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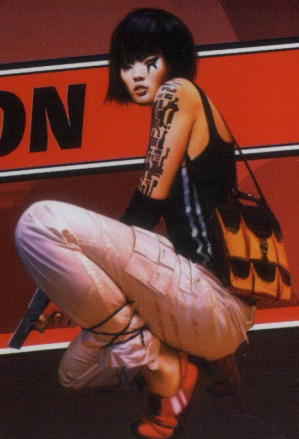
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FOR ARCHAIC

What you can do to
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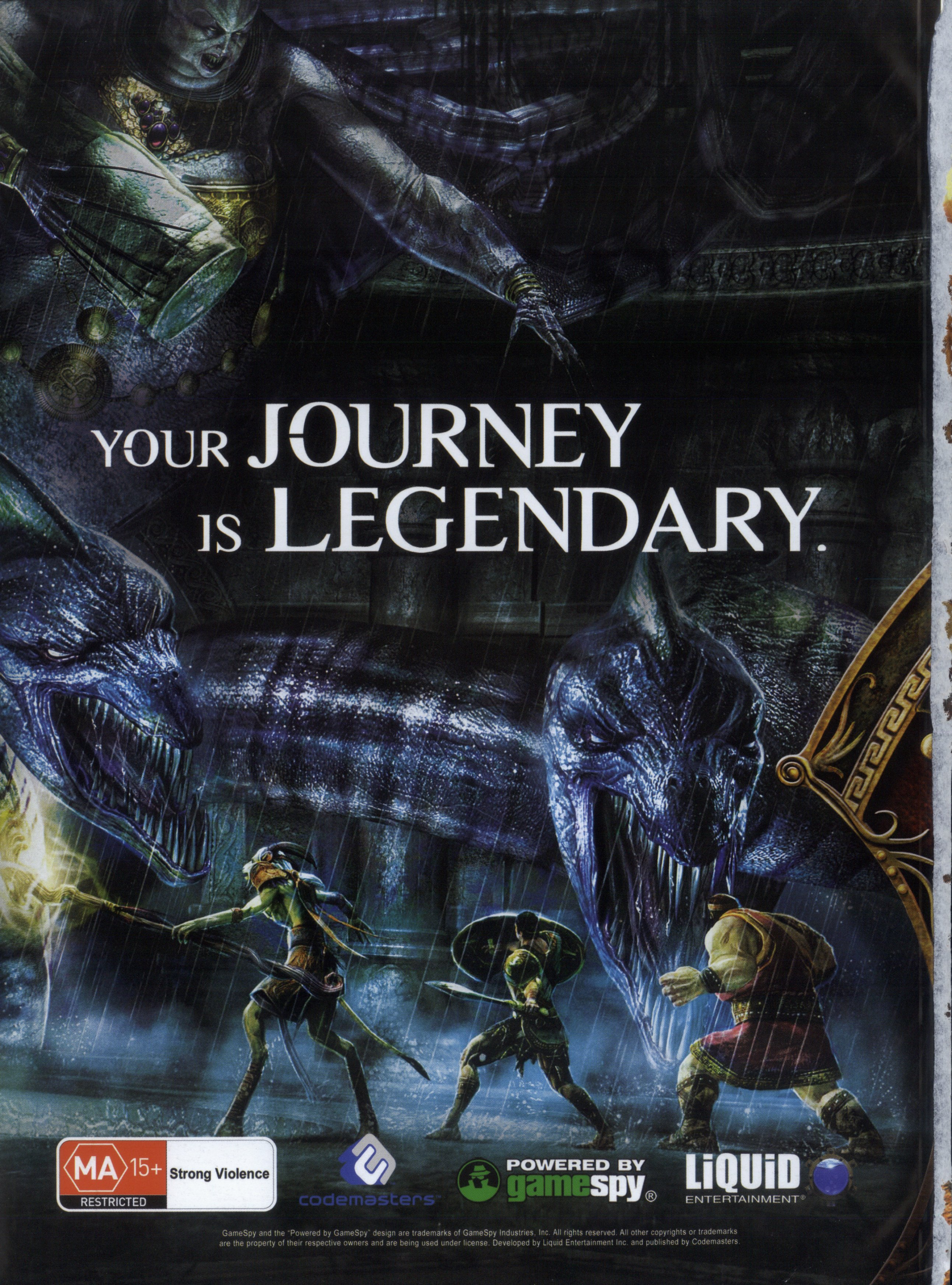
Heavy Rain ★ inFamous ★ Mirror's Edge
Tom Clancy's Endwar ★ Call of Duty 5



A next MAGAZINE



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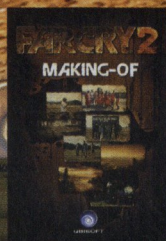
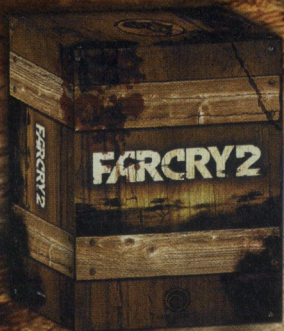


XBOX 360 LIVE

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The background of the advertisement is a screenshot from the game Far Cry 2. It shows a character from behind, wearing a tactical vest and holding a rifle, standing in a savanna landscape at sunset. A military vehicle is partially visible on the right. In the foreground, there is a large, translucent plastic bag and two spent bullet casings on the ground.

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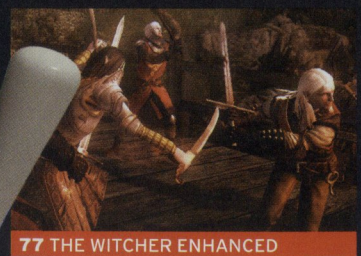
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Those about to rock, we salute you!



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Guitar Hero

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NOVEMBER 2008 ISSUE 181

WRITE TO HYPER!

Locked Bag 5555
St Leonards, NSW 1590
Ph: (02) 9901 6100
Fax: (02) 9901 6116
E-mail: freakscene@next.com.au

EDITORIAL

Editor: Daniel Wilks
Deputy Editor: Darren Wells
Sub Editor: Alan Moore, Daniel Findlay
Art Director: Malcolm Campbell

CONTRIBUTORS

Jonti Davies, Andrew Collins, Van Hammersley, Dirk Watch, Dylan Burns, Rico Suave, Eleanor Eiffe, Erin Marcon, Tim Hernderson, Tim Baker, James O'Connor, Glen Downey, Alan Moore

ADVERTISING

Advertising Manager:
Jeremy Wood
E-mail: jeremyw@next.com.au
Ph: (02) 9901 6337
Silvio Miceli
E-mail: silviom@next.com.au
Ph: (02) 9901 6334

ARNOUL MEDIA

Sales Manager: Kate Leslie
E-mail: kate@arnoulmedia.com
Ph: (08) 8379 2444 Fax: (08) 8379 2555
Mobile: 0407 718 803
Po Box 549, Glenside, SA, 5065

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscription Co-ordinator:
Justine Lynch
For all Subscription enquiries phone:
(02) 9901 6111
1800 227 236
Email: subscribe@mymagazines.com.au

NEXT MEDIA

Chief Executive Officer: David Gardiner
Commercial Director: Bruce Duncan

PRODUCTION

Production Manager:
Leiani Reardon
E-mail: leianir@next.com.au
Ad Production: Dylan Fryer
E-mail: dylanf@next.com.au
Pre-Press Manager: Jonathon Bishop
Pre-Press Operator: Jason Dreggs
IT Support: Fahri Cantas

Printed CTP by: HERO PRINT
Distribution by: Gordon & Gotch
Customer Service Ph: 1300 65 0666
Fax: 1300 65 0777

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Editorial

>> One of the first things people do when they open this magazine is skip straight through to the review section and look at the scores. Those of you who have done this already may have noticed a little change. If you haven't looked at yet, preferring to read the pages of the magazine in order, I urge you to take a look now. I'll wait.

Yes, after 15 years, our scoring system has changed. Undoubtedly we will get a bunch of hate mail screaming that we have removed the heart and soul of the magazine, or something along those lines, but the decision to change the scoring system was not one that was undertaken lightly. It has been quite an agonising month for me. We've had the same scoring system for 15 years, so who am I to come in and buck tradition?

As some of you may be aware, Hyper (and all of Next Media) is under new management, having been bought out by a larger media company by the name of Wolseley Media. This new management has prompted a number of changes in Next magazines, but this alone is not the only reason for the change in the scoring system.

The major reason is that, although the four scores out of 100 may be tradition, it's also something of an obtuse and arcane scoring system. The three scores for graphics, sound and gameplay lead many people to question why the overall score was not an average, or was sometimes lower than all of the other scores. Ultimately a score should be an easily read visual indicator of just how good a game is. Ours was anything but easy.

The other problem is that a score out of 100 gives the impression of some sort of scientific accuracy. No matter how objectively you try to look at a game, the act of playing and reviewing a game is still a completely subjective experience - unless you're writing for one of those crazy German PC gaming magazines that use graphs and charts rather than words.

So, with the explanations out of the way, welcome to issue 181, jam packed with Leipzig GC coverage, informative features and more reviews than you can comfortably shake a stick at. Oh yeah, and scores out of 10.

Daniel Wilks >> Editor

HYPER CREW

MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

DANIEL - Editor

1. The Witcher - PC
"Who knew dwarves were so crude?"
2. Bionic Commando Rearmed - Xbox 360
3. Yakuza 2 - PS2
4. Dragon Quest IV - DS
5. Saints Row 2 - PS3

DARREN - Deputy Editor

1. iPhone - Apple
"The novelty hasn't worn off yet!"
2. Saints Row 2 - 360
3. WipeOut HD - PS3
4. Street Fighter IV - Arcade
5. Drinking - Pub

MALCOLM - Art Director

1. Street Fighter IV - Arcade
"Yeah, it's Streeties. They use cards in arcades now?"
2. Team Fortress 2 - PC
3. Locks Quest - DS
4. Soul Calibur IV - PS3
5. Motorstorm - PS3

GLEN DOWNEY - BMX Bandit

1. Dead Rising - Xbox 360
"Brutal old-school action"
2. Lumines - PSP
3. Just Cause - Xbox 360
4. New Super Mario Bros - DS
5. GTR Evolution - PC



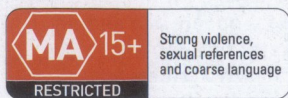
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Sony gets shocked

BioShock ready to surface for the PS3

Kindly cast your mind back to 2007, when **BioShock** first emerged onto the gaming scene. It was the shooter that was anticipated by System Shock fiends, FPS lovers, and Ayn Rand devotees alike, and when it hit, boy, did it deliver. The world — and us — went crazy over its emotional pull, its sub-textual themes, and the way in which you could kill a guy with wasps that crawled out of your arm. It was the game that showed that there's plenty of tricks up the sleeves of the FPS, and although it wasn't without its niggles — widescreen nitpicks and online activation, anyone? — it emerged as a title that others would look up to in admiration.

Whether PS3 owners were among the admirers or against them is now a moot point, as the game is heading to Sony's wonder machine. We got a peek at a preview build, and by and large it's still the same game it was on the 360 and PC. But naturally, in a good-will "sorry about the wait"

gesture, there's a few new bones thrown in to ease the pain.

A new difficulty level, *Survivor*, makes things much, much harder. Content that was released via Xbox Live, such as extra plasmids and tonics, are in the game from the start. There's PS3 trophy support, a few bonus videos, and downloadable content is forthcoming in the shape of about four "challenge rooms" that add a couple of hours' more gameplay.

But if the wait to play it is agonising, be prepared to wait a little longer once you've made the purchase: *BioShock* comes with a mandatory install of around 10 minutes. Once that's out of the way though, you're immersed into one of the finest shooters available, with the game looking and playing exactly like it should.

We're sure keen to get our hands on the final build, if only so we can play a truly great game one more time, so expect our review soon.

Google starts browsing

And then there was Chrome

The browser wars are back on! But this time it's not a two-party tussle like it was with Microsoft and Netscape, or Microsoft and Mozilla, or Microsoft and anyone else who dared look at them the wrong way. This time around the field has a number of players facing off against each other, among them Microsoft, Mozilla, Opera, and now the king of search engines and street level nosing, Google.

The company that evolved from quaint garage start-up to the all-seeing eye of the universe has entered the fray with its own open-source internet browser, called Chrome. The leak of a comic that explained its features and reasons behind designing it spurred the company to reveal their baby a little earlier than they'd planned, but a beta version of Chrome was nonetheless released to the public, and as you might imagine, it wasted no time in gathering headlines from around the world.

One thing that was raked over the coals was the EULA. The sheer wall of text that serves as the contract for most pieces of software contained a doozy of a clause, essentially saying that Google retains the right to do whatever it likes with the information you send or receive via Chrome. Concerns immediately leapt forth — what will they do with photos, bank account details, porn browsing habits? — but Google allayed the fears, saying the EULA was simply a copy and paste of conditions from its traditional terms of service, and the offending clause has been omitted.

Since then it's been trundling along in beta form, and as various outlets dissect the browser (some claim Opera is still the fastest) and its announcement comic (4chan has given the speech bubbles a makeover), you can be sure that Google will continue to polish the product into a serious contender for the browser crown.

Alienware's Call of Duty

Party like it's WWII

Alienware, purveyors of fine gaming PCs are throwing a shindig in Melbourne on November 8th for the highly anticipated *Call of Duty: World at War*. 100 Alienware PCs and 100 Xbox 360s will be available on site to play the game and each attendee will walk away with an Alienware goodie bag and a free game. For tickets (only 800 are available), please visit www.alienware.com.au/party for more details.

CAPTION THIS!

#106

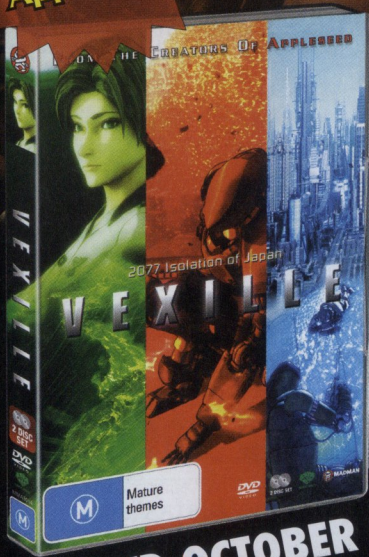
Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with **Caption This Part 106** in the subject line.



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DNA to the ISS ASAP

Now saving humanity, please do not turn off your world

It's not so much a question of if, but when. When will your PC give up the ghost? When will it go belly up, taking your precious data with it? It's something that's inevitable for all PC owners, but it's not really something that you can put a timeframe on. The best thing you can do is make regular backups and keep them in a safe place for when Doomsday comes.

That's what Richard Garriott, creator of Tabula

Rasa and the Ultima series, is doing. But he's not archiving Word documents and pictures of lolcats, he's backing up the human species. And he's not bunging it in a shoebox under his bed, he's sending it into space. Dubbed Operation Immortality, the project sees the DNA of a select group of people, along with a record of humanity's greatest achievements, digitised, popped into a capsule and sent to the International Space Station. It's sure to come in handy if a rogue asteroid blasts us into smithereens or invading aliens cross-breed with us and turn us into green-skinned, three toed monsters.

But who's among the list? What building blocks will we have with which to reconstruct humanity? Well, there's a country singer, an Olympic gold medallist, a sci-fi author, and an American Gladiator. A pretty rad bunch of people, sure. Oh, and there's Stephen Colbert. Yep, the man who has a spider named after him and attempted to run for office is now having



his genetic code preserved, ready to be used if Doomsday come knocking.

"I am thrilled to have my DNA shot into space, as this brings me one step closer to my life-long dream of being the baby at the end of 2001," Colbert quipped. Garriott, himself the son of an actual astronaut, said "In the unlikely event that Earth and humanity are destroyed, mankind can be resurrected with Stephen Colbert's DNA. Is there a better person for us to turn to for this high-level responsibility?"

Not for our money. We'd be proud to have some Colbert blood run through our veins, but the question lingers: if humans are wiped out, who's going to use the DNA to rebuild us?

Praise the Rock!

Guitar game turns to the Almighty, rocks out

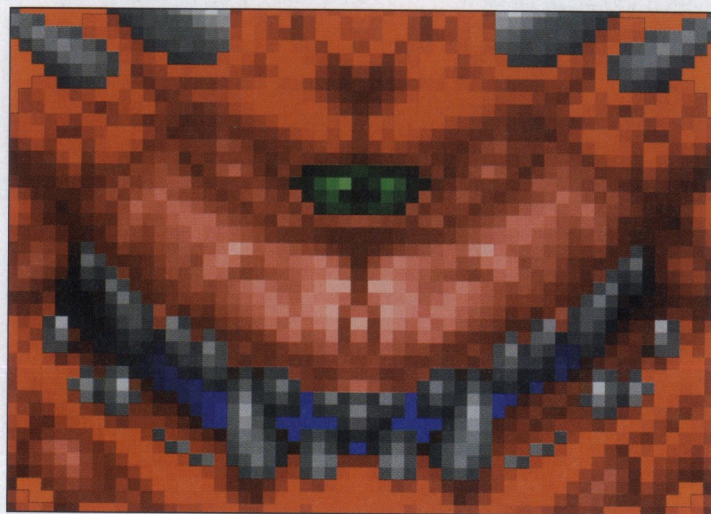
The battle of the bands continues to rage. EA's Rock Band and Activision's Guitar Hero are going head to head, and with imminent release of the latter — set for November 12 — it's given EA a definitive target if it hopes to break into the Australian market. Word remains vague on what the publisher's plans are regarding a local release of Rock Band: Pre-release boxes for it adorn the walls of game stores, and online stores are taking pre-orders, but we're yet to receive anything resembling an official announcement from EA. Activision, meanwhile, is all systems go with a solid release date, a price point, and DLC waiting in the wings.

But hark, the battle may not be over, for a new contender has stepped in. No, it's not the highly-anticipated Sousaphone Hero or the oft-overlooked Theredin Hero, but it's the holiest of all pretend instrument games, Guitar Praise. The concept: it's like Guitar Hero, but with religion-friendly songs.



Over we go to the official site for the low-down. "Grab the guitar and play along with top Christian bands! Shred those riffs or blast the bass...you add a unique sound to the solid Christian rock. But watch out: if you can't keep up, the artists will take a break and stop the music. Crank it up and try again — you'll soon be rockin' with the best while praising the Lord!"

Further details? It costs US\$99.95, is designed for the PC, comes with one guitar, and features hits by well-known artists such as Lincoln Brewster, The Crucified, and Casting Crowns. No word yet whether Activision plans to step in with a tut-tutting copyright infringement notice, but obviously the man upstairs gave the game a thumbs up... I mean, stealing's wrong. They wouldn't steal, would they?



48 Hours of Doom

Strangely, it doesn't involve watching Distaster Movie on a continuous loop

Us gamers aren't an unfeeling, heartless lot. Well, some of us are, but most of us will help out those in need — take a look at the millions of dollars Penny Arcade has raised with its Child's Play charity over the years.

One gamer has indeed looked at those generous donations, and has gathered four of his mates to help raise some of their own. Nick Wilkinson has organised 48 Hours of Doom, a "charity gaming marathon" that's taking place from evening of November 21, and going through to November 23.

"We're going to play through Doom 1, 2, 3 and Quake 1, 2 and 4

back to back over the weekend," explains Wilkinson. "We're omitting Quake 3 because it's boring to watch. If we finish within the time limit we're going to play through Daikatana and the shareware episode of Wolfenstein 3D. The starting difficulty will be Normal, and we'll up the difficulty every time we hit a milestone in donations."

All proceeds raised from the event go to the Child's Play Charity — specifically the Starship Childrens' Hospital in Auckland. For more information check out the 48 Hours of Doom sub-forum on www.hyper.com.au, or visit the official site at — surprise, surprise — www.48hoursofdoom.com.



The one where I eat crow

I'm not exactly the most understated guy around when it comes to venting my spleen or stating my opinions. I usually say what I think before I consider the consequences. Some people respect me for that, others hate me. Them's the breaks. Every month I use my little soapbox on this page to have a rant about something that has gotten on my nerves - usually things like companies rushing games out before they are anywhere near finished, terrible customer service or tech support, or developers refusing to be swayed from the opinion that what they are making/have made is the single greatest thing since sliced bread.

This month I'm taking a different track. This month I'm eating crow.

The first time I saw de Blob, to say I was unimpressed was something of an understatement - a fact I made fairly obvious to THQ and the developers themselves. The game I saw originally was childish, simple and short, with little to hook the player. I despaired that one of highest profile games being developed in house would be a dud of Fury proportions.

How wrong I was. As much as I'd like to take some credit for the turnaround, I'm sure some far more important people than I prompted the rethink. Somebody at THQ or Bluetongue must have felt the same way as I did, because the game that has just shipped is totally different from what I originally saw. It's charming, has a brilliant synaesthetic hook, controls well and most importantly, it's a bucket of fun. Kudos to whoever decided on the changes. They've taken a game that would probably have sunk pretty fast and transformed it into an office favourite.

This month also sees another humbling release. The Witcher: Enhanced Edition seems to be just about the most counter-intuitive bit of business I've seen in a while - and bless them for it. When it was released, The Witcher was a brilliant game - an adult themed RPG with a great combat system, fantastic

plot and some rather stunning good looks (an impressive feat considering it's built using a modified version of the Aurora Engine). Over the last however many months, CD Projekt has slaved away to make their game better.

It seems to me that the standard industry practise seems to be, release a mostly finished game, patch it up to working order upon launch and then maybe release a few stability patches further on down the track if the budget can stretch that far. What CD Projekt has done is almost the exact opposite. Sure the original game was a little buggy on release and required some patching, but instead of leaving it there, the team has continued on

into the night, improving the load times dramatically (they're around 80% faster now), adding new voice acting and animation to make the game more immersive, instituting a NPC randomisation engine so not everyone Geralt meets looks the same, streamlining the alchemy system and fixed numerous small bugs. If that's not enough, the developers have also designed two new mini-adventures for those who have already completed the main game. And they've released it commercially with a short story by the writer of the Witcher novels a

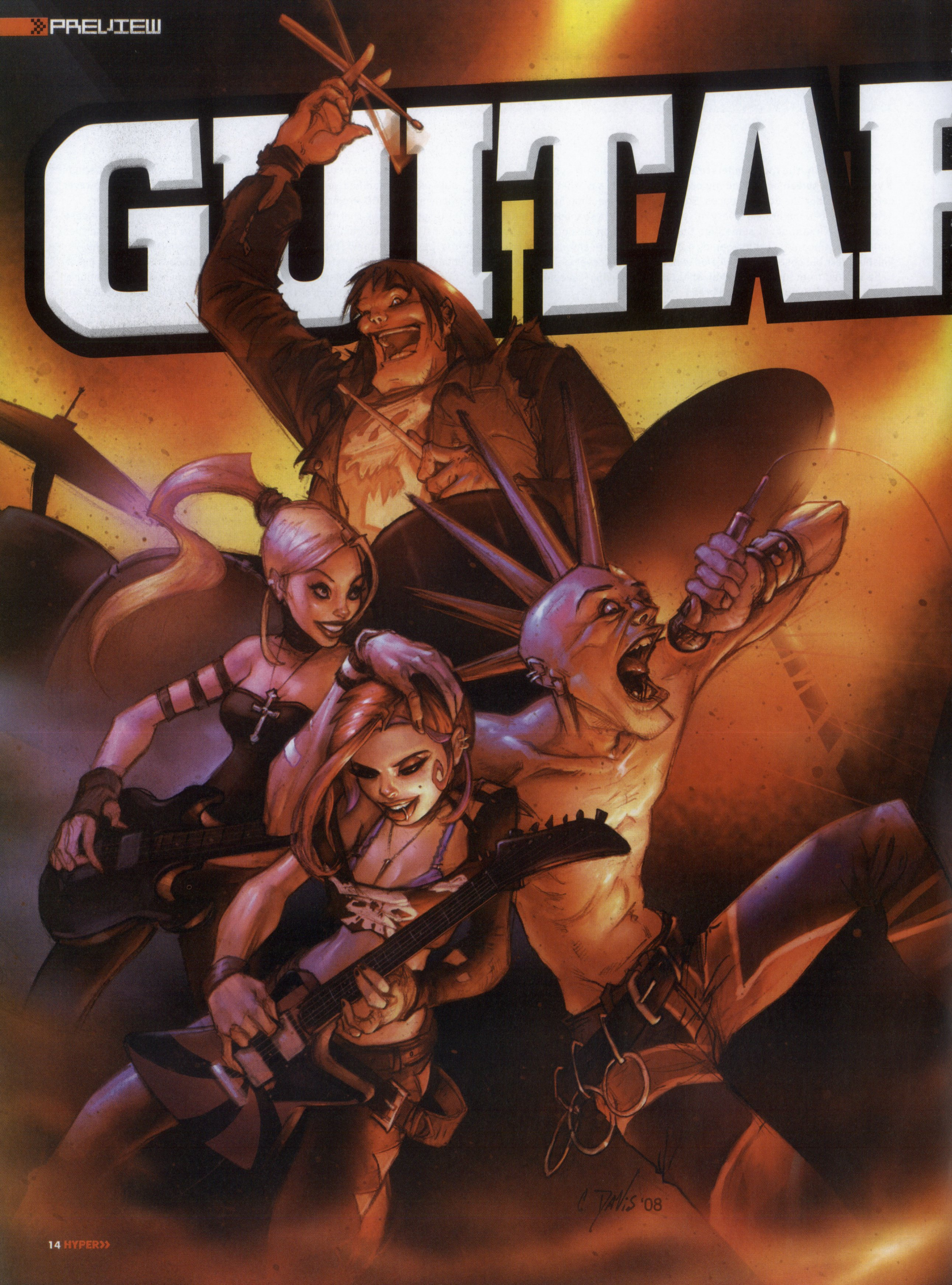
soundtrack CD and more. While re-releasing the game commercially may make firm business sense, the fact that owners of the original version of the game can simply jump online and download all of the fixes, additions and new content (including the story and CD) does not. It's really humbling to see a company that believes in their product so much that they are willing to spend the time to not only make it work but to try to make it all but perfect.

Just so you don't think that I've gone soft in my old age, I do have a little bone to pick this month. I've been playing Infinite Undiscovery this month and I have one thing to say to tri-Ace. It's 2008 ffs! We have advanced consoles with hard-drives (or failing that, high capacity storage media). So why the hell are you still relying on save points?

The game I saw originally was childish, simple and short

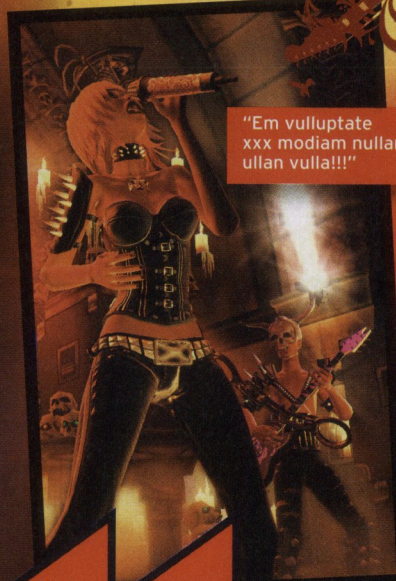
How often do you see this? Not often. A shame.





HERO

World Tour



"Em vulluptate
xxx modiam nullan
ullan vulla!!!"

Wells: Alright, I'm just going to come out and say it: I like Linkin Park. Their music agrees with my ear, it's as simple as that, and although I wouldn't tattoo their logo onto my chest, I won't skip over their songs when they crop up on my MP3 playlist, either. There, happy now?

I figure I might as well get that in the open right off the bat, since now that my two rocker friends here know, it won't be long before the whole world is aware of the fact. How do they know? Because there's a Linkin Park song in Guitar Hero 4: World Tour. And how do we know this? Because we've played it.

Guitars, drums, microphone... the whole setup exists in playable form at Activision HQ, presenting to us concrete evidence that the game is on track for a local release by the end of the year. Thank goodness for that, because we played it for over two hours, and we wanted more.

Insert lyrics
about existential
angst



**I COULDN'T AGREE
WITH DARREN MORE. AFTER TWO
HOURS OF PLAYING, I DEFINITELY
WANT MORE**



SYSTEM:
360, PS3, Wii

CATEGORY:
Music

PLAYERS:
1-4

DEVELOPER:
Neversoft

DUE:
November 12, 2008

Wilks: It's a rare thing for me to say "Thank god for Activision" (as a matter of fact I'm pretty damn sure that this is the first time those words have ever passed my lips or flown from my fingers) but that's exactly how I feel at the moment. After so many false starts with Rock Band (and now Rock Band 2) it's great to see that someone isn't treating us like a technological third-world and releasing some four-player music goodness on our shores.

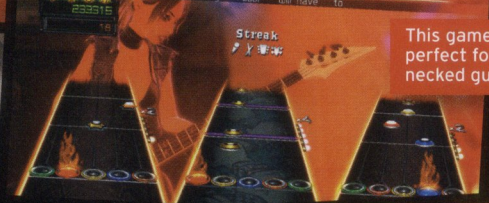
I really wanted to get to this opening without having to reference Darren's rather lamentable liking of Linkin Park but damn you Darren, you've forced my hand.

The only time rap/rock fusion (or Nu Metal as the kids seem to call it now days) was ever any good was on the Judgement Night soundtrack, in which we were blessed with collaborations such as Helmet and House of Pain, Slayer and Ice-T, Faith No More and Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E., Mudhoney teaming with Sir Mix-A-Lot, Pearl Jam smoking it up with Cypress Hill and Dinosaur Jr. debating evolution with Del the Funkie Homosapien. That last bit about debating evolution may be incorrect, but they did play together. I'm also going to state categorically that if I receive any hate mail proclaiming the greatness of Limp Bizkit or ICP I'm going to spend a day, maybe two, dedicating myself to trying to give the author of said hate mail cancer. With my mind.

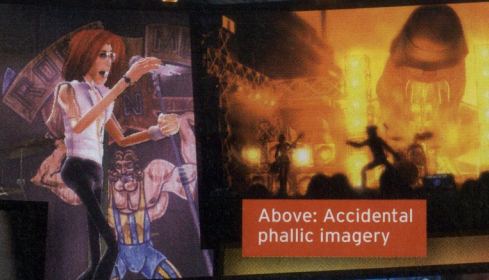
Back to the game though, I couldn't agree with Darren more. After two hours of playing, I definitely want more. Oh, and I did force Darren to play some Survivor, Billy Idol and Bon Jovi, so I guess we're even on track choice.



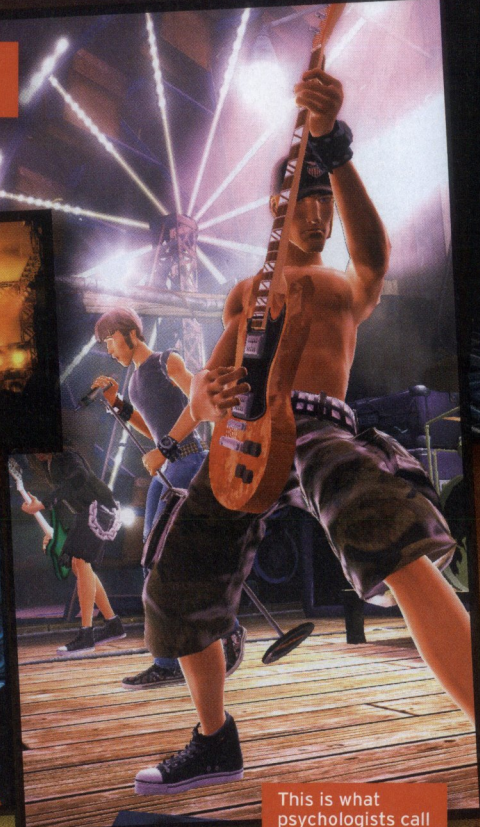
Olaf demonstrates rock pose 171: "The Suggester"



This game is perfect for tri-necked guitars

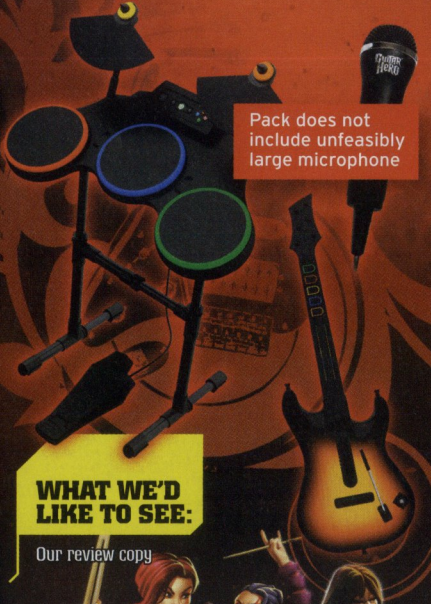


Above: Accidental phallic imagery



This is what psychologists call "compensating"

THE GUITARS HAVE A NICE SENSE OF SUBSTANCE TO THEM, AND THE DRUMS FEEL BUILT TO TAKE A POUNDING



Pack does not include unfeasibly large microphone

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Our review copy

Wells: It certainly gives us more than any other Guitar Hero title. More music: Over 85 tracks are supplied out of the box, and more will be made available online (including Metallica's forthcoming album, *Death Magnetic*). More customisation: You're able to create and change your own characters, clothes, tattoos and album cover art. More creativity: You're able to compose your own songs in the Music Studio note by note, and upload them to the GHTunes database where others can download and play your creations. And of course, there's more instruments: Lead guitar, bass guitar, drums and microphone are all part of the deal, and each can be used to play through the singleplayer mode, or any combination thereof during multiplayer.

That's a lot to digest, but let's backtrack and take a look at the instruments themselves, for they certainly warrant a mention. The guitar controllers still come with their iconic strum bar and coloured buttons, but this time around a touch-sensitive pad sits on the neck, segmented into the five button

colours. Its purpose emerges when notes come strung together with a purple line: simply run your finger along the pad and you'll play those notes, no strumming or fingering required. In practice it's a tad harder than it sounds, and you're still able to play those notes with the buttons if you prefer, but it's a feature that's sure to give the world's expert players something else to master.

If you're more into hitting than strumming, the drums offer three drum pads, two high-hat cymbals, and a kick pedal. Each pad is made of thick rubber, which not only delivers a nice bounce effect to the drumsticks, but also eliminates the coconut shell sound that plagued Rock Band's setup. They're also velocity sensitive, meaning that the harder you whack the drum, the more in-game sound you'll get out of it.

The microphone, well, it's a microphone. USB cord, a bit at the end for shouting into... yeah, not much to see here.

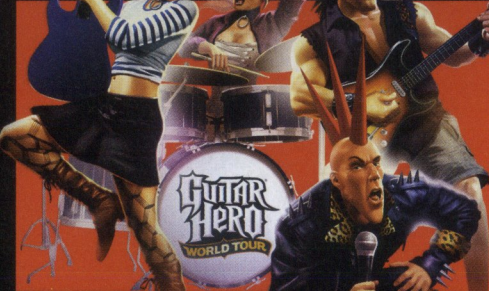
Between each instrument, the build quality is universally great. The guitars in particular have a nice sense of substance to them, and the drums feel built to take a pounding. Although the units we played with were prototypes, we'd be more than happy to see that quality make it to the retail shelf.

Wilks: Agreed — the only change I would like to see in any of the instruments is a little tightening of the rather floppy whammy-bar. Of course, the guitar I played on had been demoed to all and sundry, so it could have been a little worse for wear. (I think so, for the whammy bar on my axe was fine —Wells)

One thing that became abundantly clear in my hands on time with GH World Tour is the fact that I have been blessed with a white man's sense of rhythm. I cannot drum to save my life and had constant trouble hitting the correct pad or high-hat, and trying to get my foot working in time with my hands made me feel (and most probably look) as though I were having some kind of fit. You know what though? I didn't care. Drumming is incredibly fun and, somewhat counter intuitively as we discovered, easier on medium and hard difficulties than it is on beginner and easy. On the lowest difficulty levels, the notes are so intermittent and slow that we all found

BATTLE OF THE BANDS

Guitar Hero: World Tour is set to feature one of the most rocking online modes we've heard of in the music genre. The Battle of the Bands mode will allow two full bands of four players to compete against each other online, effectively combining the best of offline multi-player with mates, and the online pwning of noobs in the one package.





Giant singer will destroy us all!

It's like a Great White gig! (Too soon?)

The result of trying to apply makeup while driving

ourselves actually drumming along to the beat of the song rather than waiting for the notes to crawl down the screen. At higher difficulty levels what you're playing actually synchs into the music.

The only problem that I foresee with the drums is that to activate Star Power the player must simultaneously hit both high-hats – something that proved rather more difficult to time than simply tilting a guitar.

Wells: Another niggle that we noticed was the layout of the in-game interface. In multiplayer mode, the top-left corner houses each player's rock meter – needle in green is A-OK, needle in red means you're seconds away from being booed off the stage. With four players needing their share of screen real estate, things are understandably cramped, but the placement of all four rock meters in the one corner means that, unlike the convenient location of the rock multiplayer, you can't just glance next to your note highway to see how well you're doing. No, you need to look up in the corner, find your designated meter, take in the information, and look back down to your notes. It mightn't sound like much, but scrambling for the required info can potentially cost you a few missed notes. Hopefully things aren't totally set in stone, and an interface reassessment is still on the cards before release.

Something that we're glad got re-examined is the note placement for songs. Guitar Hero 3 stands as the hardest game in the series due to its arbitrary flurry of notes in the more difficult settings – for that you can thank the countless YouTube videos of smug gamers breezing through each song and the desires of Neversoft to give them a challenge. With World Tour, the developers have thankfully realised that throwing in a note hailstorm is not the way to go, and present songs with note placement that's far more logical than the game's predecessor. The tracks we played were an enjoyable challenge, rather than presenting teeth-gritting, finger-numbing frustration.

Wilks: Definitely. The notes actually followed a logical sequence instead of just flying all over the place to make things difficult for players. I did

notice that there still seems to be a rather (too) steep difficulty curve between medium and hard difficulties. Of course, we were playing tracks essentially at random so some of the tracks we chose could have been from the end of the game and thus were far more complex than others.

Speaking of playing random songs, in the quick play mode, players can actually set up a track listing of up to six songs, so there's no need to keep going back to the song screen to choose the next track. It's not a huge leap forward in game design, sure, but it's a nice feature nonetheless.

There are a hell of a lot of customisation options in World Tour. Players can create a unique character using a system akin to create-a-skater in Tony Hawk, create a unique guitar from numerous individual pieces, create band logos and cover art, drum skins, face paint – the whole shebang. Money earned during play can be used to unlock new items of clothing, guitars and the like. It's pretty damn big. Sometimes it's a little worrying to see a developer concentrating on the customisation aspects of a game so heavily, as it often means that the actual core of the game leaves a little bit to be desired. That's definitely not the case with World Tour. Neversoft seem to have overcome the hiccups that plagued their first Guitar Hero title to produce a real corker of a game.

Wells: As we ended our two-hour session wearing face-wide grins of delight, we reached a unanimous verdict: this game rocks. What rocks even more is the fact that Australian gamers will be receiving the game at all. As Daniel mentioned, the Rock Band saga has demonstrated that antipodes clearly desire a multi-instrument game, and Activision has thankfully stepped up to the plate rather than choosing to hide behind cost-related excuses. Which reminds us, we're still not sure what the RRP will be for Guitar Hero 4. Hopefully it's kept down to a reasonable amount, as the game deserves to be made available to as many budgets as possible. With a plethora of songs and customisation options, a detailed song creation utility and a range of instruments to play – Drums! Drums! – this game can't arrive soon enough. “

THE GUITAR GUY

For our handson we decided to bring an actual musician along to get their take on the game. As neither Darren nor I have any musical talent whatsoever, we brought along Lachlan Marks, editor of Australian Guitar magazine.

Lachlan: As a guitarist I approached Guitar Hero 4: World Tour with trepidation. We all know that Guitar Hero is the great equaliser; even if you're a master on the “real” fretboard, your gamer friends are likely to be leaping off couches, maximising point scores while you struggle to make the pretty coloured buttons line up with those on the screen. So I confronted my insecurity and...I played drums. After tapping along quite comfortably (and joyously) to Foo Fighters Everlong, I had my brain fried by the sudden change in tempo and the concentration level required for Dinosaur Jr's Feel The Pain. However, I had proved myself a reliable beatkeeper by this point and gained the confidence to strap on the virtual six-stringer. There was, of course, no chance I'd be matching the acute hand-eye-coordination of my seasoned bandmates, but it can be said that this version of Guitar Hero makes greater sense from a

“ FOR THE MOST PART THE NOTES LAND WHERE YOU EXPECT THEM TO ”

musician's standpoint – just don't play it with an actual plectrum! For the most part the notes land where you expect them to – this is really noticeable in bass mode where it can get too easy (see Silversun Pickups Lazy Eye) – and the ability to customise guitars right down to fretboard inlays and pickups is hugely appealing from a guitar porn lover's perspective. The huge range of songs, ease of play and singing/drumming options mean it's easy to switch from unwilling spectator to fill in drummer after a few beers. This is the most universally accessible and, more importantly, fun addition to the series so far.





Heavy Rain: The Origami Killer



SYSTEM:
PS3

CATEGORY:
Adventure

PLAYERS:
1

DEVELOPER:
Quantic Dream

DUE:
Late 2009

“Quick!” David Cage is spitting his words, furiously, in a fit of barely-contained excitement, “hide somewhere! Anywhere, it doesn’t matter! The closet! Quickly! There — hide there!”

Over in the other corner of the small closed-off space within Sony’s booth at Leipzig, the fingers of Cage’s assistant dance desperately around the controller gripped between his hands. The results of these frantic finger-responses are cast clearly upon a gigantic LCD screen; the camera lurches with heavy sickness as a desperate woman is guided hurriedly into a closet, a 24-style camera keenly highlighting the encroaching danger. Moments later a deranged Taxidermist arrives in the room, his posture that of a psychopath in the cozy comfort of a familiar scenario as he goes about searching the room for the source of the noise that first alerted him to the foreign presence in his home. He peers under the bed to no avail. Unperturbed, he moves on to the closet. A QTE quickly ensues.

Cage continues to scream enthused orders with the passion of a smacked-up charming eccentric as the specific control commands dart frenziedly around. The button prompts themselves waver across the screen, stitched to the area or limb

that the contextual focus is due to shift to. Each is met successfully, and free control is briefly returned, the player-character, a young female Journalist named Madison, is now animated with keen panic; she is practically falling over herself as her hands press against any and every wall and object she comes close to. The camera’s cinematic desires have gone into overdrive, keenly splitting points of focus in such a way as to make a perfectly

flawed gem that did a few too many things wrong for its own good, but it’s also a game that had the makings of a masterpiece in places, and everyone who has shown up for the Heavy Rain presentation knows it. If the guys at Quantic Dream have been taking what was good about their last game, polishing it up while at the same time jettisoning the gangrenous limbs, then the demonstration that awaits is going to be something special.



The variety seems greater than anything that Fahrenheit ever offered, and the cinematic element has been enhanced multifold.

interactive slice of gameplay appear as a frantic, point-of-view cinematic. There’s a panicked jostle with a knife, a frantic dash for the garage, a roll under a jammed door and then an escape by motorbike — almost. The sordid thing won’t start, and Cage’s assistant is now manically mashing at the controller in an effort to get the engine to start.

REWIND

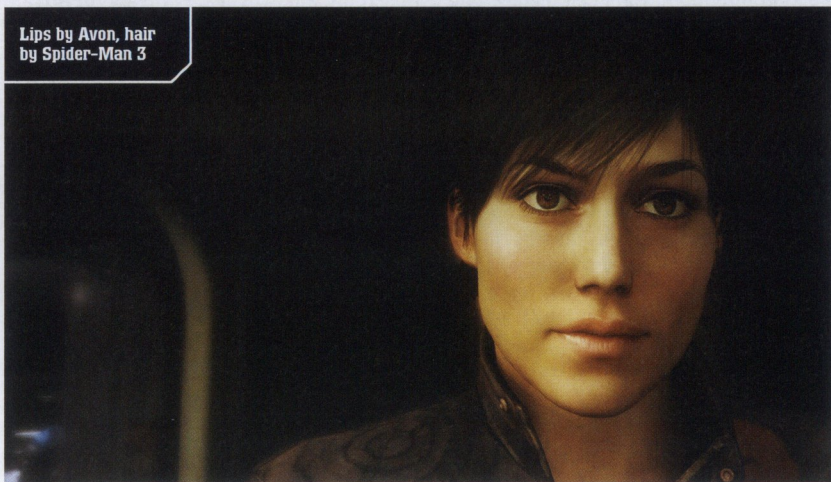
Skip back an hour and the atmosphere in the booth is somewhat less tense, but hardly lacking in excitement. Fahrenheit was a

A few minutes pass, and then David Cage walks to the front of the room and introduces himself. It’s a quietly powerful moment, simply because of how it highlights the potential of what everyone’s about to witness: Quantic Dream are yet to produce a classic to rival the ages, but Cage’s vision and ambition have nonetheless earned him celebrity status in an industry that has produced remarkably few household names.

