat styles with
the Free-Form Fighting System



Endure hours of battle and mystery
through the Persian underworld

"Our Most Wanted Game of 2004" - PSE2

"9.6" - Official Xbox Magazine

"10 out of 10" - PSM

princeofpersiagame.com

FEATURING MUSIC BY:
GODSMACK

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX

XBOX LIVE ONLINE ENABLED

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PlayStation.2

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One Million Ways to Defy It.

Even when you've been sentenced to death by a demonic incarnation of Fate, you still have choices. And with the power to develop your own combat style using countless weapons, environmental objects, and whatever enemy crosses your path, there's no telling what your warrior within will unleash next. You can't run from Fate. But with this much freedom, you can stop it dead in its tracks.

*Game of the Year: Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences, *U.S. Official PlayStation Magazine*, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, *Official Xbox Magazine* (Staff Pick), *PSE2*

UBISOFT™

STARTING LINEUPS

EGM compares the top five games for Sony's PSP and Nintendo's DS

Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP) and Nintendo's DS offer wildly different handheld gaming experiences—PSP strikes hard with high-end audiovisual performance, a gorgeous screen, and multimedia functionality, while DS reinvents portable gameplay with two screens and a unique touch-panel control system. Still, both consoles will invariably be judged against one another, and ultimately, the available games will determine which system is better. Back in ye olden days, Sega's Game Gear blew the pants off Nintendo's Game Boy in terms of specs...but a helluva lot more people wanted to play *Tetris* than *Woody Pop*—it's all about the games. With that in mind, *EGM* spent quality time with every playable title for both PSP and DS, selecting the top five games for each system. Which lineup reigns supreme?

—Shane Bettenhausen and Mark MacDonald



(ACTUAL SIZE)

BASIC INTEL



Release Date: March 2005 (December 2004 in Japan)
Price: Undisclosed, though $299.99 is expected
Media: Proprietary UMD (Universal Media Disc) optical disc format holds up to 1.8GB of data (roughly half of DVD capacity)
Other:
- You'll also be able to purchase movies and music on UMD discs
- USB 2.0, infrared data port, and Sony memory stick slot
- Allows playback of both ATRAC3 and MP3 music on memory sticks
- Wi-Fi functionality allows PSP users to network with other PSPs for multiplayer gaming and connect to the Internet using Wi-Fi hot spots and wireless networks

PSP: HANDS-ON WITH SONY'S CUTTING-EDGE HANDHELD

Sure, the console's dead sexy, but serious questions remain concerning whether or not PlayStation Portable games can really deliver the PS2-quality experiences promised. After months of silence, Sony finally allowed consumers to manhandle its long-awaited PSP software lineup at the 2004 Tokyo Game Show in September...and the answer still isn't quite clear.

Some PSP titles deliver outstanding visuals, like Konami's futuristic first-person shooter *Coded Arms* and Namco's *Ridge Racer PSP*, but many of the playable games barely looked better than PS1 titles. The huge gap in graphical quality only served to make the average PSP game look unimpressive, so the entire lineup suffered. Plus, a large percentage of the playable PSP games at TGS will never make it Stateside, and for good reason. We really don't need portable renditions of traditional Japanese parlor games like go, shogi, and mahjong, and we sure as hell don't need two different slot machine simulators.

Still, it's a bit unfair to damn the PSP based on this spotty initial showing—the PS2's Japanese lineup was similarly uneven, and look how that turned out. That said, let's take a look at five top titles for Sony's new machine....

Hardware Concerns

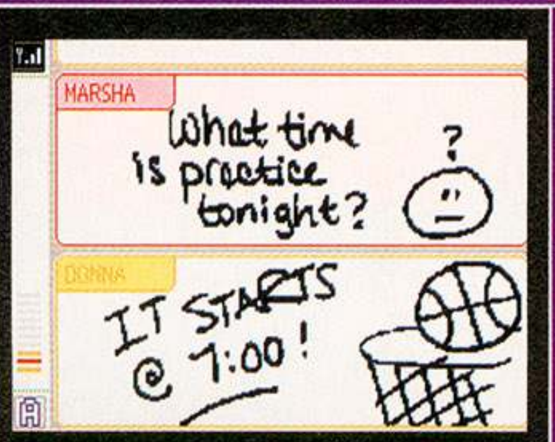
We applaud Sony for including an analog control stick on the PSP (Nintendo offers only a traditional directional pad on the DS), but after hands-on time with the games at TGS, we're not sold on the PSP's rubber nub. The small stick re-centers itself in a noticeably different manner than the DualShock, and its overall motion feels very loose, causing us to oversteer in racing games and making just about every game seem a bit off. Also, the PSP's battery life offers reason for concern: Sony claims that it will last four to eight hours for playing games and a scant two and a half for watching movies. Guess that means no *Lord of the Rings* movies on UMD. And don't forget that rumored U.S. launch delay until September 2005....



(ACTUAL SIZE)

DS: DIFFERENT IS GOOD

"What we are doing with [the Nintendo DS] has never been done before." Nintendo VP of Sales and Marketing Reggie Fils-Aime may be prone to melodrama, but in this case it's almost an understatement. With two screens (one also a touch-sensitive pad), a built-in microphone and chat program, plus wireless multiplayer and Internet capabilities, the Nintendo DS advances well beyond any Game Boy. Which means that when the system launches at $149 on Nov. 21, it'll take some getting used to—it's just a bit too big to fit comfortably in a pocket, and players (and developers) will need a little time to learn how to use the touch pad effectively. (Hint: When using the stylus, try swinging the pinky of your writing hand under the system to stabilize it.) Nintendo expects the adjustment to be smooth; although the company will release more than a million DS systems by the end of the year, it expects shortages this Christmas shopping season.



■ **The stylus-centric wireless instant messaging/drawing program *PictoChat* is built right in to the DS hardware.**

Hardware Concerns

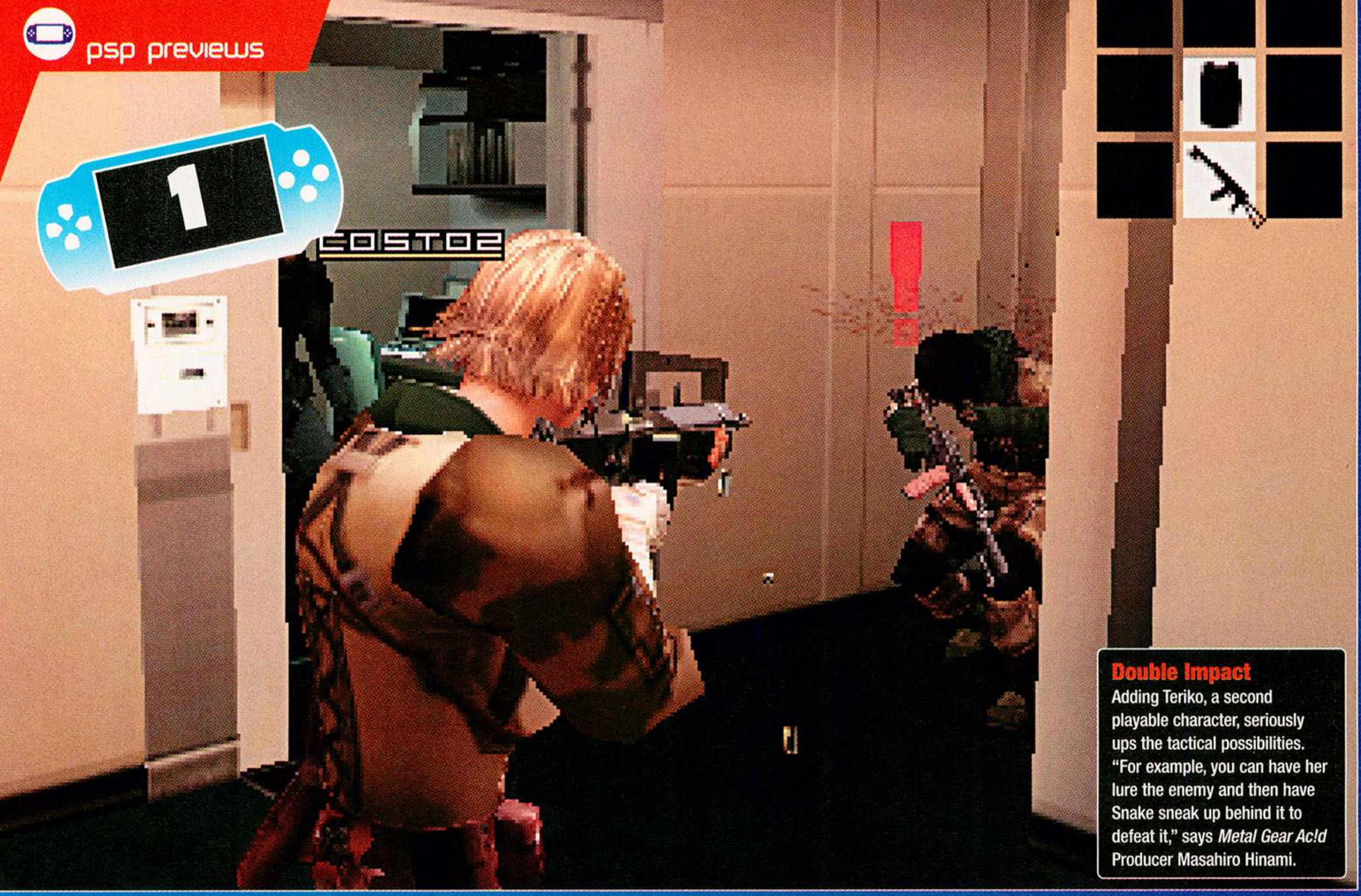
The biggest advantage the Nintendo DS has at this point isn't its cheap sticker price ($150 hardware, $30 games) or any of its fancy new features; it's Nintendo itself. Plenty of developers are on board and talking up the great potential of the system, but so far nearly all the games worth getting excited about are being developed by Nintendo, including four of our top five picks.

Will the DS gain strong third-party support, or become yet another first-party-software delivery system for the Japanese giant? Nintendo points to launch games from juggernauts like EA (*The Urbz*, *Tiger Woods*, and *Madden NFL 2005*) and Namco (*Ridge Racer* and *Mr. Driller*), plus pledges from heavy-hitters like Capcom, Konami, and Square Enix (noticeably absent from the PSP camp) down the road. But then again, Nintendo promised strong third-party support in the past with the GameCube, and the Nintendo 64 before that....

BASIC INTEL



Release Date: November 21, 2004
Price: $149.99
Media: Proprietary DS game cartridges that can hold up to 1 gigabit of info (roughly 1/14 the capacity of the PSP's media).
Other:
- Also plays Game Boy Advance games (but not original Game Boy or Game Boy Color games)
- Includes built-in *PictoChat* software for wireless instant messaging
- Battery life estimated at 10 hours; can be recharged with the same AC plug as the Game Boy Advance
- Wireless functionality allows DS users to network with up to 15 other DSes for multiplayer gaming or connect to the Internet using Wi-Fi hot spots and wireless networks



Double Impact
Adding Teriko, a second playable character, seriously ups the tactical possibilities. "For example, you can have her lure the enemy and then have Snake sneak up behind it to defeat it," says *Metal Gear Ac!d* Producer Masahiro Hinami.







METAL GEAR AC!D

Konami • March 2005



"The game's title has three meanings," explains *Ac!d* Producer Masahiro Hinami. "First, acid dissolves metal, and we wanted to destroy the old *Metal Gear* and create something new; second, there is an important acid chemical weapon in the game's story line; and third, we created a new genre—Active Command Intelligence Duel, or A.C.I.D." With that much symbolism packed into the name, it's obvious that the guys behind the PSP's *Metal Gear* title aren't messing around.

Melting down everything you know and love about *MGS*, however, is risky. *Ac!d* eschews action-stealth gameplay in favor of strategic card-based duels in which everything occurs in turns. Moving, equipping weapons and armor, attacking, and escaping all require points from Snake's pool. Run out of points and you'll have to rest to regain more, and your enemies can take turns while you recover. "We decided not to make an action game for two reasons," says Hinami. "First, there's the issue of the PSP's touchy analog stick, but beyond that, we really wanted to make a *Metal Gear* that you can play on the train or bus and put down if you need to."

Although the plot isn't officially part of the *MGS* canon, it does take place a few years after *MGS2*—Solid Snake is happily retired (again), until the U.S. government lures him out for one last mission (again). During his adventure, he meets a feisty female agent named Teriko...who's also a playable character. "The ability to control both Snake and Teriko simultaneously makes this very different from past *MGS* games," states Hinami. This two-character mechanic begs the obvious question: What about Wi-Fi co-op play? "We're still exploring possibilities for it," says Hinami.

KONAMI'S TAKE ON THE PSP

"I think that DS will attract a younger demographic while PSP attracts a more mature gamer."

—Konami CEO Kazumi Kitaue

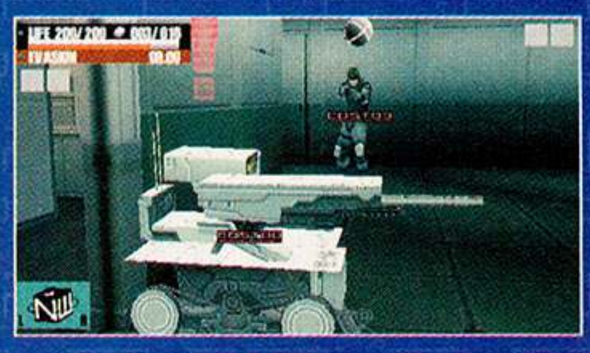
"While we don't know the final specs of the battery, we're concerned about how long it will last. Unlike the GBA's ROM cartridges, you have to keep spinning the UMD in the PSP. I'm going to attempt to minimize the amount of disc access to keep battery usage as small as possible."

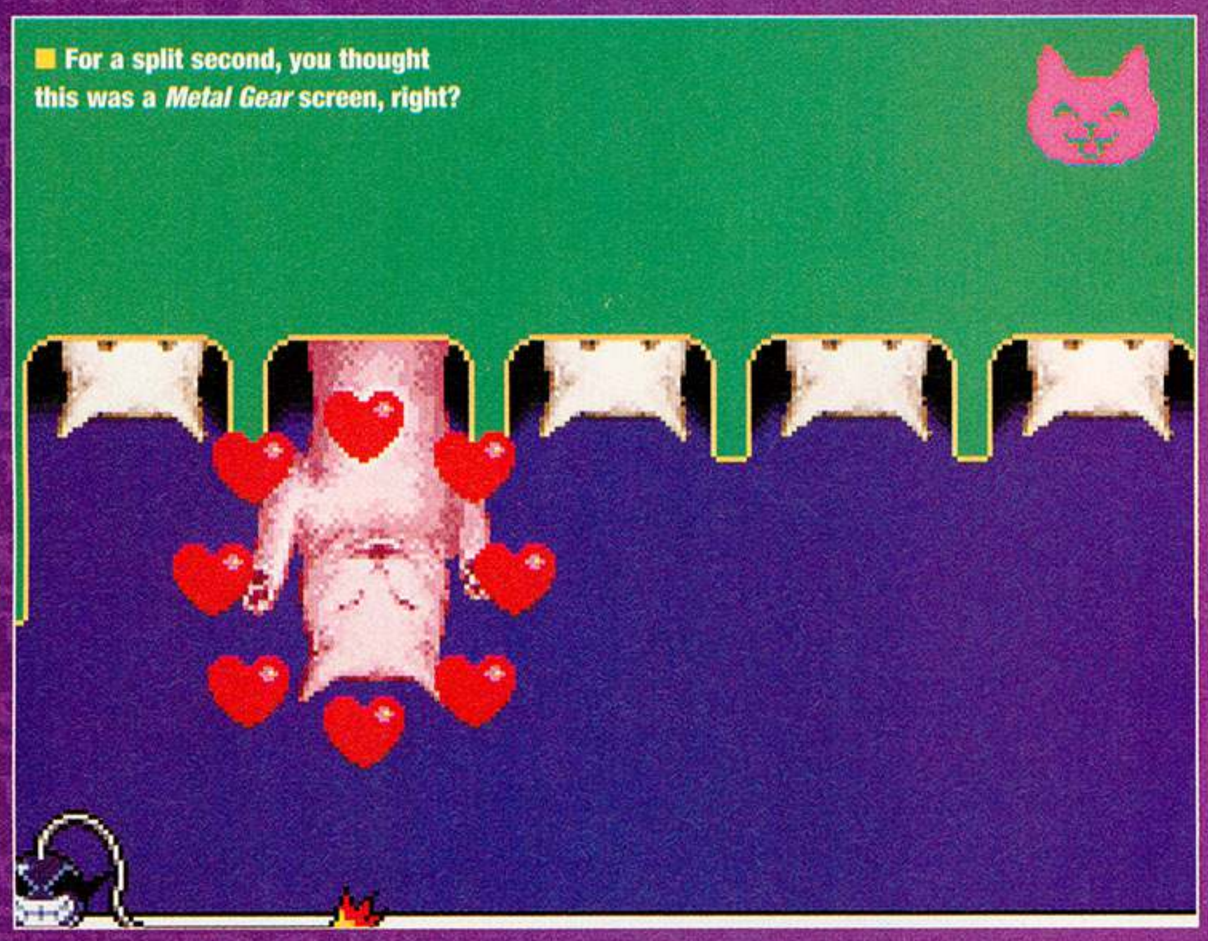
—Metal Gear Ac!d Producer Masahiro Hinami










■ For a split second, you thought this was a *Metal Gear* screen, right?



■ Wario commands you to blow.



WARIOWARE INC. DS

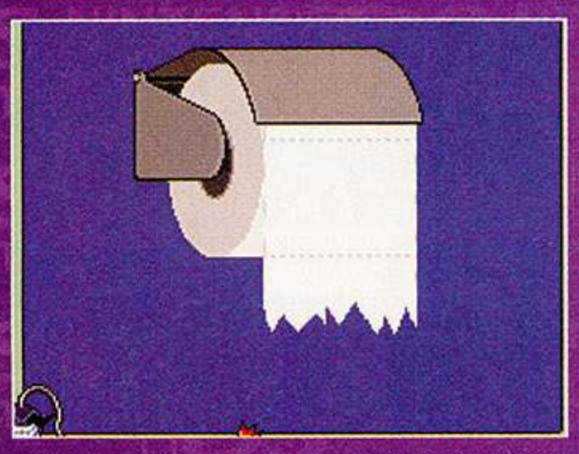


Nintendo • January 2005

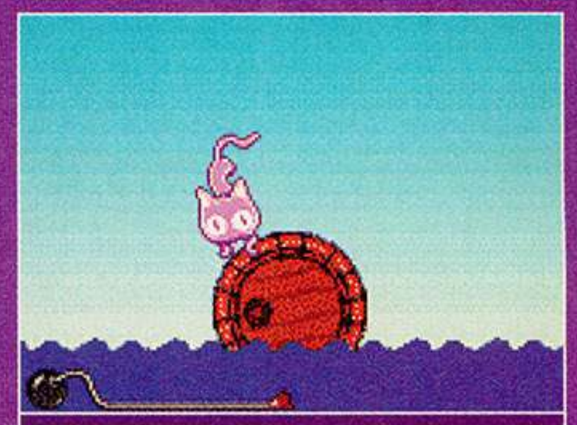
2003's *WarioWare Inc.* blindsided the easygoing Game Boy Advance masses with its bizarre twist on portable gaming—assault the player with a nonstop barrage of brilliant little "microgames." Figuring out how to solve these tiny challenges within a three-second time limit was half the fun; catching all the clever Nintendo in-jokes and references to classic games provided the rest. This DS sequel takes that same premise but injects extra insanity, courtesy of the DS's unique touch panel/stylus gameplay.

Nearly every task utilizes the stylus in a different way: You'll be rubbing, tracing, catching, and poking tons of random things in more than 180 all-new microgames. Some are quite simple, like striking a match or unravelling an entire roll of toilet paper (which really helps you get in touch with your inner house cat), but others will leave you pleasantly befuddled. A few microgames also make use of the DS's oft-overlooked microphone, demanding that you shout or blow into it at the right moment.

Not too surprisingly, *WarioWare Inc. DS* easily claims the top spot among the initial DS lineup. It won't win any accolades for visual prowess, but no other game uses all of the DS's unique features quite so effectively.







MORE WARIO?

Still in need of more *WarioWare* insanity? Help is on the way. In Japan, Nintendo recently shipped a totally different sequel for the GBA named *Mawaru Made in Wario*. It offers a new array of wacky, spastic microgames, but with one killer twist—a motion sensor. You'll have to turn, flip, and spin your GBA in order to succeed. Look for it here early next year.

NINTENDO DS: ONLY IN JAPAN?

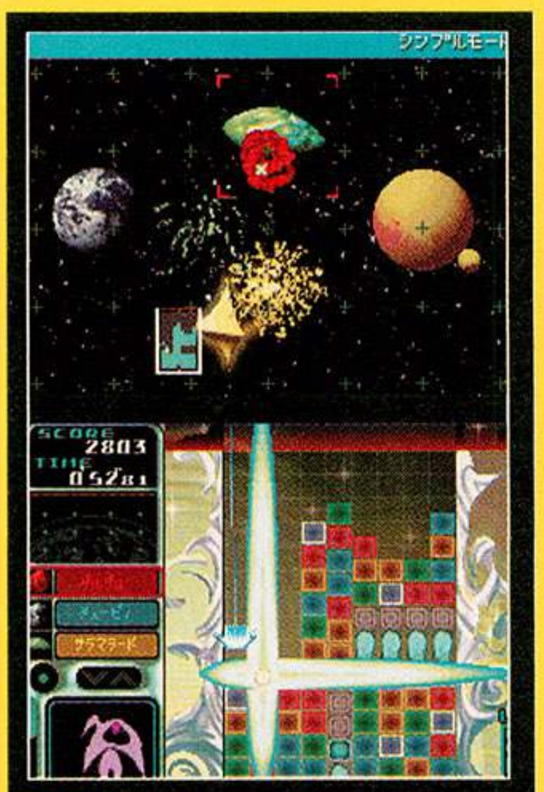
The Japanese DS has its own launch date (December 3) and game lineup, including a few interesting titles that haven't been announced for the States. All these titles will be out by the end of the year across the Pacific, and we expect (as with every Nintendo portable so far) they will play on American systems.



■ **GANBARE GOEMON:** Konami's lighthearted action-adventure series (generally known Stateside as *Legend of the Mystical Ninja*) has a fresh new art style for its DS debut.



■ **ANOTHER:** This graphical adventure game seems like a weird departure for Nintendo; you explore various mysteries by solving puzzles using the DS' touch screen and microphone.

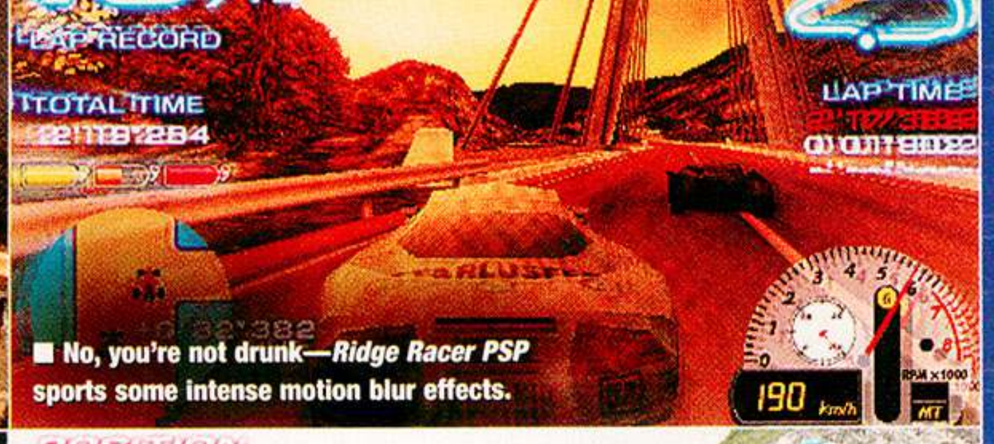


■ **METEOS:** You laugh at the PC shareware look of Bandai's multiplayer puzzle game, but did you know that it hails from the guys behind *Rez* (PS2) and *Smash Bros.* (GC)? Thought that'd shut you up.

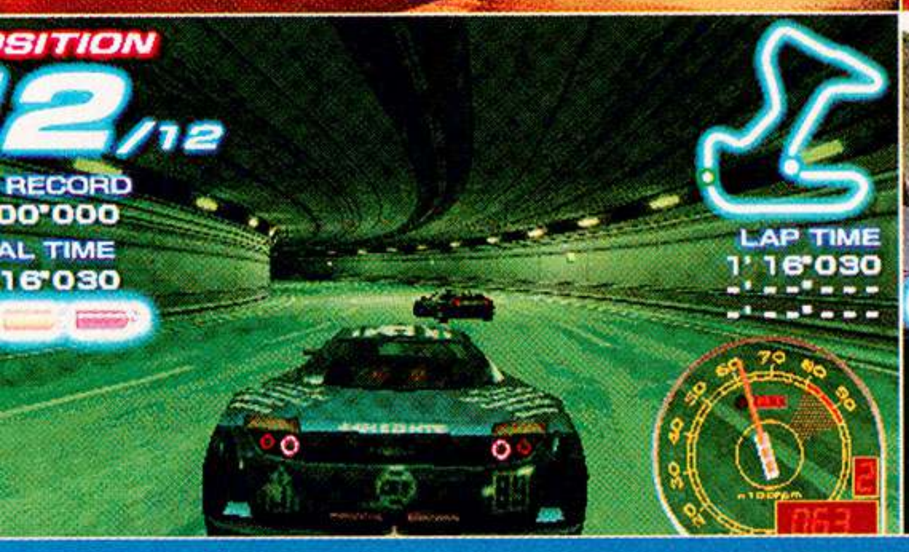


■ **INTERN TENDOU DOKUTA:** One of two surgical games being developed for the DS (God bless Japan!), *Dokuta* challenges you, as the titular hero, to diagnose patients after giving uh, physical exams.





■ No, you're not drunk—*Ridge Racer PSP* sports some intense motion blur effects.





RIDGE RACER PSP

Namco • March 2005

It's a good sign that, even in its current, stripped-down demo form (the playable build at the Tokyo Game Show featured neither competing cars nor a finish line on the endlessly looping course), *Ridge Racer PSP* was still remarkably fun and beautiful. Namco is definitely on the right track here: Unlike some other PSP games, the flat analog control feels pretty natural for steering the car, since making slight adjustments is easier than it is on a stick, and the famous *Ridge Racer* drifts come off easily.

The demo's single mountainous looked great on the PSP's wide screen, and there were some nice background touches, like a jumbo jet flying overhead at one point. Unlike other PSP racers on display, *Ridge* suffered from no slowdown or choppiness.

The original *Ridge Racer* defined the PlayStation, so it's fitting that a decade later its descendant is making the same strides on PSP.

Ridge Racer Race-off

Two new portables, two new portable *Racer*s:



■ Ridge Racer DS



■ Ridge Racer PSP

The DS *Ridge Racer* looks awful when compared to its PSP cousin, but then again, it lets you control your car with the stylus and touch panel. No, really.



VAMPIRE CHRONICLE: THE CHAOS TOWER

Capcom • March 2005

Vampire Chronicle: The Chaos Tower collects all of the characters, moves, and stages from Capcom's long-running *Darkstalkers* franchise into one condensed mélange of monstrous 1-on-1 fighting. Gameplay unfolds just like in the legendary *Street Fighter* series—you have three different punches and kicks, a vast arsenal of bizarre special maneuvers, and zany last-ditch supermoves. The fighting isn't terribly original, but the character roster surely is: Debonair demons, various grisly ghosts, an abominable snowman, and an undead rock star represent but a small sample of the freak show present here.

Really, *Tower* delivers little that we haven't seen before (in fact, this very collection came out for the ill-fated Sega Dreamcast in Japan), but it's a good fit for the PSP with its bright colors, fluid animation, and responsive control. Plus, the addition of head-to-head network play over wireless PSP-to-PSP connection will allow you to test your skills against random succubi and werewolves eager for a challenge.

PSP: ONLY IN JAPAN?

These PSP games are slated for Japan only. Will they play in Peoria?



■ **DERBY TIME:** Slick anime kids breed, rear, and race the pricey ponies.



■ **GHARGREV:** This unpronounceable action-RPG offers *Zelda*-style combat.



■ **POPOLOCROIS:** Will the U.S. get this remake of a Japan-only PS1 RPG?



■ **SOUKYU NO FAFNER:** Re-creates the mech battles of a hit anime show.





SUPER MARIO 64 DS

Nintendo • November 2004

So what's a rehash doing near the top of our list of the best games for a system that's all about originality? First of all, this isn't a rehash of just any game—it's *Mario 64*, the groundbreaking 3D platformer that established the genre, yet remains one of its best games even today. Second, well, this isn't a rehash. "We've taken a classic," says Nintendo rep Chris Campbell, "and made it an entirely new experience."

Maybe not *entirely* new, but Mr. Campbell has a point. You still explore the Princess' castle, gathering stars from various worlds in your mission to save her from Bowser. But just about every important word in that last sentence has been altered on the DS.

For starters, you are not just Mario anymore, but also Yoshi, Wario, and Luigi, each with his own abilities (Yoshi swallows enemies, Wario can punch blocks, etc.) and power-ups. You can even have these characters face off in a simple wireless multiplayer battle for up to four players, even if only one DS has the cart loaded.

As you might expect, controls are different, with the option to use the touch pad to move (and D-pad to jump, crouch, etc.) or a more standard setup where the second screen merely controls the camera. The castle now includes entirely new worlds to explore, with 150 stars hidden throughout—30 more than in the original game.

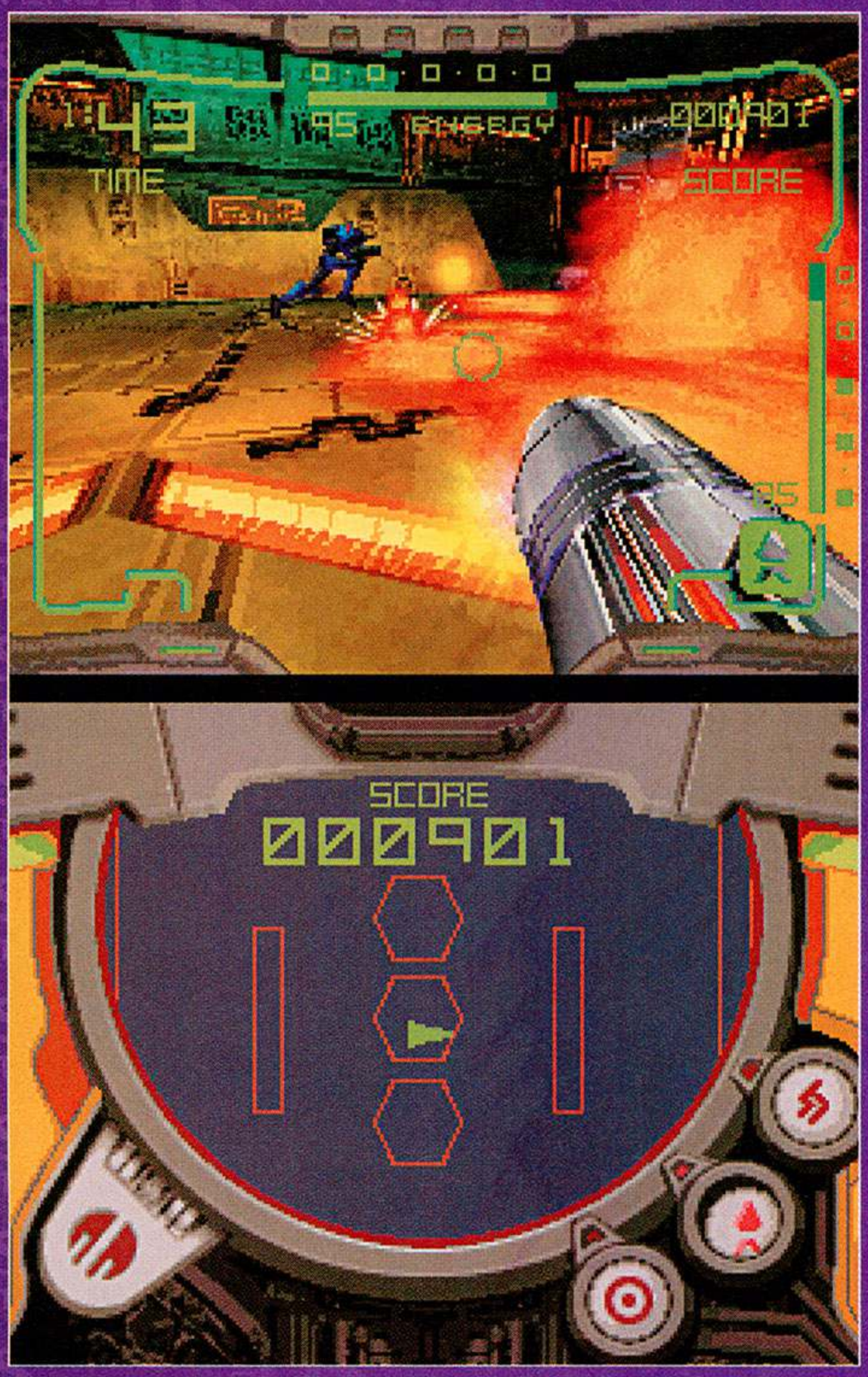


■ You can unlock dozens of minigames which use the DS's screens and touch pad.



Even the returning worlds boast new features, like mushrooms to make Mario grow huge, and new areas that require use of the different characters' powers. In fact, just about the only feature that hasn't changed much is the graphics—*64 DS* looks very much like its 7-year-old console cousin. Nintendo VP Reggie Fils-Aime doesn't seem worried. "Mario is like the postman," he says. "He always delivers."









METROID PRIME HUNTERS: FIRST HUNT

Nintendo • November 2004

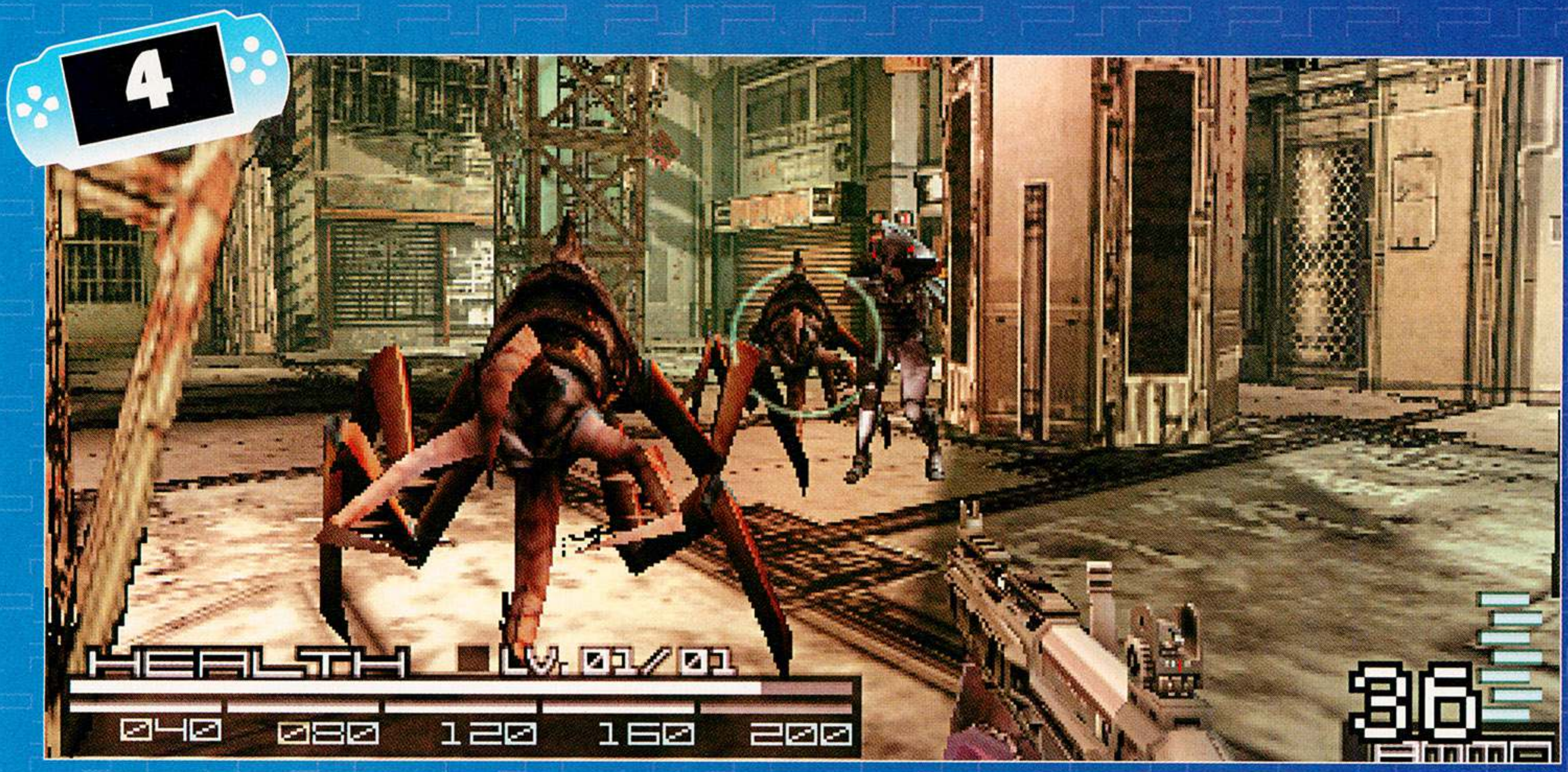


Hunters is exactly what fans feared a few years back when Nintendo first announced that the next *Metroid* would go with a first-person view: a fast-paced, arcadey shooter that feels completely out of step with the beloved adventure series. Which, as Nintendo Designer Rich Brody explains, was exactly the idea. "We wanted a new experience," he says. "The gameplay is different from any other [game in the franchise]. We thought, 'Maybe we can change what players think about *Metroid*.'"

As a freebie that comes packed in with the DS hardware, *First Hunt* is only a demo version of *Hunters* (the final game is due out early 2005), but it includes more than you'd expect: three single-player modes (one with an end goal, a timed contest to kill as many enemies as you can, and a racing game of sorts with Samus rolled up in the morph ball) and two multiplayer game types for wireless deathmatch. Using a combo of the D-pad to move and the touch screen to look around (double-tap to jump), like a keyboard and mouse setup on a PC shooter, plus the shoulder button to fire, *Hunters*' controls eventually feel natural, and the sharp, colorful environments showcase the DS' best visuals yet. But as for the most important aspect—the main game itself—the jury is out until next year. ➤



■ Like any good FPS, *Hunters* offers various control options, but we suggest the default.



CODED ARMS

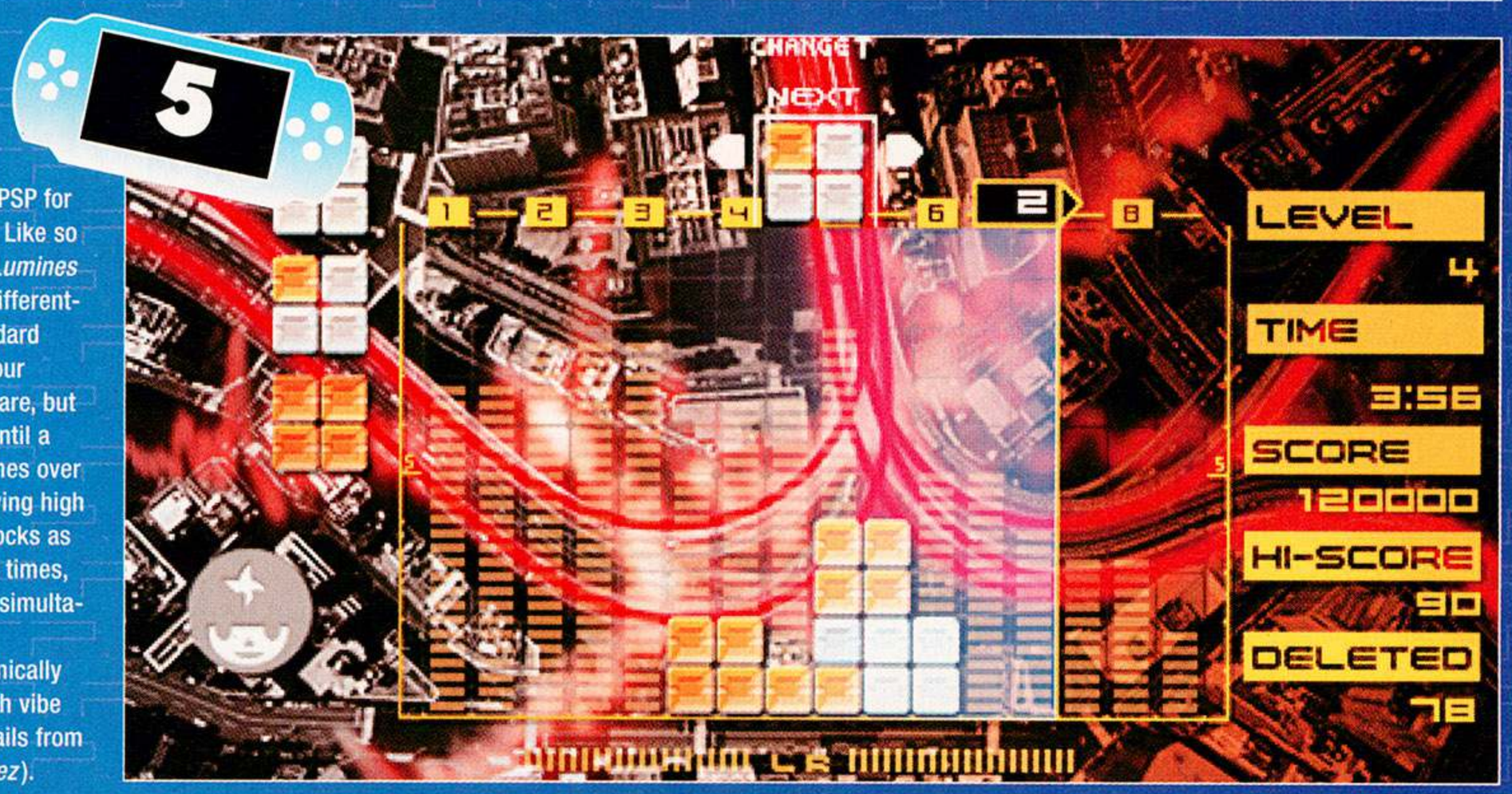
Konami • March 2005

In the sea of early PSP titles, Konami's cyberpunk first-person shooter *Coded Arms* stands out as arguably the most gorgeous. Of course, looks aren't everything, and story details are scant—something about a supercomputer run amok and lots of mutant beasties to squash.

We're ranking it highly due to its nearly PS2-quality visuals, though its gameplay seems a tad restricted by the PSP's limited control scheme at this early state. You control movement with the weirdly loose analog nub while using the face buttons (X, O, etc.) to look around. The setup smacks of *Turok* on the Nintendo 64, and in this era of dual-analog-stick control as the FPS norm, it didn't quite click.

A better control solution isn't obvious, but hopefully Konami will find one before the crucial U.S. debut. "FPS games aren't accepted in Japan, so we're making this with the U.S. market in mind," says Konami CEO Kazumi Kitaue. "To be honest, I don't think that it will do very well in Japan."

LUMINES



Bandai • March 2005

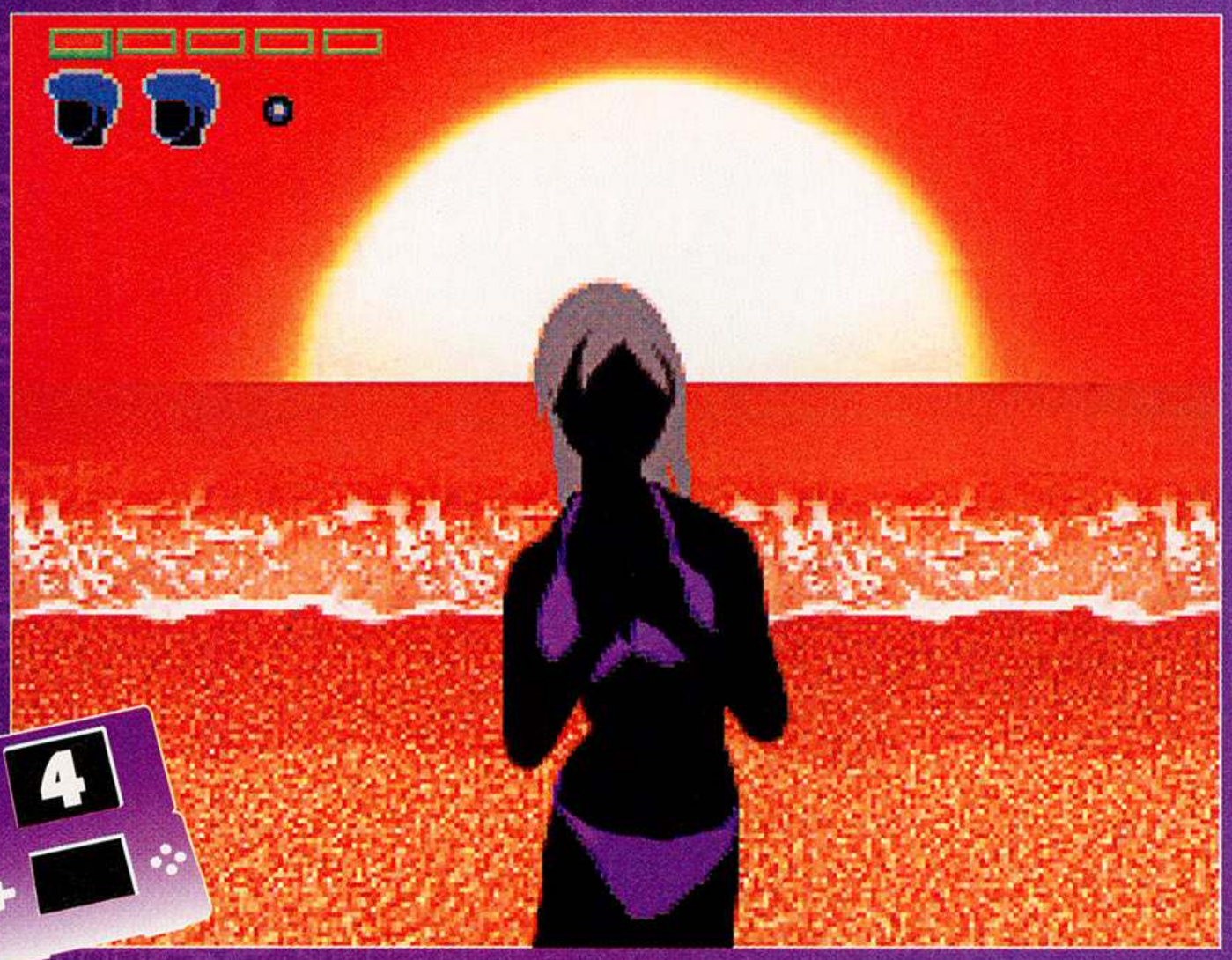
When you want to whip out your PSP for a few minutes of fun, pop this in. Like so many of the best puzzle games, *Lumines* seems deceptively simple, with differently sized blocks falling into a standard well. Here, your object is to get four blocks of the same color in a square, but your achievement isn't counted until a constantly scrolling scan line comes over to sweep the blocks away. Achieving high scores means having as many blocks as you can ready to sweep out at all times, and it's like playing three or four simultaneous games of *Tetris*.

Stellar backgrounds and dynamically altering music impart a hip, stylish vibe (not too surprising, as *Lumines* hails from the guy behind the PS2 cult hit *Rez*).



NOTABLE GAMES ON THE PSP'S HORIZON

- Death Jr.
- Devil May Cry
- Gran Turismo 4 Portable
- NBA Street
- NFL Street
- NHL FaceOff 2005
- Spider-Man 2
- Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow
- Tony Hawk's Underground 2
- Twisted Metal World Tour
- Viewtiful Joe
- Wipeout Pure



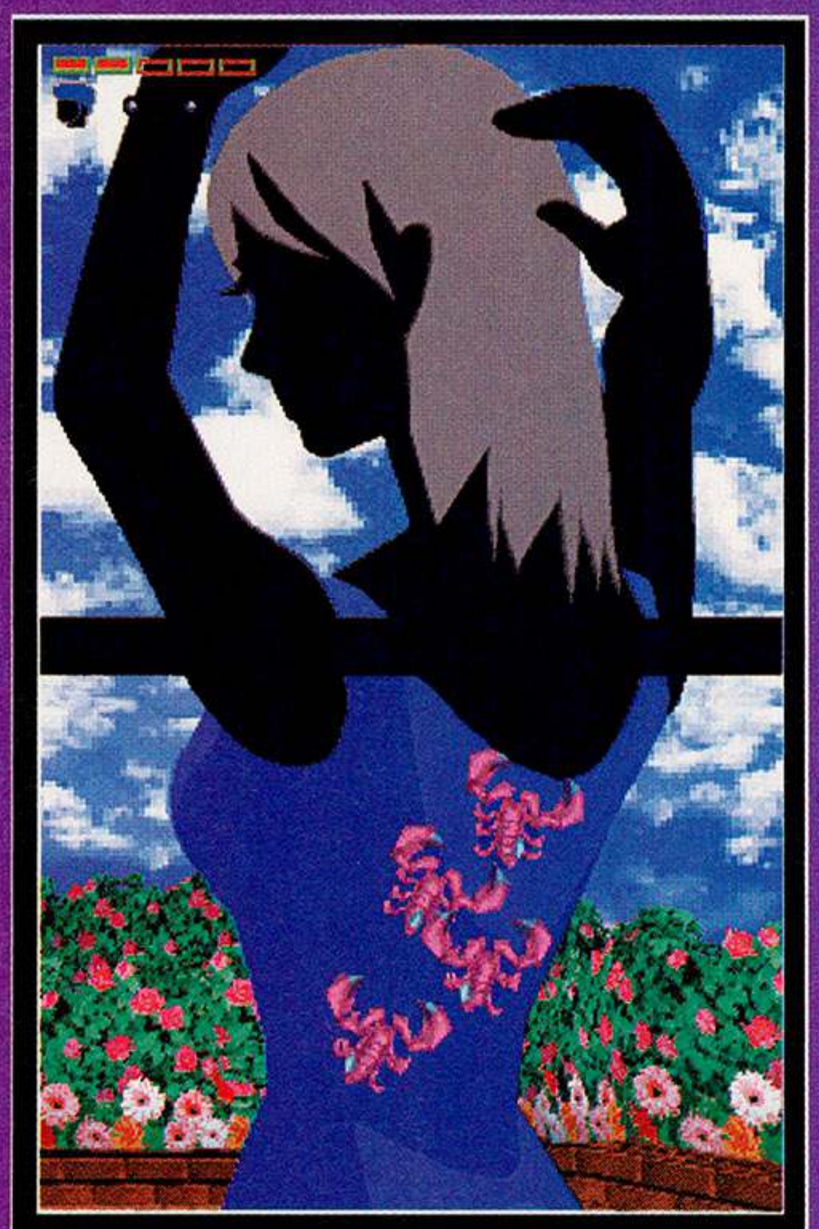
FEEL THE MAGIC: XY-XX

Sega • November 2004

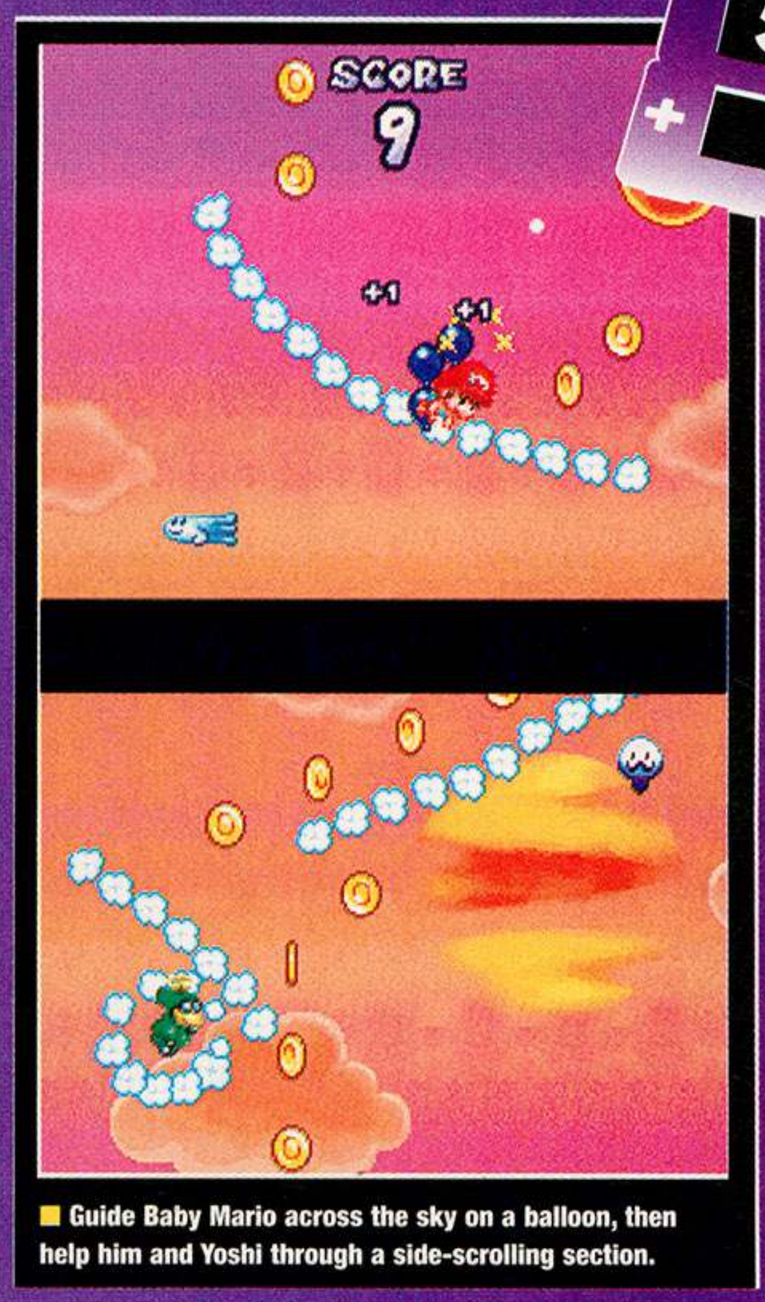
You know the story: Boy meets girl, boy falls in love, boy swipes scorpions off girl's back, boy stops rampaging bull, the end. Hey, it's only right that the story threading together Sega's collection of *WarioWare*-style minigames is bizarre, if only to match its distinct iPod-ad graphical style, '60s-era folk-rock soundtrack, and freaky name. Even our short hands-on time with the game was enough to challenge our notions about the DS hardware. (For example, one game has you extinguish candles by actually blowing into the DS' microphone. Cool.)

