



**SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS
LEADS THE PLAYSTATION 2'S**

ONLINE ASSAULT

BY CRISPIN BOYER

Pop-pop-pop! Pop-pop-pop! Bursts of heavy-caliber bullets smack into watermelons and lightbulbs, sheet metal and mailboxes, panes of glass and slabs of ham strewn across a firing range in the California desert just south of San Diego. It sounds nothing like the kapow-kapow! gunfire you hear in movies.

But then, these aren't movie guns. Pulling the very real triggers are real Navy SEALs, the most badass of the military's special forces. This messy target practice isn't low-tech training for future deployment to some Afghanistan warzone. Instead, these guys are lending their hardware to help launch a different kind of onslaught: Sony's online PlayStation 2 campaign, which finally gets rolling with the release of the system's \$40 Network Adapter in August (no exact date has been set).

More specifically, the SEALs are squeezing off rounds for developer Zipper Interactive, whose audio engineers are recording—from a safe distance, of course—gunplay sound effects for their upcoming PS2 spec-ops sim, *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*. It's the most true-to-life shooter we've ever locked and loaded into a console. (We'll let you guess what the melon and ham impact sounds will simulate.) But the bigger deal here is that *SOCOM* packs hefty online features, including 16-person multiplayer modes and voice chat via an included headset microphone. *SOCOM* is so feature-rich, in fact, that it can only be played over a broadband connection. But despite the lack of dial-up support, *SOCOM* is the primary weapon in Sony's initial online barrage: The game hits the same day in August as the Network Adapter.

Needless to say, this adapter—which was originally scheduled to ship last fall—is arriving a little late. Some figure it might have shipped even later if not for a certain competing black-and-green game box and its ambitious broadband-only network. "Had Microsoft not been going down the online-gaming road the way they are with Xbox, [Sony] may have felt they could delay even longer," says Ross Rubin, vice president and senior analyst at research group Jupiter Media Metrix. Sony, on the other hand, says competition had nothing to do with their timing. "We've taken a lot of time to study the overall North American market in order to get this end result," says Kaz Hirai, president and chief operating officer of Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA). "We

commissioned market studies and talked to a lot of PlayStation 2 gamers about what they wanted from their online experience." Hirai added that it also took longer than expected for the first-party online games to get up to speed.

But now that a handful of games—roughly half a dozen announced so far—will be ready for duty this year, Sony is geared up for online PS2 deployment. Its solution is simple: All that gamers need to buy is the Network Adapter, along with a game such as *SOCOM* that offers online features. The adapter combines a conventional 56K v.90 dial-up modem and an ethernet port for broadband connectivity, so it's good to go with any type of Internet-service provider (ISP) you already have. Flip the page for our guide to getting your PS2 online. Right now, though, the important thing to know is that you won't pay any additional fees to play.

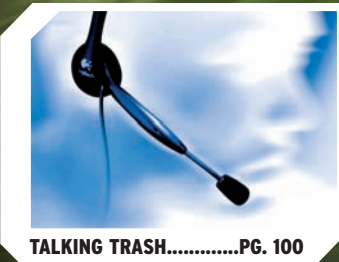
Of course, the adapter represents only the first stage of what Sony hopes will become a rich entertainment experience that goes beyond online gaming. When broadband worms its way into more gamers' homes, Sony plans to create a sort of online glitter gulch of downloadable games, music, movies and other content for your PS2. "This is something we'd like to offer consumers sooner rather than later," Hirai says. "We're talking this year or early next." That's also when we expect you'll be able to use your PS2 for browsing, instant messaging and other tasks spawned from SCEA's partnerships with America Online, Netscape and Real Networks. The PS2 hard drive add-on, which you'll need to do any heavy-duty downloading, will ship "once content becomes available that takes advantage of its storage capabilities," Hirai says. We know that next year's online RPG *Final Fantasy XI* will be one of the first games to require the hard drive, as well as one of the first to cost additional fees to play. But for now, Sony is easing both gamers and the industry into its grand online scheme for the PS2, going so far as to co-fund developers who experiment with novel network play. "We won't force a strategy on the market that it is not ready to embrace," Hirai says. "But we will approach the online arena with as much power and vigor as we always have in the offline arena."

In other words, as the SEALs say, "Hooyah!" Sony is finally firing their first volley in the online-console war. We're taking you on a recon mission to uncover the adapter's flagship title, *SOCOM*, as well as the rest of the games we'll be challenging you to online. See you on the battlefield.

