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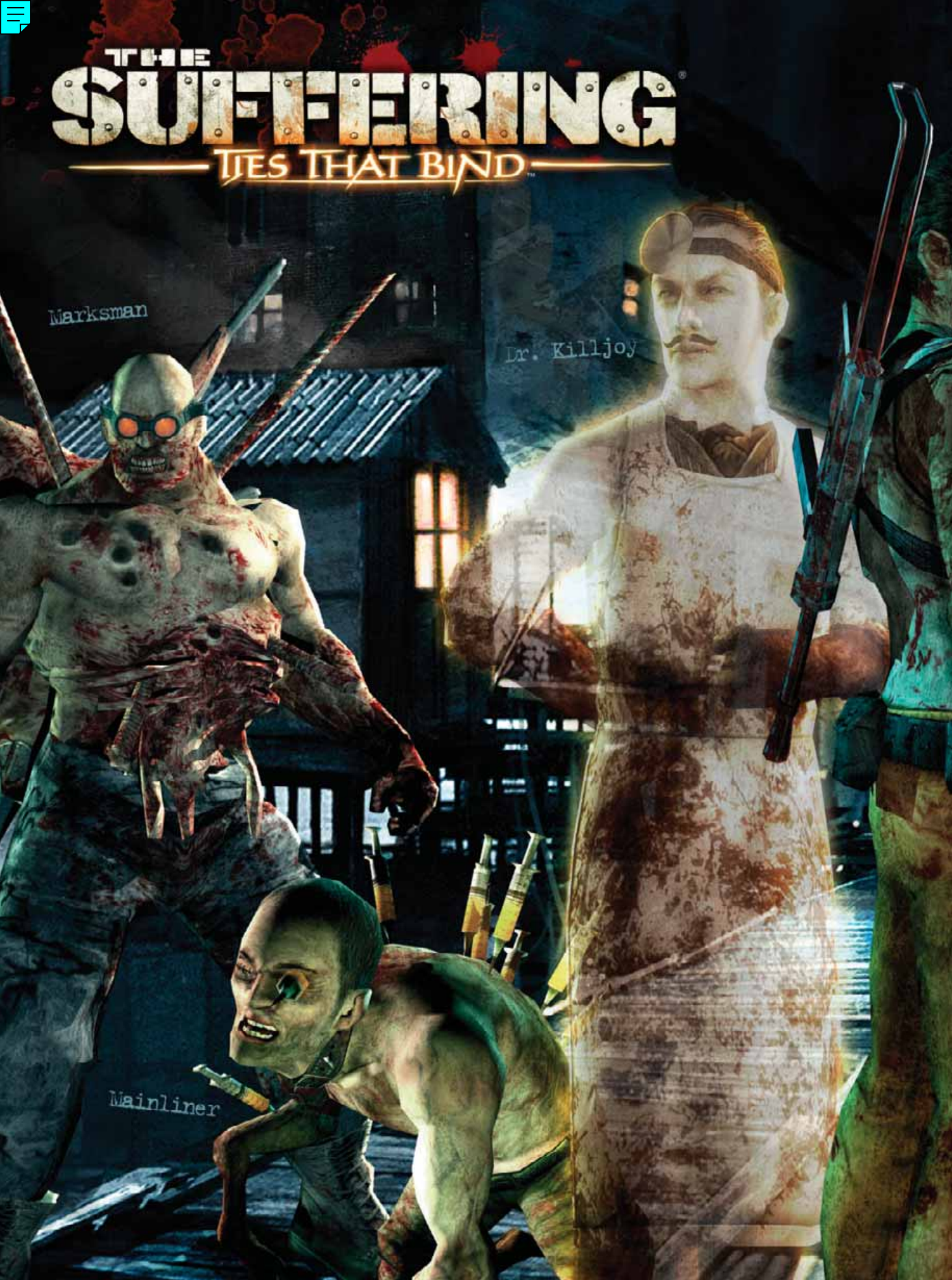
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Dwyane Wade: Miami Heat / HIGHFLYER

(Freestyle Superstar No. 4) Cutaway



- 1 Internal shoulder protector
- 2 Exterior chest hatch



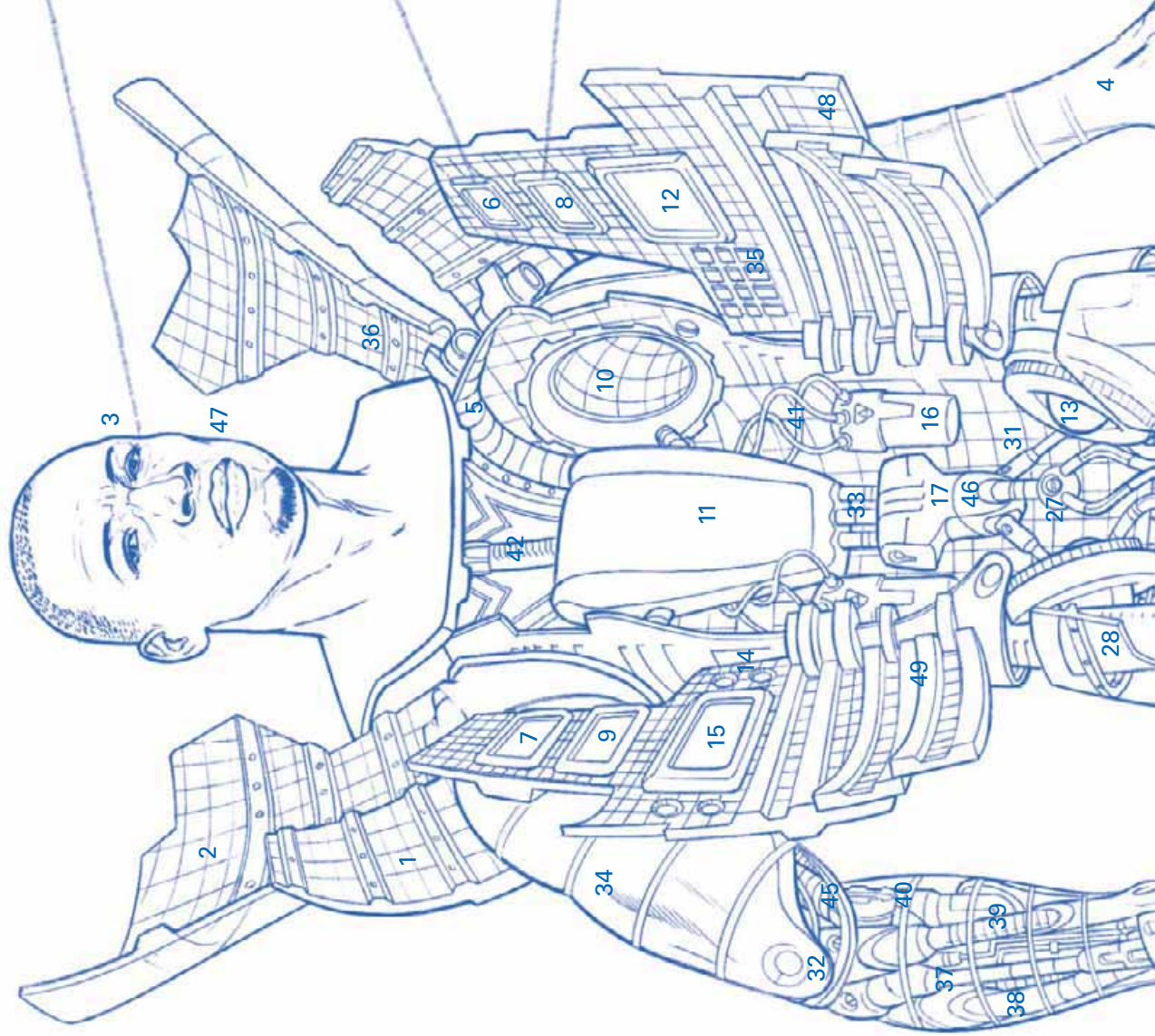
- 3 Full-court floor vision display
- 4 Silicone-based breathable skin
- 5 Internal shoulder padding

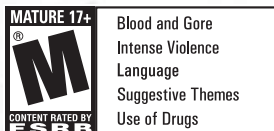
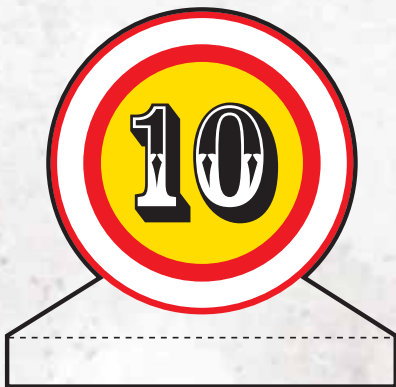
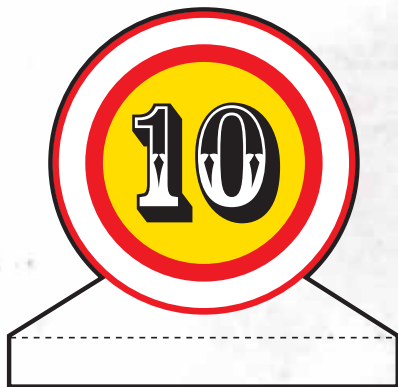


- 6 Monster-jam playback screen
- 7 Front court radar display



- 8 Shotblock advanced targeting system
- 9 Rear court radar display
- 10 Anatomic auto-adjusting arm sleeve
- 11 Upper ergonomic backrest
- 12 SCORER high-accuracy repeater
- 13 PLAYMAKER 360° quick-spin hip joint
- 14 Quick-eject release toggle
- 15 SHOOTER 3-point targeting computer
- 16 Aerobic/anaerobic oxygen respirator
- 17 Lower ergonomic backrest
- 18 Hydraulic thigh musculature
- 19 Titanium femur
- 20 Pilot's foot hold
- 21 Knee cover
- 22 Breathable mesh outer layer
- 23 Ankle cover
- 24 HIGHFLYER achilles jump mechanism
- 25 Quick-jump neuro-muscle response unit
- 26 Anatomic leg holds
- 27 Leg hydraulics processor
- 28 Reinforced screen protective plate





PlayStation 2



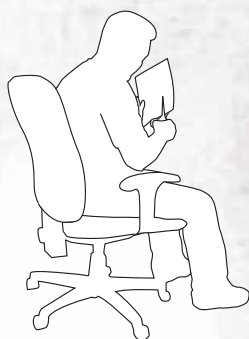
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HOW TO SURVIVE IN MEXICO'S
DRUG-UNDERWORLD

LOCO MOVE #1:

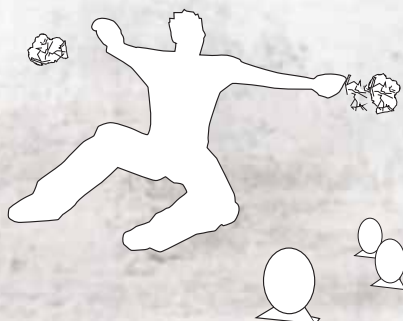
TORNADO SPIN

STEP 1:



Cut out targets on opposite page.
Fold along the dotted lines.
Arrange at various distances in a
circle surrounding yourself.

STEP 2:



Crumple other game ads into small
wads to build up your ammo supply.
Jump and spin 360° while trying to
hit as many targets as you can.

STEP 3:



Tally points and reward yourself
with a shot of tequila (if you're
of legal drinking age, of course).
If you are in a group, the lowest
score buys more tequila. If you
are alone, make friends.



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issue 196 • october 2005

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COVER STORY: FINAL FANTASY VII

Eight years after *Final Fantasy VII* rocked the role-playing world, Square Enix delivers four new titles that carry on its hallowed heritage. Plus, *EGM* offers a look at the creation of the PS1 classic and a glimpse into future of the franchise...



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Microsoft and Sony unveil new
games and new battle plans

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EDITORIAL

Grand Theft Auto is to videogames what Madonna is to pop music—always up to something that, like it or not, is going to make headlines.

But even when

Madonna's Frenching Britney on MTV, droning on about her latest spiritual awakening, or just doing a bad British accent, she's still OK in society's book. She's an artist, right? She's supposed to be shocking and controversial. The same goes for other creative people: actors, directors, writers...they're just "like that."

Videogame makers don't get that kind of pass. We may never know Rockstar's true motives for releasing *San Andreas* with unrated sexual content on the disk, but it really shouldn't matter. Making games is a creative process—stuff gets cut, tweaked, and changed all the way to the end. The ratings process must adapt to changing technology, and that's exactly what happened in this case.

But using this latest scandal as another launchpad into vilifying videogames and those who make them? I'm tired of it. Maybe it's because games are still rather exclusive; it's legitimately difficult for someone who wasn't raised playing games to understand their true impact on our emotions, our values, our choices, our lives.... Games are tough, time-consuming, and often pretty technical. Of course, a lot of people don't have experience playing them. It follows, then, that they wouldn't truly understand how games resemble other forms of entertainment. Once you do give games a chance, their artful nature—even *GTA's*—becomes undeniable. Game-makers aren't villains; they're artists. They're unpredictable. They might speak ugly truths. They've got unusual, at times even deviant, perspectives on our world. That's why they're making games and not working as teachers, cops, or brain surgeons. Values watchdogs already understand we have to watch, read, and listen responsibly. Someday, they'll understand we have to play responsibly, too. While we wait for that to happen, have a closer look at the scandal that started it all on page 68.

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NEED FOR SPEED
MOST WANTED





Letters

simulated sex, imagined drugs, and corporate paranoia



■ What do these three machines have in common? IBM processors.

Really, really Big Blue

After reading "Deciphering the Technobabble" [EGM #194], it's clear that the only real winner in the console war is IBM. It is amazing to me that each company has separately decided to rely on IBM's chips. And it's even more amazing to see the difference in construction between these chips. If I were smart, I'd be buying stock in IBM right now.

—Lou Youngstrom

Avatars in love

I met my boyfriend while playing *Phantasy Star Online* on the Dreamcast. We ended up in a room together [along] with his clan. He was a low-level character, and I kept saving his butt. I gave him my phone number, and soon we were talking and e-mailing every day. Two months after meeting him I flew to the States (from Canada) and



■ Raz explored EGM's hive mind and found love for bright colors and kid-friendly themes.

never went back. We've been together four years and have two children together.

—Andi Walke

We're glad to see the state of human-android relations on the up and up. Congrats on your new clan.

Debunking gamer stereotypes that don't exist

I'm put off by the stereotypes we gamers receive. People who do not game often seem to see themselves as above us. I don't think our industry helps with the image game advertisements present. Has anyone noticed the TV ad for *Destroy All Humans!* ends in a gag about having a love affair? How do you think that makes the public perceive gamers?

—Zachary Glatt

There's no hiding the lecherous swinger lifestyle of the modern gamer. When he's not indoors leveling up, he's out on the town getting down...with your wife.

Stealthy ads

Game companies are coming up with much craftier methods of advertising their products these days. I was reading your "From Combat to Console" article [EGM #195] and was amazed

that there was so much written about a

LETTER OF THE MONTH

The other console war

In your overview of the PS3 [EGM #194] you ask what's up with the Spider-Man font emblazoned on the PS3. Sony, responsible for the *Spider-Man* movies, is cross-marketing its products. Be afraid.

There is another war brewing outside the console arms race, a battle between HD-DVD (high-definition DVD) and Sony's Blu-ray (the format for PS3 games). Both HD-DVD and Blu-ray produce a high-definition picture for HDTVs, but Blu-ray has far more storage space.

Sony is trying to corner consumers and limit their options (like EA did with *Madden*). Look forward to buying a PS3 or a Blu-ray player to watch certain movies, *Spider-Man* for instance. And if the other studios don't support Blu-ray, you may be forced to buy a separate HD-DVD player.

—Al Medina



Congrats, Al. Your pessimistic paranoia earns you a game on good old-fashioned DVD.

game I'd never heard about. That is, of course, until I got an issue of my other gaming magazine that had the very same article! I finally noticed the word "advertisement" discreetly printed on the top of the pages. They'll think of anything these days to get us to buy their games.

—Daniel Doo

Defending kiddie and cartoony

Stop trashing kids' games in your reviews. My 11-year-old daughter is autistic and happens to greatly enjoy the kid-themed and animated/cartoon-looking games. She doesn't like the violent, sporty, blood-spurting games like *GTA*, *Metroid Prime*, *Resident Evil*, etc. But if she sees a picture of something like *Spyro*, *Sly Cooper*, *Kingdom Hearts*, *Ratchet & Clank*, or *Psychonauts*, we end up owning the game.

As an after-school program director, I specifically look through her monthly EGM for games for the kids in my care—not mindless sports games, endless car chases, or boring shooting galleries of mobsters and aliens. These kids want fun

games that more than one person can play, games that aren't gross-out fests. Sorry guys, but *Mortal Kombat* and *Halo 2* are passed over in favor of *Lego Star Wars* and *Super Smash Bros.* To each his own...just stop trashing the kid-themed games.

—Jinjer McCurtain

Anyone ever teach you to say "please"? Doesn't matter—we think you wrote the wrong magazine. Who's trashing those titles? Almost all those "kids' games" you mentioned (except some of the later *Spyros*) have received awards and high review scores in EGM. In fact, the recent *Mortal Kombats* are the lowest-scoring of this bunch. Next time, read the reviews and check those scores before complaining about them. Please.

Thank you, Steve's parents

I come to you with a problem. My parents won't let me buy M-rated games (I'm underage). Despite the fact that I lack about half the awesome games out right now, my parents also continue to hinder my gaming further by taking away the ▶

POST OFFICE

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

What gets you through the summer gaming drought?

Kilik: Talking about games on these forums instead of actually playing them.

Maximosl: Knowing that even if there were a lot of games out, it wouldn't

matter. I'm as broke as your grandpa's back.

Sngltrak: Suntan lotion and my PSP on extra-bright mode.

Yingvsyang: Thinking about how much money I'm saving on games.

Ragnarok 32: Catching up on the games I've yet to beat.

Truly101: Doing anything to stay out of the hot southern sun. It's 100-plus degrees in North Carolina today.

MyDingling: "Hot Coffee" with Mr. Thompson [the anti-videogame lawyer/activist, see pg. 68—Ed].

Crossbone: "Hot Coffee" ON Mr. Thompson.

ProdigyDude85: To me summer is all about being outdoors. You guys should try that once in a while.

MeatWad229: Playing through the *Zelda* franchise in aroused anticipation of this fall.

Budmanx: I like to play a little game called "real life."

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BONUS GALLERY

Going the extra mile for love of the game

Criminal Cube

I just figured out what to do with my GameCube's useless high-speed and modem ports: I can stash money, laser pointers, and various illegal substances in them.

—Jesus Calderon

See, not all the bad kids are playing *Grand Theft Auto*; they're all over the Nintendo GameCube, too.



► Internet connection to my PS2 and my PC. They don't understand online gaming. They think it'll expose me to "things unneeded for my development." Help! My 'rents suck!

—Steve Mucci

If only there were more parents out there like yours, Steve. Now be a good little tot and stay away from the big-people games.

The ravages of boredom

Assuming you have the weekend off, get up as early as possible on Friday morning. Do not sleep that day. When it gets dark, play a bright, flashy, colorful videogame all night. When the sun comes up, sleep for two hours. Then get up and go for a walk outside. You won't notice for a minute or two, but it will hit you real suddenlike: The whole world looks like a videogame. I have done this three times myself. My only real fear in telling the world about this is that Uncle Sam may make *Mario* a Schedule I drug.

—Steven Wellner

We've got an even better one: Spin around really fast for a whole minute. Stop. Enjoy.

Those numbers do stuff?

I came home from work just a couple of hours ago to find my house had been broken into. My GameCube, PlayStation 2, and DS had all been taken. The police couldn't really do anything about it. It turns out that all those numbers on the back of your systems serve a purpose. In my blissful ignorance I never bothered writing down the serial numbers of my systems. I didn't know until informed by the cops that if [the consoles are] sold to a pawnshop, the serial number is scanned and entered into a database to see if it matches any stolen property. I urge all gamers to learn from my mistake and write your serial numbers down.

—Eric Farmer

Fashion police

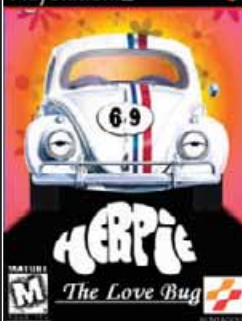
I'm tired of seeing so-called fans of videogames all wearing the same T-shirt bought at Target, JC Penney, Sears, or some thrift store. They all wear it around town thinking they're the biggest fan because they have a shirt. A few minutes later, another person walks by wearing the same shirt. Wearing those cheesy Target/Wal-Mart shirts makes you look like a poser and a cheap ass.

—Ducky

GAME DESIGN-O-RAMA

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

PlayStation 2



Herpie the Love Bug

Catch an incurable case of the giggles when *Herpie the Love Bug* rolls into your PS2 this fall. He's faster than a co-ed on spring break and itching for action. Drive the streets in search of a 24-hour pharmacy, where Herpie fills his prescription with sunglasses on, even in the dead of night.

—Lee Carlton

We find this pretty tasteless, but it beat out such inhumanly bad entries as *Bran Turismo* and *The Getawank*. Please readers, for the love of God, send us something good....

You're too cool for us. We just wear anything that doesn't have pit stains or smell like Rico's nacho cheese.... Where's that *Dead to Rights* windbreaker?

Damn Rockstar

The ESRB has been had by Rockstar Games. By hiding code [the Hot Coffee sex minigame, see pg. 68] in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* that can be unlocked with a downloadable hack, and failing to disclose this to the ESRB, Rockstar brought unwanted and unneeded attention to the board. While Rockstar states that the content in question was "edited" during finalization, the failure to remove the code could turn the industry upside down. Politicians and other watchdog groups already on the warpath over videogames now have even more ammo. Thanks, Rockstar! Thanks for taking us out of the pan and into the fire!

—Gregory M. Hall

Damn ESRB

Why can't the ESRB get it right? The ratings need to be on game boxes much more prominently, so that parents can no longer claim ignorance about the ratings system. I don't want to hear parents say things like, "My kids told me M stood for Mass Audience!" Obviously the type isn't large enough. Maybe this mock-up label I made is a little bit extreme, but it sure as hell gets the point across. Keep away from the kiddies.

—Robert Cicetti

Damn them both

I recently read that the infamous "Hot Coffee" mod for *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was revealed to be in the PS2 version of the game. This is after Rockstar blamed the PC issue on "hackers."

This makes me angry because I like the *GTA* games but I also like the ESRB. If game companies can't be respectful of the ratings system, how can the industry detractors place any faith in what the ESRB does? However, if Rockstar really had nothing to do with it: Thank God! On the flip side, if they did, shame on them.

—Ethan B.

Killer 7 plays in Peoria

In his review [EGM #194], Shane Bettenhausen expressed a belief that *Killer 7* wouldn't play in Peoria. Guess what, man? I live in Peoria! I found *Killer 7* to be an artistic masterpiece. True, it violates the golden rule, which is to put gameplay above all other considerations. Yet every

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rule has an exception, and this game is a prime example. *K7* is not really a game that has some great movielike story moments. Rather, it is a movielike story for which the "gameplay" merely serves to bind the chapters all together. I realize that opinions are neither right nor wrong...they are simply opinions. Yet in my personal opinion, you are truly oh-so-wrong regarding Capcom's latest masterpiece.

—Danny Ray

Shane responds: "Wow, it actually did play in Peoria. Well, at least in one style-conscious household. Frankly, I'm glad you could dig it, but I still contend that *Killer 7*'s fans are all too willing to

overlook its boring, repetitive gameplay because they're dazzled by the inventive story line and slick visuals. Artistic merit is admirable, but call me old fashioned for wanting good gameplay. Even though I didn't give the game an award-winning score, I still found it unique and interesting enough to own.... It's OK to respect the daring narrative success of *Killer 7* without pretending that it's a fun game." ❖❖❖



■ **Killer 7:**
Pretentious, boring nonsense, or masterpiece of interactive minimalism?





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PlayStation 2



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XBOX 360

V

In the arsenal of any console maker, it'd be a terrifying weapon. Capcom's *Resident Evil 5*, sequel to the GameCube-only early-2005 horror hit that's still our front-runner for Game of the Year, has just shown its rotting face in Japan (see page 20). But instead of livening up the library of one system as an enticing

exclusive, it's hitting two: Microsoft's Xbox 360 (which is out this fall) and Sony's PlayStation 3 (due no earlier than spring 2006). Strange—Japanese developers usually shy away from *ands*, instead focusing only on exclusives. But this surprising new stance reveals a lot regarding the Japanese front of the next-generation console war.

Live from Tokyo

For the big picture, we turn to two recent Tokyo conferences thrown by Sony and Microsoft to flesh out their next-gen plans for the Japanese market. We've already seen some of what the companies have in store for us here. Both the Xbox 360's and PS3's splashy debuts at Los Angeles' E3

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PLAYSTATION 3: ROUND 2



Sony and Microsoft take the next-gen battle to the Japanese front, unveiling new war plans and big games (**Resident Evil 5**!)

games conference back in May had decidedly Western orientations—understandable, as North America has grown to become the largest of the three major gaming markets (North America, Japan, and Europe). Still, Japan and its star developers are widely perceived as important and influential participants in the next-gen race. “A lot of

baseball fans right here [in Japan] think that their players only become world-class when they succeed in the American major leagues,” says Xbox Corporate Vice President Peter Moore. “What you need to know is that a lot of Americans and Europeans feel the same way about how a console does in the Japanese major gam-

ing leagues.” While Sony already has that success, Microsoft craves it.

Acceptance from Japanese developers and consumers eluded the original Xbox. Microsoft has realized that no amount of marketing or Western acclaim will turn games like *Halo* or *Project Gotham Racing* into Japanese success stories. Only

Japanese software can do that. “We have been taught lessons that only the world’s most developed gaming market can teach,” said Moore. And Microsoft’s conference made it clear that the company won’t give up Japan without a fight. Though no single Xbox 360 title established itself as a must have for Japanese gamers, the breadth of ►

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XBOX VS. PS3 (CONT.)

BRINGING OUT THEIR DEAD

Resident Evil 5 rears its beautifully ugly head for both PS3 and Xbox 360

We've seen zombies hustle in *Resident Evil* games before (the Crimson Heads creatures of the *RE* GameCube remake managed a power-walker's pace), but the trotting rotters of the just-unveiled *Resident Evil 5* should be tested for performance-enhancing T-viruses: These guys move! That's one of many tidbits we took away from the game's debut at Sony's PlayStation conference. The bigger bombshell: *RE5* is hitting the Xbox 360, as well. We expect both versions in late 2006.

Developer Capcom isn't saying much, not even confirming if that's S.T.A.R.S. supercop Chris Redfield—last seen in *Resident Evil Code: Veronica*—skulking in the darkened alleyways of a nonspecific South American country in the first footage of the game. We see the mystery hero startle a flock of crows, which fly off and expose the alley to the burning light of day. And then the zombies come running....

Director Jun Takeuchi hopes to exceed even *RE4*'s level of terror. Wide-open environments, for instance, lack safe zones. (He cited the Black Hawk helicopter crash in Somalia as one inspiration.) And then we have those faster, smarter zombies, which will swarm the player from any direction. Takeuchi hopes to expand on *RE4*'s core gameplay with fiercer action, real-world physics, and reactive environments.

One new danger is the environment itself; players must rest in cooler areas to survive the heat. And the graphical detail is stunning; each stubby hair on the hero's face is individually modeled, and the developers have control over expressions right down to individual muscles. We had a hard time controlling our own jaw muscles after looking at these screens....

■ Capcom won't confirm whether *RE5*'s hero (above) is series regular Chris Redfield, but eyeball him next to Redfield in the *RE* remake (below left) and cheeseball live-action incarnation from the original *RE* (below right) and make up your own mind.



■ Sunblocked: Don't fear the dark in *RE5*—you'll actually welcome its shade from the scorching sunlight. Last thing you need to worry about while fighting superfast zombies is skin cancer.

► its Japanese support is still impressive. "Today," said a beaming Moore, "I am proud to say that every major third-party publisher right here in Japan is committed to supplying games to Xbox 360."

Microsoft swallowed its pride and hit the street, winning Japanese support for the 360 one developer and one project at a time. Many developers announced projects in the early stages. Heavy-hitters Capcom and Konami, for instance, promised an original game each, Namco touted a new role-playing game from the staff behind the popular *Tales* series, and Bandai showed more of its shooter based on *Gundam*.

Sony's game plan

After fighting for every inch (or centimeter—this is Japan) for this support, Microsoft was only too happy to tell the world about every new game and alliance it had earned. Sony, on the other hand, kept its weapons under the table. Very few games were shown at Sony's conference, and most titles appeared only as brief technical or conceptual demonstrations. Part of the reason for this is practical: The Xbox 360 launches this fall in all three major markets, so Sony has the luxury of letting Microsoft move first, then adjusting its plans accordingly. Another part is psycho-

logical: By keeping quiet, Sony can imply that it has a lot more in the wings than it's showing. Several mondo Japanese franchises—*Final Fantasy*, *Dragon Quest*, *Onimusha*, *Devil May Cry*, *Tekken*, *Virtua Fighter*, *Soul Calibur*, to name a few—have yet to swing exclusively to a next-generation system. If Sony can keep all or most of these franchises on PS3, then the company's continued Japanese dominance is assured. The multiplatform announcement of *Resident Evil 5*, however, proves that almost anything is possible as the next generation looms.

In many ways, Capcom's marquee zom-

bie title is a poster child for next-generation game development. Its multiplatform debut stems not from a newfound sense of fair play, but from the simple economics of creating a triple-A game. Next-generation titles the quality of *Resident Evil 5* will cost tens of millions of dollars and be made by teams of well over 100 people. To recoup this investment, a game has to reach the largest audience possible, period. Even if the Xbox 360 barely cracks Japan, it will still likely take a big chunk out of the North American and European markets. Japanese developers can't afford to miss out on global customers, so they're hedging their bets now. ►

>> SOUNDS SUPER—ACTIVISION PLANS ON RELEASING A BRAND-NEW MARVEL-BASED ROLE-PLAYING GAME SOMETIME IN 2006.... >>



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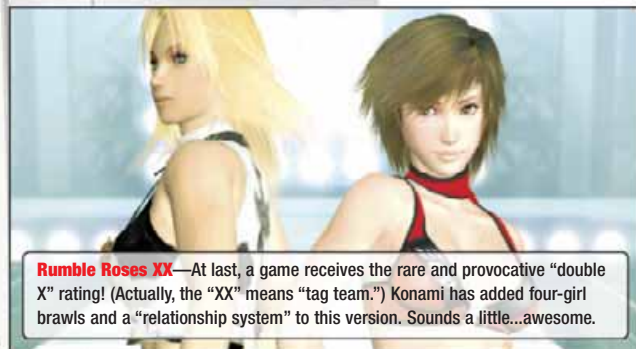


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XBOX VS. PS3 (CONT.)

DISPLAYED IN JAPAN: FIVE FRESH XBOX 360 GAMES

(AND ONE TO KEEP AN EYE ON)



Rumble Roses XX—At last, a game receives the rare and provocative “double X” rating! (Actually, the “XX” means “tag team.”) Konami has added four-girl brawls and a “relationship system” to this version. Sounds a little...awesome.



Frame City Killer—Namco's *FCK* (heh) impressed with its bustling city streets and *Matrix*-style gun fu.



World Air Force—Taito's air-combat game collects the world's niftiest jets and lets you dogfight in 'em online.



Dead or Alive 4—Tecmo is readying *DOA4*, *DOA Xtreme 2* (more than just volleyball!), and *DOA Code: Cronus*.



Ridge Racer 6—Launching with the system, *RR6* will be the first in the series to support online racing.

AND KEEP YOUR EYE ON...

N3: Ninety Nine Nights—Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the man who made trippy shooter *Rez* and PSP puzzler *Lumines*, says this is his best game yet. So naturally we're interested in this fantasy title that has you single-handedly decimating entire armies.



DISPLAYED IN JAPAN: FIVE FRESH PLAYSTATION 3 GAMES

(AND ONE TO KEEP AN EYE ON)



Endless Saga—The PS3's first massively multiplayer online role-playing game comes from WEBZEN, a Korean developer with a long history of this stuff. The trailer revealed little—just a butterfly fluttering by a hot iron-armored maiden.



Ni-Oh—An action game from the developer behind Koei's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* strategy epics.



Project Force—Pilot a mech in a destructible city in this sim from the makers of the *Armored Core* games.



Gundam—This squad shooter based on the white-hot robo-combat series will likely sell big in Japan.



Genji—A PS3 sequel to a Japan-only samurai slash-em-up. Will it live up to the promise of its flashy CG movie?

AND KEEP YOUR EYE ON...

Lair—Developer Factor 5 is known for eking every last processor cycle out of Nintendo systems with its *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* games. *Lair*, the American developer's first ever Sony title, is a dragon-filled fantasy shooter, and it looks hot.



► New rules

In fact, the rising cost and challenges of next-generation development were major themes of both presentations. Microsoft, always one to push its software advantage, was touting XNA, its unified Xbox/PC development platform designed to streamline the Xbox 360 development process. Even Sony, which never met a stat it couldn't graph, eschewed its usual number crunching to focus on the affordability of Epic's *Unreal 3* engine (demoed by Epic Technical Director Tim Sweeney himself) and strategic alliances with Havok and Ageia, physics middleware providers. Impressively, Sony is not only

including Havok and Ageia with all PS3 development kits, but will provide “frontline support” for the Japanese market. For a variety of cultural and financial reasons, Japanese developers have been slow to adopt middleware in the past. With next-generation hardware, however, all but the very largest developers will need to swallow their pride and accept a degree of outside help. Both hardware companies are doing everything in their power to make this transition as painless as possible.

For now, at least, the Japanese industry is in a holding pattern. Sony, the dominant force, expects to remain dominant.

Microsoft, the scrappy stranger in a strange land, is hungry for a piece of the action. But as Peter Moore put it, “In our business, things can change faster than some entrenched business interests would like.”

A little more than 10 years ago, the PlayStation was just a gleam in inventor Ken Kutaragi's eye. Nowadays, the American videogame market is nearly twice the size of the Japanese market, making it a force that cannot be ignored. Along with some interesting games, the two conferences have given us our first glimpse of Japan's answer to these exciting times.

—Andrew Vestal

Hey, what about the Revolution?

Sony and Microsoft's recent next-gen racket has us looking in Nintendo's direction: When will it reveal more about its backwards-compatible mystery machine, the Revolution, due in 2006? Mid-September's Tokyo Game Show seems like the likely venue for further disclosure, so expect new Revolution details in *EGM* #198. 



>> MIDWAY ANNOUNCED THAT IT'S MAKING A GAME BASED ON WARNER BROS.' UPCOMING ANIMATED FLICK *THE ANT BULLY*. . . >>

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DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

The Driver series looks to its roots to save itself

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Reflections
Release Date: March 2006

Former *Driver* series hero Tanner has turned in his tarnished badge. The conflicted undercover cop who slaughtered hundreds of innocents and lawmen alike just to bring down some two-bit car thieves is gone, replaced by a new wheelman known only as The Kid. And after the sloppy, bug-ridden, frustrating experience that was

DRIV3R, The Kid definitely has his work cut out for him.

"It's New York, 1978," says Gareth Edmondson, production manager at developer Reflections. "Tanner's no more. You're a driver for hire, so you're not an undercover cop—we got rid of all those obscure conscience-type issues. He's doing work in New York City for the mob,

small time building up to bigger time.

[And] there is a big twist that we're not revealing yet, a big twist that affects all aspects of the gameplay."

But that's not all that's new with *Driver: Parallel Lines*. *DRIV3R* sold like crazy, but Reflections knows it was seriously flawed—to avoid a *Tomb Raider*-esque meltdown for the franchise, some things need to change. "There were quite a lot of issues with *DRIV3R*, and we had a very good hard look at that, a very in-depth postmortem," says Edmondson. A revamped mission progression is one of



Righting the Wrongs of DRIV3R: Hey Kid, get back in the car

Many of *DRIV3R*'s worst moments happen when the wheelman gets out from behind the wheel. Shoddy targeting is the worst problem, and often-idiotic level design doesn't help. But *Parallel Lines* is primarily a four-wheeled affair. "There's a very heavy focus on driving," says Reflections' Gareth Edmondson. "There is on-foot stuff—we have completely overhauled that—but it's back to *Driver*'s roots of being heavily driving focused. I'd say 20 percent of the missions would be on foot."

Photograph by Randy Daskin/GAMERSITE 2005

"This is not called DrIver...nor DRIV4R."

—Gareth Edmondson, *Driver: Parallel Lines* production manager

>> SEAN "DIDDY" COMBS, ROSARIO DAWSON, AND BRITTANY MURPHY ARE JUST SOME OF THE FOLKS WHO WILL BE PROVIDING



■ **Developer Reflections'** wish feature: downloadable missions, which would be small enough to fit on a memory card. They may not make the final game, though.



Righting the Wrongs of DRIV3R: #\$\$@ this #\$\$@ing #\$\$@!

