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PlayStation®2 official magazine-UK

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"AUTOBOTS, TRANSFORM AND ROLL OUT!"

TRANSFORMERS

IT'S PRIME TIME

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> ROGUE GALAXY > MANHUNT 2 > SMACKDOWN 2008 > GTA IV
> THE GOLDEN COMPASS > THE DARKNESS > TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM
> GUITAR HERO 3 > SPIDER-MAN 3 > THE ULTIMATE RPG PARTY

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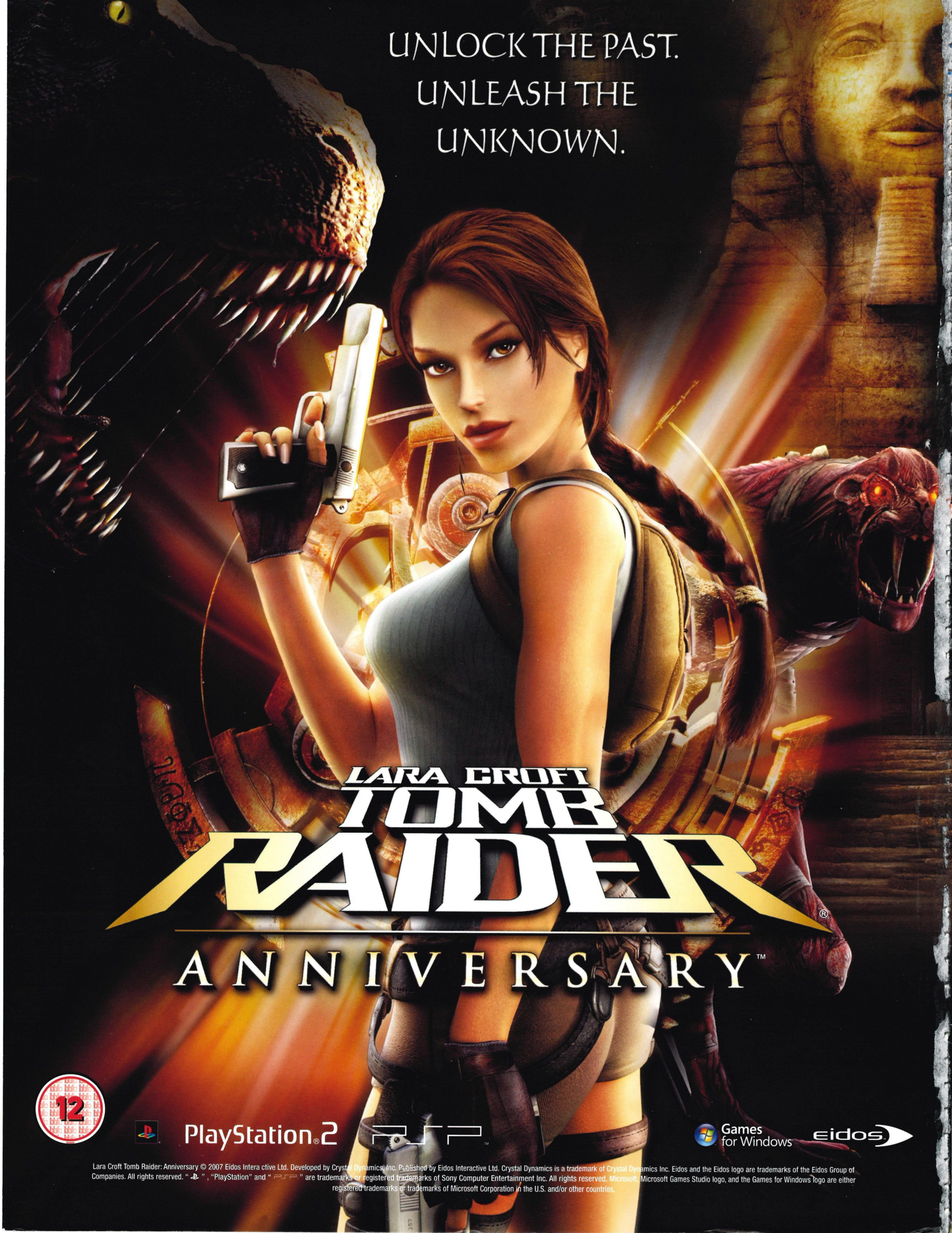

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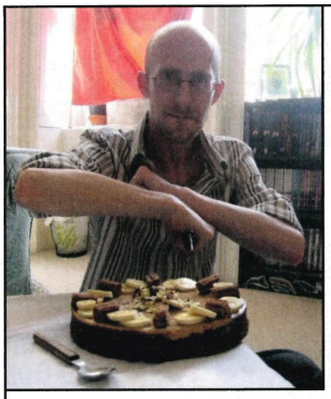
*In a nod to our budget game feature on page 100, this month we asked our contributors to come up with a budget game that they'd like to see made



CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

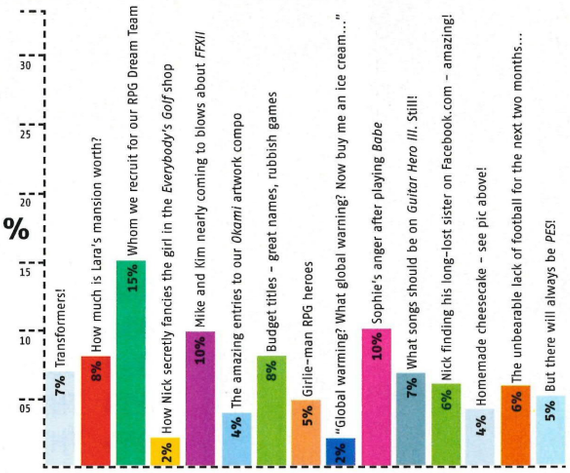
I bet you thought I was going to say ch-ch-ch-cheesecake! Nope, that would just be silly. Anyway, being the wrong side of 30, I'm more than old enough to remember the *Transformers* when they first appeared on the telly in 1984. I loved them then and I still dig them now: robots that transform into planes or cars or boats or whatever are just plain cool, no argument. And that's pretty much the reason why we've been pestering Activision for months to get the exclusive lowdown on the new *Transformers* game. Our petitioning finally paid off this issue and on p18 Andy brings you our first impressions of the game after visiting Traveller's Tales to see it. Regular readers will know that OPS2 will be undergoing its own transformation in the coming months, and I'd like to say a big thank you to all of you who've written in with your ideas, opinions and observations about the mag. Keep 'em coming! One thing that will *never* change, though, is our dedication to bringing you the very latest news and info on PS2's hottest games, and this issue is bursting at the seams with great stuff, from our *Manhunt 2* hands-on update to the very first screens of Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass* and the exclusive review of *Rogue Galaxy*. Enjoy.

COVER COMPO!
No cover compo this month folks, but you will find the answers to the last three compos on this issue's back page. New comp next month...

Nick

NICK ELLIS, Editor

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT



TEAM OPS2

Kim Richards
Writer, *Shadowhearts* review (p86)
Tiny but mighty Richards has been banned from saying 'awesome!' in the office but it didn't stop her finding a Grand Canyon-full of other superlatives to describe the joy of being paid actual cash money to play RPGs while her mates have to do real jobs.

Mike Sterry
Writer, *Rogue Galaxy* review (p76)
Mike is also a big fan of RPGs but has spent much of the month arguing with Kim about *Final Fantasy XII*. Mike, you see, isn't quite so enamoured with the game as our Kim. We set them to fight it out in a battle of words. Head to p11 for that and see who you side with.

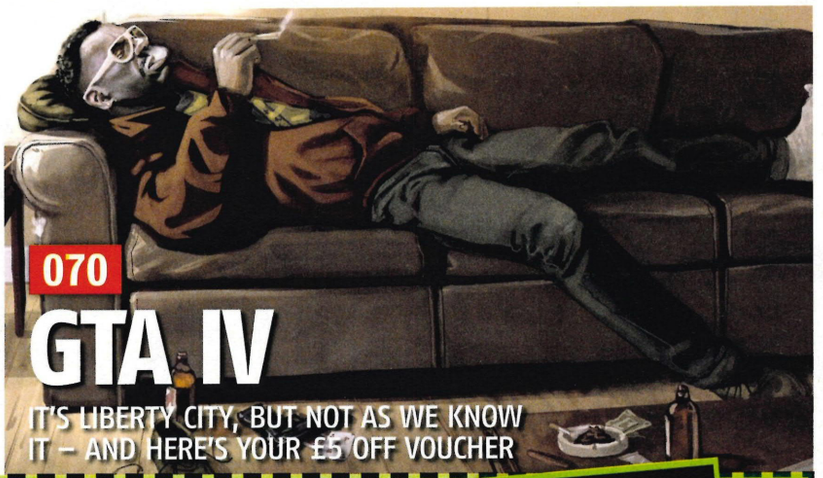
Andy Hartup
Writer, *Transformers* feature (p18)
Having worked him so hard over the last couple of months that his fingers became all bent and bust up, we've promoted Andy to deputy editor as a reward. Benefits include working harder, staying in the office later, and getting a train to Knutsford at 5am.

Sophie Mason
Writer, budget games feature (p100)
Sophie is normally as sweet-natured a girl as you could hope to meet, but since spending most of a day playing *Babe* for our budget games feature, she transformed into a ball of hate, anger and frustration. We didn't make her play it, though. It was Sophie's choice.

PlayStation®2 OFFICIAL magazine-UK

018 ROBOTS IN SURPRISE

WOULD YOU ADAM AND EVE IT: THE TRANSFORMERS GAME IS ACTUALLY GOOD!



070 GTA IV

IT'S LIBERTY CITY, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT – AND HERE'S YOUR £5 OFF VOUCHER

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- This voucher entitles the holder to £5 off the price of GTA IV for PlayStation 3 at Currys.digital and Currys stores. Only one voucher may be redeemed per purchase.
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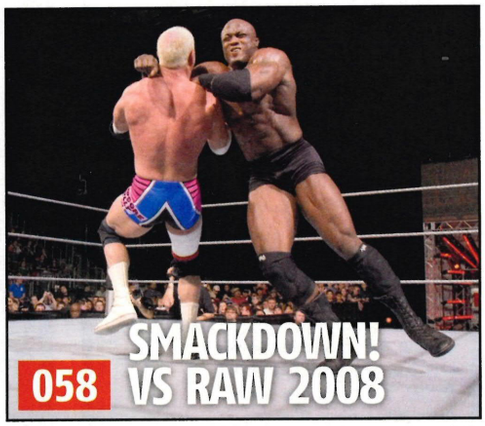

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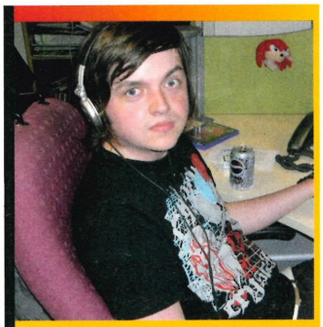
THIS MONTH'S HOTTEST DEMOS!



The Cover Disc Elves have outdone themselves this month with the high-concept theme of duality.

On the one hand, you can get your terrorist-torturing groove on as Jack Bauer in *24: The Game*; on the other, you can engage in polite, Crown-sanctioned murder as Sean 'Best Bond' Connery in *From Russia with Love*.

It just goes to show that in gaming, for every frantically fun kart racer à la *Crash Tag Team Racing*, there's a super-serious simulation such as *Enthusia Professional Racing*; and that for every *Everybody's Tennis* there's an, erm, *Everybody's Golf*. It's ying and yang, baby.

Mike

Mike Sterry,
Staff writer

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHY WON'T MY DISC WORK?

To be honest, we're not sure. But seriously, if your DVD appears not to be loading properly, first try resetting the PS2 and loading the disc again. If that fails, we'll gladly replace it for you. Simply mail the faulty disc (no need to send the box) with your address to *OPS2* Magazine, Disc Returns, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. If you have any further queries, email us at ps2postal@futurenet.co.uk

01 EVERYBODY'S TENNIS

What you get: We gave it 8/10 in the last issue, so you already know how highly we rate this light-hearted, yet surprisingly deep and challenging tennis game. If that's not enough to convince you that it's exactly the type of new balls that you need, smash your way through the Match Challenges in this demo or sample the players in a Single or Doubles match.

02 EVERYBODY'S GOLF

What you get: It's not everybody's, it's yours – and it's the perfect partner to *Everybody's Tennis*. Warm up for summer days (or keep yourself occupied indoors when it's too rainy for the links) by playing a quick round of virtual golf with your mates. In this taster, you can go three holes on the scenic course of Mount Sakura.

***GAME SAVE TERMS AND CONDITIONS** Memory cards are sent to OPS2 at sender's risk and OPS2 cannot be held responsible for the non-receipt of memory cards. Readers whose saves are used on the OPS2 disc will win a game of the editor's choice. There's no prize for saves that are not used on OPS2's disc. All memory cards will be returned by Recorded Delivery as soon as possible. We reserve the right to amend the prize offered at any time. The editor's decision is final.

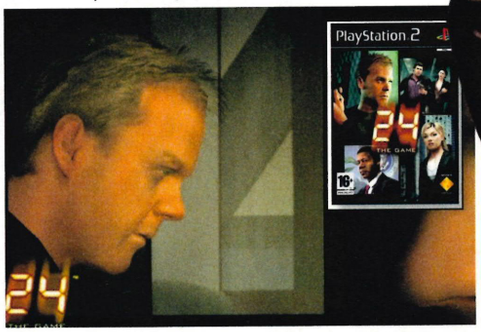
NOW!

03 DARK CLOUD

What you get: Oh no! Someone's resurrected the evil (and hungry) Dark Genie, and it's gone on a rampage. Now it's up to you to explore the first dungeon of Level 5's precursor to *Rogue Galaxy*, gathering the bits to rebuild the town the nasty genie has destroyed.

04 24: THE GAME

What you get: Experience what it's like to be legendary counter-terrorist agent Jack Bauer. Battle through the first integrated tutorial level. Kill 'tursts', rescue a hostage, say 'you're going to have to trust me on this' lots and generally save the day – or at least, the hour between 2pm and 3pm.

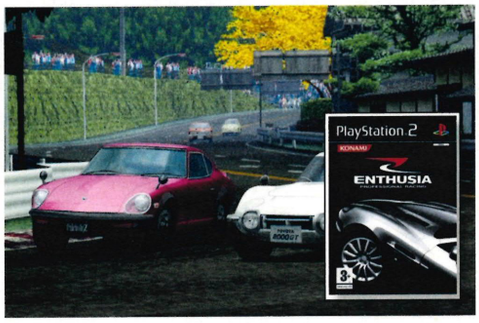


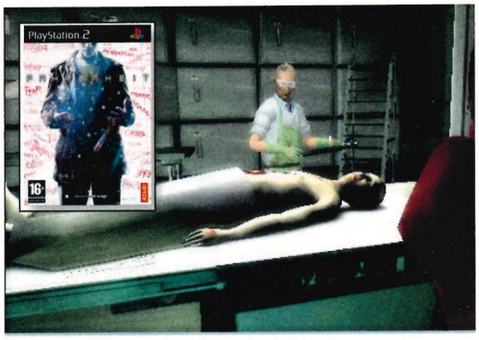
05 CRASH TAG TEAM RACING

What you get: To warm you up for Crash Bandicoot's forthcoming game, here's a chance to get to grips with his bizarre world in the first theme park of his classic racing title.

06 ENTHUSIA PROFESSIONAL RACING

What you get: Free race around the Speediapolis Ring, Marco Strada or Burgenschlucht tracks, choosing from a host of classy cars including an Aston Martin Vanquish.





07 FAHRENHEIT

What you get: Your adrenaline will be flowing in this bone-chilling taster of paranormal thriller *Fahrenheit*. The director pops up in the intro to give you some facts that'll help you understand better what's going on in this demo.

08 FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

What you get: Step into the shoes of Britain's best-loved secret agent and shoot your way through the first level of this nostalgic James Bond title. Your mission is to save the prime minister's daughter, who's been nabbed by a bloke with a jetpack...

09 RATCHET: GLADIATOR

What you get: Blast through a generous portion of gun-toting fun. Jump in the Landstalker for extra kicks, or get some mates round to try the Co-op and Deathmatch modes.

10 SECOND SIGHT

What you get: When you wake up in a hospital, wrapped in bloodied bandages and with no memories but some freaky psychic power, you just know it ain't gonna be a good day. Sneak your way to patient records and try to find out what's going on.

DEMO DISC EXTRA

DISC CHALLENGE

01 EVERYBODY'S TENNIS

Woohoo for Wimbledon! With the greatest tennis tournament on Earth set to start on 25 June, it's time to get into the spirit of things with a top tennis game for your PS2.

To celebrate the release of *Everybody's Tennis*, we're giving you the chance to get your mitts on some prime prizes by playing this month's demo.

One lucky winner will win a copy of *Everybody's Tennis* plus a selection of *GTA IV* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* goodies, in a special *GTA* pizza box. Four runners-up will each get a copy of *Everybody's Tennis*. To enter the competition, you'll need to fire up the demo disc and use the *Everybody's Tennis* demo.

THE CHALLENGE

On the demo, select a 'Tennis with Everybody' match and choose to play a singles game against the computer. Choose whichever characters you'd like to play as and against, and make sure you're playing one set with two games in each.

Your aim is to beat our Match Rating (68/100 pts). If you do so, take a pic on your phone, attach it to an MMS and text CHALLENGEDISC (then a space) followed by your name and where you live to 07738 647177. In the event of a tie, the entrant with the highest number of Sweet Spot Hits will win.

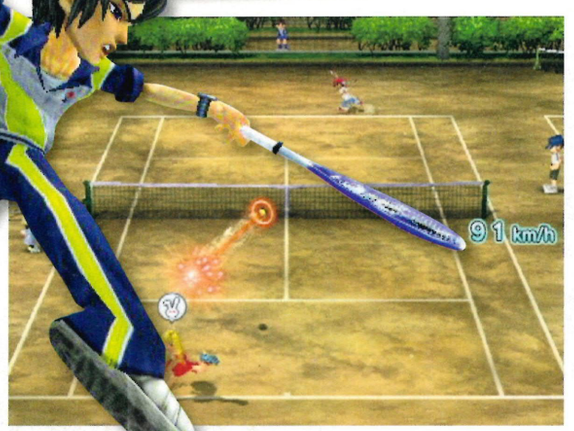
Texts are charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate. Please source all necessary permissions. Lines are open from 24 May to 20 June. We will not advise non-winners of the results.

A HELPING HAND

To give you a head start, here are a couple of tips that should help you rack up a top score.

You must learn to time your strokes. Simply running around bashing buttons will not only lower your final score, but give the AI multiple chances to dominate the match. Time your swing and the ball will go exactly where you want it to, but swing too early or too late and where it will land is anybody's guess.

Try to catch out your opponent by setting him or her up for a fall. Aim to get a few volleys as close to the net as possible in the enemy's court and, when they're lured in, smash the ball as far back as you can without being out. Hopefully they won't be able to scramble backwards in time to volley it.



CONTROLS

- ⊗ Topspin
- ◎: Slice
- △: Lob
- □: Replay

Joystick: Move character/ select shot direction

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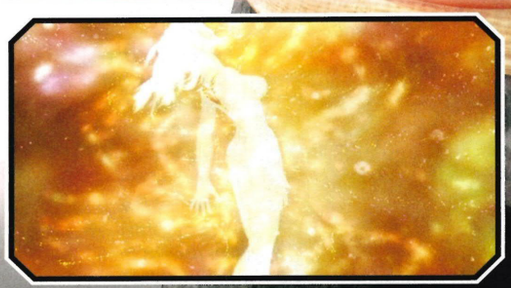
SHADOW HEARTS®

FROM THE NEW WORLD



RPG Fan - 90%
"It's lengthy. It's engrossing. A really decent RPG."

GameSpot - 82%
"A great battle system and a myriad of side quests to explore."

TotalPlaystation - 95%
"Without a doubt, one of the best RPGs to hit the PS2."

12+ TM

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postal

THIS MONTH: BOARD WITH SNAKE, BAD MEMORIES AND STUFF WE WANT...

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WIN THIS!
This month, any letters published here will get a copy of *Tomb Raider Anniversary* courtesy of ShopTo.com. Only main Postal letters receive games. The Star Letter also wins £100 to spend at ShopTo.com. Letters will be edited for length and clarity.

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star letter

BLAND THEFT AUTO?

I hope I'm not the only one who thinks this but I'm really disappointed with the new *Grand Theft Auto* game. It looks like absolute garbage.

First of all, I thought that the whole point of making a new *GTA* was to create a new area, such as we've had before with Vice City and San Andreas. But all we're getting is Liberty City again. Where is the fun in that?

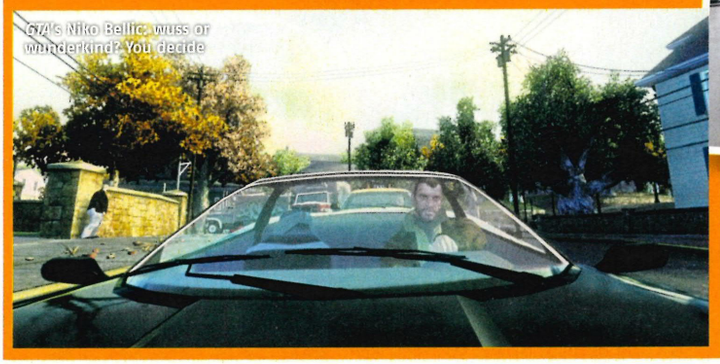
I thought that Rockstar had creative minds and they should have come up with a whole new land and a whole bunch of new features to go with it, but no.

And as for the main character, why? You need a handsome, rugged guy that can kick ass. This guy in *GTA IV* looks a wuss, no offense!

I've got all of Rockstar's games, new and old. They are my favourite game developers, but from what I've seen so far I'm utterly disappointed with them. Are they losing their touch ?

Lois Northway , Leeds

Strong opinions, Lois, and that's why we've made you Star Letter. Having seen the game in action (p70), we think GTA IV *is going to be awesome, but you're clearly not happy. Any thoughts, folks?*



BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE

I was just wondering, if Amaterasu doesn't count in your dogs feature (OPS2#84) how come something 'bipedal, unable to bark, and built from 10 tonnes of titanium', two entries that aren't technically alive, and five cartoon dogs managed to get in?

Yes, Amaterasu may be a wolf, but one deserving of a place on the list. I mean, she is a god, emerging from one of the best games ever to grace the screen of PS2-controlled television.

Out of interest, where would she have come if she had been on the list?

Although, thank you for putting Interceptor in there, probably one of the most undeservedly overlooked characters in any *Final Fantasy*.

Paul Jennings, Co. Down

We felt that Amaterasu would have been gravely insulted to be placed on a page with mere canines. We've honoured her with four pages of reader art instead, starting on p14.

A GOD IDEA?

Great mag, I have 16 issues of it and I get it every month. I was reading your guide to *God of War II* and I think that there should be a free roaming *GTA*-style version of the *God of War* games.

For example the average enemies like the Sentries and Beast Lords would be equivalent of gang memebers and cops, while the Sisters Of Fate would be like *GTA's* gang bosses. Instead of vehicles you'd have stuff like the Gryphons and the Pegasus to hijack. And so on.

Adam Fraser, Smallfield

It's a nice idea, Adam, but we rather dig God Of War *just the way it is.*

CUT 'N' PASTE

Carrick Edmond, Co Louth
Aaaargh, Snake dies in *MGS4*. I can't handle it. Kojima has killed off the fans' favourite because he likes men who look like women (Raiden)

Rob Tipping, Birmingham
Reading last month's magazine I saw that someone had created a *Metal Gear Solid* board game, and thought that it was really good. So I decided to send you a pic of the Limited Edition PS3 that I designed for a school project

Patrick Mayes, Potters Bar
Here's an interesting fact about *Tomb Raider*: to celebrate the fantastic new game and anniversary, Lara's mansion was modelled on the front of the Derby Studios where Core Design worked on the original.

DISTRESSING DELIVERY

WHAT WE WERE REALLY TROUBLED TO FIND IN OUR SACK THIS MONTH

"I would like to thank you for your glossy finish... in the magazine, not you (although that would be cool).

"I say this because while being anti-social and reading my mag at the dinner table, I managed to spill a bit of Golden Syrup on the *Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights* preview.

"I was a bit annoyed because I thought that I wouldn't be able to clean it off without wetting through the page and destroying it.

"I then thought "Hey, what do I have to lose?" and proceeded to lick the Golden Syrup off the page without damaging it a single bit... Hurrah!"

Phil Edwards, email

Oh dear...

LEGEND FOR A FALL

How can you possibly say that *Tomb Raider: Legend* had the best controls and puzzles since the first *Tomb Raider*?

There was no subtlety to the controls, the camera was slow and low-slung and the puzzles were mind-blowingly easy and repetitive, mostly involving the (yawn) grapple hook or (bigger yawn) swing bars. You say the early games were criticised for being too hard? Any true adventurer would have to laugh at such player criticisms.

The puzzles weren't lateral enough, you say? They were clever, and required a mixture of logical and imaginative lateral thinking to crack. In short, the games were challenging – which is a lot more than can be said for the linear *Legend*.

Hopefully *Anniversary* will buck the trend for dumbed-down Lara. As for the disaster that was *Angel of Darkness* – that was Core Design trying to make an ill-advised re-working of the game to garner good reviews from magazines like yourselves, which you duly obliged them with.

Lee Morrall, email

As we understand it, Lee, the decision was made to design Legend *to appeal both to long-standing fans of the game*

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and to attract newcomers who may not have been around in Lara's PS1 days. Hence it was a short and sweet encounter rather than the epics of old. However, we think you'll like the challenge that Anniversary *poses.*

I'VE COME A CHOPPER

After reading your splendid Spy feature on *Mercenaries 2* in OPS2#84, I decided to revisit the original game, rescuing it from a long dust-collecting session.

While flying a Mafia Copter low over East Pyongyang, I failed to notice a large crane swing its magnet-chain towards me until I was stuck to it.

After a long laugh, I managed to tumble out and survive, so I thought I'd take a few photos of my latest demonstration of incompetence, which I hope you will also enjoy.!

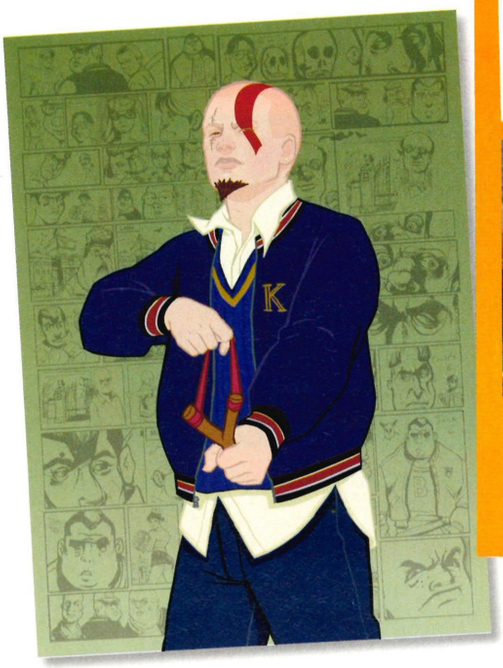
Ciaran McConville, Poole

A fine testament to unfortunate gaming moments, Ciaran. And to how cool Mercs *is, obviously.*

OUR FATHER?

I have just started playing *God Of War II* and have realised that Kratos must be a parent to more than one child, seeing as though he has 'relations' with a lot of women. So he must have some descendants, right?

I think so. And I do believe I've found a couple of them. One of his great (x99) grandsons is Jimmy Hopkins from *Canis*



WRITER FACE OFF

SUCH HAS BEEN THE FEROCITY OF ARGUMENTS BETWEEN OUR TWO NEW WRITERS ABOUT *FINAL FINAL XII*, WE'VE PUT THEM HERE TO DUKE IT OUT

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

I am a massive *Final Fantasy* nerd; I've played the lot. From NES to PS2, from *Mystic Quest* to *Tactics* to Square spin-offs such as *Chrono Trigger* and the *Seiken Densetsu* series.

I'm a completist, too. If there's an ultimate weapon, hidden dungeon or a rare slab of petrified chocobo dung, me and my party of 9999 HP misfits have found it.

So when I say *Final Fantasy XII* is overrated, undercooked and exceedingly dull, I know what I'm taking about. It's also the first *Final Fantasy* game I've refused to finish, incidentally.

Gameplay is extended by repetition alone: the torturous process of 'grinding' recycled monster models for experience, items and loot. Because of this, many *FF* fans are starting to make the mistake that game length must somehow be proportionate to enjoyment.

FFXII's six characters are indistinguishable. Power players will end up filling all their characters' licence boards fairly early in the game, creating identikit characters with no unique abilities aside from looking different.

Add to that a predictable, paper-thin plot, albeit disguised by a beautiful script, and *FFXII* is hardly the best in the series many folk claim it to be.

That said, though, Balthier is a badass.

Mike Sterry, staff writer

VS

BETTER THAN EVER

I'm an even bigger *Final Fantasy*, nay Square Enix, fan than Mike.

As well as completing every *FF* and *FF* spinoff, I've played rarer games such as *Chrono Cross* and *Vagrant Story*. If that doesn't convince you that I'm a worthy defender of the *FF* cause, it was I who was locked up for four solid weeks to bring you issue 82's in-depth *FFXII* guide – a task that would have killed lesser beings.

In this day, it's rare to find a story that hasn't been done before, be it book, film or game. It's the delivery of the story that matters, and *FFXII* triumphs with gorgeous cutscenes, an emotive score and – something that previous *FF*'s have failed to achieve; a plot that makes sense.

Furthermore, the in-depth politics, credible history of each country and interweaving storylines between characters made the conclusion incredibly satisfying.

The non-exclusive Licence board *makes* the characters unique, because you can personalise them to your own play style and characters aren't restricted to one limited slot.

The option of Headhunting and side quests makes levelling up (something every RPG gamer expects to undertake) less of a repetitive chore and more of an adventure.

But I do agree, Balthier is one cool cat.

Kim Richards, editorial assistant

Mike and Kim relax in the OPS2 office

OUCH! SO WHERE DO *YOU* STAND ON THE DEBATE? IS *FINAL FANTASY XII* THE GREATEST GAME IN THE SERIES? OR HAS SQUARE ENIX COMPLETELY LOST ITS WAY? OR COULDN'T YOU CARE LESS? DROP US A LINE AT THE USUAL ADDRESS

score bores

Are you disrespecting us?

"*Okami*? 10/10? How? It may just be my superior PS2 skills but it's far, far too easy. I breezed through it and the final boss took me only one try. Fair enough, the graphics are great (in a Japanesey cartoon kind of way) but the high-pitched voices gave me a headache. However, I agree the story is original and creative. I'd give it a 7/10, certainly no more."

Dec, Nottingham

"Only an 8 for *Tomb Raider Anniversary*? Are you mental? Okay, so I've not played it but I love *Tomb Raider*."

Chrissie Miles, email

"Shamelessly trying to get onto the OPS2 Score Bores section, I think OPS2 were wrong with *Heatseeker*. How can a game about flying planes get a 7? More like 5."

Steel Avenger, playstation.com forums

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Canem Edit and another is Agent 47 from the *Hitman* games.

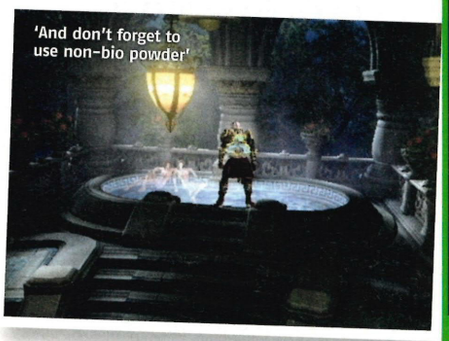
I know what you're thinking, it's crazy. But let's just sit down and see what they all have in common: a shaven head that is smoother than a bowling ball; a lust for violence; er, there you go, what more evidence do you need?
Joseph Johnson, Dartford

Editor Nellis is bald and occasionally gets angry... hmmm, you may have a point.

ATHENA'S LAUNDRY

I've always wondered, when you turn off the PS2 or pause it to have a quick whizz or answer the phone or whatever, what do the characters do while they wait for you?

Do they just sit there? Or do they do their own thing? Just imagine it: you're having a run though *God of War* and fighting your way through the



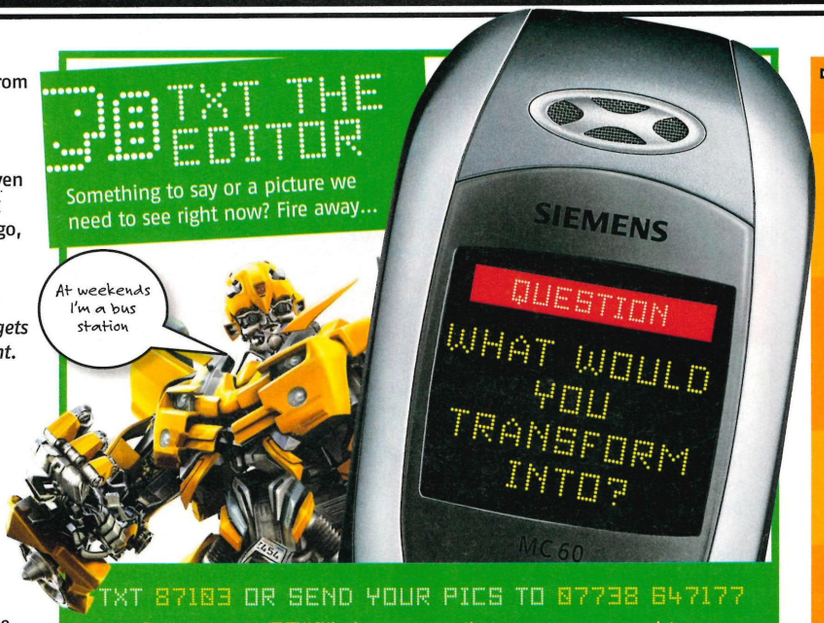
Temple Of Pandora when the doorbell rings, so you pause and go to answer; what does Kratos do?

Sit down and have a nice Gorgon sarnie? Or maybe even pick up Athena's washing? Sadly, we'll never know.
Sam Slatter, Culworth

An interesting philosophical question Sam, along the lines of 'If a tree falls over in a wood but no one is around, does it make a sound?' and 'Do androids dream of electric sheep?' Class, discuss.

TXT THE EDITOR

Something to say or a picture we need to see right now? Fire away...



TXT 87103 OR SEND YOUR PICS TO 07738 647177

Be sure to text 'TXTNICK', then a space, then your message or picture

I WOULD HIDE A SAUSAGE IN A SAUSAGE FACTORY. IT'S THE LAST PLACE ANYONE WOULD LOOK - HEBERT

I GOT A PS3 ON LAUNCH DAY. THREE DAYS LATER SOME B****RD BROKE INTO MY HOUSE AND STOLE IT. I HOPE HE DIES. VERY SLOWLY.

THE LITTLE FLUFFY BITS OFF THE TREES KEEP GETTING IN MY EYES SO I BOUGHT A REALLY SILLY PAIR OF SUNGLASSES TO PROTECT THEM! - PHILIPPA, LONDON

GOODBYE DIRTY LEEDS! - PETE

I'D LOVE TO HAVE A KRATOS JUMPER BUT I AM RUBBISH AT KNITTING - DOM

HI COULD YOU TEXT ME THE NUMBER FOR THAT TOMB RAIDER BIRD KARIMA THAT WAS IN LAST ISSUE. CHEERS - MIKE T.

I WANT SUM KATAMARI SHOES!!!! PLEASE!!!! - TAMSIN

BUZZ IN SCHOOLS IS A WICKED IDEA I AM GOING TO SHOW MY TEACHER RITE NOW - JEZZA

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BRICK DRAW MCGRAW

After seeing all the great Lego creations in the mag, I decided to give it a go. So here is my attempt at recreating the brilliant but short Wild West game, *GUN*.
Mike Baker, email

Yee-haw! We're definitely going to buy a huge crate of Lego and make some stuff ourselves. Definitely...

THE SHORT ANSWER

Q Where can I get a copy of *Rule Of Rose*? I know it was banned in this country.
Mrs S Schwarz, Chafford
A On eBay for around £40

Q Has *Elite*, the excellent ZX Spectrum game, ever been updated for a PlayStation console?
R Kingsford, email
A No

Q Have you guys at OPS2 got a PS3, and if so what are you playing?
Rowan Campbell, Grimsby
A Yes. *Tomb Raider Anniversary* :-)

Q Will they make a Dr Who game?
Anon, via text
A Doubtful

TOP OF THE SWAPS

I was reading the letter in OPS2#84 about game characters doing different jobs and it got me thinking, what if characters swapped abilities?

I can imagine the Prince of Persia swapping his abilities with John Terry in *PES*. Terry has the ball and a sword and is doing somersaults, front flips and backflips, rewinding time if he misses a penalty, or slowing down time to get through the defence.

Meanwhile the Prince is kicking a ball and taking people's heads off with it, or putting the ball on the end of his dagger tail and hitting people with it.

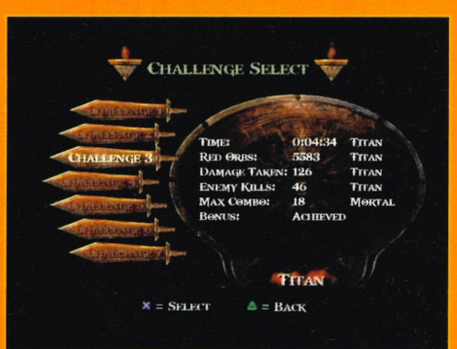
Or how about Tony Hawks and Spyro doing swapsies? Just before Tony hits the ground he could use Spyro's wings to prevent injury, or Spyro could take out enemies with a well-timed 360 kickflip.
Alex Tindall, Newton Aycliffe

Or maybe you could have characters from different games playing together, like in our feature on p118? ■

SEND US STUFF LIKE THIS!

Your photos of *SingStar* and *Guitar Hero* rock'n'roll excess! Great gigs, dazzling duets, sensational solos in unusual locations... anything!

You can see from our budget games feature on p100 that all sorts of ideas have been dreamt up for games, and we know that you can do better. Send them in!



We know you're great at games, but why not prove it to the world by sending in pics of your high scores, fastest times and whatnot. Go on, impress us!

IF YOU'VE BEEN BULLIED, YOU DON'T HAVE TO HIDE IT ANY MORE.

Angry? Scared? Lonely? There's no need to put on a brave face. It's not your fault. There is always someone to turn to who cares, will believe you, and can help make it stop. We know it's hard but when you're ready, visit the NSPCC website donthideit.com or speak to us confidentially at ChildLine on 0800 1111.

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OKAMI ACCORDING TO YOU

A big victory howl for our **Okami** art compo winners!

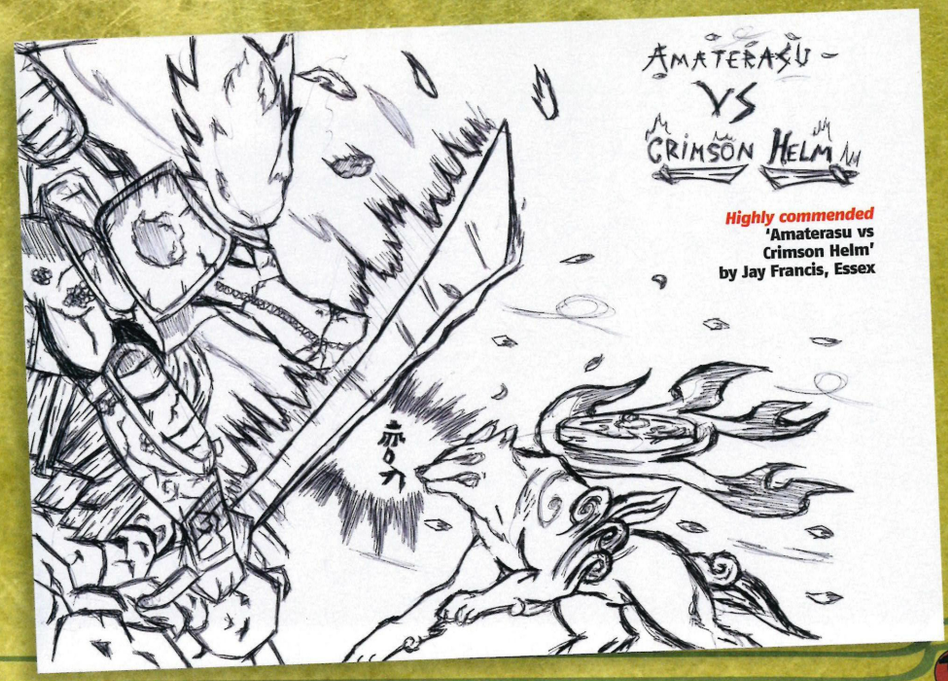
Who knew you were such a talented lot? The standard of the entries we received for our *Okami* art competition (OPS2#84) was so high that we were utterly gobsmacked.

We asked you to create a piece of artwork inspired by the game and its gorgeous graphics and you did us proud. So much so, in fact, that we felt we had to introduce two whole new prize categories as well as the winner and runners-up that we originally promised. And when Capcom saw your pictures, they happily agreed to hand over some more prizes.

First, though, here are three 'highly commended' entries which each win an *Okami* poster and four runners-up, who all win a T-shirt and a copy of the game. Turn the page to see the rest of the winners...

Highly commended
'Untitled' by Zak Edwards, Birmingham

Highly commended
'Sweet scent of flowers' by Laura Bentley, Somerset

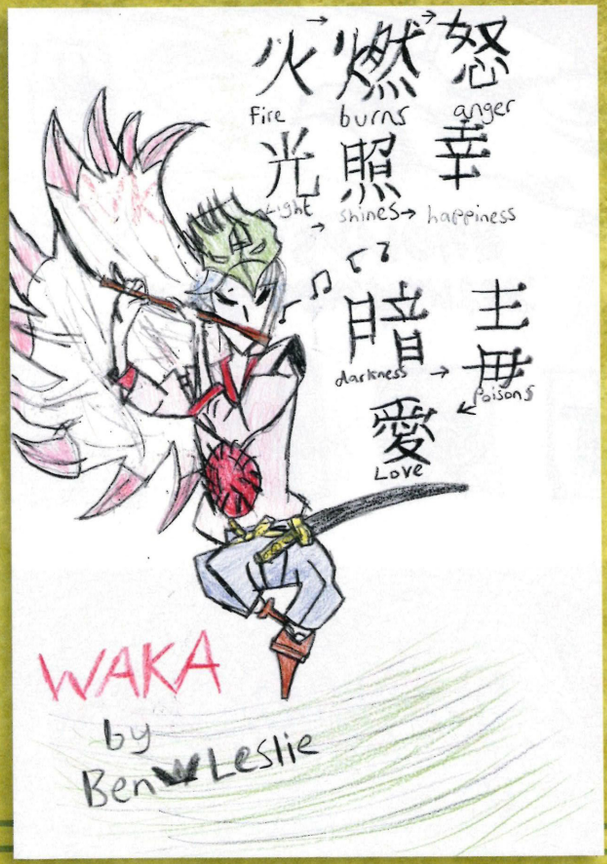


Highly commended
'Amaterasu vs Crimson Helm' by Jay Francis, Essex

Runners-up

Runner-up
'Untitled' by Donna Hiley, Leeds
A mixture of crayon and felt tip, there's loads to look at in Donna's exciting piece. We particularly liked the flames that seem to move as you look at them, the blossom in three shades of pink and Amaterasu's green claws.

Runner-up
'Untitled'
by Simon Goldsworthy, Lincolnshire
We liked Simon's pen-and-crayon drawing because it shows Waka, Susano, Mr and Mrs Orange, Kushi, Sakuya and many more of our favourite characters from the game, with lots of little details and vibrant colour.



Runner-up
'Waka'
by Ben Leslie, Northumberland
An energetic rendition of mischevious Waka in crayon that emulates the brush-stroke style of the in-game art. We can almost hear him playing his flute! And Ben gets extra kudos for drawing all those kanji.

Runner-up
'Nature's Beauty' by Jonathan Curotto, Leeds
Not only is Jonathan a dab hand with the watercolours, using some wonderful shading on the tree branches, he's also used an impressionist sort of a style. And we think both those things really suit the subject matter.

Second prizes

'Amaterasu Rising' by Philippa Bishop, Norfolk

This collage really stood out not only because of the beautiful drawing but because of the sheer effort and attention to detail that Philippa's clearly put into it. The green part at the bottom is actually a ribbon cut to shape, the sun is actually made up of the word 'Amaterasu' written over and over and the swirly patterns on it are made with glitter (and Team OPS2 likes glitter). We're also impressed that she took the time to draw the kanji with little pink and red patterns inside the outline of each one.

Philippa, 17, wins an *Okami* charm, a poster, a T-shirt and a copy of the game.

'Ookami' by Georgina 'Adeacia' Tominey, Berkshire

This piece, done in Photoshop, took 17-year-old Georgina 10 hours to make and features her idea of Amaterasu's human form as well as the wolf and Issun. The team loved her modern interpretation of the game's classic Japanese style. We think it looks like a poster so if Georgina isn't yet planning a career in illustration or design, maybe she should be.... Georgina wins an *Okami* charm, a T-shirt, a poster and a copy of the game.

WINNER

'Untitled'

by Rachel Banks, Swansea

Slap bang on the competition closing date, just as we were arguing about whether Georgina or Philippa should be our winner, this amazing painting arrived and there was no question that it should get first prize. Nellis wants to put it on the office wall (but of course we'll send it back).

A photo just doesn't do it justice: what you may not be able to see is that what looks like a brown background is metallic copper paint and that it's painted on a real canvas scroll.

Rachel's used mainly oil paints, which adds stunning texture to the water and detail on the leaves and fish, as well as really effective shading on the grass and trees. We loved the shape of the trees and the perspective of the whole thing, which immediately made us think 'Japanese scroll'.

Rachel wins a book of *Okami* game concept art that's not available to buy in the UK plus a furry Amaterasu toy, an *Okami* charm, an *Okami* T-shirt, an OPS2 T-shirt and a copy of the game.

spy

SPY CONTRIBUTORS | ANDY HARTUP, KIM RICHARDS, STERRY, SO

BOT SHOTS

RISE OF THE MACHINES

Transformers will invade Earth this summer and we've got exclusive access to their plans for PS2. Roll out...

It's strange to think that the largest, most apocalyptic game of 2007 is being quietly developed in a small, countryside studio, just outside Knutsford, Cheshire. But that's where *Transformers* developer Traveller's Tales (best known for *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* and *Lego Star Wars* and recently voted UK development studio of the year) calls home.

Tucked away on a quiet country road between a row of ostentatious footballer mansions, and the local Rolls Royce dealership, it looks like a haven of rural peace from the outside.

Go inside, though, and you enter a dark, cluttered den of wide-eyed programmers, producers and artists all working flat out to make sure that *Transformers* appears on shop shelves by July and that it's worth playing, too.

As director Michael Bay and executive producer Steven Spielberg painstakingly shape the final cut of the forthcoming film, so the team at Traveller's Tales are making last-minute adjustments to the game.

The good news is that both movie and game are on track to be real scorchers when they arrive.

Traveller's Tales has been given generous access to the film's top-secret content – some have even been treated to a screening of the near-finished product – to make sure *Transformers* on PS2 is a close as possible to the version you'll see in the cinemas.

How close? Well, close enough for fans to enjoy, but with enough artistic licence to make this feel like a decent game in its own right.

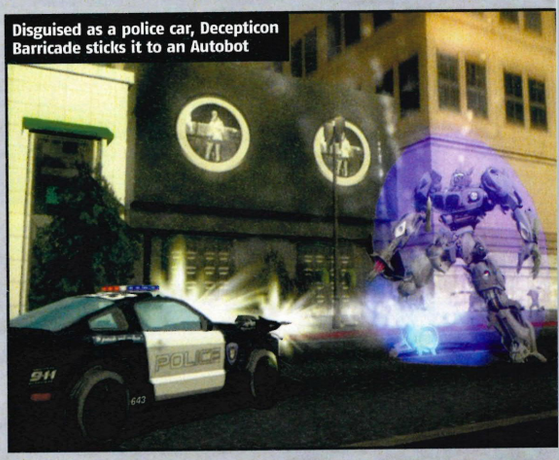
Drones, like this one challenging Barricade, are a frequent foe

ROBOT WARS

You can choose to play as either the Autobots or the Decepticons and both factions have their own campaign to play through.

Because the plot of the film will follow the earth-saving exploits of the Autobots, their campaign mirrors the movie.

The majority of the Decepticon missions will have players chasing similar goals, but with different intentions – the overall aim being to win the Transformer war and enslave the earth.


Disguised as a police car, Decepticon Barricade sticks it to an Autobot

The Autobots are mainly concerned with rescuing, saving, escorting and defending, whereas the Decepticons are all about wrecking stuff up and making life tough for the 'good guys'.

IT'S THE MOST DESTRUCTION WE'VE SEEN ON PS2 AND MAKES THE IDEA OF PLAYING AS A GIANT ROBOT GREAT AGAIN

During our demo we were given a walkthrough of a couple of typical *Transformers* missions. First up was a combat-based objective. Playing as Bumblebee (an Autobot) it was our job to track down and destroy several waves of Decepticon drones that had started making trouble in the game's Suburbs stage.

That done, we were onto mission two, which required us to race to a spot on the map before a rival Decepticon got there. So, after a swift transform, we were weaving through

Welcome to another episode of *When Citroen Adverts Go Bad*

PRIME SUSPECTS

Original voice actors? Hooray!

So, *Transformers* has gone all fancy-pants CGI, but fans of the cartoon need not worry that the new-look metal giants will be devoid of all personality. Well, we can't speak for the characters in the film, but the Transformers in the game will be given a healthy dose of soul by familiar voice actors. Both Peter Cullum (voice of Optimus Prime in the cartoon series and original movie) and Frank Welker (the voice of Megatron) have voiced their respective parts in the game. The rumour that Orson Welles has returned from the grave to play the part of Unicron is, sadly, a complete lie.

NICE TO MECH YOUR ACQUAINTANCE

Our complete guide to the playable Transformers in the game

AUTOBOTS

BUMBLEBEE

Who? He's the first Transformer you'll get the chance to play as, and the only character in the game to have two different transforms. Why? Apparently Transformers can assume any mechanical form they choose, so in the film, when Spike asks Bumblebee why he chose to mimic a beaten-up 1974 Camaro, Bumblebee responds by changing into a sports car. You'll get to play as both in the game.

Transforms into a yellow 1974 Camaro (and a flashy sports car)

JAZZ

Who? Another of the original characters from the cartoon series, Jazz is a staple from the Transformers universe. In the original animated movie of 1986 Jazz was voiced by the legendary Scatman Crothers, who's appeared in classic films *The Shining* and *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. The 1986 Transformers movie was the last movie he did, though, because he died later the same year of lung cancer.

Transforms into a Pontiac Solstice

IRONHIDE

Who? Unofficial second in command of the Autobots (behind Optimus Prime), Ironhide is one of the larger Transformers in the game. Interestingly, he is voiced by Peter Cullen, who also does the vocals of Optimus Prime.

Transforms into a red flatbed pickup truck

OPTIMUS PRIME

Who? Prime is the leader of the Autobots and the one who dishes out your missions as you romp through the game. At the start of the 1986 movie Prime died and passed leadership to Ultra Magnus, but he's been resurrected for the 2007 film because he's the most well-known Transformer of all time.

Transforms into an articulated truck

DECEPTICONS

BLACKOUT

Who? A newcomer to the Transformers universe, Blackout is the helicopter/robot you might have spotted wrecking up the military base during the teaser trailer for the film. You'll be able to recreate this scene in the game by devastating the human armies based in Qatar. Before he became Blackout, this Transformer was referred to as either Vortex or Incinerator.

Transforms into a Seastallion helicopter

BARRICADE

Who? Another robot in disguise created for the film. You'll first meet Barricade during one of the early Decepticon missions, where he's fighting with Bumblebee over key character Spike Witwicky.

Transforms into a police cruiser

SCORPONOK

Who? A scorpion-like machine with the ability to tunnel through the ground and shoot up underneath his enemies. He's smaller than all the other Transformers and, strangely, he can't transform. During the game, you'll take Scorponok on several 'hit and run' missions in the desert.

Can't transform (what a loser!)

STARSCREAM

Who? A long-running character from the TV show, Starscream is the impetuous second in command of the Decepticons. His shrill vocals in the cartoon are provided by Chris Latta, who also lent his talents to cult kids show Action Force in the late 1980s.

Transforms into a jet fighter

MEGATRON

Who? Leader of the Decepticons and the nemesis of Optimus Prime. During the 1986 movie he faced off against Prime and came off worse. Left for dead, adrift in space, he is resurrected by planet-sized Transformer Unicron. In the new film, Megatron once again faces up to Optimus Prime for an epic robot-on-robot showdown.

Transforms into an alien jet

the city streets, sliding round corners and blasting drones as we went.

The first Decepticon mission we saw took place in the Qatar level. Taking control of Blackout, the awesome machine from the teaser trailer that changes from robot to Seastallion helicopter, our objective was simple: destroy the human military base.

This meant pulling off our rotor blades and smashing up buildings before transforming into a helicopter and nailing any resisting troops with rockets. Beats the hell out of checkpoint racing and 'protecting' people with Optimus Prime's gang...

WORLD PIECES

In fact, we feel a little sorry for the Autobots, because actually destroying the game world and being a robot menace is one of *Transformers*' best features.

Each level is a self-contained recreation of key scenes from the movie and every one is littered with buildings, cars, trees, and of course, squashy humans.

Like in *Mercenaries*, you can choose to take specific missions, hunt for bonus items, or devote your time and effort to reducing your environment to a dusty wasteland. But unlike *Mercenaries* (and in fact every other game) you're a mechanical colossus, so you're more than capable of bringing down apartment blocks with a few swift punches, or picking up cars and hurling them into the distance.

And that's not all. After you've broken up entire neighbourhoods, you can use the chunks of rubble as weapons. You can pick up trees and use them to swat away the Transformer drones that are sent against you by your enemies, or you can climb buildings and leap down onto your enemies, leaving massive craters wherever you land.

This really is the most destruction we've ever seen on PS2, and after the endless plodding iterations of *Gundam*, *Armoured Core* and the like, *Transformers* makes the idea of playing as a giant robot great again.

Of course with either faction, you can choose to just romp around each stage causing havoc and looking for hidden items and events to unlock extras, but you'll need to complete missions to progress.

DESTROY ALL HUMANS

The humans will try to stop you causing too much damage to their cities but, until the later stages when they start to roll out the serious military hardware, their puny firearms don't do much more than tickle your metallic skin.

The real damage comes from fighting other Transformers and battling it out with arch rivals at the

The Transformers can rip up bits of scenery to use as weapons

The chance to play as Optimus Prime is worth the admission price alone

SPOILERS IN DISGUISE

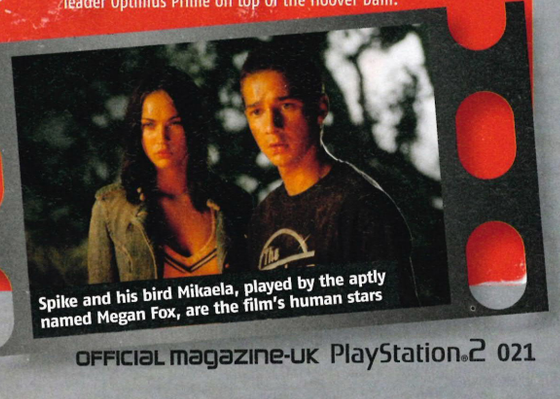
The game's action recreates that of the film, so here's what to expect

The movie's opening sequence takes place in the 1800s, when polar explorer Archibold Witwicky falls down an abyss in the Artic Circle and discovers he's landed on Decepticon leader Megatron, who's been buried in ice for centuries. Trying to get a message to his fellow Decepticons, Megatron burns the location of an ancient energy source called The Allspark into Witwicky's spectacles.

Cut to the present day. The specs have been handed down to Archibold's descendent Spike (Shia 'Kale in *Disturbia*' LaBeouf), who's shopping for a car.

Autobot Bumblebee transforms into a Camaro and Spike buys him (why does this never happen to us?).

Meanwhile, in an army base in Qatar, Decepticon Blackout attacks a US military base to steal information from the facility's computer, giving them Spike's location. The rest of the film follows both factions' struggle to find the Allspark, and culminates in an epic scrap between Megatron and Autobot leader Optimus Prime on top of the Hoover Dam.


Spike and his bird Mikaela, played by the aptly named Megan Fox, are the film's human stars

spy

We're watching you, Dale. At night, when you sleep

WHY I LOVE TRANSFORMERS

Long-time OPS2 contributor Alex Dale explains why he and so many others are obsessed with *Transformers*...

Turns out that we don't grow older chronologically, after all. I mean, I think I probably hit the apex of my maturity aged 13, when I decided to replace my *Transformers* collection with more age-appropriate hobbies. I gave the entire box away to a charity for autistic children, that being the kind of altruistic thing that people used to do before eBay was invented.

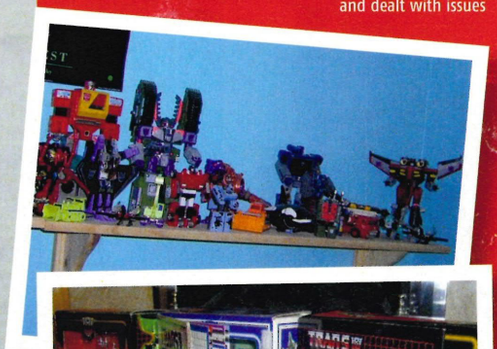
But eBay was invented, and thus a decade later I began replacing the collection I so foolishly threw away. I wouldn't like to guess how much I've spent in the four years since then.

My biggest purchase was a boxed 1984 Megatron, which cost me £65, so I'd like to think I'm more sensible than some. A few Japan-only models can fetch more than £500 and some limited runs from the early 1990s sell for more than a grand!

It's a great world to interact with. The original cartoon was cheesy like a mouse's tummy yet had a progressive story and dealt with issues such as death and mental instability. And the toys? Well, the early 1980s models wouldn't get made today, being heavy, die-cast monstrosities with enough choking hazards to wipe out a primary school. But then, it was never about the build quality; it was about taking a young boy's favourite things – tanks, cars, planes – and giving each one a unique personality.

Well, I say 'boy', but the Transformers community I'm part of is 70% female, and there's always a healthy mix at conventions such as Birmingham's Auto Assembly, which is almost exclusively populated by adults.

So what I'm saying to young 'uns enjoying Transformers now for the first time is: enjoy your maturity while it lasts.



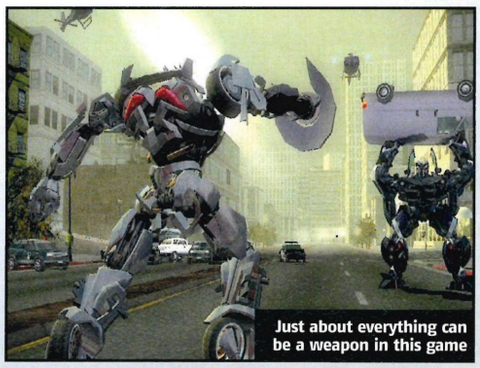
end of each level. Although we didn't get to see these boss fights in motion, we're really quite excited about the prospect of two giant mechs going at each other using entire cities as both battleground and weaponry.

Each boss scrap will be a grudge fight between two equally matched Transformers, so expect to see Bumblebee versus Barricade, Ironhide versus Blackout and the ultimate: Optimus Prime against Megatron.

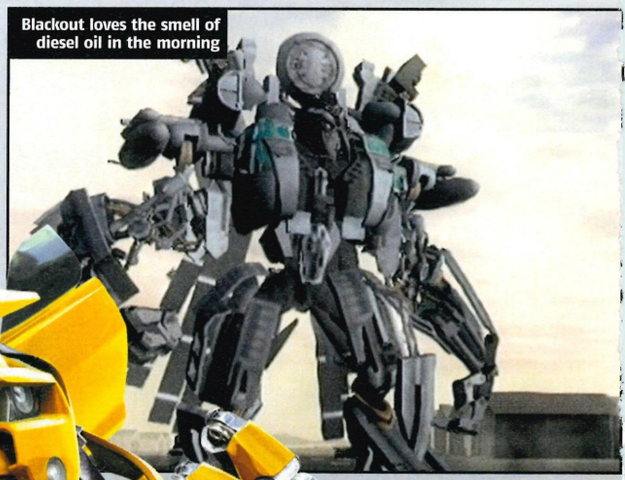
With its careful mix of licensed content and suitably sweet made-up features, *Transformers* has the potential to sit among the best movie tie-ins on PS2.