He keeps his introduction brief, and the game’s current build is quickly booted up. We look at the menu screen as it looks



Lips by Avon, hair
by Spider-Man 3



"All the better to see
you with my dear!"

teasingly back at us with phenomenally believable eyes, and Cage moves into explaining his game and the reasons for its existence. Primarily, and not surprisingly, *Heavy Rain* is to be an experience that will be driven by its story. More to the point, special emphasis was placed on it presenting a sophisticated adult thriller, and of sidestepping gaming's all-too-familiar audience of geeks and teenagers. This means no overly impossible feats, no supernatural powers and...

"Wait", we find ourselves interrupting the discourse before our host is given a chance to move on from his point, "does this mean that the sci-fi nonsense from the second half of *Fahrenheit* is done away with?"

Cage pauses, singling us out in the small crowd of on-looking faces. For the briefest of moments we fear that we've overstepped that murky line that

dictates when it is and isn't appropriate to ask questions. The quiet lasts for a couple more seconds, and then, suddenly, his face breaks into a beaming smile: "Yes! Isn't that nice? There will be no supernatural powers; the last third — may I remind you that it was the last third, really — of *Fahrenheit* won't happen again."

There is warmth to his speech, although we felt thoroughly (and rightly) corrected on just where *Fahrenheit* lost its footing. The presentation picks up again, now with added focus on how *Fahrenheit* suffered expressive limitations at the restriction of the hardware it ran on, and how it has taken the grunt made available under the hood of the Playstation 3 to allow a truly subtle mode of expression. A simple gesture can now carry more informative weight than ever before.

SUPERNATURAL, SUPERSERIOUS

Of course, being a spiritual successor to *Fahrenheit* minus all the flying around, impossible fisticuffs and sex with animated corpses, *Heavy Rain* is a game that will "transfer the challenge from the controller to the mind of the player." This translates to *Heavy Rain* being very much an adventure game, with a greater concern placed upon exploration, puzzle-solving and generally paying attention to the environment than on headshots. However, unlike so many games in the genre, *Heavy Rain* won't be an entirely dictated, one-trick experience.

The concept of 'bending stories' is one that Cage has spoken of before, especially as it was given a chance to flex its muscle-tissue in *Fahrenheit*. The technique is a response to the impossible task of creating a completely open-ended, spaghetti-and-meatballs videogame narrative: *Heavy Rain*'s overarching storyline may be linear and predefined, but each segment can be pulled and stretched in different directions by the player, altering key events and allowing each unique situation to act as a catalyst for multiple potential experiences.

UP AND RUNNING

By this point the audience has become hungry to experience some actual gameplay; a wish soon granted. A specific section of the game — one largely removed

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The story outline. If there really is no *Matrix*-y nonsense, then *Heavy Rain* stands a chance of presenting the best adult thriller that gaming has seen since *Gabriel Knight*.



Nothing says casual elegance like severed animal heads

from the greater narrative (of which Cage refused to so much as to provide clues about) — is booted up, and we witness Madison pull up outside the house of a Taxidermist, in search of clues for a story-in-progress.

Much of the interface brought back immediate recollections of Fahrenheit, but first of all the simplest of control functionality — that of walking around — was put to our attention. Rather than mapping movement directly to the left analogue stick, as has been the norm for so long now, Quantic Dream have instead associated the act of moving forward to the right shoulder button. It seems like a brazen move at first, mere change for its own sake, until it becomes apparent that this has allowed for the use of a far more cinematic camera without disorienting the player, as the universality of the forwards command works irrespective of what angle the action may be viewed from.

Other aspects are more familiar, such as the analogue movement used to snoop in a letterbox. Furthermore, the game displayed what may well be the most sensible use of the sixaxis tilt functionality seen to date. Aside from being used to kick barrels and holster windows, conversational responses are now mapped to control tilt and as such it is possible to continue wondering around and exploring the world, mid-conversation, with no interruption.

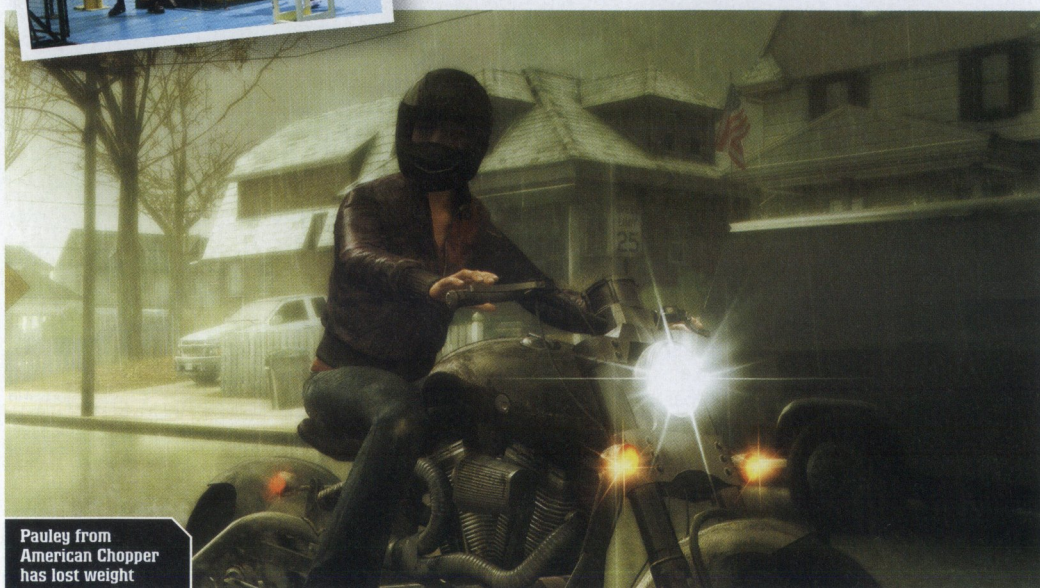
At this point, the demonstration has shown some general snooping around the grounds of the Taxidermist's house, but it's fast becoming obvious that Madison is going to have to sneak into the building itself if the storyline is to advance. After quickly showing off a new option to listen into what Madison is thinking (an internal debate of whether to enter the house or not; we're promised slightly more difficult conundrums as the game progresses), she was prompted to climb through a window and moved into the house's interior without so much as a hint of loading.

Madison slipped cleanly past the Taxidermist as he sipped his beer in ignorant bliss

Impressively, although the interior of the house was realistically cramped, walking through it was a completely fluid experience without a jitter or clipping-error in sight. It also promised a chance to interact with lots of things in ways both meaningful and meaningless. The house was trod through with due caution, a successfully executed QTE preventing a glass from smashing on the kitchen floor. Upstairs, and a floorboard creaked underfoot as our Journalist made her way to her frightful discovery of a

disturbing, career-related fetish before the man whom has just been discovered to be a rather deranged killer is shown returning to his home.

Mocap! (not the guy from the MK franchise)



Pauley from American Chopper has lost weight

LIVE TO WRITE ANOTHER DAY

A little careful treading saw a clean escape in this demonstration — Madison slipped cleanly past the Taxidermist as he sipped his beer in ignorant bliss, with nary a QTE in sight as she snuck out to her motorcycle and rode off without a single scratch upon her being.

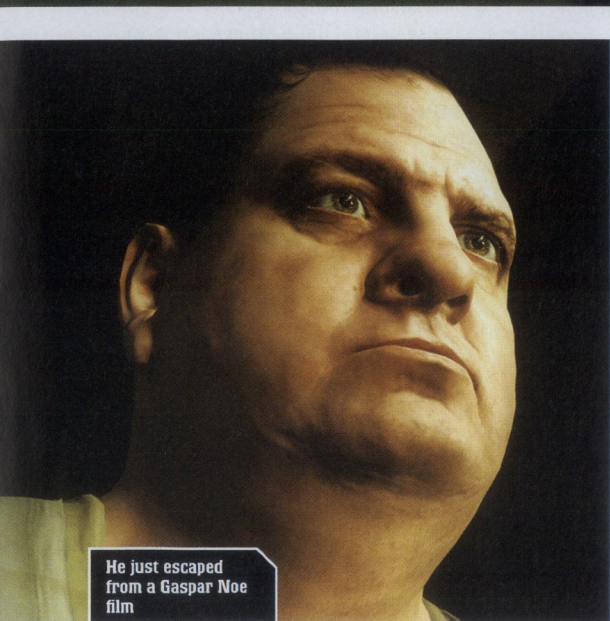
But, as the opening paragraphs to this article allude, this was just one way for the scene to play out. The scene was loaded again and played somewhat more dangerously, with far more intense results. But even then we're sure we didn't see everything, and according to Cage there were indeed other options — Madison could call the Police, or even kill her attacker herself if events were pushed in a certain direction. The variety seems greater than anything that Fahrenheit ever offered, and the cinematic element has been enhanced multifold.

If there's one thing that glues Heavy Rain together as an experience, then it's an already very rich atmosphere. The presentation is more cinematic than anything that has come before it, at least so far as being intertwined with actual play mechanics is concerned. There's a lot of detail in the visuals, but it's the animations, small shakes of the camera and an impressive depth of field that really stand out. This is a truly expressive creation, and will likely prove to be an emotionally varied and intense experience to play.

Naturally, final judgement will have to be withheld, at least until we get our own hands on the game. After all, Alone in the Dark presented some potentially revolutionary ideas but still messed things up with a little inconsistent pacing and controls that had all the charm of stirring shit with a stick. Quantic Dream has teased us with titles that have flirted with genius before, though, and we have very high hopes that this will be the title that finely plucks up the courage to ask for a date. Surely the stream of bad luck that Sony has had with some of their exclusives — Genji, Lair, Haze — has to dry up eventually? **Tim Henderson**

PRETTY EYES It's no exaggeration to say that Heavy Rain's lead character, Madison, has the most impressive set of eyes seen in a videogame to date. Such is their allure that the game's main menu itself is actually just a close-up of the eyes of the actual in-game model with the text for the various play options superimposed on top.

What's most impressive, though, isn't how smooth or shiny they appear, but how accurately they animate. Cage claims that Quantic Dream somehow found ways to motion-capture them, and looking at the end results it's an easy boast to believe. Every small jitter comes across as charged with emotional potential, and is totally, completely fascinating to watch. This is what Cage means when he speaks of the power of the Playstation 3 allowing for greater subtlety - funny, really, as it was the Playstation 2 that was supposed to have the Emotion Engine.



He just escaped from a Gaspar Noé film

inFamous

leipzig
GAMES CONVENTION



SYSTEM:
PS3

CATEGORY:
Sandbox

PLAYERS:
1

DEVELOPER:
Sucker Punch

DUE:
2009

For all that is polished and accomplished about it, there's no real shaking the sense that Grand Theft Auto 4 suffers from a mild case of Attention Defecate (does Tim mean Deficit? — Ed) Disorder. The scope of the world and what you can do is amazing, but the scattered, almost mini-game way in which the narrative missions are laid out as a series of activities awaiting activation does a lot to keep this gameplay frequently distracted from any real sense of being a part of a greater goal.

ELECTRIC

Described by Creative Director Nate Fox as being "just like the TV series Heroes, where you get reality mixed with superpowers without the spandex suits", inFamous (a hideous game title that Word frequently insists on automatically correcting) takes the sandbox approach to creating a living gameworld that GTA popularised on the Ps2, makes it dystopian, and then proceeds to pepper it with superheroes and super villains. According to Fox, Batman would be nothing without The Joker, and so the team at Sucker Punch are setting out to provide "big villains and big moments", with a double-emphasis on the word 'big'.

The most substantial challenge facing inFamous at present is in getting its prospective audience to recognise its New

"Come with me if you want to live."

Remember to earth yourself first.



York-inspired setting as its own, with a knee-jerk reaction to describe it as 'Liberty City' (rather than Empire City, as it has been named here) crippling the scrawling notes of many Leipzig attendees. This will perhaps best be achieved by the premise — something that should at once give the game a greater sense of general focus than Grand Theft Auto, as well as make its take on the Big Apple more its own. A massive explosion has torn a part of the city to shreds, tearing head from limb and brick from mortar. With the singular, bewildering exception of Cole:

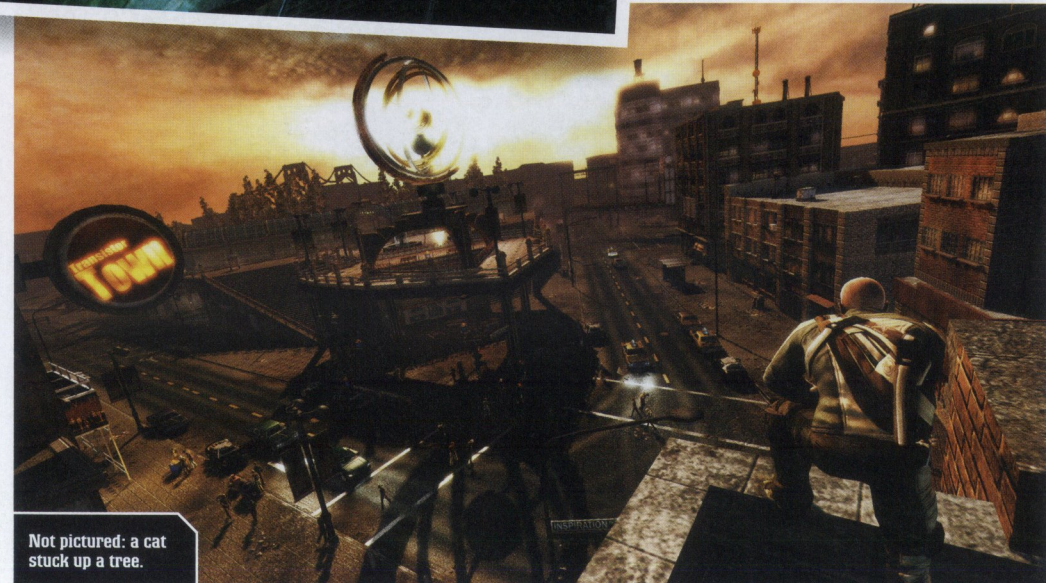
one very confused man who seems to have instead become charged with electrical superpowers and the ability to jump and climb very, very high.

The decision to limit Cole's abilities to electricity was reached quickly, but wasn't quite immediate: "Yes, we did [want to give him additional elemental powers]", Fox explains, "but in the end we decided to go into the full depth of electricity, and explore it thoroughly rather than skim over several skills..." He pauses, and then smirks as he goes on to make a wholly un-subtle hint at the inFamous' overall franchise potential: "... at least, not for the first version of the game."

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

As for the finer details of the storyline, we've been told by Fox that he "would love to share that information", but that we'll have to wait another couple of months yet. What we do know, however, is that it will feature more highly scripted missions than GTA, providing a more personable, front-row seat to the main event in a way that was described as having more in common with the likes of Half-Life.

But Empire City is still an open, sandbox world: a metropolis that will operate on its own, and one full of citizens that will hold a different attitude towards Cole depending on how the player behaves. It's also completely explorable, as Cole can climb just about any physical object that populates the cathartic urban mess. Players are free to act as total twats and



Not pictured: a cat stuck up a tree.

Thanks, friendly
neighbourhood
asshat.



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A little extra graphical polish. *inFamous* is presently a very handsome-looking game held back by a worrying amount of pop-in.



jump on innocent pedestrians from sixty-story buildings should they so desire, but Fox expects that more people may actually choose to play the friendly hero than the crime-centric efforts that have dominated sandbox have led us to expect.

"One of the key inspirations has actually been the WTO riots," Fox explains, "this is this kind of shit that happens in Seattle, a chance to act like a total jerk without getting arrested for it, but when I got myself mixed up in this I found that the people were actually very kind." It's a unique inspiration for the creator of a sandbox gameworld to have: an event where people are given the chance to get away with causing total chaos, but actually choose to act with compassion and humanity instead. It lends some hope that *inFamous* may actually manage to be a weighted experience in some places, rather than just an intricately crafted timesink.



inFamous may actually manage to be a weighted experience in some places, rather than just an intricately crafted timesink

Cole starts the game as a marked man, a sort of unfortunate hero who is blamed for the disaster that kicked off the whole scenario, in spite of actually being as perplexed by it as everyone else. Turning around the opinion of the populace will be one aspect of the game, as the demonstration itself briefly highlighted when Cole was able to use his electrical abilities to resuscitate a collapsed bystander, earning himself a more favorable image in the process.

But that was just one small aspect, and much of the demonstration itself did focus more on cathartic moments. A quick ride atop a train purposely showed off the scope of the city, but Cole was soon climbing up buildings and using metallic parts of the environment to conduct his electrical powers and assist in dealing with a few fellow men out to kill him. He

then proceeded to survive a mighty fall, tossing a ton of cars around with ease until a random blackout drained him of some of his power. The demonstration was brief, but in the short time it did plenty to highlight the full detail of the world, as well as the level of attention that has been paid to the place that electrical superpowers will have in such an urban landscape.

There are still a few kinks that need to be ironed out, though. The build crashed on one occasion, and a couple of graphical glitches detracted from what is otherwise a very pretty game. But, with the release penned for the distant shores of 2009 there's still plenty of time to work on this, especially as so much of the game already appears to be implemented and functioning quite happily.

Tim Henderson «



He'll go to any
lengths to avoid
paying the toll.



Not pictured:
comfortable landing



Too sexy for a
safety harness



Mirror's Edge

Although not shown in gameplay trailers, there is a persistent dot in the middle of the screen in Mirror's Edge. This is because players subconsciously keep their focus on it, which in turn removes any sense of nausea from the whirlwind of motion. In itself, this is a pretty telling example of exactly what should be expected from Mirror Edge's gameplay — gameplay that, from its very inception, has focused intently on actually putting gamers in a body. As such, while there is no option for a third person view, the game's lead protagonist, Faith, has been completely modeled and realistically animated.

TWIN SEEDS

Mirror's Edge is all about gaining and maintaining momentum. This is a game that promises to excel its fullest potential when consistently delivering fluid, unbroken motion, as is evidenced by the

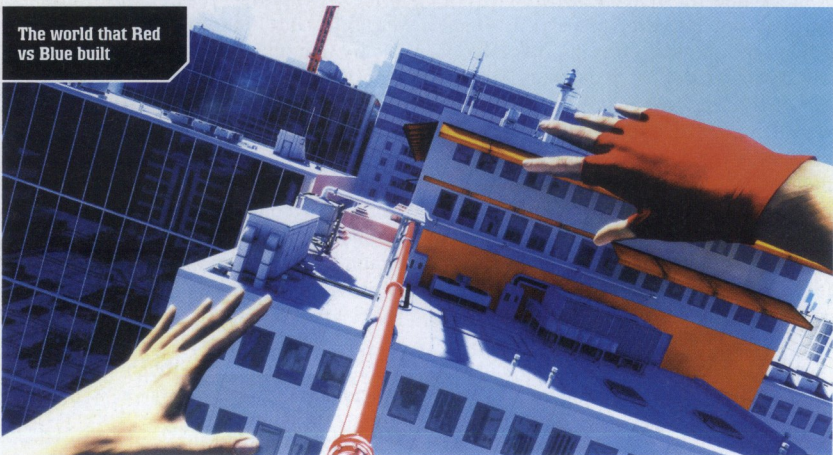
one visual distraction on the screen (there is no HUD) being an aid in preventing dizziness.

The camera itself is firmly committed to tracking the movement of Faith's eyes rather than her head, and the result is a strong sense of spatial awareness. In our time with the game we were taken across the shiny, white rooftops that characterized the original teaser trailer as various features were pointed out at relevant intervals.

Firstly, the cold, clinical look to the city is very much based on Faith's perception of things. This could in some ways be extended to the objects that are highlighted in red. While this feature can be turned off, its purpose is to simulate a Parkour Runner's awareness of their surrounding environment by highlighting anything that may assist the progression from point A to point B. Running from one point to should

[Mirror's Edge will] open itself up to greater possibilities and gain replay value through speed-runs as players become more confident

The world that Red vs Blue built



leipzig

GAMES CONVENTION



HANDS-ON

SYSTEM:

PS3, 360, PC

CATEGORY:

Action Adventure

PLAYERS:

1-Multiplayer
Undisclosed

DEVELOPER:

DICE

DUE:

Q4 2008

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Seriously — would EA or DICE let us in on who's behind the soundtrack already?

be expected, also, as Mirror's Edge is staunchly mission based and asserts no ambition of creating an open gameworld.

To this end, the fun will be in refining the journey, and in developing the skill to find alternative paths to the linear objectives. This is a game that will not contain power-ups, but will instead open itself up to greater possibilities and gain replay value through speed-runs as players become more confident in the controls. In a sense, Mirror's Edge is actually the finest 3D interpretation of the original brand of Sonic the Hedgehog gameplay to date.

Controls have, appropriately, been streamlined to fine-tuned simplicity. Combat is context sensitive, and consists simply of attack and disarm commands, the focus being more on getting away unharmed than on entering epic battles. This will likely mean abandoning weapons at regular intervals, as any extra weight could impede the successful execution of a death defying leap. Thankfully, grabs are fully automated, allowing for concentration to be dedicated to finding the best path.

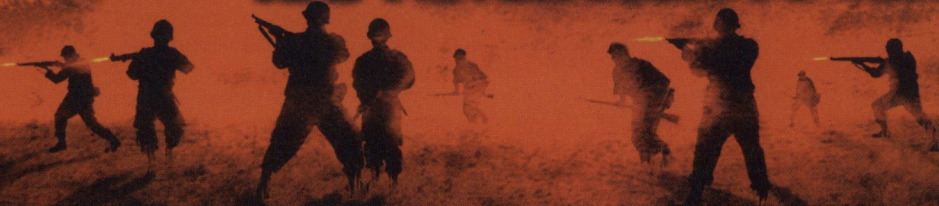
Other features such as accumulative slow-motion will aid tricky jumps, although we worry slightly about the sixaxis tilt being used for balancing on narrow railings (the Ps3 build was used for the demonstration), and hope it's better implemented than it was in Uncharted. That aside, it will take a monumental balls-up for this to fail to be one of the most exciting games of 2008.

Tim Henderson «

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Tom Clancy's EndWar

There are two franchises to keep in mind when talking about Tom Clancy's *EndWar*: *Total War* and *Ghost Recon*. The reason for this is simply that both have had a massive impact on the development of an RTS that, if the developers live up to their claims (and the final product to the promise that the demonstrations have shown), will deal a substantial blow to the PC's status as the central platform for the RTS genre.

BARKING ORDERS

Michael de Plater, *EndWar*'s Creative Director, had worked for Creative Assembly on the *Total War* series before moving in with Ubisoft. It was here, back when the 360 was still just a silly, highly-American name for a console that he saw his first glimpse of *Ghost Recon*, and was immediately inspired by how simple it was to issue orders to squad mates. With this in mind, and a desire to move away from the bird's-eye perspective of the traditional RTS, it seemed that a new game was ready for Ubisoft's oven.

Well, almost. It took a brief look at *Socom*, and the realization that having voice commands was more than a little obvious for a game where you were essentially the general for the final stamp of approval to arrive.

Upon starting the demonstration, the map was presented with a realistic line of sight, and being a Tom Clancy property it quickly became apparent that the strategy here was more about smaller units, with



SYSTEM:
360, PS3

CATEGORY:
RTS

PLAYERS:
1

DEVELOPER:
Ubisoft Shanghai

DUE:
Q4 2008

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The PS3 version come with a Bluetooth headset to compensate for the lack of one packaged with the console itself. Oh, wait – it does come with one! Blow us down.

Many heads call for many choppers



Then the magic hit: a few commands were spoken, and what a few moments ago was a simple claim became an immediate reality.

additional squads being airlifted in rather than being produced by magical soldier factories. The battle felt more immediate because of this, and certainly conveyed a stronger flavour of a small campaign taking place within a massive war.

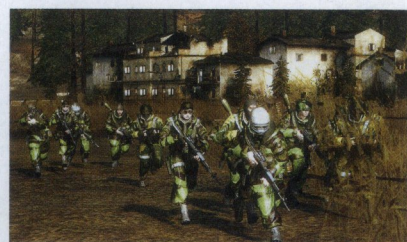
Then the magic hit: a few commands were spoken, and what a few moments ago was a simple claim became an immediate reality. What was more impressive is just how smoothly a couple of vocal orders managed to streamline what otherwise may have been a complicated set of actions. Ordering a collection of squads to capture a point removed a tremendous amount of perceived mouse-clicking, and simultaneously increased the sense of intimacy while making *EndWar* feel like the anti-thesis of *Starcraft*: here, micromanagement isn't a skill to be honed so much as an annoyance to be amputated.

Other small features can be expected. In an attempt to keep each game interesting until the very end, weapons of mass destruction will be available for a potential, desperate comeback. Considering that using this feature will also open the option up to the winning side, it can be quite a tough decision as units are carried from battle to battle, and Playtesters have reportedly found themselves in emotional conundrums.

Interestingly, the final game will ship in several languages, including two versions of English: one for America and one for the Brits (and presumably us, also). Ubisoft Shanghai are obviously taking no chances with the vocal recognition, and if *EndWar* turns out to be as easy to play as it appears, then claims of making the console the new RTS mainstay may just hold water. **Tim Henderson** «



Tanks for the memories!
(thanks Darren)



Space Invaders 3D!

Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts



Banjo should probably invest in a shirt

Nuts & Bolts is all about shopping.

Or, at the very least, it's about acting like a stoned teenager who thinks that pimping supermarket trolleys is totally amazing.

There's logic to this, of course. Nuts & Bolts sees Banjo pushing an oversized shopping cart around the game's central hub, and will initially be quite restricted in where he can go until he starts modifying the thing. Eventually, the cart will become more powerful, and develop the ability to float and so forth. The game's progression structure hinges on this.

In fact, progression through Nuts & Bolts is looking remarkably complex as not only does Banjo need to push his cart around town, carrying objects to activate doors to the various worlds, but upon completing them he will be given a good, old-fashioned Jiggy. Thing is, he then has to get this Jiggy safely to the bank. Fail to get it all the way and you have to start the journey (which we're told will become longer and more complicated as the game progresses) again from scratch, with no checkpoint system mentioned. It's a design decision that presently feels like shameless padding.

leipzig
GAMES CONVENTION



SYSTEM:
360

CATEGORY:
Platformer

PLAYERS:
1-8

DEVELOPER:
Rare

DUE:
Q4 2008

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Rare get back on form again.



For those who are keen, Nuts & Bolts will contain online play for up to eight players. Events are set to range from the logical (racing) to the slightly more mental (egg and spoon racing), but, being a game that's key gimmick is to allow players to build all sorts of contraptions, it's the ability to share stuff that comes across as the most alluring. Or you could just have Kazooie take a photo and steal the blueprint of your foe's design. **Tim Henderson**

Borderlands

leipzig
GAMES CONVENTION



SYSTEM:
360, PS3, PC

CATEGORY:
RPG/FPS

PLAYERS:
1-4

DEVELOPER:
Gearbox

DUE:
Q4 2008

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Master Chief appearing in the 360 version, while wearing a cowboy hat.

The guys behind Borderlands are keen to remind us that they're not making *Deus Ex*. This is a First Person Shooter with Role Playing elements, and not the other way around. They were also keen to remind us that the game is yet to even reach its Alpha stage, which may explain away why the visuals looked so much like Halo (the first one) running in high definition.

Borderlands has been heavily designed as a co-op experience, and the demo kicked off with a pair of gun-toters jumping together into a vehicle that acted suspiciously like a Warthog with a nitro boost. It was possible to change seats on the fly while tearing it up over the alien terrain, which was a tidy touch, but the focus of play soon found the ground being traversed by foot.

Communication between the presenters was strong, and there was an encouraging



Goddamn Sunday drivers!

sense of them actually enjoying themselves as they called across to the booth to each other, offering support or asking for ammunition for some of the game's touted 653,000 procedurally

generated weapons. That's a lot, and it's come at the cost of some visual refinement as well as chests revealing random treasures on each play through, which leaves us feeling a touch cold over just how tightly designed the scenarios in the game really are.

The game's RPG elements should allow for three basic character classes, upgradeable abilities that can be swapped and switched without the need for absolute commitment, and some truly laughable voice acting that we can only hope to be placeholder. **Tim Henderson**



Champions Online



Way to create Dr. Fate, Mr original!

Champions Online looks like a refreshing break from the typical MMO inspiration, until it becomes apparent that it's actually based on a Pen and Paper IP. Fortunately, it's still looking distinct enough — painted as it is with clean colours kept neatly inside the cel-shaded lines —, and it should comfortably stand out among the fantasy offerings that currently dominate the market.

It's also a bit more action-focused than may be the norm, although at present the combat itself is lacking a little in

variety — the same moves were repeated again and again, with little thought for diversity, or even visual differentiation. We will need our own private time with the game to truly determine if there's really that much more to it than mindless mashing, but it's clear that Champions isn't aiming to be God of War. Thankfully, for all the repetition of the combat with the minions, the boss battles are showing more promise, and are set to encourage parties of players to assume different roles in order to overcome the odds.

Other features will include an



SYSTEM:

360, PC

CATEGORY:

MMORPG

PLAYERS:

Err... lots.

DEVELOPER:

Cryptic Studios

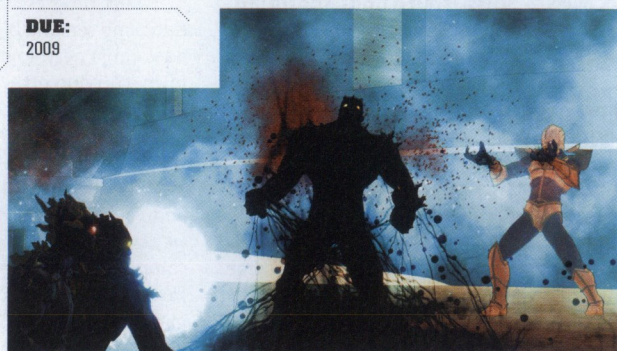
DUE:

2009

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We'd like to hear the promised dynamic audio, thank-you-very-much. The preview session was disconcertingly quiet a lot of the time.

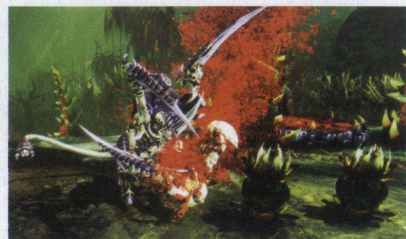
appropriately robust character creation system that already appears to provide almost limitless possibilities for cartoony creations, as well as the odd small homage to the original source material — including soda that acts as a protective power-up, although there is no word yet on realistic tooth-rot simulation. **Tim Henderson**



Dawn of War 2

Making a long overdue entrance into the Dawn of War franchise, the Zerg will now be playable. By Zerg we of course mean the Tyranids, who are the exact same thing as the Zerg... only they came first, and so it's really Blizzard who did the copying. We're still on the fence over whether imitation of imitation is flattery or not.

Whatever the answer, the section of the game we were allowed to witness focused on a unit of Space Marines who were in search of an antidote for a poisoned ally on a Tyranid-infested planet. That, and some woefully cheesy narration. The mission was selected from a small pallet of options, which in itself is a sign of grater things to come: we've been told that players won't have to play through each and every mission to complete the game, and nor will it even be necessary to win even the majority of those undertaken



SYSTEM:

PC

CATEGORY:

RTS

PLAYERS:

1+

DEVELOPER:

Relic

DUE:

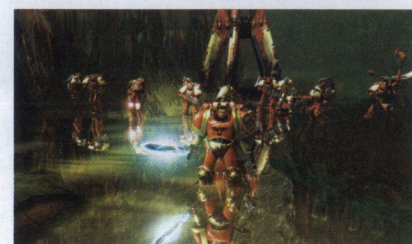
2009

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

More games embrace DoW2's shorter mission mentality.

for total victory in the greater war to become a reality.

In terms of direct gameplay, the use of cover and destructible environments that was seen in Company of Heroes will make an appearance. Perhaps less expected, though, is the terse nature of the mission structure itself, which is likely to work in 15-20 minute bursts. This, in particular, is something we're keen to see the progression of, as many of us who



were playing Starcraft when we were 15 no longer have as much expendable time as we did in the 90's, and quicker doses may just be the key to maintaining the older gamer's attention. **Tim Henderson**



OMG Tyranid rush kekekekeke

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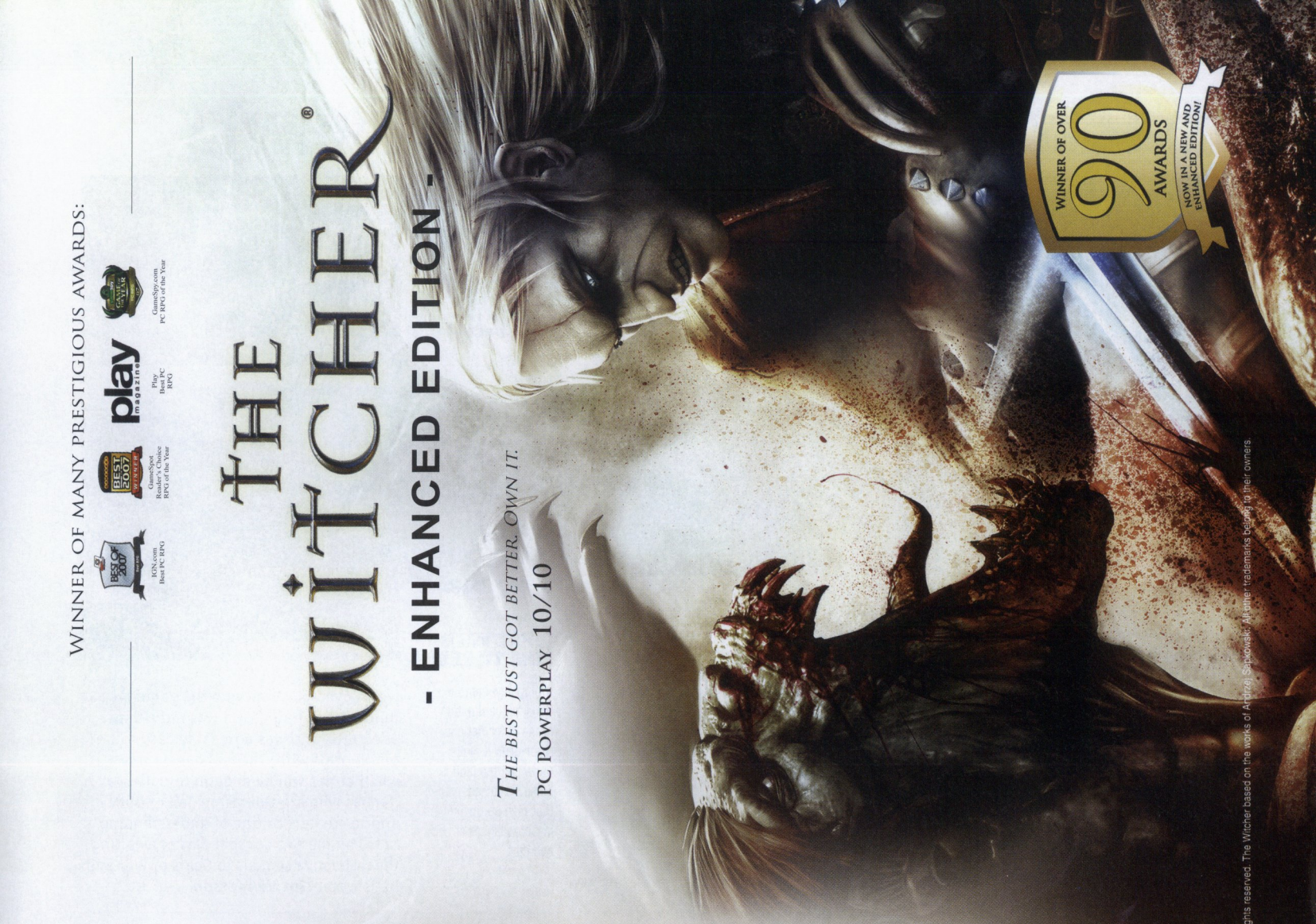
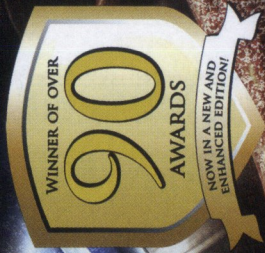
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PC POWERPLAY 10/10



Fracture (Multiplayer Preview)



The dreaded spinny rock thing grenade in action

Impressions of *Fracture* come in the form of two polar viewpoints: on one hand, the code churned happily along and the Press were actually given ample time to sample the game's multiplayer; it was obviously in a polished, solid state of build — more than could be said for some games on show. On the other, however, the terrain deformation that has been so heavily touted as something to set the game apart has given an initial impression of being nothing more than a gimmick.

The main reason for this was the ominous voice that instructed each new set of players on how to approach the game: for our entire time in the demonstration room, instruction for what could be done with the deformation grenades never went beyond raising ground to create safe pathways through toxic liquid. In all other instances, it was just a particularly entertaining means of attack, and a way for marking territory that must be defended in appropriate game modes.

While we worry over *Fracture*'s innovation, it must still be noted that

SYSTEM:
360, PS3

CATEGORY:
Action

PLAYERS:
Multi

DEVELOPER:
Day 1

DUE:
Q4 2008



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

An improvement in the actual animation of the deformations. At present it looks more like the land is being stretched, rather than torn up through grinding layers of rock and dirt.

we enjoyed our time with the game. As a third person frag-fest it was more than adequate, and was agreeably easy to get to grips with. The real question is whether this will be enough to pull away gamers who are still lost in *Call of Duty 4*, and to create a bridge of understanding between the two console parties awaiting the respective sequels to *Gears of War* and *Resistance*. **Tim Henderson**

Call of Duty: World at War



SYSTEM:
Wii, Ps3, 360, PC, Mob

CATEGORY:
FPS

PLAYERS:
1-4

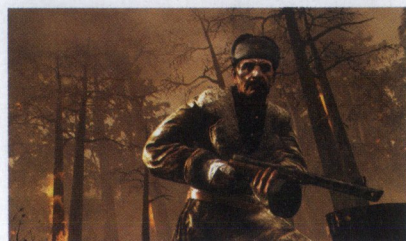
DEVELOPER:
Treyarch

DUE:
Q4 2008

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The Wii version. Seriously, the console is desperately short of decent FPS games, Metroid aside.

More than any other game at the Leipzig GC, it was the new *Call of Duty* that best summed up the mentality of the major Western Publishers. In an industry that moves from one fad to another every couple of months, *Call of Duty 4* has proven to be a remarkably resilient seller: instead of shifting the main bulk of its units in the first week, it has instead gained momentum with time and has outlasted its entire competition. With a smart



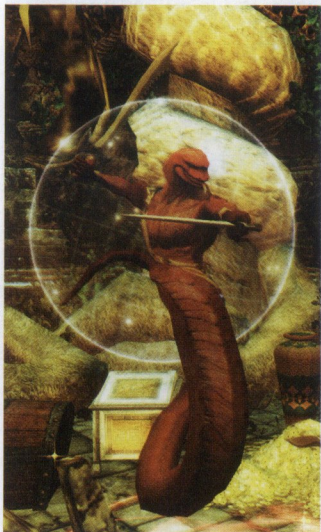
Tanks for the...
(you've already done that one Darren)

drop of new multiplayer content it could easily sell on for another year, in the tradition of Nintendo's best releases. A new *CoD* isn't really needed yet.

The developers at Treyarch are of the mind that gamers will buy and play both, however, and, while we're not fully convinced, they do have a point about the games being set apart from each other. Where *CoD4* featured a modern setting, *World at War* sees a return to the Second World War. It also, thankfully, appears to be something of an improvement over their efforts on *CoD3*.

Extensive research has been done on the tactics of the foes you will stumble across, so expect Japanese tree snipers that shoot to wound when playing the part of the campaign that takes place in the Pacific. But then, you can expect flamethrowers too, so when Treyarch talk about this being the most realistic WW2 experience yet, they obviously don't mean to the extreme where the element of fun has been removed. **Tim Henderson**

Neverwinter Nights 2: Storm of Zehir

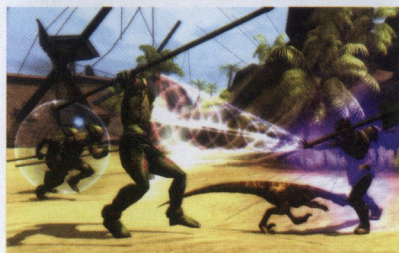
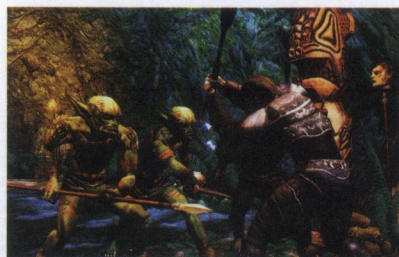


Why, exactly, this is a restricted expansion pack isn't entirely clear.

Maybe it's because it uses the same, aging game engine? Whatever the case, unlike the F.E.A.R. expansions, this isn't a standalone release and you'll need a full copy of Neverwinter Nights 2 to play it.

The reason for our confusion is that Storm of Zehir has been pitched as a separate experience, practically a new game by its own right. The tone of story takes on a lighter, swashbuckling vibe, and all characters start as level 3 pups. New classes are of course included, and it's now possible to create a complete party of up to four of these Adventurers, rather than just the one, unique lead character.

Graphically, Storm of Zehir is looking a bit better than its predecessors, but hardly on level with many other Christmas releases. Still, it's remarkably self-contained, and restricting sales to those who already own NW2 is a mite perplexing. **Tim Henderson**



leipzig

GAMES CONVENTION



SYSTEM:
PC

CATEGORY:
RPG

PLAYERS:
1+

DEVELOPER:
Obsidian
Entertainment

DUE:
Q4 2008

leipzig

GAMES CONVENTION



SYSTEM:
PC

CATEGORY:
RPG

PLAYERS:
1

DEVELOPER:
Obsidian
Entertainment

DUE:
Q4 2008

The Sims 3

Remember how The Sims seemed so fresh and original when it was first released?

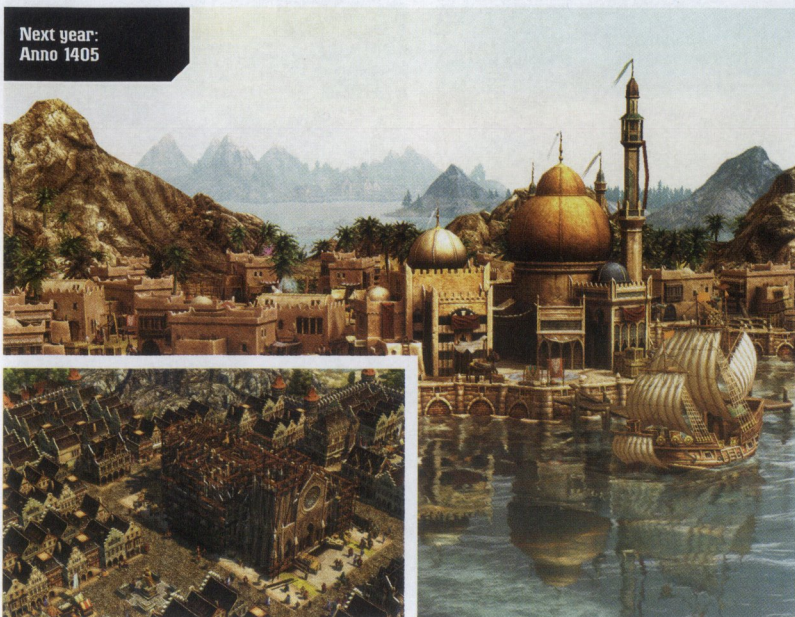
Recall how it was once an enjoyable, innovative and quirky experience in an industry with a dire case of copycat-and-sequel-itis? Yeah, we know what irony tastes like, too.

The good news is that The Sims 3 may actually offer a brief return of that tingling sensation. The sheer breath and depth of options that have been shown off already is truly staggering, and the gameplay itself is undergoing a considerable reworking.

Instead of turning everything into a tedious exercise in babysitting, Sims 3 has set the focus much more of creating unique characters and directing the stories of their lives. Customisation has huge potential and is much easier than before, and the community and sharing aspects have been refined to the point where this may become the gaming equivalent of Facebook. **Tim Henderson**



Next year:
Anno 1405



Anno 1404

We're actually surprised by just how charmed we've become with the latest in the line of Anno releases.

There's a distinctly cheerful functionality on display here; a sophisticated graphics engine is happy to bake itself in vibrant colours, and to impress through a series of gorgeous subtle effects rather than large explosions or bloom lighting.