DRIV3R was just a liiiiittle frustrating. Hit a light post or tree five minutes into a long chase mission and prepare controllers for entry into near-Earth orbit. Edmondson says you'll have a bit more leeway to catch up to your target, and the A.I.-controlled cars will sometimes make mistakes too, but if a mission's giving you fits, you can save it for later and do a different one. We have to take his word on that, but the immovable light-post problem is definitely fixed—smack one at speed and you'll knock it down and keep on going.



the results of that good hard look. "We've changed it from sort of a very linear 'do the mission, retry, do the mission, retry' to much more open gameplay," explains Edmondson. "So the mission structure is a branching one, but you don't necessarily have to do every mission."

Reflections is also going back to *Driver* fundamentals, like, er, concentrating on driving instead of running around on foot, although The Kid will climb out of the car now and then—otherwise, you'd never see his kickin' bell-bottoms.

You'll be able to not only save cars in your garage as usual, but also spend money on performance and cosmetic upgrades. "The idea is that when you're playing through the missions, we want people to be a bit smarter and...choose the right car for the right mission," says Edmondson. That armored AMC Pacer look-alike might be just the ticket if you're planning to get shot at, while a highly tuned sports car will leave the cops in the dust.

One of DRIV3R's strengths is its sprawling, detailed cities, and *Parallel*

Lines looks to build on that with its version of NYC. It won't be a street-by-street re-creation like *The Getaway's* London, but a more stylized, game-friendly New York that includes parts of New Jersey and Staten Island along with the usual boroughs and landmarks, including the Twin Towers and Coney Island (complete with roller coasters), and even Studio 54 if all the legal wrangling works out. It'll also be a lot more alive—expect to see random events like fire trucks tearing through the streets or a garbage truck running its route. ➤

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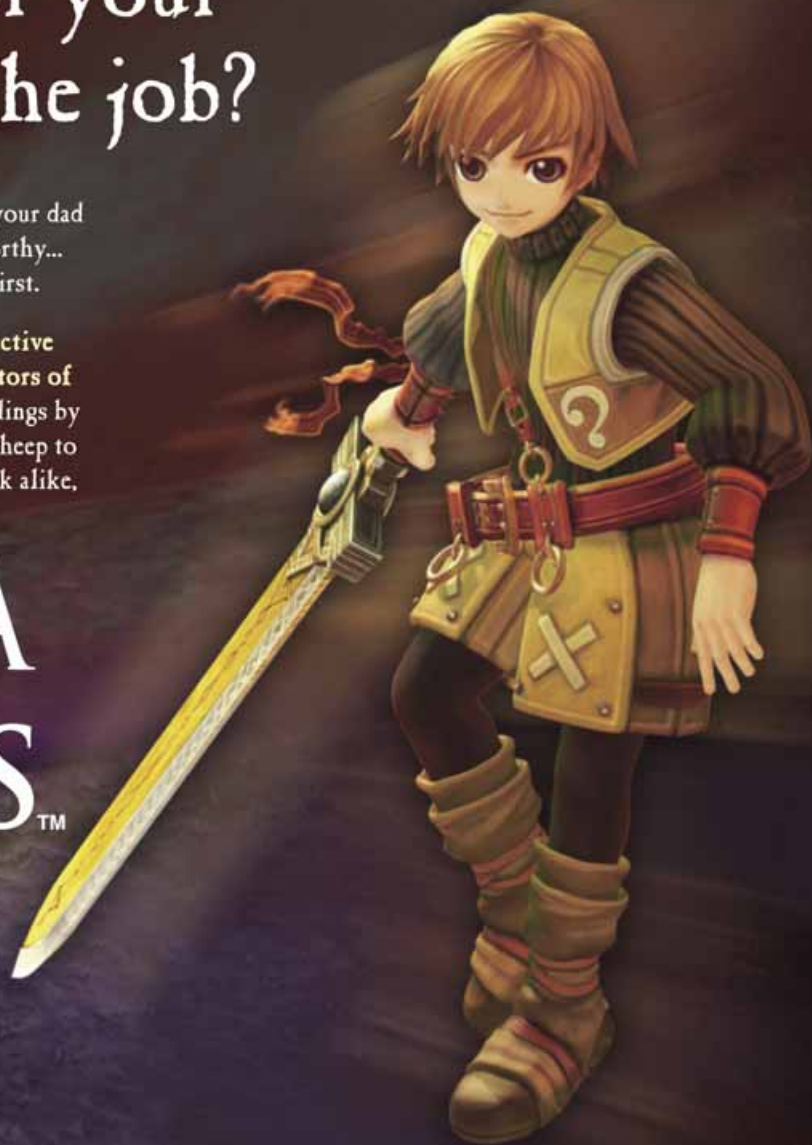
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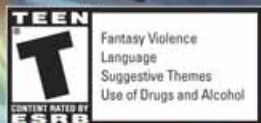
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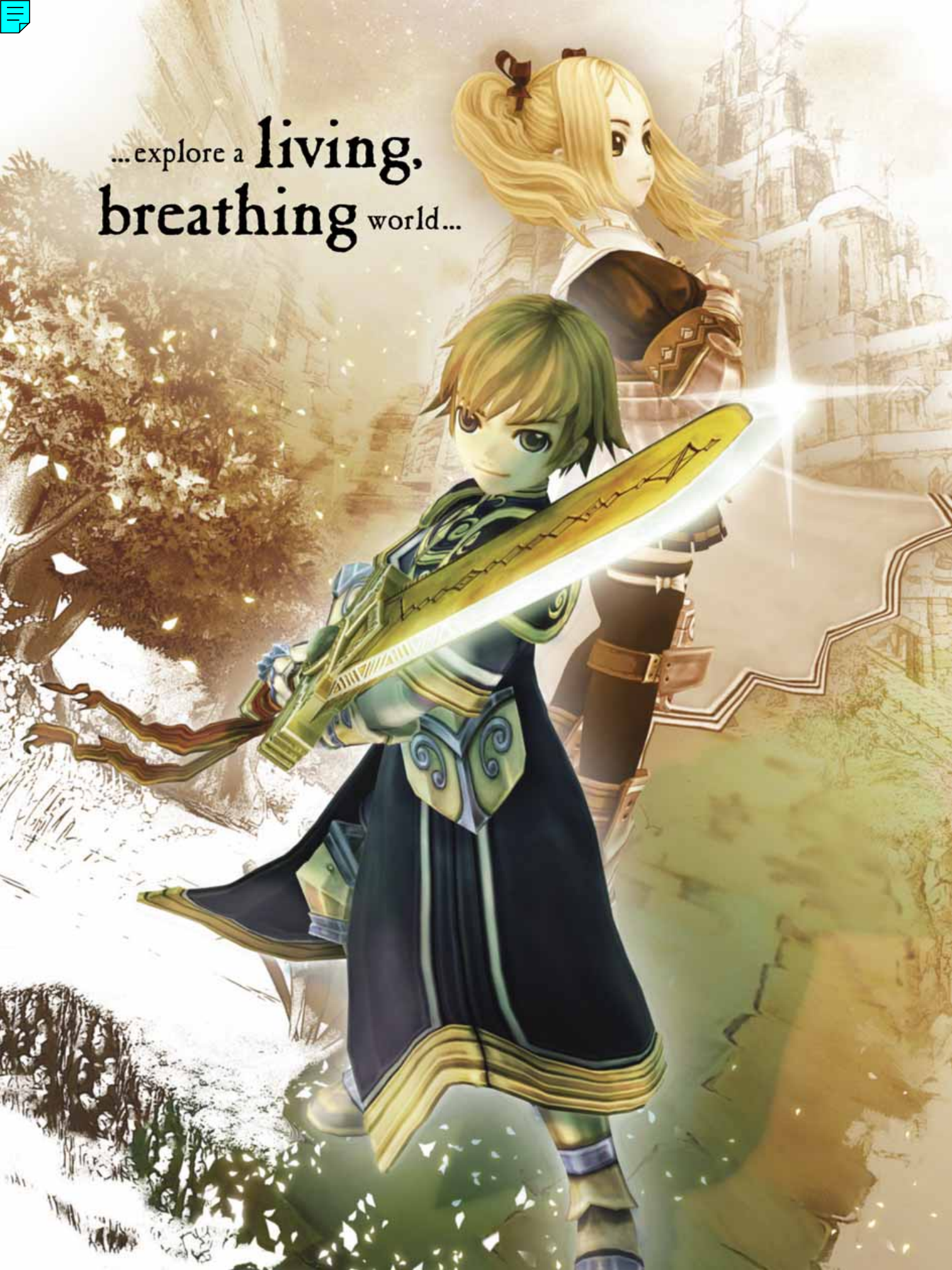
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DRIVER (CONT.)



■ Atari won't tell us if it's planning a next-gen version...but we're hoping.

“One of the things with *DRIV3R* is that the cities were very big, probably too big. There wasn't enough going on in them.”

— Gareth Edmondson, production manager

➤ *DRIV3R*'s director mode gets the ax—sorry amateur moviemakers—but the good news is you'll be able to see much further ahead as a result (director mode put a major strain on the

hardware), so dangerous oncoming traffic won't suddenly pop into existence half a block up the road. *DRIV3R* can handle 8 to 10 cars in your vicinity, while *Parallel Lines* is more on the order of 20 to 30, and you can drive at a much higher speed while dodging all those damn

taxis.

Faster, better, stronger...every sequel makes similar Six-Million-Dollar Man promises. We hope, for the sake of a good game, that *Reflections* comes through this time.

—Demian Linn



Righting the Wrongs of *DRIV3R*: Big city, nothing to do

Tooling around Miami, Nice, and Istanbul in *DRIV3R* is fun for five minutes, until you realize there is really nothing going on aside from the missions. In *Parallel Lines*, there's more to see and do—you'll notice random events, like cops chasing other cars, or stumble into a shoot-out between two street gangs. “We've got a guy sitting on top of a building [threatening to jump], a few cops [parked below]. You can stop and kill him if you want to and drive off,” says Edmondson. Traditional *Driver* minigames such as Survival, Trailblazer, and Quick Chase offer fun diversions, along with track races (oval, dirt, and street) and a destruction derby. “For Survival, you ram doughnut stands to piss off the cops, and they all come chasing after you. If you survive, you win some money,” says Edmondson.

As with the minigames, you can also access online multiplayer directly from hot spots on the map. Online modes include cops and robbers (one player tries to outrun five others), circuit racing, and team-based carjacking competitions that work like capture the flag. 🚗

>> ANOTHER FLATOUT—VU GAMES HAS ANNOUNCED A SEQUEL TO ITS LESS-THAN-STELLAR DRIVING TITLE (PS2/XB), ARRIVING IN 2006... >>



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PlayStation.2

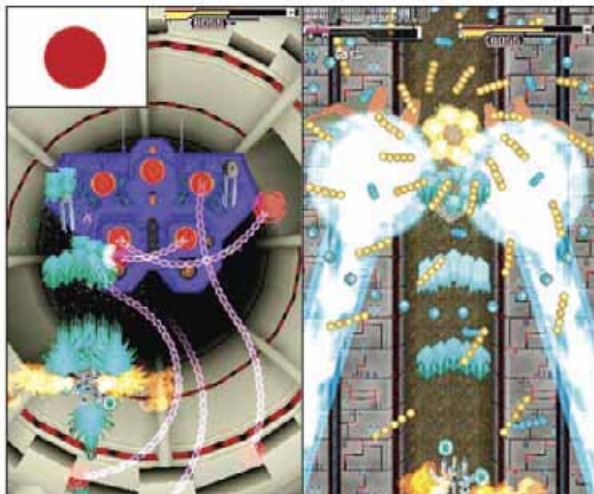
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ANDAMIRO



EGM INTERNATIONAL

More hardcore than a month-old crab apple



■ PSP

STAR SOLDIER

I've heard that name somewhere before.

Then congratulations—you're officially a game dork. Originally released for the Nintendo Entertainment System, Hudson's *Star Soldier* has made an appearance on a massive variety of systems. This version, though, may take some getting used to. Since the game runs in *tate* mode (that's shoot-em-up nerd speak for "vertical"), you have to hold the PSP like a cell phone, with one hand on the control pad and the other on the face buttons while you cradle the unit at the same time.

I'm a man! I can take it! Then prove it by importing this shooter. And while *Star Soldier* is aggressively old school, it's also hip to modern culture—you can even win tote bags and stuff by sending your high scores to Hudson.



■ PS2

EUREKA SEVEN

Is this like Didi Seven? No, *Eureka Seven* isn't a cleaning product sold in infomercials. Rather, it's a robot anime currently running on Japanese television. Bandai is treating the game version quite seriously, as the company has brought in the anime's main writer and character designer to work on the project. The game itself somewhat resembles *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf* (XB); the environments are large and detailed, and you can explore most of it on foot or via enormous mech.

I've got techno-envy! When can I play this? Bandai isn't bringing the anime *Eureka Stateside* until at least 2006. With any luck, the game (or another one based on the series) will have a simultaneous release over here.

NEWS TIDBIT

Xbox 360 Lookin' Marvelous!

Attention all true believers: Spider-Man, the Hulk, and the rest of the Marvel superhero family have found a new home—Xbox 360. Microsoft recently acquired the exclusive rights to make massively multiplayer online games featuring Marvel's cast of characters for its upcoming console. Unfortunately, no game

specifics were released.

This news comes on the heels of another superhero announcement, as earlier this summer Sony Online revealed that it's developing a DC Comics-based MMO for PlayStation 3 (the game is due out in 2007). So expect the next generation of gaming to have more than its fair share of men in tights.



■ Sorry in advance to the person who gets stuck playing as Paste Pot Pete.

WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

If the millions of first-person-shooter fans out there are any indication, then whoever claimed violence is bad for games is clearly an idiot.

Battlefield 2: Special Forces



Online gaming clans have no doubt already embraced *Battlefield 2* as the new king of first-person shooters, and there's even more to look forward to before the end of '05: *Battlefield 2: Special Forces*. This expansion introduces Navy SEALs, Russian Spetznas, and other elite forces to the game, as well as new stealth-driven gameplay mechanics and gear (night vision goggles, flashbang grenades, etc.). A handful of new maps—all designed with these new toys in mind—round out the experience, which might be best described as *Battlefield* meets *Splinter Cell*.

F.E.A.R.



As October is a month widely known for ghosts, goblins, ax murderers, and *EverQuest* cosplayers, VU Games' aptly named *F.E.A.R.* couldn't be timed more perfectly. Here, you'll head up an elite strike force team to contend with grisly murder scenes, Predator-like stalkers, and other eerie supernatural menaces. *F.E.A.R.* is no survival-horror game, though. Developer Monolith bills the suspenseful, atmospheric shooter as a "cinematic combat experience"—picture *Die Hard* meets *The Ring* and you'll have a good idea of the type of creepy, immersive action that's in store. Just spare us the clichéd *Doom 3*-style jump scares, OK?

—Ryan Scott
Computer Gaming World

>> WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE PLANS TO RELEASE A JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA RPG (PS2/XB) DURING THE FALL OF 2006... >>

ONE MAN'S CREATION IS ANOTHER'S DEMISE.



Explore the SOULCALIBUR world in "Chronicles of the Sword" and test your abilities in a real-time simulation.

Battle classic SOULCALIBUR warriors like Mitsurugi or square off against newcomers such as Zasalamel, Setsuka and Tira.

Create your own character and battle other players or legendary SOULCALIBUR warriors.



The battle begins anew in SOULCALIBUR III when Nightmare returns to a world inhabited by classic and new warriors. Choose your character's face, hair, armor and weapons in "Character Creation" mode, then lead him in strategic battles through "Chronicles of the Sword" mode. Experience the world of SOULCALIBUR like never before.



PlayStation 2

namco®





■ **Gun star:** Hero Colton White was into fringe way before fringe was cool—or even optional, really.

>> **STICKING WITH JOHNNY BALLGAME:** ELECTRONIC ARTS HAS SIGNED LEGENDARY COACH AND BROADCASTER JOHN MADDEN TO A



■ XB360/PS2/XB/GC **HANDS-ON PREVIEW**

GUN

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Neversoft
Release Date: November 2005

The posse behind Tony Hawk's Pro Skater gives us hands-on trigger time with the wildest Western game ever

When Los Angeles police walked into a mirror-glassed office building after an intruder tripped its silent alarm, they found a wiry man with a handlebar mustache sitting behind a desk piled high with Old West pistols and mountain-man knives.

Try talking your way out of that one.

"There was sort of this frozen moment before I could spit out, 'They're not real!'" says Joel Jewett, the building's "intruder." Actually, Jewett is the president of developer Neversoft, best known for the blockbuster *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series, and

he unknowingly set off his building's alarm when he arrived early for work that morning. Fortunately, L.A.'s finest weren't the type to shoot first, ask questions later. Jewett, without making any quick movements, explained that the guns were merely research material for a new Wild West adventure called, appropriately enough, *Gun*—due this November for PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, and Xbox 360 (a separate developer is making a PSP version for later release). The office was actually full of such weapons, Jewett told the cops, and all of them were just

replicas. "We have fake rifles, pistols, knives, bullwhips, hatchets all over the office," says Jewett. "You ever play with a bullwhip? You can put out an eye with one of them, and it will likely be your own."

Wild, Wild West

Between the phony arsenal, team trips to tumbleweed-strewn towns such as Deadwood, SD, and Jewett's own cowboy upbringing (he was born in Montana and runs a working ranch there today), Neversoft had all the gun-slinging research it needed to build a game that

hog-ties how the West was done. If you've seen it in a Western or read it in Time Life's famous series of Old West books ("We must have five sets of those," says Project Lead Chad Findley), you can probably do it in *Gun*. "You never know what will happen next," says Studio Development Director Scott Pease. "You might be on horseback. You might be on a mounted weapon. You might be on a stagecoach."

As the first magazine allowed to squeeze *Gun*'s trigger, we got to break in its broncos, blast its bandits—just put the whole experience through its paces. We ►



BULLET TIME: WE WALK A MILE IN THE GAME'S COWBOY BOOTS...

Those carefree deer and antelope have it made. But for cowboys, home on the range is one tough place to make a living. *Gun* keeps you busy with side tasks anytime you decide to take a break from the main story (which itself has about 20 missions). Completing this bonus business pumps up your five skills—gunplay, horsemanship, melee attack, quickdraw, and health—plus earns money you can use to upgrade the weapons you swipe from bosses.

Peace Keepin'

Colton gets deputized later in the game, and that opens a series of law-enforcing missions, including breaking up an opium ring, killing the town sniper, escorting a snitch, and finding a rapist.



Pony Expressin'

Hey, these copies of *Nonelectronic Gambling Monthly* aren't going to deliver themselves. You have to carry the mail—and other vital items—come rain, snow, or bandits.



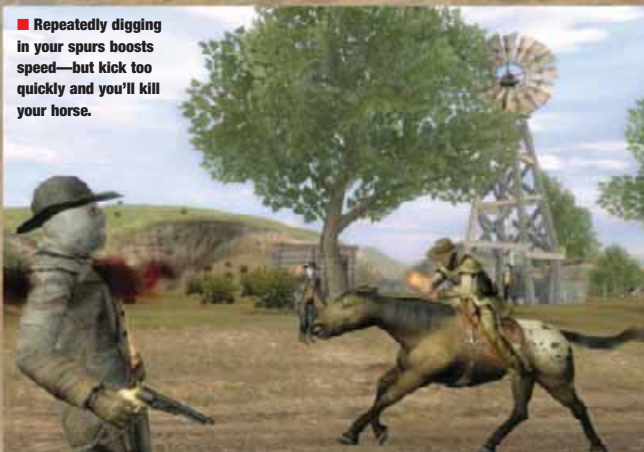
MULTIYEAR CONTRACT, WHICH MEANS SIMPLY THAT EA'S GRIDIRON FRANCHISE WILL CONTINUE TO GO BY THE BIG GUY'S LAST NAME.... ►►

GUN 4 (CONT.)



Quickly drawn? Visuals on the Xbox 360 version of *Gun* are barely better than the current-gen game's.

Repeatedly digging in your spurs boosts speed—but kick too quickly and you'll kill your horse.



found a game undeniably similar in structure to the *Grand Theft Auto* series, set in a sprawling world full of side activities and held together by an epic story starring big-time Hollywood actors. Neversoft doesn't dodge the *GTA* comparison. "I don't think it hurts ya," says Jewett.

He's leaving it up to *Gun*'s theme to set the game apart from other *GTA* clones. After all, despite valiant attempts by Rockstar's decent *Red Dead Revolver* and Capcom's ridiculous cowboy-vampire shooter *Darkwatch* (reviewed this issue), no recent game has bull's-eyed the Western genre. "If we do it right first," says Jewett, "then you can't catch us."

An adventure with a mature tale and potty-mouth language that would be at home on the range of HBO's *Deadwood*, *Gun* sprawls across big-sky country, starting in the lush forests of Montana, continuing to dusty Dodge City in Kansas, and then on to the deserts and canyons of New Mexico. "It's basically the center of the United States all boiled down to its best parts," says Findley.

Much of the world opens about 20 percent of the way into the game, and you can swipe horses from townspeople to get

around, or even find roving herds in the wild. No need to get overly concerned with the law; there is none (well, until you get deputized later in the game—then it's *your* problem). Townspeople will run you out of their towns if you raise a ruckus. And at this particular time in U.S. history, they're itching for a fight. "You've got this whole Western migration from all these guys that are all messed up after the Civil War," Jewett says. "They got nowhere to go. They're mean and they're tough and they basically got one thing they know how to do: shoot guns."

Giddy-up

The game's hero, a lean mountain lad named Colton White, is no exception. He sees his pioneer papa die early, right after learning that the old man wasn't actually his dad. A tale of vengeance naturally follows, involving a city of lost Incan gold, a corrupt sheriff, a sassy whore, an obsessed preacher, a hapless sidekick, an evil Civil War officer, Indian tribes, buffalo herds—even grizzlies.

Helping Colton survive in such a dangerous world is a special attack mode called quickdraw, which when activated

BULLET TIME (CONT.)

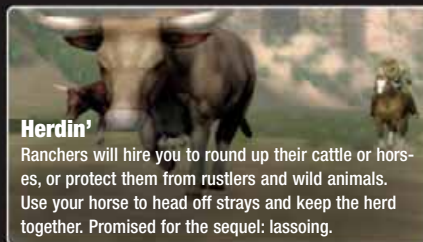
Bounty Huntin'

You'll find wanted posters featuring notorious cowpokes. Just walk up to the posters to accept the bounty mission, then go hunt down your man.



Herdin'

Ranchers will hire you to round up their cattle or horses, or protect them from rustlers and wild animals. Use your horse to head off strays and keep the herd together. Promised for the sequel: lassoing.



Prospectin'

The old hayseeds are right: There really is gold in d'em thar hills. Neversoft has hidden it throughout *Gun*'s world. Buy a \$5 pickaxe early in the game and you can mine the deposits for a tidy profit.



>> GRAB THE POPCORN—PARAMOUNT HOME ENTERTAINMENT HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL RELEASE MOVIES FOR THE PLAYSTATION



■ Neversoft tapped Hollywood talent to voice *Gun*'s gunslingers, including Thomas Jane (*The Punisher*) as main man Colton, country legend Kris Kristofferson as his old man, and *Deadwood*'s Brad Dourif (above left) as gold-obsessed preacher Reed (above right).



■ You fight the Indians early in the game—until you find out [spoiler deleted—Ed].

throws you into first-person view, slows down time, and makes it easier to go for the money shots: shooting baddies between the eyes, blasting the hats off their noggins, and sending their weapons spinning from their hands. Such skillful shots extend the time you can stay in quickdraw mode (as does scalping enemies, a brutal ability you acquire later). More than just useful, quickdraw is a blast to play—a fun mix of trick shooting and arcade twitch. You don't have to use the mode if you don't want to, but nothing embodies cowboy cool like walking into a saloon, dropping into quickdraw, and blasting every crook's gun out of his hands before he can get a bead on you.

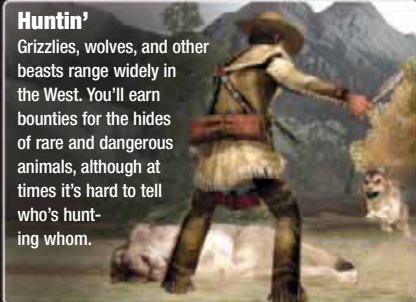
Aside from various pistols you can wield in quickdraw, you'll find four other weapon types—shotguns, bows (one with TNT-tipped arrows for *Rambo*-style kabooms), long-range rifles, and regular rifles—for use outside the mode. You also get dynamite and Molotov cocktails. But, as you'd expect from the guys who let you infuse your own play style into the *Tony Hawk* series, much of *Gun*'s fun comes from how you wield your...well, guns. You can, for instance, spend the game disarm-

ing enemies with eagle-eyed quickdraw shots. Or why not grab some innocent bystanders for use as human shields? Or—more fun still—trail unlit dynamite across a road, retreat to a safe distance, then blast it when enemies reach your trap. "Luring people to their doom doesn't get old," says Findley. "It's like, 'Just come a little closer!'"

Westward expansion

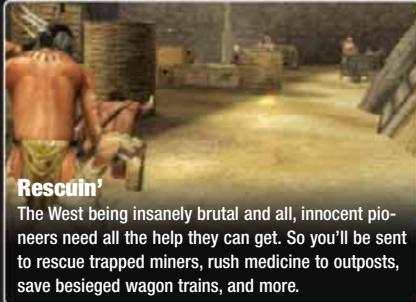
Gun is more than just a side project for Neversoft (which has divided its staff between this game and the next *Tony Hawk* title, *American Wasteland*). It's the company's first go at a new franchise since it launched *Spider-Man* for Activision. And these guys can't quit now—what are they going to do with all the replica pistols and Wild West books? "Once we started doing a little research," says Jewett, "it hit us like a ton of bricks. There's so much content here that we can tap into. We can jump back in time and be a mountain man. We can jump forward to the turn of the century. We can do the Civil War. If we get the ball rolling, we can have fun with this for years to come."

—Crispin Boyer



Huntin'

Grizzlies, wolves, and other beasts rove widely in the West. You'll earn bounties for the hides of rare and dangerous animals, although at times it's hard to tell who's hunt-ing whom.



Rescuin'

The West being insanely brutal and all, innocent pioneers need all the help they can get. So you'll be sent to rescue trapped miners, rush medicine to outposts, save besieged wagon trains, and more.

WEST EASY

Four Neversoft inspirations to get you in the *Gun*-wielding mood...

Crow Killer: The Saga of Liver-Eating Johnson

When *Crow Indians* scalped pioneer John Johnson's pregnant wife, he didn't get mad—he got psycho. This book follows the real frontiersman's path of vengeance as he hunts Crows and gulps their livers (without even a side of fava beans). "The stuff that happened back then is way gnarlier, more brutal, and interesting than you can make up," says Neversoft's Joel Jewett.



The Wild Bunch

No need to wait until November to experience *Gun*'s slow-mo quickdraw mode. Director Sam Peckinpah pioneered low-speed gunfighting in this 1969 Western (available on DVD) about bad cowboys doing really bad things in Mexico. The film's highly choreographed slow-motion shoot-outs play out like brutal ballets of flung bullets. Also worth seeing: Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (only available on VHS).



Deadwood

This HBO series' muck-caked cast of gold-rush pioneers live, die, and fornicate in the most lawless town in Old West America—and it makes for must-see TV among the *Gun* team (the first season is out on DVD). Random acts of holy-moly violence are always one hot temper away, an atmosphere Neversoft wants to create for its game. Plus, *Deadwood*'s residents swear more than George Carlin with Tourette's syndrome.



Unforgiven — Oscar-winning actor/director and veteran gunslinger Clint Eastwood straps on his holsters one more time for this ultrarealistic tale of an outlaw killer who settles down, goes legit, raises a family, then finds his old habits dying hard. Ultimately, it's tough to tell who's the bad guy here: ol' squinty Clint or Gene Hackman's menacing frontier sheriff, who keeps trouble-makers at bay by beating them to death.



■ *Gun*'s horse controls are slick, letting you gallop in one direction and shoot in another. It's like driving a *Halo* Warthog with hooves.

Card Sharkin'

Each town has a casino with its own poker tournaments. And yes, you can cheat. The game? Texas Hold 'Em, of course. "No point reeducating the ESPN2 crowd," says Neversoft's Jewett.



PlayStation 2 EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

RESIDENT EVIL 4

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: October 2005

Capcom's infectious masterpiece spreads to the PS2

If Vegas set odds for the gaming industry, the chances of *Resident Evil 4* coming to the PlayStation 2 would've fallen somewhere between "New Mario title exclusively for Xbox 360" and "Halo 3 will be a puzzle game." In other words: not bloody likely.

For one thing, Capcom Producer and *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami was perfectly clear on the matter: "*Resident Evil 4* will definitely release only on GameCube, not on another console." And he didn't stop there. "If that happens," he said, "I will cut my head off."

A year ago it didn't seem like such a bold statement. The last two editions of the horror-adventure series—a remake of the original *Resident Evil* and a prequel, *Resident Evil 0*—were already GameCube exclusives. Besides, *RE4* had been designed from the

ground up for Nintendo's system, its new behind-the-back perspective and revamped, fully 3D graphics squeezing every ounce of power from the Cube. "We were afraid it might not even be possible to port it over [to the PS2]," says Producer Masachika Kawata. His job? To port it over to the PS2.

Turns out the wishes of Capcom's shareholders and millions of PS2-owning survival-horror fans are worth more than Mr. Mikami's head (or at least his pride); for the past 10 months, Kawata and his team have been busy getting *RE4* up and running on Sony's console. "It's taken a lot of work," he admits. "The game underwent a thorough reworking to maintain the [high-quality graphics of the GameCube version]. We made changes to almost everything, including character models, background graphics and effects, etc." Ironically, the net result of

all these changes is a game that appears almost exactly the same—save for some slightly muted colors, you could mistake the PS2 version for the Cube original.

And as you'll see over the next four pages, Capcom didn't stop at creating a faithful port, adding extra options and bonus content: a true 16:9 ratio widescreen mode (that still runs in extrasharp progressive scan mode on HDTVs); new areas, weapons, and costumes; plus movies and files that fill in some of the game's background and unanswered questions. "I'm confident," says Kawata, "that all gamers, from those who are patiently awaiting the PS2 version, to those who already enjoyed it on the GameCube, and even those who haven't played the series for a long time, will enjoy it." Sounds like a safe bet to us.

—Mark MacDonald



■ This is not the best way to fight "El Gigante."



■ Makes waiting for the PS3 a little easier, eh?

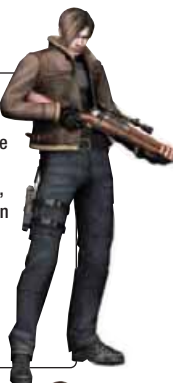
>> ALSO NEW TO THE PS2 VERSION OF *RESIDENT EVIL 4* IS ADA'S REPORT, A COLLECTION OF MOVIES AND TEXT FILES THAT SHOULD FILL



THE GOOD & EVIL RESIDENTS OF RE4

Leon S. Kennedy >>

Six years ago during his first night as a Raccoon City police officer in *Resident Evil 2* his boss went completely insane, the station house was overrun by flesh-eating zombies, and the entire city was bombed into ashes. Not surprisingly, he quit. Now he works for the Secret Service, which sent him to find...



Ashley Graham >>

20-year-old daughter of the President of the United States. Ashley has disappeared and is presumed kidnapped, although no group has come forward to claim responsibility or demand a ransom. The only lead to her whereabouts occurs when she's spotted in a town run by...



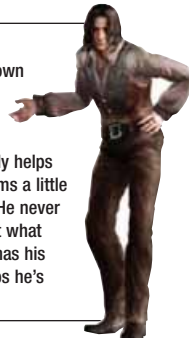
<< Bitores Mendez

9-foot-tall mayor of a small Spanish village, whose oddly colored eyes, shaved head, and gigantic ZZ Top beard no doubt helped him get elected. Bitores may be keeping a secret buried deep inside, but he's not talking to Leon or...



Luis Sera >>

A Spanish cop from a town next to Mendez's village—or so he says. Luis is captured along with Leon and eventually helps him escape, but he seems a little too slick to be trusted. He never gets very specific about what he's after...perhaps he has his own agenda? Or perhaps he's working with...



<< Ada Wong

The last time Leon saw "the bitch in the red dress" in *Resident Evil 2* she was lying about her identity and getting him shot. Turned out she was working for the mysterious "Agency," trying to locate a sample of the virus. Now Leon doesn't know who she's working for (series fans are in for a surprise), and if she's friend or foe.

IN WHAT SHE'S BEEN UP TO IN THE SIX YEARS BETWEEN RE2 AND RE4. LOOK FOR IT AFTER YOU FINISH THE MAIN GAME.... >>

RESIDENT EVIL 4 (CONT.)



FOUR WAYS TO PLAY RESIDENT EVIL 4

The Main Game

Approximate completion time: 16-24 hours

You'll go over a river and through the woods, but instead of grandma's house, you'll find a nasty old castle, caves, and...well, we won't ruin it for you. The goal here is to rescue Ashley, uncover the evil plot, kill the bad guys, and, of course, escape to safety. Save all the treasures you find hidden along the way and money you pick up from dead enemies, then trade with merchants for guns (including a new-for-PS2 laser), upgrades for your weapons, and healing items. Some simple puzzles and incredible boss fights every now and then mix things up.



■ Leon and Luis hold off a giant assault from inside this crusty shack.

1



■ We've seen combos as high as 132 kills in a row.

The Mercenaries

Approximate completion time: 4-12 hours

If you're still itching for a fight after you've finished the main quest, choose this unlockable bonus game. Mercenaries tosses you into one of four big arenas with a couple weapons, some healing items, and a handful of ammo to slaughter as many enemies as possible before time runs out. Earn bonus points for combo-ing kills one after the other, or extend your time by locating hourglass power-ups. A four-star ranking on any stage will unlock a new playable character, each with his own weapons, melee attacks, and special moves.

2

■ Even nasty, infected soldiers are cute when they chase a laser pointer around.



3



Assignment Ada

Approximate completion time: 3-6 hours

In this unlockable bonus game, you play as supersexy superspy Ada Wong in her hunt for five samples of the "thing" causing so much trouble in Spain. Ada is fast and has a nasty kick, but she doesn't have a knife to open boxes, takes twice as much damage as Leon from any attack, and can't save (so you'll need to finish the whole thing in just one run).

>> A LINE OF RE4 ACTION FIGURES, INCLUDING LEON, ADA, AND THE CHAIN-SAW GUY, IS ON THE WAY—CHECK NECAONLINE.COM....>>

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RESIDENT EVIL 4 (CONT.)



FOUR WAYS TO PLAY RESIDENT EVIL 4

Separate Ways

Approximate completion time: 5-8 hours

Ah, we saved the best for last. This mode is entirely new to the PS2 version—five missions that finally reveal everything Ada was doing in the background of Leon's adventure. (For example: Guess who rang the bell that summoned the villagers away at the start of the game?)

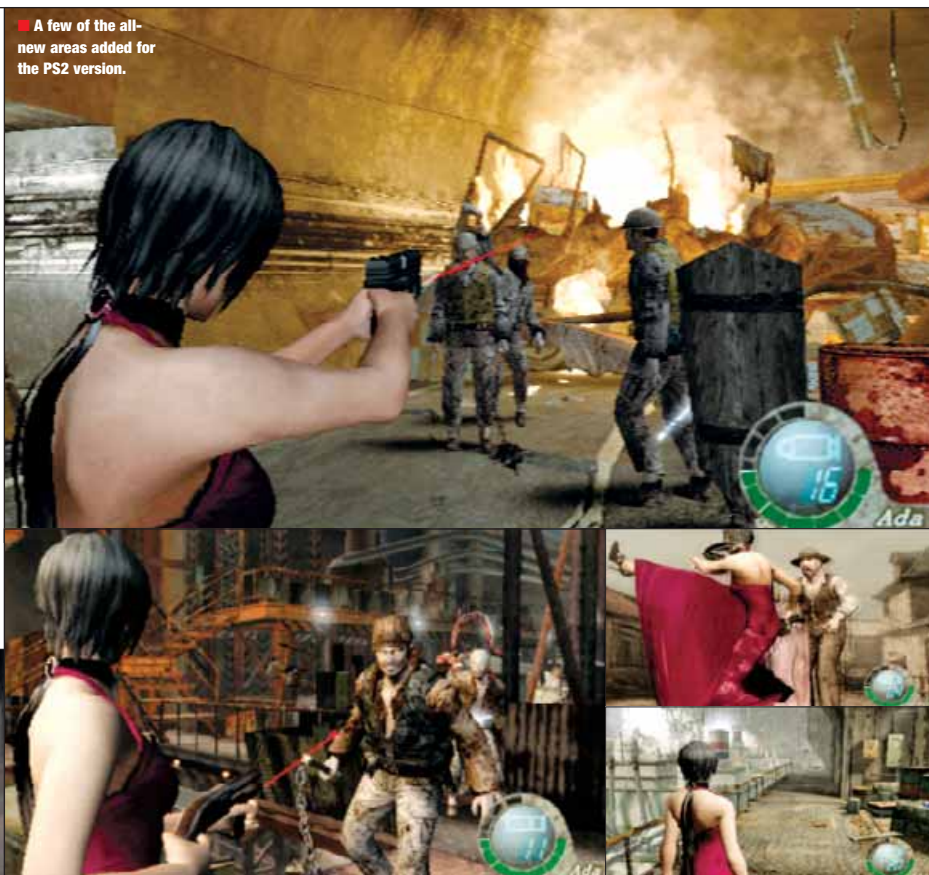
Although most of Separate Ways is Ada retracing Leon's steps through familiar areas, sometimes she can use her grapple gun to reach areas he never saw. And a few sections are entirely new, like a huge battleship in dry dock, where Ada needs to ride her zip line back and forth to take out the ship's giant turrets. "The idea came from wanting a stage that was sort of a puzzle in and of itself," says producer Kawata.