Publisher Activision is promising some great unlocks for completing specific side missions, so we're expecting more than just artwork and film stills. Right now, though, all it will say is that fans of the original G1 cartoons will be well catered for.

Whatever Traveller's Tales manages to cram onto the disc, the most important thing is that work is on course to reach its explosive climax in July. The robots in disguise are almost ready to reveal their true form and we reckon it'll be very easy on the eye. ■ **AH**



Just about everything can be a weapon in this game



Blackout loves the smell of diesel oil in the morning

COMPOTRON

OPTIMUS PRIZE

Play the game and see the film before anyone else – and take a friend with you!

Like what you've seen over the past five pages? Of course you do, which is why we've squeezed a juicy *Transformers* bonus out of the game's publisher Activision to feed your robot-hunger.

And it's a good 'un: five pairs of tickets to a special, invite-only 'First To Play, First To See' event in London on 15 July, two weeks before anyone else!

The event has been organised by Activision and Paramount Studios to celebrate both the game and the film. Winners will be ushered into a secret screening room at Paramount's UK base in London for a special advance screening of the movie.

Then, you'll be treated to extensive time to play the game on all formats. Not enough? Then how about going home with a goody bag stuffed full of *Transformers* treats including a copy of the game? Because that's what you'll get!

For your chance to score this once in a lifetime opportunity for you and a mate, all you have to do is answer the question below. Oh, and you might have to fight our John for your ticket, because he's a self-confessed Transformers addict and gutted that he's not allowed to enter the compo because he works here. Sucks to be us, eh.

PRIZES

Five lucky winners will each receive:
A pair of tickets to the Transformers 'First to Play, First to See' event and a goody bag including a copy of the game

What is the name of the Transformers' home planet?

QUESTION

A: Cybertron
B: Unicron
C: Omnicron

HOW TO ENTER

By email
Email your answer to ps2compos@futurenet.co.uk and put 'OPTIMUS PRIZE' in the subject line.

By SMS
Write OPTIMUS, followed by a space, then your answer (A, B, or C) to 84383

By Post
Send your answer to
'OPTIMUS PRIZE'
OPS2
Future Publishing
30 Monmouth Street
Bath BA1 2BW

Closing Date **20 June**

OPTIMUS PRIZE COMPETITION TERMS AND CONDITIONS
Only the first five entries that OPS2 randomly draws and judges to be correct will win the PS2 and merchandise. Texts will be charged at £1 plus your standard network tariff rate. Please source all necessary permissions. Lines are open from 24 May to 20 June inclusive. We will not advise non-winners of the result. You must be available all day on 15 July. Prize does not include travel to London or any other costs associated with attending the event. By entering you are agreeing to receive details of future offers from Future Publishing Ltd and third parties. Only UK residents over the age of 15 may enter. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word NO at the end of your text message. Winners will be notified within 28 days. No employees of Future Publishing, any associated company or any member of their close family may enter. Prizes are as stated and no alternatives, cash or otherwise are available. Publicity may be given to any entrants and their names, addresses and/or photographs printed in OPS2. Editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. No purchase necessary.

FINAL FANTASY® III

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A FANTASY REBORN

As their world descends into darkness, four young heroes are chosen to bear the burden of its fading hope...

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NINTENDO DS.

SQUARE ENIX.

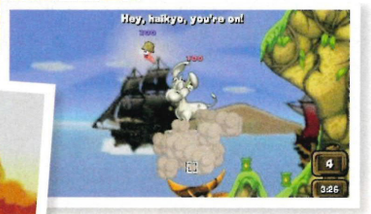
Bike enthusiasts' choice MotoGP will return to PS2 later this year: Capcom has snapped up the rights to bring MotoGP 07 to the console

This gadget, which looks like a reject from an episode of Dr Who, is the next-generation EyeToy for PS3

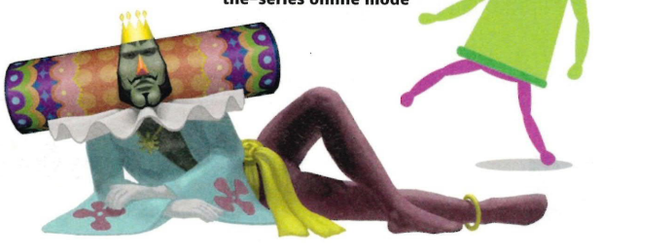
SNAPPED!

The future of PlayStation presented in pictures

No new info on Heavenly Sword, the most exciting game planned for PS3 – just these stunning new shots and character art. Mmmm, arse-cheeks in high def



Fans of all things invertebrate will be pleased to hear that Worms: Open Warfare 2 is coming to PSP this July. Concrete donkeys at the ready!



The PS3 will get a shot of bright colours this winter when Beautiful Katamari is released in the UK, complete with a new-to-the-series online mode

THE SIX GIANTS YOU NEVER FOUGHT IN SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

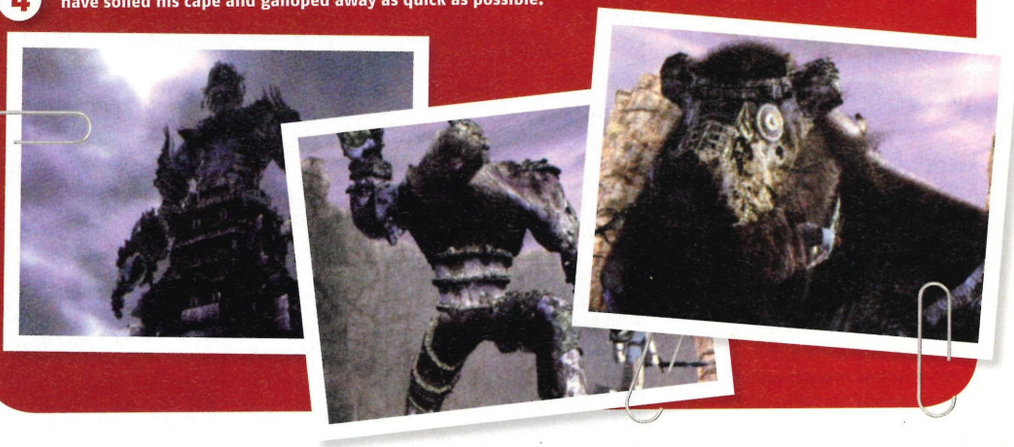
Introducing the six enemies who never made it off the developers' drawing board and into development...

1 Is it a bird? Is it a troll? Who knows? We're just bummed out to know that we'll never get to rip those stupid eyes off its head.

2 To be honest, we don't find this strange bug beast very intimidating. Wouldn't have been much of a challenge for our colossus-rodeoing hero, anyway.

3 Again, not a massive creature, but we reckon this wild boar-style colossus might have put up a good fight.

4 This. Guy. Looks. Enormous. Faced with the prospect of fighting this colossus, we reckon our hero would have soiled his cape and galloped away as quick as possible.



5 Yikes, this one's a bit *War Of The Worlds*. Still, we think we might have been able to take him down with a few well-placed stabs to the knee.

6 Here be dragons! Well, a colossus that looks like one anyway. Did he breathe fire? Was his skin as hard as stone? We'll never know. Sniff.

INFO NUDGE

ART ATTACK

Street Fighter II, Capcom Vs SNK, Fatal Fury **– if you're old enough to buy booze legally, you'll remember these classic 2D fighters like childhood friends. They've been busting out of their arcade confines onto PS2 since the console launched and are still going strong. *Art Of Fighting Anthology* is heading our way next month. With all 33 scrappers from the *Fatal Fury* universe crammed in, it'll be a treat for retro fans.**

THERE BE DRAGONS

Back at the birth of legend, when dwarves laboured under the hills and elves... *[get on with it – Ed]* well, before *Warhammer*, *World Of Warcraft* and all those other kobold-bothering franchises, there was *Dungeons & Dragons*. The brand's come a long way from its tabletop days and later this summer, *D&D Tactics* is coming to PSP. As well as Adventure mode, you'll be able to launch straight into battles or play multiplayer WiFi (co-op and versus).

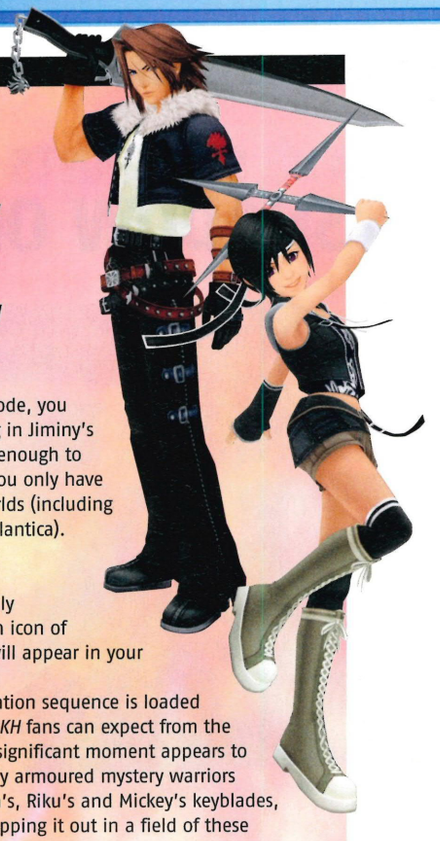
MORE MEMORY FOR PS3?

According to PlayStation spokesperson Satoshi Fukuoka, Sony is considering modifying future versions of PS3 to include a larger hard drive. Handy if you're the kind of download hog who just has to grab every trailer, demo, and mini-game uploaded to the PlayStation Store and great news for those still to take the PS3 plunge. Mind you, it may grate a little on the nerves of the 800,000 European gamers who've already bought the console.

HEART ATTACK

SECRET MOVIE TAKES THE MICKEY

Unlockable trailer shows a whole new **Kingdom Hearts** world is on the way



A fresh *Kingdom Hearts* game is coming and it won't be just another episode, but an entirely new chapter in *KH* history – that's the message from legendary director Tetsuya Nomura.

Having finished his work with *Chain of Memories* and *Kingdom Hearts II: Final Mix*, Tetsuya has revealed he is already working on another *Kingdom Hearts* game. But he's very firmly avoiding the word 'sequel', and instead pushing the phrase 'a new series'.

To see what this new series will be like, you can unlock a secret CGI trailer in *Kingdom Hearts II*. To do so, if you're playing on Standard mode, you must unlock everything in Jiminy's Journal. If you're hard enough to take on Proud mode, you only have to complete all the worlds (including 100 Acre Woods and Atlantica).

MOUSE MYSTERY

When you've successfully unlocked the movie, an icon of Mickey Mouse's head will appear in your Start menu.

The gorgeous animation sequence is loaded with clues about what *KH* fans can expect from the next game. The most significant moment appears to be the three fully armoured mystery warriors picking up Sora's, Riku's and Mickey's keyblades, and then scrapping it out in a field of these mystical weapons.

In an interview with the official *KH* website, Tetsuya has already confirmed that these masked fighters aren't our three heroes, but of course that doesn't mean that there aren't connections...

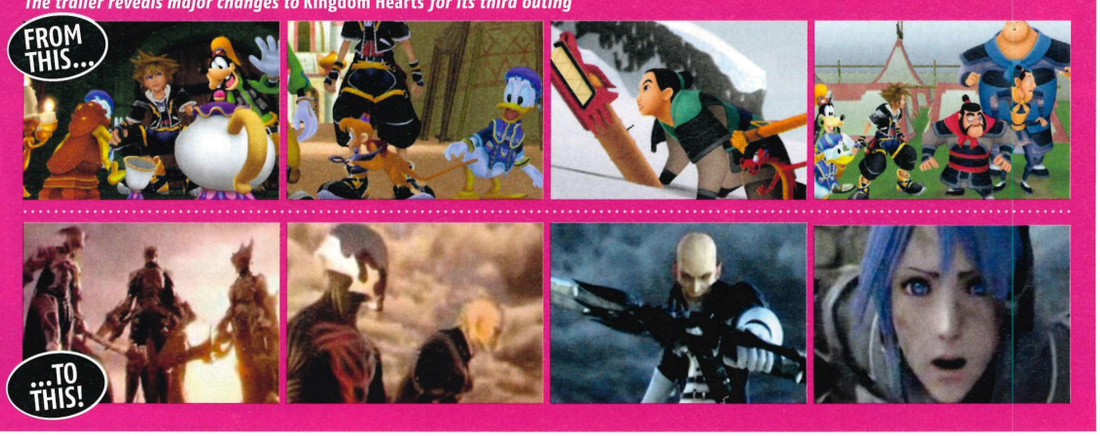
As for the Keyblades, he implies that there was a Keyblade War, and goes on to suggest that this new series will answer questions about these ancient weapons raised in *Kingdom Hearts* and *Kingdom Hearts II*.

There is also a longer secret movie at the end of *Kingdom Hearts II: Final Mix*, continuing where the previous one leaves off.

But *Final Mix* won't be out in the West until late Autumn 2007, so you'll have to be patient. Or, ahem, watch it on YouTube. **KR**

MICKEY REMIXED

The trailer reveals major changes to* Kingdom Hearts *for its third outing



LEGAL EAGLE

IS IT A BIRD? IS IT A PLANE? NO! IT'S A LAWYER

Kooky courtroom sim wings its way towards your PS2

Do you want the truth? You can't handle the truth! Oh, you can? Well, we'd better tell you then... Capcom is collaborating with Adult Swim TV to bring its show *Harvey Birdman, Attorney At Law* to PS2 this year.

It's a late night series on Cartoon Network that features one Harvey Birdman, a former third-rate superhero who's now working as a third-rate lawyer for a firm called Sebben, Sebben and Birdman.

No one's sure if Harvey actually went to law school, but he's got a suit (and wings), so it's all good.

Backed up by a cast of famous and not so famous Hanna-Barbera characters such as Scooby Doo, Fred Flintstone, Apache Chief and Black Vulcan, it's no surprise that this show is going down a treat in the USA. It's become infamous for its snappy, random jokes, wicked sense of humour and pop culture parodies.

The combination of Capcom's law gaming expertise, previously demonstrated in the *Phoenix Wright* series for Nintendo DS, and the TV cartoon's own writing team means that the game may well be a winner.

Each case will be a self-contained story in which Harvey must visit the scene of a crime, take in all the evidence, examine the witnesses – and if all else fails, take the opposing lawyers out to the pub and plug them for info over a sly tipple.

There'll also be plenty of courtroom action where you present your case in the most convincing light and tear your opponents to shreds with vicious cross-examinations.

We're very much looking forward to watching Fred Flintstone sweating it out in the virtual dock when the questions start to get awkward.

The game will be out in the autumn in the USA and although it hasn't been confirmed, we're expecting a UK release to come shortly afterwards. ■ **KR**

THE LAW FORCE

Harvey Birdman

Back in the day, Harvey was a superhero who starred in *Birdman and the Galaxy Trio*. He could fly and shoot energy beams from his hands. Now he's a lawyer. With wings.

Quote: "Get ready to feel the power... of attorney!"

The Avenger

This purple eagle used to be Harvey's sidekick and now serves as his faithful legal clerk. Although he can't speak, he can type, file and take dictation: the perfect secretary (even if he does crap on the desk occasionally).

Quote: "Caw"

Mron Reducto

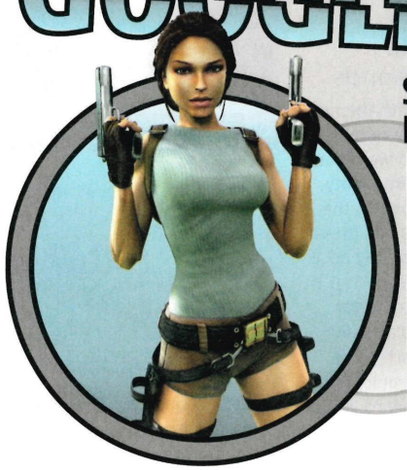
An attorney of Freezoid, Zarog and Skon, Reducto is Harvey's chief nemesis in the courtroom. He's an obsessive compulsive with paranoid delusions and a shrink-ray gun.

Quote: "When I was a kid if someone brandished a shrink gun he'd get a little bit of respect!"

GOOGLE FIGHT

SETTLING GAMING SCORES BY THE POWER OF INTERWEB

Solid Snake or Sam Fisher? Ratchet or Jak? *FIFA* or *PES*? These rivalries have been debated for years, but now they can be resolved. Each issue we pit a pair of legends against one another in searches at www.googlefight.com to see who gets most hits. This month: PlayStation heavyweights Lara Croft and Solid Snake. Surprisingly, Snake won with 230,000 to Lara's 192,000!



Got a gaming grudge match you want settled? Send your Google Fight ideas to the address on p8 and we'll find out who the daddy is

TERRORISE THIS!

PRESENT TENSION

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare moves the action up 60 years

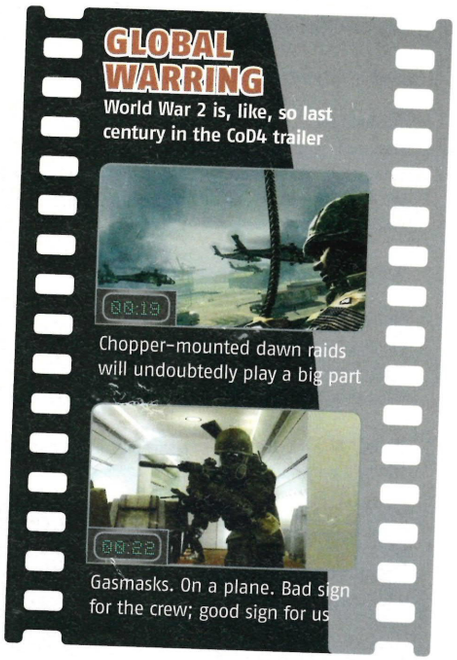
It's official: World War 2 is played out. From *Medal of Honor* to *Call of Duty*, we've done it all. We've come at Omaha Beach from every angle, ploughed through every major campaign and battle and (possibly) iced more Nazis than died in the actual conflict itself.

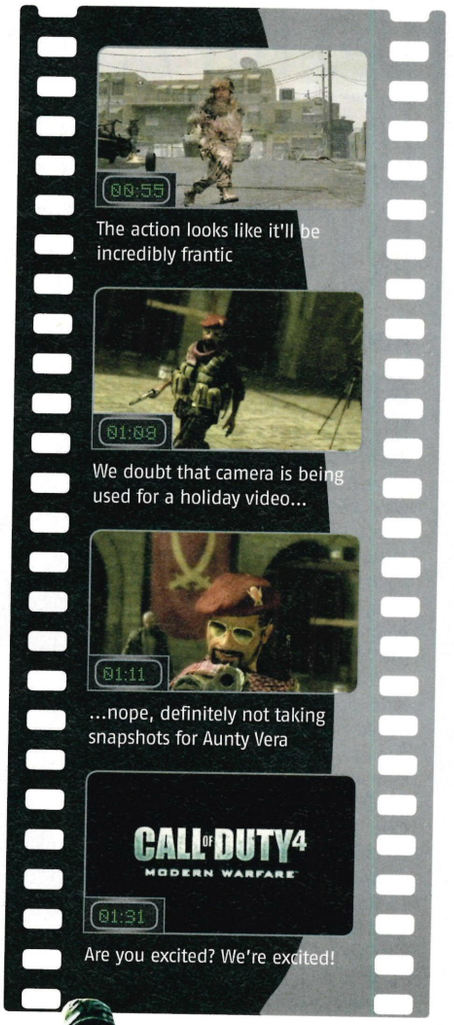
And it seems the people at Infinity Ward Studios are as tired of the big Double-U Double-U Two as we are. So they've brought their *Call of Duty* series bang up-to-date with a 21st century makeover, which you can see in the first trailer for part four.

Expect a cabal of freedom-hatin', ne'er-do-well terrorists, modern kill-toys of every calibre and payload plus a sprinkle of Tom Clancy-esque, right-wing proselytising.

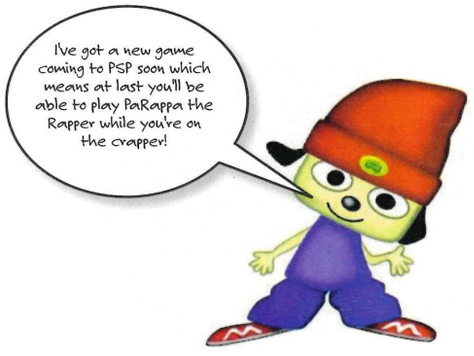
The trailer looks decidedly next-gen at the moment, but we suspect *Call of Duty 4* will go the way of its predecessors and make an explosive appearance on PS2.

And when it does, you can be sure we'll be here first with all the latest news. In the meantime, here's everything you need to know about the all-action trailer. ■ **MS**





JUST SO YOU KNOW...



HOT SUMMER

GETTING WRMR

Hot Pixel is back, better and almost ready for launch

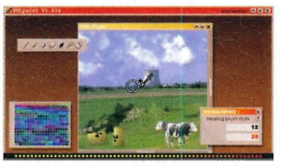
Back in our December issue we reviewed a PSP game by the name of *Hot Pxl*, awarding it a not-so-mighty 5/10 on the ol' OPS2 score-o-meter.

The game never saw the light of day last year, but now the cleverly renamed *Hot Pixel* is now steaming towards a June release.

A collection of grimy urban mini-games, *Hot Pixel* is the ideal game for anyone with the attention span of a gnat and an iPod full of 50 Cent.

We've now had extensive hands-on time with the new preview code.

And we reckon that with plenty more polish, the odd bug fix (there are currently no on-screen instructions for how to actually play each game, for example) that *Hot Pixel* could be a solid summer game. It'll need a fair slash off the price from the planned £35, though. ■ **AH**



NEW! SPIDER-MAN 3, TRANSFORMERS, CAMERON DIAZ & THE MOVIE ZOO!

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PIRATES 3

Johnny, Keira & Orlando The Only Interviews

DOUBLE TROUBLE

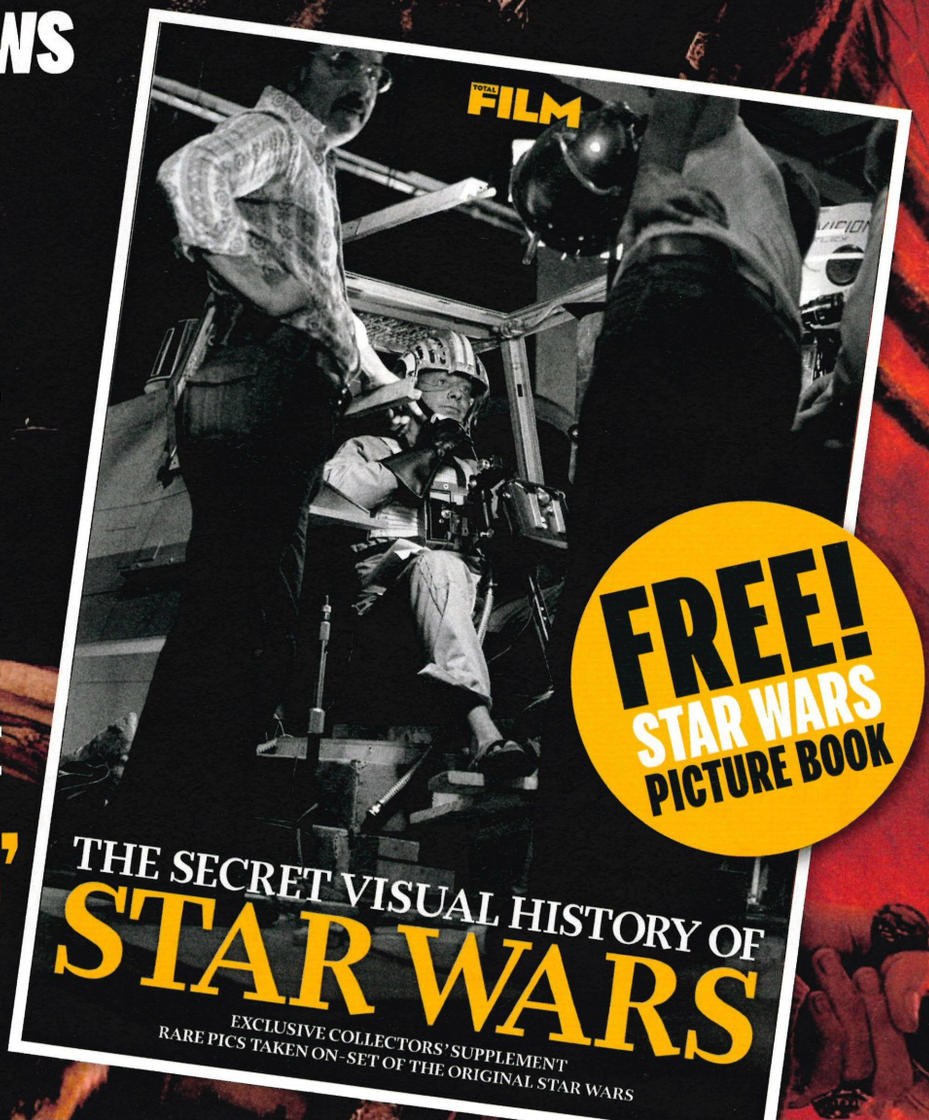
Tarantino & Rodriguez open Grindhouse

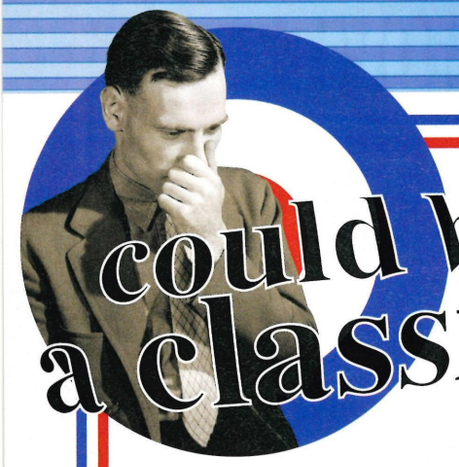
TRANSFORMERS FOX!

The robots aren't the only special effect

'I'M SUCH AN OLD HAG'

The many moods of Natalie Portman





could be a classic

The look is heavily RPG-esque, but it's actually more of an RTS

NICE BUT GRIM

GRIMGRIMOIRE

Format: PS2
Publisher: Nippon Ichi Software
Developer: Vanillaware
Release: Q3 2007

WHAT WE KNOW

Just another Japanese roleplaying game? From the look of these graphics you might think so. But look closer. Despite the fey, goggle-eyed boys and frilly-skirted child witch, *GrimGrimoire* is actually a real-time strategy.

In a world where magic is the norm, young witch Lillet Blan has just been accepted into prestigious magic academy the Silver Star Tower. But just five days into her studying a disaster strikes the school, killing everyone but Lillet. She mysteriously travels back in time to her first day there.

So far, so RPG. But, breaking away from the tried and tested formula, developer Nippon Ichi has decided to use RTS army building, not turn-based fighting, for *GrimGrimoire*'s action.

You must build up and control a legion of magical creatures and instruct them to attack, defend or run like the blazes.

You'll also be enlisting the help of pixies to mine for Mana, which is crucial for building and looking after your army. You can use any leftover Mana to erect Crystal Towers that protect the more vulnerable areas of your base.

The main aim is to fight your way through the massive, Gothic-look castle without being cut down by the innumerable hordes of demons who want to prevent you from discovering why the students were so suddenly snuffed out.

Fans of sparkly spells won't be disappointed

This castle is an academy for witches that you must explore

Talking to classmates and tutors will give you vital clues into the mystery and will unlock spell books that'll allow you to summon new creatures.

COULD BE A CLASSIC BECAUSE...

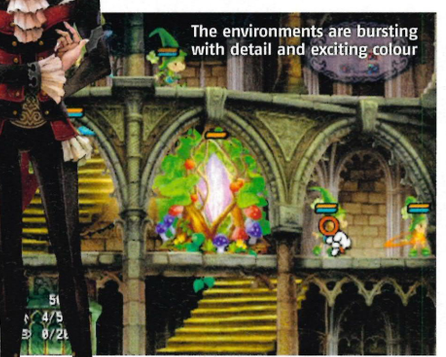
Publisher Nippon Ichi is renowned for top-notch RPGs with eccentric characters and intense storylines. And because developer Vanillaware has been working with PS2 for so long, it's got the hardware sussed.

So expect *GrimGrimoire* to be full of tongue-in-cheek action (such as the demon succubus who farts fire when she gets angry) balanced with solid and engaging gameplay.

But the thing that really makes this RPG-cum-RTS look set to stand the test of time is its visuals.

The graphics are gorgeous and every detailed bit of animation is bursting with colour. Plus, of course, it's got more than a fair share of those swooshy spells, buxom lasses and effeminate heroes with tragic backstories that we RPG fans go wild for. ■ **KR**

Assemble an army of magic helpers and use their powers



The environments are bursting with detail and exciting colour

Saucy spellcasters, gothic castles: the game is true to its RPG roots

HIP HIP HERO!

HOLDING OUT FOR A THIRD HERO

Guitar Hero III confirmed for PS2

Strap on your axe and limber up your digits, because it's just been confirmed that *Guitar Hero III* will be coming to PS2 and before the end of this year.

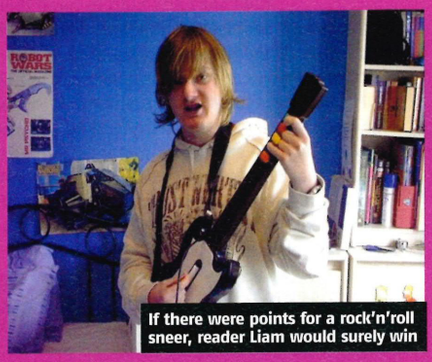
What's more, US publisher Red Octane has confirmed that there will be a yearly instalment of the note-noodling fret-fest on all formats from now on.

The tracklist has not yet been announced but that hasn't stopped fans dreaming about the songs they'd like to perform to a packed living room. Some have even written to us already with their own dream setlists, which of course we plan to pass on to our friends at Red Octane as soon as possible.

If you've got some songs you'd like included, post or email them to us (contact details on p10) and we'll make sure your requests get heard, too.

To start you off here are our choices (apart from John, who only likes dance music) and a couple from readers... ■ **SM**

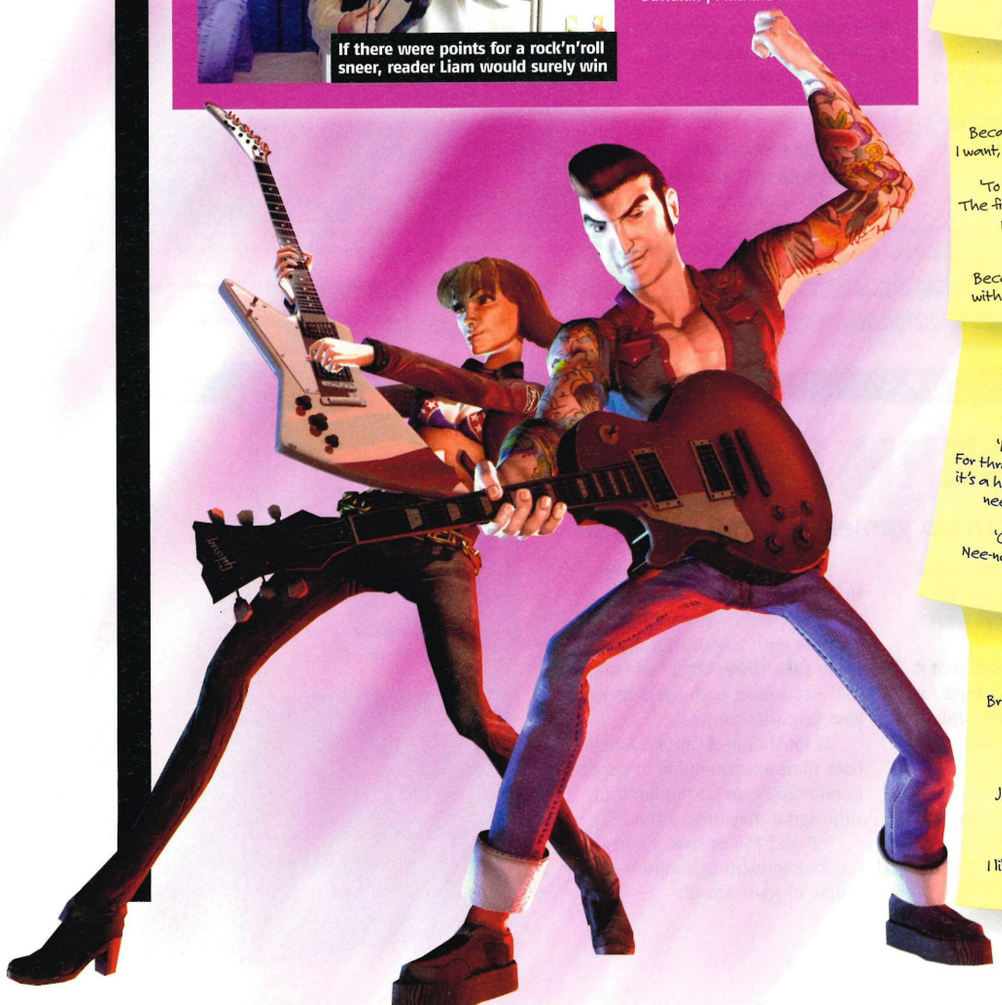
READERS' CHOICES



If there were points for a rock'n'roll sneer, reader Liam would surely win

Liam O' Brien, Co Kerry (pictured)
'Anarchy in the UK', The Sex Pistols
'Crazy Train', Ozzy Osbourne
'Fear of the Dark', Iron Maiden

Darren Rogers, Maidstone (not pictured)
'Painkiller', Judas Priest
'Fear', Primal Fear
'Davidian', Machine Head



Nick

'Shine On' The House Of Love
Because it reminds me of when I had floppy hair and wore black jeans

'1979' Smashing Pumpkins
'...and we don't know... just where our bones will rest... to dust I guess...'

'I Am The Resurrection' Stone Roses
Eight minutes, 14 seconds of guitar heaven

Mark

'Rock and Roll' Oasis
Because it's a feel-good singalong

'Main Offender' The Hives
Because it reminds me of Kylie riding a mechanical bull in her undies

'Orgasm Addict' The Buzzcocks
For the lyrics and classic punk riff.

Mike

'Mouths Like Sidewinder Missiles' The Fall of Troy
It's the ultimate Guitar Hero finale because nobody but God and guitarist Thomas Erak can play it

'Cosmonaut' At the Drive In
Beware: will cause spontaneous arthritis in all but the sturdiest axe warriors

'Circle Square Triangle' Test Icicles
Because it's a finger-blistering ode to the PS2's buttons

Kim

'Knights of Cydonia' Muse
Because of the sheer gigantic scale. I want, nay DEMAND that this is included

'To the End' My Chemical Romance
The finger-shredding solo is an excuse to pull out your teen angst poses

'Thunderstruck' AC/DC
Because it wouldn't be a Guitar Hero without Angus Young ripping up the axe

Sophie

'Comfortably Numb' Pink Floyd
Because of That Solo

'I Saw Stars' Django Reinhart
For three-fingered gamers. And because it's a happy song. And because everyone needs some Django in their lives

'Cannonball' The Breeders
Nee-now nee-now, nee-now nee-now... need I say more?

Andy

'I'm Broken' Pantera
Brutal axe-grinding, savage vocals, and who can forget that opening riff?

'First Breath After The Coma' Explosions In The Sky
Just under 10 minutes of pure guitar madness. A true test of skill

'Plug-In Baby' Muse
I like the opening bit. And the rest of it. Because I'm emu

Kwik Fitz

He's rumoured up to the nines, but he's only got time to write a line

CONFIRMED: ***Burnout 5*** **has been renamed** ***Burnout Paradise*** **and will be appearing on PS3 at the end of 2007**

RUMOUR: Tecmo may be working on a PS3-only instalment of bounce-tastic series ***Dead Or Alive***

CONFIRMED: Supercar racing sim ***Ferrari Challenge*** **will be zooming onto PS2 around October**

RUMOUR: Sony is said to be in talks with technology company Immersion to bring rumble functionality to the PS3 sixaxis controller

CONFIRMED: Former Xbox 360 exclusives ***Crossfire*** **and** ***Kane and Lynch: Dead Men*** **are both in development for PS3**

RUMOUR: ***Lost The Game*** **is no longer coming to PS2 because Ubisoft has decided to focus on next-gen versions**

CONFIRMED: Thanks to a new firmware update, ***Pro Evolution Soccer 6*** **will now work online when played through a PS3**

RUMOUR: Square Enix is rumoured to be planning to announce another game in its PlayStation-friendly ***Star Ocean*** **series soon**

spy

INFO NUDGE

PAY LESS FOR PSP

Sony has slashed the price of PSP by £30. You can now snap up one of the natty handhelds for a reasonable £130: great news if you're looking for something to keep you amused on the journey to your summer holiday destination. And the budget bonanza doesn't end there, because five of the system's top games have been given a price cut. You can now pick up *Killzone: Liberation*, *LocoRoco*, *Ridge Racer 2*, *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* and *MotoGP* for just £15 each.

ENDWAR BEGINS

Armchair generals, take note: Ubisoft has announced that the first game in a fresh military franchise, *Tom Clancy's EndWar*, will be landing on PS3 within the year. Set in a nightmarish near future where World War III has broken out, the game is a strategy title that puts you in charge of an entire army. Expect to find a wealth of high-tech killing machines at your disposal, ranging from *Ghost Recon*-style grunts through to enormous super-tanks and jets – much like recent PC release *Command And Conquer 3*.

CROFT COMMEMORATED

Lara Croft is a British national icon and at last, her international fame is getting the recognition it deserves. The Core Studio offices on Ashbourne Road, Derby – where Lara was created – are being torn down to make way for a block of flats. But to mark the spot where the First Lady of gaming was born, the builder will put up one of those blue plaques that mark where famous historical figures have lived or died. Lara joins Sherlock Holmes as one of only a few fictional characters to get this honour.

SING IT ON!

WIN WHEN YOU'RE SINGING

We've got three copies of **Singstar Pop Hits** up for grabs. Fancy one?

If you've never embarrassed yourself in front of family and friends by wailing out your 'unique' rendition of Scissor Sisters' 'Don't Feel Like Dancing' after one too many glasses of pop, then you, sir/madam, have not lived.

To remedy this, we've scored three *Singstar Pop Hits* packs (with mics, natch) from Sony and plan to hand them out to a trio of lucky readers. If you're planning to make the most of the impending slew of summer parties, a copy of this game will put you on everyone's guest list.

Please note, though, that neither OPS2 nor Sony can take responsibility for your party fizzling out when one of your 'tired and emotional' mates gets all weepy and has a stab at Akon's 'Lonely'. You have been warned.

If you're gagging to get your mitts on one of our prizes, there are *two* ways to try! Either send us a picture as below, or answer the question (left).

METHOD 1

Answer the following question:

Who is known as the King Of Pop?

A: Nat King Cole
B: Michael Jackson
C: Henry Rollins

HOW TO ENTER

By Post Send your answer on a postcard to 'HIT ME BABY ONE MORE TIME', OPS2, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW

By Email Email your answer to ps2compos@futurenet.co.uk and put 'HIT ME BABY ONE MORE TIME' in the subject line.

By SMS Write HITMEBABY, followed by a space, then your answer (A, B, or C) to 80889

METHOD 2

Send us a picture of your best rock pose. Snap a picture of you and your mates rocking out and post or email it us (see left for address), marking it HIT ME BABY ONE MORE TIME

Only the first entry that OPS2 randomly draws and judges to be correct will win a *Singstar Pop Hits* pack. The first two pictures we receive will each win a *Singstar Pop Hits* pack. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate. Please source all necessary permissions. Lines are open from 24 May to 20 June inclusive. We will not advise non-winners of the result.*

*HIT ME BABY COMPETITION TERMS AND CONDITIONS By entering you are agreeing to receive details of future offers from Future Publishing Ltd and third parties. Only UK residents over the age of 15 may enter. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word NO at the end of your text message. Winners will be notified within 28 days.

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FAMOUS FOUR

A MODERN MARVEL

Four new superhero games thunder into view

If you're a fan of all things comic book, sit down because we're about to make your knees weak with joy.

Sega has given us word that it has studios working on games for massive Marvel characters Captain America, The Incredible Hulk, Iron Man, and Thor!

Platform-wise, Sega has announced that all the projects will be current-gen, next-gen, PC and handheld, but what does that actually mean?

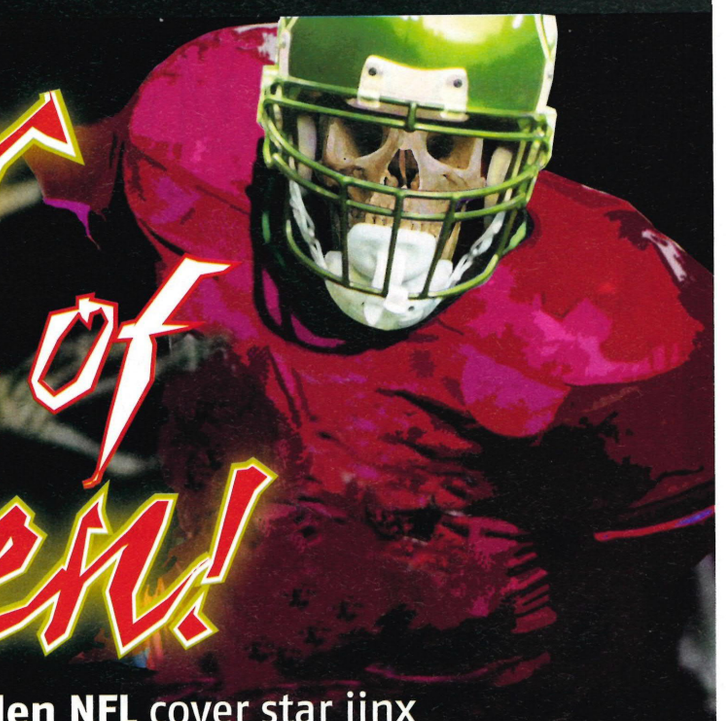
Well, with the Iron Man and Hulk games pencilled in for a Summer 2008 release date to coincide with blockbuster films, we're sure 'current-gen' will mean PS2 – so expect both these titles on your favourite console.

As for Thor and Captain America, both films are scheduled to appear in mid-2009, so we wouldn't be surprised if they missed the PS2.

PSP and PS3 owners, however, can look forward to a marvel-lous couple of years ahead.

THE FINAL TOUCHDOWN?

Fear The Curse Of Madden!



Thousands of fans spooked by **Madden NFL** cover star jinx

Rabbit's feet, black cats, opening umbrellas indoors – almost everybody is superstitious about something. For thousands of San Diego Chargers fans, it's (cue dramatic thunderclap) The Curse of *Madden NFL* – so much so that they've signed an online petition to keep star player LaDainian Tomlinson safe from it.

The crux of the curse is that the American Football star that appears on the box of the latest *Madden* game – having had a storming season the year before – is doomed to a long-term injury, or pronounced loss of form.

Sounds like hokum? The spooky facts speak for themselves, as you can see below in our History Of The *Madden* Curse. Before 1999, by the way, the face of John Madden himself adorned the cover each year.

Luckily for Tomlinson, the petition to keep him off the cover of *Madden NFL 08* was successful: check out the sea of signatures for yourself at saveitfrommadden.com. Unfortunately for Tennessee Titans fans, their quarterback Vince Young will be decorating the game box instead.

Publisher EA is upbeat about Young's chances of avoiding the curse, though. During a recent interview online with 1UP, EA Tiburon's Chris Erb said: "We're trying to go with a really young, healthy guy who's not going to get hurt.

"The jinx thing bites us every year. I haven't told this to people, but I've got a bottle of champagne in my office that we're ready to pop once someone breaks the curse." You heard the man – break a leg, Vince. ■ **AH**

History Of The Madden Curse

A concise guide to the spookiest sporting injury on the planet

Madden: 1999
Star: Garrison Hearst
What happened: 1998 was Hearst's best year: he clocked up a total of 1570 rushing yards and three touchdowns. In 1999, during the very first minute of his team's first playoff game, he broke his ankle and was out of action until 2001.

Madden: 2000
Star: Dorsey Levens
What happened: Basically he fell apart. After grabbing 1034 rushing yards the season before, Levens only managed 224 in 2000 and was subsequently dropped entirely from the Green Bay Packers squad. He never recovered his form and retired in 2004.

Madden: 2001
Star: Eddie George
What happened: Eddie George was the least cursed of all the Madden cover athletes. Although he certainly didn't perform as well as he did in 2000, George didn't completely bomb on the field or suffer any serious injuries.

Madden: 2002
Star: Daunte Culpepper
What happened: Despite having a poor season, Culpepper probably thought he'd escaped the curse. However, when he sustained a career-ending knee injury in 2006, it seemed fate had caught up with him.

Madden: 2003
Star: Marshall Faulk
What happened: During the 2003 season Faulk suffered an ankle injury and missed five games. After this, he lost his form, and never broke the 1000 rushing yards again during his career.

Madden: 2004
Star: Michael Vick
What happened: During the Atlanta Falcons' pre-season game against the Baltimore Ravens, Vick broke his fibula and missed almost every game of the season. He returned during the last five matches, but his team failed to make the playoffs.

Madden: 2005
Star: Ray Lewis
What happened: Lewis broke his wrist in the last game of the regular season – a small mercy after his stats had taken a nosedive. Half-way through the next year he suffered a season ending injury, and sat out the rest of the Baltimore Raven's games.

Madden: 2006
Star: Donovan McNabb
What happened: During the first game of the season McNabb suffered a sports hernia, which hampered his performance until the tenth game of the season, where it was aggravated to the point of needing season-ending surgery.

Madden: 2007
Star: Shaun Alexander
What happened: Broke his metatarsal during the first game of the season (having remained injury-free for seven years previously) and was forced to sit out the majority of the year's games.

VICELY DOES IT

GTA GIVEAWAY

Get set for summer – and the new **Grand Theft Auto** game IV – by bagging some GTA swag and a PS2

It's getting hot outside, and that means friends, family and other assorted loved ones nagging you to ditch the games and get outside to do long-term UV damage to your skin and get ice-cream drip down your fingers. So they're probably not going to be happy that we've teamed up with *Grand Theft Auto* moguls Rockstar to give away a pair of sexy slimline PS2s to keep you playing until autumn.

But we recognise the importance of a healthy game/life balance, so we've twisted Rockstar's arm a little further and scored a few more prizes to give away to help you out with the outdoorsy side of things. As well as the PS2, two winners will stagger away with a limited-edition *Vice City* beach chair, three different *GTA* T-shirts, a duffel bag, a Member's Only jacket and a money-can't-buy wristband.

So, when you're not ripping up Vice City you could be lounging in your very own chair, soaking up the sun and sweating profusely into your choice of stylishly branded apparel. Nice.

All you have to do to be in with a chance of winning this mighty stack of merchandise is answer the following question:

QUESTION

In which fictional city is Grand Theft Auto IV **set?**

A: Freedom City
B: Liberty City
C: Norwich City

HOW TO ENTER

By email
Email your answer to ps2compos@futurenet.co.uk and put 'VICE CITY SWAG' in the subject line.

By SMS
Text VICECITYSWAG, followed by a space, then your answer (A, B, or C) to 80889

By Post
Write your answer on a postcard and send it to:
'VICE CITY SWAG'
OPS2
Future Publishing
30 Monmouth Street
Bath
BA1 2BW

Closing Date 20 June

Only the first five entries that OPS2 randomly draws and judges to be correct will receive the specified prizes. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate. Please source all necessary permissions. Lines are open from 24 May to 20 June inclusive. We will not advise non-winners of the result.*

*VICE CITY SWAG COMPETITION TERMS AND CONDITIONS By entering you are agreeing to receive details of future offers from Future Publishing Ltd and third parties. Only UK residents over the age of 15 may enter. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word NO at the end of your text message. Winners will be notified within 28 days.

No employees of Future Publishing, any associated company or any member of their close family may enter. Prizes are as stated and no alternatives, cash or otherwise are available. Publicity may be given to any entrants and their names, addresses and/or photographs printed in OPS2. Editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. No purchase necessary.

PRIZES

Two lucky winners will each receive:
- **A charcoal-black, slimline PlayStation 2 console**
- **A *Vice City Stories* beach chair**
- **A *GTA* duffel bag**
- **3 sexy *Vice City* T-shirts**
- **A *GTA* Member's Only jacket**
- **A *GTA* wristband**

Three not-quite-as-lucky-but-still-very-fortunate-indeed runners-up will each receive:
- **A *GTA* duffel bag**
- **3 sexy *Vice City* T-shirts**
- **A *GTA* Member's Only jacket**
- **A *GTA* wristband**

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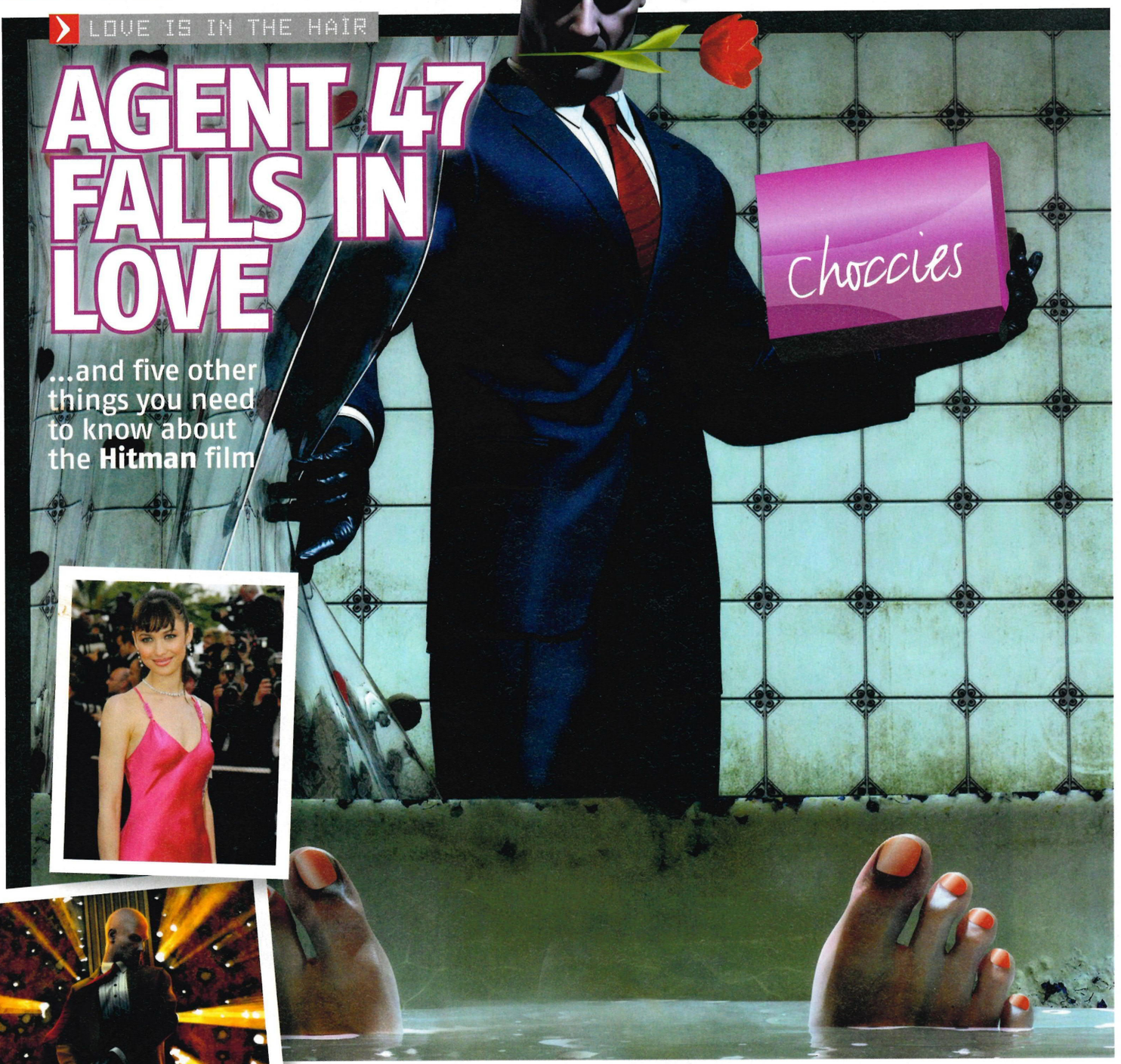
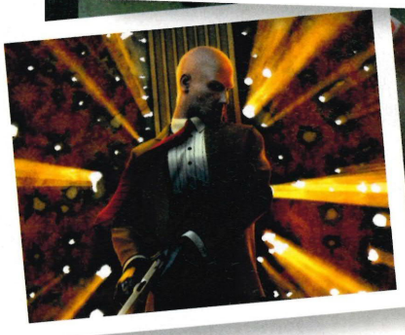
LOVE IS IN THE HAIR

AGENT 47 FALLS IN LOVE

...and five other things you need to know about the **Hitman** film





1. You might have heard of some of the actors
Timothy Olyphant (*Deadwood*, *Go*, *The Girl Next Door*) has been cast as baldy badass Agent 47. He's joined by Dougray Scott (*Mission Impossible: 2*, *Ripley's Game*), Robert Knepper (*Good Night And Good Luck*, *The West Wing*) and foxy Olga Kurylenko (*Paris Je t'Aime*) – whose character, according to the press release, stirs up 'unfamiliar emotions' in 47. Hmm.

2. The plot is political
We're not sure why, but Agent 47 will find himself in the middle of a rather vicious political takeover. The ace assassin will be chased through the prettier locations of Eastern Europe by not only the Russian military, but also a number of crack Interpol agents. We're guessing he'll find time to pick up a few lucrative killing contracts in between chases too.

3. Part of it is being filmed right here in Blighty!
Although the bulk of the shooting is taking place in Sofia, Bulgaria, some scenes will be done in the UK. Predictably, the film-makers have chosen London, so if you're in the capital, keep your eyes peeled for well-dressed bald men running around waving pistols. In fact, you should probably watch for that sort of thing anyway.

4. It's a French film...
...but don't worry, it won't be one of those plodding art-house flicks with three hours of experimental camera angles, a bunch of moody actors and a quick but gratuitous flash of 'lady garden'. It's being backed by a French studio, EuropaCorp, and director Xavier Gens is of a Gallic persuasion, but the rest of the project is pure Hollywood. We're hoping this means *Hitman* will be made with the style and precision of the French film tradition but the budget of the Tinseltown fat-cats.

5. It might be worth watching
Okay, this is more of a 'hope for the best' thing than an actual fact, but we've got good reason to be optimistic. The director has worked on some quality films (*Ronin*, *Maximum Risk*) and the cast is young enough to be hot but experienced enough to avoid hamming it up. We'll find out one way or the other by the end of the year, so keep everything crossed.

STEER 'ERE

VROOM FOR ANOTHER

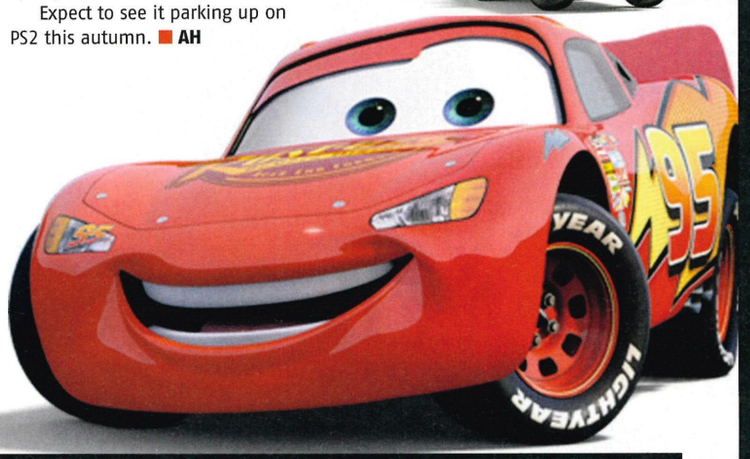
Cars is wheeled out for another drive

Disney Pixar Cars was a surprisingly solid affair. Far from the usual crud we've come to expect from games that are sprog-movie tie-ins, Rainbow Studios delivered a playable kids' racer that you wouldn't be embarrassed to own. Or at least, to be seen buying.

Now THQ has announced a sequel is on the way, and we're quietly optimistic that *Cars Mater-National* will be another helping of nipper-pleasing racing.

As well as fresh tracks there'll be some new car-acters, all of whom will be vying for a chance to challenge Lightning McQueen, champion of the first annual Mater-International contest, for his title. The game will pack in some fresh multiplayer modes, too, and allow players to explore the world of Radiator Springs at their leisure.

Expect to see it parking up on PS2 this autumn. ■ **AH**



incoming

Our guide to what's coming your way

JUNE		
Hard Rock Casino	Party	Oxygen
History Channel: Great Battles of Rome	Sim	Black Bean
Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World's End	Adventure	Disney
Raw Danger	Survival	505 Games
Spongebob: Battle For Volcano Island	Adventure	THQ
Surf's Up	Sports	Ubisoft

JULY		
ATV OffRoad Fury 4	Racing	Sony
CSI: Dimensions of Murder	Adventure	Ubisoft
Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer	Action	2K Games
Harry Potter & the Order Of The Phoenix	Adventure	EA
King Of Clubs	God sim	Oxygen
Mr Bean	Adventure	Blast!
Manhunt 2	Adventure	Rockstar
Shrek the Third	Adventure	Activision
Top Trumps: Horror And Predators	Puzzle	Ubisoft
Transformers	Action	Activision

AUGUST		
Earache: Axe Attack	Racing	JoWood
Obscure II	Horror	PlayLogic
Premier Manager 2007/8	Sport	Zoo Digital
Rogue Galaxy	RPG	Sony
Stuntman: Ignition	Racing	THQ
Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam	Racing	Activision
Top Trumps: Dogs and Dinosaurs	Puzzle	Ubisoft
Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria	RPG	Square Enix

2007		
Ape Escape: Million Monkeys	Platformer	Sony
Aqua Teen Hunger Force	Adventure	Midway
Buzz! Junior Dinos	Party	Sony
Buzz! Junior Monsters	Party	Sony
Cars Mater-National	Racing	THQ
Crash of the Titans	Platformer	VU Games
Guitar Hero III	Music	Activision
Harvey Birdman Attorney at Law	Sim	Capcom
Indiana Jones 2007	Adventure	Activision
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	Racing	THQ
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames	Action	EA
Painkiller: Hell Wars	Shooter	TBC
PDC World Championship Darts 2008	Sport	Oxygen
Phantasy Star Universe: Illumninas	RPG	Sega
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	Action	Sony
Ratatouille	Action	THQ
Shining Force EXA	RPG	Sega
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	Action	Activision
The Golden Compass	Adventure	Sega
WWE Wrestlemania 2008	Fighting	THQ
Yakuza 2	Adventure	Sega

PSP

JUNE		
Alien Syndrome	RPG	Sega
Crush	Puzzle	Sega
Driver 76	Action	Ubisoft
Earthworm Jim	Action	Atari
Elder Scrolls Travels: Oblivion	RPG	Ubisoft
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	Action	Ubisoft
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	Action	Sony
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	Action	Sony

JULY		
Manhunt 2	Adventure	Rockstar
Transformers	Action	Activision
Harry Potter & The Order of the Phoenix	Adventure	EA

THE LIGHT SIDE

ROBOT ROCK

Your childhood memories are looking safe! *Transformers* the game is shaping up to buck the trend and actually turn out to be a top-notch blockbuster movie tie-in. See it now on p18 and expect a full review next issue

READY TO ROCK

Red Octane has not only announced *Guitar Hero III*, but has also let slip that we can expect a fresh axe-grinder every year from now onwards. For those about to develop, we salute you

ROCK STARS

Manhunt 2, *GTA IV* and a *Vice City Stories* competition in one issue! Rockstar is spoiling us with three of its biggest games this month, and we want to share the love with you

IN THE SABER

GIANT DISAPPOINTMENT

Tell us you wouldn't relish the chance to take down the weird, wonderful 'lost colossi' that were axed from *Shadow Of The Colossus* (p27). You can't say it, can you...