XY-XX is one to watch out for at launch—a creative, playable effort with a great sense of style. The only question left is if its roughly 30 minigames will stay entertaining under repeated play.





■ *Magic*'s previous code name, "Project Rub," was fitting—you use only the touch panel and mic to play the game.



■ Guide Baby Mario across the sky on a balloon, then help him and Yoshi through a side-scrolling section.

YOSHI'S TOUCH & GO



Nintendo • January 2005

This DS platformer may borrow its sketchy crayola look from the Super Nintendo favorite *Yoshi's Island*, but the gameplay is something only the DS could handle. After using the touch screen to draw clouds that guide a falling Baby Mario past obstacles, over coins, and onto a waiting Yoshi's back, the player guides the duo through horizontally scrolling levels, tapping on Mario's dino steed to make him jump, drawing lines to cover pits and ensnare enemies, or hitting anywhere on screen to toss an egg at that spot. The short demo we played was one of the few that made extensive use of both the DS' second screen and touch pad, leaving us anxious for more.



■ Old-school Nintendo fans might feel a hint of NES' *Gumshoe*–inspired gameplay in *Touch & Go*.



■ Get huge in *New Super Mario Bros.*

NOTABLE GAMES ON THE NINTENDO DS'S HORIZON

- Animal Crossing DS
- Boktai DS
- Bomberman
- Castlevania DS
- Final Fantasy III
- Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles
- GoldenEye: Rogue Agent
- Need for Speed Underground
- New Super Mario Bros.
- Pokémon Pearl/Diamond
- Rayman
- Viewtiful Joe

PSP: THE BEST OF THE REST

MORE GAMES

If any of the top five games should be unable to fulfill its duties...



APE ESCAPE

Sony CEA • March 2005

Netting wild monkeys never gets old, but *Escape*'s time-tested gameplay will likely suffer a bit due to the lack of two analog sticks. Fans can also look forward to a second *Ape* title—a collection of monkey minigames.



TALES OF ETERNIA

Namco • March 2005

This epic RPG actually came out for PS1 under the title *Tales of Destiny II*, but hardly anybody noticed. Hopefully it will find a new audience in this expanded portable form.



DYNASTY WARRIORS

Koei • March 2005

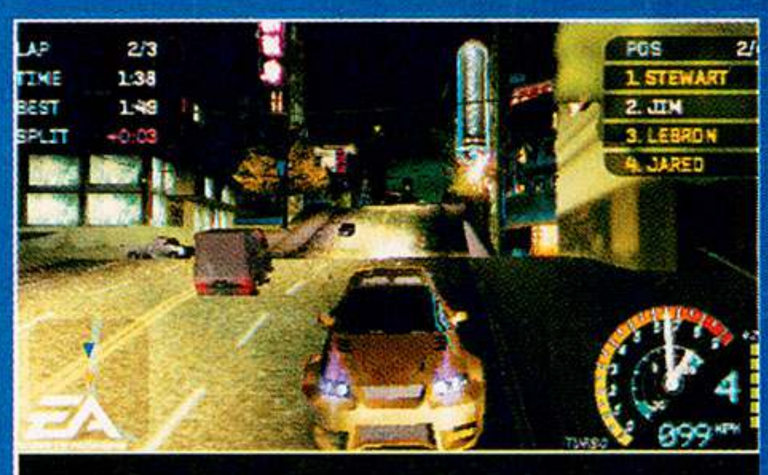
Thwacking legions of burly Chinese warlords works well on a small screen, but we wish Koei hadn't decided to use a third of the screen for a map. What is this, the Nintendo DS?



HOT SHOTS GOLF PORTABLE

Sony CEA • March 2005

Sony's cute and quirky golf romp simply belongs on the PSP—crisp visuals, zany character customization, and pick-up-and-play network multiplayer over Wi-Fi should make it a winner.



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND: RIVALS

EA Games • March 2005

All the tricked-out, lowered, and neoned rides from EA's blockbuster console series transition nicely onto the PSP screen, though it didn't run quite as smoothly as *Ridge Racer*....



GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX

Sony CEA • March 2005

Sultry cinematic cyborg Major Kusanagi jumps back into action in this first-person shooter based on the hit anime series. Expect action more akin to that in the older PS1 *Shell* title than in the ho-hum PS2 job.

PSP LINEUP REPORT CARD:

C

WHY IT'S HOT:

- Some games look graphically amazing
- Huge, high-resolution screen
- Several games already use Wi-Fi network play
- Promise of massive future third-party support

WHY IT'S NOT:

- Some games look like butt
- Analog stick takes some getting used to
- Too few must-have titles shown
- Where are the Square Enix games?

DS: BEST OF THE REST

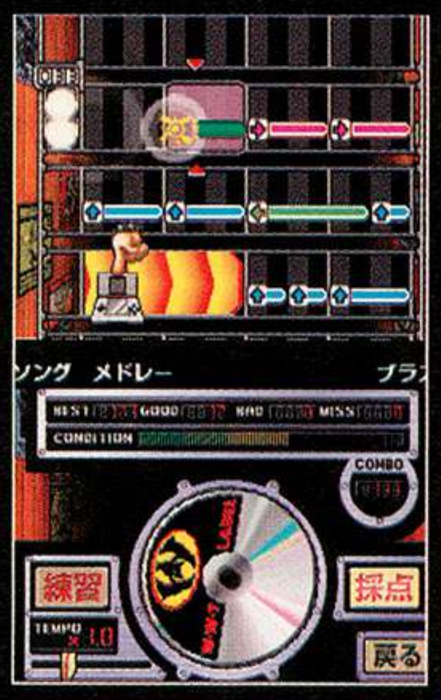
You didn't make the list, but you're still winners in our book!

MORE GAMES

JAM WITH THE BAND

Nintendo • 2005

Thank Miyamoto someone decided to resurrect this simple music game, originally designed for the GBA. *Band* lets you choose an instrument then tap buttons, *Donkey Konga* style, along to prerecorded or your own custom-made tunes, with up to seven other players.



ADVANCE WARS DS

Nintendo • 2005

We're so happy the turn-based war strategy series is coming to the DS—and making good use of the top screen for an in-air map, combat, and other things—that we aren't even going to dwell on how profoundly dumb the title is. (Shouldn't it be *DS Wars*?)



PUPPY TIMES

Nintendo • 2005

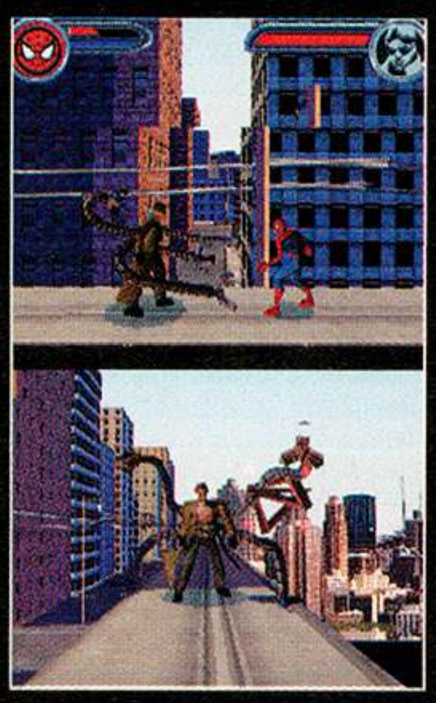
Don't tell our friends, but the idea of raising three virtual puppies by using voice commands via the DS' built-in mic actually sounds pretty damn cool. Different DS' doggies can communicate wirelessly, too. Not that we would care about that. Ahem.



SPIDER-MAN 2

Activision • Nov 21

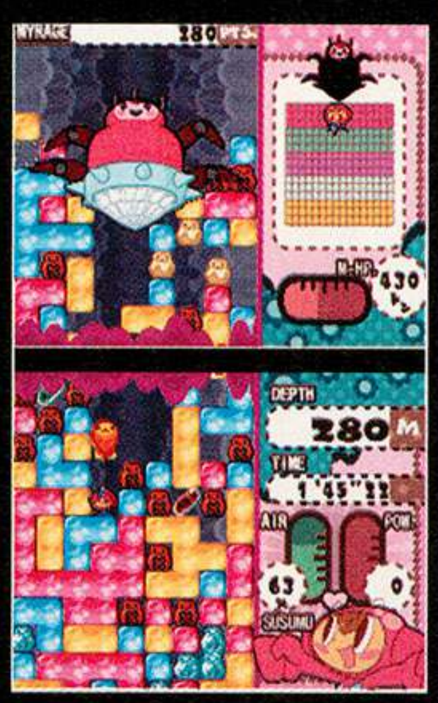
Although most of its gameplay felt like a million GBA scrolling action games, *Spider-Man 2* has sharp graphics (flat characters on 3D backgrounds, kinda like *Viewtiful Joe*) and minigames (like webbing items Doc Ock flings at you via the touch pad) only possible on the DS.



MR. DRILLER: DRILL SPIRITS

Namco • Nov 21

Anyone who's tried this prolific puzzle series will instantly understand how this new *Driller*'s most obvious DS enhancement—the ability to see farther down to plan your route on the second screen—comes in handy. The wireless multiplayer for up to four is nice, too.



MARIO KART

Nintendo • 2005

The screens don't show much new to get us excited (is it just us, or do Bowser and DK seriously need bigger karts?), but the idea of wireless multiplayer *Kart* is enough to warrant a mention. And has there ever been a bad version of *Mario Kart*? No, no there hasn't.



DS LINEUP REPORT CARD:

B

WHY IT'S HOT:

- Many games use the touch screen in cool ways
- *Super Mario 64 DS* is an obvious must-buy title
- Several games already use Wi-Fi network play
- It's actually making it out in time for the holidays

WHY IT'S NOT:

- Nintendo 64-ish visuals aren't so hot
- Lack of an analog stick hinders some games
- As usual, few great third-party games
- Family-friendly games reaffirm DS' kiddie image

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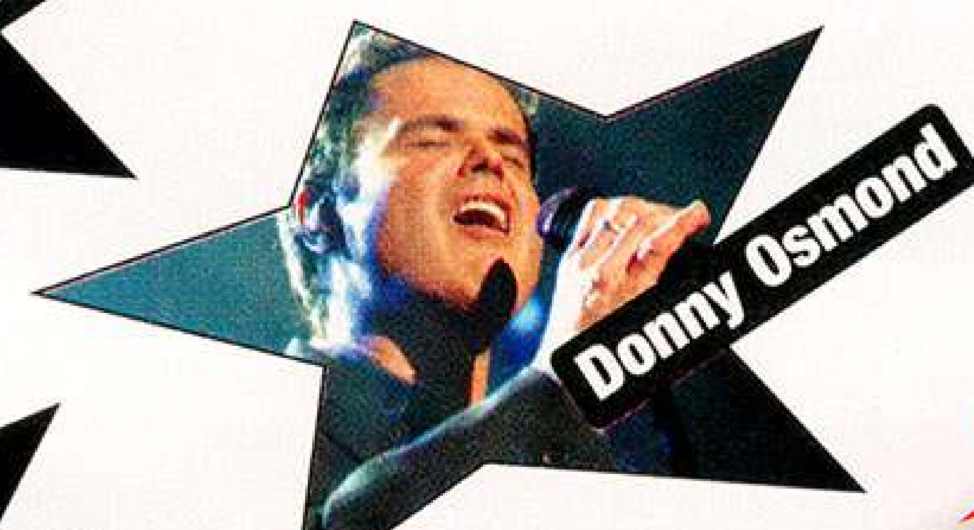
HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

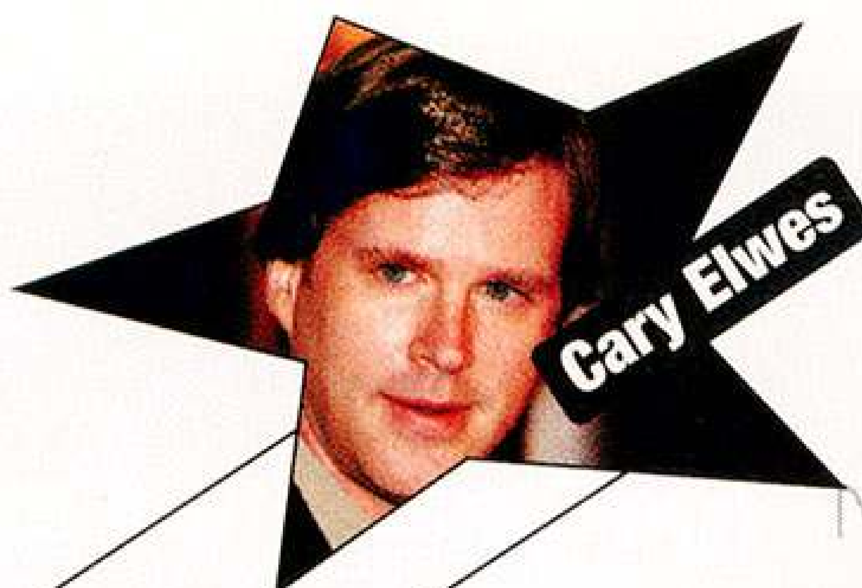
EGM picks this season's **top 10 must-give/must-get** gaming gifts

'Tis the season for game-magazine gift guides to drop the blatantly obvious on your head like a sack of fruitcakes. Wait...you mean shooter fans will want *Halo 2*? Sportos will crave *Madden*? Racing junkies will like *Gran Turismo 4*? Get out of here! We'll let the competition tell you what you already know. We're using our holiday gift guide to highlight the hottest gaming paraphernalia: game-related toys, clothes, books, movies, gadgets—all conveniently ranked in ascending order of niftiness. And if you have more enemies than friends on your shopping list, we might be able to help you out there, too. (Hint: Turn your magazine upside down.)

—*Shawn Smith*







Starring genuine Hollywood entertainers...

10



As Seen on TV

Pro 200 Gaming System • (800) 578-2386 • $20

You'll find 250 "brick," "frog," and "bee" games on this "powerful" "computer-gaming system"—and no way are these just 250 versions of *Tetris*. We guarantee this is the most powerful gaming console you'll see advertised during reruns of *Walker, Texas Ranger* at 3 a.m.

CRAPPY HOLIDAYS!

EGM picks this season's 10 most useless gaming gifts to unload on your enemies

'Tis the season, all right—the season to exact revenge on every friend or relative who stiffed you with a present so awful that you couldn't even regift it. Lucky you: We have your 10 tools of retribution right here. Granted, most of the gadgets on this list aren't out-and-out hunks of crap. We're sure you have lots of friends who want a $1,200 game interface controlled by physical fitness, or buds who've been bugging you for years for a tissue box shaped like a Dreamcast. No? We thought so.

—Shawn Smith

Starring bona fide Hollywood celebrities...





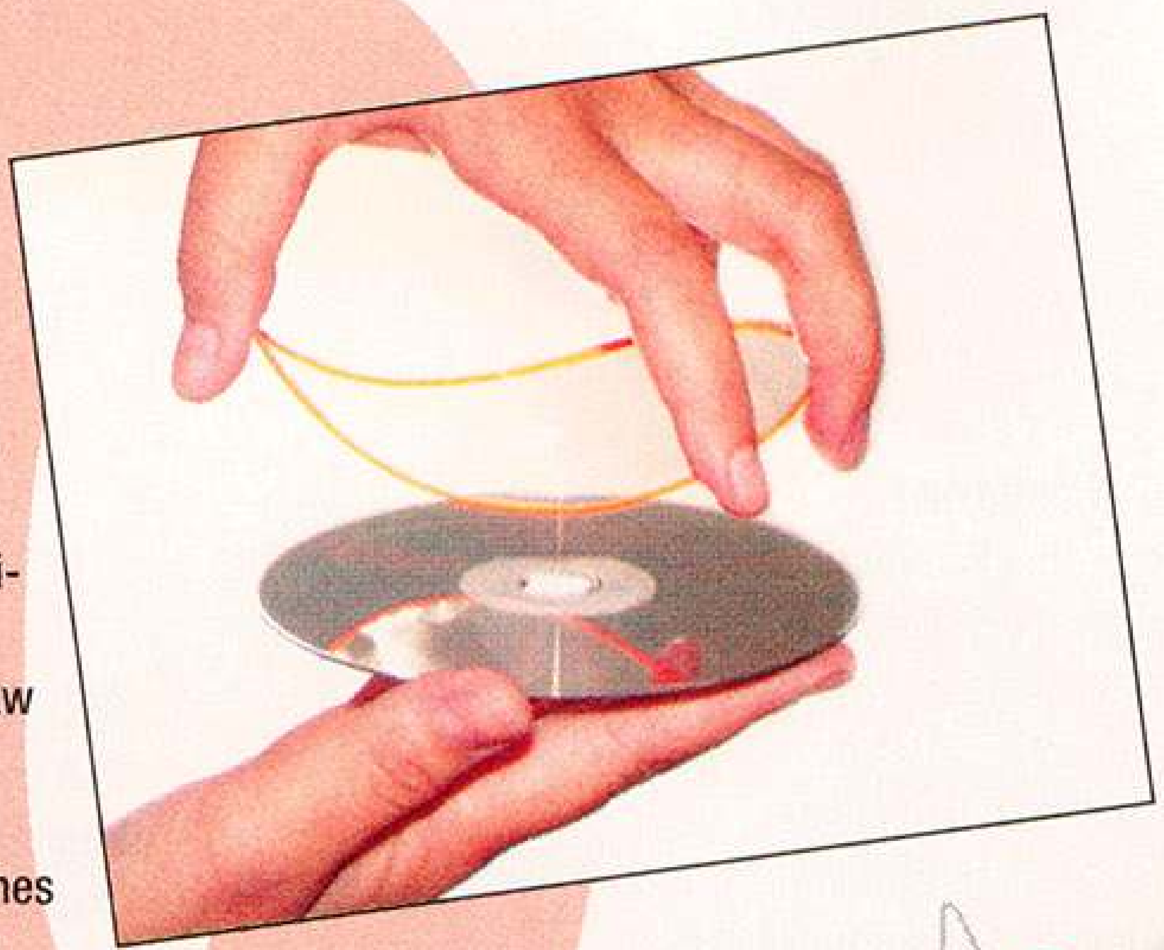


10

The Gift of Protection

d_skin • www.d-skin.com • $6

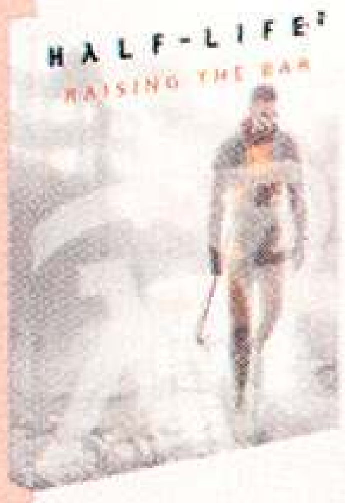
Truth be told, we thought these rubbery game-disc covers—basically condoms for your DVDs—were gimmicky when we first saw them, but now we're sold. They protect the tender undersides of your favorite games from scratches and make perfecto (read: cheap) stocking stuffers. ➤

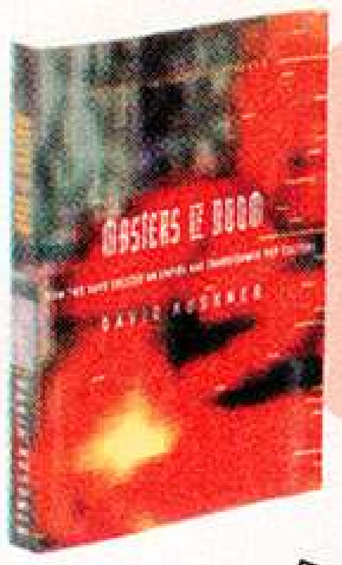


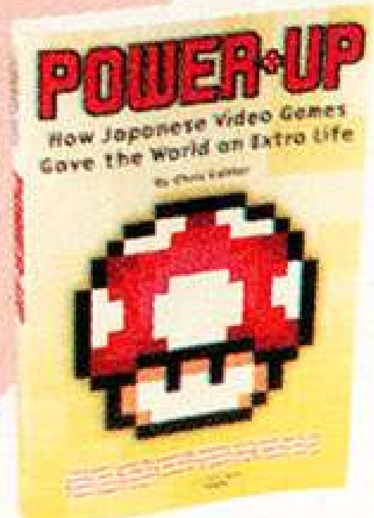
Book 'Em

Half-Life 2: Raising the Bar • www.primagames.com • $30
Masters of Doom • www.amazon.com • $11
Power-Up • www.bradygames.com • $20

When the blisters on your thumbs make playing unbearable, take a break and open up one of these slick reads to gain a new perspective on gaming. *The Making of Half-Life 2* is a lavish behind-the-scenes coffee-table tome that'll make the wait for the game to hit the Xbox more bearable. Meanwhile, frequent *EGM* contributor David Kushner's *Masters of Doom* tells the cockle-warming tale of the two guys who built the first-person-shooter genre. And the just-released *Power-Up* gives a look at the Japanese culture behind gaming.







Time Machine

Atari Flashback • www.atari.com • $45

This slinky black box—styled after the Atari 7800 system—will give you tingles in your special place, thanks to the 20 Atari classics found inside. Play *Adventure*, *Yar's Revenge*, *Battlezone*, and a few games that were never even released. If you get bored, invite a friend over for two-player *Warlords.*



Must-see DVDs

Red vs. Blue • www.redvsblue.com • $20
Mega64: Version 1 • www.mega64.com • $20
Once Upon Atari • www.onceuponatari.com • $30

Laugh it up with either *Red vs. Blue*—a *Halo* parody starring Master Chief characters—or *Mega64*, whose balls-of-steel stars commit game-inspired pranks in the real world. For an equally entertaining but more serious look at the history of games, go for *Once Upon Atari*, which explores the early days of the industry with the people who made it happen.









Star Guidance: *The Princess Bride*'s Cary Elwes will give his friends...
"*Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.* I'm very much looking forward to it. Though I always feel bad when I run over a civilian. I actually had to stop playing *Vice City* for a while."



Star Misguidance: *I Love the '80s'* Hal Sparks will give his enemies...
"Any of *The Sims.* They should just be called *Being God Sucks.* 'My people are dying! My people are on fire! This sucks.' Waste your time on that, why don't you."

Text Heavy

The CG Tutorial • www.amazon.com • $45
Game Programming Gems 4 • www.amazon.com • $70
Programming Believable Characters for Computer Games • www.amazon.com • $55

Perfect for curling up next to a warm PC monitor on those brisk winter nights, these master works for master dorks burn the page with esoteric tips on programming real-time graphics and A.I. logarithms that only hardcore developers can appreciate. On a related note, avoid giving to your enemy if he's a hardcore developer.







Cheesy Coating

SCOTTeVEST Version 3.0 • www.scottevest.com • $130

Because hauling around your cell phone, PDA, Game Boy, iPod, copies of *EGM*, a GPS system, your digital camera, a sandwich, old NES cartridges, 20-sided dice, etc. in a $130 20-pocket coat is apparently easier than just stuffing it all in a backpack (or, better yet, leaving some of that crap at home), SCOTTeVEST makes the nerdiest gizmo-ready jackets this side of the Members Only era.



Freakin' Ridiculous

Freak Series Game Pads • www.gemini-usa.com • $25

Perhaps better suited for Halloween—or a GWAR concert—than Christmas, these horrifying monster-faced novelty controllers will make children shriek and old ladies call an exorcist. Sure, the pads work just fine, but touching that knobby coating makes us feel all gross.



If it seemed like they

were coming from all sides before,

try it in 3D.








No matter how cool it looks, never stop shooting. Three dimensions. Two playable heroes. One classic franchise returns. Neo Contra. The more things change, the more they stay insane.

NEO CONTRA™

MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation.2

KONAMI
www.konami.com/usa

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Too Fly

GameFly gift card • www.gamefly.com • $30

In a perfect world, we could buy every game that came along. Since that's not really how life works, ask for a GameFly gift card. The service is essentially NetFlix for gamers, letting players rent games through the mail and play them for as long as needed.





Clothes That Make the Gamer

Gaming Duds • www.80stees.com • $20
NES Belt Buckle • www.nesbuckle.com • $30

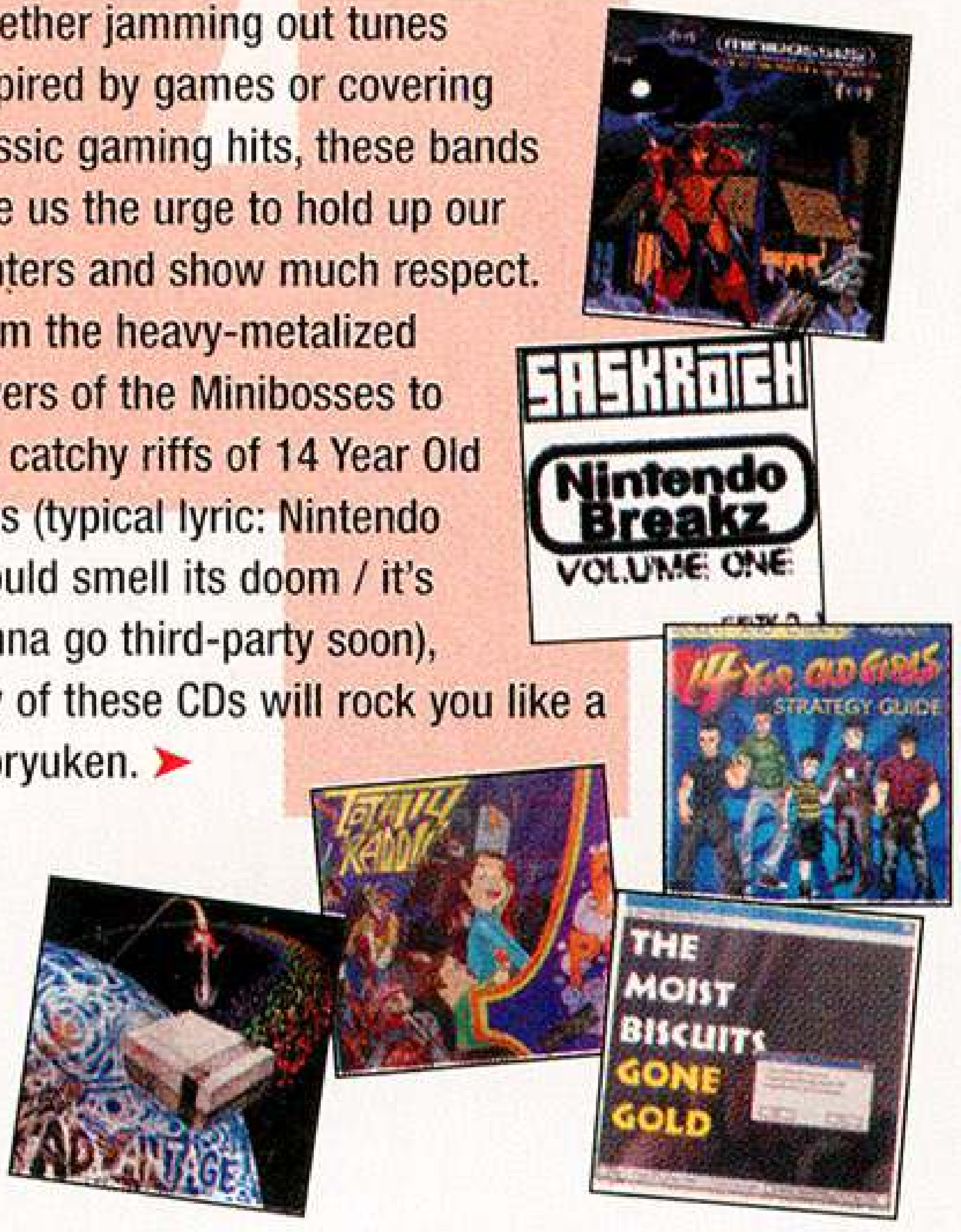
There was a time when wearing an any-thing-gaming-related shirt screamed, "Kick my ass—I'm a dork!" Nowadays it's fashionable. So grab a Pitfall Harry trucker's hat, throw on your Nintendo shirt, add a studded NES controller belt (made from genuine NES joypads, no less!), and continue on your hipster quest with confidence.



Play It Loud

Minibosses • www.minibosses.com
Saskrotch • givedaddytheknife.tripod.com
14 Year Old Girls • www.retarddisco.com
The Advantage • www.theadvantageband.com
Totally Radd!! • www.retarddisco.com
Moist Biscuits • www.moistbiscuits.com

Whether jamming out tunes inspired by games or covering classic gaming hits, these bands give us the urge to hold up our lighters and show much respect. From the heavy-metalized covers of the Minibosses to the catchy riffs of 14 Year Old Girls (typical lyric: Nintendo should smell its doom / it's gonna go third-party soon), any of these CDs will rock you like a shoryuken.





Star Guidance: *24*'s Dennis Haysbert will give his friends...
"*GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*. I love the intrigue of those games. I've always been a big James Bond fan. And Sean Connery's my favorite Bond, to answer your next question."

Sore Thumbs

Digiglove • www.inventhelp.com • $14

Maybe international superstar David Hasselhoff would look awesome wearing these digit-protecting half-gloves, but we figure everybody else would look like a bozo. Bonus meanie points if you get your giftee to wear these out in public—perhaps to the local arcade. But then you're only trying to protect him or her from painful repetitive-stress injuries and blisters, right? How considerate.



Corporate Uniform

Phantom Boxer Shorts and BBQ Apron
www.cafeshops.com • $25
Pac-Man Fever Hat
www.cafeshops.com • $15

Game shirts can be nifty. Delicate underthings and other random items emblazoned with the corporate logo of an unproven console company...not so much. Complete the look with a silly, microscopically printed "I've got Pac-Man Fever" cap, and now you're cooking with geeks.



Bad Mood Music

Pac-Man Fever CD • www.bucknergarcia.com • $10
Street Fighter soundtrack • www.amazon.com • $14

Now it's time to get nasty. *Pac-Man Fever*'s cornball tunes—all based on '80s arcade hits—are so catchy, your victim will spend weeks singing ludicrous lyrics like "I think I'm going berzerk, would you like to come too? I can't stop now—I'm addicted! I'm berzerk over you." Follow up with the *Street Fighter* movie soundtrack to invoke nightmares of mullets and zoobas at the local arcade.





Star Misguidance: Bree Turner, from *Good Girls Don't...*, will give her enemies...
"*Bust A Groove* [PS1]. I used to be so into that game, but now it's become the bane of my existence because I can't get that techno song out of my head. So I'd give that to someone so they'd get that stupid song stuck in their head, too."

MEGA MAN - ZERO - AXL

THREE HEROES JOIN FORCES TO DEFEAT EVIL

Earth is in shambles. As Sigma unleashes a diabolical army against *mankind, it's up to* Mega Man to turn the tide. It is humanity's last *stand, but with Zero and* Axl by his side, Mega Man will battle back the *forces of evil and bring* freedom back to the world!





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EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

PlayStation.2

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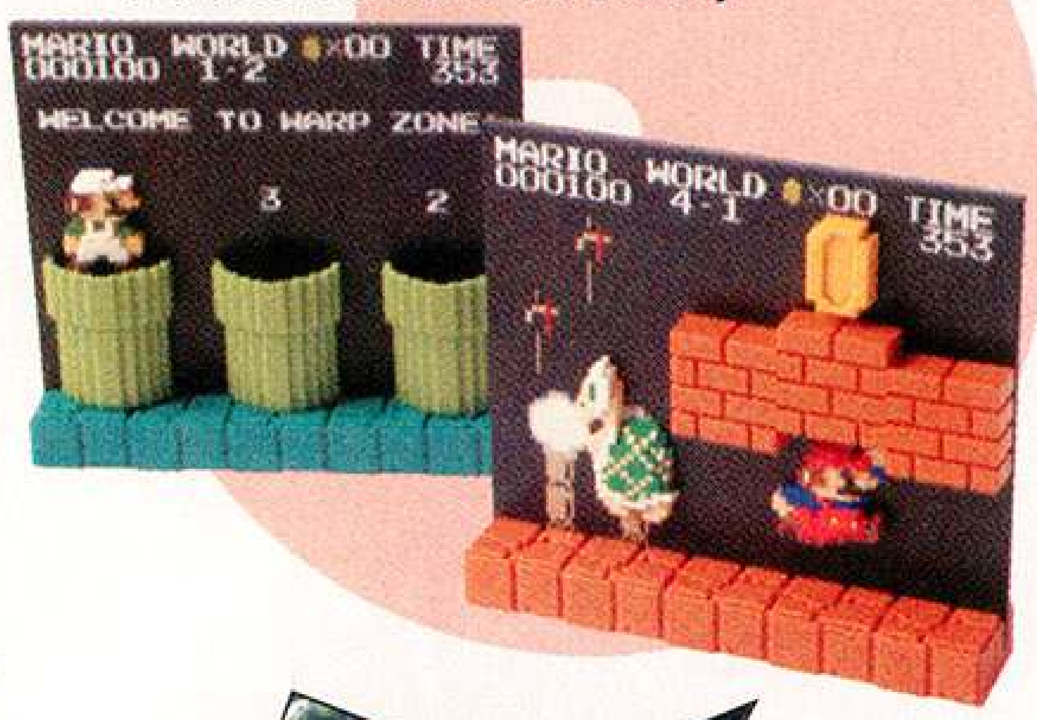
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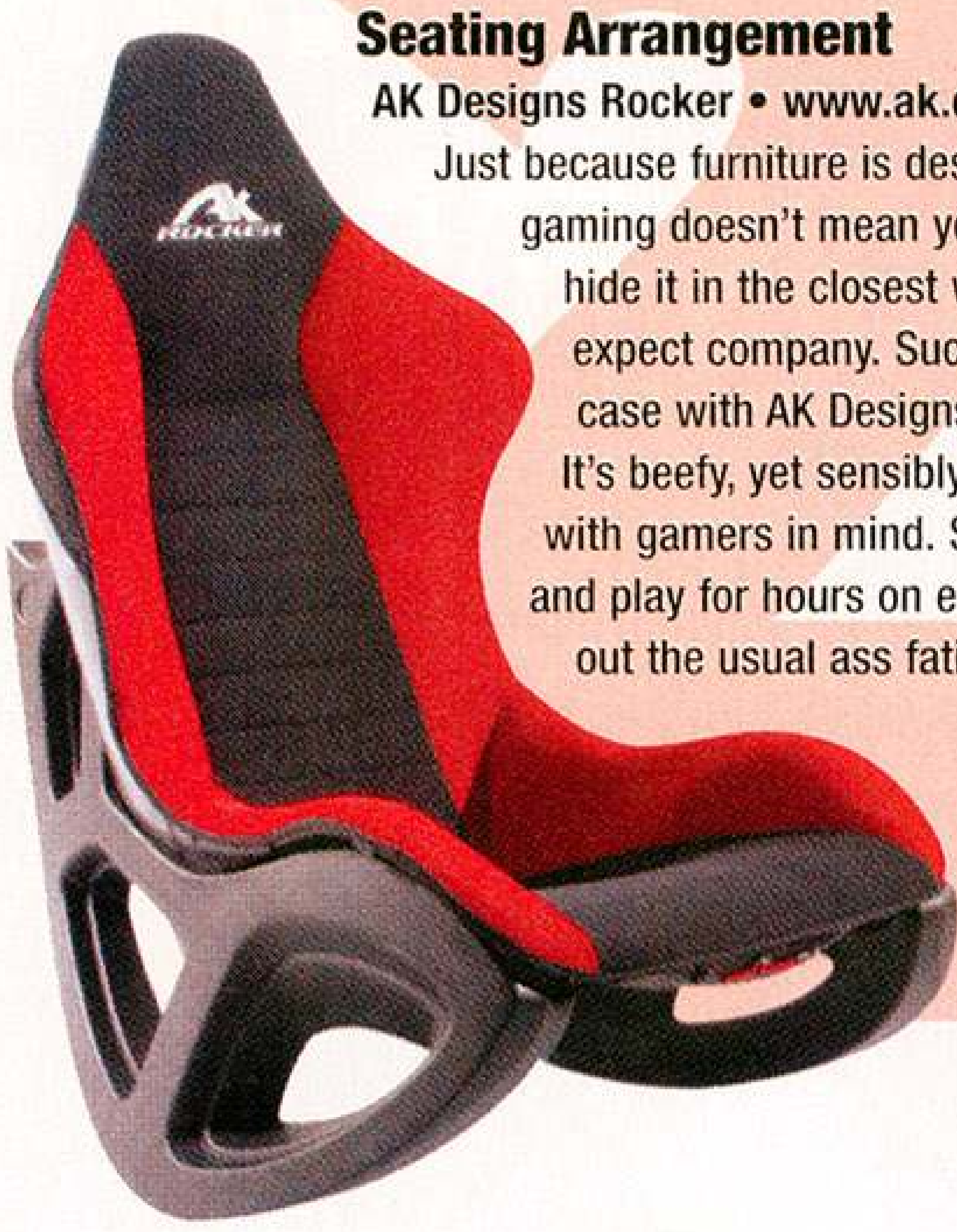
Most game-related toys are good at one thing: collecting dust. But here's something you can actually play with: Straight from Japan, these pixel-style *Super Mario Bros.* dioramas can be rearranged however you like using the mysterious power of magnets. Several sets are available, and you can even buy bonus Koopas and other characters to add to the scenery.



Seating Arrangement

AK Designs Rocker • www.ak.com • $80

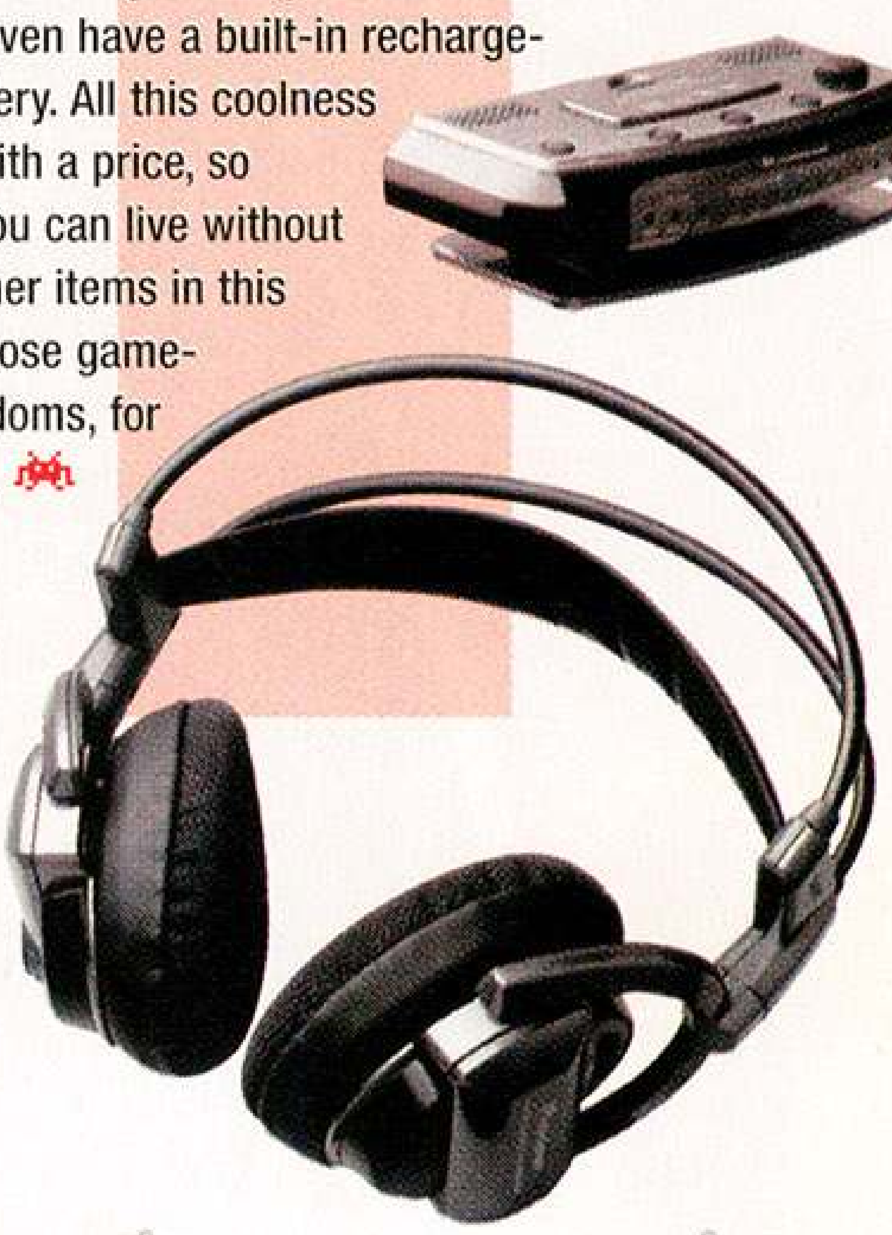
Just because furniture is designed for gaming doesn't mean you have to hide it in the closest when you expect company. Such is the case with AK Designs' Rocker. It's beefy, yet sensibly designed with gamers in mind. Sit back and play for hours on end without the usual ass fatigue.



Hearing Aid

Pioneer Wireless Dolby Digital 5.1 Headphones
www.pioneerelectronics.com • $400

The best of the best this holiday goes to these wireless 5.1 digital headphones. Turn on, tune in, block out your yapping girlfriend, and enjoy your favorite games in all of their Dolby Digital glory instead. It also supports all popular surround-sound modes, including Pro Logic II. The headphones even have a built-in rechargeable battery. All this coolness comes with a price, so maybe you can live without a few other items in this guide. Those game-disc condoms, for instance.





Star Guidance: National treasure Donny Osmond will give his friends...
"*Halo 2*. I have this big room with a pool table, ping pong, and, of course, videogames. *Halo* is the game of choice these days, but I hear *Halo 2* is going to be even better."

Tissue Issuer

Dreamcast Tissue Holder • www.lik-sang.com • $9

Play a trick on your favorite Sega fanatic and present them with this Dreamcast-shaped tissue box holder. When he realizes it's not the real thing, pop open the lid and hand him a Kleenex to dry his eyes. Wuss.



Sticker Shocker

System Skins • www.decalgirl.com • $15-$25 each

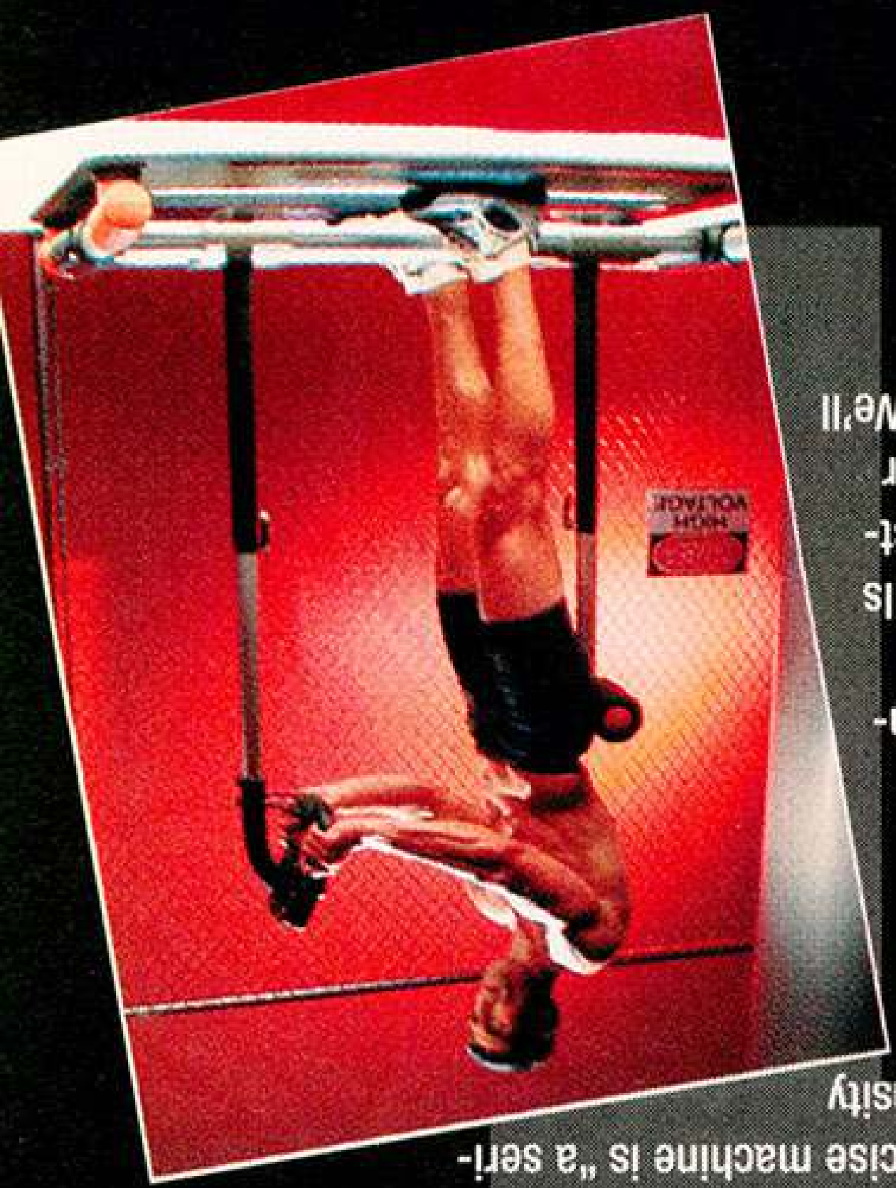
The gift that keeps on misgiving. Give your victims the tackiest system stickers you can find, then get PO'd every time you visit their homes and they *still* haven't applied the decorations. Eventually, guilt will win out—and they'll be stuck with a leopard-print Xbox.



The Gift that Says, "Hey Fatty!"

The kiloWatt • www.powergridfitness.com
$1,200 (Pro version)

According to the kiloWatt website, this game-based exercise machine is "a serious piece of intensity sports equipment that pushes you to your physical limits," and "a kick-ass PS2 and Xbox controller that will make your eyeballs bleed." A flab-busting eyeball blaster for only $1,200? We'll take six.



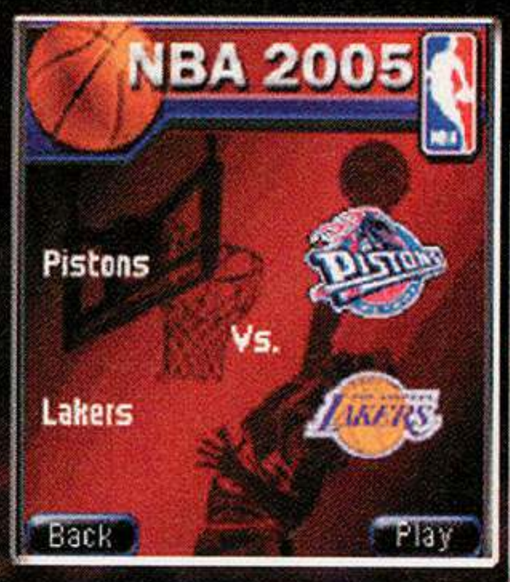


Star Misguidance: Beloved American entertainer Donny Osmond will give his enemies...
"Any of the *James Bond* ones. I don't like *007*. I just don't like violent games."

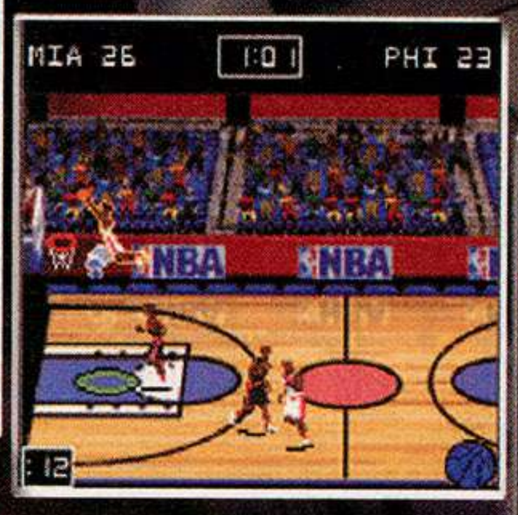
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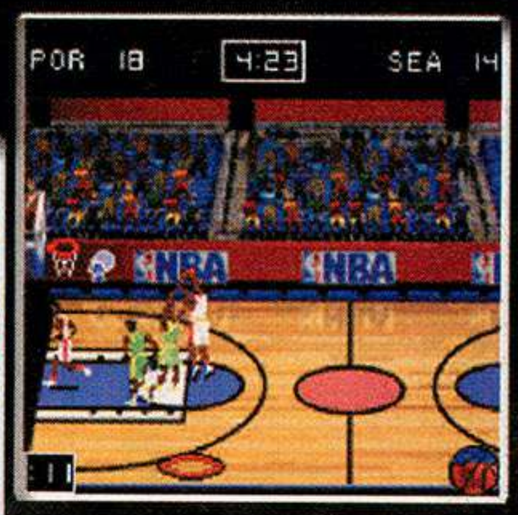


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- Updated graphics provide more fluid gameplay and player movement; new animations and effects during awesome dunks and moves



- Power meter charges up special plays like alley-oops, monster slams and big blocks

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review crew

a very special episode



DIRECTORY

MULTIPLATFORM

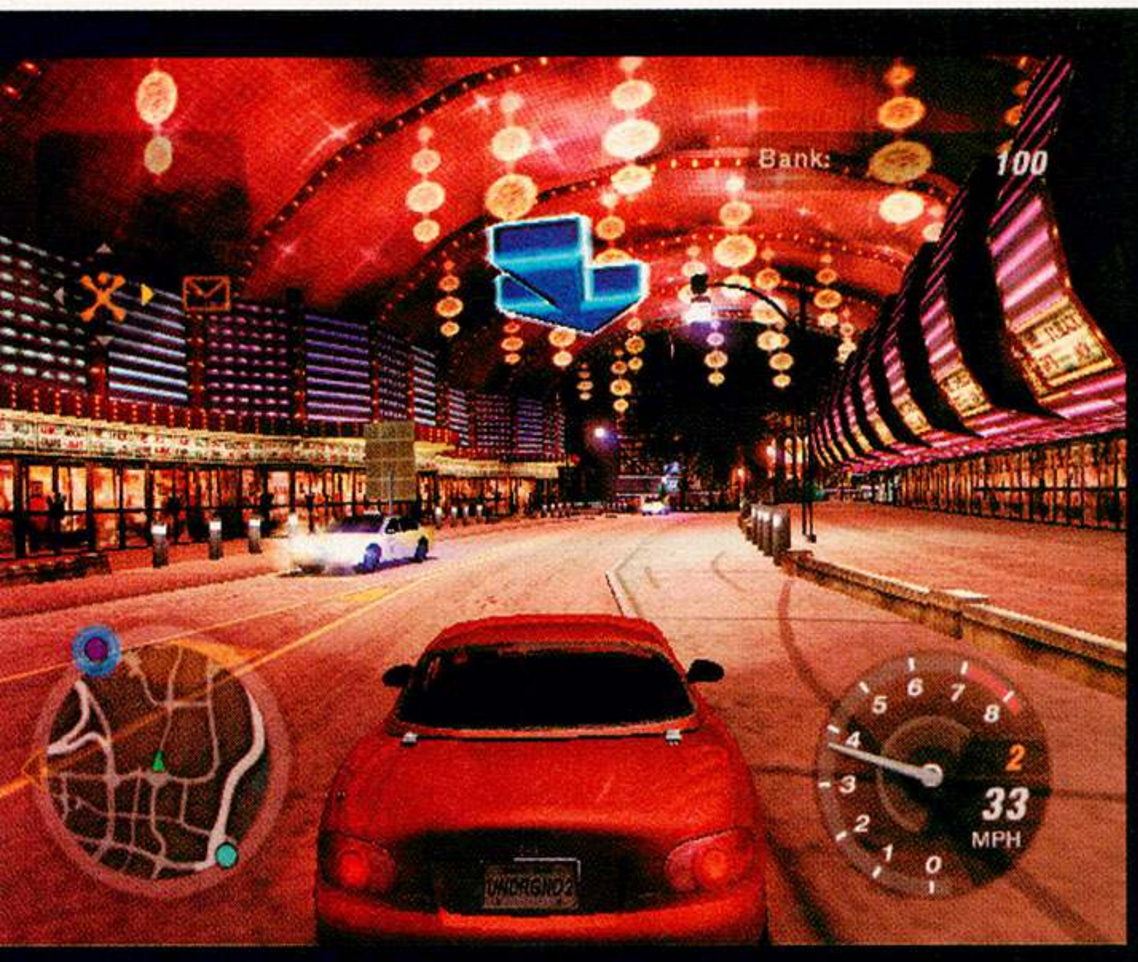
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■ *Underground 2*'s URL series races don't open up until you've earned your rep with the locals.

