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VAN H

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2004

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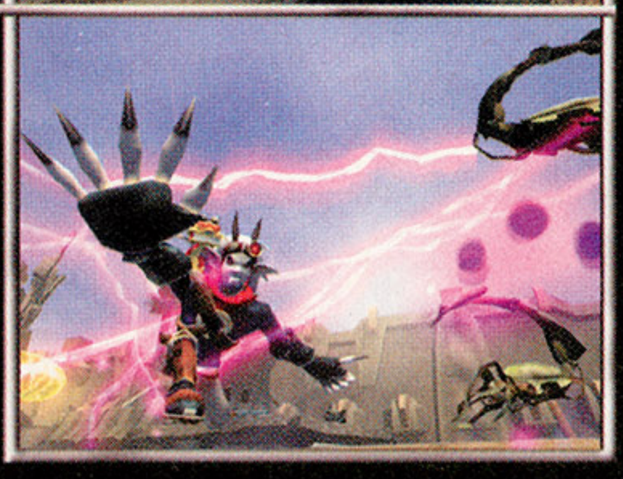

It ain't no namby pamby fairyland, pal. It's a whole new kind of evil. Crawling with ruthless dictators, backstabbing allies and blood thirsty freaks with an appetite for extra rare meat. All pansies kindly tippy toe on out of here. This requires someone with serious ass-kicking savvy. And that someone, my friend, is Jak. This time he's pissed off and battle ready, with a frighteningly large gun, get-the-hell-outta-my-way hoverboard and a nasty case of mutant powers. So please, save yourself the detached appendages and let him handle it.

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THE MINOTAUR OF ATLANTA

ZOOM VICK
at
nikelab.com
BISLEY
VICK

contents

issue 175 · february 2004

LETTERS

20 Shucks, a whole month and no steamy love letters

PRESS START

The latest news, interviews, features, and gaming tidbits

36 FIRST LOOK—HITMAN: CONTRACTS
Mr. Clean returns to the PS2 and Xbox for yet another killing spree

38 INSTANT EXPERT
We list all the essentials needed to build one killer PC-gaming rig

40 FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES
Finally, a reason to dig through the closet for your GC-GBA link cable

42 AFTERTHOUGHTS: SOCOM II
Don't join Bravo team until you read these tactical strategies

46 EGM INTERNATIONAL
Batter up! Here's America's pastime like you've never seen it before

53 METROID: ZERO MISSION
Samus returns in portable form

54 AFTERTHOUGHTS: PRINCE OF PERSIA
We turn back the sands of time to chat about *POP*'s development

62 CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EVERQUEST
Take our personality test to see which RPG profile fits you best

63 CELEBRITY INTERVIEW
We spy on *Lifeline* star Kristen Miller

64 THE BARD'S TALE
Newbie developer InXile breaks the rules of today's action-RPGs

68 FACTORY SHOWROOM
Check out the latest and greatest game gadgets

72 SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN
A look at how to stop this deadly virus, online and off

74 ONLINE
We have the answers to all your *Rainbow Six 3* questions

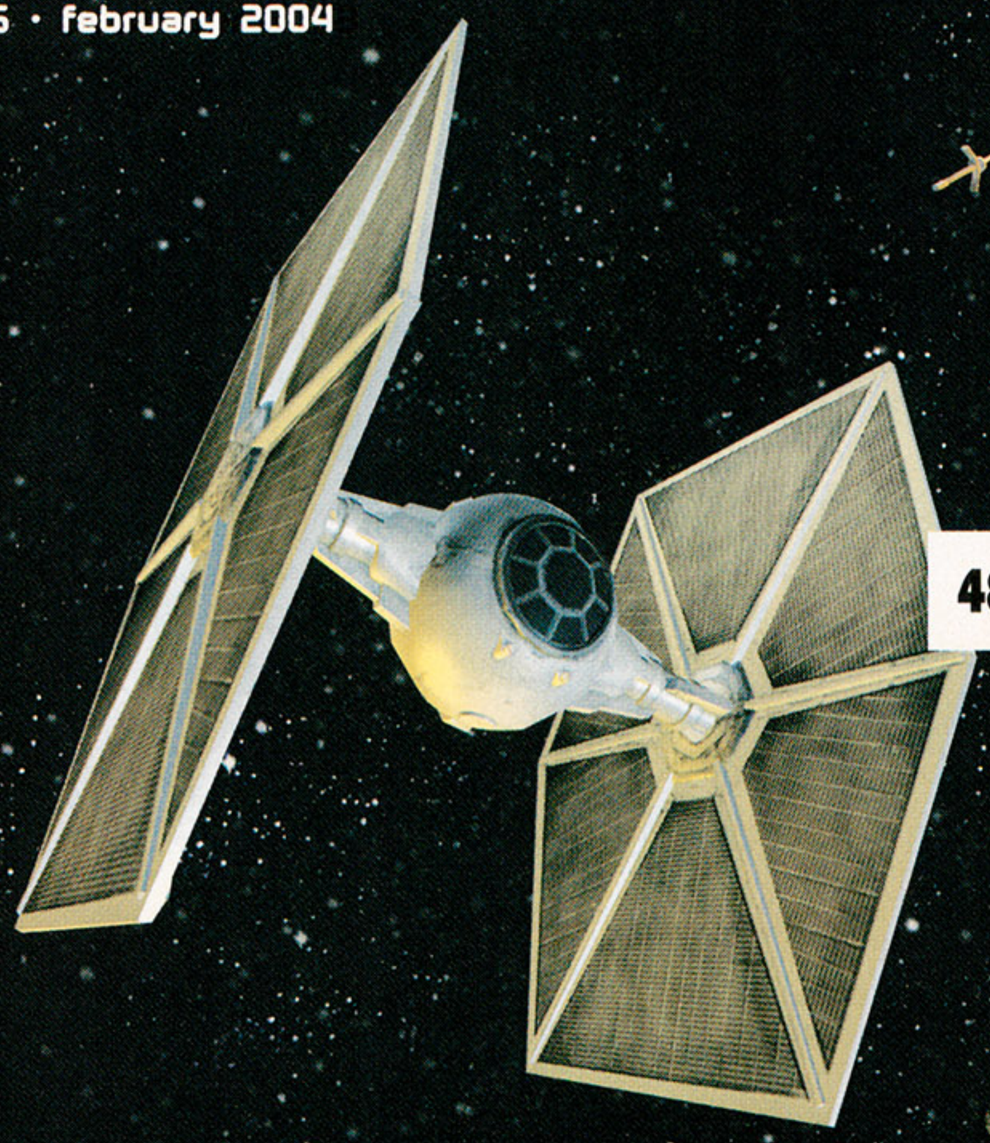
76 DRAKENGARD
Revenge isn't as sweet without the help of a dragon

80 THE RUMOR MILL
What's that? A *Halo 2* delay?

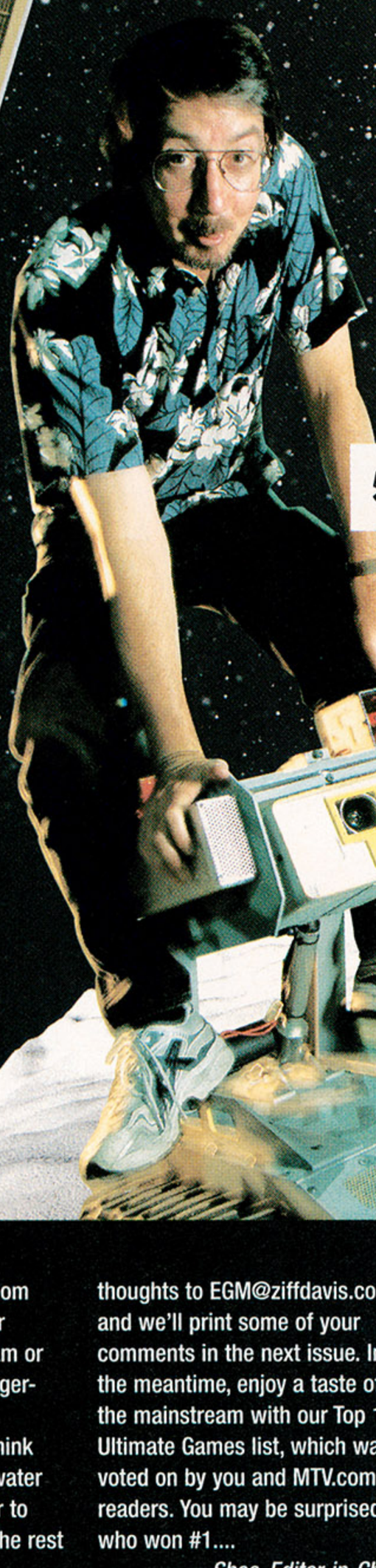
82 THE SUFFERING
Droppin' the soap is the least of your worries in this survival-horror prison

86 THE HOT 5
Master Chief reigns supreme...again

87 COMING SOON
16 ways to spend your holiday cash from the grandparents



48 STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT
Opposing forces in a galaxy far, far away take the fight online



58 PLAY MONEY
How eccentric folks from the gaming industry spend their hard-earned cash

30 FINAL FANTASY XII
Square Enix's next big thing in the world of role-playing is revealed

editorial

We all know videogames are mainstream. Every major newspaper from the *San Francisco Chronicle* to the *Wall Street Journal* has a videogame beat. Our industry makes more dough than Hollywood. Spike TV just had an awards show, and MTV is doing an hour-long special with us (see our Top 15 special, pg. 90). And my mom just bought an Xbox. Either videogames *are* mainstream or the world's gone twirly-finger-'round-the-ear cuckoo.

Readers: What do you think about this trend? Does it water down the fun or is it better to share Mario and co. with the rest of the world? Send your thoughts to EGM@ziffdavis.com, and we'll print some of your comments in the next issue. In the meantime, enjoy a taste of the mainstream with our Top 15 Ultimate Games list, which was voted on by you and MTV.com readers. You may be surprised at who won #1....

—Shoe, Editor-in-Chief

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REVIEW CREW
Not one, not two, but three reviews for each game

Multiplatform
102 Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne
106 SpyHunter 2
106 Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines
108 Sonic Heroes
110 Mission: Impossible Operation Surma
110 Monster 4x4: Masters of Metal
111 Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II

PlayStation 2
112 Maximo vs. Army of Zin
114 American Idol
114 Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly
118 Manhunt
120 EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers
120 Lowrider
122 .hack Part 4: Quarantine

Xbox
122 Carve
124 Deus Ex: Invisible War
126 Counter-Strike

GameCube
127 Pokémon Channel

Game Boy Advance
128 Sword of Mana
128 Yu Yu Hakusho: Spirit Detective
129 Max Payne

TRICKS OF THE TRADE
Game hints, tips, and cheats

136 Mario Kart: Double Dash!!
136 True Crime: Streets of L.A.
137 Tony Hawk's Underground
137 Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge
138 Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike
138 Medal of Honor: Rising Sun
139 GameShark vs. Action Replay
140 XIII
140 Rainbow Six 3
141 Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga

GAME OVER
A buncha stuff that don't fit anywhere else, ya dig?

142 REST OF THE CRAP
143 CROSSWORD
144 HOROSCOPES
145 NEXT MONTH
146 HSU & CHAN

TOP 15 GAMES

90 *EGM* readers and MTV viewers join forces to rank the top games of the millennium, plus we find out what's next for these super-duper videogame franchises.

staff

our thumb calluses make children cry

the review crew

DAN "SHOE" HSU, Editor-in-Chief
So many holiday games to play, but when Shoe takes a break from editing, he goes back to good ol' *Rainbow Six 3* on Xbox Live (aim for "EGM Shoe") and *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*.
Also Playing: *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, *Simpsons: Hit and Run*
Fave Genres: Just about everything

MARK MACDONALD, Executive Editor
While his workers' comp paperwork for being forced to play *Pokémon Channel* without protective gear is being processed, Mark somehow finds the will to help write and edit the mag.
Now Playing: *SOCOM II*, *Rainbow Six 3*, *Halo* (PC)
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Shooters

JENNIFER TSAO, Managing Editor
It's time to give a big shout out to all those brave American soldiers in the Middle East who've taken a minute to write nice letters to Jennifer. Come home soon—we miss ya!
Now Playing: *Prince of Persia*, *SSX 3*, *Final Fantasy X-2* (still...)
Fave Genres: Adventure, Action Sports, Music, RPG

CRISPIN BOYER, Senior Editor
It's time to give a big shout out to all those *EGM* editors giving big shouts out to the soldiers in the Middle East. To those about to shout out, I salute you.
Now Playing: *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, *Rainbow Six 3*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, RPG

CHRIS "CJ" JOHNSTON, News Editor
CJ's playing so much *Rainbow Six 3* online ("EGM Chris" on Xbox Live) that he sneaks around the office yelling things like "Breach and clear!" before kicking the bathroom door open.
Now Playing: *Rainbow Six 3*, *Mario Kart: DD!!*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Puzzle, Music

SHANE BETTENHAUSEN, Reviews Editor
Over the past four years, Shane has lent his critical acumen to publications like *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, *Xbox Nation*, *GMR*, *Computer Gaming World*, and *Cat Fancy*.
Now Playing: *Mario Kart: DD!!*, *Sonic Heroes*, *Zelda II* (NES)
Fave Genres: Action, RPG, Fighting, Karaoke

JOE FIELDER, Previews Editor
Old-school Apple II RPG *The Bard's Tale* was the first game that Joe ever lost major sleep playing, so we sent him down to SoCal to check out the new action-RPG update.
Now Playing: *Prince of Persia*, *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*
Fave Genres: Action, Shooters, Strategy

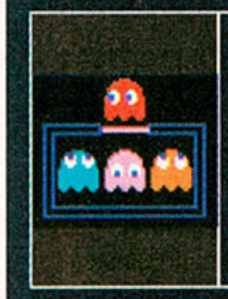
DEMIAN LINN, Editor-at-Large
To research his *Lowrider* review Demian strongly considered attending some lowrider-related events, but ultimately decided just to look at pictures on the Internet.
Now Playing: *Mario Kart: DD!!*, *Rainbow Six 3*, *Lowrider*
Fave Genres: Action, Hockey, Racing, Fighting

PAUL BYRNES, Associate Editor
Taking a page from Max Payne's graphic novel, Paul's been trying to woo dangerous dames with hard-boiled noir-type romanticynicism. So far, no dice.
Now Playing: *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*, *Prince of Persia*
Fave Genres: Adventure, RPG, Puzzle

BRYAN INTIHAR, Associate Editor
A pic of Bryan visiting Japan (for *Final Fantasy XII*) would be perfect here, but a problem with customs cost him his camera. He doesn't wanna talk about it!
Now Playing: *Prince of Persia*, *NFL Street*, *Kingdom Hearts*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Sports

SHAWN ELLIOTT, Associate Editor
To research his *Lowrider* review Shawn strongly considered looking at pictures on the Internet, but ultimately decided just to attend some lowrider-related events.
Now Playing: *Lowrider*, *Max Payne 2*, *NFL Street*
Fave Genres: Fighting, Shooters, Adventure, Racing

Guest Reviewers



JON DUDLAK
Inspired by *Fatal Frame 2*, Jon went out and captured these elusive spooks on his antique shutterbox.

GREG FORD
This month, Ford...star, power-slide, fun, stadium, *Mario Kart*, mush-room, 150cc, shell, cactus, banana....

JOHN RICCIARDI
Ricciardi's New Year's resolution: no more *Dragon Ball Z* reviews. (You got that, Shane?) Happy New Year!

KEVIN GIFFORD
Reviewing *EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers* meant no social life for Kevin this month.

PATRICK MAURO
Syndicated radio guy plays video-games, watches sports, reads Hesse, and aspires to start a cult.

■ Each month, the enterprising editorial staffs of our sister gaming mags (and website) **XBOX NATION**, **GAMENOW**, **OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE**, **GMR**, and **1UP.COM** lend several dozen helping hands (and blistered thumbs) to our Review Crew.

The Contributors

■ **SCOTT STEINBERG** reveals the glitzy lifestyles of game developers in our Play Money feature....
■ **WILL O'NEAL**, PC-hardware guru at *Computer Gaming World*, gives a quickie lesson on building the ultimate computer-gaming rig in Instant Expert....
■ Prima Games' tricks guru **DAVID HODGSON** tells you how to let Snoop Dogg off the leash in *True Crime*....
■ **DANIEL BOUTROS**, a Brit writer for the BBC, takes an inside look at the next installment in the *Hitman* series—and lives to tell about it....
■ **JUSTIN SPEER** gives you the skinny on *The Suffering*, as well as the games you're starving for in The Hot Five....
■ **CASEY LOE** helps aspiring role-players pick the perfect character class in *Champions of Norrath*....
■ 1UP.com's **KEVIN GIFFORD** finds out why it pays to have four GBAs when playing the forthcoming *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*.

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DESIGN
Art Director Monique Convertito
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CONTRIBUTORS
Chris Baker, Daniel Boutros, Che Chou, Robert Coffey, Kevin Convertito, eBoy, Chuck Ernst, Jon M. Gibson, David Hodgson, Dustin Hostetler, Casey Loe, Miguel Lopez, Will O'Neal, Thierry Nguyen, Tom Price, Marc Saltzman, Norm Scott, Seanbaby, Carrie Shepherd, Justin Speer, Scott Steinberg, Phil Theobald, Giancarlo Varanini

Founder Steve Harris

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Senior Vice President Dale Strang
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Copy Chief Tom Edwards
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Art Production Manager Michele Manousos
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Production Manager Monica Brent
Assistant Production Manager Teresa Newson

CIRCULATION
Group Circulation Director Tracy Schultz
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Senior Advertising Coordinator Tipler Ubbelohde
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MARKETING
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Assoc. Research Director May Tong
Marketing Coordinator Wayne Shiu

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IT'S TIME FOR SOME NEW HEROES.

EVERYONE

E

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Mild Fantasy Violence

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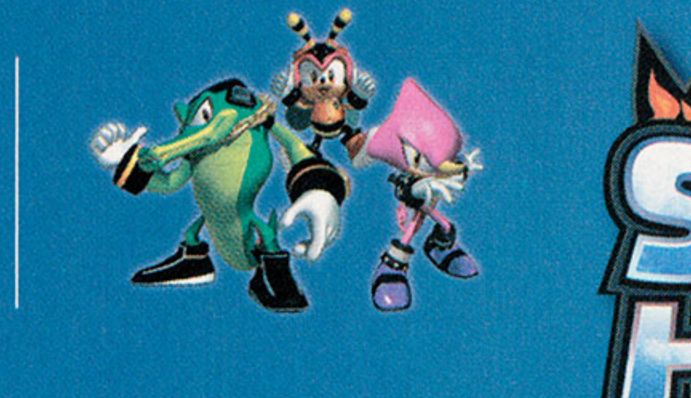

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SWORD of MANA

EVERYONE

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GAME BOY ADVANCE

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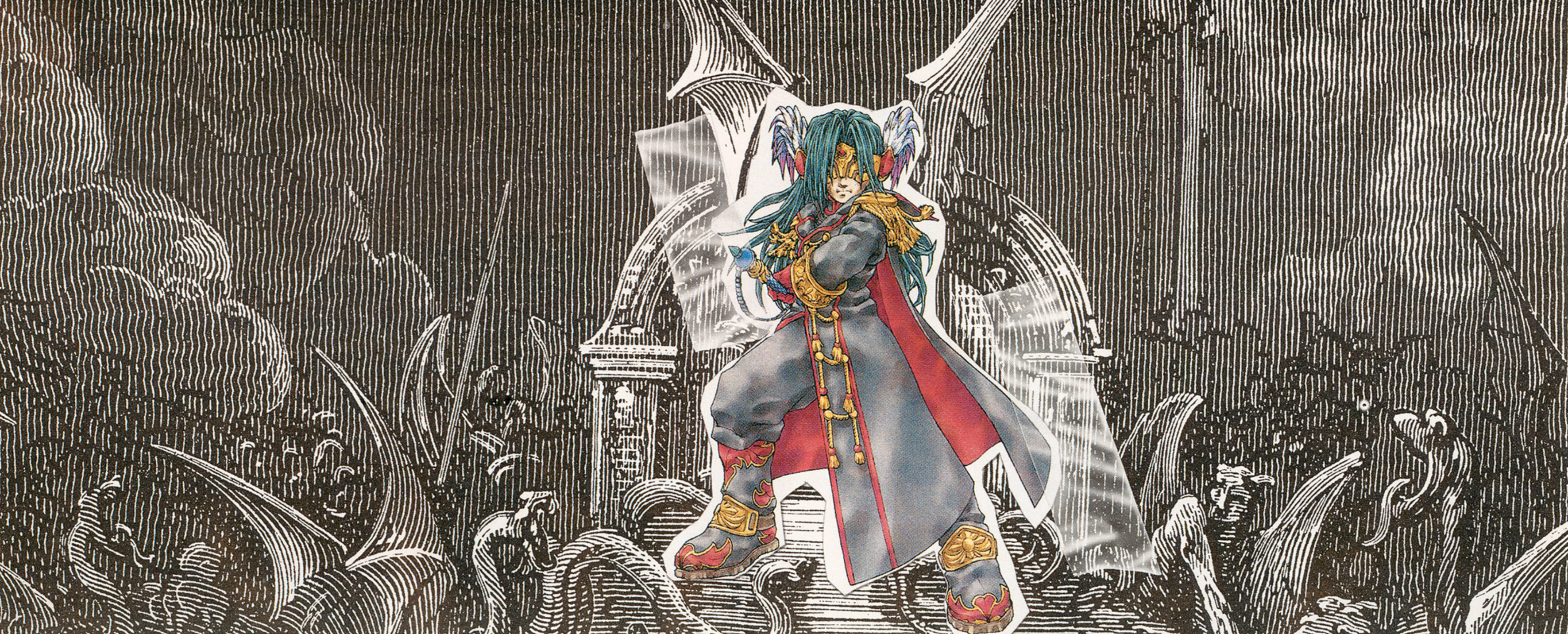
who are you?



letters

ranting, raving, and a very excited mario

■ I want you! For the Imperial army.

A man's casa is his castle

In your recent review of *Jedi Academy* (XB) [*EGM* #174, page 156], reviewer Bryan Intihar wondered, "Since when did Darth Vader have a castle?" Well, since Timothy Zahn's *Thrawn Trilogy* book series (in which Luke Skywalker is trying to found a school for Jedi). In one of Luke's many adventures, he finds himself at his father's castle, Casa de Vader, a submerged dwelling which can only be entered by using the Force to raise the house up from the depths.

I don't know if it's the same in the game—I don't have an Xbox, because my wife says a PlayStation 2 and GameCube are enough (shows what she knows about gaming). Hope I didn't geek out too much on you there, but I know you guys and gal at *EGM* understand.

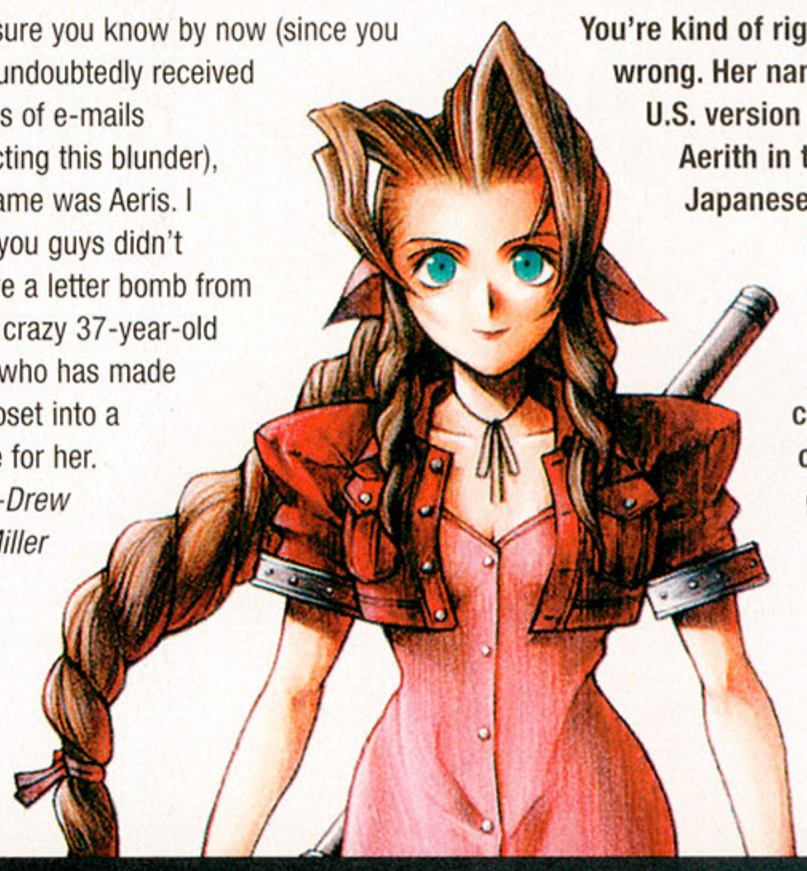
—Scott Shiveley

Casa de Vader? Even if what you say is true...we choose not to believe it.

Revisionist history

I understand that everyone has a brain fart now and then, but you are gonna make some people mad unless you print a correction to the typo that appeared not once, but twice on page 32 of *EGM* #173. You wrote that the murdered girl in *Final Fantasy VII* was named "Aerith," but as I am sure you know by now (since you have undoubtedly received billions of e-mails correcting this blunder), her name was Aeris. I hope you guys didn't receive a letter bomb from some crazy 37-year-old dude who has made his closet into a shrine for her.

—Drew Miller



You're kind of right, but mostly wrong. Her name is Aeris in the U.S. version of *FFVII*, but Aerith in the original Japanese. When Square released *Kingdom Hearts* here (featuring *Aerith*), the name change was official. Didn't you get the memo?

Painful burning

As I was reading the review of *Project Gotham Racing 2* in *EGM* #174 (page 150), I noticed that you said "kudo" is the second ugliest word in the English language. If this is true, could you please solve all my problems and tell me, what's the first ugliest word?

—Nich Backman

Hemorrhoid. ➤

letter of the month

Much ado aboot nothing

So I got my *EGM* in the mail the other month and noticed a sweet giveaway that involves the console of your choice and three games to go with it. I was beside myself with joy.

Then I got the latest *EGM* and noticed a giveaway of *Final Fantasy X-2*, three action figures, a poster, and the strategy guide to said game. Again, the joy radiated. Until I went to the website—as instructed—and read, "Open to U.S. residents only."

It's probably some legal mumbo jumbo, but why do you hate us Canucks? Is it because you're jealous of our pet polar bears and low-cost, igloo-based housing? Canadians like free stuff, too!

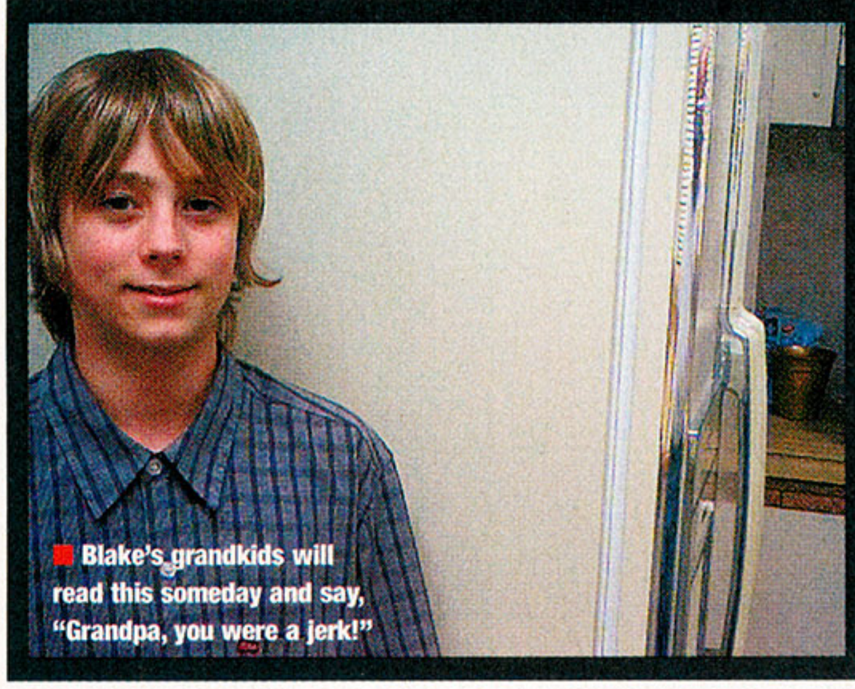
—Megan Dinner

We're aware that, like the language of love, the lust for free stuff is not bound by geopolitical lines. But as our resident law-talking guy Waleed Moubarak explains, "It does have to do with 'some legal mumbo jumbo,' as Ms. Dinner eloquently puts it. Since we're a U.S. company, the contests we run have to comply with the local laws of the U.S., rather than the laws of any other country—which often have different or more stringent regulations with regards to contests." There you have it. We can't cross Waleed, 'cause he'll sue our asses.

Of course, we can award you our Letter of the Month prize, because it's a prize, not a contest. See how we just perverted international law with that loophole? Delicious. But wait, we're also awarding a special, one-time-only prize to every resident of Canada: government-provided free health care! Don't say we never did anything for ya.

Congrats, Megan Dinner! As our Letter of the Month winner, you've got a Nyko iType2 PS2 controller winging its way to you. It's like the love child of a DualShock and a keyboard!

unedited letters



■ Blake's grandkids will read this someday and say, "Grandpa, you were a jerk!"

Amanda Hugginkiss

Hello EGM! Me-Blake Peters, and my friends have all been contacting x box for over a year now. We call there and say that our name is Chuck, and we've been doing this from each other's houses alot and each time we swear at them and piss them off generally! Like saying how doyou properly put marmalade in the x box without it breaking or can i fix my x box my bringing to the shed and hitting it with a hammer. No matter what we say it makes us laugh hartily. Just a couple minutes ago the head of the x box department in Austin Texas phoned my friend's house and said that a man named Chuck keeps on harrassing the employees and 46 people have complained.

—Blake Peters

FBI: This is the guy. Blake Peters. We have his address.

CONTACT EGM

E-mail us at EGM@ziffdavis.com and get a soulless auto-response in return! It's like a magic bit of the magazine that only you and a million Viagra spammers ever get to see. Or, write the address below and get nothing.

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■ Iron Man in reader Kevin Hawkey's mocked-up game screen (left)...Iron Man in *THUG* (right).

➤ Iron Man lives again

On page 24 of *EGM* #173, you featured a game called *Tony Stark's Pro Skater* in your Game Design-O-Rama section, with a screenshot of a skating Iron Man. The thing is, in *Tony Hawk's Underground* [released after the mag came out—*Ed.*] you really can unlock and play as Iron Man! Pretty cool coincidence.

—Yeyeman

Nostradamus called it: "In two double aught three, a ferrous man shall mount a wheeled board. Oh, and the world ends."

Gee, thanks Mom and Dad, part 2

On page 20 of *EGM* #173, you printed a letter from Michelle Villmer, who'd named her girl Rinoa (a *FFVIII* character). Seeing as how some great new games in the *Final Fantasy* series are on the way, I thought it was time to come clean. I named my first child Aerith. I just loved the name...I'm not a freak, really!

—Richard Corral, Jr.

Gee, thanks Mom and Dad, part 3

My wife and I named our firstborn son Donovan, after the *Darkstalkers* and *Puzzle Fighter* series character. We followed the tradition when our daughter came along two years later and gave her the middle name Morrigan. It's great that people are naming their kids after the things that make them happy. Congrats to Michelle Villmer on her daughter Rinoa!

—Mike Block

Cheaters sometimes win—but not this time

It would appear the fearsome cheat protection that was to safeguard *SOCOM II* online play has been circumvented. Less than two weeks after release, folks have figured out some sort of glitch to get around Sony's security by using cheat hardware like the GameShark. Infinite ammo and infinite grenades appear to be a reality. Bummer, eh?

—Edward A. Picchi

We'd heard mumblings about that and asked Sony what was up. According to Patrick Seybold, senior PR manager for Sony CEA: "*SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs* has not been cracked. As we have mentioned in the past, the cheat detection in *SOCOM II* is handled on the server side, and we are able to detect and thwart cheating attempts on the back end. We have already identified the method used by this individual and have tested and updated our servers to prevent this type of cheat. This is an isolated incident, and we have made the necessary changes as needed."

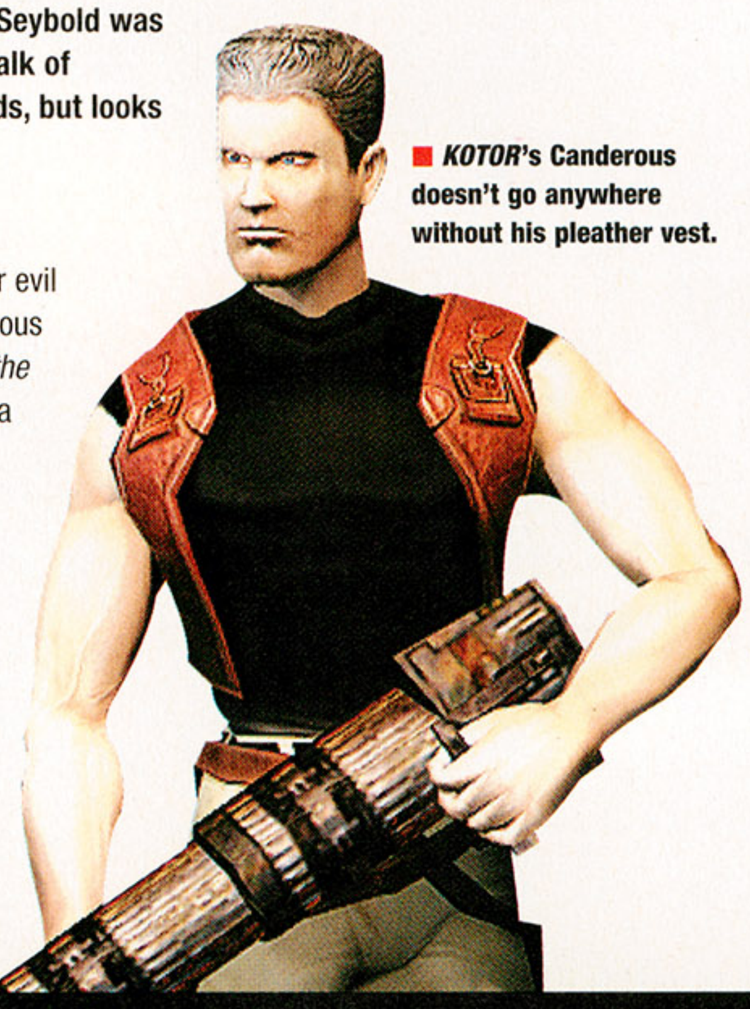
Not quite sure what Seybold was on about with all that talk of thwarting and back ends, but looks like problem solved.

Vox populi

Is it just me, or does your evil mercenary friend Canderous in *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (XB) sound a lot like Solidus Snake from *Metal Gear Solid 2*? Has anyone else noticed this?

—Bry Wiz

Actor John Cygan voiced both Canderous and Solidus Snake, as well as characters in *Grandia 2* (PS2) and ➤



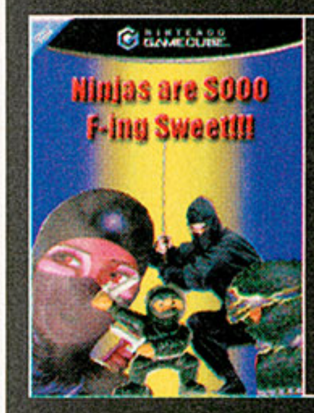
■ ***KOTOR*'s Canderous doesn't go anywhere without his pleather vest.**

OOPS!

The tiny hobos that infest our office but are visible only in our peripheral vision have struck again! In our Ultimate Review Archive (*EGM* #174, page 170) we incorrectly listed the PS2 version of *Grandia II* as scoring three 9.0s (out of 10). Turns out that was the rating for the Dreamcast game—the PS2 version actually received a 4.0, on account of it being a shamefully bad port of the quite good original.

GAME DESIGN-O-RAMA

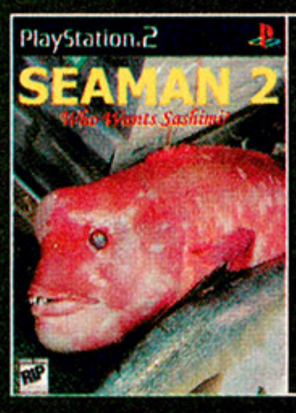
Another month, another passel of videogame inspiration. Keep the ideas (and art) coming to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject: design-o-rama



NINJAS ARE SOOO F-ING SWEET!

Tired of ninja clone after ninja clone? Do you have to buy *Shinobi Gaiden Part 27* and all the other sequels that come out? No more! We have collected everything that makes ninjas so f-ing sweet and put it all in one game! Become invisible! Chop your enemies in half! Battle pirates from outer space! Make it with ninja babes! I have to go lie down now.

—Mike Fatum



SEAMAN 2

The sequel to Sega's megahit puts you in the role of a sushi chef at a floundering Tokyo restaurant. You've spawned a brilliant plan to reel in customers: Raise chatty Seamen in your shop-front tank that interact with diners before you slice and dice 'em into quivering cubes, served with wasabi and rice. Features analog chopstick physics!

—Neil Austin

MIGHTY MORPHIN' SPACE TURBO POWER RANGERS IN THE LOST GALAXY

Transform into a colored-spandex hero and take down whatever monster is attacking the local juice bar. Call in your *Super Ultra Thunder Ninja MegaZord* robotic vehicles to battle space monsters, and keep your identity a secret by wearing civilian clothes that color coordinate with your ranger suit!

—Bob Cassella

FALLOUT DAYCARE

In the year 2142, the postapocalyptic world needs a hero. That hero needs someone to watch after his kids. In *Fallout Daycare*, you play Jack, a man in power armor who is ready to take on any task—like diaper changing, bottle warming, and even nap time. See Jack's youth disappear as the children suck the very life out of his soul in this tactical baby-sitting sim.

—Patrick Malone

SEAGULL BATTALION: LINE OF FECES

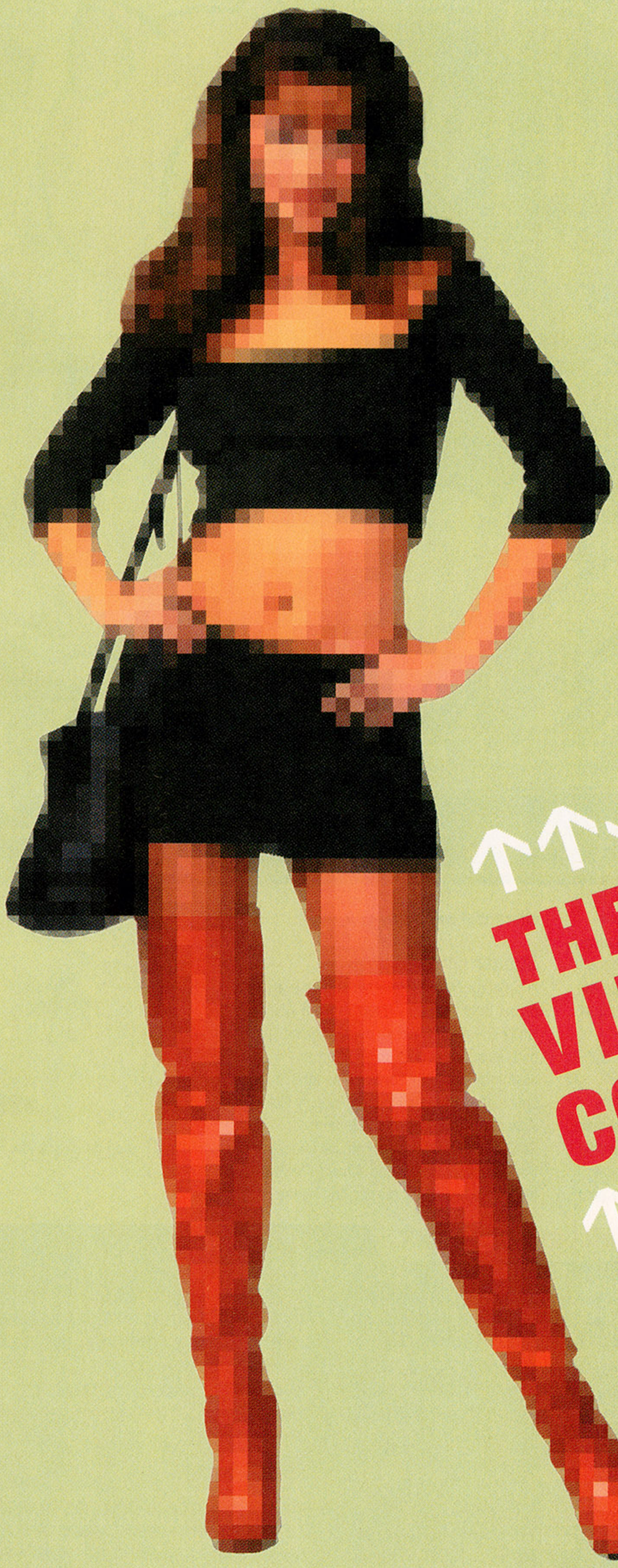
In *Seagull Battalion*, you play a seagull named Bob, who lives to release effluvium onto nearby humans. As Bob collects birdseed, pressure slowly builds up in the stomach bar. When the bar is full, you have 15 seconds to unleash hell.

—Brendon Quebedeaux

ZOMBIES ATE MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD

Protect the small town you grew up in from various demons, zombies, doom trolleys, and pink Christina Aguilera monsters. You will also have to face the notorious dictator King Friday with just your trusty water gun and a cardigan.

—Doug Duncan



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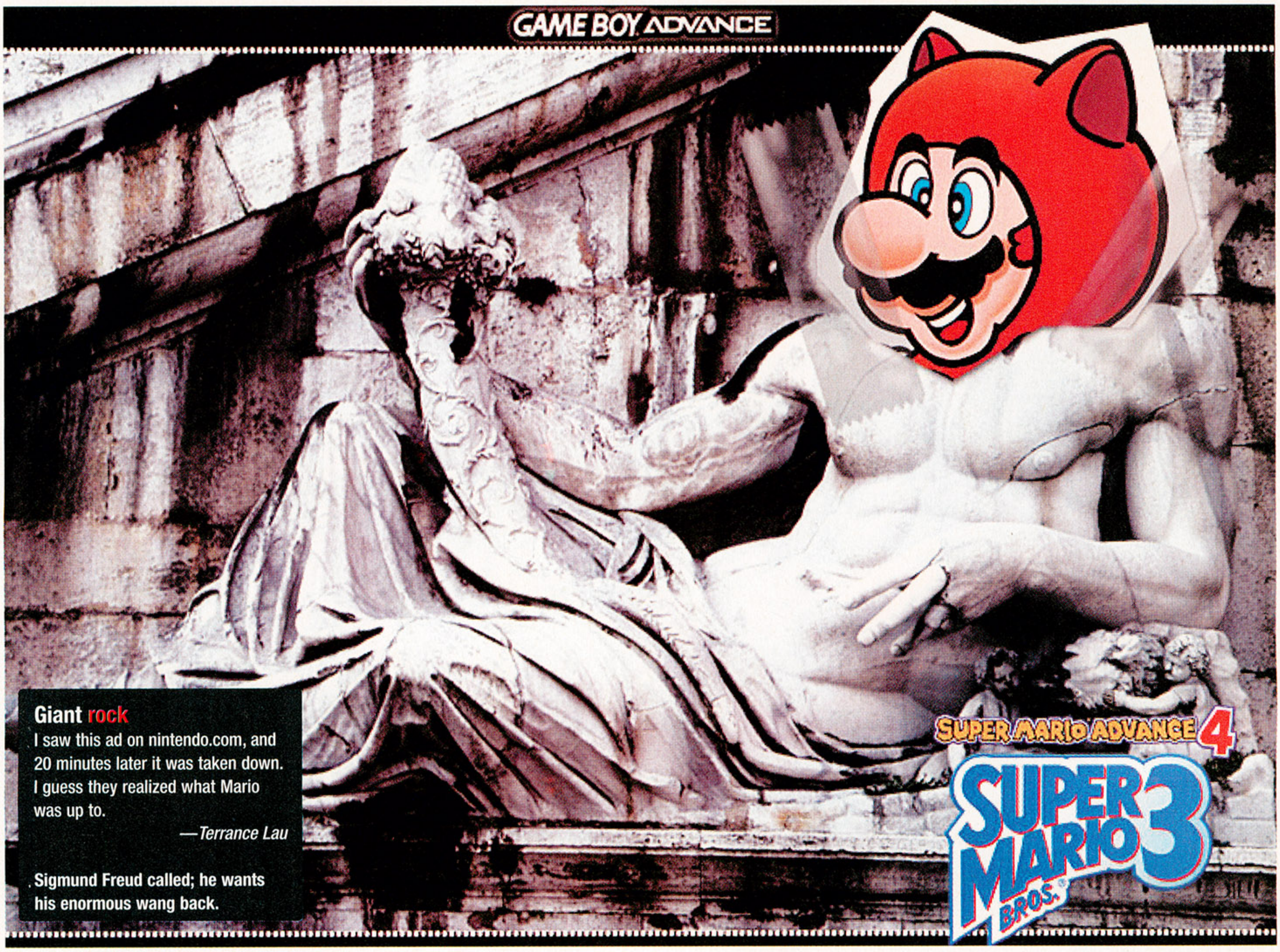


Giant rock
I saw this ad on nintendo.com, and 20 minutes later it was taken down. I guess they realized what Mario was up to.

—Terrance Lau

Sigmund Freud called; he wants his enormous wang back.

➤ ***Dark Cloud 2* (PS2). He's also guest starred (the whole guy, not just his voice) on *NYPD Blue*, *X-Files*, and *Frasier*, in case you'd like to follow his entire oeuvre.**

Princess bride

Everyone has heard about people who have met and married because of *EverQuest* [PC]—it seems no other online game has been such a successful matchmaker. Well, my mother and stepfather met on the Dreamcast version of *Phantasy Star Online* and have been married now for nearly two years. Ah, videogame love. Maybe this will inspire some other gamers with online love interests to get hitched. Or not.

—Bradley Klutz

How 'bout it? Any other beautiful romances take root on the arid steppes of online console gaming? We wanna know! Send pictures.

False alarm

Have you heard about Sony's new repair policy for PS2s? Apparently, so many people complained about the DRE (Disc Read Error) problem that a class-action suit was filed, and Sony is now offering to repair all PlayStation 2s with this problem, even those without a warranty. The only stipulation is that you can't have installed a mod-chip or opened the unit. I just thought you guys would like to help me spread the news. Wait, can you hear that? A nerd just got his wings.

—Robert Wilkins

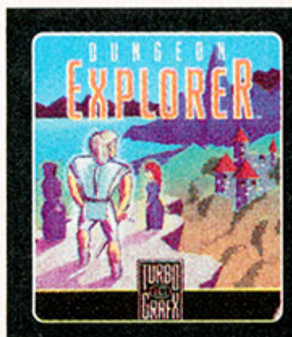
You sure about that? We called Sony's customer service line, and they said disc-read-error repairs are still being handled on a case-by-case basis—no policy of fixing all DRE-afflicted PS2s for free is in effect. That was a dirty trick, Bob.

Sticker shock

I'm a huge *Final Fantasy* fan and an even bigger Sephiroth (*FFVII*) fan. I mean, who isn't? The man is just so good at being bad—and hot to boot. In an effort to customize my 2003 Pontiac Vibe (and in anticipation of the upcoming *Fantasy* flick *Advent Children*), I decided to honor Sephiroth and Cloud. I got official images from *Kingdom Hearts* and *Advent Children* made into decals for my car. And by the way, I'm 21 and I do have a life. Keep up the good work!

—Jen Ursillo

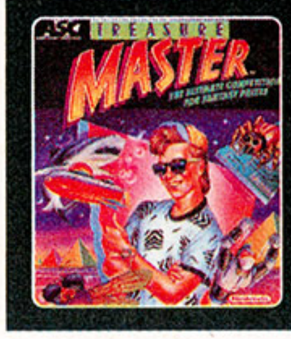
attack of the killer box art



Healthy glow

In response to your Worst Box Art sidebar in *EGM* #174 (page 188), you neglected to include this awesome stinker: *Dungeon Explorer 2* for the TurboGrafx 16. Apparently, everyone in the game is radioactive. In your face, Michelangelo!

—Rodney Brett



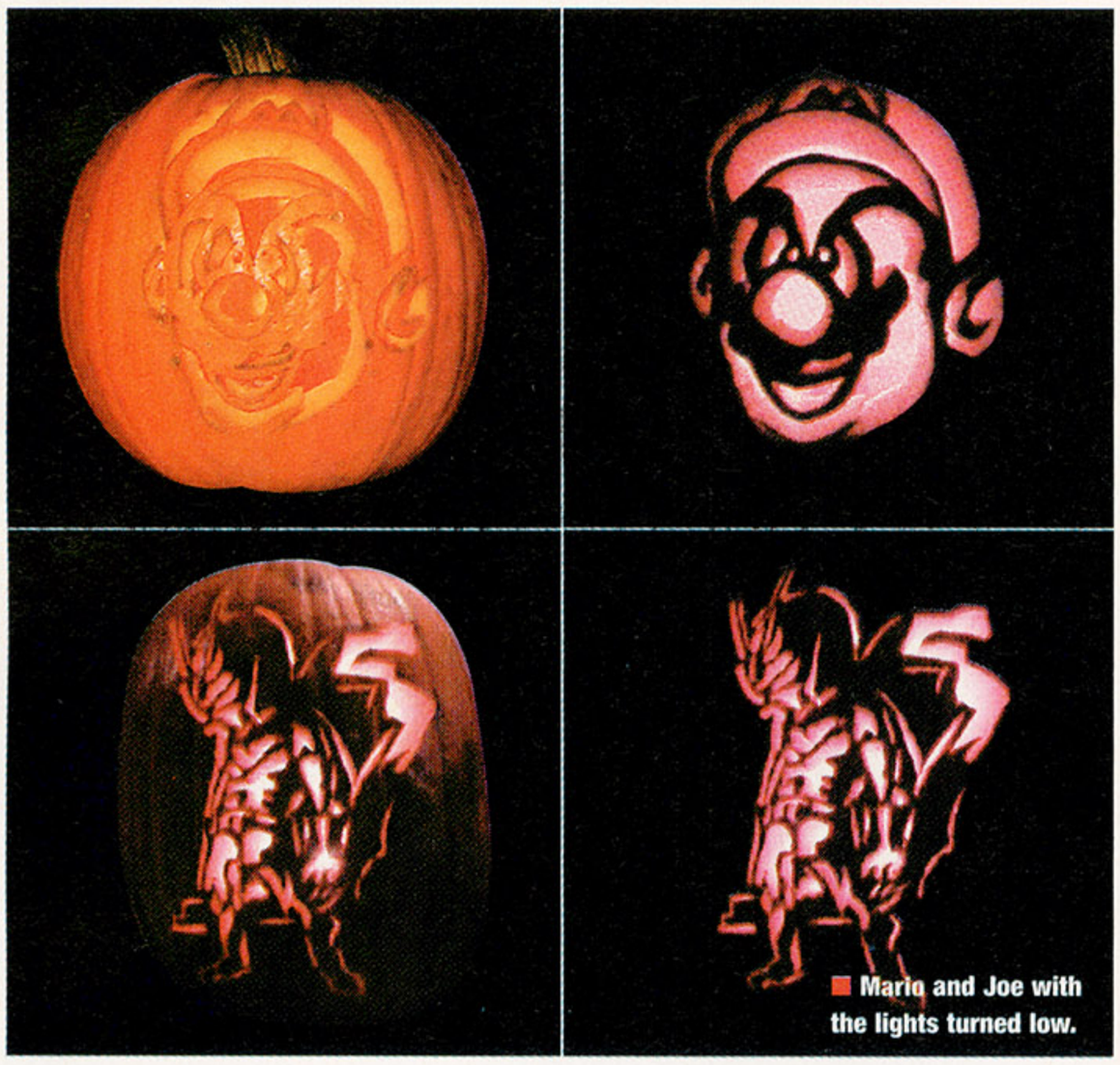
Wow. *Dungeon Explorer 2* is truly a vision in pastels.

Sharks, spiders, and submarines, oh dear

You missed one crucial contender in your Worst Box Art thingie—I'm referring, of course, to 1991's runaway Nintendo Entertainment System hit, *Treasure Master*. Whoever was in charge of the box art for this gem surely must have recognized every videogame consumer's uncontrollable attraction to a bad likeness of Corey Haim. Fathers hide your daughters; here comes the Treasure Master!

—Peter Athas

***Dungeon Explorer* is certainly terrifying, but *Treasure Master* is straight-up design-by-committee-of-idiots genius. On a box. Think you've found a better (as in worse) example of heinous box art? Send it in!**



Mario and Joe with the lights turned low.

We've seen scarier

Halloween is the coolest holiday of the year, and videogames are my favorite pastime, so I decided to combine the two. I found a picture of Mario in *EGM* and, on the opposite page, a pic of *Viewtiful Joe*—inspiration comes from the weirdest places, eh? Mario took about an hour to carve, but *Viewtiful Joe* ran me about five or six hours. Yes, I have too much free time, but some things just need to be done.

—Shane Krajewski

We like the cut of your jib, Shane.

word on the street*

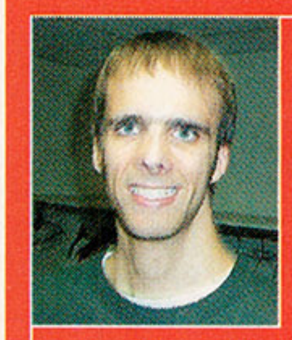
■ WHAT FINAL FANTASY CHARACTER IS MOST IN NEED OF A BEATING?

The one with the big hair and disproportionate body—you know, with an abnormal name. Wait, that's all of them.

—Robert Feulner

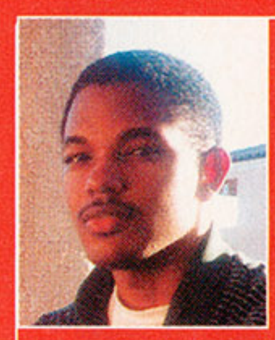
Cloud (*FFVII*). Just because he can hold a sword twice his size doesn't mean he's cock of the walk...he is cock of nothing!

—Max Myers



I think that Yuffie (*FFVII*) really deserves a severe beating. She annoyed the crap out of me when she stole all my items. Because of her silly antics, you had to walk all the way to her village with no items and then go on a crazy chase after her once you got there. Then you're forced to save her? Someone needs to give her a strapping!

—Douglas Dickinson



Tellah (*FFIV*). A supershallow character that did nothing more than show up on occasion to bother me with some melodramatic whining about his daughter and tease me in every battle by not being strong enough to pull off his Meteo spell. If I could, I'd have honorably sacrificed him to the first imp I ran into and been done with him.

—Ryan Armand

* Superfreaky pictures edition. Except for Ryan, who looks like an upstanding young gentleman.

■ If you'd like to participate in Word on the Street, check our message boards at www.egmmag.com.

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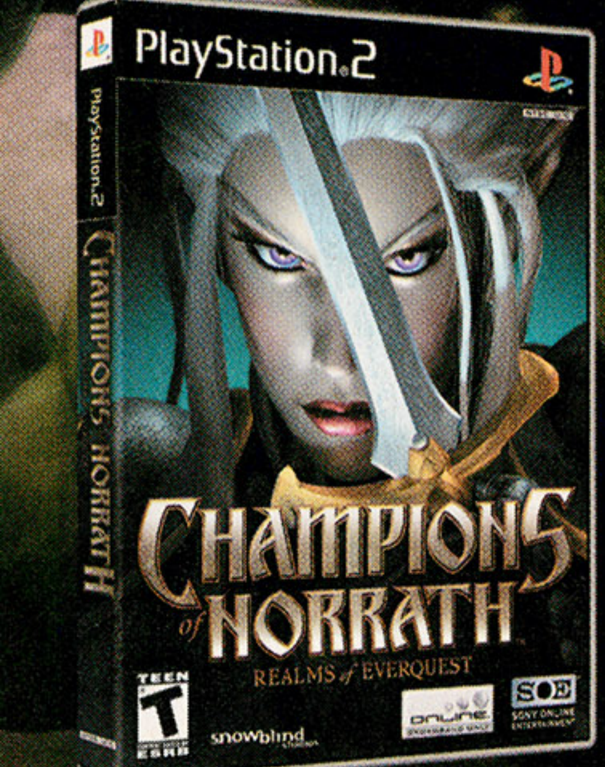

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Goldie Toane - flex for her at the gym, and she'll coo over your buff body and maybe tell you a few dirty jokes if you're lucky.

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WHAT THE FF?

12 things you should know about Final Fantasy XII

More than 45 million copies sold worldwide and still goin' strong—you can rest assured that Square Enix's role-playing fantasy is far from being final. The company recently lifted the veil on the next installment, *Final Fantasy XII*, which is headed to PS2 in spring 2005. Expect more info to steadily leak out in the months to come, but here's 12 morsels of *XII* goodness to satisfy your chocobo's hearty appetite for the time being. ***—Bryan Intihar***

The Creator

Even if you don't recognize the name of *Final Fantasy XII*'s director/producer, there's a good chance you've played one of his previous works. Yasumi Matsuno is responsible for such PlayStation 1 hits as *Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Vagrant Story*, the *Ogre Battle* series, and most recently, *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* for Game Boy Advance.

The Heroine

Her story: Ashe, 19-year-old heir to the Dalmascan throne
Life ambition: Lead the resistance to drive the Arcadia Empire outta the kingdom
Takes fashion advice from: The gals of *Final Fantasy X-2*

The World

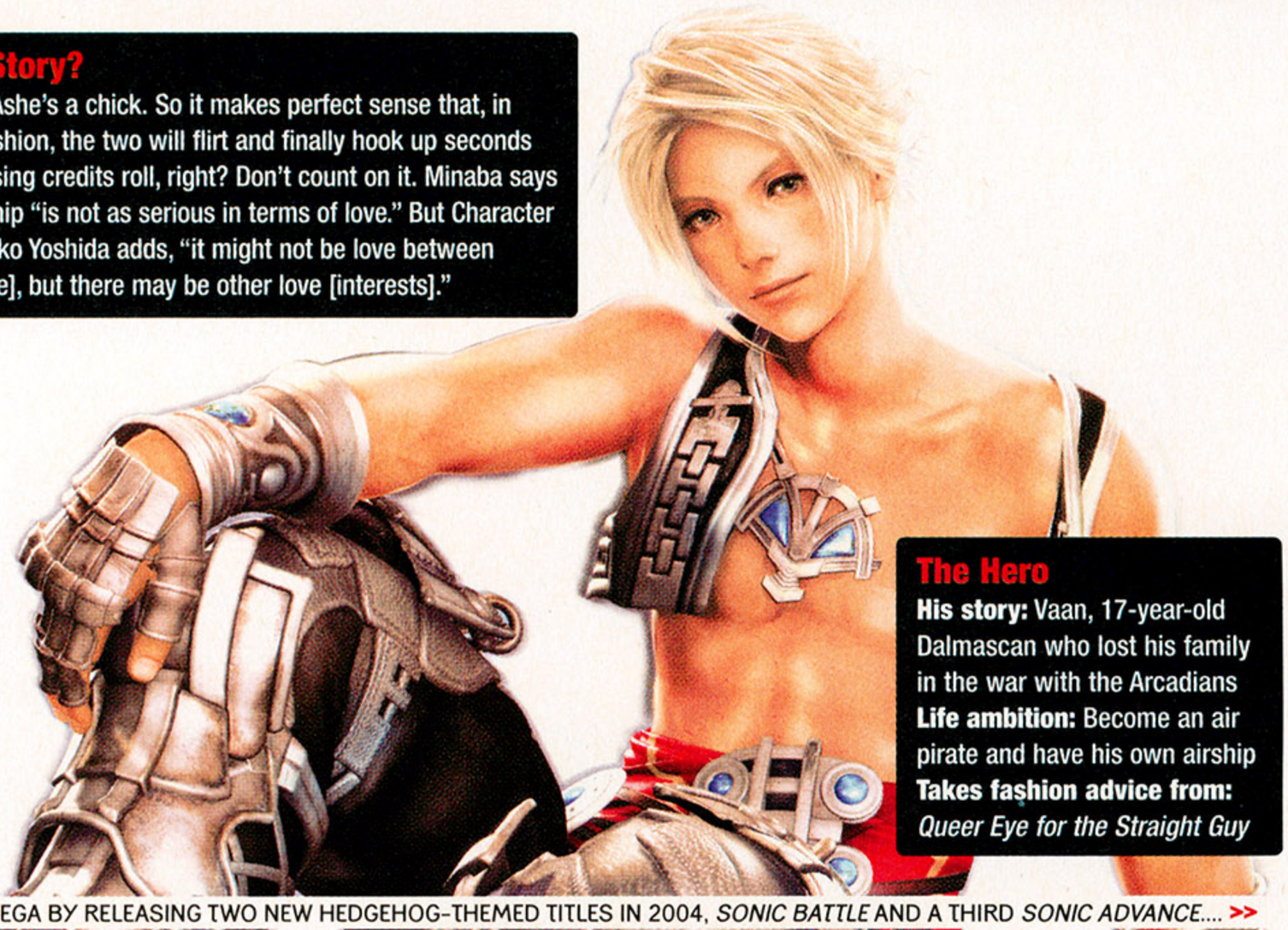
Just as in *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Tactics Advance*, the world of Ivalice provides the backdrop here. But fans of those games shouldn't expect to instantly recognize *XII*'s stomping grounds. "[This world of Ivalice] is another version of what you've seen previously," says Art Director Hideo Minaba. "[This game] is an opportunity to present it in a different way."

The Story

XII's plot centers on a war within a war. Two rival factions, the Arcadia and Rosaria Empires, are wrapped up in one heavy-duty cross-continental conflict. But, in the midst of battle, the Arcadians seize control of a small neutral kingdom called Dalmasca. The game's two heroes call this place home, so they eventually meet up and set out to evict their uninvited guests.

The Love Story?

Vaan's a guy. Ashe's a chick. So it makes perfect sense that, in typical RPG fashion, the two will flirt and finally hook up seconds before the closing credits roll, right? Don't count on it. Minaba says their relationship "is not as serious in terms of love." But Character Designer Akihiko Yoshida adds, "it might not be love between [Vaan and Ashe], but there may be other love [interests]."



The Hero

His story: Vaan, 17-year-old Dalmascan who lost his family in the war with the Arcadians
Life ambition: Become an air pirate and have his own airship
Takes fashion advice from: *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*

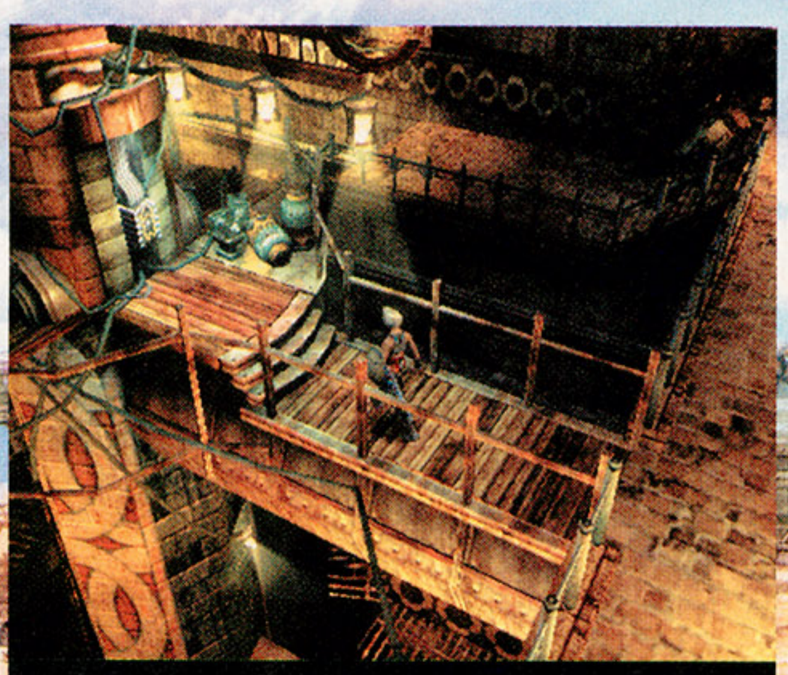
>> THQ WILL CONTINUE ITS GBA PUBLISHING AGREEMENT WITH SEGA BY RELEASING TWO NEW HEDGEHOG-THEMED TITLES IN 2004, *SONIC BATTLE* AND A THIRD *SONIC ADVANCE*.... >>

The Airship(s)

According to Minaba, these *Final Fantasy* trademarks "will have a more prominent role [than in previous games], whether it be just a stage for an event or used as your means of transportation." And as variety is the spice of life, Matsuno assures us that a large number of unique flying vessels will litter *XII*'s skies.