THE BATTLE PLAN



HOOKING UP.....PG. 98



TALKING TRASH.....PG. 100



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THE OTHER GUYS.....PG. 106

THE ONLINE EQUATION

Everything you'll need to get PS2 wired and ready



NETWORK ADAPTER AND PS2

The \$40 adapter, which ships in August, snugs over the rear hatch on your PS2. It combines a 56K v.90 dial-up modem and ethernet port for broadband connections such as cable modems and DSL.



STARTUP DISC OR GAME DISC

The startup disc included with the adapter will baby-step you through the process of hooking your PS2 online via your existing ISP. Your configuration will be saved to a memory card, so online-enabled games can load the settings and connect lickety-split. *SOCOM* will even attempt to find its way online on its own (a process that's not too tricky, since the game supports broadband only). The startup disc also contains an online version of the tune game *Frequency*.



YOUR INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER

Sony says the PS2 adapter will support any ISP in the country, so if you already have a Net connection at home—say, for your PC or Dreamcast—then you're all set (although you'll want to buy an ethernet hub if you want to split your broadband connection between your PC and PS2). Not wired? No problem: The startup disc also packs subscription offers for several popular dial-up and broadband ISPs, including EarthLink, AT&T WorldNet and Prodigy.



ONLINE PS2 GAMING

Pick a name and a password for your warrior (you can make as many characters as you like), connect to the *SOCOM* server, join a game and—whammo!—you're playing with other gamers just like you (they probably play in their underwear like you, too). The first batch of online titles won't cost extra fees to play, so all you spend here is the \$40 price of the adapter, the cost of the online-enabled game, and whatever you fork over per month for your ISP. Nothing's keeping third parties from charging fees, however, and we know that ambitious titles like *Final Fantasy XI* and *EverQuest* will cost extra to play.

WAIT! WHAT ABOUT THIS THING?



THE PS2 HARD DRIVE

This peripheral—which fits into the hatch on the rear of your PS2, right underneath the Network Adapter—will eventually play a major part in Sony's online strategy. You'll use it to download games, movies and music, as well as play more complex online titles. But right now, this thing doesn't do jack. None of the first batch of online PS2 games takes advantage of the hard drive, and SCEA says they won't release it here until there's a need for it. (We don't expect the drive to hit until 2003, with the release of *Final Fantasy XI*.) No word yet on a price.



THIS IS WAR!

"Bravo, go to Juliet," 3D artist Russ Phillips says into his headset microphone as he demos *SOCOM*'s single-player campaign for us. In the kind of clipped dialog understood by the game's voice-recognition software, Phillips has just ordered his computer-controlled SEAL teammates to head to Juliet, a waypoint position that makes an ideal sniper perch for the team to cover his approach to a nearby terrorist base. Phillips taps the Triangle Button to crouch his character onto his belly. He begins a sneaking crawl toward the enemy stronghold.

Once his mission's accomplished, it's our turn to slip on the headset—and now we're talking to real-life players in an online *SOCOM* mode called Extraction, which pits our team of eight SEALs against eight terrorists guarding hostages. "You escort the fat lady," a teammate's voice blurts in our headset when we reach the three female hostages. "I'll lead the two skinny ones." We're lucky this round: The players on the terrorists team didn't move the hostages to separate locations or use them as

human shields. The game's two other online modes demand just as much teamwork and strategy. The Demolition mode has players trying to plant a bomb in the enemy's base, where they must guard it for 30 seconds until it detonates. The third mode, Elimination, is a deathmatch of SEALs versus terrorists. We see players sniping from foliage and shooting out lights to help exposed teammates. Each of the 12 multiplayer maps offers plenty of ways for crafty players to spoof enemies. One of the Zipper team's favorite tactics: They walk backward in the Alaskan level, so opponents can't track their footsteps in the snow.

Nope, *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs* is not your typical console run-and-gun shooter—and not just because it comes packed with the microphone gizmo (see page 100 for more details) or that it's the PS2's first online game. Like the *Rainbow Six* titles and the PC *Half-Life* add-on *Counter-Strike*, *SOCOM* is set in the real world, where your life depends on your teammates, you can't carry 10 weapons at a time, and one well-aimed shot will kill you. "You have to be careful in this game," says Jim Bosler, Zipper's president. "You're going into dangerous situations with really tough enemies, usually outnumbered and outgunned, just like real SEALs face."

