



16 Wii games
previewed inside!



SPIDER-MAN 3
Bigger, blacker, and next-gen!

INSIDE:

**AFTERTHOUGHTS:
CRACKDOWN**

PAC-MAN COMEDY

**GAMING AROUND
THE WORLD**

**SAYING GOODBYE
TO LAST GEN**

GOD OF WAR II



THE No.1 VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE

ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY™

ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY EGM.COM



10-PAGE WORLD EXCLUSIVE

**Ratchet & Clank
FUTURE**

PS3 gets the big guns.
Amazing screenshots inside!

XBOX 360: ONE YEAR LATER

A 7-page interview with Xbox's big boss

ELDER SCROLLS

A historical look at this epic RPG series

GIRL POWER

How one girl gamer made it to the big leagues





EVERYONE
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Cartoon Violence

Wii

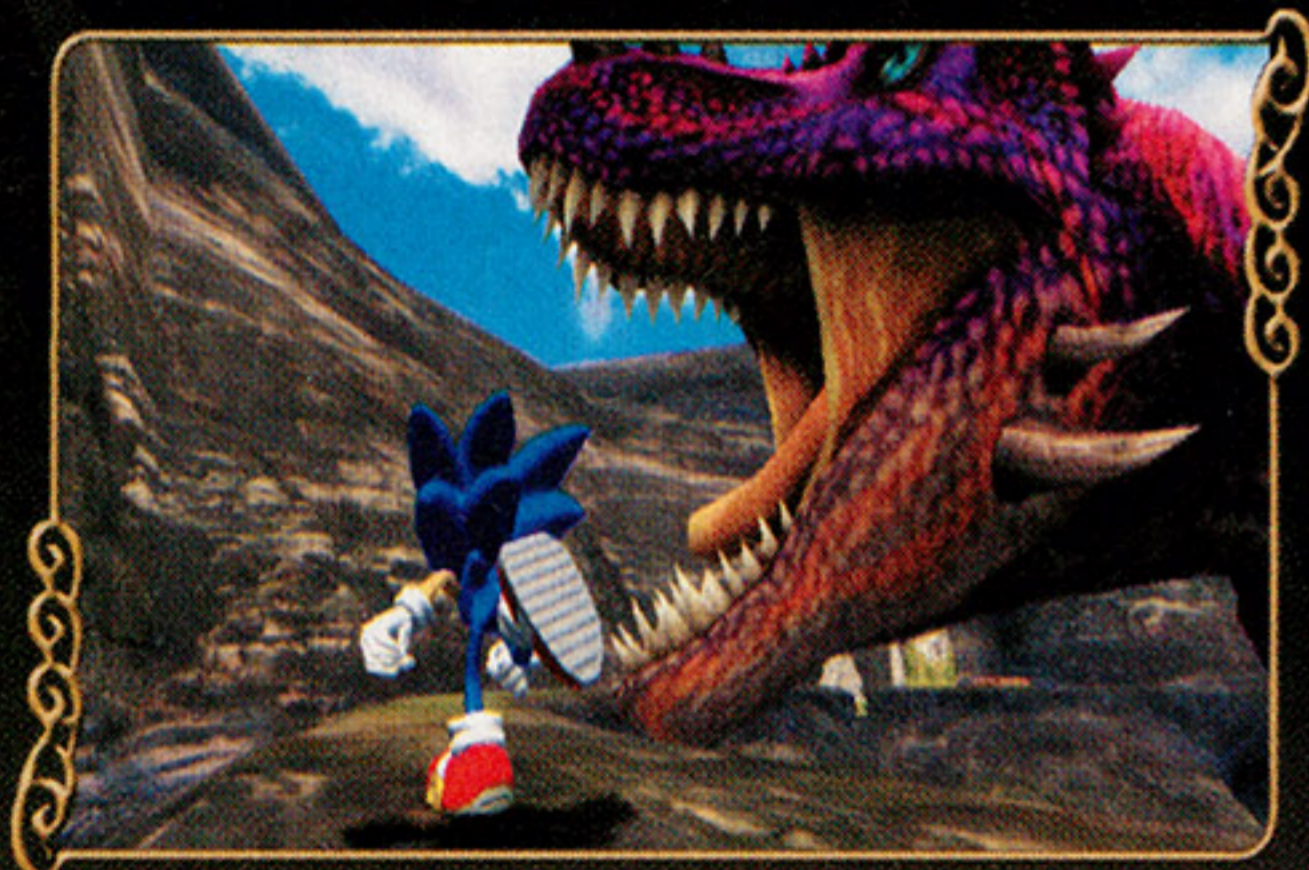
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No "I" in Team



A LOT OF PEOPLE COME UP TO ME and say, "Hey, great job on the magazine" or "You're stepping on my dog." I always appreciate the feedback (especially if I'm hurting an innocent animal), but I always have to let them know that *EGM* is a team effort. I am nothing without these guys (pictured above, left to right)....

Bryan (previews editor), for example, is a workhorse. He'll do everything he can to make the magazine the best possible, even if it's not in his job description. He would have a bright future ahead of him... if only he weren't an Ohio State fan, working for a Michigan man (that's me). Sitting in the cube behind him is **Michael** (news/features editor). This kid is insane and brings a lot of humor and energy to the magazine. He created one of my favorite new sections: 5 Lives (see pg. 43). Across the way sits **Greg** (reviews editor). He's very meticulous, which makes him superdependable. You can trust he'll be precise, and despite his huge workload each month, he never complains. Then we have **Shane** (executive editor). Shane is a pain in the ass and will give me an ulcer someday (listen to our podcasts on EGMLive.1UP.com to understand why), but no one can question his dedication to the magazine. He seems to know everything about everything going on in the gaming business, so he brings serious expertise (along with some out-there opinions) to our group. **Brooks** (intern) rounds out their cubicle cluster. He's the hardest-working intern we've ever had. (I hope none of the others are reading this....)

Well, that's it! The other people on staff aren't really worth mentioning. (Just kidding, guys. I'm out of room this month. I'll get ya next time....)

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief



> electronic gaming monthly



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> THIS MONTH'S EGM EXTRAS

EGM214.1UP.COM



Ratchet & Clank: Extended Coverage
Want more *Tools of Destruction*? We've got videos, developer interviews, blogs about our visit to the studio, and more...all online.



More Wii
Go to our website to see videos of more Wii games in motion.

Peter Moore: Looking Back One Year Ago
Last year at this time, we interviewed Xbox top dog Peter Moore about the launch of the Xbox 360. The discussion caused quite a bit of controversy—you can read it again online if you missed it the first time around. In this issue, we do a one-year follow-up interview with Moore.



Please check out our podcast at EGMLive.1UP.com and our message boards at EGMboards.1UP.com.



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LETTERS

> wii porn, androgyny, and more sony backlash

> TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

What classic football videogame was a hit at the South Pole?

E-mail the answer to EGM@ziffdavis.com

(subject head:

Trivia: EGM #214)

for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



Letter of the Month It's not me, it's you

I'm not given to voicing my opinion too much, but I thought if I add my voice then maybe Sony might believe that they do have a problem. I am speaking as a gamer who owned a PS1 and owns a PS2. I was satisfied with Sony's products in the past. When I heard PS3's launch price, I figured I could afford it, but it had better be pretty darn amazing! But everything I saw was a dud.

Now that the hype is dying down and the real work of keeping their system on top begins, Sony seems to ignore the cesspool it finds itself in. I can't find the Wii anywhere—but I could get up from my chair and have a PS3 in minutes if I wanted. I stopped at a Toys "R" Us and asked when they'd get more Wiis. Of course they didn't know, but they said they had "tons of PS3s on the shelf." I've got a friend who works at a major electronics retailer. He says the only way they can sell their PS3s is to put one or two on a shelf and pretend [that] that's all they have. This isn't good, Sony.

And Sony's response to this seals the deal. Every Sony bigwig deflects the bad press and the embarrassing launch by trash talking the competition, hyping their disappointing games, or outright blaming the gamers for not emptying their pocket-books. [Sony Computer Entertainment America President Jack] Tretton saying, "The problem we have...it's society in general" [EGM #213] is inexcusable. You screwed up. Your product is overpriced and your lineup is disappointing. Your online sucks and your attempt to push your Blu-ray agenda down the consumers' collective throat is irritating at best.

I used to be a fan and didn't want to see you fail, but you did. I will not purchase another Sony videogame product until you clean up your act.

—Travis Carlson

You know, it's true what they say: There's no rage like the rage of the recently brokenhearted. (Don't they say that? They don't? Well, they should.) To be fair, though, Travis, Sony has addressed some of the issues plaguing the PS3, cleaning up backward compatibility and



■ Jack Tretton in his underground lair

speeding up the PlayStation Store and web browser, and we know they're planning to add functionality to the online platform. The question is: Will anything be enough at this point? Ask us again in six months—it's way too early to consider Sony out of the game at this point.

Xbox flashback

I'm confused by EGM's cover story last month—so much praise for the Xbox 360. How soon we forget the problems Microsoft had when its system was first released. Overheating boxes, no good games around launch...and besides being incredibly loud (additional cooling fan, please?), my Xbox 360 was constantly locking up. I have to say I was very disappointed—the 360 is not a perfect game system by any means. I traded

mine in for a PlayStation 3, and I feel it is a much smoother system than the 360 (not to mention the fact that it doesn't make nearly as much noise).

Sony has already proven to be the leader in the gaming world, and I think Jack Tretton is right when he tells EGM that the leader will always receive more criticism. Yes, the PS3 is more expensive, but it comes with more features (like Blu-ray support, for one). Maybe the launch lineup was weak, but it's always that way—the early games on any system are never as good as the ones that come out later, years into a console's life cycle. I can't wait to see what PS3 has in store.

—Todd

Spiral galaxy

The other day I was playing a demo of *Rogue Galaxy*, and I barely got >



For writing this month's winning letter, Travis Carlson wins a game and other goodies.

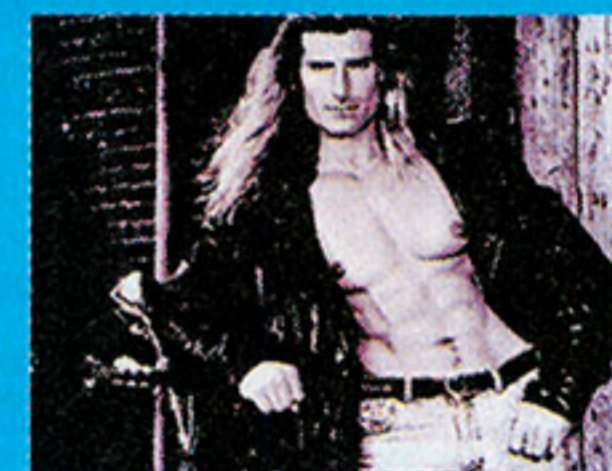
> FABIOWNED!

Ask an EGM cover model

Dear Fabio: I created a Wii Mii that looks exactly like me, but he looked lonely so I created a girlfriend for him. They cannot date or perform coitus. Actually, pretty much all they can do is go on parade and arm wrestle in *WarioWare*. Is this healthy? Should I be concerned about my mental state?

—Ephraim Freed

Fabio responds: Ephraim, you don't need to worry about your mental state, but it sounds like you should try to get out of the house more often. Girls like a guy who projects a confident attitude. And—trust me on this—interactions with an actual girl are a lot more fun than playing with your Mii (or your wee wee). Good luck!



Have a question about life, love, exotic creams, or anything else for Fabio, who appeared on the cover of EGM #3? E-mail EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject: "Dear Fabio." We're not kidding. Fabio really answers these!

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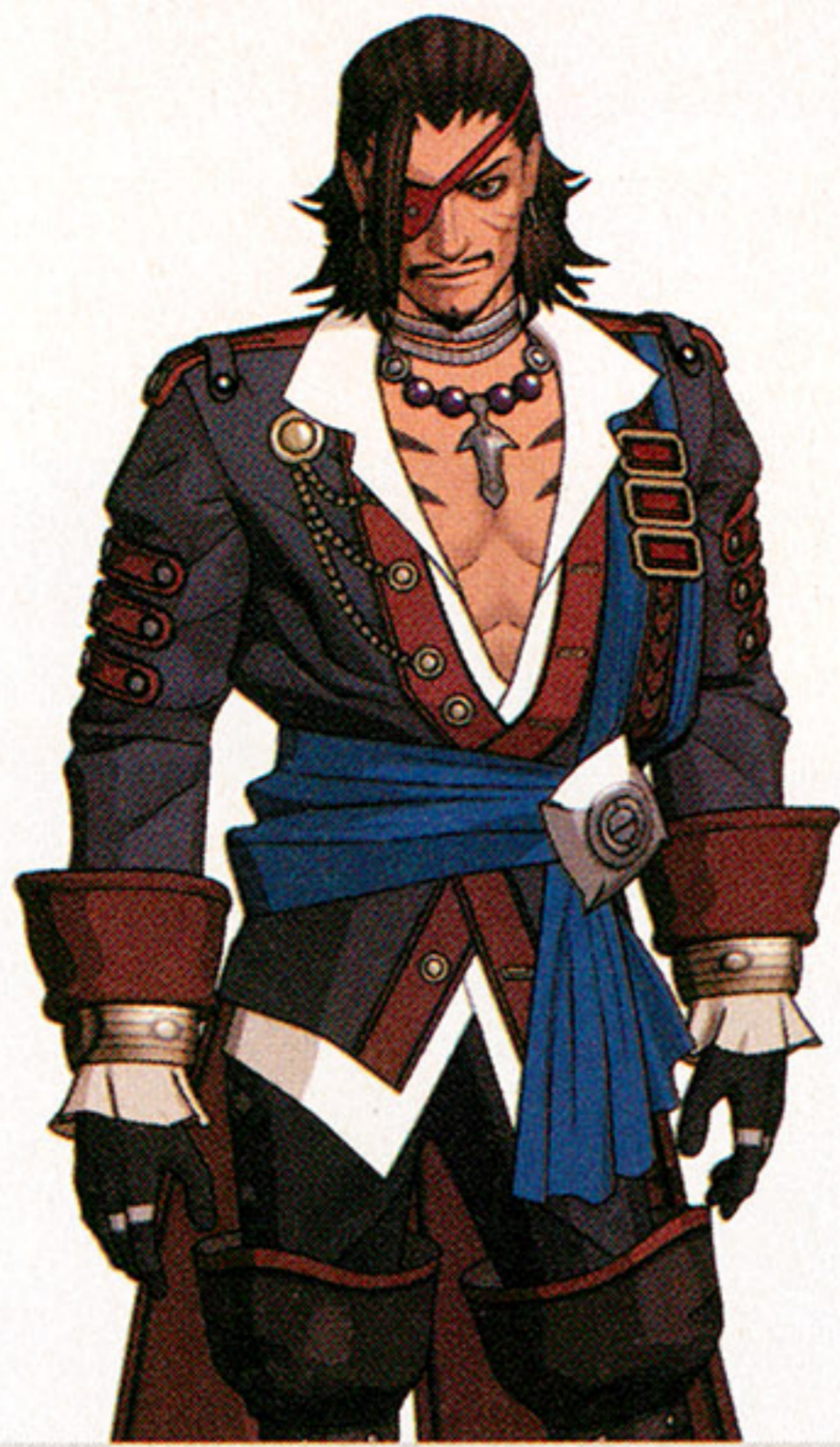
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■ *Rogue Galaxy*: It really doesn't get any manlier than this, people.

into the first 30 seconds of it before saying, "This is just like every other Japanese role-playing game on the market." It seems like JRPGs are trying to copy the qualities of the classics, like *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest*, only to spiral into a pattern of clichés. The shy, magical, center-of-plot girl? Long, dull cut-scenes? The metrosexual parade of boys? It'd take a fool or an RPG zealot to say that JRPGs are actually going somewhere with this. As for the Western-made games, I'm seeing some disturbing parallels to *Dungeons & Dragons*.

—Scotty Farnsworth

You're seeing parallels to *Dungeons & Dragons* in a genre that was essentially created as an unabashed *Dungeons & Dragons* homage? Ric Romero salutes you! Look, when you're speaking of specific genres, you have to consider certain things as standards. Almost all beers use the same basic ingredients. Almost all blues tunes use the same basic chord progressions. And almost all JRPGs feature spiky-haired girlie-men with delusions of grandeur and a flair for soliloquy. It's what you do with these ingredients that counts. Funny thing is, we found *Rogue Galaxy* to be one of the least, er, "femmy" JRPGs we've played in a long while.

History Wiipeats itself?

When *EGM* declared 2007 the "Best Year Ever" for games [*EGM* #212], I couldn't wait to read what was on the grill for the only next-gen console I own: the Wii. Man, was I disappointed. You listed 36 games coming out for the 360, 32 titles for the PS3. The Wii got a lousy 12. And while you were

singing the praises of such upcoming ass-kickers as *Halo 3*, *Lair*, *BioShock*, and company, what do Wii owners have to look forward to? Another lame *Sonic* game, another *Pokémon* game, *Cooking Mama*, *Mario Party 8*... ugh. And the salt in the wound: You show eight games slated for 2008 that look amazing, too, and not one of them is a Wii title either. Assuage my fears, *EGM*: I'm afraid Nintendo fans might have another GameCube on our hands.

—John Hayes

First of all: You will not dis *Cooking Mama*. How dare you? You get to chop onions! You get to roll dough! How can you not be excited about that? Second: Perhaps you're forgetting *Metroid Prime 3? Super Mario Galaxy? Dragon Quest Swords? Super Smash Bros. Brawl? Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles? Sure, the Wii may not have as vast a lineup as the other systems, but it's got more than its fair share of strong games for '07.*

Naughty, naughty consoles

I just wanted to drop a line and let people know that I don't like that a kid-friendly Wii or PS3 supports web browsing, letting them access adult sites that announce that they're Wii or PS3 compatible. I think in doing this the gaming industry is going to get some real heat from the government. We see what transpired with that lame "Hot Coffee" mod. As a parent and a faithful gamer of many years, I find this completely unnecessary.

I have the 360 right now. It doesn't support web browsing, and I hope it stays that way. I don't want our innocent consoles becoming porn machines. College guys (or guys who don't have a hot wife like mine) can fill their laptops with that junk.

My biggest fear is my wife. She already gets mad when I even mention the word download, so I can just imagine what she'd do to my poor videogame console if she found out the kids were getting XXX-rated stuff. Forget about it. She'd take a sledgehammer to the thing.

—Joe Parker

Before we go on, let us just say: Wii porn. Tee hee. Now that that's out of the way, let's investigate your letter's claims of console porn. Thoroughly. No wait, hang on, we're still investigating. Aaaaaand...done.

So yes, the PS3 and Wii support web browsing. Yes, the Internet is full of things kids shouldn't see. That's why both consoles have

parental controls that can block out the browser entirely. What more needs to be done?

Look, a web browser (in whatever format) is a tool. Like most tools, it can be used for nefarious activities. Does that mean we should get rid of all tools? Kids could get hold of a screwdriver and stab someone to death. Should we outlaw screwdrivers? What will happen to all those poor, lonely, unscrewed screws? Look, these things need to get screwed, and without the tools for screwing, how's that going to happen? Someone's got to...to screw... Aaaaaand...done.

They're so precious at this age, aren't they?

Reading Katie Bailey's letter ["The rosy view..."] in *EGM* #212 reminded me of a conversation I had after I got a PS3. I went to school and was bragging how cool *Resistance* was. One of my friends then tried to tell me that *WarioWare: Smooth Moves* was the best game he ever played, and how the Wii was so much better than the PS3. After he said that, I was left with just one question: When buying the Wii, did you have to pay extra to have your masculinity stripped from you, or was that included in the price? Never before have I heard a teenager utter the words "Dude, I played *Smooth Moves* for like 10 hours yesterday." After hearing this I was convinced that if you are the owner of a Wii, and you're over nine years old and not a woman, you'd better kiss your manhood goodbye.

—Tobe Platt

Tobe, Tobe, Tobe. Put aside how brilliantly innovative some of the games are. Put aside what a blast it is to actually throw punches in a boxing game or swing a bat in a baseball game. Here's the real power of the Wii: Girls love it. Is that reason enough to get one? That's your call. But it's pretty compelling, isn't it? 🍌

> OOPS!

Have you ever tried to knit a sweater while riding a unicycle and playing "Mandy" on the kazoo? Our last deadline was kinda like that, and we missed a few grammatical errors in the cover story. We'll take it slower this month, we promise.



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PRESS START

> features, previews, brazilian nuts, and other stuff



> INTERVIEW: ONE YEAR LATER

Moore's Law

(FIRST AMENDMENT)

The 360 is a year old. Where do things stand now, and where do things go from here? The Xbox boss tells us...

By Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Photographs by www.claudiagoetzelmann.com



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Preview:
Next-gen
Spidey



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A world of
gaming



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Take This
Job: Girl
power

A YEAR AGO, WE INTERVIEWED XBOX BOSSMAN PETER MOORE

shortly after the 360's launch. Most of you liked our line of questioning—brutal, honest, and frankly, a little smart-assy. (Google “Moore’s Law, 1UP” to read it online.) Xbox loyalists, however, thought we were being rude and said we needed to apologize to Moore. Yeah, right.

Don't worry, Xbox fans...Moore actually enjoys tackling the tough issues—he told us so himself. So we decided to do a one-year follow-up with the guy, and we threw in a few questions direct from our readers on EGMboards.1UP.com to force Moore to address his customers directly. We also ask him some of the same big-picture questions that we posed last month to Jack Tretton, Sony Computer Entertainment America's president and CEO, so you can compare the two's responses....

EGM: Last year we asked you about the successor to the Xbox 360, and you told us, “The platform development team is taking a well-deserved break, and they should come back in a year refreshed, looking for the next challenge.” OK, it's been a year. What are those guys working on now?

Peter Moore: As with any platform group, they're always looking ahead once they deliver a system. They start looking at scenarios, four, six years from now—where will we be, what will the consumer be looking for, what will be the capabilities of silicon [chips] in 2011, 2012, whenever it is that the next next generation starts. These things take years to develop; you have to work with partners to be able to build the necessary infrastructure to make sure the next-generation console is truly a next-generation console. We're going to be ready for the next generation if and when it arrives.

EGM: A year ago you said the number of defective Xbox 360s was small, “no different from any other major consumer electronics product,” but late in 2006 your company admitted that there was a higher than usual number of units coming in for repair. What happened?

PM: That comment was specifically referring to the early manufacturing in '05 and wasn't referring to all consoles manufactured. We took care of that through some warranty measures—we have increased our warranty to 12 months. We're trying to do right by the consumer.

EGM: We talked about how the 360 is a really loud machine, but it's even more apparent now next to the relatively quiet PS3 and Wii.

PM: I keep a very close eye on what consumers are saying. I really don't see that as being a major issue. Would we like to be able to have a quieter machine? I guess so. Is it feasibly possible? You're probably asking the wrong guy to start talking about technology for cooling fans.

EGM: We gave you a hard time about the 360 not being backward compatible with the entire Xbox 1 library. Now the Wii is out, and it can play GameCube discs, going as far as to offer ports for GameCube controllers. And the PlayStation 3, although it's not perfect at it, certainly supports a far greater percentage of past-generation titles than the 360 does. Both these systems even let you transfer old save files. Is this just an area that you don't care to compete in?

PM: If you look back at when the issue of backward compatibility came up, I don't think anybody really felt we'd get to where we are today. We recently had another update that pushed us to over 300 games. It is something that is not easy to do, and you and I talked about this ad nauseum over the past couple of years, but we continue to work on it. We'll continue to add games to that list.

EGM: Why are we still getting voice-chat problems? It seems like

nobody at Microsoft is able to give us a straight answer about this. There used to be echoes...now there are players who just can't hear each other. It's especially frustrating considering that the service costs \$50 a year.

PM: Why are you still getting voice-chat problems? [Laughs] I know you spoke with [Group Product Marketing Manager for Xbox Live Global] Aaron Greenberg, and we're actually going to try and come down and fix that on-site with you. It's pretty complex when we're connecting millions of people and 20-odd countries around the world with so many different protocols and broadband partners—every now and again you'll get some glitches. If this is something that is broader than more than a handful of people, my apologies, and we'll do everything we can to be able to fix it.

EGM: Are you saying that you and Aaron are going to come over to my house to fix my voice chat?

PM: [Laughs] I didn't say “Aaron and I,” but I did say “we” meaning the broader Microsoft “we.” Somebody will come to your house, yes. I want you to print this. Somebody will come to your house, diagnose the problem, and fix it...once we replicate it.

EGM: While we're giving you a hard time about stuff, to be fair, last year we complained that many of the 360 games looked only marginally better than their current-gen equivalents. But now that we've seen *Gears of War*, we're believers. But we're still not sure about that whole “games feeling like a lucid dream” thing that you were pitching....

PM: You know, it's funny. My son was home from [UC] Berkeley.... The Xbox 360 is on the big screen—I got a DLP projector—and let me tell you, >



Peter Moore was president and COO of Sega of America, where he helped launch the Dreamcast, before joining Microsoft in January 2003. He is now corporate vice president of the Interactive Entertainment Business in the Entertainment and Devices Division of Microsoft Corp, making him: 1) the boss of the Xbox and Games for Windows businesses, 2) responsible for establishing relationships with third-party game developers and publishers, and 3) holder of one the longest titles known to corporate America.



> We're going to be ready for the [next] next generation if and when it arrives.

—Microsoft Corporate Vice President Peter Moore



you get involved in some of those late-night games on Xbox Live in *Gears of War*, and you are exhausted. I don't know if it's a lucid dream, but boy, you are transported to a different world. You're ducking and popping and shooting and watching your team's back...it transports you to what we used to talk about in my old PE-teacher days: the right side of the brain, where you move over into a different world. All of a sudden you're away from that left side of the brain—analytical thinking—and you're at war. It's intense and it's immersive, so yeah, one of these days something is going to come along where people will say it felt like a lucid dream. I dunno. [Laughs] You're going to hammer me on that every year, so I may as well just come up with a good story for it.

EGM: Another thing we have to give to you: Originally we thought the concept of Achievements was rather silly, but most of us are hooked now.

PM: Yeah, I watch all of you guys on your blogs. You're all hooked. You're chasing the most obscure Achievements I've ever seen. Things I never knew existed. I think it's human nature to want to achieve something, and then more importantly, let the rest of the world know you've achieved it.

EGM: You told us that Rare is very important to the future of the Xbox 360 platform. We love *Viva Piñata*, but it was a sales disappointment. *Kameo* and *Perfect Dark Zero* were relatively disappointing. So what else do you have? Is it all up to *Banjo-Kazooie* now?

PM: Well, let's talk about *Viva Piñata*. You say it's a sales disappointment. Our long-term plan for *Viva Piñata* is not a typical videogame cycle of, "Let's look at the first four weeks and then make a determination whether it's been a success or failure after that." The people who play it, including your boss [editorial director John Davison], love it. And we also see a longer tail in *Viva Piñata* than we're seeing in other games—it continues to truck along nicely. It's a very important title that will broaden as we continue to reach out into a broader demographic of consumers. So don't write off *Viva Piñata* as anything but a success yet, because I think it does a lot of things for the platform that other games aren't doing for it.

Rare continues to be very important. *Banjo* will be along soon, and while you and I have gone back and forth on *Kameo*, I still think that was an important title at launch for us. It's easy to look at sales and dismiss it, but it's the more subjective opinion of having titles that were available at

launch that you would never expect at launch. *Viva Piñata* will do the same thing this past holiday, and *Banjo* will do the same thing when it's available. Rare is still very, very important.

EGM: Whatever happened to community-driven microtransactions? You originally envisioned part of Xbox Live Marketplace being run by the community, where you could buy and download content designed by other gamers.

PM: I think that XNA Game Studio Express is the first step there. People are loving this idea of being able to build their own Xbox 360 games. And I think that's the first stepping stone to [other types of] user-created content. Those microtransactions are still in our plans. There's a lot of complexity involved with that...allowing consumers to interact with each other...but we're committed to [being] able to do that in the future.

EGM: In regard to offering HD-DVD as an optional add-on, you said in the past, "We're not forcing movie technology on game players, but instead are letting them choose how to personalize their experiences." If that's true, why not sell a Blu-ray player as well?

PM: Well, because...when we look at HD-DVD, we're looking at a superior format. Microsoft is a backer of HD-DVD for a number of reasons, and I don't see any reason why we should support something that we don't believe in. We believe in HD-DVD.

EGM: Why not give the consumer the choice, though?

PM: Because the consumer's choosing HD-DVD. [Laughs all around] Look...we're not going to get embroiled in a movie-playback war. We're very clear on this. If you've already got your 360, \$199 puts you in the high-def movie playback scenario, but I'm not burdening the box with it as our competitor's done. This is about games. It's not about movies.

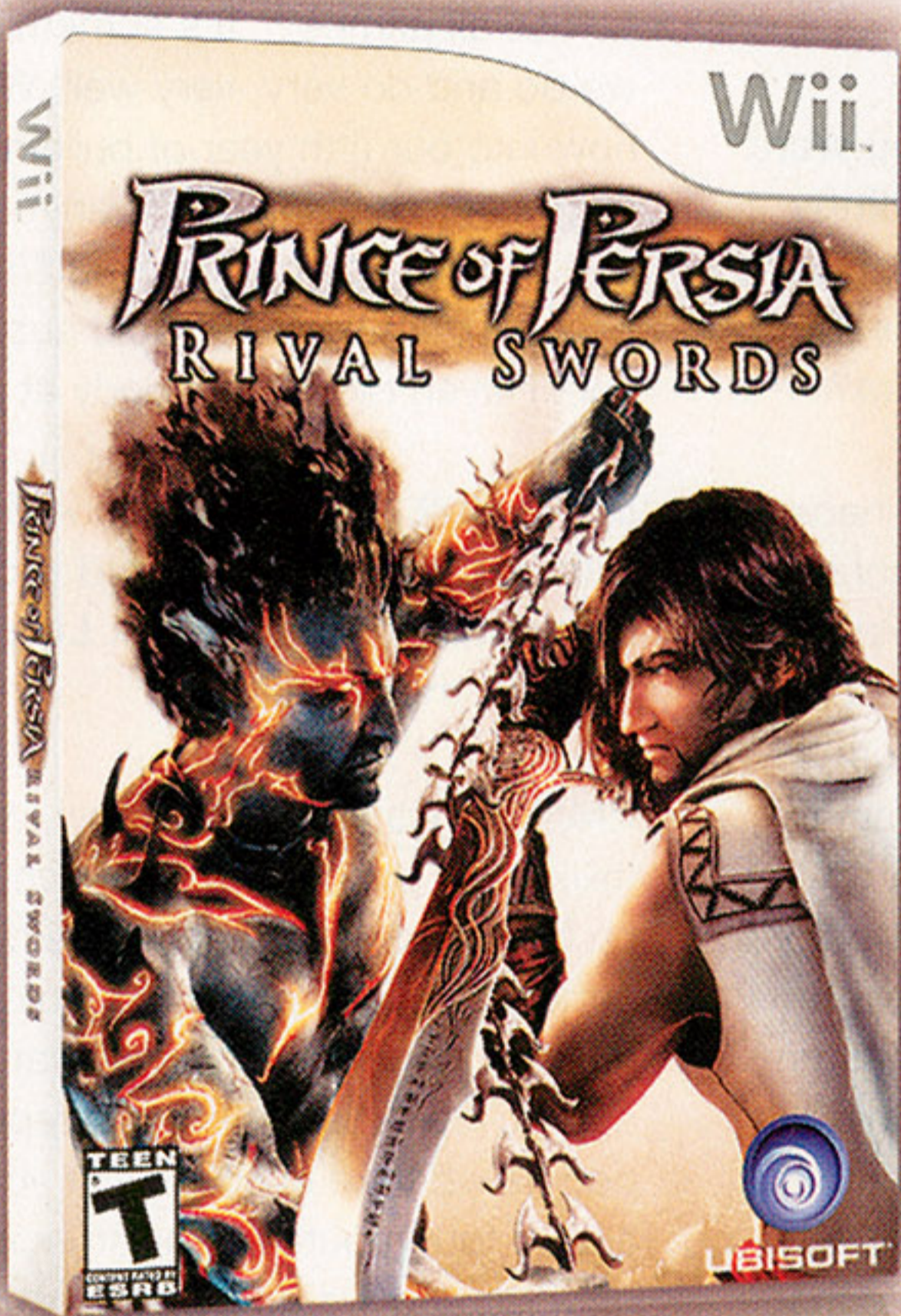
EGM: Does that mean you wouldn't include a built-in HD-DVD player in future iterations of the Xbox 360?

PM: No, no, it's about choice. We're absolutely focused on consumers that want to play games, and if they're fortunate enough to be the small minority right now that have the equipment to take advantage of the new generation of high-definition movie playback,

➤ I watch all of you guys on your blogs. You're all hooked. You're chasing the most obscure Achievements I've ever seen.

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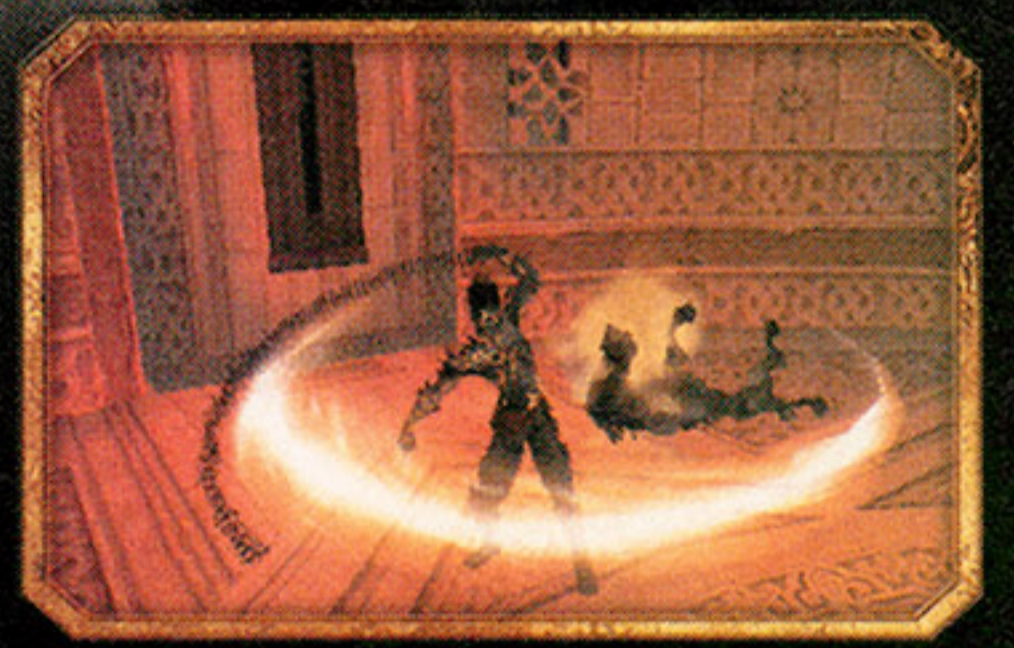
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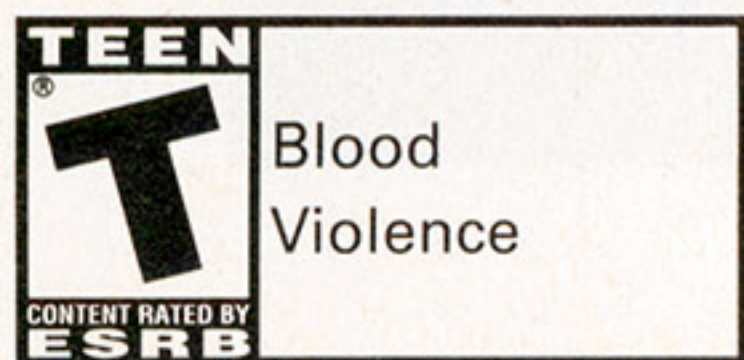


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EGM: So tell us about the Zephyr.

PM: The what?

EGM: The Zephyr, the prototype of a new 360 model that was leaked on the Internet...

PM: The Internet...OK, therefore it must be true. [Laughs] We have nothing to announce about that. The last time I looked, zephyr was actually some sort of wind. From a British point of view, it was the first car I ever bought—a Vauxhall Zephyr, I think. But no, we have nothing to announce about any leaks and what-have-you. If I had to respond to that, that would be my full-time job.

EGM: But you told us you are always looking at ways to improve

the hardware. And don't you want to compete with Sony on things like high-definition HDMI output? Is there a strategy on a timeline for releasing an updated system?

PM: I don't think that there's necessarily a timeline, but we are constantly looking. The industry now, even in relation to when I got into it, is changing so quickly. It used to be just a piece of fixed hardware—something we were stuck with for five or six years. Technology didn't move along at the pace it does now. So we're constantly looking at what consumers are feeding back to us, what their wants and needs are, whether that's hardware, whether that's software, and most importantly, whether that's the services we're providing.

The platform team here takes all that feedback seriously and does a lot of research and does a lot of usability [studies], so...while we've got nothing

to announce right now, we've got tons of stuff in the hopper, and when the time is right we'll let you know.

EGM: Why are we paying for Xbox Live Gold if Sony can offer PlayStation Network for free?

PM: Well, it's interesting...we're now 5 million-plus members strong. When we look at the experience that \$50 a year is giving people, in relation to the experience that I have certainly seen with the PS3 online network, I don't think there's a comparison yet.

People say the value for their money is the experience of having single gamertags and identities, voice chat in all games...you talk about Achievements...to be able to see achievements in your gamer profile, know who your friends are, have this consistent quality of experience across all games.... It's something that we do and do very, very well. We're now into our fifth year of building this thing out...I haven't found anybody that complains about paying \$50 a year for the Xbox Live Gold subscription. Haven't found anybody at all.

EGM: Isn't there a way to kick the foul-mouthed, 12-year-old racist homophobes off of Xbox Live a little bit more quickly?

PM: [Laughs] Well, you know, we have millions of people now that can be on Live, and it's not easy. We do our utmost to govern. There's a lot of self-governing going on as well that we appreciate—the community reporting people who are exactly what you talk about: foul-mouthed, racist, homophobic...and we do everything we can to quickly react to the complaints.

But I apologize to anybody that's offended by [inappropriate behavior], particularly if they're going into games that are not Mature-rated and are >

WHAT'S UP WITH...

...the Halo movie?

"The Halo movie is on hold," Moore says. "It's unfortunate that, for whatever reason, the two partners that we had, Universal and Fox, decided that they didn't want to pursue the next step for the movie. Here's something that is probably one of the top three cultural icons for the 18-to-34-year-old male, who Hollywood continues to complain doesn't go to movies anymore, and for whatever reason they just don't see the opportunity [in a Halo movie]. Some production work has already been done, and we continue to be optimistic that a movie will be made."

...movie director Peter Jackson's [King Kong, Lord of the Rings] upcoming Halo spin-off game?

"We've got teams that are going back and forth from New Zealand, working with Peter and his group," Moore says. "So while we don't have anything to announce yet, work is going on...actually, pretty feverishly. Hopefully, let's say in the next 12 months, we'll have a little bit more information to tell you."





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hearing things. I would just encourage the community to self-police.

EGM: What's the point of purchasing a core Xbox 360 to save \$100 if you have to buy—

PM: To save \$100!

EGM: But you have to pay \$40 to get a memory card to make up for the lack of a hard drive.

PM: So you're saving \$60.

EGM: But these memory cards aren't even big enough for the upcoming content you have on Xbox Live Marketplace....

PM: We need to offer choice to the consumers, and not everybody wants a hard drive—a memory unit is just fine for their purposes. Look, we would love for everybody to have a hard drive, and we would love for everybody to connect their box to broadband, but we also recognize that the majority of people outside the United States don't have access to broadband right now, although that's quickly changing. We're trying to offer the choice.

EGM: The certification process for Xbox Live Arcade games has taken a robust opportunity that Microsoft had to innovate in the space and clogged things up. We hear a lot of horror stories from developers with games in certification limbo, and it seems like Nintendo is capitalizing by shoveling out up to four titles per week on the Wii's Virtual Console. Do you feel like this might be a missed opportunity for you?

PM: No. You use the term "shoveling out," and that's what we're trying to avoid. Arcade needs to be something that's managed very closely from a quality point of view. There's a cost involved in this, and what we don't want to do is "shovel" things out and make the experience that little bit more diluted. I think the publishers and the developers are all getting used to our quality standards now, and we've certainly got no shortage of concepts that are coming in.

But don't expect us to shovel anything out. Not having to sit through bad games to buy good games is something we're all about.

EGM: With the continued success of the PlayStation 2, why has

Microsoft left the Xbox 1 to wither away? Why abandon the potential cash flow with a wider audience?

PM: Well, we have tried to give consumers enough notice on what our intentions are. The PlayStation 2 continues to do well, as you say, and my plaudits go out to Sony on that, but we've moved forward. The Xbox 1 continues to be something that our third-party partners develop and publish games for. But we have determined that we need to move on to the next gen, and the Xbox 360 is our focus.

EGM: What would have to happen at the end of this current Xbox 360 cycle for you to want to support it longer and more heavily than you did Xbox 1?

PM: While we're talking hypothetically about, I don't know, four to six years from now, our plans are to continue to support the Xbox 360 for as many years as consumers want to buy it. I think that first-party plays a large role in that. When you think of *Halo*, *Gears of War*, *Fable*, *Forza*, and *Project Gotham*, to name just a few, you now have franchises that we can continue to extend longer and deeper into the lifecycle than we [were able to] in the first generation. [On Xbox 1] you could have said there was *Halo* and not much else, for better or for worse. We've continued to build on a five- to 10-year plan with first party that you're now starting to see the benefits of.

EGM: Now that it's out, how do you view the Wii?

PM: The same way when I first saw it last year: It's a very innovative device. It's done incredibly well at the holiday period and retailers seem to be very happy. The question that remains is, how long will the experience be innovative to consumers, and what are the legs of this thing? Is it a real next-gen contender that can continue deep into the lifecycle, that can continue to meet the numbers?

EGM: Do you have one yourself?

PM: I don't. I was hoping my friend Reggie [Fils-Aime, Nintendo's president and COO] would send me one,

but there's plenty around here that I get to play with. My house is an Xbox 360 house. And a Games for Windows house, I might add.

EGM: How do you view the PlayStation 3?

PM: Sony clearly had a shaky start, and I think even they will admit that. I'm a little disturbed from an industry point of view to actually see them available at retail just recently...still sitting on the shelf. I don't know what that's telling me. I certainly think *Resistance* has done a good job for them, but the games that come to mind trail off pretty quickly after that.

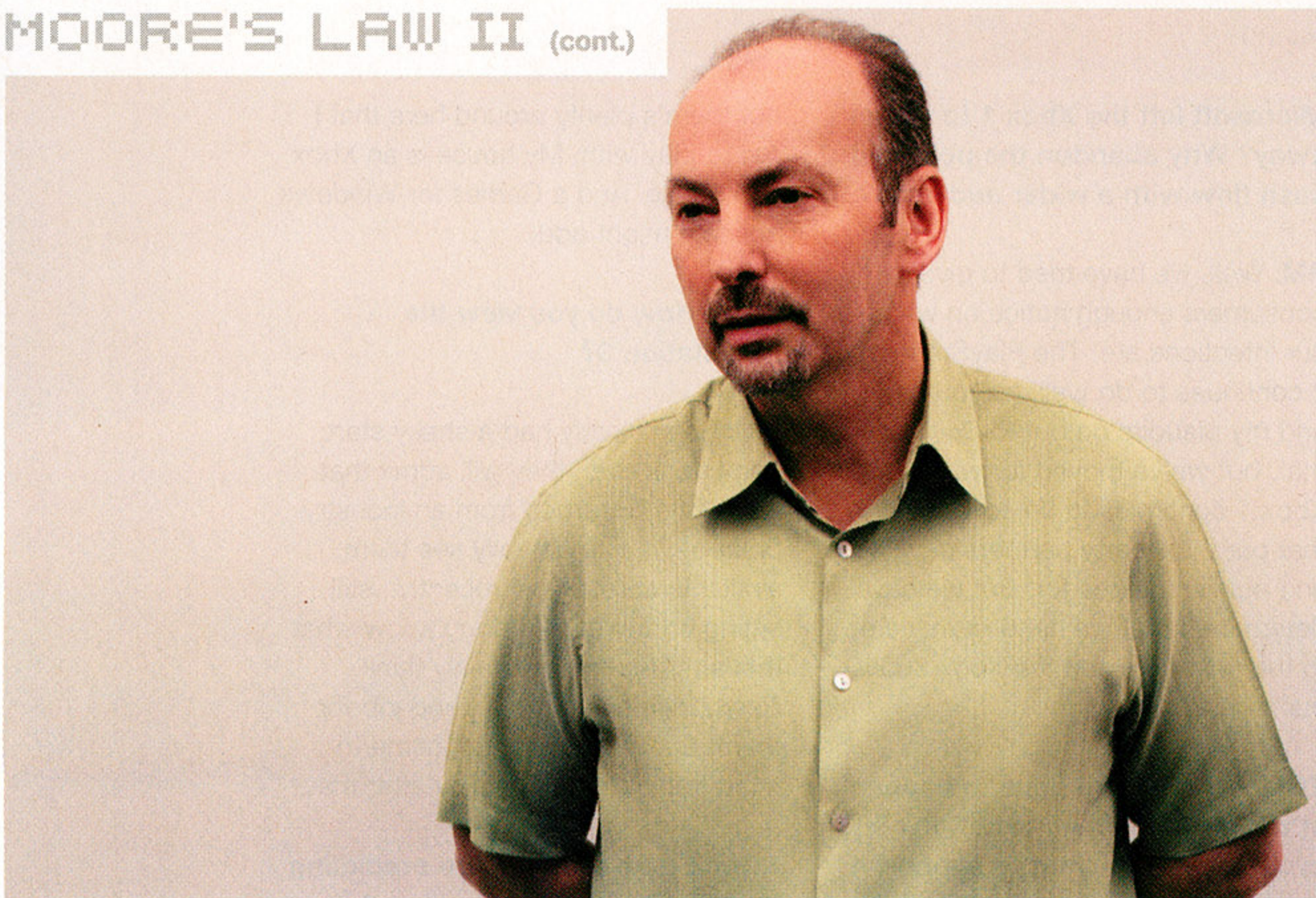
EGM: Some analysts are predicting that the PlayStation 3 will end up the market leader in a few years despite its stumble out of the gates. Why do you think that is?

PM: I don't know what the analysts would [look at] right now—vis-à-vis the price point, the quality of the games, the number of units they're shipping, their supply chain scheduling on a global basis—that would indicate the PS3 is going to beat the Wii or the Xbox 360. The facts don't bear that out right now. Maybe the historical strength of the PlayStation brand is something that they're looking at, to say, "Well, it's happened twice, therefore it must happen a third time." Maybe they think that Blu-ray is going to be the de facto high-def movie playback format this year, and that consumers will be clamoring to pay extra money to get a Blu-ray player as part of the PlayStation 3 experience. I don't know. I guess you'd have to ask them.

EGM: Sony's seeing a few former exclusives head to the Xbox 360 as well, such as *Grand Theft Auto 4* and *Virtua Fighter 5*. This is good news for you, but it seems to make the two platforms feel...a little bit more homogenized. So besides a few first-party games, what defines your platform?

PM: I think you absolutely downplay the importance of first-party. There's not going to be the equivalent of a *Grand Theft Auto* like there was in the previous generation—a third-party >

➤ Don't expect us to shovel anything out.



exclusive that will determine winners and losers in this next generation. It will be the power of the franchises that first-party develops and delivers on a regular basis. That's where we feel really good about where we stand in this next generation.

And of course, having some key third-party exclusive games is very important. I'll point to *Lost Planet...* on the heels of what we did with *Dead Rising*. I'll point to *BioShock*. I'll point to *Splinter Cell 5*. So when you combine what I think is a very strong portfolio from a first-party point of view, and then you add some key exclusives from third party, and then having Xbox Live as a very powerful layer all over that...that's why we feel real good about what we can offer to the consumer.

EGM: What is the deal with *Halo 3*? There's no other game out there that could get away with putting out updates on just a gun or something minor like that...

PM: I just think it recognizes the voracity and the passion around *Halo* nation, that we can update a weapon, update a vehicle, or add a character, and volumes...tomes are written about it. People look at it like a conspiracy theory, and people break down frame by frame anything that we send them. It's in recognition of the power of this franchise around the world that any morsel of information that we provide is voraciously gobbled up.

EGM: If there's one game or franchise you could steal away from the competition, what would it be?

PM: You know, I've always been a huge fan of Nintendo intellectual property from the early days of owning a Super NES, and when I think of franchises that have defined our industry, there's probably none bigger for me than Mario. I'm sure the headline will be "MOORE WANTS MARIO ON XBOX 360," but when you think of our industry over the past 25 years, and you think of the one character that would define what videogaming is about, it's that little Italian plumber.

EGM: When will ad-supported games actually change the economics of games for gamers? Will you be passing along the savings to consumers, or do you think it will ultimately let you afford more ambitious projects?

PM: There are numerous ways now that we can continue to bolster development budgets with advertising, with product sponsorship, with sponsored downloads.... We continue to look at ways that advertisers can get what they need, but at the same time, so gamers don't get games that are too over-commercialized.

You're looking at companies that are just lining up down the street to be involved in the game environment. I look back at the old days in my previous life at Sega, when we


were actually paying for licenses of consumer-product companies to put in the game. I think about *Crazy Taxi* [Dreamcast], things like KFC and Pizza Hut.... Boy, the shoe is on the other foot now, no pun intended. The ability for us to be able to have control of this demographic and bring that to consumer-product companies... it's a powerful tool. It's already helping to defray some of the costs in the next-generation game environment, because these next-gen games are fabulous, but they're not cheap.

EGM: What do you think are the immediate challenges for the games industry?

PM: It's not an easy business. The hardware is expensive, we're pushing the boundaries of where the silicon manufacturers can go, it's a heavy investment up front, and you've seen Sony announce that they think that the PlayStation 3's first year is going to cost them \$1.7 billion in losses and startup costs alone.

So it's big bets. [We need to be] able to cover our costs as quickly as we possibly can, and start to bring the prices to the mass market and get to these 100, 150 million-unit console generations that we all need to be able to scale our business, and therefore reinvest in even better games. That's the key. We can't make this elitist. We cannot, absolutely, make this all about the early adopter and nobody else.

EGM: As someone who can directly impact the way the industry evolves, what is your vision for where this business is going?

PM: The industry is in as good a shape as I've seen it in the years that I've been involved. I remember years ago, people saying there was no way three consoles could ever coexist. Now, the Wii has carved out a position that is very distinctive, I think we've carved out a position that's distinctive, and the PlayStation 3 is in the process of carving out a position. I think that is good for consumers; it's good for retail. The more competitors that you have and the more that companies like Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo invest in the industry and invest in great development resources, and with publishers putting large amounts of money behind marketing...it makes for a very healthy industry. I hope that continues. 

➤ I'm sure the headline will be "MOORE WANTS MARIO ON XBOX 360."

Next month: It's Nintendo's turn....



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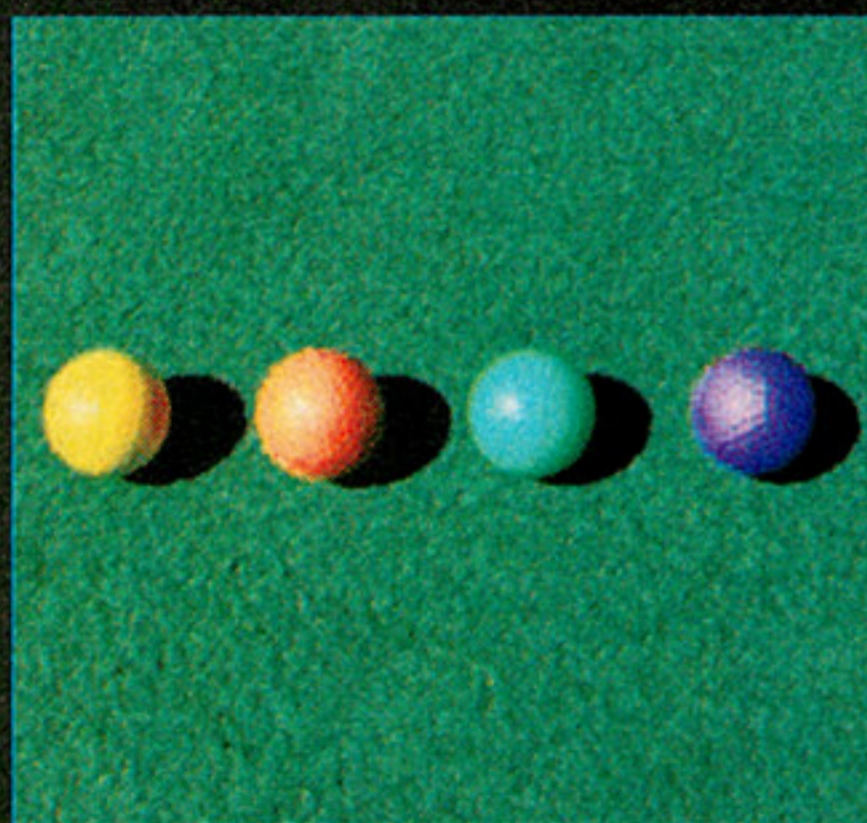
Dastardly delays

Even though the next gen has arrived, we're still waiting for the games to show up to the party—like, ironically, *Mario Party 8* for the Wii. Nintendo has pushed back the festive minigame collection to this summer. The Wii isn't the only culprit, though. Publisher Koei ending up delaying both the PS3 button masher *Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War* and the futuristic racer *Fatal Inertia* to this summer as well. Things aren't looking good for *The Lord of the Rings: The White Council*, either. Mega-publisher EA confirmed the upcoming 360/PS3 role-playing game is indefinitely on hold (a nice way of saying the game will eventually get canned).

Phantom hourglass

Like racing your saved time-trial ghost in the Virtual Console release of *Mario Kart 64*? Probably not, considering you, uh, can't—Nintendo confirmed it's impossible to save time-trial ghost data because doing so requires an N64 memory pack...something the Virtual Console does not support.