What's the Diff?
The Xbox and Cube versions of *Underground 2* look sharper than the PlayStation game but don't have some of the (arguably) cooler blur effects. All control perfectly well, though the Xbox's shoulder triggers are ideal for launching at just the right revs in drag races. The Xbox version *doesn't* support custom soundtracks, though (boo!). Load times are also frequent and particularly terrible on PS2.

■ PS2/XB/GC

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

Blurry lights, big city

SILVER

ONLINE
(PS2/XB only)

DEMIAN: Brooke Burke as the no-guff-takin', street-slang-slingin' queen of an underground racing circuit? Eh, whatever, nobody plays a racing game for the story...or the stilted dialogue.

Underground 2 ditches the last game's parade of menus in favor of a *Midnight Club*–esque open-plan metropolis that's packed full of tuner shops to discover, relatively diverse race events to pick and choose from, and rivals you can challenge to an impromptu drag. As you win, you'll increase both your rep and your bank account, in turn opening up new areas, events, part upgrades, and cars, and even attract corporate sponsors. It's the usual hamster wheel, except this one is unbelievably big—you'll be unlocking new stuff for weeks. Unfortunately, you'll soon get to the point where you've got stacks of cash but nothing to spend it on because the better gear isn't available yet. Kind of defeats the purpose of being rich.

Although the racing itself feels a little slower than the last game's, it's good, arcadey fun. *Underground 2* takes some inspiration from *Burnout* and refills your nitrous supply a bit when you drift or narrowly miss another car; it keeps you driving on the edge, even if the performance payoff is fairly small. *Underground 2* is a fun ride as long as it lasts—which is for a hell of a long time.

GMR—ANDREW: If money's tight and you're having trouble deciding what kind of racing game you want to pick up, *Underground 2* is your best bet. Like the first *Underground*, it's a good blend of styles: The look and feel of the game is quite arcadelike and the multitude of customization options really heightens the flash factor, but there's still enough going on under the hood to keep sim and tuning aficionados interested.

And considering the game's massive size, it'll have a hold on your interest for quite a while. *Underground 2*'s fictional metropolis, which is broken into four main sections, is a veritable racing buffet. Tired of losing drag races and need to build some more bank? Head on over to the drift courses. If you want to get technical, enter a URL event. Or if you want to see more of the city, take on a circuit race or just challenge a fellow motorist to a friendly duel as you roam freely about the city. It's packed with value; any fan of



■ The pockets of *Metal Gear Solid 3* boss The End (right) are packed full with Werthers Originals.

THE RATING SYSTEM

0-4.5	5.0-6.5	7.0-10
BAD	FAIR	GOOD

At *EGM*, we evaluate only games that have been deemed final and reviewable by their publishers. Three editors rate each game independently, and we use the whole scale. **5.0 IS AVERAGE.**

AWARDS

Platinum — straight 10s. For games that are life-changing.

Gold — for games with an average score of 9.0 or higher.

Silver — for games with a mean score of 8.0 or higher.

GAME OF THE MONTH The highest-scoring game each month gets a star.

SHAME OF THE MONTH The lowest-rated game with unanimously bad scores.

ESRB KEY (Also check out www.esrb.com)

E-Everyone: Saccharine fun for the whole family: dancing elves, rampant sharing, and possibly Smurfs.

T-Teen: Like PG-13 movies, Teen games often feature fisticuffs, mild violence, and madcap antics.

M-Mature: For the 18-and-over crowd. Intense violence, gore, pixilated sex, drugs; parents no likey.

GAMECUBE

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■ Hit the nitrous in a drag race and let the acid flashbacks commence.

New Parts Have Arrived!

A quick look at *Underground 2*'s new modes and features



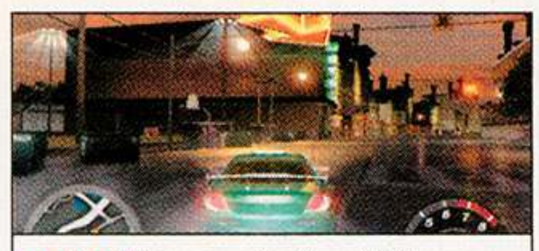
Street X: These races around short, tight tracks usually involve a lot of banging and rarely go beyond third gear. Fun, but fairly easy. And no nitrous!



URL: Short for Underground Racing League. URL events are on real racetracks, sometimes involve multiple heats, and are tough but lucrative.



SUVs: These hogs of the road aren't much for actual racing, but if all you want to do is roll around town, nothing says "call me playa" better.



Online: Well, new for Xbox (PS2 was online last year), online modes support only four players and don't offer any online-specific race types. Pretty vanilla.









auto racing in general will find something to like about *Underground 2*.

XBN—CHE: Sure, the cars are fast, the streets are wet, and the night is aglow with neon streaks—but if you think *Underground 2* is a formulaic rehash of the street-racing games you've already seen this year, think again. The game's new approach, opening up all of fictitious Bayview City for you to explore, is innovative enough that less ambitious racers in the future will feel stale by comparison. Since the journey from one race to the next is nearly as important as the official events themselves, *Underground 2* takes on vague role-playing game undertones with its random encounters (with rival night kids) and a car that literally "levels up" in stages of performance.

Still, there's plenty of room for improvement; the massive urban environment, although technically astounding, could teem with a bit more nightlife. As well, the game's overall length and number of hidden surprises is downright daunting, yet the story is so paper-thin, the series still lacks the impetus necessary to motivate casual racers through nearly 50 hours of gameplay.

Good: Huge game, equally huge car customization options
Bad: Desperately hip faux street lingo, long load times
Hard to Unlock, but it's in There: Nissan Skyline



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

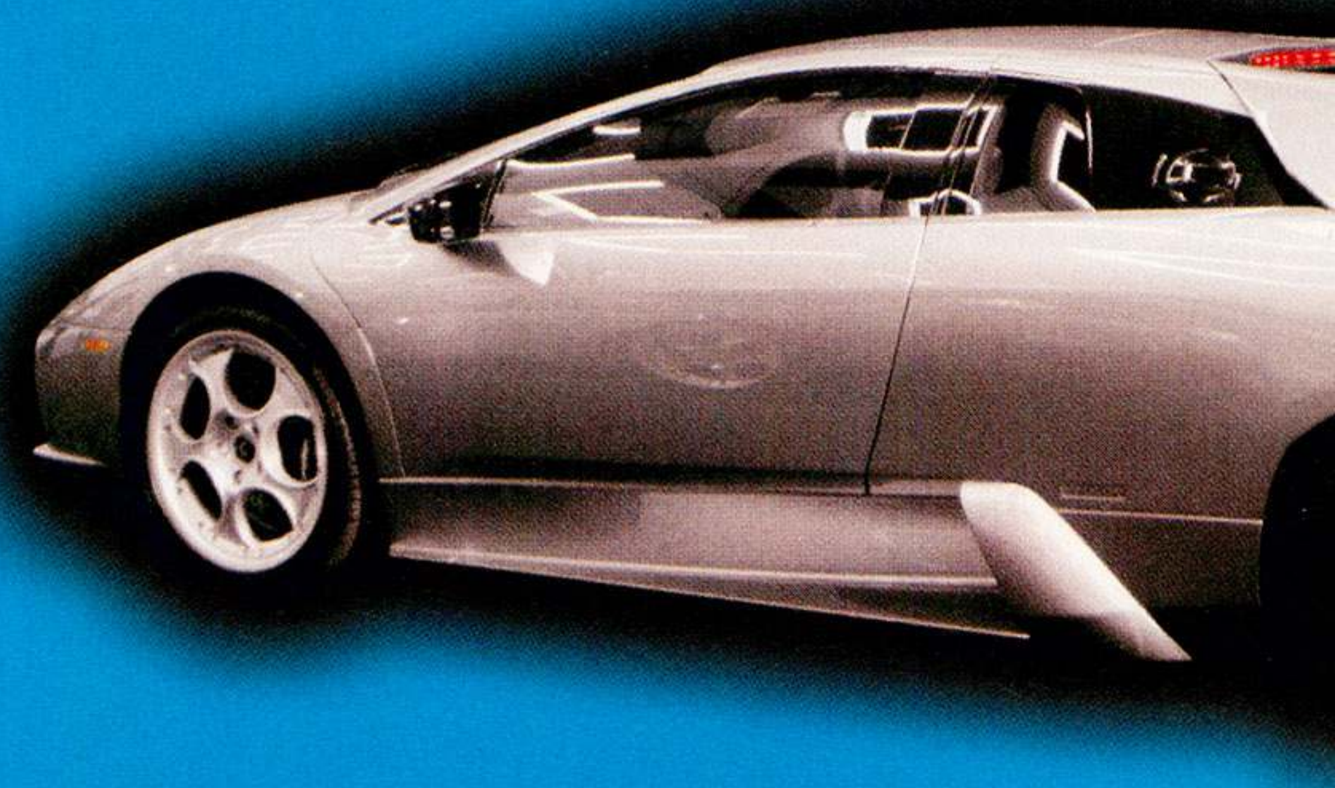
DEMIAN	ANDREW	CHE
8.0	9.0	8.0

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: EA Canada
Players: 1-2 (2-4 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.ea.com

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PlayStation.2 XBOX NINTENDO GAMECUBE GAME BOY ADVANCE

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Lambroghini Murcielago image courtesy of Cindy Lewis photography. Used with permission.



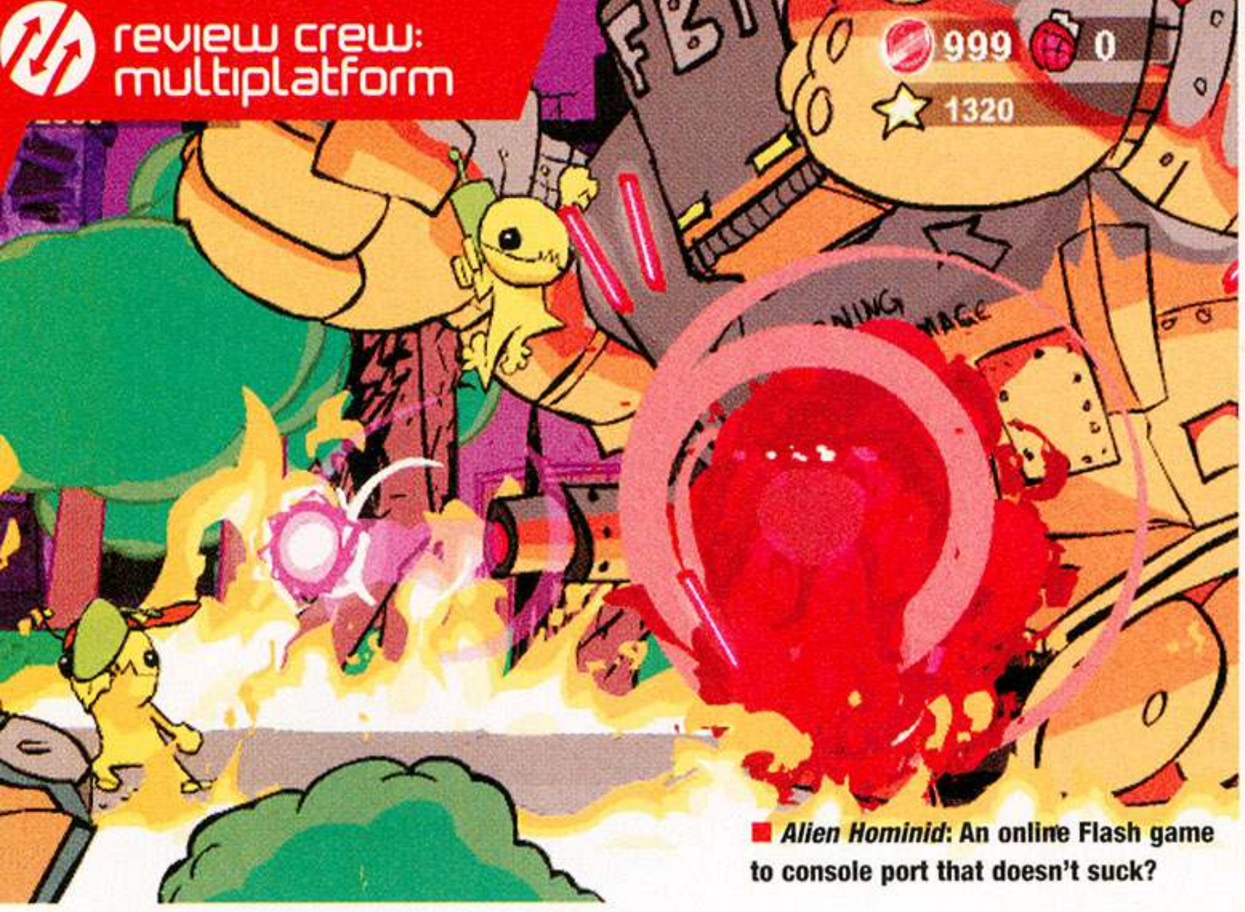


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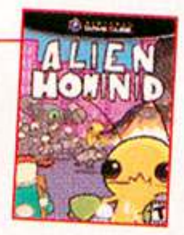


Alien Hominid: An online Flash game to console port that doesn't suck?

PS2/GC

ALIEN HOMINID

Close encounters of the chaotic kind



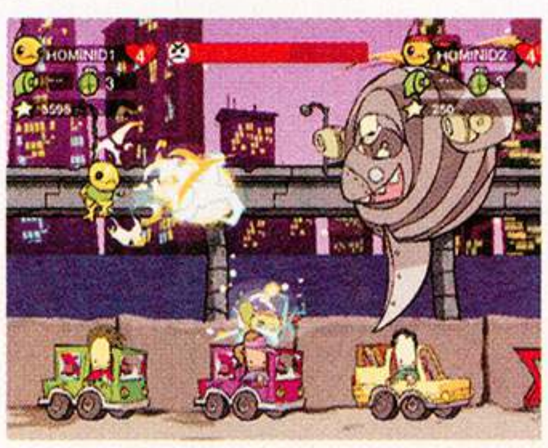
Good: Stylish graphics, old-school gameplay
Bad: Lots of cheap deaths
Be Sure to Try: The addictive PDA game

G. FORD: It's hard not to love a Cinderella story like *Alien Hominid*. This side-scrolling shoot-em-up—which stars a cute, yellow gun-toting alien—started life as a free Flash game, one good enough to be downloaded more than 6 million times. So the guys at developer Behemoth decided to bring their game to consoles, with impressive results. The endearing hand-drawn animations are simple yet slick, and they have a truckload of personality. As for gameplay, imagine *Contra* or cult-classic *Gunstar Heroes* (Genesis) on speed, with bullets flying everywhere, plus some incredible bosses that will both humble and wow you. To keep things fresh, you get to commandeer cars, tanks, giant robots, and a UFO.

The classic gameplay suffers from a classic problem, though: cheap deaths. With screens so packed with action, oftentimes you'll lose sight of enemy bullets, a problem in a one-hit-and-you're-dead game like this—fortunately, *Hominid* is liberal with lives and continues. While not overly long, it's a hoot for just 30 bucks. Through mayhem and charm, *Hominid* delivers.

ROBERT: I am so crushing on Hominid. Watch him get so adorably excited when his abominable snowman buddy gorges on KGB agents. He loves it. The game's combination of naïveté and ultra-violence rings in my head like church bells. And these characters make all those lifeless 3D mannequins we've been playing with look dorky. Great bosses, plenty of maneuvers, maybe a little short, but packed with quality fun...that's *Hominid*. Controlwise, I often wished for a *Contra*-style aim-lock button to keep my gun on target while dodging. Still, I'll be playing this for a good while. Viva indie console games!

1UP.com—MATT: *Alien Hominid*'s got its 2D run-n-shoot heart in the right place; it features unique moves, like biting enemy heads, unlockable costume—well, hat—changes, a few vehicles, and an art style that makes the game look more like a cartoon than half the stuff on Saturday morning TV, but the gameplay isn't perfect. An occasionally sluggish feel, limited animation, and one-hit deaths that can be hard to anticipate result in just a fun, candy-colored diversion for shooter fans.





THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.0	8.5	7.0
	G. FORD	ROBERT	MATT

Publisher: O~3
Developer: Behemoth
Players: PS2 1-2 (3-4 w/MultiTap), GC 1-4
ESRB: Teen

www.alienhominid.com

PS2/XB/GC

X-MEN LEGENDS

X-rated four-play



Powerhouse Jubilee uses her devastating "pretty lights" attack.



Good: Entertaining combat, X-tras for the fans
Bad: Annoying loading before accessing your character menu
X-Man You're Least Likely to Actually Use: Jubilee

JOSH: Have no fear, true believers! This comic-based action/role-playing game is good, but the lengthy loading (on PS2 especially), spotty A.I., and characters who appear to have oven mitts for hands mean players must have Professor Xavier–like patience to fully appreciate it.

Despite the problems, I love that I get to control four of my favorite X-Men at once. Unfortunately, the strength disparity between the characters, which admittedly reflects the differences between actual X-Men, means certain heroes rarely get used. The team dynamic is also a bit underutilized, as you can ignore your partners for the most part and just slash away with your favorite mutant (by which I mean Wolverine). Strategic use of your team is sometimes necessary to bypass obstacles, though, and coordinating attacks rather than going solo adds depth to the otherwise simplistic combat. In addition, the included extras, such as artwork, in-jokes, flashback levels, and training sessions in the Danger Room make this one a real treat for fans.

BRYAN: After a poor solo adventure starring Wolvie (*X2: Wolverine's Revenge*—sorry, bub), *Legends* helps bring Marvel's "gifted" students back to respectability. Comic-book loyalists will dig the diverse cast, the beefy character customization options, and the ability to hunt down Magneto while sharing the couch with three fellow X-heads. But there are a few abnormalities in this game's mutant DNA: dimwitted A.I. squadmates, enemies who pack a bit too hard of a punch early on, and a weak story. Still, it's worth checking out.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: Despite recycled levels, repetitive enemies, chaotic combat, and unbalanced characters, just controlling four X-Men and using their powers is usually enough to make up for *Legends*' flaws. As a total comic nerd who knows his 616 continuity from his Ultimate continuity, spotting all the references (ranging from old lore like Professor X's meeting with Shadow King to recent story lines like Emma Frost's secondary mutation) is a real treat. *Legends* might need more time in the Danger Room, but it's still a great representation of the X-Men universe.





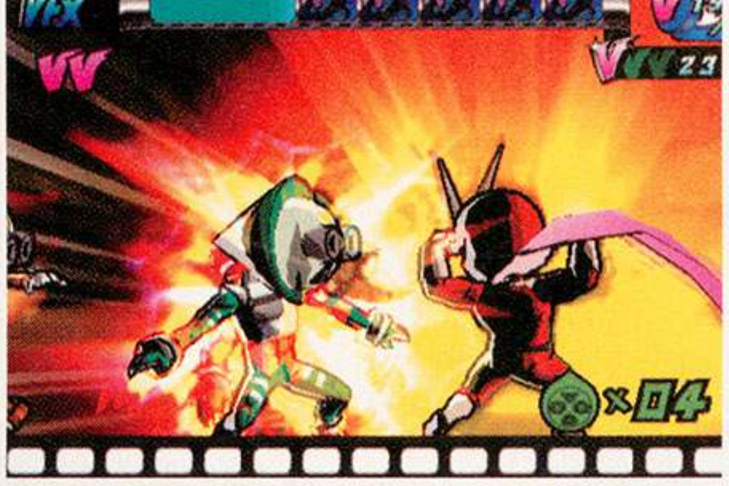
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	7.0	8.0
	JOSH	BRYAN	SCOOTER

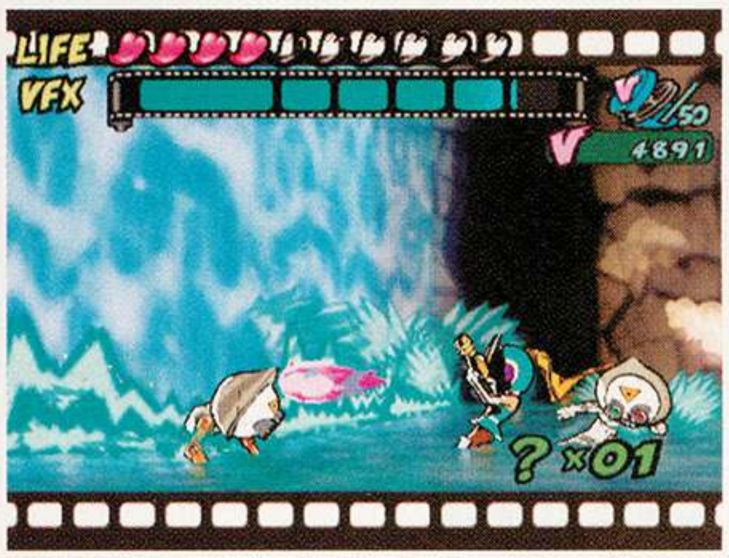
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Raven
Players: PS2 1-2 (3-4 w/MultiTap), XB and GC 1-4
ESRB: Teen

www.activision.com



■ Joe and Silvia: Delivering spandex justice to a head and neck near you.







■ PS2/GC

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

Thank heaven for viewtiful girls

KEVIN: Capcom, as a company, loves its sequels. When the first *Mega Man* hit big in 1987, it responded by churning out five Nintendo Entertainment System sequels, all pretty much the same—and let's not get started on *Street Fighter*. So it's hardly surprising to find the follow-up to the swingin'-est game of 2003 essentially unchanged from before. Not that I'm complaining. Yet.

What few additions exist are done well. Silvia, Joe's girlfriend, is a playable character now—and she's a lot more fun to bounce around than the alleged hero of the game. She's brought along one more special "VFX" ability, the power to record actions and repeat them in rapid succession. Two players can also storm the movie-themed game world at once, a mode that requires serious teamwork as special powers affect both characters. Otherwise, it's the same exact thing—2D gameplay, wild pop-art graphics, and occasionally devious puzzles that require creative use of Joe and Silvia's abilities to solve.

Unlike *Mega Man*'s sixth adventure, though, *Joe*'s completely original visuals and gameplay style still seem fresh a year later. The fighting's always a blast—the dodge, punch, and VFX combination is exhilarating, no matter how many times you pull it off—and the over-the-top story bits are funnier and more fully fleshed out than before. In short, *Joe* nuts won't be disappointed...hopefully this doesn't become a yearly thing, though.

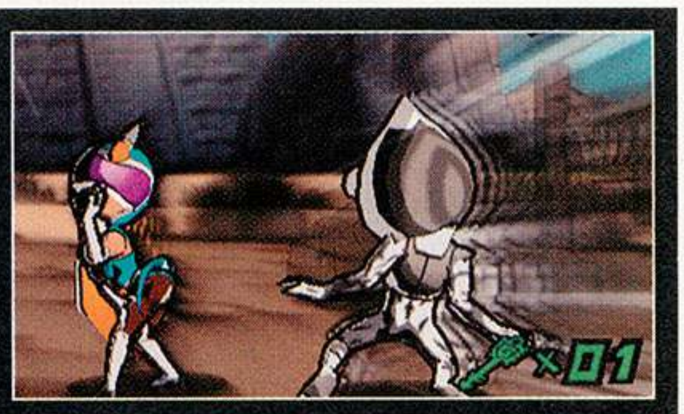
JUSTIN: For everyone who used cinematic special effects to superheroically beat the crap out of movie land's bad guys as Viewtiful Joe and wanted to do it all over again, this sequel is for you. *Viewtiful Joe 2* is a deftly executed, highly technical and challenging action game, but it could scarcely exist without the original. Nondevotees could have a tough time seeing this game as a thing of viewty, partly because the cheeseball story line is insanely self-referential for a series just hitting its second installment (it's also way too earnest to be funny). Vets will find respectably challenging new enemies and obstacles, but the one new tool provided is ironically "replay"—which repeats and emphasizes an action twice over. Fortunately what happened the first time was pretty darn good.

1UP.com—JEREMY: *Viewtiful Joe 2* is a paradox. The action seems like the usual mindless brawler fare, but it rewards technique and sharp puzzle-solving skills. The thick, stylized graphics are so ugly and grungy that they somehow seem stylish and attractive. The name suggests stubby superhero Joe is the main man, but playing as his gun-slinging girlfriend Silvia is actually more fun. And all it really offers over the first game is a second character and a new skill or two—yet it never feels tired or rehashed. With its goofy sense of humor, cool special effects, and tough but fair challenges, *Joe 2* is the sort of straightforward action game we don't see enough of these days.



Run That Through One More Time, Please

Silvia's "replay" power is simple to pull off—press the R1 (or R) button, then perform any action that comes to mind. Whatever it is, she'll do it three times in a row while the game shows off your viewtiful moves from several camera angles. It's good for fighting, but it's also a valuable tool for creative minds—eat a hamburger in replay mode, for example, and you'll recover thrice the energy.



■ Slyvia is a fully-empowered female game character who doesn't rely on stereoty...nevermind.

Good: It's more *Joe*!
Bad: Hasn't changed much over the last game
Hottest Fashion Accessory: Silvia's pompoms



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	KEVIN	JUSTIN	JEREMY
	8.0	8.0	8.5

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Clover
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.capcom.com



With the band: Instead of gathering a party, the Bard summons magic helpers with his rockin' music. He can whip up a small army by game's end.

PS2/XB

THE BARD'S TALE

Time to slay the cliché

Good: Smarmy hero, cheeky story
Bad: Ultra-repetitive dungeons and combat
Name Brand: This *Tale* has little to do with the classic PC series



CRISPIN: Hark, hear this tale of distressed princesses in towers, chosen-one warriors, and swords and sorcery. But before you get all "been there, earned experience points for that," know that this tale also packs cursed beer, follow-the-bouncing-ball sing-alongs, a puppy sidekick, and a boss monster named Lou. The most hated enemy in *Bard's Tale* isn't some sorcery-slinging wizard (although you'll find one of those)—it's the role-playing cliché, which is lambasted at every turn in this funny but flawed 20-hour adventure.

Credit for the yuks goes to our scruffy horndog hero, voiced by *The Princess Bride*'s Cary Elwes. He offers up snarky asides the second he encounters a hackneyed RPG convention, often arguing with the game's patronizing narrator. "Wouldn't it make more sense to keep your levers on the other side of your doors?" the Bard asks monsters guarding a gate-opening dungeon switch. It's one of a hundred clever jokes from a silly game that knows it's just a silly game. Such humor made me stick with this tale, which otherwise suffers from mind-numbing hack-and-slash combat and dull dungeons—action-RPG clichés that are anything but funny.



JENNIFER: I didn't come to the party bubbling over with memories of the old PC *Bard's Tale*—so I had no youthful nostalgia to propel me through *Tale*'s somewhat unbalanced gameplay. My chump-ass bard, even after extensive leveling, could still be defeated in three hits by little forest bears. The humor is clever and enjoyable, but you might be better off watching *The Princess Bride* one more time.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOHN D: While not breaking from the gameplay conventions of the *Norrath*-style dungeon crawl, *Tale*'s postmodern, self-referential humor pokes fun at every RPG convention, from meaningless quests to protagonist motivation. Though the beginning is a little harder than you'd expect, things really start to get interesting when you learn magical tunes that summon creatures to help you, and your abilities improve to a point that you can wade through the enemies more efficiently. Worth it for the laughs alone.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	CRISPIN	JENNIFER	JOHN D.
	6.5	6.0	9.0

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: InXile
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.inxile-entertainment.com

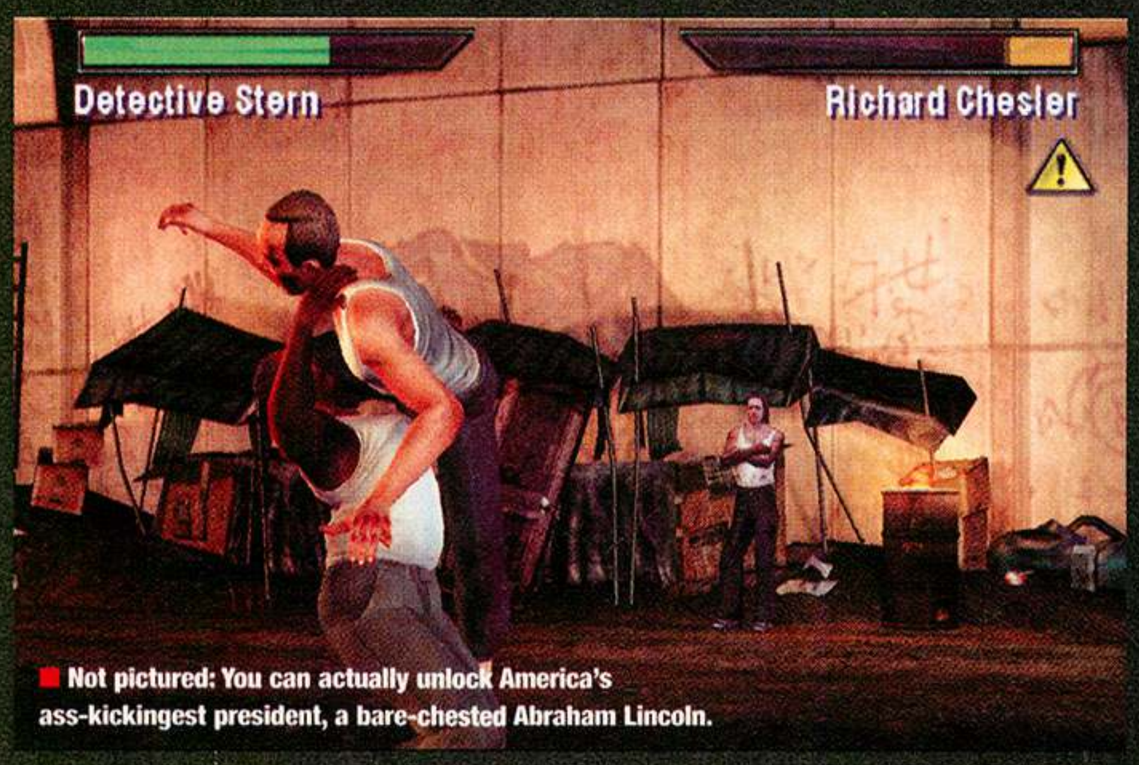
PS2/XB

FIGHT CLUB

I am Jack's crappy game

SHAME OF THE MONTH

ONLINE (PS2/XB)



Not pictured: You can actually unlock America's ass-kickingest president, a bare-chested Abraham Lincoln.

Good: Much of the soundtrack is licensed from the movie
Bad: The game's obviously unfinished
At Least You Can Beat Up: Fred Durst



JUSTIN: If you want a taste of the gritty underground fight scene depicted in the movie *Fight Club*, you'd be better off paying someone 50 bucks to beat you to a bloody pulp than wasting money on this game. It's unpolished, unfinished, and just plain bad. You can't even use your incredibly generic create-a-character space monkey (three body types, one face per type, four exciting pants colors to choose from) in story mode. Instead, you're stuck with some other incredibly generic-looking guy who lends his ugly mug to a progression of still shots that make up *Fight Club*'s lame, half-assed attempt at a story. The other modes put in even less effort.

Everything, including the fighting engine, character balance, and stat improvement (cheating is as easy as hooking up a second controller; like Tyler said, self-improvement is masturbation), is completely and utterly broken, boring, and useless. When you see Tyler Durden's mouth moving after a fight and no words come out, just assume he's telling you to quit playing this f&*%$@# game.

ROBERT: How many twenty-somethings home from college this winter break will wake up on Christmas morning to a shrink-wrapped copy of *Fight Club*, visions of broken bones and bloody faces dancing in their heads, bracing for the thrill of oh-my-gosh naughty words while button-mashing shirtless G.I. Joe dolls into kicking the crap out of each other? After suffering through a *Reading Rainbow for Adult Idiots* "story" to unlock Fred Durst (who seems out of place, but embodies perfectly the game's shallow, dollar-whoring violence), they'll hate *Fight Club* as much as I did...if there's any justice.

1UP.com—DAVE: At best, *Fight Club* will serve as a resume bullet to get somebody work doing 3D art or interface design. It has some decent character models and animation and a cool interface inspired by the movie's camera work, but the rest is like a bunch of 14-year-old kids trying to make *Tekken* in mom's garage. The controls are stiff, the balance is wildly off, and the fighting system is at least five years behind the curve. Good for a sick laugh (like the movie's liposuction gag), but nothing you'd want to actually play.





THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JUSTIN	ROBERT	DAVE
	2.5	3.0	2.0

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: Genuine
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Mature

www.fightclubgame.com

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AS HARD
AS YOU CAN.

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Intense Violence
Mild Language

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XBOX

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SOFDEC

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REGENCY

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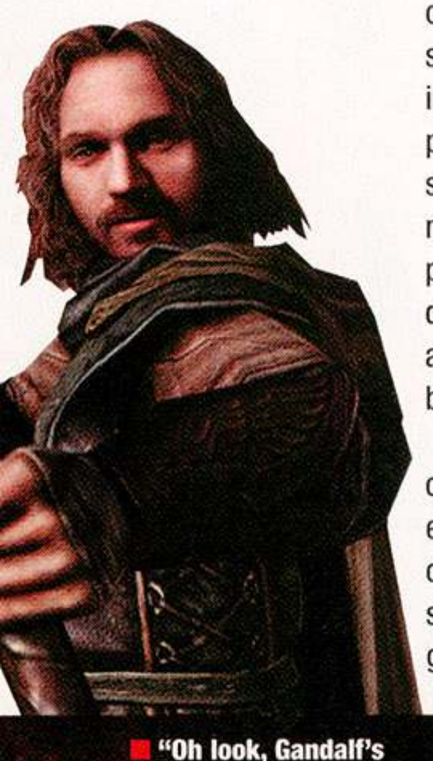
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PS2/XB/GC

LORD OF THE RINGS, THE THIRD AGE

Fellowship of the booooooring

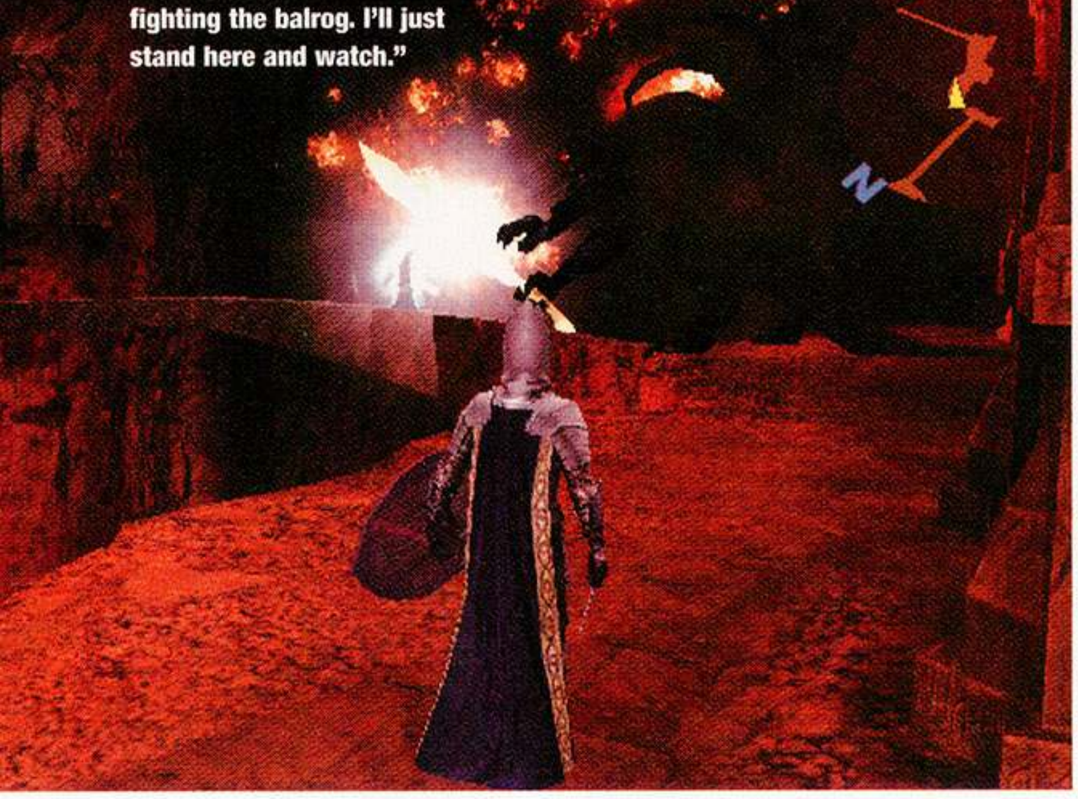
KEVIN: Put yourself in the game designer's shoes for a moment. You'd like to make a Japanese-style role-playing game and show those pantywaists over at Square Enix a thing or three. You've even snared the *Lord of the Rings* license, the tale that inspired the whole genre in the first place, for the project. The only snag: You've got the *movie* rights, so you can use material only from the film trilogy, not from Tolkien's original books. So what do you produce? *The Third Age*, that's what—an RPG that deftly copies *Final Fantasy X* but is burdened with a story that plays more like a "deleted scenes" bonus DVD than anything coherent.



On the gameplay front, *Third Age* is an out-and-out clone of *FFX*. The battle system, in which every action takes time and alters the overall turn order for everyone, is almost a carbon copy. The same goes for the linear story structure and the graphics, which feature beautiful natural landscapes mixed with stiff but immaculately detailed characters. You've even got the overwrought summon attacks (renamed "Perfect Strikes") and the ability to swap characters in and out of your party during battles. It's not very original, no, but it's all deftly implemented, and the pacing is among the quickest of any traditional RPG.

The story, unfortunately, drags the whole package down. Your party is sent by Gandalf to tail the Fellowship and help them fight Saruman's forces, but that's literally all you do—follow a path, beat up some orcs, then watch a movie cut-scene detailing all the swarthy adventuring the Fellowship is up to offscreen somewhere. There's zero character development for your own party, and scenes of real excitement are few and far between—for every climactic fight against Grima Wormtongue or the balrog of Moria, there are countless more alleged "boss battles" against a swarm of 15 Uruk-hai that come up one after another after another until you want to scream. *Third Age* is still the best "Japanese" RPG yet from a non-Japanese maker, but remember—*Final Fantasy*'s clientele is there for the story, too, not just the monster whacking.

CRISPIN: Forsooth, Kevin son of Timothy gives it straight up. *Third Age* is a valiant attempt at a *Final Fantasy*–flavored role-playing game, forged with the sword-and-sorcery conventions of ye-olde-school turn-based RPG-dom. But that doesn't mean hardcore roleplayers will crown this lengthy adventure as the new king of the genre—it's more like a fast-talking, sharp-dressed baron. While it holds its own in production values (as you'd expect from EA Game's treatment of its past two *Lord of the Rings* actioners), *Third Age* drops the ball in one department: character development.



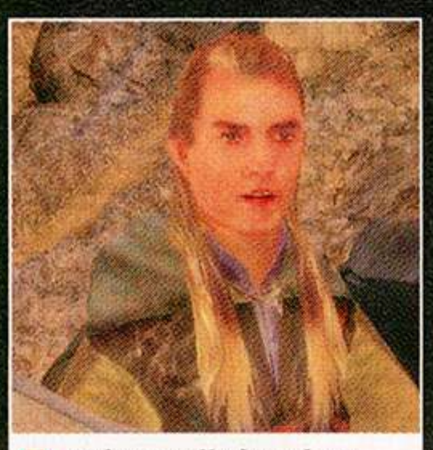
■ "Oh look, Gandalf's fighting the balrog. I'll just stand here and watch."

A Very Special Guest Cast

They never make more than a cameo, but you'll run into most of the Fellowship (save the hobbits) through the course of *Third Age*. They'll even join your party at times, saving your arse repeatedly during the trickier conflicts with their telegenic charm and godlike special attacks.



■ Ah, Aragorn son of Arathorn. Not a woman in the world who wouldn't want to share a saddle with the King of Men...



■ ...unless pretty-boy elven prince Legolas is available, of course. But if both of them are preoccupied, there's always...



■ ...Gimli the stout as a last resort. That is no orc horn... that's just his gas. Little dwarf humor there. Sorry.



■ *Third Ages'* makers could cull their baddies only from the films, so expect to kill Fido here a million times.

Orcs Are People, Too. Sorta

"You shall not pass" is retooled to "Right, maybe you shall pass after all" in *Third Age*'s evil mode. This bonus, unlocked after finishing every major section of the game, turns the tables on the Fellowship and lets you control the game's monsters in a series of battles. Smash the forces of good hard enough, and you'll earn some extra weapons and armor for your party. Simple when you're in command of a huge dragon, yes, but what if you've got an orc and two albino wargs against Gandalf the White and a pissed-off elf?



■ As Peter Jackson takes his lunch, the extras get restless and start attacking the main cast with their aluminum swords.







I'm not saying the game is lean on character-customization options. In fact, you get to soup up your party members' abilities after nearly every battle. Players will certainly feel a sense of speedy progress—proof of the developers' commitment to making *Third Age* catchy for casual players. But aside from a big twist halfway in, the plot rarely covers the thoughts and interaction of your characters. Each is a bland imitation of the films' Fellowship crew—with nary a hobbit in sight, I might add. But *Third Age* is hardly a royal mess for superfans of the movies, who will tolerate the game's shortfalls—as well as hundreds of battles that suffer from very little enemy variety—just to experience what's essentially a side quest to the films.

SHANE: *Third Age* serves up lovingly rendered locations, haunting melodies, and oodles of video clips from Peter Jackson's fantastic films, but at its core, this is one hollow fantasy. To me, the *Lord of the Rings* movies aren't great because Aragorn and company kick copious orc ass—they're great because the central story line (Frodo's quest to destroy the ring) delivers a dramatic, engrossing tale. Rather than tackling that branch of the *Rings* tale, *Third Age* instead puts you in charge of a personality-free, cookie-cutter band of humans, elves, and dwarves that follow behind Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli. The narrative totally blows: Interpersonal relationships barely exist, dialogue redefines banal, and the game's one major plot twist is inconsequential—your party always feels like the Fellowship's B team, dining on warmed-over sloppy seconds.

My fellow reviewers are spot-on with the *Final Fantasy X* comparison, as both the exploration and battle scenes here come off as mimicry. If you're going to steal, though, it's good to grab from the best, and EA did just that—battles offer balanced, strategic combat with plenty of options, and exploration is easy with that handy radar and smart camera. Problem is, they didn't bother to include anything except battles and exploration—*Third Age* is nothing but an endless procession of battles and linear exploration.

A few simple "go here, get this" quests break up the monotony once in a while, but you'll mostly just be fighting goblins and orcs for a good 30 hours. Trapped by the license, the developers could include enemies only from the films...for a grand total of about 10. It's tough to imagine even the most die-hard *LOTR* nut not getting bored. The tacked-on, cheesy evil mode adds nothing—replaying the same dull battles as the same horribly repetitive enemies doesn't make them even a shred more interesting.







Good: Lovely graphics, decent fighting system
Bad: No story...literally
Try To Avoid: The choppy, slower-loading PS2 version



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	KEVIN	CRISPIN	SHANE
	7.0	7.0	5.0

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: EA Redwood
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.ea.com

PS2/XB

GODZILLA: SAVE THE EARTH

ONLINE (PS2/XB)

Stick with the late-nite movie marathons



In a battle of originality, Godzilla 2000 takes on Mechagodzilla 3.

Good: Nails the Godzilla vibe
Bad: Plodding gameplay grows tedious
Playable Fan Favorites: Mothra and Jet Jaguar



G. FORD: Godzilla's already celebrating his 50th year of scaring poorly dubbed extras and general rampaging, and now the big lug has a new game too. After playing *Save the Earth*, though, my will to party in his honor is on the wane.

This brawler attempts to spice up its more than adequate predecessor (*Destroy All Monsters Melee*) by including more varied characters, levels, minigames, and other unlockables. Unfortunately, it doesn't tweak the plodding gameplay, so in most modes you'll slowly whittle down your opponent's health in battles that sometimes test your ability to stay awake as much as they test your skills.

The gameplay isn't terrible—*Save the Earth* does an admirable job of simulating what it would be like if behemoths with special powers whaled on each other in detailed cities and used high-rise buildings as projectiles. And it gets better when you play with some fellow fans in the entertaining multiplayer modes. But gamers weaned on faster smackdowns and who aren't turned on by the idea of a showdown between Megalon and Destoroyah should proceed with caution.

JON D: Poor Godzilla can't hook up with a winner to save his life. *Save the Earth* echoes *Destroy All Monsters*' melee and mass-destruction gameplay, but the one-on-one fighting model is tedious and unbalanced. Simple pleasures like watching Gigan get crowned with an office building and finding the cheapest ways to annoy your opponent friend give it some redeeming two-player power. But matches are too drawn out to stomach without that human element, so don't expect to play alone any longer than is necessary to unlock more monsters.

XBN—GREG: The King of Monsters gets shoehorned into the Turkey of 3D Fighting Games, and the apex of silliness here has superbehemoths punching, kicking, and behaving like Street Fighters. Ask yourself: Would the movie Godzilla ever need to throw—or block—a punch? Then wonder why the in-game Godzilla would either, as it can win every fight by swiping its tail until the credits roll. Online play means more mayhem but also an overworked camera system that must pull very far back to accommodate the action.





THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	G. FORD	JON D.	GREG
	6.0	4.5	5.5

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Pipeworks
Players: PS2 1-2 (3-4 w/MultiTap, 2-4 online), XB 1-4 (2-4 online)
ESRB: Teen
www.atari.com



When not killing stuff in the sexiest way possible, Rayne likes to grind a good rail.

PlayStation 2

BLOODRAYNE 2

When it Raynes, it pours

Good: Sexy vampire violence
Bad: Too many "toss someone into whirling blades puzzles"
Most Limbs Severed at Once: All of them—plus the head



JUSTIN: Even if vampire action isn't your thing, *BloodRayne 2* makes a striking first impression. Rayne, in a revealing evening dress, descends a grand staircase, and gothed-up party guests are suddenly spurting bright red from severed heads and bisected bodies—after you've sunk your teeth into them and felt them up. Whether you're enthralled or repulsed, the physics-enhanced spectacle of corseted cleavage and gushing blood alone could keep the controller in your hands for a good while.

Sex and violence are the stars, but clever, well-delivered dialogue carries an entertaining vampire apocalypse plot well above current game standards. Rayne herself is particularly sharp, wryly commenting on what turns out to be one of the game's biggest faults—strange, bloody puzzles that repeatedly compel you to fling bad guys into fans, fireplaces, wood chippers, etc. Talk about overkill. It's also tragic that basic blade and gun work is ineffective and unsatisfying compared to gory, instant feeding fatalities, but sadistic glee and stunning looks help cover up the game's imperfections.

XBN—GREG: Watching some sap gamely gimp away after his leg's been torn off by the vampiress Rayne's claws, the evidence is fairly conclusive, Toto: We are not in Kansas, unless it's some sort of ultraviolent Kansas where bloodletting has replaced complaining abut the government as the national pastime. Here, Rayne skewers, slices, and splatters until violence doesn't become just a means, but the end. Still, there's a solid if unspectacular game here—just one a tad too reliant on the formula of "toss enemy A into object of death B."

1UP.com—DAVE: I can't figure out why my fellow reviewers didn't wind up bored to tears with *BloodRayne 2*. Sure, it looks nice, and sure, it's fun to dismember goth kids for a while, but the combat controls are a masher's delight (bosses go down with minimal tactical effort), and the puzzles, such as they are, repeat themselves much too often. The chuck-guys-in-the-trash-compactor gag shows up three times in the first two levels alone. That ought to be a sign to the level designers—come up with another gimmick.



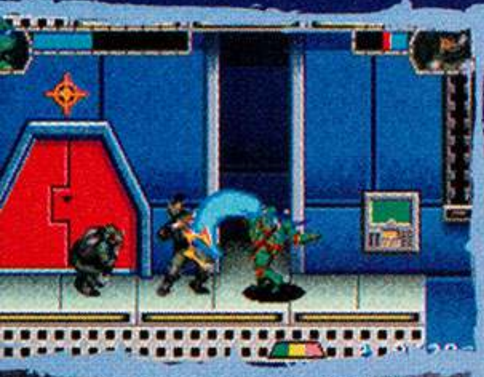


THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JUSTIN	GREG	DAVE
	7.5	7.5	4.0

Publisher: Majesco
Developer: Terminal Reality
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.bloodrayne2.com

YOU 'DA TURTLE.
AND 'DA OTHER TURTLE.
AND 'DA OTHER TURTLE.
AND 'DA OTHER TURTLE.
AND 'DA OTHER TURTLE.





The battle's on. And the turtles must work together to survive. Leo's swords. Raph's strength. Don's computer skills. Mikey's jumping. You'll need it all. Switch between each character in single player mode or play with friends and have the whole team on screen at once. Pick your turtle. It's go time.





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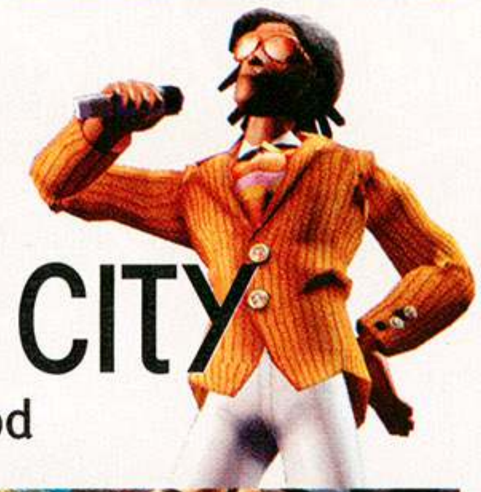




PS2/XB/GC

THE URBZ: SIMS IN THE CITY

Here comes the neighborhood





Goth No. 1 attempts to explain the depth of his suffering, while Goth No. 2 laughs and laughs.

Good: Less drudgery, more sucking face
Bad: Still manages to feel repetitive at times
What Genius: Put the kibosh on mass garden-gnome production?



DEMIAN: My Urb (don't call 'em Sims, now they're Urbz) is clearly on drugs. The little minx sleeps about two hours a night and spends the rest of her time dancing and making out with random people. Guys, gals, if it walks and talks—Simlish, of course, the Sims' garbled Charlie Brown–teacher language—she'll freak it.

Urbz takes *The Sims*' suburban dollhouse theme and kicks it uptown and outside. Forget being a homebody; Urbz hop on the subway, go to work, party, gamble...and sometimes don't sleep in their own beds for days. It's much easier to keep your Urbz happy; their motive bars decrease more slowly and refill faster, so you'll spend less time cleaning the kitchen and more time doing fun stuff. Or at least stuff that's supposed to be fun: While the jobs—little, self-contained minigames—are a great idea, they're all the same button-tapping exercise at heart. Lazy.

Urbz definitely takes some risks, and not everyone's going to appreciate the changes (see: Nich), but if you still want to spend hours picking out wallpaper and end tables, you can. My Urb'll be at the bar.

NICH: *The Urbz* is fun at first, but it becomes more a test of patience than of skill. Your reputation—the main measure of your success—can be increased quite easily by sticking to the green dialogue options in the chat menu, so the strength of your relationship with any given Urb is a function of how long you're willing to do the same move over and over. If rep were just one part of the game, fine, but that's it. That's the game. Well, that and not forgetting to pee.

GMR—CARRIE: Developer Maxis did a couple of things right, but some others very wrong. The streamlined motives are a tremendous improvement in alleviating tedium—so why the heck is the skill advancement so painful? Button-tapping on the job is bad enough, but building skills requires the worst kind of button-mashing imaginable. And even though it's over-the-top, *Urbz* lacks the wackiness of previous *Sims* games. I almost wanted to quit playing altogether. Almost, because despite its faults, there's still something compelling about steering your alter ego to success.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	DEMIAN	NICH	CARRIE
	7.5	5.0	7.0

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: EA Maxis
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.ea.com





The water-rafting minigame is thumb destroying.

PlayStation 2

APE ESCAPE: PUMPED & PRIMED

Party like it's 1999





Good: Unique controls, adorable monkeys
Bad: Not enough fun minigames
Strangely Erotic: The video of monkeys doing the hula



JOSH: If you're like me, you spent the majority of 1999 holed up in your Y2K-proof underground bunker, marveling at the original *Ape Escape*'s dual-analog control scheme and playing *Mario Party* with the three hot gals you convinced to help you repopulate the planet after the impending apocalypse. Sadly, *Pumped & Primed* is a throwback to that paranoid era. By combining the original's gadgets and controls with *Mario Party*-esque minigames, *Escape* fails to be more than the sum of its parts.

The single-player game consists of eight recycled minigames, at least one of which would not be termed "fun" by any reasonable person. Stomping the A.I. in single player is child's play, but the game rewards you for really trouncing them by unlocking gadgets, costumes, and movies. *Pumped & Primed*'s focus is obviously on multiplayer, which succeeds in being entertaining. Unfortunately, choosing the match types is confusing, and the lack of variety means most players will quickly grow bored. Learn from my former friends Tiffany, Nicole, and Jugzilla—leave 1999 behind and move on to something better.