WE LOST LOST

According to *Lost* series producers John Cuse and Damon Lindelof, the game of the show will appear on PS3, Xbox 360 and PC. No mention of a PS2 version

THE CURSE OF MADDEN

Hey, we're sure Vince Young is going to be just fine (p35). Fingers crossed for ya, though, Vince

THE DARK SIDE

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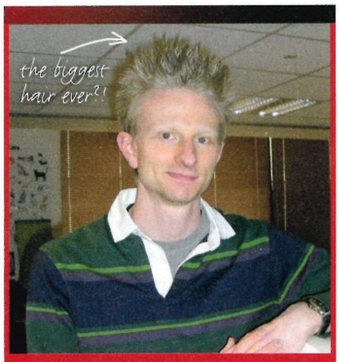
monitor

SEEING GAMES BEFORE THEY HAPPEN



OPS2 Towers was an unpleasant place to be while we were putting this issue together.

Not only was our tiny enclosure hotter than Satan's nostrils and cramped like a battery farm, but the air was filled with talk of horror and depravity, the likes of which hadn't been witnessed since George Walter left the mag six months before.

Why? It's because we've got no fewer than four terrifying treats for you in the Monitor section this month, and each one has its own uniquely frightening style.

First off, *Manhunt 2*. Easily the sickest game we've ever seen, Rockstar's latest is stealth horror at its very best.

Then there's *Obscure 2*, the follow up to 2004's *Resi*-esque student scream-up.

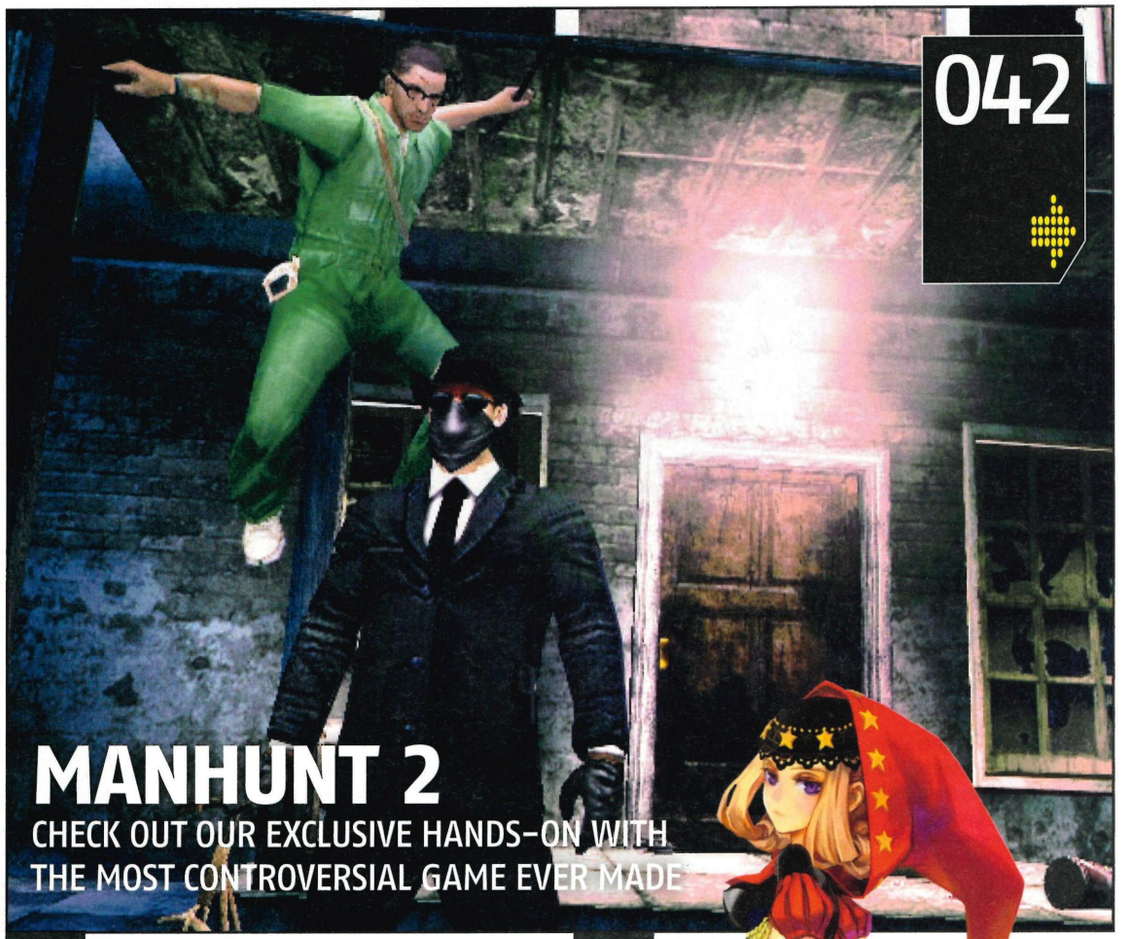
Thirdly, Konami has given us fresh shots from its latest and greatest *Castlevania* game on PSP.

And finally we get our hands on PS3's *The Darkness*, which mixes up the blammo and the bloody scary to great effect.

There really is something to scare the pants off anyone – so stock up on clean underwear, bolt your door, and get reading.

Andy

Andy Hartup,
Deputy editor



042

MANHUNT 2

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A teen ninja in a Tango orange tracksuit – this isn't your average kung-fu adventure... or is it?

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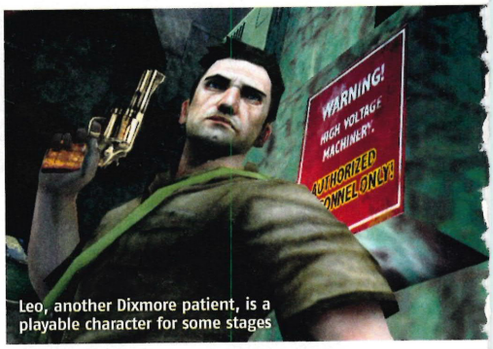
056 **CASTLEVANIA: THE DRACULA X CHRONICLES**
Sticking it to the pointy-toothed guy, retro-style

You play as bugged-out scientist Daniel Lamb, who's being pursued by hired killers



Leo, another Dixmore patient, is a playable character for some stages

All those TVs and he *still* missed the grand final of *Dancing on Ice*

PUBLISHER **ROCKSTAR** | DEVELOPER **ROCKSTAR LONDON** | WEBSITE **WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/MANHUNT2**

PlayStation 2 official magazine-UK hands on

MANHUNT 2

BLOOD, SWEAT AND FEARS. YES, MANHUNT'S BACK

There's no other game quite like *Manhunt*. Other titles have outraged the nation's self-appointed moral guardians, but none have matched the unadulterated, undiluted brutality of *Manhunt*. And if you think that all the media attention it received means its sequel is going to pull any blood-soaked punches, you'd be wrong. So, so wrong.

The plot is prime nightmare material. You take control of Daniel Lamb, a research scientist who falls on hard times and is therefore forced to take work on a shady project under the supervision of a shifty character by the name of Dr Pickman.

When funding for his work gets yanked, Pickman approaches Dan and asks him to put himself forward as a test subject for the project. After a long chat with his wife and kids, Daniel agrees to be Dr Pickman's guinea pig.

Several years later Lamb regains consciousness inside Dixmore Hospital For The Criminally Insane, and his first act is to strangle the nurse who's trying to restrain him. And so the second *Manhunt* begins.

IF LOOKS COULD KILL

The first thing you notice in the new *Manhunt* is that the visuals are tidier and the animations have been spruced up. Fans of the original *Manhunt* may baulk at the sequel's less grimy feel so, just for them, there's an option to turn the VCR-style static filter on or off.

The first level is a tutorial, in which Daniel hooks up with fellow inmate Leo in a bid to escape Dixmore and you learn the fundamentals of the game's methods.

The kill system in this sequel works in exactly the same way as the first game. When you're close enough to a victim to strike, Daniel's heart will start pounding inside his ribcage, and the DualShock pad will vibrate.

Holding down R1 will ready him up for the kill and the longer you hold the button down before releasing it, the more gruesome your butchery will be.

The first weapon Daniel finds is a syringe and even though he's reluctant to use it, he's soon encouraged to jab it into someone's neck and stab away until the victim stops breathing.

The rest of the game sees Daniel hacking, shooting and punching his way through the contracted killers who come after him, all the while trying to piece together what happened to him in the years since he signed up to become a test subject in the project.

To this end, the game incudes several flashback missions, where Lamb relives a snapshot of his past to try and recall what has happened to him.

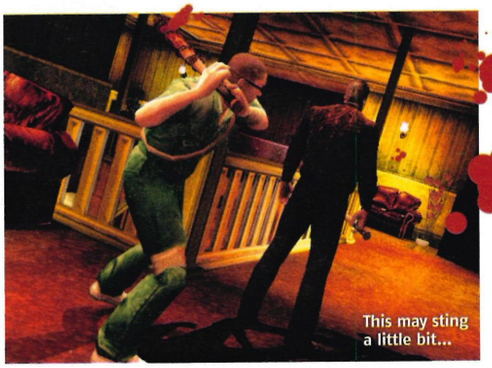
ACE OF CHASE

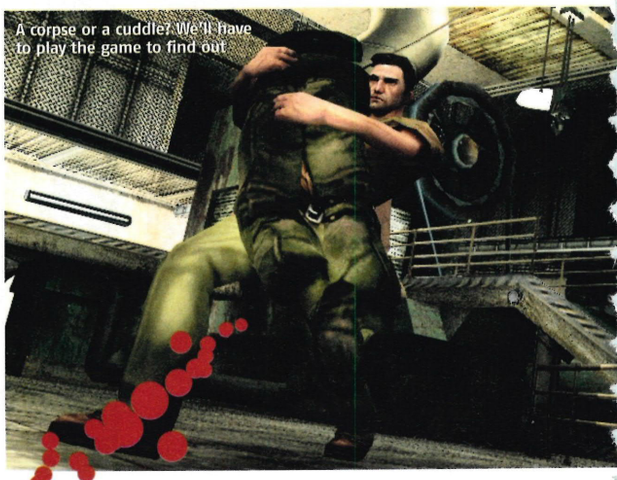
The level we played, Best Friends, was one such flashback mission. Here we were playing as Leo, Danny's chum from Dixmore, and we were hunting down a man called Michael, who'd double-crossed us. Bad mistake.

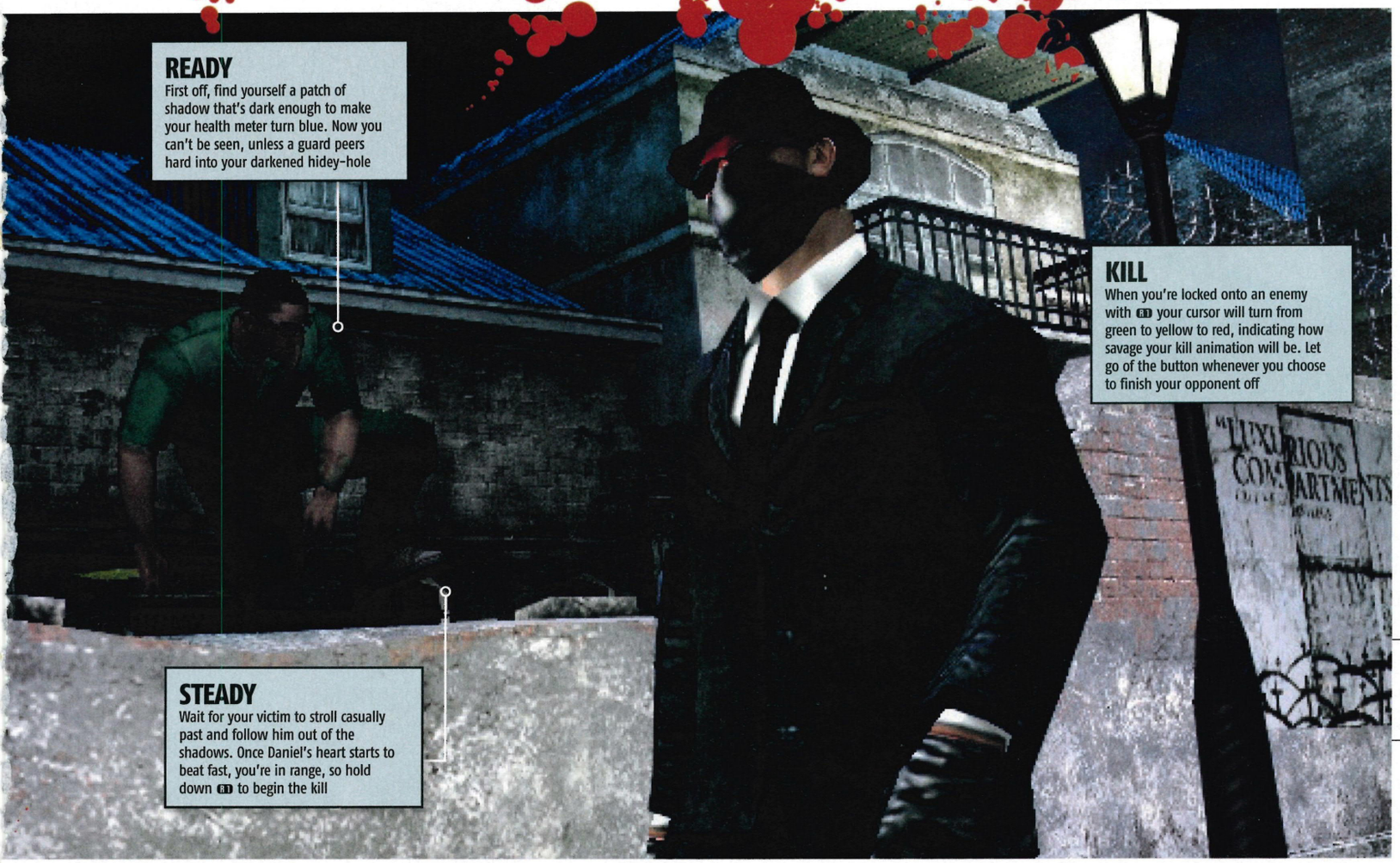
The first task was to chase Michael down, so we held down the ⊗ button and legged it into an industrial dockside warehouse. Inside, we spot a group of hired guns searching the building: they're looking for Leo. Unarmed, we take to the shadows.

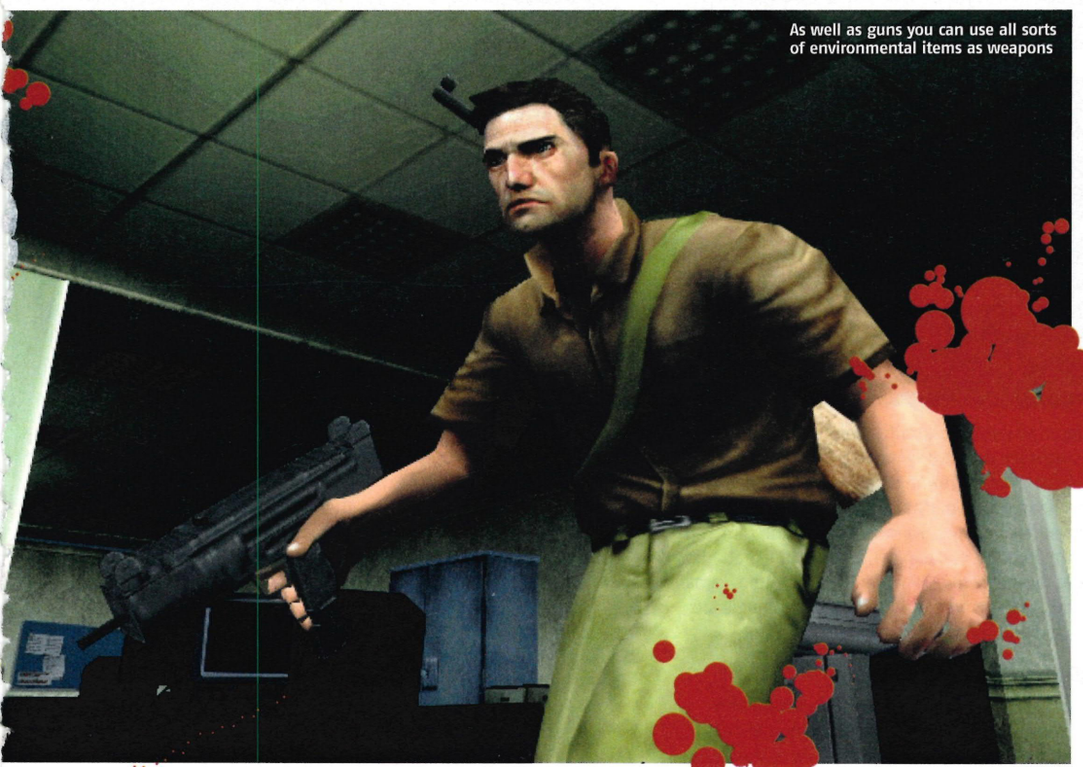
Unlike the first game, *Manhunt 2* won't let you get away with murder when it comes to stealth. Squatting in semi-darkness doesn't guarantee safety, because your enemies will actively peer into dark areas when spooked. If they stare right at you, you must quickly press a button sequence to stay hidden, which really keeps you on edge.

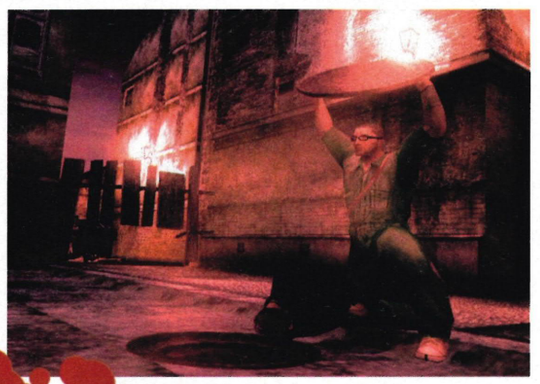
After avoiding detection from a couple of goons, we're itching to kick off the bloodbath, but there's one ▶


This may sting a little bit...

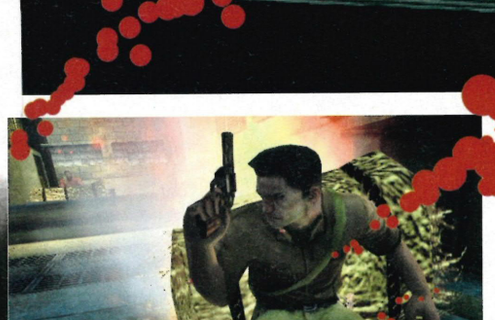

A corpse or a cuddle? We'll have to play the game to find out




As well as guns you can use all sorts of environmental items as weapons

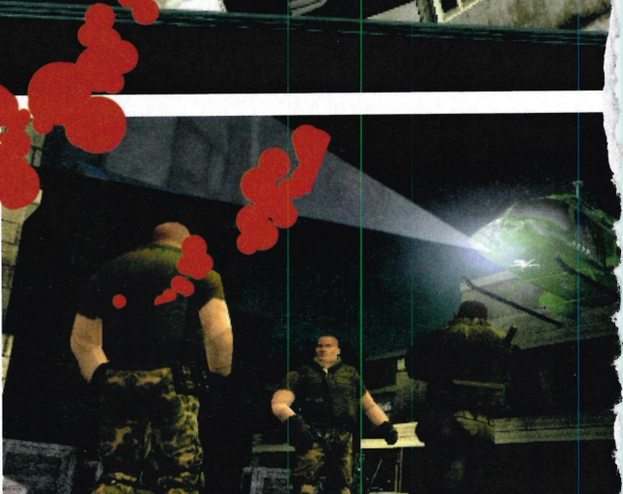


Having woken up unconscious in a nuthouse, Daniel must find out what happened



Stealth is more challenging than in the first game

When he said 'hang on a tick' this wasn't what he meant



problem: no weapon. Luckily, *Manhunt 2* introduces *Punisher*-style environmental kills, so we flick the switch on a nearby meat-grinding machine and patiently wait for the nearest bad guy to check out the noise.

Once he's in range, we sneak up behind him and feed him into the mechanism, causing blood and body parts to fly everywhere. Thankfully, his buddies remain oblivious to the whole incident, because there's too much background noise in their ears.

HOPE AND GORY

After grabbing our victim's weapon (a baton) and dispatching his chums with a combination of brute strength and meat-grinder, we're ready to track down Michael again. The next area is a puzzle. A meat-packing device sits in one corner, there's a patrolling guard and a conveyor belt leads into the upper recesses of the room.

Leo can't walk along the conveyor because the exit is blocked by a mesh gate, so we have to work out how to activate the packing machine. We dispatch the guard with a close-up gun kill (Leo shoves his pistol into the man's mouth and blows off the top half of his head), and approach the machine.

It needs a specific weight on the belt before the machine will activate and what do you know, that weight is roughly the same as a human male, much like the one we recently sent to meet his maker.

So, we pick up the guard's corpse and dump it onto the conveyor belt. He's snatched into the machine and after some sickening tearing and crunching noises, he emerges as a human-box.

Meanwhile, we're free to progress and confront Michael on the warehouse roof. This kind of encounter is what will pass for a boss-fight in *Manhunt 2*. We run

Daniel was once a family man but it's been a while since he saw his children

BAG FOR STRIFE

Everything is a potential weapon in *Manhunt 2*

During our time playing *Manhunt 2* we had the chance to try out a few of the more unconventional weapons the game has to offer. Anything that has a ghostly green glow around it can be used as a tool for killing or distracting. Bottles and cans can be thrown to attract the attention of guards and everyday items such as pens and carrier bags can be used to kill them off. Other weapons we found in the demo included a syringe, a barrel full of water, a puddle of petrol (with match) and a scythe.

after our victim, who's armed with a flare gun. After several exchanges of fire (and some ill-advised hiding behind very flammable blocks of whatever was being kept in the warehouse), we take him down and steal the keys to his powerboat, which was moored in the dock where we entered the level.

This kind of running, taking cover, and shooting gameplay assumes a much larger role in *Manhunt 2* than seen in the first game, and you'll be asked to wield a pistol or two during most levels.

THEN THERE WERE NONE

From what we've seen, it doesn't make the game any less of a spine-tingling stealth-a-thon, but it does add a much-needed dose of action every now and again to keep the game running at a lightning pace.

Or in the case of the Best Friends level that we were playing, it adds an explosive climax. See, by the time we'd legged it back to the boat, four heavily armed mercenaries had found their way there too.

Our ammo was low. We needed to get creative. First off, a carrier-bag kill on a guard who stepped out from the watchful view of his buddies. Then it was a gun execution on another mercenary and finally a shoot-out with the other two.

By this time, we'd nailed the art of headshots, and with a quick couple of flicks of the right thumbstick we were free to steal the boat and escape the level.

So although the hands-on time we were given with *Manhunt 2* was brief, it was plenty enough to convince us that this is yet another slice of top-quality violence from Rockstar.

Although new devices have been added, such as the environment kills and the ability to create your own shadows by shooting out certain lights, the game sticks to the tried-and-tested *Manhunt* formula.

Most importantly, though, this sequel is as brutal, gruesome and vicious as the original. Faint-hearted gamers, concerned parents and knee-jerk commentators: you have been warned. ■ **AH**

monitor

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL magazine UK

UNCOMPROMISING, BLOODY, and every bit as savage as the original was, *Manhunt 2* is shaping up to be the perfect sequel to the PS2's premier videogame nasty

HOT OR NOT

TEPID | WARM | **HOT** | BOILING | MELTDOWN

PUBLISHER ATARI | DEVELOPER NAMCO BANDAI | WEBSITE WWW.NARUTO.COM

NARUTO: UZUMAKI CHRONICLES

THE LEGEND IS STARTING TO DRAG ON FOR ALL BUT THE HARDCORE FANS

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL MAGAZINE-UK hands on

Everyone loves a ninja. Thanks to mainstream martial arts films such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Hero* and *House Of Flying Daggers* ninjas have ascended the popular culture tree and threatened to kick the ass of anyone foolish enough to follow them up. So how do we feel about a ninja with blond, spikey hair, a Tango orange tracksuit, and an ASBO attitude?

Right now, we've got mixed emotions about Naruto. Having spent hours of hands-on time with a nearly finished version of *Uzumaki Chronicles*, the latest in this anime mega-series, we've unearthed fistfuls of strengths and weaknesses in equal measure.

On the surface it's a slick, if repetitive, third-person fighter in the vein of *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks*. Punch; kick; lob razor-sharp weapons and so on. But much more than that, it's shaping up to be a goldmine for fans of the TV series on which it's based.

KNOW YOUR NARUTO

If you're familiar with the cartoon, which has been running on the Jetix channel for almost a year, you'll know that Naruto is a boy training to be a ninja.

His birth is something of a mystery, and he's made even more complex by the fact that an evil nine-tailed fox spirit has been locked inside his body since he was knee-high to a grasshopper.

There's a whole huge history to *Naruto* (it's been around in Japan since 1999) so there's plenty to learn about the series and, therefore, this game.

Fans of the show will be over the moon with the authenticity of the game, and it's this faithfulness that will make *Uzumaki Chronicles* a firm favourite among devotees. The visuals are very much in the style of the TV show, and the game is stuffed to bursting with lovable secondary characters. Kakashi, Sasuke and Neji all make playable appearances.

The main game is mission-based. Playing as Naruto you travel to a village, pick up an assignment then roam the land trying to complete it. The quests range from dull stuff such as protecting wagons of merchandise to genuinely interesting concepts: advertising shops by beating up bandits using that shop's specific weapons, for example.

However, the variety seems to stop at the concept stage. Each mission we played – no matter what the objective was – consisted of a series of small skirmishes with starving ninjas and amazonian ladies.

There's little or no exploration within each stage, and no chance to level Naruto up in an RPG style or properly customise his character. You can merely collect Virtue, to

You move between towns to collect and fulfil missions

CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAG QUEEN

Naruto on a weekday, Nora at the weekend

One of the more unusual moves you'll be able to pull off in this game is this distraction technique. Tapping R1 and R2 at the same time activates your Sexy Jutsu ability and turns Naruto into a busty lovely, stunning your enemies in the process. To be honest, it stunned us too, but not in a good way.

Those are Naruto's shadow clones, not just a pair of chav mates

Your wide array of enemies include lady ninjas

Don't blame us. We're only working for Emporium Karin.

Naruto is an impetuous (read: irritating) hero

I bet he's got loads of awesome Jutsu to teach me!

give you larger bars for your health and special abilities, and cash that can be traded for special items in town.

KUNG FU TUSSLE

During the actual fights, however, *Naruto: Uzumaki Chronicles* has plenty to shout about. As well as regular combos and special attacks, Naruto can unleash his special Nine-Tailed Fox Spirit power, or call in a partner to attack for a short time.

While you're playing as Naruto's buddy, you can use special moves specific to that character and this will help you overcome certain obstacles, or beat specific types of enemies much more quickly.

Sadly, the developer passed on the chance to include a proper cooperative mode, which would have been a real boon. Sure, there will be plenty of content to keep you busy in a singleplayer capacity, including the chance to find ancient plate pieces and chips to boost Naruto's stats and abilities, but we'd love to have seen some kind of multiplayer action built in.

It would certainly help us muster up a little more enthusiasm for the future of this plucky fighter, because from these first impressions, it doesn't look like Naruto has the legs to be a legendary PS2 ninja. ■ **AH**

The game is at its best in the colourful fight scenes

monitor — PlayStation 2 Official Magazine-UK

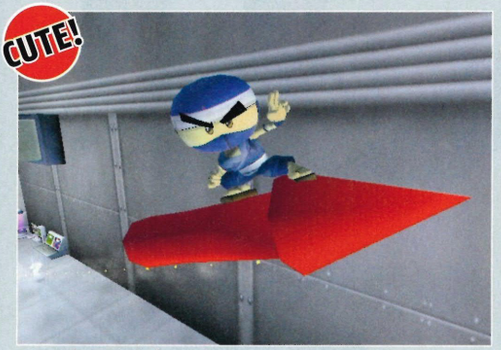
NUTTY FOR NARUTO and all things anime? Then this is definitely one to watch. But if that kind of thing isn't your bag, you may as well forget about the game right now

HOT OR NOT?

TEPID | **WARM** | HOT | BOILING | MELTDOWN

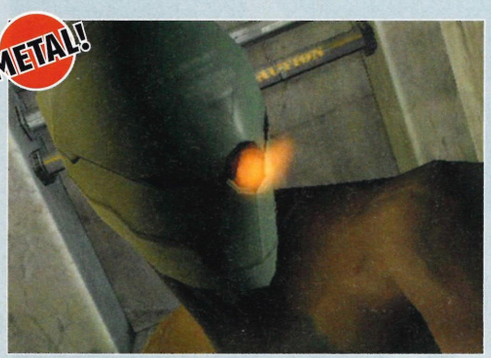
BEST NINJAS EVER

PS2's top three Shuriken-chuckers, according to us



I-Ninja (from *I-Ninja*)
Don't be fooled by this diddy-ninja's cuddly, super-deformed appearance. He knows how to bring the pain

Rikimaru (from *Tenchu*)
The toughest ninja from the finest stealth series ever to grace PlayStation: nuff said. Shame he's no longer with us



Gray Fox (from *Metal Gear Solid 2*)
He may be madder than a bag of March Hares, but this only makes Gray Fox (aka Cyborg Ninja) twice as dangerous

PUBLISHER **ACTIVISION** DEVELOPER **SUPERVILLAIN STUDIOS** WEBSITE **WWW.ACTIVISION.COM**

TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM

PlayStation 2 Official Magazine-UK new screens

DROPPING INTO PS2 SOON WITH EXCLUSIVE CONTENT

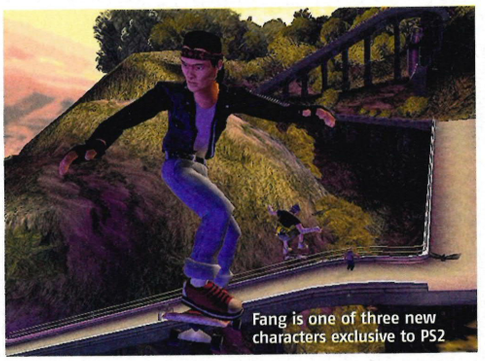
It may sound like one of those peculiar West Country sports where the objective is to chase after a food item rolling down a cliff, but *Downhill Jam* is actually Activision's latest reinvention of the *Tony Hawk's* franchise.

Downhill Jam was previously released on DS and Wii to high acclaim, and now the good old PS2 is yet again the recipient of a publisher's output considered too exuberant and quirky for other consoles. Well, having played it on Wii, we're not complaining.

The long-running series of *Tony Hawk's* games were groundbreaking at the start but have been getting formulaic, so *Downhill Jam*'s mix of seat-of-the-pants thrills and time-attack scoring is a breath of fresh air.

The focus is entirely on getting from A to B in the quickest time possible, though a number of collectible tokens can also boost your stats and final score.

The races take place on some of the steepest hills in the world, from the streets of San Francisco to the rocky terrain of Machu Picchu in Peru. Imagine *Sonic The Hedgehog* on a skateboard.



Fang is one of three new characters exclusive to PS2

SKATE EXPECTATIONS

Game modes include Race, Trick Attack and Slalom plus three new, PS2-exclusive modes: Airtime, Mayhem and Yard Sale.

Activision is currently keeping schtum about these new features, but judging by the Wii version and the PS2 screens we've seen, we reckon Mayhem could consist of destroying everything in your path and mowing down as many tourists as possible while Yard Sale is likely to focus on collecting money tokens in difficult-to-reach places.

The formula worked surprisingly well on Wii and the new emphasis on replaying levels to achieve higher scores and open up new goals certainly gave it a 'one more go' factor that should appeal to PS2 players as much as it did to the Wiimote-wavers.

Just like in *SSX*, pressing down on the crouch button boosts speed while letting go at the crest of a hill or ramp provides the extra air required for pulling off amazing tricks and stunts. Grinding obstacles is typically satisfying while jostling with rival racers as you bomb down the tracks adds a further frisson of excitement.

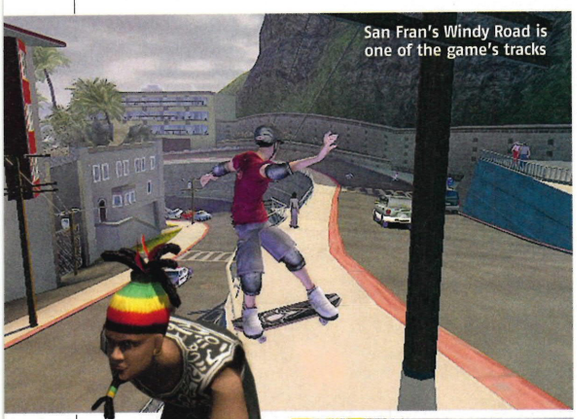
CHARACTER CLASS

Instead of the usual line-up of real world skaters and Tony's mates there are eight generic characters to choose from: think Goth chick and stoned teenager, and the PS2 gets further bonuses with three extra, exclusive skaters.

Plus the excellent Create-A-Skater feature is present and correct, in which you can design your own avatar.

It's looking like a comprehensive package containing more than 100 events across eight environments. And to sweeten the experience even more there'll be a further 10 exclusive PS2 events and three all-new, split-screen multiplayer modes.

Some felt the Wii version of *Downhill Jam* was too far removed from the popular *Hawk's* formula but we reckon it's all pointing towards a more frenetic and possibly more fun addition to the franchise. ■ **MW**



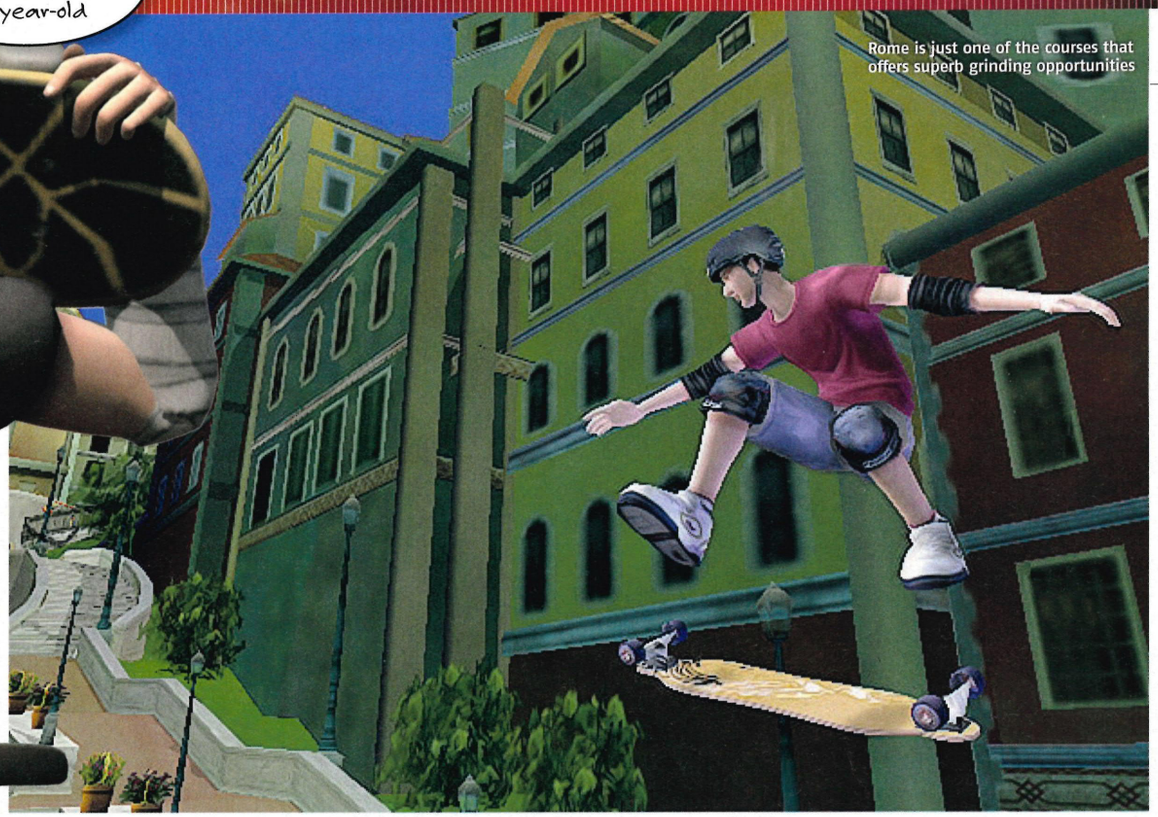
San Fran's Windy Road is one of the game's tracks

monitor — PlayStation 2 Official Magazine UK

IF THE CONTROLS are nailed then we fully expect *Downhill Jam* to be an accessible, fun and flamboyant alternative to the now-too-familiar *Tony Hawk's* series

HOT OR NOT?

TEPID | WARM | **HOT** | BOILING | MELTDOWN

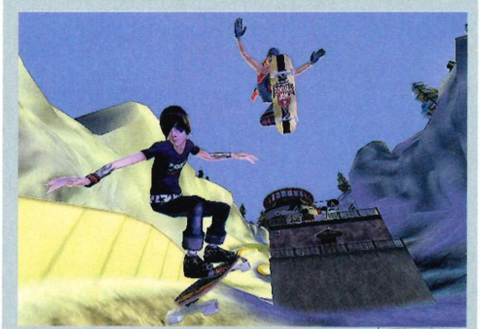

Rome is just one of the courses that offers superb grinding opportunities

Mascara under the eyes? What exactly is this woman thinking?

The emphasis is on replaying levels to do better tricks and score more

RUCKY RACES

The first rule of *Downhill Jam* is there are no rules...



One of the more engaging features of the Wii version was the ability to kick pedestrians out of the way and slap opponents as they rode up beside you. A touch violent perhaps but it added a great deal of fun to the speedy hill runs. Indeed, some of the courses are so large it will take several minutes to reach the end and like all Hawk's games there are plenty of secret areas and shortcuts to find if you experiment and pull off some amazing wall-runs and leaps.

We're praying he doesn't fall and straddle that railing at speed...

Look! Audrey II from *Little Shop of Horrors*! And that's not all that *ObsCure II* borrows

PUBLISHER **PLAYLOGIC** | DEVELOPER **HYDRAVISION** | WEBSITE **WWW.PLAYLOGICINTERNATIONAL.COM**

PlayStation 2 Official Magazine-UK **new screens**

OBSCURE 2

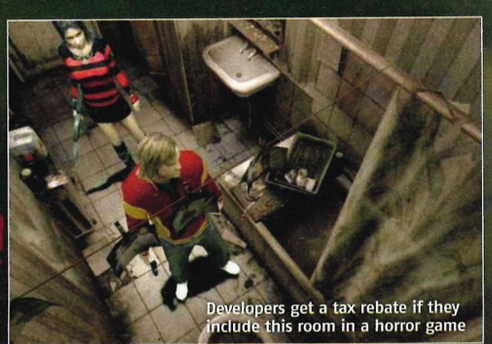
MY TEACHER IS AN ALIEN. NO, REALLY...

When Hollywood horror heavyweight Robert Rodriguez and *Scream* scriptwriter Kevin Williamson joined forces for the 1998 teen sci-fi movie *The Faculty* – a tale of alien bodysnatchers taking the forms of the teachers of a US college – the most surprising aspect of the rather predictable film was that there were absolutely no gaming tie-ins.

Teachers from outer space? Misunderstood, rebellious teenagers? A healthy dose of paranoia? This was prime gaming steak just waiting to be served up.

But it wasn't until 2004, when *ObsCure* hit the PS2, that anyone got a taste of teen survival horror. *ObsCure* took *The Faculty*'s plot, set it inside *Resident Evil*'s traditional third-person engine, threw in a bunch of light-shy demons and implemented a two-player system in which your single player's AI buddy could be replaced by another human player at any time.

As you progressed you swapped control to other characters, giving you a game that took the ensemble nature and teen-wit of *The Faculty* and turned it into a novel take on the aging survival horror formula.



Developers get a tax rebate if they include this room in a horror game

SCARE IN THE COMMUNITY

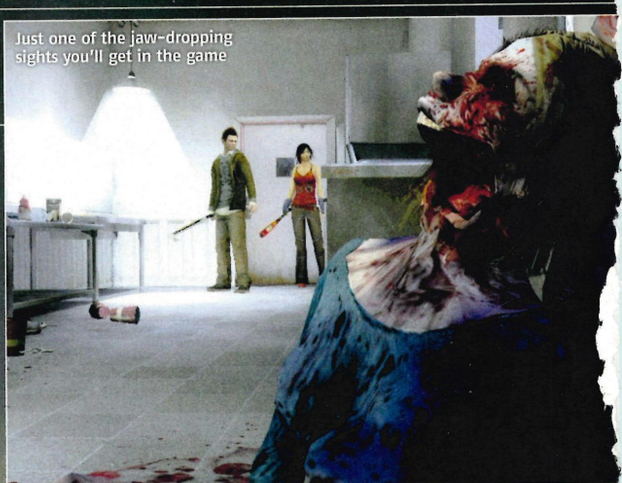
It started promisingly enough as you assumed control of high-school jock Kenny Mathews chasing a thief from the locker rooms and on to his mysterious disappearance.

But what followed was a veritable check list of survival horror clichés complete with painfully forced dialogue and puzzles that were either blatantly obvious or simply didn't make any sense.

For example, you'd find yourself looking for a ready supply of acid that wasn't strong enough to burn through a paper cup, but was potent enough to melt through a solid metal door lock.

It was the high-school setting that gave *ObsCure* its novelty. The game was so 'teen America' that the publisher convinced Sum 41 to contribute angst-ridden skate-rock song 'Still Waiting' to the soundtrack.

ObsCure made you feel you were wandering around a nightmarish episode of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, where you're less aroused by the lead character and more scared to death of the abominations waiting to leap out and start gnawing into your squishy parts.

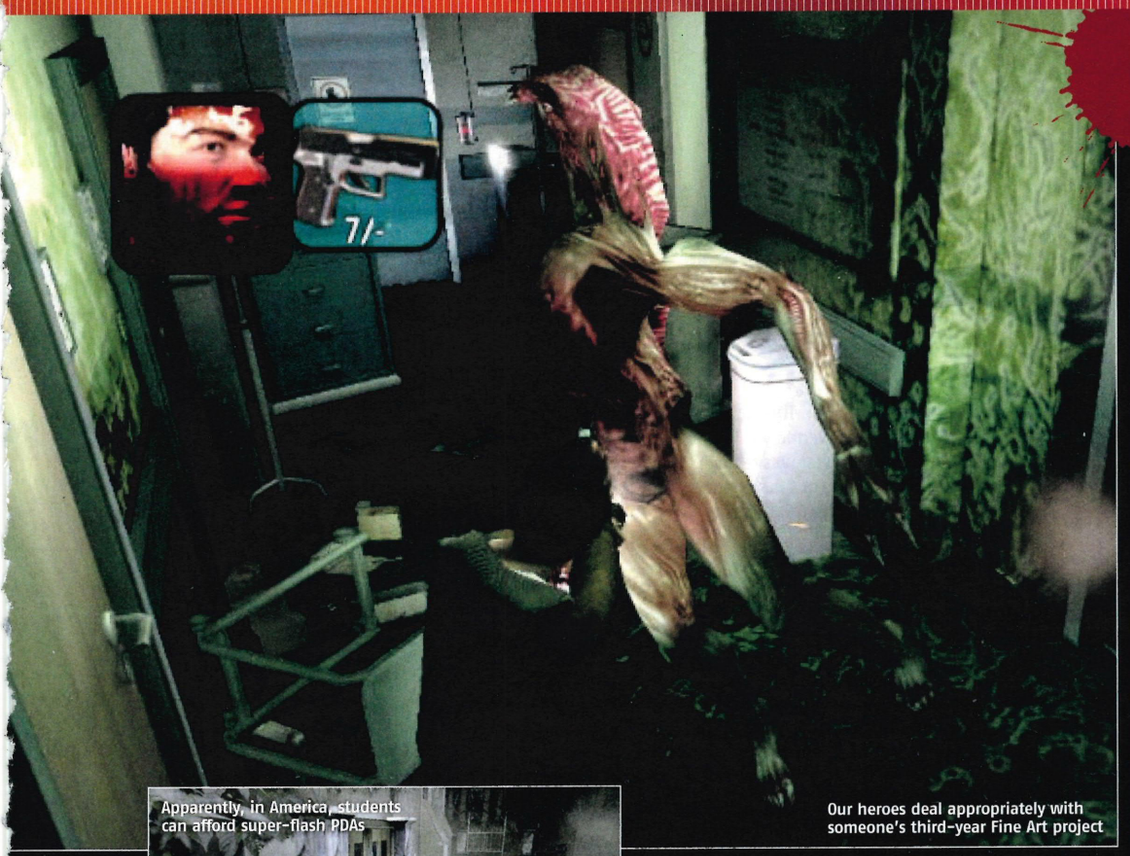


Just one of the jaw-dropping sights you'll get in the game

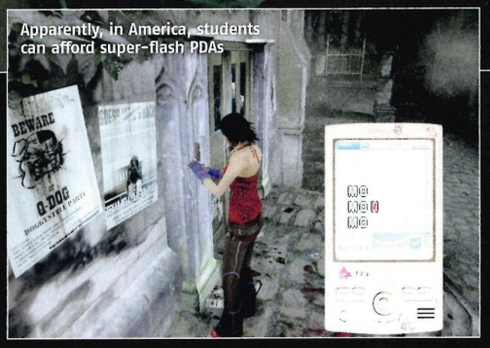
CARRY ON CAMPUS

It's been two years since demons enjoyed the poor lighting set-up of Leafmore High and the six surviving classmates haven't let the mere fact that they've dealt with an insane principle's unconstitutional use of vile beasties from an evil dimension stop them from graduating and moving onto college.

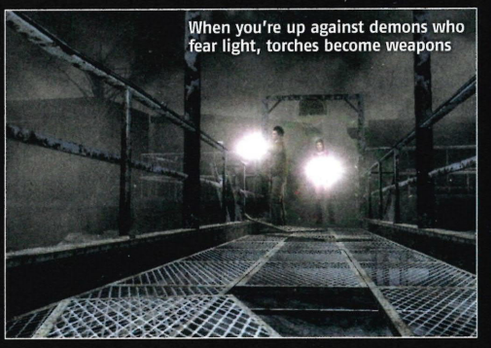
Co-ed life should be a screaming blur of sexual discovery, booze-laden regret and occasional study but not so for our unlucky half-dozen. It's not long before the eerily beautiful plants that have started sprouting up



Our heroes deal appropriately with someone's third-year Fine Art project



Apparently, in America, students can afford super-flash PDAs



When you're up against demons who fear light, torches become weapons

across the Fallcreek university campus prove to be far more than just interesting conversation starters.

What a surprise! They're actually aliens, or demons, or demon-aliens or something. Cue more optional co-op exploration and conundrum-solving, more combat that utilises the everyday things you find around a US campus (baseball bats and guns, for example) and probably the twanging of guitars rocked by white middle-class punks.

YOUNG GUNS

To describe *ObsCure II* as a reboot of the original game in a new education facility would accurately cover all the details currently in the public domain.

Light plays a similar role to the one it had in the original so you can bet you'll be hastily opening windows or relying on your torch to keep nastiness at bay. Even so, you may wonder why plants, possibly the planet's most famous sun-lovers, could develop in such a counter-intuitive way? Ah, they're demon/alien plants. Right.

Teen horrors don't need great stories, just intense situations, good-looking leads, plenty of gore and some snappy dialogue.

So we can almost forgive the Xerox nature of the story and setting as long as the conundrums aren't further retreads of aging ideas and as long as the team at Hydravision remember that teen horror movies only work if they're fun as well as packed with jolt-out-of-your-seat moments. Nudity helps, also. ■ **WJ**

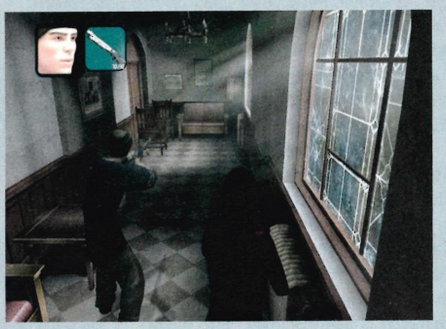
monitor PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL MAGAZINE-UK

SO FAR, THIS LOOKS LIKE more of the same of the same. Still, if you like hair-raising scares alongside painfully cool teen angst, keep a severed eye on *ObsCure II*

HOT OR NOT?

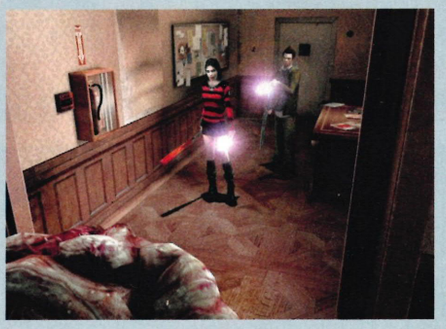
TEPID	WARM	HOT	BOILING	MELTDOWN

WHY, IT'S JUST LIKE AN OLD-SCHOOL SCHOOL REUNION!



HALLS OF RESI-DENCE
Any second now a zombie guard dog will smash through that window and scare the living crud out of you. Actually, no, that was *Resident Evil*'s first great 'woah!' moment 11 years ago and has absolutely nothing to do with this screenshot. For starters, in *ObsCure II* light is your friend, so the sight of a glass window should make you feel safer. Now there's a cunning twist to the horror formula if ever there was one.

MANSION FAMILY
American colleges don't have to worry about being funded solely by government money and so, evidently, have plenty of cash to spend making their buildings resemble the sort of mansions you might find, say, in the countryside around *Resi*'s Raccoon City. Explore the college with a friend in tow – and you might be wise to take some kind of weapon with you.



BEANO BONANZA
Resident Evil's failure to include *The Beano*'s Minnie The Minx as a playable character was a shame so it's great to see her take one-sixth of the centre-stage in *ObsCure II*. We're betting that she plays the role of the disinterested emo chick who learns to get on with the popular kids as they all realise they have more in common than they previously thought (and that it's easier to kill monsters when there's two of you).

ETA 3 months
September 2007

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PUBLISHER **ATLUS USA** | DEVELOPER **VANILLAWARE** | WEBSITE **WWW.ATLUS.COM/ODINSPHERE**

ODIN SPHERE

PlayStation 2 Official Magazine-UK **new screens**

'THE FATE YOU HAVE ACCEPTED'? OOER...

Odin Sphere is the unofficial sequel to *Princess Crown*, released in 1997 on the Sega Saturn. So it's taken a fair while to happen, but its arrival is a sign that, finally, Japanese companies are listening to the fans and are bringing such beautiful games over to Western shores.

And beautiful this is. Mouth-wateringly delicious. The backgrounds alone could practically be framed in the Louvre, right next to the Mona Lisa. Developer Vanillaware boasts that every individual location and character is painstakingly hand drawn and coloured, and it shows.

Set in a medieval world full of Norse legend, the kingdom of Valentine is destroyed by an ancient artefact, and now war has broken out between humankind and fairies (don't laugh, they have swords) to gain control of said doomsday device.

Enter Demon King Odin, who's intent on obliterating everything that gets in between him and the artefact. But Odin seems to have forgotten about an ancient prophecy foretelling that his actions will lead to Armageddon. Doh!

You experience the action from the eyes of five playable characters, each with their own tale of tragedy to tell. The main star is Valkyrie Princess Gwendolyn, Odin's daughter. Her older sister was recently killed, so Gwendolyn's out for revenge; she also hopes that in fighting for her father, she'll win his love.

FAIRY NUFF

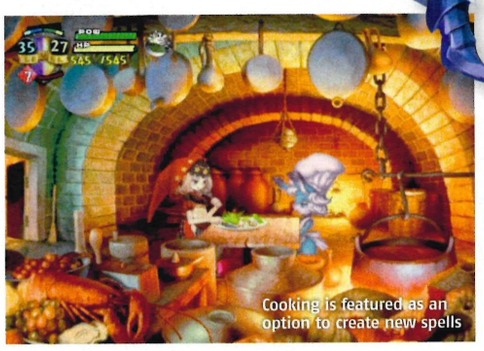
Backing her up is Velvet (a princess who hid in the forest after her kingdom was annihilated), Cornelius (a prince turned monster who fancies Velvet), Mercedes (not a car, a fairy child queen) and Ozmund (a killer knight who's been trained to murderise everything in sight).

In a break from the modern-day roleplaying norm, *OS* is a 2D side-scroller with real-time action rather than using turn-based battles. But of course you still have to fight through hordes of enemies and face down gloriously huge bosses.

The game is split into separate acts, and at the end of each, you get a score on the time you took to get to the end, how many baddies you slaughtered and how good your fighting was. The better the score, the more goodies you can unlock.

To balance up the physical action, there's plenty of magic spells to cast. And, usefully, Gwendolyn's spear can absorb Phozons (the souls of the dead) and use their energy to either charge up your magic gauge or level up the spear.

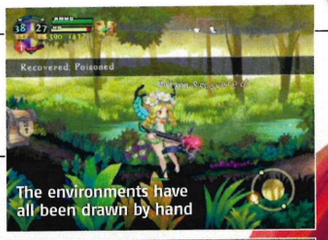
With sidequests, mini-games and unlockable spells galore, *OS* is shaping up to be one lengthy chuck of gorgeous RPG gold. ■ **KR**



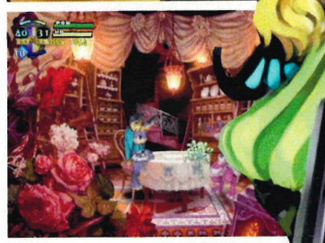
Cooking is featured as an option to create new spells

Some spells appear to involve flashing your pants

They may be fairies but they still kick butt in a scrap



The environments have all been drawn by hand



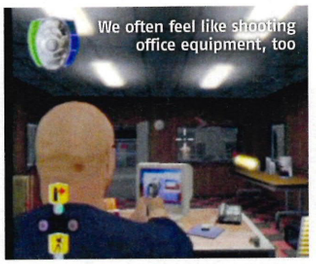
You set enemies on fire to weaken them

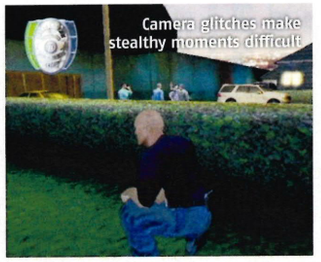
monitor — PlayStation 2 Official Magazine-UK

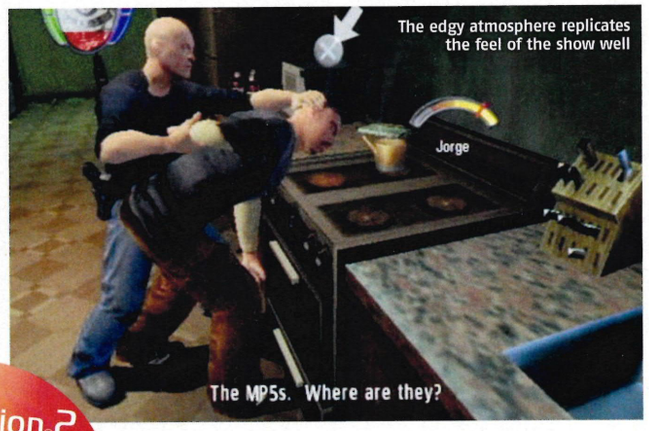
BEAUTIFUL GRAPHICS, epic storyline, sparkly spells: the perfect formula for a killer RPG. And with real-time fighting it looks set to appeal outside the hardcore RPG fanbase too

HOT OR NOT?

TEPID | WARM | HOT | **BOILING** | MELTDOWN







PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL magazine-UK
hands on

PUBLISHER **ATARI** | DEVELOPER **POINT OF VIEW** | WEBSITE **WWW.ASPYR.COM/PRODUCT/INFO/64**

THE SHIELD

GOOD COP? SORRY, NO, IT'S A REAL BAD COP

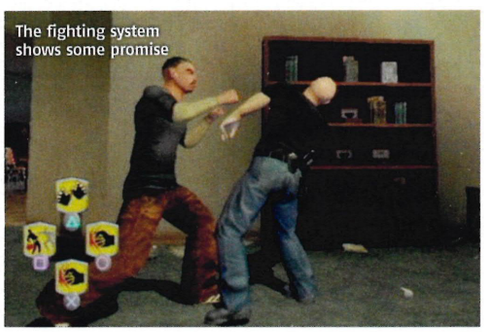
The folk at Channel Five plainly hate *The Shield*. Otherwise, why keep putting it out at midnight on a weekday? And we don't understand why they hate it, because we love it.

We love it so much we've just imported the Season 5 box set from the USA *and* got genuinely excited when we heard Aspyr was bringing the official game of the show to the PS2, voiced by the entire cast and incorporating a spin-off plot from one of the show's strongest story arcs.

But then we played it.

A mix of gunplay, stealth, fighting and, er, running very fast after perps, the formula is what we'd call 'basic' if we were being kind. But we can't be kind. Not even in a preview.

Because we know that the finished game will very likely look exactly the same as this: the same repetitive missions, the same awful camera, the same lethargic voice acting. And, presumably, the same version of The Barn: in case you're not a fan, that's the police station in the fictional Los Angeles borough of Farmington, where our heroes the Strike Team are based, but here it looks more like a Moroccan souk.



COP A FEEL

To be fair to developer Point of View, though, the general vibe is spot-on. The show is a mixture of interrogation, fast on-foot chases and the occasional 'naughty' police tactic (planting evidence, smashing in a suspect's face, nicking drug money, that kind of caper). The game replicates that feel fairly successfully.

And the ideas behind the fighting system (which is a mix of punching, grappling and *Punisher*-style, context-sensitive torture) are sound.

But it's all so shabbily done. The camera glitches as you try to deliver a punch in a cramped space; the levels are just trial and error as you work out what AI quirk cost you your life and then do it again; the script is terrible; and, from a purely cosmetic standpoint, the character models are just terrifying.

We remember Vic quite clearly saying in Season 2 that he didn't step aside, he stepped up. Well, in digital form, he steps *in* – and we don't like the smell. ■ **TW**

monitor — PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL magazine-UK

GRAPHICALLY IT'S NOT BAD, but in all other areas *The Shield* is as wafer-thin as one of the Strike Team's warrants. And we don't expect it to change greatly before release

HOT OR NOT?

TEPID | WARM | HOT | BOILING | MELTDOWN

'I'M A DIFFERENT KIND OF COP...'

Never seen *The Shield* before? Here's a potted guide to what you've been missing

Vic Mackey is the star of the show. He's the bald one. Vic is in charge of the Strike Team at The Barn, an experimental police unit set up in the fictional Los Angeles district of Farmington. Vic and his team (Shane, Lem and Ronnie) are tasked with curbing the city's huge gang problem, principally concentrating on two groups, the One-Niners and the Biz-Lats. The game picks up towards the end of Season 3, in the aftermath of one of the show's standout storylines: the team's audacious, highly illegal stealing of millions of dollars' worth of Armenian mob money.

PUBLISHER 2K GAMES | DEVELOPER STARBREEZE | WEBSITE WWW.2KGAMES.COM/THEDARKNESS

THE DARKNESS

A ONE-WAY TICKET TO HELL AND BACK

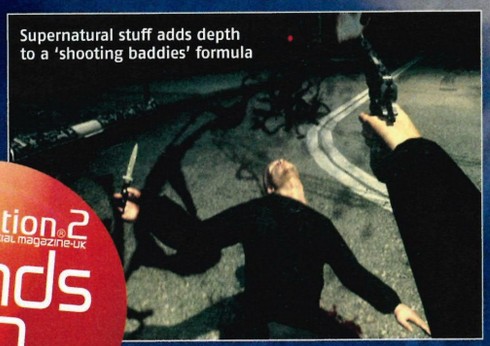
'Not one for the kids' we hastily scribble onto our notepad as a snake-like beast rips the still-warm heart out of a fallen enemy and gulps it down its gullet in one squelchy swallow. '*Definitely* not one for the kids' we add, as the next minute the demonic being we've summoned leaps onto a still-breathing bad guy and begins to saw his head off with a rusty hacksaw.

The Darkness is one of the most brutal, bloody games in development for PS3. It makes the alien gore of *Resistance* and the war-horror of *Call Of Duty* look like back-to-back episodes of *Barney Joins The Army*. And because Starbreeze (famous for making the handsome *Chronicles Of Riddick* on Xbox) is pushing the console's visuals further than most developers, the violence is super-detailed.

