



Official Xbox Magazine

HALO 2

5 fun tricks
you didn't
know you
could do

PRO GAMER
SECRETS



Get Paid to Play

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2

PLAY THE
LIVE-ENABLED
DEMO
RIGHT NOW!

Best-looking, fastest Xbox game ever! Every detail you need **INSIDE!**
PLUS: Map strategies and tips – Dominate on Live!

TESTED – Video Chat on
Xbox Live

Exclusive Reviews

- ▶ Playboy: The Mansion
- ▶ Project: Snowblind
- ▶ Fight Night Round 2

Splinter Cell Chaos Theory

Complete Hands-On Report

- ▶ Stunning single-player
- ▶ Sneaky cooperative play
- ▶ Spectacular adversarial mode



March 05 / Issue #42

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OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE GAME DISC

DEMOS: Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict*, *Worms 3D*, and *Conker: Live and Reloaded*.

FEATURES: *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict*, *Pariah*, and *Fight Night Round 2*.

VIDEOS: *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, *Iron Phoenix*, and *Truth*.



COVER STORY!

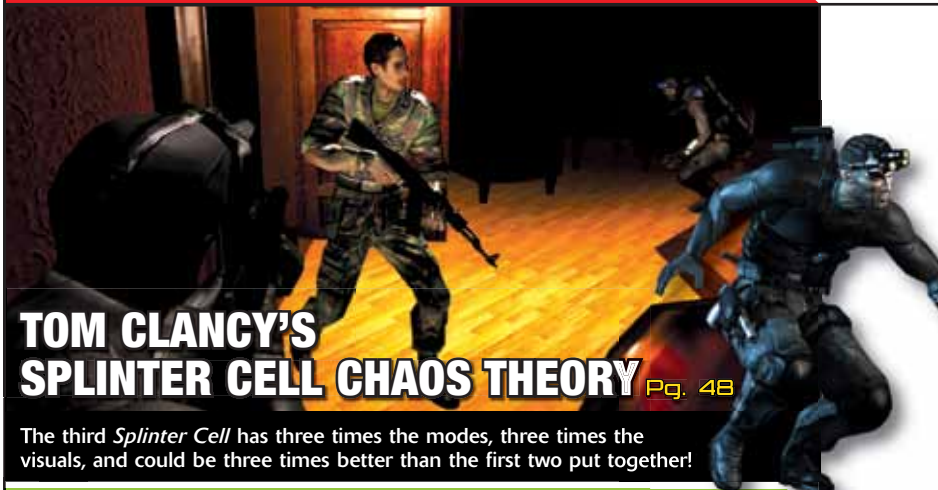
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UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2: EXCLUSIVE REVIEW AND DEMO!



A unique blend of first-person-shooter action and melee-fighting combat that's guaranteed to surpass your expectations. Read the review, then play our demo on Live for two months until the game releases!

STEALTH SPECTACULAR!



TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

Pg. 48

The third *Splinter Cell* has three times the modes, three times the visuals, and could be three times better than the first two put together!

EXCLUSIVE REVIEWS!



PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

Pg. 72



PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

Pg. 82

Ready for the review rush?

It's March, but it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...

Normally, come the March issue – which we're finishing in mid-January – we're scrambling to find those super-killer, super-timely announcements and big reviews; in other words, it's post-holiday quiet time in videogame land. Not so this year. After so many big games plain slipped (or bailed out of the well-predicted *Halo 2*–sales feeding frenzy) from the usually crazy sales period, we're now blessed with more genuine AAA releases than we almost have time to play.

When we first got the chance to play *Unreal Championship 2* nearly a year ago, we were amazed by its polish and playability, still some months away from release. Its move to Midway bought the game more time, allowed a ton of new items to be added, and resulted in a look that's as polished as any we've seen. Tom has tried every character, worked through all the skills, and now demands *UC2* as our office go-to game in place of *Halo 2* (mainly so he has a good chance of topping the leaderboard). You can read his detailed review starting on page 32.

We were also the first to get our hands on final builds of Crystal Dynamics' colorful and thoroughly entertaining

shooter, *Project: Snowblind* (page 72). This one's a sleeper that I think action fans will really get a kick out of, and it promises some very impressive Xbox Live play. And...we've got the first review of *Playboy: The Mansion* (page 82). Though the very pairing of the words "play" and "boy" will cause ultra-conservatives to convulse in fits of panic, the game turns out to be a fun magazine-empire-building sim. And though I make a magazine in real life during the day, it wasn't a drag to virtually do the same thing for fun at night.

And the hits just keep on coming. Next issue we'll deliver our final judgment on more huge games, including *Doom 3*, *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory*, and...oh, a couple of other gems you should not miss. What are they? We won't say here, but you'll most definitely be pleased. Finally, you'll also see a few tweaks to the format starting next month that'll ensure you're getting the best read with the best information...

See you in the April issue,

Rob

Meet The Team

Online gaming – the most precious domain of weirdos, freaks, geeks and us...sw33t.

Rob Smith

editor-in-chief

My best online gaming experience: Maybe it was ye olde *Doom II* death/lag fests. Maybe it was *Meridian 59* and typing to a real person in an online game for the first time. Or beta-testing *Wireplay* in 1994 waiting for a promised 10-on-10 real people (with an AI goalie) soccer game...that even with broadband is still virtually impossible. Or *Quake*. **And worst...:** Launching *Ultima Online* the first time and getting blasted in the town (a "safe" zone) by a cheater. Or maybe falling off a ship travelling in *EverQuest*...then swimming in seclusion for hours until finding land. What a dork. rob@officialxboxmagazine.com



Paul Curthoys

managing editor

Best online gaming experience: My first love in online gaming was *NHL 95* on Genesis – I racked up huge phone bills on the X-Band modem. My *Counter-Strike* flame also burned brightly on the PC, but – I say this sheepishly since I work at *OXM*, but without a doubt – *Halo 2* rules them all. Playing every night with friends is as good as good times get. **And worst...:** It's true for anything online, but the sucking begins when you're stuck with racist, homophobic knuckle-draggers intent on flaunting every crap part of human nature in the shortest amount of time possible. paul@officialxboxmagazine.com



Dave Rees

DVD editor

Best online gaming experience: Definitely *Quake II* on PC. I used to play it every night for hours on end. The game was ridiculously good online, and sometimes I'd so get in the zone and the competition would get so intense...it felt like a real sport at times. The adrenaline rush was insane! **And worst...:** *Resident Evil Outbreak*: I love the *Resident Evil* franchise, and this one could've been awesome. But why does it take two full minutes to load a small closet? Why can't you talk to players through a headset instead of using those annoying voices? Weak. dave@officialxboxmagazine.com



Francesca Reyes

executive editor

Best online gaming experience: It's weird to think that I put a total of somewhere around 400 hours of my life into *Phantasy Star Online* (on Dreamcast, GC, and Xbox). Just think...400 freakin' hours! It was a blast and I drool over the thought of a new installment, but I suspect I might've been able to put those 400 hours toward something like finding a cure for cancer. Then again, probably not. **And worst...:** I agree with Paul on this one. Just when you think we're all one big, happy family of geeked-out gamers looking for a little community, voice chat often confirms that we're not. Boooo. francesca@officialxboxmagazine.com



Tom Price

senior editor

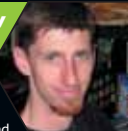
My best online gaming experience: Definitely, *Counter-Strike* on PC. In 2002, I played it online at work for at least four hours a day (with very limited bathroom and burrito breaks), and never got fired – mostly because my boss was playing too and I was working at a videogame magazine. Good times. **And worst...:** The first time I logged onto Xbox Live...and realized I couldn't use my trademark online gaming moniker "Pooperstar" anymore. How will all the kids know it's me when I'm cappin' mad fools? Okay, more like when they're cappin' me. Okay, maybe I'm glad Pooperstar is no more. tom@officialxboxmagazine.com



Ryan McCaffrey

assistant editor

Best online gaming experience: Pick (literally) any night since November 9, and you've got my best online moment. My friends and co-workers have all convened on Xbox Live religiously for nightly *Halo 2* matches, and there's always a good story or two to be shared the next day. A close second is my old DWANGO days with *Doom 2*. **And worst...:** Trying to play *QuakeWorld* for *Quake* when it first released while using a 28.8k dial-up. It was the dawn of the Internet era for 3D gaming, but dial-ups = lag = pain. Excruciating, impossible-to-aim, player-warping pain. Argh. ryan@officialxboxmagazine.com



Juliann Brown

art director

Best online gaming experience: I used to have nightly matches into the wee hours on *Ghost Recon* with former *OXM*-ite, Frank, which would involve him lining up fools for me to take down. Now Mr. "Bungie" Frank only ever wants to play *Halo 2* online. I wonder why... **And worst...:** Getting busted by my upstairs neighbors on a Saturday evening, home alone, sitting three feet in front of my TV with a headset on, talking (seemingly to myself). They stood there pointing and laughing at me for a good five minutes before I noticed. Still, it's a lot more fun than going out on a silly date, right ladies? juliann@officialxboxmagazine.com



Gary Cribb

associate art director

Best online gaming experience: By day, I'm a mild-mannered graphic artist. But by night, I like to think of myself as a friend-slaughtering machine on Xbox Live in *Halo 2*. A plasma sword in an enemy's back or sticking someone with a plasma grenade – there's just no offline, real-world equivalent. Or at least, I really hope not. **And worst...:** You come home from a great day at the office, turn on Xbox, sign onto Xbox Live...and who's waiting for you? If you're unlucky and your friends aren't online – lame, ignorant, weary-mouthed, racist-remark-throwing losers. Bummer. gary@officialxboxmagazine.com



Dane Frederiksen

multimedia editor

Best online gaming experience: Sweet, glorious *Ghost Recon 2*: This is the game I've been waiting for all my life (this week). There's nothing like some voice-enabled, squad-based tactics to start your mornin'. **And worst...:** Trying to get a solid connection to play PC games online with my brother back on the East Coast in DC. Oh, that sweet lag. The missed connections! It's enough to make you just wanna play single-player! I've settled for a user-created, brother-like bot, rather than the real thing on many an occasion. dane@officialxboxmagazine.com



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Going Pro Gaming for Money and Glory



Top Tourneys To Watch for in 2005

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE:

Major League Gaming National Championship, December 2005 in New York, NY.

HOW MUCH: If you can win your way through the regional conferences, the national championship boasts prizes as high as \$20,000 for first place in *Halo 2* 4-on-4 battles.

MORE INFO: www.mlgpro.com

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE:

Cyberathlete Professional League's Extreme Summer Championships, held July 6 to 10, 2005, in Grapevine, TX.

HOW MUCH: Tournament payouts range from \$10,000 (*Halo 2*) to \$100,000 (*Counter-Strike*).

MORE INFO: www.thecpl.com

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE:

World Cyber Games 2005 Grand Final, Fall 2005, Singapore.

HOW MUCH: For the elite players of titles like *Counter-Strike* and *WarCraft III* who advance to the big show, this is gaming's largest and most prestigious combined payday. Prizes total in excess of \$400,000.

MORE INFO: www.worldcybergames.com

WHAT, WHEN, WHERE:

EA Sports Madden Challenge and NCAA Challenge, Fall 2005, TBA.

HOW MUCH: Last year's grand prizes were \$50,000 and \$10,000 respectively, and the glitzy finals were held in Las Vegas.

MORE INFO: www.maddenchallenge.com

For most of us mortals, what we do for fun and what we do for a living are two very separate and distinct things. Excluding lucky saps like *Playboy* photographers, Ben & Jerry's taste testers, and videogame magazine writers, of course. Professional athletes also fall into the golden work-equals-play category, but unless you started practicing when you were in third grade or have deity-bequeathed physical prowess, chances of you making the NBA, NFL, NHL, or any other N-league are slimmer than a pre-rehab Mary-Kate Olsen.

But what if those gaming skills you've honed from your Atari 2600 *Missile Command* days on up through your *Halo 2* butt-kickery on Xbox Live could actually put some serious coin in your jeans? For a growing number of gamers, making a living with their favorite pastime is no longer a pipe dream, it's a



■ An MLG event at the Hollywood Sports Club in Los Angeles.

fact of life. For many others, getting involved in the ever-increasing number of professional leagues and tournaments has earned them nice chunks of cash and the respect of a swelling fan base.

Console Combat

Those in the know say it's just the tip of the iceberg. Michael Sepso, co-founder of New York-based Major League Gaming, has 17 professional gamers on contract, and a handful of them draw large enough sponsorships to play games full time. That number is only going to rise as competitive gaming inches its way toward mainstream acceptance, not only among players but also spectators. "We've put enough money in it to make it a real thing, not just a promotional vehicle for sponsors," Sepso said of MLG, which this year will host nine major regional tournaments leading up to three conference finals and a national playoff. "It's an evolution, not a revolution."

Pro gaming isn't just for *StarCraft* and *Counter-Strike* fanatics in South Korea anymore, though that tech-savvy nation does remain the world's hotbed of competition. The console arena is now starting to catch the PC as 2005's major tournaments feature *Halo 2*, *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, *Tekken 5*, and more.

Ditto for virtual sports themselves: Eugene "Big Gene" Williams of Philadelphia won \$50,000 in EA Sports' most recent Madden Challenge tournament, and Brian McMahon of Farmingville, NY, won \$10,000 playing *ESPN NFL 2K5* in the ESPN Videogames Titanium Bowl. That's impressive

coinage for something most of us do to while away a Sunday afternoon.

Check Please!

The cash isn't just in the prizes, either. Sponsorships and product endorsements are accounting for a larger chunk of pro gamers' paychecks with guys like legendary *Halo* champ Matt "Zyos" Leto pulling down in excess of \$120,000 over an 18-month period. Yowza! If gaming can solve the puzzle of how to present itself effectively on television – we're talking ESPN instead of G4 – those paydays could skyrocket. Watching guys play games on TV might not sound that thrilling, but then who'd have thought that poker – poker! – would become one of the breakout spectator sports of the year?

"Flipping cards isn't inherently very exciting," said Sepso. "But it's one of the highest-rated shows on ESPN. It's accessible, there are personalities involved, and lots of money on the line."

Which is exactly the kind of model professional videogaming could follow. And unlike most pro sports, it's cheap to get into, and entering the same tournaments as gamedom's elite is usually just as simple as paying the registration fee.

Plus, most players have already spent years honing their skills for the sheer fun of it, much to their parents' frustration. Wait until you cash that first check for \$20,000.

Tom "Tsquared" Taylor, a 17-year-old Floridian who is ranked as one of the world's top *Halo 2* players in the MLG and the Association of Professional Gamers, got his own parents on side once they saw firsthand what he was up to. Winning \$6,000 last year for playing *Halo* didn't hurt, either. "My mom thought every person online was a pedophile, so I took her to a tournament in Orlando and introduced her to a lot of people," said Taylor. "Now she wants to go to tournaments with me, but I can't have her crampin' my style."



■ Tom "Tsquared" Taylor, cyberathlete.

Gamer Grrls



■ Why, I'd be honored if you royally kicked my ass.

Think being a pro gamer is the sole domain of the fellas? Think again. While the Ubisoft-sponsored all-girl gaming posse the Frag Dolls might be more professional ambassadors than hardcore tourney junkies, these seven lovely lasses could whip your butt in *Halo 2* without breaking a sw...err, without gently perspiring in that glowing, feminine way. We caught up with the Frag Dolls' Katscratch and Valkyrie to receive some pearls of wisdom.

OXM: How much does it kick ass to get paid to play games, and do you ever rub it in people's noses?

KATSCRATCH: I try not to brag about getting paid to play games because as soon as I do, I know I will meet the Pringles taste tester, and I'll just feel stupid.

OXM: Do you think gaming will be accepted as a mainstream sport in the coming years?

VALKYRIE: I definitely see gaming becoming more mainstream every day and the competitions and teams heightened and improved. I also see gamers uniting on all platforms, which can only help the industry in terms of reaching a larger audience.

OXM: What advice would you offer to someone who has their sights set on becoming a professional gamer?

KATSCRATCH: Since most sponsorships are for clans, find a group you work well with. Teamwork is the most important part of competitive gaming. Hopefully we'll see more sponsored Xbox clans with the rising popularity of Xbox Live.

OXM: Cough up some tactical secrets. What's your favorite *Halo 2* weapon combo?

VALKYRIE: Don't you dare touch my pistol or I will frag you myself, teammate or not! The pistol/assault rifle combo is my favorite weapon set on all maps but Coagulation, and I'm deadly with it.

OXM: Girls who play games are intrinsically hotter than girls who don't. Discuss.

VALKYRIE: [Hardcore male gamers] are in search of the "unicorn": the elusive female gamer who spends as much time as they do wrapped in their favorite game of choice. The one that won't yell that they are playing too many games and not paying attention to them, and the one that can frag with the best gamers – right at their side.

KATSCRATCH: I think anytime a person is passionate about a hobby, they become much hotter. Ours just happens to be video games. However, girls who drive motorcycles are intrinsically hotter than girls who don't.

Useful Links

- Major League Gaming: www.mlgpro.com
- World Cyber Games: www.worldcybergames.com
- Cyberathlete Professional League: www.thecpl.com
- Association of Gaming Professionals: www.theagp.com
- Global Gaming League: www.ggleague.com

Metal Wolf Chaos

THE HOTTEST NEW XBOX GAME YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF



Instead of following tradition and drinking themselves into a tizzy, thousands of Japanese gamers spent their New Year holiday playing as a mech-wielding U.S. president in *Metal Wolf Chaos*. With the game's ritzy color palette and gaudy Americana façade, *Chaos* doesn't appear to be powered by the famed *Otogi 2* engine at first glance. That is, until things start going boom.

Just like the *Otogi* series, the environments in *Chaos* are fully destructible, and nary a minute passes without a boss battle or explosive firefight. However, instead of mythical Japanese demons, you battle revolutionary forces as the heroic 47th president of the United States. Manning a government-developed mech, the prez departs on a tour de destruction, stamping out terrorist hotspots in Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon, and on Beverly Hills' famous Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles.

Scenes of homeland terrorism, including Times Square under siege and the Statue of Liberty as the target of missile attacks, are gutsy propositions in this post-9/11 world. Thankfully producer Masanori Takeuchi coated the game with cheesy dialogue and action heroes of classic comic-book flair. With the president heaving corny one-liners like "I'll smash it faster than a Florida recount!", *Chaos* has a distinct tone of parody, not social commentary. Takeuchi promised that Americans will get a beefier version of *Chaos* when it ships in late spring, including a new Xbox Live battle mode.

Rollin' On

EA ISN'T DONE DEALING, NOT EVEN CLOSE



If you thought EA buying the exclusive rights to the licenses of the NFL and NFL Player's Association was a big slap in the face to Sega's *ESPN* sports series, then EA's new exclusivity contract with ESPN can only be seen as a Vinatieri-like kick to the groin. The 15-year contract gives EA the exclusive rights to ESPN's media properties, including shows and personalities, and will

likely be used to cash in on other "sports" like poker and the X Games.

So not only has the NFL been taken from Sega, now ESPN is gone, too. Could this have anything to do with Madden's contract running out in 2006? Expect 2007 to introduce EA Sports' new *ESPN NFL 2007*...and the end of the biggest brand in sports videogames.

Games currently in development at Sega, like the new *ESPN MLB 2K5*, will be largely unaffected, keeping their monikers and ESPN play-by-play guys (Jon Miller and Joe Morgan).

Some wondered what Sega would do with its excellent football engine (developer Visual Concepts declined to comment on its plans), and others suggested maybe it was time for a good Arena Football League game. Apparently EA thought so too because it snatched up that license! The rumor mill reports that its AFL game is in the works for 2006. Time will tell how this plays out for all involved, especially consumers, but no one is playing football – or maybe any sports games – for a while without going through the EA juggernaut.

2004 Reader's Choice Awards

OXM and TeamXbox teamed up to determine the best games of 2004 according to you, the reader. Thousands of gamers logged on to TeamXbox.com to express their opinions, and the results are in. Newsflash: People love *Halo 2*.

BEST ACTION GAME: **NINJA GAIDEN**
RUNNER-UP: TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON 2

BEST ACTION/ADVENTURE GAME: **TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW**
RUNNER-UP: PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

BEST FIGHTING GAME: **DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE**
RUNNER-UP: MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION

BEST FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER: **HALO 2**
RUNNER-UP: THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

BEST PLATFORMER GAME: **SONIC HEROES**
RUNNER-UP: PITFALL: THE LOST EXPEDITION

BEST RACING/DRIVING GAME: **BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN**
RUNNER-UP: RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

BEST SPORTS GAME: **ESPN NFL 2K5**
RUNNER-UP: MADDEN NFL 2005

BEST RPG: **STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II - THE SITH LORDS**
RUNNER-UP: FABLE

2004 SLEEPER HIT OF THE YEAR: **FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR**
RUNNER-UP: OTOGI 2: IMMORTAL WARRIORS

2004 XBOX GAME OF THE YEAR: **HALO 2**
RUNNER-UP: NINJA GAIDEN

BEST XBOX LIVE GAME: **HALO 2**
RUNNER-UP: TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

BEST XBOX HARDWARE/PERIPHERAL: **PLANTRONICS XBOX LIVE HALO 2 HEADSET**
RUNNER-UP: SPHEREX XBOX 5.1 SURROUND SOUND SYSTEM

BEST XBOX GRAPHICS: **HALO 2**
RUNNER-UP: DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE

BEST XBOX SOUND: **HALO 2**
RUNNER-UP: TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON 2

The Xbox Rox CES

Introducing the comedy team of Bill Gates and Conan O'Brien!