The Logo

In *Tactics Advance*, Judges are knights who enforce rules and laws. But Matsuno says that in *XII* the Judges are "depicted as a group of knights [who produce] terror and fear." Both the developer's words and the trailer we saw in Japan suggest that they pledge allegiance to the Arcadia Empire, or better yet, are its leaders. Either way, these bad boys are pretty important. Why else would one of them make up the game's logo?



The Camera

All the offline *Final Fantasy* games have automatically controlled your view of the action, until now. "The camera angle will be [adjustable] 360 degrees," says Minaba, "closer to *Final Fantasy XI*, where you can see [from both] first- and third-person perspectives. [We're even] creating ceilings, and drawings on the ceilings, which you can view." ➤

>> *RISE OF THE MACHINES* NOT ENOUGH *TERMINATOR* FOR YA? THIS SUMMER, ATARI WILL RELEASE *T3: REDEMPTION* (MULTIPLATFORM), *ANOTHER* GAME BASED ON 2003'S *T3* FILM.... >>

The Inspiration

The art team visited Turkey, which partly influenced the game's Mediterranean Sea–style setting. Other sources include areas in India and New York City, as well as Arabic and ancient Roman cultures.

The Net Connection?

Unlike in *XI*, an Internet connection isn't required to enjoy this role-playing expedition. "*XII* is going to be an offline game," says Minaba. "Matsuno mentioned that he would love to have an online component, but there are no elements that are going to be online."

The Characters

A central theme in *XII*'s story is structure and social class. One way the development team will flesh out this subject is by providing nonhuman races with a more significant role than ever before. Already, we can tell from the trailer and select screenshots that a floppy-eared, but strangely sexy, Viera (below left, in the thong) is a member of your party, and the lizardlike Bangaa (below right) act as judge henchmen (side note: both character types were first seen in *Tactics Advance*).

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

We know you're about to ask, "But wait a sec, what about the…" Stop right there, fellow moogle lover. We have several burning questions, too—just take a look below. And as soon as we get the answers, you'll be the first to know.

1. How will *Final Fantasy XII*'s battle system differ from previous games' systems? All we've heard so far is that it may resemble *Vagrant Story*'s combat, which focuses largely on timing and defense.
2. Who and how many characters will eventually join your party?
3. *XII*'s sound team commented that it is "trying to do something new" outside of the game's songs. Just how exactly will this affect gameplay?
4. The trailer shows a woman who looks like Ashe dressed in full bridal attire. But with whom is she tying the knot?
5. Matsuno mentioned that the world of *Vagrant Story* is also related to Ivalice. Does this mean you'll meet up with any characters from that PS1 title in *XII*?

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>> PUBLISHER PLAYLOGIC SAYS IT WILL RELEASE *PSP RACING* (TENTATIVE TITLE) FOR SONY'S PLAYSTATION PORTABLE SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THE SYSTEM'S LAUNCH IN FALL 2004.... >>

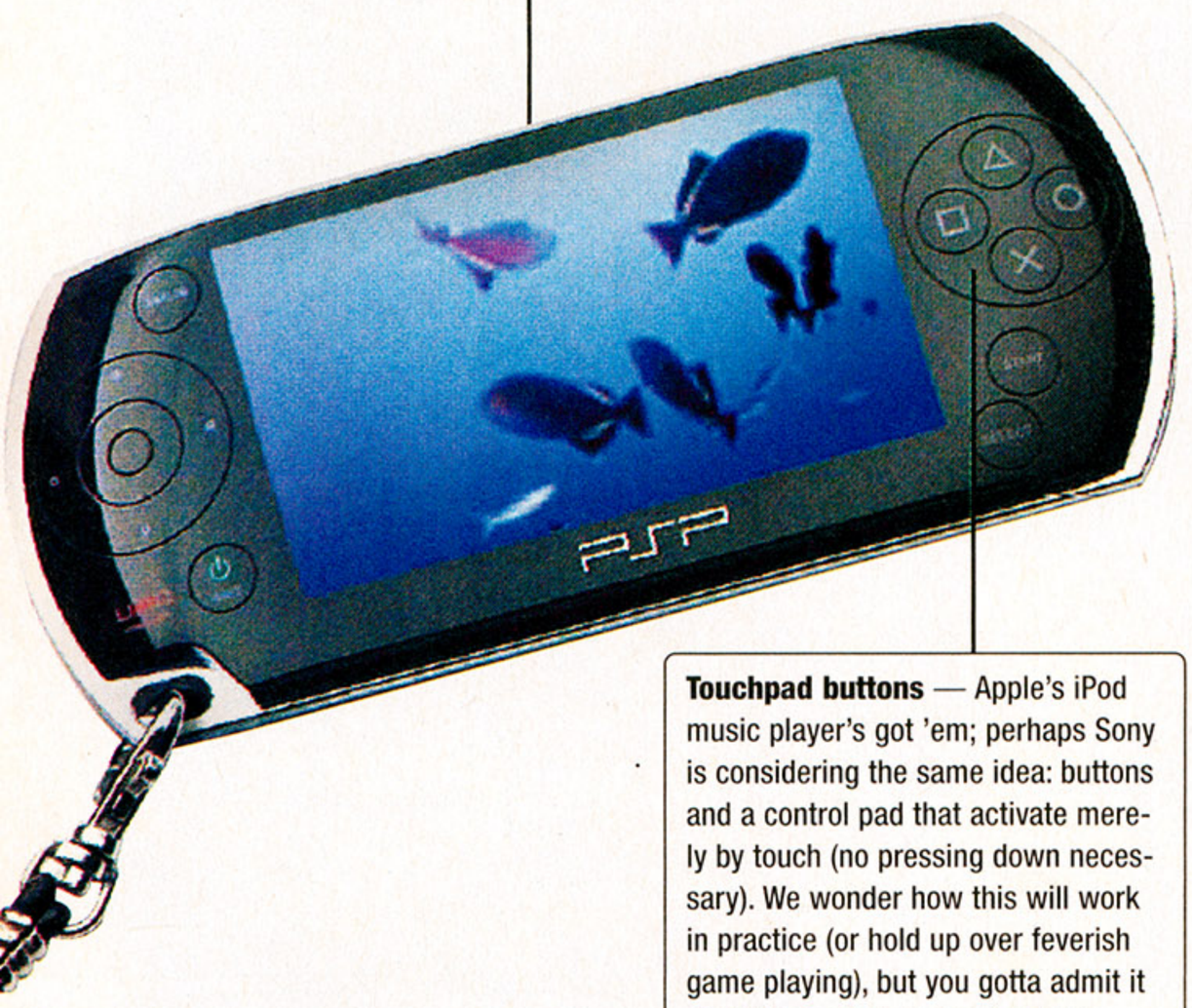
I'm not a soccer star, but I play one on TV.

SNEAK PEEK AT PSP

Sony shows off an early concept of its **PlayStation Portable**

Note to Sony: Stop the incessant teasing already. The early concept model of the PlayStation Portable (aka PSP, shown below) revealed by Sony Computer Entertainment prez Ken Kutaragi at a recent event in Japan has merely fueled our growing excitement over the mysterious handheld. The final product, which will play games, music, movies, and possibly double as a cell phone, will likely bear little resemblance to what you see here, but this early, rough sketch hints at some design ideas Sony is considering. (We won't know for sure until it's unveiled this May at the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles.)

Sense of style — Game Boy, it ain't. Unlike previous attempts at portable game decks, this has a very adult, high-tech gadget look (more so than even Nintendo's GBA SP). Which is important, when you consider PSP's rumored $299 price tag.



Touchpad buttons — Apple's iPod music player's got 'em; perhaps Sony is considering the same idea: buttons and a control pad that activate merely by touch (no pressing down necessary). We wonder how this will work in practice (or hold up over feverish game playing), but you gotta admit it gives the machine a badass look.

WHAT'S MISSING?

Where's the Memory Stick port? Where's the headphone jack and volume control? Will the promised digital and analog directional pads be combined? If this thing can also double as a phone, where are the buttons? Where do I talk into? (Note to self: That's why this is an "early concept.")

GRUDGE MATCH

Six rounds, two Princes, one helluva matchup

PRINCE **PRINCE OF PERSIA**

Can the exotica of Persia challenge the erotica of Prince? Our scienticians bravely played through *Sands of Time* and watched *Purple Rain*, *Under the Cherry Moon*, and yes, even *Graffiti Bridge* (moan) to bring you the facts:

ARAB TIES		
	Uses ancient Middle Eastern symbol to sign checks	Uses ancient Middle Eastern weapons in battle **Advantage: Prince of Persia**
WEAPON OF CHOICE		
	The "Yellow Cloud" **Advantage: Prince**	Dagger of Time
SOCIAL AGENDA		
Parties like it's 1999		Alters time, then parties *in* 1999 **Advantage: Prince of Persia**
WARDROBE		
	Drag queen/space pirate/gigolo **Advantage: Prince**	*Aladdin*
FAMILY ISSUES		
Mother beaten by father **Advantage: Tie**		Father beaten by sand **Advantage: Tie**
LOVE INTEREST		
	Apollonia Kotero	Slave girl Farah **Advantage: Prince of Persia** (the Sands of Time can keep her bod forever young...)

REIGNING CHAMP: PRINCE OF PERSIA

His name is Prince, and he is funky, but the Persian warrior is the true prince among men.

TIDBITS ABOUT CLASSIC SEGA FRANCHISES GETTING MAJOR FACELIFTS

■ ***Phantasy Star* gets a new paint job.**

Sega Remakes Head To America

Sega's recent budget-priced PS2 remakes of classic titles are headed Stateside in '04, courtesy of Conspiracy Games. Release dates haven't been firmed up yet, but expect to see revised versions of *Fantasy Zone*, *Golden Axe*, *Monaco GP*, *Phantasy Star*, and *Space Harrier*. No word if the budget pricing will carry over.

The Choice Of A New Generation

It may share the *Virtua Fighter* name, but *VF Cyber Generation* (for PS2 and GC, coming to Japan this summer, U.S. date TBD) strays dramatically from the one-on-one fighting of its namesake. Instead it puts you in the role of a young boy searching a vast computer network for bits of legendary data.

>> MARKET RESEARCHER IN-STAT/MDR SAYS THAT THE GAMES BIZ WILL ONCE AGAIN SURPASS BOX OFFICE RECEIPTS IN '03, DESPITE LOWER CONSOLE SHIPMENTS AND REVENUES.... >>

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BACK IN BUSINESS

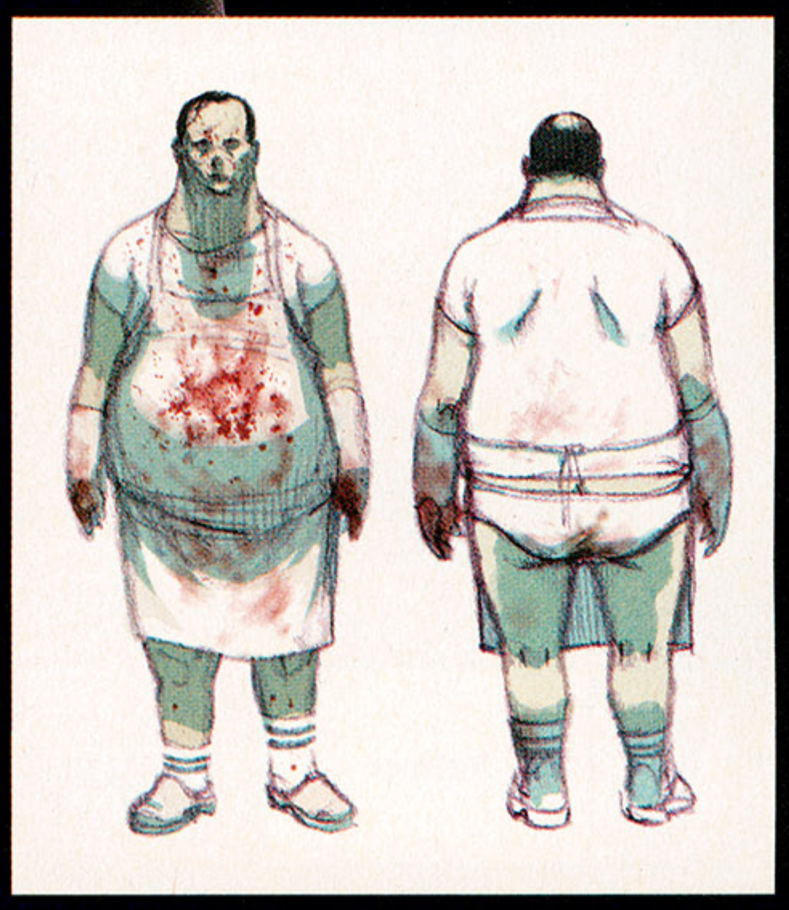
We make first contact with **Hitman: Contracts**, the silent assassin's lethal PS2 and Xbox sequel. And he will not be killing you softly

Call it an on-the-job hazard: If you assassinate people for a living, it'll eventually mess with your head. That's the first message we're getting from *Hitman: Contracts*, the PS2 and Xbox sequel to the multiplatform sleeper hit *Hitman 2*. Due spring 2004, the game once again stars Agent 47, a genetically enhanced badass (too bad they couldn't cure the baldness) who pays the bills by making kills—a career that's warped his view on life. "The player will see the game from the hitman's eyes," says Thor Frolich, a designer at Danish developer IO Interactive, "so things will be much darker and sinister this time."

That doesn't mean IO is going overboard with schizo effects. "It won't be 'psycho vision' or anything like that," Frolich says. We do know Agent 47 will stalk targets in a nightclub so choked with smoke he can only see their silhouettes. He'll also make lethal use of such dissimilar objects as a pillow, chainsaw, pool cue, and nail gun over the course of the game. Adding to the mystery: IO says scenarios in *Contracts* were inspired by the hitman film *Ghost Dog* (makes sense) and the English period piece *Gosford Park* (figure that one out).

We'll have more pieces of the puzzle next month, when we run the first exclusive screens of *Contracts*, which so far seems like it shan't be a killjoy for fans of the last game. "We think *Hitman* [as it stands] works pretty damn well," Frolich says. "[We've taken] what works and cut out [what doesn't] and we're refining the whole experience."

—Daniel Boutros



■ **Grime time: *Hitman: Contracts'* world will be a grimmer, sleazier place. Wait'll you meet the Meat King (far right), a regular at the Slaughterhouse Nightclub. Check out the tighty whities, ladies.**

>> A DISGRUNTLED GAMER HAS KICKED OFF A CLASS-ACTION LAWSUIT AGAINST ELECTRONICS BOUTIQUE, CLAIMING THAT THE GAME-STORE CHAIN SOLD USED GAMES AS NEW.... >>

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■ **Monster box: Dell's top-of-the-line Dimension XPS costs more than $3,000.**

INSTANT EXPERT: PC GAMING

Quick info on picking the right PC hardware

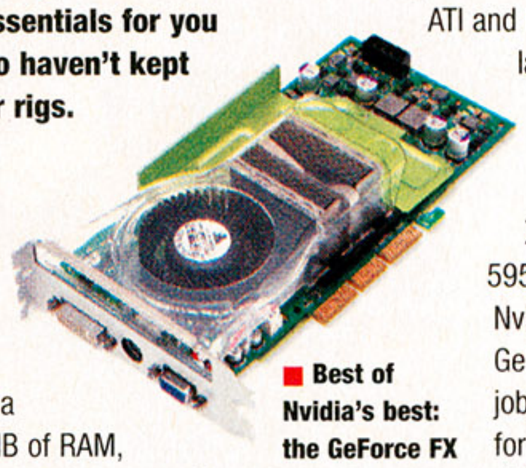
As your smarty-pants PC-playing pals have reminded you, computer gaming is going through a renaissance. And although most-wanted PC releases like *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* will hit the consoles eventually, they'll be prettier on PC as long as you have the right hardware. So we lay out the essentials for you console gamers who haven't kept up with the monster rigs.

Pump it up

To play the latest and greatest games, your basic gaming PC should pack the following specs: At least a 2GHz processor, 512MB of RAM, an 80GB hard drive, and a decent graphics card (more on that in a sec). You can get a rig like this from Vicious PC (www.vicious-pc.com) for around $1,000.

It's in the cards

A gaming PC's most essential ingredient is its graphics card, the doodad that powers your games' visuals. Nearly all off-the-shelf PCs come with a card (keep reading to see if yours is a good one), but you'll need to upgrade this component every two years or so. And you have two major manufacturers, ATI and Nvidia, vying for your dollar. If you've got $400 to burn, go for the 256MB behemoths like ATI's Radeon 9800 XT or Nvidia's GeForce FX 5950 Ultra. Too steep? Nvidia's $100 128MB GeForce FX 5200 will do the job, but you'll need to swap it for a punchier card when *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3* come out. For about $120, you can get ATI's 128MB Radeon 9600 Pro. And $200 will get you either ATI's 128MB Radeon 9600 XT or Nvidia's 128MB GeForce FX 5700 Ultra. Unlike cheaper cards, these babies have enough power to enable features like antialiasing and anisotropic filtering, which smooth out jaggy 3D graphics.



■ **Best of Nvidia's best: the GeForce FX 5950 Ultra**

Control freakery

Can't live without a joypad? Logitech's $20 Dual Action USB Gamepad is essentially a PC version of the PS2 Dual Shock. Speed freaks will drool over Logitech's $140 MOMO Force Wheel (it's got leather padding!). And flight-sim fans will find all the throttle and rudder control they need in Microsoft's $70 Sidewinder Force Feedback 2.

—William O'Neal

■ **Feel your games with the Force Feedback 2.**

As not seen on TV: Five must-play PC-only hits

Battlefield 1942
Nab the *Secret Weapons* expansion for the best online shooter on PC.

Call of Duty
Intense WWII action from the guys behind EA's *Medal of Honor* series.

Lock On
You won't find a jet-combat simulator this ultrarealistic on the consoles.

Tron 2.0
A stunning sequel to the flick in game form, complete with lightcycle racing.

Neverwinter Nights
RPG perfection from the makers of *Knights of the Old Republic* (Xbox).

OLD SCHOOL

10 years ago in EGM

■ **On the Cover: NBA Jam**
Only one sports game has ever been on the cover of *EGM*—and no, it's not *Madden*. *NBA Jam*, Acclaim's arcade-style 2-on-2 b-baller, inhabited our prime real estate a decade ago.

Game of the Month: NBA Jam (SNES)
The addictive jamming sim also scored four nines out of 10 from our Review Crew, nabbing the coveted Game of the Month position.

Skitchin'
Even back in '94, some games—like EA's Sega Genesis roller-blading action title, *Skitchin'*—let you live out your law-breakin' dreams without the associated jail time. *Skitchin'* had you lace up your skates, head for the street, grab onto the back of a car, and race other bladers while bashing the hell out of them with crude weapons.

Sega's All-In-One
Also this month 10 years ago, Sega unveiled its Genesis CDX device—a 16-bit Genesis, Sega CD, and portable CD player in one tiny $400 box. The system went on sale in March '94 but never gained much acceptance, due in large part to its luxury-item price tag.

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FANTASTIC FOUR PLAY

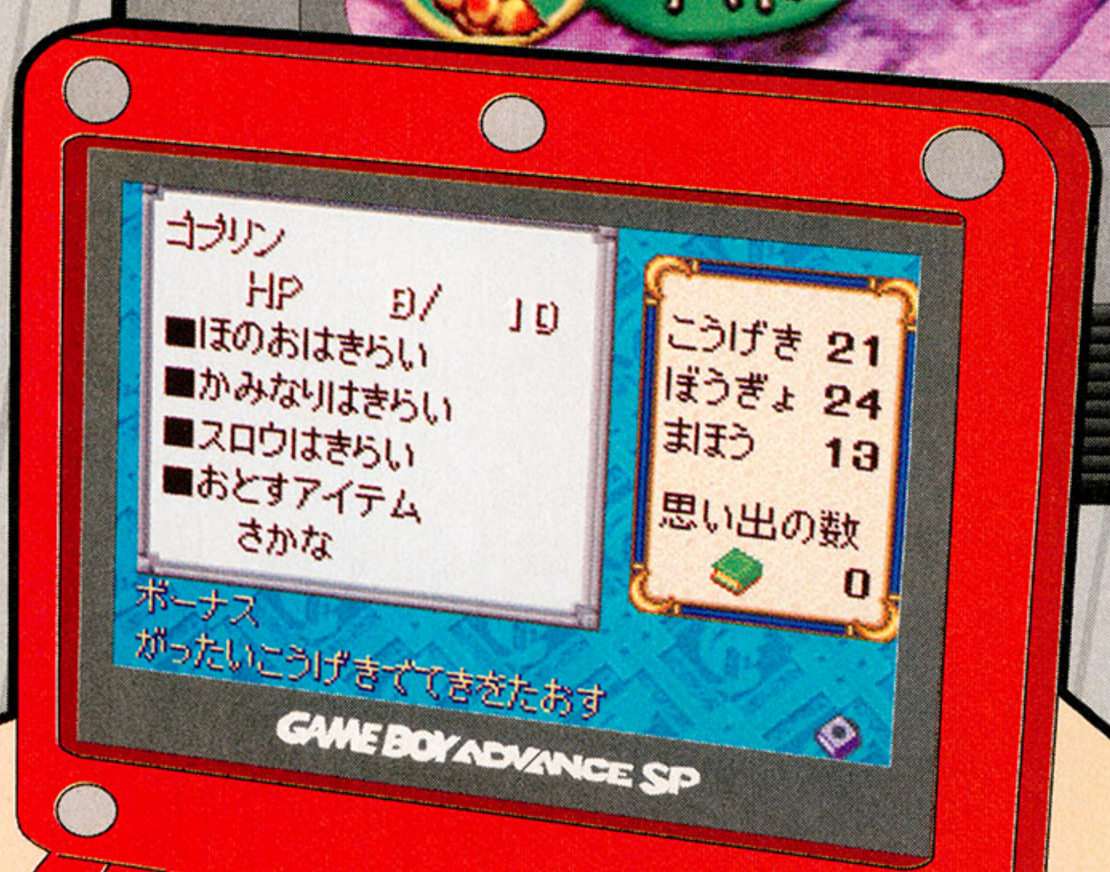
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles proves no man is a fantasy island

Got a GameCube? Own a Game Boy Advance? And do you know three friends with GBAs? Then—and *only* then—you have the oh-so-costly ideal setup for *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, due for GameCube this February.

Yup, Square's first Nintendo RPG in eight years can be played alone, but it's really meant to be enjoyed with three or four people at once, all with their own GBA. In fact, extra players can't play with Cube controllers, even if they wanted to. So why go through all the bother? Multiplayer speeds up combat, enables massive combo attacks, and adds the extra element of trying to nab treasure and special abilities before your slowpoke friends.

To understand how it all works in action, check out this typical four-player game setup—the GBA screens below* show off everything you manage on the handheld while playing. —*Kevin Gifford*

** What?!? You don't read Japanese?!? Sorry, but Nintendo was unwilling to give us screenshots of the U.S. version of the game.*



Keeping it on your radar

Every member of your crew has his own type of radar: a geographical map, a monster detector, a treasure-chest locator, or a "scouter" that displays info on the enemy currently attacking you. Exactly which radar every player gets is random—it changes with each level—so you'll need to rely on one another to get the full lay of the land.

Listing off your action items

The A button in *Crystal Chronicles* is used for everything from swishing your sword to casting magic and eating food. You choose A-button actions on your GBA screen, making up a "command list" that you scroll through in-game with the L and R buttons. The size of the command list is limited, but you can earn extra slots in the game.

>> THE MUCH-PUBLICIZED THEFT OF THE *HALF-LIFE 2* SOURCE CODE LEFT THE PC VERSION OF THE HOTLY ANTICIPATED FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER DELAYED UNTIL EARLY '04. UNFORTUNATELY,

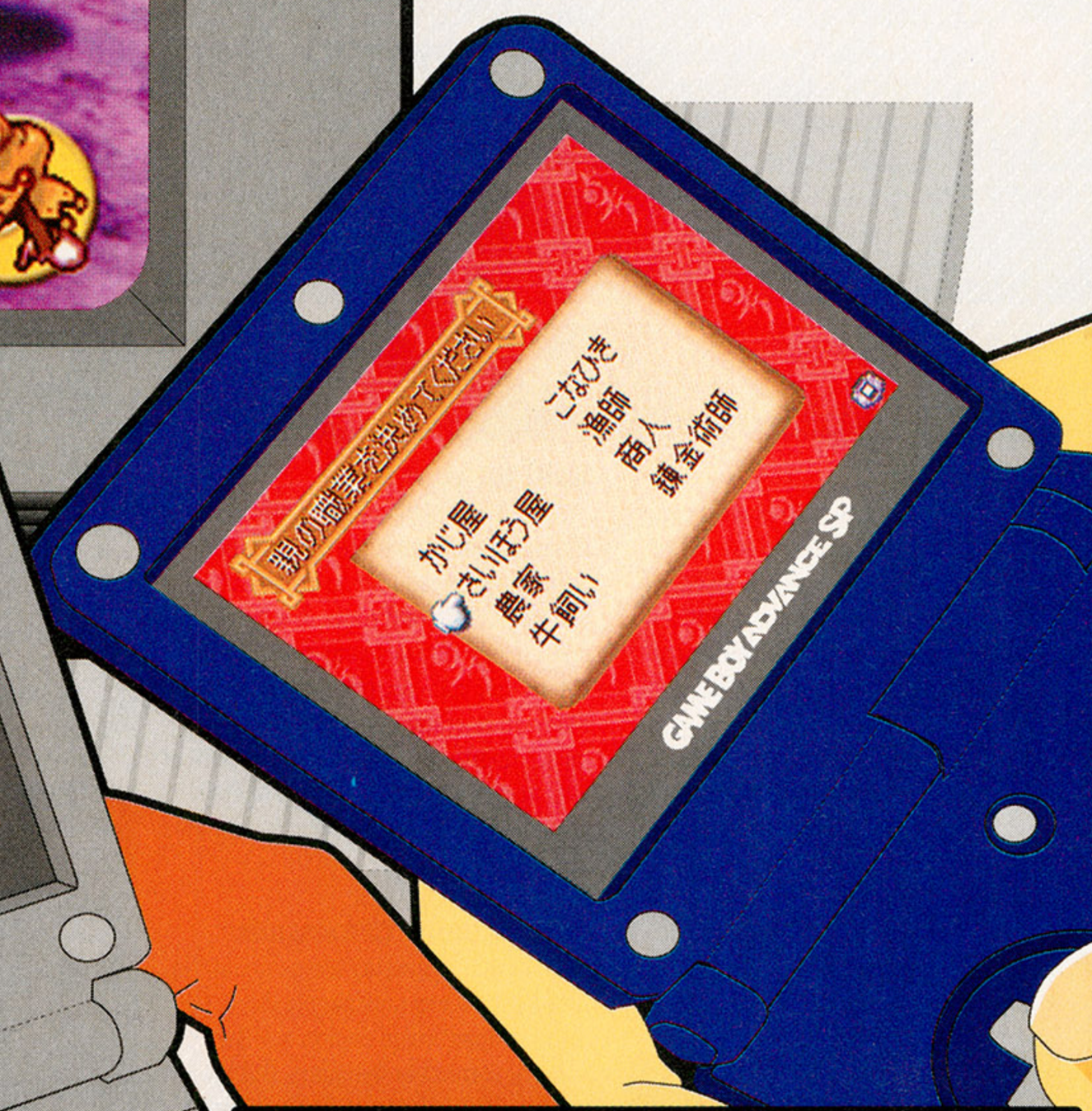
■ Lord of the rings: To set up a combo attack like the one seen here against this supersized boss monster, you aim your attack ring under the enemy you want to target; your pals then do the same. Wattaaahh!

On GameCube

Crystal Chronicles is the story of a group of kids sent off to fetch sacred dew from a mana tree—the only stuff that protects the local village from the poisonous, fog-like Miasma that covers the world. You collect this dew in a Crystal Cage, which one member of your party carries around above his or her head as you venture around each level. Wander outside the protective barrier the Crystal provides, and you'll slowly lose health and eventually keel over.

Character building is simple—you can stop in town to buy better armor and weapons and equip magic spells you find conveniently strewn about in treasure chests. If you and a friend both attack or cast spells at an enemy at the same time, you can unleash more powerful effects. For example, two players casting Thunder on the same creature can result in the more powerful Thundara attack, or a resurrection spell and a fire spell combo will stop a zombie un-dead in its tracks.

Illustration by Dustin Amery Hostetler



Shop without all the wait

When visiting towns, each player can stop by shops and blacksmiths (who can build you new weapons) without anyone having to wait for their turn. When a player talks to a shopkeeper, the store's list of items opens only on that character's GBA screen—so you can go buy some fish while your friend geeks out at the blacksmith's sword selection.

Sending letters home

After visiting a mana tree (see the sidebar above), everyone in your party will usually receive letters from home—via moogle courier, of course. You're offered several responses to each letter you receive, and if you're nice to your folks, they'll send you food, money, and items for free later on. It's like begging Mom for pizza money...except without having to clean out the garage.

THAT ALSO MEANS WE'LL EXPERIENCE AN EVEN LONGER WAIT FOR THE XBOX VERSION OF THE RETURN OF HERO GORDON FREEMAN. WHEN WILL IT HIT? LIKELY SOMETIME LATE IN '04.... >>

PREPARE FOR WAR!

Whether you're a grizzled veteran or a complete n00b*, we got the SOCOM II strategies and secrets you need to know

*Lesson one: "n00b" is online speak for "newbie," which is online speak for "you suck."

Think M4A1 has something to do with bingo? When someone spots a tango do you look for the dance floor? Well put yourself at ease, soldier. Our chat with *SOCOM II* Senior Producer Seth Luisi has enough military intel and killer tactics on the PS2 squad shooter to turn even you John Lennon–type tie-dyed in the wool hippies into John Rambo–style killing machines.

—Mark MacDonald

Photograph courtesy of Getty

SINGLE PLAYER

Slow down!

"The best way to play is to move slowly. If you tell your teammates to fire at will and just try to run through and Rambo a level, it's going to be a lot more difficult. If you use the cover and the environment and move carefully, it'll go a lot easier."

Open the secret objectives

"To find and achieve a lot of the secret objectives, you just have to use stealth. The majority of them open only if you haven't given yourself away—like when you overhear enemy conversations. Others are [gained by] killing a certain portion of enemy troops."

Split up your team

"You can complete a lot of objectives through good teammate management. Send them ahead to map points while you take a different route. A lot of people don't utilize [Bravo Team] nearly to the extent that you can, but this type of multitasking is pretty effective. [As for the most important vocal command,] 'Fire at will' is great; sneak up on the enemy first, then use it to have your teammates open fire."

Hidden voice commands

"One of the interesting things about the first *SOCOM* was how people made up these 'hidden' voice commands that actually weren't in the game. But they would write on Internet message boards and swear they were. So, we made sure to put some hidden voice commands in *SOCOM II*. There's one, as soon as you hear back, like, 'Enemy spotted, 12 o'clock,' you can say, 'Bravo, kill target,' and they'll take 'em out." ➤

"We're set up to detect cheaters, and we will take action against them."

—SOCOM II Senior Producer Seth Luisi

Luisi's favorite online map? "Fox Hunt. The grass and the rolling hills, all the different ways you can move through that level—it's a lot of fun."

>> FOR MORE TIPS, CHECK OUT THE MESSAGE BOARDS AT THE OFFICIAL *SOCOM II* SITE AT PLAYSTATION.COM. LOOK UNDER "COMM STATION" ONCE THE ANNOYING ANIMATION STOPS.... >>

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"We will have substantial downloadable content available [for *SOCOM II*] when the PS2 Hard Disk launches in March."

—Senior Producer Seth Luisi

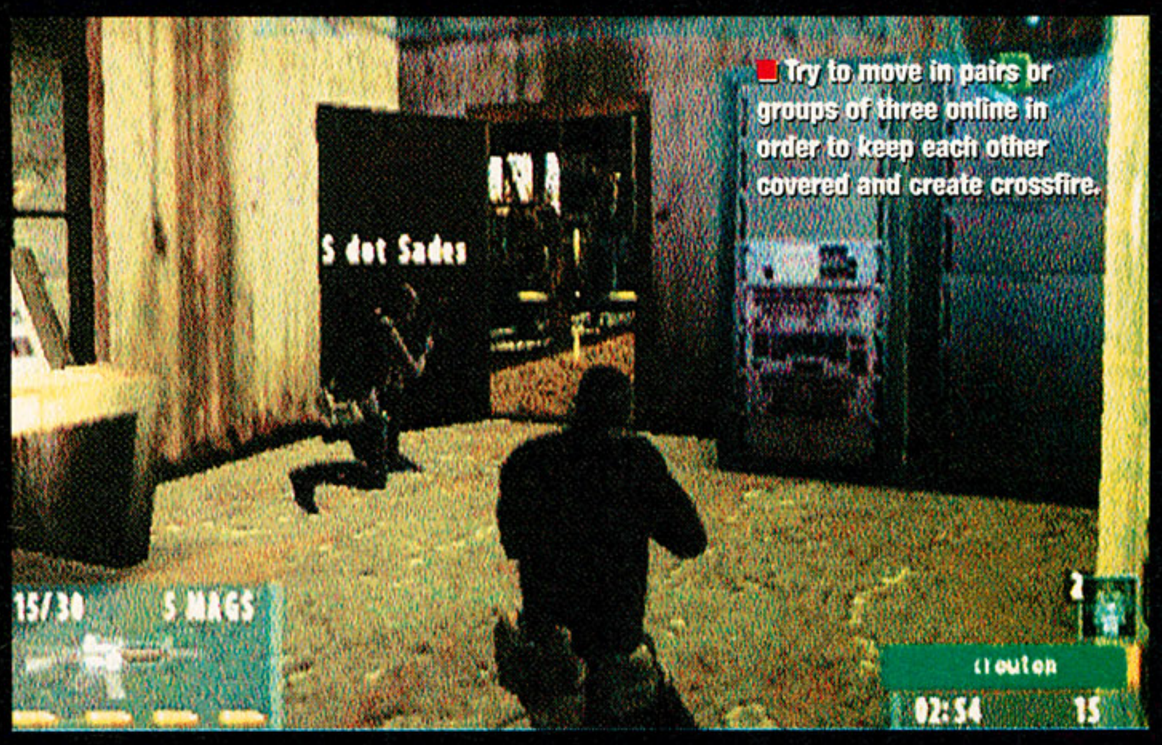
COMMUNICATION

Chat it up

"Teams that communicate well will always have an advantage. Even if the players on the other team are much better individually, they're not going to win if they split up and run around trying to get more kills. Communicating, setting up subteams to cover different pinch points in the level, setting up people to protect your base while others go out to try to blow up the other base—these are good team tactics that really help a lot."

Update early and often

"Giving updates is really important. If you know where the enemy is at, it really gives your team an advantage. Communicating enemy positions is extremely important, and it's something that isn't done nearly enough online. In *SOCOM II*, it's much easier [to do] since you can see who is talking and where they are. It helps to know the map, and if you see a guy with a bomb, let people know where he is—being a scout can be huge."



■ Try to move in pairs or groups of three online in order to keep each other covered and create crossfire.

■ Come up with nicknames for different parts of each map so you can tell teammates where the stuff is hitting the fan (examples from left to right: the gas station, the courtyard, and the tanks).

WEAPONS

The best weapons offline

"It really depends on the mission. If you're using stealth, you want to use suppressed weapons. But a lot of the unsuppressed weapons take fewer hits to kill people—my favorite unsuppressed for single player is the M4A1. It's got full auto, burst, a scope—definitely a good all-around weapon. The MP5 is good for close quarters. The M63 is a great weapon, too; it's really accurate and has a great fire rate. It's good for situations where it really doesn't matter how much noise you make."

The best weapons online

"The RA-18 assault rifle is a really accurate weapon in real life, so we tried to portray that in the game. It's sort of like the SEAL equivalent of the AKS-74 [terrorist rifle], which was a very effective weapon in the first *SOCOM*. Normally, I'll use a good assault rifle, but in some of the close-quarter levels, like Vigilance, I'll pick up one of the shotguns or the HK-5K. I also like using the M203 grenade launcher when it's available—a great support weapon. Our testers actually nicknamed it the 'nOOb tube' [since everyone seems to want to use the grenade launcher right away], but it takes some skill to aim."

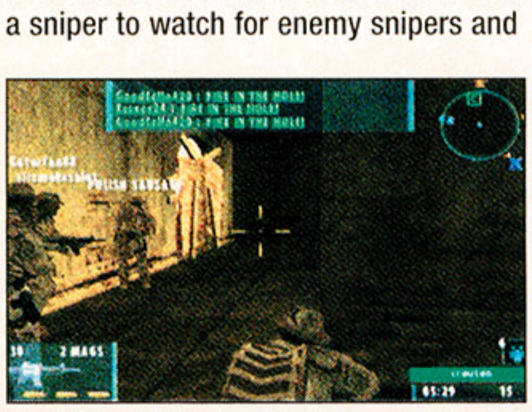
Consider a career as a sniper

"Having a lot of grass was one of the big things [we did to make snipers more effective in *SOCOM II*], since it gives them more places to hide. We also did a lot of tweaking with the scopes and their effective range, so you do have a big advantage when you're using one."

NEW MODE TACTICS

Breach

"There are always going to be pinch points [spots one team must pass through to get to the goal —*Ed.*] in breach. A lot of times the terrorist team will get bored, and a lot of them will run out and just get killed right away. But they should be focused on those pinch points where the breach points are and make sure they have good defenses around them. [Or you can go another way,] send out two or three terrorists to sweep around at the start and come around from behind the SEALs. For the SEAL team, it's really important to set up a sniper to watch for enemy snipers and other enemies who are watching those pinch points. Make sure your guys stay together—a lot of times it helps to just focus on one pinch point so you can have an overwhelming force in that area instead of splitting up your team."



Escort

"It's hard to say what's most effective in escort missions because you want to use different tactics. Don't let them anticipate what you'll do next. You want to break it up—have one team run to one extraction spot and a second team run for the other. It catches the enemy off guard since they might not be watching one of the extraction spots, or at least split their forces. Then again, if you keep doing that, they're going to pick up on it and adjust their tactics. So, sometimes you want to keep your guys together and go for just one extraction point. You really have to vary your battle plan and be dynamic. Don't always take the same route."

>> FUN FACT: *SOCOM II*'S LAN-BASED MULTIPLAYER ABILITY WAS ADDED, IN PART, FOR REAL NAVY TROOPS WHO WANTED TO PLAY THE GAME WHILE ABOARD THEIR SUBMARINES.... >>

100% SUPERNATURAL

NEW

WRIGLEY'S Juicy Fruit

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Artificially flavored

12 PIECES CHEWING GUM

Juicy Fruit

WRIGLEY'S Juicy Fruit

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Artificially flavored

12 PIECES CHEWING GUM

Juicy Fruit

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EGM INTERNATIONAL

Attack of the games from another dimension

REVERSALS OF FORTUNE

Capcom's **Gyakuten Saiban** almost makes jury duty worthwhile

In real life, Japanese courts are so slow that it can take several years to complete a typical lawsuit. In the world of *Gyakuten Saiban* (available now in Japan for GBA), which translates to "Courtroom Reversal," it's a different story—there's no jury, no insanity pleas, and only three days to convince the judge that your client's innocent. How do you, defense attorney Ryuichi Naruhodo, manage this? Simple: Visit the crime scene, gather evidence, and use it to rip the prosecutor's case to shreds during cross-examination. It sounds boring, but the high-energy anime sequences and nutty characters have made *Gyakuten Saiban* one of Japan's most popular adventure series—this third installment is coming to Japan in January 2004.

WHO FRAMED ROGER CLEMENS?

It's pro athletes versus anime in **Gekitou Pro Yakyu**

On the surface, Sega's new baseball game (available now in Japan for PS2 and GC) seems normal enough—you move little cursors around for pitching and batting, etc. for all the teams and players from the Japanese leagues. That is, until you realize that some of your players are cartoons. Literally. Sega signed a deal with comic artist Shinji Mizushima, a veteran of baseball-themed manga comics in Japan for more than three decades, and now 35 of his characters are playing alongside real athletes in *Gekitou Pro Yakyu*. Even better—the manga players all have otherworldly special moves, including the light-speed Dream Ball pitch and a batting skill that automatically injures whoever fields the ball.

OVERHEARD

"We were looking for a ninja character for *Dead or Alive*, and it just so happened we had Ryu Hayabusa. Because I really didn't play the original *Ninja Gaiden*, I'm pretty neutral when it comes to such decisions."

—Tomonobu Itagaki, visionary leader of Tecmo's Team Ninja, which is developing the forthcoming Ninja Gaiden *for Xbox*

"Well, we're not incorporating killings or carjackings into the game."

—Tony Hawk, when asked about Grand Theft Auto's *influence on* Tony Hawk's Underground

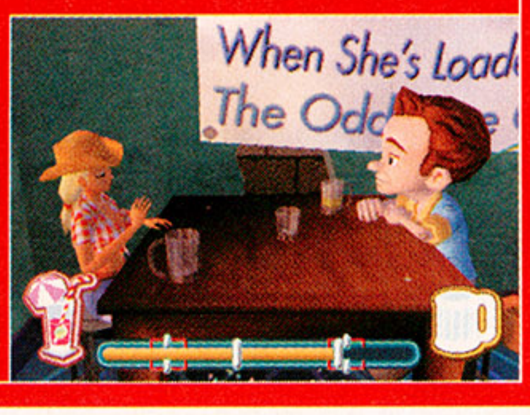
"To see the Japanese actually digging *Ratchet [& Clank]* was rewarding, because no one really knows how to sell a game in Japan. I don't think the Japanese developers even know."

*—Ted Price, president of developer Insomniac Games (*Ratchet & Clank *and its sequel)*

LI'L PREVIEWS: FROM LADY KILLERS TO KILLER LADIES

LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE

PS2, Xbox • VU Games • Late 2004 — Playing as loser college student Larry Lovage (nephew of the 1980s PC adventure-game star), you must revitalize your love life by roaming around campus, finding nice (but not *too* nice) women, and bedding them. Creepy or fun? You decide.



LA PUCELLE: TACTICS

PS2 • Mastiff • Spring 2004 — *Disgaea* was such a hit that Mastiff has picked up the rights to the developer's previous strategy RPG, *La Pucelle*. This one's set in medieval Europe, but the intense depth and zany humor are still there—the heroine's a girl who just passed her exorcism exams.

WARS & WARRIORS: JOAN OF ARC

Xbox • Enlight • Spring 2004 — Not your typical strategy game, *Joan of Arc* starts out like a straight third-person action title, but later, you'll control huge armies from horseback. Picture a thinkin' feller's *Dynasty Warriors* combined with the Frenchmen bit from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. (Not really, but we wish.)

>> MICROSOFT'S XBOX ONLINE RPG *TRUE FANTASY LIVE ONLINE* IS SCHEDULED TO LAUNCH IN JAPAN IN SPRING '04 (PERHAPS AS LATE AS JUNE) AND STATESIDE THIS FALL.... >>

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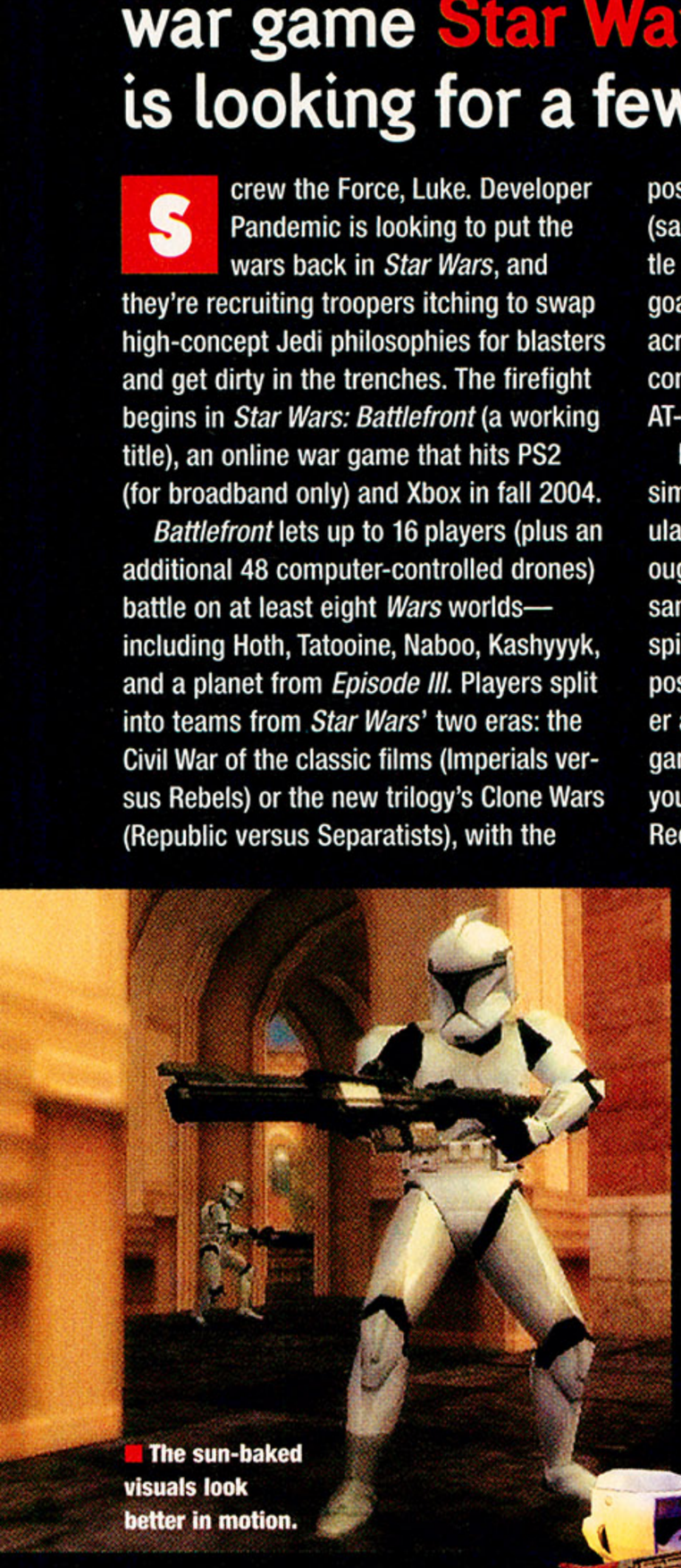
UNCLE DARTH WANTS YOU!

Wanna see the galaxy? Online war game Star Wars: Battlefront is looking for a few good grunts

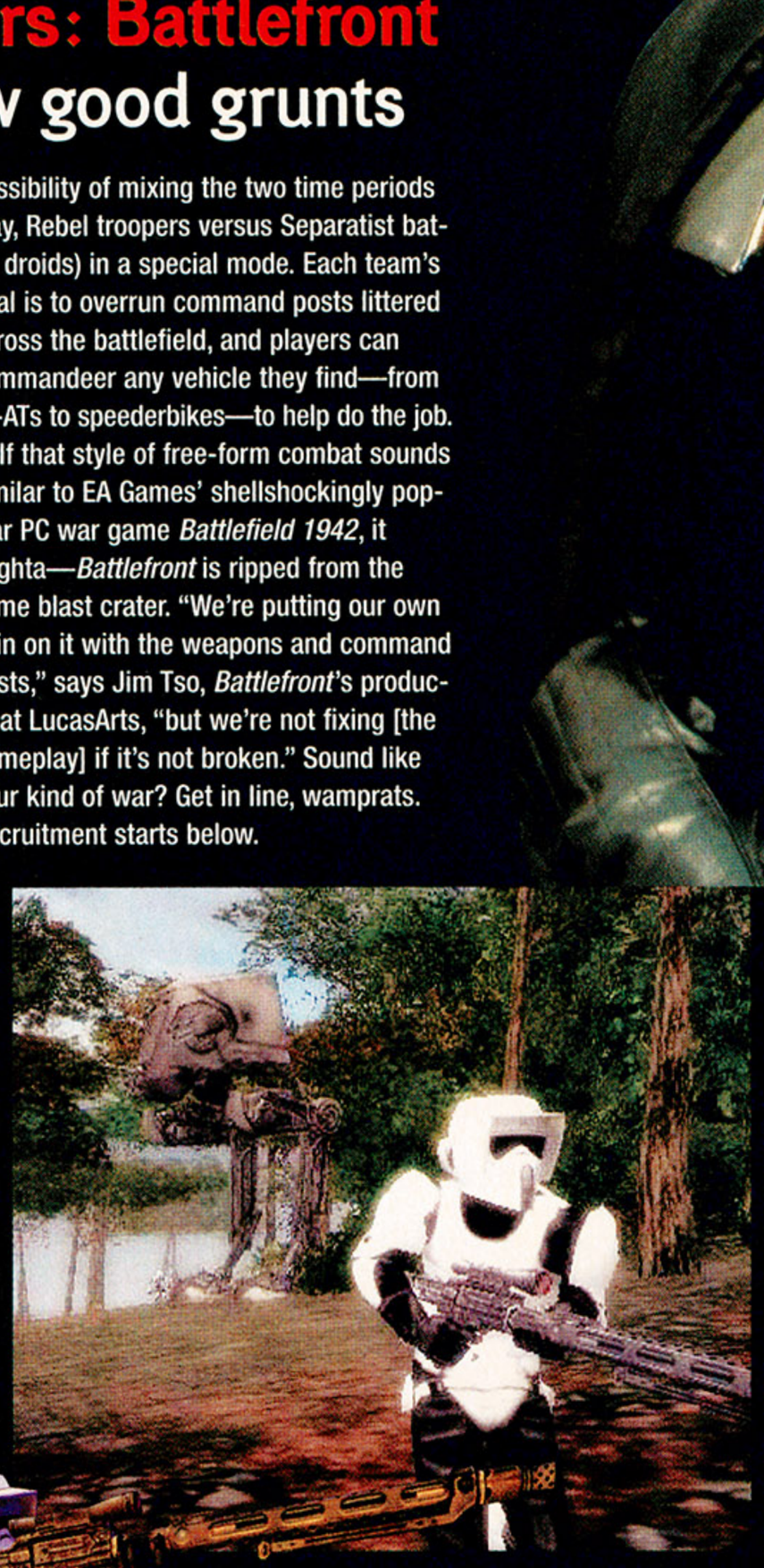
Screw the Force, Luke. Developer Pandemic is looking to put the wars back in *Star Wars*, and they're recruiting troopers itching to swap high-concept Jedi philosophies for blasters and get dirty in the trenches. The firefight begins in *Star Wars: Battlefront* (a working title), an online war game that hits PS2 (for broadband only) and Xbox in fall 2004.

Battlefront lets up to 16 players (plus an additional 48 computer-controlled drones) battle on at least eight *Wars* worlds—including Hoth, Tatooine, Naboo, Kashyyyk, and a planet from *Episode III*. Players split into teams from *Star Wars*' two eras: the Civil War of the classic films (Imperials versus Rebels) or the new trilogy's Clone Wars (Republic versus Separatists), with the possibility of mixing the two time periods (say, Rebel troopers versus Separatist battle droids) in a special mode. Each team's goal is to overrun command posts littered across the battlefield, and players can commandeer any vehicle they find—from AT-ATs to speederbikes—to help do the job.

If that style of free-form combat sounds similar to EA Games' shellshockingly popular PC war game *Battlefield 1942*, it oughta—*Battlefront* is ripped from the same blast crater. "We're putting our own spin on it with the weapons and command posts," says Jim Tso, *Battlefront*'s producer at LucasArts, "but we're not fixing [the gameplay] if it's not broken." Sound like your kind of war? Get in line, wamprats. Recruitment starts below.



■ The sun-baked visuals look better in motion.



ROLE CALL

No matter which side of the war you choose (Rebel, Empire, Republic, or Separatists), *Battlefront*'s soldiers come in five gung-ho varieties—just about every warrior type except for lightsaber-swinging Jedi. You'll pick one of these trooper templates at the start of each round or every time you respawn after dying....

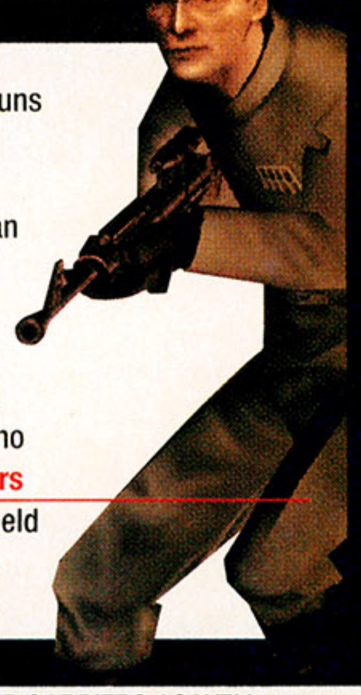
■ **Scout** — These crackshots come with a sniper rifle, plus a pocket-sized probe droid they can send ahead to spy, blast baddies with a wee laser, or explode like a grenade. "When you're guiding the droid," LucasArts' Tso says, "you can't control your Scout, so you'll want to crouch in the foliage or you'll be a sitting duck."

■ **Infantry** — Your basic have-gun-will-travel intergalactic grunt. Think stormtrooper, battle droid, or those Rebels who fought in the trenches on Hoth.

■ **Assault trooper** — A soldier with guns peppy enough to punch holes in craft.

■ **Pilot** — Although all player types can drive vehicles, only grease-monkey Pilots can patch up damaged craft.

■ **Special unit** — Each faction gets a unique class: The Rebels have a spy who impersonates enemies. Imperial officers supply ammo and health. Separatists field the heavy-duty Droideka droid. And the Republic's specialist has a jetpack. ➤



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■ **Lows and highs: *Battlefront* packs a mix of airborne and ground-based vehicles.**

Drivers wanted

➤ *Battlefront* is a regular toy box of *Star Wars* vehicles, more than a dozen in all, including X-wings, TIE fighters, Y-wings, Jedi starfighters, Imperial shuttles—even tauntauns. You won't find every vehicle on every planet—just where they make sense (snowspeeders and AT-ATs on Hoth, speederbikes and AT-STs on Endor, etc.).

Most vehicles have multiple seating positions, too. The snowspeeder, for instance, has room for the pilot and a tow-cable gunner. The Trade Federation Tank lets one player launch missiles from a twisting turret while the driver can blast lasers straight ahead. But the Republic Gunship (as seen in *Episode II*'s final battle) is the mother of all transports, with room for a pilot, four guys manning the wing ball turrets, and a rear gunner, for a total six positions in all. "Of course, if that thing goes down," Tso says, "you'll lose nearly your entire team in one go."

■ **Laser-fire color depends on your team (Rebels shoot blue, Imperials fire red). But don't worry, nerds: "For film authenticity," Producer Tso says, "you'll have the option to make all lasers red."**

War of the worlds

"We're not a story-focused game," Tso says. But that doesn't mean *Battlefront*'s warfare lacks a framework. The game offers a campaign mode (which you can also play solo with A.I.-controlled troopers or in two-player splitscreen), in which the teams take turns assaulting each other's planets. Each planet has two battle maps, and if a team wins both skirmishes, it gets control of the planet and picks the next world on which to wage war.

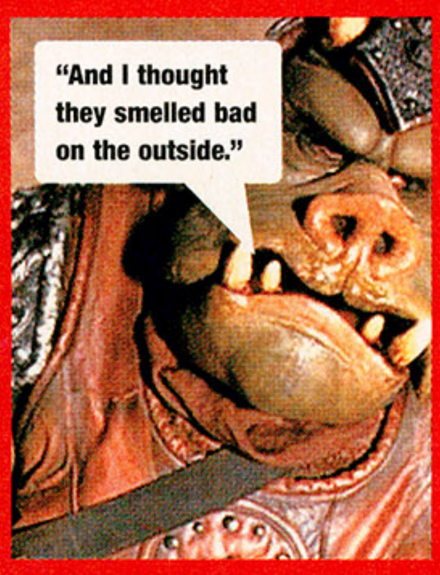
If a team manages to hold control of a planet for a particular charge-up time, it unlocks special attacks. When the Imperials control Tatooine, for instance, they can summon a computer-controlled Darth Vader to the battlefield to hack down Rebels. If the Rebels control the planet, they get Luke Skywalker. Another world grants the Imperials a Death Star attack that instantly vaporizes a Rebel-controlled planet. Conquer all the planets, and your team wins the campaign.

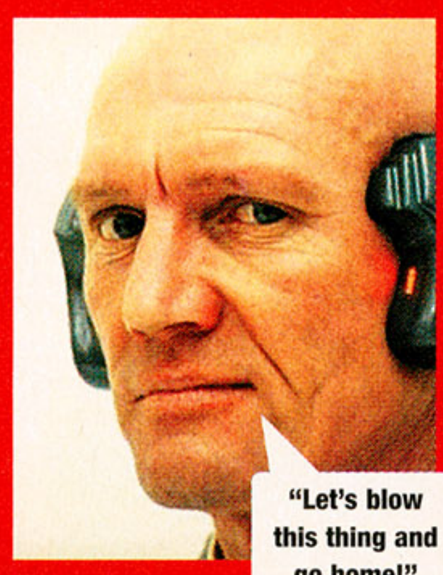
Of course, players can opt to just jump into an instant-action game. But they'll find chaos no matter which mode they play—thanks to the real-life players who wield the war machinery. "It's extremely nonscripted and nonlinear," Tso says. "You can play it over and over again, and it's never the same thing twice."

—Crispin Boyer

DO ASK, DO TELL: FIVE STAR WARS LINES THAT SOUND DIRTY (BUT AIN'T)

Battlefront will support voice chat on Xbox and PS2 via headset mikes, so why not pepper your strategic chatter with these perfectly innocent quotes from the *Star Wars* Trilogy....





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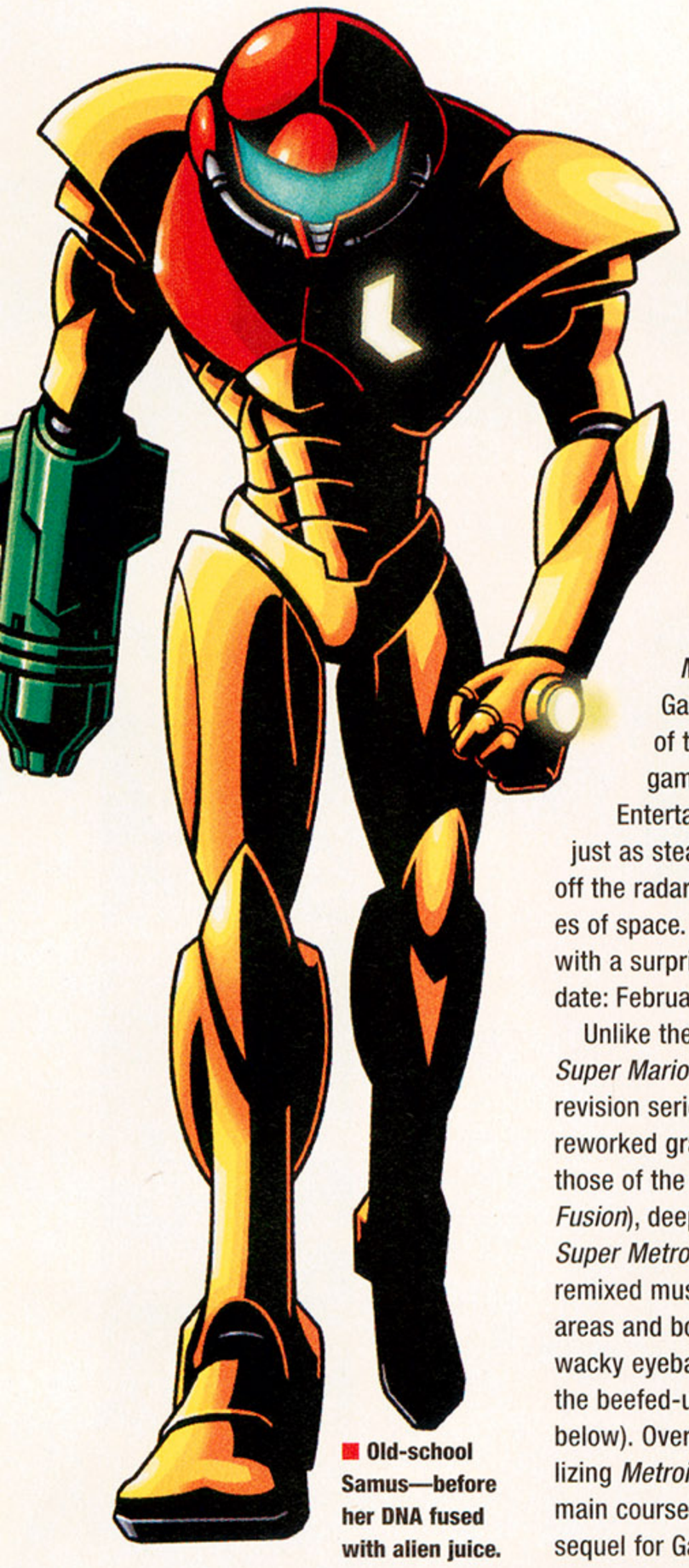


■ Old-school Samus—before her DNA fused with alien juice.

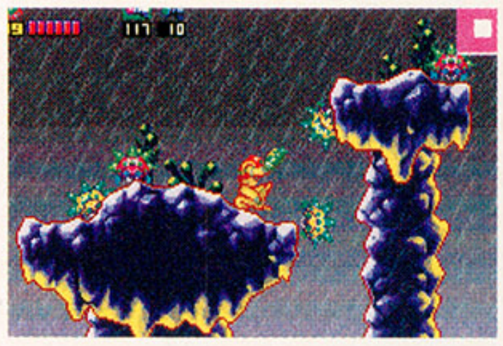
ZERO MISSION COMMENCES

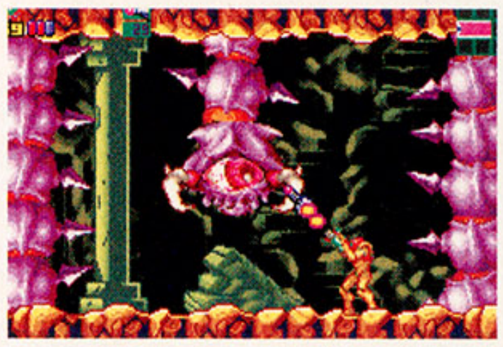
Metroid gets a modern refit

Last summer, Nintendo quietly announced *Metroid Zero Mission*, a newfangled Game Boy Advance remake of the very first *Metroid* game (for the 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System). Then, just as stealthily, the game slipped off the radar into the darkest recesses of space. Well, now it's back...and with a surprisingly close release date: February 9.