Starting out as always with a small ship out to find land with which to begin a new settlement, the core gameplay of striving to create a bustling medieval metropolis remains very loyal to the core of the franchise. However, the addition of numerous small touches such as a chipper, bustling population as well as the debut inclusion of a more Eastern culture, have done a lot more to impress us than the promise of larger buildings and islands. **Tim Henderson**

leipzig

GAMES CONVENTION



SYSTEM:
PC

CATEGORY:
RPG

PLAYERS:
1+

DEVELOPER:
Obsidian
Entertainment

DUE:
Q4 2008

Dead Space

We ended our preview of Dead Space in issue 178 with these words: "Crippled space stations full of aliens is hardly unexplored ground as far as videogames go, but if this game can offer the experience we hope it does, it might just make the whole thing seem fresh again." After having some hands-on time with the game and a chat with the executive producer, we can confirm that, yes, the experience of shooting aliens on a spaceship is there, as is the desire to present it as fresh. The *desire*.

"We want to be different," says Glen Schofield, Dead Space's executive producer. "There are some big movies and big games — things that people know. We were like 'Do not try and be like Alien, try and stand on your own.'"

It's a noble goal. Yet from the moment that the USG Ishimura hovers into view during the opening sequence, and the moment that our hero Isaac Clarke steps onto it, the aesthetic motif of Alien's Nostromo is the first thing that's evoked. It's dark, it's dingy, it's (mostly) devoid of life, and it's a clunker of a mining ship.

Once the action starts, the second thing that's evoked is the visual design of Doom 3. No, you're not equipping a flashlight every five seconds, but certain rooms and hallways look remarkably similar to that ill-fated Martian base. That medical bay that's splattered with blood? Throw a pinkie demon in there and try to tell the difference.

But throw a necromorph in there, and Dead Space really starts to define itself. These multi-limbed nasties, which range from wily spider-like crawlies to bipedal freaks of nature, aren't taken down with a simple headshot, but require specific elimination, starting at their limbs and working inward. Blast an arm off and it'll



SYSTEM:
360, PS3, PC

CATEGORY:
Action

PLAYERS:
1

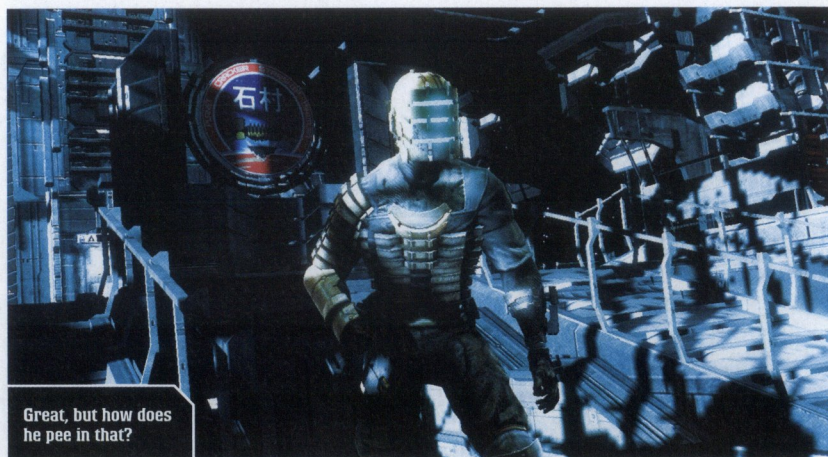
DEVELOPER:
EA Redwood Shores

DUE:
October 23, 2008



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Less clichés. Isaac's on the Ishimura to save his girlfriend, for bleedin' sake.



Great, but how does he pee in that?

You need to examine how the creature is getting around and attacking you, and remove those abilities from it

keep running at you. Blast both legs off and it'll claw forward with its hands. This becomes key to slowing them down enough to actually finish them off, either with a blast through its torso or by stomping it into a mush with your boot. It's a clever approach to what's normally a fairly mindless process of shoot-shoot-shoot: you need to examine how the creature is getting around and attacking you, and remove those abilities from it, weakening them enough to deliver the death blow. Although this approach doesn't sound like it'll extend to boss battles ("It's shoot the weak point, but that weak point is a hell of a lot bigger", says Schofield), it should put the bulk of the gameplay in good stead.

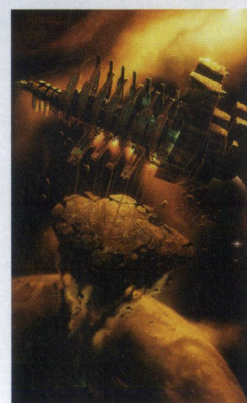
Something else that warrants mention is the way in which Dead Space presents information that's usually reserved for a HUD or game menus. By now we're familiar with how the game incorporates Isaac's health status: it's physically located on the back of his suit. The game takes a similar approach to every single menu and button prompt, with

inventory and weapon select screens projected as a 3D hologram in front of Isaac — you're free to rotate the camera around the back of it if you want — and should you get tackled by a necromorph, a green flashing "A" will appear on Isaac's back, indicating what button you should mash in order to fight the beast off.

The gameplay is definitely there, make no mistake about that. It's just that it's accompanied by a number of design choices that we've seen before. Still, we're looking forward to settling in for a decent limb-blasting session, which we should have in less than a month's time. «



Hit the weak point!
The big bit! Right there!



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MotorStorm: Pacific Rift

In an ideal world, there's an island dedicated to everything. Me, I'm hanging out for an island dedicated to chocolate, located near an island that's for the express purpose of engaging in hoedowns. Sadly, the prospects of that are slim to none, but soon we'll be able to have the next best thing: an island dedicated to breakneck racing.

MotoStorm: Pacific Rift fills the gap by carving 16 tracks — twice as many as the original game — through a lush tropical paradise. Up to four meatspace players and 16 online opponents can tackle courses that snake through overgrown forests, sandy beaches, lava-filled mountains and, in a nod to the first MotoStorm game, stark deserts.

VROOM, VROOM

It's not just a pretty backdrop either, as your choice of track can directly impact your choice of tactics. Take your use of the boost feature: driving through water will cool your rapidly overheating engine, but conversely, a desert-based track with constant sun exposure will cause it to heat up faster. Multiple paths through each track add another wrinkle to proceedings; do you go a slightly longer way if it means your engine gets a chance to simmer down, or go for the shortcut and push it to exploding point?

With destructible terrain also featuring in Pacific Rift, your choice of vehicle — and there's eight classes to choose from — will play a role in how you approach a



HANDS-ON

SYSTEM:

PS3

CATEGORY:

Racing

PLAYERS:

1-16

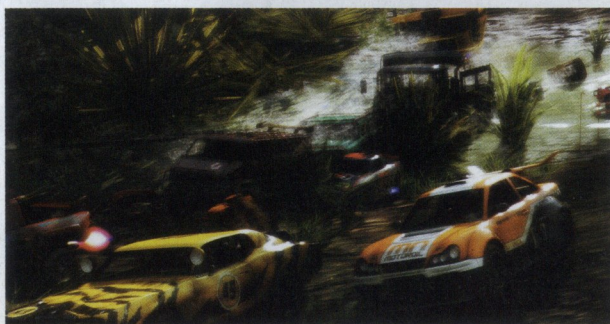
DEVELOPER:

Evolution Studios

DUE:

December 2008

Oh, just fling open the door and be rid of him!



The track design and vehicle capabilities play a role that's just as important as your driving

Needless to say, there's a surprising amount of tactics at play in Pacific Rift. It's not just about going as fast as you can and winning first place; the track design and your vehicle capabilities play a role that's just as important as your driving skills. That said, it's still an arcade racer at heart, and the game revels in its bop 'em, sock 'em approach that sees a packed starting grid jostling for the lead, and expansive jumps that send speeding vehicles airborne with plenty of time to take in the view. There are even buttons dedicated to an attack/shunt manoeuvre, with L1 and R1 delivering the goods. During our hands-on time with the game we questioned their need, given that the player can just as easily swerve their vehicle into an opponent by steering, and that the use of R2 as accelerate makes the decision to shunt via the buttons a slightly clumsy one.

Although the game's October release date might mean the time for final polish has passed, Pacific Rift nonetheless looks as solid as it is fun. Expect our review soon! ☛

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some more attention given to some of the game's textures — they'll occasionally look a tad low-res

track. Some paths may be obstructed by overgrown trees, meaning that your measly motorbike is going to come off second best should you try to tackle it at speed. No, you'll either have to hang back and let some of the bigger vehicles knock it down for you, or choose a ride that's suited to the task. Of course, that might come at the cost of vehicle mobility and nimbleness...

That reminds me, where are our flying cars? Huh?

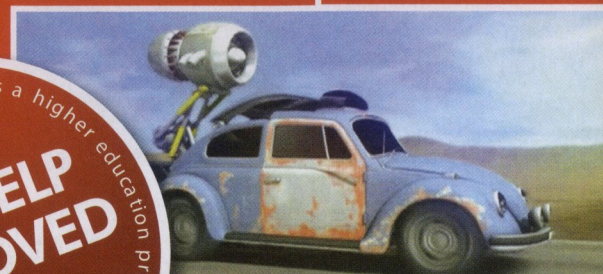


They did the Monster (Truck) Mash!

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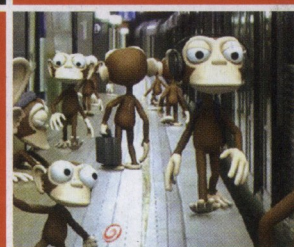
3D
Animation



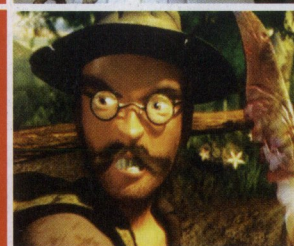
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Spider-Man: Web of Shadows

One of the things we really love in games is movement. So it doesn't sound as though we're just praising developers for making games that are not simply static images we should probably quantify that. We love interesting forms of movement — the parkour inspired running and climbing of Assassin's Creed. The ability to run up buildings and jump over city blocks in Hulk: Ultimate Destruction. The intuitive ease of skating in Skate. The acrobatics of Prince of Persia. And we loved Treyarch's Spider-Man franchise (aside from the hugely disappointing Spider-Man 3, but the less said about that the better), it should come as no surprise that we're more than a little jazzed about the upcoming Treyarch/Shaba Games co-production, Spider-Man: Web of Shadows.

You know the drill by now. New York is under attack and you are the only one who can stop it! Oh god! When will people learn to stop putting all their faith in the one guy on the planet lucky enough to get bitten by a tiny radioactive spider? What would they do without him? If not for the friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man, where would we be?

This time around, the world's most maligned city is getting grief from the pointy-toothed frightener, Venom. He's decided to infect the city with an army of evil symbiotes. As you do when you're a sociopathic man/blob hybrid.

S.H.I.E.L.D (less memorably known as Supreme Headquarters, International Espionage, Law-Enforcement Division) has quarantined Manhattan Island in a desperate bid to stop the spread of the symbiotes. As the web-slinger, of course, you have a chequered history with the black suit, and you'll be teaming up with

SYSTEM:
Everything

CATEGORY:
Action

PLAYERS:
1

DEVELOPER:
Treyarch/Shaba Games

DUE:
October 24, 2008



Spidey and Wolverine ponder which one will attack the orphanage first

You could swing down to street level as 'normal' Spidey before morphing into the black-suit



heroes and villains alike to put a stop to Venom and his childish antics. You'll get to rub noses with Kingpin, Nick Fury, Vulture (complete with a new and rather kick-arse look), Wolverine and Luke Cage, with some action on the side from Mary Jane.

SPINS A WEB ANY SIZE

As in previous Spidey outings from Treyarch, the action will take place in a sprawling, free-roaming cityscape. To make navigating the city easier a new 3D map is being implemented, featuring an X, Y, and Z-axis to give you a better idea of your current location.

Throughout the game you will have access to your standard red and blue spidey, with your standard arsenal of fast, agile web-slinging skills. You will also have unrestricted access to the Black-suited Spider-Man. In this outfit you'll

see a real change in your behaviours and abilities, becoming stronger and prone to more direct confrontations. Expect to see lots of car-throwing grandstanding in this form. Interestingly enough, you'll be able to switch at will and on the fly. In theory, this opens the door to a much more immersive and varied experience. You could swing down to street level as 'normal' Spidey before morphing into the black-suit, crushing some skulls with an old Chevy and swooping back up into the rooftops.

In addition to the suit changing mechanics, Spider-Man: Web of Shadows introduces a lock on to combat, something that will become very useful in the new airborne battles. Instead of simply jumping and bashing flying enemies, Spidey can now grapple and web to flying enemies, jumping from one to another in a fluid pinball-like motion. From what we've seen so far the overall effect is extremely impressive. We definitely can't wait to see more. Hopefully we should be able to bring you a full review next issue. «

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A real-life radioactive spider so we could get some sick jumping skills



Not shown: years of chiropractic



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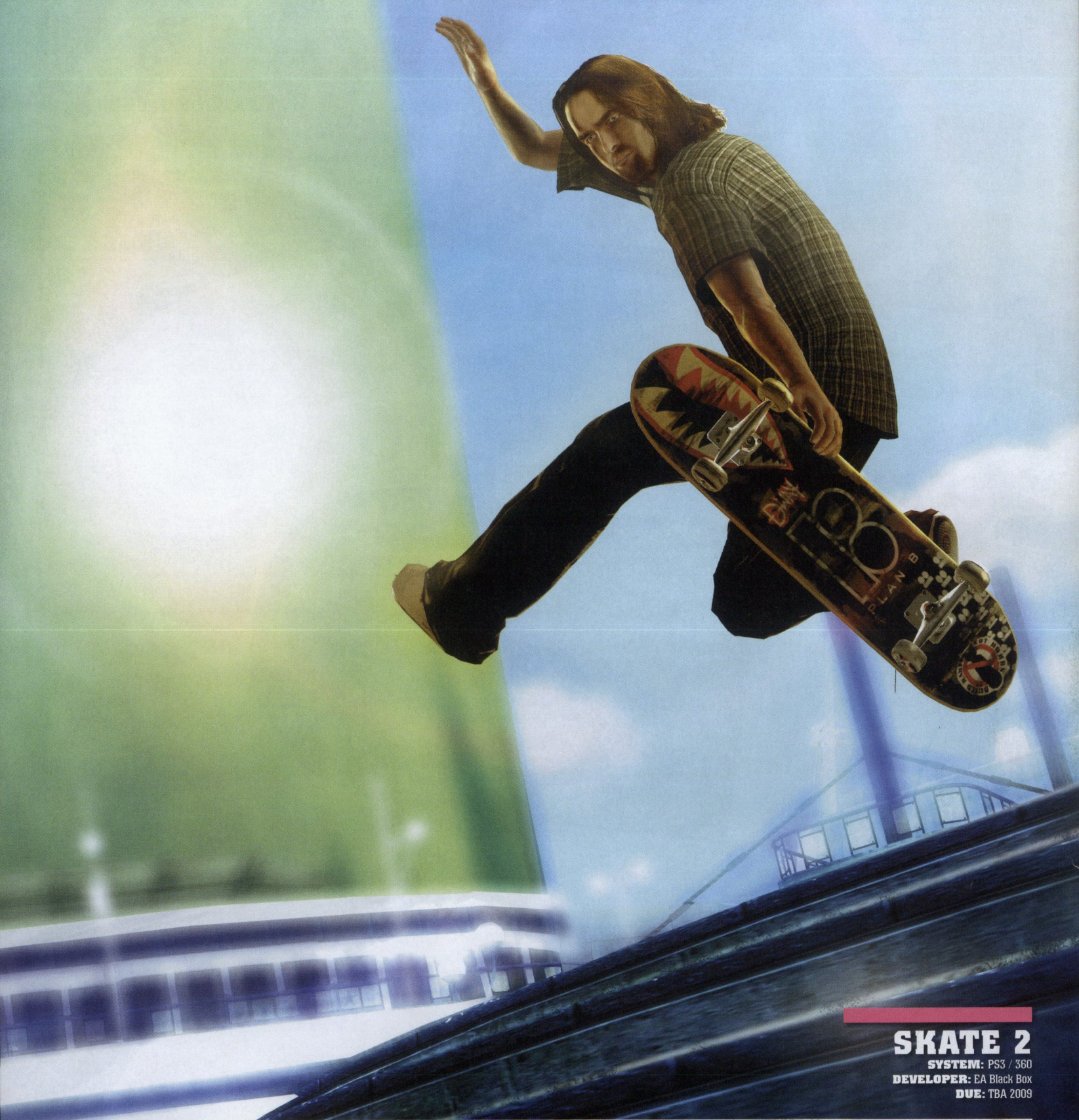
MK vs DC

SYSTEM: PS3 / 360
DEVELOPER: Midway Games
DUE: November 2008



38 HYPER >





SKATE 2

SYSTEM: PS3 / 360

DEVELOPER: EA Black Box

DUE: TBA 2009



RATED

P



FOR ARCHAIC

VIDEO GAME CLASSIFICATION IN AUSTRALIA

>> ANDREW COLLINS

Australian gamers are being denied hotly anticipated games — or being provided with censored versions — thanks to laws developed in the mid-1990s, when gaming was not recognised as a legitimate adult pursuit.

At that point gaming had grown from its childish and primitive roots into a gangly adolescent, one that had yet to deal with adult themes. Lawmakers at the time therefore considered it childish, and the game classification laws they developed reflected that.

Fallout 3, which has now been approved for release after developer Bethesda made some edits, is but the most recent example of such a game. It follows Grand Theft Auto 4, which was similarly chopped by developer Rockstar. Funnily enough, neither developer has explained exactly what was removed from either game — almost as though they thought gamers might not want an edited version.

Perhaps they've correctly anticipated what's actually happening: that gamers are pirating and importing the games that they can't buy uncensored locally, or locally at all.

According to our classification laws, the highest rating games in Australia can receive is MA15+, unlike film and literature which can both be rated R18+. So if any game has the equivalent violence or sexual content of an R-rated film or novel, that game is considered 'Refused Classification' by the nation's

Classification Board (formerly a part of the Office of Film and Literature Classification).

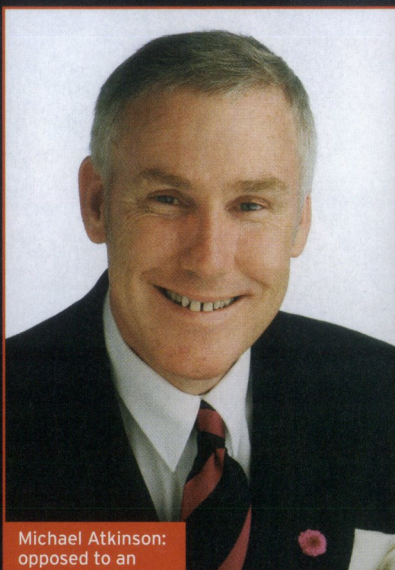
This is a problem, because in Australia if a piece of media is not given a classification, it cannot be legally sold. So while any adult can pop down to their local video store and grab a copy of Reservoir Dogs on DVD, they can't do the same for the game with the same name.

For this law to change, it requires a rather convoluted legislative dance involving multiple levels of government. Firstly the country's state and territory Attorneys-General would have to agree that we should have an R-rating. If the federal Attorney-General gave this agreement his own thumbs up, the issue would finally go to members of the federal government for debate. Should the federal government deem it a good idea, we would then have an R-rating for games.

That's all well and good, except for one thing: the South Australian Attorney-General, Michael Atkinson, vehemently opposes the establishment of an R-rating for video games. This leaves gamers rather buggered.

Or does it? As we found out from one young politician about to make a break for the big time in Canberra, there are actually other pathways we can go down (see: The Gamer Politician).

So, dear readers, we've hunted down the people most affected by the issue to see what they had to say, and cornered some politicians while we were at it to see what the future holds.



Michael Atkinson: opposed to an R-rating for games.

The Attorneys-General

Michael Atkinson
Attorney-General for South Australia

◆ Atkinson is the first roadblock to the introduction of an R-rating for video games in Australia. He says that while the current system denies adults the opportunity to do what they want, it's necessary, as the alternative would allow children access to material that could be harmful.

Atkinson explained this restriction of adult liberty in response to a letter responding from a concerned gamer, as reported by the website Australian Gamer: "This is the price of keeping this material from children and vulnerable adults. In my view, it is worth it."

Why is it worth it, you ask? Atkinson has several arguments to support his denial of an R18+ rating, roughly falling into these three categories:

Argument 1. It's too hard to protect kids from R-rated material

By allowing R-rated material to be sold, kids are simply exposed to even more potentially harmful material. This isn't helped by bad parents, he says, who will do what they want regardless of law, and supply their kids with inappropriate material.

Also, if parents legitimately buy games for themselves, their kids could too easily find them and

Argument 3. Censored games are no different to uncensored games

Finally, Atkinson believes that games don't lose any meaning after being edited to fit into an MA15+ rating. So, for example, changing the name of an illicit drug like heroin to something more child-friendly does not alter the gaming experience or the themes involved.

Furthermore, adult-themed content adds nothing to the gaming experience, he reckons.

Rob Hulls
Deputy Premier
Attorney-General for Victoria

◆ But Atkinson's views are not shared by all our Attorneys-General. The Victorian Attorney-General, Rob Hulls, believes it inconsistent to allow Australians to view adult-themed film but deny them the opportunity to play adult-themed games.

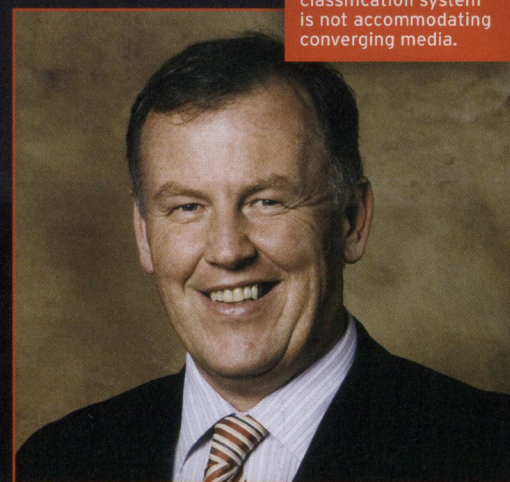
"At the moment, Australia is out of step with the rest of the developed world on this issue," he said in a statement earlier this year.

He acknowledges that media is converging, and that our classification system must be updated to accommodate the changing face of media.

And while he shares Atkinson's concern for minors, his approach is less hard lined, saying that censorship laws should strike a balance between freedom of expression and the protection of minors.

Hulls' office also told Hyper that the issue of an R-rating will be discussed at the next SCAG meeting (Standing Committee of Attorneys-General), which is tabled for November.

Rob Hulls: Our classification system is not accommodating converging media.

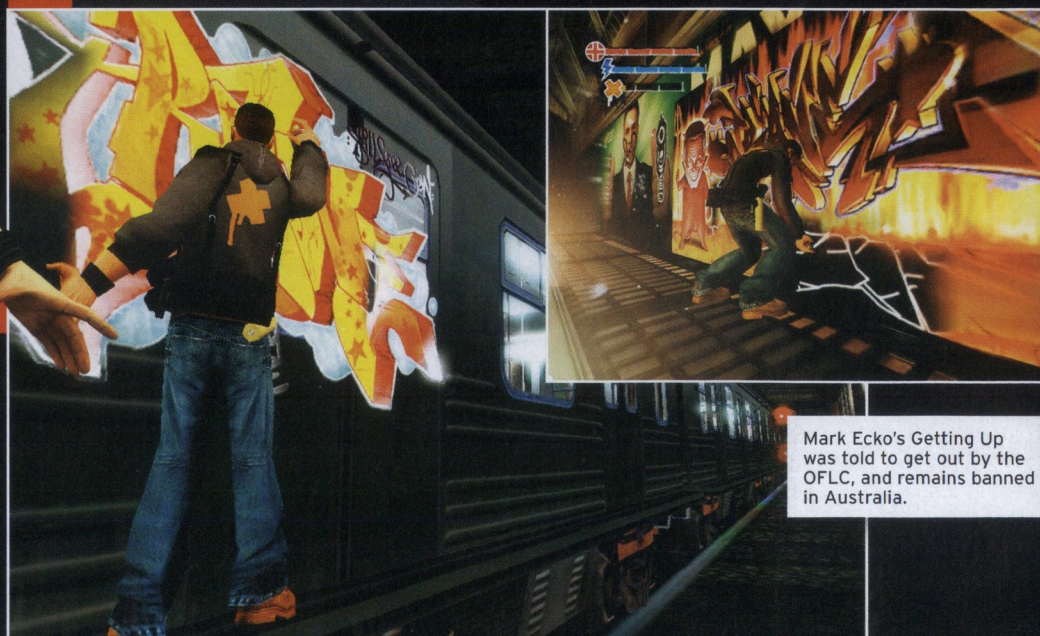
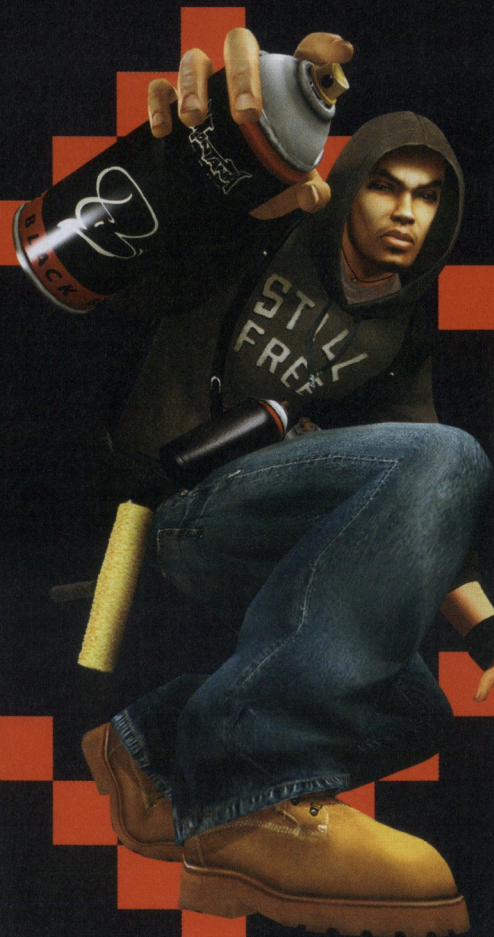


AT THE MOMENT,
AUSTRALIA IS OUT OF STEP WITH
THE REST OF THE DEVELOPED
WORLD - *Rob Hulls*

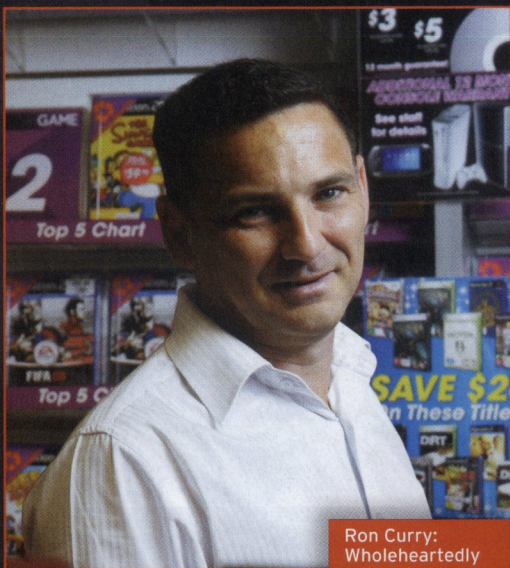
play them. On top of that, the parental locks in the current generation of consoles are simply ineffective — kids nowadays are able to break through any safeguards, Atkinson says.

Argument 2. Video game violence is more harmful than movie violence

The interactivity of video games — that is, the ability to actually enact a violent deed — sets it apart from passive media like film, Atkinson says. He says this interactivity could increase violent real-life behaviour. In other words: the long-running argument that games incite violence.



Mark Ecko's Getting Up was told to get out by the OFLC, and remains banned in Australia.



Ron Curry:
Wholeheartedly
supports an
R-rating.

The Industry Commentator

Ron Curry
CEO, Interactive Entertainment Association
of Australia (IEAA)

◆ Curry is the CEO and spokesperson of the IEAA, a group formed to support the video game industry and market in Australia. Member organisations include the local branches of the big guns of video games, like Sony, Nintendo, THQ and loads more.

Curry has kids of his own, and is not unfamiliar with administering what they have access to. He wholeheartedly supports the introduction of an R18+ rating for games.

He says the average video gamer is 28 years old, but they can only access material marked suitable for 15 year olds. If movies were similarly restricted, he says, movie goers would kick up a stink. And according to Curry games are now as mainstream as movies, judging by the fact that games generated more money in Australia than movies last financial year.

So why hasn't gaming got the respect that these other mediums do? According to Curry, "It works under a legislation that was created in 1995. Back in 1995 the attitude was that video games are for kids. It wasn't envisaged that we were going to have this content or an audience of adults, because it was child's play."

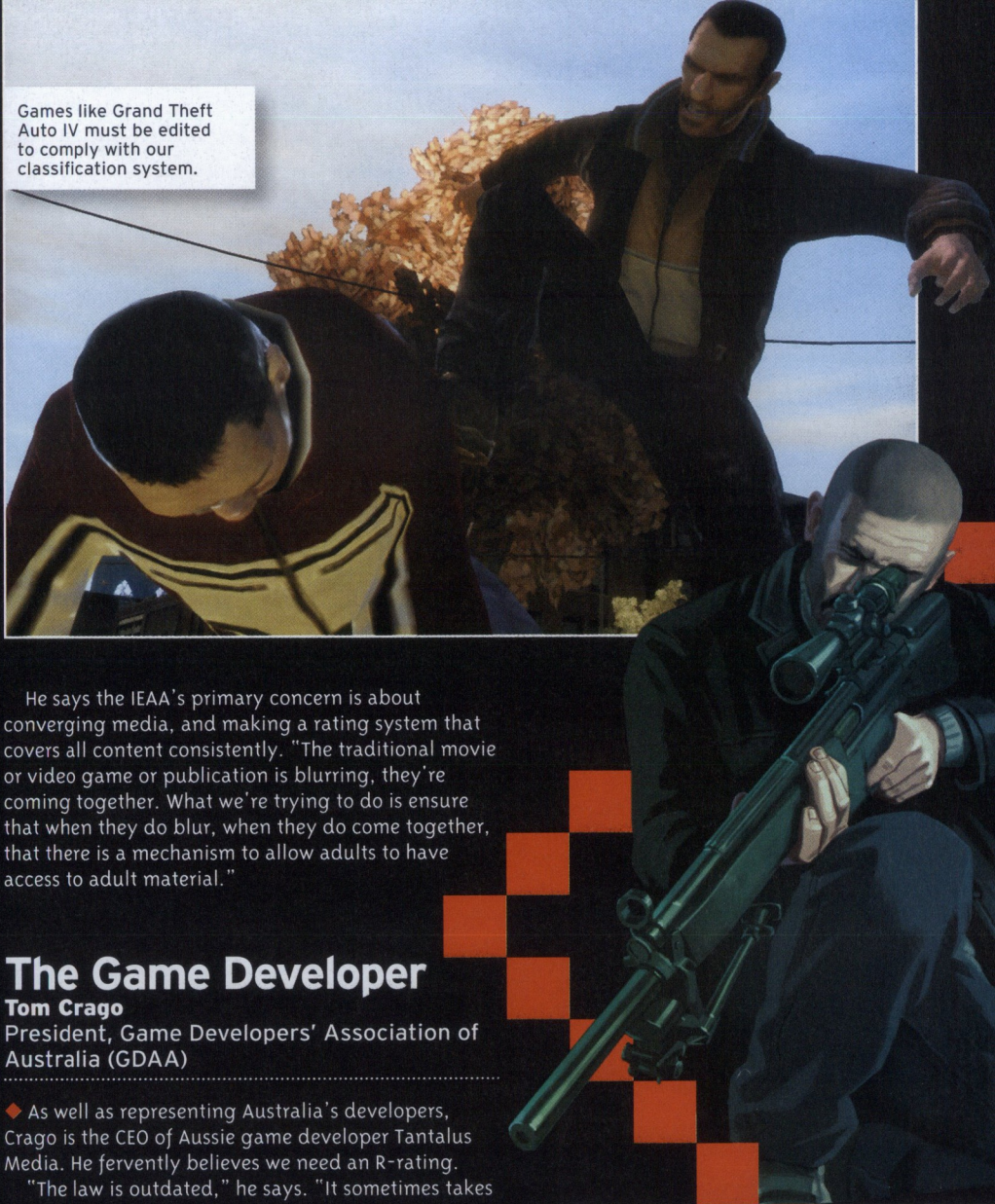
And games are changing, Curry says, to incorporate more adult-themed material. GTA 4 is a prime example of that.

But if you think international publishers worry about getting a game past our classification system, you're wrong. It just wouldn't have a large impact on their sales. "We make up such a small percentage of the overall global market that it's probably not on their radar."

Publishers only really consider it when they have a massive title on their hands like GTA 4, Curry says. Only in that case would the sales of a censored version outweigh the cost of rejigging a game for an MA15+ rating.

Curry disagrees with Atkinson's comments about video games and violence, saying the research has yet to be finalised. "It's difficult to make a conclusion. There's a recent report from the journal, Psychology, Crime and Law, that says that there are studies that show there is a connection between aggression and violent games, there are studies that there's no connection, and there are the studies that actually show that gaming reduce aggression."

Games like Grand Theft Auto IV must be edited to comply with our classification system.



The Game Developer

Tom Crago
President, Game Developers' Association of
Australia (GDAA)

◆ As well as representing Australia's developers, Crago is the CEO of Aussie game developer Tantalus Media. He fervently believes we need an R-rating.

"The law is outdated," he says. "It sometimes takes governments a little while to catch up with the fact that technologies change, and people's leisure habits are evolving, but there's really no excuse for us now to be here in Australia in 2008 and to not have an R18+ classification for video games."

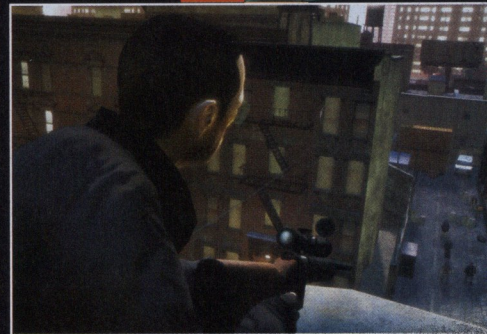
According to Crago, a good deal of Australian politicians don't understand games. "Many politicians are of an older generation and they don't recognise the fact that video games have changed over the years."

But political misconceptions about gaming are already changing. Crago says that younger politicians — those who have grown up with video games — are looking more sympathetically upon the industry.

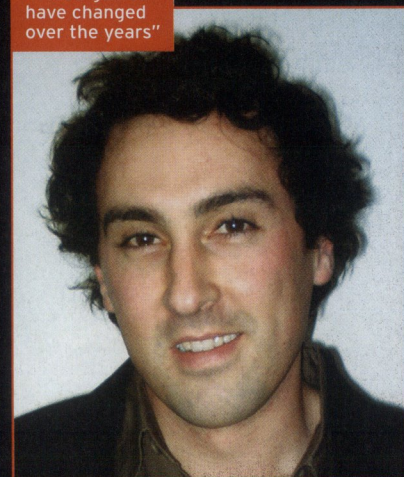
Interestingly, he considers the Wii to be instrumental in changing common ideas about gaming. "People can look at the Wii and see that the type of person playing it is not the stereotypical gamer. It's families, it's people trying to get fit, it's very young people, and it's quite old people in a lot of instances."

Crago says Australian developers are in the same boat as foreign developers, in that it's usually not worth the cost to redevelop a game to get an MA15+ rating. "Australia represents less than two percent of the overall market for video games, so it's often the case that you just don't worry about Australia. If you've got adult-themed content that you want to incorporate into your game you just accept that that game's not going to be released in Australia. And that's not a huge hit for a developer or a publisher's bottom line."

And how much would it have cost Rockstar to rejig GTA 4? "In the hundreds of thousands of dollars," Crago says. "And that's why so many companies decide not to do it."



Tom Crago:
"Video games
have changed
over the years"



So gamers can't legally obtain the games they want. As for our developers, they'll "continue to be the object of ridicule when we travel overseas," Crago says. "Our friends in the game development community elsewhere are unable to believe that we live in such a backwards society."

On protecting minors, Crago says, "It will always be a combination of parental care and responsibility coupled with a framework that, if it's working effectively, should prevent the wrong content from falling into young hands. With an R classification for video games, I believe that we'll have that framework more or less as we'd want it."

What of the parental lockouts that Atkinson believes are so easily circumnavigated? "Parental lockouts on consoles are pretty effective. If you've got a kid who's playing a PS3 and you want to restrict their access to mature titles, you set that lockout system on the console and it's 100% effective."

He also disagrees with Atkinson about the worth of adult content in games. "Video games for adults will occasionally require adult themed content. And that that content will be for the overall benefit for the game."

The Gamer Politician

Greg Tannahill
Candidate for Molonglo

◆ Tannahill represents what, as time goes on, will become increasingly common: a politician who grew up with games, and therefore understands them. A candidate in the upcoming election for the ACT's Legislative Assembly, he wants improved public transport, better housing prices and an R-rating for video games.

"Gaming's an important issue, and it's particularly important because no one else is raising it," he says. He rates the general understanding of games by politicians as "terrifyingly poor". Most are unlikely to have personal experience with gaming, he says, but that shouldn't stop them from going out and learning — but they simply aren't.

Tannahill points out that the lack of an R-rating means people can't decide for themselves whether the issue is important or not. "We can't legally be playing these games to be able say for ourselves 'Hey, yes I think this game's content is objectionable', or 'Hey, this is totally being worked into an issue, and there's nothing wrong with this game'."

But what's most worrying is that developers are self-censoring, he says. "GTA 4 was self-censored



by the developers of that title. Rather than risk a Refused Classification they made changes themselves to bring it into line, and that's even worse from my perspective because they are afraid to make the game that they want to make. They should be able to make the game they want to make and put it out to the public to make their own mind up."

"Clearly we need an R18 classification for games," he says, adding that the purpose of the Classification Board shouldn't be censorship; it should be about informing adults and families about what they expose themselves and their children to.

When can we expect an R-rating? "Obviously Michael Atkinson can't stay in parliament forever. There's one current generation gaming console between every four Australians, not including PCs and mobile phones. There's a growing recognition that this is a form of media. Seeing that change within the next five years would be realistic."

For those of you who cannot wait five years to legally play the uncensored version of Fallout 3, Tannahill explains that there are actually three ways out of the current situation: One, Atkinson could get the boot if his electorate feels he isn't looking out for their interests; two, Atkinson could change his mind; and three, the states and territories could each go their own way, ignoring the National Classification Scheme which governs the Classification Board. In fact, Tasmania and Western Australia are already doing so regarding literature.

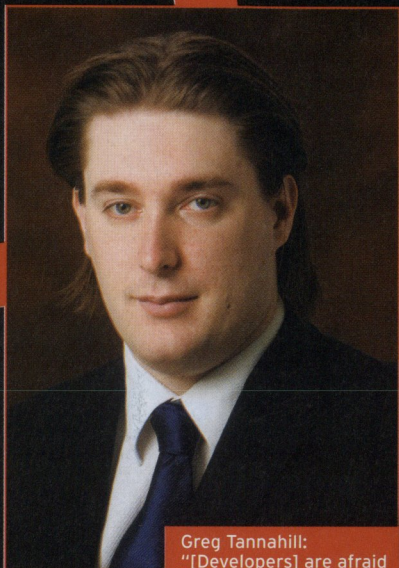
But while each state and territory could branch out on its own, there would be "enormous difficulties" in regulating such a scheme.

Regardless, gamers are a more potent force than they realise, Tannahill says, and he encourages them to tell their local media outlets and politicians just how important gaming issues are to them. "Get active," he says. "Gamers are so good on internet forums. Politics is just another forum."

Regarding the link between gaming and violence, Tannahill says, "The evidence is still out. I am, as I would hope every other politician is, open to an evidence based approach, and to hearing what those who are studying this field have to say. But no matter what they have to say, censorship is not the answer."

He also disagrees on the topic of editing games being okay. "It's like saying that you could take Pulp Fiction or Reservoir Dogs and replace all the swearing with 'darn' and 'heck' and it would be the same movie. It absolutely wouldn't."

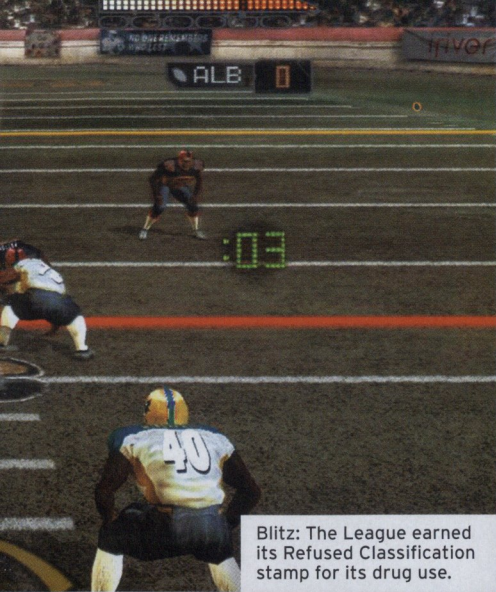
And on the issue of parenting and gaming? Tannahill says the role of government is to provide information and support. "The government can't be everyone's parent. Someone has to take responsibility. And to say that the government is a better place to do that than parents is a profound insult to parents across Australia."



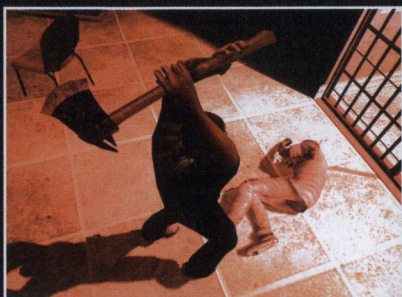
Greg Tannahill:
"[Developers] are afraid to make the games they want to make"

Reservoir Dogs: The Game was Refused Classification in Australia. The film, however, is still available for purchase.





Blitz: The League earned its Refused Classification stamp for its drug use.



Rockstar is no stranger to controversy, with its Manhunt series consistently earning the ire of the ratings board.

Gamers and the Man on the Street

◆ Given that we live the age of the Information Superweb, you might expect Australian gamers to be well-informed about this issue — but that's not completely true.

On one hand we have casual gamers like the 24 year old Andrew, who spends his days selling advertising space. He's dabbled with Wii Sports and likes to occasionally run over his friends in GTA 4. Gaming is but a small part of his life.

Despite spending only a couple of hours each week gaming, Andrew says he is aware of the R18+ debate, thanks to the release of GTA 4. He says the current system "makes no sense".

He points to the fact that Australians can drink at a younger age than Americans — 18 compared to 21 — yet Australians are prohibited from playing video games accessible to adult Americans.

He's bothered by the censoring of games like GTA 4, as he feels like he's missing some of the action. "I will turn to eBay and buy my games from overseas, unfiltered - which in the end takes money away from local retailers."

But on the other hand we have serious gamers like Jaan, who are ambivalent toward the issue. Jaan is an 18 year old graphic design intern, studying Game Development at TAFE. He games several hours a day.

Jaan says he's thus far not that interested in the debate, as the games he plays (such as Warcraft 3) haven't come up against the classification ceiling. "It hasn't affected me as such. I personally wouldn't really care too much [about censoring content]. I'm more interested in the actual gameplay."

However, he does say that banning games simply blinds parents to the idea that games could be

inappropriate for kids. "It would be better to give games an R-rating, so that when parents go to buy it for their kids they then realise that it's very gory or whatnot. Otherwise the kids are just going to jump onto the net and download it and play it anyway."

And what of the everyman, that average Joe with nothing better to do than answer questions all day? Thanks to the GTA: San Andreas Hot Coffee debacle, our everyman — Nick, a 25 year old post-graduate university student — is aware of game censorship.

And he shares Atkinson's worry that children will be able to access R-rated games all too easily, if we did get an R-rating. "Not all games are targeted at teenagers and children, but they're the ones who are going to be playing them," he says. "They could just get their older brother or whatever to buy it for them."

However, adult choice also should be a consideration, and R-rated games should be available. "But they should make sure that the person is over 18 and so on. And maybe if someone's caught supplying a kid with an R-rated game they could get charged, like with alcohol."

"Charged, chucked in gaol, and they can only play Pong or Tetris for the rest of their life," he adds.

The bottom line

◆ There are four ways this situation could play out:

1. **Nothing ever changes and Aussie gamers are doomed**
2. **Michael Atkinson bows to pressure and changes his mind**
3. **Michael Atkinson is voted out at the next federal election (probably 2010)**
4. **The states and territories go their own way**

So if you want to be able to pop down to the local store to get a copy of an adult-themed game (read: anything with violence the likes of that on free-to-air television), you're going to have to work for it. Write to your closest Attorney-General or local member and complain. Call a newspaper and have a whine. At the very least, tell someone who isn't a gamer.