In other words, it's just the kind of stomach-churning horror shooter that we've been waiting for.

Based on the Top Cow comic book series of the same name, *The Darkness* follows the story of Jackie Estacado, a Mafia hitman from a somewhat troubled gene pool.

See, Jackie's family carries a mysterious curse that strikes the males of each generation when they reach their 21st birthdays. What curse? During the game's opening level, after Jackie is double-crossed by his boss, Uncle Paulie, our hero takes cover in a graveyard. The clock strikes midnight, a mysterious voice booms inside Jackie's head and tentacles shoot out from beneath his coat and proceed to savage his enemies.



Supernatural stuff adds depth to a 'shooting baddies' formula

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL magazine-UK hands on

HEREDITARY HORROR

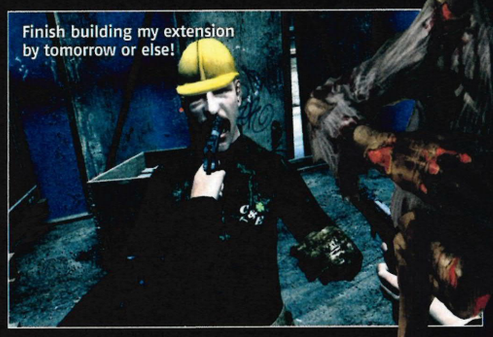
Jackie is now 21 years old and has therefore become a living, breathing puppet of the Darkness. No, not the comedy 'rock' combo, but a mysterious evil force that awards him unusual powers – which will come in handy, since he's only recently sworn to take revenge on Uncle Paulie.

And that's what makes this game much more than an average first-person fright-shooter.

Sure, at heart it's about killing bad guys with guns, but the fact that Jackie has serpentine limbs arching out from his back gives the game a whole new dimension.

Tapping L1 brings up Darkness mode and from here you can use your unholy powers and fire off weaponry. From the off you have the ability to scout ahead with your tentacles even though at this point you can't actually use the appendages to kill the mafioso goons that are tracking you down as you pursue your vengeance.

However you are able to summon a basic Darkling minion from the start, and as you progress more powers become available to you.



Finish building my extension by tomorrow or else!

You can summon these little Darkling guys to help in a scrap

Oh God, it's like the BBC's 999 programme with Michael Buerk

ETA 1 month
July 2007

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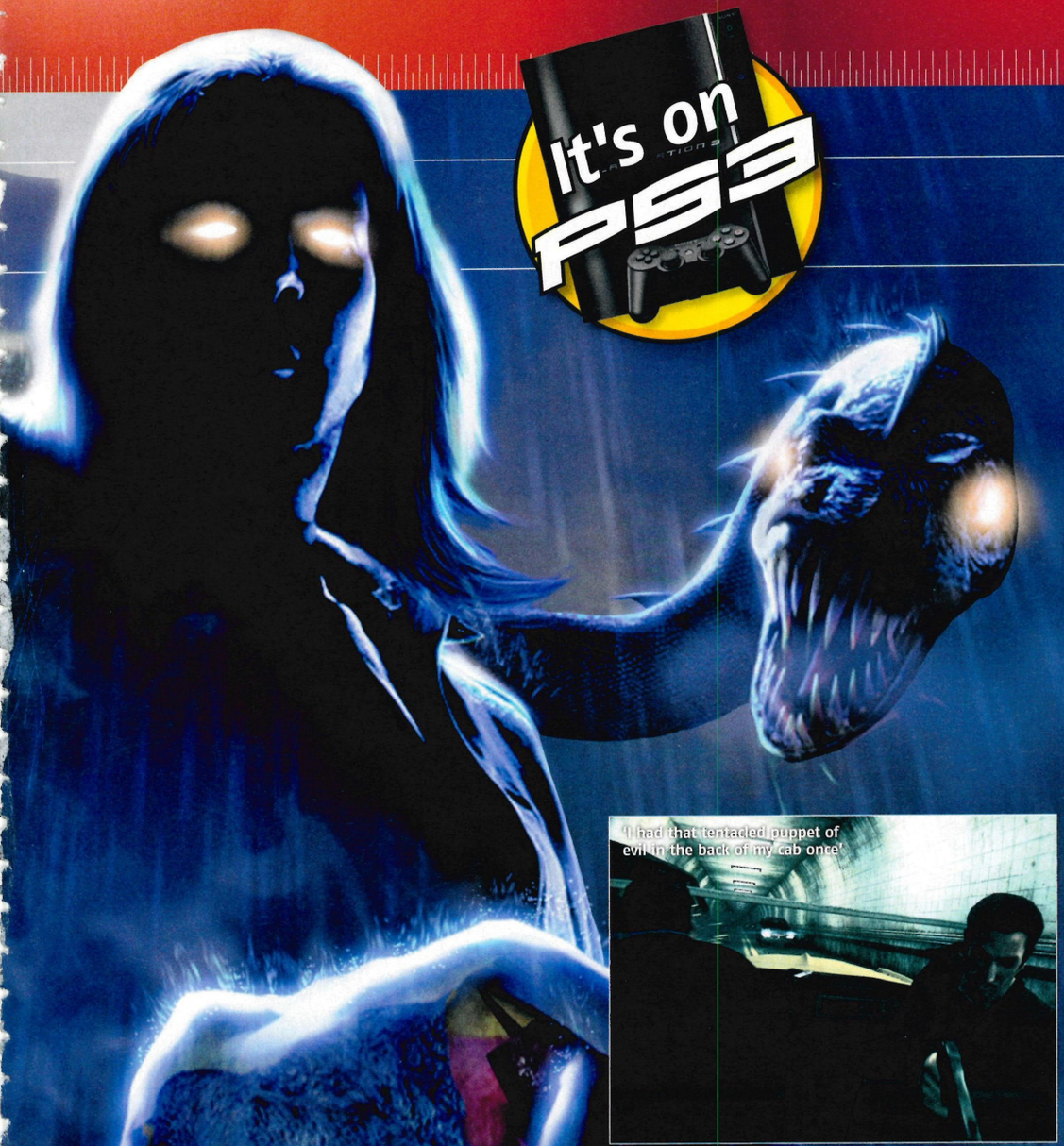
It's on PS3



Darkness mode is a chance for some extra help and forward planning, which is useful because the combat doesn't forgive many mistakes. Ammo is always limited and because Jackie's a fan of dual-wielding his weapons, the precious few clips you do manage to pick up disappear quickly.

Darklings are pretty handy in a scrap, too, and once the bullets are gone, they're a great fallback option.

DIE, MY DARKLING

Later in the game, you can impale and devour your enemies using your Darkness powers, as well as unlocking new Darklings, each with their own special abilities and personalities. In fact, during our hands-on time with the game we developed a new level of respect for the Darklings. They are far from merely being ugly cannon-fodder; these little chaps are also a great help when you're playing through the more cerebral sections of the game.

As well as ripping chunks out of your rivals they'll point you in the right direction, flip switches you may not be able to reach and open doors that are locked from the other side.

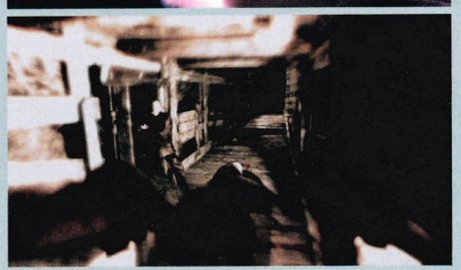
No wonder developer Starbreeze decided to dedicate an entire multiplayer game type to them. Although we're yet to see it in action, the general gist of the Darkling gametype is that you play as one of the critters and face off against virtual opponents.

It might sound like a new gimmick tagged onto an old formula, but because Darklings lose health in light areas, we reckon it'll add a decent wedge of tactics to the standard deathmatch formula. Oh, and did we mention that we can't wait to play it? ■ **AH**

BLOODY HISTORY

Modern Mafia men and World War 2 soldiers with no faces in the same game? What the Dickens is going on?

In a bid to add some variety, several stages of *The Darkness* are set in a hellish other-world. Jackie is sucked into this nightmare realm by the Darkness, and it's here he encounters the strangely warped WW2 troopers. Publisher 2K Games is keen to keep the reasons why Jackie is sucked into this alternate reality under wraps, so don't expect any spoilers until the game actually goes on sale. Still, it's a relief to know that you won't be spending all your time roaming around endless levels of dark, grimy streets.



monitor — PlayStation 2 Official Magazine UK

NEITHER A PURE trouser-ruining horror nor an unadulterated pulse-raising shooter, but its combination of goth and gunnery means we're quietly excited

HOT OR NOT?

TEPID	WARM	HOT	BOILING	MELTDOWN

PUBLISHER KONAMI | DEVELOPER KONAMI | WEBSITE WWW.KONAMI.COM

CASTLEVANIA: THE DRACULA X CHRONICLES

IT'S FANGS FOR THE MEMORIES AS PSP PACKAGE INCLUDES RARE CLASSICS

It's on PSP

PlayStation 2 Official Magazine-UK first look

First off, a bit of background. The original *Demon Castle Dracula X Rondo of Blood* was chronologically the 10th *Castlevania* game released but was only available for PC in Japan and SNES in the West.

Then in 1997, *Rondo of Blood* was alluded to in *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, its final showdown with Dracula forming a cameo during the opening level.

Confused? Don't be. All you really need to know is that *Rondo of Blood* has been remade in 3D for *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles*, coming to PSP at the end of 2007.

It's the unreleased tale of the refusal of a member of the Belmont family (the clan around whom the whole series is based) to take lightly Dracula's kidnapping of his girlfriend. And it's called 'Chronicles' because the UMD will have more than one game on it.

The star attraction will be a beautifully rendered incarnation of *Rondo* draped in the finest polygonal details the PSP can muster, and we reckon it looks like the most handsome *Castlevania* game ever released.

There'll also be a version of *Rondo* ripped straight from the original PC Engine for you to discover once you've mastered the remake.

As an extra bonus, you get to unlock *Symphony of the Night*, too – to put this in perspective, if you tried to buy the Limited Edition version of *SOTN* for your PS1 it would cost you upwards of £100. So that's pretty cool.

THE MAGIC RONDO-BOUT

Producer Koji Igarashi has been with the series since he assisted the direction of *SOTN*. For *Rondo*'s renaissance, he reunites with *Symphony* character designer Ayami Kojima and Michiru Yamane, the bloke who wrote the music that was so great that it came on a separate CD with the Limited Edition pack.

Igarashi is a confessed 2D aficionado and hopes to release genuinely new *Castlevania* titles for PSP, should *Chronicles* take off in the right way.

The biggest difference between *Chronicles* and recent *Castlevania* iterations is that it doesn't feature any roleplaying elements.

There's no need to level up your character to learn how to double-jump, or how to change into a wolf to fit through tight gaps in the scenery: you know it all from the very beginning.

KING OF THE CASTLE

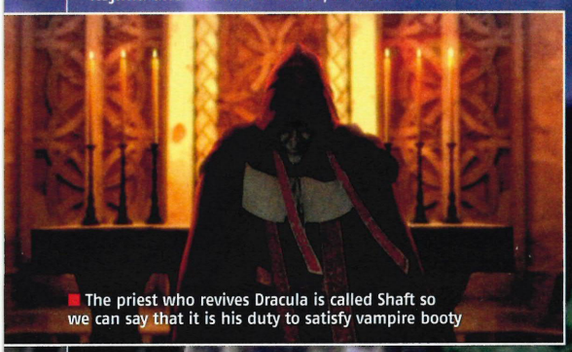
Chronicles represents *Castlevania* before the new approach to skills and abilities was put in and this makes for a more direct, accessible game where the most valuable skill is the ability to handle a whip and a sword.

But don't be thinking that the comparative simplicity of this game means it's nothing but a left-to-right hack-and-slash with a few ladders thrown in. Exploration and understanding of the castle are vital with plenty of opportunities to get lost among the constantly spawning enemies.

As is the *Castlevania* way, these enemies will die and leave you with heart tokens that can also be found inside candelabras, for no discernable reason other than game design. These hearts can be used to fuel sub-weapons such as thrown blades, or can be used in a 'Crush' attack where you combine your stockpile of energy into special smart moves that fill the screen with spinning death and discomfort.

There's a definite whiff of gaming history in this package, but it is universally welcoming. On the one hand it has been designed so newcomers can dive straight in; on the other, it lets toughened players revisit *Rondo*'s original 10 levels.

It's also a relief to see the series in 2D again, after the disastrous attempts to turn *Castlevania* into 3D for PS2 had almost exhausted our appetite for vampire-bashing action. Almost. ■ WJ



■ The priest who revives Dracula is called Shaft so we can say that it is his duty to satisfy vampire booty

monitor — PlayStation 2 Official Magazine-UK

THREE CLASSIC *Castlevania* games on one disc? Are you kidding? This is already shaping up to be an essential portable game, even if you're new to the series

HOT OR NOT?

TEPID | WARM | HOT | **BOILING** | MELTDOWN

"You, sir, are from *The Fantastic Four*, and I claim my five pounds"

If all our enemies attacked in pre-described patterns we'd be the hardest vampire slayers in town

Throwing axes do more damage but travel in an arc that makes them annoying for close-up action

WHAM, FANG, THANK YOU MA'AM

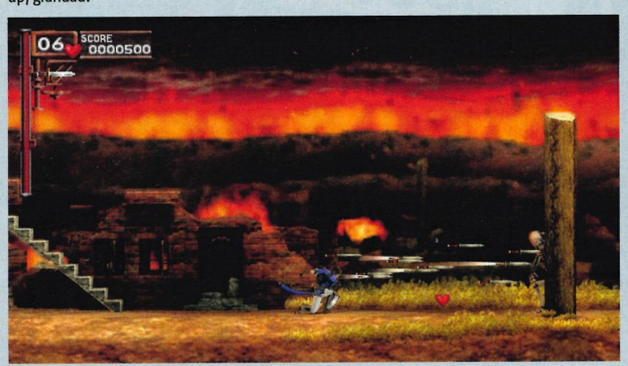
Not yet met the unfortunate family who have to fight the lord of all vampires every 100 years? Here's our guide to *Dracula X* for newcomers...

HELLO VAMPERS

It's the year 1792. Dracula has been revived by a dark priest and decides that because he's evil and has a long-running vendetta against the Belmont family that he best start his new un-life by turning 19-year-old Richter Belmont's village to ashes. Just in case Richter didn't take that personally enough, The Big D kidnaps his girlfriend Annette and her 12-year-old sister Maria. Of course, that means this generation's Belmont must enter the castle and kick some ass. You get to play as Maria, too.

FAT ASS BOSSES

When we said this was a 3D version of a classic game we weren't kidding. No fancy-schmancy button-press sequences here: you'll have to kill baddies the hard way. Boss fights still conform to the attack patterns of old but now have the extra depth that only three dimensions can afford, so you can expect each enemy's defeat to be far more cinematic than ever before. And in case you hate 3D (why are you here?) you get two 2D classics in the same UMD package, so cheer up, grandad.



WE ♥ WEAPONS

Here, Richter is demonstrating the use of weapons. You can see him throwing a gaggle of knives towards a totally non-threatening tree stump. Now, that's just daft behaviour because weapons such as throwing knives and axes use up your heart tokens, which you gain by killing enemies. You can also use them for super-powerful 'Crush' attacks. Silly boy.

NOW EVEN BIGGER!

'Hi PS2 fans and welcome to pages 58-63, where a sell-out crowd has packed the newsagents in anticipation of THQ's latest slobberknocker, Smackdown! Vs Raw 2008**. Your OPS2 reporter is ringside to explain how the scheduled main event just became a hellacious Triple Threat match...'**

OPS2: I'm reporting live on the eve of WrestleMania 23, in a grand ballroom in Detroit, Michigan. THQ creative director Cory Ledesma has just taken the stage.

He's about to unveil *Smackdown! Vs Raw 2008* to the assembled presstlers, and it's all very exciting (for additional effect, you should read this in hushed tone, as if starring in some kind of BBC2 birdwatching programme. Yes, the atmosphere is that tense).

I have with me a special guest commentator, Javan super-heavyweight and WWE wannabe Maguma. We're just seconds away from seeing the PS3 version in action.

But guess what? We managed to catch up with Cory before the presentation, and do you know what he said?

MAGUMA: Hurrrgh!

OPS2: Quite. We asked Cory how the PS2 version would differ from the other versions, bearing in mind that primary development has now shifted to the Xbox360 platform.

He assured us that THQ are still anticipating the PS2 version to sell the most of all versions, and that it'll be no cut-down port. That's quite the achieve- hey look! It's your old pal Bobby Lashley on-screen!

MAGUMA: [Crushes complimentary mints in his bare hands]

OPS2: And he's really socking it to poor old Randy Orton! See how improved the animation is? That's because it's all been re-done completely from scratch.

MAGUMA: Hurrgh! Hrrngh?

OPS2: Cory told us there was no point adding more frames of animation on top of what they already had because all that would happen is that it would take longer for the wrestlers to act out their moves.

So instead they were completely overhauled and as you can see, Maguma, the results really are quite impressive. The clipping issues of previous iterations seem to have been thrown right out of the ring and smaller wrestlers seem to match up with larger foes without it moving as awkwardly as a new-born foal on an icerink.

We spoke to some of the guys from the game's Japanese developer, Yukes, about it, and they told us that they're using techniques similar to stop-motion to get the best results –

KNOW YOUR ECW

ECW gets in the ring for the first time this year. Never heard of it? Never mind. Bluff your way in conversations with these four fascinating facts...

#1

Kurt Angle made a single appearance in ECW and didn't even last the night. After Raven performed a mock-crucifixion on the Sandman – complete with barbed-wire Crown of Thorns – the Olympic Hero and future WWE champ, disgusted at what he saw, stormed out of the arena.

#2

Jimmy 'Superfly' Snuka is the unlikely man who holds the distinction of being the first ever ECW champion. He pinned former WWE journeyman Salvatore Bellomo on 25 April 1992 to claim the belt.

#3

SmackDown!'s Chris Benoit earned his 'Crippler' nickname in ECW by taking out the late Rocco Rock with a powerbomb and then breaking Sabu's neck with a botched move shortly thereafter.

#4

After winning the NWA title by pinning Two Cold Scorpio in August 1994, reigning ECW champion Shane Douglas threw his prize onto the floor disdainfully and declared that the NWA had 'died' six years previously. The move has been credited with helping the development of 'extreme' wrestling (not long afterwards, ECW changed its name from Eastern Championship Wrestling to Extreme Championship Wrestling).

SOMETHING FOR THE NEW BOYS

Thinking of upgrading to a PS3? Well, when we asked THQ if they had any plans to allow roster updates over the PlayStation Network, they giggled and shied away like a bunch of coy fillies. When we asked the same question about the Xbox 360 version last year we got a flat-out denial, so we'd consider PS3 downloadable content a definite maybe

EASY AS 1-2-3

All the new wrestler categories make it easier than ever to pull of moves, thanks to the diversification of the roster. With high-flyers such as Rey Mysterio, it only takes one button press to initiate a breathtaking flip over the ropes. All you need to concentrate on is your position relative to your opponent because most moves are context-sensitive

STANDING IN THE WAY OF CONTROL

The new grapple system in *Smackdown! Vs Raw 2008* drastically reduces the time that you'll be sat there watching the game play itself. The new analogue pressure system means that whenever you're on the defensive, you'll always have an opportunity to fight back. Picking the right moment to do so, well, that's the tricky part

PIGEONHOLE ME PLEASE

Here are the eight wrestling styles: dirty, hardcore, technical, showman, brawler, powerhouse, high-flyer and submission expert. Each category opens up new strategies so your wrestler's style will distinctly alter your gameplan. We've seen Randy Orton, a 'dirty' wrestler, use the referee as a human shield. The cad!

or at least, that's what the translator said. Language problems, eh, Maguma?

MAGUMA: [Glares at OPS2 reporter with a menacing look that screams 'How dare you? My mother was a saint!']

OPS2: Er. But it'll be interesting to see how they fare now their number one motion captur-ee Doug Basham is no longer on the WWE roster.

Still, it's never been more essential for Yukes and THQ to get the animation right, because this time the rasslers are split into eight categories, instead of four.

Now, unlike in previous years, which category a wrestler is crammed into depends less on their weight than on their wrestling style. Obviously there'll still be the distinction between super heavyweights such as The Great Khali and titches such as Rey Mysterio, but size won't be the only distinguishing factor.

Each grappler will have a secondary characteristic to further differentiate them from one another. So whereas last year if you learned one middleweight you'd learned them all, in 2008, there's an extra layer of depth to a grappler's ring style.

Take Chris Benoit, for example. You'd peg him primarily as a 'technical' wrestler. But then, so is Finlay, and his ring style is pretty different compared to that of 'The Crippler'. So, logically, Benoit will be a 'submission artist' second, and Finlay's gregarious nature will fall under the 'brawler' category, marking a firm distinction between the two. Are you following this, Maguma?

MAGUMA: [Sound of enormous plate of fish being devoured]

OPS2: Well, whatever. We'll explain this new system's other benefits elsewhere on these pages, but there's one other very exciting thing about the animation system that we want to talk about.

THQ says one of its main aims is to rid the screen of clutter, and we agree that this is a positive step. So it's out with the reams of energy bars and all the button-bashing they entail and in with a cleaner, crisper system.

Cory likens the new system to a game of cat and mouse –if you're on the offensive with a submission manoeuvre, do you exert a lot of energy to do a lot of damage in a short space of time, or do you sit back, treat it as a rest hold and conserve your energy?

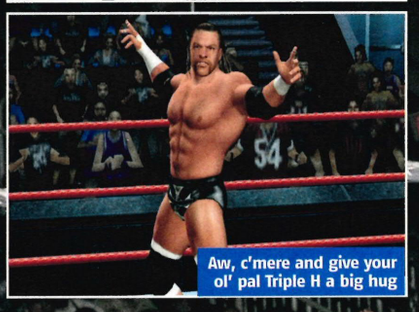
Either way, you'll be able to see your wrestler torque his body in tune to your analogue stick twiddling as you seek to apply exactly the right

Well, you'd be in a bad mood too if your eyes had fallen out

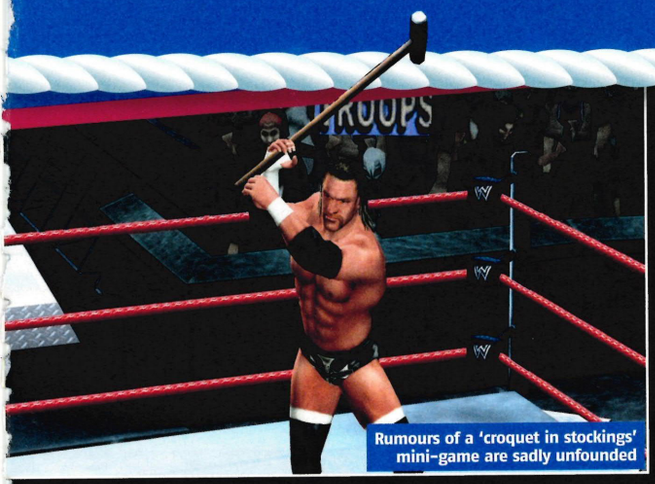
TWENTY-FOUR SEVEN LOVE

Last year's Season mode now incorporates its rival, the *Football Manager*-esque GM mode, to form an all-new, all-dancing gameplay option named WWE 24/7. In 24/7, your ultimate goal is to achieve enough over the course of several seasons to get your Superstar of choice inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame.

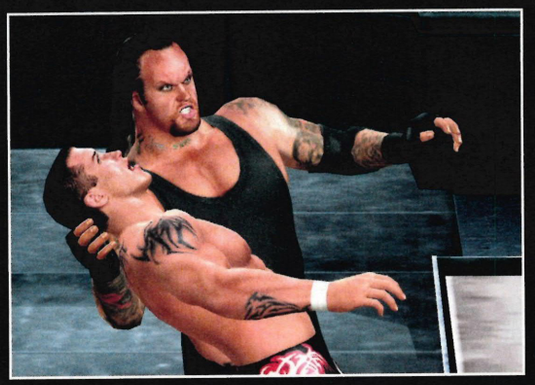
The benchmark depends on which Superstar you've chosen. Pick a bona fide legend such as The Undertaker and all that should be required is for you to turn up, tombstone a few jabronis and collect your prize. If you've picked a lesser star, or made yourself the offspring of David Bowie and Peter Kay in the renovated Create-A-Wrestler mode, achieving legendary status could take three whole *Smackdown!* seasons.

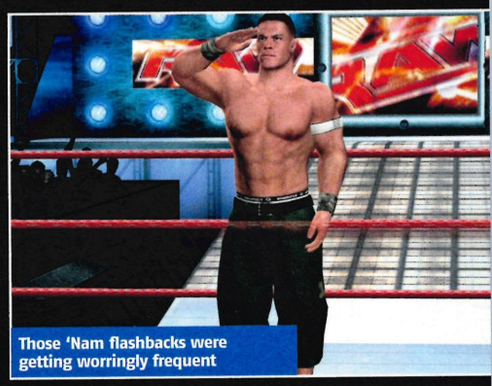


Aw, c'mere and give your ol' pal Triple H a big hug



Rumours of a 'croquet in stockings' mini-game are sadly unfounded





Those 'Nam flashbacks were getting worringly frequent

YOUR KNOCK-OUT-AND-KEEP GUIDE TO ECW'S MOST NOTORIOUS*

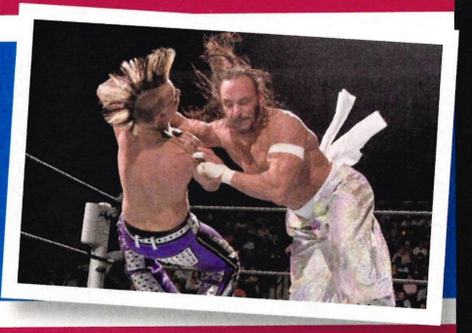
SABU

"This match should be taking place in a zoo" – so said ECW announcer Joey Styles during Sabu's debut match with the Tazmaniac (now Tazz) in 1993.

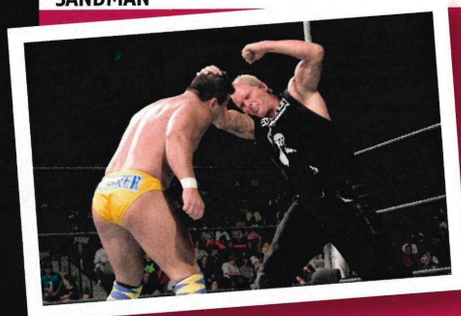
Billed as an uncontrollable maniac from Bombay, India, Sabu became synonymous with ECW. He portrayed a three-dimensional character that was at once savage (he had to be wheeled into the arena in chains) and at times lovably naïve (his trademark gesture is to point up at the arena lighting, apparently bewildered by their modern-day witchcraft).

Scars criss-cross his body, most of them gained in a brutal Japanese organisation called Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling, famed for encounters such as the Exploding Shark Tank Deathmatch (no exaggeration).

In one such match in 1992, his tag-team partner and uncle The Sheik went into a coma and nearly died, which is one reason why you don't see many no-rope barbed-wire fire matches nowadays.



SANDMAN



If you consider that the early 1990s was a horrific and utterly incomprehensible era in which the likes of *Baywatch* and *Thunder in Paradise* found ample TV airtime, it becomes more understandable how ECW came to recruit a surfer dude in a wetsuit into its ranks at just that very time.

Those carefree early days couldn't have been further removed from the eventual evolution of The Sandman's character. He became a beer-swilling, chain-smoking psychopath. He often drank beer on the way to the ring or even during fights (crushing the cans on his forehead of course).

Famous of his use of weapons including a Singapore Cane (a martial arts weapon used like a sword) the Sandman found himself in some of the most powerful storylines in wrestling history – including the famous incident where Tommy Dreamer knocked a cigarette into Sandy's eyes.

The 'accident' was reported as legitimate, and The Sandman stayed at home for months while the wrestling press swallowed it hook, line and sinker.

TOMMY DREAMER

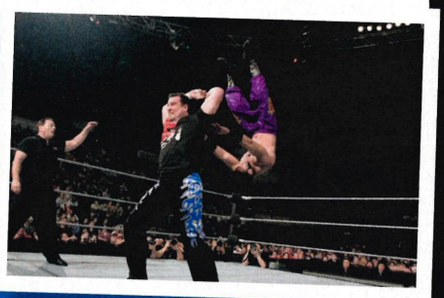
And here's Tommy Dreamer, the other half of that unforgettable storyline. It ended, of course, with Tommy flat on his back, which summed up his ECW career perfectly in many ways.

In the early days, the notoriously hostile ECW crowd had trouble taking to Dreamer, thanks to his clean-cut appearance. ECW's answer was to get the entire roster to kick him seven ways to Sunday. First, The Sandman caned him with his trademark Singapore Cane so ferociously that you could see the welts on his back.

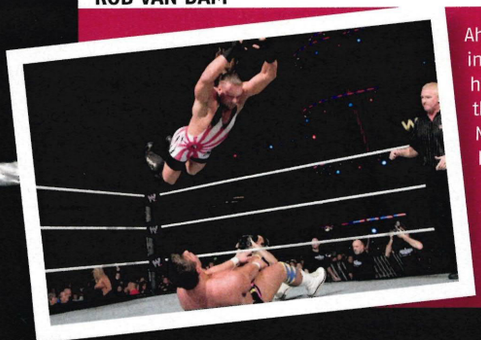
Then, Raven appeared on the scene and the two had a storyline that they were childhood enemies. Dreamer proved unable to gain a win over his grunge-worshipping nemesis for more than two years!

Once able to elect sympathy from the audience, Tommy Dreamer became a mainstay in ECW, sticking around until the original ECW closed doors in early 2001.

He was ECW champion for just 24 minutes in 2000 – mind you, that was 10 minutes longer than The Sandman's title reign on 7 January 2001.



ROB VAN DAM



Ahh, now, surely we don't have to introduce this guy to you! Although he's now a six-year WWE veteran, the high-flyer from Battle Creek, Michigan made a name for himself in ECW in the late 1990s.

His ECW stay was most notable for his uneasy alliance with tag-team partner Sabu, and a set of blistering battles with Jerry Lynn, which the two would later re-create in WWE in an episode of Heat during Lynn's brief tenure.

Top fact: Shame McMahon's spectacular 'Coast 2 Coast' move, which he debuted at WrestleMania X-Seven, was actually conceived by Van Dam. He debuted the move, then named the Van Terminator, at HeatWave 2000, on poor Scotty Anton.

*** Just so you know, none of these wrestlers are 100% confirmed at this time to appear in Smackdown! Vs Raw 2008, but we do know that the ECW invasion will feature classic faces from the 1990s and anyway, these guys are our favourites**

OPS2 VS WRESTLEMANIA

We spent WrestleMania itself largely drunk (with excitement, you understand), but do remember three blokes pinning down and shaving a 61-year-old man in the name of entertainment. For this, the show gets 9/10. As for the rest of the event...

SMACKDOWN! VS RAW SUPERSTAR CHALLENGE

Massive controversy plagued the fifth annual THQ Superstar Challenge, with undefeated, four-time winner Shelton Benjamin nowhere to be seen in the 16-man brackets.

With the favourite out, who would be the ultimate winner? "Ashley keeps on saying she's rubbish," mused Kenny Dykstra. "Those are the ones you've got to watch out for."

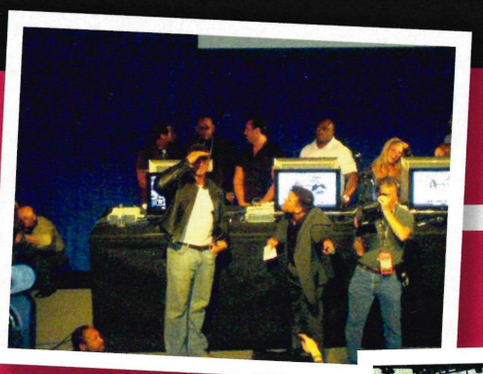
Indeed, none of the wrestlers really fancied their chances, leading to an exciting, open tournament – made all the more thrilling when last year's favourite, Johnny Nitro, was knocked out in the first round by Carlito. Miffed at being left out of WrestleMania, Carlito gave an interview with selected media – including OPS2 – which was canned after six minutes when he offered his thoughts on backstage politics and Joey Mercury's recent release from the brand.

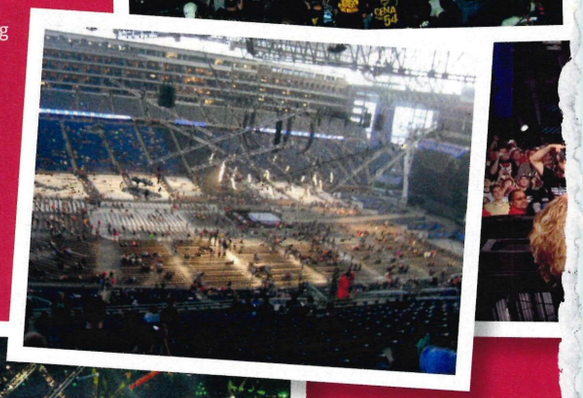
Melina receiving instructions on how to play the game while on-stage probably wasn't the kind of PR that THQ would have wanted, considering she'd powered her way past Kelly Kelly and Jeff Hardy to reach the semis. But her story ended there with a swift defeat at the hands of Elijah Burke.

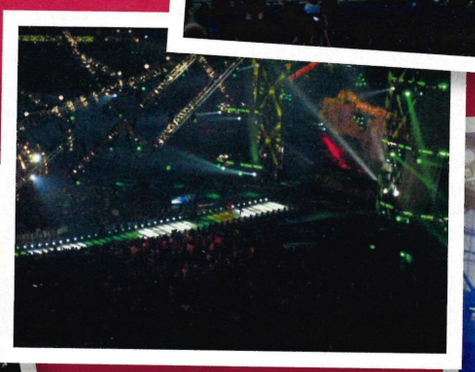
Quote of the day goes to Montel Vontavious Porter, who countered jeers from fans with: "You paid to see me play a videogame. How stupid is that?" He then defeated World Champion Batista in record time but went no further.

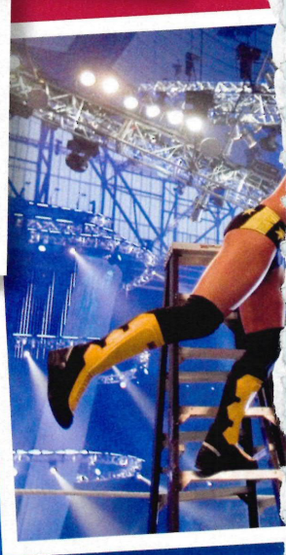
Burke walked away with the big prize, defeating (and attempting to recruit) CM Punk before besting Carlito in the final.

As for our other interviews, we now know that Carlito has a PS3, Kenny Dykstra's favourite game series is *Resident Evil* and Mickie James prefers *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* to *Vice City Stories*.









WRESTLEMANIA RESULTS

- John Cena pinned Shawn Michaels to retain the WWE Championship
- Undertaker pinned Batista to win the Heavy weight Championship
- Bobby Lashley pinned Umaga
- Melina successfully defended the women's title against Ashley
- Mr Kennedy won an eight-man 'Money In The Bank' ladder match
- Chris Benoit defeated MVP to retain the US Championship
- RVD, Sandman, Dreamer and Sabu defeated Burke, Striker, Cor Von & Thorn
- The Great Khali pinned Kane

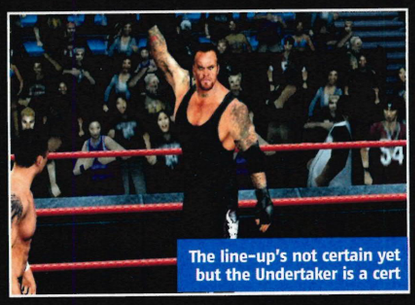
balance of pressure. For the player on the receiving end of a jolly good arm-contortion, escape is still very much a case of timing.

Instead of watching a little ⊗ button dance around a meter, you'll be watching the in-ring action in order to determine when to initiate your reversal. Much better! It's so simple, even Maguma could do it.

MAGUMA: Hunngh?

OPS2: Only kidding. *Smackdown! Vs Raw 2008* is another strong package, with a roster of more than 50 playable wrestlers. The final selections are made in mid-summer, fact fans, so keep an eye on who's hot and who's not around the time of the Great American Bash if you want to make an educated guess on who is and isn't going to make it into the game.

And that's about it for *Smackdown! Vs Raw 2008* as THQ display the logo on the big screen here... and – hold on a cotton-pickin' minute! That's the ECW logo in the top right corner! What the hey are those heinous no-good son of a guns doing here? And many other such wrestling commentary clichés!


The line-up's not certain yet but the Undertaker is a cert

MAGUMA: Why, I'm glad you asked. You see, now WWE has bought the rights to ECW, launching it as a third brand, THQ has elected to incorporate and present it as the equal to both Smackdown! and Raw in all but the game's name (which is long enough already).

Now, the new ECW, after a slow start, is slowly establishing itself thanks in no small part to an engrossing feud between The New Breed and the Originals. But THQ wants to differentiate between ECW and the other brands so, to this end, *SmackDown! vs Raw*'s ECW will draw from the original ECW, the Philadelphia-based independent that shook up the wrestling world during its nine-year run from 1992-2001.

What that means for the people with the DualShocks is smaller, tighter arenas, a raucous atmosphere and – we'd imagine – a renewed focus both on environmental hotspots and fan interaction, those both being a big part of what made ECW what it was.

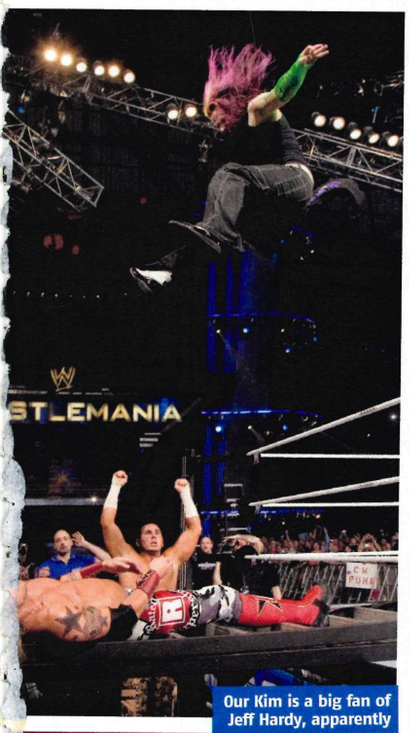
OPS2: What? How do you know all this?

MAGUMA: They told us just now during the presentation, man. You were talking all the way through it. But in summary, there's some good news and some bad news.

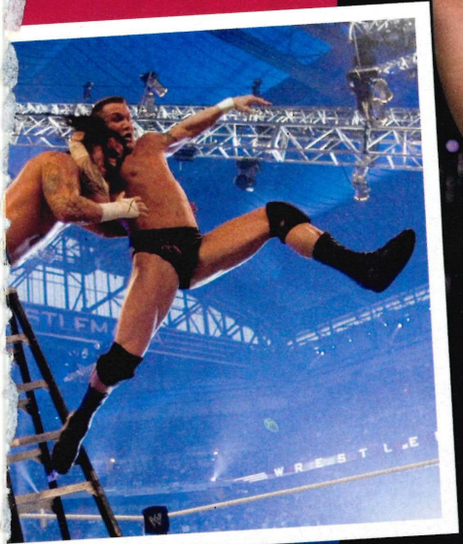
The good news is, this looks like being the strongest *SmackDown! vs Raw* to date. From the load times to the infuriating levels of player inactivity, THQ and Yukes have worked round the clock to find decent solutions for all of the previous instalments' perceived problems. From what we've seen, they've accomplished this with aplomb.

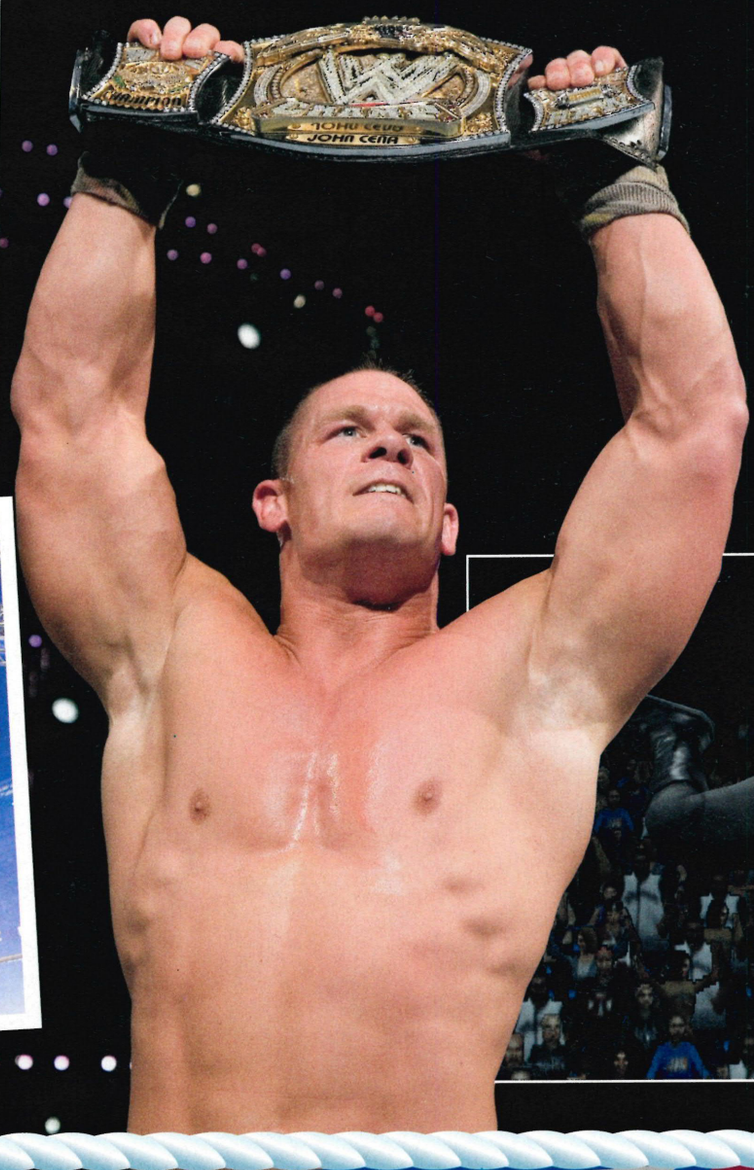
OPS2: And the bad news?

MAGUMA: Because of your insolence, I'm now going to climb up onto my chair and jump repeatedly on your head. ■ **Alex Dale**



Our Kim is a big fan of Jeff Hardy, apparently





There will be more than 50 playable wrestlers in the 2008 package

THE GOLDEN COMPASS

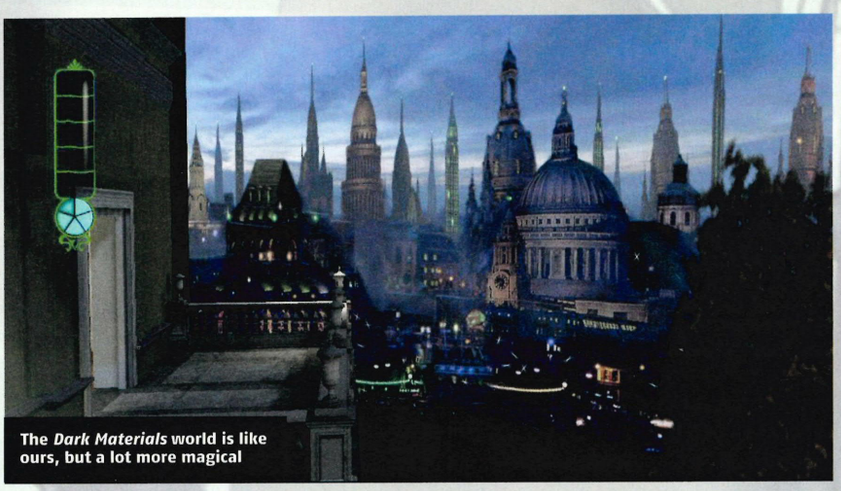
Dæmons, Gobblers and bears with helmets? It can only be *His Dark Materials*, and we have high hopes for the game of the film of the first book

There's nothing more invigorating than being swept up by a truly powerful story, having your disbelief not just suspended but blown away as you immerse your imagination in another time, another place, another life.

Obviously this is something we usually refer to in terms of videogames on these pages, but here we're celebrating the sensation generated by a series of books known as the *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Written by Philip Pullman, the three novels *Northern Lights*, *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass* have captivated millions of readers since *Northern Lights* was first published in 1995.

Now New Line Cinema is bringing the first of the series to the big screen and naturally there will be an accompanying videogame, with Sega doing the honours.

If both creative companies can capture and recreate the magic of the book, PS2 owners can expect a game of rare quality this winter. Happily, this seems likely.



The *Dark Materials* world is like ours, but a lot more magical

A portrait of herself in the living room? We hate Mrs Coulter already

Where does the 'golden compass' fit into all this? Well it's the name used for the US release of the original book, because the publishers thought *Northern Lights* wasn't sexy enough, and weren't going to let the fact that there isn't a golden compass in the book get in their way.

What they seem to be referring to is a brass device, powered by mystical force, called the Alethiometer, which comes into the hands of a young girl called Lyra.

Lyra exists in an alternative vision of our world that has many similarities with early 20th century Europe but just as many differences, the main one being the existence of 'dæmons': physical manifestations of the human soul that appear as animal companions.

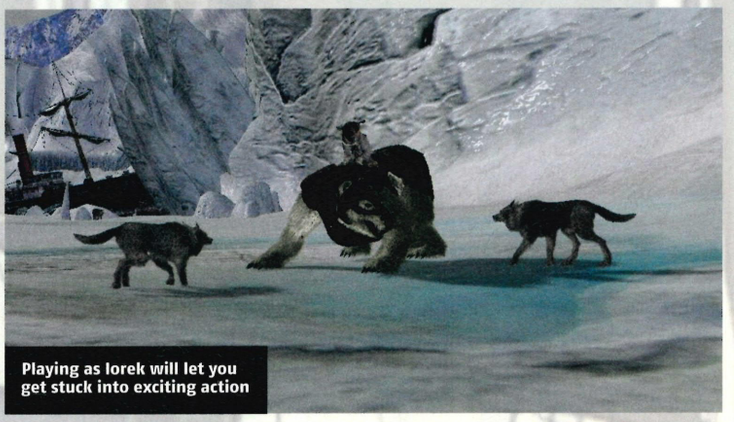
COULTER IN THE ACT

We find Lyra as an orphan looked after by the scholars of Jordan College, Oxford. Her life is turned upside down when she's whisked away by the mysterious Mrs Coulter who, we learn, is at the heart of a conspiracy to kidnap and experiment on hundreds of innocent children.

The adventure then leaves the latent evil and political intrigue of England for the wilds of the Arctic North as Lyra flees Mrs Coulter and attempts to rescue the lost children. Here Lyra encounters witches, armoured bears and ghastly monsters as she becomes caught up in a cosmic struggle that has apocalyptic consequences.

The series has often been compared to *Harry Potter* because, well, it's got a child hero and a fantastical setting. But that's where the similarities end, because where JK Rowling's

All these nautical screens suggest the game will make much of Lyra's boat journey north



Playing as Iorek will let you get stuck into exciting action

NORTHERN LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

Craig for the ladies, Kidman for the chaps: never mind the kids, it's the date movie of the year

Due out this winter, the screen adaptation of *The Golden Compass* is one of the most eagerly awaited films of the year, purely down to the popularity of the books. That said, it's sure to attract a lot of general interest thanks to the A-List cast including Nicole Kidman, Daniel Craig and his *Casino Royale* Bond girl, Eva Green.

As to who is directing the whole shebang and bringing Philip Pullman's magical world to life, well, that's a story in itself. First it was *About A Boy* director Chris Weitz who rewrote a Tom Stoppard-penned script, but then Weitz quit and was replaced by British director Anand Tucker. But Tucker didn't last long, citing 'creative differences' as the reason for his departure. So it was back to Weitz to see the project through.

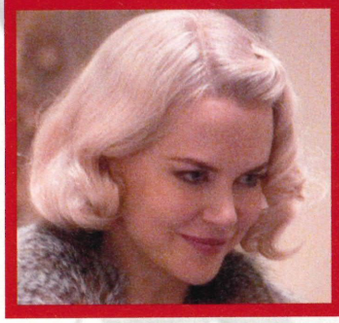
Casting the role of Lyra saw more than 10,000 girls turning up for open auditions, but the search was rewarded with the discovery of 12-year-old Dakota Blue Richards from Brighton. Philip Pullman has endorsed the choice, declaring Richards to be "absolutely marvellous, and she looks right – I know Lyra better than anyone."

PHOTOGRAMS FROM THE EDGE

Meet the three main human characters from the book, the people who shape the world in which the *Golden Compass* game will take place

LYRA is the main playable character in the game and our heroine in the story. She begins life as an orphan looked after the scholars of Jordan College, Oxford, but is soon caught up in a cosmic conspiracy. Lyra is a livewire of an 11-year-old, interminably curious, resourceful and blessed with huge resources of bravery and courage. In the movie, she's played by Dakota Blue Richards.

LORD ASRIEL is Lyra's uncle (or is he?), a respected member of the aristocracy and a celebrated explorer. Unfortunately, his determination and stubbornness mean he's often in conflict with ruling powers so he has many enemies. He has a commanding presence with a face 'to be dominated by, or to fight: never a face to patronise or pity'. He's played by Daniel Craig in the film.



MRS COULTER A beautiful, beguiling woman who employs Lyra as her personal assistant and teaches her the ways of being a lady. Her motivation is sinister, though, because she is part of a group responsible for kidnapping hundreds of children. Nicole Kidman plays Mrs Coulter in the film – a personal choice of Pullman, clearly a man of great taste – but has caused controversy among fans because she has blonde hair while the character in the book has jet black.

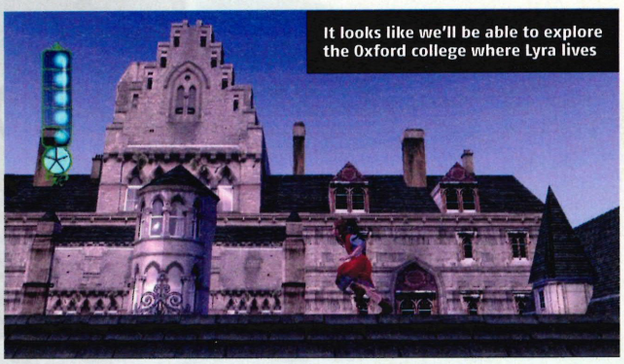
world is often whimsical and woolly, *His Dark Materials* is raw and powerful, unflinching in its handling of heartfelt emotion and savage horror.

This is just one of the reasons why we think the subject matter is far too rich for *The Golden Compass* to end up just another simplistic action game, no more than a marketing ruse.

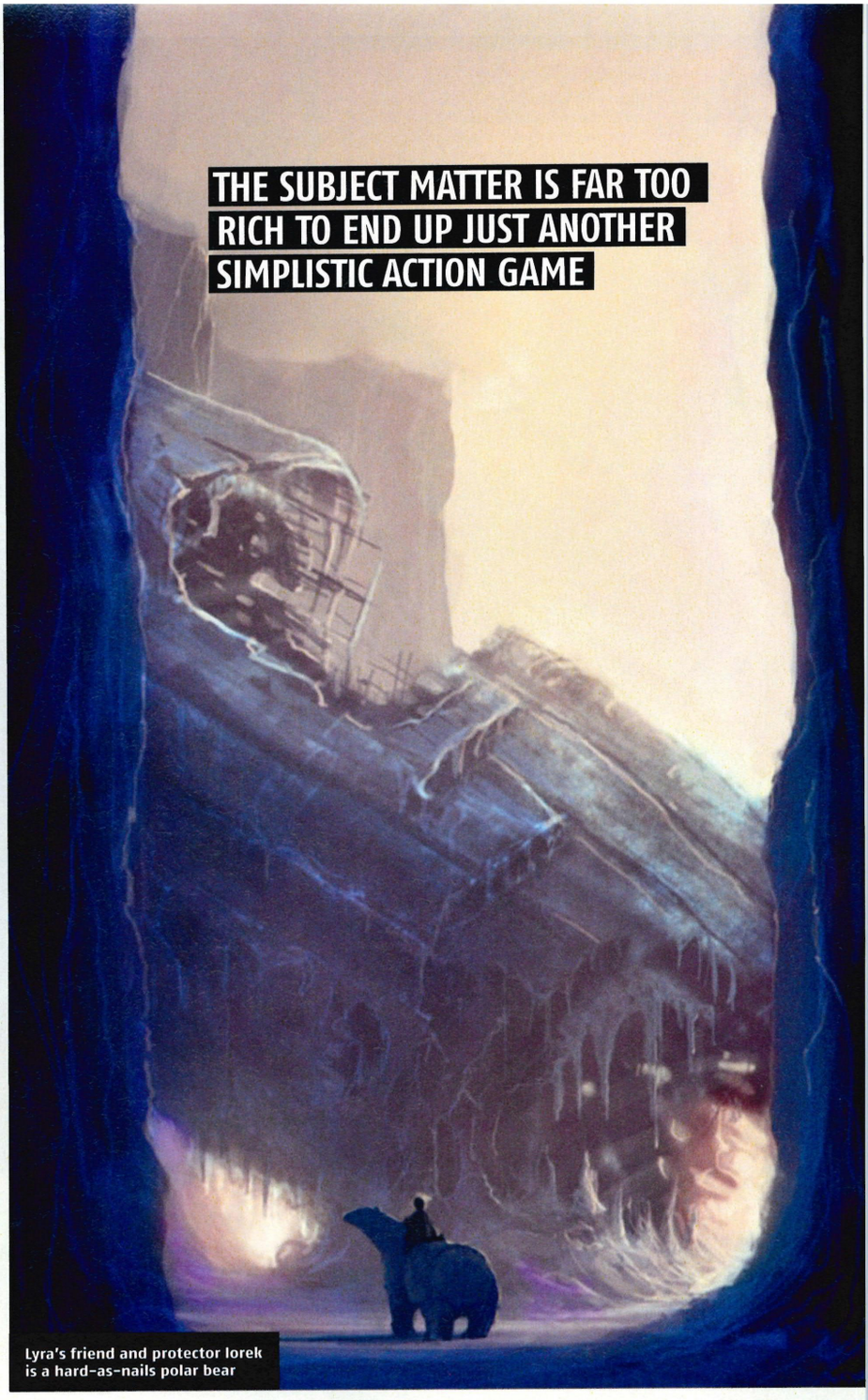
WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY

Lyra combines the vulnerability of a young girl with rare tenacity and intelligence, making her the perfect games character for exploring the *Dark Materials* world. And the situations she faces are sure to make compelling gaming.

For instance, at the start of the book she and her friend Roger treat Jordan College as their private playground, clambering across the roofs and exploring the vast cellars. Then comes Lyra's



It looks like we'll be able to explore the Oxford college where Lyra lives



Lyra's friend and protector Iorek is a hard-as-nails polar bear

escape from the evil Gobblers through the streets of London which would call for stealth and cunning; so, too, her daring rescue of the kids from the Bolvangar experimentation facility.

So it's easy to see cleverly crafted levels of exploration and puzzle-solving, but extra layers could be added by using the Alethiometer.

It's a complex device that's capable of answering any question just as long as the user is skilful enough to translate the signs.

Lyra repeatedly uses it in the book to validate her decisions, so in the game it could provide clues, directions and solutions, as well as being a self-contained puzzle game.

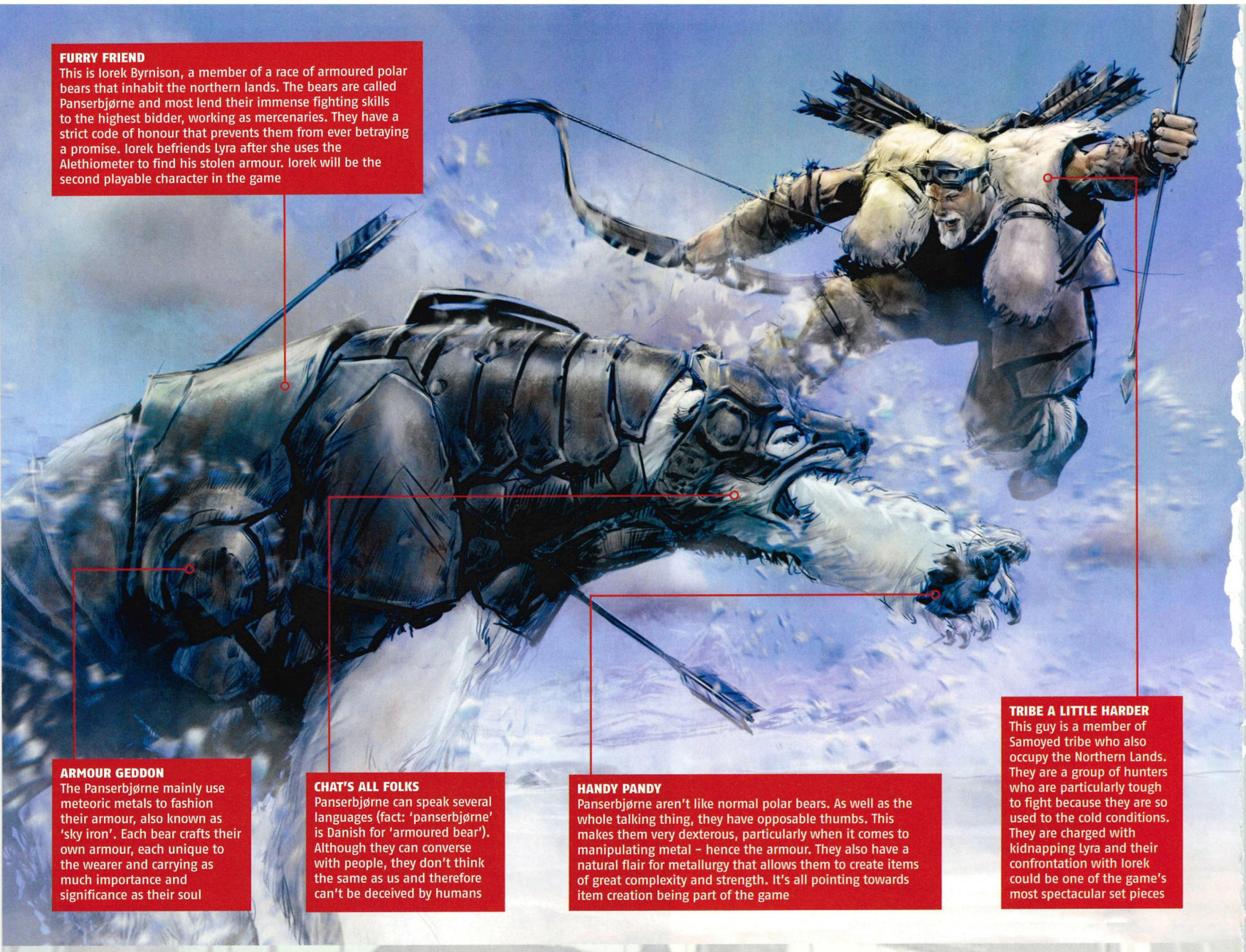
Then there's the role of Pantalaimon, Lyra's dæmon. Because Lyra is a young child her dæmon hasn't got a fixed form (that only happens when a person reaches adulthood) so is capable of turning into almost any type of animal imaginable.

Because the two are spiritually linked they can share thoughts, which comes in very useful when Pantalaimon uses the qualities of the

Water gypsies help Lyra get to the North

animal form he has chosen to Lyra's advantage: as a wildcat he can scan dark streets for dangers, he can illuminate dungeons as a firefly, become an ermine to keep Lyra warm or take to the air as an owl and become Lyra's eyes in the sky.