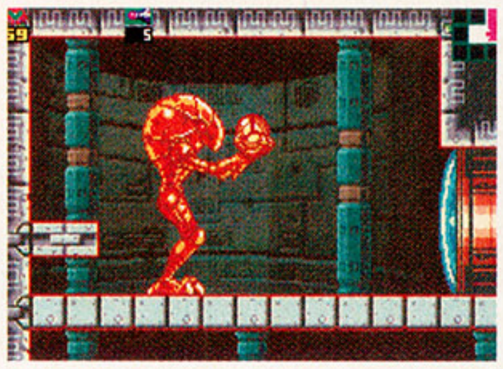
Unlike the scarcely enhanced *Super Mario Advance* ports, this GBA revision seriously ups the ante with reworked graphics (closer in style to those of the recent GBA hit *Metroid Fusion*), deeper gameplay (based on *Super Metroid* for Super NES), remixed music, and entirely new areas and bosses (check out the wacky eyeball guy on the right and the beefed-up Kraid in the sidebar below). Overall, it should be a tantalizing *Metroid* appetizer before 2004's main course—a *Metroid Prime* sequel for GameCube.

■ Planet Zebes never looked so inviting.





■ Ah, the comforting feel of nostalgia....



Kraid, You've...Changed

Scope just how much *Zero Mission* improves upon the classic NES game

■ In 1986, Kraid was a rad boss, and Samus' pink outfit was stylin'.

■ Nowadays, bosses had better fill at least 48.52 percent of the screen.

LI'L PREVIEWS: WHEN HITTING ISN'T ENOUGH

LEGENDS OF WRESTLING: SHOWDOWN

PS2, Xbox • Acclaim • March 2004 — They say legends never die, but the recent performance of *Legends* has the series on life support. *Showdown* hopes to change that with an easier grappling system, an era-based career mode, and 70-plus wrestlers, including newcomers Sting and Ultimate Warrior.

NINA

PS2 • Namco • 2004 — You know the blonde lady from *Tekken* with the skin-tight outfits and raccoon eyes? She's got her own action game now. While the story's not original (she's infiltrating a cruise ship for the CIA), it has an interesting analog-stick-only fighting system (like in, um, *Grabbed by the Ghoulies*).

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AFTERTHOUGHTS: PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

Turning back the hands of time with Prince's producer

"I'd have loved to hear the prince's barely recognizable father beg, 'My son, kill me!'" says *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* Producer Yassim Mallat about one of the few things he wish he'd worked into his game. "But that's the kind of thing you think of afterward." Yet even without the prince's Rewind power to undo such postdevelopment regrets, Mallat and crew managed to make one of the most gorgeous and gripping action-adventure games ever. Join us as we turn back the clock for a closer look at what makes Ubisoft's time-tripping masterpiece tick.

EGM: How important was it for you to remain faithful to the *Prince of Persia* legacy?

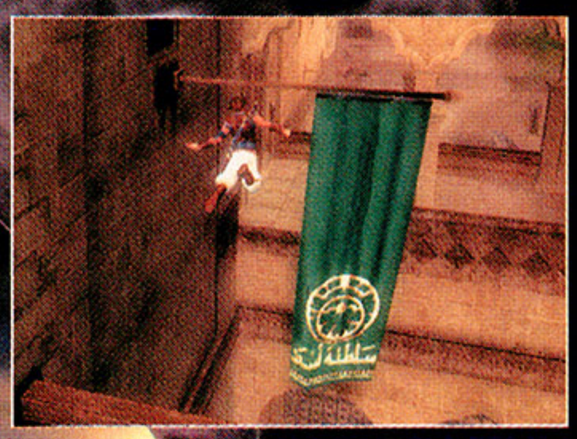
Yassim Mallat: We had to stay true to the license, but at the same time, we had to forget about it. Because of the so-so success of *Prince of Persia 3D* [Dreamcast], we knew that if we wrecked *Sands of Time*, we'd ruin the franchise forever. Of course, we needed to set the game in Persia, but we wanted to get rid of the license mindset so we could come up with the best action game ever, whether it was called *Prince of Persia* or whatever.

EGM: What role did *POP* series creator Jordan Mechner play in the creation of *Sands of Time*?

YM: Among other things, Jordan wrote the story and dialogue. He built the relationship between Farah and the prince—one of the most important aspects of the game. We wanted an interesting heroine, not another hapless princess in need of saving.

History Lesson

Do *Sands of Time*'s labyrinths still hold secrets? "Oh, yeah," says Producer Yassim Mallat. "Start a new game and stay on the balcony. For PS2, press and hold L3, then quickly tap ✖, ■, ▲, ●, ▲, ✖, ■, ●. You'll then enter the first level of the original *Prince of Persia*, redone in 3D! At the very end, when you exit the level, you can go into a secret room in which a picture of the development team [hangs]." On Xbox, press and hold the left analog stick, then tap A, X, Y, B, Y, A, X, B. And GC owners will need to press and hold B on a controller plugged into the fourth gameport. While B is pressed, enter the following sequence with the controller that's in the first gameport: A, B, Y, X, Y, A, B, X.) Additionally, the original 2D *Prince of Persia* is hidden on the PlayStation 2 and GameCube versions, whereas Xbox owners can access both *Prince of Persia 1* and *2*.



>> SOUNDTRACK CDS FOR A HANDFUL OF MICROSOFT'S XBOX TITLES (SUCH AS *HALO* AND *VOODOO VINCE*) ARE AVAILABLE NOW FOR $16 EACH AT WWW.SUMTHING.COM/GAME.HTM.... >>

EGM: In terms of atmosphere and storytelling, *Sands of Time* seems to have a bit in common with the PS2 critic's darling *Ico*. Are the similarities coincidental?

YM: *Ico* influenced us, it's true. The game's environment has a sort of personality; it taunts the player. That's the same kind of feeling we strove for. Of course, we wanted to craft it our way, in our setting. We also wanted to depict a Persia that people don't know about. We didn't want to be cartoony, and we didn't want to be associated in any way with *Aladdin*.

EGM: What's your favorite scene or moment in the game?

YM: In *Grand Theft Auto III*, there's a mission where you kill Salvatore Leone as he steps out of his car. You then steal one of his cronies' cars to escape. Suddenly, opera comes on over the radio, and you start to shiver. You're like, "Oh my god, this is f***ing awesome! I just killed a guy, I'm fleeing, I've got this beautiful opera piece playing."

In *Prince of Persia*, I wanted to have more moments like this. After the prince and Farrah have their fantasy night, he descends from the tomb to the bottom of the tower. He's basically going down, down, down into a circular corridor that seems to never end, and there's this beautiful guitar and vocal song. There's no challenge at all, there's no enemy to fight; there is nothing to do other than wonder when this winding corridor is going to stop.

EGM: What happened to the online content originally planned for the Xbox version of the game?

YM: We planned on letting you play through the prison, then upload your gameplay sequence with a timing score. Another person would've been able to watch your performance and then race your ghost. We also had a survival mode for fighting sequences. They're cool ideas, but we just couldn't get around the technical constraints.

EGM: Is there anything else you would have added or changed if you'd had more time?

YM: To have been able to block when I'm on a beam, ledge, or pole. I don't think people will miss that, but much as they say, "Cool, I can defend myself while knocked to the ground," I think they'd have said, "Nice, I can block while on the ledge!"

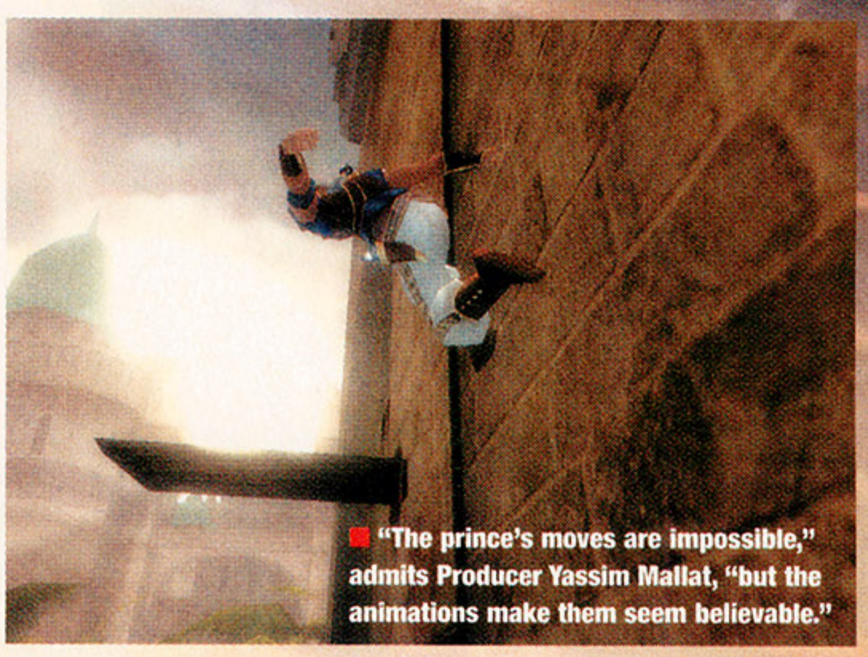
EGM: Should we expect another game in the series?

YM: Let's just say we'd be stupid not to think about it! —*Shawn Elliott*

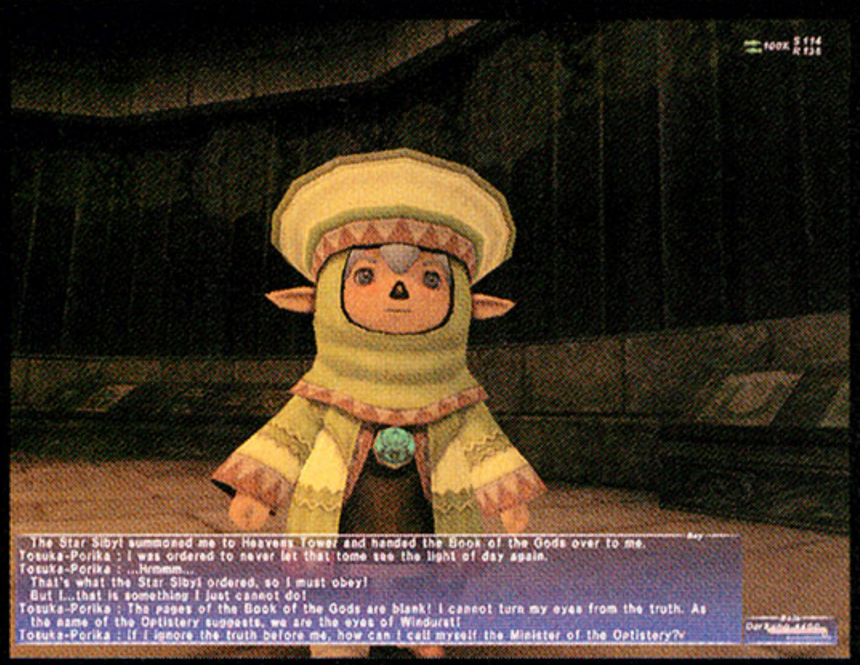
Who's the Boss

An epic adventure without obligatory boss battles? It turns out that *Sands of Time* was supposed to have its share of them. "One boss was a gryphon, the diamond of the sultan's zoo," says Producer Yassim Mallat. "Its proportions were enormous, and you had to plunge your dagger into his throat in a kind of rodeo gameplay. But that didn't make it because we were out of time. Also, we feared that adding exotic boss fights and health bars would've downgraded the experience into something more common."

■ **According to Mallat, *Prince of Persia* series creator Jordan Mechner was "totally psyched" when he first played *Sands of Time*.**



■ **"The prince's moves are impossible," admits Producer Yassim Mallat, "but the animations make them seem believable."**



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PLAY MONEY

We reveal the glitzy lifestyles of the game biz's highest scorers—and share their secrets for success

Everyone wants to break into the gaming business, but that doesn't mean you can't also break the bank. Just take the advice—and check out the homes and high-priced hobbies—of the game-biz entrepreneurs in part one of this two-part story. The moral here: Thinking big pays even bigger. After all, that moolah made by those multimillion-selling games has to go somewhere, right?

—Scott Steinberg

■ Like you don't have a robot raptor in your yard? "My poor dog," says Tallarico.

ROCK TO RICHES

Maestro Tommy Tallarico built a fine-tuned career

Think only oil tycoons and boy-band stars make $1 million a year by their thirties? Let the founder of eponymous game-music shop Tommy Tallarico Studios give you a few pointers. Not quite a pop star (although he does co-host G4's *The Electric Playground* game show), Tallarico built his fortune composing soundtracks for 16-bit classics like *Aladdin* and *Earthworm Jim*, and more recently the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series and *Unreal II*. Now, this maestro's favorite ditty goes "cha-ching!"

EGM: Why go the videogame route—got a beef with record labels?
Tommy Tallarico: All my life, music was my first love and videogames my second. Putting them together was a natural fit.

EGM: How'd you fall into this gig?
TT: When I was 21, I drove to California, broke and homeless. I got a job selling keyboards for Guitar Center. My first day there, a guy saw me in a TurboGrafx-16 T-shirt. Turns out he worked for a new company called Virgin. We got to talking. I was hired on the spot.

EGM: You started out as a game tester. How'd you move up the career ladder to become a composer?
TT: I put together a demo reel for no cost. It convinced them to go with me instead of paying someone who actually knew what they were doing.

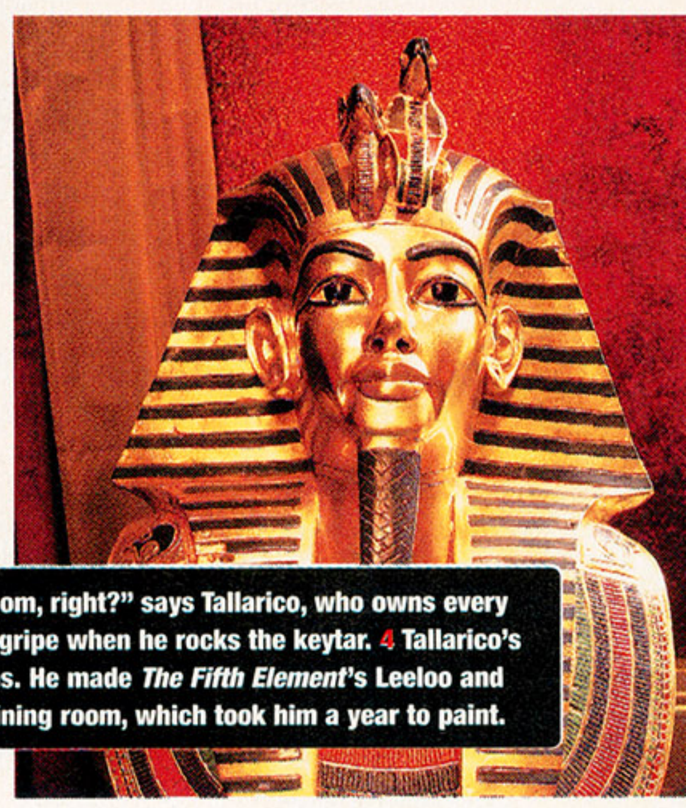
EGM: You eventually went solo and opened your own studio. Why the move to entrepreneur?
TT: It started when I began winning awards. Companies began calling, trying to get me to leave Virgin. I decided it was time to go it alone and get paid.

EGM: Any advice for the folks trying to follow in your footsteps?
TT: Find out what you love to do, then put yourself in that environment. My case is the perfect example—I was originally living in Massachusetts, and I never would have gotten into the game industry without moving out to the West Coast.

EGM: Ever see any celebrity perks from these lucky breaks? Dates with the Hilton sisters, maybe?
TT: I get some perks but nothing super special…unless you count all the adoring letters from 13-year-old boys. ➤

Photographs by Michael Sexton

>> SEGA UP, NINTENDO DOWN: BLAMING THE WEAK DOLLAR AND FLAGGING GAMECUBE SALES, NINTENDO POSTED ITS FIRST-EVER FINANCIAL LOSS—$26.7 MILLION IN THE FIRST HALF



■ **Casa de Tommy: 1 The vanity plate on Tallarico's Ferarri Spyder reads "VIDGMES." 2 "All homes should have a Spidey room, right?" says Tallarico, who owns every *Spider-Man* comic going back to *Amazing Fantasy #15*. 3 Double-paned glass soundproofs his studio, so neighbors won't gripe when he rocks the keytar. 4 Tallarico's home arcade has *Rastan*, *Super Contra*, and *Star Wars*—plus a deep-frozen Han Solo. 5 He also has a thing for mannequins. He made *The Fifth Element*'s Leeloo and imported the Lara Crofts from Germany. Next up: a functioning R2-D2. 6 A level in *Tomb Raider* inspired the decor of the dining room, which took him a year to paint.**

OF ITS 2003 FISCAL YEAR—SINCE THE COMPANY'S STOCK WAS FIRST ISSUED IN 1962. ON THE FLIP SIDE, SEGA'S PROFITS WERE UP, SOARING TO $54 MILLION IN THE SAME PERIOD.... >>

ROBOT JOCK

Sims daddy Will Wright funds his stupid, fun hobby

Giant robots tease Will Wright in his dreams. Could the designer of the blockbuster *Sims* series be going batty? Nah…it's just a side effect of championing his Stupid Fun Club, a Berkeley, CA, studio bent on bringing automatons to prime-time television. We discuss the merits of this pricey hobby with a man who's earned more than enough dough from the game industry to afford such eccentricities.

EGM: Define your Stupid Fun Club.
Will Wright: It's a place where my friends and I can do strange robot projects. We thought the idea up after meeting each other through [the TV show] *Robot Wars*.

EGM: How has success in the game biz allowed you to indulge in this project?
WW: Two ways. First, the money side: It gives me the financial wherewithal to do it. Second, the contacts generated. Now that the industry has mainstream acceptance, people see crossover potential in other fields. It helps you get in the door at places you normally wouldn't.

EGM: Did you envision ventures like this when you got into the industry?
WW: Truthfully, I didn't see gaming as a vehicle to get elsewhere. It sort of just happened as I grew personally. In the beginning, I just loved gaming…a job in the industry seemed a match made in heaven for me. Seeing figures that show that games will outgrow movies at some point, though, I'd think that such an evolutionary step has to happen in the future.

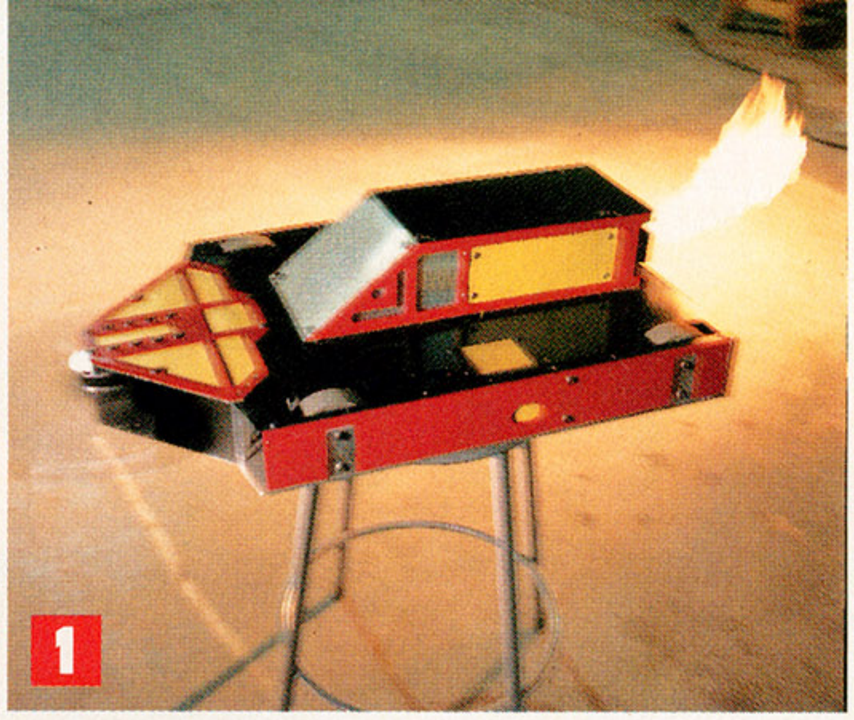
EGM: Must an artist have certain notoriety before they can take chances like you are with Stupid Fun Club?
WW: Anyone can produce interesting stuff on a shoestring budget. It just depends how much money you need. Investors like to see a proven track record.

EGM: Any advice for gamers who'd like to follow in your footsteps?
WW: Be patient. Hit games can take years. It's easy to get frustrated. Maintain your passion. It's the biggest indicator of eventual success.

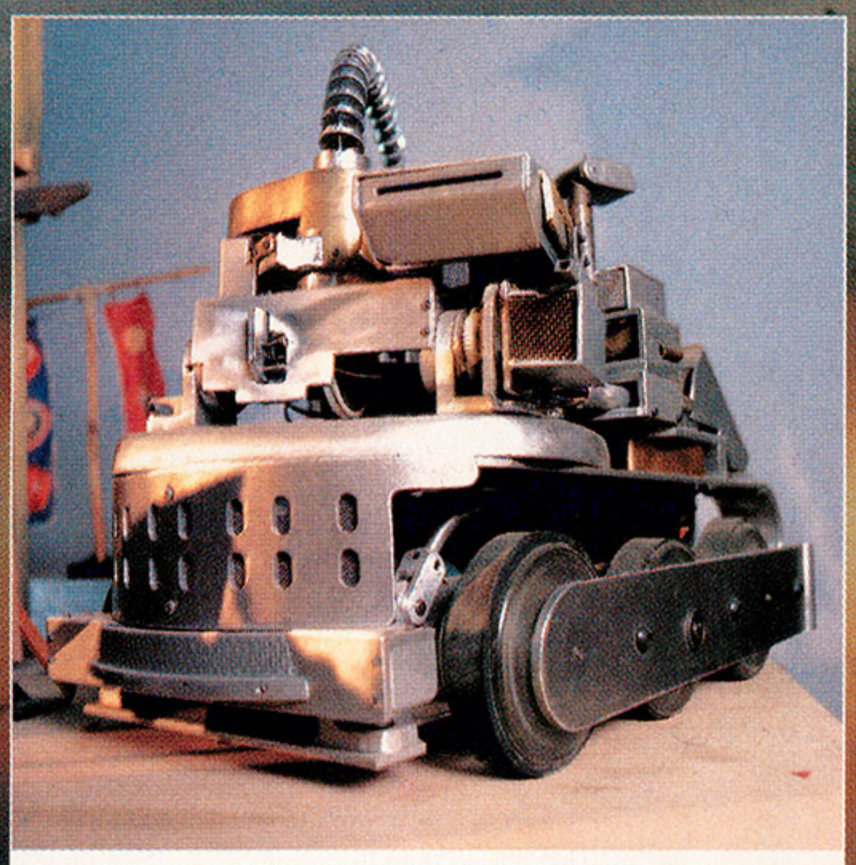
Next month: In part two, meet a gaming "lord" whose home really *is* his castle.

Will Wright was hankering for a pony ride but had to settle for some crappy robot.

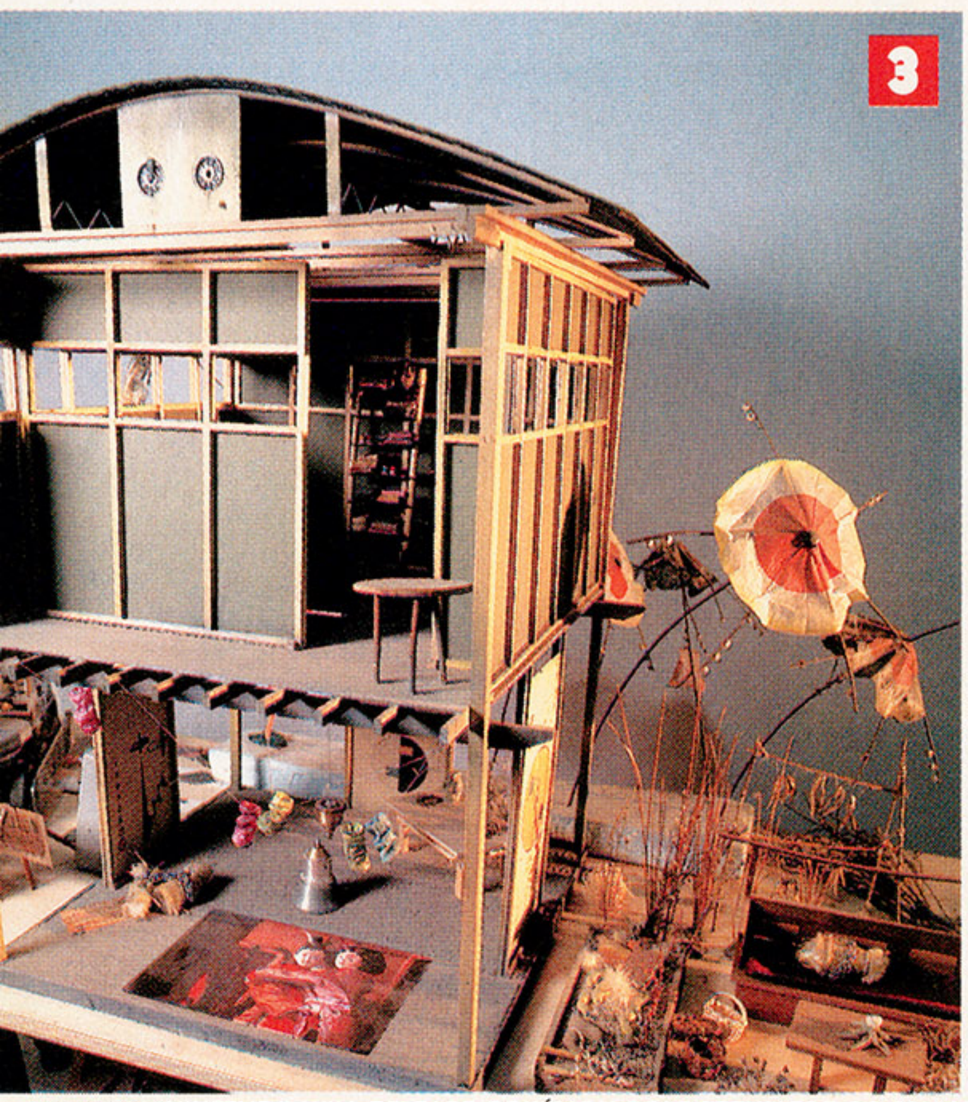
>> DESPITE NOKIA'S BEST EFFORTS, HACKERS HAVE ALREADY DISCOVERED HOW TO PIRATE N-GAGE GAMES AND GET THEM RUNNING ON OTHER PHONES.... >>



The Wright stuff: 1 *Battlebots* vet X-30 gets riled up. These guys don't take kindly to being set on bar stools, apparently. 2 While no robots were hurt during the making of this article, an old CRT monitor was royally f'd up, as Stupid Fun Club members looked on. She totally had it comin'. 3 One of the sets for Stupid Fun Club's pilot show, *M.Y. Robot*. When a robot arrives in a Japanese village, hilarity—and presumably carnage—ensue. 4 Wright takes a spin on his robot couch, Nancy. "We're not very good at naming," he says.



The star of Stupid Fun Club's pilot TV show, *M.Y. Robot*, in repose.



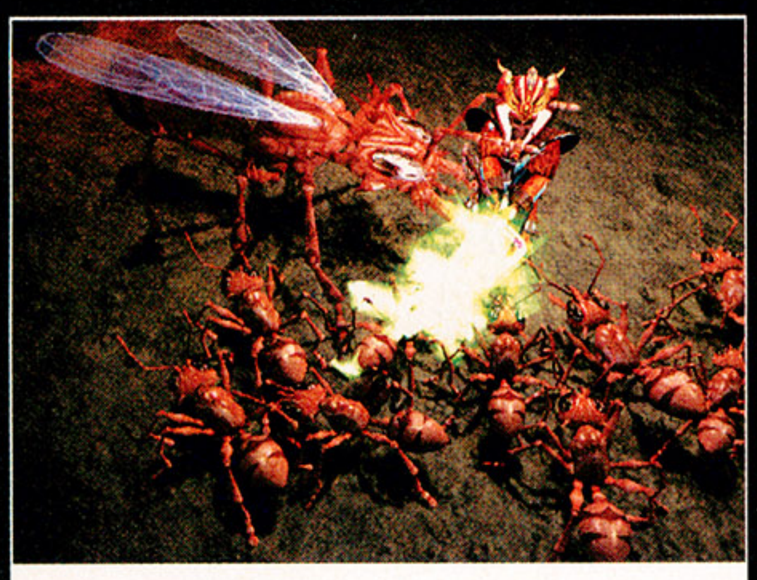
ROLE PLAYING

Find Your Place in Champions of Norrath: Realms of Everquest

Sure, *Champions of Norrath* has the *EverQuest* logo on its box, but everything about the game screams *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, the 2002 hit action-RPG created by crackerjack developer Snowblind Studios. Don't quite know the difference between the two? Let's just say *EverQuest* is (at least on PS2) a snooze-worthy online RPG, while the other gained hordes of fans with its multi-player (but offline) hack-and-slash thrills. Now, Snowblind has shaken up the proceedings by giving *Champions* a gorgeous new graphics engine, randomized dungeons, extensive weapon customization, and free online four-player co-op support—all while delivering the same relentless action that made *Dark Alliance* so popular.

There's one problem, though: We're afraid the transition to *EverQuest* character classes may be a little tricky for adventurers weaned on *Dark Alliance*'s *Dungeons & Dragons* foundation. So to help find the selection that's just right for you, we've provided the following personality quiz. —*Casey Loe*

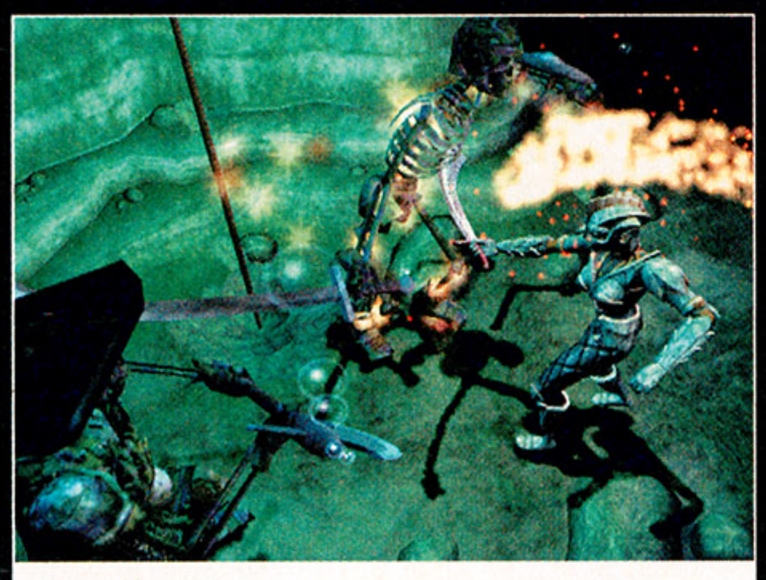
TEST YOUR MIGHT (AND MAGIC):



Question 1:

You're surrounded by an army of giant flesh-eating ants! How do you react?

- Tornado spin smash hack kill splat bwahahahahaha. **(1 point)**
- Surrounded? I think not. I already killed them all from offscreen. **(2 points)**
- Dear gods! I should search for wounded innocents and promptly render assistance. **(3 points)**
- I shall obliterate the vile formicids with a Cone of Fro... What?!? Out of mana? *Run away*!! **(4 points)**
- Let's see... can ants get the bubonic plague? No? OK, smallpox then. **(5 points)**



Question 2:

You've discovered a flaming masterwork scimitar. Do you take it?

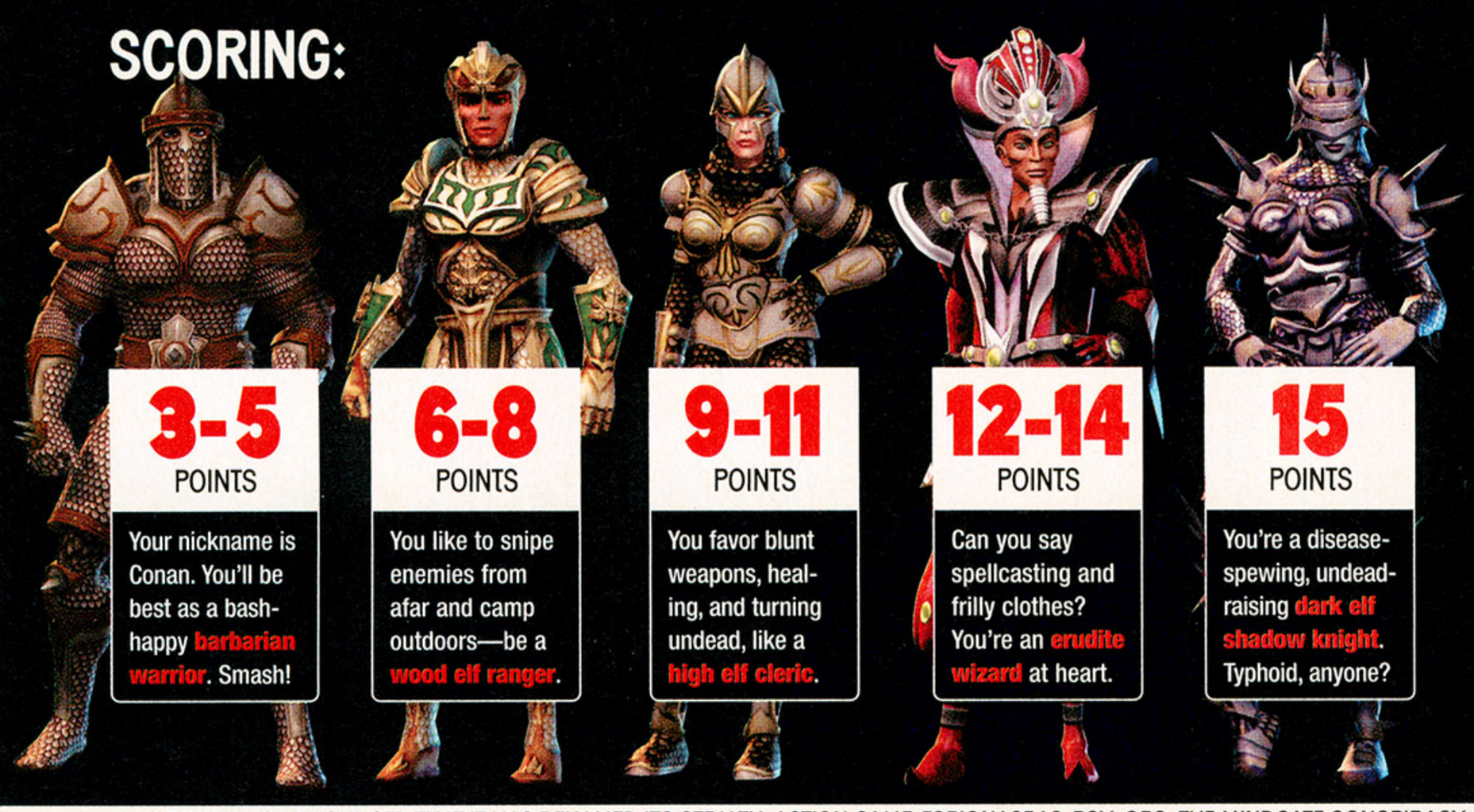
- Yes! Good chop head death burn slice. Heh. **(1 point)**
- Well, maybe if I didn't already have a hernia from carrying 140 pounds of arrows.... **(2 points)**
- Heavens no, that looks perilously sharp. Someone could put an eye out! **(3 points)**
- Um, it's not that I'm feeble, you see. It's just that I've really grown attached to my tree branch and paring knife.... **(4 points)**
- Whatever disembowels my enemies the most cleanly and efficiently. **(5 points)**

Question 3:

An army of undead is slaughtering countless innocents. How does this make you feel?

- Hammer smash make good dead crush bone noise. **(1 point)**
- Sigh. (Nocks bow) I'll be behind that tree for the next several hours.... **(2 points)**
- This abomination unto the laws of sanctity and purity must be stopped! **(3 points)**
- A level 22 Wizard Beam will show them the error of... what? Out of mana again? Run away! **(4 points)**
- You saw my army of undead marauders? What of it? **(5 points)**

SCORING:



3-5 POINTS

Your nickname is Conan. You'll be best as a bash-happy **barbarian warrior**. Smash!

6-8 POINTS

You like to snipe enemies from afar and camp outdoors—be a **wood elf ranger**.

9-11 POINTS

You favor blunt weapons, healing, and turning undead, like a **high elf cleric**.

12-14 POINTS

Can you say spellcasting and frilly clothes? You're an **erudite wizard** at heart.

15 POINTS

You're a disease-spewing, undead-raising **dark elf shadow knight**. Typhoid, anyone?

Uh...OK...maybe those are all vintage *D&D* (except for the new, mildly disturbing shadow knight). So screw the test answers! Just start a game with each character, remove their cloth armor, and select the one who looks best in his or her thong underwear. (Come on, you know that's what you were going to do anyway.)

>> MIDWAY HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IT HAS RENAMED ITS STEALTH-ACTION GAME *ESPIONAGE* AS *PSY-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY*. IT'S DUE FOR PS2, XB, AND GC NEXT MAY.... >>

CELEBRITY GAMER: KRISTEN MILLER

Spying on a She Spy

Action, drama, suspense...it's all in a day's work for actress Kristen Miller. As hacker hottie D.D. Cummings on the syndicated TV show *She Spies* (and before that, Princess Stevenson on the short-lived 2001 Comedy Central sitcom *That's My Bush!*), the cheerful vixen has seen her fair share of danger. Consider it valuable training as Miller attempts her most demanding role yet this month as Rio, star of Konami's upcoming PS2 thriller *Lifeline*. Stranded on a remote space station, this marooned lass' only chance to avoid a certain premature zero-gravity grave are your soothing vocal prompts. But watch that big mouth, buster...this one's unaccustomed to taking orders.

EGM: Making the move from Hollywood to videogames, eh? Must've been a rough transition....
Kristen Miller: Not really. I didn't even have to audition for this role. The director had seen *She Spies* and thought I embodied the character perfectly. He put his faith in me. I'd like to think it was well founded.

EGM: Were you as impressed with the game as the director was with you?
KM: Certainly. *Lifeline* shocked me. The concept is so much more skillfully developed than in most games. The details and the story line are on par with most films.

EGM: Doesn't sound like you've played much *Max Payne* then, have you?
KM: I can't say it's on my list to purchase. I'm a *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* kind of girl. It's depressing that the most cinematically sophisticated titles are typically also the most violent ones.

EGM: We take it you're not the angry type then, eh?
KM: Oh, I get pretty mad sometimes. I wanted to curse back at mean players in *Lifeline*, but the creator wouldn't let me. He claimed it "wasn't in character" for Rio. Pansy.

EGM: Shall we take your in-game appearance to mean you like being bossed around and told what to do?
KM: No way! I don't take any crap, and neither does Rio. If you yell at me, I'll scream back.

EGM: Ever wish you heard disembodied voices dispensing advice in real life?
KM: Yeah. There are times in my life I really feel lost, lonely, and in need of help. Mostly while driving.

EGM: Got any dirty gossip tidbits about gorgeous *She Spies* co-star Natasha Henstridge you can share with us?
KM: Her husband's always playing games. It really pisses her off. Remember boys, we women like attention, too.

—Scott Steinberg

This is where you say, "Shoot him in the balls."

Lifeline

PS2 • Konami • February 2004 — Rio, a waitress on mankind's first orbiting space hotel, is stranded alone after something attacks the station. Trapped in a security room, you must guide her around with your voice (via PS2's USB headset) as she fends off enemies and tries to find a way out. Lucky for you, she understands a lot–over 5,000 words—everything from "Reload!" to "Shoot him in the back!"

>> IT'S NOT A $20 PLATINUM HITS TITLE, BUT THE FIVE OR SIX OF YOU WHO HAVE AN XBOX AND *DON'T* OWN KILLER-APP FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER *HALO* CAN GET IT NOW FOR ONLY $30.... >>

TALE SPIN

Turning RPG clichés on their head with The Bard's Tale

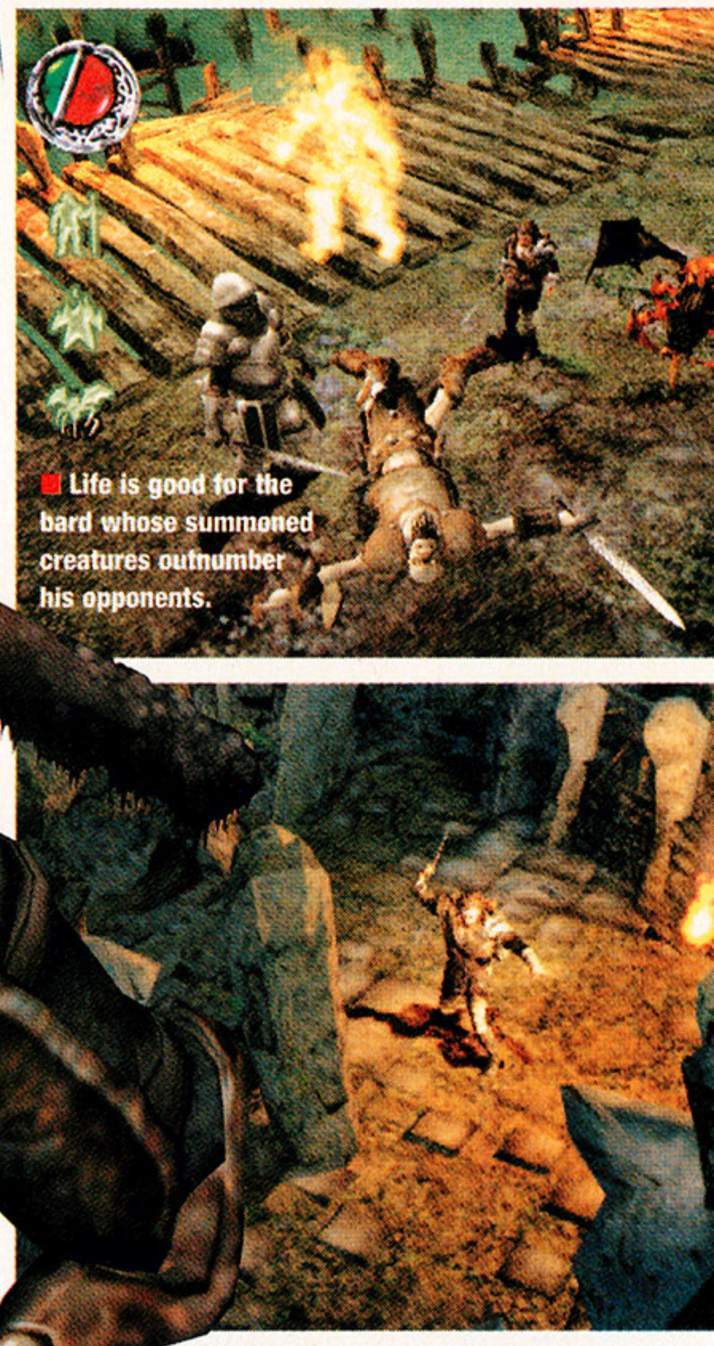
If most RPG story lines make you yawn, you're not alone. "The clichés? I'm sick of 'em," says Brian Fargo, the designer who founded Interplay and, more recently, newbie developer InXile. "I can't stand another game where I'm a 13-year-old orphan who's the chosen one and must save the universe without having any particular talents. How many times can we sit through that?!"

Enter *The Bard's Tale*, an action-RPG (due late 2004 for PS2 and Xbox) that's similar to hack-n-slash fests like *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* but promises a few notable differences. Like, say, an in-depth story…that the designers are evasive about discussing. "What's the story for *Pulp Fiction*?" asks InXile President Matthew Findley. "Who cares? It's about interesting characters in interesting situations."

Your interesting character—the bard—is a Han Solo–type adventurer who has a penchant for getting into strange predicaments. In fact, InXile vows that nearly every aspect of the game is different from the norm. Instead of casting spells, for instance, you sing songs (what's a bard without a tune?) to summon creatures. "We'd rather have something there onscreen throwing fireballs for you," says Fargo, "and then give it personality." Your bard begins the game able to summon only a rat, but even this lowly skill pays off. He can conjure the critter at inns, dispel them, and then heroically accept room and board from the grateful barkeep.

Even the way the game handles dialogue is novel. "Typically, you have two or three choices of what your character is going to say," Fargo says, "but we wanted to do something different." Here, you simply choose from an image of a nice, smiling face or one with an evil grin—and hope that your bard won't say something too horrible. "Sometimes, saying something cynical will make the game harder," says Fargo, "but being nice isn't always the way to go either." How far will they take the game's sarcastic humor? "We're definitely pushing the boundaries of good taste," laughs Findley. —*Joe Fielder*

This inn is full of drunks who sing a rousing five-minute song about their love for beer. Mmm...beer....



Life is good for the bard whose summoned creatures outnumber his opponents.

It's a Dog's Life

Much like in the recent *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (Xbox), choices you make in *Bard's Tale* will have repercussions throughout the entire game. For example, there's a dog you meet in the beginning, "and if you're mean [to it twice]," says InXile CEO Brian Fargo, "it'll run away and you'll never see it again. But if you're nice, it'll join you and will eventually start barking whenever silver is buried nearby. And as you play, he grows older and becomes a fighting dog; there are all these sequences you wouldn't see if you didn't have that dog with you. We love that kind of thing, where just that one little choice casts a ripple pattern 20 hours into the game."

Name That Tune

You may remember EA's *The Bard's Tale* trilogy from the early days of Interplay, where InXile's Fargo developed the RPG line for NES and various other platforms. The series has languished since the '80s—EA owns the publishing rights but hasn't touched the property in years. Pending a few trademark proceedings in the U.S., InXile should own the title soon.

>> YOU PROBABLY MISSED YOUR CHANCE TO BE DEEMED THE SEXIEST GAMER, BUT YOU CAN CHECK OUT THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE WHO WERE AT WWW.SEXIESTGAMER.COM.... >>

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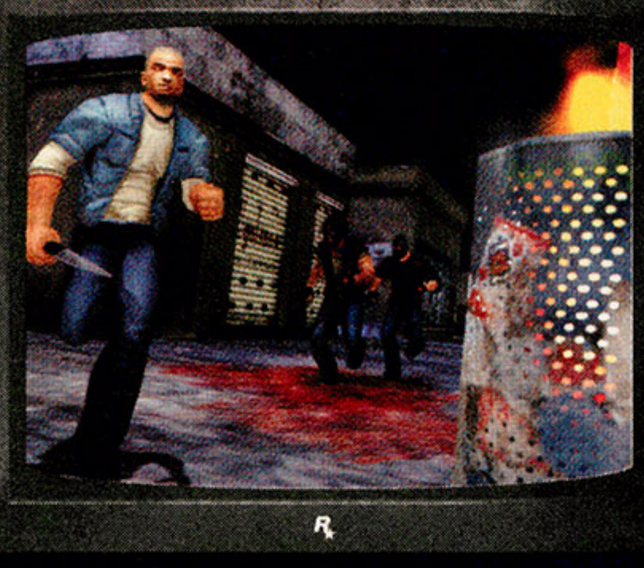

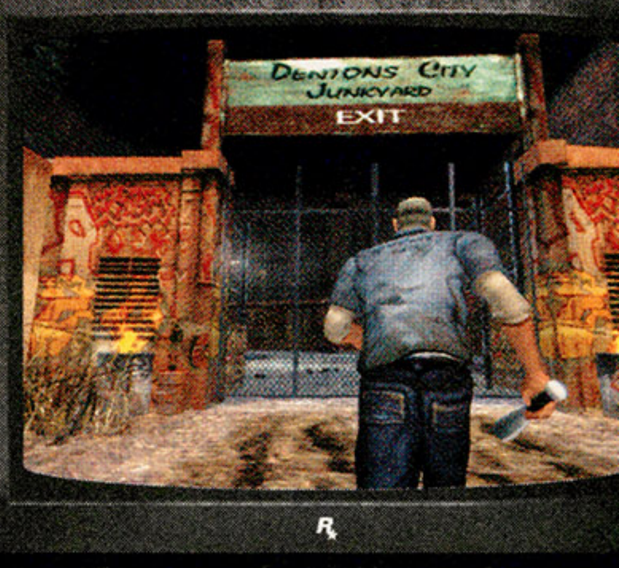

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MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Strong Language
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

PlayStation.2

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FACTORY SHOWROOM

Watch the cords, step into our pad, and check out these modern gaming gadgets

It's about time you gave gaming peripherals as much attention as your other lifestyle accessories. Granted, they may not be made of exotic hardwoods, precious metals, or posh fabrics, but some gear deserves a second look (or at the very least, a doubletake). So whether you're interested in an MP3 player for your GBA SP, a sleek, retro-style gamepad, or other gizmos, you've come to the right place. Step into our showroom and feast your eyes on these modern wares.

—Shawn Smith

1

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Photographs by Filip Dvorak

>> JAPANESE TOY COMPANY TAKARA (HOME OF THE TRANSFORMERS) BOUGHT GAMEMAKER ATLUS (THE U.S. PUBLISHER OF THE RECENT PS2 RPG *DISGAEA*). OH THE POSSIBILITIES.... >>

1

iType2 (Nyko • PS2 • $40 • nyko.com) — This strange-looking hybrid makes your living room—and your lap—a little less cluttered by combining a PS2 controller and USB minikeyboard into one unit. What better way to come out on top in those heated debates in *SOCOM II* lobbies over who's the hottest *FFX-2* babe? But beware: Its small keys are not thick-finger-friendly.

2

GamePak Carry Case Backpack (LASR • Multi • $40 • lasraccessories.com) — This stylish backpack makes it look like you're hauling books when it's really fun you're packin'. It's got pockets for games, controllers, and accessories—plus, a large, padded area for a system and a handy panel that flips down so you can jack into a TV and get gaming in seconds flat.

3

Rally Racer (Pelican • GBA • $10 • pelicanacc.com) — Pop your GBA on the backside of this bizarre wheel (complete with luscious rubber grips and spring-loaded recoil) and add a touch of realism to any portable racer. Or maybe not—should you bust this bulky baby out on a flight, you're likely to get a furious ridiculing by the fidgety toddler sitting next to you.

4

Hip ScreenPad (Hip Interactive • Multi • $99 • www.hipgearproducts.com) — Surely you can't bring that 50-inch HDTV on your cross-country road trip. So how about this instead—a control pad with a built-in three-inch LCD monitor. It eliminates the need for extra gear, whether you're gaming in your private jet or decked-out Humvee.

5

JukeBox (Gamester • GBA • $99 • gamesterusa.com) — If you're looking for more to store in your techy carryall, the JukeBox fits the bill. It allows you to play your MP3-encoded music files right on your GBA SP (stored on CompactFlash cards) and encode your own tunes in real time via its input jack. Works as a music player without the GBA, too.

6

Ultimate Kickboxing Fighting Arena (Naki • PS2 • $40 • nakiusa.com) — This delightful blend of polypropylene, nylon, and gaming technology from the future lets you do what matters most: punch and kick. Just attach the wrist and ankle sensors and get crazy, Jackie Chan–style—yes, it detects jump-kicks, too—in your favorite fighting games.

7

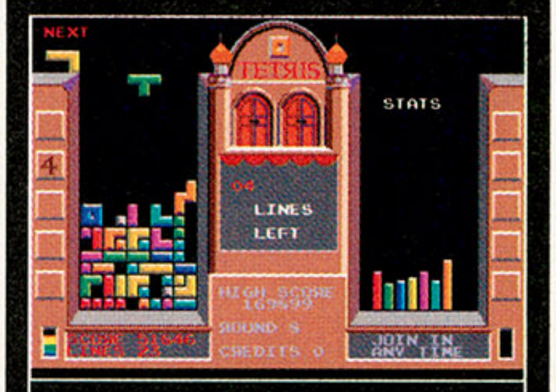
RetroCon (Mad Catz • PS2 • $25 • madcatz.com) — Even if you fancied yourself a Sega fan back in the day, chances are, you'll still appreciate this retro-done-right NES-style pad. It not only feels like a dream, thanks to impeccable design and a heavy-duty metal body, it also brings back all of the warm, fuzzy feelings of a time when gaming still had its innocence.

8

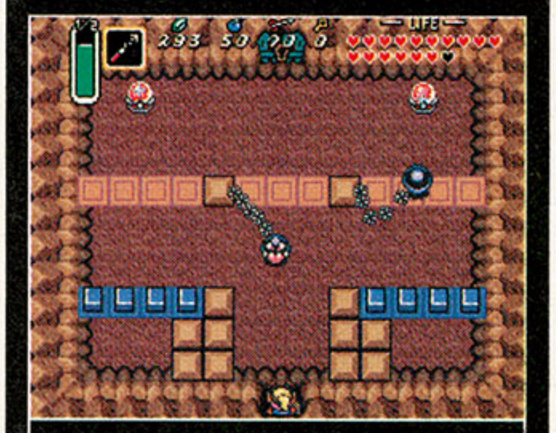
Virtual FX 2D to 3D Converter (I/O Systems • Multi • $300 • i-glassesstore.com) — That 36-inch TV in the den isn't enough to make your games spring to life. But put on these stylish glasses and make a couple quick adjustments on the included control box, and those hookers from *Grand Theft Auto* will pop right out of the TV. Whoa.

DESERT ISLAND GAMES: WARREN SPECTOR

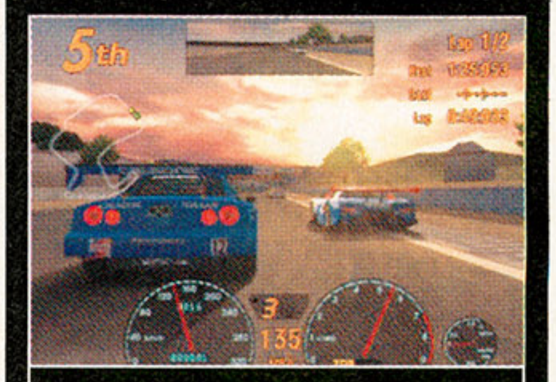
Every month, we ask a celeb or game designer: If you were marooned on a deserted island, what trifecta of games would you want with you? This month, we cast away Ion Storm's Warren Spector, legendary PC game designer responsible for titles like *Ultima Underworld*, *Deus Ex*, and its sequel, *Invisible War* (reviewed this issue on page 124). ***—Marc Saltzman***



Tetris
(Multiplatform)
"You can just keep playing this game forever and never get bored."

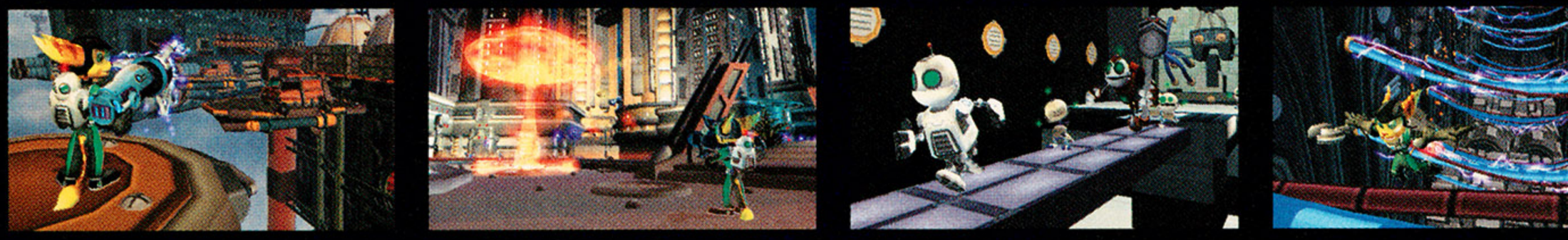


The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past
(GBA, Super NES)
"It's got a fun story, terrific puzzles, challenging combat, cute and iconic graphics, and a real feeling of exploration and discovery."



Gran Turismo 3 A-Spec
(PS2)
"Even if I ever got too good for the A.I., there's always another tenth of a second I can shave off a lap time!"

>> DEVELOPER VIS ENTERTAINMENT ANNOUNCED IT'S WORKING ON A SEQUEL TO THE LACKLUSTER ACTIONER *STATE OF EMERGENCY*, DUE LATE 2004 FOR UNSPECIFIED SYSTEMS.... >>



EENIE, MEENIE, MINEY, BOOM.

They're back. And they're itching for action. With tons of planets to conquer in a whole new gigantic galaxy, you better believe Ratchet & Clank are gonna sink their teeth into some destruction. Ummm, destruction. With weapon upgrades, mods, armor and the ability for Ratchet to get stronger and smarter as the game goes on, this could get uglier than The Grandmas In Bikinis Calendar after-party. Speaking of parties, there's also hoverbike racing, space combat and gladiator arenas. As far as weapons and gadgets go, Ratchet & Clank are stacked with over 50 new ones, along with unlockable upgrades, so by the end of the journey, you'll go through more weapons and gadgets than a hungry fat man will go through chicken wings at lunch. Lock and load, baby, lock and load. **www.us.playstation.com**

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PlayStation.2

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THE SPY WHO FRAGGED ME

A detailed look at the world of Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain

From the dusty streets of Yemen to small piazzas in Italy, hundreds of people are dropping dead from a virus...and many more will die if it isn't stopped soon. But how can you stop something you can't see? Finding the pathogen's origin is the key in the latest secret-agent action-adventure in Sony's *Syphon Filter* series. You'll need teamwork, stealth, precision, and even a little luck to get yourself and other members of The Agency (which former protagonist Gabe Logan now heads) to the bottom of this worldwide catastrophe. While such a task is easier said than done, you'll have help this time: *Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain*'s entire single-player adventure can be played online with up to three other friends (ones with broadband, at least). Peep the following advance intel on this February PS2 release, before it self-destructs. —*Giancarlo Varanini*

Globetrotter

The game begins in Michigan, but you'll visit sexier locales such as Switzerland and Yemen. Levels are up to three times larger than in the previous PS1 *Syphon Filter* games, and online buddies can lift you up to areas you couldn't reach offline.

Hot Shot...to the Head!

Precise aim saves ammo and is one of the reward system's key factors. Doing well in the single-player and online game unlocks nifty extras, including new weapons and additional agent customization options. You must play the game both online and off to get the absolute highest ranking.

All Dressed Up

You can customize your agent, giving him or her a more personalized touch. In some missions, your trooper can even don an enemy uniform to help avoid detection, making it less likely that you'll waltz into a hail of gunfire while searching through the middle of town or an enemy installation.

Take 'Em Out

The game packs more than 100 weapons and gadgets, but you can take only four with you at the start of each mission. Be sure to coordinate with your online teammates at the Equip screen, so your arsenals aren't redundant. Luckily, you can switch out a weapon for any better ones you find.

An Army of One to Four

Omega Strain's solo-play portion encourages you to use cover and peek out to shoot enemies, while multiplayer brings on a whole new tactical element that lets you ambush bad guys and set up cross fire. You can even have some players cover rooftops for snipers while others take the point.

LI'L PREVIEWS: GUNS, FISTS, OR SWORDS—ANY OF THEM WILL DO

DEAD TO RIGHTS II: HELL TO PAY

PS2, Xbox • Namco • Fall 2004 — Jack Slate is back, and this time he's angry (well, angrier than before). The sequel to Namco's 2002 brawling/shooting frenzy will have slicker visuals and a better *Matrix*-style dive move in an attempt to drop the "*Max Payne* ripoff" moniker.

SAMURAI WARRIORS

PS2 • Koei • March 2004 — Dig *Dynasty Warriors* but prefer Japan's historical past to China's? You're in luck. Koei's latest hack-n-slasher spotlights warriors from Japan's samurai era. Expect indoor combat and some stealth bits, in addition to fighting hundreds at once on the battlefield.

PAINKILLER

Xbox • Dreamcatcher • 2004 — Here's a tip, kids: Don't die in a car accident. If you do, you might end up like Daniel Garner, lost in a purgatory-like world and caught up in a demonic power struggle. Good thing they don't outlaw big guns in the afterlife, eh? Or this first-person shooter would be pretty sad.

>> THE ART INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA HAS OPENED A RESEARCH LAB TO AID BUDDING DESIGNERS IN ITS GAME-RELATED DEGREE PROGRAMS. INFO AT WWW.AICASF.AII.EDU.... >>

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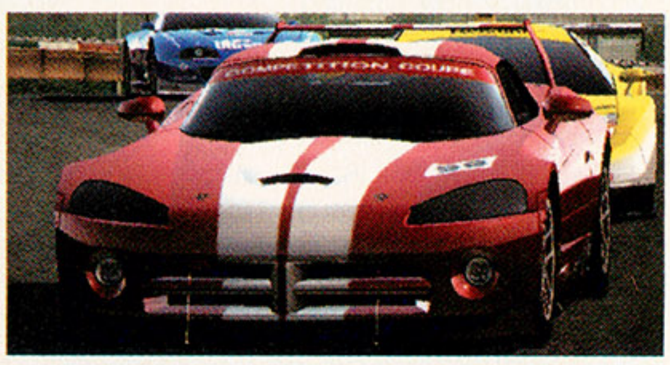

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XBOX

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■ Never fear, more downloadable maps for *Rainbow Six 3* will soon be here (ideally before we're all tired of the included arenas).

ONLINE THIS MONTH

Answers to your **Rainbow Six 3** questions

If you're anything like us, the hours you've sunk into *Rainbow Six 3*'s Xbox Live mode have led you to ask many questions. What does this "ELO" stat mean? What downloadable content is coming? Who just shot me and from where? While we can't help you with that last one, we're going to try our best—with help from the game's producer, Chadi Lebbos—to answer the rest.

Hello, ELO — The ELO stat is based on a skill-based ranking system developed (originally for chess players) by mathematician Arpad Elo (surprise, Sony's *SOCOM II* uses the same system). It rewards quality over quantity, so to move up you need to spill the blood of players ranked higher than you.

To .50 cal, or not to .50 cal — The .50 caliber sniper rifle is a very powerful, very accurate weapon that has many online players crying foul. In most matches, you'll get a stern talking to for using it, and many wonder why there is no option to banish it from matches. "While we strongly believe the .50 cal is a well-balanced weapon," Lebbos says, "we are looking for alternatives for the players who wish not to have them on their servers."

More downloadable content, when?
The first download, the Garage multiplayer map, is available now, and the team is finishing up a map called Train Depot, to be released soon (exact date TBD). More are in development, and Lebbos tells us that a full team should be working on downloadable content for the game by the time you read this and that players can expect more as-yet-unspecified multiplayer capabilities and support in the future.

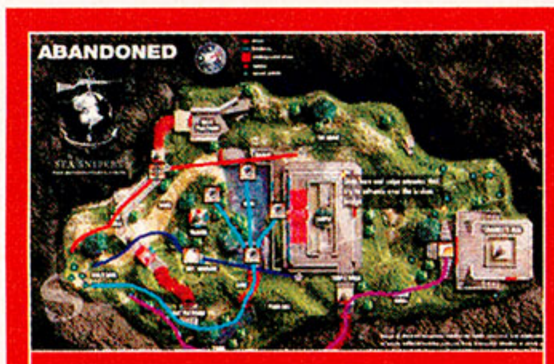
Mic-muting myth — Some say that muting your microphone when switching maps or entering games will speed things up, but Lebbos says no dice. "Loading and switching speeds have no relation to the microphone," he says. "Most likely, the data has been cached on the hard drive, which [is why it seems to load faster]."

