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**MAX
PAYNE 2:**
The Fall of Max Payne



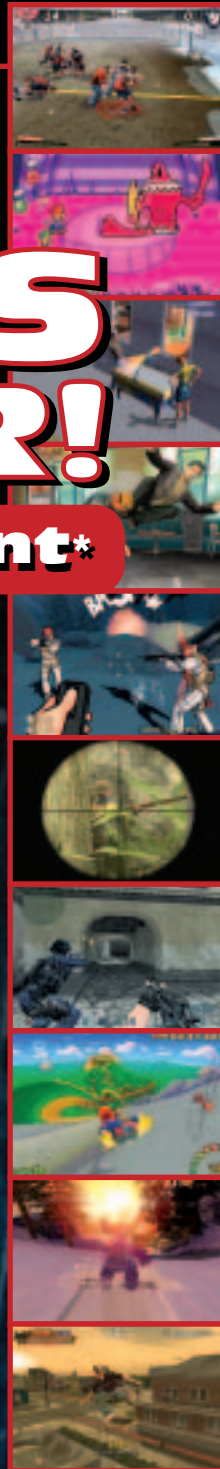
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JAK II

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

NAUGHTY DOG

PlayStation.2



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GAMEPRO
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TOP GAMES OF THE YEAR!

Get The Games You Really Want*

Welcome to the first annual GamePro and Best Buy's Top Games of the Year guide! The holidays are over, and we're sure that many of you received a new video-game system and/or new video games as gifts from family or friends. Most likely, some of the games you received weren't on the top of your list or simply aren't fun games to play because they were bought by someone without much gaming knowledge, and you can't wait to start playing something cooler. Maybe some of you received gift cards and plain ol' cash, and are itching to buy some cool stuff but don't know what's the "best buy" in your favorite local electronics store. That's where this guide comes in!

The editors at *GamePro* magazine have been authoritatively reviewing video games for over 15 years and have seen the video-game industry explode from toys into the hardcore electronic appliances that are the centerpiece of home-entertainment systems today. We've filtered through the avalanche of new games and gadgets released this holiday season and identified our top picks for playability and fun that are worthy of your time and hard-earned bucks. Plus, we've dug into our archives and identified the top bargain games for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox that are incredible gaming experiences at remarkably low prices.

This guide is all about getting the most fun out of our PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, and Game Boy Advance. Now that the holidays are over, the real fun's about to begin. Read this guide, select your favorites, and visit your local Best Buy to get the fun started. Or visit BestBuy.com for the convenience of online shopping.

During the year, be sure to check out *GamePro* magazine on newsstands everywhere and visit GamePro.com regularly for the latest game previews, reviews, news, cheats, and strategies. Code junkies will want to pick up our sister publication, *Code Vault*, jammed full of codes and strategies for all the top games each and every month. **Game on!**



Produced by *GamePro*—world's largest independent multiplatform gaming magazine! For up-to-date video-game news, reviews, and game codes, visit:

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ESRB Ratings

The interactive electronic entertainment industry utilizes a voluntary rating system developed by an independent organization—the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)—so consumers know what to expect before buying a video or PC game. The following is a quick key to the most common ratings; for a complete description, check out the ESRB's website at www.esrb.org or call 800/771-3772 for additional information.



Everyone (E): Content is suitable for persons ages six and older.

These titles will appeal to people of many ages and tastes. They may contain minimal violence, comic mischief, or crude language.



Teen (T): Suitable for ages 13 and up. These games could have violent content, strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

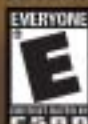


Mature (M): Appropriate for older gamers, generally 17 and up. Mature-rated games may contain more intense depictions of violence, stronger language, and, on rare occasions, sexual themes.

who are you?



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Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne

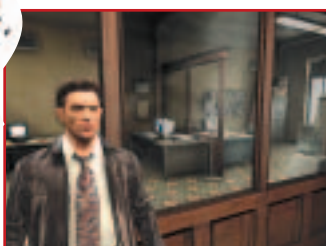
■ Published by Rockstar Games ■ Available December ■ ESRB: **MATURE**

By the time you read this, there's a good chance you'll be shoot-dodging and popping virtual painkillers like an expert, but for those of you who don't know, Max Payne is returning to the PS2 and Xbox in Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne, and he's bringing with him a new sense of film-noir style and a refined appreciation for the over-the-top gaming ultraviolence that its predecessor turned into a blood-drenched ballet.

The original Max Payne was a gaming-noir gem, filled with charmingly overwrought narration, stylish comic-book-like story scenes, and vein-exploding combat scenes. When the game hit shelves, people were saying, "This is the game that will be copied for the next couple of years," and they were right. You can't count the games that ripped off Payne's bullet-time effect on both hands. Go ahead, try it.

Max Payne 2 sets out to tell a film noir love story with all the intensity and tragedy you'd expect. Of course, the game wears the ESRB's Mature rating, so there will be tons and tons of violence, and this time, the original Max Payne's sensational bullet time will go alongside the ubiquitous Havok physics engine to create even more awesome combat sequences, complete with rag-doll death animations and completely interactive (read: destroyable) environments. There will even be two different levels of bullet time; the typical, familiar level in which everyone slows down the same, and the "in the zone" mode that gives you a slight speed advantage over your opponents to show that Max is really getting the job done.

Not so much revolutionary as evolutionary, Max Payne 2 sets out to refine the qualities that made the original a benchmark in furious action gameplay. If these things come together, this could be the title that unseats its own predecessor—something no other third-person action game has yet managed to do.





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Use multiple weapons to take apart any foe that dares stand between Ninja and his missions.



Five huge worlds, mini-quests and grueling missions that will separate the Ninjas from the boys.



PlayStation 2



NFL Street

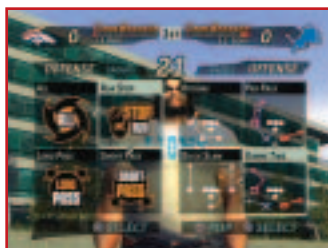
■ Published by EA Sports Big ■ Available January ■ ESRB: Everyone



Street bounces off the no-holds-barred fun of EA Big's NBA Street, this time for some wild and crazy gridiron action. The seven-on-seven football frenzy is the creation of some of the same folks at developer Tiburon who are responsible for the Madden NFL series...but a football sim this ain't!

Street blatantly sidesteps the rules and the usual pig-skin trappings like penalties, punting, or even field goals. This opens up the field for outrageous offense and defense where players are free to smash each other into walls, toss trick passes, and showboat to their hearts' content. The rewards for pulling off those feats come by way of EA Sports Big's trick system that proved popular in NBA Street. Pull off enough fancy moves, and you'll earn Showboat points that go toward a Gamebreaker power-up, which grants extra power to break tackles or create fumbles. You play your games on seven different "street" fields, including beaches, sandlots, and parks. Each area has its own dimensions and its own variety of physical hazards. The PlayStation 2 version will feature online gameplay, too.

The visuals showcase an over-the-top cartoon look. Since style and personality are big features of Street's gameplay, there are no helmets obscuring the faces of the 300 plus current NFL stars featured in the game. A selection of fictional characters and retired legends like Barry Sanders is also available as you put together your best pick-up team. Of course, you can't have style without a cool soundtrack, and a lineup of top hip-hop and rock artists will kick out some appropriate jams. With the regular season a done deal, NFL Street just might feed your need for football.