■ Pittsburgh Pirate Jason Bay (center), getting a little MLB Xbox time at CES.

No matter what the ads say, not everything that happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Each year, the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in January attracts roughly 120,000 tech-heads from around the globe to gawk at the industry's latest gadgets and doodads housed in a space equivalent to 26 football fields. (Not to mention ogle the free-range porn stars in town for their own convention.)

As expected, Bill Gates did not reveal any great Xbox 2 nuggets during his pre-show address. But Gates, joined by late-night comic Conan O'Brien, made with the funny while outlining some upcoming features for the current console, such as the Media Center Extender kit for Xbox.

In conjunction with a set-top TV Media Center PC in your living room, the kit will

allow you to enjoy digitally stored movies, photos, and audio from any other TV in the house that's connected to an Xbox. And you don't have to be psychic to foresee this same technology being built into future generations of the Xbox.

Other highlights of CES 2005 included Microsoft's massive booth, which was abuzz with players trying their hands at a build of *Forza Motorsport*. (And probably doing better at it than Bill and Conan – the game crashed live in front of 1,600 people.)

Our favorite toy of the show was the RX2 gaming chair from Spherex – a plush piece of furniture outfitted with a complete Xbox 5.1 surround system inside its frame. It's not cheap at \$1,599, but it is comfy. You can find out more at www.spherexinc.com.



■ That's a funny joke...for me to poop on!

CONAN'S BEST JOKES (at Microsoft's expense)

The coiffed host of Late Night with Conan O'Brien was in prime form at Bill Gates' keynote. Here are the best of his playful jabs.

"When Bill Gates walks onto this stage in a few minutes, the average net worth of each person in this room will be \$128 million. If you're going to hit on somebody, do it now."

"The theme this year is that gadgets are no longer just for geeks. If you look around you, they're also for nerds and dweebs."

"It was fun watching Bill walk through the casino this morning. All the electronic gambling machines started chanting, 'All hail the chosen one.'"

"I know that some people think of Microsoft as the evil empire. Well, I want you to know that Bill Gates has spent a lot of his own time and money to rid the world of these people."

"Okay, and right now nine people are being fired." – quipped by Conan when a remote control wielded by Gates refused to work.

Uppers and Downers

How this month's news affects the world of videogames.



Still in the shadows?

The rumors proliferating after Microsoft picked up the *Shadowrun* license for a possible next-generation installment in the cyberpunk universe have got us hot under the collar. Is it going to happen? We're crossing our fingers.



3 out of 10 ain't bad

The NPD Group's list of the 10 top-selling video games of 2004 is out, and three Xbox games made it. *Halo 2* was number #2 overall (#1 was *GTA: San Andreas*, of course), and *ESPN NFL 2K5* was #10, meaning it beat out EA's *Madden* on the Xbox. The four-year-old *Halo* made it in at #9.



March madness

Who knew that spring was the new holiday season for game releases? With no less than two dozen games hitting shelves this month (and many of them top-tier ones at that), you now have no excuse to be bored. So stop whining!



Barred Gates

Is no news on the next Xbox from Big Bill G. at January's CES show good news? With so much buzz swilling around on the future of Xbox at the show, it was a tad disappointing, but it should crank up anticipation for all the upcoming trade shows.



Unnatural disasters

Right when you're feeling smug in an argument over why some game sucks, 220,000+ people's lives are lost in a world-changing disaster that reminds you there's a real world out there. See how you can help at www.redcross.org.

Hard Stuff

KSSHHT Logitech, we have a problem *KSHHHHHHHT*

www.logitech.com

Logitech Cordless Headset for Xbox



After Logitech’s excellent Cordless Precision Controller, gamers asked, “How about a Live headset to match?” Logitech delivered, but at a hefty price. The Cordless Headset for Xbox costs a shocking \$80, which would be grudgingly acceptable if it worked better than any other headset on the market. Sadly, it doesn’t.

On paper, it’s a monster – a rechargeable lithium-ion battery, up to seven promised hours per charge, full duplex operation, and a weight under one ounce. The earpiece can be worn on either ear and features a soft spring-clip that gently grabs the back of your ear; it feels like it might slip off, but it won’t. Thanks to some clever engineering, all the controls are contained within the headset itself. The illuminated power button doubles as a mute button, and as a simple rocker switch with audible feedback, the volume control couldn’t be easier.

There’s just one problem: The headset produces an irritating tapping noise right in your ear, like rain on a tin roof, accompanied by light static. In two different environments – office and home – the headset worked, but the same unbearably annoying problem appeared. Wireless Internet routers and cordless phones can cause interference in the same 2.4Ghz range that the Cordless Headset uses, so we unplugged all that stuff – and the problem continued. Different areas within the 30-foot range offered more or less noise, but it never went away completely. And clearly, unplugging your Wi-Fi router is not an option if you use it to connect your console to Xbox Live. What good is wireless technology if it can’t get along with other wireless technology?

Until Logitech can come up with a less interference-prone solution, you’re better off with clumsy wires. This small unit turned out to be a huge disappointment.

– Dan Amrich

- Pros

 - Super lightweight.
 - Elegant design.
 - Easy charging via AC adapter.
- Cons

 - IrTICKing tickTICK noisTICKakes it aTICK useTICK.
 - We said, “Irritating ticking noise makes it all but useless.”
 - Hefty price for flaky tech.



Price:
\$79.99

OFFICIAL
XBOX
MAGAZINE
RATING

3.0

Walkie-talkie sucky

www.nyko.com

Nyko SpeakerCom

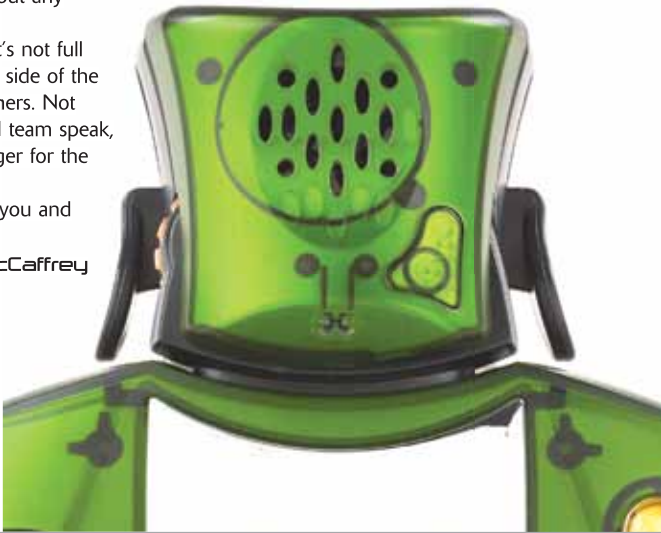
Continuing our look at well-intentioned Xbox Live–headset alternatives gone horribly wrong, the Nyko SpeakerCom eliminates the headset and lets you speak wirelessly. Unfortunately, it also eliminates convenience and the ability to hear what others are saying while you’re talking.

Aesthetically, the SpeakerCom is designed well enough. It plugs into the rear controller memory slot behind your Communicator module. Its width is adjustable so that it will fit into just about any gamepad, not just the standard Controller S.

Functionally, though, the SpeakerCom has deal-breaking issues. First, it’s not full duplex. This means that when you hold down the trigger to talk on either side of the unit (yes, you have to hold down buttons to speak), you are cutting off others. Not cool. Second, for games like *Halo 2* that support both proximity voice and team speak, you have to press the White button and then hold the SpeakerCom’s trigger for the latter. That’s too many steps.

Despite the low cost and the surprisingly good sound quality for both you and other players, the SpeakerCom is too flawed to recommend.

– Ryan McCaffrey



- Pros

 - Pretty good sound quality on both ends.
 - Fits most controllers.
 - Twenty bucks ain’t bad.
- Cons

 - Holding down buttons to talk bites.
 - It’s not full duplex.
 - It complicates team speak in *Halo 2*.



Price:
\$19.99

OFFICIAL
XBOX
MAGAZINE
RATING

5.0

WHAT TO DO IN MARCH

*NOTE: All release dates are subject (and likely) to change, but were confirmed as of press time.



3/1 Star Wars Republic Commando

LucasArts
You played our demo a couple issues back, so you know that this *Unreal*-powered, *Halo*-meets-*Metroid Prime*-meets-*Rainbow Six* first-person shooter has serious fun potential.

3/8 Rugby 2005

EA Sports
Sports giant EA seeks to satisfy the rugby fans in the U.S. (all six of you!) by releasing a videogame of the sport. And our own Rob Smith is one of the six.



3/8 Cold Fear

Ubisoft
In the absence of a big name like *Resident Evil*, the Xbox needs all of the survival horror titles it can get. This one's looking good. Full review soon.



3/8 TimeSplitters: Future Perfect

EA
Every post-*Halo 2* first-person shooter needs something to differentiate it from the crowd. This one's got wacky characters, a Live-enabled map editor, and a great pedigree! Woo-hoo!

3/15 Super Monkey Ball Deluxe

Sega
At first glance, it's potentially one of the most explicit game titles ever. At second glance, it's really a puzzle game that's more fun than a barrel full of...well, you can probably guess.



3/15 ESPN MLB 2K5

Sega
A hot free agent has been signed (Kush Games) to replace the veteran Blue Shift. Kush makes *ESPN NHL*, so we've got every confidence they'll hit a homer on baseball.



3/22 NARC

Midway
The original 20-year-old classic was weak '80s anti-drug propaganda. This time you hang with Bill Bellamy and cram as many illegal substances into your digital body as possible. Ain't progress great?



3/1 Fight Night Round 2

EA Sports
Last year's debut sucker-punched us (in a good way) with its quality. The only thing lacking was Xbox Live play. *Round 2* stitches that wound closed.

3/1

MVP Baseball 2005 EA Sports
It still lacks (thankfully) Steve Finley's pre-pitch crotch-grab animation, but nevertheless *MVP* remains the best baseball simulation around. Check out our full review coming soon.



3/8 Close Combat: First to Fight

Global Star
The Marines have made a squad-based first-person shooter, and we likey. Full co-op mode included, and you don't have to do any push-ups like the real Marines.

3/15

Stolen Hip Games
Let's see, stealthy action, a plethora of high-tech toys, and a hot chick. Those are all things that we like very much.



3/22 Dragon Ball Z: Sagas

Atari
You can all stop emailing us about it. Yes, it's finally coming to Xbox!

3/29

Team America: World Police DVD Paramount

The geniuses behind *South Park* work their magic again, this time with marionettes. If you can handle a little puppet nudity and some gratuitous Kim Jong Il action, this one's definitely a flick for you.



3/29

Red Ninja: End of Honor VU Games

We loves us a good ninja game, but anything that follows *Ninja Gaiden* has a Herculean task (not to mix cultural metaphors) ahead of it. But as we've always said: Ninjas are sweet, anytime.



PICK OF THE MONTH



3/30 TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft Montreal/Ubisoft Annelly **GENRE:** Stealth action

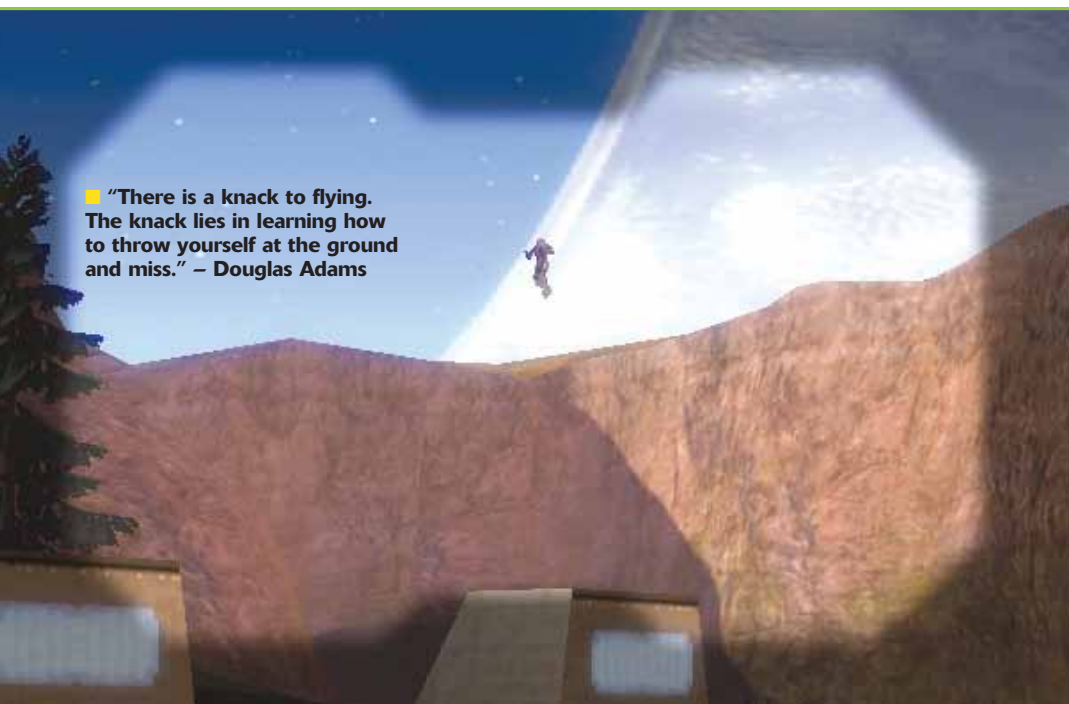
WHAT'S THE DEAL?: At its unveiling during last year's E3, it floored us with its stunning graphics and upgraded gameplay mechanics. Now that we've had our hands on a near-final build, all we can really say is: "Damn." Every detail you could possibly want on Sam Fisher's breathtaking latest awaits you on page 48.

THE FINAL WORD: After playing half the game, the experience has left us with visions that still dance in our heads of normal-mapped Sam Fishers choking fools. We again bow before you, Ubisoft Montreal.

UNIDENTIFIED FLYING SPARTANS

Sword-flying is just one of Halo 2's unorthodox, unofficial tricks. Here's the scoop, and some stunts for you to try at home...

■ "There is a knack to flying. The knack lies in learning how to throw yourself at the ground and miss." – Douglas Adams



Look, up in the sky! It's no bird, it's no plane, it's not even a Banshee – it's Master Chief clutching a sword, flying faster than a locomotive and able to leap entire levels in a single bound. By futzing with the lock-and-lunge feature of the energy sword, enterprising *Halo 2* players have discovered that they can sail across the landscape faster and higher than any vehicle with little or no assistance. As a result, "sword-flying" has become the extreme sport of choice for *Halo* hotshots – and a high-profile example of the underground phenomenon known as "tricking."

Tricking involves making the game do things it wasn't necessarily designed to do, going places you shouldn't normally be able to go, or putting things where they don't normally belong. For instance, clever players have found

ways to launch themselves on top of the Zanzibar fan and ways outside of Ivory Tower. There's also a variation on rocket-jumping using grenades to propel yourself to new locales.

One crew of nutjobs shoved boxes and Banshees into the airlifts on Headlong – not to mention a soda machine, just to see what would happen. Much (but not all) of the stuff you find in trick videos tests the rules simply because they're rules, and you feel cool when you break them. The original *Halo* spawned hundreds of fan-made videos showing weird physics behavior, show-off moves, and more off-the-record occurrences.

But why bother? Jason Neal, a.k.a. Hellion of the trick-friendly *Halo 2* clan "organized Deception" (team-od.org), spends untold hours of trial-and-error research testing *Halo 2*'s limits to see what he and his clanmates can find. (So far, they've found plenty – his clan claims at least six unique trick discoveries, from mystery



■ With little to no practice, you can achieve sword-flight distances of several hundred feet.

flag grabs to breaking through map barriers.) And while a few techniques have proven handy in competition, it's mostly for the thrill of the hunt. "I'm not positive what it is about finding these tricks that draws me in, but I think it's simply the dynamic and undiscovered nature of it," he says. "You strive to find that one thing that no one yet has found. I guess that's what I am – a *Halo 2* trickster."

Change may be around the

corner, however. At press time, the first content download for *Halo 2* had not yet been released, and there's a very strong chance that with it will come with an update to nullify these anomalies altogether, along with a few more nefarious exploits currently plaguing Xbox Live. In exchange for new maps, you may wind up losing tricks.

Then again, Jason Neal and hundreds of other *Halo 2* tricksters will simply seek out new ones.

More Stupid Halo Tricks



TANK LOVIN'

Create a custom game on Coagulation with both Scorpion and Wraith tanks (set the Heavy Vehicle to Random). Use the sloped nose of the Wraith to nuzzle up to the Scorpion from behind and shimmy beneath it, preferably if the Scorpion is at the crest of a hill. Time it right,

and you can hit the tank's special spot, sending that Scorpion spinning skyward. Have patience as this one takes a bit of luck and a lot of tries.

GRENADE-JUMPING

Grab an Overshield, then throw a grenade down on the ground and plant yourself over it. The blast will propel you into the air far further than a regular jump. (If you can jump on top of a movable object like a small box, all the better – you get the propulsion and less of the damage.) You can sometimes use grenade jumps to get to out-of-the-way places, like ledges or even rooftops.

"THE FRAN" ON MIDSHIP

Since it's such a small arena, this clever bit of positioning won't give you an edge for long (though our own Francesca Reyes used it to great effect in an office match one day). Head up the walkways on either side of the teetering bridge; you want the side with the gray segmented floor, not the blue plasma ramps. The short wall toward the middle of the arena can be jumped on; use it to scramble and crouch-jump up to the canopy above get the best view of the match. It also gives you a great view of Earth out the rear window. Of course, you can still be seen and shot...

GHOST SURFING



One person drives the Ghost, the other person jumps on the hood and tries desperately to stay on. The faster the Ghost goes, the more likely you're going to bail, but with balance and practice, you can tool around together. You might be able to use this in a CTF match to get your flag to safety slightly quicker...but probably not.

■ In sword-flying, the passenger's seat is the driver's seat.



Note: Sword-flying and the other tricks listed in this article are not guaranteed to work. By the time you read this, Bungie may have updated *Halo 2* via Xbox Live auto-updates, rendering them all moot. If so, delete your saved games (back up your data to a memory card first!), disconnect your Xbox from the Internet, and start from scratch in an offline System Link or split-screen game. You may have much better luck.

Flight School

There are multiple methods for sword-flying, but here's the easiest way to give gravity the slip:



■ Start a multiplayer game on a wide-open map like Coagulation and ask a friend to join the opposing team. Find an energy sword (Coagulation doesn't have one by default – customize your weapons before going in), grab a Warthog, and tell your pal to hop into any other vehicle.



■ Select the sword as your weapon, get into the Warthog passenger seat, and tell your friend to stand in front of you, but not right next to you. Aim at them; when your reticle turns red, press R Trigger until you hear the sound of a successful attack. Your enemy pal will be unharmed. Don't leave the car and don't switch weapons.



■ Tell your friend to jump into their vehicle and go to the opposite side of the map. Anywhere's fine as long as you have clear line of sight to them. When they're in position, hold X to exit the Warthog, and you'll instantly leap into the air toward them. It's the sword's lunge attack kicking in, albeit late and from a zillion feet away. If you're airborne, congratulations! Thank you for flying Bungie Airlines.

SEE YOU, SEE ME

Remember Xbox Live Video Chat?

Microsoft's answer to Sony's popular EyeToy accessory is now in the hands of Xbox gamers – Japanese Xbox gamers, that is. As part of a special pilot program, Japan was selected as the first market to test Microsoft's new Xbox Video Chat peripheral – a package that includes a sleek green and black camera, DVD software, and a 12-month subscription card to Xbox Live.

The most surprising aspect of the newly released product (that was announced with Jenny McCarthy's shrill assistance at E3 2004) is its aggressive price tag – 6800 yen (roughly \$60). For about the same price as a one-year subscription to Xbox Live, Japanese Xbox users essentially get a free Video Chat kit every time they annually renew their Live accounts.

While no games currently support the camera, the pack-in software offers a remarkably fun interface for socialites to connect with one another and

chew the fat. Initiating a Video Chat session isn't quite the three-button-press cakewalk that *Halo 2* matchmaking is, but it's functional. Only those on your Friends List can be invited to chat, meaning social butterflies cannot drop into strangers' chat sessions.

First-time users should start by tweaking the camera settings – sharpness, brightness, and camera frequencies can all be adjusted with relative ease. Once connected with friends, you can project humorous icons on screen, wade through strange visual and vocal effects, and manually shake a friend's Xbox controller. Hosts have the added ability to spin background music, some more pleasant than others. The musical theme "Relax" offers atmospheric, Radiohead "Treefingers"-esque tones, while other selections, like the John Tesh-inspired "Cool" theme, are great for you light-rock buffs. Unfortunately, accessing your own custom soundtracks is not an option.

Once everybody has their visual settings tuned, camera angles tweaked, and preferred background music grooving, the enjoyment to be had out of Video Chat really depends on the users. For two college buddies hooking up across campus, the peripheral has little meaning. But for long-distance friends wanting to connect beyond a simple phone call, the Video Chat experience is well worth the price of admission. The free unlimited use of Video Chat (after the initial costs of Xbox Live) is particularly well-suited for Japan, where monthly cell-phone bills normally surpass \$100.

Video Chat could see release in North America this year; however, no official announcement has been made by Microsoft. We'll keep you posted.



■ Filters, effects, and more.



■ Big ego? Watch yourself chat.



**ON THE
GAME
DISC**
demo

Intrigued by this review?
Check out the playable demo
on this month's disc, which lets
you get your frag on in single-
player combat or
on Xbox Live.



UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2: THE LIANDRI CONFLICT

THE ADRENALINE GAMES

RELEASE DATE

As we went to press, Midway announced it was delaying the release of UC2 until April due to retail considerations for its other upcoming shooter, *Area-51*, that's due out in March. We played a final, polished version of the code and tested multiplayer extensively. So given our recommendation, you can safely go get your pre-order in at your local retail emporium!

YOU SEE ME SNIPING YOU
FROM UP HERE, DON'T YOU?

PUBLISHER: MIDWAY
DEVELOPER: EPIC GAMES
MULTIPLAYER: 1-8 ON SYSTEM LINK AND XBOX LIVE
WEBSITE: WWW.UNREALCHAMPIONSHIP2.COM
ESRB: M
EXTRAS: 480P, CONTENT DOWNLOADS,
ONLINE SCOREBOARDS

Videogames have yearned to break out of their strict genre-specific labels for years now. Unfortunately, many developers' genre-defying ideas go little further than adding some "RPG-like elements" to standard formulas. But Epic Games took an entirely different direction with its much-anticipated *Unreal Championship 2*, and slapped two genres together, merging the best moments of each, and ended up with a concoction to rival peanut butter and chocolate.

Continued on page 37



More importantly, this first-person shooter crossed with a fighting game finally legitimizes the *Unreal* series for console gamers and makes for some of the best damn online multiplayer fun we've had since, um, last night (*Halo 2*, you know).

A long-running and esteemed franchise on the PC, *Unreal* has yet to establish itself with Xbox gamers as one of the premier multiplayer shooters. Blame that on the first *Unreal Championship* – one of the first games to support Xbox Live – as it was troubled by bad lag times and poor framerates. Epic brought *UC2* development back in-house, and the franchise owners went about crafting a game built around the wants and needs of console gamers.

UC2 is the perfect game for console gamers discovering the joy of online multiplayer over Xbox Live. Taking *Unreal* from being a straight multiplayer shooter – albeit one with fantastic weapons with multiple firing modes, cool characters, and more power-ups and modifiers than you can shake a flak cannon at – and introducing a melee system that feels more like a fighting game, makes for an incredibly varied playing experience, especially online. Xbox Live is booming right now thanks in no small part to *Halo 2*, and the time is ripe for *UC2*.



INTRODUCING THE RACES

THE NAKHTI

- **BEST ADRENALINE POWER:** FLASH
- **BEST FEATURE:** SELKET'S DÉCOLLETAGE

This race looks like it stepped out of ancient Egypt. The main characters, Anubis and Selket, come from Nakhti, as does Anubis' friend Sobek, and they are the basis of the Ascension Rites campaign. Nakhti use energy-based melee weapons and Scorpion pistols. They all have access to the Repulse ability to deflect incoming projectiles, Warrior Spirit for speeding up their attack rate, and a Heal ability.



UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2

WELCOME TO THUNDERDOME

The game is essentially built around the melee-fighting-game motif. The single-player mode is broken up into three parts: the story-driven Ascensions Rites, Tournament ladders for each of the 14 characters (half of which need to be unlocked), and a Challenges Mode that gives you different scenarios to fight through. The story of the Ascension Rites ladder is told in some excellent *SportsCenter*-esque cutscenes (a strange concept for *Unreal* fans) that explain some of the story behind the interstellar Liandri Tournaments. The Tournament ladders and Challenges for each character put you in a wide range of combat situations that'll introduce all the skills, abilities, and mutator options at your disposal.

The Liandri Tournament storyline has never been so well illustrated as it is in the Ascension Rites Mode. Well-directed and occasionally funny cutscenes follow the story of Anubis, a Nakhti warrior, as he competes and earns the scorn of other competitors. There are even a couple of linear levels to mix it up.

The main action in *UC2* is true to the original form of the game: arena-style shooting with a host of weapons, featuring the standard games like CTF and Deathmatch (of course, the *Unreal* series helped establish some of those standard multiplayer modes over the years). Some new and creative modes also join the fray, like the wickedly fun Nali Slaughter (you score points for slaughtering the passive Nali while your opponent does the same, and you get bonuses for sending the invisible Nali to its grave!).



Cool, multi-tasking weapons have always been a trademark of the series, and favorites like the flak cannon and shock rifle are back with slight tweaks. Interestingly, you carry one energy weapon and one explosive weapon, plus your character-specific melee weapon. You also have a basic race-specific weapon, usually a sort of pistol, but each has its own interesting secondary trick up its sleeve.



INTRODUCING THE RACES

THE JUGGERNAUTS

- **BEST ADRENALINE POWER:** UNSTOPPABLE
- **BEST FEATURE:** THE LUMBERING GAIT

Members of a race of massive gene-boosted humans, Arclite and Gorge are fighting in the Liandri Tournament. They brawl with their fists, of course, because guns are for wussies. And they're a bit prone to flying off into berserk rages. Juggernauts may be big and slow, but they're as hard to take down as a bull on PCP.



THE LIANDRI

- **BEST ADRENALINE POWER:** DEVASTATION'S HEAD TURRET
- **BEST FEATURE:** RAPTOR'S ELECTRIC DREADS

In addition to sponsoring the tournaments, the Liandri Mining Corporation also build some of the contestants. Raptor and Devastation are of Liandri manufacture, and can cannibalize their own chassis for ammunition at a slight cost of health. They also have a Radar combo that allows them to find flag carriers, etc., through walls. Their melee weapons are pneumatic hammers built into their arms, and their fine engineering makes them flexible and nimble.



UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2



NALI MAY SEEM INNOCENT, BUT SLAUGHTER THEM TO BE SAFE.



I'M LETTING MY SOUL GLOW.



HOW ABOUT I SLAP THAT HOT FLAK BACK IN YOUR FACE?



NIMBLE ALLOWS YOU TO LEAP TALL PYRAMID ATRIUMS IN A SINGLE BOUND.



MAINTAIN YOUR LOCK-ON AT ALL TIMES, ESPECIALLY IN HAND-TO-HAND.

INTRODUCING THE RACES

THE SKAARJ

- BEST ADRENALINE POWER: BLADE BURST
- BEST FEATURE: CLAWS

This menacing reptilian warrior race has been at constant war with humanity, not to mention a mainstay of the *Unreal* franchise. Szalor and Torgr are the playable Skaarj in *UC2*, and they use their claws, which can generate a deadly laser pulse, as both their melee weapon and as their primary race weapon. Skaarj are immune to poison, which is an advantage against some weapons. They can also slowly regenerate, given a little time.



THE NECRIS

- BEST ADRENALINE POWER: ETHEREAL
 - BEST FEATURE: LAUREN'S MILKY-WHITE COMPLEXION
- Lauren and Brock represent the undead Necris Phayder assassins, and are now selling their rejuvenation services to the highest bidders. The Necris are not very strong, but most of their adrenaline abilities siphon health from opponents, which gives them a distinct advantage. Their melee weapons drip with nanoblack, the Necris compound that also flows through their veins, making them very dangerous – not to mention creepy – up close.



USE THE JUICE

The adrenaline power-up system has been a part of the franchise for a while too, giving you the ability to temporarily enhance certain skills by adding time-limited boosts to strength, speed, or more agile moves. This time around, the powers are more dramatic, and characters have some of their own unique powers they can exploit on the fly through button combos.

Most of the weapons feel the same as they would in any *Unreal* game, but the melee combat is entirely new. A bit more complex than fighting with energy swords in *Halo 2*, it requires you to use combinations, blocks, and power moves to defeat your enemy hand-to-claw. Melee comes in handy against an opponent who's sticking to its guns. You can deflect shots back with your melee weapon – provided you've timed it right and you've locked on to the shooter. Ultimately it's a vibrant, visceral dynamic of combo attacks, leaps, and lunges that always favors the combatant with the best skills.

How it balances online does remain to be seen, but in our extensive testing in the office, we were all devising new moves and combos and testing them out for bragging rights. When you're playing on Live, expect to uncover all kinds of creative ways to splat each other, and listen for the resulting refrains of "did you see that?".

All these options, combos, weapon choices, adrenaline powers, map shapes, and control points do mean that you've a learning curve to crest before you're likely to be really comfortable with any of the characters' multi-layered skill set. The spectacular results of the matches, however, make that time and learning investment worth the effort ten times over.

5 MOST AWESOMEST THINGS YOU CAN DO IN UC2



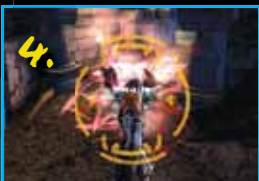
1. FLY LIKE AN EAGLE
In general, you won't be spending a lot of time on your feet (or hooves or whatever you have; this is an equal-opportunity interstellar arena-combat league, after all). But one of the best ways to zoom around the map is by charging up your melee attack in mid-jump. This will propel you at ridiculous speeds wherever you're pointing. If you're pointing at a locked-on enemy, the words "death from above" spring to mind. You can also do a neat energy charge through the air this way too.



2. OVERDOSE
The Overdose game mode resembles your standard "take the ball to the goal" multiplayer type that's been done before. The twist here is that holding on to the ball makes you more radioactive. Charge your radiation meter all the way up, and you'll overdose the next time you score a goal. As opposed to real life, this overdose is a good one since it makes you invisible, amplifies your damage, and speeds you up a smidge. And you look hella cool and scary too.



3. NAILED TO THE WALL
Super Robot Rastafarian Devastation and his shapely aluminum pal Raptor wield some nasty rivet guns as their



primary race weapon. The cool thing about these guns, other than the fact they fire glowing hot rivets, is that they can be charged up to fire one big rivet that can stick your enemy to the wall. Then you can just sidle on over and have your creepy robot way with them while they're stuck. In fact you can...

4. FINISH HIM!
Keeping with the *Mortal Kombat* spirit infused by Midway's inclusion of Raiden, *UC2* allows you to do finishing moves on stunned opponents. Through a complex button sequence that flashes on your screen, you can execute a finishing move that is played out from a third-person camera and is unique to each character. But hurry up, you've only got so much time to mash buttons.

5. ME AND MY SHADOW
The gothy Necris race possesses an adrenaline power that will give you fits if you come up against it. It's called "Ethereal" and it's like an invisibility cloak, but far more devious. Not only does it make you invisible, but it creates a shadowy decoy just a few feet away from you that will confuse enemies. Remember, if you see this little ghost running around, don't hit it, swing at the space around it. And don't worry about looking crazy while swatting at air.

UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2

SWEET CURVES

The art direction of *Unreal* has always been memorably striking. From its early beginnings that seemed to spring from some '70s prog-rock poster to this current iteration, it's maintained its same unique sci-fi look. But once again, *UC2* seems to have reached a sort of zenith, thanks to the amazing power it's squeezing out of the Xbox. Characters are extremely detailed, sporting appendages that swing and scales that glisten, along with all kinds of other neat stuff that you better not admire too long or you'll catch a happy-faced grenade in the chops.

And that's to say nothing of the map designs, which are simply amazing. What's beyond amazing is the relatively smooth framerate. It's a bit smoother in first-person mode than third, but it never looked like it dropped below 30 frames a second. Considering the amount of activity going on visually between the environments, characters, and weapon effects, it's an impressive technological achievement.

Unreal Championship 2 is almost the definition of a triple-A title. It's got everything – good online play, amazingly fun and addictive action, options up the wazoo, a graphics engine that will make your eyes well up – and it's all polished to a glistening shine. Its amazing mix of melee and weapon combat is bound to be copied by future games, but it'll take a special effort to match its quality bar. It's a spectacle to behold and the signal that *Unreal* has finally truly arrived on the Xbox.

– Tom Price



GOT THE FLAG, ALMOST HOME...OK, SOMEONE POP OUT AND KILL ME NOW.



OOOH, PRETTY COLORS. WHAT, THAT'S THE DAMAGE AMPLIFIER? UH-OH.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
So this is what the Xbox can do, eh? It may not be photorealism, but the bursts of colors and glowing things, along with the imaginative art direction, make for visuals sweeter than candy (but better for you). Check out the icicles.

Immersion
The series has never really made the gamer feel as if they too were a competitor in the Liandri Tournaments, but this time around, it's much more believable, thanks to the great cutscenes.

Sound
Sound has never been one of the most noticeable points of the franchise, but it continues to be serviceable and uniquely *Unreal*, chock full of dramatic "arrghs!"s and big loud explosions. What else do you need?

Design
The melee fighting is inspired and well-tuned, and the game's relentless amount of maps, characters, game types, and mutators may be expected but lengthen the life of the game considerably.

(+) Good.
(-) Bad.
(?) Perplexing
+ Bouncing projectiles back with your melee weapon.
+ Whimsical art direction.
+ Nearly endless combinations of weapons and adrenaline.
– Could be a little unbalanced.
? What, no Redeemer?

Official Xbox Magazine
Verdict
9.3
10.0



INTRODUCING THE RACES

THE HUMANS

- BEST ADRENALINE POWER: HOMING
- BEST FEATURE: SAPPHIRE'S MINI SKIRT

Sapphire and Malcolm do not have some of the special abilities of the other races, but they do have some powerful adrenaline abilities, such as an Ice Burst that freezes nearby enemies; the Sentinels personal defense bots, which fire upon nearby enemies; and a homing mode that leads weapons fire unerringly at their locked-on targets. Malcolm is also one of the most experienced combatants in the tournament and acts as a commentator as well.



ELDER GOD

- BEST ADRENALINE POWER: TELEPORT
- BEST FEATURE: LIGHTNING HANDS

Raiden is the only elder god, but he is a brother from another universe, after all. His powers are far beyond the mortal realm, though he limits himself in order to have fair competitions. Raiden's special ability is to teleport, as well as set traps of energy that can stun opponents for an easy kill. He wields his simple wooden staff in melee combat, but don't be fooled, he's incredibly adept with it.



SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY
2005 GAME OF THE YEAR ALREADY?



**ON THE
GAME
DISC**
demo

If this story doesn't get you reaching for the phone to call in a pre-order for *Chaos Theory*, the playable demo on this month's disc will. Play it RIGHT NOW!!!



IF IT AIN'T BROKE, REBUILD IT

RedFox and I crept silently into the darkened square room. With the Shadownet spy training ingrained into our minds and bodies, we instinctively surveyed our surroundings: nothing too challenging – two tangoes were sitting on a couch with their backs to us, glued to the big-screen television four feet in front of them, a World Cup soccer match occupying their complete attention. Those Europeans, they love their soccer. Even the terrorists. And it would be the death of them.

Our footy-favoring foes had already done us the favor of killing the lights in the room, so taking them out and moving on toward our objective

should be easy. But how should we deal with them? Sticky shockers? Whistle and lure them toward us? Or invoke the fifth freedom and cap them both?

We crept to the couch, each of us behind one of the enemies. Unfortunately, they were so engrossed in the soccer match that they were literally on the edge of their seats, putting them out of chokehold range. We couldn't move in front of them because we'd be bathed in the glow of the television screen and risk being seen. Sigh. I guess we weren't going to get any information out of these two. Somewhat reluctantly, then, our safest course of action was make their deaths quick.

I stood up and drew my silenced pistol, as did RedFox. Silently, I mouthed a countdown: "Three, two, one..." And in the same instant, we each fired a bullet, and a second later, each terrorist slumped forward, their lifeless bodies coming to a rest on the floor in front of the TV.

That's a true story of one of our cooperative adventures in a near-complete version of *Chaos Theory*, the latest and greatest *Splinter Cell* of them all. Read on to find out exactly why this could be the single greatest Xbox game yet, and then play the first single-player mission for yourself on this month's demo disc!

THE ORIGINAL SPLINTER CELL SCORED **9.6**.
PANDORA TOMORROW SCORED **9.5**.
CHAOS THEORY IS LOOKING AND PLAYING BETTER THAN BOTH.
INTERESTED?





SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY 2005 GAME OF THE YEAR ALREADY?



■ **Whichever way this thug turns, he could get shot by one guy or grabbed and choked by the other.**

GOOD THINGS COME IN THREES

Back in our November cover story, we told you all the basics about *Chaos Theory*: its three gameplay modes (campaign, cooperative, and versus), its production values (visuals so good you'll do a double-take; in fact, Ubisoft told us that Microsoft originally wanted it to be a next-generation launch title), and its incredible sense of freedom. Now that we've had a chance to spend the past month playing through several of the single-player missions several times each, taking different approaches to each scenario in every area, we feel compelled to illustrate just how much choice you have, and what it means to the gameplay. And we'll tell you more about the return of *Pandora Tomorrow's* versus mode. But first, there's the dazzling new co-op campaign we're dying to discuss...

IT'S GOOD TO PLAY TOGETHER

As enthralling as the campaign and versus modes are, we're actually most excited about the four cooperative missions. Despite the general popularity of co-op play, few games nowadays support it. Here, the quests take place in a story arc that runs parallel to Sam Fisher's exploits, and Fisher himself will even make a brief cameo if you explore

each of the levels with extra care and due diligence.

Playable in vertical split-screen, via System Link, or on Xbox Live, the two-player co-op mode begins with you and your Shadownet spy teammate outside a multi-story office building in a courtyard with a few guards to tackle. You've got to get in, get information out of several different computers, and get out. Communication is key as you and your partner must often execute moves simultaneously. Furthermore,



■ **The boost co-op move can be used to either toss your partner over a high wall or to set up the human ladder.**



when playing on Live with headsets, you must whisper to your teammate as enemies will be alerted if you speak too loudly.

The same freedoms you enjoy in the solo game are out in full force here, too. It's quite a rush to be hiding in a bush and see your buddy creep up behind an unsuspecting guard and stab him in the neck with *Chaos Theory's* new toy, the knife. Then you get your fellow spy's back by running down another foe who's heard his pal's

dying scream and is heading straight for your friend to investigate.

Chances are you'll empty your bag of spy tricks during the course of each mission. You can lower your friend down by his ankles, *Mission: Impossible*-style, through an open ceiling panel to hack a keypad below. You can train your pistol's electronics-disabling OCP mode to temporarily kill a security camera in a well-lit hallway while your buddy creeps by undetected. You can reach high ledges together by boosting

your partner up to the ledge while you then use him as a human ladder (see image sequence below).

Solving problems that require you to talk to your buddy and use your collected skill sets in cool combos generates a depth of gaming interaction you just can't find anywhere else. And once you've completed it one way, you can go back and do it all over again in a different style for a different experience. And we're quite sure that you will.



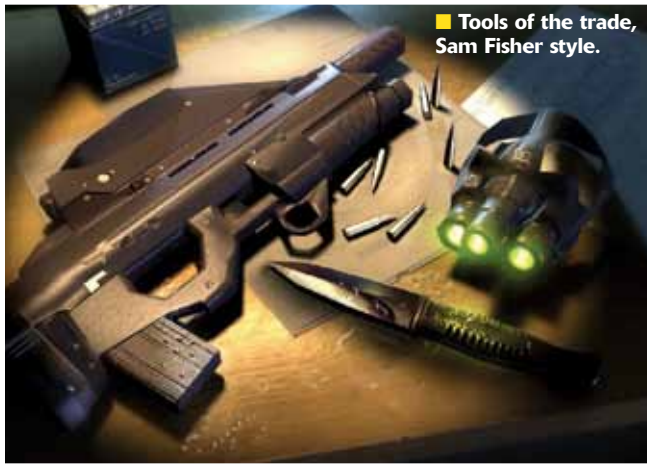
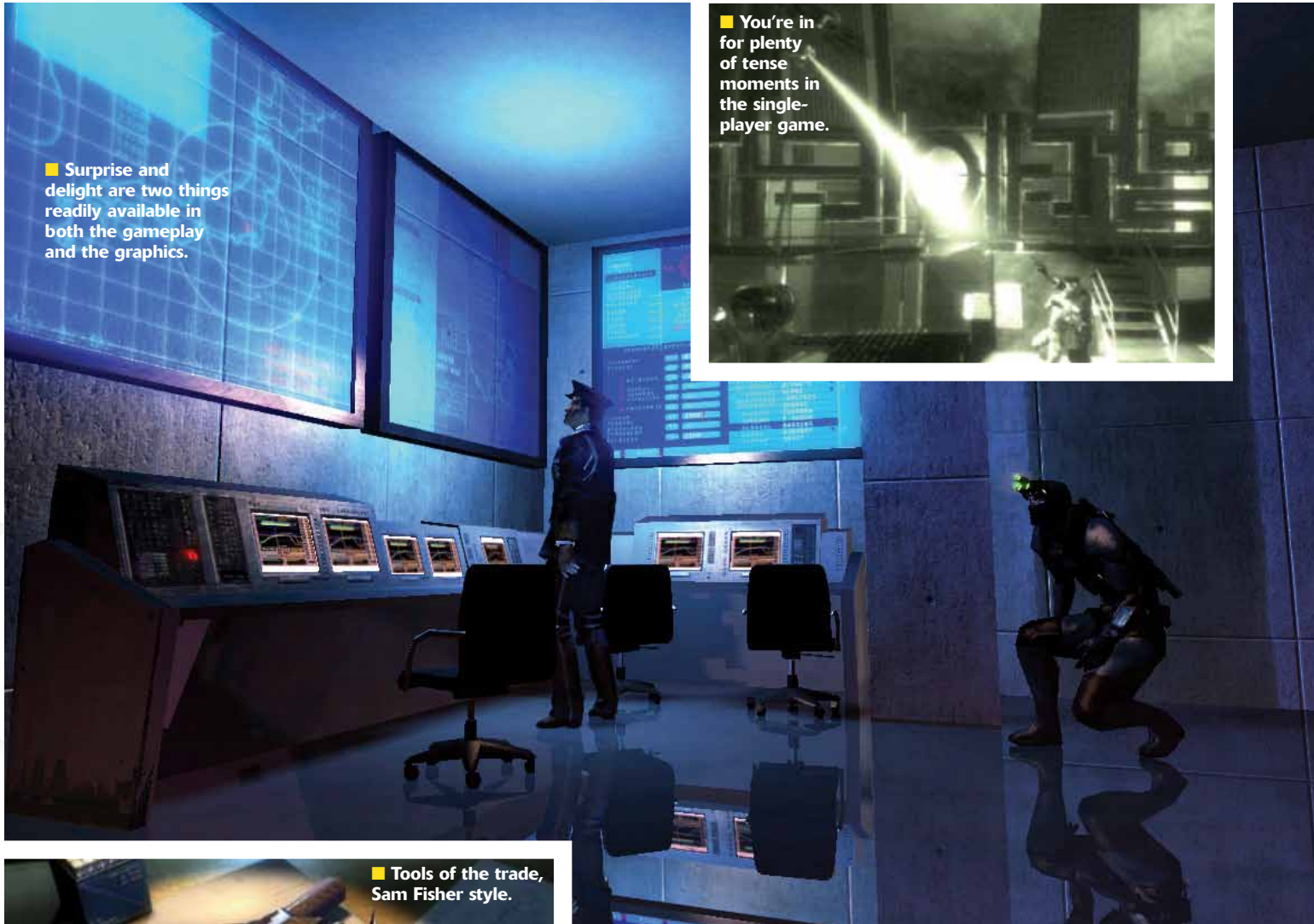
■ **Rappelling (top) and giving your buddy a boost (below) are two of the many tandem moves in co-op.**

BASS-ACKWARDS

In a reversal of the usual Tom Clancy pattern for success, the *Splinter Cell* game has become so huge that it has spawned a paperback novel. The book, appropriately titled *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*, is actually written by David Michaels, not Clancy. It goes for eight bucks, and it's actually a decent read, provided you can imagine Michael Ironside as your inner voice.