Toss in a new weapon, two extra boss

fights, and a timed dash to get Leon that rocket launcher at the end of the game, and it's clear a lot of time and effort went into this PS2 extra.

4

■ A few of the all-new areas added for the PS2 version.



GETTING ALONG WITH THE LOCALS

Learn these useful expressions to help you blend in with *RE4*'s friendly Spanish locals:

"¡Allí está!" — "There he is!" "¡Mueren!" — "Die!"

"¡Cogedlo!" — "Get him!" "¡Agárrelo!" — "Grab him!"

"¡Mátelo!" — "Kill him!" "Morir es vivir..." — "To die is to live..."

Have a great trip!

PLAY DRESS UP

You can unlock two new costumes in *RE4* PS2: Leon's purely cosmetic "smooth criminal" gangster getup and a full suit of armor for Ashley that actually affects gameplay. "The armor deflects bullets and makes her too heavy for enemies to easily carry her away," says producer Kawata, "[so you] don't have to protect her as diligently. It makes it easier to [replay] the game." 🎮



>> NUBY WILL RELEASE A PS2 VERSION OF ITS AWESOME BUT AWKWARD *RE4* CHAIN-SAW CONTROLLER IN OCTOBER FOR \$59.99....>>

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The Magic Seal: destroy your enemies with the touch screen

Enhanced Tactical Souls: collect more souls to upgrade your abilities and weapons

Wireless Versus Mode: race another player through custom maps

Wireless Soul Exchange: trade acquired souls with other players

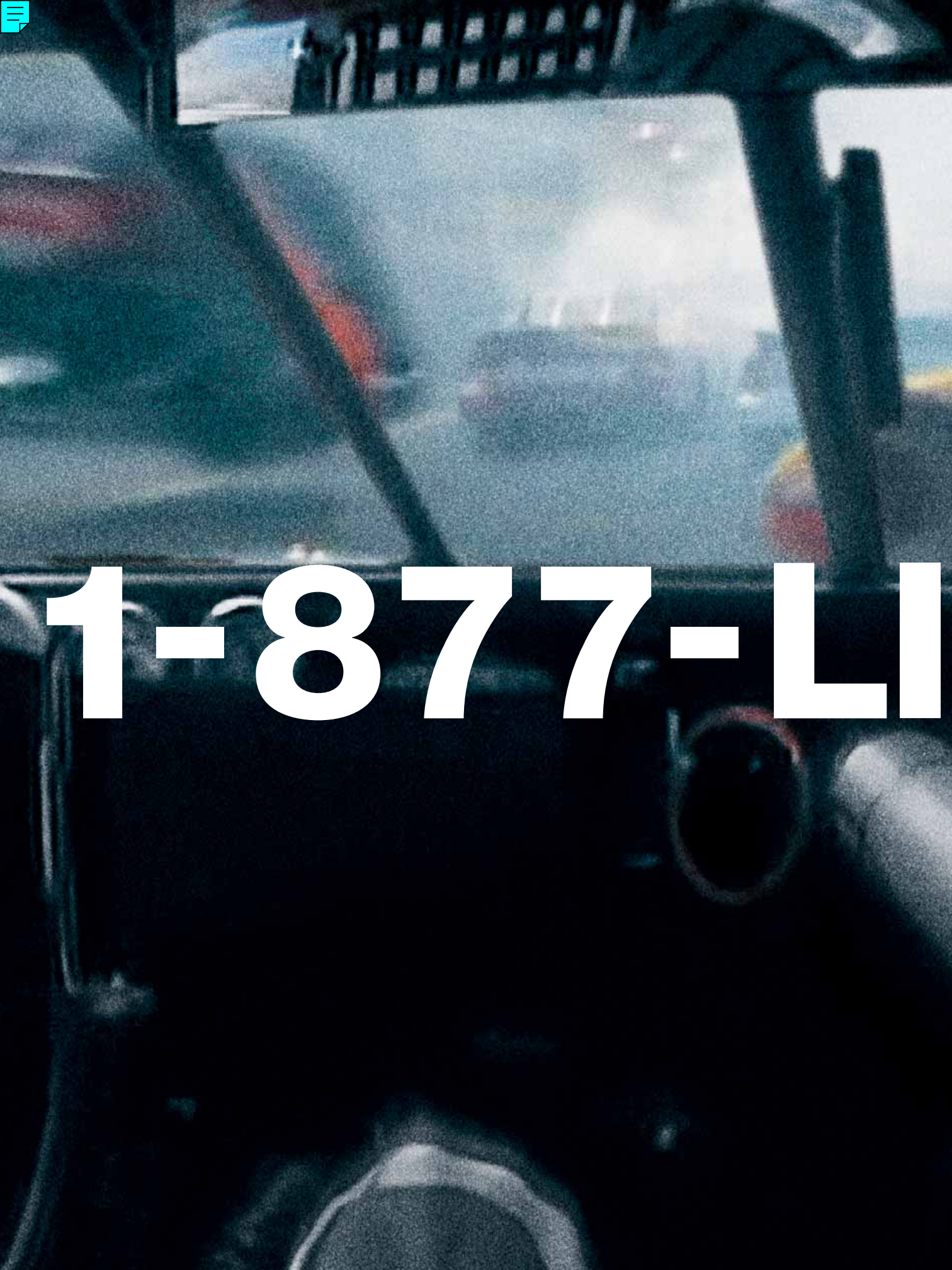


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1-877-LI

A blurry background image showing a car race. A yellow and blue car is visible through a window, with other cars and spectators in the background. The image is dark and has a grainy, high-contrast aesthetic.

TL-HELP

ZELDA WATCH



Brush up on your Zelda knowledge while you await the arrival of *Twilight Princess*

It's only the second edition of our monthly Zelda Watch and we've already hit a goron-sized snag: no new info. Nintendo promises the drought will end soon, and there's always zeldawatch.1UP.com for up-to-the-minute updates—interviews, new screens, etc.—until *Twilight Princess*' December release. But for now all we can offer is this (totally awesome) quiz on all things *Zelda*! Write your answers down on a piece of paper and send them to: Give EGM Some New Zelda Info, c/o Nintendo of America, 4820 150th Ave. N.E., Redmond, WA 98052.

—Mark MacDonald



3 Match the *Zelda* game to its plot summary:

a. *Zelda: Twilight Princess*



b. *Zelda: A Link to the Past*



- Link travels between light and dark realms in his quest to save Princess Zelda and the land of Hyrule.
- Link travels between light and dark realms in his quest to save Princess Zelda and the land of Hyrule.



6 Match the following pieces of *Zelda* merchandise with their approximate eBay values:



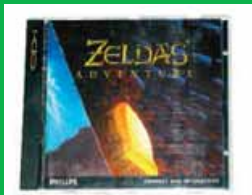
a. Sealed copy of the original 8-bit *Zelda*



c. 1988 Milton Bradley *Legend of Zelda* board game



b. Link bobblehead



d. *Zelda's Adventure* for the Philips CD-i system

1. \$20



2. \$25



3. \$80



4. \$400



1 Which of the following statements about *Twilight Princess* is not true?

- It takes place decades after *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*.
- Link transforms into a wolf when he enters the dark world of the Twilight realm.
- The boomerang weapon now has an added whirlwind effect and can lock on to multiple targets.
- A pack of wild red-assed monkeys helps Link get through one of the dungeons.
- By blowing on a blade of tall grass, Link can summon a hawk to help him.



4 Who is this man?



- A carpenter who would love to make a mast for Link's boat, if only someone could help him find his toolbox....
- A rival from Link's village who says that *he*—not Link—is the best cowboy! Prove him wrong in a goat-herding minigame.
- Boogie Nights* star Luis Guzmán. ➤



2 Which image represents Link's new, more realistic look for *Twilight Princess*?



5 True or false:

The Princess Zelda in *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link* is the same Princess Zelda from the first game.



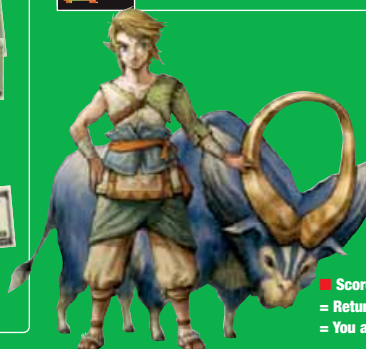
7 What is your reward for spending hours—no, days—painstakingly creating figurines for every man, woman, and monster as part of a side quest in *Zelda: The Wind Waker*?

- Access to the two dungeons they should have never cut from the game.
- A making-of video documentary and interview with Director Eiji Aonuma.
- One f***ing lousy-a** figurine of f***ing Link on his f***ing boat?! What the f***?!



8 Essay Question:

What the hell is this guy thinking? ➤



Score yourself: 1 to 7 correct = Return of Ganon; all 8 correct = You are the hero of Hyrule! 🏆

Answers: 1. Trick question—they are all true 2. d. a-2, b-1, c-2, d-None of the above 3. False 4. d-None of the above 5. False 6. a-4, b-1, c-2, d-Too much money 7. F***ing c 8. "Tinglet Tinglet Koo-too...limpahh"



You're breaking the **DRAFT** when you see a massive wreck beginning in front of you.



You tell your teammate to get on your tail and **FOLLOW** you through the pile-up.



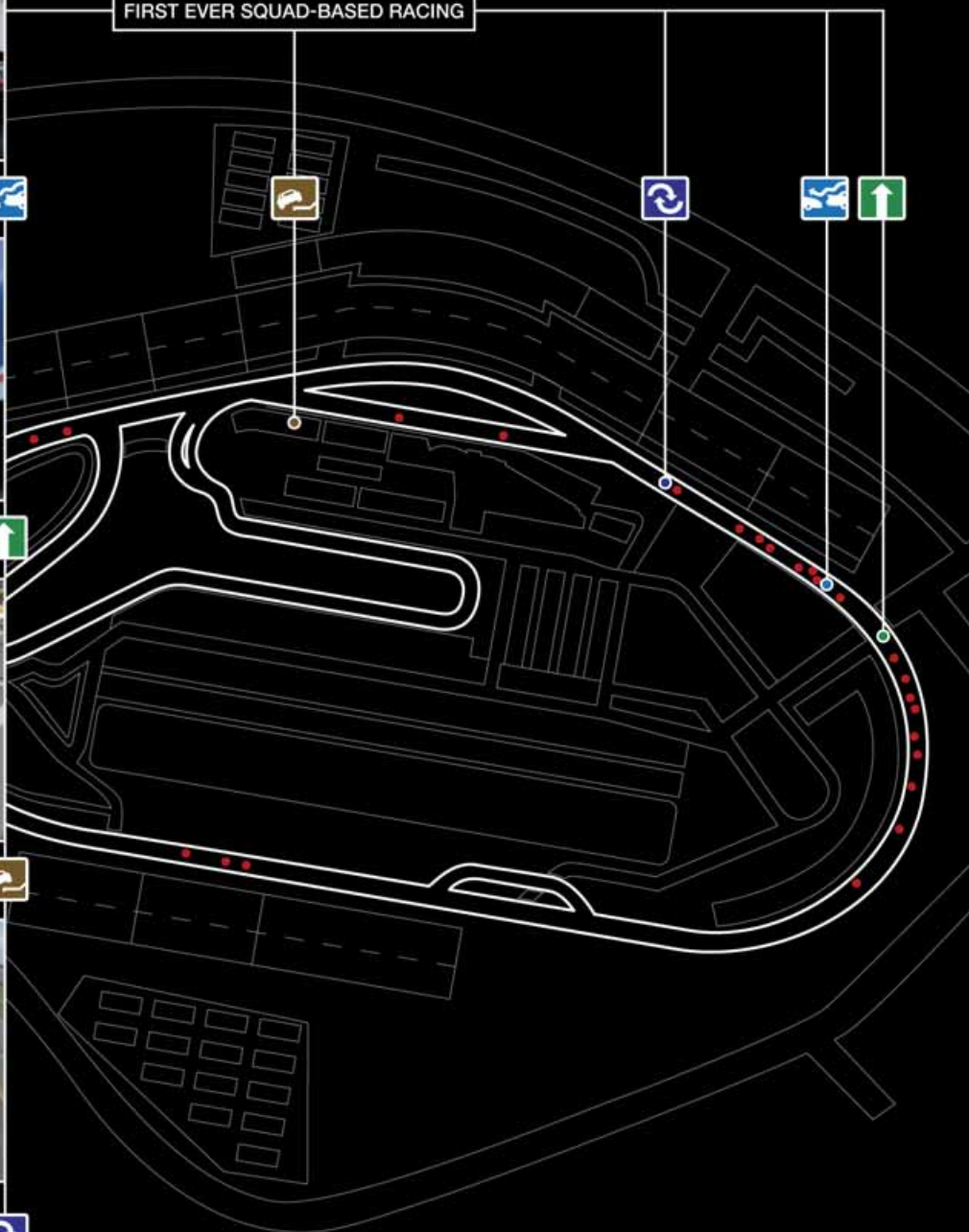
You call your team to **PIT** so they can help you keep your track position.



A split second before your car slams into the wall, you use the real time **SWAP** feature to jump into your lead teammate's car and race flat-out for the checkered flag.



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PlayStation 2



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**ONLINE
THIS MONTH**

GAME COACHING



The rise of online tutors: How the student becomes the Master Chief

Dying via needler, the shard-spitting wimpiest weapon in *Halo 2*, is like being tickled to death—only more embarrassing. And it was happening to me, *EGM*'s lowly intern, at the hands my boss, Editor-in-Chief Dan “Shoe” Hsu. We were in the first round of a three-map challenge in the Xbox's blockbuster online first-person shooter. It goes by in a flash. Shoe wins 25-12. The second map—a 25-6 defeat—is more humiliating. For the final round, I get feistier and lose by only seven points, reclaiming some of my manhood, so I don't feel like I need to sit down to pee after the match.

We weren't playing for fun or to satisfy Shoe's sadistic streak. This one-sided

mini-tourney was an experiment—a trial of the latest profession to hit the industry: videogame coaching. This budding industry is starting with the popular *Halo 2* but will soon offer training in other games, such as *Super Smash Brothers Melee* and *Tekken 5*. We've established that I suck at *Halo 2*—at least against a seasoned player who once even beat the guys who made the damn game. With my rematch with Shoe looming, it was time to see if this coaching thing could work for me.

Taking the short bus to Halo 2 school

This is where Tom Taylor comes in. He's one of the rising stars in the *Halo 2*

world and leading the charge for one of the first console videogame coaching sites: gaming-lessons.com. “I've given lessons to people who [are] looking to go to tournaments or people who are just looking to brag to friends,” Taylor says, adding that he guarantees I'll beat Shoe after my training session. He's gotten offers from gamers in Europe and Australia for some schooling—his rate: \$40 for a one-hour session—but today he'll be training a simple guy who just wants to beat his boss once.

I log on to Xbox Live for our first training session; all such sessions are done over the Net—I never actually meet Taylor in person. We do a quick match so he can see what level I'm at. In the first

30 seconds, I accidentally jump off the map...twice. “Uh, this isn't a good sign,” Taylor tells me. Final score: 25 to negative 2. I would've done better if I had just put down my controller. But Taylor's a pro and goes over the basics with me from strafing to quick reloading. “It's all about having good strat,” or strategy, Taylor emphasizes. He offers advice on which weapons to go after and where to station myself. But I feel like I still have a long way to go.

I move on to my second lesson, this one with 14-year-old Bonnie Burton, one of the elite girl gamers in *Halo 2*. Burton gives me some more much-needed strategy, then gives me all the power weapons to see how long I can “control

>> WHILE *METAL GEAR SOLID 4* REMAINS A PS3 EXCLUSIVE, KONAMI PREZ MICHIOHRO ISHIZUKA TOLD THE JAPANESE PRESS THAT THE



■ Master Chief's next class: TV and VCR repair.

the map." I station myself on a sniping tower and scan the horizon. After a minute, she whispers, "Look behind you," and I see her Master Chief ninja standing behind me. I need more practice.

So I decided to play some 1-on-1 against a professional player that I thought would be more my speed. He dices me with his favorite weapon, the plasma sword. I don't register a single kill and try not to notice that this pro is, in fact, 7 years old. It's not easy; Victor DeLeon III, the youngest *Halo 2* pro player, keeps giggling in his helium-high youthful voice after each kill. I had to phone his dad to set up a time for some coaching, but it all

feels less like a training exercise and more like a playdate. I face Shoe for a rematch tomorrow and ask the little kid for some advice anyway. "Stop rushing," he tells me.

Round 2...fight!

I feel like I rushed through the training anyway. I don't know if I will be able to put all the pieces together. I call up Taylor minutes before the rematch. "Just remember the strats I taught you," he says. Shoe and I start the first map. He doesn't kill me in a split second, and I slowly start to build up confidence. Before I know it, I'm leading 7-1. I have found my eye of the tiger.

Still, when the fog of war is lifted, Shoe pinches the victory out of his ass 25-24 and dominates the second map 25-18. On the final map, Shoe's up 24-17, but I continue to stick with what I've been taught. Like the sage rumblings of Obi-Wan Kenobi, my coaches' lessons echo in my head. I'm not blind with rage and stupidly rushing out. I pick up power weapons and make him work for each kill. After the two long hours of battling Shoe, I finally get the best of my boss: I win 25-24. Cue the *Rocky* music. If my coaches were here, I'm sure they'd carry me on their shoulders in celebration. Well, maybe not the 7-year-old kid.  —James Lee

"SWEEP THE LEG!"

The coaches of Gaming-Lessons.com

Tom Taylor, AKA: **Tsquared**

Rated in the top four in 16 consecutive pro tournaments, this hotshot *Halo 2* sensei gets paid anywhere from \$400 to \$800 a week teaching players level 3 to 37. He's getting profiled for *True Life* on MTV.

Personal website:
gaming-lessons.com

Rate: \$40 an hour for an individual lesson



Bonnie Burton, AKA: **Xena**

Burton, a member of the all-girl PMS clan, will handle most of the female clientele and isn't worried that girls won't sign up for a class. "Most of them just want to game and get better like every other gamer out there," she tells us.

Personal website:
msxena.1UP.com

Rate: \$25 an hour for an individual lesson



Victor DeLeon III AKA: **Lil Poison**

At 7 years old, DeLeon is the youngest pro gamer in the world. He began playing videogames when he was 2 and will train the younger *Halo 2* players. DeLeon also enjoys spelling and swimming.

Personal website:
lilpoison.com

Rate: \$30 an hour for an individual lesson



Other sites to see:

www.halo2player.com—Watch videos that promise to teach "secret ninja moves" in *Halo 2*. Just don't hurt yourself.
www.consolepro.com—Another new coaching site with its own band of pros. These guys'll run you 20 bucks an hour.

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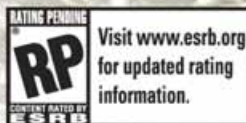
I've been out of Baker's shadow for no more than three days now and already I'm feeling the weight of my fear. The fear that around every corner somebody's lying in wait. The fear that any wrong choice could end up killing what I'm trying to save. Well, somebody's got to lead this fight. And if I call this right, my men — the men who have fought next to me — will get out of this hell alive.

Red
6/16



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PlayStation.2



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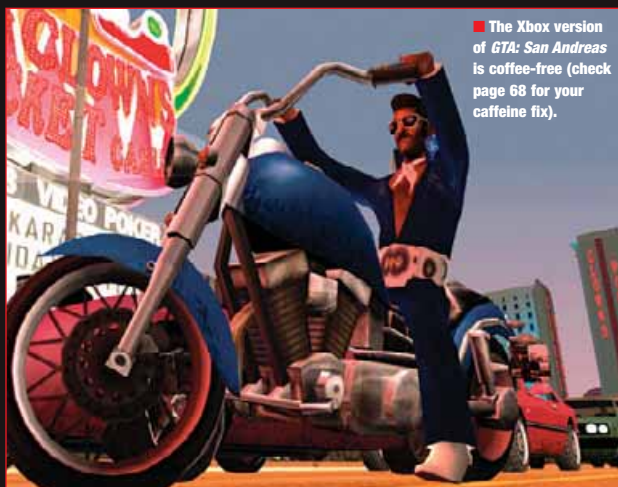
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THE SALES CHARTS | FOR JUNE 2005

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES



■ The Xbox version of *GTA: San Andreas* is coffee-free (check page 68 for your caffeine fix).

1 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas • XB • Rockstar

2 Pokémon Emerald • GBA • Nintendo

3 Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith • PS2 • LucasArts

4 Medal of Honor: European Assault • PS2 • EA Games

5 Conker: Live & Reloaded • XB • Microsoft

6 Lego Star Wars • PS2 • Eidos

7 Madagascar • PS2 • Activision

8 Madagascar • GBA • Activision

9 Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition • PS2 • Rockstar

10 Destroy All Humans! • PS2 • THQ

TOP 10 PS2



- 1 Star Wars: Episode III ROTS
- 2 Medal of Honor: European Assault
- 3 Lego Star Wars
- 4 Madagascar
- 5 Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition
- 6 Destroy All Humans!
- 7 MVP Baseball 2005
- 8 Batman Begins
- 9 God of War
- 10 Juiced

TOP 10 XBOX



- 1 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
- 2 Conker: Live & Reloaded
- 3 Star Wars: Episode III ROTS
- 4 Destroy All Humans!
- 5 Medal of Honor: European Assault
- 6 Lego Star Wars
- 7 Forza Motorsport
- 8 Batman Begins
- 9 Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition
- 10 Advent Rising

TOP 10 GAMECUBE



- 1 Madagascar
- 2 Super Mario Sunshine
- 3 Super Smash Bros. Melee
- 4 Pokémon Colosseum
- 5 Animal Crossing
- 6 The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker
- 7 Kirby Air Ride
- 8 MVP Baseball 2005
- 9 Medal of Honor: European Assault
- 10 Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat

TOP 10 PORTABLES



- 1 Pokémon Emerald • GBA
- 2 Madagascar • GBA
- 3 Fire Emblem: Sacred Stones • GBA
- 4 Star Wars: Episode III ROTS • GBA
- 5 Kirby: Canvas Curse • DS
- 6 Lego Star Wars • GBA
- 7 Super Mario 64 DS • DS
- 8 WarioWare: Microgame\$ • GBA
- 9 Need for Speed Und. Rivals • PSP
- 10 Untold Legends • PSP

TOP 10 RENTALS

FOR THE WEEK ENDING 7/17/05



- 1 NCAA Football 06 • PS2
- 2 Destroy All Humans! • PS2
- 3 Medal of Honor: Eur. Assault • XB
- 4 Fantastic Four • PS2
- 5 Medal of Honor: Eur. Assault • PS2
- 6 Midnight Club 3: DUB Ed. • PS2
- 7 Destroy All Humans! • XB
- 8 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas • XB
- 9 Star Wars: Episode III ROTS • PS2
- 10 Fantastic Four • XB

WHAT'S UP AT



EGM.1UP.COM

Our mag is stuffed with info, but if you desire more content, you have to get one of those computer contraptions and visit this here site. We've got additional screenshots of *NBA Live 06* for Xbox 360, plus videos of the *Driver 4* producer talkin' shop.

SOULCALIBUR3.1UP.COM

Our comrades over at 1UP.com, *Computer Gaming World*, and the *Official PlayStation Magazine* love all that is *Soul Calibur* nearly as much as we do. Apparently, our love is better, because in the company-wide *Soul Calibur 2* tourney our own Demian Linn took home the crown. Head to this URL for footage of the competition, as well as everything you need to know about Namco's next soulful fighter.

CHEATS.1UP.COM

This site not only is a great source for hints, strategies, and tactics but now features a forum for posting your own questions, or you can answer those posed by others. Just try doing so in a polite and articulate manner.

Featured Club: Useless Videogame Facts

Think you know more completely insipid things about videogames than anyone else? Find others like yourself and delight each other with inane bits of trivia at UVGF-club.1UP.com.

Featured Blog: Dan "Shoe" Hsu

So you want to write about videogames for a living, huh? It's a great gig, for sure, but it ain't just about being able to solve *Metroid Prime* in less than one hour. Visit egmshoe.1UP.com, where *EGM*'s head honcho gives some sound advice on how to take his job.

Source: NPD TRS'S Video Games Service. Call (516) 625-6190 for questions regarding this list.

Source: Blockbuster Video

>> WEBZEN HAS ANNOUNCED *ENDLESS SAGA*, A MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME FOR PS3 THAT'S DUE IN 2007... >>

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4-player multi-tap over 3 modes

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PlayStation®2

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COMING SEPTEMBER

OVERHEARD

Silly things said by interesting people, or vice versa



"Let me make it clear: This is Universal f****ing Studios, guys. These are the producers of *Batman*.... **[God of War] is a real movie**...no offense to Mr./Dr. Bowl (or whatever you spell it like), but this ain't gonna be *Alone in the Dark*."

—Sony game designer David Jaffe assures readers of his blog that the movie licensed from his PS2 actioner will surpass game-movie director Uwe Boll's previous masterpiece

"I'm not going to reveal [the PS3] price today. **I'm going to only say that it'll be expensive.**"

—Sony Computer Entertainment President Ken Kutaragi

"Be a nerd. Watch lots of movies, read comics, do what you've gotta do. If you can run your friends through a [*Dungeons & Dragons*] game as a dungeon master, and they have a good time, congratulations: You're a game designer."

—Alex Jimenez of Tesseract Games gives advice to would-be game designers at a San Diego Comic-Con panel

"I don't think we look at it as a negative thing, because as we're not focusing on the Internet, we've got to focus on the local [wireless multiplayer] stuff."

—Metroid Prime: Hunters designer Richard Vorodi comments on the upcoming DS shooter's lack of online multiplayer, proving denial ain't just a river in Africa

"We've got a Ferrari. They've got a Ferrari. **Our Ferrari is leaving the starting line substantially before their Ferrari is** and, in most races, that's a very nice thing."

—Microsoft chairman and spokesperson Bill Gates on the upcoming showdown between PS3 and Xbox 360

"If parents really want to scare their kids away from *Grand Theft Auto*, they should start playing it themselves. Nothing makes a game, album, or movie less cool more quickly than knowing your mom and dad think it's, like, totally awesome."

—Editor Nathan Alderman of the financial site Motley Fool in a column on why the recent controversy over GTA: San Andreas will only make teens want the game more

"You'll just have to **hack our game to find out.**"

—Neversoft President Joel Jewett when asked if his company's M-rated Wild West adventure Gun would have a hidden sex minigame similar to San Andreas' notorious Hot Coffee mod

"I think everybody is kind of confused by [Nintendo] right now. Publishers don't know what to think—whether this Revolution thing is even going to happen, whether it's going to be cool or not, or whether Nintendo's just going to stop making consoles and just become a software publisher."

—Ex-Microsoft Games VP and current game industry consultant Ed Fries paints a not-so-rosy picture of Nintendo's image among third parties

Pay Close Attention To His Technique

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QUOTATION SOURCES FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: DAVIDJAFEBLOG.COM, GAMESPOT.COM, GAMASUTRA.COM, NINTENDO OF EUROPE INTERVIEW, GAMESPOT.COM, FOOL.COM, EGM INTERVIEW, UAT.EDU

>> DELAY OF GAMES: EIDOS HAS PUSHED BACK THE RELEASE OF ITS NEXT *TOMB RAIDER* AND *HITMAN* TITLES UNTIL EARLY NEXT YEAR.... >>

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VS

PARAGON





BRIGADE vs WOLVERINE



IRON MAN vs HAZMAT



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HUMAN TORCH • VAN ROEKEL • FAULT ZONE • SOLARÄ • THE WINK**

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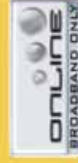
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XB360 EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

NBA LIVE 06

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Release Date: November 2005

Hoop dreams

Oh man, just wait until they see the game." That's what Tim Tschirner tells us he said to himself a few months back after reading our first (and quite skeptical) preview of *NBA Live 06* for Xbox 360. But how could we not question the

next-gen debut of EA's hugely successful basketball series? The company had only released one screenshot from a "visual target" CG video, which wasn't even the actual game.

"This is a brand-new *NBA Live*," says Tschirner.

"We have three goals for this game: It's gotta look next-gen, play next-gen, and feel next-gen." And after some exclusive hands-on time with the Xbox 360 title, this baller already has us eating our initial words.
—Bryan Intihar

The Players

The images here aren't dressed-up beauty shots—the NBA's superstars really do look this lifelike when you're playing the game. And aside from the photo-realistic mugs and rippling physiques, you'll also notice moving uniform cloth and perspiration. Yep, players now break a sweat (some more than others) throughout four quarters. "Players will also portray true emotion," says Tschirner. For instance, a defender will grimace after taking a charge, and loudmouths such as the Pacers' Ron Artest will argue calls. Hopefully, he won't be too emotional and get into a brouhaha with unruly fans.



The Camera

Even the perspective from how you play the game is receiving some tweaks. *NBA Live 06* will offer roughly 20 different (and fully customizable) camera options, and the overall system will be more dynamic. "It may start as your basic low camera," says Tschirner. "But if you're at the top of the key and you pass the ball to an open guy in the corner, the camera is going to then cut to behind that particular player."

The Crowds

Usually, those in the seats go neglected. Not in how they look, per se, but in their reactions. In *NBA Live 06*, crowds will respond with a thunderous roar if, say, the home team has just sunk a go-ahead free throw in the waning seconds of overtime. They'll recognize momentum changes, too; fans will get all pumped and start cheering louder as the home squad starts mounting a comeback. The increased emphasis on audio is also trickling down to the players, as you'll now hear teammates call for the ball and bark at you to shoot the rock.



The Arenas

Another next-gen bonus is the crazy amount of detail that's going into each team's digs. "We've rebuilt all the arenas from scratch," says Tschirner. This equates into scenery like fully functioning Jumbotron that display game footage, a scorer's table, and even those ever-changing billboards that wrap around several NBA homes.

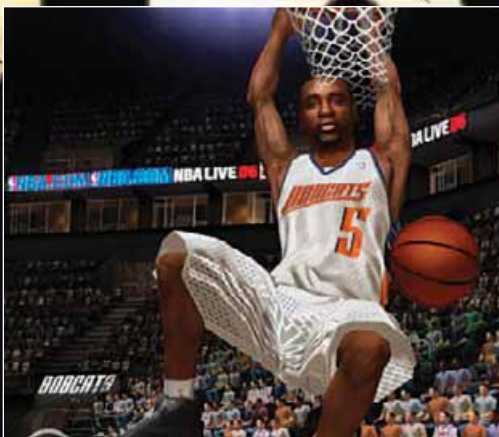
The Gameplay

Due to technical limitations, physical play, such as applying pressure D or contesting a layup, has never looked very pretty on today's consoles. Either it seems like there's a thin invisible wall between the two players, or even worse, one will literally go through the other's torso or stretched-out arms. "We are now using real physics to determine collisions," explains Tschirner. "This means that players can really get tangled up. If body parts hit, it will interrupt the offensive player's flight path to the basket." So definitely expect a rougher brand of basketball in the next generation.



The Courts

Attend any real pro basketball game and you'll see the courts surrounded with spandex-clad cheerleaders, cameramen, security guards, and annoying team mascots. While the court in this batch of screenshots is bare, Tschirner promises that the final game will have several onlookers. "The sidelines are coming to life," he says. "You can collide with these people, too. The plan is that if you dive for the ball and crash into one of the cameramen, the game will show an instant replay from that camera." Very nice.

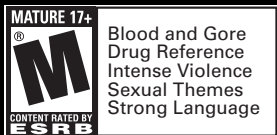
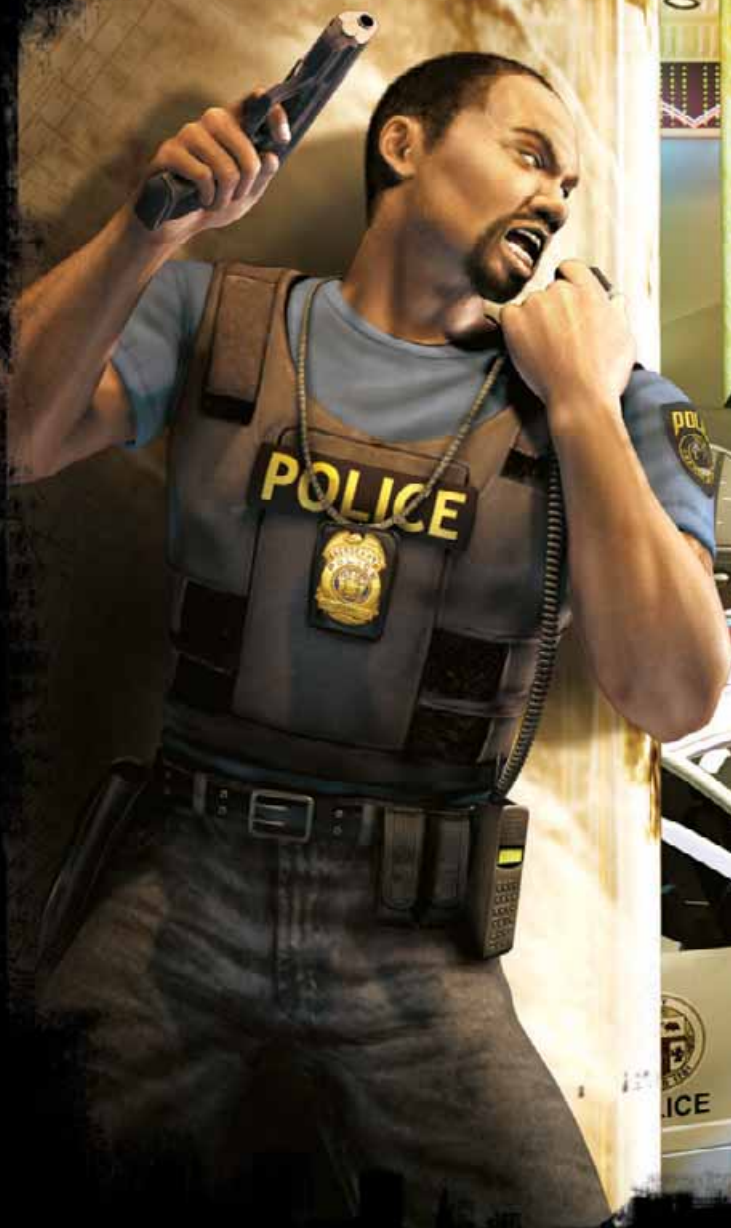


Can't Afford an Xbox 360?

No biggie—*NBA Live 06* will also rattle the rims of all the current consoles and the PSP this September and October, respectively. The major addition here is what EA's calling Freestyle Superstars. Each of the six player classifications, from the dunkaholic High Flyer to the no-look-passing Playmaker, will provide the NBA's best with unique move sets. Also, expect a smoother transition game and an easier slam-dunk contest.

GOD OF WAR (PS2). NO RELEASE DATE WAS ANNOUNCED, BUT CHARLES ROVEN (BATMAN BEGINS) WILL BE THE MOVIE'S PRODUCER.... >>

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TAKE THIS JOB: GAME DESIGNER

Our monthly look at the jobs you want—
with tips from the guys who have them

THIS MONTH:

LORNE LANNING

PRESIDENT AND CREATIVE
DIRECTOR OF ODDWORLD
INHABITANTS

LANNING'S DETAILS

Experience: Eleven years as a designer, 19 years in the graphics industry

Notable games: *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee* (PS1), *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee* (XB), *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath* (XB)

Game designer job data

Salary Range: \$40,000 to \$90,000

Recommended education: It varies, but solid art and communications backgrounds help

Location of most jobs: West Coast

Current level of demand: Low

How he got the gig

Becoming the ringleader of the oddest and ugliest bunch of heroes in gaming isn't easy. Lorne Lanning's career path to president and creative director of *Oddworld Inhabitants* was a detour-heavy road, to say the least. After learning photo-realistic painting in New York and studying special effects and animation at Cal Arts (also the alma mater of many at CG-movie powerhouse Pixar Studios), Lanning went on to work in the defense industry, creating simulations in weapons programs. Working on such

ultra-high-end simulators and graphic equipment was like "looking into the future of gaming," he says. From there, Lanning switched to special-effects work, where he met Sherry McKenna, then a client. The two cofounded *Oddworld Inhabitants* in 1994 and developed the award-winning *Oddworld* series of videogames. Frustrated with what he calls the sequel-driven direction of the industry, Lanning recently scaled back his company and shifted its focus to developing movies and TV shows.

—Johnny Liu





LANNING'S QUICK TIPS

1. Learn the basics: for instance, the fundamentals of art, such as drawing from real life, light, and shadow. The tools are secondary.
2. Create work that stimulates the soul. Don't let go of your imagination. Be a storyteller.
3. At the same time, live in the real world and understand financing.
4. Don't be one of those \$@% artists who are unwilling to bend. The best ideas are sometimes the collective ones that merge together creatively.
5. Practice your design skills by creating custom levels for games that foster the DIY lifestyle (such as *Pariah* for Xbox or the multiplatform shooter *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect*).