> GUESS WHO



- 1 I suck at most sports, but I play a mean miniature golf.
- 2 Working in an office is so mundane; I prefer the fancy freelance life.
- 3 Ma is always bragging about her intelligence—what a show-off!
- 4 I like to scan my own groceries—not only is it quicker, but it's also fun.
- 5 I'm not hotheaded, but I do tend to blow up every now and then.

Who am I?

Samus Aran from the *Metroid* series



+ FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN



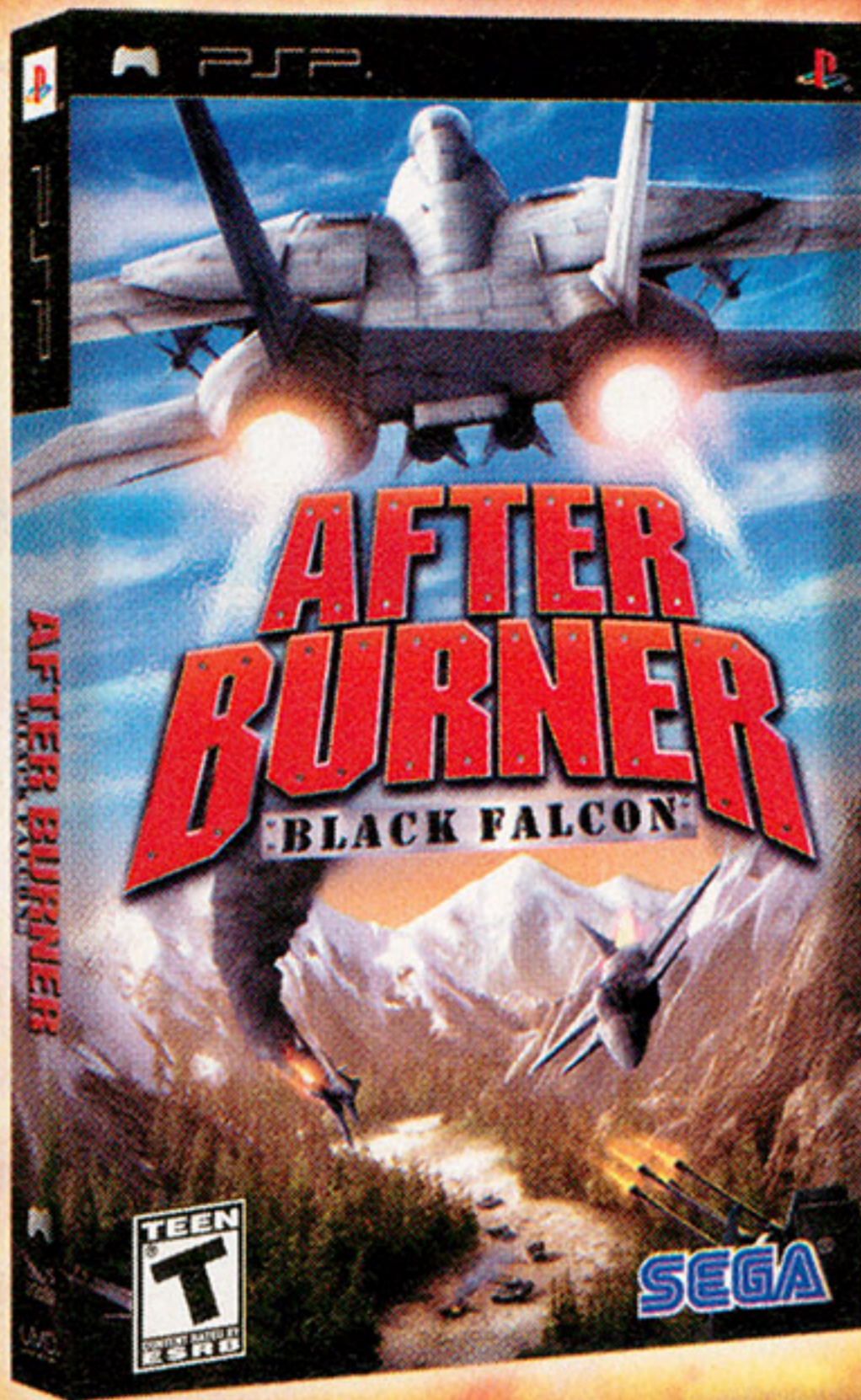
Gundam MUSOU

Solving pressing international conflicts with giant robots

Platform: PS3
Likelihood it'll come here: Both *Gundam* and *Dynasty Warriors* sell well here...so this cash-in has a chance.

I'm sick of beating up hapless Chinese soldiers! Then Namco Bandai has a nice trade-up plan: How about ditching the dynasty (or samurai) warrior and replacing him with a 200-foot-high mech? *Gundam Musou*, a co-op project between publishers Namco Bandai and Koei, is easy to describe—it's the same old *Dynasty Warriors* formula (i.e., kill endless enemies until your thumbs go numb) except this time, it's filled with robots from the *Mobile Suit Gundam* anime saga. The story mode takes you through the first three *Gundam* TV series, controlling three different heroes as they plow through hundreds of wimpy robots.

But I don't know jack about anime. It's all right. Like *Dynasty Warriors*, the game's set up such that you can press the square button over and over again and still kick all manner of virtual mech ass. Since you're a robot, though, you've got a bunch of long-range weapons, a "dash" move for dodging stuff, and even the ability to fly around in outer space. Sure, *Gundam*-license games have never really been known for being blockbusters (even though the Japanese gobble 'em up regardless of their quality) but a round of robot-bashing sounds like it could be kinda cool...even if the monotony sets in quicker than the hand cramps.



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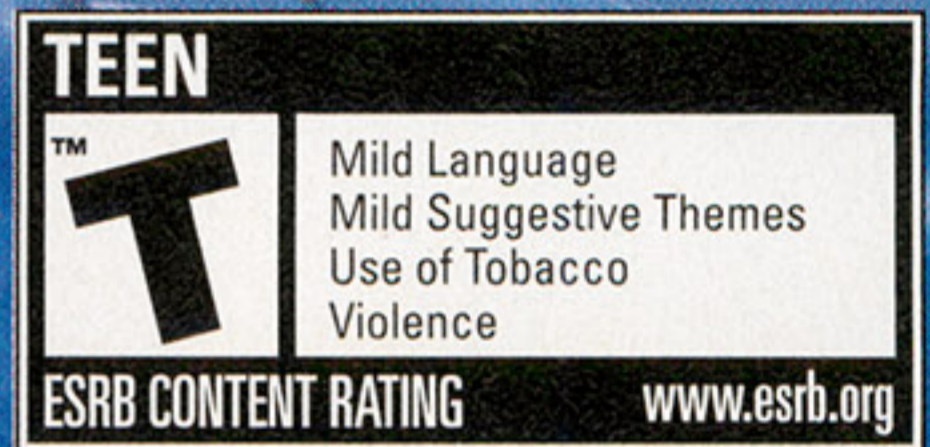
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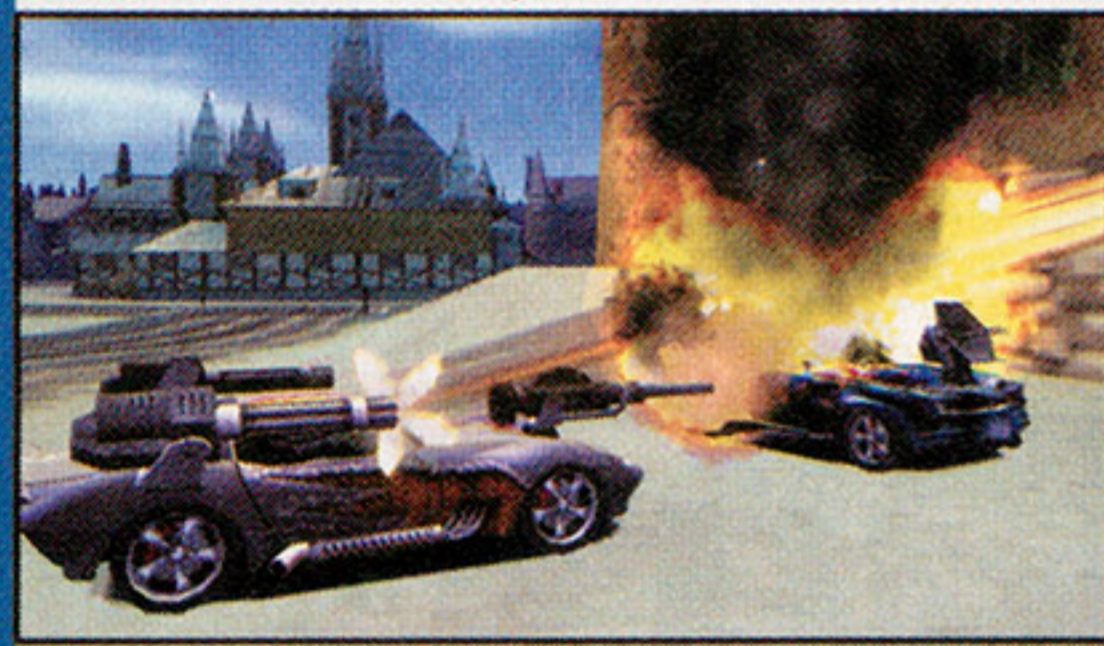


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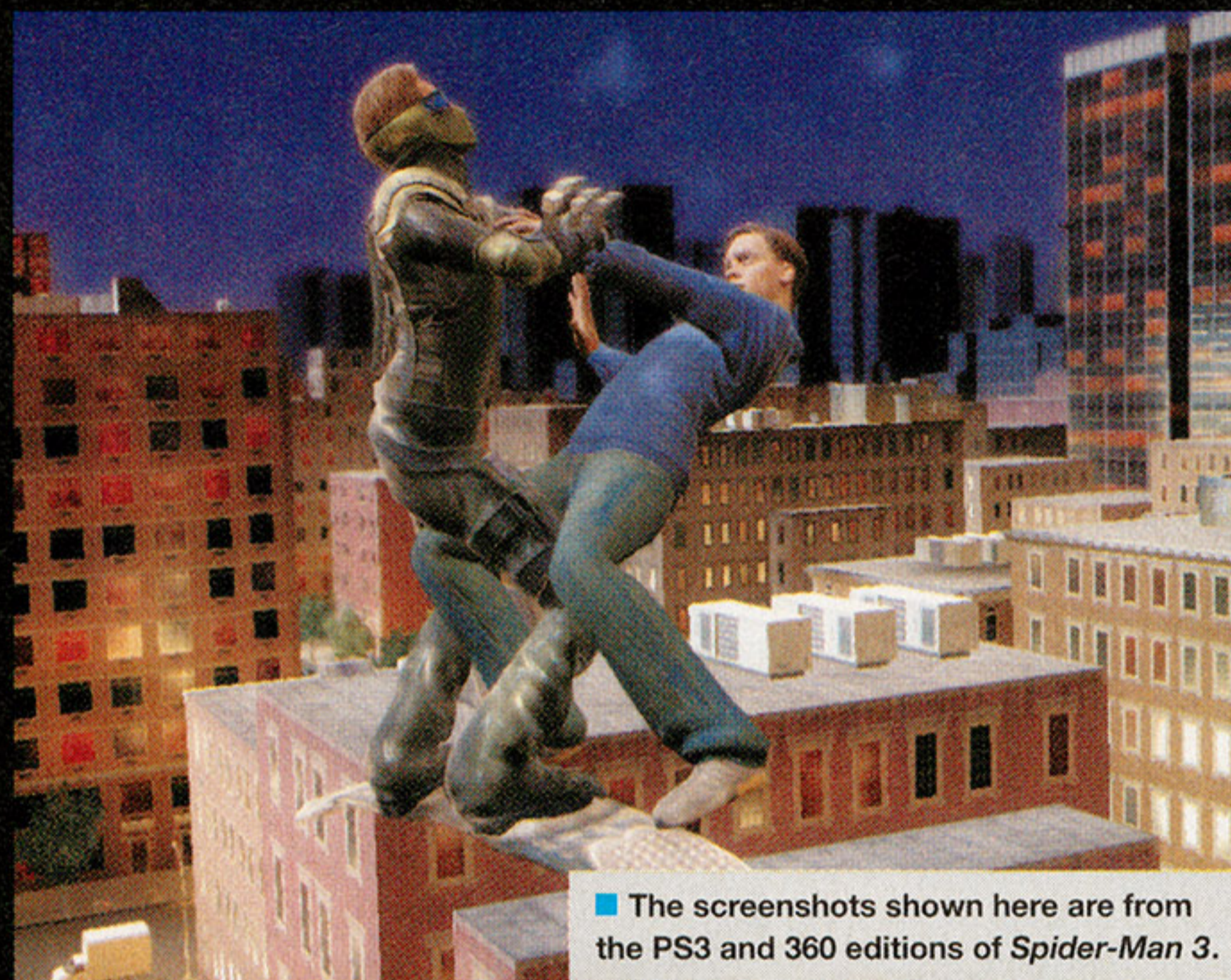
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> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

Spider-Man

Full of venom By Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen



■ The screenshots shown here are from the PS3 and 360 editions of *Spider-Man 3*.

Platforms:
Wii/PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Activision

Developer:
Treyarch

Release Date:
May 2007

SOME TWENTY-ODD YEARS

before Sony decided to use the *Spider-Man* font as the PlayStation 3 logo, and even before Tobey Maguire suited up for the first time onscreen, *Spider-Man* reached one of the biggest milestones in its history: the black suit. Its origin is totally goofy and reeks of the '80s—Spidey got it when he was transported to an alien world where he was forced to fight in a sort of intergalactic UFC match and needed a replacement for his traditional blue-and-red duds. But, despite that, it had an extremely iconic look and nifty powers that augmented his abilities, making it the centerpiece for the creation of one of the series' most popular villains, Venom (who will appear in the upcoming *Spider-Man 3* movie). And it's this very same black suit that will

take center stage in Treyarch's video-game adaptation of *Spider-Man 3*.

Man in black

The black suit's basic characteristics make it the perfect power-up in terms of gameplay. In the comics, the suit generated its own webbing (no need for pesky web-fluid cartridges or organic web-shooters). It could change its shape (hence Spider-Man never took it off; it just morphed into civilian clothes when needed). And it enhanced his general abilities. The

game stays true to the suit's origins. "Playing as black-suited Spider-Man enables greater strength, more hit points, the ability to absorb damage, and a completely unique set of more powerful combat maneuvers," says Executive Producer and Game Director Chris Archer.

The city in which you'll wear your new suit has also changed. "This is the biggest Manhattan we've ever built," says Senior Producer Greg John. "In addition to the full city from street to the tops of the tall-

➤ **We have taken painstaking steps to make sure that every mission has a different flavor and feel.**

—Executive Producer and Game Director Chris Archer

est buildings, we have an extensive subway and sewer system, plus the most sophisticated and detailed interiors of any *Spider-Man* game.” But Treyarch doesn’t want you to just gawk at a big map of New York—you’ll need to actively clean up the streets yourself. “We wanted the player to not only be able to visually see the effect that they are having on the city, but also we wanted to reward them for cleaning up crime,” says Archer. The game’s Citizen Satisfaction Index (CSI) system tracks everything that players do in the city, translating that into progress and rewards. “Do your job right and the citizens are happy and you’ll be given more complex missions and tasks,” says Archer. “Fail to be a good superhero and you will have more crime and unhappy citizens than you can deal with.”

More web-slinging, less pizza-delivering

Which leads us to how Treyarch plans to address one of the biggest criticisms of *Spider-Man 2*: the “sameness” of the missions. “We have taken painstaking steps to make sure that every mission has a different flavor and feel,” says Archer. “The ‘missions’ are exactly that—fully developed immersive gameplay experiences. This is in contrast to the more ‘nugget’-like gameplay that was sprinkled into *SM2*.” Specifically, you’ll find more cohesive storylines and distinct city gangs, each with their unique mission sets. “*SM3* also has a wide variety of story-based missions that weave their way through the movie storyline and lead the player into key moments,” says Archer. His ultimate aim for the missions in this game? “Less repetition and a more rewarding, deep gameplay experience,” he says.

But the mission structure is only one of the ways the team is changing things up this time around. Combat has been redesigned “from the ground up,” says Archer. The developers have added more moves, upgrades, and combos, as well as more sophisticated aerial combat and more multi-opponent focused attacks. Web maneuvers and webbing, of course, are an integral part of the core combat system, and “it still feels like *Spider-Man*—fast, frenetic, and big, over-the-top ground and air maneuvers,” says Archer.

All of this new stuff, however, applies to normal, red-and-blue Spidey. The black suit has its own

> SWING TIME!

As *Spider-Man 3* hits so many platforms (including the handheld sector), you can expect some specific tweaks for each system. Activision’s developers have found pretty good ways to use the Sixaxis (for *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* and *Call of Duty 3* in particular), and we’re

fairly confident that *Spider-Man 3* will have some neat twists with that PS3 tilt feature.

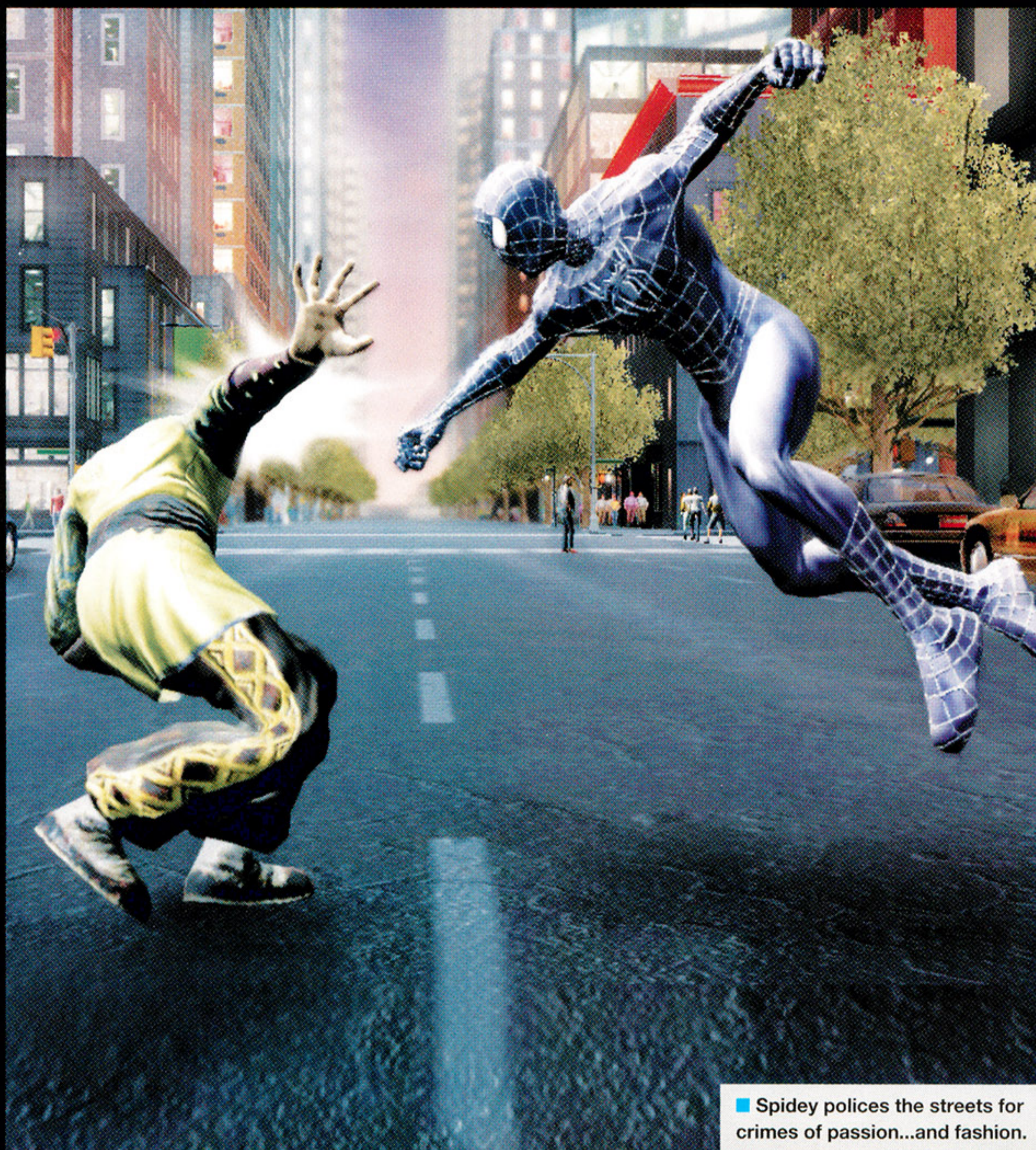
The Wii controller, too, is a natural fit for “web-swinging and webbing up crooks,” according to Associate Producer J. C. Boone. “The player will command full interactive gestures

on the Wii Remote and Nunchuk to take the player right into the action,” says Boone. Our arm-chair guesses include: aiming while webbing (much like using the Double Clawshot in *Zelda: Twilight Princess*) and simple flicks of the wrist for basic attacks and evasions.



■ The black suit has many unique capabilities, including auto dent repair.





■ Spidey polices the streets for crimes of passion...and fashion.

set of combat mechanics, and Treyarch promises enough difference between the two suits' gameplay that it will add a new layer to the game. "With missions built specifically for each suit to play up their respective abilities and talents," he says, "for the first time players will be able to enjoy two totally different *Spider-Man* experiences in one game."

But what about the villains? Treyarch is keeping that info closely guarded for now, but Archer did let slip that lame-o Shocker, who's been in all the other *Spider-Man* games, will not make an appearance. It's just one of the ways that *Spider-Man 3* looks to be the natural evolution of the series. John notes, "With *SM2* and *Ultimate SM* we made locomotion an incredible experience. You got to *be* Spider-Man, web-swinging through the huge city. In *SM3* we've made it bigger and better in every aspect." Archer agrees, "We have improved or totally replaced every system in the game. It is really bigger and badder in every way."

When asked to narrow down the most exciting new feature here, though, they both went back to the one element that predates the game by 22 years: "the black suit." 🕸





MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Nudity
Sexual Themes
Strong Language

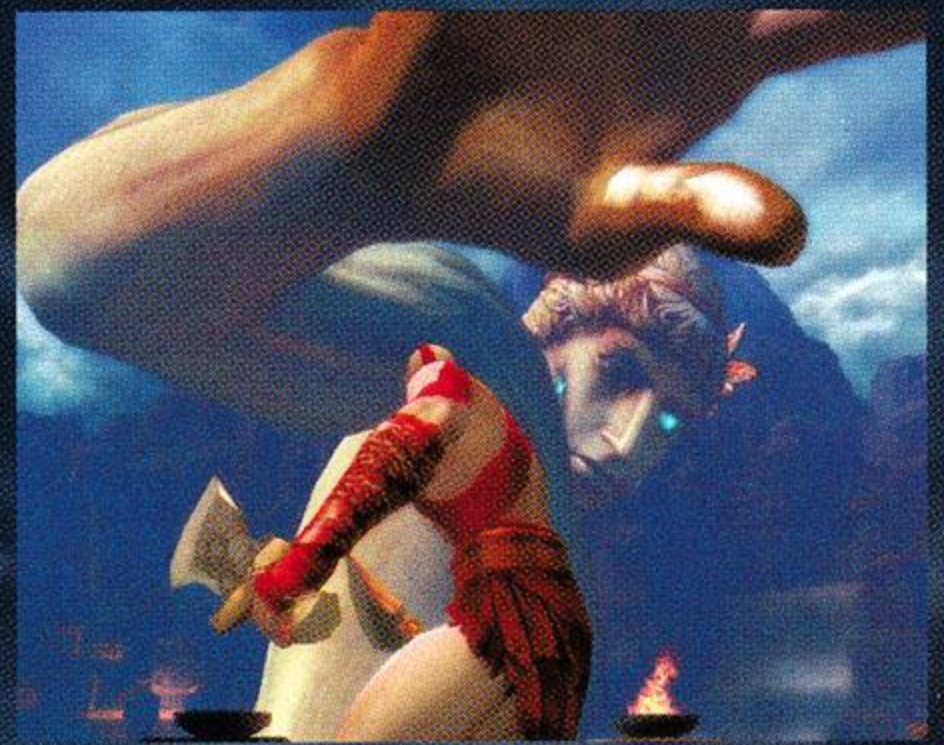
BRING THE GODS BACK DOWN TO EARTH

The epic journey continues as Kratos, driven by rage and revenge, crawls back from the depths of Hades to battle against Greek mythology's wickedest. Now he must do what no mortal has done before: change his fate and bring down the gods once and for all.



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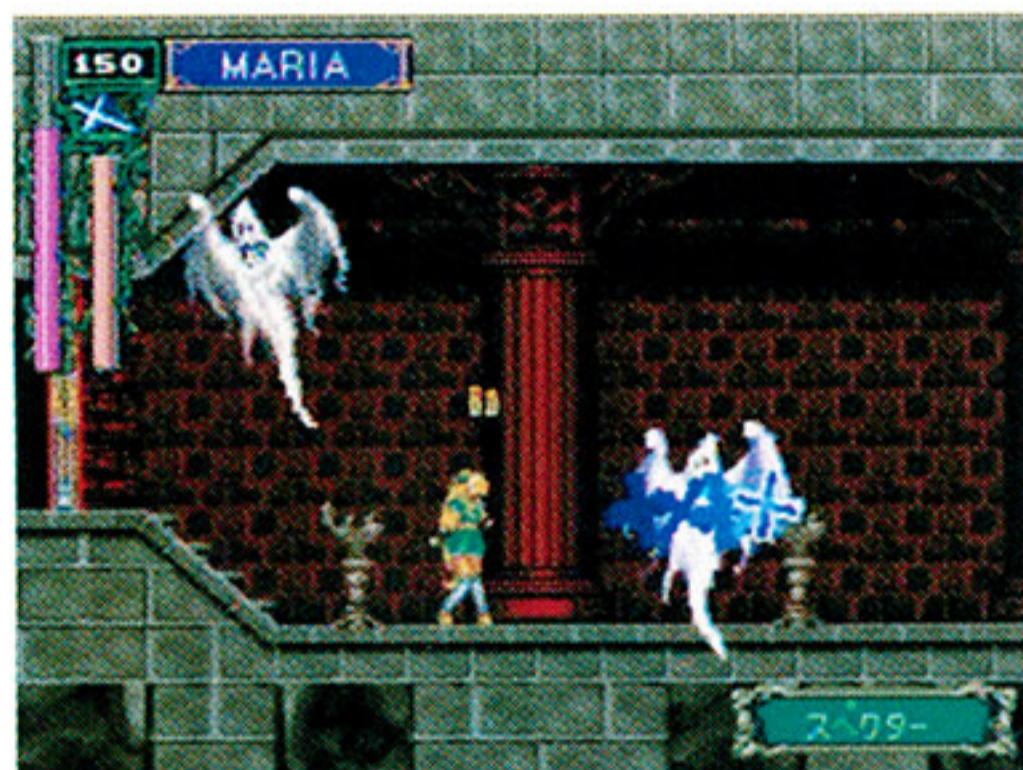


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We got your game-related clips right *here*—or at least we do on GameVideos.com. And every month we put four of our favorites in the *EGM* channel; see 'em at GameVideos.com/EGM.



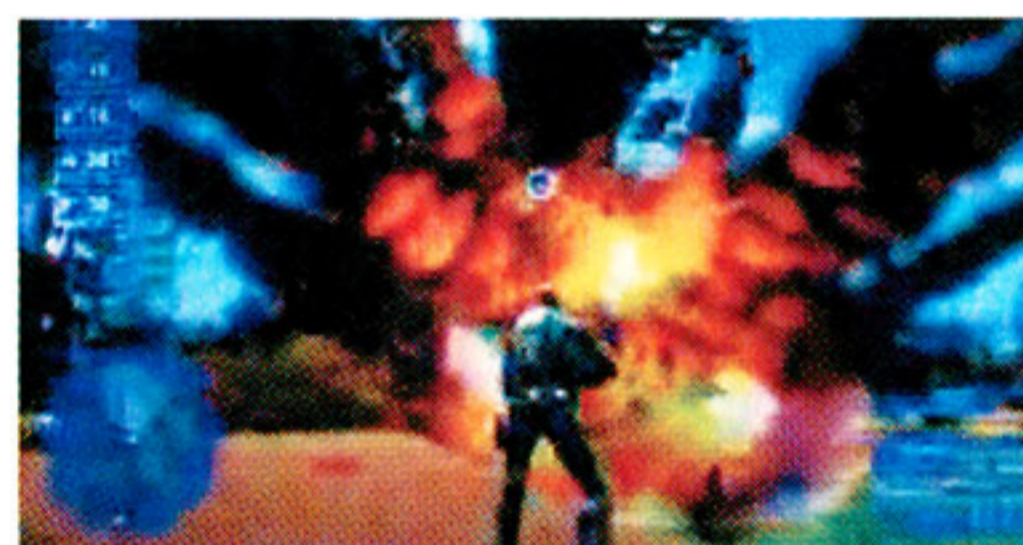
FTW: Retronauts Bonus Stage

The all-new video incarnation of 1UP's Retronauts audio podcast, Bonus Stage is for the old-time 2D sprite lover in you.



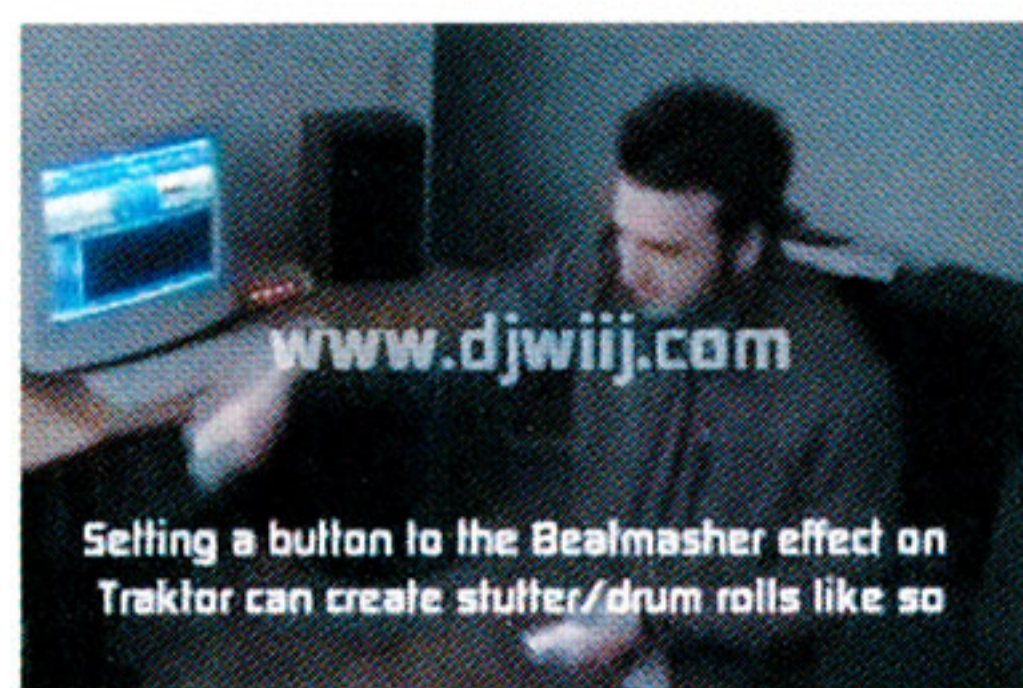
ZOMG: Streaming TV on PSP

Nice hack for streaming live TV stations from your PC to PSP. In case your regular TV screen is, you know, too big.



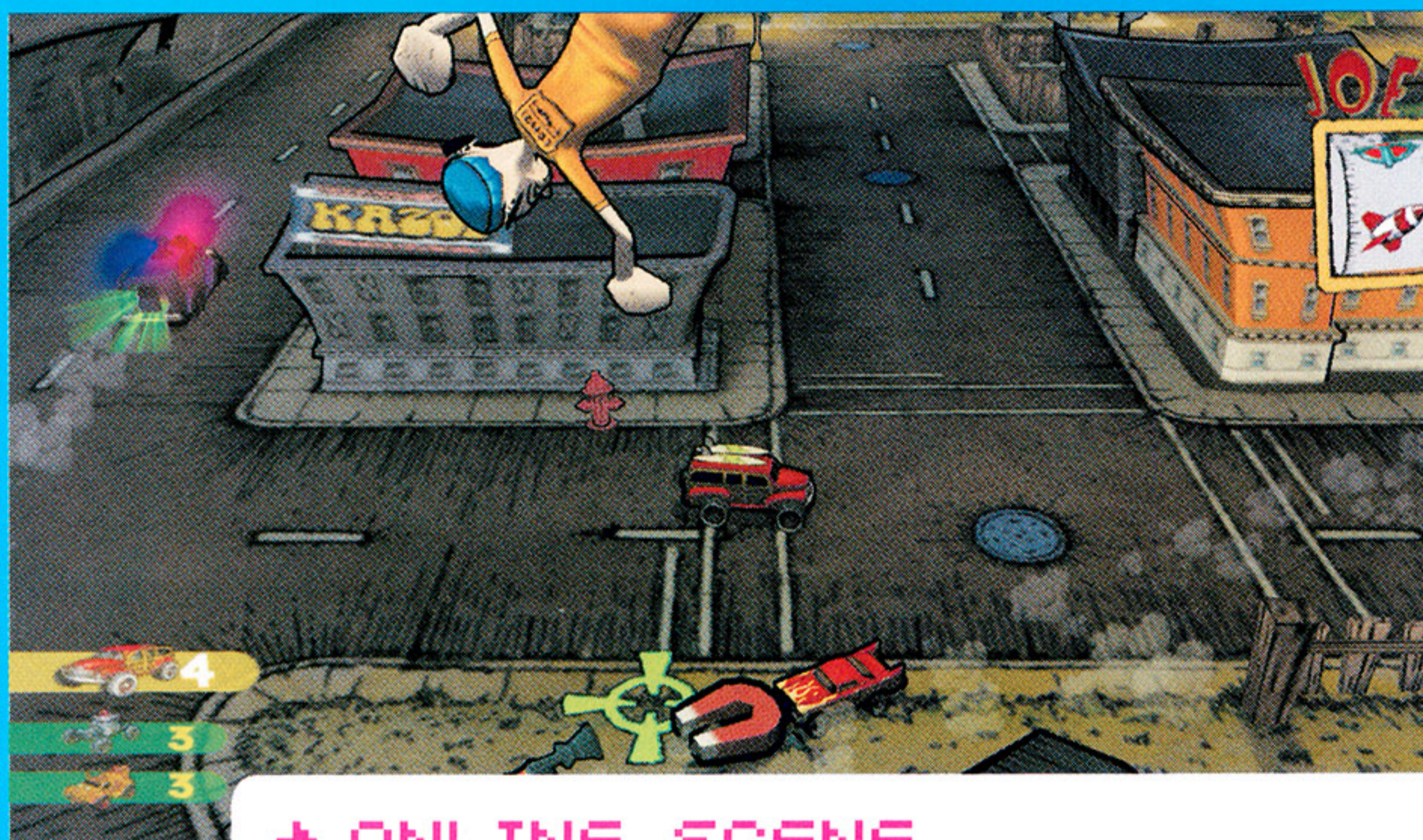
LOL: Crackdown havoc vids

It's the new *Grand Theft Auto*; he (or she!) who blows up the most crap in the game wins. Assuming he/she/it makes a super cool video detailing all the destruction.



WTF: The art of Wiijing

DJ Wiij controls the virtual wheels of steel using a pair of Wii Remotes. And dances in a quite brightly lit room.



ONLINE SCENE

Calling all CARS

Throwing David Jaffe behind bars

By Michael Donahoe



David Jaffe is known best for directing *God of War*, but he is also responsible for revving up the *Twisted Metal* series.

GOD OF WAR CREATOR DAVID JAFFE THINKS HE SUCKS AT MAKING STORY GAMES.

But he's not afraid to yap about how much fun his story-free PS3 downloadable game, *Calling All Cars*, is. Read why he thinks we should tell you his game is cool and why he ditched *God of War* for the downloads....

EGM: At what point did you decide to stop doing big story-heavy games and focus on more pick-up-and-play, casual games?

David Jaffe: I think right after *God of War* shipped and I started working on [his cancelled "crying" game], which was again more of a story-heavy game that we were going to call *Heartland*. It was a PSP title and we never ended up finishing that game for a number of reasons. But I had been on the story track of videogames for quite some time. I think after looking at *God of War*, I had reached the end of how much I could really do in that kind of genre and with that kind of goal, which is to fuse storytelling and games. I think much better game designers like Kojima [*Metal Gear Solid*] and Miyamoto [*Super Mario Bros.*] could probably crack this nut a lot wider than I have. For me, the stuff I was

really excited about was the [immediate] stuff—picking up a controller and [instantly] having a smile on your face, laughing with your buddies, and having a good time.

But [stories] just seemed to be always right out of my grasp. Just hearing about the PlayStation store and realizing I could finish a game in eight or nine or 10 months is really quite refreshing when you've been on titles that have taken three, three and a half years to make. Think about it—[I] spend three years doing a game, and I'm 35 now. Now let's say I make videogames until I'm 65, so what is that, another 25, 30 years or so. That's only three games every decade that I get to put out if I continue down the road of these big, epic story-based games.

That's a really long answer that I hope you can pare down into like three sentences for your magazine—the answer: Jaffe just got bored of story games. Next question....

EGM: What was Sony's reaction when you pitched *Calling All Cars*? Do you think they were concerned you wouldn't continue to milk the *God of War* franchise?

DJ: Well, [Sony] were pretty adamant that I stay on as creative director

on the franchise, and that has happened. So they didn't say, "OK Jaffe, we're going to force you to make *God of War II* and *God of War III*," you know, into the infinite, because they knew the product would suffer. If your heart isn't into it, the gamer will know.

EGM: Most people know about CAC because the "God of War guy" is making it. Do you think that people would actually care about your game if your name weren't attached to it?

DJ: I'd like to think that the game that we're making is going to be compelling enough—regardless of who's the lead designer. From an ego standpoint, I guess it's kinda nice if people know more about it because my name's attached, but at the same time, I'm proud of *Calling All Cars*.

EGM: A lot of people are really into racking up Xbox Live Achievements...to the point where we actually know people who impulse-buy Xbox Live Arcade games not so much to play the game but mainly to earn a few easy Achievements. Do you think Achievements are a good way to increase a game's life? And are you bummed Sony didn't turn its rumored "entitlements" system into a reality?

DJ: I've been at Sony for a long time, I'm privy to a lot of information, [and] I never heard one word about "entitlements." So I think that was probably an Internet rumor. So there's that for you. I think Achievements are kinda cool; I respect what Microsoft did with them. I'd like to think that the games we're making for the PlayStation store can live or die based on [their] quality. Let's put it this way: If your game is so weak that it needs this meta-game on top of it in order to make it compelling, then maybe you need to go back to the drawing board and work on the actual core of your game. By the way, print this, so [people won't think] "Jaffe hates f***in' Microsoft." That's not what I'm saying.

EGM: Yeah, but it's something a lot of gamers are really into. People will play crap like the *Burger King* games just for Achievements....



DJ: And I get that. It's kind of like the *World of Warcraft* [PC] or *Diablo* [PC] thing—there's a certain kind of gamer who just likes to acquire stuff, be it experience points or Achievements. And any good game designer worth their salt knows that is one of the little strings you can pull to make a game addictive. I just don't think Achievements are the be-all end-all, and I don't think that our games are going to suffer because they don't have them.

EGM: We hear that some PS3 games are getting scaled back into downloadable games. Do you think these meatier downloadable titles will overshadow something small like CAC?

DJ: I hope not. I think the idea is that we, as both an industry and as game consumers, are just about at the point that we can mature this market enough to say that look, everything doesn't have to be *God of War*, *Gears of War*, *Halo 3*. You guys know from time to time I bitch about the state of game journalism. I really think the onus in many ways is not only on our marketing at Sony and at Microsoft but also on the game journalist to say to our audience, "Look, guys, there are many flavors of games."

Will it be overshadowed? I certainly hope not, but I think a lot of

that has more to do with the fact that gamers may just not be informed enough to realize that a \$5 title can entertain the hell out of them and their buddies as much as a \$60 title can. It's just entertaining them in a different way.

EGM: The Wii's Virtual Console has a bunch of classics, but it also has a whole lot of crap. What oldie would you least want to see on the Virtual Console?

DJ: I'd hate to see any of the classic Nintendo games, because they're a competitor. I'd like there to be nothing but s*** on the Virtual Console. [Laughs] But that's just as a person who works for Sony. As a game fan, I remember *Jaws* [NES] being pretty disappointing when I brought it home from the store, so I'd have to say the NES version of *Jaws* would probably be the most disappointing game if I actually paid for it. I'd go, "You've gotta be kidding me—this is crap...."

EGM: That's a pretty bad game.

DJ: You know, lemme f***ing go back to my own heritage. *Cliffhanger* on the NES—I actually tested that, so it would be doubly painful, not just for gamers, but for me to actually have to play that s*** again. The block in *Adventure* for Atari 2600 had more animation. 🐾



Calling All Cars will run you no more than 10 measly bucks and should be on the PlayStation Network by the time you read this.



➤ I'd like there to be nothing but s*** on the Virtual Console.

—Director David Jaffe



> REAL WORLD

We Are the World?

EGM trots the globe to see if games really are a universal language By Lauren Gonzales



¿Habla EGM? Did you know this magazine is translated into five languages?

LOVE, FOOD, COCA-COLA, PAMELA ANDERSON—all cross cultural boundaries in ways the United Nations can only dream of. But what about videogames? Sure, it's a given that software piracy and FIFA soccer games (that's futbol to the rest of the world) are big just about everywhere that *Madden* is not. But surely U.S. console gamers and their overseas counterparts share some similarities.

We poll EGM's enthusiastic international correspondents—from analysts to editors at EGM's foreign editions to regular gamers like you—to see what plays from San Pablo to Iraq to (we're not kidding!) Antarctica.



Brazil
Population: 188,078,227

An unscientific poll of Americans shows that most can't distinguish Brazil from the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) on a map. But wait...FIFA isn't a country; it's a state of mind. Brazilian Pietro Marafiga Monteiro, who learned

English from games and manuals, says the *only* sports titles Brazilians play are the *Winning Eleven* and *FIFA* soccer games. No basketball. No tennis. And no surprise, really. Futbol is Brazil's national sport.

Gamer Marcos Felipe adds that the *Tony Hawk* series is slightly more popular in Brazil than other U.S. sports games are, but it's by no means mainstream like it is here. Speed and action are big—especially series like *Need for Speed* and *Gran Turismo* and fighting franchises such as *Soul Calibur* and *Street Fighter*. What's not so big in Brazil are “games where you must use the brain,” says Monteiro.

Fabio Santana, editor-in-chief of *EGM Brasil*, says that piracy and taxes are the two biggest issues facing Brazil's games biz. The Associação Brasileira das Empresas de Software (ABES) fights piracy, but no one can beat the import taxes, which are 60 percent of the original price, plus an additional 18 percent sales tax. That's before shipping, kids. PS2 games

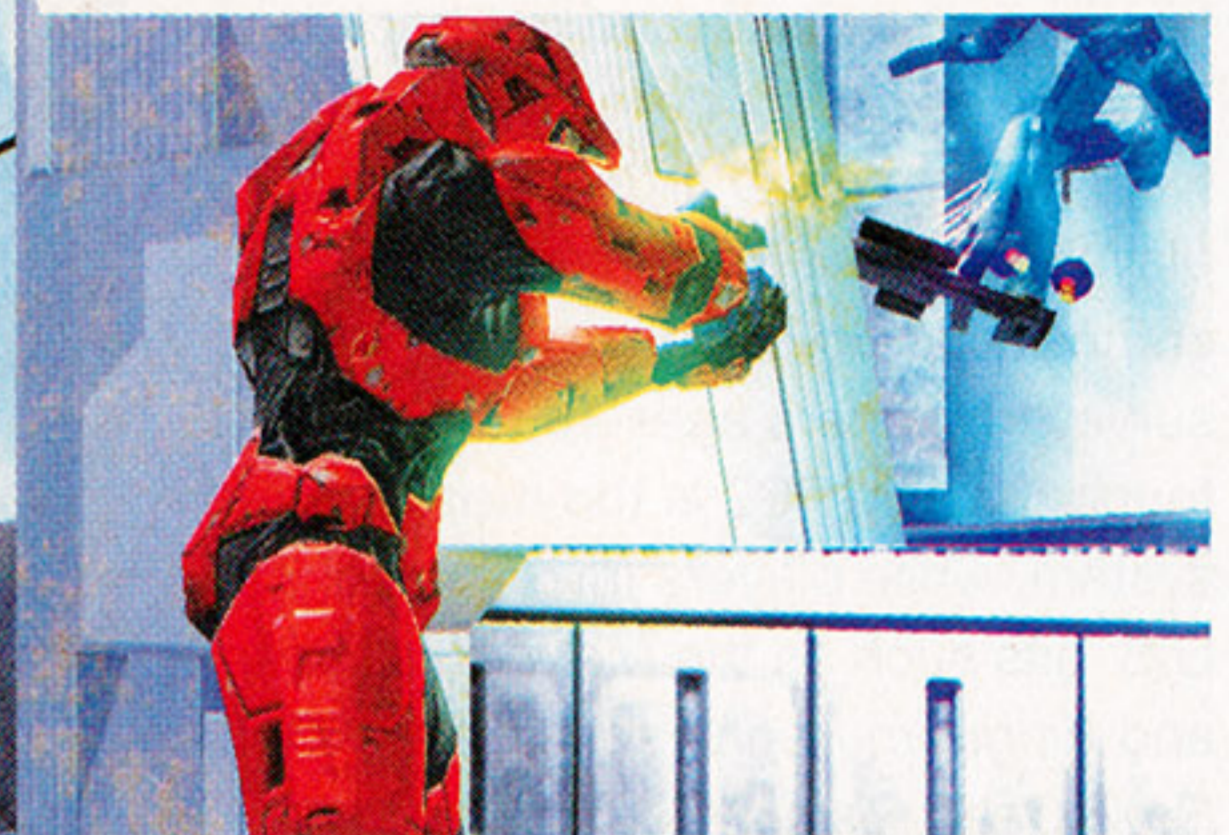
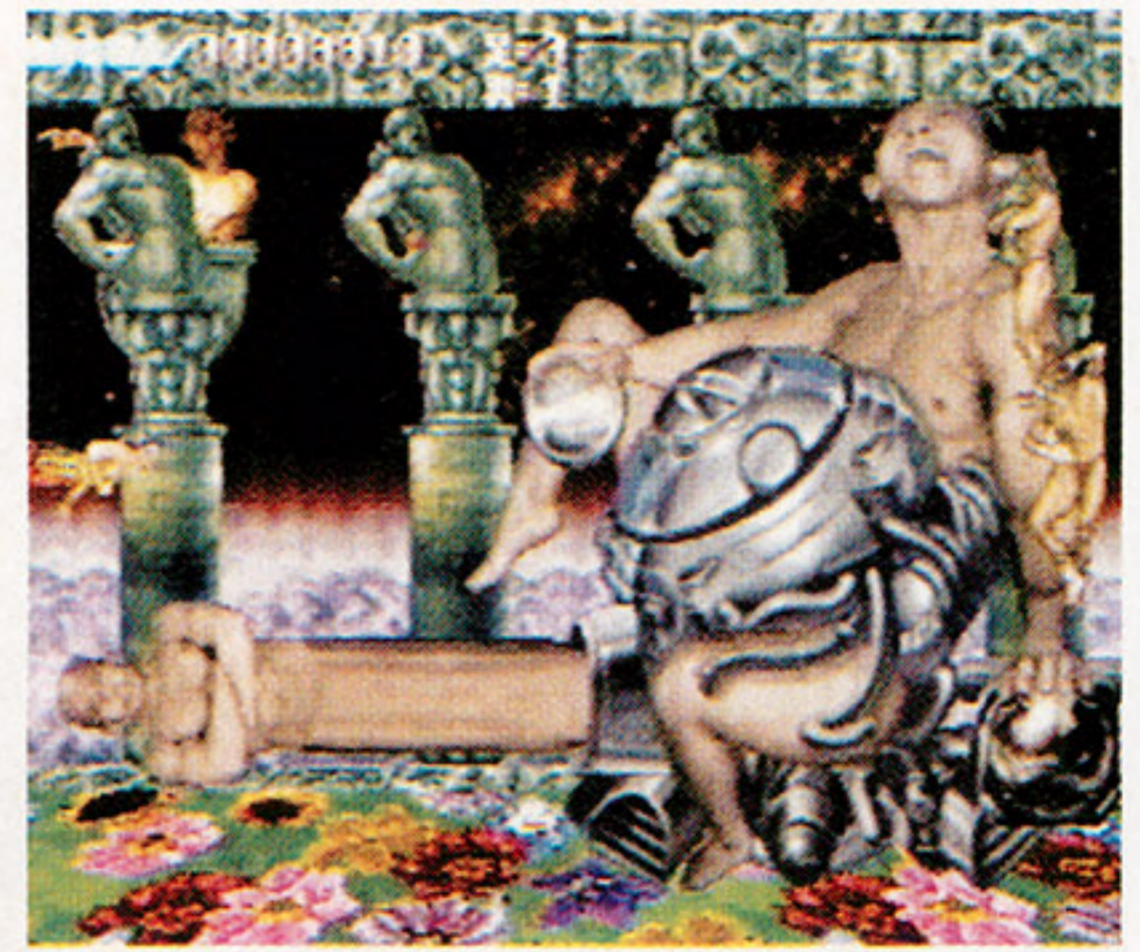
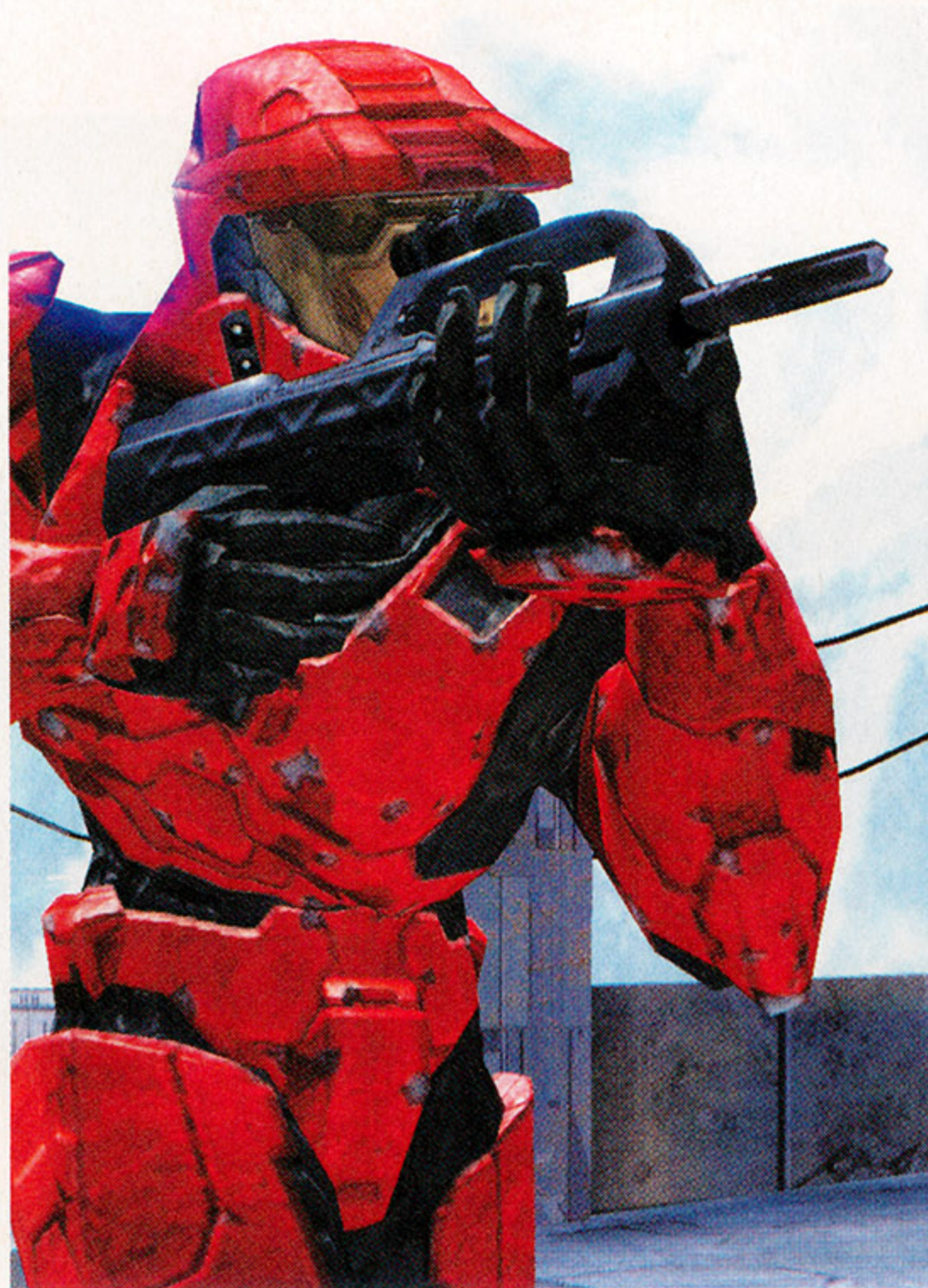
alone cost the U.S. equivalent of nearly \$330 each! Legal and unofficial importers are the only way to score hardware, as none of the systems are manufactured in Brazil. But Brazil's economy is getting stronger. Does this mean hope for an end to piracy? “Even those who can afford an original buy the pirated [copies],” Felipe says. “It's a culture over here.”



Japan
Population: 127,463,611

We are conflicted about Japan. On one hand, it's the birth-ground of many of our favorite franchises, from *Mario* to *Metal Gear* to *Final Fantasy*. On the other hand, Japan spawned...*Cho Aniki*, a series of homoerotic shooters.