■ **HILARIOUS:** When you first enter the main building in the Hokkaido level, wait for the conversation between the two guards about the nightingale floors and ninjas. It's comedy gold.



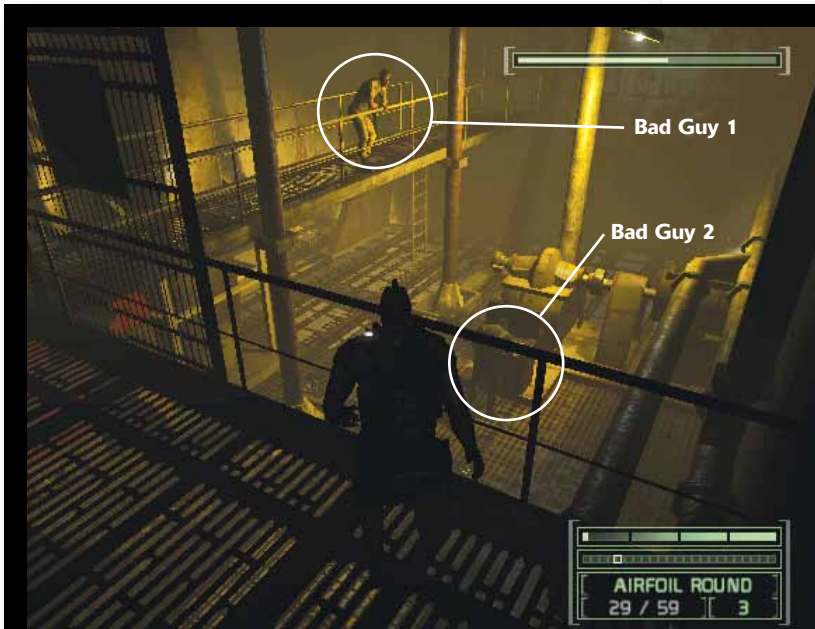
HAVE IT YOUR WAY

While *Chaos Theory*'s solo campaign still leads you down a generally linear path, the developers at Ubisoft Montreal have nevertheless managed to transform the *Splinter Cell* experience into a relatively open-ended adventure in every aspect of the gameplay.

First, you now have primary, secondary, and opportunity objectives available, and you'll only invoke the dreaded "Mission Failed" screen if you blow a primary one. Kiss the frustration goodbye.

Prior to each mission, you can choose your equipment loadout: Redding's recommendation (he's your weapons guy, and he always suggests a bit of everything), stealth (fewer bullets, more gadgets), or assault (vice versa).

Once you're in the actual game, Sam can transform the SC-20K Launcher assault rifle – on the fly – into a sniper rifle or a shotgun. And then there are the mission scenarios themselves. Have a look at just one real example from the Cargo Ship level of the campaign (see right):



OPTION 1:



Wait for him to get under you, then press R Trigger. Snap go the vertebrae! And if the other guy comes up to investigate, snap his neck too!



OPTION 2:



It's hard to pass up such a conveniently located pipe. Why not cling to it, hang down with your pistol drawn, then shoot?



When his buddy wonders why their conversation just ended, put a cap in his face too.

OPTION 3:



Use your silenced pistol to take out the room's lone light source...



...then hop over the railing, ease down to the lower level, knock out the enemy, activate the pump, and move along without ever dealing with the other guy.

OPTION 4:



Creep along the catwalk, ready a flashbang, and throw it at the feet of the top-level guy.



While he's blinded, stab him with your knife (press R Trigger when close). Now you're free to deal with the other enemy as you see fit.

THE WHOLE PACKAGE

Splinter Cell Chaos Theory is gearing up to be one of the most value-packed Xbox discs ever. In addition to the 11-mission single-player campaign, you get the four-mission co-op mode and 11 versus maps, several of which should sound familiar to *Pandora Tomorrow* veterans. We've also been assured that more co-op and versus levels will be released later for download on Xbox Live.

CO-OP LEVELS

- Panama
- Seoul
- Chemical Bunker (North Korea)
- New York City Grand Central Station

VERSUS MAPS

- Aquarius
- Factory
- Clubhouse
- Orphanage
- Missile Strike
- Station
- Deftech Below*

River Mall*

- Warehouse*
- Bank*
- Museum*

* Returning *Pandora Tomorrow* map



SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY 2005 GAME OF THE YEAR ALREADY?

■ Story mode has lots of cool stuff to do, like launch missiles.



SNEAKING VS. SHOOTING

Rounding out *Chaos Theory*'s triumvirate of gameplay greatness is the return of *Pandora Tomorrow*'s versus mode. Consider this the "2.0" version of the revolutionary "hide and seek" multiplayer introduced in last year's game.

"We wanted to make it better, deeper, and more accessible," says versus designer Arnaud Mametz. To wit, level design has improved, and interactive elements — such as breakable walls — have been carefully introduced.

"We also wanted to reinforce team play and cooperation," he added. Case in point: Both the sneaky, non-lethal spies and the well-armed mercenaries can now work more closely together with their teammate. Spies can heal each other and utilize the tandem moves from the co-op mode, while mercenaries can set up camera networks for each other and share their backpack contents.

In addition to the revamped core gameplay in story mode (whereby bombing, hacking, and hard-drive-extracting objectives replace *Pandora*'s ubiquitous neutralizations), two other variants are being introduced: disk hunt and deathmatch. In disk hunt, the spy pair must collect a dozen disks scattered around the map. There's no safe deposit box at the spawn point, so if you're hoarding nine disks and get killed, the disks return and you're screwed.

You'd assume deathmatch was straightforward, but the mode has its own deep twists. Mercs must kill 16 spies to win, but the unarmed spies need only take out four gun-toting mercenaries in order to claim victory. Plus, you can customize every gameplay detail from allowable weapons and gadgets to objectives and the requirements for victory.

■ Among the spy's new gadgets is a *Predator*-esque cloaking mechanism that temporarily renders you nearly invisible.



had everything to lose," producer Mathieu Ferland said, alluding to their own expectations and those of their fans with each release. "We wanted to create a monster (game)," he added. When we asked how they do it time and again, he joked, "Oh, we just decided to make it awesome."

In a more determined tone,

he added, "We want to beat *Halo 2*." Whether that's critical acclaim (*Halo 2*'s 9.7/10 is our highest score to date) or sales (the Chief's sequel has topped six million) is unclear, but either way, if the rest of *Chaos Theory* plays as brilliantly as the levels we've lost sleep over, it'll make a mighty splash.

— Ryan McCaffrey

COLLECT ME

Following *Halo 2*'s wildly successful lead, Ubisoft will be unleashing a *Chaos Theory Limited Collector's Edition* for \$54.99. Housed in a "metallic embossed collector's box" (Ubisoft's words), you'll get the game on one disc and on the other you'll find a making-of featurette, developer diaries, an art gallery, and a spy training manual created by the web comic geniuses at *Penny Arcade*. We'll take two!



■ Mercenaries finally get revenge for all those times they got grabbed and taunted in *Pandora Tomorrow*.



Previews

Speed for your need

Preview

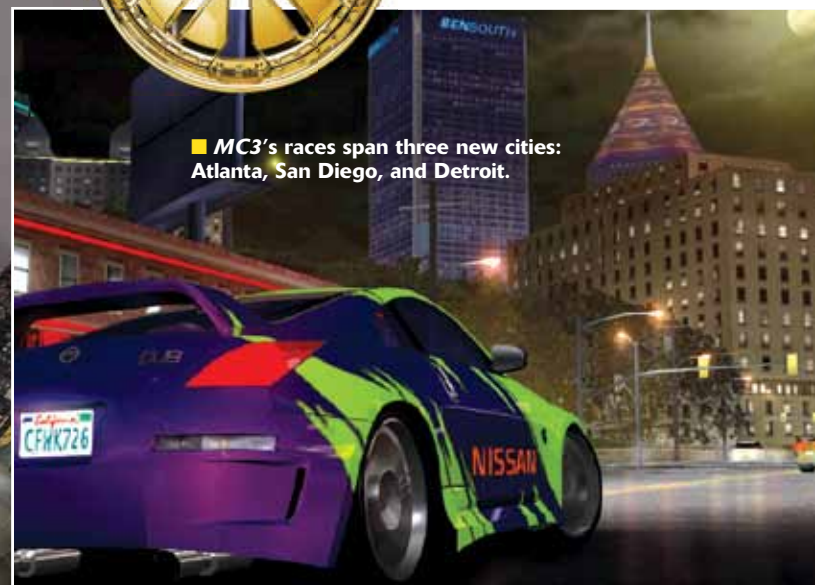
A catchy tune



■ Once you buy a car, you'll be able to make copies of it and give them different looks, a technology that we're hoping Rockstar shares with the real world soon.



■ MC3's races span three new cities: Atlanta, San Diego, and Detroit.



"Midnight Club 3 already has a screaming-fast sense of speed."

Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition

Passing those ten-second rides in the fast lane

PUBLISHER **ROCKSTAR GAMES** | DEVELOPER **ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO**
RELEASE DATE **APRIL 2005** | XBOX LIVE **YES**



■ Along with pickup trucks and SUVs, MC3 offers more types of bikes, ranging from Ducatis to choppers.

In the past two years, *NFS Underground* has made the biggest splash and the most cash in street-racing gaming, but the granddaddy of the genre is almost ready to roll again, and it's got the cred and an impressive overhaul on its side. *Midnight Club 3* expands the series' free-roaming approach to racing and adds a ton of real cars, three new cities, a blazing sense of speed, and authentic tuning options with the help of *Dub* magazine, which provided advice on which parts are hot and what cars they do and don't belong on.

Rockstar picked three cities for their prominence in car culture – San Diego, the heart of street racing; Atlanta, home of

the country's most outrageous tune jobs; and Detroit, Motor City – and created authentic-feeling, "highlight reel" racing environments. You'll rumble down those streets in a wide selection of vehicles that includes everything from pickup trucks to Lamborghinis to street bikes, muscle cars, choppers, and SUVs (check out our story in All Access last issue for the complete list). Rockstar promises that the bigger rides won't handle like beasts; realism isn't the goal – preserving the series' accessible, arcadey vibe is – so a Hummer will be as fun to whip through turns as a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo.

The structure of the game received a fresh coat of paint, too. Alongside the usuals like circuit

races, ordered and unordered checkpoints, and no-checkpoint sprints, you'll find FPS-style options like CTF, territory, and bomb-delivery competitions.

Career Mode also takes a fresh new approach. After buying one of six cars (Uetta, Neon, Golf, Impala, Monte Carlo, or Eclipse) with your initial stake of cash and completing an introductory test-run race, you're free to choose from checkpoint and circuit races, challenge specific drivers, enter a tournament, and tackle competitions based on the type of car you're driving. A map with navigation aids helps you make your pick and then find the starting line.

Right from the beginning, you have all the abilities that you had to unlock in *MC2*: burnouts, two-wheel driving, slipstream turbo, and mid-air control. On the AI side, every computer-controlled driver has its own "brain," so cars should behave quite differently, and a long "elastic band" ensures

that even after a couple of wipeouts, you can get in the mix with the race leaders. The difficulty also dynamically responds up and down to your performance.

The race editor returns, while up to eight players will be able to compete online, and if the host quits, the game moves to another

host – just like *Halo 2*. Next issue, we'll have the full scoop on everything else the online play has up its sleeve.

Midnight Club 3 already has a screaming-fast sense of speed – a 350Z moves like a rocket, while a Murcielago flashes so quickly down the road that it takes every

ounce of concentration you can muster to maintain control. The car models themselves sparkle with pretty highlights and sharp details. When April rolls around, Rockstar's latest should be the new top pick to satisfy your need for speed.

– Paul Curthoys



■ As in previous *Clubs*, cars will take damage in collisions and eventually explode, then re-appear unscathed without delaying the action too much.



Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30

Finding your inner squad leader

PUBLISHER **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER **GEARBOX**
RELEASE DATE **MARCH 2005** | LIVE **YES**

It would take a very refreshing new angle to get us really psyched about a WWII game at this point of oversaturation of the genre, and Gearbox's *Brothers in Arms* is full of fresh angles. And yes, we're very interested.

Having seen a number of the single-player situations, our

question was how *Brothers in Arms'* innovative squad-based gameplay will translate into a good multiplayer experience over Xbox Live. Recently, we got some hands-on time playing multiplayer with the developers, and signs are very good that it will play as intensely online as it will offline.

Instead of following the standard videogame practice of

throwing players into an open arena with flags (no Deathmatch here either), *Brothers in Arms'* multiplayer aims to stay true to the historical accuracy of the single-player game.

Both online and off, you command a squad of up to three other soldiers through a fairly intuitive on-the-fly interface. Since this could become unwieldy in multiplayer, matches are limited to four players, two per side. At any given time, this means you'd have up to 16 players on the field, but only four of them are non-bots.

Each team is divided into assault and suppression teams with one player controlling each. Loadouts for the teams vary between the two, but working them in concert is what's key here. It goes far beyond sending one

team left and one right toward the objective. As in *Full Spectrum Warrior*, suppressing fire is key. We had to plant a bomb on the back of a truck in the middle of a village, while the other side (playing as Germans) had to stop us. Possible strategies are endless, but basic infantry tactics will serve you well as you use cover and support to oust dug-in enemies.

Despite the avalanche of WWII games we've played over the last couple of years, *Brothers in Arms* still has our attention, thanks to its cool gameplay and hardcore historical accuracy. Multiplayer mode is looking like just one more reason to play this game.

— Tom Price



Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

A villain is born

PUBLISHER **LUCASARTS** | DEVELOPER **THE COLLECTIVE**
RELEASE DATE **MAY 9, 2005** | LIVE **NO**

How's this for true-to-the-trilogy lightsaber-swinging? When he wasn't teaching Obi-Wan to whittle his Padawan protégé into ultimate dark lord Darth Vader, *Star Wars* stunt coordinator Nick Gillard spent his time crafting an arsenal of exclusive moves for LucasArts' upcoming *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* – the game. The result: super-fluid sword-fighting fit for the big screen (or so LucasArts swears – as with mostly all things from the fabled galaxy far, far away, the publisher is playing it strictly hands-off until the game hits store shelves this May to conveniently coincide with the hype leading up to the movie's theatrical release).

Following the flick's plot (minus the mushy stuff that leads to the soft, pink, mewling pair of Luke and Leia), *Episode III* puts you in the tunics of both Anakin and Obi-Wan. Glow sticks in hand, each follower of the Force slices and dices druids, low-rent Jedis, and other laser-cannon fodder with unique whirlwinds of saber work. Blaster fire got your balls to the wall? Block it or bat it back at 'em. Barred doors impeding your progress? Slice through them like so much Bantha butter. When all else fails, you can levitate and launch matter with your mind, electrify foes with Force lightning, or better yet, convince 'em that they don't really feel like fighting at all in classic "you do not want to sell me

Have Vehicle, Will Travel

Want a sneak peek at never-before-seen planets and a bundle of potential spoilers before *Revenge of the Sith* opens in theaters? The *Episode III* game arrives one full week before the film. In the meantime, feast your eyes on this first-ever, not-from-the-*Star Wars Holiday Special* scene from the Wookiee homeworld Kashyyyk.

Photo by Derryck Menere



death sticks" fashion. More *Prince of Persia* than typical star chores? What we've been hearing gives us new hope.

Sure, we're skeptical, but so was Han Solo. *Battlefront* fulfilled our biggest blow-this-thing-from-home fantasies and the pair of *Knights of the Old Republic* RPGs proved the draw of the dark side

and the worth of a license that had languished in gaming limbo (or hell, to be specific) for too long. Perhaps we won't want to toss this event-by-event adaptation of the saga's Collective-developed (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Wrath Unleashed*) concluding chapter into a volcano either.

— Shawn Elliott



■ The brief color flashes in the pitcher's hand indicate what type of pitch is coming and are meant to simulate the act of a hitter picking up the ball. We're not sure whether we like it yet, but you can turn it off.



■ The hitting mini-game sports some arcadey elements, but the end result is both fun and helps you get better at hitting.

MVP Baseball 2005

Currently keeping four staffers from getting any work done

PUBLISHER **EA SPORTS** | DEVELOPER **EA CANADA**
RELEASE DATE **MARCH 2005** | XBOX LIVE **YES**

As hardball sim fanatics will recall, *MVP Baseball* was a re-launch of the old *Triple Play* franchise. It showed promise in its 2003 debut, and delivered on its potential last year, reeling in an Editor's Choice award, healthy sales, and many, many collective staff hours.

Because the core formula was nailed last season, the 2005 game is more a *Madden*-esque tweaking of the winning recipe. Most changes are small (but nevertheless important; baseball is, after all, a game of little things), but there is one big addition that addresses a gaping hole left by *MVP 2004*: online play.

Indeed, you will now be able to take your pitching, hitting, and managerial skills on Xbox Live and compete against fellow armchair skippers. Perhaps better still, though, is the online

functionality's other benefit: roster updates. No more manually initiating blockbuster trades. Yay! On the field, many needed tweaks have been made. Sacrifice bunts are now easier, gappers don't automatically equal triples, you can now throw to the bag for double plays or pitchers covering without waiting for the player to get there, bad swings actually look terrible, and you can foul balls off your foot and the catcher.

A few new features sweeten the deal, too. Drag bunting is in. Hitter's Eye replays show exactly how close you were to putting the perfect swing on the ball. Fake throws are new, too. All-new pitching and hitting mini-games serve dual purposes: to make you better at each respective skill and to earn points for unlocking classic teams and stadiums.

By popular demand, a deep Owner's Mode has also been

Be Your Own George Steinbrenner

Yes indeed, *MVP's* finally got an Owner's Mode à la *Madden*, and in it you can satisfy your inner control freak. Build your stadium; upgrade its seating, lighting, scoreboard, and other features; set ticket and concession prices; and a whole lot more. We're disappointed that you can't actually be the architect and tweak every detail of your ballpark (you can only upgrade through a series of preset levels), but it's a start.



introduced (see boxout). Frankly, EA could've gotten away with bolting an online component onto last year's game, and we would've been both impressed and riveted for another season.

But the developers have listened to the fans, and the result is what may very well be the finest Xbox baseball game ever. We'll let you know next issue.

— Ryan McCaffrey



■ Intersect your dots when pitching in order to hit your desired spot.

ESPN MLB 2K5

Baseball without the annoying alternative music

PUBLISHER **SEGA/ESPN VIDEOGAMES** | DEVELOPER **KUSH GAMES**
RELEASE DATE **MARCH 2005** | XBOX LIVE **YES**

After a lackluster 2004 season, development duty on this once-shining baseball series was handed off from longtime creators Blue Shift to veteran *ESPN NHL* studio Kush Games. It's still too early to tell if Sega will reclaim the baseball-game crown with *ESPN MLB 2K5*, but a lot of moves in the off-season and major efforts at improvement are giving it a great shot at a pennant run.

First, the pitcher/batter interface has been rebuilt. A

plus symbol appears with a dot moving across the X-axis when pitching. When the dot intersects with the vertical line, press your pitch button to lock it, and then do the same for the ball on the Y-axis as it moves toward the horizontal line. This is how you hit your spots. Should the pitcher miss badly, however, the hitter can move a cursor to lock on to the pitch. If he's successful, he gets a slow-motion look at the ball out of the pitcher's hand, and then powers up his swing by whaling on the A button. If you pound enough to fill the meter, you then press your power swing (B button), and it's a near-guaranteed homer every time.

Batters can also give themselves this chance by guessing the pitch location before it's thrown.



■ Somehow, the presentation is better than ever.