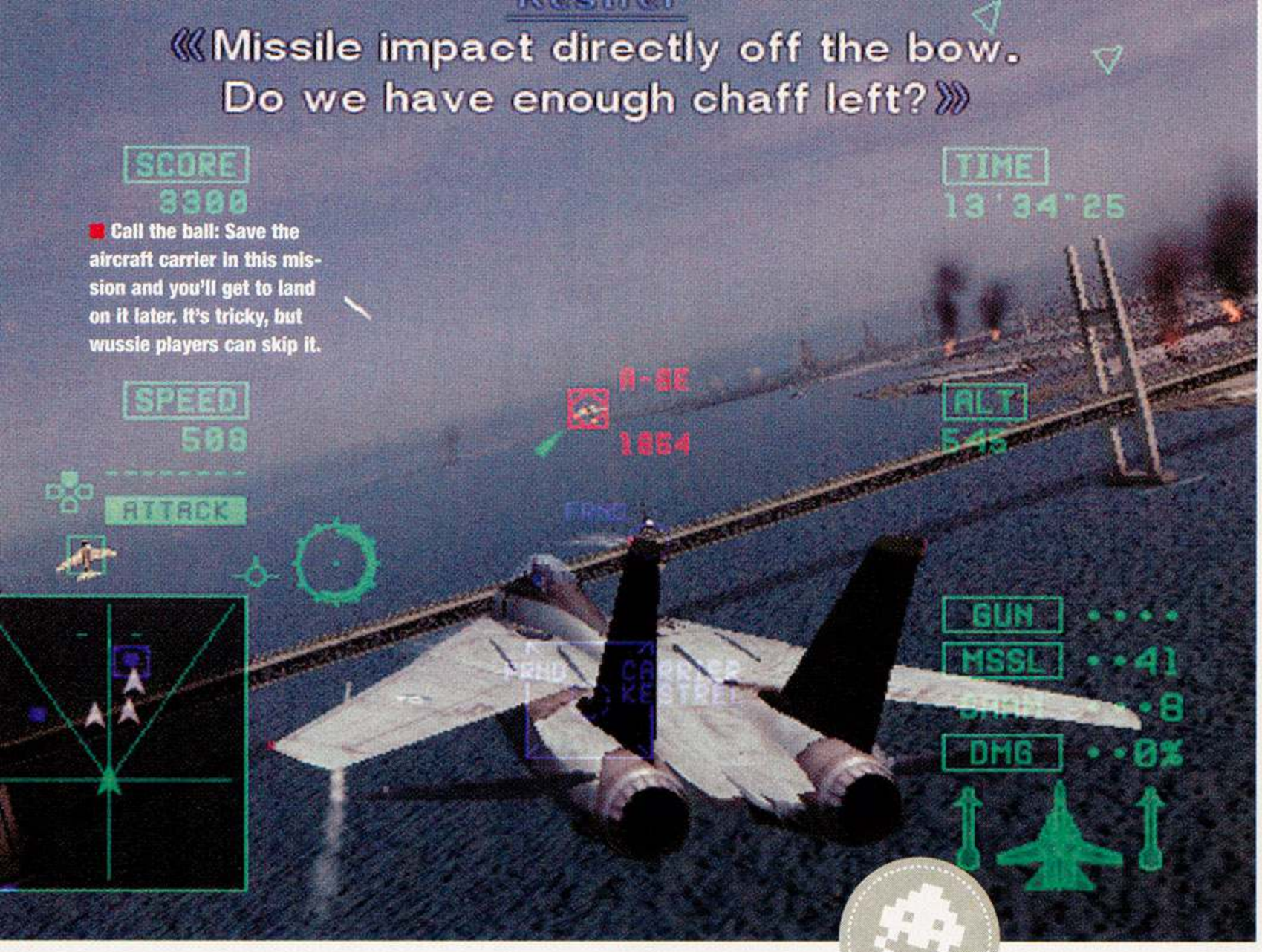
G. FORD: Ah, poor apes. Seems they'll never escape the exploitative ways of their diversion-seeking human masters. Sure, *Pumped & Primed* is geared more toward younger gamers, but it's a solid title, especially on a system without a *Super Smash Bros.* or *Super Monkey Ball*. Take away the infuriating slingshot matches that beg for better camera control and you've got some fun games in here, namely the coin-collecting races and stun-club fights. And multiplayer action makes matches more enjoyable since you don't have to deal with the chimplike A.I.

1UP.com—JEREMY: Looks like *Mario Party* clones are the new mascot racers: quick, easy ways to squeeze extra cash from a franchise. *Pumped & Primed* looks good and is faithful to the original games, but that's also its biggest weakness: Since *Ape Escape* is all about dual analog controls, many of the events boil down to twirling the sticks as fast as possible. A decent excuse to mash buttons, but I'd rather have a real *Ape Escape* sequel.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JOSH	G. FORD	JEREMY
	5.5	6.5	5.5

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Sony CE
Players: 1-2 (3-4 w/MultiTap)
ESRB: Teen

www.ubi.com



■ Call the ball: Save the aircraft carrier in this mission and you'll get to land on it later. It's tricky, but wussie players can skip it.



■ Get airsick of the missions? Take a layover in the arcade mode (below). Similar to the ol' *AC* coin-ops, this mode has you downing waves of bogies before time runs out.



■ PlayStation 2

ACE COMBAT 5: THE UNSUNG WAR

Soar winner

CRISPIN: Survive the finale of this flight-combat thriller and you'll find a shout-out to the U.S. Department of Defense in the closing credits. And it's not just some ploy to get on Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's good side. *AC5*'s developers enlisted the aid of real-world jet builders, licensing fighter plane models accurate down to the rivets. Combine that with the terrain imagery grabbed from satellite snapshots, and you have the slickest-looking console flight game ever (although the horizon gets foggy when you fly high and the ground gets blocky when you soar low). You'll zoom through clouds, above treetops—even through caves—all with an adrenaline-pushing sense of speed that's often lacking in these kinds of games. I had fun just cruising hypersonic 10 yards above terra firma in free-flight mode (an option that, unfortunately, isn't available until you beat the game).

But aside from the defense-contractor-boosted visuals, not much with the series has changed. It's still far from realistic—each plane carries at least 50 missiles, you can fly right through trees, etc. And a couple of missions are ripped from the last game. Nevertheless, nothing else in this genre can match *AC5*'s danger-zone atmosphere. Missions pour on the objectives, while radio chatter from your wingmen, enemies, and friendlies on the ground puts you in the heat of air battle. Who cares if the artsy plot doesn't coalesce until the final act; the gameplay will make your knuckles white. Wannabe jet jockeys should buy this game—Donald Rumsfeld commands it.

G. FORD: What a liberating feeling it is to soar through the air with tight, responsive controls. What an empowering feeling it is when you add in the chatter of almost-useful wingmen and a slug of missiles. And while many games set this scene, not many pull it off as well as *AC5* does. The landing and midair-refueling sequences that are so often a pain have a natural ease here. And while the story will string you along, it's the interesting missions that will suck you in as you're pulling off synchronized air and ground attacks and neutralizing the spread of toxic gases in a city. My biggest beef is with the checkpoint-less, multipart missions. They offer a rewarding challenge, but when the first half ain't so tough while the second is, you will likely be replaying them more than you'd like.

1UP.com—DAVE: *Ace Combat 5* is not any kind of quantum leap over *Ace Combat 4*. The new pre-rendered cut-scenes are nice, but not necessary, and while it's a cool idea in theory, the highly touted Wingman Command system doesn't really give a measurable feeling of control over the rest of the squadron. That said, if you liked *Ace Combat 4*, this is more of the same good stuff—gorgeous planes, complex missions, and a real feeling of being in the middle of a war, thanks in part to scripted events, radio chatter, and the massive scale of it all.



Flyers' Club
For the first time in an *Ace Combat* game, you're not flying solo. Early on, you assume command of a ragtag crew of three spunky wingmen. You can order them to attack specific targets, cover your six, or just do their own thing. They never affect the battle in any noticeable way, but they will talk your ear off with ceaseless radio chatter. If only we could fly with real players online instead. Namco says next time.



Upgrading Your Flight

It certainly sounds nifty—a heavy-duty stick-and-throttle combo bristling with buttons and bundled with *Ace Combat 5* in a $130 limited edition. But cool your jets, Maverick. Half of the buttons on this gizmo either don't do anything or repeat functions of other buttons. The throttle does let you fine-tune your speed settings, but we'd rather burn our money on a much cheaper introductory flying lesson (see www.beapilot.com).



Good: Ultrareal visuals, atmospheric missions
Bad: No online play, overwrought plot
Jet to Get Just for Its Awesome Name: Mig-21 Fishbed



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	CRISPIN	G. FORD	DAVE
	8.0	8.0	8.0

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

acecombat5.namco.com

PlayStation 2

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

GOLD

Paid the cost to be The Boss

You don't get many chances to get behind turrets in the game, so when you do make sure you take full advantage.

MARK: The setup is nothing new—every *Metal Gear* plops you in the middle of nowhere with only your wits (and maybe a few smokes) to get by. But *Snake Eater* delivers on the survive-and-conquer premise like never before. Staying hidden via stealth and camo, picking off the enemy one by one, living on captured snakes and fish, prying bullets out of your body before sewing up your wounds—John J. Rambo would be proud.

One thing I cannot stress enough: Patience is absolutely required to appreciate *MGS3*'s unique new features. For example, almost any time you get hurt, you need to stop the game and head to the cure subscreen to spread ointment on burns, stitch up cuts, or mend broken bones. Innovative and definitely realistic, but when you're hurrying or in a boss fight, constantly switching to a menu can be jarring and annoying. Likewise, swapping different uniforms and face paints to camouflage yourself is great fun—lying in wait for an enemy perfectly hidden in the tall grass is what it's all about—but it also requires switching to a subscreen.

Luckily, developer Konami added a great reward for staying stealthy—my favorite new feature, the close quarters combat (CQC) system. Get close enough to grab any enemy and your options are astounding: Slam him to the ground, interrogate him, slit his throat, choke him unconscious, take him hostage, etc—all these moves are executed with amazingly lifelike animation. Sure, you could gun your way through the whole game and never bother with CQC, but for those of us who know the thrills of true stealth gameplay, *MGS3* offers an impressive deep end worth diving into.

And the graphics...oh my, the graphics. *Snake Eater*'s outdoor environments are huge, bigger than anything *Metal Gear Solid* or any other console game has done before, yet detailed down to individual blades of grass. Seriously, at times it's hard to believe this game is running on a PS2—it would still be a feat for the Xbox. All the open space does come with a price, though. The irregular natural terrain and the fact that the new sonar radar doesn't show walls or where enemies are looking make it difficult to locate and keep track of bad guys. *Metal*

The younger, shorter-haired, handlebar 'stache-less Revolver Ocelot.

The cutscenes look so good it's hard to believe they are all done in real-time.

WHO'S THE BOSS?
The End

This grizzled old prune may not cast an imposing figure (especially since he spends most his time either asleep or in a wheelchair), but he's one of the toughest bosses in the game. The unique nature and slow pace of his fight—which is about an hour long—makes it a love it or hate it experience for sure.

WHO'S THE BOSS?
The Pain

You would be hurting, too, if deadly bees buzzed around your body 24/7. And when The Pain isn't using his insect friends as a shield, he's sending them after you in massive swarms. But don't sweat Cobra unit's beekeeper—the only real sting comes from listening to this weirdo's head-scratching rants.

Gear's top-down camera is not up to the task, so the player must constantly switch to the first-person view or slowly crawl everywhere just to play it safe. I hate to say it, but I think the time has come to kiss the traditional view good-bye and embrace a more (dare I say it?) *Splinter Cell*–style camera.

As for the biggest complaints about *MGS2*—its bland, androgynous hero and convoluted story—*MGS3* puts the series back on track. The plot is still filled with crazy twists and, at times, bizarre dialogue (one boss "meows" to call his troops), but the overarching plot is as exciting and unpredictable as a great summer popcorn movie. Add in tons of secrets, a bewildering array of different ways to tackle bosses, optional cut-scenes and minigames, and the overall polish *Metal Gear Solid* creator Hideo Kojima is known for, and you have one of the PS2's best games.

BRYAN: A sweaty controller, bent-but-not-broken nerves, a strange craving for snake meat—this game does a number on you both physically and mentally. But as the credits roll, I promise you'll also have a smile that stretches from ear to ear because you'll have just completed the finest installment in Konami's acclaimed stealth-espionage series.

It's kinda funny, but *Metal Gear Solid* mastermind Hideo Kojima had to take the franchise back in time (to the '60s, to be precise) in order for it to evolve. And it begins with the environments. *Snake Eater*'s new emphasis on outdoor play presents welcome challenges to the sneaky, as the uneven terrain makes the patterns of patrolling guards less predictable, plus the lack of an onscreen radar (don't listen to Mark—you won't miss it) and the ability to slice someone's jugular with the new, intuitive close quarters combat moves add to the tension. Oh, and Snake's trip into the great outdoors is a beautiful one. From the dense jungle full of mud pits and waterfalls to the rocky mountainside at dusk, this series has once again raised the visual bar for the console.

Snake Eater is also well paced. Boss fights seem to happen right when the action needs an adrenaline shot, and surprisingly, you (and your blood pressure) ➤



■ Ever seen *The Fugitive*?

WHO'S THE BOSS?
The Fear

This freak can move—he darts from tree to tree, showering you with poison darts, barely giving you time to take a shot before he's gone again (doesn't help that he's cloaked like Predator most of the time). Two of our reviewers thought he went down way too easily, while he posed a challenge for poor li'l Shane. Hot tip: Think before you fight.

Snake vs. Ape

In one of the more bizarre examples of cross-promotion since the NBA/*Van Helsing* TV ads, Sony allowed Konami to use its *Ape Escape* monkeys in an *MGS3* minigame. After a hilarious intro that skewers both games as well as the stealth genre as a whole, Snake races against the clock to capture all the frolicking primates as fast as he can.

Snake vs. Ape is ridiculously simple, but fun. While most of the monkeys run around in the open, a couple are always deviously hidden. And just the sight of a few special animations—monkeys dancing in the rubble of the first base or slapping their asses to taunt you—is worth it. The game is open from the very start; creator Hideo Kojima says he wanted parents who buy *MGS3* to have something for their kids to play.



will look forward to the downtime that the cut-scenes offer. The finale is just the dramatic roller coaster you'd expect, and definitely worth the 20-plus-hour investment. Speaking of bosses, even though a few may be too easy to defeat, each Cobra member's shtick is quite original, and there's one encounter in particular that will have the Internet message board crazies yapping until *MGS4*—believe me, your noggin and skills have never been tested like this.

Here are some other things that should please the longtime *Metal Gear* fans who had some legitimate complaints about *MGS2: Sons of Liberty*: The twist-filled plot actually makes sense, there are far fewer conversations with your allies over Codec (but give them a holler once in a while; they have some good tips during boss battles), and *Snake Eater* is considerably longer than the previous game. And in true series form, there's a boatload of secrets that'll have you playing through the game multiple times. I'm totally snake-bitten...and I mean that in the best possible way.

SHANE: You know that feeling you get when you're watching the ending credits of a really amazing game—when you instantly yearn to start all over again to discover all the stuff you missed along the way? You'll be feeling that way about five hours into *MGS3*. Simply put, it's the deepest, longest, and most replayable chapter in the *Metal Gear Solid* series yet.

After the lukewarm reception gamers gave *MGS2: Sons of Liberty* (most loved the gameplay but couldn't wrap their heads around its wild postmodern story line), no one knew what to expect from the plot of *Snake Eater*, a prequel to the existing titles. Would *MGS* creator Hideo Kojima delve even further into endless Codec philosophizing? Might he finally begin to unravel the labyrinthine backstory that's only been hinted at in previous games? Would that damned girlyman Raiden return? Well, Raiden-haters take note: *MGS3* wisely returns to the style of *MGS*—it's a gripping yet easy to understand tale of heroism,



WHO'S THE BOSS?

The Fury

At some point out in orbit, this ex-cosmonaut got a little "Lost in Space," if you catch our drift. Maybe that explains why he is such a pitifully easy boss to defeat. Still, you won't want to kill him too quickly—check out his flamethrower and jetpack; they're about the most impressive graphical feats we have ever seen on the PS2.

Lesson in Survival

MGS3 introduces three crucial new gameplay systems. And snake eating.

Camouflage

Since this *MGS* lacks high-tech radar to show you enemy positions, you'll have to rely on old-fashioned stealth to blend in. Switch Snake's camo suit and face paint to match his surroundings and stay close to the ground for maximum effect.



Healing

Mere flesh wounds will heal on their own, but nastier stuff like broken bones and embedded bullets require swift first aid. You'll have to carry gear like antiseptic, burn ointment, and bandages, and though healing can be a chore, ignoring it can be fatal.



Hunting

Nothing's worse than a rumbling tummy alerting a nearby guard, so be sure to feed Snake regularly. Often that means killing innocent forest fauna or foraging for fruits and shrooms. Blasting varmints is relatively easy, and pretty damn fun to boot.



Up Close and Personal

In previous *Metal Gear* games, the limited move set forced you to play defensively and, when spotted, usually run away with your snake...er, tail, between your legs. But that's not always the case here, thanks to the new, easy-to-learn close quarters combat (CQC) system. Using the directional pad, you can now crawl or walk right behind an enemy without making a peep. And once you get close enough, you can: toss the enemy to the ground and then pull out your gun—your foe will then give up some supplies; keep a firm grasp around his neck and proceed to interrogate him (via the L3 button); use him as a shield while shooting nearby enemies; put the helpless foe down for the ol' dirt nap with a very bloody slice across the neck. The last two CQC techniques are especially effective when enemies are in alert mode, as they won't attack if you've got ahold of one of their kind, plus you can eliminate the threat with only a knife and conserve ammo.





love, and destiny, packed with memorable characters. Sure, a few bits of dialogue are overtly cheesy, with several homages to '60s James Bond flicks and hilarious, self-depreciating humor aimed at *MGS* vets. Nevertheless, chuckling's preferable to head scratching, and *MGS3* keeps the confusing, meandering chatter of *MGS2* to a minimum. Expect to be entertained from the opening cinema to the final epilogue.

While the dramatic story line and expertly directed cinemas drive the overall *Snake Eater* experience, pitch-perfect pacing blends the cut-scenes with ample amounts of gameplay. Oh, and what phenomenal gameplay it is...no other game has ever come close to matching *MGS2*'s spot-on stealth action (sorry, *Splinter Cell*, but no), but *MGS3* manages to improve the basic mechanics. The addition of customizable camouflage, hunting, and first-aid systems (see sidebar) threatens to overly complicate matters, but keen implementation makes these new concerns realistic, rather than annoying. As expected, every facet of sneaking and shooting feels perfect, and series regulars will instantly feel comfortable with the controls.

So, what pushes *Snake Eater* into the realm of 10-ness? Three things excel far beyond possible expectations—visuals, length, and boss battles. Graphically, *MGS3* pulls things out of the PS2 that nobody dreamed possible. Lush jungles, superdetailed characters, and outrageous effects (like fire and water) constantly amaze. You'll also notice a great deal of graphical diversity as Snake travels to several different locales during his surprisingly long mission. Expect to spend at least 25 hours playing before eating your final serpent.

Finally, no *MGS3* review could be complete without addressing the game's outstanding bosses. Creepy, creative, and tenacious, the Cobra team outdoes even the wicked Foxhound squad from *MGS* in terms of flat-out coolness. The nerve-racking, ambitious duel against one boss, code-named The End, will likely go down as one of gaming's finest. So will the game itself. ➤





■ **Dangling with one hand while shooting with the other looks cool, but it's not actually that useful.**

WHO'S THE BOSS?

The Sorrow

By far the most mysterious member of Cobra, this shadowy apparition appears sporadically throughout the game to spook everyone out by creating freak rainstorms. Snake's eventual confrontation with The Sorrow easily constitutes the game's most bizarre battle—try sticking through to the very end.

Good: Gripping story, breathtaking graphics, tight controls
Bad: Camera problems, some wonky dialogue
Extras: Minigames, downloadable camouflage, and secrets galore



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	9.0	9.5	10
	MARK	BRYAN	SHANE

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami CEJ
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.metalgearsolid.com

WARNING: MGS3 SECRETS AND SPOILERS PAGE!

Frogger

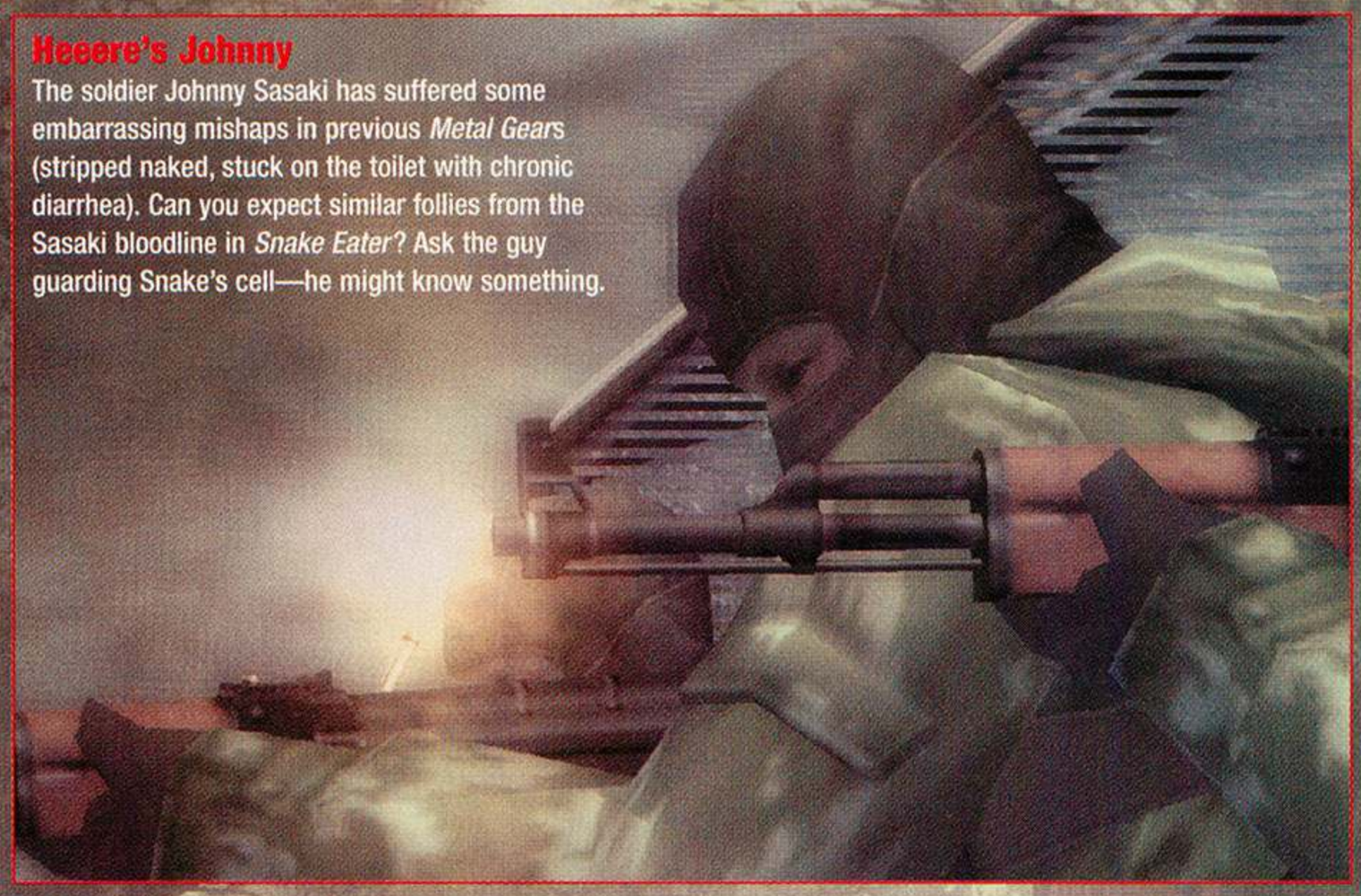
Dozens of little green frog dolls are scattered throughout the game—some out in the open, some cleverly hidden. Switch to first-person view and check the spots where you'd least expect to find anything. Wonder what happens if you shoot them all....

Dumps Like a Truck

Take a gander at the front of the Raiden look-alike officer's underpants for a little joke (Raiden is the name of the god of thunder in Japanese lore) and the back of them for a nasty surprise. Return to the locker you stuffed him in for an extra camo outfit as well.

Heeere's Johnny

The soldier Johnny Sasaki has suffered some embarrassing mishaps in previous *Metal Gear*s (stripped naked, stuck on the toilet with chronic diarrhea). Can you expect similar follies from the Sasaki bloodline in *Snake Eater*? Ask the guy guarding Snake's cell—he might know something.

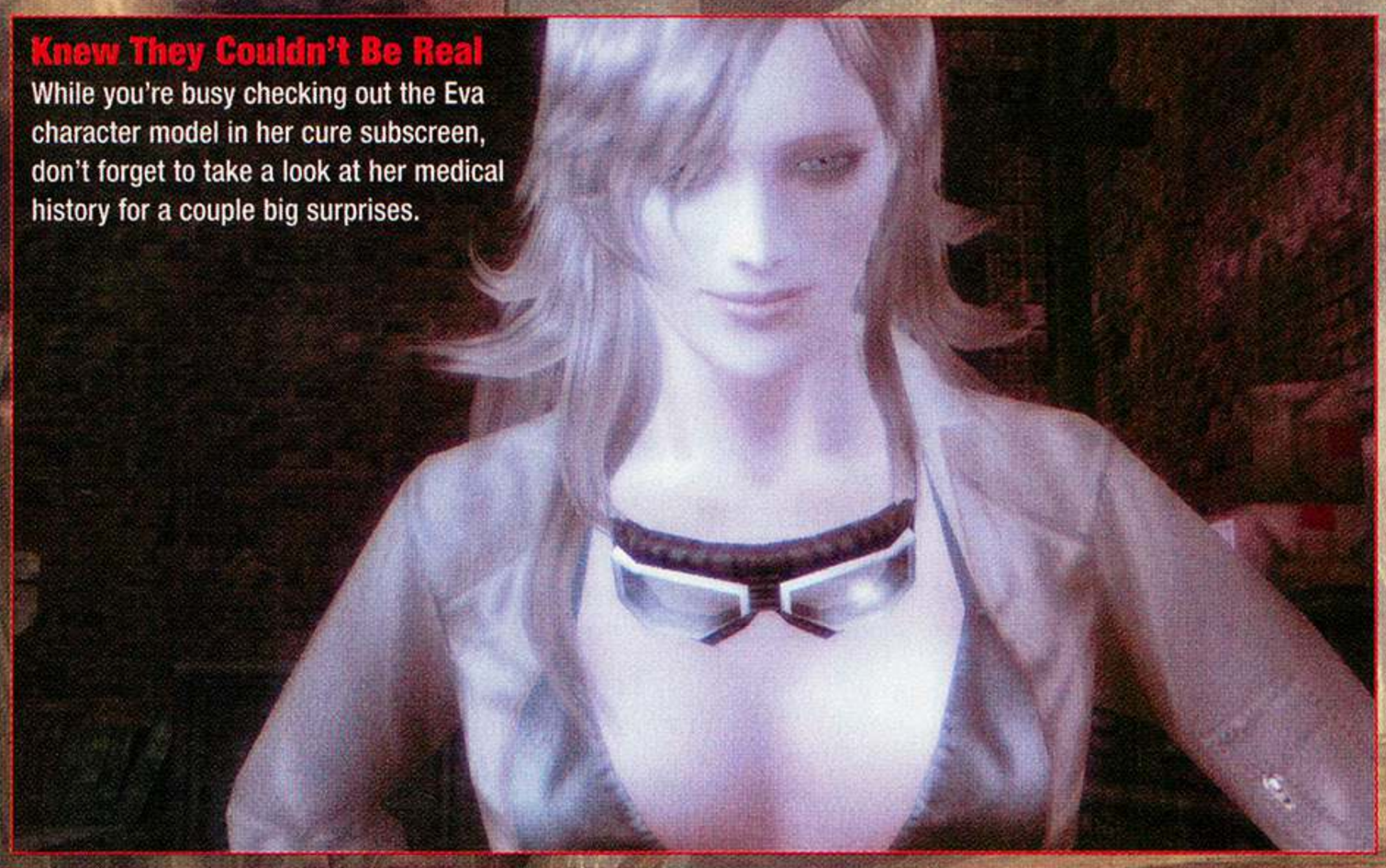


Heat Vision and Jack

Your battle against The End past the hour mark and you're getting ansy? Tired of crawling around, using the microphone, hoping to find catch him napping somewhere? Maybe the Thermal Goggles could come in handy, somehow....

Knew They Couldn't Be Real

While you're busy checking out the Eva character model in her cure subscreen, don't forget to take a look at her medical history for a couple big surprises.



Intro-active

Don't just sit there twiddling your thumbs during the game's intro movie—check out what happens to the screen when you get a little button-mash happy.

Pop-up Action

Grass in the face got you down? While lying down, try holding in the L2 and R2 buttons at the same time to lift yourself up and peek over the greenery.

Special Guest Star

When starting your game, choose "I like *MGS2*!" when prompted. (Yeah, we know—just do it!) You'll begin the game with a bit of a surprise and a few extra lines of dialogue about it later.



The Long Walk

It's possible to end the battle with The Sorrow very quickly, but you might want to slog through his ghoulish parade in order to meet up with some familiar faces. Just be sure to take action when The Sorrow says, "Wake up!"



The Big Secret

We can't tell you exactly how to do it, but thorough *MGS3* players might be able to unlock a secret minigame featuring a totally different style of gameplay.

Eye Candy

When you're landing the drone at the outset of the Snake Eater mission, be sure to look around the cockpit to spy some hot cheesecake pinups.

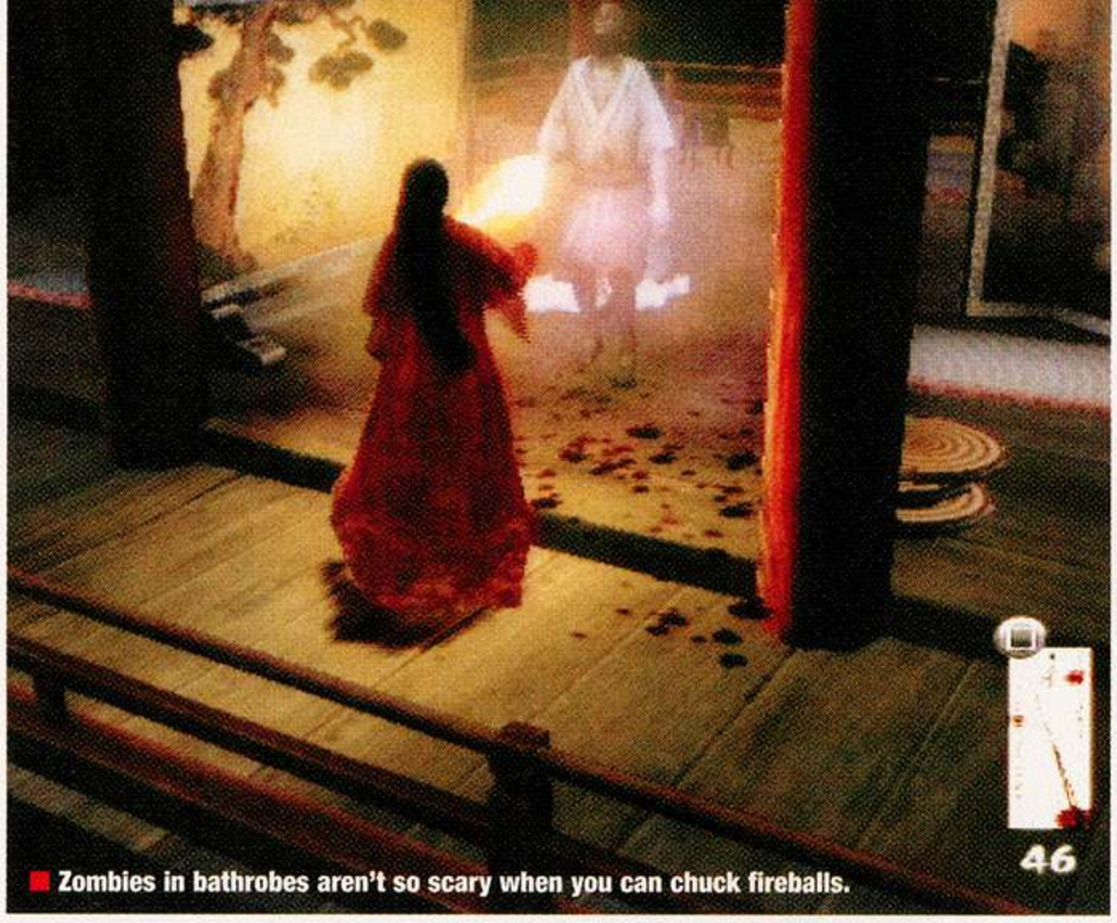
Last Resort

Is a particular boss giving you trouble? Down that fake death pill at the right time and maybe, just maybe, the Cobra member will leave you for dead and move on.

Still Tasty

Chow down on spoiled food and Snake's stamina rapidly decreases. Yet there is a way to eat rotten grub without becoming tired or getting a severe case of the runs—perhaps the answer is in Snake's medicine cabinet....

If a Snake throws up in the woods, does anyone hear it?



Zombies in bathrobes aren't so scary when you can chuck fireballs.

PlayStation 2

KUON

Shawna of the dead





Good: *Kuon*-derful graphics
Bad: Dull combat
Cliché: Dispatch twisted mutants in a haunted manor

JON D: I'd like to order a paternity test for my friend *Kuon* here. It's got the runabout item retrieval of *Resident Evil*, the blood-spattered décor of *Silent Hill*, and the style and pacing of *Fatal Frame* in an *Onimusha* setting—more daddy possibilities than your average *Springer Show* guest.

So *Kuon* can't help feeling a bit unoriginal, but whether borrowed or conceived, everything fits together pretty well. Combat that mixes hand-to-hand slashing with RPG-ish magic and summon attacks is the one thing that sets *Kuon* apart from the competition. So it's got a little more of an action-RPG edge, but slow pacing and very unscary bad guys (most enemies are just marginally deformed or even just funny-looking people) make all that fighting *Kuon*'s least attractive trait. And because everything takes place in the same haunted manor, the setting gets a little old—even though the graphics are excellent. It's a good rental on a rainy (or dark and stormy) night.

ROBERT: Same old game, new old setting. I stalk the empty stone-lined paths by candlelight, checking my map incessantly, trying to find a way into the area mentioned in a not-so-cryptic clue. These camera angles aren't helping, hiding the entrance. So much backtracking. Oh great, another potbellied zombie thing. I've seen scarier tax returns. These summon spells are useless; back to the old dagger. It's like I'm writing a letter to my character: "Dear Utuski, when you get a chance, please stab the monster who's biting you. Your loving humble servant, the Triangle button."

1UP.com—JEREMY: *Kuon* is so much like *Fatal Frame 2* that Tecmo should be getting royalty payments. The main difference is that it lacks the ghost-sensitive camera that made *Fatal Frame* unique. So does that mean *Kuon*'s just another survival-horror game? Let's see...weak heroines, illogical puzzles, terrible combat control, bugaboos bursting through paper walls (the medieval Japanese equivalent of windows): Yep, that's standard survival-horror, all right. The plot is intriguing, but a poor translation drags it down. Compared to the likes of *Silent Hill 4*, though, *Kuon* feels as ancient as its setting.





THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	6.5	4.0	5.5
	JON D.	ROBERT	JEREMY

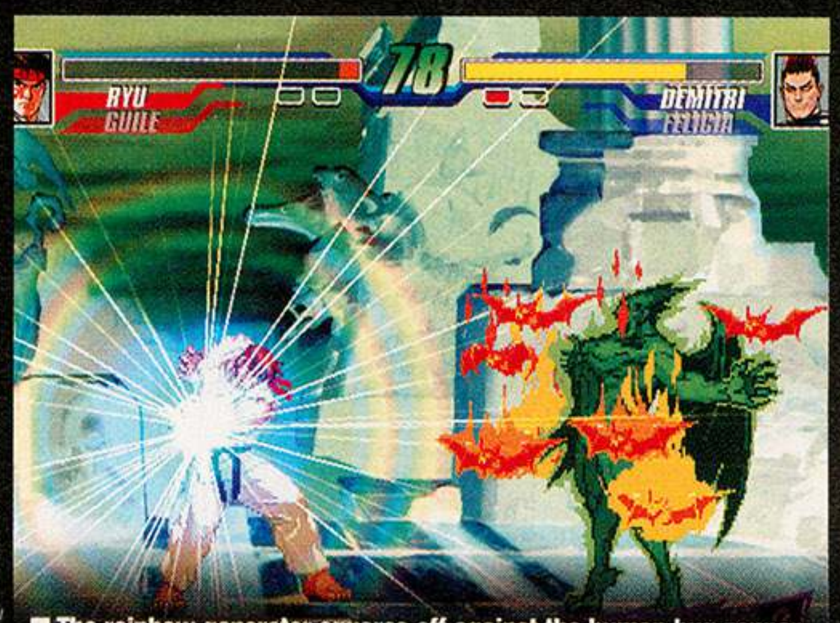
Publisher: Agetec
Developer: From Software
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

kuon.agetec.com

PlayStation 2

CAPCOM FIGHTING EVOLUTION

If it's survival of the fittest, this one dies







The rainbow generator squares off against the human bug zapper.

Good: Characters from five different Capcom games duking it out
Bad: Many of those characters suck, pointless tag-team fighting
Ridiculous: Everyone from *Red Earth* (an obscure arcade game)



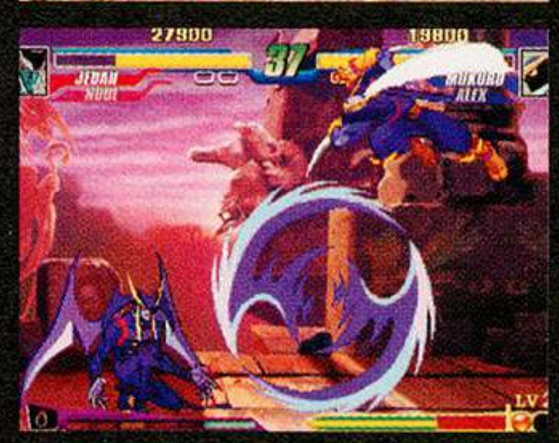
JOSH: "The *Street Fighter II* version of Ryu versus the *Street Fighter III* version of Chun-Li! Insanity!" If that's the kind of thing you would actually say without a hint of sarcasm, you might consider playing this game. The other 99 percent of people should take a pass. The only thing *Evolution* has to offer is the opportunity to pit obscure Capcom fighters against one another. And if you want to do that, I'd recommend you play the vastly superior *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* or *Capcom vs. SNK 2*, both of which feature more Capcom-specific characters than *Evolution*, in addition to tons of non-Capcom fighters. To make matters worse, many of the characters that are included in this game are awkward to control or just plain boring.

The gameplay itself is fairly bare bones, with a tacked-on tag-team gimmick that gives you the option to switch characters between rounds. The fact that there's not just one, but several 2D fighters that do *everything* better than this one means I really can't recommend it.

SHANE: Now, I'm the biggest Capcom fighting-game nut on staff (as evidenced by the well-deserved 9.0 I recently awarded *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*), but *Evolution* positively reeks of wasted potential. The concept of pulling beloved fighters from Capcom's extensive gameography is solid enough, but the execution is sorely lacking. Fanboys will dig it: *Street Fighter III*'s Chun-Li can finally fight the dorky giant nautilus from *Red Earth* (a brawler that you've likely never played), but everything looks, sounds, and feels like a relic from 1996. Solid, time-tested gameplay remains intact, but the dull, static backgrounds, scant unlockables, and limited options do the game no favors.

GMR—MILKMAN: Old-school, jaggy-ass art, blurry 2D backgrounds chock-full of meaningless cameo appearances by cast-away Capcom characters, mundane, unbalanced gameplay? Yeahhhh. A painfully small selection of characters only adds another reason to avoid Capcom's latest, and far from greatest, 2D fighter. *Capcom vs. SNK* did the multiple-character fighting thing way better than this, and *Guilty Gear* (both *#Reload* or *Isuka*, take your pick) looks way better on every level.





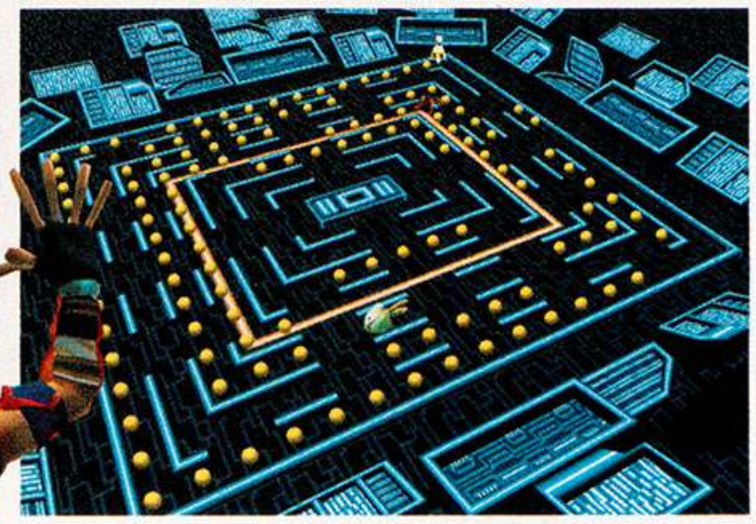
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	4.0	5.5	5.0
	JOSH	SHANE	MILKMAN

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.capcom.com







■ In this *Tron*-meets-*Pac-Man* minigame (above), Daxter chomps power pellets to hack a computer's security system.



■ PlayStation 2

JAK 3

SILVER

Run and jumpin' Jak flash

BRYAN: If Goldilocks wandered into the house of the three bears and found a copy of every *Jak* game, she'd probably call the original too easy and the sequel too hard. But after finishing the third action-platformer, I bet the nosy gal would say *Jak 3* is just right. And I couldn't agree more.

Those who smashed a controller or two (or three) over the maddening difficulty of the last *Jak* will be glad to hear that No. 3 is much more manageable. The well-balanced difficulty, however, isn't the only reason you should pick it up; as in its predecessor, the action here is nonstop and extremely varied, thanks to a gaggle of mission types like hang-gliding across the sand-covered Wasteland and racing at Mach 2 underneath a war-torn Haven City. No other game in this genre (not even Sony's third *Ratchet & Clank* installment) can complete with *Jak*'s...uh, jack-of-all trades gameplay. The narrative also delivers with its blend of humor and drama, new and improved gun mods make it easier to blast away foes, and the game—like every installment of the series—is truly beautiful.

Only the small number of boss battles and traditional platforming levels keep my enthusiasm somewhat in check, but that shouldn't prevent you from completing this not-so-final chapter in developer Naughty Dog's PS2 trilogy.

SHANE: Jak seems to be playing catch-up with friendly competitor Ratchet in the "annualized platformer" club: While *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal* impresses with its ambitious new online multiplayer mode, *Jak 3* spends most of its time trying to fix what was broken in *Jak II*. But hey, progress is progress. By ironing out the wildly unfair difficulty spikes, cutting down on the dullsville between-mission backtracking, and offering kinder, more frequent mission midpoints, *Jak 3* (unlike *Jak II*) succeeds at making you not want to snap it in half. You'll still face the occasional mission that demands a few deaths before you pass it (good luck beating the Wasteland-to-Haven City tube race in under three tries), but this clumsy brand of game design is rare. Unexpected repairs impress, too: Steering *Mad Max*-ed-out dune buggies feels awesome, weapon upgrades dazzle, and the new Light Jak's abilities add a lot of depth.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: *Jak 3* is a solid game. It's got an agreeable length, a meaty story that wraps up most of the loose ends from the previous games, typically gorgeous graphics, and Hollywood-quality animation and voice work. It's also got a hell of a lot of different kinds of gameplay: Driving, flying, hoverboarding, and shooting all complement the standard platforming action. But in a way, that's also my biggest gripe—so many different styles of gameplay are thrown at you that the experience can't help but feel a bit spotty. It has nowhere near the outrageous difficulty spikes of *Jak II*, of course—but there is definitely a feeling of unevenness, just strong enough to take a bit of luster off this otherwise brightly polished game.





Beyond Good and Evil

Jak II showed off the long-eared hero's uglier side—Dark Jak—which temporarily transformed him into an unstoppable killing machine. In this one, though, we also see the lighter side of Jak's personality, which allows him to slow down time, fly, and heal. Our controllers—now *not* thrown to the ground in anger—say thanks, especially for that last one.



Good: Challenging yet not insane difficulty
Bad: Needs more platforming levels
Now Playable: Daxter



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	BRYAN	SHANE	JOE
	8.0	8.0	8.5

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Naughty Dog
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.us.playstation.com



PlayStation 2

NEO CONTRA

Aging gracefully



Good: Over-the-top action sequences, boss battles
Bad: Like the blush of youth, it quickly passes
Greatest Quote: "I can't believe he was a plant cyborg!"

ROBERT: After twice failing to turn out a decent 3D *Contra* game on the original PlayStation, Konami made a tactical retreat with PS2's *Shattered Soldier*, a pseudo-3D (3D graphics, 2D perspective) fan pleaser. *Neo Contra* takes more chances and steps a hair further into the (scary!) third dimension.

While the game technically plays in 3D, you only control motion on a 2D plane, even as the camera moves around you and changes perspectives. There is no jump button—instead, you get a defensive spin. Anything hostile above or below you is ripe for blasting with a lock-on-type weapon (very much like Xbox's *Panzer Dragoon Orta* or PS2's *Rez*). These new elements work well, and the elimination of jumping really frees the camera up for dramatic movement.

I love the ridiculously over-the-top action sequences, such as fighting a boss on a rocket entering the atmosphere or treadmill running on the blades of a helicopter. I just wish *Neo Contra* was twice as long. I like playing stages over and over again to perfect my chops, but those who don't might not get their money's worth.

G. FORD: *Neo Contra* is certainly an impressive game, and I agree with Robert that it has handled the transition to 3D well...and that it could use more levels. I particularly enjoyed the creative aliens—one looks like a four-legged hot dog, another appears dead and rotting, birds picking at it, until it shakes them off and attacks you. And it does a great job of creating a suitably atmospheric sci-fi world. Unfortunately, with only a handful of levels that take maybe two sittings to beat, it's over far too quickly for the seasoned action gamer.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: Why must *Neo Contra* be so short? I want to see more giant plant-things with baby heads and talking dogs wearing Kaiser helmets. Seriously, there's some crazy enemy design in the game and most of the levels are equally insane. The only problem is that there aren't many of them, and while *Neo Contra* can be difficult initially, you'll plow through it in a few hours, especially if you get the new weapon set after seeing the wrong ending. Still, it's a pretty fun few hours at least.





■ The double hotdog monster is as frightening as it is mouthwatering.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.0	7.0	7.0
	ROBERT	G. FORD	GIANCARLO

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami CET
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Mature

www.konami.com

PlayStation 2

EYETOY: ANTIGRAV

Just throw your hands in the air



Good: Smashing targets on psychedelic rails
Bad: Smashing light fixtures on psychedelic drugs
Trippy: Your ghostly video-shadow tracing across the menus

ROBERT: After throwing back a few beers with my nongaming dad, I nonchalantly switched on *AntiGrav*. "What is *this*?" Pops watched as I piloted my hoverboarder through a Day-Glo tunnel, hopping to jump, crouching to duck, and smashing in-game targets with my out-of-game hands.

"Let me try that!" He shoved his way in front of the camera and promptly crashed my character into a wall. I recalibrated the camera to his body, the software locking on to his face and hands. *AntiGrav*'s physical interface is smooth and intuitive, tighter and more nuanced than you'd expect—your upper body basically becomes an analog stick with plenty of give. Pops ran through the tutorial and picked up the essentials pretty quickly.

AntiGrav welds together rail-riding sections, *SSX*-like race 'n' trick bits, and stints of free flight. Somehow, everything meshes together into nicely flowing tracks. The package feels a bit light (only six levels and two very similar modes)—a bit more like an arcade game than a console game. Still, it's an authentically new experience in a sea of holiday sequels.

KEVIN: My arms! My arms! Unlike previous EyeToy games (*Play*, *Groove*), *AntiGrav* makes the mistake of asking players to stick their hands in the air (and, yes, wave 'em like they just don't care) for long periods of time—your arms *will* be sore in the morning. It's the prettiest EyeToy game so far, with developer Harmonix's sense of cutting-edge audiovisual design as spot-on as ever, but actually playing *AntiGrav*—much less getting the EyeToy to read your hand movements accurately—is more work than *Play*.

GMR—CARRIE: *AntiGrav* is revolutionary, showing the potential to turn the stereotype of the pasty, doughy, couch potato game player into a buff, limber jock. When the game works right, you really do feel like you're in control of a hoverboard. Unfortunately, I had a lot of trouble getting the game to register my arm movements, except when I played in a room flooded with sunlight, and I found the gameplay kinda repetitive. The technology is exciting, but as a game, *AntiGrav* is pretty much a one-trick pony.



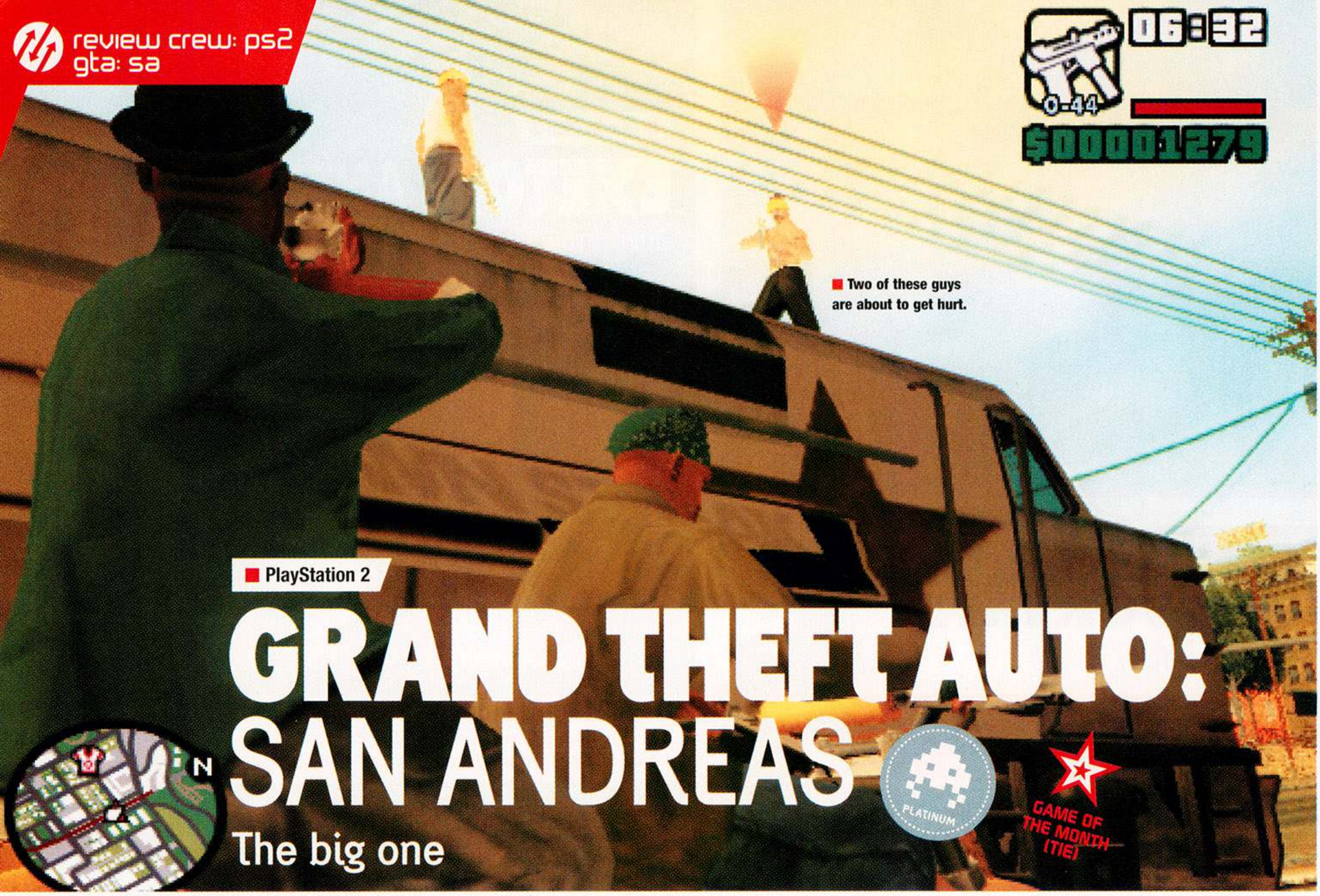


■ Long, organic lines of targets showcase *AntiGrav*'s nuanced control.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.5	6.0	7.0
	ROBERT	KEVIN	CARRIE

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Harmonix
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.us.playstation.com



■ Two of these guys are about to get hurt.