Remember: the squeaky wheel gets the games it wants. The wheel that sits idly by gets shafted. «

NO MATTER WHAT
THEY HAVE TO SAY, CENSORSHIP
IS NOT THE ANSWER
— Greg Tannahill



Fallout 3 was Refused Classification due to its real-world drug names, but its level of violence was never an issue.

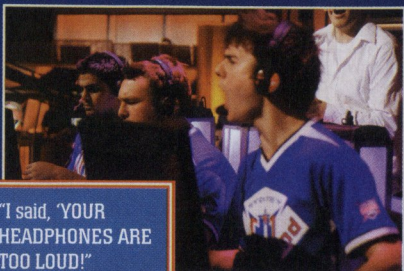


PRO



Gaming for fame and fortune? It's possible, and **Tim Baker** talks to the people who are doing it.

GAMING



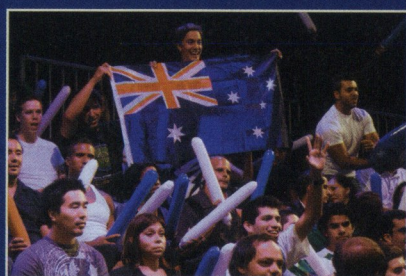
"I said, 'YOUR HEADPHONES ARE TOO LOUD!'"

The crowd is cheering, team-mates are punching the air and that familiar chant "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi" rises into the stadium. This isn't the Beijing Olympics, this is the world of professional gaming. Australia's Sydney Underground has just defeated Wuhan Dragon of China, 22-18, in the 2008 Championship Gaming Series Pan-Asia Final to win Australia's maiden team gaming premiership.

Despite losing the FIFA 08 and male Dead or Alive 4 face off, the Underground's overall scores across Counter Strike: Source (11-7), Forza Motorsport 2 (5-2) and the female DOA match (5-1), were enough to bring home the trophy for the first time. It capped a remarkable year for our only CGS representatives as General Manager Ben Thomas led his charges to an undefeated Pan-Asia season.

Unfortunately their good form couldn't be replicated in the World Finals, bowing out to Euro Continental Champions, Berlin Allianz, to finish joint 5th. But the team's achievements are no less impressive and it's their trailblazing efforts that are paving the way for Aussie gamers nationwide to pursue the path less travelled. But just what is professional gaming and how do you reach the top?

IT'S LIKE ANY SPORTING EVENT ... YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF YELLING AND AND THEN YOU GET STRAIGHT INTO YOUR GAME



A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Leagues began to pop up in the 90s after the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) started in 1996 but over the past 8 years the World Cyber Games (WCG), Major League Gaming (MLG) and Championship Gaming Series (CGS) have taken over to become the biggest and best.

Professional players, particularly in the US and Asia, have been known to spend between 14-18 hours a day preparing for the big tournaments and cash prizes can range anywhere between a couple of hundred dollars to a couple of hundred thousand dollars. And don't forget endorsement deals on top of that for the very best players.

Television has got in on the act too with ESPN broadcasting MLG events and Direct TV covering CGS in North America. Up to date or live footage can be seen on the internet with full expert commentary and analysis too. Big crowds also turn up to watch and cheer on their favourite teams or players creating a true sporting atmosphere.

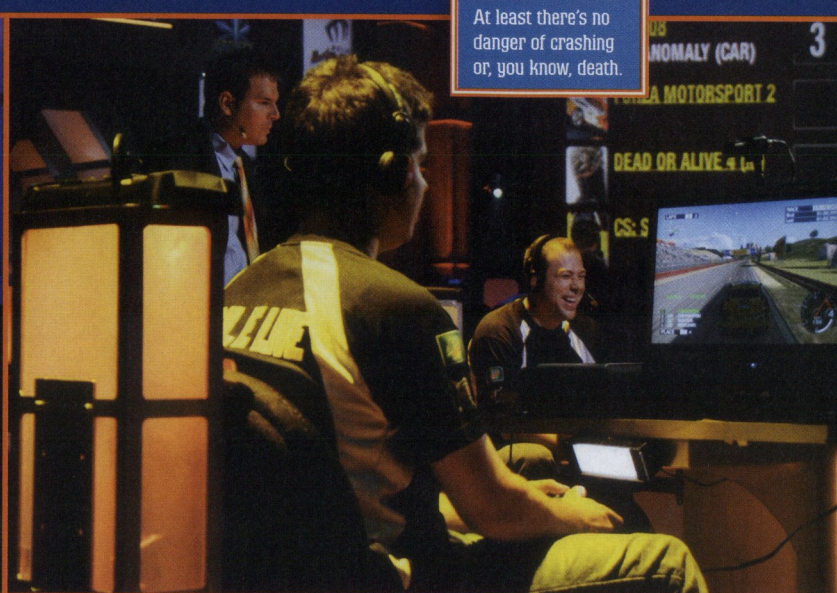
"At the world final there's a TV show they do as a live feed", says Ben Thomas, Sydney Underground General Manager. "In the studio it gets pretty insane, they have a pretty loud and vocal crowd so we like to get loud and vocal as Australians do and get the crowd on our side. But it's pretty much like any sporting event. You've got a lot of yelling and screaming and then you get straight into your game."

Although largely non-existent in Australia, media coverage in Asia has developed to a point that it borders on a frenzy. Whilst competing in China at the CGS Pan-Asia Regular Season, players from Sydney Underground required bodyguards to keep from being mobbed. In the US, things are a little more organised and regulated but in Australia coverage is almost non-existent.

The state of competitive gaming in Australia is still in its infancy but it's largely splintered into various rival tournaments and events. The consensus at the moment is that these rival competitions need to be more supportive of one another to create a unified calendar allowing the local gaming community a steady progression from one event to the next.

Geographical isolation is a factor when it comes to playing standards and awareness growth while the Aussie population is already spread thinly between the different competitive sports vying for attention. But pro gaming is on the up Down Under and with the Sydney Underground team competing in the CGS annually there is vast potential for e-sports to grow locally.

At least there's no danger of crashing or, you know, death.





"Yes, it's a marvellous day here at the CGS..."



“ AT THE MOMENT THE PAY IS NOT AT THE LEVEL WHERE I WOULD CONSIDER IT SOMETHING I WOULD QUIT MY JOB FOR ”

PRIZE MONEY

Don't quit your day job just yet chasing that pro gamer dream. As with all professional competitions prize money is substantial but not enough yet for individuals to make a living in Australia. While actually winning certain competitions results in big money the cost of actually making it there in the first place has to be taken into account.

The players lucky enough to score a contract in CGS are usually only retained for a season and as of 2007 earned around US \$30k a year each. In North America things work a little differently as GM's are able to retain and protect a "franchise" player plus another four from the previous season ahead of the draft. The Sydney Underground players aren't so fortunate.

"The person who gets franchised gets more than the protected players", says Sydney's Forza 2 rep James Davey. "And the protected players get more than the drafted players. So if you're a franchise player in the US or UK you're living pretty comfortably I think. The base salary as just a normal player here in Australia is probably not enough for a full year to not work or anything."

Winning the CGS World Final results in a US \$500k payday for the winning team with the other \$500k spread through the teams placing 2nd to 8th. That money literally goes into the players pockets but competition is fierce and there are no guarantees.

"At this stage it's not something you'd quit your job for", says Sydney DOA champ Dan Cherbowsky. "I think at the moment the pay is not at the level where I would consider it something I would quit my job

and just do. You're paid an on season and off season payment the equivalent of \$30k pro rata but it's a lot lower in the off season when they don't need you."

Major League Gaming offers attractive prize money to winners of each of their Regular Season and Playoff events with the winners of Halo 3 tournaments splitting US \$20k between players and coach. World of Warcraft winners receive US \$12k, and for Rainbow Six 2 and Gears of War the winners receive US \$4k. At the MLG National Championships prize money increases 5 fold taking Halo 3 prize money up to US \$100k.

The difference with MLG to CGS is that the players have to make their own arrangements to attend each of the Regular Season, Playoff and National Championship events held across America. If they don't win, it can be a costly exercise albeit a fun adventure.

"I would love for this to be a full time job", adds James. "It's not yet but I hope so, I hope it takes off. An Asian country such as China or the Asian region in general, if they got onto the bandwagon and saw what we're doing, I guarantee it would be pretty big."

PLAYERS

The average age of gamers the world over is around 30 with anyone from pre-teen to 40 years old actively playing one way or another. As we all know, thanks to the internet, those players can meet and compete from all over the world.

Tournaments across every genre spring up each year and more and more interest, prize money and dedicated "cyber athletes" come out of the woodwork. Now it's at the point where players can become rich and in some cases famous. Ever heard of a guy named 'Fatality'?

"We actually were hanging out with him quite a bit while we were in China", says Dan. "He's a pretty cool guy. What's interesting to me is he's a first person shooter champion, world champion in about 10 different games and a multi-millionaire. He's got his own range of Fatality PC gear and has his own company where people work for him. He is the Tiger Woods of e-sports".

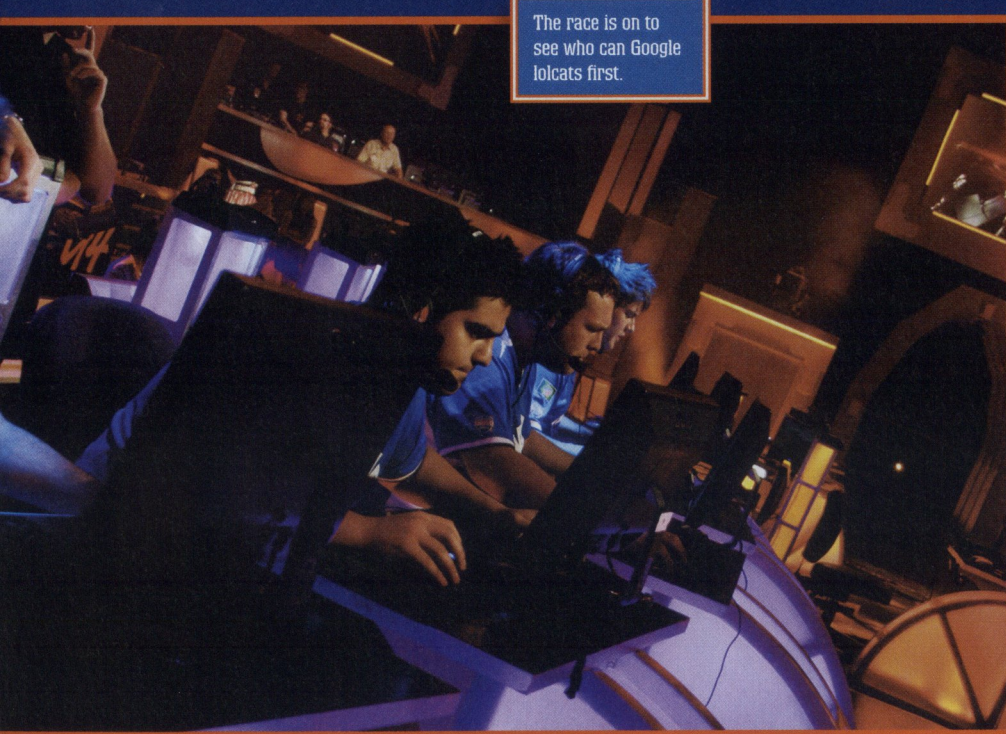
Jonathan 'Fatality' Wendel started professional gaming in 1999 by entering the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) tournament in Dallas where he won \$4,000 for placing third. He then flew to Sweden to compete in a tournament against the top 12 players in the world winning 18 straight games to take first place and become the top ranked Quake III player in the world. Two months later he defended his title and ranking in Dallas by winning the CPL again and a \$40,000 grand prize.

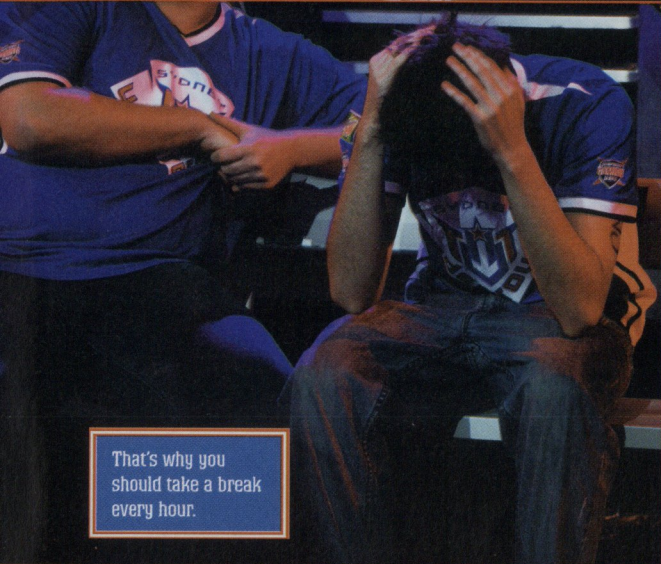
Since then Fatality has travelled the world to compete against the best, winning prizes and acclaim, including the 2005 CPL World Tour Championship in New York City for a \$150,000 first place finish. In 2007 he picked up the first ever Lifetime Achievement Award in the four-year history of the eSports-Award and now offers special commentary at CGS events.

For players of Sydney Underground though it's a very different picture.

"You've got your big fish in a small pond", Dan says. "Probably the biggest superstar in CGS is a girl named Vanessa because she basically dominated the female division of DOA in the US. She only lost her first game this year and went nearly two whole seasons without losing a match. I think Sydney Underground has a few superstars, we've got some big personalities. It's just a matter of posting the wins so people will care." [continued p. 50]

The race is on to see who can Google lolcats first.

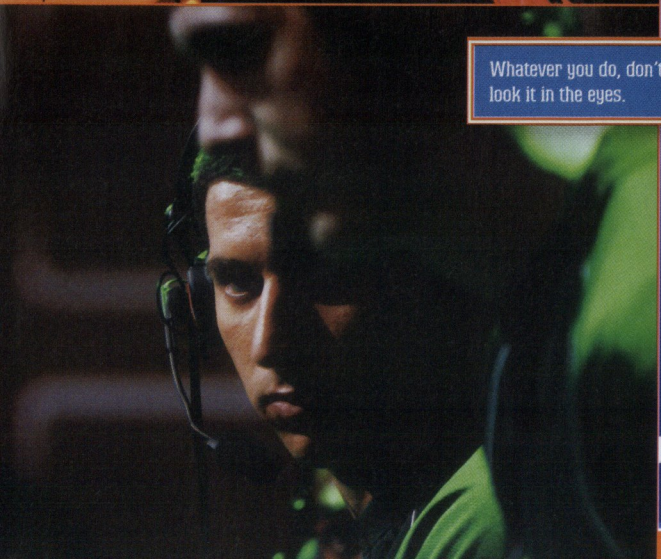




That's why you should take a break every hour.



Whatever you do, don't look it in the eyes.



★ THE BIG THREE ★

Championship Gaming Series:

★ Headquartered in Los Angeles, the Championship Gaming Series (CGS) was launched in 2007 featuring some of the world's best pro-gamers. Players are drafted and contracted by General Managers to one of 18 city-based franchise teams from North America, Latin America, the UK, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Australia.

Franchises made up of ten players and compete during the regular season in each region before the top ranking teams are invited to compete in the World Final for a \$1 Million prize purse and the chance to become the CGS World Champion team.

CGS now broadcasts across North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia but is only available to Australians via the web.

www.championshipgamingseries.com



GAMES:

PC - Counter Strike: Source (teams of five), FIFA 08 (individual)

Xbox 360 - DOA 4 (one male, one female), Forza Motorsport 2 (teams of two)

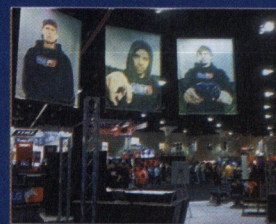
★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Major League Gaming:

★ Major League Gaming was founded in 2002 and started as a console only based competition in 2006 claiming to be the largest organised league and international sanctioning body for pro-gaming. Plans for international tournaments are underway but currently competitions are only held within North America. These are however, open to Amateurs, Semi-Pro's and Professional players.

The MLG Pro Circuit consists of four regular season events before the playoffs and finally a National Championship. Events are broadcast by ESPN across the US and prize money over the season is on par with CGS. Anyone can register to play a Pro Circuit event through the official website but don't get too excited. It must be as part of a team with an official team pass bought through the MLG store.

www.mlgpro.com



GAMES:

Xbox 360 - Halo 3, Rainbow Six: Vegas 2, Gears of War, Call of Duty 4 (Xbox 360)

PC - World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade (online exclusive)

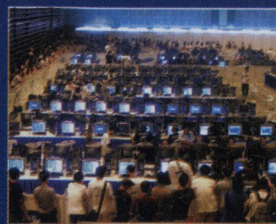
★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

World Cyber Games:

★ The World Cyber Games is like the Olympics of e-sports. Aside from tournament play an annual world wide youth festival and international gaming conference is held annually along side the competition.

Originally started in 2000 with 4 titles and 17 countries, the WCG has grown to include 14 different titles and 80 countries in 2008. After local qualifiers, Pan Regional Championships are held in Europe, Asia and The Americas in a specific host city where players then play for the chance to reach the Grand Final staged this year in Cologne, Germany.

www.worldcybergames.com



GAMES:

PC - Warcraft III, Starcraft, Counter Strike, FIFA 08, Need For Speed, Command & Conquer 3, Age of Empires III, Carom 3D and Red Stone

Xbox 360 - Project Gotham Racing, Guitar Hero III, Halo 3 and Virtua Fighter 5

Mobile - Asphalt 3: Street Rules



MEET THE SYDNEY UNDERGROUND TEAM



GENERAL MANAGER:

Ben Thomas
Alias: Racs
Age: 25
Hometown: Brisbane



PLAYERS:

Scott Bednarski
Alias: Boomser
Age: 23
Hometown: Brisbane
CGS Event: Counter-Strike Source



Harout Atachparian
Alias: haroutig10
Age: 21
Hometown: Sydney
CGS Event: FIFA 08



James Davey
Alias: iCam v1
Age: 22
Hometown: Adelaide
CGS Event: Forza Motor Sport 2



Oliver Johnson-Barrett
Alias: Huk
Age: 18
Hometown: Sydney
CGS Event: Counter-Strike Source



Chad Burchill
Alias: spunj
Age: 18
Hometown: Perth
CGS Event: Counter-Strike Source



Daniel Chlebowczyk
Alias: Bezerk
Age: 29
Hometown: Melbourne
CGS Event: DOA 4



Dale Baker
Alias: Morpo
Age: 22
Hometown: Melbourne
CGS Event: Forza Motorsport 2



BJ Bednarski
Alias: Tegs
Age: 24
Hometown: Brisbane
CGS Event: Counter-Strike Source



Eileen Bell
Alias: Eileen
Age: 21
Hometown: Brisbane
CGS Event: DOA 4



Azad Orami
Alias: topgun
Age: 19
Hometown: Sydney
CGS Event: Counter-Strike Source



Electroshock gaming is reserved for the truly elite.

[continued from p. 48] Acceptance of e-sports in Australia has a long way to go before it's on a par with Asia where it's not uncommon for players to date movie stars. Just quietly in the US, people within the industry feel that it's only a matter of time before North America reaches similar levels. But in Australia the term 'pro gamer' only attracts a raised eyebrow.

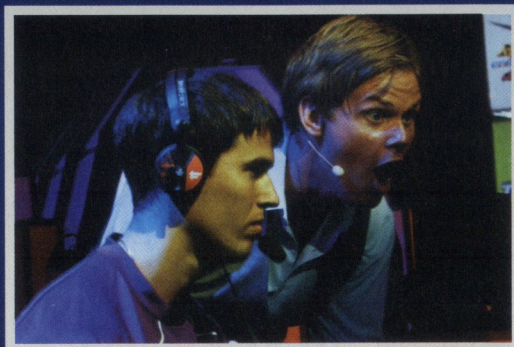
"You usually get a few weird looks", says James. "But when you actually explain how big the gaming industry is, explain how many people are into this and how many people do this you start to get your point across. No matter who you tell though they can sit there and nod their head but at the end of the day they still think you're on crack or something."

"I think broadly it's all very strange", offers Dan. "Explaining to my parents for example, I don't think they really got it until I sat them down in front of the computer and showed them a clip of me playing in the World Finals. They see what you do and they get the idea that it's a big, fun, sporting kind of environment. We've got fans, barrackers and team mates."

TRAINING... ER... PLAYING FOR FUN?

Like elite athletes, pro-gamers must be at their peak at all times. Although each of the Sydney Underground players have outside commitments, practice and training is expected to compete at the top.

"In terms of honing things and getting exact moves", Dan says. "Or really being able to play a good mind game on your opponent you have to be right on top of your playing action. So that's where practice comes in."



"If I can't find a reasonable opponent online at a reasonable speed then I'll just play time attack. It basically forces me to play the game as efficiently as I can to find the most damaging and quick moves that I can. Then you have to step away from that when you play online and do things the other player won't expect. You do a few things that trains people into thinking the natural follow up is coming but you've got to change that up constantly."

The general idea for each team member is to play around 20-plus hours a week, although Ben does not enforce any regime. Instead they are left to practice in their own time and submit regular reports of their performance.

"It depends on the individual", says Ben. "Some Counter-Strike guys will sit there, and because that's the only game they play, they'll spend ridiculous hours playing the game. As a team the Counter-Strike guys will play probably five times a week for 3-4 hours."

"Forza II and the console guys, some weeks they'll put in a large amount of hours and other weeks they might take a week off to take care of work commitments or whatever. But it's really up to the players what they do outside of this and as long as they can keep up the standard down the track then we don't have an issue."

"It's a funny thing", says Dan. "My girlfriend used to say 'why are you playing your X-box so much?' and now she's saying 'shouldn't you be playing your X-box?' At the moment I'm playing pretty regularly where I can as I'm working full time and got other things in my life I enjoy doing."

"I make a point of taking a break from the game I've been playing non-stop for two years. But there's a certain skill level now when you reach a high level. It's like cricket when you haven't played for a couple of weeks and you step up to the crease, you're not going to forget how to swing."

THE FUTURE

By all accounts pro gaming the world over has vast potential. In Asia it's already reaching fever pitch and in the US insiders feel competitive gaming is on the verge of exploding like extreme sports did over a decade ago or as poker did in recent years.



Great, now who's going to clean all that up?

Why can't we all get paid with big novelty cheques?

For professional gaming to be successful in Australia though, coverage is the key.

"I think gaming in general has a way to go before people can relate to it the way they can relate to poker", says Dan. "A deck of 52 cards with heart, spades, et cetera, is something people are more familiar with in the mainstream."

"Poker as a game to watch the cards flipping is not interesting but they present it in a way that you see this personality and they discuss what they must be thinking, the plays they're putting forward plus the other players reactions. Then suddenly it's something intriguing. That's kind of what needs to happen with gaming. People need to be a little more familiar with it first thing so they know the ins and outs and they can relate that to the audience. That's a challenge."

Currently in Australia there is no TV contract in place for any of the big gaming comps, restricting casual gamers and the general public from seeing what competitive gaming is all about. Add to that the general idea in mainstream society that video games are for nerds, the Aussie gaming community is facing an uphill battle.

"I don't think it's going to be really successful here", says James. "To be honest it's probably never going to get aired here. The problem with Australia is

it's too much of a niche market and doesn't have the population to support something like that. The only other regions I think it will take off is America and Asia just because they've got the population and can find people that want to watch it."

Other challenges we are faced with in Australia are internet speeds and peak times, geographical placement, time zones compared to the rest of the world and finding quality opposition to compete at a world class level.

These set backs can be overcome though thanks to Australia's close ties and proximity to South East Asia and the possibility for corporate sponsorship from some of Asia's biggest computer companies. Money talks and if the cash on offer was on a par with overseas events then surely the Aussie media would take notice.

But first thing's first. More competitions, some sort of unification of the various gaming tournaments and a corresponding structure needs to be put in place for Australia to take the right steps forward.

"When we get over to WCG it's great because you get there and you realise this is what it's all about, these are some of the things I need to do to play better", adds Dan.

"But you're at the event already. You didn't learn those lessons before you got to the main stage. That makes it really, really tough. So the answer for Australia is to have more competitions and again for all these various islands of e-sports competitions working together a bit more so people have things they can build, work up through and up skill."

What we do have going for us however is the local gaming communities continue to expand as players begin to realise there is a very real path to virtual sporting success.



I DON'T THINK IT'S GOING TO BE REALLY SUCCESSFUL HERE ... AUSTRALIA IS TOO MUCH OF A NICHE MARKET



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REALITY BYTES

DARREN WELLS

Shooting down the walls of time

A month on from our review and we're still playing *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2*. We're still transfixed by its neon visuals and its just-one-more-turn gameplay, and the battle to beat one's high score – or that of another player – continues to wage in the office.

With so many games littering our desks at Hyper HQ, the fact that one has remained a constant for so long must not be overlooked. What's more, it's not a game that comes packed with detailed textures, hours of music and speech, oodles of side quests and a free cup of chocolate noodles. It's a top-down shoot 'em up, and nothing more. Simplistic in the eyes of story-driven games, and repetitive in the eyes of free-roaming titles, but in our eyes it's one of our favourite games.

But why? Well, it could have something to do with the Hyper crew's backgrounds. Myself, Daniel, Malcolm, we all grew up with this type of game. We spent hours on our Atari consoles and Commodore computers making a block shoot other blocks, and the gameplay of *Geometry Wars* harks back to – geez, I feel old writing it like this – “those” days. That's not to suggest that Hyper is biased towards old-school games such as this, or lean favourably towards titles that offer a dressed-up retro game mechanic that appeals to our inner youth. No, we like to think that our long history with gaming gives us some perspective, a sense of background. We can look at today's games and put them up against the entire timeline, not just against the games of the last few years.

That's what makes *Geometry Wars* such an interesting case. Its gameplay is a direct emulation of traditional arcade shooters, and beyond coupling it with HD visuals and analogue controls, it expresses no desire to change.

The formula is as pure as it was twenty years ago, and it still works today.

This fact makes the formula perhaps more important now than when history first introduced it. Take a look at the casual gaming market: With busy people having more desire to unwind but less time to do it in, bite-sized games are just the ticket for those looking to have some down time with digital entertainment. Maybe that's another reason why we're digging the game: it slots perfectly into the nine-to-five grind. There's no need to keep track of our position in a game's sprawling narrative, there's no need to replay the tutorial for a refresher course after an extended period away, and there's no need to stop playing when the game decides the end is in sight. *Geometry Wars* is pick up and play, in the truest sense, and requires as little as a few minutes from the player in order to present a full gameplay experience.

Asteroids did the same. But *Asteroids* is a geriatric in gaming circles. Textured polygons and 5.1 orchestral scores are the bread and butter of most of today's games, and for newcomers looking to see what this videogame caper is all about, chances are the first games they'll play will consist of them. *Geometry Wars* strikes a good middle ground between presenting a timeless gameplay mechanic and a package that will appeal to today's market.

And that's the crux of the matter: timeless gameplay. Games and technology come and go, but genres endure. It's important that we remember to brush the dust off of history's lessons, rather than let it cover it for eternity, and amid titles that strive to pack more and more into all those gigabytes of space, sometimes a simpler approach is all it takes to make a great game.

Geometry Wars is pick up and play, in the truest sense

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM: What's It All About?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Worthless
- just don't
bother

Awful,
a waste of
time

A failure
in many
areas

Below the
bar in most
respects

Average, an
example of
mediocrity

Good, but
could be
better

Very good,
but with a
few niggles

Highly
rated, a
fine game

Excellence
in pixels

A masterpiece,
a must-buy,
a future classic



HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL
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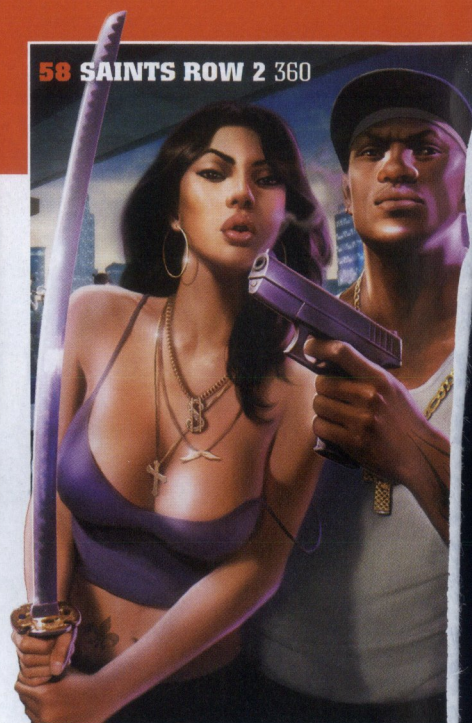
HYPER GAME OF THE MONTH
 Goes to the game that clocked up the most hours in the Hyper office.



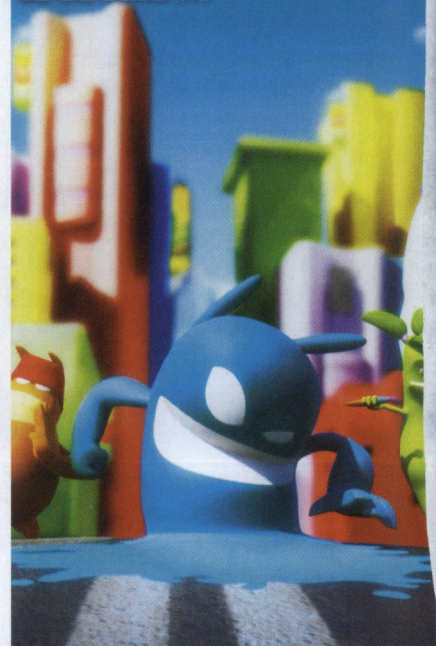
HYPER CERTIFIED DUD
 Failure by design or a waste of time? We're branding it a dud.

Huh? Wha' happen? It all different! Yes, we've updated our scoring and stamp systems in an effort to give games a more concrete verdict.

58 SAINTS ROW 2 360



62 DE BLOB Wii



68 INFINITE UNDISCOVERY 360

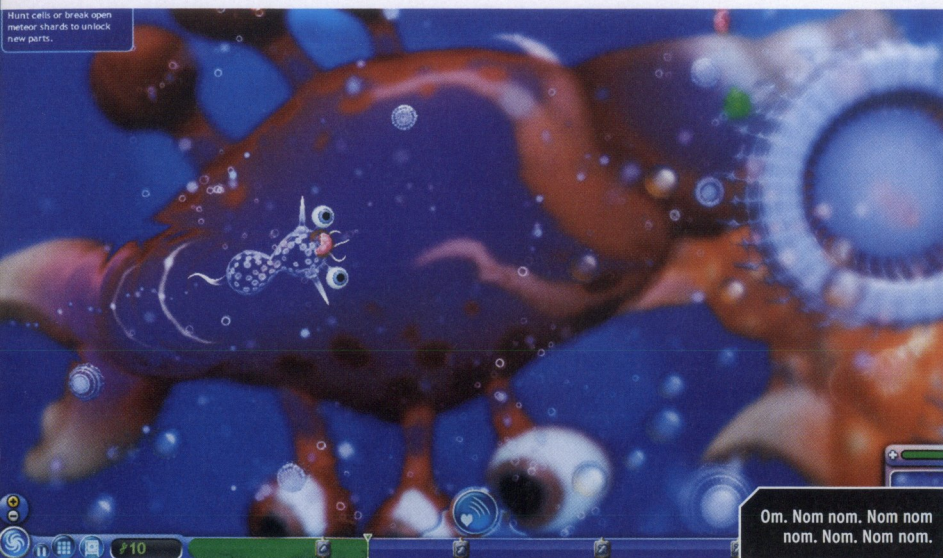




56 SPORE

Will Wright's evolution sim is here, but does it change the world?

Hunt cells or break open meteor shards to unlock new parts.



Om. Nom nom. Nom nom nom. Nom. Nom nom.



And I shall call him Leglord, the leg thing.

Spore

DANIEL WILKS wants a pet Awesomesauce

Spore would have to be one of the most hotly anticipated games of the last few years, and one of the most ambitious.

Following a creature from single cell through to galactic exploration is a huge scope – big enough to either go down as one of history's great games... or disappointments. Set over five distinct evolutionary stages, Spore charges players with creating and controlling a race of creatures spawned from your very imagination, taking over first the tidal pond and eventually the galaxy.

We could waffle on all day about the history of the game, Will Wright's obsession with making sandbox style games and the merging of the casual and core game market in the previous Maxis games, The Sims and The Sims 2 but really, all we need to say is that the Creature Creator that Wright

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

category: **Sim...thing** / players: **1**
developer: **Maxis**
publisher: **EA**
price: **\$99.95** / rating: **PG**
available: **Now**

has made for Spore is an absolute marvel. Creating a beastie from your imagination using the available parts is a wonderful experience, and seeing the creature being animated in a (somewhat) naturalistic fashion is endlessly enjoyable. As is creating buildings, vehicles and outfits for your creatures.

IT'S ALIVE!

Much like The Sims, Spore is a more enjoyable game when you cheat and give yourself more resources. During the creature stage of the game (the last stage in which you can alter the makeup of your creature) players are free to shape

Great, but where's the 7-11?



the body of their beast, adding legs, arms, mouths, hands, feet, natural weapons, eyes, ears, noses and ornamentation. Well, they're free to a point. Each body part costs a set amount of DNA, a resource gathered either through killing other creatures or befriending them. New body parts are collected in a similar manner but can also be found in skeletons dotting the landscape.

Although the Creature Creator is an absolute marvel in user created content and procedural design,

shortly after you begin to play Spore you realise that the creator is essentially the full game – there is very little to do for a large part of the actual game and even then there is very little variation in what you can do. The first level sees the player lead a single celled organism around in a pool, eating meat, plankton or both, and gathering up a few extra body parts like fins or spines, trying to wolf down enough DNA to grow a brain, some legs and venture out on to land. This plays something like a cartoonish version of Flow, sans the sense of wonder. It's slow paced and quite dull but is over relatively quickly – most people won't have to play for more than 20 minutes or so.

CREATURE FEATURE

The second stage, Creature, should be one of the most interesting, due to the fact that this is where you really make your creature, but thanks to the overly simplistic gameplay mechanics it plays like





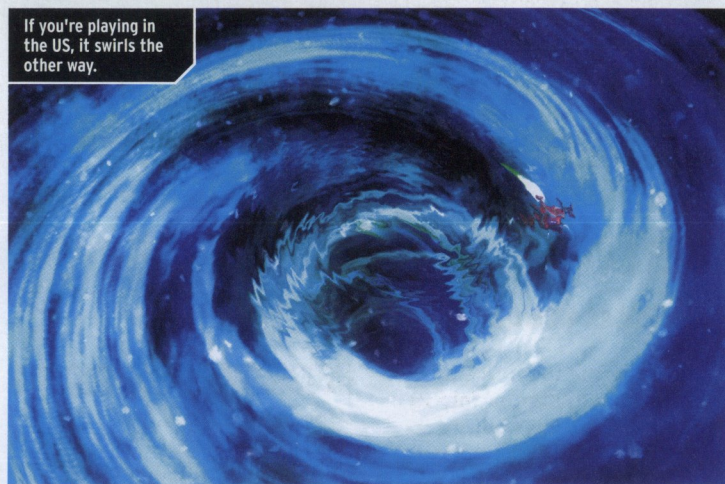
How you play determines your creature's base characteristics for the next level – rely more on social skills and you will veer towards friendly skills and religious societies, the other way and you learn skills dedicated to warfare and lead a warlike civilisation.



They're armed and extremely dangerous.



If you're playing in the US, it swirls the other way.



Shortly after you begin to play Spore you realise that the creator is essentially the full game

a game of Simon Says, the world's most simple MMO or a mixture of both. And it goes on for a long time. Befriending creatures boils down to equipping the right body parts with social abilities and hitting the right button to mimic what the targeted creature is doing – dancing, singing, charming or posing. That's it. Have high enough social stats and hit the right buttons and they become your friend. Combat is similarly simple, with a few abilities that can be used on cool downs. If your creature dies, another is simply spawned back at the home nest, so there's not even any real challenge to the level.

The next two levels, Tribe and Civilization, are similar in design, giving the player control of a group of creatures, RTS style, instead of control of a single creature. Tribal retains a similar befriend or kill gameplay mechanic to the Creature stage but adds the ability to build different buildings enabling you to equip your creatures for different

purposes – spears, flaming brands or stone axes for combat, fishing poles or gathering sticks for resource gathering and instruments to impress other tribes. Civilization takes the same concept and makes it global, adding vehicles and more micromanagement requirements to the mix.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

Thankfully the final stage, Space, feels like a fully fleshed out game – so much so that the earlier stages feel more like a very long tutorial rather than real levels. The Space sections see the player controlling a single ship (that can be built up into a fleet by forming alliances with alien races), exploring the galaxy, forming diplomatic relationships with other civilisations, battling space pirates, investigating alien species, terraforming planets and starting new colonies. While the gameplay still remains relatively simple – it's by no means as complex as a fully-fledged space exploration/strategy

game like Masters of Orion – the scope of the mission and the sheer number of things you can do and explore makes it quite a pleasure.

Ultimately what makes Spore work is how much you grow attached to your creature. They really do get to you after a while. The way they sing or dance, how they show they're happy, sad, hungry or scared. It really is an impressive achievement and will have you going back to create new creatures. Whether you'll want to play all the way through again is another matter entirely. Once a level is completed players can start a new game from that level, so after the first play through it's highly unlikely that anyone will want to play through the first stage again. Hell, for a lot of people the Creature stage will be something of a chore as well, the only factor drawing them in being the fact that they can flesh out their creature.

There is a lot of enjoyment to be had with Spore, but in reality

most of that enjoyment comes from using the creature creator, not playing the actual game. Still, the game is bound to sell a squillion copies due to the crossover appeal and huge hype and will inevitably prompt Sims-style expansion packs with new body, building and vehicle parts. Hopefully some of that will go some way to making the gameplay more engaging... and hopefully EA will have learned lessons regarding DRM and multiple accounts. ☹

THE GOOD: The creature creator is an absolute marvel and you will undoubtedly grow attached to your creations

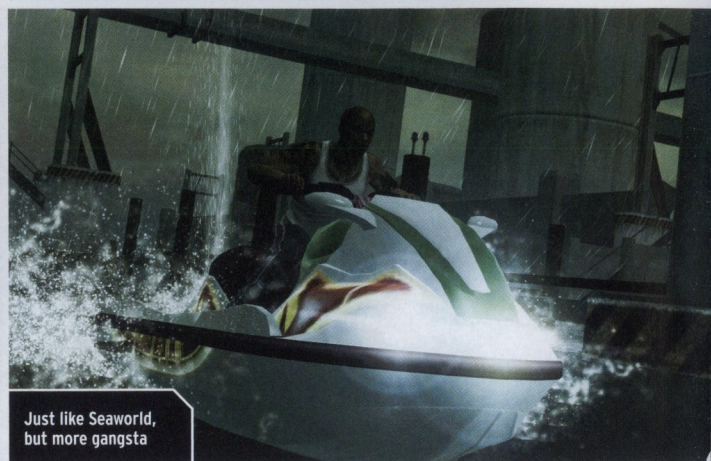
THE BAD: Actual gameplay is overly simple and not particularly compelling until you get into space

OVERALL: Spore is hugely impressive on a technical level but the core gameplay isn't nearly as engaging as the creatures you can create.

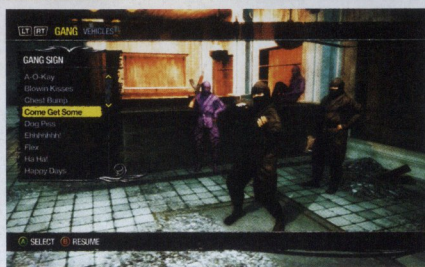




"Right, who has a fear of flying now?"



Just like Seaworld, but more gangsta



Saints Row 2

DARREN WELLS be pimpin' fo' sho', yo

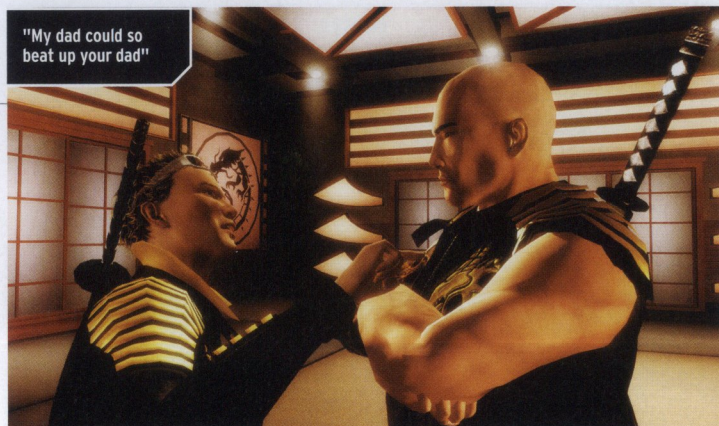
Let's address the burning question right from the top: What separates Saints Row 2 from Grand Theft Auto 4? They're both free-roaming third-person games that give you cars, pedestrians and a city in which you can do as you please, so what's preventing this from simply being a copycat? For us, that question was answered during a fairly innocuous moment: when we were customising our character. We wandered into a clothing store and scrolled through the available options, going in with the intent of outfitting our hero in a ridiculous ensemble. A traffic cone appears in the Hats section. Perfect. We make the purchase, it appears on his head, and — here's the kicker — we're allowed to choose what angle to wear it on. Slant

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC

category: **Action** / players: **1-16**
 developer: **Volition, Inc**
 publisher: **THQ**
 price: **\$99.95** / rating: **MA15+**
 available: **October 16**

it forwards or backwards? Slant it left or right? We got to pick.

That moment typifies the feel of Saints Row 2. Yes, in terms of raw gameplay mechanics it's cut from a similar cloth of its competition, but this is a game that knows full well that its design will result in players attempting all manner of crazy stunts and shenanigans, and goes the extra yard by catering to that freedom. No, beyond catering: encouraging. It doesn't just let you find your own fun; it gives you a choice of fun — and crazy — things to do, and their outlandish nature demands that they be attempted



"My dad could so beat up your dad"

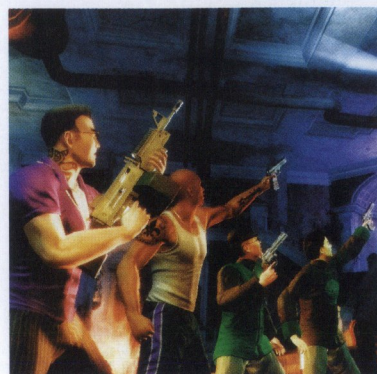
at least once. Heck, with the ability to do handstands on the bonnets of moving cars, perform nude runs through a bustling mall, and drive around in a sewerage truck and hose people and buildings with liquid brown, why wouldn't you want to?

WHAT'S THE WORD?

It shouldn't come as a surprise to learn that Saints Row 2 doesn't take itself seriously. Sure, the story is a fairly rudimentary tale of building

a posse to reclaim the streets from rival gangs, but everything surrounding that is a conduit for clowning around. The game is even enough of a tongue-in-cheek smooth-talker to account for every difference that's present between this and the original Saints Row. Your character's appearance has changed from the one you used in the first game? That's because they've had plastic surgery. You can't even remember the first game? That's because your character has amnesia. The city is bigger and has a new layout? That's because in-game corporation Ultor Unlimited has redeveloped every inch in an effort to lift it from urban squalor into a modern utopia.