Base-Running Boon

Possibly our favorite new feature of *ESPN MLB 2K5* so far is the base-running interface. By simply pressing the corresponding direction on the right stick, you can take control of your base runner. You can give generic orders to your hitter (be selective, take, swing away, bunt) while controlling the size of the lead and the motion of your runner. It's cool to actually have to learn to read a pitcher's pickoff move and dive back!



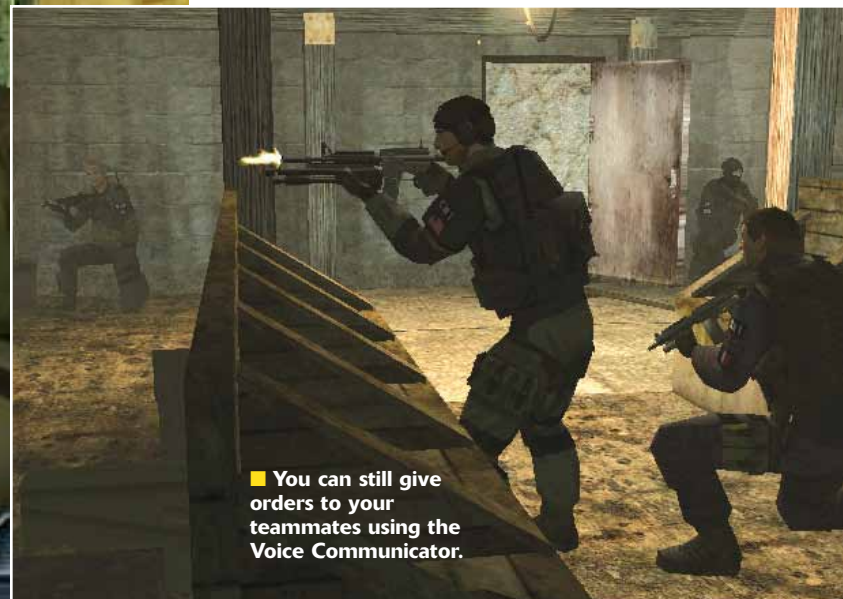
While gameplay is getting most of the attention, presentation is hardly being ignored. Refined normal-mapping gives players excellent detail, while a slick ESPN interface and great commentary by *Sunday Night Baseball* duo Jon

Miller and Joe Morgan give *ESPN MLB 2K5* the whiz-bang appeal it needs in the face of an established competitor. If gameplay follows suit, Sega's baseball offering will surely be a contender again.

— Ryan McCaffrey



■ The new gasmask/visor HUD is a nice touch.



■ You can still give orders to your teammates using the Voice Communicator.

Rainbow Six: Lockdown

Rainbow Six goes metal

PUBLISHER **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER **UBISOFT MONTREAL**
RELEASE DATE **MARCH 2005** | XBOX LIVE **YES**



■ The roster of death-dealers continues to grow longer with each new Rainbow Six outing.

Playing by the old philosophy of “strike while the iron is hot,” Ubisoft is putting the finishing touches on *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* less than 18 months after shipping *Rainbow Six 3*, and less than eight months after delivering the stand-alone expansion pack *Black Arrow*. But given developer Ubisoft Montreal’s track record for quality, along with the fact that each of the previous *Rainbow* titles sold very well and occupied either the first or second spot on the most-played Live-games list, can you really blame them?

We played through the first two missions of the single-player campaign and took a quick tour of *Lockdown*’s most-ballyhooed feature, its Persistent Elite Creation (a.k.a. Career) Mode. To begin, *Rainbow Six* veterans will notice

that you have a lot more toys to play with this go-around. Prior to each mission, you can fully customize your foursome’s weapon loadout, and there are now some fun new tools you can bring along, such as the locked-door-busting hammer.

After the usual pre-mission voiceover briefing you receive from HQ, you’ll get to the gameplay and likely notice a few more tweaks. First, there’s the engine. It’s the same one that powered the previous Xbox *Rainbow Six* titles, but the framerate seems much smoother now. Chalk it up to optimization. Second, the, um, “unique” thumbstick aiming controls – the feel of which bothered many gamers, including this one – have been tweaked, and now feel much more comfortable and more like other Xbox first-person

shooters with tight, rock-solid control schemes.

Furthermore, there’s the focus of the gameplay itself. It’s much faster now with more of an action-movie feel. In the second mission, for instance, *Rainbow* command is expecting a terrorist organization known as the Global Liberation Front to strike at an international World Bank Conference, so you and your three-man team (yes, *Rainbow Six* is still just *four* people) go in disguised as a news crew. When all hell predictably breaks loose at the mission’s onset, you go into the new sniper mode to first pick off on-foot enemies from your position in a helicopter before being dropped off onto the rooftops to carry out your mission. Once you clear a path into the conference for your ground-pounding teammates, you can join them, and the standard run-and-gun portion of the level ensues. Further upping the Hollywood feel during all of this is the licensed nu-metal music that plays over some cutscenes and intense gameplay sequences.

While we’re not yet sure how we feel about the changes to the single-player formula, we’re quite certain that the new online career mode will justify a purchase. Essentially, the multiplayer is pseudo-persistent now because

you create a character (just one per Live account), choose a class (commando, special ops, medic, or engineer), then complete training and play online to upgrade his damage and accuracy statistics, among others. You can also completely customize your avatar’s appearance using initial faces, clothing, and gear, then buy more in the shop as you earn more credits playing on Live.

We’re very curious about both components of *Lockdown*, but all questions should be answered soon as we expect to have a full review in the next issue or two.

– Ryan McCaffrey



■ The Unreal engine continues to power the action.

Evolution of Rainbow Six

■ YEAR: 1998 TITLE: Rainbow Six DEVELOPER: Red Storm PLATFORM: PC	■ YEAR: 2001 TITLE: Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear DEVELOPER: Saffire PLATFORM: PS1
■ YEAR: 1999 TITLE: Rainbow Six: Eagle Watch DEVELOPER: Red Storm PLATFORM: PC	■ YEAR: 2002 TITLE: Rainbow Six: Lone Wolf DEVELOPER: Rebellion PLATFORM: PS1
■ YEAR: 1999 TITLE: Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear DEVELOPER: Red Storm Platform: PC	■ YEAR: 2003 TITLE: Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal PLATFORM: PC
■ YEAR: 1999 TITLE: Rainbow Six DEVELOPER: Saffire PLATFORM: PS1	■ YEAR: 2003 TITLE: Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Milan PLATFORM: PC
■ YEAR: 2000 TITLE: Rogue Spear: Urban Operations DEVELOPER: Red Storm PLATFORM: PC	■ YEAR: 2004 TITLE: Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal PLATFORM: Xbox
■ YEAR: 2000 TITLE: Rainbow Six DEVELOPER: Morning Star Multimedia PLATFORM: Dreamcast	■ YEAR: 2005 TITLE: Rainbow Six: Lockdown DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal PLATFORM: Xbox
■ YEAR: 2000 TITLE: Rogue Spear DEVELOPER: Pipe Dream Interactive PLATFORM: Dreamcast	So after all that, what’s changed since it left Red Storm’s hands in 2001? <i>Rainbow Six</i> is now a fast-paced, multiplayer-centric shooter that’s much more of an action game than a tactical title. Is it for better or for worse? That’s for you to decide.
■ YEAR: 2001 TITLE: Rogue Spear: Black Thorn DEVELOPER: Red Storm PLATFORM: PC	



■ You’ll have new tools to breach doors, including a hammer!

■ In Giant Kill Mode, you can decide whether to be the many or the few, the giant or the small.



Check out the trailer on this month's disc for a taste of some of the more outrageous moves in *Iron Phoenix*.

Iron Phoenix

Get ready to rumble, mystical China style

PUBLISHER **SAMMY** | DEVELOPER **INTERSERV INTERNATIONAL**

RELEASE DATE **APRIL 2005** | XBOX LIVE **YES**



■ Weapons determine your moves, not your character.

Sammy's grand-scale beat 'em up, the upcoming *Iron Phoenix*, is definitely meant to be enjoyed in the company of others, whether they're human or bots, on your couch or across the country over Xbox Live. We're certainly not here to debate this point, but it's always wise to go in prepared. After getting some dedicated time online with the game (and against the game's testers and team members, no less) in a handful of new modes, it's difficult to fully articulate how fun it is to get demoralized at the business end of a sword.

The emphasis lies on using weapons to determine your moves

list, rather than your choice of characters, so learning how to utilize each of the power-ups and specific swords, claws, etc., is essential. Button-mashing will only get you so far – especially when your opponents are like-minded, victory-hungry humans. Though it's difficult to say whether *Iron Phoenix*'s floaty, fast-paced style of gameplay will appeal to every Xbox Live gamer, and it's still unknown how lag or framerate issues will enter into the final version, we can attest that what we did play was fun enough to send us repeatedly scrambling for our moves list.

Here's a brief rundown of the modes we got brutalized in...

– Francesca Reyes

■ **BUST A MOVE:** Each of the nine or so weapons in *Iron Phoenix* packs several different move types depending on terrain and context. For instance, you'll have wall moves as well as air attacks.



Deathmatch/Team Deathmatch

Just in case you missed the Live-enabled demo on last month's Game Disc, *Iron Phoenix* serves up the standard deathmatch variety for online gaming fighters. The twist? Snagging every item you can and using your environment to your advantage. A deathmatch game that isn't an FPS on Xbox is rare, but a non-traditional multiplayer beat-em-up online game is rarer still, especially since Sega's *Spikeout Battle Street* still dangles on the release lists. And *Phoenix*'s reliance on knowing the moves for each weapon makes it much more flexible in terms of changing up your strategies by collecting weapons on the battlefield.

Capable of accommodating up to 16 players across Xbox Live in a single Deathmatch, team or otherwise, it's wise to learn the ins and outs of each map. There will be some maps that can house the full 16 players, while others are more suitable for smaller death scrimmages, like the Summoning Altar with the ominous crucible of blood at its center.

■ Find your niche by sticking with a small selection of weapons, then move on to dominate in Deathmatch!

VIP

Putting a spin on the usual team matches, VIP Mode puts the "i" in "team" by randomly electing a member (or members) of your group as the VIP. The player deemed important enough to claim this title has the power to heal and resurrect fallen teammates – but at a cost. The minute your VIP is defeated, so is your team. This means that you'll be protecting your VIP Secret Service-style, taking out the opposition and targeting their VIP in order to get them before they get you.

On the radar, you'll be able to decipher the location of the VIPs for each team by the "V" icon that appears. This way you're able to keep tabs on the enemy and your possible savior if you're downed in a fight.



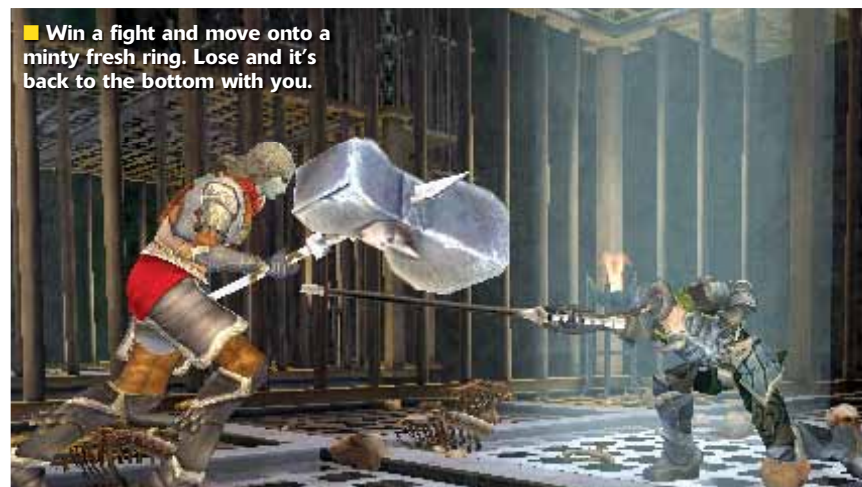
Giant Kill

By far one of the wackier, more original modes available, Giant Kill plays like a virtual David and Goliath pitting all players as peons against a handful of massive, super-powerful players called Giants (we played against two). The point? If you're playing as a Giant, you must take down a variable number of regular players in order to win. As a regular fighter, you and your buddies must take down the Giants. But it won't be easy – the Giants are beefy with strength, power, and constitution, so you'll have to continually hack away at them over the course of plenty of deaths (hack, die, respawn, hack, repeat).

And while the regular players may feel like fodder, if they manage to gang up on a Giant, all the strength in the world won't save it for long. Despite the potentially repetitive survival-mode feel, Giant Kill Mode should lead to some very interesting online matches.



■ Win a fight and move onto a minty fresh ring. Lose and it's back to the bottom with you.



Challenge Ring

Taking a more one-on-one approach, the Challenge Ring works like a series of tiered matches placing you in a string of fights against a rotating stable of players. Starting off in a lobby housing a crowd, you'll be able to initiate a match by joining one other player in a center teleport where you're zipped off to a separate ring. Here your skills (or lack thereof) will determine the victor, and if you win, you're pushed onto a new ring complete with a new challenger. And so it goes until you're defeated and thus booted back down to the main lobby to start the tough process all over again. If you've got a handle on the moves list for your weapons, you'll be able to test your prowess against like-minded fighters across Xbox Live.



■ Best. Milkshake. Ever.



■ Take your ultimate revenge on all those crooked carnival games.

Destroy All Humans!

Resistance is futile – and hilarious

PUBLISHER **THQ** | DEVELOPER **PANDEMIC**
RELEASE DATE **APRIL 2005** | LIVE **TBD**

You've got to respect a game that says what it offers, then delivers. You want to destroy all humans? No problem – walk up to any of the hapless Earthlings in the idyllic 1950s settings of *Destroy All Humans!*, blast 'em with your disintegration ray, and get instant, sizzling satisfaction. Fire away with the Zap-O-Matic until their squishy, feeble little brains literally pop out of their bodies, which is all the better for your DNA harvesting. The alien invasion is on, and you're the alien.

Of course, some aspects of this mission-based action game require a bit more subtlety. Using your colossal mental powers, you can hypnotize humans to do your bidding, or temporarily copy their appearance to walk among them

undetected (if you're careful). Different missions feature different goals, such as destroying G-men, infiltrating the suburbs, torching buildings, and probing the minds (and other orifices) of weak-minded flesh creatures.

Naturally, the game starts out with some good old-fashioned cattle mutilations, a nice test bed for your psychokinetic capabilities. Lift ol' Bessie into the air, then jettison her far across the pasture. Why stop with farm animals? You can also hurl cars, gas tanks, and even those pesky humans. You'll also get the opportunity to blast everything in sight with your flying saucer's death ray, setting buildings ablaze and popping Army tanks like so many military-grade firecrackers.

The preview build we powered through still contained a lot of

Did You Catch That?

Half the fun of *DAH!* is probing the minds of Earthlings. You never know what you'll find, but there's a good chance it will end in a pop-culture punchline. So far we've caught sly riffs on everything from Dr. Kinsey's infamous report to *The Untouchables* to the Village People.



placeholder content, but the final voice-overs sound great (especially considering each actor's tongue is planted so firmly in their cheek), as did a sinister sci-fi soundtrack that could have come straight out of 1957. Unfortunately, the second mission's "find the weakest-minded person for abduction" target became clear early on (the rural beauty-pageant contestant, of course!), but we weren't allowed to kidnap her until we'd

probed several other Earthlings' minds and been specifically told to hypnotize her by the cranky alien overlord. Bah – clearly, our superior intergalactic intellect has outwitted even *Full Spectrum Warrior* developer Pandemic! The character pathfinding is still a bit rocky in places too, but this build is far from final and those problems are totally tunable. Watch the skies this spring.

– Dan Amrich

Reviews

Frosty sightlessness

■ You can control these mechs (called Ogres), but this one's already occupied. Bad news for you!

■ This beautiful multiplayer level is loaded with vehicles and makes a great CTF battleground.

■ Most vehicles in multiplayer can hold two: one driver and one gunner.

■ (Right) You'll often find yourself fighting with many fellow enlistees. And they're even semi-helpful.

Cyborgs are people too

Project: Snowblind

DEVELOPER **CRYSTAL DYNAMICS** | PUBLISHER **EIDOS** | ESRB **T** | WEBSITE WWW.PROJECTSNOWBLIND.COM
MULTIPLAYER **2-16** SYSTEM **LINK OR XBOX LIVE** | EXTRAS **DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT, SCOREBOARDS, CLANS**

What a tough act to follow. In the post-*Halo 2* world, surely all action-game developers will wonder if their game is good enough to avoid being eviscerated by critics and forgotten by consumers. As the first major FPS of the year, *Project: Snowblind* was clearly prepared

for life after Bungie's opus — it's a polished example of a very good, value-packed title.

Developed by Crystal Dynamics (makers of the *Legacy of Kain* series and the new home of Lara Croft's *Tomb Raider* franchise), *Snowblind* tells the mid-21st century tale of Nathan Frost, an unconfident military man who's critically injured in an attack. But in this future, Nathan's not ready for a dirt nap. Rather, he's labeled a "scarecrow" and sent off for biomodding, a highly experimental procedure that employs nanotechnology to

augment the human body's abilities with superhuman powers, such as infravision, cloaking, and more. Not all scarecrows survive the dangerous procedure, but Frost, of course, does, and is instantly transformed into a cocksure one-man army with a half-billion dollars of cutting-edge science fused to his nerves.

If this sounds familiar to you Xbox veterans, there's a good reason. This project began life as a multiplayer-centric, action-oriented spin-off of *Deus Ex*, codenamed *Clan Wars*. Obviously, all official ties were severed with Warren Spector's genre-bending series, but many similarities remain, and that's a good thing.



■ CTF with vehicles and big explosions makes us smile.



Myriad in-engine cutscenes pepper the single-player campaign, where the plot revolves around a crazed world leader bent on detonating gigantic EMP bombs and sending the world back to the Stone Age. The whole shebang clocks in at a disappointingly short five or six hours, and the first hour of the adventure is the finest. You're thrown immediately into the fray, but the developers do a nice job of not overwhelming you, instead subtly saying, "Look, a stationary gun turret. Go man it and shoot some bad guys." Then you'll get your first augmentation: "This is Vision. Use it to see enemies in the dark and through walls." Most of the intermission scenes are in third-person, but Nathan's injury and subsequent transformation from Average Joe into Superman is adeptly chronicled in first-person.

Unfortunately, Frost is a pretty plain guy, from his name to his look right down to his "Who's with me?!" attitude. In fact, he looks remarkably like *Doom 3*'s nameless but equally generic Marine hero. Still, his character weakness doesn't detract from

Diverse Class

Get to know the multiplayer classes

CLASS	WEAPONS	ITEMS	AUGMENTATION
Grunt	Carbine, mine launcher	Gas grenade, flashbang	Ballistic shield
Heavy	Rocket launcher, pistol	Riot wall, gas grenade	Ballistic shield
Scout	Shotgun, mine launcher	Frag grenade, riot wall	Reflex boost
Sniper	Sniper rifle, H.E.R.F.	Frag grenade, flashbang	Cloak
Agent	Rail laser, pistol	Frag grenade, EMP grenade	Vision
Berserker	Flechette, H.E.R.F.	EMP grenade, riot wall	Electric storm

the fun of being in his shoes, and that's the bottom line. Part of that comes from the weapons. An impressive arsenal includes a silenced pistol, mine launcher, and railgun, plus the usual shotgun, assault rifle, and rocket launcher. There's even an icepick that can be used to open keypad-locked doors and take control of bots.

Yes, bots: a big reason why *Snowblind* rises above your average shooter. You'll run into a number of mechanical menaces during your quest, from small combat bots to huge mech-like monstrosities. In addition to possessing them with your icepick, you can also hop in unoccupied versions, and there are a couple of cars you can drive, too.

To top off the single-player variety, a few excellent stealth sequences open up when you acquire your cloaking augmentation. Triggering your invisibility and then sneaking up behind an enemy and punching him in the back of the head is quite satisfying.

Ultimately, though, there aren't quite enough of the cool vehicle and stealth parts, but that's not to detract from the quality of what is there. The action is solid (save for periodic bad AI that stands around), the stealth

is fun, and the augmentations and vehicles add some spice to the overall flavor.

Having read all about the campaign, you'd think that the vehicles, biomods, and weapons should make for a cool multiplayer game, right?



■ Stationary gun turrets are a big part of base defense.



■ You could've activated your cloaking biomod here and saved some trouble.

■ You can throw down these neat temporary energy shields, called riot walls, to give you cover.



■ Run, Frost, run!

And after dropping \$50 and having the solo affair end in less than six hours, you'd probably even demand it. Thankfully, *Snowblind* delivers. Rather than simply supply a deathmatch game with biomods, Crystal Dynamics has thrown everything and the kitchen sink into the System Link and Live part of the experience.

Out of the box, you get deathmatch, team deathmatch, capture the flag (plus a fast variant), tactical assault (think domination from *UC* or *Wolfenstein*), hunter (like *Halo 2*'s ninjanaut), and demolition (and its quick variant, both of which are like *Counter-Strike*'s demolition mode). All of these are bolstered by the fact that the multiplayer is broken down into player classes, whereby each class has a different weapon set, item stash, and augmentation list (see boxout on pg. 73). It lacks the tight feel and brilliant polish of the Xbox's current multiplayer king, *Halo 2*, but it's a sweet overall package.

As far as presentation goes, there's plenty to like: The proprietary engine won't drop many jaws, but the framerate stays high and smooth, and the visual effects,

such as the riot wall power-up and the EMP's snowblind effect, are impactful and effective. The latter in particular gives you a fuzzed-out, where's-the-cable-TV look that slowly fades back to normal view as it wears off – a snazzy effect.