To achieve such lethal realism, Zipper—whose previous work includes the PC hits *Crimson Skies* and *MechWarrior 3*—recruited real-life SEALs, making *SOCOM* the first game with official involvement from a special-forces group. "We

have been working with [everyone from] the admiral of Naval Special Warfare right on down," Bosler says. "He even brought his son by to play the game." Besides lending their big guns for the heavy-metal-thunder recording process we visited at the outset of this story, the SEALs posed, sprang and pummeled their way through motion-capture sessions, gripping realistic toy air guns that Zipper staff smuggled from Japan, to record the game's true-to-life hand signals, sneak tactics and enemy-takedown animations. The artists laser-scanned the SEALs' faces to record authentic camouflage, while every gun and chunk of gear in their arsenal was photographed for the in-game 3D models and textures. When you inspect your SEAL teammates' weapons, backpacks, straps, buckles, belt loops and holsters in the game, you're looking at the real deal.

The SEALs even helped pick the

four regions for *SOCOM*'s single-player campaign, in which you and a team of three computer-controlled soldiers go up against terrorists in Alaska, Thailand, the Congo jungle and Turkmenistan, a neighboring country of Afghanistan. "We wanted to stay away from clichéd areas of operation, yet make sure they were also authentic," Bosler says. "That's kinda the fun: learning new places. It's like the term *SOCOM*. Gamers will learn what it means." (For the record, it stands for "Special Operations Command.") The campaign has you going on three missions in each region, making for 12 single-player missions in all. You'll face Russian ex-Spetsnaz terrorists waging biological warfare, Eurothug mercenaries out to kidnap hostages, and straight-up Middle-Eastern terrorists. Once you pick your primary and secondary weapon at each mission's start

(aside from that, you don't have to worry much about pre-mission planning), you and your SEALs will sneak into installations, plant explosives, rescue hostages, laser-designate targets for aerial bombardment, retrieve documents and much more. Secondary objectives pop up throughout each mission. Tackle them and you'll unlock secret extras. Fail, and at least you have access to the one thing real SEALs can't count on: the reset button.



SOCOM can be played in either first- or third-person. It won't support USB mouse-and-keyboard control, since that would give some players an unfair advantage, although you can use a keyboard for lobby chat.



Dressed for success: Your SEALs sport the very latest lethal fashions, which vary depending on where in the world duty takes them. All their gear is 100-percent authentic.



right past you," Bosler says.

"You'll see it in multiplayer, too. An enemy will come by while you're hiding in the grass. You'll pop up and he'll be like, 'Whoa!'"

The game's environments give you and your team a hundred places to hide. You can creep through bushes, shadows and streams. "The deeper you are in foliage, the less likely enemies are to see you," says Software Engineer Michael Gutmann. You can shoot out lights, then switch on night-vision goggles to take out terrorists under cover of darkness. You can slip through the fog. Or you can even make your own cover if you have the right gear. "Say you want to run from one building to another," says Brian Soderberg, Zipper's vice president of technology. "You can throw a smoke grenade between the buildings and run through the smoke. The enemies will know something is up but not where you are. Or you can throw the smoke as a diversion."

Your three A.I. teammates in the single-player mode rely on the same stealthy tactics. "They understand the environment," Soderberg says. "They don't follow a script. They'll actually go hide behind trees. They'll find the shadows and move through them. They'll pay attention to what you're doing and follow your cues." In short, these guys take care of themselves—and they'll take care

of you if you don't order them to their deaths. Your fellow SEALs are so important, in fact, that you'll fail a mission if more than two of them die. "The SEALs are about being a team, not an individual," Bosler says, "so we made it so you can't succeed without acting as a team."

THEY GOT ME!

Your compadres aren't the only clever A.I. guys in the single-player game. *SOCOM*'s enemies, like your SEALs, don't follow scripted paths or patterns. Each comes with a varying level of courage, training and alertness, which govern how he'll react when you start raising hell. "They attain courage by having buddies around," Gutmann says. "Some may even try to rush you and take you out with their rifle butt. It's scary—they kind of scream when they run at you. But if you start taking their buddies out and they're suddenly left alone, they might surrender." Chicken-hearted terrorists throw their hands in the air, giving you the option of blasting them away or cuffing their hands.