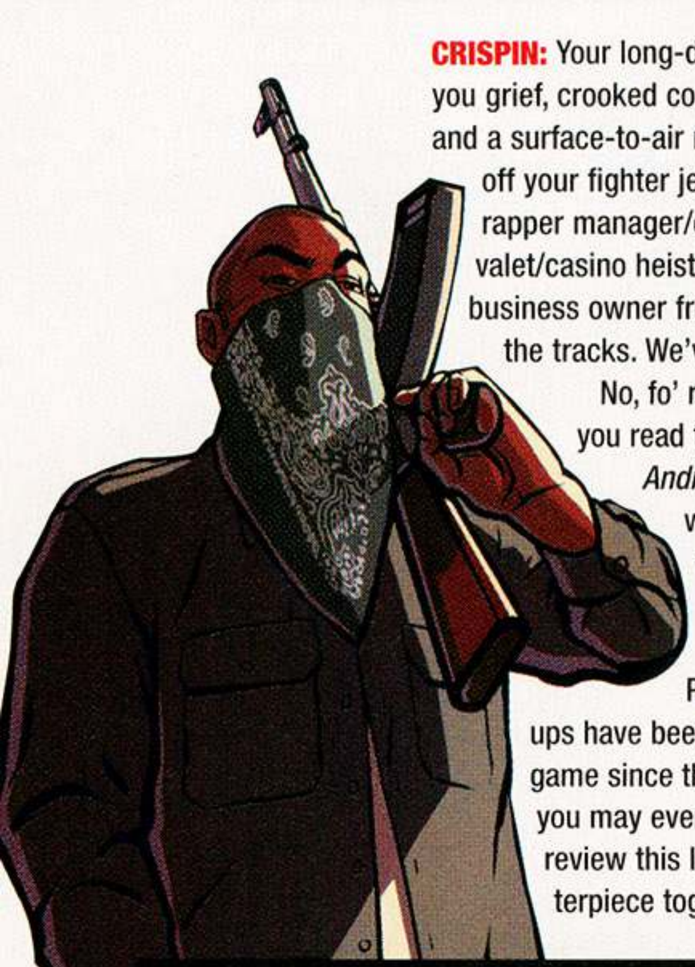
■ PlayStation 2

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

The big one

PLATINUM

GAME OF THE MONTH (TIE)



CRISPIN: Your long-distance girlfriends are giving you grief, crooked cops are cramping your style, and a surface-to-air missile just sheared the wing off your fighter jet. Such is the thug life of a rapper manager/car exporter/parking valet/casino heister/captain of industry/small-business owner from the gang-war-torn side of the tracks. We've all been there.

No, fo' real: *We've all been there.* As you read this, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*—the hyper-hyped sequel whose inner-city hero lives all the lifestyles described above—has been in stores for a little while now. Most PlayStation 2–gaming grown-ups have been racking up mileage in the game since the day it debuted. Some of you may even have beaten it. So let's review this literally larger-than-life masterpiece together (and if you haven't played it yet, no worries—we spoil nothing).

So...she's a biggie, eh? No longer confined to one metropolis, this latest chapter in the series that defined free-form gameplay sprawls across the fictional state of San Andreas, home to three massive cities and all the wilds in between them. Just as you get used to one town, it's time to move on to another, where you'll spend your first few hours gawking like a bumpkin (and you'll feel a comfortable sense of coming home when you return to familiar neighborhoods). While the game's visuals aren't much improved over those of the past titles, the sequel still ramps up the reality with little touches: thunderstorms that rumble your joypad, cirrus clouds at 20,000 feet, cops chasing crooks, copse-covered fields, blinding fog, radio newsbreaks that report plot points, and more.

As the world opens up, getting from A to B becomes an adventure in itself. You'll need to study the map and mark routes by using the new waypoint system. You'll even need to read street signs. Fortunately, a new trip-skipping feature lets you instantly bypass lengthy drives in later attempts at failed missions. And *San Andreas*' terrain is so fun to explore that road trips rarely become as tedious as, say, a long-distance drive to grandma's house.

Unless you cruise to grandma's in a hovercraft, WWII fighter plane, or cargo helicopter. *San Andreas*' variety of jackable vehicles is enormous. You'll find mountain bikes, go-karts, chopped-down hoopties, riding lawn mowers, helo gunships—plus a couple of incredible machines that embody the go-anywhere freedom of the series. (A hint: One's big, the other's small, and neither needs a runway.)

Series vets will find that cars feel slippery at first; power slides can slam you into light poles or off a bridge into the sea (good thing your hero can swim now). But the more you drive, the better you drive, thanks to a skill-building system that turns *GTA* into a full-fledged role-playing game. It's simple and it works. Use a certain weapon to nail enemies and your aim and range improve over

Extra-Vehicular Activities: Rating San Andreas' Daily Diversions

When you're ready to take a break from *San Andreas*' story, there are dozens of minigames to keep you busy. We critique 14 (but there are certainly more where these came from)....

Our scale...

$$$$$

Blah — **Bitchin'**



Shooting Hoops

**$**$$$$

Don't get too worked up, sporto—this is nothing close to a real-deal 5-on-5 b-ball game. It's more like a one-man version of horse in which you release the ball at the top of your jump to score.



Getting the Girlies

**$$**$$$

Make the rounds and you'll find six would-be girlfriends you can woo with romantic dinners or drive-bys. Dates get repetitive fast—even the ones that end in (insert squeaky mattress sound).



Grand Theft VCR

**$$$**$$

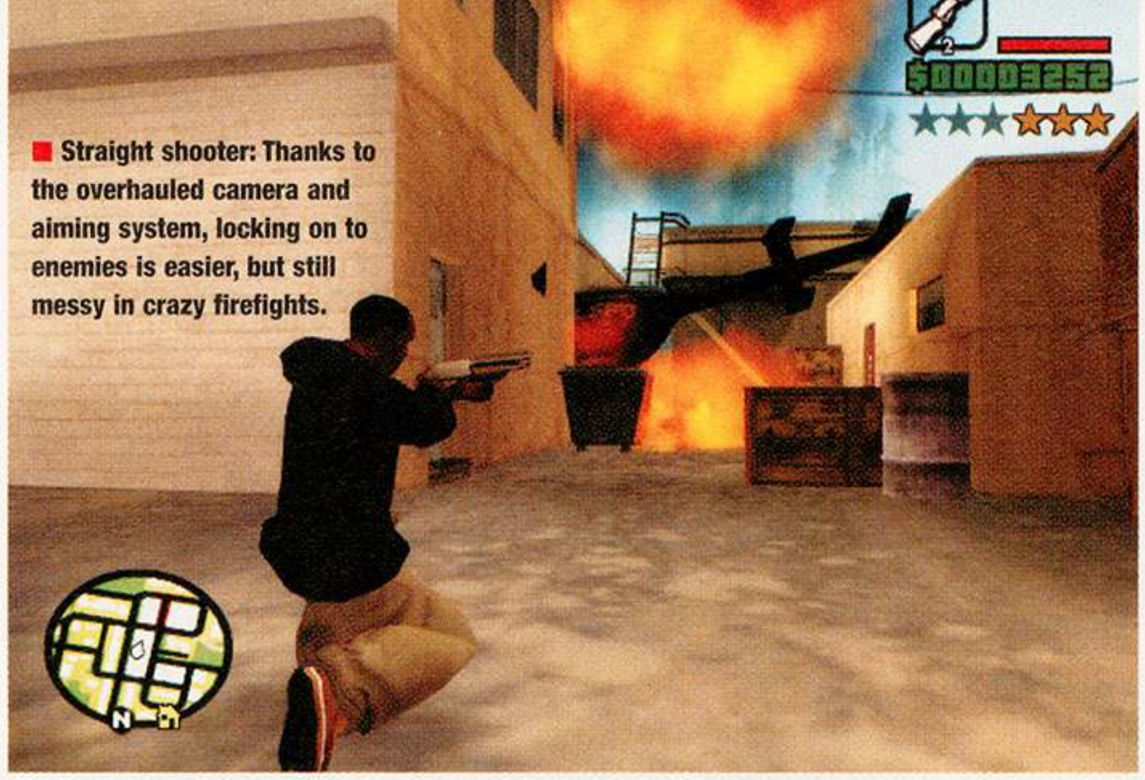
Steal a moving van and you can raid homes at night for hot merchandise. A noise meter tracks your racket—too many loud steps will rouse the armed-and-dangerous residents.



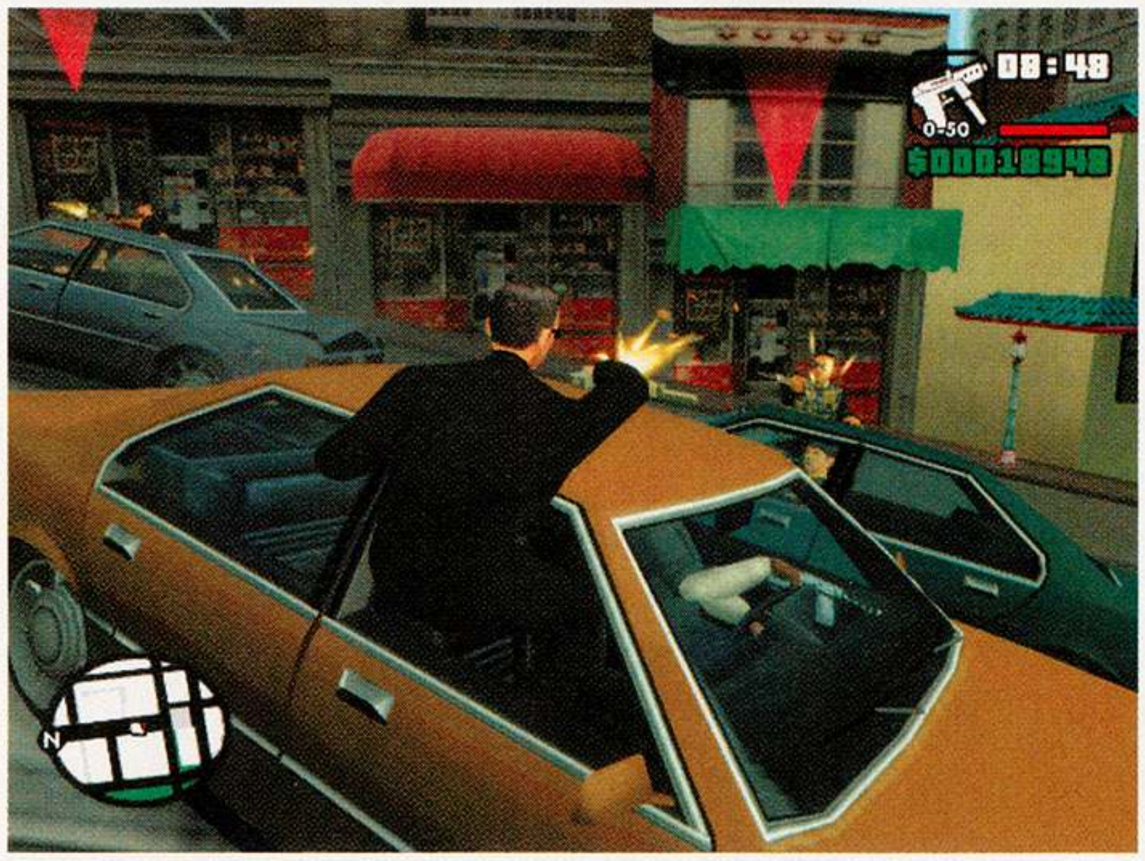
BMX Stuntmanship

**$$$$**$

Build up your bicycle skills and enter a freestyle course in downtown Los Santos. The simple wheelies and endos won't give *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX* a run for its money, but it's not bad for a minigame.



■ **Straight shooter: Thanks to the overhauled camera and aiming system, locking on to enemies is easier, but still messy in crazy firefights.**



time, and eventually you can wield a gun in each hand. Blast your pecs at the gym and you'll grow to Ah-nold proportions. Ultimately, you'll drive better and fly straighter; the ladies will like what they see, and you'll have earned the game's ultimate currency—respect.

But *San Andreas*' super size derives from more than its sheer geographical enormity or character-building options—this world is packed with an intimidating number of things to do. Your hero starts and ends his career in the 'hood, accruing a crew of super barrio brothers to wage one turf war after another. Along the way, however, he'll engage in sneaking, flying, shooting, racing, construction work, destruction work, dancing, dressing, car customizing, heist planning, and more—all during a twisting plot laden with nods to past *GTA* games that brings the series full circle (yes, fans will freak). The game can get janky (especially during *Manhunt*-inspired sneaking missions), but ultimately, there's enough variety here to fill a dozen titles. It has triathlon events, for crying out loud.

In fact, *San Andreas*' makers boast that it takes 150 hours to do all there is to do and see all there is to see. It took me about a third of that time to reach the ending, but my stat screen showed that I still hadn't seen 35 percent of the game. You, on the other hand, have no need to rush. This is your thug life. Live it large.

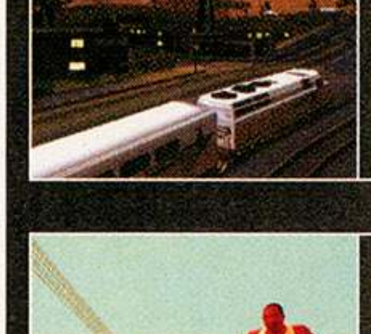
SHOE: Holy f***ing s***. (Sorry...I'm swearing a lot more now because of *San Andreas*.) I can't wrap my head around how much stuff is packed into this one disc. It's grand, it's ambitious, and funny as this may sound, it's legendary.

Playing this game, I feel like a little kid again (well, except for all that R-rated business)—my fun is limited only by my imagination. You can do so much here at your leisure. For example, I spent twice as long in the first city, Los Santos, as Crispin did because I was really determined to fight rival gangs for turf, work out until my arms looked like Popeye's, and stuff my girlfriend's ever-hungry face with food. I took care of my character's stats and appearance as if he were some SimGangsta, only he wasn't burdening me with mandatory, mundane micromanagement. And all this wasn't really even helping me finish the game....

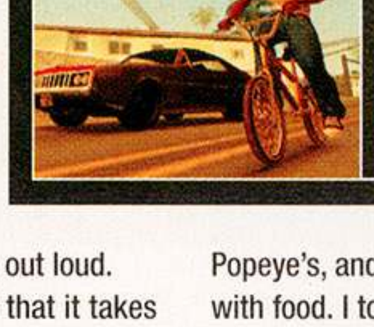
As wide open as *San Andreas* is, I do wish the main mission line was more flexible. Yes, you can tackle each mission however you'd like, but as a general rule, you still have to complete one before you can move on to the next. Several branching paths that lead to different conclusions would've been nice, so if you didn't want to help that Triad guy in San Fierro or you didn't want to do the long cross-country missions, you wouldn't have to. The only other things you can criticize are the game's dated look (despite several graphical enhancements) and the inner-city gangster theme, which may turn off some upstanding young citizens (though it lightens up a third of the way in).

Depending on your taste in music, the audio ➤

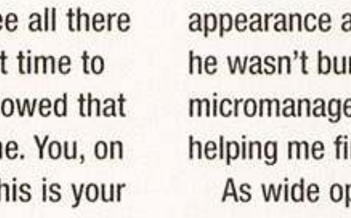
Picking Sides: Did you try these hard-to-find side missions?



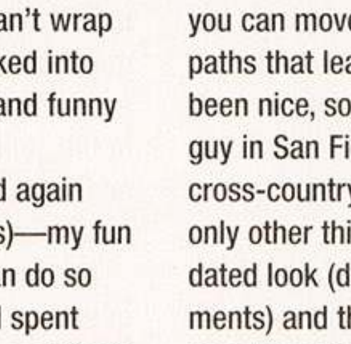
Hunter Quarry
Where to find it: Just southwest of Las Venturas
What you're missing: Reliving childhood Tonka-truck fantasies by driving construction vehicles (such as bulldozers and dump trucks) to clear rubble and...uh, burn bodies. OK, so we had messed-up childhoods.



Caligula Palace Heist
Where to find it: Four Dragons Casino in Las Venturas
What you're missing: An intricate casino robbery right outta *Ocean's Eleven*. Planning proceeds over several missions, including nabbing a truck with a helicopter and sleeping with a cashier to get her access card.



Train Engineer
Where to find it: Any train station after you've visited all three of *San Andreas*' cities.
What you're missing: You can jack everything else, so why not a train? Avoid high-speed derailment while trying to stop at the next station before time runs out.



Courier Missions
Where to find 'em: Look for parked bikes or motorcycles.
What you're missing: Remember the arcade game *Paperboy*? Now try *GTA*'s take on it. Cruise around town and hurl packages through glowing rings. Aim straight and you'll make some decent bank.

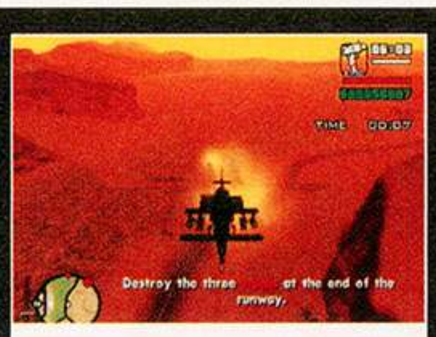


Thumb War
Rapid-tapping X boosts sprinting and pedaling. It's handy for the triathlon events (above) but murder on even heavily callused game-reviewer digits (below).





Two-Player Games
$ $ $ $ $
At certain spots around town (such as girlfriends' homes), a second player can join for absurdly thrilling free-roaming killing sprees and vehicle rampages (one player drives while the other shoots).



Getting Schooled
$ $ $ $ $
Throughout the state you'll find schools that specialize in different vehicles: boats, cars, planes, bikes, etc. Complete the *Gran Turismo*–style time trials for fun—and a boost to your skills, too!



Electronic Gangster Monthly
$ $ $ $ $
Rockstar has hidden old-school-style arcade games in bars throughout the state. You'll find the first, *The Crawler from Uranus*, on the TV in your home. Find more in the bar around the corner.



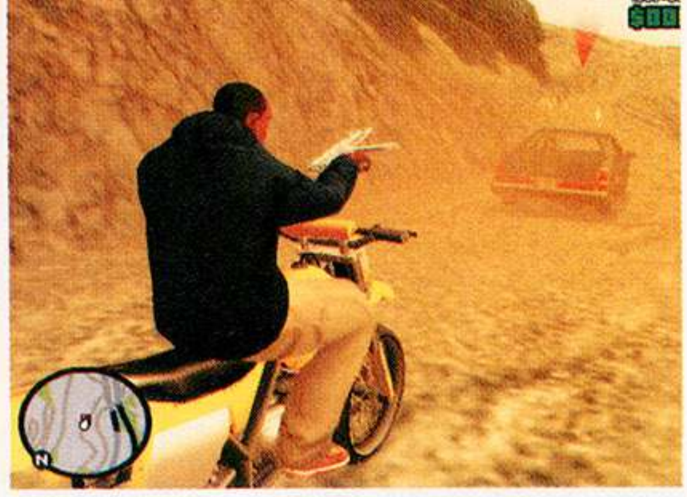
Valet Parking
$ $ $ $ $
Why steal cars when suckers will hand you the keys? After you unlock the valet uniform, you can experience the soul-crushing thrills of demeaning menial labor at a San Fierro hotel any time you want.

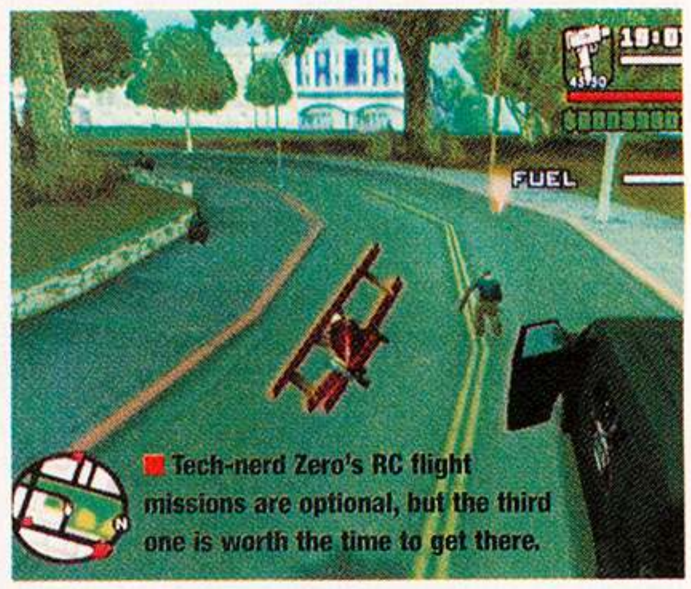


Know When to Hold 'em
$ $ $ $ $
Las Venturas' subdued casinos don't ring with the ding-ding din of the real thing, but they still take your cash in sweet facsimiles of blackjack, video poker, roulette, and wheel of fortune.



■ Altitude adjustment: The new parachute—perfect for bailouts and the extreme art of base jumping—means you never need to fear heights again.





■ Tech-nerd Zero's RC flight missions are optional, but the third one is worth the time to get there.





Best Actor
While half of Hollywood—from Samuel Jackson to Axl Rose—voices characters here, new rapper Young Maylay has the breakout role, making main thug CJ tough but likable.

➤ here tops what *GTA3* and *Vice City* already did incredibly well. The soundtrack is bigger and reminds us of how good—and how absolutely terrible—some '90s music was. And the voice acting is amazing, with several big-name personalities helping to cement videogames as legitimate an art form as many feature films.

It's sad that the inevitable controversy surrounding the gang/violence/sex/drug content will outshine the game's good points in the eyes of the general public. Because if you strip away all the vices, what you have left is still a brilliant piece of work—something the developers should be proud of and something gamers of all tastes will love.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOHN: I was prepared for "big," but I wasn't quite ready for "frickin' enormous." Rarely do you experience a game that is busting out new moves and experiences all the way through to the very end. Such is the scale of the game that major characters voiced by well-known stars don't even make their first appearances until more than 40 hours in.

Unlike its imitators, *GTA* is not a slave to its star-studded cast, nor is it quite as pigeonholed thematically as you've probably been led to believe. We've all heard the "*GTA* meets *Menace II Society*" comparisons, but believe me: They're wrong. For the first seven or eight hours, OK, maybe—but as you move through the game's five major areas, the look, feel, and tone of the experience changes quite dramatically. At the beginning of the game, your problems are more immediate and simple, but as you progress, the scale of your tasks escalates as your character develops.

Main man CJ, it has to be said, is arguably one of the most well-rounded videogame characters ever to grace a screen. He's not a one-dimensional caricature of an L.A. gangbanger; he's much more than that. As you spend more time with him and affect his development, you realize that you actually like him. This isn't the kind of admiration reserved for videogame heroes like Master Chief or Mario—it's a genuine feeling of camaraderie with your on-screen buddy. Everyone will probably enjoy a unique version of CJ; not only can you alter superficial things like his looks, but you can also build up a huge range of stats based on how you play. Every action is tracked, and as you drive more, shoot more, swim more...or whatever, you notice that not only are you more proficient as a player, but CJ himself is also more proficient as a protagonist. Like Crispin said, *San Andreas* is an RPG. Maybe not the kind you're used to, but an RPG nonetheless.

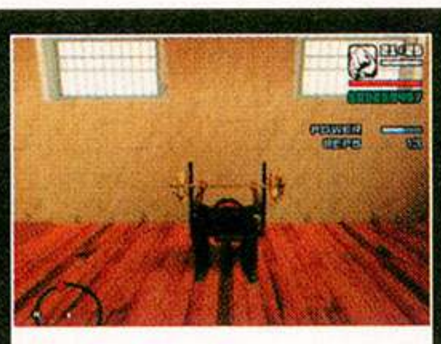
Expectations for *San Andreas* are understandably high, and the more cynical of you could be forgiven for thinking that the game can't possibly meet them. Believe me when I say that it not only meets them—it absolutely shatters them.



Dance, Fool—Dance!
$ $ $ $ $
Take your dates clubbing, then jab joypad buttons in time with tunes to unlock the next song. It's all right, but we prefer the similar minigame that has you pumping your lowrider hydraulics to music.



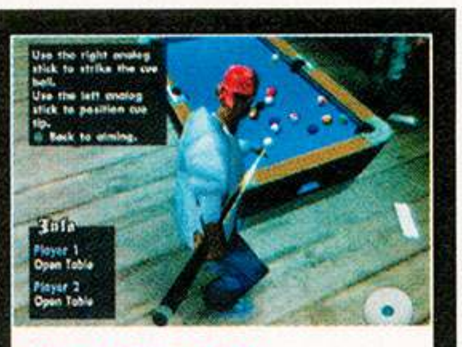
Capture the Moment
$ $ $ $ $
Grab the camera from your Los Santos home and snap pics of your gang flashing signs (or let them photograph you). Then snap 50 touristy pictures in scenic San Fierro for a special power-up.



Break a Sweat
$ $ $ $ $
Hit the treadmill, stationary bike, or weights in the gyms to burn that gut and wear out your fingers with tiresome button jabbing. Muscle builds quickly, though, and your buff bod is worth the effort.

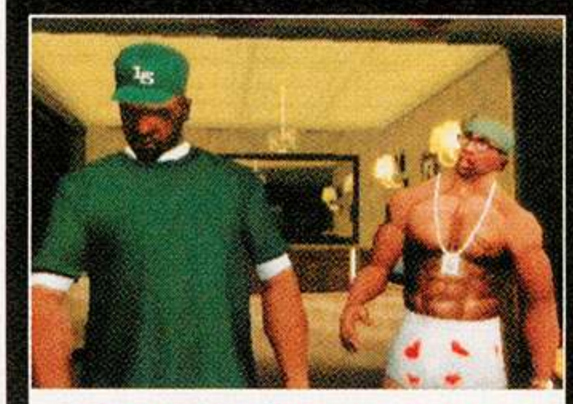


Bet on the Ponies
$ $ $ $ $
You'll find these parlors all over. Throw down some cash on the ludicrously named horses and then watch them race. A tip: Collecting all the horseshoes in Las Venturas improves your gambling luck.

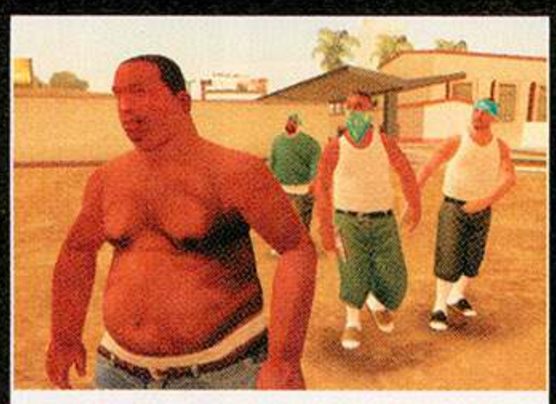


Shoot Some Pool
$ $ $ $ $
Make your wager, then whack balls on a surprisingly realistic table. If you lose, beat the winner over the head with the cue and reclaim your cash. It even supports two players!

Grand Experiments: What would happen if...



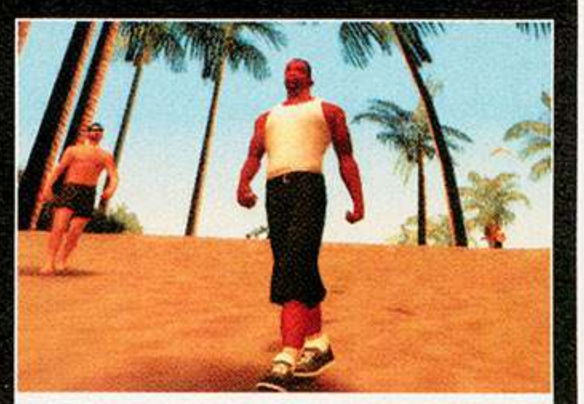
...you played through the whole game in your skivvies? Your hero's customizable wardrobe lets you walk tall in your tighty whities. It makes shootouts and cinemas all the more entertaining (no one bats an eye at your near nakedness), but late in the game you'll really need the respect that comes from dressing in family colors. Green boxers don't count.



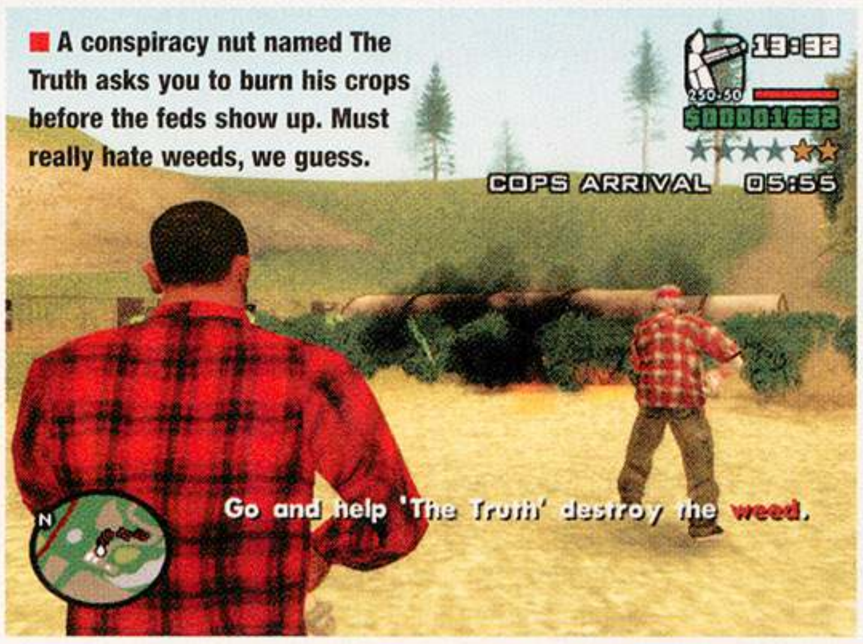
...you got really fat? (And we mean *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* fat.) Go ahead and overstuff your hero with family-size buckets of grub. It's fun to watch him puke and waddle when he runs. You'll want to hit the gym soon, though (shedding flab is easy)—a tubby hero can't sprint for long and gets little lovin', or that ever-important respect.



...you headed out to sea in a fixed direction? Take a boat or plane away from land in *Vice City* and eventually an invisible barrier will halt your pleasure cruise. Not so in *San Andreas*. Set sail—or just start swimming—to sea and you'll travel forever (although one later flying mission does have you leaving San Andreas airspace and landing in one very familiar locale).



...you moseyed from one end of the state of San Andreas to the other—on foot? Feeling a little Forrest Gump? It takes 21 minutes to jog from one side of the state to the other (14 minutes if you pedal a bike), and you'll certainly build up some stamina in the process. But if you ever do attempt this feat, turn off the game. You've officially run out of stuff to do.

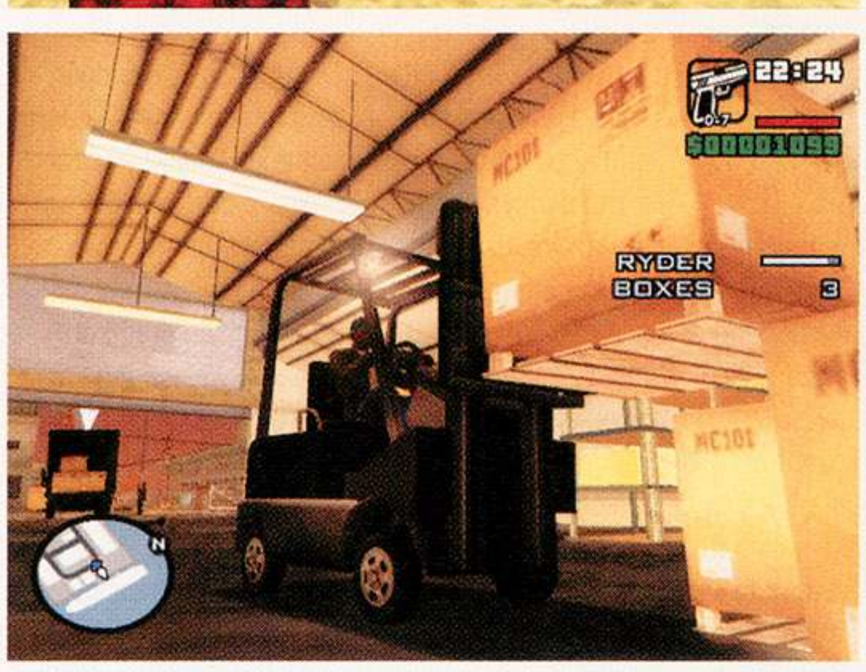


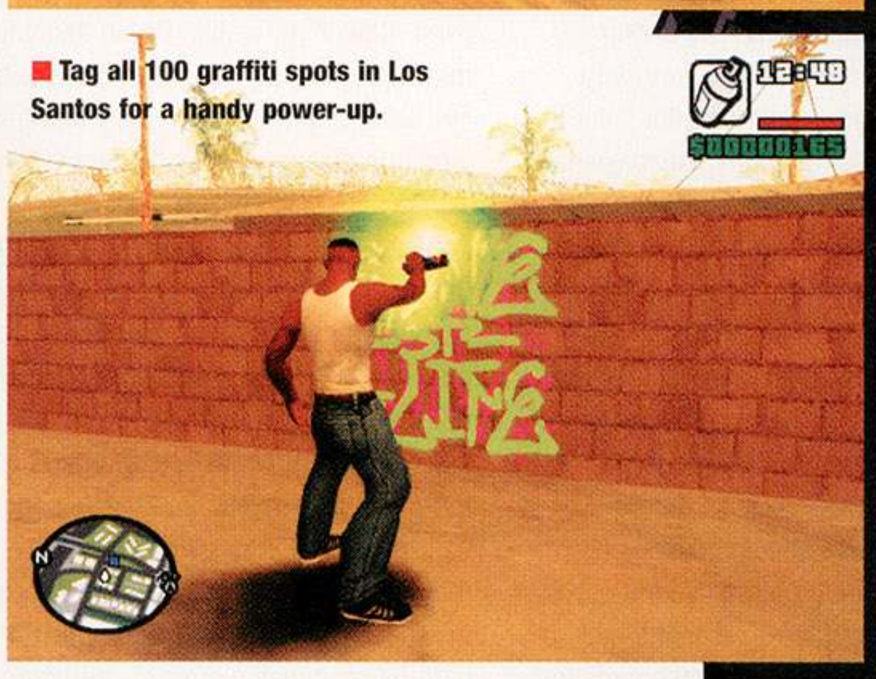
■ A conspiracy nut named The Truth asks you to burn his crops before the feds show up. Must really hate weeds, we guess.





■ This crooked cop is voiced by Samuel L. Jackson.





■ Tag all 100 graffiti spots in Los Santos for a handy power-up.

Have you tried...



■ ...driving a bike off Arco del Oste in the desert, then using your parachute?



■ ...base jumping off the tippy top of the Golden Gate–like Gant Bridge?



■ ...attaching the San Fierro crane magnet to a car, then taking it for a drive?



■ ...using the killer [spoiler deleted] to take back your 'hood from on high?

Good: Gigantic world, limitless play variety, "Freebird"
Bad: A little janky at times
Going out with a gang: *San Andreas* is the last *GTA* until PS3

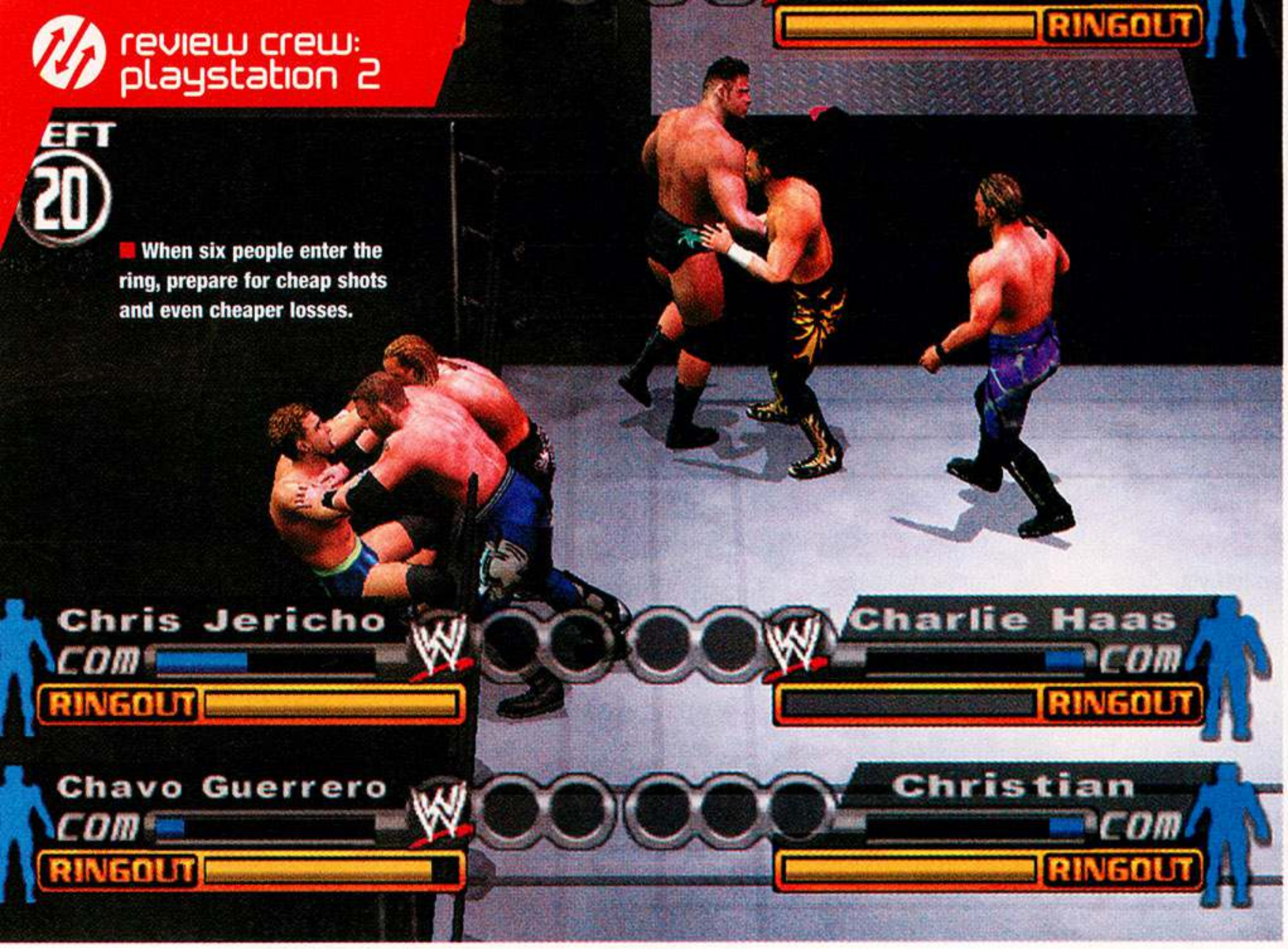


THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

CRISPIN	SHOE	JOHN
10	10	10

Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Rockstar North
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Mature

www.rockstar.com



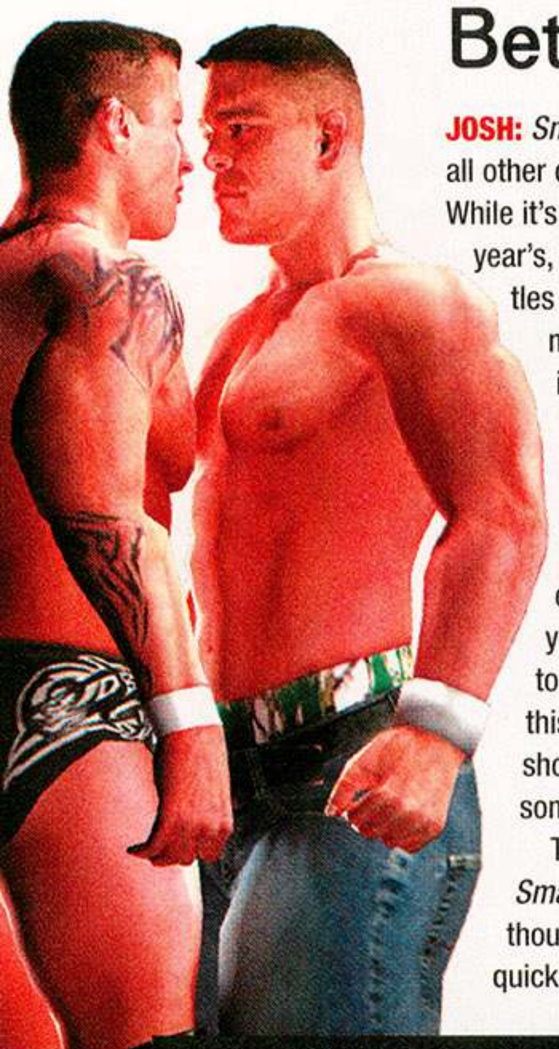




PlayStation 2 ONLINE

WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW

Better than Sunday Night Heat vs. Velocity



JOSH: *SmackDown!* returns to lay its namesake on all other challengers to the wrestling game belt. While it's fundamentally the same game as last year's, this iteration adds enough bells and whistles to keep WWE fans happy. The career mode's beefier than the Big Show, with improved story lines and wrestler voice acting, though the dialogue is occasionally worse than John Cena's rapping. The cut-scenes feature all the alliances, betrayals, and screw jobs people have come to expect from the WWE, though you're stuck repeatedly pressing a button to advance the scene. For what it's worth, this does accurately simulate idiotically shouting "What!" after every sentence—something Austin fans should enjoy.

The other big addition to this year's *SmackDown!* is nearly lag-free online play, though playing only standard singles matches quickly grows boring. Which brings me to my main problem with the game: Granted, the series has gone from Avatar to Mick Foley's sidekick quality during its lifetime, but it won't hit main event status until the core fighting mechanics are fixed. Still, if you're like Bryan and your love for man-grappling blinds you to the mash-happy fighting, poor targeting, and clunky combat, then you won't be disappointed with *SmackDown!*

BRYAN: These guys must be wearing their spandex a little too tight—*SmackDown! vs. Raw* outgrapples any previous WWE title without breaking a sweat. Sure, every voiceover performance isn't worthy of an Emmy, but hearing company prez Vince McMahon chastise a superstar in front of the millions (now pause for five seconds and raise your eyebrow) and millions of fans really makes it feel like you're part of a WWE telecast. And unlike my fellow reviewers, I find the in-ring action—with its responsive controls and stacked moves set—equal if not better than today's wrasslers. But I have a request for next year's edition: Please bulk up the online play; no voice chat and only two match types will have most changing the channel during this part of the show.

1UP.com—DAVE: It's amazing to see developer Yuke's advance by leaps and bounds in some areas and keep screwing up in others. *SmackDown!* has a frighteningly detailed season mode, and the create-a-wrestler feature is probably the most versatile in gaming history. But it's still a bizarrely balanced in-ring sim that's less consistent and predictable than GameCube's *Day of Reckoning*. Submission moves are underpowered, and the A.I. ranges from boneheaded to brutal. Adding spoken dialogue is great in theory, terrible in execution: The voice acting is *awful*, and lip-syncing is nonexistent—*Def Jam* makes this aspect of the season mode look like a joke. Otherwise, it's a fine example of "sports entertainment," but if good grappling comes first, this is still less than it could be.

Online Clothesline

Smackdown! is the first WWE title to make the jump on to the Internet. It succeeds in having mostly smooth, lag-free gameplay, though the slight delay may make timing the shoving contest minigame difficult. The extremely limited match options (you can only play a default singles or bra & panty match) mean players may quickly grow bored of online slobberknockers. The lack of voice chat is also lamentable, as talking smack is an essential part of any pro wrestling experience. It's great that online was included and what's there is done well, but next time we want more.

This may be hot, but the lag throwing off your timing sure isn't.

Undertaker and John Cena park at Inspiration Point. And then grapple.

Good: Online, superstar voice acting, gimmick matches galore
Bad: Sitting through 29 other people entering the Royal Rumble
Create-a-Wrestler: Make the Hulk...or Millard Fillmore

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOSH	BRYAN	DAVE
7.5	8.5	7.0

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Yuke's
Players: 1-2 (3-6 with MultiTap, 2 online)
ESRB: Teen

www.thq.com



■ You don't want to see evil Clank when he's angry. Or when he's not angry.



■ PlayStation 2

ONLINE

RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

GOLD



We're blown away

BRYAN: The Chinese calendar has it wrong—2004 ain't the year of the monkey, it's the year of the platformer (*Sly Cooper 2*, *Jak 3*, etc.). Might as well put Ratchet's mug on those restaurant place mats, 'cause *Up Your Arsenal* is clearly the year's best.

Generally, this one sticks to the game plan that made the first sequel, *Going Commando*, a smashing success: *Up Your Arsenal* features superb platforming stages and heavy-duty combat; our hero's equipped with bigger, badder weapons with even more upgrades, and metallic sidekick Clank's solo bits, while rare, are much more enjoyable.

Series vets will also give two wrenches up to the minor tweaks in *Up Your Arsenal*. For starters, developer Insomniac has tossed out those aggravating flying missions. The environments, like Captain's Qwark's lovely jungle retreat, look more original and diverse, plus the action rarely hits a speed bump, thanks to the new weapon select shortcut (just tap on the Triangle button to quickly switch between the last three weapons used).

But I do have one beef: Compared to the last game, this one feels a wee bit short. Then again, you could mimic Shoe and replay levels over and over and over again, collecting bolts to buy every firearm. Oh well, guess I'll use that extra time to get my frag on in the game's surprisingly robust online mode...and hopefully you will, too.

SHOE: Sony has its Mario—and his name is Ratchet. Oh, and Clank. This series continues to own with its perfect blend of guns, platforming, solid controls, and humor that adults *hope* their kids won't get. (You'd better close their ears when man meets ape in a funny joke late in the game.)

Single player offers fantastic stages at every turn and *tons* of replayability, thanks to a crapload of secrets to find and weapons to upgrade. Even though our deadline was banging on my door, it took me twice as long—more than 20 hours—as Bryan to finish the game because I kept replaying levels. And I'm not even counting the awesome multiplayer, which is more fun than most shooters out there....

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: If you were to lock a group of mad scientists in a room and force them to come up with a formula for a diabolically addictive platform game, chances are the result would play a lot like *Up Your Arsenal*. By doling out new weapons, upgrades, and gadgets, like futuristic candy-store clerks, Insomniac has created a game that rewards players with an almost perpetual feeling of accomplishment. It's quite a hook, but the oddball humor and madcap pacing are what keep you coming back.

In comparison to the core game itself, the online play is really just frosting; it's reasonably robust and a nice diversion, but it's not likely to supplant *SOCOM* in the hearts of the PS2's online demographic. That's not a complaint, though, because in regard to *Up Your Arsenal*, I truly can't think of a single one.

The Price Is Right

As in *Going Commando*, having a memory card with saves from previous *Ratchet* games earns you superhuge discounts on new weapons (which tend to be from those older titles). Hot tip: Put those extra bolts toward some stronger armor!



Sitting Ducks (and Sheep)

Up Your Arsenal introduces multiplayer action (online and off) to the *Ratchet & Clank* series. We're lookin' at the usual assortment of modes here, including deathmatch, team deathmatch, and capture the flag. But aside from using the morph gun to turn your buddies into helpless quackers, what really makes this a must-play is siege mode—two teams (up to four players on each) each try to destroy the other's base while using buggies, hoverships, and activating A.I.-controlled turrets to gain the upper hand.



■ Gimme some skins: Check out www.insomniacgames.com to learn how to unlock extra multiplayer skins.

Good: Strong mix of platforming and combat
Bad: Single-player game might be too short for some
Taste of Yesteryear: Captain Qwark's 2D levels



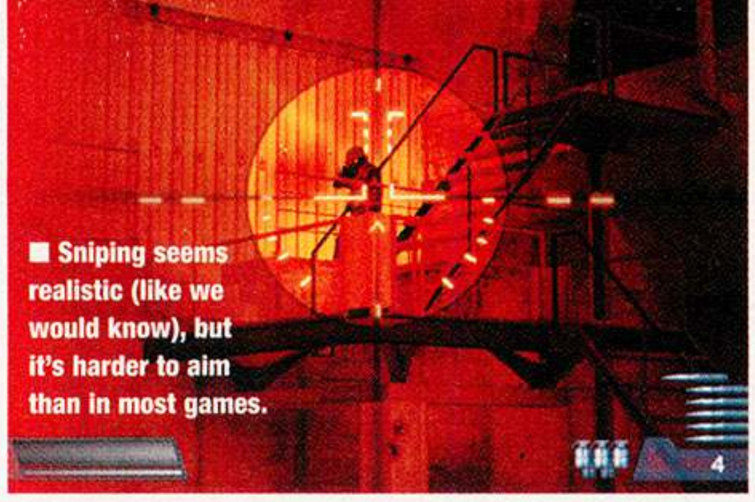
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	BRYAN	SHOE	JOE
	9.0	9.0	10

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Insomniac
Players: 1 (2-4 splitscreen w/MultiTap, 2-8 online)
ESRB: Teen

www.playstation.com



■ Don't shoot until you see the orange of their eyes.



■ Sniping seems realistic (like we would know), but it's harder to aim than in most games.



■ Multiplayer has ISA taking on helghast in several modes. You can play offline with computer-controlled bots, too. They're dumb, but hey, they're better than nothing.

■ PlayStation 2

KILLZONE

ONLINE

Now entering a low-speed zone

SHOE: *Killzone* first exploded onto the scene with an Internet movie trailer that showed promise of a first-person shooter that would blow away all others, including, possibly, Xbox's cash cow, *Halo*. Big guns, sci-fi-movie action, amazing graphics...the stage and hype were set. So let's get this out of the way now: *Killzone* is not a "*Halo* killer." A couple more months in the development Crock-Pot might've done it, but as it is now, the game only gives you a taste of what could've been.

The opening cinema sets the game up nicely. The helghast, a separatist race of highly developed sourpusses led by a half-Hitler, half–*Star Wars* Emperor visionary, decide to launch a surprise attack and invade the ISA, a federation of human colonies. It's epic and exciting, but the technology just ain't there for this one.

Killzone looks fantastic—it has vast war-torn environments, badass guns, a dark and somber mood that fits the vibe of death and destruction well—until it starts moving. The choppy, sluggish action spoils the sense of immersion the developers did such a great job of creating otherwise.

But for PS2 owners all *SOCOM*ed out, *Killzone* provides a kill-rific alternative. Well, not really kill-rific...maybe more kill-decent. The presentation (cut-scenes, music, menus) is top-notch, and when you look up into the gray skies to see enemy helghast rappelling down from a drop ship, you know you're in for an action-packed, cinematic experience. If only this game ran as smoothly as *SOCOM II* or *Metal Gear Solid 3*.... Well, there's always next time (predictably, the ending sets up a *Killzone 2*).

The online play is equally rough. Everything's just as choppy and sluggish here, but the more I played, the more it grew on me, and after about a week of learning the maps and weapons, I was looking forward to the next session. I can't say that about most online games these days....

MARK: Shoe is right—a *Halo* killer *Killzone* ain't, though it's easy to see why the comparison was made. Sony's shooter has the familiar sci-fi setting, low weapon-carry limit, one-button anytime grenade, severely limited number of enemies (the tougher ones are called "Elites," if you can believe it), and even the repeating level bits.

It also has some of the PS2's best graphics yet. The environments are huge, with large open courtyards, rolling hills, detailed buildings, and convincing plant life. Of course, *Killzone* pays for its good looks—the game never runs really smoothly, and at times it's bad enough to affect aiming, an annoyance furthered by the game's many imprecise weapons.

Luckily, you're usually too concerned with other

ISA vs. Helghast

In general, ISA characters are slightly more accurate with ISA weapons, and helghast shoot straighter with helghast guns (next page). And ISA arms are more accurate to begin with, while the helghast's equivalents have more ammo per clip (key, because the reload animations can take damn near forever—try reloading a shotgun for a test of patience). Here are a few weapons that you should pay attention to in multiplayer matches.



Pistol
Don't rule this li'l guy out just cause he's small. He's accurate at long ranges, kinda like *Halo 1*'s pistol....



Shotgun
The best short-range weapon, bar none. Secondary fire is a two-shell human body liquefier.



Templar Assault Rifle
Your default ISA gun. Comes with an empty grenade launcher. Find ammo for it, fast!



Chain Gun
Speed-fire insanity with 800-round clips (which equals fewer reloading animations). Plus rockets.



Grenade Launcher
For players with lousy aim. Secondary fire shoots proximity mines—great for setting traps.



Missile Launcher
Sit still and laser guide missiles to your target, but sitting ducks tend to, you know...die.

Good: Fantastic presentation gets you all gung ho for action
Bad: The action's rough and unpolished
Overly Animated: Cocking/reloading guns, throwing grenades...



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHOE	MARK	ANDREW
	7.5	8.0	7.0

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Guerrilla
Players: 1-2 (2-16 online, broadband only)
ESRB: Mature

www.playstation.com



■ In single player, when the fist icon pops up, hit the X button to automatically gun-butt the bad guy.



It's All in the Details



Killzone is funny about what it decides to be good at. For example, shoot a water cooler and you'll get the most realistic water-cooler-being-shot reaction ever seen in a videogame—the jug flies in the air and there are perfect boingy sound effects. Yet, shoot a lightbulb, floor lamp, plant, ashtray, piece of paper...*anything* besides a water cooler (or vending machine)—nothing happens. Guess the developers have a thing for water coolers, especially since the second level has one every 10 feet, in just about every room and hallway of an office building. Those are some thirsty folks working there.







things to notice: Enemies are smart enough (ducking behind cover, setting the occasional ambush) to keep you on your toes, and a few of the levels get super intense. Fellow soldiers fighting alongside you, enemy troop carriers moving in, grenades blowing up all around—at its best, *Killzone* surpasses even the *Medal of Honor* series at creating the feeling of a huge war raging all around you.

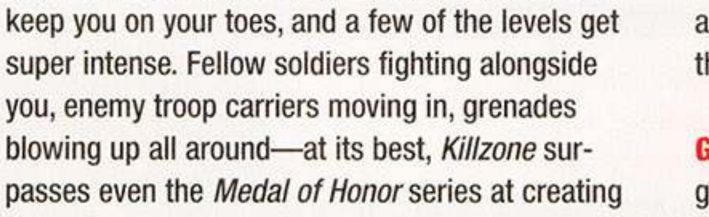
The four playable characters are another nice touch. They vary enough (despite a stealth element that never really takes off) to allow two different ways to play: slowly and methodically, or all-out guns a' blazin'. Plus, their different personalities, though at times cliché, kept me interested in *Killzone*'s story.

Multiplayer is surprisingly robust—plenty of good maps and modes, so-so bots (hey, better than nothing!), a high player limit, and some fun guns. The superslow grenade and reload animations are a mistake, as are the differences between the two teams (which gives one side the advantage on some maps), but it's still the best thing to happen to the PS2 online since *SOCOM II*.