■ **Packin' a .50 cal, you could take these three goons out lickety-split.**

On egmmag.com

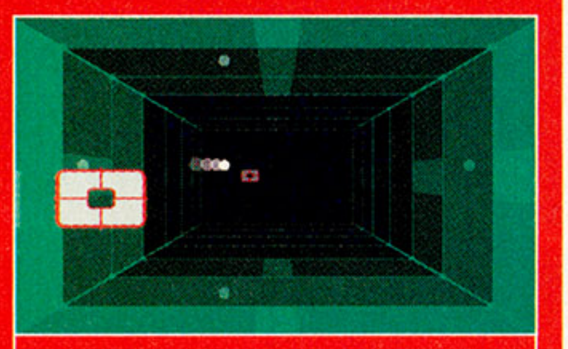
Point your browser at extra.egmmag.com and you'll find a ***Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando* Afterthoughts** interview with Insomniac Games' Ted Price.

must-hit websites



tacticalwhiteboard.com — Draw up multiplayer strategies for Sony's *SOCOM* (and soon, its sequel) using detailed maps, and share them with your battlefield comrades over the Web using this excellent Flash application. An essential tool for clans.

sidetalkin.com — Nokia's N-Gage system may not be the biggest success, but the way you use it as a phone has spawned a new craze amongst gaming's Net-connected elite—sidetalkin' with something... *anything* up to your ear.



liquid.se/pong.html — Make those winter doldrums go away with a round of *Pong* redone in 3D. By the time you escape this Web game's grasp on your attention, it'll be spring for sure. And you'll be fired from your job or kicked out of school.

PC GAMING UPDATE

Call of Duty

You wouldn't know it from most WWII shooters, but apparently wars are *not* fought by lone gunmen against hordes of enemies. Huh. Who woulda thought it? Apparently, the guys at Infinity Ward, that's who. This splinter group from the original *Medal of Honor* development team has delivered not only the best PC combat shooter of the year in *Call of Duty*, but maybe the best shooter of the year, period.

Call of Duty breaks from the crowd, ironically enough, by including the crowd—in the form of squadmates with outstanding A.I. The action is unrelenting, whether you're rescuing a POW from a camp in the dead of night or desperately holding a crucial bridge while hellaciously outgunned and outmanned. Through it all, those squadmates fight alongside you, saving your ass as frequently as you save theirs.

While the outstanding A.I. drives a lot of the action, there's a fair amount of scripting—especially in the oddly giddy car chases that have you taking potshots at Nazis while your driver barrels through fences and around buildings. The three different campaigns—American, English, and Russian—are all gripping and, sadly, in the only real misstep of the game, all very short. This game won't take an experienced gamer more than a couple days to finish.

Call of Duty will make its way to all the consoles in 2004, but it'll be an entirely different game in much the same way the *Medal of Honor* games are different on consoles and PC. This is good news for console gamers disappointed by *Rising Sun*.

—Robert Coffey,
Computer Gaming World

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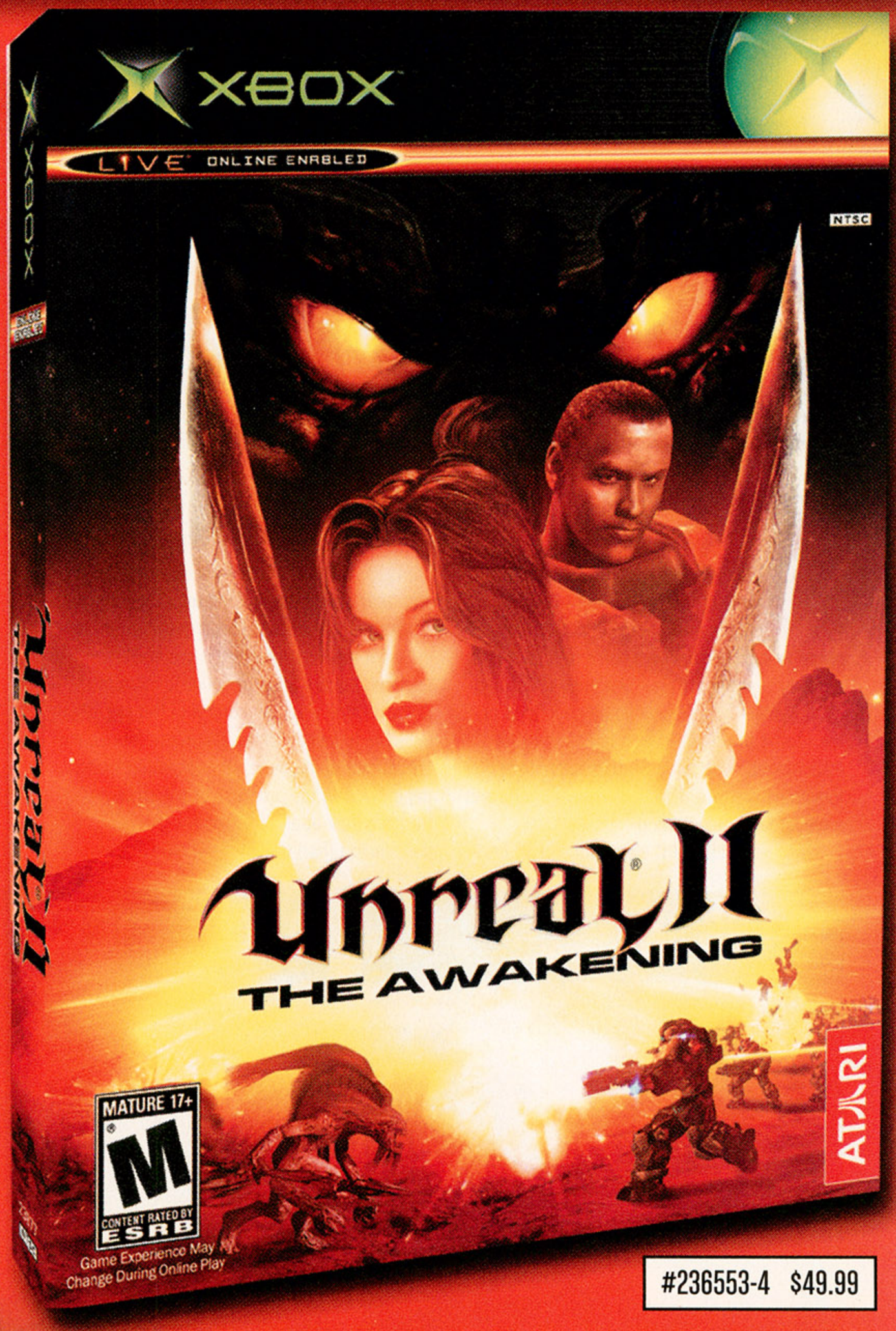

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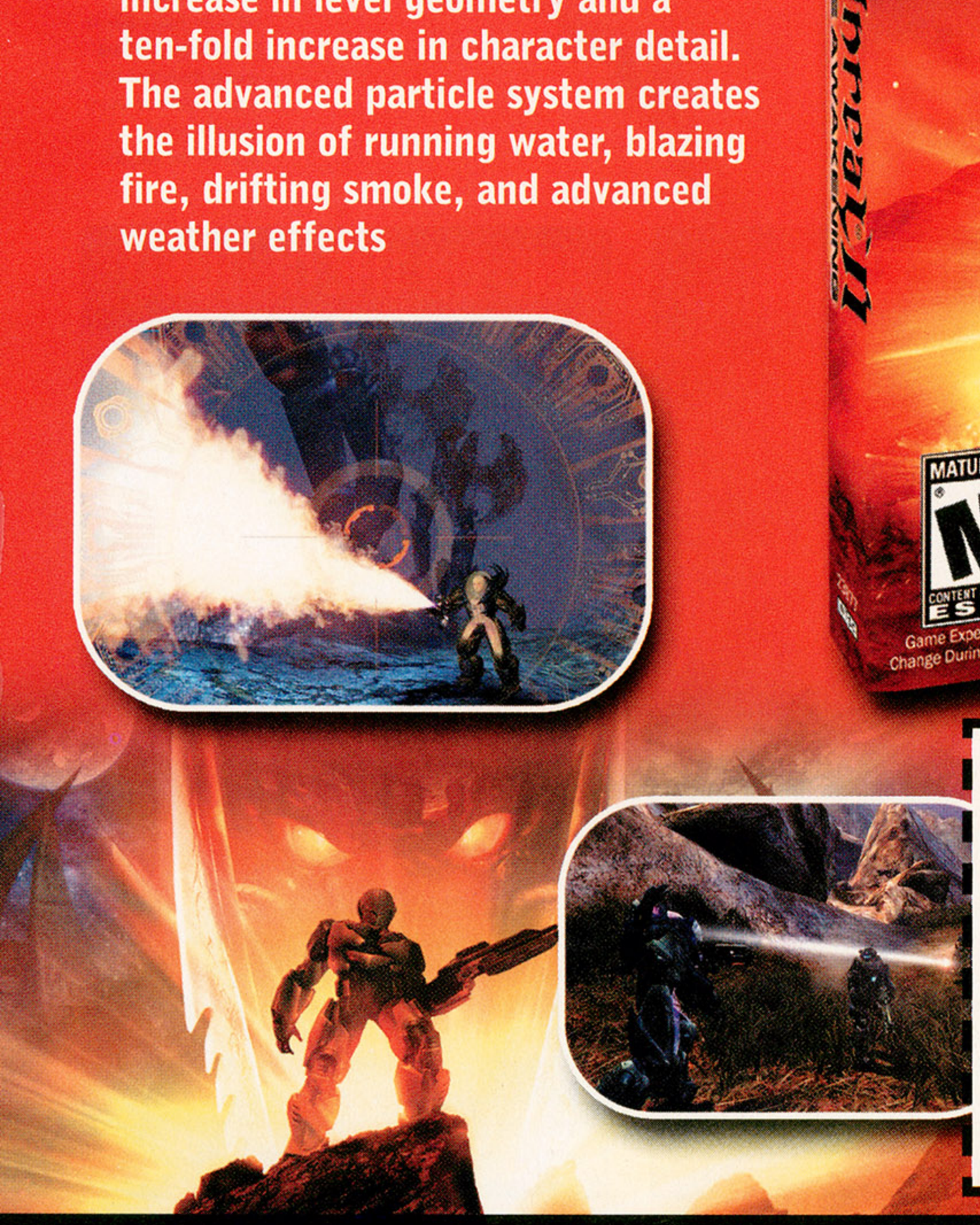

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ENTER THE DRAKEN

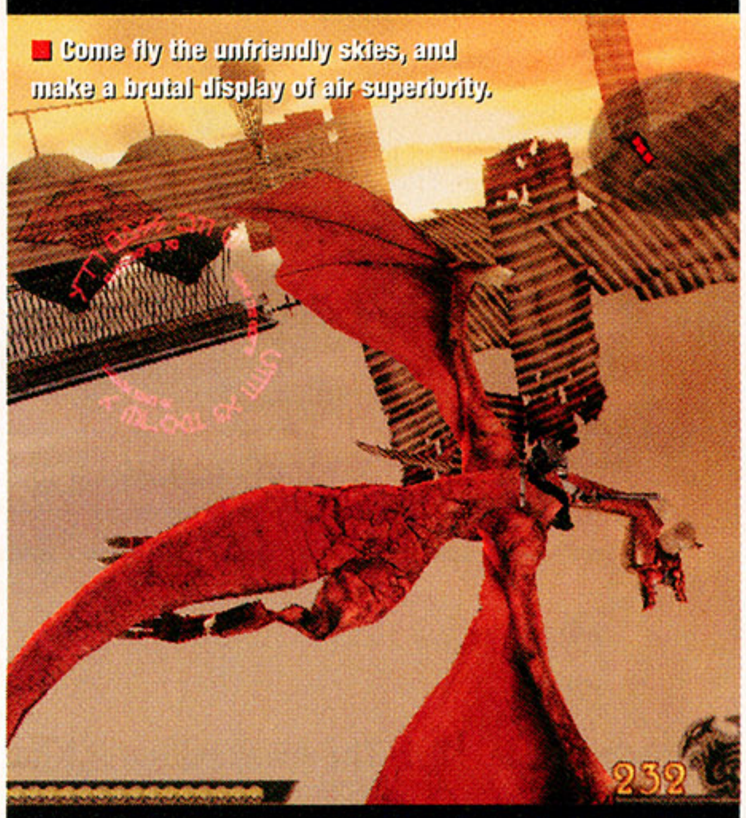
Square Enix unleashes a reign of fire with Drakengard

It takes a hard man to take on an army of thousands just to exact revenge. Of course, it helps if he's ready to sacrifice his own voice in a pact with a powerful dragon. This—the plight of protagonist Kyme—should give you a good idea of the feel of *Drakengard* (due in February for PS2); angst, guilt, and struggle against the inevitable are mixed with swords, sorcery, and a whole lotta bloodletting.

Along with light RPG elements and an intricate plot, the game follows a three-part battle plan that brings dragon and man together for a symphony of destruction. "There are three different modes in the battle system," explains Square Enix producer Takamasa Shiba. "Once you gain control of the sky, it's possible to switch to the ground or [above the battlefield] at any time, so one should switch depending on the progress of the struggle." Here's a look at all three modes in descending (ha!) order. —*Justin Speer*

■ **Meet your dragon. It's 3,000 years old, devours children's kites for fun, collects the voices of sullen young men, and has a full mouth of sharp teeth to grind against the empire.**

IN THE SKY...



■ **Come fly the unfriendly skies, and make a brutal display of air superiority.**

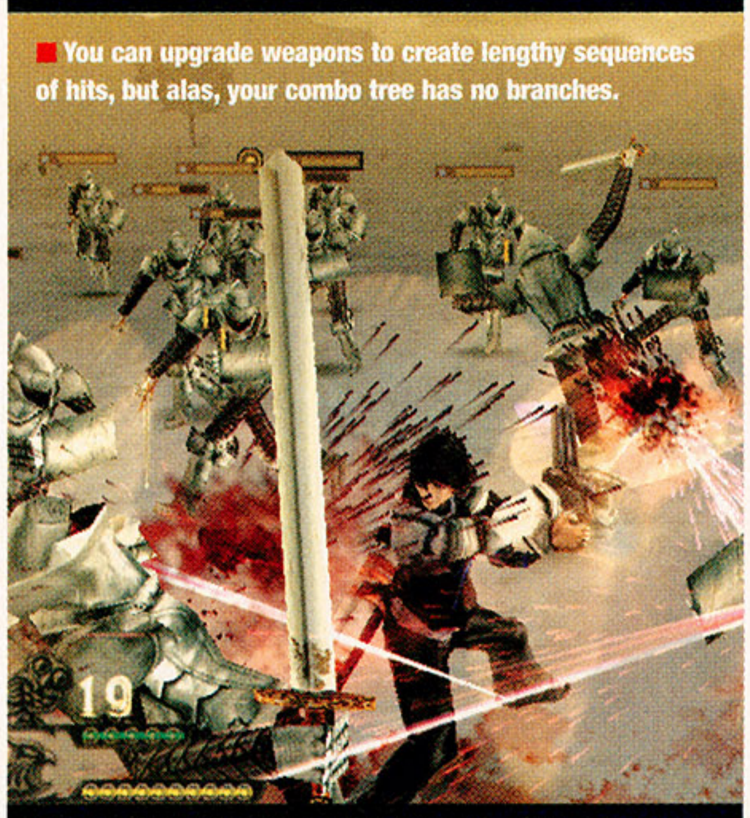
The maxim of modern war, "He who controls the sky, controls the battle," also applies to *Drakengard*'s chaotic world. Atop your winged dragon, you'll seize the darkened skies using an arcane lock-on mechanism to hurl fireballs at screaming wyverns and airborne warships. The free-flight combat might feel a bit loose, but a quick turn easily lets you draw a bead on your target, and the screen-searing Rage attack is so destructive that it can't miss.

ABOVE THE BATTLE...

■ **Get ready to watch all those pretty life bars dwindle away....**

Before you get down to the bloody business of melee combat against the thousands of heavily armored soldiers that stand against you, soften up the opposition from above. Your dragon mount can break enemy ranks with fiery meteors from its toothy maw or rain flaming hot death upon the general vicinity with a roaring breath attack. Just watch out for your enemy's archer units. They can be absolutely murder on your mount's soft underbelly....

AND ON THE GROUND



■ **You can upgrade weapons to create lengthy sequences of hits, but alas, your combo tree has no branches.**

Once you've arrived on terra firma, your foes will soon be pushing up daisies there, too. Kyme is a powerful warrior indeed, carrying a bevy of upgradeable swords, axes, and staves, each possessing a combo string and magic spell (like Rising Pillars of Flame). While your tattered army division cowers in fear somewhere (they have neither the dragon nor the balls for the job), you'll hack and slash until you achieve your objective or are the only one left standing.

>> RECENT ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM MICROSOFT HINT THAT XBOX 2 WILL BE POWERED BY A COMBO OF IBM'S POWER PC PROCESSOR AND ATI GRAPHICS HARDWARE. MORE SOON.... >>

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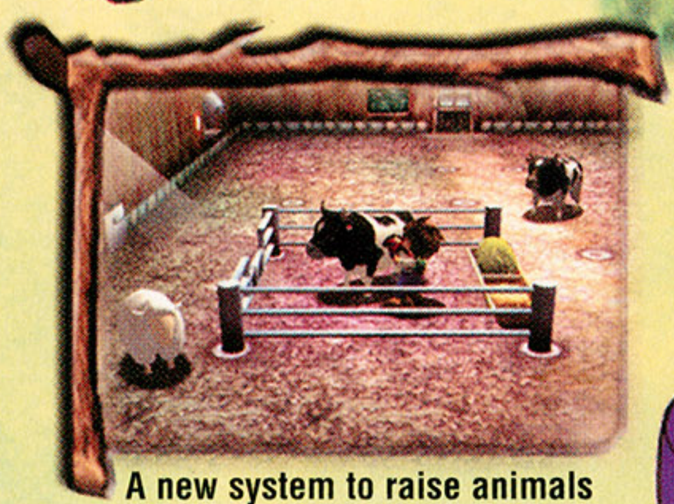

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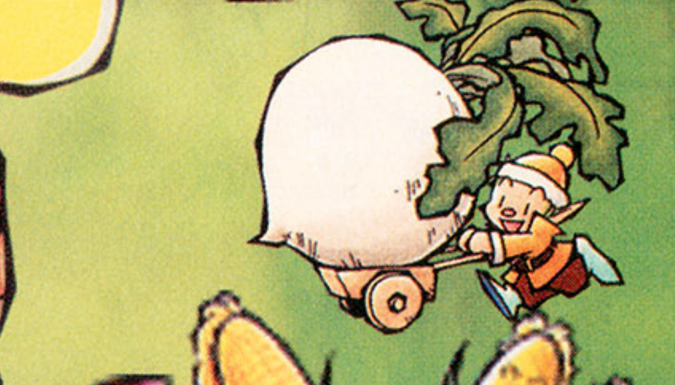

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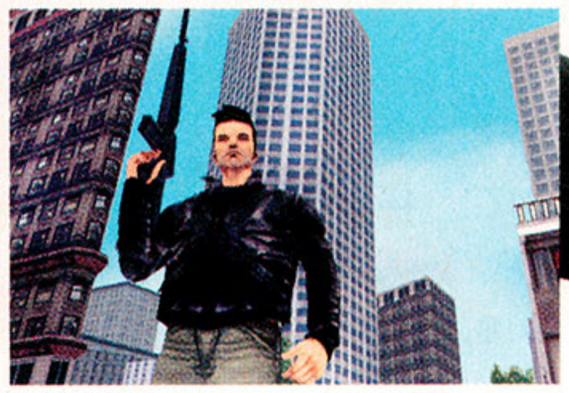
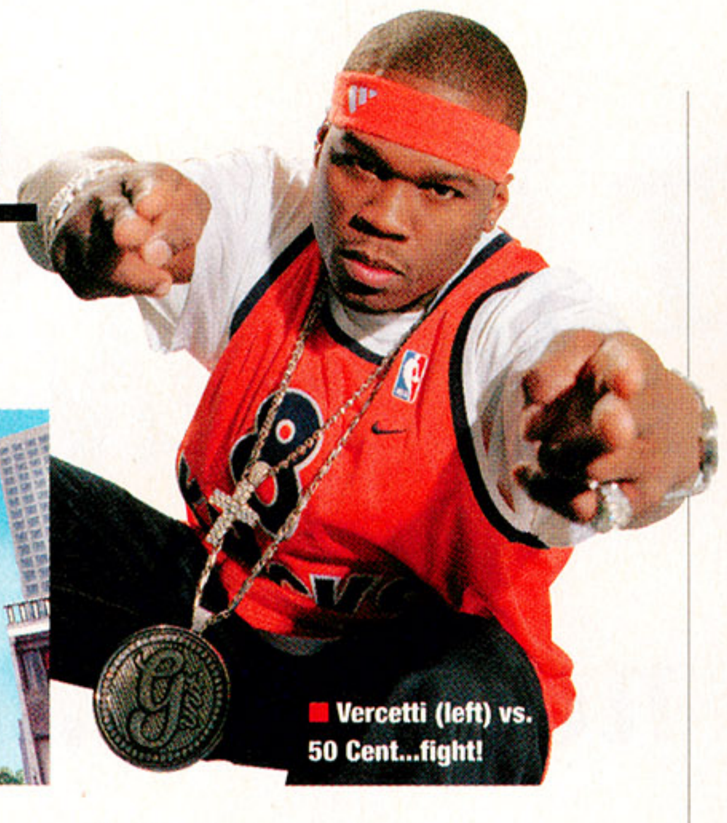
THE RUMOR MILL

Gossip that sticks to walls





■ Vercetti (left) vs. 50 Cent...fight!

q-mann

RESOLUTIN'

Another year has come and gone, and the only thing that stays the same is The Q gettin' older. But my Q-senses are still as sharp as ever, picking up the hottest gossip and speculation while filtering out all the BS.

This year, yours truly, the Q-Mann, who has told you many truths lo these many years, promises to deliver more sugary-sweet rumor nuggets to your door than ever before. Witness this month's bounty! Oh, and send your comments to quartermann@ziffdavis.com.

—The Q

GTA: 50 Cent?

Details on the next *Grand Theft Auto* are scant at best. We know it's coming. In '04. But that's it. Well here's a rumor The Q's heard recently that's sure to further pique your interest—it'll feature rappers 50 Cent (above, right) and Eminem, maybe even playing themselves.

Another Halo 2 delay?

Hold onto your butts, gamers. Sources familiar with the sequel to Xbox's killer-app first-person shooter *Halo* have indicated the game's about to suffer another delay. Word has it the release could be pushed back as far as an ambiguous "fall," but definitely in time for Christmas '04. The waiting really *is* the hardest part.

Latest Xbox 2 talk

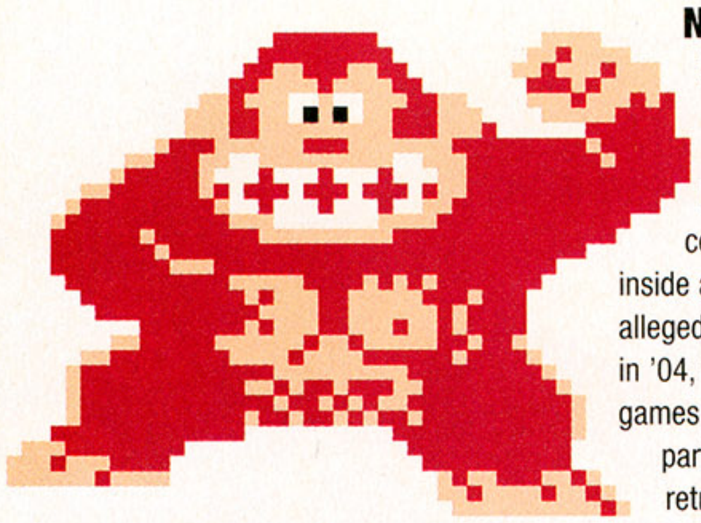
Current talk yours truly has heard puts the debut of Microsoft's Xbox 2 hardware at the annual Game Developer's Conference in the spring, with more details to surface at May's Electronic Entertainment Expo—especially if Sony and Nintendo are talking about their next machines. The Q has also picked up word on his sensors that for a needed space/cost savings, this time around it will *not* include a hard drive.

A Rare problem

Who would've guessed that Microsoft's purchase of UK developer Rare from Nintendo would turn out like this? Sales of the once-lauded developer's Xbox debut *Grabbed by the Ghoulies* are far from stellar and many of its current projects, save for *Perfect Dark Zero*, are being systematically canned. (And maybe they *should* be...cough...fairy adventure *Kameo*.) In the meantime, word has it *PD Zero* may move to Xbox 2, as the developer is already working on something for the system—a virtual garden that grows based on the number of games you have/play.

Nintendo retro

Seeing the success that self-contained multigame retro consoles are having these days (i.e., Atari, Namco, and Intellivision devices that come with up to two dozen games inside a compact controller), The Big N is allegedly prepping its own entry for release in '04, so a new generation can enjoy the games many of us grew up with. The best part is that the release of the unnamed retro device is in addition to the other mysterious hardware announcements the company plans to make later this spring.



■ DK warms up his ol' song and dance for a possible fall 2004 reunion tour.

Hardcore Contra

Lastly, Q-Spy 009 reports that Konami is working on a new installment of the classic shoot-em-up series *Contra*. 'Bout time. My trigger finger's been awfully itchy lately.

BY THE NUMBERS

Family game night edition

162.9 million	Number of games rented in 2002, according to the Video Software Dealers Association
$3	Average late fee charged, per day, for a rented game
$580 million	Amount consumers spent on video-store late fees in 2002, according to *Video Store Magazine*
86%	Percentage of gamers surveyed who say they've purchased a game after renting it

CHARTS

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES FOR OCTOBER 2003

1. **NBA Live 2004** PS2, EA Sports
2. **Jak II** PS2, Sony CEA
3. **Madden NFL 2004** PS2, EA Sports
4. **Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3** GBA, Nintendo
5. **WWE SmackDown!: Here Comes the Pain** PS2, THQ
6. **Tony Hawk's Underground** PS2, Activision
7. **Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike** GC, LucasArts
8. **Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004** PS2, EA Sports
9. **NBA Live 2004** XB, EA Sports
10. **Viewtiful Joe** GC, Capcom

Source: NPD TRSTS Video Games Service. Call (516) 625-6190 for questions regarding this list. "Bah weep granah weep ninni bong!"

TOP 10 GAME RENTALS FOR THE WEEK ENDING 11/23/03

BLOCKBUSTER

1. **True Crime: Streets of L.A.** PS2, Activision
2. **Tony Hawk's Underground** PS2, Activision
3. **Medal of Honor: Rising Sun** PS2, EA Games
4. **Mario Kart: Double Dash!!** GC, Nintendo
5. **WWE SmackDown!: Here Comes the Pain** PS2, THQ
6. **Manhunt** PS2, Rockstar
7. **True Crime: Streets of L.A.** XB, Activision
8. **Conflict: Desert Storm II** PS2, Gotham
9. **Grand Theft Auto Double Pack** XB, Rockstar
10. **Madden NFL 2004** PS2, EA Sports

Source: Blockbuster Video, 11/23/03

>> ATARI'S UPCOMING *DRIV3R* (THAT'S UH, *DRIVER 3*) WILL FEATURE THE VOICE TALENTS OF ACTORS VING RHAMES, MICHAEL MADSEN, MICHELLE RODRIGUEZ, AND MICKEY ROURKE.... >>

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MATURE 17+
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Intense Violence
Strong Language
Blood
Mature Sexual Themes

PlayStation 2 XBOX PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE REMEDY™

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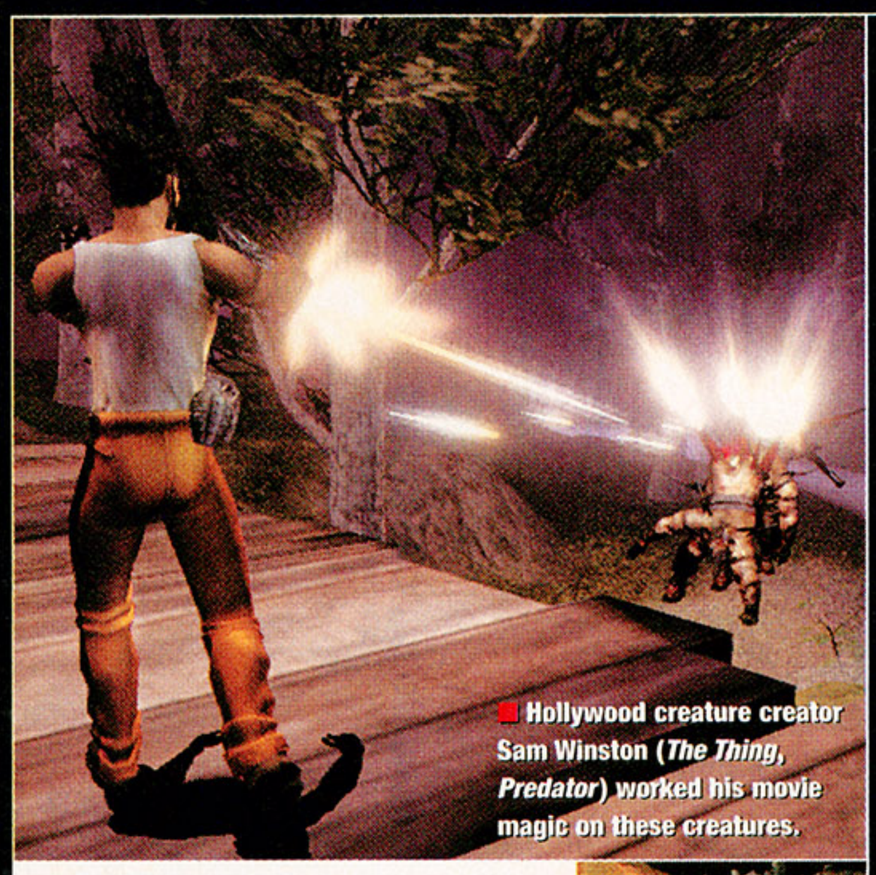
EXECUTIONER'S SONG

Meet the residents of Midway's killer app, The Suffering

Any action-horror title should have a solid foundation of evil. On the site of an ancient Indian burial ground *and* a patient-mangling insane asylum, *The Suffering* (due in February for PS2, XB, and GC) found a hell of a place to build a prison—literally. Main character Torque is a hardened inmate convicted of murdering his wife and kid, and life on the inside turns into a furious fight for survival when the sins of the jail's past are resurrected and monsters start pouring out of the woodwork. "All of our creatures fit into the history of [the game's setting] and the legacy of evil that has taken place there, with each creature designed around a different execution method," explains Lead Designer Richard Rouse III. "I don't think any game features creatures that are quite as disturbing as these." We're inclined to agree.... Let's show you a few reasons why.

— Justin Speer



■ Hollywood creature creator Sam Winston (*The Thing*, *Predator*) worked his movie magic on these creatures.

MONSTER TYPE: Marksmen
EXECUTED BY: Firing Squad

From straight-jacket to full metal jacket—these unfortunate souls were hastily executed without the benefit of a trial, and they now stalk the prison grounds as mobile meat tanks. Fleshy humps on their backs rotate to bring automatic rifles to bear on human inmates, which is nearly as sickening as it is deadly.

Real Suffering: In Francisco Goya's painting *The Shootings of May 3rd, 1808*, French soldiers execute suspected Spanish rebels. Goya is said to have used his own blood to paint the victims' blood.

MONSTER TYPE: Slayers
EXECUTED BY: Beheading

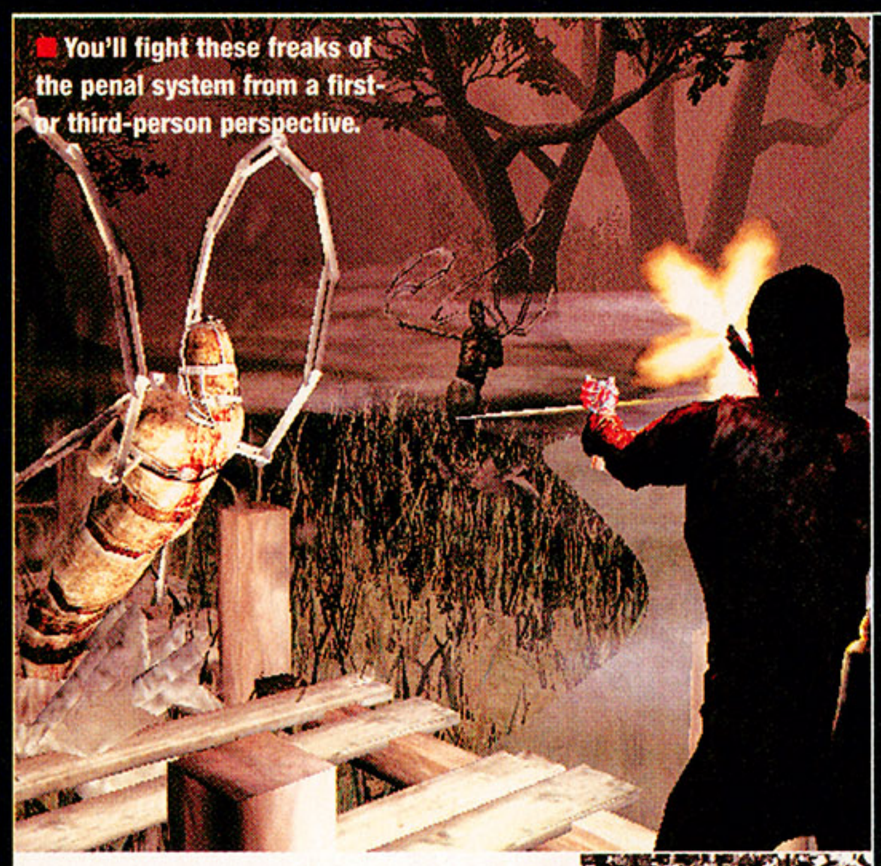
With their severed heads mechanically suspended above their shoulders, these monsters make a pointed first impression. And between the fingernails-on-chalkboard clatter they make as their blades-for-limbs scratch across floors and their skewering attacks, you'll never rest easy when they're in the room.

Real Suffering: While this brutal and ancient method of execution is no longer widely practiced, it's still publicly performed in several Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

MONSTER TYPE: Mainliners
EXECUTED BY: Lethal Injection

The prison shower experience is bad enough without naked fiends brandishing hypodermic needles bubbling up through the drain. These deformities can quickly navigate across prison floors, despite the syringes protruding from their eyes. Avoid their leaping attack or force-fed poison will soon defile your veins.

Real Suffering: First instituted in Oklahoma, death by lethal injection is now the norm in the U.S. Famous executions using this method include John Wayne Gacy and Timothy McVeigh.



■ You'll fight these freaks of the penal system from a first- or third-person perspective.

MONSTER TYPE: Burrowers
EXECUTED BY: Being Entombed

Wrapped up in restraining fetish gear and buried alive, these hook-and-chain-flailing subterranean psychos burst from the ground with barely any notice. Beware of rapidly approaching trails of earth (gophers don't go to prison!) and keep your shotgun ready—you don't want to get too close to these sensory-deprived sadists.

Real Suffering: During Japan's brutal invasion of China in World War II, roughly 2000 refugees were buried alive at the foot of Mount Zijing. Animosity for this act still continues on today....

>>JAPANESE PUBLISHER SPIKE ANNOUNCED A PS2 SURVIVAL-HORROR GAME CALLED *MICHIGAN*. PERHAPS IT'LL FEATURE THE REDNECK MICHIGAN MILITIA OR DOWNTOWN DETROIT.... >>

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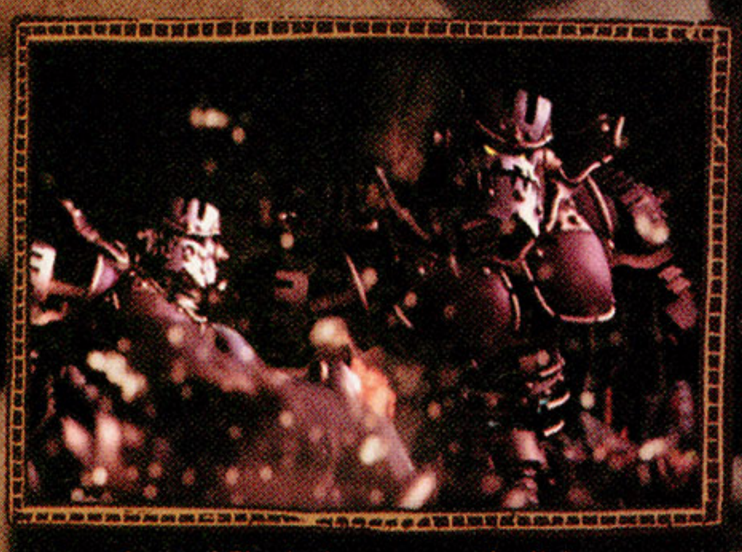

Army of Zin declare war on the living.

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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Blood
Violence

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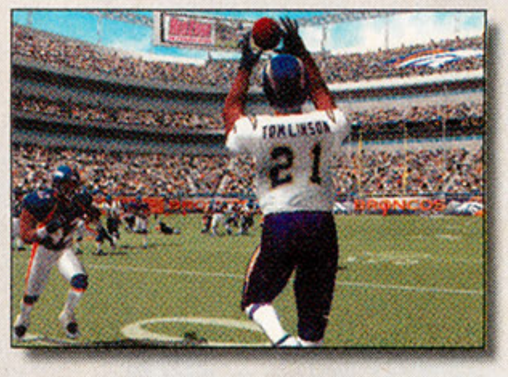
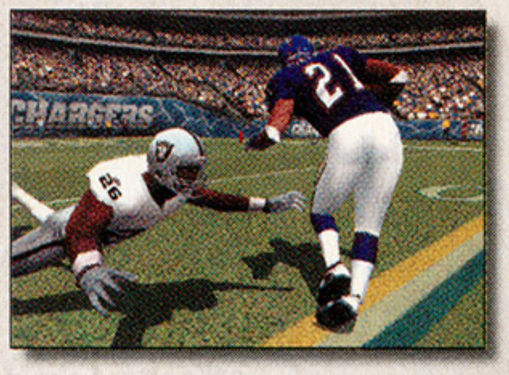
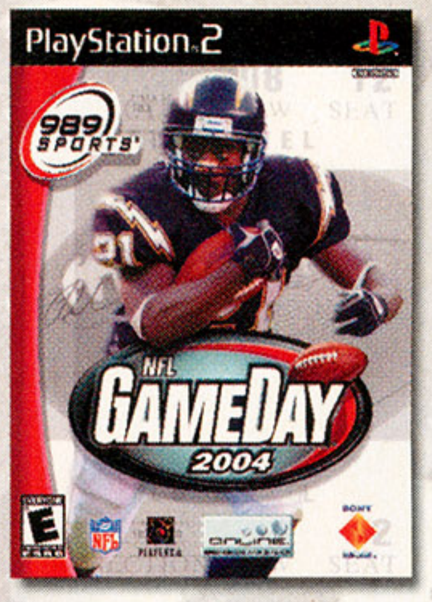
NFL GAMEDAY 2004







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THE HOT FIVE

Which games do you most want updates on? We put it to a vote

Go to egmmag.com to vote for the games you simply gotta see more coverage of. (Heck, go there anyway.)

1

■ We wouldn't want to bump into this guy in a dark alley. Or a well-lit one.

HALO 2

Xbox • Microsoft • Mid 2004 — We were dead set on providing you with some substantial new info on *Halo 2* this month, but then we ran into these guys. This small molecule of *H2* will have to float your boat for now. It's nice to see the Covenant Elites looking tough and ever vigilant, anyway. Also, check out joyridestudios.com for the latest toys.

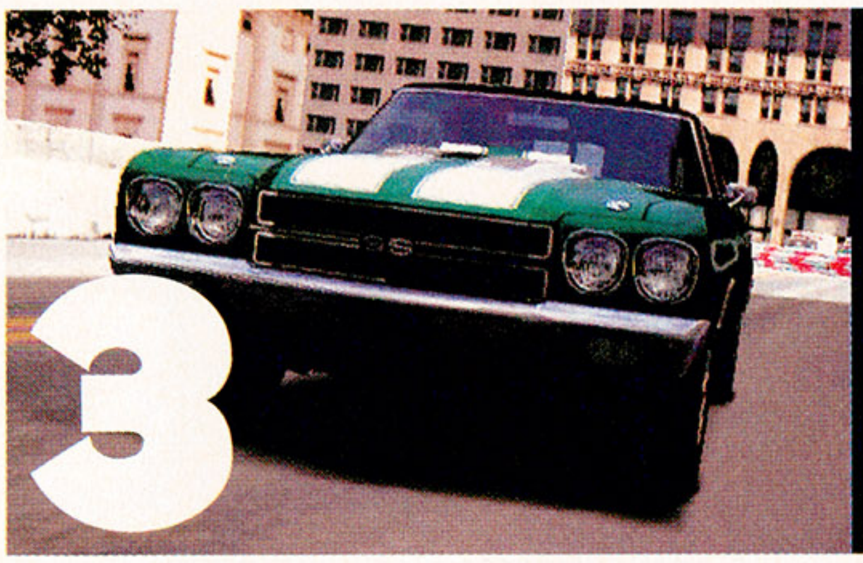
2

■ Crikey! Look at those choppas!

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

PS2 • Konami • Late 2004 — Konami, you love to tease. At the end of the most recent *MGS3* trailer, Snake rises from the water wearing a rubber crocodile mask and opens fire on a surprised enemy. Is this a new method of camouflage or some kind of joke? Why do they play with our feelings?

3



GRAN TURISMO 4

PS2 • Sony CEA • Mid 2004 — Driving school has never been so appealing. In Japan, Sony is preparing a trial version of the soon-to-be-released *Gran Turismo 4. GT4: Prologue* is a stripped-down model featuring five tracks, 30 license tests, and nearly 50 vehicles (including the requisite Skyline and plucky Toyota Vitz RS 1.5). But don't get too revved up—a North American release is "being considered" but doesn't seem likely.

4

■ It must be hard for women to trust Sam. What with him always sneaking around like he does.

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

PS2, Xbox, GC • Ubisoft • March 2004 — As government jobs go, working within a splinter cell of a top-secret black-ops organization isn't very cushy. Sam Fisher is charged with single-handedly rescuing the free world, and Uncle Sam will disavow his status if he screws up. We hear he gets a bitchin' GPS-enhanced PDA out of the deal in *Pandora Tomorrow*, though. In addition to his myriad other bleeding-edge spyware, global positioning technology lets him home in on any traceable signal—a terrorist chatting on a cell phone, for instance.

5

DRIVER 3

PS2, Xbox, GC • Atari • Mid 2004
The newly released trailer for part three of this undercover-cop saga on wheels doesn't feature any walking or shooting, but boy does it show off some impressive driving. It's easy to appreciate the incredible level of detail from the screenshot above, but wait till you see the vehicles being torn apart and bowing down before mighty physics.

>> THE ULTIMATE GAMERS EXPO, A GAMING CONVENTION MADE FOR THE PUBLIC, IS BACK ON AND WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER, AUGUST 20-22, 2004.... >>

COMING SOON

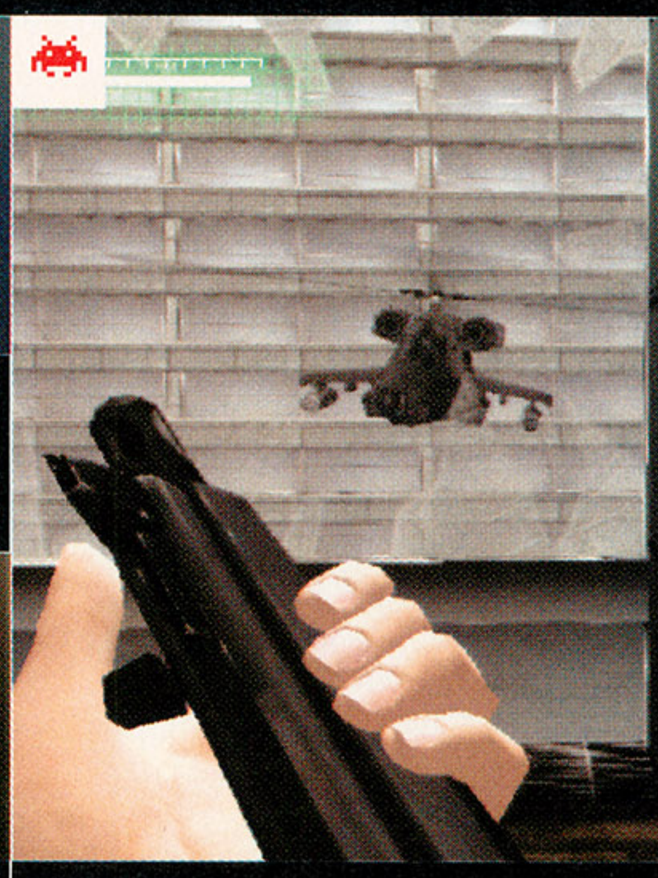
Who says you need a valentine?

■ *Cy Girls* — Like *VIP*...with brainpower.

FEBRUARY 2004

■ So much for *Alias*' Sydney Bristow slipping by unnoticed.

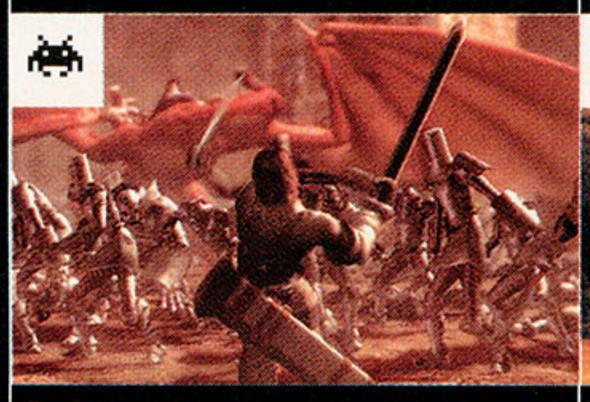
AirForce Delta Strike
PS2 • Konami — Twenty playable pilots take to the sky (and space) in 100 original aircraft, including *Gradius*' Vic Viper.



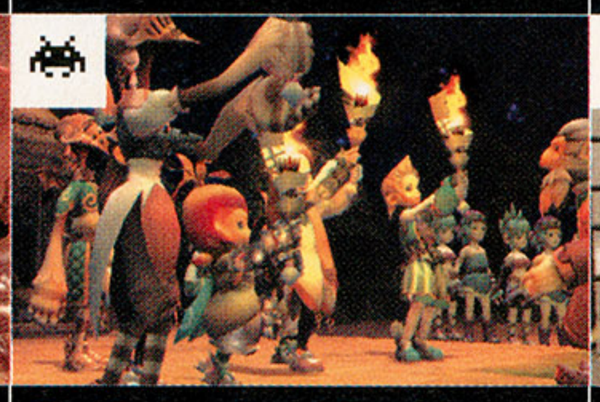
Breakdown
Xbox • Namco — This genre-bending first-person action-adventure follows the fate of Derrick Cole, who wakes up with both amnesia and biceps of steel. With its extra helping of gore, *Breakdown*'s sure to cause hand-wringing over at Decency HQ.

Alias
PS2, Xbox • Acclaim — Sydney Bristow comes to life with the voice of actress Jennifer Garner (who plays the spy on TV).

Cy Girls
PS2 • Konami — Stealthy gun specialist Ice and sword-slingin' fellow spy-diva Aska mete metal justice on cyberterrorism.



Drakengard
PS2 • Square Enix — *Panzer Dragoon Orta* meets *Dynasty Warriors* when hero Kyme fights to thwart the evil Empire.



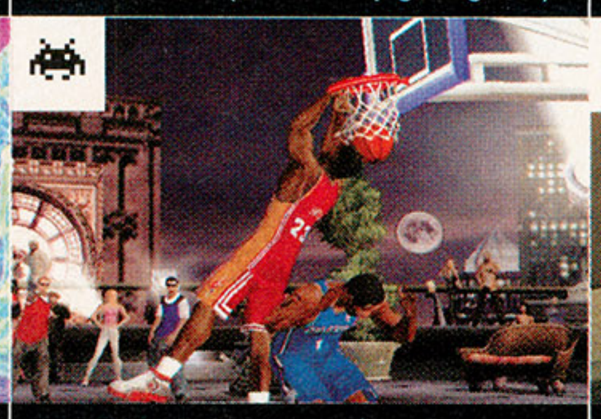
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles
GC • Nintendo — The *Fantasy* finally returns to a Nintendo console in this four-player action-RPG with GBA connectivity.

FirstStrike: Grant City Anti-Crime
PS2, Xbox, GC • Namco — Revisit *Dead to Rights'* hardboiled action, but on the right side of the law. (Is that a cop gone good?)

Gradius V
PS2 • Konami — As visually superb as it's sure to be tough, *V* brings shooters (and the Vic Viper) into the 25th century.

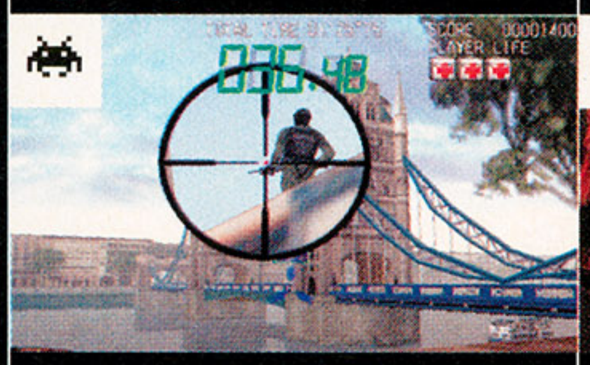
Headhunter: Redemption
PS2, Xbox • Sega — Another third-person action-adventure in the same (almost dry) stealthy vein as *Metal Gear Solid*.

Mega Man Anniversary Collection
PS2, GC • Capcom — How to piss off die-hard game collectors? Cram 10 of the Blue Bomber's best games onto one disc.



NBA Ballers
PS2, Xbox, GC • Midway — Forget about winning championships. These 1-on-1 games are all about the bling-bling. Word!

Nightshade
PS2 • Sega — This spiritual successor to 2002's *Shinobi* pits a svelte she-ninja against a diabolical army of demonic foes.



Silent Scope Complete
Xbox • Konami — From the local multiplex lobby to your own living room—four full games worth of sniping satisfaction.

The Suffering
PS2, Xbox, GC • Midway — There's much, much more shooting than puzzle solving in this blood-drenched survival-horror game.

Winning Eleven 7
PS2 • Konami
Footy, anyone? C'mon!

Wrath Unleashed
PS2, Xbox • LucasArts
Turn-based strategy meets 3D fighting.

■ *Drakengard* — You'd pout too if you had a dragon between your legs all day.

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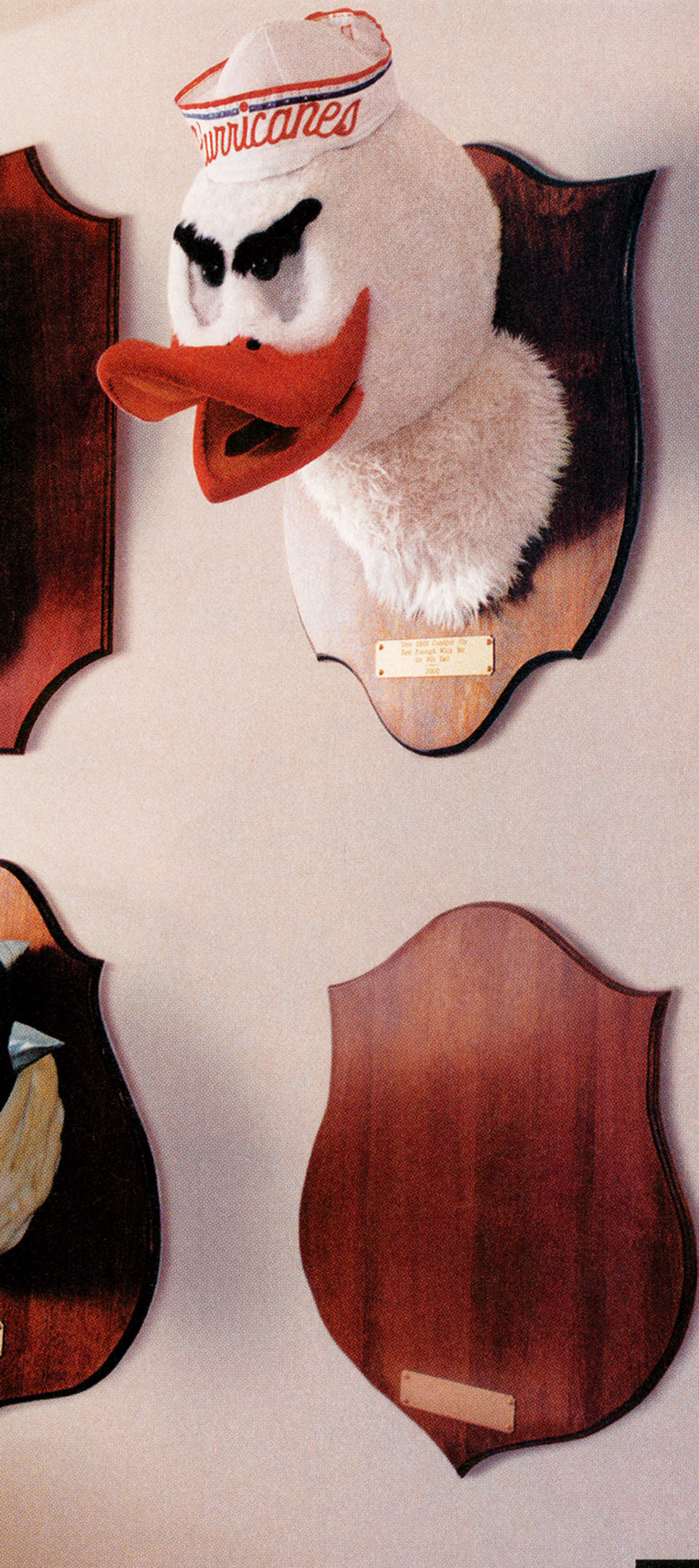

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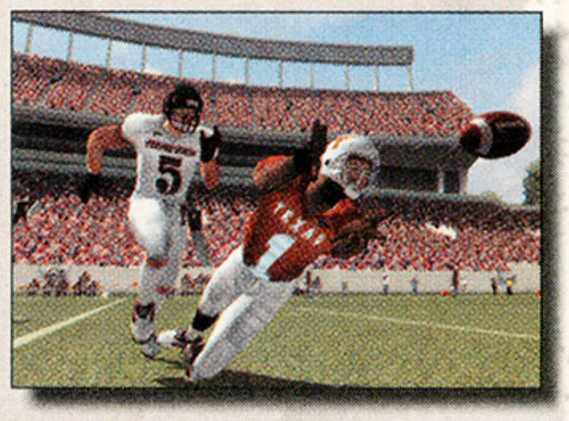
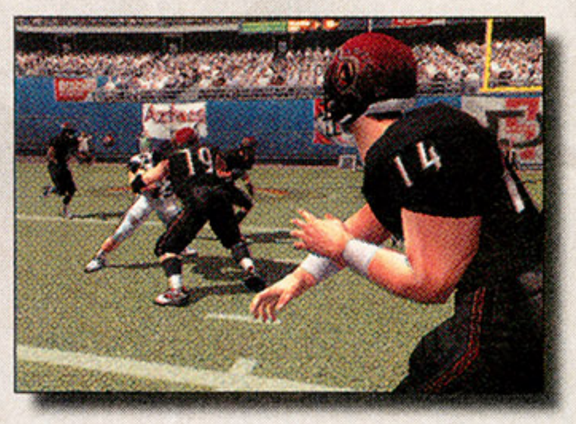
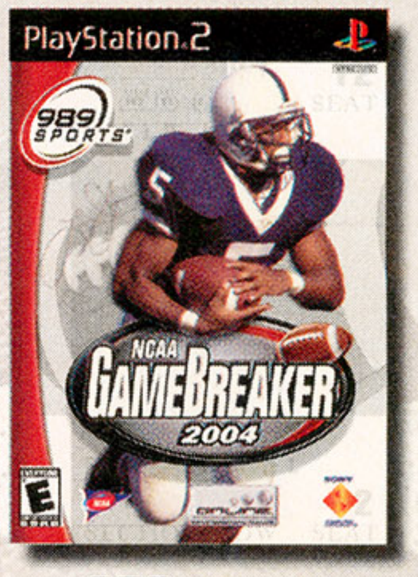
NCAA GAMEBREAKER 2004







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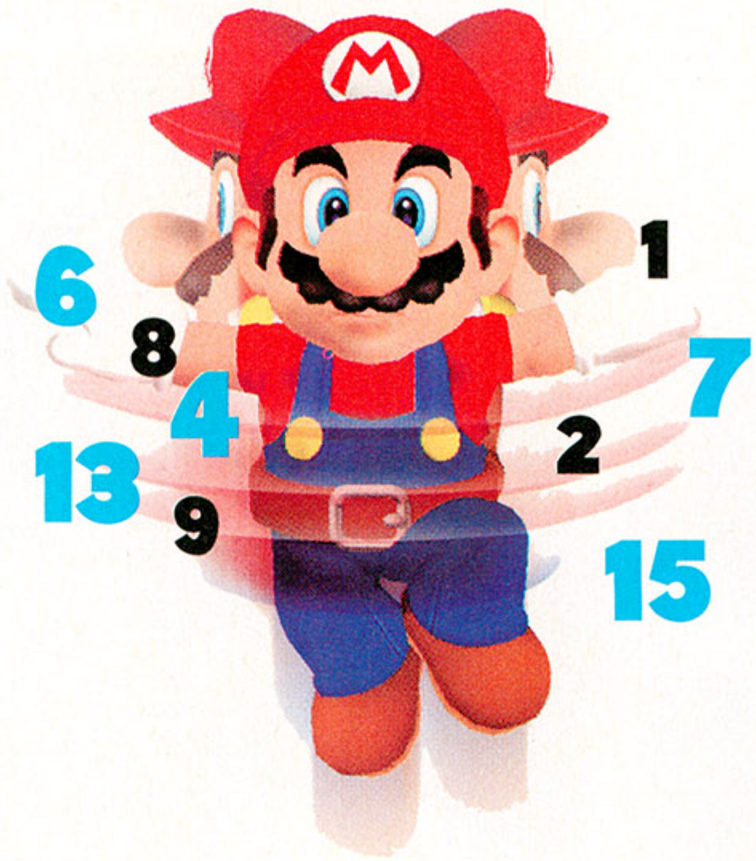
THE ULTIMATE VIDEOGAME COUNTDOWN



EGM and MTV form unholy alliance, inspire key 18– to 34–year-old demographic to Rock the Vote and choose top 15 games

OK, hold everything, hotshot. We need to address a few things. Yes, *EGM* will have a show on MTV. Contrary to online rumors, it will not be hosted by a robotic Downtown Julie Brown. And we're applying a loose interpretation to the term "ultimate videogame"—this list is more about the most popular and influential games of this console generation, because "Ultimate Videogame Countdown of Games That Came Out Since Late 2000" wouldn't fit in *TV Guide*. But wait! As an added bonus unavailable to illiterate television viewers, we're also including a sneak peek at upcoming sequels for each game!

Of course, lists like this tend to generate controversy, and by controversy we really mean hate mail. Apologies in advance to the legions of *Dr. Muto* and *Turok* fans out there—your respective favorites didn't make the list. Don't blame us, though; the games here were ranked by *EGM* readers and MTV viewers. You voted! So go ahead and write that angry letter, but send it to yourself. And if you didn't vote, go back to Russia!

AS SEEN ON TV!

Hey subscribers, tune your televisual receiver to the MTV broadcast station on January 2 at 9 p.m. EST to see *EGM* and MTV's *Ultimate Videogame Countdown* show. Johnny-come-lately newsstand buyers, if you missed the show, don't despair! They're rerunning it every hour on the hour, or so we've been led to believe. *EGM*'s own Seanbaby is master of ceremonies! Don't adjust your set; his hair really looks like that.

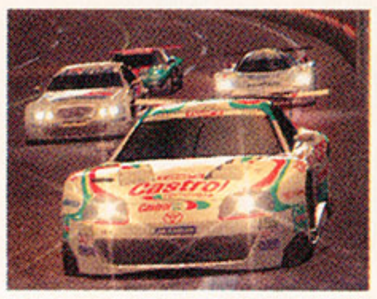
15

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION (SERIES)

PS2, XB, Arcade • Konami — Oprah doing the macarena? Swing craze? Riverdance? Nope, it took a videogame to turn a legion of career wallflowers into hip-shakin', dancin' idiots—er, experts. The *DDR* phenomenon may have started in arcades, but its combination of no-look dance routines and profuse sweating has since migrated to your living room, and even into some school PE classes. It's the new Jazzercise.

Ultimate moment: Seeing a *West Side Story*–style *DDR* "gang," complete with matching satin jackets, file into the arcade and commence to steppin'. (Hit ddrfreak.com for your *DDR* voyeurism needs.) Those about to dance, we salute you.

What's next? New PlayStation 2 and Xbox *Dance Dance Revolution* installments are scheduled for the future, in addition to downloadable song packs for *Ultramix* (XB). And if fans cotton to *Ultramix*'s online play, the feature may even turn up on a *DDR* for PS2.



14

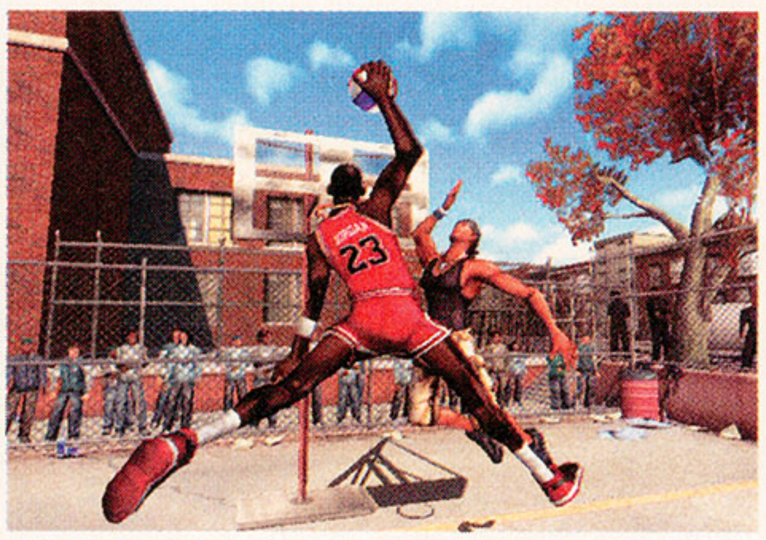
GRAN TURISMO 3 A-SPEC

PS2 • Sony CEA — The fact that we're still comparing every new racing game to *Gran Turismo 3*—which came out two and a half years ago—is a little scary. But you got any better ideas? *Gran Turismo*'s influence even extends beyond videogamedom; former Mitsubishi CEO Takashi Kiuchi told Reuters, "*Gran Turismo* played a huge role in our decision to launch the Lancer Evolution in the United States." *GT*'s success probably helped convince Nissan to bring the next Skyline GT-R here, too, though we're in for a wait: It won't launch until 2007.

Ultimate moment: Buying the car you own in real life, then tacking on a stage-three turbo, tuned suspension, and slicks. So *that's* what driving to the store at 150 mph would be like.

What's next? Sony claims that *Gran Turismo 4*, due in mid-2004, will replicate car racing more realistically than ever—in addition to improved handling and more-human A.I., long-awaited online play pads out the standard equipment. Vehicle damage and online voice chat remain on the *Gran Turismo 5* wish list.

13



NBA STREET (SERIES)

PS2, XB, GC • EA Sports Big — Like mass extinctions and the price of pork bellies, over-the-top sports games are cyclical. The *NBA Street* series is the latest take on the boomshakalaka formula to inspire a host of imitators, and not only on the basketball court: *MLB Slugfest*, *NFL Street*, *Freestyle Street Soccer*, and *NBA Ballers* are just some of the games looking to move in on *Street*'s turf.

Ultimate moment: Any given moment playing *Street* against another human is pretty ultimate, but blocking 20-plus shots and ending it all with a double game breaker is extra ultimate—double extra ultimate if you're playing for money.