Japan is the Schrödinger's cat of videogame culture, exactly like and entirely different from gaming in the States. In the 1980s and '90s, the U.S. and Japan's interest in side-scrollers, fighters, and role-playing games was closely aligned. Today, says Tokyo-



■ Clockwise from top left: FIFA 07, Halo 2, Cho Aniki, Brian Lara International Cricket.

based game writer and localizer Ike Sato, not so much: "What's popular in Japan right now is the DS and its 'educational' games like *Brain Age*." Even once-blockbuster and wholly Japanese series such as *Virtua Fighter 5* and *Tekken 6* for PS3 aren't such a big deal anymore; only niche fighter fans really care, Sato says.

The Japanese have a name for U.S. and European games: "yo-ge" (pronounced yoh-gay), meaning "Western games." The notorious *Grand Theft Auto III*, for one, has made yo-ge more than a blip to mainstream Japan. Does that mean other quality Western games such as the *God of War* or *Burnout* series do well? "It doesn't matter if the game is really good or popular in the U.S. or Europe," Sato says. "Somehow the Japanese don't have the appetite." Blame it on Western-style gameplay mechanics, art design, and difficulty—although sometimes the problem is the genre itself. "First-person shooters especially don't do well," Sato says.

What do Japanese gamers want? Anything on the DS, for starters. "It's become so common I see even girls in their 20s and 30s playing DS in the train," Sato says. "That's a phenomenon in my opinion because it used to be 'geeky' to carry a handheld console on trains." No word on whether it's geeky to play homoerotic shooters.

 **Iraq**
 ★★☆☆☆ **Population: 26,783,383**
 The average Iraqi citizen has more pressing matters on his or her mind than tracking down a

Wii. But for U.S. troops serving in Baghdad, gaming is the ultimate way to unwind. Army Captain Scott D. Wence, the Bandido Charlie Company Commander in Al Asad, tells *EGM* that, of about 170 personnel in his company, eight have Xboxes (the original—not 360s), more than 28 have PS2s, and about 20 have PSPs, with no PS3s yet in sight (but an open invite to Sony to send one). What's hot in the desert? The usual stuff—with an emphasis on games with guns: *Halo 2*, *Tiger Woods*, *NCAA 06* and *07*, *Madden 06* and *07*, and *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six*. "I guess they can't get enough of the competitive games," says Wence, "especially if [they] deal with carrying a weapon."

The larger military bases sell PS2s and "every conceivable game" for all systems, Wence says, but he isn't sure these are legal versions. Regardless, they're morale boosters. When his men aren't on missions, they "relax" by playing war games. Because, when battling insurgents and fighting for one's life, what could be more relaxing at the end of the day than a little *Rainbow Six Vegas*? "They love to sit around and talk crap to each other about who is better at certain games," he says. "[It's] commonly called s*** talking." Roger that.



United Kingdom
Population: 60,609,153

The U.K., Europe's largest game market, must be just like us, right? After all, we speak (essentially) the same language. And, as further evidence, *WWE SmackDown vs. RAW 2007* tops console lists there. Hold on—so does soccer, of course. Sean Dromgoole, the CEO of London-based consumer-analyst group Some Research, says F1 (Indy Karts), rally driving, motorbike racing, and shooters—especially the "story-driven, kooky ones"—are more popular in Europe. Licensed-film games sell too, Dromgoole says, but, like here, with skepticism on the consumer's part.

Deloitte media consultant Christy Kulasingam agrees that games that do well in the U.K. generally resemble big sellers from the U.S., with some exceptions like *Cricket 2007* and *Brian Lara International Cricket 2007*. They're not especially high on the charts, and unheard of here in the States, but they're nevertheless popular, particularly in England. U.K. gamers, in fact, embrace a wider variety of genres than we do. "The variation of taste inside Europe is extraordinary," says Dromgoole, "and the more research I do...the more I find difference and distinctiveness than >

➤ **They love to sit around and talk crap to each other about who is better at certain games.**

—Army Captain Scott D. Wence on videogaming in Iraq

similarity and overlap." And, according to research from Dromgoole's company, almost half of all gamers in the U.K. are female. These girls, he says, "emulate the testosterone violence of their male paramours." Hot!

 **France**
Population: 60,876,136

Toss aside the aspersion freedom fries, folks, and get back to French kissing, for no gamers in the world seems more aligned with U.S. players than the Frenchies. *EGM's* enthusiastic pollster Elsa Chesnet surveyed gamers ages 18 to 23 and found that the PS2 is the most desired system, while players favor typical U.S. hits such as the *Metal Gear Solid* and *Kingdom Hearts* series, *Saints Row*, *Dead Rising*, *God of War*, and... wait—wha? *NBA Live 07* and *NHL 2K7*? Sure, *FIFA Street 2* and *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* made French lists instead of *Madden*, but hockey? Basketball? And the best system ever, according to the majority in Chesnet's poll? The Super Nintendo. Vive la France! But you'd expect good taste from a country that gives tax breaks to game developers.

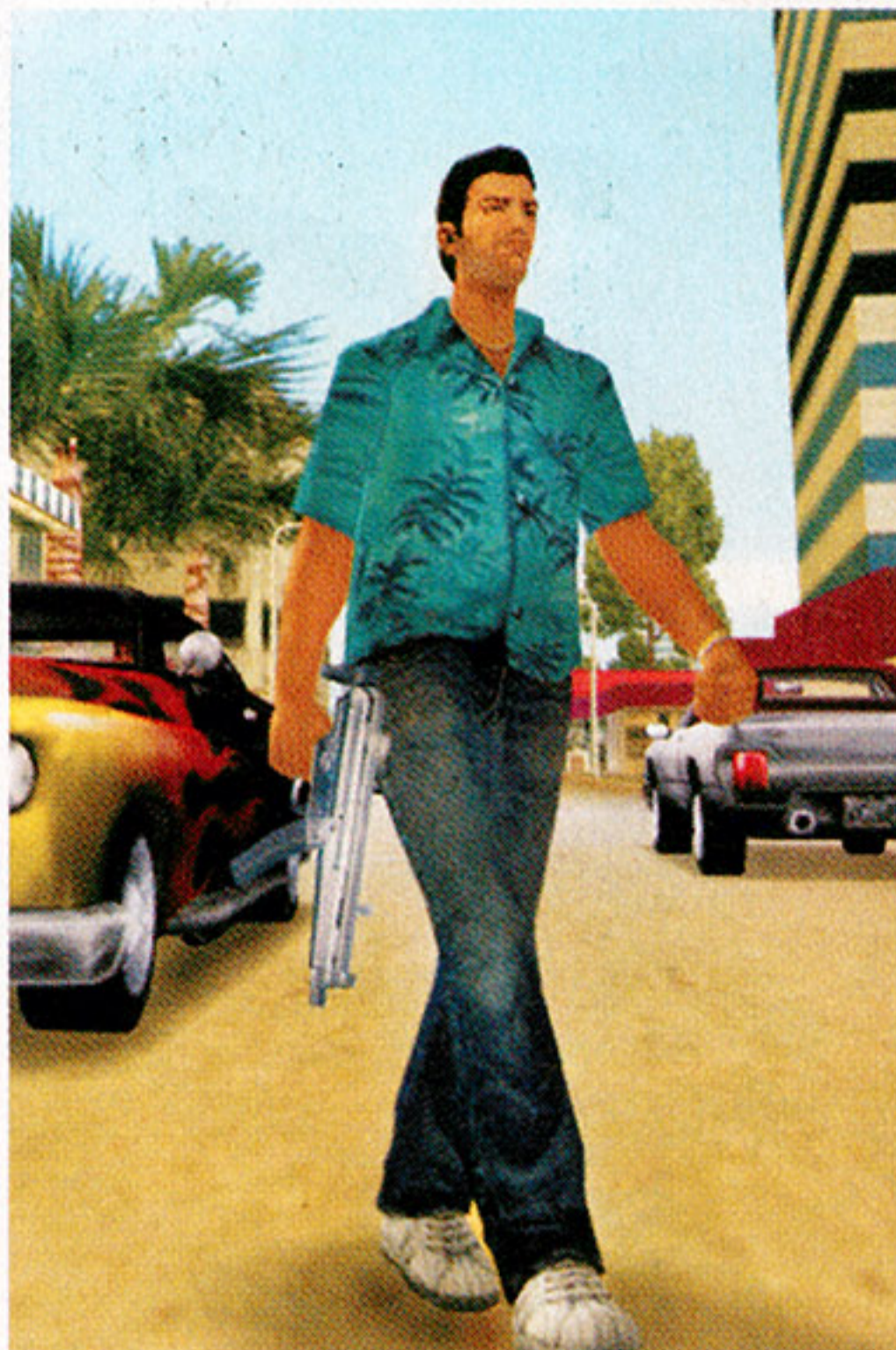
 **Netherlands**
Population: 16,491,461

In an anything-goes city like Amsterdam, who needs games for fun? Nevertheless, gaming exists and the PS2 dominates. Top games include *FIFA 07* and *World Cup 06*, plus the *Call of Duty* and *GTA* series. The Netherlands is also home to Smith & Jones addiction consultancy, whose Wild Horses Center counsels game addicts back to health. Smith & Jones did not return our cries for help.

 **Mexico**
Population: 107,449,525

Surprise, surprise: Mexico's top game in December 2006 was *FIFA 2007*. *Winning Eleven* is up there, too. *EGM's* Guadalajara correspondent Itziar Lanzagorta expected as much. "Everyone here played soccer growing up, so they can relate," she says.

Adrian Carbajal of *EGM Mexico* says that, according to a recent poll, the top three non-soccer series in Mexico are *Metal Gear Solid*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Halo*, in that order. And, yes, *Viva Piñata* makes the must-play list, too. "If you're talking about hardcore gamers," he says, "all the kind of games you find in *EGM*—the mature kind—are pretty popular [in Mexico]. Carbajal says role-playing



■ Blockbusters the world over: the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Metal Gear Solid* series.

games have a following in his country, too, but their language-heavy content loses audiences among non-English speakers. Most surprising is that—unlike in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa—PC games aren't as popular as console games. "I'll say that the ratio [is that about] 90 percent of gamers play on consoles, and only 10 [percent play on] PCs," says Carbajal.

 **Singapore**
Population: 4,492,150

EGM Singapore editor Tommy Wee says we're "not far off the mark" to assume that *FIFA* games instead of *Madden* titles are big with Asian gamers. And half of those playing futbol games, according to Wee, are playing *Winning Eleven*, too. The PC game market is bigger than the console market in Asia in general, but the usual franchises (*Metal Gear Solid*, *Final Fantasy*, *Super Mario*, *Pokémon*) are staples, unlike *Madden*, which Wee calls "culturally alienating." In spite of a ban, *Grand Theft Auto* is popular in Singapore. Virtually everyone, Wee says, owns a copy. It's just the cool bad-boy thing to do, like chewing gum—which is also heavily regulated in this take-no-guff nation.

 **Latvia**
Population: 2,274,735

Latvian IT guy Dmitry Komarov makes one thing clear: Videogames are not popular in Latvia. "People do not have much interest in specialized devices, which are still quite expensive compared to ordinary PCs," he says. Videogames aren't usually localized to the Baltic States (including Estonia and Lithuania), and, when they are, they're too costly. Practical Latvians buy PCs instead.

 **Thailand**
Population: 64,631,595

EGM Thailand's Attakorn Limparongpatnagit says futbol isn't the only sport on gamers' minds (they prefer *Winning Eleven* to *FIFA*, by the way): Thai players also dig basketball games and even the *Tiger Woods PGA* series. Among role-playing fans, the *Final Fantasy* franchise is number one with a steep lead, then comes *Dragon Quest* and *Kingdom Hearts II*. See—just like us.

But when it comes to first-person shooters, U.S. and Thai gamers somewhat differ. "Thai gamers do not like to play first-person-shooter games because they do not like to use controllers to aim at the target," Limparongpatnagit says. "But when they see *Gears of War*, it seems to make them change their minds."

 **Antarctica**
Population: Various staff at research facilities

Scientist Hugh W. Ducklow from the 45-plus-person Palmer Research Station doesn't play games, but he knows that *Quake* online is big on the "icebreaker [ship] that supplies the station" and on the station itself. So we tracked down scientist Tom Lohr of the South Pole Station, who confirms that yes, console gaming has landed in Antarctica, though the games themselves are a little dated. He even referred to a *Tecmo Bowl* marathon during a string of flight cancellations due to—what else?—weather. Scientists hooked up an NES to a big-screen monitor and enjoyed "button-mashing madness until the wee hours of the morning." And at a time of year when the sun never sets, those wee hours aren't so wee. ❄️

> **HARDCORE HITS**



Think playing *Guitar Hero* is hard? Try recording the riffs! We asked series guitarist Marcus Henderson to tell us the top five hardest songs he recorded for the *Guitar Hero* games.

5. "Hangar 18" — "Not only technically difficult, but it's basically two songs in one—it's one of the gnarliest call-and-response solo sections ever laid to tape."

4. "No One Knows" — "This one was a challenge to keep the strings in tune while hitting the strings like [Queens of the Stone Age singer/guitarist] Josh Homme does. Final score: 3 strings broken + 6 hours tracking = 1 killer tune."

3. "Heart-Shaped Box" — "That little note skip you hear in the song? That was me artfully playing off notes on purpose. Sometimes, it's harder to sound like an antihero."

2. "Institutionalized" — "Ever like a song so much but you never learned it because you didn't want to over-analyze its greatness? Well, at the age of 15, this song encapsulated my vitriol. Later in my career, it became part of the 'will-never-learn-on-purpose-but-secretly wish-I-knew-how-to-play-it' file in my brain."

1. "Cowboys from Hell" — "When tasked to record the guitars and bass for 'CFH,' I had to balance a lot of thoughts throughout the process. How do I sound like [Pantera lead guitarist] Dimebag Darrell? Can I come close? Then I asked myself, 'What would Dime do?' He would've wanted me to attack the living crap out of it, and that's what we did!"

> **OVERHEARD**

"[If I weren't in jail], I'd be in front of my computer screen playing *Final Fantasy XI*. I like *Final Fantasy* because it has a network that can connect to people all over the world, from Europe to Japan.

—Accused child kidnapper Michael Devlin's creepy quote proves Nintendo's friend codes aren't such a bad idea after all.

Quote source: FOXNews.com



PRESS START

+ **PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK**



Mushroom Kingdom HEARTS

The ultimate fanboy pipe dream

Platform:
Wii

Publisher:
Square Enix

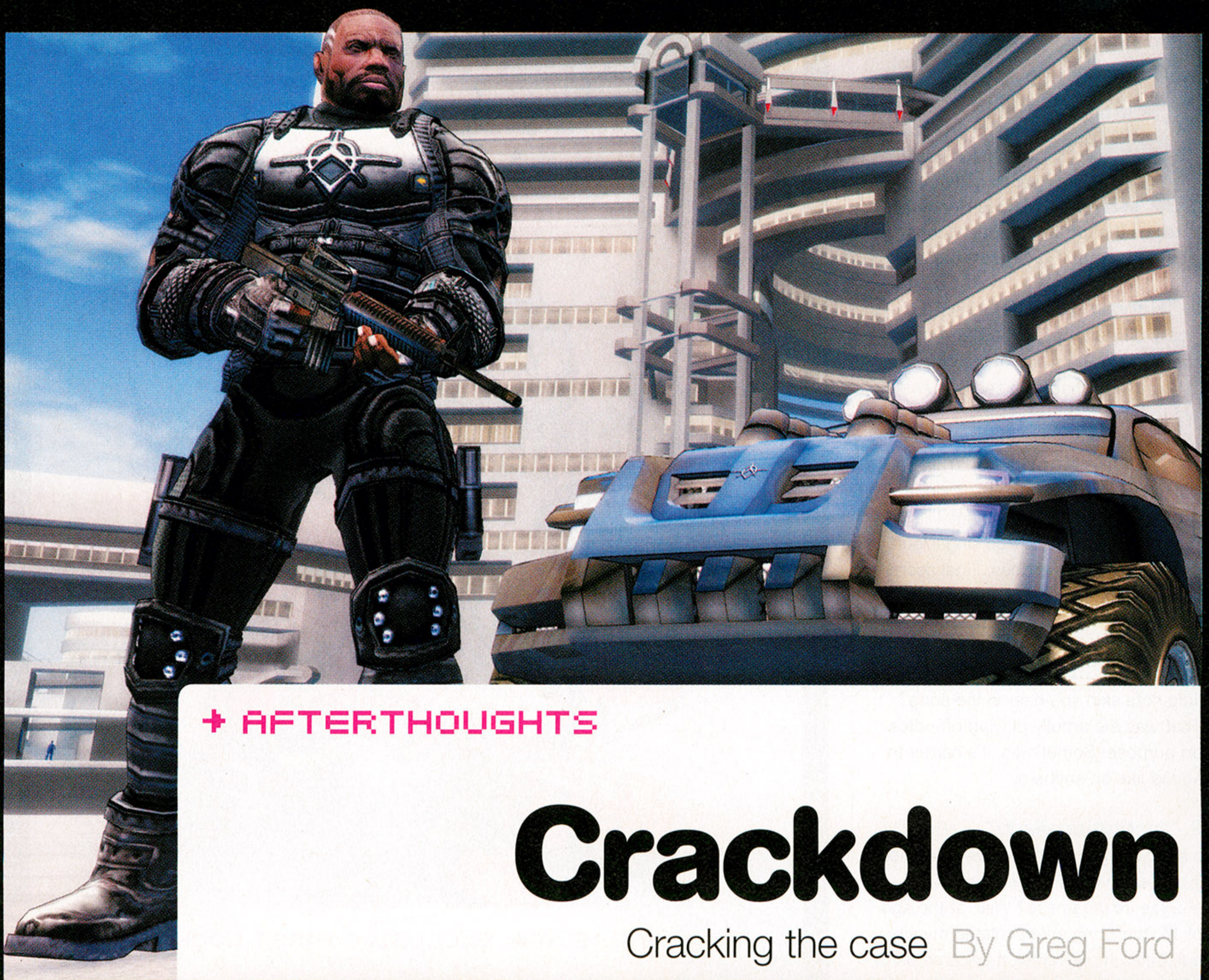
Developer:
Square Enix

Release Date:
2008



ADMIT IT—the original idea for *Kingdom Hearts* was absolutely absurd. A role-playing game featuring characters from *Final Fantasy* and Disney? Hell, that's about as asinine as combining Legos and *Star Wars* (wait—scratch that). But the only dumb ones were the ones who doubted it'd work—the unlikely combination actually touched a helluva lot of gamers' hearts. So now that we're used to seeing Mickey Mouse and the rest of his cartoon clowns muck it up with the *Final Fantasy* crew, we thought we'd seen the last of these oddball pairings. Boy, were we wrong—publisher Square Enix is ramping up a radically new *Kingdom Hearts*

sequel...only this game isn't set in under the sea, but rather under the pipes of the Mushroom Kingdom. We don't know much of the juicy deets right now (all Square Enix gave us was this early logo) but we were able to squeeze out some helpful intel. First off, *Mushroom Kingdom Hearts* is a Wii exclusive and will feature a cast of over 41 Nintendo characters. Not only that, but it will also feature Sora, Mickey, and a flock of other favorites from the first two *Kingdom Hearts*. And as far as the story goes, all we know is Mario will get his hands (and feet) dirty hammering down on the Heartless...oh, and apparently some princess needs saving, too.



✦ AFTERTHOUGHTS

Crackdown

Cracking the case By Greg Ford



Lead Designer Billy Thompson (left) and Producer Phil Wilson of developer Realtime Worlds don't condone stealing cars. Scaling buildings in a single bound? They don't condone that, either.



BUILDING-HOPPING YOUR SUPERCOP AROUND PACIFIC CITY, you quickly realize *Crackdown* offers a different take on the open-world genre, in part because of its ripped-from-a-graphic-novel art style, and in part due to the upgradeable superpowers. But this robust world still feels kinda bare-bones, no? We threw Realtime Worlds' Billy Thompson (a designer on past *Grand Theft Auto* titles) and Phil Wilson into the interrogation room for the down-low.

EGM: Any stories of your developers jumping from building to building during the development of this game?

Billy Thompson: [Laughs] I guess some guys did nearly jump out windows. Those big windows were a worry in some of the stressful times. It's crossed my mind a few times, but I hope nobody ever tries to recreate the stuff in *Crackdown*.

Phil Wilson: The funny thing is, we were actually walking around in San

Francisco yesterday looking at the skyscrapers and just thinking, "Ah, reckon I could get up to level 4 [in one jump]?" We don't have buildings like that in Dundee [Scotland]. You instantly look at one and think, "Oh, that's a level-3 jump; I can make that." It's really sad.

EGM: Leading up to the game's release, the buzz for *Crackdown* had been steadily building, and then Microsoft decided to pack in the *Halo 3* beta. What were your feelings on that? Were you pleased? Disappointed?

PW: We were both. Our initial reaction was, I think, kinda similar to the way people have reacted to it when [they] heard about it. We knew that we didn't need *Halo*; it wasn't like, "[*Crackdown*]'s gonna get reviewed low, so with the *Halo 3* beta it might be worth a purchase." It wasn't that at all, and we were really worried that that was how people would view it. However, having said that, we can completely understand why Microsoft would do it; it makes

complete commercial sense. If they're going to do it, it has to be with a Mature-rated title, and if it's going to be any title I'd rather it was *Crackdown*. The real positive, and why we are happy with it, is because it obviously drives awareness of the brand and franchise.

EGM: Whose decision was it to include the beta?

PW: I know we kind of play it on the negative side—we did have mixed opinions—but in the end, had they really wanted to know if it was OK with us, we would have definitely been OK with it. But yeah, in the end, it was a Microsoft decision. They're the publisher; they decide how this stuff works.

EGM: So when you made this deal with Microsoft, did you guys think, OK, so when *Halo 3* comes out, is the *Crackdown* demo going to be included there?

BT: We actually joked about that... you never know!

EGM: One of our biggest complaints was the mission structure—it's always assassination missions. Come on, where's the variety there?

BT: From our point of view, Dave Jones, the guy who runs the company, really wanted something that was free-form and open, and he didn't want any failure conditions.... We didn't want things like in other genres like your *Grand Theft Autos*, where you have to answer a phone or talk to a contact to open a mission.... [Dave] wanted it based on gang bosses as well; he didn't want environment-based missions or anything like that.... We just didn't want to get too close to *GTA*. We wanted to make our own game.

EGM: All right, but the game is still bare-bones in terms of what you can do—some more sub-missions would've really helped.

BT: *Crackdown*'s a game you can dip in and out of; you can turn it on for 15 minutes and feel that you've made a bit of progress.... Some other games, you put in so much time that it's almost like you've got to plan [ahead to play it].

EGM: Aren't you worried that people who are really into *GTA*-style games—since some of you worked on that franchise—will be disappointed there isn't more to do?

PW: I think to a point, if people are coming into *Crackdown* expecting *Grand Theft Auto*, which is understandable. We've done our best to make it clear that it's different in a lot of ways, but it's understandable. Initially they might [think], "OK, so I was expecting more scripted objectives; I was expecting to be directed a lot more." But then I think they'll appreciate the gameplay that *is* in *Crackdown*. We have heard the reaction a lot of times: "I'm almost not exactly sure why I'm having a great time." We don't want to question it too much if it works.

Coming back to *Grand Theft Auto*, as you'd expect, people are talking not about the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, but about *San Andreas*, which was what, the fifth in the series? Those guys have done an amazing job on those games; they don't just churn out the same thing.... And, over time, *Crackdown* will also become a richer experience.

EGM: Now, about the map. In *Saints Row* you have the GPS-like device that shows you where to go, and in *San Andreas* you have the waypoint system that's a huge help. Here, you don't have anything like that, which makes navigation more difficult.

PW: It's harder at first, yeah. That was actually deliberate, [not] including the GPS-style thing. To be honest, *Saints Row* is done really well, but the reason we didn't go, "You know what, we're going to have to do the *Saints Row*-style thing," was that...people were using [the GPS] to navigate—they weren't using the environment. They were just looking at the map and blindly driving. We spent a lot of time making this unique city, no two buildings are the same, everything's been hand-built for your character actions...[and with this type of assistance], the game loses that sense of exploration.

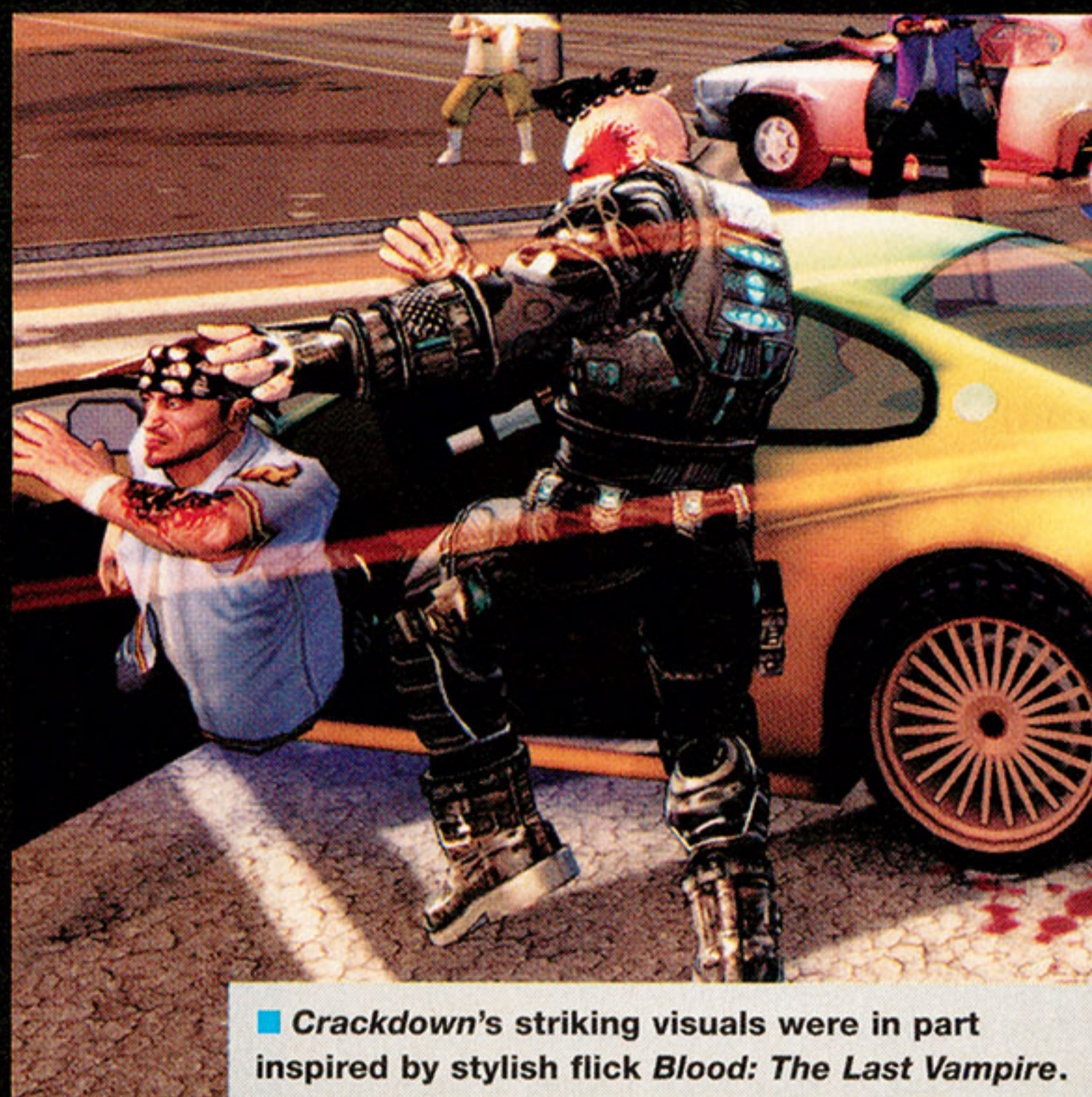
EGM: So the main guys are cops. Did you want to get away from the villains that usually star in these types of games?

PW: Dave actually did, at the very start; I was trying to get him to go for another villain game. [Laughs] That's what we wanted at the start because there're certain things you can do with villains, but Dave wanted to make sure that you were on the good side this time. I think it was another [way to get] away from *GTA*.

BT: Initially I was worried, just because of this squeaky-clean guy nobody wants to be. But then we're like, well, Blade's a good guy, Judge Dredd's a cop—it's that kind of mold. It's not *CHiPs*.

EGM: [Laughs] Downloadable content? We'll look out for the 20th anniversary of *CHiPs*: *Crackdown* pack! So the grenade launcher is insanely powerful—by the time you build it up, it makes the game too easy...bosses included.

BT: We had to make a conscious decision at one point to say, "If they're having loads of fun, then don't close the door on them." You



■ *Crackdown*'s striking visuals were in part inspired by stylish flick *Blood: The Last Vampire*.

get a lot of developers—I've done it before in the past with games I've worked on as well—where a tester will come across and say, "Have you seen this? Wait until I show you this." And you go, "Oh, I've got to fix that." And yet they were having fun doing it. You end up stopping it because you think it's broken. We tried not to do that this time, which is quite hard as a developer.

EGM: Downloadable content—we know it's coming. Whatcha got?

PW: The stuff that people want to know that we're working on and that we can confirm are new vehicles...[and] there's something special about each one. We're doing a lot of new equipment, new gadgets, just toys to play around with in the game world.

We're going to [add] a lot more game modes, a lot more things for solo and co-op players, and leaderboards that are attached to those, that make for more reasons to screw around, so you're not so much making your own fun, you're going with the game modes we've created. The stuff we're putting together is just really fun.

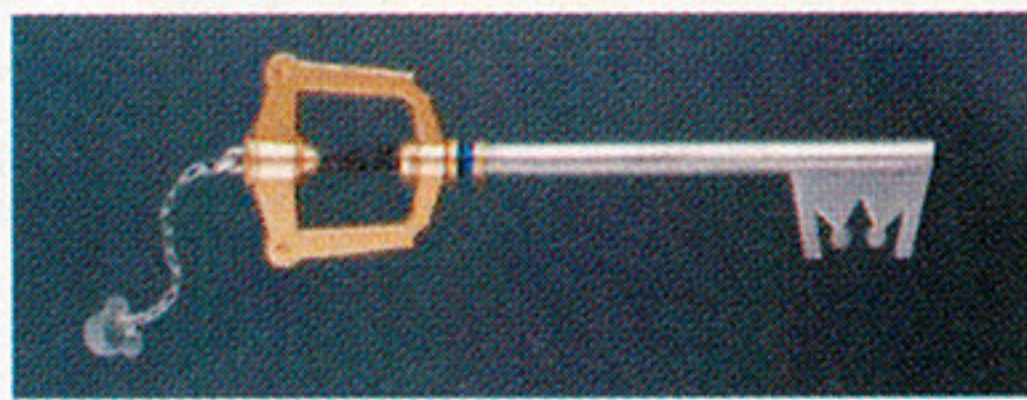
EGM: Finally, given your Rockstar connections, how about you tell us something about *GTA4*....

BT: It's probably going to be really, really good. [Laughs] 🎮

➤ **We just didn't want to get too close to *Grand Theft Auto*. We wanted to make our own game.**

—*Crackdown* lead designer Billy Thompson

> THAT'S COOL

**Come out and play...nice**

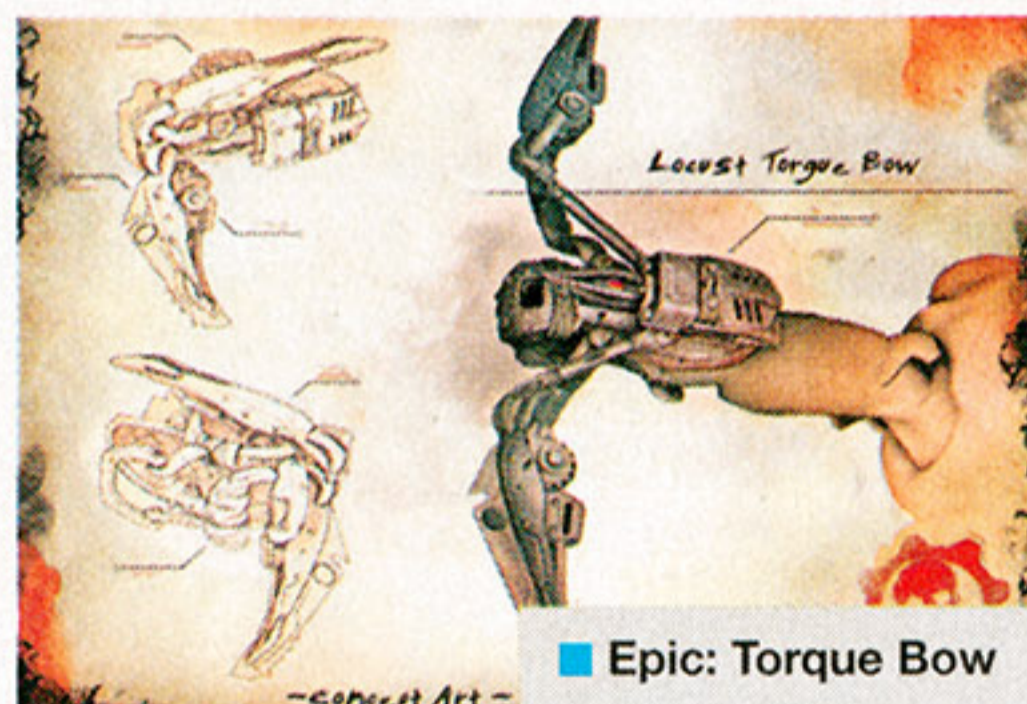
Constructing your own videogame costume may be a breeze (and insanely nerdy), but forging your own dragon-slayer is a wee bit tougher. Well, at least all you crazy cosplayers can now swing semireal weapons—Square Enix has released scaled replicas of the keyblade from *Kingdom Hearts* and the gunblade from *Final Fantasy VIII*. Pick up these \$39 geek gifts at import site www.ncsx.com.

2K Sports gaining yards

Move over *Madden*—2K Sports announced it's returning to the field. After spending three years on the sideline, the sports publisher announced *All-Pro Football 2K8* for the next-gen. Because EA owns the rights to the NFL license, 2K8 won't feature any current stars or teams, though. Don't worry—it will feature football legends instead.

> GUN GALLERY

Killing people is easy. But choosing the right weapon is tough. Shotgun? Sniper rifle? Decisions, decisions! Well, since we don't like making our own choices we asked developers Epic (*Gears of War*), Insomniac (*Resistance: Fall of Man*), and Ubisoft (*Rainbow Six: Vegas*) to pick their favorite killing pieces from their own games. Here's what they chose....



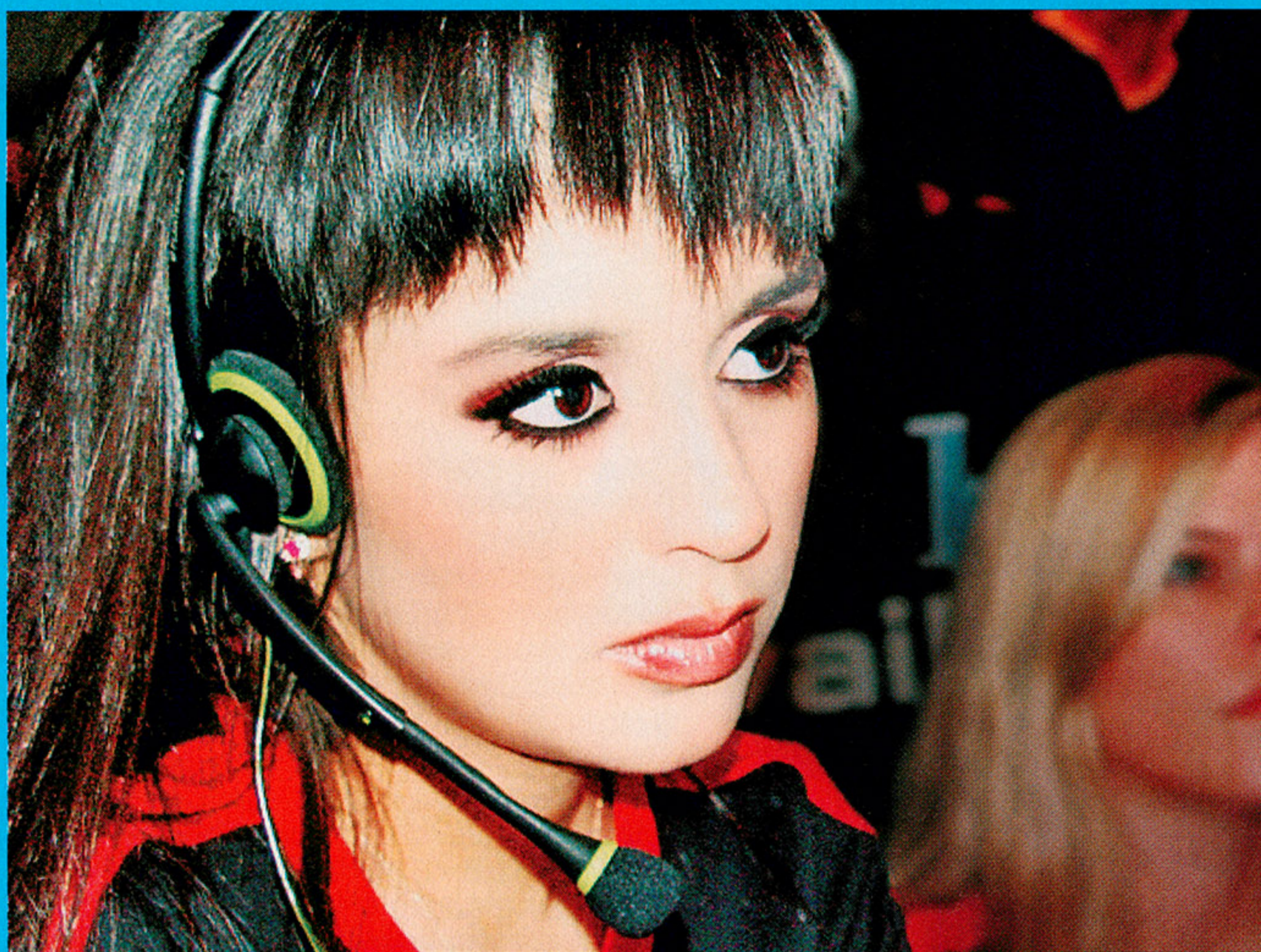
■ Epic: Torque Bow



■ Insomniac: Bullseye



■ Ubisoft: 552 Commando



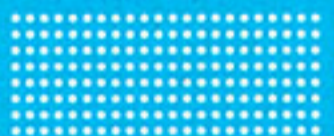
> TAKE THIS JOB

Pro Gamer

Our monthly look at the jobs you want
By Evan Shamoon

This month: Alexis Hebert, pro gamer with Major League Gaming

Experience: An MLG *Halo 2* pro for two years, with dozens of tournaments behind her

**What's a pro gamer?**

A hardcore player who competes in tournaments for cash prizes and product endorsements. In short: This is serious gaming. "You don't go to a tournament and go out and get drunk and treat it like a fun field trip," says Major League Gaming pro Alexis Hebert. "You know what game maps you're playing, you know what game types you're playing. You go to bed early, you wake up early, you practice, you eat right."

Job data

Salary range: Hebert earns \$100-\$200 a day for public appearances, or she can make thousands in prize money. She reckons she pulls in about \$40,000 a year, and that's not including all the perks—free hotel rooms and meals and comped gear. "Beyond the money, you also get to enjoy the lifestyle," she says.

Recommended education: More than what you know, pro gaming is all about mindset. "You have to

be a perfectionist—more left brain. Creative people probably aren't cut out for this job," says Hebert. "Sometimes I'll spend two straight hours learning how to wall-strafe."

Location of most jobs: "The great thing with online gaming is that you don't need to be centralized anywhere," says Hebert. "That said, big cities are better because there are more people that play."

Current level of demand: Huge. "From USA to DirecTV to *60 Minutes*, it's just getting ridiculous," Hebert says about the game's recent explosion in popularity on mainstream television. "I think it's the new poker. The average tourney I go to is like 1,300 people."

Hebert's typical day

After waking up around 10 a.m., she checks her e-mail and goes for a jog. Then it's *Halo 2* practice for about five or six hours, followed by a 45-minute break, and then another five to six hours of *Halo 2*. Hebert says



■ Halo 2 tournaments—along with paid appearances—are Hebert's bread and butter.

she usually needs quiet time before a tournament. "I'll just play around with my joystick a lot," she says, "keep my hands warm, and remember what habits I need to correct."

How'd she get the gig?

"Practice, practice, and more practice," says Hebert. "It takes much more sacrifice than people think." Would-be pros rise through the tournament ranks (see MLGpro.

com and GGL.com for listings), get their names out there, and often focus on first-person shooters. "While there are circuits out there for fighting and racing games, Halo 2, Quake 4, and Counter-Strike are by far more popular." But it's about more than just skill nowadays; you've gotta market yourself. "Now you definitely need to shower," says Hebert. "Nobody even wants to talk to you if you don't." 🚿

> TOOLS OF HER TRADE

Extra controllers

"I go through one a month," says Hebert. (Halo 2 pros never touch 360 pads, which they say feel awkward.)

A good attitude

"Don't get discouraged, don't let the trash talk

get to you, and learn from your mistakes," she says.

An outlet to unwind

"Exercise and reading are key for me—[I need] to be physically and mentally active outside of gaming," she says.

MySpace

"I've gotten 55,000 hits in six months; it's really helped me get out there in the community," she says. The trade-off: Now she must use her mom's Gamertag when she just wants to play "and not make it such an ordeal!"

> THE GAME OF LIVES



5 Lives: Keiji Inafune

Fending off butt-ugly bugs in *Lost Planet: Extreme Condition* got our blood boiling. So before this shooter melts completely off our gaming radar, we pinned down the game's producer, Keiji Inafune (who also produced the mall-infested zombie romp *Dead Rising* and created *Mega Man*), to find out just how long he can last in our 5 Lives hot seat. Can he handle the heat? Let's find out....

1. What's a bigger tragedy? The box art for *Mega Man 1* (NES) or the sinking of the Titanic?

Keiji Inafune: [Laughs] Some people made it out alive after the Titanic, so that may have been a little less of a tragedy than the box art.



EGM: Correct

Lives remaining: 🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑

2. Name of the kind of game Shaun and Ed play at the beginning of *Shaun of the Dead*

KI: Action

EGM: Incorrect. It's first-person shooter

Lives remaining: 🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑

3. Attribute the following Robot Masters with the correct *Mega Man* game: Cut Man, Yamato Man, and Snake Man.

KI: Cutman is *Mega Man 1*. Yamato Man is *Mega Man 6*. Snake Man is *Mega Man 4*.

EGM: Incorrect. Snake Man appeared in *Mega Man 3*.

KI: Bah, the one I like the least is *Mega Man 3*!

Lives remaining: 🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑

4. What's the better mall treat? A cinnamon bun or a pretzel?

KI: Pretzel

EGM: Incorrect. It's actually a cinnamon bun

KI: But I like pretzels better.

EGM: Sorry, cinnamon bun is the correct answer.



Lives remaining: 🧑🧑🧑🧑🧑

5. So, uh, did anyone ever find the planet?

KI: Maybe Columbus?

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining: 🧑🧑

Game Over: A noble effort, Mr. Inafune. But here's a quick tip: Next time defeat Sarcasm Man before you battle with EGM.



> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

Left 4 DEAD

The dead are the lucky ones By Joe Rybicki

Platform:
XB360

Publisher:
Valve

Developer:
Turtle Rock

Release Date:
Winter 2007

RABIES IS A NASTY DISEASE. If contracted by a human (generally through an animal bite), it can be virtually undetectable for up to three months. Once symptoms start manifesting themselves—such as aggression and hallucinations—it's generally too late; death almost invariably follows in as little as two days from the first manifestation of symptoms.

In our world of SARS and West Nile and bird flu, where affordable air travel transports disease with a speed and breadth never before seen, the idea of a drug-resistant, fast-spreading rabies virus is frighteningly plausible. Frightening enough,

certainly, to serve as the premise of a survival-horror game.

Meth zombies

Enter *Left 4 Dead*, a multiplayer-focused shooter from Turtle Rock, a studio best known for its work with Valve's tremendously successful *Counter-Strike* (which is still a big deal in the PC gaming community). Stemming from a *Counter-Strike* experiment featuring a handful of human players against a swarm of bots equipped with hand-to-hand weapons, *Left 4 Dead* is essentially a zombie game—but it's a far cry from the plodding, *Resident Evil*-derived

survival-horror norm. It sets a very different pace, dispensing with the shambling, Romero-esque zombie formula in favor of vast mobs of fast, agile, and powerful Infected.

"My favorite zombie movie is *28 Days Later*," says Turtle Rock founder Michael Booth. "It took the whole mythical undead genre and turned it upside down, making the whole situation disturbingly plausible." If you're familiar with the film, it should be no surprise that the *Left 4 Dead* team favored the fast-moving zombie type. But it's not a mere homage to good cinema: "From our very early prototypes," Booth continues, "we just



■ Sick of playing as the good guy? This one lets you assume the role of the grotesque, too.



loved the intensity and chaos of a running mob attack. Trying to survive a screaming, raging mob running full-out at your team is visceral and intense, and just never gets old.”

United we stand

Note the reference to “your team.” This is one of the primary features of *Left 4 Dead*: a fully fleshed-out, carefully constructed online co-op mode. While players can choose to take the role of an Infected, the main focus of the game is the conflict between a tiny squad of human players and swarms of A.I.-controlled Infected. This idea presents two serious challenges: First,

how do you design a co-op game that forces true cooperation without relying on cheap gimmicks? And second, how do you create an A.I. enemy that actually poses a challenge to human players working together?

“The reason more games don’t support co-op, or don’t do it well,” says Booth, “is because co-op is hard to do. Allowing two or more people to play your game together is not enough; the game itself must be designed from the ground up with co-op in mind. We’ve explicitly focused on things like sharing items, reviving downed friends, rescuing trapped friends, helping them up ledges, and

so on. [We also focus on] communications, an award system to highlight helpful teammates as well as teammates who are causing problems, and a voting system to allow the group to police itself.”

Game, program thyself

For the often-problematic A.I. issue, Turtle Rock is taking a novel approach, building in routines to allow the game to generate enemies on its own—but to do so in a carefully directed way. “Each and every Infected, whether part of the common horde or a boss, is placed in the world by our A.I. director algorithms,” Booth >

says. "There are no triggers, generators, special flags, or other human-placed information to determine where these enemies are placed. As a result, the Survivor team cannot predict when or where they will encounter *anything*."

And enemy placement and numbers won't be the only factors driving the challenge here; individual Infected will be powered by Turtle Rock's celebrated A.I., the tech that drives *Counter-Strike*'s surprisingly intelligent bots.

The result, Booth says, will be a game that's almost infinitely replayable. "A primary design goal," he says, "is to make each campaign playable hundreds of times." And perhaps more important for the game's longevity, it should create an experience that's easily transferred to new maps and scenarios (Turtle Rock is still figuring out whether this 360 game will support user-created content like in the PC edition).

Are we talking about a revolution in the crowded survival-horror genre? Probably not. But with its premise of a handful of humans working together against near-insurmountable odds, *Left 4 Dead* has the potential to recreate that classic zombie-flick atmosphere with an accuracy no game has yet managed. 🧟

> UNLEASH YOUR INNER ZOMBIE

While *Left 4 Dead* will support only four human-controlled Survivor characters, four additional humans can take on the role of these "boss Infected."

Boomer: Methane-filled fat-ass. Explodes when killed, can tag Survivors with projectile vomit to

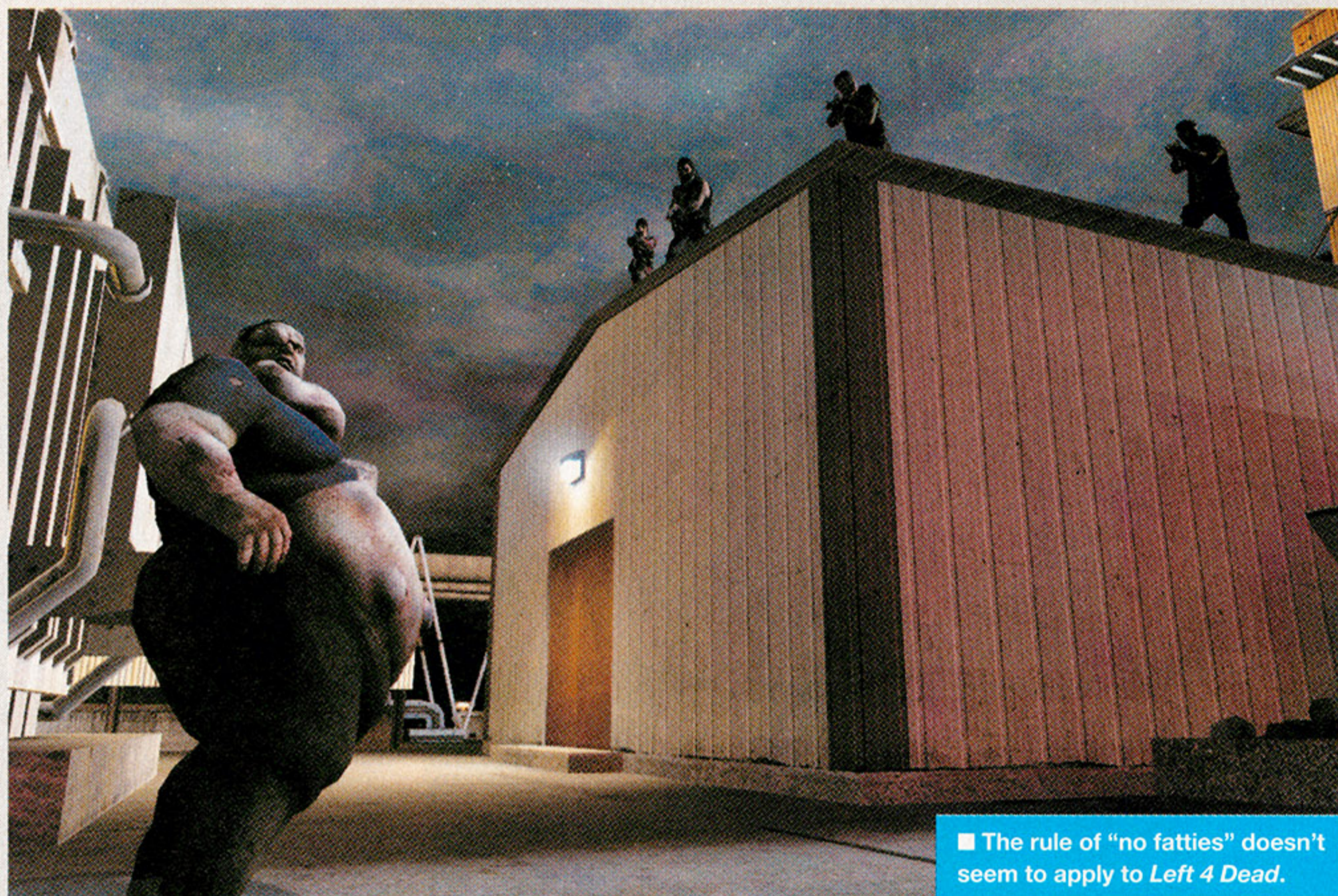
make them the focus of A.I.-controlled Infected.

Hunter: Zombie ninja. Leaps, hides, and pounces on Survivors, pinning them in place.

Smoker: Zombie Gene Simmons. Prehensile tongue can

strike up to 50 feet; can attack from above, hanging Survivors by the neck until dead. Collapses into smoke when killed, blinding the Survivors.

Tank: Tank smash! Tank throw cars! Tank break walls! Tank big and slow, but Tank strong!



■ The rule of "no fatties" doesn't seem to apply to *Left 4 Dead*.