This dæmon-human relationship has huge potential as a gaming device, especially if the gamer could control Pantalaimon's forms, enabling him to become an invaluable source



FURRY FRIEND
This is Iorek Byrnison, a member of a race of armoured polar bears that inhabit the northern lands. The bears are called Panserbjørne and most lend their immense fighting skills to the highest bidder, working as mercenaries. They have a strict code of honour that prevents them from ever betraying a promise. Iorek befriends Lyra after she uses the Alethiometer to find his stolen armour. Iorek will be the second playable character in the game

ARMOUR GEDDON
The Panserbjørne mainly use meteoric metals to fashion their armour, also known as 'sky iron'. Each bear crafts their own armour, each unique to the wearer and carrying as much importance and significance as their soul

CHAT'S ALL FOLKS
Panserbjørne can speak several languages (fact: 'panserbjørne' is Danish for 'armoured bear'). Although they can converse with people, they don't think the same as us and therefore can't be deceived by humans

HANDY PANDY
Panserbjørne aren't like normal polar bears. As well as the whole talking thing, they have opposable thumbs. This makes them very dexterous, particularly when it comes to manipulating metal – hence the armour. They also have a natural flair for metallurgy that allows them to create items of great complexity and strength. It's all pointing towards item creation being part of the game

TRIBE A LITTLE HARDER
This guy is a member of Samoyed tribe who also occupy the Northern Lands. They are a group of hunters who are particularly tough to fight because they are so used to the cold conditions. They are charged with kidnapping Lyra and their confrontation with Iorek could be one of the game's most spectacular set pieces

of information and protection for Lyra. It could be like Pokémon, but good.

All this is speculation but what has been confirmed is that the second playable character will be Iorek Byrnison, a noble, armored polar bear who's sworn to protect Lyra.

BEAR WITH US

In contrast to Lyra's careful cunning, Iorek is a fighting machine who's at the centre of every thunderous battle in the book. This will allow the game to change tone and pace, bursting into all-out action at key moments.

And there are some almighty action set pieces to be replicated, such as Iorek's repelling of attacks by Samoyed huntsmen, his assault on the facility where the evil experiments take place and his bloody confrontation with Iofur Raknison, the king of the armoured bears.

So we have magic, exploration, platforming, puzzle-solving, stealth and all-out action. Not one of these elements has to be shoe-horned into the game, meaning there's no need for 'spinning attacks', token collecting or any other action game cliché. And this gives Sega a rare opportunity to create its own piece of *Dark Materials* magic. ■ **Dave Harrison**

Lyra's perilous sea journey offers plenty of gaming potential

KNOW YOUR DARK MATERIALS

Not read the books? No one need ever know if you gen up with our bluffer's guide

DÆMONS The physical manifestation of the human soul that takes the shape of an animal and accompanies the human at all times. Dæmons of children can change form into other animals, before settling on one form when the human becomes an adult. The form they choose should reflect the personality of the human. Dæmons can talk, though usually only to their respective human, and are normally the opposite gender.

GOBBLERS The nickname for the General Oblation Board which is run by nasty Mrs Coulter. Originally thought to be supernatural bogeymen, it turns out they are an organisation that has been kidnapping children from the poorer sections of society and transporting them to the northern lands for mysterious reasons.

GYPTIANS A community of canal barge-dwelling travellers who have suffered most from the Gobblers' nefarious doings. They take Lyra into their community, protecting her from Mrs Coulter, and set out on a journey to rescue their children.

PANSERBJØRNE A tribe of armoured, talking polar bears, the king of whom is Iofur Raknison who isn't content with being the leader of his tribe but wants to be seen on the same level as humans and to have his own dæmon. He's voiced by Ian 'Lovejoy' McShane in the film.

DUST A mysterious cloud of light particles, invisible to the human eye but seen in 'photograms' (the *Dark Materials* version of polaroids) using special films. Dust falls from the sky and seems to be attracted to humans and man-made objects.

ALETHIOMETER A mystical brass device that looks like a clock or a golden compass (see what they did there?). It's got a round face with numerous symbols on it and three hands. Its purpose is to tell the truth and it can answer any question; trouble is, it is incredibly hard to read because every symbol has numerous different meanings. Good thing Lyra's so skilled at deciphering it, then!

INTERCISION The process of separating an individual from his or her dæmon – a traumatic, crippling process that leaves the victim a hollow shell. Seeing a human without a dæmon is akin to seeing a person without a head or hideously disfigured in our reality. So not a good thing.

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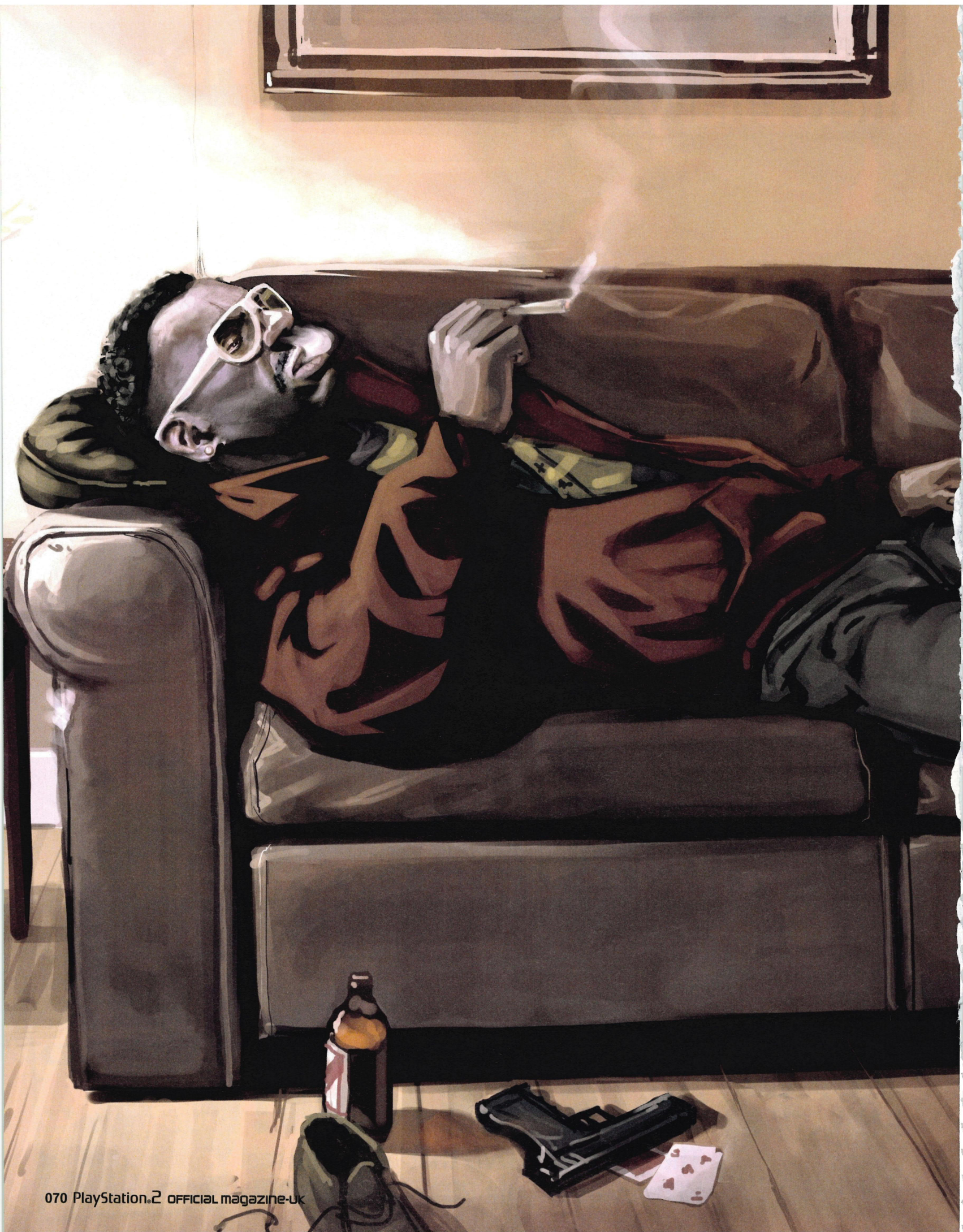
DEVIL MAY CRY 4



GUNS, TRAFFICKING AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

An illegal alien needs friends to survive. So in **GTA IV**, you'll need to make some – if you can stop looking at the scenery

Everything's been leading up to this. A decade ago, the cover photograph on the *Grand Theft Auto* box made us a promise. Depicting gleaming New York skyscrapers through a fish-eye lens, it was a road map to where the series was heading: a practically photo-realistic rendering of the Big Apple.

Now, 10 years on, that promise has been fulfilled. Finally, you'll be able to stay awake in the city that never sleeps. Welcome to the real Liberty City.

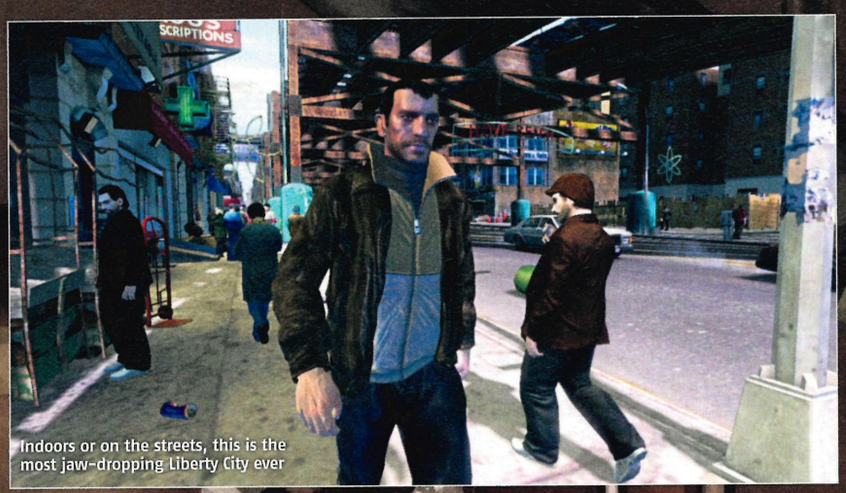
New York has always been the inspiration for the previous incarnations of Liberty City, and while some fans were surprised that the game would go back there, it makes perfect sense.

With the PS3's grunt it's finally possible to reconstruct a city with a level of realism that accurately reflects its character. And few cities in the world have as much character as New York.

It's the scrappy prizefighter that refuses to take a dive in the fifth, a cultural melting-pot where people of all colours and nationalities have been thrust together. It's the kind of city that responds to an appalling terrorist attack by rebuilding bigger and better.

Even if you've never been there, you know it through the work of movie directors such as Martin Scorsese, Abel Ferrara, Woody Allen and Spike Lee, and TV shows such as *NYPD Blue*, *Friends* or *Sex and the City*. And the game plays on this familiarity to great effect. Developer Rockstar has been based in New York for five years or more, and this first-hand experience has been injected into the game.

Standing on the corner of a street in 'Broker', in an area that strongly resembles the notorious Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn with its tall Brownstone buildings and numerous pawnshops, you can watch pedestrians go about their business.



Indoors or on the streets, this is the most jaw-dropping Liberty City ever

CITY-ING PRETTY

As one man walks by, he smokes a cigarette. He flicks it on the floor as he walks in a thoroughly naturalistic way. It's a small detail, but it's moments like this that make you realise how dedicated Rockstar is to breathing true life into this game.

Crowds ebb and flow according to the time of day. People give you strange looks. Hotdog vendors bark and bums hang out in alleyways, warming their hands on trash burning in oil drums blackened with soot.

The animation of the characters is now entirely based on physics rather than animation: feet actually respond to the ground beneath them, meaning that if you move unevenly halfway up a step, one leg will raise up to meet it while the other stays on the ground, instead of having your character shifting awkwardly up the step with one leg hovering in mid-air. It helps the suspension of disbelief enormously.

The city looks stunning, with weather effects and shadow generation creating a deeply credible environment. Yellow lines are faded,

bollards poke out from the earth at wonky angles and there's rubbish everywhere.

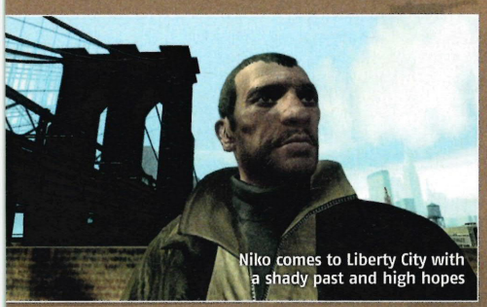
Interiors, too, are much improved. The lounge and kitchen we saw looked suitably lived-in, with cushions strewn casually over the sofa and a grimy-looking, hand-cranked meat mincer on the worktop.

REALLY BIG APPLE

The level of ambition present in this recreation of the city is ridiculously far ahead of anything that precedes it. In previous *GTA* games, driving from one end of a city to the other rarely took longer than 10 or 15 minutes. To get from one side of the new and improved Liberty City to the other will take you at least an hour.

Four of New York's five boroughs have been reimagined through the Rockstar filter. Brooklyn has become Broker, Queens has become Dukes, the Bronx has become Bohan, and Manhattan is renamed Algonquin.

Staten Island hasn't been put into the game, but it doesn't matter because a) *GTA III* was based there and b) you get a chunk of New Jersey (or 'Aldernay') instead.


Niko comes to Liberty City with a shady past and high hopes

But it's far more than just the size that's impressive. There's a full transport infrastructure too, with trains and buses, and beneath the city there's a sprawling subway system.

Within this setting, you engage in an experience that, like the other games in the series, unashamedly borrows its central theme from a movie. What is surprising, however, is that rather than pilfering from a gangster film – *Scarface* or *Boyz N The Hood*, maybe – for *GTA IV*, Rockstar's gone with *An American Tail*.

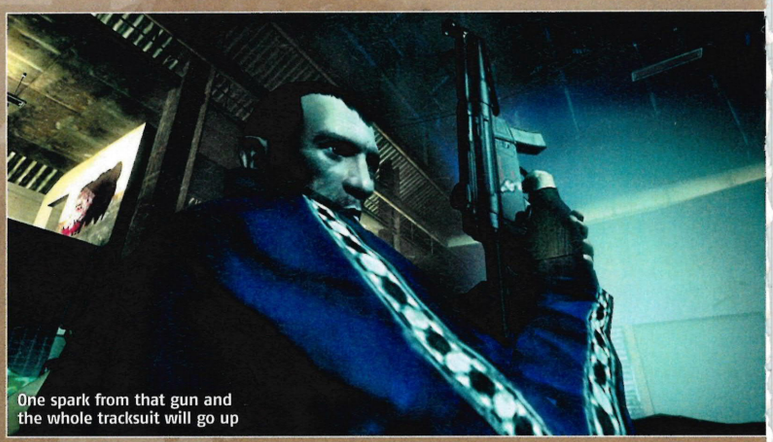
Just like Fievel Mousekewitz, our protagonist Niko Bellic is from Eastern Europe, and he's come to Liberty City to make a new life. Unlike Fievel, though, he's no mouse. 'Bellic' means warlike, and Niko's shady past certainly suggests he's no stranger to conflict.

He's arrived in Liberty City to hook up with his cousin Roman, who's been supposedly living the American Dream... but when Niko gets there, he finds that Roman's been a little economical with the truth, his 'big business' turning out to be no more than a nicotine-stained taxi office.

Anyone expecting a John Gotti-style rise to prominence will be disappointed, however, because *GTA IV* is not another 'rags to riches' storyline. The sense of plot escalation will instead be dictated through your relationships with other characters – think *The Sopranos* rather than *King Of New York*.

Forming these bonds with people is a key aspect of *IV*. The aim is to free the player from the mission structure of old, letting you simply hang out with the characters you like and have the missions evolve organically. You'll certainly need a few friends when your dodgy past starts to catch up with you later on in the game.

Your mobile phone is now an important tool, allowing you to make calls as well as receive them for the first time, although it's as yet unclear whether you'll get service providers phoning up about your talk plan every 10 sodding minutes.


One spark from that gun and the whole tracksuit will go up

GRAND OF THE FREE

Being somewhere between 35 and 40, Niko is older than most of the other *GTA* leads and this maturity has been extended throughout the game on every level.

By the end of *GTA: San Andreas*, CJ had begun to resemble James Bond more than a street kid, flying around on jetpacks and the like.

This time it's all about deepening the emotional experience rather than adding a ton of slightly incongruous vehicles – and some

New York's boroughs are totally recognisable

GRAND TIMELINE AUTO

The series has never been afraid to jump back and forwards in time. Allow us to untangle it

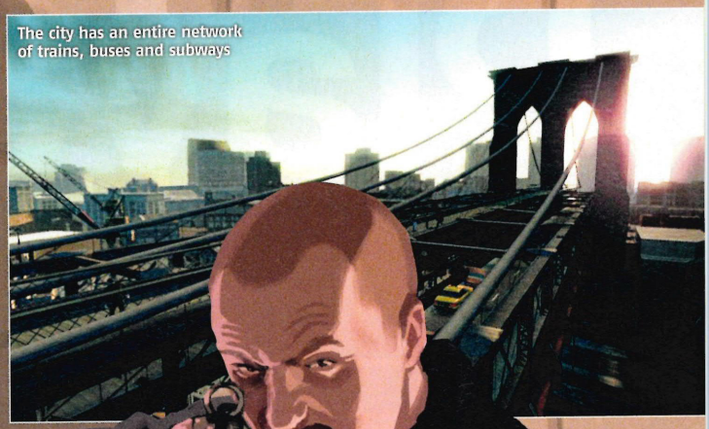
GTA: London (1969) – GTA: Vice City Stories (1984)

GTA: Vice City (1986) – GTA: San Andreas (1992)

Grand Theft Auto (1997) – GTA: Liberty City Stories (1998)

GTA III (2001) – GTA IV (2007)

GTA 2 (2013)



The city has an entire network of trains, buses and subways

The mission structure is looser than ever

have actually been removed. As much fun as it might've been to drive a hovercraft down the Hudson river, Rockstar is keeping it real.

Planes and jetpacks won't be making an appearance, because people simply don't fly around the city like that. Helicopters will definitely feature, however, so you'll still get to take to the skies.

AUTO ENGINE

Almost every aspect of the engine has been tweaked and tuned for next-gen: gunplay and targeting will be very different and cars are now far easier to control.

It's actually possible now to cruise down a street and irritating, high-speed collisions with slow-moving traffic will happen far less often. That means, of course, that customising your car is actually worthwhile now.

The police presence has become heavier and getting arrested will have far greater consequences than before, bearing in mind Niko's criminal past and illegal immigrant status.

But it's *IV*'s commitment to character and story that has us most impressed. We're chomping at the bit for its release in October, which could well be the moment that gaming finally comes of age. ■ **Jon Hamblin**

GRAND TRAILER AUTO

The GTA IV trailer, with its fast moving skies and sped-up footage of Liberty City, is actually an homage to a famous German film called *Koyaanisqatsi*. The arty film, first released in 1983, has no plot but is 87 minutes of beautifully shot urban landscapes with a soundtrack by Philip Glass – a track from which, Pruit Igoe, is used in the trailer. If you want to see the original version of the bit that relates to the trailer (and you should, it's awesome), you can check it out at www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4qxk7KhnHs

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review

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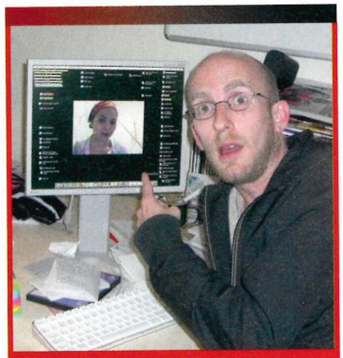

When I first got my paws on the Japanese version of *Rogue Galaxy*, the new space pirate roleplaying game, I was startled to see just how much of a... homage, shall we say, developer Level 5 has paid to *Star Wars*.

So when I asked our Mike (who reviewed it for us this issue) if Jaster and Kisala, two of this most excellent game's main characters, discovered in the end that they were brother and sister like Luke and Leia, I was sorely disappointed that he replied in the negative.

"How so?" I hear you cry. Well, if they *had* been siblings it would have given me the perfect excuse to tell you all about my sister.

I've always known about her but until this month I'd never met her or even spoken to her.

But, using the magical power of the internet, I've finally tracked her down. Hurrah!

That's her in the photo. And yes, I know what you're thinking: she got all the looks. Whatever, I've got far superior gaming skills.

Anyway, I can't ramble on about it for the entire length of this column because Jaster and Kisala aren't related, so it would be entirely irrelevant... Oops.

Nick

Nick Ellis,
Editor

076

ROGUE GALAXY

PIRATES! SPACE TRAVEL! TALKING CATS! BUT DOES IT ADD UP? READ THE REVIEW TO FIND OUT...

PS2

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It's official: Japan is now the number one tourist destination for demonkind

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A game where the chief aim is not to catch a cold. Is *Raw Danger* feverish fun, or sickeningly awful?

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Man, RPGs just keep getting weirder...

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Certainly not about that food fight Caligula had

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What happens in Vegum, stays in Vegum

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098 **DEATH JR 2: ROOT OF EVIL**
Death comes for all of us. Question is, will you want *Death Jr 2* to come for you?

ROGUE GALAXY

Think the PS2 roleplaying game is dead? Think again, matey

DETAILS

PUBLISHER SONY
DEVELOPER LEVEL 5
PRICE £29.99
PLAYERS 1
OUT SEPTEMBER
WEBSITE WWW.US.PLAYSTATION.COM/ROGUEGALAXY/
60HZ MODE NO
WIDESCREEN NO
SURROUND SOUND NO
ONLINE NO

AT A GLANCE

The latest romp from *Dragon Quest VIII* developer Level 5 and a classic RPG design. C'mon, pirates in space – how could it go wrong?

Roleplaying games are changing. Terrified by the popularity of massively multiplayer offerings sych as *World of Warcraft* and cowed by the success of free-roaming Western RPGs such as *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, Japanese developers are now desperately clambering to cater for Western tastes in their products.

Why, you need only look at *Final Fantasy XII* and observe its conscious decision to ape many of the stock gameplay elements found in the MMORPG for proof.

It seems the simple joy of taking on the role of an androgynous lad with a massive sword and saving the world is no longer enough.

So *Rogue Galaxy* finds itself part of a dying breed, and it may very well be one of the last old-school RPGs. Happily, it is also one of the greatest ever made.

It plunks for perfection over innovation and accessibility over irritating complexity, thus harkening back to the halcyon days of colourful, character-driven RPGs such as Square classics *Chrono Trigger* and *Secret of Mana* on PS1.

The Square Enix propaganda machine would have you believe that the PS2 RPG began with *Final Fantasy X* and ended with *XII*. But to believe that is to ignore fantastic games such as *Dark Chronicle* and *Dragon Quest VIII*, both the work of developer Level 5, and all of them leading up to this: the mighty *Rogue Galaxy*.

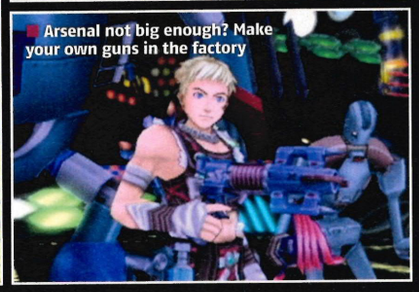
As you'd expect, *Rogue Galaxy's* plot is suitably old-school. The story opens on young

It's a traditional RPG at heart but combat isn't turn-based

The Dorgenark is the space pirates' home ship

Every boss has a weakness. Can you guess this one's?

Boulder-throwing apes: it's only rock'n'roll, but we like it


Arsenal not big enough? Make your own guns in the factory

WORTH THE WAIT

The Western version of *Rogue Galaxy* was delayed – but for a good reason

For once, the Western localisation of a Japanese RPG isn't just limited to badly sized text and laughable mistranslation. There are new items, new costumes, new abilities, new weapons and a whole new planet to explore, not to mention generally improved graphics and loading times (now barely noticeable), plus 2000 lines of extra dialogue.

Something tells us he's not one of the good guys

A sexy Amazon, a helpful robot, a big adventure... Jaster is indeed a lucky lad

BURNING AMBITION

Open a can of whup-ass on your chosen foe using limit breaks

In a change from the Japanese version of the game, *Rogue Galaxy*'s take on character-specific special moves (limit breaks) makes them not a random event but one that you can initiate yourself. By beating 'Burning Chips' out of the enemy, you can fill your Burning Strike meter. Once your meter is full, holding L1 and ○ will initiate a rhythm-action sequence in which you time button presses to deal out ludicrous damage.

Jaster Rogue, a good-natured lad desperate to get off the dreary desert planet of Rosa and pursue his fortune in the stars.

STARS IN HIS EYES

By happy coincidence, he's mistaken for the galaxy's number one bounty hunter, Desert Claw, and press-ganged into the crew of an infamous pirate named Dorgengoa.

Once onboard Dorgengoa's spacefaring ship, the Dorgenark, Jaster travels from planet to planet merrily doing good deeds and recruiting weirder and weirder crew members.

The game takes its time before revealing its own take on the 'end of the galaxy as we know it' scenario, but this itself is refreshing, giving you the illusion that *Rogue Galaxy*'s universe existed long before you selected 'New Game'.

But just as you wouldn't purchase a car

Mark VIII Salamander is the first boss you face

IN A GALAXY YARR, YARR AWAY

The piratical playable cast in full

Steve

The Dorgenark's helmsman. The mystery behind Steve's construction gradually unravels as the game unfolds. But really, if you built a robot, would you name him Steve?

Party Role:
May not seem very butch, but he's a powerful all-rounder, fully capable of standing toe-to-toe with the game's toughest foes.

He's a bit like:
C3-PO
In a battle of propriety and politeness, our money would be on Steve.

Jaster Rogue

A young lad with a mysterious past, Jaster is desperate to escape from under the oppressive regime the Longardian Empire has imposed on his home planet of Rosa. Luckily for him, he's mistaken for a legendary bounty hunter and taken aboard as interstellar pirate ship. Cue high adventure!

Party Role:
In true RPG tradition, you would expect leading man Jaster to be an overpowered all-rounder. He is.

He's a bit like:
Luke Skywalker
Blonde-haired orphan from a backwater desert planet destined to save the galaxy? Aren't they all?

Lilika Rhyza

A highly militant native from the jungle planet of Juraika, Lilika has got more Amazon in her than the whole of Brazil. She's also the subject of some *Dead or Alive*-inspired physics, if you know what we mean.

Party Role:
The only character to have a long-ranged weapon as her primary means of attack, Lilika is also skilled at debuffing enemies.

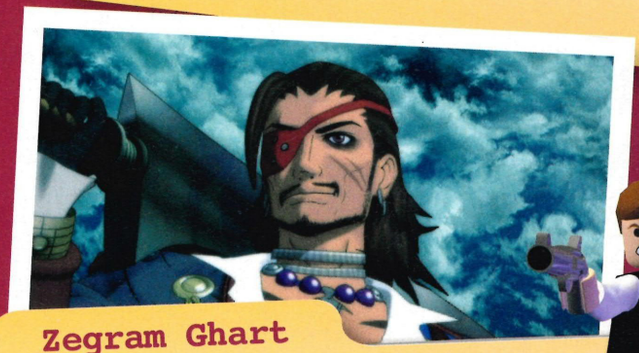
She's a bit like:
Wicket the Ewok
Hey, she's cute and cuddly (in a different way).

Simon Wicard

Simon's the Dorgenark's tech specialist. He's hiding a big secret beneath his armoured flight-suit. And, bizarrely, he sounds like Billy Connolly.

Party Role:
Polite banter, occasional cowardly quips and brutal long range bombardment, care of a portable missile pod.

He's a bit like:
R2-D2
One speaks in beeps. The other in a thick Scottish brogue. Both were evidently designed around a trashcan.

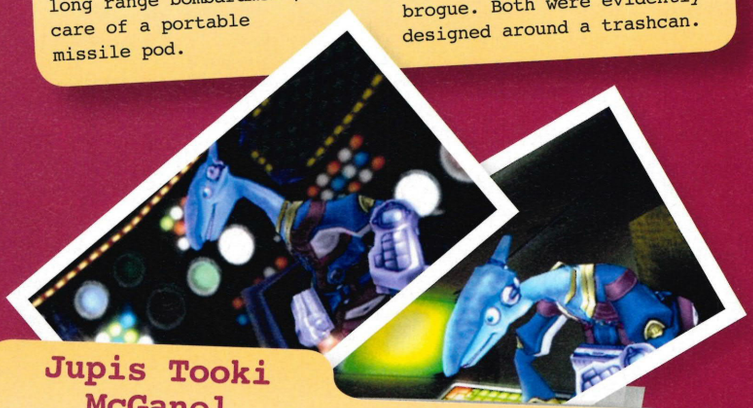


Zegram Ghart

Surly, sneering and keen to see Jaster thrown off the Dorgenark, Zegram - both in appearance and demeanour - is the closest thing the Dorgenark has to a true pirate.

Party Role:
Slow to attack, but punishing when he connects, Zegram can raise the party's stats by getting drunk on grog. Naturally.

He's a bit like:
Han Solo
Because every space opera needs an anti-hero of questionable moral fibre.



Jupis Tooki McGanel

An unhinged scientist once in the employ of the evil Drayton Corporation, Jupis joins the crew of the Dorgenark without even asking for permission. Cheeky.

Party Role:
With a selection of special attacks that revolve around yo-yos, bubblegum and casually sipping coffee – we're still not really sure.

He's a bit like:
Jar Jar Binks
We'll leave it for you to decide who's more annoying.

simply because you liked its tyres, you don't pick up an RPG for its plot. Nay, it's a decision made by examining the sum of its parts.

And in this case, it's *Rogue Galaxy*'s characters and combat that steal the show.

SPACE CASES

Your party is limited to three on-screen characters, but that's no problem because your reserve characters still receive experience, so you won't be unfairly punished for having a favourite formation.

Of course, it's difficult to pick just three out of the eight that make up *Rogue*'s playable cast. From lovelorn, dog-faced ex-soldier Deego to hard-bitten, half-pirate Zegram, there's somebody or something to suit every player's party-building preferences.

Granted, *Rogue Galaxy*'s characters are somewhat two-dimensional, and not just because of the way in which they're drawn: their back-stories can invariably be summed up in a matter of sentences.

But the vivid, cel-shaded art style and half-decent voice work brings them to life

These are not the droids you're looking for...

Kisala

Daughter of famed space-pirate Captain Dorgenark, wee Kisala is the only female character in your party who just so happens to be the same age as Jaster. Gee, what could that mean?

Party Role:
Speedy but lacking any ranged firepower, Kisala more than makes up for that with a batch of sparkly offensive magic spells.

She's a bit like:
Princess Leia
Half-Jedi princess, pirate princess... what's the difference?

Deego Aegis

A former soldier in the Longardian military, Deego fights for love, family and the right to lick his nethers in public.

Party Role:
He wields an oversized axe and a wrist-mounted chaingun, but isn't as tough a fighter as he looks. He's better suited to a party-buffing support role.

He's a bit like:
Chewbacca
At least with his shorter fur, Deego's easier to bathe.

THE JOURNEY OF A SANCHEZ FRUIT

Or, how *Rogue Galaxy's* item economy works

I'm full of potential, amigo!

THE INSECTRON TOURNAMENT

Catch a team of creepy-crawly Insectors and compete for fabulous prizes. It's a game in its own right!

Feed me to your Insectors!

Slot me in here!

REVELATION FLOW

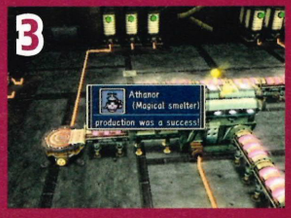
Grant new abilities to your party by dropping items into their Revelation grid

These abilities will help you get to the...

The weapons you make can be given to...

FACTORY

Create rare weapons in this surprisingly deep puzzle mini-game



TOADY THE WEAPON-FUSING FROG

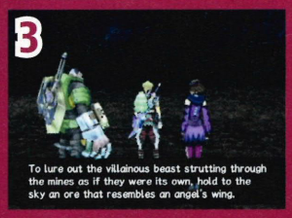
Max out two weapons' stats and combine them into something better

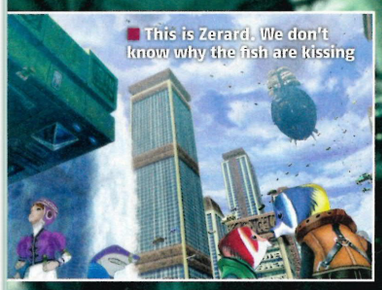
And once you've become the galaxy's top hunter, why not try...

The product of which can be used when...

HUNTING

Rare beasts can be tempted out of hiding with offerings of rare items





more than any tacked-on, character-specific quest line could.

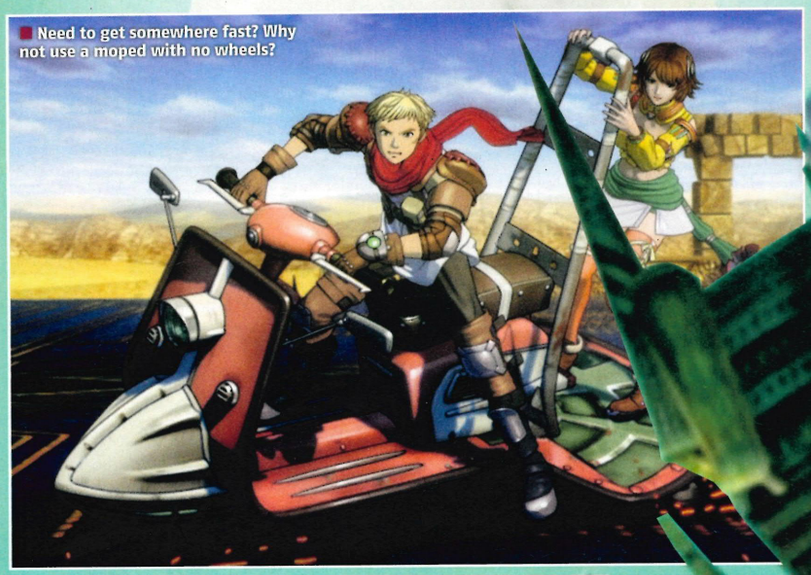
Every planet you visit yields a whole host of supporting characters, many of whom only appear for a few scenes – so it's a testament to Level 5's knack for creating good personalities that they remain memorable long after you've shipped off to another spaceport. Many of them are genuinely funny, too, which is something you can't say about the po-faced protagonists of a certain other recent big-name RPG.

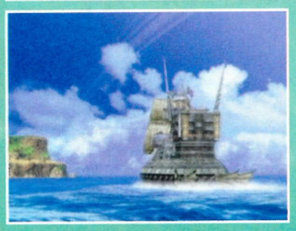
DUNGEON AND ON

Sadly, this attention to detail doesn't extend to the game's dungeon environments, many of which – despite alleged improvements made to the Western version – suffer from tedious, carbon copy corridors syndrome.

However, thanks to a handy map and teleportation system, you rarely need revisit an area, but can instead jaunt from one important location to another in a matter of seconds.

It might not be the most realistic system, and hardcore RPG fans might cry foul at its ease of use, but when you're hopping between


Need to get somewhere fast? Why not use a moped with no wheels?



'Look mate, I don't know this Darf Vaydar fella. Stop asking'

As the most piratey character, Zegram really knows how to buckle his swash

multiple planets in order to source the rare ingredients involved in making one of the game's Seven Star Swords, you'll be thankful that it exists.

The planets themselves, despite slavishly conforming to sci-fi archetypes ('the desert planet', 'the mining planet'), are bright, beautiful and bursting with life – and do more than enough to instil that all-important sense of wonder and exploration you'd expect from a finely crafted RPG.

MANY OF THE BATTLES GENUINELY FEEL LIKE YOU'RE FIGHTING FOR YOUR FRIENDS' LIVES

COMBAT ROCKS

Rogue Galaxy's combat is exciting and kinetic. There's no turn-based drudgery here, no gambit-and-forget system; instead it offers a real-time, combo-driven mix of melée, magic and gunplay. Though the game's difficulty tapers out towards the end as your fighting abilities reach godlike levels of martial finesse, many of the game's battles genuinely feel like you're fighting for your friends' lives.

Your AI-controlled party members are fairly adept at getting themselves killed, particularly if you haven't exposed a given enemy's weak point for them.

They're not entirely useless, however: they'll often shout out suggestions which can be

LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEGAELIXIR

If only *Final Fantasy* was as funny as this

All right, then! We're to proceed on our new mission--Renew the Galactic Travel Visa!

Eek! OMG, scary...!

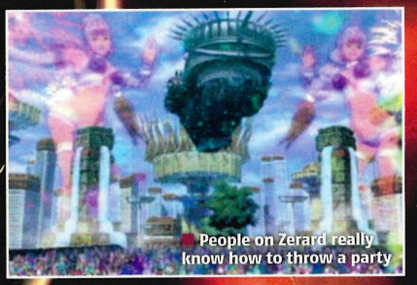
FURRY FREAK
The Dorgenark's first mate, crazed talking cat Monsha. In short: hilarious

MIO MY
The Galaxy Corporation's daffy valley-girl receptionist Mio is a riot...

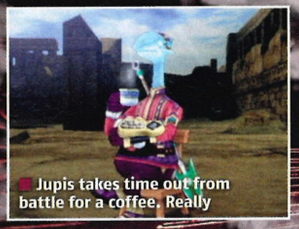
C-C-Check it out. MIO's changed into her j-j-jammies!

OFFICER DRIBBLE
...as are affable perverts Robert and Henry, members of Mio's fanclub

DOG LOVERS
Eww - what the hell are their kids going to look like?


People on Zerard really know how to throw a party

You control one character and choose two AI helpers


Jupis takes time out from battle for a coffee. Really

acted upon with a quick tap of the shoulder button. Wonderfully, they always seem to know when to throw a healing potion your way - so the nightmarish Game Over screen shouldn't trouble you very often.

DEEP AND CHEERFUL

To look at, it might bear a passing resemblance to a high-value Saturday morning cartoon, but that's not to say *Rogue Galaxy* doesn't have depth. Stat-grubbing power players will find plenty to love, particularly within the game's Factory and weapon-fusion mini-games, both of which have roots in Level 5's previous titles.

It's possible to ignore this side of things for the entire game, of course, along with the addictive Insectron tournament (think Pokémon battle chess) and Jaster's fight to climb the bounty hunter ranks by tracking down rare monsters. To do so, though, will not only be missing the point of the game, you'll also lose out on around 20 hours of extra gameplay.

Each party member has up to six costumes

And that's the true magic of *Rogue Galaxy*. Hidden among the swashbuckling sci-fi and cheery anime anarchy lies a remarkably deep game that will happily siphon hours of your life away, should you let it.

Despite Square's intention to create an accessible RPG in the form of *Final Fantasy XII*, it's only *Rogue Galaxy* that truly succeeds in this admirable goal - there's something for everyone here. Quite simply, to own it is to love it, to miss it is a crime. ■ **Mike Sterry**

In the year 4599, George Bush Jr don't look so junior no more

A perfect complement to the ruler of a galaxy.

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL magazine UK	VERDICT	
Graphics	09	Beautiful character design, repetitive maps
Sound	08	Solid score, voice acting of variable quality
Gameplay	10	Old-school RPG heaven
Lifespan	08	One satisfying play-through, plus extras

Deep, addictive and awash with colour and character,* Rogue Galaxy *is a near-perfect take on the old-school Eastern RPG formula

9/10

You play as an immortal commander of huge armies

DEMON CHAOS

Feuding in feudal Japan – with added demons!

DETAILS

PUBLISHER KONAMI
DEVELOPER GENKI
PRICE £34.99
PLAYERS 1
OUT NOW
WEBSITE UK.GS.KONAMI-EUROPE.COM/GAMES.DO
60HZ MODE NO
WIDESCREEN NO
SURROUND SOUND NO
ONLINE NO

AT A GLANCE
Action and strategy game that allows you to lead an army while also getting stuck in on the frontline

Games based around military strategy don't often inspire mass fervour among PS2 gamers. So it's always a joy when a game makes an attempt to spice up this (often fairly) maligned genre by taking the more exciting elements and combining them with some good old close-up hacking and slashing action.

To this end, here we have feudal Japan circa 1543 as our backdrop and legions of demons emerging from Lake Suwa to rudely interrupt the civil war that's raging.

The gods send an immortal warrior (this is you) to reunite the warring human factions and save humankind.

IMMORTAL COMBAT

The word that probably jumped out there is 'immortal' and that's right, you are. Your soldiers aren't, though, so success comes more as a result of your strategic decisions than your fighting prowess.

The controls are simple enough with a handful of often spectacular fighting moves that can also be combo'd, and surprisingly few basic army commands. As well as the Story mode there's a Time Trial mode where you have to slay a certain amount of chaos demons in a given time, and a Free mode wherein you can revisit previous levels.

The action is viewed either from a close-up third-person perspective that puts you slap bang in the middle of the scrapping, or from a bird's-eye view so you can direct your army's movements more effectively.

The big selling point, though, is the sheer vastness of the demon hordes that appear on screen. We're told that there can be more than 60,000 visible at any one time.

In between fighting you must protect people

This all sounds pretty good, but unfortunately in order to incorporate the strategy and the fighting, both elements have been scaled down from what you'd expect from dedicated games in these styles.

The combat moves are few, and the strategies seem to consist of your army either following you or, er, not following you. Granted there are portions where you have to assist or protect other characters from the various factions but they're hardly taxing on the old grey matter.

Plus, the story lacks creativity somewhat and seems to consist solely of 'go to X and help Y, but first, defeat the demons!'

GRAPHIC BLOODSHED

It's obvious that the graphics is the area that the programmers have concentrated on and it's to the detriment of the gameplay.

Even the action itself, which should be a hugely impressive sight with the much vaunted hordes on both sides, mostly turns into a nondescript, pulsing miasma of demons and soldiers engaged in an almighty ruck where furious button-bashing is the order of the day.

The ideas are certainly there, but in the end it's all a bit lacklustre. **Joe Barnes**

PILLARS AND THRILLS

There are many impressive and useful powers that you could reasonably expect to see being wielded by an immortal, god-sent warrior.

We'd wager that the ability to conjure a variety of pillars out of thin air isn't one of them, though.

This isn't as daft as it might sound: it forms an integral part of your strategy for laying waste to the pesky demons and keeping your troops in rude health.

If there's enough space around you, fire pillars and arrow pillars can be laid to provide an important boost to your armoury, and you can also plant life pillars to heal those soldiers that have taken one too many for the team.

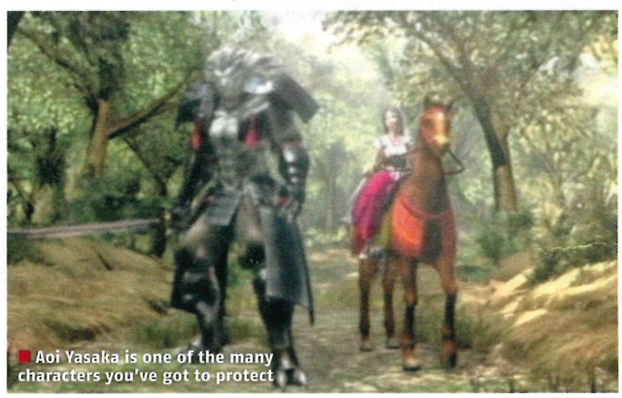
PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL magazine UK VERDICT

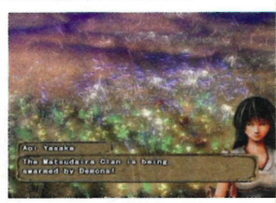
Graphics	07	Good, but a tad over-ambitious
Sound	07	Creepy scuttling sounds from the demons
Gameplay	04	Disappointing, needs more options
Lifespan	04	Not great, levels are rather samey

Demon Chaos is a valiant attempt, but ultimately it falls short of being the ingenious blend of genres that it strives to be

5/10

A typically chaotic battle in full swing

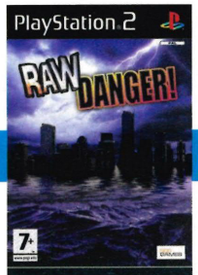

Aoi Yasaka is one of the many characters you've got to protect



It's not a game for arachnophobes

Raw danger, raw sewage!

The city's flooded and you must get to safety



RAW DANGER

What? A survival game? With no zombies?!

DETAILS

PUBLISHER 505 GAMESTREET
DEVELOPER IREM
PRICE £29.99
PLAYERS 1
OUT 18 MAY
WEBSITE UK.PLAYSTATION.COM
60HZ MODE NO
WIDESCREEN NO
SURROUND SOUND NO
ONLINE NO

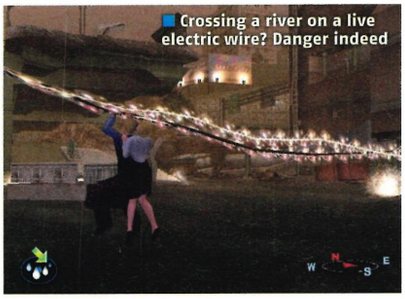
AT A GLANCE
Futuristic city starts flooding. You must guide characters to evacuation points while keeping warm

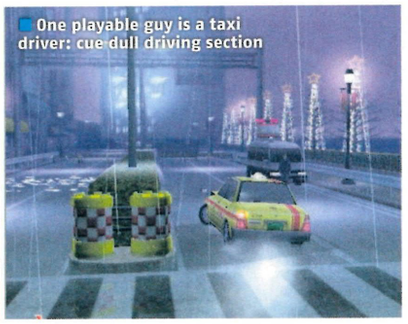
There's no easy way to say this, so here goes: *Raw Danger* is a terrible game. Sorry, but it is. Ironically, the game set in a natural disaster zone is, itself, more than a bit of a catastrophe.

Set in 2010, engineers have built the world's first 'ultra-safe' city. But as it turns out, Geo City ain't so safe after all. Although it can hold off a nuclear war, it crumbles in the face of architecture's oldest enemy: rain.

After a month of stormy weather, the Hudson River bursts its banks, and the resulting flood destroys everything in its path. You play as various survivors as they trek across the city to evacuation points.

So, the premise is fine. But the characters are horrendously stereotypical – to the point where it offends. Plus, while *Raw Danger* tries to paint the perfect portrait of blue-collar America, it ends up feeling creepy and soulless. Everything's just so bland and lifeless.


Crossing a river on a live electric wire? Danger indeed


One playable guy is a taxi driver: cue dull driving section

FLOODY AWFUL

Every 'personality' in the game is as forgettable as the next, making it impossible to connect with them on a basic level, let alone summon enough empathy to want to help save their stupid lives.

We have a special, personal hatred reserved for the first playable character – blue-eyed, blonde haired Joshua Hartwell – who is utterly useless. His frequent exclamations of 'Huh?', 'Um...' and 'Err...' will make you want to throw him into the nearest raging river just to do mankind a favour.

Are there any redeeming features to Raw Danger? Yes, several. Firstly, the way you interact with the environment with one character will affect the next person's journey, leading to multiple endings, which is a nice touch.

For example, when stuck in an underground station, you can choose to take a dangerous path to get to the other side, or a shorter path that will result in collapsing a section of the building.

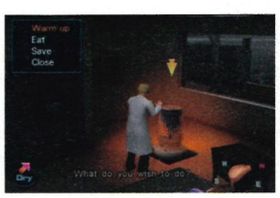
So, in theory if you take the shorter one, the next character you play will be forced to take the longer, more perilous route.

However, it appears that the developers forget about this neat little feature once the first couple of chapters were in the bag.

Secondly, there's the 'keeping warm' concept. During your struggle to survive, wet clothing and

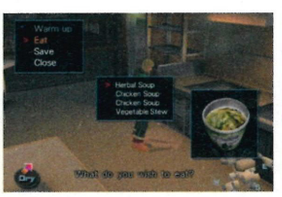
HOW TO SURVIVE MOTHER NATURE

STAY OUT OF THE RAIN
A simple idea, but if you must wander out into the elements, be sure to pack a stylish brolly and raincoat as modelled here



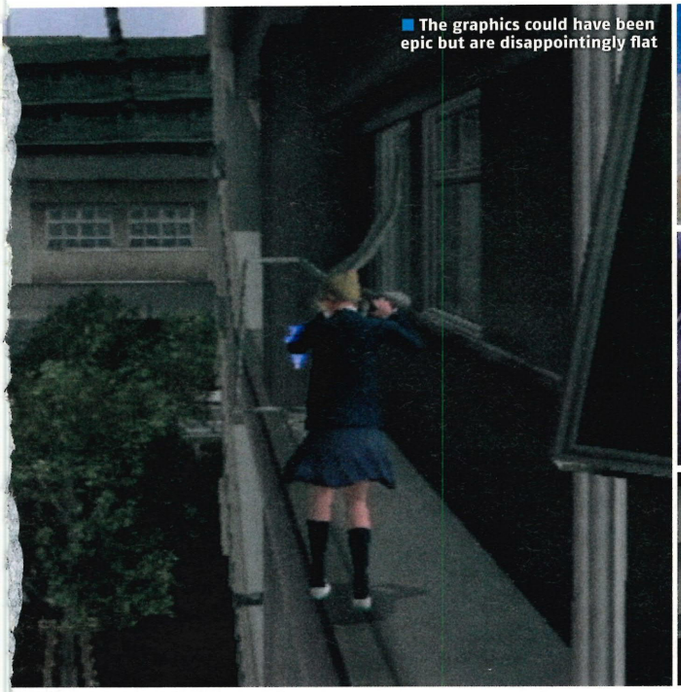
KEEP YOURSELF WARM
If your body temperature drops too low, you will die from hypothermia. Finding sources of heat such as this one is essential

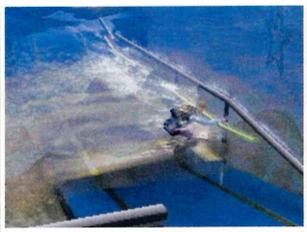
DRESS TO IMPRESS
Your mum was right: you should wrap up warm in any clothing you can find, even if it means you end up looking like a nonce

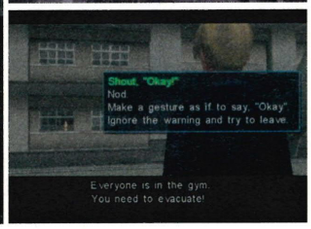


EAT HEALTHILY
If you have a saucepan, you can cook up any food you've scavenged. A hearty stew or pot of noodles keeps you warm for a while

USE YOUR PROVISIONS
Things you find can be combined to make useful items, such as a makeshift raincoat, a cardboard shelter or a pair of oars


The graphics could have been epic but are disappointingly flat





You can leave items for other characters to find later

cold temperatures will decrease your body temperature. As you get colder, your character will become more lethargic; if hypothermia sets in, he or she collapses and that's game over.

There are various survival points (heaters, bins on fire, kitchen hobs) dotted around, where you can warm up and cook some nice hot food to sustain your poor little body for a while.

A BIG, FAT BLUE ARROW HOVERING ABOVE ALL USEFUL ITEMS MAKES EXPLORATION FEEL IRRELEVANT

To make things even more realistic, you'll find various items you can take with you, but the amount of stuff you can carry depends on the size of your backpack. While this can be restricting for hoarders, it means you must prioritise what to take.

Plus, interestingly, there are various recycling bins where you can dump stuff you're not using so other characters can pick through them later.

Unfortunately, the inspirational idea of scavenging to survive is marred by the fact that all useful items are highlighted by a big fat blue arrow hovering above them, making the idea of exploration feel irrelevant.

Mind you, we didn't really feel like trekking around the city anyway. The graphics are dire; buildings are scratchy and jagged; characters are blocky with stodgy animation and after a while everything starts to become one big blur. Or was that just us glazing over?

WATER WASTE OF TIME

There's no noticeable attempt to produce a credible 'wrath of Mother Nature' environment: raging water looks like brown wobbly jelly and what could have been the dramatic collapse of a dam looks like a Lego-brick demolition derby.

The cutscenes over-use slow motion action, making it look as if the game just can't keep up with the pace. And, laughably, characters are shot out of frame, so while there could be some deep and meaningful exchanges happening, you really can't tell because, sadly, knees lack the ability to portray emotion.

In fact, we'd have to say that the most frustrating flaw in the game is the diabolical camera. It often sticks itself in an unhelpful position, hindering you from finding where to go next or seeing what's going on when you're stuck wandering around a godforsaken patch of glitchy flooded road, your character getting colder and colder – then you fall off the edge of a cliff into a rushing river for the 30th time and glare darkly at the screen with the thought 'someone must pay for this'.

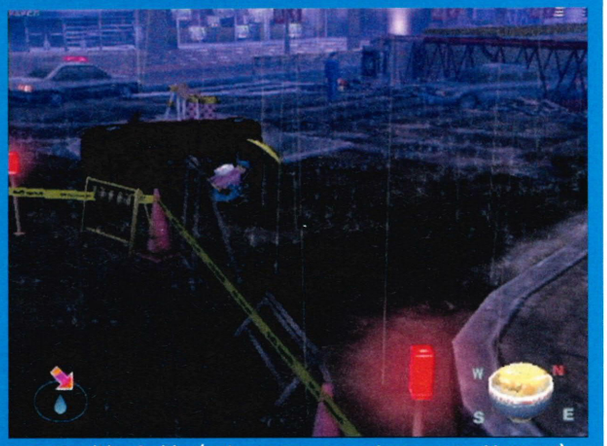
Yes, someone must be made to pay for this awful game, but for heaven's sake, don't let it be you. ■ **Kim Richards**

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL MAGAZINE UK	VERDICT	
Graphics	02	The city looks like it's being flooded by jelly
Sound	02	Awful acting; rain that sounds like TV static
Gameplay	04	Some good ideas, under-used or mis-used
Lifespan	04	Multiple endings, if you make it that far

Unique survival tactics and some interesting ideas meant* Raw Danger *had the potential to be a classic, but poor delivery has crucified it **4/10**

TEETHGRINDING FRUSTRATION

Our pick of the most annoying moments in the game



Amber Brazil is a fugitive (and not a porn star, as her name would suggest). Unfortunately, the camera angle makes it impossible for her to sneak past the policeman without guesswork and saint-like patience

Your aim here is to jetski to safety before being drowned by the brown tidal wave. But the camera angle means you can't see where you're meant to go

If all you can make out is a pair of hands hanging *through* a rock, your eyes aren't deceiving you. *Raw Danger* is full of glitches, making you fall down holes that don't exist

SHADOW HEARTS: FROM THE NEW WORLD

Without a shadow of a doubt, the strangest RPG yet

DETAILS

PUBLISHER ARUZE
DEVELOPER XSEED
PRICE: £29.99
PLAYERS 1
OUT NOW
WEBSITE: WWW.SHADOWHEARTS NEWWORLD.COM
60HZ MODE YES
WIDESCREEN NO
SURROUND SOUND NO
ONLINE NO

AT A GLANCE
A roleplaying game with a cast of oddballs, set in 'real' world 1929 as gangs and demons run wild

Shadow Hearts: From the New World is so called because, despite being as RPG as they come, it's set not in a made-up land of pointy-eared magic people but in the North and South America of 1929.

Androgynous teen Johnny Garland is on a quest to find out why monsters from another dimension are wreaking havoc around the world (surely you remember learning about the Great Monster Invasion of 1929 at school?).

Helping him out is a beautiful, semi-naked, shape-shifting Native American called Shania,

who decides to follow Johnny after noticing he has some freaky powers. Or something like that.

See, the problem with this game's storyline is that after the bare bones have been lain out, it's sort of... forgotten about.

WORLD AROUND

There are clues, such as the arrival of a silent lady who could be evil (she massacres an entire squad of policemen, but should you judge her for that?) and a ginger serial killer called, helpfully, Killer, but that's about it.

Johnny goes to Chicago and rescues Al Capone, then heads to Roswell because a ninja tells him to; once there he's pointed towards Aztec territory, but ends up in the Caribbean, captured by a six-year old pirate captain; you find yourself wandering through Alcatraz when the whole theory of existence hits you in the face like a dive-bombing pigeon....

Frankly, the storyline appears to have been written by someone who's very easily distracted.

Tragically, though, *SH:FTNW* fails to use the 'real world' setting to its full potential.

The 'real world' settings include the Grand Canyon

What could have been the panoramic landscape of the Grand Canyon looks like a cardboard cutout that's been rained on.

Buildings resemble sticklebrick blocks and dungeon levels play like a cut-and-paste exercise. It just really doesn't do the PS2 justice.

MEET THE TEAM

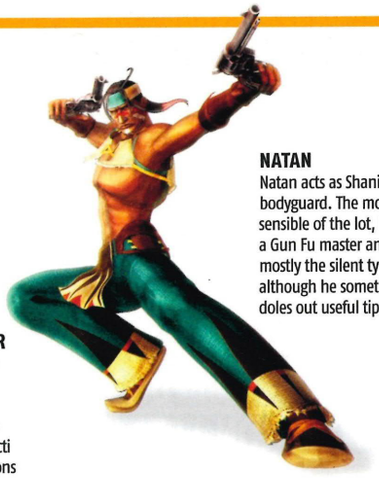
Introducing your playable characters, none of whom could find normality if it stood in front of them yelling 'Hi! I'm normality!'

HILDEGARDE VALENTINE
Hilda is a vampire who changes form depending on how many calories she's drained from enemies. Schizophrenic by nature, she tags along to see the sights

SHANIA
Princess of a Native American tribe (known for their blonde hair), she is a bounty hunter by trade and can morph into godlike spirit beings for extra ass-kicking power

JOHNNY GARLAND
A 16-year-old detective and the androgynous blonde hero without whom no RPG is complete. His parents died in a mysterious car accident and he's since been in the care of Lenny the butler

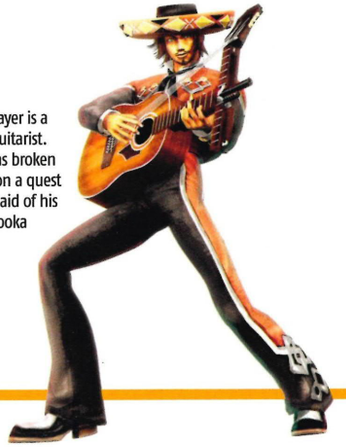
FRANK GOLDFINGER
Frank is a ninja. A really rubbish one. He has an affinity for objects with tragic stories and enjoys using bus stop posts, cacti and swordfish as weapons

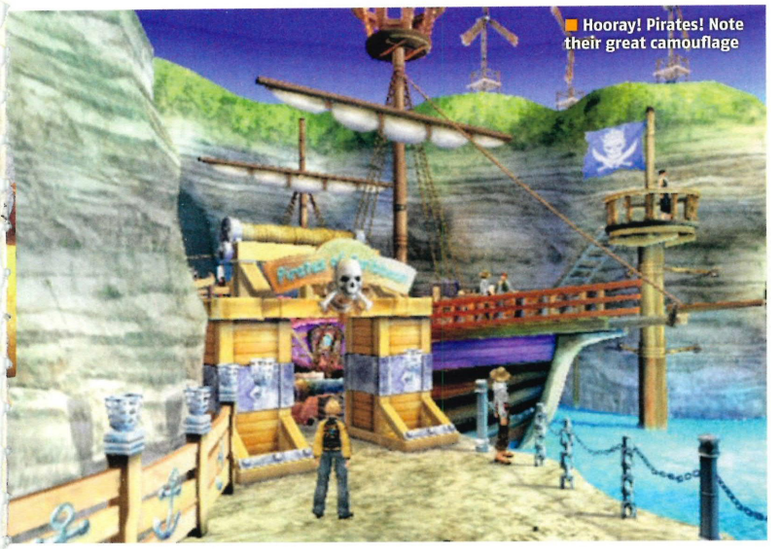


NATAN
Natan acts as Shania's bodyguard. The most sensible of the lot, he's a Gun Fu master and mostly the silent type, although he sometimes doles out useful tips

MAO
This giant lady cat fights like a Drunken Master. Her hobbies include making movies, drinking serious alcohol, and running Al Capone's gang when he's not around

RICARDO GOMEZ
Ricardo the mariachi player is a passionate and skilful guitarist. The death of his love has broken his heart, and so he is on a quest to avenge her with the aid of his handy guitar-cum-bazooka




Hooray! Pirates! Note their great camouflage

Turn-based combat is gussied up with an innovative system

The magic system is simple but the spells are big and shiny

It's not helped by the background tunes, which verge on elevator music and slowly eat into your brain – odd, given that the battle music (a mix of swooping orchestras and pounding heavy metal) is dramatic, emotive and almost hypnotic.

The voice acting is acceptable, but incredibly stereotypical. In normal circumstances that would make the characters seem fake, but it fits in well here, for this RPG is really about a huge cast of caricatures.

ODD COMPANY

These bizarre characters are the game's real saving grace. Everywhere you go is packed with larger-than-life weirdos who will either make you giggle or raise an eyebrow: ninjas with sushi rolls on their heads; gay bikers; a cyborg cat called the Meowmanator (Meow'll be back!).