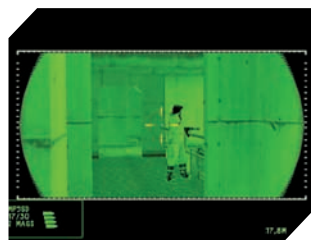
A clever terrorist will scoop up your tossed grenades and chuck 'em right back. Enemies will come to investigate if they see foliage sway while you crawl through the bush. They'll call for help if you attack and track your footprints in the snow or your trail of blood if



you retreat. "It's a good idea to sneak around the enemy perimeter and leave your footprints in a shadowed area," Soderberg says.

Your team needs to stay stealthy to stay out of trouble, but that requires more than just creeping through shadows. Use silenced weapons and enemies won't know which direction you're firing from. And when you do kill a bad guy, clean up your mess. "If you leave a body in the middle of the base, the A.I. will eventually see it and tell other A.I., who will tell other A.I.," says Creative Director David Sears. "You want to drag and drop your victims behind walls or in foliage. It's just good housekeeping."

Fortunately, the bad guys have to play by the same rules you do. Their weapons are modeled after real ones, so they'll burn through ammo quickly if you stay one step ahead of them. "A lot of times," Gutmann says, "they'll run out of ammo and can't get to more



without having to come out of hiding, so they'll surrender."

And when they do give up the fight, you'll want to grab their guns. *SOCOM* features nearly 40 weapons in all, from the standard-issue M4 (basically an M16 with a grenade launcher) to a .50 caliber sniper rifle. "That gun would kill an elephant, pass through, and kill a tank on the other side," Sears says. Thing is, you can only carry two weapons at a time—a primary big gun and a secondary pistol—in addition to your pack of ammo, grenades and other gear. Grabbing enemy weapons will keep you in the fight when your guns run dry.

Tapping in the left analog stick changes your rate of fire, from single-shot to three-shot burst to



full auto. Going auto with most guns will empty your clip in four seconds. Fortunately, a little ammo goes a long way—literally: You can shoot through doors and walls and actually get guys hiding on the other side. "Each material in the environment, such as wood, concrete, glass and corrugated metal, has different characteristics for penetration," says Producer

Seth Luisi. "And each bullet type has a different velocity characteristic that determines what materials it can pass through." Shots will even ricochet, so watch that stray fire when you're near hostages. And bullets will cut through the softest targets of all: terrorist dirtbags. "If you line them up," Gutmann says, "you can get two guys with one shot."



COVER ME!

Such gruesome laws of physics apply to the multiplayer games, too. You will be able to shoot through stuff. Stumble carelessly through foliage and enemies will spot you. But even more important than sure shots or stealth is the teamwork aspect of *SOCOM* online. Playing as a team is so crucial, in fact, that your ranking on the game's ladder—which rates every participating player and is viewable by all—is determined by more than just who's got the most kills. You score higher for escorting hostages to safety, blowing up enemy bases, and finishing a match with all your teammates still kickin'. "It's a team-based game," Luisi says, "so you're given more points for doing team-based things."

Climb the rankings and you can expect to be contacted by *SOCOM* "clans," or groups of gamers who play together on a regular basis, who will invite you to join their

Tapping Triangle switches your stance from standing to crouching to lying prone. Your accuracy is best when you lie still on your belly—a great position for sniping.

team. *SOCOM* makes it easy to form your own clan. Just name it, type in a one-line credo, select a badge, and you're ready to invite up to nine players to join. Then you can challenge other clans to see who's got the top team (the game ranks clans as well as individual players). Since *SOCOM* doesn't support split-screen or local-area-network play, clan warfare is the best option for gamers who only want to play with people they know. Instead of everyone lugging their TVs and systems to a room for LAN play, they just need to pick a day and time for the clan to meet online.

Clan support alone is going to nab *SOCOM* a massive following—especially if the latency stays as tolerable as in the version we played (we noticed no lag at all). "To provide the best performance, a consistent experience and no unfair advantages, all of the *SOCOM* servers will be hosted by SCEA in our San Diego facility," Luisi says. "We are also prepared to co-locate servers in Chicago and



Washington, D.C., if the East Coast-West Coast latency is greater than we expect." Sony says connection tests from as far as Europe and Asia have produced minimal lag.