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PLAYSTATION 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE

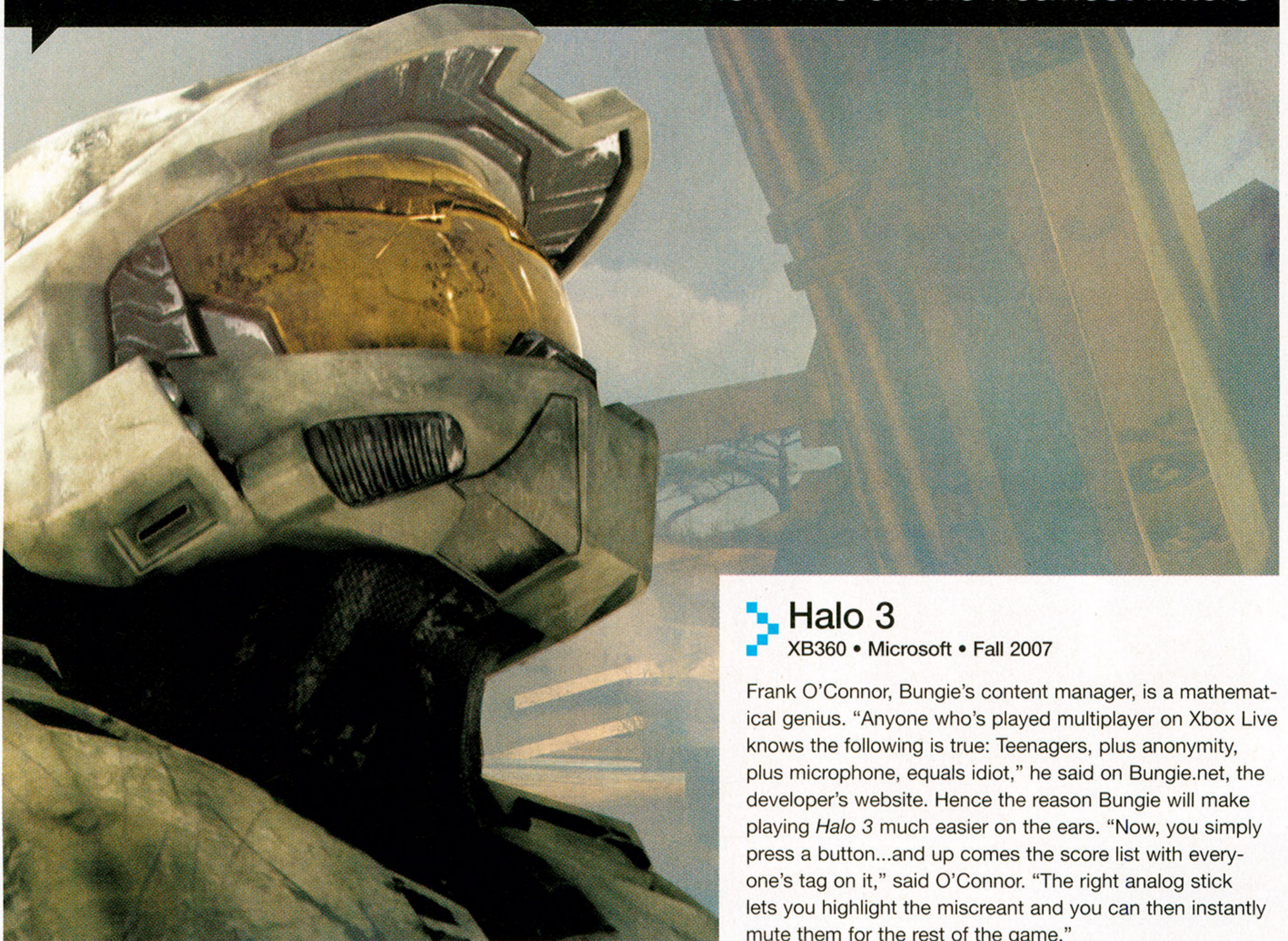
NINTENDO DS™

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

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THE BIG ONES

New info on the heaviest hitters



Halo 3

XB360 • Microsoft • Fall 2007

Frank O'Connor, Bungie's content manager, is a mathematical genius. "Anyone who's played multiplayer on Xbox Live knows the following is true: Teenagers, plus anonymity, plus microphone, equals idiot," he said on Bungie.net, the developer's website. Hence the reason Bungie will make playing *Halo 3* much easier on the ears. "Now, you simply press a button...and up comes the score list with everyone's tag on it," said O'Connor. "The right analog stick lets you highlight the miscreant and you can then instantly mute them for the rest of the game."

Final Fantasy XIII

PS3 • Square Enix • 2008

Xbox Live may be the download hotspot this spring (thanks in large part to the *Halo 3* multiplayer demo), but late this year that honor will go to the PlayStation Network. We hear that Square will release a demo of its highly anticipated role-playing game via Sony's online marketplace. Now that's one helluva season greeting.

Super Mario Galaxy


Wii • Nintendo • Fall 2007

Wanna know how "OMFG" awesome Mario's next adventure will be? The plumber ain't shy about telling ya: "[*Super*] *Mario Galaxy* is going to be the most exciting, amazing fun ever," said Charles Martinet, the long-time voice of Mario, to the British newspaper *The Sun*. "I played a little preview of it, and I had goose bumps of joy and was giddy with laughter. The new Wii controller has so much versatility and makes possible all the things you could never imagine doing before." Thanks for the sales pitch, Chuck. Still, at least it's nice to hear that *someone* is actually playing the game these days.



Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

PS3 • Konami • Fall 2007

With rumors running wild about Snake slithering into '08, perhaps the due date of his action figure will put those worries to rest. The 12-inch-tall geriatric you see here is coming this November. So unless Konami pulls a George Lucas and has the toys hit well before the game's release, the PlayStation 3 may have its killer (exclusive) app by this holiday after all. 



RUMOR MILL

Space-age scuttlebutt By Quartermann

FINAL FANTASY

I know some people out in Internet land have been calling me out...well, I hope you naysayers had a chance to pick up our last issue when my rumor about publisher Square Enix making several *Final Fantasy* remakes for the PSP came true—booyah!

YAWN—someone wake me up. Why am I not pumped by all the next-gen pizzazz going on...oh yeah, because Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo are snoozing, too. Seriously, guys, wake up! Make me excited. Make me want to play your systems. Make me stop complaining...and while you're at it, make me a sandwich—I'm hungry. I bet y'all are starving for some dirt, too. No worries, I got you covered....

Stretching out a saga

Xenosaga—once planned as sprawling six-game series—eventually got chopped down to a trilogy. And though the series apparently sung its swan song, I hear Namco Bandai intends to keep this series singing. Word is it is making a **PS3 action game starring the ass-kicking robo KOS-MOS.**

A braaaainy move

Even though we're waiting for a sequel to last year's *Dead Rising*, my undead sources claim **Capcom is reanimating the campy zombie game as a 360 Platinum Hit, complete with a tasty extra: online coop.** Now don't moan if you already own the game—we hear this new

mode will also be available on Xbox Live...for a price, of course.

Up all night, play all day

Now that *Resistance* is out, you'd think the developers at Insomniac could finally get some sleep—yeah, right! Along with the PS3 *Ratchet & Clank*, they're keeping busy—I hear a ***Resistance* map pack will arrive this spring.** Not only that, but a sequel is also in the works (duh!). Expect that to fall, well, fall of 2008, actually. I wonder if they have room for another project, though? Hmm....

Bloody new content

We may be playing *Gears of War* to death, but developer Epic is trying

to keep it alive—my spies told me **new *Gears of War* downloadable content is on its way** (possibly this month). Expect some new multiplayer modes and maps. But get this: The ranked Achievements may also switch over to player matches (if Microsoft approves it, that is).

Hurtin' hawk

Seems like Sony is trickling out its first-party PS3 titles pretty slowly. One of those games, **the flight-shooter *Warhawk*, is currently crying mayday**—I'm hearing the game is in bad shape, and because of that, it will only be released as a download title. Don't be surprised if you hear this soon, too. 🦅

> Q-TIPS

- Looks like I got more music rumors for ya—my Microsoft mole told me both ***Every Extend Extra* and *Rez* are coming to Xbox Live Arcade.**
- Someone must be hungry—I discovered a **certain publisher is cooking up a collaboration with the Food Network.** *Iron Chef* on Wii? Yes, please.
- We thought *Need for Speed* was putting the brakes on a new game—guess not! I hear a **new *NFS* is coming this fall.** Worst part? It's a sim—ugh.

APRIL 2007

COMING SOON

April's arrivals



Guitar Hero II

XB360 • Activision/RedOctane

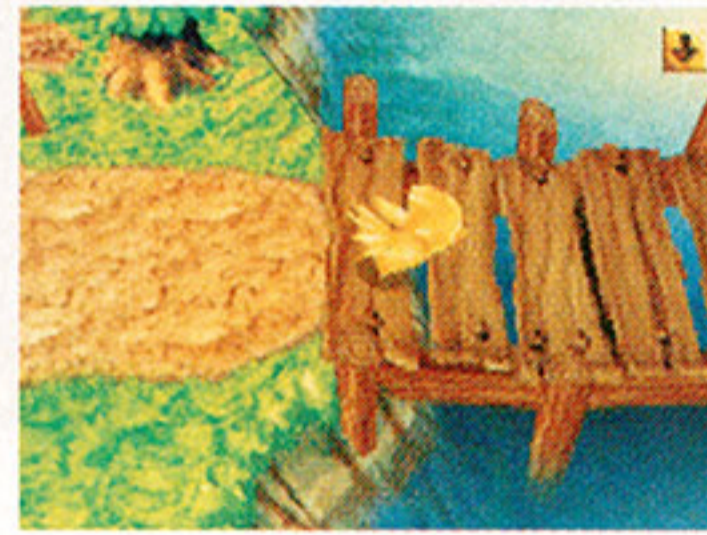
Well, it's about freakin' time that folks other than PS2 owners can rock out with their c***s out. New tracks and venues up the ante in the 360 edition, but Achievements and the promise of downloadable tunes are what really have us itchin' to jam again.



MLB 07: The Show

PS3/PS2/PSP • Sony CEA

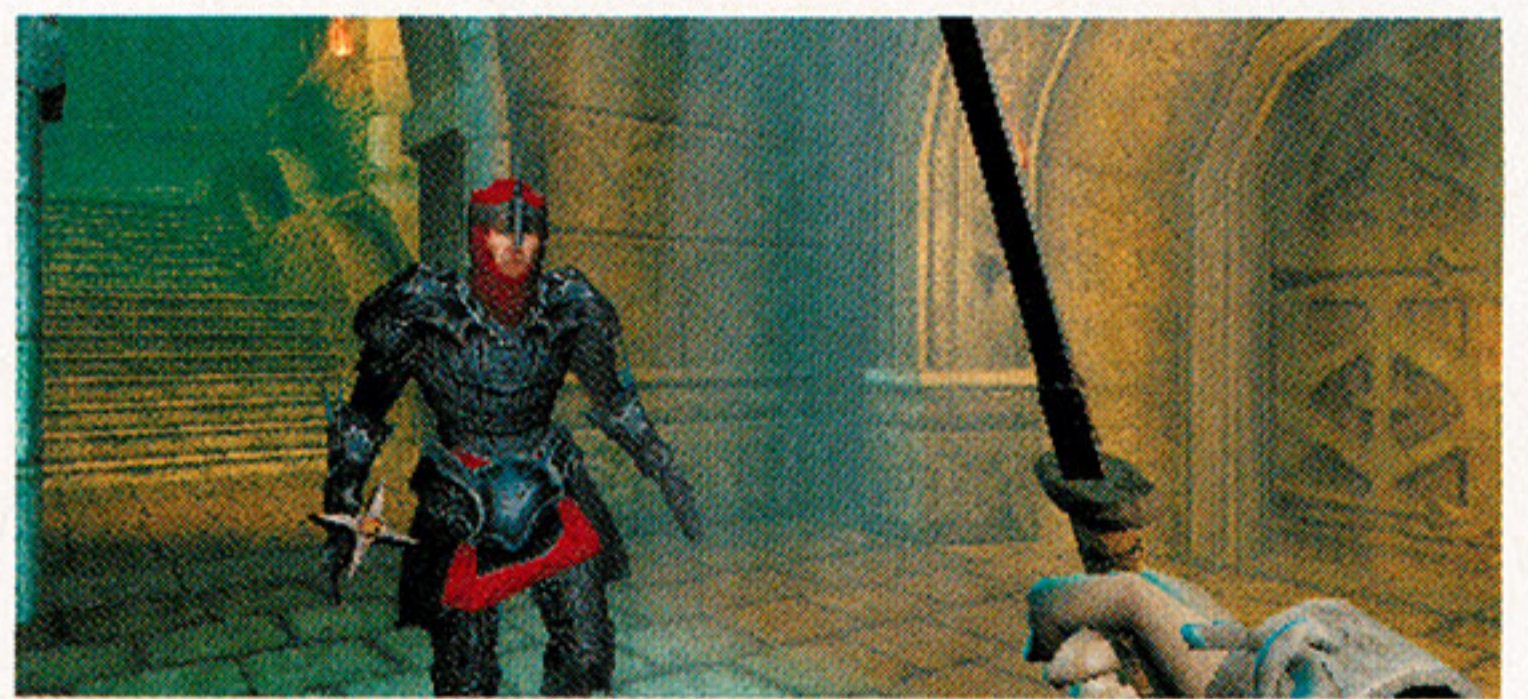
The *MLB* series has always played at an All-Star level, but now with the power of the PS3, the game should start lookin' like a big leaguer (so, it'll be better than this PS2 screen). It's also steppin' it up off the diamond; you can now create online leagues. See, *Madden*, other next-gen sports games are doing it...



Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales

DS • Square Enix

The DS is literally going to the birds! Cuteness aside, spending time as a chocobo—without some filthy human on its back—looks promising, with combat (consisting of a highly polished card-battling system) that should even interest gamers who have long waved bye-bye to puberty.



The Elder Scrolls Travels: Oblivion

PSP • Bethesda

Squeezing an enormous world like *Oblivion* on to a handheld would be a dangerous act of dark magic. So instead, this *Elder Scrolls* role-playing installment will focus more on dungeon-crawling (think *Zelda*) and less on dicking around towns.



Shadowrun

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios

Who woulda thunk it—a role-playing game providing the source material for a first-person shooter. But that's exactly what's happening with *Shadowrun*, which originally hit the videogame scene during the Genesis/Super Nintendo era. While fragging replaces spellcasting, the real draw here lies in the Live Anywhere feature, meaning you can shoot the holy hell outta 360 and PC players.



SNK vs. Capcom: Card Fighters

DS • SNK Playmore

Didja feel that? It's the spirit of the NeoGeo Pocket swirling about, as one of the handheld's top titles finally receives the sequel treatment. This DS follow-up will sport wireless versus play (which only requires one DS card) and decks that'll now include character cards such as *Street Fighter*'s resident lover of Indian cuisine, Dhalsim (read the original *SFII* manual for the full scoop on this pugilist's food choices...seriously).



Monster Madness: Battle for Suburbia

XB360 • SouthPeak

Don't let the name fool you; this doesn't involve 4x4s terrorizing some remote neighborhood (à la *Monster Truck Madness*). Rather, it's a top-down action game in the vein of *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* (SNES). So be prepared for plenty of comedy-filled carnage.



Pokémon Diamond and Pearl

DS • Nintendo

Attention all Pokéholics: You can finally retire (read: throw out) your GBA, as Nintendo's dual-screen machine will soon fulfill your pocket-monster fix. And expect a major rush from *Diamond* and *Pearl* when you go battling online (a series first). If you're still attached to your old creatures, don't worry—thanks to the handheld's GBA slot, you can upload your cute pals into these adventures.



More April Releases

Code Lyoko
DS • Game Factory

Riviera
PSP • Atlus

Cooking Mama: Cook Off
Wii • Majesco

Super Paper Mario
Wii • Nintendo

Dead Head Fred
PSP • D3Publisher

The Settlers
DS • Ubisoft

Legend of the Dragon
PS2/PSP • Game Factory

Wii-ality Check

Grandsons, grandmas, the family pet...these days, it seems like everyone is playing Nintendo's unique "graphics aren't everything" console. So what better time to preview the next crop of Wii games and show how some are taking a page from, well, your life? >



Looking for more? Head to EGM214.1UP.com for videos of several of the Wii games in this feature.

Photographs by www.claudiagoetzmann.com



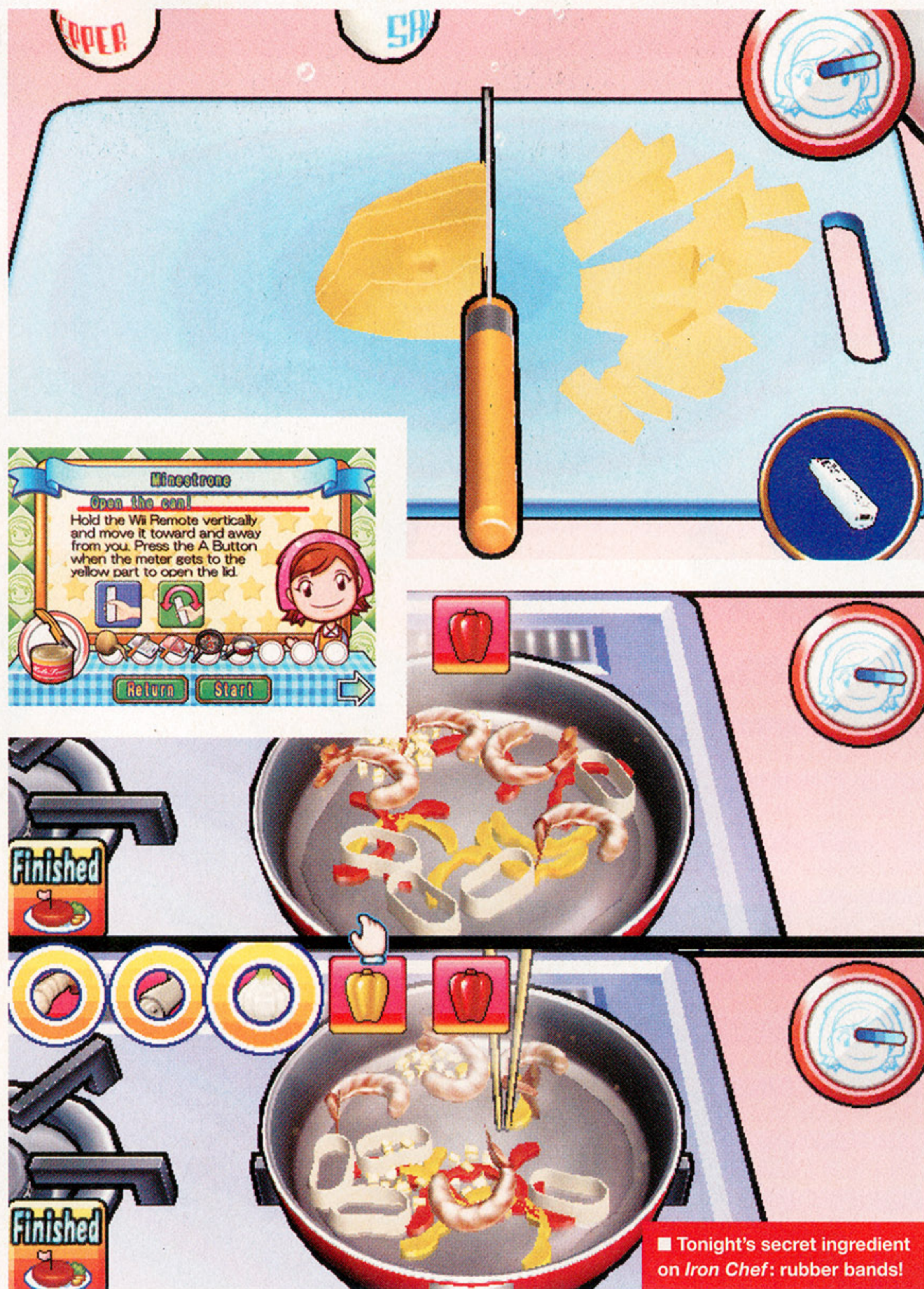


Cooking Mama: Cook Off

Majesco • April 2007

After fattening up the DS' quirky catalog last year, *Cooking Mama* returns to the kitchen to serve up a tasty dish for the Wii. Sure, it's disappointing that *Cook Off* borrows so much from the DS version, but at least using the Wii Remote to whip up a smorgasbord of fake food feels surprisingly intuitive. Cooking the grub on the Wii could even prepare you for a potential future career as a short-order cook—you chop vegetables, roll dough, and crack eggs using the same motions you would in real life (assuming you actually cook, that is). Each delicious recipe breaks down into several little minigames—some are super-simple (filling a pot with water) while others a little more complex (carefully chopping the legs off a crab).

Though *Cook Off* is a pseudo-sequel to the first game, don't expect to prepare all the same meals all over again. "While there are fewer recipes than in the DS version," says Senior Product Manager Liz Buckley, "there is a lot more variety between dishes and the actual steps to prepare them, because *Cook Off* includes cuisine—plus desserts—from 10 different countries. There are also new modes like multiplayer that delivers the cook-off concept in a competitive way." Sprinkling in the *Iron Chef*-like competition really helps keep this simplistic series fresh, especially considering the original DS game needed some meatier modes to keep us fully satisfied. But don't worry too much if you can't find a friend to battle with—the "Friends and Food of the World" mode pits you in the same competitive dish duels, only against CPU-controlled chefs.



■ Tonight's secret ingredient on *Iron Chef*: rubber bands!

Tamagotchi: Party On!

Namco Bandai • Spring 2007

Party On! marks the first time the seemingly immortal *Tamagotchi* license makes the journey from obnoxious beeping keychains all the way to a home console. As if that isn't ambitious enough, your creepy virtual pet now has presidential aspirations. A party game in the same vein as *Mario Party*, *Party On!* sets you off on the campaign trail to participate in various minigames gathering popularity points. Too bad so many of the challenges are so lame. Paper-rock-scissors? C'mon now.



Dewy's Adventure

Konami • Fall 2007

Konami follows up its electricity-based *Elebits* with another cuddly—yet more promising—elemental diversion: Meet Dewy, an animated droplet of water who's tasked with saving the world. But don't expect a traditional platformer; instead of controlling Dewy directly, you tilt the Wii Remote to manipulate the entire level, *Super Monkey Ball*-style. And we like that it's got more depth than Sega's simian-rolling sim: Dewy gains new abilities when frozen or boiled, and you can edit and share levels online.

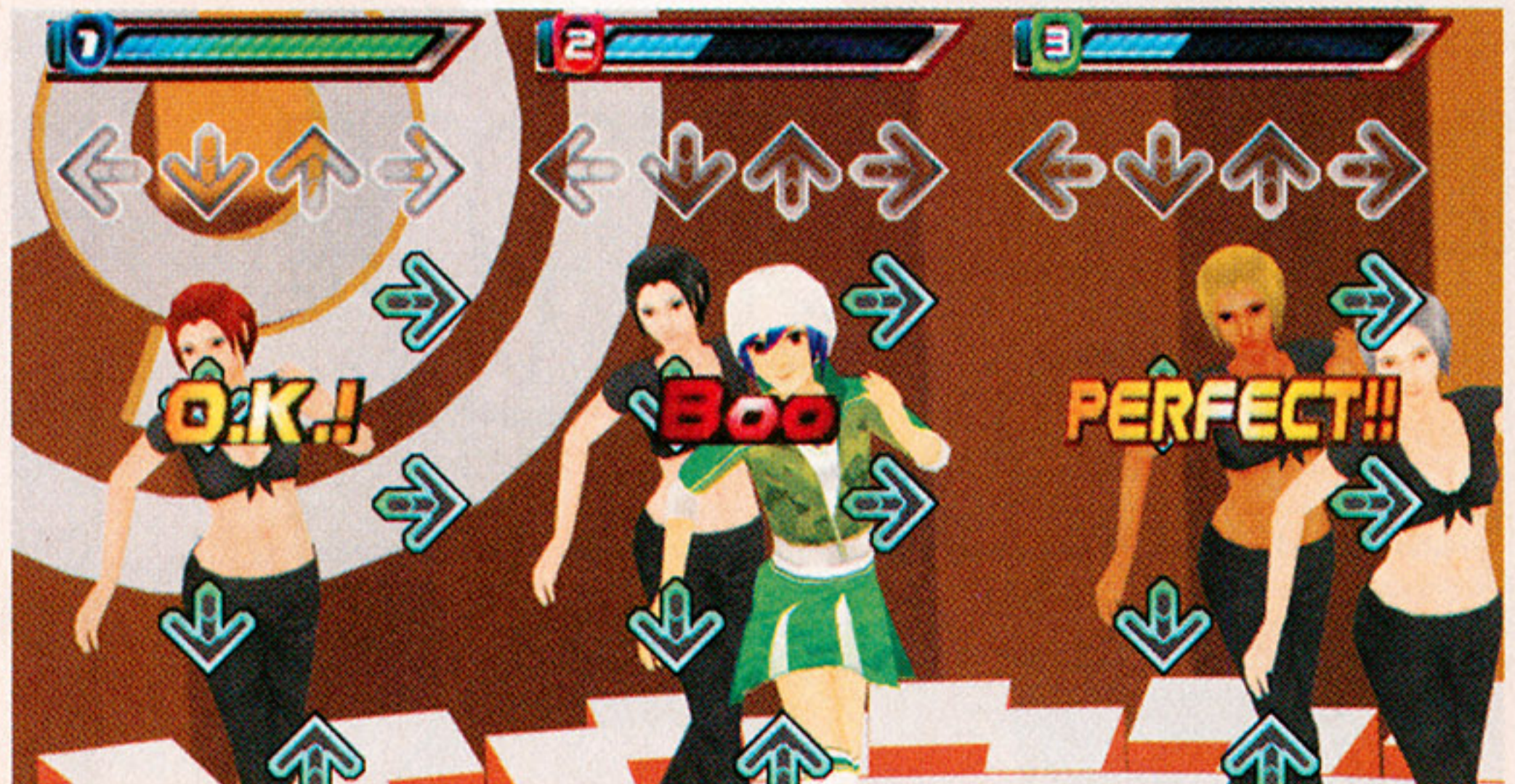




Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party

Konami • Summer 2007

Having already conquered consoles, arcades, and even grade schools, Konami's ubiquitous hot-stepping simulator gets a major face-lift for its Wii debut. In addition to a more realistic visual style, *Hottest Party* also features reworked gameplay that has you posing (and attacking rival dancers) with the Wii-mote and Nunchuk while hopping on the traditional dance pad. Series vets can also look forward to an all-new soundtrack packed with pop hits from the last four decades and a smattering of new multiplayer minigames.



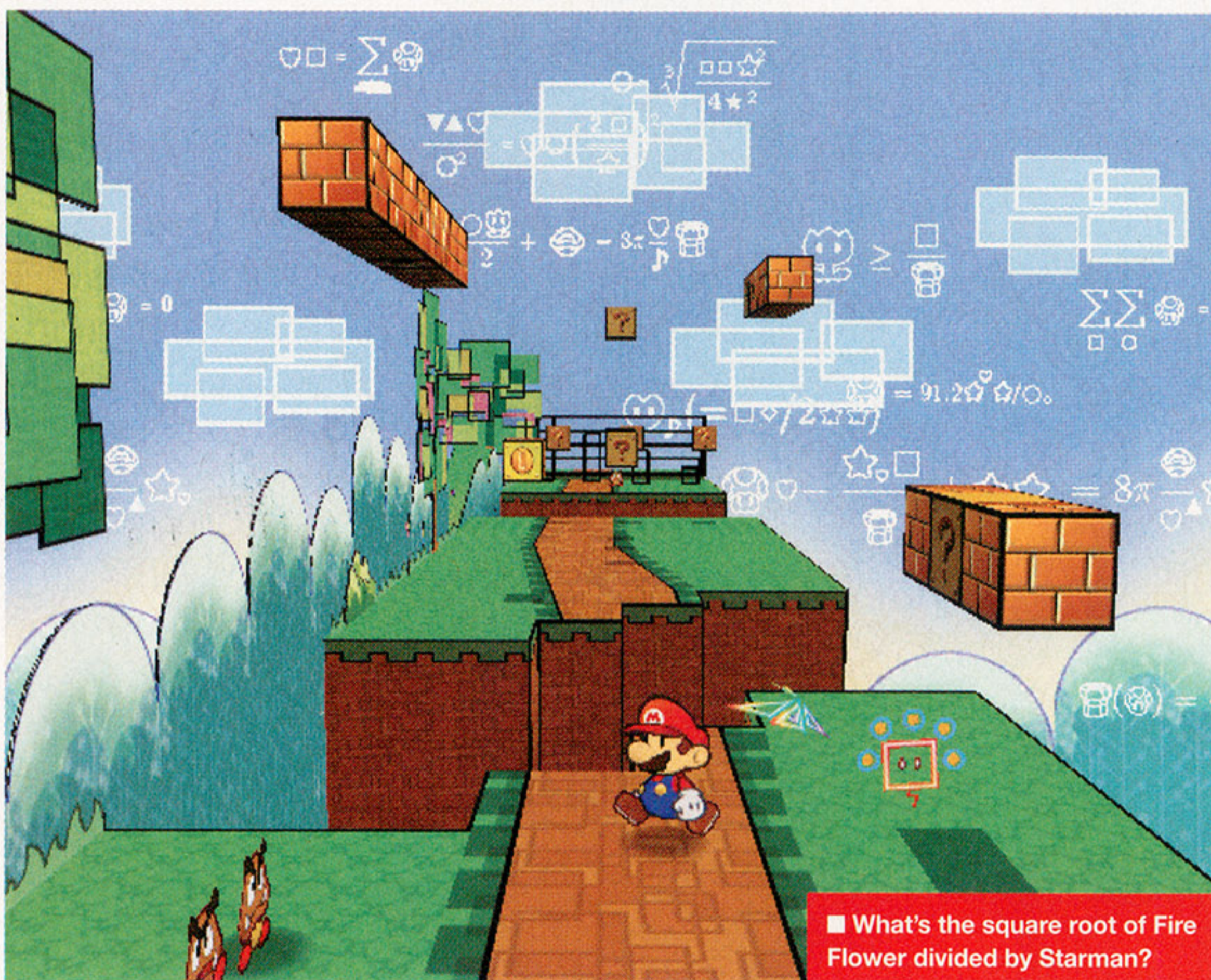
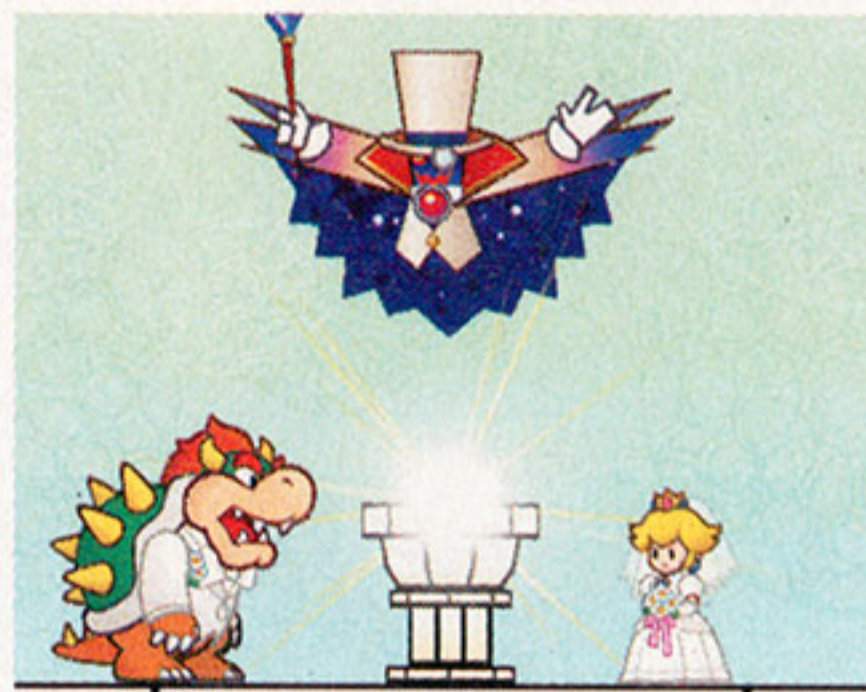
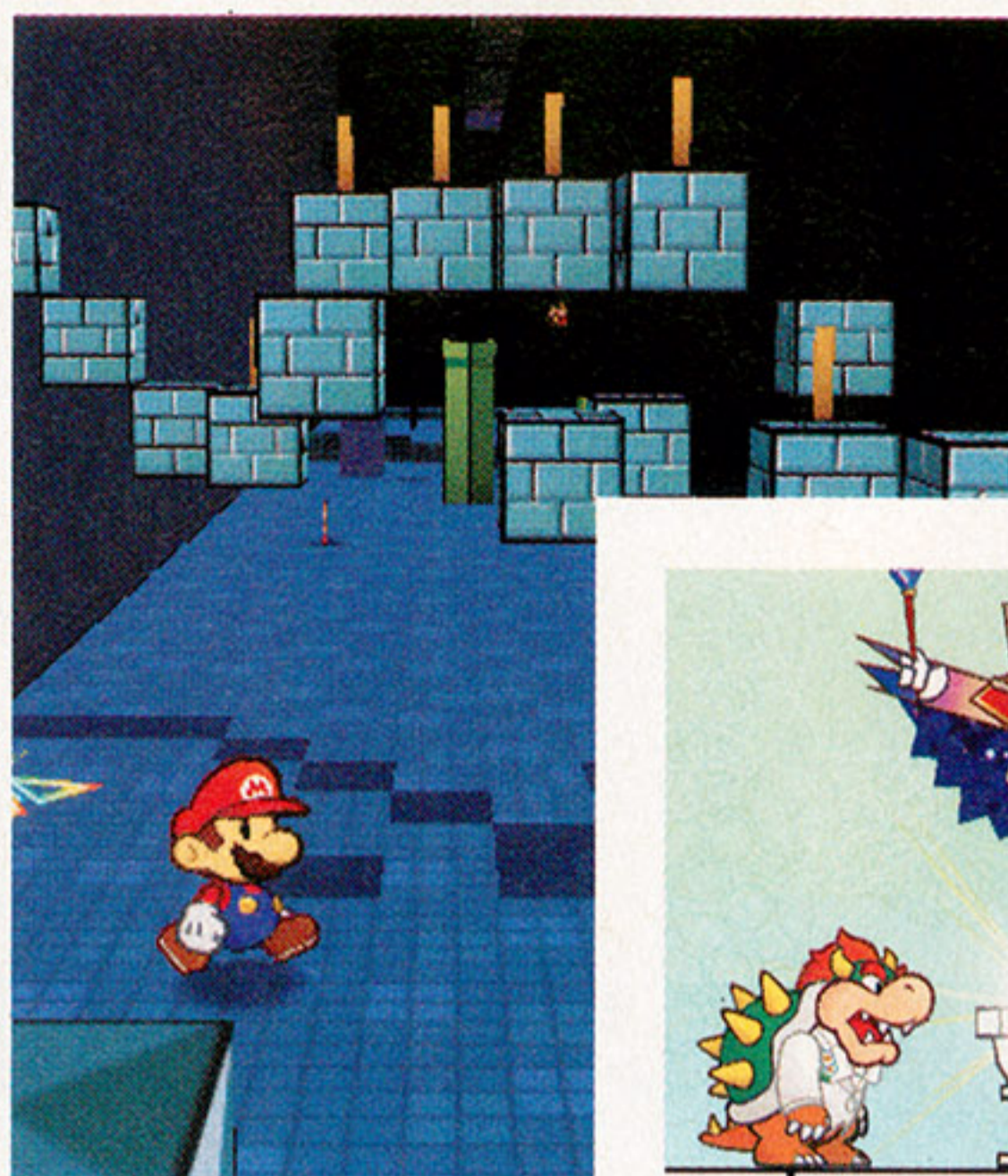
Location courtesy of The Cellar, San Francisco

Super Paper Mario

Nintendo • April 2007

After banishing this quirky GameCube platformer to release-date limbo for a few months, Nintendo finally wised up and moved *Super Paper Mario* to a more fitting home—the red-hot Wii. Like the *Paper Mario* role-playing games, you can expect here creative papercraft visuals, whimsical dialogue, and obscure *Mario* in-jokes aplenty. The oddball plot tasks the plumber with saving Flipside, a bizarre town that's under attack by the evil Count Bleck. His quirky weapon of choice? A massive black hole that spews crazy mathematical equations.

Don't expect a return of the series' turn-based RPG combat, though—this flattened-out romp unfolds as a traditional platformer à la *Super Mario Bros.* This time, you'll be able to take control of three beloved Mushroom Kingdom regulars, switching between them on the fly to best make use of their unique abilities: Mario can rotate the 2D environments by 90 degrees (allowing you to travel "into" the stages to find hidden goodies), Princess Peach can glide long distances thanks to her frilly parasol, and Bowser can trample obstacles and belch deadly fireballs. Traditional *Mario* power-ups work a little differently here—Mushrooms still increase your size, but Starman now balloon characters into colossal, megapixelated monstrosities, while two different species of flowers serve to increase or decrease your top speed. Also, look for some wild new accoutrements, such as a powerful space suit/raygun combo and various "Pixls," little familiars that let you use the Wii-mote in clever new ways (for example, one Pixl named Tippy lets you point at the screen to uncover hidden objects).



Alien Syndrome

Sega • Summer 2007

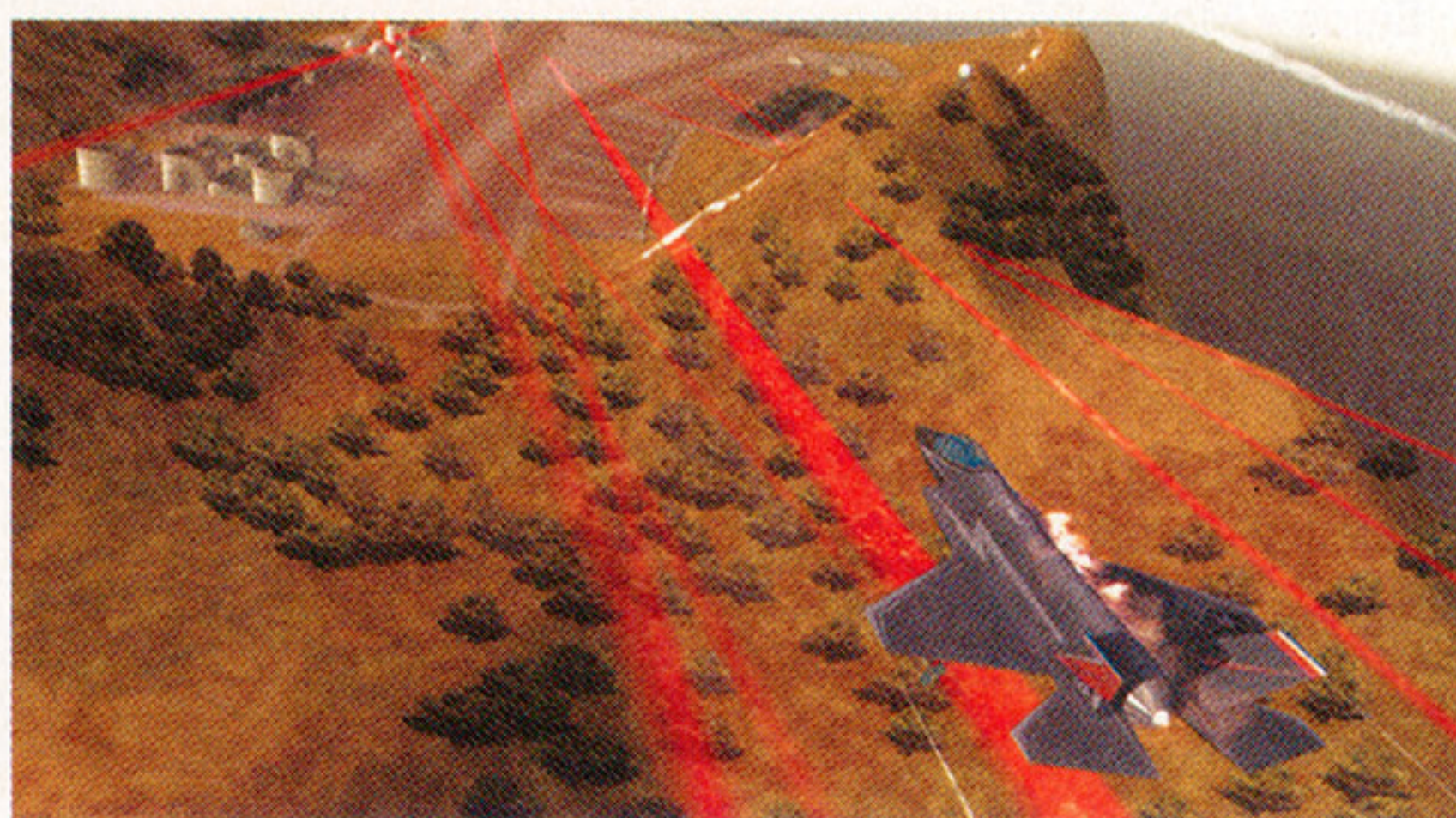
The sci-fi experts at Totally Games (the guys behind PC hits *TIE Fighter* and *X-wing*) aim to revitalize this dusty top-down arcade shooter with a new Wii-only control scheme. Now, you'll use the Nunchuk's analog stick to maneuver the alien-hunters while independently aiming and blasting enemies with the Wii-mote. Expect over 30 levels of action, plenty of massive bosses, plus graphics—even by Wii standards—that look ugly (guess that's what happens when you start out life on the PSP).



Heatseeker

Codemasters • April 2007

Ever since that biplane tech demo at the Revolution's unveiling (see: *Wii*, circa 2005), we've been hoping for a new *Pilotwings* from Nintendo. Instead we're getting Codemasters' *Heatseeker*. Here you don't hold the Wii Remote like a pencil, but rather rotate the Nunchuk to turn, which works surprisingly well. Still, it's unfortunate that *Heatseeker*'s backgrounds currently look like they got tossed in a blender, and a multiplayer mode will only appear in the PSP edition.





Escape from Bug Island

Eidos • May 2007

Known as *Necro-Nesia* in its Japanese homeland, *Bug Island* takes a brave-n-bloody first stab at survival horror on Wii. If you're expecting something of *Resident Evil*'s caliber, be prepared to dial down those lofty hopes—this bug-busting horror show evokes cornball Dreamcast “classics” such as *Blue Stinger*, *Illbleed*, and *Carrier*. The game clearly doesn't take itself very seriously, as chunky visuals, cheesy dialogue, and goofy enemies lend the adventure a definite B-movie feel. Thankfully, Eidos plans on tweaking the controls, interface, and difficulty in the U.S. version.

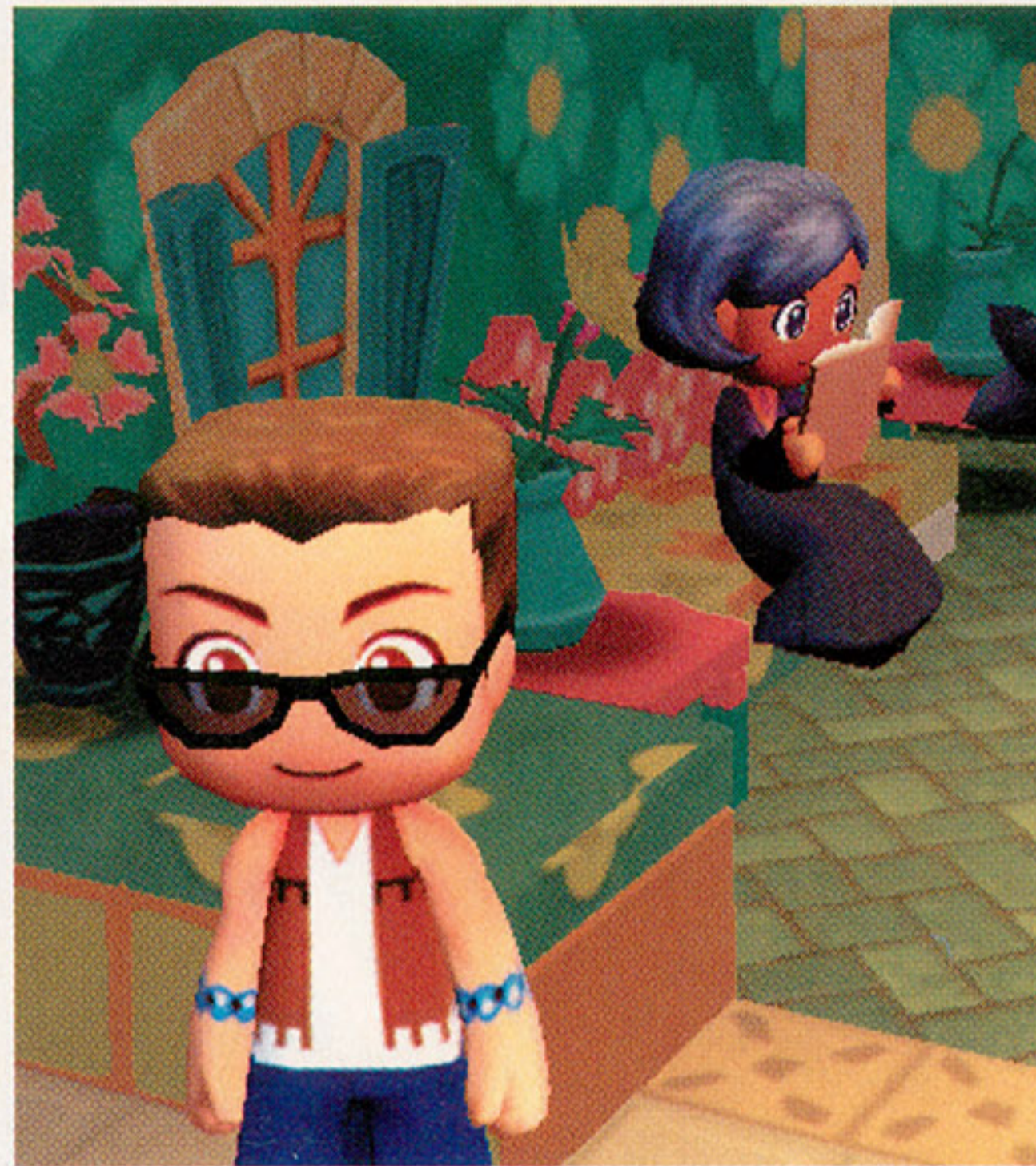


My Sims

EA Games • Summer 2007

You read that right—this is a *Sims* game. The same life simulator that's one of the greatest-selling franchises of all time has gotten a cute-tastic kiddie makeover for this Wii-exclusive release. Gone are the grown-up dollhouse graphics, replaced by toddler-block architecture and squished, Mii-like creatures (though Lead Designer Robin Hunicke insists, "We actually started working on the characters way before the Miis came out").

The graphical overhaul is only the most immediately noticeable change. What's really new for this version is the gameplay. If you hated babysitting your Sims' every bodily need, from eating hash browns for breakfast to going doo-doo after dinner, you'll be pleased to hear that this game does away with the micromanagement-intensive motive gameplay. Instead, you'll focus on making your town a nice place to live. Part *Animal Crossing*, part *SimCity*, the objective here is to create a harmonious town where the type of residents you want to attract will be happy. Let's say you want to have the pizza chef (one of dozens of characters in the game) living in your town. You'll need to make sure he has everything he needs to run a successful restaurant. In previous *Sims* games, you would have simply bought prefab objects, like an oven. Here, you'll create everything from the ground up using building blocks, unlocking more sophisticated blocks as you go. It may sound complicated, but simplicity is the designers' goal—the Wii Remote is mainly a pointing and dragging device. "We want to get it down to a simple click, a simple point, a simple grab," says Hunicke. "It shouldn't feel like a big science project."



Mario Party 8

Nintendo • Spring 2007

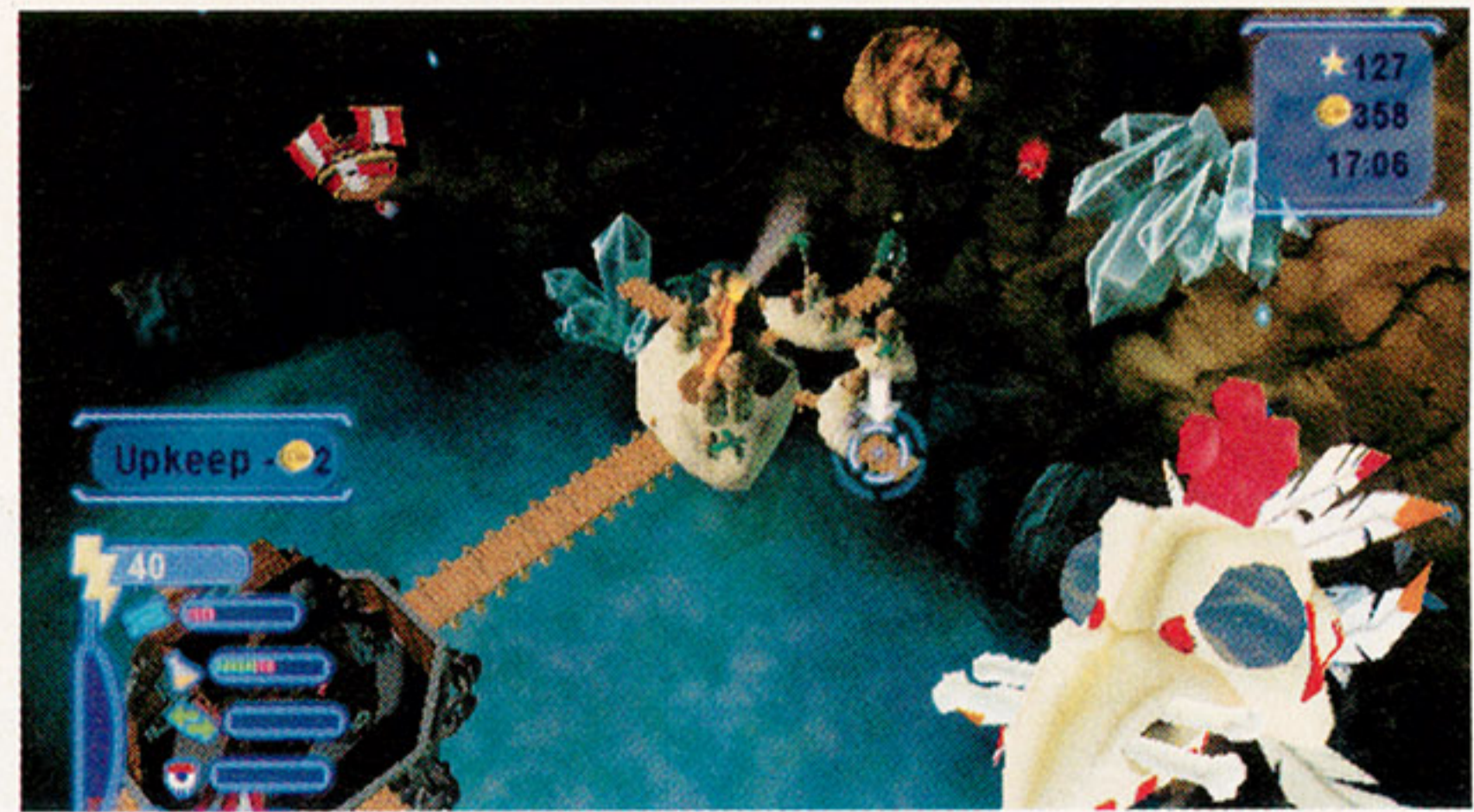
Pitting friend against friend in a race for dominance on six intricate game boards is Nintendo's way of saying "social get-together." We call it every man for himself. Play as one of 14 characters, including newcomers Hammer Bros. and Blooper, the white squid. And unlike the *Tamagotchi* game mentioned earlier, we're actually looking forward to this *Party*'s minigames, such as steering a Jet Ski, balancing on a tightrope, and lassoing barrels—all with the Wii Remote.



Space Station Tycoon

Namco Bandai • Summer 2007

Amassing fame and fortune as a space tycoon sounds great. Dealing with space pirates and their tendency to destroy everything in their path sounds dodgy. You've got to keep a keen eye on your many clients' best interests while also thwarting danger using the Wii Remote to repel asteroid attacks and fling cannonballs. Space isn't just about work, though: In a nice *SimCity*-like move, you can have some fun with your space empire by opening tiki bars and hole-in-the-wall taverns.



> PLAYED OUT?

Nintendo's console may be home to lots of new ideas, but it's also opened its doors to several ports. Let's find out if these Wii-ified editions are worth your time...again



The Godfather: Blackhand Edition

EA Games • April 2007

What's the difference?

It's a "director's cut" of the 360 version: In short, more of everything, but now you use the Wii Remote and Nunchuk to knock out enemies. No, you can't furiously move your arms to whale on your opponent; technique is mired by animation strings. But you can use the Wii-mote for better aim when shooting enemies. New mission trees guide you as Enforcer or Operator, offering exclusive contract hits and missions. Additional side missions, revised compounds, and larger hit squads round out the new content.

Worth the upgrade?

The extra gameplay keeps this one from sleepin' with the fishes.



Location courtesy of Original Joe's, San Francisco

Driver: Parallel Lines

Ubisoft • April 2007

What's the difference?

Whether you're bobbin' and weavin' through NYC traffic in 1976 or 2006 (remember, *Parallel Lines* takes place during two different eras), all of the controls are now mapped to the Wii-mote. Also, the developers are using the console's (slightly) extra horsepower to spruce up the visuals and A.I. Thanks, fellas.

Worth the upgrade?

The lack of fresh content keeps this *Driver* outta the fast lane.



Mortal Kombat Armageddon

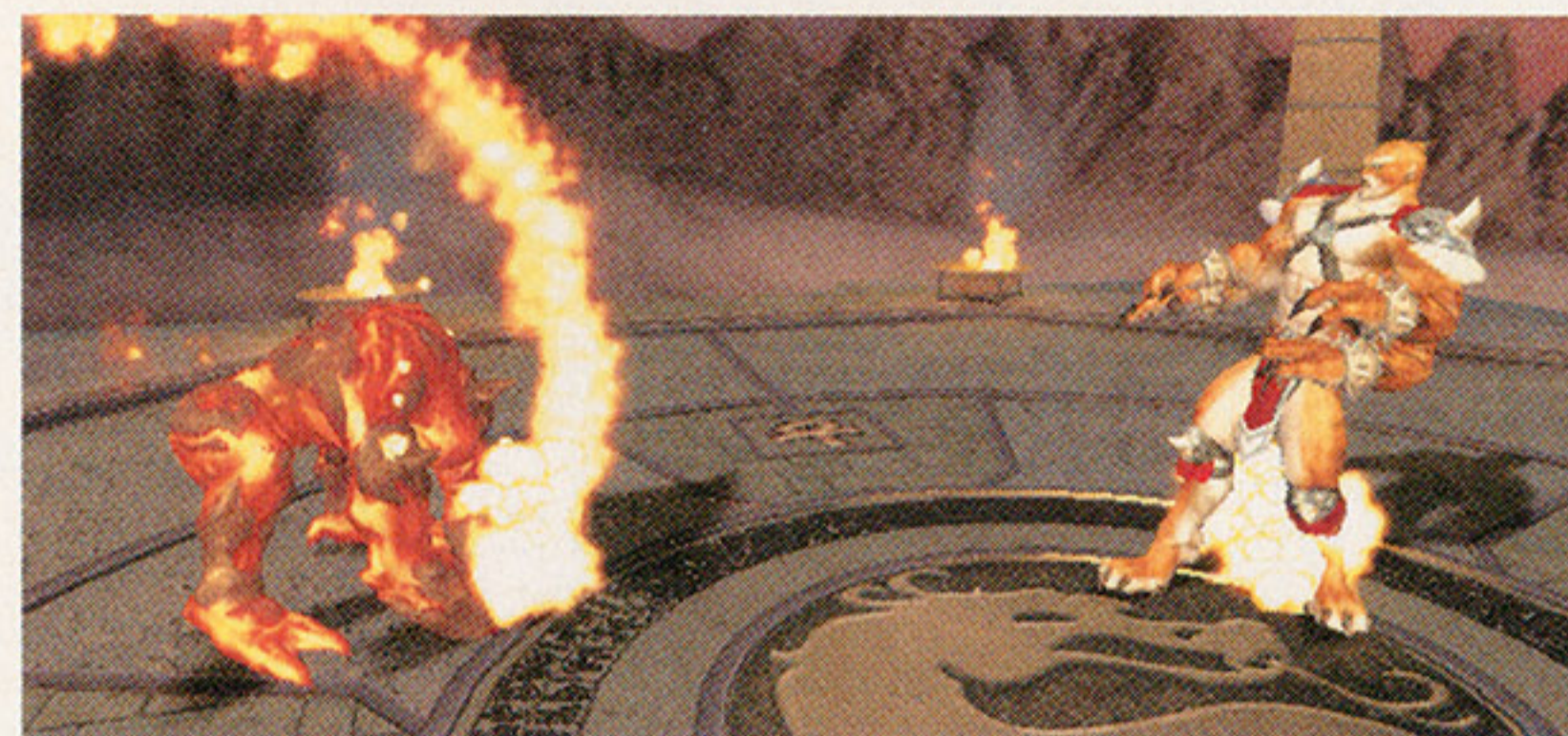
Midway • April 2007

What's the difference?