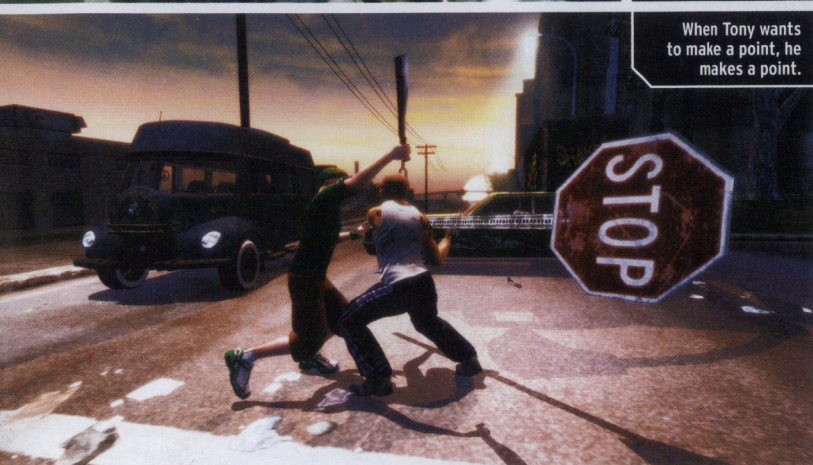
It has some pretty snappy answers, despite much of the game resigning itself to territory that's more, well, juvenile. The poo-flinging missions in particular come to mind, but there's also the none-too-obscure names given to some of the stores, such as clothing



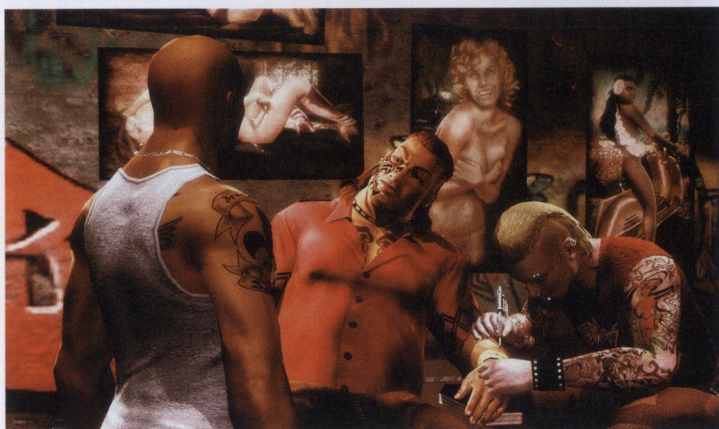
M-M-M-M-MULTIPLAYER! Saints Row 2 supports online co-op, meaning you and a friend can tackle the singleplayer campaign together. Extra enemies are added into each task, giving you both plenty to shoot at. There's also garden variety multiplayer, which offers a range of game modes that can be set to rotate after a given time frame, ensuring that no one mode gets stale after extended play. Just as you're tiring of one, bang, a timer counts it down, and it's a minute or so of free-for-all before the next one kicks in. Without a doubt, our all-out favourite mode is Insurance Fraud, which tasks you with deliberately falling into oncoming traffic — the more your body is crumpled and the further you're hurled, the more money you'll net. Then you pick yourself up and run into another car. Just don't try this at home.



Keep your ears open while listening to the in-car radio – your character just might sing along to the music!



When Tony wants to make a point, he makes a point.



outlets like On The Rag and Sloppy Seconds. It's easy to point to the GTA series as another perpetrator of such schoolyard humour, but there it (mostly) had constructive purpose, whereas this seems implemented for the sake of upping the ante.

If only that ante extended to the visuals. Saints Row 2's characters look simplistic at best and ugly at worst, the landscape is occasionally doused with murky brown when it rains – as an observer asked, "Did you turn on the sepia tone by mistake?" (Given that no such option exists, I answered in the negative) – and in general, the whole production will struggle to win any beauty pageants. That said, the graphics aren't game-killing and do serve their purpose well enough, but better showcases of 360 horsepower can be found elsewhere.

SMACK DOWN

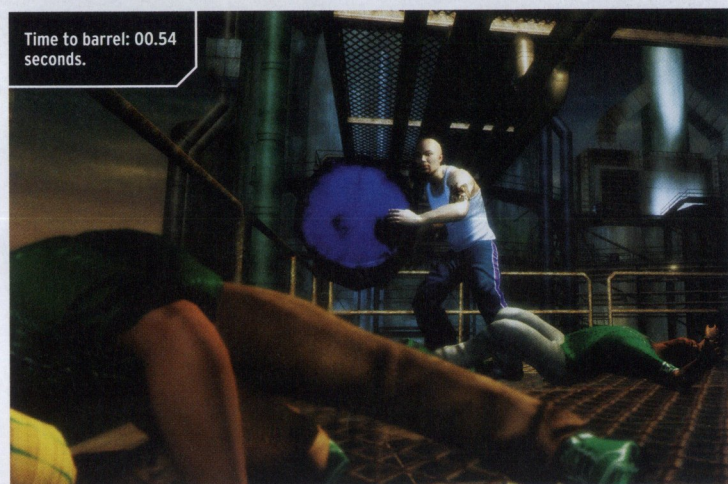
As for what we have here? Well, it's packed to the gills with diverse missions, varied gameplay and

moments that range from the brutal to the bawdy. At any given moment you'll be recruiting hookers (naturally, the game calls them "hos") and bringing them back to meet their new madam, you'll be manning a helicopter-borne machine gun as you raze a rival drug factory, or you'll be backing a tow truck up to a hearse and hauling it to a mechanic's workshop. There's plenty to do even when you're not following the mission markers, as the game allows you to spend your hard-earned on unlockable songs from a music store and compile your own playlist, impersonating a police officer and let a TV crew tail you while you lay the "law" down, or, you know, run into a crowded mall tackle out.

Side missions feed into the main storyline by way of the respect meter: complete a diversion task – and that's precisely what the game calls them – and your respect level goes up. Once it's at a satisfactory



Time to barrel: 00.54 seconds.



It gives you a choice of fun – and crazy – things to do, and their outlandish nature demands that they be attempted

level, you're allowed to proceed. It's a semi-forced way to ensure the player sees some of that extra content, but it does blur the line between what is traditionally recognised as the storyline path, and what is recognised as "all that other stuff".

As you see it all you may notice something else: realism seems to have little place in the world of Saints Row 2. We're talking about the way in which cars move and turn, the way in which you can throw grabbed opponents, and the speed at which your character runs while sprinting. It's all exaggerated, all over the top. Whether this is done intentionally or done via sloppy programming is unclear, and whether it assists or hampers your enjoyment of the game may be subjective, but given that the game never forces you to accept Saints Row 2 as a 1:1 substitute for real life, we can accept it if our foes are thrown backwards with the might of The Hulk.

Face it, there's only going to be one Grand Theft Auto, and that's Grand Theft Auto. The existence of the Saints Row series may be a direct response to the success of Rockstar's franchise, but this game certainly demonstrates the benefits of friendly competition. When it comes down to brass tacks, Saints Row 2 is fun. Brash, occasionally immature, sometimes irresponsible, but fun. Oh, and for the record, we chose to wear our traffic cone to the left. Jaunty, no? «

THE GOOD: Diverse missions, game has a fun sense of itself

THE BAD: Subpar visuals, occasionally juvenile approach

OVERALL: A tad unrefined, but an otherwise enjoyable approach to the free-roaming genre.

HYPER VERDICT

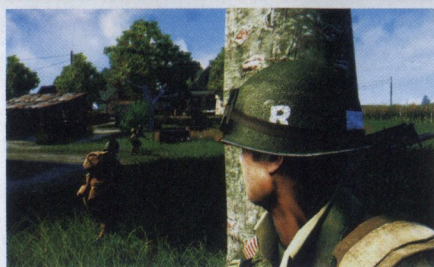
8



Caution: aim away from face.



"Phwoar, next door forgot to draw the blinds!"



Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway

DARREN WELLS knows where not to hitchhike

Another WWII game? Yeah, it is, but bear with us before dismissing Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway as another brick in the overused setting wall.

It's no secret that this theatre of war is one that's been explored at length across numerous FPS games from years past. Medal of Honor and Call of Duty are the obvious big boys, with each presenting an experience that turned the player into a 1940s action hero. Each has gone on to become a highly-regarded brand — possibly as a direct result of this — but when it comes to Ubisoft's Brothers in Arms, it's a brand that's often overlooked in favour of EA or Activision. Its following, however small, is nevertheless loyal, and when it comes to Hell's Highway, those familiar with the franchise will doubt look to it for their fix of story-focused Nazi killing. Newcomers who are fed up to the gills with World War II shooters might let their instincts take them

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

category: **FPS** / players: **1**
 developer: **Gearbox Software**
 publisher: **Ubisoft**
 price: **\$99.95** / rating: **MA15+**
 available: **Now**



away from the game, but if it's because the genre now appears stale, this might be the game to liven it up again.

IT BEGINS

For starters, you're not a one-man army charging through Nazi bunkers without so much as a graze. Your character, Sergeant Matthew "Matt" Baker, is portrayed as just another



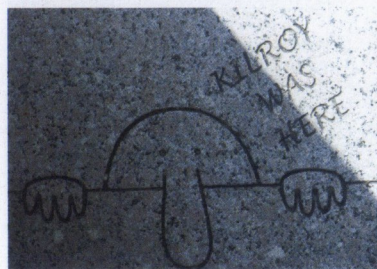
"Hey, uh... can I have a gun too?"

guy amongst his crew — one who pulls rank only when the situation demands it — with the game telling its story through his eyes.

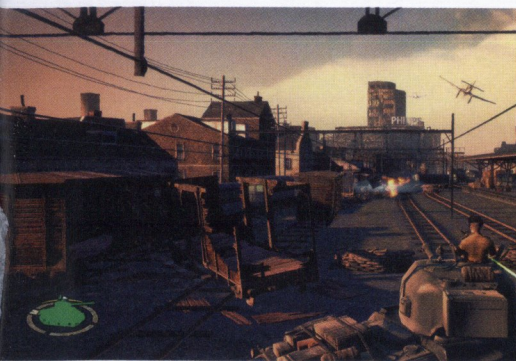
It's not just a matter of dumping Baker in disjointed warzones, either. The game has a distinct lean on narrative and character, a fact that's made obvious in the opening recap of the previous games. Scenes like a child Baker being made by his

mother to return a firearm gift to his father demonstrate that this isn't a game that's just about spilling as much enemy blood as possible. This is a game that shows its lead character actually caring when one of his squad bites the big one.

If you charge in full pelt, this is something that you yourself will do quite often. Brothers in Arms has never really been a run-and-gun shooter, and Hell's Highway is no exception. Gradual steps forth, interspersed with the occasional breakneck sprint, are part and parcel of the experience, and the new gameplay mechanics only drive this further. Hit the Left Bumper near a wall and the view switches to third-person as Baker ducks down, allowing you to slowly peer over to squeeze off a few shots.



KILLROY WAS HERE It might take more of a realistic bent than its competitors, but Hell's Highway is still a videogame, so naturally there's hidden items to find and unlockables to, well, unlock. One of the find 'em elements is the timeless "Kilroy Was Here" doodle, placed in various locations throughout the game. Look, there he is! Look at that long inquisitive nose, and those little sausage fingers. Look at that dome-like scalp, and those beady eyes. Truly an icon of our times, and one that I'm all for seeing more of.



!!! The game uses the Unreal 3 engine, but in a remarkable show of restraint, not every surface is eye-blindingly shiny. Hurrah!



Anyone bring 20 cents for the binoculars?



Aiming away from face: you're doing it right.



the side of the barn. They'll even make remarks on your situation, whether they're urging you to move forward and out of the current bullet hailstorm, or advising you of an enemy's location.

But there's one more thing that the series incorporates that really makes it the most strategic of the bunch: a red circle. Over each enemy hovers a simple circle, and when it's red you'll want to get down, because they're up and shooting. Returning fire will see that circle, bit by bit, deplete into grey, indicating that they're suppressed for the time being. Then you and your team just might stand a chance as you hot-foot it forward, seeking out more cover or moving in for a more intimate kill.

What makes the game work is its incorporation of all of this, and how it presents it. Hell's Highway definitely knows how to convey the scope of war, with entire base camps showing tents as far as the

eye can see, and skies filled with B52s towing gliders before they're released into a controlled crash landing in a field. Levels that take place in the open really let that scope filter down into the gameplay: it's not just about roaming corridors and hallways; the player is allowed to see how the war is invading pristine farmland and humble homesteads, rather than constantly enduring shelled building after shelled building.

The game isn't for everyone, but those who seek more tactical depth in their WWII shooters should consider Hell's Highway. It's technically proficient, tells a great story, plays well, and provides an alternative approach to the genre beyond that of an action drone. «

THE GOOD: Knows how to tell a story, decent tactical depth, suppressing fire actually means something.

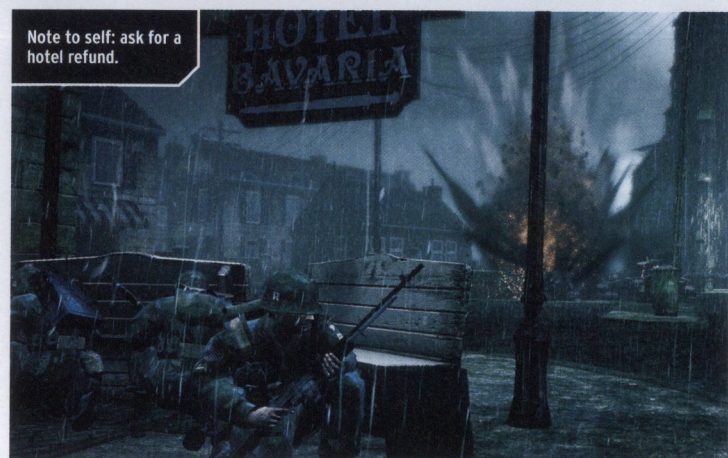
THE BAD: Occasionally quite punishing in some sections, with level design demanding that a specific tactic be used.

OVERALL: A thinking man's WWII shooter - just be prepared to endure some punishing sections amid the brilliant ones.



HYPER VERDICT

8



Note to self: ask for a hotel refund.

This is a game that shows its lead character actually caring when one of his squad bites the big one

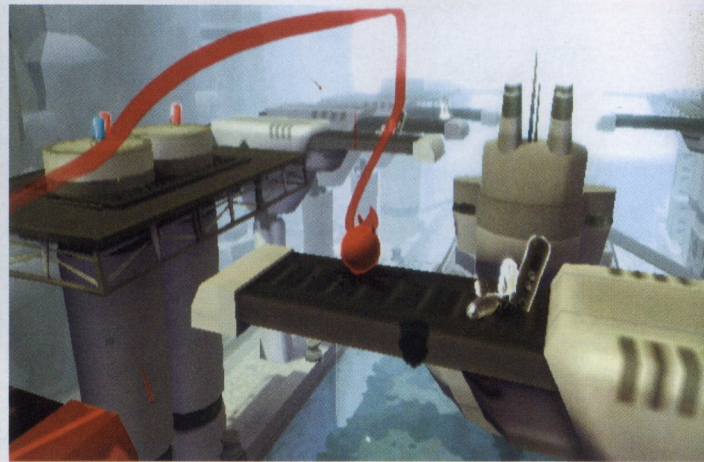
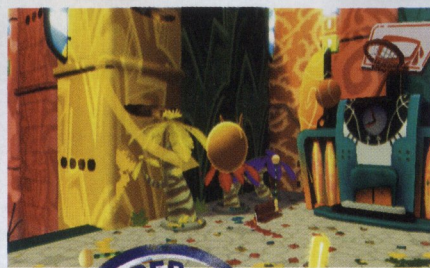
The enemy AI makes you work for every single kill, as soldiers bunker down behind cover just the same as you, and although they do abide by the occasional scripted moment (such as a swathe of enemies emerging in formation, or a sudden rush swarming out of a house), generally you'll only notice them upon repeated playthroughs of a particular section... which, if you're not approaching the game with the careful tactics required, will be frequent.

CAREFUL, LADS...

Just as Hell's Highway favours characterisation over hollow cutouts, it also gives you a team rather than throwing you into each battle solo. A number of squads are at your beck and call, and you've

got to be mindful of them - they'll take care of themselves most of the time, that's not the issue, but you'll need their firepower if you plan on getting through a section alive.

You've got it via the squad command feature, used with the Left Trigger: hold it down to bring up the blue marker in the field, and release it once the marker where you want it. You can use it to direct soldiers to a specific area and await further orders, or you can position it directly over an enemy and order them to attack. Your crew is also split into dedicated units, selected via the D-Pad. It's definitely a handy, no, essential tool to harness, as with enough tactical foresight you can send the Mi9 unit to fire from behind the stone wall, and the assault unit to ambush from



de Blob

MIKOLAI must work for BAPE



Wii

category: **Platform/Adventure** / players: **1-4**
 developer: **BlueTongue, Melbourne**
 publisher: **THQ**
 price: **\$79.95** / rating: **PG**
 available: **25 September 2008**

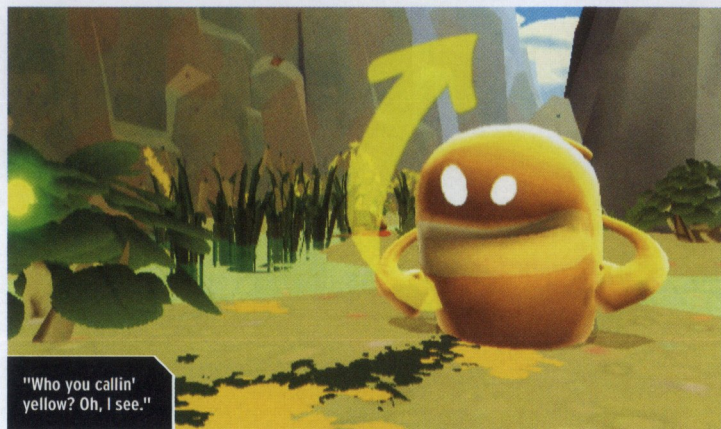
Oh no! An evil dictator has strolled into Shiny Happy Town (AKA Chroma City) and enslaved the population — draining all the colour from the landscape in the process. Looks like de Blob and his sidekicks are going to have to restore the environment and defeat the evil minions!

Okay, so the plot is rubbish, but bear with us. What this locally developed title lacks in narrative it more than makes up for in the entertainment stakes. In fact, it's one of the best platform-adventure games to come along since Mario Galaxy. Yeah, seriously.

At its heart, de Blob is a platformer in which you guide the eponymous 'Blob' through ten worlds, restoring the colour that's been stolen. Blob is basically an empty (alien) vessel that slides along the ground until you pick up one of the liberally scattered paint vials. These come in three primary colours and once absorbed allow you to start

adding colour to the environment. Rub up against a building/ tree/ piece of landscape and you'll revive it with whichever colour de Blob happens to be. Adding colour to the world increases your score and once you've hit the level target and completed specific objectives the gates open up and you can progress to the next world. Easy.

While the basic gameplay mechanic is simple enough, it's been fleshed out in numerous ways. Firstly, you can mix and match colours on the go, combining primary colours to create new shades, e.g. yellow and blue will give you green. Not only does this allow you to paint the environments in a multitude of colours, it also affects the music. Each time you



paint something you get a guitar riff, horn blast, Rhodes piano or some other instrumentation on top of the soundtrack, varying according to which colour you're painting with. If we wanted to impress hot women with our 1337 vocabulary we'd refer to it as synthenesia.

HIPSTER BEBOP JUNKIES

The music itself is a freewheeling mix of jazz, funk and lounge and was composed by members of a well known Australian jazz outfit. We can't mention their name (and it's not who you're thinking of) but the soundtrack is real highlight.

The sort of thing you might hear in some back alley jazz bar populated by indie nerds in hoodies.

That hipster element is carried over into the design of the levels and characters. De Blob (and the rest of the cast) wouldn't look out of place in the latest Kid Robot catalogue. Meanwhile, the special 'print pattern' icons scattered around the levels give your paint a whole new dynamic. These turn your stock standard colours into elaborate patterns that you can splash all over buildings and the environment. The kind of print patterns you might find on some BAPE merchandise. The real BAPE — not the stuff they sell at dodgy markets.

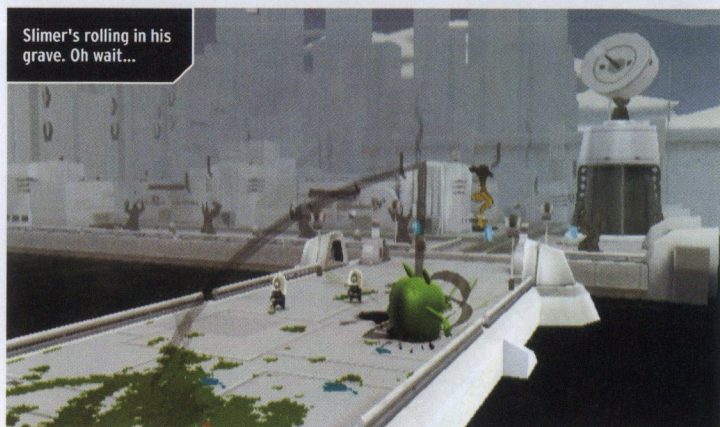
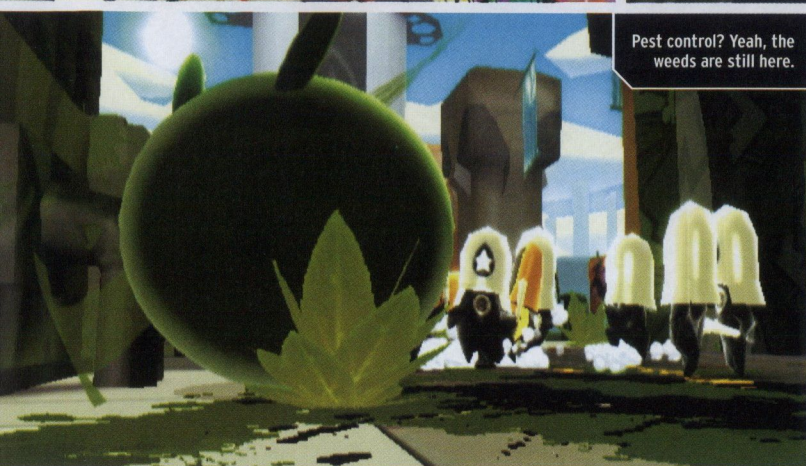
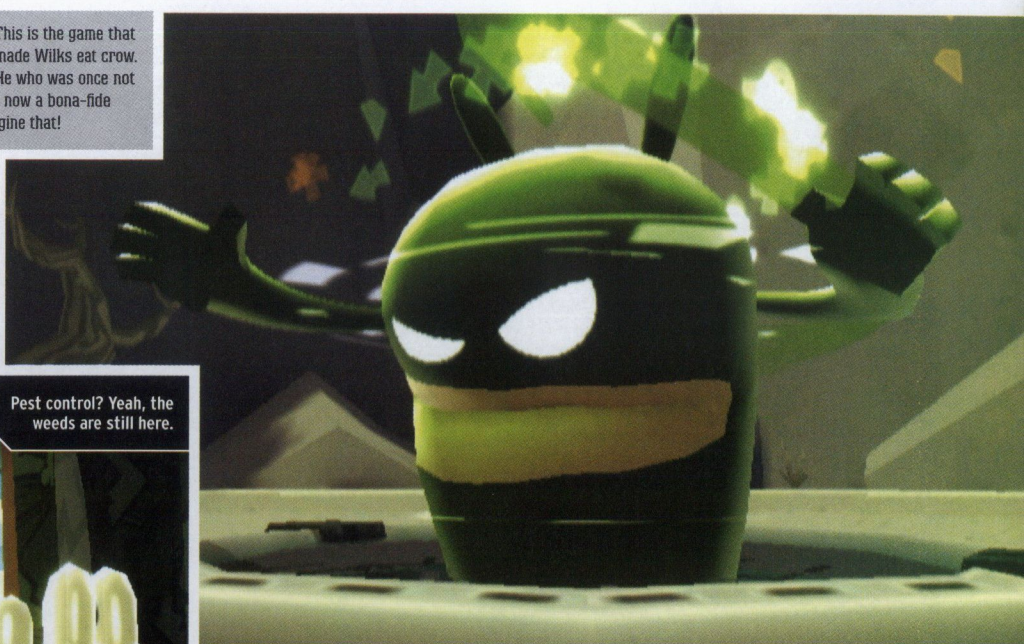
So the game looks fantastic, has a unique design aesthetic and a wonderful soundtrack. How does it play? Glad you asked. Blob can be guided through the 3D levels with the analogue controller while jumping is accomplished with a flick of the remote. Enemies, paint vials and other stuff can be targeted with



ON THE BLOG... Each of the main levels comes with two bonus missions, AKA 'sprint challenges'. These are divided into four separate categories and are hardcore variations on tasks you already do in the main game; stuff like attacking enemies, racing through a level, reviving environments in a specific colour scheme and sabotaging evil factories / weapons. Pick up a Gold Medal rating in these sections and you'll be rewarded in the main game with cool things. Cool things we can't reveal because, apparently, we suck at videogames.



!!! This is the game that made Wilks eat crow. He who was once not impressed is now a bona-fide convert! Imagine that!



'Free paint' mode allows you to simply mooch around levels and mess around with colour schemes

the Z button and once locked on a simple flick of the remote will send Blob flying across the screen to do his thing. If you know what you're doing you can 'chain' together your attacks or jumps and move from one area to another without touching the ground — notching up high scores in the process.

The controls are intuitive and easy, within five minutes you'll have grasped the basics and be working your way through the (massive)

levels. Or simply adding some colour to the surroundings. The fact is, simply moving through the levels, discovering hidden areas and painting is pretty 'win'.

EDGEY

That probably has a lot to do with the game's genesis as student art project in the Netherlands. It was named Internet Game of the year by Edge Magazine back in 2006 before THQ snapped up the rights and

turned a fun concept into a fully developed game idea. This lineage lives on in the 'free paint' mode that allows you to simply mooch around levels listening to the jazz soundtrack and messing around with different colour schemes.

That said, the game proper is never frustrating. If you fail a challenge you can simply retry it with all your previous effort saved, i.e. the buildings you painted will still be painted. De Blob is a game that wants you to like it and goes out of its way to accommodate players. Even the most shambolic no-hopers will be able to see it through to the end with a bit of persistence.

Finally, there's the multiplayer aspect. If you've seen the screen shots and thought that all this painting would make for a great variation on Tony Hawk's Graffiti Mode then you're absolutely right. 2-4 players can compete in split screen action and painting the environment for

points is as simple as it is fun — especially after several beers.

And there's the rub, despite the cartoon like appearances, De Blob isn't a kid's game. With its vinyl toy influences, jazz soundtrack and evenly graded difficulty, it's a title that will appeal to 'urban professionals', old school platform fans and younger players in equal measure.

Yes, the game was designed right here in Australia, but that should only be a footnote. De Blob is up there with the world's best and comes highly recommended. Or, if you need a snappy sound bite: it's Okami meets Kid Robot at a jazz festival in a Melbourne laneway filled with graphic design students drinking imported beer. «

THE GOOD: Great music, great aesthetics, instantly accessible, genuinely fun and engaging.

THE BAD: Occasionally fiddly controls, difficulty ramps up considerably towards the end.

OVERALL: Probably the best platform/adventure/painting game around.



You're a poet and the fact escaped you!

Defend Follow Orders Follow Orders Follow Orders

	Solo	Kiryl	Moya	Meena
HP	153	108	112	107
MP	69	79	134	83
Lv.	18	18	19	19

Kiryl casts Fizzle!

!!! We haven't been able to test it, but Dragon Quest IV features a WiFi mode in which players can build a town and trade gear with other players.

The heal slime casts Heal!

King Burnard
Och, just this morn, I've had mothers from Strathbaile here cryin' about their bairns.

Isn't it standers on the left, rushers on the right?

Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen

NURY ANTRIM wants to be a Gaelic Knight

Believe it or not, *Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen* isn't just a remake of an old NES game. No, *Chapters of the Chosen* is more than that – it's a remake of an old NES game based more upon the Japan-only PlayStation remake of the old NES game than the actual NES game itself, essentially making it a remake of a remake. The original *Dragon Quest IV* was lauded as one of the very best, if not the best 8-Bit RPGs, so the current incarnation of the game can be seen as more than just another Square-Enix DS port – it's a chance to play one of the great, and all

but unknown, games of the past. Even though the battle mechanics may be old school, the structure of the game is anything but. Players create their own character, but rather than relying on the traditional main character and a series of companions, *Dragon Quest IV* uses a rather revolutionary (at the time) chapter based system that sees the player, during the earlier stages of the game, playing through chapters with a different lead character each time. The first chapter sees players meeting the noble Gaelic Knight Ragnar McRyan. The next introduces the tomboyish Princess Alena, and so on. Each new character and chapter

essentially starts the game from the beginning with a different story, but never fear. After all of the characters are introduced the story lines converge into a rather epic tale.

8-BITASTIC!

Although the characters are still sprite based, the levels are all shown in 3D and in a nice tip of the hat to modernisation, the maps can be rotated so as to give the player a better view of the environment. This is one of the few gameplay upgrades in the remake – most of the other improvements are graphical. Combat utilises a fairly traditional turn-based mechanic, with the player choosing what actions the main character performs and either relying on some simple preset AI (such as all out attack, offensive casting defense and the like) to take care of the NPCs, or turning the AI off altogether so they can choose individual actions for each player. The menu system is elegantly designed and functional, and the top screen of the DS is used to display important combat information, such as how many hit points each party member has remaining. It should be noted that the top screen only shows the number of hit points remaining, not the maximum number, so unless you

category: **Japanese RPG**
players: **1+**
developer: **ArtePiazza**
publisher: **Square Enix**
price: **\$69.95** / rating: **PG** / available: **Now**

have a good memory, effectively using healing spells can be a bit of a pain in the arse. There are random battles galore and players have to do some serious grinding to ready their characters to actually progress the story – and earn enough money to upgrade weapons, armour and levels – but even so, *Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen* is a truly excellent example of good old Japanese RPG design. It's epic, beautiful, has a bestiary of around 200 fantastically designed creatures and is a great deal of fun as well. Bring on *Dragon Quests 5-7*. «

THE GOOD: Fantastic structure, epic story, great old-school Japanese RPG mechanics

THE BAD: Lots of grinding, lots of random battles, no touch screen controls

OVERALL: It's *Dragon Quest* – what more do you really need to know?

HYPER VERDICT
9

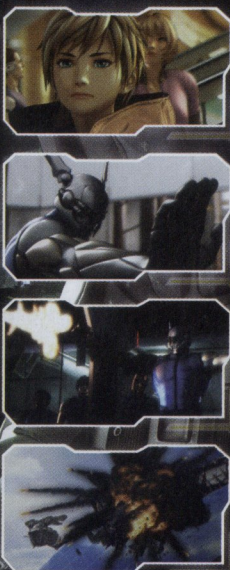
Oh no, not Snub!
We've been IGNORED!

The king slime casts Snub!

JOHN WOO PRESENTS THE FUTURISTIC ACTION-ADVENTURE...

APPLESEED EXMACHINA

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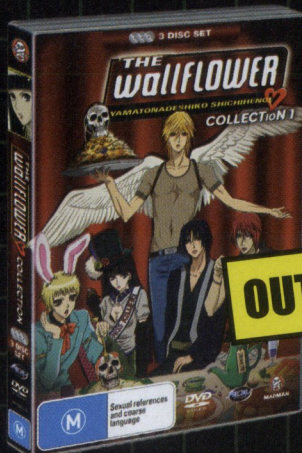
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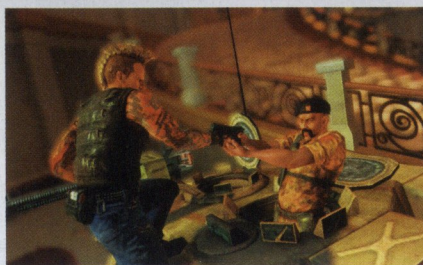
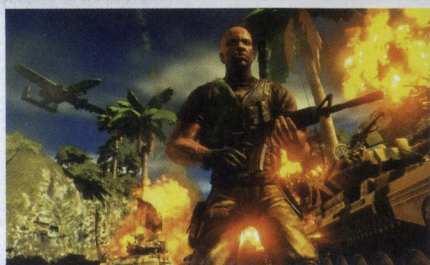
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Poerty in motion.
And flames.



Watch out for
hop-ons, you will
get hop-ons



Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

DIRK WATCH has something against South America

I've agonised for quite some time about how to start this review. Should I start by talking about how it is the sequel to a popular open world game that essentially boiled all of the action down to a heady mixture of stealing, shooting and blowing shit up? Should I talk about how the game has had a somewhat problematic early life, with the government of Venezuela getting shirted about having a game about a bunch of mercenaries, drug lords and shady business cartels set in the country? Ultimately, I realised, after writing and re-writing the opening paragraph a bunch of times, there is something far more important I should mention before launching into the game proper. Mattias Nilsson, one of the three mercs the character can choose to play, has a totally awesome accent. It's somewhere in between Peter Stormare and early Arnie. Or maybe Avid Merrion is if he

X360 | PS3 PC | PS2

category: **Action** / players: **1-2**
developer: **Pandemic**
publisher: **EA**
price: **\$99.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

was a bad-arse and not a creepy celebrity stalker/interviewer. It's lucky that Mattias Nilsson is such a strangely charismatic character, because little of the rest of the game is quite as compelling.

THINGS GO BOOM

How much you will like Mercenaries 2: World in Flames comes down to how much you A) like to blow shit up and B) like to shoot AI enemies only slightly more intelligent than a turnip. If you do, if fact, enjoy blowing shit up, Mercs 2 is definitely a game you should investigate, as the vast majority of the game involves running around on foot, or tooling around in all manner of civilian and military vehicles blowing shit up.



Bike, tank, fire.
I feel so butch.

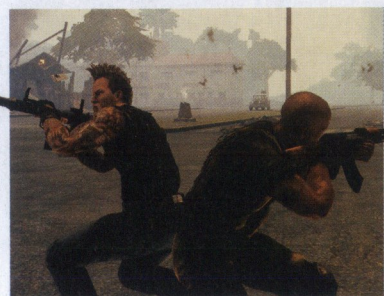
Much like the original game, Mercenaries 2 casts the player as an international mercenary, taking jobs from a variety of factions and political parties, simultaneously trying to make some money and keep everyone on side. Being in everyone's good books means there are more jobs to be had, more money to be earned and more

goodies that can be purchased for airdrops and air strikes. Missions range from kidnapping important people, taking strategic bases, test-driving vehicles and just generally blowing stuff up.

Rather counter intuitively, some of the more enjoyable missions are the ones that don't necessarily involve running and gunning. Early in the game, the player is tasked with test-driving a monster truck/muscle car hybrid thing around a quarry. It's a fairly straightforward time-trial livened up by the fact that the player is being shot at whilst driving, and the car is equipped with powerful hydraulic suspension, allowing the player to make some rather epic jumps at the touch of a button. So why is it that Mercenaries 2 is more fun when it's not all about

EXPLOSIVES FOR TWO

For the most part, World in Flame is much more enjoyable when played with a friend in co-op, but even this isn't without its problems. Running around and blowing stuff up as a pair is a hoot, but actually doing missions can be a somewhat painful experience, as players are forced to always be fairly close together. Sometimes this restriction works fire - when taking over an enemy base, for example - but during the missions in which players have to escort NPCs or steal and deliver vehicles it becomes a pain in the arse, as it's far too easy to become separated, forcing you to try again.





Strangely enough, it's easier to hijack tanks and helicopters via the simple quick-time hijacking mini-game than it is to actually destroy them.



Just hope it doesn't rain



Knocking before stealing is optional



shooting people and blowing shit up? It really comes down to the sense of challenge... or lack thereof for the most part.

BETTER THAN BLACKWATER

All three of the mercenaries the player can choose from are superhuman. They can move faster, shoot straighter and take a hell of a lot more damage than the average Joe. This last point is probably the most important, and damning. All of the mercenaries quickly regenerate health when not under direct fire, making it very difficult to actually die in the game. Take too much damage for comfort and you can simply run away for 10 or 15 seconds and come back with most of your health restored. This problem is even more noticeable when playing

Nilsson — he regenerates health even faster than the other mercenaries. To make matters worse, most of the action hot spots — military bases, rebel compounds and the like — are liberally dotted with health packs, making it virtually impossible to kick the bucket.

The AI doesn't help when it comes to the sense of challenge either. For the most part the AI seems content to go through a number of rather formulaic moves — following a prescribed path, standing in a set position, running through a set number of actions — but in a game as over the top and action oriented as *Mercenaries 2* you would expect a little more than a soldier simply standing in the middle of a street shooting. Very rarely does the AI seem to utilise cover or any form of tactical advance (flanking, for

instance) — it's more common to see an AI character simply stare off into the distance oblivious to the bullets slamming into his face than it is to see them do anything particularly clever.

ELITE SUICIDE TROOPS

This terrible AI extends to friendly characters as well as enemies. It's not uncommon for friendly factions to start taking potshots at the player for no readily apparent reason, and during the missions in which players can call in fire support teams, the AI helicopters will frequently drop them on top of buildings. The first time you see a bunch of special forces types leap to their deaths from a rooftop because they're not smart enough to do anything but charge in the direction of their target is pretty amusing. After the fourth or fifth time it becomes somewhat grating.

Even though there are many caches of money and weapons stashed all over Venezuela, players aren't really encouraged to explore the world. Sure, there are rewards to be found laying about, but if you take time out from following missions to have a look around you can expect to get frequent (and identical) calls from home base

explaining that you can call in for a pickup if you're lost.

While this review may sound rather resoundingly negative, not everything about *Mercenaries 2* is bad. Some of the driving missions are a lot of fun, as are the target practice missions players can undertake from base. Unfortunately, much of the rest of the game feels incomplete or simply run of the mill, the huge landscape of in-game Venezuela being a prime example. The size itself is very impressive, but the lack of anything to do and the rather ludicrous travel times to get anywhere make it a hindrance rather than a feature. If you can find yourself a copy of the original *Mercenaries* you'd be better off playing that. «

THE GOOD: Nilsson's accent, some missions are fun, destruction is superficially amusing

THE BAD: Lack of any decent challenge, erratic AI vacillates between archaic, stupid and suicidal, feel unfinished

OVERALL: Despite a fairly lengthy development period, *Mercenaries 2* somehow manages to feel both rushed and unfinished.



Even though there are many caches of money and weapons, players aren't really encouraged to explore the world.



!!! Seriously, the twin mages are creepy as hell.



I can totally see the string.



Infinite Undiscovery

DIRK WATCH totally looks like someone else

Mistaken identities are quite commonly used in fiction to kick start an adventure, catapulting an every-man into an unfamiliar situation forcing him to draw upon stores of heroism and skill he never knew he had. Infinite Undiscovery starts with a street musician, Capell, being mistaken for the greatest hero in the land, Sigmund, and is essentially forced by fate (and the plot) to join the merry band of freedom fighters in breaking the chains that tether the moon to the planet.

From the outset, Infinite Undiscovery is a game that requires some serious patience, as the opening few hours settle somewhere between frustrating and terrible, featuring a long chase sequence against an unbeatable foe that can send you right back to the beginning to play through again as there are no saves or checkpoints along the way, some unwanted stealth, a long dungeon bash, an escort mission, a chase sequence in which you can't even draw a weapon and some serious lack of direction. The first few hours also saddle the player with two of the creepiest party members in recent memory — brother and sister mages that look something like a cross between a porcelain dolls and Strawberry Shortcake and are all but guaranteed to have you screaming, "kill it with fire!" There's also some terrible voice acting, the worst lip-



synching you've ever seen and far too many voiceless cutscenes for a game built after the year 2000.

WITH SUFFERING COMES REWARD

Stick with it though and you'll find a muddled yet still quite rewarding action RPG with a pretty good story, real time combat and some well thought out, if somewhat complex mechanics. Combat for the most part feels fairly familiar to that in Final Fantasy XII, in that players control Capell, the main character, and the other party members follow simple preset instructions such as attacking Capell's target, attacking any target they choose, conserving mana and the like. What sets the combat system apart is twofold. Firstly, Capell is incapable of casting magic, so must call out for party members to cast or heal.

Secondly, Capell can "connect" with members of the party, giving him direct control over their one of two major abilities. Unlike the majority of "real-time" Japanese RPGs, Infinite Undiscovery is played in real real-time — there is no option to pause the game to make decisions or take potions, forcing players to keep on their toes at all times.

Throughout the game players will meet numerous allies that can be brought into the party or interacted with in towns to create



X360 PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

category: **RPG**
players: **1**
developer: **tri-Ace**
publisher: **Square-Enix**
price: **\$109.95** / rating: **PG** / available: **Now**

items to help out in talking to the population. Rather annoyingly there is no option to choose the best equipment load out for each of the characters at the touch of a button so players must cater to each one individually — considering that there's 20 odd characters that's a lot of micromanagement.

JRPG fans looking to fill the gap until Final Fantasy XIII, Star Ocean 4 or any of the other high profile upcoming JRPGs will undoubtedly find a lot to like about Infinite Undiscovery. If you're new to the world of Japanese RPGs, stick with it — after the first two hours or so it gets a lot better. **W**

THE GOOD: Fun combat, decent plot, looks quite nice

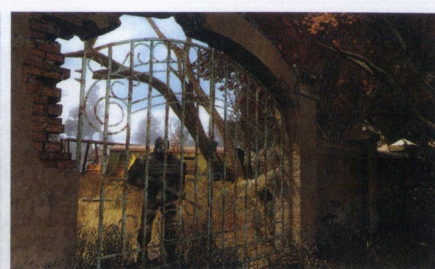
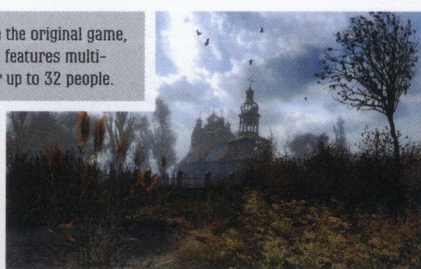
THE BAD: Terrible opening few hours, save points, no checkpoints, so if you die you're going back a long way

OVERALL: Quite enjoyable if you can manage the slog through the first couple of hours.

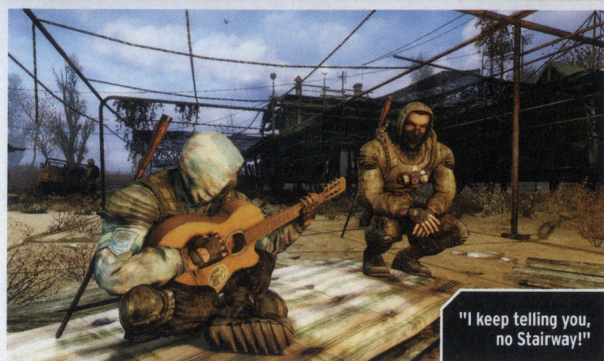




Much like the original game, Clear Sky features multi-player for up to 32 people.



No, making "pew pew" noises does not assist your aim



"I keep telling you, no Stairway!"



Stalker: Clear Sky

DIRK WATCH can see clearly now the rain has gone

The fact that there's only three classifications of NPCs in the Zone, Friendly, Hostile and Dead, according to the new and improved PDA in S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Clear Sky really tells you something about the game world. It's harsh, it's bleak and it's very unfriendly. A prequel to a game in which the player takes the role of a Stalker searching the area around Chernobyl, bent by reality altering anomalies and patrolled by enemies both human and unnatural couldn't be anything but harsh, bleak and unfriendly. At times, though, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Clear Sky is unfriendly to the point of sometimes not being that much fun to actually play.

All of the features that made the original S.T.A.L.K.E.R. enjoyable make a welcome return — the expansive, incredibly detailed landscapes, the naturalistic creature AI, the gritty atmosphere, beautiful character models, character and weapon upgrades and realistic combat. Although S.T.A.L.K.E.R. was a phenomenal looking game,

category: **FPS** / players: **1-32**

developer: **GSC Game World**

publisher: **Deep Silver**

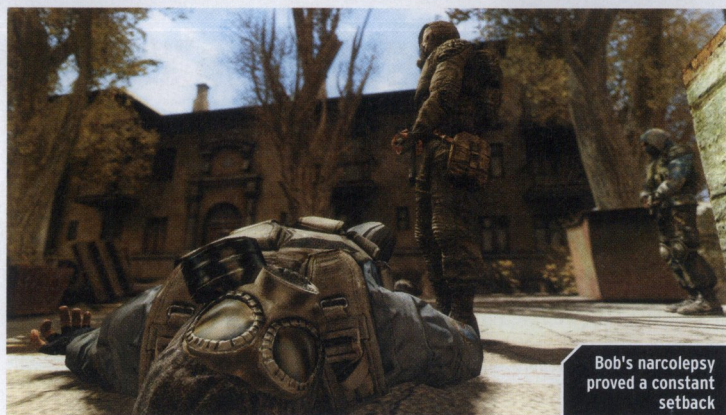
price: **\$69.95** / rating: **M**

available: **Now**

Clear Sky manages to one up its predecessor with even better looking character models and structures so realistically dilapidated it's scary.

GRENADE!

It seems as though the developers have listened to their hardcore fans and have instituted some changes — enemies can now throw grenades, there are fewer artifacts in the game and as a consequence money has a great deal more meaning. Unfortunately these changes have been a little mishandled. While it is nice that enemies have some new ways to interact with the player, the fact that they seem to have the unerring ability to lob a grenade between your feet, even if you're hunkered down behind cover, is not. The fact that there are fewer artifacts to be found in the game



Bob's narcolepsy proved a constant setback

means that it is much harder to make decent amounts of money without seriously delving into side missions. It also means that artifacts that increase skills and attributes are far more precious. Unfortunately, the new artifacts are so difficult to find that you may well find yourself playing through the game with only the artifacts given to you at specific story moments.

Unfortunately, much like S.T.A.L.K.E.R., Clear Sky is riddled with bugs, ranging from small to game breaking. During our play time we encountered quests that wouldn't trigger as complete, missions that wouldn't even start, and quests that were offered and canceled in the same instant. We even had some items vanish from the inventory — and that's separate from when the game just takes everything from your inventory as part of the game's progress.