3

TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

1 Faces off

Lanning finds expressive, twisted art inspiring. These faces normally adorn the wall inside his library.

2 Sexy toys

Look on the desk of anybody in the game biz and you'll find at least one toy. Lanning's eclectic collection has everything from a statue of comic anti-hero Grendel to designer toys from Europe to sculptures from fans. Japanese bobble heads cheer him up on bad days. "A man has to be pretty depressed to need these," he says.

3 Street arts

Street culture is an endless source of inspiration for Lanning. "Look at the way graffiti is different in each culture," he says. He also highlights turntablism, the iconography of surf and skate graphics, and machinima. "Anything that allows young, creative people to create faster and [less expensively] is exciting."

4 Skeletons in his closet

Thanks to the power of eBay, Lanning landed the skeletons of two gophers locked in battle. "Skeletons show

how creatures tick," he says. "They also make great pieces of art."

5 Light reading

Behind Lanning's office is a library with bookshelves 15 feet high. The books—about everything from art and design to the Chernobyl disaster—are meticulously organized with labels and bar codes. A sign reminds employees to put every book back where it was found. Lanning has worked social commentary from these tomes into his *Oddworld* series.

Photographs by Michael Sexton

NEXT MONTH'S JOB:
PRODUCT MANAGER

KIDS. IT'S THE TRUE TALE OF A GROUP OF GAMERS WHO USE THEIR SKILLS TO WIN BIG ON THE LAS VEGAS POKER CIRCUIT.... >>



BF2

02.23 PST **LIVE with Ken Chappel**



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PlayStation 2



XBOX 360

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*INTERNET CONNECTION required for online play. PlayStation®2 online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). Online play may not be available on all platforms. See product pack for details.





■ Soma takes aim at a nice piece of fish.



DS PREVIEW

CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami Tokyo
Release Date: October 2005

Give your DS a little soul

After 19 years of gothic flagellation, Konami's most prolific action-adventure series still manages to successfully reanimate itself on a regular basis. *Castlevania* is so iron-clad that even the departure of its signature villain, Count Dracula himself, hasn't hurt the franchise. *Dawn of Sorrow* continues the playfully weird plot of 2003's *Aria of Sorrow* (GBA), in which Soma Cruz, an androgynous high school lad, avoids becoming the vessel for Drac's resurrection by sealing the accursed castle in a magical solar eclipse. Now, one year later, Soma must infiltrate a diabolical cult that's plotting to assassinate him to facili-

tate the dark lord's return.

Gameplay faithfully adheres to the established "Metroid-vania" mold pioneered by *Symphony of the Night* (PS1)—you wind your way through a labyrinthine castle, collecting oodles of creative weapons, armor, and items—yet still manages to feel sufficiently original. Additions include a substantially deepened take on *Aria*'s innovative soul system and some gimmicky yet enjoyable touch-panel functionality (see sidebars on the next page). The game's fresh feeling even extends to its roster of grisly, screen-filling bosses, which are nearly all new to the series.

While the previous game offered little reminder of its futuristic 2035 setting (aside from a few modern weapons and Soma's boot-cut blue jeans), *Dawn*'s setting bravely mixes elements of old and new. "The cult's fortress is a modernized replica of *Castlevania*," explains *Dawn of Sorrow* Director Koji Igarashi. "Some elements are close to the original, but the cult also uses modern machinery and implements of dark alchemy." In other words, you'll still dodge Medusa heads in the clock tower, but you'll also launch a few rocket-propelled grenades past the parked cars of cult members. *Vania* vets will note that the more open-ended level

layout allows for increased exploration. "Much like in *Symphony of the Night*, I wanted to give players a little bit of freedom," says Igarashi. "It's also a fair bit more difficult than *Aria of Sorrow*." Even players who traditionally blast through these portable adventures in two days might be stumped by some of *Dawn*'s wicked new puzzles, including slot machine doors, movable rooms, and ripped-from-the-tabloids mysteries involving Bigfoot. "We made some of the puzzles really quite hard," Igarashi says. "Of course, those are optional: You don't need them to see the ending...well, an ending at least."

—Shane Bettenhausen

>> CASTLEVANIA FANS WILL BE GLAD TO HEAR THAT DAWN OF SORROW'S SOUNDTRACK ISN'T NEARLY AS SPARSE AND TINNY AS THOSE



All-Star Whipping

Bad endings aren't always so bad. Reaching *Dawn*'s nets you a classy unlockable—Julius mode, where Julius Belmont (above, descendant of original Drac-whipper Simon) and sexy shopkeeper Yoko Belnades (below) join forces with other surprise playable characters in a remixed version of Soma's game. You're able to switch between the members of your vampire hunting squad with a simple button press. Expect plenty of new attacks, a cool new story, and sweet remixes of classic *Castlevania* tunes.



Small Touches

Dawn of Sorrow doesn't go overboard with its DS-specific functionality. The ever-present map on the upper screen is a godsend, but the touch-panel implementation is fairly minimal. Each boss battle climaxes with a "Magic Seal" puzzle where you have to trace a specific rune with the stylus in order to kill the foe. Other than that, you'll only whip out the stylus to clear a special type of ice block from the screen.



THE POWER OF SOUL

"*Dawn of Sorrow* seems very difficult at first glance," says Director Koji Igarashi. "But if you find the right enemy souls along the way, it will become much easier." The man speaks truth. Armed with only a weapon, young Soma is a weak girly man, but armed with the right combo of enemy souls, he's unstoppable. Souls come in three types: Bullet (weapons), Guardian (defensive and summon spells), and Enchant (special abilities). Every enemy in the game has a soul, ripe for the taking.



Acquiring Souls

Soma earns the most crucial souls (giving him abilities like double-jumping, breathing underwater, etc.) from bosses, but every other attack must be earned by killing foes. Depending on the rarity of the enemy (from one to three stars, three being the rarest), you may have to kill an enemy over 50 times to harvest its soul. "If you're a hardcore gamer, you'll feel that you really want to get them all," laughs Igarashi. "But beginners might not want to take the time to collect them, so they can clear the game without concentrating on soul collection."



Soul Powers

Not all enemy souls are created equal. Many can be powered up, often as many as nine times, to create more potent effects. Sometimes this is as simple as collecting nine copies of the same soul, but a few of the most damaging Bullet-type attacks require nine souls just to reach level three. Ouch. It's worth it, though: A high-level attack soul always delivers serious damage, and the attack animation looks a hell of a lot cooler. Our personal favorite: a fully leveled-up Waiter Skeleton attack, which hurls a massive platter of deadly food at foes.



Soul Synthesis

You'll find a sizable arsenal of weapons scattered throughout the castle (and a few more available for purchase at a shop), but the finest equipment can't be found just lying around. "Enemies drop some basic weapons, but if you want to make the ultimate, more powerful weapons you'll have to use souls in the weapon synthesis," says Igarashi. That means doubling up on your favorite rare souls if you want to keep a spare one after buffing up your sword. Think that's rough? Some upgrades require one-of-a-kind boss souls.



THE ULTIMATE DANGER CALLS FOR



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



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September 21, 2005

NO NOOKIE ALLOWED

Videogame ratings firestorm burns on

Until recently, all most gamers knew about the Entertainment Software Ratings Board's Adults Only rating was that they didn't see too much of it. Like NC-17 for films, the dreaded AO is something publishers go out of their way to avoid—largely because major retailers like Wal-Mart, EB, and GameStop don't sell such titles. But then a modder (a type of videogame hacker) unearthed explicit sexual content buried in the code for *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, prompting the ESRB to reevaluate the game and change its rating from Mature to AO. The ramifications for the industry are unclear.

Scalding Hot Coffee

If you've been living under a rock for the past month or so, here are the basics. Patrick Wildenborg, an avid *GTA* fan and modder, discovered Hot Coffee, a sex minigame hidden within *San Andreas*. After initial deflections, *GTA* publisher Rockstar eventually acknowledged that the scenes, though inaccessible to ordinary gamers, were in fact in the code. Oblivious parents, headline-hungry politicians, and talk-show hosts everywhere were morally outraged. The ESRB launched an investigation, then rereated the game. Rockstar ceased production and began working on a version that did not contain the code; the company

also reduced its quarterly earnings forecast by roughly \$50 million. Soon enough, Congress was calling for a Federal Trade Commission investigation of Rockstar's parent company. Senator Hillary Clinton was denouncing games for their violence and depravity. Antivideogame lawyer Jack Thompson was obsessing about labia in *The Sims 2*. Real gamers simply saw more evidence of how misunderstood games are in the mainstream.

Explicit acts

Sex is nothing new to videogames. In the past few years, high-profile games with adult-themed content occupied store shelves with no ratings fanfare. *The Sims 2* (PC) features rampant fornication and user-created nude mods. *Playboy: The Mansion* has gamers shooting racy centerfolds and bopping like bunnies. The title character of *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude* is a horny college student desperately trying to get laid. Games have been rude, raunchy, and rapacious for a long time—*GTA* itself first gained notoriety for its potential for free-form and extreme violence. What's the fuss about Hot Coffee?

"We're talking about sexually explicit acts," says ESRB President Patricia Vance. "The Hot Coffee minigame is explicit, with or without the nudity.... You have scenes of sexual intercourse and fellatio." Sex in *The Sims 2*, in

"The Hot Coffee minigame is explicit, with or without the nudity."

—ESRB President Patricia Vance

other words, takes place under the covers and is only implied. In *Playboy: The Mansion*, the sex might seem explicit to some, but the raters didn't agree. "In M[-rated] games, you might have references to [these acts]. You may know what's going on, but they're not explicit," Vance says. Violence seems to be in another category altogether. *San Andreas* has always let gamers bludgeon innocent bystanders at will. "Our raters didn't consider it to warrant an AO rating," says Vance.

It's society, stupid!

To the average media consumer who's watched *The Sopranos*, heard an uncensored 50 Cent song, or seen Paris Hilton's sexed-up Carl's Jr. ad on prime-time TV, *GTA*'s Hot Coffee content might appear reasonably within society's bounds for content intended for a mature (but not adult-only) audience. It's consensual sex, after all, and its original gameplay function seems to have been to reward a strong relationship with your girlfriend. Sounds almost...emotionally healthy?

Yet there's still something touchy about videogames, even when they contain content that's not measurably different from other forms of mainstream entertainment. "There does seem to be a credible gap between society being perfectly fine with underage kids watching raunchy videos on MTV and having them play similar videogames," says Hal Halpin, president of the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association. It's an important issue to raise, Halpin says, because IEMA member companies such as Blockbuster, Wal-Mart, Target, and Toys "R" Us often account for a significant share of music CDs and DVD movie sales. "It's very often the same executive responsible for two or more of these categories," Halpin says. "It helps fuel the discussion about a universal ratings system for all packaged-good entertainment products." Such a system would hold games to the same standards, and anyone complaining about *GTA*'s sex and violence would have to put the game up against films or TV with the same rating.

What now?

The ESRB stands by its current ratings standards, and the only change as a result of the Hot Coffee scandal is that now the ratings board has made it clear to game publishers that all content on a disc, playable or not, must be disclosed if it's pertinent to the rating. Beyond that, it's really anybody's guess which way things will go. Halpin says he doesn't foresee videogame retailers changing their no-AO policy; in fact, he says, the social and political climate could affect even those games that have thus far stayed out of the crossfire. "The subject of the debate [will be] what separates Teen, Mature, and Adults Only," Halpin predicts. "Increased pressure regarding M-rated games from religious and political groups may well see a reduction in total M-rated games stocked by retailers."

It's equally difficult to assess how this could affect the development community, but so far it sounds like business as usual. "The ESRB rating system is...well executed, consistent, and highly respected," says Electronic Arts spokesperson Tammy Schachter. "We're big supporters." Reilly Brennan, spokesperson for Midway, says the company will continue making games for a wide audience. "Games are a mass-market form of entertainment," he says. "There's no reason they should have to adhere to one certain age group—you don't see that with TV or movies." Whatever happens, one thing is for sure: Gamers aren't getting any younger, and the adults-only issue is here to stay.  —Jennifer Tsao



■ Hot Coffee is undoubtedly graphic, but then so is the R-rated *Team America* (inset). Both feature caricatured sex scenes.



■ *Playboy: The Mansion*, an M-rated game that had, if not explicit, then at least badly acted sex.

>>> THE ESRB SAYS THE PERCENTAGE OF GAMES IT HAS RATED "MATURE" HAS CLIMBED ABOUT 2 PERCENT EACH YEAR SINCE 2002. ... >>>

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■ *God of War's* Kratos, still pissed off about those Mr. Clean comparisons.

THE RUMOR MILL

Producing juicier gossip than Grandma's knitting circle

Man, how time flies. To think it was 20 years ago that I rocked out to Mötley Crüe, learned from MacGyver how to make a rocket launcher out of tree bark and two rubber bands, and purchased Nintendo's very first console (check out page 136 for our retro piece on the NES). Damn, those really were the good ol' days. Wanna share with me one of your memorable moments from 1985? Shoot me an e-mail at quartermann@ziffdavis.com. In the meantime, enjoy yet another delicious helping of rumors. —The Q

Greek time line

If you haven't tried the simply divine *God of War* yet, then WHAT PLANET HAVE YOU BEEN LIVING ON FOR THE PAST SIX MONTHS?! Anyhoo, it appears enough of

you already approve of main man Kratos, as word around the Acropolis is that a *GOW* sequel is scheduled to slice-n-dice the PlayStation 2 sometime next year. Why isn't the game coming to Sony's next-gen system? Well, I'm hearing that the pasty-white hero is waiting until the third game in the action series before calling the PS3 home.

Is that a snake in your pocket?

As much as I eat, sleep, and s*** games, I've never been one for playing them on my cell phone. And quite honestly, most titles for the platform aren't worth their weight in pixels. But hopefully that'll change very soon, as Konami is planning to bring its stealthy *Metal Gear Solid* franchise to mobile phones by the end of the year.

Where you hiding, Sam?

And speaking of sneaky fellas, it seems *Splinter Cell*'s Sam Fisher is returning to the gaming scene. In addition to revisiting the current crop of consoles, the grizzled spy is going out on a next-gen assignment. That's right, *Splinter Cell 4* will head to Xbox 360 and PS3 next spring and fall, respectively.

Make 'em bigger

Even though The Q's mainly a console guy, I do dabble in the art of PC gaming. And right now, *Battlefield 2* has yours truly handcuffed to the computer. So it makes me giddy that the *SOCOM* series is taking a page from EA's gigantic shooter. Look for *SOCOM* on PS3 to be *really* multiplayer focused, feature much larger maps, and support up to 64 people online.

Next-gen fare

In my last rumor mill, I made mention of Sega teaming up with outside developers to remake some of its classic franchises for the upcoming consoles. That's still the case (and add *Virtua Cop* to the list of series I mentioned last time around), but I also hear that the company plans on keeping the next-gen version of *Crazy Taxi* in-house. Expect this one to pick up Xbox 360 and PS3 passengers in '06, plus it appears that the game will include some type of online component.



■ *SOCOM* on PS3: stealin' a battle plan from the PC world.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT



■ Sony's PlayStation 3 could still be a ways off.

Q: If the Xbox 360 has a shaky launch, will Sony push back the release of the PlayStation 3?

A: Put it to you this way: Sony will be watching gamers' initial impressions of the Xbox 360 very closely. Those in the know tell us that if Microsoft's Xbox successor does stumble out of the gate this November, Sony will consider moving the PS3's debut from next spring to the fall. And a delay might not be such a bad thing; it would leave the company with enough time to change that god-awful boomerang-shaped controller. 🙄

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10

Mike Tyson

Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!! (NES)

If Iron Mike winked at you back in 1987, it meant that with the next punch, your world was going to end. If the former heavyweight champion winks at you now, it probably means that he wants to rip out your large intestine and wear it as a tie, or perhaps a tasteful scarf.

Stage 3

R-Type (Arcade, many consoles)

Any boss can pop up at the end of a level; this one *is* the level. A giant battleship that filled the entire screen back when 4-inch-tall monsters ruled the arcades, this bad boy can fry you with its thrusters, smash you into a wall, or straight shoot you down. Respect.

9



8

De Rol Le

Phantasy Star Online (DC/XB/GC)

A barrage of purple energy balls. Gut-piercing tentacles. A skin-scorching laser beam. It's no wonder you need one, two, or three other friends to help take down this unpredictable, water-dwelling worm.



7

Alma

Ninja Gaiden (XB)

One of the few bosses from the current generation of consoles to make the list, Alma earns her spot by separating the men from the boys in one of the hardest games ever made. Many a ninja has fallen to this femme fatale, but surviving means that you are among *Ninja Gaiden's* elite.



6

Nemesis

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (PS1/DC/GC)

"S.T.A.R.S.!" Being hunted room to room for hours by this giant freak scarred us for life (in a good way). Note: Nemesis was knocked down two spots for his appearance in *Resident Evil Apocalypse*.

5

Seven Force

Gunstar Heroes (Genesis)

Back in the day, an action game wasn't an action game unless you broke a sweat battling its bosses. Seven Force, a robot that possessed a whopping seven different forms, helped keep several couch potatoes from sporting love handles (at least for the time being).



4

The End *Metal Gear Solid 3* (PS2)

The lengthy sniper showdown with the elderly End is the quintessential *Metal Gear Solid* experience: a lethal game of hide-and-seek where you must use sight, sound, and technology to track down the old fart...and to avoid being caught yourself.



Mother Brain

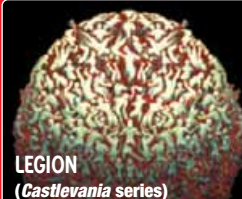
Super Metroid (Super NES)

When it comes to epic endings, you can't do much better than the climax of *Super Metroid*. Mother Brain's first form jogs the memory of battles past, but what unfolds after her true form rises is the perfect finale to an already sublime experience. What's truly amazing about the event is that it happens without the characters speaking a single word.

3



Honorable Mentions



LEGION

(*Castlevania* series)

There's just something undeniably cool about fighting a giant ball of dead bodies.

BOWSER

(*Super Mario* series)

None of Mario's meetings with Bowser have been that noteworthy, but we still love the guy's never-give-up attitude.

GANON

(*The Legend of Zelda* series)

Link's main adversary just missed the list, but that last fight with Ganondorf in *Ocarina of Time* (N64) still deserves a shout-out.

2

Psycho Mantis

Metal Gear Solid, *MGS: The Twin Snakes* (PS1/GC)

By committing a narrative faux pas and breaking the fourth wall, *MGS* mastermind Hideo Kojima gave us one of the most uniquely memorable boss fights ever. Psycho Mantis can read our minds (actually, our memory cards), mess with our TV sets, and anticipate our every move.



1



Sephiroth

Final Fantasy VII (PS1)

Is it his luxurious flowing hair? His 7-foot-long sword? The green glow of his eyes? We may never know why we love Sephiroth so much, but we do know that thanks to what he does to Aerith (see pic), he's unquestionably the most memorable villain in role-playing game history, and the *EGM* staff's unanimous No. 1 boss of all time. 



THE HOT 10

This month's list of must-see gaming items (and eight other things)

1 ALTOIDS CANS AS GAME CASES

Once you get rid of the crap inside, those round **Altoids** sours tins are the perfect size to hold three PSP UMDs. DS owners, try the Altoids chewing gum case for your carts.



■ Videogames > candy.



2 HIDDEN CONTENT

San Andreas' unlockable booty call isn't the only bit of extra content ever left buried in a game's code. Head to egm.1UP.com for links to leftover *Super Mario Bros.* 3 levels (above), unused voices from *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (PS1), and a test area from *Zelda: The Wind Waker* (GC).

Photograph by Randy Dodson/GAMERS' 2005



3

THE WARRIORS

PS2/Xbox

• October 2005

Warriors be lookin' good. You hear me babies?

4

PIMP MY CONSOLE

Stuff your game machine's guts into something else—the more ridiculous the better—and e-mail us a pic at EGM@ziffdavis.com.

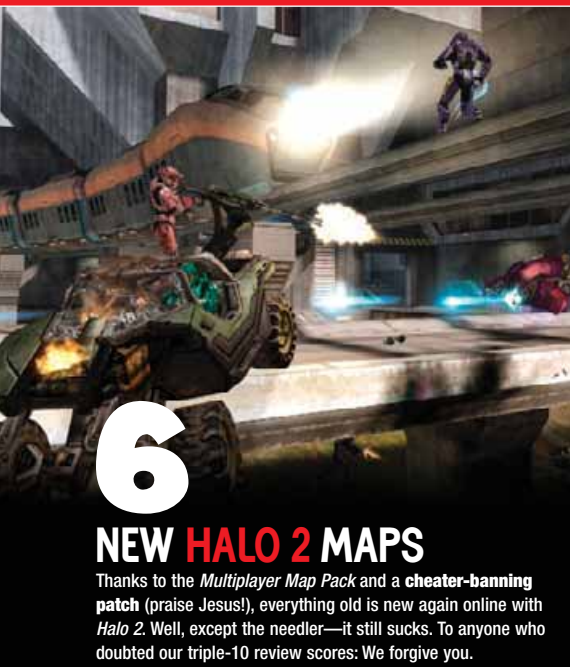
Bonus points for hydraulics, fish tanks, and anything neon.



5

REAL STYLI

(Yes, that's the plural of stylus.) The secret weapon of all serious *Meteos* and *Yoshi's Touch & Go* multiplayer gamers. **Ditch the dinky plastic toothpick** and get yourself a full-sized stylus at any office supply store ASAP.



6

NEW HALO 2 MAPS

Thanks to the *Multiplayer Map Pack* and a **cheater-banning patch** (praise Jesus!), everything old is new again online with *Halo 2*. Well, except the needler—it still sucks. To anyone who doubted our triple-10 review scores: We forgive you.

7

1UP.COM'S GAME DEVELOPER BLOGS

A few to get you started:

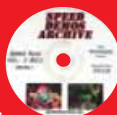
mizuguchi.1UP.com, getting-up.1UP.com, seropadope.1UP.com. Would we be shilling for this website if it weren't owned by the same company as *EGM*? We like to think so.

8

SPEED RUNS

Super Metroid completed in 36 minutes. *Super Mario Bros.* 3

in 11. The original *Resident Evil* in one hour and 10 minutes—using only the knife. Check out speed-demosarchive.com to download (or buy on DVD) these and other incredible feats of gaming derring-do.



9

RESIDENT EVIL 4

PS2 • October 2005

You'll dig the new "separate ways" side missions, even if (actually, especially if) you've already played through *RE4* on the Cube. Besides, it's a great way to pass the time until...



■ What if you fight zombified Al Qaeda terrorists? How awesome would that be?

10

RESIDENT EVIL 5

PS3/XB360 • Release TBA

Who knows what the final product will be like—remember how much *RE4* changed from its original teaser trailer? We expect a long wait before we find out, but even the brief glimpse of new **high-speed 28 Days Later-model zombies** will hold us for a few months. 🧟

COMING SOON

It's Halloween—everyone's entitled to one good scare

■ Ultimately, the scariest thing about *Nightmare's* Jack Skellington was his struggle with anorexia.

OCTOBER 2005



Aeon Flux

Majesco • PS2/XB — Don't be fooled by the Oscar-winning film *Monster*. Oscar-winning actress Charlize Theron is HOT!



Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance

Nintendo • GC — The GBA tactical-RPG hit migrates to the Cube, picking up some superbly smooth animation in the process.



Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories

Rockstar • PSP — A game? On PSP? That you want to buy? Whoa.



Jaws Unleashed

Majesco • PS2/XB — Clear something up for us, please: Who put a leash on Jaws to begin with? In this action splash-fest it's your turn to terrorize the unsuspecting spring breakers on Amity Island as the revered chum-guzzler.



Ratchet: Deadlocked

Sony CEA • PS2 — Sony's fuzzy mascot enters a *Running Man*-esque game show. Who loves you, and who do you love?



Infected

Majesco • PSP — Finally, technology that properly captures the fun and excitement of global viral pandemics.



L.A. Rush

Midway • PS2/XB — Race your fly-ass pimpmobile through the very heart of darkness—the greater Los Angeles area.



Tim Burton's: The Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge

Buena Vista Games • PS2/XB — An absurdly long title. No room to be glib.



Trapt

Tecmo • PS2 — As devil woman Queen Allura, you trap your suitors with weapons such as chandeliers and pregnancy.



The Warriors

Rockstar • PS2/XB — "Warriors! Come out to plaay!" By "play," they mean roam a lawless urban wasteland.



We Love Katamari

Namco • PS2 — Grab a friend and tackle this ball-rolling sequel's new co-op mode. If it doesn't end in a fight, we'll be impressed.



WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw '06

THQ • PS2 — Even the all-new "buried alive casket match" isn't as scary as men of great girth in gamey singlets.

Also in October

24: The Game
2K Games • PS2

Backyard Skateboarding
Atari • GBA

Fatal Frame III: The Tormented
Tecmo • PS2

Soul Calibur III
Namco • PS2

50 Cent: Bulletproof
VU Games • PS2/XB

Blitz: The League
Midway • PS2/XB

Jak X: Combat Racing
Sony CEA • PS2

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland
Activision • PS2/XB/GC/PSP/DS

Armored Core: Nexus
Digital Jesters • PS2

BloodRayne PSP
Majesco • PSP

Shining Force Neo
Capcom • PS2/XB

Virtua Tennis: World Tour
Sega • PSP



■ 24's real-time waiting action!

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MY NAME'S JACK CARVER. GOD KNOWS HOW I WOUND UP IN THIS HELLHOLE. IT'S CRAWLING WITH MERCS. THEY'RE HUNTING ME FOR SPORT. BUT THEY GOT A SURPRISE COMING. I CAN FEEL MYSELF CHANGING. I CAN SMELL THE BAD GUYS' BLOOD. THEIR SWEAT. AND I CAN KILL. I'M GETTING REALLY GOOD AT KILLING. TRUTH IS, I'M STARTING TO LIKE IT.

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■ Banana Republic's capri pants for men: \$129.99.



CALL OF DUTY 2

XB360 • Activision • November 2005

Targets Acquired: For a young series, *Call of Duty* already sports a twisted family tree. This Xbox 360 launch title is the direct sequel to the original 2003 PC hit, not last year's console smash, *Finest Hour*. Plus, a totally different *COD2*, *Big Red One*, hits current-gen consoles this fall. Confused? Don't be. Just know that this is probably the most anticipated first-person shooter of the year. And understanding your enemy isn't difficult. "The Nazis are very bad people," *COD2* Producer Grant Collier explains. "They were a highly trained, technologically advanced, and incredibly effective fighting force." It's your job to stop them as you join American, Russian, and British squads across pivotal battles leading up to World War II's climax.

Know Your Enemy: "In the first *COD*, we got a lot of props for how smart the

friendly A.I. was, and now we've put that attention to detail into the enemy side," says Collier. "When attacking an enemy, he might decide to fall back, call for back-up to either flank you or set up a machine gun, or maybe he'll suppress you with grenades." This game aims to do this incredibly efficient, fastidiously trained army justice. "The enemy knows its surroundings, it knows where you are, and will attack you from the best position for greater success," adds Collier.

Having highly intelligent enemies transforms urban battlegrounds into dynamic, constantly shifting war zones where anything can happen. It's all about the chaos of war, with ricocheting bullets, airborne shrapnel, clouds of dust, exploding scenery, and copious amounts of realistic "battle chatter," an almost constant stream of useful info (and panicked freak-outs) from your friendlies...and enemies.

"Any fans that speak German will be able to hear the Nazis shouting out your location, calling for ammo, or ordering flanking maneuvers," muses Collier.

Even with all this extreme realism, Collier isn't forgetting that the game is, well...still a game. "Good A.I. doesn't shoot you from a mile away; good A.I. acts like a human." Your foes will make mistakes, get confused, and react slowly if they're near an explosion. And while it's a difficult game, it's still doable by the average player, thanks to multiple difficulty settings. "Fun definitely trumps reality," says Collier. "It's still a game. It's not the History Channel."

The Most Dangerous Game: Although *Call of Duty 2* will invariably offer outstanding multiplayer action via Xbox Live, the developers claim that the single-player action might actually be tougher. "Sure,

there are different levels of players out there," Collier says. "But I think that for the average person who picks up *Call of Duty 2*...the A.I. will actually be better players than they are."



This fall's shooters don't go down easily

Once the playthings of the hardcore PC crowd, shooters (either first person or otherwise) are now solidly mainstream, and the recent massive success of *Halo 2* proves that the love affair between gamers and gunplay is still as hot as an exploding barrel. But what makes shooters so fun? Realistic

graphics certainly help, as do creative map designs and badass weapons. Yet, in terms of single-player shooting, it's really all about enemy artificial intelligence (A.I.). It's these complex programming routines that make foes like *Halo*'s Elites so damn tough (and rewarding) to gun down.

We've quizzed the developers behind this year's most promising

shooters to find out how dangerous their latest creations are and also how their games' human-versus-human online combat stacks up against the competition. The next time you see these foes, it'll be at the business end of a shotgun, so it's best to know your enemy....

—Shane Bettenhausen
and Dan "Shoe" Hsu

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

PS2/XB/PSP • LucasArts • November 2005

Targets Acquired: In this massive shooter spanning both the new and old *Star Wars* trilogies, you'll have the opportunity to blast just about every man, woman, droid, and Ewok in the far, faraway galaxy, including this super battle droid. We aren't making any promises, but we heard a rumor of a possible Gungan extermination on Naboo....

Know Your Enemy: Since you can tackle the conflict as one of four different factions (Separatist and Republic for the *Episode III* era and Rebel and Empire for the classic era), the single-player game boasts an immense quantity of foot soldiers, from dumb-ass battle droids to slightly more dangerous clone troopers. Not everyone is easy cannon fodder, though: New units such as the clone commander and magna droid pack lethal firepower, and brutal boss characters, including General Grievous, Boba Fett, and the daddy of them all, Darth Vader, provide climactic duels.

Simply adding new baddies isn't enough, though—*Battlefront*'s developers are keen on making the fights in this sequel more intense and realistic than they were in the previous game. "Let's face it: If you are going to be waging a war, the A.I. is a key factor in making that war come alive," explains Producer Dan Pettit. "Our team has done a great job to make sure not only that the A.I. behaves realistically as individuals, but also that they work well as a group." Often that means that each enemy will use his unique skills to get the best of you: Bothan spies launch sneak attacks from behind, battle droids roll up shields blazing, and Jedi embarrass you with all manner of unfair magic trickery. As if the fray wasn't already crowded enough, factor in a full arsenal of ground- and space-based vehicles to commandeer and you've got one hell of a star war on your hands.

The Most Dangerous Game: "A.I. can definitely give players the sense of real-



Picture this, nerds: You load up a boarding party inside your Republic gunship, land inside an enemy capital ship, then sabotage its engines, shields, or turrets from within. Awesome!

ism that allows them to become immersed in the game," Pettit says. "But in the end, you are never going to be able to create the uniqueness and various styles that a human player can bring to an online experience." He's right: 16 players

running and flying around expansive maps blasting and slicing one another...it's good stuff. The new ability to play as crucial characters like Darth Vader, Yoda, or Han Solo doesn't hurt, either.... ➤





■ **Multiplayer (both versus and cooperative)** comes in two flavors: Allied...and Axis for all you flag-burning commie terrorists out there. "If people enjoy trying the German side of things, we may see more treatments in the future that consider the German soldier's point of view," says Randy Pitchford, president of developer Gearbox Software.



■ **Two-for-one special:** *Earned in Blood* contains all the multiplayer missions from the first *Brothers in Arms*.

BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD

PS2/XB • Ubisoft • October 2005

Targets Acquired: Everyone's bitching about the overabundance of shooters based on that big ol' war that grandpappy was a part of. But at least *Brothers in Arms* did something to set itself apart—instead of controlling one soldier through several epic battles, you command a couple of squads in intense, small-scale firefights while first-person shooting all Nazis in sight. In *Earned in Blood*, you're a 101st Airborne Division paratrooper going from Normandy to the Cherbourg peninsula to help control a key deepwater port that's vital for bringing in all that's needed for the Allies to attack Germany directly.

Know Your Enemy: Forget about "shooters"—improved A.I. is the real theme of our feature. And in *Earned in Blood*, the Nazis aren't just smarter, they're a whole lot more unpredictable. "Even simple, sub-

tle movements in enemy positions get me jumpy," says Randy Pitchford, president of developer Gearbox Software, "because I don't know if the adjustment is a survival movement or some kind of feint to keep my attention while something else is going on. The designers have been pretty forgiving, so the game is actually winnable, but the A.I. has gotten to the point that if we wanted to let it, it could totally kill you without cheating."

The Most Dangerous Game: Online, you're trading bullets not just with other human players, but their A.I. squads as well. You can be a squad leader on the Axis or Allied sides in new scenario- or objective-based missions. *EIB* also features a new cooperative skirmish mode, so you and a buddy can be squad leaders and take on missions together. ➤

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FOR ANYTHING

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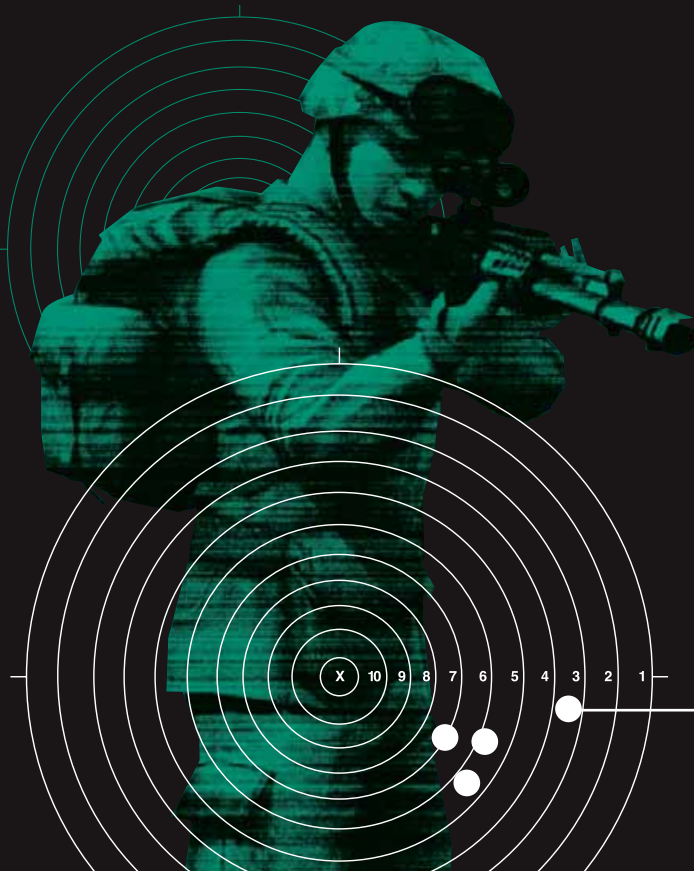
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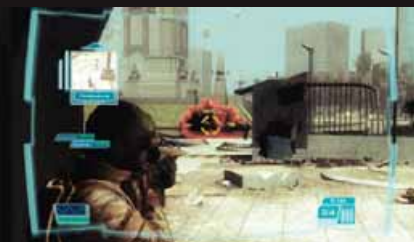
XB360/PS2/XB/GC • Ubisoft • November 2005

Targets Acquired: The “*Rainbow Six* for the outdoorsman” *Ghost Recon* series continues to explore near-future technology with *Advanced Warfighter*. It’s 2013, and the U.S. Army can now outfit its boys with the Integrated Warfighter System, which gives soldiers unprecedented battlefield awareness with satellite linkup wizardry. That means war for the Ghosts is no longer about finding enemies lurking in the bush, but rather knowing that they’re there already and analyzing their movements and figuring out what to do next. In *Advanced Warfighter* you must use this tech to find and secure the U.S. prez and the nuclear-weapon codes he was carrying with him.

Know Your Enemy: *Ghost Recon 2*’s enemies must’ve been using some future sci-fi tech as well, since they were able to see and shoot through solid objects when it suited them. This sloppy programming ruined the experience for many—hopeful-

ly, *Warfighter*’s bad guys won’t feel the need to cheat this time around. “Facing strong, smart, and organized A.I. is central to the gameplay,” says Producer Robbie Edwards. “We are putting a lot of effort into having the enemy behave like real soldiers do.” What about those short-bus moments when your teammates or enemies just sit and take bullets like someone’s blowing them kisses? “We’ve implemented what we call ‘self-preserving A.I.’, meaning the enemies as well as your Ghost teammates will care for their lives,” says Edwards. “For example, if the cover they are using is blown away, they will automatically run to the next cover instead of staying there in the line of fire.”

The Most Dangerous Game: Except for GameCube players, online gamers will get to pick a character class before heading into combat. What you pick (grenadier, marksman, etc.) will determine your stats (accuracy, recoil management, etc.). ►





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■ A tragic deleted scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*....



CALL OF DUTY 2: BIG RED ONE

PS2/XB/GC • Activision • October 2005

Targets Acquired: Yep, it's more World War II, 'cept this *Call of Duty 2* is on the consoles that are currently in your possession. It's not quite as visually stunning as its Xbox 360 cousin, but for a current-gen game, this one's quite the looker.

