

straight and sterile, convenient rather than compelling. A grid added to the grid.

"The layout of paths will seem right and comfortable only when it is compatible with the process of walking," Christopher Alexander writes in his 1977 classic "A Pattern Language." "And the process of walking is far more subtle than people might imagine."

Sounds simple. The challenge is finding that comfort level. But as Boston and Cambridge show, the payoff is immense.

Place appears on Tuesdays. E-mail John King at jking@sfchronicle.com.

Auto, has a pathetic vibe, with a false confidence that doesn't hide the fact that he's a tragedy waiting to happen. He's somewhere between the Falstaff character from Shakespeare and Namond from the fourth season of "The Wire."

The game reveals its true motivations a few hours into the action, on a dock at the edge of Liberty City, after a brutal (but deserved) murder. Niko gives a powerful soliloquy that reveals a large chunk of his past, and some previously unknown reasons for his coming to America. The scene is cut cinematically, lit by the moon, with the city's vast skyline looming ghostlike in the background. From there, it's clear where

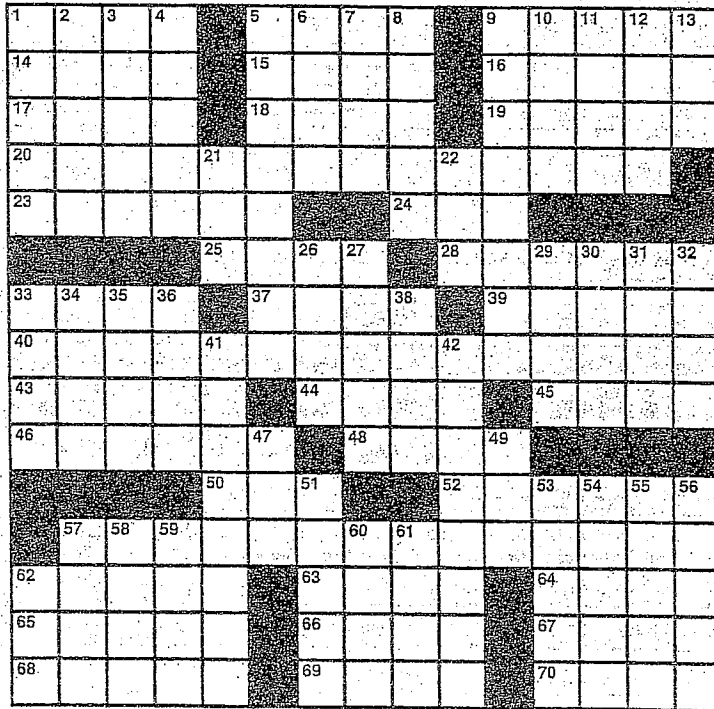
the game is going: Niko may have a dead soul, but his experiences have heightened his sense of right and wrong. He's a modern-day Tom Joad.

The amount of mayhem and carnage in GTA IV is about the same as in the two previous games, but it seems as if there's less — in part because Niko isn't just a mindless instigator, and in part because there's so much more to do in this game.

When the pedestrians, cars and buildings became repetitive in GTA: Vice City, released in 2002, it was always tempting to get bored, steal a cop car and end up in your own North Hollywood shootout. There are 10 times as many distractions in GTA IV, in-

CROSSWORD PUZZLE Andrea Carla Michaels & Michael Blake

- ACROSS**
- 1 Ticket tear-off
 - 5 Help in a scam
 - 9 Cold explosion?
 - 14 Window segment
 - 15 ___ contender: court plea
 - 16 Munch
 - 17 "The Genteel Style in Writing" essayist
 - 18 "Let's get crackin'!"
 - 19 How-to-play-the-game list
 - 20 1970 Dustina Hoffman saga?
 - 23 Cowboys' ropes
 - 24 "___ boom bahl!"
 - 25 Ed and Mel of baseball
 - 28 Slanted type
 - 33 "Bus Stop" dramatist
 - 37 Nevada senator Harry
 - 39 "This is where ___ in"
 - 40 1939 Roberta Donat film?
 - 43 Actor Davis
 - 44 "Cut it out"
 - 45 Before, before
 - 46 Microwave, perhaps
 - 48 Midday
 - 50 Fish eggs
 - 52 Fan club member's purchase
 - 57 1967 Cindy Poitier film?
 - 62 Chocolate substitute
 - 63 Big blowout
 - 64 Ugandan dictator
 - 65 Poker player's "Let's see what you've got"
 - 66 Columnist Bombeck



- 67 Tidy
 - 68 "48 HRS." co-star Nick
 - 69 Take five
 - 70 Dianne Wiest's "In Treatment" role
- DOWN**
- 1 Hex
 - 2 "Rocky" actress Shire
 - 3 Curriculum parts
 - 4 Outscores
 - 5 Family tree subject
 - 6 Box office disaster
 - 7 "The Time Machine" race
 - 8 Salad servers
 - 9 Puzzle that involves a quoted passage
 - 10 Pal
 - 11 Hello, in Hidalgo
 - 12 Sign of what's to come
 - 13 Photo chances
 - 21 John of London
 - 22 Nintendo game system
 - 26 Ready to drive, as a golf ball
 - 27 Electronic memory game with colored buttons
 - 29 Dull pain
 - 30 Lion's den
 - 31 Pixies
 - 32 "___ la vie"
 - 33 Composer Stravinsky
 - 34 Snoop (around)
 - 35 "Oh, my!"
 - 36 Singer Adams
 - 38 Bond novel in which Q first appeared
 - 41 Not as arduous as it might be
 - 42 "Cut it out!"
 - 47 One ___ customer
 - 49 Japanese drama
 - 51 Fire leftover
 - 53 Much street talk
 - 54 "My Cousin Vinny" Oscar winner Marisa
 - 55 Perrier competitor
 - 56 Fashion's Oscar de la ___
 - 57 Fiesta fare
 - 58 Vocalized
 - 59 Lose feathers
 - 60 Hard or soft attachment
 - 61 Philosophies
 - 62 Reds, on scoreboards

Solution on Page E2

DEAR ABBY Jeanne Phillips

Did you hear? She

Dear Abby: I live in a medium-size community where a lot of people know one another. I often hear them discuss such private matters as the state of someone's marriage, their finances, etc. Even if they don't know if what they're saying is true, they still repeat it.

Whenever someone starts talking to me about a person who isn't there, I remind her that she wouldn't appreciate having her business discussed behind her back. One neighbor even asked me about my own marriage in front of a group of people. When I politely asked why she would ask about such an intimate matter, she became angry and told me I was being rude to her. I may have embarrassed her, but not as much as she did me.

I think gossiping is a low form of entertainment at someone else's expense. What do you think?

MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS IN NEVADA

Dear Minding Your Own Business: If we're honest, gossip is something that most of us have indulged in at one time or another. Why we have this compulsion is anybody's guess. Perhaps it's because gossip requires little intellectual effort, distracts us from concentrating on important tasks in our lives that might be painful or difficult to confront, or makes us feel superior.

P.S.: You did not embarrass your neighbor. She embarrassed herself.

Dear Abby: I am a high school senior applying to colleges. As I've visited various schools, I have realized that college isn't cheap. Many of them cost more than