Overall, S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Clear Sky is a bit of a mean spirited slog that will have even the most hardcore of shooter fans abusing the quicksave

function, as combat is deadlier than before, glitches are almost certainly going to ruin your day more than once, anomalies are even more dangerous thanks to the fact that money (and thereby radiation proof outfits and meds) is so hard to come by, and just to add insult to injury, the developers have seen fit to occasionally steal everything in your inventory if you talk to the wrong NPCs. That said, it's still a tense and fun game when it works properly. With a little patching Clear Sky could be great. «

THE GOOD: Looks absolutely incredible, brilliantly realized setting, fantastic atmosphere, challenging

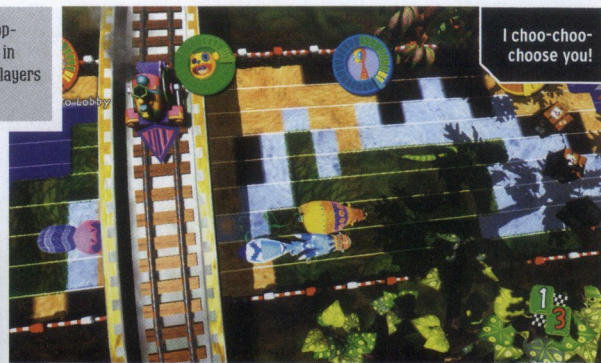
THE BAD: Buggy, enemy AI can be cheap, frustrating, forces players to abuse quicksave

OVERALL: With a little more polish this could have been fantastic, as it is, Clear Sky is a fun though frustrating and seriously bug ridden experience





Two-player drop-in-drop-out gameplay is offered in meatspace, while four players can share a garden over Xbox Live.



I choo-choo-choose you!



What, no sports car? Worse game show ever.

Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise

Who wants to hit **DARREN WELLS** with a stick?

Games have the power to elicit all sorts of emotions from the player, but this was the first time that I've been made to feel seedy. The concept of Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise is wholesome and family-friendly enough, yet here I was, feeling like a dodgy guy who's luring kids to his van with candy. Think about it: you're constructing and maintaining a garden in order to attract wild and varied piñata, before you then trap them, fill them with goodies and fire them out of a cannon. Okay, so writing it that way makes it sound like a bit of a stretch, but still...

GET ON WITH IT

Okay, okay. Facetiousness aside, Trouble in Paradise is an addictive little game. Combine the catch-'em-all mechanics of Pokemon with the customisation of Animal Crossing, and you've got a fair idea of what's in store. Parties need piñatas, and in this game they're wild animals, meaning you've got to bring them to your garden, look after them, and help them fulfill their destiny of being hung from a rope and split open with a baseball bat. It's a sandbox game, and with its varieties of piñata (over 100) and range of items (bajillions), the elements of collectability and customisation make for a game with supreme staying power.



That's assuming you can work it out, though: Trouble in Paradise seems cut for those who are already familiar with its predecessor. But this puts the game in a curious position indeed, for it only offers a handful of new piñata, a couple of new areas, and a few gameplay refinements — everything else is largely the same as Round One. Why should veterans be expected to fork out again? And why should newbies be punished for coming late to the party?

Perseverance may be required in order to find a point of entry, but once you're in, it's hard to leave. There's a great deal to master if you want to become the Piñata King, as your garden needs to meet certain criteria in order to attract, and then keep, each type. On paper it's a decent enough gameplay device, but in practice it's something of a double-edged sword: the game lets you create your own garden, yet it's only by adding certain things in it that particular piñata will appear. Forcing such conditions upon the player occasionally imposes on some of the freedom — you're not



really creating *your* garden, just the garden you *must* create in order to advance. Imagine if Animal Crossing's house customisation feature meant that certain characters would only talk to you if you had a specific item located in a specific corner of the room.

LOOK AT ME! LOOK AT ME!

The family-friendly visuals betray its depth, however. The game is bright and colourful, yet its gameplay mechanics require a significant amount of multitasking and menu navigating. Planted seeds will sprout and wither if you're not quick off the mark to entice a piñata to eat it, and pairs that you'd like to see get involved in a "love dance" (read: procreate) need to be manually selected and ordered to get busy. For all the disparaging remarks that are thrown towards The Sims, Viva Piñata could learn something from that game's level of self-reliance. Making a garden and leaving captured piñatas up to their own devices doesn't get the player far,

X360

category: **Catch 'em all**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Rare**
publisher: **Microsoft**
price: **\$69.95** / rating: **G** / available: **Now**

instead requiring constant attention from them at every juncture.

But maybe you're just enough of a control freak to enjoy that; in which case, Viva Piñata is right up your alley. A range of eccentric characters are on hand to sell you plenty of items, buildings and tools, and the info dump that's behind each piñata's encyclopedia entries borders on the obsessive-compulsive. There's a good enough game here, but is it for you? Do the Pokemon/Animal Crossing litmus test first, then check if your copy of the original Viva Piñata is still warm in your console, or on your shelf gathering dust. **«**

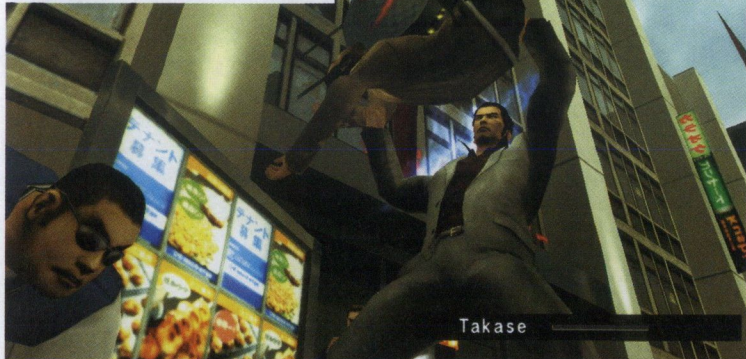
THE GOOD: Fun presentation, plenty to see and collect, create your own garden...

THE BAD: ...but the requirements of certain piñata dictate how you should create it.

OVERALL: Charming and addictive, but inherently flawed and a rerun of the previous game.



!!! In addition to beating the crap out of people, Kazuma can visit clubs and cabarets licensed from real world establishments, chat up club girls, go bowling, try his hand at a batting or driving range and play a very simple arcade game in Sega World.



Yakuza 2

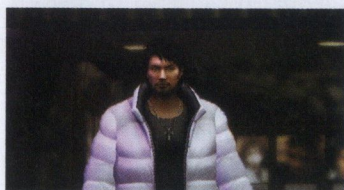
DANIEL WILKS is missing a pinkie

If you haven't played the original Yakuza, close this magazine, put it down and head to your nearest gaming outlet and purchase a copy. Not only does it have a kick-arse story, it also has some pretty impressive mechanics. It will also make reading this review a little easier, as the story of Yakuza 2 starts shortly after where the last game left off.

Kazuma Kiryu, the leading man and all round bad-arse has left the Yakuza to take care of Haruka, the little girl he protected in the original game. After the shakeups of the previous year (and the huge number of deaths) the Tojo Clan is floundering, leading to attempted peace treaties, betrayals, attacks from other Yakuza clans and the involvement of the Korean Mafia. Naturally all of these things conspire to draw Kazuma back into the life he has so desperately tried to leave behind. But he does come back, and with a vengeance, fists and feet flying, laying the smack down to any who dare betray his trust or interrupt the peace.

In nearly every way Yakuza 2 is an improvement over the original. The story, thanks to the efforts of novelist Seishu Hase, is much tighter than the original, focusing more on the characters and action instead of sidetracking the player with unnecessary padding. The dialogue is all spoken in Japanese

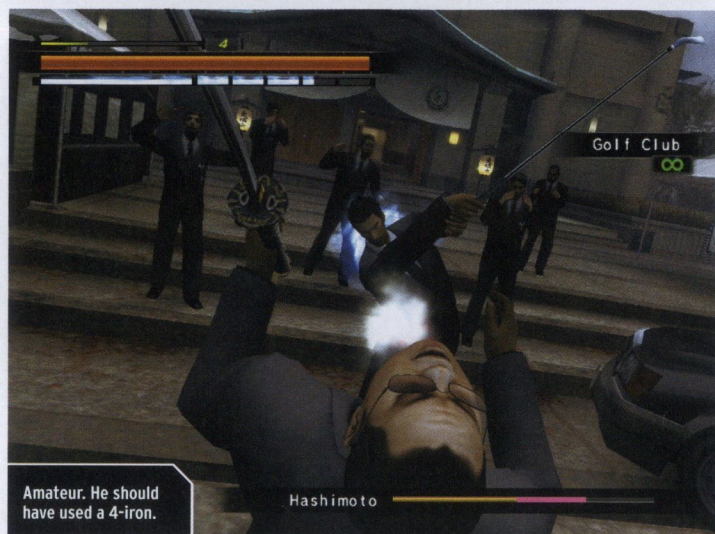
PS2
category: **Action**
players: **1**
developer: **Amusement Vision**
publisher: **Sega**
price: **\$49.95** / rating: **MA 15+** / available: **Now**



(and Korean), so there's no longer any bad or inappropriate dubbing. Sure, the subtitles substitute "ya" and "yer" for "you" and "your" a little too often for our liking but even so, it's still a lot better than the gratuitous swearing that was used to punctuate nearly every sentence in the previous game. The combat system, while unchanged from the previous game, feels more responsive. Even the combat tutorials are improved, with the HEAT gauge instantly refilling when necessary, instead of forcing Kazuma to battle a number of foes to fill it manually.

SINKING THE SLIPPER

I should back up a little for those of you unfamiliar with the original game. The Yakuza series has much in common with the Shenmue franchise in that it is an adventure game with fighting elements. The



fighting engine is simple, with a quick and heavy attack, a grapple/throw, block and target. Beating enemies fills Kazuma's HEAT gauge. When the gauge is full, Kazuma can perform devastating (and incredibly brutal) finishing moves to take out opponents in one shot. All of the finishers are truly cringe-worthy, from slamming a person's face into a wall and then kneeling them in the back of the head to further ruin their day, to throttling someone from behind with a lead pipe of baseball bat, kneeling them in the small of the back for good measure. Defeating enemies also rewards Kazuma with experience points that can be spent to upgrade fighting skills and the size of his health and HEAT gauges, transforming a simple brawler into an impressive martial artist.

If a great story, a large area to explore and a good fighting engine

aren't enough to entice you to give Yakuza 2, the fact that it's retailing locally for \$49.95 probably won't do anything to sweeten the deal. Everyone else should rush out and purchase a copy. The PS2 may be all but dead, but with games like Yakuza 2 coming out (albeit 2 years later than it came out in Japan) there's still some life in the old dog. **«**

THE GOOD: Fantastic story, original Japanese voice acting, great fighting engine, much tighter than the original

THE BAD: Some shonky translation, takes about an hour for the main game to actually start

OVERALL: A great story well told. Proof that there's still some play left in the Playstation 2.





Final Fantasy IV

TRACEY LIEN is an obsessive fan-girl

Final Fantasy IV is, by no means, a new game. But it feels like it is. Where many games remade for the DS fail to take full advantage of the console's sound and graphics capabilities (*cough*Arkanoid*cough*), Square Enix has used its fist of awesome to seize the opportunity to make FFIV even better than it was before. And it has succeeded.

For someone who is more familiar with Final Fantasy VIII and X where all the characters appear 'full size', Final Fantasy IV comes as a surprise. Rather than being greeted by a tall Tidus-esque protagonist and a languid Yuna-fied heroine, all the

characters are more like squashed clip art. But unlike squashed clip art, everything looks absolutely exquisite. In true Final Fantasy form, the characters, scenery, and cut-scenes are all presented in beautiful 3D and... oh my god, the wind sweeps through the sand! And the clouds move in the background during battle scenes! There are even rays of sunshine that appear through the canopy during battles in forests! This attention to detail alone is almost enough to make the game worth playing — it's just so pretty.

But the strength of FFIV, as is the strength of most Final Fantasy games, lies undoubtedly in its

storytelling and the wealth of interesting characters that are easy to become attached to. When you play FFIV, you're not just getting a salad that looks good, you're getting a full meal with chops and chips; a game with substance and characters that you actually want to learn more about, each with their own traits and mannerisms. It's an engrossing RPG that sucks you in and makes you want to invest copious amounts of time developing your characters' unique abilities.

OH SO PRETTY

While the graphics and music score are a burst of fresh air (Final Fantasy music seems to be inherently amazing), FFIV is, at its core, a traditional Final Fantasy game. Gameplay is very much in line with the original Active Time Battle System from the Super Nintendo release in 1991. You still run around collecting items, exploring the environments (did I mention how pretty it is? Because it is.), leveling-up your party, and taking part in random battles, of which there are many. One could even say that there are too many, with every two steps equating to a random battle that you can't run away from. It's almost impossible to get from one end of a small cave to the other without encountering more than a dozen gnomes in between, most of who want your

category: **RPG** / players: **Single player (or wireless multiplayer)**
 developer: **Square Enix**
 publisher: **Square Enix**
 price: **STBA** / rating: **TBA** / available: **5th Sept**

proverbial blood. Annoying, yes, but that's me being nitpicky.

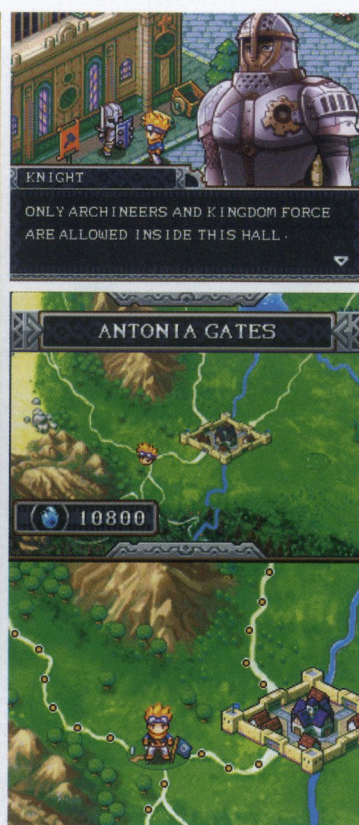
There isn't much to not like about FFIV — even serious gamers will find it a challenge because, as cutesy and rainbow-filled as it is, the game is actually hard. If you get stuck in a cave and are low on potion (which happens often), a surprise attack of the gnomish variety can easily send you back to the start-up page. This is a game where you really need to invest a bitch-load of time into leveling-up your players if you intend on getting far. Not that anyone should mind spending so much time playing FFIV, of course, because it's rad. «

THE GOOD: Beautiful graphics, delightful music and an engaging storyline.

THE BAD: Too many random battles and questionable dialogue.

OVERALL: It's a Final Fantasy game. It's timeless, addictive and, as stated, rad. Enough said!





Lock's Quest

DANIEL FINDLAY can take you apart, brick by brick

Lock's Quest is the kind of game that offers a little something for almost everyone.

Whether your poison of choice is an RPG, RTS, or side scrolling platformer this adorable and surprisingly deep strategy/action epic has got you covered. Starting you out in a charming coastal village, you're running and skipping about freely with your sister until out of nowhere an army of clockwork monsters appears. All of a sudden the sprightly Lock is called upon to defend his hometown using the skills of an Archineer (part architect, part engineer) and construct defences

against the merciless mechanical invaders. Proving himself mighty handy with a spanner, the young lad finds himself caught up in the titular quest to track down the perpetrator of the attack, the mysterious chief Archineer gone bad, Lord Agony.

HOT SOURCE

Lock's Quest is about Source. Not the type you splatter all over a pie, it's the blue flame-like substance that powers your defences, animates the clockwork army and gives life to the greatest constructions of the Archineers. Throughout Lock's Quest you'll be consumed with

gaining it, spending it, allocating it and understanding it. With enough source you can purchase upgrades for your inventions, invest it in R&D, hire troops to aid you in combat and make repairs to your defences. Run short and the next wave of 'Clockworks' is likely to be your last. Combat in Lock's Quest is broken down into several categories, the most important of which are the building phase, in which you prepare and construct your defences, the fighting stage, where you maintain your walls and engage in direct combat, and the awesomely fun siege components where you take control of turrets and bombard the enemy. Invested with strategy in even the smallest details, allocating Source becomes a careful balancing act, ensuring that you have enough to research new weapons while maintaining your existing structures. The R&D sections consist of neat puzzles, requiring you to build prototypes from scrap metal following a design you are shown. At every level of Lock's Quest is layer upon layer of careful detail, charming you forward with gameplay that's tactical and taxing but never boring.

CHARMED I'M SURE

To simply focus on the myriad gameplay features offered by Lock's Quest would miss the point of the game almost entirely (and

category: **RPG**
players: **1**
developer: **5TH Cell**
publisher: **THQ**
price: **\$59.95** / rating: **TBA** / available: **Now**

require a much longer review). Lock's Quest is charming, from the tips of its spiky blonde hair to the toes of its muddy boots – it draws you in with a compelling story and allows you to uncover plot twists and hooks, rather than ramming them down your throat. The music complements the story perfectly, ranging from cutesy to nerve wracking and the simple text-based conversations fit in neatly with the old school vibe. Running on a day/night cycle, Lock's Quest actually feels like a quest, and it allows enough moral grey area between the protagonists to offer up a genuinely interesting story arc. «

THE GOOD: Great presentation, taxing gameplay, great story.

THE BAD: Having trouble coming up with one.

OVERALL: An intriguing and entirely satisfying mix of genres and play styles.

HYPER VERDICT

9





Even though Wario Land: Shake Dimension is a little on the simple side, the use of motion control is very good.

Wilks acts just like this on pay day



TADA!



Wario Land: Shake Dimension

GLEN DOWNEY wants fries with that shake

Wario is one of those characters that, despite all his best efforts to be evil, we can't help but love.

Developer Good-Feel obviously shares our opinion because this is a game that would fit no other kind of rat-bag.

The plot kicks off in a gorgeously realised animation style that is 2 parts Saturday-morning cartoon to 1 part SNK, and starts getting weird quickly. But this is Wario we're talking about here so that shouldn't come as any kind of shock.

The Shake King has taken off with the world of Yuretopia's beloved monarch Queen Merelda and got his hands on the apparently fabled Bottomless Coin Sack. A sack, which fortuitously enough for the Shake King, never runs out of coins no matter how often its shaken.

Hearing of the Coin Sack, Wario decides it's in his best interest to head on down to Yuretopia and sort some things out.

From here we're introduced to the overworld, a magic globe that when viewed through its accompanying magic telescope allows Wario to begin his Yuretopian exploration.

Initially, this is a delight. The art direction in the Shake Dimension is a refreshing return to the kind of visuals we might have seen with some more power in the days of the Super NES. Each character and enemy is beautifully detailed with



Not even fire can destroy the 'tash!

little flourishes and details to their animations that would make the Warner Brothers proud.

The levels all exude their own distinct style, the circus and jungle levels in particular coming to life a beautifully vibrant and twisted way.

SHAKE ME LIKE A BRITISH NANNY!

Wario's main objective in each level is to use his range of abilities to free the captured Yuretopian and then high tail it out of there before the clock runs out. Unite four of these little guys and they'll open the gate to the boss of the world. Rinse and repeat until you've collected the 5 boss tokens to advance to the Shake King, Queen Merelda, and all the Bottomless Coin Sack Wario's twisted little heart could ever hope to shake.

The problem here in the Shake Dimension, to the experienced player, is that while the levels are all quite visually different there isn't a whole lot separating them as a different challenge to the last. Vehicle missions and sections offer a welcome break from the formula but they're not robust enough to really stand out.

The boss battles, again, are spectacularly animated. Often you'll find yourself at the start of a new map itching to get through the levels just to see what boss fight is lined up next. They show us a rare glimpse of the 16-bit inspired adventure that doesn't fully shine through in the main levels, and it's hard not to feel a little bit annoyed that the challenge never really ramps up.

Wii

category: **Platformer**

players: **1**

developer: **Good-Feel**

publisher: **Nintendo**

price: **\$79.95** / rating: **G** / available: **Now**

There are plenty of collectibles and bonus objectives to achieve in each level for the determined player but with each boss battle only just around the corner their relevance is hard to appreciate. Unless you're obsessive about your unlockables, you're not going to find yourself heading back too often.

Wario Land: Shake Dimension is a good sign of things to come, and that the beloved 2D platformer still has legs. Pick it up for your kids or kid siblings and appreciate its visuals over their shoulder. But those still looking for a solid side scrolling challenge shouldn't throw away the old Super NES just yet. Wah! «

THE GOOD: Charming visuals frame the welcome return of our good friend the 2D Platformer

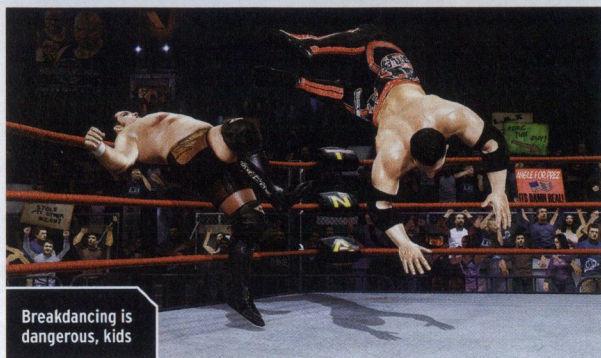
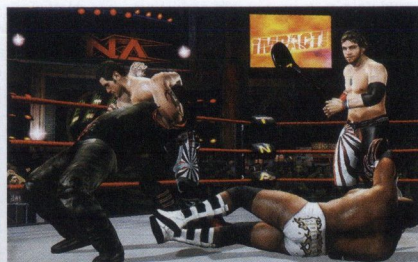
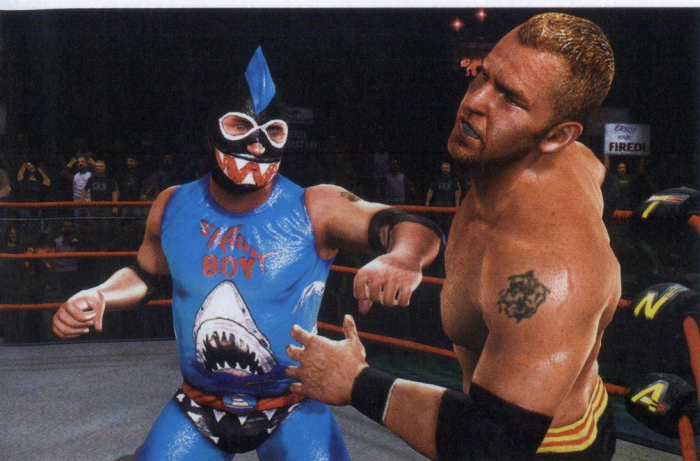
THE BAD: Formulaic gameplay won't satisfy the seasoned platformer looking for a challenge

OVERALL: Mario is still the king of this castle



HYPER VERDICT

7



Breakdancing is dangerous, kids



TNA Impact

YURI SPADEFACE likes sweaty men

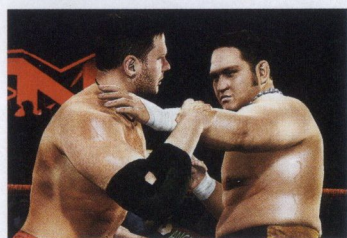
For the longest time there has only been one player in the world of wrestling games, with WWE titles filling the niche on a yearly basis. Now, thanks to Midway and the upstart wrestling league Total Nonstop Action we have TNA Impact, a title that, in the years to come, could see the WWE tree shaken. Right now, however, the larger, more established franchise doesn't have a great deal to be worried about.

TNA Impact takes a far more accessible, easy to pick up/difficult to master control route than the WWE games, and this is probably the game's strongest point. The four face buttons are mapped to high and low attacks, grapple and action, with the triggers and shoulder buttons adding modifiers, such as running or strong attacks and grapples. It is a very easy system to come to grips with quickly, making even the greenest of players capable of beating a few opponents off the bat.

The problem with this system is that it doesn't allow for a great deal of variation. There are only a few moves mapped to each attack and even then there are some bizarre design decisions that limit those — there are no grapples from behind, so even if you manage to spin an opponent around, when you grapple they will spin back to face the player so they can execute one of their limited number of moves.

X360 | PS3 | Wii PS2

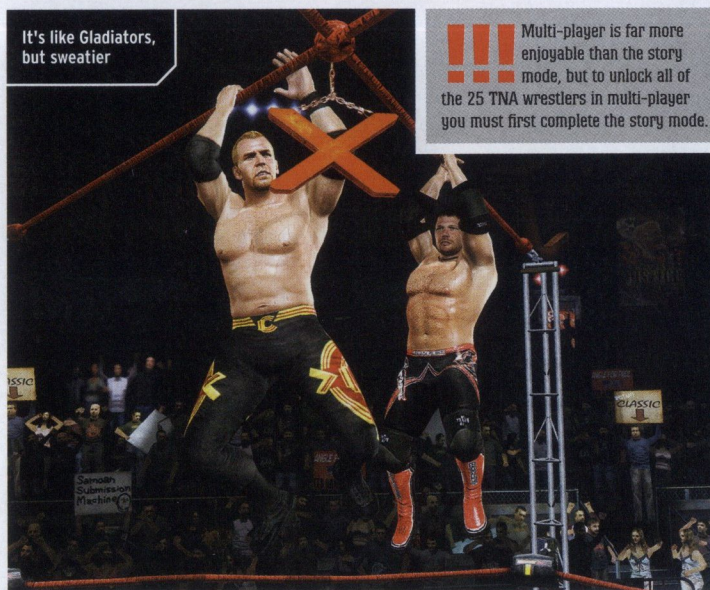
category: **Wrestling** / players: **1-4**
 developer: **Midway**
 publisher: **Midway**
 price: **\$99.95**
 rating: **M** / available: **Now**



IRISH WHIP, IRISH WHIP, IRISH WHIP, IRISH WHIP

This lack of variation is most noticeable in the story mode in which players take the role of a hotshot up and coming wrestler by the name of Suicide. After being beaten and left for dead for failing to take a fall (and also lacking a memory), Suicide is patched up by Mexican surgeons and heads back to the ring. There are few options when it comes to creating your wrestler, with preset characteristics being the only choices that you can make. The moves are locked to some basic starting moves, and only by playing through multiple bouts can you unlock a few new moves to mix things up. The starting characters the player wrestles all use exactly the same move set as well,

It's like Gladiators, but sweatier



!!! Multi-player is far more enjoyable than the story mode, but to unlock all of the 25 TNA wrestlers in multi-player you must first complete the story mode.

leaving only the finishing moves to differentiate between them.

The AI is mostly decent but can be punishing at times, especially when it comes to reversing attacks. By hitting the right bumper at the right time players can reverse attacks and get in a blow of their own. The window of opportunity is very small but reversing an attack is satisfying. The AI doesn't face the problem of requiring reflexes and can reverse attacks at will — towards the end of the story mode it's not at all uncommon to be defeated solely by an opponent using little but reversed attacks.

TNA Impact lacks the depth, the massive roster and moves sets of the WWE franchises but makes up for it with breezy, pick up and play mechanics. It's not a hugely ambitious game, but if you're

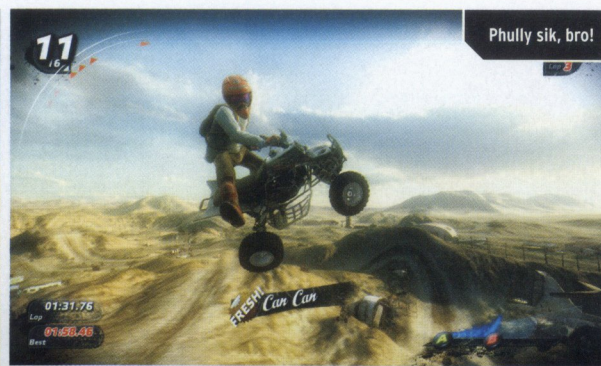
looking for some fun couch based multi-player it should fit the bill — just don't go looking for too much depth or you'll be disappointed. Although a little rough around the edges, there's plenty of potential, putting the TNA name on the road to becoming a great franchise. **«**

THE GOOD: Easily accessible controls, some great animations, fun brawling

THE BAD: Cheap AI, limited moves and character creation, no grapples from behind

OVERALL: A little rocky but forms the basis of what can be a great franchise.





Pure

DARREN WELLS is also untainted and clean

When two wheels are too risky and car racing is too boring, it's time to look towards the ATV. Those dirt-raising quad-wheel bikes have been on the receiving end of many game treatments in the past, but by and large the experience has been lackluster, due to either the nature of the bikes themselves or the game design they're shackled to.

Thankfully, Black Rock Studios has looked at previous attempts — as well as those from their own stable, such as *ATV Offroad Fury* — and made amends with *Pure*. It's turned what has in the past been a niche concept aimed at hardcore followers into a fun and accessible arcade racer, striking a nice balance between the nitty-gritty and the light and fluffy.

NITTY-WHATTIE?

The nitty-gritty. You know, the stuff that gets ATV enthusiasts weak at the knees. It comes primarily with the game's main schtick: in *Pure*, you don't just pick your vehicle from a range of options — you have to build your own bike, bit by bit. Engine, driveshaft, tires, brakes, the lot, all from scratch. To reiterate: it's not a modification process that attaches upgrades to an existing bike, it's you starting with nothing and creating your ride LEGO-style. The multitude of parts available runs the risk of becoming daunting, but the layout of the system and the graphs that display each part's abilities make the process clean and intuitive. We're by no means an office of hardcore bikers, but we were easily able to build our own vehicle and throw it into the game.

Once on the track — and there are 36 to choose from — things surge into standard racing territory. Each is a three-lap race against 15 competitors, and aside from aspiring to beat them all to first place, the nature of ATV racing also tasks you with pulling airborne tricks in order to earn points. The more elaborate the trick, the more points you'll net, and they're ordered into three tiers. Basic stunts are pulled off by hitting the A button; land them and you'll eventually unlock the second tier, tied to the X button, which earn you more points than the basic stunts. Again, if you land enough X-button stunts you'll unlock the third tier, the high-falutin' Y-button stunts. The big daddies of the trick world, they're your route to points galore and a beefy boost meter, which depletes less rapidly when you're on a roll. Oh, and if you stack a trick you're dropped back down to the stunt tier below you, meaning if you fail to land a Y-button move, you go back down to the X-button. (Incidentally, in a *Burnout*-esque move, crashing will spawn you back on the track an instant after giving you time to enjoy the ragdoll carnage.)

Just one more note on the boost feature. It's one that seems to pack less punch speed-wise (at least by appearance, as the sensation of speed isn't that great unless you're jostling against a handful of

X360 PS3 Wii PC PS2 DS PSP

category: **Racing**
players: **1-16**
developer: **Black Rock Studios**
publisher: **Fantastic**
price: **\$99.95** / rating: **TBA** / available: **Oct 23**

opponents), but it ties in directly to your stunt abilities, adding a layer of depth to the formula.

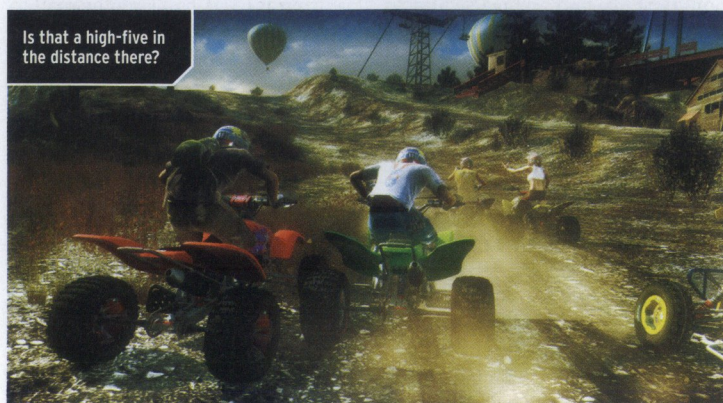
The game looks the goods. Massive jumps come with a camera focus change and the ambient whoosh of wind as you sail through the air, fully conveying a sense of height, speed and risk. It sounds the goods, coming with a soundtrack of licensed songs, but also with annoying sound bytes of your rider. And it certainly plays the goods, striking just the right balance of layered gameplay and pick-up-and-play arcade mayhem. Together, these elements go towards creating a polished, and fun, ATV racer. «

THE GOOD: Fun arcadey racer, good three-tier trick system, decent amount of depth in bike construction

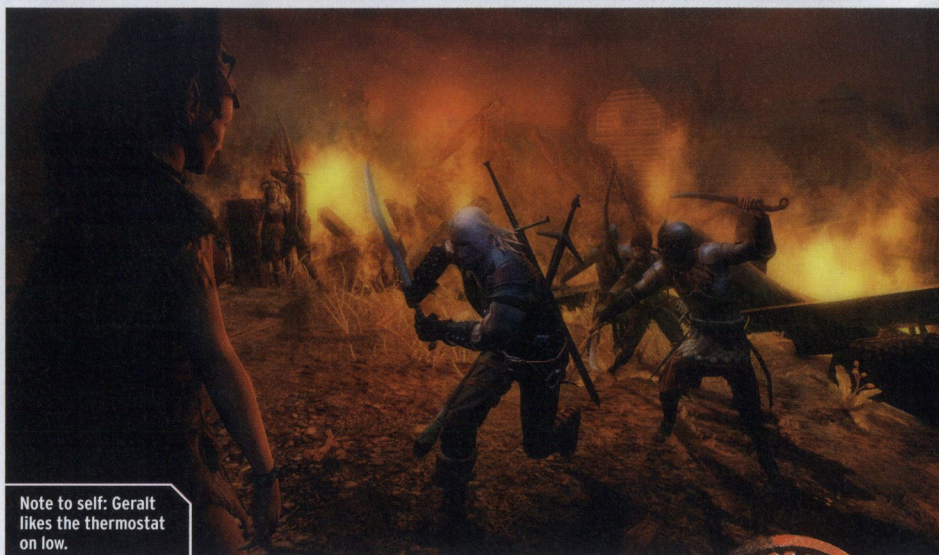
THE BAD: Some annoying sounds, possibly too niche for general racing fans

OVERALL: If your collection is lacking an ATV racer, *Pure* fills the gap nicely.

HYPER VERDICT
8



!!! The Hexer, a 2001 TV version of the Witcher was a dismal failure. The film version was also a box office failure - unsurprising as it was cobbled together from the TV series.



Note to self: Geralt likes the thermostat on low.

The Witcher – Enhanced Edition

Like a (censored) fits in a (censored), **ALAN MOORE** fits RPGs



There are very few words that I consciously limit my use of. Most of them I restrict on humane grounds — they are simply too vulgar or unpleasant for every day use. Others are limited not through choice but lack of necessity. 'Definitive' is one of those words. I rarely get a chance to use it, because very few things seem to deserve it. Happily, I can use it today, when I tell you in no uncertain terms that The Witcher Enhanced is the definitive RPG. There. I've said it, and only 450 words left to convince you!

The Enhanced Edition has a strong foundation to build on. Version 1.0 was a strong game in itself. Something about the combination of stunning visuals, slick combat mechanics, a deep and genuinely interesting story line and a Nordic looking chap with a ponytail combined to create wondrous gaming alchemy.

It wasn't without criticism, though. The three killer bees were the load times, poorly realised dialogue and repetitive models and animations.

WE'LL BE BACK AFTER THIS QUICK BREAK

Loading times were a real pig. You just don't want to be staring at a loading screen when you're hell bent on tearing a ghoul a new limb socket. The developers realised this

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

category: **RPG** / players: **1**
developer: **CD Projekt Red**
publisher: **Atari**
price: **\$69.95/free**
rating: **MA 15+** / available: **Now**



and quickly promised us 80% faster loading times. They've been true to their word, and it's remarkable the difference it makes to your immersion in the game. It's like those 'short' 60 second ad-breaks on Foxtel. A necessary evil, but they're over so fast you end up having to rewind your IQ a bit because you missed the start of your stories.

Having spruced up the performance issues, the team revisited the dialogue. To make up for lost time and (as one wag put it) for making us talk to crack-addled hobos in the first release, the Enhanced Edition features 5,000 lines of re-written and re-recorded dialogue. Suffice to say, it's awesome.

The additional dialogue combines well with the new gestural animations in cut scenes. There are



apparently over 100 new gestures and facial expressions, all designed to give a more natural feel to conversations. I don't think I even have 100 gestures, so I wasn't overly convinced, but you certainly feel the difference, even if you can't quite put your finger on it. The 50-odd new NPC models are almost the icing on the cake, as you'll rarely find yourself bumping into the same (or suspiciously similar) characters anymore.

The real icing on the cake, for the more hardcore among us, will be the D'jinni Editor. While it doesn't alter the original game, it does allow you to create your own adventures. I sat in front of it for some time and couldn't quite get my head around it, but I live safe in the knowledge that lots of people will a) get to grips with it and b) develop some

really sweet new add-on quests for me to plough through at some point in the future.

The Enhanced Edition also comes with a whole slew of extras, including a hard copy of the map, a 'Making Of' documentary, the soundtrack and an illustrated short story from Andrej Sapkowski. «

THE GOOD: Fantastic story, improved voice acting, looks great, excellent value, free to previous owners of The Witcher

THE BAD: The language is a little fruity

OVERALL: The quintessential version of an already fantastic game - if only more developers would follow CD Projekt's lead

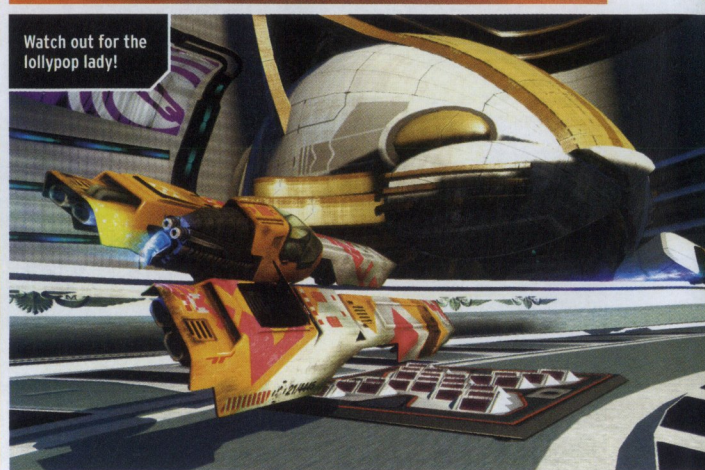


HYPER VERDICT

10



!!! The SIXAXIS controls can be used to steer your ship, with the controller detecting pitch and yaw as well as left and right movements. If you're after a challenge, this will certainly provide it.



Wipeout HD

DARREN WELLS lives life at 500 kilometers per hour

Wow. Just wow. If Hyper's review guidelines permitted me to fill the whole page with that one word, I'd do it in a second. It not only describes the game, but it gets the review finished in record time, allowing me to get right back to playing.

Wipeout HD is by no means a drastic leap forward for the futuristic racing series — in fact its purpose of existence is right there in the title — but by doing what it knows, it succeeds in presenting its gameplay as timeless and pure. Played a previous Wipeout game? You'll know what to expect. Super-fast race crafts hooning along all manner of twisty-turny tracks, with speed boosts and weapon pickups littered along the way. It's sleek. It's fast. It's polished. And holy crap, it looks freaking amazing.

SWOON

Just like Ridge Racer on the original PlayStation, Wipeout HD serves to demonstrate just what the development team is capable of, and what they can squeeze out of the hardware. Let there be no room for misunderstanding: Wipeout HD looks simply gorgeous. Textures are clear, crisp and detailed, weapon effects light up the track or cover it with billowing smoke, metallic surfaces shimmer with pristine brilliance, and to top it all off the framerate is rock solid. Owners of a 1080p television



will immediately see the benefits (and feel a sense of satisfaction that their hard-earned didn't go to waste), but on our 1080i display our jaws were similarly on the floor.

So, yes, it's a showcase game, and the fact that much of the content is recycled from previous titles further establishes it as such. Tracks from Pure and Pulse get brought back — sorry, "remastered" — while the ship design will look familiar to anyone who knows the latter game. The controls feel the same, the race structure is the same... a revolution this is not, but a fun and attractive game, this most certainly is.

What's more, it has finally started to be more accessible to newcomers. The game's speed and each ship's often wayward handling, not the mention the lack of a traditional brake, sometimes sees the uninitiated slamming into walls like a pinball. Wipeout HD eases the pain with Pilot Assist, which prevents your craft from coming into contact with the barriers in all

but the hardest of shunts. Think of it as futuristic bumper bowling. It's an appreciated feature that makes the game a tad more forgiving, though it shouldn't be relied on for too long, because when the Zone mode kicks in, you're on your own.

SUB-PHANTOM

Zone continues to stand out for its departure to the standard racing. Acceleration is not required on your part — your ship's speed slowly ramps up by itself — but careful steering and controlled use of the airbrakes is essential. The race-until-you-die concept is at once clever and fiendish, and just like the rest of the game, it looks simply wonderful. Zone tracks are rendered in flat colour as opposed to realistic textures, and suit the accompanying music perfectly with their incorporation of a graphic equalizer on the track surface itself. The visuals also offer a great cue of when you advance ranks, with a huge sweeping colour change transforming the appearance entirely.

But there's one area that we'd prefer not to look at, and that's the weapon pickup icon. Race over a red marker on the track and you'll pick up... something. You're not entirely sure until you hit Square to use it. It might be a shield, it might be a rocket. The omnipresent female voice only advises you of

PS3

category: **Racer**
players: **1-8**
developer: **SCE Studio Liverpool**
publisher: **SCEE**
price: **STBA** / rating: **TBA** / available: **Now**

what opponent-fired weapons are coming your way, not what you yourself obtained. Until you've got a few races under your belt and are familiar with what each icon represents, it's pretty much an artillery lottery, and stands as the game's main sticking point.

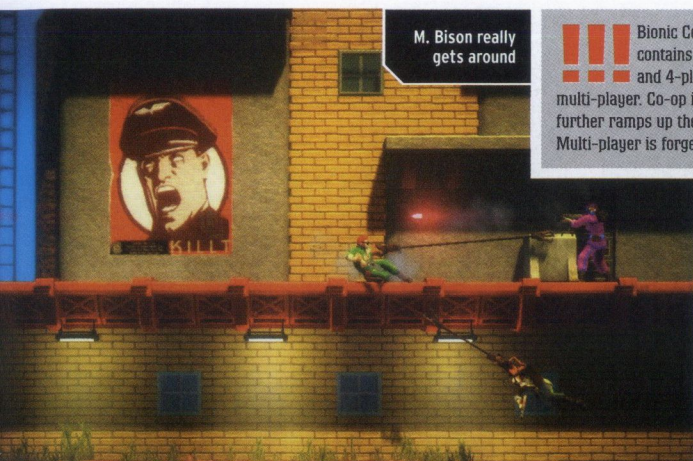
Everything else, well, it's all gravy. The game is silky smooth, the visuals are awesome, and although there's only a handful of tracks included, more are on the way via the PlayStation Network. It's a great demonstration of the PS3's powers, and shows that the Wipeout magic is still as strong as it was over a decade ago. **«**

THE GOOD: Excellent visuals, timeless gameplay, polished to a tee

THE BAD: No weapon voice over, essentially a repackaging of previously played content

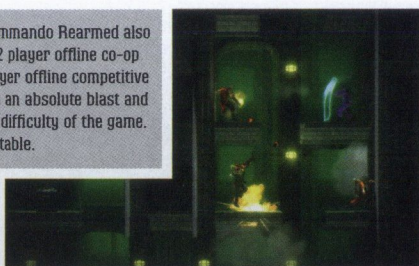
OVERALL: It might be stuff that we've seen before, but we're sure glad to see it again.