Even your own team mates aren't spared by normality (see them for yourself in 'Meet the Team', opposite). There are also a few cameo appearances from old *Shadow Hearts* characters to keep fans happy.

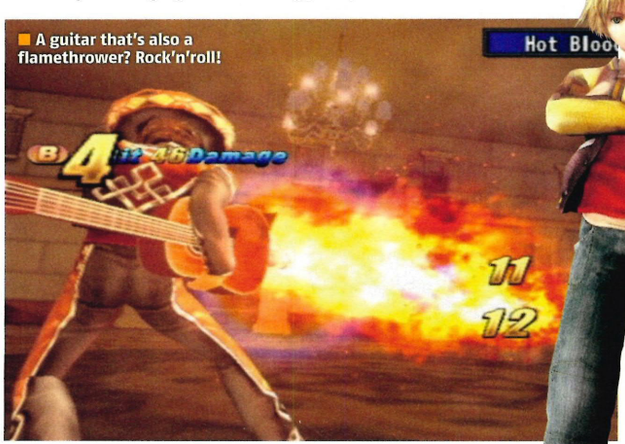
Enemies range from gangsters, hooligans, policemen and robots to monsters who'd send that lot from *Silent Hill* running home to their nannies. They are absolutely gruesome, with limbs sprouting from everywhere, slime, blood and flesh adorning their mismatched bodies, and balance the kookiness of the 'normal' characters.

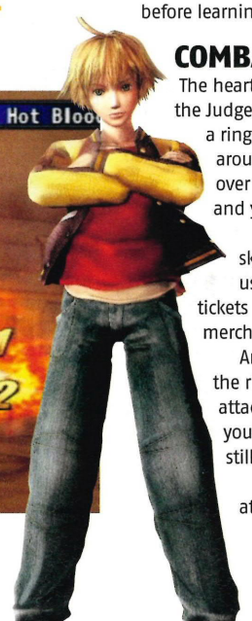
NINJAS WITH SUSHI ON THEIR HEADS; A CYBORG CAT; GAY BIKERS...

Another feature that pulls this game from the brink of pap is the incredibly challenging but refreshingly simple combat system. It has so many aspects to it that a newcomer might be overwhelmed, but thankfully, the tutorials are very gently introduced, so you get used to one technique before learning another.

Yes, that really is a bus stop sign that he's fighting with

In this evil demon's home dimension, this is a good look


A guitar that's also a flamethrower? Rock'n'roll!



COMBAT SYSTEMS GO!

The heart of it is *SH*'s familiar mechanism: the Judgement Ring. Select an action, and a ring appears with a cursor ticking around it. Bash ⊗ when it hovers over hit zones and you'll attack. Miss, and you'll fail.

This unique device brings a real skill element to battles and is also used in mini-games such as lottery tickets and bartering discounts with merchants, pushing up the challenge.

And although battles stand within the rigid confines of 'your party attacks, then the enemy have a go', you can use combo attacks, or, better still, double combo attacks.

In these, you can chain your attacks with another member of the group, and another, and another, until your foes are thoroughly vanquished and your grin of satisfaction threatens to break your jaw.

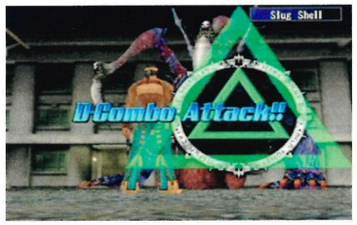
Physical combat is backed up by a relatively simple magic system, powered by Stellar Charts. Following the Zodiac, each character can equip one chart and fix Stellar nodes to it, thus equipping them with various magic spells, whether defensive (Shields and Healing, for

GET IN THE RING!

How the combat system works, plus a peek at the joys of a double-combo attack

THE JUDGEMENT RING
Hit ⊗ on the right areas of the Ring to land an attack. Hit all the red areas and your attack will be stronger.

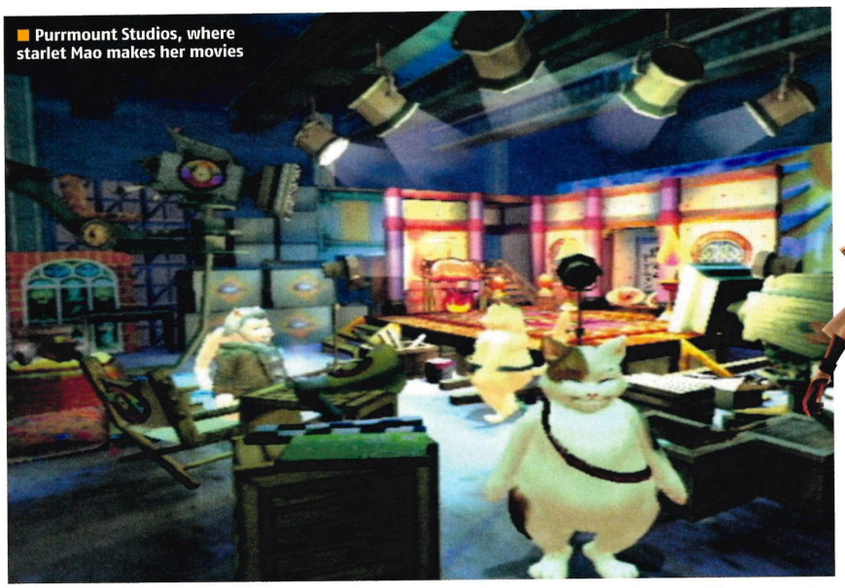
MIX AND MATCH
If your Stock Bar is full enough, you can use a combo. Select D-combo. Choose two attacks and then...



COMBO A-GO-GO
... hit the correct button to match the symbol on screen.

REPEAT THRASHING
After your attack, pick another team mate to have a go.

THE SPOILS OF BATTLE
When you win you'll get experience points, money and Soul Charge points to power up Shania's abilities.

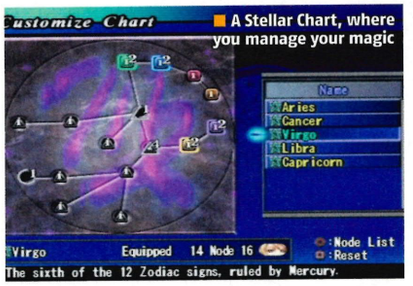

■ Purrmount Studios, where starlet Mao makes her movies

example) or offensive (Rock Bump, Hail Dust... you get the idea).

In fact you can personalise absolutely anything. Judgement Rings, Stellar Charts and magic attacks can be tailored to make the game more laid back, or hardcore and challenging.

Taking this one step further, each character's growth depends entirely on you. Each warrior has their own special attack and a subsequent sidestory that you can choose to follow, which will result in them upgrading their exclusive moves. In keeping with the weirdness, these stories are far from dull.

Mao must use Cat Drain to draw cat money from crippled enemies in order to fund her Hollywood movies.



■ A Stellar Chart, where you manage your magic

Natan has to find animals such as Big Foot and catch them in a jar. This level of detail is what really makes *SH:FTNW* such an involving success, because it turns what could be rather shallow characters into in-depth personas with whom you can really lose yourself.

So despite the nonsensical story, average graphics and annoying background music, *SH: FTNW* is an enjoyable and challenging way to spend your time. The sheer amount of sidequests and minigames alone means that you could easily (and willingly) spend up to 40 hours of your life unravelling Johnny's mystery.

The inclusion of multiple endings and the option to unlock a different version of the game means that this is a good chunk o' gaming to sink your teeth into.

If bizarre stories and unusual characters are your thing and you don't mind a random plot, this is definitely a game for you. ■ **Kim Richards**

PlayStation.2 OFFICIAL magazine UK **VERDICT**

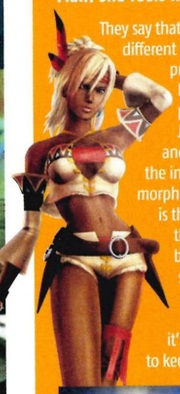
Graphics	06	Rigid and outdated, bar the nice cutscenes
Sound	07	Background music dull, battle music great
Gameplay	09	Makes turn-based battles exciting
Lifespan	08	Multiple endings and sidequests

Looks outdated, but is challenging, cheeky and charming. The combat and sidequests will keep you entertained for ages

8/10

SHANIA'S MIGHTY MORPHING POWERS

Man! She feels like a woman. And a bunch of other creatures too...



They say that girls have many different faces, a fact that is proved by Shania, the Native American princess who saves Johnny from a demon and joins his quest to fight the invasion. Her talent for morphing into magic creatures is the best special ability in the game, not least (for blokes, anyway) because she has to get naked to do it. Well, hell, when you've a bod like that it's a crime against nature to keep it covered up, eh?

OOPS, MY BIKINI FELL OFF

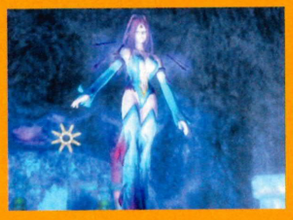
To begin the transformation, Shania must rid herself of mortal clothes; something she does a lot. You never really see anything saucy, though.

THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO

Shania's first form is called Thunderbird. It's in this guise that she enters the story, rescuing Johnny from becoming demon dinner.

ROCK HARD

To unlock new forms, Shania must find each spirit's shrine and defeat the corresponding manifestion in battle. Tatan'ka here is an earth spirit.

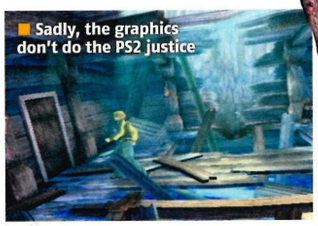


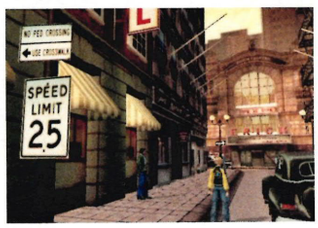
WATERED DOWN

Each form can be powered up by finding and charging up statues relating to each spirit. Shania's third power, La Sirene, is a water spirit, who makes her calm and peaceful.

FLAMING 'ECK!

Fiery Tirawa is the final creature with whom Shania can fuse to increase her abilities, and is the most powerful spirit of the lot. Plus she has a very impressive pair of... swords.


■ Sadly, the graphics don't do the PS2 justice



■ World domination by limbo dancing. It's a novel approach

■ The Judgement Ring becomes a familiar sight

After preparing your armies, you watch them fight from above

THE HISTORY CHANNEL: GREAT BATTLES OF ROME

PlayStation 2

Lacklustre Roman strategy that will bore even toga fetishists

DETAILS

PUBLISHER KOCH
DEVELOPER BLACK BEAN GAMES
PRICE £19.99
PLAYERS 1
OUT NOW
WEBSITE WWW.GREATBATTLESOFROME.COM
60HZ MODE NO
WIDESCREEN NO
SURROUND SOUND NO
ONLINE NO

AT A GLANCE
Learn about the Roman Empire in this History Channel-endorsed strategy sim

Not so much Rome's greatest hits, more a slap in the face with a sweaty Centurion's sandal. Rome had orgies, gladiators, war and togas, but all the gory glory is here reduced to a strategy battle sim with all the excitement of a 1980s schools TV programme.

Great Battles Of Rome is split into campaigns, each with its own goals and terrain. Your first job is to bash the turnips out of some farmers.

You start by putting your units into position on the battlefield. You can see the enemy and check out the terrain (skirmishers are better on the hilly patches, cavalry struggle in the mud) but it hardly counts as an advantage when you can only move your units a few millimetres.

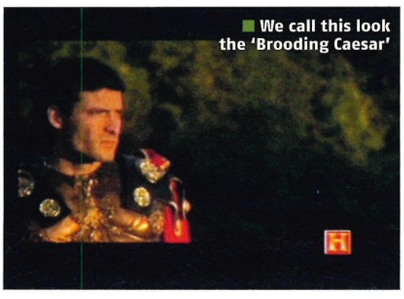
It's enough to drive even the most genius tactician to beating themselves around the head with the DualShock.

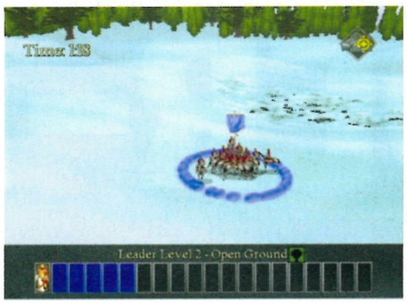
ROMAN BOREFARE

Once you're ready, hit the fight button. Now you can relax, leave the pad and make a sandwich while the game carries on without you.

You *can* direct your units during the fight or order a shameful retreat, but your impact as general is minimal, and unarmed farmers aren't exactly a threat.

The view is from overhead, so although you can zoom in, you're not exactly up close and personal. You may as well poke some ants with a stick. And even as Rome expands, your units


We call this look the 'Brooding Caesar'



increase in size and the campaign pushes on, the battles really don't get any more challenging.

Before every scrap you can recruit new fighters, upgrade abilities and weapons and heal injured parties. Sounds exciting, but the text-heavy presentation makes it as dull as doing your grocery shopping online.

Everything is strung together by cutscenes that look like History Channel leftovers, featuring pompous voiceovers and cheesy acting. Even if you try to appreciate the game purely on educational grounds, any real information is shoehorned into the loading screens, and who actually looks at loading screens, anyway?

At less than 20 quid, *Great Battles Of Rome* may be tempting to the poverty-stricken gamer, but you'd be better off making a toga out of bed sheets and renting a DVD of *Gladiator*. It's just no fun playing something your history teacher would approve of. **Rachel Weber**

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL MAGAZINE UK	VERDICT	
Graphics	03	Squint-inducing, with grainy film clips
Sound	03	Agonising Latin yells and elevator music
Gameplay	02	Like herding tiny sheep dressed as Romans
Lifespan	03	Too intolerable to play for long

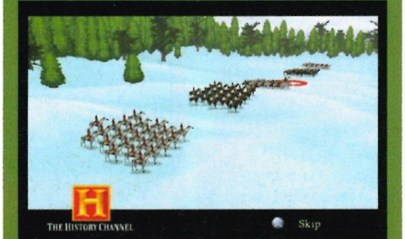
Definitive proof that even the most exciting bits of history can be reduced to a cure for insomnia. Shoddy, slow-paced and dull

3/10

THREE STEPS TO A ROMAN BATTLE

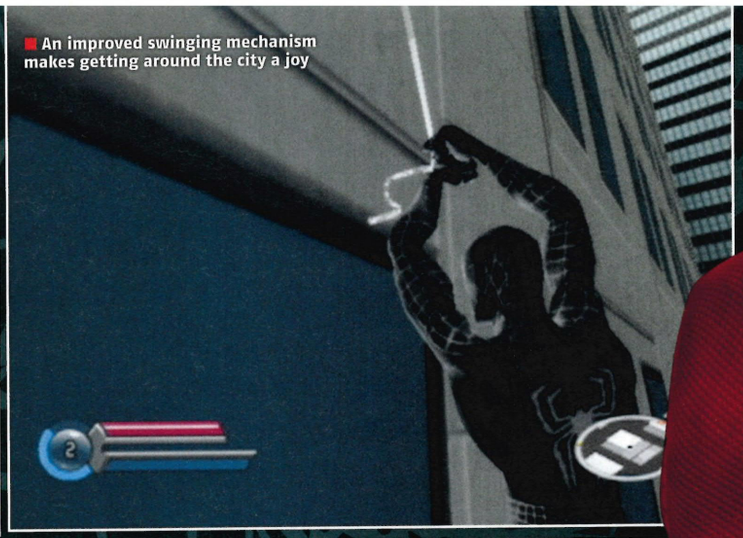
THE CAMP
Choose to recruit from smelly peasants, aggressive militia or swanky nobles

TACTICS
Give your orders, but mind the muddy patches – they'll get your totally on-trend sandals dirty

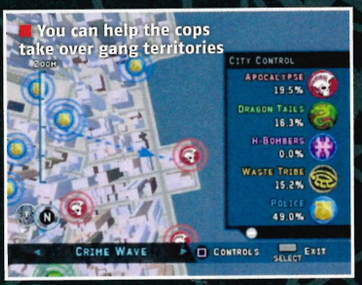


LET BATTLE COMMENCE!
The hard work is all done. Time to sit back and watch your tiny Romans crush the opposition

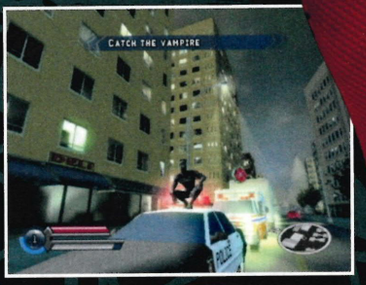
Larger enemies require a more personal touch


An improved swinging mechanism makes getting around the city a joy

The city's huge but is evidently made of Lego

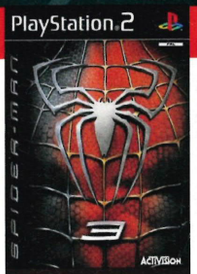


You can help the cops take over gang territories



SPIDER-MAN 3

Even with his new suit, Spidey's looking unfashionable on PS2



DETAILS

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER VICARIOUS VISIONS
PRICE £39.99
PLAYERS 1
OUT NOW
WEBSITE SM3THEGAME.COM
60HZ MODE NO
WIDESCREEN NO
SURROUND SOUND NO
ONLINE NO

AT A GLANCE
Spider-Man swings in for his third film tie-in to find little's changed since the last one

Hey tricked us! In a shocking first for PS2, *Spider-Man 3* publisher Activision has cheekily tried to gloss over the existence of this game until the last possible minute. "Wait," you may say. "No they haven't – I've seen loads of *Spider-Man 3* already!"

Ah, dear reader, you may well think you have. But what you read about were the next-gen versions, and *Spider-Man 3* on PS2 is an entirely different, and sadly lesser, game experience: fewer Marvel villains, less variety, a less realistic New York and significantly fewer hours of play time.

It's not a total let-down, mind. Just as in *Spider-Man 2*, swinging through a massively realised New York City remains the highlight of *Spider-Man 3*. It simply has to be experienced to be believed.

And, thanks to a series of improvements since *Spider-Man 2*, it's now a highly intuitive system that, given some practice, will see you zipping between buildings with lightning accuracy. There's also nothing like the sensation you get from taking a giant leap off the top of a skyscraper and webbing yourself to safety from two feet above the street.

WHAT YOU SAW WERE NEXT-GEN VERSIONS AND SPIDER-MAN 3 ON PS2 IS A SADLY LESSER EXPERIENCE

WEB SIGHTS

While travelling through NYC, you'll pick up radio chatter for various emergencies happening around the city, to which you can respond to with a quick tap of △. Unlike the PS3 version, there's no penalty if you don't.

From delivering sweet pies (really) to finding lost children, the missions illustrate well the more mundane aspects of superherodom, but this kind of tedious catch-and-fetch doesn't make for engaging gameplay.

Between these randomly-spawning city missions and the gang-busting missions you can initiate by tracking down stool pigeons, it would seem New York City is suffering from an epidemic of men locked in dumpsters. During our playthrough, we – no joke of a lie – must have released around 30 of them.

Yes, the bugbear of mindless mission repetition is here, artificially inflating the playtime beyond the pitiful four-and-a-half hours it takes to complete the main story.

The story itself? Well, if you're a Spider-Man geek the inexplicable blending of film and comic canon will drive you mad. But even if you're unfamiliar with the comic lore, you'll still find the lack of story disappointing when Sam Raimi's film adaptations, and the comics themselves, are so adept at exploring the motivation behind Peter Parker and his super-powered enemies.

Apart from characters central to the film's plot, villains enter and exit the game's story with little explanation, merely queuing up for their allotted beating before fading back into the shadows again.

Combat itself has been improved since *Spider-Man 2*. After spending some Hero Points

CHIN OF THE SWINGERS

Campbell camps it up

One of *Spider-Man 3*'s best features is narration by B-movie actor extraordinaire Bruce Campbell, who has cameoed in all three films (and was also in *Evil Dead*, above). Best game quote: "This upgrade gives you more power when you mount an enemy. And there's nothing else I can say here that won't get me in trouble." Ho ho!

■ Using the black suit for too long kicks off a mini-game

to unlock a few moves, it's almost fun. Well, it would be, were the enemies and the tactics you employ to dispatch them not so repetitive.

Lizard-spawn, cybernetic soldiers, even bosses – all can be taken down with some liberal use of ⊗. Annoyingly, the camera remains zoomed out during these encounters. It's ideal for when you want to take in the (admittedly bland) sights of New York, but not exactly conducive to coherent brawling.

BACK IN BLACK

Switching into the much-hyped black suit raises Spidey's pounding-power substantially – to the extent that it renders the game rather easy.

Beat on enemies for too long, however, and the black suit will start to exert control over Peter Parker's mind, the screen will darken, and you'll pass out, failing your mission. This can be avoided by playing a little button-mashing mini-game, with Spider-Man reverting back to his traditional red and blue jammies.

It's a nice touch, but overall, if you've been ogling the next-gen games, *Spider-Man 3* PS2 will leave you feeling mugged. ■ **Mike Sterry**

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL MAGAZINE UK	VERDICT
Graphics	07 NYC is huge, but dull
Sound	05 Bring us the head of Tobey Maguire
Gameplay	06 Swinging's brilliant, the rest is repetitive
Lifespan	04 Main story: four and half hours

Despite a huge city and a great swinging mechanic with which to get through it, Spider-Man 3 is repetitive and disappointing

5/10

MENACES TO SOCIETY

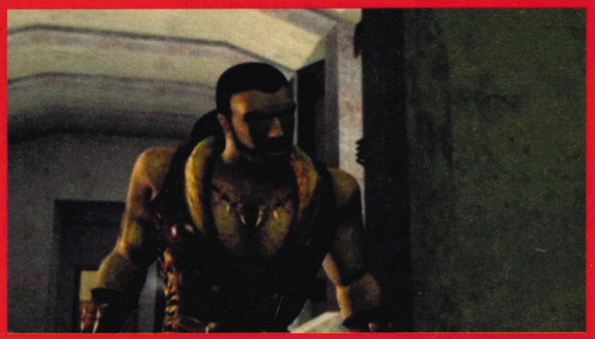
Four game-exclusive baddies who aren't featured in the film

MORBIUS

Geek Fact: In the Marvel comics, Morbius was a member of the Order of the Midnight Sons alongside Ghost Rider and Blade.

SHRIEK

Geek Fact: Shriek's last videogame appearance was on *Spider-Man and Venom: Maximum Carnage* for the SNES, all the way back in 1994. She hasn't aged a bit.

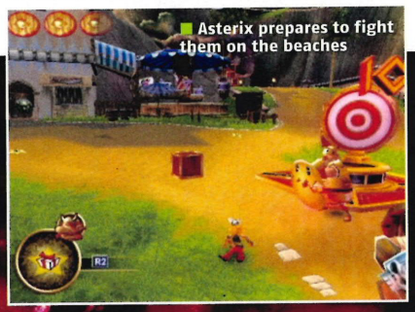


KRAVEN THE HUNTER

Geek Fact: The Kraven depicted in *Spider-Man 3* has been 'dead' in the comic books since 1987.

THE LIZARD

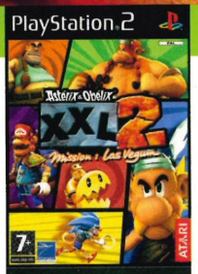
Geek Fact: The Lizard's alter ego, Dr Curt Connors, appears in both the *Spider-Man 2* and *3* films – but with little indication that he would ever become The Lizard.


Asterix prepares to fight them on the beaches

The look, if little else, is true to the original comics' style

ASTERIX & OBELIX XXL2: MISSION LAS VEGUM

The Gauls are back in town



DETAILS

PUBLISHER ATARI
DEVELOPER ESTANGES LIBELLULES
PRICE £29.99
PLAYERS 1
OUT NOW
WEBSITE WWW.ASTERIX.COM
60HZ MODE NO
WIDESCREEN NO
SURROUND SOUND YES
ONLINE NO

AT A GLANCE
Solve puzzles, bash Romans and rescue Druids in a platform and combat game featuring everyone's favourite pair of Gauls

The Roman occupation of Gaul doesn't sound like the kind of thing that's ideally suited to producing a riotous knockabout PS2 game. But filter it through the minds of the 20th century's greatest Frenchmen, René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo, and you have the classic comic characters Asterix and Obelix.

Their tireless campaign to put one over on poor old Caesar so they can kick back and enjoy the good life with a roasted boar and a noggin of magic potion is still entertaining kids and grown-ups as much as it did in 1961 when the first book was published.

The story for this game is simple. Browbeaten Caesar, in his neverending quest to overcome the indomitable Gauls, has kidnapped the world's leading Druids from the International Druid Festival in Carnutes Forest. In the process, he's framed Asterix and Obelix's friend Getafix to shoulder the blame.

Like all good megalomaniacs, Caesar has imprisoned the Druids in the various locales of his custom-built theme park, Las Vegum. It's like Las Vegas but obviously without the strippers, pimps, mafia and other less salubrious aspects (this is family entertainment after all).

GAUL BUSTERS

Despite all the evidence pointing to Getafix 'going Roman', Chief Vitalstatistix is having none of it and sends the lads off to Las Vegum to retrieve the Druids. It's then up to you to lead the two-thirds Gaul, one-third dog triumvirate through the standard platform, puzzle-solving and fighting levels we've become accustomed to in games of this type.

THERE WILL BE A SIZEABLE AUDIENCE WHO'LL EXPECT THIS GAME TO BE A NOSTALGIA TRIP; THEY'LL BE MIFFED

You control one Gaul at a time with the other following, and although you don't directly control Obelix's canine life partner, Dogmatix, you can send him off to gnaw on some Legionaries or tell him be on alert for any clues lying about the place.

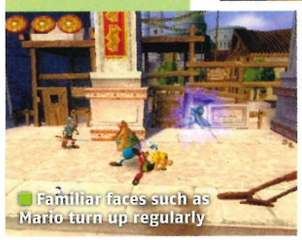
The combat moves are simple enough with various combos and special moves at your disposal, along with bonus moves that are awarded when you dish the right kind of punishment to a specific Roman.

The tasks and difficulty have been suitably pitched for the younger audience at whom the game is chiefly aimed.

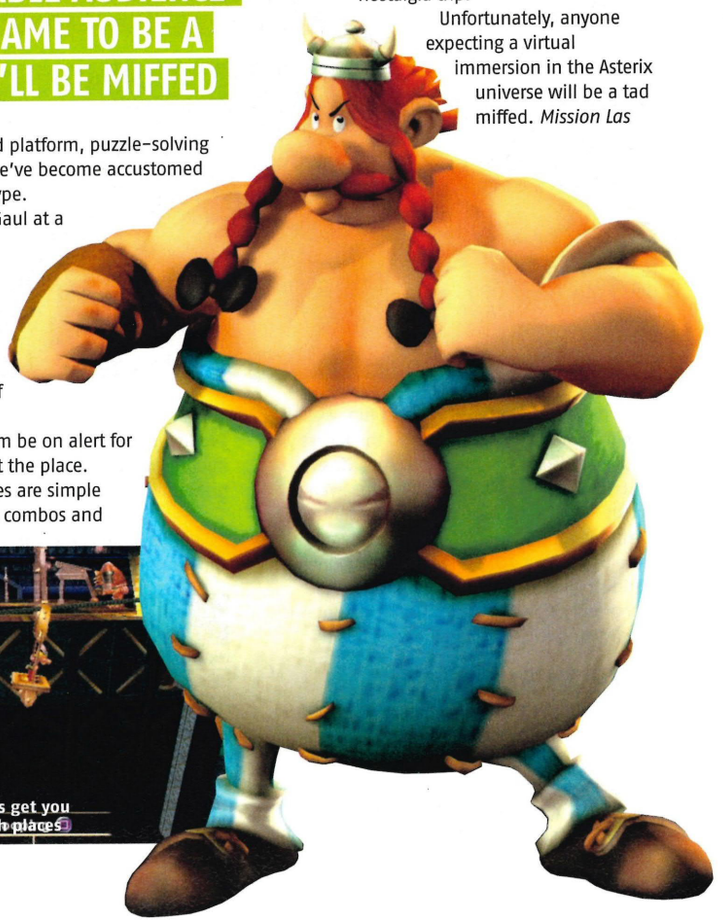
However, the Asterix books have a rich vein of humour and personality running through them that still appeal to readers as they get older (mainly due to their 10-year-old selves not quite getting some of the jokes the first time around). Therefore there will be a sizeable audience who'll expect this game to be a witty nostalgia trip.

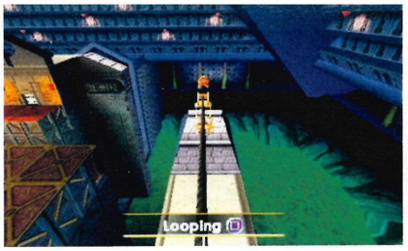
Unfortunately, anyone expecting a virtual immersion in the Asterix universe will be a tad miffed. *Mission Las*

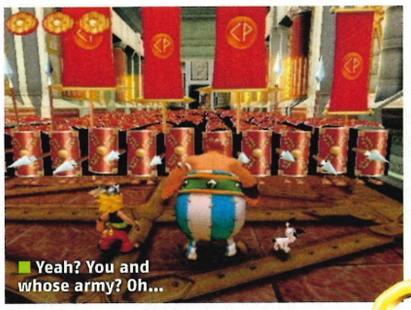
Shields askew means Roman arse has been suitably kicked


Familiar faces such as Mario turn up regularly

Ropes and pulleys get you up to hard-to-reach places






Yeah? You and whose army? Oh...

Vegum feels more like a generic platform and combat game with Asterix and Obelix plonked in the centre.

The inclusion of familiar peripheral characters from the comic books would have made it something special for adults. But the programmers have inserted contemporary cultural references and caricatures of characters from classic videogames instead of Geriatrix, Unhygenix and the rest.

Mission: Las Vegum isn't a bad game per se. There's certainly a lot to like about it. The rendering and animation of the titular characters is superb, and there are some nice touches and nods to its 2D inspiration. Long-time fans will instantly recognise the way Legionaries fly out of their sandals when being dispatched by our dynamic duo, for example.

But anyone north of their pre-teen years will be disappointed by the failure to truly channel the spirit of the mighty twosome. **Joe Barnes**

The game's set in Caesar's theme park

PlayStation 2 Official Magazine UK	VERDICT	
Graphics	08	Eye-poppingly good: best bit of the game
Sound	06	Good effects, but dodgy accents
Gameplay	06	Fun, but the fighting can get tedious
Lifespan	06	Large levels, but lacks variety overall

A missed opportunity. As Asterix fans, we really wanted to like this game, but it's one that's best left to the young 'uns

6/10

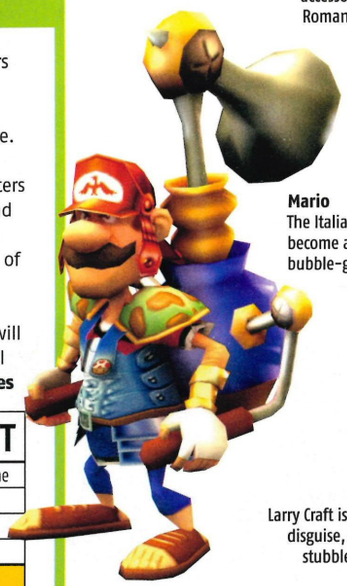
NOTICE ANYONE FAMILIAR?

Ever fancied knocking seven bells out of Mario and Sonic? Now you can. Well, sort of. Caesar has enlisted a variety of gaming legends to aid him in his evil quest, and given them a Roman twist

Sam Fisher
Splinter Cell's hero puts in an appearance as ex-Roman spy Sam Schieffer

Sonic
A super-speedy Legionary – are those Olympic rings?

Pac-Man
The yellow peril becomes a vicious accessory for the Romans' shields



Mario
The Italian plumber become an Italian bubble-gunner

Lara Croft
Larry Craft is a Centurion in disguise, complete with stubble and hotpants

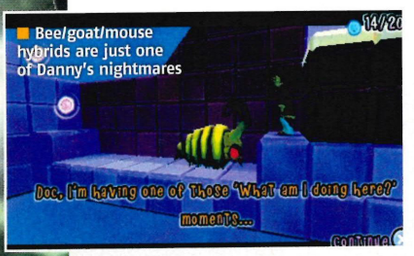
KING OF THE SWINGERS

They might only have their bare hands to attack the fully tooled-up Romans, but Asterix and Obelix also have a rather nifty line in using soldiers as weapons and impromptu door keys

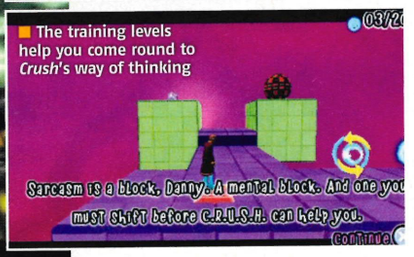
FIRST
Stun your Roman. Then, gripping him thusly, give him an almighty good swing

SECOND
Take out as many of his mates as you can using the unfortunate fellow's head

THIRD
Release at the apogee of your swing at the appropriate target. Throw enough, and nearby doors magically open



Bee/goat/mouse hybrids are just one of Danny's nightmares

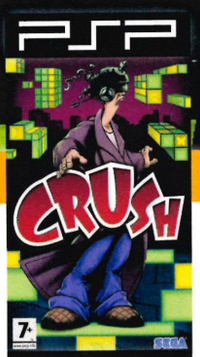


The training levels help you come round to *Crush*'s way of thinking

bronze
PlayStation 2 official magazine-UK

CRUSH

A tricky, trippy puzzler that'll keep you up all night



DETAILS

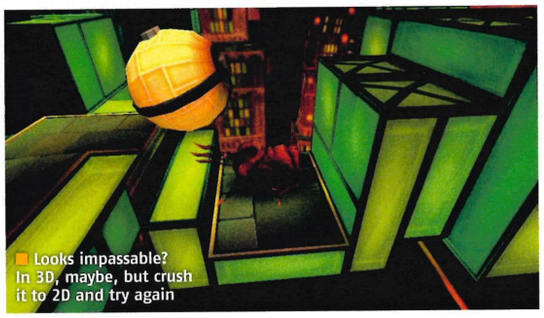
PUBLISHER SEGA
DEVELOPER KUJU ENTERTAINMENT
PRICE £29.99
OUT NOW
WIFI MULTIPLAYER NO
CUSTOM SOUNDTRACKS NO
GAMESHARING NO

AT A GLANCE

The PSP continues its reign as the premiere portable for puzzlers with another mind-melting title

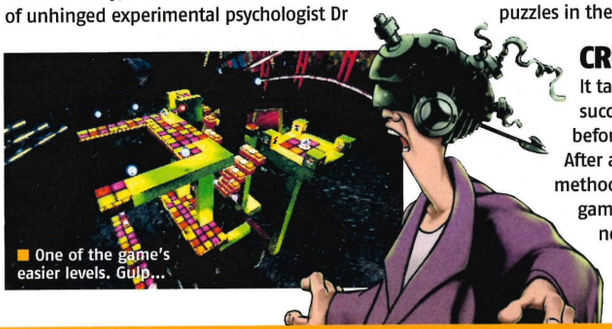
Can you imagine trying to explain an MC Escher print to a person who's never seen one? The infinite staircases in a maddening lithographic feedback loop, the brain-tweaking impossible objects. Well, trying to explain puzzle game *Crush* to someone who hasn't played it is a bit like that.

However, they say a picture speaks 1000 words (and in the case of Escher, we'd imagine they're mostly 'like, wow, man') so rather than describe the scope of *Crush*'s multidimensional puzzle mania, we've decided to go a bit more visual (see 'Three-Dementia', below).


Looks impassable? In 3D, maybe, but crush it to 2D and try again

VIRTUAL INSANITY

The craziness begins with the game's plot. You control Danny, a troubled insomniac in the care of unhinged experimental psychologist Dr Reubens. Rather than simply brew up some valerian tea, the doc hooks Danny up to CRUSH, a virtual reality AI that turns his turgid unconscious into a series of fiendishly difficult puzzles in the hope of curing him.


One of the game's easier levels. Gulp...

CRUSH HOURS

It takes a few accidental successes in the early levels before you start to 'get' *Crush*. After all, we're familiar with the methodology of 2D and 3D gaming – it's just that we're not used to playing both concurrently. Once your synapses are attuned, it doesn't get any easier – you're simply more aware of the challenge, rather than bumbling into solutions. But that's no bad thing, because *Crush* is one of the most brain-taxing and innovative puzzlers around. ■ **Mike Sterry**

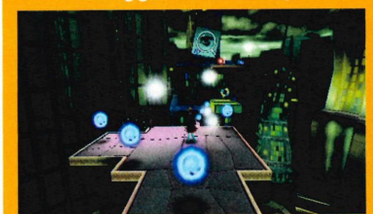
PlayStation 2 official magazine-UK		VERDICT
Graphics	08	Huge levels, disorienting backgrounds
Sound	08	Good voicework and excellent music
Gameplay	08	Unique, taxing and rewarding
Lifespan	07	Lots of levels and hidden content

Don't let the game's presentation scare you. If ever there was a game that screams cult classic puzzler, it's this one

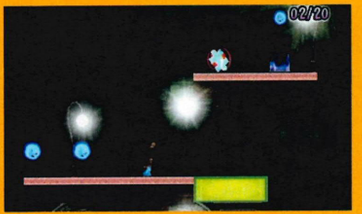
8/10

THREE-DEMENTIA

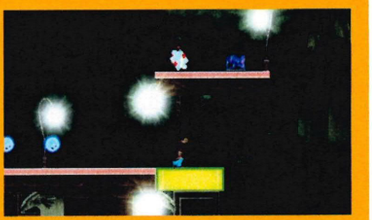
Those crushing game mechanics explained


1 That green platform is awfully far away. But Danny needs to reach it. How can he get there?

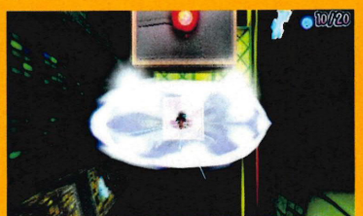
2 Why, he claps his hands and makes the world go into 2D, of course!



3 In this view, it's easy to get to the platform, simply by walking


4 Once on the platform, Danny can uncrush the world again into 3D

5 Now, how is he going to reach that platform above his head?

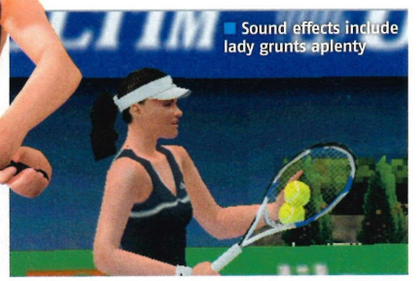


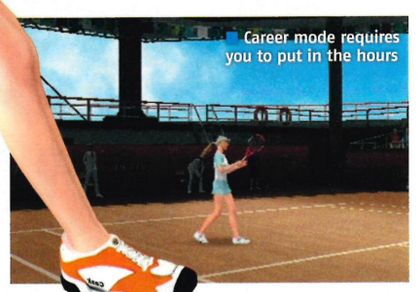
6 Crushing from top-down does away with the concept of height. Huzzah!

7 Look! Now everything's in 2D, we can reach the exit and finish the level

8 Think that was all pretty easy? Well, that was the first level. Try level 38...

The courts look great, the players move convincingly


Sound effects include lady grunts aplenty


Career mode requires you to put in the hours

PlayStation 2

SMASH COURT TENNIS 3

Can Namco serve up a genuine rival to *Virtua Tennis*?

DETAILS

PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI
DEVELOPER NAMCO BANDAI
PRICE £29.99
OUT NOW
WIFI MULTIPLAYER YES
CUSTOM SOUNDTRACKS YES
GAME SHARING YES

AT A GLANCE
The once-playful, now serious tennis title three-quels its way to PSP with official players and tough gameplay

Back in the dim and distant past, *Smash Tennis* was almost the *anti*-tennis game: big-headed, doe-eyed players; courts perched on cliff edges or beachfronts and eye-searing special moves that helped to complement a frantic multiplayer mode.

But things have changed, and for the series' first outing on PSP, it's impossible to imagine a tennis game being more realistic than what's on offer in *Smash Court 3*.

Sega's recent *Virtua Tennis 3* offered up real players, real courts and true-to-life shots, but tweaked just enough to allow for huge rallies, glorious cross-court shots and death-defying leaps across the grass to return the unreturnable.

Smash Court, you come to realise within minutes of beginning to play, isn't like that.

HARD COURT

Returning is hard; at least, it's hard to zing diagonals from one corner to the other. Rallies are long but low on excess. And the Career mode is so super-serious that in order to gain the kind of experience you need to get on, you spend hours aiming shots at a pile of sand.

The piles of sand thing is obviously designed to help you improve accuracy, but it's a measure of what to expect from *Smash Court 3*.

Deep? Definitely. Lifelike? The players, for one, look and move amazingly, putting *Virtua*'s army of disturb-o-freaks to shame. A little bit boring? Er, unfortunately, yes to that, too.

It's not that *Smash Court* doesn't play a good game, or that it hasn't got everything in place to deliver. It's more that on a PSP, designed for short, sharp bursts of fun, this feels too drudgingly realistic. In fact, it can be a dreary experience, at times, painful and repetitive – especially to begin with, where rallies involve you and your opponent standing pretty much in the same places because you haven't gained the necessary skill set to mix up your play.

Of course, with practice and experience points – gained through the game's RPG-esque Career mode – matches gradually become more dynamic, but before that you'll just have to put in the hours.

So, *Virtua* is definitely more fun. But *Smash Court* does have a lighter side in its minigames, which are thoroughly bizarre.

BALL RIGHT NOW

They are mostly themed on Namco's classic back catalogue. Pac-Man, Galaga Tennis and Bomb Tennis (see 'Yellow Fever') are a welcome relief from the studious, all-consuming nature of the main game.

They're entirely throwaway, of course, but they're more reminiscent of the values on which the *Smash* series was first built – values to which Namco should give some thought for next time round. Although *Smash Court 3* has all the intelligence of Pete Sampras and the depth of shots to go with it, on balance we'd rather have *Virtua*'s John McEnroe. **Tim Weaver**

You learn new styles of play as you progress

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL MAGAZINE UK **VERDICT**

Graphics	08	Looks the part from beginning to end
Sound	07	Solid crowd effects and player grunts too
Gameplay	07	Great if you have the patience
Lifespan	07	Very comprehensive but can get dull

A deep, rewarding tennis game that lacks the fireworks of* Virtua Tennis *and also some of its fun. You will like it... eventually

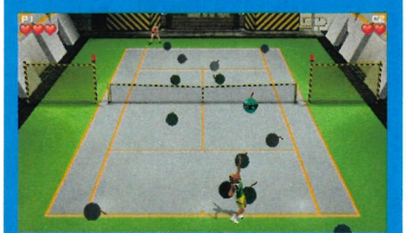
7/10

YELLOW FEVER

Although the game does have some 'unusual' courts – skyscraper, tropical beach, castle – the simulation-style tennis carries on regardless. So it's left to the three minigames in *Smash Court* to offer something a bit different...

PAC-MAN!
Whack Pac-Man back and forth and every time your Pac-ball hits one of his trademark yellow dots, they clock up points for you. The idea? Clear all the dots.

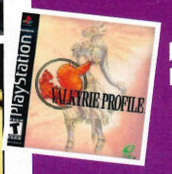
GALAGA!
Classic space shooter reworked with astro-rackets. Hit the aliens dotted around the court but steer clear of the green light or you'll be beamed aboard the mothership.



BOMB!
Weirdly, this is probably the best minigame of the lot, despite not being based on a retro classic. Win points and extra bombs land on your opponent's court.

Train a troupe of warrior souls to aid in your final battle

VALKYRIE PROFILE: LENNETH BY NUMBERS



1999 When the PS1 game was originally released in Japan

£150 The price that shrink-wrapped copies of the original game were recently selling for on eBay

0 Number of gameplay changes between the PS1 and PSP versions (it's a translation of the Japanese rather than the US version)

8 Number of 'chapters' to play through

192 Number of 'turns' you have in which to gather your heroes before the end of the world

25 Number of characters (including 'hidden' characters) at your disposal

36 Number of hours you'll put in to complete the main game

3 Different endings to the game

VALKYRIE PROFILE: LENNETH

bronze
PlayStation 2 official magazine-uk

DETAILS

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER TRI-ACE
PRICE £29.99
OUT NOW
WIFI MULTIPLAYER NO
CUSTOM SOUNDTRACKS NO
GAMESHARING NO

AT A GLANCE

Round up the souls of deceased heroes as a Valkyrie goddess and train them to fight in the battle of Armageddon

Re-release of RPG classic shows the young 'uns how it's done

Roleplaying games are like Adam Sandler films. Even though you enjoy them, you get to the end wishing that something different had happened – that what you'd just sat through had been something you hadn't seen 100 times before.

But that's a forlorn hope. Sandler almost invariably plays a borderline autistic but lovable rogue; RPGs almost invariably star an orphan from a small village who develops from meek farmhand to savior of the world.

Happily, *Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth* breaks the mould. Sure, the original version is seven years old now, but don't let its age put you off: before this PSP re-launch was announced, fevered fans would have swapped their souls for a copy of this previously rare title.

It's not hard to see why. You are placed in the role of the goddess Lenneth, who has been put in charge of collecting the souls of fallen warriors and re-training them for an apocalyptic battle in Valhalla. It's way more rewarding than trudging through those countless 'coming of age' moments in average RPGs.

Combat is partly real-time and partly turn-based

Having the right trinkets on your team is key to survival

UNDEATHWISH

Harvesting these undead heroes forms the majority of the game. After a short narrative about the circumstances of their death, Lenneth must toughen up her recently demised recruits and send them 'upstairs' to join the gods.

Negotiating 2D platform maps (hence the 'Profile' in the title) is a refreshing element to the genre, but it's the combat that really shows how the game has stood the test of time.

It's part turn-based, part real-time, and nailing a combo not only for each character but also one that incorporates all four of your chosen team is satisfying for you and devastating for your opponents in equal measure.

IT'S TRAINING MEN

The one frustrating thing is having to dispatch your heroes to Valhalla. You spend hours levelling up characters, only to have to send them away once they're capable and start on the next group of wet-behind-the-ears newbies.

Even so, *Lenneth* serves up varied, innovative, engaging gameplay that makes us wonder why we've put up with so many other games giving us tired nonsense in the past seven years. ■ **Shaun Curnow**

PlayStation 2 official magazine-uk

Graphics	07	Re-done since PS1, plus full-motion video
Sound	07	A tad repetitive but the voiceovers are good
Gameplay	09	As good today as seven years ago
Lifespan	08	Extra level at the end adds longevity

Proof that age cannot dampen a well-made game. Even seven years after the original it looks and plays like few other RPGs

8/10

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PSP

PlayStation Portable

THE OFFICIAL GUIDEBOOK

[EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW]

Pursuit Force 2

Sony's road warriors return!

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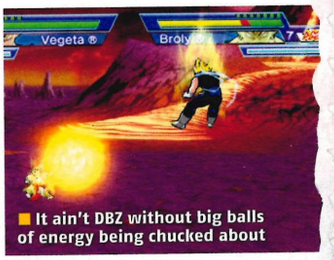
Lots of familiar DBZ faces show up



It ain't DBZ without big balls of energy being chucked about

DRAGONBALL Z: SHIN BUDOKAI 2

Flash! Bang! Wallop!

DETAILS

PUBLISHER ATARI
DEVELOPER DIMPS
PRICE £34.99
OUT NOW
WIFI MULTIPLAYER YES
CUSTOM SOUNDTRACKS NO
GAMESHARING NO

In another future, Goku suffered and died of a heart condition, and Earth's strongest defenders fell at the hands of the androids.' Confused? If so, you're not a *Dragonball Z* fan – an essential qualification if you're going to understand anything in this game.

It's set in the future (although there is time travelling to the past) and the main baddie is Buu, whose minions go around destroying cities.

The story splits into numerous different paths depending on whether or not you succeed in a mission. This opens up more exciting battles, but won't shed any light on what's going on. No matter, though, because following the plotline is not essential to enjoying the game.

The Story mode is split into three sections: story, field map and fights. After sitting through some static cut scenes that boringly tell you about the action rather than show you, you're transported to Earth.

There, you float around saving cities (which all look like tiny identical buildings lumped together) and ram into enemies to engage in battle. And that's where the real fun kicks in.

GREAT BALLZ OF FIRE

Characters can be hurled in all manner of directions and since the *DBZ* cast are a supernatural lot, much of the action happens while you're hovering far above the ground.

There are plenty of beautifully animated attacks to carry out, but the lack of a tutorial means that unless you read the instruction manual, you won't have a clue what to push.

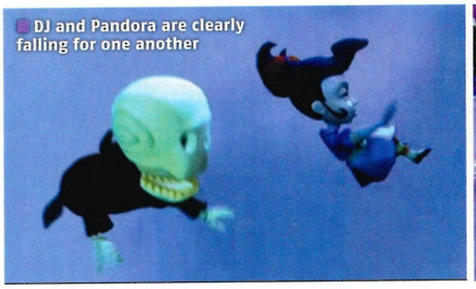
That doesn't matter much, because button bashing guarantees you 95% of victories. But the inclusion of a standard Arcade mode and Z Trials (battles with conditions to win) means you can mash your PSP's controls until your thumbs fall off. ■ **Kim Richards**

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL magazine UK VERDICT

Graphics	08	Slick animation, bright colours
Sound	06	Standard Ballz voicework, annoying music
Gameplay	07	Enjoyable battles with easy controls
Lifespan	07	Multiple story paths and arcade levels

An enjoyable beat-'em-up despite the ADHD storyline. The smooth, ninja-tastic fighting is fun and there's plenty of stuff to do

7/10


DJ and Pandora are clearly falling for one another

Out of ammo, DJ remembers his giant scythe

DEATH JR 2: ROOT OF EVIL

Death's son is little fun, no bones about it

DETAILS

PUBLISHER KONAMI
DEVELOPER BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT
PRICE £29.99
OUT NOW
WIFI MULTIPLAYER YES
CUSTOM SOUNDTRACKS NO
GAMESHARING NO

When the original *Death Jr* was released around the dawn of the PSP, it didn't turn out to be the killer-app many had anticipated.

It had all the potential to be a portable *Psychonauts*; a twisted, laugh-out-loud romp starring the son of the Grim Reaper that was at its core a solid and innovative platformer.

Well, as history tells us, that didn't happen. Instead, it turned out to be a generic platformer beset by control issues and noticeably devoid of the dark humour its Tim Burton-inspired subject matter promised.

Sadly, *Death Jr 2: Root of Evil* does little to rectify the previous game's mediocre reputation.

There's a paper-thin plot involving the kidnapping of Death Sr by a female, not-so-jolly green giant, and a smattering of sub-Saturday morning cartoon humour, stitched together by a series of incoherent cutscenes. But little seems to have been done to improve the core gameplay.

GRIM PICKINGS

The most obvious addition is the option to play as Death Jr's girlfriend, pallid obsessive-compulsive Pandora. Her existence allows for a new wireless co-op mode, but other than that, picking her is merely a cosmetic decision.

And, with no gamesharing option, to play in co-op mode you and your Pandora are going to have to fork out for a second copy.

The control scheme is just as fiddly as ever, something that is no longer acceptable in the era of *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*.

There's an automatic lock-on system, which is new to *Death Jr 2* and represents a huge step forward from the previous game's punishing manual lock-on. Of course, nothing in *Death Jr* is easy, so you still have to flick on 'strafe mode' manually when you whip out one of the game's many weapons.

It's a minor irritation – a phrase that sums up the *Root of Evil* experience. ■ **Mike Sterry**

PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL magazine UK VERDICT

Graphics	07	Great art style, bitty in practice
Sound	07	Suitably spooky-kooky sounds and music
Gameplay	06	Solid enough but often frustrating
Lifespan	06	Seven hours plus co-op if you care

A Ratchet & Clank-style platformer based around the son of Death is a great idea. Unfortunately it's been largely squandered here

6/10

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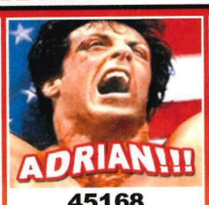

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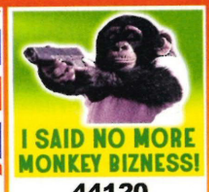

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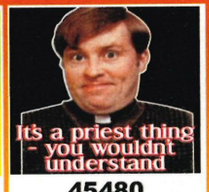

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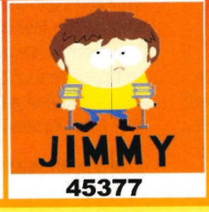

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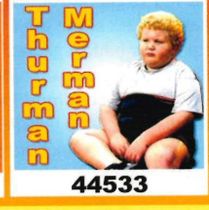

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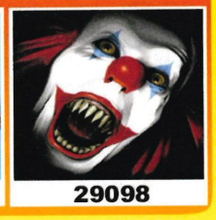

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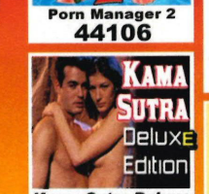

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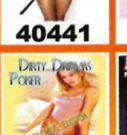

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CH£APIN' IT REAL

Join us in the bargain bin as we explore the weird and wonderful world of budget games

Go on, admit it. You've got one or two hiding away at the back of the shelf. Your little secret. Your budget games. We've all got some. The ones you hide behind your copy of *Resident Evil* or *Grand Theft Auto* when your mates come round to play *PES*...

Maybe they were a present from your gran who knows you like wrestling and didn't see why she should fork out for the latest version of *SmackDown! Vs Raw* when she could get *WWC – World Wrestling Championship* for £7.99 instead. Well, it's still burly men grappling, isn't it?

Or perhaps you saw *Crabby's Kingdom*, *Splatter Master* and *Animal Soccer World* in the bargain bin, three for 15 quid, and it was such a good offer you bought them on the chance that you might get a few hours of fun out of them?

Or maybe when you were a kid you really, really liked diggers so when you saw a copy of *Battle Construction Vehicles* in the supermarket, you bought it and now it's a nostalgic joy?

Whatever the reason, plenty of people buy budget games. And since they invariably involve considerably less investment to make than upmarket games, it's a profitable sector despite the low cover prices (typically between £4.99 and £14.99, in comparison to £29.99 or more for a brand new upmarket game such as *God of War II* or *Final Fantasy XII*).

Sean from Blast!: doing it for the kids

CHEAP AND CHEERFUL

It's so profitable, in fact, that while some publishers such as 505 Games produce budget titles alongside their regular output, others such as Dutch company Phoenix Games avoid the upper end of the market entirely and specialise in filling supermarket shelves with the cheap and cheerful.

Blast! Entertainment is one such firm. It specialises in publishing kids' games that sell for £9.99 or less. It would be easy to assume that because they are what the company prefers to call 'value', they're bound to be chod.

But in fact Blast! has negotiated a swathe of high-profile licences including Xena Warrior Princess, Home Alone, Alpha Teens on Machines, Bob the Builder and Charlotte's Web. We asked chief executive officer Sean Brennan how they do it.

OPS2 On average, how much does it cost to make a Blast! game?

SEAN "Usually below £250,000. The beauty is that by keeping the development costs down we can continue to retail recognisable, branded games aimed at kids and families for £9.99.

"Blast! games aren't huge, multiplatform, cinematic experiences, they're simple games made to appeal to young children, with problem solving, spelling, hand/eye coordination skills or simply addictive, tried-and-tested formulas."

OPS2 Who buys them?

SEAN "Apart from *Little Britain: The Video Game*, which we released with our parent company Mastertronic, the core audience for Blast! games is aged four to eight years old, male and female.

"We target the younger audience with an excellent value range, all with high-profile, instantly recognisable brands that parents are comfortable with.

"For example, our first EyeToy titles, *Bob the Builder* and *Thomas the Tank Engine*, will both be available bundled with the hardware and as standalone titles."

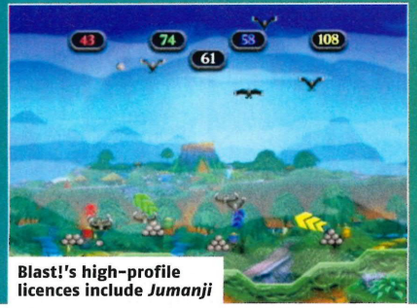
OPS2 *Little Britain: The Video Game*, which had a relatively low RRP of £29.99, was a chart success and outsold many AAA games, despite getting bad reviews in magazines (OPS2#83). Why do you think that was?

SEAN "It's a popular licence for certain people. 'Clever' journalists liked *Little Britain* the TV series, until it became too popular or too repetitive. And the game appealed to the casual gamer who likes the series – the same target market who bought the *Little Britain Live* DVD or the interactive DVD game.

"The game reflected the core values of the series well and included script input and voices from Matt Lucas and David Walliams with narration from Tom Baker. Anything from the *Little Britain* camp will be bought by fans and the younger audience especially liked this game.

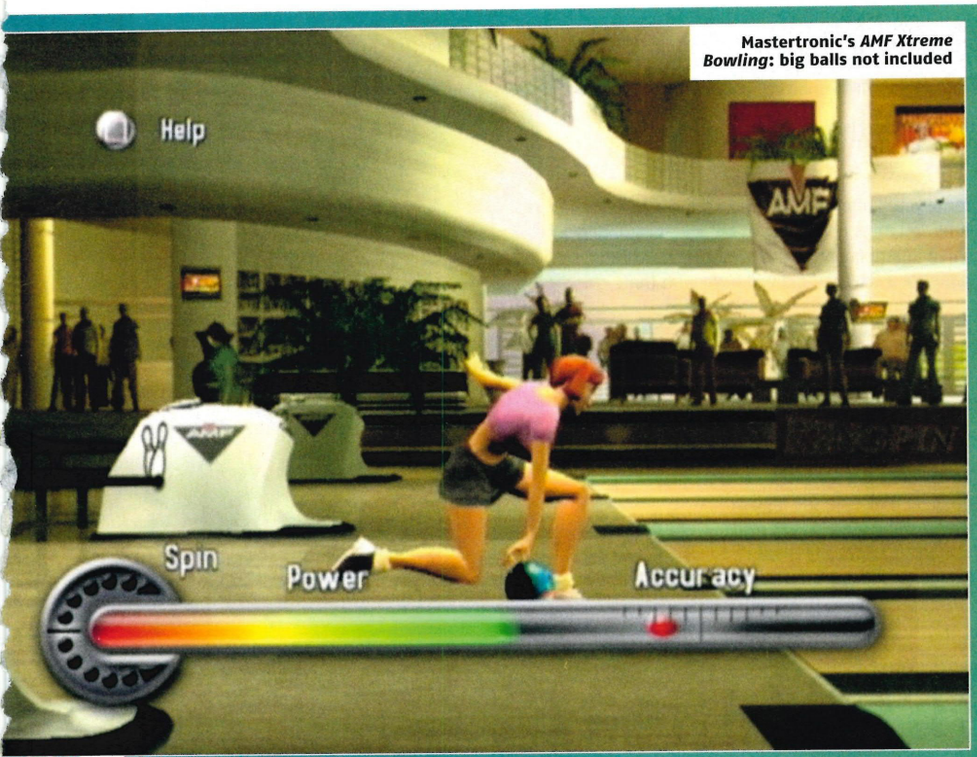
"Serious gamers would never want to play it and it was always destined for bad reviews in the specialist press, but now games are truly

505's *Paparazzi* is a photography sim

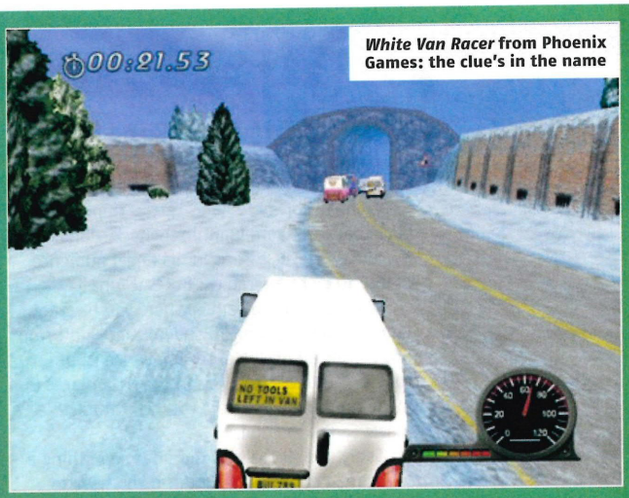


Blast!'s high-profile licences include *Jumanji*

Roll-playing in Phoenix's *Habitrail Hamster Ball*



Mastertronic's *AMF Xtreme Bowling*: big balls not included



White Van Racer from Phoenix Games: the clue's in the name

Table tennis with a dominatrix? You can in 505's *Pink Pong*!