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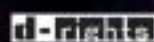
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GAME BOY ADVANCE



Tony Hawk's Underground

■ Published by Activision ■ Available now ■ ESRB: Teen

   Enough about this Tony Hawk guy—what about *your* needs? Neversoft is giving its landmark skate franchise a new spin this year, dropping the “Pro Skater” from the title and adding a ton of customization options that are designed to put you in the game. No, literally—you’ll be able to e-mail your digital photo to Neversoft then download and import it into your game (that’s only available on the PlayStation 2 version, though).



You’ll see your own face on your skater during game-play and cinemas, building your own legend as you interact with professional skaters. The developers say that the “story mode plays you” instead of the other way around.

Customizing doesn’t stop there; you can design and upload entire levels with your personal goals (where would *you* put the C-O-M-B-O letters?), original gaps, and even character dialogue. You can use the trick editor to build and name your own custom trick, and throw that in, too.







And for the first time, you’re finally able to jump off your ride and walk around, climb on rooftops, drive cars (!), and explore new areas just begging to be sessioned.

Ambitious, to say the least—but hey, this is Neversoft.



The Sims: Bustin' Out

■ Published by EA Games ■ Available now ■ ESRB: Teen

    The Sims sold like crazy on the consoles last year, and this year’s update is all about getting out of the house. Exploration is key as Sims have access to vehicles like motorcycles that enable them to get out and visit new areas like the Hollywood lot and the military base. There’s also a new plot to the proceedings: Mr. Landgrabb has stolen your stuff, so you’ll have to go around town and find interesting new ways to discredit him in order to get it back. If that seems a little mean spirited, don’t worry—it’s all delivered with the standard Sims lighthearted tone.

Bustin’ Out includes 10 new career paths, an updated wardrobe, 100 unlockable objects, and an eclectic mix of friends. A new integrated two-player game and memory-card support will enable players to play with or against their friends and also transport their Sims to a friend’s place; GameCube players can also

link up with a Game Boy Advance to trade players between the console and handheld versions of the game. Plus, Bustin’ Out features sleek graphics with vastly improved textures as well as new voices, sound effects, and original music.



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SOULCALIBUR II




Violence
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation 2

REFLECTIONS OF TRADITION. Exclusively on the PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system, Tekken legend Heihachi jumps into the Soulcalibur®II arena. The battle will be hard fought with old Soulcalibur favorites and new masters ready to battle anyone with the guts. And the fighting continues with over 10 modes of play, including the new Weapon Master Mode, giving you the chance to unlock hundreds of weapons, costumes, arenas and hidden characters.

True Crime: Streets of L.A.

■ Published by Activision ■ Available now ■ ESRB: MATURE

   True Crime: Streets of L.A. shoots from the cinematic hip, placing gamers in the filmic persona of Nick Kang, a renegade ex-cop who's been recruited as a member of the Elite Operations Division. Loose cannon Kang battles Asian and Russian crime organizations using martial arts techniques, expert marksmanship, and a lead foot to restore law and order in the City of Angels.




True Crime features a branching story structure (the outcome of a mission can vary the resulting events wildly) as well as a strong, RPG-style character-improvement element that lets players choose how they progress. Assisting on random crimes earns points that are redeemed at different dojos, where you can learn 10 different martial arts styles. There's also plenty of twin-pistol combat with a flexible targeting system and some cool Max Payne-style slow-motion dodging attacks.

The action takes place in a huge, realistically modeled chunk of Los Angeles; roughly 300 square miles—from downtown to the beach and from LAX to Sunset Boulevard—are covered. Big-name Hollywood talent will do the voices (Gary Oldman performs two parts), and with three types of gameplay wrapped in a Hong Kong-style package, True Crime features plenty to woo gamers.



XIII

■ Published by Ubisoft ■ Available now ■ ESRB: MATURE

   You've lost a lot of blood. There's a tattoo on your chest and a key in your pocket—neither of which make any sense. You don't know where you are. You don't know who you are. And the first person you see upon waking up—the buxom lifeguard who apparently kept you in the land of the living—just collapsed in a hail of gunfire and a pool of blood.

So begins your cryptic adventure in Ubisoft's arresting new first-person shooter, XIII, which is based on the French smash-hit comic book. Players awake on a New England beach armed only with severe amnesia but soon unravel a vast conspiracy involving the military, secret agents, and

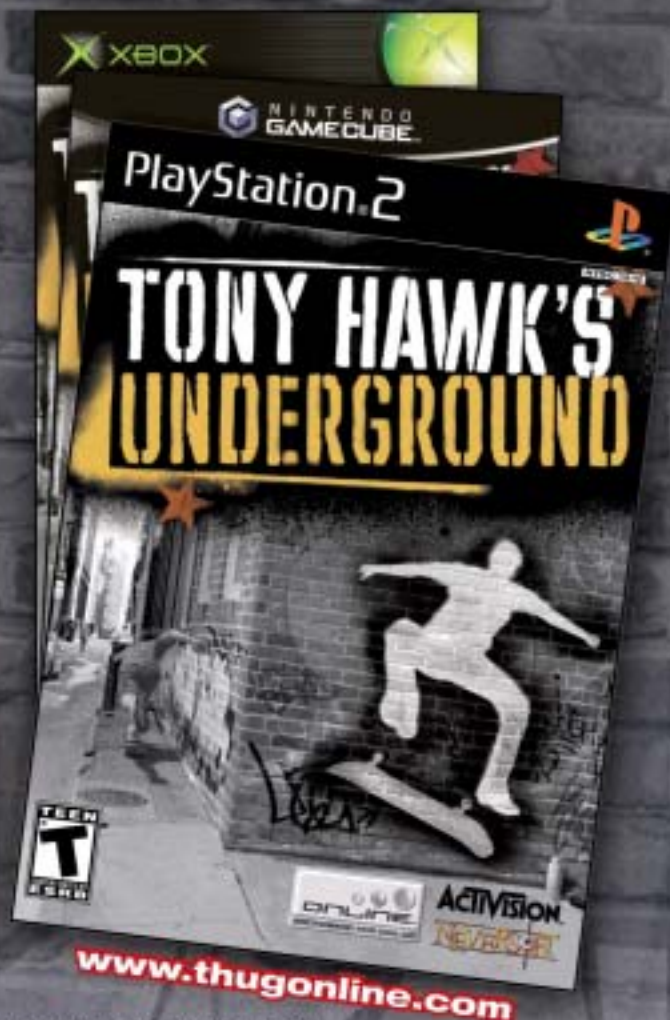
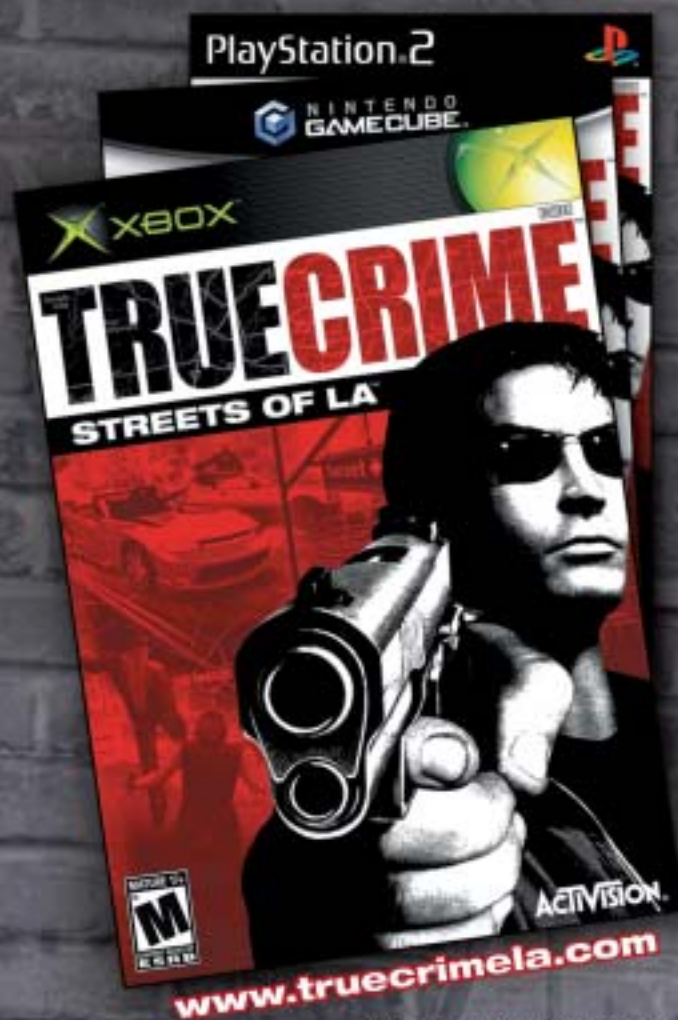