GMR—ANDREW: Sorry to repeat what the other guys are saying, but *Killzone* is either A) two years ahead of its time, or B) on the wrong hardware. The PS2, bless its little heart, just cannot do consistent justice to the game's ambitious design. For certain other genres, choppy visuals, dense fog, and distracting graphical glitches are excusable, just as long as they don't affect gameplay. But for first-person shooters, where a fast response and accurate aim is of paramount concern, you need a game that runs smoothly at least 90 percent of the time. All it takes is one attempt to use the horrendous sniper rifle to see that *Killzone* can't deliver.

Technical difficulties aside, *Killzone*'s overall design is actually very solid: The visual motif is incredibly well conceived (think WWII if it happened 50 years from now), the story and characters are interesting, and even though it's totally linear, the single-player campaign puts you in some very cool scenarios and firefights. The only big problem is that the helghast troops are profoundly stupid, and it seems that to compensate they have unfairly accurate aim and can withstand ungodly amounts of direct fire. They can take over 200 rounds, including multiple headshots, before going down.

Killzone is good; it's still playable, and quite fun online...but thanks to unfortunate timing, it's not what it should have been. The inevitable *Killzone 2* on PS3 ought to be something special.

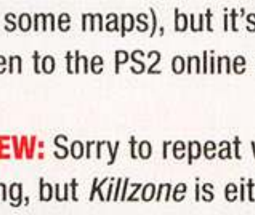


Machine Pistol
Three-round bursts, but go for the more accurate single shots with secondary fire.

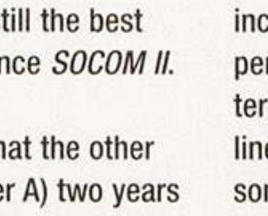
Assault Rifle
Awful accuracy, but the attached shotgun, while slooow to reload, can cause a world of hurt.



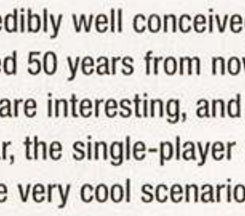
Light Machine Gun
Looks cool, but neither accurate nor versatile. But looking cool is important, too.



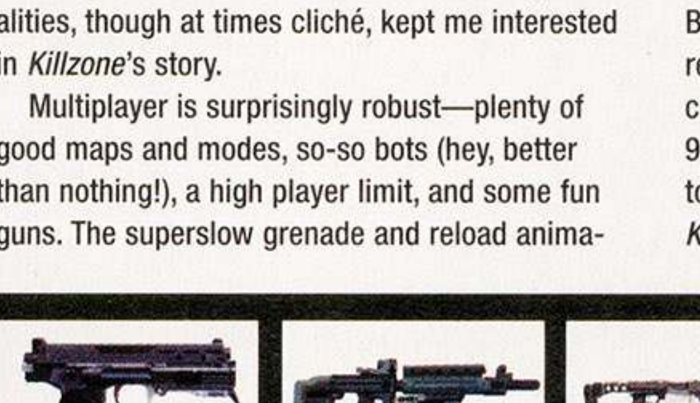
Battle Pistol
Don't accidentally pass this ugly duckling by. It doesn't just shoot bullets; it shoots bullets that go BOOM.

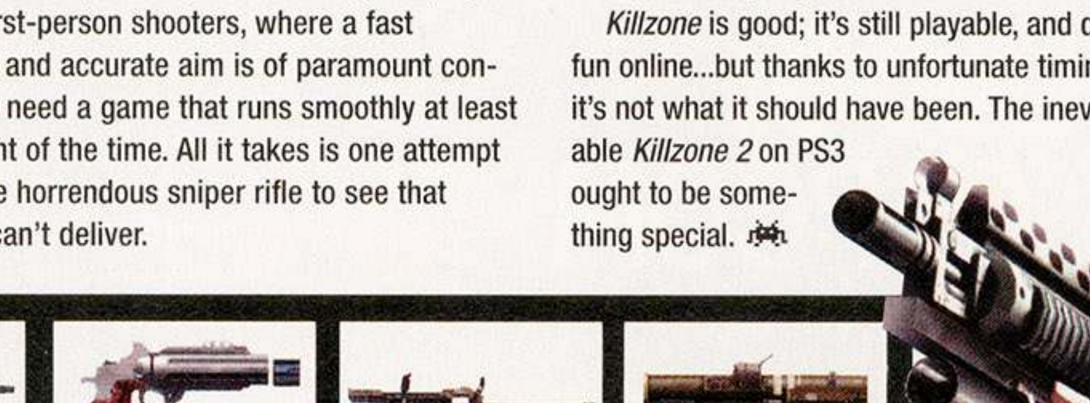


Squad Cannon
Another boom launcher. But it reloads fast, which means more boom for your buck.



Missile Launcher
Secondary fire shoots three missiles. Do you really want that many? Yes. Yes you do.









PlayStation 2

GROWLANSER: GENERATIONS

It sounds naughty, but it's not





Good: Fun strategy-ish battle system
Bad: Neither game quite stands out on its own
Money to Burn? The Deluxe pack adds a watch and other crap



KEVIN: After more than two years of silence, storied developer Working Designs has come through with a role-playing game package for the pudgiest...sorry, *manliest* of the hardcore. Smart move, because the two games here—the second and third incarnation of a cult-hit strategy-RPG series—falter by themselves but work superbly as a $50 combo deal.

Both *Growlansers* are RPGs with an eye toward deep character development and fast-paced battles. Each has some glaring flaws: *Growlanser 2* is short and there's not much to it besides the fighting, and its sequel features huge, boring, randomly generated dungeons that all look alike. But you gotta give it up for the cheap price (assuming you aren't buying the silly Deluxe Pack) and the battle system. Fighting is a fair bit more involved than in, say, *Disgaea*, but it's still a snap to master, offering intricate tactical maneuvers without a nightmarish interface. In the end, these battles literally save the collection.

JUSTIN: Though the two games look even older than they are, and they're very nearly relics from a previous generation, there's something to be said for Growlansing; most of which relates directly to appealing battles that feature interesting strategic scenarios and action that's clearly visible and exciting—though sorely lacking in flair. The key is that everyone on the field moves at once, establishing a perceptible flow and bucking genre tradition by not exhibiting stubby-limbed battle-children walking in place and patiently waiting their turns to clock each other.

GMR—CHRISTIAN: Sure, *Generations* looks archaic, but if you've played *Disgaea*, you won't care. The character art is so good, I forgot about the graphics. More importantly, the gameplay is gripping. *Growlanser 2* dumps the boring stuff (troop setup and movement) and keeps the great stuff (varied objectives, rich narrative).

Growlanser 3 hews closer to the RPG norm, but doesn't sacrifice *2*'s tuned battle system, the series' most refreshing asset. It's like *Grandia* meets *Shining Force*—if you know what I mean by that, you'll love these unexpectedly inventive games.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	KEVIN	JUSTIN	CHRISTIAN
	7.0	7.0	8.0

Publisher: Working Designs
Developer: Atlus/Career Soft
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.workingdesigns.com





Xbox

ONLINE

SVC CHAOS: SNK VS. CAPCOM

Old school isn't getting any younger



Good: Classic 2D feel with next-gen online play
Bad: Nothing we haven't seen before
Coolest Secret Character: *Mega Man X*'s Zero



JOSH: Silly SNK and Capcom characters. Won't you ever learn that fighting isn't the answer? Apparently not, as each fighting series has been churning out sequels for years now with little sign of stopping. *SVC Chaos* is an SNK-style brawler, but those familiar with *Street Fighter* shouldn't have much of a problem picking it up. The battle system is pretty basic, and other than the "exceed" moves that allow a one-time special attack when your health is low, you're not going to find much new here.

What sets *Chaos* apart from past SNK-developed fighters is that it's Xbox Live compatible, so you can throw down with your buddies without ever leaving the comfort of your Mai fan-art–decorated basement. Sadly, online play ranged from silky smooth to nearly unplayable. *Chaos* is a fundamentally fun, if not outstanding, 2D fighter, though with fewer characters and a simpler fighting system than its Capcom-produced brother, *Capcom vs. SNK 2*. Only SNK faithful need check it out.

XBN—CHE: *Chaos* is a sharp reminder of why most 2D fighting games eventually went the way of cassette tapes and acid-washed jeans. *Chaos* brings me back to the mid-to-late '90s, when there were so many mediocre *Street Fighter* clones out there that my care factor for the genre was at zero. Although you'll find a handful of beloved characters returning to the fray, there's little reason to be excited; they look worse for the wear, their moves have been dumbed down, and they lack proper priorities for their attacks. A sometimes laggy online mode makes this one to look for in the bargain-bin.

1UP.com—DAVE: This game might have flown in, say, 1993, against competition like *Power Instinct* and the original *Fatal Fury*, but when online *Guilty Gear* costs all of 20 bucks, forget it. *Chaos* suffers from imbalanced fighters, hit-detection issues, and other basic gameplay screwups, while some character art looks a solid decade behind the curve. I didn't encounter the Xbox Live lag problems Josh and Che saw, but the clumsy interface makes lengthy sessions a drag. SNK should bow its collective head and beg for fan forgiveness.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JOSH	CHE	DAVE
	6.0	6.0	3.0

Publisher: SNK
Developer: SNK Playmore
Players: 1-2 (2 online)
ESRB: Teen

www.snkneogeousaconsumer.com

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PLAYERS HUT

GET ONLINE &
GET INTO THE GAME



The narrow streets and alleys of Old Mombasa make for some intense close-quarters fighting near the start of *Halo 2*.





Xbox

ONLINE

PLATINUM

HALO 2

Finally, a Halo killer

GAME OF THE MONTH (TIE)

SINGLE PLAYER: For all the hoopla over online play (don't get us wrong—turn the page, and you'll see it's well deserved), single player is what made us fall in love with the first *Halo*. How does the sequel's solo campaign stack up?

MARK: Combat evolved indeed. Building on the strengths of the first game and eliminating, or at least minimizing, its weaknesses, *Halo 2* overcomes its greatest challenge by topping the only first-person shooter that really comes close to challenging it: the original *Halo*.

For example, remember the thrill the first time you went on a rampage behind the wheel (and 10-foot cannon) of the scorpion tank? *Halo 2* wisely expands on vehicular combat, peppering it throughout several levels, with you free to ride shotgun now that your fellow marines can drive (usually pretty well, even). The chases and battles that break out—sometimes with half a dozen or more friendly and enemy vehicles flying, dodging, shelling, and exploding all around—are truly epic.

Not that it's all balls-to-the-wall action. *Halo 2* does a great job of maintaining balance in several aspects: between on-foot and in-vehicle bits, indoor and outdoor levels, fighting by yourself and with friendly troops alongside. Speaking of A.I., besides the fact that they can push or jump over objects (just try the ol' hide-behind-the-crate trick now), enemy behavior hasn't changed much since the first game, but a number of welcome tweaks (see sidebar) to the original impressive intelligence still makes for better opponents than any other shooter.

Visually, *Halo 2* has plenty of special moments—gigantic, open environments and massive structures that will take your breath away with their sheer scale—and only a few sections of mediocre graphics and a couple of minor glitches. The problem of repeating environments from the first game has been all but eliminated; outside of a few moments in the second half, you never get that "What, this again?" feeling here.

Unfortunately, one of *Halo 2*'s biggest strengths is what I'm allowed to talk about the least: the plot. (One awesome surprise in particular will change the way you think about the entire series.) Speaking generally, a greater reliance on cut-scenes and excellent voice work add extra dimensions to the *Halo* mythos even as they answer long-standing questions, with a few jokes and references that only the hardcore fans will catch.

SHOE: While these other guys decided to go the sane (or wimpy?) route and beat the game on Normal difficulty (which some say is actually too

The Alien Starting Lineup:



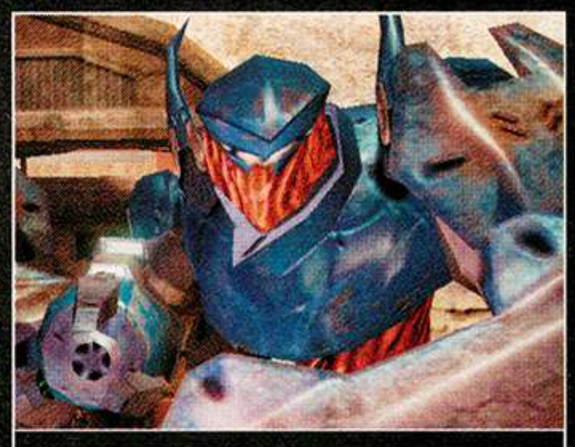
GRUNT: The weakest bad guy returns virtually unchanged. These purple midgets aren't much to worry about even on Legendary difficulty; take out the Elite leading them, and they'll often run away on their own.



ELITE: Besides the hunters and the later brutes, elites are your biggest threat—kill them first. Still the smartest enemy in the game, these energy-shielded soldiers can now jump on or over obstacles and dual-wield weapons, just like you.



JACKAL: The standard version of these punk-rock chicken soldiers makes a bit better use of its shield, but the ones to watch out for are the new snipers. On Legendary, they'll kill you with a single head shot from across the map.



HUNTER: Now that they can push aside objects you're hiding behind (and it takes much more than a single bullet to the back to take them down), hunters demand your immediate attention—especially when they come in pairs.



■ A.I. teammates can now pilot vehicles, leaving the Chief free to man the chain gun.

The Cutting Room Floor

In preparation for the *Halo 2* edition of *Trivial Pursuit*, here are the features that didn't make it into the final version of the game:

Dash: Bungie planned on letting you speed up the notoriously slow walking speed with a short run, during which you couldn't fire (you'd lower your gun).

Melee combos: Plan was you'd be able to link button presses for more powerful attacks, like in a fighting game. A couple of guns have different animations for consecutive melee attacks, but that's all.

Lean: The D-pad was going to allow you to peek around corners and scout out rooms before entering.

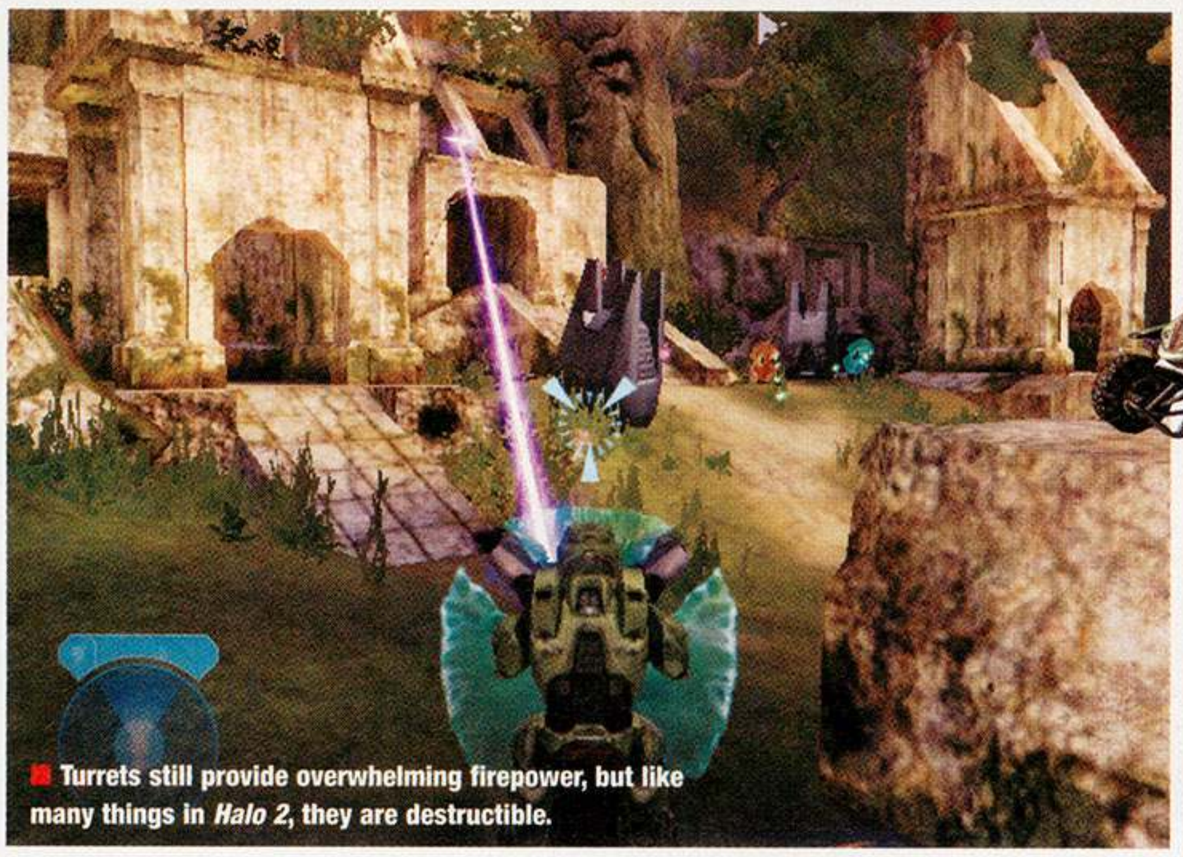
ATV: These single-man vehicles were all modeled and textured but didn't make it anywhere in the final game. Maybe as a downloadable extra down the road?



Different Warthogs: Ditto for these variations on the standard Warthog jeep; guess they weren't needed in any of the missions that ended up making the cut. (Wonder what happened to the snow level....)

Timed grenades: Bungie toyed with, but apparently decided against, the idea of grenades you could set and then trigger remotely whenever you pleased.

Online co-op: Though it was never promised, hopes were high that two players could tag-team through the main story mode over Xbox Live, but it's not in the final version. Hmmm.



■ Turrets still provide overwhelming firepower, but like many things in *Halo 2*, they are destructible.





easy), I fried my brain and eyesight for 17 and a half hours to play it through on the next setting up: Heroic. My ass is black and blue from the beating—and I'll be more than happy to do it all over again.

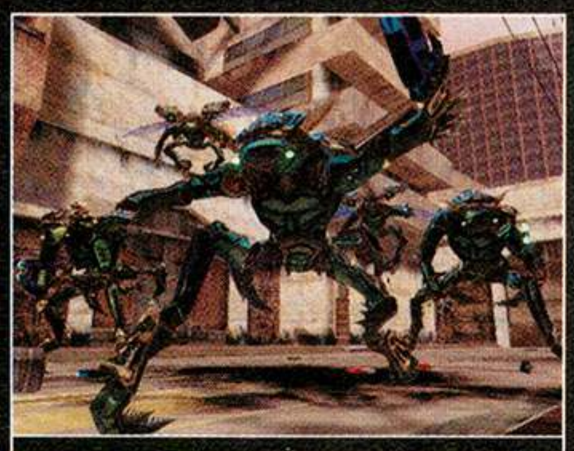
With single-player *Halo 2*, I feel like I'm playing a massively multiplayer game, except it's me against the universe. The enemies are smart and wicked like that. For example, they'll hide behind cover and stay hidden if they know you're watching them through a sniper's scope (so you can't always just wait for them to pop back out predictably, like in other shooters).

But it's the jaw-dropping "Oh my God" moments in *Halo 2*—which I absolutely don't want to spoil for you here—that make it so killer. From the huge gameplay twist early on, to taking down a giant walking tank, to way late in the game when you team up with certain...teammates, all the way to an end that'll leave you with the same breathless feeling you had when you first watched *The Empire Strikes Back*...moments like these turn a fun game into a monumental experience. Even if the second half tends to drag on a bit.

XBN—CHE: Mark totally stole my intro, but I don't care. If the subtitle of the original *Halo* is "combat evolved," then the moniker for this anticipated sequel could very well be "combat beefed up." On a gameplay level, *Halo 2* advances the evolution, pursuing the series' unique emphasis on tactical firefights and dynamic battlefields. For the most part, *Halo 2*'s campaign mode is brilliant. There's a chunk right in the middle of the game where you feel a bit of level-design déjà vu and you're gripped with certain despair. But to its credit, the game never veers hard into repetitive territory. Single player is now better paced, split nicely between on-foot and vehicular sections, where truly satisfying moments involving new Covenant technology awaits.

In terms of story, *Halo 2* brings more questions than answers to its arc. Ironically, it's Bungie's decision to "humanize" the Covenant—imbuing them with speech and personality—that gives *Halo*'s by-the-numbers space opera a touch of real emotion and depth.

You could argue that given all the hype, *Halo 2* is disappointingly more of the same; but with more weapons, vehicles, enemies, and a much better story line, not to mention the series' infamous "Legendary crawl"—where you literally spend up to 30 hours trying to beat the game on its hardest difficulty—I fail to see how that can be a bad thing. In fact, *Halo 2* is all good. Very, very good. ➤



DRONE: You don't fight these new insectoid aliens very often, which is too bad. Their ability to fly, tendency to hide in out-of-the-way spots, and erratic movement make for a refreshingly different kind of fight.



BRUTE: Think of these apelike lugs as Elites minus the shields and plus a lot more health. Two things to watch for: their explosive "brute shot" gun, which can do massive damage, and their rampaging charge attack.



■ Two-player splitscreen co-op is back, and it is glorious.





■ *Halo 2*'s interface gets thumbs up from us. Icons tell you to reload, timers show how the teams are doing against each other....

MULTIPLAYER: Four-player splitscreen? Check. Two-player co-op? Check. Online play for 16 players. Hell yeah, check that. So how's *Halo 2* when more than one player is involved?

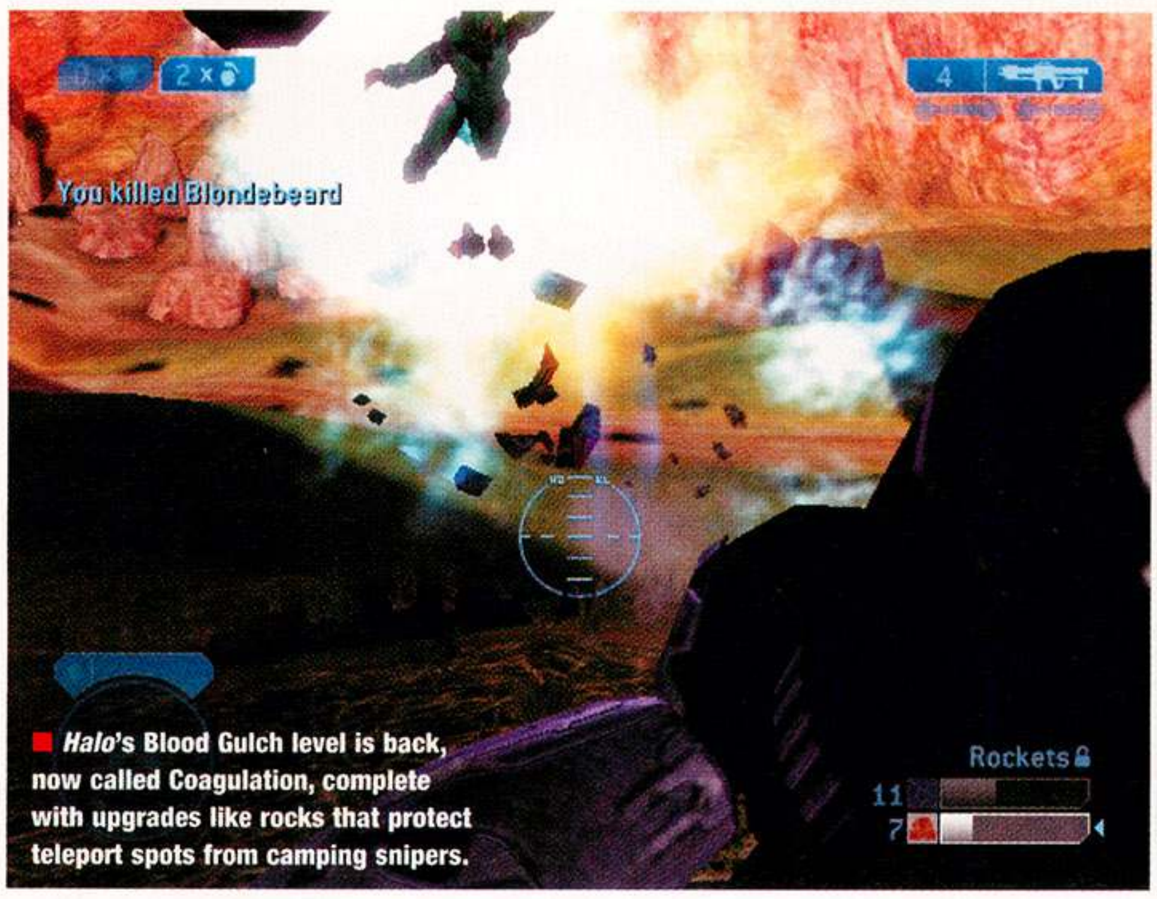
SHOE: I don't understand why other console shooters today can't live up to the standards set by the first *Halo* back in 2001. Is it a money thing? Time? Creative differences? Whatever the case, these other developers' heads will explode when they see how far up into the stratosphere *Halo 2* has now raised the bar.

No doubt, a lot of *Halo 2*'s multiplayer is just *Halo*'s with a fresh coat of fine-silver polish, like the user-friendlier customization options that allow you to make quick changes (score limits, radar on/off, etc.) without having to create a new game type for each scenario. But the biggest addition allows more people to battle together than ever before: online play. Now those of you with Xbox Live can forget about lugging around all that hardware for local-networked games. It's all so...wonderful. Like, I'm-gonna-spend-the-next-year-of-my-life-online-with-*Halo-2* kind of wonderful.

Because I'm a pro reviewer, I looked and looked for things to complain about in the multiplayer department, and here's what I found: 1) There's no online or system-link cooperative mode. If you want to play the story mode with a fellow Master Chief, you're gonna have to do it on half a television, which spoils much of the single-player game's grandeur. 2) You can only join one clan at a time. What if you want to play with one group of serious players for rankings and another group of not-so-good players for fun? Which I do. But I can't. 3) You can't turn off specific weapons, like the energy sword, which some players may consider too powerful. You can only switch general sets. 4) More maps would've been nice, but expect some later in various Xbox Live updates. 5) Bah, all this is really nitpicky, so let's move on.

You easily have enough here to keep you playing forever; you can customize practically everything, from what turrets are used in the levels to whether players can dual-wield weapons. And if other developers don't step it up, you might just be playing this one forever...or until *Halo 3* comes out, whichever comes first.

MARK: I'm not worried about finding the time to play *Halo 2* online; I'm worried about finding the time to do anything else. Seriously. Not since *Phantasy Star Online* have I been literally afraid of



■ *Halo*'s Blood Gulch level is back, now called Coagulation, complete with upgrades like rocks that protect teleport spots from camping snipers.



■ Icons mean less reading, which should please parents and teachers everywhere. The crossed-out bullet here means no ammo.



Advised trash talk for needler kills: "Stick around." You're welcome.





That Color is so...*You*

Throw a pink and yellow custom job on your multiplayer character model—see if we care. But what emblem you choose does matter: These symbols are always visible onscreen to teammates, even if the character isn't. At first, you probably won't like them because they clutter up the screen, especially if you have seven teammates running around. But you'll soon grow very used to them, since you'll know where everyone's at, who's running alongside you, and who's in a scuffle at the moment (which causes the icons to flash—useful for sniffing out invisible opponents fighting your friends).

So don't make all team members wear the exact same emblem, because it won't help you so much in the multiplayer matches.



what a game is going to do to my social life.

I mean, just *Halo*'s multiplayer on *Halo 2*'s huge assortment of awesome maps (including a good mix of sizes and some old favorites) would have been bad enough. But oh no, Bungie had to go and add all these brilliant touches. Take the way *Halo 2* uses player icons to present a ton of info about each teammate (who is where, are they fighting or dead, etc.) with why-didn't-anyone-think-of-this-before efficiency. Or how it rebalanced all the older weapons and added great new ones, especially the energy sword, which is so ridiculously fun to wield that people literally fight over it. Or all the extensive clan options. Or the intimidating amount of online stats you can track. Or the downloadable extras (including at least one huge surprise) on the horizon. Or the—damnit, you get the idea....

The best-looking and best-playing console shooter ever comes with the most impressive list of modes, options, and extras...ever? How am I supposed to find the motivation to work, much less do optional stuff like eat and sleep, when there are online matches of this available 24/7?

XBN—CHE: It never ceases to amaze me that the original *Halo*'s multiplayer wasn't Bungie's main focus when it created its system-link legacy. And it blows me away once again that *Halo 2*'s incredibly robust Xbox Live multiplayer experience was created by a small fraction of Bungie's overall workforce.

Although we weren't able to try out *Halo 2*'s Xbox Live ranking and clan features at review time, we all understood its far-reaching communal implications. The game's main online hook is that, in any random game, you're always playing with someone of the same skill level as yourself. Plus, the fact that Bungie calls the shots in terms of stat tracking and matchmaking means a level and competitive playing field for all. I was uncomfortable at first with Bungie's heavy-handed involvement in my online experience—but it's a small price to pay for an untainted promised land.

In deathmatch, the addition of dual-wielding weapons not only brings additional strategy to the proceedings, but also makes you realize how important the balance of every weapon in the game is (try combining the magnum pistol with the submachine gun to see what I mean). With the addition of downloadable content to periodically freshen *Halo 2*'s online experience, it's safe to say this game is the pinnacle of Xbox Live for the foreseeable future. ➤







Good: Story, controls, and multiplayer we'll be hooked on for months
Bad: A couple single-player levels drag on a bit
Worth It: Five bucks more for the Limited Edition box



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHOE	MARK	CHE
10	10	10

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Bungie
Players: 1-4 (2-16 online and system link)
ESRB: Mature

www.halo2.com

MO' MODES

Forget four-player splitscreen nonsense—you haven't truly experienced *Halo* (*1* or *2*) until you've played it with 15 other Master Chiefs. Find those friends (and let them know they can play as Covenant aliens now), and try these multiplayer modes and their included variants.

Slayer

Simple kill-the-other-guy affairs.

Best variants: Of course, you'll be playing plenty of **Team Slayer** with your buddies, but the dynamics are all funky now that you can form up to eight teams of two. Or four teams of four. Or three on two on two on nine. Or...well, you get the idea. Also try out **Swords**, 'cause nothing makes you feel more like a man than carrying a big-ass energy sword to an online battle. Except for dating a girl, that is.

Territories

Sorta like king of the hill, except you take over territories to turn them to your color—the more you take over, the faster your time goes.

Best variant: Mama always said three plots are better than one, so try **3 Plots** with two teams. It's frantic because everyone wants the third plot for an edge in the timer department. And if one team can hold on to all three, even for a little while, it'll make the other team freak out as their clock stops while the winning team's clock goes three times faster toward victory. This is one of the best new modes for *Halo 2*, provided you have at least six players.

Juggernaut

One guy is more powerful than the others. Take him out to become the new juggernaut, who's the only one that can score points.

Best variant: **Ninjanaut**—the juggernaut is invisible, and all other players must work together to hunt him down. Play it on a small map like Lockout with lots of people—the title of juggernaut will constantly be changing; hilarity will ensue. Watch out for **Dreadnaut** mode, though. The juggernaut is a triple-overshielded mutha, and if he gets a hold of an energy sword, he can easily go on a long run to win the game without much competition. We didn't like that one so much.

Oddball

Smear the [guy with the oddball].

Best variants: When you have the oddball, you don't have a weapon. What happens when you have the oddball and everyone else has energy swords in **Swordball**? You crap your pants, that's what. **Low Ball**'s another fun one where everyone on the team must hold the ball for at least 30 seconds for the team to win.



Capture the Flag

If you don't know what capture the flag means, then you have no business playing games.

Best variant: **1 Flag CTF**, because **Multi Flag CTF** can take too long sometimes, as teams trade flags back and forth. With one flag, the teams alternate playing offense and defense, which is much more intense. Try it on the Zanzibar map, because the flag is appropriately holed up in a giant fortress.



King of the Hill

Control the "hill" the longest to win.

Best variant: Try **Crazy King** (moving hill) on the map Colossus, where a deep valley sees players flying in from all over the stage trying to take the center spot. It looks like a bunch of Batmans descending on a common prey.



Assault

Carry a bomb into the enemy's base, then detonate it, natch.

Best variant: They're all pretty much the same, but we like **Neutral Bomb**, where everyone's racing to get the one bomb in the middle. Sorta like dodgeball with one ball. Except that ball's da bomb, literally.





Xbox

OUTRUN 2

ONLINE

At this rate, OutRun 3 is due in 2022





Different top speeds aside, cars handle the same way: weird and floaty.

Good: Sliding sideways between two trucks at 168 mph
Bad: Getting slapped by the hussy riding shotgun when you lose
FYI Fanboys: Unlockable *Daytona*- and *Super GT*–inspired tracks



DEMIAN: Now that I know what arcade-classic *OutRun* would look like if it were released today...I can go play something else. This port of the *OutRun 2* arcade game adds some new modes, but the actual driving part hasn't evolved a whole lot since the original came out in 1986. Linking one impossibly huge slide after another can be intense and fun, but the weird, floaty physics would probably make more sense in a game about racing ATVs on the moon. Tap the brake (or downshift) to kick the tail out and you'll magically slide around the tightest turns at 150-plus mph.

The single and multiplayer challenge mode is the biggest new addition; its 101 stages recycle a series of sometimes off-beat objectives, many of which involve collecting hearts, stealing hearts, or photographing giant hearts middrift. It'll take quite a while to complete—and not because there's so much stuff to do, but because you'll have to try the tougher stages over and over. *OutRun* also supports online multiplayer slidin', but its basic gameplay flaws make it a racer only a Sega fanboy (cough—John R.!) could love.

SHOE: Old tracks. Old songs. Old gameplay. Sounds kinda...old, doesn't it? Even if they are all remixed and updated. Well, those are the key selling points of *OutRun 2*, so unless you have some kind of weird obsession with the original game, you may want to pass.

The few minigames in challenge mode offer some decent alternatives to straight-out racing—impress the gal in the passenger seat, take photos, even do some high-speed math. There's plenty to unlock here, too, but the ho-humness of it all won't thrill you, even if you're burnt out on *Burnout 3*.

JOHN R: It's hard not to draw comparisons to *Burnout 3* with *OutRun 2*, but I think there's room in every Xbox owner's library for both games. *OutRun 2* is the first racer to really capture that old-school "Sega arcade" feel since *Sega Rally 2* back in 1995, and despite its simplistic controls and relative lack of depth compared to *Burnout 3*, it's amazingly fun to play. The visuals are stunning and the racing is fast and intense—just how I like it. Now if only they'd bring *Daytona USA* to Xbox Live....

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

DEMIAN	SHOE	JOHN R.
6.5	6.0	8.0

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Sega/AM2
Players: 1-4 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.xbox.com





GameCube

BATEN KAITOS

Lay 'em on the table



Good: The kooky but addictive card system
Bad: Bad pacing, worse voice acting
From the Makers of: *Xenosaga*, believe it or not



KEVIN: Now *this* is a different experience. Although *Baten Kaitos*' plot is middle-of-the-road fantasy claptrap (it's practically comatose until over halfway in, when a plot twist finally accelerates things), the rest of the game is fresh and original, thanks to one of the most interesting battle systems in console RPG-dom.

Baten is based around cards called Magnus, which contain offensive moves, defensive parries, and recovery items. The idea is to hit monsters with your attack Magnus, then nullify their blows with your defense Magnus—but you've also got to worry about elemental attributes, special card combos, and even the luck of the draw. This makes enemy encounters drag on a bit, but the sheer novelty of performing all your moves with cards makes even the piddliest battle exciting.

This ain't an RPG for everyone—although the audiovisuals are breathtaking, the plodding pace will turn off gamers who dug *Tales of Symphonia* a little while back. If you're in no hurry, though, you won't regret tackling what could be the deepest game in the Cube library.

1UP.com—DAVE: Whether you'll like *Baten Kaitos* boils down to a few questions—do you want to play an RPG, look at an RPG, explore an RPG, listen to an RPG, or read an RPG? *Kaitos* is fun to play (with a fast card battle system), gorgeous to look at (thanks to backgrounds from *Chrono Cross*' artists), engaging to explore (side quests abound), sometimes dull to listen to (especially in combat), and boring to read, held down by a clichéd plot and one-note characters. If graphics and gameplay are more important to you than story, by all means dive in.

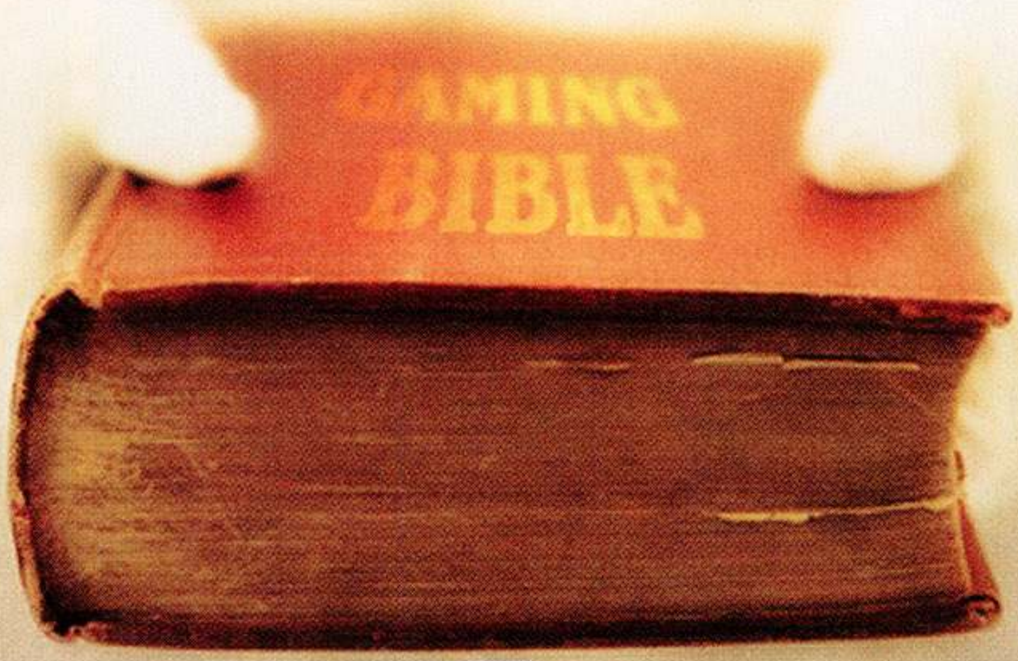
GMR—CHRISTIAN: Hey, Namco? If you want to make a great sequel to this game, listen up. First off, fire the writers. *Baten Kaitos* strings together the crustiest, most tired RPG clichés around. Its slow, boring mess of a story has characters that come off flatter than tortillas. Next, take that card-based battle system and run with it—what's here is great fun, but it's oversimplified. Anyone half paying attention can easily wreck house. Keep the art and music guys, though. They're talented. How 'bout it?

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

KEVIN	DAVE	CHRISTIAN
8.0	7.5	6.5

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Monolith
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

batenkaitos.namco.com



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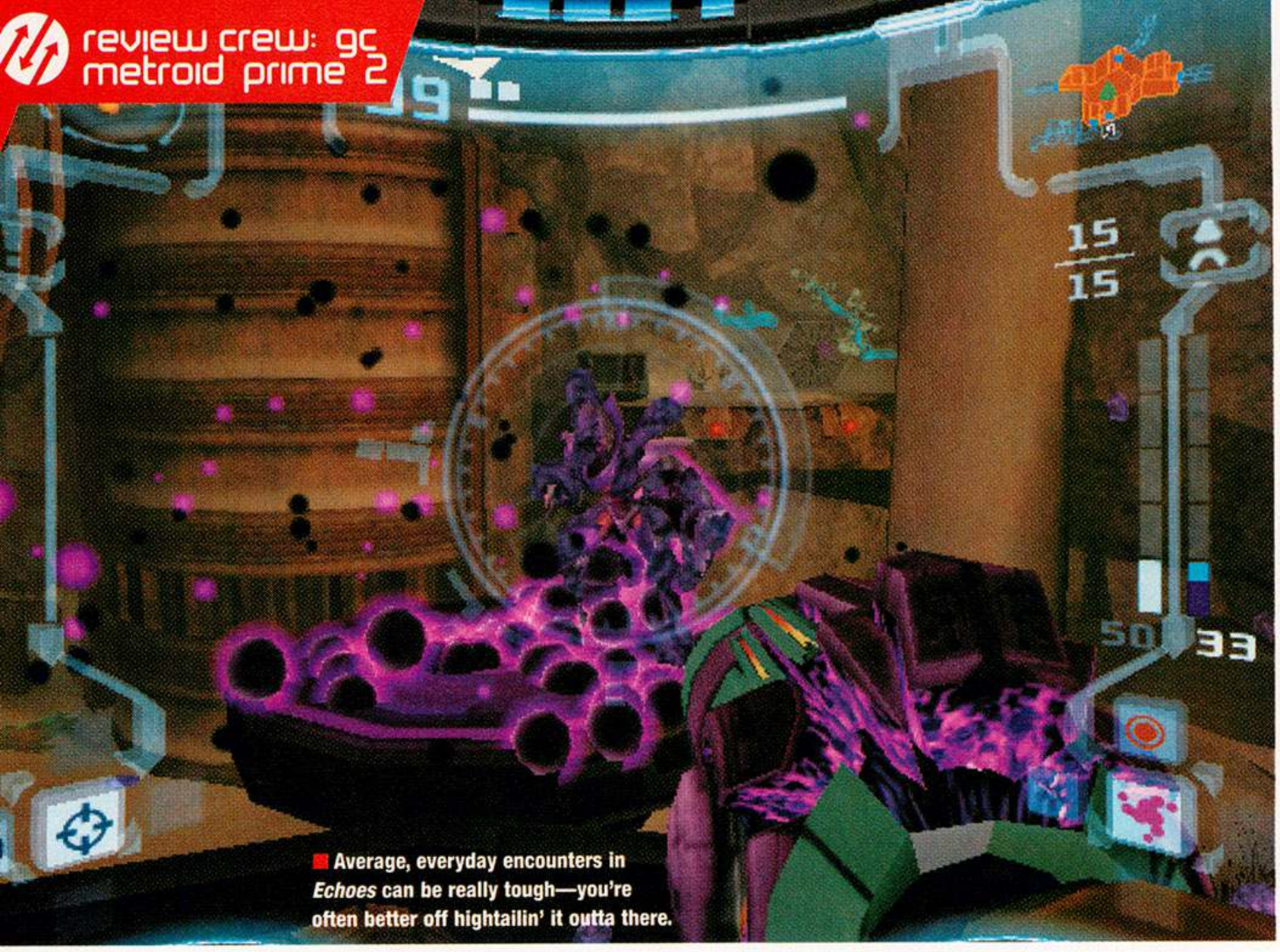
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Average, everyday encounters in *Echoes* can be really tough—you're often better off hightailin' it outta there.





GOLD

GameCube

METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES

If only you knew the power of the dark side

SHANE: *Metroid Prime*, released in 2002, shocked us all with its brazen disregard for genre rules and confines—it looked like a handsome first-person shooter, played like a secret-filled, meandering adventure game, and, against dizzying odds...still felt like old-fashioned *Metroid* despite the dramatic shift from 2D to 3D. It was a stunning rebirth for the long-dormant franchise, and one that begged for a sequel.

But rather than trying to one-up its lauded predecessor with just a bigger, flashier *Prime*, developer Retro delivers instead the slightly low-key *Echoes*, a left-field follow-up packed with surprises. Reminiscent of how *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (N64) provided a weirdly different reworking of the *Ocarina of Time* framework, *Echoes* twists several elements from its forerunner. For starters, it's a considerably tougher game. Normal enemies present a major (and sometimes deadly) challenge, and those handy hints on where to go next when you get lost appear less frequently. In fact, it's just a smidge away from being too hard—newbies can expect a full-on, metroid-clamped-on-your-balls evisceration—but vets will undoubtedly enjoy the rich, meaty challenge. This isn't a game you'll master in a weekend.

Another huge shift manifests itself in the overall level design: *Echoes*' world of Aether exists on two planes, light and dark. You're constantly switching between the two via portals, hopping back and forth to solve puzzles and locate items. While hardly original, the concept plays out effectively. Navigating these mirror realms requires tremendous thought, planning, and experimentation, and solving the game's trickier riddles provides plenty of satisfaction.

Series regulars will also notice how different heroine Samus' arsenal is in *Echoes*. Sure, you've still got your charge beam, morph ball, missiles, and bombs, but rad series standbys like the ice and wave beams are noticeably AWOL. In their place, Samus appropriates wacky Luminoth tech from planet Aether, getting dark and light weaponry to better smite the beasts in each dimension. These new guns, along with the new visors (see sidebar), go a long way toward making the gameplay feel different than *Metroid Prime*'s.

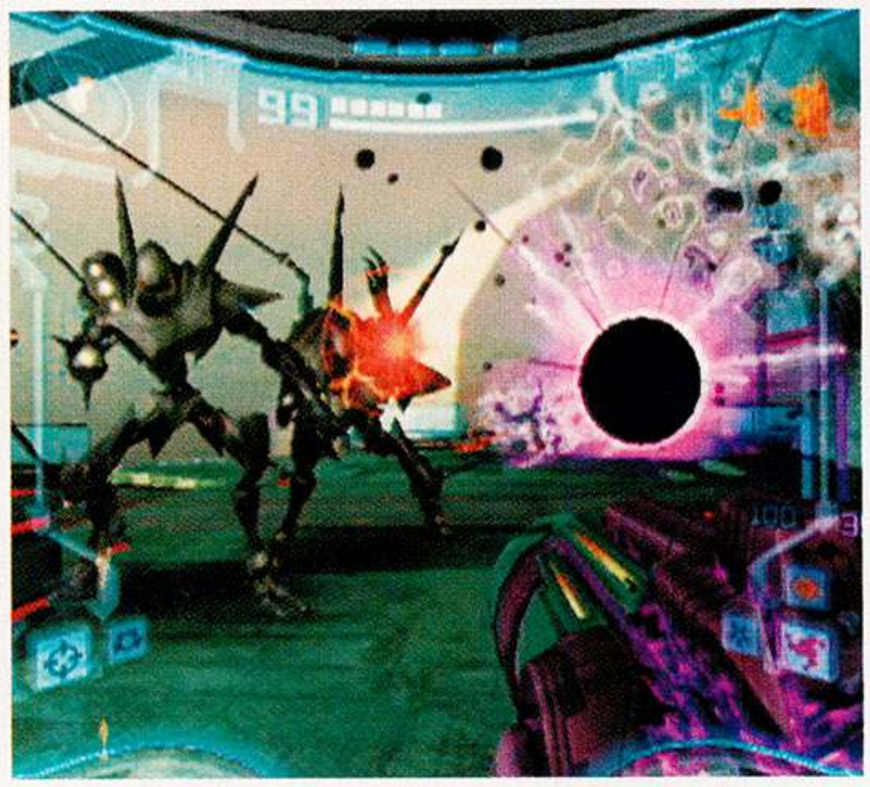
Although all these changes successfully set *Echoes* apart from its predecessor, several key bits of *Prime*-dom remain gloriously unscathed. Once again, the game's art direction, graphical quality, and audio design (both music and effects) rock your face with brilliance. Seriously, games rarely look or sound this good. Another key holdover from the first *Prime*: crafty pacing that pushes you to explore while simultaneously thrusting oodles of can't-get-it-yet secrets at you that you'll return to

How 'Bout a Foursome?

Uh, thanks, but no thanks. *Echoes* delivers multiplayer (for up to four players via splitscreen) to the series, but sadly, this feature is more evolved in the Nintendo 64 smash-hit *GoldenEye 007* (which, mind you, came out almost 10 years ago). All the maps are tiny and pretty simplistic in design, and the only time we found it somewhat entertaining was when four players grabbed a controller...or when we said heck with all the shooting and raced around the areas as morph balls.



A bounty on your head: Aside from the multiplayer-standard deathmatch, *Echoes*' features bounty mode in which you kill other human-controlled Samuses and collect coinage from their corpses.



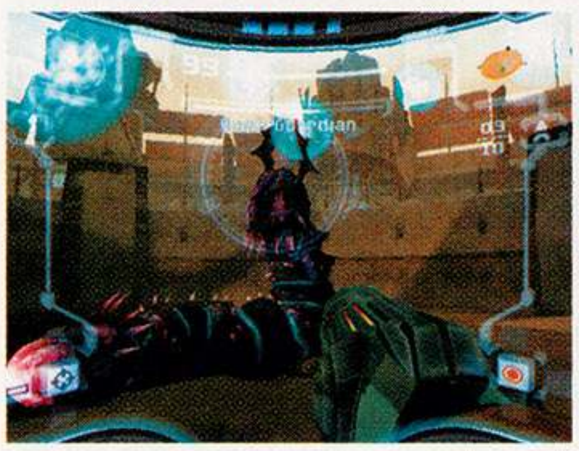
Hunt high and low for well-hidden power-ups for both the light and dark beams. Here, you see the dark beam's crippling black hole blast.



■ This handy new five-missile lock-on shot is clearly among the cooler new weapon upgrades.











later in the game. Add in an impressive barrage of creative boss battles and you've preserved nearly everything that made *Metroid Prime* such a winner.

So, why no 10 for *Echoes*? Chalk it up to a few missed opportunities. *Echoes* totally drops the ball in the plot department, offering an empty quest on a random planet with little in the way of motivation other than "go collect some keys." Imagine a *Metroid* game with a story you actually cared about, told in an interesting fashion. Keep on imagining. Likewise, Retro fails to make the most of *Echoes*' new equipment. You barely use the nifty echo visor or screw attack before the game arrives at its final destination. An overall diminished sense of scale, however, presents the game's most worrisome issue—although *Echoes* is a larger and tougher game than the first, the world design *feels* small. Even though Aether's four areas exist in both the light and dark worlds, those worlds seem so similar that it all comes off as a bit cramped. It's not a big enough problem to seriously damage the game, but don't be too surprised if you're left wanting a little more ground to explore when it's all over.

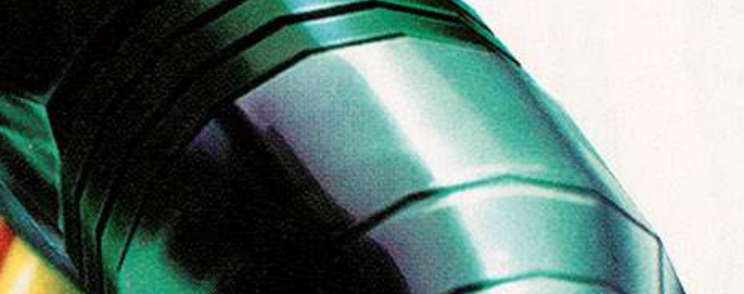
MARK: It's appropriate that *Echoes*' developer is named Retro, because in many ways *Echoes* brings back fuzzy memories of the old days. And I don't just mean the familiar *Metroid* sounds, enemies, and power-ups—although the expanded morph ball sections and return of the somersaulting screw attack (both perfectly implemented in 3D) bring a tear to this old-timer's eye. It's more *Echoes*' grueling old-school gameplay I'm talking about. While most modern games are afraid to ask much of the player, this one demands mastery of the controls, complex map navigation, and the time and commitment to run back and forth➤

For Her Viewing Pleasure

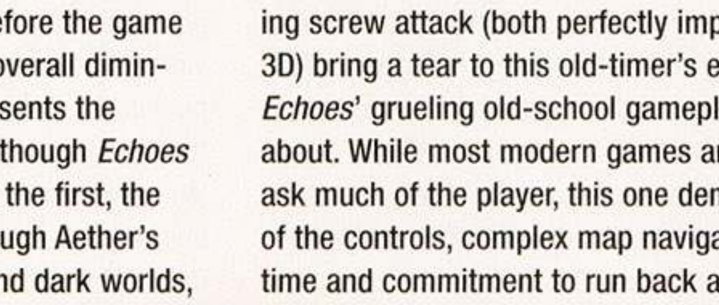
Just as in the previous *Metroid Prime*, there's a helluva lot to see in *Echoes*, and you'll need specialized visors to make the most out of what Samus surveys. Gone are the pedestrian thermal and X-ray specs from the last game, replaced by two innovative (yet underutilized) new modes of sight.



SCAN VISOR: Love it or hate it, Samus' trusty encyclopedic eye returns in force: Expect to scan every enemy, item, and anomaly if you want to unlock *Echoes*' hidden secrets. If you're pressed for time, scan only crucial objects—they glow red with this visor.



ECHO VISOR: Although it's the game's namesake, this visor doesn't show up until near the game's end. With it, you can see sound waves—and turn the screen into a confusing black and white morass. Use it to open a few doors, defeat one boss, and well, not much else.