Know Your Enemy: Better A.I.? You bet! "The A.I. system in *Big Red One* is struc-

tured to re-create the very dangerous Axis soldiers of WWII," explains Creative Director Christian Busic. Of course, "flanking" and "working as a team" are all part of this A.I.'s vocabulary, but what makes it feel real is how it's all communicated on the battlefield. "The player and his squad encounter a group of German soldiers defending a supply depot," Busic offers as

an example. "As the Germans become aware of the player, they will move to cover. The player's squadmates will also move to cover and call out what they 'see' the Germans doing—'Behind that wall!' or 'Watch the left!' If the Germans feel they have an advantage on one side, they may try to flank, and the player's squad may call out the new threat—'They're flank-

ing!' If the player isn't paying attention, he could all of a sudden find himself surrounded by the Germans."

The Most Dangerous Game: You will be able to play war against other players online on PS2 and Xbox, but multiplayer intel's been light, so details are a bit scarce right now.



HALF-LIFE 2

XB • VU Games • October 2005

Targets Acquired: On the keyboard-and-mouse side of gaming, few games get bigger praise or more hype than *Half-Life 2*. The thrilling PC first-person shooter killed with realistic environments, even more realistic physics, and a tense story line about a group of human rebels fighting back an alien infestation on Earth. Expect the Xbox game to be just as good, with a downgrade only in graphics.

Know Your Enemy: You won't find any Nazis here—only several aliens who are quite unhappy to see a free human running amok. "*Half-Life 2* contains a variety of enemies," says Doug Lombardi, director of marketing at Valve, the developer behind the series, "from the very agile Combine soldiers, to the pesky headcrabs, to the large and lethal striders." Of course, these aliens have the smarts you'd expect: They find cover, they find help, they know how to flush you out of hiding

with a well-thrown grenade. But they also know their own game better than you. "The A.I. in the game is wired to the physics simulation system," says Lombardi. "So a zombie on the attack knows it can use the objects in the world. If you launch a barrel at one, it can throw it back at you."

The Most Dangerous Game: This war of the worlds is for lone soldiers only. So while you won't find any multiplayer modes here, the developers don't feel they're necessary. "Humans are infinitely more unpredictable than even the most advanced piece of code," says Lombardi, "but it's impossible to re-create the epic battles such as the ones at the end of *Half-Life 2* in multiplayer." ►



IT'S IN THE DARKEST DAYS
WHEN A LEADER MUST STEP INTO THE LIGHT.

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BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

PS2/XB • EA Games • October 2005

Targets Acquired: Hop into a tank, helicopter, gunboat, jeep...or hoof it on foot. In this jack-of-all-trades shooter, you can do whatever you want, however you want. Each time you spawn, you pick a character class (ranging from sniper to special ops), then jump into a war zone where everything you see can be used, whether it's an APC (driver, gunner, or passenger, it's up to you) or an artillery gun.

Know Your Enemy: EA delayed *Modern Combat* almost a year just to put in a strong single-player game for this designed-for-multiplayer experience. You'll get to fight for various superpowers and against A.I. enemies that don't play so nice. "Each enemy will fit his soldier type," says Producer Dan Blackstone. "It's definitely a kick in the pants when an enemy combat engineer jumps behind the

wheel of a vehicle you just climbed out of, then proceeds to run you over with it."

The Most Dangerous Game: Up to 24 players can battle it out online with persistent characters that you can upgrade through victories and experience. Eventually, you'll be able to earn better equipment, like thermal-vision sniper scopes and faster tanks.



■ Behold the unholy union of cloven hooves, karate pants, Fu Manchu mustaches, and saw blades.

SERIOUS SAM II

XB • 2K Games • October 2005

Targets Acquired: While other shooters strive for realism, *Sam II* approaches the genre with a lighter touch. And by lighter touch, we mean going toe-to-toe against swarms of maniacal, unicycle-riding clowns that throw exploding cakes. The enemy roster is a motley crew, indeed: Dumb-as-dirt lizard men fight alongside sinister witches, murderous tank-beasts, and crafty orcs.

Know Your Enemy: *Sam II* is a thrill-a-second shooter that doesn't skimp on the

body count, but the foes don't just stand there and let you circle-strafe them to death. "You will see enemies spreading around you, circling while shooting and throwing grenades, flanking players, and even jumping from dropships," says Lead Artist Admir Elezovic. "Also, enemies are now able to spawn other enemies, so watch out if you see a large bastard in front of you—he might have surprises for you!" Deepened battlefield tactics should help elevate this sequel over its fairly basic predecessor, but the developer defi-



nately intends to keep the simple run-n-gun gameplay intact. "We never planned to make the world very realistic, because that's not what *Serious Sam* is about," says Elezovic.

The Most Dangerous Game: *Sam II*'s multiplayer hails from the fragfest old school. Expect big guns, bizarre maps, and a stable of...interesting characters. "We will have a plethora of different multiplayer characters," says Elezovic. "Some really weird, some even weirder." 🐼



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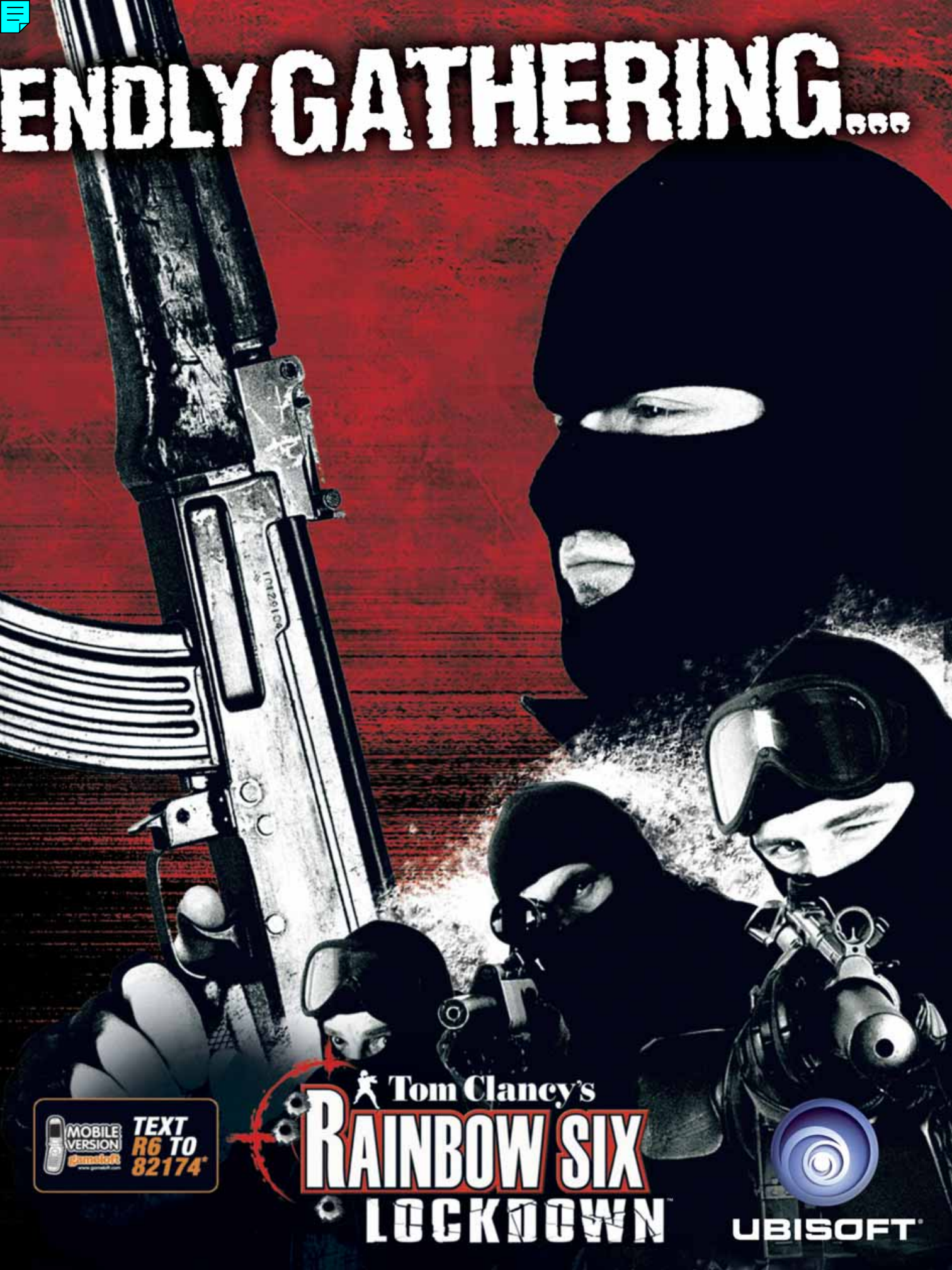
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A high-contrast, black and white promotional poster for the video game Rainbow Six Lockdown. The background is a textured red. On the left, a large, detailed assault rifle is angled upwards. On the right, a large, close-up profile of a person wearing a black balaclava and goggles is shown. Below this, several smaller figures of soldiers in similar gear are visible, some holding weapons. The overall tone is gritty and action-oriented.

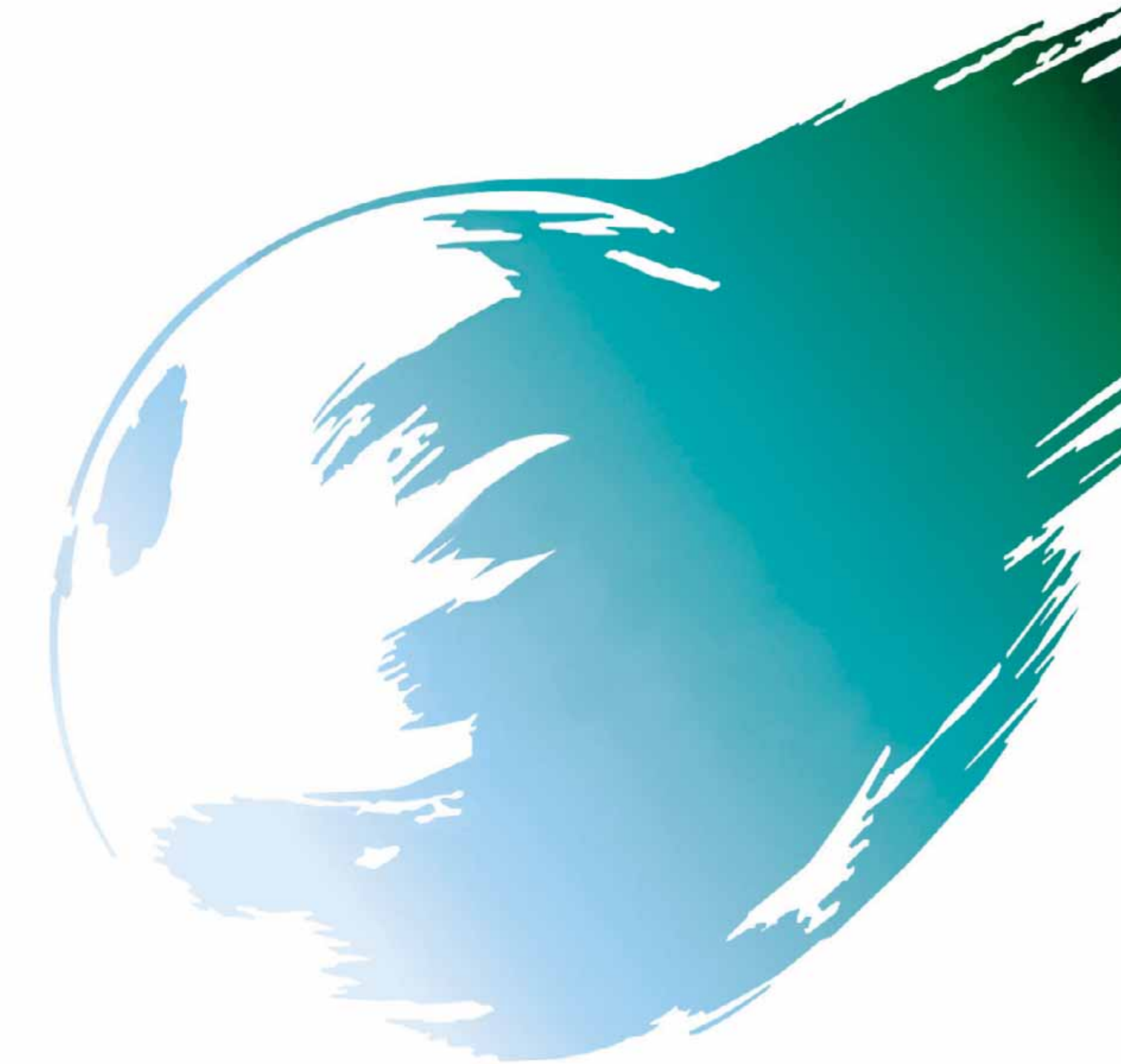
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These 10 pages provide a veritable *Final Fantasy* overdose, but we know all too well that some of you are truly insatiable. We've got you covered. Look for "Final Fantasy" under "EGM Extras" on egm.1up.com for exclusive interviews, videos, documentaries, retrospectives, and lots more.

the FINAL COUNTDOWN

Eight years after *Final Fantasy VII* changed the world of role-playing games, its offspring assemble to do it all over again

by Shane Bettenhausen

Final Fantasy stands firm as the most successful and influential role-playing series in the history of console gaming. But do you remember the last time you actually played a regular *Final Fantasy* game? The three most recent releases were hardly normal: Online-

only massively-multiplayer *Final Fantasy XI* reached only a specific, Net-savvy audience, *Final Fantasy X-2* turned off some players with its giddy girl-power themes and recycled FFX environments, and *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* for GameCube was, well...just plain loopy. You have to go way back to 2001 to find the last tradi-

tional installment, *Final Fantasy X*. Luckily, publisher Square Enix has devised a plan to win back the support of its rabid fans: the Compilation of Final Fantasy VII project. Using 1997's phenomenally successful PS1 RPG as a springboard, four different development teams have devised a cadre of prequels and sequels to the best-loved and most

successful *Final Fantasy* game of all time. The fun kicks off this holiday season with *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, a full-length CG-animated motion picture sequel to *FFVII*, and continues with three new games for three different platforms. Choose your alphabetically oriented *FFVII* poison from among the following choices.... ➤



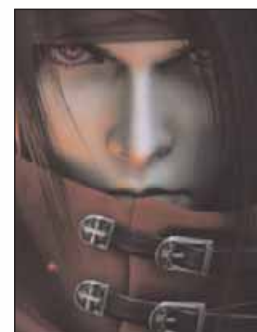
ADVENT CHILDREN
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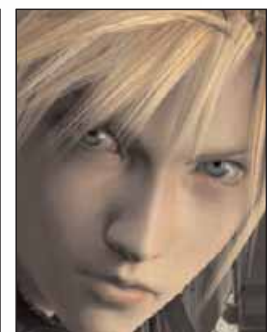
BEFORE CRISIS
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■ The *FFVII* gang's all back. Well, the surviving members, at least.

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FINAL FANTASY VII: ADVENT CHILDREN

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Release Date: November 2005

EGM digs deep into the mind of director Tetsuya Nomura

➤ **A**fter the painful failure of 2001's big-screen effort *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, the franchise's chances of crossing over into the realm of motion pictures seemed doomed. Surprisingly, Square Enix decided to take another stab at the format, although this time going with a safer bet—a full-length animated sequel to *Final Fantasy VII*. *Advent Children* picks up two years after Cloud and company defeated Sephiroth. All of your favorite characters return, along with a trio of new villains, a new crisis (a deadly disease known as geostigma), and plenty of jaw-droppingly pretty fight scenes. We recently sat down with reclusive director

Tetsuya Nomura (the man behind *Kingdom Hearts* and just about every Square Enix character design for the past eight years) to discuss the details of his highly anticipated film.

EGM: How did the *Advent Children* project evolve over time?



Tetsuya Nomura: Initially, the project began as only a 20-minute short film. We quickly realized, however, that from a scenario standpoint it would be impossible to pull off a sequel to *FFVII*

in such a short work. We wanted to include every crucial element from *FFVII*, so the scope of the film grew and grew. Now that it's roughly 100 minutes, I feel that we have what's necessary to truly speak to the fans of *FFVII*.

EGM: How did you go about redesigning and updating the characters and world of *FFVII* for *Advent Children*?

TN: Eight years is definitely a long time, and I found it very challenging to bring these characters into a more realistic project. Had I kept the art style from the game and simply tried to age them up, the film might have felt like a bunch of marionettes prancing around in a box. I

had to make huge changes; I had to add a lot of depth and life to the world and characters. Of course, it's still not fully realistic, but I wanted to make it seem less comical overall.

EGM: You've been splitting your time between two projects for the last two years. Which ended up being a more difficult birth: *Kingdom Hearts II* or *Advent Children*?

TN: I experienced very specific difficulties with both projects. For example, *AC* is the first film that my team and I have ever created, so everybody had to struggle to discover what must be done when creating a motion picture. On the other hand *KH2* is ➤

THE CHARACTERS OF ADVENT CHILDREN



CLOUD STRIFE

FFVII's mopey antihero is still working through a lot of personal issues and contracting the dangerous geostigma disease isn't helping.



SEPHIROTH

FFVII's bad-ass villain certainly seemed dead, yet we have to wonder if his appearance in *AC* is limited to spooky flashback scenes....



KADAJ

This young swordsman is *AC*'s central villain, and he definitely bears a striking resemblance to Sephiroth. There's certainly a connection....



LOZ

He's a burly brawler who reports directly to Kadaj. He fights with a unique weapon called Dual Hound that's both a shield and a gun.



YAZOO

This unfortunately named longhair also follows Kadaj's lead. He fights with a gunblade that's similar to Squall's in *FFVIII*.

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ADVENT CHILDREN (CONT.)



■ In the crumbling slums of Midgar, Reno joins the fight against Kadaj.



■ One of the central mysteries of *Advent Children* concerns the connection between Sephiroth (above) and the silver-haired boys (Kadaj, Loz, and Yazoo—pictured below). We won't spoil it for you here....



➤ a sequel, and our team feels that the fans have a tremendous amount of expectation for this game. So we must try even harder to exceed their expectations. Plus, we're not even done with that one, yet....

EGM: How would you compare the creation of a film versus that of a game?

TN: Completing any title, game or otherwise, fills me with a profound satisfaction. I feel that even though *AC* is not a game, I have crafted it in such a way that the viewer can still look within himself to fully define its meaning. The viewing is not a passive experience, and I have left places in the work where viewers can insert their own memories, experiences, and concepts.

EGM: *Final Fantasy VII* is so revered by fans, and yet there's no way that the plot of *Advent Children* can match the colossal depth of a 50-hour-long game. Do you feel that fans will be disappointed because the film is more action oriented than the game?

TN: Actually, I'm not so sure that it can be considered an "action movie." My team debated what genre to promote it as, and we ultimately decided that it really has no genre. In many ways, it's every genre. I believe that each fan will determine its meaning on a personal level. It's true that I've used action set pieces to bridge the

deeper, more narrative scenes from the film. But really, action isn't new to *Final Fantasy VII*; the game features a substantial number of battles. So, naturally, you'll see many elaborate action scenes throughout the film, and they're quite important. Plus, the so-called action in *Final Fantasy VII* was still encumbered by numbers and text. In the film, viewers can truly enjoy the thrilling combat scenes like never before.

EGM: Can you point to the central narrative theme present in *Advent Children*?

TN: Mr. Nojima (the scenario writer) has written a script that's ultimately about salvation. Personally, I approached the project with a slightly broader theme—the concept

of life itself. I believe that our viewpoints both combined to form the final product.

EGM: The film's fight scenes seem to defy established medium traditions; they are both more realistic and visceral than anime, yet with a supernatural flair beyond Hong Kong-cinema wirework. What do you cite as inspirations?

TN: It's funny, I didn't originally approach *Advent Children* from an action standpoint: It was all about the dramatic aspects of the story. The script came first and offered no real direction for the fight scenes. And I couldn't very well assault the viewers with ➤

THE CHARACTERS OF ADVENT CHILDREN



BARRET WALLACE

FFVII's brawny, foul-mouthed freedom fighter continues to crusade for justice and equality with his newly modified gun arm.



TIFA LOCKHEART

Cloud's childhood sweetheart sports a sexy new look in *Advent Children*, and her hand-to-hand fighting maneuvers defy description.



VINCENT VALENTINE

Mysterious, lycanthropic, and possibly undead, Vincent has a minor role in *AC*. His own game, *Dirge of Cerberus*, takes place one year later.



RED XIII

This fan-favorite furball lends a paw to help Cloud combat the terror of geostigma. Hardcore *FFVII* fans know that he'll be around for years to come....



YUFFIE KISARAGI

FFVII Director Yoshinori Kitase asked us why American gamers love Yuffie so much. "Cause she's a thief?" was our only guess.



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ADVENT CHILDREN (CONT.)

- nonstop scenes of gripping drama; it would simply be too tiring for the viewers. So I broke up the scenario, inserting action sequences throughout the film in a vaguely abstract way.

Back to your question about my inspirations for the fight scenes. Well, I think the unique look might just be a result of a bunch of game creators coming together to make a film...games are violent, and we're used to creating violence. I can't really point out any single works that influenced the creation of *AC*. Everything in my life inspires me.

EGM: Cloud has always seemed to us a rather nontraditional hero, as he's reluctant, mysterious, and conflicted. What are your personal feelings about what's arguably your best-known character?

TN: I actually rather like him as a hero. I find it's easier to utilize a strong, laconic character than one who talks too much, like Tidus (*FFX*'s jovial hero). Someone like Cloud speaks so very rarely, that when he does utter something, it's much more meaningful.

EGM: Are you like Cloud? All silent and mysterious?

TN: I'm not at all like that character. [Laughs]

EGM: Really? You have a reputation for being the Clint Eastwood of *Final Fantasy*....

TN: [Laughs] Well, I think that I'm getting too old; there's no "Dirty Harry" left in my mind now....

EGM: Can you tell us a little bit about the new villains in *Advent Children*: Kadaj, Loz, and Yazoo?

TN: Those three are an inseparable trio, and Kadaj is their leader. Really, *Advent Children* isn't just Cloud's story...it's Kadaj's, too. The central theme of the film really pertains to him. Many of the people who have now seen the completed film tell me they feel a deep emotional attachment with Kadaj. He's really very important. It's much like *Final Fantasy VII*, in which Sephiroth was the enemy, yet still well liked. Fans who felt a connection with Sephiroth will likely feel that way about Kadaj, too. In comparison, Loz and Yazoo don't really have a lot of lines, but perhaps the viewers can use their imaginations to speculate about their lives.

EGM: Why do you think *Final Fantasy VII* fans gravitate towards characters like Kadaj and Sephiroth?

TN: It's true that in the fans' eyes, Sephiroth is very often sympathized with. At the same time, he's a character that has perfect confidence in himself, so I don't fully understand why people feel so sorry for him. On the other hand, Kadaj is still only a boy. If you think of the title "*Advent Children*," obviously one of the film's themes is about children, the vulnerability and difficulty of youth. The fact that he's not a man makes him quite a different villain than Sephiroth. I think that viewers will be surprised that *AC* isn't so much a love story between a man and a woman; instead, you experience love through the character of Kadaj. I can't really reveal anything more about him without spoiling the film....



■ Here at *EGM*, we've officially decided that the statute of limitations has expired on *FFVII* spoilers. If you don't already know that Aerith (above) bites the big one, well...now you do. So, what's she doing back in *Advent Children*? Excellent question....



Got \$300 to Spend?

If you're a true (read: insane) *FFVII* fan, prepare to pony up for the absurdly massive limited-edition box-set of *Advent Children*. It contains:

- *Final Fantasy Advent Children* DVD
- *Advent Pieces* DVD with making-of featurette and *Last Order* anime feature
- Cloud and Fenrir motorbike figure set
- Copy of the *FF Advent Children* script
- *Final Fantasy* cap
- *Final Fantasy* T-shirt
- Serially numbered key chain
- Special rerelease of *Final Fantasy VII* for the PS1

Not a bad haul, really, and the *Last Order* anime provides the basis for the upcoming *FFVII: Crisis Core* PSP game. The only catch? No U.S. release is planned.



THE CHARACTERS OF ADVENT CHILDREN



CID HIGHWIND

Tough-as-nails pilot CID returns with a newer, larger airship in *Advent Children*. His surly attitude remains safely intact, of course.



CAIT SITH

FFVII's comic relief, a mechanical cat controlled by a reformed villain, returns. He seems to have ditched his huge moogles mount, though.



AERITH GAINSBOROUGH

FFVII's beloved martyr appears in what must be a poignant dream sequence. At least we hope it is....



THE TURKS

Most of the ShinRa's elite mercenaries are dead, but Reno and Rude survived the end of *FFVII* and now fight alongside Cloud and company.



ZACK

Cloud's dearly departed friend makes a guest appearance in a flashback scene. Perhaps we'll get a bit of insight into his relationship with Aerith....



■ Mobile

BEFORE CRISIS: FINAL FANTASY VII

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Release Date: Spring 2006

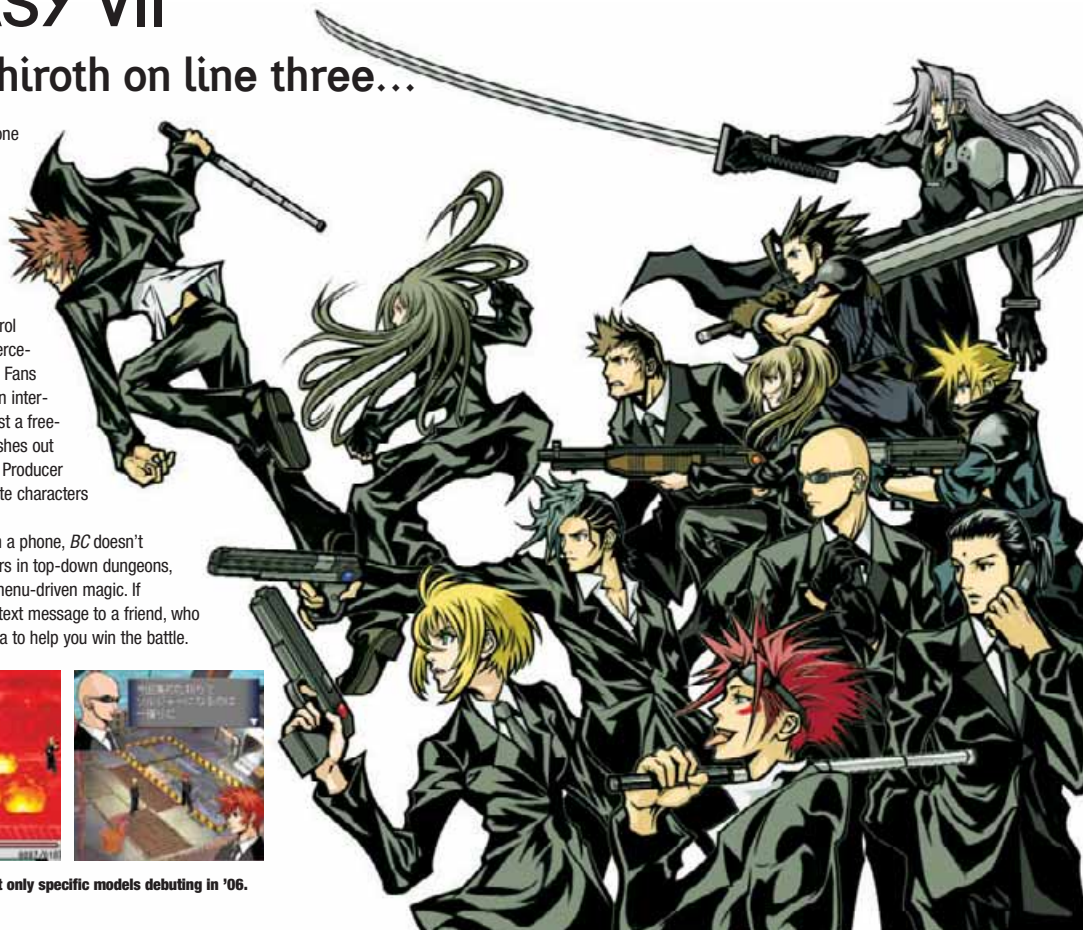
Sir, we have Sephiroth on line three...

Although you probably consider cell phone games to be fluffy fare like *Bejeweled*, *Jamdat Bowling*, or *Tetris*, Square Enix intends to change the way U.S. gamers think about mobile entertainment. *Before Crisis* is serious stuff: an episodic (16 downloadable chapters are available so far in Japan) action-RPG chronicling the six years that led up to the events of *Final Fantasy VII*. You control various members of the Turks—highly skilled mercenaries hired by the nefarious ShinRa corporation. Fans of *FFVII* will recognize nearly everyone, and it's an interesting twist, for example, to lead the Turks against a freedom fighter such as *FFVII*'s Barret. "*BC* really fleshes out the events that transpired before *FFVII*," explains Producer Kosei Ito. "And it also shows you how your favorite characters turned out the way they did."

As you'd expect from something you play with a phone, *BC* doesn't sport overly complex gameplay. Exploration occurs in top-down dungeons, and battles use a blend of real-time action and menu-driven magic. If you're in over your head, you can even fire off a text message to a friend, who can instantly lend some of his own magic materia to help you win the battle.



■ Is your phone up to snuff? Nope. *BC* will support only specific models debuting in '06.



■ PSP

CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Release Date: Late 2006

Bizarre love quadrangle

When Square Enix announced an all-new PSP action-RPG based on *Final Fantasy VII*, fans anxiously waited for further details...and they're still waiting. So far, only a brief anime trailer (which turns out to be scenes from the *Last Order* short film packed with the Japanese limited edition of *Advent Children*) has surfaced for the game. *CC* appears to center on *FFVII*'s flashback scene of Cloud, Zack, Tifa, and Sephiroth in Cloud's hometown of Nibelheim. "*CC* is still very far away," says Director Yoshinori Kitase. "All I can say is that it's about three men and one woman."



■ "Fans want this to be Zack's story," says *Crisis* Director Yoshinori Kitase. "I will respond to their expectations."

► PlayStation 2

DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Release Date: Spring 2006

Final Fantasy gives shooters a shot

The idea of blending the swords-and-sorcery realm of *Final Fantasy* with the trigger-happy shooter genre might seem far-fetched, but Square Enix has actually been kicking the concept around for years. "We had the notion to make a gun-based action game for quite a while," explains *Dirge of Cerberus* Director Yoshinori Kitase. "We toyed with several different FF characters, like Yuna from *FFX* and Irvine from *FFVIII*, but Vincent from *FFVII* made the most sense. *FFVII*'s brooding, vaguely undead marksman Vincent Valentine plays a supporting role in *Advent Children* but takes center stage in *Dirge*, which is set about a year after *Children*. "Vincent carries a lot of dark secrets," explains Kitase. "He still has a lot of tragic, unresolved issues from his past—he was in love with the woman who gave birth to Sephiroth, after all."

Kitase cites a personal love for PC shooters as an inspiration: "I'm a huge fan of *Half-Life 2*, and I'm currently addicted to *Battlefield 2*," he says. But it's not simply some vanity project—Square Enix also has its eyes on a potentially lucrative untapped U.S. market.

"*Final Fantasy VII* is very popular all over the world, and shooting games are so popular in the U.S.," Kitase says. "It's not a major genre in Japan yet, but I think it will become accepted here over time."

Dirge's plot centers around the Deep Ground soldiers, a powerful military force wreaking havoc on citizens still struggling to rebuild their shattered lives. "Deep Ground was a secret project that President ShinRa began before the events of *Final Fantasy VII*," Kitase says. "These supersoldiers were forgotten about after his death, and they've transformed the catacombs beneath



■ About half of *Dirge*'s levels are based on *FFVII* and *Advent Children* locations. The rest are all original.



Splendid Cinemas

In classic *Final Fantasy VII* tradition, *Dirge of Cerberus* peppers its gameplay with plenty of gorgeous, over-the-top CG cut-scenes. "The *Advent Children* team was hard at work on their film at the same time we were developing this game," explains *Dirge of Cerberus* Director Yoshinori Kitase. "So, we use the same high-quality visuals for our cinemas." So far, we've seen *FFVII* costars Cait Sith (and its controller, Reeve) and Yuffie show up in the cinemas, but neither is confirmed as a playable character.



■ Guzzle a classic *Final Fantasy* potion when your HP gets low.

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DIRGE OF CERBERUS (CONT.)

➤ the ruins of Midgar into a fortress." It's your task, as Vincent, to defeat these radicals across a series of linear, mission-based stages. You will get a little help, though: A group called the World Recovery Organization (WRO) provides tactical support on some levels.

Gameplay blends the acrobatic leaps, dodges, and hand-to-hand attacks of *Devil May Cry* with traditional first-person shooter elements. Vincent isn't limited to his Cerberus handgun, amassing an arsenal of shotguns, rifles, and other firearms along his journey. A dynamic camera system shifts the view from behind-the-billowing-cape for walkabouts to an over-the-shoulder angle for aiming, but FPS fans can go *Halo*-style if they choose. "We're leaving the viewpoint up to the user," says Kitase. "You can play through the whole game from strictly a first-person perspective if you really want to."

Vincent will also be able to unleash a limited set of materia-derived magic spells, and you can cash in his entire magic gauge for a special surprise. "Vincent's limit breaks in *FFVII* had him transforming into other creatures," Kitase explains. "We've brought that idea back, so he can now morph into a beast with its own unique moves, attacks, and spells."

In its current state, *Cerberus* certainly shows a lot of promise. Although, we must admit, it might not be every *Final Fantasy* fan's ideal *FFVII* follow-up. Players accustomed to solving their quests by patiently tapping one button whilst eating a sandwich should be worried. Pinpoint aiming, skilled enemy snipers, and the simple fact that you use every button on the DualShock 2 controller could prove to be a deadly information overload for RPG fans.



■ Vincent may be a loner, but he's not afraid to ask for help. Here, WRO soliders lend him some much needed support.



■ Cerberus ain't just a hellhound: It's the name of Vincent's frisky triple-barreled handgun.



■ The developers chose a *Resident Evil* 4-ish over-the-shoulder perspective in hopes of keeping gamers who experience motion sickness (oddly prevalent in Japan) from blowing chunks.



Taking the Action Online

Square Enix's decision to include a full online multiplayer mode in *Dirge* took us by surprise. But Director (and die-hard shooter fan) Yoshinori Kitase wouldn't have had it any other way. "Of course, I had to include online play," Kitase says. "We're starting the beta test in Japan this August, and we hope to have between 20 and 30 simultaneous online players." Online, you don't play as Vincent. Instead, you design a Deep Ground enemy soldier and engage in team deathmatch, survival, or co-op mission-based modes.





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► ■ PS1

AFTERTHOUGHTS: FINAL FANTASY VII

Retro RPG reminiscence

In light of all these new *FFVII* offshoots, we thought it would be interesting to look back at the groundbreaking original PS1 game that popularized the role-playing genre in the United States. We waxed nostalgic with two of *FFVII*'s most integral team members: Director Yoshinori Kitase and character designer/battle director/coauthor Tetsuya Nomura.

EGM: What does *Final Fantasy VII* mean to you?

Yoshinori Kitase: *FFVII* was the first *Final Fantasy* for the PS1, and it was also the first 3D game in the series, so it determined the new direction that the franchise would take after the 16-bit Super Nintendo era. It's by far the most memorable and important title for me, and when I had the chance to expand any of the past games, I immediately chose *Final Fantasy VII* for the project. The ending of *FFVII* seemed to me to open up so many possibilities with its characters, more so than other games.

EGM: When you were working on *FFVII* eight years ago, could you conceive of how much the game would affect the RPG marketplace?

Tetsuya Nomura: When I look back, I remember having no concept of just how massive that project would go on to become. Of course, I'd been associated with the *Final Fantasy* franchise before *FFVII*, as I did monster designs on *Final Fantasy V* (Super NES). I remember

that before we started *FFVII*, the characters from *Final Fantasy IV* were still very popular, despite the fact that *FFV* and *FFVI* had been released. I found this really frustrating. Why would people still be talking about those characters? So I made it my goal to create my own batch of characters that would be remembered and loved by the *Final Fantasy* fans. Also, starting with *FFVII*, I was far more deeply involved with the story and characters, so I was really extremely excited to work on that project.

EGM: *FFVII* was a departure from the Super NES titles...were you worried about fan reaction?

YK: I wasn't really worried about response to the graphical shift, as there were already several 3D games in America that were accepted by fans. My fear had been that the *Final Fantasy* franchise might be left behind if it didn't catch up to that trend, actually.

EGM: What did you think of Cloud as a hero when you were making *FFVII*?

YK: There wasn't really much controversy or criticism about having him as the hero from within Square, but he is definitely a mysterious character. That's one of the game's main themes, the fact that the protagonist has all these secrets to unravel. He isn't a straightforward hero like Superman; rather, he has lots of mysteries, self-doubts, and a real dark side. Mr. Nomura was also very good at designing a character like that.

EGM: We heard that the death of Aerith and the creation of Tifa both originated in a phone call between you two....