the assassination of the President of the United States. What's more, it's presented with a unique visual twist that could make it the most authentic comic-to-game translation ever.

Players will destroy a submarine, survive a cable-car disaster, protect and cover allies, wage underwater harpoon battles, bash bad guys with makeshift weapons like shovels and bottles, outwit enemies who intelligently hide behind cover, and use a mix of stealth and heavy weaponry through 34 missions.



AVAILABLE NOW!



Online play requires internet connection and Network Adaptor for PlayStation® 2 (sold separately).

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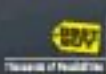
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Medal of Honor: Rising Sun

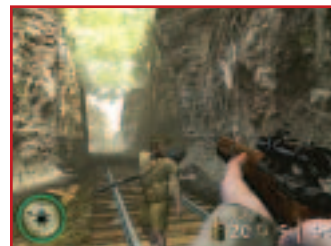
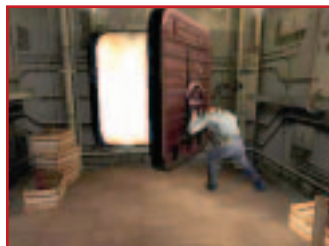
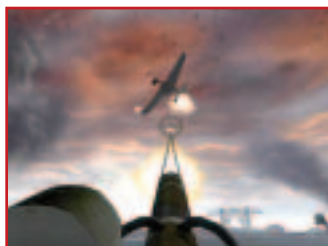
Published by EA Games Available now ESRB: Teen



With Rising Sun, the Medal of Honor series extends its brand of first-person perspective military combat to World War II's Pacific theater of operations. You play as Marine Corporal Joseph Griffin, and your tour of duty begins unexpectedly with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The game weaves through famous Pacific campaigns right up to Guadalcanal before the final assault. As in previous Medal games, you undertake covert military missions, but here your five assignments represent a hunt for a stolen cache of gold.

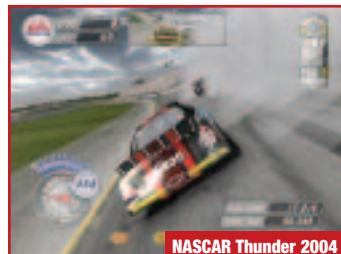
Rising Sun's missions are spread over 10 massive levels with multiple pathways, something new for the series. Additionally, you can play the entire game in two-player co-op mode, and there are 10 multiplayer levels for up to four players.

The gameplay features the combat gunning that Medal vets have come to know and love, but the story line adds depth by weaving other characters into the action, such as a British commando and a Japanese-American special-forces operative. Corporal Griffin even encounters his brother, who, by the way, is going to star in the next Medal of Honor title. With Rising Sun, World War II has officially become the longest military conflict in video-game history.



EA Sports Nation

It's a good year to play sports games—you don't even have to have any friends. Fans of the most popular line of sports games can turn to EA Sports Nation for all the competition they can handle as this new feature delivers online play against gamers across the country. It's not a product that you have to buy separately—it's included in the PlayStation 2 version of all EA Sports titles this year (Xbox and GameCube owners are not able to take part). Once you purchase the game, there are no additional charges because you get online using a PS2 Network Adaptor and your usual Internet connection.



NASCAR Thunder 2004

EA Sports Nation currently supports online play in Madden NFL 2004, NBA Live 2004, NCAA Football 2004, NASCAR Thunder 2004, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004, NCAA March Madness 2004, NHL 2004, and FIFA Soccer 2004, but you sign in for all of them using one login. Ladder tournaments organized by EA are one of the big attractions, as are the downloadable roster updates that let you keep up with trades and signings of each team. A rankings board will track your status in the standings across several layers of leaderboards.

On the communication side, EA Sports Nation supports voice chat during gameplay via a USB headset (including the SOCOM one), along with USB keyboard support and an instant messenger that connects to all EA titles. You'll also be able to log on to easports.com to see who's currently online and check the leaderboards and news.

It's safe to assume that a broadband connection is a practical necessity for this service—modem-based play is supported, but the lag factor causes significant problems. For true sports fans, EA Sports Nation makes the decision to spring for the 2004 version of your favorite sport an easy one—you won't just be able to fiddle with stats in a fantasy league... you could be the star.



Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004



NHL 2004



Madden NFL 2004



NBA Live 2004

Need for Speed Underground

■ Published by EA Games ■ Available now ■ ESRB: Everyone

Need for Speed Underground deftly overturns its own conventions in an entirely unexpected way, changing almost everything about the series...and emerging as a far better game for it. Tapping the vibe that first went mainstream with *The Fast and the Furious*, NFSU discards the focus on exotic European cars, turning to the world of street racing and tuner cars. Always at night, the races are set across a sprawling, vaguely San Francisco-like city. Each event connects different streets and sections in its own way, so you'll regularly see familiar scenery but in a different order.

The events range from the awesome drag racing to drift, point-to-point, circuit, and lap knockout races, as well as four-player online competitions on the PS2 only. The street-racing scene is ever present as crowds gather at the starting line, and the Underground mode captures its vibe superbly. A light story presence has you trying make a name in street racing by building up your ride in a series of events. Manufacturers include Toyota, Mitsubishi, Honda, Dodge, Subaru and more, and cars can be tricked out with parts from Dazz, Skunk2, Enkei, MOMO, and many others. It's a no-brainer to call NFSU one of the holiday's brightest lights.