Although *Armageddon* felt like just another by-the-numbers *Kombat* rehash on PS2/XB, this tardy Wii port injects some new blood into the mix. Now, you can use simple Wii-mote gestures to unleash brutal, spine-stealing special moves and string together custom fatalities.

Worth the upgrade?

Purists can still play with old-fashioned dial-a-combo controls, but frankly, we're sold on the delightfully dumbed-down new method.



Scarface: The World Is Yours

Vivendi Games • Spring 2007

What's the difference?

A certain videogame-hating attorney's head is gonna explode once he hears about Tony Montana's Wii-exclusive mechanic: "We added a gesture system that feels really natural when you want to insult someone," says Producer Geoff Thomas of developer Radical. "I'll leave it to your imagination, but I'm sure you get the idea."

Worth the upgrade?

Sure, if taunting pretend characters with silly gestures gets you off.



Prince of Persia: Rival Swords

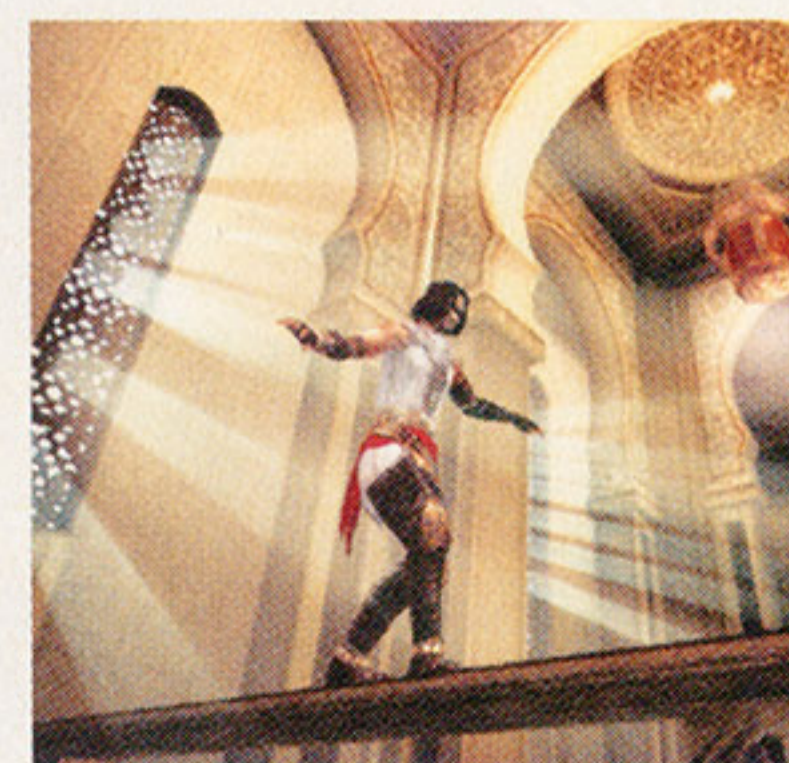
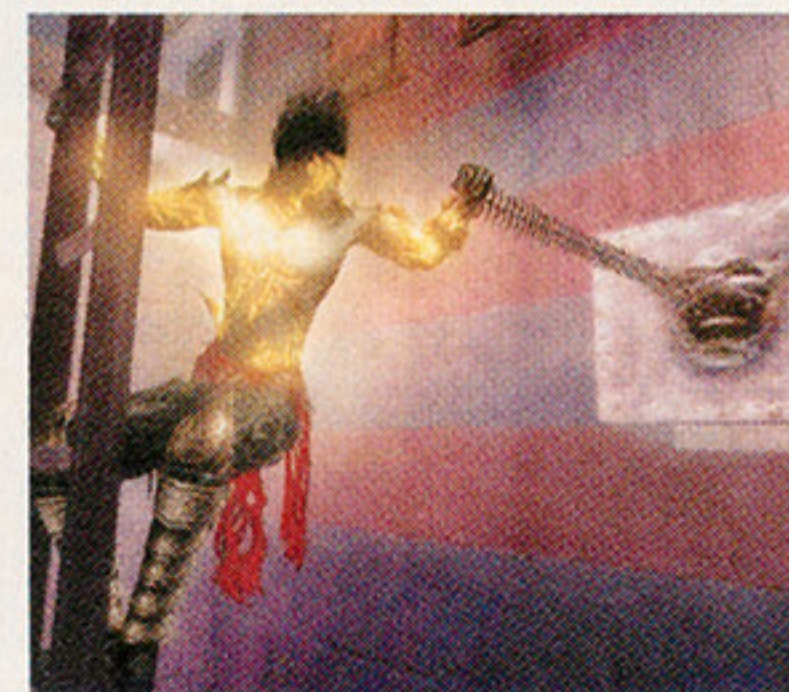
Ubisoft • March 2007

What's the difference?

Hmm, that crafty name change can't hide the fact that *Rival Swords* constitutes little more than a waggle-fied version of 2005's trilogy-ending *The Two Thrones* (PS2/XB/GC). The shadiness doesn't stop there: The PSP *Rival Swords* sports new areas to explore and original multiplayer challenges...this version, not so much.

Worth the upgrade?

Hardly, but maybe worth a look if you skipped *Thrones*.



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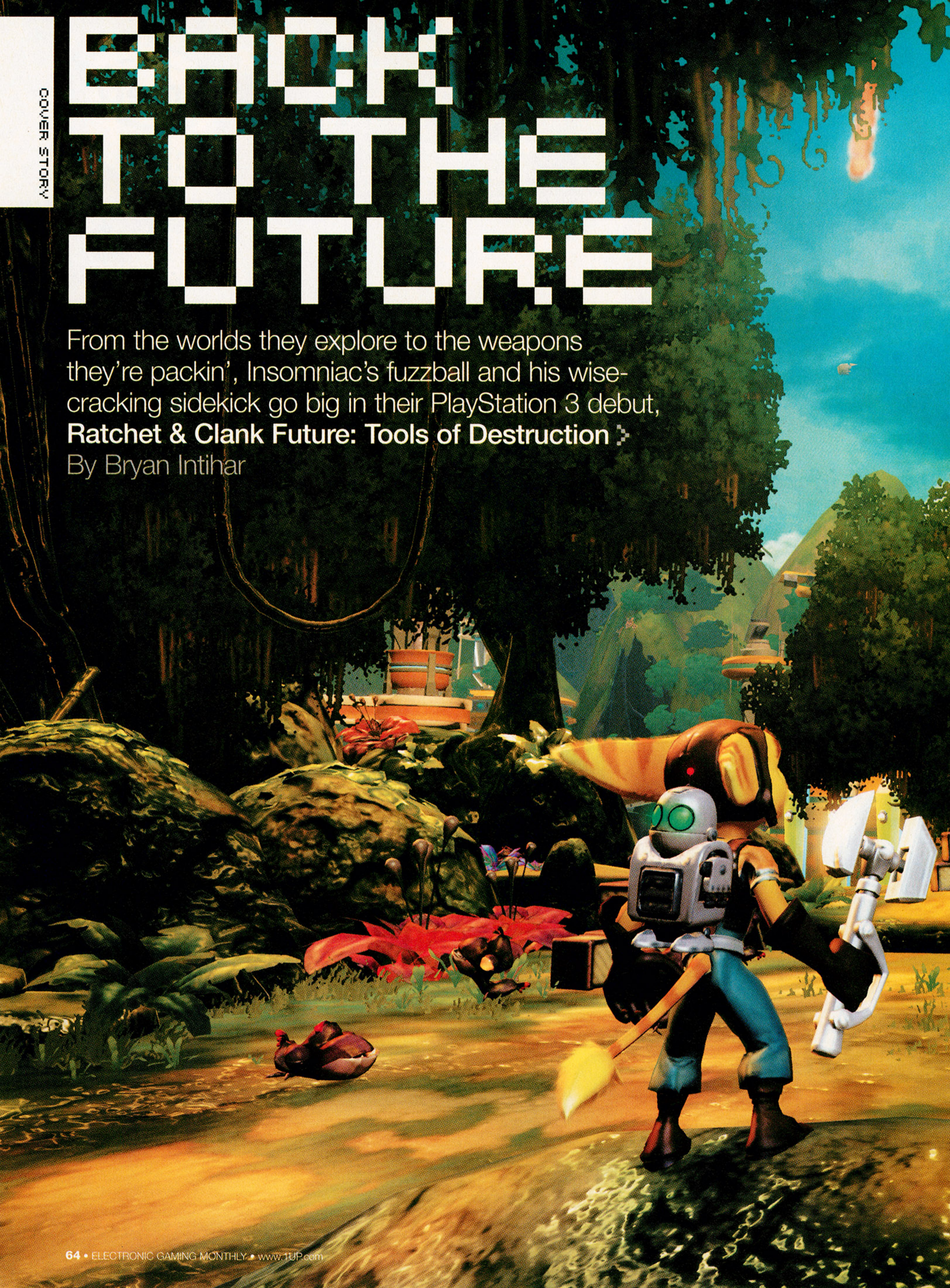
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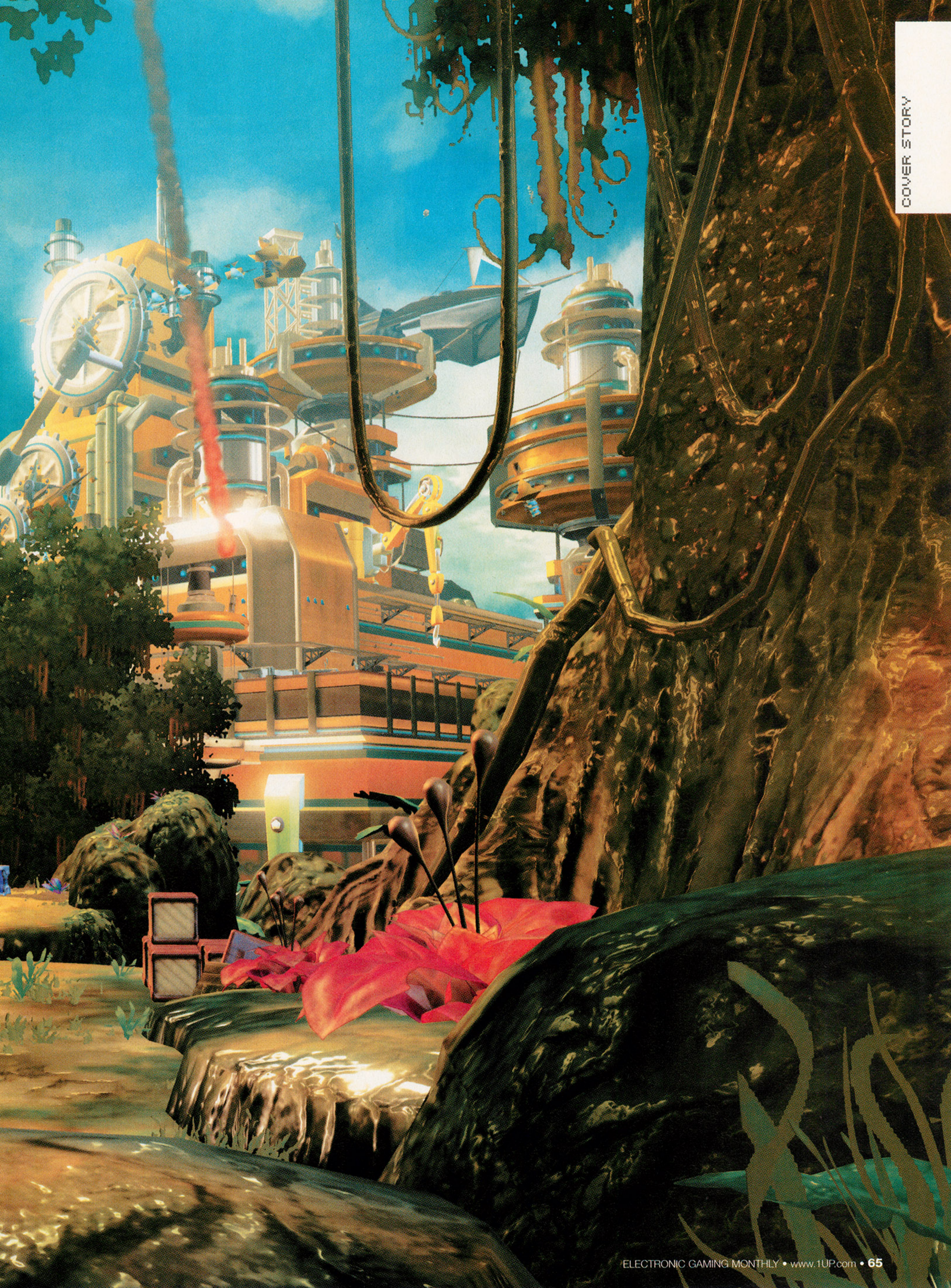
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BACK TO THE FUTURE

From the worlds they explore to the weapons they're packin', Insomniac's fuzzball and his wise-cracking sidekick go big in their PlayStation 3 debut, **Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction** ➤
By Bryan Intihar





IN THE MIDST OF THIS UNBELIEVABLY HEATED CONSOLE WAR, developer Insomniac ain't afraid to play the role of *Saturday Night Live*. "Cronk and Zephyr are pretty old, decrepit, kind of falling apart, and always at odds with one another on whose hardware is best," Design Director Brian Allgeier tells us as he describes two new robots you'll meet in *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction*, which jumps and shoots its way to the PlayStation 3 this fall. "Cronk's got Blu-ray technology, Zephyr's got some online abilities...it's a long story. I think I know who you guys would side with given your last cover art [a tomato-splattered PS3 console]." Burrn.

Poking fun at the Sony/Microsoft rivalry, the heavily rumored Xbox 360 redo (code name Zephyr), and *EGM*'s cover choices do more than make us laugh, though: It's a surefire sign that even after just shipping the PS3's premier launch title, *Resistance: Fall of Man*, this studio has plenty of gas left in the development tank. And, according to Art Director Chad Dezern, this 180-degree changeup (going from making a darkly sci-fi first-person shooter to a humor-filled platformer) has definitely helped keep the dev team from hitting the snooze button. "Most of us find it invigorating to change styles so dramatically," he says. "I think that's the reason we're not tired and can actually have a conversation [with you] right now."

So, what exactly did we learn during our chat about Ratchet and Clank's next-gen coming-out party? As the lombax and his metallic mate move forward, they're first taking a step back.

Don't forget where you came from

Four *Ratchet* games (all on the PS2) in four years—yeah, we'd say that Insomniac's franchise suffered from one helluva case of sequelitis. And it definitely started showing by the end. *Deadlocked*, with its *Running Man*-esque backdrop, became more of a shooter and left Ratchet

↳ It was a no-brainer for us to explore what made the original so compelling.

—Insomniac President Ted Price

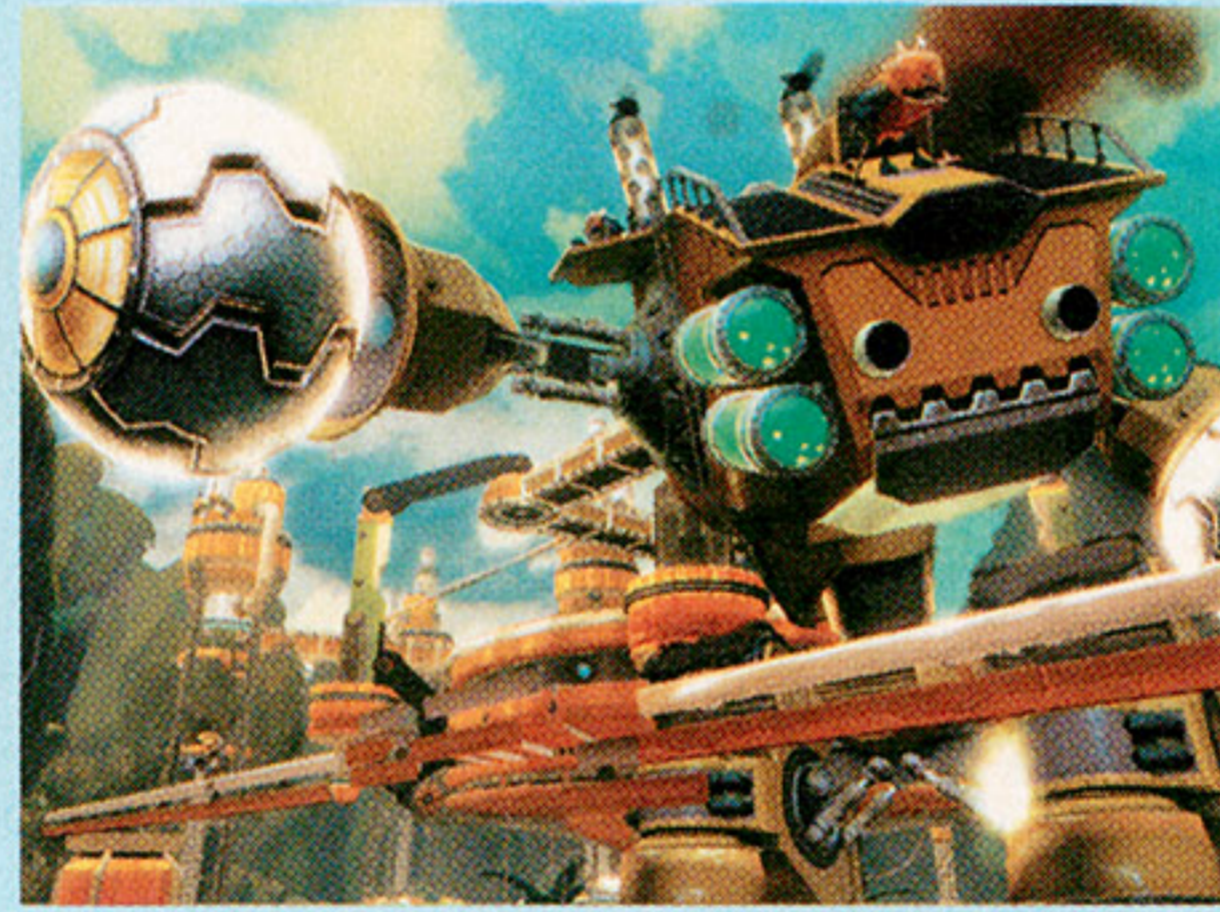




■ Seeing really is believing: All the images throughout this cover story are actual gameplay screens.



■ The Groovitron gets enemies dancin' and leaves them open to attacks. Other new toys in Ratchet's arsenal include the Flame Blaster (complete with crazy heat distortion effects) and the highly electrical Plasma Beast.



with a nasty Master Chief-looking makeover and Clank stuck on the sidelines. Even Allgeier refers to that last one as "a fun experiment." But now, after a much-needed break and the introduction of a new console, Insomniac is reverting to a play style from the early days.

"When we talk to people who played all of the *Ratchet* games," says Insomniac President Ted Price, "one of the things we hear the most is 'I grew up playing *Ratchet*, and I remember it four or five years ago, and I have really fond memories of those times. Are you ever going to go back to its roots?' And a lot of

us were thinking the same thing. So it was a no-brainer for us to explore what made the original *Ratchet* so compelling." In *Tools of Destruction*, you'll see roughly a 60/40 split between combat and platforming (in comparison, *Deadlocked* was closer to 80/20) with much more of an emphasis on exploration, gadgets, and gadget puzzles. Insomniac isn't ready to talk specifics on that front, but you'll see challenges along the lines of *Up Your Arsenal*'s Hacker minigame. "It's all about variety," says Dezern. "We've had a lot of different types of gameplay in the series, and I think we're getting back to the studio's strength of showing as much as we possibly can in a title." And Ratchet's encounter with the Kerchu City boss, the giant construction beast with wrecking-ball arms pictured above, more than demonstrates that the developers are back on track.

The battle begins with our hero

grinding along a rail and jumping over gaps that the enormous enemy has so graciously made with his pulverizing limbs. Then comes a missile attack, which Ratchet must first dodge from the side (as shards of broken window glass obstruct your view) and then from straight on. As the rail suddenly twists him upside down, it's time to fire away at the boss' weak spot from this unorthodox perspective. Soon thereafter, the furball finds himself on firm ground, but now in addition to dealing with this heavy hunk of metal's devastating paws, he's gotta figure out how to curb the enthusiasm of its helper robots—spherical Kerchu rollers, which have their own specific line of defense. Aha! Time to bring out the Groovitron (more on that discorific gizmo later).

Now here's the kicker: That's only the halfway point of this wonderfully chaotic meeting. "We're calling this an action sequence," says Allgeier.

➤ **It's all about variety...we're getting back to the studio's strength of showing as much as we possibly can.**

—Art Director Chad Dezern

TOOL TIME

What else to expect from this next-gen galaxy thrill ride

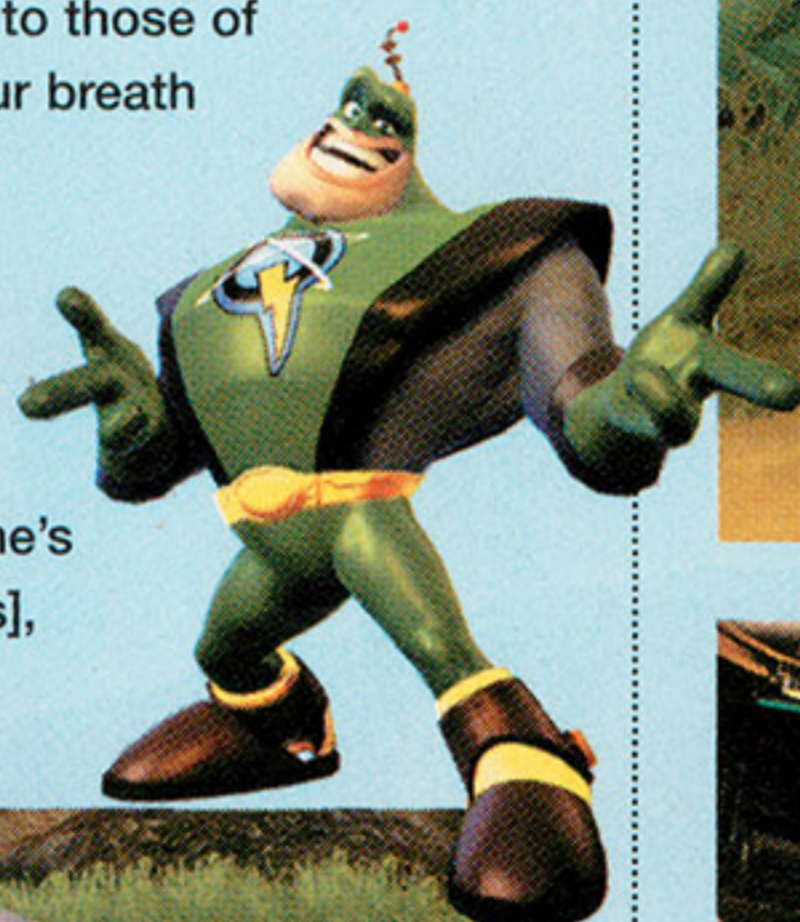


Playable Clank: After riding the bench in *Deadlocked* (and getting his name removed from the title—how dare they?), Ratchet's robo bud will once again have his own sections in *Tools of Destruction*. What's the metalhead gonna play like? All Insomniac will say is that "Clank discovers that he has new powers."

Star Fox-y space combat: In between hoppin' and boppin' around gorgeous planets, Ratchet and Clank will take to the stars. But space combat is getting a big makeover from previous installments. "Before, we felt that we gave players too much rope to hang themselves with," says Design Director Brian Allgeier. "So we decided to keep these segments more in the vein of an action sequence and show off the best visuals we could."

Multiplayer: Insomniac's still evaluating whether or not to include versus play in this installment. Yet since *Up Your Arsenal* and *Deadlocked*'s competitive battlefields were a virtual wasteland (especially when compared to those of other PS2 online games like *SOCOM*), we're not holding our breath for this feature. Online co-op may be a different story...

Captain Qwark: Aside from our two stars, the longtime troublemaker Captain Qwark will be the only other familiar face returning here. His role? "He's up to no good again," says Allgeier. "We really don't know what side he's on, as he's kind of working for Tachyon [who wants to kill all lombaxes], but also giving secrets to Ratchet and Clank."



Goin' to the zoo:

Yes, in true series form, you'll be able to turn enemies into helpless animals. Our pick for *Tools of Destruction*: How about morphing them into something from PS3 safari-sim *Afrika*'s wild kingdom?



"We're taking the various gameplay modes and stringing them together to really create this intense series of events." Intense indeed, plus a fine example of how this next-gen *Ratchet* will play more like its early predecessors.

Lethal weapons

Like we mentioned earlier, *Tools of Destruction* won't be Insomniac's maiden PS3 voyage; the studio already cut its next-gen teeth with *Resistance: Fall of Man*. And as you might expect, that experience is making the lombax's transition to the new console much smoother. "We definitely know where we wanna push things early on, and now we know our development tools a lot better," says Allgeier. "We've learned from our mistakes and from some of the things that went really well." With this series tailored as more of a mainstream product compared to Insomniac's first-person blaster,

the dev team also realized they had to take a different approach when creating Ratchet's weapon set, the hallmark feature of the franchise. "One of the things that was very tempting to do was to try to make the weapons more complicated, and that's something every designer is faced with the problem of: 'Oh, we have more functionality, so there's more ways to control the weapons,'" says Allgeier. "*Resistance* is for a different type of audience, the more hardcore gamer who likes the alternate fire and all that stuff. For a while there, we went down the path of 'let's make things complicated,' but then we realized that, for this type of adventure and the amount of variety it has to offer, we wanted to keep things simpler for people."

Yet just because this game's arsenal will be more accessible doesn't mean it won't sport some fancy tricks. Take the Tornado Launcher: Thanks to the PS3's Sixaxis function-

ality, you can actually maneuver its enemy-catching twister via tilting the joypad in various directions (expect other firearms to support Sixaxis, too). Plus, while guiding that tornado, you can move Ratchet with the left analog stick. Think of it as the gaming equivalent of simultaneously rubbing your stomach and patting your head (but you'll look less stupid). Also, the Tornado Launcher is evidence of how, from a technical standpoint, *Tools of Destruction*'s...well, tools of destruction are more intricate than those found in *Resistance*. "There's a little more interaction with the environment here," admits Allgeier. "One of our goals is that there's always something that affects the environment and is more tied into the environment. Anything from dynamic lighting to things bouncing around, we really want the weapons to have an impactful feel."

It doesn't hurt that Insomniac can have a little more fun here, either. ➤

"We have a lot more range of play," says Allgeier. "The Groovitron is a good example of that." Tell us about it—rather than using standard stun grenades to confuse foes, Ratchet tosses disco balls at 'em. And if he waits long enough before attacking, enemies will start groovin' with the rhythm of a prepubescent boy band. Freaky.

Welcome to the jungle

Let's set the scene for ya: Ratchet begins the demo standing on the tropical outskirts of Kerchu City. The lombax rests his feet on grass so green it almost hurts our eyes. Colors overwhelm every square inch of this jungle, which is home to cuddly creatures that soon end up being not so adorable (their bite is literally as big as Ratchet). Yet it's the action way off on the horizon that really grabs our attention. Swarms of Kerchu vehicles and space-pirate ships whiz by the towering structures of this budding futuristic metropolis, whose beauty is only tainted by the mortar flares raining down from the bright blue heavens. Comparing this scenery to a Pixar flick may be a stretch, but man, it sure does demonstrate how Insomniac is taking this game's backdrops up a notch.

"A big goal of ours is to really round out these worlds, give them a lot of dimension, and ultimately, give people a living, breathing galaxy," says Allgeier. "Something we've always wanted to do is have this very dense jungle, which we couldn't do before. Same holds true for the traffic moving in the distance." Environments here will be roughly twice of size of the largest level in any previous *Ratchet* title, and *Tools of Destruction's* areas even one-up those Chimera-infested cities from the studio's only other PS3 offering. "In *Resistance*, if you backed away far enough, some of the distant objects would lose some definition," says Allgeier. "Now with this *Ratchet*, we can maintain that definition." But given the fugly mugs of *Resistance's* enemies, maybe that blurry picture wasn't such a bad thing. >

> A big goal of ours is to really round out these worlds... give people a living, breathing galaxy.

—Design Director Brian Allgeier





■ "We can get roughly 15 enemies onscreen," says Allgeier. "And we're still putting in more guys, still optimizing. In the past, we could get around 10 onscreen."

Express yourself

A.I. hasn't exactly been a selling point of the platform genre (seriously, have *Mario's* Koopas or Hammer Bros. gotten any smarter over the years?). While the power of the PS3 won't suddenly turn Ratchet's new adversaries into brainiacs, the console should spark a few extra synapses. "We have a lot more expression in our enemies," says Allgeier. "One thing that we've been working on is creating different emotional states for enemies. So they will change their facial reactions depending on the situation, like if they're fearful or angry. Our goal is to get a performance out of the enemies and to have special moments where they will work with environments." Unfortunately, we weren't able to catch a glimpse of space pirates crappin' their pants (the emotion system hasn't been instituted just yet), but we did see how at least one enemy will take advantage of the environment—this particular foe used a rock as a launching pad to leap forward and catch the lombax off guard.

You can also expect better coordination on the battlefield. "We have a much more advanced scripting system than we've ever had before, even compared to *Resistance*," says Allgeier. "In *Ratchet*, it's never been about whether the A.I. feels human—it's more about making it interesting and how much more fun can you make the gameplay based on the sophistication of the enemies."

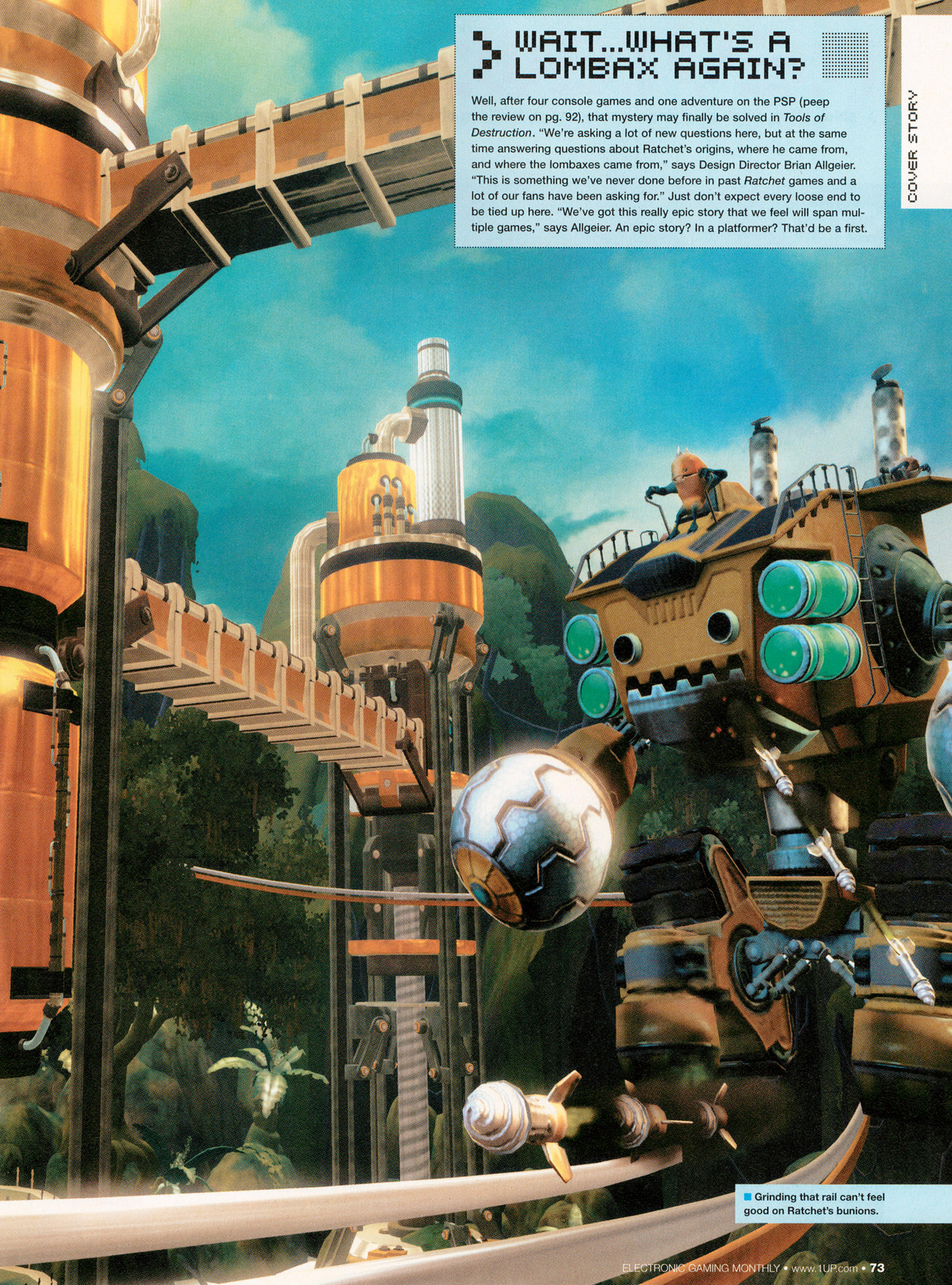
Now, about those robots...

After we left Insomniac's office, we couldn't help but think back to that feud between Cronk and Zephyr. Something just didn't seem right. Sure, it was a clever jab at today's gaming climate, but why was Nintendo—the other player in this console race—absent from the gag?

"Cronk and Zephyr used to have a combat buddy, Willy, but he didn't make it through their last battle," says Allgeier, responding to our follow-up question. "He was a hyperactive fellow who had a tendency to wave his arms wildly whenever they saw action. Unfortunately, it made him an easy target and he was taken out by the enemy." Hey, at least he restrained himself from making some silly Wii/"Dick in a Box" joke.... 🎮

 Our exclusive coverage of this PS3 platformer continues online at EGM214.1UP.com with developer interviews, footage of the game, and a special treat for those who like to boogie.





WAIT...WHAT'S A LOMBAX AGAIN?

Well, after four console games and one adventure on the PSP (peep the review on pg. 92), that mystery may finally be solved in *Tools of Destruction*. "We're asking a lot of new questions here, but at the same time answering questions about Ratchet's origins, where he came from, and where the lombaxes came from," says Design Director Brian Allgeier. "This is something we've never done before in past *Ratchet* games and a lot of our fans have been asking for." Just don't expect every loose end to be tied up here. "We've got this really epic story that we feel will span multiple games," says Allgeier. An epic story? In a platformer? That'd be a first.

■ Grinding that rail can't feel good on Ratchet's bunions.

REVIEWS

> shiny bling, small gold rings, wonky wings, the king of swing, and hardcore threesomes

90 GOD OF WAR II

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> THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

THE GODS HAVE SPOKEN

And who are we to defy them?

EVER SINCE *BULLY* LAST FALL,

I haven't played a game on PS2, Xbox, or GameCube. It's hard to go back after experiencing *MotorStorm*'s visuals, *Crackdown*'s seamless co-op play, or *WarioWare: Smooth Move*'s novel controls. But then *God of War II* arrives, and for a moment, the PS2 doesn't seem so archaic any more. You might even wonder why we need the next-gen with games this good. But we go through this routine every five years or so—a late, great game comes along to keep us current-gen gaming for just a bit longer.... Sure, developers can mine more out of the hardware toward the end of their life cycles, but do we really want to remain in a static state? To me, *God of War II* is the perfect send-off to a great system...but you'd better believe the eventual PS3 follow-up will have us glad the PS2 is enjoying this early-bird special.

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

> HOW WE RATE

- 10 to 9 Excellent
- 8.5 to 7 Good
- 6.5 to 5 Average
- 4.5 to 3 Bad
- 2.5 to 0 Terrible

> SCORES AND AWARDS

We give awards to games based on their scores. Platinum: all 10s; Golds: 9.0 average and up; Silver: 8.0 average or higher. Game of the Month goes to the highest-scoring game with unanimously "Good" scores, and Shame of the Month is the reverse. Simple.

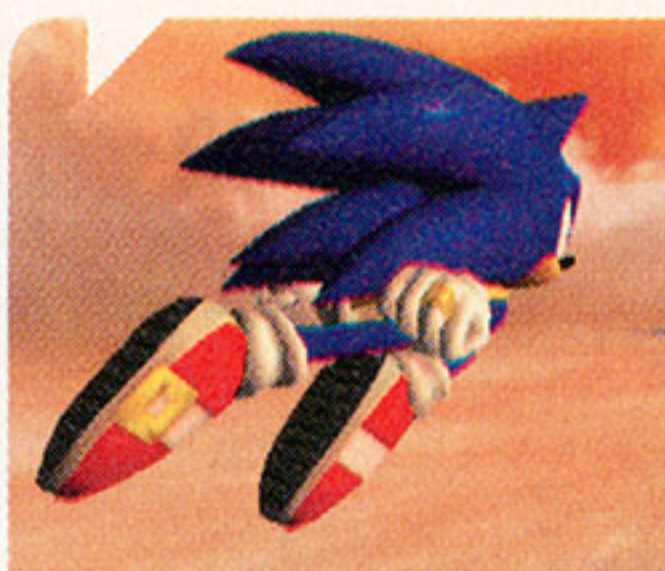
Keep in mind that a 10 does not mean a game is perfect, but rather it's the best score we can give. Also, 5.0 is *average*.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

KRATOS
9.0
EXCELLENT

ICARUS
6.5
AVERAGE

BLUE FATTY
1.5
TERRIBLE



PAGE
76

Sonic:
Almost up
to speed



PAGE
80

Blur: Snow
bunnies
tossin' balls



PAGE
88

Def Jam:
A series
scratch

THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

Brought to you by the letter F, the number 3, and cheap intern labor



Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editor-in-Chief

Shoe and Crispin were recently seen holding hands...er, controllers, during two-player *Wing Island*, which has the two sharing one Wii-mote/Nunchuk combo. It was simply adorable. And creepy.

Now Playing: *Crackdown*, *Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao

Managing Editor

Jen's new jacket has her totally pumped to go snowboarding... the sleek stylings, the chic hood, the pearly white fabric—come to think of it, she'd hate to see it get dirty. Better stick to *SSX Blur*.

Now Playing: *SSX Blur*, *Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Wii)
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Bryan Intihar

Previews Editor

Big B is taking a break from his regularly scheduled bio to ask you to please start watching *Friday Night Lights* (his fave new show) so the TV execs don't cancel yet another killer program, like *Armed & Famous*. Sorry, Ponch....

Now Playing: *God of War II*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com

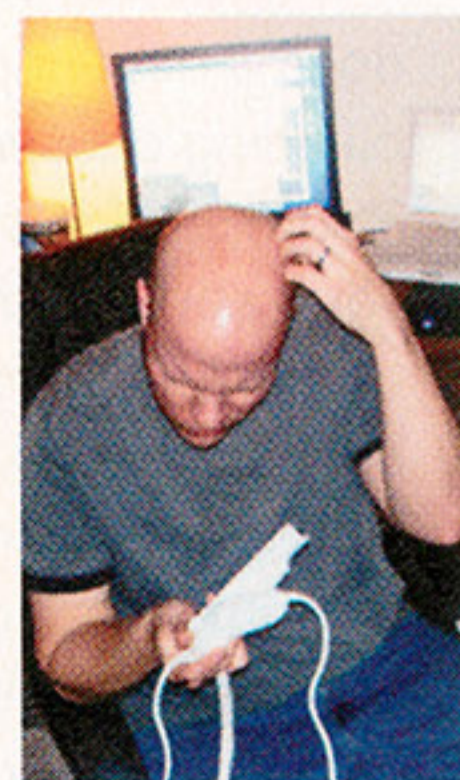


Michael Donahoe

News/Features Editor

Reviewing *Def Jam: Icon* this month didn't make Michael shizzle his bizzle—a hip-hop game without Kriss Kross, Vanilla Ice, or "Macho Man" Randy Savage? Now that is wiggly wack, dawg.

Now Playing: *GOW2*, *Hotel Dusk: Room 215*, *Crackdown*
Blog: egmhoe.1UP.com



Joe Rybicki

Staff Reviewer

After nine years on the now-defunct *OPM*, Joe has finally moved beyond the warm, safe confines of Sony's machines. He's finding that this strange, new, Nintendo-scented world has its share of challenges.

Now Playing: *Wii Sports*, *MotorStorm*, *Hotel Dusk*
Blog: opmjoer.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor

A month after reviewing *Virtua Fighter 5*, Shane's still training in hopes of toppling Milky's dreaded Pai. His new secret weapon? Drinking incredible amounts of Sofia Coppola's awful-tasting wine in a can.

Now Playing: *Sonic* (Wii), *Virtua Fighter 5*, *MotorStorm*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Senior Editor

Crispin spent this month in the future (in 20XX) to work on our next cover story. He learned that fashion will be as ironic as ever, all restaurants become Taco Bell, and you should avoid airships on Smarch 47, 4000!

Now Playing: *PlayStation 9's Greatest Hits*, *Super Mario 69*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Reviews Editor

Inspired by Kratos' continued success with the ladies, Greg decided to take a more aggressive approach with the fairer sex. First move: looks. Michael told him all the chicks go wild for this look. Word.

Now Playing: The game, *God of War II*, *Crackdown*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Matt Leone

Previews Editor, 1UP.com

Sensing we needed help handling the beast of a game known as *God of War II*, we brought in 1UP.com's alleged *God of War* expert Matt Leone. After seeing him blow through the game, we're believers.

Now Playing: *God of War II*, *After Burner: Black Falcon*
Blog: bigolaf.1UP.com



Todd Zuniga

Sports Guy

Todd's on the shelf this month with *Virtua Tennis 3* thumb, but he's fought through the pain to get his Cubbies into first-place in *MLB 2K7*. Also of note: He wants you to share his obsession with Brazil by Netflixing *City of Men*.

Now Playing: *MLB 2K7*
Blog: opiumtodd.1UP.com

Also on deck...

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1UP Network

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Garnett Lee
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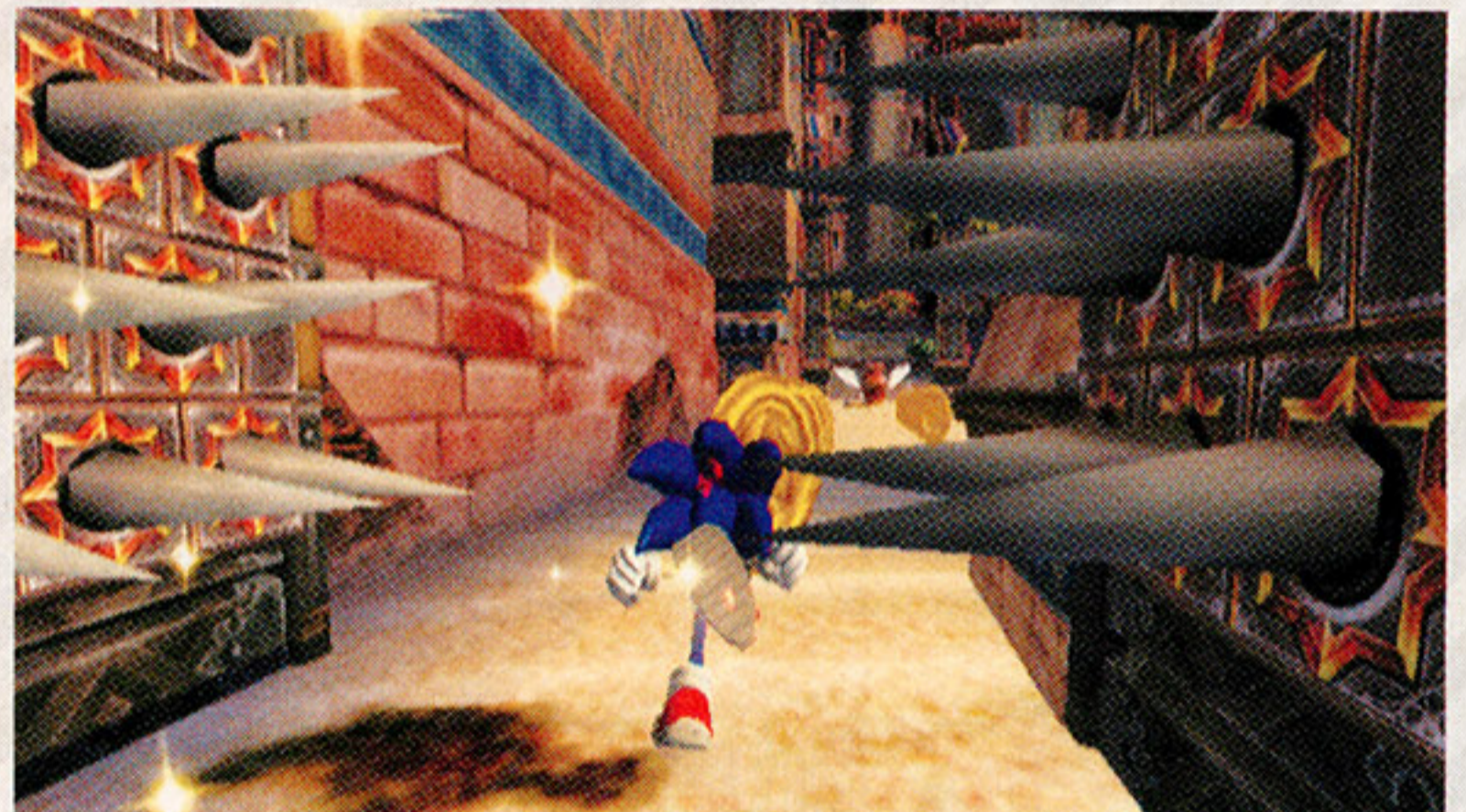
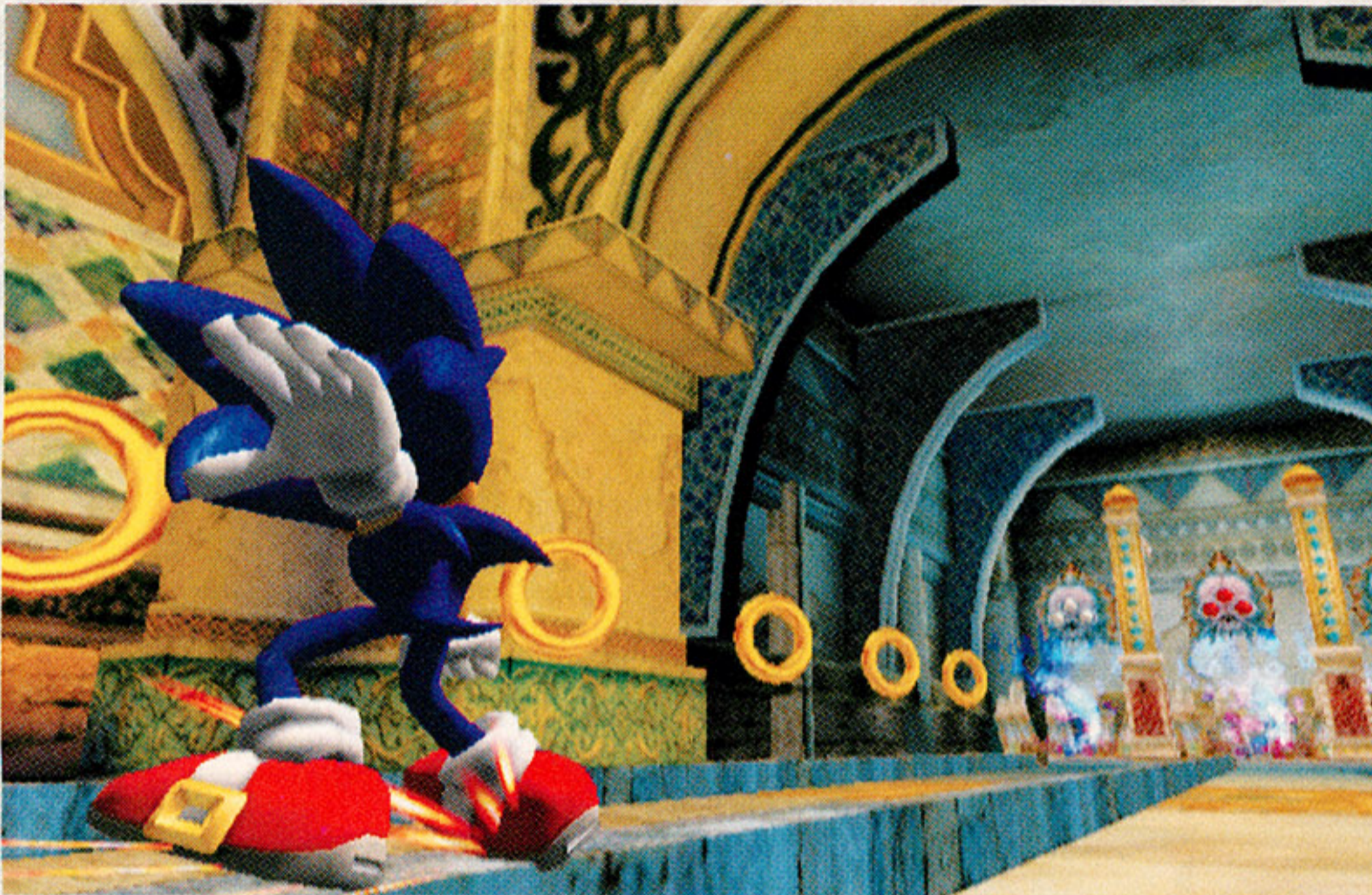


Want more?

Looking for a review of a game we didn't have enough time or room for? We've got you covered. Check 1UP.com for all your up-to-date review needs. It's where you can also find the lead EGM review. The second and third reviews, though—you'll find those here.



■ Grinding a pirate rope? What, Sonic's pillaging moves from Tony Hawk now?



Wii

SONIC AND THE SECRET RINGS

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sonic Team ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHANE
7.5
GOOD

G. FORD
6.0
AVERAGE

MILKMAN
6.0
AVERAGE

The Good: Snazzy visuals, creative controls, cool bosses

The Bad: Difficulty spikes, control issues, awful music

Party Mode: Ain't exactly *Mario Party*

Running in the right direction

➤ **SHANE:** *Secret Rings* isn't exactly a triumph, but it's a clear cut above most Wii fare. In the wake of all the recent PS2, PSP, and DS ports, it's encouraging to see that a from-the-ground-up Wii game can look hot. While nothing here looks like *Gears of War*, some stages approach *Resident Evil 4*-level artistry...not bad. Sadly, the same can't be said for the vocal-packed soundtrack, seemingly performed by a local Winger cover band.

Perhaps all the singing is forgivable in lieu of the fact that *Secret Rings* is more fun than any other *Sonic* in years. The radically deconstructed gameplay has you steering the 'hog by holding the Wii Remote horizontally and tilting it right and left, while thrusting the Wii-mote forward delivers a

satisfying homing attack. The controls feel reckless at first—Sonic's momentum takes some getting used to, and trying to go in reverse is a pain—but become more natural and fluid as you get acclimated to the fast-paced, twitchy action. It's almost as if you combined a surreal, motion-controlled racing game with the tricky, pinpoint platforming of *Super Mario Sunshine*.

➤ **G. FORD:** Compared to other platformers, *Secret Rings* rests just above average. Shane's right on about one point, though. The good stuff (the complete stages themselves and the boss battles) is a lot of fun. It's just a pity it doesn't make up a majority of a game. Instead, we're stuck with tons of pointlessly difficult side missions,

which take place within the overall level, that you must complete a certain number of in order to advance.

And then you've got the multiplayer mode, which provides mild thrills but sure won't make you forget about the Wii's other 45 minigame collections.