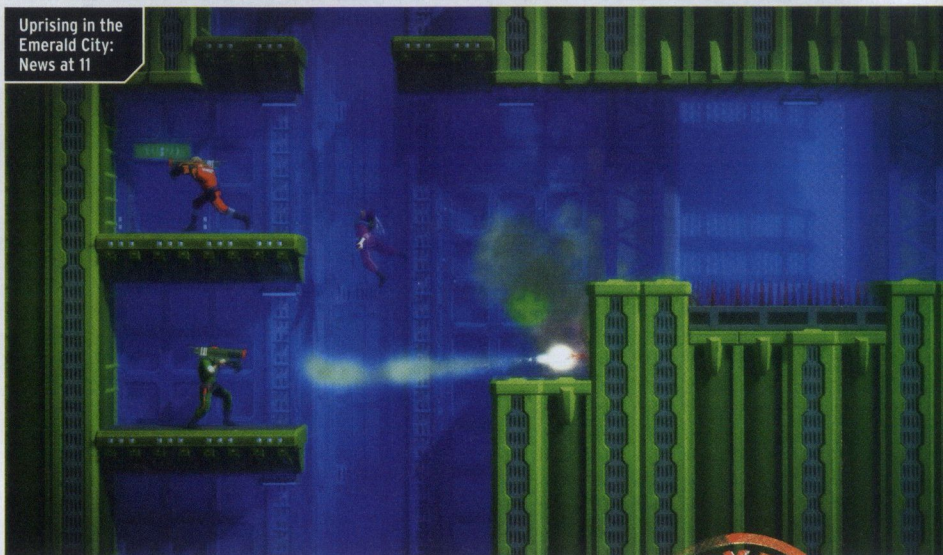
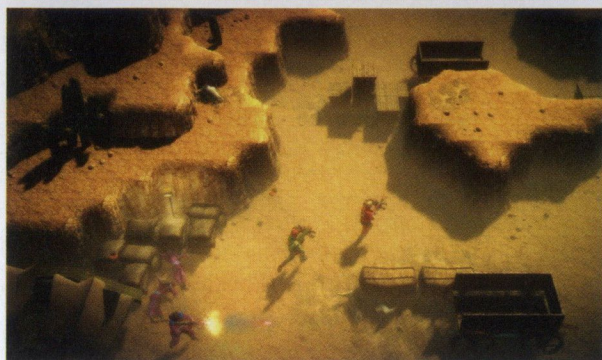
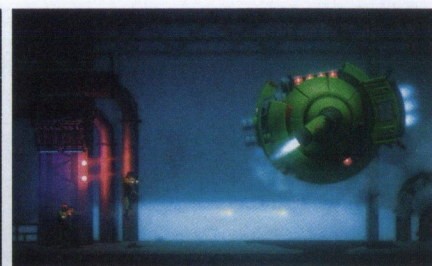


M. Bison really gets around

!!! Bionic Commando Rearmed also contains 2 player offline co-op and 4-player offline competitive multi-player. Co-op is an absolute blast and further ramps up the difficulty of the game. Multi-player is forgettable.



Uprising in the Emerald City: News at 11



Bionic Commando Rearmed

DANIEL WILKS is not normally a swinger

You have to love a hero by the name of Nathan "Rad" Spencer. It's such an audaciously 80s videogame name that even if you didn't know Rearmed was a remake/reworking of the original NES Bionic Commando the hero's name alone would date it. Not only does the game place players in the shoes of such an awesomely named hero — it also charges players with stopping the resurrection of Hitler...or at least someone remarkably Hitler like. Throw in a couple of ninjas and maybe a few sassy anthropomorphic animals and you have the quintessential 80s game.

There may be no anthropomorphic animals in Bionic Commando Rearmed, but it does contain just about everything else that is good in an old school side scrolling

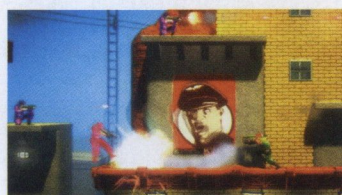
Xbox Live Arcade | Playstation Network

category: **Platformer**
players: **1-4**
developer: **GRIN** / publisher: **Capcom**
price: **800 MS Points** / rating: **PG**
available: **Now**

platformer cum shooter — fantastic level design, great music and a core mechanic that is absolutely fantastic. In the case of Bionic Commando Rearmed, this core mechanic is Rad's bionic arm. It is essentially used for everything, from attack to defense to movement.

SWINGERS

Unlike pretty much every other side-scrolling platformer ever made, Bionic Commando Rearmed has no jump button. To climb to higher platforms or traverse gaps, players must use Rad's bionic arm as a



grapple, either winning the soldier up or swinging on the tether cable. At its core, the swinging is a very simple mechanic but the effect it has on gameplay is dramatic. Nearly all surfaces can be grappled, giving the player far more access to the X-axis than a normal platformer. The swinging mechanics take a little while to get used to — a few hours in and most players will still have some difficulty reliably pulling off chain-swings to get to secret areas or traverse spiked pits — but the level of difficulty simply adds to the enjoyment of the game and makes finding a secret area of completing a level all the more satisfying.

The arm is also indispensable when it comes to combat. Barrels can be picked up and used as shields or thrown at enemies. Most boss battles require the player to alternate between shooting and using the arm in some way to beat them. You can even upgrade the arm to enable it to grapple enemy soldiers and fling them out of the way, a feat made more amusing by the slightly out of place ragdoll physics. Every

dead enemy falls with ragdoll animations — it's quite amusing to see a dead soldier slide off the edge of a platform in an obviously 2D environment. There are numerous weapons to pick up during the game, but even so, enemy soldiers are never much more than an annoyance — the real danger is the spiked pits, sentry lasers and other environmental hazards.

Not all is great with Bionic Commando Rearmed. There are some problems with the controls — sometimes it's a little fiddly to accurately get the arm to grapple at an angle, and controlling the helicopter during the level select screen can be a pain in the arse — but even so, it still ranks up there as one of the very best downloadable games on Xbox Live Arcade and Playstation Network. It's definitely worth every cent...or Microsoft point. **«**

THE GOOD: Fantastic level design throughout, some inspired boss battles, excellent core swinging/grappling mechanics

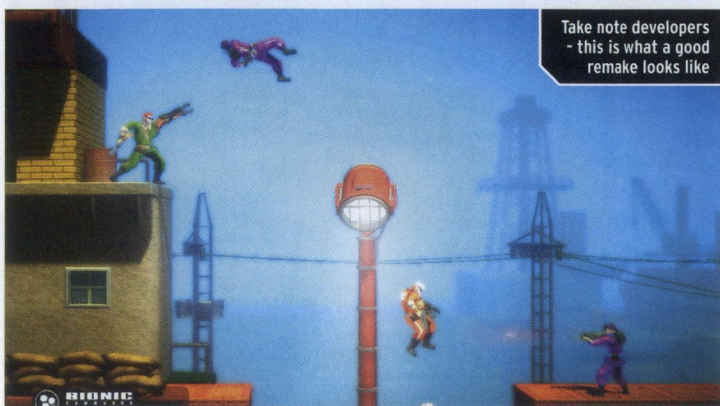
THE BAD: Controls are a little inaccurate for fine control of the bionic arm/controlling the helicopter during level select

OVERALL: One of the best, if not the best remakes of a classic game around — and it's really cheap to boot.



HYPER VERDICT

9



Take note developers — this is what a good remake looks like



Madden NFL 09

X360 | PS3

category: **Sport** / players: **1-4**
 developer: **EA Tiburon** / publisher: **EA Sports**
 price: **\$99.95** / rating: **G** / available: **Now**



This year's Madden is a significant release, as it celebrates its 20th Anniversary.

Released way back in 1989, the series has come along way. It's amazing that the series tops the sales charts annually, while also keeping the gameplay exciting. This year's Madden is no different — the game includes several new features that change the way Madden is played.

The addition with the biggest impact this year is the My Skill feature. Upon entering for the first time, players will be faced with a simple test involving the basics of the game. How you fare in these tests will determine your Madden IQ, the difficulty setting that is specially catered for you. After each game, the difficulty will adjust to the player's skills.

Another improvement in the game is the commentary, which is now done by Cris Collinsworth and Tom Hammond. The guys keep up with the goings on in the field, and Cris's analysis of a play gone wrong in the BackTrack feature is fantastic. It feels like a real television presentation, and you'll nod your head in agreement as he points out your mistakes.

An addition that hardcore Madden fans may not appreciate is the Rewind feature. It allows players to rewind certain plays during a game, so a play that led to a fumble can be redone. Thankfully, there's the option to turn it off. Otherwise, for the gamers who like second chance, there's the option to have a only a couple or even unlimited rewinds.

Fans of the series, and there are many, will enjoy another superb effort from the Madden team. And the way the series is going, I'm sure it'll easily make another 20 years.

AMOS HONG

HYPER VERDICT

OVERALL: The Madden series scores another touchdown.

9



Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

Wii

category: **Golf** / players: **1-4**
 developer: **Tiburon** / publisher: **EA**
 price: **\$79.95** / rating: **G** / available: **Now**

You have to worry a little when the game you have just popped into your Wii has to advertise all of the new features in this year's version of their Tiger Woods franchise. To be honest we expected the worst. We expected the fact that they had to point out the differences to mean that there were very few. That's not at all the case. Tiger Woods 09 is just about the best golfing game on the platform, combining good (for the most part) controls, customisable characters, some pretty good party games and even the ability for multiple players to compete online simultaneously instead of laboriously having to wait for their turn in the round. On the whole, Tiger Woods 09 is pretty damn good.

There are, of course, a few problems stemming from the motion control. The Wiimote feels a little inaccurate overall, especially during putting. Instead of registering a swing the Wiimote will occasionally just slowly lower the club, only to swing if you merely twitch, inevitably leading to a bogey or worse. The helpful hints given throughout the game to improve your performance are also delivered in what could possibly be the most boring voice ever recorded. Seriously, it's superhumanly boring, like Ben Stein, only more droning.

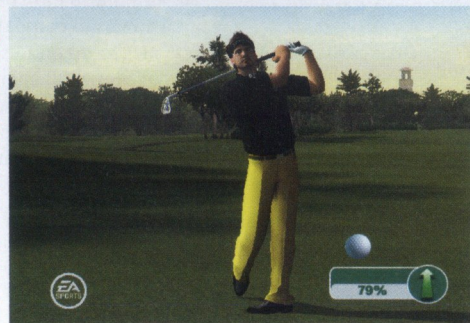
If you're looking for a good golf game on the Wii, look no further. It's fun in both single and multiplayer — you may want to turn the sound down, however.

DIRK WATCH

HYPER VERDICT

OVERALL: The best golf game on the Wii.

8



Space Siege

PC

category: **Action RPG** / players: **1**
 developer: **Gas Powered Games** / publisher: **Sega**
 price: **\$89.95** / rating: **M** / available: **Now**

There's nothing particularly wrong with Space Siege. It's a functional game in which players take the role of a gruff space guy protecting a bunch of other gruff space guys, initially from some aliens hell bent on destroying the human race because of a diplomatic incident (hello Babylon 5) and later from some robot zombie things and the plot of System Shock 2. There's also nothing particularly right with it. The combination of one click melee and ranged combat is initially fun but quickly becomes something of a chore, and the special abilities that are available when levelling the character aren't particularly great or necessary.

Although part of the Siege franchise (Dungeon Siege 1 & 2 coming before), Space Siege forgoes item drops and instead renders pretty much everything down to upgrade parts that can be used to upgrade armour, weapons and robot sidekick. As such there is no character customisation in the game, the only cosmetic changes coming when you either scale up your armour sufficiently or install cybernetic implants.

If you have a hankering for some action roleplaying, have ten or so hours to spare and don't have any particularly high expectations then Space Siege should fit the bill OK. If you're looking for something more than a simple by the numbers click-fest that succeeds at being more than a vague, rather characterless distraction that feels more like a budget game than a full priced release, you should probably look elsewhere.

DANIEL WILKS

HYPER VERDICT

OVERALL: Bland and run of the mill, but fills the hours if that's all you're after.

5





Soul Calibur Legends

Wii

category: **Action** / players: **1-2**
 developer: **Namco Bandai** / publisher: **Namco Bandai**
 price: **\$99.95** / rating: **PG** / available: **Now**

Soul Calibur Legends feels like a sundry game mode for a real Soul Calibur game, such as the Edge Master mode, but it's not really like a proper game in and of itself. It certainly doesn't feel like a full priced game either, as the vast majority of it falls back on a number of budget game techniques, such as an extremely limited bestiary, incredibly repetitive environments and a story that is almost entirely delivered in dull, poorly written static, silent cutscenes.

Unlike the rest of the Soul Calibur franchise, Legends is not a fighting game. It's a third person beat 'em up in which players control two characters from the roster of seven, hacking and slashing their way through roughly five kinds of enemy and a few bosses, wagging the Wiimote to control attacks and using the Nunchuck to control the character, block and dash. The motion controls work fairly well, with different attacks being mapped to the direction the Wiimote is moved, but shortly after starting the game it becomes apparent that there is little or no need to do much other than simply swing the Wiimote up and down or side to side as quickly as possible to take out pretty much an enemy with a minimum of fuss.

The character models animate quite well, and what little voice acting there is, is as pompously hilarious as it is in the Soul Calibur fighting games, but aside from the moreish attraction of unlocking new weapons for each of the characters there is little, if anything to recommend SC Legends.

RICO SUAVEZ

**HYPER
VERDICT**



OVERALL: Not even the copious amounts of boobage and arse cheek can save this.

4



Castle Crashers

Xbox Live Arcade

category: **Action** / players: **1-4**
 developer: **Behemoth** / publisher: **Microsoft**
 price: **800 MS Points5** / rating: **PG** / available: **Now**

Castle Crashers is a simple, endearing, addictive and hugely enjoyable side scrolling beat 'em up from the creators of Alien Hominid, now available on Xbox Live Arcade. That's all you really need to know. If you like side scrolling action then you will like Castle Crashers, it's as simple as that. If you don't then you won't. Of course, given that I have another 200 odd words allocated to me I should talk about the game a little more.

Perfect couch multi-player fodder, Castle Crasher allows you and up to three mates to hack and slash your way across a cartoon landscape to rescue some princesses, collecting new weapons and abilities, upgrading skill and attributes and just generally hacking the crap out of some great looking cartoonish enemies, ranging from knights through to evil cats and beyond. In addition to the normal enemies, Castle Crashers features some massive and hilarious bosses, an office favourite being a giant cat/submarine thing that uses another cat as a periscope. Each boss requires the player to memorise patterns and attack sequences but this only adds to the old-school charm of the game.

The visual design is outstanding and hilarious, the music and sound effects are excellent and the whole thing will only cost you around a tenner. Brilliant.

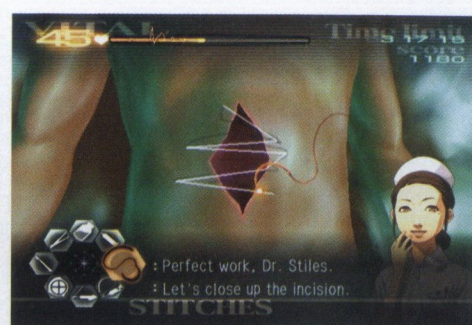
DANIEL WILKS

**HYPER
VERDICT**



OVERALL: Charming and addictive, and won't break the bank.

8



Trauma Center: Second Opinion

Wii

category: **Sim/Adventure** / players: **1**
 developer: **Atlus** / publisher: **Nintendo**
 price: **\$79.95** / rating: **M** / available: **Now**

"Yuo" may notice something about this game, and it's not the typo that's present on the bottom of its location screen. Trauma Center: Second Opinion is little more than a port of the original DS game, with Wiimote controls and a few Wii-centric surgical tools thrown in. To be fair, there is a brief side-mission that centres around Dr Weaver, as well as an extra section following the game's conclusion, and 3D graphics replace the grainy DS sprites.

Each procedure presents a satisfying enough experience, even if some of them do hold the player's hand a bit too tightly. You'll be tasked with excising tumours, zapping clots with a laser, draining burst arteries, and extracting foreign bodies, preferably without killing the patient. The heart rate gives the game a natural time counter, with each task requiring completion before they flatline, and your performance is graded depending on how sloppy your stitching was or how many times you fumbled the forceps.

The Wii controls work quite well, detecting movement on all axes accurately. With some actions requiring a steady hand, however, this is one game where outstretched arms will soon turn to tired arms, so kick back and steady them on your lap or knees. That's until you get to the defibrillator, one of Second Opinion's new tools which requires you to hold up the Wiimote and nunchuck and press the Z and B buttons when a moving meter reaches an optimal point. Again, it works, and the position required for its use makes it feel natural, and only slightly less contrived.

Gave it a miss on the DS? Consider this the go-to game to satiate those surgical desires.

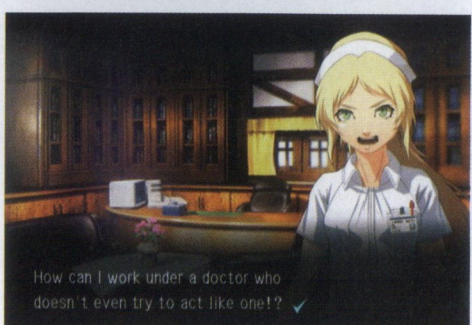
DARREN WELLS

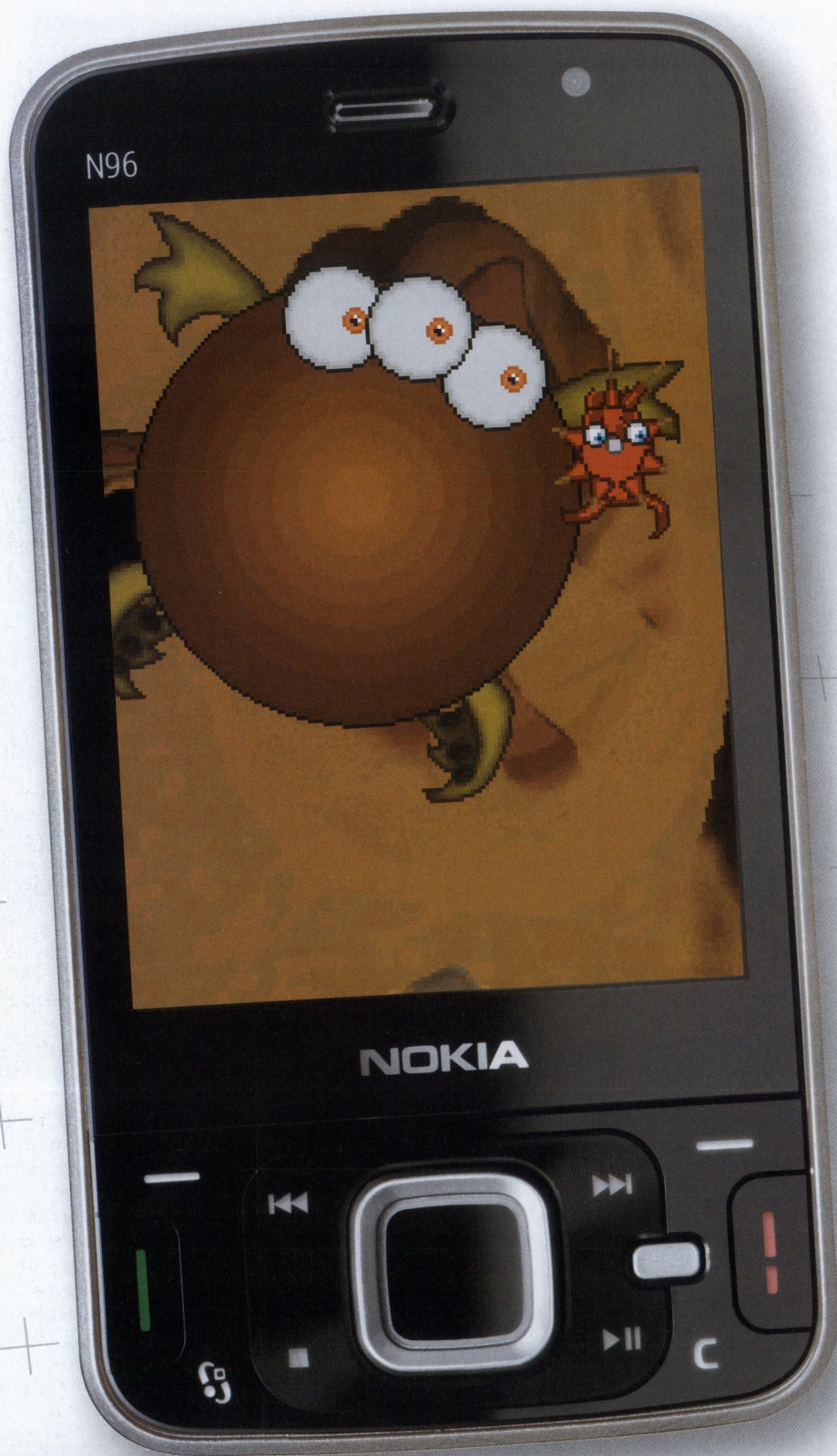
**HYPER
VERDICT**



OVERALL: It's hardly a new game, but it sure is a fun one.

7





Who says
you can't
teach an old
dog new
tricks?

Coming next month...

ATARI ACTIVISION KONAMI Harrah's Hasbro WB Microsoft PlayFirst PopCap SEGA SONY

Glu is a leading global publisher of mobile games. Its portfolio of top-rated games includes original titles Super K.O. Boxing!, Stranded and Brain Genius, and titles based on major brands from partners including Atari, Activision, Konami, Harrah's, Hasbro, Warner Bros., Microsoft, PlayFirst, PopCap Games, SEGA and Sony.

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PONG WATCH

It's guaranteed to make you more attractive to members of the opposite sex

The Pong Watch is a solo 'hobbyist' project from a guy called John Maushammer, who earns bonus points for an awesome last name.

The concept is pretty straightforward. Your watch simulates a game of Pong, with the guy on the right scoring 60 points an hour (one a minute, conveniently) and the guy on the left scoring one point per hour, you know, to represent the passage of time and all that.

Sadly, as a solo project this isn't commercially available but John, if you can hear me, make me one please!

If you can't deal with the fact that these aren't for sale then follow the link and it'll set you on your way to building your own version. Be warned though, it's not a process for the faint of heart!

PRICE: N/A • **URL:** WWW.MAUSHAMMER.COM/SYSTEMS

SONY VAIO RT SERIES ALL-IN-ONE PC

The iMac Killer is here. What's an iMac? Exactly.

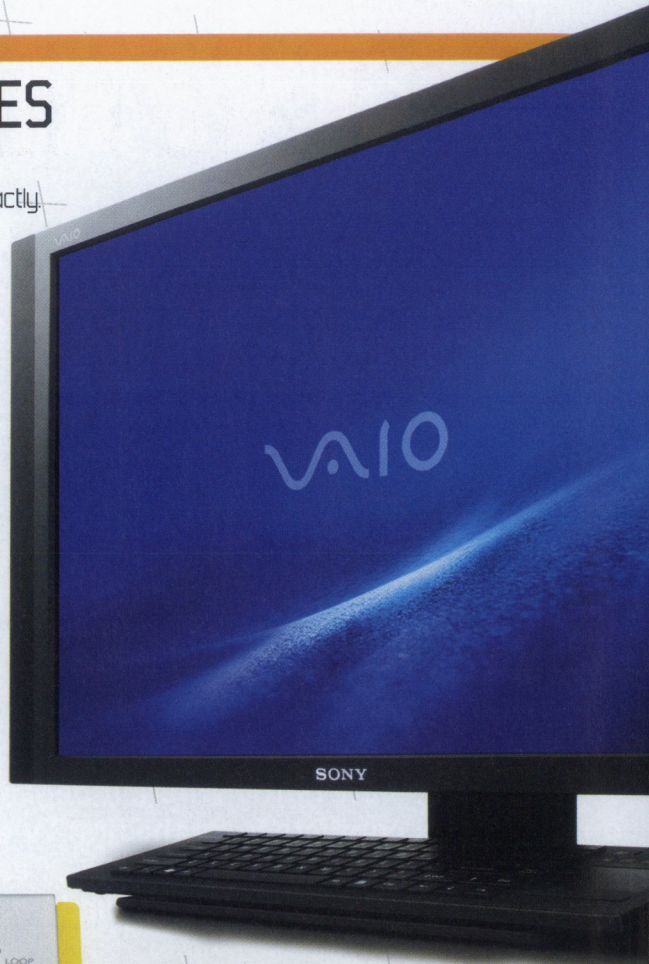
My goodness. Just when we were starting to falter and thinking the iMac really was the only all-in-one solution on the market one of these little beauties appeared before us. Just out of the ether. It was weird.

Anyway, the top-of-the-range model is an all-singing all-dancing PC with some impressive specs: 25.5" LCD, 2.66GHz Intel Core 2 Quad Q400 processor, 8GB RAM, 1TB HDD storage, Blu-ray recorder, NVIDIA 9600GT, eSATA ports and Vista Ultimate 64-bit edition.

Possibly our favourite feature is how the HDMI input works. Plug your PS3, cable/satellite set-top boxes or other HDMI enabled gadgets into the VAIO and you can get it running without having to fire up the PC.

Lower-priced (less attractive) options are available, from US\$1,099. Hurry up and post Australian prices, please!

DISTRIBUTOR: SONY • **PRICE:** US\$3,999.99 • **URL:** WWW.SONYSTYLE.COM



KAOSILATOR TOUCHPAD SYNTHESIZER

They call me Mr Bombastic. Ro-romantic.

Everyone knows how awesome Synthesizers are. If they have one drawback, it's their size. We don't always have room, or the spare hands, to be taking one-to parties to bust some impromptu Kraftwerk-esque electro-madness.

Thank goodness for Korg and their Kaossilator then! So small it can fit in the palm of your hand, this is one of the most condensed forms of insta-cool that money can buy.

It comes ready packed with a hundred different sounds culled from the KAOS PAD series including classics such as leads, basses and sound effects as well as one-shot and looped drums.

The horizontal axis controls note/pitch while the vertical controls cutoff, feedback and modulation depth. It also features a Gate Apreggiator to let you produce notes in synch with a specified tempo. God IS a DJ and this is his weapon of choice.

DISTRIBUTOR: MUSICLINK • **PRICE:** \$349 • **URL:** WWW.MUSICLINK.COM.AU



MVIX MV-2500U ULTRA-PORTABLE MEDIA CENTER

Bringing Hi-Def output to your jacket pocket

Slightly larger than a standard hard drive (not included), the MV-2500U is a marvel of media management. You can slot anything up to a 250GB 2.5" drive inside and carry up to 400 hours of DVD quality movie with you wherever you go.

Connect it to your PC and it works like a standard USB 2.0 hard drive, letting you sync and store your totally legitimate files in next to no time. Best of all, it's not at fussy. You can throw almost any format at this little bad boy and it won't so much as blink. Once you're done synching, plug it into your high-def TV and enjoy resolutions of up to 1080i. Marvelous!

Supports: DivX 3/4/5, XViD, MPEG1-4, DVD (IFO, VOB), VCD (DAT) **Music:** MP3, OGG, WMA etc.

DISTRIBUTOR: MVIX.NET.AU/WHERE_BUY.HTML • **PRICE:** \$179.95 • **HDD NOT INCLUDED** • **URL:** WWW.MVIX.NET.AU

HTC TOUCH DIAMOND

Will this diamond be your best friend?

When we reviewed the HTC Touch Cruise in issue 179, we cautioned punters to wait for this, the Touch Diamond, which offers all the features in a smaller form factor and delivers it for a smaller price. Now it's here, and after having some hands-on time with it, we could pretty much stop the review — it's everything the precious model was, only smaller, cheaper and prettier.

Let's go through the list. We've got a touch-screen that can be used with either the included stylus or your own digit, we've got Windows Mobile 6.1 running in the background, and we've got a super-sexy form factor that swiftly boots the business-like Touch Cruise into the distance. The screen takes up the majority of the phone's real estate, and flicking through the menu options from the Home Screen — or even looking at the clock — is incredibly attractive.

But it's slow. Selecting an option on the touch screen results in a noticeable lag between your input and your selection appearing. Expandable memory is not an option

— you're limited to the phone's 4GB internal storage — and a standard headphone jack has been omitted in favour of a proprietary connection. And even though the screen detects input from your finger, you'll still need to use the stylus for some actions, such as text entry.

Now that we've had the Touch Diamond in our hands, we see history repeating itself from our time with the Touch Cruise. HTC has announced the forthcoming S740, which does everything the Touch Diamond does (sans the touch screen), but offers a proper keypad and slide-out QWERTY keyboard. That log on the water just keeps turning, no matter how fast you're running on it. Be aware of this should you consider a purchase.

DISTRIBUTOR: WWW.HTC.COM

PRICE: \$999

PROS: Plenty of features, compact and sexy form factor

Cons: Limited storage space, laggy touch screen, no standard headphone jack



VYE MINI-V S37

Touch, swivel, drool... but it'll cost you

OK, so right off the bat we should say that the mini-v S37 is just about useless for all forms of gaming more advanced than Minesweeper, Solitaire or a rousing game of Sudoku, but sometimes you have to look at a bit of tech with non-gaming eyes. If you can manage that feat (and it is quite a feat), you'll see that the VYE mini-v S37 is certainly a pretty swanky bit of kit.

Packed in the sub 1kg frame is and 800Mhz processor, 1GB RAM, 120Gb HDD and a 7" touch screen that can be swivelled to turn the notebook into a very nice little tablet PC. There is no integrated drive in this model (there is a DVD combo drive in the S41A model), but external drives can be mounted via USB or the entire notebook can be mounted via LAN to a desktop and new programs can be installed that way.

When we first got a look at the S37 we were a little worried that the notebook runs Windows Vista. Not

only is Vista a pretty poor excuse for an OS, it's also a notorious system hog, so we thought that the 800Mhz processor and 1GB RAM would make for some seriously slow computing, but aside from a rather lengthy startup, the notebook performs quite smoothly, only faltering when more than 3 programs are open simultaneously.

The S37 may not be great for heavy computing, but as an ultra-portable movie viewer, note taker and basic notebook it works great. The price is a fair bit higher than some comparable Netbooks, such as the EEE, the Wind or the ILI, but considering the S37 has tablet as well as notebook functionality the extra money is more than justified.

DISTRIBUTOR: WWW.VYEAUS.COM

PRICE: \$1599 + GST

PROS: Versatile unit, touch-screen capabilities, small form factor

Cons: No Office software, not cut out for gaming, no integrated drive



» Win Win Win

WIN BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY ON THE SYSTEM OF YOUR CHOICE!

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway is one of the most atmospheric games we have played in a good long while, easily bringing to mind fond memories of the incredible HBO series **Band of Brothers**. Not only is the story and mood excellent, but the pacing and mechanics are also top-notch, combining FPS action, squad based tactics and a clever cover system.

Hell's Highway is also the main stretch of road in the much maligned Chad Lowe/Kirsty Swanson supernatural action comedy "Highway to Hell", in which a smitten Lowe must confront the Hell Cop and Beelzebub to rescue his lady love. Although both roads share the same name, the Hell's Highway in Brothers in Arms is not actually situated in the underworld.

So all you need to do for a chance to win is tell us, in 50 words or less, *If the highway in Hell's Highway doesn't actually go to hell, where else does it go?*

Send your answers, with your name and address to: **Heck's Hallway, Hyper, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards, NSW 1590** or email your entry to hypercomps@next.com.au with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.



WIN LEGO BATMAN AND A PSP!

The Lego games are pretty damn rad. How could they not be? They combine one of the world's best toys with characters from some of the world's most beloved franchises. So far we've had Star Wars and Indiana Jones, but pretty soon Lego Batman will be handing the BIFF! and POW! to gamers everywhere.

Thanks to the good people at Warner Bros Interactive we can give three lucky readers a jumpstart on everyone else by giving away three copies of the game along side three shiny new PSPs.

All you need to do for a chance to win one of these awesome prize packs is tell us, in 50 words or less, *if you were a Batman villain, what would you call yourself and what powers would you have?*

Send your answers, with your name and address to: **Holy Nobbly Plastic!, Hyper, Locked Bag 5555, St Leonards, NSW 1590** or email your entry to hypercomps@next.com.au with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.



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And mark
THE END
of all
MYTHOLOGY.



LEGENDARY

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Action Violence



XBOX 360 LIVE



PLAYSTATION 3



ATARI

21

SONY, 2007

Don't let the title mislead you: 21 is not about Jack Bauer chasing criminals during winter solstice while on extended Daylight Savings Time.

No, it's about blackjack, mathematics, and Kate Bosworth wearing a variety of wigs.

Loosely based on a novel which was loosely based on actual events, the film tells the story of MIT student Ben Campbell (Jim Sturgess), a genius when it comes to numbers, but broke when it comes to putting numbers in his wallet. He needs money to get into Harvard Medical School, and after demonstrating his knack for mathematics and probability to his professor (Kevin Spacey), he's drawn into a secret card-counting ring comprising of other similarly number-savvy students. Naturally, one of them is a token hottie (Bosworth), and naturally, she and Campbell are required by movie law to be attracted to one

I call this look "The Shifty"



another, hook up, fall out, then hook back up before the end credits.

Yes, elements of the plot are predictable and follow a rigid sort of formula. But despite this 21 succeeds in conveying its sense of illicit fun as the gang hits the Vegas casinos to make their card-counting cash. We're learning right alongside Campbell the cues to determine what table to play on, what the count is up to, and when The Man — in the form of security dude Laurence Fishburne — is sniffing down their necks. The film imparts just enough information on the mathematics

behind their scheme to put the audience on the same page without it becoming overwhelming, and it delivers a semi-decent comeuppance to its revealed meanie, despite the lead-up to it being as subtle as a bag of bricks.

Again, the plot is formulaic but the vibe overcomes it, and although the film can't be recommended as a must-see, it nonetheless passes as an enjoyable enough couple of Vegas-themed hours.

FILM: 7 / EXTRAS: TBA

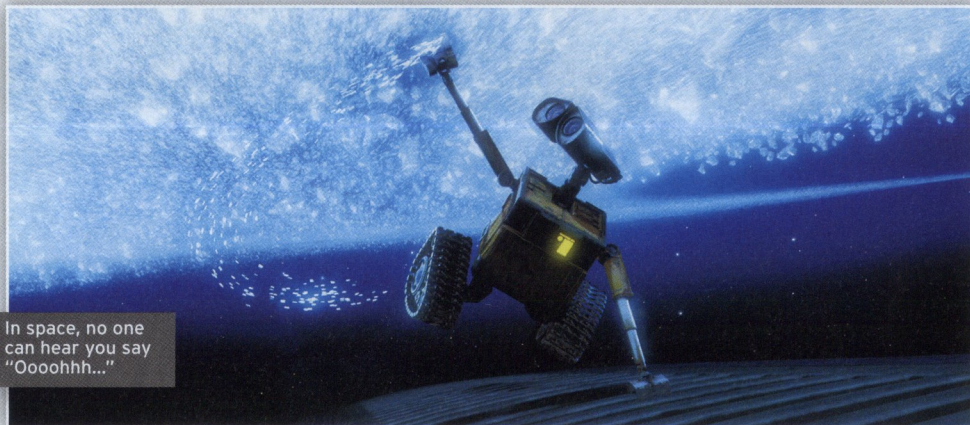
WALL•E

DISNEY, G

Meet WALL-E, a pint-sized garbage compactor with the eternal task of cleaning up the filth-laden wasteland that is our barren planet. Day in, day out, he pops out little garbage cubes that he stacks into skyscraper-sized buildings, but despite his autonomous design he yearns for some company. His cockroach pet isn't enough — he wants another robot hand to hold.

It might surprise you to learn that despite its (apparently unintentional) social commentary

In space, no one can hear you say "Oooohhh..."

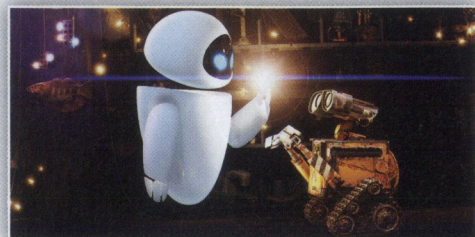


on pollution and humanity's wasteful and selfish nature, WALL-E has a love story at its core. It's also arguably Pixar's most ambitious project to date. The amount of dialogue is anorexic compared to the pop-culture havens of, say, Toy Story, but it's because of its sparseness that the film establishes such a strong opening — hearing naught but the dusty Earth's winds and WALL-E's chirps and mechanical whirrs fully establishes this as a planet that's been vacant for centuries.

The extra level of detail present in the animation serves the slightly weightier subject matter, and goes light years beyond any previous Pixar film. Real-world photography effects such as lens distortion and depth of field are present within the digitally-rendered scenes, and textures are presented in a manner that puts them further on the realism scale than the cartoon end. That said, human characters are still presented in a caricature style, though it stands in contrast with the film's occasional use of live actors, which sometimes breaks the immersion as the opposing techniques share a scene.

Still, Pixar's knack for telling an engaging and charming story does not waver. It's a thoroughly entertaining tale that has just as much for an older audience as it does for the littlies, and emerges as Pixar's best film.

ANIMATION: 10 / STORY: 10 / OVERALL: 10



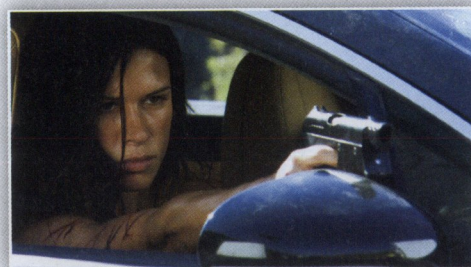
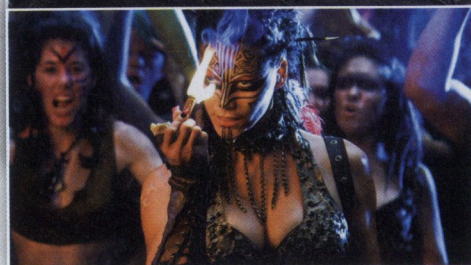
Doomsday

UNIVERSAL, R 18+

Watching Neil Marshall's new film *Doomsday* is like getting a 105 minute crash course on some of the coolest cult films of the 80s. Within the running time viewers are taken on a rollercoaster ride through *Mad Max*, *Escape From New York*, *Excalibur* and pretty much every low budget Italian film that ripped off one of those three. In the near future a deadly plague known as the Reaper Virus wipes out Scotland. In response to the disaster, England builds a wall around the country trying to block the spread of the disease. Years later when it appears signs of life have reappeared in Scotland, a crack team of doctors and soldiers are sent over the wall to investigate. What they discover is a gang of post-apocalyptic road punks that listen to Fine Young Cannibals while cooking someone for dinner, a feudal society run by Malcolm McDowell and a whole load of creative gore.



Lars pondered whether his Real Doll was worth it



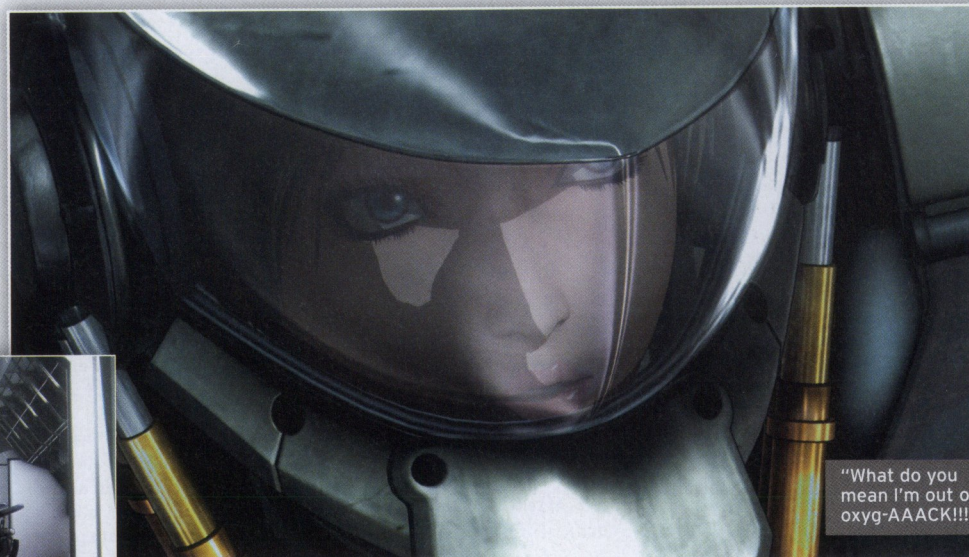
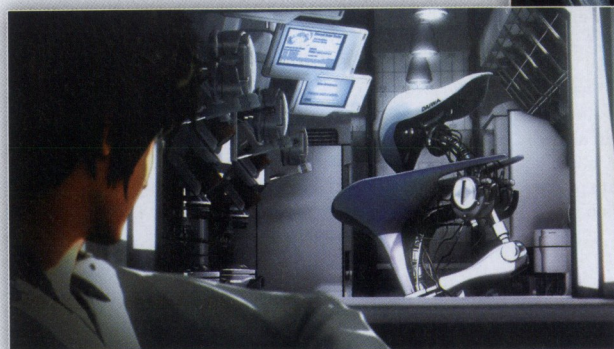
Unlike Marshall's previous films, *Dog Soldiers* and *The Descent*, there's nary any originality to be seen in *Doomsday* — the whole thing comes across as a homage to films the director loved as a kid. This, however, is probably the film's strongest point. It's made with so much love for B-movies that the balance between earnestness and tongue in cheek works a treat. Take it seriously and you may have problems — watch it to see the beautiful Rhona Mitra killing a load of people and drive a seemingly indestructible Bentley and you should have a blast.

FILM: 7 / EXTRAS: TBA

Vexille

MADMAN, M

In the near future, after discovering a revolutionary new robotics technology, Japan shuts itself off from the rest of the world. Ten years on and the world has all but forgotten about the secretive island nation until, during a routine police raid on a crime boss,



"What do you mean I'm out of oxyg-AAACK!!!"

heroine Vexille and her powered armour clad cohorts discover a technology that seamlessly blends robot technology and flesh. As a result Vexille is given

the mission to penetrate the barrier around Japan to discover exactly what is going on.

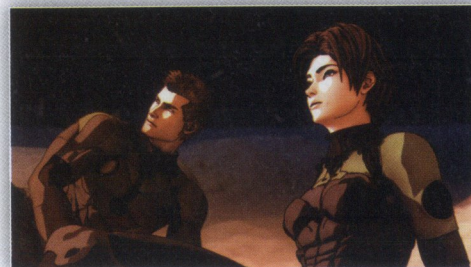
While the plot of *Vexille* certainly sounds pretty interesting, the actual film feels more like a retreading of familiar territory already covered effectively in *Ghost in the Shell* and pretty much every cyberpunk anime that came after — namely, what it is to be human.

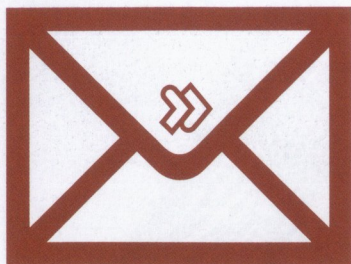
The visual style of *Vexille* is excellent for the most part, falling somewhere between

cel-shading and rotoscoping, leading to some incredibly impressive looking set pieces. Unfortunately the action scenes aren't nearly as exciting as they should be — most of the action scenes boil down to rather mundane gun fights or chases, and while they look great there's no real energy in them. The only real outstanding moment comes towards the climax when giant sandworm creatures formed from thousands of broken machines chase the heroes. These scenes have a visual inventiveness that hints at some real talent and the breathless pace missing for much of the rest of the film.

FILM: 6 / EXTRAS: 6

HYPER» 89





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freakscene@next.com.au

REMAKES, READERS AND RIDICULOUSNESS

Is anyone else looking forward to Square's upcoming DS/PSP remakes? After being treated to Crisis Core and the excellent The World Ends With You, we will soon have FFIV (DS), the highly-regarded remakes of Star Ocean 1 & 2 (PSP), all topped off with the subliminal Chrono Trigger (DS). Awesome.

I was also stoked to see the latter, together with FF6, FF9, Sonic 2, and Shadow of the Colossus, all making the reader's top 50. Sadly personal favourites including Resi 2, Okami, Shenmue, and Panzer Dragoon all miss out, but what really surprised me was the absence of fan favourites GTA and FF7. Is it really possible that neither of these gaming behemoths could even garner enough votes to make a top 50? Could it be that passionate fans of less recognised titles are just more motivated to write in and drum up support for their neglected favourites...?

Finally, I must commend you for your stance on the NDA from Konami / Atari (with MGS4). What a ridiculous concept! Do they really want to perpetuate a communist-style PR industry? Good on you for sticking to your guns and refusing, and getting the review anyway!

All the best and keep up the good work!

Richard, N.Z

The subliminal Chrono Trigger? The game that's played really really fast and leaves you with a sudden hankering for some fries? But we get your point: there are some great remakes available that are perfectly suited to the handheld consoles. It's great the publishers aren't just casting time-proven games aside as they march forth, but are instead putting time and money into re-developing them for new and old audiences alike

Regarding the Reader's Top 50, we were equally surprised to discover that the games you mention were both overlooked. They still received

their share of votes – Final Fantasy VII at #59 and the GTA series splattering throughout #53, #55, #73, #237 and #401 – but didn't manage to break into the top tier. Weird.

The overly-strict NDA issue is one that we (thankfully) haven't encountered since reviewing Metal Gear Solid 4, but rest assured that if we do, we'll be turning it down until we're able to review the game on our own terms.

MUNNEHZ?

Dear Hyper

Two month's ago, I quit the Online time whore of a game World of Warcraft. Cold turkey. After battling down the urges to play it for two month's I thought I had the game beaten when suddenly, One morning, BAM! Wrath of the Lich King beta activation code, straight to my email, comin' right at ya. And honestly, I don't know what to do. Two month's of hard work suddenly just went down the drain and I get hardcore urges to play. Do I A. Neglect my family and precious other consoles once again and take this one in a million chance to play the Beta or, B. Sell the activation code to a friend for RL MUNNEHZ and cry myself to bed everynight with a \$100 cheque sleeping silently under my pillow. Please oh wonderful and wise Hyper, Show me the way.

tankoticz

Just as you muster up the willpower to leave, they wrangle you back in. It's like a religion, or like quitting smoking but being enticed to take it up again after seeing an attractive swimsuit model holding a cigarette. If you want to give up World of Warcraft, then give up World of Warcraft. Don't let a few letters and numbers in an e-mail force you back to a game that you're looking to move away from. Just put the South Park episode "Make Love, Not Warcraft" on a continuous loop and enjoy some other games. Then when Wrath of the Lich King hits a retail release, see how it reviews and assess whether it's really worth dedicating more of your life to.