What's next? EA Big's brand of b-ball is heading back to the courts before the end of 2004. Our inside spies report that *NBA Street Vol. 3*'s most attractive new feature is online play. The least attractive new feature is the unlockable *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* all-star team.

12 WWE SMACKDOWN!/ DEF JAM VENDETTA (SERIES)

SmackDown • PS2 • THQ; Def Jam • PS2, XB, GC • EA Sports Big — We're lumping these two wrasslin' games together because we can, mainly, but also because they represent two vastly different—and excellent—takes on the same genre. The *SmackDown!* series is clearly the top contender among a field of otherwise scrubby WWE games, while *Def Jam*'s battling rappers (and powder blue tracksuits) bring a whole new dynamic to a sometimes tired formula.
Ultimate moment: Nothing tops that first gal-on-gal "bra and panties" match in the latest *SmackDown!*; Redman's nut-busting finishing move in *Def Jam* is also very satisfying, but in a completely different way.

What's next? *Smackdown*'s developers are hard at work makin' the next game playable online—a wrestling first. As for *Def Jam Vendetta 2*, we've heard it'll take place in a free-roaming, *Grand Theft Auto*–style setting. Expect it in late 2004/early 2005.

11 TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL

PS2, XB, GC • Ubisoft — Sam Fisher: wily secret agent and deep-cover operative for the Lightbulb Retailers Association of America (the only reasonable explanation for all the light fixtures he destroys, ostensibly in the interest of efficient skulking). He'll sneak right into your heart. Then blow it up.

Ultimate moment: Near the end of the game, five guards surround you and it looks like your espionage days are over. But one momentary power failure later, you take out your would-be captors in a few seconds of night-vision mayhem.

What's next? Sam might be older than your average gaming hero, but he ain't retiring anytime soon. The oddly named *Cell* sequel *Pandora Tomorrow* hits all three consoles in 2004, adding outdoor environments, branching paths through levels, and a wild new online multiplayer game.

10 TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER (SERIES)

PS2, XB, GC • Activision 02 — The reigning king of frantic, free-form action-sports gameplay was starting to look a little slow on the draw and low in the ollie, but then *Tony Hawk's Underground* came out and gave the series a needed boot in the baggy pants. How many aspiring game designers pitch their genius idea as "*Tony Hawk* meets X"? Just about every last one of them. Even the French.
Ultimate moment: *THPS3* was the first game to take PlayStation 2 online, so that's fairly ultimate. But it's trumped by *Underground*'s put-your-face-in-the-game feature (PS2 only), which lets gamers create their own skating doppelganger.

What's next? The crew at developer Neversoft is in recovery mode (fracturing coccyxes on company president Joel Jewett's backyard skate ramp) now that *THUG*'s out the door, but they did say they liked the latest game's online, player-focused direction. So expect more of that in a year or two.

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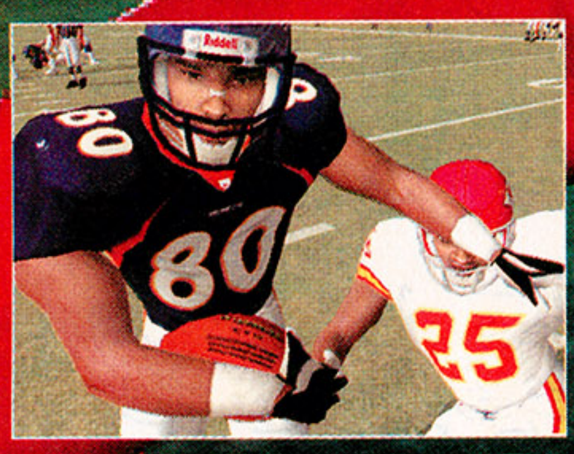
9 MADDEN NFL (SERIES)



PS2, XB, GC • EA Sports — *Madden*'s not even a game anymore—it's a cultural phenomenon riding on the back of an entertainment juggernaut that's hitched to a runaway cash cow. The latest iteration sold over 2 million copies in a month, putting *2004* on track to earn more money than all but the most blockbusting Hollywood movies. The game is even used for diagramming plays on ESPN's *EA Sports NFL Matchup*, which must really stick in the craw of the guys who made the also rather good *ESPN NFL Football*.

Ultimate moment: Blaming your poor performance on the quarterback's obvious lack of concentration while playing against your best friend...who's online, tanning your hide from six states away.

What's next? This just in: no *Madden* in 2004! The big guy's just had enough. OK, not really. Currently, mum's the word over at the developer's training camp, but we'll be shocked if an online franchise mode doesn't arrive next season. Don't bet on a first-person gameplay option, à la *ESPN NFL*, though.

8 SOUL CALIBUR II

PS2, XB, GC • Namco — Don't even try to make sense of the obtuse backstory—just accept that a zombie pirate, French aristocrat, impossibly busty ninja, and Nintendo's own elfin name-taking ass-kicker, Link, have started up a private little fight club. But unlike the last *Soul Calibur*, which was exclusive to Sega's now-defunct Dreamcast, this *Calibur*'s for the people—it's available on all three consoles, and each version has a unique playable character. It's an intensely deep fighter that'll leave your thumbs (and sometimes your ego) black and blue.

Ultimate moment: Tie: Playing a worthy competitor in an eight-fighter team battle that finally ends in a simultaneous double knockout; learning Ivy's Criminal Symphony throw, the game's most powerful move.

What's next? We've heard *Soul Calibur III* may not be out until 2005, and since arcades will be extinct by then, it'll head straight to consoles. Besides the expected new characters and gameplay tweaks, rumor has it *SC3* will put a lot of emphasis on new modes (perhaps like *Virtua Fighter 4*'s deep character-building single-player game) and have online play. Hold me!

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Language
Violence

PlayStation.2

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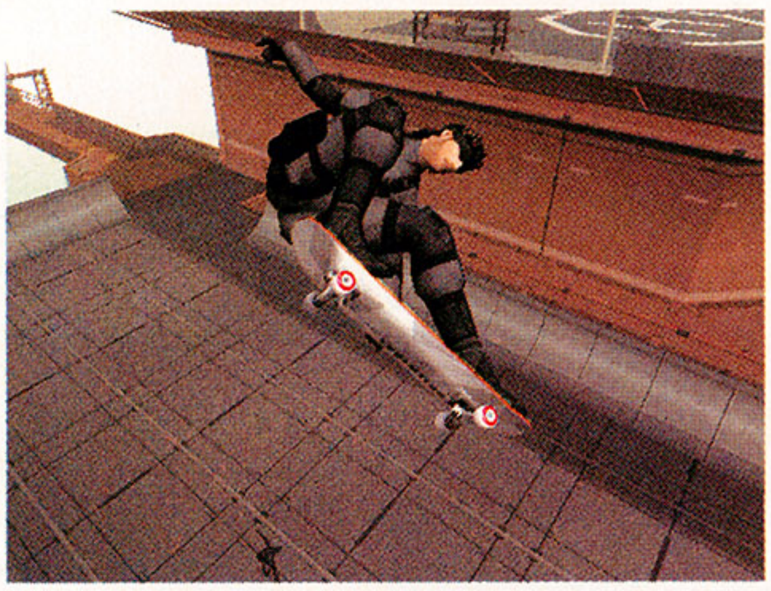
7 SUPER MARIO (SERIES)

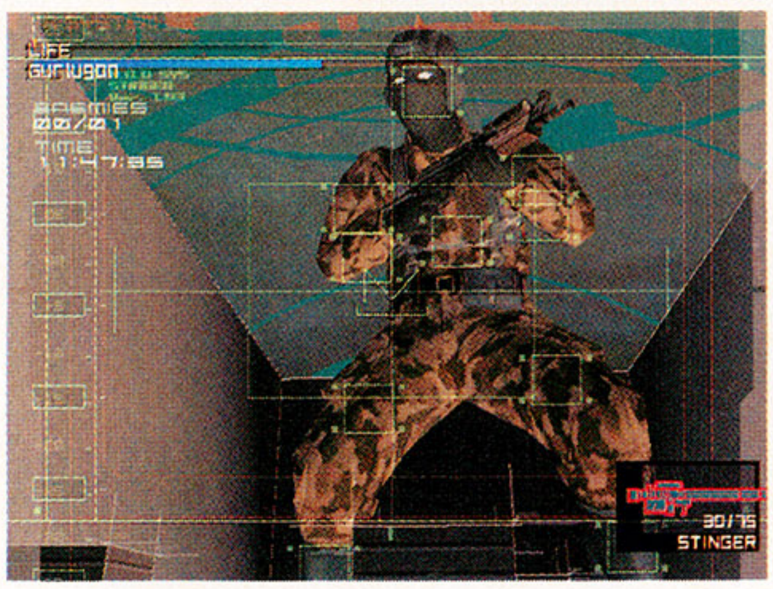
GC • Nintendo — He's the kind of squeaky-clean mascot (despite the 'shroom addiction) who wouldn't pass today's focus-group gristmill—unless he was enhanced with a plumber's crack and a squad of belly-baring tool-girl assistants. But Mario remains an icon, stirring nostalgia in even fair-weather Nintendo fans, as recent GBA remakes rekindled fuzzy feelings for the classic originals. Even if the mustache man's latest console outing—*Super Mario Sunshine*—doesn't please everyone, only a hater would claim it ain't fun.

Ultimate moment: Clearing all 96 levels in *Super Mario World: Super Mario Advance 2*, the largest game in the series.

What's next?
Nintendo's Japanese designers are working on at least one new GameCube installment, due in the second half of 2004. (After all, a good plumber's never out of work for very long.) Rumored to be a more traditional and easier-to-play title than 2002's *Sunshine*, it currently goes by the code name *100 Marios*. Other than that, Mario's entourage of suit-wearing heavies are keeping their lips zipped.

6 METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY



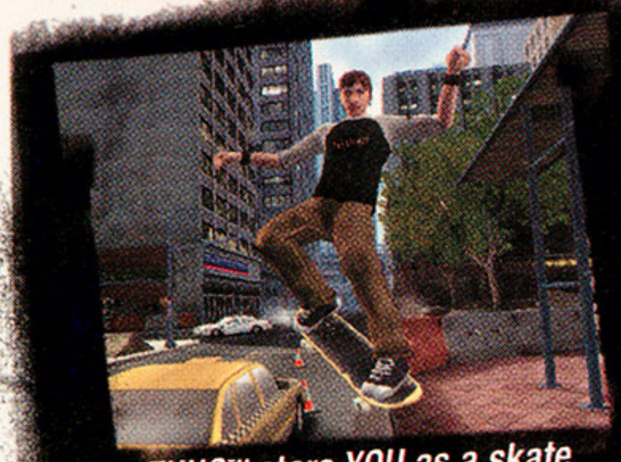


PS2, XB • Konami — Bisexual vampires, pseudo-incestuous relationships, morbidly obese bomb enthusiasts on roller blades—by criminy, *Metal Gear Solid 2* is crammed with stuff that'd put dollar signs in Jerry Springer's eyes. But if you can look past the freak-show cast, an over-wrought and preachy plot, and girlie hero Raiden (who replaces mucho macho series hero Solid Snake for much of the game), you're rewarded with ingeniously designed gameplay filled with taught spy-thriller moments and clever boss battles. Just to hurt your brain, the PS2 version of *MGS2: Substance* even has a skateboarding minigame.

Ultimate moment: Finally wrapping your head around the ultimate plot twist: That *MGS2* is really a simulation of *MGS1*, and you've just been playing a game within a game designed to trap Solid Snake for his enemies. Hey, isn't that how *St. Elsewhere* ended?

What's next? Due sometime in the fall of 2004, *MGS3* asks PS2 gamers if they wanna take it outside to the dense wilderness of Southeast Asia for a Cold War–era prequel of sorts (presumably starring Solid Snake's papa, Big Boss). The emphasis is on using camouflage and survival skills, which you might have guessed from the game's subtitle: *Snake Eater*.

"10 OUT OF 10" -GMR



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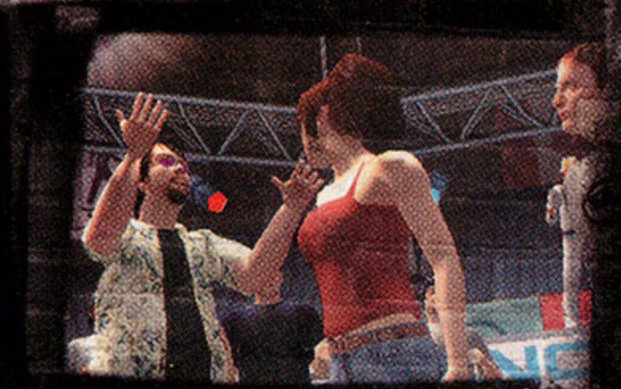

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood
Mild Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Game Experience May Change During Online Play.

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NEVERSOFT

ACTIVISION

5 GRAND THEFT AUTO (SERIES)

PS2, XB • Rockstar — It's a filthy dirty porno game that's training kids how to do filthy dirty things, or so says your mom, the PTA, and that publicity-hounding lawyer you see on CNN trying to outlaw fun. To everyone else—or more like the 11 million gamers who play it—the *Grand Theft Auto* series is the ultimate adults-only (scram, you kids!) freedom kit. Both *GTA3* and its acid-washed '80s-themed sequel *Vice City* turn players loose in living, sprawling cities where they can get away with actions—from launching stolen cars off 10-story buildings to hosting flamethrower barbecues—that in real life would land 'em in the clink lickety-split. It's a fun world to visit. We just wouldn't want to live there.

Ultimate moment: Why, driving within the speed limit and kindly giving pedestrians the right of way, of course. (Just go with it—that CNN guy might be watching.)

What's next? Here's the latest in Grand Theft Rumorin'. The next *GTA* may take place in the '70s. It might be called *GTA: Sin City* (think Las Vegas). And you may never see a proper *GTA4* because Rockstar may be dropping the numbers thing altogether (so *Sin City* is in effect *GTA5*, with *Vice City* being *GTA4*). Can we tell you anything useful at all? Nope, 'cept Rockstar has confirmed the next game will be out in 2004. And the only reason we know that is because we've been sifting through their dumpster.

4 FINAL FANTASY (SERIES)

PS2 • Square Enix — It's got dungeons. It's got dragons. It's got eight-foot-tall chickens you can saddle up and ride. Yet despite such trappings of role-playing dorkdom, the *Final Fantasy* series has evolved into a mass-appeal franchise you can discuss in public without getting pummeled for your latte money. Maybe it's the Hollywood-caliber production values or the hot-chick characters—or the prissy-guys-who-look-like-hot-chick characters—that has driven this long-running series' (final my ass) appeal among gamers, many of whom don elaborate costumes that combine sashes, Spandex, and cellulite in ways that defy imagination. But we'd like to think it's something **else**: oh, the humanity! *FF*'s characters grow and connect with a rich human complexity seldom seen in videogames.

Ultimate moment: *FFX*'s final boss battle, which ends on a big downer (main characters eat it) but still fills you with a huge sense of accomplishment.

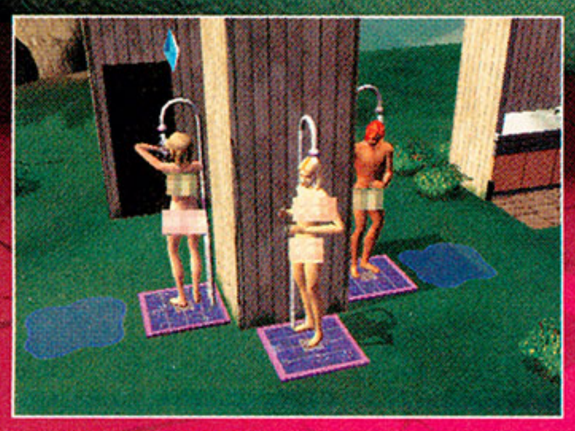
What's next? Four-player *Fantasy* action is just around the corner when *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* (GC) comes out in February, and the first online *Fantasy*, *XI*, plugs into PlayStation 2 this March. Further out on the horizon, look forward to *Final Fantasy XII* (scope the full scoop on this upcoming PS2 title on page 30) and *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, an original CG-animated film that continues the story of *FFVII* (release date unknown). Beyond that? We're out of mana, but expect a few more surprises in 2004….

3

THE SIMS (SERIES)

PS2, XB, GC • EA Games — Trust PC gamers to embrace a bodily function and personal-hygiene simulator with rabid, cult-like fervor, but who knew *The Sims* would be just as big a hit on consoles? Maybe it's the all-new multiplayer modes or *The Sims: Bustin' Out*'s expanded career tracks (who *doesn't* want to be a Mad Scientist?) or, more likely, the voyeuristic thrill of seeing virtual folks being as slutty—or chaste—as we wanna be. *The Sims* isn't just a game, though; it's a chance to try things you don't have the guts to pull off in real life—like putting the moves on creepy-yet-slinky Bella Goth in the hot tub while her husband, Mortimer, holds a séance in the next room, or quitting your day job in favor of 24/7 garden-gnome production for fun and profit.

Ultimate moment: It's kind of fitting that in a game about life, the ultimate moment is death—be it by electrocution, starvation, or man-eating Venus flytrap. The *Sims* experience isn't complete until you've kicked the bucket at least once.



What's next? Nobody truly knows what the future holds—not even the folks who make a game that lets you play God. But an inside source hints that Maxis is "always exploring bringing *The Sims* to as many platforms as possible," which probably means a new *Sims* is in the works for next-generation consoles or even Sony's PSP.

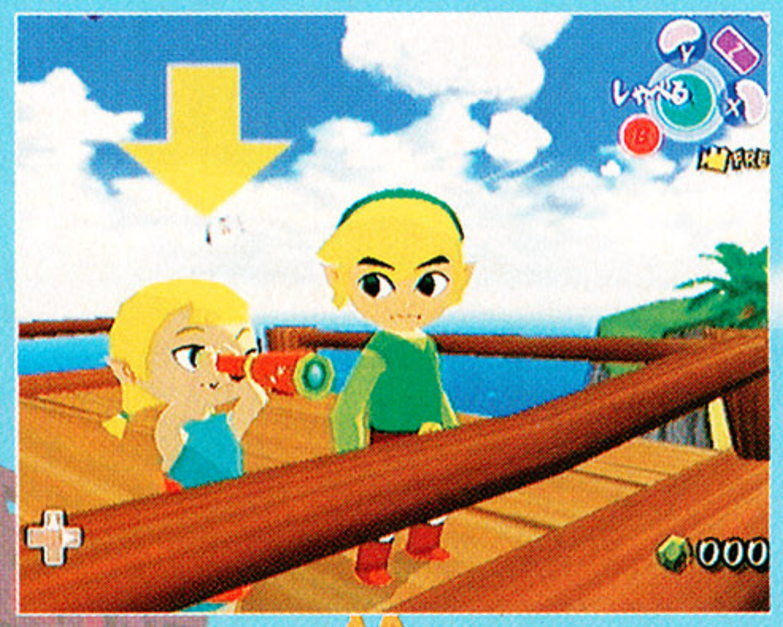
HALO

XB • Microsoft — Ask any kid what he (or she!) wants to be when he grows up and every last one of the little terrors gives the same answer: cybernetic space marine. Blame *Halo* for inspiring a new generation of glorified pest exterminators. The game that sold a few million Xboxes is still the best first-person shooter you can play from the comfort of your La-Z-Boy, and it's even better with a few (or a dozen) like-minded wannabe-space-marine friends. Dead-on controls, an epic story, and deviously smart enemies—well, smart for alien bugs at least—are just a small part of *Halo*'s greatness.

Ultimate moment: The Silent Cartographer level has to be one of our favorites in any game, ever. It kicks off with a Normandy-like beach invasion, followed by general tear-assing around in a Warthog jeep with your rowdy marine pals, and then it's a great mix of indoor and outdoor action, culminating in a showdown with a one-hit-and-you're-dead blade-wielding alien. But for the expert snipers out there, beating *Halo* on the Legendary difficulty setting is the ultimate bragging right.

2

What's next? Melee attack combos, destructible objects, new vehicles, smarter friends and enemies, the ability to hold two weapons at once, spiffier graphics, humans vs. aliens online multiplayer combat—you can add up all the awesome features planned for *Halo 2* and still not come close to understanding our excitement for this game (or our disappointment at the recent rumblings that it will be delayed again, this time past its scheduled spring '04 debut).



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA (SERIES)

GC • Nintendo — This little Link has legs, and we're not talking about the ones wearing the booties—Nintendo's tales of elfin heroism in the face of unspeakable evil just never seem to get old. When we first heard that an upcoming *Zelda* adventure would star a young, cartoony-looking Link, we grumbled with the worst of them. Then *Wind Waker* came out. Aside from some boring moments piloting a dinghy, it is nearly perfect. Seeing as how the *Zelda* series ran away with the popular vote and Link's cameo in the Cube version of *Soul Calibur II* helped make that game a best-seller, we're apparently not the only ones in touch with our inner elf.

Ultimate moment: In *Wind Waker*, it has to be your first visit to Hyrule Castle, which is on the ocean floor, frozen in time. Everything is black and white, with statue-like guards caught in midarmpit scratch. It's one of the eeriest moments in any game we've ever played. And then you pull the Master Sword from the stone, time starts ticking again, and all hell breaks loose....

What's next? Expect 2004 to be a monumental year for the pointy-eared lad in green tights. First up, two oddball *Zelda* spin-offs—*Four Swords* and *Tetra's Trackers*—land on GameCube in the next few months. They're both GBA-connectivity minigames, of sorts, that Nintendo will probably sell for cheap. A full-fledged sequel to *Wind Waker* and an all-new Game Boy Advance *Zelda* title are also en route in 2004; both should debut at May's colossal E3 game expo in Los Angeles.

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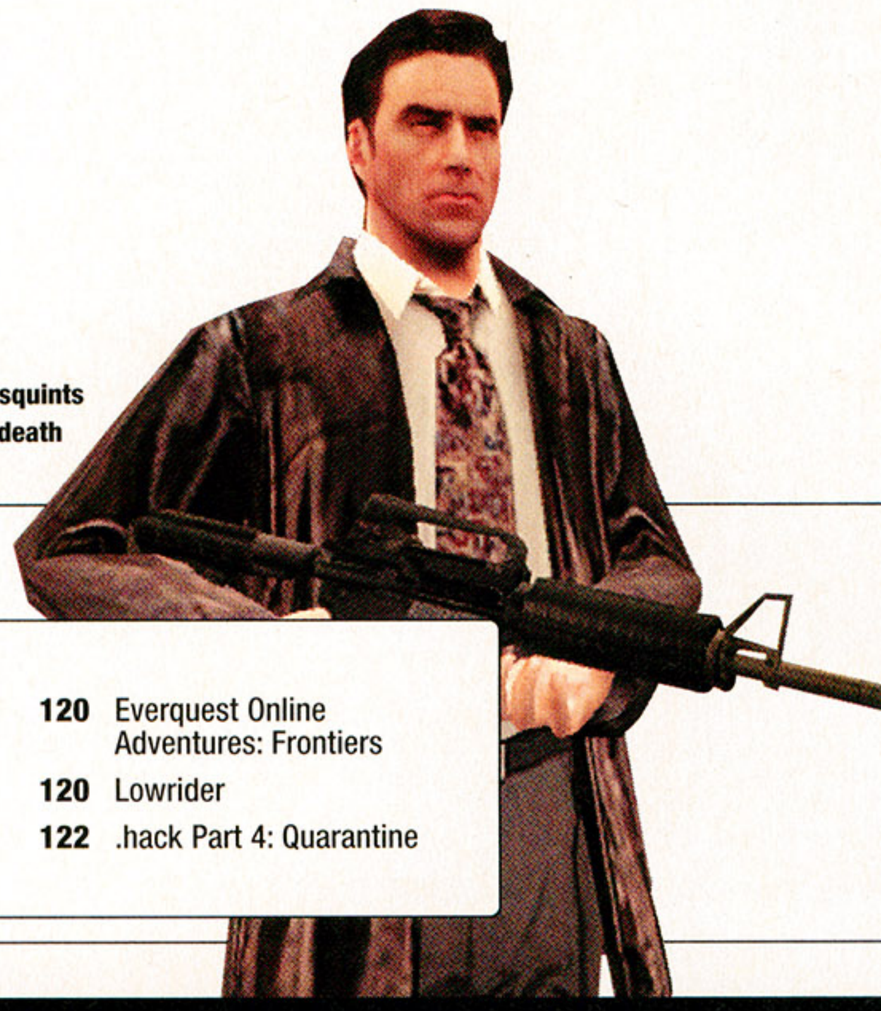


■ Max Payne squints in the face of death and dishonor.

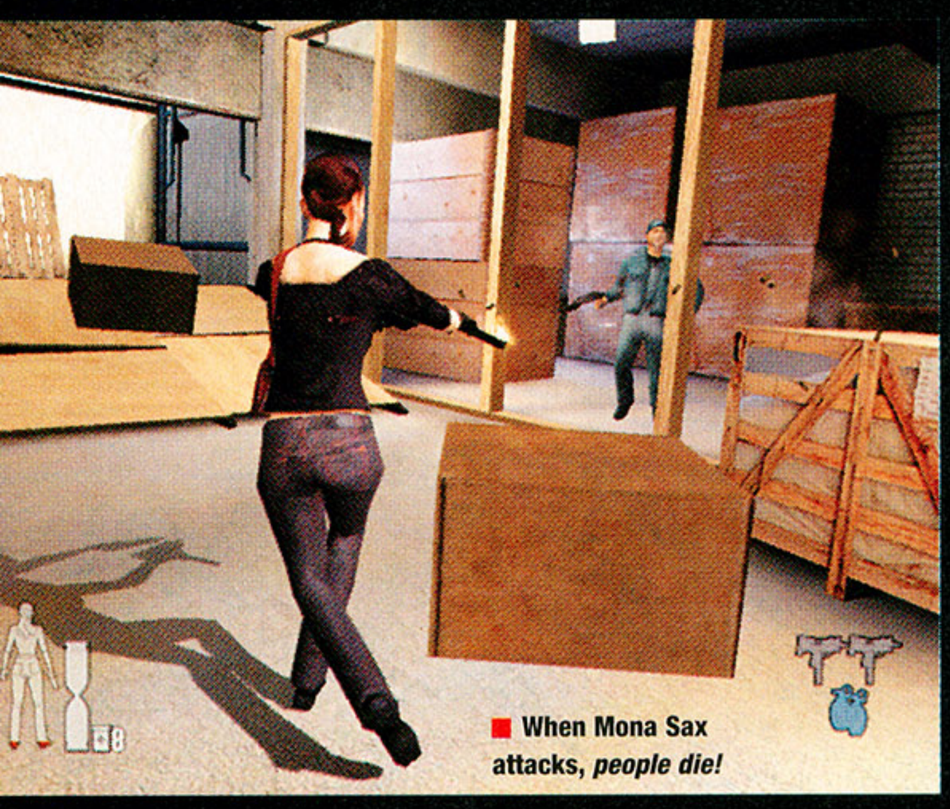
DIRECTORY

MULTIPLATFORM

102 Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne
106 Spy Hunter 2
106 Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines
108 Sonic Heroes
110 Monster 4x4: Masters of Metal
110 Mission: Impossible Operation Surma
111 Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II

PLAYSTATION 2

112 Maximo vs. Army of Zin
114 Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly
114 American Idol
118 Manhunt
120 Everquest Online Adventures: Frontiers
120 Lowrider
122 .hack Part 4: Quarantine



■ When Mona Sax attacks, *people die!*

■ PS2, XB

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

SILVER

GAME OF THE MONTH

He can even dodge the sophomore slump

Dive Right In
Did you miss the prequel? Here's a quick recap: Pushers of a new drug called Valkyr murdered Payne's wife and daughter. After a bit of existential moping, Max transfers to the DEA and infiltrates the pushers' organization. Then his cover is blown, so he grabs his guns and slaughters *every last one* of the dirty drug dealers.

PAUL: Max Payne's first adventure was a simple quest for revenge (see sidebar), with just enough film noir flavor to keep us interested in the grim widower's slow-motion third-person gunplay. But this time, Payne is both hard-boiled and soft-hearted. This sequel should've been subtitled *The Rise of Little Max Payne*—the rogue cop's fascination with sexy assassin Mona Sax drives a much more compelling story.

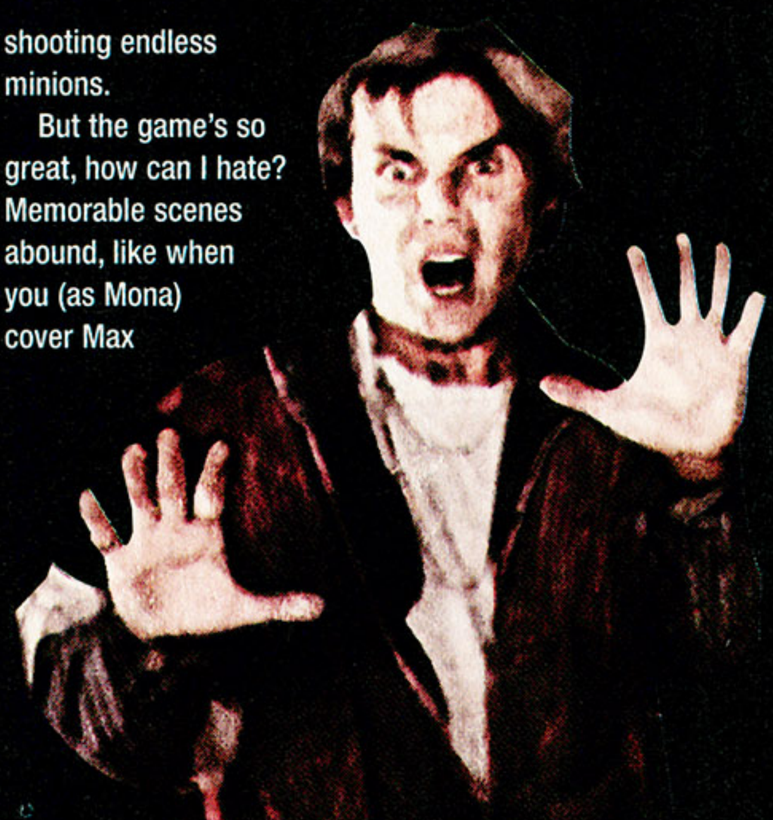
Across the board, *Payne 2* is vastly improved. Peep this appropriately bullet-pointed list:

- **It's written better.** Max's ridiculous mixed metaphors are gone, replaced by a lot of sharp, funny, very well-acted dialogue.
- **The world is more convincing.** Bodies fly and sprawl realistically. Excellent level design keeps combat interesting: Apartments and warehouses look just right, yet they cleverly steer the player toward goals, battles, and major events.
- **Bullet time is cooler.** An efficient slow-mo killing spree puts Max deeper into the zone, making his enemies even slower and triggering flashy balletic reloading animations. Now we have incentive to continue a rampage rather than playing it safe.

Like its hero, *Payne 2* scores more hits than it suffers, but it does sustain these flesh wounds:

- **The platforming sections suck.** Maybe *The Fall of Max Payne* is apropos, after all.
- **Characters are sometimes blocky and jagged.** Check out the claws on Winterson, Payne's bitchy partner!
- **More bad guys would help.** Future *Paynes* need more boss characters as relief from shooting endless minions.

But the game's so great, how can I hate? Memorable scenes abound, like when you (as Mona) cover Max



THE RATING SYSTEM

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

Here at *EGM*, we only review games that have been deemed final and reviewable by their publishers. Three editors review each game independently, and don't forget: 5.0 IS AVERAGE.

AWARDS

Platinum — for games that get all 10s. These games rule.

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

Silver — for games with a mean score of 8.0 (but not 9.0).

GAME OF THE MONTH — This goes to the highest-reviewed game each month.

SHAME OF THE MONTH — A rare dishonor for games with unanimously bad scores.

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

E-Everyone: Wholesome fun for the whole family, devoid of hookers, head shots, or heroin use.

T-Teen: Like PG-13 movies, Teen games usually feature mild violence and "comic mischief."

M-Mature: Whereas these games typically offer all the gore, sex, drugs, and fun of R-rated fare.

XBOX

122 Carve
124 Deus Ex: The Invisible War
126 Counter-Strike

GAMECUBE

127 Pokémon Channel

GAME BOY ADVANCE

128 Sword of Mana
128 Yu Yu Hakusho: Spirit Detective
129 Max Payne

from various sniper perches around a construction site. Max and Mona's in-game conversation conveys all the instructions you need without interrupting the action. Other games' text hints and heavy-handed cut-scenes seem downright primitive by comparison.

Little incidental scenes are crafted with equal care. For example, in one level, three Italian mobsters mistook me for an ally and helped me fight a bunch of Russians. Then a fourth mobster joined us and recognized me, so I slaughtered my ex-allies in sweet slow motion. It didn't affect the game's overall plot one whit, but it made the experience more believable, more compelling.

Fun, smart, and polished, *Max Payne 2* is everything a sequel should be.

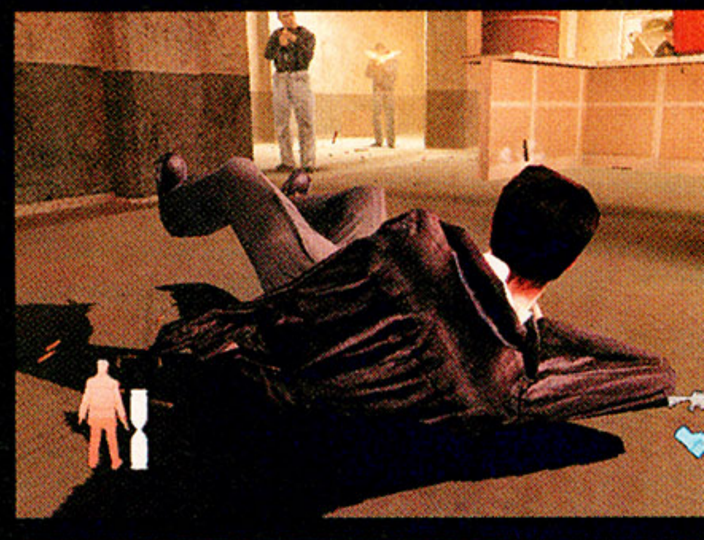
Fun, smart, and polished, *Max Payne 2* is everything a sequel should be.

SHAWN: He may be outnumbered, but with an Ingram machine pistol in each hand spitting bullet casings like brass confetti, Max Payne isn't outgunned. Lunging and lighting up targets may seem like more of the same, but the difference is in the details, such as the shower of sparks from ricocheting shots or the guy who crashes through a cabinet, sending boxes and bottles flying when a shotgun blast sweeps him off his feet. This is bullet time at its best. Graphics, gameplay, A.I.—everything that matters has been improved, and even those who found the first game a bit dull should have a bloody good time with the sequel.

Payne 2 is just as gripping when your guns aren't blazing. Characterization unfolds in mature, clever ways, from overheard wiretap phone-sex tapes to a surprisingly well-handled love scene. Max's descent into madness is believable and riveting, and you're living through it.

Like its so-called hero, however, the game has ➤

■ Just another day at the office for Detective Payne.



➤ a few issues. Losing progress because you've fallen from a ledge (just one of a dozen faces of instant death) is infuriating. But, like Paul, I'm willing to forgive *Payne 2*'s problems when the rest of the game is so damned good.

GMR—TOM: The first *Max Payne* never truly delivered on its promise of a dark and gritty cinematic experience, probably due to the amateurishly purple prose (we all can't be James Ellroy, now can we?) and the overall lack of that extra layer of polish. *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne* delivers on that promise with much more professional writing, superbly directed cut-scenes, and some awesome level design. One spectacular level—a tense fun-house shootout—is worthy of some sort of award for being so creatively bizarre and scary at the same time.

Thankfully, *Max Payne 2* doesn't tweak the mechanics of the game too much. After all, that's what worked in the first game. Bullet time has been slightly enhanced (you get bonus time as you kill more guys), but otherwise, most of the changes are to the presentation.

As a result, *Payne 2* is far more satisfying than its predecessor. In fact, it's one of the most satisfying story-driven shooters you can play right now, as well as the latest success in the drive to make games as deep and engaging as movies. There's sex, drugs, and instead of rock 'n' roll, lots and lots of violence. But hell, that's the way we like it.

Meet the Perps

Max Payne: Like Dirty Harry, but dirtier. Max doesn't investigate crimes so much as he finds those (probably) responsible and shoots them.

Mona Sax: A hired gun. Who is she working for, and what does she want? Didn't she die in the first game? Will she and Max get it on? (Yes.)

Vladimir Lem: He's into some shady business, but he's been a good friend to Max. Prone to philosophizing in a ridiculous Russian accent.

Alfred Woden: Senator and member of a secret society, Woden helps Max with influence and info...when it suits his purposes.

Good: Top-notch voice acting
Bad: Too many instant-death situations
Possibly the First: Nongratuitous sex scene in a game

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

PAUL	SHAWN	TOM
8.0	8.0	8.5

Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Remedy
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

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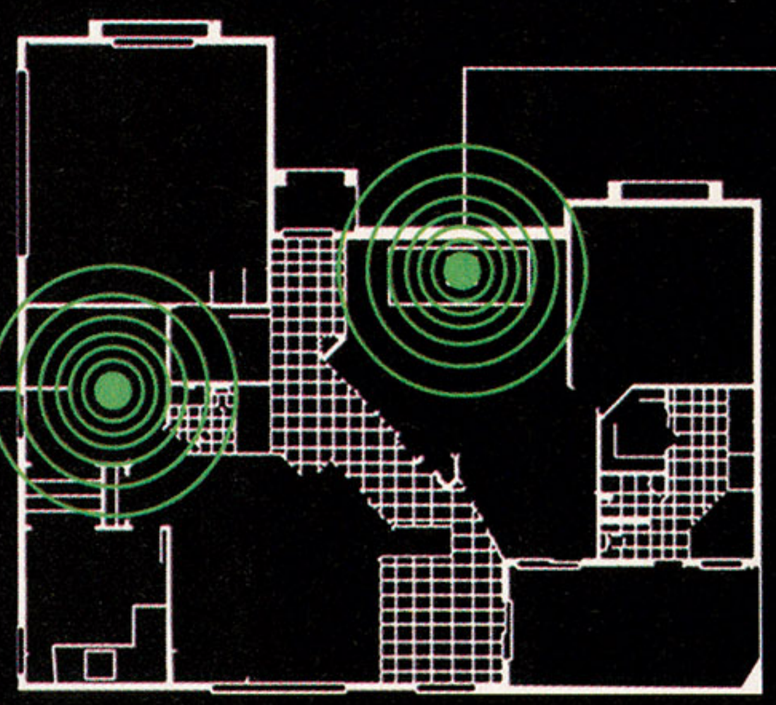

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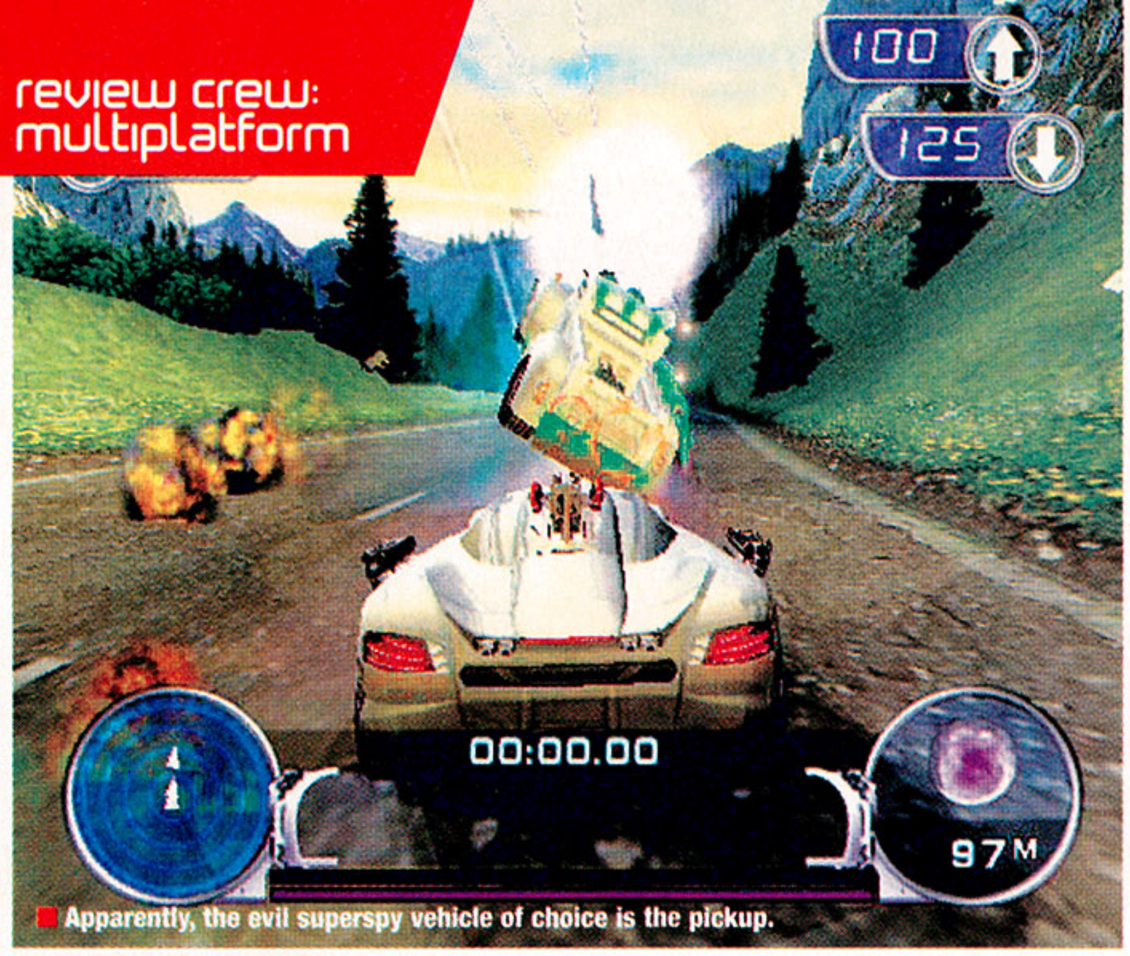

Apparently, the evil superspy vehicle of choice is the pickup.

PS2, XB, GC

SPY HUNTER 2

Tie up the hounds, call off the hunt

Good: Boy...we'll get back to you on that
Bad: Graphics, level design, gameplay, fundamental concept
Percentage of All Spies Who Are British: 90

DEMIAN: Let's say, hypothetically, that it's always been a private dream of mine to pilot a car that turns into a snowmobile that turns into a tricycle. *Spy Hunter 2* fulfilled that dream I never actually had, and then, like a wish-granting evil genie, made it horrible.

Yes, you do indeed drive a super-transforming car that would make a good love interest for *Knight Rider*'s K.I.T.T., and you do hunt spies, technically. But now that I know that all spy hunting really entails is driving around drab, boring levels, shooting anything that moves, and restarting yet again until you figure out just what it is you're supposed to accomplish, I'm no longer interested in it as a career.

Even versus mode isn't very enjoyable, since there's no four-player support and deathmatch is the only option. Two-player co-op mode (the gunner controls a roof-mounted turret) is the best part, but that's relative—it's still not actually good. Leave the spies to their own amazingly miniaturized devices, I say. They ain't worth huntin'.

SHAWN: Equipped to ride through wilderness, over water, and on two wheels, the G-8155 Interceptor seems like the ultimate spy utility vehicle. Shaking chasers with smoke screens and oil slicks is satisfying, and the game's responsive controls compensate for lusterless graphics. But, same as any SUV restricted to the beaten path, unbending laws curb this supercar's potential. Without the ability to transform when you want, *Spy Hunter 2*'s confining missions are just too monotonous.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—CHRIS B: Whereas Midway's original reinvention of its classic '80s franchise blew me away, *Spy Hunter 2* disappoints big time. Though still basically fun and boasting impressively responsive controls, it does nothing to move the series forward and somehow manages to turn the last one's breakneck gameplay into a ho-hum action game. It's still worth a rental, but be prepared for the appallingly inconsistent difficulty (from incredibly easy to so hard you never want to play again).

(Left) Thanks to boat form, you can also blow up the bayou.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	4.0	5.0	6.0
	DEMIAN	SHAWN	CHRIS B.

Publisher: Midway
Developer: Rockstar San Diego
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.midway.com

PS2, XB

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES

No need to come back, Arnold

"Now turn your head and cough, please."

Good: Missions that expand *T3*'s story line
Bad: Uneventful fisticuffs with the Terminatrix
On the Disc: A demo of the upcoming *Terminator 3: Redemption*

BRYAN: EA's *The Return of the King* is a perfect example of a movie-based game done right. *Rise of the Machines*, however, demonstrates how it can go terribly wrong. What you get here is your everyday, run-of-the mill first-person shooter with very few bells and whistles other than repetitive one-liners taken from the *Terminator* films. Shoddy hand-to-hand combat interludes and below-average visuals don't help either. Except for missions that deviate from the flick's main events—such as playing out the scene where one of Arnold's kind kills John Connor—even the most devout *Terminator* followers will find few enticing elements in this four-hour trek. And don't expect much in terms of cool bonus material. Only one unlockable cut-scene—where you learn how Terminators adopted Mr. Schwarzenegger's physical appearance—is exclusive movie footage. You're better off sayin' "Hasta la vista, baby" to the game and picking up the *T3* DVD.

G. FORD: After scoring a hit with *T3* the movie, Arnold immediately took a step back by lending his voice and likeness to *T3* the game (granted, his backup career ain't too shabby). Problems abound in this mess: Enemies seemingly come out of the woodwork; missions end in the middle of firefights; lackluster level design and boring mission objectives will leave you baffled; a horrible weapon-swapping system bogs down an already plodding game ...blah, I could go on. At least a couple of the unlockables are mildly interesting. All said, this is exactly the type of disaster Arnold's advisors should steer him clear of.

JOHN R: If you look in the back of the manual for *Terminator 3*, you'll see there are seven pages of credits. This begs the question: Did it really take several hundred people to make a game this bad? *T3*'s first-person shooting stages are plagued by poor controls, terrible level designs, brain-dead enemies, and just plain ugly graphics. And the third-person fighting portions are a joke, with hardly any move variety and a complete lack of depth. Even if you loved the movie, stay away from the game. Trust me, you won't regret it.

Governor Arnie's intense hatred for California's car tax comes to a head.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	3.5	3.5	2.0
	BRYAN	G. FORD	JOHN R.

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Black Ops
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

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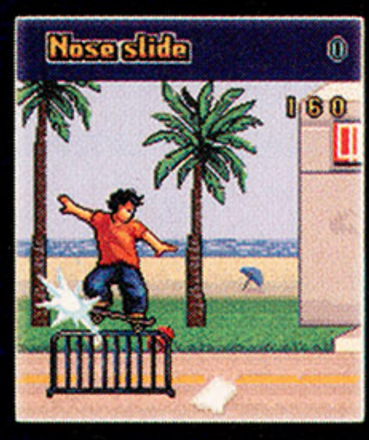

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Get ready for dizzying loops, dazzling skylines, and the occasional unexpected fall to your death.

Nelson Rocks
From bland hip-hop to brazenly hideous metal, the past few *Sonic* games dished out awful tunes. *Heroes*' music is surprisingly decent...well, all except for the Chaotix team theme, a hideous piece of butt rock by Gunnar Nelson. Yeah, he of the Nelsons fame. (You might remember their one hit, "After the Rain.")

PS2, XB, GC

SONIC HEROES

We can be heroes

SHANE: Ever since *Sonic Adventure 2* (for GC and Sega Dreamcast), Sonic's status among the pantheon of top-tier mascots has been in jeopardy. That ill-conceived title unsuccessfully tinkered with the traditionally speedy *Sonic* experience by forcing players to suffer through tedious crystal excavation and hovering stages that simply sucked. Nearly every review (be it critical or from li'l Jimmy the consumer) boiled down to "I just want to run!" Thankfully, Sonic's handlers listened: *Heroes* has the 'hog doin' what he does best in a rewarding return to form.

Heroes' basic gameplay echoes the classic, side-scrolling *Sonic*s of yore, but with an interesting twist—team play. The four teams you can choose from have minor differences (see below), but with each one, you're simultaneously controlling three characters: one speedster, one powerhouse, and an annoying, chirpy one that flies. A simple button press switches leadership among the three guys, and the clever level designs basically guarantee that you'll have to switch leaders in order to break a few walls and soar over pits to succeed. This constant switching seems confusing, clunky, and forced at first, but after a few levels, it becomes natural, and it's fun to experiment with different leaders to find new paths. Plus, by the time the gameplay clicks, the Milquetoast early levels give way to wildly cool areas that have you spinning through giant pinball machines, reversed-gravity haunted mansions, and stratospheric airship armadas. *Heroes* offers a surprisingly long experience (for a *Sonic* game), and it's one that gets better the longer you play.

In classic *Sonic* fashion, the game looks spectacular, with dazzling Day-Glo colors, ultrasmooth movement (well, on GC and Xbox at least—scope the sidebar), and trippy effects: Every single stage explodes with breakneck speed, insane loops, absurd corkscrews, and other gravity-defying razzamatazz. It's a breathtakingly gorgeous game that's unmistakably *Sonic*.

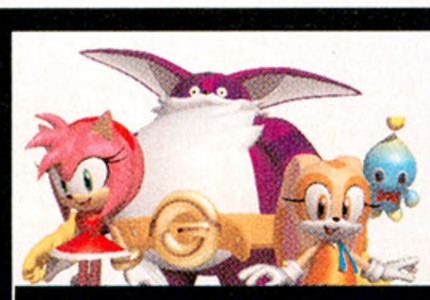
So, what's not to like? Mostly stuff that no 3D *Sonic* game has managed to get right, including an annoyingly touchy camera, lame bosses, and an overabundance of deaths caused by falling off edges. These issues seem almost endemic to the series at this point, but it'd be nice if a future update could clear 'em up. Still, don't let these quibbles (or the hateful grumblings of the other reviewers) deter you—*Heroes* is worthy.

CJ: I could go on and on about how *Sonic* just doesn't work well in 3D, but it wouldn't change anything. He's here to stay. Thankfully, most of what made the *Adventure* games a bore—in particular, everything that didn't star Sonic or Tails—

Meet the Teams

From the game's outset, you can choose to play as one of four teams. All of them have a similar mix of speedy, powerful, and airborne members, but you'll find that each group offers a slightly different gameplay experience and story line. Of course, you'll have to finish the game with all four teams if you want to fight the true last boss and see the real ending....

Team Sonic — Ah, the old standbys.... Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles deliver a basic, balanced game. If you've played the *Adventure* titles, feel free to start out as these guys.



Team Rose — If you're new to 3D *Sonic* games, acclimate yourself with Amy Rose, Cream the Rabbit, and Big the Cat. Their game is a lot like Sonic's, only much easier.

Team Dark — If you're a veteran player, give this team of miscreants a try. Rouge, Shadow, and Omega play the same levels as Sonic and Rose, but they're way harder.

Team Chaotix — If you're looking for something completely different, give these oddball castoffs a shot. Their levels have weird goals...like harvesting hermit crabs.

Good: Fantastic visuals, creative levels
Bad: Touchy controls, steep difficulty curve
Coolest Character: Anyone but Vector the Crocodile

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	8.0	6.0	6.0
	SHANE	CJ	JOHN R.

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Everyone

www.sega.com

is gone, and as a result, *Heroes* plays more like the balls-to-the-wall Sega Genesis *Sonic*s. It's even got a classic-style casino stage, something that the previous 3D efforts didn't even dare to try. But for each brave step forward, it takes a few back. Racing full speed through stages that take 10 or more minutes to complete while constantly switching characters for the most mundane of tasks becomes exhausting.

It's even worse when you consider that you have to play through the same stages *four* times (once with each team) to get the real ending. I don't have the patience for it, especially when the terrible camera and hit-or-miss lock-on attacks that leave you plunging to your doom (and spelled trouble in the last two *Sonic*s) still haven't been adequately addressed.

Once at the forefront of platforming action, the *Sonic* series hasn't aged well. And while *Heroes* is better in some respects than the last two, it still leaves me disappointed.

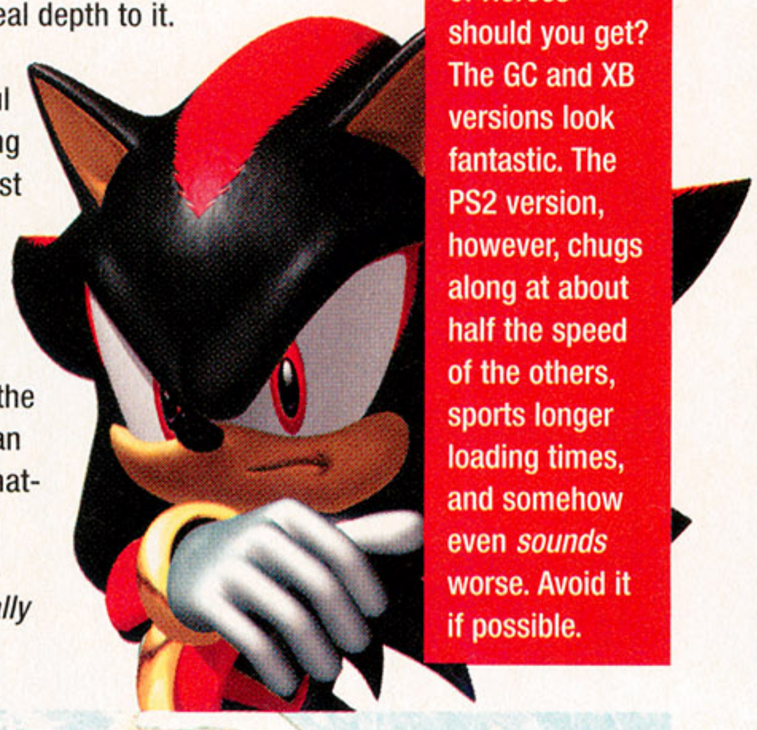
JOHN R: For a character as recognizable and symbolic as Sonic the Hedgehog, you'd think Sega would spend a little more time polishing each of his adventures before shipping them to stores. Sadly, this is not the case. As with the previous two 3D *Sonic* outings, *Sonic Heroes* is a solid platformer that could've been a lot better if the developers had spent more time balancing the levels and tweaking the unbelievably frustrating camera.

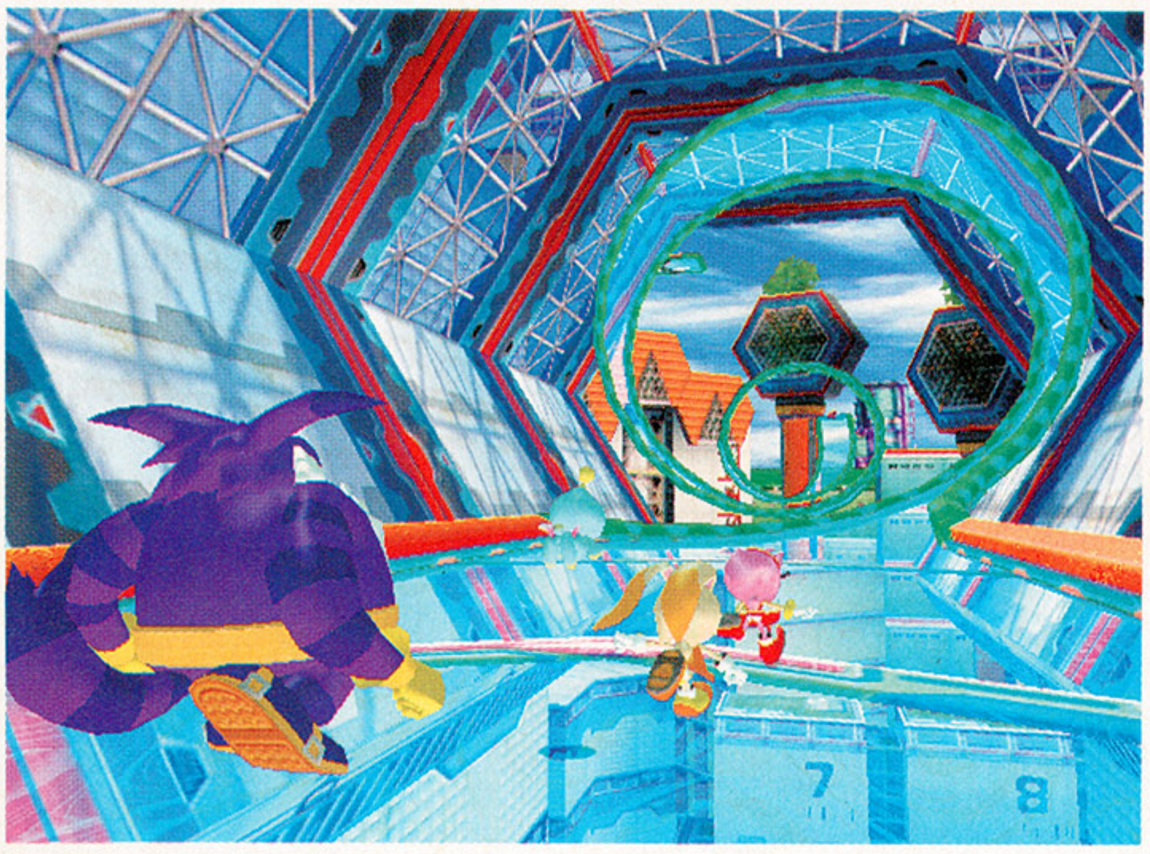
The team-based gameplay is interesting enough, but instead of having four separate teams, three of which play virtually identically, Sega should've just stuck with Team Sonic and focused on making it a more cohesive, enjoyable experience. The one team that does play differently—the exploration-based Team Chaotix—isn't even fun, as *Heroes*' stages were clearly designed for speed, not adventuring.

That said, it is nice to have a *Sonic* game with a bit of real depth to it. Switching formations requires careful consideration, making *Heroes* more than just another glorified roller-coaster ride. But given that the horrendous camera disrupts the flow of the game more often than not, I'm not sure it matters. And one more thing—the whiny preschool voices *really* have to go.

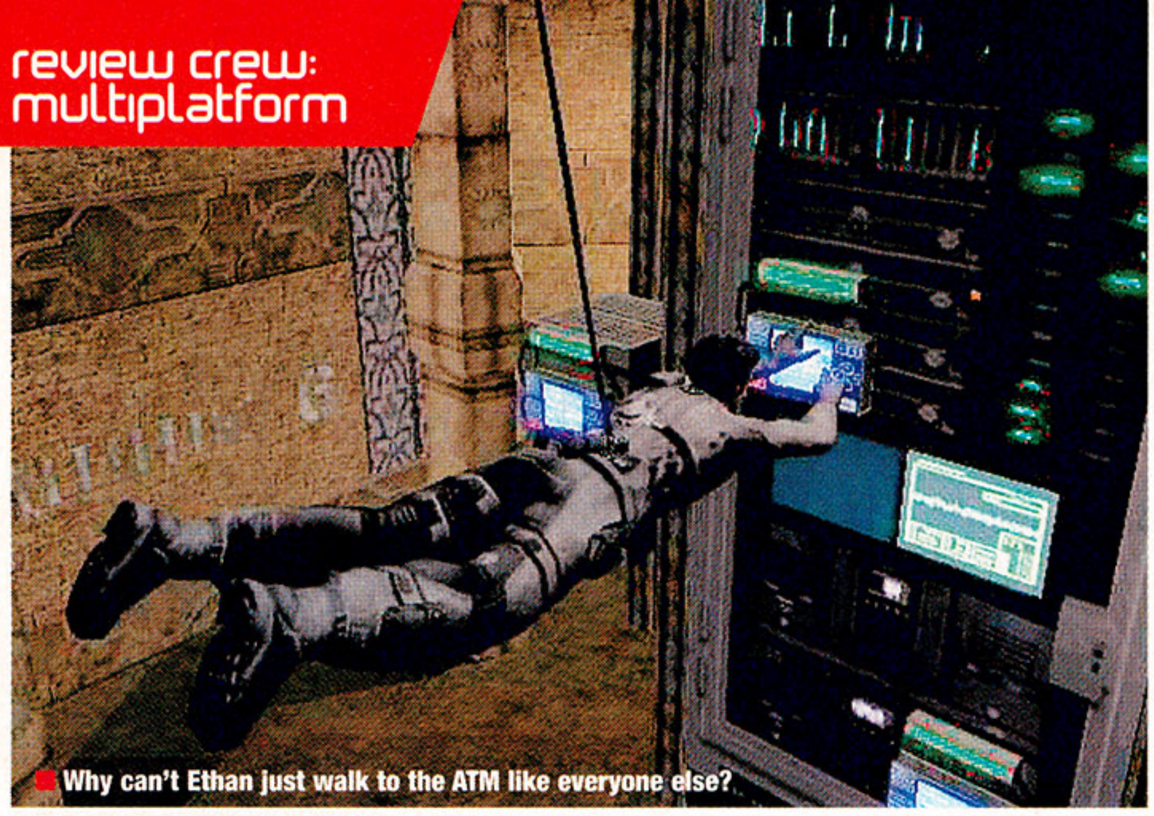
■ Cream the Rabbit has two terrible tasks: ferrying fat cats around and having to deal with that name for the rest of her life.

Sorry, PS2
Which version of *Heroes* should you get? The GC and XB versions look fantastic. The PS2 version, however, chugs along at about half the speed of the others, sports longer loading times, and somehow even *sounds* worse. Avoid it if possible.





■ *Heroes*' bonus stages fill your screen with psychedelic insanity.



Why can't Ethan just walk to the ATM like everyone else?

PS2, XB

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE OPERATION SURMA

It's not only possible, but also pretty entertaining

Stiff over-the-shoulder shooting (left) and ho-hum skydiving (right) hurt the game's flow.

Good: The high-wire sneaking scenes are tense and fun
Bad: Clunky shooting sequences
No Sign of: Tom Cruise

G. FORD: Talk about an impossible mission—who thought developer Paradigm could craft a compelling game out of a license that no one's cared about for three years? Well it has, partially thanks to the way the *MI* franchise naturally lends itself to the stealth genre, and partially due to the fact that it features an intriguing stop-the-evil-corporation story (told through some nice cut-scenes).

Operation Surma really nails the *MI* feel with the ubiquitous theme song and the dangling high-wire scenes. Adding to the slick atmosphere are solid controls and a bushel of useful items—such as a wasp-sized camera and a sonic imager that lets you see through walls. The game, however, is not without holes. When you trip alarms, enemies start popping out of nowhere, and the skydiving scenes are more frustrating than thrilling. Also, the game's over-the-shoulder shooting style never feels as responsive or quick as it should. And though most of the game is well balanced, the last few missions become unfairly hard. But all these problems are easy enough to overlook. A fine effort, indeed.

PAUL: Like the flicks, *Mission: Impossible* gives secret agent Ethan Hunt a gun and bagful of gadgets, then sics him on a supervillain. The spy toys are truly useful, and inventory management in *Operation Surma* is a breeze. Sidekick character Luther provides objectives and advances the story without breaking that cinematic vibe. Excellent. And yet, it's nearly impossible to sneak around without getting caught, and shooting or stealth-killing a lot of identical guards gets old, especially on your fifth or sixth attempt at a level.

BRYAN: Unlike the crappy *MI* games of years past, this one doesn't self-destruct in five seconds. After years outta the gaming spotlight, Ethan Hunt takes on another impossible endeavor with all sorts of gadgetry that even 007 would envy, and you'll put each one to good use. And I gotta disagree with Mr. Ford about the missions. I found most objectives—even the skydiving bits—to be quite entertaining. Still, some work remains, and next time Mr. Hunt could use cooler stealth attacks, less cumbersome controls, and brainier enemies.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	G. FORD	PAUL	BRYAN
	6.5	6.5	6.0

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Paradigm
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.atari.com

PS2, GC

MONSTER 4X4: MASTERS OF METAL

Redneck Rampage

The bigger the wheels, the closer to God.