➤ **MILKMAN:** While *Secret Rings* does a decent job of stopping the bleeding caused by the recent 360/PS3/PSP *Sonics*, it's not quite there yet. I applaud the decision to focus on Sonic (his wretched "friends" have been wisely relegated to the uninspiring party mode) and deliver pure platforming stages, but the control scheme, while innovative, proves too ambitious and unreliable in the overly complex later stages. ❌

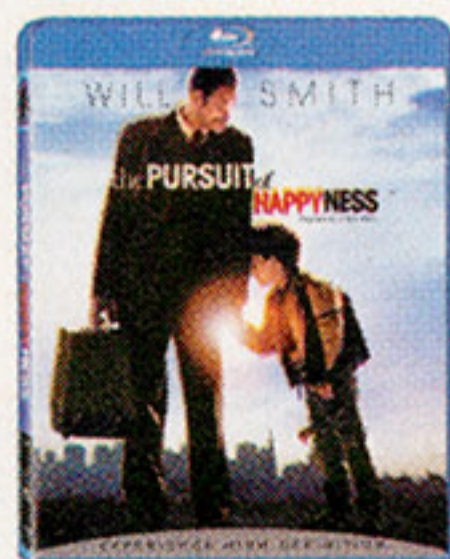
CASINO ROYALE

HIGH DEFINITION BOND

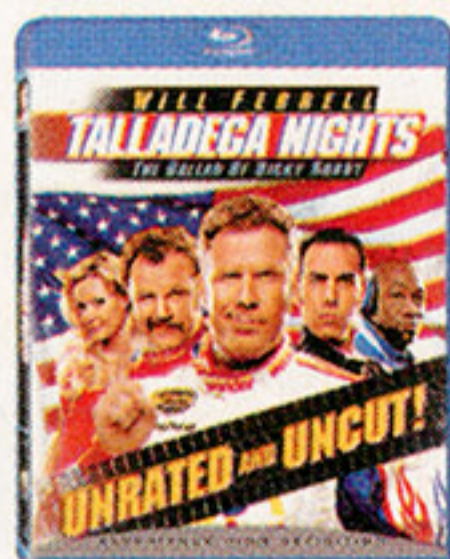


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PG-13



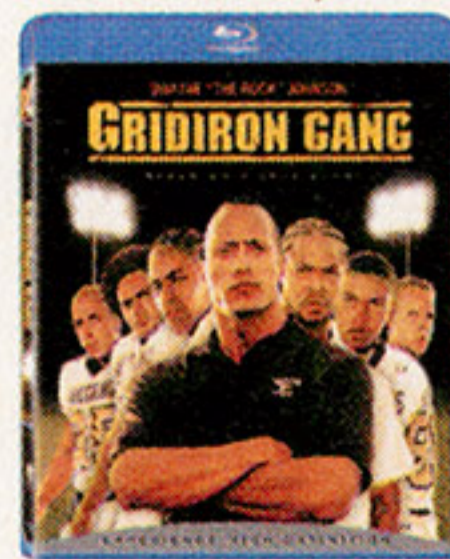
UNRATED



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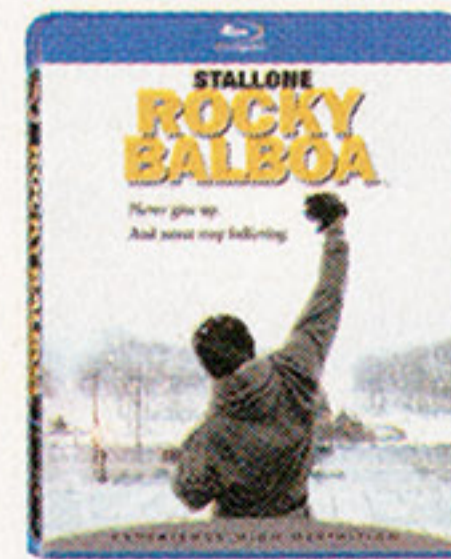
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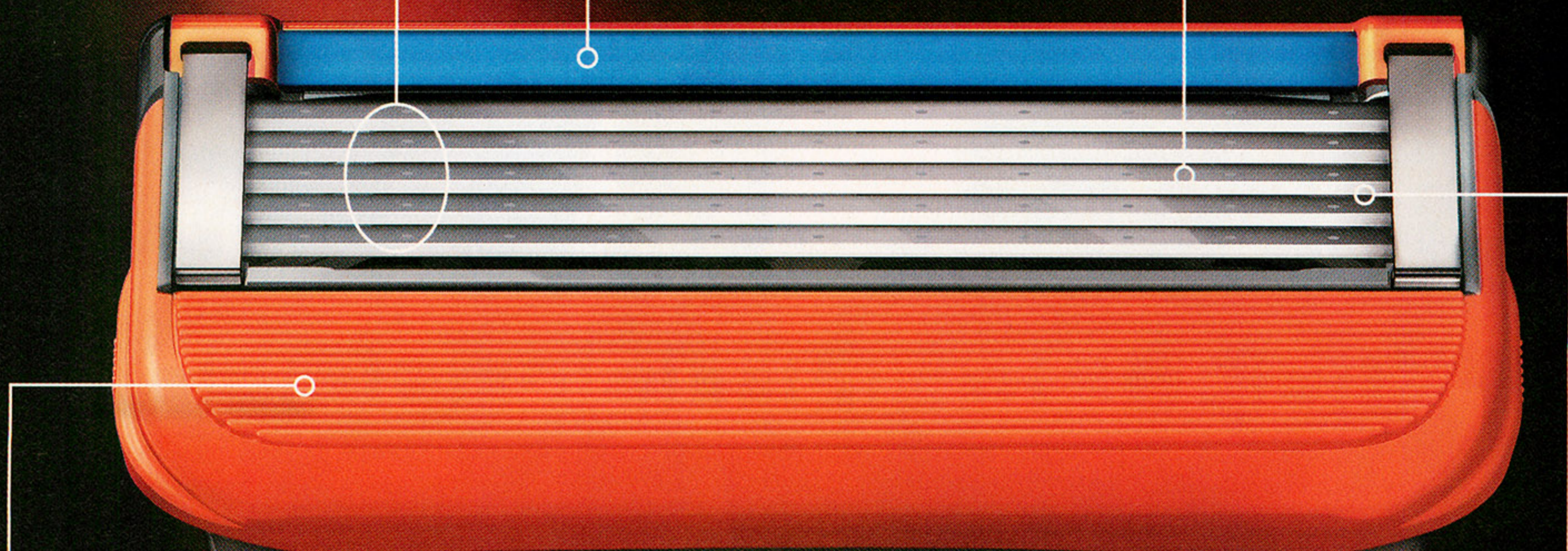
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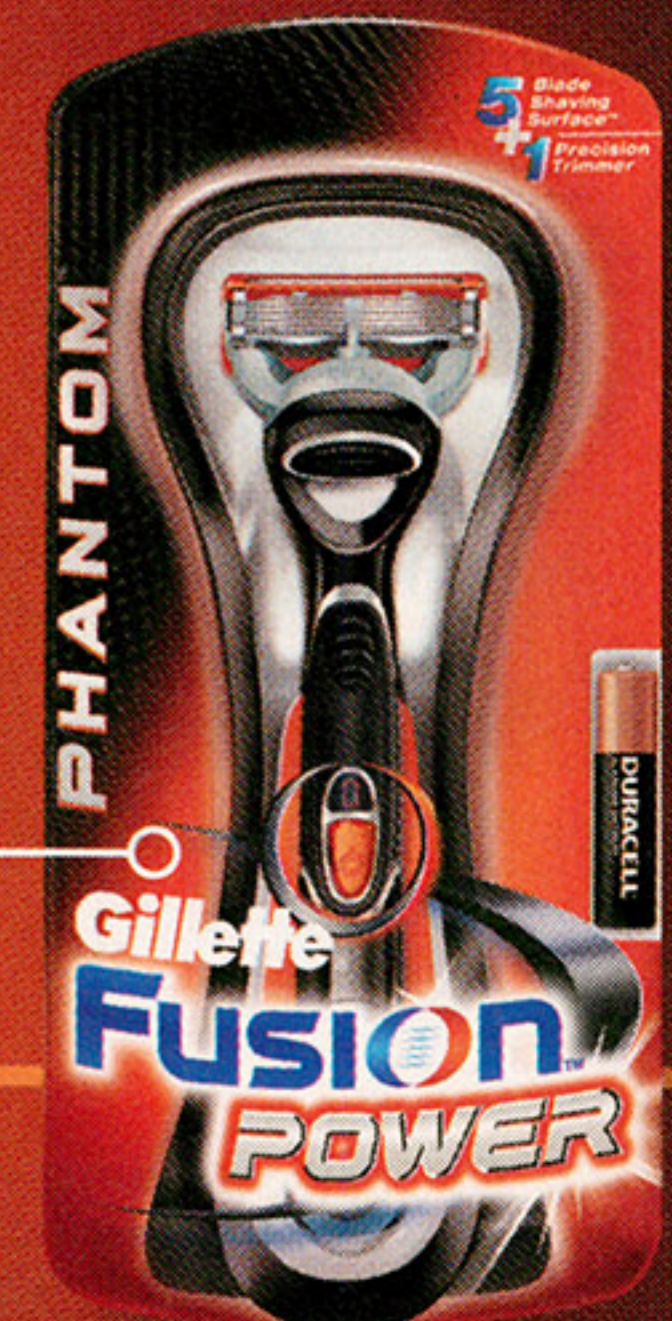
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■ The taxicab ball is a speed demon—good luck nailing that jump.

Wii

KORORINPA: MARBLE MANIA

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Hudson
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Worth losing your marbles over

✦ **JENN F:** With chirpy music and candy-land levels, *Kororinpa: Marble Mania* comes wrapped in a deceptively unassuming package. You simply navigate a marble through a 3D puzzle, tilting your Wii-mote to move the board while collecting gems en route to the exit. The most fulfilling of these puzzles involve rotating the game board onto its side, so that walls become floors. It's a simple game mechanic that makes full use of the Wii Remote's range of motion while not being too sensitive. In fact, the controls are responsive and tight, and each unlockable marble has its own weight and physics. Nice.

Splitscreen competition (the second player uses the Nunchuk or Wii Remote) is uninventive: Each marble mundanely races against the

other marble's "ghost" toward the goal. Here I'd hoped to, oh, fight for gems or bump my opponent screaming over a ledge. Missed opportunities and some perspective glitches aside, though, *Marble Mania* is a solid, charming puzzler.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

JENN F.
7.5
GOOD

JENNIFER
7.0
GOOD

BROOKS
7.5
GOOD

✦ **JENNIFER:** I had the same initial reaction as Jenn—at first, I was horrified that the next-gen Wii experience boiled down to something so plain-Jane. Next thing I knew, I'd played 30 levels. *Kororinpa* won't go down in the annals of innovation, but it does have a pleasantly addictive quality, with compelling level design, a natural difficulty curve, and surprisingly sharp controls (the music, though? Jenn's being nice—yeah, it's chirpy...just like children's music in hell). I also like that falling off edges incurs only a minor penalty: It motivates you to keep trying when the going gets rough.

✦ **BROOKS:** *Marble Mania* ought to be the final test for any aspiring surgeon due to its requirement for a steady hand and a high level of patience. Fortunately, controlling your little hero-sphere feels flawless in execution; I never felt cheated by some inaccuracy with the Wii-mote. Also cool: Unlockable balls, with abilities like increased speed or bounce, add a deeper level of strategy. But what really won me over was the intricate and well-thought-out level design—nastier boards come equipped with all sorts of imaginative obstacles, with stairs becoming arch-nemesis No. 1.

The Good: Solid level design, great use of the Wii-mote
The Bad: Can't see into nooks and crannies, lame two-player mode
For Beginners: The adorable "Panda" marble

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■ Moves that look good onscreen usually mean you look ridiculous off.

Wii

SSX BLUR

■ Publisher: EA Sports Big ■ Developer: EA Montreal ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

ANDREW P.

5.5
AVERAGE

TODD

4.5
BAD

JENNIFER

6.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Hip music and (mostly) smooth graphics

The Bad: Can't play it on a Wii Classic Controller

The Multiplayer: Lacks options

Left in the cold

➔ **ANDREW P:** Imagine, if you will, a snowboard. Straight, thin, and most important, one piece. This is the case for a good reason: If each foot got its own board, you'd end up with a massive lack of coordination and control over what you were doing. Now imagine the Wii Remote attached to a Wii Nunchuk. See the problem?

SSX Blur's motion-control scheme sounds intuitive on paper, but just like the idea of splitting up a board in real life, breaking the controller in half doesn't really work. Instead of feeling like a natural extension of your body, your board and rider respond erratically, and performing tricks is less about the finesse the franchise is known for and more about the random waving of limbs. As a "My First SSX,"

Blur is passable. But for longtime *SSX* fans, this installment's much too limited coursewise, the track design is as poor as *SSX on Tour's*, and instead of innovating, the unreliable motion controls get in the way.

➔ **TODD:** Yeah, the controls here are bunk. I used to be an *SSX* trickmaster, but *Blur's* nonintuitive arm-flail system has turned me into the guy who gets slapped in the face with the cord attaching the Nunchuk to the Wii-mote. The embarrassing face-whip reached a peak every time I tried to pull off an Übertrick by drawing a pattern with the Wii-mote, which never worked, though the workout routine was great cardio. To ease all this, *Blur* at least features outstanding art direc-

tion and some deliciously soothing tunes—I'd kill for the soundtrack.

➔ **JENNIFER:** Please don't hurl your Nunchuks at me, guys. I agree with your criticisms—the controls here are baffling, the courses ordinary, the overall game structure both simplistic and impenetrable at the same time. (Would it have killed them to make the signs more readable? Or include a decent training system?) And yet, somehow I ended up having...fun. Now, I'm not sure this was the sort of fun EA intended. It's much more fun to learn accurate controls and be able to execute them when you want. But this is a nice way for casual gamers to dabble in *SSX*. I just hope they get it really right next time. ❄️

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PlayStation 2



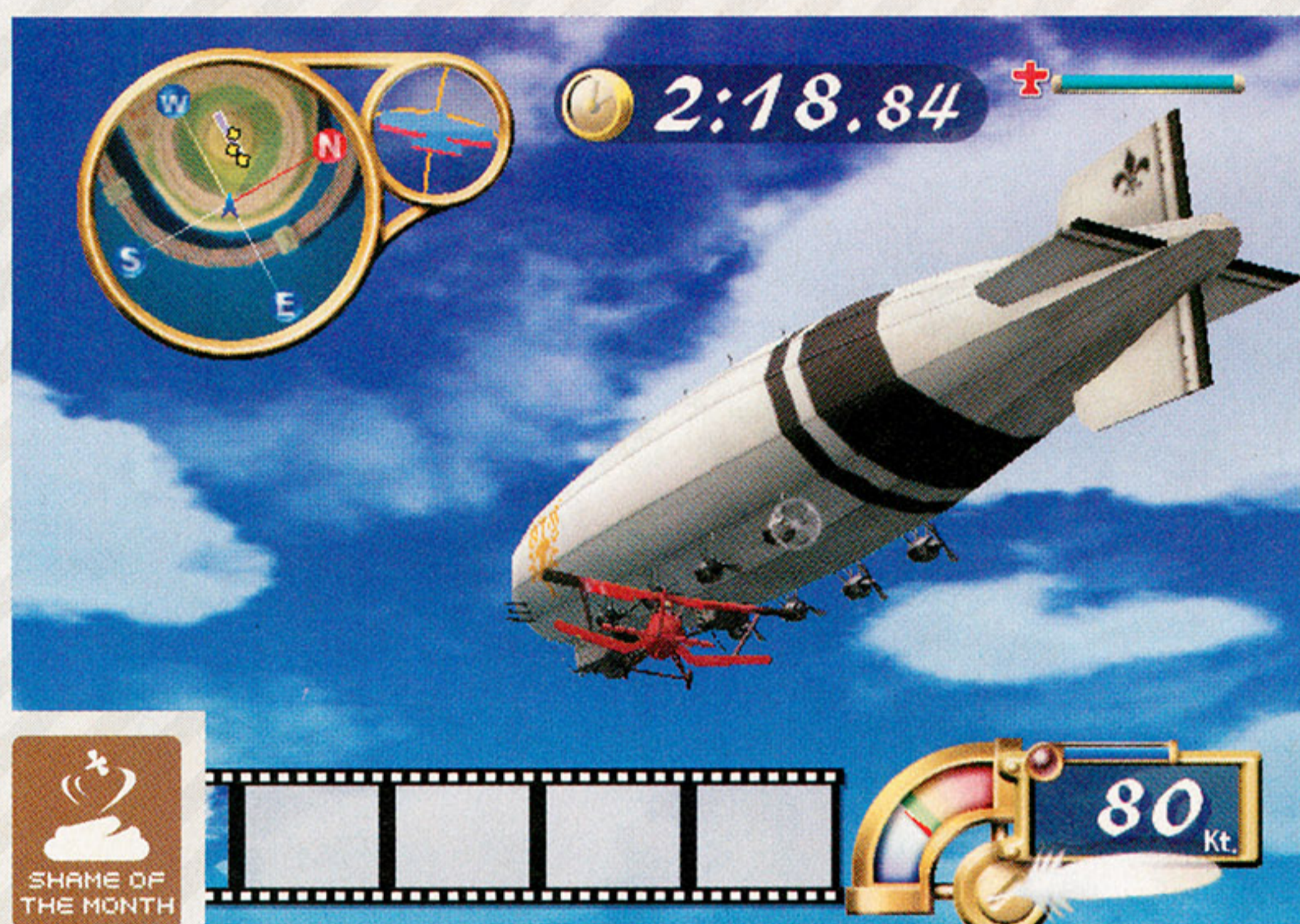
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Wii

WING ISLAND

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Hudson ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

CRISPIN
3.0
BAD

SHOE
4.0
BAD

JENN F.
4.0
BAD

The Good: Cinch to play, nifty formation options

The Bad: Dull missions, baby-game story

Relaxing: The balloon-popping game

Wild blue yawner

➔ **CRISPIN:** *Wing Island* packs all the thrills of massively subsonic (more like walking-speed) flight coupled with aerial searches for wayward livestock and villages just begging for propaganda-leaflet bombardment. I've got nothing against oddball flight games; the quirkiness is most of the charm in higher-flying titles like *Pilotwings 64* (N64) and PS2 launch game *Sky Odyssey*. But *Wing Island's* missions are often as boring as they are bizarre. Dumping water on fires? Eh, kinda fun. Hauling crates to hard-to-hit drop zones? Uh, great. Bombing immobile, derelict ships? Someone wake me up when we land.

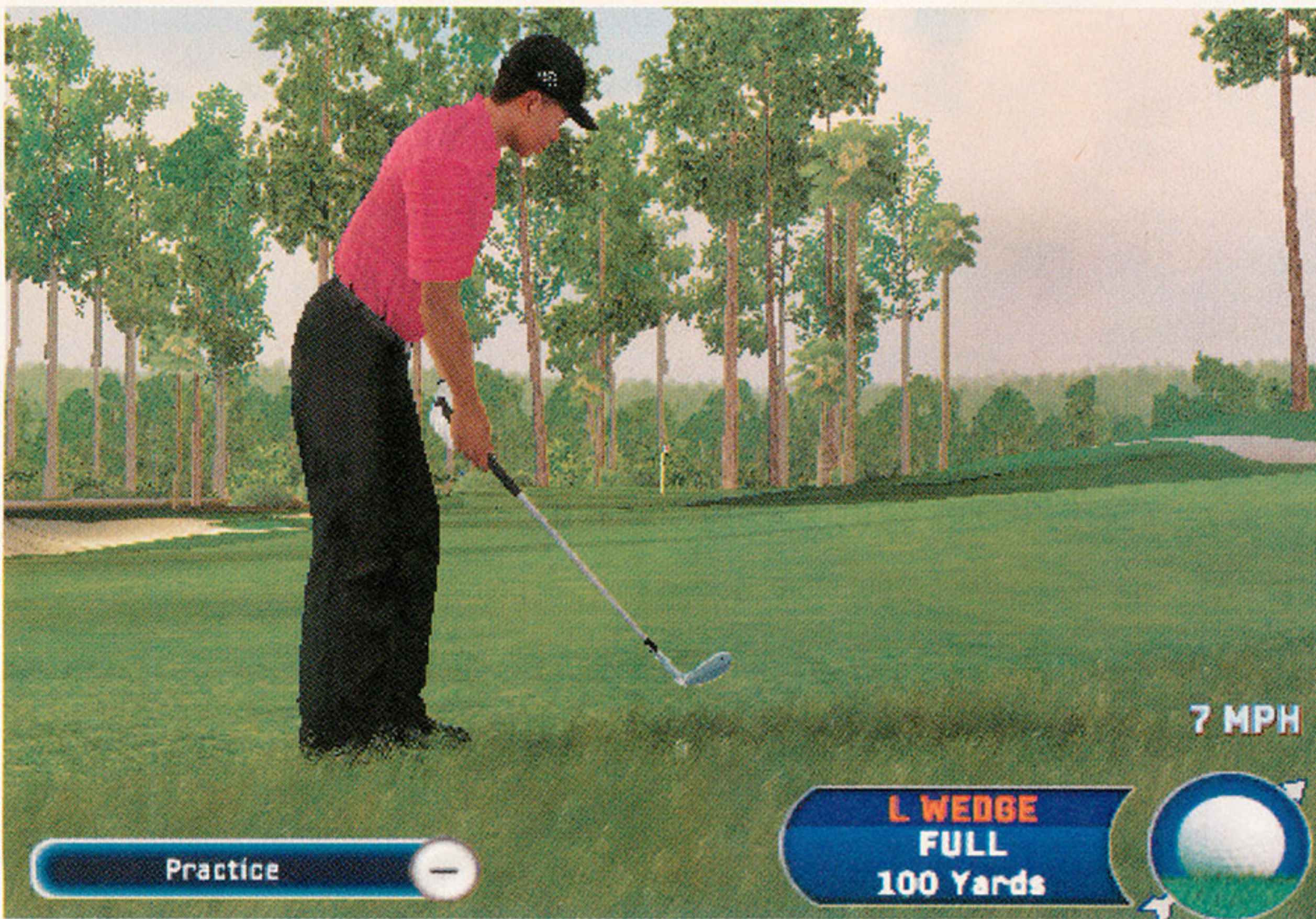
Guiding multiple planes and changing their formations to alter handling and speed is a nice twist, but the real

novelty is the motion control. Jerking the Wii-mote to turn and turbo-boost, however, feels like a hokey way to fly—like you're piloting a bar of soap. I would've preferred gripping it like a flight stick.

➔ **SHOE:** The made-for-kids flying tasks and cut-scenes (complete with baby-talking chickens) won't interest most of-age gamers despite the difficulty taking off to hardcore heights in a hurry. Too bad, because unlike Crispin, I found the controls to be responsive and intuitive; your plane mimics the Wii-mote's movements really well for such an otherwise poorly designed game. Crispin's just bitter because he consistently lost to me in multiplayer, an odd two-player setup

where one guy uses the Nunchuk and the other uses the Wii-mote (you can also use two Wii Remotes). Here, again, the game falters: The few modes you get last about five minutes before you want to bail out.

➔ **JENN F.:** Playing this game, my first question was, obviously, "Why does a bird need to fly a plane?" But new questions (such as, "Why am I still playing this?") soon surfaced. Navigating your too-large cartoon plane among clunky cliffs and bluffs is akin to playing in a world of giant Duplo bricks. Like Shoe, I thought the controls were oddly crisp. But where are the dogfights? Dreamcast-era graphics further sour the deal. In the end, *Wing Island's* one lame duck. ❌



Wii

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Redwood Shores
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Golf without bells, whistles, and other such junk

+ TODD: Let me first declare myself a *Super Swing Golf* hater (*Tiger's* early Wii competitor). It plays fine, but I don't go for starlight spewing from a struck ball or clubs made out of donut holes. So, yeah, I favor EA's golf debut on the Wii based on its lower silliness index. But the main reason I find it to be a far better game is the pacing. I zipped through a back nine in minutes, without having to slog through my opponent's shots. As for *Tiger's* mechanics, arthritics beware. If my backswing was jittery, I swung before I intended to—which is frustrating, as the maddening result is a dink instead of a drive. The irony is that when I wanted to hit a shot with reduced power, it was as inconsistent as John Daly's sobriety. Plus, the lack of a power meter for putts

means lots of profanity. Cover your ears, kiddies!

+ BROOKS: Todd nailed it. *Tiger* finally offers a reason to geek out with a worthy golf simulator, officially demoting *Wii Sports Golf* and *Super Swing Golf* to mere tech

demos. Just like in real life (read: the great outdoors), a sloppy Wii Remote backswing results in a wicked hook or slice. I can with live that. Real frustration sets in, however, with any attempt to manage power when trying to nail those smaller greens; ultimately, though, persistence pays off. Rookies take note: If the swing motion is too much for you to handle, switch over to the Nunchuk's analog swing; it's less fun but more accurate.

+ BRYAN: Sorry, fellas, but I can't be quite so generous to *Tiger's* handicap. Not only does the lack of a power meter make any stage of a hole extra difficult, but even when you think you've performed the perfect swing (which the game indicates onscreen), all too often you'll end up overshooting the tin cup or landing off to the side of the green and in the bunker.

But here's something I didn't expect: Even with these mishaps, I had a tough time putting down my *Wii Club*. The one thing this game does right—thanks to the realistic mechanics—is when you finally hit that clutch shot, it feels really damn good. You just can't get that kind of gratification from the other *Tigers*, and this is why I'm excited for next year's edition.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

TODD
7.5
GOOD

BROOKS
8.0
GOOD

BRYAN
6.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Real courses, great pace of play
The Bad: No power meter for putting, shaky backswing causes problems
Manlier Than: *Super Swing Golf*



(newbie)



(alpha geek)



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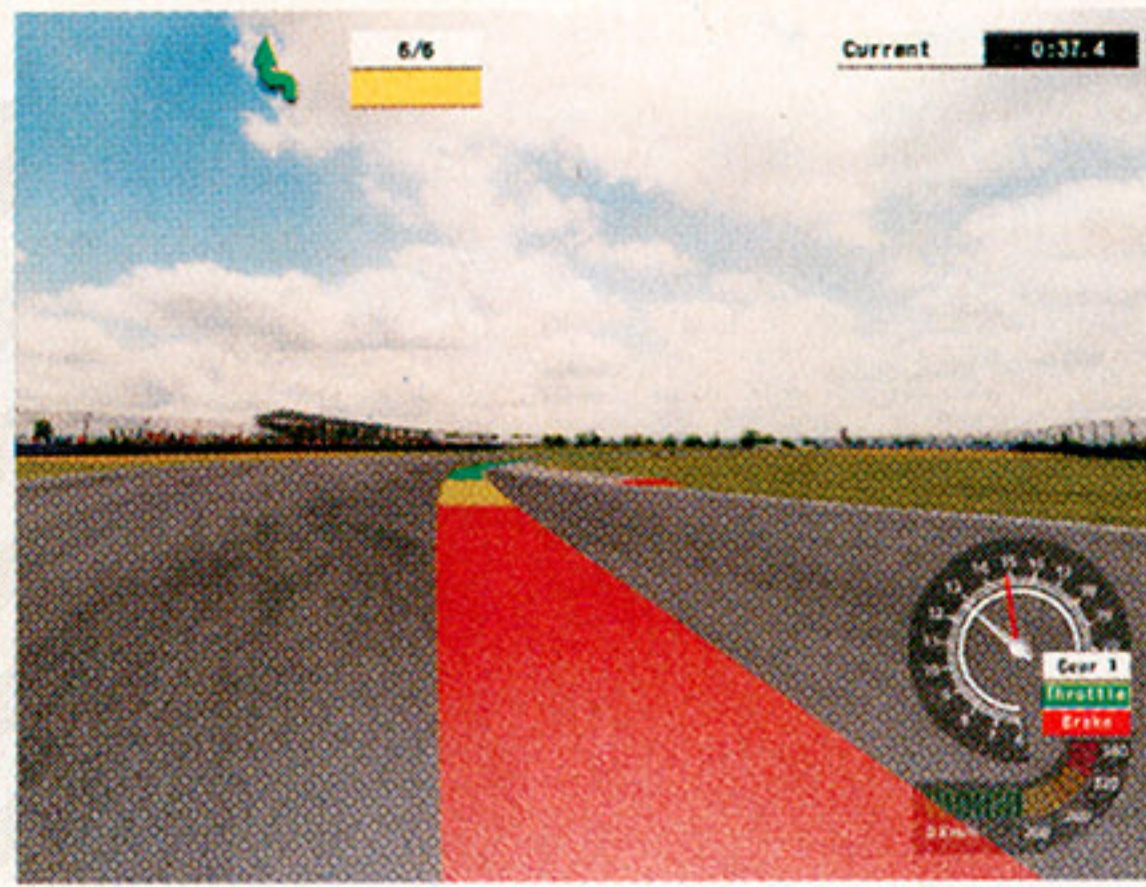
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FORMULA ONE CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Sony Liverpool
 ■ Players: 1-11 ■ ESRB: Everyone



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOHN
7.5
 GOOD

GARNETT
6.5
 AVERAGE

DEMIAN
7.5
 GOOD

The Good: Visuals, sense of the speed

The Bad: Steep learning curve, twitchy controls

The Risky: America's still not wild about F1

It doesn't make you *feel* like a race driver...it requires you to *be* one

➔ **JOHN:** No one can deny that *F1* is a truly gorgeous game that absolutely wallows in the rich culture of Formula One—but get beyond the pretty stuff, and you need to be prepared for a shockingly tough game.

Even skilled racing enthusiasts are going to struggle with how sensitive and twitchy the steering can be, and anyone used to the way a “normal” car performs is going to be quite shocked at the way an F1 car accelerates and stops. Unless you're some kind of race-driving savant, you're going to need to spend a few hours in “idiot mode” with the braking and steering assists turned on. Yes, I said *steering assist*. I'm not proud; I can admit it. Climbing the ludicrously steep learning curve yields very sat-

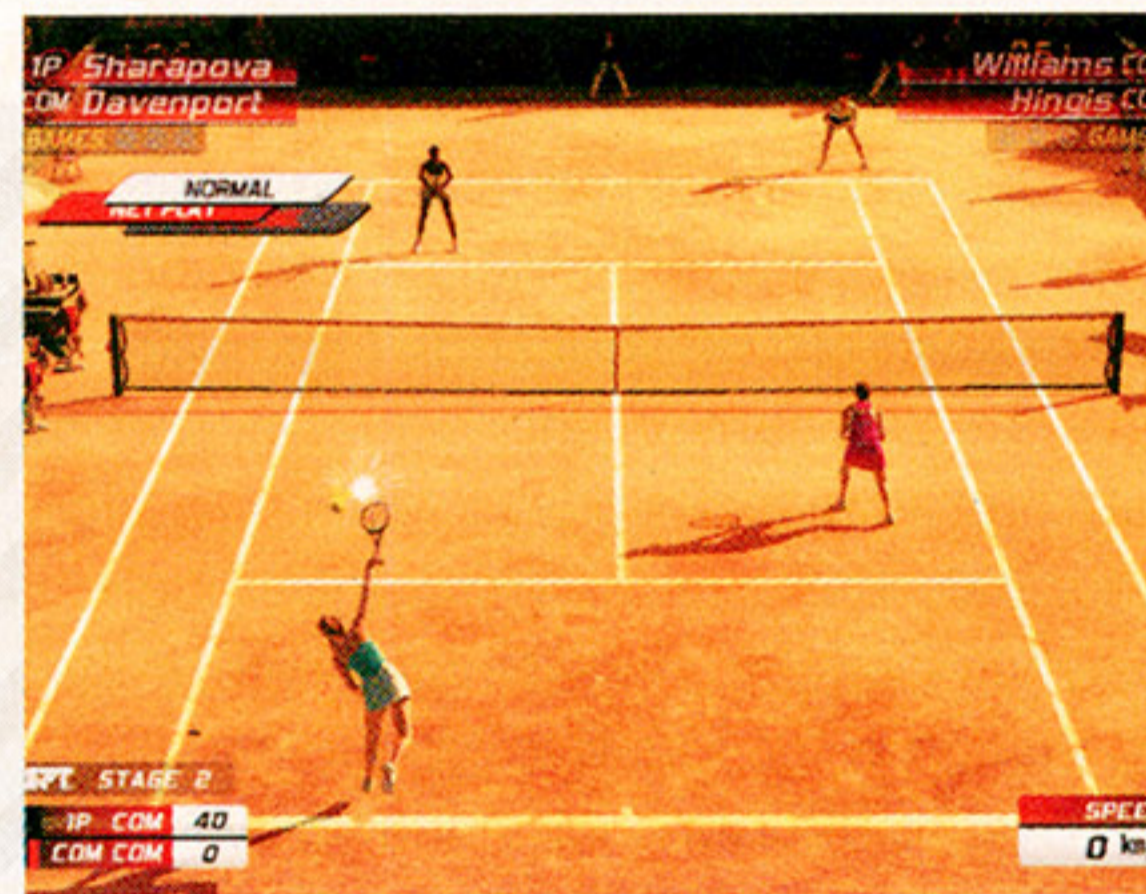
isfying results, but more so than any other sports franchise (including EA Sports' *NASCAR*), *F1* requires a passion for the sport and a tolerance for its quirks and minutiae that are still quite rare in the United States.

➔ **GARNETT:** Yeah, *F1* looks great, but I felt more like I was guiding the camera around the track on a flyby than driving a 19,000-rpm racing beast. Those assists John mentions basically turn your vehicles into slot cars. Without them, though, carving the racing line takes an almost unattainably deft touch on the sticks. Sixaxis motion control also lacks this necessary precision, compounded by the awkwardness of holding it in midair. Only hardcore fans with a PS3-com-

patible wheel and ample patience will take this game past a few laps.

➔ **DEMIAN:** You aren't a Formula One race driver for a good reason—you can't handle it, and neither can I. But if you're undeterred, in time you'll find the sweet spot between the all-assists-off crash-o-rama and the all-assists-on “Look, Ma, no hands!” difficulty settings. You have to be a dyed-in-the-flame-retardant-NOMEX F1 fan to make it that far, though.

But wouldn't online races against 21 other gearheads be fun? Couldn't tell you, because *F1* gives up at 11 human players and pads the field with 11 computer-controlled cars. And during our test sessions, the action would occasionally freeze for a second or so.



PS3/XB360

VIRTUA TENNIS 3

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sega AM3
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

TODD
6.5
 AVERAGE

JOE
7.5
 GOOD

ANDREW P.
8.0
 GOOD

The Good: Minigames are still a hoot

The Bad: Where are the unforced errors? Uneven difficulty

We'd Rather Play: *Top Spin 2* (XB360)

Could use more top spin

➔ **TODD:** *Virtua Tennis 3* reminds me of modern-day gym classes, where kids jump rope without the rope. Because of the rare unforced errors, it's a perfect game for those frailists who live in fear of failure (for the record, I want to hit those delicate-egoed people with a tennis racket). More problematic is the incessant diving that keeps the ball in play, denying so many winner-worthy hits. It continually leads to unrealistically lengthy rallies. But gameplay gripes aside, my biggest “What the—?!” is the omission of generic players. You'll *only* play against pros (of which there are just 20), which goofs up the career mode. The best in the world will lower themselves to your level, which is plain dumb. If you play Roger Federer when

you're ranked 300th, you'll clown him. If you play him when you're ranked 100th, he'll turn you inside out. I find the core game to be a lot of thumb-flattening fun—it's just no *Top Spin 2*.

➔ **JOE:** Yeah, kicking pros' asses up and down the court is a little odd, but personally, I like the more-fun-than-realistic challenge. The draw of *VT* is that you can do well right off the start, but you can do *really* well if you get your player's stats up and your technique down. I spent loads of time in the Tennis Academy, which throws specific challenges at you, like winning a point with a lob, or scoring within four shots of the serve. The lack of online play in the PS3 version (we didn't get the online-enabled XB360

version in time but will let you know of any major differences next month), though, is a crime against gaming.

➔ **ANDREW P:** Yeah, that's the thing—as soon as I started ignoring *VT*'s attempts to be more simlike, I found what I love about the series. Right when you play that first serve-and-volley specialist in career mode who effortlessly locks you into a cycle of desperate diving, the “simulation” is shattered. But if you just play a pick-up game with the maxed-out pros (or better yet, get some friends on the sticks), the ridiculous running speed and light-speed smashes suddenly become tons o' fun. *VT*'s always been an arcadey, party-game experience—let's not muck that up with “realism.”



■ We didn't play the 360 version, but it should be the same...a shame. If not, we'll let you know.

PS3/XB360

ARMORED CORE 4

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: From Software
 ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen

Rotten to the core

➤ JOE: Here's the thing you need to remember about *Armored Core 4*. The game isn't about giant mechs fighting in large, bland arenas. The game is about *building* giant mechs to fight in large, bland arenas. The actual fighting takes a backseat to the *insanely* in-depth customization of your "Next." This is the focus of the game: selecting, tuning, and modifying weapons, boosters, arms, legs, paint schemes, decals, and about three dozen other parts I haven't mentioned.

That being the case, it shouldn't really be much of a surprise that the bits in between—you know, the *gameplay*—are awfully weak, with missions that tend to be almost comically short and simple. It should also come as no surprise that online play is little more than a simplistic way to show off and trade Nexts. But somehow, the lack of surprise doesn't improve the product any.

➤ MILKMAN: Credit is due where credit is deserved, Joe. Unlike past *Cores*, where game-

play was barely interrupted by a mission list, *AC4* makes with the cut-scenes, resulting in a decent reason to propel through the missions. And that mech customization you bitch about at least now is less about deciphering the arcane number of parts combinations than it is about building a mech from blueprints. Also, *Missile Command*-style defensive objectives help mix up the missions. So yes, *AC4* has decent enough action, but I gotta wonder: Why can't Japanese developers design realistic backgrounds to save their lives?

➤ MARK: Wait a second, Joe—I'd hate for anyone to read your review and think the mech building in *AC4* is handled well. Thanks to the single most confusing, cumbersome, just all-around worst interface of any game I have ever played (seriously, Milky), tuning your mech's impressive list of options is a chore. The controls are great once you get them customized properly (fire buttons on L1 and R1), with nimble movement and crazy bursts of speed seldom seen outside of anime, but this dexterity is wasted on short missions, bare-bones multiplayer, and the same ol' gameplay *AC* has been recycling for years.

The Good: Near-infinite customization of your mech
The Bad: Actually doing anything with your mech
Most Comical Moment: Playing the "Desert" arena online—it's just...sand!

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOE
4.0
 BAD

MILKMAN
6.5
 AVERAGE

MARK
4.0
 BAD

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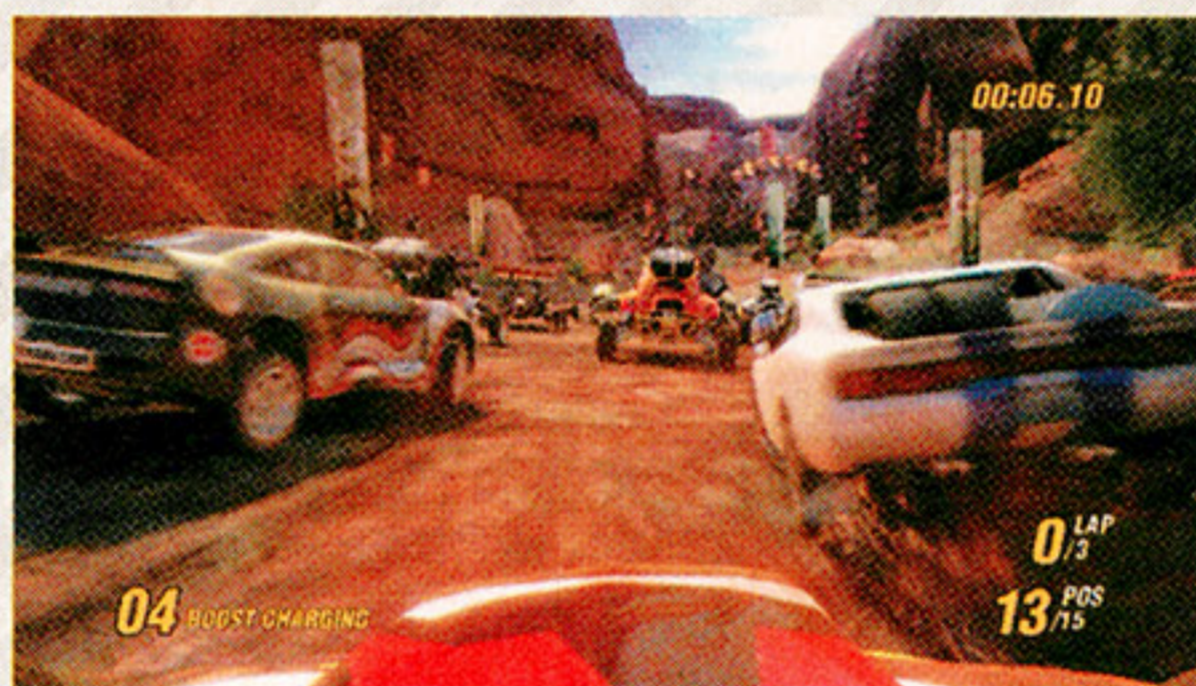
— Electronic Gaming Monthly

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■ ATV races often turn into high-speed boxing matches.



PlayStation 3

MOTORSTORM

Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Evolution ■ Players: 1-12 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOHN
7.5
GOOD

GARNETT
7.5
GOOD

SHANE
9.0
EXCELLENT

The Good: Stunning visuals, exhilarating ride

The Bad: Steep learning curve, gameplay stretched thin

Prediction: *MotorStorm 2* will astonish

Burning Man meets motocross

➔ **JOHN:** Few videogame experiences are more exhilarating than playing *MotorStorm* in first-person mode, hurtling through the Dust Devil track in a rally car, with Wolfmother's "Woman" blasting in the background. The sense of barely controlled velocity is shockingly convincing thanks to the spectacular visuals, bouncy camera work, glorious lighting, and ambient dust effects. It's a stunning package, all presented with an aching hip Burning-Man-meets-MotoX-weekend aesthetic that somehow begs as many comparisons with *Wipeout* as with something like *ATV Offroad Fury*. It's certainly a feel-good PS3 game...or at least it is for the first few hours.

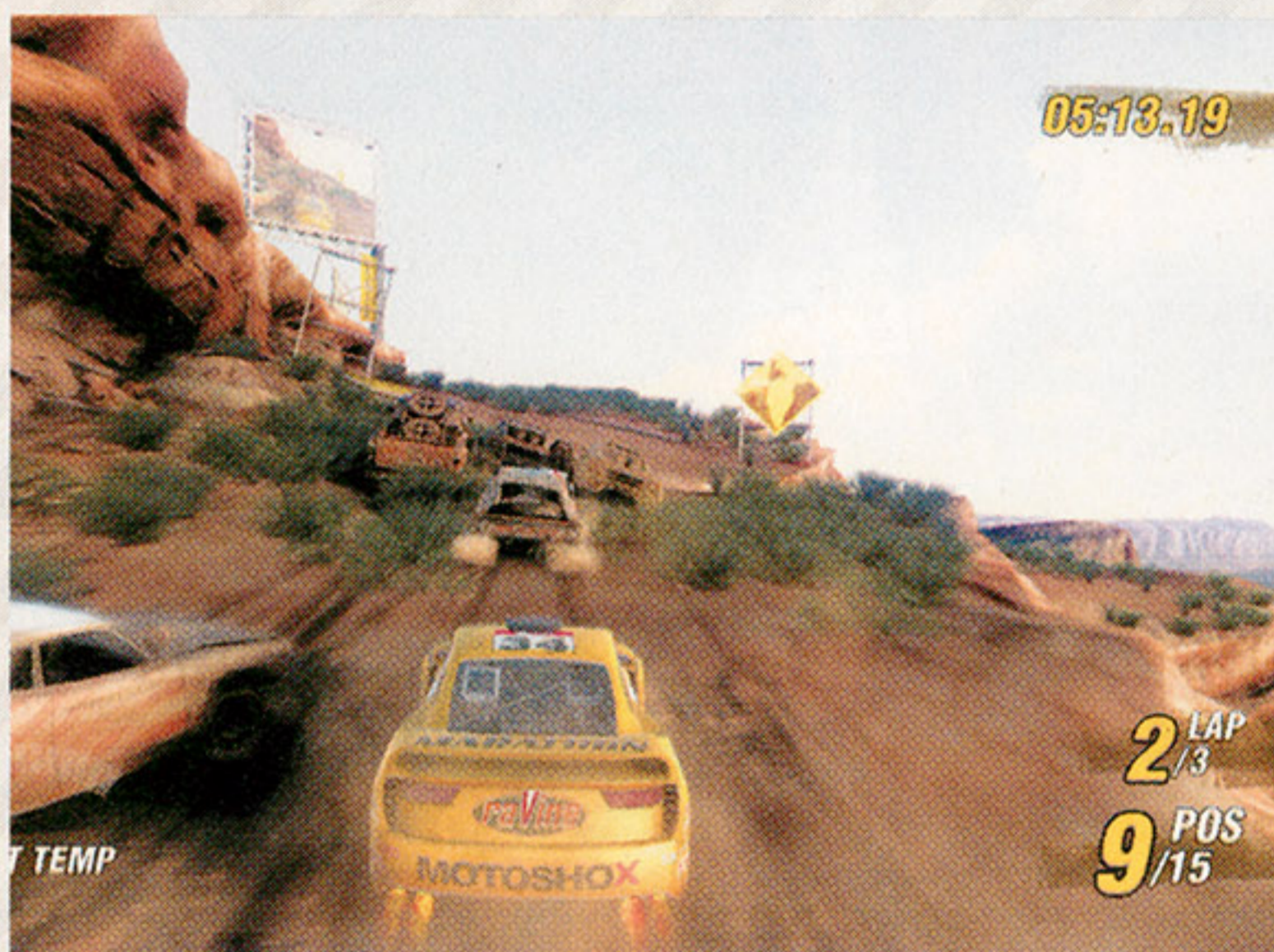
So why not a higher score? Surely something this gorgeous is nothing

less than a glorious example of PS3 supremacy? Play the single-player mode for any length of time, and the frustrations start to kick in... hard. Initially, the game forces you to learn the tracks by demanding that you tackle them with specific vehicle classes. While this is a great way to learn the myriad paths through the mud and scree, it soon becomes a burden. With only eight tracks to plough through, the pacing soon proves too slow and repetitive.

As you plod your way through, the game offers little to reward your progress aside from a pathetic trickle of new vehicles and changes to the (albeit impressive) lighting effects. Difficulty scales on a fairly steep curve, and rather than add new

gameplay modes or challenges, increasingly psychotic A.I. opponents and an escalation of unreasonable race requirements are what test your skill. As a single-player game it's just too limited and too long, and after an initial push to open stuff up, you'll almost certainly want to only play online (see sidebar).

➔ **GARNETT:** I wouldn't buy a PS3 to play it, but *MotorStorm* definitely deserves a spot on your playlist if you own one. It looks so amazing that just watching the HD video of Monument Valley included as an extra made me wonder for a moment, "Wait, is this in-game?" I also got a great sense of getting in a groove with each of the different off-road toys and finding the



Online: Have MotorStorm your way



While the single-player game suffers from being stifling and frustrating, the online mode provides a lot of what you might be craving from the overall experience. For starters, you can put any vehicle in any race on any track...an option sorely lacking elsewhere. It's limited to human players only, so if you want a more exciting 12-man race, you need to rustle up a big crew. The game tracks stats against your profile and ranks you accordingly, so all that offline training will come in useful. After playing online, all three of us said we'd probably not be returning to polish off the brutally tough single-player game.

right line around the courses to suit their strengths.

But beauty can't hide the bare-bones game underneath. The single-player mode's long progression of races intended to disguise the lack of variety only reinforces the scarcity of tracks. I got completely fed up with knowing what I enjoyed driving but being forced to use something else just for the sake of filling up another level. It left me wishing for additional modes and environments. Only online play offered a glimpse of what could have been.

➔ SHANE: Man, tough crowd around here...while it doesn't fully deliver on the absurdly ambitious promise of that infamous concept video, *MotorStorm* comes awfully damned close, handily outclassing every other racer on the

market with astoundingly photo-realistic visuals. Now, if you closely examine every graphical element in exacting detail, you'll spy the occasional blurry texture or simplistic shrubbery. But the insane blur effects, lifelike lighting, and constantly shifting desert roadways combine to effectively put you behind the wheel in a mind-bending virtual rally through Monument Valley. If you're playing in the gloriously disorienting first-person view, expect to witness at least one "holy s***" moment per race, guaranteed.

Eye candy's great for a next-gen sugar rush, but *MotorStorm* delivers on a more satisfying level, too. The instantly accessible gameplay balances arcadey physics, supremely aggressive A.I., and a crucial risk/reward boosting system to create an off-road experience that's just as

addictive and rewarding as *Wipeout* and *Burnout*. And the game's seemingly scant eight tracks offer surprisingly diverse experiences, thanks to the large number of unique vehicle types to master (*Road Rash*-style fisticuffs make ATVs and bikes my favorites) and plentiful shortcuts.

Sure, the epic loading times and minimal extras remind you that this is indeed a launch effort, but the killer online mode will keep me racin' for months to come. Divorced from the single-player rules and restrictions, these online races simply rock, boasting zero lag (due to dedicated servers) and full voice chat. 🏁

Go to EGM214.1UP.com to find our MotorStorm SuperGuide. Among other tips, we outline the best racing lines for each vehicle type on every course.



■ In the world of *Icon*, 99 percent of all rap record deals involve fisticuffs.



PS3/XB360

DEF JAM: ICON

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: EA Chicago ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Mature

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

TODD
6.5
AVERAGE

MICHAEL
6.5
AVERAGE

SHANE
7.5
GOOD

The Good: Beautiful environments that rock to the beat

The Bad: Right analog stick is broken, too few moves

Weird: Notable lack of Def Jam artists

Bling without the bite

➔ **TODD:** When it comes to concept, *Def Jam* games have always been shaky. But *Icon*'s (finally) believable premise gets rid of most of the clunk. I liked working my way up the label's ranks from thug (by protecting Ludacris from the paparazzi) to entrepreneur (by signing Mike Jones to a record deal). Now, with the story sorted out, the series' biggest weakness is the fighting itself. The amount of available moves is limited, and I found the right analog stick to be about as responsive as a stretch Hummer's steering. Flashy moves aren't terribly necessary, though: Here, victory requires you to throw foes into specific level hazards while using the new "DJ controls" to time analog-stick "scratches" with each impact for mas-

sive damage. It's a slightly silly gameplay mechanic, but the sterling environments alone make it worth a play. And I've gotta give big kudos for the dropping of N- and F-bombs—EA's finally getting with the urban program.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Believable premise? Uh, ya mean grill-bustin' gangstas tossing each other into exploding gas pumps is realistic? Sorry, but the story is pretty wack—it's completely jarring to go from superserious cut-scenes to supersurreal fights in a matter of seconds. Like the previous *Def Jams*, *Icon* can't decide what kind of game it wants to be. I personally dug the bizarre environments boppin' to the beat—too bad it doesn't carry over to the actual story. And yeah, the record

label stuff is a nice distraction, but like blocking, it's completely arbitrary.

➔ **SHANE:** *Icon*'s ambitious gameplay initially feels way too convoluted—prepare to struggle with needlessly complicated blocking and record-scratching mechanics for the first hour or so. Luckily, breathtaking visuals and a richly detailed story mode make ascending that steep learning curve a helluva lot easier. When two adept players engage in a brawl, the action resembles a glitzy, million-dollar rap video gone brutally awry. Plus, the developers truly seem to understand hip-hop culture, and close involvement from several key MCs gives the game some serious street cred (and a killer soundtrack). **B+**



PS3/XB360

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K7

■ Publisher: 2K Sports ■ Developer: Kush Games/Visual Concepts
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Chicks dig the long ball

➔ **TODD:** I know my fellow reviewers will rant about *MLB 2K7*'s lack of innovation, and yes, the fielding and pitching feel a bit historic compared to EA's *MVP* "Analog Everything" 07 (PS2). But I can't get over how lifelike the first true next-gen baseball game looks! The player models and behaviors are so accurate that I feel like Comcast snuck the MLB Extra Innings package on my 360. I love how Derrek Lee's pants go to his heels, how Tom Glavine lives on the outer half of the plate, how Pedro wears a jacket when he lucks onto first. The game does have faults: The offense is way too home-run-centric, pitchers throw so hard that you won't have enough time to distinguish a ball from a strike, and defense is often a Manny Ramirez-like adventure. But those faults shouldn't stop you from putting this in your system and keeping it there all summer long.

➔ **G. FORD:** Here's the thing, Todd. *MVP 07* plays better in each area that matters—pitching, batting, fielding—which means it's my game of choice when I'm looking for a gritty matchup of skill. But it sure doesn't look as sweet (or feature the MLB license). *2K7*'s sick presentation makes it easy for me to *keep* playing despite the miscues. You know, like the feast-or-famine hitting—how about some feedback so I can learn why I pull my best Adam Dunn and whiff far too often? And while the pulsating pitching meter got the job done last year, I'd hoped some seasoning would've improved it. I do love how catchers will call the whole game if you let them...as well as the gimmicky Sixaxis swinging with the PS3 game. Seriously.

➔ **BRYAN:** Oh Greg, I think you just miss your college days a bit too much: *2K7* is a much cleaner-playing game than last year's edition and EA's error-filled *MVP*. And while I'm psyched that this diamond finally looks next gen (which I think is the only thing about this game all three of us agree upon), I'm equally disappointed with the utter lack of innovation. The visual upgrade will get you by this season, 2K, but come back peddling the same lackluster feature set next year and I'm sendin' you down to the minors.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

TODD
7.5
GOOD

G. FORD
7.0
GOOD

BRYAN
7.0
GOOD

The Good: A beautiful game that mimics real-life baseball
The Bad: Too many homers, spotty defense
Bad Vibrations: No PS3 vibration makes pitching tough



PlayStation 2

SHINING FORCE EXA

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Neverland
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Eerily eXact replica

➔ **A. FITCH:** Hey, it's the *Madden* of action-RPGs! *EXA* sports the exact same engine, combat system, enemies, environments, and amateur-hour voice acting as 2005's *Shining Force Neo*. In fact, it's probably more appropriate to think of it as an "expansion pack" than anything else.

EXA does add a couple of wrinkles to *Neo*'s formula, though. First, you get two clichéd RPG heroes for the price of one: impetuous, hardheaded warrior lad and haughty, mysterious sorceress chick. Second, gameplay revolves around defending your headquarters—one character ventures out on quests, while the other stays home and wards off hordes of invading monsters. A cool concept, but the attacks on HQ interrupt the flow of gameplay and happen far too often—it felt like I was fighting the Battle of Helm's Deep every 15 minutes. And without Gimli and Legolas alongside to liven things up, that's way too much "defend the fortress" for my tastes.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Yikes, I didn't realize *EXA* was going to be such a blatant rip-off of the ho-hum *Neo*. Even so, I kinda fancied its girlie-man's take on *Gauntlet*. Though the combat is simple enough for a brain-dead baboon to play, it's still fun to hack down endless hordes of enemies. Sure, I prefer the serious head-scratching of the original *Shining Force* games to this recent thumb-numbing thwacking, but complaining about the old sure ain't going to make anything new. Face it, fanboys: Sega's current strategy with the *Shining Force* series ironically doesn't involve, uh, strategy.