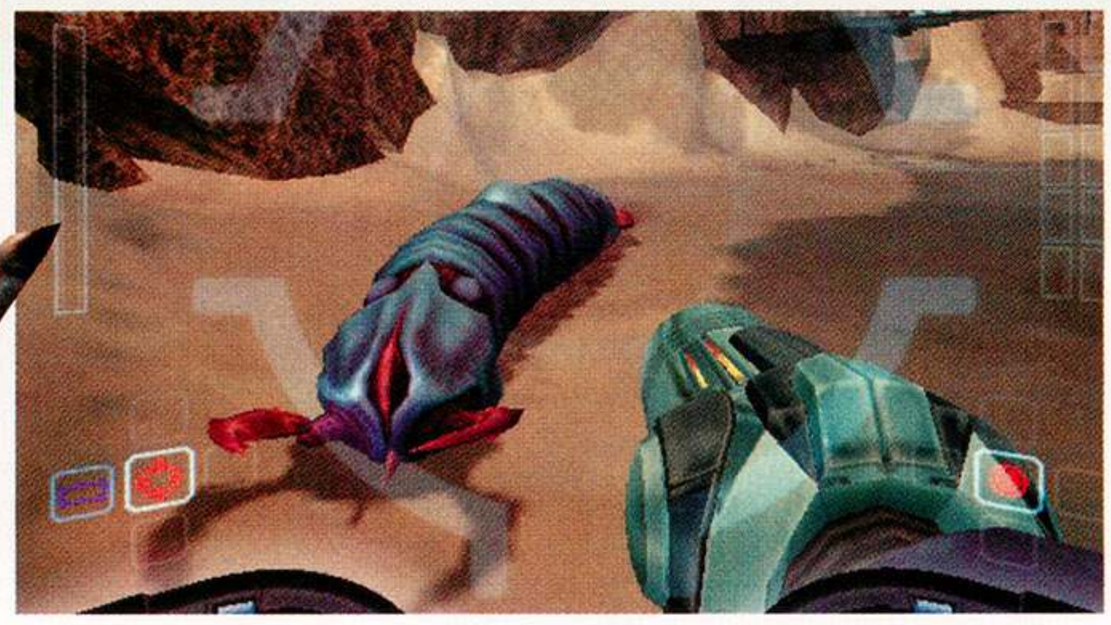
DARK VISOR: Use this visor to peer into the mysteries of dark Aether and glimpse hidden platforms, switches, and keys. You can also use it to keep an eye on specific enemies who have a nasty, Predator-like penchant for turning invisible.





■ Here's the best tip you'll ever receive for facing *Echoes*' massive, tricky bosses: Scan them each time they change shape.





➤ across a world filled with nasty enemies and complicated puzzles for more than 20 hours.

But *Echoes* never—and this is key—crosses the line from challenging to all-out frustration. Sure, there were moments I cursed out loud wondering how to solve a puzzle; the dimension-jumping mechanic requires real thinking and quite a bit of planning, made only a bit easier by an excellent in-game map. And yes, there were times I got up from my chair to literally jump up and down and, uh, "gesture" at certain bosses (just thinking about the final boss still makes my hand involuntarily ball into a fist). But in the end, like a Marine who looks fondly back on his days at boot camp, these trials only made my eventual triumph that much sweeter. *Echoes* doesn't include any unfair enemies or cheap deaths, and the controls are solid enough, once you adjust, that you usually have only yourself to blame for failure. If you're the type of gamer who wants to be challenged not only by figuring out how to approach a puzzle or boss pattern, but also in executing it, I'm confident you'll feel the same way about *Echoes*. Otherwise, you might want to steer clear of this one or, at the very least, come equipped with a strategy guide.

Unfortunately, the old-school vibe isn't all positive—the bare-bones story, told mostly through little bits of text scattered throughout the game, feels terribly dated. Two years ago in the original *Prime* it was a bit disappointing—now it's embarrassing. *Echoes* also doesn't even try to hide the fact that you're gathering keys—literal keys—for the *entire game*, which is about the most original and exciting motivation since "rescue the princess."

Multiplayer likewise seems like it fell through a time warp from 10 years ago. Not that the gameplay is the same stale old *Doom* clone—the grapple beam and morph ball add unique ideas. But the mode is so limited in options, maps, and game types, not to mention saddled with a control scheme built around a single-player *adventure* game, not a shooter (as the developers themselves have pointed out many times before), that the whole mess seems more like a last-minute afterthought than a full-fledged feature. Forget competing with *Halo 2*—on a multiplayer basis, *Echoes* can't even come close to *Halo 1*.

But there is one area *Echoes* is undeniably state of the art: aesthetics. This game looks *unbelievably* good, with some of the best art direction ever in a videogame coupled with technical know-how that pushes the Cube further than ever before. Combine the stylish visuals with moody music and a meticulous eye for detail (every single room is completely unique), and the same awesome atmosphere that made *Metroid* famous reaches new heights.

The Lighter (and Darker) Side of Echoes

Despite what wishy-washy philosopher types might tell you, the world really is black and white. At least it is in *Metroid Prime 2*, where almost every room in the game has two versions—one a light version of the planet, the other a dark version—that are always similar but never exactly the same. You can fight different enemies, find different items, or gain access to different areas depending on which dimension you're in.

Example: Say in the light world you see a power-up on the other side of a gate you can't open, along with a portal to the dark world. Leaving the room, you cross over into the dark world and find your way back to the dark version of the first room; it doesn't include that gate you couldn't get past or the power-up, but it does have the portal. Hop in and you appear back in the light world on the other side of the gate, where you're able to grab the power-up. Huzzah!

Needless to say, that's a very simple example—the mechanic is used in far more ingenious ways throughout *Echoes*. If it sounds like a cheap and easy way for Nintendo to make the game seem bigger, well, it is. But it also adds complexity and depth to the game, since figuring out how to get where you need to be is often a puzzle in itself.





■ As a rule, the light beam works really well against the black-as-sin alien monsters. Just keep an eye on your ammo...you'll want to save it for bosses, too.

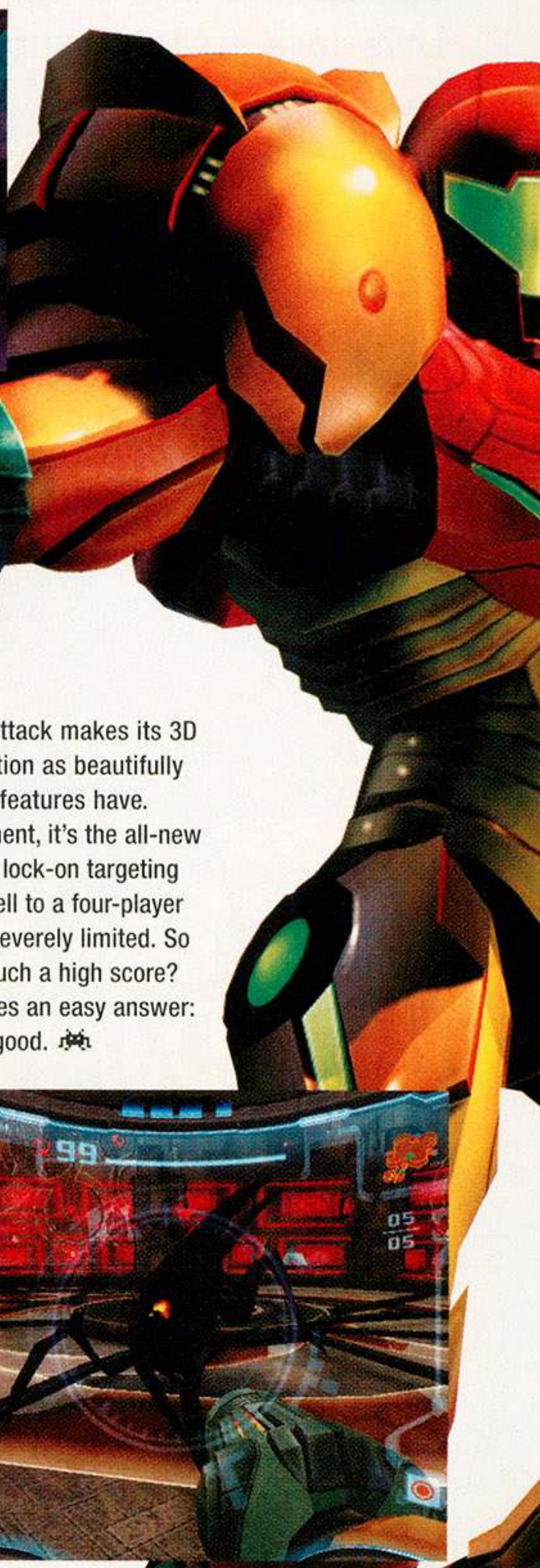


■ Yes, your GameCube can produce lovely visuals like these. Pity more games don't.







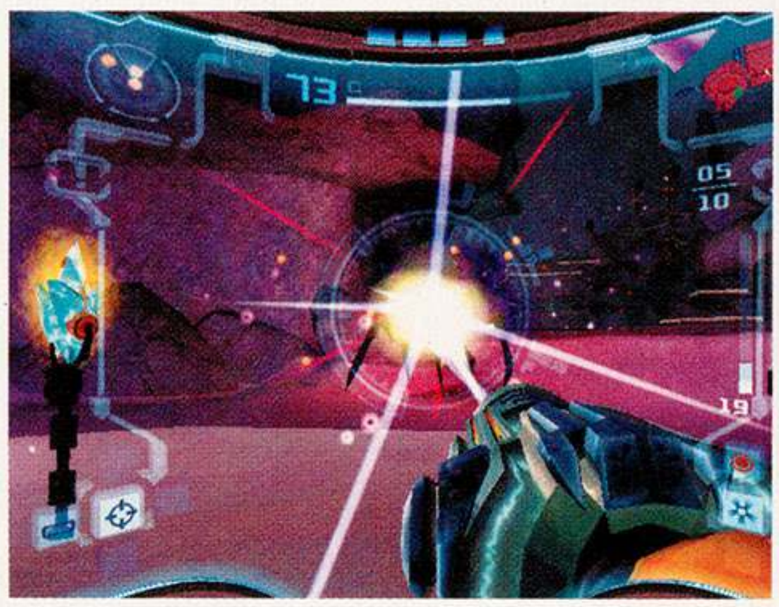


BRYAN: Like the first *Prime*, female bounty hunter Samus Aran's second GameCube mission is a must-play, and for several of the same reasons. The environments are huge and exhaustingly detailed, instantly sucking you into this first-person adventure. Now throw into the mix an alternate dimension to explore, and the whole adventure element grows significantly. So don't mind Shane's comments about the dark world being a weak excuse for not creating additional areas, since this environmental change-up also plays perfectly into another of *Echoes*' strengths: puzzle solving. Get your melon ready for a workout, as it takes some serious thought to figure out which area in the dark world can open up new areas in the light world and vice versa.

And you might as well get your trigger finger in shape, too—combat is more intense this go-around, thanks to tougher routine enemies, a heavy dose of mini-bosses, and very memorable main boss battles that require as much skill and strategy as the space they take up onscreen (and that's a lot). And as with the original *Prime*, *Echoes* is visually intoxicating. Just take a walk through the neon-lit hallways of the *Tron*-esque sanctuary, and you'll see exactly what I mean.

But *Echoes* also throws in a few wrinkles so that it doesn't feel too much like the last game. In terms of weaponry and equipment, the majority of the beams, visors, and suits are completely new, plus the classic screw attack makes its 3D debut and pulls off the transition as beautifully as the rest of the franchise's features have.

If anything is a disappointment, it's the all-new multiplayer mode; the game's lock-on targeting just doesn't lend itself very well to a four-player fragfest, and the options are severely limited. So why am I still giving *Echoes* such a high score? Well, an easy question deserves an easy answer: The main game is that damn good.







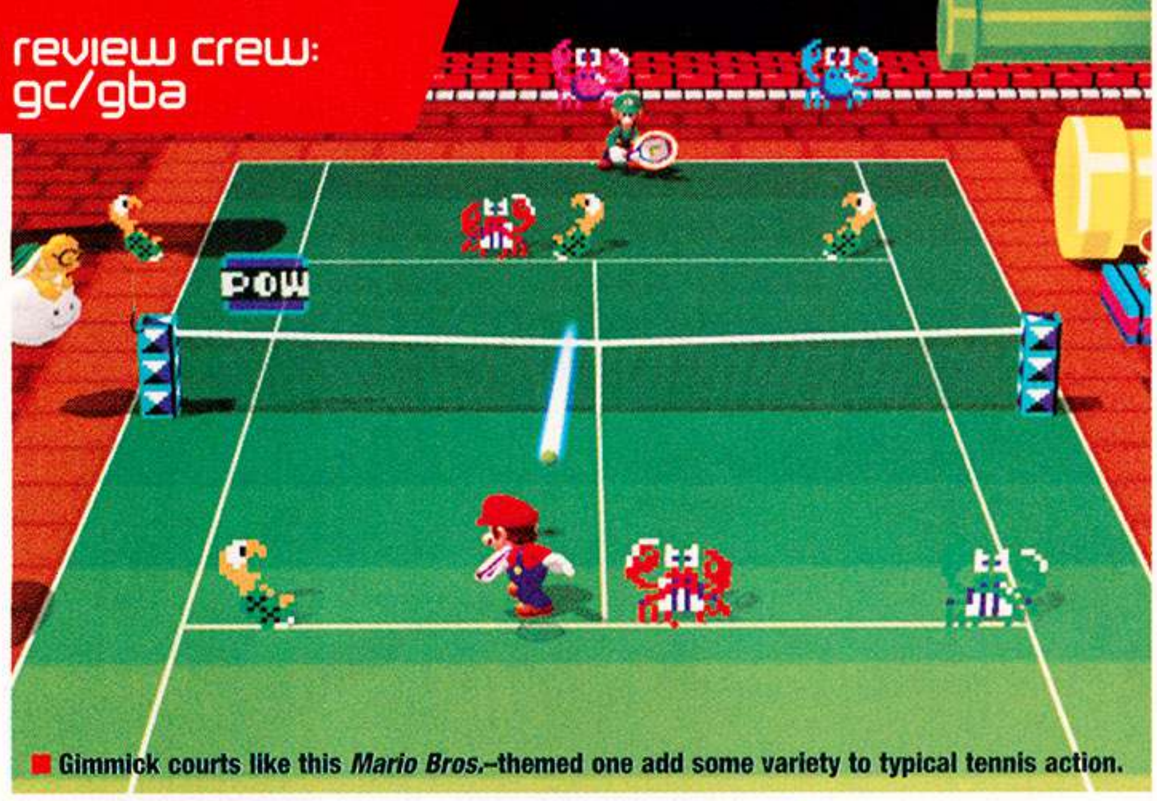
Good: Gorgeous graphics, plentiful secrets
Bad: Some overly convoluted level design
Ugly: Dark Samus' creepy third eye



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	9.0	9.0	10
	SHANE	MARK	BRYAN

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Retro
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Teen

www.metroid.com



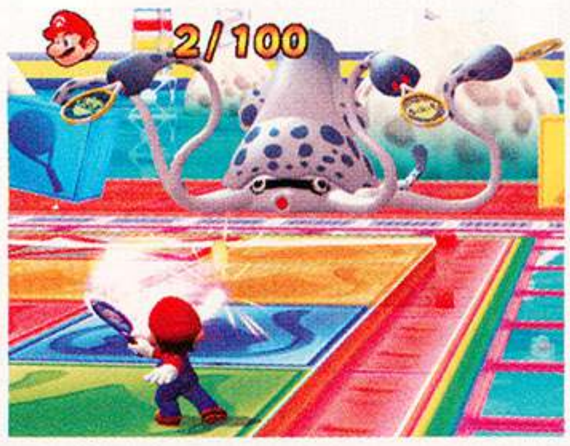
Gimmick courts like this *Mario Bros.*–themed one add some variety to typical tennis action.

GC

MARIO POWER TENNIS

Love-love in the Mushroom Kingdom







Good: Great gameplay, solid additions
Bad: Some minigames get tedious
Doubles Trouble: Mario's current gal Peach paired with ex Daisy



G. FORD: In a feat that is both remarkable and expected, Nintendo once again delivers a highly impressive update to an N64 classic. Following the lead of *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* and *Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour*, *Mario Power Tennis* falls into line and delivers a game that has ridiculously simple controls yet near-endless replayability.

Tennis delivers the typical impressive cartoony *Mario* graphics, catchy tunes, and a bevy of unlockables. Key additions include new power shots for each character—one offensive, one defensive—that make cross-court saves a regular occurrence without sacrificing balance; clever gimmick courts fraught with hazards; and generally addictive minigames that offer a nice alternative to the standard exhibition and tournament singles or doubles play.

Playing solo does grow old, and a few of the minigames are more tedious than fun, but the solid gameplay will have you and some buds up till all hours of the morning to get in one more round. Good times.

PATRICK: Just seeing Mario and Luigi makes me reminisce about a simpler time, but I digress. Like its N64 predecessor, *Tennis* plays great. Just grab the controller and go. Funky new courts, in addition to the Peach Dome, and several minigames offer more than the standard exhibition and tournament modes. Each character has exclusive power moves—Diddy Kong going from paw (or is it a hand?) to tail happens to be my favorite—giving them a huge advantage at the net. One complaint: Balls hit past me could still be returned with a power move. Hmm.

GMR—CARRIE: Crammed with the usual Nintendo trappings, there's a solid tennis game underneath all the over-the-top *Mario* wackiness. It's fun to experiment with different characters—and they really do feel different to play. Purists may object to distractions such as alligators waddling across the court, but this stuff does make it more challenging to keep your mind on the game—and there's a lot to be said for variety when you're hitting a ball back and forth. My main complaint is waiting for the animations of the power moves during a fast-paced game. Get on with it already!

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	G. FORD	PATRICK	CARRIE
	9.0	7.5	8.0

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Camelot
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com



Boktai mans up to a T rating, thanks to the half-naked flower girl boss (right).

GBA

BOKTAI 2: SOLAR BOY DJANGO

The light...it burns!



Good: Interesting gameplay additions
Bad: Same-y visuals, steep difficulty curve
Special Guest Star: Capcom's Mega Man



SHANE: Last fall, *Boktai* successfully tricked pale, confused gamers into venturing outside: They had to hold the game's special sensor directly in a sunbeam to vanquish the bosses in this *Metal Gear*–meets–*Dracula* action-role-playing game. Sure, it was a gimmick, but the expertly crafted gameplay and level design more or less balanced out the increased melanoma risk. And this follow-up relies on the solar-powered concept even more, forcing players to solve various puzzles with our friend sunshine.

At first, *Boktai 2* seems like a rehash. Series vets will find unimproved visuals, similar music, and a smattering of new, harder dungeons. Robbed of his handy Gun del Sol, hero Django has a much tougher time—you'll have to carefully manage resources to succeed. After a few tricky labyrinths, however, the shocking gameplay twists kick in—multiple playable characters, wild new powers, and bits where playing in the sunlight actually *hurts* you. Other additions, like a huge arsenal of weapons and a nifty multiplayer battle mode sweeten the deal. While not as groundbreaking as its forerunner, *Boktai 2* still innovates enough to warrant your attention.

ROBERT: This game feels like a minimum-wage job: Dragging caskets around while bats take pot shots at you. Going into debt with the Solar Bank at night. Sitting in the sun the next day to pay it back. Missing a payment, then hammering away at the A button to square up. Still, *Boktai 2* has its charms. Inventive, *Zelda*-ish puzzles outshine sometimes sloppy combat, and the dungeons take off in the second half. I just prefer a minimum of labor in my leisure.

1UP.com—JEREMY: At first, *Boktai 2* appears to have fallen victim to its own vampiric villains—the qualities that made the original shine seem to have been sucked out. The switch to melee weapons makes fighting a drag, and the solar sensor is more vital than ever...though you're sometimes punished for using it. But invest a few hours and you'll get to the meat of the game, which is often as satisfying as its excellent predecessor. Quality stuff, but probably too demanding for its own good.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHANE	ROBERT	JEREMY
	8.0	7.0	7.5

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami Japan
ESRB: Teen
Players: 1 (2-4 via link cable in link battle mode)

www.konami.com



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GBA

FANTASY I & II: DAWN OF SOULS

Restoration of the classics







■ **Left:** ***Final Fantasy V*** **boss Gilgamesh is one of many classic baddies in** ***Dawn of Souls.***

Good: Cool new dungeons, weapons, and bosses
Bad: *FFII*'s weird experience system
MIA: *Final Fantasy III*

SHANE: Call me crazy, but I like my handheld role-playing games to be simple. Since I'm playing these things on planes, trains, buses, and especially toilets, I want to triumph over legions of loser imps with minimum mental impact. *Dawn of Souls* handily wins the easy-breezy battle award—both of these classic Square Enix RPGs allow you to hack and slash your way to victory with the A button. But then they aren't for morons, either: Complex dungeons, tough bosses, and well-hidden secrets require more thumb action (and brain waves). Compared to modern *FF* epics, these old-tyme relics lack the memorable characters, killer cut-scenes, and sexy summoning spells. But the basic exploration, combat, and character-building are rewarding enough. Plus, these versions easily obliterate all previous offerings (including the PS1 games): Creative new dungeons, heaps of original equipment, and additional bosses (taken from several different *FF* games) mean that even series regulars will find plenty of reason to replay. The best RPG value on GBA, no contest.

JOHN R: Whether you're a nostalgic fan or a curious newbie, you really can't go wrong with *Dawn of Souls*. Shane's right, these are far and away the best versions of Final *Fantasy I* and *II* to date, with updated scripts, awesome new bonus dungeons, and superb visuals and sound. *FFII* is the bastard child of the series, with its broken level-up system and relatively dull quest, but it's still worth playing to see how the series evolved. As for the first *FF*, it's simply classic, and the music is awesome. Play it with headphones!

KEVIN: I used to think that the first two *FF* games had the longest nod-off-for-a-few-minutes battles ever—and yet the fights in *Dawn of Souls* seem blazingly fast to me! Maybe it's just that all the other RPGs have gotten slower. Regardless, this set of remakes is way easy (I finished the first *FF*'s main story in 17 hours without dying once—unheard of in the original version), but that's for the better—novices can blaze through the game, and old farts like me can access the extra scenarios and other stuff without having to slay 80,000 imps.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHANE	JOHN R	KEVIN
	9.0	8.5	8.0

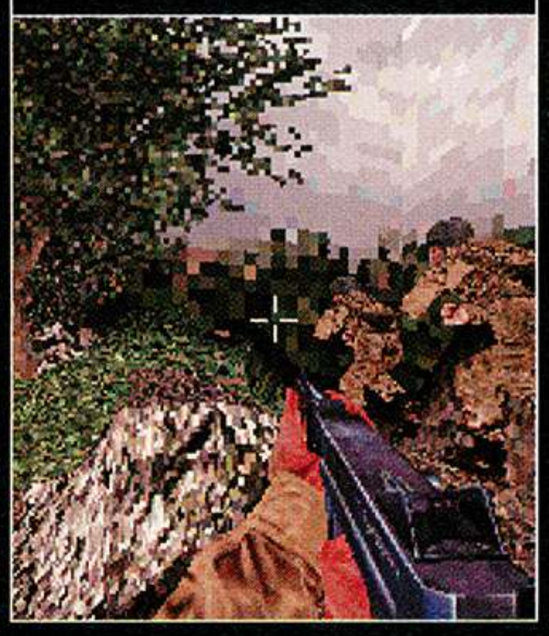
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Square Enix
ESRB: Everyone
Players: 1

www.square-enix.com

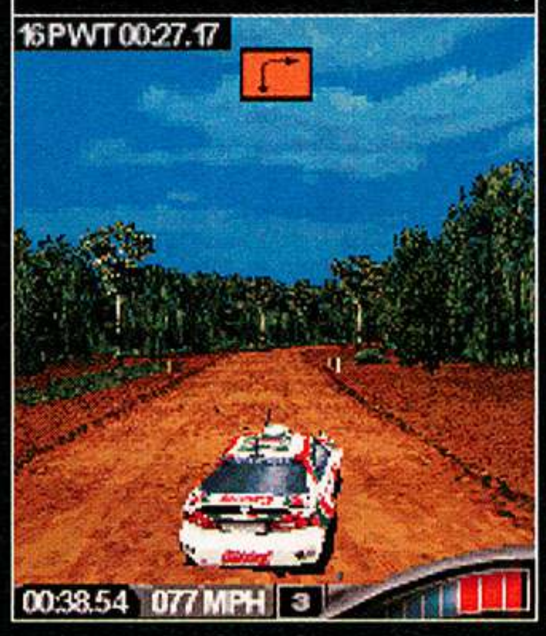
N-GAGE LI'L REVIEWS

Side-talk on games for that phone that calculates tips and also plays games

Call of Duty • Nokia • ESRB: T
Nokia clearly killed the families of everyone who developed *Call of Duty*. When people play the game they're going to think, "This is terrible, but *Call of Duty* was good for PC. Obviously, It must be the N-Gage's fault." That's exactly what they want you to think! The developers obviously made *COD* slow down horribly, the A.I. nonexistent, the controls cumbersome, and the game flat-out not fun as part of a blood feud. Try not to get involved.



Colin McRae Rally 2005 • Nokia • ESRB: E — If you're looking for a realistic racing sim on your N-Gage, look no further than *Colin McRae Rally 2005*. The graphics are solid, the physics are realistic (which makes turning a bit difficult if you're not a fan of the ol' brake concept), and the racing is actually fun. Real gearheads will enjoy adjusting the car's power ratio and brake bias, though others may want something a bit more arcadey. Phone a friend, this one's good.



King of Fighters • Nokia • ESRB: E
You've got your requisite Mais and Ioris, your quarter circles (surprisingly easy to pull off on the N-Gage pad, actually), your special moves, your teams of three facing off—your standard *KOF*-style 2D fisticuffs. Unfortunately this incarnation plays more like confrontational underwater tai chi than the responsive one-on-one arcade fighter we know and love. Only consider if you like your action slow, pixilated, and old...school.



Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm • GameLoft • ESRB: T
Recon puts you in control of an elite squad of military personnel whose job it is to kill terrorists or drug dealers or something (the mission briefings are *really* long). You take out the baddies with a combination of teamwork and enough high-tech weaponry to conquer a small island nation. The game is fun, but clunky controls hold it back. N-Gage absolutely was not made for first-person shooters.




"I have systematically purged the earth of evil. I fear only sunlight and girls."
OK, you've purged the earth of evil. *Again*. So now what? Sync up with the new 1UP.com, *that's* what. It's got the game world's best previews, reviews, trailers, cheats, ratings, rankings, downloads and message boards — all optimized for your broadband connection. Need more? 1UP.com's got it. Join an incredible online gamer community where you can share homepages, bios and blogs. Who knows, you might even make a new friend. And she *might* even be a girl. Amazing things happen. At 1UP.com.
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REVIEWS WRAP-UP

Too many games! Too many damn games! Uncle!

A two-way tie for Game of the Month, with both *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and *Halo 2* earning platinum awards? Somebody kick us—or, no, maybe just take a nice picture. This kind of thing doesn't happen very often.

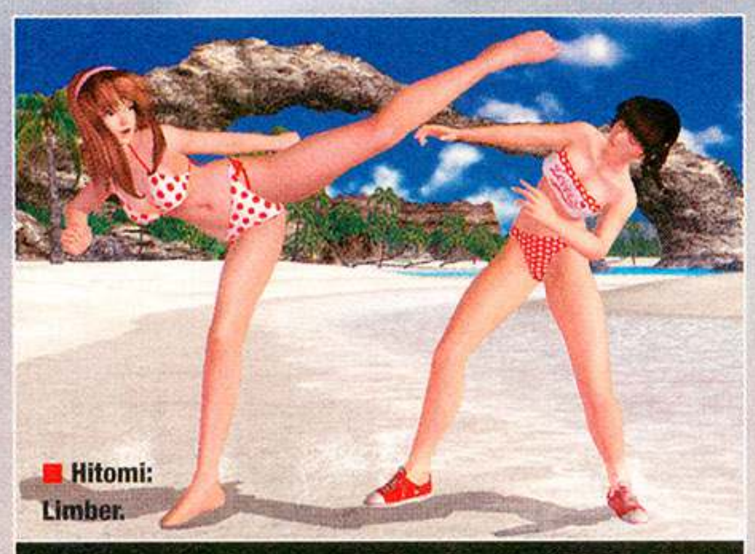
Even with this month's 40-plus pages of review insanity, we couldn't fit every last game in.... What're you gonna do? Besides write an angry letter, or course. That's a given.



■ For a ninja with a heart as black as night, *Dead or Alive*'s Ayane sure can look perky.



Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex • **PS2**
Namco • ESRB: M — We spent hours looking for a ghost in this shell of a game. Instead, we found generic action-shooter gameplay from the mid-'90s that completely defies the technologically advanced setting—although characters do handle like futuristic jumping Buicks. For devoted fans only.

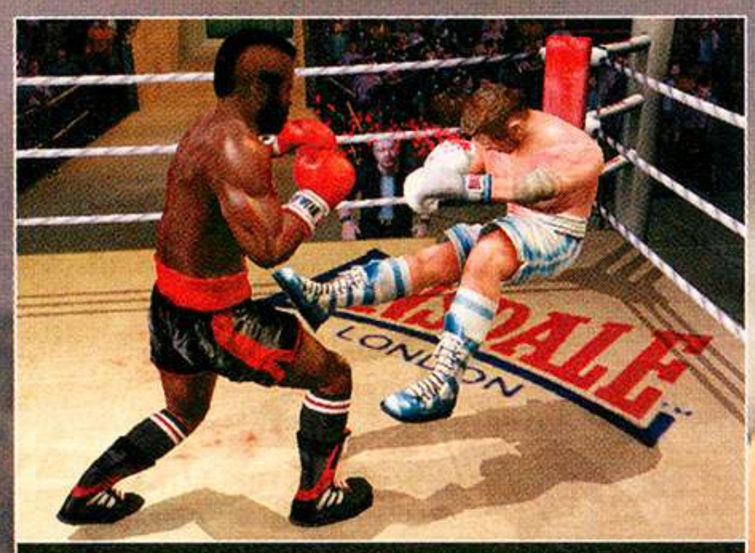


■ Hitomi: Limber.

Dead or Alive Ultimate • **XB • Tecmo • ESRB: M**
It's finally (probably? Gotta be) out by the time you read this, but the version of *DOA Ultimate* we played had some definite lag issues. Tecmo told us the problems would be fixed by launch, but we won't be able to verify that until next issue. So if you read reviews in other mags this month...beware.



Gretzky NHL 2005 • **PS2 • 989 Sports • ESRB: E**
The game formerly known as *FaceOff* returns after a year's hiatus, and it's vastly improved. The controls are simple, it's got all the essential modes (including online and World Cup tourney), and only *ESPN*'s puckster looks prettier. Let's hope the Great One's game is back next season, but with faster-paced play.



Rocky Legends • **PS2/XB • Ubisoft • ESRB: T**
It's packed full of Mr. T and Dolph Lundgren goodness, but Ubisoft's boxing sequel pales before games like *Fight Night*. If video boxing had never stepped into the new world of analog control, the presentation and fun training modes would carry this one ahead. Instead, it feels a little dated.

THIS MONTH IN BABY GAMES

Because you've already got a sitter. It's right there. It's called a television



SpongeBob SquarePants: The Movie • **PS2 • THQ**
The simple collection-based gameplay is great for tykes, but even the shorties will lament the cartoon stills in cut-scenes.



Spyro: A Hero's Tail • **PS2**
VU Games — It's hardly auspicious when developers admit to conforming to platformer clichés through in-game dialogue...but at least you know what to expect.

Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams
PS2 • THQ — A decent platformer with Nickelodeon-minded humor and dialogue, murky graphics, and throwaway minigames.



Crash 'n' Burn • PS2 • Eidos • ESRB: E — Match *CNB* against supercharged wreck-em-up *Burnout 3* on gameplay mechanics, speed, graphics, and replay value and it can't even hope to compete. But some may find its comprehensive car customization and more realistic driving experience a unique enough approach to warrant a rental.



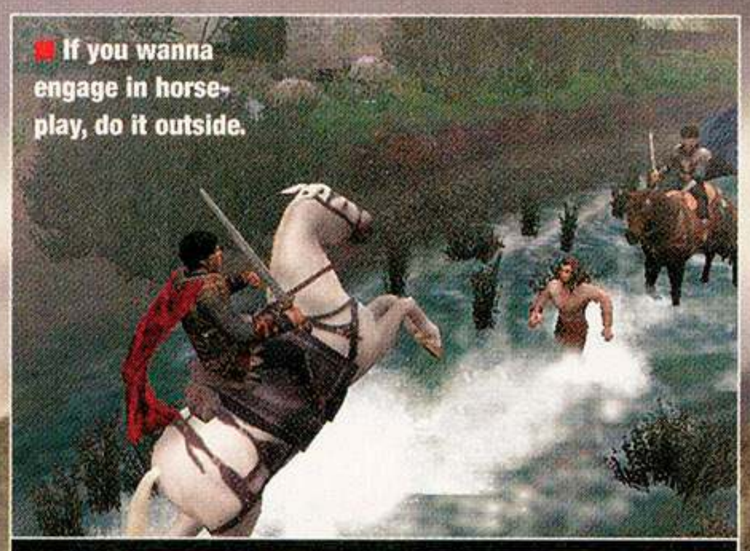
Sonic Mega Collection Plus • PS2/XB • Sega • ESRB: E — Once a GameCube exclusive, *Mega Collection* brings all the great (and not so great—whatever, they're all here) *Sonic* platform, pinball, and puzzle games from the Genesis/Sega CD era to PS2 and Xbox. Nostalgic bliss if you've tossed your old cartridge consoles; regular bliss if you never had 'em.



Vietcong: Purple Haze • Xbox • Gathering • ESRB: M
It's another Vietnam game, one that's fun and easy enough for the casual crowd, but certainly nothing special. Unless you're bent on flashing back to Nam in particular, you're much better off with just about any Tom Clancy title for your tactical-warfare/shooter fix. There'll just be less swearing.



F-Zero: GP Legend • GBA • Nintendo • ESRB: E
The second *F-Zero* for GBA offers a lot more content than its predecessor—more crafts, more courses, and several new gameplay modes—but the kiddie cast of characters and general lack of challenge may turn off hardcore players. Still, it's an excellent handheld racer, and the music rocks.



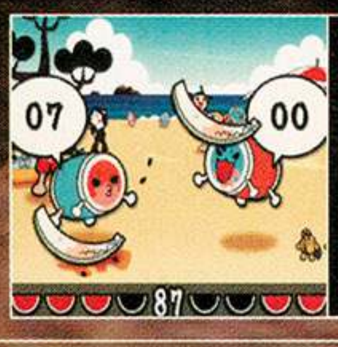
King Arthur • PS2/XB/GC • Konami • ESRB: T
Just in time to be four months late for the movie on which it's based, hack-and-slasher *King Arthur* tries to trick you into thinking the dud flick was actually a thrill ride. In fact, this game plays nearly the same as EA's thumb-deadening *Lord of the Rings* games. Except with horses. Sure beats watching the movie.



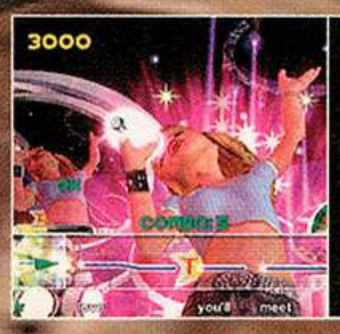
Nightmare of Druaga • PS2 • Namco • ESRB: E
If you're one of those who complain that games aren't what they used to be, jump back more than a decade to when role-playing games were grid based, there was no spoken dialogue, and death was unavoidable and irreversible. Advances in game technology are usually referred to as "improvements" for a reason.

GAMES TO GET DOWN TO

Music games, that is. Listening to music, making beautiful music, and strictly optional dancing



Taiko Drum Master • PS2
Namco — Whack a huge plastic drum with phallic beige batons in time to music while cuttlefish and wolves wearing bonnets dance along. Awesome.



Karaoke Revolution • XB
Konami — The Xbox version of *Revolution* packs 10 more songs than the PS2 original, with 30-plus available to download via Xbox Live. Sing, dammit!



Get on da Mic • PS2
Eidos — It's like a stripped-down *Karaoke Revolution* with rapping instead of singing, and quite possibly twice the crushing embarrassment.

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

Short and sweet

bargain-bin bounty





MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES 2

■ PS2/XB/GC
■ Released: October 2004

Revisit a time when digitized graphics were cool, arcades were more than expensive novelties, and the likes of *Mortal Kombat II*, *NARC*, *Wizard of Wor*, and *APB* ruled the gaming scene. Our bet is you dropped more than $20 into any one of those machines back in the day.

LORD OF THE RINGS VS. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Orc, dragon, and troll slaying? Check. Wizards, warriors, and effeminate elf dudes? Oh, you know it. Both of the long-standing fantasy universes have had their fair share of hits and misses (*Heroes of the Lance*, anyone?). In the epic quest for the love of nerds everywhere, Tolkien still reigns supreme—and not even a +6 ax of smiting can change that.



■ Average score for the 11 *Lord of the Rings* games reviewed by *EGM*: 6.74



■ Average score for the eight *Dungeons & Dragons* games reviewed by *EGM*: 6.25

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)	AWARD
Advance Guardian Heroes	GBA	■ Old-school bash-em-up brawling from fan-favorite cult developer Treasure	6.0 7.0 7.5	
All-Star Baseball 2005	PS2/XB	■ Take us out to the ball game...just not this one	5.5 4.5 6.0	
Amazing Island	GC	■ What's amazing is that this game made it to the States at all	5.5 3.0 5.5	
Armored Core: Nexus	PS2	■ Impress the ladies with your elaborately customized mechanical avatar. Or not	6.0 6.0 7.0	
Astro Boy	PS2	■ Tweens will take to this robo tyke, but his game's too short and totally not sweet	5.0 3.0 5.0	
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	GBA	■ 'Toon lovers and jaded players alike will enjoy this intense platformer	8.5 9.0 8.5	Silver
Athens 2004	PS2	■ You'll feel the burn when playing these silly pseudo-Olympic minigames	5.0 5.5 5.0	
Blood Will Tell	PS2	■ Handi-capable hero quests for lymph nodes, an esophagus...and justice	8.0 6.5 6.0	
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	PS2	■ Your average martial arts actioner, but with 100 percent more Japanese rock stars	4.5 6.0 7.5	
Burnout 3: Takedown	PS2/XB	■ Insurance (and heart) rates skyrocket with each spectacular crash	9.0 9.5 9.0	Gold
Catwoman	PS2/XB/GC	■ The feline femme looks purrfect, but she's flea-ridden under the fluff	4.5 5.5 2.0	
Champions of Norrath: Realms of EQ	PS2	■ More about slaying orcs than socializing with dorks	8.5 8.0 8.5	Silver
The Chronicles of Riddick	XB	■ *Chronicles* makes stabbing people in the face fun again	9.0 8.0 9.0	Silver
Conflict: Vietnam	PS2/XB	■ Conflict: Reviews. Some like this 'Nam-based squad shooter. Others, not so much	7.5 5.5 4.5	
Crimson Tears	PS2	■ Repetitive battles will bore you to tears	5.5 6.0 6.5	
Custom Robo	GC	■ Impress your schoolyard chums with your elaborately customized minirobot. Or not	6.5 6.0 8.0	
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme	PS2	■ EyeToy support elevates this *DDR* to a new level of aerobic insanity	8.5 8.0 8.5	Silver
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix	XB	■ Lose pounds and prepare for the prom	8.5 8.0 7.0	
Dead Man's Hand	XB	■ Find out how the West was dumb in this oddball first-person shooting gallery	6.5 5.0 4.5	
Def Jam Fight for NY	PS2/XB/GC	■ There's only one rule in this hip-hop-studded fight club: Buy it, foo'	8.5 8.5 9.0	Silver
Destruction Derby Arenas	PS2	■ Smashing cars and sailing off big jumps has never been more...blah	4.5 3.5 6.0	
Donkey Konga	GC	■ (Mostly) great songs and a quality bongo controller make for a lively party game	8.0 7.0 7.5	
DRIV3R	PS2/XB	■ *Driver* meets *GTA*'s on-foot combat and somehow an "e" becomes a "3"	8.5 7.5 6.5	
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	PS2	■ New name, same ol' beat-em-up game—with light "strategy" elements	6.0 5.5 6.5	
Echo Night: Beyond	PS2	■ *Echo Night*'s creepy moonbase has everything you'd want...except for combat	6.0 5.5 5.0	
ESPN Major League Baseball	PS2/XB	■ Like the Dodgers, *ESPN* isn't quite ready for the fall classic	8.0 8.5 7.5	Silver
ESPN NBA 2K5	PS2/XB	■ ESPN's baller is oh so pretty. Too bad it commits a few fouls on the court	7.0 8.5 8.5	Silver
ESPN NFL 2K5	PS2/XB	■ The best 20 bucks a sporto could ever spend	8.5 8.5 8.0	Silver
ESPN NHL 2K5	PS2/XB	■ ESPN's puckster hoists the Cup yet again. Can you say dynasty?	8.5 8.5 8.0	Silver
EyeToy: Groove	PS2	■ Discover just how idiotic you look dancing on television	8.0 8.0 7.0	
Fable	XB	■ Hack-n-slash action-RPG with *Sims*-style dollhouse elements	7.5 8.0 9.0	Silver
Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly	PS2	■ Combating poltergeists with a Polaroid is scarier than it sounds	7.5 7.5 6.5	
FIFA Soccer 2005	PS2/XB/GC	■ Controls better than last year's, but *FIFA*'s still a close second behind *Winning Eleven*	8.5 7.5 9.0	Silver
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	GC	■ Charming RPG romp works best with three friends along for the GBA-linked-up ride	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	PS2/XB	■ Orc No. 786, I stab at thee. Orc No. 787, I stab at thee. Orc No...	7.5 5.0 6.0	
Front Mission 4	PS2	■ This mech-whomping strategy game's so deep, it's smarter than you	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
Full Spectrum Warrior	XB	■ A war-winning coalition of gritty graphics and tactical gameplay	8.0 7.0 8.0	
Galactic Wrestling: Feat. Ultimate Muscle	PS2	■ Only a girly man would sport such a weak feature set	5.5 5.5 5.0	
Galleon	XB	■ A high-seas letdown six years in the making...that plays as clunky as it looks	4.0 5.0 4.5	
Ghosthunter	PS2	■ Light on the spookiness, with linear gameplay only an algebra teacher could love	6.5 6.0 6.0	
Guilty Gear Isuka	PS2	■ Fighting-game insanity for four players, but it's still old news for PS2 *GG* players	7.0 7.0 4.0	
Guilty Gear X2 #Reload	XB	■ We're not sure how to pronounce it, but this online fighting game rocks	9.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
The Guy Game	PS2/XB	■ The game part sucks, and the naked chicks, well, that's what the Internet's for	1.5 1.0 0.0	
Gradius V	PS2	■ With more games like this, maybe side-scrolling shooters would still be popular	7.0 8.5 8.0	
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	GC	■ For those who think farming and videogames are a natural combo	6.5 6.5 7.0	
Headhunter: Redemption	PS2/XB	■ Iffy controls and a twitchy camera are this hunt's less redeeming qualities	5.0 6.5 5.5	
Hot Shots Golf Fore!	PS2	■ Aside from online play, you won't find many surprises on these links	7.0 8.5 6.5	
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	PS2	■ Medleys, more songs to butcher, and a streamlined interface	8.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
Katamari Damacy	PS2	■ Be the ball—or, in this case, be the rolling sticky blob. Quirky and awesome	8.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	PS2	■ *KOF* has finally gone 3D...and yes, that includes fan-favorite Mai's heaving chest	6.5 7.0 6.0	
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders	XB	■ *Dynasty Warriors* combat meets *Full Spectrum Warrior*'s troop tactics	7.5 8.0 8.0	
La Pucelle: Tactics	PS2	■ Deep strategy-RPG gameplay you'll love, with childish characters you'll despise	7.5 8.5 8.0	Silver
The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adv.	GC	■ Zelda teaches Link a little somethin' about four-play in this old-school adventure	8.5 9.0 8.0	Silver
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	PS2/XB	■ You won't find penis jokes this unfunny outside of Spencer Gifts' naughty aisle	3.5 2.5 1.5	
Madden NFL 2005	PS2/XB/GC	■ Visual touch-ups and superior play keep Johnny Ballgame on top	9.0 9.5 9.0	Gold
Mafia	PS2/XB	■ Jack jalopies and outdrive thugs in this glitchy 1930s gangster game	6.0 5.0 7.5	
Malice	PS2/XB	■ You can beat this limp platformer in a single sitting...but why bother?	5.0 5.0 4.0	
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	GBA	■ Play with your putter on the bus—without getting arrested for once	9.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
Mario Pinball Land	GBA	■ Built for pinball muggles, not wizards—until tricky bosses tilt your temper	5.5 3.5 3.0	
Mario vs. Donkey Kong	GBA	■ The plumber and big ape clash again in this good, but not great, platformer/puzzler	7.0 7.5 7.5	
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	PS2	■ This half-assed, brainless beat-em-up is evil indeed	2.0 3.5 2.5	
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	PS2	■ This quality compendium is well worth it, but only for old fans	8.0 8.0 7.0	
Mega Man X: Command Mission	PS2/GC	■ His Blueness' first console RPG is decent, but strictly by the numbers	6.5 6.5 6.0	
Mega Man Zero 3	GBA	■ Play it just for the incomprehensibly named bosses. Blazin' Flizard, you got moxie!	8.0 7.0 7.0	
Men of Valor	XB	■ Decent multiplayer saves that day in this otherwise blah Vietnam-era shooter	6.0 7.5 6.0	
Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	GC	■ No, it's not a Ron Jeremy/Peter North game, just a remake of the stealth classic	8.0 9.0 8.5	Silver



■ **This *Leisure Suit Larry* professor enjoys chatting with master debaters, solving world hunger, and bikinis.**

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)	AWARD
Metal Slug 3	XB	■ Dimensions: two. Objective: Shoot everything	7.5 6.5 8.0	
Metroid: Zero Mission	GBA	■ Surprise twists supercharge this remake of space chick Samus' original romp	9.5 9.0 9.0	Gold
MLB 2005	PS2	■ A quick trip to the minors has made *MLB* a title contender again	7.0 7.0 7.0	
MLB SlugFest: Loaded	PS2/XB	■ The new and surprisingly deep sim mode keeps Midway's batter in the big leagues	8.0 7.0 8.0	
Monster Hunter	PS2	■ The hunt for a *Phantasy Star Online*–like experience on PS2 is over	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
Mortal Kombat: Deception	PS2/XB	■ *Deception* has online and adventure modes, but kombat's as messy as it is bloody	6.5 5.5 8.0	
MVP Baseball 2004	PS2/XB/GC	■ EA's take on America's pastime clears the fences with an all-new batting system	8.5 8.0 8.5	Silver
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	PS2/XB/GC	■ A great game, even if your nickname isn't "Cooter"	9.0 8.0 9.0	Silver
NBA Ballers	PS2/XB	■ Midway's 1-on-1 baller has the skillz to pay the billz (or something like that)	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
NBA Live 2005	PS2/XB/GC	■ White men *can* jump...thanks to *Live*'s dunk contest	8.5 8.5 8.0	Silver
NCAA Football 2005	PS2/XB/GC	■ Subtle but oh-so-effective improvements make *NCAA* Heisman-worthy	9.0 9.5 9.0	Gold
NHL 2005	PS2/XB/GC	■ EA likes it rough. We don't	6.0 6.0 7.0	
NHL Rivals 2004	XB	■ After *Rivals*, developer/publisher Microsoft discontinued the series. Good move	3.5 4.0 6.5	
Nightshade	PS2	■ *Beverly Hills Ninja* on a scale of ninja-tude	6.0 5.5 5.0	
Ninja Gaiden	XB	■ Download more beautiful, brutal levels on Xbox Live	9.5 9.5 9.5	Gold
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	PS2	■ The soul-sucking series finale has us screaming "*Vive la France!*"	8.5 7.0 9.0	Silver
Onimusha Blade Warriors	PS2	■ Four-way fighting like Nintendo's *Smash Bros. Melee*, 'cept less kiddy and more Asian	7.0 7.0 7.5	
Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors	XB	■ Everybody was kung fu fighting in a beautiful world steeped in Japanese mythology	9.0 8.0 9.0	Silver
Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door	GC	■ Nintendo's much-needed GC role-playing game is flat-out fantastic	9.0 9.0 9.0	Gold
Phantasy Star Online: Episode III	GC	■ As deep and addictive as real-life card games, but without all that geeky cardboard	9.0 8.0 9.0	Silver
Phantom Brave	PS2	■ Only the mentally courageous will be able to handle this hardcore strategy-RPG	8.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
Pikmin 2	GC	■ Just when you think it's over, this flower-powered game grows a new adventure	8.5 9.0 9.0	Silver
Pokémon Colosseum	GC	■ Story mode injects some life into this otherwise mediocre Poké-battler	7.0 5.0 7.0	
Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen	GC	■ Catch 'em all again for the first time in this greedy (yet great) remake	7.0 8.0 8.0	
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	PS2/XB	■ Better than bullet time, *Psi-Ops*' brain powers are mind blowing	8.0 7.5 7.5	
Puyo Pop Fever	GC	■ A classic puzzle game updated with new modes and short-bus-ready characters	7.0 7.0 7.0	
R: Racing Evolution	PS2/XB/GC	■ Not much of a racer, but the ladies look lovely	6.5 6.0 4.5	
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	XB	■ Mission pack for the squad-based FPS is worth it for its expanded online features	7.5 8.0 8.0	
Red Dead Revolver	PS2/XB	■ Guess we skipped the history lesson about the fat cowboy in a dynamite suit	6.0 4.5 4.0	
Resident Evil Outbreak	PS2	■ A little help? Hello? If only this otherwise gripping online game had a gab function...	5.5 6.5 7.0	
Robotech: Invasion	PS2/XB	■ Body armor that turns into a motorcycle. Convenient for road trips? Yes. Fun? Kinda	4.0 7.0 6.0	
R-Type Final	PS2	■ Remind your thumbs of yesterday with this fun throwback to '90s shooters	8.5 8.0 8.0	Silver
Samurai Warriors	PS2	■ The series hasn't been there (Japan), but it's done that (skewer oodles of swordsmen)	7.0 6.5 7.5	
Second Sight	PS2/XB/GC	■ Earn mind powers that'd make Kreskin jealous, then use 'em to...flip switches	5.5 7.5 6.5	
Seven Samurai 20XX	PS2	■ So boring we wish it would slit its own wretched belly	3.5 3.5 4.0	
Shadow Hearts: Covenant	PS2	■ Delightfully weird WWI-era RPG with oddball characters and action-packed battles	7.5 8.5 7.0	
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	XB	■ War is hell—but still preferable to this modern-day cliché-ridden first-person shooter	4.0 4.5 4.0	
ShellShock: Nam '67	PS2/XB	■ Boom-boom with the ladies after boom-booming the enemy in this grim shooter	7.0 6.0 4.0	
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	PS2	■ A dark RPG that's as archaic as it is excellent	8.0 9.0 8.5	Silver
Shining Force: Res. of the Dark Dragon	GBA	■ Addictive tactical-RPG, but still a few steps shy of *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*	8.0 8.0 7.5	
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	PS2/XB	■ This glitchy grappler's retirees reek of Bengay	3.5 3.0 2.5	
Shrek 2	PS2/XB/GC	■ Even the kiddies will zoom through this gorgeous but simplistic action game	7.5 6.0 5.0	
Silent Hill 4: The Room	PS2/XB	■ Claustrophobic chills upstage the now-familiar cadavers	7.5 7.5 7.5	
Siren	PS2	■ Battle hayseed zombies in this *Silent Hill* clone that's more convoluted than creepy	5.0 7.0 4.0	
Sly 2: Band of Thieves	PS2	■ Sony's slick, cartoony fox returns for madcap heists with his two partners in crime	9.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
Spider-Man 2	PS2/XB/GC	■ Sticky-string commuting across New York City is a thrill, but combat's a tangled web	7.0 7.0 7.0	
Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow	XB	■ The ultimate stealth game with revolutionary 2-on-2 online multiplayer...	10 9.5 9.5	Gold
Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow	PS2	■ ...gets a little chopped up on PS2, but non-Xboxers won't even notice...	9.0 9.0 9.5	Gold
Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow	GC	■ ...unlike GameCube owners, who'll wonder where the multiplayer modes went	7.0 8.0 7.5	
Spy Fiction	PS2	■ Spy fact: Creeping around like a third-rate Solid Snake kinda blows	5.5 3.0 5.0	
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	PS2	■ Janky battles keep this epic RPG from attaining *Final Fantasy*–caliber status	7.0 7.0 7.5	
Star Wars Battlefront	PS2/XB	■ Shoot droids, stormtroopers, AT-ATs, X-wings, Ewoks, and Gungans online. Nuff said	8.0 8.0 9.0	Silver
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	PS2	■ Celebrate a decade of street fighting with the champs of 2D combat	8.5 9.0 8.0	Silver
Street Racing Syndicate	PS2/XB/GC	■ *SRS* showed up fashionably late, but the race had already started	7.0 6.0 6.0	
Sudeki	XB	■ Microsoft's full-frontal action-RPG assault is kinda flat	4.5 6.0 5.5	
Tales of Symphonia	GC	■ Solid adventure with a dippy plot, but RPG-starved Cubers won't mind	8.5 7.5 8.5	Silver
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2	PS2/XB/GC	■ With four-player brawlin', the half-shell heroes are half-baked, -hearted, and -assed	3.0 4.0 2.0	
Terminator 3: The Redemption	PS2/XB/GC	■ *Hasta la vista*, quality gameplay. *Hola*, mondo explosions and so-so vehicle levels	4.0 2.5 5.0	
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	PS2/XB	■ Slow, floaty, down-home dirt-track racing with a side of grits	7.5 4.5 8.0	
Thief: Deadly Shadows	XB	■ Adjust your TV set in this too-dark game of grand theft bauble set in medieval times	7.0 7.0 8.5	
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	PS2/XB/GC	■ The real-life Tiger may be struggling, but his virtual game remains well under par	8.5 8.0 9.5	Silver
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	PS2/XB	■ Not a revolution, but *Tony Hawk* fans won't mind, and it's newbie friendly, to boot	9.0 9.0 8.5	Silver
Transformers	PS2	■ The changing trucks and Datsuns in this shooter have the touch *and* the power	8.0 7.5 7.5	
Under the Skin	PS2	■ This little multiplayer hors d'oeuvre needs more substance to stand on its own	5.5 4.0 4.0	
Viewtiful Joe	PS2	■ Stylish graphics and deep beat-em-up gameplay still rock socks	8.5 8.5 9.0	Silver
WWE Day of Reckoning	GC	■ We reckon wrestling fans should skip that day	5.5 5.0 6.5	

TREND SPOTTING

Tired of getting your groove on and shaking those old maracas but still can't get enough of music-based games? If so, these funky titles will get you pounding, rocking and warbling until you finally realize you have neither rhythm nor music.