Good: Terrific truck physics
Bad: Camera goes wonky when trucks collide
Mullets: Not included

SHAWN: When a mafia don paid me to race my mammoth truck through Central Park for his pleasure, I came to the following conclusion: Intercepted pay-per-view programs inspired aliens in the Alpha Centauri system to make *Monster 4x4*. How else can you explain *Masters of Metal*'s creepy announcer—he sounds more like a fey ESL student than a hoarse emcee with too much reverb on his mic (ya know, "Sunday, Sunday, Sunday!"). Anyone who actually enjoys the world of monster trucking will instantly realize that this game seriously lacks authenticity.

Despite its rudimentary grasp of redneck culture, *Masters of Metal* manages to nail the handling and physics of the massive machines, even if its brand of big wheelin' won't convert new followers. (A standard racing game this most certainly is not.) It does deserve credit, however, for a layout that lets you pick up the points you need to proceed by doing donuts in exhibitions instead of rerunning flubbed races, although fans won't feel large and in charge as the camera goes haywire when their truck gets stuck in a wall.

DEMIAN: I second Shawn's space-aliens theory, and I would like to add that the main character, named Rookie, looks like a cross between Lyle Lovett and the dude from *Eraserhead*. Aside from that highlight, *Monster 4x4* is just a cavalcade of nonsensical cut-scenes and subpar, glitchy driving designed to catch the eye of Wal-Mart shoppers. Events vary from indoor arena races to despoiling America's parklands, but with a curious lack of wanton car crushing. Sure, there's a *little* car crushing, but not *wanton* crushing, and that's what I want in a monster truck game.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: *Masters of Metal* does a fairly good job of capturing the glory of car smashing with open-circuit courses where you can plow through all sorts of objects in the environment with kick-ass trucks. Unfortunately, the traditional stadium tracks are pretty mundane in comparison, and A.I. opponents don't offer much of a challenge (you can easily complete everything in a matter of hours). It's a fun little romp, but one that won't fully sate your hunger for mud-caked mayhem.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHAWN	DEMIAN	GIANCARLO
	4.5	4.5	6.0

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Barcelona
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Everyone

www.ubisoft.com

See, this is exactly why you shouldn't barge into other people's crypts.

PS2, XB

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

Wine, wenches, and warhammers

You'll be hearing from the SPCA about this, barbarian.

KEVIN: Stick a Roman numeral on the end of your new game's title, and players start to expect certain things: better gameplay, fewer annoyances, and more entertainment value than the original. That's why I'm scratching my head on why Interplay broke out the II for its latest bash-em-up. It's just as fun as the original *Dark Alliance*, but legitimate improvements are scarce.

You can count all the original features here on one hand. There's a new item-creation system (see sidebar), you can switch weapons quickly with the control pad, the camera's a bit less ornery...and that's it. The sense of déjà vu here is undeniable, especially since the *Gauntlet*-like gameplay is repetitive by nature. And why are we still limited to two players? That's a flaw in the *previous* game.

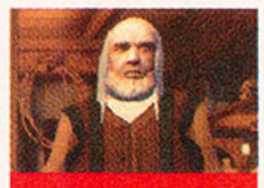
Still, you can't fault Interplay for not fixing what ain't broken. *Dark Alliance II* is still an addictive spark of a game—the story's much deeper now, and there are dozens upon dozens of new levels to explore. Plus, there's something inexplicably enjoyable about building a godlike warrior through the massacre of goblins by the thousands. If you played the first *Dark Alliance* to death, though, then it might be better to wait for the similar-yet-online-enabled *Champions of Norrath* on PS2.

JOE: The first *Dark Alliance* was a little bit of gaming sunshine, bringing *Diablo*-like hack-n-slash thrills from PC over to consoles. Too bad the original developers have since headed for the hills to work on *Champions of Norrath* for Sony, because they've apparently taken the fun with them.

The epitome of a sophomore slump, *Dark Alliance II* is immediately boring, painted with dated graphics and rife with dull, uninspired level design. Remember how critics said that the original was a great start, but that we'd expect more than just brainless action out of a sequel? Well, the first game is the pipe-smoking, monocle-twirling intellectual in this particular family. You'd get more entertainment by going back and beating the still pretty nifty original again than by playing this unpolished mess. If you've got a PS2, hold out for *Norrath*. If you've got an Xbox? Hold your breath.

CRISPIN: If *Dark Alliance II* were a creature in the *D&D Monster Manual*, it'd be called the Yawnisian Mind Borer, and it would lure victims into repetitive dungeons, make them wander until they fell asleep, then swipe 50 gold from their wallets.

So don't give this monster your cash unless your favorite part of the prequel—or any *Diablo*-style dungeon hacker—is building up your character. The lure of reaching that next experience level, earning a few new attacks, and donning niftier equipment was the only thing that kept me motivated (and then just barely) in this sequel. Dungeons are mostly dull mazes that sprawl too far and seem big just for the sake of being big, and you get stuck with too many fetch-the-mythical-gizmo quests. Face this monster of a game with a second player to increase your saving roll for fun.



Weapons While-U-Wait
Who wants a boring old Great Axe when you could wield a +1 Fine Stirge's Great Axe instead? This frumpy-looking guy runs a shop where you can make your own equipment. All you need is a base item, a runestone to add bonuses, and gems to give the item elemental abilities. It's an easy way to get rare weapons with minimal effort, but you still need to find the gems and stones first....

Uh, Say That Again, Please?
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic has a name generator that automatically creates a *Star Wars*-y moniker for your character. There's no evidence that Interplay used a similar program to come up with names for *Dark Alliance II*'s cast, but with examples like Allessia Faithhammer, Ysuran Auondril, and Ulua Uoswiir, we sure hope no human devised 'em.

Good girls don't have names like Luvia Bloodmire.

Kindly ignore the dead bodies around Randalla Brasshorn, please.

Sleyvas has a pretty normal name...by shaman lizardman standards.

Good: Smiting monster hordes is oddly addictive
Bad: It's basically the same game over again
Want Online?: Then hold out for *Champions of Norrath* (PS2)

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

KEVIN	JOE	CRISPIN
7.0	4.5	5.0

Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Black Isle Studios
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.interplay.com

The title isn't kidding—Maximo literally fights an entire army of Zin robots. Like, a million of 'em.

(Below) You'll find some new gizmos in *Zin*'s final stages, like this robot-mincing turret. Yeah, it's hackneyed, but it's a nice break from all the hacking.

PlayStation 2

MAXIMO VS. ARMY OF ZIN

Not quite as charming the second time

SHANE: The original *Maximo* took a brave stab at bringing the classic 2D run 'n' jump gameplay of Capcom's spooktacular *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* series into the modern age. It garnered fantastic reviews, but if you ask me, critics were overly kind to its faults—all that pinpoint platforming didn't translate well to the third dimension, the difficulty curve spiked erratically, and some levels were just plain dull. So, you'd think that *Army of Zin* would address all of these quibbles and perfect the formula, right? Wrong.

Zin is actually a small step back for the franchise. Uninspired visuals provide the first clue that something is amiss: Nearly all of the stages bore with drab colors and lifeless backgrounds, and odd bouts of choppiness slow down the action. Plus, the characters look extremely simplistic and blocky, especially in close-up cut-scenes. Gameplay is much the same as in the first game—you run around thwacking enemies, collecting goodies, and rescuing damsels in distress. Most levels are linear treks from point A to point B, so the occasional creative diversion really stands out: More stages akin to those in which you fight alongside A.I. comrades or bring down an iron airship would have infused some much-needed freshness. As it stands, you're basically beating up the same five enemies over and over, collecting money to buy a handful of new moves, and repeatedly dying during incredibly frustrating jumping bits. (Hey Capcom, what happened to toning down the platforming?) Rent it and get your fill.

CRISPIN: Call me nutty, but I thought sequels were supposed to improve on the games that preceded them: you know, offer souped-up weapons, tweaked gameplay, new moves, yada, yada, yada. *Army of Zin* just doesn't do the job. Killing enemies—mostly a motley crew of brain-dead robots—doesn't require any figuring out like in the prequel (one of that game's most endearing points). The levels aren't as interesting, either (although they sprawl toward the end and pack plenty of secrets), and you're forced to replay previous stages just to build up your arsenal of attacks for the trickier later levels and bosses. The game does keep up the original's compelling pace, with enemies swarming you nearly every step of the way. I never got bored—I just never got all that excited, either.

MARK: I think Shane and Crispin forget just how annoying and numerous the tricky jumping bits were in the original *Maximo*. *Zin*'s platforming bits represent a huge improvement—they're challenging but not sadistic. And while I agree combat could've used more strategy (you'll forget you even have a block move), the new attacks and weapons you can earn kept me happily mashing buttons. *Zin* is old school in many ways, and it lacks a feature or gimmick that really stands out, but this is a solid entry to the genre that action-platform fans will definitely find worth checking out.

Health Care Reform

Zin's most annoying quirk? The fact that you can't refill your life meter on the Map screen between levels. Prepare to always start the next level with the tiny sliver of health you had at the end of the previous level, even after totally grueling boss battles.

Dead and Loving It

Army of Zin greatly expands the role of Grim, the lovable reaper of souls who befriended Maximo in the first game. Now as you destroy the evil, soul-fueled robots, you'll harvest their energy to build up your Soul meter. When it reaches its max and glows blue, press R1 to summon Grim. You control this invincible force of ultimate destruction for only a few scant seconds, but he can wreak serious havoc in that time. Highly recommended for boss battles.

Maximo's top-tier moves make fighting mindless robots much easier.

Good: Tight control, good music
Bad: Repetitive levels, dull visuals
We Still Want: A side-scrolling *Maximo* for GBA

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHANE	CRISPIN	MARK
	6.0	6.0	7.0

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

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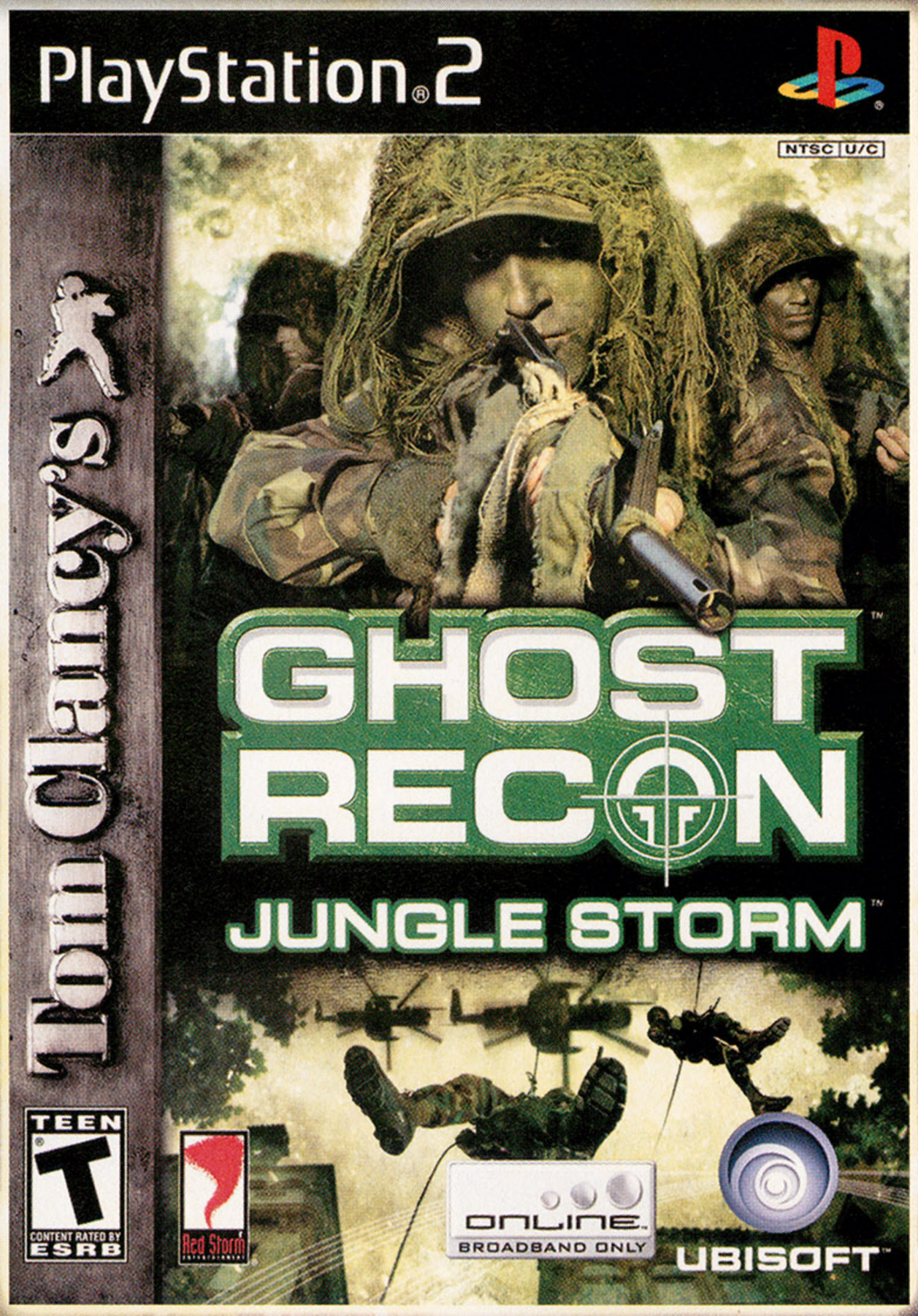

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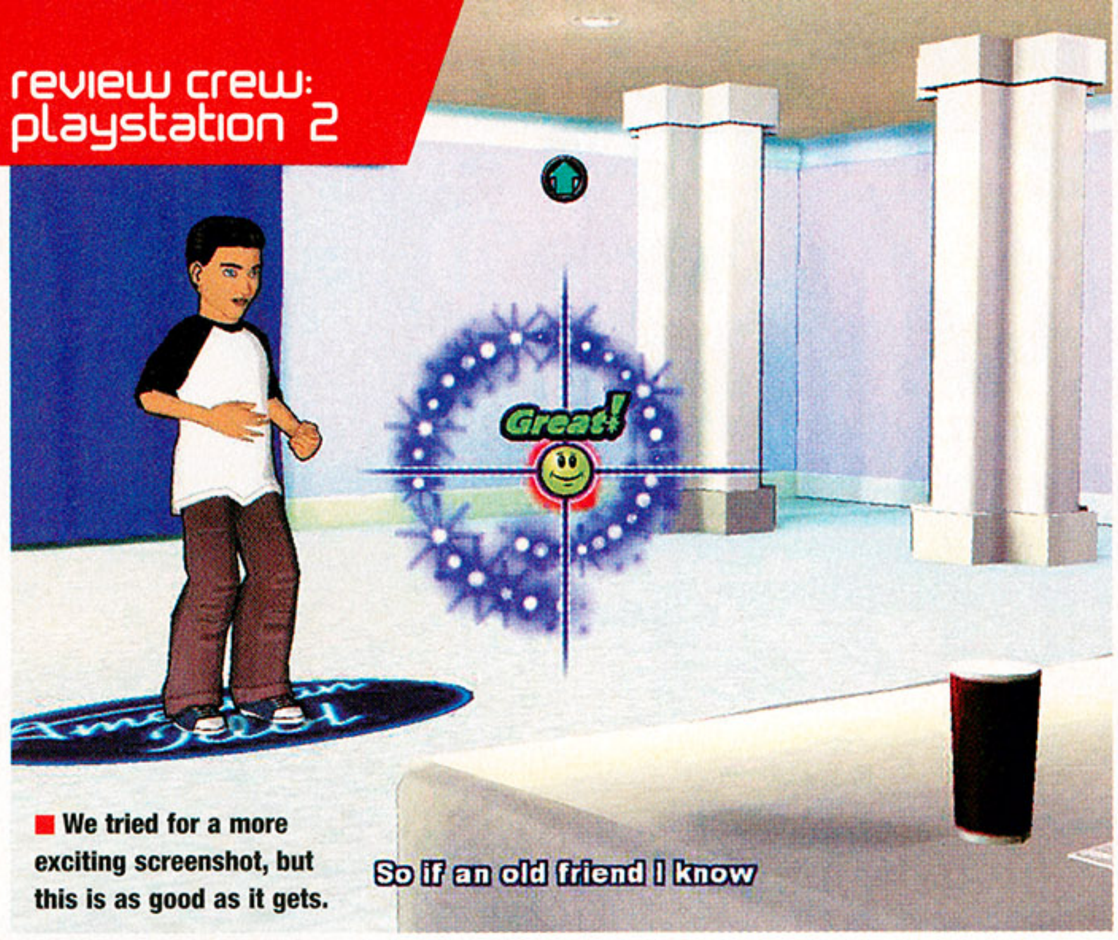


■ We tried for a more exciting screenshot, but this is as good as it gets.

■ PlayStation 2

AMERICAN IDOL

SHAME OF THE MONTH

Quite frankly, it's crap

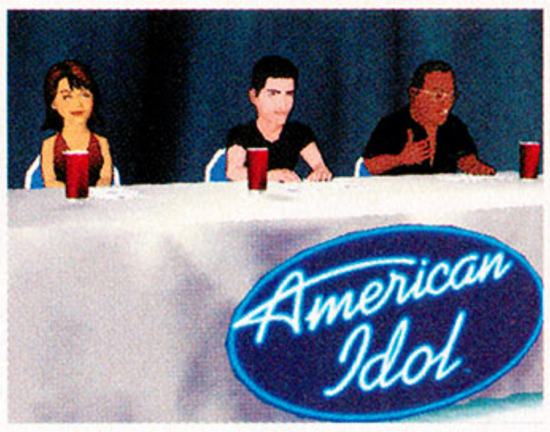
Good: *Three* different voices to choose from!
Bad: All the parts with music
Also Bad: All the parts with graphics

JENNIFER: Ever wish the earsplitting, off-key vocals of the *American Idol* TV show would penetrate your gaming world? No? Then this isn't for you—and I'm really not sure who else would want to play it. In truth, you hardly "play" anything. Sure, there's some tapping along with Top 40 hits while your ugly character sings like a wannabe superstar (read: badly). And presumably, how accurately you tap determines how well your character sings. But (in perhaps the game's most realistic moment) even when you do well, your singing still totally sucks. You can't preview the schmaltzy songs you have to perform or even find out who they're originally by—oh wait, it doesn't matter whether or not you know the songs, since this game involves *no actual singing*! Don't be fooled by its so-called karaoke mode—all you do is sing along (to yourself, unamplified) with an instrumental track.

I'm giving it points only because it technically works when you put it in your PlayStation 2. But don't you dare even look at this when you could be playing *Karaoke Revolution*.

SHAWN: If you want to press buttons while a cartoon character does bad karaoke, you might as well fiddle with your controller while watching cable. There's absolutely no connection between what's happening onscreen in *American Idol* and what your hands are doing. And in terms of excitement, the non-interactive karaoke mode is roughly as fun as taking an eye exam. The only button you really need to know about is on the back of your console and it's pretty much impossible to press it too soon.

GAMENOW—CARRIE: Even Simon Cowell couldn't think of an insult demeaning enough for this game. It's bad enough that you can beat the single-player game in an hour. But that short time includes excruciating minutes spent watching ugly cartoon people sing off-key while you're waiting for your turn. And multiplayer games are no more fun than single-player ones: How stupid is it to judge your friends' ability to press buttons? There's no reason to buy this game—and this is coming from someone who loves the TV show. Bloody awful.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	1.5	2.0	1.0
	JENNIFER	SHAWN	CARRIE

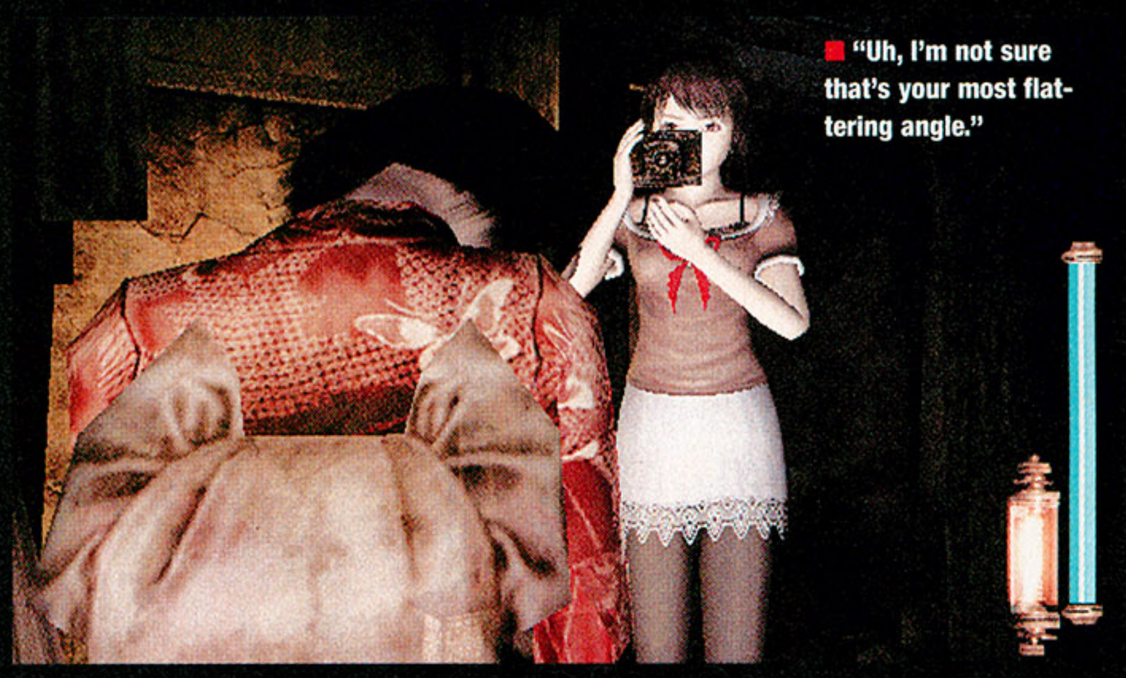
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Hothouse
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Everyone

www.codemasters.com

■ PlayStation 2

FATAL FRAME II: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

Join the poltergeist paparazzi



■ "Uh, I'm not sure that's your most flattering angle."

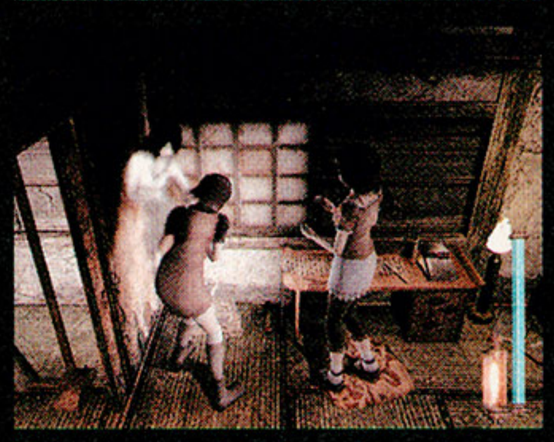
Good: Phantasmagoric visuals
Bad: Repetitive puzzles
Soon to Be a: Major motion picture

JON D: For a sequel to a game that was hyped as one of the scariest around, *FF2* strikes me as something of a spookiness letdown. Sparse apparitions lingering in the halls and appearing from thin air startle successfully, but the feeling of impending danger I'd get with a *Resident Evil* or *Silent Hill* just isn't there. Some ghosts are armed, but many simply use some sort of vague, inappropriate touching to whittle away my easily replenished stamina. Not too scary, really.

But the beauty of *FF2* is that there's still plenty there without the scare. I fell in love with my job as a photographer of this beautifully bleak environment. A chilling atmosphere and intentional sensory limitations (only what's seen through the viewfinder defines your offensive and defensive scope) magnified my feelings of insecurity and uncertainty really well—if I were actually afraid of these spooks, it'd be especially potent. Take it for a spin, at least as a rental—not everyone's the thick-skinned horror veteran I am.

SHOE: The scary game with the silly name is back, ready to mess with your mind like nothing else can. And mess with your mind it will, with the creepiest, most unsettling visuals and sounds this side of *Silent Hill*. The gameplay isn't the strongest; there are awkward *Resident Evil*–style camera angles and some vague, almost arbitrary objectives that force you to revisit certain areas over and over (the fear factor drops significantly when you're back in a room you've already been to five times). But this game is so genuinely terrifying, you can't help but appreciate its incredible art direction.

SHAWN: Something other than the floorboards is creaking and your sister's curled up in the corner muttering nonsense. *Fatal Frame 2* is best when it's scaring you senseless. The tension is palpable as you probe claustrophobic rooms, trying to allay your fears with a flashlight. But whenever the chills stop, the horrific gameplay beneath all the hocus-pocus shows through. Scaring up keys and solving dull puzzles just isn't exciting, but shockingly, the story involving a ritual gone wrong was enough to see me through.



■ The ghosts in *Fatal Frame II* are all about rudely invading your personal space.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	7.5	6.5
	JON D.	SHOE	SHAWN

Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: Tecmo
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

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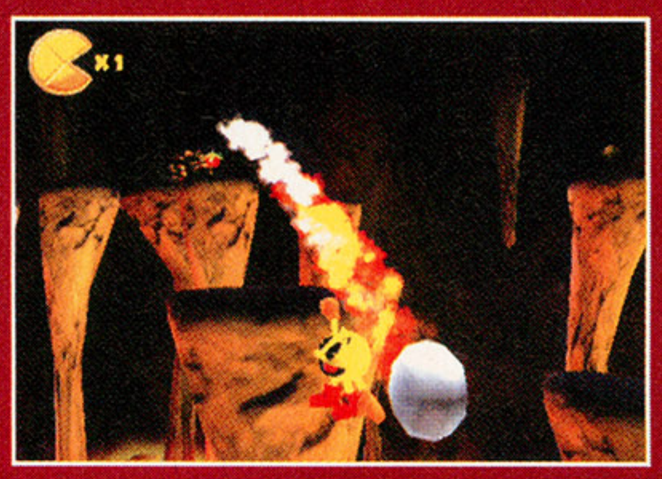

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EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Mild Violence

XBOX · NINTENDO GAMECUBE · PlayStation®2

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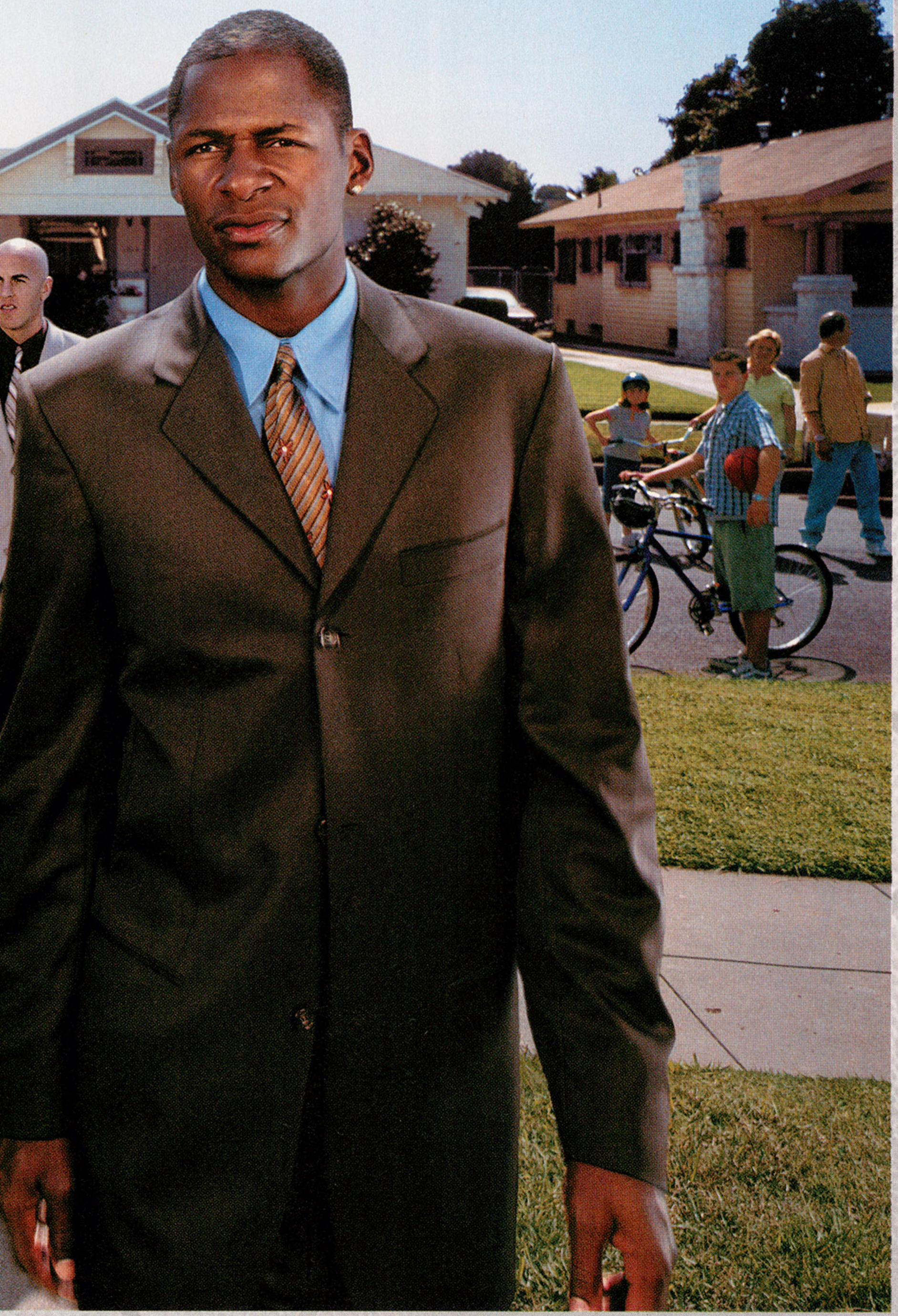

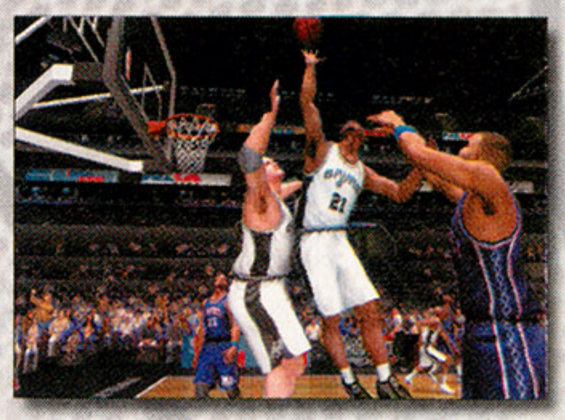

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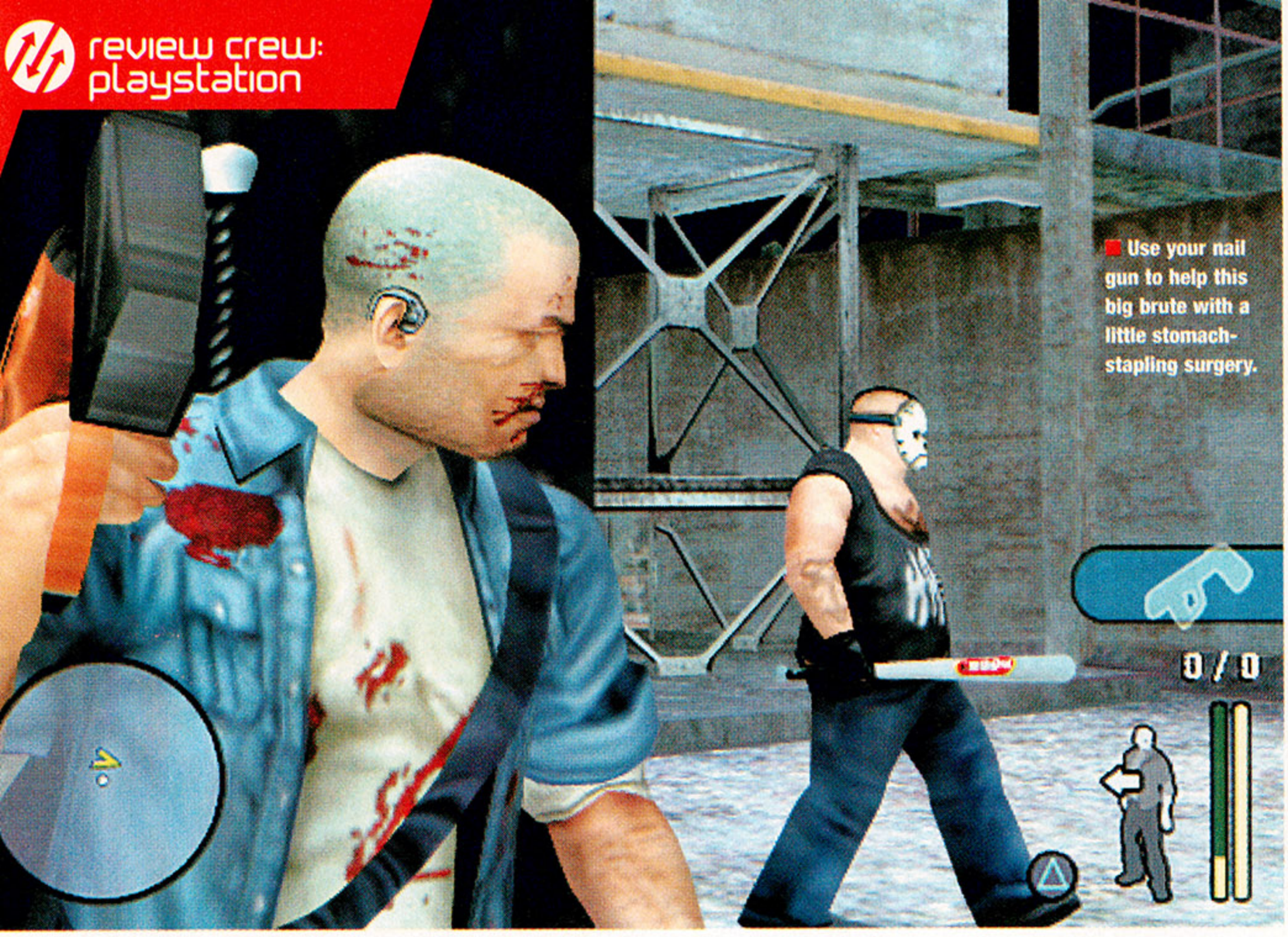
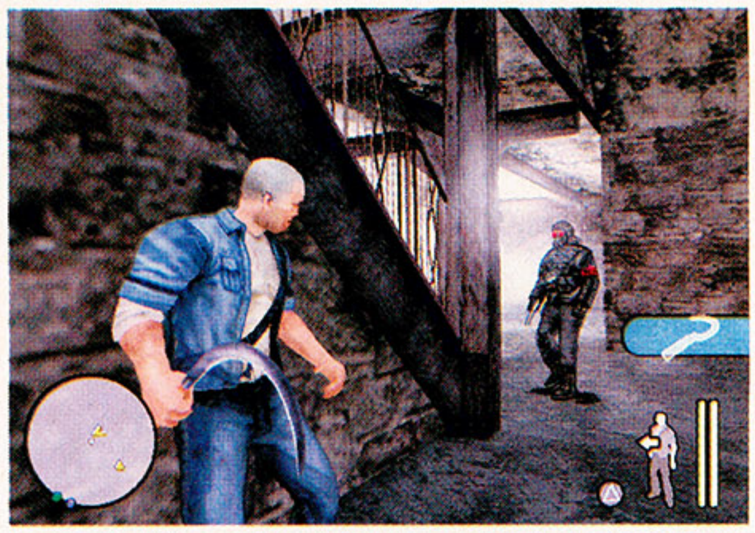


Use your nail gun to help this big brute with a little stomach-stapling surgery.



Hide and Seek
Manhunt takes stealth gaming to new levels with smart enemies who will keep you on your toes and make your palms sweat. Make a noise and they'll run right up to your hiding spot and look all around, cursing at you to show yourself. Later on, they'll shoot blindly into the shadows, hoping to flush you out. It's intense.

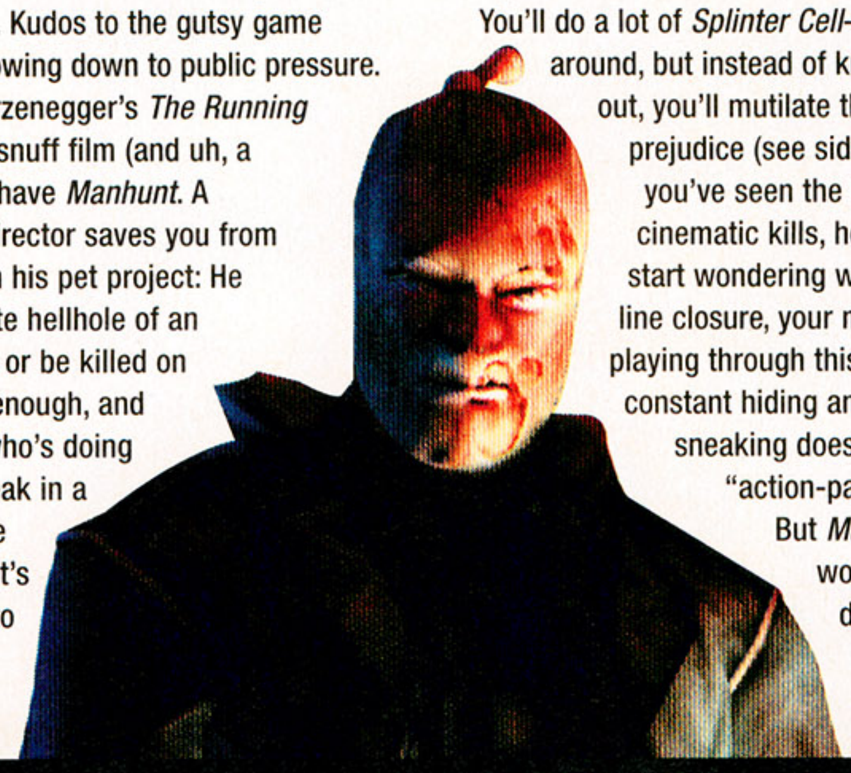
PlayStation 2

MANHUNT

It's raining men...dead men

SHOE: The controversial *Grand Theft Auto* series put Rockstar in a lot of heat. *Manhunt* spits nitroglycerin on the fire. Kudos to the gutsy game company for not bowing down to public pressure.

If Arnold Schwarzenegger's *The Running Man* were one big snuff film (and uh, a videogame), you'd have *Manhunt*. A demented movie director saves you from execution to star in his pet project: He puts you in a private hellhole of an urban jungle to kill or be killed on film. Survive long enough, and you may find out who's doing this to you and sneak in a little revenge at the same time. The plot's intriguing enough to make you want to see it through to the end—though you may be disappointed with the quickie conclusion.



You'll do a lot of *Splinter Cell*–style sneaking around, but instead of knocking enemies out, you'll mutilate them with extreme prejudice (see sidebar). After you've seen the limited number of cinematic kills, however, you'll start wondering what, besides story line closure, your motivation is for playing through this game. All the constant hiding and tiptoeing and sneaking doesn't scream "action-packed!" after all.

But *Manhunt*'s still worth the trip down death row because of its solid engine (with great controls, camera, interface, and radar), intense and scary atmosphere, and hours of gameplay (it lasts a lot longer than you'd expect)—what's here is really well developed and finely polished. Plus, about halfway through, you get to shoot a lot more guns, which helps pick up the initially slow pace.

DEMIAN: Videogame-hating Senator Joe Lieberman, your wildest dream—the one that ends with you covered in Gatorade, carried off on the shoulders of jubilant, doddering legislators and soccer moms—is about to come true. Rockstar has gone and made a game so ultraviolent that for kids to be able to walk into most any store and buy it really is criminal. Shoe might congratulate the guys at Rockstar for pushing the envelope, but I'm calling bulls*** on that. Rockstar's just been paying close attention to the media-outrage-

Killer Scenes

You're no James Bond or Jackie Chan, so rather than fighting scores of bad guys with guns or kung fu in the beginning, you'll have to sneak up and eliminate them silently one by one with everyday objects. After all, the game does set you up to be on the sucker's end of a dangerous cat-and-mouse game.

Every weapon has three kill levels, each one taking longer to set up but giving you a higher score and a more violent cut-scene. A basic glass shard attack, for example, is a quick poke to the neck. A level-three glass shard attack, however, is several squishy stabs in the eyes. Later on, you'll get crowbars, baseball bats, machetes, chain saws, nail guns, and more.

Yeah, don't let your kids play this one.

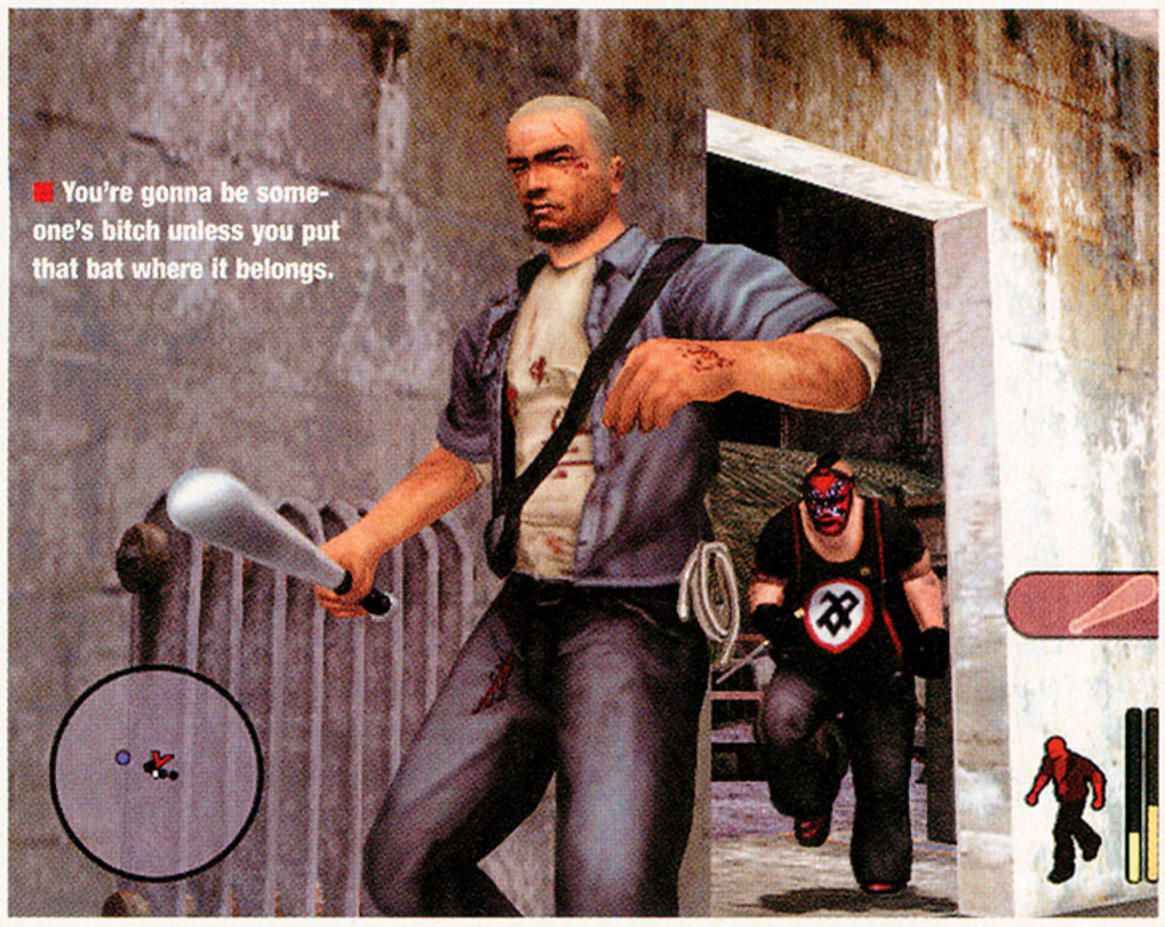
As in the *Time Crisis* series and *kill.switch*, you can hide behind cover until you're ready to peek around and unleash a hail of bullets—or just one to the head.

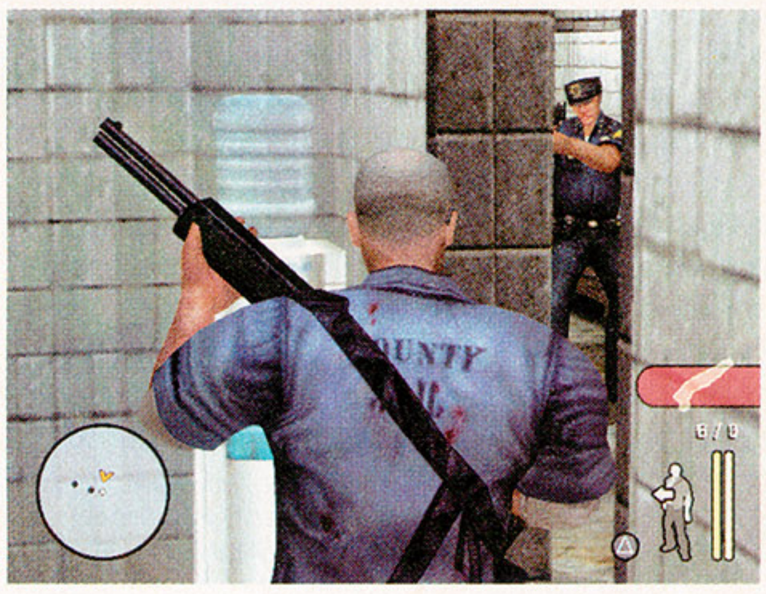
Good: Killer atmosphere. Har har
Bad: Lots of slow-paced sneaking around and hiding
Finally: Another game besides *GTA* to blame for society's ills

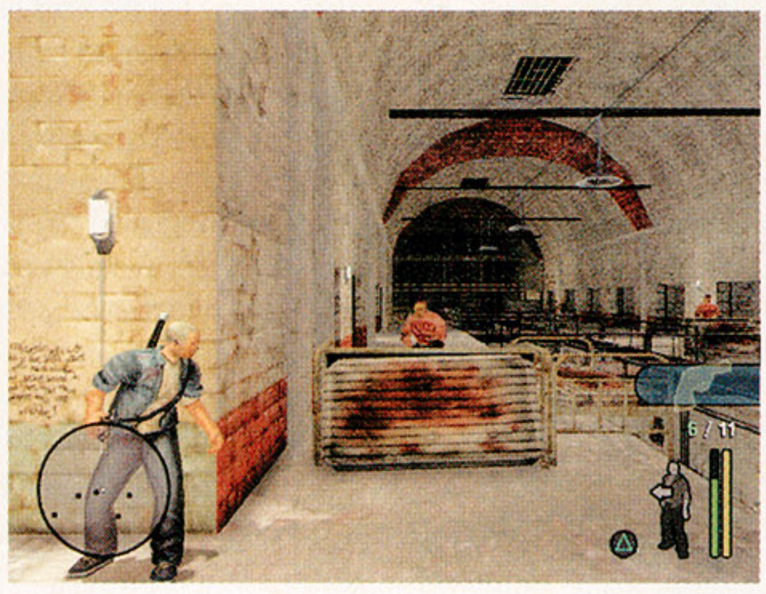
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHOE	DEMIAN	SCOOTER
	7.0	6.5	7.0

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

www.rockstargames.com







equals-money-in-our-bank phenomenon.

Not that *Manhunt* doesn't have some good points. It starts slowly and almost demands repetition (hide, lure your foes near, then sneak in for the kill), but it's intense, building up a real feeling of dread as you play. The later levels are much more fun (thanks in part to beefier weaponry), and the enemy A.I. gets noticeably smarter.

Manhunt is also probably the most cinematic—in a good way—and immersive game that I've ever played. The graphics are intentionally grainy and washed out, as if everything you're seeing is captured on cheap digital video. But the difference is, games aren't movies: *I'm* controlling the dude. I don't actually want to jam a shard of glass into another guy's eye or decapitate some fool with a serrated garrote, but *Manhunt* demands it. That kind of violence is one thing in a movie theater when the whole audience is laughing. But in my living room, with my girlfriend looking at me like I just drop-kicked a baby? No thanks.

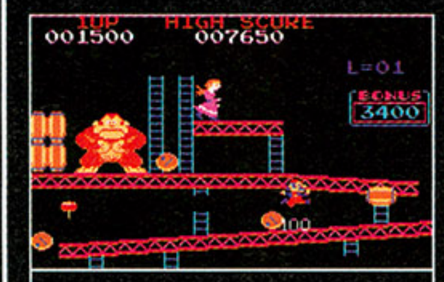
OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: After seeing *Manhunt* through to its grisly end, this feels more like a confession than a review. I wholly admit that *Manhunt* has utterly desensitized me at this point. After witnessing too many shankings, gougings, and sawings, I had to watch some innocent children's programming or I would have become an even more emotionally disturbed game reviewer.

I must concede, however, that Rockstar North has crafted a solid, yet unoriginal, stealth-action game. But just when I was starting to get bored of the repetitive, gory deaths, the plot twists and different mission types kept me hooked on killing. The A.I. is pretty dumb at first, but the intelligent (and morally questionable) gang you encounter later makes up for the earlier louts. If you play only the first part of *Manhunt*, you'll grow bored, but by the end, I'm forced to confess...I actually enjoyed the overall experience.

Great Moments in Videogame Depravity

You've come a long way, baby. But how much further can you go?

INCREASINGLY MORE DEPRAVED



DONKEY KONG
Titular Kong kidnaps Mario's hapless lady friend.

1981

MORTAL KOMBAT
Kano rips out Johnny Cage's still-beating heart.

1992

NIGHT TRAP
Drill (like Black & Decker) into a woman's neck, drain blood.

1993

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
Beat up hookers and hoods before the fuzz guns you down.

2001

MANHUNT
Decapitate a crooked cop and put his head on your belt. Yes.

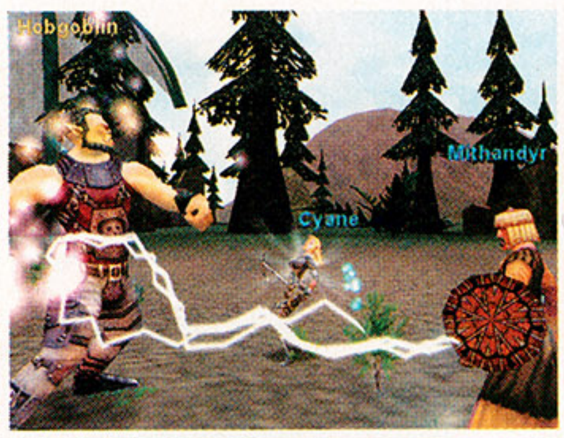
2003

Remember, the giant undead centipede is more afraid of you than you are of it. Or not.

PlayStation 2 ONLINE

EVERQUEST ONLINE ADVENTURES: FRONTIERS

On empty servers, no one can hear you scream



Frontiers offers an expanded bestiary that includes hobgoblins and Santa-headed griffons.

Good: High-level characters will dig the new horizons
Bad: The drudgery it takes to get to those levels
Includes: Full version of the original *EQ Online Adventures*

JENNIFER: Revisiting *EQOA*'s online world with this expansion, I really hoped to find a healthy community of roleplayers at all levels to join me in my mock-medieval adventure. I figured that, almost a year after *EQOA*'s initial release, this community just had to be there. Instead, I wandered the same lonely hills—many times as the only person for miles—killing beetles, ants, and the odd rabid badger while I imagined how much better this game must get at higher levels. Newbies have to invest upward of 15 hours in the same boring location until they can even look past their starting area, and without a couple other freaks to keep it lively, this dull intro phase will seriously deter anyone but the hardcore.

But the hardcore do have a solid game to play, with noticeably improved graphics, plus new locations, monsters, and loot. The new Tradeskill system (in which you craft your own items) also adds depth for serious players. Getting mad experience points and rare magical items for killing some hideous high-level beast lurking in its hidden lair is still fundamentally addictive—too bad it's so hard to get that far.

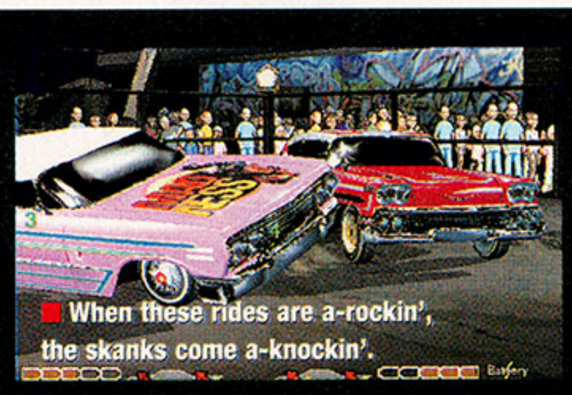
KEVIN: *EQ* has never been a game that people *choose* to play, exactly. Instead, the game chooses its players: You either cheerfully log hundreds of hours to build that coveted level-54 monk or you wonder what the fuss is all about. *Frontiers* fixes many of the problems online-RPG nuts pinned on the original *Online Adventures*—you can build items, there's more customization, and the graphics are slightly improved. The gameplay's still boredom defined, though, so unless you're already into the *EQOA* community, you're probably better off avoiding this slippery slope.

GAMENOW—MIGUEL: *Frontiers*' biggest problem really has nothing to do with the game itself. It's a respectable RPG that was impressively shoehorned onto PS2. It's got a deep character-development system, its world is vast and varied, and this expansion offers a lot of new content for veteran players. The problem, really, is its future competition. See, this is the kind of game that you have to sink many, many hours into, so you might just want to wait for the vastly superior *Final Fantasy XI*.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	JENNIFER	KEVIN	MIGUEL
	6.5	6.0	7.0

Publisher: Sony Online Ent.
Developer: Sony Online Ent.
Players: Massively multiplayer
ESRB: Teen

www.everquest.com



When these rides are a-rockin', the skanks come a-knockin'.

PlayStation 2

LOWRIDER

The lowdown on lowmobiling

Forty hours and $2,000 later, the car is worth $300 less.

Good: Unintentionally funny
Bad: Not much to the gameplay, really
Best Played On: An in-dash PS2

SHAWN: Until now, niños too young to drive and too poor to pay for hydraulics have had to settle for pimpin' out bicycles before working their way up to proper lowriders. No more, mis amigos. *Lowrider* gives the little guys a jump start on the luxurious lifestyle. Starting with an antique beater, you impress kids in the barrio with baby bounces, slowly build a reputation, and collect cheddar. Plentiful upgrades allow you to express ill creativity: Who wouldn't want a colorful mural of the Virgin of Guadalupe gracing their hood?

Too bad the gameplay isn't half as mind-blowing. The secret to success is as simple as repeatedly pounding buttons on cue. That's it, and that's all, so if you're entertaining the thought of lowmobiling on your lonesome (you fool), feel free to subtract as many points from my score as you'd like. But as far as jokes go, what's funnier than a hopping car with smoke colored to match the Mexican flag billowing from its grill? Plus, the multiplayer modes are the stuff that drinking games are made of (not that I'm endorsing such irresponsible behavior or anything).

DEMIAN: Don't let the technically above-average score fool you—this game is awful. And also totally hilarious. Once you figure out when to mash the buttons, well, you've plumbed the depths of gameplay. But I *dare* you not to laugh at the sight of two chromed-out ghetto sleds hopping like they've got pogo sticks for wheels. If the NFL canned the crap dance number and had a lowrider competition during the Super Bowl halftime show, America's collective face would be thoroughly rocked. When *Lowrider* hits the bargain bin, you better get in on that.

CJ: The only way I would recommend this game is if it were sitting in Demian's bargain bin (or dumpster) for under $10. Even then I'd mull it over for several minutes. Controlling the hydraulics on tricked-out G-rides to make them shimmy and shake for points in front of a crowd of barely moving cardboard cutouts is weaksauce. Gameplay, graphics, sound, you name it...bad. Ridiculous loading screens and a cheesy intro movie provide the game's only entertainment value—unintentional humor.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHAWN	DEMIAN	CJ
	5.0	5.5	2.0

Publisher: Jaleco
Developer: PCCW-Japan
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Teen

www.jaleco.com

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■ This could actually be a screen from *.hack Part 3*...and you'd never know.

■ PlayStation 2

.HACK PART 4: QUARANTINE

It's finally over!

Good: Engaging story, lots of bonuses after finishing
Bad: Exploration and fighting are just plain dull
Prerequisites: *.hack* parts 1-3

KEVIN: *Quarantine* is difficult to review by itself. It's the closing volume of a four-disc RPG saga, so if you haven't played the last three, you'd be daft to start now...but if you *have* played the whole series, then you'll likely want to finish it up.

In terms of gameplay, at least, *Quarantine* is unchanged from the previous two volumes. There are some new treasures to find, and an extra game world's been unlocked to explore, but the repetitive battles and plain-Jane graphics are still in full effect. The misbalanced challenge from *Part 3* is still there, too, but this volume seems slightly easier than before—magic users are now stupidly powerful for some reason, so bring one or two along to avoid headaches.

Quarantine is the shortest volume in all *.hack*-dom, and most of it is spent running errands, but the final battle (which is spoiled in the pack-in anime DVD) is a great payoff if you've been following the story all this time. I'd be hard-pressed to recommend the *.hack* series in general—it just plods too much—but this climax makes *Quarantine* worth the muddle to fans who've seen it through this far.

SHANE: I hate to be the guy who says "I told you so," but hey, after playing the samey second chapter of *.hack*, I could tell that this four-part series was running on empty. *Quarantine* offers more of the same tedious dungeon hacking, boring battles, and faux online interface that you've been playing for a year now. The molasses-slow story line finally reaches its surprisingly cool climax, but at this point, the rote gameplay has probably lulled 75 percent of the initial fans into abandoning the series. *.hack* really, really should have just been one game.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GARY: Here we go again: Another few months, another *.hack* review—and once again, my two pals just don't get it. Sure, it's more of the same. But unlike Shane and Kevin, I'm more than happy to return to *.hack*'s trippy, intense world. Now, don't get me wrong: If you didn't care for any of the past three chapters, then *Quarantine* won't change a thing. Truth be told, I did suffer from a bit of *.hack* fatigue by the end, but I still maintain that the overall experience is well worth the time (and money).

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	KEVIN	SHANE	GARY
	6.5	4.0	8.0

Publisher: Bandai
Developer: CyberConnect 2
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.dothack.com

■ Xbox ONLINE

CARVE

This turkey

■ Shaving your back for an aerodynamic edge? Now that's extreme.

Good: At 20 dollars, it's dirt cheap...
Bad: ...but you get what you pay for
This Game Came: From outta nowhere

SHAWN: If you had to "borrow" this mag from your neighbor's mailbox, *Carve* might be for you. A no frills, no thrills watercraft racer, this game proves that even budget-ware can look sharp on Xbox. Sea spray mists the screen as you slalom past buoys and scythe through surf in colorful courses that include arctic ice floes, Amazonian mangroves, and sun-bleached Pacific shores. Yet, with the exception of online play, *Carve* offers nothing you haven't seen every other jetski game do better. Tricks are either idiotic—whoa! He's riding with one hand—or so difficult to perform that they're useless. If I'm gonna take the trouble to tap Up, Down, X, Y, X, Y during a half-second hang time, it better make my opponent's head implode.

It gets even sillier when you discover that it's easier to take first place in all but one of the tournaments by avoiding ramps and stunts altogether, even with the speed burst the latter generates. Still, if you're strapped for cash and sick of *Splashdown*, there are worse ways to spend your loot.

JENNIFER: This game is fundamentally unremarkable. It's neither all that terrible nor all that great—it just sort of...is. The environments and water sure look nice, but the screen gets too cluttered with water droplets on the camera and the visual effect that accompanies your Rush boost. Plus, the boost is almost worthless in many races; you're better off just running a clean, efficient course with your pedal to the metal the whole way. Props to the mildly amusing Xbox Live component, although communication gets clunky, since you can speak to only your closest opponent.

CJ: *Carve* sports instinctive control, a decent tricks system, eye-catching visuals, plenty of well-designed tracks, and enjoyable Xbox Live play (it's almost worth it for that alone). But two things sour the solo game for me. First off, catching the wakes of opponents slows you down too much—it's as if your engine suddenly stalled out. Second, the difficulty is too unforgiving. A.I. foes run perfect lines and they seem to always boost when you do, canceling out the edge you would've gained from that just-performed trick.

■ *Carve*'s future as a franchise isn't nearly as bright as these screens.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHAWN	JENNIFER	CJ
	5.0	6.5	6.5

Publisher: Gotham
Developer: Argonaut
Players: 1-4 (1-8 via Xbox Live)
ESRB: Everyone

www.gothamgames.com

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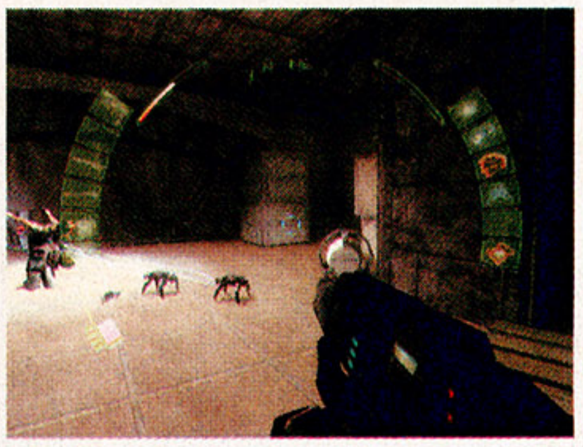
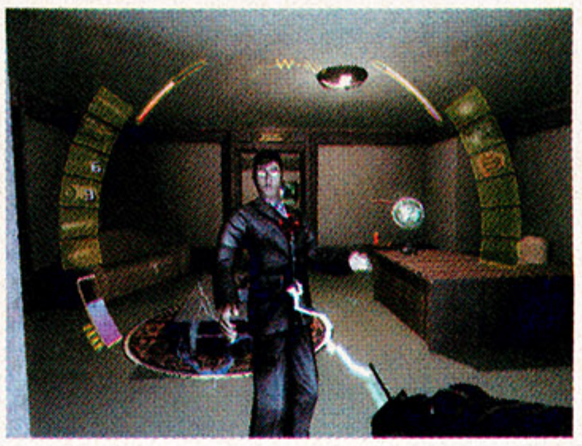
Deus Ex's regular gunplay isn't as fun as *Halo*'s, but you'll have plenty of chances to snipe or set enemies on fire.





Xbox

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

SILVER

Knights of the New Republic

JOE: No doubt about it, the best thing about *Deus Ex* is its freedom of choice. This cyberpunk first-person adventure presents you with an astounding number of decisions. For instance, say the bigwigs in the WTO want you to snag something from the vault of a VIP's home. You could bribe the building's janitor to get the door code, break in, or convince the VIP at a bar that you're going to prepare drinks back at his place. To get past the security devices, you might sneak past cameras, take over the gun turret by the stairs with a special ability, or just blast everything. It's up to you.

The only problem with the game's wealth of choices is that you rarely realize all the options open to you until you've already picked one. Between that and the fact that the missions rarely branch too far, you'll find little need to discover all of *Invisible War*'s nuances. Even so, your journey won't disappoint: This gorgeous futuristic world demands exploration, and the story is intriguing enough to compel you forward. Just be prepared for long loading times, somewhat clunky combat, a crappy mapping system, and weak finales.

If you're looking for another unconventional RPG now that you've explored every possible nook and cranny in *Knights of the Old Republic*, you should check out *Invisible War*, but it's definitely the padawan to *KOTOR*'s Jedi master.