The level design, too, is excellent in both its look and variety. You'll move from a *Deus Ex*-looking military base to a war-torn downtown right out of *Full Spectrum Warrior*, and it all looks great. The nine included multiplayer maps are also equally slick looking and playing, with the highlight being a brilliant

CTF-worthy multi-layered parking structure (with drivable tanks!) called Kowloon Garage. Clan support is a tasty cherry on top.

When you get right down to it, *Project: Snowblind* is a jack-of-all-trades first-person shooter. It does everything very well, but none of its ingredients leave a truly lasting impression. Those who won't play multiplayer might feel a bit cheated by the six-hour solo quest, but everyone else should have plenty of fun biomodding their way to victory against AI opponents or fellow Xbox gamers.

– Ryan McCaffrey



■ The weapon variety is impressive in the game, and makes for an especially interesting multiplayer mode.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Clean, with good effects and a smooth framerate, but nothing dazzling.

Immersion
Frequent cutscenes and action are enough to hold your interest in single-player, and multiplayer is packed with options.

Sound
Decent voice acting and solid sound effects, save for a lack of precision from speaking characters in surround sound.

Design
A six-hour campaign is short even by today's standards, but multiplayer is well-thought-out and, better still, well-executed.

(+) Good.
(-) Bad.
(?) Perplexing
+ Cool gadgets and abilities.
+ Excellent multiplayer mode.
- Short single-player mode.
- Occasional AI gaffes.
? Half a billion for biomods? What's that in the future, like \$50 in 2005 money?

Official Xbox Magazine verdict

8.4

10.0

■ The new haymaker crosses and uppercuts land with the impact of an elephant jumping off a skyscraper.

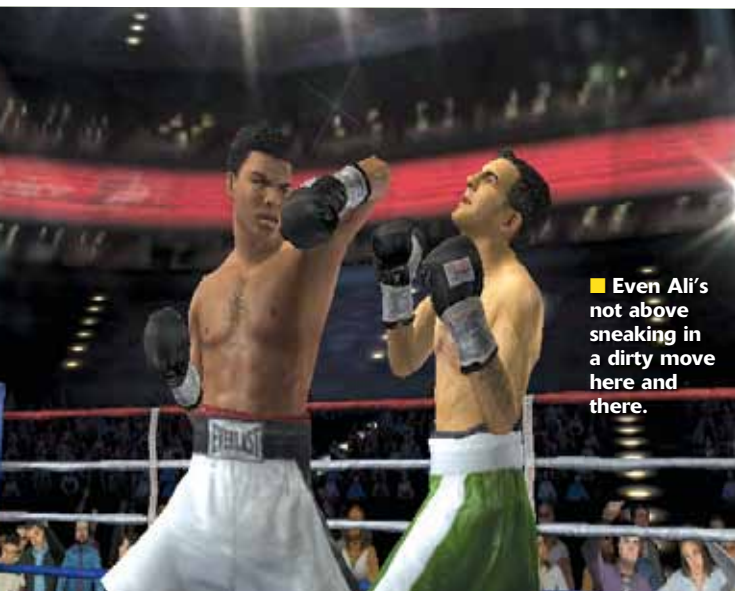
ON THE
GAME
DISC
video

Fire up this month's disc for a guided tour of *Fight Night* by EA Producer Kudo Tsunoda.

The astronaut of boxing – in a world of its own

Fight Night Round 2

DEVELOPER **EA CHICAGO** | PUBLISHER **EA SPORTS** | ESRB **T** | WEBSITE WWW.EASPORTS.COM/GAMES/FIGHTNIGHTRound2/HOME.JSP
MULTIPLAYER **2 ON SAME SCREEN OR XBOX LIVE** | EXTRAS **480P, DOLBY 5.1**



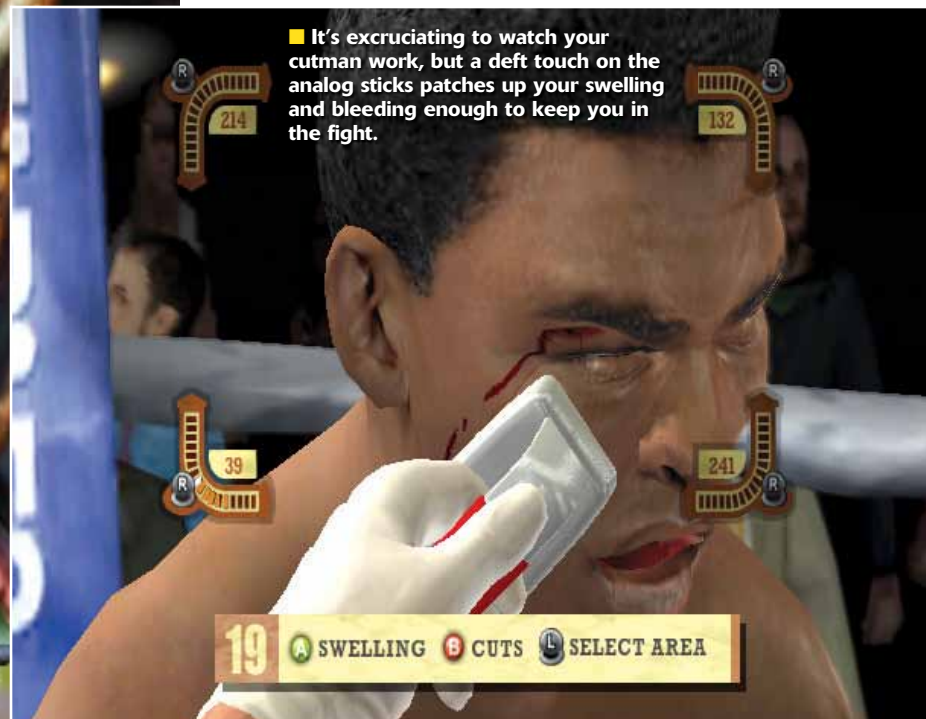
■ Even Ali's not above sneaking in a dirty move here and there.

Thanks to *Fight Night*, jabbing fiercely at button combos just doesn't feel like boxing anymore. As the bell dings for this second round, its innovative thumbstick-based control floats and stings even more sweetly, while some finely crafted new features supply all the motivation you need to climb back into the ring.

Probably the most striking improvement in *Fight Night Round 2* comes when you first eyeball the new graphics – and it's not like the first game got smacked with the ugly stick. Although they're a bit shiny in that über-presentation EA way, the boxers ripple with animated musculature

and move with a lightning smoothness, while the brutal injuries and blood sprays make you sincerely regret every opening you leave for your opponent.

Twirling the thumbsticks to uncork your flurry of fists feels even more organic and responsive than it did in the first *Fight Night*, especially since you can now move your boxer while punching, so good footwork pays off. You can also now clinch when you're in desperate need of rest (or affection), or on the flip side, pound your foe with a few more punches when they're on their way down to the canvas. Great stuff, but the new haymakers rule the roost. You have to wind them up, so you're vulnerable and a



■ It's excruciating to watch your cutman work, but a deft touch on the analog sticks patches up your swelling and bleeding enough to keep you in the fight.

19 A SWELLING B CUTS L SELECT AREA

smart opponent can quickly spot what you're up to, but if you connect, the devastating impact smears your opponent's face sideways and takes a hefty chunk out of his health.

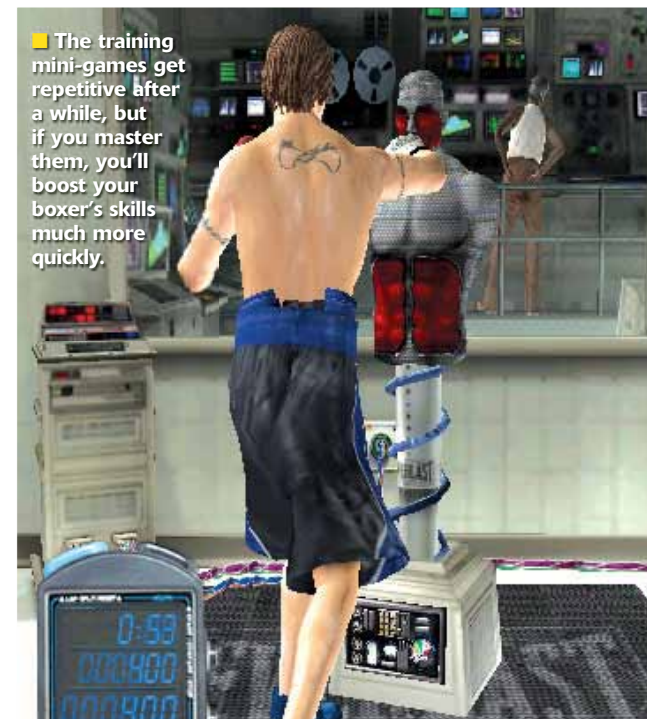
The thumbsticks are also smartly deployed in the new player creator and cutman mini-game. Instead of squinting at meters when building your boxer from scratch, you simply stretch or shrink their features with the sticks. Better yet, you also use them in your corner between rounds, taking on the role of cutman and working feverishly to reduce

swelling and stop bleeding – it's great fun and strategically vital.

Career Mode delivers some nice refinements, but after a while, you'll wish it had a few more layers to peel away. You now start as an amateur, and can go pro at any time. It's intended as a safe haven for practice, but on the default difficulty, any remotely experienced gamer won't face an even slightly challenging bout until they've climbed to about 30th in the pro rankings (which are 50 boxers deep). You still cash in your winnings for gear, entourage, and entrance effects, but you



■ Wind up a haymaker, hold it in reserve until an opponent drops his guard, and hammer it home.



■ The training mini-games get repetitive after a while, but if you master them, you'll boost your boxer's skills much more quickly.

never really feel like you must spend any money to succeed.

Training, though, is vital, and your physique noticeably changes as you improve – a nice touch. Boxer skills are also capped depending on weight class, so heavyweights won't be as quick as welterweights, though you can go up and down in weight class over the course of your career. By the very nature of the sport, a boxing career won't have as much going on as, say, *Madden's* insanely deep Owner Mode, but in *Round 2*, your interest will probably peter out long before you decide to retire your boxer.

Fortunately, that's where online play comes in as you can battle your way up the rankings of the various weight classes toward the title belt. A new Hard Hits match type (the round ends when someone's knocked down, and you fight until KO time) and a more modern boxer roster (De La Hoya's out, Merriweather's in, etc.) also add some beef. Even without a really deep Career Mode, *Round 2* improves so substantially on every other level that you won't want to pass up on a ringside seat to this impressive sequel.

– Paul Curthoys

THE VERDICT

Graphics

For an instant, you might consider checking for a "2" after the Xbox logo on your console. These boxers look astonishingly good...until you beat their faces to a pulp. Even muscles ripple as you bob, weave, and punch.

Immersion

Holding a controller is an inherently artificial barrier, but *Fight Night* breaks it down better than any other game with its ingenious use of the thumbsticks, which respond even more smoothly this year.

Sound

The new ESPN commentator Joe Tessitore is a great improvement in the tone of the bouts, but often, he's off the mark or repetitive. Thunderous sound effects help make amends as big punches land like sledgehammers.

Design

Loads of great new stuff – cutman gameplay, new moves and graphics, online play – make for an excellent sequel. The Career Mode needs more depth, though.

(+) Good.

(-) Bad.

(?) Perplexing

- + Refined and upgraded the already-sharp controls and graphics.
- + Haymakers are a blast and strategically useful.
- + Online is here at last!
- Career Mode needs more oomph.
- Replays and ring entrances take forever and are too melodramatic.
- ? Hiring "ring girls" gives you the ability to get up from more knockouts.

Official Xbox
Magazine
verdict

9.0
10.0

Do robots dream of 3D sheep?

Scrapland

DEVELOPER **MERCURY STEAM ENTERTAINMENT** | PUBLISHER **ENLIGHT** | MULTIPLAYER **1-4 IN HEAD-TO-HEAD OFFLINE**
WEBSITE **WWW.SCRAPLAND.COM** | EXTRAS **NONE** | ESRB **TEEN**



■ His name is D-Tritus, a play on detritus, or discarded garbage...or, ahem, scrap. Ahhh!



■ Building and customizing your ships is about the most fun you'll have in *Scrapland*.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
The goofy art design works well with the setting, although the interior areas are rather generic. The exterior areas, though, look fantastic and are packed with an impressive amount of detail.

Immersion
There are a few nice story twists, but the repetitive nature of the gameplay will make your eyes glaze over and the drool trickle from your mouth.

Sound
You can't walk more than two feet without being accosted by bad voice acting, and the music is often totally inappropriate for the game's setting. The combat SFX kick ass, though.

Design
Buried somewhere behind the generic gameplay is a great game screaming to be set free. Alas, no amount of digging is going to emancipate it.

(+) Good,
(-) Bad,
(?) Perplexing
+ Jumping from one robot to the next is cool.
+ Designing and building your ships is a lot of fun, and the weapons pack an explosive punch.
- You do the same tasks over and over and over and over.
- What's with all the human-hating?
- It's generally a bad sign when you can think of ways to improve a game while you play it.
? Who is this fella American McGee?

Official Xbox
Magazine
Verdict
6.3
10.0

On the robot-inhabited asteroid of Chimera, someone is murdering high-ranking officials and erasing their files from the Great Database, thus ensuring that the slaughtered robots stay dead. Only one robot can solve this mystery, a strapping heap of metal and bolts named D-Tritus, and along the way he has to battle mercenaries, kill other robots, and generally look handsome. And best of all, he can take the form of any other robot in the game and gain its abilities.

Sounds like a fairly original and engaging premise (a sense backed by auteur American McGee loaning his moniker to it), but by and large, *Scrapland* is

something of a disappointment. The open-ended gameplay is divided into two sections: specific buildings within Chimera, where you can walk around and speak to other bots, and the exterior areas. The latter is where the game's real fun lies as you zip across massive skylines and slug it out with missiles, machine guns, and robotic powers against mercenaries, cops, and anyone else who crosses your path.

Unfortunately, the mission design never fully realizes the inherent coolness of the game's environments. For example, to gain the assistance of other robots, you must carry out certain tasks – like photographing ship plans or killing a certain type of

robot – but you're spoon-fed the same basic few objectives. And the combat always devolves into cornering an enemy and blasting them until they explode.

Scrapland's saving grace is the ability to design and build your own spaceships. As you discover new parts, you can mix and match them and create vehicles designed for a specific purpose, like racing or laying the smack down. It's great fun in a game that's otherwise severely lacking in that department.

The entire time I was playing, I kept thinking how this cool premise should have made for a better game. Alas, it never realizes its potential.

– William Harms

Graduating from the old school

Tork: Prehistoric Punk

DEVELOPER **TIWAK** | PUBLISHER **UBISOFT** | MULTIPLAYER **NO** | ESRB **E**
EXTRAS **XBOX EXCLUSIVE** | WEBSITE **WWW.UBISOFT.COM**

In a gaming climate overstuffed with “character action” titles that have rendered the old-school term “platformer” totally meaningless, *Tork* admirably attempts to capture some of that magic of yester-system romps that focused on the simpler pleasures of jumping and destroying, rather than the modern chore of hunting down 100 of each collectible.

As a caveman-era hero suffering the age-old plight of having to save his father/princess/insert-endangered-chump-here, you're sent through a series of hub-connected levels dressed up with a garden variety of enemies and rewards. Thankfully, *Tork* keeps it simple by not overwhelming you with collectibles. Different items in each level will fall into one of three categories: Points, transformation tablet pieces, and energy cores.

Points come from gathering up fruit and bashing enemies. These are tallied at the end of the level to boost a meter that unlocks bonus levels. The transformation tablet pieces and energy cores introduce *Tork's* ability to morph into a specific creature once you've powered up by taking out enemies. Once you transform, you're nearly invincible and some areas are only accessible in your creature form.

Truth be told, this is all standard stuff – *Tork* goes so far as to include the cliché geological cross-samplings from the 16-bit era with a snow world and a lava



■ We don't advocate killing herbivores.

■ Bet you didn't see this coming – *Tork* gets to *time travel* through three ages! Hence, robots.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Remarkably sharp and highly polished for a platformer with a multiplatform feel – just check out those details and textures!

Immersion
How immersive can thwacking pterodactyls as a time-traveling seven-year-old with a pair of balls on a string really be?

Sound
Neither here nor there – we would say it was pleasant if we could remember anything in the least about it.

Design
It sticks strictly to the platformer rulebook, but manages to feel and play with incredible solidity.

(+) Good,
(-) Bad,
(?) Perplexing
+ Remarkably tight handling and playing make it a really well-done current-generation platformer despite its overly “standard” approach.
+ Plenty of (non-annoying) collectibles and mini-games.
- Backtracking in a level renders the quasi-manual camera unusable.
- Was the “Prehistoric Punk” subtitle really necessary?
? A prehistoric Yeti? An armored armadillo? At least a caveman is somewhat feasible, but what about the rest?

Official Xbox
Magazine
Verdict
7.6
10.0

world making their appearances, among others. But as any gamer will tell you, it's not necessarily about the innovative pathways a title forges, but in how it handles – and *Tork* handles the curves smoothly.

With a rich and colorful visual sense, *Tork's* gameplay is nearly as polished as its graphics. In everything from double jumps to the transformation attacks to learning the function behind every breakable totem mask, *Tork* packs its world with detail, offering up a fairly seamless experience from regular levels to boss fights.

■ Yetis may not actually exist, but if they did, they would be very powerful.

Tork certainly sticks too closely to the genre rulebook and plays it too safe. And although it's marketed at younger gamers, the sophistication in some boss fights might frustrate them even beyond a camera that doesn't easily allow for backtracking. But none of this should deter determined genre fans – *Tork* honors its roots admirably well.

– Francesca Reyes



The Need to Feed

If *Tork* is prehistoric, then his older spiritual cousin, *Bonk*, from NEC's much-beloved TurboGrafx-16 series, is positively ancient. Don't mistake one for the other, though – *Bonk* was all about growing seven feet high after feasting on multiple meats, while *Tork* is only for vegans with his strict diet of fruits.

■ **UBI-TURN:** Tiwak is made up of ex-Ubisoft employees whose *Tork* was to be published by Microsoft, but the developer was eventually bought by Ubisoft. Oh, the humanity.

■ **SEEDS OF THE MATRIX:** Here are our three principles of robotics: They're our slaves; they'll do as they're told; and there's nothing they can do about it. What could possibly go wrong?

Capcom creates the ultimate fighting mash-up

Street Fighter Anniversary Collection

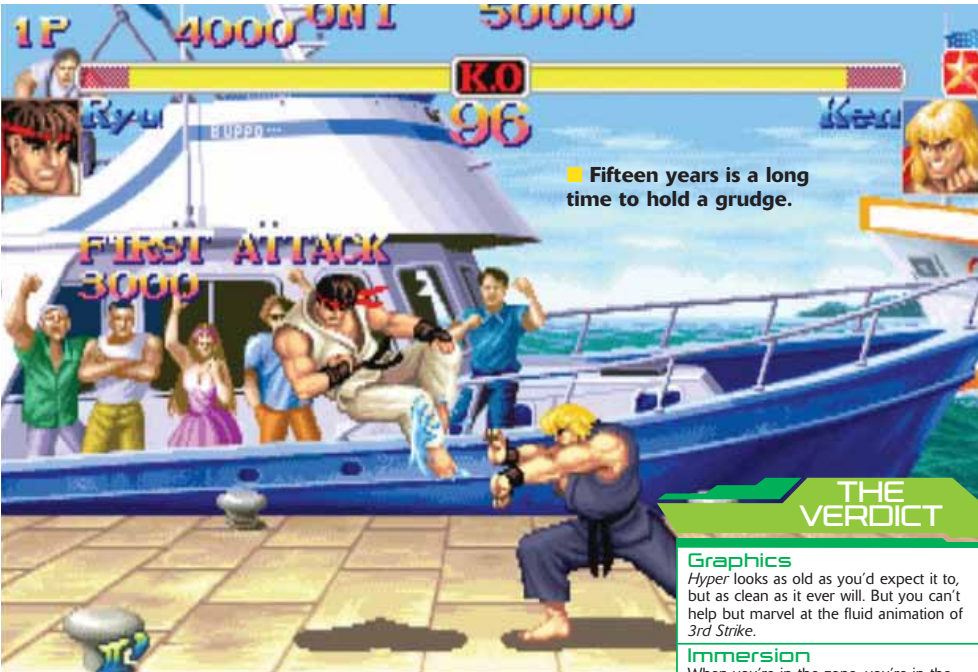
DEVELOPER **CAPCOM** | PUBLISHER **CAPCOM** | MULTIPLAYER **1-2 VIA SAME SCREEN OR XBOX LIVE**
WEBSITE **WWW.CAPCOM.COM/SFAC/** | EXTRAS **STREET FIGHTER II: THE ANIMATED MOVIE INCLUDED ON GAME DISC** | ESRB **TEEN**

If you thought all the *Street Fighter* games were the same, you're finally right. To celebrate the 15th anniversary of the franchise, Capcom has created the ultimate package that not only collects the best and most important entries of the series, but blends them to create something unique...and Xbox Live-compatible. That makes *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* not only definitive but also indispensable.