Donkey Konga (GC)
8.0, 7.0, 7.5

Gitaroo Man (PS2)
7.0, 6.0, 7.5

Karaoke Revolution (PS2)
8.5, 8.5, 8.5

Greatest hit or miss?

BLINX: THE TIME SWEEPER

■ **Xbox**
■ **Released: October 2002**
■ **Original Scores: 7.5, 5.5, 8.0**

Once thought to be Microsoft's answer to *Mario*, *Blinx* turned out more hard-core puzzler than cuddly mascot platformer. Our reviewers were divided on the time-shifting gameplay, and *Blinx* flopped at retail. As Master Chief went on to become the Xbox poster boy, Blinx went back for some retooling.

tricks of the trade

just beat it! beat it! no one wants to be defeated!

trickster

Ah, the holiday season. Endless reruns of *It's a Wonderful Life*. Figgy pudding. Kissing your cousin under the mistletoe and feeling all strange and tingly. It's a great time to be alive; it's the season for giving. Not like January, when the crushing despair of winter threatens to dampen your *Halo 2* online marathons. And it's with this holiday cheer that we've created this special, nondenominational bumper crop of tricks, codes, and convoluted exercises to wring the final drops of gaming goodness from your software. Happy Festivus!

—David S. J. Hodgson

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■ PS2/XB/GC

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2: BATTLE NEXUS

Want a little more out of your *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus*? Here are some hidden characters and alternate costumes to spice things up a bit. Enjoy!

Hidden characters

In addition to the original Ninja Turtles, four other characters have made their way into *Battle Nexus*: Casey, Karai, Slashuur, and the lovable rat, Splinter. In addition to in-game requirements, these characters will unlock after a number of days from the date you began the game (internal clock). Here are the requirements for unlocking these hidden cast members:

Casey



Become champion of Open Brawl Tournament. Alternate requirement: Unlocks after 5 days.

Karai



Beat Karai in Foot Fight Tournament in less than 150 seconds. Alternate requirement: Unlocks after 35 days.

Slashuur



Become champion of Battle Nexus Tournament. Alternate requirement: Unlocks after 45 days.

Splinter



Complete Episode 11-7. Alternate requirement: Unlocks after 10 days.

To play a hidden character, scroll through the Turtles at the character selection until you see arrows above and below the Turtle's name. Press Up or Down to access the hidden character. There is a hidden character for each of the Turtles.

Take this into consideration when selecting a hidden character: Hidden characters possess some but not all of the skills that the Turtle he or she is replacing has. Splinter is Donatello's alternate character, and while Splinter can also operate computer consoles, he doesn't have Donatello's Rebound Laser. Slashuur is Leonardo's replacement but can't dash through objects. And Karai, Michelangelo's alternate, doesn't have his ability to hover.

Alternate costumes

Play dress up, Turtle style! To help an oversized, talking turtle better blend into the busy city streets, each has two alternate costumes. These are unlocked by various in-game requirements, or by simply entering a password (samurai outfits are available to GameCube players only). Here are the goods to unlocking the alternate costumes for the legendary Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

Samurai outfits





Michelangelo

Examine "Japanese Doll" Antique from Episode 6-6.
GameCube password: MDSMSDM

Leonardo

Examine "Armor Suit" Antique from Episode 6-4.
GameCube password: SMRDLML

Raphael

Examine "Imari Porcelain Plate" Antique from Episode 6-1.
GameCube password: DDRSMSR

Donatello

Examine "Noh Mask" Antique from Episode 6-5.
GameCube password: RDLDSMD

Nexus Turtle outfits





Michelangelo

Overall rank of S or above in Episode 6-6.

Leonardo

Become champion of Monster Open Tournament.

Raphael

Become champion of Foot Fighter Tournament.

Donatello

Overall rank of S or above in Episode 11-3.

Look for a turtle or bat icon on the chests of the Turtles at character selection to indicate that you have unlocked that Turtle's alternate costume(s). To select a costume, hold down either the Block or Dash button while you select the Turtle.



■ Donatello

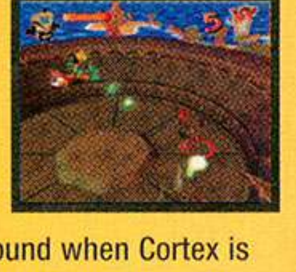
■ PS2/XB

CRASH TWINSANITY

***Crash Twinsanity* pairs Crash and his archrival, Cortex, to fight an even more evil presence. But before you can join him, you must beat him. Here are some tips for fighting Cortex and MechaBandicoot, a two-for-one boss battle in Jungle Bungle.**

Cortex

Cortex flies a hover platform and has three attacks: streaming shots, bombs, and a green plasma blast.



A red target appears on the ground when Cortex is about to fire the streaming shots. To avoid them, just keep moving. Run around the arena in big loops.

Next, a green plasma blast homes in on Crash. Stand still and wait until it's close, then Spin-Attack to send it back.

The final attack is a stream of bombs. A blue target appears on the ground at the spot each bomb will fall. Bombs destroy the floor section they hit, except the very middle section, which is never destroyed.



MechaBandicoot

MechaBandicoot has three attacks: missiles, a chain saw, and a green plasma blast, which are used in that order, unless you've destroyed the weapons.

To avoid his missiles, run along the wall. Keep moving in one direction as long as the missiles are dropping, and you won't be hit.

Mecha-Bandicoot raises his arm before using the chain saw. Run to the side. He drags the chain saw along the wall a short distance and hits you if you're too close.

Finally, MechaBandicoot shudders and "charges up" before firing his green plasma blast. Spin-Attack to knock it back at him. (The blast travels quickly, so be prepared.)



The key to fighting MechaBandicoot is having room to run. Whenever he isn't attacking, go to one end of the arena wall so you have a long way to run when the attacks begin.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIMA GAMES

There's a whole lot more than boss battles and hidden costumes in Prima's Official *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus* Strategy Guide, even though the guide's name alone takes up an entire page. Ready to half-shell out a reasonable sum of cash for said tome? Then head down to your nearest game emporium today.



■ GBA

POKÉMON FIRERED/LEAFGREEN

Want a Legendary Pokémon? The following quest is optional and not required to beat the game. However, if you want Articuno, you have to do it.

Articuno

Items to have on hand

- As many ultra balls as you can carry/afford
- High-level Pokémon with Surf, Strength, and Status attacks such as Paralyze, Sleep, etc.
- Escape rope (to make a quick exit after catching Articuno)

Advance across Route 19 (south of Fuchsia) to reach the Seafoam Islands. Once there, head into the first cave you spot.

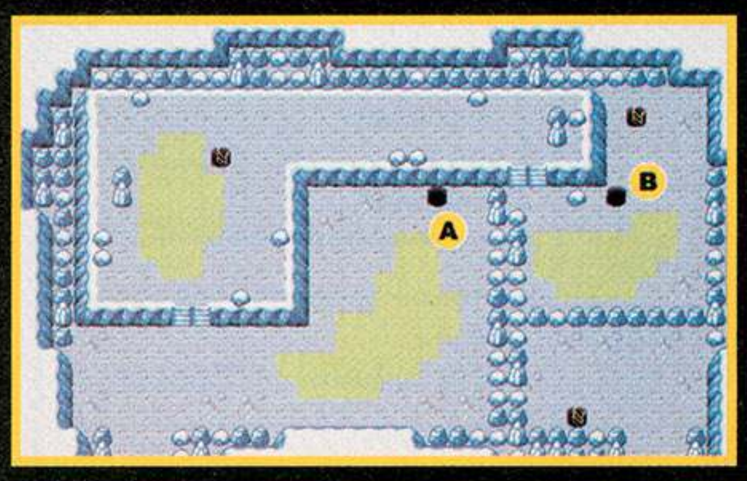
Capturing Articuno requires more work than bagging Zapdos (if you did that first). The main issue is navigating the mazelike levels, pushing various stones into holes and redirecting the water flow so you can reach the Legendary Pokémon that makes its home here.

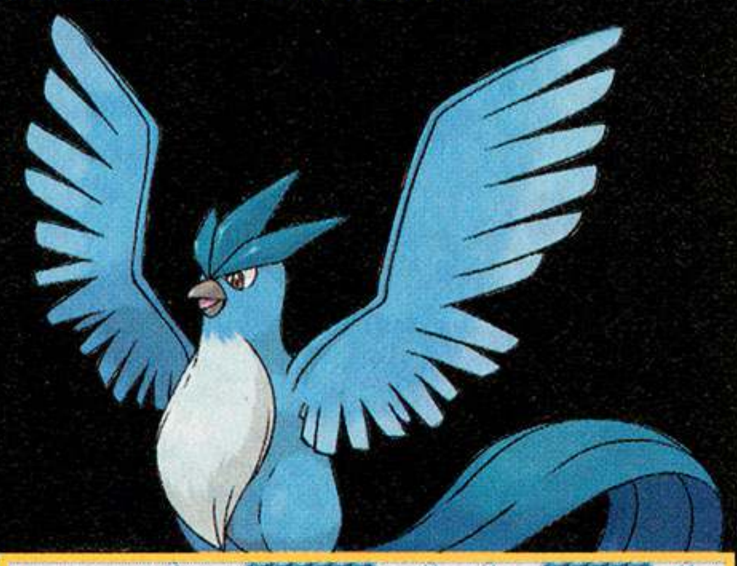
Following this "cheat sheet," however, easily gets you there:

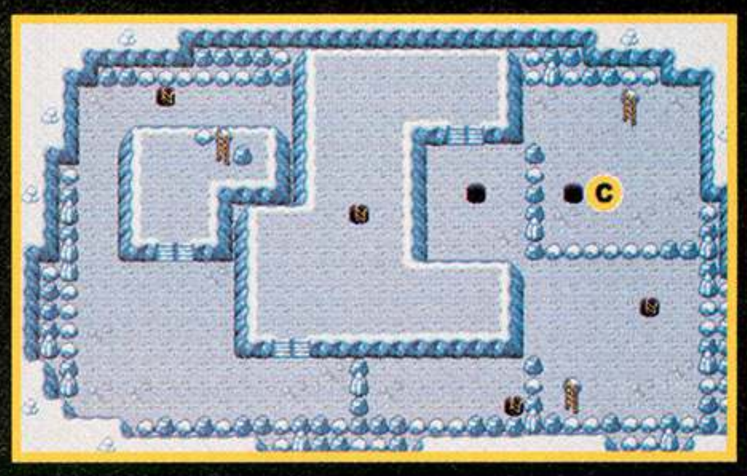
1. Move to point [A] and push the nearby rock into the hole (you only need to do this if you wish to continue to Cinnabar after getting Articuno). Follow that rock down to exit at Seafoam's opposite end; otherwise, continue to step 2.
2. Make your way to point [B], push the nearby rock into the hole, and fall in after it.
3. Push the same rock into the next hole at point [C] and, again, fall in after it.
4. On the next level down, push the rock into the next hole at [D] and clamber in after it.
5. You land in the water and Surf automatically kicks in. From here, surf to the northern stairs, then make your way to the ladder at [E] and climb up.
6. After ascending the ladder, travel to southeastern point [F], then west to find a series of rocks.
7. Maneuver rock [G] left. From there, push rock [H] into the hole below it.
8. With those two out of the way, move rock [I] all the way up, then maneuver rock [J] into the nearest hole by pushing it down once, then left twice, then once into the hole.
9. Drop in after the rock and surf north to find Articuno chilling out on a slab of ice.

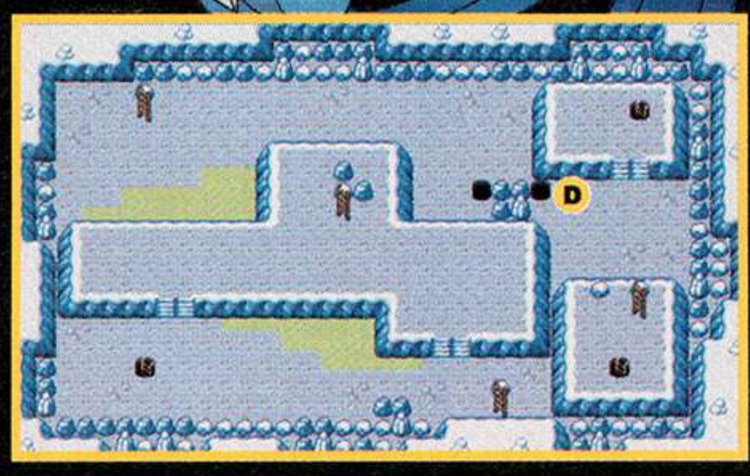
When you reach Articuno, it's business as usual: Reduce his health as low as you can without beating it, then throw ultra balls till he's captured. As was the case with Zapdos, Status effects are helpful. But generally, it takes luck.

After you bag Articuno, use an escape rope to exit or backtrack up and out of Seafoam via Route 19 or Route 20 (if you followed Step 1 to its conclusion). ➤











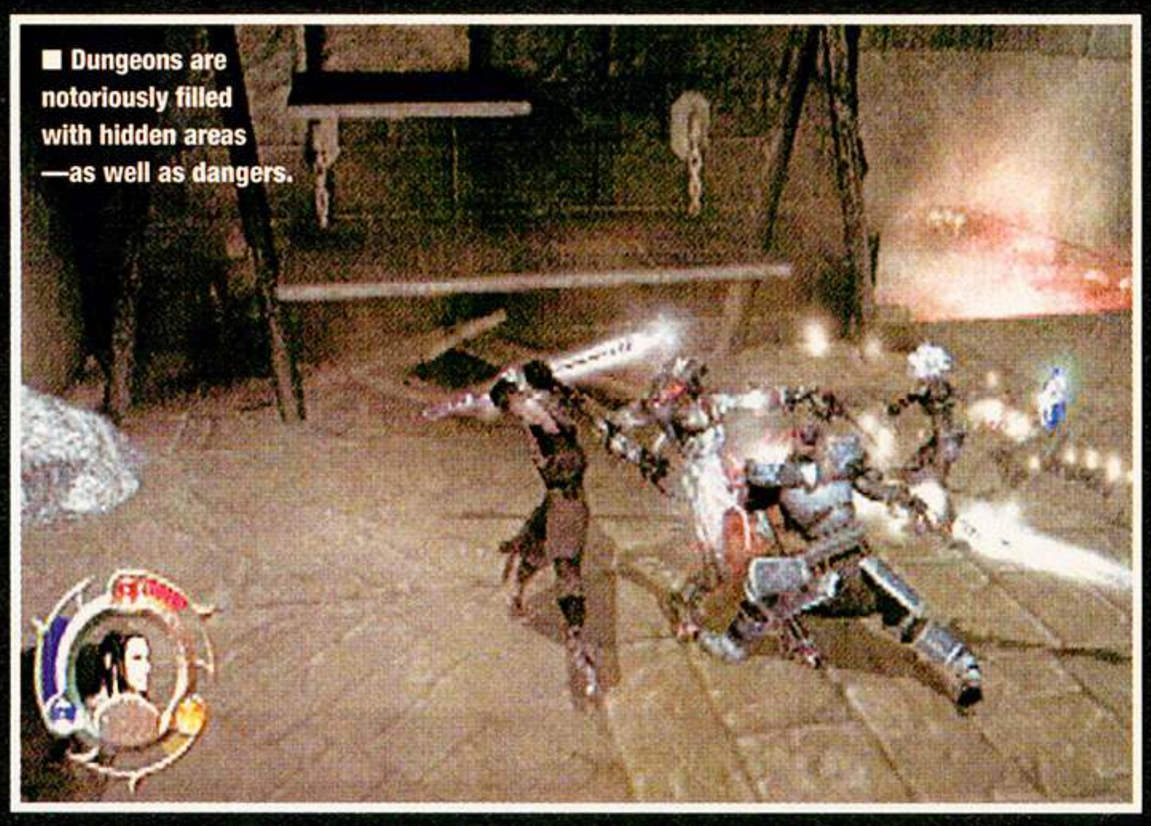


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➤ ■ PS2

FORGOTTEN REALMS: DEMON STONE

In *Forgotten Realms*, there are many hidden areas for you to unearth. Sure you could search endless hours for these areas, or you could read the following and tell all of your friends that you found them for yourself. Who's going to know? Cheater!



■ Dungeons are notoriously filled with hidden areas —as well as dangers.

Chapter 1: War in Damara

There are no hidden areas in this level.

Chapter 2: Descent into Gemspark Mine

Location: Throne room where you fight the orc king boss
What: Treasure chest containing gold

The throne in this room can be destroyed to reveal platforms that lead to the hidden area. Use Rannek's new gauntlets to smash the throne. With the throne gone, Zhai can use her new jumping ability to reach the treasure chest at the top.

Chapter 3: Attack at Cedarleaf

Location: At the top of the platforms near the waterfall that leads to the hut with the switch
What: Bag of gold and treasure chest containing gold

Make sure you grab the treasure before you go to the hut. Once you pass the hut, there's no turning back and you will have missed the hidden area.

Chapter 4: The Wizard's Tower

Location: Behind a cracked wall on the balcony, just before the long hallway with statues and bugbears
What: Three treasure chests of gold and a book pickup

Use Rannek's Gauntlet of Ogre Power or Illius's Beads of Force to crack open the wall.

Chapter 5: The Jungles of Chult

Locations: One is hidden in the bushes to the right of the start location, and another is above the mill
What: Treasure chest of gold

Before you leave the clearing where the party starts the level, look in the trees to the right of the clearing. In the brush and trees is a treasure chest.

There is a hidden treasure chest on the rafters above the upper level of the mill. Zhai can access it here by jumping onto the box, then onto the stairs.

Chapter 6: The Yuan-Ti Temple

Location: To the left of the courtyard outside, just before you enter the temple itself
What: Treasure chest with gold, bag of gold

See those ledges? Zhai can jump up using the cobra's head to reach the top for a few nice surprises.

Chapter 7: Stand at Mithral Hall

Location: On the far side of the tower where you protect Thibbledorf as he jams the gears
What: Treasure chests with gold

For the hidden treasure, have Zhai go down the far stairs, next to the fire pit. You can use any character here, but she is the fastest.

Chapter 8: Into the Underdark

Location: A crude walkway that shoots off the right "arm" of the four-way intersection
What: Bag of gold and treasure chest of gold

At the four-way intersection, take Zhai over to right of the intersection. Notice anything interesting? Jump over to the crude walkway and make your way to the top of the cavern.

Chapter 9: The Dragon's Lair

Locations: This level has three hidden areas in the smaller enclosed rooms
What: Treasure, book pickup, and health scroll

The first area is in this enclosed room with three barrels by the ledges. Use the ledges to reach the top area to find a book pickup and a treasure chest.

Past where you watch the dragon kill Cireka is a small and dark room. Use the ledges to reach the dark hidden area at the top.

The last hidden area of the level is in another small room. Find this room right after the party makes it through the long indoor hallway.

Chapter 10: The Lord of Chaos

Location: This is the same hidden area as in Descent into Gemspark Mine
What: Treasure chest with health scroll

You'll need this health scroll big time.

■ PS2/XB/GC

MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION

Finally, a new *Mortal Kombat* has emerged for our sadistic fighting needs. And what would *Mortal Kombat* be without fatalities? Here are a few of the best of the bunch to get you started.

Mileena: Bite off Head (Fatality)

Toward, Toward, Down, Down, Attack 1 (X on Xbox; Square on PS2, B on GC)

Ashrah: Voodoo Doll Stab (Fatality)

Down, Down, Up, Up, Attack 2 (Y on Xbox; Triangle on PS2, Y on GC)

Mileena: Head Stab (Suicide)

Away, Down, Toward, Away, Attack 1 (X on Xbox; Square on PS2, B on GC)

Ermac: Multi-Slam (Fatality)

Down, Away, Away, Down, Attack 3 (A on Xbox; X on PS2, A on GC)

TOP FIVE TRICKS

■ PS2/XB/GC

Street Racing Syndicate

Pac-Man Vinyls

At the Main Menu, press Up, Down, Left, Right. Enter the password "goretro" and this will give you the *Pac-Man* vinyl.



■ XB

ShellShock: Nam '67

God Mode

At the Start Screen, enter: click Right Thumbstick, click Left Thumbstick, Right, Left, L Trigger, R Trigger, click Right Thumbstick, click Left Thumbstick, Right, Left, L Trigger, R Trigger.

■ PS2

Hot Shots Golf Fore!

Mochi the Dog

To make Mochi, the fun-loving dog caddie, available for purchase in the pro shop, go to the Password menu in Options and enter "mypwpa".



■ PS2

Sly 2: Band of Thieves

Time Rush

Press Start, pausing the game, and press Down, Down, Down, Up, Down, Left, Right. Then press Select to assign the Time Rush gadget to a button.



■ PS2/XB/GC

NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup

Race as Dale Earnhardt:

Go into the Edit Driver menu and change your first name to "The" and your last name to "Intimidator" to unlock the man himself, Dale Earnhardt.



GAMERSCOPES

Blame Uranus! Gaming-inclined predictions by EGM's Clitoria Van Buren



AQUARIUS
(Jan. 21-Feb. 19)
Are you in the s***? Put down that copy of *Vietcong: Purple Haze, Men of Valor, Conflict: Vietnam, Hamburger Hill: I'm Holding My Buddy's Guts In*, or whatever Nam-themed videogame that's dropped you deep in green hell. Scrape off that camo face paint, soldier; tune in and turn on to some hippy games, like *Katamari Damacy*, which is about rolling a ball, rainbows, and world peace.



PISCES
(Feb. 20-Mar. 20)
Does the phrase "Magical Sound Shower" set you all a-tingle? How about "Splash Wave"? If so, you're probably too busy cranking these *OutRun 2* tunes to read this. If not, consider it your duty to conduct a closet-to-closet search for Sega fanboys, and when you find one of the little devils, grab him or her by the lapels and scream, "'Magical Sound Shower' isn't a good song! Not even the Richard Jacques remix."



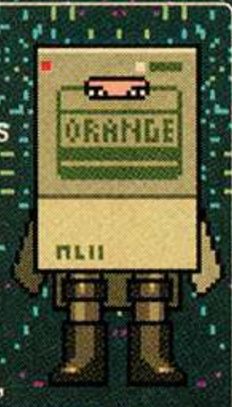
ARIES
(Mar. 21-Apr. 20)
I hope you've been on a last chance powerdrive to finish all your old games, Aries, because your time's officially run out. If you haven't played through *KOTOR* again as a dark Jedi by now, it's not gonna happen. Look at *Paper Mario 2*, *GTA: San Andreas*, *Halo 2*, *Metal Gear Solid 3*, *Metroid Prime 2*, the 40-some-hour *Need for Speed Underground 2*...they just sit there, calling you a sissypants.



TAURUS
(Apr. 21-May 21)
Seems like everybody's coming out with wacky peripherals these days. Taiko drums, $130 *Ace Combat* flight stick bundles, kongas...it's time to get your piece of the pie, Taurus. It takes more than one person with a crackpot idea to make a game, of course, but it doesn't take more than one crackpot to show up at a game developer's doorstep with a homemade pogo stick and some crazy notions. Be that guy!



GEMINI
(May 22-June 21)
Rumor has it *Pac-Man* world record holder Billy Mitchell once reneged on a gentleman's agreement relating to *Missile Command*, setting off a chain of events that ultimately landed Mitchell's rival in a mental hospital. Take heed, Gemini—if you've been consistently tanning someone's hide in *Burnout 3* or, heck, *Animal Crossing*, a Machiavellian plot to take you down could be afoot. Insure your thumbs, posthaste! And for God's sake, don't play *Missile Command*.



CANCER
(June 22-July 22)
I would like to take this opportunity to publicly call out fellow astrologer Vangelis, who claims Cancerians often "...suffer from pleurisy, dropsy, piles, and varicose veins." Charlatan! It's well known that Cancers are susceptible to wicked blisters, most often as a result of intense *Mario Party* sessions, and the occasional club foot. But pleurisy and dropsy?! Piffle! Piles can be a problem, however.



LEO
(July 23-Aug. 21)
Tekken's King knows it takes more than a smart suit and leopard head to make the man. But the suit and leopard head sure help. While neither a suit nor a leopard head is comfortable or practical for an extended session of gaming, the way you present yourself can still psych out the competition. Head- and wristbands are a start, but bowling-style wrist guards and Ace-brand elbow supporters are money in the bank.



VIRGO
(Aug. 22-Sept. 23)
Princess Peach and *Mortal Kombat*'s Johnny Cage would make a good couple. The kind of relationship they would have—based on tenderness and Cage's amazing flexibility—will always remain the ideal, but our own relationships are more complicated. You might find happiness with a game-hating boy- or girlfriend, but when Kano rips out your beating heart, who'll be there to yell, "Awww BAM! KanOWNED!!!"



LIBRA
(Sept. 24-Oct. 23)
That new *Leisure Suit Larry* game really chaps my hide. I've got nothing against naked cartoon sluts, but as far as the naked beefcake goes, I'm stuck looking at that misshapen troglodyte Larry's pimpled heinie. I figure your innate sense of fair play makes this a cause you can really get behind, Libra. I'd say start with petitiononline.com, then transition to a congressional letter writing campaign.



SCORPIO
(Oct. 24-Nov. 22)
Have you thought about firing up *GTA: San Andreas* and taking CJ out for a nice, leisurely drive in the country? I mean, without massacring everyone you see and maybe helping some old ladies (or chicks in hot pants) cross the street? You're a lover, not a fighter, Scorp. Act like one. Put down that *Dead or Alive Ultimate*. Pick up that *Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. Give Kasumi a new baseball cap; she loves that crap.



SAGITTARIUS
(Nov. 23-Dec. 22)
So are you a Nintendo DS or Sony PSP kinda guy (or gal!), Sag? Decide right this very moment: Even as you read this, you're wasting valuable time that could be spent denigrating the competition and building up your personal favorite on message boards across the Internet. I recommend PSP, simply because it's possible to make a delicious but clumsy rhyme using "DS" and a key part of the male anatomy.



CAPRICORN
(Dec. 23-Jan. 20)
They say you've got a head for business, Cap, which is also sort of like saying you have a face for radio. Prove them wrong by founding a nonprofit corporation based on...well heck, you figure it out. Maybe air-dropping GBAs and copies of *WarioWare* onto war-torn countries. Recycling game cases into plastic canoes for when the polar ice caps melt. You try writing something coherent about all this cosmic bullroar.

Illustrations by eBoy

SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP



Barbie, back where she belongs

Forget everything you thought you knew about bad videogames. Now remember what you can, because that knowledge you just forgot might have helped you get through this explanation of our Rest of the Crap selection process, which is quite complicated. First, my editors need to make sure a game is actually bad. They have reached such a level of sophistication that they can do this simply by looking at the amount of pink on the box. Second, the game is given to me in a ceremony I call "Hey, is this copy of *Lame-Ass Cartoon Thing: The Game* on your desk for me?" Thirdly, and this is the most important step, I learn the game inside and out. By the time I'm ready to write my review, I've not only checked the screen several times to see if I'm done skipping the opening cut-scene, I've checked the instruction manual to see if the whole thing wasn't just a practical joke on Game Boy owners.

—Seanbaby



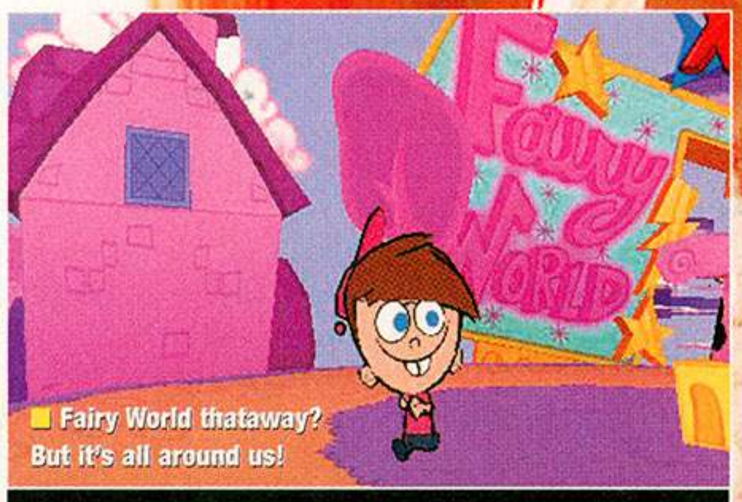
You squirrel bastard!

Barbie as the Princess and the Pauper • GBA

The story begins with the two princesses, Anneliese and Erika, discovering that the orchard's water supply has been sabotaged. "Who could do this?!" they demand rhetorically as they run off in a blind panic. Afterward, their cats meet in the hallway and calmly form a list of suspects. If there was a word for the feeling you get when you realize you're stuck in a puzzle game starring two fashion dolls stupider than their own cats, then I would be typing it.

The princesses each have their own unique ability. Anneliese carries a pink shield; Erika sings. And the limits of these abilities will be tested in a never-ending series of treacherous dangers. For example, squirrels. Which brings me to my only point: How god-damn beautiful do I need to be before squirrels stop trying to kill me? Look at my gown...my brushable hair! Squirrels should be perching on my shoulder and tap-dancing, not throwing acorns at me until I die!

Dirty woodland creatures: The only reason I'm even adventuring through the woods in my prom dress is because I don't have any survival skills. If this is one of those forests where animals torture princesses to death instead of decorating them in flowers, I might as well fill my pockets with bacon and scream like a horny bear. My attack button makes me *sing*, damn it!



Fairy World thataway? But it's all around us!

Fairly OddParents: Shadow Showdown • PS2/GC

This game is very similar to *Fairly OddParents: Breakin' Da Rules* (PS2/GC), a game I know I reviewed at some point, because it's still sitting on my floor. The only reason it's still sitting on my floor is because the videogame store offered me half a dollar for it, and I'm holding out for 75 cents. Hey, stingy nerd clerks, if you're looking for a battle of wills, come and get it.

Battle of Wills, Day One: I sent in seven friends to ask for used copies of *Breakin' Da Rules*. All reported suspicious looks from the clerk. Friends two through seven were also asked if they were friends with the blue-haired guy who tried to trade in that game yesterday.
Day Two: Tactical error. One of the nerd clerks confronted me about trying to artificially inflate the demand for *Breakin' Da Rules*. I pretended not to speak English and asked for directions to the hot dog station. Like a fool, I wasn't wearing a disguise.
Day Three: Sold the game for 30 cents of trade-in, with the stipulation that it can only be redeemed when I'm buying games in a dress because I'm a little girl.

Oh yeah, the review: I forgot to play this, and in the field of journalism, deadlines are more important than details like that. And even though I didn't play it, check this out: 1.5 out of 10.



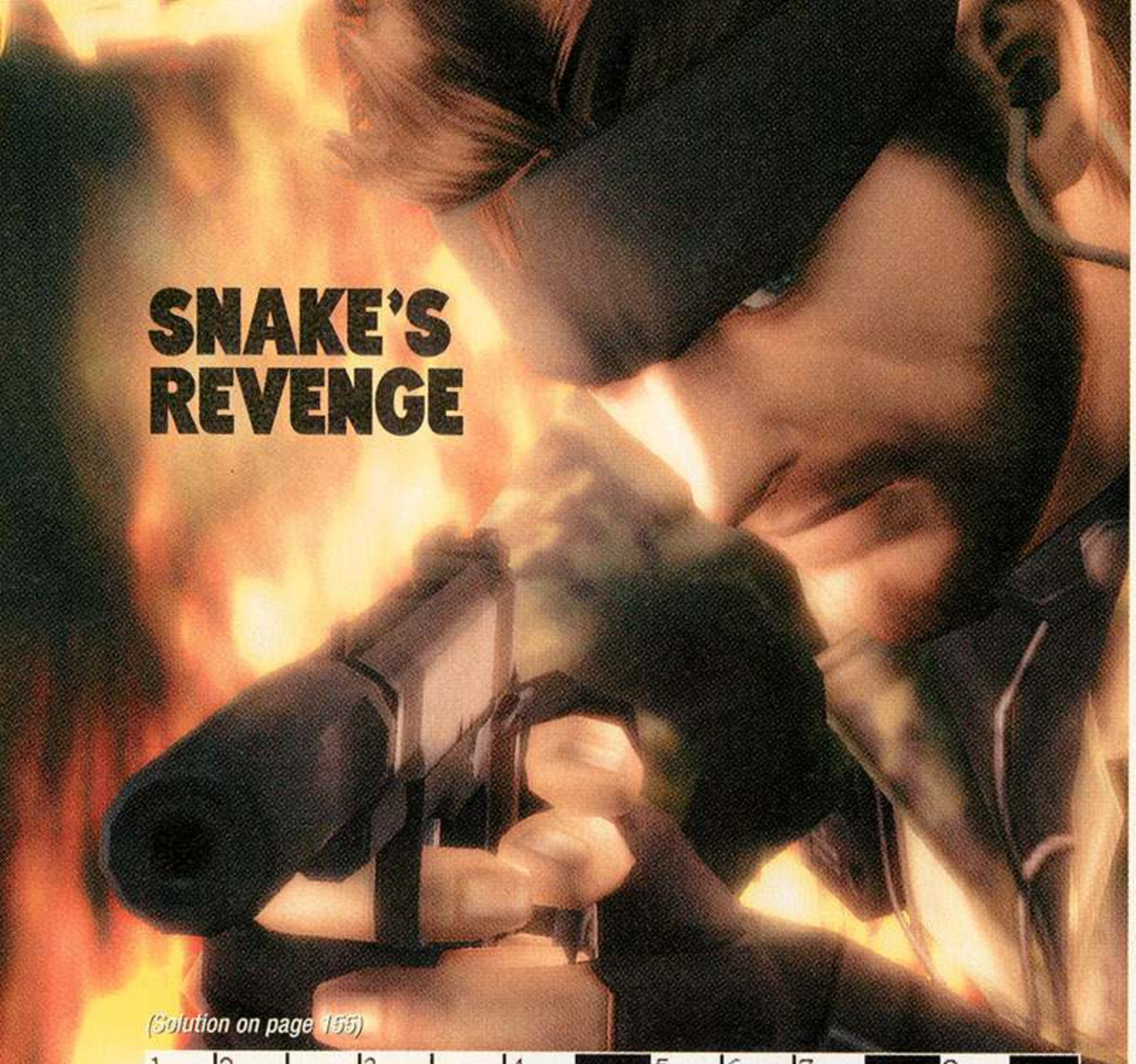
Shark Tale • GBA

Shark Tale goes through the motions of a game. There's a mascot you can jerk around who attacks more or less when you tell him to. But the graphics are a special kind of awful. Maybe they were going for an artsy, Impressionist feel, using patches of pure color and relying on the viewers' eyes to mix them into simulations of form and space. If that's the case—and keep in mind that this theory comes from someone who spent most of his education upside down on a keg—the *Shark Tale* artists are giving my eyes and brain a hell of a lot of credit if they expect me to create the impression of, say, a door out of a purple rectangle with chicken pox.

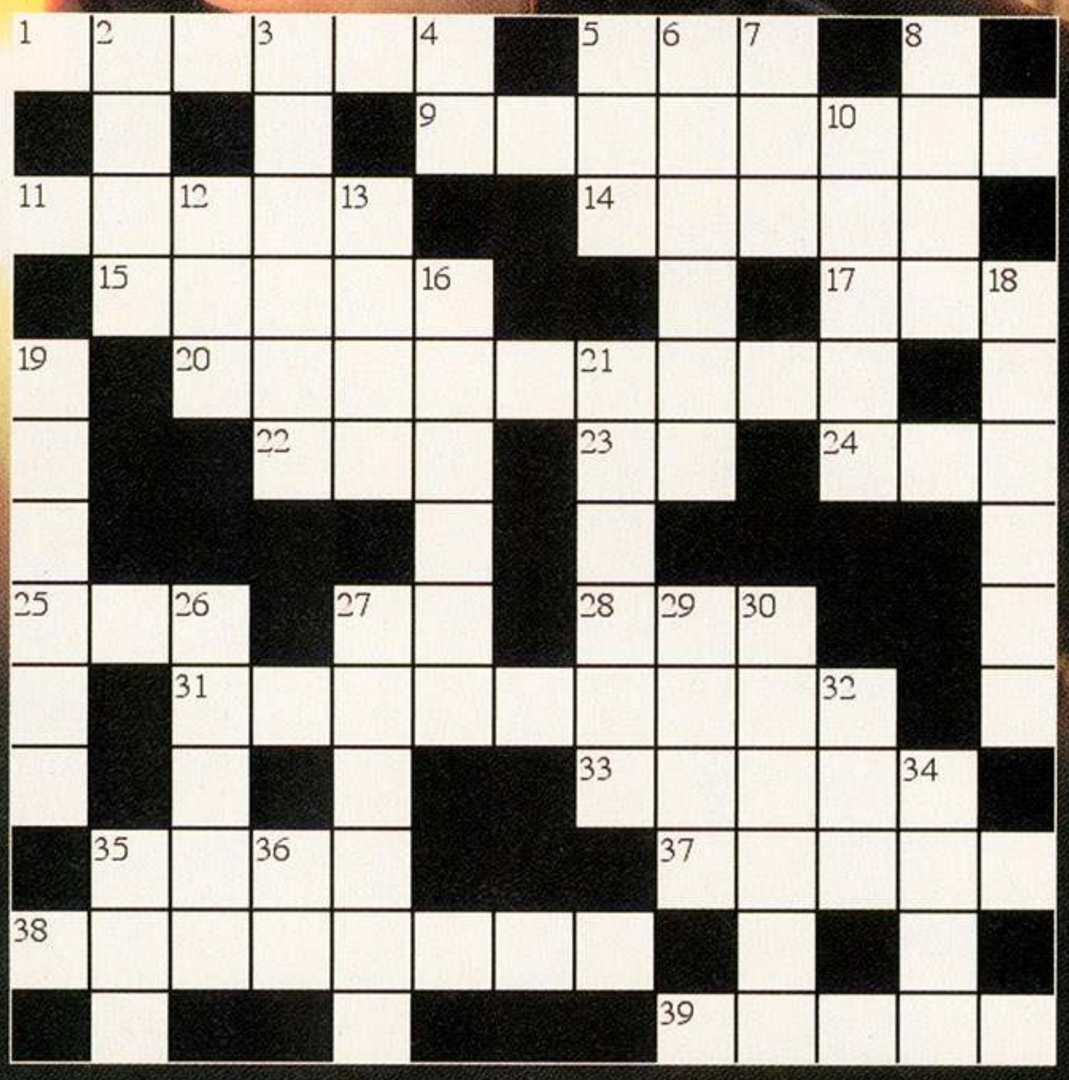
I read the back of the box, so intellectually, I may know that I'm a karate fish kicking a sea horse, but if you brought this to me at a point in my life where I had no prior *Shark Tale* knowledge, I'd say two beaded seat cushions were having an argument. *Shark Tale* looks like a copy of a copy of a 15-year-old documentary on the history of blurry aquarium photography.

Given the right context, not so awful! If you were on the *Shark Tale* website, looking for all the hottest *Shark Tale* news, and this was a free online game, you wouldn't feel so cheated. What I'm saying is that, to score well, *Tale* has to get everyone to drastically lower the standards used to judge games, either by making it free or including a mental disability with each copy.

Photograph by Getty Images



(Solution on page 155)



ACROSS

1. *MGS3* setting
5. Namco's main *Man*
9. Latest *Metal Gear* tank o' doom
11. Acts like a *Resident Evil* zombie?
14. Prerelease game samples
15. Strategy-game explorer
17. Comes between "Q" and "U" in *Sesame Street A-B-C* (GBC)
20. *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s Hal and Emma
22. Lukewarm PS2 beat-em-up (abbrv.)
23. *Kriss Kross: Make _ Video* (Sega CD)
24. First word in 22 ACROSS acronym
25. Shorthand for some strategy games
27. Sega 3D brawler, for short
28. *LOTR*'s Sir McKellen
31. X-Men leader's title
33. Contracted a butler in *The Sims*?
35. *MGS3* snappable foliage
37. Xbox 'board game
38. Alternative to "quit"
39. *SOCOM* grenade type

DOWN

2. Space invaders?
3. *MGS* enemy soldiers
4. Half of Sega Sports licensee name
5. Controller
6. *Enter the Matrix* bad guys
7. Half-assed handheld Game Dot _
8. *MGS3* blonde bombshell
10. Subject of Xbox Barbie *Adventure*
12. *Smash Court Tennis* untouched serve
13. *Tekken* Ganryu's sport
16. Start a game of *Tiger Woods PGA Tour*?
18. *MGS3* old-man marksman
19. *MGS3* terrorist group
21. Like some *Doom 3* monsters?
26. Xbox-exclusive *Soul Calibur II* combatant
27. *MGS3* colonel
29. Where Region 3 game DVDs work
30. Medium difficulty mode
32. *The Urbz* measurable clout
34. Eidos' *Ex* first-person adventure
35. Like *Gun* or *Gear*
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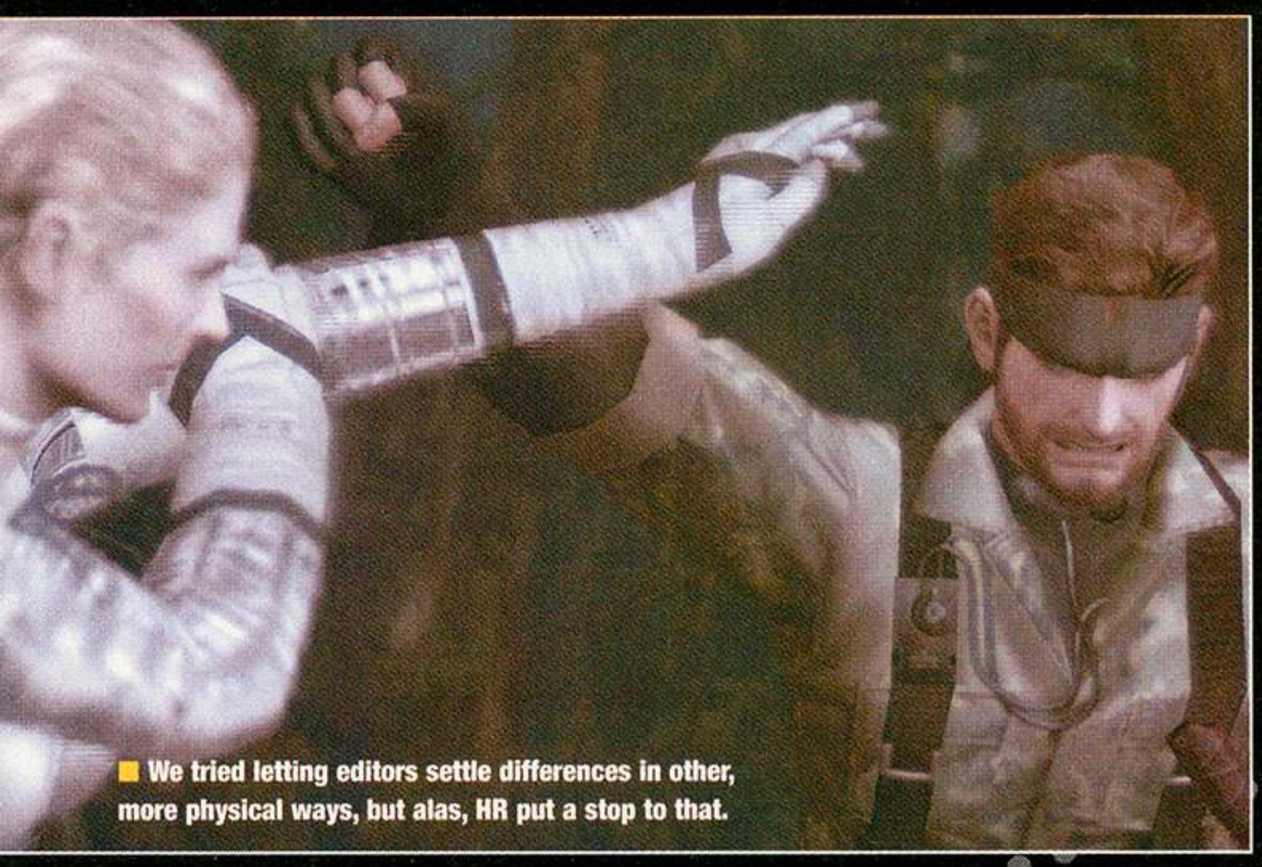
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FINAL WORD

Two crazy editors, one crazy game



■ We tried letting editors settle differences in other, more physical ways, but alas, HR put a stop to that.

He loves *Star Wars*' Jar-Jar Binks and hates nickels (yes, the coin). What does that tell you about *EGM* Previews Editor Shane Bettenhausen? That he gets beat up a lot around the offices and that he's an opinionated freak—perfect for being a guest again on Final Word. Going up against him this month is 1UP.com News Editor Dave Smith, who's equally as opinionated but slightly less insane.

"I love *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s story line. Yeah, you heard me."

***Metal Gear Solid 2*'s story line. Discuss.**

Shane: My opinion here isn't a popular one, but I love *MGS2*'s story line. Yeah, you heard me. I loved how the tanker mission with Snake was just a tease—*MGS* creator Hideo Kojima had the balls to take everything fans expected and twist it into something unexpected. Introducing a new character took a lot of guts, and I feel that Raiden gets a bum rap. Yeah, he's no Snake, but his story is just as compelling. *MGS2*'s story is admittedly a bit hard to follow and leaves a lot of unanswered questions, but it tackles some shockingly deep stuff that challenges gamers to actually think. From postmodern musings on the power of virtual killing to apocalyptic theories on the dissemination of information, *MGS2* goes miles above the heads of any other game out there.

Dave: Revolver Ocelot's hand can think. Deep. Otacon slept with his stepmom. Deep. Thirteen dead guys rule the world. DEEP! FORTUNE CAN MAGICALLY DEFLECT MISSILES! SHOCKINGLY DEEP! IT ALL MIGHT BE A VIRTUAL REALITY DREAM ANYHOW! DEEP! DEEP! DEEP!

Any worthwhile points this material might have made are buried under a mountain of nonsense. The story is terribly told, too—there's no attempt at artfully presenting the narrative, just gigantic wads of exposition interrupting any kind of groove the gameplay might get into.

Shane: I'll agree that some of the cut-scenes seem to stretch into infinity, but if you approach *MGS2* with an open mind (and maybe take some notes), you can really enjoy the story. I'm not sure why Dave got so riled up about the plot, really. Maybe the whole stepmom thing hit a little close to home or something.

Dave: Instead of a logical explanation of what's entertaining or edifying about the story, all Shane can muster is "Fantastic! Incredible!" and lurid sexual innuendo. Rather sad, really.

Which was better, *MGS1* or *2*?

Dave: *MGS1* had better boss battles, a tighter story line, more compelling villains, and more innovative gameplay within its technological limitations. The sequel...had awesome cut-scenes. Sometimes. And you could shoot watermelons.

Shane: Well, I agree with Dave that the first *Metal Gear Solid* gets the slight edge here...but I also really enjoyed *MGS2*'s story line. No, really. It's fantastic.

Which games are better all around? *Metal Gear Solid*, *Splinter Cell*, or... uh...*Spy Fiction*?

Dave: Which did you play more—*MGS2* or *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*? Chances are you beat *MGS2* once and put it away. *Splinter Cell* delivers a compelling solo campaign and a multiplayer mode that people are still playing online, seven months after its release. Seven months after *MGS2* came out, gamers were still trying to make sense of the plot.

In its limp-wristed defense, *MGS2* is still better than *Spy Fiction*.

Shane: Yeah, *Pandora Tomorrow*'s excellent multiplayer action kept gamers enthralled for months, but the single-player *Splinter Cell* experience is wildly overrated. Dull stories, busted A.I., and an overabundance of missions that force you to restart if you're spotted once kept me from playing through either *Cell*.

Dave: What does *MGS2* do better in terms of single-player game design? Let you ham-fistedly shoot through what's supposed to be a stealth game? For every hole in *Splinter Cell*'s A.I. and level design, you can find three in *MGS2*.

■ Would you trust an editor who actually likes this guy? Beat him up, sure. Trust, no.



■ Who knew *Splinter Cell* vs. *MGS* arguments could get so cutthroat.

Shane: At least you don't have to worry about restarting obscenely long missions over and over à la *Splinter Cell*.

Going off-topic...what's your early predictions for Game of the Year?

Dave: *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* will outsell everyone, but it'll probably lose in the year-end awards, just like *Vice City*. *Halo 2* is the out-front favorite, and there's a fistful of dark-horse contenders—*Prince of Persia 2*, *Metroid Prime 2*, *Ratchet & Clank 3*, even *Burnout 3*.

Shane: Yeah, I predict *Halo 2* to sweep. Still, the voting at *EGM* is pretty fair and democratic, so if a few people feel strongly about *San Andreas* or *Metroid Prime 2*, it could sway the vote in an unexpected way.... 🎮

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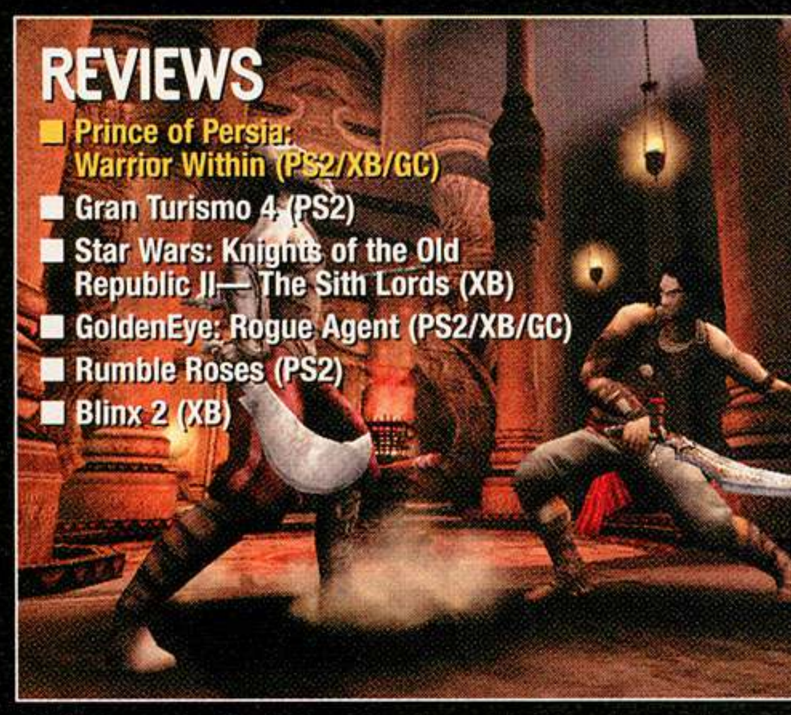


IN TOUCH WITH DS

We finally get a chance to caress the glorious touch screen and tell you just how good it feels. That's right, we're bringing you the first ever **reviews of Nintendo DS games**, in addition to **previews of the big games** that were delayed until next year. Expect juicy details on such titles as *Conker: Live & Reloaded*, *Jade Empire*, *Suikoden IV*, *Shadow of Rome*, and a host of others. Plus, if you think the games we reviewed this month look good, you should see them compared to stuff that's 10 years old. After playing classic games for hours for the return of our **Child's Play** feature, the kids we kidnapped seemed happy to see an N-Gage. OK, so we didn't mistreat them that badly, but they did have trouble figuring out which button killed the hookers in *Adventure* for the Atari 2600.

As a bonus for all you lucky devils who buy the issue from newsstands, you'll gain access to our **best DVD ever**. It's got contests, trivia, video features of the biggest games of 2005, loads of free desktop wallpapers, and tons more!





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I MEAN, DON'T GET ME WRONG, YOU **DO** WANNA GET THOSE OUTTA THERE, THEY PILE UP.

THESE ARE ISSUES EVERY HOMEOWNER MUST FACE, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF US WHO KEEP VALUABLE ITEMS WITHIN OUR WALLS, LIKE TOP-SECRET SOFTWARE DESIGNS, OR THE OCCASIONAL SOUVENIR HULA GIRL LAMP.

IF THERE'S A HOLE IN SECURITY, WE **NEED** TO KNOW!

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CRAZ GLUE

IN ORDER TO PROVE THE SUCCESS OF THE BREAK-IN, OUR SPECIALISTS HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO RETRIEVE THIS HANDSOME STATUE OF LUIGI, THE LESSER MARIO BROTHER.

AS SOON AS GILA MOBSTER CONCLUDES THE BRIEFING, THE TASK WILL BE UNDER WAY, AND WE'LL BE **THAT** MUCH CLOSER TO FEELING A GOOD DEAL SAFER IN OUR HOMES!

LUIGI "SECOND BANANA" MARIO

SO... IS LETHAL FORCE AUTHORIZED?

SURE, WHY WOULDN'T IT BE? CRAZY LIBERAL!

ALL RIGHT. LET'S BE FAIR ABOUT THIS, WE REALLY SHOULDN'T BE STANDING AROUND, **WAITING** FOR THEM.

WE SHOULD GO ABOUT OUR DAILY ROUTINES, BEHAVING FULLY UNAWARE OF IMPENDING INVASION IN OUR PRIVATE DWELLINGS.

I'M GOING TO DO SOME DUSTING.

DUST DUST

DUST DUST

OH, COME ON, ALREADY.

BY COINCIDENCE, I JUST HAPPEN TO BE AIRING OUT THE OL' TUNA NET TODAY.

BOOM!

GO! GO! I WANT A FULL SWEEP OF THE FIRST FLOOR!

NEUTRALIZING HOSTILE PRESENCE!

BONK BONK BONK

OW! OW! OW!

FOUND IT!

IT'S-A HIM!

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