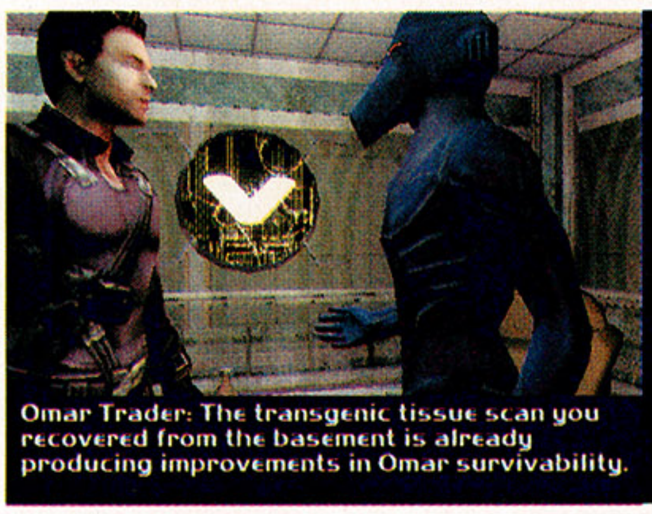
SHOE: The developers didn't put a game on this Xbox disc—they crammed an entire world onto it. Like *Morrowind*, this is a huge, open-ended, do-anything-you-want adventure that sucks you in and holds you a willing prisoner until you almost forget you're playing a videogame. The story line is rich and complex in that twisty "whom can/should/will I trust?" sorta way. And no matter what you do—whether you kill characters you shouldn't be killing or tackle objectives in a counterintuitive manner—the game is always ready for it, giving you endless options to take it on however you'd like.

To test out how well-designed *Invisible War* is, I played the Cairo level through twice, skipping goals and doing stuff out of order the second time. You know what? It knew exactly what I was doing and guided me along as if I'd done nothing unusual. This is a truly great, immersive experience only hampered by poor enemy A.I.

BRYAN: As Joe stated, *Invisible War* is all about choices. Well, here's the big choice: Should you buy it? Weigh the positives and negatives. Here's the good: The story unravels like a thrilling mystery novel where *you* determine the outcome. Better yet, you won't fully realize the consequences of your actions until the ending. And with such open-ended gameplay and a stockpile of side quests, your time spent playin' *Invisible War* will vary greatly from your friends'. Now for the bad: The game suffers from questionable A.I., frequent and lengthy loading times, and some horribly choppy graphics. If you can look past these technical hiccups, *Invisible War* shouldn't disappoint.

A More Perfect Machine

Throughout *Invisible War*, you'll buy, steal, or earn biomodifying devices (biomods for short). Legal mods, such as thermal masking (which makes you invisible to cameras and machines) and health-restoring regeneration, are useful, but aren't nearly as handy as black market items like a computer-overriding neural interface or the self-explanatory bot domination.



Omar Trader: The transgenic tissue scan you recovered from the basement is already producing improvements in Omar survivability.

Warring Factions

A war rages on—even if you can't see it—and several rival groups would love to have you on their side. The religious Order, the corporate-minded WTO, the genetically altered Omar, and the anti-biomod extremists of the Knights Templar tend to have goals that cause them to work at cross-purposes with one another…and there may even be other organizations at work behind the scenes. Work for them—or decide that you're a better man than The Man and work for yourself.

Talk first or shoot? It's an age-old gaming question.

Good: Much to see and do. And pick up and throw.
Bad: Long...loading...times....
For Fans of: The *Shadowrun* games for Super NES and Genesis

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOE	SHOE	BRYAN
8.0	9.0	7.0

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Ion Storm
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

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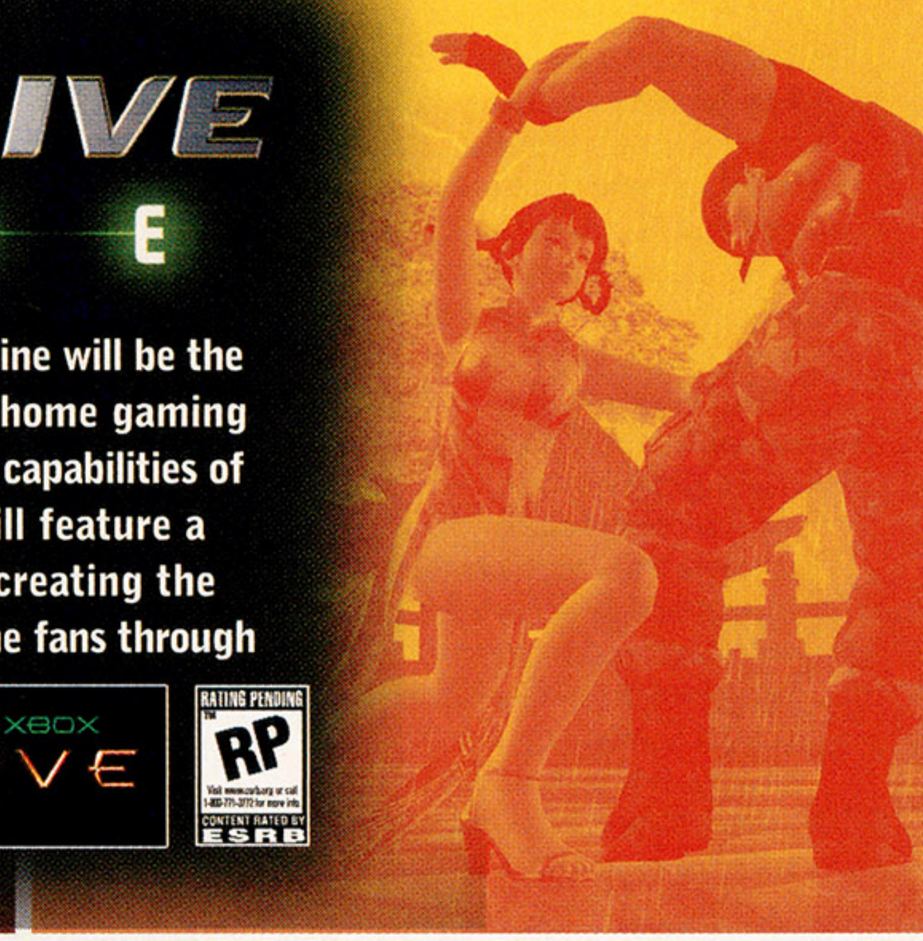

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Xbox ONLINE

COUNTER-STRIKE

Less of a strike, more of a hit-by-pitch

MARK: What there is of *Counter-Strike* is OK—it's a simple, decent online shooter. The problem is how little of it there actually is. With a measly two play modes and no real solo campaign, it's hard to believe Microsoft expects anyone to pay $50 for what feels like one-third of a game.

The one area *Counter-Strike* doesn't skimp on is the number of cool levels it offers: indoor, outdoor, banks, villages, Mayan temples—there's a great variety of locations, all with plenty of interconnecting paths and nuances to learn. But, again, with only two modes to choose from (hostage rescue and plant-the-bomb), the game itself grows stale before the levels do. It doesn't help that single player is multiplayer, just with the computer A.I. controlling the other combatants. These bots are pretty smart (save for the occasional wall-humping hiccups), but playing by yourself gets repetitive within the first few hours anyway.

I have minor quibbles with other aspects of the game. The controls are solid and easy to master, but for a shooter with such an emphasis on realism, the lack of some moves (like lean, lie prone, and crawl) seems a bit odd. Also, graphics and animation range from merely decent to poor.

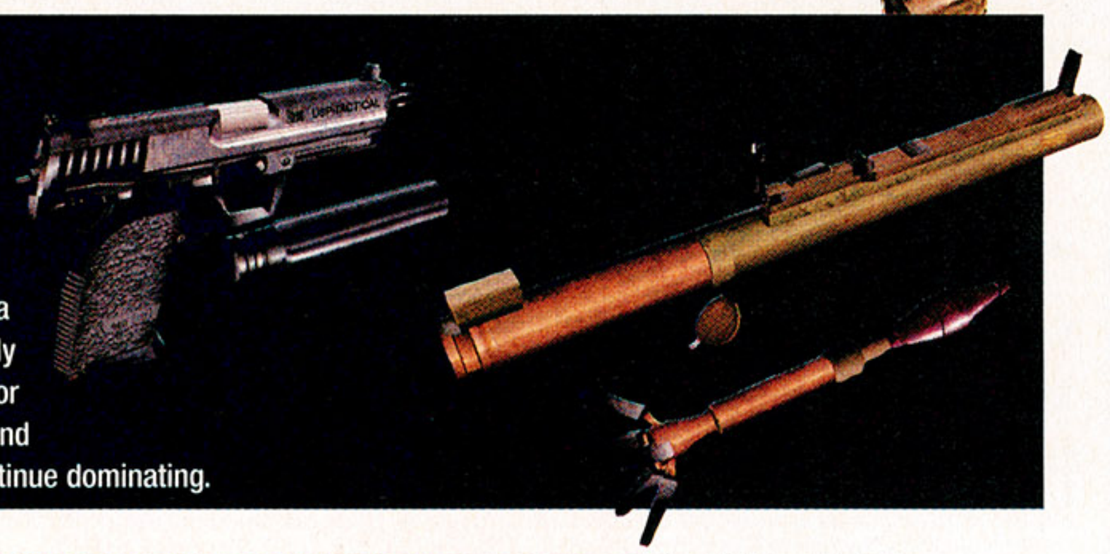
As the online multiplayer part of a kick-ass single-player game or with a buttload more modes or as a $20 budget title, I could recommend *Strike*. As is, there are just too many other quality shooters out there for anyone to waste their money on this.

CRISPIN: If you've already liberated squad-shooter *Rainbow Six 3* from your local game store, don't bother securing *Counter-Strike*; its bare-bones, online-only (solo play with A.I. bots is a bore) tactical action makes it expendable in the war of the war games. That's not to say it's lean on gung-ho thrills—the game unleashes a double-barrel blast of realistic weaponry and twitch gameplay. You will sweat bullets in many tense gunfights. But the fun fizzles fast. *Counter-Strike* needs more mission types, more weapons, more customizability—it just needs more more. Most levels are blocky, blah, and look like they were made to run on a low-powered PC (which they were). There's a reason *Counter-Strike* is free for PC. Microsoft should take the hint and give this away with Xbox Live subscriptions.

XBN—CHE: As a *Counter-Strike* PC vet, I must admit that this Xbox port comes as a deafening disappointment. It isn't that I don't appreciate the new features—console-exclusive maps and de facto voice chat via the headset—but shockingly little has been done to improve (or evolve) *Counter-Strike* beyond its garage-gaming roots as a *Half-Life* mod on PC. It's still a landmark title, but this new version fails to incorporate advancements made by recent tactical shooters such as *SOCOM II* and *Rainbow Six 3*. That said, what's here is still surprisingly solid, from a gameplay standpoint. Great controls and a balanced weapon system make it instantly clear why *Counter-Strike* is the world's most popular online shooter.

The Price Ain't Right

You need to buy all your equipment each round in *Counter-Strike* with money you earn from killing enemies or accomplishing objectives. Kevlar armor, smoke or regular grenades, rifles, pistols, even ammo—everything has a price. And you can purchase equipment only at certain spots and for a limited amount of time. This unique system is really a mixed bag—it provides a nice bonus incentive for playing smart, but it's a pain to deal with each round and it makes it easier for the winning team to continue dominating.



Good: Smooth controls, tons of great levels to fight in
Bad: A paltry two play modes
Play Instead: *Rainbow Six 3*

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	MARK	CRISPIN	CHE
	5.0	5.0	7.0

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Valve
Players: 1 (2-16 Online via Xbox Live)
ESRB: Mature

www.xbox.com

■ Just in case the game hasn't already put you to sleep....

■ Pikachu enjoys simple pleasures—he'll gleefully watch your fingertip as it moves in for a gentle caress of his silky fur.

■ GameCube

POKÉMON CHANNEL

57 channels and nothin' on

Good: Pikachu's a cute li'l bastard
Bad: Watching the Pichu Bros. animated short over and over
Use to: Keep little brother busy while you play something else

CJ: I cannot idly stand by while this once-great series is turned into a toddler-only playland sideshow. Seriously, Nintendo needs to stop making *Pokémon* spin-offs aimed at babies (see: *Pokémon Snap* and *Hey You, Pikachu!* for Nintendo 64). *Channel* is the worst offender yet; it's a simplistic bore of a "game" where you watch Pikachu as he watches channel after uninteresting channel of virtual *Pokémon* programming over and over. Or, should you tire of the game's "watch as much TV and buy as many *Pokémon* products as humanly possible" concept, you can also fiddle around with a virtual Pokémon Mini game system or watch Pikachu cavort around your house and the surrounding areas. But none of that is much fun either.

My question is, who is this game for? Its main attraction is a Pichu Bros. animated short (that you have to watch over and over) clearly made to enchant kids ages 3 to 5. But then, *Channel*'s got a lot of text and directions those tots won't get, and anyone older will avoid it because it's a baby game. Maybe I'm being too hard on it, but I'd cancel my cable if this *Channel* came on.

MARK: The Bible was wrong. Hell does not look like a giant lake of fire. Hell looks like Smoochum Shape-Up, a typical program from *Pokémon Channel,* where you watch a Pillsbury Doughboy in drag grind through hip-slimming aerobics while uttering high-pitched squeals. Unlike *Pokémon Snap* or *Pinball*, *Channel* isn't...well it's not really a game. Playing catch with Pikachu or guessing which Pokémon is behind a curtain is about as interactive as it gets; mostly, you just collect Pokécrap and watch Pikachu watch insanely repetitive, horrifically annoying TV. Do not buy this for yourself or your kids or anyone you know—you do not ever want to be in a room where it's being played.

GAMENOW—PHIL: Here's the deal with *Channel*—it's not really a game, per se. It's more of a virtual pet crossed with one of those "edutainment" PC deals (like Humongous' *Putt-Putt* or *Pajama Sam* titles). Any *Pokémon* fan over the age of 5 will quickly become very bored, but it's a decent game for parents to play with their small children (tykes will need help with all the reading). The various diversions here are cute, slickly produced, and entertaining, assuming you really, really dig *Pokémon.*

■ What's that Pikachu? Are you trying to tell us something, boy?

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)			
3.5	2.0	6.0	
CJ	MARK	PHIL	

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Ambrella
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.pokemon.com

■ *Mana*'s hero is gonna smoke this weed.

■ GBA

SWORD OF MANA

A little rusty after all these years

■ (Left) When the Easter egg hunt went violently awry, only one kid was equipped to fight back.

Good: Lush visuals
Bad: Unclear objectives, poor A.I.
Remake of: *Final Fantasy Adventure* for old-school Game Boy

SHANE: The *Mana* action-RPG series has had its highs (like *Secret of Mana* for Super NES) and its depressing lows (steer clear of the clunky *Legend of Mana* for PS1), but this latest installment falls into a more nebulous "pretty good" territory.

Visually, it's one of the most stunning games on GBA—beautifully painted backdrops, fluid animations, and cool effects fill the screen with life and color. *Sword* also delivers suitably epic sounds, with a quality soundtrack packed with rousing fanfares and catchy melodies. And the story line, while not terribly original, is interesting enough to keep you questing.

So really, it's the gameplay that drags the experience down. Running around thwacking enemies feels fun enough, but poor A.I. renders your other party member nearly useless—you'll often have to switch between them just to keep them from getting killed. Also, many events and puzzles are tough to trigger (due to the seemingly random day/night cycle), and upgrading equipment requires a Master's degree in metallurgy and botany. Worth a look for fans, but overall, it should have been better.

PAUL: The rewarding action and story that made previous *Mana* games great return, but they're nearly drowned by this prequel's ridiculous complexity. Get out the graph paper: Eight weapons and eight types of magic do varying damage (sometimes zip!) to each of 120 enemies. Upgrading weapons is a five-step process that involves dozens of items and even the current *day of the week* in the game. *Sword*'s monster thumping and epic story line are sometimes sublime, but honestly, it makes you work far too hard for them.

GMR—MILKMAN: *Sword* is a functional and attractive action-RPG that works well as a multiplayer game—it's quite fun to link up and run through lavish environments while engaging in simple hack-n-slash combat. But if you don't have a human being to team up with, you're screwed. The CPU pathfinding A.I. is lousy (read: your pal gets stuck on everything), and the weapon management baffles with an unintuitive, inefficient menu-heavy system. It's better to stick with *Zelda* for action-RPG thrills.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	SHANE	PAUL	MILKMAN
	6.5	6.5	5.0

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Square Enix
Players: 1 (1-2 w/ Link cable)
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com

■ GBA

YU YU HAKUSHO: SPIRIT DETECTIVE

How to misuse a lucrative anime license

■ Fight your way through legions of *Scooby-Doo* zombie rejects.

Good: Follows the show's opening saga
Bad: Boring, repetitive, nonsensical gameplay
WTF: Apartments with dozens of identical rooms

CJ: At least the *Dragon Ball Z* action-RPGs for GBA are decent games. *Yu Yu Hakusho* sure isn't. It's pure boredom harnessed in cartridge form.

Each lackluster chapter has you (as one of the beloved anime's characters) running from one side of the current area to the other, often back and forth, doing whatever inane thing it is you need to do to save someone or collect something. Kill a few enemies, maybe fight a boss, and then the chapter ends. Repeat 20-plus times.

Yu Yu's intriguing story line is condensed to the point of being nonsensical, and if you're not familiar with the anime, you have no hope of making heads or tails of it. The areas are so sprawling that simply getting around is a chore, and combat is so tedious and busted that it feels like nothing but a formality so you can level up. And as for the visuals...yuck: *Yu Yu* looks as if it were crafted by a crack team of 5-year-olds armed with only three crayons and a fading memory of what the anime actually looks like. It doesn't matter if you love the show or the comics on which it's based—this game sucks.

KEVIN: If I were a Supreme Court justice, I would issue an immediate restraining order against *Yu Yu Hakusho*. It shouldn't be allowed within 50 feet of anybody's GBA. Four questions come to mind here: Why is Yusuke fetching items in huge, mazelike towns without a map? Why do all the characters look like they're constructed out of pipe cleaners? Why is fighting so dull and annoying when thrilling battle scenes are the original anime's chief attraction? And most importantly, why would anybody want to play this?

GAMENOW—PHIL: When the best thing you can say about an anime-based game is that it's faithful to its source material, you're in trouble. Unfortunately, that's all *Yu Yu Hakusho* has to offer. Fans of the series will enjoy the fact that the game closely follows the plot of the show's first saga. Too bad they'll have to cope with ugly graphics, poor control, and sloppy combat along the way. And although the anime is pretty exciting, the dull quests will help you forget that. This is a quick cash-in and nothing more.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	CJ	KEVIN	PHIL
	2.0	1.5	3.0

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Sensory Sweep
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

us.atari.com

■ Not the water cooler! Will these fiends stop at *nothing*?

■ *Max Payne*'s violence (above) and gritty story (below) survive miniaturization.

■ GBA

MAX PAYNE

Bullet time in your back pocket

Good: Spoken dialogue on GBA!
Bad: Far too difficult in parts
Quote: "Twilight crawled across the sky, laden with foreboding."

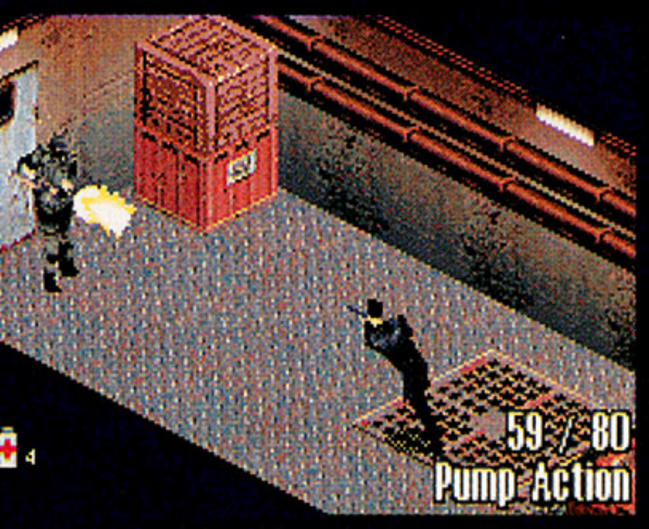
PAUL: Bang! *Max Payne*'s slow-mo bloodshed and stark story have come to GBA. The world-weary cop narrates his grisly tale with voiceover as flat as roadkill. Nearly every character is a murderer, murdered, or both. By the time Max leaves a room, bad guys' guts decorate its walls like grim, wet tapestries. *Pokémon* it ain't.

It ain't easy, either. Foes frequently fire from offscreen, so you'll need to spend bullet time (your only advantage) just to live long enough to locate them. Instant-death hazards such as pitfalls and flame jets are annoying and unthematic—if you can't shoot it, does it belong in *Max Payne*? But you can retry a level from its beginning any number of times, so tenacious players will prevail...eventually.

Despite these flaws, this game offers an atmospheric experience unlike any other Game Boy Advance title. I welcome a portable game with a moody, cinematic story devoid of precocious big-headed heroes and anthropomorphic animals. Gritty and unforgiving, *Max* will make your Game Boy bleed *fun*—if you can stand the pain.

JON D: Believe it or not, *Max Payne*'s trademark bullet time is even more of a necessary gimmick in this quasi-port of the blood-soaked console hit. Since bad guys see you coming and start firing from offscreen, I had to mechanically force myself into preemptive slow-mo diving rolls when exploring uncharted ground to prevent painful perforation. But lots of pleasure still comes with *Payne*—its levels are long and numerous, and it delivers solid, no-frills action throughout.

JOHN R: Rockstar has somehow managed to retain the core elements of what made the original *Max Payne* so good—namely the slow-mo bullet-time gunplay and the gritty atmosphere—in this surprisingly solid handheld shooter. Diving through the air in slow motion with a pair of Berettas to take out a room full of thugs is exhilarating to say the least, and it looks much better on GBA than you'd expect. The forced perspective can be a bit limiting at times, and enemies who haven't yet spotted you are dumb as bricks (blow a guy's head off from a distance, and his friend won't even flinch), but otherwise, my complaints are few.



■ (Right) Stoic and squinty-eyed as always (we assume), Max is captured by those responsible for his wife's death.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)			
7.0	7.0	8.0	
PAUL	JON D.	JOHN R.	

Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Möbius
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.rockstargames.com

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

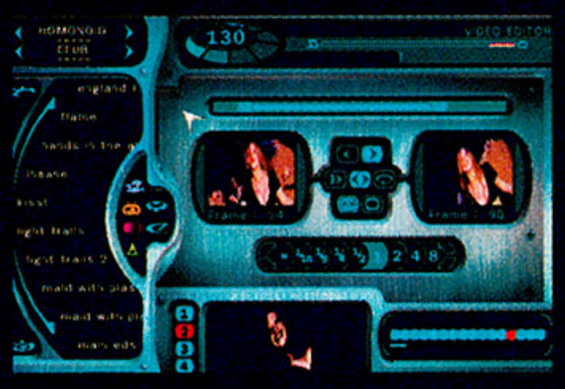
A useful catchall for games too late, too lame, or too little-known to make it into the Crew

We always try to squeeze every last game into the Review Crew, but a few games inevitably seem to slip through the cracks. This month, we tackle the Xbox rerelease of *Grand Theft Auto* (you already know it's great), the second wave of N-Gage titles, and a handful of oddball releases that might strike your fancy.

Intellivision Lives!

PS2, XB • Crave • ESRB: Everyone

Only people who owned an Intellivision console at one point in their lives will give half a damn about this compilation of dinosaurs that 99 percent of you never heard of. For fans, the sports games (remember *Football*?), *Snafu*, and *Utopia* are great inclusions, but a clunky interface plus the exclusion of *BurgerTime* and any *Dungeons & Dragons* games spoils the package.



Funkmaster Flex's Digital Hitz Factory

PS2 • XS Games • ESRB: Teen — You wanna patrol the twelves, but when you grab the crossfader, it's chaos. Enter *Factory*, the PS2 equivalent to PC mixing programs like *Acid*, complete with a mic. It's a bit difficult to use, but deep as heck.

King of Fighters EX2: Howling Blood

GBA • Atlus • ESRB: Teen — It's a sad testament to just how outdated the Neo•Geo hardware is when GBA ports are nearly arcade-perfect. *Howling Blood* looks and plays roughly the same as the recent *KOF 2000/2001* pack for PS2.

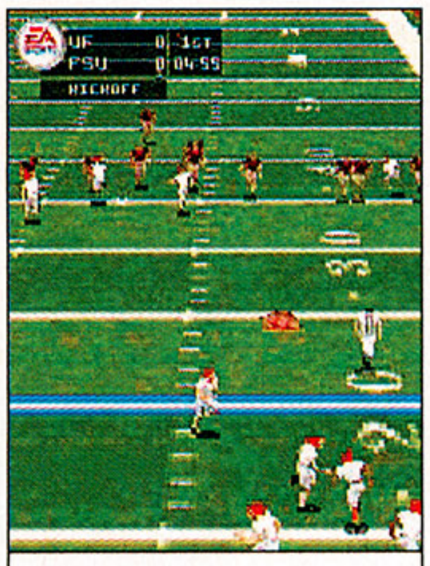
Grand Theft Auto Double Pack

XB • Rockstar • ESRB: Mature — So, you Xbox players been dying to get a hold of the games that started the whole go-anywhere, do-anything, putz-around-and-listen-to-music genre? Rockstar finally delivers in style. The Xbox Double Pack offers faster loading times, smoother, more polished graphics, custom soundtracks, and other minor tweaks—and that's about it. Otherwise, you'll find the games as criminally enjoyable as always, although PS2 veterans will have some difficulty adjusting to the controls. Hey, the ultimate version of two of the best games of the last two years for the price of one—you can't beat that. Plus, it gives your PS2 buddies one less thing to brag about.

N-GAGE ROUNDUP

FIFA Soccer 2004

N-Gage • EA Sports • ESRB: Everyone — You won't find much to complain about with this footyball game. The controls are very accurate and responsive, and you can see all the tiny action just fine—it's like playing classic, pre-PlayStation 1 *FIFA* games, only on a television made for the Smurfs.

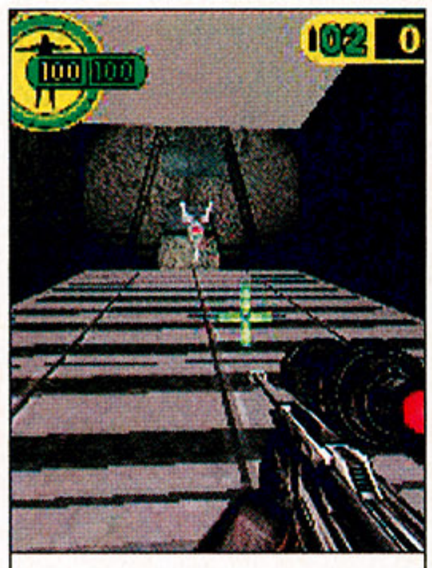


NCAA Football 2004

N-Gage • EA Sports • ESRB: Everyone — At first glance, EA's portable college gridiron looks passable. It has all your favorite schools, a deep season mode, and even multiplayer action. Too bad the on-field passing action is horribly flawed—it's nearly impossible to distinguish open receivers from those covered.

Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc

N-Gage • Ubisoft • ESRB: Everyone — Bravo to Ubisoft for successfully porting the enjoyable GBA version of *Rayman 3* over to the taco phone. It looks, sounds, and plays perfectly fine, although the overly simplistic Bluetooth multiplayer minigames won't hold your interest for long.



Red Faction

N-Gage • THQ • ESRB: Mature — Bad controls are the real oppressors here, not the cruel overseers of Mars' mining facilities. It's nearly impossible to shoot while strafing, and jumping over chasms is a chore. Predominantly brown labyrinths that look like fudge tunnels are just as revolting.

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell

N-Gage • Ubisoft • ESRB: Teen — Sam Fisher skulks his way through the same side-scrolling spy missions he faced on GBA. From lock-picking to sniping, most of the smoothly animated agent's moves remain intact. Plus, a sticky-cam feature (which lets you look ahead) makes playing on a narrow screen bearable.

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REVIEWS ARCHIVE

A look back at recent game ratings

greatest hit or miss?

METROID PRIME

- GameCube
- Released: November 2002
- Original Scores: 10, 10, 10

"An absolute masterpiece" is what one *EGM* reviewer called *Metroid Prime*. Developer Retro Studios beautifully transitioned the series to a 3D setting and first-person view while retaining *Metroid*'s classic gameplay elements. It's a must-have, for sure.

MASCOT RIVALRY

Mario and Sonic are both household names in the land of gaming. But when you look at *EGM* review scores of each character's games over the years, it looks like Nintendo's mustachioed mascot has the advantage over Sega's bright blue speed freak.

■ Mario
Average Review
Score: 8.92

■ Sonic
Average Review
Score: 7.71

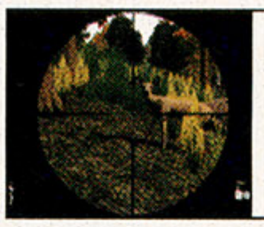
GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)	AWARD
1080° Avalanche	GC	■ The straightforward slope riding is OK, but *Avalanche* can't compete with *SSX 3*	7.5 7.0 5.5	
Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	PS2	■ Commanding your idiotic troops can be quite frustrating	6.5 8.0 6.5	
Alter Echo	PS2	■ More pink and purple than a prom's worth of dresses	6.5 6.5 4.0	
Amped 2	XB	■ A competitive, visually stunning snowboarding sim with plenty of flair	8.0 8.0 9.0	Silver
Armed & Dangerous	XB	■ Looks like butt, but plays better than blasé blasters like *Brute Force*	6.5 7.0 8.0	
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try at Home	PS2, XB	■ Trailer-trashy thrills with cheap opponents	7.0 8.0 2.0	
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	PS2, XB, GC	■ Beating up cavalcades of clones gets boring before the end of the first stage	5.5 7.0 4.0	
Battlestar Galactica	PS2, XB	■ Launched before all systems were go	6.0 6.0 5.5	
Beyond Good & Evil	PS2, XB, GC	■ The best action-adventure game since *Wind Waker* (GC)? We think so	8.5 9.0 8.0	Silver
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	GC	■ Egg-pushing gameplay helps *Hatcher* feel wonderfully unique	7.0 8.0 8.5	
Bloody Roar 4	PS2	■ Once again, *Bloody Roar*'s call-of-the-wild concept is tamed by woeful execution	4.0 3.5 3.5	
Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	GBA	■ A portable gem in which playing in the sun is an enjoyable requirement	9.0 8.0 8.5	Silver
Bombastic	PS2	■ An addictive, unconventional puzzler…even if it involves some math	8.0 7.5 8.5	Silver
Brute Force	XB	■ Repetitive squad-based shooter recycles too many levels and enemies	6.5 6.0 7.5	
Buffy: Chaos Bleeds	XB	■ A brain-dead *Buffy* fan's dream and a decent beat-em-up for the unbitten	4.5 6.5 7.5	
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	PS2	■ Comes close, but doesn't quite capture that classic *Castlevania* brilliance	8.0 7.5 7.5	
Conflict: Desert Storm II	PS2, XB	■ Another flawed operation with a few moments of valor	5.5 4.0 6.0	
Crash Nitro Kart	PS2, XB, GC	■ This kart needs a tune-up	5.5 6.0 5.5	
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	XB	■ A stellar and stylish shooter, *Crimson Skies* kicks the genre's tires and lights its fire	9.0 9.0 8.5	Silver
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	PS2	■ Re-creates the movie's characters and locations, but none of its grace	5.0 4.0 3.0	
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix	XB	■ Perfect your gimp step and build a pimp rep	8.5 8.0 7.0	
DDRMAX2	PS2	■ An overly familiar experience for all but the complete novice	6.5 7.5 9.0	
Dino Crisis 3	XB	■ The vestigial remains of a genre that needed to evolve or die a long time ago	6.5 6.0 6.5	
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	PS2	■ Creative, challenging, and totally deserving of RPG gamers' attention	8.5 8.0 7.5	Silver
Downhill Domination	PS2	■ Huge tracks boast intense attention to detail and gripping gameplay	8.5 8.0 7.0	
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	PS2	■ This time around, *Budokai* is best left to the most loyal breed of *DBZ* fan	5.5 5.0 5.0	
Dragon Ball Z: Taiketsu	GBA	■ Sucks ballZ	5.5 4.0 3.5	
Drake	XB	■ A shooter so horribly busted that's it almost funny. It's mostly sad, though	2.0 0.5 2.5	
Dungeons and Dragons: Heroes	XB	■ Like swimming, story-free dungeon crawling shouldn't be done alone	6.0 5.5 6.5	
Dynasty Tactics 2	PS2	■ Focuses more on hardcore, heady planning than visual thrills and frills	7.5 7.5 7.5	
ESPN College Hoops	PS2, XB	■ Simply a pro game in college basketball clothing	6.5 7.5 6.5	
ESPN NBA Basketball	PS2, XB	■ No other baller matches *ESPN*'s stellar graphics or innovative 24/7 mode	8.5 9.5 9.0	Gold
ESPN NHL Hockey	PS2, XB	■ Solid gameplay and slick visuals make ESPN's puck offering the year's best	8.5 9.0 9.0	Silver
FIFA Soccer 2004	PS2, XB, GC	■ Plays more like *Winning Eleven* and less like *FIFA*. That's a good thing	7.5 9.0 8.0	Silver
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	GBA	■ Unparalleled character customization and on-field tactical arrangement	9.0 9.0 9.0	Gold
Final Fantasy X-2	PS2	■ Yuna and her female friends rock Spira like never before, and we like it	8.5 9.5 9.5	Gold
Fire Emblem	GBA	■ Like *Advance Wars*, but with a rich fantasy setting and intriguing plot	7.5 8.0 8.5	Silver
Freaky Flyers	PS2	■ No self-respecting pilot would put *Freaky Flyers* on his or her flight plan	5.0 3.0 4.0	
Freedom Fighters	PS2, XB, GC	■ Liberating the Land of the Free from Russian invaders is historically fun	7.5 8.5 8.0	Silver
Freestyle Metal X	PS2	■ *X*'s average motocross action can't overcome its trailer-park trappings	5.0 4.5 5.0	
Futurama	PS2	■ A kleptomaniac alcoholic robot from the future deserves better	4.5 5.0 5.0	
F-Zero GX	GC	■ Fast? Yes. Stylish? Yes. Frustratingly difficult? Oh hell yes	9.0 7.5 7.0	
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	XB	■ The single-player mode is an appetizer to the multiplayer's heartier meal	7.5 7.0 7.0	
Gladius	PS2, XB, GC	■ Repetitive combat, but rich storytelling makes it worthwhile	6.0 8.5 7.0	
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	PS2, XB, GC	■ The best original real-time strategy game to grace a console	8.0 6.0 4.5	
Grabbed by the Ghoulies	XB	■ Definitely more fun if someone grabs *your* ghoulies while playing	5.5 4.0 4.5	
The Great Escape	PS2, XB	■ Rent the movie instead	4.5 4.0 6.5	
Group S Challenge	XB	■ An uneven, seemingly thrown-together *Gran Turismo* pretender	5.0 6.0 5.0	
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	PS2, XB, GC	■ Don't be a snitch. Catch it. It's a blast, especially for *Potter*-heads	7.5 7.5 6.5	
The Hobbit	PS2, XB, GC	■ Bilbo Baggins' journey just isn't as appealing as his young nephew's	6.5 5.0 7.0	
Hunter: The Reckoning—Redeemer	XB	■ Slow, repetitive pacing keeps the thrills in check	7.5 6.0 6.0	
I-Ninja	PS2, XB, GC	■ This cutesy assassin suffers from hydrocephalus	8.0 6.0 6.5	
Karaoke Revolution	PS2	■ Even the tone deaf will enjoy belting out these tunes	8.5 8.5 7.5	Silver
Kill.Switch	PS2, XB	■ *Kill.Switch*'s run-and-gun gameplay is as gripping as it is one-dimensional	6.0 6.5 7.5	
King of Fighters 2000 & 2001	PS2	■ Deep and responsive, but only diehards will pick it up over Capcom's 2D fighters	5.5 5.0 7.5	
Kirby Air Ride	GC	■ Supremely easy for anyone to pick up and play, yet surprisingly deep	6.0 8.0 7.0	
Kya: Dark Lineage	PS2	■ Profoundly mediocre platformer with aspirations of greatness	6.5 6.0 5.0	
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	PS2, XB	■ Stunningly gorgeous. Let the blood sucking and soul reaving commence	7.5 8.0 7.0	
Lethal Skies II	PS2	■ Not even the dull two-player modes earn *Skies* any frequent-flier mileage	3.0 5.5 4.0	
Links 2004	XB	■ A shallow create-a-golfer mode keeps *Links* a few strokes behind *Tiger*	6.5 7.5 6.5	
Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	PS2, XB, GC	■ For another year, hail to the king of movie-based game franchises	8.5 8.5 8.0	Silver
Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	GBA	■ Doesn't quite rule them all, but offers enjoyable hack-n-slash action nonetheless	7.0 6.0 7.5	
Magic the Gathering: Battlegrounds	XB	■ The cards say you need a life	4.0 5.5 4.5	
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	GBA	■ A polished, thoroughly enjoyable adventure in the same vein as *Paper Mario*	9.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	GC	■ Cinch-to-learn controls, funky minigames, and all-around ball-whacking fun	8.0 8.0 7.5	
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	GC	■ Smile. Now you have a reason to play your GameCube again	10 10 9.5	Gold

■ Like an undead UPS worker, Raziel pushes crates in *Legacy of Kain: Defiance*

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)	AWARD
Mario Party 5	GC	■ Buy it, call some friends, and let chaos reign	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	PS2, XB, GC	■ This tour of duty is fit for serious war buffs only	5.5 5.0 5.5	
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	PS2, XB, GC	■ A surprisingly good sci-fi shooter and contender for sleeper hit of the year	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
Midway Arcade Treasures	PS2, XB, GC	■ With 20 timeless classics for a mere 20 bucks, there's no reason not to buy it	8.5 7.5 8.5	Silver
Monster Rancher 4	PS2	■ Vast, empty, and repetitive dungeons didn't bother all of our reviewers	5.5 7.0 6.5	
NBA Inside Drive 2004	XB	■ Another ho-hum hoopster from Microsoft, but at least you can now play online	6.0 7.5 6.5	
NBA Jam	PS2, XB	■ Plays much like the original arcade game, which is both good and bad	6.0 7.0 5.0	
NBA Live 2004	PS2, XB, GC	■ Superior on-court control keeps *Live* steadily on the comeback trail	8.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
NCAA March Madness 2004	PS2, XB	■ Captures the essence of the collegiate game like no other	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
NFL Blitz Pro	PS2, XB, GC	■ Incredibly fast, great looking, totally over-the-top football	7.0 7.0 6.0	
NFL Fever 2004	XB	■ A shallow dynasty mode tackles *Fever*'s shot at greatness	6.5 6.5 6.0	
NFL GameDay 2004	PS2	■ Online options are *GameDay*'s only saving grace	4.0 4.5 5.5	
NHL 2004	PS2, XB, GC	■ EA skates on the ice with too much force and not enough finesse	8.5 6.5 7.0	
NHL Hitz Pro	PS2, XB, GC	■ Not the most realistic game of hockey, but among the most enjoyable	7.5 8.5 8.0	Silver
NHL Rivals 2004	XB	■ Microsoft's first attempt at hockey falls through the ice	3.5 4.0 6.5	
Pac-Man Vs.	GC	■ Excellent multiplayer makes GBA connectivity worthwhile	8.0 7.5 9.0	Silver
Pirates of the Caribbean	XB	■ Barely shipshape Arr-PG won't keep your interest afloat	6.0 5.5 4.5	
P.N.03	GC	■ One truly badass character design is all *P.N.03* has to offer	4.0 5.0 4.0	
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	PS2, XB, GC	■ An opium-induced vision where time moves at the speed of your imagination	9.5 9.0 9.5	Gold
Project Gotham Racing 2	XB	■ Buckle up for the best racing sim since *Gran Turismo 3*	9.5 9.5 9.5	Gold
R: Racing Evolution	PS2, XB, GC	■ Watered down with twitchy, frustrating controls and zero customization options	6.5 6.0 4.5	
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	PS2	■ Everything you've ever wanted from an action game, and an absolute must-play	8.5 9.5 9.5	Gold
RoadKill	PS2, XB, GC	■ Delivers violence and four-letter words in a playable format	5.5 5.0 8.0	
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	PS2, XB	■ Like playing a game of *Risk* in which you always die halfway through	3.0 6.0 4.5	
Rogue Ops	PS2, XB, GC	■ Nikki Connors needs a few more stealth lessons from Sam Fisher (*Splinter Cell*)	7.0 6.0 4.5	
RPG Maker 2	PS2	■ No matter how cool the concept, your RPG will look like crap	5.5 3.5 6.5	
Sega GT Online	XB	■ The addition of online play and a $20 price tag gets our motor runnin'	8.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
Shining Soul II	GBA	■ Prettier visuals and more character classes give *Soul II* just enough shine	7.5 7.0 7.0	
Silent Hill 3	PS2	■ So scary it'll have you stocking up on those adult-sized diapers	8.5 8.5 9.0	Silver
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	PS2, XB, GC	■ A family-friendly *Grand Theft Auto: Springfield*	8.0 6.5 7.0	
The Sims Bustin' Out	PS2, XB, GC	■ Even your lady friend will bust out a controller and play	9.0 8.5 9.0	Silver
The Sims Bustin' Out	GBA	■ Surprisingly rewarding for an errand-running simulator	8.0 5.0 8.0	
SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs	PS2	■ Cool missions and great multiplayer make *SOCOM II* the best game of its kind	9.0 9.0 9.5	Gold
Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix	XB	■ A dull, dumbed-down shooter with inconsistent A.I.	6.5 7.0 3.5	
Soul Calibur II	PS2, XB, GC	■ Our souls, at least, still burn. Can't speak for yours	10 9.0 10	Gold
Space Channel 5: Special Edition	PS2	■ Sensational style and a swingin' soundtrack meet simple Simon Says gameplay	8.5 6.5 8.5	
Spawn: Armageddon	PS2, XB, GC	■ Among the better *Spawn* outings to date...which isn't saying much	5.0 6.0 3.5	
Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	PS2, XB, GC	■ The masochistic mummy more than makes up for Sphinx's mediocrity	8.0 7.0 7.0	
Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild	PS2	■ Responsive handling and cool tracks compensate for convoluted trick controls	7.0 8.0 6.5	
SSX 3	PS2, XB, GC	■ Still the undisputed king of the mountain	9.0 9.0 9.0	Gold
Starsky & Hutch	PS2, XB	■ Tailing jalopies along rigidly scripted trails grows tiresome	7.0 3.5 4.0	
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	PS2, XB	■ We'd sooner play with the captain's log	3.0 3.0 3.0	
Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy	XB	■ Takin' Lightsabers 101 is cool, but we'd rather cut class and hang with Boba Fett	6.0 6.5 3.0	
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	XB	■ Follow either side of the Force in the best Xbox role-playing game to date	9.0 9.5 10	Gold
Star Wars Rogue Squad. III: Rebel Strike	GC	■ Yoda says, "Stay in the air, you will. Heading out on foot leads to the dark side."	7.0 7.0 7.5	
Super Mario Advance 4	GBA	■ Undoubtedly stands the test of time as one of history's greatest platformers	9.5 9.0 9.5	Gold
SWAT: Global Strike Team	PS2, XB	■ Commanding your team via headset is cool, even with the atrocious enemy A.I.	4.0 5.0 6.0	
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	PS2, XB, GC	■ Looks great, but the action is as repetitive as the Turtles' catchphrases	5.5 6.0 7.0	
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	PS2, XB, GC	■ An accurate sim that's more fun to play than other less serious golf games	9.0 9.0 9.5	Gold
Time Crisis 3	PS2	■ *TC3* remains an uncontested crack shot among light-gun shooters	7.0 7.0 8.5	
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	XB	■ Squad-based shooting at its best	9.0 7.5 9.0	Silver
Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	PS2	■ Lara's back, but her gameplay's never been jankier	5.0 3.0 7.0	
Tony Hawk's Underground	PS2, XB, GC	■ Story mode breathes new life into the venerable series	9.0 9.0 10	Gold
Top Spin	XB	■ You'll never wanna play *Virtua Tennis* (DC, PS2) again	9.0 9.0 9.0	Gold
True Crime: Streets of L.A.	PS2, XB, GC	■ A spot-on re-creation of Los Angeles. Too bad the ride is over so quickly	6.5 9.5 5.5	
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	PS2	■ As fleshed-out, complicated, and utterly addictive as fighters come	10 9.0 9.5	Gold
Voodoo Vince	XB	■ Tedious jumping puzzles and pointless collecting plague the patchwork hero	6.0 6.5 7.0	
Wakeboarding Unleashed	PS2	■ Provides that twitchy instant gratification every action-sports title should have	9.0 8.5 7.5	Silver
Wallace and Gromit in Project Zoo	PS2, XB, GC	■ Wallace does nothing really horrendous, nor anything really praiseworthy	4.5 6.5 6.5	
Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	PS2	■ A switch-flipping, key-finding, frag-em-all affair, oblivious to FPS innovation	5.5 5.5 6.0	
Whiplash	PS2, XB	■ Goofy concept and humor compensate for crummy graphics and average gameplay	7.0 6.0 8.0	
WWE Raw 2: Ruthless Aggression	XB	■ They couldn't even spell Goldberg's name correctly. We willingly tap out	3.0 5.5 4.5	
WWE SmackDown! Here Comes the Pain	PS2	■ Match types galore, improved story mode—pain never felt so good	7.5 8.0 7.0	
WWE Wrestlemania XIX	GC	■ *XIX*'s improved character-creation system atomic-drops you into the WWE	7.5 7.5 6.5	
XGRA	PS2, XB, GC	■ A consummate copycat, matching the competition in all essential categories	6.5 6.5 7.5	
XIII	PS2, XB, GC	■ One stylish first-person shooter. Sadly, superhuman A.I. keeps this one unlucky	6.5 6.5 6.5	

BULLET TIME SELLS, BUT WHO'S BUYING?

We like watching goons bite the bullet in glorious slow-mo as much as the next gamer, but, as these titles prove, you can get too much of a good thing. For instance, after tracking Bambi with every instrument modern science can muster, do you really need to snuff him *Matrix*-style in *Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004 Season*? In *Drake* and *Spawn*, the feature makes more sense, but still feels like a half-assed afterthought.



Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004
(PS2, XB)

Drake
(XB)
2.0, 0.5, 2.5

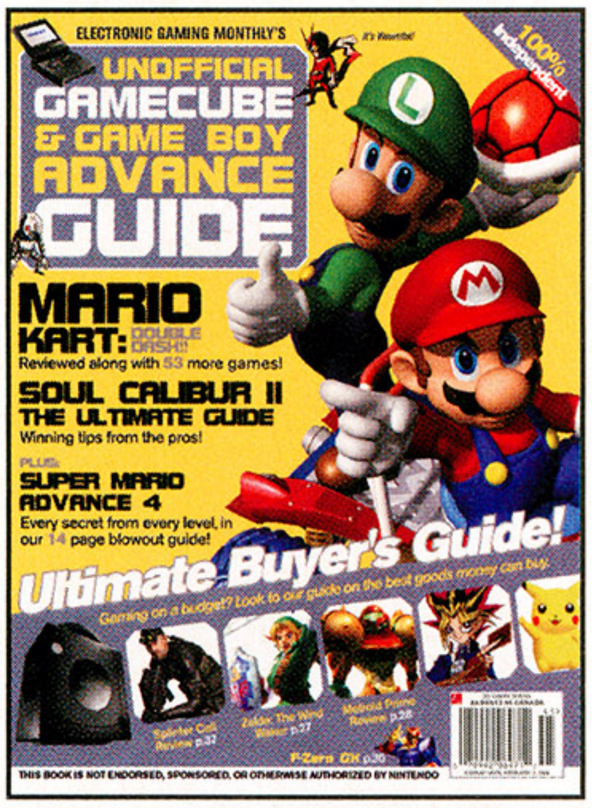
Spawn: Armageddon
(PS2, XB, GC)
5.0, 6.0, 3.5

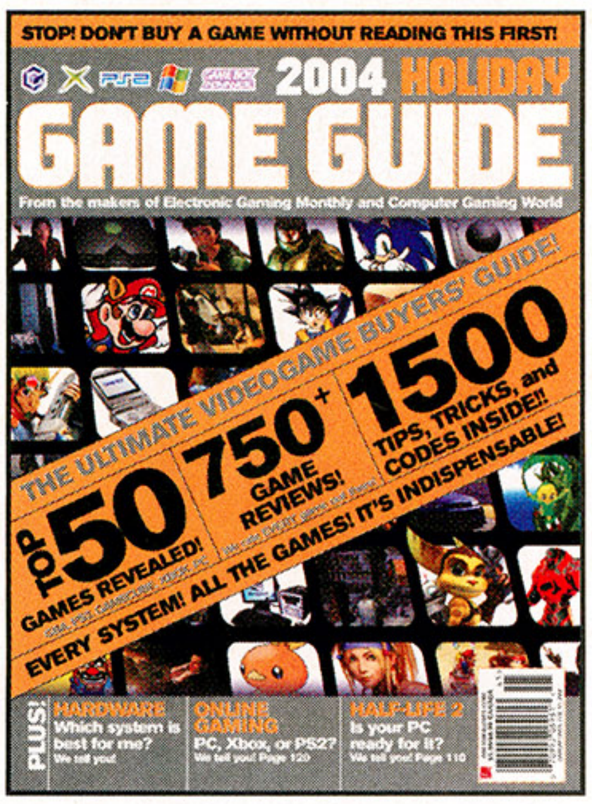
greatest hit or miss?

KINGDOM HEARTS

■ **PlayStation 2**
■ **Released: September 2002**
■ **Original Scores: 8.5, 8.5, 8.5**

Final Fantasy meets the wonderful world of Disney in a game that will challenge even the most veteran action-RPG players. In true Square fashion, the story and production values are top-notch, yet the gameplay takes a slight hit because of some troublesome camera issues. Even so, it's still worth its new price of $20.





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tricks of the trade

every time you enter a cheat code, a programmer gets his wings

trickster

There are a whole lot of codes, tricks, cheats, and general tomfoolery in the following pages. From unlocking karts and riders in *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* to playing as Snoop Dogg in *True Crime: Streets of L.A.*, we've got you covered. You'll also find tricks for *Tony Hawk's Underground*, *Crimson Skies*, *XIII*, *Rainbow Six 3*, and more. You might want to do some finger-strengthening exercises before you put this info to use. You know, to prevent thumb sprains.

—David S. J. Hodgson
egm@ziffdavis.com

GAME DIRECTORY

Mario Kart: Double Dash!! 136
True Crime: Streets of L.A. 136
Tony Hawk's Underground 137
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge 137
Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike 138
Medal of Honor: Rising Sun . . .138
GameShark vs. Action Replay . .139
XIII 140
Rainbow Six 3 140
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga 141

■ GameCube

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

This is a bloody marvelous game, and it comes complete with this newfangled "local area network" play, too. Who knows, perhaps three years from now in *Mario Kart: Triple Dash!!!* Nintendo'll introduce some crazy new technology that lets us play—what's the word?—"online." While we wait for the big N to join us in the 21st century, let's amuse ourselves with *Double Dash!!*'s many unlockable bonuses.

Unlockable Riders

To unlock all the game's extra riders, fire up grand prix mode and take first place in the following events.

Toad: 100cc Special Cup
Toadette: 100cc Special Cup
Petey Piranha: Mirror Star Cup
King Boo: Mirror Star Cup

Unlockable Karts

Time to score a new set of wheels or two (or 13). Place first in the divisions listed.

Green Fire: 50cc Mushroom Cup
Bloom Coach: 50cc Flower Cup
Para Wing: 50cc Star Cup
Bullet Blaster: 50cc Special Cup
Battle Buggy: 100cc Mushroom Cup
Waluigi Racer: 100cc Flower Cup
Toad Kart: 100cc Special Cup
Turbo Birdo: 150cc Flower Cup
Barrel Train: 150cc Star Cup
Toadette Kart: Mirror Mushroom Cup
Piranha Pipes: Mirror Star Cup
Boo Pipes: Mirror Special Cup
Parade Kart: Mirror All Cup

Unlockable Courses

Are you missing a couple of cups or battle courses? Then you've come to the right place! Win the specified cups to access these new tracks or events.

Special Cup Tour: 100cc Star Cup
Luigi's Mansion Battle Mode Stage: 150cc Mushroom Cup
All Cup Tour: 150cc Special Cup
Mirror Cup Tour: 150cc All Cup
Tilt-A-Kart Battle Mode Stage: Mirror Flower Cup

A Staff Ghost of a Chance

Want to unlock the 16 different staff ghosts in time trial mode? Then you'll have to beat the following times (in time trial mode only) to race against these notoriously incredible karting superstars! (For some reason known only to sadistic Nintendo developers, you can't save unlocked staff ghosts to your memory card. When the power's off, the ghost is gone. If you want to see 'em again later, you'll have to beat the relevant time trial record again.)

Course	Staff Ghost	Time to Beat
Mushroom Cup: Luigi Circuit	Luigi/Mario/Mario's Kart	01:29:000
Mushroom Cup: Peach Beach	Peach/Daisy/Bloom Coach	01:18:000
Mushroom Cup: Baby Park	Baby Mario/Baby Luigi/Mario's Pram	01:13:000
Mushroom Cup: Dry Dry Desert	Birdo/Yoshi/Turbo Yoshi	01:52:000
Flower Cup: Mushroom Bridge	Koopa/Paratroopa/Koopa's Kart	01:31:000
Flower Cup: Mario Circuit	Mario/Luigi/Mario's Kart	01:42:000
Flower Cup: Daisy Cruiser	Daisy/Peach/Peach Coach	01:51:000
Flower Cup: Waluigi Stadium	Waluigi/Wario/Wario's Jalopy	02:00:000
Star Cup: Sherbet Land	Baby Luigi/Baby Mario/Mario's Pram	01:26:000
Star Cup: Mushroom City	Paratroopa/Koopa/Para Wing	01:51:000
Star Cup: Yoshi Circuit	Yoshi/Birdo/Turbo Yoshi	02:02:000
Star Cup: DK Mountain	Donkey Kong/Diddy Kong/DK's Kart	02:10:000
Special Cup: Wario Coliseum	Wario/Waluigi/Wario's Jalopy	02:23:000
Special Cup: Dino Dino Jungle	Diddy Kong/Donkey Kong/DK's Kart	02:03:000
Special Cup: Bowser's Castle	Bowser/Bowser Jr./Bowser's Kart	02:46:000
Special Cup: Rainbow Road	Mario/Peach/Mario's Kart	03:19:000

■ PS2, XB, GC

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A.

To unlizziliock Snizoop Dogg, you need to collect 30 bizones plizzaced around the grizziliater Los Angeles area. Right, we'll stizzop now. To control everyone's favorite chronic-inhalin' rap megastar, find 30 bones scattered around the city. Then lead Snoop on a crime-fighting caper that takes about an hour to fizzinish.

Codes now, is it? Right then: During any driving mission (for the Extra Car Mass cheat) or destination driving mission (for all others), get yourself a car, bring up the city map, and input a code from this handy table:

Cheat	Code	System(s)
All Combat Moves	Up, Down, Up, Down, A	GameCube, Xbox
All Combat Moves	Up, Down, Up, Down, X	PlayStation 2
Extra Car Mass	Down, Down, Down, A	GameCube, Xbox
Extra Car Mass	Down, Down, Down, X	PlayStation 2
Show Nick's Coordinates	X, Circle, Square, Triangle	PlayStation 2

What? You crave more? OK, let's try creating a license plate. Type in one of the following personalized plates. Highlight OK, then hold L and R while pressing A (GameCube and Xbox). PlayStation 2 owners, hold L1 and R1 and press X. Congratulations! Now you can play as the hackneyed stereotypes listed below.

License Plate	Play as...
FUZZ	Johnson the Cop
SWAT	SWAT Officer
M1K3	Commando
B00Z	Bum
TFAN	T-Shirt Homie
HARA	Asian Dude
MNKY	Punk Kid

TRICKS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIMA GAMES

100 percent, ESRB-approved grade-A cuts of succulent strategy have been sliced from those prime Prima guides. In particular, if you're after a full course of trickery for *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*, *SSX 3*, or *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, sprint down to your nearest gaming emporium for a ravenous feed; these fabulous guides are on sale now.

■ PS2, XB, GC

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

Want to flip the bird to society *and* pay for a fourth wing on Tony Hawk's mansion but don't know how? Achieve all this by purchasing *Tony Hawk's Underground*. This latest *Hawk* is quite different from the *Pro Skaters*, but it does have the trove of secrets and unlockables the series is known for. And by the time you've thrashed your way through with all this stuff, we'll have a new batch of *Tony* trickery ready for you. *Hawk*-crazy website planettonyhawk .com helped with compiling these codes, so check there for updates, you dig?

■ Dude, you wouldn't have bailed if you'd used that cheat code....

Unlockable Levels

Hotter Than Hell:
Beat story mode
School II (*THPS2*):
Get Old Skool Icon (New Jersey)
Venice (*THPS2*):
Get Old Skool Icon (Hawaii)
Hangar (*THPS2*):
Get Old Skool Icon (Moscow)

Unlockable Skaters

Iron Man:
Beat beginner story mode
Gene Simmons (Kiss):
Beat normal story mode
T.H.U.D.:
Beat sick story mode
20 Pedestrian Skaters:
Clear all gaps

Unlockable Cheats

Completing all 129 story mode goals unlocks quite a lot of stuff, even roller skates! (Good heavens, what's the world coming to? We thought skateboarders hated roller skaters like Rosie O'Donnell hates diets.) Finish those 129 goals to get the following:

Cool Specials
Kid Mode
Roller skates
Flame
Always Special
Perfect Rail
Perfect Skitch
Perfect Manual
Moon Gravity

Cheat Codes

Only got a two-day rental? Incredibly short attention span? Then sap the game's replayability without delay with these codes. To enter them, choose Options, then Cheats from the main menu. Then, during gameplay, turn them on/off by pausing the game and choosing Options, then Cheats.

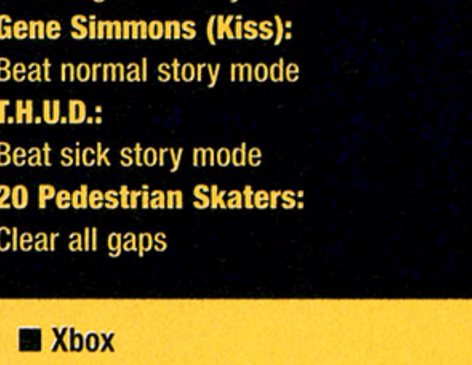
Unlock All Videos:
digivid
Perfect Rail:
letitslide
Perfect Manual:
keepitsteady
Moon Gravity:
noforce ➤

■ Xbox

CRIMSON SKIES

Sick of that airborne jalopy you're currently dogfighting in? We have codes that can help! With a few simple button presses, you can unlock all the game's planes or make yourself filthy rich, five grand at a time.

Bang these codes out during gameplay. You'll hear a crazy sound effect if you've done it right. Obviously, if you want new planes (such as the later aircraft shown in the second stage), you'll need to finish your current mission and then go to your hangar to pick up your new ride.



Extra 10 Tokens:
X, B, X, B, Black
All Planes Unlocked:
Y, X, B, Y, Black
Invincibility:
Y, A, X, B, Black
High-Power Ordnance (1,000 points damage per shot):
B, X, A, B, Black
Big Money, Big Prizes. I Love It! ($5,000):
A, Y, A, Y, Black
Superhard Difficulty Level:
X, B, A, X, Black

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■ GameCube

STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

Those cheeky game developers are sitting back, chugging down the Cristal, releasing code information when they damn well please. What does this mean to you? You'll have to work to unlock these goodies instead of lounging around, waiting for a password cheat.

Unlockable Ships (Cooperative Mode)

Here's how to unlock a bunch of snazzy new starfighters for use in cooperative mode only.

Jedi Starfighter: Locate all gold medals in co-op mode.
The Millennium Falcon and TIE Advance X-1: Find all bronze medals in co-op mode.
Naboo Starfighter: Nab every silver medal in co-op mode.
Slave-1: (That's Boba Fett's ship, you know.) Receive all platinum medals in co-op mode. No disintegrations.
TIE Fighter: Purloin the TIE in both night and day missions of Imperial Academy Heist (in co-op), then finish the mission.

Unlockable Ships (Single-Player Mode)

Of course, there are plenty of secret ships for single-player mode, too. This is how you earn 'em.

Jedi Starfighter: Get silver medals in all single-player missions (including all bonus missions).
The Millennium Falcon: Earn bronze medals in all single-player missions (including bonus missions).
Naboo Starfighter: Finish Tatooine Training (all four times of day), grabbing all hidden items.
Slave-1: Achieve bronze medals in all single-player missions.
TIE Bomber: Blow up all the ground turrets in Raid at Bakura.
TIE Hunter: Achieve gold medals in all single-player missions (including bonus missions). Good luck.

Hidden Features

More unlockables! We know a lot of hardcore *Star Wars* fans will feel compelled to uncover every last secret in the game. Knock yourselves out, guys:

Ace Mode: Get a gold medal in every single-player mission (including the bonus ones). Also complete Tatooine Training during all four times of day.
Audio Commentary: Earn bronze medals in all single-player campaign missions.
Credits and Documentary: Finish Triumph of Rebellion mission.
Empire Strikes Back Arcade Game: Complete the single-player campaign.
Star Wars Arcade Game: Finish Triumph of Rebellion mission.

Cheat Codes

All right, they have released a few cheat codes. Punch them in!

Passcode	Effect
WHATTHE?	Ace mode
WIMPIAM!	Easy mode
LOOKMOM!	Unlocks credits
THEDUDES	Unlocks documentary
FREEPLAY	Unlocks *Star Wars* arcade game (Arcade must be unlocked first. See above.)
HARKHARK	Unlocks the music hall

■ The documentary: It's like *Star Wars*, plus *The Brady Bunch* and a Kubrick flick.

■ PS2, XB, GC

MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN

■ OMFG, what are you waiting for? Press ACTION already.

Never in the field of cheat-code conquests have so many codes been hidden so bizarrely. *Rising Sun* has you unlocking eight different cheat codes by literally digging them out of the ground using an entrenching tool. There's one entrenching tool on each level, usually in plain sight leaning against a wall. Search thoroughly; you'll find it. Grab this tool, then dig at the specific spot for each of the levels to unlock a bonus cheat you can activate when you play through the game again. Locations for five of the levels are shown below.

Midnight Raid on Guadalcanal

When you enter the camp, take out the snipers in the tower, then look to the right for a large boulder marking a path. Follow the path through the jungle to a two-story storage building. Clear the sniper on the second floor, then exit the building. Look for two dirt piles blocking a trench. Use the entrenching tool here to dig up the Bullet Shield cheat (an invisible force field surrounds the player, protecting him from bullets).

Pistol Pete

In the river area? Good job, soldier. Put your back into digging up a dirt pile near the save point, and you'll acquire Funny Hats. This cheat puts hilarious headgear on all your foes, destroying their dignity and decimating their ability to fight.

In Search of Yamashita's Gold

At the Ruins and Crash Site portion of this mission, pay special attention to the area behind the nose of the crashed plane. Start digging here to uncover Invisible Soldiers, a cheat whereby the enemy soldiers' helmets and weapons are visible...*but they are not!*

A Bridge Over the River Kwai

Once you've reached the blockade area, unpack that shovel and start digging in the dirt pile in the middle of the camp, slightly right of the boxes (above). Your prize is the dreaded perfectionist mode, where one hit kills you. What fun!