TN: It's funny, some magazine ran that story, but only the beginning and ending of it. People think that I wanted to kill off Aerith and replace her with Tifa as the main character! [Laughs] The actual conversation between Mr. Kitase and myself was very, very long. Originally, there were only going to be three characters in the entire game: Cloud, Barrett, and Aerith. Can you imagine that? And we knew even in the early concept stage that one character would have to die. But we only had three to choose from. I mean, Cloud's the main character, so you can't really kill him. And Barrett...well, that's maybe too obvious. But we had to pick between Aerith and Barrett. We debated this for a long time, but in the end decided to sacrifice Aerith.



■ Back in '97, spiky hair and huge swords were totally cutting edge. Now, everyone's got 'em.

EGM: Did you pick her to increase the drama?

TN: In the previous *FF* games, it became almost a signature theme for one character to sacrifice him or herself, and often it was a similar character type from game to game, kind of a brave, last-man-standing, Barrett-type character. So everyone expected that. And I think that death should be something sudden and unexpected, and Aerith's death seemed more natural and realistic. Now, when I reflect on *Final Fantasy VII*, the fact that fans were so offended by her sudden death probably means that we were successful with her character. If fans had simply accepted her death, that would have meant she wasn't an effective character.

EGM: Which female character in *FFVII* is your personal favorite?

TN: [Laughs] I'm not really interested in any superdeformed females.



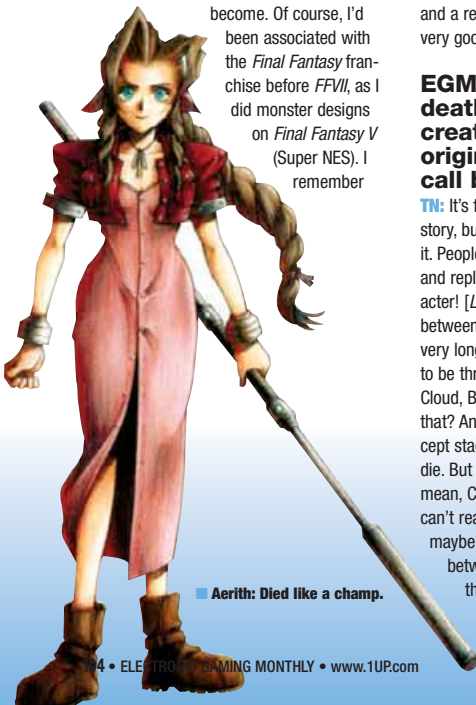
■ Tifa was not even written into the early drafts of *Final Fantasy VII*'s story.

EGM: Since *Dirge of Cerberus* is, chronologically speaking, the furthest game in the *FFVII* timeline, does it have a happy ending?

YK: *AC* and *DC* both have their own resolutions, so don't expect cliff-hangers there. Also, *DC* isn't the direct sequel to *FFVII*, *Advent Children* is. So we can't view *DC* as the ending to the whole big *FFVII* saga. Plus, *FFVII* definitely has so many diverse elements, and different fans have interest in different characters, so if, for example, one person is interested in Cloud, Tifa, and Aerith's relationship, then *AC* may provide some sort of answers for them. Somebody else might be interested in Vincent, so they might want to explore *DC*. It's not like this is going to complete the whole story, but it will satisfy fans who have strong attachments to individual characters.

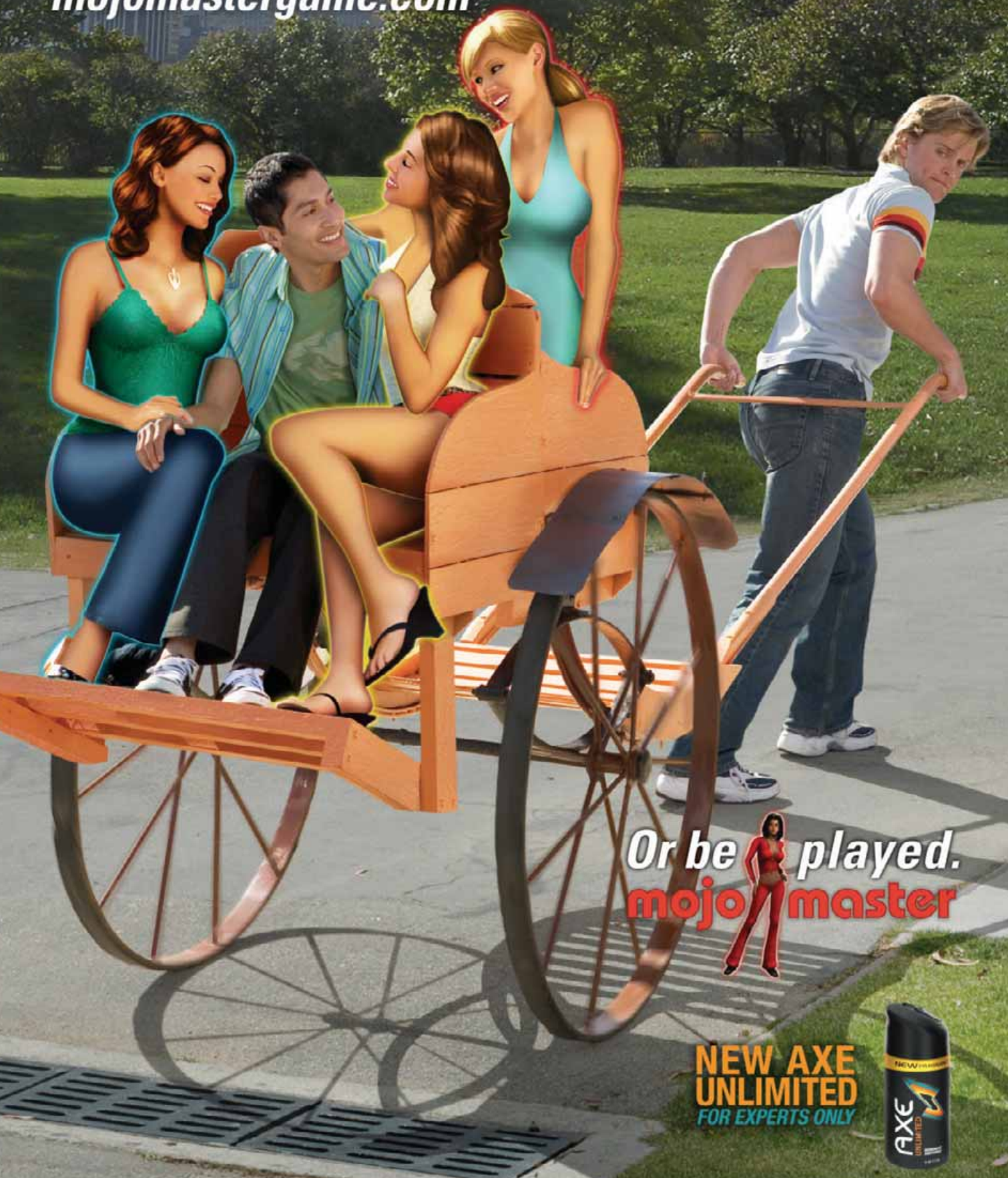
EGM: At the very end of *FFVII*, we see the epilogue to the whole story that takes place 500 years later, so really, you still have another 497 years' worth of games and movies to fill in....

YK: Ha, maybe I'll try to do that. In a way, I consider that epilogue to be the true happy ending of *FFVII*. Well, it's a happy ending even though all the human beings are destroyed. [Laughs] ►



■ Aerith: Died like a champ.

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BEYOND FINAL FANTASY VII

Final Fantasy VII on PlayStation 3?



■ Yep, this shot sports actual, real-time graphics pumped out by the PlayStation 3.

At the massive E3 game conference this past May, Square Enix debuted a trailer dubbed “*Final Fantasy VII* Tech Demo for PS3.” This clip re-created the opening CG cinema from the PS1 game in vastly improved form, all of it rendered in real time on the PS3 hardware. Fanboys fainted, Yuffie cosplayers squealed with delight, and the rest of us were left wondering, “Wait, does this mean that they’re actually remaking this game?” It seems like an obvious decision—it would move a lot of PS3 hardware and sate the demands of countless fans.

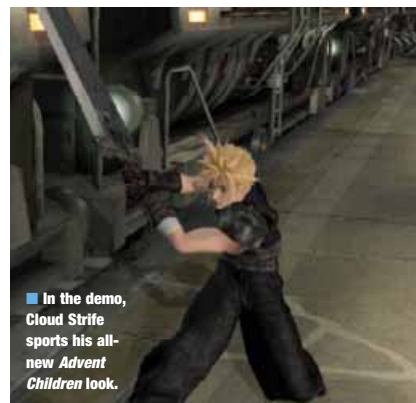
Even so, company representatives seem remiss to confirm that the demo is anything more than a theoretical showcase. “Well, if

the team were to decide to remake the game for PS3 with that level of quality,” says *FFVII* Director Yoshinori Kitase, “we’d have to hire 300 people and it would take about five years.” Hmm...that doesn’t mean that Square Enix isn’t already doing that, right? Kitase went on to speculate on what the graphical prowess of the PS3 could do for the game: “In a PS3 *FF* game, we’ll be able to have such incredibly detailed character models that when you change their clothing and equipment, we’ll be able to carry that look throughout battles, fields, and cinema scenes.”

Advent Children Director Tetsuya Nomura doesn’t rule out the possibility of the project coming to fruition. “Mr. Kitase has told me

many times that if there is a remake, that I should create it,” Nomura admits. “But I have so many projects already in the pipeline that it would be difficult to squeeze it in...perhaps if the timing is just right, though. It’s a very interesting prospect....”

Here at *EGM*, we believe that *FFVII* will eventually be remade, but it probably won’t be Square Enix’s first PS3 effort. That honor will likely go to *Final Fantasy XIII*, a title reportedly headed up by Nomura. “I’m incredibly excited about the new systems,” says Nomura. “My team has already started working on several next-generation projects for multiple consoles, though I won’t name which ones...I wish I could tell you all about them now....” So do we, man.



■ In the demo, Cloud Strife sports his all-new *Advent Children* look.



■ Look for *FFXII* updates (and actual new screenshots) in future issues.



WHAT’S UP WITH FINAL FANTASY XII?

Finally, a release date...

With all this hoopla surrounding the *FFVII* spin-offs, it’s easy to forget about *Final Fantasy XII*, first shown nearly two years ago. After a series of crippling delays, the game is finally back on track and scheduled for release on PS2 in Japan on March 16, 2006. (Expect a U.S. release by late summer.) The project has been tumultuous—Director Yasumi Matsuno (the dude behind PS1 classics like *Vagrant Story* and *Final Fantasy Tactics*) has left the project citing medical reasons (rumors of a mental breakdown persist), and Akitoshi Kawazu (the guy in charge of quirkier fare like *Unlimited Saga* and *Final*

Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles) has taken over the reins.

The change in leadership hasn’t produced any noticeable changes yet: A recent playable demo offered the same characters, world, visual style, and battle system present from the project’s outset. We’re secretly hoping that the very nontraditional battle system—combat takes place on the field map in semiautomated *FFXI* fashion—receives some tweaks before release. In its current state, the repetitive, simplistic battles make the game feel a lot like a dungeon hack. Perhaps Kawazu can inject some of his unique flair into the proceedings. Hope springs eternal, right? 🐉

187 RIDE OR DIE

"...looks incredibly detailed and dynamic with relentless and over-the-top car acrobatics."

-1Up.com



STARRING

LARENZ TATE

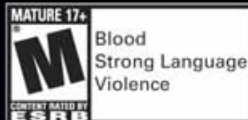
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PlayStation 2



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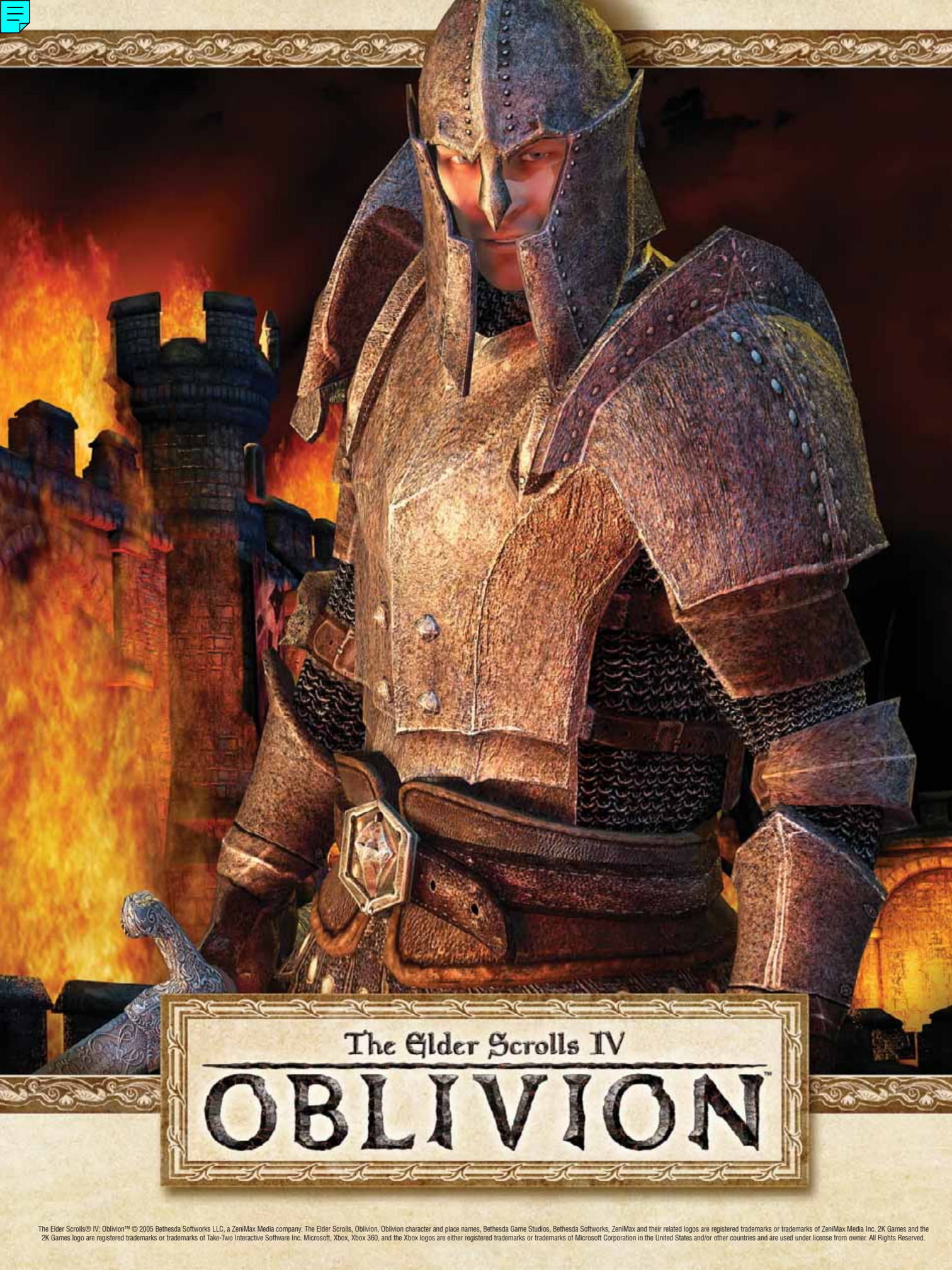


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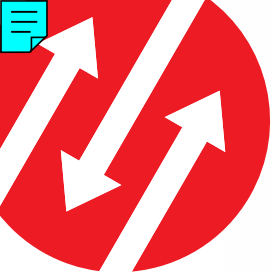
The RPG for the Next Generation





The Elder Scrolls IV

OBLIVION™



review crew

a little heavy on the puppies, honestly

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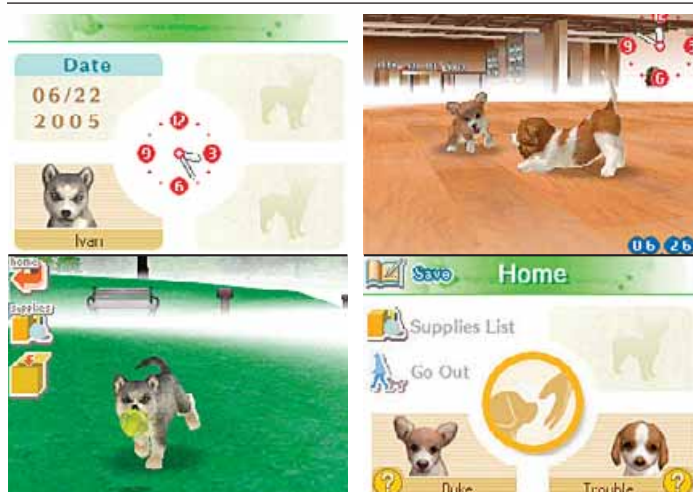
THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS...

This ain't *Dog Fancy*. We're not used to this much cuteness in our magazine—or our games. At least not the good ones. And even though *Nintendogs* isn't a game in the traditional sense, it is fun, and interesting, and different. A lot of people like to whine about all the sequels in the game industry, and it's true, the yearly treadmill that some franchises are on now (even nonsports games... especially nonsports games) may not be sustainable. But look at that list of games up there. Nine out of the 17 are brand new. Sure, some of them

also happen to suck (*187: Ride or Die*), are cynical money grabs (*187: Ride or Die*), or are can't-miss vehicles for established mascots (*Mario Baseball*). But still. Too bad only one of 'em was worthy of even a Silver Award.

In other news of note, we had to give different scores to the PS2 and XB versions of vamp-shooter *Darkwatch*. The PS2 game gets an exclusive two-player co-op mode, a bonus train robbin' level, and one extra weapon, but that doesn't make up for the Xbox version's 16-player online deathmatches....

NINTENDOGS





Photograph by GK Hart/Wikki Hart/Getty Images

THE RATING SYSTEM & AWARDS

7.0-10 GOOD

5.0-6.5 FAIR

0-4.5 BAD

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



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



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



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The lowest-rated game with unanimously bad scores.

ESRB KEY

(Also check out www.esrb.org)

Everyone:

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

Everyone 10+:

Saccharine fun for family members over 10 that may include mild violence between cartoon squirrels.

Teen:

The PG-13 of game ratings. Fisticuffs, hilarious sexual misunderstandings, and madcap antics.

Mature:

For the 17-and-over crowd. Intense violence, gore, pixelated sex, drugs; parents no likey.

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■ Out of the closet: Skeletons 756 and 757 lead the charge.

PS2/XB

ONLINE
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DARKWATCH

Midnight at the O.K. Corral

PS2 REVIEW SCORES

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	CRISPIN	MARK	GIANCARLO
	6.0	6.5	6.0

XBOX REVIEW SCORES

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	CRISPIN	MARK	GIANCARLO
	6.5	7.0	6.5

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: High Moon Studios
Players: PS2 1-2,
XB 1-4
(2-16 online)
ESRB: Mature
www.dark-
watch.com



Good: Atmospheric visuals, fun physics
Bad: Repetitive enemies make for blah battles
See Villainess Tala Butt-Naked in: The October 2004 *Playboy*



CRISPIN: Fear not that the armies of the underworld are idle and wasting away. They're gainfully employed—thousands upon thousands of them—in *Darkwatch*, a gritty Old West shooter with an extra-cryptic flavor. As an outlaw hero turned high-plains bloodsucker after a vampire curse, you'll face skeletal gunslingers, ax-hurling skeleton Indians, scythe-wielding skeletons—even the ghosts of skeletons you've blasted. Oh, you gun down a few other enemies, too—including witchy barmaids and morbidly obese, projectile-vomiting zombies—but mostly the game blends into one blah battle against the undead, with a few horse-riding, turret-manning, and vehicle-driving sections thrown in.

But that's not the only bone I have to pick here. *Darkwatch* often feels so...so-so, with *Halo*-inspired play mechanics (a regenerating shield and two-weapon limit). The pacing goes giddy-up toward the end, and you can make moral choices that affect your vampire powers, which wilt if you wander into sunlight—a cool but under-used gameplay quirk. Playing good or evil has little effect on the loopy story; although the game kept me entertained, I didn't feel the need to replay for the alternate ending.

MARK: For the first few hours *Darkwatch* feels like a job on the skeleton disassembly

line as you blast one mindless, bony cowpoke after another. But a funny thing happens once all hell literally breaks loose halfway through the game—*Darkwatch* gets good. The increased difficulty and enemy variety force you to take advantage of your vampiric powers and the strengths of your different weapons. Sadly, the game never sheds its bad-80s-heavy-metal-album-cover design or silly plot, but along with the unbalanced-but-fun online modes (exclusive to Xbox, though PS2 offers offline co-op), the second half of this undead shooter brings it back to life.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO:

Darkwatch is the very definition of average when it comes to first-person shooters. While just about every aspect of the game is sound in terms of design, none of the individual elements truly shines or does anything to really set the game apart. Sure, the theme of the game is kind of cool (who doesn't love cowboys that also happen to be vampires?), and the vampire powers idea is alluring, but the in-game story just isn't all that deep, and the vamp powers turn out to be pretty similar to typical first-person shooter power-ups. Multiplayer is fun when you're first getting a feel for the layout of each level, but beyond that, it won't do much to hold your attention.



PS2/XB

BEAT DOWN: FISTS OF VENGEANCE

Kicking and screaming

SHAME OF THE MONTH
—TIE—

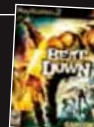


THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	G. FORD	ROBERT	ANDREW
	4.5	4.0	4.5

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Cavia
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Mature

www.capcom.com

Good: Unique ideas for a beat-em-up
Bad: Fighting gameplay is nothing special; crappy camera
Not Quite: *Grand Theft Brawler*



G. FORD: Recent years haven't seen much in terms of memorable brawlers—and even though Capcom makes a noble attempt with *Beat Down*, a 3D beat-em-up with some interesting ideas, it's not enough to rekindle this once beloved genre. *Beat Down*'s action takes place in the open yet limited fictional city of Las Sombras. You can choose one of five characters to bring through the story mode missions, accepting a slew of optional submissions as you see fit. More interesting is your ability to recruit up to two additional A.I.-controlled characters to join you in group battles, which offer a contrast to the game's 1-on-1 showdowns. Finally, you can use money you acquire to buy a variety of clothes and accessories, and you earn ability points to upgrade your stats.

Bland gameplay, however, stifles what inspiration there is. The fighting action is fundamentally underwhelming, and a poor camera and constant loading further handcuff things. Plus, boss battles are won more often by finding the one move your character can exploit rather than by utilizing any high level of skill. As it stands, *Beat Down*'s good ideas aren't enough to overcome its shortcomings.

ROBERT: *Grand Theft Auto* is like goat cheese; they put it in everything these days. And like the goat cheese peach tart I

ordered the other night, this *GTA*-infused brawler is sour and weird, maybe even a little rancid. The entire game consists of jogging around town (hitting load times left and right) in search of characters with red arrows above their heads. That's when you fight. Yes, *Beat Down* bills itself as a fighting game, but that's like calling an *Ernest* movie "cinema." The dumb, simple fights have a stuttering, ham-fisted feel. The game also suffers from a laundry list of technical problems: invisible cars that run you down, bogged-down animation, camera troubles, even the occasional full-on crash. The hilariously bad, obscenity-peppered dialogue relieves the pain at bit...a very tiny bit.

1UP.COM—ANDREW: I enjoy my job, most of the time. But I've never resented having to play a game as much as I did while reviewing *Beat Down*. I think it was right around the time when I had to run back and forth across the city looking for my kidnapped game members—before I was told where they were, I had to run to the other side of the city...just for the hell of it. If this is the most creative way to freshen up the brawler genre, maybe it's time we put it to pasture. Also: Capcom makes the clumsiest menus and interfaces in the industry today. Figuring out what items you have equipped is an aesthetic nightmare.



■ It may look cool, but the cockpit view is for NASCAR obsessives only.

PS2/XB  ONLINE
(PS2/XB)

NASCAR 06: TOTAL TEAM CONTROL

Lame left turn joke goes here

Good: Extensive voice-recognition control (on both PS2 and Xbox)

Bad: Dated graphics, occasional visual slowdown on the PS2

For a Good Time: Curse into the microphone



GREG: It would be easy to think *NASCAR 06* is nothing more than the usual annual incremental upgrade over last year's title. And in a lot of ways, it is: *NASCAR 06* still offers four different series to run and delivers a superb feeling of congestion as you race through a 180 mph traffic jam in each event.

But it's the addition of voice recognition in tandem with the new team controls that makes this new version of *NASCAR* kick so much tail. With a headset on, you can control just about every aspect of the game with simple voice commands. Ask a teammate to draft with you, tell your crew chief you want only two tires on the pit stop, or turn the HUD on and off.

The team control part adds an aspect of the sport that's become quite important in the past couple of years. Now—along with the old ally/rival system, in which drivers react to whether you race clean or dirty—you have partners out on the track. They can work with you, or against you should you get them caught up in a wreck of your making. Team chemistry and prestige are just as important as your personal points standing in

NASCAR 06, which makes the whole experience much deeper.

BRYAN: Even though my passion for the sport doesn't quite reach the magnitude of Greg "Hi, I'm the president of the Jeff Burton fan club" Sewart, I appreciate the innovative efforts of this year's *NASCAR*. Thanks to the new team-based tactics and voice commands, taking the checkered flag now requires more than just hitting the gas (and turning left); it's easy and, more important, enjoyable ordering your teammates to open up passing lanes or asking your crew chief to apologize to the competition for your "rubbin' is racin'" ways. Too bad the handling—even with the assistance turned on—is still so sensitive. And visually, this franchise is really starting to show its age.

1UP.COM—JOHN D: Although I can see why the whole team control thing is innovative and certainly quite significant, I just don't like it very much. To me, the idea smells more of "what more can we do to try and make this interesting?" rather than "what more does the game need?" Managing the team is far too distracting for my liking, regardless of how clever the voice recognition stuff is. Last year's *Chase for the Cup* somehow managed to make the sport far more accessible to car fans rather than just hardcore NASCAR wonks like Greg. Personally, I enjoyed it because it focused on *driving*. Sadly, that's not the case here, and, coupled with the inexplicably sensitive handling, it's not a particularly enjoyable racer.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	9.0	7.0	6.5
GREG			
BRYAN			
JOHN D.			

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Tiburon
Players: 1-2 (2-4 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.easports.com

The end of Civilization begins here.

Addicted to Sid Meier's Civilization PC games?
Finally, there is hope.

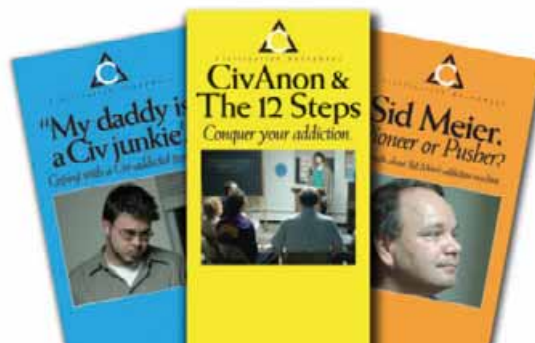


www.CivAnon.org

No more turns.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Enroll before November. Local meetings are filling up.





■ 2K6's new on-the-fly coaching feature lets you call for a screen or tell your D to clear the net, among other options.



■ Diving poke checks are still overpowered in 06 (shown here), but no longer quite so godly in 2K6.

■ PS2/XB

ONLINE
(PS2/XB)

■ PS2/XB/GC

ONLINE
(PS2/XB)

NHL 2K6 VS. NHL 06

Just when hockey was getting back to normal...

It's a brave new world over in the real NHL, and it's the same over here on the videogame side. The 2K series is solid as usual, but EA Sports has finally turned its hockey game around. Does parity reign once again?

BRYAN: It's fitting that the PS2 version of *NHL 06* also includes the Super NES/Genesis classic *NHL '94*, because I haven't enjoyed EA's hockey franchise this much since those glory days. The developers have finally toned down the checking, which was a major issue with the last two editions, and really spiced up the offensive side of the puck with new signature moves mapped to the right stick. I only wish those *SportsCenter*-worthy shots hit the back of the net more often on the higher difficulties.

DEMIAN: I know it's blasphemy, but I find '94 almost unplayable now, at least this version. Anyway, yeah, *06* is incredibly improved, though still a bit biased toward offense. I love using the left analog to control my stick work and get the goalie to bite—my “crack monkey technique,” as James calls it—but I don't dig the canned right-stick superdekes that Bryan likes. Those moves are too ridiculously highlight-reel to happen half a dozen times a game.

JAMES: Yeah, I'm not a big fan of the highlight-reel button either. However, I agree with Bryan that EA's finally reached a great balance with the checking. You can still rub out opponents along the boards and perform some sweet open-ice

hits, but against the big guys in the league you'll have to play the puck. On the other hand, in 2K6 you're always playing the body since every check is a doozy.

DEMIAN: I'm fine with the checking in both games. Sure, you can lay the computer out, but a human player will make you pay.

BRYAN: 2K6's checking doesn't bother me—it's the game's shoddy goalies. This year's netminders are way too weak on the glove side (even letting unscreened shots from the blue line get by), plus they don't react fast enough on wraparound attempts.

DEMIAN: Wraparounds score way too often in both games, but you're right, in 2K6 it's ridiculous. Of course, in *06* the goalies stack the pads and roll around like Hasek doing the worm if you just look at them funny. 2K6 has more variety—you'll see five-hole goals and pucks bounce off defensemen (and in) more often. But then players'll put the puck in their own net, too.

JAMES: I didn't find 2K6's goalie A.I. to be that shoddy compared to the computer's defense. I found myself pushing up the difficulty to Hall of Famer—once you cross the opponent's blue line they almost never force the play. They'll let you dance around their zone as if they were scared of the damn puck. Plus, after playing EA's somewhat arcadey fast-paced hockey, 2K6 felt like hockey underwater.

BRYAN: What about 2K6's new icon-based passing system? At first it's a tad compli-

cated (memorizing every position's button icon so you can send teammates the puck even when they aren't onscreen), but after a few games you get comfortable enough to pass with the grace and efficiency of the prelockout Red Wings. And you'll set up more one-timers this way.

JAMES: Yeah, I did enjoy the icon-passing system, but is it just me or do the passes in 2K6 seem incredibly slow? Hit it with your purse next time, Rob Blake.

DEMIAN: It's definitely harder to thread passes through the defense in 2K6, but I'm all for that. What about *06*'s 120-plus mph slapshots? Don't answer: They're a joke.

BRYAN: True, but what really has me laughing is each game's franchise mode. When will sports developers get the hint that piling on text-heavy features isn't what we want from this already snooze-filled mode? I mean, really—who cares (or even has the time) to sit there and simulate a team practice?

JAMES: I like that in *06*'s franchise mode each NHL team has its own objectives—the Wings and anything short of Canada's Holy Grail is a disappointment. But EA still hasn't fixed last year's problem with franchise mode, where bottom-tier teams have pathetic missions like “Get the No. 1 draft pick for next season.” I played as the Penguins and tried to lose as hard as I could during the season, but ended up with the second pick (sorry, Sidney Crosby). 2K6's franchise mode can be just painful,

like when you're forced to fiddle with a goaltending consultant's wages.

DEMIAN: All right, enough talk. Both games lack polish, but I give 2K6 the slight edge because the defense is better (even with the faults James mentioned), there are more options to customize gameplay, and it's \$20 cheaper. But *06* is still a lot of fun to play. It's good to finally see some competition out there again.

BRYAN: Tune and tweak all you want, Demian, and 2K6's goalies will still be absolute sieves. And for that reason—plus *06*'s faster play and flashier offense—I'm giving the nod to EA's game.

JAMES: Demian's obviously forgotten what hockey's supposed to look like because of the lengthy lockout. The game's action-packed compared to 2K6's snail pace. Plus, outside of the rink, *06* offers enough options for me, such as being able to create a 7-foot hockey player with the play-by-play name of Spanky.

DEMIAN: There's a speed slider, you know. Crank it up if you want to commit sacrilege. Jerks! 🎸



■ 06's Mike Comrie on air guitar.

NHL 2K6			
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	7.0	6.0
	DEMIAN	BRYAN	JAMES

Publisher: 2K Sports
Developer: 2K Sports
Players: PS2 1-2 (3-8 w/Multitap, 2-8 online), XB 1-4 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.2ksports.com

NHL 06			
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.0	7.5	7.5
	DEMIAN	BRYAN	JAMES

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Players: PS2 1-2 (3-8 w/Multitap, 2 online), XB 1-4 (2 online), GC 1-4
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.easports.com



It's like *Burnout* minus all the fun parts, but with shooting.

PS2/XB

ONLINE
(PS2/XB)

187: RIDE OR DIE

We choose "die"

SHAME OF THE MONTH
—TIE—

Good: Huh. There's co-op play...so you can ridicule it together

Bad: Lines like "murk that bean-eatin' vato"

Most Shocking: The developer is straight up French, yo. Fo' reals



DEMIAN: Every once in a while a game comes around that really makes you think. *187: Ride or Die* is one of those games, and what it makes me think is that when marketing guys have free reign to do whatever they want, the resulting product can be shockingly, amazingly crass. There is one thing that the people who conceived of *187* dream about at night, and that is how to transfer the money from your wallet to their own, with a minimum amount of effort.

187 is a below-average racing/car-combat game with repetitive events and gameplay that offers absolutely no surprises and not much fun. Usually, you'll lap the same few courses, trying to shoot (and ultimately destroy) the other cars—sorry, *whips*—and place first, with occasional arena battles and escape-the-cops stages.

But what I didn't factor into my score is *187*'s bald-faced, cynical attempt to capitalize on "gangsta" trappings and an M-rating. If only the Eskimos had 144 words for "tasteless" in their language, I would totally learn Inuit just to describe *187*. As a game, I give *187* a 4.0, but as a *product*, my score is negative f*** you.

JAMES: *187: Ride or Die* tells me, "Don't be the last ride at the end of the race. You feel me? Holla back," but I ain't feelin' it, thug dizzle. This game took pieces from *Burnout*'s scrapyard and gives you a dude riding shotgun...with a shotgun. Shooting other brightly painted generic-looking cars is simple, at least, with muscle cars that blow up just as easily as in any B movie. But everything gets old quickly: The same

bland race tracks and even exploding bad guys reappear—and the game forces you to watch each car blow up in slow motion, like you're a rubber-necker on the expressway holding up traffic. *187* tries to mix it up with yawn-inducing battle modes and escort missions (don't let 'em destroy the hooptie), but none of it put any crunk juice in my system. Did I say that right?

1UP.COM—MATT: From the moment you fire up *187* and see a chrome version of the Ubisoft logo, you know something is wrong. Maybe it's the liberal use of bad, intentionally broken English (tip sheet: "bets" means "best"), or maybe the developers over on the mean streets of Paris just see urban culture differently than we do, but *187* gets a zero for style, and style is all it really had going for it. Otherwise it's a mindless *Twisted Metal*-style blast-em-up that's OK in short doses. The star of the show is multiplayer, and though we don't understand why the gunner can't control his own camera—even while on his own screen online—taking out opponents as you race around is as good as *187* gets. Holla back!



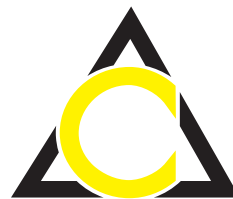
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	4.0	4.5	4.5
DEMIAN	JAMES	MATT	

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Paris
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Mature

www.187game.com

You won't stop playing until you *want* to stop playing.

Addicted to Sid Meier's Civilization PC games?
Finally, there is hope.



www.CivAnon.org

No more turns.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Enroll before November. Local meetings are filling up.



■ PlayStation 2

RADIATA STORIES

A bright RPG debut



■ The character designs have kind of a Precious Moments thing happening. Plus swords.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	7.5	7.5
CHRISTIAN	SHANE	JUSTIN	

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Tri-Ace
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.square-enix.com

Good: Lots to do, a sense of humor

Bad: Way...too...slow...

Biting Suikoden's Style: 100-plus potential party members



CHRISTIAN: *Radiata Stories* spins a generic fantasy yarn with slight comedic flair. Young Jack Russell aspires to be a knight. His comrade in arms, Ridley Silverlake, finds herself at the center of a political conspiracy against the elves, dwarves, and other nonhuman races. The story's a slow burn...too slow, in fact.

The bulk of the game, like most role-players, will send you exploring far-off vistas and dank holes in the earth, battling monsters in droves. The battles are a damn sight better than *Star Ocean's* frustrating encounters, offering action and strategy, although I would have liked more of a chance to mix up my tactics on the fly.

Optional content is as crucial to *Radiata Stories* as the main tale. The lively town of Radiata is full of potential recruits. You're also forced to do side quests to keep things moving: fetching items mainly. Yawn.

Unfortunately, the game takes way too long to come together. The result is slightly reminiscent of *Fable* and *Suikoden*—and too disjointed. RPG veterans will enjoy puttering around the town and uncovering its secrets, but it's all a bit low-key to truly engage the player. I was entertained but never quite addicted.