Secret Weapons Over Normandy

■ Published by LucasArts ■ Available now ■ ESRB: Teen

Secret Weapons Over Normandy, the creators of the renowned X-Wing series prove that the skies of World War II can deliver gameplay as compelling as the era's popular first-person shooters. Playing as American pilot James Chase, you travel the globe to beat back the Axis, undertaking operations like covering escaping spies in North Africa, sinking Japanese convoys in the Pacific, or flying captured German bombers in surprise attacks on occupied France. Some are official sorties, and some are optional challenges that are anything but the mini-games they sound like, offering exciting battles that fill in the story and provide useful instruction.

The mission structure is gripping in a way that will feel pleasantly familiar to X-Wing vets. As each operation begins, you'll face an almost daunting array of possible targets. You'll quickly get caught up in devising and executing the best plan of attack, ordering wingmen to handle one target while you zip off to dispose of another. Helpful radio chatter ensures you'll never be clueless, and juggling all the priorities makes you feel like you're part of a bigger battle and a living world.





SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs

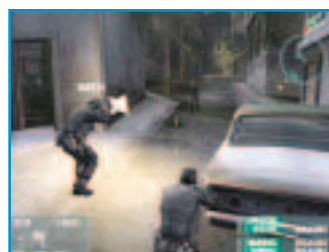
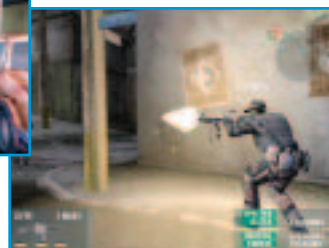
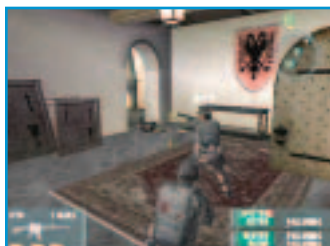
■ Published by Sony ■ Available now
■ ESRB: **MATURE**

EThe U.S. Navy SEALs once again show off their raw and focused talent in on- and offline combat gameplay, delivering even more action than in the first SOCOM game. To start, SOCOM II enhances the realism even further. Environments are at least twice as big—this

time covering areas in Albania, Algeria, Brazil, and Russia. Each of the 12 new single-player missions takes place in locations that look more natural with noticeable detail upgrades like swaying brush and variable weather patterns. Team members also have their own unique look. Soldiers don't all wear the same uniforms as they did in the original game, which helps distinguish each character and reflects the way real SEALs dress. In addition, each officer uses weapons of his own choice.

SOCOM II also doesn't have a shortage of new equipment to use in the field. The latest light-armored weapons, rocket-propelled grenades, sniper rifles, shotguns, laser designators, and remote-detonated anti-personnel mines are all available. You can even take control of turrets that are placed throughout particular levels. Additionally, the accuracy of each weapon is affected by a number of factors, including fatigue, movement, and weapon recoil. And as in real special operations, you can expect to team up with and take control of another country's elite military group like the British SAS and Russian Spetsnaz to help complete your missions.

Multiplayer gaming, however, is where Sony is really pushing SEALs operations—in fact, SOCOM is still the most-played PS2 game online. The sequel builds on this success with added features like player and clan rankings, friend lists, spectator modes, stat listings, and an improved chat system. If you haven't already, get prepared to gladly get your feet wet with the second invasion of the SEALs.



Achtung!

Hauptmann - Ihr Flugzeug brennt*



*(Translation: Hey, Captain! Your airplane's on fire.)



The fortunes of German pilots everywhere are about to take a severe downturn. In this intense WWII flight-action game, from Secret Weapons of Luftwaffe®, TIE-Fighter®, and X-Wing® creator Lawrence Holland, you'll join a secret, elite fighter squadron. Your mission: thwart the most insidious plans of the Third Reich. Over Europe and other theaters, you'll pilot nearly two dozen authentic aircraft, and face over 30 air-to-air and air-to-ground combat scenarios. And you won't need any flight training. Just nerves of steel, a steady hand, and a burning desire to rid the world of tyranny, one mission at a time.

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WEAPONS
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Final Fantasy X-2

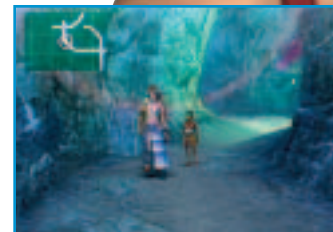
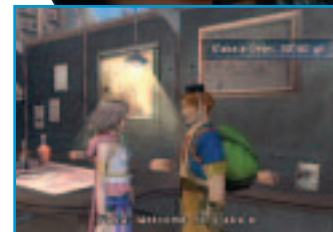
■ Published by Square Enix U.S.A. ■ Available December ■ ESRB: Teen

FF It seems only fitting that after every other successful role-playing franchise seemingly provided sequels, prequels, side stories, and (in some cases) fighting games, Final Fantasy finally took its own turn. X-2 incorporates unconventional elements into one of the most engrossing adventures you're likely to play this year. As the only game with the FF name to feature a full continuation of a previous adventure, X-2 fits nicely for what it is: a sequel. X-2 takes place some time after X and finds Yuna ditching her staff and long dress for twin guns and short shorts. Along for the ride are FFX vet Rikku and a newcomer Paine. These self-proclaimed "hunters" hop around Spiria searching for spheres that help unravel the mystery of Tidus's disappearance. The whole setup is awkward at first, but it gradually takes hold for an engrossing quest.

However, this isn't your traditional linear Fantasy adventure. From an airship hovering over Spiria, you select from several destinations for missions that take place over five chapters. Some visits are mandatory, others are optional, and the game over-

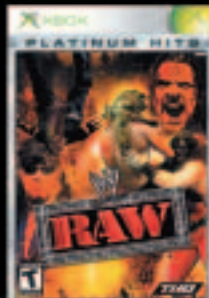
all should keep fanatics and explorers occupied for quite some time. There's also plenty of combat, and X-2 uses a brand-new Garment combat system, where the three principals change into different outfits during combat. Garments vary in terms of effective-

ness and have a strong affinity with certain characters. The urgency and oh-so-serious tone of X has been replaced by something more relaxed and playful as is mirrored in the voice characterizations. In keeping with the lighter tone, there's plenty of *Charlie's Angels*-esque posing, and embarrassing dialogue never seems to be in short supply. Final Fantasy X-2 is an interesting continuation of a strong story, and although hardened RPGers may find it too saccharine for their tastes, it's nevertheless an engrossing adventure—warts and all. X-2 is A-OK.



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Counter-Strike

■ Published by Microsoft ■ Available now ■ ESRB: MATURE

X If you've played any online multiplayer PC games in the past two years, chances are you've come into contact with the phenomenon known as Counter-Strike. The insanely popular team-based military shooter finally arrived on a console this year, and fittingly, the lucky console in question is the online-ready Xbox. Counter-Strike's team-coordinated aspect helped elevate it above other deathmatch-style shooters on the PC, and Microsoft is banking on that same magic to draw people to its Xbox Live online service.

Counter-Strike's simple premise has you joining a terrorist or counterterrorist team and attempting to carry out your objective. Some missions require terrorists to guard hostages and counterterrorists to go in and rescue them, while other scenarios involve the former attempting to plant a bomb and the latter trying to prevent or defuse it. Working in concert with team members is absolutely crucial to success, so voice support via Xbox Live is a welcome boon. Other Xbox-exclusive features include graphically revamped characters, two new teams, 20 character skin variants, and seven new maps—along with 13 original ones that have received visual upgrades. Cool technical tweaks include 480p display support for a sharper picture and 5.1 Dolby Digital sound support. The button layout is identical to that of Halo, and the aiming is just as precise, while the voice support works great.