LEGEND OF ZZZZZZZ

Hey Hyper

I've been a fan of the Legend Of Zelda series since the SNES. These games are the only reason i continue to buy Nintendo systems. One thing that has annoyed me with the series is the story and gameplay. I feel the story lines are a really cheap and pathetic of Nintendo. They havn't developed the story



Feedback

winter_combat_knight:

That has got to be one of the coolest covers ive seen on Hyper. Well designed Malcolm!

Adios: Good issue so far! Never heard of Velvet Assassin until I read it in Hyper. Looks like it will tide me over in stealthy goodness until the release of SC: Conviction... should Conviction ever actually release.

JubeiSautome: So apparently I'm in one of the pics in the avcon article, playing rock band. Singing, no less.

the_watchers_eye: The game title 'Age of Booty' promised so much, and I was quite disappointed upon discovering it was about pirates.

SOX: I liked how subtle the spoiler was in the Braid review was. Rest of the magazine seems pretty good quality so far too.

bradlaw: Love the cover, looks really quite awesome. I really enjoyed reading the preview section of the magazine and it looked really nice. I didnt look much into eg this year through websites, so this area made for a great read to see all the games coming out in the near future.

Ad-Rock: Review are good, previews are good, design and layout are good, features are good, miscellaneous articles are good.

Good job.

Good.

since... probably A link to the Past. And when they did try something original like in Majoras Mask and Wind Waker, they went back to the same old gameplay with Twilight Princess. Twilight Princess, was a fun game, but it really felt like Nintendo took the franchise a step backwards becoming more like a re-make of Ocarina of Time. Really it was the same game. If another company did this, it would not be acceptable. At the moment, it doesn't look like the series is going to change any time soon. And new Wii controls isn't enough either. I think someone needs to step in, take over the direction of the series and do a complete re-boot of the franchise, with a new game engine, new gameplay and of course an interesting storyline and new cast of characters. Zelda needs to change. This series is really getting old. What do you guys think?

Anthony McKeown

We agree. The Zelda games are fun – we'll admit we're partial to Phantom Hourglass and Twilight Princess – but when you take each element apart and look at it separately, the sameness begins to show. Dungeons, mystical items, swords, rupees, more dungeons... where's the sense of wonder? A reboot with a focus on true exploration might be what the series needs, but then again, change it too much and it's no longer Zelda. It's a delicate balancing act, but it was achieved with Metroid Prime, a game that made the series fresh again. We'd like to see a similar feat at least attempted with Zelda.

FATTY FATTY FAT FAT

I am writing regarding the game featured in your last edition of Hyper, which was 'Fat Princess.'

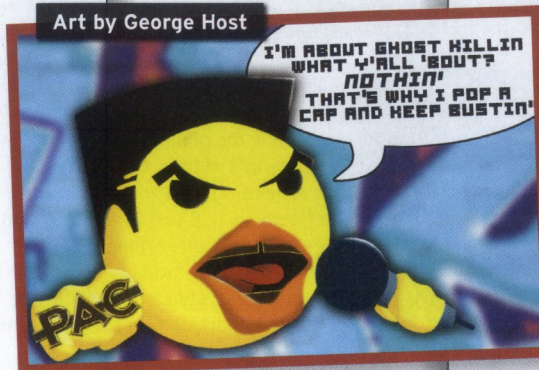
I am what you would probably call a larger gentleman and let me tell you now, life isn't all roses when you are a bit different. Everyday is a struggle to be taken seriously. Oh look, they say, here comes a tubby old boy (I am 14) and then they just nod and smile when I say things, I don't think they even know what I am saying they are just trying not to laugh. I have chronic asthma for chrissake.

So, games like this make my life far more difficult. Oh, here is a good idea, let's make a game teasing larger people, and feed them up so no-one can take them away, like good lumps. Yeah, hahahaha, that is really funny.

Get a life Nintendo. Screw you. Big people rock. I'm out.

Jeremy Pencil

Art by George Host



You could see the game as a platform for making fun of fat people, or you could look at it as a post-modern twist on the classic "princess in danger" device that games have used for years. The princess is not a MacGuffin, she's the central game mechanic. She's not a classically-drawn glamorous stick figure, she has a fuller figure. She's not the object of rescue, but the object of imprisonment. Perhaps more games should give the conventions of game design a similar shake now and then.

15 YEARS OF GAMING

Greetings,

I have been meaning to write to the magazine since I started reading it, many many years ago. The first letter I started writing (when I was about 13) was inspired by my discovery of downloadable computer pranks. You could download some "funny" ones which would send you mouse haywire, or pretend to crash the computer etc. But for some reason I never sent it. The second such letter I began was after the first time I played a PS2, just after their release. I was amazed at the power and graphical capabilities of the machine. Again I never got around to sending it. The Console Wars (last generation) spawned an idea for another letter, but that one never left my skull... I subscribed for a year and planned to correspond regularly, but then I got my first serious girlfriend and that went down the drain. When I found the Hyperactive Forum (in '06) I was going to send you an email about how much fun it was, but I got distracted by university and stopped posting there for a couple of years. Now I am finally writing this letter about the times I was going to write or did write, but never sent. OK, finally have an idea for an actual letter: the previous 15 years of gaming from my perspective.

Musings on my past 15 years of gaming. I had a Nintendo Entertainment System. It was from this machine that my gaming passion grew. Super Mario Bros 3 was the first game I owned. I used to love going to my 22 year old cousins house because he had Double Dragon 2 and Wrestling. My grandmother had Duck Hunt (with the gun) and Zelda, amongst other games. My other cousins had a Sega Mastersystem II with California Games and Alex the Kidd. My unclce had a Mac with Ra and Centipede. My grandfathers had PCs; one had Wolfenstein 3D and Commander Keen; the other

Forum Talk

TOPIC: The Bunk Couch - The Future Is NOW!



Aranchined

etnlleaurus: Economy class sitters may be pelted with crumbs and bodily fluid by their superiors.

Ghazrat: I heartily endorse this product and/or event.

FX-GTZ: Oh god... What if a fat person sat on the top, and the he farted... Im scared of this couch, what if you sit on the top, and the ceiling fan is like, 2 cm away from cutting your face!

Scary... Especially if a child was being a dickhead on the top couch.

the_watchers_eye: But clearly the bottom couch is for the losers. I mean, who wants feet dangling in their face?

Cerebral: I'm stealing this idea for my Uni New Venture Business proposal. Do you have any more references/pie charts?

Aranchined: I would need to recall my R&D team from that 10 week Bali trip I sent them on, but I believe we could come to a suitable arrangement in regards to your graphing and referencing needs at this time.

Stevo: I'll take 12!

Art by Otaku Da



CAPTION THIS!

It was a slow month of entries (mainly due to our e-mail address being down - sorry!), but Jake Williams snuck in with...



When Pull My Finger meets dramatic opera, the results are, shall we say, interesting.

had a bunch of DOS games, like Joust and some fly swatting game. Living in a tourist location, we had a local arcade with loads of awesome video games, slot cars, pinball machines, other ticket winning machines (such a ripoff!), indoor dodgem cars, and another ride called the Sizzler. Some of my greatest memories are from there. When I returned to the town 2 years ago it had been replaced with a Timezone, it was heartbreaking all my beloved oldschool arcade machines had been replaced by new shit kiddie games, and other flash gimmicks. I must have been about 10 or 11 when my best mate got a PlayStation. He had the Tekken 2 demo and Jumping Jack Flash. Awesome times. Another friend got a N64 shortly after, Mario 64 was mindblowing! Metal Gear Solid and FFVII were literally breathtaking. Golden Eye was the greatest of multiplayer games, until Perferct Dark was released,

weekend after weekend of my childhood zipped past with those games. Getting my first PlayStation one Christmas morning was a true delight; looking back I wonder how Mum and Dad managed to afford one... I remember my first PS2 experience, it was a 24hour affair, as we paid \$20 to hire it for one night. Every afternoon after school, my mates and I would walk down town to K-Mart to play their X-Box. It was to be my next console a couple of years after its release (I was about 17 years old at the time). My (N64) friend and I hooked it up and played Brute Force for ages. The graphics were outstanding, the

controls precise. Let's not forget the Dreamcast! Another friend of mine had one straight after its release never played it much, apart from Crazy Taxi. The Gamecube was lots of fun: Smash Bros, Metroid, Zelda, Rogue Squadron all occupied a large chunk of my HSC preparation. I discovered the potential of PC gaming when I got my first PC in 2004; I had been missing out. Civ III and Unreal Tournament are directly responsible for my under-performance in year 12 (WoW is currently in line to recieve the blame if my Honours goes awry!). The Wii has received most of my attention this "generation". I have spent about 10 hours on a PS3, not that impressive so far and I haven't even seen an X-Box 360 in action. I just bought myself a PS2 last month. There are so many games on X-Box and PS2 that I haven't got around to playing; the past is my future of gaming for the next year or two - then I might get one of the current consoles... Throughout my gaming adventures (since 1998) I have always had the latest issue of Hyper to guide me along the way.

This is all pretty boring for someone who isn't me, but I have enjoyed reminiscing and the (obvious) nostalgia that comes with it. I realise this is way too long to publish (if it is even worth publishing), but it has taken my so many years to get around to writing it that it was bound to be a lengthy exercise.

Thanks for reading it,
Ad-Rock

There's certainly been a lot of great games throughout the last 15 years. Bring on the next 15, but don't wait that long before writing in again, Ad-Rock - share the memories and thoughts as they happen!

Ninjabread Man

Nintendo Wii • 2007 (PS2 in 2006) • Developed and Published by Data Design Interactive » James O'Connor

Visit your local JB Hi-Fi, Game, EB, or wherever else you can find second-hand games. Search through the stacks of Wii games and try not to collapse, screaming and convulsing with fear and rage, at the purchases people have evidently been making. Data Design Interactive, in particular, have turned a tidy little profit on their shovelware, cramming it into the game box directly out of the horse's arse that excretes their every new release. They've already managed to infect the Wii with eighteen different samples of digital cancer. On these searches through the pre-owned shame bins, I can't help but notice that there's one title that keeps popping up, time and time again, a game that evidently people have actually been spending real, genuine money on: Ninjabread Man. This is a game that has done well enough to actually warrant the production of a sequel, and I won't stand for it. No more, Data Design Interactive. No more.

TAKE A FLYING F*** AT A ROLLING DONUT

Released originally as a budget piece of PS2 shovelware before being ported to the Wii years later at a higher price, Ninjabread Man is the cheapest of the cheap. Taking less than an hour to complete and featuring graphics on par with a fifth grade Powerpoint presentation about the erosion of sedimentary rocks, this is a game that has sold largely on the quality of its title pun. This is baffling, because there is actually nothing funny about the title 'Ninjabread Man'. If Gran Turismo had been called 'Wheely Good', it would not have sold nearly as well. The plot is about a gingerbread man who needs to kill a bunch of evil cakes and activate teleporters for some reason. I don't know. Featuring four 'action-packed' levels and a handful of different enemies, Ninjabread Man feels like the rushed product of a slave labour camp. The game credits make sure to thank the team for all their hard work, which I can only assume means they all work as full-time shoe cobblers on the side because there isn't a lick of effort across this entire production.

The camera comes very close to rendering the game unplayable. It has a habit of rotating around you unendingly, always twirling, twirling, twirling towards crisis point. Of course, being physically unable to play the game would

have been a blessing, but it tends to right itself just as the downtrodden writer feels he might be able to turn off his Wii and hurl it into the nearest open fire. Controls...well, it's a shitty Wii game, how much more do I need to say? Sword slashes require such a specific motion and so rarely register that most players will take to using their ninja death-stars, or gumdrops, or whatever it is Ninjabread Man is throwing exactly, to take down enemies from afar. This

It's upsetting to think that there are young children out there who would be lured in by the pretty pictures and 'humorous' title

is done by aiming the remote at the screen to lock onto enemies, which feels unexpectedly intuitive at first, until you stop and realise that you're shooting barely animated cakes from a great distance by hammering the B trigger. Jumping, a key part of any platforming game, doesn't really work here either. Ninjabread Man seems to get himself snagged on ledges, which he cannot grasp onto, and has an odd sense of weight. Running and walking is just barely analogue, meaning the one section of the game that requires you to walk results in about seventeen of gaming's most awful seconds as you struggle in vain to slow down. The main star's a charmless little bastard too, considering the character is the singular appeal that attracted people to this shameful trash in the first place. Some voice acting wouldn't have gone astray, no matter how squeaky and unrehearsed it inevitably would have been.

YOU CAN'T HAVE CAKE; EAT IT TOO

The actual objective of the game is to collect all the teleporter pod things in any given level to activate the teleporter to the next level. So basically, following an on-screen arrow until the game finishes. There are only three levels, not including the training section, with the developers trying to add longevity by adding modes where you have to collect a bunch of extra shit, or collect shit extra fast, if that grabs you. If anything, these modes just take a traumatic experience and make it worse, like eating a poisoned steak then cutting off your own dick for dessert. Positives? The game didn't completely ruin gingerbread for me. And if you

derive some kind of bizarre sexual pleasure from smashing up cakes, you might find something to like here. That's really about it. We all know the Wii is host to a lot of shit, but Ninjabread Man sets a worrying precedent for just how shit you can make your game and still have it sell. Also worth noting is that the gameplay on offer here is practically identical to a few other games to come out of DDI, such as 'Anubis II' and 'Rock N Roll Adventures'. I didn't track down these

other titles and play them through (don't judge me), but from all accounts, Ninjabread Man is the worst one of the lot. Aside from this, DDI have also released a series of sports and racing games that

are basically reskinned versions of the same game, possibly to appease some sort of Dark Lord the company have taken to worshipping. It's upsetting to think that there are young children out there who would be lured in by the pretty pictures and 'humorous' title on this, gaming's Stranger With Candy, over something like Super Mario Galaxy, which clocks in at twice the price but well over a thousand times the entertainment value.

So run, run away, as fast as you can. You don't want to play with the Ninjabread Man. ☹

a hotdog monster that shoots its sausage
Comment by jake 07.02.08 @ 4:16 pm

I have the perfect idea for Ninjabread Man 2:

- A. Cease development immediately.
- B. Close down your studios forever.

Comment by Jickle 07.29.08 @ 10:03 am

CHILD LABOUR: CHEAP AND EFFECTIVE

Ninjabread Man 2: Blades of Fury looks to take everything that was bad about Ninjabread Man and force it down people's throats until they choke. To celebrate their undeserved success, DDI have decided to host a competition on their website (www.ddi-games.com/ninjabreadman), allowing the players to submit their own ideas for the sequel. Highlights so far include 'a big hot dog cat' and 'a coconut what calls 100 rats'. The competition has been running since the game came out late last year, but if you've taken anything out of this article, you'll never know what exactly makes it into the final game.





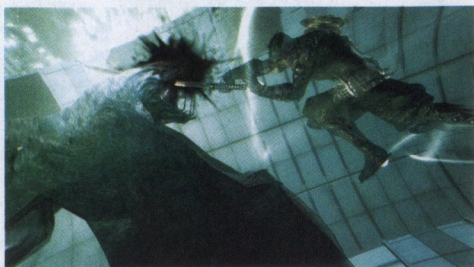


LAND OF THE RISING FUN

Jonti Davies on games and life in Japan.



I never thought I'd see the day, but Microsoft Japan's recent work with the Xbox 360 has resulted in something like a glimmer of hope for the format in this territory. Specifically, MS Japan revealed at its Media Briefing 2008 shindig in Tokyo (held at the beginning of September) that Japan would be getting a new 60GB SKU - a bargain at 29,800yen - and that it would be cutting the prices of the other existing models quite significantly, with the Arcade pack undercutting even the Wii at just 19,800yen. Plus, a new approach to promoting



the Xbox 360 brand has been drawn up, centred on a slogan that goes "Susume, wakuwaku! Xbox 360", which I would translate roughly as "Go on, be excited! Xbox 360". This is a clear improvement on MS Japan's old 360-pushing marketing lines - things like "Do! Do! Do!" and the left-as-English "Jump in". Perhaps people here will now begin to understand what the hell Microsoft Japan is trying to say...

All of these changes took effect on September 11th, which also happens to be the Japanese release date of SquareEnix' Infinite Undiscovery, a title that has done excellent business in this part of the world. Beyond that, another new homegrown title in From Software's Ninja Blade was shown off at the Media Briefing and will be playable at the Tokyo Game Show (and I'll be there on Hyper's behalf, so you can expect some hands-on impressions in the near future).

Tomonobu Itagaki and his Team NINJA had been key supporters of the Xbox and Xbox 360 in Japan, so it makes sense for Microsoft to promote a game that has visceral and thematic qualities similar to those of the now-dormant Ninja Gaiden series. Surprisingly, although Ninja Blade is a From Software game, the project is being overseen by the lead designer of Capcom's Lost Planet while the soundtrack is being composed by the guy who worked on Metal Gear Solid 3's music. So it's not just a me-too ninja game - it has real development pedigree. Ninja Blade won't be released in Japan until some time next year, but it's already looking quite promising.

I think Microsoft still needs more games of this ilk to really tip the balance in Japan, but for the past



The 360 is gaining ground in Japan! In other news, cats and dogs declare truce, world ends

couple of months the only Xbox 360 news in Japan has been positive news: (moderately) increased sales, the success of Tales of Vesperia, the imminent release of Infinite Undiscovery (which, remember, is for now a 360-exclusive), and the price cuts and change of marketing tack. A good showing at TGS will be crucial to build on all of this promise, and I'm sure Microsoft Japan is capable of delivering there - even in past years, the Xbox 360 booth has been inordinately popular with show-goers considering the relatively limited success of the machine at retail in Japan. All will be revealed next month; for now, it's time to enjoy some Undiscovery...

COLLECTIONS

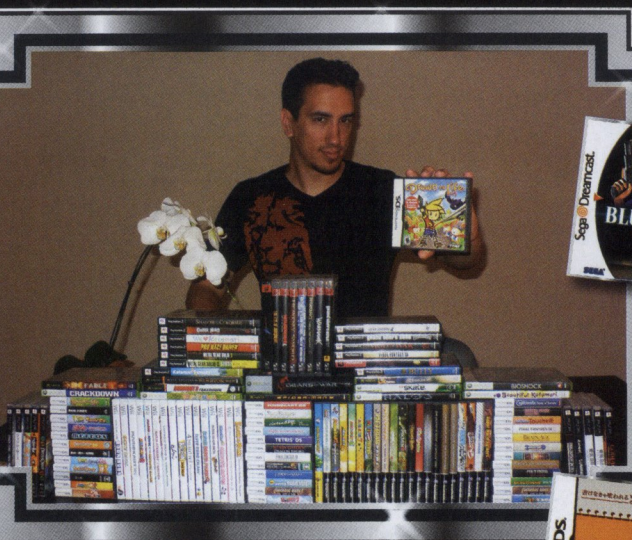
BY ERIN MARCON

Drawn to Life was not only a surprise hit on the Nintendo DS, it was widely regarded as one of 2007's most original releases. Encouraging players to sketch their own characters, tools and environments, Drawn to Life was also the game that announced creator/director Jeremiah Slaczka to the broader gaming community. He was kind enough to take us through some of the games that have influenced his evolution as a games developer.

Though his studio initially specialised in mobile phone games, Slaczka always kept an eye on the industry's blockbusters, particularly those with innovative storylines or gameplay. Slaczka dipped into his collection for a couple of examples. The first was 2004's most celebrated PC shooter. "Half-Life 2 is my benchmark for pacing a game," he said.

"Valve does an excellent job of cutting up the gameplay so it's always interesting. It's what makes Valve games amazing - there's always new stuff to do - story, exploration, puzzle, vehicle, skirmish, rest, boss and then repeat with new content! It taught me a lot. And with each episode this gets better!"

The second game Slaczka cites as an influence was Metal Gear Solid, Konami's influential stealth action title for the original PlayStation. "Metal Gear Solid was a truly incredible experience for me," he said.



"...and you can get all this if you call within the next fifteen minutes!"

"The integration of story and unique gameplay made me a rabid fanboy of the game. The amount of content in it was staggering for its time."

As a gamer, Slaczka casts a wide net, refusing to focus solely on the big names and popular genres. For instance, he described himself as a keen follower of the "indie and mod scene for games. I love the creativity people can put into a product when there's no pressure behind them to profit from it."

Though he conceded a mild aversion to sports games ("I'd rather be out playing the sport"), his collection is as diverse as it is large.

"As a designer I love to try things out that people are talking about regardless of the genre," he said.

"I have a ton of DS games." Why did this platform receive the most attention? "Mostly for research purposes," he said, "since 5TH Cell's main focus on its past few titles have been for the DS."

Slaczka's collection has recently swelled to approximately 300 titles but like many of our Collections interviewees, he expressed his dismay at having parted with some of his treasures. "I sold all of my legacy stuff when I was younger," he said.

"I should have never done that." We would like to thank Jeremiah Slaczka for participating in this month's Collections.

Cataloguing the Classics
Check out this random assortment from Slaczka's collection. Note the multiple entries from the House of the Dead franchise.

1. Blue Stinger

This surprisingly colourful survival horror from Climax Graphics arrived on the Dreamcast in 1999. The original Japanese camera system was completely overhauled prior to international release.

2. Bushido Blade

A weapon-based 3D fighter for the original PlayStation, this 1997 release from Light Weight was praised for its realism. One hit kills? You bet.

3. English of the Dead

Learning a new language is difficult at the best of times. Throw the undead into the mix and it's downright dangerous. One of 2008's most bizarre titles, this DS outing from SEGA is (sadly) unavailable in Australia.

4. Knytt Stories

This charming indie platform adventure emerged from Umea, Sweden in 2007. The main game has already been supported with three expansion packs.

5. Mag Kid: Slide Adventure

This 2007 DS release from Agenda casts players in the role of a fridge magnet. Just let that sink in for a moment.

6. Space Giraffe

Llamasoft's neon dream arrived on the XBLA in 2007. This unapologetically hardcore shooter is not for the faint of heart (or weak of stomach).

7. Super Mario Bros. The Lost Levels

Issued in Japan as Super Mario Bros. 2, Nintendo's 1986 NES platformer is currently available to Western audiences on the Wii Virtual console.

8. Theta

Unreleased in the West, Vitei's DS puzzle anthology (if two games can be called an anthology) was released in 2007.

9. Typing of the Dead

An offshoot of SEGA's House of the Dead light-gun franchise, this typing tutorial became a cult hit on the Dreamcast in 2001.

10. Viva Piñata

Among the most aesthetically pleasing Xbox 360 titles on the market, this 2006 release from Rare brought animal husbandry to the masses.

Meet Jeremiah Slaczka

Jeremiah Slaczka is the Creative Director of 5th Cell. This innovative Washington-based studio was, along with publisher THQ, responsible for the DS hit, Drawn to Life. Slaczka's next project, due for release in September 2008, is also a DS exclusive. "Lock's Quest is what we're calling an arcade-strategy game for the Nintendo DS," he said.

"The game is purely stylus driven and is split up into two modes, Build and Battle. In Build Mode you have a short amount of time to set up defences around an objective by placing walls, turrets and traps with your stylus. In Battle Mode you take control of the hero Lock and run around the map defending it from an army of clockwork invaders by working with your defences to fight the enemies and repairing your building."





THE PASSION OF THE GAMER

DYLAN BURNS

Does Size Matter?

I've got a big one. Mansion, I mean. A massive inherited estate that has been passed down from Gameboffin to Gameboffin for hundreds of years. In fact, my great grandfather - Brutus Gameboffin IV (or Bruty as we called him affectionately) - introduced an interesting stipulation to his will just before he died in a horrible accident involving a donkey and a half-yard glass.

Bruty came to electronic games late in his life, but so readily did he carry out our namesake (investigating the minutiae of all gaming matters) that you could almost say I drew inspiration from the old bugger. It was Bruty's dying wish that his estate be passed on to each Gameboffin who wished to devote his life's work (pfft, as if girls could do this job!) to analysing games. Relatives would always be welcome here - and indeed we hold an annual Boffinalooza, where local folk bands gather and perform for our family's pleasure - but the estate itself would belong to the family member most willing to devote himself completely to gaming. In this way, he can be provided for (via a nice inheritance) and need not be distracted from his extremely important mission.

Being the current resident Gameboffin, I proudly carry on Bruty's legacy. I am gifted with many hours of solitude in which to ponder this and that regarding games. So the other day something occurred to me. What about the poor, unfortunate plebs who do not have the gift of free time that I so joyfully revel in? So willing am I to sink countless hours into every game that I rarely wonder what it's like for someone who only has a spare few hours every weekend. It could be argued that those paltry hours are incredibly valuable to such souls - providing an escape from the depressing monotony that is everyday life.

It makes you wonder whether there will be a market for epic, 40 hour-plus games in the future

This then got me to thinking about game design. Obviously, the length of time a game takes to complete is somewhat related to the price that we pay. When you're shelling out \$100 there better be at least thirty hours of gameplay in that bastard, as well as packaging that includes a shoddy looking art book and even shoddier plastic model of the main protagonist that will inevitably sit next to your monitor until the poor guy suffocates from a thick layer of dust - otherwise what the heck are we paying for? Oh, that's right; we're paying to feed the families of the four hundred employees who worked on the project for several years.

However, with 'casual' gaming ostensibly representing the largest slice of the gaming retail pie, I'm left wondering if perhaps developers won't start changing the ways in which they approach things. Episodic titles are perhaps the most apparent representation of bite-sized, casual gaming, but they've never really taken off - or more accurately Valve lied when they said we'd be playing a new Half Life 2 Episode every six months. It's obvious that developers have no idea how to do episodic gaming properly. Do you try and impress with a long-ish short game or do you actually bite the bullet and make a tiny game for a much smaller selling price?

Sure, the other developers might laugh and smirk a little bit when you reveal just how small

your new game is, but perhaps those smirks will transform into horrified, aghast stares as you sell a bazillion copies of the thing.

So how small is too small? How short does a game get before it simply has no chance of satisfying any gamer? At the risk of going against everything I've ever said, I'd actually be happy with a game that is only a few hours long - as long as that experience is as rich and satisfying as a full-priced game for those few hours. By that I mean that the content needs to be there; it needs to feel like a small slice of a larger gaming universe. Obviously, there'd also need to be the promise of future installments in such a series to warrant my interest.

Still, with some full priced games only offering around ten hours of gameplay, it makes you wonder whether there will be a market for epic, 40 hour-plus games in the future. I absolutely love massive, immersive games as much as the next geek manboy, but the success of the Wii - which has, like, no actual games - makes you wonder about which direction developers will go. The cynic in me says 'where the money is' which just serves to worry me further.

What the existence of the HL2 Episodes has shown us is that on the development side of the fence there simply isn't this ability to pop out short, snappy and (more importantly) content rich gaming episodes with reliable regularity. A look at the film industry might serve as an example of how it could be done: the Lord of the Rings trilogy was filmed as one big story, then cut up into separate films. Unfortunately, if games tried something like this, not only would we see ten year (or even longer) development periods, it simply wouldn't be feasible to invest in such a large effort if games ended up looking old and dated on release.

Publishers need that sweet, sweet lucre rolling in regularly. The risk is simply too massive. What we'd likely end up with is something akin to the Star Wars prequels, three films that are so disparate, quality wise and in terms of the time between them, as to effectively ruin continuity.

I guess I should throw the question to you, the reader, as it is the buying public that has a small hope of influencing the game industry, assuming they all act in unison and at the same time (yeah, no chance really). Do you have the time these days to get stuck into a massive gaming adventure or do you find yourself craving a smaller, more satisfying experience? Does size matter or is it more important to have a quality title, regardless of its length?

Yes, I think Bruty would be proud of me this month. Not only have I managed to write a thousand words of meaningless drivel, but right at the end there I pretty much threw the onus onto the reader. You taught me well, old chap!

Episodic gaming: don't leave us hanging!



gameboffin@hotmail.com



GAMES WANK: AN EXERCISE IN OVER-ANALYSIS

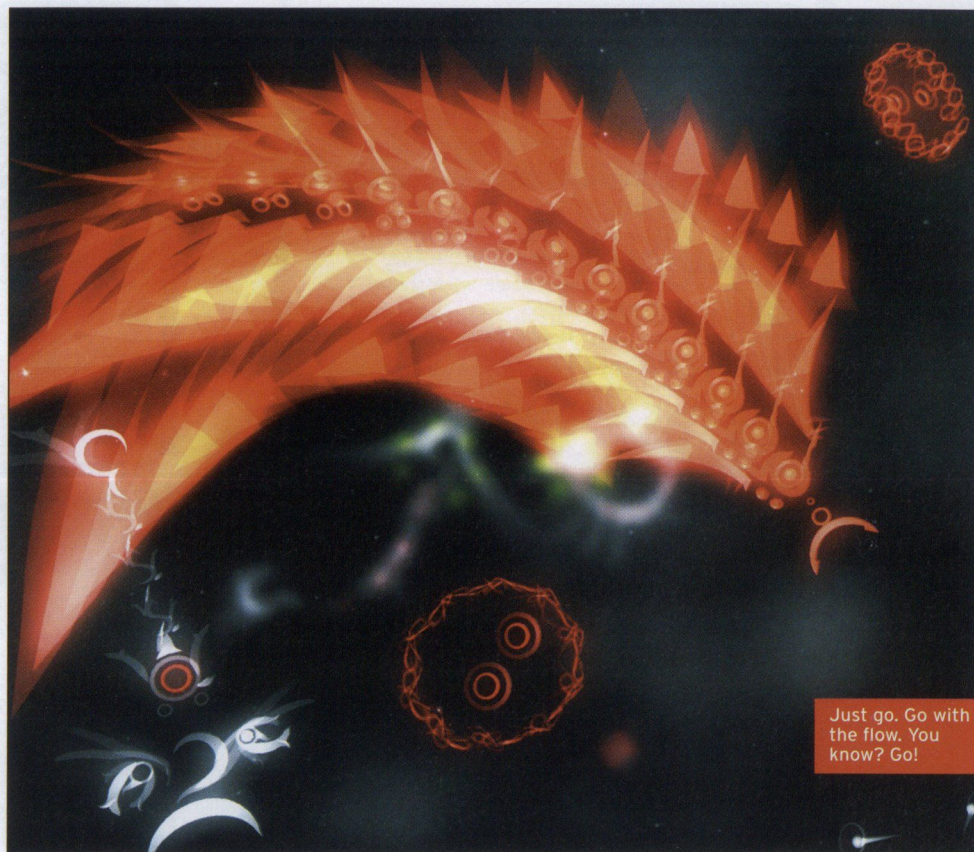
ELEANOR EIFFE

Flow: How Games Make Us Happy

Think back to the last time you really lost yourself in a game. One of those times when you were so completely absorbed that the world beyond the screen ceased to exist. When ten minutes became four hours without you really noticing. No doubt you were concentrating intensely on your actions in the game, yet your efforts didn't feel like hard work. You became less conscious of the controller in your hands or your fingers on the mouse and keyboard. Everything that happened on screen seemed to be a direct extension of your will. You felt a sense of mastery, of accomplishment, of mental clarity in the face of any challenge. You might say you were "in the zone". Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced chick-SENT-me-high) would say you were in a state of "flow". It's a mental state that videogames are very good at producing.

While flow theory was originally inspired by the state of creative ecstasy often experienced by artists and musicians, you'd be forgiven for thinking the idea was developed with videogames in mind. Any activity can get you into a state of flow, as long as it provides the following: clear goals and rules (shoot all the aliens and get to end of the level), a way to control the experience (move with the D-pad, press A to jump), and clear information on how well you're doing (100 points!). Flow happens when you invest all of your attention in a single task. For this reason, you're much more likely to experience flow playing a game than indulging in a more passive form of recreation like say, watching TV or listening to music. (Not that those activities can't lead to flow, but it will require more effort on the part of the viewer/listener to get it happening). Games demand attention because they require input from the player. You need to follow what's happening on screen and think about how to respond to it appropriately. It's the very "gameyness" of games that makes them so conducive to flow.

Flow is a state of intense focus. A flow activity should keep you interested, but not overwhelmed. This is why it's so important that game designers get the difficulty right. If a game is too easy, you'll be bored; too hard, and you'll be frustrated. A flow activity needs to provide a challenge that's balanced against your (perceived) skills. That's why the über-hardcore complain so loudly when they think the sequel to their favourite game has been dumbed down for the masses, or why your non-gaming girlfriend "just can't get into" your favourite pastime. If someone's gaming skills are too high or too low for a given game, they're not going to experience flow with it. Multiple difficulty settings can do a lot to alleviate this problem. Game designers also need to take into account that a player's skills are going to improve as they spend more time with a game. Most games get more difficult as they progress. Keeping a player in flow depends



Just go. Go with the flow. You know? Go!

on offering new challenges that are in step with the player's advancing abilities. The best games get the difficulty curve just right.

Flow is what separates good games from bad. It's why review scores tend to correlate more closely with the number assigned to "Gameplay" than those for "Visuals" or "Sound". High production values do not an outstanding game make. Pretty graphics, a stirring soundtrack or an exciting storyline can all add to our enjoyment of a game, but from a flow perspective, they're largely irrelevant. Whether or not a game succeeds in its mission of entertaining you depends on how well it can draw you into a flow state and keep you there. When games are frustrating, it's often because they're doing something that gets in the way of the flow experience. Don't know which town to visit next? The goals of the game aren't clear. NPC

Keeping a player in flow depends on offering challenges that are in step with the player's abilities

keeps killing itself on an escort mission? Success or failure is no longer within your control. Can't tell if you're hurting the boss or just making him angry? Inadequate feedback. Bad games break the "flow rules" all the time. Good games - the ones that capture your attention and keep you playing way past your bedtime - are very efficient flow generators.

One defining characteristic of flow activities is that they're intrinsically motivating. We do them for the sake of it. Unless you're a cyber-athlete or a gold farmer, playing games isn't going to help you reach any concrete, external goals. Most of us play games simply because we like playing games. They're fun. Are they just a pointless waste of time, then? Would we be better off investing our time and attention into something more useful? In his 1992 book, called - funnily enough - "Flow", Csikszentmihalyi proposes that a person's overall level of happiness relates to the frequency and intensity with which he or she experiences flow. As opposed to simple pleasures like food, sex or sleeping in, which satisfy our immediate needs, flow leads to a more rewarding, longer-lasting kind of happiness. So don't feel guilty next time you spend the better part of a weekend immersed in a good game. Think of it an investment in your quality of life.

THE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN GAMES CHART

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP
10

PlayStation 2 Games Over \$30

W/E 7th September
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ▲ Guitar Hero 3 Limited Ed Family
- 2 ◆ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 Sports
- 3 ▼ Singstar Amped (S/W Only) Family
- 4 ● Wall-E Adventure
- 5 ▼ Madden NFL 2009 Sports
- 6 ▲ GH Aerosmith (S/W) Family
- 7 ▲ Smackdown Vs Raw 08 Ptm Fighting
- 8 ▲ The Mummy Tomb Dragon Action
- 9 ▲ Fifa 2008 Sports
- 10 ▲ Lego Indiana Jones: Original Adventure

TOP
10

Nintendo DS Games Over \$30

W/E 7th September
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ▲ Brain Training Family
- 2 ▲ More Brain Training Family
- 3 ▼ Mario Kart Racing
- 4 ▲ Guitar Hero: On Tour Bundle Family
- 5 ● Barbie Island Princess Childrens
- 6 ▲ Big Brain Academy Family
- 7 ▲ Carnival Games Family
- 8 ▼ Cooking Guide Can't Decide Family
- 9 ▼ Crosswords Family
- 10 ▼ Kageyamas Maths Training Family

TOP
10

Nintendo Wii Games Over \$50

W/E 7th September
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ Wii Fit Family
- 2 ◆ Wii Play W/ Remote Family
- 3 ◆ Mario Kart W/ Wheel Racing
- 4 ▲ Super Smash Bros Brawl Fighting
- 5 ▲ Mario & Sonic At Olympics Sports
- 6 ▲ Guitar Hero 3 Double Pack Family
- 7 ▲ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 Sports
- 8 ▲ Mario Party 8 Family
- 9 ▲ Super Mario Galaxy Action
- 10 ▼ Top Spin 3 Sports

TOP
10

Playstation 3 Games Over \$60

W/E 7th September
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2009 Sports
- 2 ◆ Grand Theft Auto Iv Action
- 3 ◆ Beijing Olympics 2008 Sports
- 4 ◆ Buzz Quiz Tv Bundle Family
- 5 ◆ Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Action
- 6 ◆ Gran Turismo 5 Prologue Racing
- 7 ▲ Battlefield Bad Company Shooter
- 8 ▼ Race Driver Grid Racing
- 9 ▲ Guitar Hero 3 Limited Ed Family
- 10 ▼ Soul Calibur Iv Fighting

TOP
10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 7th September
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ● Spore Simulation
- 2 ▼ The Sims 2 Apartment Life Simulation
- 3 ● Stalker: Clear Sky Shooter
- 4 ◆ Call Of Duty 4: Modern Shooter
- 5 ▼ World Of Warcraft Role-Playing
- 6 ▼ WOW Battlechest Role-Playing
- 7 ▼ WOW Burning Crusade Role-Playing
- 8 ▼ The Sims 2 Ikea Stuff Simulation
- 9 ▼ The Sims 2 Simulation
- 10 ▲ Age Of Empires 3 Asian Strategy

TOP
10

Xbox 360 Games Over \$50

W/E 7th September
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ Too Human Role-Playing
- 2 ◆ Beijing Olympics 2008 Sports Games
- 3 ▲ Battlefield Bad Company Shooter
- 4 ▲ Guitar Hero 3 Limited Ed Family
- 5 ◆ Grand Theft Auto Iv Action
- 6 ▼ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2009 Sports Games
- 7 ● Infinite Undiscovery Role-Playing
- 8 ▲ Assassins Creed Action
- 9 ▲ Halo 3 Shooter
- 10 ▼ Soul Calibur Iv Fighting

TOP
10

All Format Games Over \$50

W/E 7th September
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ Wii Fit Nintendo Wii
- 2 ● Spore PC/MAC
- 3 ▼ Wii Play W/ Remote Nintendo Wii
- 4 ▲ Mario Kart W/ Wheel Nintendo Wii
- 5 ▼ Brain Training Nintendo DS
- 6 ▲ Super Smash Bros Brawl Nintendo Wii
- 7 ▲ Mario & Sonic At Olympics Nintendo Wii
- 8 ▲ The Sims 2 Apartment Life PC/MAC
- 9 ▲ More Brain Training Nintendo DS
- 10 ▲ Guitar Hero 3 Double Pack Nintendo Wii

TOP
10

PlayStation Portable Games Over \$40

W/E 7th September
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ Secret Agent Clank Adventure
- 2 ◆ Buzz Master Quiz Family
- 3 ▲ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09 Sports
- 4 ● Wall-E Adventure
- 5 ▼ God Of War: Chains Action
- 6 ▼ Final Fantasy VII Crisis Core Role-Playing
- 7 ◆ Madden NFL 2009 Sports
- 8 ▲ Fifa 2008 Sports
- 9 ▼ GTA: Liberty City Stories Ptm Action
- 10 ▲ Need For Speed Pro Street Racing

- ★ New Entry
- ◆ Non Mover
- ▲ Up from last week
- ▼ Down from last week



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NEXT ISSUE: Tokyo Game Show!

Prince of Persia, Fable 2, Christmas Gift Guide, Wrath of the Lich King, Warhammer Online

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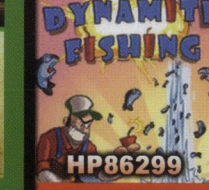
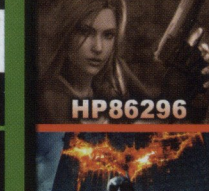
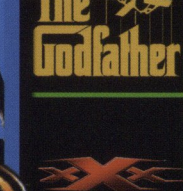
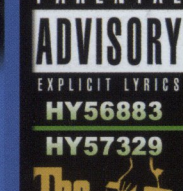
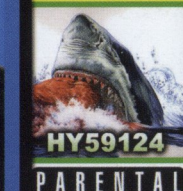
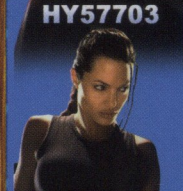
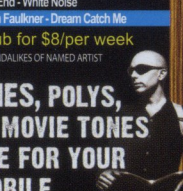
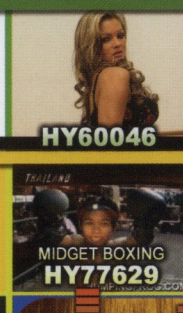
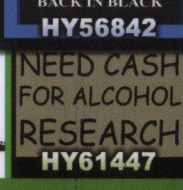
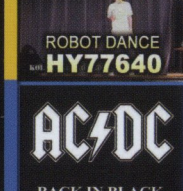
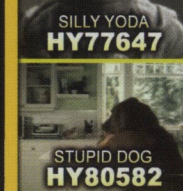
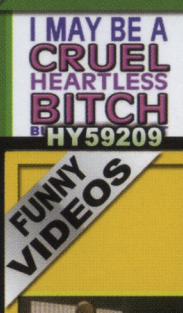
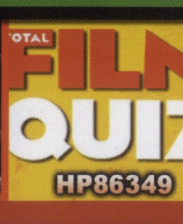
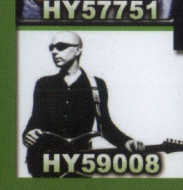
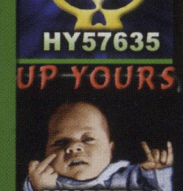
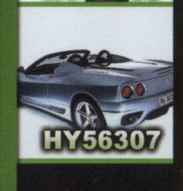
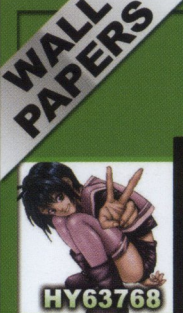
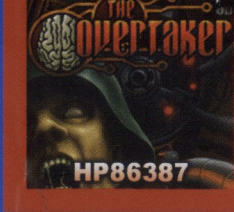
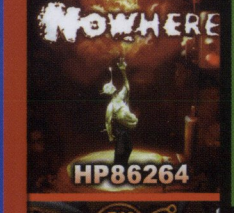
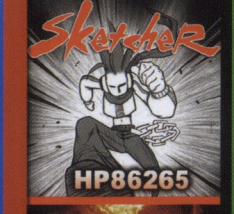
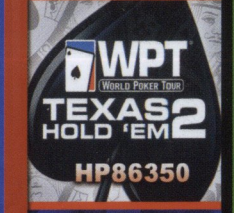
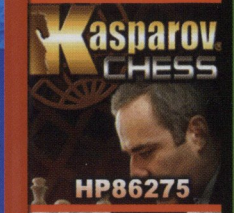
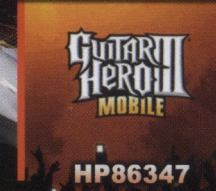
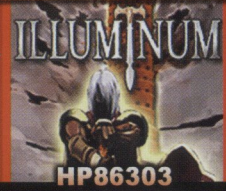
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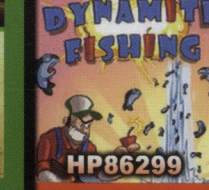
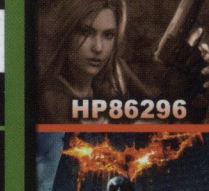
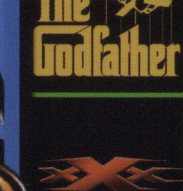
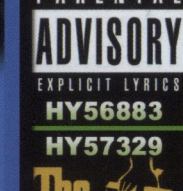
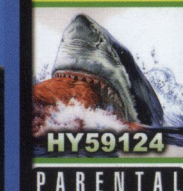
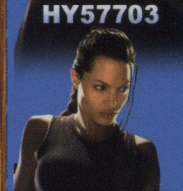
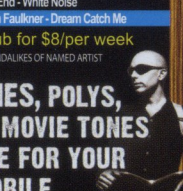
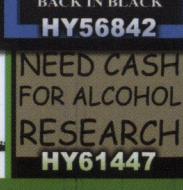
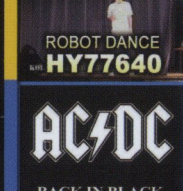
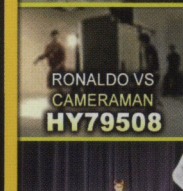
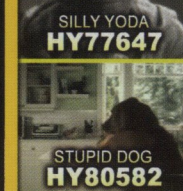
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