SHANE: *Radiata*, like developer Tri-Ace's previous PS2 effort, *Star Ocean*, thrusts the

player into a massive, messy role-playing world that's positively over-stuffed with content. Unlike the meticulously honed *Final Fantasy* experience, *Radiata* is loose and goofy, and you're expected to squander hours just messing around with optional crap. Following the denizens of the city through their daily lives (how very *Shenmue*) in order to befriend them might be the genre's most ambitious minigame to date. The cutesy art style and cornball dialogue are borderline baby game, but the total package is solid.

JUSTIN: Jack Russell, the young hero of *Radiata Stories*, is great with people. By chatting up and helping out, he can win the friendship of dozens upon dozens of potential party members. Animals, on the other hand, *hate* this guy.

And that's a problem, because wildlife tends to hang out in the middle of very narrow roads, so creatures big and small are constantly lunging at the opportunity to kick your cheerful little butt. This adds length to the adventure and keeps you pressing buttons, but because *Radiata* trims away all the complexity and customization that would make these battles interesting on their own, these meaningless scuffles only serve to muck up the pace of an otherwise charming RPG.

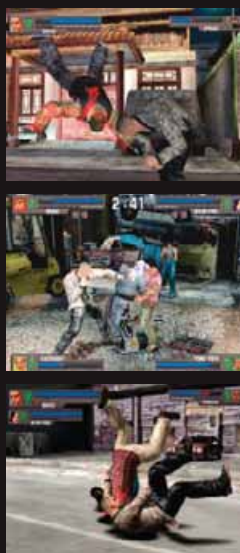
■ PlayStation 2

URBAN REIGN

Just another street fighter



■ My Buddy: When accompanied by a CPU-controlled partner, you can switch characters on the fly and set up satisfying double-team moves.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	5.0	3.5
ROBERT	G. FORD	ANDREW	

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Players: 1-2 (3-4 w/Multitap)
ESRB: Teen

www.namco.com

Good: Fights that flow from pile drivers to baseball bats

Bad: The "now fight these dudes!" concept gets a little tired

Where's: The co-op play? *Final Fight* had it 14 years ago.



ROBERT: Fusing the traditionally separate genres of wrestling, fighting, and old-school beat-em-up, *Urban Reign* is a kind of Unified Theory of Fisticuffs. You got your grappling moves, your martial arts, your broken bottles, and your lead pipes, all while taking on several enemies at once. There's a nice weighty feel to the way fighters give and take abuse. Just watch how the force of an attack is transferred as you sidestep an incoming haymaker and bury your opponent's face in the pavement. Exaggerated realism you might call it.

But for all the quality combat (at least I thought it was—not so much G. Ford and Andrew), the game surrounding it is underdeveloped. You play through a series of disconnected levels in "gritty" locales, populated by generic "tough" guys, thrown together on a big map. The best moments feel like fleshier versions of *Soul Calibur's* master mode or the Tekken Force minigame. Too bad the only real development over the course of *Urban Reign's* 100 missions is the steady unlocking of features, some important to enjoying the game. Consequently, the game isn't really compelling until you're a third of the way through it.

G. FORD: In a number of ways, *Urban Reign* is an adequate brawler. Graphically,

it looks like it belongs on Xbox, and its basic punch/kick/grapple system works well—beating up your enemies is good fun (minus the infuriating deflection system), a mark many games miss (see: *Beat Down*, page 112). A.I. teammates and some basic stat building also help keep things interesting. But these positive qualities go to waste by about level 12 when you realize each stage consists simply of minibattles between you and up to a handful of enemies. There's no sense of progression, only a sickening sense of tedium as you're dropped into the next box of a level and take on another too easy minion, too tough boss, and the too bewildering camera.

1UP.COM—ANDREW: I'm perfectly comfortable being the hater on this one—in fellow subpar brawler *Beat Down*, at least you can run around a city, beat up random thugs for money, and do cool stuff like recruit new members into your gang. *Urban Reign* is a monotonous, repetitive march through what seems like the same cheap, unfair fight. Against a single foe, a kick to the back opens you up to an unbreakable, juggle-filled combo. Against multiple opponents, it's open season on your lumbar region. Pile on, boys! Who needs an adequate blocking system or reliable escape move?



review crew:  xbox



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■ Xbox

ONLINE

MOTOGP 3

The ultimate braking simulator

Good: Realistic racing, new online commentator mode

Bad: Little has changed, awkward animation

Must Buy: If you don't already own *MotoGP 2*. And love the bikes

GREG: When you look at something like EA's *NASCAR* series, which has seen large, sweeping changes every year for a while now, it's hard to get too excited about *MotoGP 3*, which is essentially the same game it has been since the original release, receiving nothing but a smattering of roster and track upgrades each time.

But then you get out on the track and you're reminded why this franchise is held in such high regard. *MotoGP* re-creates the fast, dangerous world of bike racing better than any other game out there, with spot-on physics and a control scheme that's both newbie friendly and deep enough for the grizzled two-wheel veteran all at the same time.

And the online racing can be a real blast, just like in the previous game. Getting into a crowd of folks who know how to handle these crotch-rockets at high speed leads to intense, close battles for position.

Still, if you have *MotoGP 2* in your collection, it's hard to justify another purchase. *MotoGP 3* is not head and shoulders above its predecessor in any department. It remains a very solid racing game in need of a design overhaul.

DEMIAN: I haven't hit the brakes so much in a racing game since...oh... *MotoGP 2*. And while *MotoGP 3* is clearly not a game that's going to appeal to casual fans, it's just the kind of intense, technical experience that a hardcore player can get lost in for weeks, especially the online matches. But Greg's absolutely right—there's really not a whole lot new here.

The game does add a set of "extreme mode" races around tight, demanding courses loosely based on the cities that host the real MotoGP championship. These tracks support up to 10 racers in multiplayer (the

standard courses can handle 16), and while the bikes handle a bit more nimbly, it's not all that big of an addition. The new seeding system is nice for online games, though, as it'll ensure you race against evenly matched opponents.

1UP.COM—CHE: *MotoGP 2* schooled me the hard way on the art of superbike management—you go in hot, ride those brakes, then gun it out of the corner as you rinse, repeat, and win. With *MotoGP 3*, the developers at Climax have loosened their ties a little by including "extreme" modes that give you some of the over-the-top antics of an arcade racer.

But the meat of the game remains hardcore as ever. Still, if *MotoGP 3* wants to be *Gran Turismo* on two wheels, the bikes need to look quite a bit sexier—as it is now, the game lacks the visual realism you'd associate with a simulation. 



■ Series experts may need to ditch their old power-sliding technique—it's a lot harder to pull off in *MotoGP 3*.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.5	8.0	7.5
GREG	DEMIAN	CHE	

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Climax
Players: 1-4 (2-16 online and system link)
ESRB: Everyone

www.thq.com



■ Waluigi throws like such a girl.



GameCube

MARIO SUPERSTAR BASEBALL

More role player than superstar

G. FORD: Though he may not look the part, Mario always got picked first for sports. The *Mario Tennis* and *Golf* series have won over hardcore fans and casuals alike with a mix of newbie-friendly pick-up-and-play controls and deep gameplay. But while the Mushroom Kingdom's take on America's pastime is a generally solid game, it is guilty of a few unfortunate miscues.

Teams in *Mario Superstar Baseball* are made up of a captain—Mario, Peach, Bowser Jr., etc.—and a slew of lesser Nintendo characters, including Petey Piranha and Toadsworth. They hit, run, pitch, steal bases—but then there's the Nintendo difference. Certain characters can toss special pitches and take powered-up swings, plus each stadium has its own obstacles, such as floating coin blocks in Peach's stadium that can redirect fly balls. Besides the requisite exhibition games, there's a single-player challenge mode in which you recruit team members and gear up for a showdown with Bowser's team, as well as some entertaining minigames and an enjoyable pitch/hit/catch competition.

A couple of problems prove to be rally killers, though. Hitting is far too fickle for such a casual game, especially with the batless characters (Donkey Kong whacks the ball with his fist, for example). Baserunning can be just as painful—runners take off whenever there's a hit, fly balls be damned. These are both problems you learn to deal with over time, but the casual audience this game is intended for likely won't stick around that long. Those who do, though, will enjoy their time with this off-beat ball game.

BRYAN: Don't let this game's beloved cast of characters, quirky equipment, and Nintendo-themed fields of dreams fool you—*Mario Superstar Baseball* isn't very beginner-friendly. Unlike the plumber's stint on the links and tennis courts, you can't get away with simply knowing the basics; you'll be slaughtered if you don't master the advanced pitching and batting mechanics.

But even if you can get past the game's surprisingly steep learning curve, this one still has a few strange quirks. Hitting homers seems to require more luck than skill (I jacked less than five over the fences in the dozens of games I played), and, apparently, fancy-pants mascots can't be bothered with smart baserunning fundamentals. The additive minigames help *Mario*'s case, but I still think he and his friends could use some more practice.

1UP.COM—ANDREW: The lack of a season mode or player development helps make this the perfect Friday night pick-up game before (or after) hitting the town. True, newcomers might find themselves swinging and missing with great frequency. And running the basepaths, especially with multiple runners, is much harder than it really ought to be...but *Mario Superstar Baseball* is still far more accessible than the average baseball sim. The Nintendo shtick is once again in full effect, but having a random sandstorm turn a sure fly-out into a stand-up triple in the bottom of the ninth is far more frustrating than it is whimsical. For my requisite baseball pun, I shall go with "not quite AAA ball."

Mario Superstar Baseball vs. Real Baseball

Which game packs more punch?

POWER-UPS



Lucky Glove,
Dash Spikes
Advantage:
Mario
Baseball

Steroids,
pine tar,
Lasik surgery



NOTHING-TO-DO-WITH-THE-SPORT MINIGAME



Star Dash
coin-collection
race

Sausage race
at Miller Park
Advantage:
Real baseball



BEST 'STACHE



Waluigi

Rollie Fingers
Advantage:
Real baseball



WINNER: REAL BASEBALL

Looks like real baseball gets the nod here. But *Mario Superstar Baseball* will work in a pinch during a rain delay.

Good: Impressive graphics, fun minigames, unlockables
Bad: Batting too tough, bungled baserunning
Most Addictive Minigames: Piranha Panic and Barrel Batter



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

7.5

G. FORD

6.0

BRYAN

7.5

ANDREW

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Namco
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com

■ GameCube

WWE DAY OF RECKONING 2

We reckon it could use some work



■ So real, you can almost smell the various oils and lotions in Bret Hart's hair. Ewww.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	5.0	5.0	7.5
	GREG	BRYAN	KAREN

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Yuke's
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Teen

www.thq.com

Good: Excellent graphics, fast action, good teammate control

Bad: No online play, bland story mode, dumbass A.I.

At Least: There's a wide selection of WWE legends to unlock



GREG: Wrestling games have been mediocre for so long now that it's hard not to be jaded about the incremental improvements we get to see every couple of years.

Day of Reckoning 2 is a definite improvement over last year's GC wrasslin' title, though that's like saying being stabbed is an improvement over being shot. As a multiplayer game, *Reckoning 2* delivers action about on par with what we've come to expect, with nice features like submission-hold breaks and the option to attack the referee to stop a count. But like almost every other wrestling game, *Reckoning* falls apart the second you get into a single-player tag-team match. Unlike the recent Xbox *WWE* game, in which the A.I. is so stupid that it doesn't know when to interfere, here the A.I. is so overzealous that it interferes nonstop, but rarely in the right way. Yes, it's great that my teammate will run in and break a submission hold for me. But boy does it suck when he won't protect me when I attempt to pin or slap a hold on my opponent. Long story short: *Reckoning 2* is slightly better than last year's game, but it's still nothing special.

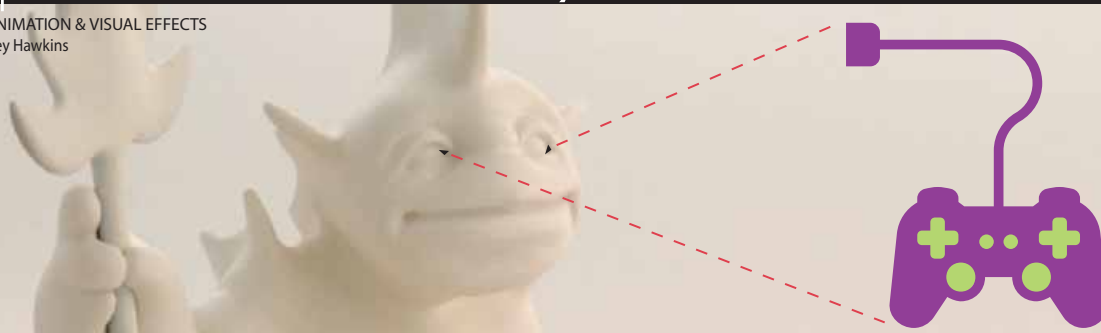
BRYAN: Success in the real WWE may be more about looks (and talkin' smack) than wrestling ability, but in the virtual squared circle, it's the other way around. And sadly,

when it comes to gameplay, *Reckoning 2* performs like a jobber. As with the first game, the A.I. here is a mess. While any jabroni can breeze through the toughest 1-on-1 bouts (it usually took me under five minutes to finish off one of the WWE's finest with my wimpy created grappler), the combination of superhuman opponents and spacey partners makes getting the 1-2-3 in a tag-team match one tough feat. Actually, make that too tough. Toss in an uneventful story mode, and you've got yet another forgettable wrestling title on the Cube.

1UP.COM—KAREN: Say farewell to that weirdly shiny plastic skin! The series has returned with astonishingly good looks and supersmooth play that'll appeal to button mashers and strategists alike. Unlike Bryan and Greg, I think the A.I. is significantly improved (faster reaction times, headier play during fatal four-way matches), and the stamina meter will humble you like a dastardly villain in a classic match. Rather than mashing one button frantically to make or break a submission, the new system requires more scheming (and as we all know, scheming equals fun). Sadly, *Reckoning 2* skimps on voiceovers and cinematic effects, which ultimately lessens the fanfare and epic feel.



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Student ...Jeffrey Hawkins



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■ Resist the too-helpful hints under these question marks: They're truly for dummies.

■ PSP

FRANTIX

Pleasantly puzzling, but not actually frantic

Good: Dozens of entertaining levels

Bad: Flighty control = cheap deaths

Puzzling: The inclusion of the *ChubbChubbs* CG short



CHRISTIAN: *Frantix* is not terribly 2005. It's more of a charming throwback to the late '80s action puzzles that populated the Nintendo Entertainment System—the kind in which you control a character and pick up gizmos, avoid enemies, and can walk only in the four cardinal directions. (*Adventures of Lolo*, anyone?) The goal here is to grab crystals, dodge monsters in a maze, and reach the exit. It's simple fun, great for on-the-go gaming.

Frantix progresses smoothly, slowly getting harder, and by the time you get stuck, you'll have several levels open, so you can hop to another stage before frustration sets in. Smart. If it's the kind of game you just don't see anymore, it's not because the genre sucked—it just got played out. The PSP is the right place to bring it back.

Control, however, is a bit janky, making cheap deaths easy. The camera also tends to obscure things. You don't lose ground when you die, though, making these minor nuisances. The lack of a belabored story is also a breath of fresh air. Long-winded movie sequences are the last thing we want to watch on the bus.



JENNIFER: *Frantix* is one of those games you sort of innocently start playing, and then next thing you know, hours have gone by, *Seinfeld* reruns are on, your back hurts, and you're wondering what the hell happened to your life. It's low-level addictive, a game you keep playing not so much because it's thrilling but because it offers that weirdly satisfying balance of moderate mental stimulation and zero actual effort. I enjoyed the pacing and difficulty, and the puzzles are all nice and short—more games should let you play for a minute or two and get rewarded with an autosave and the next level. It's basic block-pushing nicely gussied up, and, somewhat unexpectedly, that was good enough for me.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—DANA: The name *Frantix* is a misnomer, as it's much more advisable that you be deliberate rather than hurried while playing this game. And that's OK—the simple pace here is actually a strength in a way. Like Christian and Jennifer said, the short, quick-loading puzzles are perfect for portable gaming; even if all you have is five minutes, you'll be able to complete one or two levels with no problem. That is in itself a bit of a problem—if finding the solution was more of a mental challenge, finishing a level would be more satisfying. Not being able to see pitfalls in a level is also a problem, as obstructed views sometimes led to my untimely and frustrating end. Nevertheless, *Frantix* fills a nice gap in the PSP's current software lineup.

■ PSP

MEDIEVIL RESURRECTION

A skeleton from the PlayStation's closet



■ Boss of you: *MediEvil*'s mega-monsters still put up a good fight.

Good: Great music and funky enemies

Bad: Repetitive levels, frustrating platforming bits

Lame Character Alert: Al Zalam, a wiseacre street-smart genie



CRISPIN: Turns out that great action games really don't die. They just fade away, replaced by niftier, more innovative titles. Such is the case with *MediEvil*, a PlayStation 1 hack-and-slash adventure that in its day charmed us with moody visuals, funky bosses, and screwball humor (you play a one-eyed reanimated skeleton out to outdo his cowardly past).

And now that the game has been zapped back to life on PSP (with a few new extras) as *MediEvil Resurrection*, what once seemed so charming and fresh comes across as competent but stale from the crypt. That's not to say it isn't fun. *Resurrection*'s save-your-game-anywhere system makes it perfect for quick snatches of playtime, and the levels themselves (only a couple of which are new) are imaginative and hold up well today. It's just that all the hacking here is hackneyed, lacking the fresh intensity of newer action titles like Capcom's *Maximo*. The new-to-this-version's kid-friendly minigames don't add many thrills, either, even in the two-player mode. Ultimately, it doesn't matter if you played the original *MediEvil*; anyone into action games will find this grave jumper a bit moldy.

KATHLEEN: Poor Sir Daniel Fortesque. He dies a coward's death and is then resurrected in a terminally mediocre action platformer. These dark levels are not well suited for the PSP, and while I could see that the graphics were pretty, I was left wanting when it came time to do more than watch. Sizeable, well designed lev-

els are squandered on pedantic step-and-fetch quests during which the game torments you with side-kicks, cut-scenes, and narration that taunts and nags you. *MediEvil* has the same sense of humor as that schmuck in class who acts cynical and indifferent but is transparently desperate to be loved. Like that guy, this game is harmless and should probably be left alone.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—TOM: Be thankful the dismal *Death, Jr.* didn't discourage other publishers from releasing action-adventures featuring skeleton-headed heroes. *MediEvil Resurrection* is a delight: a fun, pick-up-and-play game that's ideal for a handheld. At least until the second half, when I had to return to levels I'd already been through to find items I hadn't the first time around. Problem was, I had to redo the levels as if I had never been there, battling the same enemies and bosses. But for some reason, it didn't bother me. Maybe it was the catchy orchestral soundtrack, the relative ease of the puzzles, or the fact that the PSP can save on a dime that soothed me.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.0	7.0	6.0
CHRISTIAN	JENNIFER	DANA	

Publisher: Platform Publishing/Sony Online
Developer: Killer Game
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.station.sony.com

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	6.0	4.5	8.0
CRISPIN	KATHLEEN	TOM	

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Cambridge Studios
Players: 1 (2 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Teen

www.us.playstation.com



■ PSP

NAMCO MUSEUM BATTLE COLLECTION

You won't mind being dragged into this museum



■ Updated versions of *Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, *Rally-X*, and *Dig Dug* offer wireless multiplayer.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	7.0	8.0	8.0
SHANE	SHOE	JEREMY	

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Players: 1-2 (2-4 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone

www.namco.com

Good: Plenty of games, fun wireless multiplayer

Bad: A few stinkers, old games get dull quickly

Don't Import: The Japanese version—it only has half the games



SHANE: If you're interested in this collection of geriatric arcade titles, you're either an oldster who survived *Pac-Man* fever...or someone who's sick of all the sports sims and racing games clogging PSP shelves. Namco's collection oozes quantity: With 17 oldies and four modernized remakes, you'll never be bored again, right?

Well, your mileage will vary, but relics like *Galaxian*, *Rally-X*, *Bosconian*, and *Mappy* are tough going. Oh, and you only think that you want to play through *Rolling Thunder* again. At least some of the more obscure older titles, such as *Motos*, *Grobda*, *Dragon Buster*, and *King & Balloon* (Namco's borderline nonsensical *Space Invaders* rip-off) provide head-scratching intrigue. You'll likely spend the majority of your time on the real winners, like *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, and *Dig Dug*—perfectly balanced bite-sized enjoyment that makes your two-hour layover melt away.

The gussied-up, remade versions of *Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, *Rally-X*, and *Dig Dug* aren't particularly groundbreaking, but the colorful visuals, peppy tunes, and frivolously fun multiplayer action won't disappoint when you need a quick retro pick-me-up.

SHOE: Here's gaming with an ordinary compilation: You're thrilled because the disc contains this, this, and that. You start playing. Fast-forward 15 minutes, and the disc

is back in its case 'cause those games just don't hold your attention like they used to. Here's gaming with *Battle Collection*: You're extra thrilled because it contains way more titles than the average *Namco Museum*, plus a few updated classics. You start playing. Fast-forward 60 minutes, and the disc is back in its case....

Hey, that's four times the love. But it could've been 20 times had Namco included more remakes (or made them all as excellent as the four-player update of *Pac-Man* here). I won't be playing this one for hours on end, but it's easily one of the best classics compilations ever put together.

1UP.COM—JEREMY: Finally, a *Namco Museum* that does these classics justice. True, playing *Dragon Buster* or *King & Balloon* in the dentist's waiting room makes the prospect of oral surgery seem appealing in comparison, but fan favorites like *Galaga*, *Pac-Man*, and *Rolling Thunder* more than make up for the weaker selections. Plus, these games have never looked nicer; aside from some color bleeding in fast-scrolling titles, the PSP's screen makes these retro graphics shine. The remade versions are a little too simple, but they make for a fun extra and provide a decent Wi-Fi multiplayer experience, too (which the original games don't support). It's quite likely the best classics compilation to date.



■ You can also choose to tilt your PSP 90 degrees and play the older games in vertical mode.



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by Rick O'Connor

■ PSP

GRIPSHIFT

We'll agree to disagree



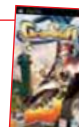
■ Looks fun, right? Too bad the powersliding feels kind of like ice-skating on stilts.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	3.0	7.0	6.5
KATHLEEN	G. FORD	JOE	

Publisher: Platform Games/
Sony Online
Developer: Sidhe Interactive
Players: 1 (2-4 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone
www.gripshiftgame.com

Good: Track editor is easy to learn yet powerful

Bad: Not everyone likes replaying the same track over and over
Ice, Lava, and Desert Levels? You know it



KATHLEEN: If Dr. Frankenstein made a game, he'd probably patch together something like this self-proclaimed puzzle/platform/driving/actioner.

Let's break it down. First, *GripShift* fails as a platformer: Its twisty, hazard-filled, loop-the-looped tracks (perched high over a few stale backgrounds) actually end up feeling tedious, as you repeatedly plummet over edges. It also sucks as a puzzler: Only masochists will enjoy scouring the tracks for hidden collectibles. *GripShift* isn't much of a racer, either: You're given several choices for hubcaps and hood decals, but no ability to tweak your car's handling or performance. This is mash-the-brakes-and-crawl-around-the-corner driving, not easy-powerslide-woo-this-is-so-fun driving. And as far as *GripShift* being an action game, well, I'm not sure where that part comes in. Do hack car-combat clichés like firing missiles and dropping TNT count as action?

GripShift's only novelty is its track editor, which is simple to learn and elaborate enough to allow for some fun designs to race on and trade. But with everything else malformed and pieced together, it's not enough to give this monster life—at least for me. These other yahoos loved it, though.

G. FORD: Bah, I say. Though by no means a killer app, *GripShift* is precisely the type of

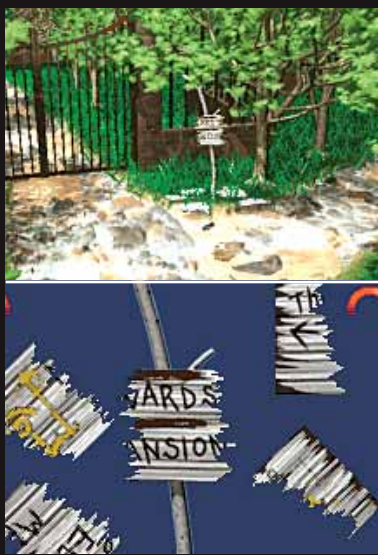
game the PSP needs right now. Its quirky puzzle/driving/platform gameplay quickly won me over, mostly thanks to the controls. What I love is that in *GripShift*'s world of floating tracks, you'll find a physics system that lets you toss around your vehicle like some sort of metallic Hacky Sack, bouncing from track to islands and through checkpoints in a haphazard yet controllable fashion. New obstacles, including magnets and teleporters, appear regularly, and though you'll be replaying levels in an attempt at achieving different goals, it doesn't become frustrating until some of the later stages. Solid.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE: I'm not sure how much of this is due to the fact that this is actually an original PSP game, but I had a reasonably good time with *GripShift*. Its claim to "puzzle platform driving action" sounds ludicrous, but that's what you get: a very simple puzzle-based platformer starring a car rather than a plucky young mascot. It's kind of like *Super Monkey Ball*, complete with a sense of not being fully in control of your character. The 100-plus levels are so simple that you'll be hooked into beating just one more. A powerful track editor and cute minigames add further value. This ain't no *Lumines*, but it's a mildly diverting puzzler all the same.

■ DS

TRACE MEMORY

Myst opportunity



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)	5.5	6.5	6.5
SHANE	JENNIFER	ROBERT	

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Cing
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen
www.nintendo.com

Good: Unique story line

Bad: Surprisingly short, some vague puzzles

Meta: Heroine Ashley has her own DS



SHANE: What a bizarre little game. *Trace Memory* beams in from the art-house gaming zone, melding the old-timey point-and-click adventure aspects of *Myst* with a surreal, postmodern murder mystery plot. The results are, well...suitably weird.

Gameplay (and I use that term loosely) consists of guiding introspective heroine Ashley through a deserted island from a top-down view. When she spies something interesting, you can check it out on the DS's upper screen. Since our white-haired tween solves her problems by thinking rather than fighting, interaction consists of either simple conversation trees or puzzles.

The odd story line, with its moody tone and tragic revelations, mostly succeeds. It's tough to pull off a convincing game set in a quasi-realistic modern setting, especially a game without combat. The puzzles, on the other hand, range from mundane (clumsily using the DS's touch panel to manipulate physical objects) to painstakingly cerebral (deciphering complex codes). A strict order of operations means that you can't interact or collect objects until Ashley knows that she needs to...which leads to plenty of backtracking. It's all very dreamy, insubstantial, and ultimately, a bit dull. Plus, at only five hours long, it's strictly a rental.

JENNIFER: Subtract about 2/3 of the books I've read, movies I've seen, TV shows I've

watched, games I've played, friends I've had, and places I've visited—this puts me at the emotional age of, oh, 9—and suddenly, this game is just about the greatest form of entertainment in the whole damn world. Something about the simple yet lovely story of a young girl searching for the truth about her missing genius scientist parents really struck my imagined younger, more impressionable self. The brainteaser puzzles are just challenging enough, and they use the touch pad in a variety of clever ways. This really is a glorious place to escape to—unless, like me, you actually have already read all those great books and played all those fabulous games. Then, *Trace Memory* is, well, just what it is.

ROBERT: Playing *Trace Memory* is like spending an afternoon sifting through the yellowed photographs and family heirlooms of an estate sale, piecing together the identities of the dead by the things they've left behind.

If that doesn't sound like a thrill ride, it's not. Slow to start and quick to finish, *Trace* holds your attention by the thinnest of strings: a desire to fill the blank pages of the story. The game's double-helix plot structure—parallel murder mysteries set half a century apart—adds a touch of unusual sophistication. Too bad it lacks a satisfying final twist.



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PRETENDING TO BE AN ELF,

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Unleashed
Nintendogs is a one-player game, but put it in bark mode and your DS will send out wireless signals looking for other nearby *Nintendogs* players doing the same thing. If you hook up, your puppy can give his new friend one of your items, and you can get one in return. Just don't get upset like Shoe did when Kathleen's dog brought him a dirty ol' stick. Yeah, a stick. She just wanted to show off Gouda's new rainbow Afro wig, is all.

DS

NINTENDOGS

Puppy love

SHOE: Good thing Bob Barker and his ball-bustin' crusade to "fix" the world's pets doesn't reach into the virtual world—otherwise my new best friend, an adorable corgi pup named Corky, might've never been born.

Before I lose complete credibility amongst my more masculine peers out there, you should know this "game" (I'll explain why that's in quotes in a bit) isn't just about making sure you're grooming and feeding a pretend dog like it was some advanced, fuzzy Tamagotchi. It's about watching him develop from a clueless, seemingly deaf ball of fur to a smart, obedient, Frisbee-catching ball of fur. You do this by educating your dog in the ways of the DS: You use the stylus to get him (or her) to move a certain way (or just to rub his belly for some feel-good encouragement), and you speak into the built-in microphone to teach it commands, from a simple "sit" to a more

provocative "booty call" (my self-named command for getting Corky to shake her thang). Repeat several times and you will see your companion evolve and mentally grow over time. It's quite impressive—especially when you realize it's all a "game."

Oh yeah, about that "game" thing.... You teach your dog tricks, take him for walks, and enter him in agility, disc-catching, or obedience competitions. It's not really gaming, per se—just a lot of activities to keep you and your puppy busy. *Nintendogs* does offer a collectible aspect, however; you can get and trade a hundred random items ranging from squeaky chew toys and clothing accessories to controllable RC helicopters. But all they do is entertain your pal in new ways, or make him look funny 'cause, hey, a dog wearing glasses is pure comedy gold.

So once I cut my emotional ties with Corky

(named after a personal fave TV character, by the way), I won't be Nintendogging any longer. I do have to give the game huge, huge props for being so technologically cool and for getting me hooked for even a short little while. But it won't be long before you're looking for something much deeper with longer-lasting appeal. *Animal Crossing DS*, perhaps?

JENNIFER: As a lover of portable gaming, dogs, and cute things in general, I was predisposed toward this one. My high expectations weren't exactly exceeded, though—not by a mile-long walk with two poop breaks.

I adored teaching my dogs tricks, scrubbing their coats till they sparkled, and taking them on long walks where they played in the park and brought me the most darling presents (loved the tissue box, ChiChi!). The competitions are super-



Good: These puppies sure are cute....

Bad: The puppy love may be short-lived

EGM Pups: Corky, Benny, Bertha, ChiChi, Baxter, Gouda, and Cheesy



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

7.5

SHOE

8.0

JENNIFER

9.0

KATHLEEN

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

www.nintendo.com



■ Scat! Make poop go away by touching it on-screen. If you don't, the other dog walkers in your game will bitch.

simple, but they're highly addictive; they also happen to be where *Nintendogs* is at its least cute and cuddly. Three meets a day isn't enough—mostly because even when your dogs are well-trained, well-practiced, recently bathed, and pampered with top-quality canned food, treats, and positive feedback aplenty, they'll behave startlingly unpredictably just when it matters most. Poor Penelope, my prize boxer, would enter the disc-tossing championship with everything going for her but come home an open-class loser at day's end. I understand it's something of a stamina issue, and this game does an amazing job creating a realistic pet you care both for and about. It's just stuck halfway between sim and silly.

If it's supposed to be realistic, then let me truly train, discipline, and breed my dogs. If it's just a quirky game, I want to drive those puppies to compete till they bring home a first-place trophy

we can both be proud of. (Either way, that dorky precompetition banter should've been skippable.) I really hope the next game works out these identity issues; then *Nintendogs* will be best in show.

KATHLEEN: To protect its property from dirty pirates, Nintendo gave us special sealed DS systems to review *Nintendogs*. Now that we're done they plan on taking them back, so I just want to say this to those puppy-snatching bastards: Cheesy likes when you scratch under her chin, but Gouda doesn't. Dairy likes to play with the balloons, but it scares Cheesy when they pop. Cheesy doesn't like Charlie, and Aster got in a fight with Dairy over her new rainbow wig, so be sure to keep them apart.

Each of my dogs has its own little quirks and qualities that I enjoyed discovering. It was surprising how quickly I found myself unabashedly

praising Cheesy for sitting on command and catching Frisbees, then delighting in her response of wags and happy kisses. Gouda, on the other hand, had the enthusiasm for agility-based competitions but totally lacked the speed and coordination for catching anything. We went to a disc-throwing event and couldn't even place out of the amateur class.

With all of those unique traits, I wish there had been more ways to show off my little troopers. An *Animal Crossing*-style society and level of interaction would have been a perfect fit. Also, the walks around town occasionally got a bit dull, since we often ran into the same people. (That Billy is such a brat, and his bitchy mother thinks she knows everything!)

So, farewell to you, my wee wagger brigade! I will do my best to ignore the DS-shaped hole that Nintendo has ripped out of my heart.... 🐾



CHIHUAHUA GRUDGE MATCH

Minnie the (real) EGM Chihuahua VS. *Nintendogs* Chihuahua

COST

The first year of ownership runs around \$1,000. But counting Minnie's wardrobe and spa treatments, it's like \$2,500

Even if you didn't have a DS and bought all three versions of *Nintendogs*, you'd still spend only \$250 or so
Winner: *Nintendogs*

THE BACK END

Dispenses waste in tiny pellet form, occasionally under Previews Editor Shane's desk
Winner: Minnie

Dispenses waste in tiny pellet form, which is then magically transported into a paper bag

JABBING WITH A POINTY OBJECT

Your ass is in jail for animal cruelty, pokey
Winner: Minnie

How else are you going to pet it?

OBEDIENCE

If you speak clearly, don't yell, and are consistent, she will probably chase her tail and then puke in your shoe
Winner: Minnie

If you speak clearly, don't yell, and are consistent, you may impress your pals with your dog's signature move, the "booty call"

BABE MAGNETISM

Seriously, the ladies LOVE Minnie. They love anything about her. Including you, if you're in the vicinity
Winner: Minnie

People will be impressed with your dog's beautiful coat or accomplishments in the show ring, but you'll still be sleeping alone

Against the greatest 'huahua of all time, *Nintendogs* was just completely outclassed.



■ When you pick your first dog, you're stuck with it for a while. But with the dough you earn from competitions, you can buy a second and third pup.

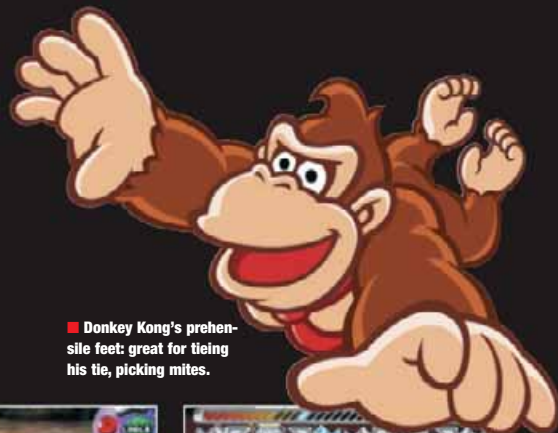


■ Too bad the dogs can only wear one accessory at a time. No hippie Rasta nerd puppy for us...



REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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



■ Donkey Kong's prehensile feet: great for tying his tie, picking mites.



Donkey Kong: King of Swing

GBA • Nintendo • ESRB: E

Remember back when Nintendo made normal platformers? Yeah, neither do we. But *DK: King of Swing* is one of the company's better excursions off the beaten path: Gameplay revolves (literally) around Kong grabbing hold of objects in midair and swinging along.

Bottom line: It's a bit gimmicky, but anyone seeking a novel challenge should take it for a spin.



Outlaw Tennis

PS2/XB • Global Star • ESRB: M

It's *Mario Tennis* for the frat house as the *Outlaw* series stretches its blue comedy shtick onto the tennis court. *The Daily Show*'s Stephen Colbert handles announcer duties, lending a familiar voice and witty banter.

Bottom line: The characters are wild, but the game is remarkably tame, almost slow. It's moderate fun, with online multiplayer and slick production values.



Harvest Moon: Another Wonderful Life

GC • Natsume • ESRB: E

This cute and quirky farming sim has a female star, but other than that it's pretty much the same as the last GC *Moon*. You'll raise crops and animals and find a good househusband to mind the kid.

Bottom line: *Harvest Moon* encourages solid work ethics and upright social behavior, but it'll leave you wondering if that's really such a wonderful life.



Pump It Up: Exceed

PS2/XB • Mastiff • ESRB: T

More than just a *Dance Dance Revolution* knockoff, but less than original, *Pump It Up*'s subtle variation on the popular dancing game is its custom dancepad: The step sensors have been moved to the corners, and a new one placed in the center. That headstand move you've always dreamed of is finally a reality!

Bottom line: Worth checking out if you'd like to change up your dance routine.

HEX, I SAW YOU ON THE TV!

It's an all-out toonami assault for you folks who love big eyes and chicks with cat ears



One Piece: Grand Battle

PS2/GC • Bandai • ESRB: T

This anime fighter successfully blends *Smash Bros.*-style wackiness with traditional kicky/punchy. The large stages make for great arenas: fighting on top of a giant water-logged mer-cow...thing...is a highlight.

Bottom line: Party-ready gameplay, even if you don't follow the adventures of the Luffy Pirates on TV.



DICE

PS2 • Bandai • ESRB: E10+

Who doesn't like robot dinosaurs that transform into bikes and cars? Shame, then, that this stylish but disjointed kids' cartoon reject runs out of ideas in seconds, offering unbelievably simple, repetitive beat-em-up gameplay.