It's just too bad that the only gamers who can play *SOCOM* are those with broadband ISPs. Right now, barely 40 percent of console gamers have broadband connections such as cable modems, DSL and T3 lines, according to numbers from Jupiter Media Metrix. Do the math and it's clear that a lot of PS2 owners will be left out of the *SOCOM* party. Sony says the game is broadband-

only for many reasons: Its realistic bullet physics, voice-chat functions and 16-player support just require too much bandwidth for narrowband to handle. "It would give gamers with broadband connections an unfair advantage over those stuck with dial-up," Luisi says.

In other words, even if gamers could jack into *SOCOM*'s brutal combat via narrowband, they'd wind up as target practice for players with fat-pipe connections. And...well, you remember the mess those SEALs made at that California desert target range.

TALK THE TALK

Command and conquer with SOCOM's nifty headset microphone



It's made of chinsey plastic, and you look kinda like a McDonald's drive-through employee when you slip it on, but Logitech's headset microphone peripheral adds so much to the *SOCOM* experience that you really shouldn't play this game—either online or off—without it. Lucky you: *SOCOM* comes with this chatty gadget packed into the box, and the entire game-and-mic combo costs a reasonable \$60.

The gizmo's tremendous value during online play is obvious: Instead of pawing at a keyboard to type "Help, old chaps, I seem to be getting shot in the face!" to your compadres, you can just holler it right into the mic. All you gotta do is hold in the Circle button and begin speaking, then let go when you're done. Your team members will hear your message in their headsets or from their TV speakers if their mics aren't jacked into the PS2's USB port. You can even switch to separate audio channels for offense and defense. It's a great setup for talking strategy in *SOCOM*, a game that rewards well-planned team play.

We tried the voice-chat feature and found that it worked extremely well, with minimal delay. Team member voices—which pop through your earphone with an artificial hiss as if

they were talking via a real military radio—even sound authentic. *SOCOM* lets only one person speak at a time, to prevent overlapping conversation and surges in lag-inducing voice data being sent over the Internet. The game will limit the length of each voice transmission to make sure punk players won't just hold down the Circle button and hog the channel. "Ten seconds seems a pretty reasonable duration," says Producer Seth Luisi.

But voice chat during online play is only half of the headset hoopla. *SOCOM* also supports voice recognition, meaning you can issue orders to your three A.I. squadmates during the single-player game. It works the same way: Jab the Circle button, bark out a command like "Team, deploy at crosshairs," then watch your fellow SEALs sneak out of the bush and chuck grenades in the direction you're aiming. At any time, you can hold the Circle button and eye the available orders (see screen at left), which change depending on the situation. You might, for instance, order the guys to sneak to a certain waypoint (by saying, "Team, stealth to Charlie") or escort a hostage to the extraction zone ("Team, escort to Zulu"). "The team-command menu is subject-verb-object based," says Creative Director David Sears, "and once you become accustomed to the commands, it's



really easy to just hold the button and talk."

Your fellow SEALs talk back to you, too. Give them an order and you'll hear their crisp "affirmative" in your headphone. They'll also feed you info throughout the mission, telling you when they've taken out enemies or if they see a terrorist near your position. Mission briefings feed through your headphone, as well. It all adds up to a completely immersive experience—which becomes even more intense when you see enemies react to your vocal commands. "If you walk into a room of terrorists and shout, 'Drop your weapons! Drop your weapons!' they'll actually listen to that and are more likely to surrender," says Software Engineer Michael Gutmann.

The voice-recognition system worked perfectly for us, once we got used to speaking the curt commands. Zipper claims the software will work with more than 90 percent of gamers. People with thick southern draws, high voices or other unusual vocal characteristics may have to speak slowly or just use the joystick to select commands as a back-up. Still, most gamers should have no problems commanding the troops. "One of the guys in our company is Russian, and it works just fine for him," says Multiplayer Designer Erin Korus.

The headset mic worked so well with *SOCOM*, in fact, that we wondered if we'll see it used with future PS2 titles. SCEA is taking a "whatever



Logitech designed *SOCOM*'s packed-in headset mic, which comes with a 10-foot cord and snaps into your PS2's USB port.

happens, happens" stance. They're not planning to sell the headset separately, although they did post the gadget's drivers to the PS2 development Web site, so any developers can add voice functionality to their games if they wish. "Sony's not really trying to push the headset," Luisi says. "It's just sort of something that came out of making this game, where we thought it would work really well. It's not similar to the Nintendo 64 and *Star Fox 64* where they were trying to sell the Rumble Pak in there."