➔ **GREG S:** The constant interruption by the castle-defense scenarios Andrew speaks of doesn't bother me so much. What's irritating is that they add *absolutely nothing* to the game. Had they offered a different gameplay experience, maybe something more strategic than the rest of the game, they'd be worthwhile. Perhaps even a throwback to the old Genesis *Shining Force* series? As is, more of the exact same hack-n-slash schlock interrupts your main game, making *EXA* supergeneric and forgettable.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

A. FITCH
6.0
AVERAGE

MICHAEL
7.0
GOOD

GREG S.
4.0
BAD

The Good: Fast-paced combat
The Bad: Way too similar to *Shining Force Neo*
Voice Acting: A horrifying assault on the ears



■ Finish him again...and again: Kratos now has several different fatalities.

PlayStation 2

GOD OF WAR II

Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Sony CEA Santa Monica ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MATT
9.5
EXCELLENT

G. FORD
9.0
EXCELLENT

MICHAEL
9.0
EXCELLENT

The Good: One incredible scenario after another, amazing graphics, clever story

The Bad: It's a bit familiar...

Bosses: Lots of 'em, you whiners

God among last gen

➔ **MATT:** (Warning, spoilers ahead!) Leaping off the back of Pegasus in midair to grab a Chimera and tear its wings off; air-wrestling with Icarus in a free fall over who gets his wings; fighting a giant Colossus and then ascending its burning innards to finish it off—gory actioner *God of War II* is essentially a back-to-back string of some of the most memorable moments in gaming history.

Like the original, the sequel puts you in scenes that are amplified by how well they fit with the story. So you don't just fight the Colossus at the game's outset—you have to drain all your powers (that you earned in the first game) into a sword to properly slash its stomach. You don't fight your way out of hell in a cut-scene—that's

in-game. And you'll find plenty more examples like these of how the gameplay and story work together.

The core gameplay features have done a nice job of keeping up with inflation (you can swing around on grappling points and glide with the Icarus Wings), but the game relies on story as its biggest asset. And there it does a fantastic job continuing the franchise—I challenge anyone to come away from the game without being incredibly pumped for the inevitable PS3 sequel. That the game manages to both come to a satisfying conclusion and still make it clear that Kratos' adventure is far from over is quite a feat and a lesson that other action-game developers could learn something from.

My only real disappointment is that most of the best new stuff in the game doesn't stick with you all the way through. Grappling does, but things like Pegasus and many of the great moments you come across only happen for a few minutes at a time and then disappear.

➔ **G. FORD:** No way I'm going to challenge you on most of those points, Matt. Be it a slog through viper-haired Euryale's bog or a plummet into and subsequent ascent out of world-shouldering Atlas' underworld, each memorable section carries a gravity most games don't achieve in their entirety. Let's discuss your last point, though. Is it really disappointing that you don't make use of the same mechanics



■ Macy's Day massacre: Who let out this crazy mannequin?



What's missing?



God of War II succeeds in many of the same ways as the original—great graphics and gameplay—but what did the first game (above) have that's missing here?

Killing innocents: You won't find yourself slashing through crowds of civilians to earn health bonuses now.

Epic puzzles: It's got a few thinkers, but nothing on the scale of the align-the-doors-in-Pandora's Temple puzzle from the original.

Hand over fist/tip-toeing sections: Technically, you'll still find these, but in limited amounts and not nearly as challenging as they were last time.

Ballistas: Enjoy pulling back and letting the spears fly? It's gone.



throughout, new or otherwise? The sense of wonder for me grows when I *don't* know whether I will take another ride on Pegasus (which, aside from those kick-ass Chimera kills, was the weakest section). Besides, in addition to the grappling move you mention, Kratos' new time-slowing power finds myriad uses throughout.

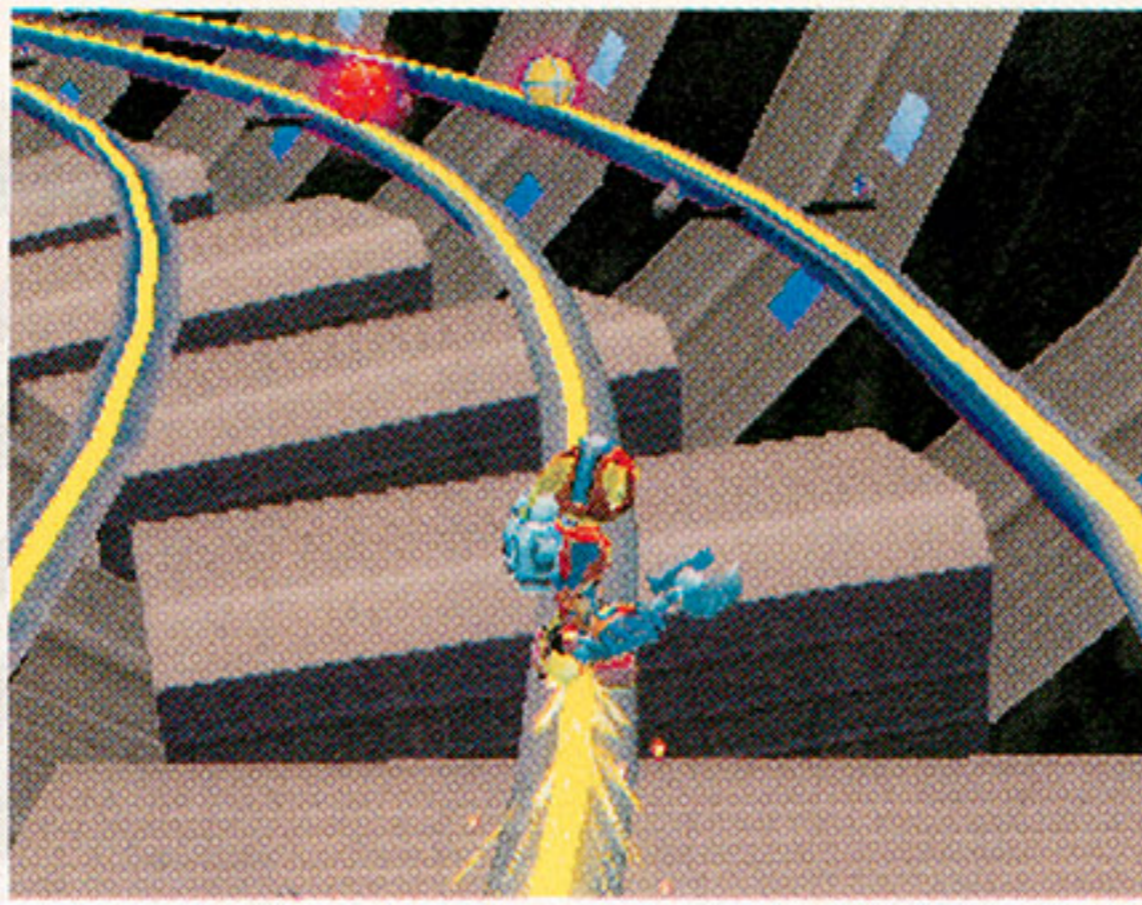
An area where *GOW2* could have taken a step out of its forebear's shadow is with the weapons...but it doesn't quite answer the prayer. The Spear of Destiny is badass thanks to its enemy-skewering simplicity, but I still found myself using the blades 90 percent of the time. And that brings me to the point you'll hear all of us harp: The original was a masterpiece, and *GOW2* feels a lot like it...which is both good and bad. It's missing that first-time excitement, but the journey

here is stronger, with a more epic scale and exemplary boss battles. Two of my favorites weren't even of the titanic variety: one involved a straight-up clash against a mounted barbarian, and the other a simple duel that's limited to a 2D plane as you and your opponent battle it out as silhouettes against a vibrant backdrop. So a more radical makeover will have to wait, but what Sony delivered here rocks pretty hard.

✦ **MICHAEL:** Big surprise—everything about *GOW2* is frickin' epic (badass bosses, mammoth levels, and a sharp narrative that never gets dull). What did surprise me, however, was that *GOW2* failed to impress me as much as the original. With two new weapons, I fully expected to dissect and dismember baddies in new, more

brutal ways. Um, yeah...that wasn't the case—you don't use the Barbarian Hammer, Spear of Destiny, or Blade of Olympus for any special fatalities. I never felt the urge to use 'em since Athena's Blades are still the best way to kill. Hey, but that ain't so bad, really—chopping up enemies into mangled carcasses still manages to leave a sadistic smile on my face. And like these guys said, the onslaught of new bosses is so damn great—no other game captures the carnage of these grandiose duels. And when *GOW2* gets something like that so right, it's hard to ramble on about what's hardly wrong. 🦍

📖 Go to EGM214.1UP.com to find a SuperGuide for *God of War II*. Check it for tips on taking out gods, monsters, and multiarmed fat-ass blue dudes.



PSP

RATCHET & CLANK: SIZE MATTERS

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: High Impact
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOE
7.0
 GOOD

SHANE
8.0
 GOOD

JAMES L.
7.5
 GOOD

The Good: Typical *Ratchet*-style variety and humor

The Bad: Distinctly un-*Ratchet*-like camera and control

Pretend: It's not a *Ratchet* game

Gameplay matters more

+ JOE: Funny thing about *Size Matters*: If you look at it like an unknown platformer, it actually seems pretty good. It's got loads of variety, mixing up jump-n-gun gameplay with plenty of tangents into things like racing, simple puzzles, and minigames. Collectibles, upgradeable weapons, armor and weapon customization, and an entertaining (if rather shallow) four-way multiplayer mode (online or via local Wi-Fi) make for a ton of replay value. And for a PSP game, it sure does look nice.

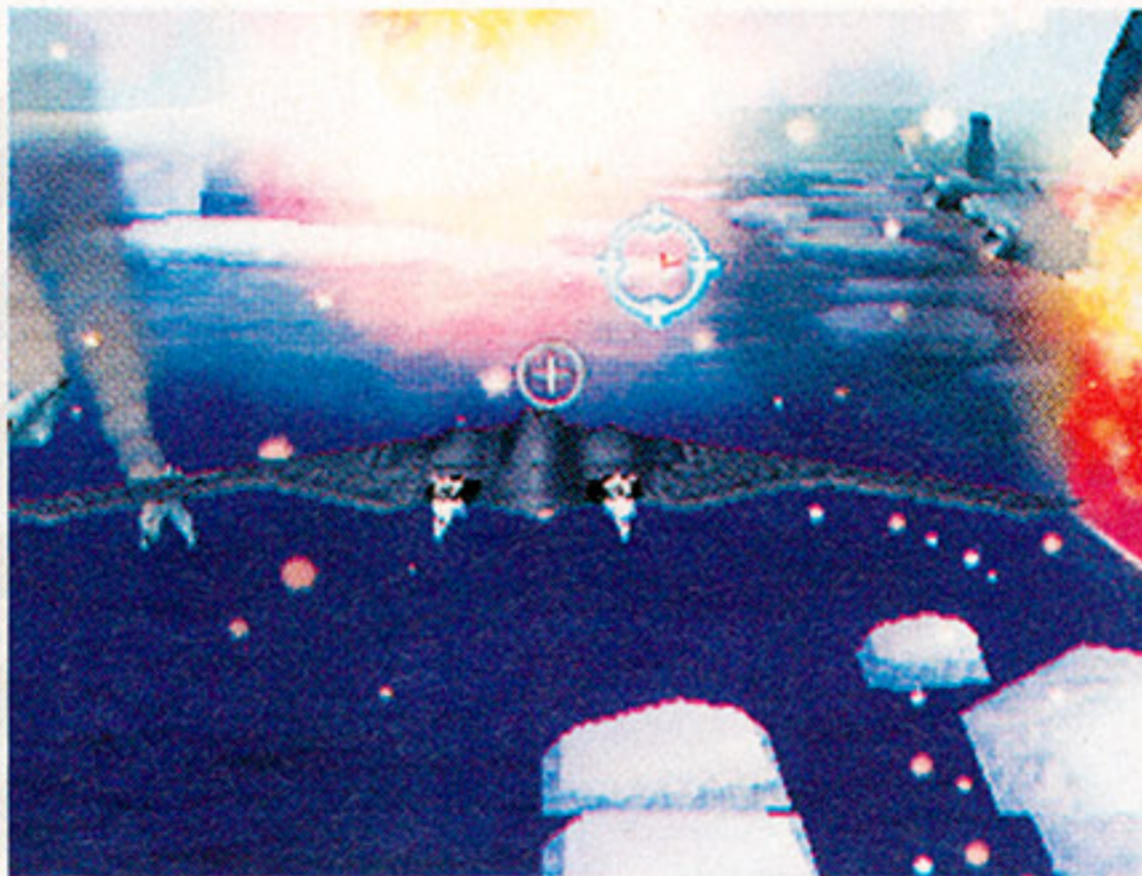
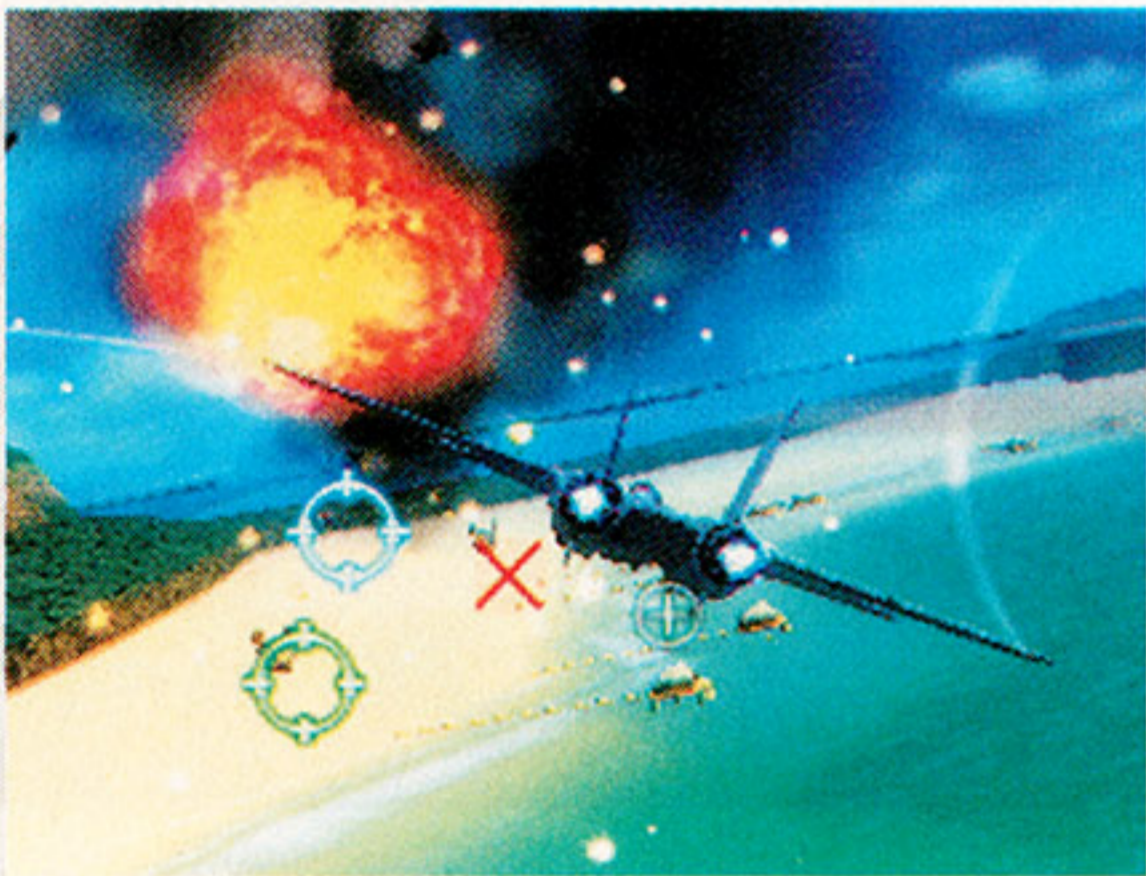
But if you look at it in comparison to the standards set by the *Ratchet* games on PS2 it's, well, abysmal. A finicky camera is just the beginning; *Size Matters* also boasts a uniquely irritating control scheme and a dra-

matically unbalanced difficulty level. Add some fairly ho-hum weaponry and gadgets, and you end up with a game that, while decent enough in its own right, is a substantial step down for the series.

+ SHANE: Although it's not a port, *Size Matters* feels awfully familiar to this *R&C* fan. But hey, after the misguided stylistic departure of *Deadlocked*, I'm up for a new romp that expertly transplants the series' best bits (a single-player experience that rekindles the effortless charm of *Going Commando*, multiplayer online shoot-outs with funky firearms) onto the PSP. Sure, it's familiar fare, but executed well—no platformer on PSP delivers an audiovisual package like

this, let alone seamless online play this addictive. Prepare to suffer some meaty load times for that fun, though.

+ JAMES L: Since I get the last word, I'm gonna say that Joe's totally wrong (even if his score isn't too far off), and I think he has a small penis, too. *Ratchet* game or not, *Size Matters* doesn't have many gameplay deficiencies for me to bitch about. The "ho-hum" weapons and gadgets—they deftly add to the mix. The camera posed no problems for me, nor did I find the lombax's adventure to be overly difficult. The puzzles could be more elaborate to match up with the solid combat, sure, but compared to the handheld competition, *Size Matters* measures up quite nicely.



PSP

AFTER BURNER: BLACK FALCON

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Planet Moon
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JAMES L.
6.5
 AVERAGE

GREG S.
2.0
 TERRIBLE

DEMIAN
5.5
 AVERAGE

The Good: Tons of enemies, power-ups, and missiles

The Bad: Repetitive levels and vehicles

Afterburning Feature: Too fast and furious

Experience a little turbulence

+ JAMES L: G forces be damned. *After Burner* gives the arcade flight-combat genre a nitrolike feature that makes you feel like you're moving at *ludicrous speed*. And hey, the combat is enjoyable at first: Aiming is a cinch with the constant target locks, which means you'll be shooting off a plethora of missiles, no problem (thankfully, the enemies don't seem to mind).

The levels follow a pretty standard format: Shoot down planes and tanks/turrets, hit a few checkpoints, watch the obligatory cut-scene, and finish up with a boss. That's all fine, but I'm not a big fan of the camera—it tilts as if it *wants* to make you run into rock formations, and it's generally difficult to tell what the hell is shooting you down. The little things also

bug me, like failing a mission if you reach the last checkpoint when you haven't finished off the boss—kind of like if your pilot suddenly got homesick and abandoned the fight...which nicely sums up my feelings about the game—I could walk away at any time.

+ GREG S: James is being too nice; I was ready to quit the service after one mission. *After Burner* sports merely decent graphics while managing to suck all the fun out of a once-great franchise. It's next to impossible to know if or when you're taking damage, and the game moves at a snail's pace when you aren't jamming that Afterburner button. I really dig that the game has so many planes and upgrades to buy. But when the action

is no damn fun, you won't want to play long enough to enjoy the perks.

+ DEMIAN: What Greg said, and I'd like to add that the local Wi-Fi co-op mode is the best way to play if you're going to play at all. Two to four players share the same on-rails path (but with more stuff to blow up and shared lives), and you can open up new stages just like in single player. The competitive mode, on the other hand, sucks. One player becomes the target—his or her plane morphs into a half cow, half plane hybrid, naturally—and then the other players cram about 50 practically unavoidable, heat-seeking missiles up the flying cow's tail-pipe. Then someone else gets to be the flying cow. Huh?

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We, the makers of Dap Body Spray for Men, have spent the last 27 months researching and developing a brand that speaks to young men in a real and authentic way. Through personal interviews and focus groups across the country, we talked seriously with thousands of young adults and asked them what they demand from a brand. We studied the products they use, why they choose them and whether they were happy with their choices. Most importantly, we took it back to the streets, neighborhoods, and even Myspace.com to get the 411 on what you want, need and think is hot – and here's what we found:

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The development of every small detail was analyzed by thousands of young adults to gain their approval on a brand we were building specifically for them. There were focus groups in high schools, visits to some of the most well-known street basketball temples around, and personal interviews with those that know ... just like you.

DAP, THE BRAND

What is Dap? Thousands of videos and essays, blogs and text messages, emails and instant messages answered that question. The initial responses showed Dap to be a fist pound, a lean-in with a shoulder tap, a head nod, a finger point, and other "physical" gestures. Over a period of time, all the abstract properties that makeup the components of Dap started to pour in. Dap is a philosophy of inclusion, opening up one's personal circle, networking relationships. Dap is giving credit to another and embracing that accomplishment. Dap is an understanding that a branch of loyalty is being extended, a spirit of integrity exchanged. Dap is an approach taken, a commitment begun.

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When we started asking young adults what they were really looking for in a product, their answers mirrored the principles behind Dap. We knew we had a concept that people would feel good about. We also found that many products in the male grooming market only catered to one type of person. But there was a whole audience, just like you, that were left out – with no representation and often we heard, "What about me? I want to smell good too!" And when we asked you who you thought represented Dap, you told us overwhelmingly ... Allen Iverson. We agreed, so did he ... we got him.

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So now we need your voice. This brand ... this movement is growing and we want all of you to be an active part in its development. We want to hear what you think about Dap and how well you think we've represented you. We want you to tell us what you think about the scents, about our website, even about Allen Iverson representing the brand.

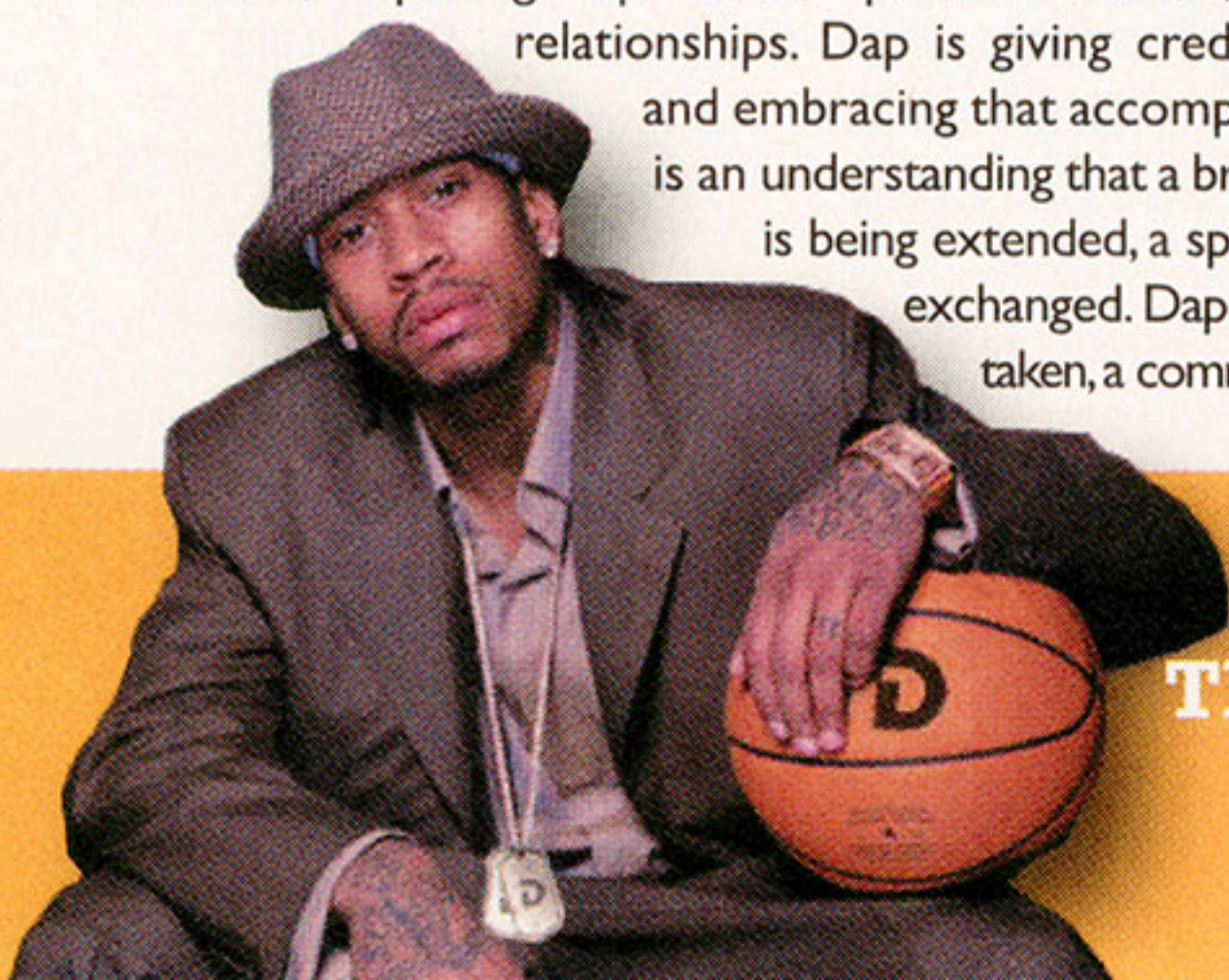
This brand was built for you, by you so call **1-800-452-0852** or visit www.dapcircle.com to voice your opinion. When you register, you'll get the three Dap scents (Crew, True, and Chill) absolutely free plus a free Dap Dog Tag. Once you get your cans, tell us what you and your friends think by visiting dapcircle.com. We're even looking for a new name for our next Dap scent. So get your entries in! All entries must be received by 03/20/07 to make your mark on the next Dap launch so get registered for your free cans today!

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THE CIRCLE IS OPEN **YOU IN?**

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The games that were too late...or too little

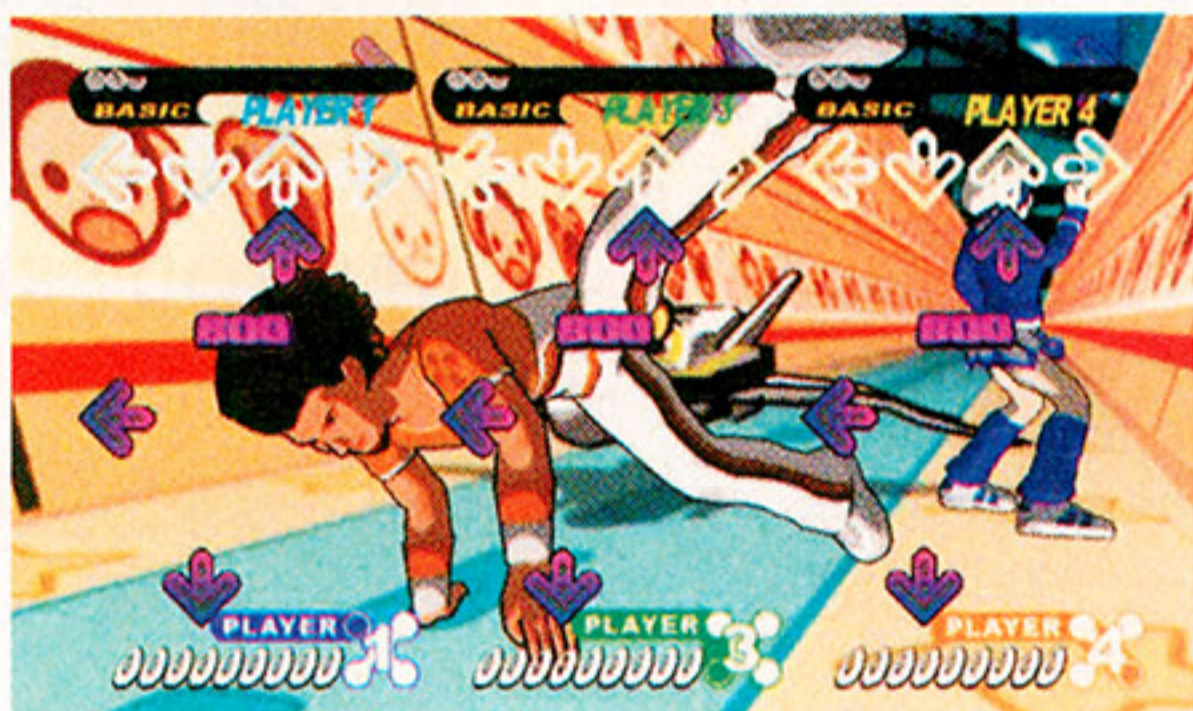
XB360

GHOST RECON
ADVANCED
WARFIGHTER 2

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ ESRB: Teen

Wait, is this *GRAW 2* or just *GRAW 1.5*? Yeah, we loved last year's original, but not a lot has changed here. The differences include day/night cycles and dynamic weather changes, smarter A.I., less wonky 16-person co-op, and improved graphics—especially in multiplayer. Speaking of multi, Ubisoft has added plenty of new maps, several new game modes, and (best of all) clan support.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *GRAW 2* looks to continue the series' "real American hero" feel; we'll let you know how it turns out—and how it differs from the first *GRAW*—next month.



XB360

DANCE DANCE
REVOLUTION
UNIVERSE

■ Publisher: Konami ■ ESRB: Everyone

The first next-gen effort in this rhythm-action series doesn't stray too far from what you've seen a million times, but one particular new feature is more than enough to separate it from all that came before: individual songs available for purchase over Xbox Live. A couple new multiplayer modes also give newbies and hardcore alike fun ways to play together. Our favorite? Speed mode, where you race to complete steps.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *DDR* never exactly wows with its innovation, but it's nice to see a rhythm-action game finally offering downloadable songs.



PS2

CHULIP

■ Publisher: Natsume ■ ESRB: Teen

Far too long in the making (*Chulip* was first announced four years ago), the silly kissing adventure game slid in for a Valentine's Day release in PS2's death throes. You play a poor boy trudging around, helping townspeople, writing love letters, and, yes, practicing his kissing skills. Your ultimate goal? Win the heart (and luscious lips) of the town hottie.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Maybe if it had come out in the PS2's heyday, *Chulip* might have enchanted gamers looking for something different. Instead, chunky graphics and plodding gameplay make it only worthy of a quick peck on the cheek.



PS2

BURNOUT
DOMINATOR

■ Publisher: EA ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

New tracks, new cars...but old gameplay ideas? Why has developer Criterion decided to take the franchise backward? Those of you who loved traffic-checking in the last game will be sorely disappointed to see that the boost-fueled destruction has been omitted in *Dominator* in favor of a game that feels like a superrefined *Burnout 2* with *Burnout 3*-inspired party play.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** It still looks great and is faster than any other racer, but it's lost some of the magic this time around. If this is the direction it's taking, then *Burnout* peaked with *Revenge*.



PS2

RAW DANGER

■ Publisher: Agetec ■ ESRB: Mature

Raw Danger's Geo City is a haven for destruction, where "survival of the fittest" means overcoming obstacles—such as a mazelike flooded subway—to stay alive. The story is decent, as is the cheesy, soap opera-esque dialogue, but it's the varied puzzles (which usually involve escorting others) that prove surprisingly fun in their execution and make the game worth checking out.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Admirable level design keeps the action moving. It's just too bad your character is constantly bitching about being wet—who knew staying alive would involve so much frivolous maintenance.



XB360/PS2

SAMURAI WARRIORS 2: EMPIRES

■ Publisher: Koei ■ ESRB: Teen

This one falls under the *Empires* line, which means it's not 100 percent mindless hacking and slashing of ancient Asian warriors; it's only 95 percent that, with the rest emphasizing strategy and resource management. Build up armies, collect gold, and take over territories—or risk being an unpronounceable footnote in history.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** News flash: Koei's *Warriors* games are near indistinguishable from each other. New features in *SW2E* include...ah, it doesn't matter. But you should know the game starts off rather difficult unless you build up before invading other areas.



GBA

FINAL FANTASY VI ADVANCE

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

The last of the GBA *Final Fantasy* remakes—and for all intents and purposes, the last significant GBA game—has finally arrived, and boy, are gamers angry! *FFVI*, formerly the Super NES game known as *FFIII*, is a fan favorite, and those fans aren't too crazy about the new dialogue and music here. But assuming you don't have too much emotional investment in the original, *FFVIA* is great: a deep, richly textured RPG with a huge cast and an equally epic story. The new English script adds more backstory, and the bonus areas add new substance to the adventure.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** RPG fans need this one.



PSP

CHILI CON CARNAGE

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ ESRB: Mature

Over-the-top humor adds a jalapeño-induced kick to this spiritual successor to third-person shooter *Total Overdose* (PS2). Delivering flamboyant action sequences that will fulfill any extreme junkie's prescription, *Carnage* ups the *Max Payne*-style bullet time effect with gravity-defying acrobatics. Also, the designers created levels specifically geared toward a plethora of fiery explosions, thanks to scads of red barrels. Most important, varying missions and locales keep things fresh.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** A lack of strafing hurts, but racking up combos with precision lock-on shooting complements the gameplay well.

On the DL

Some downloadable games worth your space bucks...or not

WORTHY WINNERS

TEKKEN 5: DARK RESURRECTION (PS3)

■ Pub: Namco Bandai

■ Price: \$19.50

The PSP's best martial arts contest arrives on the PS3 sporting a gorgeous HD face-lift. It won't exactly supplant *VF5* as the console's top fighter, but at this price, you'll likely want to own 'em both....



ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST (Wii)

■ Pub: Nintendo

■ Price: \$8

Hmm...since nine

out of 10 Wii

owners bought *Twilight Princess*, odds are they'll also go gaga for this fan-favorite SNES *Zelda*.



OTHER WINNERS:

➤ SUPER MARIO WORLD (Wii)

■ Pub: Nintendo ■ Price: \$8

➤ JUMPING FLASH! (PSP)

■ Pub: Sony CEA ■ Price: \$6

➤ f10w (PS3)

■ Pub: Sony CEA ■ Price: \$10

LOUSY LOSERS

ROOT BEER TAPPER (XB360)

■ Pub: Midway

■ Price: \$5

Man, Midway is really tapping its crusty arcade



favorites. Sure, this mug-tossing simulator was fun when it was a quarter, but for five bucks? Not so much. You're better off cashing in on a better classic.

VIGILANTE (Wii)

■ Pub: Hudson

■ Price: \$6

Not even the fact that you're trying to rescue



a blonde hottie named "Madonna" can save this brain-dead brawler. Keep your cash for the inevitable *Streets of Rage* or *Final Fight*.

OTHER LOSERS:

➤ BONANZA BROS. (Wii)

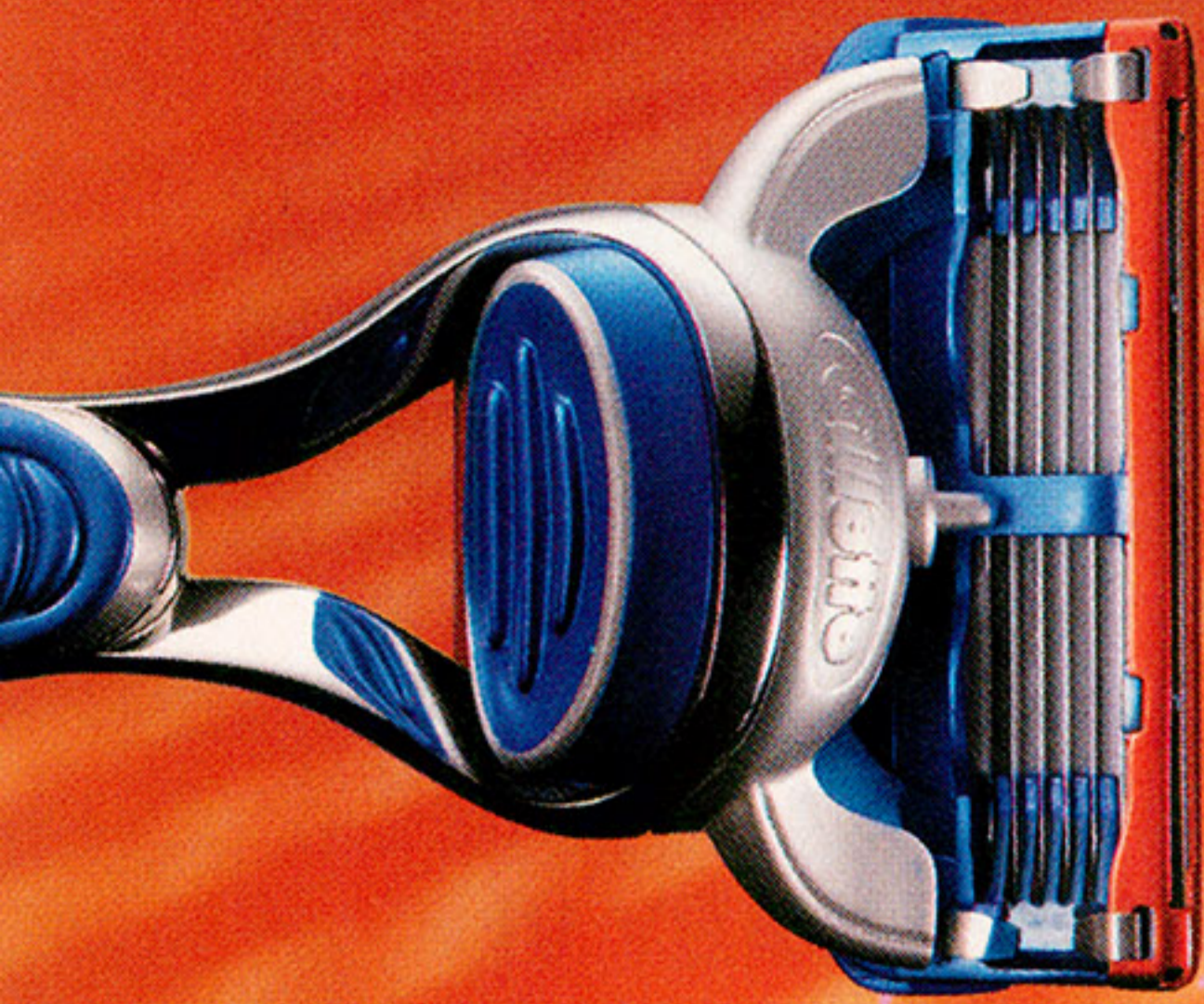
■ Pub: Sega ■ Price: \$8

➤ HEAVY WEAPON (XB360)

■ Pub: PopCap ■ Price: \$10

➤ RALLY CROSS (PSP)

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Price: \$6



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THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Jan/Feb

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores
1	WarioWare: Smooth Moves  <p><i>WarioWare: Smooth Moves</i> is the first non-<i>Wii Sports</i> Wii game that's compatible with your man-made Miis. Where're the other games, Nintendo? Hello? Anyone?</p>	Wii	8.0 8.5 7.5
2	Guitar Hero 2 (Bundle with Guitar)	PS2	9.0 9.0 8.5
3	Gears of War	XB360	10 9.5 9.0
4	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS	8.5 9.0 9.5
5	Lost Planet: Extreme Condition  <p><i>Lost Planet</i> already has a sequel...or a prequel...or whatever—<i>Lost Planet: Trag Zero</i>, a mobile phone game, is currently out...if you care (please don't!).</p>	XB360	6.5 8.0 7.5
6	The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Wii	10 10 10
7	Hotel Dusk: Room 215  <p>Don't be a dick in <i>Hotel Dusk</i>—the different endings you receive are dependent on the way you treat people. So try being nice for a change, a**hole.</p>	DS	8.0 8.0 10
8	Kirby Squeak Squad	DS	7.0 7.0 6.0
9	New Super Mario Bros.	DS	9.5 10 8.0
10	Big Brain Academy	DS	9.0 8.5 7.5
11	Mario Kart DS	DS	9.0 8.5 8.5
12	Final Fantasy III  <p>Now that the portable <i>FFIII</i> and <i>FFVI Advance</i> are out, you can play the first six <i>FF</i> games anywhere you want—just wash your hands afterward, OK?</p>	DS	8.0 8.0 7.5
13	Rainbow Six Vegas	XB360	8.5 7.0 8.5
14	Resistance: Fall of Man	PS3	8.5 8.0 9.0
15	Madden NFL 07	PS2	Not Scored
16	Fight Night Round 3	XB360	9.0 8.0 8.0
17	Call of Duty 3	XB360	6.5 7.0 7.0
18	The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess	GC	Not Scored
19	Animal Crossing: Wild World	DS	7.5 7.0 9.0
20	Rayman Raving Rabbids	Wii	7.0 7.5 7.5

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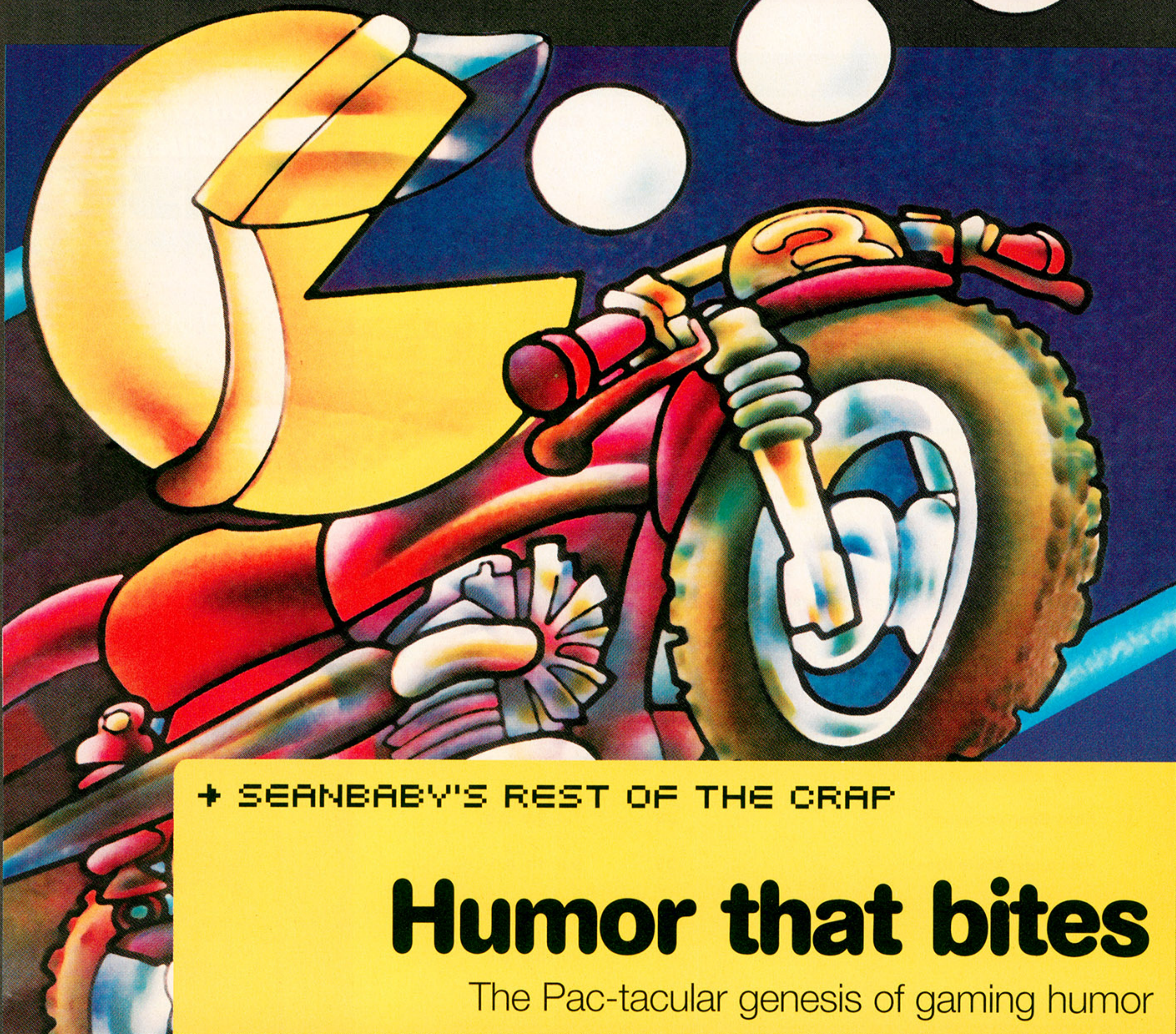


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GAME OVER

➤ press continue for pac-humor, educational programming, and horse armor



➤ SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

Humor that bites

The Pac-tacular genesis of gaming humor



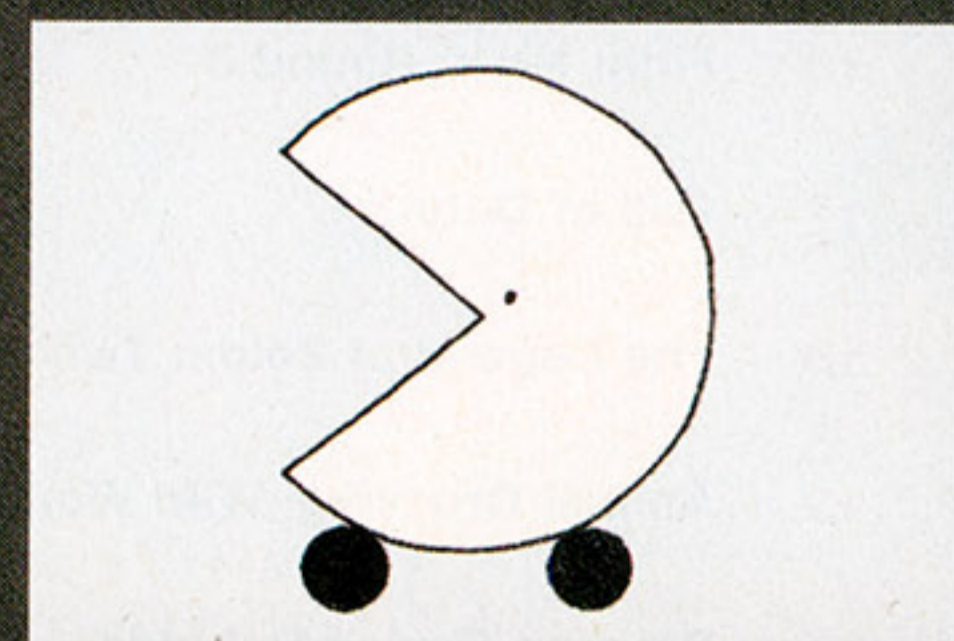
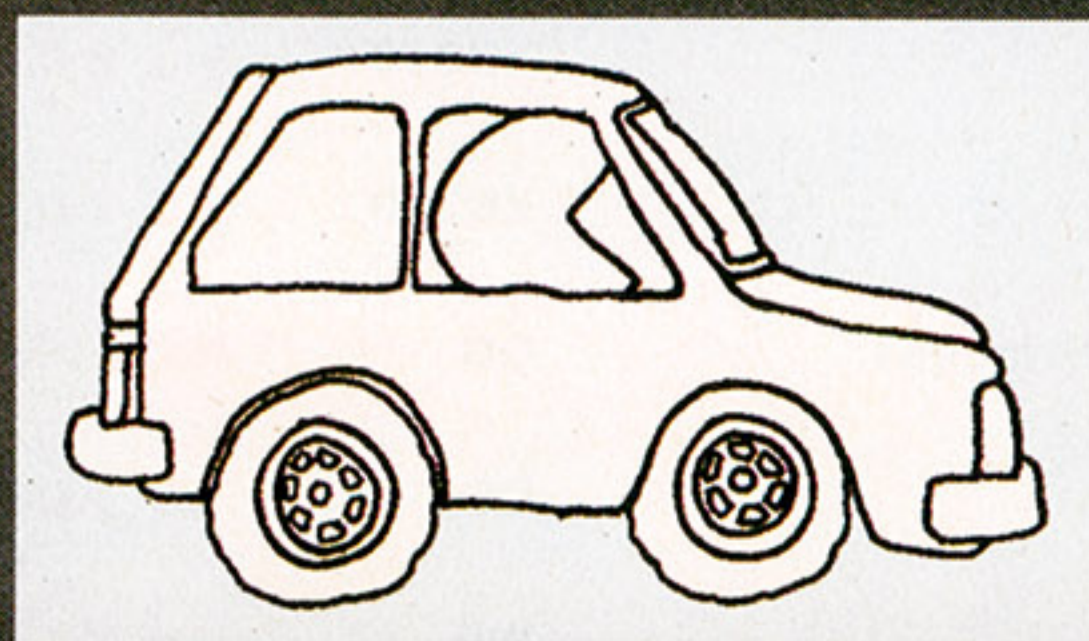
Seanbaby and his girlfriend Natalie are still searching for an application for their combined zero hours of formal kung fu training.

I'VE BEEN WRITING JOKES ABOUT VIDEOGAMES for almost a decade. But did you know that videogame comedy goes all the way back to the early '80s? Two fantastic paperbacks started it all in 1982.

Author Haller Schwarz released his masterwork, *The Official Pac-Man Joke Book: Pac-Mania!* It featured "96 Pac-Filled Pages of Biting Humor!" and encouraged readers to "JUST OPEN WIDE AND LAUGH!" Working in parallel, rival Pac-visionary (and "America's Riddle King") Mike Thaler wrote and illustrated *The Pac-Man Riddle and Joke Book*, a book that was "PACKED, MAN, WITH RIDDLES AND JOKES."

Great minds obviously think alike: Schwarz' and King Mike's books share the same witty observation that compact cars have a linguistic similarity to Pac-Man's name, and both wordsmiths crafted clever puns such as "Leader of the Pac" and

"the HunchPAC of Notre Dame." Yet at times, these pivotal comedic works offer startlingly unique visions of Pac-humor. This month, I pay my respects to these timeless literary standouts who paved the way for my own work.



■ Witness cutting-edge comedy circa 1982: Pac-Man *in* and as a com-PAC car.



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Retro:
The Elder
Scrolls



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Grudge:
Motorcycle
Diaries



PAGE
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Hsu & Chan:
Mascot
Mayhem

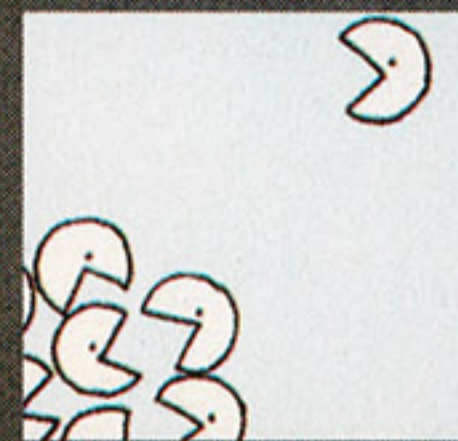


DONKEY KONG

Since America's Riddle King is as brilliant an artist as he is a writer, Donkey Kong is now a platypus holding a woman with a starfish for a hand and most of her is soup. Hold on, though, what's the comical twist?

That a talking gorilla recognizes a rival crime against God? In the back of his book, it says Mike Thaler "has met Pac-Man and won a new high score in humor." If that's not an outright lie, then the previous champ was Fatal Wheelchair Accident.

Joke Rating: There will never be a lazier anything meets anything comic in the history of anything. 0 out of 10.



BAD BREATH

Haller Schwarz: "Here's my idea—Pac-Man, with bad breath!"

Haller Schwarz' conscience: "And then something funny happens because of it?"

Haller Schwarz: "No, it makes other Pac-Mans KEEP THEIR DISTANCE...BECAUSE HE HAS BAD BREATH!"

Haller Schwarz' conscience: "And then, something funny happens, right?"

Haller Schwarz: "No! Get it? Ha ha ha ha!"

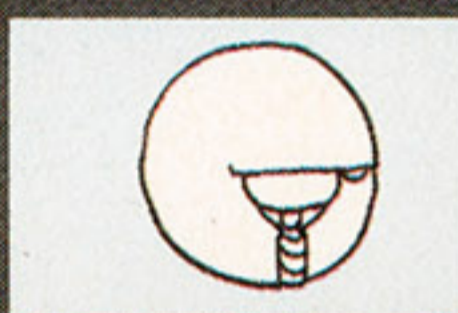
Joke Rating: You're an idiot, Haller Schwarz. 0 out of 10.



PAC-PONG

Riddles aren't funny—the riddle industry perpetuates that myth to sell taffy. What's especially criminal about this riddle, though, is how it makes a special effort to kill its own punchline. Pac-Man isn't good at the "table sport" your own joke made up? How does that pertain to the comedic device of changing words to "Pac"?

What's Pac-Man's favorite sport?



Pac-Pong, and he's lousy!

Joke Rating: If someone ever asks you Pac-Man's favorite sport, you should know that it's OK to stab them. 0 out of 10.



PAC-MAN DRESSED FOR LET'S MAKE A DEAL

Author Haller Schwarz would have no idea that in 25 years, *Let's Make a Deal* would be canceled and his dumbass book would still exist. If a caption were written for this picture today, it would say, "PAC-MAN DRESSED UP FOR DATELINE: TO CATCH A PREDATOR." Or, now that I think about it, "WILL GOD FORGIVE ME FOR WHAT I HAVE DRAWN?" Who let Schwarz crap directly into my brain?

Joke Rating: No one should get paid for being this bad at something. 0 out of 10.



HYPEREXTENDED

Try using this one as a Rorschach test. If you see sideways, one-nippled cleavage, you're ruled by your passions. If you see a snake that swallowed two tacos, you're a community leader. But if you see a Pac-Man yanked inside out, your mother carried you to term during a drinking contest. On another medical note, this unfunny mess is perfect for doctors trying to get a happy person ready to hear about his or her inoperable face cancer.

Joke Rating: Step one in a successful Pac-Man joke will rarely be the spine-rending murder of Pac-Man. 0 out of 10.