See girls grapple in 505's *Fighting Angels*

Street Boyz cause mischief courtesy of 505 Games

mass market this title goes to show that people who buy games aren't necessarily 'gamers'.

"*Little Britain* received 10/10 in *The Beano* when reviewed by readers but was slated in the specialist gaming press, which really isn't a surprise. But the fact is that in this day and age there is a place for casual games that will appeal to fans and games don't all have to be

GAMES DON'T ALL HAVE TO BE ENORMOUS, IMMERSIVE AND TECHNICALLY BRILLIANT

enormous, immersive, technically brilliant and aimed at serious gamers only... it's the equivalent of comparing sales of Jimi Hendrix to Steps! There's something to suit everyone."

OPS2 Does it upset yourself and your teams when reviewers pull your games apart?

SEAN "We have never had a bad review from our target market; the kids' press love the Blast! games. A lot of those magazines use readers to review games and they've always given Blast! titles glowing reviews and high scores.

"I very much doubt that any of the specialist readers would be interested in reading a review about learning to spell or problem-solve in *Charlotte's Web* and obviously games aimed at children wouldn't stand up when reviewed next to something like *Lost Planet*. I'd also be very surprised if any specialist press readers were pre-school or pre-junior school age.

"I am never upset about predictable situations, I am more upset that I didn't put a bet on at Ladbrokes about the bad reviews for *Little Britain* in the specialist press.

"Our games are not hardcore. Our research shows what younger kids want from a game and we provide them with that. We don't write games for 18 to 25-year-olds so can never satisfy certain magazine reviewers who only favour the style of games they particularly like."

OPS2 Is there any genre or type of game that doesn't lend itself to the budget treatment?

SEAN "Doing an RPG or a massively multiplayer title would be difficult as a budget game."

OPS2 Do you think you'll make games for PSP and PS3?

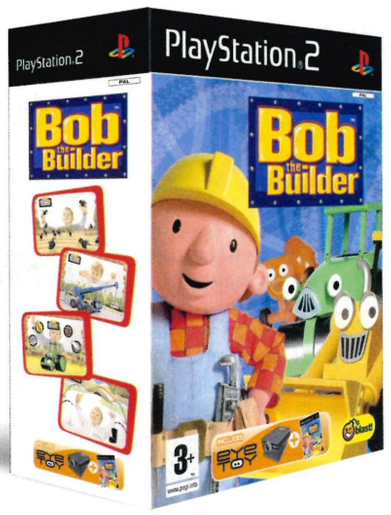
SEAN "The PS3 will be bought by serious gamers and older consumers in the first two years of its life so that stands outside our core demographic."

OPS2 Which game (released or in development) are you the proudest of?

SEAN "*Bob the Builder* for the Eye Toy is one of our next releases which is pretty good, if you're a young kid that is, and like the character! Not if you're a mature journalist who doesn't identify with anything he can't shag, drink, kill or kick.

"I'm also proud that, because we are a European company, all our titles are translated into 13 languages to completely cater for all of the PAL territories."

Well, we've torn ourselves away from shagging, drinking, killing and kicking (has he been spying on our office?!) to try out a random selection of budget games that we found in the bargain bin at our local games-and-DVD emporium. Turn the page to find out what we thought of them...



Blast! is about to launch a couple of EyeToy titles including *Bob the Builder*

PlayStation 2

BABE

PUBLISHER Blast!
PRICE £9.99

THE PITCH: 'Help Babe herd the sheep to the goal – but make sure they don't get trapped!'

Problem solving? Check. Lateral thinking? Check. Forward planning? Check. *Babe* has a lot of useful lessons for its target audience of four to eight-year-olds. But is it fun?

It's one of those games where you have to guide something (here, a sheep) that won't stop until it hits an obstacle. The challenge is, of course, to put obstructions in the right places to make the sheep go where you want through a maze. So far, so good.

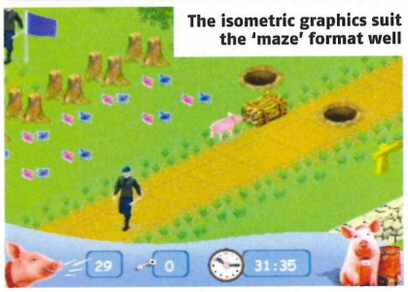
Sadly, it's all too easy to nudge something a touch too far and get it stuck, so you have to restart. That's typical of this type of maze game, but it's a real issue here because although there are plenty of checkpoints, they each only fire off once, and if you're scouting ahead to find a route you'll often set off two or three – so every time you mess up from then on, you must replay three-quarters of the level. Imagine how little patience a six-year-old will have with that.

SWINE TASTING

The game ties in well with the films by basing its 50 levels (same idea, different settings) around key plot points and the graphics, albeit simple, are fine for the target audience.

But we spotted some English errors that hardly set a good example and we just can't imagine that even the biggest sheep-pig fan would get past the first few levels without giving up. ■ **Sophie Mason**

4/10



The isometric graphics suit the 'maze' format well

This is as exciting as it ever gets. Really

CAPTAIN SCARLET

PlayStation 2

PUBLISHER Blast!
PRICE £9.99

THE PITCH: 'The Mysterons are plotting to assassinate the president – and only you can stop them!' '16 all-action missions!' '2 amazing vehicles!' 'Fire at will!' Shoot me now...

Drearier than a motorway service station on a rainy winter Sunday, *Captain Scarlet* takes the already dodgy subject of vehicle-based combat, paints it brown and then makes you hate videogames. And life.

The 'all-action' missions involve driving up a narrow road in one of two different but equally uninspiring cars, and then occasionally you get to shoot a Mysteron car with either your bumper-mounted gun or rocket launcher (depending on your vehicle).

Mysteron cars, incidentally, appear to be Ford Cortinas from circa 1973, with a machine gun mounted on the roof. Sometimes you'll be shooting at them in order to protect something from their attacks. Other times you'll just be shooting them. The environments where you shoot them vary from brown, to green, to grey.

CAPTAIN INSENSIBLE

The cars corner like tanks, requiring you to make use of the handbrake; surely an odd choice given the age of the target audience. It's really hard to find words to describe how extraordinarily dull, monotonous and limited this game is. There aren't even any cutscenes! ■ **Nick Ellis**

3/10

PlayStation 2

BATTLE CONSTRUCTION VEHICLES

PUBLISHER Midas Interactive!
PRICE £6.99

THE PITCH: 'Turn some of the toughest construction vehicles into smouldering piles of scrap metal' in order to 'save your father's construction business from certain doom at the hands of a ruthless rival!'

There's surely not a gamer alive who wouldn't relish the prospect of jumping into the cab of a JVC for some arena-based vehicle combat. The box and name did more than enough to totally sell the game to us: "Look! Bulldozers vs cranes!"

Before you get to the action there's some some plot stuff to watch, which is as completely bonkers as you would expect from a developer whose other PS2 offerings include a game called *Lunatic Dawn*.

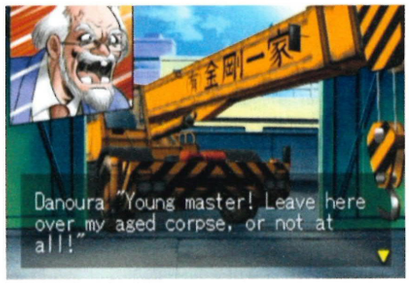
Presented half in anime and half in still backgrounds, the story relates something about assembling a team to do battle with a rival construction company. And then you have to fight your grandad. Oka-aaaay!

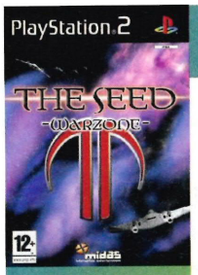
CRANE AND ABLE

The beat-'em-up-style bouts would be okay if the vehicles were easy to control, but half the time your button presses seem to bear little relation to what's happening on the screen.

But who can argue with a game where your crane's special attack is a giant bee that stings rivals? ■ **Nick Ellis**

5/10





THE SEED: WARZONE

PUBLISHER Midas Interactive
PRICE £9.99

THE PITCH: 'Dozens of interior and exterior battleship components to research develop [sic] and use in your custom designs!' 'Research and develop new equipment!'

Honestly, we had to check that our controller was plugged in – more than once – because at no point did we feel that we were actually playing *The Seed: Warzone*.

The back of the box would seem to indicate a tactical strategy game fused with exciting real-time aerial combat. But in practice you'd have more fun sitting in a sandbox with a brace of model airplanes.

Most of the time you are building ships, which is about as exciting as using a graphics calculator. Then, once one of your little fleet icons nudges an enemy icon on the 2D overworld map, it initiates a 30-second long 3D battle that requires absolutely zero input from you. Oh wait, sorry, you *are* able to switch the camera between the various craft.

STAT STAND

Once that's over with, you're rewarded with the kind of score screen that would make Harvard statisticians weep blood, accompanied by the sinking feeling that you've just witnessed the game in its entirety.

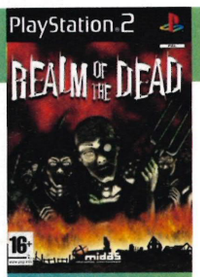
And guess what? Apart from the sub-*Gundam* anime guffery that makes up the plot, you have. ■ **Mike Sterry**

3/10

You don't actually fire weapons yourself

For a sub-£10 title the graphics impress

REALM OF THE DEAD



PUBLISHER Midas Interactive
PRICE £9.99

THE PITCH: 'Choose from three awesome characters'

Right, let's start with the positives. *Realm Of The Dead* isn't the worst-looking game in the world. In fact, it's got some impressive moments for a sub-tenner PS2 title.

The action is straightforward enough to be playable. Painfully slow and brain-meltingly repetitive, but playable nonetheless.

There are plenty of monster-killing items to collect, and you can upgrade your kit in end-of-level shops. You even level up at the end of each mission, although we were never sure what this actually meant in gameplay terms.

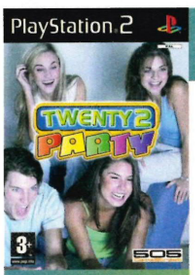
DEAD ALERT

Now the not-so-great stuff. *Realm Of The Dead* has a 16+ rating, so it's immediately unsuitable for the age group that's least likely to feel insulted by its cheapness. The '*Dynasty Warriors* in treacle' vibe that the gameplay adopts isn't exactly thrilling, and the sound effects are naff to the point of being hilarious. Still, once you've heard the same yelp of a demon doggy getting hit for the 100th time, it starts to grate.

We weren't too impressed by the hackneyed 'zombies taking over kingdom' concept either, and there wasn't a moment in the game where we had any clue about why we were dressed up as medieval knights, hacking and magicking through the walking dead.

Overall, *Realm Of The Dead* is a reasonable game for the price, but its gore-ridden combat takes it well out of nipper territory. ■ **Andy Hartup**

4/10



TWENTY 2 PARTY

PUBLISHER 505 Games
PRICE £9.99

THE PITCH: 'Play and compete in 20 fun mini-games'

There are indeed 20 mini-games on offer here. But – and it's a big 'but' – you can't choose what to play and when.

In between you move around a sort of virtual board game, 'spinning' a wheel to see how many spaces you move. It's only when you land on a (rare) space marked 'game' that you get to do anything particularly competitive.

There's some complicated collection and sale of treasure thing going on in the board game bit, but we didn't understand why we were doing it and thus never really came to care about it.

MINI-LAME

The point of *Twenty 2 Party* is supposed to be the mini-games, so why won't it let you play them more often? Some of the ones we played were kind of fun, such as throwing starfish about or reeling in treasure using the analogue sticks, but more were just pointless or over too quickly. A platforming game where you only get one life? A pairs game where the time limit runs out before you've turned over all the cards?

Plus, only two people can play each one, even though this is a four-player title. And if you're playing with fewer than four you're forced to use AI to make up the numbers which means with two real-life players, you often get stuck watching the PS2 play itself at a mini-game.

Frankly, even if you're a child, if your party is so dull that this game is an improvement, you really need to get some more exciting friends. ■ **Sophie Mason**

4/10

The games all have an under-the-sea theme

WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?

Our top 18 most bizarre budget games

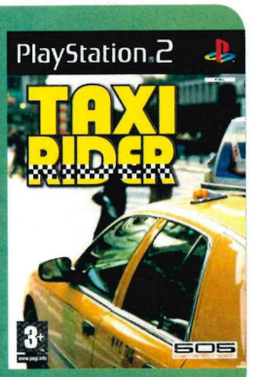
While researching this feature we naturally had a look round at what budget titles were on the market. We couldn't play them all, of course, and in many cases that was disappointing because they sounded quite intriguing.

We couldn't let them pass without celebrating them, so here's our choice of the sub-£10 games we came across, with our first impressions. Of course, we may be completely wrong about any or all, so don't take these as informed opinions.

And if you've played one of these games and think we've done it an injustice, we'd love to hear about it. Write or email to the addresses on p10 and tell us your budget game experiences!

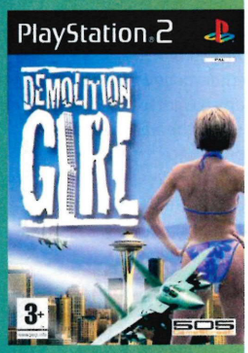
18 Taxi Rider

In this cab driving game your fares include 'flustered passengers with car sickness, injured people...'. We'll take the bus, thanks.



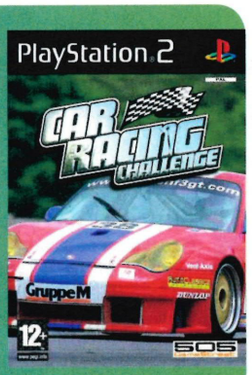
17 Demolition Girl

A Tank Girl-style heroine at the helm of a monster wrecking ball machine? Sadly not. You have to fight a 48m-high woman. She is in a bikini, though.



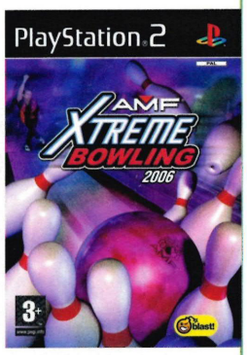
16 Car Racing Challenge

'A spectacular four-hour car chase!' trumpets the publicity blurb. Four whole hours? We don't think we could handle the excitement.



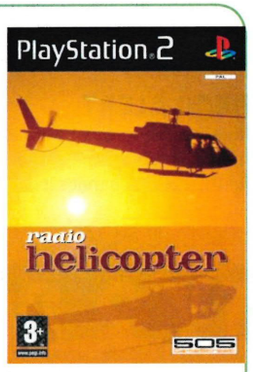
15 AMF Xtreme Bowling 2006

Look, we know they make you wear ugly shoes and stuff, but could you not just go down your local bowling alley?



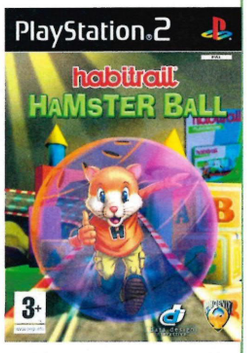
14 Radio Helicopter

A remote-controlled helicopter sim? Could you not, like, just buy the real thing? Mind you, we shouldn't scoff, *Radio Helicopter* was successful enough to warrant a sequel.



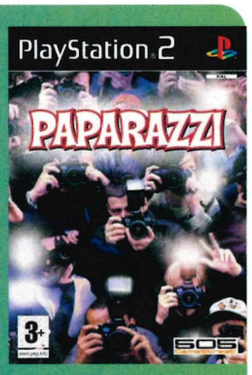
13 Habitrail Hamsterball

Habitrail make very nice pet products but whether we want our kids to play an entire game with the logo in their faces is another issue entirely.



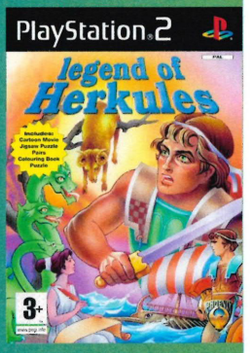
12 Paparazzi

'Three beautiful models striking poses just for you!' Well, guys, we've seen screens, and the best we can say about the ladies is that they're a cut above Jodie Marsh.



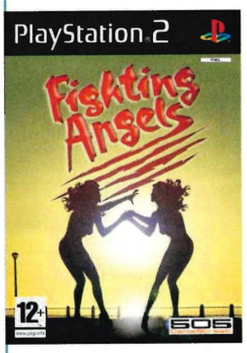
11 Legend of Herkules

He's like Hercules, but with a K. And wearing lipstick. And with a dead sheep hanging from a tree.



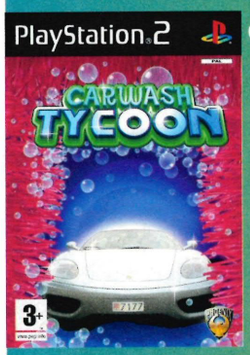
10 Fighting Angels

'Sexy attacks! Silly attacks! Watch the Sexy Gauge rise and when it hits the top, unleash the Sexy Dance!' Hmm. Let's not.



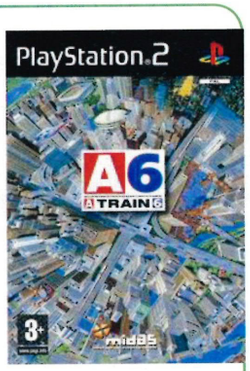
09 Car Wash Tycoon

Sadly, nothing to do with the disco-era classic movie. It's a city sim in which you run a chain of car washes. Still, it only costs 7.99.



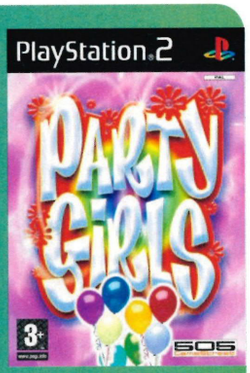
08 A Train 6

'Plan, design and integrate a railway network that meets the demands of a burgeoning city.' Is this where the Tube companies learned their trade?



07 Party Girls

Heralded as 'the ultimate beauty battle', this game pitches pretty girls against one another in a series of challenges including standing on a platform and swimming away from a plastic shark.

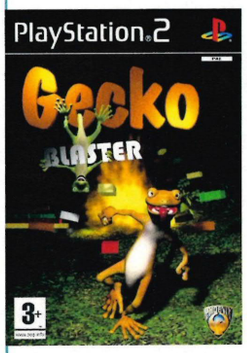


06 Retro

This collection of eight arcade-style games looks okay, actually, but it warrants a mention here because one of them is called *Roids*. Snigger!

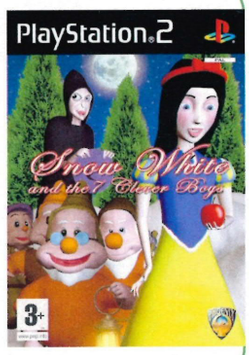
05 Gecko Blaster

Do the geckos do the blasting or get blasted? We don't know, because this game's not out yet. But we're looking forward to it. Really, we actually are.



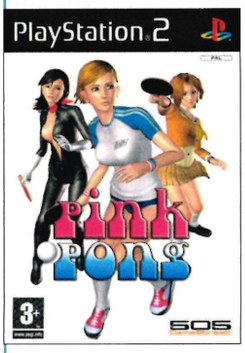
04 Snow White & the Seven Clever Boys

Are they being politically correct or was there some copyright issue with Disney over the 'seven dwarves' thing? Sadly, we'll never know.



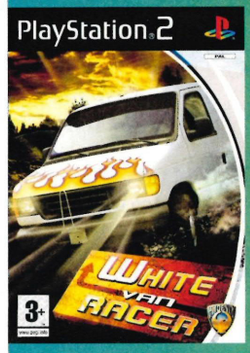
03 Pink Pong

'If you have ever secretly desired to challenge beautiful girls at ping pong, this might be the game for you!' Yes, well, it might. But that's a big 'if'.



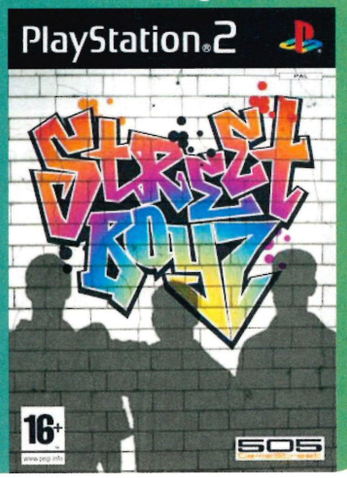
02 White Van Racer

The title says it all: it's a racing game where you assume the role of that famously aspirational figure, the white van driver.



01 Street Boyz

What do you mean, it sounds like a game about male escorts? Of course it's not. You play as a lad helping the authorities tackle gang culture as part of 'Operation Gang Snatch'. Hooray!



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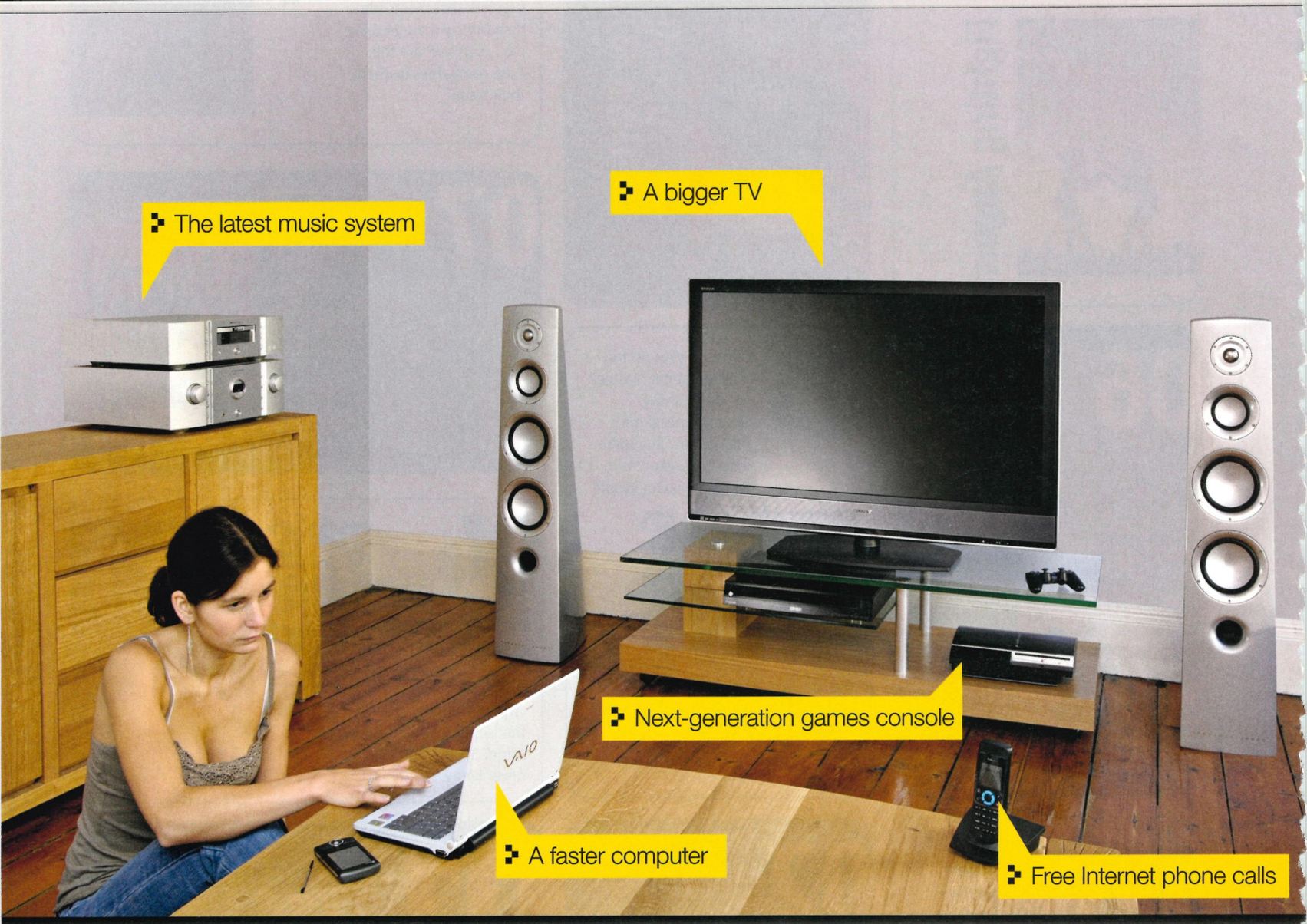

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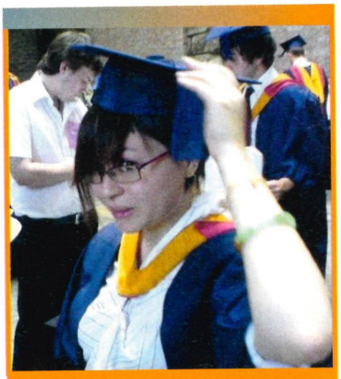
technology news first

replay

PLAY FOR TODAY. AND YESTERDAY. AND TOMORROW



Look, mum! I have my own section! My edjukation paid off! Right, enough of that, let's get to the meat.

This month, to get you primed for the arrival of *Tomb Raider Anniversary*, we've got an exclusive guide to Lara Croft's home, Croft Manor – a new level for this remade game. Flick to p114 for some tips on how to crack the lovely lady's boudoir.

Following that, since I've been typecast within five minutes of walking into OPS2 Towers as the resident Moogle, well, by the power of Bahamut, I'm going to use it to my advantage.

Following an ongoing argu... discussion in the office about the ultimate roleplaying game dream team, we decided to bring this hot topic to you.

If you're not normally a fan of staff-wielding maniacs, it's a glimpse into the wonder behind a +5 sword. If you're an RPG fanatic like me, it's a chance to join the debate. And yes, I'm just as upset as you that Balthier wasn't included as the cool cat.

Kim

Kim Richards,
Editorial assistant

THE CHOSEN ONES

IF YOU COULD MAKE UP A PARTY OF CHARACTERS FROM ANY RPG, WHO WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

118

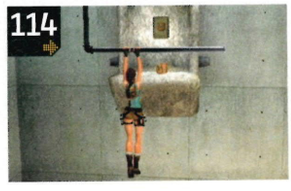
108 CHARTS
Kratos soars off the shelves as if he had Icarus Wings... oh, he does

109 CHALLENGES & ONLINE
Sing, quiz and raid your way to games and T-shirts plus find out if *SOCOM*'s latest online offering sucks

110 HOT 100
Got cash to burn? Here are the 100 games most worth getting fired up about

112 CHEATS
Dominate *Burnout* and get to the end of your *Vice City* story with these tips, tricks and unlockables

114 COMPLETE CROFT MANOR
Our step-by-step guide to getting all you can out of the newest *Tomb Raider* level



charts

FACTS, FIGURES AND FUNNIES

WHAT THE OTHER MAGS SAID

WE READ 'EM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO

PSM3	"A good old-fashioned FPS" 73%	"Another of PS2's last-minute masterpieces" 93%	"Doesn't offer anything over *FIFA 07*" 67%	"PSP's finest hour? Only in flashes" 70%
PSW	"Isn't good enough" 4/10	"The best PS2 game of recent months" 9/10	*NO REVIEW	"*Roads To Victory* is nowhere near a triumph" 6/10
PLAY	"*Medal Of Honor* continues to kick ass" 71%	"There is no better third-person adventure" 94%	"We're bored with the series now" 59%	*NO REVIEW
PlayStation 2 OFFICIAL MAGAZINE-UK VERDICT	"Nothing more than a poor man's *Call Of Duty*" 5/10	"Accessible, exhilarating and macho as hell" 9/10	"Still a formidable football game" 7/10	"One of the most atmospheric shooters on PSP" 7/10

*Review not available at time of going to press

THE TOP 20 ChartTrack

ELSPA Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association

	Game Name	Publisher	Score
1.	God Of War II	Sony	9/10
2.	Buzz! The Mega Quiz	Sony	8/10
3.	TMNT	Ubisoft	7/10
4.	Medal Of Honor Vanguard	EA Games	5/10
5.	Free Running	Ubisoft	5/10
6.	Brian Lara International Cricket 2007	Codemasters	7/10
7.	UEFA Champion's League 2006-2007	EA Sports	7/10
8.	Final Fantasy XII	Square-Enix	10/10
9.	Pro Evolution Soccer 6	Konami	10/10
10.	Guitar Hero II	Activision	8/10
11.	Burnout Dominator	EA Games	8/10
12.	FIFA 07	EA Sports	9/10
13.	The Fast And The Furious	EA Games	5/10
14.	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari	7/10
15.	WWE Smackdown! Vs Raw 2007	THQ	8/10
16.	PDC World Championship Darts	Oxygen	5/10
17.	Need For Speed Carbon	EA Games	8/10
18.	Call Of Duty 3	Activision	8/10
19.	Championship Manager 2007	Eidos	7/10
20.	Meet The Robinsons	Disney	7/10

GOD OF THE UK

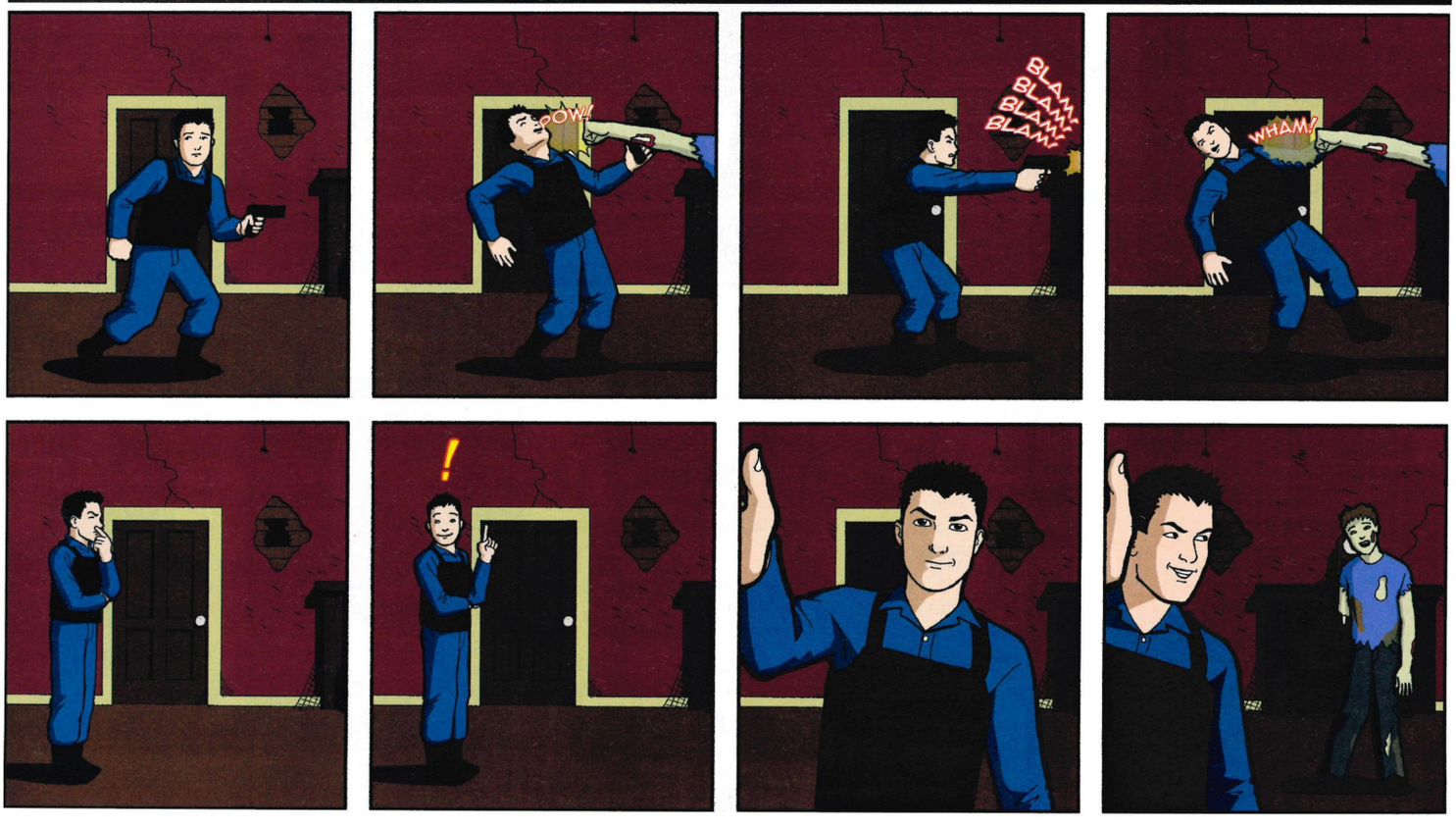
Not only has *God Of War II* stormed to the top of the PS2 charts, it also rocketed to the top of the All Formats list, making Kratos the UK's most high-profile anti-hero

BULL'S EYE

Although last month's TV coverage was dominated by snooker, cricket, and footy it seems we're still itching for a few games of darts on our trusty PS2s

SAVE POINT TAKING THE LESS TRAVELLED ROUTE TO GAMING WISDOM

WORDS: KIERON GILLEN ART: JAMIE MCKELVIE



challenges

IT'S NOT A RACE, YOU KNOW. OH, ER, HANG ON...

TOMB RAIDER ANNIVERSARY

CHALLENGE 1 PS2

How fast can you move Lara through the Peru Mountain Caves? If you can beat our sluggish time of 26:24 and send hard, MMS-shaped proof, you'll be justly rewarded.

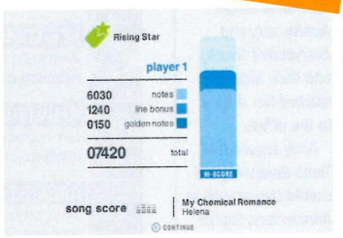
Fastest proved time gets...
Three great PS2 games and an Official PS2 Magazine T-shirt

SINGSTAR POP HITS

CHALLENGE 2 PS2

Do you love to put on eye-liner and scream an ode to your dead grandmother? We certainly do. So we challenge you to beat our score of 7420 on 'Helena' by My Chemical Romance.

Highest proved score gets...
Three great PS2 games and an Official PS2 Magazine T-shirt



HOW TO ENTER

Attach your MMS picture then text either **CHALLENGE1, CHALLENGE2, or CHALLENGE3 (then a space)** followed by your name and full address to **07738 647 177**

Only the entries that OPS2 judges as the best score/time will win the respective prize(s). Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate. Please source all necessary permissions. Lines are open from 24 May to 20 June inclusive. We will not advise non-winners of the result.*

BUZZ! THE MEGA QUIZ

CHALLENGE 3 PS2

Fire up the single-player mode on Standard difficulty and let your fingers dance over the *Buzz!* buzzer in an attempt to beat our superbrain score of 7725. Then show us the evidence.

Best proved score gets...
Two great PS2 games and an Official PS2 Magazine T-shirt

online

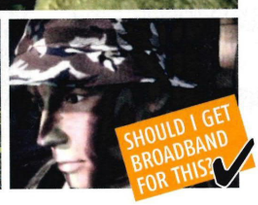
IS IT WORTH GETTING BROADBAND FOR THIS GAME?

SOCOM US NAVY SEALS: COMBINED ASSAULT

What you get: In addition to generously including all the multiplayer maps from *SOCOM 3*, *Combined Assault* chucks in 10 new ones and allows for co-op play in the game's varied main campaign. In fact, given the *SOCOM* series' notoriously stupid AI, plodding through the campaign with your chums is actually the ideal way to play.

What it's like: The series might be getting on a bit, but it still supports a thriving online community – somewhere in the region of 18,000 players – so there's always a game going. But if you want a real challenge, you might have to adjust your body clock to the USA's Eastern Time Zone to encounter the true *SOCOM* zealots.

If being fragged into the ground by 'A$$F@Ce69' from Hicktown, Wisconsin isn't your idea of fun, then you can always play co-op with your saner friends. When human players take away sniping and demolition roles from the AI, *Combined Assault* suddenly becomes a lot more playable (and less likely to result in your AI-abetted death).



PSP WIFI TEST

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

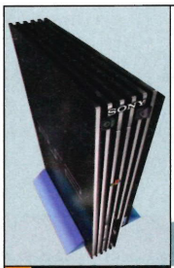
What you get: The very definition of tacked-on wireless multiplayer – the only fault in this otherwise sparkling PSP pirate port.

What it's like: It could have been so good. How hard would it have been to allow four players to play through a full game, or even a potted version, of *Pirates!*? Instead, up to four players can choose a vessel, a tiny map, and engage in some peewee cannonading. Sounds fun, no?

No. Anybody who's played *Pirates!* will know that the game's sea battles last only a matter of seconds, and are only but a fraction – albeit an entertaining fraction – of the gameplay. It's not like we desperately want to engage in wireless ballroom dance-offs, but in the case of a one-on-one deathmatch, the pre-battle loading screen lasts longer. Highly irritating. Like scurvy.

SHOULD I GET MY SHIPMATES ROUND FOR THIS?

*CHALLENGE COMPETITION TERMS AND CONDITIONS By entering you are agreeing to receive details of future offers from Future Publishing Ltd and third parties. Only UK residents over the age of 15 may enter. If you do not want to receive information relating to future offers and promotions, please include the word NO at the end of your text message. Winners will be notified within 28 days.
No employees of Future Publishing, any associated company or any member of their close family may enter. Prizes are as stated and no alternatives, cash or otherwise, are available. Publicity may be given to any entrants and their names, addresses and/or photographs printed in OPS2. Editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. No purchase necessary. These competitions are open from 24 May to 20 June inclusive.



the hot 100

BECAUSE 'THE BEST PS2 GAMES YOU CAN BUY' ISN'T AS CATCHY

THIS MONTH

Two new entries this month to our ton of fun: *Tomb Raider Anniversary* and *Everybody's Tennis*, and their inclusion sparked hot debate in the office.

Andy argued that *Tomb Raider Legend* should stay as well as *Anniversary*. Sophie was adamant that *Legend* is an inferior game that deserves to be usurped. Editor Nellis had the casting vote: bye bye *Legend*. It's good, but not good enough.

The question with *Everybody's Tennis* was, should it replace *Everybody's Golf* or *Smash Court Pro Tennis 2*? Both are great games.

"If you drop *Everybody's Golf*, you're fired," said Nellis. Gulp. Sorry, *Smash Court Pro*...

But this is all just our opinion. Well, Nellis's opinion, anyway. We'd love to hear *your* top five, so send it in, with reasons, to:
'My All-Time Top 5', OPS2 Magazine, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

YOUR KEY TO THE TOP 100

GOLD
Reserved exclusively for games that scored the elusive 10/10

SILVER
Only awarded to games that scored a mighty 9/10

BRONZE
Lovingly given to games that scored an impressive 8/10

DVD#78
Want to try before you buy? Here's the issue where we ran a playable demo

24: THE GAME — BRONZE
A quality re-creation of the show that's fun to play.
REVIEWED *OPS2#69* / OVERALL 08 / DVD#69/#72 — ON THE DVD

ACE COMBAT: SQUADRON LEADER — BRONZE
Great flight sim that's well worth a fly-by.
REVIEWED *OPS2#56* / OVERALL 08 / DVD#56/#57

AMPLITUDE — SILVER
Fun music/rhythm game with tunes adults or teens will recognise.
REVIEWED *OPS2#38* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#38

AREA 51 — SILVER
Guns, aliens and conspiracies make for a top-notch shooter.
REVIEWED *OPS2#60* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#58/#62

BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT — SILVER
Body-swapping war shooter full of challenges and action.
REVIEWED *OPS2#65* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#68

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL — BRONZE
A gripping, engaging platformer from the makers of *Rayman*.
REVIEWED *OPS2#40* / OVERALL 08 / DVD#39/#85

BLACK — GOLD
Hollywood-style gun porn – by far the best shooter on PS2.
REVIEWED *OPS2#69* / OVERALL 10 / DVD#72/#76

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30 — BRONZE
An addictive take both on WW2 and squad-based shooters.
REVIEWED *OPS2#58* / OVERALL 08 / DVD#60/#62

BURNOUT DOMINATOR — BRONZE
Another cracking *Burnout*. When it shines, oh boy, it dazzles.
REVIEWED *OPS2#83* / OVERALL 08

BURNOUT REVENGE — GOLD
The best arcade racer in existence.
REVIEWED *OPS2#64* / OVERALL 10 / DVD#64

BUZZ! THE MEGA QUIZ — BRONZE
Latest and greatest instalment of this mega-fun family quiz.
REVIEWED *OPS2#84* / OVERALL 08

CALL OF DUTY 3 — BRONZE
The most atmospheric and intense WW2 shooter we've played.
REVIEWED *OPS2#80* / OVERALL 08

CANIS CANEM EDIT — SILVER
Funny, silly yet always enjoyable school-based adventure.
REVIEWED *OPS2#79* / OVERALL 09

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005 — SILVER
The career mode means this driving title is still loads of fun.
REVIEWED *OPS2#51* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#51

CRICKET 07 — BRONZE
EA's solid, good-looking cricket sim will bowl you over.
REVIEWED *OPS2#80* / OVERALL 08

DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2 — BRONZE
Globe-hopping comedy alien mayhem set in the 1960s.
REVIEWED *OPS2#78* / OVERALL 08 DVD#78

DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING — SILVER
Combat-heavy, demonic adventure with shooters and swords.
REVIEWED *OPS2#58* / OVERALL 09

DRAGON QUEST: THE JOURNEY OF THE CURSED KING — SILVER
Vintage Japanese role-player: long, strong and good-looking.
REVIEWED *OPS2#71* / OVERALL 09 DVD#73/#75

EVERYBODY'S GOLF — BRONZE
Cartoon visuals with some seriously dazzling golfing action.
REVIEWED *OPS2#65* / OVERALL 08 / DVD#64 — ON THE DVD

EVERYBODY'S TENNIS — BRONZE
A deceptively brilliant sports sim that surprises and challenges.
REVIEWED *OPS2#86* / OVERALL 08 — ON THE DVD

EYETOY: PLAY 2 — BRONZE
Games collection that uses the EyeToy to full effect.
REVIEWED *OPS2#53* / OVERALL 08 / DVD#54

FAHRENHEIT — SILVER
Stylish, cinematic reinvention of the point-and-click adventure.
REVIEWED *OPS2#64* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#64/#69 — ON THE DVD

FIFA 07 — SILVER
Finally tackling *PES*'s unchallenged champion status.
REVIEWED *OPS2#77* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#82

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 — SILVER
Knockout boxing sim takes face-punching to the next level.
REVIEWED *OPS2#71* / OVERALL 09 DVD#74/#82

FINAL FANTASY XII — GOLD
The best role-playing game PS2, or any console, has ever seen.
REVIEWED *OPS2#81* / OVERALL 10

FREEDOM FIGHTERS — SILVER
Tactical battling in an urban setting. Insanely addictive.
REVIEWED *OPS2#37* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#38

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE — BRONZE
This is the finest Bond game on PS2. Simple and enjoyable.
REVIEWED *OPS2#66* / OVERALL 08 / DVD#67 — ON THE DVD

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS — BRONZE
Tactical army sim that's accessible and truly gripping.
REVIEWED *OPS2#72* / OVERALL 08

GOD OF WAR — SILVER
Heart-in-mouth joy from this frantic and bloody hack-fest.
REVIEWED *OPS2#60* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#62/#63

GOD OF WAR II — SILVER
Accessible, exhilarating and macho as hell.
REVIEWED *OPS2#83* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#85

GRAND THEFT AUTO DOUBLE PACK — GOLD
Two superb games in the same box for just £40? Grand!
REVIEWED *OPS2#41* / OVERALL 10

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES — BRONZE
Another killer *GTA* title ported from PSP. Stars Phil Collins!
REVIEWED *OPS2#84* / OVERALL 08

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS — GOLD
Enormous, even more so than *Vice City*, and cracking good fun.
REVIEWED *OPS2#54* / OVERALL 10

GRAN TURISMO 4 — SILVER
Unsurpassed, automotive beauty. The best driving game on PS2.
REVIEWED *OPS2#57* / OVERALL 09

GUITAR HERO II — BRONZE
Slightly more challenging than the first one but just as much fun.
REVIEWED *OPS2#80* / OVERALL 08

GUN — SILVER
This *GTA*-inspired Wild West shooter is mighty fine, if a little short.
REVIEWED *OPS2#67* / OVERALL 09

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY — SILVER
Agent 47's biggest, bloodiest and best adventure yet.
REVIEWED *OPS2#73* / OVERALL 09 / DVD#73/#75

ICO — SILVER
Beautiful, inventive, magical: *Ico* is an adventure like no other.
REVIEWED *OPS2#18 & #69* / OVERALL 09

READER TOP 5

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 COMES FROM JAMES WALSH, SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

1 NFS UNDERGROUND
9/10 IN OPS2#41
"None of the opponents can catch me," says James. Quite a claim!

2 KING KONG
9/10 IN OPS2#66
James goes ape for this game and particularly enjoys "smashing things up with King Kong".

3 INDIANA JONES & THE EMPEROR'S TOMB
7/10 IN OPS2#37
This one's on James's list because "I like killing the alligators".

4 FIFA 06
7/10 IN OPS2#65
Controversially, James chooses this one over its rival, *PES*, because he prefers the Manager mode.

5 BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN
10/10 IN OPS2#51
"I like getting money for crashes," reveals James. Well, it's a living.

DISAGREE? LET US KNOW ABOUT IT

NEED A BACK ISSUE OF *OPS2* TO CHECK OUT THE FULL REVIEW? THEN CALL:
UK: 0870 837 4773
OVERSEAS: +44 1858 438 795

replay

JAK 3 — BRONZE
Ambitious platform adventure with oodles of varied gameplay.
REVIEWED *OPS2#53* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#58/#75**

JUST CAUSE — BRONZE
Massive parachuting fun in a '*GTA* does jungle' adventure.
REVIEWED *OPS2#77* / **OVERALL** 08

KILLER 7 — BRONZE
Insane shooter with exploding zombies and multiple personalities.
REVIEWED *OPS2#61* / **OVERALL** 08

KINGDOM HEARTS II — BRONZE
Disney roleplayer from the makers of *Final Fantasy*.
REVIEWED *OPS2#78* / **OVERALL** 08

LEGO STAR WARS II — SILVER
Hugely enjoyable and comical retelling of the original trilogy.
REVIEWED *OPS2#77* / **OVERALL** 09 **DVD#76/#77**

MADDEN NFL 07 — SILVER
One of the most accurate sports sims ever made.
REVIEWED *OPS2#77* / **OVERALL** 09

MANHUNT — SILVER
A dirty, grisly, filthy but downright brilliant game experience.
REVIEWED *OPS2#42* / **OVERALL** 09

MARC ECKO'S GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE — BRONZE
Graffiti game created by a fashion designer. Original and good.
REVIEWED *OPS2#69* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#71**

MASHED — SILVER
Got friends? Get the brilliant party racer *Mashed*.
REVIEWED *OPS2#48* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#49/#55**

MERCENARIES — SILVER
Enjoy all the fun of free-roaming warfare, and get paid for it!
REVIEWED *OPS2#55* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#55/#85**

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY — GOLD
A must-own, tactical espionage stealth-a-thon.
REVIEWED *OPS2#17* / **OVERALL** 10 / **DVD#17/#37**

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SUBSISTENCE — SILVER
The superb *Snake Eater* gets a new camera and an online mode.
REVIEWED *OPS2#78* / **OVERALL** 09

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION REMIX — BRONZE
Super-bling street racer, now with extra tunes and vehicles.
REVIEWED *OPS2#73* / **OVERALL** 08

MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS — BRONZE
The classic beat-'em-up gets a spectacular adventure makeover.
REVIEWED *OPS2#65* / **OVERALL** 08

MOTO GP4 — BRONZE
Fast, pretty and very challenging motorbike racing.
REVIEWED *OPS2#60* / **OVERALL** 08

MUSIC 3000 — SILVER
A virtual recording studio for £30? Can anyone say no to that?
REVIEWED *OPS2#33* / **OVERALL** 09

NBA 2K7 — SILVER
Great looking, responsive basketball game that's not just for fans.
REVIEWED *OPS2#79* / **OVERALL** 09

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON — BRONZE
The latest instalment of this consistently good series.
REVIEWED *OPS2#79* / **OVERALL** 08

NHL 07 — BRONZE
New controls and great looks make for a pucking brilliant time.
REVIEWED *OPS2#79* / **OVERALL** 08

OKAMI — GOLD
A beautiful, original, magical, picture-book adventure.
REVIEWED *OPS2#81* / **OVERALL** 10 / **DVD#81/#82**

ONIMUSHA 3 — SILVER
If you're looking for the best '*Musha* this is your boy.
REVIEWED *OPS2#79* / **OVERALL** 09

OUTRUN 2006: COAST 2 COAST — BRONZE
Sun-kissed retro-racer makes a blistering comeback.
REVIEWED *OPS2#70* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#73/#75**

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG — SILVER
The best movie tie-in on PS2. An awesome adventure.
REVIEWED *OPS2#66* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#66**

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES — SILVER
The best *PoP* so far.
REVIEWED *OPS2#67* / **OVERALL** 09

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6 — GOLD
The most realistic footie on PS2, good licences, great online stuff.
REVIEWED *OPS2#79* / **OVERALL** 10 / **DVD#80/#82**

PROJECT ZERO — BRONZE
Genuinely disturbing survival horror, dripping with menace.
REVIEWED *OPS2#24* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#23**

RAINBOW SIX 3 — BRONZE
Squad-based shooter with a realistic edge and online missions.
REVIEWED *OPS2#45* / **OVERALL** 08

RATCHET & CLANK 3 — SILVER
Weapons and flashgun-centric play make this the series' best.
REVIEWED *OPS2#53* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#51/#58**

RED DEAD REVOLVER — SILVER
Wild West shooter that's like a cool breeze in Death Valley. Yeehaw!
REVIEWED *OPS2#47* / **OVERALL** 09

RESIDENT EVIL 4 — GOLD
One of the greatest games ever made. Buy it now.
REVIEWED *OPS2#65* / **OVERALL** 10

REZ — SILVER
Psychedelic, music-based rhythmic shoot-'em-up. Hypnotic stuff.
REVIEWED *OPS2#16* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#17**

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS — BRONZE
Excellent drug-dealing film tie-in.
REVIEWED *OPS2#78* / **OVERALL** 08

SECOND SIGHT — BRONZE
Slick, absorbing thriller touched with psychic powers.
REVIEWED *OPS2#50* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#50** ON THE DVD

SHADOW OF ROME — BRONZE
A historic blend of bloody action and stealth set in Roman times.
REVIEWED *OPS2#56* / **OVERALL** 08

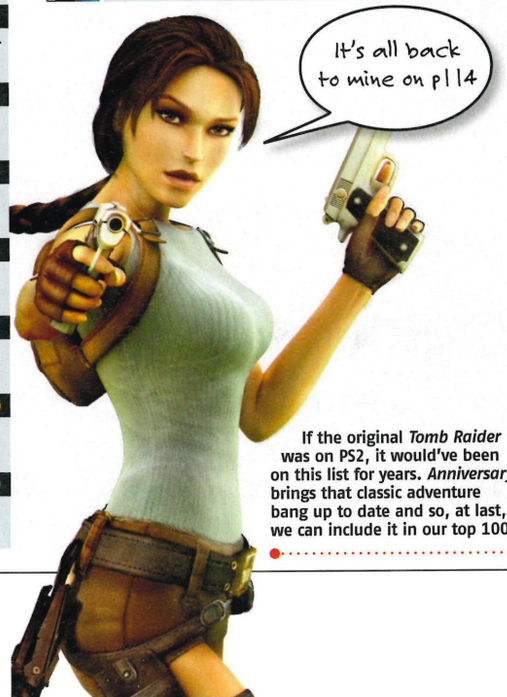
SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS — SILVER
Original, beautiful and haunting – nothing else feels like this.
REVIEWED *OPS2#68* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#69**

SILENT HILL 3 — SILVER
Wet-the-bed scary survival horror. We dare you to play it.
REVIEWED *OPS2#33* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#34/#80**

SINGSTAR ROCKS! — BRONZE
Party fun of the highest order, whether you can sing or not.
REVIEWED *OPS2#72* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#76/#82**

SLY 3: HONOUR AMONG THIEVES — SILVER
Clever, funny and essential for all platformer fans.
REVIEWED *OPS2#66* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#66**

SOCOM II: US NAVY SEALS — BRONZE
Move in for the commander-in-chief of online tactical shooters.
REVIEWED *OPS2#43* / **OVERALL** 08



If the original *Tomb Raider* was on PS2, it would've been on this list for years. *Anniversary* brings that classic adventure bang up to date and so, at last, we can include it in our top 100

SOUL CALIBUR III — SILVER
Better than ever, this is the greatest fighting game on PS2.
REVIEWED *OPS2#66* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#65/#84**

SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR — SILVER
Mythological hack'n'slash epic.
REVIEWED *OPS2#64* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#66**

SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT — BRONZE
Challenges your ethics as well as your stealthiness.
REVIEWED *OPS2#79* / **OVERALL** 08

SSX 3 — SILVER
Super-long, fast races make this an essential PS2 purchase.
REVIEWED *OPS2#40* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#43**

STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II — BRONZE
Fantastic set-pieces and brilliant space battles. Buy it.
REVIEWED *OPS2#66* / **OVERALL** 08

SUPER MONKEY BALL DELUXE — BRONZE
Steer monkeys in Perspex balls around courses in this arcade oddity.
REVIEWED *OPS2#59* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#60**

TEKKEN 5 — BRONZE
The original PlayStation fighter beats its way back to top form.
REVIEWED *OPS2#61* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#61/#63**

THE SIMS 2 — BRONZE
The soap opera you can play. Entertaining and addictive.
REVIEWED *OPS2#66* / **OVERALL** 08

THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND — BRONZE
Hardcore, ultra-bloody, action-survival horror.
REVIEWED *OPS2#64* / **OVERALL** 08

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006 — BRONZE
Like the man himself, this year's edition is on fine form.
REVIEWED *OPS2#65* / **OVERALL** 08

TIMESPLITTERS 2 — GOLD
As vital to PS2 as your central nervous system is to your brain.
REVIEWED *OPS2#25* / **OVERALL** 10 / **DVD#25/#31**

TIMESPLITTERS FUTURE PERFECT — SILVER
Shooter with enough guns to satisfy the most trigger-happy soul.
REVIEWED *OPS2#57* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#56**

TOCA RACE DRIVER 3 — SILVER
Tones down the Story mode and ups the red-hot driving experience.
REVIEWED *OPS2#69* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#68/#72**

TOMB RAIDER ANNIVERSARY — BRONZE
A spellbinding adventure that stays true to the original.
REVIEWED *OPS2#86* / **OVERALL** 08 **DVD#75/#82**

TOTAL OVERDOSE — BRONZE
Comedy Tex-Mex shoot-a-thon with entertaining special attacks.
REVIEWED *OPS2#65* / **OVERALL** 08

URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE — BRONZE
Loud, brash, highly enjoyable law-and-order shooter.
REVIEWED *OPS2#72* / **OVERALL** 08

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2 — BRONZE
Cartoon-style action adventure with great fighting controls.
REVIEWED *OPS2#57* / **OVERALL** 08

WALLACE & GROMIT: WERE-RABBIT — BRONZE
For once, a kid's game that doesn't treat you like a child.
REVIEWED *OPS2#65* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#65**

WE ❤ KATAMARI — BRONZE
Very odd, very Japanese puzzler. Relaxing and enjoyable.
REVIEWED *OPS2#69* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#70/#72**

WRC RALLY EVOLVED — SILVER
Fantastic tracks with random events to test your skill.
REVIEWED *OPS2#65* / **OVERALL** 09 / **DVD#65**

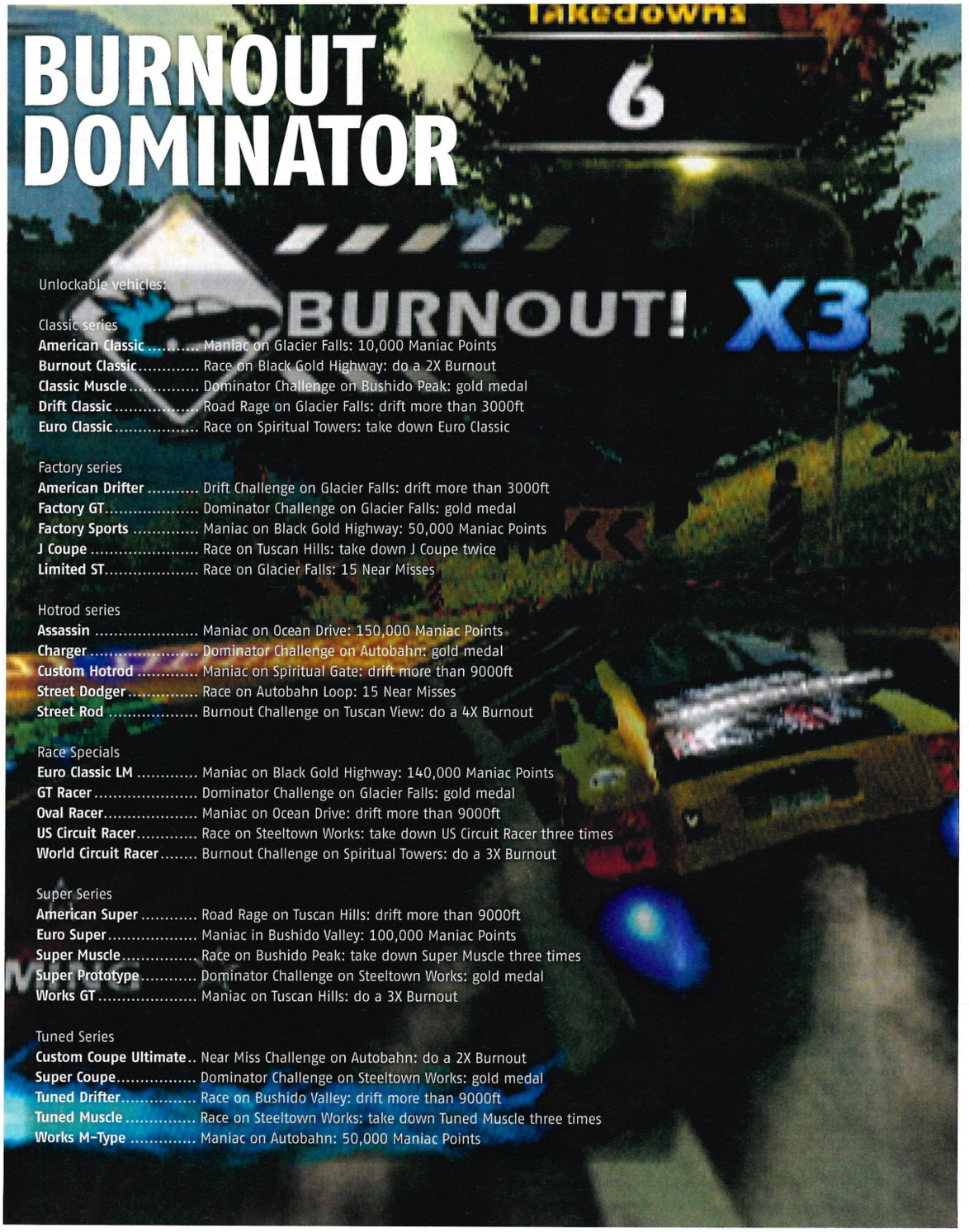
WWE SMACKDOWN! VS RAW 2006 — SILVER
With better online play and new match types, this is essential.
REVIEWED *OPS2#66* / **OVERALL** 09

XIII — BRONZE
Gorgeous PS2 shooter based on the comic-book adventure.
REVIEWED *OPS2#40* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#42**

ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE 2ND RUNNER — BRONZE
Strikingly impressive robo-scrapper.
REVIEWED *OPS2#38* / **OVERALL** 08 / **DVD#38/#83**

cheats

CHEATS, SECRETS AND UNLOCKABLES FOR NEW AND CLASSIC GAMES



BURNOUT DOMINATOR

Unlockable vehicles:

Classic series
American Classic ..... Maniac on Glacier Falls: 10,000 Maniac Points
Burnout Classic..... Race on Black Gold Highway: do a 2X Burnout
Classic Muscle..... Dominator Challenge on Bushido Peak: gold medal
Drift Classic..... Road Rage on Glacier Falls: drift more than 3000ft
Euro Classic..... Race on Spiritual Towers: take down Euro Classic

Factory series
American Drifter ..... Drift Challenge on Glacier Falls: drift more than 3000ft
Factory GT..... Dominator Challenge on Glacier Falls: gold medal
Factory Sports ..... Maniac on Black Gold Highway: 50,000 Maniac Points
J Coupe ..... Race on Tuscan Hills: take down J Coupe twice
Limited ST..... Race on Glacier Falls: 15 Near Misses

Hotrod series
Assassin ..... Maniac on Ocean Drive: 150,000 Maniac Points
Charger..... Dominator Challenge on Autobahn: gold medal
Custom Hotrod ..... Maniac on Spiritual Gate: drift more than 9000ft
Street Dodger..... Race on Autobahn Loop: 15 Near Misses
Street Rod ..... Burnout Challenge on Tuscan View: do a 4X Burnout

Race Specials
Euro Classic LM ..... Maniac on Black Gold Highway: 140,000 Maniac Points
GT Racer..... Dominator Challenge on Glacier Falls: gold medal
Oval Racer..... Maniac on Ocean Drive: drift more than 9000ft
US Circuit Racer..... Race on Steeltown Works: take down US Circuit Racer three times
World Circuit Racer..... Burnout Challenge on Spiritual Towers: do a 3X Burnout

Super Series
American Super ..... Road Rage on Tuscan Hills: drift more than 9000ft
Euro Super..... Maniac in Bushido Valley: 100,000 Maniac Points
Super Muscle..... Race on Bushido Peak: take down Super Muscle three times
Super Prototype..... Dominator Challenge on Steeltown Works: gold medal
Works GT..... Maniac on Tuscan Hills: do a 3X Burnout

Tuned Series
Custom Coupe Ultimate.. Near Miss Challenge on Autobahn: do a 2X Burnout
Super Coupe..... Dominator Challenge on Steeltown Works: gold medal
Tuned Drifter..... Race on Bushido Valley: drift more than 9000ft
Tuned Muscle ..... Race on Steeltown Works: take down Tuned Muscle three times
Works M-Type ..... Maniac on Autobahn: 50,000 Maniac Points

24: THE GAME

At the main menu, hold R1, L1, R2 and L2 for about 10 seconds until a Security Clearance menu appears. Use the D-pad to move around, then hold down ⊗ to change letters by pressing ← and →. Once all the letters have been changed hit □ and the code will turn orange. Exit with △. Select 'Previously On *24*', then 'missions' and load your save file to access the cheats.
ALMEIDA062 .... Get infinite ammo
BAUER066..... Get invulnerability
DESSLER072.... Unlock all missions
PALMER054 ..... Unlock all bonuses

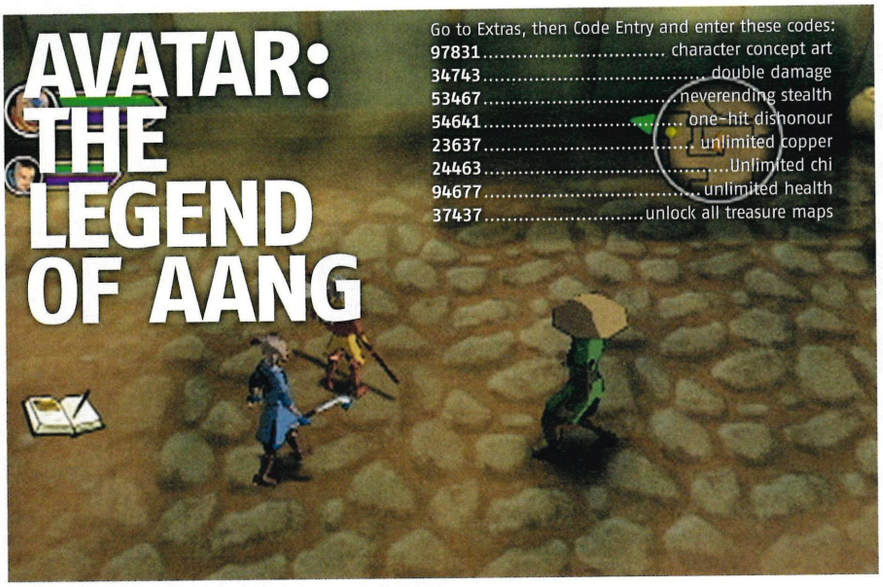
GODHAND

In the second round, there's an extra NPC in the shop. Talk to him to change to a Carnival, Devil Hand, Karate or Olivia's Bunny Girl costume, all unlocked by beating the game.
Other unlockables:
Jukebox A
Complete the game, any difficulty
Jukebox B
Go to the casino for jackpot pulls and get a ticket to redeem the Jukebox CD
Jukebox C
Complete the game on Hard mode
Jukebox D
Complete the game, any difficult, with the 'Kick Me' sign on for the entire game, without using any GodHand Reels or Godhand Power
Fighting Ring Battle 41-50
Beat the game
Fighting Ring Battle 51
Clear Fighting Ring Battle 41-50
Hard mode
Beat the game on Normal Mode
Chihuahua Race
Clear Stage 2
Fighting Ring challenges
Clear Stage 1

GOD OF WAR II

Where and how to find the urns:
Urn of Gaia
Rhodes Palace. Destroy the statue on the pedestal you've been pushing around and use it to double-jump to three chests.
Urn of the Gorgons
Near Euryale's Temple. Use the

AVATAR: THE LEGEND OF AANG



Go to Extras, then Code Entry and enter these codes:

97831 ..... character concept art
34743 ..... double damage
53467 ..... neverending stealth
54641 ..... one-hit dishonour
23637 ..... unlimited copper
24463 ..... Unlimited chi
94677 ..... unlimited health
37437 ..... unlock all treasure maps

Golden Fleece on the petrifying beams on the conveyor belt

Urn of Olympus
After defeating Perseus, but before you find the Spear of Destiny. Push the Statue of the Fates close to the pressure-triggered gate so you'll be able to get through once you've slowed down time.