Perhaps the coolest feature is the ability to use your Xbox as a customizable, dedicated server to host multiplayer games. Even if you don't choose to go that route, your friends can notify you of a current online match with the Xbox Live Aware feature. Lock and load for frenetic shootouts with Counter-Strike for the Xbox.



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Deus Ex: Invisible War

■ Published by Eidos Interactive ■ Available now
■ ESRB: **MATURE**

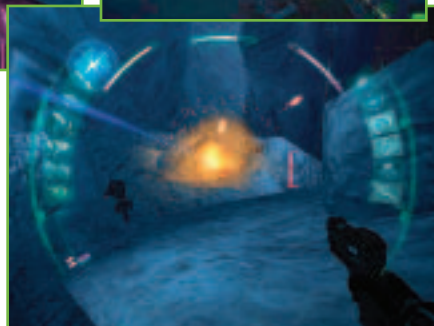
 The original Deus Ex is almost unanimously known as one of the best games of all time, and its sequel, available for the Xbox, expands and improves on it in many ways. It's a few years after the adventures of J.C. Denton, and J.C.'s "brother," Alex, finds himself similarly embroiled in a massive conspiracy. This time, however, nano-augmentations will be as commonplace as plastic surgery is in our time, and so Alex

has his hands full with similarly augmented enemies.




The technology behind this title is simply stunning, especially the advanced physics

code—every object in the game has realistic behavior, and you can kick over lamps and hide in the shadows that you made, build hiding places out of furniture, and more. A neural interface enables you to hack into computers and security systems, while the bot dominator gives you the power to possess robots and see through their eyes—or shoot through their guns. Invisible War is also a lot more intuitive for casual gamers than the stat-crunching Deus Ex, and it's more accessible for players who don't like all that adding and subtracting.

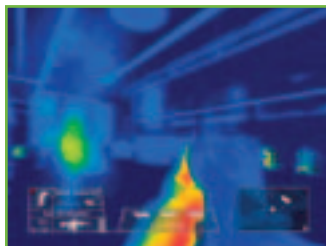


Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3

■ Published by Ubisoft ■ Available now ■ ESRB: **MATURE**

 Rainbow Six 3 for the Xbox isn't just a port of Raven Shield for the PC—it's an all-new game with a sort of "faster action, less crazy tactics" kind of philosophy. Still, don't go thinking you can just run blindly into a situation with guns blazing. That kind of stupidity will still get you killed right quick.

Everything is new, including the urban setting, plot, level structure, and enemy A.I., but the most noticeable change is the improved visuals. The Xbox graphics are superb, borrowing a lot from Splinter Cell tech with cool night- and thermal-vision effects and awesome flash-bang after-images. Perhaps the most promising new addition to Rainbow Six 3 is the ability to play with other elite troops via Xbox Live. You can also direct your team to perform various tasks using the game's real-time order system and by voice-activated commands. The core of the game doesn't diverge from the series' legendary gameplay: close-quarters battles using a squad of international soldiers equipped with the latest realistic weaponry.



Mario Kart: Double Dash!!

Published by Nintendo Available now ESRB: Everyone

The high concept of placing classic Mario World characters behind the wheels of little go-kart racers worked magic in Mario Kart and Mario Kart 64, so placing two characters into little go-kart racers should be a winner, too...right? Right! With Mario Kart: Double Dash, the famous plumber and his pals ride into town to remind us all why we should play GameCube games.

The names and the lanes may change, but the basic racing is the same. In single-player Grand Prix mode, you can still race at 50cc, 100cc, and 150cc skill levels in three contests: the Mushroom Cup, the Flower Cup, and the Star Cup. Eight karts roll up to the starting line, and the 16-character driver/passenger lineup is a veritable Who's Who of the Mario world with Mario, Bowser, Princess Peach, and the usual suspects as well as Waluigi and the babies, Luigi and Mario. The basic controls and simple driving mechanics have not changed. Mastering corners with the power slide is still the strategy, and the smooth GameCube joystick enables you to finesse the slide with ease.

Teamwork in gameplay is where Double Dash really shines. In single-player modes, you can swap driver with passenger to grab extra power-ups, but multiplayer games are a real gas. With four players, you can try any variation of head-to-head or co-op action. Co-op enables you and a pal to team up with one person driving and the other tossing power-ups or punching out opposing Kartsters. Mario Kart: Double Dash works a winning formula. Fans everywhere know exactly what to expect—and that's a rip-roaring good time on the Mario road with a whole bunch of friends in tow this time, too.





1080° Avalanche

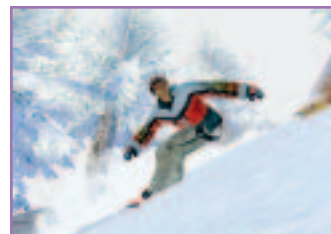
■ Published by Nintendo ■ Available December
■ ESRB: Everyone

The original 1080° Snowboarding was a landmark in extreme sports gaming—the first of what would eventually become an avalanche of 3D snowboarding games. Nintendo's crown was soon claimed by EA's SSX series...but now Nintendo's coming back to the slopes to try to take back the crown and give fans the cold shot they've been waiting for.

1080° Avalanche promises to incorporate a new trick and character-balancing system that let you keep your rider on his or her board. Avalanche also brings back characters from the original game, including Ken-

suke, Dion, Rob, Akari Hayami, and Ricky Winterborn, while up to four players can compete on the slopes of Crystal Lake, Golden Forest, and Deadly Fall. As you speed through the environments, you'll be beset by all sorts of cool natural (and other) obstacles, including surprise avalanches, rockslides, and cave-ins, as well as collapsing bridges and

pesky wildlife. There's a half-pipe for tricking, too, if finesse and style points are more your game, and plenty of secret paths that should help give the new 1080° the power it needs to take SSX 3 head on.



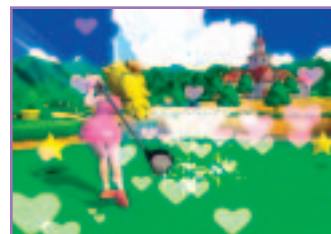
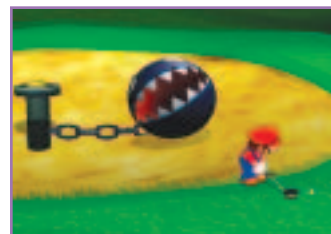
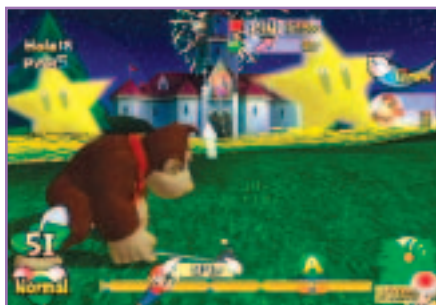
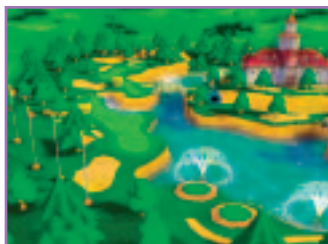
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour

■ Published by Nintendo ■ Available now ■ ESRB: Everyone

While the prospect of golfing by itself may not excite you, the prospect of golfing with a


giant lizard and a talking mushroom...well, that's a different story, now isn't it? In this new chapter of Mario's adventures on the fairway, Peach, Donkey Kong, and some of their other rivals compete for eagles while eschewing bogies as much as humanly (or otherwise-ly) possible. Featuring special courses designed specifically with the Mario motif in mind (as well as some more traditionally designed courses), players can expect new hazards in the form of warp pipes, Chain Chomps, and Piranha Plants.

Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour uses the same Camelot golf system made famous by classics like Hot Shots Golf for the PlayStation. While there's an expert mode for those familiar with the system, novices need not worry as Mario Golf parades a special beginner mode that will allow a partial automation of the club swinging effort. For those with friends, Mario Golf will support up to four players for the ultimate day on the green. The game also links up with the upcoming Game Boy Advance version of Mario Golf—look for it sometime in 2004.



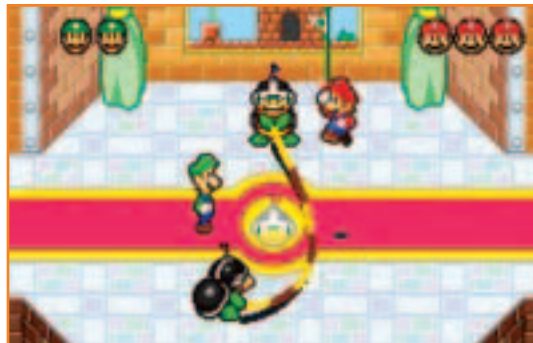
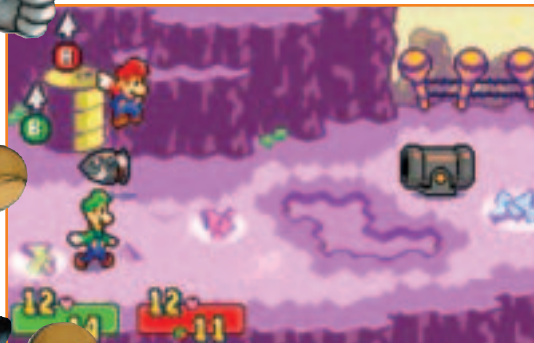
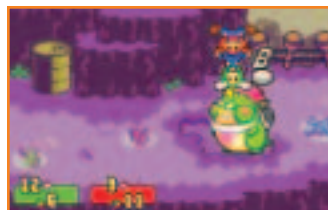
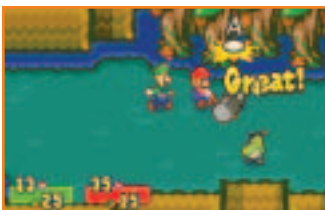
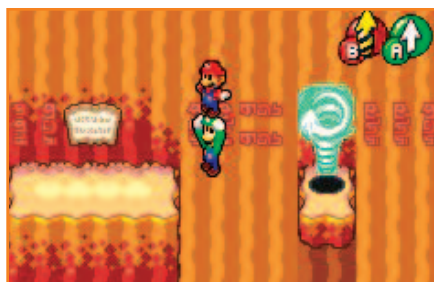
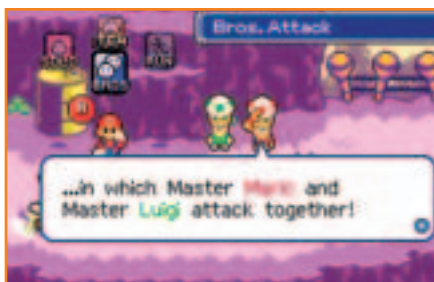
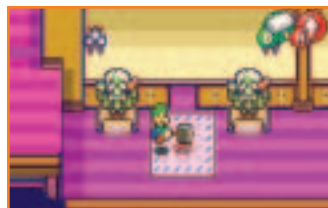
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga

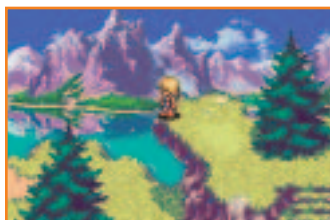
Published by Nintendo Available now ESRB: Everyone

 *Chicken con broccoli!* Weird is the watchword with Mario & Luigi, a strange 2D platformer/role-playing hybrid creature cut from Paper Mario's scrap papyrus. You play as both of Nintendo's world-renowned Mario Brothers, together or separate, wandering around in a top-down traditional RPG-ish perspective, climbing on each other's shoulders, using each other's heads, and smashing each other with hammers in order to get through puzzle-laden environments. Why? 'Cuz Princess Peach's voice has been stolen by an evil bean witch and replaced with explosives, that's why. The game promises 40 hours of gameplay as you explore the Beanbean Kingdom trying to figure out how to return normalcy to the princess's vocal cords.

Mario & Luigi plays out like an homage to Mario's storied history, from his days as Donkey Kong's arch-nemesis to his recent GameCube stint on Isle Delfino in Super Mario Sunshine. The graphics are colorful and vibrant, the tone is lighthearted, and the sense of humor should hit home with anyone who's followed the Brothers' adventures on the NES, SNES, N64, and in the arcade.

Mario & Luigi's most unique feature is its battle system: When you meet an enemy, the game switches to an "active time battle" mode as each brother takes turns smacking enemies in order to earn experience, build skills, earn coins (of course!), and bolster their hit-point meters. The twist: When enemies try to smack you back, you can tap a button and hop over their attacks in real time or use a hammer to smash them before they can bash you. Combination Bros. Attacks let one brother use his sibling as a weapon in a combination attack that does damage based on the difficulty level you chose for the button presses. It's a bizarre but promising twist on the plumbers' profession.





Sword of Mana

Published by Nintendo Available now
ESRB: Everyone

Life flows from the goddess, and Mana is her name; her sword is the subject of this GBA game. Nintendo's follow-up to the immortal Super NES action/RPG Secret of Mana is actually a prequel; it tells the story of the leader of the Duchy of Grantz (a gladiator raised in slave pits) and a young woman from the Mana tribe, two heroes whose fates intertwine in their quest to defeat the unkindly Shadow Knight. A long time ago, you see, an evil empire tried to use Mana's energy to take over the world. In order to stop them, a young lady from the Mana tribe transformed into the Mana Tree to seal away the mighty power from those who would abuse it. The Shadow Knight is trying to do just that.

Sword of Mana features two possible story routes. It lets you pick either character (gladiator or priestess), and the story

and events change dramatically depending on who you choose.

The original game's trademark Ring Command menu, a sort of landmark in game-control systems, makes a comeback here, letting you swap out magic and weapons on the fly to best suit the situation. The original's best feature returns, too—two-player co-op play in which a friend controls the other character in your battle against villainy and vice.



Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3

Published by Nintendo Available now ESRB: Everyone

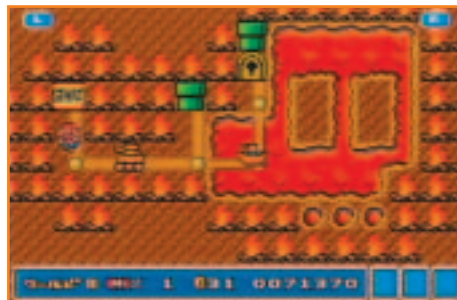
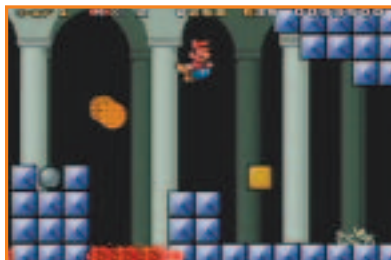
If Super Mario Bros. 3 was your favorite Mario game, then, dude, you're like seriously hardcore. Even back in the day, it was a skill3d gamerz game; today, it still seems ingeniously crafted to hone your hand-eye coordination and pattern-recognition skills to cyborg level.

In case the Mario lore center in your brain is scrambled, here's a quick refresher: Super Mario Bros. 3 is the birthplace of Raccoon Mario and the Tanooki Suit; it introduced the "overworld map" concept to Mario games; and it's the game where Bowser's kids battle you with magic wands on airships at the end of every world. There are too many levels to count (and even more now, plus additional weirdness from other Mario games, if you have an e-Reader and special e-Cards), and really tough-to-find secrets are hidden behind rocks, dunes, and platforms.

The presentation is ripped from the Super NES remake in Super Mario Bros. All-Stars rather than the 8-bit NES original, so the graphics and sound are pretty comparable to latter-day SNES Mario

titles. Sure, swimming is slow and tough, but it's by design rather than by way of poor programming—rest assured, Mario's jump rate, B-button acceleration, and coefficient of 'coon flight have been endlessly, carefully tweaked. It's Mario, for heaven's sake.

Admittedly, Super Mario Bros. 3 seems like a weird step back from Super Mario World and Yoshi's Island, two successors to this game that are already available on the Game Boy Advance (if you haven't already, get those games before getting this one—they're a little more accessible). But that doesn't make it any less of a classic—it's a test of your true gaming mettle, a must for the Mario completist, and validation for your sense of nostalgia.



Datel Max Memory

■ Datel ■ Available now

EE If you're an active gamer—especially an online one—memory-card space is always at a premium. The standard 8 MB cards just aren't enough to hold all the precious saved games you want to have on hand as you battle through a quest, uncover a conspiracy, or strategize your way through a season. The answer, of course, is a bigger memory card—and Datel's Max Memory offers more and then some. Not only is the card 16 MB for double the standard card's storage (for less than the standard card's price!), but it also comes with free PC software to enable you to “crush” your saves to take up even less room for long-term storage. If you've got the Network Adaptor and fast Internet access, you can also use the Max Memory software to download custom game saves for free. Of course, with temptations like that, it might be even harder to keep free space on your memory card—but at least now you have lots more room!



Logitech USB Headset

■ Logitech ■ Available now

EE Logitech created the packed-in USB headset for SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs, so you know the technology works; now the company's upping the comfort level with this deluxe microphone. Unlike the skinny metal headband on the SOCOM model, this one's molded plastic—thick but lightweight—and it's size-adjustable and hinged to minimize that pinching-squeezing feeling on your skull when you wear it. The bendy-tip microphone is shorter than most, but it's designed to hover at the corner of your mouth, thereby eliminating unwanted breathing noises (for which your online opponents will thank you). Don't worry about it not picking up your voice; the sensitivity is ample, and the microphone worked just fine in real-world gaming tests. The real perk here is comfort—the headset not only features a padded contact point opposite the earpiece, but the unit also comes with three different ear cushions: thin foam, padded leatherette, and luxurious velvet. Your ear never had it so good.

Mad Catz Universal LCD Travel Display

■ Mad Catz ■ Available now

EE Portable game screens have gone from novelty to near necessity in the last two years—and part of that is thanks to huge technology leaps. Mad Catz's new display is a fine example, and it's one of the better screens you're likely to find. For one, it works great with a PS2, but it also connects to your Xbox or GameCube, thanks to a cleverly designed clamp (it snaps onto the console itself—or the edge of a desk or table) and universal connection jacks—including high-resolution S-video, which makes a huge difference in the picture clarity. The screen is a 16:9 widescreen high-resolution TFT active matrix full-color display—which is a fancy way of saying “the same quality and style LCD displays you'll find in automotive installations for DVD playback, only larger and designed specifically for games.” With integrated stereo speakers and two headphone jacks—as well as independent color, brightness, and volume controls—the portability of the unit almost gets overlooked. Truth is, the Universal LCD Travel Display could easily replace your TV as your permanent dedicated gaming monitor.



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Microsoft Xbox Live Starter Kit & Renewal Card

■ Microsoft ■ Available now



The future of gaming is online—and services like Microsoft's Xbox Live are leading the way. The Starter Kit includes a year's worth of service, which enables head-to-head matches with Xbox players across the country and around the world as well as new levels and content for games like Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell* and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. The kit comes with a headset microphone for live voice chat—and trash talk—during gameplay without causing slowdown. The service recently celebrated its one-year anniversary with an attractive visual makeover, easier navigation, and expanded features, so there's literally never been a better time to join. If you're already a member, there's the 12-Month Subscription Card, which extends your online gaming for another full year without any fuss about monthly payments or credit cards.



Pelican System Selector Pro

■ Pelican ■ Available now



This is the system selector of your dreams. This is the system selector of the gods. This is as if someone said, "What would you like in a system selector?" and you named every crazy, top-shelf thing that came to mind and that someone replied, "Okay." It's kinda ridiculous: seven inputs, each with jacks for composite, S-video, and component cables (all of which the GameCube supports). Three of the seven also feature optical audio and Ethernet ports. They all lead to one massive output area with everything. The unit comes with 13 pre-printed, backlit faceplates with consoles and components on them—just pop the "GameCube" title over the appropriate button and your system has a slick, professional look. The unit is sized to fit in perfectly with your other home entertainment components, and it's available in silver or black. Tons of inputs, every connector a modern gamer needs, gorgeous looks, and a smart design... simply awesome.



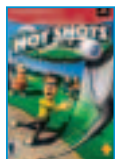
Datel Action Replay

■ Datel ■ Available now



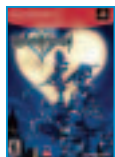
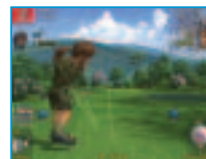
Whoever said that cheaters never prosper never played with an Action Replay. Pop this cartridge into your GBA or GBA SP, and you'll be able to unlock all-new, totally unauthorized cheats and options in your favorite handheld games. Want infinite missiles, bombs, and health in *Metroid Fusion*? How about all the maps in *Advance Wars 2* instantly—or thousands of new goodies at your disposal for *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire*? They're all realities with the Action Replay. The kit comes with a USB cable to enable fresh code downloads through your Internet-enabled PC, or you can visit codejunkies.com or read *GamePro* and *Code Vault* magazines to get and enter them "the old-fashioned way"—by hand. But once they're in your Action Replay, they're saved for whenever you want to use them.