PAC-MAN WEARING A TOUPEE

This was a whole page in this book. It's like someone scribbled hair on Pac-Man and a taxonomist declared, "Yes, gentlemen, this is Pac-Man wearing a toupee." And how did the artist manage to draw the world's only nonfunny toupee? This thing looks like Hitler, and Hitler's only funny to the men he tried to sleep with. Which is why I'm declaring this joke review to be Victory Over Hitler paragraph. Have fun getting emasculated and being dead, Hitler!

Joke Rating: This is less than unfunny. 0 out of 10.

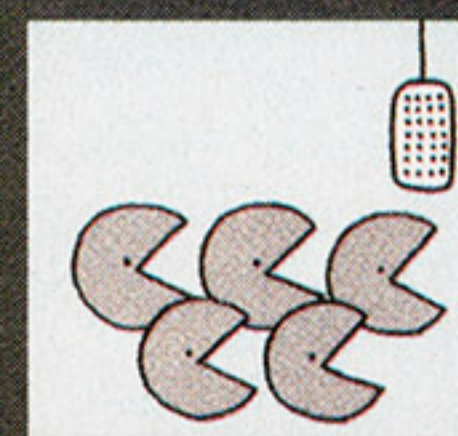


LOOKING PAC: THE 1920S

Who can forget the classic gag of putting a hat on something, then shouting the era in which that hat was popular? Well, look who's doing it now! It's Pac-Man! For bonus fun, see if you can spot where I

added clip art of a hot dog cooking hot dogs. Hot dog or no, this wouldn't have even been funny in the 1920s, although back then it would just be a Pac-Man saying, "Now."

Joke Rating: This "Pac-Mans in hats" concept went on, without a punchline or a point, for several more pages. Well, here's a number punchline for you, Pac-Man: 0 out of 10.



THE PACSON FIVE

As a nonracist white person, I'm required by law to have no idea if painting your face like an African-Pacmerican is funny. However, my girlfriend is black—and she assures me it is NOT. And she has solid racial-comedy qualifications: Once, a Burmese girl shouted the catchphrase "Burmese, if you please!" at her, and my girl countered, "Uh...black! Shacka-lacka-lack!" Even with no actual Pac-content, it's currently my favorite racist Pac-joke.

Joke Rating: Hey, racists, Pac-Man jokes should heal, not divide. 0 out of 10.

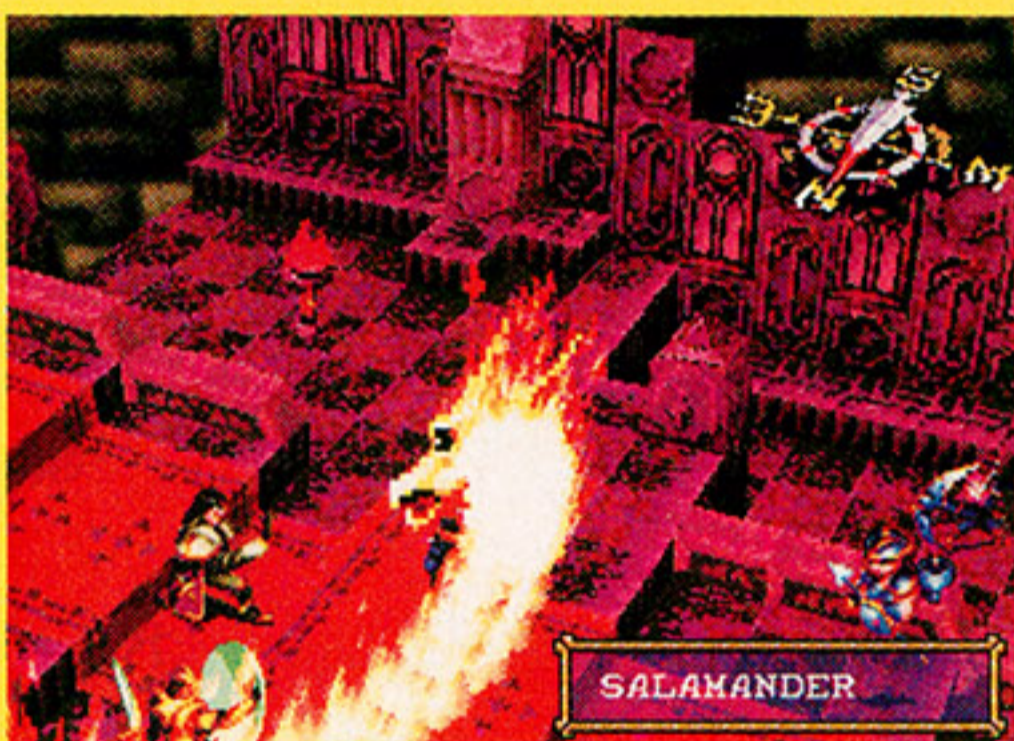
10 Years Ago...

GAME OVER



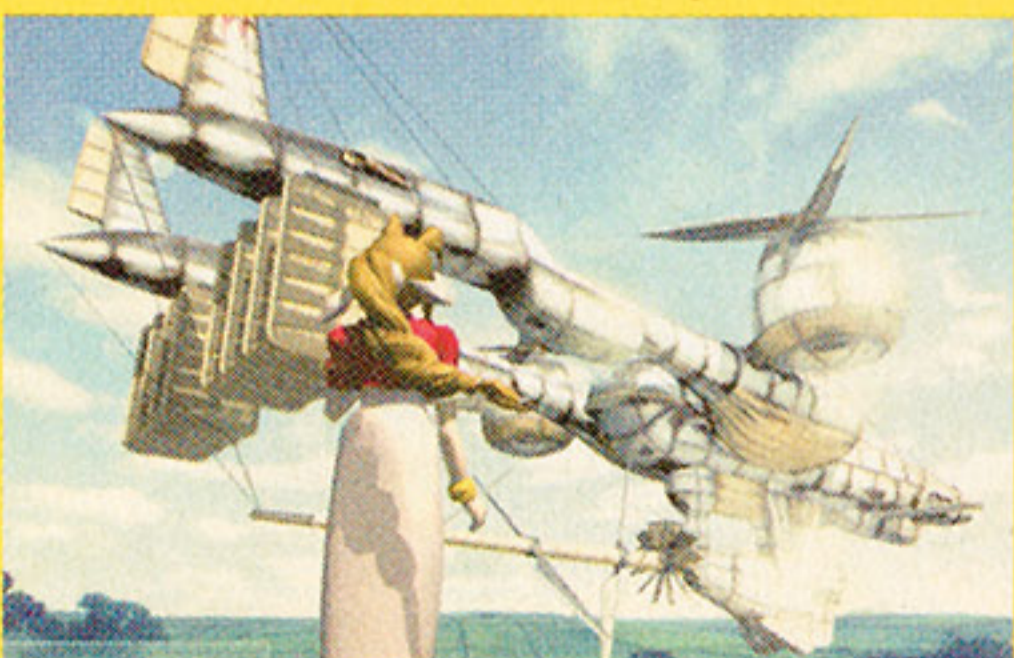
On the cover: The Lost World: Jurassic Park (PS1)

A cover millions of years in the making, for a game that only takes seconds to realize it sucks. Sure, the flick is good, but this dino game should've remained extinct. We also found out *Mortal Kombat 4* was ditching the series' trademark humor to focus instead on laughably bad 3D combat.



Game of the month: Vandal Hearts (PS1)

Though it was deemed "too short" (15 hours), this strategy role-playing game made an impact on the crew, ousting *MechWarrior 2* (PS1/Saturn). On the preview end, we showcased the big hitters for the N64: *Zelda* and *Starfox*. Early screens tickled the palate but left us wanting more. Why must waiting involve so much...uh, waiting?



Import: Final Fantasy VII (PS1)

After hearing nice things about *Final Fantasy VII*, we decided to import a Japanese copy to find out what all the fuss was about. So what did we learn? Apparently it's a good role-playing game or something....



+ RETRO

The Elder Scrolls

Scrolling the pages of an aging series

By Jeremy Parish

While *The Elder Scrolls* is still a fledgling in the console world, it's no stranger to the portable format thanks to a series of cell-phone spin-offs called *Travels*. Weirdly enough, the spin-off appeared on the notoriously terrible N-Gage.

OBLIVION'S UPCOMING ARRIVAL ON THE PLAYSTATION 3 marks the first time that Bethesda's blockbuster *The Elder Scrolls* series has appeared on a Sony system. The PlayStation family has always been the console of choice for role-playing fans, but the emphasis has always been on games of Japanese origin. You *Final Fantasy* nuts are bound to feel a little lost the first time you play *Oblivion*, so we've put together this handy primer as you travel to a land no pretty boy has gone before.

Arena (PC, 1994)

Although you wouldn't have known it by looking at the horrible, heavy-metal-album box art, *Arena* was the beginning of a beautiful friendship

between a big-ass world and a few million gamers. It also introduced Uriel Septim VII, the beleaguered emperor of the land of Tamriel with a habit of needing the player's aid. *Arena* found him imprisoned and replaced by his battlemage, Jagar Tharn. To rescue him, players had to hack-n-slash through an entire randomly generated kingdom packed with monsters. In short? The quintessential role-playing game.

Daggerfall (PC, 1996)

Daggerfall might actually be the biggest game ever created in terms of the actual explorable area relative to the player's character. Sounds awesome, right? Well, not entirely—as in *Arena*, much of the enormity of



■ You won't find world-saving kids in *The Elder Scrolls*. But tacky looking skeletons? A whole closet full of 'em.



> ELDER SCREENS

Here's a peek at what *The Elder Scrolls* series looked like before all them fancy Blu-rays and Cell processors.



Arena is infamous for its totally bitchin' box art. Rock on, barbarian!



Daggerfall is a hardcore game—seriously! It features nude characters.



Unlike the first two games, *Morrowind* doesn't look quite as dated.

the second *Elder Scrolls* game was arrived at by what is scientifically known as “fudging it.” That is to say, it was padded out with lots of randomly generated territory.

The story, however, was not as grandiose—you are sent to the city of Daggerfall, by request of the Emperor, to perform a couple of tasks: 1) free the ghost of King Lysandus (yawn), and 2) recover a letter that reveals the location of a special item that resurrects the giant golem, Numidium (yikes!). What the tale lacked in complexity it made up for in choices—the game offered six different endings. Since each one messed with the overall story time line, the sequel, *Morrowind*, combined all the endings together via a

convenient continuity-saving event called a “Dragon Break.” Cheaters!

Morrowind (PC/Xbox, 2002)

Morrowind slimmed down the explorable area to a tiny fraction of its predecessors, instead focusing on crazy innovations like “variety” and “design.” And text—the game is famous for the sheer amount of dialogue and literature it contains. This gave rise to the advent of loremasters, crazed fanboys who happen to

take the series' mythology very, very seriously.

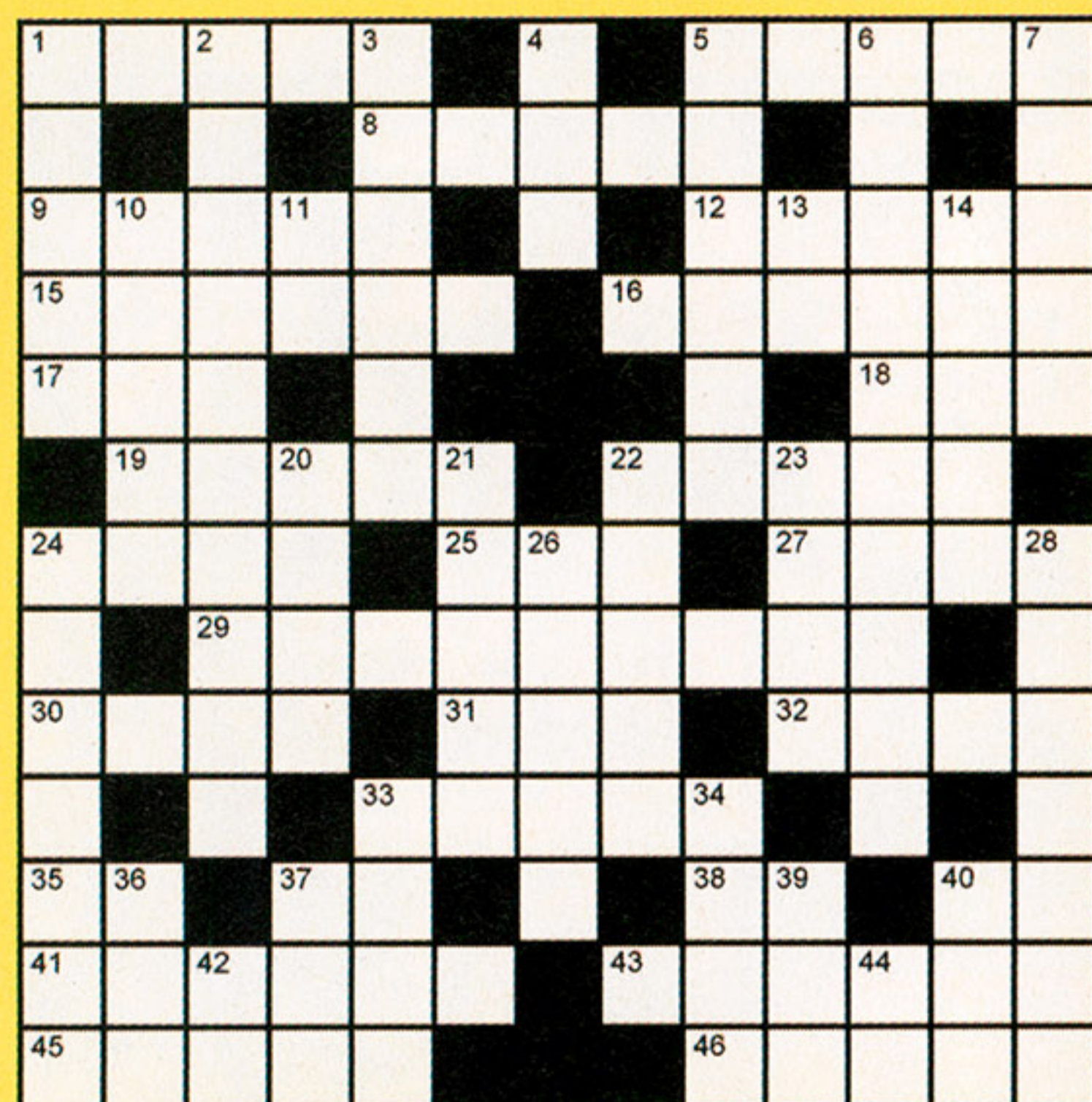
On the other hand, *Morrowind* expanded on its predecessors' unique character-building system, which eschewed common leveling-up systems in favor of skill-building and specialization. Canny character development allowed players to approach their adventure in completely different ways—something plenty of games always promise to include but rarely ever deliver. 🐉

Every *Elder Scrolls* so far has taken place on Tamriel. Its population comprises numerous demihuman races such as the Dunmer (dark elves), the Khajiit (cat people), and the Orcs. And the one race that rules over them all? It's us, the humans. Man, we're such bastards.

➤ The enormity of the second *Elder Scrolls* game was arrived at by what is scientifically known as “fudging it.”

➔ CROSSWORD

Ratchet Tools



ACROSS

- 1. _ Loaded (NES)
- 5. Found at the end of a power cable?
- 8. Mega Man's quasi-clone _ Man
- 9. Publisher Agetec's former name
- 12. Spider-Man perceptive skill
- 15. *Rune*: _ Warlord (PS2)
- 16. Fox McCloud has one down his forehead
- 17. *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* beastie
- 18. Emerge victorious
- 19. Nice shot in *Tiger Woods PGA Tour*
- 22. *Command & Conquer: Red* _ (PS1)
- 24. *Enter the Matrix* voice actress Carrie- _ Moss
- 25. Game spots on TV
- 27. *Legend of Dragoon* swamp-land Dragon's _
- 29. How *Resistance: Fall of Man*'s story is revealed
- 30. Dropped by birds in *Castlevania*
- 31. Possible *Punch-Out!!* (NES) victory
- 32. *James Bond Jr.* (NES) crime org.
- 33. Kick it wide in *Madden*?
- 35. *Ace Combat* or *Armored Core*, for short
- 37. *Madden NFL 07 Bears'* state, for short
- 38. *Mission* _ (C64)
- 40. *Metal Gear Solid 2* whiz kid's nickname
- 41. *Ratchet & Clank* weapon
- 43. *Fable* fictional beings
- 45. Like *Twilight Princess* Link's Epona
- 46. The "T" in *GTA*

DOWN

- 1. *SOCOM* squad
- 2. *Ratchet & Clank* weapon
- 3. *Resident Evil 4* valuable gem
- 4. *Ratchet & Clank* weapon tweak
- 5. PC shooter with third installment coming to Xbox 360
- 6. *Ratchet & Clank* weapon
- 7. Color worn by character in 14 DOWN
- 10. Spooky PS2 horror title
- 13. Agetec early PS2 RPG, for short
- 14. Attacks like *Mortal Kombat II*'s Reptile?
- 20. *Metal* or *Guilty*
- 21. What you're trying to save, according to PS2 *Godzilla*'s title
- 22. PS2 *Bond* car _ Martin
- 23. *Dukes of Hazzard* (PS2) deputy
- 24. Townies in GameCube's *Crossing*
- 26. *Paris- _ Rally* (PS2)
- 28. *Ratchet & Clank* weapon
- 33. Arcade's *Cyber* _
- 34. *Crash Nitro* _ (PS2)
- 36. Like Xbox's Blinx
- 37. NES hockey medium
- 39. *Simpsons: Hit and Run* Homer-ism
- 40. *Gauntlet* staple character
- 42. Home to *Madden*'s Patriots (abbrv).
- 44. *Test Drive: _ Mans* (PS2)

(Solution on page 105)

➔ GRUDGE MATCH

Groovy Ghoulies

Is the pen mightier than the flame?

Amazing—only a couple little letters separate a movie-inspired game about a flaming-skulled biker from a kids' show about sleuthing from beyond the grave....

Ghost Rider VS. Ghost Writer



Premise

Stunt rider sells soul, transforms into superfreak
Advantage: Rider



Kids solve mysteries with help from pedophilic spook



Arsenal

Typical beat-em-up moves and a hell-spawned chopper



Teamwork, communicative props, and ethnic diversity!
Advantage: Writer



Star Power

Voices of Cage and Mendes are MIA



Samuel L. Jackson did a couple episodes...
Advantage: Writer



Grease meets Spawn
Advantage: Rider



In Living Color meets The Bloodhound Gang



Ultimate Pitfall

It's on last-gen consoles, so does anyone even care?

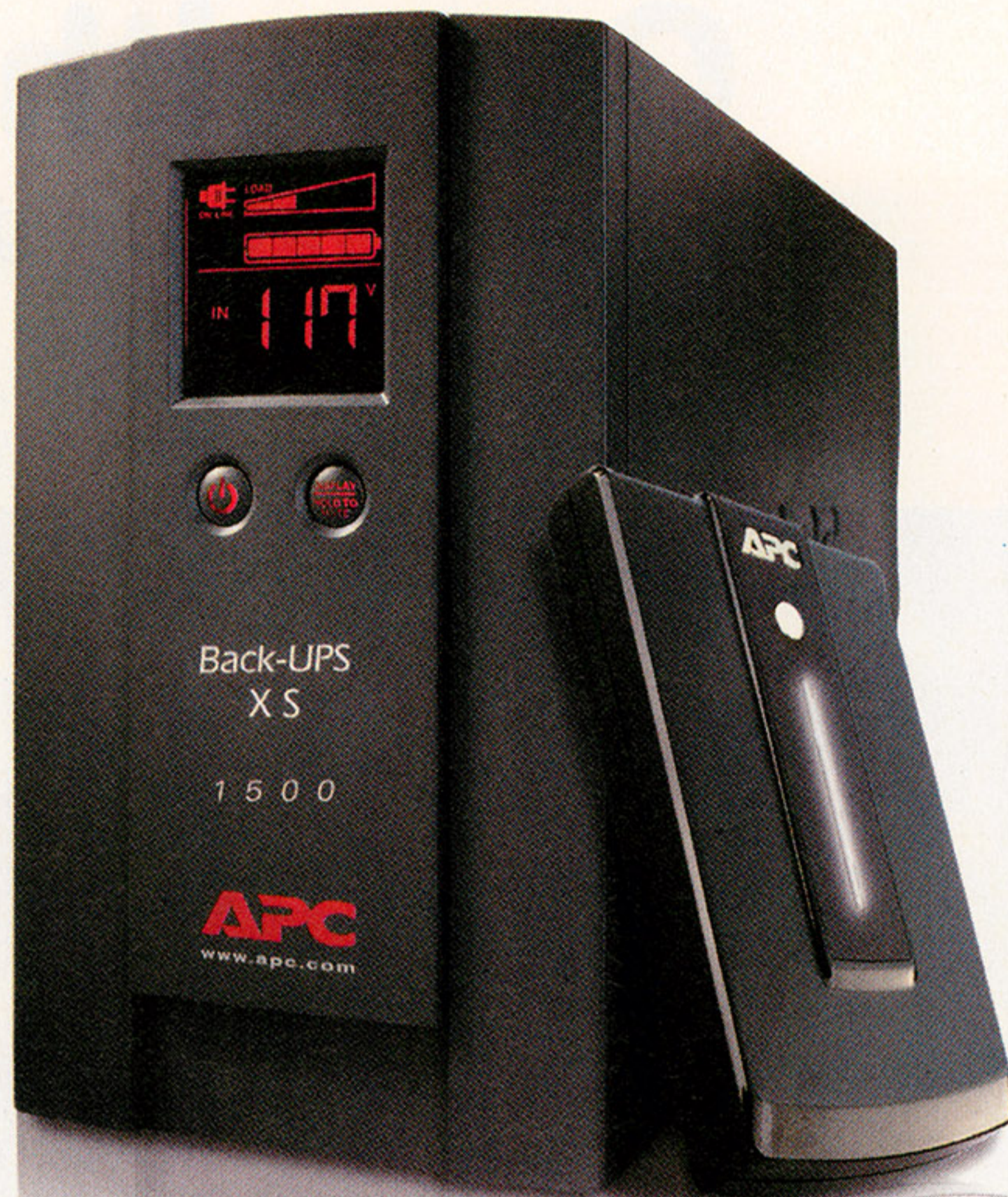


Like most PBS shows, they ran out of money
Advantage: Writer

Winner: Ghost Writer

Oh, sorry *Ghost Rider*. Your loss was made possible by public television and the support of gamers like us.

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just in time to save your gear from imminent destruction. You should also check out the UPB10, for those times when you're away from home and need to recharge and add runtime to get you through the game.

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- 2x more playtime and up to 55 hours runtime* on iPod Nano.



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Out with the old

Saying farewell to the last generation of consoles

Next gen is now current gen, making the previous gen last gen...right? Oh, the PlayStation 2's still got it going on, but really, it's time we moved on. Goodbye, GameCube, Xbox, and soon, PS2—you all played a good game.



■ Michael Donahoe, News/Features Editor



■ Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

Which “last generation” console had the best first-party games: PlayStation 2, Xbox, or GameCube?

GameCube: Come on, you'd have to be a gaming goof not to choose the “NintenCube.” While the third-party support was—wait, what am I saying? It had no frickin' third-party support! But hell, it didn't really need it—games like *Animal Crossing*, *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*, and *Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance* were more than enough to keep any sane gamer satisfied.

PlayStation 2: Going for the obvious answer, huh, Donahoe? Fact is, for first-party games, the Cube was Nintendo's weakest system, with many franchises having strong but not classic showings. Sony really stepped it up, though. *Ratchet*, *Jak*, and *Sly* made me forget debacles like PS1's *Blasto*, *God of War* is the gen's best action game, and some feel *Ico* is Smithsonian-bound.

Who had the best third-party games?

PlayStation 2: Though I absolutely adore *Oddworld Stranger's Wrath* (my most underrated game of last gen) and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* on the Xbox, I have to go with the PS2's lavish library. I have no choice, really: The PS2 is the prominent system for Japanese role-playing games. But Greg wouldn't understand this—he only plays American games. Racist.

Xbox: (Do not dignify with response. Do not dignify with response....) So, did you skip the whole “if a game is on all systems, get the Xbox version” trend? Pretty much any multiplatform release was superior on the black-and-green behemoth, both graphically and online. And you forgot the spate of made-in-Japan Sega exclusives (*Jet Set Radio Future*, *Otogi*) that buoyed the fledgling box.

Lamer exit: Xbox or GameCube?

Xbox: Though your first instinct may be to choose the GameCube, it's easy to forget that *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* gracefully put the Cube into its official console grave. As for the Xbox? The system went down the s****er as soon as the 360 ushered in the next generation of costly consoles. But at least you can play all your old favorites on your 360—oh, wait, you can't. Ha, my bad!

Bzzt!: This is not a valid either/or question. The way both systems whimpered into the sunset has brought shame onto the decisionmakers—and any kids they'll be lucky to produce, given the blanks they're shooting. The fact that Nintendo tried to bury the release of the GameCube's *Twilight Princess* to shill more Wiis is a disgrace to tights-wearing fans everywhere—led by Michael.

One problem you're glad has been fixed this generation:

Turning on consoles: Sure, you guys may praise the pretty polygons and wacky motion-sensing technology our current generation consoles tout, but only one new addition has truly impressed me: the ability to turn on my consoles without moving my lazy ass off my bed. After this kind of luxury, I really can't imagine going back to pushing a button—man, that is soooo 1985.

Tangled: I, too, love the remote switch-flipping: Just install a crapper in my bed, and I'm good for two days minimum. But what really makes this all possible is the death of wires. All three of the new systems have fully embraced wireless technology, and I couldn't be happier. Anger-induced controller chucks, however, just got a lot more dangerous. Hello, next-gen lawsuits! 🎮

2027: It's Coming

May Issue (#215) • On sale April 10

THE FUTURE OF VIDEOGAMES

TAKING A RIDE WITH THE TIME TURNER

Yawn...we seem to be bored with 2007 already; where are the flying cars and male-dominating fembots? Better yet, where are the videogames you play with your mind in an interactive parallel universe? While we're waiting for that sci-fi stuff, we spend next month predicting a more realistic future—the next 20 years of gaming. In this future-themed issue, we talk to developers, futurists, sci-fi writers, comedians, and evil laboratory monkeys to put together a picture of how games, consoles, controls, displays, online gaming, and even game players themselves will evolve over the next two decades. Perhaps gamers will evolve and spawn a third eye for those damn 4D *Pokémon* games...or a third leg for *DDR 22*. Or not.

If this month's Wii feature isn't enough to get you all hot and heavy, then next issue's selection of upcoming titles should do the trick. Some of these games are so secret that we're forbidden to drop hints for fear of PR ninjas (yes, they exist) dropping into the office to test the limits of the human spinal chord. But we can tell you this so far: Expect hands-on reports of both *Burnout 5* and the 360's exclusive ride, *Forza Motorsport 2*.

The long-awaited sequel to *God of War* has officially landed on store shelves, and, like naked ladies and threesomes, you really can never get enough. So, we seek out the team responsible for all the blood and carnage in *God of War II* to answer a few questions for our colossus-sized Afterthoughts. All this and more in 30....

(All planned editorial content is subject to change.)

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> PREVIEWS



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- Star Wars: The Force Unleashed (PS3/XB360)
- Transformers (Wii/PS3/XB360)
- WWE SmackDown! 2008 (Multi)

> REVIEWS



- **Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 (XB360)**
- MLB: The Show (PS3)
- Cooking Mama: Cook Off (Wii)
- Earth Defense Force X (XB360)

> CROSSWORD SOLUTION

Answers to Ratchet Tools on page 102

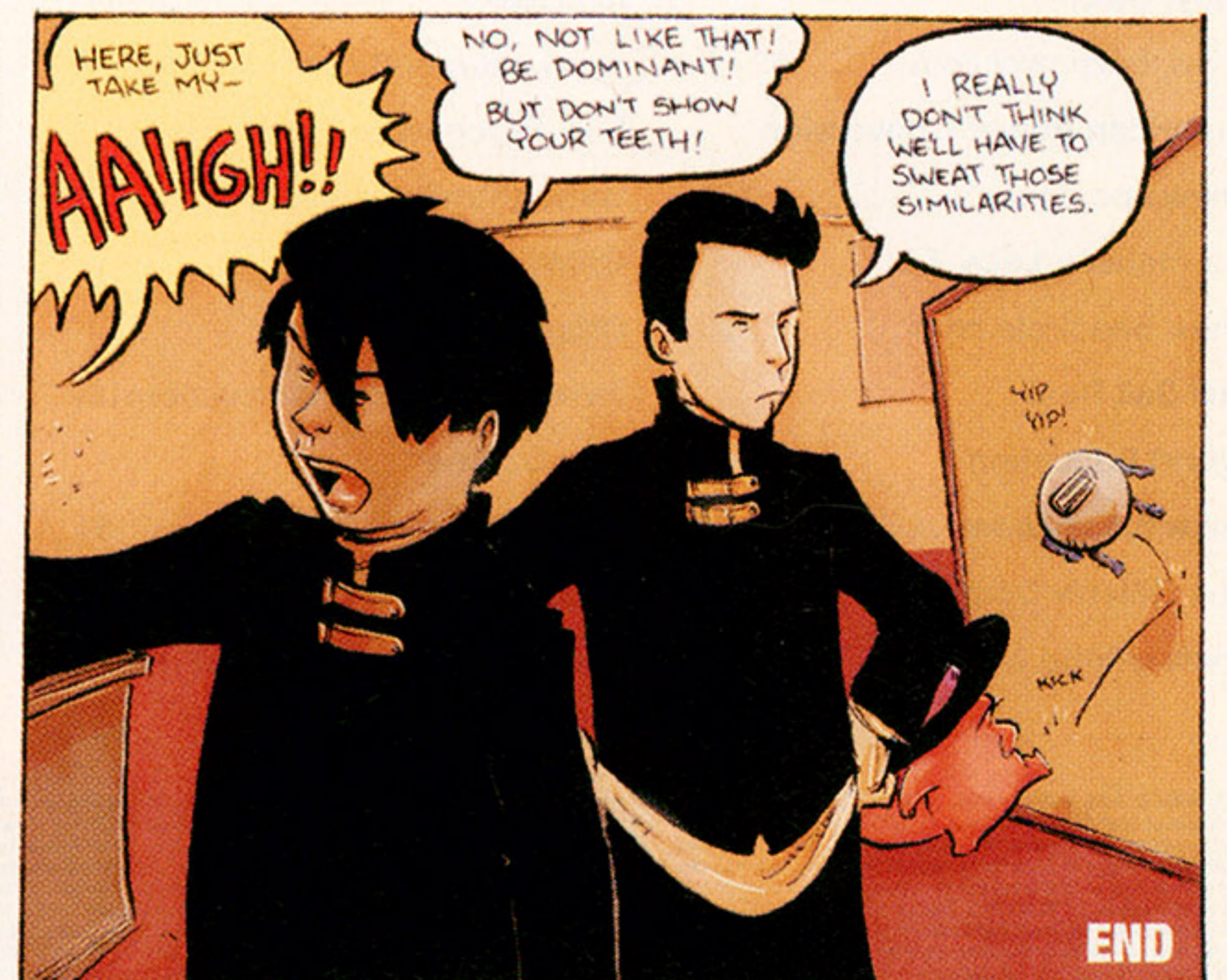
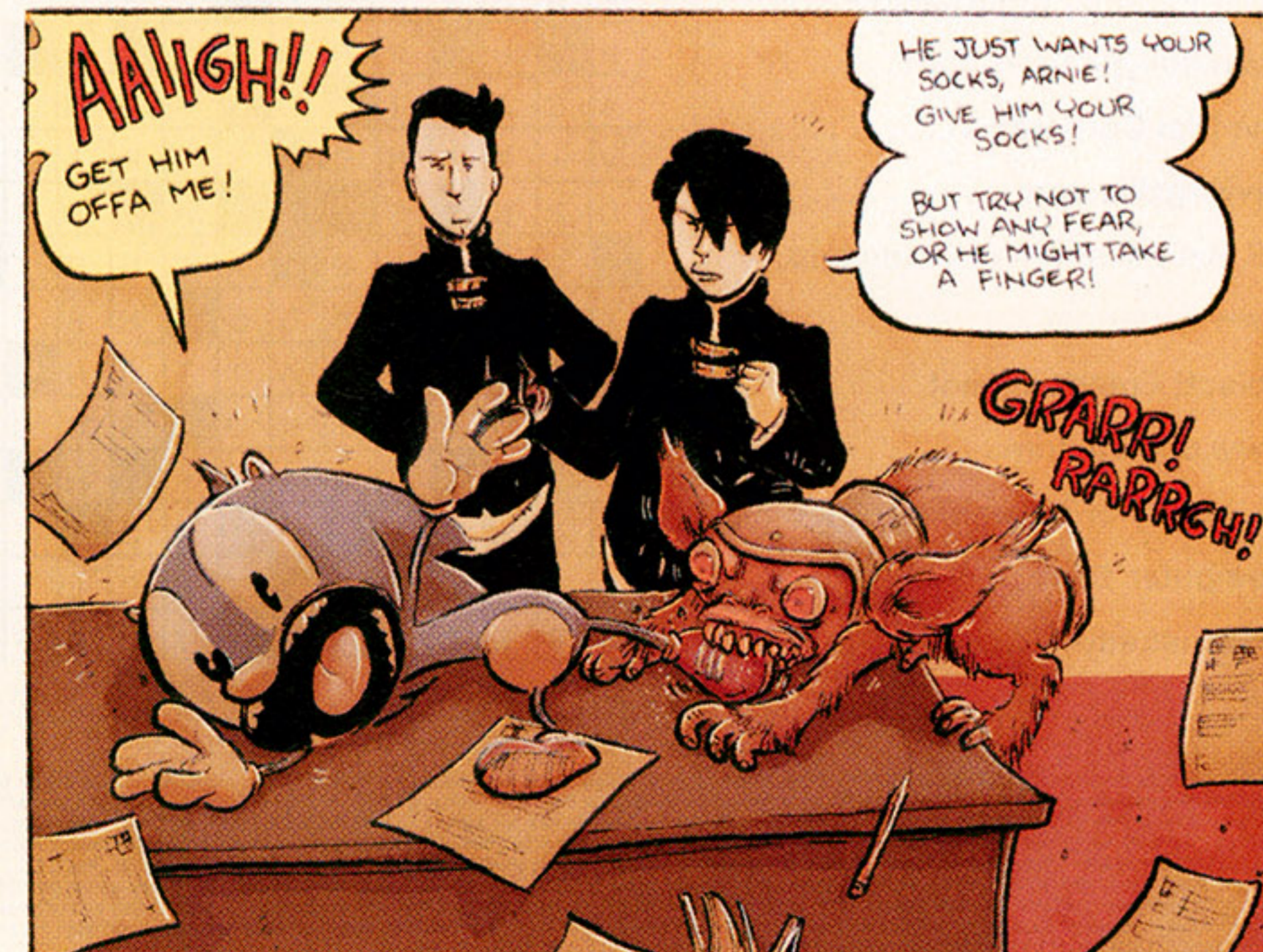
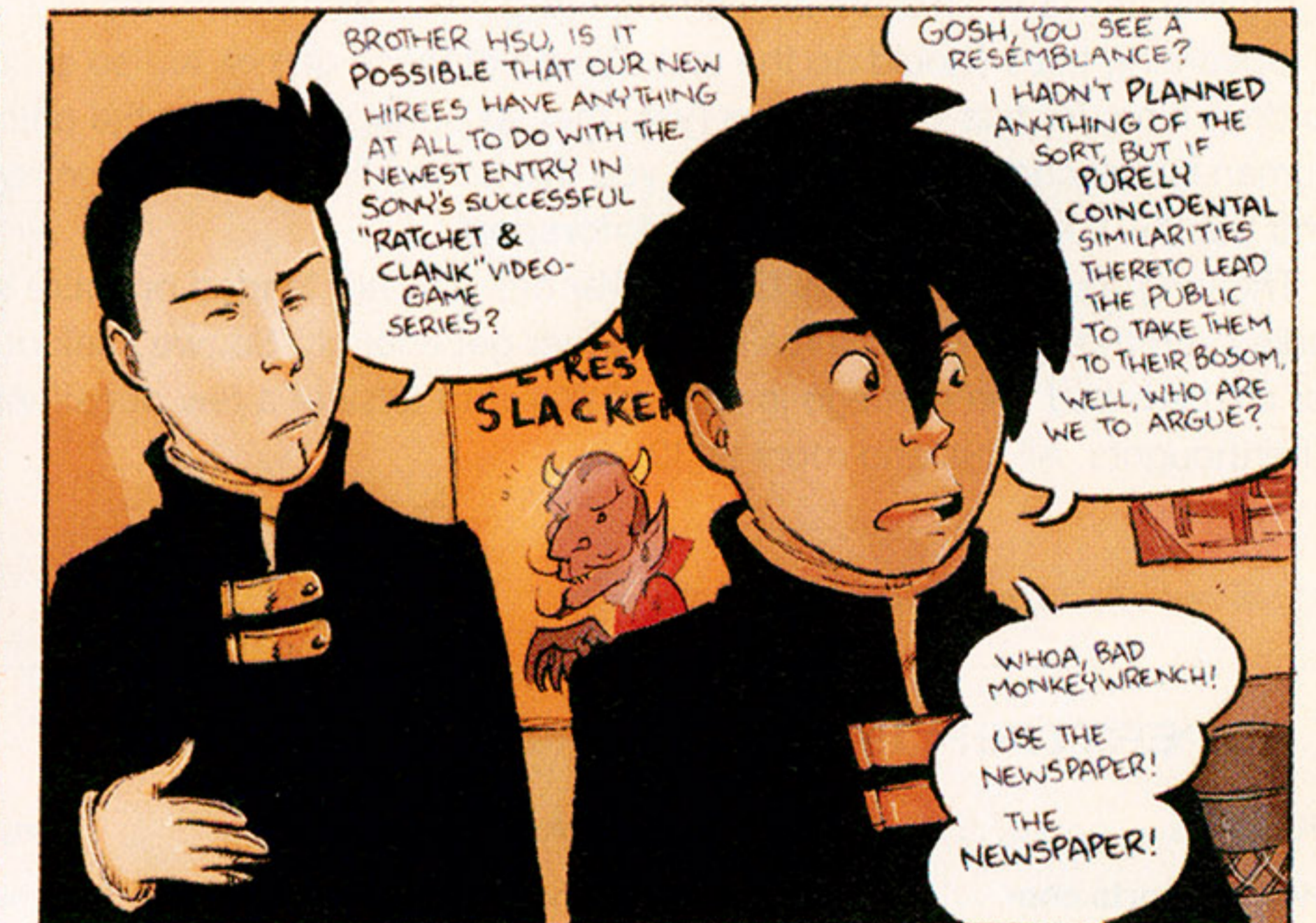
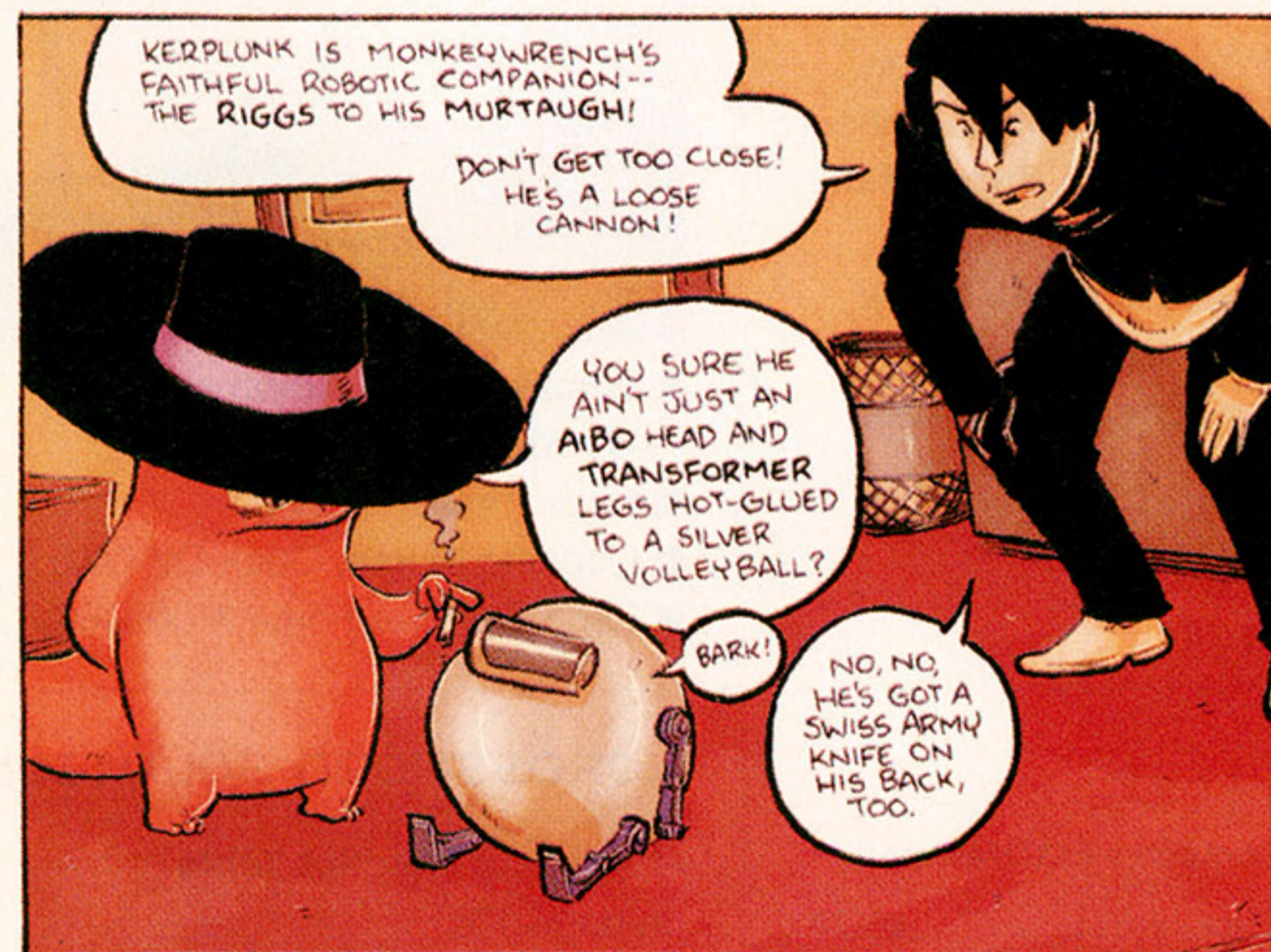
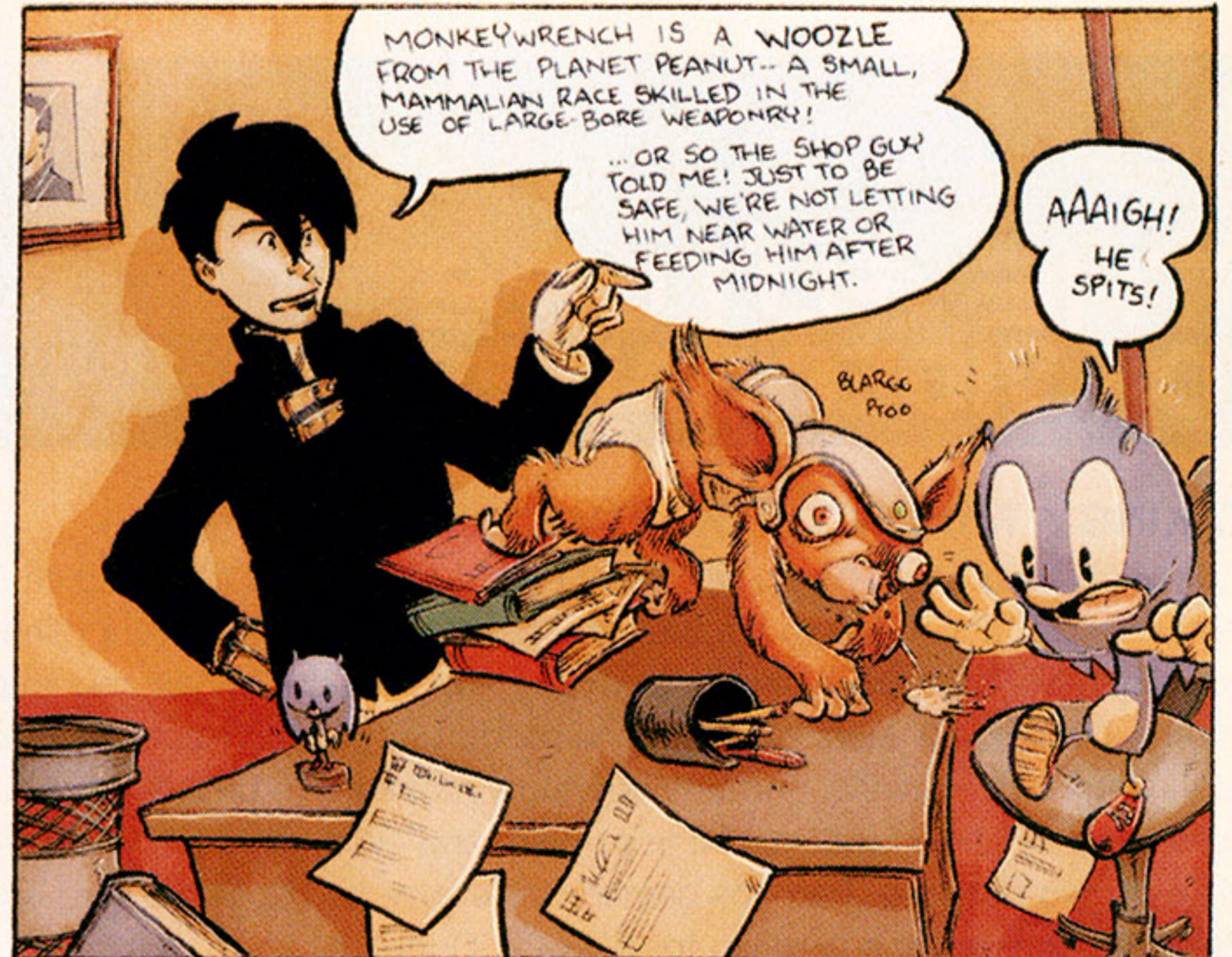
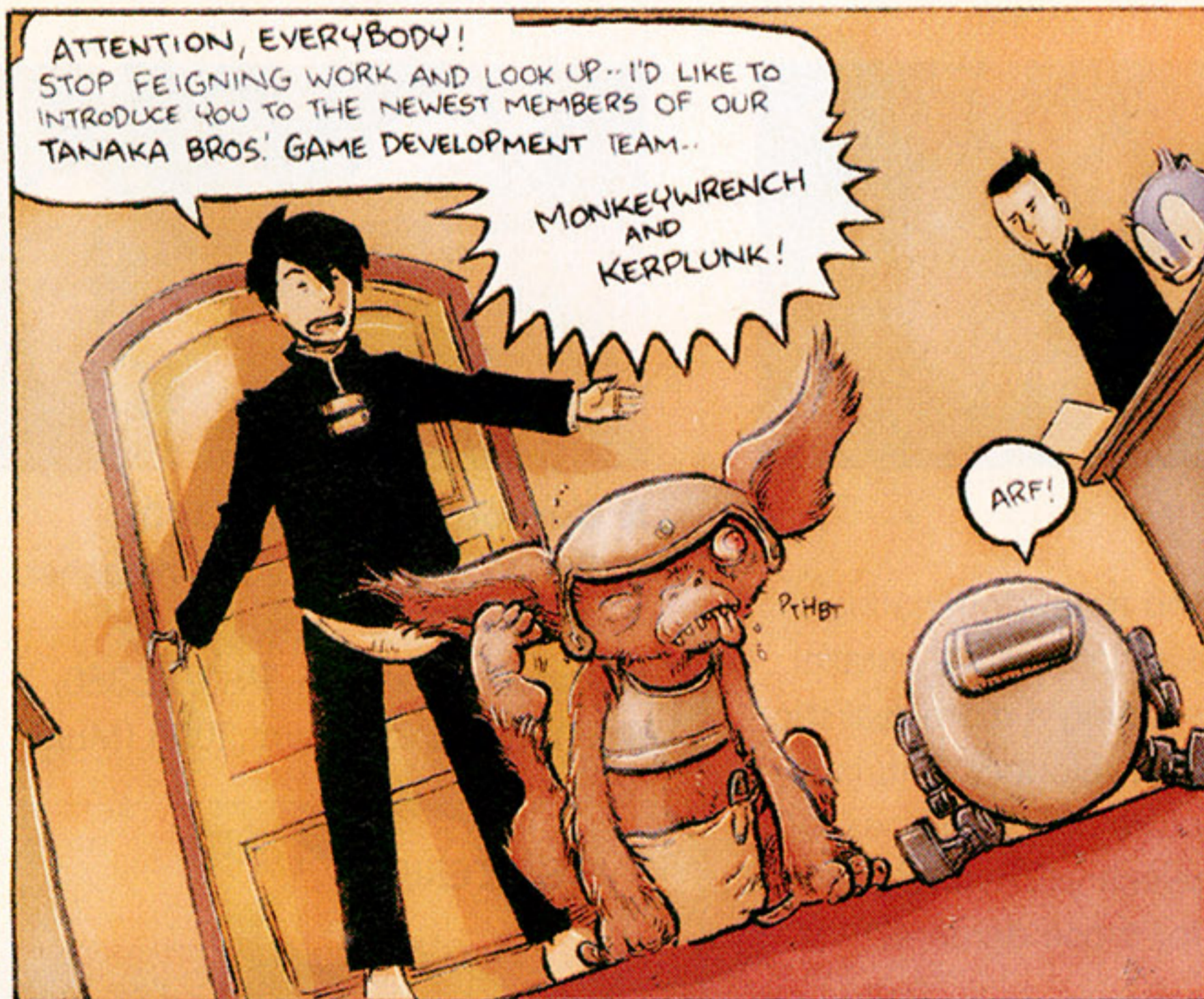
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7	24	A	N	N	E	A	D	S	N	E	S
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9	30	I	G	O	R	T	K	O	S	C	U
10	30	M	N	S	H	A	N	K	H	P	
11	35	A	C	I	L	R	A	D	E	E	
12	41	L	A	N	C	E	R	T	R	O	L
13	45	S	T	E	E	D	T	H	E	F	T

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† HSU & CHAN IN:

Wretched and Cracked

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott

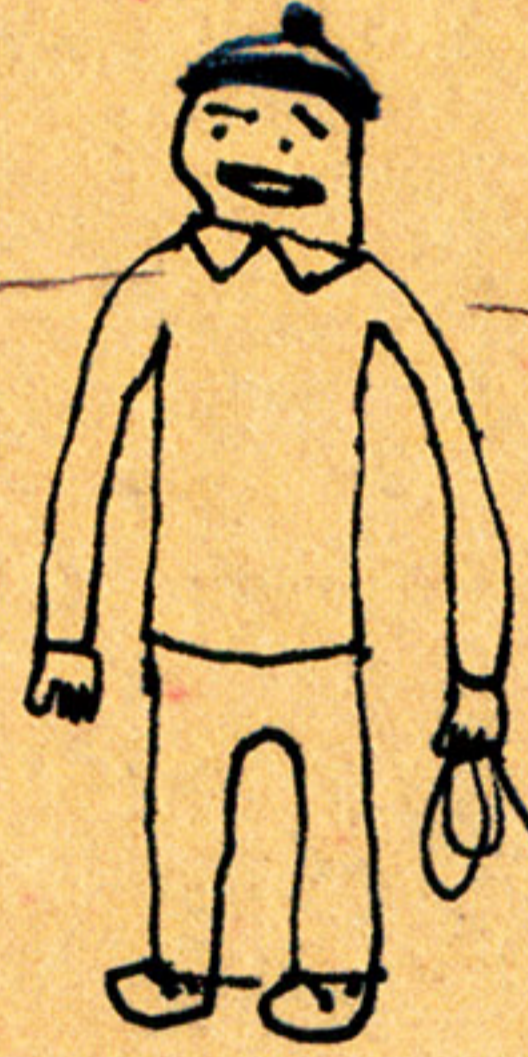




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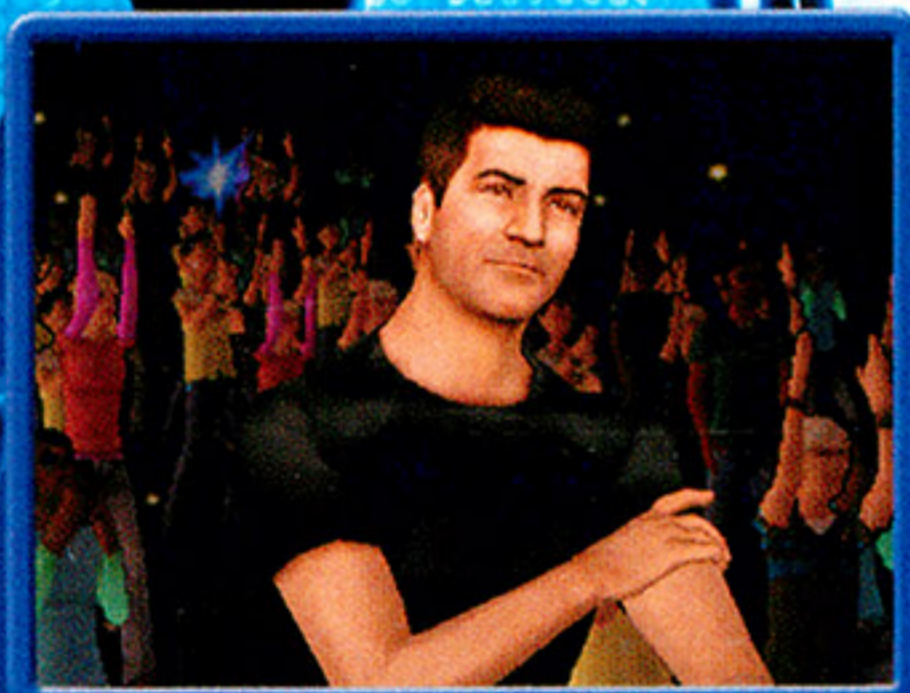
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