Bottom line: The folks who made this one don't care about dinosaurs, robots, or the hopes of small children.



Inuyasha: Feudal Combat

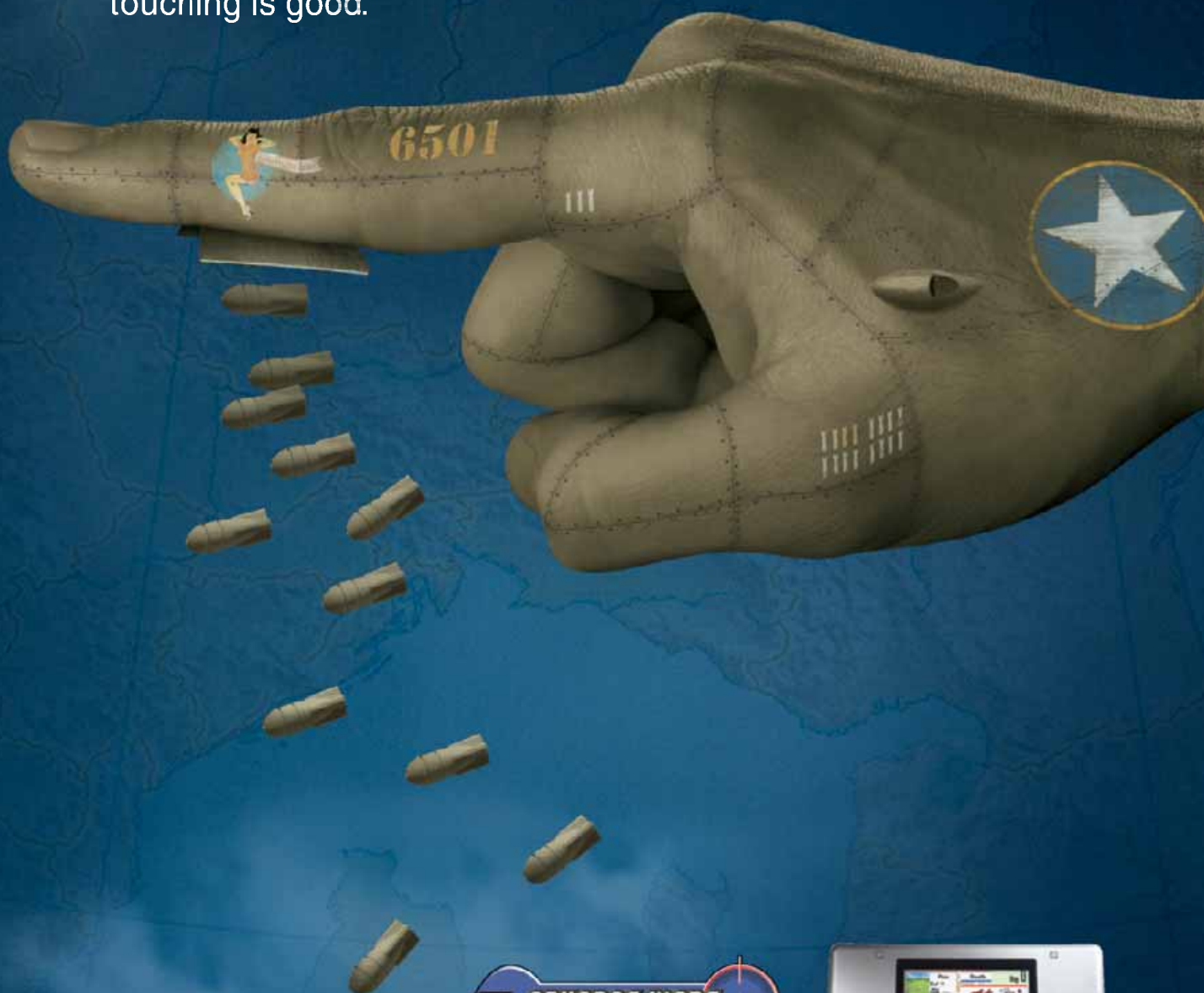
PS2 • Bandai • ESRB: T

The popular TV series is now a 3D fighter, thanks to the guys behind the *Bloody Roar* franchise. But that expertise goes to waste on a game that's far too simplistic to be entertaining. *Inuyasha* fans will love the animation, though.

Bottom line: The titular demon-dog needs to learn some new tricks.



touching is good.



The twisted Black Hole Army has returned, and this time you'll need both screens as the war rages on two fronts. It's up to you to command your troops on the ground, in the air and at sea as you engage in dual-screen combat in order to fend off the deadly invasion.

NINTENDO DS™



Cartoon Violence

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Rebelstar: Tactical Command

GBA • Namco • ESRB: E10+ — Get grid-based tactical on E.T. and his lizardman friends with cute but deadly human insurgents, employing some of the most complex tactics ever crammed onto a handheld. The story line and preset anime-style characters are completely beside the point, but same-cartridge multiplayer could give this one legs if you've got a strat-minded pal.

Bottom line: If you like your tactics tense, pick this one up. It's by the creators of PC classic *X-Com*.



Big Mutha Truckers 2: Truck Me Harder

PS2/XB • THQ • ESRB: M — All of your favorite red-neck stereotypes return in a basic driving game that has you hauling loads in your big rig, then wheeling and dealing to get more cash for your pork bellies. It's more fun than it sounds...if you can put up with the endless unfunny "humor."

Bottom line: If you like your jokes simple and your games simpler, this one could be worth a spin—it's bargain priced.



Namco Museum 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection

PS2/XB/GC • Namco • ESRB: E — This collection is mostly a been-here, done-that round up of Namco's early-to-mid-'80s arcade hits in serviceable condition with no frills or fancy remakes (like in the PSP version of *Museum*, see page 121). *Rolling Thunder* and *Sky Kid* make their first *Namco Museum* appearances.

Bottom line: If you already have one of these Namco comps, no need to get this one. Otherwise, have fun.

RAINBOW SIX 3: LOCKDOWN

Locked, loaded...and reviewed next issue



Rainbow Six: Lockdown

PS2/XB • Ubisoft • ESRB: M — We couldn't lock down a final version of the realistic squad shooter's latest episode, but we did play a work in progress. Single-player *Lockdown* is no surprise: a smoother interface, a couple added effects, but basically the same predictable shooting gallery as before. The only two changes we noticed were new (and dull) sniper levels and easier difficulty (the A.I. was clearly not up to final specs, though).

Multiplayer is another story. The RPG-like character building system in the Xbox version is innovative for a shooter—you gain levels and upgrade stats like armor and reload

speed—but frankly, we're worried how it'll play out online. *Rainbow Six* is a hardcore shooter to begin with, but the prospect of facing competition with skills honed over the last couple games *and* the advantage of built-up characters might leave more casual players cold (as in dead in the first few seconds of a match). Ubisoft claims that, in practice, the upgradeable skills hardly make a difference (a head shot is still a head shot), which then begs the question, why bother in the first place? In any case, only time online will tell. At least the four-player co-op game has been bulked up with added options as a sanctuary for online players frustrated with the competitive modes. **A-**

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PlayStation 2



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*Screenshots and game play features apply to PlayStation®2 and Nintendo GameCube™ versions only.

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REVIEWS ARCHIVE

Just add water and watch them grow!

■ The big green guy from *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*—neckless and lovin' it.

MOST PUZZLING

Every good handheld deserves a great puzzle game. Game Boy had *Tetris*, which is still being played everywhere from mobile phones to the sides of skyscrapers. PSP has *Lumines* and DS *Meteos*, but how do these upstarts compare to arguably the most popular game of all time? (Note: the *Tetris* reviewers way back in *EGM* #5 were obviously off their gourds on Diet Tab when they handed in their scores.)



Tetris (GB)
8.0, 8.0, 7.0, 8.0



Lumines (PSP)
7.5, 8.5, 9.5



Meteos (DS)
9.0, 9.0, 9.0

bargain bin bounty



JADE EMPIRE

- XB
- Released: April 2005
- Original Scores: 10, 9.5, 8.5

This beautiful little role-playing game from BioWare (the developer who also brought us the really-not-bad-at-all *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*) puts you in a magic- and martial-arts-filled feudal China. Real-time combat, fantastic character development, and a moving and elaborate story line are even better when the price tag is just \$30.

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)			AWARD
Arc the Lad: End of Darkness	PS2	■ An "action" role-playing game with less action and more dialogue reading	6.0	5.5	4.0	
Advance Wars: Dual Strike	DS	■ DS is ideally suited for this addition to an awesomely addictive strategy series	9.0	8.5	9.0	Silver
Advent Rising	XB	■ So-so sci-fi story, but you won't get past its numerous bugs and sucky controls	4.5	4.0	6.5	
Area 51	PS2/XB	■ This fun, creepy shooter is satisfying even with Duchovny's monotonous voiceover	8.0	8.0	8.0	Silver
Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana	PS2	■ A difficult-to-pronounce name, but a worthy RPG with simple, enjoyable battles	8.0	7.0	7.5	
Batman Begins	PS2/XB/GC	■ Superstar voiceovers and cool cars can't overcome dull game design	6.0	5.0	5.0	
Bombberman DS	DS	■ Have a blast (get it?) with some classic multiplayer fun or the decent single player	8.0	6.5	8.0	
Close Combat: First to Fight	XB	■ Belongs in no man's land because of bland gameplay and shell-shocked A.I.	5.0	5.5	4.0	
Coded Arms	PSP	■ First-person shooting comes to PSP...then shoots itself in the foot with this crap	4.0	6.0	3.5	
Cold Winter	PS2	■ 007 meets MacGyver (sans mullet) in this above-average violent shooter	7.0	6.5	7.0	
Colosseum: Road to Freedom	PS2	■ Thought Russell Crowe was a pissed-off gladiator? Try playing this repetitive game	7.0	4.5	5.0	
Conker: Live & Reloaded	XB	■ The squirrel's single-player game should have stayed caged in the Nintendo 64	5.0	7.0	8.0	
Dead or Alive Ultimate	XB	■ The bouncing boobs of <i>DOAs 1</i> and <i>2</i> look way nicer revamped for Xbox	7.0	7.5	7.5	
Dead to Rights II	PS2/XB	■ This boring sequel about a cop and his dog is great...for us to poop on	4.0	6.0	4.5	
Death, Jr.	PSP	■ A lousy camera and dull levels kill off any chance for fun this platformer had	4.0	6.0	4.0	
Destroy All Humans!	PS2/XB	■ The missions get old, but launching cows and anal probing never do	7.0	7.5	6.5	
Enthusia: Professional Racing	PS2	■ Even hardcore <i>Gran Turismo</i> fans should take this racing sim out for a spin	8.0	8.5	8.5	Silver
EyeToy: Play 2	PS2	■ Minigames that double as upper-body workouts. Hey, you're on the TV!	8.0	7.5	8.0	
Fantastic 4	PS2/XB/GC	■ Fantastic, eh? This brawler's a little full of itself if you ask us	6.0	4.0	7.0	
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	GBA	■ A great strategy-RPG sequel, but just more of the same stuff from the original	8.0	7.5	9.0	Silver
FlatOut	PS2/XB	■ You can learn a lot from a dummy: Avoid this car wreck of a driving game	6.0	4.0	4.0	
Forza Motorsport	XB	■ Skids across the finish line as one of the best racers for the Xbox	9.5	10	10	Gold
Fullmetal Alchemist 2	PS2	■ Diet <i>Kingdom Hearts</i> ; with better RPGs to play there is no excuse for less than great	5.0	6.0	6.0	
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	XB	■ This bally game expands its gangland territory to the Xbox (cue outraged senators)	9.0	9.0	9.5	Gold
Haunting Ground	PS2	■ Even the bouncy boobs can't make us think this is a top-notch survival-horror game	7.0	6.5	5.0	
Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee	PSP	■ An addictive golf game, even though its cuteness nearly sets off our gag reflex	7.0	7.0	7.0	
In the Groove	PS2	■ Dust off the headband and spandex: a decent dancing game with more crappy techno	7.0	7.0	5.5	
The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	PS2/XB/GC	■ Go green and wreak havoc; explosive rage issues have never been more fun	9.0	7.5	9.0	Silver
Jade Empire	XB	■ Put Jet Li to shame as you build your own kung fu badass in this excellent action-RPG	10	9.5	8.5	Gold
Juiced	PS2/XB	■ Trails the pack, but with A.I. teammates and betting on races, it earns our respect	7.0	6.5	7.0	
Killer 7	PS2/GC	■ A shooter that tries harder for artsy-fartsy style rather than gameplay	5.5	5.0	6.0	
Kirby: Canvas Curse	DS	■ That pink blob's ingenious DS game has us proud of our writers' cramps	8.5	9.0	9.0	Silver
Madden 06	PS2/XB/GC	■ The passing game is now overly complex, but <i>Madden</i> is still All-Pro	8.5	9.0	9.5	Gold
Makai Kingdom	PS2	■ Hardcore tactical RPG fans will love this like they love obsessive organizing	7.5	8.0	7.5	
Medal of Honor: European Assault	PS2/XB/GC	■ No online multiplayer; new features are nothing to write home about	7.5	6.5	6.0	
Meteos	DS	■ Who knew a puzzle game where you rub space rocks would be so addictive?	9.0	9.0	9.0	Gold
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	PS2/XB	■ This time around, cars have superpowers and move faster than a speeding bullet	8.0	9.0	9.0	Silver
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	PSP	■ Long load times keep the tiny version out of pole position	7.0	8.5	7.5	
Mortal Kombat: Deception	GC	■ This bloated sequel has so many extra game modes that there's even <i>MK</i> chess	6.0	6.5	7.5	
MVP Baseball 2005	PS2/XB/GC	■ Slick minigames help make it the best hardball sim yet	8.5	8.5	9.0	Silver
Nanostray	DS	■ This 2D shooter excels at being deeply, depressingly mediocre	5.0	5.0	5.0	
NBA Street Showdown	PSP	■ Decent b-ball, but it just double-dribbles the console version of <i>Vol. 2</i> onto PSP	6.5	7.0	6.5	
NCAA Football 06	PS2/XB	■ Go from pizza box-filled dorm rooms to Heisman winner in this great football game	9.5	9.0	9.0	Gold
Pac-Pix	DS	■ Get ready for more DS drawing—all that doodling in school will finally come in handy	7.0	6.5	7.0	
Pac'N Roll	DS	■ An entertaining, but ultimately soulless and occasionally aggravating, platformer	7.5	6.5	6.5	
Pariah	XB	■ This shooter has cool weapons and a semi-interesting story, but it's no <i>Halo</i> killer	9.0	6.5	6.5	
Pokémon Emerald	GBA	■ Catch those little bastards all over again, if you're into that sort of thing	7.0	7.5	7.0	
Pokémon Dash	DS	■ In this mediocre <i>Pokémon</i> spin-off for tykes, rubbin' really is racing	5.0	6.5	6.0	
Predator: Concrete Jungle	PS2/XB	■ Predator vs. crappy camera: Whoever wins, we lose by playing this bland game	5.5	4.5	4.5	
Psychonauts	XB	■ Cure more crazies than shock therapy does in this great platformer	8.0	9.0	8.0	Silver
Rengoku: The Tower of Purgatory	PSP	■ Insanely repetitive—it's more like <i>BattleBots</i> hell than purgatory	3.0	2.0	2.0	
Samurai Western	PS2	■ Yawn as you hack and slash as a samurai who deflects bullets...with his sword	4.0	7.0	5.0	
Smartbomb	PSP	■ Need to get crappy shareware games and <i>Minesweeper</i> on your PSP? Look no further	3.0	3.0	2.5	
Sonic Gems Collection	GC	■ Plural form is misleading; the only "gem" is <i>Sonic CD</i> , which is the best <i>Sonic</i> to date	6.5	5.5	6.5	
Spider-Man 2	DS	■ If your spider sense is on the fritz, let us warn you to avoid this ho-hum adventure	6.0	5.5	3.0	
Spider-Man 2	PSP	■ Kirsten Dunst looks nice, but the camera has a hard time focusing on anything else	6.0	7.0	6.0	
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory DS	DS	■ Let's all just try to forget this game ever happened	1.5	4.5	5.5	
Star Wars Republic Commando	XB	■ Guide a squad of three smart stormtroopers who actually shoot the bad guys!	7.0	7.0	8.0	
Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith	PS2/XB	■ Play this repetitive game and you'll understand why the dude went to the dark side	4.5	5.5	6.0	
Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith	DS	■ Maybe in a galaxy far, far away this side-scrolling crap is still considered awesome	4.5	4.0	4.0	
Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix	PSP	■ The additional features make you want to keep grinding in the <i>Destruction Tour</i>	9.0	8.0	8.5	Silver
Twisted Metal: Head-On	PSP	■ This fighting game with cars is OK, but the series is due for some maintenance	7.5	6.5	6.0	
Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict	XB	■ Its fast-paced deathmatching is ideal for gamers bored with <i>Halo 2</i>	8.5	8.0	8.0	Silver
Viewtiful Joe 2	PS2/GC	■ More of what you (hopefully) know and (should) love from <i>Joe's</i> first outing	8.0	8.0	8.5	Silver
Wipeout Pure	PSP	■ Remind yourself to blink while playing this great, intense racing game	8.0	8.0	8.5	Silver
WWE Wrestlemania 21	XB	■ The A.I. is so bad that this game is even unworthy for a fake sport	3.5	5.0	6.5	

*Games in red are previous Game of the Month winners.

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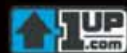


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PlayStation[®]2



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game over

the van damme references continue

SEANBABY'S I HATE THE 1991s



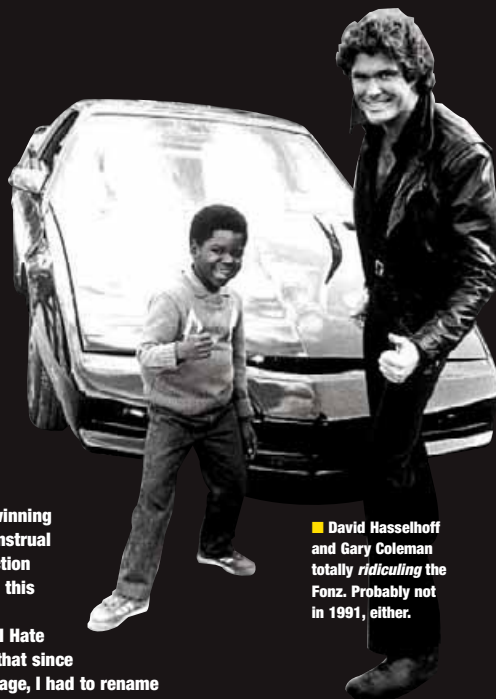
It was a very crappy year

Sometimes I get nostalgic for the kind of nostalgia in which you could just list things you remembered. Like, remember *Knight Rider*? Or menstrual pad belts? How about movies from about 10 years ago! Ha ha ha, I know! These days, nostalgia is so self-important that if you want to properly share in the memory of Jean-Claude Van Damme

doing the splits, you have to put together a historical documentation of it, discuss the effect it had on the doing-the-splits world, and interview TV's hottest celebrities after they sing the theme song to Jean-Claude Van Damme Punching Your Crotch: The Cereal. I admit I'm partially to blame for the movement of overenthusiastic nostalgia by raising the bar so high

with my award-winning *Knight Rider*/menstrual pad belt slash fiction website and with this remembrance of videogame crap: I Hate the '90s. Except that since I have only one page, I had to rename it I Hate the 1991s.

—Seanbaby



■ David Hasselhoff and Gary Coleman totally *ridiculing* the Fonzie. Probably not in 1991, either.

■ One-eyed redhead says, "Oh, do my four A's win again? Now shut up and take off your pants, Timmy."



Jesus vs. Naked on the NES!

What with the release of Super Nintendo, the regular Nintendo knew its days were numbered. And when you're faced with your own mortality, there are two ways you can deal with it. One is to film yourself standing between a bear and its cruel, Snicker's-smearing handler to let your awesome death live forever through Internet videos. The other is to turn to superstition just in case there are magical

angels waiting for you when you die. The NES tried this by releasing three Jesus games in 1991: *Bible Adventures*, *Exodus*, and *King of Kings*. Gamers responded with the kind of excitement you'd expect from bad rip-offs of existing games now with the added fun of Bible quizzes, and the games sold negative four copies combined. The same year, other developers tried a different losing strategy by making *Peek-a-Boo Poker*, a poker game with

■ *Exodus*: only the hottest S&M action.



boobs, and *Bubble Bath Babes*, which was *Tetris* with untamed eroticism. And here, 14 years later, we still don't know which was more inappropriate: celebrating our Lord God's majesty with our Nintendos or celebrating ourselves with nude *Tetris*.

In the arcade!

"What happen? Somebody set up the bomb." *Zero Wing* set dozens of mistranslation records on the road to its win in 1991's Broken English Awards. "Gord tuna bounce face bike," it said during its victory speech. "A thank you is you," it added.



■ *Zero Wing*: You speak very well English.



Pit Fighter hits the consoles!

Pit Fighter used digitized photos to re-create the gritty, realistic look of two half-naked paper dolls cut out of a body-builder's photo album and rammed against each other's pelvises. Previously, the only way to recreate that experience was through the razzmatazz of tap dance.

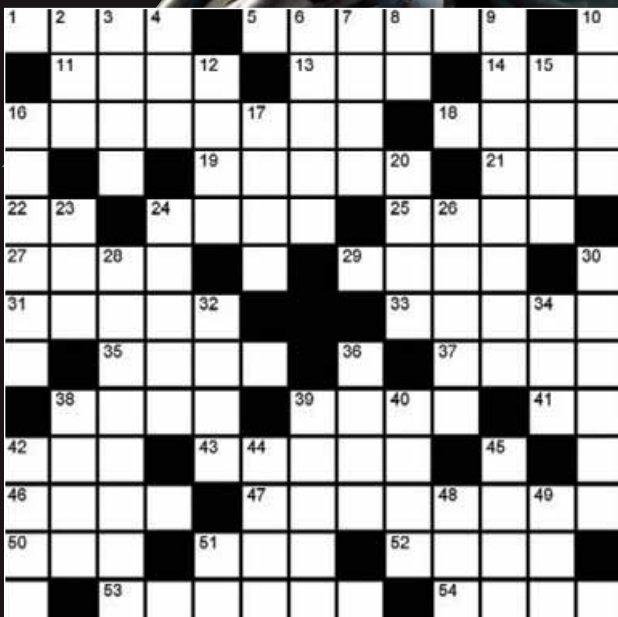
Scrapyard Dog!

The most compelling story of the year has to go to *Scrapyard Dog* on the Atari Lynx. Dognappers snatch your dog, but in a strange twist, they don't have a sinister plan or ransom demands. They only leave a note to let you know that you'll have to find the dog if you want it. So in what would have been a generic platformer, we now have a smart, psychological thriller in which the gamer must get inside the head of a madman...a madman who risks everything to move a dog around, then tell its owner that he did it. 🐕



FANTASY FRENZY

(Solution on page 140)



ACROSS

1. TMNT Raphael's weapons
5. FFVII opening city
11. FFVIII probing spell
13. Final Fantasy that inspired Advent Children
14. Upper-left key on most keyboards
16. Golden Saucer racers
18. Soul Calibur fighter
19. Lights the way in Shadowgate
21. Final Fantasy perennial guy
22. NCAA's Irish, for short
24. Like DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball?
25. What a bulborb does with pikmin
27. Cloud's FFVII lady friend
29. Bungie's Xbox breakthrough
31. GBA Frogger: Forgotten
33. How Snake gets if he doesn't eat in MGS3
35. Teammate
37. Where most import games come from
38. Government space org using games to research brain waves
39. Pirates! settings
41. NES casino game, for short
42. EA WWII series, for short
43. Jonny Moseley setting
46. Panzer Dragoon Saga star
47. Vincent Valentine's tribarreled gun
50. Dreamcast precursor to Project Gotham Racing
51. Pro hockey league in EA games' names
52. Wild or Thousand
53. Metal Gear boss cloned into a pair
54. RBI Baseball popular hurler

DOWN

2. Pokémon's Ketchum
3. In-game marker or symbol
4. Champions of Norrath venom pouch pickup
6. Halo 2 multiplayer map _ Tower
7. PS2, XB, or GC media
8. FFVII boss _ Nattak
9. Structures found in 5 ACROSS
10. What Mortal Kombat II's Reptile spits
12. What you may find under the door in Silent Hill 4
15. Tools of the trade for 43 ACROSS
16. Early Konami NES shooter
17. Like Metal Gear's cardboard?
20. Mega Man 2's fiery _ Man
23. Lose all HP
24. Crosses the seas in The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker
26. TV drama turned PS2 title
28. Metroid Prime plant boss
30. What a multitap does for extra controllers
32. Online gang?
34. Shoe's EGM title, for short
36. Altered Beast (Genesis) animal form
38. Command & Conquer teams?
39. Final Fantasy magic recitation
40. Fantastic Four actress
42. Resident Evil clue scrap
44. Alter or Night
45. PS1's plastic Men
48. Does not compute?
49. Street Fighter Guile's homeland
51. Contra: Shattered Soldier director Nakazato's initials

GRUDGE MATCH

Get in the ring...ring...ring



VS.

N-GAGE

GIZMONDO

Wouldn't it be great if instead of having a few devices to handle your phone calls, pics, and gaming, you could cram watered-down versions of each into one unwieldy brick of plastic? Wish no more: Nokia and Tiger Telematics have released their own all-in-one devices. Let's have a purely objective look at 'em.

MARKETING



New model QD doesn't stand for anything so you can't pigeonhole it!
Advantage: Tie

Furious Phil literally billed as a splatter-horror-fighting-action-adventure game
Advantage: Tie



DISPLAY

"Compact" vertical screen makes it feel like you're playing a version of Burger Time from space

The 2.8-inch LCD can't make it any clearer that you're still playing Milo and the Rainbow Nasties
Advantage: Gizmondo

GAMES



Everything that was hot on consoles many years ago
Advantage: N-Gage

Go to gizmondo.com and check out Momma, Can I Mow the Lawn? Just go



TARGET AUDIENCE

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Advantage: N-Gage

We honestly have no idea

DESIGN FEATS

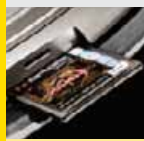


Impress friends by holding your phone like a jack-off

Built-in camera can document said hilarity
Advantage: Gizmondo



BONUS OPTIONS



New QD can now change games without total disassembly
Advantage: N-Gage

GPS helps you find the four other Gizmondo owners



WINNER: N-GAGE

So if you're looking for the perfect present for those gamers on the go (and the store is out of Nintendo DSes, PSPs, Game Boy Advances, and paddleballs), gifting the N-Gage will probably lose you the least respect in their eyes.



EGM RETRO:

20 YEARS OF NES

Looking back at two decades of playing with power

So you're all excited about the Xbox 360's imminent launch, eh? Microsoft's new powerhouse may offer a sleek design and astounding processing power, but it's

going to have to work hard to make the same lasting impression on gamers that Nintendo's first console did. That's no slam on the 360, though. It's just that the NES (which is

short for Nintendo Entertainment System) still stands as one of the most successful and influential consoles of all time—even now, 20 years after its U.S. debut. —Jeremy Parish



■ Mario: teaching kids how to shroom for two decades.

A HISTORY LESSON

When the NES launched, America hated videogames. Well, sort of. The Atari 2600 had upset folks by flooding the market with bad software and, at first, retailers were reluctant to sell another system. But the NES was a hit, controlling a healthy 90 percent of the U.S. home videogame industry at the peak of its popularity.

That high market share, however, brought about lawsuits against the company—which Nintendo won. Although the Federal Trade Commission technically decided against the company, its “punishment” was to offer customers \$5 off the purchase of a future NES game, thus wrapping up even *more* sales.

All told, the NES enjoyed nine years of life in the United States, with quality software like *Kirby's Adventure* being released long after gamers had moved on to the Super NES. Not bad, considering most people figured videogames were dead and buried when the system first showed up on the scene.

It's the Software, Stupid

The NES was memorable for a lot of reasons, but ultimately it was the games that kept us coming back.



■ *Castlevania III*



■ *Contra*



■ *Double Dribble*



■ *Final Fantasy*



■ *Kid Icarus*



■ *The Legend of Zelda*



Photograph by Randy Dodson/SFMS/STS 2005

MOMENTS OF GREATNESS

The sheer popularity of the NES meant that everyone was eager for a piece of the action...even if their efforts weren't terribly well thought out. Here are just a few of the strange moments of brilliance that surrounded the console's life.

Famicom Disk System

This floppy-based drive for the Famicom (Japan's version of the NES) never made it overseas. By the time the NES caught on in the United States, plain ol' cartridges had exceeded the disk's storage capacity. Unfortunately, progress in games that started life on the disk system (such as *Metroid*) couldn't be saved to carts, which is why game rooms were usually cluttered with reams of paper with confusing passwords scribbled all over them. Our hats are off to the man who invented battery backups for carts.



Power Pad

Before America's fatties gamed themselves thin with *Dance Dance Revolution*, Nintendo had the same idea with the Power Pad. Who knows—maybe if the company packaged it with something as addictive as Konami's musical confection rather than a lame sports game, it might've been a success.

Power Glove and U-Force

These are two of the strangest peripherals ever created. The Power Glove looked cool enough to net a cameo in the movie *The Wizard*. But anyone who ever tried to use this wearable controller quickly discovered that novelty alone doesn't make for fun gaming. Still, it was better than Broderbund's motion-sensitive U-Force, which wasn't much of a controller but certainly did a great job of making users look like complete tools when waving their hands in the air as Mega Man blithely ignored their commands.



■ *The Wizard's* Lucas had it right: This thing was bad.

Unlicensed carts

Nintendo's decision to force third parties to license their games was actually a very prudent one, since unrestrained software

was precisely what had killed the Atari 2600. But not everyone was willing to play by the rules, including Tengen, which published software from Namco, as well as competing console makers Atari and Sega. Tengen found itself on the losing end of a lawsuit, but Color Dreams had the right idea—it changed its name to Wisdom Tree and started producing Christian-themed games, banking on the fact that Nintendo didn't want to be known as the company that sued Jesus. Then you had Panesian, whose trilogy of NES porn games can fetch more than \$500 on eBay today. NES collectors are a very lonely lot, it seems.



■ Warning: Don't play with the Power Glove.

MEDIA SATURATION

Great games are essential to any system's success, but clever media exploitation is still the best way to get the word out. And few companies knew how to manipulate the media like Nintendo back in the day...

Nintendo Fun Club News/Nintendo Power

Nintendo's quarterly *Fun Club News* was so popular that after a few issues the company changed its free mailer's name to *Nintendo Power* and started charging kids for the privilege of reading shameless propaganda. Everyone from Sega to Sunsoft tried their hands at mimicking the NP formula, but no one ever pulled it off with quite the same panache as the Big N.



The Wizard

The epitome of cinema as commercial, this Fred Savage star vehicle was one part *Rain Man* and three parts advertisement for *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Oh, and the Power Glove, of course.



Super Mario Bros. Super Show

A perfectly entertaining (if completely cheesy) cartoon, the *Super Show* was probably best known for the live-action

segments featuring Captain Lou Albano as Mario—who, it should be said, fit the part way better than Bob Hoskins did in the terrible, terrible live-action movie.

Nintendo Comics System

An occasionally amusing diversion, Valiant's comic series will forever live on in the hearts of young men everywhere for the episode in which Princess Peach dressed up in Luigi's overalls. *Rowr*. The "Nintendo (whatever) System" marketing gimmick also found great success in the form of the Nintendo Cereal System, which was pretty much what you'd expect: a sugary Lucky Charms rip-off

with marshmallows that vaguely resembled deformed *Zelda* characters.

Worlds of Power

A series of kids' books by the pseudonymous F.X. Nine that novelized (in the loosest possible sense) popular NES games. This collection is notable mainly for making *Blaster Master's* "save your pet frog" plot even lammer than it was in the actual game, which was no small feat! ➤



■ *Mega Man 2*



■ *Metroid*



■ *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*



■ *Rad Racer*



■ *River City Ransom*



■ *Super Mario Bros.*

20 YEARS OF NES (CONT.)

IT GAMED FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE!

The last official NES game was *Wario's Woods*, released way back in 1994. But the NES lives on in a way that would make horror director George Romero proud.



Famiclones

Nintendo's patent on the system's hardware has expired, leaving anyone free to churn out their own version of the machine. And churn they do: Hundreds of "Famiclone" (Famicom clone) systems are available throughout Asia, where the NES is still the most popular format around. But don't feel left out, America! Messiah Entertainment will be bringing us our very own corn-fed, homegrown Famiclone this fall in the form of the NEX (you can preorder now at playmessiah.com).



Hacker Software

What fun would homemade hardware be without homemade software to go along with it? Aside from the wide amount of Asian bootleg NES software available, the most impressive hack we've found is a completely original unlicensed Chinese *Harry Potter* game in which the young *Where's Waldo*-looking wizard journeys through the Dursley homestead kicking the crap out of rats, bats, fats (Dudley and Vernon), and, uh, Voldemort. And that's just before Harry learns he's a wizard.



Emulation

Regardless of what you may think of the prickly issue of emulation—that is, using a PC to run NES software—it's introduced the system to an entire generation of gamers too young to remember it. (And given rise to terrible NES fan sites by said kids.) It's also fostered the search for unreleased games. Did you know the original *Final Fantasy II* and the prequel to *Earthbound* (shown above) were translated into English but never released? Check out lostlevels.org for more info on these rare finds.



Pony Up

Nintendo isn't stupid, and the company hasn't been blind to the sustained popularity of its old games. *Animal Crossing*'s free NES games tested the waters, while the eReader's \$5 NES games proved people would still pay money for tripe like *Urban Champion*. (How little we've learned in two decades.) And the rousing success of the the GBA's Classic



■ The Revolution: new, but old.

NES series proved that people would pay a lot of money for these oldies but goodies—which is probably why one of the few things we know about the company's next-gen console is that we'll be able to download NES games to play on it...for a fee, of course. It turns out we weren't just playing cool games 20 years ago—we were laying the groundwork for the Nintendo Revolution, too. 🎮

It's the Software, Stupid (cont.)



■ Super Mario Bros. 3



■ Tecmo Bowl



■ Tetris



■ Zelda II

OLD SCHOOL

10 years ago in EGM

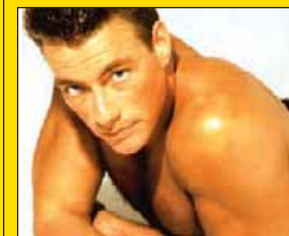
Street Fighter: The Movie and Mortal Kombat 3

Would you pass up the chance to put a Guile-clad Jean-Claude Van Damme on your cover? Didn't think so.



Game of the Month: Mortal Kombat 3 (PS1)

In our continuing salute that year to all things *Mortal* and *Kombat*, No. 3 earned a gold award (averaging a score of 9.0 or above) from the EGM Review Crew.



Street Fighter: The Movie: The Videogame

A decade ago, Capcom could do no wrong when making a fighter. Then came *Street Fighter: The Movie* (PS1/SAT). We still wonder what's more painful: watching the flick or playing the game it's based on.



Super Role-playin'

We broke the news on Mario's debut in the realm of role-playing games. *Super Mario RPG* required an extra chip in the cartridge, which brought the game to a shocking 32 MEGABITS! Also, this marked the first time gamers got a chance to play as the plumber's fire-breathing foe, Bowser.



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360
IS HERE!

Well, almost...

The launch is nigh upon us. This is an exciting time for nerds, but it holds great danger, too. We'll get the skinny on all things Xbox 360, from the latest screens and accessories to the launch games you'll need. Greet launch day with

the savvy swagger of a gamer who knows the score.

We're also checking in on the PS3's progress to find out if Sony is delivering on the show it promised.

Along with new systems we take a peek at some deals and steals in peripherals (cheap do-it-yourself projector, Nintendo 200-game controller, portable NES) and tell you if they're actually worth a damn.



PREVIEWS

- The Warriors (PS2/XB)
- The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (GC)
- True Crime: New York City (PS2/XB/GC)
- Quake 4 (XBOX 360)
- SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo (PSP)



REVIEWS

- Shadow of the Colossus (PS2)
- SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs (PS2)
- Burnout: Revenge (PS2/XB)
- Rainbow Six: Lockdown (PS2/XB)
- Indigo Prophecy (PS2/XB)

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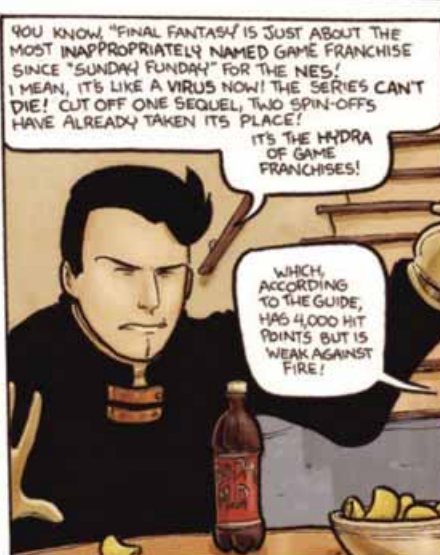


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