Urn of Prometheus
After the Titan Minotaur, inside Atlas, hidden in a stalactite.

Urn of the Fates and Urn of Poseidon
Found in Challenge of the Titans

Unlockable costumes:

Cod of War
Complete the game on any difficulty level

Hydra armour
Complete the game on any difficulty level

General Kratos
Collect 20 Cyclops Eyes

God armor
Achieve God ranking in Challenge mode

Dark Odyssey
Complete the game on God mode

Athena
Complete the game on Titan mode

Hercules
Complete the game on Titan mode

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES

Aggressive traffic
↑, ↑, →, ←, △, ○, ○, □

Black vehicles
L1, R1, L1, R1, ←, ○, ↑, ✕

Chrome vehicles
→, ↑, ←, ↓, △, △, L1, R1

Coax pedestrian into vehicle
↓, ↑, →, L1, L1, □, ↑, L1

Commit suicide
→, →, ○, ○, L1, R1, ↓, ✕

Destroy cars near you
L1, R1, R1, ←, →, □, ↓, R1

Faster clock
R1, L1, L1, ↓, ↑, ✕, ↓, L1

Foggy weather
←, ↓, △, ✕, →, ↑, ←, L1

Full armor
↑, ↓, ←, →, □, □, L1, R1

Full health
↑, ↓, ←, →, ○, ○, L1, R1

Get $250,000
↑, ↓, ←, →, ✕, ✕, L1, R1

Guy magnet
→, L1, ↓, L1, ○, ↑, L1, □

Lower Wanted Level
↑, →, △, △, ↓, ←, ✕, ✕

Overcast weather
←, ↓, L1, R1, →, ↑, ←, □

No traction
↓, ←, ↑, L1, R1, △, ○, ✕

Pedestrians attack you
↓, △, ↑, ✕, L1, R1, L1, R1

Pedestrians have weapons
↑, L1, ↓, R1, ←, ○, →, △

Pedestrians riot
R1, L1, L1, ↓, ←, ○, ↓, L1

Permanent green lights
↑, ↓, △, ✕, L1, R1, ←, ○

Rainy weather
←, ↓, L1, R1, →, ↑, ←, △

Raise Wanted Level
↑, →, □, □, ↓, ←, ○, ○

Slow down game
←, ←, ○, ○, ↓, ↑, △, ✕

Spawn Rhino tank
↑, L1, ↓, R1, ←, L1, →, R1

Spawn Trashmaster
↓, ↑, →, △, L1, △, L1, △

Speed up game
←, ←, R1, R1, ↑, △, ↓, ✕

Sunny weather
←, ↓, L1, R1, →, ↑, ←, ○

Upside-down modes:
1: □, □, □, L1, L1, R1, ←, →
2: ←, ←, ←, R1, R1, L1, →, ←

Weapon sets
1: ←, →, ✕, ↑, ↓, □, ←, →
2: ←, →, □, ↑, ↓, △, ←, →
3: ←, →, △, ↑, ↓, ○, ←, →

SECOND SIGHT

How to unlock the mini-games (once unlocked you can play them any time via the Pause screen)

Earth Impact
In the Reliance level, after you enter the building through the vents there is a room with arcade machines. Kill the guard playing a machine and use it yourself.

X Space '92
In the Madness level, on a shelf in a room just before the third checkpoint. The room has only one entrance with a camera and guard on it. Use Telekinesis in this room to get the game, then use it with any computer in this level.

CRASH TAG TEAM RACING

At the main menu, hold down L1 and R1 and enter the following:

Chicken-head people
✕, ○, ○, □

Disable all heads-up displays
✕, □, △, ○

Drive a toy-block car
○, ○, △, □

High speed
○, ○, △, △

Japanese Crash skin
□, ○, □, ○

Automatic KO
✕, ○, ○, ✕

CAPCOM CLASSICS VOL 2

In *Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo*, enter the following codes to unlock characters:

LP, ↓, ↑, ↑, ↓, LP..... Old Bison
LP, ↑, ↑, ↓, LP ..... Old Cammy
LP, ↓, ↓, ↓, ↑, LP..... Old Chun-Li
LP, ↓, ↓, ↑, ↑, LP..... Old Dee Jay
LP, ↓, ↑, ↑, ↑, LP.... Old Dhalsim
LP, ←, ←, →, →, LP Old Fei Long
LP, ↑, ↓, ↓, ↓, LP..... Old Guile
LP, ↑, ↑, ↑, ↓, LP..... Old Honda
LP, →, →, →, ←, LP ..... Old Ryu
LP, ←, →, →, ←, LP ..... Old Vega
LP, ←, →, →, →, LP ..Old Zangief
LP, ↑, ↓, ↓, ↑, LP..... Old Sagat

TOMB RAIDER LEGEND

The following unlockables are rewards for Time Trials

Bulletproof Lara
Clear England in less than 27:00. Once unlocked hold L1 during gameplay and press ✕, R1, △, R1, □, L2

Infinite grenade launcher
Clear Kazakhstan in less than 27:10. To use, hold L1 during gameplay and press L1, △, R1, ○, L1, □

Infinite MG415 ammo
Clear Peru in less than 21:30. To use hold L2 during gameplay and press ○, △, L1, R1, ✕, ○

Infinite RC650 ammo
Clear Japan in under 12:15. To use hold L2 during gameplay and press ✕, ○, ✕, L1, □, △

Infinite shotgun ammo
Clear Ghana in under 20:00. To use hold L2 during gameplay and press R1, ○, □, L1, □, ✕

One-hit deaths
Clear Bolivia in under 4:15. To use hold L1 during gameplay and press △, ✕, △, □, L2, ○

Excalibur
Clear Nepal under 13:40. Once unlocked hold L2 during gameplay and press △, ✕, ○, R1, △, L1

Soul Reaver
Clear the game and complete all Time Trials. Once unlocked hold L2 during gameplay and press ✕, R1, ○, R1, L1, □

PS2 CHEATS

300: MARCH TO GLORY

To get 25,000 Kleos, pause the game and enter ↓, ←, ↓, ←, ↑, ←

ATV OFFROAD FURY PRO

Enter the password lazyboy as a code to unlock all bonuses

BATTLEZONE

In the Cheat menu (under Options), move the cursor over a cheat option and then type in the following codes. When you've finished press ✕ not ○ or all cheats will be turned off.

Team special recharge
→, →, ←, □, R1, L1

Mortar only
△, L1, □, □, →, <-

Insta gib
L1, □, △, →, △, R1

Unlimited ammo
←, R1, L1, △, →, □

Pick up double time
□, →, △, →, R1, L1

No auto-heal
START, →, ←, SELECT, →, □

Always invisible
L1, ←, →, □, △, R1

Maximum players
→, ←, →, ←, →, ←

CHILI CON CARNAGE

Save your game and create a profile in the name of **ERNESTO** and you will be invincible

DRAGONBALL Z: ANOTHER ROAD

To start a battle in Super Saiyan form hold R1 when choosing a character and press ✕ on the Super Saiyan form. If you get it right you'll hear a special sound.

RATCHET AND CLANK 3

Pause the game and press ○, □, ○, □, ↑, ↓, ←, ← to turn Ratchet's wrench into a lightsaber

COMPLETE CROFT MANOR

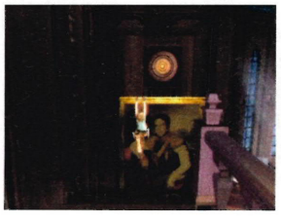
YOUR GUIDE TO LARA'S GAFF IN TOMB RAIDER ANNIVERSARY

It isn't *Tomb Raider* if there isn't a Croft Manor to nose around and *Anniversary* doesn't disappoint. Although the game's a remake, this level is new; in the original, the manor was the training area. Lara finds a note from her butler (whom you can't lock in a freezer this time) saying that the security alarm's gone off, locking various rooms. Here's how to unlock the secrets of Lara's ancestral pile.

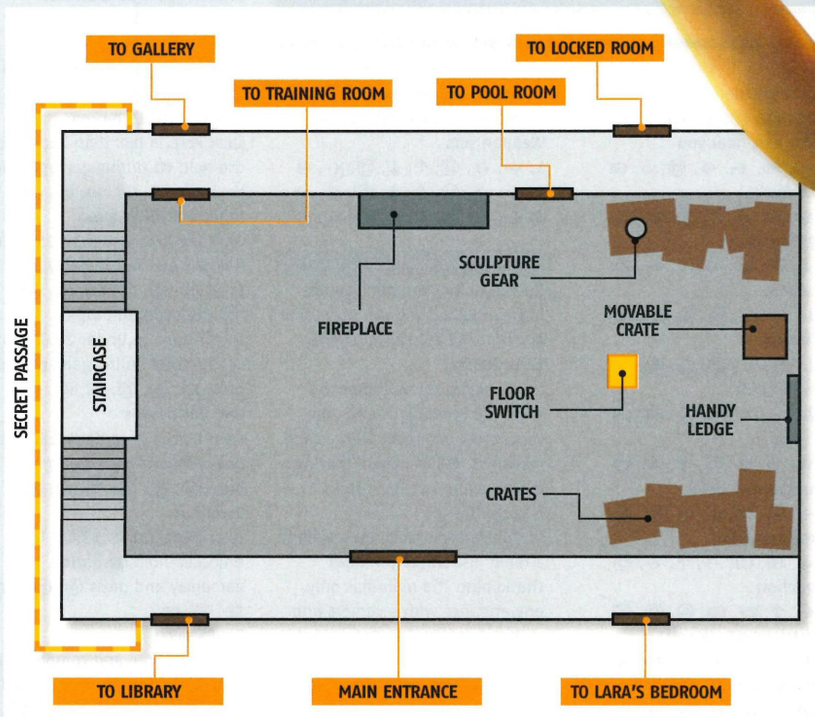
1 GET YOUR GUNS

Head straight for the Library and push all the suspicious books back into the bookcases to reveal two hidden cupboards. The bottom one contains a Garden Maze map; the top holds Lara's dual pistols.

On the top staircase, jump onto the painting of Napoleon to reveal a switch that you need to shoot. Do it quickly, though, because the painting pops back up again. This will open a secret passageway.



MAP OF THE MANOR

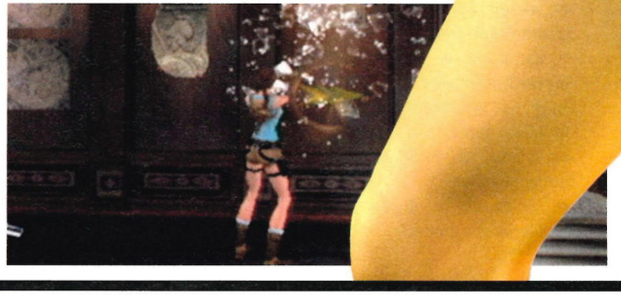


2 GRAB THE EMPTY BUCKET

Pick up the empty bucket that's in the passageway. Then follow the corridor around and you'll end up in the Gallery.

3 SHOOT THE GLASS

Head upstairs, shoot the glass cabinet and grab the Sundial Gnomen. Go back downstairs and touch the alarm by the main door to deactivate it and unlock the door.



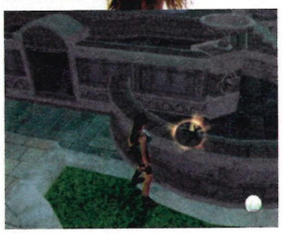
4 GET THE GRAPPLING HOOK

Go to the Garden and put the Sundial Gnomen on the sundial.

Grab hold of the sundial and rotate it clockwise until it points at XI, which will make the XI tile rise up. Repeat with the dial pointing at II, then again at VII. That will open the gates to the maze.

Use the map you found in the Library to navigate through the maze to the central area with the Roman statues, where you can pick up Lara's grappling hook. Have a good search about while you're in the maze: there's lots of useful stuff to be found.

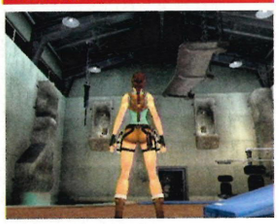
Finally, grapple open the double gates to allow yourself easy access back here.



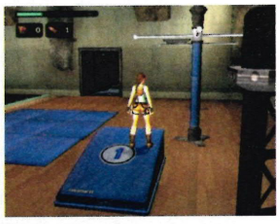
5 GET THE WRENCH

Go to the Training Room. Your aim is to get to the long metallic platform at the top, where you can pick up the wrench. To achieve this you'll need to flick three switches as follows...

SWITCH 1



There are ramps in here marked with numbers.



Run up ramp '1' and launch Lara onto the movable crossbars.

To get to the second crossbar, swing round and jump onto the ledges on the wall. Make your way to the wall with the green handholds, climb up to the top, then press ⊗ to jump onto the platform behind.

Hit this switch to raise the four podiums in the room, then go down to floor level again ready for the next section.

SWITCH 2

To get to the second switch, run up ramp '3', jump onto the wall, and climb round to the left. Jump further up the wall and pull backwards to do a wall run.

When you've grabbed onto the next ledge, shimmy around to the left and drop onto a lower ledge.

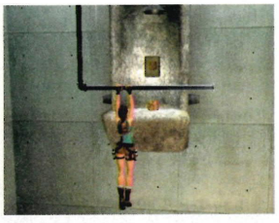
Shimmy right, jump into the alcove and hit the switch.

SWITCH 3

For the final switch, run up ramp '3' again and jump onto the wall but this time climb around to the right. Head upwards, then jump backwards onto a ledge.

Jump right to the second ledge, then drop down to a lower one and shimmy right until you can do a wall run.

Run and jump onto the ledge above the slope, then shimmy around to the right and jump onto the bar.

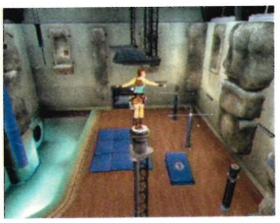


The bar will swing towards the alcove that holds the final switch.

GETTING THE WRENCH

Return to ramp '3' and traverse round to the right-hand ledges, but this time, don't drop to the lower ledge. Instead, pull backwards and jump onto the bar.

From there, jump onto the blue post, spin left and then jump onto the second bar. From there you should be able to get to the perches – a great opportunity to practise Lara's latest move, perching, introduced for this new game and essential to success. If she wobbles a little, try tapping △ to keep her steady.



Jump onto the metallic platform, and run along it to grab the wrench that's at the end.

6 TURN THE WATER BACK ON

Head back to the right-hand side of the garden where the water pipes are and use the wrench to turn the water back on. Then go to the nearest fountain and fill the empty bucket with water.

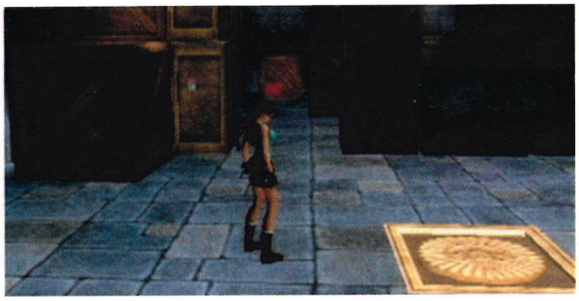
7 DOUSE THE FIRE

Go to the manor's Main Hallway where you'll find the pile of crates that Winston mentioned in his note. They are the source of the security system issues.

Search the pile for a smaller one that can be moved onto the floor switch. The back of the fireplace will open up, but the fire is in the way.

Pour the water from the bucket on the fireplace and you can reach in to pick up the arrow.

While you're in the main hallway, go back to the stack of crates and clamber up them to find a sculpture gear.



8 DROP THE ARCHER

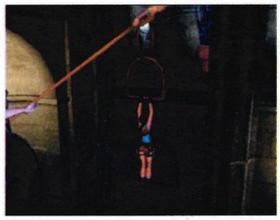
Go to the Pool Room, where you need to climb onto three balconies and shoot the pulleys there to drop to statue hanging in the ceiling. You will achieve this thusly...

BALCONY 1

Climb on the crates at the back right, then jump and swing onto the yellow and black pole.

Swing onto the balcony ledge, shimmy round and jump and grab onto the pillar, then pull backwards to land on the scaffolding's wooden platform.

Jump and hang onto the statue's conveniently located chain to pull the spear downwards.



Repeat this process, except you can now swing around the spear to launch yourself onto the balcony. Once there, shoot the pulley on the right to release one rope from the statue.

Jump down and pull the skip out so that it's positioned in between both scaffolding structures.

BALCONY 2

You can now use the skip to perch, then jump onto the left hand side structure.

Turn right and do a wall run to gain access to the second balcony, from where you can shoot the second pulley.

Before you jump down again, head back to the wooden scaffolding and push the crate off the platform. Position it between the central scaffolding structure and the one on which you were just standing.

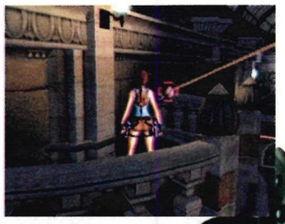
BALCONY 3

Back on the ground, shoot the pulley on the central scaffolding structure.

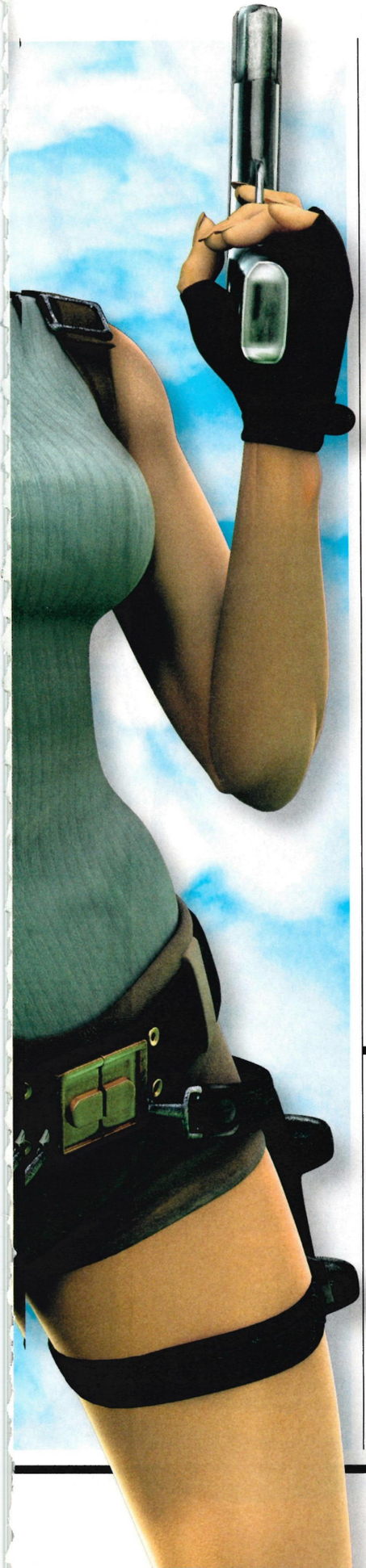
Grapple and pull on the right hand hook of the plank, then run to the left side and use the box to climb onto the now-tilting wooden plank so you can use it to spring-vault onto the vertical wooden ledge.

Traverse until level with the final balcony and jump onto it.

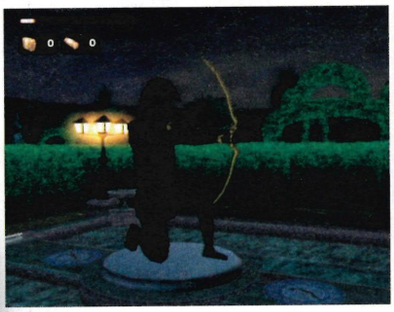
Shoot the final pulley and the statue will crash to the floor.



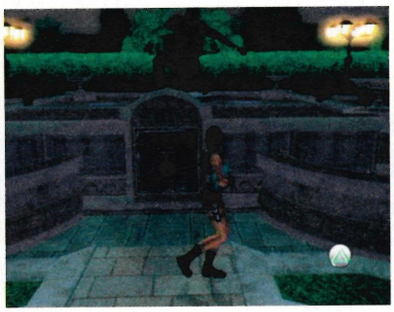
Now you can swim down and pick up the bow.



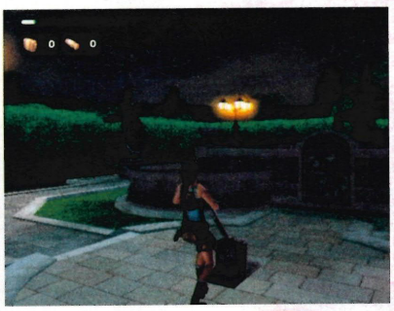
9 GET THE MUSIC BOX CYLINDER



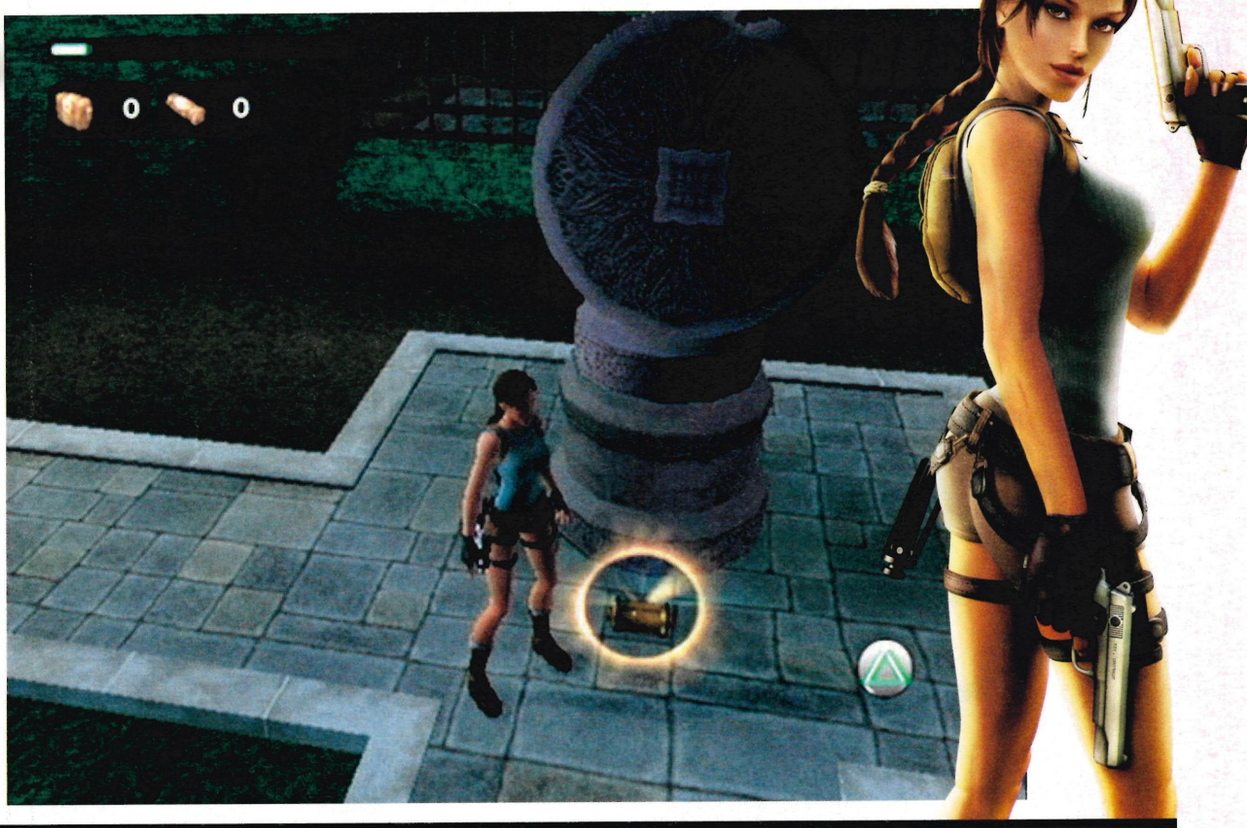
Go back to the statues in the Garden. Put the bow and arrow you just obtained in the hands of the centremost statue.



Go to the front of the statues and use △ to grapple the panel off to reveal a series of gears. Put the sculpture gear in place...

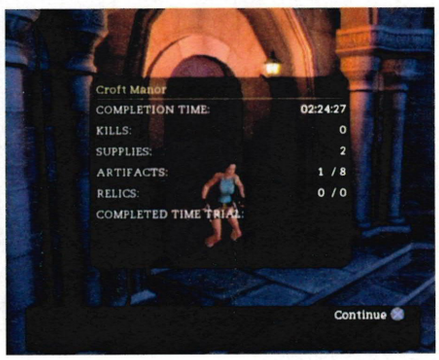


...and pull the lever. Watch the cutscene then pick up the music cylinder.

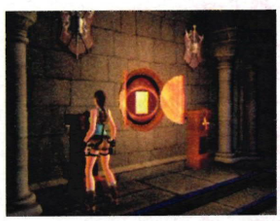


10 LAST BUT NOT LEAST...

Go to the final locked room in the right-hand balcony and put the cylinder into the big security panel at the side of the door.



A tune will play, the door will open, and Croft Manor is complete. Hooray for you! Now there are just a few more levels to go...



BEFORE YOU GO...

Now that you've deactivated the alarms in the house, you'll be able to access Lara's bedroom. Here, you can find her journal, which is hidden behind the circular etching of Medusa on one of the walls. Pull down the two knives either side of it to open it up and get the journal. ■

PlayStation®2
OFFICIAL magazine-UK

THE OPS2 Role Playing Game DREAM TEAM

Pick'n'mix your ideal party from the wondrous world of PlayStation RPGs

Choice can be a strange concept in roleplaying games. People who don't understand the joy of RPGs generally have some kind of beef with the lack of control they usually have: you're forced to go where the story tells you, the cutscenes witter on forever and your interaction may be limited to tapping the ⊗ button over and over during unending random, turn-based battles.

But, for their fans, the enormous scope and imagination of the best games can keep a gamer glued to an RPG for a distressing percentage of his or her life. Once the customisation aspects of games such as *Disgaea* or *Dark Chronicle* take hold, you can't shake the addiction of those jazzed-up spreadsheets that involve nurturing the perfect warrior or combining items to make spanky new weapons.

However, there's one thing you can't do. And that's to fill in the weak spots in your party with characters from another game.

Perhaps you've been in a *Shadowhearts* boss battle and thought to yourself: "This would be so much easier if I could just swap in Yangus from *DragonQuest*." Or maybe you're playing *Final Fantasy XII* right now and wishing Lulu from *X* was in your party instead of bunny-girl Fran. Or maybe something else, or none of the above.

We thought it would be cool to pick our dream RPG team. Sort of, Fantasy *Final Fantasy* Football. So that's what we've done. We now present to you our dream RPG party, hand-picked from all the adventurers and adventures that have graced PS2 and PS1 over the years. It's the kind of line-up that lights its farts in the face of fate, not to mention any endboss you'd care to name.

We've not been completely disrespectful to RPG convention, however – after all, some traditions are sacred. So we've chosen a squad to fit into six of the archetypal character slots that so often turn up in role-playing : Leader, Brawler, Mage, Siren, Engineer and Wild Card.

And of course we couldn't agree on just one list so we've included some subs and a few 'B Teams', too.

Do you agree with our choices? Or are we wrong-headed dumbasses who know so little about RPGs that we shouldn't be allowed to swing a magic sword or toy with a licence chart? Then let us know! Go into that bulging repository of RPG lore that you call your brain and put it to some use. Serious or daft, send us your ideas (address on p10).

RPG DREAM TEAM

The Hero

SPECIALISES IN
World-saving destinies, inherited swords, answering '...' to plot revelations, having no parents, floppy fringes

Sephiroth
Final Fantasy VII, Kingdom Hearts 1 and 2

WHO'S SEPHIROTH?
The uber-villain from *FFVII*. Tall, dark and powerful as the sun – why can't we have an anti-hero as our ultimate hero?

WHY'S HE IN OUR PARTY?
Because he's the hardest bastard in the most well-known RPG of all time. No one's going to say 'boo' to him, not even behind his back.

MEMORABLE MOMENT
Murdering Aerith during *FFVII*, thus making a generation of gamers cry all over their knees (not us, of course. Nope. Nuh-uh).

ON THE SUBS' BENCH
Lahari from *Disgaea*, the overlord of the underworld. Another anti-hero he may be, but then they do get all the best lines.

The Brawler

SPECIALISES IN
Hitting things, massive punches, thick necks, not getting jokes, large boots, deep voices, hitting other things

Joachim Valentine
Shadow Hearts: Covenant

WHO'S JOACHIM?
He's a light-headed wrestler who transforms into a bat. Or a superhero known as Grand Papillon. Or turns invisible.

WHY'S HE IN OUR PARTY?
Joachim's 'Muscle Arts' involve him thwacking the proverbial out of anything. Plus, every RPG team needs a borderline-homoerotic beefcake.

MEMORABLE MOMENT
Ripping up a postbox to use as a weapon, from outside a magical castle in Wales. Yep, you read right.

ON THE SUBS' BENCH
Basch from *Final Fantasy XII*. Half iron bar and half lion, every time he opens his mouth a lady somewhere in the world gets pregnant.

The Mage

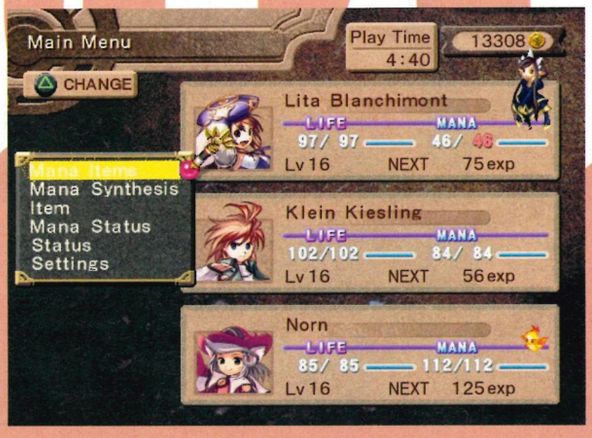
SPECIALISES IN
Running around in flowing clothes without tripping up or catching sleeves on door handles, being eccentric, bizarre weapons, having pets

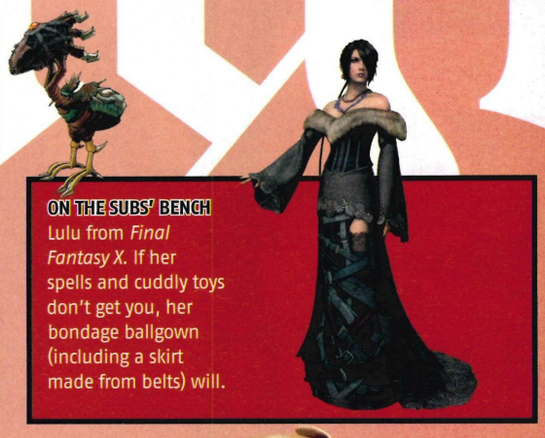
Klein Kiesling
Atelier Iris

WHO'S KLEIN?
He's an alchemy geek who was (of course) raised by his grandmother. Travels the world in search of adventure and further alchemy skills.

WHY'S HE IN OUR PARTY?
Klein can conjure up new magic attacks and items by slapping together the stuff that other RPG characters throw in the bin.

MEMORABLE MOMENT
Helping out the local bartender, improving his menu by whipping up special recipes like some mystical version of Tom Cruise in *Cocktail*.





ON THE SUBS' BENCH
Lulu from *Final Fantasy X*. If her spells and cuddly toys don't get you, her bondage ballgown (including a skirt made from belts) will.

The Engineer

SPECIALISES IN
Tinkering, esoteric attacks that do huge damage to certain enemies types, riding on two-legged mechanical beasts, retro headgear

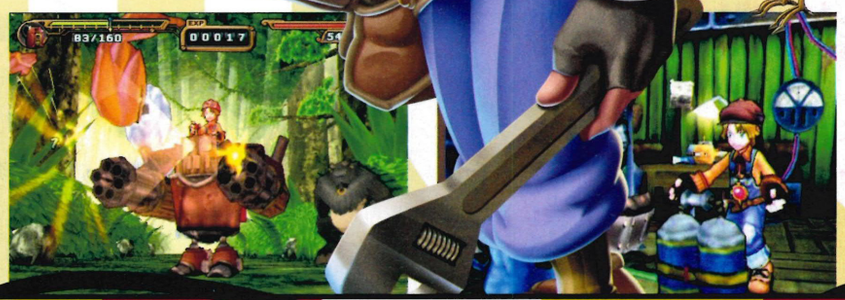
Max
Dark Chronicle

WHO'S MAX?
He's an inventor with an estranged mother (of course), who can create objects based on 'ideas' taken from photographs.

WHY'S HE IN OUR PARTY?
Oh, did we forget to mention that he can travel through time and build entire villages just to make the future a better place? Fear this puppy-faced boy.

MEMORABLE MOMENT
Battling a psychotic, missile-firing circus elephant, while piloting a 'Ridepod' attack vehicle named Steve.

ON THE SUBS' BENCH
The Geomancer, from *Disgaea 2*. This ageing curmudgeon can change the earth itself, adding weird status effects to patches of the ground.



The Siren

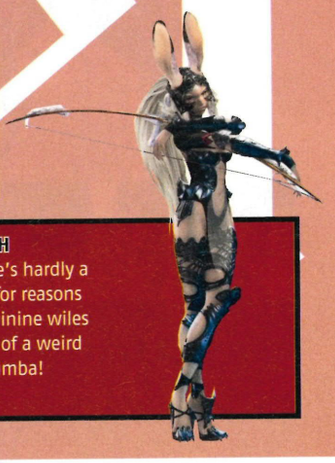
SPECIALISES IN
Gravity-defying breasts, skimpy outfits, ass-kicking ranged attacks, manipulating on-duty male guards

Shania
Shadow Hearts: From the New World

WHO'S SHANIA?
A red-blooded Native American princess who morphs into powerful spirits. Needs to pull one of her socks up.

WHY'S SHE IN OUR PARTY?
When Shania, um, transforms, her, erm, clothes fall off and you get to see, err, the majority of her breasts. What?

MEMORABLE MOMENT
"Inexperienced!"; "Don't ever let me see you again!"; "Not even worth mentioning!" You see the pattern?



ON THE SUBS' BENCH
Fran from *FFXII*. She's hardly a bimbo, she's cold for reasons other than her feminine wiles and she's got kind of a weird noise – but ay carumba!

The Wild Card

SPECIALISES IN
Kooky but powerful attacks that are hard to use well, outlandish attire, silly voices, 'amusing' one-liners

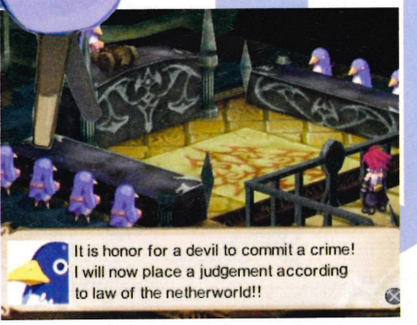
Prinny
Disgaea 1 & 2

WHAT ARE PRINNIES?
Fat blue penguins with squeaky voices that serve in the Underworld, and end virtually every sentence with 'dude!'

WHY THEY'RE IN OUR PARTY
Prinnies explode when thrown. Plus, they've got all manner of weird bits in those pouches, alongside some nasty machetes.

MEMORABLE MOMENT
The deadly Pringer Beam, a huge laser that Prinnies can call upon in times of need. For when those irritating voices aren't doing enough damage.

ON THE SUBS' BENCH
Quina Quen, from *FFIX*. Fat-tongued gourmand capable of eating enemies and absorbing their powers (and not getting a messy apron).



THE B TEAMS

RPG DREAM TEAM

Here are some we made earlier (and then thought better of it)

Team Loophole

Cheekily cherry-picked from games featuring 'RPG elements'

TOMMY VERCETTI
From **GTA: Vice City**
Just one word out of place about his taste in shirts and you'll be getting a motorbike to the face. Then you'll have all the loose change stolen from your corpse.

KAZUMA KIRYU
From **Yakuza**
Appreciates fine whisky. Excellent at baseball and casino games. And not even Chris Ryan could wield a traffic cone in as deadly a manner as this elegant thug.

JEAN
From **God Hand**
Can punch men into space. Kisses the back of his own fist in delight at his own awesomeness, while fireworks explode in the wake of his attacks. Truly a dude's dude.

Team Ballbuster

Hell hath no fury like this lot scorned

FLONNE
From **Disgaea**
Slightly mental angel-in-training who gets branded a 'love freak', she's also an enormous geek whose eyes catch fire if something gets her back up.

ENTA
From **Disgaea**
Dominates *Diasgaea*'s cutscenes with her own maniacal TV show. Treats her Prinny penguin lackeys like scum. You could call her playful, in a totally evil sort of way.

MIRANDA
From **Grandia III**
In most RPGs, the hero is accompanied by a close ladyfriend. Not in *Grandia III* – Miranda is your *mum*, and she won't stand for any twaddle. Total MILF though, obviously.

Team Sympathy Shag

Not every RPG character is a rippling-muscled champion

AXEL
From **Disgaea 2**
Formerly famous for being a kick-ass action hero and rock star, these days Axel is nowt but a deluded loser. One you get to beat up, over and over and over...

ETHAN WABER
From **Phantasy Star Universe**
If Ethan was in the real world there's no way, ever, not even after saving a pram that was rolling through heavy traffic, he'd get laid.

HARVEST MOON GUY
From **Harvest Moon**
Spends his life growing onions and using them as gifts to get girls into bed. Not a bad tactic, really, but it's one that takes a whole year of in-game time to pull off.

Barnet FC

Hair is a very important RPG fashion statement

MUSASHI
From **Musashi: Samurai Legend**
A haircut that never ends, and could find its way to the middle of a maze before you've even stepped foot inside it. Hated by angler fish the world over.

ALEXANDER
From **Makai Kingdom**
As God of Destruction, it's okay to look like the Eurodisco version of Cruella de Ville. But a mullet so long it reaches round to brush his pecs? There's no call for that sort of behaviour.

AMILA
From **Magna Carta**
This lass ain't getting into a phone box, ever. A dead crow and hundreds of lollipop sticks would probably be needed for a cosplay outfit.

next month

DIXMOR HOSPITAL
FOR THE CRIMINALLY INSANE
EST. 1932

Internal Memo

High Security Ward

URGENT

From: Dr. Whyte

To: Dr. Pickman

Re: Danny Lamb and Leo Kasper

Enclosed are Danny Lamb and Leo Kasper's id bracelets found discarded after last night's incident. This is the only potentially damaging evidence we have found so far. I trust every possible precaution will be taken to ensure that any records relating to these patients are destroyed.

We are all too aware that both subjects pose a highly serious threat to society, let alone the very existence of 'The Project'. Both patients suffer severe psychotic episodes characterized by intense paranoia, involuntary psychotic reactions, delusional hallucinations and acute schizophrenic disorders.

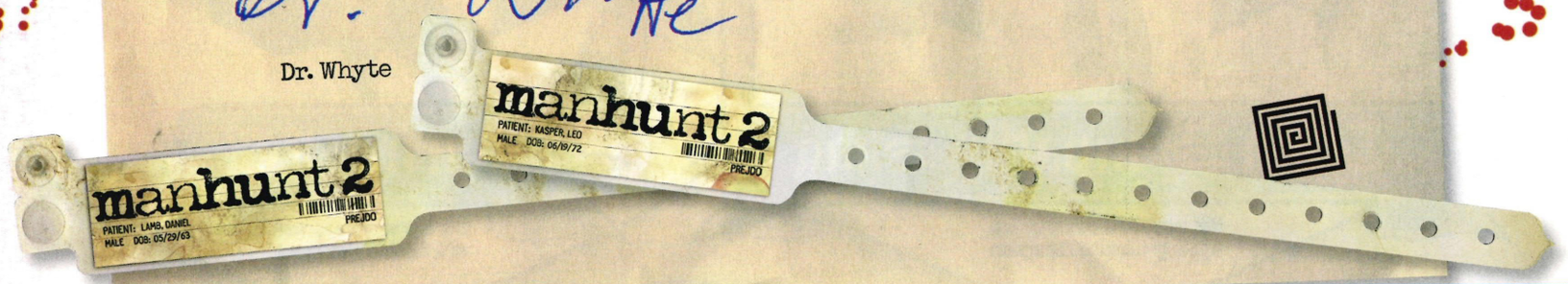
I know I don't need to mention the severity of the consequences for us and 'The Project' if these patients have escaped.

We HAVE to track them down.

Dr. Whyte

MANHUNT 2 - THE EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

IT'S LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER!



PlayStation®2 OFFICIAL MAGAZINE-UK

#87 ON SALE 21ST JUNE

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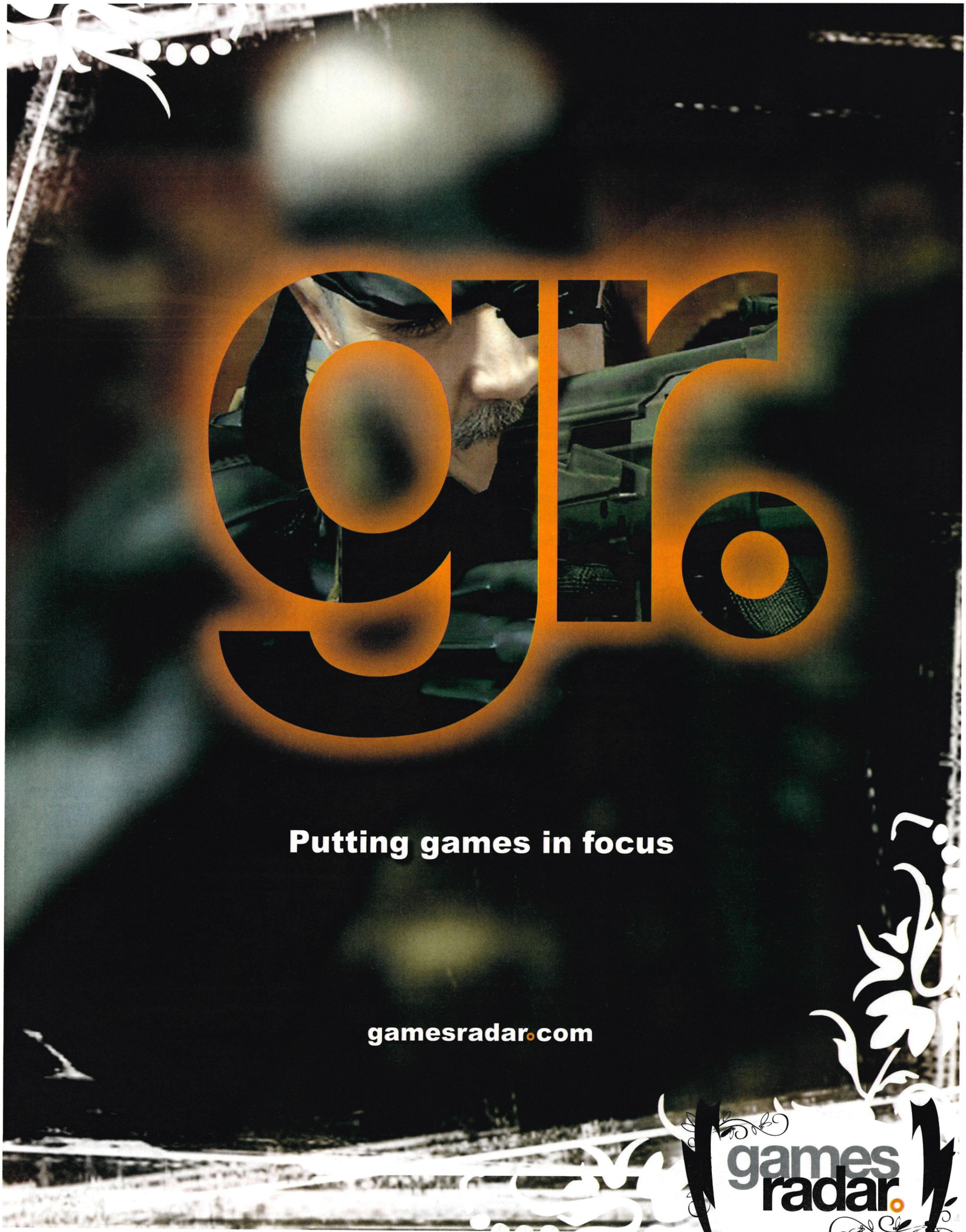
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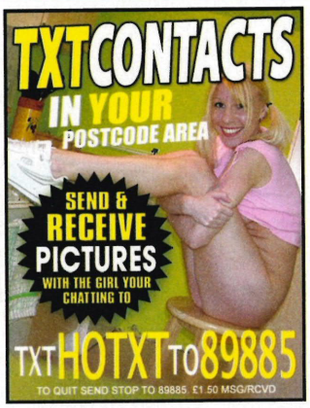

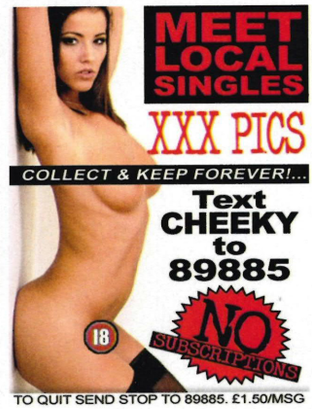

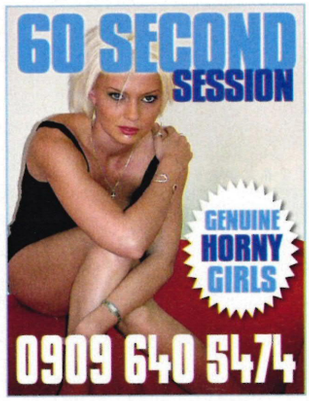

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PlayStation Education Part 5

The X Factor

Because pop stars go with PlayStation like rock goes with roll

You

Genre Anything, so long as it's RAWK!
Highest charting single 'Free Bird'
Seen in *Guitar Hero II*

Yasmin, Jade, Sasha, Chloe, Roxxi

Genre Dysmorphophobic pseudo-rock
Highest charting single 'So Good'
Seen in *Bratz Rock Angelz*

PaRappa the Rapper

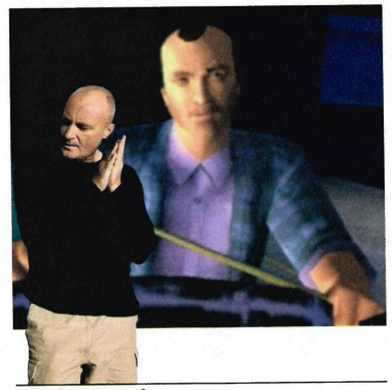
Genre Rhythm rap
Highest charting single 'I Gotta Believe'
Seen in *PaRappa the Rapper*

Billy Joe Armstrong, Green Day

Genre Pop punk
Highest charting single 'Basket Case'
Seen in *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland*

50 Cent

Genre Gangsta rap
Highest charting single 'In da Club'
Seen in *50 Cent: Bulletproof*



Phil Collins

Genre Uneasy listening
Highest charting single 'A Groovy Kind of Love'
Seen in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories*

Dante

Genre Death metal
Highest charting single 'Paradise Lost'
Seen in *Devil May Cry 3*

Jadakiss

Genre Hip hop
Highest charting single 'Jenny from the Block' (with Jennifer Lopez)
Seen in *Get On Da Mic*

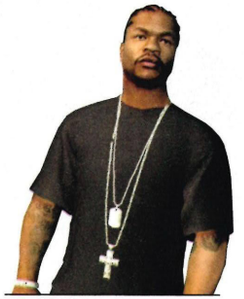
The King of All Cosmos

Genre Beatbox-driven Esperanto pop
Highest charting single 'Katamari on the Rocks'
Seen in *We ♥ Katamari*

(c) Time Out. Pictures: Ed Marshall.

Yuna

Genre Bubblegum J-pop
Highest charting single 'Materia Girl'
Seen in *Final Fantasy X-2*



Xzibit

Genre Hip hop
Highest charting single 'X'
Seen in *Pimp My Ride*

Love Fist

Genre Hair metal
Highest charting single 'Fist Till Morning'
Seen in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*

Ludacris

Genre Hip hop
Highest charting single 'Money Maker'
Seen in *Def Jam Icon*

Britney Spears

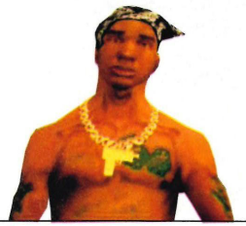
Genre Pop
Highest charting single '... Baby One More Time'
Seen in *Britney's Dance Beat*

U-1

Genre J-pop rock
Highest charting single 'Nuff' Respect'
Seen in *Gitaroo Man*

Fred Durst, Limp Bizkit

Genre Nu-metal
Highest charting single 'Rollin' (Air Raid Vehicle)'
Seen in *Fight Club*



OG Loc

Genre Wanksta Rap
Highest charting single 'I'll Pimp ANYTHING'
Seen in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*

Crazy Frog

Genre Novelty ringtone
Highest charting single Shh! Do not speak its name!
Seen in *Crazy Frog Racer*

Aerosmith

Genre Classic rock
Highest charting single 'I Don't Want to Miss a Thing'
Seen in *Revolution X*

Felix da Housecat

Genre Electro
Highest charting single 'Silver Screen Shower Scene'
Seen in *Playboy The Mansion*

TRADING PAGES

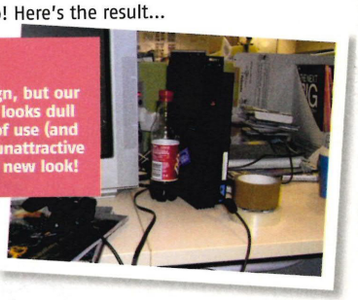
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE LET OTHER MAGS PLAY ON OUR PS2

AFTER
We've been pimped! Even though the fluff and ribbons on the DualShock render it almost completely useless, when a console looks this, ahem, flamboyant, who cares?

They come in black, they come in silver, they even come in pink and blue. But if you want to make your PS2 truly your own, there's nothing else but to pimp it.

Many gamers apply a few stickers to their beloved console, but why stop there? Particularly when there's a whole team of crafty ladies in your building whose desks are groaning with ribbons and glitter and coloured paper... So we challenged Quick & Easy Stitch & Craft magazine to make over one of our office consoles, from drab to fab! Here's the result...

BEFORE
It's a classic piece of design, but our once-sleek black console looks dull and ordinary after years of use (and some random and rather unattractive sticker action). Time for a new look!



IN PROGRESS
"Ooh, thank goodness, there's pink on it!" was the first thing *Quick & Easy* editor Ruth Spolton said when she saw the PS2. Judging by her grin in these pics, she enjoys her job even more than we enjoy ours

ARE YOU A PS2 PIMP?

Have you decorated your PS2? Have you been inspired by our console's new look and glammed up your own? Has your machine got more stickers on it than a normal person might think possible? If any or all of the above apply , we want to see it. Send or email a photo to us at the usual address (p10) and, if we're impressed, we'll send you a T-shirt and a game. Oh yeah, you might want to avoid covering up the air vents and stuff like that. Don't want any bursting-into-flame-type scenarios, do we?

COVER COMPO ANSWERS

Issue 83
God Of War II
'Strong-temper'd steel his stronger strength obey'd' is taken from Shakespeare's *Venus And Adonis*. We used the quote (spoken by Venus) because she's referring to Ares, the god of war

Issue 84
Mercenaries 2
'Nowhere to run/ nowhere to hide/ you've got to kill to stay alive' is taken from Iron Maiden's song 'The Mercenary'. Why did we use it? Er, that's kind of obvious

Issue 85
Tomb Raider Anniversary
'I wander'd lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills' is a quote from a poem by William Wordsworth about daffodils, which are the symbolic flower for a 10th anniversary

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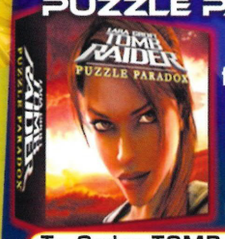

Lara's back, and she's faced with her most taxing adventure to date!

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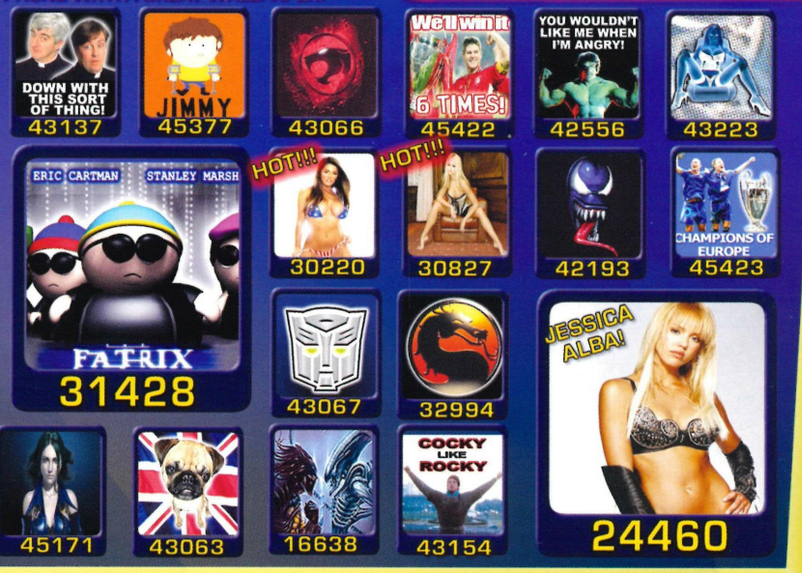

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43749	43745	FERGIE FT LUDACRIS	Glamourous
42364	42369	AKON FT. SNOOP...	I Wanna Love You
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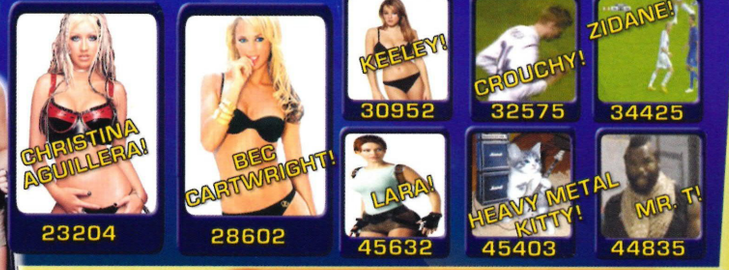

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Be a contender. Be in the action. Be Toseland!

THE OFFICIAL VIDEOGAME

SBK-07

SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

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