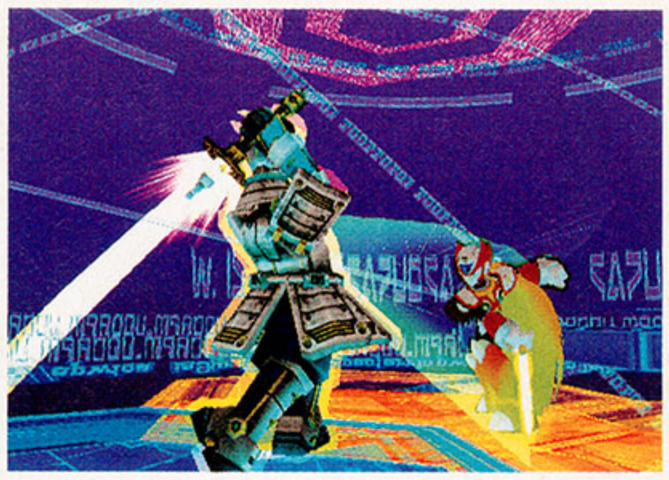
Supercarrier Sabotage

Who wants to live forever? You can: Check the lower-deck pilot-training room and rummage around in the fifth locker from the left. You'll bag Immortality, the grandaddy of all cheats, which makes you invincible. Those bayonets barely tickle you now! ➤

GameShark

VS.

Action Replay



GameShark has a present for fans of the Blue Bomber. Cheat your way through *Mega Man X7* before you have to return it to Blockbuster!

Mega Man X7 (PS2)

Enter This First
F450BE2E 76740416

Exclusive!
Max Hunted
1500B979 9C30977E
1500B978 9C30977E

Exclusive!
Max Damaged
1500B978 9C3097EE
1500B978 9C3097CE

Infinite Health
05001628 1E30C5FE
05D03628 1E30C7FC

Infinite Lives
0410942A 14F0C34C

Infinite Special
04009368 1CF0D5DA

Always Rank GA
2511B528 97A0814C

Always Rank PA
2590B538 93A0C14E

Always Rank UH
2511B538 93A0814E

All Reploids Rescued
45559028 3220C7DC
3902D7E1 9BABB1E0

Axl: Max Health
04009368 1CF0C12A

Axl: Max Special
14009368 1CF0C18A

Axl: All Specials and Weapons
240FCBD6 C9CB9C43
24009B76 9DF89C62

Zero: Max Health
0400B168 1C70D5EA

Axl: Max Weapons
04009368 1CF0D1AA
04009369 1CF0D5EA
04009368 1CF0D5DA
04009369 1CF0D5DA
04009368 1CF0D5FA
04009369 1CF0D5FA
04009168 1CF0D54A
04009169 1CF0D54A

Zero: Max Special
1400B268 1CF0D54A

Zero: All Specials and Weapons
240FE9D6 C94B8CC3
2400B976 9D788CE2

Zero: Max Weapons
0400B268 1CF0C56A
0400B269 1CF0C56A
0400B268 1CF0C55A
0400B269 1CF0C55A
0400B268 1CF0C57A
0400B269 1CF0C57A
0400B268 1CF0C5CA
0400B269 1CF0C54A

Mega Man: Max Health
04009068 1C70D72A

Mega Man: Max Special
04009068 1C70D78A

Mega Man: All Specials and Weapons
240FC8D6 C94B8E03
24009876 9D788E22

Mega Man: Max Weapons
04009068 1C70C7AA
04009069 1C70C7AA
04009068 1C70C79A
04009069 1C70C79A
04009068 1C70C7BA
04009069 1C70C7BA
04009368 1C70C70A
04009369 1C70C70A

Action Replay has a strong rebuttal: lots of crazy unlockable characters for Activision's *True Crime* and various cheats for *Turtles* fans.

True Crime: Streets of L.A. (PS2)

Enter This First
UM6W-W1P3-E8BMV
61RZ-KQQ3-A3N7T

Play as Jackass Jay
BGDW-U5WY-U8Z4F
WNQ8-8712-AJHH8

Play as Heavyweight Champ
H1QG-3R8D-CUKP7
Z25F-C3D1-NJ6XD

Play as Dropdead Fred
XM10-RMXB-W5C8A
E51C-6KB6-JF0WB

Play as Dirty Cook
B589-X001-P7DA0
CNWJ-78TB-HFJ8G

Play as SoopaFly
3PTC-A38Q-BC1P5
DR8U-7J47-RB17B

Play as Naked Tattoo Lady
4692-0DKE-HMJY2
2A39-HGFJ-F488D

Play as S&M Rosie
ACX0-CN2B-GMZ8X
QVCT-0FHG-R4VRU

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (PS2)

Enter This First
DJCZ-PKX5-HRJHR
H7AY-W7NM-1PW0E

Exclusive!
Remove Enemies (Press L1+L2 to activate)
QUUX-VE8V-T71JK
8NK8-JCAG-MX064
43ZB-P0YA-N7PA2

Exclusive!
End Stage (Press R1+R2 to activate)
DDNA-Q854-PYAP4
Z998-C3C7-Z2JYZ
A1E3-QY4F-XDB1X

Improved Weapons and Infinite Shuriken
30PB-MVD1-X43XD
5A4G-N7XK-8FYVJ

Improved Defense and Power-Ups
KKJ4-V3H9-YPB1M
TK3H-7U66-21YET

Silly (that is, even sillier) Sounds
RXY1-EYC2-4XWR7
MNN0-3FH5-ANVYE

■ Either we're having a flashback, or that's a sexy lady sitting at a table with an S&M donkey. Or both.

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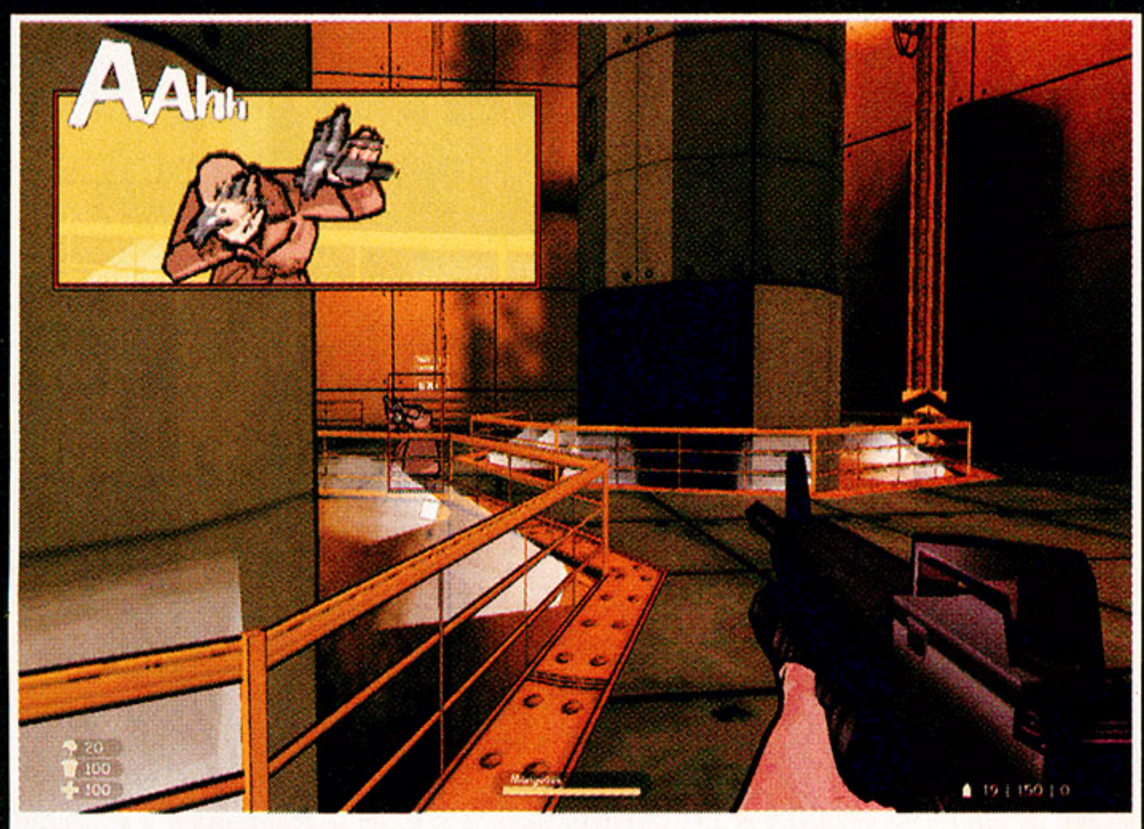
■ PS2, XB, GC

XIII



■ Keep your distance and let the hazardous environment do your job for you.

Need a little help defeating *XIII*'s tougher antagonists? We have some snazzy, surefire strategies that ought to do the trick. Check out these tips for taking down this stylish shooter's last three bosses.

The Chopper

This boss is almost invulnerable. The only weapon that can damage it is the bazooka, so don't waste your time and ammo shooting it with anything else. The Chopper has two weapons, a highly efficient heavy machine gun and a deadly rocket launcher. Best to stay out of its line of fire, hmm? Yes.

To win this fight, you have to alternate between hiding and firing. The easiest way to proceed is to set up shop behind a crate or container, preferably with some ammo and/or medkits within easy reach. Stay in your hiding place until the Chopper fires one of its rockets. Just after the danger is past, jump out and shoot that whirlybird with your bazooka, then immediately get back behind cover and reload (the bazooka holds only one round). Take a quick detour to grab health or ammunition if you need it.

Stick to this pattern, and the Chopper shouldn't give you much trouble.

Doctor Johansson

The Doctor is very fast. He basically has two types of attacks. At range, he throws knives and poison potions at you. If he gets close enough, he will try to stab you with a needle. If you get touched, his nefarious hallucinogenic drug will take effect, which will make your vision more...green. This drug also makes you drop your weapon. If that happens, just run and try to avoid being hurt until the drug effect stops. Then quickly retrieve your lost weapon and ammo.

To defeat the Doc, shoot at him from long range, and when he tries to get closer, just run backward, continuing to feed him bullets. Make sure you aren't blocked by something behind you as you run. To prevent this, try to stay on the same path, where you know what to expect (for example, the area around the table with the patient on it is relatively clear of obstructions). If you can keep Doctor J from getting too close while you attack him pretty much constantly, he won't hold out for long. Sweet victory.

The Mongoose

The final boss! Let's be clear: He's very tough. You'll need a combination of preparation and smart tactics to compete with him.

Before confronting him, be sure to collect all the weapons you can at the beginning of the level. In particular, get as many medkits as possible.

Mongoose has two miniguns, so he's pretty destructive at close range. Try to stay far from him and use your long-range weapons, like the assault rifle or the submachine gun. Each time you tag the Goose, he'll duck behind a missile for cover. If necessary, use this time to reload your weapon and heal yourself.

The simplest way to deal with this boss is to shoot at the missiles near him, unleashing a toxic vapor. When this vapor touches him, Mongoose is paralyzed for a while—hit him with your best shot! Make sure you don't touch the toxic gasses yourself, or you'll be the one to suffer.

To help you in this fight, Major Jones will kill some henchmen upstairs, who will fall from the upper floor. You can search these bodies for additional ammo and medkits. Try to score a hit on Mongoose, then use the time when he's hiding to collect items.

He's definitely challenging, but if you employ these strategies, eventually you'll succeed. Hang in there, you crazy amnesiac gunslinger, you.

■ Xbox

RAINBOW SIX 3

The sad fact is this: All those terrorists aren't going to shoot themselves. You'll have to do it. These strategies will help you realize your full combat potential. From door assaults to setting up crossfires to seeing in the dark, we cover it all—oh yeah, we cover "covering," too.

Door Assaults

Please, for Ding's sake, behave as if each door has one or more hostiles behind it. Cautiously get as close to the door as you can. If you hear footsteps receding, the enemy probably has his back to the door. Attack while you have this advantage.

Let's assume you hear zilch (which will be most of the time). While standing next to the door, study your map. Does it look like there's a wall to your left and an open expanse to your right? Play the odds and charge in with your attention focused in that direction. If you see the bad men, you know what to do.

Open, Flash, and Clear

Fragging and breaching are great for inflicting damage on the terrorists on the other side of a door. If you want to conserve equipment, a simple "open and clear" command will do. But for hostage situations, nothing beats a well-executed "open, flash, and clear."

Here's how to do it right. Approach the door and give the order. If you want to get into position elsewhere (enter through a second door if possible), hold down the right trigger as you give the order. Your squad will then wait for your Zulu, or go-ahead signal, before they attack.

When your men open the door, glance away briefly so that you don't catch an eyeful of bright disorientation. Then charge into the room with your squad and help eliminate the enemy. Should be a cakewalk, since they'll be blinded.

Flanking

When attacking a difficult enemy position, look for more than one avenue of attack. Send your men to one strategic spot (for example, through an undefended door) while you head for another (a second door, side passage, catwalk, etc.).

Attack simultaneously and drive the terrorists to panic. They may not know which direction to turn, so as they swing to attack your men, you cut them down from the side (and vice versa, as your men protect you). By flanking them, you set up a deadly crossfire that catches them with the most possible hits. It's tactically delicious!

Supervision

On nighttime missions especially, you need the use of your special visions. Don't hesitate to flick on your night vision if you're headed into a dark room, 'cause you can't shoot what you can't see.

But thermal vision can't be beat. You can even see heat signatures through barricades and doors. Try this: Throw a smoke grenade into a populated room, turn on your thermal vision, and depopulate the room before any of those fools know what's going on. Now you're playing with style!

Cover Me

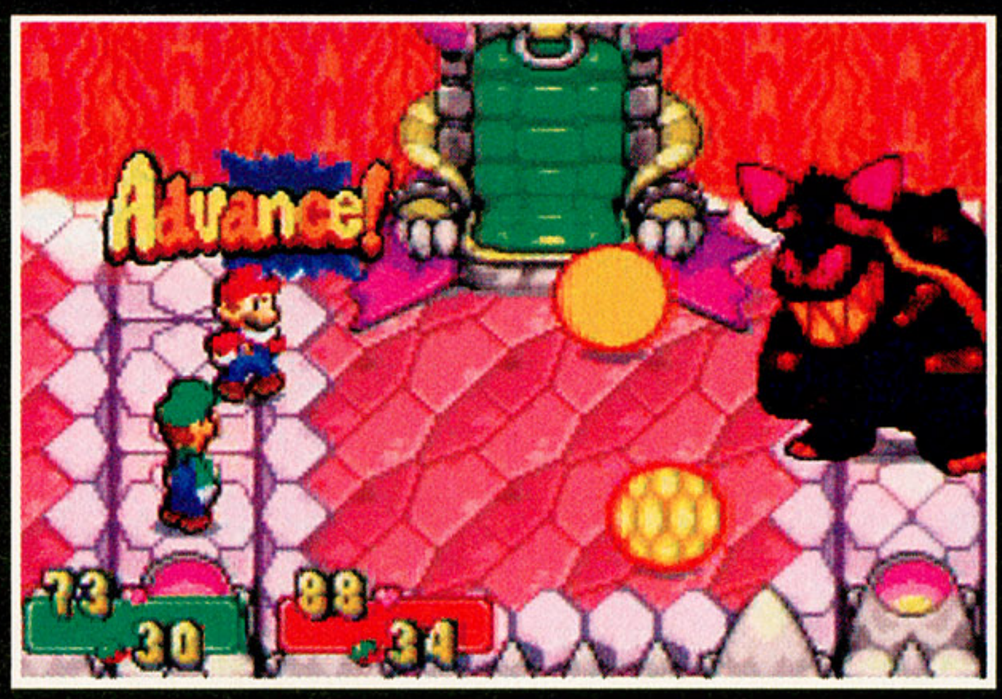
Use the "cover" command intelligently. For instance, set up your team in a side corridor, tell them to cover, then go find some terrorists and lure 'em around the corner to their bloody, bloody doom.

Try to install your squad in a superior firing position. Balconies, catwalks, and even climbable crates are great places to leave your support troops. Give the "cover" command, and your men will shoot hostiles on sight. With the high-ground advantage, your team will be a lot more effective, and they'll live longer.

■ Game Boy Advance

MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

Listen, there are invisible blocks, crazy hidden items, and a whole load of other crap you'll never find on your first playthrough of *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*. But at the top of the list of cool features are the advance commands, where furious button-tapping unlocks flashier, more powerful attacks. Check it!



Advance Commands 101

Advance commands are extra button presses (which are shown onscreen once the command is unlocked) that you may use instead of the action commands normally employed when executing a powerful Bros. attack. Advance commands are great because they tack on extra damage and sometimes cause special status ailments, depending on the attack.

If Mario or Luigi performs a Bros. attack correctly multiple times, he eventually learns how to execute the advance commands for that attack. To learn the advance commands for any Bros. attack, the normal move must be performed correctly approximately 30 to 40 times, but not in a row—it's OK to make mistakes every once in a while. You know you've performed the Bros. attack with perfection when the word "Great!" appears just as Mario or Luigi strikes the unlucky opponent.

When you see a "!" icon and the word "Advance!" appear over Mario's or Luigi's head after the character has finished executing a normal Bros. attack, he has learned the advance commands for that move. The letters "ADV" then appear to the left of that Bros. attack when it's highlighted in the Bros. attack menu.

Select the attack just learned from the Bros. attack menu and set it to level 1 or level 2, then target and attack an enemy. Notice the different button icons that appear during the Bros. attack, emphasized by an "!" icon that appears along with the button icon. The extra icons show which buttons to press in order to perform the new and improved move.

Practice with the new advance commands for Bros. attacks when they're set to level 1 or level 2. When you think you've got the hang of it, bump it up to level 3, which is more difficult because it doesn't show the button cues.

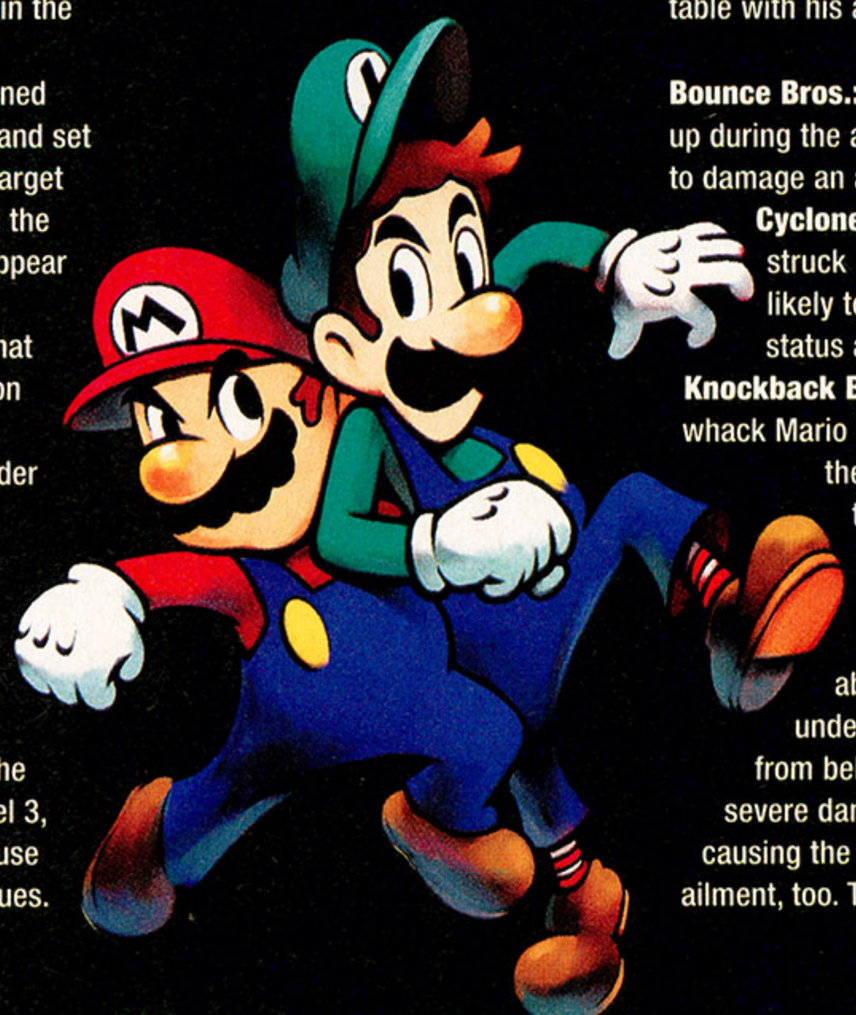
But level 3 advance attacks deal more damage and help conserve Bros. points.

You may still execute normal Bros. attacks after learning the secret advance commands, but you'll have to remember the button sequence yourself. Once you've learned an advance command, the button cues show how to execute the more powerful form of the attack, not the passé original one.

Mario's Advance Commands

The list below details the special effects of using Mario's advance commands in battle. Consider your enemy and choose wisely.

Splash Bros.: This attack deals impressive damage to enemies covered in spikes.
Swing Bros.: Mario now steals useful items from monsters when he strikes with this attack.
Chopper Bros.: When the attack is repeated many times, it inflicts massive damage on the hapless targeted enemy.
Fire Bros.: This attack, if repeated a number of times, inflicts the "severe burn" status ailment.



Luigi's Advance Commands

Here's what Luigi brings to the table with his advance commands.

Bounce Bros.: The brothers split up during the attack, allowing Luigi to damage an additional enemy.
Cyclone Bros.: Monsters struck by this attack are likely to suffer the "stun" status ailment.
Knockback Bros.: Luigi can whack Mario as he rebounds off the enemy to repeat the attack.
Thunder Bros.: Instead of attacking all monsters from above, Luigi burrows underground and strikes from below, meting out severe damage and often causing the "power down" status ailment, too. Take that!

THE ESRB VIDEO & COMPUTER GAME RATINGS

Find out whether a computer or video game is right for your home.

Learn more about the Entertainment Software Review Board rating system and how games get rated on www.esrb.org.

EARLY CHILDHOOD
Titles rated "Early Childhood (EC)" have content that may be suitable for children ages three and older and do not contain any material that parents would find inappropriate.

EVERYONE
Titles rated "Everyone (E)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages six and older. These titles will appeal to people of many ages and tastes. They may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief (for example, slapstick comedy), or some crude language.

TEEN
Titles rated "Teen (T)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

MATURE
Titles rated "Mature (M)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. These products may include more intense violence or language than products in the Teen category. In addition, these titles may also include mature sexual themes.

ADULTS ONLY
Titles rated "Adults Only (AO)" have content suitable only for adults. These products may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Adults Only products are not intended to be sold or rented to persons under the age of 18.

RATING PENDING
Product has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating.

This message is brought to you by the Editors of:

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA
GAME GROUP

THE REST OF THE CRAP

Seanbaby plays awful games so you don't have to

■ **Seriously, is this the kind of smut modern kids are watching? Sure, back in our day we had some questionable stuff (like *He-Man* and *G.I. Joe*) but nothing quite like *Super Duper Sumos*.**

sound off

SANITY DRAINING

Forget everything you've read in their cute bios—the *EGM* editors are sadistic madmen and tyrannical termagants. This strange social experiment they initiated (code-named Operation: Drive Me to Murder) is getting out of hand.

The videogames they send me are so bad that I can no longer distinguish between electronic entertainment and misery. When I see a commercial to help starving children, I think it's an ad for the next thing I'll have to play. It's even starting to affect my safety. Last week, I sat on a hot stove for 30 minutes without noticing—to me, it just felt like I was playing *Spirits and Spells* again. I really think that if *EGM* gave me a human ear, I'd put it in my GameCube and review it without a second thought.

—*Seanbaby*

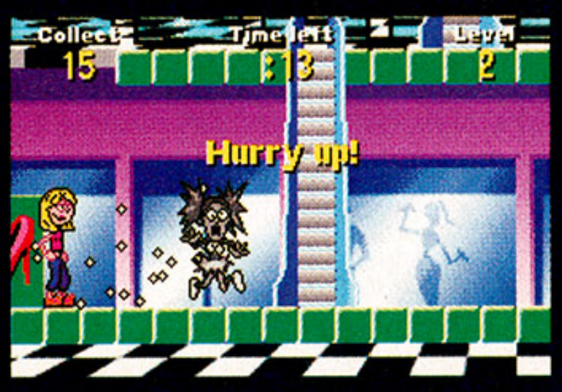
ULTIMATE BEACH SOCCER

XB • Dreamcatcher — What truly separates *Ultimate Beach Soccer* from other soccer games, besides its inherent ultimateness, is that every now and then energy bolts from the sky blast your players. I didn't read the manual, but it doesn't take a degree in soccer theology to know that this magic comes from Soccor, Lord of Beach Soccer. His dark-ball power grants no noticeable bonus to your team's running or kicking abilities, but check this: Now your players are on fire. Obviously, this is pretty awesome.

So, I think this could be an OK soccer game…if not for the insanely long celebration videos after each goal. These segments are so utterly stupid and annoyingly unskippable that I found that the only chance *Ultimate Beach Soccer* had at being fun was if I never, ever scored a goal. So, really, I guess this game only functions as a flaming half-naked-man simulator.

Bottom Line: The players' flammability can't make up for the boring gameplay, not to mention the criminal commentary and celebration videos.

LIZZIE MCGUIRE: ON THE GO!

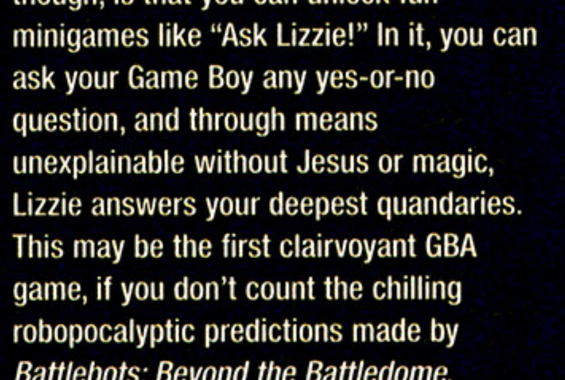


GBA • Buena Vista — Hoping to follow in the footsteps of the all-powerful Olsen twins, Lizzie plays it safe in her maiden gaming effort: Here, you must collect fashion accessories in a massive mall infested by evil cheerleaders. This legally fulfills the mall, shopping, and cheerleader requirements mandated by the Girl Game Regulatory Commission, but in a strange twist, Lizzie McGuire can throw fireballs. And not cute fashion fireballs. These things instantly immolate cheerleaders, and if you have a few minutes, you can watch as they're slowly and brutally electrocuted. That Lizzie...what a gal!

The really great thing about *On the Go!*, though, is that you can unlock fun minigames like "Ask Lizzie!" In it, you can ask your Game Boy any yes-or-no question, and through means unexplainable without Jesus or magic, Lizzie answers your deepest quandaries. This may be the first clairvoyant GBA game, if you don't count the chilling robopocalyptic predictions made by *Battlebots: Beyond the Battledome*.

Bottom Line: When I asked Lizzie if I was going to die of a fatal bowel disease, she said, and I quote, "Of course! Know why? 'Cause you rule!" Lizzie makes even the most tragic news bearable!

SPIRITS AND SPELLS

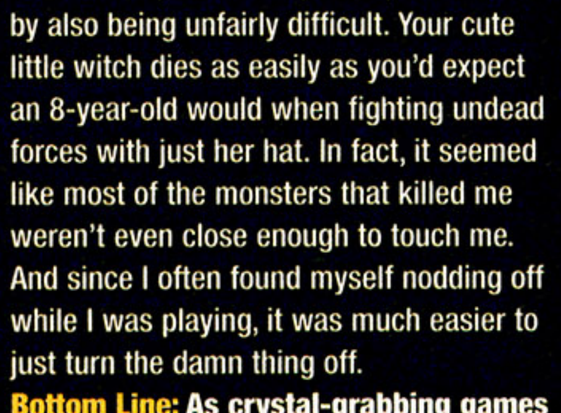


GC • Dreamcatcher — *Spirits and Spells* is one of those creatively bankrupt games where you hop your "lovable" mascot along a never-ending trail of magical gems. I don't know how many titles like this society needs, but I've got advice for game developers: The next time someone says, "Let's make another game like *Pac-Man World*, only this time, I want the arcs of dots to be a slightly different shape," maybe you should stop letting the company janitor throw out suggestions during your brainstorming meetings.

Unsatisfied with simply being derivative and lame, *Spirits and Spells* ups the ante by also being unfairly difficult. Your cute little witch dies as easily as you'd expect an 8-year-old would when fighting undead forces with just her hat. In fact, it seemed like most of the monsters that killed me weren't even close enough to touch me. And since I often found myself nodding off while I was playing, it was much easier to just turn the damn thing off.

Bottom Line: As crystal-grabbing games go, *Spells* is better than *Barbie Explorer*. However, to Barbie's credit, her game was at least thoughtful enough to mount its in-game camera right on her tight, sexy hot pants.

SUPER DUPER SUMOS



GBA • Midway — Outside of hot-dog-eating contests, fat people are generally not given the opportunity to be heroes. The makers of *Sumos* knew that to change this, they'd either have to convince the U.N. to solve disputes with hot-dog-eating contests, or create a fantasy where sumo supersoldiers save a chemical plant from robot dinosaurs.

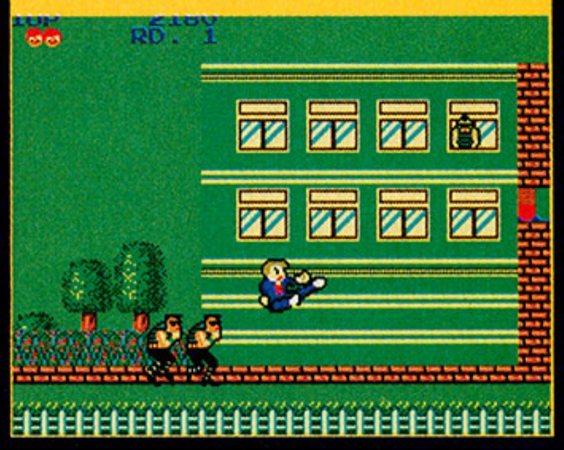
That dream is realized as a pretty standard brawler featuring, if I'm counting correctly, about one attack move. But even with that many weapons in your arsenal, you'll be surprised at how quickly you get tired of it. Luckily, there are monotony-breaking bonus levels that involve eating pork products directly from a conveyer belt. These bits are tense, tough, and educational—real-life forklift fatties will learn to avoid inedible objects in potential conveyer-belt binge situations.

Bottom Line: If you like fighting games, but thought they should be less fun and feature the morbidly obese, give *Super Duper Sumos* a try.

classic crap

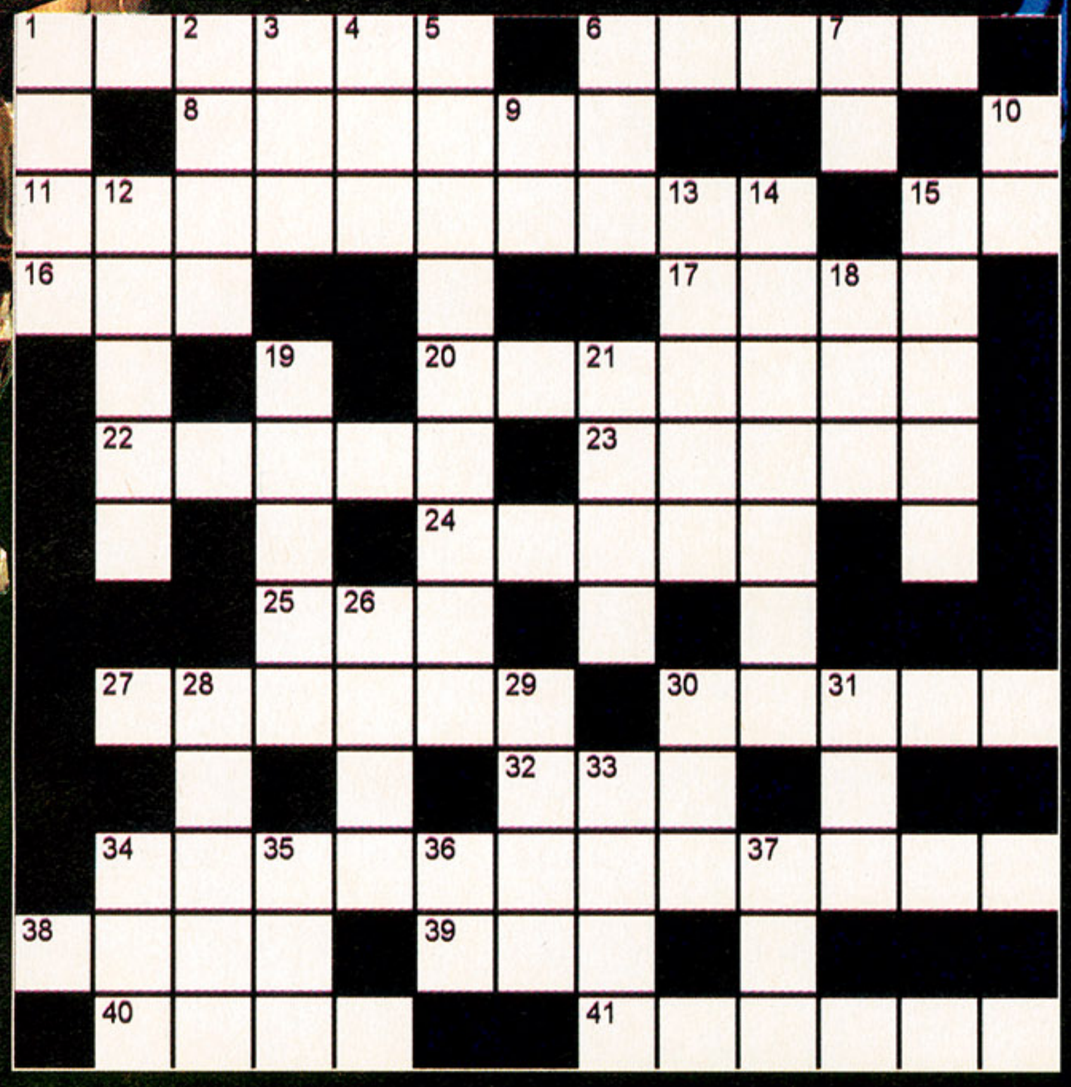
MY HERO

In the pantheon of terrible karate games, few can compare to Sega's *My Hero*. In this Master System abomination, titular hero Steve uses clumsy kung fu to rescue main squeeze Remy from an army of hoodlums, pigs, frogs, R/C cars, and copious amounts of the color green.



BURIED TREASURES

(Solution on page 145)



ACROSS

1. Will forever have his name attached to an Ultimate-15 NFL title (see feature, page 90)

6. *GTA: Vice City*'s Vercetti

8. Like dark blue ghosts in *Pac-Man*

11. *Tekken* contest

15. Like *Project Gotham 2*'s _-7 or _-8

16. *Tokyo Xtreme Racer* muffler maker

17. Microsoft PC strategy title released on PS2 in Europe and Japan but not America (abbrv.)

20. Ultimate-15 title that lets you play God and mess with people's lives

22. A dead man?

23. *Half-Life* creators

24. *Myst III* subtitle

25. Like PS1 *Parasite* or a "summer's" feminine hygiene product

27. A 2D game character is usually made of one of these

30. Sega's upcoming PS2 *Boy*

32. Another acronym for 18 down

34. Ultimate-15 military-ops game with gravelly voiced protagonist

38. Dwelling for *Street Fighter*'s T. Hawk?

39. Xbox flagship fighter

40. *Drakan* heroine

41. *Def Jam Vendetta* unlockable character

DOWN

1. Like *Godzilla*'s (NES) Mothra?

2. Like *Ex* and *Ex: Invisible War* (PS2)

3. Ultimate-15 title that you need rhythm to play

4. Like PS1's *-hander*

5. Ultimate-15 urban baller

6. *Mario Golf* starting point

7. Like *Mosquito* or *Do*

9. *Test Drive* suffix, for short

10. Ricky Carmichael's bike game

12. PS2 RPG subtitled *Shadow King*

13. Like Daxter's voice?

14. Enemies occupy them in *Metal Gear Solid 2*

15. Reboot

18. Cinematics (abbrv.)

19. Tony Hawk's latest "ground"

21. Like *Resident* _ or _ *Dead*

26. *FFIX*'s budding mage

28. Like *Animal Crossing*'s Rover?

29. Ghostbusters' car _-1

30. Vital to sustain a diving Mario in *Mario Sunshine*

31. Like *Rebel Strike* fighters

33. Solid Snake's *Metal* _

34. How you address a knight of the old republic?

35. Like forgettable PS1 fighter *Shao* _

36. *NCAA Football*'s Fighting Irish (abbrv.)

37. Built the *Final Fantasy X* airship

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

THE DIRECTORS' CUT

For the first time ever, experience director Hideaki Anno's true vision of anime's future in Neon Genesis Evangelion: The Directors' Cut. Features the final six episodes of this groundbreaking science-fiction series with scenes previously unavailable outside of Japan.

Resurrection (Episodes 21-23): Available 1.13.2004.
Genesis Reborn (Episodes 24-26): Available in March.

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GAMERSCOPES

Blame Uranus! Gaming-inclined predictions by EGM's Clitoria Van Buren

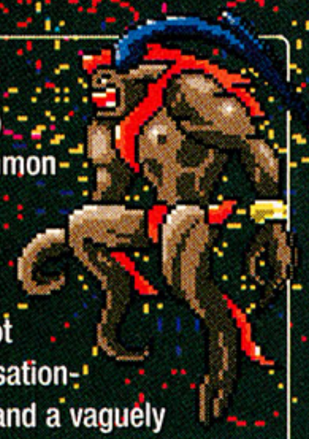
AQUARIUS
(Jan. 21-Feb. 19)

Punt that ball through the goal posts of life and score a home run—that's my advice to you. But if sports aren't your strong suit, just try concentrating on something you're really good at. Like *Dig Dug*, say. Become the best damn *Dig Dug* player in the history of *Dig Dug* and, well, everything else will work itself out, right? Those *Dig Dug* skills must have real-world applications of some sort.

PISCES
(Feb. 20-Mar. 20)

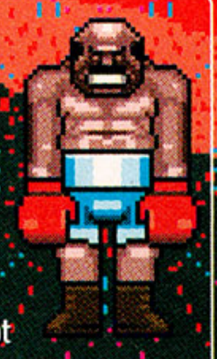
Put yourself out there, Pisces. Playing Xbox wedgie simulator *DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball* with the lights off just isn't enough anymore. As for the technical ins and outs of "putting yourself out there," I can offer only this bit of guidance: Avoid propositioning co-workers but tenaciously pursue winks and longer-than-normal eye contact—unless requested to stop by an accredited human resources rep.

ARIES
(Mar. 21-Apr. 20)



Final Fantasy summon Ifrit is your patron saint, Aries, but for all his fiery fury, he's really not much of a conversationalist. Ripped abs and a vaguely bad-boy vibe are great, but monosyllabic grunting is usually a deal breaker with the ladies. So try this certified-A1-gold opening gambit: "You know that Vann [see page 30] out of *Final Fantasy XII*? I mean, is that a chick or a dude? Seriously! Because I'd hit it."

TAURUS
(Apr. 21-May 21)

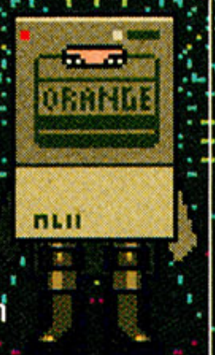


It's tough being the B.A. Baracus of the star signs, but someone's got to bust the skulls, wear the heavy jewelry, and drive the van. I'm not gonna tell you how to live your life (I reserve the right in the future, though), but do me a favor, Taurus—do *not* proceed through the door and unload the clip until you hear my "zulu." I'm sick of your bullheaded ass getting me killed on Xbox Live. Play *Rainbow Six 3* the way Tom Clancy intended, damn it.

GEMINI
(May 22-June 21)

All horoscope readers want to know two things: Am I getting some action soon, and will I win the lottery? This month, Gemini, the answer is no and no. Unless you consider a hot and heavy game of four-player *Mario Kart* and being picked for the *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact* online beta test as getting action and winning the lottery, respectively. Then the answer is yes and no. I'm glad that we had this talk.

CANCER
(June 22-July 22)



As all dedicated gamers know, even saving the world from alien invaders and single-handedly winning World War II can get a little old now and then. How about you try your hand at Texas Hold 'Em poker? You get to wear sunglasses indoors, which is pretty exciting just by itself. And if that doesn't work, have you considered effecting a limp? Monocles and lisps are also quite distinctive.

LEO
(July 23-Aug. 21)

You wanna know your problem? Besides a mild case of elephantitis, you're really just too much of a competitor. Thanking the deity of your choice and then doing the electric slide might be a culturally accepted reaction if you score a touchdown in the NFL, but it's not really appropriate for celebrating your victory over an 8-year-old at the *Soul Calibur* kiosk in Electronics Boutique. Tone it down, ace.

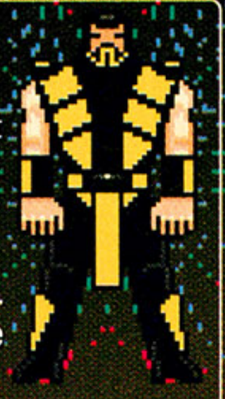
VIRGO
(Aug. 22-Sept. 23)

I don't care about all those home movies your ex put on the Internet; you'll always be a virgin to me, Virgo. Fresh, clean, a fan of the rhythm-action genre. Unless you've played *Manhunt*—then you're spoiled forever. A thousand hours of *Mario Party* couldn't wash away that taint. In other news, a family member needs your support—he or she refuses to accept that Atari has changed the name of *Driver 3* to *DRIV3R*.

LIBRA
(Sept. 24-Oct. 23)

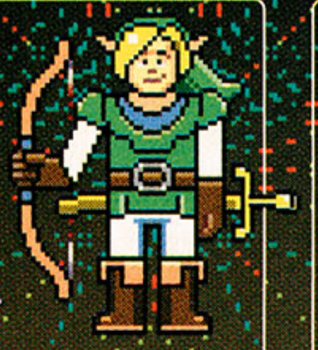
Prepare to be outrageously outraged, Libra. Have you heard about this whole "violence in videogames" thing? I mean, *have you heard*? Those fat cats in Washington are just dying to outlaw the games. Something about murder simulators, sprained thumbs, whatever—I'm not very detail-oriented. But it sure sounds like the makings of a deliciously indignant letter to the editor! Get to work!

SCORPIO
(Oct. 24-Nov. 22)



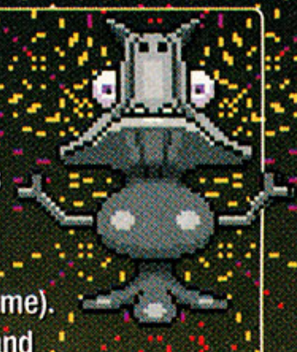
Did you know Lara Croft is a Scorpio? Outgoing personality, great with animals, pendulous rack—textbook Scorpio. Or at least I assume she is; all I know for sure is that she's too stuck up to answer my correspondence. Anyway, how about you follow her lead and, say, take a trip somewhere? Jump around, pretend you're British, steal some culturally significant artifacts? Drive a major game franchise into the ground?

SAGITTARIUS
(Nov. 23-Dec. 22)



You know, fishing games are really underrated, Sag. Especially those specializing in bass. Perhaps you might pursue this relaxing and rewarding sport from the comfort of your couch without all that pesky nature getting in the way. And these first-person shooters you've been into lately—it's not healthy. Hot tip: Don't play puzzle games on odd-numbered days of the month. I'm not asking—I'm telling.

CAPRICORN
(Dec. 23-Jan. 20)

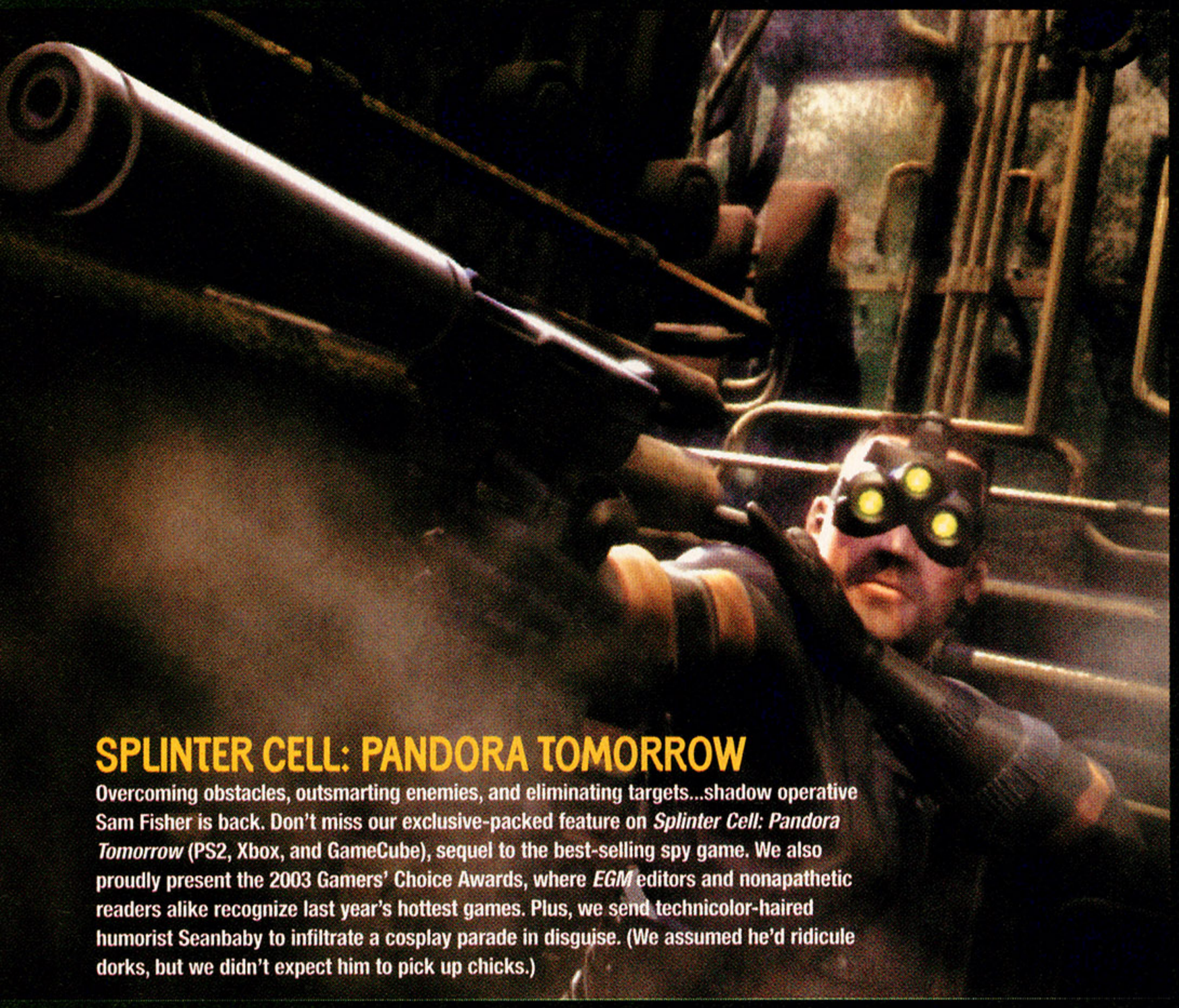


Never mind the altruistic tendencies of Capricorn poster child Munch (of *Munch's Oddysee* fame). It's time to cash in and turn your hobby into a profession. Start small, peddling used games and related paraphernalia to passersby from a multipocketed trench coat. A few of you will eventually become retail barons, trafficking in what might as well be widgets or lumps of coal, for all you care. Good luck!

Illustration by eBoy

NEXT MONTH: MARCH 2004 • ISSUE #176

ON SALE FEBRUARY 3



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Overcoming obstacles, outsmarting enemies, and eliminating targets...shadow operative Sam Fisher is back. Don't miss our exclusive-packed feature on *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* (PS2, Xbox, and GameCube), sequel to the best-selling spy game. We also proudly present the 2003 Gamers' Choice Awards, where *EGM* editors and nonapathetic readers alike recognize last year's hottest games. Plus, we send technicolor-haired humorist Seanbaby to infiltrate a cosplay parade in disguise. (We assumed he'd ridicule dorks, but we didn't expect him to pick up chicks.)

PREVIEWS

- Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes (GC)
- Resident Evil: Outbreak (PS2)
- Driver 3 (PS2, XB, GC)
- Breakdown (XB)
- Full Spectrum Warrior (XB)

REVIEWS

- Nightshade (PS2)
- Syphon Filter: Omega Strain (PS2)
- Ninja Gaiden (XB)
- Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles (GC)
- Metroid: Zero Mission (GBA)

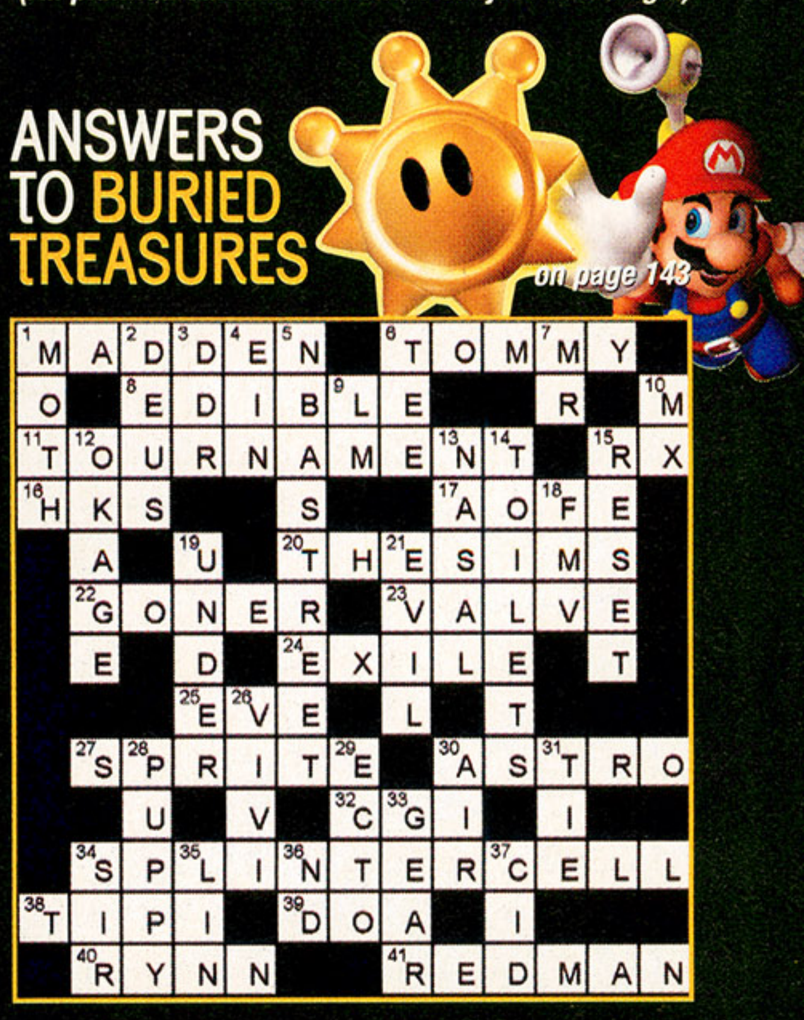
(All planned editorial content is subject to change.)

ADVERTISER INDEX

A.D. Vision
www.advfilms.com 143
Activision
www.activision.com 97
Atlus Software
www.atlus.com 121
Capcom USA ,Inc.
www.capcom.com 83, 148
Columbia House Company
www.columbiahouse.com 62a-62b
EB Games 37, 47, 74a-74b,
www.ebgames.com 75, 93, 113, 125
Electronic Arts
www.ea.com 8-9, 28-29, 86a-86d
Full Sail Real World
www.fullsail.com 137
Gamefly
www.gamefly.com 39
Koei Corporation
www.koei.com 127, 129, 131
Konami America
www.konami.com 95, 123
LucasArts Entertainment
www.lucasarts.com 15
Midway Games, Inc.
www.midway.com 21
MTV
www.mtv.com 23
Namco Hometek
www.namco.com 73, 115
Natsume
www.natsume.com 78-79
Nike Corporation
www.nikelab.com 10-11
Nintendo of America
www.nintendo.com 18-19, 77
Nyko Technologies, Inc.
www.nyko.com 105
Office for National Drug Control Policy
www.whatsyourantidrug.com 101
Sega Of America
www.sega.com 16-17, 43
Sony Computer Ent. 6-7, 33, 35, 51, 52, 53,
www.scea.com 70-71, 84-85, 88-89, 116-117
Sony Online Entertainment
www.sonyonline.com 26-27
Square - EA
www.square-enix-usa.com 66-67
Square Enix U.S.A.
www.square-enix-usa.com 56-57
Take 2 Interactive Software
www.take2games.com 65, 81
THQ, Inc.
www.thq.com 2-3
Ubi Soft Entertainment
www.ubisoft.com 107
Universal Pictures
www.vanhelsing.net 4-5
Vivendi Universal Games
www.vugames.com 49
Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company
www.juicyfruit.com 45
Zalman USA
www.zalmanusa.com 25

ANSWERS TO BURIED TREASURES

on page 143



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HSU AND CHAN

GAME DESIGNERS IN...

"AWARD ZONE"

WE'D LIKE TO THANK ALL OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY...

...BUT, COME ON, WHAT DID YOU EVER DO, REALLY? THIS IS MINE.

SHOO, YOU VULTURES.

AH, HELLO, VIDEO GAMERS... I'M HSU TANAKA, THAT'S MY BROTHER CHAN, AND WE ARE... ARE... PATHETIC LOSERS, IS WHAT WE ARE.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET DRUNK ON ZIMA AGAIN, CHAN? ITS TEPID WEENIE-NESS MAKES IT THE ONLY DRINK PATHETIC ENOUGH FOR ONE SUCH AS I!

I'D HANG MYSELF, BUT I'D PROBABLY SCREW THAT UP, TOO.

ZUM

ER... MY APOLOGIES; ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE "BEST GAMES OF ALL TIME" AWARDS SHOWS IS AIRING AND, ONCE AGAIN, TANAKA BROS. GAME DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN SKUNKED ON THE NOMINATIONS.

HSU'S TAKING IT RATHER HARD.

SEVEN CASES AND STILL NOTHING! GO, CHAN, FETCH ME ANOTHER BOTTLE OF DISTILLED FAIRY PIDDLE!

I MUST NUMB MYSELF TO THE PAIN OF A WASTED LIFE!

...

ER... AFTER I HIT THE LITTLE BOY'S ROOM AGAIN.

PARDON ME.

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HIM?

AWARDS SHOW BLUES. HE'S BEEN, VERY GRADUALLY, DROWNING HIS SORROWS.

THE ALCOHOL IN THIS STUFF DOES EVENTUALLY ENTER YOUR BLOODSTREAM, RIGHT?

I'D HATE TO THINK I'M WHIZZING AWAY MY ONLY CHANCE AT A BUZZ...

AN AWARDS SHOW, HUH? AIN'T THAT A COINCIDENCE! I WAS JUST HIRED TO DO A JOB FOR ONE OF THE NOMINEES!

YOU WERE HIRED TO "DO A JOB," GILA MOBSTER? THIS "JOB" DOESN'T INVOLVE ANYTHING VIOLENT OR MURDEROUS, DOES IT?

WELL, I'D HAVE TO CHECK MY DAY PLANNER, BUT, HEY, NOT THAT YOU KNOW OF, CAPICE? WINK, WINK!

AH, HERE IT IS... I'M JUST GOING IN AS A FIXER. TAME STUFF, BUT GOOD PAY. MAY HAFFA RENT A TUX, THOUGH.

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

A "FIXER?" LIKE, FIXING BALLOTS?

OH, DON'T LOOK SO INNOCENT, HEIDI OF THE SWISS ALPS! THIS IS AMERICA! YOU EVER WONDER HOW HALLE BERRY WON AN ACADEMY AWARD?* EVERYBODY CHEATS!

WAIT — SO, WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS, MAYBE WE ACTUALLY WERE ON THE NOMINEES LIST ORIGINALLY, AND SOME CHEATING SCOUNDREL HAD US DROPPED?

* WE KID THE ACADEMY AWARDS, OF COURSE. MS. BERRY WON BECAUSE OF HER SUPERIOR SKILL AT THE ACTING CRAFT.

ALSO, I'M A LEPRECHAUN.

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.. ER, I MEAN, YEAH, SURE, THAT'S POSSIBLE.

HEE HEE! WHEW!

CHAN, PUT ON SOME-THING MORE FORMAL!

TONIGHT, WE WILL HAVE VENGEANCE!

CAN WE HAVE ITALIAN AFTERWARD? I'M IN A LASAGNA MOOD.

OUR HEROES SNEAK BACKSTAGE AT THE AWARDS!

RIGHT, THEN, IT'S "BEST RACING GAME," THEN A MUSICAL TRIBUTE TO GUN-TOTING MUTANTS, THEN THE VOICEOVER CATEGORY...

SIR! WE HAVE A PROBLEM WITH OUR CELEBRITY EMCEE!

OH, WHAT NOW?

WELL, IT'S LIKE THIS...

EITHER HE'S OVERDOSED ON PCP, OR THERE REALLY ARE 1,000 TINY WHITE SPIDERS WITH CATS' FACES COMING OUT OF THE LIGHT SOCKETS IN HIS HOTEL ROOM, AND EITHER WAY, WE'RE NOT GETTING HIM OUTTA HIS TUB FOR A WHILE.

GREAT-- JUST WHAT WE NEED! WHERE ARE WE GOING TO FIND ANOTHER C-GRADE NON-CELEBRITY TO HOST? IT'S NOT LIKE MR. T AND ADAM WEST CAN BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE!

SIR! I THINK I CAN HELP YOU!

YOU? WHO ARE YOU?

I'M... UH... KIRK CAMERON OF TV'S "GROWING PAINS!"

OR POSSIBLY "SILVER SPOONS!" I DUNNO.

MY APOLOGIES, MR. CAMERON! IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE WATCHED THE SHOW, I'D FORGOTTEN YOU WERE ASIAN!

AN EASY MISTAKE! WHICH WAY TO THE STAGE? I'M GONNA EMCEE THE CRAP OUTTA THIS SHOW!

HSU, DON'T YOU THINK IT'S A LITTLE ODD THAT THE OLD EMCEE WOULD BE PUT OUT OF COMMISSION JUST BEFORE THE SHOW? YOU HEARD GILA MOBSTER, IT COULD HAVE BEEN A PLOT FROM SOME RIVAL DEVELOPER TO INSERT THEIR OWN GUY INTO THE CEREMONY!

HMM. GOOD POINT. KEEP ON YOUR TOES, AND IF YOU SEE GARY COLEMAN, TAKE HIM DOWN!

GARY COLEMAN IS THE LEAST OF OUR WORRIES, BROTHER! THERE ARE HIRED THUGS EVERYWHERE! IN ALL THE UNIVERSE, THERE IS NO MORE WRETCHED A HIVE OF SCUM AND VILLAINY THAN GATHERINGS OF VIDEOGAME ENTHUSIASTS!

AND THEY DON'T SMELL SO GOOD, EITHER.

MAN, THOSE GUYS IN THE BALCONY SURE DO LIKE THEIR LITTLE LASER POINTERS, DON'T THEY?

OH, NOT YOU, TOO.

HEY, CHICKS DIG AWARDS. DON'T TRY ANYTHING FUNNY.

DEATH TO KIRK CAMERON!

BAM! POW!

ALL RIGHT! ENOUGH! ENOUGH!

YOU PEOPLE SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELVES! SURE, I CAME HERE TO FUDGE THE RESULTS A BIT, BUT SEEING THE GREED AND VIOLENCE THIS AWARDS SHOW HAS INSPIRED IN YOU HORRIFIES ME! ESPECIALLY YOU WITH THE BAZOOKA THERE. YES, I SEE YOU. PUT THAT DOWN.

ME, I'M GIVING UP AND GOING HOME.

YOU, YOU SHOULD JUST STOP AND THINK ABOUT WHAT REALLY MAKES A GOOD GAME DESIGNER! IT'S NOT THE CEREMONY! IT'S NOT WHETHER YOU WIN OR LOSE! AND IT'S SURE NOT HAVING TO DISPOSE OF THE BODY OF SOME HAS-BEEN CHILD STAR AFTER THE SHOW! COME ON, CHAN!

IT'S ACTUALLY THESE LITTLE GOLD STATUES THAT WE STOLE BEFORE THE SHOW!

CATCH YOU NEXT TIME, VIDEO GAMERS!

LOOK! I'M A MOOSE!

MAJOR AWARD 100 GROSS

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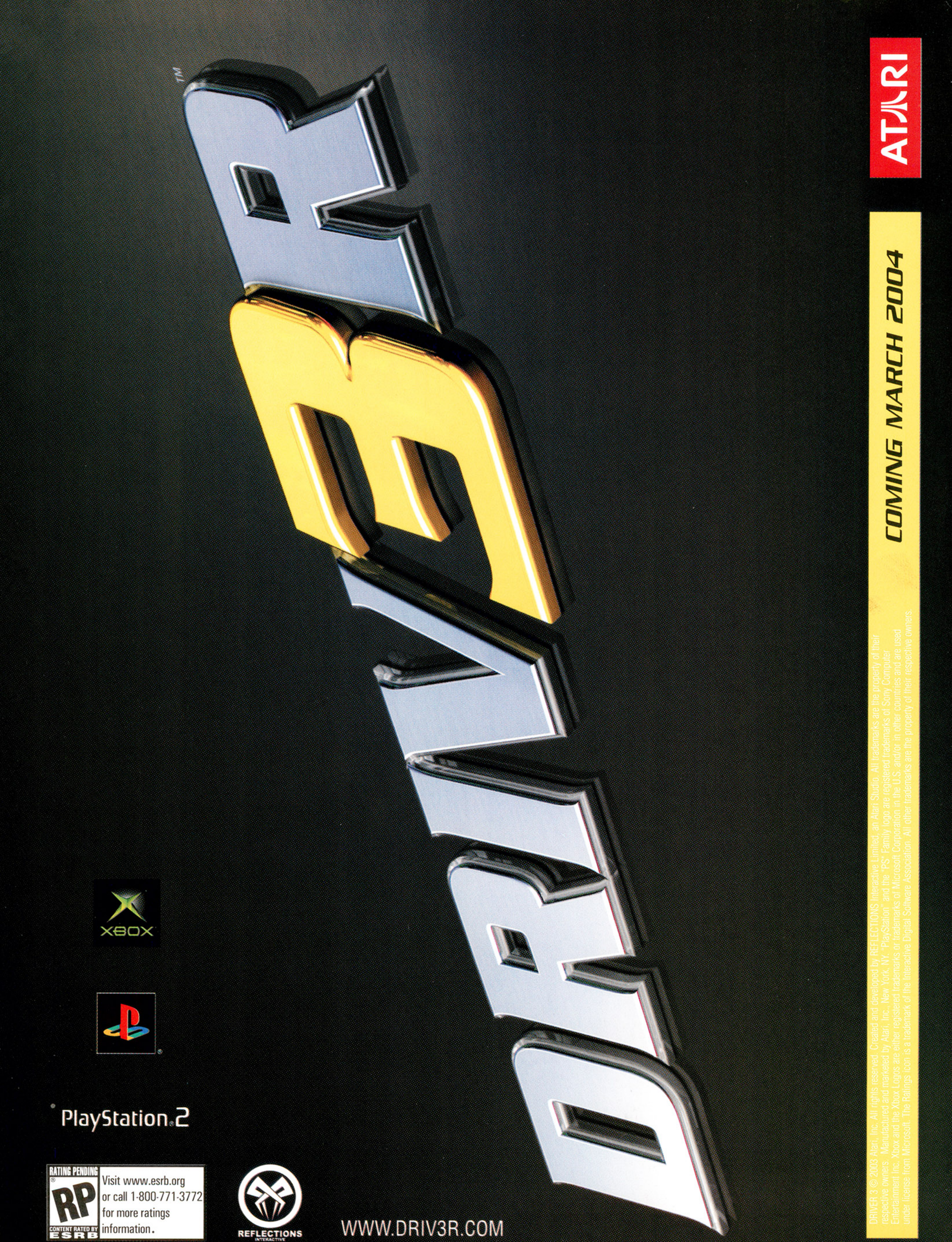
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