Capcom took five flavors of *Street Fighter II* (the original *World Warrior*, *Champion Edition*, *Hyper Fighting*, *Super SF II*, and *Super SF II Turbo*) and mashed them together into one big remix, now called *Hyper Street Fighter II*. Each game featured small but important tweaks to characters' attacks and abilities, so Chun-Li from the original game doesn't have the same moves as the one from *Hyper Fighting*. Could M. Bison from *SF II CE* beat Fei Long from *SSF II*? Find out – and find out if you still have your skills from all those years ago. It's more than just nostalgia; it's legitimately a fun time.



A whirlwind of amazing animation, *3rd Strike* is worth the purchase price alone.



Fifteen years is a long time to hold a grudge.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Hyper looks as old as you'd expect it to, but as clean as it ever will. But you can't help but marvel at the fluid animation of *3rd Strike*.

Immersion
When you're in the zone, you're in the zone. These games move at such a fast pace (just crank *Hyper* to "Turbo 2" speed) that you don't dare look away. And you won't want to.

Sound
Dated or not, all the original sounds have been accurately reproduced. *Hyper's* music is instantly recognizable, while *3rd's* soundtrack veers between lounge jazz and hip-hop.

Design
Fans couldn't have built this dream match better themselves. The five-in-one *Hyper SF II* is brilliant, and *3rd Strike* finally gives *SF* fans a reason to retire their Dreamcast.

(+) Good, (-) Bad, (?) Perplexing
+ *SFIII: 3rd Strike* is the greatest fighting game you've never played.
+ *Hyper SF II* offers the best of all *SF* worlds.
+ All this for just \$30!
- Still no way to report lame-ass droppers in Live matches.
? The first game in this 15-year-anniversary collection came in out in 1991. You do the math.

Official Xbox Magazine verdict **8.9** 10.0

– Dan Amrich

Your first chance to see the soccer successor to FIFA

Winning Eleven 8

DEVELOPER **KONAMI** | PUBLISHER **KONAMI** | MULTIPLAYER **1-4 OFFLINE**
WEBSITE **WWW.KONAMI.COM** | EXTRAS **DOLBY** | ESRB **E**

Let's take a moment to get these names and numbers straight. Though on its eighth iteration overall, this is the *Winning Eleven* soccer franchise's first appearance on Xbox. In Europe, it's known as *Pro Evolution Soccer*, and this one equates to version four over there (*PES 4* = *WE 8*). Clear? Well, don't worry – all you really need to know is that this is the soccer sim that gives EA Sports' long-running *FIFA* series a real challenge.

What Konami's game lacks in official licenses (it has the real team names of only three European leagues – the Dutch, Spanish, and Italian), it more than makes up for in gameplay features, feel, and playability. If most team names are fabricated, the players themselves are all accurate. The likenesses are incredibly realistic for the most part, and even particular player moves have been stylized, so you can tell it's Posh Spice's husband, David Beckham, taking a free kick by his animations.

On the field, *WE8* is polished, but lacks the broadcast-style presentation you'll see in *FIFA*. With the controller in your hand, the players, the moves, and the



Use the Y button to send through balls to attackers for the best chance to create good goal-scoring opportunities – and then just tap the shoot button to keep the ball low.



The right analog stick is used to perform advanced skips and dukes to help you get past close defenders.

THE VERDICT

Graphics
Serviceable with tight, detailed animations. Most famous players are recognizable (if you know what Zinedine Zidane looks like, that is...).

Immersion
Setting detailed formations, changing strategies, and researching new player personnel make the Master League a deep and incredibly involving mode.

Sound
The commentary – from well-known British pundits – is generally sound, but a few obvious gaffes in reporting what's happening sometimes upset the immersion factor.

Design
Enough options in the leagues and cup tournaments to keep a single player busy, and it'll take months of practice to be proficient and successful on the highest difficulty levels.

(+) Good, (-) Bad, (?) Perplexing
+ Plays as good a game of soccer as you can find.
+ Players look realistic, even if the team names aren't.
+ Saving goals to the hard drive lets you show off the best moments to buddies.
- With *FIFA* on Live, no online is a clear downside.
? What happens in three years? *Winning Eleven 11*?

Official Xbox Magazine verdict **8.3** 10.0

Other factors, like the height of the ball and whether it's rising or dropping as you press to pass or shoot, have an impact. This incredible attention to details makes every match play out uniquely (just like the real thing), but spending time on the training ground will pay off when you get to your competitive matches. In competition, the Master League is the big kahuna, letting you control spending, oversee training, and add experience points to stars so they improve. In cup tournaments, you can play as any of the 136 club teams or the 57 international teams in your own makeshift (unlicensed) World Cup. Unfortunately, you'll need to play against buddies on the same Xbox as there's no online component – a negative if you expect something like *FIFA's* interactive tournaments. With realistic-looking players, a full suite of edit options to let you tailor names to your liking, and core on-field action that plays just so smooth, *Winning Eleven 8* is the way to go if offline soccer action is all you crave.

– Rob Smith

GO TEAM: Rob's team, Sheffield United, isn't good enough to get included even with a fake name. One day, though, the mighty Blades will rise. Really. They will. Up the Blades.

\$454,326

Review

The dream life

■ You can get visitors to follow you anywhere on the grounds, and then interact with different objects, from feeding a parrot to hopping in the hot tub.

CAUTION

Mature-themed content. If you're likely to be offended by *Playboy*-related material, skip these pages.

Experience the life of the greatest living American!

Playboy: The Mansion

DEVELOPER **CYBERLORE** PUBLISHER **GROOVE/ARUSH** ESRB **M** WEBSITE **WWW.ARUSHGAMES.COM**
MULTIPLAYER **NONE** EXTRAS **LIVE AWARE, BOOBIES**

It's a matter of some considerable professional dismay that I didn't get a call from Hugh Hefner when the top editorial position on

the legendary men's monthly became available in recent years. Guess I'll have to console myself by building my own virtual *Playboy* empire, schmoozing stars, wooing stunning girlfriends,

photographing models, and assigning articles to bring in the bucks that will keep the staff and girls living the high life.

That's the core premise of this fun *Sims*-alike with boobies. And the *Sims* similarity is not just in passing. It looks like the *Sims*, it plays like the *Sims*, and it sounds like the *Sims*; it just doesn't have all the inanity of everyman's life that's so much a part of the *Sims*. In *Playboy: The Mansion*, you're living the life of Hugh Hefner, plotting the six elements you need to make up a magazine every month. You're partying like it's 1999 every night of the week (if you can afford it) in order to build fame. You're kitting out your mansion with the expected

accoutrements of pleasure – a hot tub, grotto, massive stereo and DJ station, plasma TV, fine furnishings, and even a zoo!

You can follow a dozen missions that introduce the core gameplay mechanics, or just play freeform. To produce a magazine – your major source of income – you need to hire a photographer and writer (and buy them a desk), hire a Playmate to pose, and schmooze a celebrity to appear on the cover. Controlling all these functions is pretty simple using the D-pad to access the magazine-creation page, your own profile (that lets you change outfits to suit your mood or party attire), the mansion-furnishing screen, and your staff roster.

■ Get your groove on to the tunes – you can pick the music at the stereo, ranging from jazz to rock to hip hop.

Your chief of staff will offer encouragement for good work. You can choose the wardrobe for your model (various colors and types of bikini or lingerie with a topless option available for each), and pick where you want them to pose. Now, playing dress up (or dress down) with a polygonal playmate is, well, kinda weird. And aside from your own personal taste, it's not immediately clear what makes for a good shoot. If I managed to snap one of my eight available shots when she winked, was that good or bad?

When the issue is printed, you'll get a sales report and cash income. Those funds can then be used to throw lavish parties, and your coordinator offers to pick the right guests for you. The relationship-building aspect – where you're balancing interests and personalities, schmoozing and flirting – is the most time-intensive element. And after a few missions, I was starting to get bored by the friendly handshakes, casual talk, business talk, and joke telling. Even interacting with the Playmates or other women – where I could flirt, hug, kiss, make out, and even have sex on the couch, complete with vibrating controller (I literally dropped the controller in shock the first time it happened) – first requires a long process of getting to know these people. Then I realized I'd merrily

been at play for about four hours and hadn't noticed. That element of *Sims*-like one-more-minute gameplay kicked in, and I was, admittedly, enjoying myself!

But the life of Hef is not all glamour. When two girlfriends started bickering, I had to try to find out what's wrong, then get the aggravated parties together for a "sort it out" meeting, and it all felt too chore-like. And in my first game, I had to restart at a previous save game after going into negative money and not having enough to print the magazine, so I couldn't progress. That's a significant design flaw that's just frustrating.

Still, the game tracks a vast number of stats, so it's easy to get sucked into the empire-building. If, of course, you're not completely weirded out by the outfit-picking and home-decorating. With

real-world celebrities popping in to say hi (from Jose Canseco to Carmen Electra), there's a ton of gameplay to dig out here.

Clearly, you need an open mind to the pixelated nudity. *Playboy* magazine subscribers will do fine. Many folks in the red states...probably not so much. And despite quirky animations and some long-drawn-out relationship-building, I found myself quite enthralled with the magazine-publishing gameplay. Give it a go if you want to get a virtual taste of the life and times of an American legend. Just please, keep both hands on the controller.

– Rob Smith

Review

Be the Hef

Facts I Learned While Playing *Playboy: The Mansion*

- 40% of Playmates are blonde.
- The average measurements of a Playmate are 35-24-35.
- The biggest-selling issue of *Playboy* was November 1972, which sold over 7.1 million copies.
- Hef's middle name is Marston. It's also the name of his son.
- Since 1970, *Playboy* has been available in the Library of Congress in Braille... the articles, that is.



THE VERDICT

Graphics

Very basic textures, but plenty of bodies, outfits, and household appliances let you spruce up the mansion pretty thoroughly.

Immersion

Always plenty to do, whether it's mission-focused, like organizing the six elements of the magazine, or just hitting on the latest celebrity hottie. Time can pass by very quickly.

Sound

Some licensed but unimpressive music, and the *Sim*-glish-like voices make Hef sound like Jabba the Hutt.

Design

Hats off to Will Wright at Maxis for the original idea. But kudos to the wiz that thought of applying this motif to living the life of the man who every other man would like to be, even for just one day. (Yes, that's every man. If you disagree, you're lying!)

(+) Good.

(-) Bad.

(?) Perplexing

- + Completing all the missions is 30+ hours of gameplay.
- + Magazine-publishing sim is a new idea.
- If anyone's watching you play, playing dress up with the models can start to get...uncomfortable.
- Open-ended format has caused some potential unbalances that forced going back to previous save game.
- ? A trampoline costs \$420,000...?

Official Xbox Magazine verdict

7.6
10.0

■ Guess what?!

Follow the evidence...straight down the toilet

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation

PUBLISHER **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER **369 INTERACTIVE** | EXTRAS **UNLOCKABLE CONCEPT/STORYBOARD ART**
ESRB **M** | WEBSITE **WWW.UBI.COM** | MULTIPLAYER **NONE**

The Xbox version of *CSI* is actually a sloppy shovelware combo of the two budget-priced *CSI* PC games

already on store shelves. Unfortunately they're both un compelling point-and-click adventures featuring rotating, explorable 360-degree crime

scenes. Never before has the phrase "seamy tales of crime" been more appropriate; you can sometimes see the ugly junctions where these panoramas begin and end.

Blurry visuals make reading on-screen evidence a chore; even the grisly flashback reconstructions – the show's visual trademark – look overcompressed. Poor character models offer jittery animations and barely recognizable likenesses.

And that's to say nothing of the gameplay itself. A clunky interface is your gateway to placeholder text, graphical glitches, and other telltale signs of simply not giving a crap. Three skill settings basically increase the level of hassle and

detail management you must endure, and while there are a few interesting twists, the 10 solved-in-half-an-hour cases are nowhere near as satisfyingly deep as the ones on the show.

Some trademark dry humor and bad puns sneak through in the dialogue, helped by decent voice acting from the original TV cast. But those mark *CSI*'s only redeeming qualities, and this lazy TV tie-in still stinks. Case closed.

- Dan Amrich

THE VERDICT

Official Xbox Magazine verdict

2.2

10.0



Could this \$20 investment make or save you real poker cash?

World Championship Poker

DEVELOPER **CORESOF** | PUBLISHER **CRAVE ENTERTAINMENT** | ESRB **E** | EXTRAS **480P, ONLINE SCOREBOARD**
MULTIPLAYER **1-6 ON XBOX LIVE** | WEBSITE **WWW.CRAVEGAMES.COM**

Once the province of smoke-filled card rooms, poker's TV-programming binge has turned the game into an overnight national obsession.

World Championship Poker applies a serviceable poker engine to 12 poker variants, including the usual five-card draw, seven-card stud, Omaha, and Texas Hold 'Em. In single-player mode you create your avatar (with the flexibility to produce some truly hideous visages) and take part in low-limit tournaments, sit 'n' go games, or open tables. It's plenty to give you a good taste for the variants, and the core engine moves fairly quickly through your opponents' decisions.

Tells and other subtleties of real poker are pretty much absent. Some AI players will be aggressive with low pairs, others will slow-play strong hands. You observe,

you learn, you play your own cards, and try to win as many fake dollars as possible.

But this virtual winning against AI doesn't hold tons of appeal.

Taking your talents onto Xbox Live is the real key. OptiMatch lets you find game types and buy-in limits to suit your own bankroll. A few more user-friendly filter options to navigate the many Live games would certainly help, as would more subtlety in the AI game. But for \$20, if you choose to care enough about winning fake cash, you'll get plenty of practice both offline and online to hone your skills.

- Rob Smith

THE VERDICT

Official Xbox Magazine verdict

7.3

10.0



Review Roundup

We love games. You love games. But your love for games shouldn't result in blindness. Behold the beauty of our Review Roundup in its two-page glory!

Game/Publisher	Score
2002 FIFA World Cup EA	8.3
4X4 EVO 2 Take Two	5.5
Aggressive Inline Acclaim	9.1
AirForce Delta Storm Konami	7.1
Alias Acclaim	6.5
Aliens vs. Predator: Extinction EA	6.0
All-Star Baseball 2003 Acclaim	6.2
All-Star Baseball 2004 Acclaim	7.7
All-Star Baseball 2005 Acclaim	7.2
Alter Echo THQ	7.5
Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding Microsoft	8.4
Amped 2 Microsoft	8.7
Antz Extreme Racing Empire Interactive	3.2
Apex Atari	8.9
Aquaman TDK	4.1
Arctic Thunder Midway	5.9
Armed & Dangerous LucasArts	9.0
Arx Fatalis Dreamcatcher	6.5
Atari Anthology Atari	7.3
ATV Quad Power Racing 2 Acclaim	6.9
Auto Modellista Capcom	5.5
Azurik: Rise of Parathia Microsoft	3.7
Backyard Wrestling Eidos	5.0
Backyard Wrestling 2 Eidos	4.3
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown Crave Entertainment	1.0
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance Vivendi	8.8
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II Vivendi	7.9
Barbarian Titus	7.0
Batman: Dark Tomorrow Kemco	3.5
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu Ubisoft	6.1
Batman Vengeance Ubisoft	4.6
Battle Engine Aquila Infogrames	8.3
Battlestar Galactica Vivendi	7.0
Beyond Good & Evil Ubisoft	9.0
Big Mutha Truckers Empire	7.4
Bionicle EA	5.5
Black Stone Xicat	5.6
Blade II Activision	6.0
Blinx: The Time Sweeper Microsoft	7.4
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space Microsoft	7.6
Blood Wake Microsoft	7.4
BloodRayne Majesco	6.8
BloodRayne 2 Majesco	7.2
Bloody Roar Extreme Konami	8.3
Blowout: Military Fighting Unit Majesco	3.0
BMX XXX Acclaim	7.4
Breakdown Namco	8.5
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon The Adventure Company	8.0
Bruce Lee: Quest of the Dragon Universal	3.0
Brute Force Microsoft	8.0
Buffy the Vampire Slayer EA	9.0
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds Vivendi Universal	8.8
Burnout Acclaim	8.0
Burnout 2: Point of Impact-Dir. Cut Acclaim	9.0
Burnout 3 EA Games	9.3
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004 Season Activision	8.1
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005 Season Activision	8.2
Call of Duty: Finest Hour Activision	7.0
Capcom vs. SNK 2: EO Capcom	8.0
Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums BAM	5.5
Carve Global Star	7.1
Cat in the Hat Vivendi	5.5
Catwoman EA Games	4.3
Cel Damage EA	6.8
Chase BAM	4.1
Chessmaster Ubisoft	8.1
Chicago Enforcer Kemco	2.0
Circus Maximus Encore	6.4
Colin McRae Rally 03 Codemasters	8.8
Colin McRae Rally 04 Codemasters	8.5
Colin McRae Rally 05 Codemasters	8.5
Commandos 2 Eidos	7.2
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers Acclaim	4.1
Conflict: Desert Storm Gotham Games	6.6
Conflict Desert Storm II: Back to Baghdad Gotham Games	7.0
Conflict: Vietnam Gathering	7.0
Counter-Strike Microsoft	7.3
Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex Vivendi	7.1
Crash Nitro Kart Vivendi	8.3
Crash Twinsanity Vivendi Universal	7.3
Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller Sega	8.0
Crimson Sea Koei	8.5
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge Microsoft	9.2
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon Ubisoft	5.8
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation Ubisoft	2.2
Curse: The Eye of Isis Dreamcatcher	6.5
Dai Senryaku VII: Modern Military Tactics Kemco	8.0
Dark Angel Sierra	4.5
Dark Summit THQ	7.0
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2 Acclaim	8.7

Game/Publisher	Score
David Beckham Soccer Majesco	4.2
DDR Ultramix Konami	8.4
DDR Ultramix 2 Konami	8.0
Dead Man's Hand Atari	6.5
Dead or Alive 3 Tecmo	9.5
Dead or Alive Ultimate Tecmo	8.8
Dead to Rights Namco	8.5
Deathrow Ubisoft	7.4
Defender Midway	8.0
Def Jam: Fight For New York EA	8.4
Demon Stone Atari	8.4
Deus Ex Invisible War Eidos	9.1
Dino Crisis 3 Capcom	6.5
Dinosaur Hunting Metro3D	8.1
Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure Activision	8.2
DOA Xtreme Beach Volleyball Tecmo	8.4
Dr. Muto Midway	7.3
Dragon's Lair 3D Ubisoft	8.1
DRIV3R Atari	4.8
Dronez Metro3D	5.2
Dungeon & Dragons Heroes Atari	9.0
Dynasty Warriors 3 Koei	7.0
Dynasty Warriors 4 Koei	8.5
EA Sports Fight Night 2004 EA	8.9
Eggmania: Eggstreme Madness Kemco	7.8
Enclave Vivendi Universal	7.4
Enter the Matrix Atari	6.2
ESPN College Hoops Sega	8.8
ESPN College Hoops 2K5 Sega	8.8
ESPN Major League Baseball Sega	8.1
ESPN MLS ExtraTime 2002 Konami	8.6
ESPN NBA 2K5 SEGA	8.5
ESPN NBA 2Night 2002 Konami	4.2
ESPN NBA Basketball Sega	9.0
ESPN NFL Football Sega	9.3
ESPN NFL 2K5 Sega	9.3
ESPN NHL 2K5 ESPN Games	8.8
ESPN NFL Primetime 2002 Konami	7.1
ESPN NHL Hockey Sega	8.9
ESPN Int'l Winter Sports 2002 Konami	5.9
ESPN X Games Snowboarding 2002 Konami	7.9
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick THQ	5.3
F1 2001 EA	8.7
Fable Microsoft	8.9
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel Interplay	8.2
Fatal Frame Tecmo	8.8
Fatal Frame II Tecmo	8.4
FIFA Soccer 2003 EA Sports	8.8
FIFA Soccer 2004 EA	9.2
FIFA Soccer 2005 EA Sports	8.4
Fight Club VU Games	6.4
Fight Night Round 2 EA	9.0
Finding Nemo THQ	4.4
Ford Racing 2 Empire	5.8
Freaky Flyers Midway	7.9
Freedom Fighters EA	8.5
Freestyle Metal X Midway	6.5
Freestyle Street Soccer Acclaim	4.7
Full Spectrum Warrior THQ	8.8
Furious Karting Infogrames	6.9
Futurama Vivendi Universal	5.0
Future Tactics Crave	5.7
Fuzion Frenzy Microsoft	7.8
Galloon: Islands of Mystery Atlas Software	6.8
Gauntlet Dark Legacy Midway	6.2
Genma Onimusha Capcom	7.9
Gladiator Acclaim	6.9
Gladus LucasArts	8.5
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde Jaleco	8.0
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee Atari	7.9
Godzilla: Save the Earth Atari	7.1
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent EA	8.0
Grabbed by the Ghoules Microsoft	8.2
Grand Theft Auto Double Pack Rockstar	9.1
Group S Challenge Capcom	7.8
Guilty Gear X2 #Reload Majesco	8.9
GunGriffon: Allied Challenge Sega	5.0
Gun Metal Majesco	7.9
Gunvalkyrie Sega	8.2
Halo Microsoft	9.5
Halo 2 Microsoft	9.7
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets EA	7.5
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban EA	7.0
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone EA	6.2
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup EA	7.9
Headhunter: Redemption Sega	5.9
High Heat Baseball 2004 3DO	8.2
Hillman: Contracts Eidos	6.4
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin Eidos	8.9
House of the Dead III Sega	6.9