PlayStation 2 Greatest Hits



Hot Shots Golf 3

Hot Shots is the golf series that made golf actually fun to play on your video-game system. The latest addition to this long-standing franchise improves its handicap with cleaner graphics and an in-depth career mode. Of course, the pick-up-and-play feel of the game appeals to all ages, too. ■ ESRB: Everyone



Kingdom Hearts

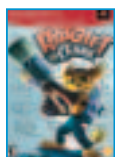
A very popular role-playing game from the creators of Final Fantasy, Kingdom Hearts mixes Disney characters with good old-fashioned adventuring. You join forces with Donald Duck and Goofy to rescue the missing King Mickey and save the kingdom from frightening creatures known as the Heartless.

■ ESRB: Everyone



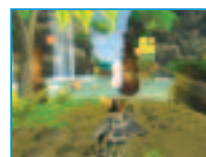
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2

It's the next best thing for those who can't afford those fast and super-expensive cars. You race down winding roads in a fancy European roadster, and the thrill becomes even more dangerous when you have the pesky police on your tail. It's a classic pursuit where everyone comes in first. ■ ESRB: Everyone



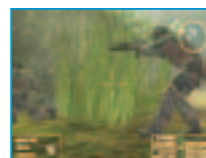
Ratchet & Clank

You'll do more than your fair share of old-fashioned trick-jumping and crate-breaking, but that's okay—Ratchet & Clank's innovation comes in the form of all those crazy, non-gimmicky weapons and tools. This is a complex, polished platform-gaming machine. ■ ESRB: Teen

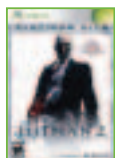


SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs

It's no accident that the SEALs are the premiere elite military group in the virtual world just as they are in the real world. Fight terrorism firsthand with this Navy special-ops team using authentic weaponry and equipment. The best part, however, is that you can enjoy the battles even more against other people with online play. ■ ESRB: MATURE



Xbox Platinum Hits



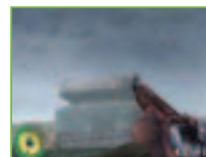
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin

The hitman is back, and this time he's got even more challenging jobs to fulfill. You'll have to use your brain as well as brawn to take out your targets, but it's up to you whether you want to use tricks, stealth, or big guns to get the job done. ■ ESRB: MATURE



Medal of Honor: Frontline

The next generation of the PlayStation hit puts you back in the middle of the world's deadliest war. Frontline's sights and sounds make you feel like you're there in Europe, battling Nazi soldiers and fighting to protect Allied interests. An inexpensive way to re-create your finest hour. ■ ESRB: Teen



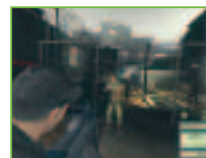
Project Gotham Racing

One of the first good racing games for the Xbox, Project Gotham Racing puts you behind the wheel of one of 25 cars for races down more than 200 circuits on city streets. You get points for both clean and stylish driving, and can race against up to three friends. ■ ESRB: Everyone



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell

Splinter Cell is one of those games that's so good that every Xbox owner should play it. Backed by gorgeous lighting and cool high-tech gadgets, its clandestine missions send you stalking through the shadows as an operative who must defend the U.S. without being detected by his enemies. ■ ESRB: Teen



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4

The fourth in Activision's groundbreaking Pro Skater series, this edition ramps up the quality and quantity in answer to challenges from the other skateboarding titles out there. With Tony Hawk's Underground on shelves, here's your chance for some bargain-priced skating action. ■ ESRB: Teen





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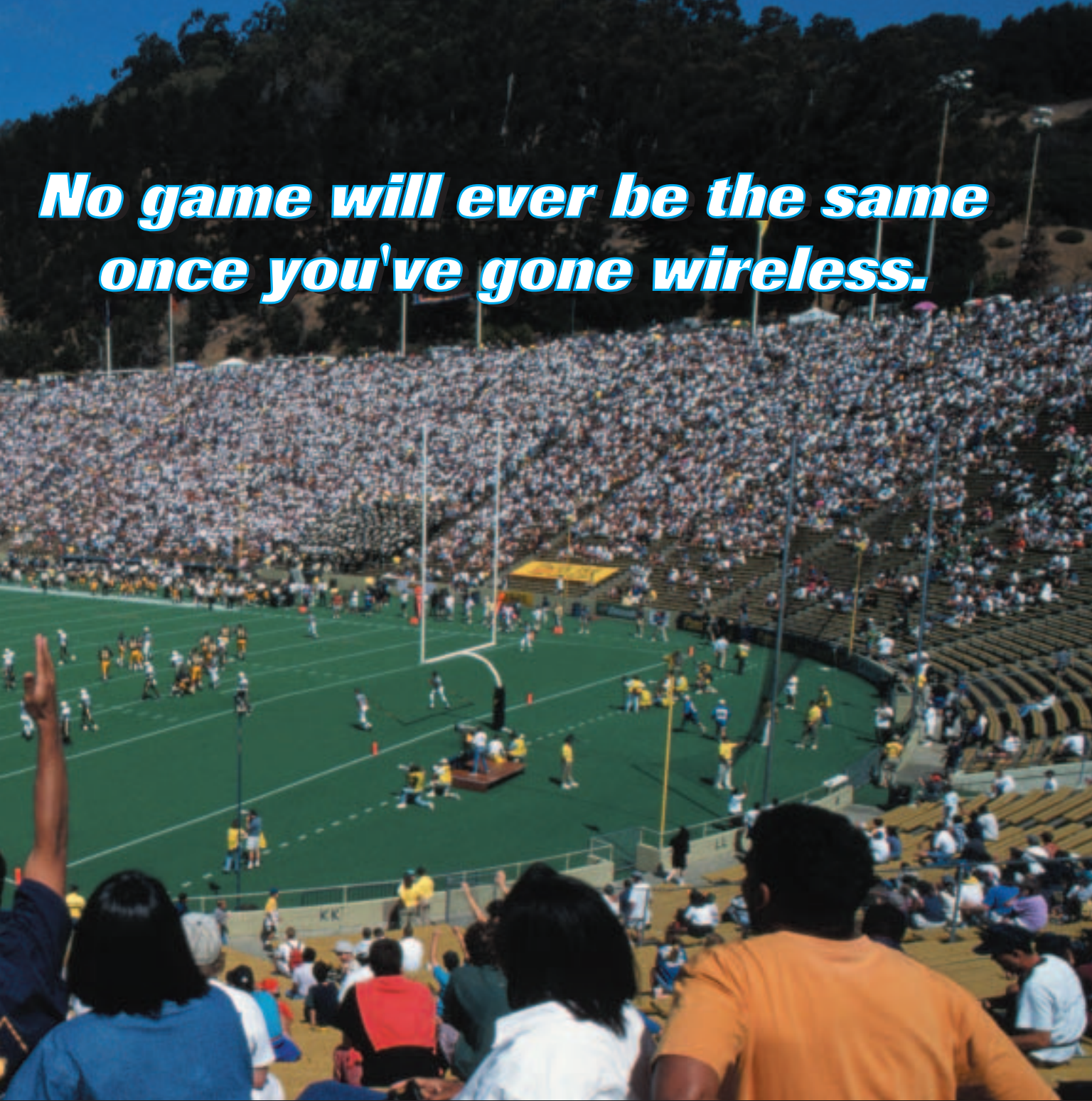
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PlayStation 2

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