Game/Publisher	Score
Hunter: The Reckoning Interplay	8.9
Hunter: The Reckoning --Redeemer Vivendi Universal	7.4
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb LucasArts	9.0
IndyCar Series Codemasters	8.1
IndyCar Series 2005 Codemasters	6.1
I-Ninja Namco	7.5
Inside Pitch 2003 Microsoft	7.2
Intellivision Lives! Crave	7.1
The Italian Job Eidos	7.8
James Bond 007: Agent Under Fire EA	7.9
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing EA	8.2
James Bond 007: Nightfire EA	8.4
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast LucasArts	9.0
Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy LucasArts	7.0
JSRF: Jet Set Radio Future Sega	9.2
Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs. Death Evolved Games	4.3
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis Vivendi	6.0
Kabuki Warriors Crave	5.9
Kakuto Chojin Microsoft	6.2
Karaoke Revolution Konami	8.0
Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer Activision	6.9
kill.switch Namco	7.8
King Arthur Konami	7.0
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders Microsoft	8.4
Knight's Apprentice: Memorick's Adventure XS Games	4.9
Knights of the Old Republic II LucasArts	9.2
Knockout Kings 2002 EA	8.0
Kung Fu Chaos Microsoft	6.9
Legacy of Kain: Blood Omen 2 Eidos	8.5
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MVP Baseball 2003 EA	8.4
MVP Baseball 2004 EA	9.1
MX 2002 Featuring Ricky Carmichael THQ	6.5
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Game/Publisher	Score
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Myst III: Exile Ubisoft	5.9
Namco Museum Namco	6.4
NASCAR Heat Infogrames	8.2
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NCAA Football 2004 EA	9.4
NCAA Football 2005 EA	9.1
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NFL Blitz 20-02 Midway	7.0
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NFL Fever 2002 Microsoft	9.1
NFL Fever 2003 Microsoft	8.7
NFL Fever 2004 Microsoft	7.9
NFL Street EA	8.3
NFL Street 2 EA Sports Big	8.0
NHL 2002 EA Sports	8.6
NHL 2003 EA Sports	7.9
NHL 2004 EA Sports	8.6
NHL 2005 EA Sports	8.5
NHL 2K3 Sega	8.9
NHL Hitz 20-02 Midway	8.4
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NHL Hitz Pro Midway	8.0
NHL Rivals 2004 Microsoft	7.0
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Nightcaster II: Equinox Jaleco	7.9
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Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee Microsoft	9.0
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath EA	8.7
Otogi: Myth of Demons Sega	9.0
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Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time Ubisoft	9.4
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Prisoner of War Codemasters	5.9
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Project Snowblind Eidos	8.4
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy Midway	8.3
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Game/Publisher	Score
Rayman 3 Hoodlum Havoc Ubisoft	8.6
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Red Faction II THQ	8.3
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Star Wars: Jedi Starfighter LucasArts	8.1
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XGRA Acclaim	7.8
Yager Kemco	5.1
Yourself!Fitness responDESIGN	8.5
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TimeSplitters 2 Eidos	9.0
TOCA Race Driver 2 Codemasters	9.2
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Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2 Ubisoft	9.0
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3 Ubisoft	9.2
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow Ubisoft	7.9
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Ubisoft	9.6
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Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 Activision	9.0
Tony Hawk's Underground Activision	9.0
Tony Hawk's Underground 2: World Destruction Tour Activision	8.7
Top Spin Microsoft	9.0
Tork: Prehistoric Punk Ubisoft	7.7
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Toaled! Majesco	7.1
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Trivial Pursuit Unhinged Atari	6.9
Tron 2.0: Killer App Buena Vista Games	6.9
True Crime: Streets of LA Activision	6.8
Turok: Evolution Acclaim	7.6
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger EA	6.9
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UFC Tapout Crave	9.0
UFC Tapout 2 TDK Mediactive	8.0
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Ultra Bust-A-Move Majesco	8.8
Unreal Championship Infogrames	8.0
Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict Midway	9.3
Unreal II: The Awakening Atari	6.1
V-Rally 3 Infogrames	8.0
Van Helsing VU Games	6.3
Vexx Acclaim	7.9
Voodoo Vince Microsoft	8.8
Wakeboarding Unleashed (Shaun Murray) Activision	9.0
Wallace and Gromit in Project Zoo BAM	7.5
Whacked! Microsoft	7.4
Whiplash Eidos	6.8
Whiteout Konami	5.7
Wings of War Gathering	6.1
Winning Eleven 8 Konami	8.3
World Racing TDK	7.4
World Series Baseball Sega	8.8
World Series Baseball 2K3 Sega	8.8
World Championship Poker Crave Entertainment	7.3
World Championship Pool Jaleco	7.1
Wrath Unleashed LucasArts	7.0
WWE Raw 2 THQ	6.8
WWF Raw THQ	5.7
Wreckless Activision	9.1
XIII Ubisoft	8.8
X-2 Wolverine's Revenge Activision	5.9
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XGRR Acclaim	7.8
Yager Kemco	5.1
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Extended Play

Extended Play
An epic game

Strategy ■ Reader Interaction ■ The Disc

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Unreal Championship 2: Top 5 Adrenaline Powers

ON THE
GAME
DISC
demo

Put these strategies to use with the playable version of *Unreal Championship 2* that's waiting for you on the disc!

From the multifaceted weapons to the new melee system, there's a lot going on in *Unreal Championship 2*. And that's to say nothing of the map mutators you can add in. But if you want to keep up with the elite players, you're going to have to master your adrenaline powers. Here are our top five most effective favorites:



X, R Trigger

1. Blade Burst

The Skaarj are full of sharp edges, from their bladed hands to their dicey demeanors. But only Szalor, the Skaarj warrior available at the beginning of the game, wields an adrenaline power that is a virtual orgy of knives. Blade Burst initiates a tornado of swirling blades around the player. This is a great one for running into the middle of a big pack of enemies. Just bring a towel for all the blood.



X, A (Nimble);
X, X, A (Speed)

2. Nimble/Speed

Every character is bestowed with both Nimble and Speed adrenaline powers, and they are crucial for much more than just jumping to high hiding spots or running away from a fight quickly. In the game modes that involve picking up an object and moving it, like Capture the Flag and Overdose, it'll help you zoom and fly to the goals faster than anyone else on the map, so save it up.



X, X, R Trigger

3. Homing

The Humans, Malcolm and Sapphire, share a unique adrenaline Vision power that gives them a decided advantage with projectile weapons. Homing briefly allows your weapons to be guided toward enemies who you have a lock on. This is especially good with weapons like the rocket launcher, and can even turn your flak into "smart flak."



X, X, L Trigger

4. Upgrade

Both of the Liandri bots, Raptor and Devastation, have a lot of nasty tricks up their sleeves. But like every other race in the game, they have a heal option. What's the cool part about it? When activated, two little repair bots fly around and repair you while you're running or jumping or fighting or whatever. It looks really cool.



X, R Trigger

5. Teleport

Raiden is an Elder God; we know this. And deities, being the all-powerful beings they are, can manipulate time, space, and other trifling obstacles. Raiden's best adrenaline power is called Teleport, and it lets him do just that – teleport away from trouble with the click of a few buttons. Apparently this Elder God likes to run away like a chicken. Brraw-k-baw-k-baw!

From the Developers

Who knows a game better than the people who made it? So we asked Epic Games President and Lead Designer Michael Capps what he'd pick as the best character for beginners.

CAPPS: The best characters for new players are the high-health characters; when you first start playing the game, Arclite (the Juggernaut), Raptor (the Liandri bot), and Szalor (the Skaarj) are all high-health characters. They have more than twice the health of the lighter, more nimble characters, so that gives new players a little bit more time to learn their way around a level or to notice an enemy.

Once players have a better grasp of the control scheme and of the very acrobatic combat style of *UC2*, they'll spend some

time with higher-agility characters like Sapphire and Lauren. Leaping and dodging around a slow tank character, taking quick swipes at him while evading hits, can be a lot of fun.

Here in our playtests at Epic with a bunch of expert players, we see a real mix of character choices based on people's playing styles.



DIRTY CHEATS

Street Racing Syndicate

Extra Cars for Arcade Mode, Pac-Man

Graphics Vinyl, and More

To bring up the cheat-entry screen, go to the Main Menu and press Up, Down, Left, Right. Now simply enter the following cheats. A message will appear saying that the code you entered was valid if you entered it correctly.

EXTRA ARCADE MODE CARS

Car	Cheat
Police Car	GOTPOPO
2004 Toyota Celica GT-S	MYTCGTS
1999 Mitsubishi Eclipse GS-T	IGOTGST
1996 Toyota Supra RZ	SICKJZA
Mazda RX-8	RENESES

STREET MODE CHEATS

Effect	Cheat
Pac-Man Vinyl (Find the Pac-Man vinyl back at the garage under the Cosmetic Upgrades menu)	GORETRO
Free Car Repair (Must re-enter cheat each time you want a free repair at the garage)	FIXITUP
Police Warning (Police give you a warning rather than busting you the first few times you get caught by the cops)	LETMEGO

Futurama

Bender the Rules

You enter the cheat during gameplay. Do not pause the game. The screen will flash blue when you have entered it correctly. You will need to re-enter it when you die, finish a level, or reach a checkpoint.

UNLOCK ALL EXTRAS

Press and hold L Trigger, then press A. Now press and hold R Trigger and press X, Y. Release R Trigger, then press A. Press and hold R Trigger again and press X, Y, B, A, Black, B, Back.

The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind – Game of the Year Edition

(Works on both regular and Game of the Year Edition versions)

Another Good Cheat

RESTORE FATIGUE

While in the game, hit B to bring up the menus. Use L Trigger and R Trigger to switch to the Stats Menu. Use the D-pad to select the Fatigue entry. Press Black, Black, White, White, Black. Press and hold A until the desired Fatigue level is reached.

Psi Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy

Extra Missions and Character Skins

To enter the following cheats, go to the Main Menu. Highlight Extra Content and press R Trigger to bring up the cheat-entry screen. Now simply enter the number codes from below and when a cheat is entered correctly, a message will appear at the bottom of the screen. The extra mission and new modes appear in the Extra Content Menu.

EXTRA MISSIONS

Effect	Cheat
Floor Of Death	05120926
Panic Room	76635766
Up And Over	020615
Stop Lights	945678
Gasoline	9442662
Bottomless Pit	154897
TK Alley	090702
Gearshift	154684
Tip The Idol	428584
Psi Pool	565485

Aura Pool	659785
Bouncy, Bouncy	568789
Gnomotron	456878

EXTRA CHARACTER SKINS

Effect	Cheat
Training Nick	564689
Urban Nick	484646
Wasteland Nick	975466
Stealth Nick	456498
Sara	135488
Psi Sara	468799
Suicide Sara	231644
Barrett	497878
Training Barret1	196001
Training Barret2	196002
Training Barret3	196003
Training Barret4	196004
Training Barret5	196005

Robotech: Invasion

Cheats To Beat the Game

To enter the following cheats, select the Options Menu from the Main Menu. Once there, select Extras, and a listing of cheat codes will appear. Press the X button to bring up the keypad to enter the following cheats in ALL CAPS. When a cheat is entered correctly, it will appear on the code list, where you can toggle its effect on and off. The gameplay cheats only effect the single-player game, while the bonus characters are only playable in the multiplayer modes.

Effect	Cheat
Invincibility	SUPERCYC
Unlimited Ammo	TRGRHPY
One-Hit Kills	DUSTYAYRES
Access To All Levels	RECLAMATION
Lancer's Multiplayer Skin	YLLWFLW
Scott Bernard's Multiplayer Skin	LTNTCMDR
Rand's Multiplayer Skin	KIDGLOVES
Rook's Multiplayer Skin	BLUEANGLS

DISC AND CHALLENGES

PLAYABLE DEMOS

CHALLENGE

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Chaos Theory

UBISOFT
THE SKINNY: You read all the glowing words starting on page 48. Now play it for yourself and come up with your own multisyllabic superlatives. Just wipe the drool off your chin first.
DEMO TIP: First, play through it multiple times using different methods. Second, the awesome night-vision effect kills a lot of the even more awesome effects in the environment. In other words, for maximum eye candy, don't keep the night vision on the whole time.
CHALLENGE: Finish the demo with a success rating of 100%. That means not killing anyone or even being seen.
CHALLENGE POINTS: 4,000
PROOF: Send in a pic of your mission-success screen at the end of the demo.



Worms 3D

SEGA
THE SKINNY: The worms have learned how to strategize! Check out this turn-based *Worms* action-strategy offering, and we dare you not to get a kick out of it!
DEMO TIP: Careful with that shoulder-mounted bazooka. It's got a kick, and you can kill yourself if you're not cautious. Wait, worms have shoulders?



To Our Subscribers: Doh!

Unfortunately, your disc case is saddled with some downright lies. The playable demo of Xbox Live Arcade games fell through at the last minute – after the cases had been printed. Between *UC2* and *Chaos Theory*, it's still one of our best discs ever, so hopefully that makes amends, and you have our sincere apologies for the mishap, but it was due to circumstances way beyond our control.

NOTE: Last month's disc featured a hidden playable demo of *Tak 2: Staff of Dreams*. To access it, hold down the **L Trigger** and press **Back, Back, White, Left, X, Y, Up, Down, A, Black, B, Right, Start, Start**

XBOX LIVE enabled

Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

MIDWAY
THE SKINNY: Go read our exclusive review on page 32 and find out why we love this brilliant first-person shooter/fighter hybrid. With this demo, we're sharing the love. Play this single-player or on Live for the next two months until the game comes out.
DEMO TIP: How about a little pre-release LAN party? This demo supports System Link in addition to single-player and Live play. Oh, and get familiar with your adrenaline moves (X button). They'll often make the difference between getting a frag or respawning.



Conker: Live and Reloaded

MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
THE SKINNY: We love the furry fast-action fury, so we're running this demo again. If you missed it the first time, well, words can hardly prepare you. So we'll just use three of them: Saving Private Conker.
DEMO TIP: There's nothing to shoot in the beginning of the demo. Just run from post to post, hiding behind cover until the gunfire stops.



FEATURES



■ **Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict** MIDWAY
Read about it, play it, and then check out the trailer, character bios, and demonstration on the disc. How much more Unreal could you possibly want?
■ **Pariah** GROOVE
Dig the worlds, the weapons, and in an Xbox first, a map editor that lets you build other maps and then share and play them with others on Xbox Live!
■ **Fight Night Round 2** EA SPORTS
Take a grand tour of the sequel to our 2004 Sports Game of the Year with EA Producer Kudo Tsunoda.

VIDEO SHOWCASE

- **Iron Phoenix** SAMMY
- **Splinter Cell Chaos Theory** UBISOFT
- **Truth** AMERICAN LEGACY

NEED TO GET A DISC?
If you don't receive the disc, then you need to upgrade! Each disc contains playable demos, video previews, downloads, and more. To get 12 issues that include the game disc with your subscription (prorated if necessary) for just \$1 per issue, please call (515) 248-7682 (listen past the entire outgoing message), and an operator will take care of everything. (Please note that subscriptions purchased through third-party subscription agents do not include the monthly game disc.)

TO SUBMIT CHALLENGES
Send an email with a digital picture attached, including your first and last name and challenge completed, to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject line "I'm a Legend." You can also take pictures the old-fashioned way and mail them to us (don't forget your full name and challenge completed) at: I'M A LEGEND, c/o Official Xbox Magazine, 150 North Hill Dr., Suite 40, Brisbane, CA 94005. P.S. Use the header "I'm a Legend," or your entry won't qualify.

READER CHALLENGES

A few of you dedicated readers have completed all of this season's challenges. Here's a look at the top 10, and for up-to-the-second standings, please visit our TeamXbox friends at oxm.teamxbox.com.

■ Erik Johnsen	37,000	■ Steve Gunn	30,000
■ Kevin Kuemmet	37,000	■ Jeffrey Earl	27,000
■ Kirk Pullen	37,000	■ Chris Swenson	24,000
■ Michael Howg	34,000	■ Bryan Arfons	22,000
■ Marc Mennillo	31,000	■ Josh Strohminger	20,000

Reader Interaction



Still feeling gorged from this past holiday's glut of fantastic games? You can bet that we are. Naturally, we now (er, still...) get a lot of mail about *Halo 2*, but there are still plenty of other Xbox issues to talk about.

Let's see what you've got to say, and if you've got an Xbox-related question you'd like to run by us, punch up an email to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com, or if you like to hand-write your missives, the address is: Official Xbox Magazine, 150 North Hill Dr., Suite 40, Brisbane, CA, 94005.



Conker-ing his past

Like many others, I am waiting patiently for *Conker: Live and Reloaded*. What I find puzzling is that, originally, the N64 *Conker* did not sell well because of its timing (it got lost in the Xbox/PS2/GameCube hype). So why would they release the new game right as the new console hype is beginning?

— Peter Zarembo

We say: Perhaps it's the curse of Conker? We'll find out after we see some sales figures for *Live and Reloaded*... Really, though, it's quite different this time. Conker's *Bad Fur Day* for the Nintendo 64 came out at a time when, for all intents and purposes, the N64 was deadlier than a party at Dr. Kevorkian's house. *Live and Reloaded* is due out just a short time from now, a period where the Xbox is hotter than ever, and Conker is looking and playing amazingly well (a fact you can confirm for yourselves on this month's disc). Oh, and BFD was a whopping 70 American dollars when it came out. That certainly didn't help.

Barry Bonds should try this "Juiced"

Has *Juiced* been picked up by a company yet? If so, when is the company planning on releasing it?

— Taylor Brown

We say: Indeed, Taylor, THQ has picked up the publishing rights to one of the finer-looking efforts by the now-fallen Acclaim, and plans on releasing it around April. Of course, regular readers got to play a demo of this one a long time ago on our disc. And this thing's only got better in its polishing time at THQ. Expect a full review soon.

Todd McFarlane's Sam Fisher

The *Halo* action figures are great, so what are the chances of getting a *Tom Clancy* series of action figures? It would be awesome to have the series of *Rainbow Six*, *Ghost Recon*, and of course *Splinter Cell*. I think the figures (not too small) would be a huge seller for those like me who are massive *Clancy* fans.

— Pete Brennan

We say: Good idea. Correct us if you know otherwise, but wouldn't a *Chaos Theory* edition figure be the first action

figure ever to depict someone choking another person? We asked Ubisoft about the chances of seeing a doll — sorry, action figure — choking another doll, and they had this to say: "Ubisoft is constantly exploring possibilities for the Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell* franchise, but we do not have any details regarding action figures at this time." Boo!

Gutter ball

You know, you guys always say that you rate every game that is out for the Xbox, but I have yet to see *AMF Bowling 2004* on your list. I thought this game was awful, but I was wondering what you guys, the

professionals, would give it. Thanks for the great mag.

— Tony Piraino

We say: We'll let you in on a little videogame-magazine-industry secret, Tony. There's a strange correlation that we see frequently. Basically, it can be summed up as follows: The worse the game, the slimmer the chance that the publisher will send it to us for review. I guess they don't think bad reviews are good for business. But then again, look at *Pulse Racer*. Our 1.0 "lowest score ever" could've only helped its sales, triggering impulse buys from masochistic Xbox owners or those looking for a good belly laugh.



■ Our cookies are in the mail, right?

True Fantasy (A)live again?

I saw an article recently that said the cancelled MMORPG *True Fantasy Live Online* might return. Oh wise ones at *Official Xbox Magazine*, is it true (oh please, oh please, oh please!)?

— James Barry

We say: Developer Level-5's president Hakihiro Hino recently told a Japanese magazine that "production was about to be resumed on *True Fantasy Live Online* once again." So there's hope yet that Ryan will indeed get to fulfill his lifelong videogame dream of being an anime wizard fishing off a bridge, riding a

broomstick, and wearing a pointy witch's hat. But seriously, the MMO was looking sweet, and while we doubt it will ever see the light of day on Xbox, there's now a reasonable chance it could show up on Xbox Next, PS2, and/or the PC. Keep your cel-shaded fingers crossed.

Spartan snacks!

During the holiday break, our mother was getting irritated at the amount of *Halo 2* being played, and she asked us if we could stop and help her with the Christmas baking. We offered to make some sugar cookies, and couldn't resist the opportunity to have some fun. Sorry Mom, no snowman cookies this year. Hope you enjoy these as much as we did.

— Rachel and Sarah Aikman

We say: Impressive work, ladies (see left). So impressive that we don't know if we could eat them, even though we're inspired by the prospect of eating a Killtacular in the hopes of then scoring one. But we'll never know unless you send us a few dozen (HINT HINT!)...



Hot Button

PREVIOUS QUESTION:

What game are you looking forward to most in 2005?

SOME OF YOUR RESPONSES:

"I'm riding the *Jade Empire* bandwagon, and there are plenty of seats left.

— Carlos Mijares

"*Conker: Live and Reloaded!* When I heard this game was coming to Xbox, I about crapped my fur-shaded pants!

— Kent Jenkins

"I can't wait for *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* to come out. I've been saving up for it, and I just got a HDTV with 5.1 Dolby sound, too."

— Matthew Buzas

"I just love the bloody gorefest kind of games, which *The Punisher* is a prime example of. Bring it on."

— Taylor Brown

"*Doom 3*, baby. What could be scarier than walking in the dark and then turning around just to see a big ol' Hellknight standing there ready to bite your head clean off?"

— Anonymous

Cover Captions January 2005



So there's a scary-looking masked guy with a lightsaber... Your thoughts?

"The nose and jaw arrive in a week, my lord."

— Carlos Armando

"Skeletor, I am your father!"

— Steve Kessler

"Trick or treat!"

— Greg Skaggs

"Give up, Mario! You cannot defeat me, the Jedi Shyguy!"

— Alex

"Friday the 13th Part XXII: Jason Takes Tatooine."

— D.J. Miller

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